

BUILDING FOR DIVORCING FAMILIES

Research about the experienced collectiveness in buildings

Student

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Thesis - Moving in. Moving on. Moving out.

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I INTRODUCTION

Architectural design is considered to be a complex process which involves many different disciplines. Acquiring necessary knowledge about the involved disciplines is achieved through architectural research that encompasses a wide diversity of substantive foci and methodological choices¹. Due to the diversity of methods, tools and techniques, the research-methodological awareness is important. The use of a specific research methodology could affect how the research question is asked, in what way the problems are being solved and how the answers represents the original intention². By having knowledge about the available research methodologies and the involved tools and techniques, architects are able to position their research within the process and choose the methodology that ensures them with the design results they were aiming for.

This course has taught me a lot of different things. Starting with all the different methods and methodologies discussed at the lectures and provided by literature. I realized that my knowledge about nearly every method and methodology was incomplete. For example, as I am personally very interested how the human perception is involved within architecture, I have never worked before with an approach as phenomenology before. The provided overview by the lectures and literature broadened my insight in some methods that I was not aware about it existed. Yet it is very important to know they exist, which is my second point. I came to understand the importance of knowing all these different kind of methods and methodologies. As it is able to frame in your research question and create new possibilities of how you want to design your research. By knowing the kinds of methods that are possible, it makes it easier for me to reflect upon the goal of my research; Do I use this method because I am familiar with it and thus I know what kind of research question provides the answer, or are there other possibilities of research methods that will provide a better answer. Because of that I have become more sharp about how I want to formulate my question, because I am able to understand better what kind of method this question provides.

I am graduating in the Dwelling studio: Dutch housing, in which collectiveness is one of the general research themes of the studio. This research was initially designed in two phases. The first phase is the anthropological phase where we as students observe human behaviour in our case study building, followed by the analytical phase, in which we analyse the spatial and material context of acts of collectiveness. It is important to mention that due to covid-19 it might not be possible to observe our case study building in the near future. These circumstances has pushed us to perform the general studio research in a different way to provide our research with the answers we are looking for. Important in this anthropological approach is the collaboration of different fields which all contribute to the understanding of architecture². Connected with the research approach of the studio I am performing my own research.

The topic of my graduation design is 'creating a supportive place to live for divorcing families to move on'. Many people going through a divorce are having a hard financial and mental time. However, creating a building for this social group to perform as a community asks for certain collective spaces. These collective spaces enables the phenomenon 'collective acts' to take place. Important is that some acts of collectivity are experienced as positive by divorcing persons and some are not. To meet the needs of divorcing people with collective spaces I want to get a better understanding of how these people experience these collective spaces, therefore this paper will focuses on phenomenology.

My aim is to design a building which enables the community of divorcing people to perform the act of collectiveness they desire. This aim provides the central question for my thesis research: *What circumstances support the acts of collectiveness desired by divorcing people ?* in which I will centre the sub-question *How do divorcing people experience collective spaces?* As the question centred in this paper.

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II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method. This methodology is based on the observed and interpreted of human behaviors and human experience towards physical sites through the analysis of sensory influences³. Phenomenology suggests the opposite of a generic approach. This means that it is a user-oriented and context-sensitive design, in which the specific needs of communities and people; the historical and cultural context and the unique characteristics of a given place are the base of design choices⁴. My aim is to design spaces which supports the desired collective experience of divorcing people. This is the reason that phenomenological approach is chosen.

The approach of this research is theory-led, as it exists in a framework of understandings within the phenomenology². It uses the philosophical theories of phenomenologists like Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty about the interpretation of phenomenology and its research methods. Under the framework of phenomenology, my research approach follows three steps. The research exists out of multiple case studies where the phenomena is experienced by the social group I am investigating: collective spaces experienced by divorcing families. The first step exists out of an observation of the phenomenon, containing images and dimensions of the space it appears. These observations will be translated into a description of the space in combination with photography.

The second step exists out of in-depth interviews with these participants. The interview is taken to intuition myself into their experiences. In order to discover meanings in this generated data out of the interviews, I need an attitude that is open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge⁵. This method is called 'bracketing', a term conceived by Husserl, where the researcher does not influence the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. The interview will be translated in a personal description of the participants' experience.

In the last step, the written narratives of the participants' experience and the objective description translated in photos with writing, will be interpreted together in annotated drawings of the specific identified spatial qualities combined with literary language. This approach is situated in an epistemic framework of the spatial narrative where the atmospheric description is using fragmented details in which different senses are given attention separately⁶.

In the architectural domain of phenomenology the most used perceptions is the philosophy established by Heidegger and the phenomenology of perception pursued by Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger views the design process is something that should be grounding on the responding to the fourfold of Earth, Sky, Mortals and Divinities^{2,4}. He expresses dwellings as something its meaning extends beyond residing a place, as it is also about comfort and homeliness and the temporality of maintaining a home². Merleau-Ponty is studying the phenomenology of perception in architecture and states that phenomenology is being a matter of describing and not explaining or analysing. According to Merleau-Ponty we are dealing with sensations rather than stimuli². Up until now, many researchers and architects have worked with their own understanding within these perceptions of phenomenology. For example, Daniel Libeskind's whose spatial concept is characterized by fragmental, accidental, heterogeneous space by accidental events which occurred by movement of human, which was identified with the spatial concept of Merleau-Ponty⁷.

The most challenging aspect within the phenomenological research approach will be the method of bracketing. As bracketing is found inconsistent and problematic, there is argued that it cannot be eliminated within the research method⁸.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The phenomenological movement began with the publication of Logical Investigations of Edmund Husserl in 1900. Husserl, whom is considered as the father of phenomenology, introduced a novel way of studying and examining the phenomenon of consciousness in that work⁴. He viewed the

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human existence as being the initial point of philosophy. Many philosophers developed their interpretations departed from Husserl's philosophy. Martin Heidegger's approach was more poetic. He expanded this in 'being and time' that specifically aimed at discovering the meaning of being. Founded on the nature of the perception of Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty demonstrated how the lived body plays a key role in human spatiality⁹ and emphasizes the importance to seek an understanding from many angles, as all the perspectives contribute to a better understanding of a phenomenon¹⁰.

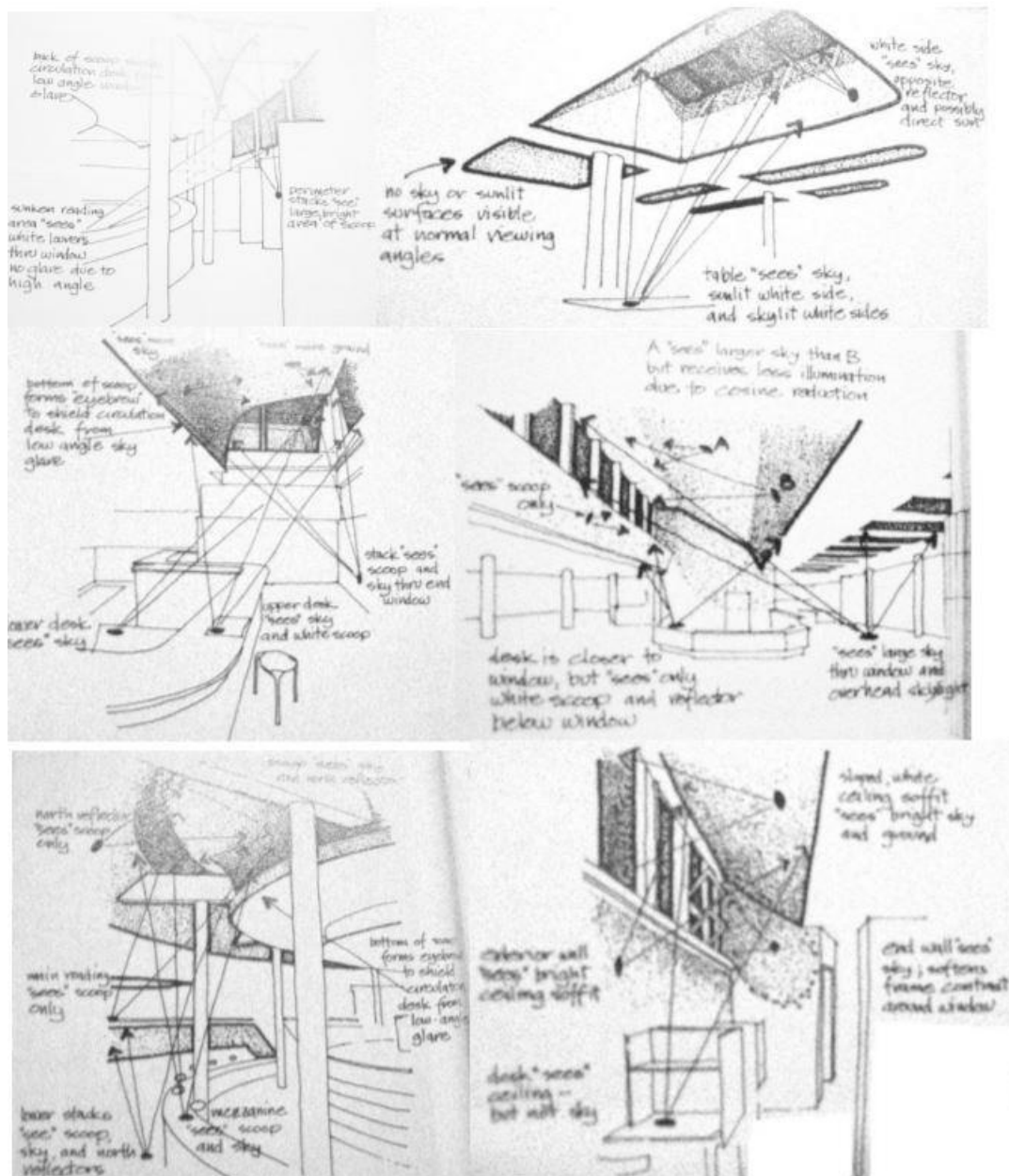
Christian Norberg-Schulz was one important architectural theorist influenced by the environmental-behavior studies. He played an important role in keeping phenomenology in sight for architects, as he sought to re-conceptualize how architects understood architecture. This he did partly through phenomenological reformulations of the work of the environmental-behavior study researchers like Kevin Lynch and Edward Hall¹¹. Kevin Lynch explored the urban public space in a phenomenological way in his book *The Image of the City*. He used the mental-map mapping method to express how people are guided in the urban environment. Edward Hall explored as an American anthropologist cultural and social cohesion and used the descriptive method of representing the experience.

In recent years, an increasing number studies have appeared considering Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception. One of them is Juhani Pallasmaa whom draws partly on Merleau-Ponty and argues that much contemporary architectural design is dominated by sight with the result that building may be outstanding in a visual manner, but have lost any expression of plasticity and multivalent sensuousness¹². For Pallasmaa, architects must aim to "*create embodied and lived existential metaphors that concretise and structure our being in the world.*" He argued that "*Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings*". Pallasmaa found examples of such design in the buildings of Alvar Aalto, Peter Zumthor, Steven Holl and Glenn Murcutt.¹²

As the phenomenological approach does not provide one single method. Architects and researchers within the architectural field have been researching phenomenology in various ways.

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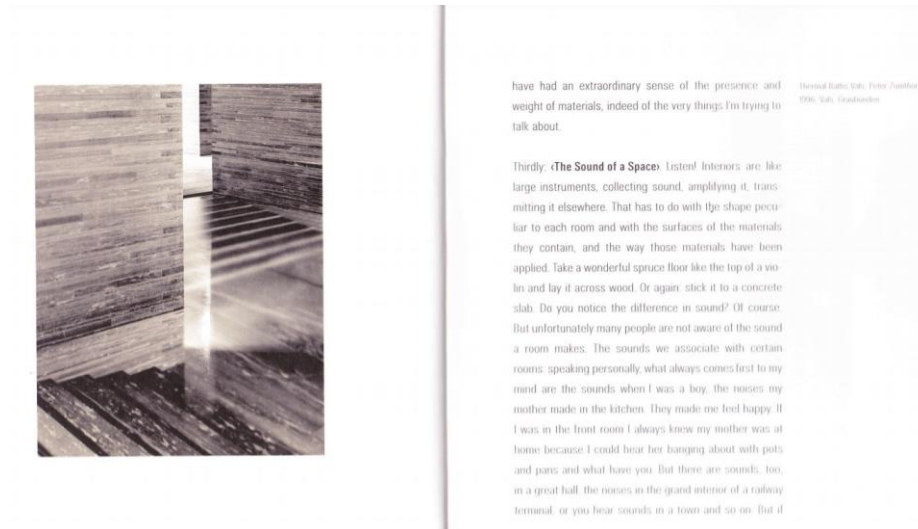
Observing the libraries of Alvar Aalto, Aalto's approach (figure 1) is specifically focused on the participant and how the light is experienced from there. In this approach he is responding to the space through the participants experience. This approach includes arrows that are starting at the point of interest; which could be a human or an object. The use of this arrow leads to the areas of illumination to show that the point of interest can see these areas¹³. I personally like this approach because of the use of annotation and arrows within the drawing itself. The writing (the annotation) and the visuals (the drawing) are working together in one frame instead of two separate frames, where the reader needs to make the interpretation to what he is looking.



(Figure 1. Sketches from Aalto's Libraries. Source: https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2102&context=utk_gradthes)

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Peter Zumthor's works showed me certain methods to document while observing and interpreting. As Zumthor didn't systematically work on the phenomenological theory, he works with some phenomenological principles within his design practice. Atmosphere, which we perceive through our emotional sensibility is important. In his book *Atmospheres*, what he used to describe his perception and experience is the combination of visuals (photos) and writing (literary narrative). Through the photos one can perceive and experience the texture and light, while the literary narratives enables one's experience of smell and sounds¹⁴.



(Figure 2. A page out of the book 'Atmospheres' by Peter Zumtho. 2006)

The drawings made for the *Therme Vals* by Zumthor interested me. *The Therme Vals* is represented by him through atmospheric drawings. He represents the intentional atmosphere in annotated drawings. These drawings were made with charcoal on tracing paper, where the indications of hygrometry rate and water temperature are observed by annotations of red and blue tints¹⁵. Important is the phase of the made drawings within the process. These drawings are not a result of perceived experiences and perceptions of others, but it represents the intentional atmosphere that has to create a certain perception and experience. This is a step that follows up this research in later stages as I have to represent experience and perception within an atmosphere I am aiming for in my design.

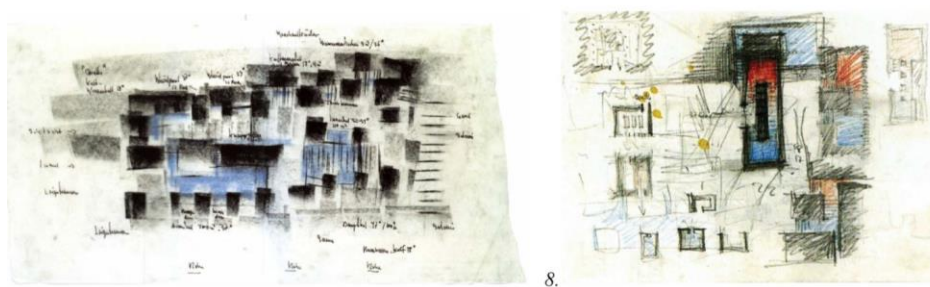


Figure 3. Sketches, *Therme Vals*, representing Peter Zumthors atmospheric intention. Source (secondary): Drozd, C. Meunier, V. Simonnot, N. & Hégron, G. *What tools and modes of representation to reflect an architectural atmosphere?*. 2016

All the methodologies provide their own advantages and disadvantages. It is crucial to know the purpose behind the research to decide the choice of the methodology. Within the research method of my graduation project I use a combination of writing and photos and annotated drawings. The combination will allow to not only represent the visual experience but also the temperature of acoustical experience. The interpretation of this will be conducted in annotated charcoal drawings with

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colors highlighting the essential experience indications, taken as a reference from Peter Zumthor. The annotations enables to locate the specific spatial characters.

IV POSITIONING

The phenomenology in architecture seeks understanding in the experience of the users and considers the social cultural and historical context of architectural intervention. In Phenomenology the observation and interpretation of experiences and spatial .. are crucial. By integrating Phenomenology within the architectural research process, the researcher or architects shows respect towards the future users. With this respect I am entering the research I am doing. Personally I think good architecture should consider the desired needs and experience of future users. As architecture has different aims I understand that phenomenology takes different places within the importance of integrating. As the design aim of my graduation project is connected with the desiring experience and perception of my future users, the phenomenology is considered as one of the most important aspects within my design.

The lecture I consider as most relevant to my position is the one about Spatial Narrative. Part of the reading material that has been offered in this course was the chapter *writing Atmospheres* by Klaske Havik⁶. This chapter argues how atmosphere seems mediating between opposite notions, like parts and whole, individual and collective, subject and object.

The different opposite notions all have their own preference of literary language and ways to represent the atmosphere to the reader. One example is the focused fragmenting, where specific aspects of the atmosphere are described in full detail. An example of this is the book *invisible cities* of Italo Calvino. The advantage of the focused fragmenting is that focusing on one detail could help us more to notice the influence of it on the atmospheric experience. As visual representations documents a part of the human beings visual experience like light and texture, the literary language is more useful to describe the smells and sounds of the experience.

The topic of my graduation project is focusing on perception and multi-sensory experience, because by experiencing a space one uses all kinds of senses. Thereby I adopt a combination of literary and visual tools. With the aim to design a building which enables the community of divorcing people to perform the act of collectiveness they desire, all the senses of this social group need to be considered. The visual tool will be not enough in this sense as a tool to perform my research.

In the observational phase in the research process I will use writing and photography as Peter Zumthor illustrated in his book 'Atmospheres'. The interview of the different participants will be written down and translated in a literary language. In the interpretation phase, a combination of annotated hand drawings and writing will be adopted to create an integral and subjective understanding of the perceptions and experience. This combination will be of great use in later stages of my design process by designing the desired experience. Thereby I will consider the way of representing the atmosphere and the experience and perception I am aiming for in charcoal drawings with color tints and small annotations, to communicate what I am aiming for.

Concluding, the position towards the methodology of my graduation project can be summarized as, 1. Phenomenology is based on the observed and interpreted of human behaviors and human experience towards physical sites through analysis of sensory influences. It emphasizes the importance of human perception and experience in architecture. As I am researching what spaces support the desired collective acts for divorcing people, I have to gain an understanding how this social group experience collectivity acts and why. This is the reason that the phenomenological approach is chosen. This methodology is adopted in the case study interviews with participants and my observations. When interviewing and observing I have to work with the method called 'bracketing'. This is of great importance as I have to set my assumptions aside to get the real experience of the participants and results from the documental analysis not influenced by assumptions.

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The research will be done through observations and interviews. The observation will be translated into photographs and writing. The interview with the participants will be described in a literary language. Subsequently, this will be interpreted together in a combination of annotated drawings and literary language. This combination makes it possible to describe the experience and perception of all the senses, such as light through the annotated drawings and smells through.

Notes

- ¹ Groat Linda & David Wang, Architectural research methods (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), VI.
- ² Ray Lucas. Research methods for architecture. (London: Laurence King publishing, 2015).
- ³ Reisner-Cook Y, The Troubled Relationship between Architecture and Aesthetic: Exploring the Self and Emotional Beauty in Design (Australia: Royal Melbourne,)
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- ⁵ Amadeo Giorgi. IPA and science: A response to Jonathan Smith. Journal of Phenomenological Psychology(2011). 42, 195-216
- ⁶ Jonathan Charley. The routledge companion on architecture, Literature and The City. *Writing atmospheres* (New York: Routledge, 2019). 270-282
- ⁷ Jung, i. & Kim, H. A Phenomenological Study on the concept of Daniel Libeskind's Architectural Space. (2002)
- ⁸ Chan, Z. Fung, Y. & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in Phenomenology: Only Undertaken in the Data Collection and Analysis Process
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- ¹¹ David Seamon. Architecture and phenomenology. (Kansas State University: Department of Architecture, 2018)
- ¹² Juhani Pallasmaa. The Eyes of the Skin, (London: Wiley, 2005)
- ¹³ Fuller Moore. "Six Aalto Libraries." AIA Journal: (1982)
- ¹⁴ Peter Zumthor. Thinking architecture,(Boston:Birkhäuser 2006) 85-86.
- ¹⁵ Céline Drozd, Virginie Meunier, Nathalie Simonnot, Gérard Hégron. What tools and modes of representation to reflect an architectural atmosphere?. Conference on architectural visualisation - 9th international eaea conference, Faculty of Architecture, Brandenburg University of Technology, Sep 2009, Cottbus, Germany. hal-01275083 al atmosphere?. 2016