

Within the framework of the Public Building Studio, Public Realm in Rotterdam, I am focusing my analysis on the theme of Formality and Informality.

Formal: adj.

1. Done in accordance with convention or etiquette; suitable for or constituting an official or important occasion:

a. (of a person or their manner) strictly conventional

b. Having a conventionally recognized form, structure, or set of rules

c. Of or denoting a style of writing or public speaking characterized by more elaborate grammatical structures and more conservative and technical vocabulary.

2. Officially sanctioned or recognized

3. Of or concerned with outward form or appearance as distinct from content

a. Having the form or appearance without the spirit

b. Relating to linguistic or logical form as opposed to function or meaning

Informal: adj.

1. Having a relaxed, friendly, or unofficial style, manner, or nature

2. Denoting the grammatical structures, vocabulary, and idiom suitable to everyday language and conversation rather than to official or formal contexts

3. (Of economic activity) carried on by self-employed or independent people on a small scale, especially unofficially or illegally.

The Oxford Dictionary .

Public Space:

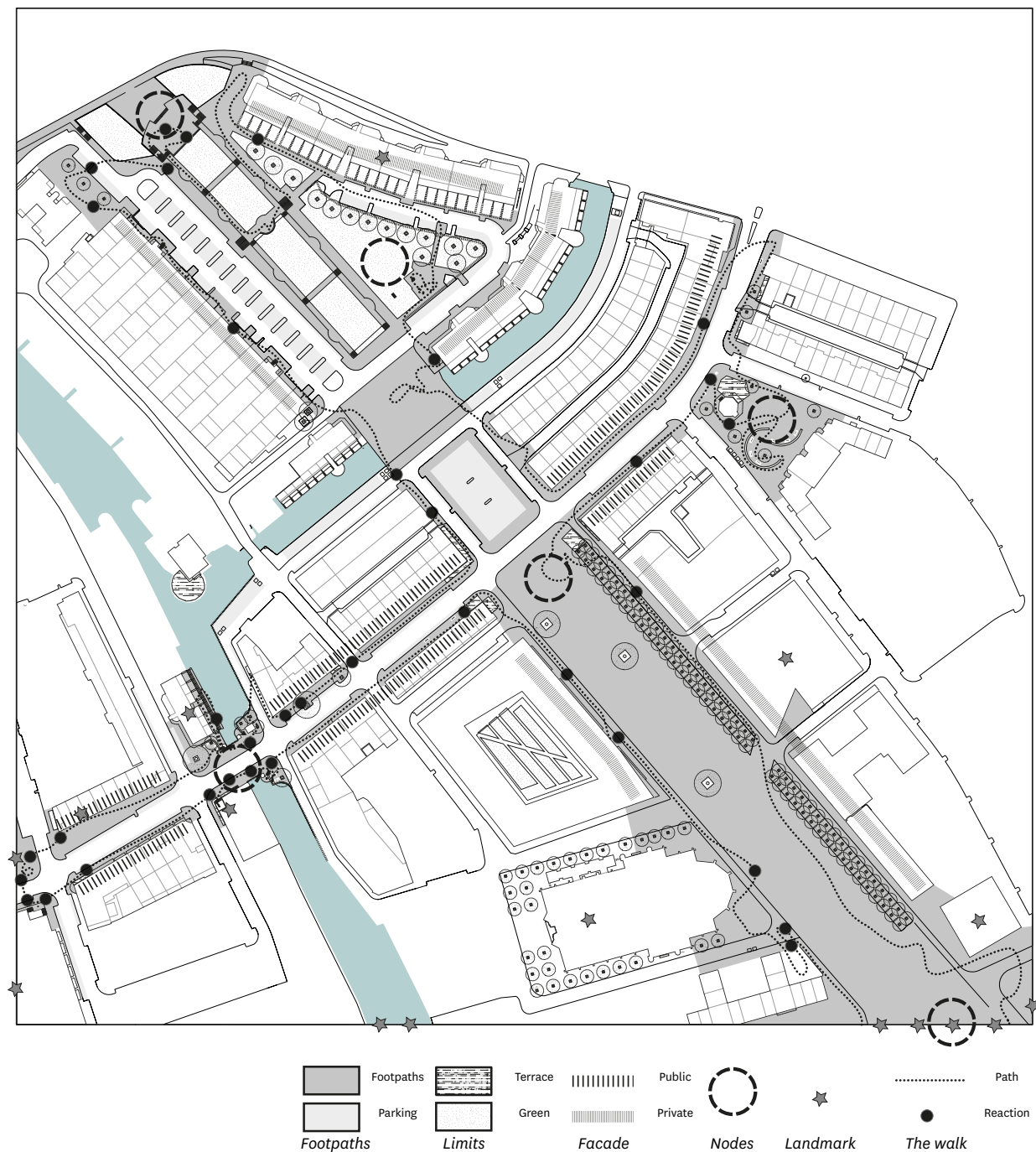
Space that anyone can appropriate.

Despite its worldwide influence as the largest European harbour, the city of Rotterdam still struggles to empower its dynamic. Destroyed by the war, the city eased itself from the heavy weight of tradition and historical structures. Indeed, the reconstruction of Rotterdam introduced a large panel of activities within a wide range of contemporary architecture complexes. However, the city itself became deeply shaped by the infrastructure, increasing the difficulty for appropriation by pedestrians and bikers, and therefore losing the power of a Port City.

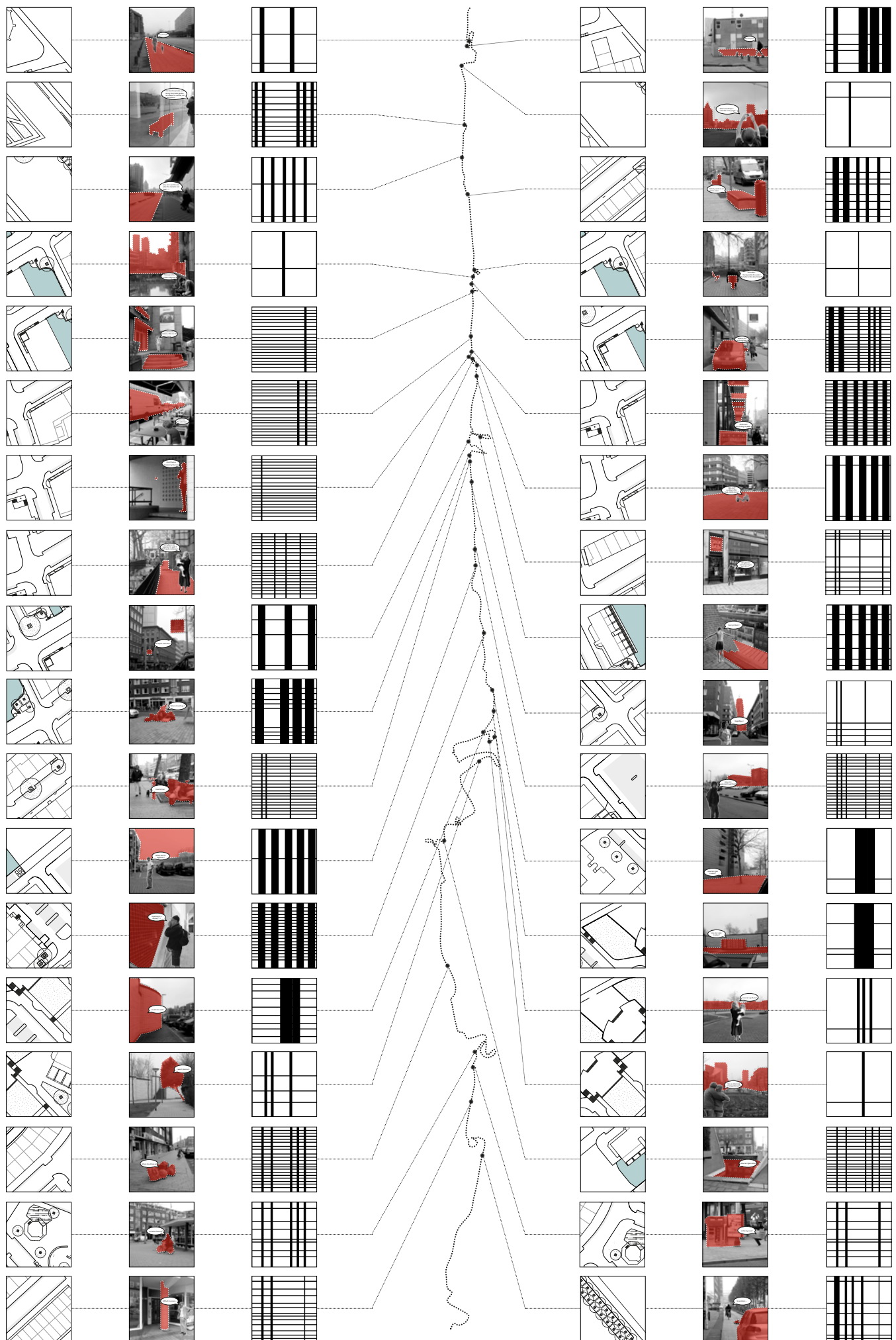
Nevertheless, the city of Rotterdam is a great example of a coexistence, and a balance between formality and informality. The exceptional dynamic environment created by the people brings a certain desire for alternative spaces. As architects, the purpose is to find the right balance between formal “shape”, by the means of design, and informal “activities”, by introducing a flexible environment adaptable to anyone.

The general position upon the development of the Masterplan is to question the limits of the design. My previous research on the gap between the designed (the planned) and the perception from it, stated that the public space of the site (Sint-Jacobsplaats) faces an “over designed” issue which limits the potential appropriation of the space by the people. Indeed, comparing the market square of Blaak with the Sint-Jacobsplaats, the limit of the designed becomes questionable: the Blaak could be considered as “simply” designed (a void) whereas the other square offers a clear design intention (the monumental terraces in combination with the symmetrical stairs). However both of the squares are diametrically opposite in their inner activities. Therefore finding the right balance between the designed, the programmed and the unplanned is the real challenge of our proposal.

According to Bernard Tschumi, there is no fixed relationship between architectural form and the events that take place within it . Therefore, creating the suitable framework to introduce a specific dynamic needs a deep understanding of the existing environment.



1.1 Analysis of the Site using the method of Kevin Lynch, showing the design of the reality.



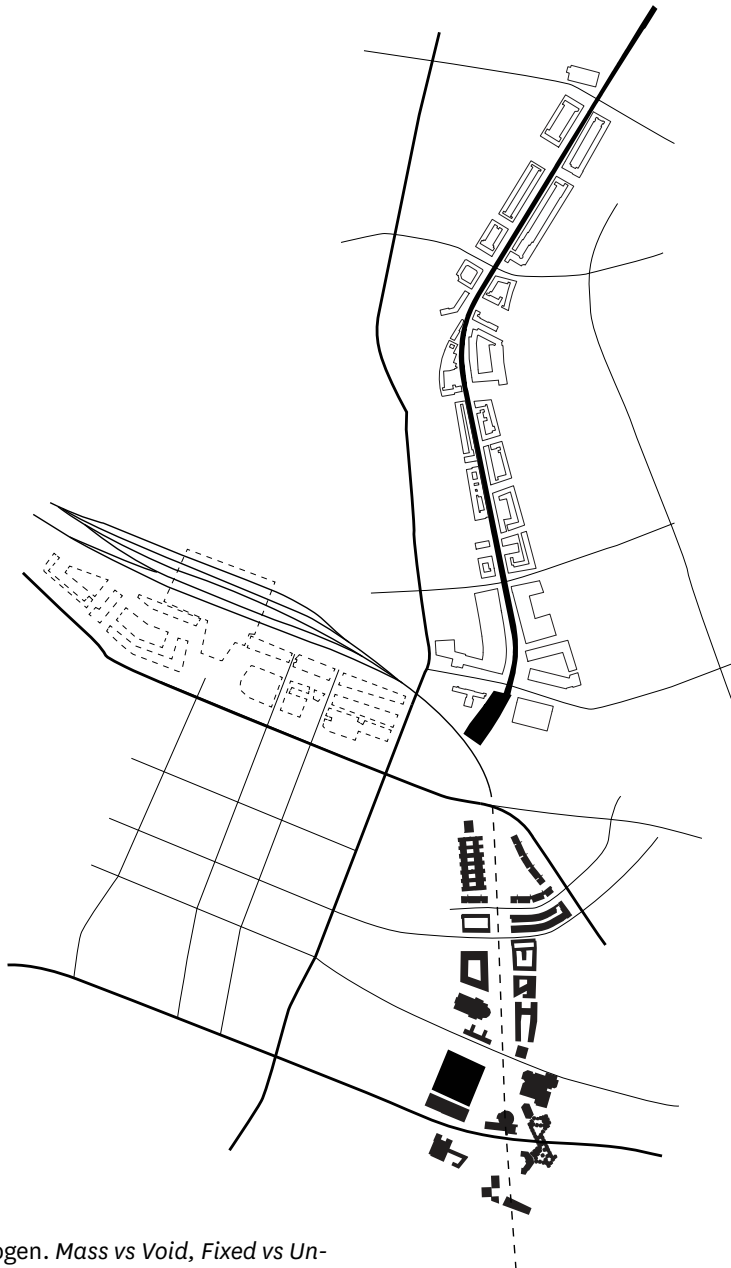
1.2 Analysis of the Site using the method of Tsumi, showing the perception of the reality, and highlighting the gap between designed and reality

Morphology:

At first sight, the overall morphology of the Blaak and its surrounding is quite striking. Indeed, the Blaak square and the Hofbogen seem to balance each other: The Square represents a large Void, cyclically full with a traditional program (the market), its structure is therefore unfixed despite a very formal environment. On the other hand, the Hofbogen represents a continuous mass (the arcades), which, thanks to the adaptability of the space, offers an informal way of inhabiting despite its fixed structure. The Sint-Jacobsplaats offers a critical position in between the Blaak, and the Hofbogen.

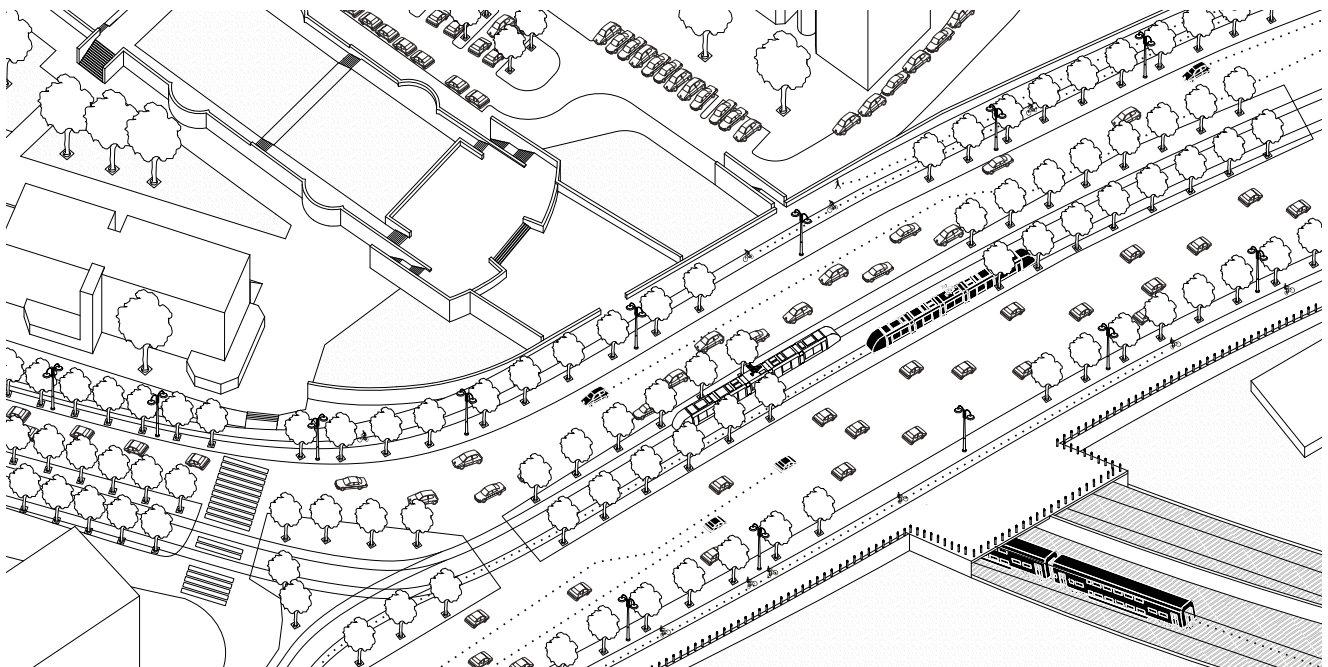
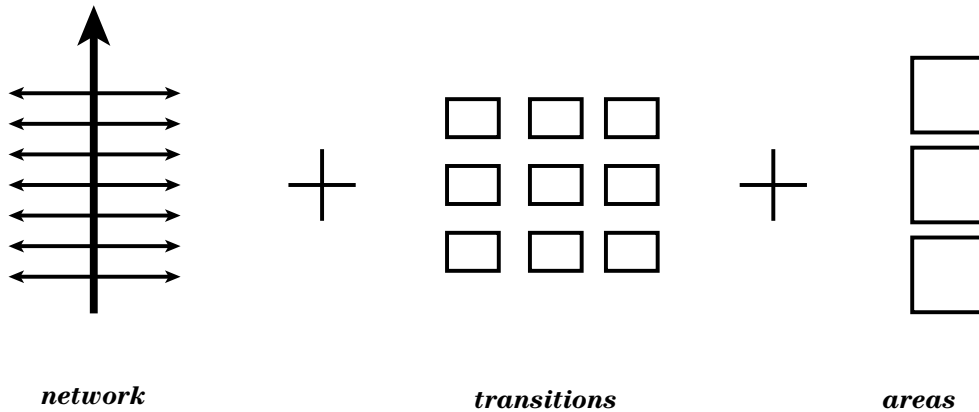
Analysing the general pattern of Rotterdam, one can notice 2 extremely different grids: the “new” City Centre (from Westersingel to Coolingsingel) which provide regular “Canvas”, and the “old” City Centre (the Blaak and the Hofbogen) which are organized into a “Spine”. The Spine and the Canvas are working parallel, but are only connected on the south (starting with the popular Meent Street), leading the city centre to be fed in only one direction, from the Centraal Station towards the South.

Despite its advantageous urban position, the Jacobsplaats appears to be a barrier to the general flow of the neighborhood. The main reason is the constraint of the infrastructure, deeply present on the square. The Sint-Jacobsplaats has the potential to be the missing link between the Blaak and the Hofbogen, and therefore to decongest the traffic of the area. To achieve and to embrace such a role as a mediator, the issue is to develop a system overpassing the infrastructural barriers. Indeed, in between the parking, the Weena and the railways, Sint-Jacobsplaats is, today, an accumulation of residual spaces.



The 3 layers Manual:

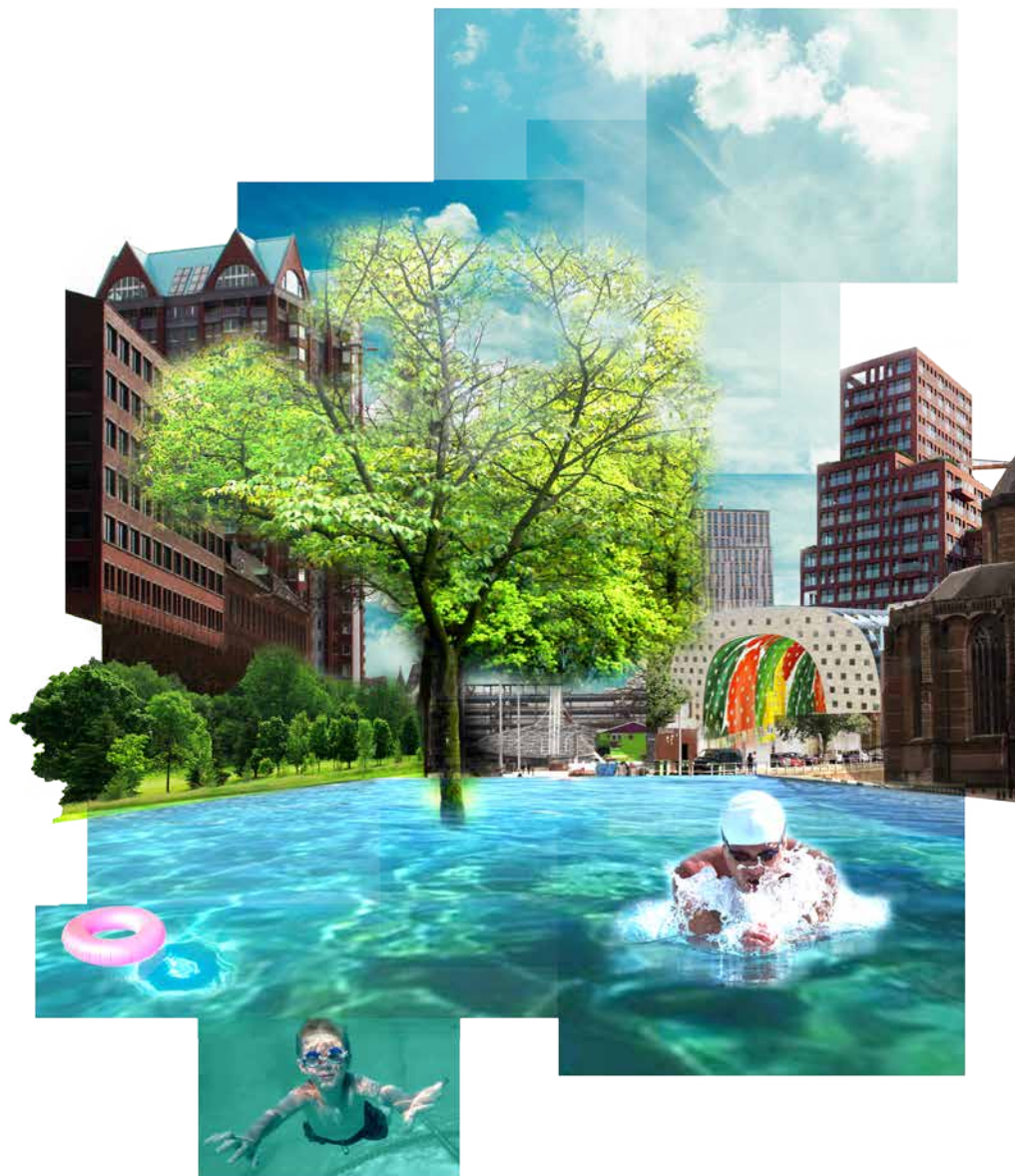
The emblematic structure of the Spine and the existing sequence need to be approached by an overlapping of 3 layers. This 3 layers-manual is a mean to understand the existing, and therefore allow the design to be fully integrated within it. The general outcome is a clear statement. The general morphology of the space (the formal) is already present. However, this existing state lacks of clarity, unity and identity (the informality).

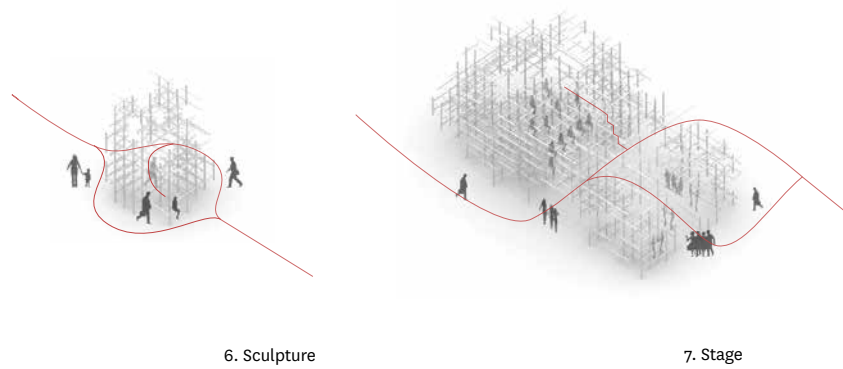
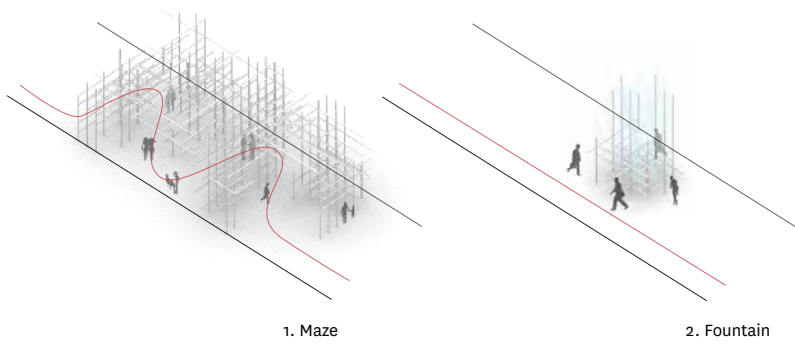


Vision:

Integrating the Sint-Jacobsplaats within a pedestrian sequence at the city scale, linking Blaak to the Hofbogen represents the challenge of the strategy. The definition of a clear identity to this walk sets into the different layers of representation, from the city icon to the neighbourhood needs.

Since the reconstruction of the destroyed city centre, Rotterdam became the stage of a fruitful and dynamic landscape of contemporary architecture, defining a new identity to the neighbourhood. Its artificiality is extremely present in the scenery of the Blaak, enhanced by the future Market Hall by MVRDV. Nevertheless, the definition of Rotterdam as a great Port City is missing in its “ordinary” streets. Indeed, the city seems to have a paradoxical relationship towards the water: despite its worldwide impact on the global market, the city centre doesn’t shine as an international harbour. The presence of water into the city seems very little since most of the canals are neglected. Rotterdam should empower its global role of a water city, and the first step is to enhance the existing presence of water, like the waterfront of the Westersingel, road of public art. In the case study of the Blaak, this paradox is even more obvious since the Blaak used to be hosting a large canal. The presence of the underground railways led to the loss of the water, leaving, therefore, an empty square. The “AquaSpine” is an answer to a clear lack of identity from the old city centre. The promenade represents a sequence at an urban scale, linking two parts of the city, and reflecting on its iconic value, while enhancing the neighbourhood quality of a rhythmic program using the image of water as a common feature along the promenade. The range of opportunities offered by the sequence is humongous, and represents a huge potential for the development of the city in the next decades. Creating coincidences along the promenade is a great challenge in order to develop the informality of the future Urban Promenade. The introduction of Follies, adaptable structures offering a possible program, at each intersections of streets is a clear reference to the Parc de La Villette by Bernard Tschumi. This continuous quest on the limit of the design led to the specific choice of “smallness” in order to draw the unplanned.





4.02 Examples of “Follies”



4.03 View from the Biennrotte

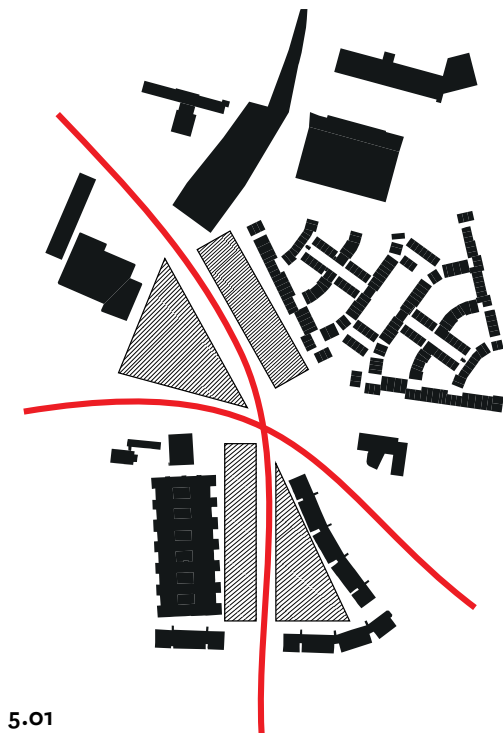
4.04 The Aquastripe



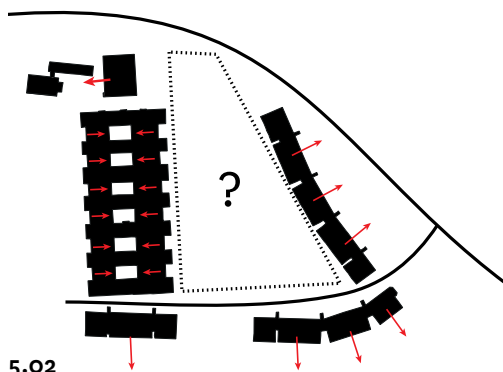
The Sint-Jacobsplaats:

The major difficulty of the existing Sint-Jacobsplaats, despite the infrastructure, is its huge lack of address. Most of its façade are created by the backdoor of the surrounding buildings, leaving the square as an undefined backyard. Therefore, the challenge is to manage to turn back the façade towards the Sint-Jacobsplaats, in order to fully integrate it within the urban Promenade.

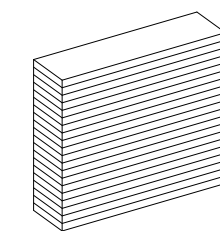
While the perception of the site (the Blaak Market, the Sint-Jacobsplaats) seems quite eclectic and without any common feature, the research on typologies raised some discoveries. Indeed, the results show that the urban fabric of the neighborhood differs from the classic system (blocks, plots, buildings). The site is surrounded by various “SuperBuildings”, ‘building-blocks’ which propose reinterpretations of a traditional typology. The soon to be Market Hall offers a reinterpretation of the classic Dutch row houses, while the Cubic House reinterprets the inhabitable bridge with individual houses. Therefore this typological method was the key asset in the design strategy since it directly led to the decision of a specific typology (the block with courtyard), and most importantly on the direction to follow for the personal development of the project.



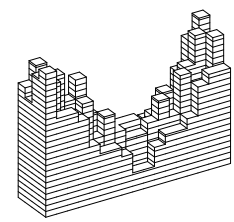
5.01



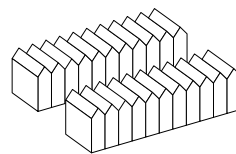
5.02



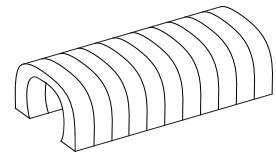
The Slab



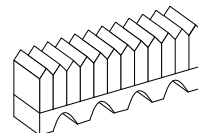
The Rotta Nova



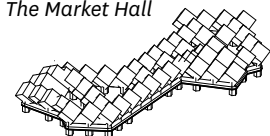
The Row houses



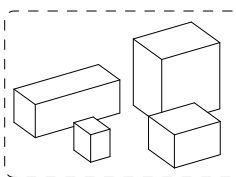
The Market Hall



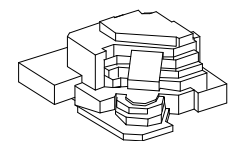
The Inhabitable Bridge



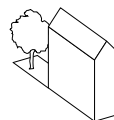
The Cubic Houses



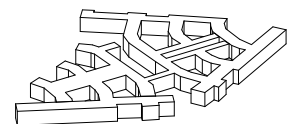
The Block Cluster



The Library



The Private house with a backyard



The Heliport

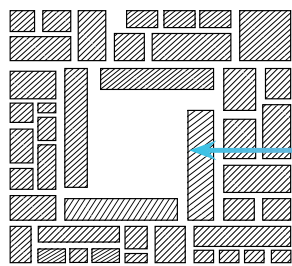
5.03

5.01 Boundaries created in the Jacobsplaats by infrastructure 5.02 The undefined backyard, due to a clear lack of address. 5.03 The buildings on the Binenrotte are reinterpretations of traditional typologies.

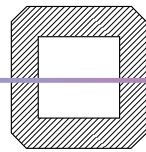


5.04 Proposal for the Sint-Jacobsplaats :
Defining the Facades of the AquaStripe

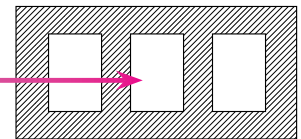
The last part of my research is a typological analysis of the courtyard block. Indeed, the direction to take towards a design is to research on a reinterpretation of the courtyard typology. Because of the morphological context of the building I will develop, the focus of my design is on the atrium, and on how to make a courtyard public. In order to achieve a consistent design method and concept, a deep understanding of the typology is needed. Most importantly the design proposed is a quest on how to shape the void in order to create a gradient of “publicness” from the atrium to the private courtyard. The program of the building will be a mix of thermal baths with dwellings and therefore those different types of courtyards correspond to the introduction of water within the mass, water which, like the Follies of the Promenade creates interactions and coincidences.



The Piazza, public square for the City



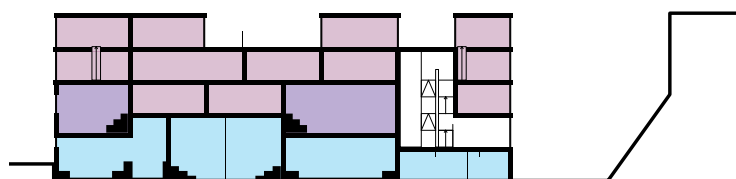
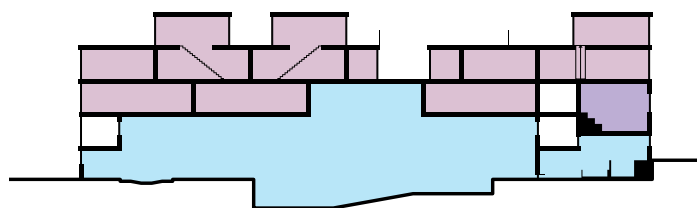
The Cerdà Plan, the public Courtyard for the Block



The Berlin Block, private courtyard for a portion of the Block

6.01 Analysis on the Courtyard Typology through time and culture.

The main concept of the design is to consider the thermal baths, and pools like the “public void”. Therefore the Bathyard proposes a gradient of publicness using baths as a mean for interactions between the visitors and the inhabitants. More precisely, the building offers a public plinths of Thermal Baths and Pools, inhabiting the courtyard of the block, and combination of dwelling with Collective Thermal Baths and Penthouses with Individual Thermal Bath. This diversity in scale of appartement offers a wide range of social population inhabiting the space.



6.02 Diagrammatic Sections of the Bathyard, showing the public, the collective, and the individual