Choreography For The Aficionado

A Phenomenological Study Choreographing Between Site, Volume and Material to Enhance the Moment of the Aficionado

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full defense can be viewed on YouTube:
mkn defense Part 1, 2, 3, 4

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Abstract: Encompassed between the Potomac River, the Washington metro line and train bridges at 14th Street, the proposal is a phenomenological study choreographing between site, volume and material to enhance the moment of the aficionado.

Exterior and interior spaces become unique stages for patron and performer alike to embellish at the onset of inspiration.

Collectively, the journey through the stages of spaces becomes an introspective opportunity for all to experience.

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General Audience Abstract:
This entire thesis study was designed with the everyday wanderer in mind. Encompassed between the Potomac River, the Washington metro line and train bridges at 14th Street, the proposal is an architectural dance between site, volume and material to enhance the moment of the aficionado and anyone who makes an effort to discover the site.

The project itself functions as a performance space for multiple flamenco performances. Exterior and interior spaces become unique stages for patron and performer alike to embellish at the onset of inspiration.

Collectively, the journey through the stages of spaces becomes an introspective opportunity for all to experience.

phenomenological: denoting or relating to an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience

aficionado: a person who is very knowledgable and enthusiastic about an activity, subject or pastime
There are many duende moments that have touched this thesis journey through the love and support of my family, friends and peers.

Special gratitude to:

patience VPNering, who is and has always been a brilliant light along our coexistent journey.
persistence LONering, whose steadfast awareness helps us across each finish line.
perseverance WJGoette, my champion and business partner who makes life, love and our world simply a better place to be.

MKNering and LNering, for your accompaniment of song and dance in the music of my life.

To the world of WAAC - thank you for a safe, invigorating and challenging place to grow.

To the architectural professionals, academia, building companions and enthusiasts alike - the collective embodiment of our work is essential and meaningful: “Saber su obligacion”

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tell a story.
in the city of Sevilla, Espana
on a street named Calle Betis.
a young woman finishes her afternoon shift as a hostess from a local cafe.
she begins walking onto the cobble stone street.
across the street, near the river,
she sees a couple sitting at a table enjoying the early evening sky.
an old man, dressed in white, is close to them
strumming his guitar.
he plays slow and soft, melodically striking a vibrant chord.
the young woman slows her stride.
she loves the flamenco guitar.

a group of young men pass the man without notice
except one.
he turns back and stands near the old man.
he begins to sing a ballad.

the woman gets up from the table.
she joins them.
she begins with light palmas
then adds abaresque movements with her arms
and begins to stomp on the stone.

there is dueno.

and then it is done.
the woman returns to her companion.
the boy joins his friends to continue along Calle Betis.
the old man plays his guitar.
and i cross El Puente de Isabel to meet friends at a nearby tablao.
When a couple dances together, they rely on non-verbal cues to indicate the progression of steps. However, the flamenco performance has a single dancer and the communication exists within a hierarchy of components. Flamenco begins with the telling of a story as a way to pass on the morals, legends, truths and myths of previous generations. In flamenco, this story is sung to those who will listen. The tone of the story sets the tempo and style of the dance, an intimate interpretation of the notions of the story. It is rhythmically independent from the storyteller’s song and is supported by the performing ensemble that uses ‘palmas y pitos’ to keep time with the dancer’s rhythm. The flamenco guitarist watches the dance in order to find cues for his own accompaniment to the dance. The ‘aficionado’ takes this in and, at one moment and only within that moment, does he or she understand the essence of the performance, the story. Flamenco exists through this exchange. Architecturally we understand this through the communication of a designed space as the user experiences the space. In short: the body reacts to the site, the site reacts to the body.

Palmas:  handclapping

Pitos:  finger snapping

Aficionado:  enthusiast
"seeing my site": train ride sketches
In the year I spent taking the yellow line metro to and from WAAC each day, I rode past a plot of land situated on the DC side of the Potomac River. It sits nestled between the railroad bridge and the metro rail bridge. This site bears witness to an orchestra of all modes of transportation in and out of the city. The planes, trains, metro, boats, cars, bicycles and pedestrians all play a part in this unique choreography with the site. The site becomes a location for a venue that supports an equally dynamic performance. A performance which will allow city patron and tourist alike to experience the city on a deeper level, if only for a moment.
There is an eclectic palette of materials between the old, the new and the natural:

steel      stone      water      sky
        concrete     wind
grass      metal      wood

Equally present and diverse are the rhythms of the site:

the water lapping against the stone
the buzz of the traffic
the sound of a bird chirping
the whiz of the metro as it zips through
the clank of the occasional train

There is coolness of shade and brilliance of light when standing under the tracks.
There is breadth of space when standing between the metro and railroad.
listening to the story of the site
where can you stamp your feet?
- everywhere -

As performed in the wedding dance ritual, flamenco performances take place within an intimate space created by people standing close together. The lighting is low, giving only a glimpse of the silhouettes of the performers. The dancers who sit in a line or semi-circle in order to emanate the original setting of flamenco, a circle. This reinforces a sense of security, safety, comfort, and coziness. This dynamic draws the aficionado in. These are descriptors for the subliminal intent of the performance spaces.
Similar to many cultures, the centerpiece of flamenco is ‘el cante’, the singer. Cantes, songs, unlike Spanish canciones, French chanson and other song traditions, have neither refrains nor a constant rhythm, which makes them more difficult for a larger audience to identify and sing along with. The flamenco cante serves to set the tone of the performance by singing a story. Common themes include love, death, fate, morality, religion, social status, humor, people, honor, the stars, supernatural powers – topics equated to occurrences of everyday life.

El baile, the dance, takes cues from the story to embody the emotion into form, which is why it is traditionally performed as a solo. The flamenco dance is a profoundly intimate art, which is what differentiates baile flamenco from classical ballet. “Ballet takes to the air, seeks to be light, almost weightless in its movements and hovers by using spectacular gymnastics, while flamenco dancing is concentrated downward toward the ground. ‘The most intense energy right on the spot, tied to the earth, stamped into it.’”

Meudtner, 75

“Psychic energy is transformed into physical, tellurian energy; catharsis is achieved in flamenco when body and earth are joined.”

Claus, 95
The movements are made predominately by the “zapateo”, a drumming sound made with the heel, toe and sole of the shoe. The hand movements achieve a different visual affect by the undulation of the arms and splaying of the fingers reminiscent of curling arabesques. Occasionally the dancer makes “palmas”, rhythmic hand clapping, or pitos, finger snapping, which sound at twice the beat.

The addition of the “toque”, guitar, was introduced at the beginning of the 19th century after dancers had already begun to perform with the “cantado”, singer. Madeleine Claus explains the role of the toque as a “backdrop, subordinate to dancing and singing. Since various dance styles have a definite structure, within which the artist follows his own inspiration and improvisation, guitarists have to be able to accompany a dancer without any previous rehearsal; thus a guitarist has to be thoroughly familiar with the structure of a given dance and its basic steps; ‘saber su obligacion’, know your job, say the flamencos.”

Claus, 99

The art of flamenco continues with the requirement of active participation of the “aficionados”, flamenco enthusiasts. “The art of flamenco with its cante, baile, and toque would be incomplete without the “jaleos”, shouts, and palmas contributed by the audience. Schreiner, 25

The aficionado as a witness to the art of flamenco serves a critical role in completing the performance.
Early studies and models show the desire to understand the site, components of the concept and the relation of "coziness" within a linear and angular composition.
initial study model: stepping into the site
el duende, the cosmic transcendental communication between the flamenco artist and the aficionado.

“It is imperative that he have the ability to identify with the duende, who is life-giving, and to impart this emotion or set of emotions to his public”

(Pohren El arte del Flamenco, p. 43)
[Schreiner, 26]
... and then, there was a pivotal moment. A moment within the moments that became the cognizance of the project. It was the beginning and the end. The tower. A pinnacle of transport through the space.
Once the circular stage had come into full play, understanding how to enclose vs cover vs shield the stage became a prolonged question. There were so many ways to capture both natural and performance lighting.

In the end, each stage offers a different solution.
There has always been a strong datum line along the boundary of the metro track and tunnel. Perhaps due to the heaviness and solidity of the concrete at the metro bridge, unlike the play between, under, and around the train track. Both offered opportunities for flashes of dueno to occur between performer and observer.
geometry and proportion studies: floor materiality comes into play
The dancing column is an important moment where geometry, material and purpose come together. The starting point of the Entri Stage is tangential to the datum line that follows the lead of the metro and train track into the city. This column poises as a conduit between interior and exterior. As an outside observer from the courtyard or at a glimpse from the passing metro, the silhouette provides an architectural duende. Equally the performer and aficionado from inside can sense the zipping by of the metro or a person strolling by. The dancing column serves as a pillar of connection for the entire site dancing around it.
layering: site plan study
The program was simplified when the two middle stages overlapped and eventually became one main middle stage instead of two. In the final program, there are three performance stages. Upon entering the theater, the aficionado can easily see the Entrí Stage. It is the largest and most open stage with plenty of room to move around freely. As one moves through the theater, the stage become smaller and more enclosed. The essence of flamenco draws you in vividly and the sequence of stages convey this simultaneously.
The program was also developing backstage. This study shows progress in the utility spaces and practice stages. From the first site visit, I envisioned what it would be like to dance below the train tract, see page 7. Instead of programming a main stage under the tracts, a practice stage was positioned there for the performer. On this stage, performer(s) and train create a unique version of the story.
Initial landscape design study.
Intermission

May 24, 2007 - June 13, 2007
North American Mobility Exchange Program

Blacksburg and WAAC come together for Art and Architecture in Mexico:

Leon
Guanajuato
Zona Arqueologica de Plazuelas
Diego Rivera
San Miguel de Allende
House+House
Atotonilco
Casa Renacimiento

The art student asked, "how come there are never any people in your sketches?"

The architecture student asked, "why aren't there any buildings in your portraits?"

By the end of the conversation there were both.
House + House Architects provided an engaging tour through San Miguel de Allende. One site visit was to an empty lot situated along a hillside surrounded by local families. The hillside was majestic in that each pueblito, no matter the status, had one of the most beautiful views of the city and landscape. The breathtaking view was exemplified everyday at sunset and it was at this time that most families stepped outside of their home to watch the sun say goodnight. It was a natural gift shared by the neighbors as each house was slightly elevated behind one another so all could enjoy the beauty. Most of the houses did not have electricity and as we walked up the dirt path children were sitting in their doorway completing their homework assignments. Upon completion, the children would gather in the empty lot. At this moment, the lot became a soccer field to which several of us joined in the play. This became one of the most memorable moments of the entire trip. We were asked to provide a design proposal using the empty lot as the site of an expatriate couple seeking to have a 2nd home in San Miguel de Allende. The proposal shown at right provides a narrow finished courtyard style path with landscape and string lighting up the hillside from the main street.

Similar to the small contemplative spaces throughout many popular cities, this space offers a place for pause and reflection, sketching or intimate conversation between friends. Rather than obstruct the view for most of the community through a gentrification project, this proposal offers a multipurpose space for the surrounding inhabitants.

Flanked on each side by a community garden, it serves as a study room for the school children or a gathering place for the neighboring families. A portion of the lot continues to be used as a soccer field for play.
Mexico became a new stage for thesis exploration. This stage allowed for a hyper focus on paths with a wide variety of finished and unfinished floors. Upon purchase of the a set of heels, very dissimilar to the heel of a flamenco shoe, I experimented with a series of zapateos along different surfaces a while exploring the city. Each finish being considered was readily available for performance review as shown in the photos to the left.

A montage video of these mini-performances were put together for thesis study documentation:

“just dance mkn thesis presentation Fall 2007”

full length video can be seen at: https://youtu.be/BJdyKIZpWcE
dancing was dancing,
and the measure of the dancing floor was the measure of the dance itself.
the place appeared with the dance
and disappeared when the dance was over.

Socrates’ Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings
Indra Kajž McCann
1: intro stage
2: entri stage
3: midi stage
4: fini stage

a: arrival terrace
b: courtyard
c: theater entrance
d: backstage prep
e: practice stages
f: dressing rooms
g: restrooms
h: gallery
i: bar lounge
The fini stage is the smallest performance stage, sits deepest into the earth and is open to the sky above. The floor is stone, the walls are solid and the combination of descent into the earth and tower surrounded give the sense of a direct contrast between earth and sky. The basic of elements simplify everything so that all that exists between these is a moment.
During inclement weather, a series of screens fan out around the tower to protect the performance. The rain falls towards and then down the interior stone wall, behind the bench seat and into a collection trough, see page 67 enlarged section: rain screen detail. This water is collected to be used for landscaping maintenance.
looking NE from the Potomac River

bird’s-eye view looking towards the Potomac River
As in flamenco, there are layers in architecture. They build, overlap, harmonize, sing, sigh, breathe - coming together to tell a story. The telling of the story is the sharing of the experience. It is within the act of giving and the act of receiving that all life intertwines together.

Life is communication.

A communication beyond the verbal and colloquial is a communication at a deeper level, a subtext. It occurs between the lines.

The building up of layers draw together a much clearer, attractive, subliminal version of the story which captures us. Receiving the message is el dueno, even in architecture.
List of Images

image 1:

image 2:
Photograph, Photographer Unknown: Flamenco Festival Washington DC, 2007

image 3:

image 4:
Photograph, Photographer Unknown: Flamenco Festival Washington DC, 2007

image 5:

all other images used in this paper are from the author
Bibliography


