

What is the Role of Phenomenology and Typology in Architectural Research When Exploring the Intimacy in City Rooms.

INTRODUCTION

In architectural research and design, methodology is fundamental, especially when research and design are conducted in an integrated manner, in which methodology will ensure the continuity and rigor of the research-design process. Therefore, the knowledge of methods is crucial. The choice of method not only affects your information collection during the research phase, but also determines the direction of your entire research-design process and the presentation of the final design results¹.

During the Lecture Series of the Research Methods, I have had the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of architectural research methods. What interests me most is that research methods in other disciplines can also be applied effectively in architecture. This course broadens my horizons and gives me a general understanding of the different methods, so that I can choose from a variety of self-contained methodologies to apply to my research. In addition, many of the cases mentioned in the lecture made me realize that the design process is inseparable from the guidance of methodology. Therefore, if the architectural profession is regarded as a “reflective practice”², it is crucial to choose the right methodology before commencing.

This thesis explores how the graduation topic, “The Intimacy in City Room”, is approached in particular methods and how these methods play instrumental roles in the process of architectural research and design. To be specific, this topic examines how to get an intimate and comfortable experience in city rooms. The methods of phenomenology and typology were implemented in the research-design process and combined to formulate an important methodology for promoting the process. The study began with a research in Milan, a city with rich urban spaces for people to experience where history and modernity interweave with each other. Next step is an exercise of spatial design, in which Milan's urban experience is transformed into a concrete space based on a non-existent context, in order to solidify the understanding of the term “intimacy” of the graduation topic. Finally, it is the research in Antwerp and the final design, in which the methodologies established before will be applied to this new context to produce other possibilities³. The entire process reciprocates between research and design, which requires very effective methodologies to guide, so as to make the whole process integrated and well-bound.

RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The relationship among people, architecture and the city is intricate and complicated. The graduation topic, “The Intimacy in City Room”, involves the perception of people in public spaces that play a significant urban role and thus is a complex issue in which multiple parameters interact. In addition, the final design goal must be closely related to the previous research process. Therefore, if the methodological approaches of the topic are not carefully selected and specified, it will lead to the deviation of the design result or the disconnection between the design and the research process. It is exactly because of the complexity of the architectural inquiry that different methodologies will be adopted and combined together to solve different problems in the research-design process.

Simply put, a research methodology is a way of making discoveries about a topic⁴. From the perspective of phenomenology, human experience and perception are included in the scope of

1 Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London, Laurence King Publishing, 2016), p.13.

2 Donald Schön, Design as a Reflective Conversation with the Situation. in *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York, Basic Books, 1983), 82, kindle version.

3 Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London, Laurence King Publishing, 2016), p.13.

4 Ray Lucas, *Research Methods for Architecture* (London, Laurence King Publishing, 2016), p.36.

architectural research. The use of phenomenological research methods can strongly connect urban or architectural phenomena with subjective consciousness of people. Things have their extrinsic "phenomenon" and intrinsic "intention", and it is their intrinsic intention that essentially reveals the existence of things. We must penetrate the veil and get access to the "intention" behind urban or architectural phenomena⁵. In the research of Milan, through the in-depth interpretation of urban phenomena, we grasped the essential urban and spatial characteristics related to intimacy in a qualitative way.

From the perspective of typology, architectural research cannot escape from urban and historical issues. The typological approach allows us to view architecture and city as a whole. The architectural work is not only conceived as a singular entity (not a unitary element), but at the same time an expression of the development of the urban aggregate within a precise historical space, the city⁶. In addition, not only in the architectural research process, typology is also important in the architectural design. Typology helps architects regain an exact architectural and urban control under complex conditions and can be implemented in the design in order to process, guide, and edit the design process⁷.

RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The two schools of thought I have identified in research-design process, phenomenology and typology, have long histories and rich theoretical background.

"Phenomenology" was originally founded by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the 1910s. After Husserl, it was said that there are as many phenomenologies as there are phenomenologists, and the only thing in common is that their findings are all based on Husserl's research methods⁸. As the student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger, like the others, developed his own version of the phenomenological method – interpreting the meaning of various phenomena in relation to the being of human. But Heidegger did not systematically elaborate on the notion of space. It is Christian Norberg-Schulz who really introduced the space concept of phenomenologists to the realm of architecture in his work *Existence, Space, and Architecture* (1971). In another book of his, *Genius Loci* (1980), he proposed a complex architectural phenomenological system based on the concept "Genius Loci"⁹. But if you want to take this complex system of Norberg-Schulz as a method, they are more likely to be an obstacle. Because the more guiding principles in our minds in front of the phenomenon, the farther is the phenomenon itself away from us. After establishing his architectural phenomenology framework, Norberg-Schulz said that what he needed in the future was to continue to study the architectural elements in a phenomenological way. His student Tomas Thiis-Evensen in *Archetypes in Architecture* (1987) filled this void. The book can basically be regarded as a "dictionary" that takes the existence of human as a yardstick to interpret the symbolic meaning of each architectural element¹⁰.

Judging from the most basic phenomenological methods, Husserl's "phenomenological reduction" has merits in ensuring the extensiveness and relative objectivity of information perceived in the early phase of Milan research. But after that, to interpret the exact focal points of our research in the city, namely the "intimacy", Heidegger's "hermeneutic" theory is proved more valid. Therefore, rather than making a choice between their attitudes towards the inquiry of "the true face of the world"¹¹, it is better to adopt the strengths of their respective viewpoints and combine them together for architectural research.

5 Steven Holl, *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture* (Tokyo, A+U Publishing, 2006), p.40.

6 Marina Lathouri, The City as a Project: Types, Typical Objects and Typologies, in *Architectural Design*, 2011, 81(1), p.27.

7 Caroline Bos & Ben van Berkel, Typological Instruments: Connecting Architecture and Urbanism, in *Architectural Design*, 2011, 81(1), p.68.

8 Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement, a Historical Introduction, Vol.2. Part 5* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p.653-659.

9 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Toward a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York, Rizzoli, 1980), p.5.

10 Tomas Thiis-Evensen, *Archetypes in Architecture* (Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1987), p.17.

11 Pu Miao, Phenomenology and Architectural Theory: An Introduction for Architects, in *Dialogue between Phenomenology and Architecture* (Shanghai, Tongji University Press, 2009), p.113.

The notion of “type” was first proposed by Quatremere de Quincy at the end of the 18th century. He believes that type is based on history, nature, and use. Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand simply abandoned the word “type” and suggested that the buildings should be classified as “genre” according to the function¹². By the twentieth century, modernism completely rejected the notion of type, and the mass production of buildings made “type” a completely replicated “prototype”. After the modernist movement, people hoped that there is a theory that can explain the continuity of form and structure in historical cities. After researching the city development of Venice, Saverio Muratori proposed a relationship between the architectural elements as individuals and the city form as a whole. Type is considered to be the generator of the city¹³. In the late 1960s, on the basis of summing up the predecessors, Rossi introduced a more subtle but also problematic notion that the definition of type is based on the juxtaposition of memory and reason. He believed it is type that defines the internal logic of forms, rather than techniques or programs¹⁴.

De Quincy's definition of "type" gives architects a lot of room to play. Rossi's contribution is to define typology within cities and history, and to make the materialization of type more rational. Moneo believes that types exist concretely in history, and a type itself is actually a framework for reinvention¹⁵. In the design process, it is reasonable to trace back the history to find the corresponding type as the starting point of design. Besides, in the result of final design, the typological expression of intimacy must be based on specific city and historical development.

POSITIONING

As we illustrated before, there are many branches of phenomenology. Although the most basic method of them are based on Husserl's method of "observation and description"¹⁶, the methodology of different phenomenological positions is not exactly the same, and of course each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, in my architectural research, I did not directly adopt the methodology of a particular theory, but critically selected and combined the methodologies of different ones to achieve complementary roles.

When we observed the city of Milan, we first employed the Husserl's method of “phenomenological reduction”, during which we open our minds to accept anything that is directly experienced or intuited in subjective consciousness¹⁷. In front of various phenomena in Milan, we observed from the perspective of bystanders, without any prejudice¹⁸. By means of photography and video, we recorded the city as detailed as possible, so that we could get a preliminary impression and objective understanding for Milan. After that, with the notion of "the intimacy in public room" in mind, we carried out Heidegger-style phenomenological method, "seeking", to scan through Milan. In contrast to Husserl's approach of observing in objective way, the “seeking” is more like “focusing” on things as one searches around to complete a task¹⁹. In the daily life of people with their feelings, the most original meaning of anything appears only when I seek to achieve "a certain purpose"²⁰, and unfortunately, people tend to turn a blind eye to this original meaning²¹. In Heidegger's view, the phenomenon that phenomenologists study is not "all presented" (Husserl's concept), but rather the concealed original meaning mentioned above, which is the very essence of things. According to this epistemology, we use the tactic of drawing to make focused interpretations on phenomena within the city, so as to discover the intimacy implied in architectural and urban spaces of Milan.

12 Rafeal Moneo, On Typology, in *Oppositions*, 1978, (13), p.29.

13 Saverio Muratori, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia* (Roma, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1960).

14 Rafeal Moneo, On Typology, in *Oppositions*, 1978, (13), p.36.

15 Rafeal Moneo, On Typology, in *Oppositions*, 1978, (13), p.24-27.

16 Pu Miao, Phenomenology and Architectural Theory: An Introduction for Architects, in *Dialogue between Phenomenology and Architecture* (Shanghai, Tongji University Press, 2009), p.111.

17 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology and to A Phenomenological Philosophy* (Hague, Martinus Nijhoof, 1983), p.57-62.

18 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to A Pure Phenomenology and to A Phenomenological Philosophy* (Hague, Martinus Nijhoof, 1983), p.136.

19 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), p.105.

20 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), p.189.

21 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), p.99.

Phenomenology made me experience in a theoretical-led way during the research process, and then I began a typological exploration in the design process. Nevertheless, how to ensure the continuity of the research-design process is the challenge of combining the two methodologies. Thiis-Evensen's interpretation of various archetypes finally turned phenomenology back to the issues of concern to architects²², but he only stopped at "interpretation" and did not further explain how to use phenomenology as an instrumental method in design process. In fact, the notion of "archetype" that he adopt has got involved in the scope of typology. This is very exciting because when transitioning from research to design, my position is established through the combination of phenomenology and typology to achieve this transition.

For De Quincy, the concept of type allows the re-establishment of connections between architecture and history by remounting to the initial moment and reason when form came into being²³. Architecture are not only defined by type but also generated by type. In the design exercise based on fictional context, I tried to trace track the types of various intimate spaces by making models. Then one type of them is determined to generate the subsequent design. The process of design is actually the process of dealing with types. Initially we may be trapped by the type, but later we can act on it, destroy it, transform it, and respect it²⁴. When exploring the "intimacy" in city rooms, the process includes not only typology as an instrumental guide²⁵, but also the phenomenological experience and consciousness of a subject, because different types conceal different reasons and symbolic meanings behind the forms that are expressed extrinsically as various phenomena to people.

The research process cannot be conducted without considering of the design results, and the design process is also inseparable from further research. Different methods may play different roles at different phases. We, as architects, must identify problems in the research-design process and select the appropriate methodologies. The complexity of the graduation topic, "The Intimacy in City Room", which involves the human perception, architectural space and urban context can only be achieved by a combination of these well-specified methodologies.

22 Pu Miao, Phenomenology and Architectural Theory: An Introduction for Architects, in *Dialogue between Phenomenology and Architecture* (Shanghai, Tongji University Press, 2009), p.125.

23 Rafeal Moneo, On Typology, in *Oppositions*, 1978, (13), p.28.

24 Rafeal Moneo, On Typology, in *Oppositions*, 1978, (13), p.23.

25 Caroline Bos & Ben van Berkel, Typological Instruments: Connecting Architecture and Urbanism, in *Architectural Design*, 2011, 81(1), p.68.

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