

**Acts of Cleaning:** Transforming the interior space of the urban block.

## Reflection

My graduation project has from the beginning revolved around deriving a method to activate the interior space of a typical urban block in Teusaquillo, Bogota, for the proliferation of present and future activities. The importance of such work relying on the inherent value of using urban space to its maximum potential in order to facilitate densification. This is especially important in cities like Bogota, where since the 1950's the main response to a growing population has been the territorial expansion of the city. However, having reached its limit, the city itself requires densification strategies which tap into its own unused-potential. One of these potentials is the back side of the buildings, which collectively make up the interior space of the block. The importance of this space, was made clear to me by several case study buildings I studied while I was there. Demonstrating the performative qualities of this space to be restricted to parking, storage and clutter. Moreover, a lot of building have gone through several reconfigurations and changes since their conception, in order to accommodate different and greater activity a clear symptom of densification.

The approach I laid out at the start was to apply a 'mediating layer' to the interior using a toolbox of instrument I had gathered from analysing how different projects, delineated the space that formed a courtyard. My hypothesis was that by applying these tools to mediate between the different buildings and their specific activities and new ambiguous space it would allow for the successful activation of the space. Consequentially, through their application a method could be formulated to apply to other blocks. However, I found it immensely difficult, to apply these tools as a sole strategy to transform the interior space. For example, I was incredibly fixated on the use of the curve as a disciplinary tool to achieve my goal, which led me to propose complex designs which started to diverge from the projects intent and significance. I think it important to mention that the complexity of my initial proposals, were not due Leaving the formulation of a method unclear and blurry up until P3.

My approach required revision in order to start creating an overview of the various different design operations I was developing to achieve my aim. In tangent, I realized the complexity that I was facing contextually by my chosen site, in terms of the general size, different instances of buildings that were present and understanding their configuration. Contextually, I did the best I could and derived some general assumptions that could be made in order to inform my design method.

Methodologically, I set out to plainly illustrate the essential steps needed to activate and transform the interior space. These included:

1. Allowing access and perception to and of the interior space from the external side
2. Reorganizing the available space (the mediating aspect)
3. Reconfiguring the buildings to further enhance the quality of the interior space.

As a stepped strategy many of the operations I had been working on started to fall into place better, however I was still struggling with an underlying concept to help tie up the individual steps with one another. Without the concept, it also meant that I had no real design direction to power the method further. Through discussions with my tutors, it became clear to me that my heavy focus on the disciplinary tools and their application on the given condition was in itself a source towards a conceptual framework. It being, the design steps I had underlined, each with their own set of

architectural and technical operations, evoked the notion of cleaning. It touches upon many of the layers which build up the complexity of the block, providing a guiding concept when dealing with the different steps of my method.

Now I was able to frame my project as an act of cleaning, allowing all the bits and pieces I had worked on to fall in place under a clear methodological thread. Some of the pieces had to be thrown-out to my regret, as I was now able to see them through the lens of a concentrated conceptual framework for designing in an urban block. It summarize into four main 'Acts' which deal with the steps needed:

Acts of Cleaning:

1. Cleaning through obstructions
  - a. Removal of non-structural physical obstructions, allowing external perception and access to interior space
2. Cleaning through circular curvature
  - a. Reorganizing and formalizing the interior space with the use of circular and radial logic to provide a cohesive and sense of continuity in the face of a multifaceted orthogonal interior.
3. Cleaning through reconfiguration
  - a. Eliminating the need for opaque obstructing in existing configurations of buildings through the use of an open plan and centralized core.
4. Cleaning through transparency
  - a. Maximize the transparency between exterior and the interior of the block, to allow light and views.

This formulation was immensely helpful to creating a design and a method that could be systematically applied on different blocks. Having applied it to my chosen site I was able to answer many of the questions dealing with where, how and when to apply what operation.

### **The Urban Interior**

Having applied it to my chosen site, it laid out the ground work to further detail the site. I drew inspiration from contemplating the consequences of unlocking such a space and rethinking the relationship of the block and its buildings towards public space. Conceptually, I think of it as an interior space, where the different elements, like the ground and walls, can be further treated as interior space. In taking this position, I believe it provides my method with an added layer to make this space, which was previously neglected and under-performing in relation to wider urban needs, special. I asked myself what does it mean to design an exterior space as an interior using the intrinsic enclosed nature of the space. From this point of departure, I think I was able to bring the project over the finish line with a technical design which derived a systematic design method.

### **Testing the Method**

Applying the method is the last step in the projects life, which regrettable doesn't have much time dedicated to it given my struggle to formulate a concrete method under an overarching concept during the semester. Fortunately, through the clear formulation of the method I can produce much of the ground work to produce a sketch design and conduct some preliminary testing to compare

the results. It also allows me to further refine the necessary elements and assumptions of the design methodology.

Through the design process and development of the method I changed my position quite drastically in relation to how the interior space should be valued. As a potential architect, I felt the expectation to produce a design which apart from unlocking the space, accommodated new activity as a manifestation of its value. This expectation is what derailed my progress towards my main aim for the project. However, in following through with the notion of cleaning, I realised that designing a building in the space was unnecessary and antithetical to my aim. I now believe that cleaning the urban block is essential in order to create new relationships with under-valued spaces in the urban context.