# Reflection P4

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The relationship between research and design

The old centre of Genoa is a densely populated area. The buildings are relatively small, tall and packed together. Within this fine grain a few buildings stand out. They are of a whole different scale and do not seem to fit in the urban plan of the city. Most of these buildings were erected between the seventies and the eighties. In most of the areas where they stand now existing buildings were demolished to make way for these buildings. Even though this flattening took place these buildings do not seem to have a clearly defined boundary. They seem to almost organically grown into the space they inhibit. If there is the space for it they might even keep extending following the same principle. They seem to climb slopes of mountains and their tentacles penetrate the existing urban fabric and create their own space within already existing spaces. Sometimes they even incorporate existing buildings by just flowing around it and encapsulating it. Because of the sheer size of the buildings they often feel like a barrier, they disregard the urban fabric so people can't move the way they naturally want to move in this city and can't see where they go. These enormous buildings, however, contain an intricate system of walkways and transitional systems to make up for their intrusive character. They overcompensate in their endeavours by providing a passer-by with connections to almost every direction imaginable. Because of their size, the buildings cross through a lot of different ground conditions and often have to deal with the height differences of the mountain on which Genoa is built. Through a stacking of plinths the buildings provide entrances on every level.

Genoa itself has learnt to deal with and exploit height differences in their architecture and infrastructure. Through the city there is an intricate network laid out for pedestrians to get where they want to go. The system contains stairs, slopes, elevators, funiculars, subways and sometimes the buildings themselves function to transport a pedestrian from one place to another. Walls are no longer boundaries but place to carve out spaces for tunnel, houses and parking places. Roofs are no longer the end of the house and a plane you can't really see, because of the height differences what might be considered a roof from one level is considered a terrace from another level extending the natural terrace of the mountain artificially.
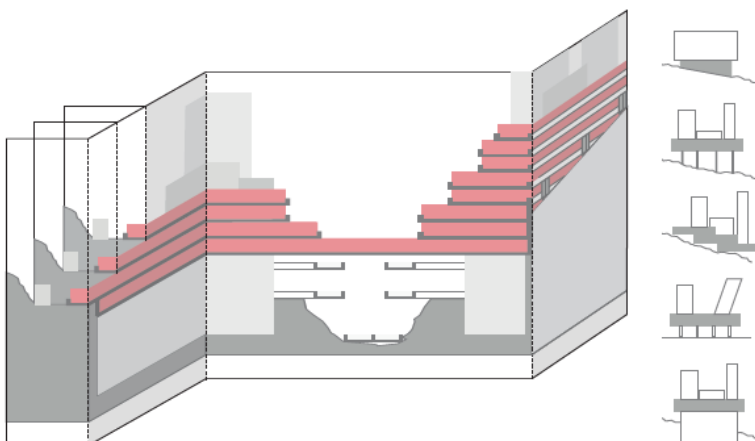
The buildings I've studied seem to try to put all these different interventions to work within themselves and consequently connect them to the already existing fabric in which they invaded. Within the building there is a small representation of how the city functions as a whole while at the same time it also tries to function within the current system. These plinths mediate between the building and the city and deal with the multitude of issues raised between the existing urban fabric, the ground conditions and the new building which is put into place. It is the plinth that deals with the height differences, that ties the different parts of the new building together and that spreads into the urban fabric like tentacles of the building while at the same time maintaining existing connections and making new ones.
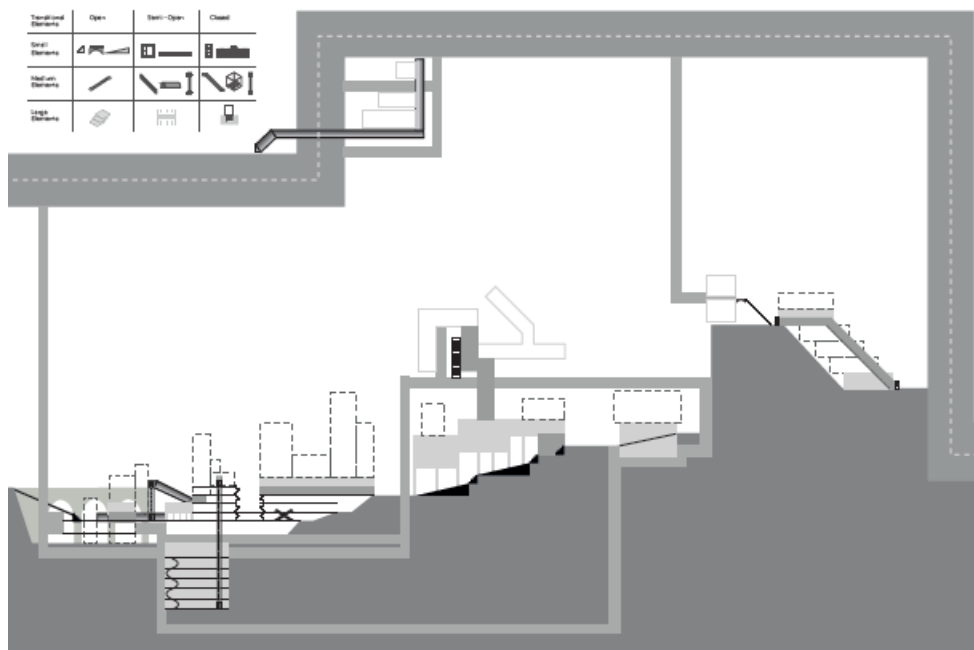
For the location of my design I considered the old city wall/retaining wall of Genoa. In this place the old city, fast traffic(*Sopraelevata*) and the big works of the port lie very close together yet there is no relationship between them. The height difference of the wall and the elevation of the S*opraelevata* function as borders in a city where height differences and elevations usually are exploited to the fullest. The port itself functions also as a border, but of a different kind, because of customs the port needs an administrative border. However, they maintain this border throughout the whole port but exceptions can be seen, the *Fiera* for instance, an exposition and event area does not reside within these borders. Also for the users of the yacht club can freely enter and leave their enclave in the port and one could argue the restrictions regarding customs are not necessary on the docks where they merely repair ships.

On both sides of the wall I found residual spaces through mapping of the area. Some formed by the orography, some by gaps in the urban fabric and some were the wall and the S*opraelevata* would suddenly diverge. The wall itself is also a big residual space which is only exploited in very few instances. Especially in a city where pedestrians move almost as easy vertically as horizontally this creates a big opportunity. The wall is just another ground condition and together with the residual spaces scattered along it can be activated as a plinth to the city. Through a series of interventions along the wall I strive to redefine the relationship between the orography, the port and the old city. While excavation works in the old city create passage on the wall itself this subtraction actually

creates more space while in the port this act of subtraction while taking away space restores the spot to what it used to be before the harbour was created.

The relationship between my graduation project, the studio and my master program

The studio topic is spaces of accumulation. The studio inquires the city as a catalogue of conflicting spatial programs where the design will be used as a synthetic act rather than a response to a problem. The site I have chosen consists of different ground conditions with conflicting programs. On the one hand the old city with messy street patterns built upon a hill but open to all and on the other hand the extremely well regulated closed of port area. In between these areas, functioning as borders, the old city wall with a road on top and the S*opraelevata*, an elevated road which completely bypasses large parts of the city and the port. The intention of the project is to become the mediating factor between these different ground conditions and programs and to redefine their relationship to each other. Designing with *tabula rasa* is an illusion, there is always a context and a building always needs to react to local conditions even disregarding the context is a reaction to it and taking an opposite stance. In my design I even dig away a piece of land which was considered tabula rasa, since it was constructed on the sea creating land out of nothing, and showing it actually is a context to be considered by revealing what lays hidden under this *tabula rasa* transforming it back to the ground condition it used to be.

Elaboration on research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio methodical line of inquiry, reflecting thereby upon the scientific relevance of the work.

To gain an understanding of the city and my site I started mapping on different scales. I mapped out routes pedestrians take and which systems they use to get around, I did this on the scale of the city as well as on the scale of individual buildings. This provided understanding of how people and buildings deal with the different height differences and ground conditions of the city. This led to an understanding that in Genoa vertical surfaces should also be considered ground conditions waiting to be exploited. I mapped the different surface conditions of the old city wall completely. Around the wall I started mapping residual spaces in which actions could be taken. To gain a new understanding of the wall and to really consider the wall as another ground condition I abstracted the wall and surrounding spaces by flattening the area in a drawing regarding the different ground conditions on the same level. Then, taking the wall as central element of the design, I straightened the wall and arranged the spaces on both sides of the wall accordingly. Throughout my research abstracting the site through drawings and has been models has been the main way to reconsider the way to deal with the borders, folding and abstracting them till they became clear as ground conditions which could be dealt with using the logic of the city. From this point I started contaminating these ground conditions with interventions that fit into the system of the city.
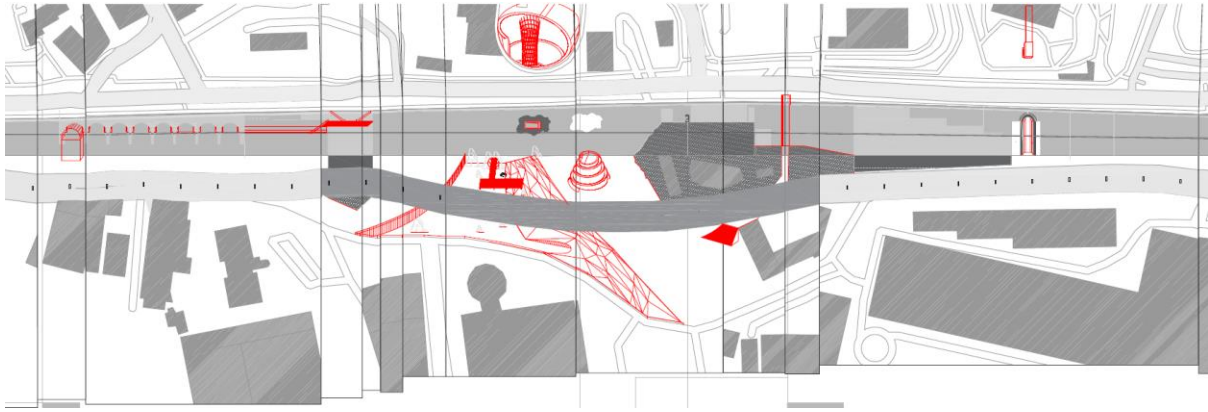
In this residual space between the port and the old city both programs start claiming ground through my interventions using a different dialectic. While these interventions stand and function on their own, the pedestrians can also experience these interventions one after the other as a walk along the wall area. This way the interventions fulfil different functions on different scales. Functioning as transitional spaces and elements as well as a destination on its own. In this way activating an area which has been largely untapped due to its location between and underneath borders.

Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework

My graduation project is situated on the border between the small scaled urban fabric of the old city and the oversized buildings of the port. By exploring how these different conditions can react to each other, ways of intervening can be found which are applicable to other cities. Usually old factories and similar large-scale buildings with programs that conflict with the programs of the inner cities are only being appropriated by other programs when its initial program ends. Until that time the building and its environment function as a barrier. In my graduation project, I explore how to open up this barrier without having to wait for the program to end. Since Genoa owes its continuing existence to the port, the prediction is that it will rather grow than end its function. Instead of the conventional method of letting the city move back into an industrial area that is no longer functional my intervention will redefine the relationship between the port and the city and reclaim ground in a functional industrial area.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

The port is an ever expanding and modernizing entity that keeps occupying more and more of the coastline pushing the city towards the hills. The city itself is shrinking and economically very much dependent on the port. The port is gaining more power over the city and is cutting Genoa off from the coast. With my interventions, I qualify the undefined spaces between the harbor and the old city reclaiming this land for the city and its inhabitants. Instead of maintaining this buffer zone between port and city, my design proposal mediates between these two conflicting programs. Since the city cannot exist without the port but also should not let the port dictate the way of living in Genoa I strive to find a new way of coexistence between the two.

For my P2, I focused in my design on the *Fiera* area it being an anomaly in the port since it is not closed off. Designing one intervention between the port and the old city turned out to be not enough to start reclaiming these residual spaces. This design exercise showed me that I had to refocus my efforts to the old city wall along which my interventions are scattered.

It was difficult for me to decide which actions to take to overcome the borders on my site. It seemed clear that it had to be an interaction between stereotomic and additional operations considering the history of genoa of carving out the mountains on the one hand and on the other hand claiming parts of the sea by filling it with rocks and sand. By studying the wall surface and the urban fabric I hoped I would find input to inform my decisions. It did till a certain extent but proved hard for me to actualize. Only by experimenting with stereotomic operations in parts of the design the necessary interventions became clearer. I have been stuck for a long time trying to come up with conventional programs to deal with this space which did not work out. This special unconventional site asked for a different approach. What came out is not a conventional building with a conventional program but rather a series of interventions along the old city wall where architecture landscape architecture and even land art meet. The intervention reveals aspects of the site which were not apparent before and allowing the visitor to experience them, thus creating a new interest in this site.