

# SOCIAL DIALOGICAL PUBLIC PLACE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND CORRELATIONAL RESEARCH ON CIVIL PUBLIC SPACE

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Thesis "SOCIAL DIALOGICAL PUBLIC PLACE "

## **MUTUALLY INFORMED PROCESS: DESIGN AND RESEARCH**

Architecture, a discipline which embody multi-disciplinary knowledge, has always involved in historical revolutionary events in various fields due to its complexity in production process and outcome. Design reveals the conclusion and end result of a production process. While research is the essential process which depict, categorise, filter, analyse and process information needed for generating the outcomes. They inform each other the epoch they contextualised and future opportunities they are inspiring. Methodology in research becomes fundamental to structure the system architects approach a project and eventually create corresponding interventions.

During the Lecture Series of Research Methods, my knowledge of multiplicity of research method was enriched. More scientific and systematic structures of research were informed which helped myself better organise the thinking process of my own fascination in the graduation studio. By understanding more about the way to find something out, more precise identification of materials formulate sorting of informations in conducting research. On the other hand, it is also inspiring that the lectures revealed designs which seems unrelated but shared similar, improved or mixture of different methodologies, informing diverse opportunities on outcome by flexible use of methodology. Therefore, the course as a whole, not only demonstrated valuable examples how different methodologies inform design decisions, but also raise the attention on the counter power of outcome to re-inform and reflect on the process.

Juxtaposing my personal interests and visions of the Complex Projects studio, flexibility and mixture of various methodologies are necessary. It has been especially crucial when the starting points are different. One being tends to be more objective and pragmatic, focusing on justification based on data while the other is subjective and humanistic. In this case, only following one method of research would result in in-comprehensive outreach of possibilities which end up limit the design complexity and richness. Aiming eventually a project not barely experimental, the scheme will bring together both pragmatic and humanistic aspects into the final design.

The Complex Project studio aims to expand our knowledge on design and dense urban area development, envisioning the future. The design as an outcome, responding to the research question, seeks to explore future possibilities of architecture within a humanistic framework in specific context in regard to the following mentioned topics.

## **THESIS: SOCIAL DIALOGICAL PUBLIC PLACE**

The design thesis will revolve around the topic of public space with specific context of mid-town Manhattan. More specifically it explores the 'public places' which carry the characters of 'human and social dialogue' as well as being a 'spacial instrument to see and to be seen'<sup>1</sup>. Mid-town Manhattan, being part of the city of New York, revealed the urban history not only of the area but also the planning philosophy of the whole city and nation. The urban grid, blocks and plots are commodified as speculative capital. While public spaces, such as public plaza' which the city generally symbolised as well being of people are also created in exchange for more FAR especially for high-rise developments.

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Extending my personal interests of public spaces, the research starts as the investigation of private owned public space. These spaces were generally underused of both indoor and outdoor. With restricted publicity and value, these plazas were often used as passage ways and transit instead of places holding diverse public activities. Also, the site is dominated by minorities and young start ups, situated at both edges of NoMad District and Garment District, with properties of clusters of small and separated groups as well as absence of unique character. People need places to discuss and interchange ideas of affairs that relate to them in political, social and cultural aspects which can then generate their own integrated distinct community. Therefore, it triggers the investigation of a social dialogical behaviour of protest and festival. The way different social and ethnic group exchange is through interaction in a specific public setting. The city recently allows large scale interactive events in informal venues such as streets and a few open spaces which their capacity are usually far below their needs. Therefore, within the built environment that capitalise public spaces, the research question explores the possibility of retrieving the original civic meaning of plaza within building and associated public function of architecture to trigger exchange between the existing mixed users in the site. Therefore, in the end, to form their own perceived sense of community. How to engage with public spaces in the specific site? How through urban and architecture design can architect trigger exchange between the different groups?

## II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

### APPROACH

The research topic has evolved through the process of research. Related terms and subjects are further defined when the initial field of interest has been developed and extended. The conflict between the functional built environment and the public assembly of people are two directions I started the research. 'Architecture should be based on the underlying rationality of mass culture and mass production.' said member of the Team 10, George Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods. By understanding that my project will be informed largely by the real life experiences of targeted groups of users, working with contexts is highly important and relevant. Firstly, studying spacial models from the wider context of New York helps to depict the favourable environmental qualities that support the existing significant social dialogues. Secondly, study of the groups should work in parallel with an investigation on the form of dialogue in existing massive social dialogical activities through urban and architectural terms. The 'social dialogical behaviour of protest and festival' becomes my research lens in which the rational behind can later inform the design decision in my chosen site.

### RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The selection of protest and festival as the two models of activities is thanks to both of their social and dialogical nature. Before selection of site, qualitative analysis is attempted to understand the favourable conditions that contribute to location of these activities. Reading of news articles which documented and reported each activities can help to understand the main issues encountered in each event. Photo documentation, documentaries and reports are tactics that can reveal the scenes without really having the opportunity of approaching the events. Mapping is used as a drawing method to illustrate, extract, analyse and compare the collected information. To study the existing spacial models

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accommodating protest and festival in New York, various type of 'public plaza' are selected to compare people's reactions on them.

In my reading of the models and selected activities, I identified two methodologies: phenomenology and correlation research taking a structuralist position. Both methodologies contribute to different aspects of my research in defining various design criterion. In my architectural research, I critically position myself on adaptation of different analytical tools in associate with different methodologies. Therefore, adapting phenomenology and Correlational Research as two main schools of thought, flexible adjusting of methodologies and tools can help to build up a more thorough research framework to the demand of my research.

### **CORRELATIONAL RESEARCH**

In the perspective of Correlation Research, relationship study can compare the selected places and identify their spacial qualities. Taking the structuralist position, it is used to analyse the relationship of space and actors which can be informed by way of their relationship to a broader structure of context. Research of several selected places has to be done to find out their perceived meanings and physical features that encourage uses. For example, in New York, the Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza is a popular site for mass demonstration. The plaza was named after the former United Nations Secretary-General, Dag Hjalmar Agne Carl Hammarskjöld. The building adjacent to it hosts numerous offices of Missions of the United Nations. To provide a visual link to the United Nations lawn and promenade, the design of the plaza is also responding. The spacial design is linked to the structure of the history and contemporary condition, explored in relation to political, social and cultural meaning. By knowing these, meanings of the place revealed its importance as a place for social dialogical activities and other public activities.

### **PHENOMENOLOGY**

Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on the study of live experiences in selected context. (citation/change terms) From this perspective, I am examining the interconnection between the environment and mass actors in both protest and minority neighbourhoods. They constitute specific communication models that formulate structures of interactions among different groups. For example, public parties voice out discontent unilaterally through participating in organised expressive movements such as protest. Public spaces are mainly used as communication tool displaying the slogans and banners as well as a stage of performance to cultivate public sympathy through social media. In different minority neighbourhoods, food culture is the media to share and learn among different groups. Korea 'Town' which actually formed revolving around a major street is constituted by those restaurants that are forming these cultural venues. Environment such as streets and plazas provides cultural and social exchange venues to construct various social context which influences people's responding behaviour.

### III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Both schools of thought, phenomenology and correlational research, I use in research have rich historical and theoretical background. Both research methods are discussed under the framework of structuralism.

#### **HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF PHENOMENOLOGY**

Phenomenology was first discussed in the 17th century by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. It established its major philosophical framework in the 20th century by German philosopher Edmund Husserl and later Martin Heidegger. In architectural field, the work of other architectural theorists cannot developed their own philosophical framework without evolve from the common source of Hesserl's work. Milanese architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers, editing important architectural articles through journal *Casabella Continuità*, has huge contribution to architectural phenomenology in Europe. Norwegian architect, theorist and historian Christian Norberg-Schulz's 'Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture' published in 1979 and French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's 'The Poetics Of Space' published in 1958. Christian Norberg-Schulz was one the first theorists to bring the concept of Martin Heidegger to the field of built environments. His definition of phenomenon did not only consist of environment but also the 'intangible phenomena'.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, phenomenology he suggested is a methodology to understand the world in both dimensions of place and experience in the reality. Bachelard's concepts of epistemological obstacle and epistemological break has also influenced subsequent philosophers such as Michel Foucault Jacques Derrida and Louis Althusser. His use of phenomenology was focusing on the more personal and emotional 'poetics' to the built environment.

Phenomenology in architecture is about the discussion on the consciousness and experiences of people with the architecture as a whole. The theory suggests embodying perception and senses into the understanding of the built environment. Moreover, incorporate these within the form of architecture to allow experiential architectural spaces. Today, there are numerous architects associate with phenomenology in their theoretical and architectural works. '... architecture has also an essential mental task; it structures our being-in-the-world through projecting specific frames and horizons of perception and understanding.' said Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect. His architectural theory focuses on haptic and the multi-sensory perception of the human body. In designing public spaces, he said 'lingering gives rise to identification and belonging in public space'. His theory suggest that '(architects) create frames and horizons of experiencing our existence and daily life as well as of understanding ourselves.'<sup>3</sup>

#### **HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF CORRELATIONAL RESEARCH**

In architectural discourse, Correlational Research is a research based on the experience and perception of the users. It can refer to the 1970s William Whyte's study of urban plazas<sup>4</sup> in New York City which eventually his proposed guidelines were eventually incorporated into a revised zoning code. Picking numbers of public plazas in New York, he compare plaza use by using charts. Later in 1980s, Joongsub Kim seek the same methodology to assess the experience of the residents of civic qualities of their own neighbourhood. Correlational Research was used to clarify patterns of relationship between variables by placing them into two major subtypes, relationship and casual comparative. Apart from data collection, the methodology has developed into a comprehensive

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mapping technique revealed in Kevin Lynch's study in his book, *The Image of the City*. He interviewed with people in the three research cities -Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles and asked them to draw the sketch maps of their city<sup>5</sup>. Also, analysis of trained observers on site. Then derived his five general categories of urban features: path, edge, node, land-mark, and district. This way of mapping then developed later in also other scholar's projects, such as Anne Lusk's study of greenway bicycle paths. Through his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre's theoretical work offer rethinking of the relationship between space and society.

### APPROACH DEPENDS ON RESEARCH PHASE

Phenomenology and correlational research are used as epistemic framework in my research to read the site and targeted research population. Both of their frameworks are complex which leads to a selection of methods instead of a comprehensive application of their all tactics. Since the research area is enormous, I tried to use these methodologies to critically review the site and try to use the result of analysis to determine my personal interested area. Correlational Research is especially effective at this stage. Borrowing the mapping technique from the book *The Image of the City*, critical system of reading of the site is established to identify neighbourhoods, land-use zoning, characters and permeability of the site and other important identities. Picking numerous places in which to analyse their significance to accommodate 'social dialogical activities', correlation research method borrowing from that of William Whyte's study of urban plazas is used owing to the fact that they shared similar background and the same research object as well as research objective. Due to insufficient time, only short term observation could be allowed, thus the collected information might reduce its comprehensiveness in regard to facts of seasonal perception or other factors. The use of phenomenological research engaged when major actors were identified to investigate their relationship to the environments. Not mentioning much about senses, analysis of perception and experiences are limited to tangible spacial relationships between places and actors. First-person experiences only contribute minor part to the research, while most of the analysis are referring to observations as a third person. Subjective interpretation implies when I research about the events that I was not able to participate during the excursion. As a whole, both methodologies reflect their consideration to the complexity of the relationship between people and environment. Scholars tend to explore a wider methodological framework to carefully apply subjectiveness into the methodologies.

## IV POSITIONING

### SELECTIVE ADOPTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGIES

First of all, identifying of relevant actors and places for the research are extremely important to know what, where and for whom I am going to investigate and compare. It hints the selection of the research methodologies we use through out the process. Also, they somehow inform the position we have to take when the research is carried out.

In this essay, the first position I embrace through my research is that meaning of places is reflected through multiple aspects and objects. The research has to reflect on multi-dimensions to generate a comprehensive set of information. Both the environment and actors within the research area has to be taken into account with special focus on their evolution through time and epoch - their historical formation. Moreover, people and environment are both weighted important throughout the process. By using Correlational Research, taking 1970s William Whyte's study of urban plazas in New

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York City as an example, he and his team took half a year to research on 18 selected plazas which had no obvious relationships. By objective observation of use, they generalise the design elements that they assumed to be favourable for public engagement. However, they did not taking into account the other variables such as weather and qualities of experience that might cause the result incomprehensive. In this case, people's perception and experience have not be analysed comprehensively. Citing another example from the phenomenological approach of Juhani Pallasmaa, his position is considered highly subjective with consideration haptic and the multi-sensory perception of the human body. 'Lingering', to him, is a way to sense the environment. Research outcome in this case highly relevant to subjective perception and experience in regard to the environments. Combining the two methods together during research provides a whole picture to the research outcome which has taken care of the two most important objects of the research.

Secondly, using a mixture of analytical tools is highly relevant in positioning by self within the diverse representation methods exposed to the multiple aspects and objects. Also, responding to the first position, using diverse tools help to juxtapose different aspects and objects which favours parallel comparison of them and generation of interrelated analysis. Yet, there are some draw backs in using the specific tools in the methodologies. In correlational research, sorting and mapping can hardly be done by local users in academic project especially when time is not sufficient during the excursion. Therefore, the exercises are needed to be produced by myself through observation and my own understanding of the site in restricted time and very limited period during the year. Reading documentaries and articles help to fill the gap. Therefore, the research can still leads to high level of accuracy.

### **RESPONDING TO PRODUCT -BASED RESEARCH OF THE COMPLEX PROJECT**

The Complex Project is base on a product based research starting with the group. Therefore, at the initial stage of the research, the studio generally focus on the generation of hard data. Informed by the hard datas, students are expected to discover issues of the city. In this case, the studio has produced enormous mappings to collect and analyse datas that can be revealed on 2D plans, some elevations and bar charts. It is unfavourable for projects which intended to deal with more intangible side of people instead of datas that do not cover emotion. Phenomenology in later personal research is then more valuable. Other than functions, perceptual and experiential data can be analysed and produced. This situation is proved during the excursion. Results reflected in the zoning map and data leave a large gap between reality and source. On site sensation absorbed are stronger and more accurate. Thus, after visiting the site, photos, collages and drawings are done to reflect abstract relations of objects to personalise and reinterpret the hard datas and observation outcomes.

### **IMPORTANCE OF CIVIL MEANING**

Recapturing the initial research question, I will need to find out the way to engage with public space in my selected site. It is then bring forward also the discussion of how through urban and architecture design can architect trigger the exchange between the different groups which are also identifies on site.

Responding to the first part of the question, by analysing through demographic data and onsite visit, separated minority groups were found on site. They are classified as two major ethnic groups, Koreans and the Middle Easts, and a group of young people from start ups. They have distinctive character by their own but lack a strong force to bring them together in a site where still

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short of a recognisable identity on its own. By researching on historical attachment to the context and event of protest, civil interaction is found significant in reconnecting different social groups. Applying this principle into generating engagement with the public space, civil value embedded public plaza and social inclusive building type such as new type of library can be considered. To trigger exchange between the different groups, we should not only consider the function but also the purpose of the constitution of space. Especially in New York, verticality cannot be neglected in approaching a project. Yet, open spaces in appropriate scale for both mass and community events are welcoming to people with different demands. Combining both verticality and horizontality of space, interweaving of scale of spaces carrying cultural and can encourage various form of activities and thus exchange between the different groups.

### END NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Avermaete, Tom, Klaske Havik, and Hans Teerds, eds. *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere*. Amsterdam: SUN, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards A Phenomenology of Architecture* (RIZZOLI, 1979), p.6.
- <sup>3</sup> Avermaete, Tom, Klaske Havik, and Hans Teerds, eds. *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere*. Amsterdam: SUN, 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> Groat, Linda N., and David Wang. *Architectural Search Methods*. 2nd ed. Canada: WILEY, 2013.
- <sup>5</sup> Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. USA: The MIT Press, 1960.

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