

Project Title:

The Interior is the Exterior; The Exterior is the Interior.

The Complex fold between the “private” and the “public”

Research

From the research which I conducted in the context of Hong Kong, it is discovered that the extremely compressed landscape of Hong Kong gives rise to a potential that people would negotiate and define their territories through their habits. In a sense, the conventional practice of architecture in Hong Kong has been transformed and adapted to the notion of compression. Whereby, the whole discussion has been shifted from the architecture “itself” towards the “explicit interiority”. Everything is “interiorised” that the conventional territory between “interiority” and “exteriority” has been destructed. (One personal experience of my journey back to my university, which I would never experience anything “outdoor” or on the street level. I leave my apartment, then I take an escalator that is connecting to a shopping mall. The shopping mall connects to the metro station through a bridge; the metro station is directly connected to my university.)

The studied neighborhood (Sham Shui Po) is a place where accommodates millions of specific user groups and habits, which express their unique notions that constitute the local culture. The same time, it is facing the challenge of urban renewal, whereby the “relatively” low-rise buildings (5-12 floors tenement buildings) are going to be replaced with the 40-45 floors high-rise. People within the neighborhood mostly live in extremely compressed units or even rooftop housings. In a sense, the units were trying to compress all functions in one single units without providing extra open spaces for possible engagement or activities. People then start exploring open spaces for their “private moment” in the public. For example, it is discovered that people would practice habits in the urban public (i.e. drying clothes) which we used to think that can only be take place at a “private home”. This completely challenges our conventional understanding of publicness and privacy; interiority and exteriority.

Methodology and Design: The compression of explicit interiority as the architectural expression

As an extension from the research result, the design project aims at exploring how does architecture accommodates the diverse point of views through the negotiation of territories between the “private” and the “public”. Besides from making use of existing architectural thresholds elements, the project allows me a change to reflect and think about: How does a threshold become a constraint; and how can a constant become a threshold?” What defines a threshold?

With “explicit interiority” as the initiation point – the habits and experiences of the people and the affordance of “spaces and architecture”, the process informs me the possibility of redefining a threshold between “private” and “public”, i.e. The different composition of spatial organization; redefining privacy and publicness through visibility; accessibility; dimension of spaces for engagements etc.

Challenges and further investigation

One of the main challenges of this project and it also explain the reality of architectural practice in Hong Kong: The regulation using reinforced concrete as the main building structure due to the typhoon concern for building involving domestic functions. At the beginning stage, the regulation and that the grid was like a huge “constraint” for myself, especially when my project is exploring a level of flexibility and the negotiation of “privacy” and “public”. The challenge is: How can I keep this constraint and make a change? How can I make use of this constraint as a “possibility”? In the later stage of exploration, it is discovered that this “constraint” in fact further helps in expression the notion of “explicit interiority”, which serves a bridge that constitutes the diverse relations as an architectural totality. Through exploring ways of striving balances between the private and public interests, it is worth for a further and future investigation in terms of the architectural materialization in Hong Kong, with regards to the notion “explicit interiority” that strives to make a “change” within the unchangeable constraint. That is, “the changeable within in the unchangeable”.