

Analyzing, Interpreting and Representation of the Domestic Life Through Time

A Visual Ethnographical and Typological Understanding of the City's Vital Component: Homes

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Thesis "From Home to Home"

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Between Rational and Emotional

Architecture is an artistic discipline in which an individual makes meaningful and original buildings. It also conveys a remarkable duality that it could be read both rationally and emotionally. It calls for reasonable consideration to the practical factors so that the corresponding conceptual Utopia could have a solid groundwork and its narration becomes meaningful, meanwhile it also serves as a container which records people and story in the long course of history. Thus, it has gone through an ongoing debate between analytical research and design which can be a practice from the self-expression of the architect. From my perspective, these two ways support each other to complete architecture as a whole with equal hierarchy. There could be research-based and oriented design, but also a project can start with an initial design hypothesis which needs more research to be completed.

During the lecture Series of the Research Methods, the duality was again proved with my knowledge on the multiplicity of architectural research methods extensively expanded. Among these methodologies, there are not only methodologies that can reflect the rational side of architecture such as typology, building technology, but also those such as praxeology, phenomenology and writing architecture, which contains more perceptual and emotional approaches. I found it also quite interesting that the research methods can be read from a wider context under a multi-disciplinary scope. The design case studies that were shown in each class already aroused a wide discussion about a specific research method, which broadened my horizon about the research. In conclusion, the course provides me with a comprehensive understanding of not only the particular methods but also the relationship between design and research.

1.2 Definition of Place as "Home"

The thesis under my graduation studio "Addis Ababa Living Lab" is aiming at providing a solution of an affordable and resilient housing project with a specific site since Ethiopia is undergoing rapid urbanization. Ethiopia's population is expected to expand drastically in recent years. Addis Ababa as the capital city is the center of this explosion which has experienced a massive influx of people from rural areas in recent years that not only strains the city's housing, transportation, sanitation, and land provisions for agriculture but also serves to destabilize normative cycles of supply and demand¹. Meanwhile, close to 45 percent of the population subsists below the poverty line and nearly 80 percent of urban inhabitants live in impoverished settlements². However, the urbanization rate of Addis Ababa is still quite low with only around 20 percent city urbanized. The rural immigrants came to the capital to seek better incomes, educations, and better living environments. However, this low-income which settled down miles away from their hometown as the urban poor, whose needs for the housing have not been properly addressed by the top-down provisions, which resulted in the self-initiated transformation with materials that suit the local climate and their economic capacity. They brought about subjective inputs and make a home out of the given structures³.

*"House is the place of central satisfaction which, depending upon the degree it represents this satisfaction, changes from a mere building to a home. The purely objective building gets a new subjective meaning, a content, which makes it home"*⁴.

The Grand Housing Project led by the government started around 2004 with western techniques of design and construction in order to adapt to the ideals of a modern, developed city. However, the specific problems are that the new condominium scheme features segregation of target income groups, abandons the original identities of Ethiopian lifestyles and old communities. It lacks cultural spatial organization such as traditional communal outdoor spaces.

¹ Marc Angélli and Dirk Hebel, *Cities of change—Addis Ababa: Transformation strategies for urban territories in the 21st century* (Birkhäuser, 2016).

² UN Habitat, "Situation analysis of informal settlements in Addis Ababa," *Cities without slums: Sub-regional program for Eastern and Southern Africa* (2007).

³ Demissachew Shiferaw, "Self-initiated transformations of public-provided dwellings in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," *Cities* 15, no. 6 (1998).

⁴ Ernst E Boesch, "Kultur und Handlung. Einführung in die K11/t11psychologie," (Bern/Stuttgart/Wien: Huber, 1980).

No matter where the urban poor live in, slums or the new condominiums, the traditional way of lifestyle has gone. The exterior space that in-between the buildings such as in the village, the spaces in between the Tukul, serves as public spaces for collective work. For Ethiopians, exterior space Open space is where people work, sell and buy goods, prepare food and spices, or do laundry. This negative space serves to sustain communal life since it provides the very foundation for collective work.

As the rural immigration to the capital city keeps going, it is urgent to properly mix different income groups properly and at the same time make the arrival of the urban poor feel home again with the traditional lifestyle under the urban context. The research started with the research about the daily life patterns among different income groups and the focus was to fully understand the housing needs of the citizens. Finally, the research question starts with what could be the possibilities that different income groups with different life patterns coinhabited properly with each group define the community as home, in other words, the accustomed traditional lifestyles can remain in a modern city? And how to create a sustainable relationship between life and the built environment. The research will lead to a design hypothesis that addresses the different needs of separate income groups.



FIG 1 Traditional life pattern between Tukuls

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

2.1 Selected Research Methods

Since the research is a case study of daily life related to a specific site in the city with a context., to fully understand the living pattern of different income groups and traditional way of living, qualitative methods rather than quantities ones should be adopted. As a starting point, I would like to start the research based on the site survey in Gerji which is near the Bole airport of Addis Ababa. Together with the help of the local students form EIABC, we compared the living conditions and daily life patterns through a process of fieldwork, interpretation, and representation among different income groups. As the Fieldwork" is about lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge, it emphasized the social production of art, blurred boundaries between high and low art forms⁵.

During the fieldwork, we chose specific methods for documenting the materials we found, by interviewing, photographing, video shooting and architectural drawings. We mainly focused on finding

⁵ K Freedman, "The social reconstruction of art education: Teaching visual culture," *Making schooling multicultural: Campus and classroom* (1996).

out their degree of satisfaction of the house, the sense of the community, their daily routines and whether they found belonging to the community compared to their original lives. As we interviewed the family members, we also used sketches and photography to record the surrounding environments. We as architectural students not only played the role of observers but also used our professional skills to map the dwelling typologies on the site by illustrations, sketches. Same as to read architecture, the understanding of the life pattern should not only focus on the current situation but through the change of times. Thus, we were informed of the used living patterns from their memories and the descriptions of the dreaming homes in the future.

Photography can be used as a tool for documenting events, places, and people and it can render contextual complexities that are difficult or elusive to depict through narrative text. The photos can be used to display our work organized into categories, often with narrative explanations. After the fieldwork, we drew the cognitive map based on our understanding of the site. Cognitive mapping is a mapping elicitation tool that is intended to represent how persons perceive the relationships between space and place. It also helps in understanding the social and physical features of the physical and built environment⁶. As a method, it has been used to geographically record a person's memories and perspectives of a place and has been advocated within art education as a critical tool for understanding spatial literacy, sense of place, and the built and social environment⁷. To represent the life patterns of Gerji, we analyzed and interpreted the data involves systematically searching, arranging, and categorizing all collected materials to understand patterns, themes in relation to the research questions. We should also consider our own subjective experiences as part of the fieldwork by writing diaries. Interpretation involves explaining the social significance of findings, situating patterns, issues, themes and/or stories within a broader context⁸. And rather than mere documentation, these methods become tools for a dialogical inquiry into the "lifeworld" of participants⁹.



FIG 2 Mapping of the typology of housing

⁶ Kevin Lynch, *The image of the city*, vol. 11 (MIT press, 1960).

⁷ June King McFee and Rogena Degge, "Art, culture, and environment: A catalyst for teaching. Dubuque, IA: Kendall," (Hunt Publishing, 1980).

⁸ Kimberly Powell, "Viewing places: Students as visual ethnographers," *Art Education* 63, no. 6 (2010). 50

⁹ Jon Prosser and Andrew Loxley, "Introducing visual methods," (2008). P19



FIG 3 the sketch of a daily scene

2.2 Epistemic Framework

Based on my readings and the use of methods I adopted, it can be identified as a category from the ethnography and typology. As a researcher, though I started the research with the methods that were commonly adopted in both ethnography and praxeology, I should not be confined by specific types of methodology. Since the use of ethnography can approach gather of information about daily lives, on which my future design could work with, I also tried to critically position myself by just not only being led by one certain type, so that I also absorbed the advantages of other methods. In order to get a more systematic understanding of the housing typologies of Addis Ababa, or even form a wider scale the typology of the global courtyard housing types which I thought could have the potential to offer the low-income groups with collective spaces for income generation. The research of housing typologies by Gunter Pfeifer and Per Brauneck and the research of Felix Heisel about the housing Typologies in Addis Ababa.

From the perspective of the Ethnography, we substitute the research focus on a specific group with a broader consideration of "people" or a "community" or an as yet undefined social "group." We then need to ask, what aspects of architecture might be incorporated into the research methods and means of representation of ethnography since ethnography is a representation of society and culture of a specific ethnic group based on fieldwork. And by studying the praxis of architecture one can develop an eye for the actual users of the building, and not the imagined ones. From the perspective of typology, one can conclude the advantages and disadvantages of certain types by comparing and analyzing variations under one certain type with different contexts, the result of which could be the reference of the future design. However, often the research neglected the activities of people. Thus, ethnography and typology should support each other in the thesis that helps me design a certain type of dwelling that can be applied to a mixed-income group under the context of Ethiopia. The relationship can be metaphoric as that typology is a database, while ethnography is the key to the correct room of the database where contains the correct information.

2.3 Current Relevance.

Many art education scholars have supported ethnography as an approach to curriculum because it encourages students to learn about the social and cultural dimensions. And the natural match between visual methods, ethnography, and art education makes the trend popular. Meanwhile, this visual ethnography has already been adopted in the architectural area, such as the book *Made in Tokyo* published in 2001, describes architecture that far from attempting to control the surrounding environment, is itself defined and shaped by the accidents of the site and the and the participation of the people who inhabit it, which inspired the Japanese architect Momoyo Kaijima in a way that she

with their attempt to explain the nature of urban space in specific cities and places. In the book *Architectural Ethnography*, she mentioned the hybrid of ethnography which focused on specific groups in a community as Architectural Ethnography. The studio of her called Atelier Bow-Wow has already done lots of research work with these methods. It investigates the living condition of people through various fieldwork and design practices. They observe architecture and its environments from a behavior logical point of view and always invent unique visual representations specific to the subject and scope at hand, like the book *Graphic Anatomy* (Toto, 2007)¹⁰. Their interests range broadly from the relationship between house typologies and urban fabric to the relationship between public space and unlocked common resources.

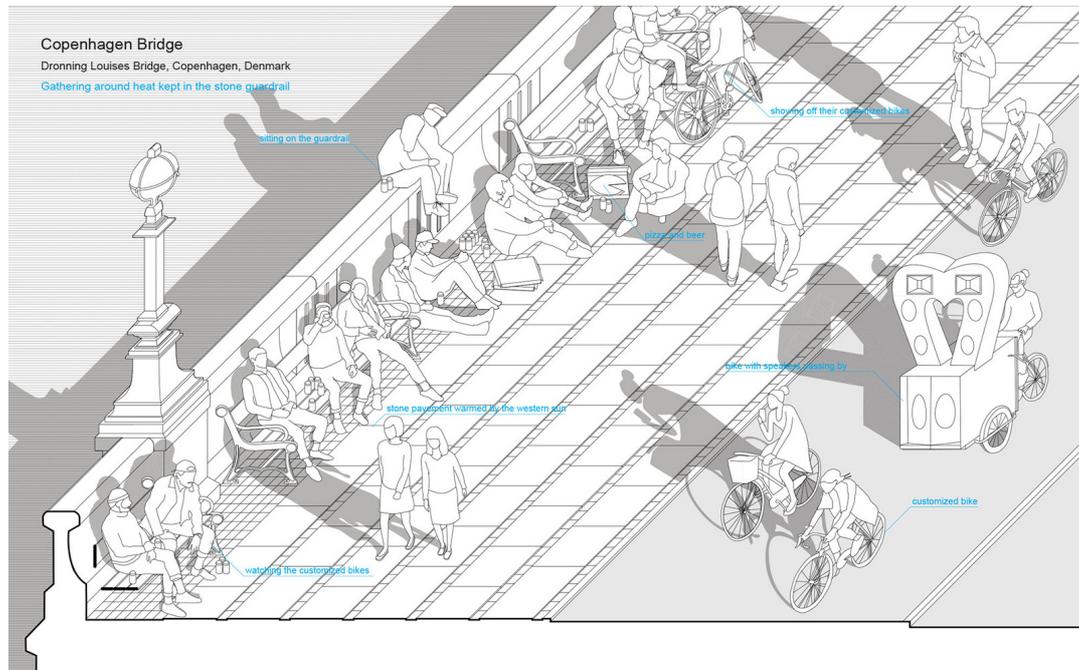


FIG 4 Commonalities of Architecture – Bow Wow

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

3.1 Ethnography historical & theoretical context

3.1.1 What is Ethnography?

Ethnography is a qualitative research method that comes from the discipline of anthropology. But it can also be applied to lots of different disciplines. One thing that makes it different from other disciplines is that ethnography takes long periods of time. Traditionally, ethnographers spent a minimum of one year living amongst members of the culture they are studying. This extended period of data collection allowed local people a chance to know and get used to the ethnographer, and this also allowed the ethnographer to build rapport with local people. This is usually conducted through participatory observation as the main method together with interviews, surveys and field notes.

3.1.2 Pseudo-Ethnography in Art

Ethnography, a process of inquiry and "written representation of culture", draws its legitimacy and increased popularity in art education because of its attention to the particularities of experience¹¹. Using photographs, drawings, and video as tools in qualitative research, art educators have broadened the boundaries of ethnography. With visual outputs as the primary data, it focused on the notion of visual ethnography. It triggered a different way of working for some artists since it impacted the daily lives of people. Consequently, the artistic process was re-conceptualized. The artist no

¹⁰ "Architectural Ethnography: Atelier Bow-Wow - Harvard Graduate School of Design," Harvard.edu, 2018, <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/exhibition/architectural-ethnography-by-atelier-bow-wow/>.

¹¹ Liora Bresler, "Zooming in on the qualitative paradigm in art education: Educational criticism, ethnography, and action research," *Visual Arts Research* 20, no. 1 (1994).

longer worked in isolation but moved into parks, hospitals, prisons, community organizations, streets and neighborhoods to produce artworks in collaboration with people in these various communities. Art became a forum that opened public dialogue on issues of concern to people¹². The collaborative process obligated artists to become participant-observers in order to better understand the communities they chose to engage with, which makes the artists also as ethnographers. However, Foster argues that the current paradigmatic shift to ethnography in contemporary art is highly problematic as it encourages "pseudo-ethnography," because many artists do not follow the ethnographic methodology in any serious way, as he stated that Many famous artists now fly around the globe producing site-specific art in different locations and employ what Foster rightly refers to as pseudo-ethnography, as they do not engage the community in any real way¹³. Despite the proliferation of pseudo-ethnography, some artists have deliberately taken on the role of ethnographers while troubling ethnographic authority. They exposed the paradox between the "calm exterior of the representation itself" and the process of representation which "involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization" of the subject, while others have deconstructed the ethnographic enterprise.



FIG 5 example of "Pseudo Ethnography"

Anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughod have called for strategies for "writing against culture," to establish ethnographic authority in order to dislocate the previously held belief that evidence of the anthropologist presence in the culture, which was established by a sparing use of the first person pronoun in monographs and a sensitive discussion of people's experiences grounded in non-biased perception. She argues that "culture" operates in anthropological discourse to enforce the separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy". Abu-Lughod is not alone in advocating for an ethnography that focuses on:

- 1) discourse and practice rather than culture;
- 2) highlighting the historical, economic, social conditions of ethnographic production;
- 3) an ethnography that focuses on rather than generalizations;

¹² Dipti Desai, "The ethnographic move in contemporary art: What does it mean for art education?," *Studies in Art Education* 43, no. 4 (2002).

¹³ Angeline Morrison and Hal Foster, "The Return of the Real," *Circa*, no. 79 (1997): 63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25563115>.

4) addressing the positionality of ethnographer and the problems of addressing different audiences¹⁴.

3.1.3 Architectural Ethnography

Momoyo Kaijima in her book *Architectural Ethnography* mentioned that building types can offer a key to understanding processes of urban transformation, which can together with the typology study give the answer to my research question related to the rapid social change of Addis Ababa. So, what is architectural ethnography?

According to the stand definition, ethnography is the "representation of society and culture of a specific ethnic group based on fieldwork. For our purposes, we might substitute this focus on a "specific ethnic group" with a broader consideration of "people" or a "community" or an as yet undefined social "group." The key is to define what aspects of architecture might be incorporated into the research methods and means of ethnography to create Architectural Ethnography? The word "architecture" could be explained as a physical enclosure that protects and supports human life and activities, which contains buildings, the environment that surrounds them, the city, and so on. A unique characteristic of architecture derives from its bigness, which binds it to gravity and means that it changes only slowly over time. The making of architecture, then, demands both historical thinking and adaptation to the time-based rules and regulations that govern its construction, which then could be related to the time-based observation of certain groups as an ethnographic method. Since drawing as a visual output is a key element in the architectural area, visual ethnography is also the focus of architecture. Differently, with precise scales, the architect moves fluidly between different dimensions, between part and whole, between the empirical and the abstract. It is this quality of autonomy that is overlaid on ethnography to make Architectural Ethnography¹⁵. In the book, Momoyo gives 4 aspects of drawings related architecture.

- Drawing of architecture:
- Drawing for Architecture:
- Drawing among architecture
- Drawing around architecture

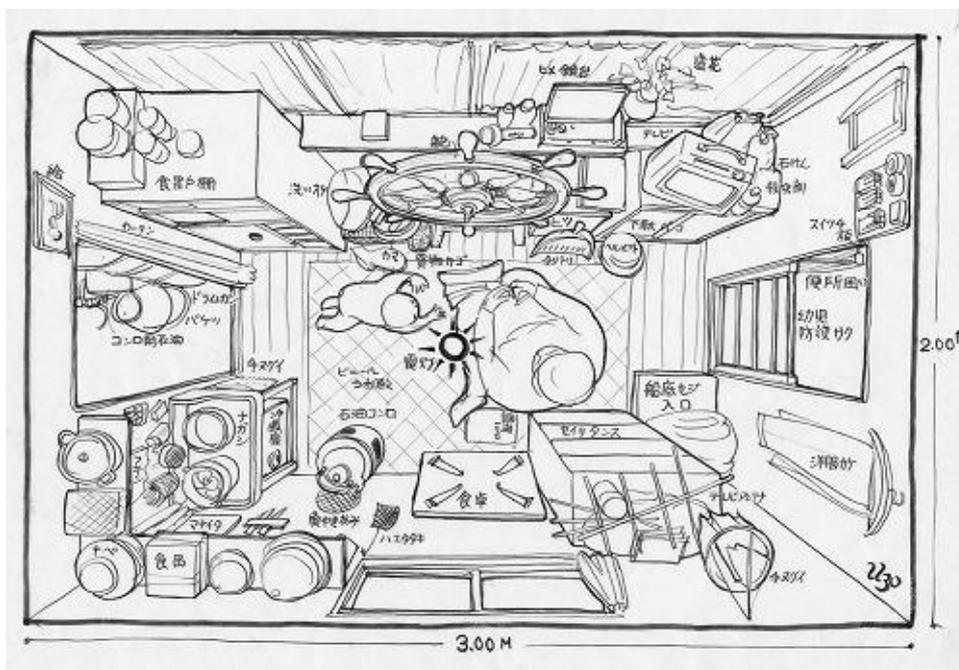


FIG 6 Uzo Nishiyama's Notebooks on Houses and Living

¹⁴ Ruth Behar, *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart* (Beacon Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Laurent Stalder Momoyo Kaijima, and Yū Iseki, *Architectural Ethnography* (Japan TOTO Publishing, 2018).

3.2 Typology historical & theoretical context

Typology is an approach that isolates the attributes of architectural coherence, identifies them as characteristics, which helps compare them with similarly abstracted attributes from other contexts and to define similarities or differences. The history of architecture has described this kind of approach by the term typology and understands it as the abstraction of formal attributes into a principle, called type, that describes the commonalities of a series of different, but historically concrete models¹⁶.

From the beginning, this systematic and abstracted view includes the possibilities to guide an action beyond literal imitation as well as to offer a tool for comparative architectural criticism. To reduce perceptions to certain recurring patterns, regular geometries or harmonies is a universal principle; therefore, the term typology has a long history in architecture and architectural theory. In this light, typologies in architecture document the changing requirement profiles of certain buildings or spatial systems.

There are different typological categories. On urban scales, it deals with blocks, row or detached houses; In architecture, it refers to a specific spatial arrangement common for a certain time or social group. The way we enter dwellings, which rooms we pass through and in which order; all these habits are not being questioned as long as we move in our accustomed cultural architecture.

In the book of Günter Pfeifer and Per Brauneck, *Courtyard houses: a housing typology*, the author discussed different possibilities for arranging floor plans within the courtyard house type, which are primarily determined by the position and the proportion of the courtyard. As it is the determining factor for exposure to the daylight of the rooms within the house, all other parameters such as access, zoning of the floor plan and orientation play a subordinate role. However it does not contain so much about people's activities. Indeed, the courtyard house can be used as a transitional typology for low-income informal housing. Families end up in self-built informal settlements where land was subdivided and lots sold off more or less legally by private land speculators. A research project carried out in the 1980s on a low-income self-built house of lowering the working class in North Africa shows that the continuous reference to the courtyard housing type¹⁷.

When zoomed into Addis Ababa, the research of Heisel showed clearly the incoherence of typologies from rural to urban and from formal to informal with the change of traditional lifestyles, especially when mentioned about the condominium type¹⁸.



FIG 7 condominium house in Addis Ababa

3.3 Critical reflection in regard to the selected approach.

In my approach, ethnography and typology are used as epistemic frameworks to read and

¹⁶ Günter Pfeifer and Per Brauneck, *Courtyard houses: a housing typology* (Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

¹⁷ Brian Edwards et al., *Courtyard housing: past, present and future* (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

¹⁸ Felix Heisel, "Housing Typologies: A Case Study in Addis Ababa," in *Building Ethiopia: Sustainability and Innovation in Architecture and Design. 1* (AAU; EiABC, 2012).

comprehend the selected studies. They in a way support each other as stated above as I always use these approaches in order to find the advantages combined to embrace the effect from multiple disciplinary scopes. Thus during the research progress, as I learned how the social pattern, cultural habitats and the way of living changed with the output as graphic novel which contains the architectural drawings which not only depicted the way how people lived but also it shows the sections, plans or isometric drawings of certain type of dwellings in Ethiopia. However, thought a start from a different purpose, these type drawings surprisingly connected to the research findings from later on typologies studies as I was thinking to compare differ typologies in Addis Ababa to find a potential type that can both serve with traditional lifestyles and modern urban fabric. The outcome from the ethnographic immediately make a supplement to the plan of typologies as the story about daily life happening in exactly the same type of house directly make everything 2-dimension to 3, thus achieving an objective interpretation of a subjective experience

IV POSITIONING

4.1 Ethnographic authority and architectural authority.

In this essay, the first position that I concretely embrace is that the manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well¹⁹, which emphasize the span of time. Ethnography is exactly a site-specific and time consuming as an observer we should try to spend as much time as possible to live the life of the people we interviewed. For example, the researcher Alazar G. Ejigu, who did an ethnography of the condominium housing of Addis Ababa, directedly moved into one project with the whole family. In the beginning, he only just played with her daughter in the open park in order to let the neighbors familiar with the researcher as a neighbor rather than a researcher. His daughter easily let him start a conversation with also parents, and his wife got lots of information in an informal way with women rather than with interviews or questionnaires. His position of totally put himself as part of the community is the one, I totally agree with. Thus, in other words, the Pseudo-Ethnography in some artists that just use ethnography as a way to fulfill self-expression without enough observation that can cause misunderstands or protest among the community, which I opposed.

4.2 Ethnographer and designer minds

When starting the prepared research in Rotterdam for architectural ethnography, we first were thought of deceived by our designer thoughts as we first visited Blijdorp. Since the nice neighborhoods designed with so many green public spaces and various thresholds that can promote interactions, we thought at the beginning that the community must has strings sense of community and even made up the story in advance with different characters meets and interact with each other. However, when we finally treat ourselves as aliens without taking things for granted, through weeks of observation and interviews, though with strong architectural features and public spaces, they only appear in the same public space without actually interacting since the diverse of residents is low and most young people do not actually make friends out of neighbors. It turns out the community atmosphere is weak. In conclusion, when doing ethnographic research, we should position ourselves as observers rather than being a designer with Subjective judgment.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," *Visual Culture: Experiences in Visual Culture* (1936).

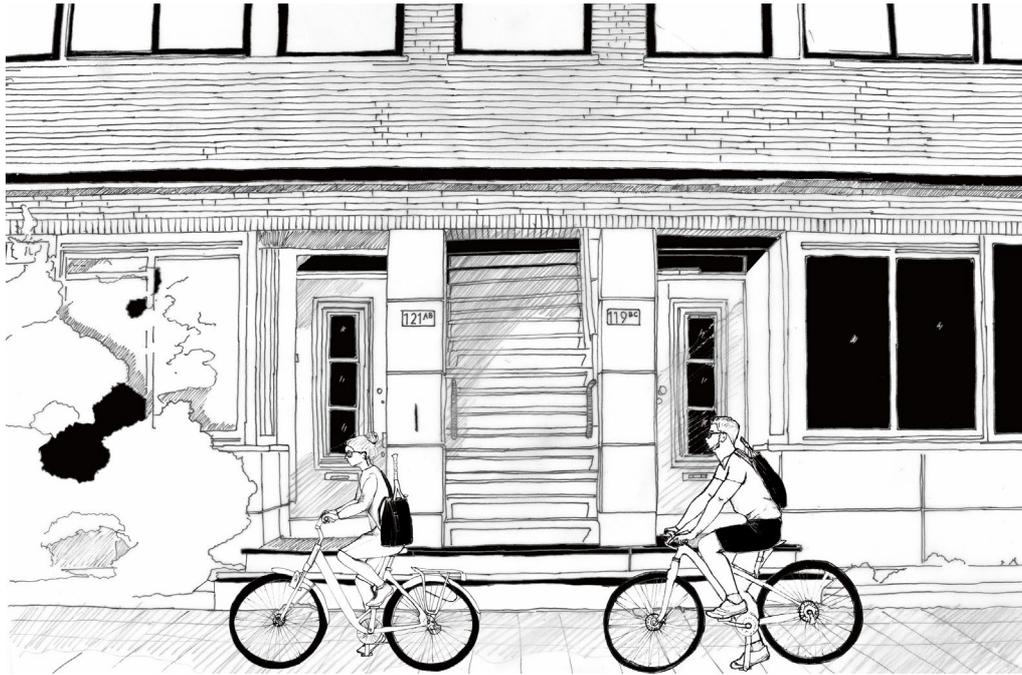


FIG 8 young couple in front of one threshold in Blijdorp

4.3 Bottom-up and top-down

The typology of the condominium in Addis Ababa now is actually typology that does not consider the real needs of the urban poor, which could have been avoided if the designer as an architect can also be an ethnographer before design to observe the life pattern of the poor and interpreted into the project. Various city plans have been applied under the different regimes to meet with the needs for rapid urbanization and most of them emphasized the Ville with primitive two-dimensional planning but neglected the cite. Sennett proposes the existence of a dialectical tension between Ville and Cité. The former, broadly, is the physical actuality of the place, the latter the life that is led in that place²⁰.

The top-down provision of low-cost housing been proved unable to address the increasing housing needs of the poor²¹. Not only the top-down plans overlooked the real needs of the residences for future housing expansion with more living spaces, but also hard boundaries were settled between building blocks and between solid and open which weaken the possibilities for flexible and sustainable expansion. Though efficient, hard boundary establishes binary opposition and is not able to cope with future certainties. So, there was no porous or updatable border been provided at the beginning for residences to add expansions on without division of shared space by a hard boundary.

Sennett compared the two kinds of edges: boundaries and borders. Borders are porous edges where different groups interact. On the contrary, a boundary is an edge where things end, a limit beyond where things stop²².

Thus, these top-down plans caused a disconnection between cite and Ville. Jane Jacobs, who was better at cite argued against conceiving of the city as a purely functional system; she asserted that big master planning inevitably suffocates community; she spoke for mixed neighborhoods, for informal street life, and for local control²³. It is, therefore, necessary to remember, given the differential access to power in our society and world, that experience can only be understood relationally.

By looking at these works now with our own eyes, we can gain a greater understanding of both architecture's relation to society and the role it can play in improving our daily lives. Architectural

²⁰ Jonathan Meades, "Building and Dwelling by Richard Sennett Review – How to Build People-Friendly Cities," the Guardian (The Guardian, February 24, 2018),

²¹ JF Turner, "C;(1976) Housing by People," *Towards autonomy in Building Environments*. London. Marion myers.

²² Richard Sennett, *Building and dwelling: ethics for the city* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

²³ Jane Jacobs, "1993, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Modern Library ed," (Random House, New York, 1961).

Ethnography, in reconnecting pieces of today's disconnected society, and critiquing from viewpoints both inside and outside of architecture, allows us to learn many things from the drawings of our time. And I believe by researching typology and the ethnography of the site simultaneously, I will find a way to dwell on different income groups properly with the traditional lifestyles remained.

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