

# Spaces of permanence

Transforming streetscapes in Teusaquillo

Reflection Paper

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Methods and Analysis . Positions in Practice

## Methods and Analysis – Positions in Practice

The studio of Methods and Analysis encourages students to emphasize the exploration and developments of individual approaches of analysis and design. This puts great emphasis on the process of the project rather than challenges the traditional role and tools of the architect, which is a crucial act against the background of constant changes in the profession through digitalization, globalization and other factors. Furthermore the chair of Methods and Analysis investigates new balances between what is called the public and private sphere and addresses this by a focus on the commons, resources of daily life that belong to the community. Referring back to the title of the graduation studio, it is also understood as a process of finding an own position within the field of architecture and the many modes of working. Within the provided context of the project, the individual choice of focus remains autonomous. The evolving project is the outcome of an agile working process that emphasizes a continuous exchange between research and design, the abstract and the present, finally connecting the individual position with the built practice in the provided context.

### Meeting the context

The project takes place in the complex environment of Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. With a population of about 9 million people and the geographical location of 2.700m above sea level, the city is in stark contrast to any place in the European context. An early fieldtrip was indispensable to get to know the area of intervention, Teusaquillo, which is located next to the historic centre of Bogotá. Many educational institutions and a range of cultural and artistic functions can be found in this area.

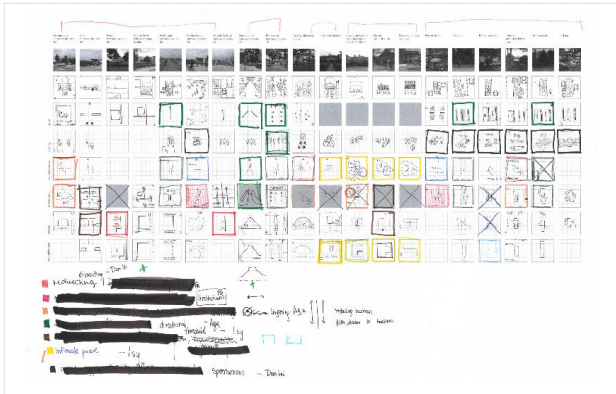
The first encounter in Bogotá was shaped by a workshop based on the method of "Thinking through things", letting an object without personal attachment guide us to gain a different perspective on the built environment. It was a successful way of stripping off possible cultural preconceptions and instead being completely open to the found impressions. The object successfully allowed me to focus on small details that I would have likely not noticed without it and it led to a fascination with the ground that became a driving force in the project. "Thinking through things" was most effective in the beginning stage of the project, yet the thought of stripping meaning off an element and objectively thinking through it has continued in the background of my project development and is conceptually intertwined with later research on the comma and the pause.

Apart from this, I perceived Teusaquillo to represent a functionalist approach of urban organization. This is due to a clear division of roads for movement and cars and parks for recreation and pedestrians, paired with a clear cut between what is perceived as *public* and *private*. To be precise, the *public* in this case describes collective, outside citizen space, whereas the *private* refers to each individual's space of withdrawal and shelter, which can almost only be found behind closed walls. Seemingly residential streets often hold public functions that are completely hidden at first glance. A thorough investigation of these "Hidden Spaces of Teusaquillo" and the contrast of their lively interiors and defensive street facades made it necessary to find new ways of analysis and representation to make something invisible visible. Although the actual hidden institutions have not been of greater importance in this master project, their existence has led to my initial research question. Looking back at the time in Bogotá, the workshop as well as my own site explorations have been a complementation of personal interest and detached investigation, which in my opinion is an important combination to build on a fascination and stay focused at the same time.





After recognizing different urban pauses and comparing them with regards to spatial organization, activity, exclusivity and other common nominators within the research group, common qualities of the pauses could be defined. One of the qualified pauses, *The Intimate Pause*, was mainly identified in the afore mentioned Hidden spaces and grew into a relevant theoretical investigation in the further process.



## 02. Urban Intimacies and the relationship between research and design

The intimate pause was only found in locations that withdrew themselves from the outside. Consequently this raised questions of why perceived intimate moments could only be found behind closed walls and whether meaningful interaction could be enhanced in collective urban space. Further investigations of the concept of intimacy revealed its great complexity. Intimacy is a concept with fuzzy boundaries and cannot be characterised with a clear definition. Therefore I defined a set of intimacies that can be imagined in the urban space, including intimacies of different natures: playful, personal, shared, ambient, protective, performative or isolated. Trying to directly translate these notions of intimacies into spatial measures and interventions has proven to be difficult due to highly subjective perception of intimacy and environment. Although factors as spatial proximity and Zumthor's mentioned interaction of light and material and resulting contrast of light and shadow can introduce a sense of intimacy, there is no common nominator to accommodate several kinds of intimacies. I accepted that the undefined characteristics of the concept paired with the lack of specified building tasks or sites became an unproductive way of developing a clear project frame. Sequentially I realized that the investigated moments of intimacy were, again, moments of pause. Understanding that no pause can occur without manipulating an existing flow of movement lead to an intervention that does not aim to create a specific sense of intimacy, but to create spaces that allow their occurrence.

### Intervening in the context- The street

The reflections of movement and pause have finally resulted in a project that addresses the street as the conclusive manifestation of movement. The intervention is therefore located in a typical street of Teusaquillo. A street that is part of the bigger network of streets, merely a space of travelling through. A street that is perceived as residential, but contains other activities despite its appearance. A street with buildings aligned that protect and disconnect themselves from the outside. Most residential streets of the area contain a further separation of the private from the public that is articulated by a continuous layer of fenced front yards. This repetitive, dominant element shapes the appearance of various streets in Teusaquillo and does not allow for any interaction within. The street is part of the machinery of urban circulation based on efficiency, functionality and the separation of actors, influenced by Le

Corbusier's modernist urban planning ideals that he presented during several visits in Bogotá. This also comes with a rather one-directional understanding of safety and ownership that is mostly directed at the belongings of the inhabitants without considering safety on the street and for the pedestrian. Building walls and fences might give the impression of protecting our possessions. Yet, a fence is an obstacle that can be overcome easily. On the contrary it does not enable natural observation of the street to prevent crime and improve the feeling of safety. An empty, fenced-off street cannot be inhabited, and no interaction paired with no observation leaves the pedestrian isolated.

The resulting intervention seeks to reimagine the spatial organization in a street, connecting its actors with each other to multiply the possibilities of interactions. In order to challenge the found organization of typical residential streets, I analyzed and dissected one of them and came up with a mode of intervention that can be applied to other streets as well.

Based on existing rhythms of facades, access to buildings, environmental considerations and contrast between intense space and empty space, the intervention combines two main components: a permanent operation of the ground organization including landscaping elements that slow down movement and create areas of permanence, and a layer of a modular, flexible structure that extends existing buildings and creates an intermediate space towards the street. The structure itself, similar to the comma, has no initial attached meaning to it. Yet it serves as a frame, a connector that can inherit many different meanings, depending on the context and use. This structure can be an extended little garden and seating space that is oriented towards the street, or it can become an in-between-space that relates to the inside of existing functions, yet maintaining direct visual contact to the collective space.

The street evolves into a space that allows for interaction, multiple activities and shared use. It is not intended to create an attractive environment only for residents, but also to encourage local businesses to flourish and intensify the identity of the area. Although the street is designed individually and sensitive to its existing composition, the systematic mode of working with suggestions to composition, materiality and traffic organization can be applied to other urban axes and serve as planning principles for the future. It was tested and succeeded on several streets of the same type, yet with each street there is a strong need for new analysis of existing patterns and individual considerations are vital.



#### Reflecting on Methodologies and Modes of Working

Literature has already been mentioned as a great inspiration that guided me throughout the research and design process. Looking into other disciplines was an inspirational process that allowed me to take on unconventional perspectives that I would not have considered otherwise. This helped to gain deeper understandings of an unknown context and my own architectural intentions.

Another form of literary work, writing, has been a helpful means of reflection and process analysis. After some difficulties translating the research on intimacy into a design, reflective continuously produced texts have been very helpful to test whether the argumentation of the design following the preceding research is consistent. This approach touches upon the proposed agile structure of the studio of constantly connecting absence to presence within the project. In this case, writing has proven itself useful to link theoretical ideas and research with design. Text also helps describe the atmospheres and elements that cannot be shown in plans and section. Writing from different perspectives such as from the pedestrian, the cyclist, the resident or the visitor helped to understand the qualities of this intervention for different people at different times of use. In the many ways literature has been linked to this project, whether through direct connections or as a reflection mechanism, it held a continuous value throughout all stages of the project process.

Taking on an abstract concept such as intimacy in order to question our environment through the lens of this concept has resulted in several struggles translating the theory into a successful design. In general it can be challenging and rewarding at the same time to work with a concept that at first seems contradictory to present conceptions of space. The challenge comes with the grade of abstraction. In my opinion, exciting architectural projects come with several restraints that provoke our creativity. Natural concepts such as intimacy cannot be precisely defined and therefore inherit the danger of becoming unproductive due to the lack of constraints. There are endless directions to take and narrowing down specific aspects of the concept onto specific locations in the real context can be a tiring procedure. Looking back at this process, it has taken up much time and many trials and fails of project locations and set-ups before realizing that a step back was necessary to arrive at the transformation of streetscapes. Although finally this method of working comes with rewarding thought process and new perspectives on the public sphere, this can only be an efficient inspiration or design tool when directly paired with precise constraints.

Apart from working with literature and abstract concepts, conventional architectural methodologies have been a continuous companion of this working process and it was interesting to observe how well the different methodologies complemented each other and how the development of one was based on the existence of the other. Abstract inspiration helped to direct the conventional study of precedents whereas literature complemented representational drawings.

During the development of an individual street, a systematic approach has been developed that extends the project from a single street transformation to a developed and tested strategy. Previous trials to first develop a strategy and subsequently apply it to other locations were always confronted with a lack of specificity or the wrong variables. Working directly on a site and developing a systematic approach alongside has been much more practicable and could be successfully tested after the in-depth development of one street. This sequence allowed to understand the difference between elements that can be organized in a framework and necessary freedom that contributes to a sensitive and individual outcome. The successful application to several other streets of the same kind supports the value of taken decisions as universal, yet each street provides an individual context which the system can then freely react upon. Therefore the sum of the project does not only include the transformation of Carrera 22 in detail, but an intense study of the environment of a street and how it can be successfully altered.

Testing the system on a street of a different type highlighted the limits of the system as well as its potential. It is easily transferrable to the same type of street, yet it naturally has to be altered to accommodate different urban environments. This was expected and therefore not a drawback of its functionality at all, yet I am convinced that many of its variables stay relevant after certain adaptations to the core composition.

#### Ethical considerations in the process

Working on a project in Latin-America was a personal challenge. I had to confront myself with a context I did not know much about, a recent history that shows much more complexity than the history of countries I lived in and create a project after spending less than two weeks in Bogotá. The method of Thinking through Things definitely helped to overcome stereotypical thinking and accommodate the found space for what it is. Nevertheless it is difficult to create a project sensitive enough to the existing environment. I addressed this by researching and analysing the given environment as carefully as possible, accepting that there cannot be a claim to completion. On the other hand, it can also be an advantage to reconsider existing patterns and break them up. This thesis particularly addresses issues of safety and ownership. Replacing fenced front yards could be a risky act in an environment where safety takes greater space in people's minds than in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, there are also many aspects where countries can learn from each other and discover new ways of living that inherit the potential of change. Whilst introducing ideas of a shared street and blurred boundaries between inside and out, I tried to keep the practical needs of inhabitants and realistic expectations in mind to come up with the most sensitive solution of implementing my visions.

#### Relation to wider social and professional framework

The intervention of Transformed Streetscapes questions the boundaries of architecture towards urbanism and landscape architecture. It relates to a new understanding of what falls in the responsibility of the architect. The street, part of an urbanist structure, is explored through an architectural scale that puts much attention on spatial quality, integration of facades, landscaping, and urban organization. Yet this project relates to another discussion which concerns the influence of the architect herself. I strongly believe that urban architecture should not be fully prescribed by the architect but leave space for honest appropriation and even transformation. The project negotiates control and appropriation, creating space and freedom for the unexpected.

Reprogramming streets and spaces that are only used for infrastructural measures is a growing trend for architects and urban planners, yet often this trend treats big traffic nodes and disregards the common street which makes up a great amount of the city. Especially in the context of Bogotá, these streets are shaped by a false sense of security enabled through fences which hinder meaningful activities taking place or exclude everyone who cannot adopt to these extreme circumstances. Bogotá has been riddled by criminal events and other societal challenges, fencing off private ground is therefore a comprehensible action. Contradictory this results in empty streets that only alter the feeling of being unsafe in a hostile environment. Opening up the street might seem to lead to a dilemma of private ownership and safety. Still I believe that the cities built structure has to reflect the positive changes the country has gone through and challenge citizens to recognise different forms of safety and interaction with the urban environment. Transforming one or two streets within a neighbourhood can be a natural way of increasing livelihood and identification, resulting in greater social cohesion and attractiveness of a whole area.

As cities become increasingly dense, a sustainable use of existing space is crucial. Therefore working with the existing ground and trying to improve the structures that are already found in Bogotá instead of building entirely new structures is also an act of sustainability. With regards to the continuous growth of the city and resulting pressures on central areas such as Teusaquillo, it is important to improve the daily spaces in order to achieve high living quality without being able to build more space for inhabitants.

#### Relation of graduation project and master track

Spaces of permanence relates to the existing setup of the street and focuses on making the space available as shared space for residents as well as pedestrians or business owners. The street belongs to everyone in a city and I consider the street an important common. It presents a resource that can affect the whole community.

Choosing a master track that encourages different ways of working apart from the usual procedure has helped me to strengthen my architectural position towards urban architecture. I have realized the great value small interventions can have for their surroundings which is a position the master tracks upholds. Yet, these interventions and changes to the existing require an immense amount of attention to detail and precision. The strong focus on methods of working has resulted in the strategical background of this master project. Yet, I have also become aware of the potential danger of thinking in strategies and I hold the strong belief that architecture should always derive from its environment and the system developed alongside this project accommodates this belief. It merely offers a framework that tries to pass on the gained knowledge without imposing a universal design onto individual locations.

The process of this project has been a delight as much as a struggle at many times. I have learnt about productive working methods as well as unproductive working methods and I am confident that this knowledge will continue to inform future projects and discussions. It was inspiring to dive into general discussions of architecture related to integration, appropriation and meaningfulness whilst relating them to a practical project and I am very content that at this stage, the discussions have continued to be relevant and sharpen my architectural position even further than the following weeks of this project.

Kommentiert [Isabel UL1]: