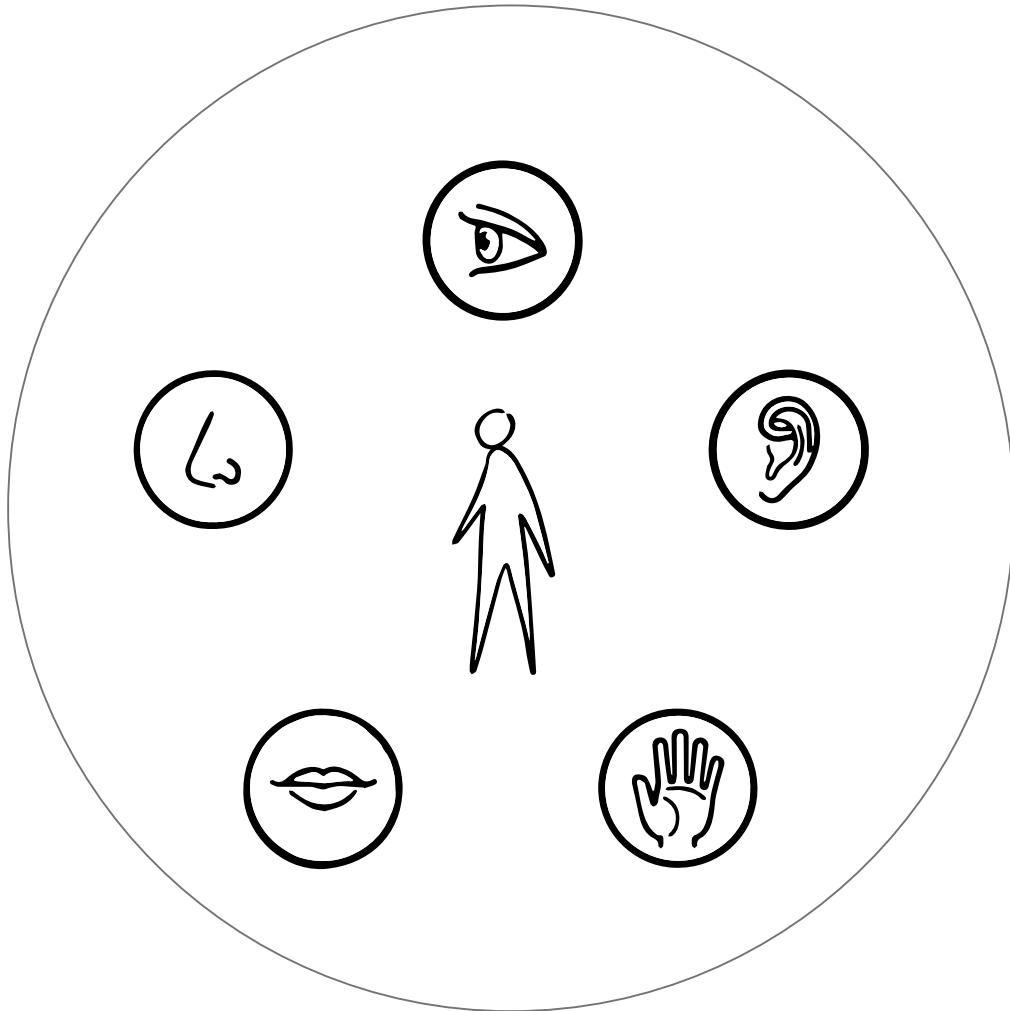


# Architecture for the senses



# 1. Introduction

Research is of course very important during the design, but just as important is the applied research methodology. Encyclo.nl Describes the definition of research methodology as "the teaching of research methods and techniques", but why is this so important? Certain research methods and techniques lead to specific results and conclusions. Based on these found results, one continues with the design (architecture). This means that the research methodology influences the architecture and is therefore inextricably linked to the design, in other words, research methodology 1 can lead to design A, while research methodology 2 can lead to design B. Before the lectures I was not aware of this, I always thought that regardless of the research methodology I would always or often come to the same design or the same end result. It was only after the lectures that I became aware of this and started to think more about research methodology. So if talking about eye openers, the moment that I realized how research methodology can influence the design and how important it is to be aware of that, was a big eye opener for me. Something else what really captured my attention was Marieke Berkers' lecture on praxeology. I found it very interesting, especially because it is about people and how people behave and act. Why I found this specific lecture the most interesting is because I personally always want to design for people. I don't feel like designing buildings that are big, impressive and flashy, because that doesn't automatically mean that it is a good design. In my opinion, a good design is a design in which the users are happy to find themselves in, where the users can stay with pleasure. During the lecture by M. Berkers I also saw a quote that I will not forget, that was: "By studying the praxis of architecture one can develop an eye for the actual users of the building, and not the imagined ones." This is spot on. The design must serve the actual users and not the imagined ones. Then the question is, who is or are the real users? I think one can find this answer through praxeology.

The graduation studio that I have chosen is "Design for care". This studio focuses on housing for the elderly, this is a very vulnerable target group who are almost at the end of their lives. In the first weeks I did field research and I stayed (slept) for one week in a nursing home with severely demented elderly. In this nursing home I discovered "the wander halls". These are halls that are designed in a loop, often a circle or a oval, so that the elderly can safely wander around. The route that they walk is constantly the same, they see the same walls, the same pictures, the same doors, the same paintings, the same smell, the same noise, the same route for days, weeks, months or even years. In the nursing home that I have visited the demented elderly could not even come outside. Some of them haven't felt rain, wind, a breeze, the sun or fresh air for 10 years. Absolutely shocking but sadly that is the reality, and that is how they live. The research question that I have formulated is therefore as follows:

## **How would the architecture of housing in a balanced community, trigger the senses of the elderly in their everyday life?**

Praxeology in combination with anthropology is the research methodology that I apply during my graduation research. Dr. ing. Birgit Jürgehake described anthropology in her research lecture as the scientific study of people and human behavior and societies in the past and present. Social anthropology studies behavioral patterns and cultural anthropology studies cultural significance, including norms and values. Visual anthropology is the commonly used method to collect data. The most important tool is the observation. Data is captured visually.

### **It is important to (objectively) look, smell, feel, etc.**

- No judgment
- No interpretation
- No conclusion
- Only observe neutrally
- Awareness of the place, the people, yourself

Jurgehake, B., Anthropological research lecture

## 2. Research methodological discussion

The research methodology that I applied to answer my research question is praxeology in combination with anthropology. I have chosen this approach because I want to design for people, I believe that architecture should be for the people. My graduation research focuses on housing for the elderly. To better understand this target group, I spent and slept one week in a nursing home (anthropology: participatory observations). The idea was to conduct anthropological research during this week, to observe the elderly, how they walk, how far they can walk, what the obstacles are, how they sit, what triggers their senses, etc. Besides that, the intention was to talk a lot with the elderly and do some activities together so that I would understand them better and would be able to place myself in their situation. However, I ended up in a nursing home with severely demented elderly, so this was a challenge. This means that I could not have a conversation with the elderly because of dementia they talk gibberish. I could not conduct interviews, I could not do any activities with them, they were not allowed to go outside because it was a closed department (psychogeriatric care), and so on. So I decided to observe the elderly and the spaces and to capture these observations with photos and sketches. I could translate these observations, photos and sketches into design guidelines. Luckily I was able to talk to the caregivers to get more information about certain topics. An example of such an observation is shown in the images below.

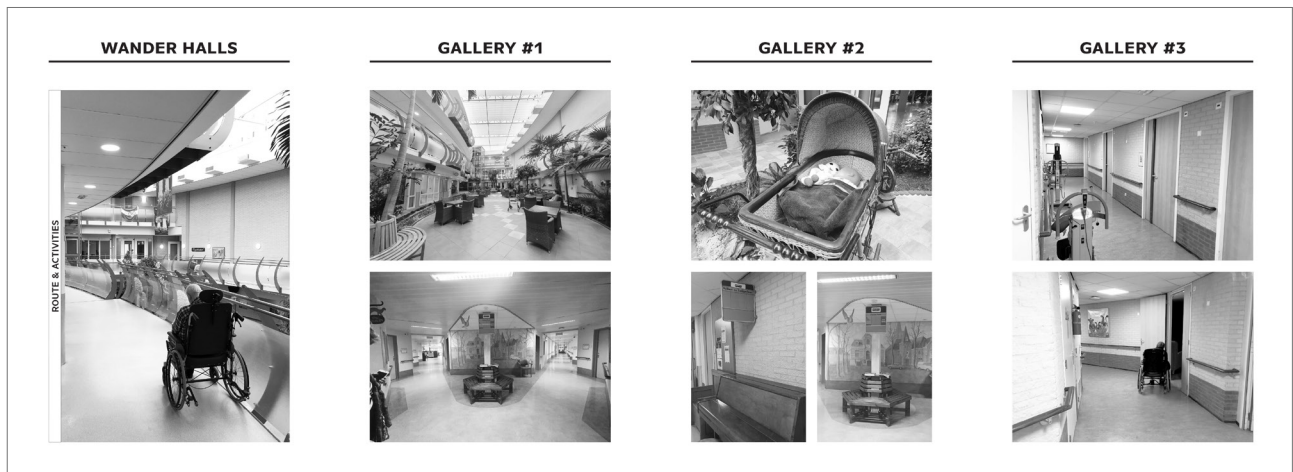


Fig. 1 Observation

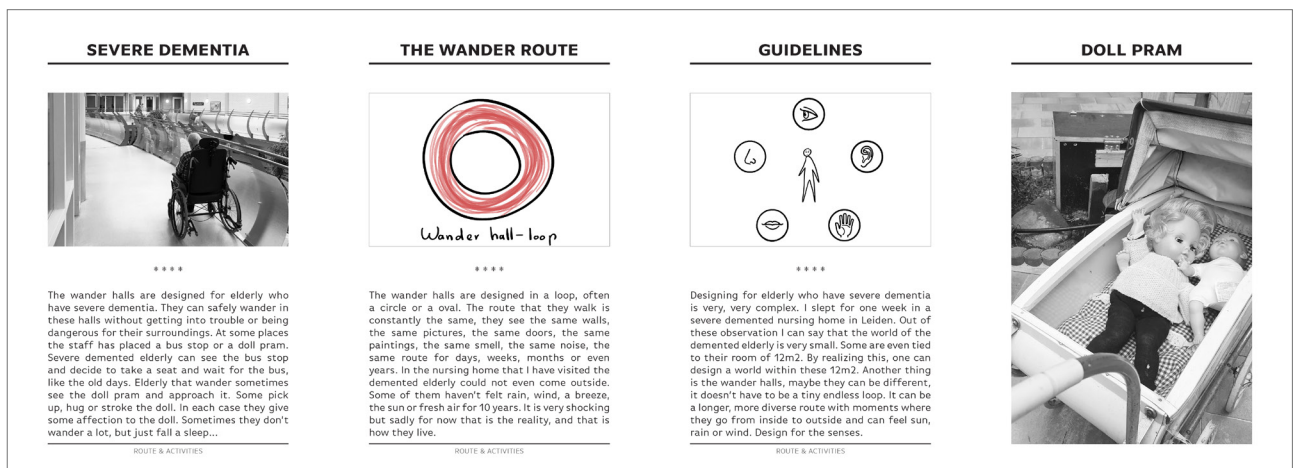


Fig. 2 Observation

## 2. Research methodological discussion

Next to the observations in the field research, I also did an anthropological location research. A relevant location research, where I investigate the characteristics of the location and what possibilities it gives to trigger the senses of the elderly. I have visited the location multiple times and looked at the elements: sun, wind and rain. I observed how the sun is oriented. The sun can be very important to trigger the senses. The sun can be seen and the warmth can be felt. The location is almost perfectly situated for sunshine. There is almost no high-rise around the site, except for the student flat in the South-West that can block the sun, especially in winter times, when the sun stands very low. I observed the wind at the site. Wind can not only be felt but it can also be seen. When the wind blows, it moves trees, dandelions, leaves, etc. Wind also moves odor, the smell of specific flowers for example can help people with dementia find their way back home. Wind can trigger the senses but it can also support the elderly as in the given example. Next to sun and wind, rain can also trigger the senses. Rain can be seen, heard and felt. After a rainy period one can even smell a specific odor that comes of the plants and trees. During my field research I stayed one week in a fully enclosed dementia facility, where some elderly haven't felt the rain or wind in 10 years. Absolutely shocking. I will make more of these observations and I will use these guidelines that have emerged out of anthropology: participatory observations when starting to the design.



Fig. 3 Location research - anthropology

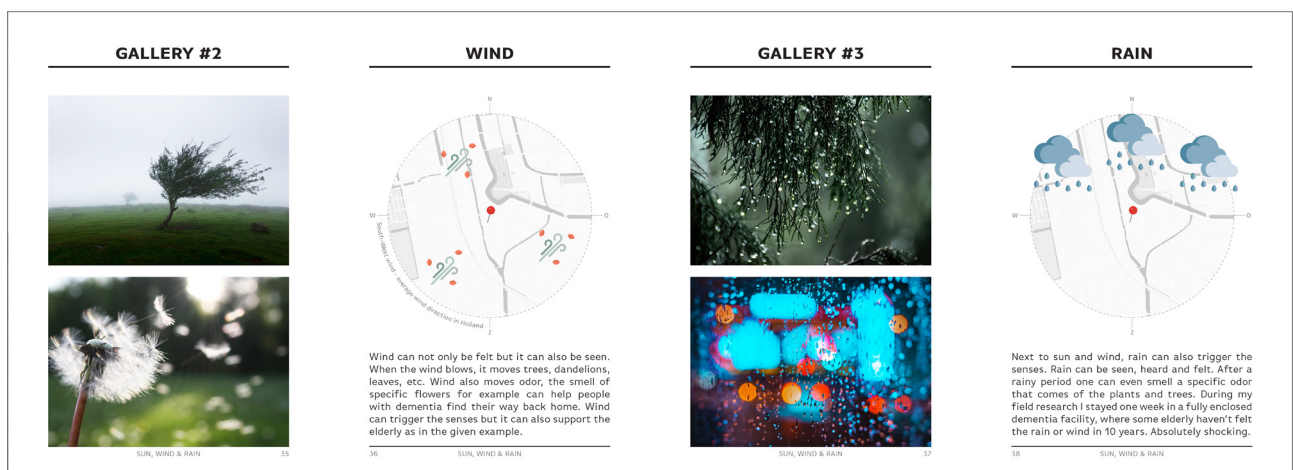


Fig. 4 Location research - anthropology

### 3. Research methodological reflection

I would like to describe how this research methodology was used by other architects in the past with a very strong example that has been presented in the lectures. I am of course talking about The Frankfurt Kitchen (1926), designed by architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky for Ernst May's social housing, called New Frankfurt. In this case Margarete has looked very carefully at the user, how the user walks through the kitchen or where the oven is in relation to the kitchen cabinets, where the waste bin is in relation to the kitchen counter, etc. Based on these observations and conclusions, she has designed a kitchen which is more compact and efficient than the previous kitchens, and all this by observing how someone actually uses the kitchen. Because there is a difference between how one think that the kitchen is being used and how the kitchen is actually being using . The only way to find out is to observe the user and his or her actions and, or by interviews, talking with them, etc.

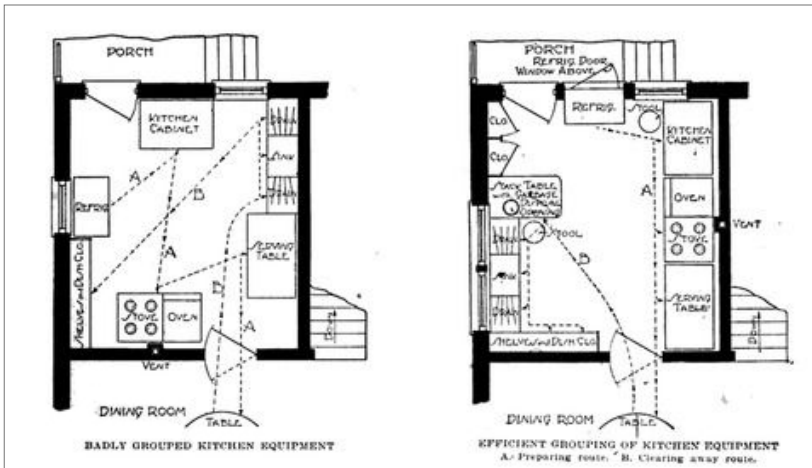


Fig. 5 observations and translation to design



Fig. 6 The Frankfurt Kitchen

Not only architects used this research methodology, but also famous people like Henry Ford who produced a car "for the young business man" where he looked very carefully at what the younger generation actually wants. As soon as he knew that, he could design for that specific target group.

Fordism: named after car manufacturer Henry Ford, refers to various social theories about production and work organization. In a broader sense, Fordism refers to the 20th-century consumer society.

[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fordisme](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fordisme)



Fig. 7 Advertisement Ford

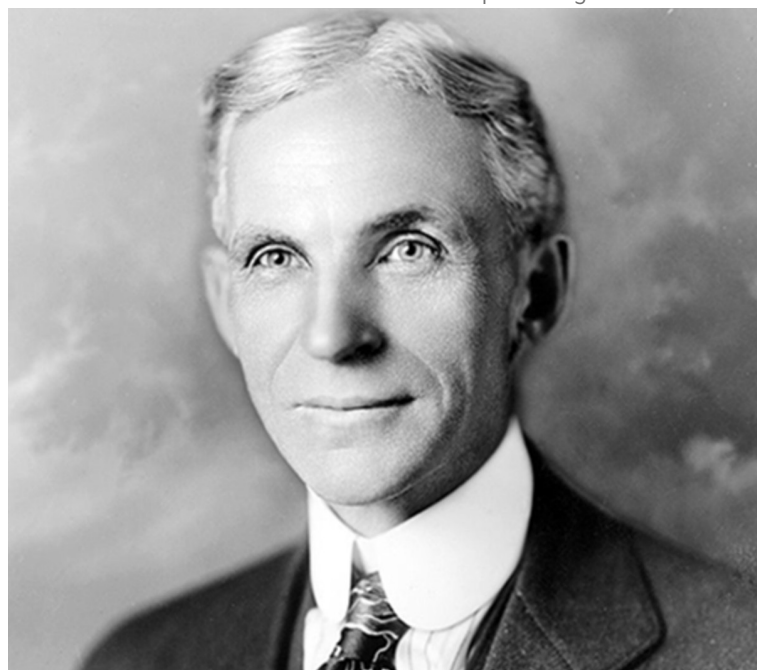


Fig. 8 Henry Ford

### 3. Research methodological reflection

In addition to architects such as Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky or Bruno Taut, there are also photographers who use this research methodology. Photographers such as André Kertesz, Peter Menzel, Michael Wolf or Benny Lam show very well how they capture the human behavior and society (anthropology) through a series of photos. The images below show a number of these photos that are made by a famous photographer called Michael Wolf.



Fig. 11 Michael Wolf - Hong Kong - Mop



Fig. 12 Michael Wolf - Hong Kong - informal seating arrangements

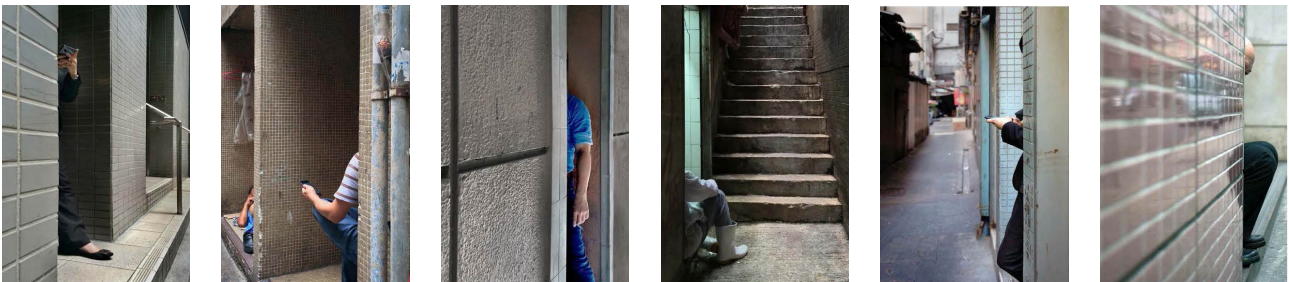


Fig. 13 Michael Wolf - Hong Kong - Break

These are some examples of people from another discipline who observed / captured human behavior. The photographs of Michael Wolf are shown in the above series. He has taken a serie of photos in Hong Kong and with each set of images he wants to telling something specific about the human behavior. For example, looking at the set of images in Figure 11, it shows how the cleaning crew store their mop or how they hang it up at the end of the day. The set in figure 12 shows how people adjust seats so that they can sit comfortably on them and the series in figure 13 shows how employees "enjoy" their break in an alley. Personally, I find this a very interesting way of doing research, because it really focuses on the human behavior. If these moments can be found and captures, then one can learn a lot from this. The hard part is finding these moments or seeing these moments and trying to capture it before the moments passes by.

## 4. Positioning

Personally, I don't think people should hold on to one research methodology. I believe that a research methodology should be chosen based on the research question and the goals that one wants to achieved. In addition, I also believe that there can be a mix of the research approach. In my case I am focused a lot on praxeology and anthropology, but at the same time I also focus on literature for architectural and the senses. I can find out a lot about the senses by observing people, but there is also literature that writes about the senses and architecture, from which I can also learn a great deal that can be important for the design process. It is all about learning and improving yourself, growing. That is why I am not really against one particular research methodology because you can learn something valuable from every research methodology, just as you can always learn something from another person, even if it is something small, it can be of great importance. In my case I have specifically chosen the position to design for the people. As mentioned before, I think that architecture should be for the people (and animals), it should contribute something positive to the living environment. A flashy building is not equal to a good building. That is why I choose the position to start researching the person / users of the building and based on the outcome of that research I will design. That is also the approach I have learned during the studio, I have consciously chosen this studio because I strongly find myself in this way of thinking. What I realize during this research methodology is that I cannot satisfy all people. I get a lot of information from the all the observations and talks with the people, but I also know that I cannot fulfill everyone's wishes. That is something to keep in mind while designing.

I do see a strong contrast between, for example, that a great deal of research is being done into the price of materials, how it can be cheaper, how it can be assembled more efficiently and faster, the facade layout, or whether it fits within the urban design. etc., etc., this is all important too, but I am always surprised that much less attention is paid to the user, the people who will live there at the end, who will stay in the building for 10, 20 or 30 years and sometimes longer. But once again, a large amount of people find money far more important than the human values.

At the end I would like to thank you for the interesting lectures you gave and the lessons that I have learn from them. Thank you very much!

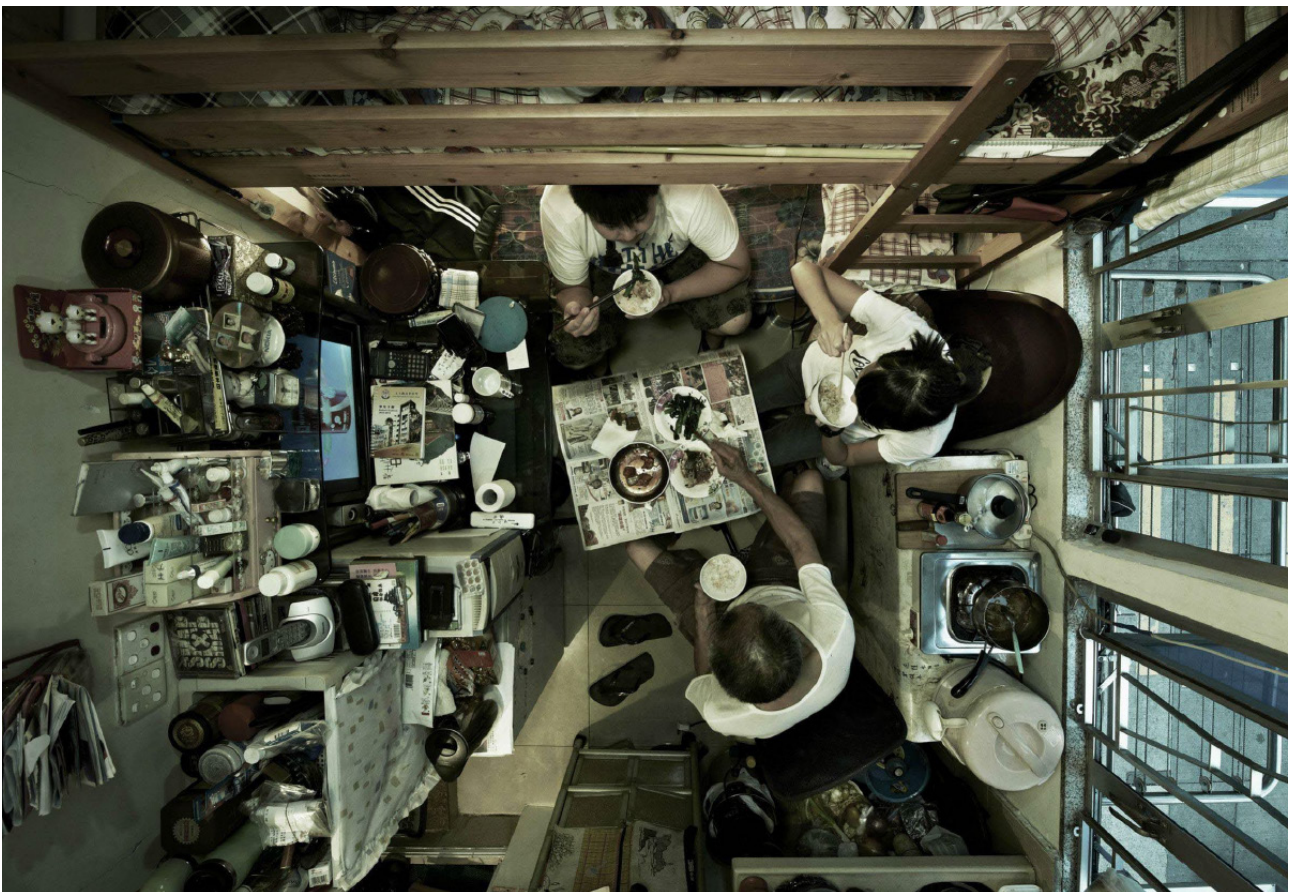


Fig. 14 Benny Lam 2012 - Hong Kong - Shoebox homes

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