Reflection of thesis project at P4
“it is in the articulation of a question or problem, rather than its solution, that we can locate a sense of truth and falsehood.” 1 Gilles Deleuze’s words for me emphasises the importance of ways of doing. My graduation project has not been an easy journey, but throughout all my research and design attempts, it revealed to me my habitual way of thinking and designing. The challenge of this project is therefore to transgress limits I have previously set for myself. In this paper, I will reflect on how my methods of research and design have performed and how they have evolved during the process.

My ambition of the graduation project was to derive architectural design from theory and the operation of the metropolis of Skopje, using the social and urban context as determinate of design. David Chipperfield commented that there is no invention in architecture. What moves the discipline forwards is different ways of thinking, driving original ways of doing, creating new relations between matter. I believe that architecture theory have immense unexplored potential for design practices. In my thesis project, I have therefore chosen the studio of Methods and Analysis that allows me to explore this way of working, translating ideas from theory into design strategies. My attempt resolved in an architectural design may be merely posing a false problem. However, it is in the constant attempt to transgress that reveals the nature of a problem.

At the start of my thesis project, I have framed my research method with phenomenology as a starting point moving to ethology to investigate the workings behind the phenomenon. Phenomenology methods of narratives helped to develop a sensibility to understand the joy, misery and pain of the city. Ethology methods helped to reveal the physical manifestations of phenomenons. The revelation allows new composition of relations. This research methods have worked well in the research phase, allowing me to accurately pin down my project.

The city of Skopje was envisioned with a bigger, more unified reality than what it is now. In a small city packed with architecture carrying distinct ideologies, individuals negotiate and position themselves in relation to these strong statements. I was very much captivated by the complexity of the city and the woke culture raised from the aftermath of Skopje 2014 project, people standing on moral high ground condemning the ugliness of neo-neo-classical buildings. More than the aesthetics of contemporary architecture culture in Skopje, I was intrigued in the aesthetics of actions. Embedded in the fabric of the city, manifested in social events and economic status, and reflected in the architecture, there is an inescapable atmosphere of latency, unrealised potential in the present. The young adults see no hope in a life they cannot leave. 27% of young people (15-24) are not in education, training nor employment. Highly educated young adults are longing to leave the country and live in a place where their potentials can be realised. However, the difficulties to leave due to the state of the country results in young adults passing their dissatisfaction to the city of Skopje. The project intend to deal with this inescapable sense of latency, I attempt to design a built environment that activates the negotiation between past, present and future in order to not to further dwell in sentiment. The building provides two programs of vertical public space and night club, providing space that accommodates the state of transitions, for both bus and train passengers as well as young adults of Skopje going through symbolic life transitions. My design is therefore also a respond proposing another aesthetics of action. the program of a night club is considered as a cultural institution in my project, which provides a safe shelter for expression, a place of immersive experience and a habitat where everyone is alone together. It is not an escape, it is to be joyfully anarchic and wonderfully mischievous. It is acceptance with love, love for the world. Life is nonetheless meaningless, all you can do is to liberate yourself from the endless dissatisfaction and enjoy!

In my previous study and work experience, I have adopted a similar approach with temporary installation as results. My challenge for this thesis project is to resolve this into the design of a building which requires multitude levels and scales of considerations including form, materiality, technics etc. It has been a difficult, challenging but enriching process. I have the tendency of drifting to abstract thinking whenever I do not know how to physically implement my ideas into design and construction. I found theoretical research significant, however until the point where the research can be explained in the most practical terms or even realised in practice, the research stays merely on the level of knowing instead of understanding. I need to confront my lack of knowledge in construction and how ideas are being physically realised rather than staying in my comfort zone of conceptual thinking, writing and making. The work of Office for Metropolitan Architecture has been especially of interest to me as its design practice is firmly rooted in architecture theory which is also tangible in its spatial qualities. I went on to thoroughly analyse their designs of ramp buildings including Kunsthall, Seattle library, Jessieu library competition to familiarise myself with different ways of operations that achieve a continuous yet dynamic spatial quality with one architectural element of ramp.

In my design process, I have had many different versions of design schemes. Looking back, the chosen scheme has many research ideas and results embedded in it that I was not consciously implementing. All research eventually feed back into my design. I have noticed that my graduation project is an evolution of ideas from previous research and fascinations. Often I have taken inspiration and references from outside the architectural discipline. Research on absurdism in MSc 2 and theory writing on transgression have paved ways for the theoretical background of my thesis design project. As an individual who is often too attracted to conceptual thinking, positioning myself in a technical university has allowed me the freedom to keep exploring my theoretical interests. However, more importantly, it also made me confront and aware of the importance of technology (here refers to the applied technics) and its accuracy.

The combination of three mentors have supported me in different ways. Jorge has helped me not only on my thesis project, but my way of architectural thinking in a wider sense. He has sharply pointed out my strength, weakness and potentials. At the start of the studio, I realise that there is always a sense of sketchiness to my drawings and practices as if they have not been finalised and concretised. It has been my goal to be more precise and accurate in both communication and translation of my ideas. Jorge has helped me to identify my habitual way of doing that deviates me from solidifying ideas. He has guided me towards the direction that I wanted to head towards. I believe that this will benefit me immensely in the long run that allows me to communicate my conceptual thinking more accurately. Pierre as my building technology tutor has allowed me to be more experimental with construction methods, telling me that nothing is impossible all depending on the way of detailing. Klaske has a special sensitivity that understands the atmosphere of my project. At times when I have lost track of the bigger picture, she helped me to remind me the initial ideas and intentions of the project.

The final part of my graduation period will be about delivering accurate representations of ideas and atmosphere, experimenting new ways of presenting in the current special circumstance of quarantine. I am planning to make an animated film of my project, attempting to consolidate all my research, thinking and doing into the short film. The choice of this medium aligns with my research method where filming has played important role in understanding the atmosphere of the context of Skopje.

It has been a truly enriching process and all research and design practice is to be continued…