ETHNOGRAPHIC VISUALS
WHAT VISUALS TO USE FOR COMPLEX ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS

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Chair of Dwelling, Designing for Care in an Inclusive Environment
Thesis Spontaneous Social Interactions to prevent loneliness

I   OBSERVATIONAL METHODOLOGY

Kent Bloomer and Charles Moore in their book "Body, Memory, and Architecture" describe that buildings affect the way we feel and how we identify ourselves with our environment. They perceive architecture as a sensual art where the human body is the main character. Simultaneously they critique the current by technique driven architecture.[1] The architectural practice is now more than ever shaped by technology. Highly sophisticated computational tools help the architect shape buildings through parameters that are linked to for example solar exposure or sound. Next to this our modernist cities have made urbanism the study of traffic rather than the scaping of cities for humans. Consequently these developments have further distanced the architectural practice from its users. So how can architecture again become a field closely related to human occupation, and reject the self-concerned ways of thinking? During an interview Rem Koolhaas provides a framework for this issue.

> *"With the market economy, we've slowly found ourselves supporting, at best, individual ambitions and, at worst, pure profit motives. In that sense, every crisis perhaps presents an opportunity."* [2]

During this interview Koolhaas refers to crisis as the current issue presented to architects to house the millions of refugees coming into Europe. He indicates thus a more human approach of architecture instead of architecture that satisfies personal ambitions or interests. But how would one conduct research that strives for a more human approach, a bottom up approach? A methodology that is consistent to this description is ethnographic research. According to Loshini Naidoo the definition of ethnography is as following:

> *"Ethnography is a qualitative methodology that lends itself to the study of the beliefs, social interactions, and behaviours of societies, involving participation and observation over a period of time, and the interpretation of the data collected."* [3]

Herman Hertzberger confirms with a statement in his book "that observational skills are an architects greatest attribute.

> *"The architect's most important attributes are not the traditional emblems of professional skill, the ruler and pair of compasses, but his eyes and ears."* [4]

Praxeology while not being a methodology was discussed during the lecture series and also stresses the importance of observations. The lecture series about praxeology therefore triggered me even more to look into this topic and especially into the visuals of ethnography. How does one visualize or communicate for example social contacts between residents. This question also applies for other complex situations such as the use of space or the preference of seating spots of certain people or groups. How does one depict these situation in a visual way that they are clearly understood by its readers? The question this paper will therefore try to answer is:

> *How can observations of complex human behaviour during ethnographic research be visualized?*

The studio that addresses ethnographic research and that I follow during my MSc 3 & 4 is Dwelling, Designing for care in an inclusive environment. During this course the objective is to create housing for elderly that addresses the current issues concerning elderly in the Netherlands. My focus during this graduation studio is on loneliness and especially on spontaneous social interactions.
For this studio it was of importance to conduct fieldwork. The importance of this fieldwork is to spark an interest into one of the current issues regarding elderly. This interest then forms the framework of

1 Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore, Body, Memory, and Architecture, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977),
2 Rem Koolhaas, "Architecture has a serious problem today," interview by Mohsen Mostafavi, 2016 AIA convention, 21 May, 2016, https://www.fastcompany.com/3060135/rem-koolhaas-architecture-has-a-serious-problem-today,
3 Loshini Naidoo, Ethnography: An Introduction to Definition and Method (2012),
4 Herman Hertzberger, Het structuralistische gezicht van de sociale ruimte (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000), 39,

the graduation research, which for my was spontaneous social interactions to prevent loneliness among elderly.

II   FIELDWORK

Ethnography is closely related to but distinguishes itself from anthropology and praxeology by being not a field of study but a research methodology. Anthropology in addition to ethnography also discusses other aspects of humans such as for example physiology.[5] Praxeology on the other hand is a field of study that is concerned with human action. It relates certain results (such as economic decline) by intentional human actions and refers to other fields of study such as for example psychology, sociology and anthropology to explain these phenomenon.[6]

Ethnography was determined as the research methodology during the graduation studio. Ethnographic research manifested itself within the studio by doing multiple fieldwork sessions. To teach us what fieldwork is and how all the information obtained during the observations can be presented, introductory assignments where given in the beginning of the studio. The first assignment was to introduce the steps of observing and interviewing. According to Randall, Harper, and Rouncefield an introduction into the topic of fieldwork is needed to get more familiar with processes concerning this research method.

"First, there is a need for researchers to be ethnographic in their approach. This has to do with being familiar with what to look for in terms of themes, topics, and issues, and in knowing how to explain or explicate aspects of the observed setting around these themes and topics." [7]

The other given assignments focused on the different visual techniques presenting the observations made. The methods of presenting the information obtained, ranged from photography to sketching.

The main fieldwork during the studio concerned a seven day fieldwork in an elderly complex. The students were divided in groups of 2 to 3 people and housed together in an elderly complex somewhere in the Netherlands. As preparation for this fieldwork, we had to think about what we were going to observe and how we were going to tackle this. But we also had to think about how to present these results in a visual way. The methods to portray the results ranged from interviews to drawing social situations of the residents.

During this week of fieldwork we had no particular focus and had to observe every situation in order not to miss crucial information. We tried to stick to our planned observations and visuals but in practice this turned out to be very hard. The problems faced during this week manifested itself on multiple levels, such as unrealistic planning, the weather, false expectations and even the absence of activity in the building. The time limit given also restricted us to explore certain planned topics. The combination of encountered problems with the fact that there was no particular focus made it hard to truly come up with effective data.

After the fieldwork we had to specify the overall problem among elderly in that specific complex. This then could become the framework of our research. This resulted into our drawings being not relevant anymore. Due to this problem I had to portray social situations from memory and draw those to have any relevant usable findings from the fieldwork. Most of my irrelevant drawings consist of floor plans of the dwellings from the residents of the complex. These are not detailed and do not show any signs of human behaviour or occupation. Summarized, they are not ethnographic.

This fieldwork in the end showed that ethnographic research is not as straight forward as other research methodologies. The time needed to get good results depends on factors that are out of our influence. It can therefore be an unpredictable methodology which maybe does not give the information that was planned to be gathered beforehand. Multiple fieldwork sessions or one longer

5 Zaenuddin Hudi Prasojo, "Introduction to Anthropology," Borneo Journal of Religious Studies, no. 2 (2013), 294.
6 Alan G. Futerman, and Walter E. Block, "A Praxeological Approach to Intentional Action," Studia Humana, no. 6:4 (2017): 10-33.
7 Dave Randall, Richard Harper, and Mark Rouncefield. "Fieldwork for Design: Theory and Practice," 2007, 3.

fieldwork session is needed to come to good conclusions or issues concerning the theme studied. The time it takes to come to good conclusions depends on the objects which are studied and the activity that takes place, it is therefore not realistic to plan a certain timeframe in which the observations have to be conducted. It is also unrealistic to plan beforehand what visuals to make if there is no clear framework yet. The visual representations of certain activities or interactions can develop during the fieldwork to create highly accurate and on point visuals that best communicate the situation depicted. Planning ahead can give inspiration but certain considerations revolving the visuals have to be made on site.

III   ETHNOGRAPHIC CHANGE

During the 15th century, European countries began colonising exotic countries to obtain materials and produce. This process of countries competing to expand their over sea territories called colonialism. During this quest the explorers came upon other cultures. These "other cultures" especially became an interesting object of study during the age of enlightenment. It is during this period that ethnographic and anthropologic study is conducted on a large scale.[8] Resulting eventually in the first description of ethnography by the Russian historian Gerhard Friedrich Müller. During the second Kamchatka expedition, an expedition to map the coast of Siberia, he used the term Völker-Beschreibung to distinct a separate field of study which later became ethnography.[9]

But while Müller is the first to describes ethnography as a separate field of study, Greek philosophers such as Herodotus [10] & Posidonius already used these methods during the ancient age. Posidonius for example studied the Celtic culture and described things such as their respect towards Druids. Findings during this time were presented in text and sometimes adjoined with drawings.[11]

In later periods anthropologist took over ethnography as a research methodology. Important anthropologist such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski further explored this field of study.[12] [13] They critiqued earlier anthropological research by stating it was speculation. They found that living among the people they were studying and taking part in their customs and talking to them in their own language really resulted in in-depth knowledge about these people. This really elevated the use of ethnography among anthropologists. Their published works mostly presented their observations in written text and pictures. Occasionally drawings would be used to elaborate their text. These pictures or drawings were mostly staged and the text was written in an explanatory and scientific way.

Figure 1 Picture of Bronislaw Malinowski with natives on Trobriand Islands [14]

8 Robin Patric Clair, "The Changing Story of Ethnography," (2003), 4-6.
9 Han F. Vermeulen, "Gerhard Friedrich Müller and the Genesis of Ethnography in Siberia." ETNOGRAFIA 2018, no. 1 (2016): 40-63.
10 Robin Patric Clair, "The Changing Story of Ethnography," (2003), 3.
11 Maria Michela Sassi, The Science of Man in Ancient Greece, Translated by Paul Tucker, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 128.
12 Robin Patric Clair, "The Changing Story of Ethnography," (2003), 7.
13 Francesco Marano, Key Points for a visual Ethnography of Architectural,(n.d), 1.
14 Billy Hancock, Malinowski on fieldwork in the Trobriand Island, London School of Economics Library Collections.

But how has ethnography shaped the field of architecture? To fully understand what triggered the use of ethnographic research in architecture and why this happened, it is good to first look at the context of which it originated. During the beginning of the 20th century modernism began to manifest itself in the field of art, urbanism and architecture. During this period a congress was formed which called itself Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne also known by its abbreviation CIAM. CIAM was a group of architects that concerned themselves with new design ideas. In 1959 CIAM ended and the different groups within CIAM split into smaller groups of architects. One of those was called Group 10 and consisted of multiple young architects. There critique on CIAM was that their view on urbanism was not focused on humans anymore and lacked originality.[15]

This was primarily pronounced in a manifest of Aldo van Eyck for a more humanist approach to architecture.[16] Aldo van Eyck his work reflects ethnographic methods, such as for example this study of the vernacular buildings of Taos Pueblo in New Mexico but also other locations in West Africa. Van Eyck took observational photographs of these places and described them in journals.[17]

Figure 2 Taos Pueblo in New Mexico [18]

Urbanist Sigfried Giedion also argued for more humanism in urban design in his book "You and Me",[19] Next to Siegfried also other urbanists such as Kevin Lynch, William Whyte, Jan Gehl and activist Jane Jacobs indicate with their literature a more observational way of analysing urban use.[20]

In later periods artist also unintentionally became more involved in developing ethnographic visuals. Jan Rothuizen is a great example of this. He portrays spaces and neighbourhoods in a combination of text and drawings. Another artist named Yukiko Suto creates highly detailed landscape drawings. While these drawings do not include humans, it is still a product of observational research into surroundings and culture. Yukiko Suto triggered Japanese architects to use similar drawing technique to portray their observations. Atelier Bow Wow uses detailed drawings with notes besides elements and people to portray their observations.

15 Eric Momford, "CIAM and Its Outcomes," Urban Planning (Washington University) 2019, no. 4:3 (September 2019): 291-298.
16 Endry van Velzen, "De parallelle stad," OASE (NAi Publishers) 1989, no. 26-27 (1989): 46-63.
17 Georges Teyssot, "Aldo van Eyck and the Rise of an Ethnographic Paradigm in the 1960s," Joelho, no. #02 (2011): 50-67.
18 Aldo van Eyck, Aldo van Eyck. Writings Volume 1: The Child, the City and the Artist, (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), 118.
19 Sigfried Giedion, Architecture, You and Me, The Diary of a Development, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), 154-156.
20 Jesper Magnusson, Clustering Architectures: The Role of Materialities for Emerging Collectives in the Public Domain, (Lund: Lund University, 2016), 112.
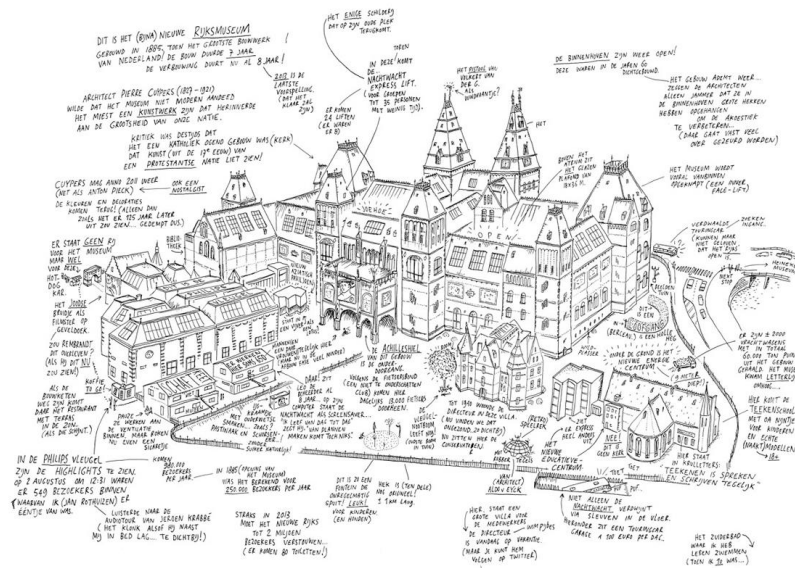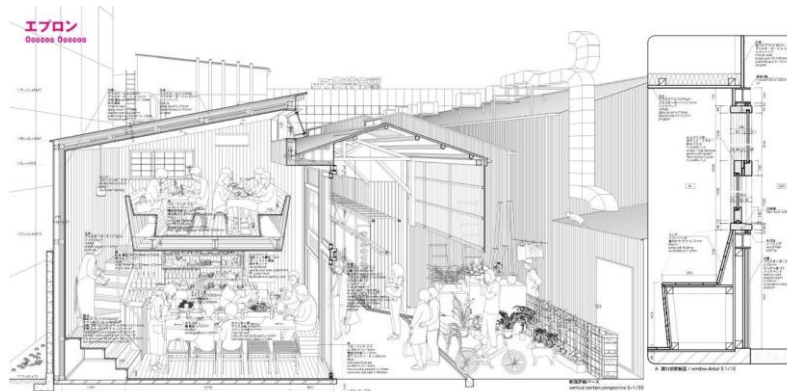
Figure 3 Rijksmuseum by Jan Rothuizen [21]

Figure 4 Section by Atelier Bow Wow [22]

This new wave of methods to portray the observations made during ethnographic research has also created an uplift in literature about this topic. While this is a positive movement it also highlights a misconception of the term Ethnography within the profession of architecture. Where in anthropology the term always implies observations done by spending time with people of a certain culture or demographic group, in architecture it is also used as a definition that implies observations made by architects concerning materials and or objects. "Window scape" by Yoshiharu Tsukamoto Laboratory and Tokyo Institute of Technology is a good example of this. The book has the subtitle "Window Behaviourology" which indicates research into human behaviour effected by windows. But nevertheless they don't focus on human behaviour but on the materials and detailing of the windows. Yoshiharu Tsukamoto describes even that these observations of windows are architectural ethnography.[23] The architectural profession has to be aware that it does not confuse observations with ethnography.

21 Jan Rothuizen, "Rijksmuseum," Drawings for the national museum of the Netherlands "Rijksmuseum", (2013), https://janrothuizen.nl/portfolio/rijksmuseum/.
22 Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kajima. Graphic Anatomy Atelier, (Bow-Wow. Tokyo: TOTO, 2007).
23 Yoshiharu Tsukamoto Laboratory and Tokyo Institute of Technology, Window Scape, Window Behaviourology, (Singapore: Page One Publishing Pte Ltd, 2011), 24.

IV   TIME AND EXPERIENCE

When positioning my own visuals within the methods of visualizing ethnographic research as mentioned in chapter III certain deviations become clear such as the use of photographs. Earlier ways of ethnographic research use photographs to complement their text. Photographs are truly observational and portray a situation in high detail. But because our fieldwork consisted of only a week, trying to bond with the residents was more important than to take pictures. Bonding with the residents and retrieving private or valuable information can only take place if the observer and the observed are on a similar level. When taking pictures of them while not having established a good bond, will make them not perceive you as on a similar level to them. In shorter timeframes, photographs distance the observer from the observed. Therefore I did not make a lot of photographs but more detailed drawings with text balloons. I made these drawings in an isometric parallel projection and not in perspective such as Yoshiharu Tsukamoto did. This was done to make the drawing more objective. Mapping was also done quite extensively. While not discussed in this paper, it is a common type of architectural ethnographic visual but it is not specific to ethnography and therefore not discussed.
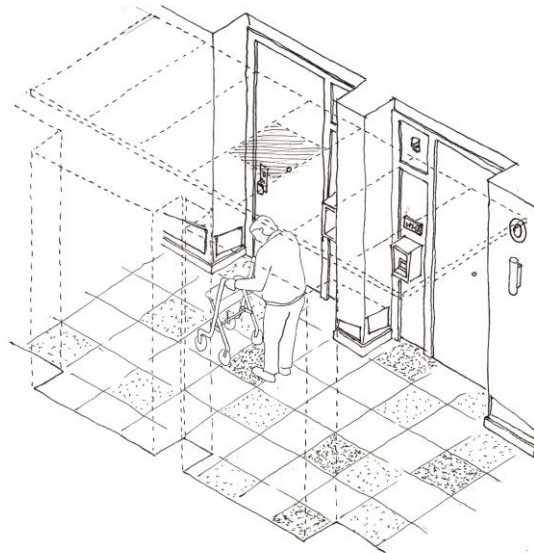
Figure 5 Own drawing of corridor

There are some current problems concerning the current architectural practice that effect the use of not only ethnographic visuals but architectural ethnography as a whole. As stated by Koolhaas, architecture is part of a market economy and therefore has to be profitable. But is architectural ethnographic research profitable? It costs a lot of time to produce an ethnographic research because researches have to do fieldwork, visualise their observations, order the information and afterwards analyse it to come to certain conclusions. The processing of all of these observation into visuals and text has to be done correctly and therefore also costs a lot of time This inevitably means that ethnographic research costs a lot of labour and thus a lot of money. But the affects and information derived from it, do not directly result in better architecture. The analysis from this material can result to conclusions that may do this but this is obviously not guaranteed. Furthermore, there is no experience conducting ethnographic research which means the quality of the work will be low or even false.

Other professions such as sociology and anthropology have more experience in conducting ethnographic research and also benefit more directly from its findings but they hardly discuss the effects of space on human behaviour. So there also lies a change for other professions to collaborate and find out more about space and human behaviour.

Another problem regards the implementation of an mostly unknown research methodology within the field of architecture. How can this be established? A starting point would be to let architects reflect on their newly designed buildings. Sale prices normally give a certain view of the public's opinion of a product and thus a reflection to the creator. In architecture this reflection on the success of designs is not present. Sales numbers do not represent the wish of the public anymore due to shortages and overheating of the housing market. [24] By simply conducted fieldwork on their own designs, they can learn if certain ideas or tools that they have implemented function as they thought beforehand.

The final conclusion of this paper and the answer to the question stated in the introduction "How can observations of complex human behaviour during ethnographic research be visualised?" can be sum up to the lack of architectural ethnographic research and thus also the lack of experimenting with visualizing those observations.

But the information provided by this paper also shows that due to current crises, architecture is in need of a more human approach. But ethnographic research cost a lot of money and it is unplannable and therefore is unattractive for architects. Only when profitable literature is the outcome and product of the research, architects will use this methodology. Other professions have more experience with ethnography and also benefit from collaborations with the field of architecture. Architecture can implement ethnography by reflecting on current designs thus introducing this methodology in a beneficial way. The architectural profession needs to clarify the term ethnography not to introduce misconceptions. All the statements above can hopefully promote the creation of ethnographic visuals and inspire more architects to use this bottom up approach.

24 Melanie Hekwolter, Rob Nijskens, and Willem Heeringa, The housing market in major Dutch cities, (Amsterdam: De Nederlandsche Bank N.V., 2017).

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