White Elephant : A Study on Exclusion in Public Sphere of Bogota
Cevdet Ege Çakır 4745558

Introduction: Initial Analysis and Selection of Research Topic

Methods & Analysis Graduation Studio "Positions in Practice" is focused on the investigation of human actions in relation to the built environment in terms of meaningfulness, appropriation and integration in the context of the city of Bogota[1]. This investigation initiated by the tutors during site visit by a workshop spread into three days. During the workshop, we selected a domestic object to analyze and interact with our surroundings or in other words, we tried thinking about the city through domestic objects. As I selected "pillow" as my domestic object, it guided me towards searching for privacy, intimacy and comfort in the public space. This situation forged my initial analysis of the city and established framework and theme for my research.

As I searched intimacy, comfort and especially privacy in public sphere, I ended up finding the dark, inconspicuous and forgotten (abandoned) parts of the city which is occupied by the excluded individuals of the society. This seek for privacy in public may seem nonsensical or implausible yet, it directs the focus on what "real" public space is. According to Wim Cuvyers[2], these spaces are what public has. He mentions that public space is the space of powerless, it is the space of transgression and the space of being uncontrolled. Cuvyers believes that the squares and streets are not public spaces because the movement and acts of individuals are controlled by the power-holders. Instead, he considers dead-ends, parking lots and shady corners of the city as public spaces where people can act freely and out of reach of moral and societal rules. His peculiar way of seeing the public sphere influenced me tremendously in my research. I wanted to understand where, how and why these excluded individuals interact with the public sphere. I chose to analyze how exclusion changes their perspective on moral and societal rules and how exclusion forces them to find extreme uses of the built environment.

In summary, my research and design investigates the relationship between individuals and public sphere by analyzing the transgressive actions of excluded groups in built environment. Furthermore, the topic could and will be broaden to include excluded objects and spaces and their relation with the city. I believe this topic is suitable to the main theme of the studio and its focus on meaningfulness, appropriation and integration.

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1 AR4MET100 Methods and Analysis Studio Booklet, Autumn 2018

2 Wim Cuvyers, Public Space. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.readingdesign.org/public-space

Research: Terminology and Methods of Analysis

The topic inherently demands an objective and all-inclusive research on excluded individuals. Without the objective methods, the study is doomed to be in the target of criticism of limited understanding of the exclusion from a position that is considered to be privileged. Thus, it is essential to specify the definitions underlying the research like "public" or "excluded individuals" and to reduce the individuality of the observer/researcher by realistic suppositions & assumptions. That is why as a strategy, I tried to establish terms and definitions before starting my studies on investigating transgressive practices of the excluded. After a long and extensive literature search, I borrowed inclusive definitions and related terminology from acclaimed researchers like Agamben[3], Foucault[4] and Deleuze[5] who spend their lives to understand the inner structure of exclusion-inclusion in society.

With these accumulation of definitions and knowledge, I started to illustrate the self-documented situations of transgressive practices of excluded individuals as diagrams. I have selected nine cases where excluded individuals interact with surrounding built environment and use the space in most extreme practices as possible. Similar to what Tchumi did in his Manhattan Transcripts[6], I matched these diagrams (fig 1) with related photographs to start a subtle debate about the situation without explicitly pointing out the meaning behind it.

This analysis helped me to interpret the relations between the public sphere and the excluded individuals; as the forces of exclusion increases on the individual, it directs them outside the realm of moral and societal rules and forces them to search for extreme uses of the space and objects in order to survive.

At this point of my research, I believe the literature review and the discussions in the studio shaped my interpretation of my own diagrams that made me draw specific arguments from my analysis. These arguments formed the basis of my design which will be explained in the further sections.

3 Agamben, Giorgio, and Daniel Heller-Roazen. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

4 Foucault, Michel. ***Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison***. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

5 Deleuze, Gilles, and Seán Hand. *Foucault*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

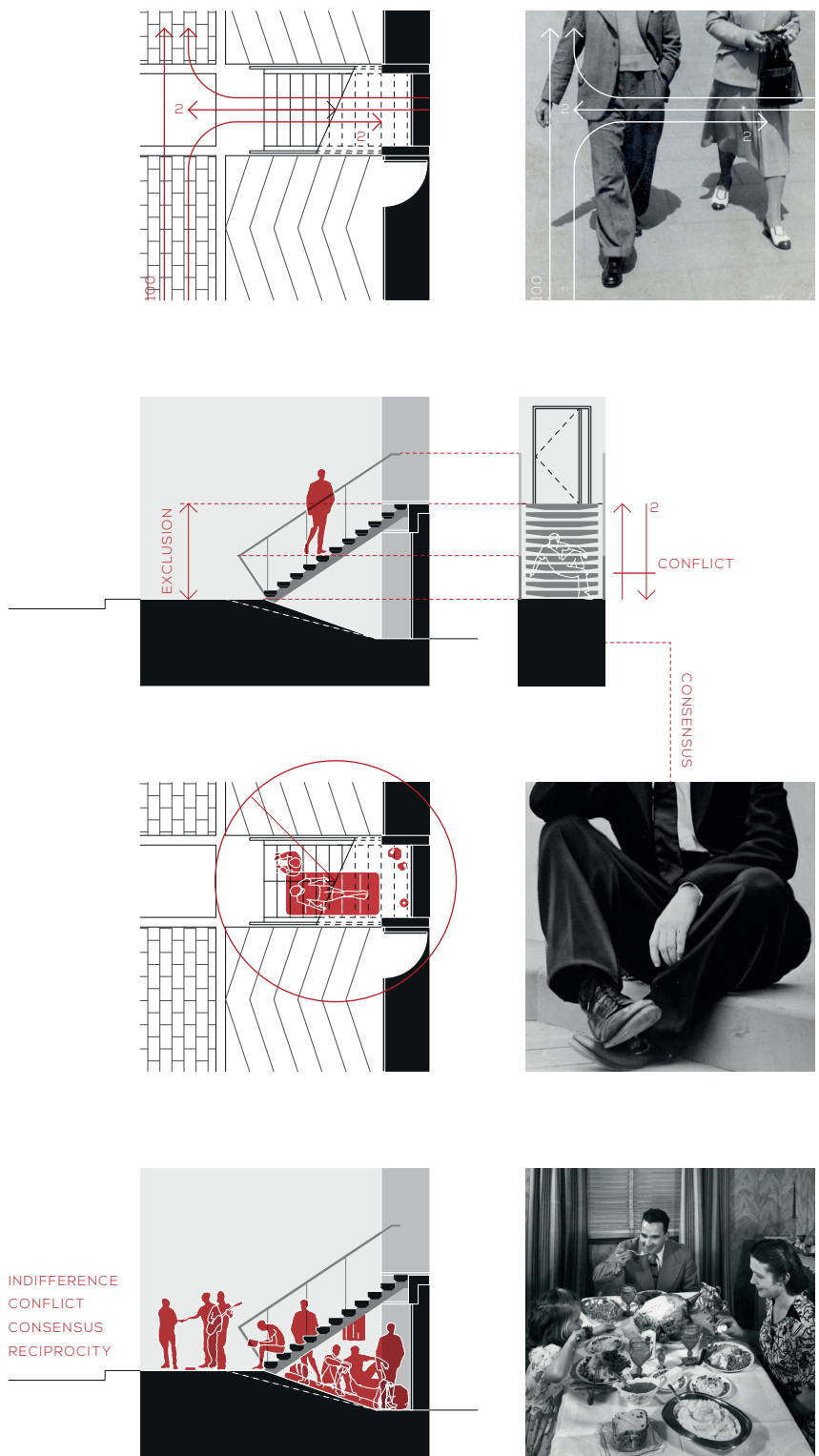6 Tschumi, Bernard. *Manhattan Transcripts*. London: Academy Editions, 1995.

EXCLUSION

CONFLICT

CONSENSUS

INDIFFERENCE
CONFLICT
CONSENSUS
RECIPROCITY

Fig 1 - Diagram of transgressive practices of excluded individuals

Outcomes: Arguments About Exclusion

Before moving on, I wanted to clarify findings of my research because they are crucial to understand the foundations of my project. To make it even more clear, I structured my arguments as bullet points down below:

. Exclusion derived from various sources affects every individual in varied levels which is heavily bounded to the specific place and time.

. Not only individuals but also objects and spaces can be affected by exclusion which prohibits the use and hinders the existence of it.

. Excluded individuals/objects/spaces inhabit the public space and yet they are outside the public realm and they are not bounded to societal rules and norms. That is why, their actions cannot be controlled by neither built environment or social influences.

. Architecture (or Architect) can't dictate the function of the space, the amount of exclusion determines the use; when the forces reaches to its maximum, individuals seek to find new functions to add the space.

. Integration, in conventional manner, is not a solution because their (excluded individuals/ objects/spaces) existence is heavily bounded to their exclusion from the public sphere.

. Instead, "inclusion" is the expansion of the attention towards exclusion rather than the integration. The aim is not to "normalize" the "abnormal" but *allowing it to exist.* In other words, integration is about restoring the situations of exclusion to presence by understanding the elements of inclusion & exclusion in public space.

The arguments here are based on my analysis of specific cases that I documented in Bogota, nevertheless, they can be applied to other situations in various contexts. On the other hand, these claims are overarching the whole society and cannot be narrowed down to a certain context or a site. Moreover, these arguments deprive the role of the architect as the decision maker which narrows the possible operations as an architect. That is why, it was difficult to create the required loop between site, precedents and theory which is the main approach of the studio.

After all, by inverting the perspective of the relation between excluded and public sphere, I could find public sites where individuals, objects and acts are excluded from. By this way, I overcome the problem of relating my research to specific sites and contexts. As I talked about these sites in the studio with my tutors, we discussed if the central square of Bogota, "Plaza de Bolivar" is inclusive or not. In the end we agreed that it is one of the sites of exclusion in spite of the fact that it is the central public space of the city: It is heavily guarded, surrounded by surveillance and the events in the space are controlled by the government. The facades facing the square does not contribute to the public space and they are there just exist to depict the power of the institutions that control the society. When, all these are considered, Plaza de Bolivar is the opposite of what Wim Cuvyers describe as public space. That is why, I wanted to work here in central square of Bogota and come up with a project that deals with the exclusion in the most extreme case.

Project: White Elephant in Plaza de Bolivar

Although the project has subject, a purpose and a site to work on, it still lacks the crucial element of an architectural intervention; a program. However, this creates a dilemma: the research suggest that the architecture cannot dictate the use of the space by the excluded, yet a program is required both by the hypothetical institutions in the context of the project and by graduation studio I am working in.

That is why, I wanted to make two different programs, one is an expected, fabricated program of a building, and the other is a program defined by the placement of the analyzed situations of exclusions inside the plaza. By making a "fabricated" program, I can disguise my project to deceive hypothetical costumers and the power-holding institutions surrounding the plaza. In this way, I can have the required program for my studio as well as designing something for the excluded individuals.

To illustrate the idea clearly , It is better to look at an example of stairs of apartments in Teusaquillo (Fig 1). The analysis of the staircase depicts that excluded individuals uses it completely different than the visions of the architect; Architect's idea of separating public and private by creating height difference clashes with the fact that homeless people are re-appropriating it as a shelter to create protection, privacy and comfort. They see the potential of the space and be more creative than the architect: they use the space in such an extend that it is beyond the reach of visions of the decision maker. That is why, my position as an architect, cannot dictate what "real" program of the space is. However, I could make a "fabricated" program that could also potentially facilitate other functions.

If we think about the our staircase example, its equivalent in building program could be required emergency exits that pops out to the plaza level from the underground spaces. On the other hand, it can be re-appropriated by the excluded to act as a look-out tower similar to a periscope to protect themselves from the physical forces of power holders. In my project, these two ideas merges to a structure which disguise itself as an emergency exit which has room that surveillances the plaza level.

Similar to this example, the building program is formed by contrasting dualities which collaborates with each other to form spaces above and below the plaza surface which is the only surface that is accessible by the public. These situations become almost like characters that interacts with each other similar to what Hejduk did in his competition entry "Victims" for the design for memorial park in Berlin[7]. In his design, building programs are individual characters that change the function and meaning of the space over time by interacting with one and another. On the other hand, unlike Hejduk, in my project, these programs are placed in peculiar points inside the plaza to catalyze functions in the already existing built environment. For example, placing the underpass in front of the already existing arcade proposes functions for both sides. By doing this, I am looping my design process between site, precedents and theory which is the main approach of our studio towards design methodology.

In summary, the project continues the ideas derived from the research by transporting the situations of excluded individuals from all around the city to the main public square. By disguising and placing them inside the square, the project brings the forgotten & abandoned parts of the city and its inhabitants to the center without interruption of institutions surrounding the square. Moreover, duality of the program and its placement creates a feedback loop between site and research in terms of meaningfulness, appropriation and inclusion.

Reflection: Self Criticism and Future of the Project

My research project White Elephant is focused on exclusion of individuals/objects/spaces inside the public sphere. It analyzes the existing situations spread around the city and transforms them into programs and places them inside the main square. By doing this, project deals with topics that are relevant to the pre-given topic of the studio in different scales, starting from general understanding of exclusion towards the city and finally to the site, which is Plaza de Bolivar. During the process from research to the final design, the project loops between conceptual ideas and physical site which enhances the quality of the project. However, during this long development, there are points that can be criticized.

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[7] Fabrizi, M. (2018, February 10). A Growing, Incremental Place – Incremental Time: "Victims", a... Retrieved from http://socks-studio.com/2015/11/01/a-growing-incremental-place-incremental-time-victims-a-project-by-john-hejduk-1984/

Firstly, I believe the research done before the analysis is considerably comprehensive yet it only includes the study of exclusion and omits the contextual research of Bogota. This is due to the fact that the resources of Bogota is less accessible than the others and generally in Spanish. On the other hand, I think the sources about exclusion generally present research that could be applied in different contexts and scales. Another criticism could be about the reasoning of borrowing the related terms from different sources: it can be seen as "cherry picking" different terms in order to justify the analysis. I believe this is a valid criticism that I already addressed extensively and explain my reasoning while writing my position paper.

Secondly, the intermediary step between research and design process could be reviewed. Although I encountered various problems while transforming my research into an architectural intervention, I believe my findings have interesting qualities which lead to peculiar approach in design stage. I also tried many other ways (incorporating different methods from various fields) that I did not included to the paper to overcome the challenges that I am facing. One of this challenges, maybe the most important was about the role of the architect/ure in terms of exclusion. My findings deprive me from decision making and gave it to the subject of the study. This situation entangled my project and slowed down the process for a long time. However, with the feedback from my tutors, I could overcome this challenge by applying the most suitable strategy.

Thirdly, I want to review my design and its relation with my research and the general topic of the studio. Even before starting to design the intervention, I already struggled to understand the context because there were so many inputs from surrounding built environment, public sphere and already complex building program. The site situated in the most dense part of the city in terms of social, historical and architectural aspects. Social structure of the public space, how it is regulated, supervised and controlled is one of the biggest challenges to overcome while designing a place for excluded and "unwanted" individuals. Complicated and violent history of the square accumulates the social challenges further and decrease the validity of possible projects. Lastly, various monuments from different ages and styles makes it harder to find the language of the project.

On the other hand, I believe I have addressed some of these contextual challenges while re-designing the plaza. The design could be criticized in many ways because it inherits many subjective approaches. However, I think it does a good job bringing not only excluded individuals but objects and spaces to the plaza while respecting the already existing square and built environment by hiding itself in the horizontal surface. If we think about the architectural context, the design formed by subtle basic geometric forms that does not add to already dense architectural language of the plaza.

Lastly, I believe that the project lacks some aspects in detail wise. I tried to use simple details and systems to reduce the costs and increase the validity of the project. In addition to this, the context requires much less climatic and structural decisions than other parts of the world. Nevertheless, the design approach and the placement of the spaces made it difficult to come up with simple detail solutions.

That is why, in the remaining time of my project I want to focus more on solving the details in smaller scales, re-designing by deliberately sculpting them into well thought spaces while maintaining the conceptual idea even in the smallest scale.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my research and project investigates the relationship between excluded individuals/objects/spaces and public sphere by analyzing the transgressive actions of the excluded in built environment. By transferring the existing situations to the center of public sphere, the project initiates a debate about inclusion/exclusion and its effects on public space in terms of social, economic and physical impact. I believe the project makes an interesting, unique yet crucial statement about inclusiveness of the public space which could get a negative reaction as retaliation but I think this pushes the debate further into more inclusive architecture.