Graduation Project Reflection Paper
Msc3 Interiors Buildings Cites
The Intimate city

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Introduction
This paper is going to review the three phrases of my graduation project—America Natie: logistics study centre in Antwerp, from the initial research to design narrative. The first phrase I researched a series of public interior space in Vienna and Antwerp, and the phenomenology methods were chosen as main research system. The second phrase I tailored very specific building program to my site in Antwerp, which combined the thoughts of city context. The last phrase is design base on previous study, and keep to the point of studio theme of this year—The Intimacy City.

The relationship between research and design
After the research method course, I have the more clearer knowing of the relationship between research and design. First, research focus on past and present, and design focus on the future; research aims to acquire knowledge and design aim to creation or changing. Hence, I would say research and design are two different disciplines at this stage. Second, I think the relationship between two domains is neither one-way nor serving and being served, instead, research and design are reciprocal and complementary. Research provides information to design, design process and final artifacts could become research objects as well, most importantly, the design processes usually stimulate the significative research proposal come into being. As for my work this semester, I aimed to design a city room, to design the space of threshold between public and private, collective and intimate experience. However, the function of this space wasn’t determined yet, so I started to conceive my city room on architectural level. The space might be a large room design in city scale. From my interpretation, it should be a quality interior public space people enjoy visiting and spending time in, which invoke physical activities and emotional sensitivity. In order to build a more graphic impression of city room in my mind for future design, I started to research a series of historical public interior space, which still radiates vitality in modern ages. Such as church, passage, monastery. I concentrated my research scope on merely spatial quality research, to observe the sensitivity of scale, rhythms and elegance of structure and the intricate delicacy of its decoration. One thing should be explained is why historical interior space was targeted instead of modern interiors. Due to the interval of a long time, the program design for the historical space was lost or obscure, the spaces are less build upon the modern urban program, which are more constructive on straightforward research of space.

After the preliminary understanding of phenomenology’s methods, I conducted the research of interior space exploring in my studio field trip to Vienna. I participated in group cooperation with several classmates, to complete a phenomenological research of Vienna city. Our final products are made up of an “Encyclopedia” and a stack of “visual index cards”, on which behalf of objective information database and subjective ephemeral perception. Each visual index card was composed by a photograph on the front and textural narrative on the back, in which case our own phenomenological observations were documented and collected. And encyclopedia is made by traditional research method that is gathering information like floor plan, sections, structure, material, this kind of fact files. What’s more, these cards act as the visual index of the encyclopedia with chapter number, linking these subjective fragments to the specific architectural components. This exercise seemingly looks easy, however, which was
my first trial to understand the phenomenology through my own study. In addition, I realized phenomenological considerations is a perfect way that makes me jump out of the traditional architectural thinking, maybe there is no ideal circulation diagram on paper, but touching moment always happened in real life world. In the group of this exercise, each of us has our own focus and mine is historical interior space. Except for space narrative practice I did in card’s making job, I conducted another exercise, trying to explore the urban living in public interior space by phenomenological methods. I drew the scene of Ferstel-Passage in Vienna by memories, and distinguished the three types of spatial elements, Fixed-feature elements, Nonfixed-feature elements, and Semifixed-feature elements. I found different types of elements contribute to different human body experience. For instance, fixed-feature elements such as building structure, usually contribute to the visual extension or obstruction and sometimes impact interior lighting condition, while nonfixed-feature elements could contribute to the auditory sense of our spatial experience. Consequently, drawing by memories is a key to open my various sensory experience to capture the crucial qualities of space.
To sum up, I explored spatial quality through phenomenological methods, to restore the essential feature of interior space, and to understand the way which accommodates people activities and perception. In my opinion, phenomenological observation is an inverse process of subjective design, which reflect on traditional theoretical methods with human nature. No matter in the architectural study or future professional field, phenomenology is a necessary supplementary on design thoughts.

**The relationship between project and city context**
Antwerp is a big port city with long history, the delta region with its extraordinary infrastructural density on the north of city of Antwerp. The old port was abandoned and transfer to the culture cluster “Eilandje”, which are adjoined to the historical city center geographically. Base on the special urban configuration of Antwerp port area, I found some weakness and problems on the transitional region between Eilandje and historical city center, which motivate my design concept. In this transitional area, it’s rare to see any urban identity and atmosphere, the lively historical center and cultural center Eilandje seems isolated from each other, because of this lost transitional area. Therefore, looking for the regional identity to break down barriers between Eilandje and historical city center is my starting point of thinking. How to use small architectural intervention to impact the unbalanced urban development and isolated urban atmosphere? I tried to respond this problem on both architectural program and architectural form these two aspects.

I chose the site on the transitional region between Eilandje and historical city center, Ankerrui 34, Antwerp. I believed the building program should completely inspired by the context of site, community, and driven by the surrounding everyday life. Therefore, I extracted three different story lines from context, to make my program very specific and tailored. First, the
historical context, two old natie buildings on my site arise my curiosity, so I study a typical phenomenon of the port city Antwerp-natie culture. Second, my site is in the walkable distance to the University of Antwerp which could contribute to the university neighborhood, and I found the department of the transport and regional economics Antwerp need better study facilities, so my programs were confirmed: a logistic study center. Third, due to many small logistics companies in this district and lack of public service, so this study center also do business function instead of a rigid campus building. So far, the relationship between project and context is clear on programmatic level.

And on the architectural form aspect, I tried to emphasize my concept as well, to make isolated urban atmosphere flowing. Therefore, I combine my previous study of public passage, to apply it in my plan arrangement. In my opinion, passage is a very interesting architectural type, it can be built by repetitive architectural elements to extend space, and open a block for connecting two places at two ends. In this way, a passage keep in the middle to connect two exposed façades of building is my design principle throughout the process.

Engagement with the year theme: the intimate city

In the previous design project, I always arrange programs by their private or public level as an initial step before my design, using architectural design experience to protect privacy. The idea of the intimate city provides me with a chance to rethink this problem. In this logistic study center project, I interpreted the intimate in a new way.

I zoomed in my observation from a single building site to the city scale, to experience the people activities in the surrounding collective space, to rethink the definition of the word ‘intimate’. After my research, I think the city is composed by all kinds of space and blocks, creating different urban lively atmosphere. For me this time, Intimate City is not a physical isolation to protect anyone, Instead, it is something collecting these urban lives, to achieve
harmonious coexistence.