

Intimacy in public interiors

Quantitative and qualitative approach to the case study.

INTRODUCTION

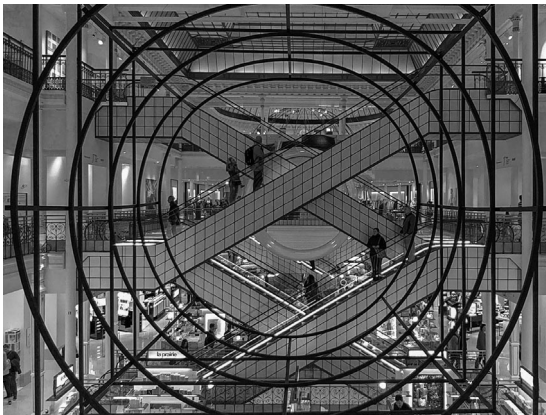
Research methodologies and the way how they are understood, translated and incorporated into the process of architectural design either into architectural discourse, is crucial for defining a broad perspective of a particular context. Architecture as a discipline has been described extensively and in different interpretations, one of which is the division of architecture into three categories by James Fergusson, Scottish architectural historian. The first one, the technical, requires manual work of a craftsman. The second, the aesthetic, is connected with art's impact on the senses and finally the third one, the phonetic, is connected with the intellect for the most. (Fergusson, 1849) This explanation shows how complex the discipline is and how many different aspects it engages. The research-methodological awareness is then highly relevant in relation to the profession of an architect, because it enables to use the variety of tools that potentially could help to look at design practices from different angles. Architects often think that designing a building is a form of research itself. Each design proposal could be defined as exclusive so its creation is therefore the production of original knowledge. This argument has been undermined by Jeremy Till from the RIBA's Research and Development Committee, because the original knowglade may be included in the building only to some extent. It also lies apart of it; in all the processes that led to the final design and in the theories beyond it. "Architecture profession always exceeds the building as an object, just as art exceeds the painting as object" (Thill, 2003), it means that the research-methodologies allow to look beyond the object, which also determines its relevance for the architectural discourse.

One of the methods of looking beyond the object is a scriptive approach presented by Klaske Havik in her articles and later emphasized during the lectures. I found the proposal of her perspective, particularly helpful and the most unexpected. Literary methods give us the ability to reinforce our means with the complex intellectual and emotive worlds in design. (Havik, 2014) Architecture is building a scene, which is set up to play with the emotions of those who accommodate the space. Moreover, this particular approach, became in my hands a simple, yet powerful tool to describe and investigate areas of my research, which I probably would not be able to express by drawings.

My thesis topic is related to and based on the theme of the intimate city. It assumes the city as a sphere where people come together, where private life involves the contact with public in places, named as the City rooms by Interiors Buildings Cities studio. Therefore, my research question is: what defines a place to be a city room? With the findings what it means, I could then explore the conditions and qualities, which public interior needs to be a city room. What are the social and architectural qualities for intimacy in public and at which moments does it take place in a city. The intimate city in the context of city room takes into account metropolitan cities from which our investigation began, like Paris, Neaples, Milan or Vienna. Moreover, the knowledge gather from these cities will be implemented into Antwerp, where my thesis project will exist. My studio focuses on contexts, precedents and people. The first one concerns public interiors as a tool, which prevails the environment and generate the figure ground for the city. Precedents are more purely architectural gestures, like patterns and forms. For the third one, we focus on people from both anthropologist and designer points of view. Finally all three of them should be intertwined and developed parallel to one another, which stands in need for awareness of different research approaches.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The research in the Interiors graduation studio could be distinguished by two parts; theoretical and more practical. For the first part, I focused on Paris as a metropolitan city, which emerged in the 19th century. My theoretical body of knowledge consists of a literature and anthropological research. For researching social aspect of intimate interiors, we decided to use the experiential and comparative descriptions inspired by a scriptive describing of Klaske Havik. In description of Viipuri City Library and Virgilio Barco Library, she has chosen a poetic approach, bringing into play phenomenological aspects such as perception and memory. (Havik, 2017) We followed her attitude together with the book "Twenty Minutes in Manhattan" by Michael Sorkin as an inspiration for the investigation of Parisian city rooms. Each of Paris group member focused on the description of one public interior, which in my case was The Bon Marche. The emotional, intuitive description allowed to explore the context of human life and intimacy in particular space much more intensive than any drawing I made, which was the motivation for this approach. In order to have a complex perspective, we decided to support our writing by making a movie. In result, observational and empirical methodology allowed me to developed a foundation for qualitative research through case study, which I will implement in Antwerp where we prepare a proposal for a potential public programme. Following this experiential and qualitative methodology, each of description from Paris served as a primary knowledge of space and a script for a movie, which together; moving image with a narration, became a choreography of life in the metropolitan city. (Fig. 1) Using a scriptive approach, even as not as a fully possessed skill, strengths the designer's functional and spatial imagination (Havik, 2014). This approach allowed me to derive with a body of knowledge about intimacy in public space.



I walk through it, space by space, one place of retail leaks into another, time elapses, each space is different but nothing changes, users who accommodate the store, flow constantly. In this constant flow everyone is anonymous. Every one of them focused on the goods and other activities that are not as simple to sort out. Some entirely opposite visuals of the vivid Le Bon Marche come to my mind; the end of the 19th century, crowds gather during day in the main gallery illuminated by the glass - iron roofs. The roofs are still present, but almost no light come to the interior thanks to new technologies.

Fig. 1: Main Hall of the Bon Marche, fragment from the movie with the fragment of written narration.

When we moved to Paris, I decided to use the Arcade Project by Walter Benjamin as a main literature source. Even if the title concerns the Passages, which emerged in the 19th century from the industrial revolution, it is also an unfinished casebook of immersive amount of Parisian elements, from experiential descriptions of Flaneur's life to more precise architecture analysis. Together it merges cultural anthropology with social and architectural history to provide a complex view of 19th century Paris. I find his work similar to Landau's investigating history by pieces. He believes that "To produce a historical construction requires the identification of a whole followed by finding ways of analysing that whole." (Landau, 1982) As author suggest, there is an interplay between the practical and the theoretical matter. I find Benjamin's research methodology comparable, when he investigate Paris on both; practical level of Iron Constructions descriptions and theoretical, when he try to connect development of houses under glass with the rise of bourgeoisie.

The second source, which I have chosen to support my research is Mark Pimlott book "The public interior as idea and project". His work defines the notion of public interior and investigate its roots and architectural qualities. Already in the very beginning he constructs an argument that, "*public interior is the one, which we consider ourselves to be free and individual, where we can see ourselves within the others, where we are aware of our place in the society.*" (Pimlott, 2016) For me it is a heuristic discovery, that relies on analogy and intuition. Based on this definition, he describe different interiors and exteriors and provide visual analysis where occur sociability, display, contemplation and other. Although, the exploration of different environments is captured and divided into five chapters. For instance, the first one is a Garden, the Idyllic space of biblical Eden, which could be later found in public interiors like Glass Houses in the 19th century Paris. Both authors have experiential and descriptive approach to the "city rooms", although their methodology differ in structuralizing their work. Pimlott's book gives particular context for each example, when Benjamin's work gives its reader broader possibilities for interpretation.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Architecture is an ambiguous discipline, which need to be considered through its technical aspect as well as the sociological side of it. To sum up my previous explanation, my research will consists of three methods: a literature research, empirical research and a qualitative research through case studies and observations. The qualitative research is employed among many academic disciplines. Within architecture it could focus on the human aspects but includes much more than that. (Fross, 2012). My Case study is going to examine in depth certain examples of city rooms in Antwerp on different levels.

Case study is arguably one of the most popular research method, which could be interpreted as "*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*" (Yin, 2003). For Robert Yin, it is a holistic strategy based on observation of the theoretical scheme in the particular context. The complexity of relation between the subject and the context makes it peculiar among other research methods. Some researchers, like Geoffrey Easton, put stress on the educational aspect of case study. Using this method by students encourage their creativity and decision-makings, as well as provoke to learn and train analytical thinking, which could be implemented into the design (Easton, 1982) It is also the definition that concerns case study as a description of a phenomena with a problem, for which researcher has to find or create alternative solutions. R. K. Yin points out that there should be a clear distinction between a research and educational case study and we should not confuse it with other methods of research, which also include collecting and analysing data. (Yin, 2003) Case studies often employ various qualitative approaches, like ethnology, phenomenology or historical issues. However, This method should be understood as a methodological affinity, not a definitional entailment. (Gerring, 2012). Following this statement, one who is doing a case study cannot restrict own approach only to qualitative techniques. The context of the case study is usually too broad to be constrained and should be concerned in a quantitative manner as well. J. Gerring use case study as an intensive study of a single unit to understand a larger group of similar units (Gerring, 2012).

I rely the most on Gerring's definition of a case study as a research method. The description of my personal approach to Parisian city rooms proves that it is hardly possible to define social activities and the notion of intimacy in architecture without certain amount of empirical attitude to the research. My research in Antwerp will be consisted of number of case studies, for the purpose of understanding a quality of a good city room, embedded in a city. With the abstract subject of research such as "intimacy" experimental techniques, like scriptive narration will be a valuable tool to approach it as a foundation for a series of case studies, which will include specific interiors, buildings, urban spaces and communities. I

also believe that my comparative observation has to be executed in the particular context of Eilandje in Antwerp, Public Interiors, City Rooms and intimacy. By using qualitative and quantitative methodology combined, with the support of literature, I believe to find a great body of knowledge. For instance, my research in Paris, guided me into the direction, which concerns the tension between the public and private life in the public interior. The in-between space immediately become a context, in which the case study could be introduced.

IV POSITIONING

The Research Methods lecture series at the TU Delft brought my attention to the importance of research methodology awareness and made me aware of different tools and intellectual approaches. Klaske Havik described explicitly in the lecture about Spatial Narratives the possibility to approach architectural research in a literary way. During her talks and in her articles, she substantiated the complexity of architecture practice. She wrote that *“Even the simplest architectural task fuses issues of functionality, performance and technique, philosophy and aesthetics, science and economy, rational deduction and emotive intuition, knowledge and faith.”* (Havik, 2014) It means that this ambiguous discipline requires not only analytical but also verbal skills, for instance usage of metaphors, verbal concepts and imagination. It allows for recording the experience of architecture, which in such a subjective subject of research like mine, it is crucial. However, I decided build the narration by scriptive writing to emphasize my first impressions, and further observe already experimentally experienced stage with drawings, photographs and spatial analysis, which all be creating a complementary case study.

For R. C. F. Souza, case study can be both, literal and theoretical since It was predominantly theoretical. (Souza, 2015) It means, that his statement could confirm my assumptions for the empirical approach as a foundation for later, more practical, qualitative research methods like case study. In addition to that, Souza refers to Yin’s paper, who claims that this unity of analysis occurs when the primary research questions are accurately specified (Souza, 2015). I believe that my research questions takes into account appropriate aspect of intimacy in architecture, so I could adopt the position presented in his research and achieve unity of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

My university and professional experience made me aware that Architects often do research for their projects with the case study method. However, they sometimes try to find someone’s designs as a reference for their own, taking different elements from various works to implement them in their own or to inspire their own creativity. I believe this approach lacks the entire theoretical framework and the empirical methodology, which I recognize as the most exciting part of research. This example of doing research by a lot of architects, also forgets about the importance of relation between a subject with its context. By taking Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project as an example, I would like put a stress on the relevance of the context in the case study research. Only after I recognized the entire background of the 19th century Paris, I could understand Passages on different levels. It motivates my research to define “city rooms” in the context of intimacy and the city of Antwerp as broadly as possible.

The Interiors Building Cities studio introduces design process as a part of research. “Thinking through making” usually includes making physical models and reflecting on them. I believe it is a unquestionably valuable way of experimental approach. However, I argue that this approach could become a great support for my research methodology, not a substitute. With the notion of intimacy in architecture, anthropological aspect is hardly possible to investigate only by doing models.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that doing a complex case study research, which has quantitative and qualitative character, I will be able to answer the question of intimacy in public interiors. My initial findings

display that city room could be not entirely a public space, as well as one could find intimate relation with an architectural object, which is completely exposed to public. However, each city room create a figure ground and defines an urban tissue in the city. My experience before research methods course shows that I have had too little experience in doing research, most universities does not pay enough attention to the importance of research methodology. I have also found research methods described in this essay, personally more valuable than literature study, when the subject of research incorporates such experiential characteristics.

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