

Graduation Project Reflection Paper

MSc4 Interiors Buildings Cities

The City Room

Jiao Chen (4723996)

Echo0227@foxmail.com

Brief

This essay is a part of my graduation project, it includes a reflection on examining the relationship between research and design; how my project relates to studio theme and reflection on research methods.

The relationship between research and design

The theme of the studio is "The intimate city". The studio has given much freedom to students, which means there is no fixed site or project, and each student determines his research direction through sufficient urban research about context, culture and anthropology.

In the early days, the study of "intimacy" was our main task. Thus we conducted a series of exercises in the seminar, including various practices from theory research to collage and physical models.

My preliminary research can be divided into two phases. The first part is to interpret the spatial characteristics of the city room, the identity in the city, especially about the embodiment of intimacy in the city room. We went to Paris, Naples, Vienna, Milan and conducted an in-depth investigation. The research seminars of the studio did work well. Though these exercises seems little connection to my site, the conclusions might apply equally to Antwerp.

Specifically, we conduct our exercise of writing in the way of making such kind of "Intimate encyclopedia". It consists of a visual index of cards that represents specific places, buildings, interviews and artworks, etc. And a book which contains further description about these Cards, in other words, the stories behind the cards. Taking phenomenological writing as a method, we could understand how intimacy was influenced by our own understanding of the environment. For instance, under the guidance of phenomenological theory, writing is narrative and we can Record the changes in our feelings when entering a space, thus knowing which part/element of the building brings up intimate feeling, and how the change of light/material would affect the degree of intimate. All these narratives, which we imbue with our own experience, memories and aspirations, explain what urban intimacy may entail.

During my trip to Vienna, the most impressive public room is the cafes. Cafes as public living room offers the chance for people of different backgrounds to gather. And it's a place situated between private and life. As Polgar said "for all who wish to be alone, but need sociability for this" To me, this is a Typical case of urban intimacy.

The second exercise is more personal, we are asked to conceive our city room to express our understanding of intimacy after lots of case study of city rooms. The model is utilized to restore space, as well as spatial experiments based on this. The physical model is, to a certain extent, a real state of construction. Physical model in large scale (1:20/1:50) are more realistic than drawings and computer models. The temperature of the material, and the light at a definite moment are expressed and tangible.

In the fragment model, I expressed my understanding of urban intimacy as a city within a city, which contains the mixed condition from very public to private and the people of diversity. Different levels of privacy, from public to private, and the state of multiple symbiosis. This recurring subtopic can be summarized as --- social mix.

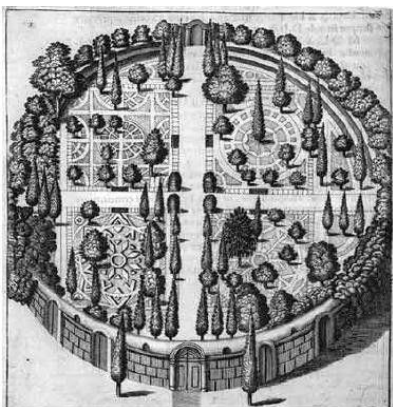
After these exercises, Antwerp did set the tone. I think this kind of research combined with the exploration of specific research topics on the website, really works for the studio and I.

In addition, for the subsequent development of personal research: anthropology, material culture, played an important role. I think it's important to develop a coherent narrative of each aspect of research as my own design guide. Anthropological research is very helpful in understanding the social needs of Antwerp and the venue about social mix, as well as the specific architectural needs of the target group (the elderly and children) and how to create shared space. Material culture research contributes to the interpretation of the site context, making the building truly rooted in Antwerp.

But when I reflect on my research process, the limitations mainly exist when I can't limit the time spent at each stage and find the point where I should concentrate. I should have been as efficient as possible at the beginning to conduct an effective study of the target group – the elderly and the children– and draw conclusions about their habits, psychological characteristics, and architectural needs. Rather than being fragmented during the design process, it was repeated to modify the confirmation, which caused my program to take a long time to determine. In addition, I spent too much time on the research of context but never formed a specific conclusion, which led me to make several fundamental changes in the design process. After the P3 critic, inspired by the teacher, I found a more open way to express my architecture concept. I try to summarize my research and strengthen the narrative.

Engagement with the Studio Theme: The intimate city

My project engage with the year theme of the Interiors Buildings Cities chair “the Intimate City” in several ways.



1. Wall - Hortus conclusus, the enclosed garden as a city room

The garden is an important feature of the Antwerp, represented as an inner courtyard in public buildings, and in the area of Berchem, a residential-type building, the continuous residence forms a solid facade enclosing the back garden, these enclosed gardens serve as private leisure spaces create a protective barrier that takes nature inside.

"The notion of the garden as an enclosed space, set apart, and infused with metaphorical meaning - a representation of nature perfected through human art in the service of an ideal -. Is fundamental to our understanding of the history of landscape design"

When it comes to my site, its characteristics can be summarized by Hortus conclusus. It can be seen from the early planning that it existed as a private garden very early, but it was wasted as a school parking lot in recent years, and there are many beautiful trees inside. Vine maple and sycamore maple, aged over 50 years, school buildings representing traditional style, exquisite walls, tall trees form an image that I want to retain, so I decided on the basic strategy: open the green to the city and the form of the building should be soft and blanking, which is heteroid from school buildings and trees, forming a new level between nature and labor.

2. Architecture begins with the making of a room. (Louis Kahn)

When facing the trees, the initial idea was to engage with nature. According to the original topological relationship of the trees, the building, in units of rooms, spreads between the gaps of the trees, forming an intimate posture with nature. The large garden was disintegrated into smaller yards.

3. Architecture as city



The logic of the forming the building: the public functions are concatenated into paths, from comparatively public to relatively private, and the most intimate space is interspersed in the path in the form of blocks. For two service groups: the elderly and the children, they have separate paths. And in the middle of the building they meet, forming a shared node.

If I compare my building to a village or city street, then my city room will be reflected in different scales. First, the original enclosed garden opens as a large city room that accommodates nature. Secondly, the wooden corridor acts as an open public street, it is occupied by relatively public functions. Finally, the most intimate brick rooms are complete interior. Through the window, they can enjoy the view of the respective yard and have a good interaction with nature.

4. Architecture for elderly and children

The elderly and children share many similarity in needs for architecture. For example, they both like ground floor and they like the atmosphere of nature, they both need some barrier-free design, they both like warm colors, soft natural light, comfortable temperature.

5. Main city room: Kitchen and refectory

My goal is not only to create a good social space for the homogenous people, but also to create a positive interaction between two different groups of people. Refectory and kitchen is a representative social space (case study of the refectory of the Sint-Michielsabdij). As a result, open kitchens and refectory have become the center of architecture.

6. Material, structure, technology

Taking into account the future conversion of functions and the impact that going trees may have on the buildings. I choose light structures of laminated wood to meet future transformation or demolition needs. Wooden skeleton with brickwork surface is the continuation of the red brick wall outside and can realize the requirements of flexible opening.

With the help of the building technology tutor and climate and structure tutors, I found solutions for heating and cooling environment and ventilation. Combined with green roof, solar panel, rainwater collection, it is hoped to reduce energy consumption and damage to the environment.