

# GRADUATION REFLECTION PAPER



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## From Studio to Research | Intimate city

To get a better understanding of the theme of this project, I started with a painting depicting a scene of my idea of an 'Intimate City'. This painting, 'Drukbevolkte Hollands straatje bij namiddagzon' by Willem Koekkoek, frames a lively, narrow, 19th century Dutch street. The life of the inhabitants is spilled out on the streets. Playing outside, doing dishes, having dinner and the everyday conversation, people use the public spaces for the most private of affairs, sharing everything. This is what intimacy means to me, allow people to invade in your most personal and private affairs. An 'Intimate City' is a city that facilitates and even stimulates this behaviour. This is why I chose to analyse Naples, a city that with its porousness still allows this kind of behaviour



Image 1 |

This means that my research started simply with investigating the theme of the studio. This investigation started by trying to define what an 'Intimate City' meant to me through finding images of such a city and describing what was depicted. With this definition I started a literary study in order to find a city that could still be working like such an 'Intimate City' and ended up with Naples. Walter Benjamin described Naples as a 'porous city'. Saying: "The whole city is perceived as made of different interiors: public or private are fused together in a spectrum of different degrees of permeability, but are almost felt as if they were interiors". From the studio's theme I now found myself a case study.

Prescribing a certain way of approaching a project could lead to a really single sided, demanding design task. Every studio has its own philosophy, where in my opinion the chair of interiors, buildings, cities has a view on architecture where architecture is constructed of a sequence of experiences in spaces. These sequences of experiences results in the buildings, which make the cities. This is connected to my view on architecture. This is why for me it was liberating to follow the studio's structure since the given tasks were broad enough to allow you to decide your own focus and yet focussed enough to quickly get a feeling with the studio's theme.

## From Research to Project | City Room

Intimate city, a city that with its porousness still allows a kind of behaviour where people share. But what is it that makes people behave this way in Naples? How can this kind of intimacy be created? Like Walter Benjamin Richard Sennett describes Naples as an open city. He writes how we can design this kind of porousness, saying: "Whenever we construct a barrier we have to equally make the barrier porous; the distinction between inside and outside has to be breachable, if not ambiguous." I believe the answer to these questions lies in the way the thresholds are designed. I found there are two ways this is done in Naples.

First: delete the threshold. In some of the streets in Naples, the barrier between inside and outside

is almost totally wiped away. People take their chairs, tables, card games, everything outside and use the street as an extension to their houses. Or on the other hand [as shown in this picture] simply open up the façade of their houses, allowing in the public.



Image 2 | *Deleting the threshold*



Image 3 | *Delaying the threshold*

The other way is delaying the threshold through courtyards. These courtyards, this sequence of spaces, seem to delay the threshold from the public to the private. These are spaces where you can forget if you're inside or outside, in a public or a private space. These undefined and unassigned spaces, even though being freely accessible, still allow for people to carry out their private actions and by doing so will constantly be appropriated. The people who use the space decide its character. The spaces can be markets or dining rooms, depending on the needs of the people who use it. In this I see a 'city room'. These city rooms, by making people feel as if it's their own, allow the kind of urban intimacy as is depicted in the painting.

By focussing on finding a concrete architectural concept like the 'City Room' from the abstract idea of an 'Intimate City, I sometimes forgot to look at the broader picture to initiate a design project. This meant that in the end of the research I nearly had any idea of a potential function. In the end I found a function, namely a ballet school, that was really well suited to both the architectural concept as the physical concept but in a next project I would certainly broaden my scope from the start of the research.

## From Project to the City | Antwerp

In the previous face of the project I tried, by researching Naples, to go from an abstract idea of an 'Intimate City' to a concrete concept that would define my architecture. I found in Naples the 'City Room', which would become the guiding theme through my project.

The next step was to bring this architectural concept to Antwerp. A city with a different climate and architecture, different people and ideas. I found that the research results I brought from Naples could not directly be translated to Antwerp. An extra urban investigation helped me get an idea of how to translate the Neapolitan courtyards to urban fabric of Antwerp. What was immediately clear was that from the two ways of designing thresholds the one of deleting the threshold is too

rigorous for this city. This meant that threshold needed to be delayed. In order to get a better idea of how this is done in Antwerp I looked at more case studies, only now in the city of my project.

I found that research through case study is an approach that suits my way of thinking. It is immediately physical and quickly connects abstract ideas to concrete concepts. Because it is so physical, it is also bound to a place. Since almost no place is identic, a concept found in one place always has to be rethought in the other. Even though through my process I have always been able to use Naples as a metaphor, the Neapolitan way had to be rethought as well. Still I am happy with the approach I took because even though the research could not be directly translated, the founding's of the over all research helped me in my design every step of the way.



#### From Project to Design | Royal Ballet School Antwerp

A ballet school is one with an internal focus. The students are committed and spend a lot of time inside. In the previous faculties this has always been visible in the architecture. The school has always known buildings that allowed for a private intimacy but stepped over their threshold. When we talk about an 'Intimate City' we say that the function should add something to this city and carry out their private affairs. Finding the connection between the private intimacy of the ballet school and the urban intimacy of Antwerp was one of the ethical issues I came across in my design.

Another was the distinction between the different functions within the program. Where an performance hall has a complete different intimacy level than a classroom, the different functions within the program tried to create a design of different entities. Yet the goal was to design one building as a whole.

As complicated as some of the questions I came across were, the answer was always to be found in the concept of a 'City Room'. A collection of 'City Rooms' that all have different levels of intimacy. This guiding theme helped me make decisions throughout the entire project from decisions about massing in the urban context to the detailing and a climate concept.