

REFLECTION PAPER

MSc3/MSc4 Graduation Studio Methods and Analysis 2018-2019 (AR3MET100/AR4MET100)

Positions in Practice: Constructing the Commons in the Latin American Metropolis

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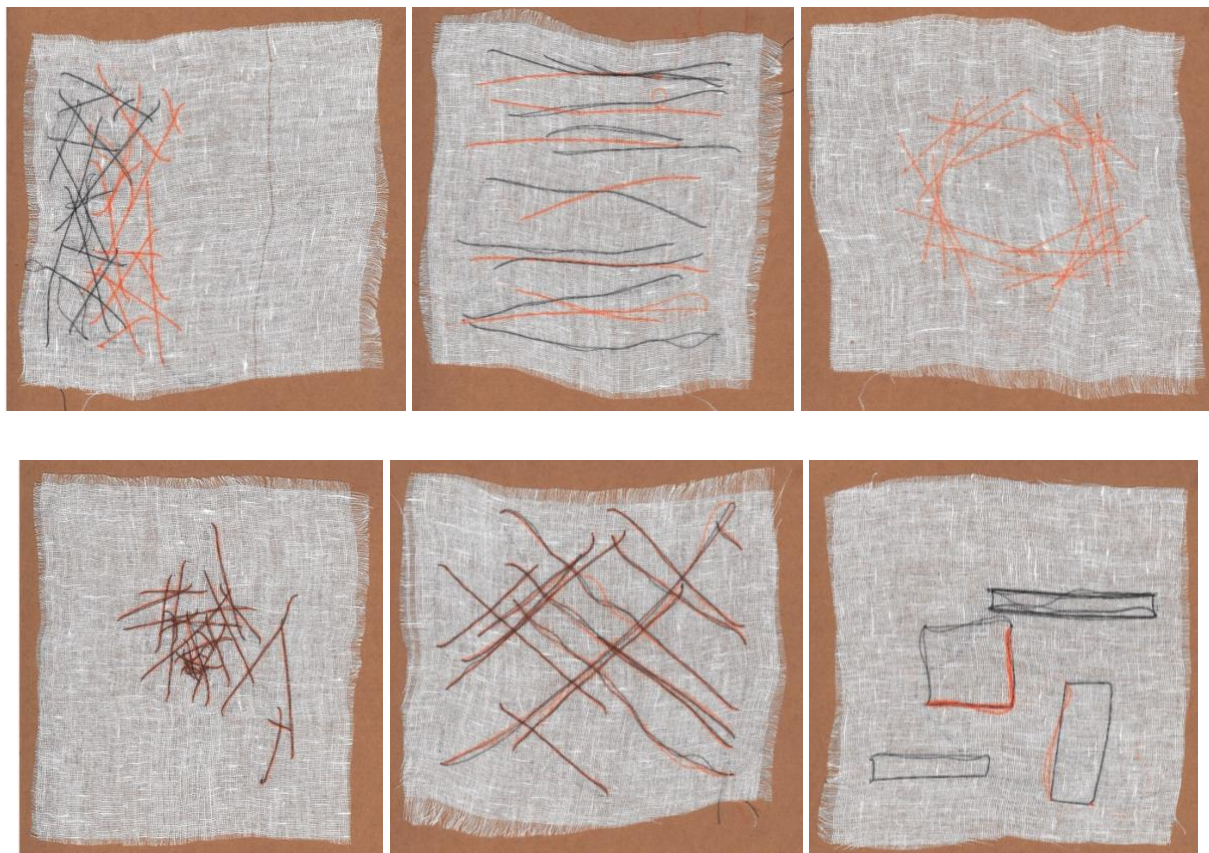
The studio of Methods and Analysis emphasizes the use and application of the following three research methods; praxeological, phenomenological and epistemological. Within each of these lies the importance of investigating the human actions in relation to the built environment in terms of meaningfulness, appropriation and integration. Throughout the research and design phase, these three methods have been applied in order to perform the contextual, conceptual and disciplinary analysis. As a result, several design proposals evolved, even though at times the application of them was not always equally consistent. Nonetheless, Cherk Ga Leung my partner and I developed our own research method and it is with this that we propose our final design intervention. The latter will be discussed at a later stage of the current reflection paper. I would like to point out that our aim is not to solve a problem but rather to ask ourselves a question and answer it with the ensuing design proposal. On another note, I would like to notify the use of “we/our” as this graduation project has been carried out together with my partner Cherk Ga Leung. Hence, particular written parts might occur in both our reflection papers. However, I would like to emphasize the fact that this reflection paper has been written individually and will reflect upon the contribution to the collaboration and the individual design intervention.

From the outset of my time in Bogotá, Colombia I was intrigued by the nature of the movements that the people made as they made their way through the city. As I preferred to make my way on foot instead of making use of public transport, there was enough time for me to observe these pedestrians, how they move and how a particular or random setting might have a determining factor. Simultaneously, being on foot was a way for me to feel more at ease in a continent, a country, a city which I had never been to before.

The desire to become familiar with what was going on around me and avoiding leaving my comfort zone was imperative as I wanted nothing to get in the way of fully experiencing the dynamics of the life going on around me. With hindsight my response was not totally unpredictable as I began to realise that from a young age ‘movement’ as a subject had been an ongoing fascination. Having completed a degree in contemporary dance during my secondary education, this topic always stayed in the back of my mind in spite of the fact that a career in dance was no longer an option. Despite the sensitive nature of the memories, I am grateful for the freedom of my years at university that have enabled me to weave my ongoing passion into several projects. During the graduation project, the concept of modern dance evolved to such an extent that it found its way as a growing interest in choreography and thus how this could be related to, used to further explore, understand and/or experience architecture. With this in mind the search for places related to dance in Bogotá started and I visited six locations which were all situated around Parkway; La Factoria (cra. 25 #5034), Adra Danza (dg. 42a #2045), Casa Ensamble (cra. 25 #41-39), Epic Studios (cll. 40 #18a-27), La Sala (cra. 22 #41-28) and Casa del Teatro Nacional (cra. 20 #37-54).

Back in the Netherlands, and in the process of reflecting on my sojourn in Bogotá, the six locations visited and a deep rooted interest in dance as well as choreography, it began to dawn on me that knowing how to give shape to my Colombian impressions would be challenging. Through the method of weaving, which is in line with the praxeological research method, I decided to make an abstract interpretation by working with threads and a cloth, resulting in embroideries. The motion of my hand tried to revive the memories, feelings

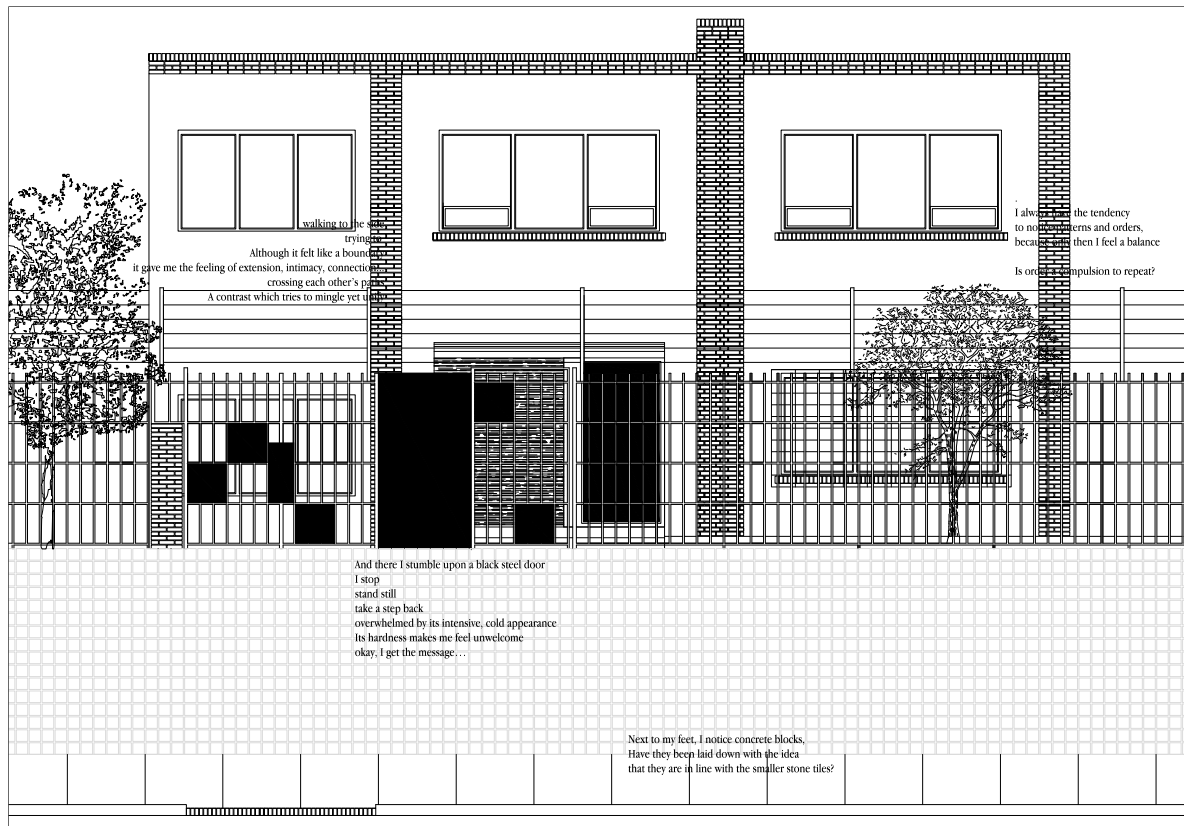
and movements which were embodied within my muscles and joints. This tool relates to kinaesthetic learning, a hands-on approach where the kinaesthetic memory refers to how the muscles remember certain movements. It was a way of coming to understand what my thoughts and feelings were and why my body might be moving in a particular way. My body was thinking for me instead of my brain and it needed to be expressed in a graphical way, not through words. The embroideries could therefore be seen as a choreography, a personal choreography about movement through the existing layer of patterns of Teusaquillo, using threads on cloth. The embroideries as it were could be viewed as a score or choreographic notation representing the movements I made at the time. Additionally, embedded in the texture, the patterns and rhythms of the embroideries also lies the embodiment of emotions and memories. It is therefore that Cherk Ga and I defined choreography as *“the practice of weaving oneself through existing patterns to dissolve the clear boundaries that constitute the binary opposition of identities; to enter into relations among bodies in time and space.”*



Embroideries

Reflecting upon the embroideries made, it was important to make a distinction in the underlying feeling and idea of moving as well as to be moved and the restless feeling within the body. How allowing yourself to be moved, can be relate to how embroidery and hesitation are related to each other and how it articulates movement. After emerging from hesitation, a sense of delay and estrangement seemed to appear. In order for me to understand this, it was essential for me to now start looking at the smaller elements and details within this choreography which step by step had led the way to the present score and understand ‘what’ had actually moved my body and ‘why’ it had made those particular movements. Hence, why the method of writing was applied. Using this method the motion of the hand enables one to revisit/recollect something. The is another example of kinaesthetic learning which is in line with the epistemological research method. This method made it possible to reflect on the spatial and architectural elements which I was confronted-

and interacted with. These elements embodied the cues, which were interpreted and triggered my bodily movements. However the cues can be interpreted in different ways, not only by me but also by others, resulting in an element with a shifting and open nature and therefore creating an open choreographic score.



Material Stories

After having proposed several design interventions in collaboration with Cherk Ga Leung, we came to the conclusion that none of the ideas would lead to a concrete proposal for a design intervention which is how we moved on to the idea of festivals. Our fascination and research had reached a certain level of abstractness which we could not detach ourselves, or take a step back, from. Hence, we decided to completely step away from these ideas as they were not developing itself in the desired manner resulting in a concrete proposal for a design intervention. Festivals have been present throughout world's history in various forms, each having their own identity which up until now is still clearly discernible. In the book *Festival: Definition and Morphology* by Alessandro Falassi he defines the festival as "... *an event, a social phenomenon, encountered in virtually all human cultures. (...)*" Festivals are created within a particular setting in the urban fabric of the city which is transformed into social spaces through the festive. It brings people together to create an understanding about their participation in the world, but also for a moment liberates one from oneself and the norms and rules which are laid upon us and we unconsciously live by. "*In the realm of the Carnavalesque the structure of society is blurred and an alternate set of rules present themselves as the new authority, playing through dance, laughter and fantasy.*" (Mohammed 2010) In order for one to experience this liberation, dancing takes place where the rhythm of the music hypnotizes the body. However, we have made the distinction between the festive and attentive dance, which is clarified by the diagram seen below. *The Festive Dance* is concerned with the alternative but pre-existing way of living. When performed repeatedly in the presence of others in a community, the "alternative" has the potential to be assimilated into the norm. The Festive Dance is a

dream in which one can experience the life that is desired but not yet practiced and accepted by society. Dance at a heightened level of *attentiveness* has the potential to mobilize the unknown knowledges that are at present below the threshold of one's perception. These knowledges emerge from the built environment through the movement of one's body, therefore coming into contact with the unknown. Dance is corporeal processes of being-other, experiencing other ways of living by the self, the community and the city. Nothing stands in opposition to the norm. Knowledge around the established code of conduct and societal order are not abnormal, but either not performed persistently or not yet perceived by the thinking-body. These "new" knowledges that emerge in movement, if shared among multiple individuals, has the potential to become accessible to a wider community, and to become the commons.

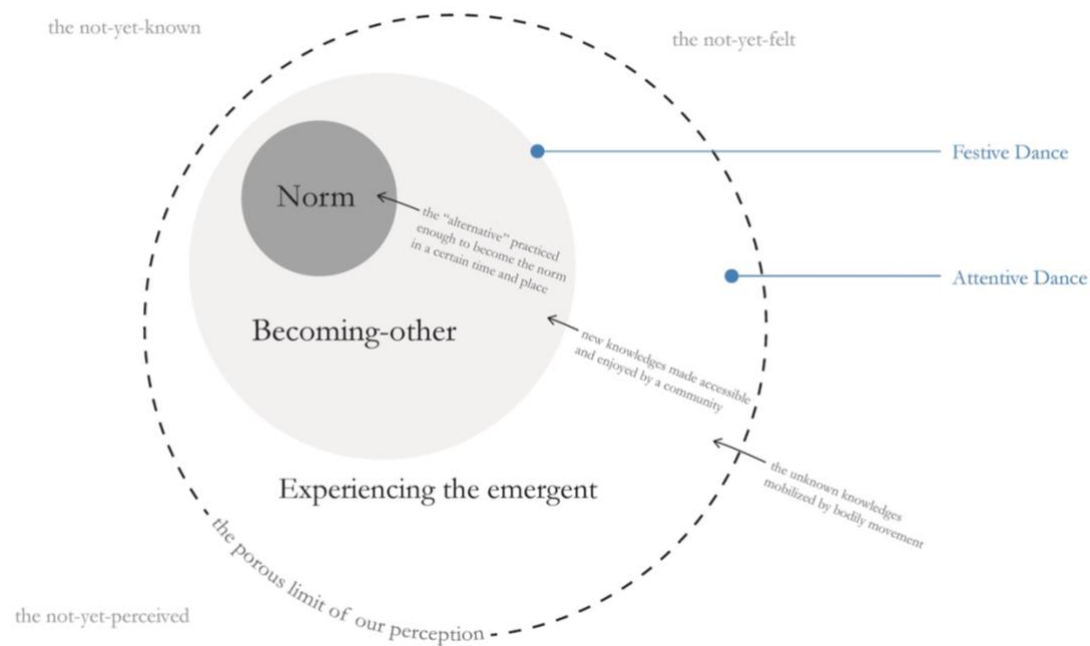


Diagram Attentive & Festive Dance

However, in Bogotá the presence of festivals has never been evident. What if we were to imagine a festival taking place along Parkway? An avenue located in the desired residential area of Teusaquillo, with two lanes on both sides of a continuous green area strip.

Even though it is quite a desirable residential area there is not much life going on. A location with potential where the boundary between public and private life feels uncomfortable for no apparent reason. We asked ourselves whether we could make it possible for the local community and dwellers in Teusaquillo to collectively experience the public realms anew through the movement of their bodies and for them to choose whether to fully engage with the street or to withdraw if they wish. Here, we defined the following two research questions; *"How can our intervention set up the conditions to host festivals along Parkway? How can the same constructions offer dwellers more ways to appear in the presence of others and engage with the environment in their daily lives?"* And, *"Can the transformative spirit of the festive influence the everyday use of space beyond the duration of festive events?"*

Since the beginning of our research, we have held onto the research question - how do we choreograph the unexpected? However, we have come to the realization that as architects, we cannot plan or control the unexpected, but that we can select the relevant instruments and methods, and when combined, can compose

a course of action. This set of intended actions would give us instruction to transform the city in order to achieve the goal of enabling the individual, the community or the city to experience the alternative through movement and potentially to tap into the presently imperceptible and thus unknown knowledges latent in the built environment.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the carnivalesque features in the streets and town squares, Cherk Ga and I have identified key architectural elements that supports the "becoming-other/transgression of the individual and also the society as a whole. Although Mikhail Bakhtin inspired us so did 'A Pattern Language' by Christopher Alexander. In conjunction with our understanding of their work and our understanding of Teusaquillo, four design instruments were selected. The design instruments which we formulated are: (1) the paved ground, (2) anchors and supports, (3) the façade overlooking the street (4) and the in-between room. We first described each instrument in the form of instructions individually, since the use of each has its own specificity. In the instructions we describe the intended intervention and how this would function both on a daily basis and during festive events. The application of these instructions in the context can be interpreted in several ways resulting in different architectural forms and materialisation. The open ended approach of interpretation was especially important for us as we are working together. The four instruments relate to each other across scales and have to support each in order to have the maximum effect, as on their own their impact in the context will most likely be limited. This network of instruments then lead us to examine locations that suit all their requirements. In a way we could say that we have been choreographing the relation of different elements in space, and the relation between and within each instrument. As a result, we discovered certain segments of Parkway where we could launch this intervention effectively.

The division was made for the individual parts where Cherk Ga would focus on (1) the paved ground and (2) anchors and supports, and I would focus on (3) the façade overlooking the street and (4) the in-between room. For the development of the individual design for these two instruments the same methods have been applied, as they are very much woven into each other, yet can still function on their own. The forming of the main concept started with the strong idea that the design intervention had to have an equal meaning and function during the daily life and festive, making it a plural concept. This too has been a strong concept throughout the evolution of the carnivalesque where *"the urban walls, as mentioned earlier are transformed into temporary and transportable market places that sell good and refreshments to the exhausted observers."* (Mohammed 2010) The book Festival Architecture, made me understand how over the years, architecture has supported the festive taking place yet still maintains its primary function in the everyday life.

One of the wandering experiences in particular along Parkway made me aware of the hard boundary between the in- and the outside, the private and public. It was something which I personally had never experienced before. Another remarkable aspect of the festive is the use of the mask. Here, the *"masquerade dissolves the boundaries of the inside and the outside and the relationship of the private and the public. It has the ability to liberate and suspend the hierarchy of authority."* (Mohammed 2010) One also puts on a mask, in order to step into a different personality, to separate oneself from their previous identity and together form a unity. (Picard 2015) Covering up who they really are and collectively becoming the other. With this in mind I imagined a scaffolding like structure in front of the existing façades, as a metaphor for the mask. This then acquires a function and a meaning simultaneously; during daily life as well as the festive. The buildings along Parkway would at moments be wearing a masque, the scaffolding, and through the façade (overlooking the street) one would trespass into the space of the in-between room. It is here that for the façade overlooking the street the following research question has been formulated; *"How does one step into the mask?"* And for the in-

between room; *“How can we create ‘both-and’ elements which enables one to become part of the festive as well as function during the daily life?”* and *“How can one choose to (not) become part of the collective/festive while staying in the comfort of one’s home?”*

In order for all three questions to be answered I developed four concepts for each of these. For the first question small interventions would be made in the façade in order for one to be able to step into the mask, varying from a bay window to sliding door panels. For the second research question elements would be designed varying from platforms as stairs or lying down surfaces as viewing platforms. For the third research question elements of railing and canopy’s would be designed, where the materiality is especially important. The elements have a plural meaning as they can function during the festive as well as during the daily life by describing the possible bodily movements during each of these two situations and by naming the elements as actions/movements. This strongly relates back to where our fascination for disobedience and dance choreography have led Cherk Ga and I to develop modes of operation of weaving and subverting through which we have gained knowledge from Teusaquillo, and as a result has led us to be able to develop a method where we design with movement to imagine alternative ways of moving and engaging with other in the public realm. Each of these elements are to be combined with each other, resulting in combinations of a one, two or three elements. Here, the action/movement titles are combined with each other, forming a written choreography of bodily movements with an open ended interpretation. The combinations of the elements resulted is private, semi-private/public and public platforms which would be placed on the scaffolding structure. The semi-private/public and public platforms would then be made accessible for the public, however the private platforms are not and belong only to the residents of that particular apartment which it is placed in front of. Based on the dimensions of the platforms, the average floor to floor height and the depth of the pavement from the façade up until the road, an appropriate structural concept was developed which could be repeated at several moments along Parkway. Within the concept of the structure the following aspects were important; it should be an interwoven, seamless structure which is demountable, sustainable and flexible in use. As a result, a glulam wooden structure has been chosen, where the individual modules are to be connected to each other through the application of Japanese wooden joints, inspired by Kengo Kuma. As it is flexible in use, the scaffolding structure can be minimized in size, by taking out modules which are not required for the stability of the structure. Following up on this point, the question was raised whether cross bracing would be required. However, this would mean that another structural system would be added which did not meet the fundamental idea and the view for the residents would be blocked. As Japanese wooden joints have been applied, cross bracing would not be required if dimensions of the structural elements would be made bigger.

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