

REFLECTION
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Within the graduation studio of Methods and Analysis, Positions in Practice, the challenge of working within the previously unfamiliar context of Valparaiso, Chile, the emphasis placed by the chair on defining for yourself a particular position and project approach, and the exposure to a completely different methodological approach to architecture practiced by the Valparaiso School of Architecture and the Open City, all had a fundamental impact on the way that my graduation project developed across the research and design stages through the year.

RESEARCH

The year began with a group research phase, comprising of initial preparation and onsite fieldwork in the run up to and whilst visiting the city of Valparaiso. With a research question to explore the 'common figures' of Valparaiso, our method comprised of a selection of preparatory spatial studies at both a 'macro' (1:1000 site plans of city fragments) and 'meso' (1:500 axonometric studies of particular arrangements of public space extracted from the larger scale study) scale. Whilst on site, we then explored each of these city fragments, drawing into our axonometric studies to record use and appropriation of space, alongside 'micro' observational studies, using sketching, photography and interviews. This allowed us to draw a range of conclusions across scales, observe relations between space and spatial practice, and, critically given the relatively short study trip, meant that we had pre-defined tools in order to record our research in a thorough and systematic way.

Several of the conclusions we drew out of our 'common figures' research went on to be instrumental in the development of my personal project. The first of these was an interest in the remarkably differentiated areas of the city - the coastline, the plane and the hills - and the transitional relationships found between the three. Another was an idea of a 'common route' shared by inhabitants across the city - a daily cycle of down and up the hills, where the plane of the city centre is flooded with people during the day for work, school, shopping etc., and by night left deserted as people return back up the hillside for home. A key common figure we identified was the figure of 'The Frame', a spatial phenomenon occurring in the city across scales, from window, to streetscape, to the dramatically undulating landscape of the city; a result of the amazing verticality of the hills that fan out around the flat plane of the centre to give the city its 'amphitheatre' characteristic. For me this figure sparked a theme that has been a guiding one in my project - the idea of 'The Spectacular'. Across scales, Valparaiso inhabits a spatial theatricality. It is a city full of stages and of performers. From the many miradores looking out across the bay, to the active streets and squares of the plane, the city holds a specific sort of drama, its inhabitants playing the role of both actor and audience as the city's topography creates a condition of simultaneously seeing and being seen.

Our initial observations drew my interest to the boundary zone between the city centre and the hills, which in the second phase of my research I examined in detail. This led me to understand that the boundary manifests itself in a variety of ways, at each of a physical, functional and temporal level. Across the city, the extreme topography frequently results in a 'hard' boundary condition of sectional disconnect between the hills and the plane. The large retaining walls that structure the hillside mean that two adjacent parts of the city sit one above the other, separated by an almost vertical cliff face, with little relation between. It is in this condition that the city's many funiculars and staircases can be found, and whilst these offer a mode of crossing between these two city zones, in a way these transitional spaces act to emphasise the boundary zone as something to be bridged, rather than a space in its own right. At a functional level, Valparaiso can be described as a mono functional city, where the commercial city centre contains most of city services and the hills almost entirely comprising of residential use. In the plane of the city, we see little housing, with many buildings host to ground floor commercial use seemingly un(der)occupied above, and commercial usage frequently taking place at first floor level. This functional divide present in the city results in a temporal one. As a result of their different functions, parts of the city are operating on extremely different time cycles. In terms of the city centre this results in vibrant use of the public/common space of the city through the day, with squares and streets heavily occupied with everything from informal selling to street performers, chess games to cafes. However after closing time, the city completely shuts down. Streets are empty and windows dark, with only a few bars and restaurants open for business.

Choosing an empty site along this boundary zone, situated in the declining Peurto neighbourhood of the plane, I looked to ask:

- **How can the divide between the plane and the hills be overcome in order to create a city condition that is more transitional, connected, collaborative and cohesive?**

- **How can this boundary be addressed at a physical (spatial), functional (use) and temporal (experiential) level?**
- **Is there a spatial alternative to the existing condition that could offer a more transitional relationship between these two zones, claiming the boundary as a space in its own right?**

The next stage of inquiry into the surroundings of the chosen site raised another set of questions in the face of a neighbourhood exhibiting conditions of extreme decline:

- **How can an intervention at the boundary stimulate the regeneration and rehabilitation of the wider Peurto neighbourhood?**
- **How can a design engage with the theme of temporality, both functionally and spatially, across a range of temporal cycles - from the daily rhythm of the city, to larger seasonal and yearly cycles of use, development and change? (In response to designing with an urban area in flux)**

At a theoretical level I was influenced by Henri Lefebvre's concept of Rhythmanalysis, in which Lefebvre proposes a way of understanding the city that is equally temporal and spatial, centred on the everyday use and cycles of space. He suggests that by learning to listen to the multiple rhythms that co-exist in the relationship between time, space and 'use of energy' (the everyday practices of the city), it is possible to first diagnose and then intervene within these rhythms, in order to create a more harmonious and 'eurhythmic' urban life. I was also inspired by the city at night, particularly the work and research of the French practice AWP, including the book 'Nightscares: Nocturnal Landscapes', written by the three founding partners.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

With temporality as a central investigation of the project, I was encouraged to take an open approach in defining the project program. Looking for a project that can engage in different ways with the city across the cycle of the day, as well as larger seasonal and annual changes and rhythms, suggested the necessity for a program that is flexible and adaptable. With this in mind, I propose for the project to offer a variety of spaces available for use by existing community groups and players located around the site. With many organisations working in the surrounding hillsides, and with a strong sense of community and neighbourhood identity found in each hill, I propose that the project could offer a platform for inhabitation by these different groups, the boundary location offering a more public face to the hillside and the opportunity for local groups to engage with the centre and therefore the wider city. This open approach to program is supported by a conviction in the resourceful and engaged nature of the residents of Valparaiso that we encountered whilst conducting our fieldwork - demonstrated by both the high level of use of the spaces of the city that we observed in our meso and micro scale city studies, as well as by research into various community groups operating in the city, triggered by fellow classmate's research into the communities of Valparaiso.

These different uses could be tied together under the umbrella theme of 'The Spectacular', in a broad sense of the word: perform, rehearse, debate, interact, protest, gather, celebrate, exchange, play. Under this theme, I propose a curated calendar of events that could occur at the project site across the year, composed of longer term residencies, classes etc. led by community groups and creative organisations, alongside a series of events that tie in with the many festivals and celebrations that occur in Valparaiso across the year. Temporal variety would also be addressed across the daily cycle, with different parts of the project occupied at various points across the day, engaging with a permanently accessible public route bridging the site.

At a physical level, the proposal offers a means to connect the steep sectional division found at the site, and for this route to offer an alternative to the directly vertical bridging found at the city's many staircases and funiculars. The project looks to offer a 'slow' route, finding opportunities for pause and interception across the journey up or down. In this way, the project becomes not only a building but a landscape, a series of stepping platforms that move between the street level of the plane and the top of the retaining wall that bounds the southern edge of the site. The form is a direct result of the multi-directionality of the site condition, comprising a series of layered volumes that interlock and twist in different directions, so that the project isn't understood to have a front and back, or a top and a bottom, but rather as a dynamic series of spaces that are revealed in various sequence depending on the approach.

PROCESS

Embarking on the design process of the project, I was faced with the challenge of generating a spatial proposal without a fully predetermined programme or brief. Whilst it might have been possible at this point in the process to determine a fixed set of 'flexible spaces' to accommodate a range of scale of use, I felt that to do so would be to miss the

opportunities that an open programme could stimulate. Instead, I began a series of purely spatial studies of the site, working into my 1:500 context model with a series of iterative sketch models, quickly testing massing and spatial language with little thought to the use of the spaces that were implied. This allowed me the freedom to explore the spatial potentials of the site, and begin instinctively to grasp an understanding of project scale and specific moves that felt right within the surrounding context.

This approach was completely new to me, and was a major part of my response to the challenge proposed by the studio of displacing its students into a previously unknown and unexplored context. From the initial research phase, the project has taken a particularly spatial line of enquiry - from axonometric studies into the specific arrangements occurring in the city, to an exploration of an appropriate spatial language of the proposed project. In this unfamiliar context, which still in many ways feels so unknown to me, I strongly felt that the main contribution I could make was a spatial one. In this way I have seen my role as that of a spatial enabler, feeling much more comfortable with my abilities to explore, amplify and unlock the existing spatial potentials of the city, than with defining a fixed set of programmatic uses. It has also been a way for me to engage with the specifics of place, and I believe has resulted in a project that, whilst formally very different to the surrounding buildings in which it sits, has a language that resonates with the unusual and particular spatial qualities of the city of Valparaiso that we examined at the beginning of the year.

On reflection, I also feel that this approach was influenced by the series of exercises we carried out in the run up to visiting the Open City campus of the Architecture School of Valparaiso. Being introduced to the methodological approach of the school through a series of workshops run by Oscar Andrade Castro, I was impressed and inspired by the spatial clarity achieved through the approach. Starting with observational sketching, we were asked to arrive at an affirmation and a resulting spatial name, before re-representing this name spatially, through a series of white paper cube models. The final step of this process challenged us to express an intention spatially - to three-dimensionally communicate the specific spatial qualities that we had extracted from our observations. This process proved to be difficult, and encouraged me to also see my graduation project as an opportunity to push my spatial abilities. In a similar manner to the white cube exercise, I aimed through the spatial form of the project to communicate a specific intention - to engage with the multidirectional qualities of the site and provide an extended ascent/descent through the boundary zone of the plane and the hills.

After conducting my initial spatial study, I felt in a more qualified position to identify some key elements that could be contained within the project. These I thought of as a series of 'moments' I imagined across the building, and helped me to determine a set of spaces that I aimed to incorporate - a landing square, an external stage, a hall and a classroom tower, each with specific characteristics in relation to the site.

Simultaneously, I was also able to determine a set of spatial tools, a project language with which to incorporate these elements into the site. These included:

Building as journey - Journey as Building

The journey as a spatial element that creates and frames the various spaces of the project.

Occupied/Inhabited Wall

Thickened walls that act as the buildings infrastructure, allowing flexibility to the spaces that they enclose and blurring notions of inside and outside, public and private.

The Oblique

Folding walls and tilting ground, as a mode of creating a diagonal tension that emphasis the quality of a project to be experienced in motion, as well as a method of controlling spatial sequencing and dynamics.

In this way, the project materialised simultaneously as a programmatic arrangement and a spatial language of folding planes, developed in an open dialogue between formal language, programmatic arrangement and program. This was achieved through an iterative process of exchange between model studies and plan development. Fundamental to the methodology of the project design was the use of model making, specifically folded paper models that looked to formally represent the building as a series of journeys that could be unfolded into a range of sequential arrangements.

Besides the calendar based program and the impact that this had on the process as described above, the temporal aspect of the project impacted on the way I conceived of the spaces of the project in several ways. Firstly in the idea of moving through, the idea of project as a journey, and the equally temporal and spatial impact that this had on the way that the project is experienced and conceived. At a similar scale of temporality was the notion of the moment - understanding the project as a series of sequential fragments in which specific events and times of day are related in space. Equally, the temporal cycle of the day was heavily present in the way that I thought about the spaces of the

project. How the project could appear differently if approached from the hillside on the morning commute down to the plane, or on the way back home up into the hills. How the project could be read differently in the day and the night time, expressed in the building elevation and material use, where perforate brick allows light into the building by day and transforms the project into a series of glowing lanterns by night. This also meant that the night lighting strategy for the project was important, in which looks to maintain the shadowy and mysterious qualities of Valparaiso's night time character, and transforms the project from a language of folding walls by day, into a landscape of floating planes by night.

CONCLUSIONS

The chair of Methods and Analysis describes its aim as 'to understand architecture, more than a response to program or problem solving, as the development of distinct approaches and tools'. I feel this is an aim that I fully responded to in my project, in which the how became more important than the what. The project followed a process which felt very fluid in nature between research and design, where the design process became a continuation of the spatial enquiry conducted at the beginning of the year, and the project was conceived as an exploration into the spatial potentials of an underused city condition. In order to accomplish these aims, I had to specifically structure my design method, as well as finding particular tools to realise the approach, such as the folded paper model. The chairs research into 'Constructing the Commons' also impacted my project, which looks to combine spaces and circulation ranging from through private, public and collective, and holds a form that is understood to be both building and accessible landscape.

At a personal level, I feel the challenges of the studio - the unfamiliar context and the place-led approach to brief development - have been equally difficult and rewarding, and have help me to develop personal tools for understanding and designing place, and to reflect on my own approach and position within the discipline of architecture. In the chair, we have been encouraged to take a position, and to understand our graduation project in relation to our own personal aspirations, agenda and approach, which has resulted in a project that, for me, has felt both personal and personally rewarding. I began the year with a conscious decision to push and challenge myself, and I feel that I have grappled with themes, method and process that have been new to me, and as a consequence I have opened up the way that I conceive of myself and my role as an architect, designer and thinker.