Solitude | Designing for Introverts in an Extroverted World

Subject:

We live in a society that celebrates the out-going over the quiet, action over contemplation, the extrovert over the introvert. It has been engrained in our mind at a very young age that we need to have bombastic personalities less we be the person who is alone. This inclination of extrovert personas has shaped our environment most evidently in Western societies, namely here in the United States. We create large open spaces to promote social atmospheres, modern offices employ open floor plans or offices with no walls so that we are forced to engage with coworkers and even in schools where seating used to be arranged in orderly rows with individual desks is being replaced by group seating to foster group activity. Statistically somewhere from 1/3 to ½ of all people are introverts. Being an introvert does not necessarily mean that you are shy or reserved but is a matter of reaction to stimulation. Extroverts prefer more amounts of stimulation while introverts prefer lesser amounts of stimulation. Some of our greatest leaders and innovators have been self-described introverts, from Steve Wozniak (co-founder of Apple) to Ghandi. Studies show that introverts tend to be better leaders of the workplace and that workers produce significantly better results than their colleagues when placed in environment of solitude and privacy. "*Open-plan offices have been found to reduce productivity and impair memory. They're associated with high staff turnover. They make people sick, hostile, unmotivated, and insecure. Open-plan workers are more likely to suffer from high-blood pressure and elevated stress levels and to get the flu; they argue more with their colleagues; they worry about coworkers eavesdropping on their phone calls and spying on their computer screens*" (Cain, 84). Some of the greatest innovations of our time would not have happened if the innovators had not sought ought a moment of solitude and quiet (ex. Wozniak and Apple). **In a society that is built for extroverts, how can we design for the introverts?**

Thesis:

As architects we have the opportunity to **design for people.** Yet we are shaping our built environment with a bias to support a little more than half the people of the world. I believe there is great and underappreciated value in **designing for solitude and quiet** despite the influence of society. Through research and I plan to challenge the effectiveness and rationale behind existing built conditions in two scales. The macro scale where I will be analyzing urban planning choices and argue that we need less blocks of noise and more moments of introspection. And the micro scale where I will analyze the strategy of open-plan offices and argue that though collaboration and transparency are necessary, we also need privacy and isolation.

Timeline:

The rough timeline of this project will be seperated by semesters: research and analysis & application. As a speculative project there is a lot of qualitative information that needs to be collected on top of understanding existing research and studies. For subjects or study, I will look into the structure of Oakland in the Urban Lab Oakland 2050 studio and the Carnegie Mellon campus and community. For application in the spring semester I hope to propose a revised general office-plan strategy or challenge the open-studio plan for architecture students. Ultimately I would like to construct and deploy a quiet space on campus to test my thesis "in the field". If possible I would like to do this in the environment of Spring Carnival where quiet spaces are few and far between.

Bibliography:

Cain, Susan. *Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012. Print.
Laney, Marti Olsen. *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World*. New York: Workman Pub., 2002. Print.
Dembling, Sophia. *The Introvert's Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012. Print.