

**Contested Interiority:  
Sense of Outsideness/Insideness Conveyed through  
Everyday Interactions with University Campus Doors**

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**Abstract**

*Our sense of place in the world is mediated through our everyday interactions with both people and space (Seamon, 1985). Everydayness is one of the most profound levels and shapers of human experience, yet too often this level of relation is overlooked and taken for granted in the design of environments (Dyck, 2005; Tuan, 1977). In this article, I present a first-person phenomenological account of my everyday interactions with doors on a university campus to uncover contested notions of interiority. My body-space routines reveal how a sense of outsideness/insideness is controlled through my interactions with objects such as doors, door handles and thresholds. These accounts suggest that given our everyday activities are intrinsically linked to designed environments (Upton, 2002) and that interiority is relational (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2018), adopting an everydayness frame from diverse users' perspectives is imperative to improve human experiences and spatial justice within design practice. This is critically important for non-normative bodies like mine whose subjective experience of interiority is constantly being disputed and denied by hostile materiality.*

*Keywords: phenomenology, embodiment, interiority, accessibility, built environment, disability*

## Introduction

As a geographical phenomenologist, I am deeply interested in how people experience and give meaning to their interaction with their everyday life world. The intricate but often taken for granted journeys people embark on every day to become involved in daily life fascinates me. Through focusing attention on our everyday routine interactions we come to understand how a sense of interiority is inherently linked to the quality of our daily relations with designed environments (Seamon, 1985; Tuan, 1977; Upton, 2002).

Assuming an everyday frame also reveals that not all body-space encounters evoke a sense of insideness. As Dovey (2008) notes: "The built environment reflects the identities, differences and struggles of gender, class, race, culture and age" (p. 1). For people with non-normative bodies – like myself who uses a walking stick and a power wheelchair (more recently) – our interiority is constantly in dispute, as designed environments privilege standardised bodies while excluding others (Stafford & Volz, 2016). The act of opening a door and entering a room involves a series of time-body-space routines so habitual they are often performed without thought- preconscious. As such many designers do not recognise how exclusionary a door, door handle and threshold is unless one starts to think and take perspective from a diversity of human users' corporeality and movement.

To illustrate this further, I present my own first-person phenomenological account of my encounters to get through doors to become involved in work life as an academic on a university campus. Before doing so, I will provide an overview of everydayness as a lens to understanding interiority, followed by an overview of bodies in spaces. I will then turn to descriptive accounts of my everyday encounters with university-campus doors, and end with concluding remarks on the importance of adopting an everyday lens in understanding interiority at a profound personal level – which I argue is crucial to improving designed environments for human experience and spatial justice (Soja, 2009).

## Everydayness – An Existential Level of Understanding

Human experience of space is deeply existential. For decades now, interdisciplinary fields of study have shown how our sense of place in the world is mediated through our everyday interactions with both people and space (Seamon, 1980, 1985, 2012; Tuan, 1977; McLean, Stafford, & Weeks, 2014). Everydayness is understood as the "taken-for-granted mundane routine activities" that take place

in one's lifeworld (Dyck, 2005, p. 233). These routines are bodily in nature (Buttimer, 1980, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012)). Not only do our everyday routines and practices reveal how people use and act in everyday spaces; our interactions also illuminate how social, political-economic and spatial structures shape these everyday routines (Middleton, 2011; Dyck, 2005). Our everyday encounters reveal much to us about our felt sense of insiderness/outsiderness with our everyday space as well as power and political struggles within it (Dovey, 2008; Meade 2013).

#### *Habitual acts - Body-space routines*

To illustrate the significance of our body space interactions on our sense of being and place in our everyday lifeworld, Seamon (1980, 1985, 2002) developed a specific typology of habitual movement. The typology consists of three body-movement layers (see Table 1). *Body routines or body ballets* as described by Seamon (2002) are a "set of integrated gestures, behaviours, and actions that sustain a particular task or aim, for example, preparing a meal, driving a car, doing home repair, and so forth" (p.445). The body ballet becomes embodied through practice and training.

Seamon (1980) noted that a sequence of body ballets can form into time-space routines (second layer), which is defined as a "set or habitual bodily behaviours which extends through a considerable portion of time" (p. 158). An example of a time space-body routine is the act of getting ready in the morning (Seamon, 2002). The morning is the temporal aspect, the home is the spatial aspect, while the act itself is towards something like going to work or school. These time-space routines are pre-conscious (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012).

The *place ballet* is Seamon's (2002, 1985, 1980) third layer of movement. This space-environment interaction is described as the convergence of time-space routines and body ballets. According to Seamon (2002, p. 455) the "ingredients to experience place ballet" are "feelings of attraction, diversity, bodily and psychological comfort and convenience (comfortableness) and sense of welcome (invitation)". Such place ballet encounters can create a sense of place, which is produced through regularity, continuity, and repeated meeting with people who share in an activity in space (Relph, 1976). A sense of "well-being, enjoyment and appreciation" has also been linked to place ballet (Seamon, 2002, p. 455). However, Seamon (2002, 1980) notes that the felt meaning and impact of our everyday interactions with our environments is often not obvious until they are lost or denied.

Table 1  
Three layers of  
habitual routine  
defined by Seamon  
(2002, pp. 44–455)

Name	Definition
Body ballet	A set of integrated behaviours that sustain a particular task or aim.
Time-space routine	A set of habitual bodily behaviours that occur in a particular time period.
Place ballet	To describe the space-environment interaction, this is the combining together of time-space routines and body ballet when in supportive environments.

### *The sense of insideness /outsideness*

Having a sense of place is considered an important quality of human existence (Buttimer, 1980; Relph, 1985), one that links with interiority. It is through our habitual routines that space becomes lived and imbued with meaning (Seamon & Magerauer, 1985). Some spaces evoke a sense of safety, calm, familiarity, while others evoke fear, dread, uncomfortableness. To explain how space is given meaning through our interaction, one can draw on Relph's (1976) phenomenologically Model of Insideness/Outsideness. Relph's model captures the "dialectic of human life" insideness/outsideness. This dialectic helps to understand the intensity of a person's experience with everyday environments (Seamon & Sowers 2008). Relph's model comprises of seven modes of insideness/outsideness (Finlay, 2011), each offering a different "level of experiential involvement and meaning" (Seamon & Sower, 2008, p. 46). The modes are defined in Table 2.

According to Relph's model, Insideness is understood as the degree of felt attachment to and involvement with a particular space experienced by a person. A felt sense of insideness could be described as "safe, enclosed, at ease, here" (Seamon & Sower, 2008, p. 45). The strongest sense of insideness identified by Relph is *existential insideness* - which is a deep feeling of at-homeness. Relph's (1976) research concluded that having a sense of "insideness" is fundamental to the "structure of place" (Seamon & Sowers, 2008, p. 44), and that the more one feels a sense of insideness, the stronger the sense of place attachment and identity (Seamon & Sower, 2008). However, people could also encounter a felt sense of outsideness relating to space. Relph (1976) contended that felt sense of outsideness can be provoked through a feeling of remoteness, vulnerability, inhospitality of the situation or, being out-of-place. The deepest sense of outsideness described by Relph (1976) is *existential outsideness*, where a person experiences detachment to

place evoking a felt sense of alienation or otherness (Stafford, 2013).

Relph's Model of Insideness/Outsideness is conceptually and practically applicable to understanding the human experience of space in contemporary society (Finlay, 2011). As Seamon and Sower (2008) note, the strength of the model is its "identification that different places take on different identities from diverse individuals and groups" as "human experience takes on different qualities of feelings, meanings, actions" (p. 45). Such insight can contribute to understanding interiority, by providing a deeper level of insights into how different body-space encounters evoke felt senses of insideness or outsideness through our everyday interactions. Such learnings can help to inform spatial design practices that help evoke the human experience of felt insideness.

Mode Name	Description
Existential Insideness	The deepest kind of place experience, where one feels they belong and has a sense of at-homeness.
Existential Outsideness	Is where one feels out of place, evoking a felt sense of alienation, unreality, unpleasantness, or oppressiveness. Contemporary designed environments can contribute to this experience.
Objective Outsideness	Deliberate dispassionate attitude of separation from place. Place is viewed as a thing to be studied and manipulated as an object apart from the one experiencing it.
Incidental Outsideness	Place is the background or setting for activities.
Behavioural Insideness	Place is seen as a set of objects, views or activities.
Empathetic Insideness	Where a person as an outsider is open to place and to understand it more deeply. This is an important aspect of approaching a place phenomenologically.
Vicarious Insideness	Deeply felt second-hand involvement with place, one transported to place through imagination – painting, music and so on

Table 2  
Definitions of the seven modes within Relph's Model of Insideness and Outsideness (Relph, 1976, cited in Seamon & Sower, 2008, pp. 51–55)

## Bodies in Space – Negotiating Boundaries between Inside and Outside

Our felt sense of insideness /outsideness is given meaning through our bodies, as our bodies play a key role in how we experience space. This is well understood through the works of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012), who contends that our experience with the world is “always bodily in nature” (Cerbone, 2006, p. 132). It is through the body, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) argued, that we come to understand our taken-for-granted connections with our world; our perception; our consciousness of the world (Stafford & Volz, 2016; Stafford, 2013).

Bodies and their performance offer an understanding into the creation of interiority (Pringle, 2005, cited in McCarthy, 2005); as our everyday bodily encounters reveal how our existential felt sense of insideness/outsideness within space is produced. However, our bodily encounters also reveal the power and political struggles within space (Dovey, 2008; Meade, 2013). As Grosz and Eisenman (2001) contends, the body is “the primary sociocultural product” shaped by “physical and sociocultural paradigms that are enacted in everyday spaces” (p. 32). Through the body-world experience, we are able to reveal “meanings and understandings attached and inscribed about the body” (Stafford & Volz, 2016, p.4), including entrenched ableist thinking.

### *Contested bodies in space*

Society holds dominate beliefs and images of what is a “normal and able” body. Goffman’s work on *Stigma* (1963) described what he deemed was the normative body that was valued by society - that is “a young married white urban heterosexual protestant, father, college educated, fully employed of good complexion, weight and heights and sporty” (Goffman, 1963, cited in Garland-Thomson, 2017, p.8). Garland-Thomson (2017), describes this dominate representation as the *normate*, “the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” (p. 8). Power in terms of authority and status is attributed to anyone who fits such bodily configuration (Weiss, 2015; Weissman, 1992).

Images of the privileged normative body form have been conveyed and reinforced overtime in design (Imrie, 2003; Stafford & Volz, 2016, Garland-Thomson, 2002; Butler, 1990). Examples include Leonardo Da Vinci’s interpretation of *The Vitruvian Man* in the sixteenth century, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris’ (better known as Le Corbusier) *Modular* body of the twentieth century and Neufort’s (2012) *Metric Handbook* for anthropometric data in the twenty-first century (Stafford & Volz, 2016). The inclusion of gender emerged with Dreyfuss (1984), the industrial designer, who portrayed Joe and

Josephine as standardised bodily forms (Stafford & Volz, 2016). These standardised bodily depictions are devoid of diverse corporeality or complexity of bodily habitation of space. Yet these normative body forms are “superimposed upon all bodies, regardless of the diversity of narratives those bodies present” (Stafford & Volz, 2016, p. 3). These idealized forms are imbued in everyday life spaces, where power and status are mediated spatially to normative bodies while non-normative bodies are devalued, precluded and/or exploited in everyday life (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Weiss, 2015).

Disability scholars have deemed normative body privileging as Ableism - a prejudice that preferences “normative” standardised body form while subjugating non-normative bodies. According to Chouinard (1997), this form of prejudice is based on “ideas, practices, institutions, and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by doing so construct persons with disabilities as marginalized [...] and largely invisible ‘others’” (p. 380). Ableism is a set of beliefs, processes and practices about the kind of body that holds value and worth (Wollbring, 2008).

Ableism is evident in the designed environment. People with disabilities often encounter exclusion spatially due to normative bodily representation, and as such are forced to manage and navigate negative experiences and othering attached to our diverse corporeality (Imrie & Kumar, 1998). For non-normative bodies’ a felt sense of interiority is constantly being disputed and denied by hostile materiality encountered in everyday interactions. This tenuous relationship is illustrated through my body-space interaction with doors, door handles and thresholds as I perform the routine act of opening a door to get inside. Such insights reveal the significance of understanding interiority at the everyday bodily level.

### **Methods: Capturing Everyday Experience**

Capturing everyday experience can be difficult as it is so habitual and mundane (Finlay, 2011). Often, the only way to understand our habitual routines is by intentionally turning our attention to the body-space acts we perform daily. This helps to reveal to us the intricate nuances and sequential nature of our movement, and negotiations we do in order to inhabit space. A focus on the body movement is important, as Finlay (2011) describes “phenomenologists agree that the body discloses the world just as the world discloses itself through the body” (p. 40).

Experience is lived and imbued with multi-layered meanings, thus a key focus of phenomenology is capturing how people give meaning

to their experience – there felt senses of being-in-the-world (Relph, 1985). First person phenomenological accounts are one such way to grasp an understanding of experience and meaning of everydayness (Finlay, 2011). First-hand descriptive reflections provide depth and insight – both in terms of reflection and revelation (Finlay, 2011, Van Manen, 1990). Revelations, because first-person level descriptions help to make general insights into meaning and experience about the particular phenomenon of concern (Finlay, 2011).

In this article, I used first-person phenomenological accounts to provide rich insight into how interiority at the everyday bodily level becomes contested for people with diverse corporeality and movement, in my case a woman who has a physical disability. The descriptions provide insights into the everyday – complex bodily routines required to be performed to do my job as an academic in an ableist, often hostile environment. These accounts illustrate that my way of moving and being on campus - using a walking stick or a power wheelchair - is at odds with normative assumptions about body and space that is embedded in physical materiality and assemblage of spaces that makes up a campus. The descriptive data presented here was generated during 2018.

### **Descriptive Accounts of Encounters with Doors – The Battle of Getting Inside**

As an academic at a university, I have many doors to negotiate on a daily basis. Doors are embedded with meaning about inside/outside and inclusion/exclusion (Lang, 1985; McCarthy, 2005). As Lang (1985) noted, "there is a language spoken by doors" (p. 205). For diverse embodiments like mine, doors, their handles and thresholds often exclude entry to life unfolding behind doors. Doors speak loudly to non-normative bodies – of being a misfit – not fitting in. They also emphasize the normative body and movement on which doors, handles, and thresholds are constructed upon. My move to a different campus 18 months ago and becoming a regular user of a power wheelchair while on campus, reinforced to me the power embedded in doors, their handles and thresholds – via their rejection of my entry to life unfolding behind these doors. It was during these confrontational bodily-space encounters I developed a deep-felt sense of outsidership, placelessness and alienation within the confines of the spatiality of a university campus.

My relationships with buildings outside and inside have not got better. While I have found strategies to manage hostility towards my non-normative body movement, I am not free to move about my campus unconsciously. I am constantly having to think and check if

I can go into that building, what is the best accessible route (there are only two to choose from), how long it will take to get from one building to another and is there an accessible toilet on the way. Things people take for granted is something I need to consider all the time. The most dramatic time is the beginning of the semester, as it often means new teaching rooms to navigate as it is rare to ever get the same room. This is a significant issue – as a designed assumption embedded in lecture and tutorial rooms is that lecturers do not have disabilities and chronic illnesses.

To illustrate the extent to which doors and routes to doors can influence one's sense of interiority /exteriority, insiderness/outsiderness, I draw on my different experiences between a welcoming door and hostile doors, followed by a confrontational body-space-time routine of getting inside a lecture room to perform a lecture.

#### *A sense of inclusion – the welcoming doors*

To provide insight into what an actual inclusive body-space experience feels and looks like I draw on my interaction with the door I call the welcoming door. The door that welcomes me is the front door to the floor of the building my office is located. Glass sliding doors glide open as it senses my arrival - welcoming me with a wide opening – like open arms - as I effortlessly enter - unconsciously moving forward on route to my room. At no time does the door and threshold convey I do not belong here (see Figure 1).

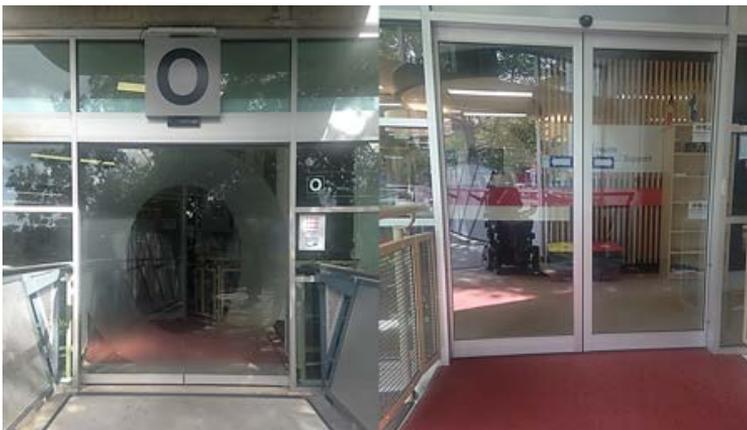


Figure 1  
Welcoming doors  
- Doors opening as  
they sense my arrival

#### *Hostile doors – mis-fitting*

Unfortunately, I am confronted with many doors on campus that are not welcoming as I go about my everyday role as an academic. Different materiality and positioning of doors convey different grades

of exclusion and hostility. These are located throughout the campus in environments I carry out roles - being in my office, delivering lectures and tutorials, and attending meetings. Everywhere are doors that speak and endorse normative bodily assumptions while disputing my being and place on campus.

### *My room door*

Arriving at my office door is a welcome relief from the other spaces on campus. This is because beyond the door is my space, my familiar, comforting and safe place where I can escape to – and just be me. However, getting inside requires an awkward dance, as there is a body-space conflict between my body and movement and the office door. My door is solid, fixed with a lever handle and lock – this door is typical of the many found around campus (see Figure 2). In opening my door, I have an easy lever handle to use however I need to also navigate key entry to unlock the door. I need to unlock first, then perform a manoeuvre requiring me to hold down the handle while pushing the door forward as much as I can while manoeuvring my joystick control to move my chair forward. I then nudge the door wide open with my footplates as I slowly move forward into my room. As it is my office/my room door, I feel I have more control and agency over the door, as evident in my act of nudging the door with my foot plates to get inside. However, the act of nudging open the door is also an indication of the ongoing clash between me and the ableist door. This clash is clear through the increasing mark on the door and the growing dint out of the plasterboard as illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 2  
My office door—  
markers of body-  
space clash

*Body-space routine of getting inside: The case of F-Block*

The routes to these doors are also ill thought through - often token gestures to “access” with little understanding of everyday body-space routines required to be performed to inhabit space. This is evident in the route to get inside the lecture room. In many cases you are negotiating door upon doors. At each time you are constantly being made to feel what Relph (1976) describes as existential outsidersness – that is, you are completely out of place here – you do not personify the profile of a lecturer according to ableist conceptions. Furthermore, it reinforces notions of dependency. To illustrate this further I describe the case of F-Block, an “accessible” lecture room I teach in.

In 2018, I was delivering a course on disability in F-Block. This was the first time I had been allocated this room to lecture in. This lecture room is in one of the newest buildings on campus and has one of the largest seating capacity. As such accessibility should be well embedded in this space. Well, that is what I assumed, however, this is not the reality of my experience. As I made my way for the first time to deliver the lecture via the wheelchair access entry, I was first confronted with what floor do I go to. There is no wayfinding information that indicates how to enter for wheelchair access until you stumble across level 4. Once you get to level 4, you are then confronted with a solid blue outward opening door. However, unbeknown to me this door is a door to the corridor running along outside the building, not the lecture door itself. Furthermore, while the door indicates this is the accessible door and route through its signs and symbols, the door has a key lock entry – it does not open to anyone on the outside wanting to go in. The sticker “activate switch to open” is misleading as the “accessible switch access” and the automatic opening is only available to let you get out of the corridor not in. Rather access into the corridor through this door is obtained by calling security/facilities to let you in (see Figure 3). Such control of access reinforces that security is valued over the right of entry in this space.

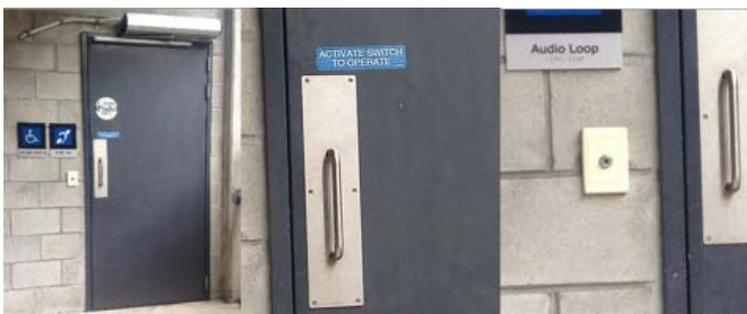


Figure 3  
Closed inaccessible  
door to the accessible  
route

Such an act also reflects how power is mediated in the built environment (Dovey, 2008). In this case, the key entry to the door, the holder of the key and the decision made to have key entry over automatic entry illustrate how materiality and ableist views are used to reinforce power over disabled academics and students in a university campus environment. The door and route also convey ableist assumption about bodies and performative roles embedded in spatial design (Garland-Thomson, 2017; Chouinard, 1997).

The next statement of othering and devaluation of non-normative bodies is the corridor itself leading to the accessible entry to the lecture door. The corridor with concrete, steel rails and limited lighting screams of indifference towards inclusive design. Not only have I been disempowered and belittled by not being able to get into spaces and having to get help to open the door. Once I get into the corridor, I am now traversing what feels like a harsh space. I could not feel any more on the outer – a sense of exteriority or what Relph describes as existential outsidersness. This is the time-space-body routine I needed to do every time I performed the lecture, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4  
Intimidating  
corridor: My body-  
space encounters  
of traversing the  
external corridor to  
get to the lecture  
room



The final reinforcement that accessibility is an indifferent form of practice in designing and maintaining the campus environment, is the automatic swipe door itself. On approaching the swipe access to open the door into the lecture room, I had a sense of relief come over me – yes - I can get in. Everything here spoke to me that it was going to be okay – the symbols, the swipe access, the slight ramp to the door – all spoke of a potential seamless journey into the lecture room and being able to deliver my lecture (perform one of my key roles as an academic in this space). However, this feeling soon shifted to dread when I arrived to find the automatic opening door and swipe access on the outside is broken (see Figure 5). Access again can only be permitted to me by others. When this occurs, worry sets in and time becomes magnified - every minute I have to wait feels like 10 minutes – sitting, waiting and hoping someone will arrive to let me in. Each moment reinforcing dependency and devaluation



Figure 5  
Broken switch access  
into the lecture room  
– student assistant  
required

Following my first encounter, I adopted some strategies to manage being a 'misfit' to address the spatial injustice I encounter and to lessen the impact of feeling out of place and being stranded. One strategy was raising the issues to facilities personnel – whose solution was to give me my own key to the corridor - however this is not a solution – as what happens for people with less fine motor control than me, or on bad days when I might struggle to be able to put the key in and turn it. To address the automatic door, which sometimes opened sometimes did not during the semester, I sort the support of students and tutors. For example, students knew that if I was not in the room 5 minutes before the lecture they would look out to the corridor to see if I was there (see Figure 5). I gave up on security personnel as they did not always come.

These encounters emphasise that unlike the place ballet Seamon (2002) describes that helps to establish a sense of place and place attachment, my body-space routines on campus I have to perform to get around and inside spaces could only be described as an outsider tussle - nothing smooth and flowing like a ballet. The hostile physicality of the space reveals a lack of consideration of diverse corporeality and movement involved in the body-space routine of getting inside. The route of getting inside also speaks loudly that everydayness along with designing for diversity (e.g. people with disabilities) is not well embedded in spatial design practice. Furthermore, the add-ons of key locks to doors and the removal of switches illustrate a deliberate controlling of entry to non-normative bodies and the privileging of "security" over the seamless entry for bodies like mine. Not only does this act devalue and disrespect disabled academics and students, but it is also highly concerning that decision makers, believe our entry, use and interaction with spaces on campus is up for compromise. These encounters reinforce the ongoing social-spatial oppression of academics with non-normative bodies on university campuses.

## Conclusion

Interiority is a complex and ongoing dialectic of insiderness/outsiderness - felt through our relations with space. It is evoked or not through our interaction and inhabitation of space (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2018). A person feels or senses interiority not just through the materiality of walls and windows but through one's bodily encounters with the whole space and its parts (McCarthy, 2005). My first person phenomenological accounts reinforce this point – showing the significance of not only body-space relation involved in interiority but the deep existential meaning conveyed about our sense of insiderness/outsiderness felt through our everyday body-space encounters - such as opening the door to get inside.

Such knowledge reinforces that everydayness has a significant place in the design praxis, as noted by Anderson (2011): “the everyday world at its most fundamental level is a domain of praxis, a realm of predominantly practical truths shaped by and disclosed to practical tasks and relations” (p. 69). Adopting an everydayness lens will help to raise consciousness so as to improve human experiences within our designed spaces. Through an intentional focus on our mundane level of existence, we expose how everyday activities are intrinsically linked to the designed environment (Upton, 2002) and the quality of our interactions with the physicality of space.

Embracing everydayness is also critically important for understanding interactions that supports or prevents interiority. For people with non-normative bodies, an everydayness perspective can help to expose ableism (a prejudice towards standardised body form) in designed environments, which is critically important for non-normative bodies like mine whose subjective experience of interiority is constantly being disputed and denied by hostile materiality. Everydayness is key to spatial design practice to improve human experiences of interiority and spatial justice within design practice.

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