

THE JOINTS IN THE CITY

*A research into mediating tensions in the city through the joint.
Analysing, ornamentation, appropriation and light*

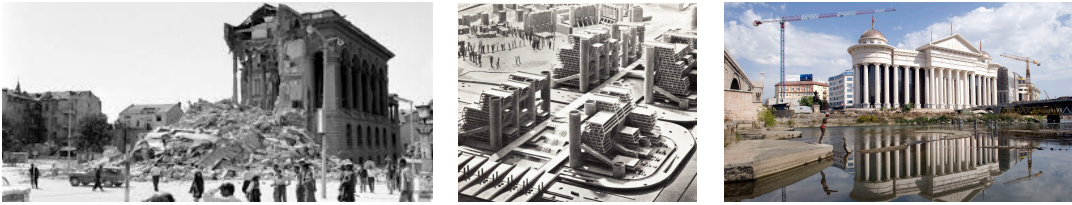
Student

Holly Dale (4832574)

Chair of Methods and Analysis, "Positions in Practice"

Thesis "The joint and the city"

I CONTEXT AND IMAGE



Images: Skopje 1963, Aftermath of earthquake ¹, Tange masterplan for Skopje, 1965², Skopje 2014 under construction ³

It can be said that the city of Skopje has experienced three monumental earthquakes in relation to its architectural history. The infamous physical earthquake in 1963 destroyed eighty percent of the city's building stock. The second and third earthquake were caused by political and architectural forces. The second earthquake was in 1965, Kenzo Tange masterplan won a competition for urban renewal in the city, not all of it was realised but the large contemporary infrastructure network and metabolised style of building made huge impacts to the image of the city, transforming it with monumental concrete structures. The latest earthquake in 2014 when the government implemented the plan for "Skopje 2014", a new vision for the city to unite all its residents under the image of a neo-classical city in an attempt to Europeanise the city centre; a composition of new facades, statues, and monuments, once again changed the image of the city centre dramatically.

We were based in Delft for the research with a two-week excursion to Skopje, therefore we conducted the research as observers in an etic manner. The first explorations of the city's urban environment led us to base our research topic on its present situation, exploring the images within the city. For us, the term 'image' does not follow the well-known conventions of Kevin Lynch⁴ who looks at individual experiences to categories urban blocks or space into edges, nodes, and landmarks etc. We instead use 'image' to understand the communication of objects in the city (e.g. statue, billboard, sign, flooring, guttering etc) and the tensions they create, this later progressed into looking at the physical connection between images and how they converse with one another.

As a research group of three within a research and design studio, we aimed to explore and gain an understanding of the physical impact of images within the city; moving from the intangible emotional impact of imagery, to understanding the physical joints, mediating the tensions in the city, for better or for worse. Within the graduation studio of Methods and Analysis, it is understood that architects should act within the discipline of architecture whilst addressing social issues, which allowed us to research in-depth the field of anthropology and art history. With this in mind, the research of the studio has been predominately qualitative research alongside heuristic techniques, heuristic, defined as "relating to exploratory problem-solving techniques that utilise self-educating techniques to improve performance"⁵. The heuristic process we have used included, exploration through drawings, experimentation through modelling, and evaluation through photography. The methods we applied within the heuristic process were driven by Skopje's complex urban environment and look for meaning within the cityscape. The techniques strengthened our ability to critically analyse contextual and complex problems within interdisciplinary research through architectural techniques.

¹ Devastating. "Devastating Disasters." Devastating Disasters. Accessed December 6, 2019. <https://devastatingdisasters.com/skopje-earthquake-1963/>.

² "i.pinimg.com." Accessed December 6, 2019. <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/84/75/c8/8475c8e4b040cd38d130e6433a63fc4a.webp>.

³ Kjuca, Deana. "Urban Renewal Or Nationalist Kitsch? Skopje 2014 Stirs Controversy." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, December 2, 2013. <https://www.rferl.org/a/skopje-kitsch-renewal-statues/25187521.html>.

⁴ Lynch, Kevin, Kevin Lynch, and Kevin Lynch. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012.

⁵ "Heuristic." Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed December 9, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heuristic#h1>.

To summarise our research we focussed on the relationship between the images within the city and the effect this has on the appropriation of the built environment; we then hope to use this understanding to create interventions within the city, based on the variables and conclusions of our research. Throughout our research we created new research questions and hypothesis', concluding with the following,

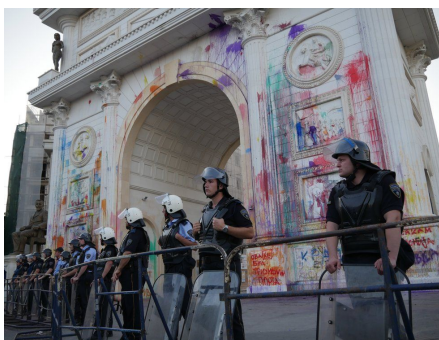
Research questions:

How can the joint mediate tensions in the city?

Hypothesis:

The variables which influence the joint between the separate images in the city are maintenance, ornamentation, appropriation and light

II OBSERVING VARIABLES



To understand the context of Skopje we began explored Macedonian artwork, their explicit imagery and powers of communication, through iconography, design, and materiality. We noted how works of art tell stories to unmask the incomprehensible and unknown. Works of art are explicit ways of depicting what is meaningful to you. Skopje 2014 and the protest art which followed are clear examples of vocalising opinions and appropriating space through imagery.

Image: Colourful revolution protests, 2016⁶

When selecting our approach we considered phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology is focus' on individual views, based on "memory, image and meaning"⁷ in the city; however, our approach was led by observation of the context with an emphasis on image and urban tensions. While observation, image and meaning are present in both phenomenology and ethnographic research, our specific focus is inline with ethnography focus on observations and the impact of imagery in space, not interpretation through memory which would be more in line with phenomenology⁸. We used our study trip interviews and multidisciplinary theories to test our research. Through exploring explicit imagery we came to understand the impact of more integrated imagery in the public realm: advertising, facade ornaments, and informal appropriation, the observations were possible through inducted meanings from a layered analysis of multidisciplinary theory, observed appropriation in the city, and architectural methodology. We developed an understanding of imagery as a process of inception within space, the physical embodiment of an established idea.

We were inspired by the publication *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown; their work focus' on the power and meaningfulness of the image, they challenge modern architects idea to "abandoned the tradition of iconology in which painting, sculpture, and graphics were combined with architecture"⁹. Through prioritising the image and visual elements of the built environment over materiality, their method prioritises the architecture of communication over space. In their research they use methods such as correlative research, categorising variables in the city, such "symbol, word, and architecture"¹⁰ to be able to compare complex situations in the city, with use and appropriation.

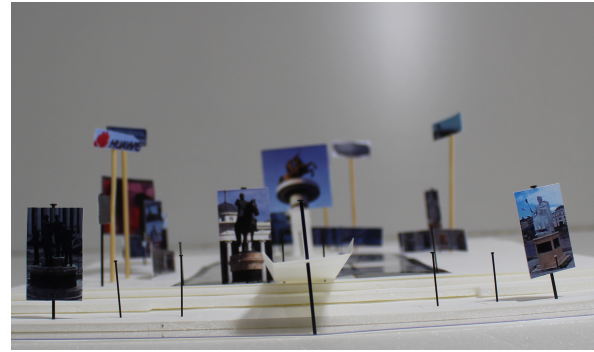
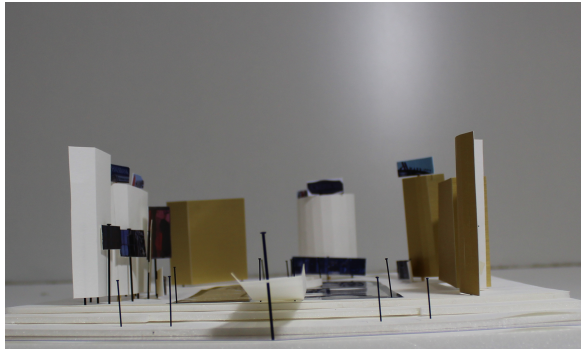
⁶ Delauney, Guy. "Macedonia's Protests Try to Bring down Government with a Splat." BBC News. BBC, June 8, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36468088>.

⁷ Wang, David, Groat, and Linda N. Groat. *Architectural Research Methods*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013 pg 227

⁸ *ibid* pg 227

⁹ Venturi, Robert, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown. *Learning from Las Vegas: the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. pg. 7

¹⁰ *ibid* pg. 15



Own work: Plane model, Alexander Square, Skopje, Image 1: advertising and building facades, image 2: statues and signage

Focussing on the visible images, we abstracted the city into planes and used this to evaluate the effect of images on space in the city; the models above attempt to view the city through image and plane. We could interchange the objects we used to depict the spaces in the city, capturing this through photographs to understand which images had a larger effect on space. This method allowed our research to specifically explore the image and its relationship to space and use. Our research quickly began to focus on two variables, image and appropriation. Both naturally occurring variables, we wanted to understand the specific relationship between the two. We hoped that in the design stage we could then know how to manipulate a variable to achieve a new outcome in the city.

We utilised established theories from Venturi, Izenour, and Scott Brown of the “decorated shed” (exploring meaning in image and signage) and “duck” (exploring meaning in form), as a platform for our methodology development. Through reading literature, mapping and drawings, we can understand the process of abstraction they used to understand the urban landscape in Las Vegas, this allowed us to test our methodology and variables. Through a correlative research approach, we broke down imagery in the city, a complex and broad topic, into manageable elements. Images were categorised into the following; ornamentation (decorative), functional (useful), and silent (neither decorative or useful). After we categorised the images we were then able to establish relationships and correlations between image and appropriation in the public space, using our observations.

III IMAGE AND THE JOINT

The city of Skopje exemplifies the historical arguments over the importance of style in a architecture. In recent history, the idea of ornamentation was challenged in the early 19th century by Loos' and later by the Modern movement through the dominance of new building techniques and theoretical texts. Loos' announced culturally we have outgrown ornamentation and if we haven't we should¹¹. Their ideals were promoted throughout the post-war period in Europe, countries we needed construction techniques which allowed for fast reconstruction of cities: both homes and industry. Despite Loos' best efforts to denounce ornamentation, the Modern movement created a new style of contemporary ornamentation. In addition to its intended efficient construction techniques the image of the architecture was one of modern life, a new life style to aspire to¹². It is clear from the lessons learnt by Loos' that architecture provides a platform or vessel to be filled with meanings, and this cannot be erased. Through characteristics such as materiality, texture, and depth we can fill architecture with messages, affecting people's everyday experience of the city. Throughout our research methodology, we hope to understand recognising vessels of meanings in the built environment to create sensitive designs within complex contexts.

¹¹ Loos, Adolf, and Ulrich Conrads. “Adolf Loos: Ornament and Crime.” In *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, 19–23. Cambridge, Mass., United States: MIT Press Ltd, n.d. pg 20

¹² Fiedler, Jeannine, Dessau Stiftung Bauhaus, and Stiftung Friedrich Ebert. *Social Utopias of the Twenties : Bauhaus, Kibbutz, and the Dream of the New Man*. 1st ed. ed. Wuppertal, Germany: Published for the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, Tel Aviv by Müller + Busmann Press, 1995. pg 19

To ensure their research was not dominated by “traditional urban environments” or “style”, Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour adapted traditional mapping techniques to allow them to map a unique urban environment. An example would be their take on the traditional nolli map, used to show accessibility and flow of public space within a city. They created the nolli map of the strip in Las Vegas as a point of comparison and then repeated the black and white graphical style on numerous variables: developed land, asphalt, autos, buildings, ceremonial space, and illumination levels¹³. This comparison of variables and abstract mapping allows their work to explore their site specific context understanding that in Las Vegas, system and order are more present than accessibility and flow. Their methods heighten our understanding that architecture is not always about style¹⁴

The research in Las Vegas exemplifies experimental process within a heuristic approach, which ultimately led them to understand the techniques through which objects communicate meaning. Learning from Las Vegas provided our research with a springboard to look at specific elements within the city. Alongside this we needed to understand further how people place meaning in both imagery and appropriation. For this, we study the work of historian George Kubler, and his work “the shape of time”¹⁵. How does the physical city mediate the tension created by image and appropriation? Kubler allowed us to understand that this tension can be mediated in the space between images, he describes it as actuality:

“Actuality is when the lighthouse is dark between flashes’: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: it is a void internally slipping forever through time: the rupture between the past and future: the gap at the poles of the revolving magnetic field, infinitely small but ultimately real. It is the inter chronic pause when nothing happens. It is the void between events.”¹⁶

The joint allowed us to see the spatial depth between images but more importantly look so closely we could compare and contrast the correlation between variables of image and appropriation. We came to understand the variables in the image as elements of ornamentation, appropriation and light, could change throughout time due to events. Events became crucial to the image of a space, the more a space is used, the more a space is used¹⁷. We concluded the elements to have the following influence of the mediation of a joint.

1. Ornamentation often directs the use of a space and sets a precedent for activity, this creates a visual tension when aligned next to an ornament which tells a paradoxical story.
2. Light and more crucially the lack of, shadow provided depth within joint, allowing each image to have a depth, the layering of objects through events impacted the depth of shadow.
3. Appropriation could be found through observing events or the traces the events left behind. Negative or positive appropriation affected the image of the space.

Kubler’s theories allowed us to see, “a work of art is not only the residue of an event but its own signal, directly moving other makers to repeat or to improve it solutions. In visual art, the entire historical series is conveyed by such tangible things”¹⁸. To conclude our research event led to be the correlation between all the elements which could be found in all images, creating cycles of image and appropriation.

¹³ Venturi, Robert, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown. *Learning from Las Vegas: the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. pg. 25

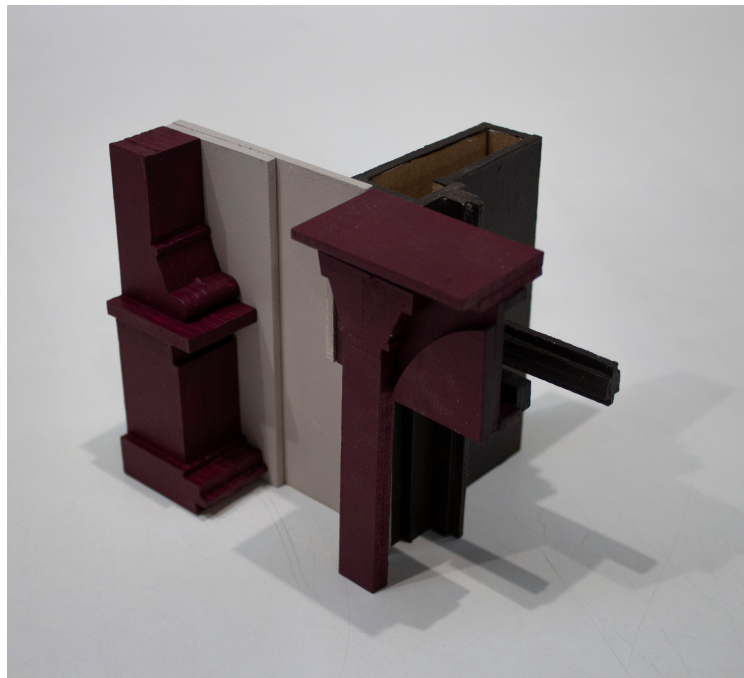
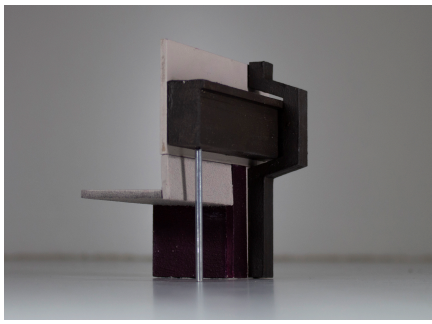
¹⁴ *ibid* pg. 53

¹⁵ Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990.

¹⁶ *ibid* Pg 17

¹⁷ Ahmed, Sara. *Whats the Use?: on the Uses of Use*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

¹⁸ Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990. Pg 20



Own work: Joint model, 1:20, Key: brown - function, purple - ornamentation, shell - silent, texture - appropriated areas

IV POSITIONING

I would like to position my work in comparison with the lecture by Klaske Havik. Havik emphasised that phenomenology was the study of perception, allowing me to consider how our research results would have differed if we had chosen a phenomenological approach instead of an ethnographic approach. Through the readings of Lucas¹⁹ and Wang, David, Groat²⁰ I have come to understand ethnology as the study of a collective experience through observing the rich context of a situation, whereas phenomenology looks to an individual's experience to understand a complex context. In Havik's lecture she references Christian Norbert Schulz, who is renowned for his work in developing the concept of "genius loci" and the spirit of a place²¹. Whilst an important text in architectural literature to understanding the context, a single "genius loci" does not make room for people who may not fall into a specific or majority's mindset of people. Positioning my work in an ethnology framework allows for a broader spectrum of observations in the search of "genii loci", it allows me to be aware that qualitative research taken from an etic point of view can easily misinterpret the data, and therefore my research looks to all the possibilities of meaning within a small range of tangible observed variables, as explained in section ii.

Positioning my current research against that of Schulz's theory, I can make a link between Modernist theories and the aim of finding genius loci, both look to a single style to design a utopian society; with time we have seen the repetitive dystopian results within Modernist urban planning. In contrast to utopia, I chose to acknowledge and rejoice in the research of Learning from Las Vegas, which may not lead us to a utopia but can provide individuals with small moments of paradise, found in a diverse urban environment. In my work the definition of utopia and paradise play a crucial role, while utopia usually depicts a place for all members of community living in together in a perfect environment, paradise is an individual's idyllic place, which does not include everyone. Learning from Las Vegas acknowledges the incomplete and paradoxes within the urban environment but instead of criticising the lack of unified image, it chooses to acknowledge the presentation of individual paradises, created by a range of people, generating a necessary tension in the city²².

¹⁹ Lucas, Ray. *Research Methods for Architecture*. Laurence King Publishing, 2016. Pg 37

²⁰ Wang, David, Groat, and Linda N. Groat. *Architectural Research Methods*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013. Pg 224

²¹ Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Genius Loci: towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1996

²² Venturi, Robert, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown. *Learning from Las Vegas: the Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. pg. 53

The Chair of Methods and Analysis aim to “foster and protect processes of meaningfulness, appropriation and integration between the built environment and those who use and produce it.”²³ Whilst architects and critiques have often criticised the output of Learning from Las Vegas relevance of the “decorated shed” and “duck” to our everyday complex cities²⁴, claiming it is an oversimplification of a far complex urban landscape. I believe in the context of Skopje and our work it allowed us to quickly make decisions and sharpen our focus. We try to be sensitive to the current context, adapting methods from learning from Las Vegas, we do not look at the city as a whole, but the joints between images in the city which hold the variables of tension. Our research challenged our perceived notions of meaning and ornamentation, allowing us to reflect it on to contemporary issues of sustainability, economy and immigration. How can we create inclusive environments with meaning for all members of society?

The research concluded that it is possible to mediate and protect tensions within the built environment, understanding that appropriation, image, light and crucially event can impact peoples individual perception of the built environment. A cycle is created through event and response, we have observed this on the scale of the joint, however, hypothesis it could be true for the urban scale. A person's actions are their reaction to how they perceive the built environment, this can cause a cycle; action, interpretation, reaction. Skopje 2014, was an attempt by the government to unite the residents of Skopje under one image. A utopian ideal attempted through neo-classical facades. Unfortunately, the complexity of a city could not be resolved within Skopje 2014's tactics. Resulting in a new cycle of protest art, once more changing the images in the city. To mediate the tensions of the city I chose to use the research conclusion to look for solutions within events and performative space. Prioritising relationship between event and appropriation over a united image or style.

²³ “Methods and Analysis.” TU Delft. Accessed December 9, 2019. <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/education/programmes/masters/architecture-urbanism-and-building-sciences/msc-architecture-urbanism-and-building-sciences/master-tracks/architecture/programme/studios/methods-and-analysis/>.

²⁴ Chowkwanyun, Merlin, and Randa Bassem Serhan. *American Democracy and the Pursuit of Equality*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2013.

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