

A STUDY OF POWER TRANSITION IN COPENHAGEN

Reflection on Contextual Led Research of Political Space

Danyu Zeng

Chair of Interiors Buildings Cities, The Independent Group, "Political Architecture"

Thesis "Cultural Contingency: Revelry as an Expression of Grass-root Autonomy"

I INTRODUCTION

There are two types of architecture degrees in the architectural educations, Master of Science, or Master of Arts. It is hard to extract architecture as either a pure piece of art or a scientific result. Art is emotional, subjective work, for displaying and evoking purpose; architecture in the modern scientific perspective, often relates to the pragmatism of structural and technical restrictions. Architecture, as a practice of intertwining art and science, helps architects to develop their positions in the preliminary design stage —research. It becomes important because the research stage brings the design to a contextual study that relates the practice to its surroundings and histories; it requires a critical thinking of the social and cultural role of the design, and a theoretical validity of what it means to build and dwell.¹

While the architecture students always struggle in how to start the research, the *Lecture Series Research Methods* offers me a guide with distinct categories among most methods. The course provides both lectures and readings. When I have difficulty concluding my research direction, I found it rather helpful to look at the book *Research Methods for Architecture*, which clearly concludes each research branch. I realized it is important to define one's research to be context led, methodology led, or theory led. My graduation studio—Interiors Buildings Cities—is very much focused on contextual aspects. In the book, Lucas explains that a context led research often includes two aspects. The first one is typology study, investigating a context with reference to other circumstances following the same rules; the second is the *unique*, which sets a different and specific place from the others². Among all the lecture topics, I find the three talks very helpful for defining my approach: *Investigating Typologies* and *Investigating Spatial Narrative*. The first two lectures help me to build up a basic knowledge on the terms that my graduation studio is paying attention to, while the third one simulates my personal interest and inspires me to expand my exploration to a fictional perspective. Therefore, I would conclude my research methodology as a combination of the two.

My thesis topic is: A Study of Power Transitions in Copenhagen. It derives from the studio's general theme: the political engagements with space, especially the manifestations within the city in the context of environmental crisis. The study of political space often includes a range of approaches, but the core discipline remains unchanged: to understand the politics of space and the implications of power relations in space.

We are encouraged to research the use of resources, people's movements and relations to labor practices. I started with a series of research questions from historical aspect towards the architectural reflection of future. Firstly, what does a crisis mean to the Danish state and its people? How did both sides react to the crisis? How did people's movement affect Copenhagen's urban structure? Secondly, how does the movement evolve until today, when everything has calmed down and social order has been re-organized? What does the gatherings mean to citizens today? What can I design for a better future?

In chapter II, I will discuss my research methodology— a contextual led research composed by typology and spatial narrative. Then in chapter III, I will reflect the related methodologies via two literacies: *The Public Interior as Idea and Project* by Mark Pimlott, and *Festival Architecture* by Sarah Bonnemaïson and Christine Macy. In chapter IV the last, I will compare my methodology to the course *Lecture Series Research Methods*, and formulate my position: inviting the chance nature of events into architectural research and design as an approach of collaging existing facts.

¹ Lucas, Ray. "Introduction: What is Architectural Research", *Research Methods for Architecture*. (London, King: 2016), P7.

² Lucas, Ray. "Introduction: What is Architectural Research, Context, methodology and theory", *Research Methods for Architecture*. (London, King: 2016), P11-13.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

To understand the relation between of Danish state and its people in the environmental crisis, I divided my research into two branches: the control of authorities, and the people's fight for freedom. The first branch includes a wide range of types with a quantitative research, while the second one focus on a qualitative research of one specific event.

Inspired by the Lecture of *Investigating Typologies*, the first discussion of "control" invites the method of typology study. Robert Alexander Gorny explains in his lecture, "a typology approach is the study of a geometrical and spatial relations constant through continuous change, the way in which constituent parts are interrelated or arranged"³. In my study, I collect a series of the circular interiors to illustrate the notion of central control. The study starts with a local precedent, the Police Headquarters in Copenhagen, with a gated circular courtyard. Then I relate it to different programs with the same purpose of control, for instance the prison Panopticon, the reading room of British Museum. From those examples, one can conclude that the "control" usually realized by the way of gazing, the control of limiting accessibility to public.

In comparison to gazing and inaccessibility, I continue with the same example of the Police Headquarters, which opens annually for Summer Dance Events. Through this specific event, I see the power of culture breaks into the order and the control. In the form of culture, entering a controlled space gains its legitimation. To conclude, the main purpose of this typology study is to reveal my idea of "culture event as a political tool to fight for democracy".

The second discourse of "people's fight for freedom" is developed in parallel to the typology studies. In response to the *unique* factor in contextual led research, I try to define my research to be as specific as possible. My implementation is focused on a specific movement happened in a specific "place" and a specific period—the battle for Ungdomshuset (Youth House) in Copenhagen's immigrant clusters during 1980s when most European countries were experiencing squatting movements. From the historical research, I have learned how the Danish workers becomes a victim under crisis of neo-liberal economy and how the authorities tried to suppress the workers' movement.

Inspired by the Lecture of *Investigating Spatial Narratives*, I integrate the spatial analysis with specific event. Based on praxeology, Klaske Havik's Lecture introduces the approach of visualizing human behavior on architectural mapping. She brings a fictional perspective of "architecture literacy", which moves down through personal experience and stories, then reveals and enhances to the society. The preliminary research often includes personal interpretations of site visit, interviews, and readings of novels. My research sources are built under the influence of Klaske Havik. ⁴

The research materials include published sources such as newspapers, journals and essays. It is also supported by autonomous sources such as interviews, diaries, webpages and videos. Through the published resources, I learned the two major events. Firstly, the workers' movement in Copenhagen has started from 1980 until 2008, when Danish government was forced to let the squatters take possession of a new building⁵. Secondly, today's most popular cultural event Distortion was born in 1998 for a one-night party in Tivoli, Copenhagen. A small, chaotic, illegal 5-day night culture saw a victory and won its legitimation from the Copenhagen City Council and the Copenhagen Police, after

³ Robert Alexander Gorny. "Investing Typologies", *Lecture Series Research Methods*. (Delft University of Technology, 2020)

⁴ Klaske Havik. "Investing Spatial Narratives", *Lecture Series Research Methods*. (Delft University of Technology, 2020)

⁵ "Ungdomshuset." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 December 2019, [online] access online from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ungdomshuset>.

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gathering more than two thousand guests at a single street party⁶. Today, the ultra-mobility idea and the event are developed into a huge revelry. The autonomous source plays an importance role of weaving the events of past and the current. Through the diaries, I read that during the workers' movement, the underground group was gathering in the dark to avoid the police and celebrating their victory at night. Such a discover helps me develop my idea of "revelry as an expression of grassroots' autonomy" (Figure 1). I build a spatial narrative of political in relates to urban structure by mapping out where the events took place and where are the clusters of workers and authorities.

One reflection is worth mentioning here. During the mapping based on few samples, I always doubt my research lacking accuracy while selecting samples. To better evaluate if Klaske's approach suits me or not, I turn to the book *Research Methods for Architecture*, where Lucas explains the two basic divisions of research methodology: qualitative research and quantitative research. The understanding of the two answers my question. While the qualitative research focused on individuals or a specific group of people, the depth of research plays an important role in humanity-based study of architecture despite the lack of accuracy and uncertainty as a whole. ⁷

As a result, my diagrammatic analysis is based on the understanding of the two opposed branches, the control of authorities versus the people's fight for freedom. It is visualized in the diagram of comparing the state power and the individual power through events/programs (Figure 2).

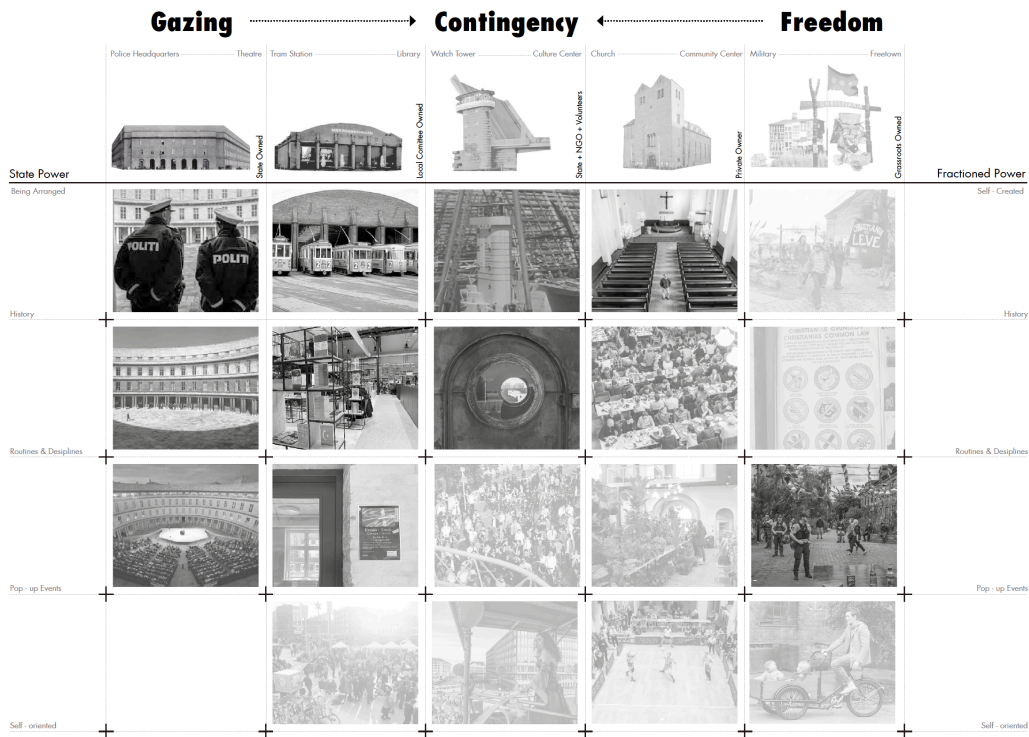


(Figure 1: Map of Distortion — An Annual Musical Festival in Copenhagen)

⁶ "Copenhagen Distortion." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 22 March 2020, [online] access online from: https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copenhagen_Distortion.

⁷ Lucas, Ray. "Fundamentals of Architectural Research, Chapter 2: Defining your research methodology", *Research Methods for Architecture*. (London, King: 2016). P36-37.

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(Figure 2: Power Transitions Through Programs/Events, Copenhagen)

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A politically engaged research often involves a range of approaches rather than one single methodology, but the central discussion is always focused on one issue: how the control of governance, finance, commerce affects the city. The power relations therefore become the core of my research I find two books especially influential to me in the study of power relations: *The Public Interior as Idea and Project* by Mark Pimlott, and *Festival Architecture* by Sarah Bonnemaison and Christine Macy. Written by the studio mentor, the first book helps me understand the general approach of my graduation studio Interiors Buildings Cities, as one example of quantitative research in my case; The second, as a qualitative research, offers me a more historical approach to concentrate on festive events in depth— how carnival has politically facilitated the urban revolution.

In *The Public Interior as Idea and Project*, Mark Pimlott categorizes the public interiors into six types: the Garden, the Palace, the Ruin, the Shed, the Machine, the Network. He interprets each type its cultural, social role throughout different historical periods. Rather than a mere typology methodology or merely listing by building characters such as sociability, display or control, Mark uses the narrative to link various building types to characteristics. His attention on the material culture —the invisible culture behind what it makes—critically interprets what one sees towards what one designs.⁸

Referring to Mark's approach, I firstly divide my research of political architecture into several terms, namely the Control, the Autonomy, the Festivity. Within each term, I collect the building types referring to the theme, study their social, cultural and political roles, and carefully select which one helps build up my narrative (Figure 3).

Before I understand the above methodology, I had difficulty integrating the typology study to a defined narrative. To me, the typology discusses a repetitive pattern in different purposes of use. By looking at

⁸ Mark Pimlott, "Introduction", *The Public interior as Idea and Project* (Jap Sam Books: 2016). P11-12.

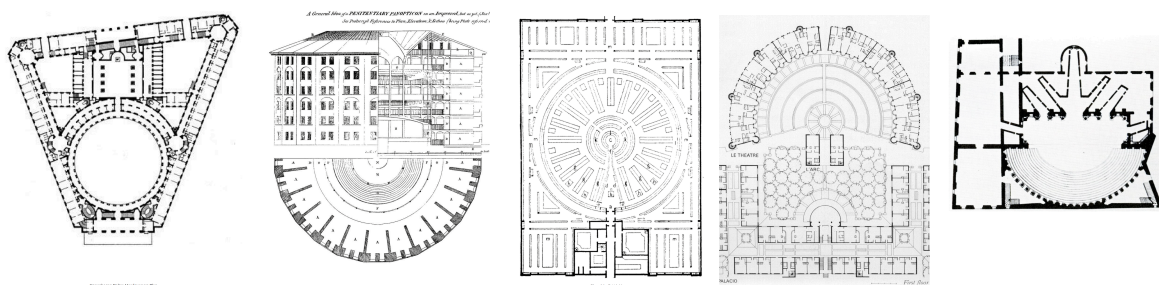
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the type of circular interiors, I find it easy to collect such types across the history. In the study of “control”, I build up a precedent archive, including prison, reading room, theatre, gated community, Colosseum, plaza, palace and police station. However, I was not clear which precedent is helpful to cite. Learning from Mark’s Method, I noticed a narrative, or a statement should be invited at this stage. I made a statement that the state power of control is realized by gazing. The precisely selective exercise helps me take out some of the irrelevant samples, such as the plaza, which is not reflecting a state power.

In *Festival Architecture* shows a different approach. Sarah Bonnemaïson and Christine Macy explores the power transitions through festive events in the European cities through a historical timeline. There are eleven essays in the book; each show one particular event in one place in depth. For example, in *Taking back the street, Paris 1968-78*, Sarah compares the daily street to the occupied street during protest. The daily street contains a certain controlled order, while the autonomous occupation shows the power of protest while the order is temporality removed. Despite its illegal origins, the protest has later been legitimized as the festivals, while the authority allows the order to be moved in a defined period.⁹

Inspired by the Book, I investigate a specific event in my second term “Autonomy” — the historical movement “battle for Ungdomshuset”. An experiential impact strikes me while going through documentaries, site filming, interviewing and reading diaries of the individuals who had been engaged in the workers’ movement in Copenhagen. One of the diaries vividly describe how the workers’ group gathered secretly at night and talked secretly in the dark to avoid the police, and how they celebrated the Friday victory at night, because the police will not come until Monday.¹⁰ The investigation helps me establish a personal engagement to the movement and understand the importance of such a night culture. Referring to the *Festival Architecture* where the author relates the carnival as political trigger to urban transformations, I conclude my research to be “revelry as an expression of grassroots autonomy”. It weaves the two events together, “Distortion”, Copenhagen’s most popular revelry, and workers’ movement “battle for Ungdomshuset”.

To me, the two methodologies above work together in my research development. They respond to first chapter where I mentioned a contextual led research includes the typology and the uniqueness. Mark’s approach is to a narrative to link various building types to characteristics of social, political and cultural; it is a way of categorizing the typologies. Sarah’s Methodology is to focus on one specific event in a specific place; it is an implementation of the qualitative research of uniqueness in the context.



(Figure 3: Typology study of Power Transitions in Circular Space)

⁹ Sarah Bonnemaïson, “Taking back the street, Paris 1968-78”, *Festival Architecture*. (Routledge, 1 edition: 2007), P277-305.

¹⁰ “The Battle for Ungdomshuset—The Defense of a Squatted Social Center and the Strategy of Autonomy.” *CrimethInc*, CrimethInc. Association, 1 March 2019, [online] access online from: <https://crimethinc.com/2019/03/01/the-battle-for-ungdomshuset-the-defense-of-a-squatted-social-center-and-the-strategy-of-autonomy>.



Supporters Demonstration in City Hall Square, 2006



- Distortion on the Bridge towards Vesterbro, 2017 -

(Figure 4: Occupation of Urban Structure by protest (left) and revelry (right))

IV POSITIONING

To conclude my position built on the political engaged research, a notion of cultural contingency is invited: it is a chance that people pass by, bump into an event, where they cheer for the joy and start to talk with each other. It is not a place for simulating one domain culture, but a place for transculturalism, where people live differently and respect each other's difference.

One might argue the position is more imaginary than the fact, and I would argue that my imagination through architectural design, it is never about telling a truth or a fact, but more an exploration to build a future. To further illustrate, I want to compare Klaske's approach of architecture literacy to Bernard Tschumi's approach of cinematic architecture.

Among all the talks in *Lecture Series Research Methods*, my interest on the humanity scope draws me closer to Klaske's approach. In her talk *Investigating Spatial Narrative*, Klaske introduces a fictional perspective of "architecture literacy", which moves down through personal experience and stories, then reveals and enhances to the society. When I talk about fiction here, it is not a pure imagination; it is a collage of different facts representing by the author. It is more powerful and informative to build a narrative upon the existing facts. ¹¹

In architectural research, the approach encourages site visit for observations and interviews of specific subjects. The direct and deep contact with the subject can be seen as an experiential and evoking approach to touch humanities. Later on, Klaske encourages her students to illustrate their findings in an analytic diagram, such as mapping. One impressive example to me was — one of her students used two intertwining wavy lines to map a daily route of an old lady—to mimic her bumpy walking gesture. It is a simple but powerful interpretation as an architectural language that expresses the deepest emotion of everyday life as a human.

In the first talk on *Heuristics*, Jorge Mejia cites Le Corbusier's argument in *Towards a new architecture*. In the book, Le Corbusier made a simple comparison: if the classic temples represented the spirit of the time of ancient Greeks, the industrial products, such as cars, can be referred to the spirit of our time. Jorge points out, "according to this way of thinking, in order to achieve an architecture that represented the spirit of his time, architects could simply translate the logics of cars

¹¹ Klaske Havik. "Investing Spatial Narratives", *Lecture Series Research Methods*. (Delft University of Technology, 2020)

and other technical developments to architecture.” He shows a strong opposition to this interpretation, based on his understanding of architecture as a cognitive practice instead of a corroborative practice¹².

I concur with Jorge Mejia’s idea and I see the corroborative practice through the exploration of expanding the boundary of architectural field. Besides Klaske’s integration of literacy, the movie field is invited by Bernard Tschumi’s idea of cinematic architecture. Such investigation through movie techniques originated in an interest in sequences and programmatic concerns. He explores the relation between events, or programs, and architectural spaces. The use of film images can be seen as a transformational device of sequence nature. Bernard believes there is no architecture without action, no architecture without event, no architecture without program.¹³ Similar to Klaske’s idea, Bernard’s approach is a composition upon existing facts, rather than a pure fictional framework. To compare, Mark’s approach of framing narrative does not involve a fictional, or imaginary factor. He arranges the narrative through typology discussions. However, it is a more analytical narrative than a designated result.

In chapter one, I have asked the questions: how does the movement evolve until today, when everything has calmed down and social order has been re-organized? What does the gatherings mean to citizens today? What can I design for a better future? These are also the recurring questions throughout my entire study of architectural design.

After the research, I think I have got an answer. The answer must situate between facts and imaginary. An architectural design is a re-organization of imaginative events based on the past. I conclude it as a fictional narrative upon the typological fact. Specifically, the use of typology research is to collect existing facts and building up the archive, and based on that, the imaginary events is articulated through architectural design. Beyond the academic field, the actual practice requires architect’s arrangements, or guidelines to coordinate the events and spaces, and I believe, creativity grows from the exercise of collaging existing facts through a fictional narrative.

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¹² According to Jorge Mejia, a corroborative practice is meant to embody any law or spirit, a cognitive practice means to produce knowledge. Jorge Mejia. “Heuristics”, *Lecture Series Research Methods*. (Delft University of Technology, 2020)

¹³ “Screenplays.” *Bernard Tschumi*, Bernard Tschumi Architect, 1976, [online] access online from: <http://www.tschumi.com/projects/50/>