



Claiming Interiority

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Claiming Interiority
opening public spaces

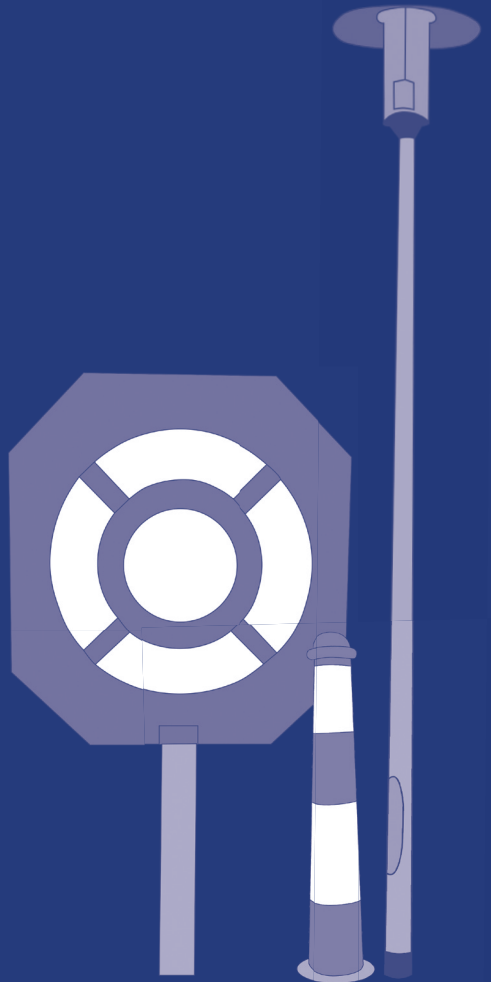
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Introduction



This essay deals with the spatial design task of creating open spaces¹, following the question on how equality and a feeling of belonging can be supported in both encounters and solitude. For this purpose, I will first define the differences in dealing with realms or spaces, as well as the more detailed differentiation of the private, the parochial and the public², on the example of the analyses of the Marineterrein in Amsterdam. Furthermore, I will explain why, in the effort to create open spaces, the role of the individual must be central. The process must be about an atmospheric and social sense of security as well as the inclusion of minorities.^{3,4}

Especially at the present time, when space in cities is becoming increasingly unaffordable on the one hand and public space is shrinking on the other, the design focus on opening up space is crucial.

It is not only about the social right to participate in shaping the city and urbanity, but also

about a collective sense of responsibility⁵ in protecting public space. The exclusive character of spaces often is not obvious and does not only include physical

inaccessibility, but also societal habits and atmospheric exclusion.⁶ Therefore, the influence of recent history and especially that of the Built Environment in the Marineterrein will be used to illustrate these factors spatially. A fundamental goal in any design of public space must be, and here I follow Hannah Arendt's but also Richards Sennett's claims, the assembly of diversity and the possibility for interiority in the exterior.^{7,8} Contributing to the sense of belonging and the visibility of minorities⁹ and counteracting homogenising movements, to which the increasing gentrification and the real estate market also contribute, is vital in the current political context and, in my opinion, one of the tasks in designing urban spaces. The urgency of this demand becomes the basis not only of spatial analysis but also of theoretical debate on the specific example of the Marineterrein.

Following this paper, the conceptual and practical experiment can be an instrument of creative practice in dealing with the area. Especially in terms of inclusion and the participation of visitors, a project can only be successful in a dialogue between design and users.

This is preceded by a detailed content-related and cartographic analysis of the terrain, current use, users and existing obstacles.

¹ **Sennett, Richard:** The Open City. Lecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PoRrVqJ-FQ>, accessed on April 19th 2021

² **Lofland, Lyn H.:** The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. Routledge, 1998, P. 8f.

⁴ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' — public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

³ **Definition** of minorities, following Vaiou and Kalandides, as „outsiders“ of public space who are excluded by the multiple determinations of otherness in relation to the locally dominant societal average in public space, Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares: Cities of 'others' — public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

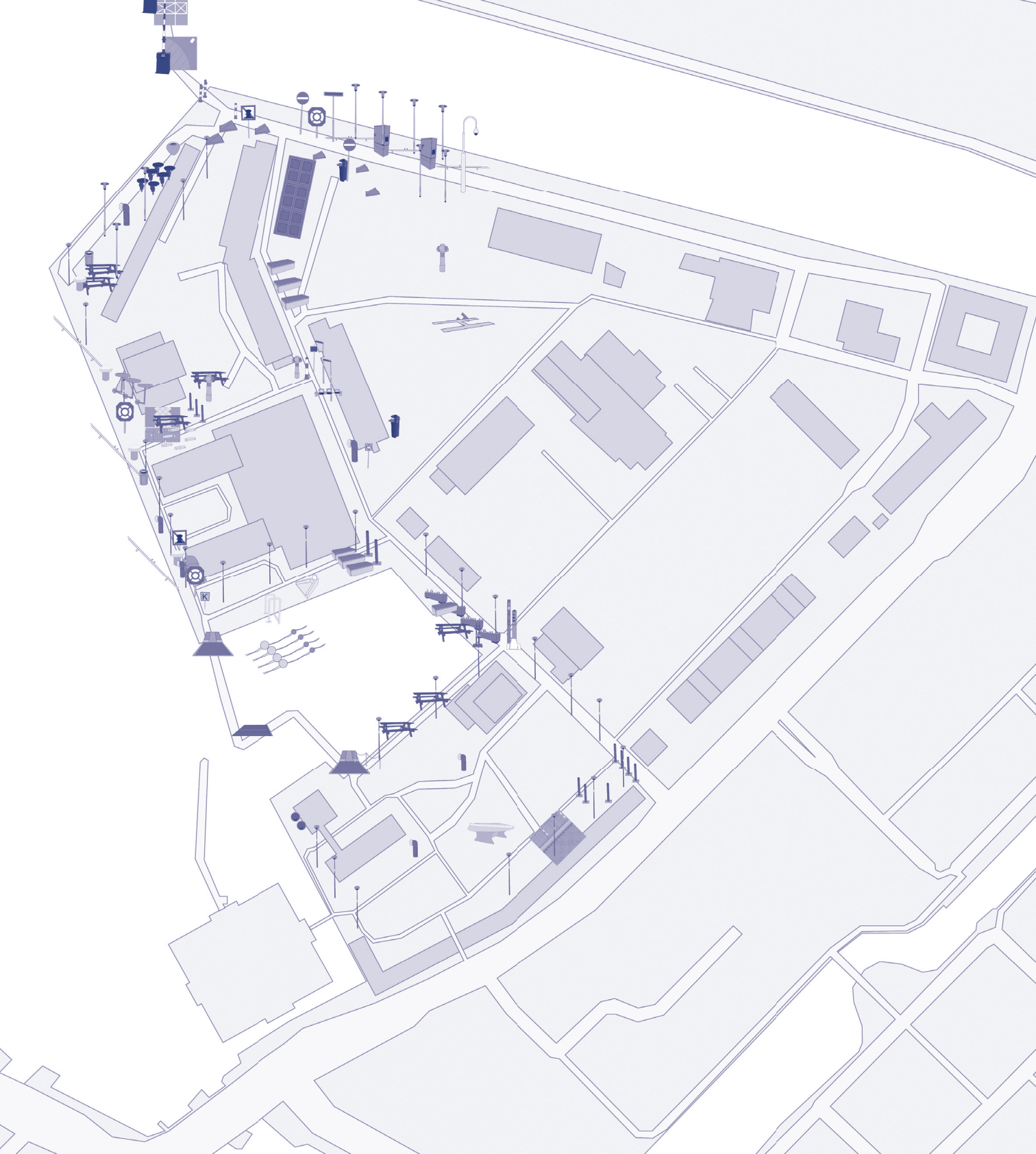
⁶ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' — public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

⁷ **Sennett, Richard:** Interiors and Interiority. Lecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVPjQhJfK0>, accessed on April 19th 2021

⁸ **Arendt, Hannah:** Reflections on Architecture with Hannah Arendt. OASE Journal for Architecture, 2020, P. 35

⁹ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' — public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

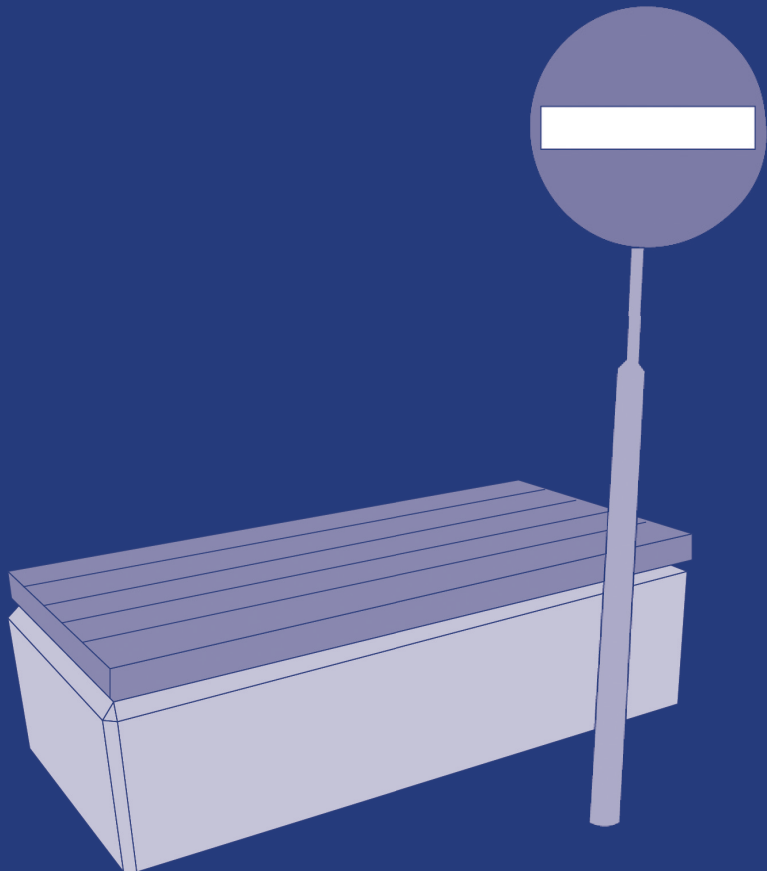
⁵ **Lauwaert, Maaikje;** van Westrenen, Francien (edt.): Facing Value — Radical perspectives from the arts. Stroom den Haag, Amsterdam. P. 318







Interiority in Open Space



¹⁰ *ibid.*

Opening existing space

In the discussion about public space, a clear parallel emerges among many authors: The call for open spaces or even open cities.^{10, 11} In order to get to the bottom of these demands, we, as designers, need to take a closer look at public space in order to distinguish it from the private space and so-called closed spaces.

First of all, the binary image of public and private must be deconstructed, whereby the differentiation between the physical construct of space and the social construct of realm helps to separate the spatial from its societal significance. Legally, public space is defined as „accessible or visible to all members of the community.“¹² „By the virtue of the

law and common practice, the public thoroughfare is accessible to everybody. It is the place to see and be seen. In principle, nobody can be barred from

this public space, and nobody has any special rights of use,“ summarises the sociologist Abram de Swaan in the 77th issue of the OASE journal.¹³

It stands in sharp contrast to private space, which is not open or accessible to the general public.¹⁴ Apart from this premise, however, social constellations determine not only the accessibility but also the equality of individuals. „Understanding public space not as a physical space that is already

determined, fixed and bounded, but as space lived through contact and meeting with others, encounters which produce both inclusions and exclusions.“¹⁵ Because of the influence of these encounters, Lyn Lofland speaks much more of the public realm rather than space in her sociological texts.¹⁶ This realm is determined by the action that takes place and the social environment, rather than by accessibility in the legal sense. Ongoing, I will follow this distinction in order to differentiate between the private realm, the encounters within the close circle of intimates and family, and the public realm, the encounters with strangers. Already in the presentation of these extremes it becomes clear that a bipolar presentation is not sufficient - therefore Lofland establishes a realm between these opposites: the parochial realm, the realm of encounters with friends, colleagues and acquaintances.¹⁷ Often, the design of the physical public space is made with this gathering of broader communities in mind: it should enable simultaneous and spontaneous encounters. If this becomes the only premises, we disregard two effects of the social encounter. On the one hand, the exclusive factor that both the social context and the context of strangers meeting in the public realm can have on members of minorities¹⁸ – a factor that is amplified by the physical context of

¹³ **de Swaan, Abram:** Unauthorised Urban Thoughts – Private and Public Practices within Urban Space. OASE 77, P. 34

¹⁴ **Lofland, Lyn H.:** The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. Routledge, 1998, P. 11f.

¹² **Lofland, Lyn H.:** The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. Routledge, 1998, P. 8f.

¹⁵ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.compernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

¹⁶ **Lofland, Lyn H.:** The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. Routledge, 1998, P. 11f.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, P. 9

¹⁸ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.compernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

¹⁸ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

¹⁹ **Lehtovuori, Panu:** Artefacts, Oeuvre and Atmosphere – Applying Lefebvre's Spatial Thinking in Urban Design. OASE 77, P. 65

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ **Sennett, Richard:** Interiors and Interiority. Lecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVPjQhJffKo>, accessed on April 27th 2021

²² *ibid.*

the built environment.¹⁹ This influence on the individual arises from different perceptions of the atmosphere. Also in the journal OASE, Panu Lehtovuori refers to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme. „For him, atmospheres do not exist outside (individual) perception but nevertheless they are not subjective. Atmospheres are „something between subject and object. They are not something relational, but the relation itself.“²⁰ On the other hand, and here I follow the social analysis of Richard Sennett, the focus on a strong and healthy community in the sense of conviviality ignores the need for safe places of solitude. Sennett emphasises that opportunities for safe solitude are essential for a strong community.²¹ „Us as designers, we need to translate that notion of „city air makes you free“, of being freed off the constraints of domesticity - safely - into something that our practice is. [...] The emphasis on sociable space is something we have got to rethink, because for a lot of people that's not why they want to be in public. They want [...] an interior life: [...] a life where they can practice observational cruising (or just cruising), reflexivity in which the work of memory can work, because they're alone. And that's not something we as designers have in our heads.“²² Both points overlap. The retreat from

the private into the public realm, paradoxical as it may seem, creates for some the possibility of interrupting domestic labour, for others the underestimated attention of the public: „They leave the hidden private space of their home, they enter (material) public space and become visible. [...] Migrants are given public speech: their presence and practices force the political world to deal with them. [...] visibility seems to be the first condition for participation in the political.“²³

These two points inevitably lead us to formulate new demands on public space. Reducing it merely to its accessibility misses the point: „The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of unnumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised.“²⁴ Taking these perspectives into account is important, just as functioning, safe public space is essential for a healthy, strong community (Sennett), equality and visibility of minorities (Vaiou, Kalandides) and, according to Judith Butler, even for a healthy democracy.^{25, 26, 27} Including this diversity of perspectives in the design means designing spaces as open. „Spaces ought to be designed as „open spaces‘ in order to accommodate the many shifts between public and private interactions. Designers should not prescribe,

²³ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed on April 19th 2021

²⁴ **Arendt, Hannah:** Reflections on Architecture with Hannah Arendt. OASE Journal for Architecture, 2020, P. 19

²⁵ **Sennett, Richard:** Interiors and Interiority. Lecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVPjQhJffKo>, accessed on April 27th 2021

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²⁶ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, on April 19th 2021

²⁷ **Butler, Judith:** Shared Spaces. Interview, publicspace.org, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDRJ_dPck_o, accessed on April 27th 2021

²⁸ **de Swaan, Abram:** Unauthorised Urban Thoughts – Private and Public Practices within Urban Space. OASE 77, P. 33

²⁹ **Vaiou, Dina; Kalandides, Ares:** Cities of 'others' – public space and everyday practices. 2009, <https://gh.copernicus.org/articles/64/11/2009/gh-64-11-2009.pdf>, accessed April 19th 2021

not restrict, but rather invite social explorations.“²⁸

A successful public space must therefore have the openness to offer both groups and, above all, individuals of diverse origins a safe platform for gathering and retreat in the public and parochial realm.

How do I, in my position as a designer, relate to this demand?

I have to „help develop an understanding of the multiple determinations of otherness in public space“,²⁹ first for myself and then communicate this to the outside world in my design. Awareness, understanding - broadening one's focus to the multilateral needs of minorities and individuals, away from the focus on the average person is a crucial first step, especially for me: a middle-European, white man with a height of 190 cm and able to communicate in regionally understood languages. The space surrounding me privileges me, the majority of potential encounters go smoothly for me, there is hardly any sense of potential danger. The public space is mostly designed by men like me for men like me. The ignorance and exclusiveness of this androcentric design does not stop at gender or skin colour. „Gender and religion/culture are two possible categories that distinguish who is inside and outside of society, for the German

literary critic, Hans Mayer, there is a third category that should be added to it: sexuality.”³⁰

³⁰ *ibid.*

Therefore, design in public space is always political, also for Hannah Arendt. „[She] addressed the character of public space as a political thinker: [...] The essential aspect of public life, for her, is its plurality.”³¹ And ensuring this plu-

³¹ **Terds, Hans; Grafe, Christoph; Koeboek, Catherine:** Four themes for Architecture in the Writings of Hannah Arendt — A Plurality of Perspectives. In: Arendt, Hannah: Reflections on Architecture with Hannah Arendt. OASE Journal for Architecture, 2020. P. 19

rality means proceeding in analysis not only spatially but also personally. Especially in the Marineterrein, the dominance of the patriarchal, white and economically better-off society in the design of space can be shown. Places of retreat are missing, seating is tied to paid consumption, the possibilities for action are one-dimensional. The lasting influence of centuries of military administration of the area underlines this.³²

³² **Vis, Dirk:** Incubator for dreamers. 2017. On: https://www.marineterrein.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ENG-versie-magazine_2k.pdf, accessed on April 27th 2021

The homogeneous user group of 20–45-year-old, upper middle class, mostly white people is the logical consequence. We could not find the residents of the nearby social housing on the site.³³

Apparently, no worker from the construction sites surrounding the Marineterrein enjoys his evening or his break there. Only very few children play here, as there is no playground. Hardly any pensioners stray onto the grounds.

³³ **Research Collaboration** between Caterina Tioli, Georgina Pantazopoulou, Chen Liu and me. NA

How do the built environment of the Marineterrein and the results of the observations and interviews with users influence each other?

In my opinion, lowering entry barriers is one of the first steps in the effort to create open spaces. If places visibly encourage takeovers by individuals, these offers will be accepted more easily. The temporary character is the basis of every takeover, so that a simple takeover process is also guaranteed for subsequent users. Protected spaces in the public realm make it difficult for a single, strong and homogeneous user group to take it over. Spaces as such allow for diversity and invite especially minorities that would otherwise be victims of exclusion to use them. The Marineterrein is characterised by spaces that are already used or occupied, a pre-set which makes it difficult for users to claim them themselves. The different types of occupation are diverse - they range from unmaintained green spaces, the pavement split into countless corners with lines and rules from different periods, to the barriers or the „chaotic abundance of obstacles”³⁴ and the unavoidable atmosphere of the nearby, guarded and fenced military area. The initiatives occupy spaces by furnishing them or through an atmospheric expansion of restaurant areas. The roads, intended for cars, prevent safe dwelling. The areas that remain for users to take over are small, scattered, always close to the boundaries – a term Sennet uses for physical

³⁴ **Tioli, Caterina:** On how to claim the In-between – an inquiry on the Marineterrein and its chaotic abundance of obstacles. 2021, KABK The Hague. P. 1

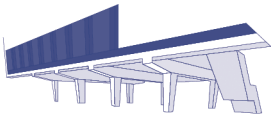
barriers – but which are also surrounded by borders, permeable yet sensible atmospheric divisions.^{35,36}

³⁵ **Sennett, Richard:**
The Open City, 2006.
on: <https://urbanage.lsecities.net/essays/the-open-city>, accessed May 19th 2021

³⁶ **Sennett, Richard:**
The Open City. Lecture,
Harvard University
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of Design, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PoRrVqJ-FQ>,
accessed on April 27th 2021

Even though recent initiatives by the tenants on the Marineterrein try to change this predominant order, the character of their interventions is small-scale, temporary, but also unadaptable. This further collection of objects supports the cluster-like division of the entire site rather than opening it up.

The Levels of Obstacles
at the Marineterrein



buildings



signs & light



fences



usable obstacles



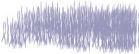
poles & barriers



curbstones & stairs



unmaintained green



maintained green



pavement



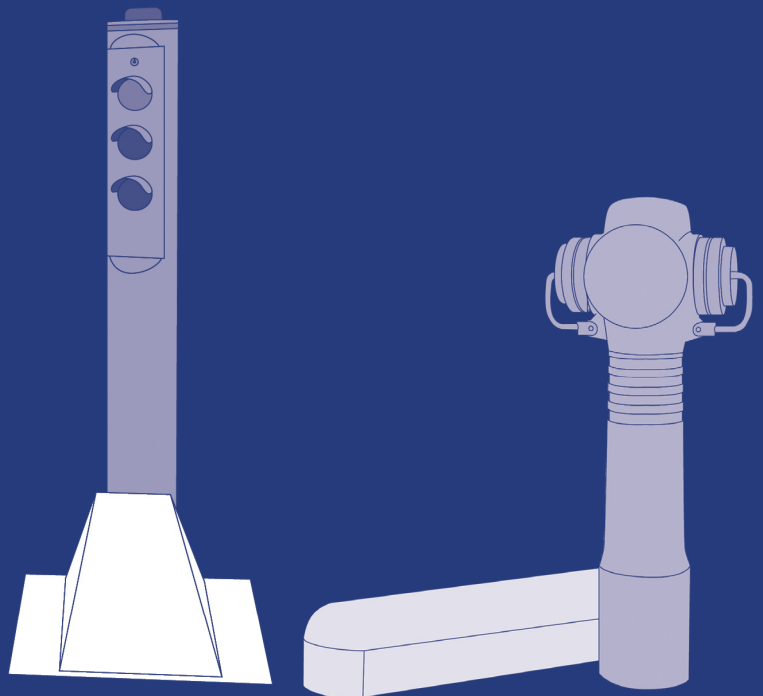
water





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Conclusion



The core of any intervention aiming at opening up public space of the Marineterrein must be safe spaces of ‚solitude among others‘ – the creation of public interiority. This approach of designing public space starting from the individual and with a declared focus on minorities simultaneously cannot generate an exclusive result: A space, which is easy to occupy without inhibitions, remains open for the assembly of groups, but prevents them from a homogeneous, exclusive use.

In order to guarantee this diversity, the space must adapt to different needs and thus cannot prescribe a singular usage scenario.

As the historical remains of military use in combination with the temporary interventions of the current tenants show, dividing the space into smaller and smaller areas is not a solution.

Nevertheless, the task of ensuring security for individuals in adaptive, easily changeable public spaces can only be the declared goal of a longer-term development of society’s handling of public space. The design of a temporary intervention by me cannot guarantee a final solution here, but only point to the problems and outline possible ways of dealing with them.

In order to find the right starting point, I will shortly consult seven case studies. They aim to strategically activate people to rethink the use of public space and to get authorities to involve the needs of residents and minorities. They each enhance one (among others) angle of design processes who allow for open spaces with a focus on individual safety.

1

Achieving equal rights in the use of space by striving for a sense of security for individuals. (Arendt/Butler)

With their initially illegal installation of a gallery to open up an alleyway previously made unsafe by darkness, stench and dodgy crowds, the Serbian collective Ministry of Space claimed a part of public space in Belgrade back for individuals who now can safely pass through.³⁷

³⁷ **Katz, Marisa Mazria:** Inside the Ministry of Space. 2015, on: <https://creativetimereports.org/2015/10/07/inside-ministry-space/>, accessed May 10th 2021

2

Safe space allows diverse user groups and has a preventive effect against exclusive social processes. (Sennett/ Arendt/ Vaiou, Kalandides)

With their project Cineroleum, the collective Assemble created cohesion in the diverse and socio-economically challenged neighbourhood through the unifying act of transforming public space together, resulting in a cinema experience on one’s doorstep - an event that can be enjoyed alone or in groups and, by the end of the film, collectively changes one’s perspective on one’s own neighbourhood.³⁸

³⁸ **Assemble:** The Cineroleum. 2010, on <https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/the-cineroleum>, accessed on May 10th 2021

3

The principle of successful common responsibility (Habraken/ Sennett) presupposes that an authority does not prescribe offers and that users can either accept them or not, but that there is a possibility of temporary

change of places by the users. In the example of the Prinzessinnengärten, a place in Berlin was changed by the residents themselves in such a way that they committed themselves to its preservation and maintenance in the long term - up to the now existing protection by the municipality.³⁹

³⁹ **Prinzessinnengarten Kollektiv:** Über uns. n.d. on: <https://prinzessinnengarten-kollektiv.net/wir/>, accessed May 19th 2021

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With a similar approach, Assemble always creates a form of belonging. They try to offer the users opportunities to make a space their own. In the Folly for a Flyover project, anyone can build in passing, the time and difficulty is kept to a minimum so that as many people as possible can contribute and relate.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ **Assemble:** Folly For A Flyover. 2011. on: <https://assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/folly-for-a-flyover>, accessed on May 10th 2021

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In order to incorporate the design requirements and usage wishes of residents and users into such processes, options are needed to renegotiate and challenge the existing solutions. Studio Knol does so in their project Architecture of Appropriation.⁴¹

⁴¹ **Studio Knol:** Architecture of Appropriation. 2017. On: <https://studioknol.com/architecture-of-appropriation/>, accessed on May 18th 2021

6

Known as the Wind Phone, a public phone booth built by Itaru Sasaki gives visitors a place for retreat and remembrance in Japan.

Not connected to any line, it offers a place to talk to lost loved ones, originally designated to deceased cancer victims it became a nationwide memorial after the tsunami in 2013.⁴²

It serves as an example for a space, which offers safety in plain side, is easy to occupy by individuals and allows for vulnerability within.

⁴² **Inquirer.net:** Japan's tsunami survivors call lost loves on the phone of the wind. 2021. On <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YbN1dNG-COU>, accessed on May 18th 2021

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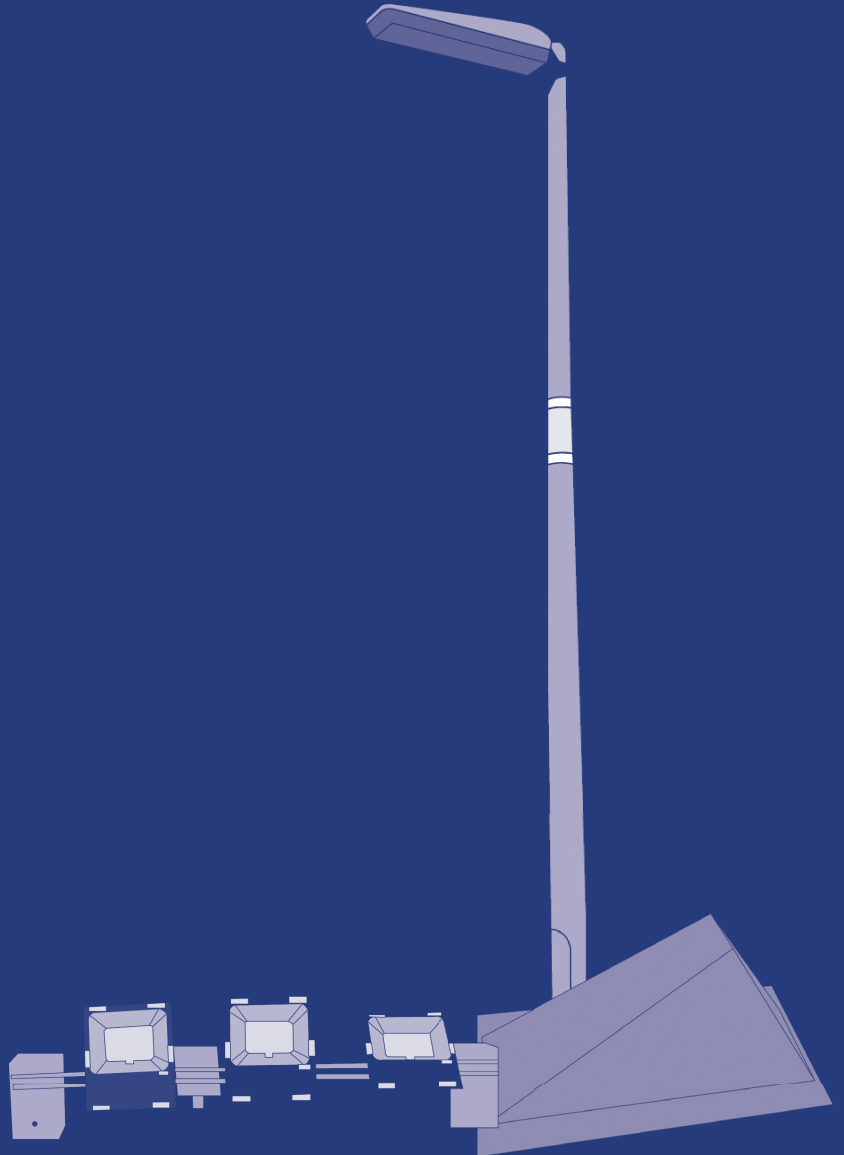
Finally, there is the acknowledgement to not know beforehand. Design in public space cannot be repetitive and must change individually, depending on the place, but also depending on the users. In the project Planbude, pedestrians were asked to contribute Ideas for an architectural competition in Hamburg.⁴³ Without communication and an option of participation or adaptation, design in public spaces cannot be successful.

⁴³ **Planbude:** Planbude-Intro: Knack' den St. Pauli Code! 2014. On: <https://planbude.de/tag/esso-haeuser/>, accessed on May 18th 2021





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