

TOWARDS SPATIAL DEMOCRACY

A synthesis of praxeology and phenomenology to study relations between human's activity and built environment

Student

Yue Shi (4893530)

Chair of Interiors, Buildings, Cities "Palace"

Thesis "City Hall in Brussels"

I INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a subject of researching, thinking, making and designing, and research plays an essential role in the process of making architecture, and in most cases, both for academic projects and in practical designs, research will happen first in place, which helps designers build a concrete foundation for future design. There are various kinds of research methods, analytical tools and heuristic techniques which could be adapted to analyse different types, directions or focuses of researches. However, it is also important to design and build the research with appropriate methods in terms of their specific concerns.

The lecture series of Research Methods provide fundamental and solid knowledge of multiple kinds of methodological tools and techniques which helps me understand different ways of designing and structuring architectural research, both theoretically and practically. Especially one of the methodological tool *Praxeology* introduced in the lecture series gives me enlightenment and widen my thought of the multiple ways of establishing human-related researches which have beneficial in making design decision. Architecture is an ever-developing body of knowledge which has a close relation to how we use space: how we live and adapt space, creating meaningful places and giving form to the world around us. It provides stages for everyday life and people need to be put in the heart of architectural design. The way we understand the world has influences on the way we build, and in return, what we have built has impacts on the way we understand the world.¹

Taking Brussels as a heterogeneous city, the Graduation Studio of Chair of Interiors Buildings and Cities focuses on the right to the citizens and agency that embedded in design and architecture. The project is a new city administrative building in the centre of Brussels on the site of Parking 58, a former parking structure that now demolished, which was built for the Universal Exposition in 1958. Before Parking 58 took the place, Halles Centrales (Central Market) located on the site, providing spaces for various activities and people gathering. The new building will be used for the city administration, but also will become a centre, a public place for the local citizens' contact with governance and administration; and a presentation which could represent the citizens and their concerns.² As there are strong relationships between people and architecture, as well as citizen and city in this design project, it is important to understand in which way architecture and built environment could represent the agency of the people.

This thesis will explore the synthesis of praxeology and phenomenology as a methodological tool to analyse and study the relation between human activities and the space offered by the built environment. Under the brief of designing a political architecture, together with concerns of positioning people in the heart of architectural design, my research will be built under the topic of spatial democracy – how people use and adapt space in order to achieve their political and democratic roles in cities, and how architecture could embed the power of citizens in itself.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION – ADAPTING PRAXEOLGY AND PHENOMENOLOGY STUDIES AS FOUNDATIONS FOR A POLITICAL DESIGN

Praxeology is a way of studying human's activities, behaviours, and conduct. As Marieke Berkers introduced in her lecture, by studying the praxis of architecture, an insight to the actual users of the building will be developed, instead of the imagined ones.³ Praxeology provides a way of studying and analysing the actual needs and willing of the future users of the building, that will be beneficial for the architects to achieve a building of better quality, and fulfil users' demands. Similarly, phenomenology is a study concerning human everyday life, but with concern on one's own experience and sensory feeling of a space.

In the design of an administrative building for a city and its citizens, the wish is to design an architecture for city administration, but most importantly, a centre – forum, agora, palace – for Brussels's citizens. The theme of the studio, 'palace', originally comes from the palazzo comunale or palazzi civici of renaissance and medieval Italian cities and the so-called 'people's palaces' of the twentieth century: spaces that offered to everyone, all citizens for gathering both culturally and politically, as antidote to the conventional power structure.⁴ These examples present the early forms of democracy, as a way of individual citizens being part of political life. This tradition of democratic ideas in civic buildings stretched over until nowadays. As Arndt stated, 'I feel that democracy as a political way of life has to rely from the outset on the independent man and that everything in it, including building, has to aim toward supporting man in gaining this independence and consciousness in this world, that he is a political man, who carries his share of historical responsibility – even if that contribution is modest.'⁵ Building has been taken as a form of representing human democracy in societies for centuries, and it is logical and convincing that for a new administrative building or a city hall for the city of Brussels, to achieve democracy on the individual level both functionally and spatially.

Then the question raised to how to present people's voice and this sort of individual democracy in architectural design, and in which way citizens' political concerns could be recorded and studied in order to be developed with architectural language. Collectively working in the studio, a list of activism and activist groups has been selected and studied to understand the ways of people's engagement with political life. Taking praxeology as a methodological tool, activities, marches and protestings held by ten activist groups have been recorded both in the forms of drawings and text. Drawing is introduced as a technical tool. People's actions and behaviours have been studied and translated into axonometric drawings, which offers insight into the relations which exist between patterns of activities and spaces offered by the built environment. Meanwhile, interviews have been given to the representatives from each activists group. Some general questions as well as specific group-related questions have been asked which provide a way of analysing their political demands and thinking in a comparable manner. In addition to the architectural translation of activist groups' stories in Brussels, we also participated in the Climate Strike in Den Haag – a real-life political activity, as an experimenter, to observe the way of people using urban space to express political ideas, and to gain the sensory feeling of being inside a political space and environment.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION – THEORITICAL AND HISTORICAL APPROACH OF PRAXEOLGY AND PHENOMENOLOGY, AND THEIR INTEGRATION

The origin of the word 'praxeology' is commonly credited to French author Louis Bourdeau, for a classification of science, in his publication *Théorie des sciences: Plan de Science intégrale* in 1882,⁶ while the modern definition of praxeology was firstly introduced in the field of economy by Alfred V. Espinas, a French sociologist and philosopher.⁷ The term praxeology came into widespread by modern Austrian economists, following the publication of Ludwig von Mises' article on economics, *Human Action*, where Mises drew relations between economic actions and goal-directed human behaviours.⁸ The adaptation of praxeological study in architectural research dated back to the early twentieth century. Bruno Taut's book *Die Neue Wohnung* in 1924 is an early example of adapting the idea of praxeology into domestic architectural study. He analysed people's possible movements and activities inside domestic spaces, and based on this kind of study regarding human behaviours, he set up several guidelines and standards in terms of arranging the layout of domestic interiors more efficiently. Christine Frederick and her *Home Economist* is another example of studying human movements, especially women's activities inside kitchen. It provides an ideal formula of organising domestic layout with deep consideration of household efficiency. In the scale of small urban spaces,

William H. Whyte researched the way how people would occupy small urban spaces, for example, squares, and used a time-lapse camera to film how people use the plaza in front of the office towers in New York City. His film *The Social Life of Small Urban Space*, and an accompanying book offer guidelines for designers to achieve good quality urban spaces.⁹ Another case of studying the praxis in urban scale is the GAMMA studies on the bidonville in Morocco for CIAM congress in 1953. In this example, architects and researchers took visits to the slums and studied the life of people living there. The real need and demand of local residents were then able to be abstracted as research outcomes.

Phenomenology was defined by German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the volumes of *Logische Untersuchungen* (Logical Investigations) in 1900 and 1901. Husserl's approach was to study the essence of consciousness through the subjective experience of phenomena.¹⁰ In *Being and Time*, published in 1927, Martin Heidegger expanded the field and reach of phenomenology. He introduced semiconscious and even unconscious mental activities concerning internalised and practical activities including speaking, hammering a nail, and dwelling. Heidegger established the framework of a personal study of experience in terms of psychological analysis as a means to a deep understanding of being. This principle of framing the relation between phenomenology and architecture is influential in the field of architectural design until nowadays.¹¹ The theoretical debate of the importance of phenomenological study in the field of architecture continued in the second half of twentieth century, with some main writings including *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Poetics of Space* (1958) by Gaston Bachelard, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (1980) by Christian Norberg-Schulz and *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (1995) by Juhani Pallasmaa. Practically, numbers of architects adapt the idea of phenomenology in their works and architectural design, such as Bernard Tschumi, Aldo van Eyck, Steven Holl and Peter Zumthor.¹² These architects apply their own experience and specific studies of context and culture to the design of buildings, aiming to replicate a similar experience in their buildings for the users.

By revisiting and examining the historical and theoretical approach of praxeology and phenomenology here in a parallel manner, it is interesting to find out that although these two methodologies both closely relate to seeking links between human actions with architecture and built environment, one is more objective, while the other one is more subjective. Praxeology is a more objective approach of studying human activities, which aims to provide common and general understandings of certain target groups, through the analysis of their actions, activities, behaviours, or movements within spaces. While for phenomenology, it focuses more on the sensory experiences of an individual, or a group of people, which are usually subjective feelings of human being. Architects are the people who make decisions to the design of buildings, and architecture should present and satisfy the real spatial demands of the users. It is necessary for the architects to have consciousness and cognition of the sensory feeling which should be realised in the design. The combination of praxeology and phenomenology can provide a prevailing tool to achieve these goals.

IV POSITIONING – A SYNTHESIS OF PRAXEOLGY AND PHENOMENOLOGY TOWARDS SPATIAL DEMOCRACY

The historical and theoretical development and adaptation of praxeology in the field of architecture have provided proof that praxeology can be used as a methodological tool to analysis and study the actual use pattern of the real operators of space. Architecture and built environment are stages for everyday practice,¹³ and it challenges architects to take the real needs of real users into account in design. However, it is also a fact that in today's fast-developing built environment industry, developers sometimes blind their eyes only seeking for profit, and make design decisions in a mindless way, that quite often resulting in the ignorance of the feeling of users. In the case of Bruno Taut's *Die Neue*

Wohnung and Christine Frederick's *Home Economist*, the adaptation praxeology help the architects draw the pattern of people's life and most importantly, the movement in space and the way using space. Both of the examples show results of a more efficient way of living and arranging domestic spaces, which improve the living quality of people. However, praxeology is not limited adapted in domestic scale. In the example of William Whyte's study of people using small urban spaces, architects are able to understand how and what kind of architectural elements could improve spatial quality and make welcoming places. Praxeological study provides a way of translating human actions objectively. By adapting praxeological study prior architectural design, architects could have an insight into the ways of satisfying future users' spatial request.

In the meantime, phenomenology provides a subjective way of fulfilling human's sensory satisfaction in spatial design. As Bernard Tschumi argues in *Architecture and Disjunction*, 'the paradoxical relationship between architecture as a product of mind, as a conceptual and dematerialized discipline, and architecture as the sensual experience of space and as a spatial practice...the impossibility of simultaneously questioning the nature of space, and at the same time, making or experiencing a real space.'¹⁴ Also, Steven Holl states that architecture engages in our sensory perceptions, which is more fully than other forms of art.¹⁵ Sensory experience of a space is an undivided part of spatial experience in architecture. Using phenomenology as a way of analysing human subjective feeling of a place enable architects to replicate similar feeling in the design, which promotes individual's engagement within space.

Under my research question of how to achieve spatial democracy in the design of a new city hall in Brussels, it is essential to study and understand the relations between citizens' activities and their city. This relation can be understood as in which way people have been adapting spaces in cities in order to express their group or individual voice for political engagement. Moreover, it can also be read as sensory feeling and satisfaction of a space, and in which kind of space people feel comfortable expressing their ideas. Singly adapting one methodological tool, either praxeology or phenomenology, has the danger of resulting in a limited understanding of relationship between human actions and space around. By integrating praxeology and phenomenology, the research question highlighted in this thesis is able to be explored both objectively and subjectively. Praxeological study can help draw common and general conclusions of the spatial demands focusing on the future users – the citizens. In the meantime, phenomenological study provides designers insights into the sensory experience that the building should be aimed to simulate and achieve.

Drawing and interview are adapted as specific techniques to study the praxeology of certain activist groups in Brussels. My partner and I choose to analyse 'Picnic the Street'¹⁶, a local activist group from our studio's collective activism list. Two axonometric drawings are produced to translate the normal day scene, together with the scenario during the 'Picnic the Street' event happening. Axonometric drawings (see Fig.1 and Fig.2) are drawn with the same position and angle, and by showing different situations in a comparable manner, the way in which people use the space in city and transform their city in order to express their voice can be clearly shown (see Fig. 3-6). Meanwhile, by giving interviews to the representatives of the activist group, their actions and conducts are translated into word and text, which provides another way of studying the relation between citizen and city, as well as citizens' specific political thoughts to their city (refer to Fig.7 and appendix).

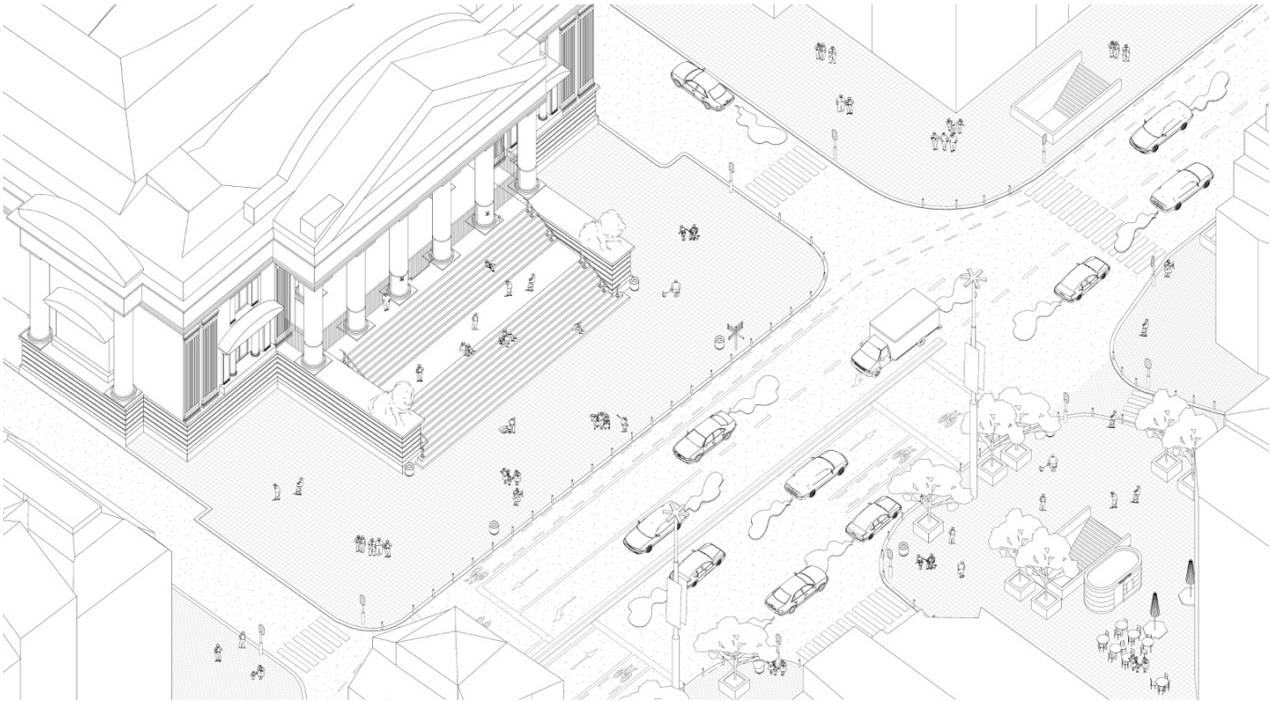


Fig. 1 Normal days at Place de la Bourse in Brussels, 2012.

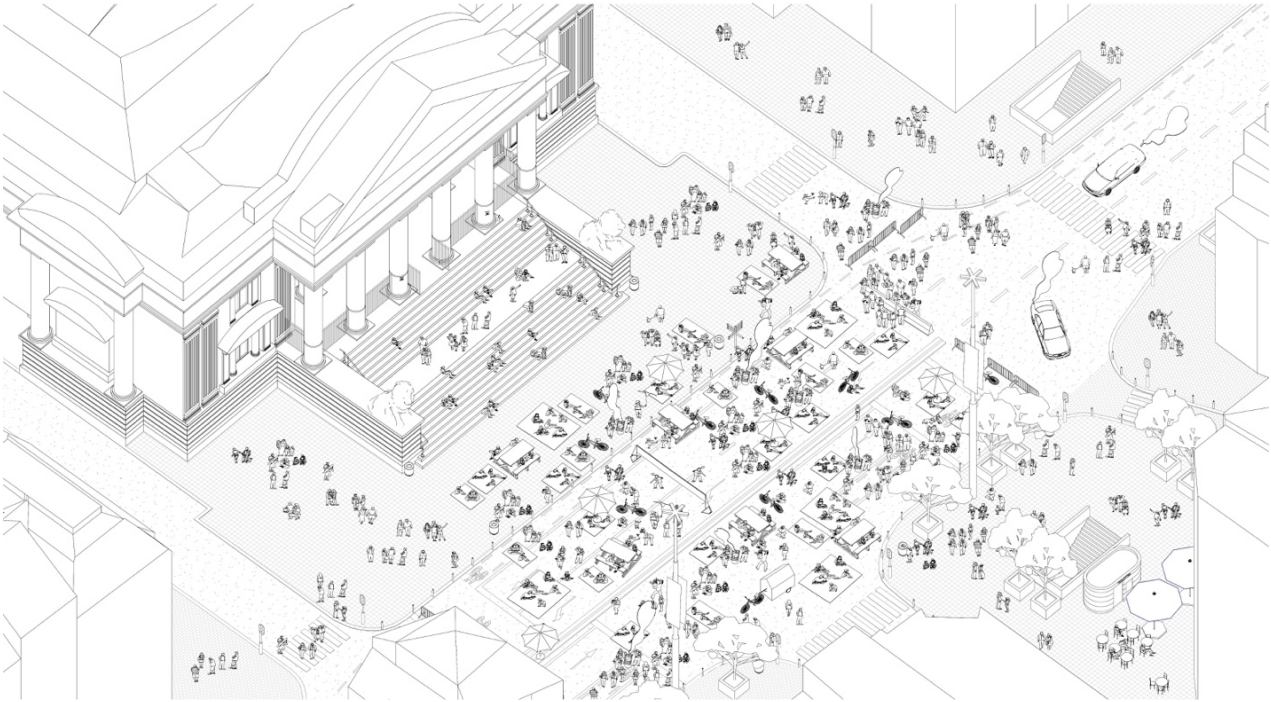


Fig. 2 'Picnic the Street' event day at Place de la Bourse in Brussels, summer 2012.

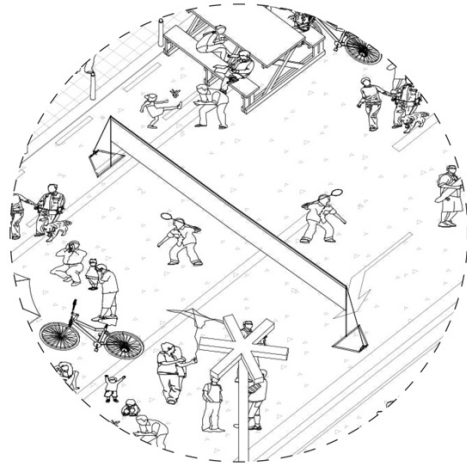


Fig. 3 People placing mini-badminton court on the street.

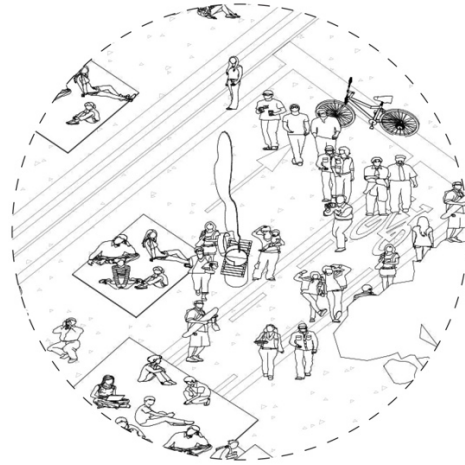


Fig. 4 People have barbeque on the street.

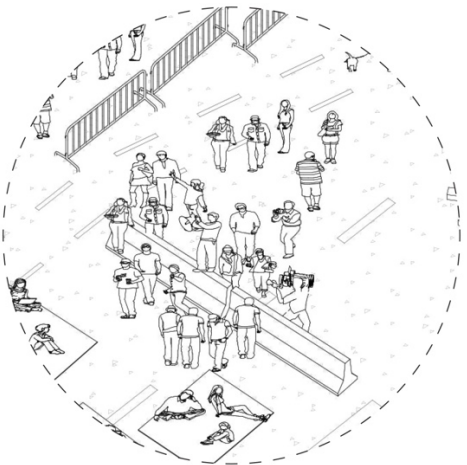


Fig. 5 Event organiser standing on concrete element with people around and reporter filming them.

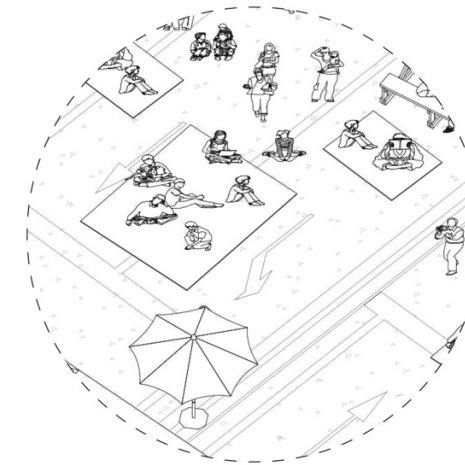


Fig. 6 People putting their picnic blankets occupying the street.

On May 24th 2012, the Belgian national newspaper *Le Soir*, published an article by philosopher and economist Philippe van Parijs. This personal statement, entitled 'Picnic the Streets', did not only call for a change in public space in Brussels, like was occurring in other places in Belgium and abroad, but also addressed the danger of motorised traffic in the city centre, thereby causing bad air quality. Philippe van Parijs proposed a protest picnic like the one in 1971 on the Grand Place, that had been taken over by motorised traffic as a parking lot and was named 'The most beautiful parking lot in the world' by the *British Magazine The Bulletin*.

Every Sunday throughout the summer of 2012 people peacefully gathered in front of the Stock Exchange and the streets transformed into one large picnic. People of all ages participated in this festive civic movement striving for a more pleasant city for pedestrians and cyclists, with healthier air to breathe in and public spaces liberated from cars. The protesters, who many came by foot (or in a stroller) and bikes, brought a variety of attributes to claim the public space. Unlike other protests, this was a gathering on a specifically chosen location rather than a march.

The first picnic turned into a success. 2000 citizens of Brussels gathered in front of the Stock Exchange - in the context of the municipal elections in October - and were accompanied by members of the Political College. As a result, it became an important topic on the political agenda. The protest picnic received international media attention and got imitated by Belgian cities like Liège, Namur and Antwerp.

Interviewee: Bram Dewolfs

- How did Picnic the Streets start? How did you get involved? In the morning the article by Philippe van Parijs was published. I happened to read that newspaper by coincidence. I totally agreed with what he said and I immediately responded to his call to make his ideas known with the help of social media. I created a Facebook group and invited my friends to share it with their friends. I went into a meeting and as soon as I got out I had thousands of messages. I had to add my friends as administrators to be able to accept all the requests for the Facebook group. At the same time, someone else had created a Picnic the Streets event and also got an overwhelming amount of responses. That same evening, we came together since we felt we really had to do something. Some of us wanted to organise the picnic the following Sunday, but I personally thought we needed more preparation to do this right. Although there was not a lot of preparation needed, since everyone would bring their own equipment, we had to think about safety. In the end, we decided to do the first picnic a couple of weeks later. The police contacted us because they knew that we were planning on doing something. Although they knew about the picnic we had to occupy the streets ourselves before they started to place barriers and redirect the traffic. In the beginning, we were just with a small group of maybe 40 people standing in front of La Bourse. Together we occupied the streets and many others followed. By the end of the day, we were there with around 2000 people.
- How do you communicate your protest to involve the public? Besides the newspaper article and the posts on Facebook, we are well aware that you are not able to reach all citizens of Brussels with these kinds of media. We also did smaller projects in neighbourhoods outside the 'vijfwoks' (city centre) with small vehicles or pieces of furniture occupying the streets. In these neighbourhoods, we

used different techniques to draw attention to our protest because not everyone has the time and money to join the picnic.

- Where do you protest and why in that specific location instead of using the Anspachsaan for a march for example? How does the city accommodate protesting? How do you lose the activism group engage with elements in public space? The idea of the picnic comes from the article by Philippe van Parijs. We really used his proposal as a guideline for the event. A picnic in a sense also has something 'banal'. The space in front of La Bourse was chosen for its adjacent location to the Boulevard Anspach, a road that is used by 150.000 vehicles a day. The staircase in front of La Bourse can be seen as a sort of speaker's corner to address the crowd.
- How do you want yourselves (the activism group) to be known to the general public/citizenship? The spontaneous nature of the activism group is important. The fact that we really had to take over the streets in front of La Bourse shows also a sort of disobedience. For example, when the municipality wanted to provide us with a legal way to occupy the streets in a certain time frame, we claimed the streets for longer. This kind of disobedience is used to annoy the municipality. Apart from that, Picnic the Streets is an event that everyone can participate in. It has a low threshold by organising a picnic. Therefore, everyone is able to bring their own food and blankets.
- After our research on activism groups in Brussels, we noticed that almost all groups (except for Extinction Rebellion) have a rather peaceful approach to their way of protesting. Is this something you recognise? (For example Parckfirm, Pool is cool, Cultuurfest, Café Filie, Eye Eye Klein ring, Samen voor Morgen) I think a peaceful protest is proven to be the most effective. Of course, you can be disobedience as activism group, but I think more aggressive approaches of protests are not going to win over the ones you are trying to convince.
- With the changing function of La Bourse into a beer museum, do you see this as a threat for its current capability to serve as a spontaneous meeting place after a major event, both festival or tragic? (For example after the attacks in 2015 or the celebrations after winning an international football match) This is, of course, a relevant question. The museum about Kapitalism that was located in La Bourse last summer was actually a reaction to the future function of the building. La Bourse has housed many different functions. The beer museum was actually the idea of a small group of people and is funded with European money. These funds are meant to serve a public good. For example, in Italy, they are restoring railways, as something for the public, with the same money. It is unbelievable that the city puts that same public money in a museum that is dedicated to beer. Also, if you look to the demography of the city of Brussels it would make a lot more sense to create a museum about Islamic culture, rather than becoming a tourist attraction.
- Our graduation project concerns a new administrative centre for the municipality of Brussels. The municipality is currently building a new centre at the former location of Parking 56. What do you think about this decision? How did people respond to that idea? When Parking 56's future was still unknown, many NGOs were hoping for a place to accommodate their work. Besides parking, the building was also an office space with a spontaneous character. People were really making a concrete plan for the building to serve as a hub for social groups. Unfortunately, when the building got demolished all hope vanished, although there was not so much resistance against the new building, there was a lot to do about the demolition of the old Parking 56. Now that the building got demolished I think it would be a perfect spot for a public park because if you make a park it is most probably going to stay there forever.

- Anything you would like to add we want us to know? After all those years of working for different protest groups and after founding my own activism platform, I came to the realisation that I am just a citizen and that I am not paid or on a payroll to do these things. I spent half my week accompanying youth to help them organise their own event and protest. The municipality should listen to all these protests because lots are happening in the city. Besides the fact that they are not listening, they also do not provide actual space for these activist groups. For years I have been trying to get a place, but this is actually impossible for a small organisation.

Fig. 7.1 - 7.3 Interview with Bram Dewolfs, representative from 'Picnic the Street'.¹⁷

At the same time, taking part in a real-life protesting is realised as a phenomenological way of observing the subjective feeling of interacting with space in the city for specific political demands.

Being a participant of the Climate Strike in Den Haag on 27 September 2019, we are able to gain the sensory feeling of spatial engagement in the city. It is helpful to understand the sensual relation of an individual, also together with a large group of people, with the spaces that city offers (see Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). By taking part in the event, the sensory feeling of being engaging with space, surroundings and city can be understood and translated into architectural language, which is helpful for simulating an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable expressing their ideas in the following building design.



Fig. 8, 9 Climate Strike in Den Haag, people occupying the street and urban park.

Under my research topic of seeking spatial democracy in design, a synthesis of praxeology and phenomenology provides a methodological way of studying the spatial relation between human being and the built environment. The term democracy in the project of a new city hall in Brussels could be understood as satisfying people's needs for expressing their political position and participating in political life as individuals. And spatial democracy means enabling these demands to happen through architectural design. A city hall should not only be a body of municipal power, but also become a representative of citizens' agencies. An integration of praxeological and phenomenological study is in the hope of analysing the relations between people's actions, their political positions, together with the built environment. By studying these relations both objectively and subjectively, architects will be able to embed these relationships into architectural design, which expectantly towards a spatial democracy.

ENDNOTE

- 1 Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016, pp. 7-8.
- 2 Mark Pimlott, *Interiors Buildings Cities Studio Manual*. Delft University of Technology, 2019, p. 3.
- 3 Marieke Berkers, "Praxeology." Lecture, Delft University of Technology, Delft, September 12, 2019.
- 4 Mark Pimlott, *Interiors Buildings Cities Studio Manual*. Delft University of Technology, 2019, p. 3.
- 5 Adolf Arndt, *Demokratie als Bauherr*. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1961, p. 20. Cited in Grafe, Christoph, ed. *People's Palaces Architecture, Culture and Democracy in Post-War Western Europe*: Architectura and Natura. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 2014, p. 51.
- 6 Louis Bourdeau, *Théorie des sciences: Plan de Science intégrale*, Paris: G. Baillière and Co., 1882.

- 7 Jean J. Ostrowski, "Notes biographiques et bibliographiques sur Alfred Espinas". Review *Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger* 3 (July–September 1967): 385–91.
- 8 George H. Smith, "Praxeology." The encyclopedia of libertarianism. <https://www.libertarianism.org/encyclopedia/praxeology> (accessed November 24, 2019).
- 9 William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Washington, D.C: Conservation Foundation, 1980.
- 10 ABIBOO Studio, "Quick Tour through Phenomenological Thinking in Architecture", ABIBBO Studio. <http://www.abiboo.com/arch/quick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecturequick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecturequick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecture/> (accessed November 24, 2019).
- 11 ibid.
- 12 ibid.
- 13 Marieke Berkers, "Praxeology." Lecture, Delft University of Technology, Delft, September 12, 2019.
- 14 Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.
- 15 Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Pérez Gómez, *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, A+U (special issue) (July 1994), p. 41.
- 16 Picnic the street is an activist group first established by Philippe van Parijs. Every Sunday throughout the summer of 2012, people peacefully gathered in front of the Stock Exchange and the streets transformed into one large picnic.
- 17 Refer to appendix for detailed interview record.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABIBOO Studio, "Quick Tour through Phenomenological Thinking in Architecture", ABIBBO Studio. <http://www.abiboo.com/arch/quick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecturequick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecturequick-tour-through-phenomenological-thinking-in-architecture/> (accessed November 24, 2019).
- Arndt, Adolf, *Demokratie als Bauherr*. Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1961, p. 20. Cited in Grafe, Christoph, ed. *People's Palaces Architecture, Culture and Democracy in Post-War Western Europe*: Architectura and Natura. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 2014, p. 51.
- Berkers, Marieke. "Praxeology." Lecture, Delft University of Technology, Delft, September 12, 2019.
- Bourdeau, Louis. *Théorie des sciences: Plan de Science intégrale*, Paris: G. Baillièrre and Co., 1882.
- Holl, Steven, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Pérez Gómez, *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, A+U (special issue) (July 1994), p. 41.
- Lucas, Ray. *Research Methods for Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016, pp. 7-8.
- Ostrowski, Jean J. "Notes biographiques et bibliographiques sur Alfred Espinas". Review *Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger* 3(July–September 1967): 385–91.
- Pimlott, Mark. *Interiors Buildings Cities Studio Manual*. Delft University of Technology, 2019, p. 3.
- Smith, George H. "Praxeology." The encyclopedia of libertarianism. <https://www.libertarianism.org/encyclopedia/praxeology>(accessed November 24, 2019).
- Tschumi, Bernard. *Architecture and Disjunction*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.
- Whyte, William H. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Washington, D.C: Conservation Foundation, 1980.

LIST OF IMAGES

1. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. Normal days at Place de la Bourse in Brussels, 2012.
2. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. 'Picnic the Street' event day at Place de la Bourse in Brussels, summer 2012.
3. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. Zoom-in diagram of the event day axonometric drawing - People placing mini-badminton court on the street.
4. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. Zoom-in diagram of the event day axonometric drawing - People have barbeque on the street.
5. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. Zoom-in diagram of the event day axonometric drawing - Event organiser standing on concrete element with people around and reporter filming them.
6. Image created by author, in collaboration with Nicky Brockhoff, 2019. Zoom-in diagram of the event day axonometric drawing - People putting their picnic blankets occupying the street.
7. Interview record with Bram Dewolfs, produced by author and Nicky Brockhoff, 2019.
8. Photograph by author, 2019. Climate Strike in Den Haag, people occupying the street and urban park.
9. Photograph by author, 2019. Climate Strike in Den Haag, people occupying the street and urban park.

APPENDIX - INTERVIEW RECORD

On May 24th 2012, the Belgian national newspaper *Le Soir*, published an article by philosopher and economist Philippe van Parijs. This personal statement, entitled 'Picnic the Streets!', did not only call for a change in public space in Brussels, like was occurring in other places in Belgium and abroad, but also addressed the danger of motorised traffic in the city centre, thereby causing bad air quality. Philippe van Parijs proposed a protest picnic like the one in 1971 on the Grand Place, that had been taken over by motorised traffic as a parking lot and was named 'The most beautiful parking lot in the world' by the British Magazine *The Bulletin*.

Every Sunday throughout the summer of 2012 people peacefully gathered in front of the Stock Exchange and the streets transformed into one large picnic. People of all ages participated in this festive civic movement striving for a more pleasant city for pedestrians and cyclists, with healthier air to breath in and public spaces liberated from cars. The protestants, who mainly came by foot (or in a stroller) and bike, brought a variety of attributes to claim the public space. Unlike other protests, this was a gathering on a specifically chosen location rather than a march.

The first picnic turned into a success. 2000 citizens of Brussels gathered in front of the Stock Exchange - in the context of the municipal elections in October - and were accompanied by members of the Political College. As a result, it became an important topic on the political agenda. The protest picnic received international media attention and got imitated by Belgian cities like Liège, Namur and Antwerp.

Interviewee: Bram Dewolfs

- **How did Picnic the Streets start? How did you get involved?**
- In the morning the article by Philippe van Parijs was published, I happened to read that newspaper by coincidence. I totally agreed with what he said and I immediately responded to his call to make his idea known with the help of social media. I created a Facebook group and invited my friends to share it with their friends. I went into a meeting and as soon as I got out I had thousands of messages. I had to add my friends as administrators to be able to accept all the requests for the Facebook group. At the same time, someone else had created a Picnic the Streets event and also got an overwhelming amount of response. That same evening, we came together since we felt we really had to do something. Some of us wanted to organise the picnic the following Sunday, but I personally thought we needed more preparation to do this right. Although there was not a lot of preparation needed, since everyone would bring their own equipment, we had to think about safety. In the end, we decided to do the first picnic a couple of weeks later. The police contacted us because they knew that we were planning on doing something. Although they knew about the picnic we had to occupy the streets ourselves before they started to place barriers and redirect the traffic. In the beginning, we were just with a small group of maybe 40 people standing in front of La Bourse. Together we occupied the streets and many others followed. By the end of the day, we were there with around 2000 people.
- **How do you communicate your protest to involve the public?**
- Besides the newspaper article and the posts on Facebook, we are well aware that you are not able to reach all citizens of Brussels with these kinds of media. We also did smaller projects in neighbourhoods outside the 'vijfhoek' (city centre) with small vehicles or pieces of furniture occupying the streets. In these neighbourhoods, we used different techniques to draw attention to our protest because not everyone has the time and money to join the picnic.
- **Where do you protest and why in that specific location instead of using the Anspachslaan for a march for example? How does the city accommodate protesting? How do you/does the activism group engage with (elements in) public space?**
- The idea of the picnic comes from the article by Philippe van Parijs. We really used his proposal as a guideline for the event. A picnic in a sense also has something banal. The space in front of La Bourse was chosen for its adjacent location to the Boulevard Anspach, a road that is used by 150.000 vehicles a day. The staircase in front of La Bourse can be seen as a sort of speaker's corner to address the crowd.
- **How do you want yourselves (the activism group) to be known to the general public/municipality?**
- The spontaneous nature of the activism group is important. The fact that we really had to take over the streets in front of La Bourse shows also a sort of disobedience. For example, when the municipality wanted to provide us with a legal way to occupy the streets in a certain time frame, we claimed the streets for longer. This kind of disobedience is used to annoy the municipality. Apart from that, Picnic the Streets is an event that everyone can participate in. It has a low threshold by organising a picnic. Therefore, everyone is able to bring their own food and blankets.
- **After our research on activism groups in Brussels, we noticed that almost all groups (except for Extinction Rebellion) have a rather peaceful approach to their way of protesting. Is this something you recognise? (For example Parckfarm, Pool is cool, Culturegem, Cafe Filtre, Bye bye kleine ring, Samen voor Morgen)**
- I think a peaceful protest is proven to be the most effective. Of course, you can be disobedience as activism group, but I think more aggressive approaches of protests are not going to win over the ones you are trying to convince.

- **With the changing function of La Bourse into a beer museum, do you see this as a threat for its current capability to serve as a spontaneous meeting place after a major event, both festival or tragic? (For example: after the attacks in 2015 or the celebrations after winning an international football match).**
- This is, of course, a relevant question. The museum about Kapitalism that was located in La Bourse last summer was actually a reaction to the future function of the building. La Bourse has housed many different functions. The beer museum was actually the idea of a small group of people and is funded with European money. These funds are meant to serve a public good. For example, in Italy, they are restoring railways, as something for the public, with the same money. It is unbelievable that the city puts that same public money in a museum that is dedicated to beer. Also, if you look to the demography of the city of Brussels it would make a lot more sense to create a museum about Islamic culture, rather than becoming a tourist attraction.
- **Our graduation project concerns a new administrative centre for the municipality of Brussels. The municipality is currently building a new centre at the former location of Parking 58. What do you think about this decision? How did people respond to that idea?**
- When Parking 58's future was still unknown, many NGO's were hoping for a place to accommodate their work. Besides parking, the building was also an office space with a spontaneous character. People were really making a concrete plan for the building to serve as a hub for social groups. Unfortunately, when the building got demolished all hope vanished, although there was not so much resistance against the new building, there was a lot to do about the demolition of the old Parking 58. Now that the building got demolished I think it would be a perfect spot for a public park because if you make a park it is most probably going to stay there forever.
- **Anything you would like to add/ want us to know?**
- After all those years of working for different protest groups and after founding my own activism platform, I came to the realisation that I am just a citizen and that I am not paid or on a payroll to do these things. I spent half my week accompanying youth to help them organise their own event and protest. The municipality should listen to all these protests because lots are happening in the city. Besides the fact that they are not listening, they also do not provide actual space for these activist groups. For years I have been trying to get a place, but this is actually impossible for a small organisation.