Welcome to the **Urban Catharsis**

Please take a dump

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Abstract

Embodied cognition suggests that human beings are emotional machines whose experience of the world lies on the interaction between the body and the environment. This can be seen as the echoing of the twentieth century philosophers such as Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari that breaks from the disembodied concept of mind. The research elaborates on architecture and music as domains of immersive experience. The study borrows from recent developments in musicology and cognitive neuroscience, specifically embodied music cognition. This framework is used to address the irreducible multiplicity of the experience of music as cerebral, corporeal, emotional, sociocultural and contextual. Thus, the architecture of musical experience should incorporate all these dimensions. The Binckhorst, a post-industrial area in the Hague, will be treated as the dance floor where spaces can be activated through the movement of bodies. Through the cathartic release of immanent properties of the site, local sub-culture and industry will be preserved. Unpleasant characteristics of the area will be reevaluated as emotionally moving musical elements, such as discordance. Without any preconceived architectural program or concept, similar to a musical arrangement, these elements will be reformatted and played back to the crowds.

Keywords: Catharsis, discordance, embodiment, emotions, immanence

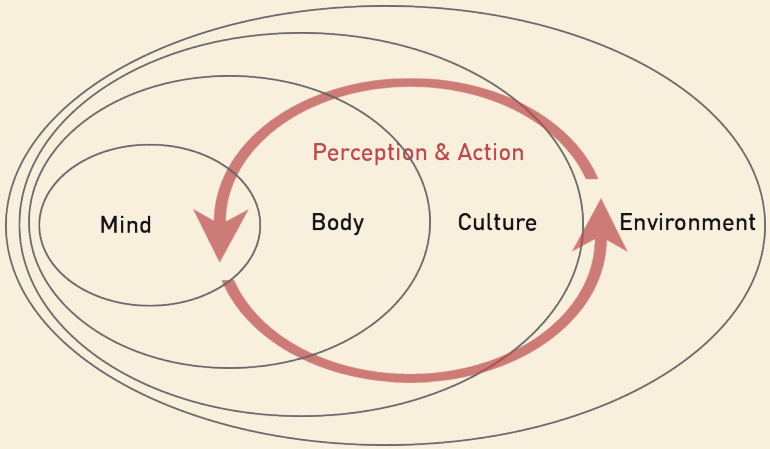


Fig.1 Embodied cognition scheme.
(Adapted from Raymond et al. (2017))

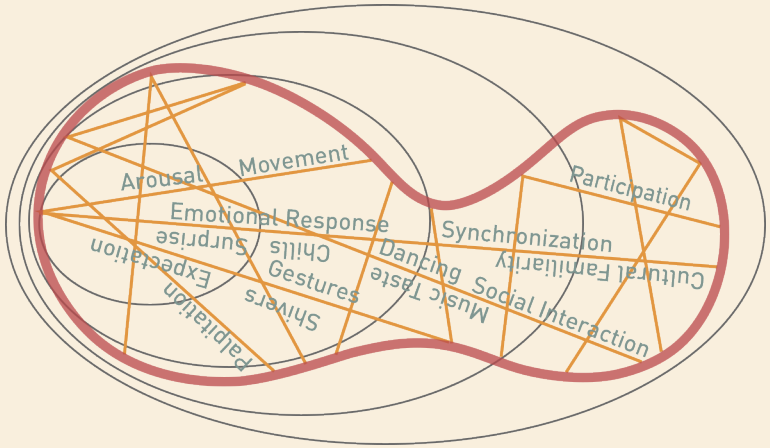
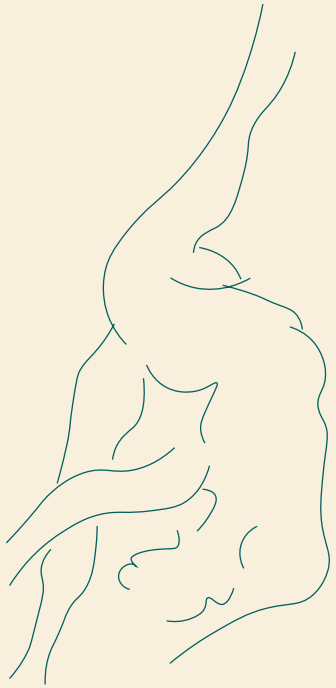


Fig.2 Embodied music cognition scheme including relational values such as psychological mechanisms, bodily responses and socio-cultural processes.

Introduction to the Experience of Music

Embodied music cognition is an influential paradigm over the past decade that follows the framework of embodied cognition. This can be seen as the echoing of the twentieth century philosophers such as Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari that breaks from the disembodied concept of mind. According to this framework, the cognitive system is fundamentally linked to the body and its interaction with the environment. Respectively, bodily movement determines the way we comprehend music. (Leman & Maes, 2015)[1] Many people feel the need to move when they hear music because the formation of meaning happens through this movement. Therefore, repercussion occurs not only in concert halls but in the cultural minds of the audience which is mediated through their bodies. Multidimensionality of embodied cognition - the stratas of mind, body, culture and environment - based on the cycle of perception and action is explained in the following scheme. (Fig.1) This is solely for the clarification of the research and not an attempt of simplification or omission of interrelations. Hence, the complex and intertwined nature of the experience of music is what sparked the fascination behind the research. (Fig.2)

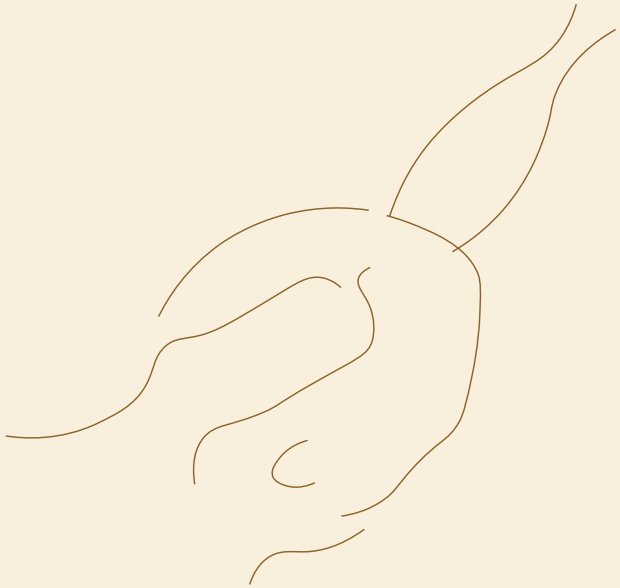


Emotional Response to Music

The irrefutable connection between music and emotional experience has been the topic of several studies. (Balkwill & Thompson, 1999; Sloboda & Juslin, 2001; Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008; Zatorre & Salimpoor, 2013)[2,3,4,5] The auditory, motor, and limbic systems are all stimulated by music, the latter being connected to emotions and pleasure. The 'shivers', 'goosebumps', or 'the tingles in the spine' are physiological manifestations of the emotional response to music. (Guhn, Hamm & Zentner, 2007)[6] *Frisson* is a French term that is used to describe the arousal from listening to music, more specifically the skin orgasm. It means "a sudden feeling of excitement or fear, especially when you think that something is about to happen". (Cambridge University Press, n.d.)[7]

Experiments have shown that this response is evoked by a level of discordance. (Sloboda, 1991; Guhn et al., 2007)[8,9] Deviations in frequency, pitch, and rhythm are generally associated with exhilarated emotions. When a dissonant melodic note leans on a strong beat and resolves on a weak one - also known as appoggiatura - the discordance creates tension and expectation in the minds of the listeners. When the tension is resolved, a pleasurable feeling of release is experienced. Tension and release, build up and drop arrangements, and disruption of regular rhythms result in the discharge of stored emotions while experiencing music due to contrastive valence. Multiple cycles of such arrangements only further enhance these reactions.

Despite its negative connotation, discordance has been the common denominator of many emotionally moving musical pieces. (Rickard, 2004; Craig, 2005)[10,11] How this corresponds to spatial experience is best explained by Steven Holl who is known for his phenomenological approach to architecture. He states that "the materials of architecture communicate through resonance and dissonance, just as instruments in musical composition, producing thought and sense-provoking qualities in the experience of a place."[12] Thus, architecture is designing experiences that are accessed through bodily presence and activated through movement. The movement in space involves many cognitive levels through which the emotional response to *milieu* is constructed.

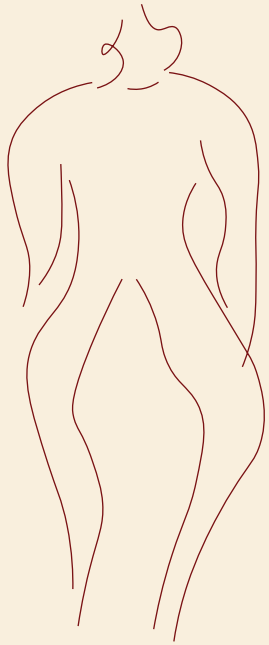


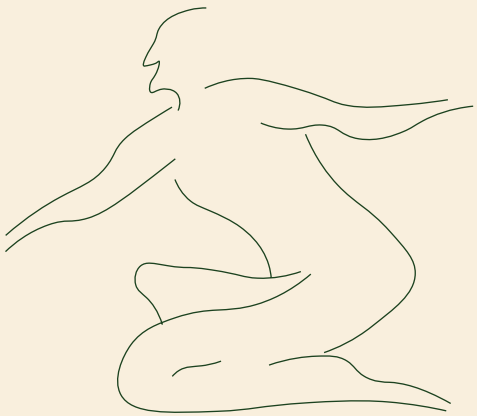
Moving to Music

Music, directly transected by desires and drives, has always had but one subject - the body, which it offers a complete journey through pleasure, with a beginning and an end. A great musical work is always a model of amorous relations, a model of relations with the other, of eternally recommenceable exaltation and appeasement, an exceptional figure of represented or repeated sexual relations.
(Attali, 1985, p. 143)[13]

The dance floor is the only place other than public baths that involve such a level of intimacy where human bodies are staged. Public baths are archetypes of contrasting thermal sensations which give rise to a collective atmosphere where social statuses become fluid. Similarly, music creates a collective medium that brings humans closer. Thudding beats creeping over heated bodies, gradual tempo changes creating tingling sensations through the skin, breathing together with the pulsating vibrations, delirious illusions triggered by phantasmagoric lights . . . are elements brought together for an act of collective hedonism. Eshun (1998, p.99)[14] identifies moments from the dance floor as "when each dancer in the crowd becomes a medium transmitting sensory current." The dance floor houses a synaesthetic community that interacts with sight, smell, touch, sound, and even taste.

Listening and moving to music as a public event creates an opportunity to strip off individuality and become a part of something bigger. A singular body is formed that approximates Deleuze and Guattari's 'body-without-organs' where the experience of dissolving identities create a source of *jouissance*. In his book Deleuze and Guattari for Architects, Andrew Ballantyne describes the 'body-without-organs' as a catatonic body that is not influenced by concepts, acquired habits or identity. In this state, we are outside of "the world of common-sense stability, where we function well by repeating the habits of the day before." (2007, p.35)[15] In other words, the collective catharsis of attending crowds in musical events realign human senses and alter the socio-cultural space.





Music that moves the bodies, and evidently emotions, of its listeners can't be owned by a single composer. It is activated and animated by the participation of its audience who can feel the music as much as they hear. Vibration of the slowest sound waves, the bass portion of the frequency spectrum, yields the maximum corporeal experience to the listeners. Exploitation of the materiality of sound and blurring of the distinction between sound and music can be dated back to the 1950s. The developments of electronic, electroacoustic, computer and experimental music; which later evolved into interactive, site-specific performance and dance-based contemporary electronic music brought a musical thought and practice forward which is irreducible to a score. "Contemporary computer music has become fragmented, it is composed of stratified layers that intermingle and defer meaning until the listener takes an active role in the production of meaning. (Cascone, 2000)[16]

Many genres of twentieth and twenty-first century music have embraced new materials, new performance technologies and media carrying the embodied experience to another level. They can be said to rely less on a literary narrative and more on spectacles. Consequently, this made them less significant to the philosophical tradition which resulted in the lack of theoretical framework. (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999, p.47)[17] Furthermore, very little attention is given to the acoustic properties of the spaces for these performances since the focus is on the strength of technical equipment. Such spaces do not reflect the transparency of typical concert halls as the sought after ideal sound is treated and compressed, to be mediated through bodies brought together. They are constructed around absence to assemble as many bodies as possible which results in a cavernous space. Needless to say, such treatment is detrimental to the acoustic experience. These performances are known - almost always temporarily - to occupy the leftovers of the industrialized civilization such as appropriated warehouses, factories, power plants, low-roofed cellar spaces, marquees, hangars, and larger scale fields open to the sky. Opportunely (?), the research location contains heaps of leftovers and sounds of the industry which ignited the very development of such music and performance.

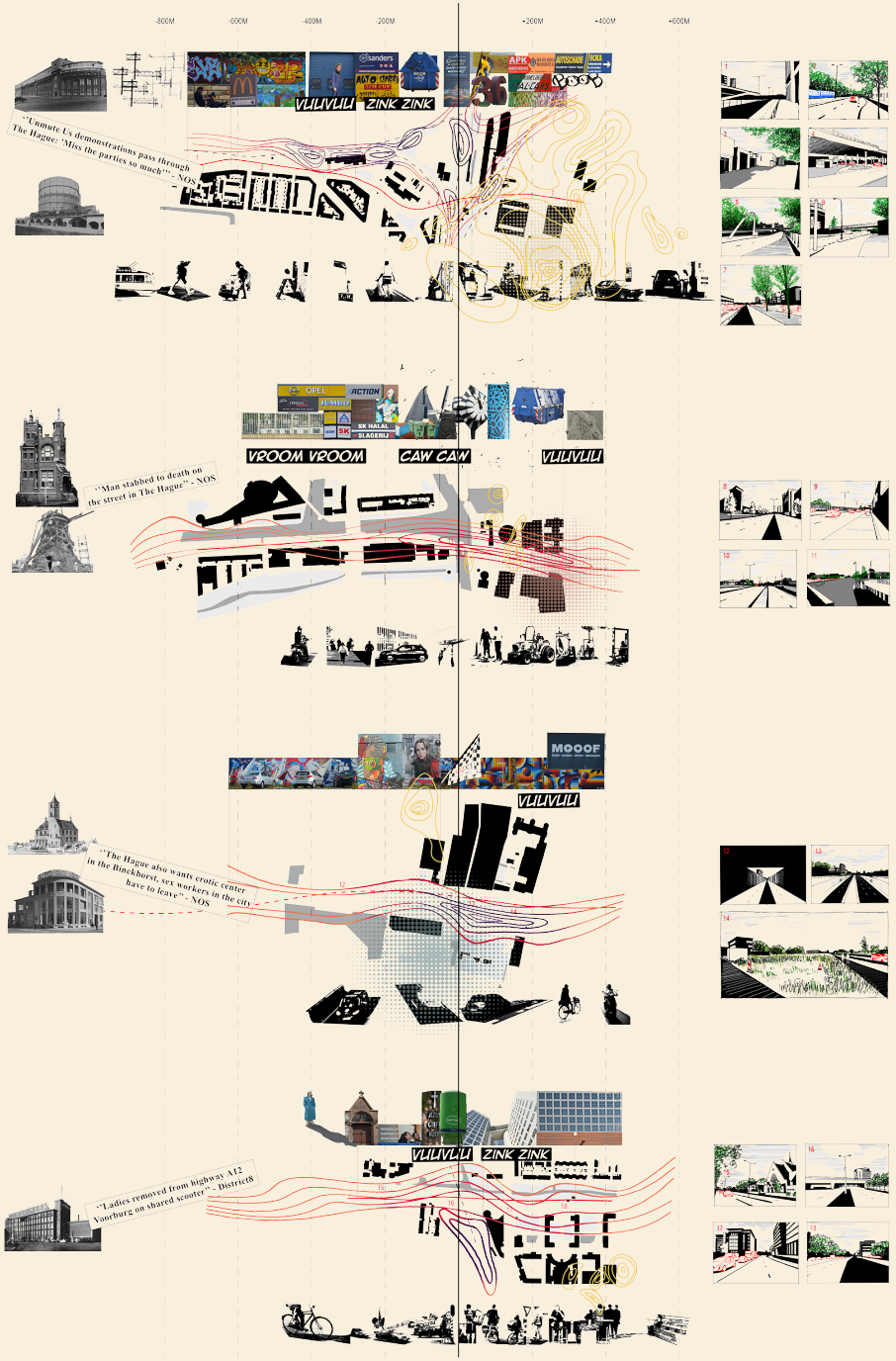


Fig.3 Notational system in progress for the Binckhorst (group work from P1)

Embracing The Discordance

Think of the fact that sounds with harsh textures, reminding us of the hard materiality of their sound sources—the ear-splitting whine of uncontrolled electric feedback, the noise of heavy machinery . . . —are almost always unpleasant; think of how close these noises are to sounds which are generally thought as pleasant—the throb of a bass drum, the ecstatic flight of an electric guitar . . . —and we have an illustration of the principle of significance giving rise to a jouissance which can be experienced as either pleasure or pain.
(Gilbert & Pearson 1999, p.65)[17]

The research location, Binckhorst, is the epitome of post-industrial lands of European cities. It is also known as the urban dump of The Hague. Despite its very central location, it is the place where unwanted programmes of the city are disposed. Other than literal waste disposal facilities; there are several car dealers, industrial warehouses, scrap yards, dismantling companies, a cement factory, an asphalt plant, abandoned offices, and a cemetery. People usually pay a visit and leave only to take care of their business, such as getting their car repaired or using it as a free parking space. On the other hand, the area has several qualities to become a vibrant location with cultural facilities that attract people. The area houses local industries, some heritage values, green areas and many local businesses such as breweries. Several visits to the site have revealed a state of discordance with the rest of the city and within the Binckhorst itself. This state is targeted as the reason why Binckhorst has not been able to achieve its full potential as a central district with attractive features.

The study started by dismantling the elements that cause the perception of discordance. Based on the method of psychogeographical mapping of twentieth century situationists, a dérive was performed at the four main entry routes to the site. This meant clearing the mind of everyday motives and relations in order to be drawn by the attractions of the terrain. On this map, one can find information on history, street art, advertisements, movements, sounds, smells and so on. (Fig.3) There is no denying that the Binckhorst is a place with many disturbing sounds caused by machinery, irritating smell of trash, and a vast number of chaotic advertisement signs. Furthermore, other factors of discordance were discovered such as: irregular morphology, misplacement of functions, concealment of

programs, inaccessibility due to fences, self-interested appropriation of the public space, and an overall individualistic attitude. Through mapping and layering the quantitative and qualitative urban values of the site, emotional zones of the Binckhorst will be discovered working towards a site specific notational system.

Questions arose from the research as the following:

- How can the framework of embodied (music) cognition be used to construct (musical) environments?
- Just like in music, how can the discordance of the Binckhorst be embraced to design an architectural space?
- Can the Binckhorst be placed back on the map through the creation of a space for the musical experience?
- Can the Binckhorst become an urban dump for emotions where people come to attend musical events and how can architecture respond to a desire driven, emotive collective?
- What if the Binckhorst was designed according to elements such as movement, sensory perception and emotions instead of regulations, program and structure?

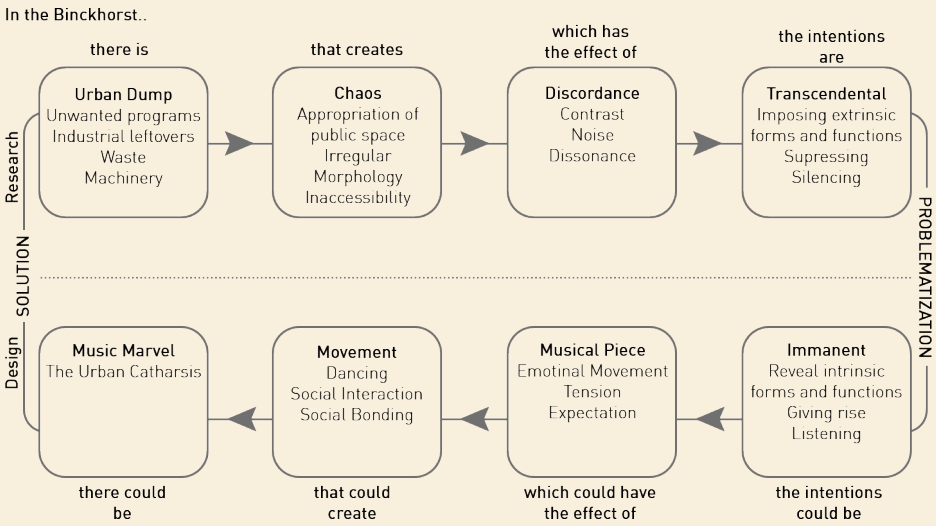


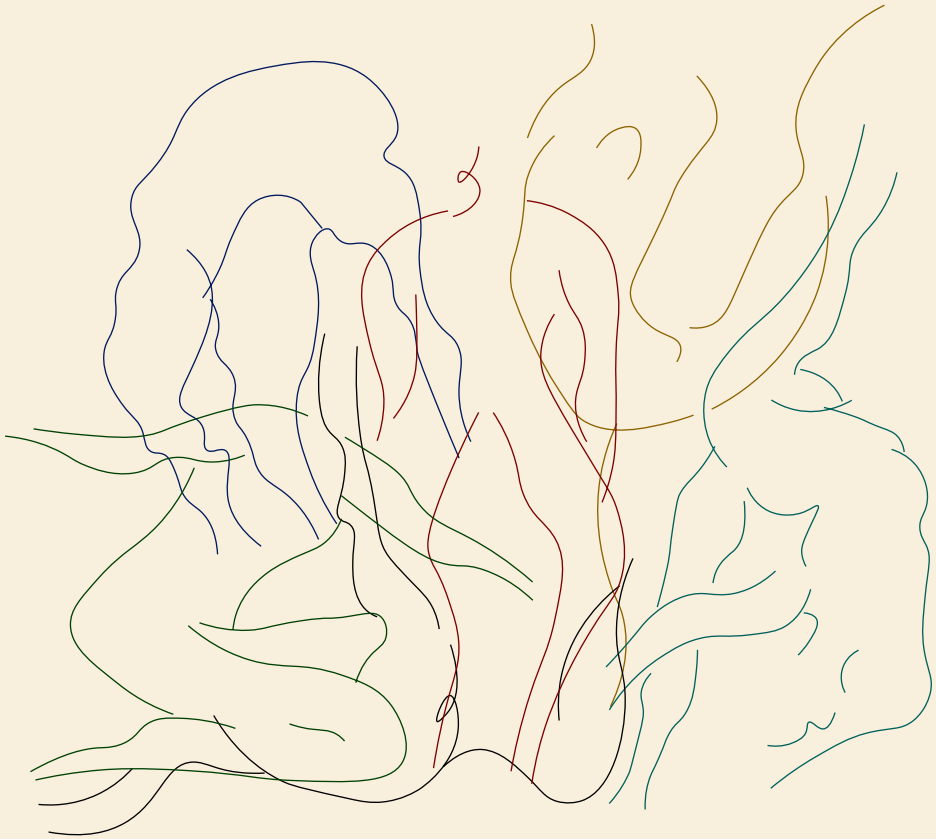
Fig.4 Bergson's Method of problematization for research & design (Adapted from Kousoulas, S. (2021)). Lecture Problematization. TU Delft AR3A010 Research Plan.

Designing the Urban Catharsis

The concept of 'body-without-organs' will be carried to the next step of the research in relation to design as suggested by Ballantyne. He describes it as the creative state where preconceptions are set aside. Before a design is given form, all the possibilities are immanent. "The body without organs is pure immanence ('the plane of immanence') having in it no conceptual apparatus that has been imposed from outside – nothing transcendental about it." This is an ideal state where everything is possible. "When a stimulus or an internal pain prompts a line of flight, then formations assemble, giving the beginnings of a form – a structure, a detail, a leitmotif." (2007, p.36)[15]

Problematic characteristics of the area will be reevaluated as emotionally moving musical elements inspired by Bergson's method of problematization. (Fig.4) "For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is to uncover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing." (Bergson, 1934, p.89)[18] Departing from the proposals for the Binckhorst - impositions of extrinsic forms - so far, the granules of the context's matter will be revealed to give rise to the design. Immanent properties of a place are inherent and there all along although making them apparent requires particular methods. The research aims to exhaust these methods. After the cathartic release of immanent properties of the site, local sub-culture and industry will be preserved. Industrial leftovers will be integrated in the design not solely as containers but with proper theoretical and acoustic care where music and performances that incorporate new media and technology can take place. Accordingly, an extensive study of the embodied experience of music and architecture in regard to new materials and performance technologies will be conducted.

First phase of the research (P1) started with site visits, sample collections and recordings in forms of photography and sound. In the meantime, case studies of significant music venues as well as influential urban manifestoes were scrutinized in order to situate an individual position towards the context. The dérive and multidimensional mapping that has been coming along, explained in the previous chapter, will continue throughout the research. Each time a cultural, material, sensory or any



new layer is formed, a question will be asked: What is the score of this (cultural, material, sensory) rhythm? This activity is expected to result in a site-specific notational system where the interrelations give rise to spatial arrangements. Without any preconceived architectural program or concept, elements of discordance in the Binckhorst will be reformatted similar to a musical arrangement and played back to the crowds. (P2-P4) In order to produce a purposeful system, theories from architects, landscape designers, dancers, choreographers and how they used movement and notation to guide the construction of space will be looked into. These can be listed as Bernard Tschumi, Lawrence Halprin, Rudolf Laban, William Forsythe and Frederic Flamand. For example Flamand, a choreographer who collaborated with architects such as Elizabeth Diller and Jean Nouvel, sees music as the dance floor and architecture as the space that exists between one body and another. Flamand's performances focus on body and movement in relation to media and environment, specifically the city. His performances are almost always located outside the conventional theater challenging architecture and public space, in order to add shock value and challenge boundaries between art and daily life. Finally, the typology of public bath as the embodiment of coexisting spatial and sensual contrasts will be studied. It will be taken as the architectural reference of the act of purification; as centres of social interaction where statuses become fluid and private rituals become public.

The research strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as across disciplines such as neuroscience, architecture, urbanism, site-specific performance, music and dance. This walk of architecture is expected to deviate from the traditional role of a master architect/ composer and instead engage cognitively as well as emotionally with the users through dynamic and participatory approach to the surrounding environment. The Binckhorst holds the power to become a dance floor where the context and contrasts are appreciated, a place where people come stripping off their identity to become a part of something bigger. It can be a place where people dump not just their trash but emotions, an attractive urban catharsis. The Binckhorst is envisioned to become both a place of relief from strong emotions, and a place causing strong emotions through musical experience where borders between performance and real life are blurred.

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