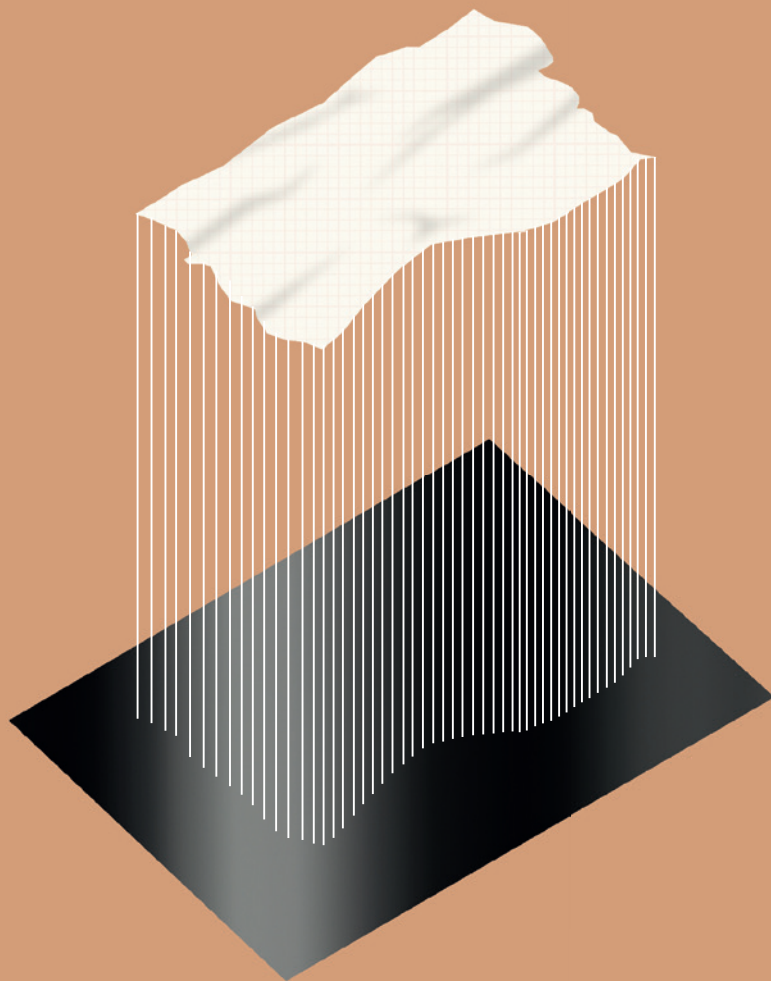


# The Last Trace of Inhabitation

Intimacy in the domestic interior in the age of (hyper)interactivity



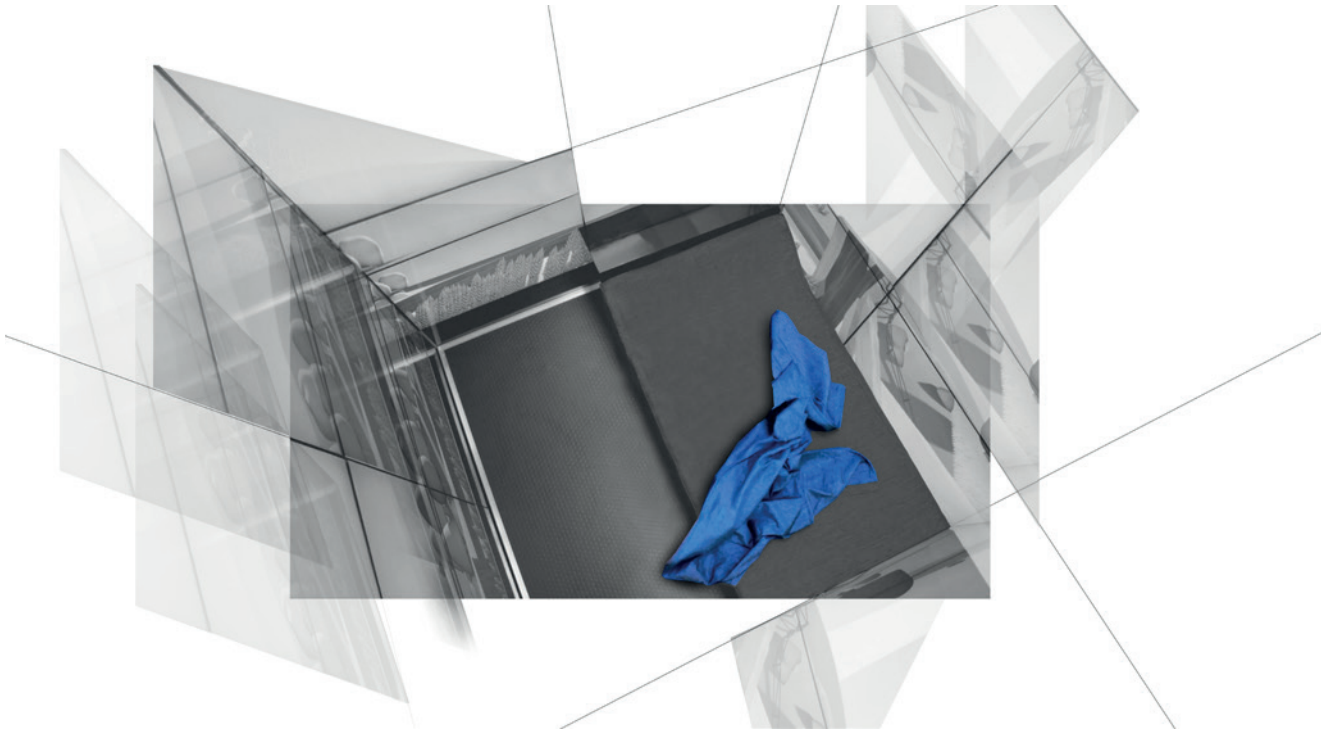
*Conceptual image 'Twofold - The last trace of inhabitation', own image*

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**Tingling and buzzing surfaces all  
around us. Surfaces that instantly react  
and communicate. These surfaces are  
so smooth they look like black mirrors,  
only reflecting the now...**



Still from the *Black Mirror* TV Series showing a (hyper)interactive domestic space.



## THE LAST TRACE OF INHABITATION

### Intimacy in the domestic interior in the age of (hyper)interactivity

*Tingling and buzzing surfaces all around us. Surfaces that instantly react and communicate.*

*These surfaces are so smooth they look like black mirrors, only reflecting the now.*

We live in an age of interactivity and connectivity. An age where every surface, every object becomes more and more responsive and interactive. It gives us the opportunity to 'personalize' and 'customize' the space around us in real-time. Walls, light, color, sound, temperature, even the arrangement of furniture reacts due to the input sensed from us. (Hyper)interactive interiors respond instantly to our mood and are able to adjust accordingly, appearing to make us feel comfortable. But does this comfort of having a 'personal(ized) space' still allow us to feel intimate within our domestic space? In other words, does (instant) comfort provide us with intimacy?

The domestic interior contains a layer of deep meaning constructed through the act of inhabiting it, "it accommodates a story of personal remembrances. [Walter Benjamin writes] '[t]o live means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated.'"<sup>1</sup> The domestic interior is inseparable from the life that takes place within it. Compared to the public space outside, enclosing our

domiciles, where "those traces inevitably fade, in the interior they remain visible and tangible for the occupant."<sup>2</sup> Hans Teerds states that it is exactly these traces that are attached to domestic interiors that makes them intimate. "To be at home is more than to merely eat, sleep and work somewhere – it is to inhabit the house. That is to say, to make it your own, to leave trace."<sup>3</sup>

Zooming in from the interior to surface as such, Giuliana Bruno states in an interview with Sarah Oppenheimer that "[o]bjects have their histories written into their surfaces. They particularly affect us because of that. Anything that occurs on the surface, including the lines in our faces, shows its historicity, shows the traces of life."<sup>4</sup>

With this understanding of intimacy in the domestic interior in mind, I would like to draw an overlap of the Art Nouveau interior as viewed by Walter Benjamin with the (hyper)interactive surface interior marking our present and future homes. Art Nouveau's characteristic of turning the domestic interior into a 'Gesamtkunstwerk',

treating all elements and surfaces of the interior from smallest to bigger scale within its holistic artistic vision, makes it impossible to inhabit it as previously described. According to Walter Benjamin in the time of Art Nouveau the "interior as a surface for the registering of traces, traces of an inhabitation registered over time, was lost. The Jugendstil interior was completely pre-ordained; it fixed a frozen, alien image of its inhabitants."<sup>5</sup> Almost everything added to or subtracted from the interior conflicts with the 'one vision' design idea of this particular space.

As the Art Nouveau interior became a frozen 'still' of an alien image of its inhabitants, the future (hyper)interactive interior will become a fluid and reactive projection of its inhabitants. But the effect this has on domesticity's intimacy is really the same; there is an absence of intimacy. Intimacy can not be established, where surfaces appear to be repellent to traces and thus, are incapable of storing memory of inhabitation. "In Benjamin's terms, at the moment of its total capture by architecture as art, [and in my sense architecture by interactivity,] the

interior as a space of inhabitation is liquidated.”<sup>6</sup> Both, Art Nouveau and the interactive interior, can be seen as an ‘interior of the now’, where traces of inhabitation are non-existent.

Against this background, for me it is not enough to think of intimacy in the interior along the lines of a space of privacy providing comfort. The intimacy of the interior lies in its traces of inhabitation. In the attempt to design (hyper) interactive interiors we might forget to consider the surface as a means to register traces. The only traces these reactive surfaces can register are the ones of the very moment, the now, where interaction with the surface might only leave digital traces.

Comfort and intimacy should not be confused with each other because the latter holds a much deeper meaning.

It might be possible for an interactive interior to provide comfort, but intimacy, in the domestic interior, at the core of its meaning can only be experienced due to the traces of inhabitation. They are visual manifestations of personal memories in the domestic interior. They have a strong affect on the inhabitant,

but also on the visitor. Traces of somebody else makes the visitor feel like invading an intimate space.

Taking all this into account, how can we, in the age of ubiquitous interactive surfaces, create intimate spaces rather than settling for a notion of comfort and privacy by mere superficial ‘personalizing’ or ‘customizing’ our interiors? Is there maybe a way to reveal digital traces, as a sort of binary memory of the inhabitant?

1-3) Teerds, H 2015, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, and the Importance of the Interior. 25 January 2015. Hans Teerds; Blog. Available from: <<http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?p=15242>>. [06 February 2016].

4) Oppenheimer, S, Interview: Giuliana Bruno by Sarah Oppenheimer. Available from: <<http://bombmagazine.org/article/10056/giuliana-bruno>>. [06 February 2016].

5) Di Palma, V & Periton, D & Lathouri, M (eds) 2009, Intimate Metropolis, Routledge, Abingdon, p.82.

6) Rice, C 2007, The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity, Routledge, Abingdon, p.95.



Art Nouveau interior illustrating the 'holistic artistic vision' of the architect, liquidating the interior as a space of inhabitation (Walter Benjamin)





Musee d'Orsay in Paris

