

# The Spectacular City

## Inhabiting the Boundary Zone of Valparaiso's City Centre

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### Project Description:

The focus of the graduation studio Positions in Practice within the chair of Methods of Analysis was the urban context of Valparaiso, a coastal port city in Chile. The project positions itself in the boundary zone between two parts of the city; the 'plane' of the city centre and the surrounding 42 hills or *cerros* that fan out around the bay. Inspired by the incredible spatial theatricality found across scales in this amphitheatre city, the project looked to engage with the theme of The Spectacular, both programatically and spatially, in order to unlock the potentials of an underused city condition.

Sited along the edge of the plane in the declining Puerto neighbourhood to the west of the city, the proposal addresses this boundary at a physical level, offering a means to connect the steep sectional division found at the site and rejecting the front/back dichotomy found almost exclusively along this city-wide zone. Instead, 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 approach.

Simultaneously, the project looked to intervene into the specific spatio-temporal rhythm of Valparaiso, a daily cycle shared by city residents of down and up the hillsides. Here the boundary is understood to exist as a functional and temporal division. In response, the project proposal at a programmatic level consists of a calendar of events, curated under the theme of The Spectacular, imagined to occur at the site across the year. A combination of classes, residencies, events and city wide festivities, the calendar aims to connect the neighbourhood with the city, provide temporal diversity from the cycle of the day to that of the year, and to embrace a project that is open to change, flexibility and growth.

In placing its students in an unknown and non-Western context, the graduation studio of the chair of Methods and Analysis challenges its students to re-evaluate their tools for analysis, design and intervention when confronted with a complex social, political, and spatial condition far removed from their own. In response to these questions, as well as the challenge posed by the project of generating a spatial proposal without a fully predetermined programme or brief - rather a calendar of events - the project process took a particularly spatial line of enquiry, where on a personal level I felt most comfortable seeing my role as that of a spatial enabler, my contribution to explore, amplify and unlock the existing spatial potentials of the city. The project began as a purely spatial investigation, testing massing and spatial language through quick sketch models in order to explore the potentials of the site and begin to instinctively to grasp an understanding of project scale and specific moves within the surrounding context. Working between model studies and plan development, the project developed in open dialogue between formal language and program, materialising simultaneously as a programmatic arrangement and a spatial language of folding planes. 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.

Approaching the project in this way allowed me to develop a personal and project specific method of intervention, an equally challenging and rewarding process of designing not just project but process. In doing so, the project became a symbiosis of method, project and spatial philosophy, encompassed in the idea of the 'fold'. The project is imagined not as a fixed set of spaces, but as a series of journeys, an unfolding sequence of rich spatial experiences that might be rearranged depending on approach, purpose or time of day.