BRIDGING PARAISÓPOLIS:
PERVERTING MODERNISM

REFLECTION REPORT

“...TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE TO ADAPT TO THE RULES OF THE FAVELAS, IN OTHER WORDS, YOU MUST KNOW THE REASONS WHY DID THEY EMERGE, HOW DID THEY GROW AND DEVELOP.”
Stefano Boeri

“PEOPLE CAN INHABIT ANYTHING. AND THEY CAN BE MISERABLE IN ANYTHING AND ECSTATIC IN ANYTHING. MORE AND MORE I THINK THAT ARCHITECTURE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.”
Rem Koolhaas

“A SPACE IS NOT A PLACE UNTILL IS USED FOR A PURPOSE OTHER THAN WHICH THE DESIGNER INTENDED.”
David Engwicht
PRODUCT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Favelas have been problematized with conventional paradigms, in most of the cases, with short term or without any success. Fortunately, nowadays, the issue that has been discussed about them is no longer on the removal or relocation of its inhabitants to areas outside the city.

The urbanization of these areas has become a vested and an indisputable right. The question is no longer just social and political, but also includes the cultural and aesthetics dimensions.

Besides being part of our culture and artistic heritage, favelas emerge through a unique vernacular architectural and urban process, which not only differs from, but is the very opposite of the traditional design tools from architecture and urbanism scholars. It also composes its own aesthetic, which can be labelled as the ‘aesthetic of favelas’ or the ‘favela pattern’. This aesthetic is completely different from the aesthetics of, what is so called, the ‘formal city’, and has singular characteristics.

The rational logic of the architects and planners is still relevant and they end up imposing their own aesthetic, which is related to the ‘formal city’. So to say, the favela should become a ‘formal’ neighbourhood for a better integration with the rest of the city to become possible.

Favelas are part of the city for over a century. The favelas emerged before the dense occupation of cities and the domination of real estate interests. Following this logic, is a formal integration needed? Wouldn’t this be an authoritarian imposition of a formalistic aesthetic towards a standardization of the urban fabric?

Most of the current urbanization projects end up causing the destruction of the original architecture and urban fabric of the favelas in order to create impersonal spaces. Why not to accept the aesthetic of the favelas as legitimate rather than apply architectural and urban aesthetics expectations from traditional practice? Why the traditional standards, learned in the academies, are always the examples to be imposed rather than the inventive and rich, both culturally and formally ‘favela pattern’? Why not try to learn from the ‘favela pattern’ formal complexity and richness?

A different way of acting, inspired by the favelas, could be interesting, not just for the favelas themselves, but for the city as whole, specially to its borders and frontiers, where architects and urban planners tend to find serious difficulties of intervention, especially due to the lack of the traditional architecture and urban procedures to adequately themselves to these contemporary extreme urban conditions.

A critical questioning facing the ingenuity and complexity of the favelas’ spaces seemed to me almost inevitable for any architect, especially for those who believed in or were influenced by the simplicity of the modernist doctrine. A ‘new urbanism’ must take in account the complexity and indeterminacy of the contemporary context of the cities.

GOAL

To act in a different way towards the orthodox discourse and design of the favelas, prioritizing their qualities rather than imposing traditional solutions.

To explore the richness (spatial, cultural, social, and others) of the favelas, in order to understand the peculiarities which form those spaces, and apply those aspects in the design.

To find the proper balance between romanticizing and problematizing the favelas.
PROCESS

METHOD DESCRIPTION

Mapping the spatial conditions, and hidden forces of the Favela Paraisópolis. Elaborate diagrams, maps, physical and digital models, texts, and drawings. Visit the site and talk with local authorities, planners, and inhabitants. Research on a wide range of aspects, such as history, cultural, social and economic issues, mapping, diagrams, representation of unstable conditions and related topics among them all. Get involved in activities related to the favela’s inhabitants, such as internet based forums for discussion and news of the community and NGO’s digital discussion forums. Case studies of past projects related to my design.

LITERATURE AND GENERAL PRACTICE PREFERENCE

In this section there is a list with the most important sources for the development of the work. Further, within the research booklet, a full list with references will be given.

BOOKS


ARTICLES

Alexander, Christopher. A CITY IS NOT A TREE.

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Vidler, Anthony. DIAGRAMS OF DIAGRAMS: ARCHITECTURAL ABSTRACTION AND MODERN REPRESENTATION.

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Wigley, Mark. PAPER, SCISSORS, BLUR.

REFLECTION

RELEVANCE

To contribute to the discourse over Favelas. To think and act within a different perspective about these spaces, neither grassroots, neither top down. To depicted the Favela to general public, in a didactic way, showing its problems and qualities. To demystify the label ‘just problems’ inherent to the context, approaching the ‘formal city’ and the ‘informal city’ beyond, than just, the economic and labour sphere.
To understand the history of Paraisópolis it is needed to go back to 1921. The area where the favela is located today was part of Fazenda do Morumbi which was divided in 2200 plots by União Mútua Companhia Construtora e Crédito Popular S.A. The infrastructure of the allotment has not been fully implemented and many of those which purchased plots have never taken actual possession neither paid the taxes.

That is, as has been verified many times in the history of São Paulo, public or private developments which had not been completed eventually become abandoned regions. For this reason they became a call for informal occupation.

Today Paraisópolis complex is considered the second largest favela in the city of São Paulo with 55,590 people and 20,832 properties (officially), plus a network of civil institutions working in social projects within the community. Paraisópolis is divided into 5 parts (Grotinho, Grotão, Brejo, Antonico and Centro) and has two other adjacent favelas (Jardim Colombo and Porto Seguro) originated around the same time as Paraisópolis.

Paraisópolis has a peculiar characteristic which distinguishes it from most of Brazilian favelas. The slum is located on a regular urban grid, which is reminiscent of the first urbanization project for the area. The idea of creating a regular allotment ended up creating one of the most paradoxical spatial conditions in the city, where formal and informal city layers overlap.

In Paraisópolis the "center", not as geographic location but as the hub of specific activities, is not limited to a single point as in the traditional city, not just to the edges like most of the slums, but it is found throughout the area, specifically along the urban grid. Thus, virtually all the blocks’ boundaries are "center".

The region of Grotão due topographical reasons interrupts the continuity of the orthogonal urban fabric. That is, what should have been divided into smaller blocks turned into a super cluster of shacks located in risk areas with the largest urban, economic and social problems of the whole community.

The design is concerned to reconnect the Grotão with the rest of the community. The proposal was to create a bridge that allows vertical connections that act in local level and a horizontal connection which is the continuation of the grid that performs in a higher urban level.

The structure was designed so that its program can be modified easily with low cost. The project contains a school, a library, a sports zone, green areas, spaces for temporary activities (fairs, exhibitions, or any activity that does not require special infrastructure) plus a street for light vehicles. In a way, the bridge is part of the urban grid.

The bridge operates in a highly urban level. The connection can be used to improve other areas of Paraisópolis besides Grotão with the least possible impact on existing buildings. In an architectural context, the interesting point of the project is it to be a very flexible open structure.

Structure can be evaluated emotionally; envelopes will surely also be. Structure and envelope can be separated from each other. User's emotions might change. However, structure (the skeleton) is the most unchangeable component of the architectural artefact and can only be changed with great difficulty. Envelopes can be changed relatively easily. The function map (which is concerned to the user of the building) is what can be changed most easily.
BIBLIOGRAPHY - RESEARCH


Chatterjee, Gautam "Consensus versus Confrontation" Habitat Debate, June 2002, 8:2.


P5 Reflection Report

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Title: Bridging Paraisópolis:
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P5 is a moment that deserves a self-criticism rather than a design explanation. The path until this moment was long, though and pleasurable. It was a period where I learned a lot and shared my experiences with people of diverse knowledge. In every learning process there are always setbacks from which you can learn even more.

To not present my P5 a month after P4 came to me in a very surprising away. First I was very upset with the situation but it ended up in a clearer and consistent self-critic conclusion. Staying away from the design and research a couple months and then returning to them with fresh mind showed me exactly where are the weaknesses of it.

The research started not so clear. I was floating over a lot of different topics and trying to reach them all at the same time. In the middle of the process I had to choose in which direction my research was going. I had two options. The first was to discuss about the spatial conditions of the favelas focusing more on Paraisópolis. The second alternative was to research about the favelas’ dwellers. I chose for the second option because as an architect I believe that we design for the people primarily. My research had no directly relationship with my final design. On the other hand it made me realize that when working in a favela context architects are not heroes, somehow are powerless. The best we can do is design spaces or draw strategies to improve the public space, the accessibility, the use of risk areas, infra-structure and so on. We as architects cannot change the social and economic situation of the favela's inhabitants but we can give them improvements on their spatial conditions of living.

I believe today that the power of my design is not focused on the program which it contains, rather in the urban scale by reconnecting the former urban grid, the provision of new accesses to the bottom of the valley which is isolated from the rest of the community, and the provision of an empty land as public space which can be filled with the most diverse program according to the population needs and wills, or it can remains programless as a pure public territory.

The project has been already shown to the community via Gilson, the community leader, through their website and few other means. So far it has been accepted really well by the local population and the urban planners and NGO’s that work in that area. On the hand there are few people skeptical about the size of the intervention, but these people really believe in the idea of reconnecting the grid.

I am really glad that I could show the project to the community and open up a new discussion in the context.