

# **The Ephemeral Architecture of Mas(k)**

National Centre for Carnival and Culture  
Trinidad & Tobago

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## **abstract**

This thesis examines the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago and their renowned institution of Carnival. Several intended explorations include notions of 'the mask' and its ability to create an escape from the everyday; the uninhibited release of tension, troubles, and hard times; uplifting the spirit through satirical mimicry of all that holds one down; and the power of the human body in motion and its poetic ability to express the soul. In studying Trinidad Carnival, and its many social, political, and religious implications, an effort has been made to appropriately respond to both colonial and post-colonial social conditions in relation to the architectural design of a National Centre for Carnival and Culture in Trinidad and Tobago's capital city of Port of Spain: In an attempt to capture the essence of Trinidad Carnival, how can architecture functionally respond to the ephemerality of the festival and fundamental notions of masking (and revealing) the souls of the people, the city, and the nation?

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## **acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

**carnival** [mid 16<sup>th</sup> century] *carn-* 'flesh' + *levare* 'put away', associated with feasting before fasting at Lent.  
(Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories, 2002)<sup>1</sup>

In days of glory colonial empires flourished, being built upon the backs of 'uncivilized', yet 'exotic' nations. In attempts to adapt to new climates while maintaining the comforts of home, colonizers more often than not imposed their social, political, cultural, religious, aesthetic, and artistic ideals upon native peoples. Perhaps one of the greatest phenomena born in response to these bittersweet conditions is that of Carnival. Trinidad and Tobago, former British, Spanish, and Dutch Colonies, are now an independent republic which possesses a uniquely rich and multi-faceted culture based upon many ethnic, religious, and political components. Annually these individually complex constituents seamlessly unite to produce one of the largest and most powerful pre-Lenten Carnivals in the world: Trinidad Carnival. The Carnival season spanning from Christmas to Ash Wednesday, is a great testament to Trinidad and Tobago's excellence and strong identity in visual, performing, and culinary arts. The festivities climax on Carnival Monday and Tuesday always directly preceding Ash Wednesday. At midnight on Carnival Tuesday, all festivities come to an end and the Carnival spirit once again dissolves into the pattern of the everyday. In its

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<sup>1</sup> Glynnis Chantrell, ed. Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2002) 85.

entirety, the spirit of Carnival speaks of colonialism, slavery, emancipation, religion, a play against good and evil, a celebration of life, the validity of all human beings, perseverance, strength, creativity and unity.

Trinidad Carnival is a renewal of place: it is a renewal of the entire twin island nation; of the capital city of Port of Spain, where many carnival activities take place; of the Queen's Park Savannah—the immediate site of the parade and all major carnival shows and competitions. In its ephemeral yet cyclical nature, an annual awakening of carnival activity and a return to slumber can be seen throughout Trinidad and around the Savannah. Though this festival of Carnival has retained several key aspects throughout the centuries, a large portion of the event is based on the spontaneous, ephemeral spectacle, which in itself reflects the renewal of creativity, ingenuity, and spirit of individuals. Author Milla Cozart Riggio acknowledges this characteristic as an integral and defining attribute of the festival:

“It is impossible to pin Trinidad Carnival down. Always on the edge, always threatened by commercialization, the festival spins on, twisting and shifting in ways that are neither predictable nor essentially comforting. Nothing characterizes carnival more than its perpetual sense of change. Mostly, whatever one says today will not be true tomorrow. The essence of the event is ephemerality and endless renewal—death and rebirth of many kinds.

(Cozart Riggio, 45)<sup>2</sup>

Currently, Trinidad and Tobago's government wishes to lead its nation to a developed status by the year 2020. This goal is attainable, in large part, through the islands' wealth as a major natural gas and oil exporter. In order for this renewal and redevelopment to occur, the nation must undergo intense periods of

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<sup>2</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio. “The Carnival Story—Then and Now” Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 45.

building, re-planning, and re-designing of major urban areas; the development and stability of rural areas; and the realization of acceptable national and international standards of infrastructure reaching all areas of the country. It is believed that the strength of Trinidad Carnival can help the nation achieve this goal. Revenues generated from the festival will certainly be a welcomed contributor to the nation's undertaking. However, perhaps more importantly, the added pride to an already incredibly patriotic nation, boosted through the celebration of Carnival, will spur nationals to push forward in every aspect possible to become the best that they can be as a united nation. The majority of Trinidadians are immensely proud of the spectacular impact Trinidad Carnival has made. The festival's recognition on a world scale means that Trinidad and Tobago can be recognized among the world's best for creativity, flamboyancy of spirit, ingenuity, and multicultural unity. Both the parent festival of Trinidad Carnival and diasporic carnivals in North America and Europe bring awareness of Trinidad and Tobago to foreigners, which may be a powerful catalyst for developing international ties. In turn, diaspora carnivals around the world serve to renew the spirit of Trinidad culture and sentiments of "home" to nationals living abroad. In observing this phenomenon, author Keith Nurse asserts:

"diasporic Caribbean carnivals are products of and responses to the processes of globalization as well as transcultural social formations. This illustrates that carnival as a cultural activity is not just about merriment, colorful pageantry, revelry and street theatre, although there is a lot of that taking place. Carnival is born out of the struggle of marginalized peoples to shape a cultural identity through resistance, liberation, and catharsis.....The diasporic carnivals have acted as a bond between the diasporic community and those at home, promoting much travel and contributing to the growth of a cultural industry in Trinidad and Tobago.....It is also observed that the sheer size and economic impact of

the diasporic Caribbean carnivals have made them an important basis for transnational diasporic politics.

(Nurse, 254)<sup>3</sup>

Being a developing nation, it often goes unnoticed that Trinidad and Tobago has a wealth of creative resources and the ability to accomplish fantastical feats—a skill most definitely exemplified by Trinidad Carnival. This festival reinforces and legitimizes the fact that such a small nation can certainly have a big voice on the global stage.

## The Site

The Queen's Park Savannah, a large 94-hectare park located in Port of Spain, lies at the foot of the Northern Range<sup>4</sup> in the centre of several residential neighbourhoods. It is bordered by the city proper to the south, and the Magnificent 7, a lavish group of colonial mansions, to the west. The site of this festival extends beyond the Queen's Park Savannah into the core of Port of Spain as the parade carves its way through a long route of commercial and residential streets. The Savannah was originally part of St. Ann's Estate, a sugar plantation owned by the Peschier family. Governor Woodford purchased this portion of land as a park for the city in 1817<sup>5</sup> provided that the space remained available for the recreation of the people.<sup>6</sup> The Peschier's walled family cemetery still lies at the centre of the park and remains in use by the descendants of the family.

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Nurse. "Globalization in Reverse: Diaspora and the export of Trinidad Carnival" Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 254.

<sup>4</sup> **Northern Range** A mountain chain lying on the northern coast of Trinidad.

<sup>5</sup> Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 218.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Mason. Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 35.

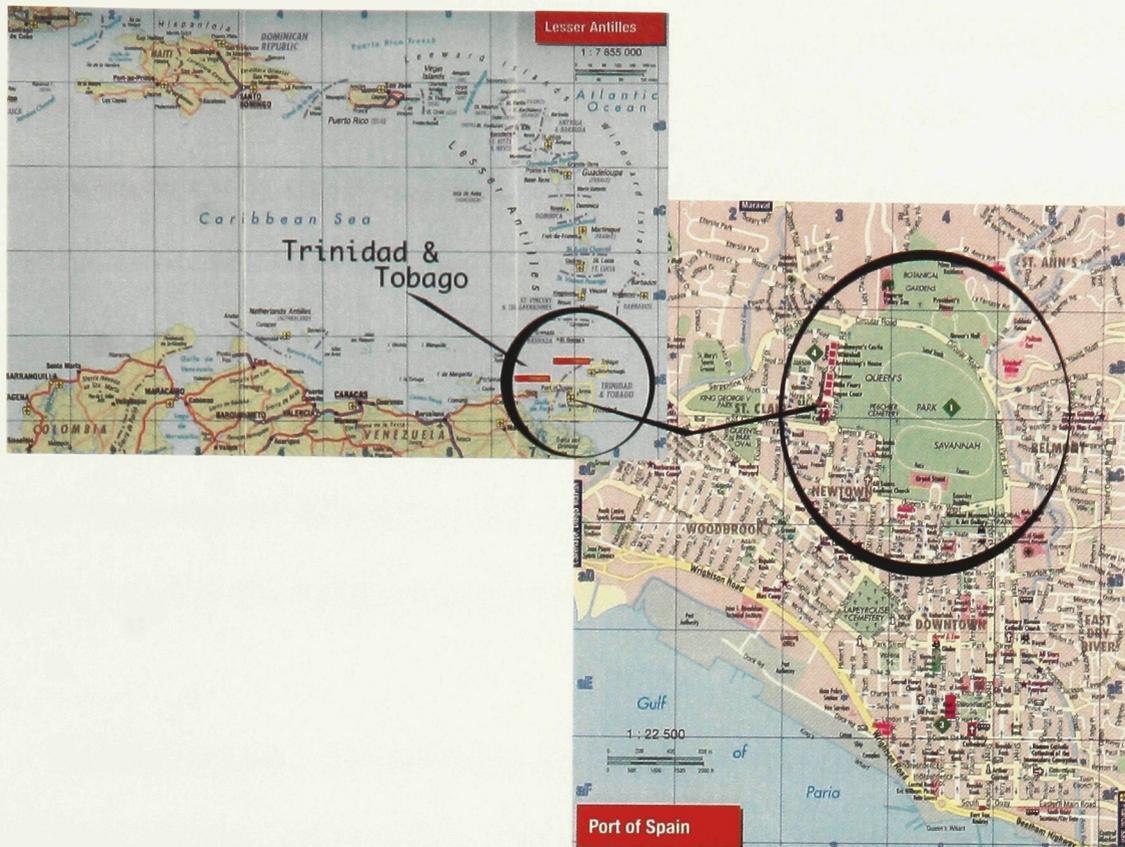


Figure 1 . Trinidad and Tobago's location in the Caribbean Sea; a map of Port of Spain highlighting the Queen's Park Savannah.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2 . A north west view of the Savannah on a weekday afternoon in May. Existing Grandstand seen in mid-ground. Photograph by author, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> InsightMap: Trinidad & Tobago. (Fürstenfeldbruck, Germany: Berndtson & Berndtson GmbH) 2002.

This site is one long steeped in controversy as many attempts have been made over the centuries to put this prime piece of land to other uses. In 1890, an attempt was made to erect housing on a portion of the Savannah. This idea was met by much opposition from the colony and city dwellers who, by now, had embraced the park and were accustomed to passing leisurely time on its greens. In 1999 a portion of the park was covered with an asphalt surface, which caused a tremendous uproar throughout the island.<sup>8</sup> The unsightly surface remained, however, much to the disappointment of the nation.

As time passes, a growing concern troubles many Trinidadians: that the site of their carnival, the Queen's Park Savannah, is becoming forgotten as one of the nation's most celebrated gathering spaces. Is it fair to say that were it not for the festival of Carnival that the Queen's Park would likely become a large void in the centre of Port of Spain? Presently, it seems that one of the few conditions keeping this urban park alive is the occurrence of festival upon its grounds. This may be due to changing priorities and interests among citizens—perhaps strolling, gaming, and liming<sup>9</sup> in the park are not as desirable pastimes as they once were. If this is the case, it will be the role of festival, of Trinidad Carnival, that will continuously renew this site for centuries to come.

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<sup>8</sup> Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 218.

<sup>9</sup> **liming** to spend time talking, laughing, drinking with other people. Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 289.

## The Design Proposal

This thesis responds to the aforementioned site conditions by proposing a demountable and transformable structure that pushes normal boundaries just as the spectacle of Trinidad Carnival does. It proposes an informal architecture in the park which Trinbagonians may use for their leisure year-round. This structure does, however, take on a formal character from January to March as it becomes the center stage of Trinidad Carnival activities. The proposed architecture aims to act as a political and social neutralizer while prescribing to the ephemeral nature of the festival.

The now dilapidated Grandstand (seen in *figure 3*) located in the southern portion of the Queen's Park Savannah, has been the home of Carnival and its major activities for the past 60 years. Since its construction, this galvanized shed-like structure and its support facilities have been in violation of the condition that no permanent structures should exist on Savannah grounds. The Grandstand has served its purpose for decades, providing seating for sporting events in the Savannah as well as all major Carnival events. Now seen as an eyesore and deficient as a significant piece of civic architecture in terms of international standards, the structure, long loved and hated by many nationals, is scheduled for demolition to make way for a new, permanent, state-of-the-art *National Centre for Carnival and Culture*. Many critics worry that the new designs for such a program may not be sensitive to the park and its users and may further contribute to its decline. Traditionally, the Queen's Park Savannah has been cherished as 'the nation's playground', being the site for many games,

picnics, cricket, horse racing, and Trinidad Carnival. In recent years, however, many of these activities have been relocated or have ceased to materialize, leaving the green grounds eerily silent on many beautiful afternoons. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that as time progresses and more cars crowd the city streets, the park becomes increasingly inaccessible. Motorists are reluctant to stop to allow pedestrians to cross onto park grounds thereby negatively impacting the park's use as recreational grounds.



Figure 3 . Queen's Park Savannah, 2006. Early morning Carnival Tuesday crowd begins to gather as masqueraders dance onto the stage for judging. Photograph by author.



Figure 4 . Queen's Park Savannah, 2006. The empty Grandstand and Northstand face each other for the final time as the Grandstand awaits demolition to make way for new facilities. Photograph by author.

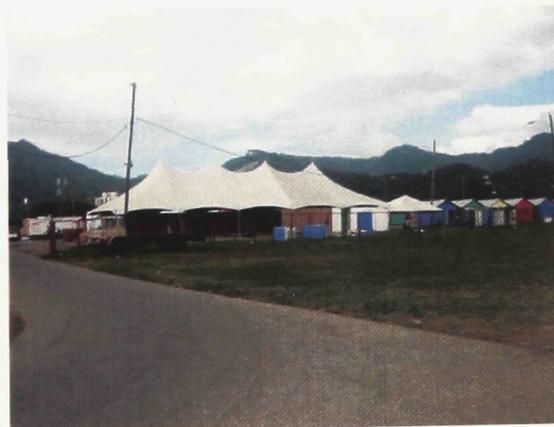


Figure 5 . Queen's Park Savannah, 2006. The temporary structures of the Carnival Global Village remain desolate just days after carnival. Photograph by author.

Based on these conditions, the park has become satirically known as the largest roundabout in the world, since the program in the park becomes practically dormant for the majority of the year, compared to the tremendous amount of activity seen in the Carnival season. Currently, the perimeter of the park sees the most action, as it is used by joggers and couples seated upon the few shaded benches situated along its edges.

The design proposal of this thesis strives to bring life back into the park by introducing a carnival off-season “mask” where the new Grandstand structure becomes imbedded in the park’s greens translated as shaded benches, water features, and vending and picnic areas. All of these features are in a sense temporary as once carnival season approaches, the Grandstand structure is annually hoisted out of the ground and erected into a carnival village including a shaded structure that seats approximately 15 000 carnival spectators, a raised run-way like stage, media, vendor, and washroom facilities, and a back-stage preparation area. The design proposal of this thesis is intended to result in a multi-functional world-class structure whose characteristics evoke the spirit of Trinidad Carnival.

### **Conceptual Carnival Influences**

This thesis explores a festival which is highly based on experience. It is a festival of the spectacle, deeply rooted in tradition, slavery, colonialism, and emancipation. Trinidad Carnival is further influenced by struggles of political and social power, and rich themes of masking, making, renewal, self-discovery,

acceptance, the appropriation of spaces, the release of inhibitions, the ephemeral and an entire nation in motion through the expression of the soul, spontaneous, yet deeply focused in sensuous dance. The motion of carnival can be seen at several different scales: isolated parts of the body, the entire individual, the couple, the group, and the sea of people flowing through the city streets. Similar notions of motion and flexibility have been applied to the Grandstand design proposal: the flex and or motion of individual parts, the demountable nature of the structure, and the folding of the major structure into the ground plane of the site.

An all-encompassing experience of Trinidad Carnival engages the five senses and demands the complete physical and mental immersion into the spectacle. In a sense, the development of this thesis has become a narrative based on personal experience of the festival. In addition to the narrative, this exploration is primarily artistically based, as is Trinidad Carnival, where expression is drawn through fabrication and the further translation and interpretation of the object. As well, it reflects the tendency of Trinbagonian<sup>10</sup> society to thrive on the spontaneous and the surreal. As Milla Cozart Riggio's preceding quote states, "it is impossible to pin Trinidad Carnival down" as it is in a constant state of often unpredictable movement. In this society, the spontaneous becomes the spectacle, both of the everyday and of the festival of carnival, which is freely embraced, interpreted, criticized, and re-interpreted.

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<sup>10</sup> **Trinbagonian** An inhabitant of Trinidad and or Tobago; of or pertaining to Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally, this thesis reveals relationships between architecture and *mas*<sup>11</sup> (the creations contributing to the spectacle) on both formal and scalar levels.

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<sup>11</sup> **mas, mas'** Mas is the Trinidadian word for masquerade. Some people prefer "mas" to carnival. Mas is part of the triumvirate: *calypso*, *pan*, and *mas*.  
Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 289.



**part I . Carnival & Bacchanal**

## **A Brief History of Trinidad and Tobago & Trinidad Carnival**

To better understand the current status of postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago, it is imperative to comprehend the islands' history. These two West Indian islands are situated in the Caribbean Sea being the southernmost islands in the Lower Antilles Chain. Lying just seven miles off the northeastern coast of Venezuela, Trinidad, the larger of the two islands, has been inhabited by Mesolithic Indians dating back to 5000 BC. It was not until later on, however, that the commonly known South American tribes of Carib and Arawak Indians made these islands their home.<sup>12</sup> Christopher Columbus claimed the sister isles for Spain in 1498, giving Trinidad its name. After his arrival, the majority of the 35,000 indigenous Indians were eventually wiped out by European occupation. By 1797 over 10,000 West African Slaves had been relocated to Trinidad and Tobago from the Atlantic Slave Trade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, being the golden eras of colonization, brought the secured British colonial occupation of Trinidad and Tobago in 1814. With the 1834 abolishment of slavery, the British Empire had to find an alternative labour force which would help them continue to farm their plantations. As a solution, between 1845 and

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<sup>12</sup>Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 21.

<sup>13</sup>Ovidio Guaita. On Distant Shores: Colonial Houses Around the World. (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999) 12.

1917, over 145,000 East Indian indentured labourers were transported to help work the fields.<sup>14</sup> The years between 1848 and 1852, a couple thousand Chinese labourers were brought with the anticipation that they too would help with the physical labour. Unfortunately, the death rate of the Chinese labourers was quite high once they reached the isles and the majority of the surviving immigrants assisted in the sale of goods and light physical labour.<sup>15</sup>

Trinidad and Tobago is a relatively young nation who received their independence from Britain in 1962. Following their independence, they began acquiring wealth through offshore drilling in the late 1960's.<sup>16</sup> As a result of such a past, the ethnicity of Trinidad and Tobago is quite varied. In today's society, over 80% of the population is of African and East Indian descent.<sup>17</sup> A large portion of the remainder is of mixed race including traces of Spanish, Portuguese, Syrian, Lebanese, East Indian, African, and Chinese. Finally, smaller, yet equally significant percentages of the population are of Chinese and European descent. These backgrounds yield a combined population of 1.3 million inhabitants.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Arif Ali, ed. Trinidad and Tobago: Terrific and Tranquil. (London: Hansib Publications Limited, 2001) 12.

<sup>15</sup> Arif Ali, ed. Trinidad and Tobago: Terrific and Tranquil. (London: Hansib Publications Limited, 2001) 12.

<sup>16</sup> Arif Ali, ed. Trinidad and Tobago: Terrific and Tranquil. (London: Hansib Publications Limited, 2001) 264.

<sup>17</sup> Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 84.

<sup>18</sup> Arif Ali, ed. Trinidad and Tobago: Terrific and Tranquil. (London: Hansib Publications Limited, 2001) 10.



Figure 6 . "Children of Trinidad and Tobago"<sup>19</sup>

Resulting from this flavoured *mélange* of ethnicities, the country is made up of several religious groups. Filtering down from colonial times Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Baptists, and African Orishas, among more, practice their faith on the islands.<sup>20</sup> The cultural makeup leads to several different cultural traditions, each with its own unique vernacular, along with assorted religious aesthetics and tectonics. It is imperative to pose the question: In the aftermath of colonialism, why is it necessary for Trinbagonians to cling to a national identity provided that such a concept is a European creation? The idea of national identity is key since these islands were founded on a man-made society comprising many different ethnicities, which were introduced at various levels of social stratification. National identity is a much-needed mechanism for unification in Trinidad and

<sup>19</sup>Michael Anthony and Andrew Carr, Eds. David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago. (London: André Deutsch Limited) 1975, colour insert.

<sup>20</sup> Burton Sankeralli. "Crossing Boundaries of Faith and Religion" Trinidad and Tobago: Terrific and Tranquil. Ed. Arif Ali. (London: Hansib Publications Limited, 2001) 19.

Tobago. Many rifts result from the introduction of social stratifications. Whereas some groups were permitted to maintain various levels and aspects of their homeland cultures, others were not. For example, indentured Indian labourers were permitted to retain their names and languages, while African slaves were not. With these lingering issues, how, then, is a nation to unify and harmoniously combine such varied elements to further develop a modern society?

The tradition which is perhaps the most successful at binding the nation in unity is the globally renowned celebration of Carnival. A celebration born in colonial times of both sacred and secular origin, Carnival is an annual tradition falling on the last few pre-Lenten days. The Carnival season, ranging from Christmas to Ash Wednesday, is a great testament to Trinidad and Tobago's excellence and strong identity in visual, performing, and culinary arts.

Trinidad Carnival has long been a festival based upon the renewal of spirit through a release of tensions and troubles borne of slavery and colonial rule. First celebrated in Trinidad in 1783 by the newly arrived French plantocracy during Spanish occupation, the festival of carnival was introduced as a high-class celebration where whites held masked balls and paraded through the streets dressed as their lowly free-coloured counterparts and garden slaves. Negro slaves were not allowed to participate in these festivities; however, they were allowed certain liberties in the form of revelry upon plantations where they were free to express themselves without retribution from their masters.<sup>21</sup> Despite these rare liberties, colonizers always braced themselves for any type of revolt

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<sup>21</sup> Errol Hill. The Trinidad Carnival. (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1997) 10, 11.

that may be facilitated by large congregations of slaves sampling a taste of freedom.<sup>22</sup> When the emancipation of slavery act was officially announced in Trinidad on August 1, 1834, the following Trinidad Carnival saw a newfound working-class participation much frowned upon by the whites of the upper class. This participation, non-coincidentally, was the same time when members of the higher social classes ceased to participate in the now “marred” event.<sup>23</sup>

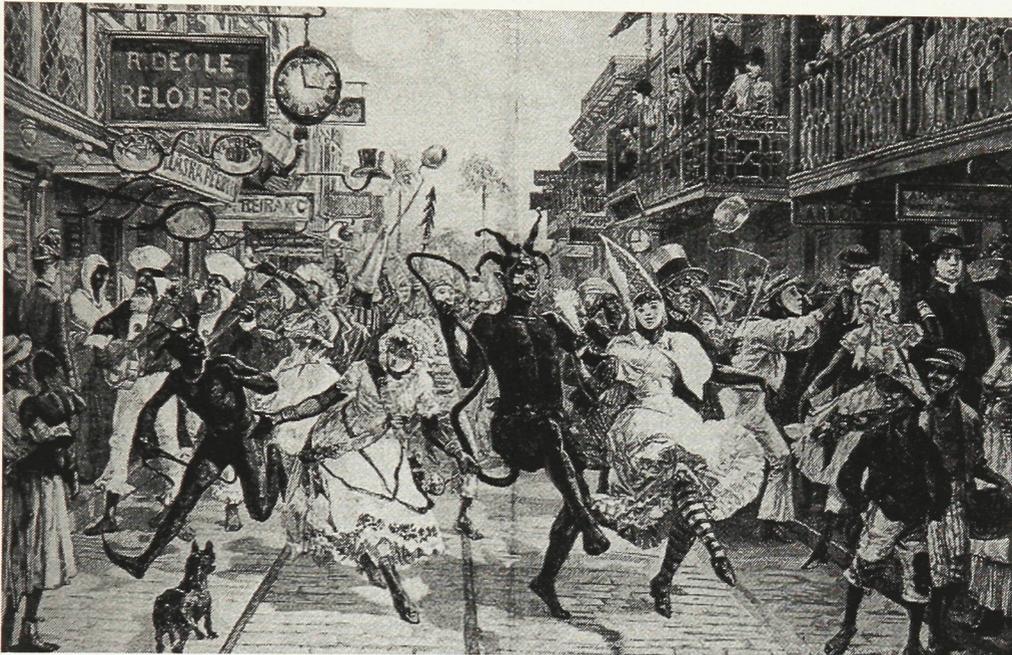


Figure 7 . Ole time *mas* in Port of Spain, Trinidad, c. 1888. Negro Trinidadians masqueraded, openly mocking the upper class and the authorities.<sup>24</sup>

Taking to the streets in disguise, freed slaves openly mocked the authorities under whom they had suffered much oppression, degradation and misery.<sup>25</sup> Carnival became the voice of the people, an outlet, a cleansing catharsis that allowed them, through satire, to reclaim their self-worth in a repressively structured society.

<sup>22</sup> Errol Hill. The Trinidad Carnival. (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1997) 13.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Carr. “Carnival”. David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago. (London: André Deutsch Limited) 1975, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 43.

<sup>25</sup> Errol Hill. The Trinidad Carnival. (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1997) 14.

Following the complete abolition of slavery in 1838, there were many riots during Trinidad Carnival through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was a reflection of a changing society attempting to progress despite fresh wounds which had hardly begun to heal. Authorities attempted to dictate the manifestation of the festival, banning the use of drums and the performance of *canboulay*,<sup>26</sup> among many other restrictions. The following brief timeline, sourced from “Trinidad Carnival Timeline”, *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*, outlines the evolution of the festival, bridging the gap between colonial and modern carnival times:

- 1834 Emancipation of Slavery Act passed in Britain.
- 1838 The complete abolition of slavery was announced on August, 1.
- 1843 Trinidad Carnival celebrations limited to two days of revelry, signaling the end of the carnival season.
- 1901 *Calypso* formally recognized as a genre of music.
- 1917 Prohibition of masking during carnival, this ban lifted for Victory Carnival of 1919 following a two-year carnival ban due to WWI.
- 1941 Carnival suspended due to WWII; the development of steelbands commenced and continued until 1945
- 1953 Beginning of the Calypso King competition which would later inspire the Calypso Monarch, Soca/Chutney, Soca Monarch, and Panorama competitions.
- 1962 The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago gained its independence from British rule.

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<sup>26</sup> **canboulay, cannes brulees, cannes brûlées** Derived from the French for “burning cane”...Canboulay is a celebration of resistance and emancipation, reenacting the days when enslaved Africans were driven with cracking whips to put out fires set by vandals on sugarcane plantations...Canboulay used to be celebrated on August 1, the date of emancipation. Subsequently it was moved to midnight of *Dimanche Gras*.

Carol Martin. “Trinidad Carnival Glossary” *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 285.

- 1977 Soca was born as a musical genre as Calypsonian Ras Shorty I labels “the soul of calypso” SOKAH
- 1991 The National Carnival Commission replaces the Carnival Development Committee<sup>27</sup>

In modern times, Trinidad Carnival continues to strengthen and maintain its role as the major characteristic of national identity for this Caribbean nation. Accordingly, the renewal of spirit brought about by carnival serves as a continual renewal of the nation, and the national identity. Carnival is a time when racial and economic tensions subside and the majority of nationals, 1.3 million on both islands combined, come together in the name of being Trinbagonian, to give life to the popular phrase “All o’ we is one”. The carnival season spawns an annual awakening which reaffirms the value of life—Trinidad Carnival has the power to keep the place (i.e. the urban sites inhabited by the festival) and the nation alive. In his much-acclaimed fiction entitled *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace depicts true people of Trinidad, their daily struggles, and their personal affinity to carnival. Lovelace writes of the power of the festival of Carnival to uplift the people, signifying the dawn of new days:

“Up on the hill with Carnival coming, radios go on full blast, trembling these shacks, booming out calypsos, the songs that announce in this season the new rhythms for people to walk in, rhythms that climb over the red dirt and stone, break-away rhythms that laugh through the groans of these sights, these smells, that swim through the bones of these enduring people so that they shout: Life! They cry: Hurrah! They drink a rum and say: Fuck it! They walk with a tall hot beauty between the garbage and dog shit, proclaiming life, exulting in the bare bones of their person and their skin.

Up on the hill with carnival coming and calypso tunes swimming in the hair of these shacks, piercing their nostrils, everybody catches the spirit and these women with baskets and their heads tied, these women

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<sup>27</sup> Dawn K. Batson and Milla Cozart Riggio. “Trinidad Carnival Timeline” Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 31-36.

winding daily down this hill on which no buses run, tramping down this asphalt lane slashed across this mountain's face, on their way, to Port of Spain city, to market, to work as a domestic, or to any other menial task they inherit because of their beauty; these women, in this season, bounce with that tall delicious softness of bosom and hip, their movements a dance, as if they were earth priestesses heralding a new spring."

(Lovelace, 5)<sup>28</sup>

Carnival is a time of renewed hope for the future. A time when people forget their lot in life, however unfortunate or opportune it may be, and rejoice in the fact that they are beautiful and free in many more ways than society may claim; they are free because they have a voice; they are free because they love and are loved, they are free through dance, and music and laughter; they are free because they live life a day at a time; they are free because they, as a society, no longer live in fear of themselves and of others.

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<sup>28</sup> Earl Lovelace. The Dragon Can't Dance. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979) 5.

## The Mask . The Social Significance of Carnival

Up on the Hill Carnival Monday morning breaks upon the backs of these thin shacks with no cock's crow, and before the mist clears, little boys, costumed in old dresses, their heads tied, holding brooms made from the ribs of coconut palm leaves, blowing whistles and beating kerosene tins for drums, move across the face of the awakening Hill, sweeping yards in a ritual, heralding the masqueraders' coming, that goes back centuries for its beginnings, back across the Middle Passage, back to Mali and to Guinea and Dahomey and Congo, back to Africa when Maskers were sacred and revered, the keepers of the poisons and heads of secret societies, and such children went before them, clearing the ground, announcing their coming to the huts before which they would dance and make their terrible cries, affirming for the village, the tribe, warriorhood and femininity, linking the villagers to their ancestors, their Gods, remembered even now, so long after the Crossing, if not in the brain, certainly in the blood; so that every Carnival Monday morning, Aldrick Prospect, with only the memory burning in his blood, a memory that had endured the three hundred odd years to Calvary Hill felt, as he put on his dragon costume, a sense of entering a sacred mask that invested him with an ancestral authority to uphold before the people of this Hill, this tribe marooned so far from the homeland that was never their home, the warriorhood that had not died in them, their humanness that was determined not by possession of things. He had a desire, a mission to let them see their beauty, to uphold the unending rebellion they waged, huddled here on this stone and dirt hill hanging over the city like the open claws on a dragon's hand, threatening destruction if they were not recognized as human beings.

(Lovelace, 112)<sup>29</sup>

Trinidad Carnival perpetuates notions of 'the mask' and its ability to create and escape from the everyday. Carried over from ancient African tribal traditions, in European-influenced carnivals of the West Indies, masking traditions facilitate the uninhibited release of emotion, tension and a distancing from hard times, and often assists in the uplifting of the spirit through satirical mimicry of all that holds one down. Author Milla Cozart Riggio notes that in colonial times, African slaves, as well as East Indian indentured labourers

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<sup>29</sup> Earl Lovelace. The Dragon Can't Dance. (London: Andre Deutsch) 1979, 112.

developed Janus-type personalities in places borne of circumstances where the majority of the population is forced to live by colonialist laws which they did not create, nor would naturally subscribe to. This first mask is the indifferent, submissive *other* face shown to colonizers whereas the opposing mask is the face of the true *self*, which is willingly shared with family and those who relate to the daily struggles. In such societies of domination where “authorities” denounce the free will of “the people”, the practice of masking oneself and playing the *other* becomes an integral skill of daily survival.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 8 . “Carnival, Wild Indian Costumes, 1910”<sup>31</sup>

The term “play mas” is a derivation of “playing mask” which literally meant to masquerade in the streets in the early days of carnival.<sup>32</sup> Trinidad is “an island in which ‘playing *mas*’ has for many come to define a way of life, where to ‘play your *mas*’ can mean to ‘do your thing’. Carnival masking has a mystique that

<sup>30</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio. “Play Mas’—Play Me, Play We”. Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 93,94.

<sup>31</sup> Photographer unknown. “The Trinidad Guardian Online Photo Gallery: Postcards From Trinidad & Tobago”. The Trinidad Guardian. [Online] [http://www.guardian.co.tt/photos/details.php?image\\_id=954](http://www.guardian.co.tt/photos/details.php?image_id=954), 1910.

<sup>32</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio. “Play Mas’—Play Me, Play We”. Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 107.

both manifests and calls into question varying senses of identity and processes of cultural memory.” (Riggio, 93)<sup>33</sup> In colonial and post-colonial societies, Riggio states that this identity and disguise are often in danger of blurring into one another where it becomes difficult to separate the *self* from the mask of the *other*. She elaborates that this occurrence is common in these societies where the subverted masses are constantly told that they do not fit the mold of all that is publicly acceptable in terms of beauty, intelligence, strength, and wisdom. Perhaps this blurring occurs when one accepts subversion and turns to the standards of the “authorities” in an effort to belong to the “greater” social image. Riggio believes that it is, however, possible to maintain the sense of *self* despite ruthless colonialist criticisms. This is achieved through transforming, adapting, and disguising the beliefs, rituals, and customs of the *self* into a form that fits within the ideal of acceptable ritual belonging to European colonizers. She acknowledges that this method causes traditions to become altered by the mixing and or disguising of European ideals, but the outcome allows the roots of meaning to remain intact:

Equally as important as the threads of origin are the parallels between different masking traditions: between the European hobbyhorse, the Indian Soumarie, and the Trinidadian Burroquite; the African martial game of stickfighting and European fencing; African Moko Jumbies and European stilt walkers. Just as the character of Catholic saints made it easy for Yoruba Orishas to take refuge behind Catholic masks, so too these parallels facilitated the creation of carnival as a Trinidadian phenomenon, merging and mixing many traditions.

(Riggio, 95)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Milla Cozart Riggio. “Play Mas’—Play Me, Play We”. Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 93.

<sup>34</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio. “Play Mas’—Play Me, Play We”. Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 95.

In Riggio's theory, the blending of drastically different African, East Indian, and European cultures became a mechanism of survival and preservation of the *self*.

Similar to Riggio's views, Jane M. Jacobs and her theories of colonialism, makes clear distinctions between the *colonizer* and the *colonized*. In a different manner to Riggio, Jacobs equates these terms to notions of *Self* and *Other* respectively. In her book entitled *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, she states:

Although imperialism is undeniably a political and economic event, it also operates through a range of cultural processes. For example, social constructs of Self and Other provided the fundamental building blocks for the hierarchies of power which produced empires and the uneven relations among their citizenry. Under colonialism, negative constructions of the colonised [sic] Other established certain structures of domination through which the coloniser triumphed....The processes by which notions of the Self and Other are defined, articulated and negotiated are a crucial part of what might be thought of as the cultural dimension of colonialism and postcolonialism....The nineteenth-century imperial project most clearly, but not exclusively, depended upon the racialised [sic] notions of Self and Other. Imperialism operated within an ideal of the Manichaeian binary, which constructed a demonised [sic] Other against which flattering, and legitimating, images of the metropolitan Self were defined. Such racialised [sic] constructs were never stable and were always threatened not only by the unpredictability of the Other but also the uncertain homogeneity and boundedness of the Self.

(Jacobs, 2)<sup>35</sup>

Jacobs is one of few who recognizes the cultural effects that such dominations bring into effect. Perhaps the most detrimental is the birth of the myth of inferior races—the *Other* being inferior. This unfortunately is a mentality that, although not as prevalent, still lingers and filters down into the views of modern society. A view that is hard to overcome, no matter how many hundreds of years have passed—a mentality that has no hope of being obliterated until the *Other* is consistently viewed as an equal at the modern scale of globalization. This may

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<sup>35</sup> Jane M. Jacobs. Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City. (London: Routledge, 1996) 2-3.

be a large, somewhat utopian ideal, seeing that the task at hand is to change stereotypes that have been heavily engrained over centuries. The manifestation of Jacob's *Self/Other* is the basis for the creation and necessity of the two-faced *self/other*(mask) which Riggio describes. Following Jacob's construct, nations cannot move past colonialism and proceed to strengthening a developing nation until these notions of *Self* and *Other* have been substantially broken down as the modern form of Trinidad Carnival's masking attempts to do.

Bakhtin's theories surrounding carnival are based on a non-democratic society where carnival is an event in which official societal rules are set aside when "the people", or Riggio's *self*, can express themselves freely as the African maskers did in Lovelace's depiction. Bakhtin's theories originated in the USSR under the regime of Stalinism. His theories are based, however, on the European medieval. Author and Professor Richard Schechner's essay "Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin" notes that coming from a society familiar with oppression yet foreign to the brutal colonial origins of European-inspired Trinidad Carnival, Bakhtin's views, influenced by a society of dictatorship, depict carnival revelers who rebel against official culture. This motive of revelry contradicts Trinidad Carnival of today where the festival is as much a celebration of official culture as it is a critique.<sup>36</sup> Schechner points out one way to view modern Trinidad Carnival: as "an enactment that at one and the same time plays out democratic illusions, giving temporary relief from the authority (if not oppression and downright

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Schechner. "Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin". Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 3,4.

tyranny) imposed in the name of 'democracy'." (Schechner, 2004)<sup>37</sup> That said, Schechner declares that Trinidad Carnival "is partially a festival of 'differences' demarking the urban from the rural, the African from the European, the Asian from the African, and so on. From this perspective, Trinidad Carnival is in its largest frame a Festival of the Other, no matter how 'official' it is within its own national-cultural boundaries." (Schechner, 4)<sup>38</sup>

In modern times, Trinidad Carnival's ritual of masking may deal less with preserving the true notion of the *self*, and more with the aspect of transforming into something other than that *self*, which was not an uncommon aspect of early *mas*.

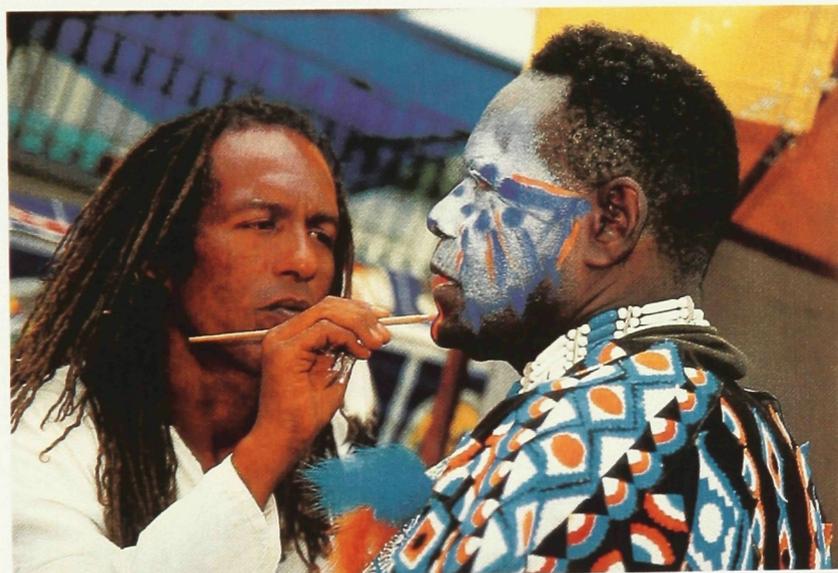


Figure 9 . An artist masks a masquerader in preparation for Trinidad Carnival.<sup>39</sup>

Turning back to Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, his character Young Silvia yearns to play *mas* but cannot decide which *mas* to play. Upon consulting

<sup>37</sup> Richard Schechner. "Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin". Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 3.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Schechner. "Carnival (Theory) After Bakhtin". Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Lesley Gordon, ed. Insight Guides: Trinidad & Tobago. (Singapore: Apa Publications GmbH & Co., 2004) 166.

Aldrick the faithful dragon-maker, she reveals her desire: “It ain’t no big expensive costume. You will laugh when I tell you. A...a slave girl,’ she said bashfully. ‘You see, it ain’t no big expensive costume. You feel I should play a princess or a slave girl?’ He smiled. ‘You is a princess already,’ he said. ‘Play a slave girl.’” (Lovelace, 26)<sup>40</sup> As a reflection of the evolution of post-colonial Trinidadian society, portraying the *other* mask is no longer required for survival. This modern society presents new challenges and as Milla Cozart Riggio remarks, “In a culture of multiple identities, to ‘play yuhself,’ as the carnival cliché suggests, may be best achieved in fantasies of the so-called ‘other’” (Riggio, 94).<sup>41</sup>

So why not play a slave girl?

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<sup>40</sup> Earl Lovelace. The Dragon Can’t Dance. (London: Andre Deutsch) 1979, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Riggio, Milla Cozart. “Play Mas’—Play Me, Play We”. Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 94.

## Carnival & the Appropriation of Space & Architecture

The festival of carnival restores life to the Queen's Park Savannah and its surrounding areas in the city. Its occurrence causes many temporary structures to spring up and to be later demounted, thus transforming the Savannah and streetscapes to accommodate the various activities attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Temporary food and craft sheds and stalls are erected along the park's periphery, showcasing the culinary and artistic skills of the nation. Such temporary stands, namely the large Northstand erected opposite the Grandstand in the Savannah, are constructed to facilitate viewing along the twelve-hour carnival parade route.



Figure 10 . Annually erected Northstand serves as viewing of activities upon the carnival stage. Photograph by author, Carnival 2006.



Figure 11 . One of the many temporary viewing stands erected along the city's streets in order to view the parade of carnival bands. Photograph by author, Carnival 2006.



Figure 12 . A somewhat crudely erected viewing stand along a Port of Spain Street filled with spectators on Carnival Tuesday, Port of Spain. Photograph by author.



Figure 13 . A temporary shack displaying crafts can be seen in the mid-ground, erected at the Savannah's edge, across from a colonial mansion now serving as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Photograph by author.

The way in which such temporary structures arise in odd urban spaces and along streetscapes during carnival time speaks of the immediacy of the event and its tendency to appropriate space. By its very nature, Trinidad Carnival's appropriation of urban spaces plays on notions of colonial emancipation. This appropriation of space, among locals, renews the sentiment that they finally belong to the city and the city belongs to them—a sense of belonging made critical in colonial times when Trinidad was not “home”—for most. It was a place inhabited against free will, a place of oppression and degradation. Post-emancipation circumstances create a sense of place and belonging crucial in the establishment and development of a free, democratic, and progressive society. In the book *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*, author Milla Cozart Riggio notes that:

“carnival's relationship to space can be best understood as a way of claiming, appropriating, and dominating urban spaces...As the aesthetic equivalent of social protest, carnival claims city streets and other urban spaces or village squares not only for the momentary pleasures of play but also implicitly (and for many of the participants probably unconsciously) to affirm its right to those streets. The transforming energies of mas link the festival world to social practice, crossing

boundaries, defining territory, marking places as their own in a variety of ways. Claiming the streets and replacing the corporate and governmental infrastructure with festive exuberance for a day or two may seem like nothing more than a temporary inversion of the classic kind. However, by bridging the gap between the material and the aesthetic and by transforming space itself, such an appropriation creates a more lasting effect throughout the culture.”

(Cozart Riggio, 24)<sup>42</sup>

As Riggio states, the act of appropriating these spaces means much more than simply disregarding the civic laws of everyday. If one sees a man entranced by the music, dancing, while defying gravity being wrapped around a lamp post upside down, it is not because he knows he can get away with this during Carnival versus any other day. It is because he is claiming that lamp post, that streetscape, the city, as his own on behalf of the people. It may seem adverse or ‘uncivilized’ but this form of expression, no matter how brief, serves to renew that man’s sense of national identity and claim to the land. This is essential in such a postcolonial society, though most societies would not prescribe nor condone this sort of surreal public display of expression.

Included within the realm of appropriation of space, there also exists an appropriation of architecture seen throughout the city. Just as the temporary seating stand in *figure 12* appropriates the architecture by latching onto it in order to provide a heightened view of the spectacle, individuals claim any built surface in search of a superior vantage point, or for the perfect spot to vend goods. A common sight, as seen in *figure 14*, are people perched high upon fences,

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<sup>42</sup> Milla Cozart Riggio. “Time Out or Time In? The Urban Dialectic of Carnival” Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 24.

terraces, rooftops, and the random vendor staking his claim on a piece of sidewalk.

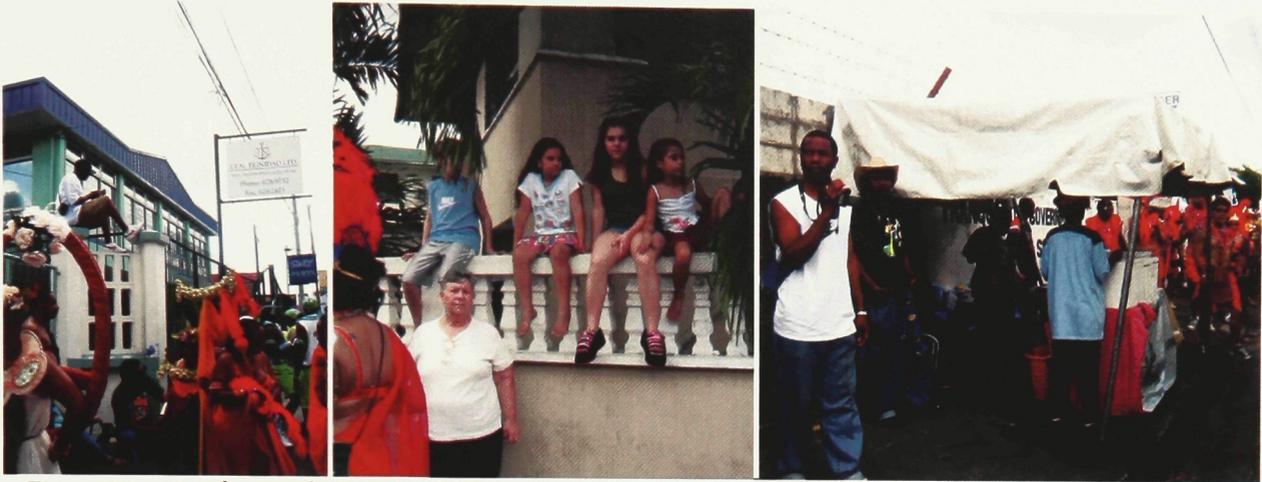


Figure 14 . (l-r) A man is perched high upon a corporate company's fence, taking pictures of the event; barefooted children sit on a fence for a better view of the parade; a temporary bar precariously leans, claiming its random spot on a sidewalk along the parade route. Photographs by author, Carnival 2006.

During carnival, Trinbagonians claim any free surface with which they would normally interact in a different manner. On any given day in Port of Spain, it is certain that one would not see a person sitting high up on that fence as in the first photograph of *figure 14*. On any given day, that man would probably be reprimanded by the law for his choice of seating; but during carnival, people are free to appropriate the architecture of the city. People use any free surface to their advantage—any way they can view the spectacle or express themselves, while maintaining respect for the city as fair game. Yes, these acts of appropriation can sometimes seem wild, as the example of the man on the lamppost, but this appropriation of spaces and architecture while in a state of lost inhibition and abandon is not a negative notion as one might think. It is important to note, that respect is a key factor in this equation. If an underlying respect for the city, its holiness, were not present, the city would certainly suffer damage,

both physically and regarding its reputation, from carnival's unruly debauchery. On the contrary, this appropriation of space and architecture is a way of embracing the city and the nation, while celebrating a sense of belonging.

In a subtler method of appropriation, author Earl Lovelace depicts the character of *Florence* in his novel entitled *Salt*. *Florence* is a young woman who has never played *mas*, and has never felt as though she quite belonged in Port of Spain. One carnival, she finally agrees to play *mas* with friends and while walking to meet her band, dressed in her costume, *Florence* has a revelation concerning her place within the city. Walking in those streets,

she had felt naked with her short skirt, short hair, her standard, her ridiculous little crown. She felt people's eyes on her and she kept her head straight and her eyes down looking. It was only when she looked up, looked again at the spectators, that she saw in their eyes their admiration, their acknowledgement and their granting of a right that she had claimed by the display of herself. She recognized then that this city was a place that granted you only what you were willing to claim. Tramping the streets those two days marked the place as her own. She felt joined to every masquerader, not only the ones playing in her band, but to all, everywhere. For the first time, she felt the holiness of the town and saw the beauty of its people and that it was hers, the city. She was no longer alien in it, no longer intimidated by it.

(Lovelace, 96)<sup>43</sup>

*Florence* realizes that Carnival presents her with a freedom to appropriate the spaces and the attitude of Port of Spain, making them her own. The city can only become what she allows it to be; the city does not define her—she, along with the other Trinidadians in the streets, define the city. Accordingly, the appropriation of the spaces of the city for these few days leads to a renewed appreciation, a value of physical, and intangible urban conditions, which often

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<sup>43</sup> Earl Lovelace. *Salt*. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996) 96.

remain unnoticed and undervalued for the majority of the year but are an essential factor in the daily function in this postcolonial society.



## part II . the narrative

## The Observer & The Participant

### the observer

The journey to Carnival, whether it be a pilgrimage home to sweet T&T<sup>44</sup>; a rare trip to town; or a walk through familiar streets; is one that never ceases to be filled with tremendous anticipation. For the passive observer, the active observer, or the participant, the planning of this journey, no doubt, commences months before *jouvay*<sup>45</sup>. Friends and family must be gathered: Who is coming from abroad? Who will sleep where when the *fete*<sup>46</sup> is done? Who will prepare the food for *de lime*<sup>47</sup>?

The glorious days of Carnival finally arrive after weeks of anticipatory fetes, shows, and competitions. The crucial planning of Carnival attire has long been completed. Shoes must be good for hours of jumping and dancing.

<sup>44</sup> **T&T** A colloquial term referring to Trinidad & Tobago.

<sup>45</sup> **Jouvay, j'ouvert, jouvert, jourvert, jour ouvert, jou ouvert** Trinidadian *jouvay* is derived from the French *jour ouvert*, the opening day of carnival which begins (often officially 2:00 a.m.) the Monday morning before Ash Wednesday. *Jouvay* is a nocturnal *mas* [masquerade] that breaks up shortly after dawn. Thousands of revelers in old clothes covered with mud, or as *Blue* or *Red Devils*, or drenched in black oil (Oil Men) fill the streets.  
Excerpt from Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 288.

<sup>46</sup> **Fete** A party with music, dance, and food, from the French word *fête* meaning festival.  
Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 287.

<sup>47</sup> **Lime/Liming** To spend time talking, laughing, drinking with other people.  
Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 289.

Clothing must allow one to move freely and *get on bad*<sup>48</sup> if so desired. Carnival is a time to watch and be watched.

You finally reach to the heat of the festival 'ready for *de lime*'. Posse in a circle observing, laughing, joking, eating. Mouth-watering roti, roast corn, doubles from the woman selling or pulled from a car trunk. Rum flows freer than water. A drink sweats in every man's hand. "Yuh chasin' with coconut water?".....

On *de road*—pure excitement seeing streams of beautiful sun-kissed people rejoicing and dancing away their stresses, pains, and misfortunes. If watched carefully, one can see the exact moment when a reveler releases all that holds them down. The negative vibes exit their whole being, floating, rising high above the crowd.

Masses of those whose legacy is *Trini*<sup>49</sup> culture, those who have assimilated, those longing to belong standing along the parade route anxiously waiting for the bands to come down. Children nestled in a forest of legs—some become royalty for the day, majestically seated upon tall shoulders enjoying the magic of the moment.

A low rumbling can be heard in the distance. '*Look de band*<sup>50</sup> *comin'!!*'.... Your breath catches as colours explode heralding the rich spectacle. The scene,

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<sup>48</sup> *get on bad* Misbehave, behave in a rowdy manner, perform without inhibitions.

<sup>49</sup> *Trini* A colloquial shortening of 'Trinidadian'.

<sup>50</sup> *mas band* A group of mas players ranging in size from a few dozen to several thousand often under the direction of one individual who designs the costumes. Mas bands compete for prizes. Excerpt from Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 289.

so beautiful and astounding, literally hurts your eyes as costumes shimmer and gleam, their captivating splendor heightened by the hot rays of the sun.

The boisterous throng boasts a fabric as rich as the spectacle itself. To your left, a baby, still wobbly on his legs, bobs up and down in time to the music. A group of men dancing bareback with their shirts tucked into their shorts play bottle and spoon, happy to be home from the lonely and treacherous oil rigs floating offshore. Their metal bottle openers steadily hit empty beer bottles mimicking the swift soca rhythm. A weathered, barefoot vagrant lightly steps through the crowd, a large crocus bag slung over his shoulder. Every few feet, he bends to pick up an empty bottle from the side of the road and flings it into his bag. As a faint smile brushes his lips, he quicksteps a few dance moves, thoughts of all he can afford after cashing in the bottles rushing through his mind. A young girl wears a red halter and close-fitting cutoff jean shorts showcasing her thick, lean body. A body so well shaped that it is the personification of some mythical chocolate goddess one can only conjure in a reverie. She appears to be in her own universe of dreams as she stands in one spot, eyes closed, taking a wine<sup>51</sup>. Her hips and waist circle with precision, not moving a muscle in her upper body. Slowly, her hips effortlessly circle to the ground without missing a beat. There, she lingers for a moment before rising and opening her eyes. A sun burnt tourist watches the young girl with pure fascination for several minutes

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<sup>51</sup>**wine, win', wining** Dancing emphasizing fluid pelvis rotations, either alone or in full physical contact front or back with another person. The expression comes from winding the hips in a circle. The erotic movement can be traced to various African dances. *Jam* and *wine* have approximately the same meaning.

Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 294.

before she, herself, attempts to wine. As a virgin *winer*, her hips make timid, stiff, uneven circles, never quite catching the beat. Nevertheless, she enjoys every moment of this newfound, uncensored movement. A pregnant woman in full costume dances with her band while holding the hand of her young son. Shrouded by the music, she ceases to worry over all the sacrifices she will have to make in order to raise the second child growing inside her belly. A small part in the crowd reveals an old granny who pauses to lean on her cane for support as she holds her hip and gyrates to the music. She rejoices that she has woken up to live through this glorious day—to live through another Carnival.

So many people, so many stories to tell....

Back in the moment, your senses spring to life. The heavy bass of the Soca Road March<sup>52</sup> shakes the ground. Your feet start vibrating as this potent energy rises from the earth and seeps into your body. The music takes command of your nervous system and begins to move your body. First, your foot casually taps the beat, then your legs start to sway. As the music continues to rise through your body, your hips start to gyrate. Slow and cautious at first, they gradually speed up to the fiery soca rhythm. Then, your waist starts to roll smooth, smooth, smooth, like a well-greased machine hitting every dip and accent the music hurls at you. On a mission, the bass clamps onto your heart contracting and releasing it until it is satisfied that your center of being is

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<sup>52</sup>**Road March** A music competition on the streets of Port of Spain on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. The *calypso* or *soca* which is played most often as *mas bands* pass through the downtown performance venue or cross the *Queen's Park Savannah* stage on those two days is ruled Road March winner for the year.

Excerpt from Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 292.

pulsating to the jamming rhythm, filling your body with an electric sensation. Now, the bass radiates to your extremities begging for a release. Playing its role as puppet master, the bass forces one of your arms into the air, and then the other, followed by a knee. By the time you realize the jumping, kicking, and waving of your body, you are no longer in control. The bass is the heartbeat of Carnival, and now it has become your own. Your heart pumps up into your throat forcing your mouth open in a series of shouts and cries of complete bliss. This is the power of Carnival. The power of Carnival is no joke.

The moment has come when the soca sounds so sweet that you are unable to stay in one spot. Your feet pick up and begin chipping<sup>53</sup> in time with the crowd, flowing at its pace. Your body rides the wave of energy around you as if floating downstream a river. When they jump, you jump. When they wave, you wave. When they pause, you pause. When they take a wine, you take a wine. Moving against the crowd is like trying to swim upstream in rough waters. So many bodies moving against yours. So many strangers who seem so familiar. Being a part of this crowd means surrendering your body to the festival—surrendering your body to the people.

One of these strangers approaches you as many times before. Whether they advance from the front, back, or side, they know the unwritten laws of bacchanal.<sup>54</sup> There is no longer any space between you two as this stranger

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<sup>53</sup> **Chip, chipping, chippin, chippin'** Shuffling to the down beat of a carnival song in a manner that has subtle rhythmic reverberations in the rest of the body. Chippin is a ubiquitous, simple carnival dance uniting people—young and old—in a pulsing flow of group movement. Everyone who *plays mas* chips.

Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 286.

<sup>54</sup> **bacchanal**: Rowdy behavior, a party; any situation in which there is excessive confusion.

conforms to every curve of your body, your back, your behind. If you look back at them and smile or continue to dance, they know they have gained your permission to share a moment. If you deliberately and abruptly create space between your bodies, the stranger knows that you are not interested. You take a quick glance behind you and decide to flash a shy but welcoming smile. The bass guides your tempo as the two of you move as one among a sea of others. You become completely consumed with each other as the crowd continues to flow around you. The stranger, now intimately familiar after this brief sensuous encounter, senses it is time to move on as you reclaim as much of your personal space as the crowd will allow. *Got* to keep chipping into the damp heat of the night. *Gotta* keep jumping till your body approaches the point of crumbling into a million pieces. Bearing an expression of gleeful exhaustion on your bronzed face, you chip into the night satisfied with the stinging soles of your feet and all that they signify.

### **the participant**

It is sometime near the end of July when a good friend calls me up. It has been a while since the two of us have spoken, so we take a few moments to catch up on the latest happenings. After the pleasantries, my friend half

questions, half assumes, “Ah know yuh must be playin’ *mas*<sup>55</sup> this Carnival.” The mere mention of the word brings a smile to my face. These last couple of months have been quite a challenge. I hadn’t thought about relaxation for a while, but come Carnival, I will surely embrace the festivities with open arms, as relief for a break from the daily grind. Of course I will play *mas*. I make an unspoken carnival pact with her by asking the essential question: “So, what are we going to play this year?”

Carnival plans set in motion, my friend and I, among a group of others, head to the chosen *mas* camp<sup>56</sup> to select our carnival persona. Enough money has been saved to play a true pretty *mas*<sup>57</sup> this year. The more decadent, the better...the more colour and sparkle the better. I have decided that this year, I want to look my best...I want to show a little more skin than usual; I want to play *mas* that makes me feel special—queen for the day; I need to let go; I want to feel free; I want to be something that I’m not; I want to ‘get on bad’.

Upon entering the *mas* camp, the luxuriousness of all the creations requires a moment of silence as I take in their extreme complexity. The camp is

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<sup>55</sup>**play mas, play mas’, play mask** To put on a costume and participate in a *mas band* or *jump up* in the streets. This is the key action of carnival from which everything else comes. The expression “to play mas” is part of Trinidadian vernacular, connected to the idea “to play yourself” or “do your thing”.

Carol Martin. “Trinidad Carnival Glossary”. Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 292.

<sup>56</sup>**mas camp** The location where the costumes of a specific *band* are assembled and distributed and where rehearsals, if any, are held.

Carol Martin. “Trinidad Carnival Glossary”. Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 289.

<sup>57</sup>**pretty mas** Today’s dominant form of masquerade emphasizing beautiful costumes with elaborate decorations. To some extent, pretty mas developed as middle-class participation in carnival increased, although the African Creole carnival also emphasized “dressing up and looking good,” from early on in the nineteenth century.

*Excerpt from* Carol Martin. “Trinidad Carnival Glossary”. Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 292.

in a bustle—500 costumes made, 7500 to go....A massive skeleton structure of steel towers and spreads in the process of becoming the magnificent king of the band. Rich materials and plumes are delicately draped on every surface, waiting to be put to use. Creativity flows, electric vibes in the air. Gluing, binding, stitching, painting....All of a sudden, I spot it out of the corner of my eye, and I know that we will be the perfect match. I go to place my order and get a custom fitting. Excitement starts to build now that I've found my costume, my section<sup>58</sup>, my Carnival family.

Seven months later, the carnival season reaches its peak. Carnival Tuesday is finally here. Time to don the costume, change character for the day. I carefully lay each piece of it out onto the bed. Sitting in front of the mirror, the transformation begins. Each stroke of makeup takes me a step away from who I am, and closer to the carefree alter ego who surfaces once per year. This ritual—of putting on the mask—allows me to cast daily inhibitions aside. A certain sense of freedom accompanies the guise of this mask. In front of the mirror, each bead and feather is carefully placed, bronzing shimmer brushed upon my chest. I make sure I have all of the necessities: my flag, my whistle, and my rag. The final touch is crowning my head with the statuesque headpiece. As the almost ceremonious dressing is complete, anticipation bubbles in my stomach as I bust my best moves in front of the mirror to warm up.

Out on the street, appreciative glances and beckoning gestures prompted by my unusual baring of flesh confirm, as with most women, the often forgotten

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<sup>58</sup>**section** A group of like costumes within a larger mas band. The design of each section of a mas band relates to the overall theme the band's designer has chosen for that particular year.

beauty of my body. My friends and I finally find our band and our section among the organized chaos. Someone hurriedly hands me a standard,<sup>59</sup> which will be my faithful companion throughout the lengthy parade. Last minute adjustments are made as thousands of masqueraders await in extreme anticipation. After what seems like an eternity, several 18-wheelers lead our band onto the road. These large flatbeds are our lifeline for the next twelve hours. The band's flag bearers lead the way announcing our overwhelming presence. They lead us onto the Savannah stage, followed by the king and queen of the band shining in all of their glory. On the stage, there is only one chance to impress the judges. Colours swirling, standards high in the air, bright smiles, dancing with all that I have. I want to win that coveted title—"Band of the year is...."

Off the stage, formalities are over. Time to dance for myself—dance away sorrows, pains, troubles, and insecurities. I dance to heal my soul. I jam on any woman and I jam on any man. The plumes covering my behind are oh so enticing as they echo every move I make in a playful game. The more I dance, the more intense and precise my movements become. Wining in a circle, dizziness starts to take hold. Colours, faces, forms begin to blur but I can't stop until I have reached that moment, that place. Everything is spinning as I finally feel my muscles begin to relax. Vacant eyes indicate the cleansing events stirring inside of me. Slowly, the negative energy exits my body limb by limb. As the last bit leaves, my body gives a slight jerk and I blink back to reality. Then it washes over me—the calming sensation of emancipation.

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<sup>59</sup>**standard** A tall flag-like pole, decorated to compliment a mas costume. Masqueraders often carry a standard, waving it high in the air while parading. The added height to a mass of masqueraders creates spectacular volume and motion when seen from afar.

Invigorated by this freeing sensation, I chip and jump behind the big truck as it blares the bass. The live band on the truck is driving the crowd into a frenzy. The lead singer, mic in his hand, commands the people to jump, wave, and *get on bad*. The music has a hold on me as I continually jab my standard into the air to the spirited *tassa*<sup>60</sup> rhythm. The tropical sun is blazing on my exposed flesh. Residual stress seeps through my pores and is washed away with the beads of salty sweat rolling down my back. The gallons of liquid I consume in an attempt to stay cool have seemed to evaporate into the already moist air. Those efforts in vain, wetting myself down with water seems the only plausible way to prevent my overheating body from combusting in the middle of the street. For extra measure, I gulp down some *press*<sup>61</sup>, enjoying the sweet, sticky syrup dripping on my fingers.

The stop and go of the parade creates bulges in the linear route. In these pockets, masqueraders mingle with the spectators along the side of the road. During one of these many pauses, our section breaks out into impromptu song, scores of whistles keeping the beat. The crowd shouts, dances, and claps alongside us, loving every moment.

Six hours later, I seriously doubt that I am capable of taking another step. I put one foot onto the massive wheel of the truck and hoist myself up onto its edge, assisted by a familiar looking man. I smile my thanks as I take a seat,

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<sup>60</sup>**tassa drums** East-Indian-derived drums made from goat skins stretched over clay bases. Tassa drums are carried with a shoulder strap and played with sticks. Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 293.

<sup>61</sup>**press** A shaved-ice treat topped with colourful, fruity syrups and condensed milk similar to a 'snow cone'. Often sold by street vendors.

holding onto the side of a speaker. The truck is my chariot, high above the animated mass of heads. I savour the spectacular view up here watching my friends below me jumping alongside the truck as I gently run my fingers through the plush plumes adorning my scant attire. The parade stretches for kilometers in front and behind the truck. A sea of colourful people is jumping up like churning waters. 'Is people like peas' occupying any space left unclaimed by the street's buildings. People perched on balconies or high up on roofs are fully engrossed in the action, silhouetted against the fiery sunset.

How long have I been sitting down? Long enough for the feeling to return to my feet. I jump down from the moving truck letting the crowd swallow me whole, as I let out a euphoric cry sandwiched between two gyrating bodies intent on summoning the fierce passion lying deep within my soul.

## Before & After Trinidad Carnival



Figure 15 . The character before and after the mask. Montage by author, 2006.



Figure 16 . The body before and after the costume. Montage by author, 2006.



Figure 17. The city before and after Carnival. Montage by author, 2006.



**part III . the Carnival Experience**  
**Trinidad & Tobago Carnival 2006**

## prologue

Trinidad Carnival 2006 was a whirlwind of familiar and anticipated experiences, which, I now realize could never have been fully comprehended until I was thrown into, and fully submersed in its tantalizing, spiraling depths. Born of Trinidadian parentage and having participated in, and observed several North American diaspora carnivals over many summers, I was well prepared for this spectacular festival locally dubbed “the greatest show on earth”. I was not, however, fully physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared for Carnival’s sheer magnitude in several respects. I was overwhelmed by the extreme scale of the parade; the true meaning of ‘a crowd’; the constant partying until literal physical exhaustion; the unending flow of alcohol; the extreme abandon of inhibitions; the intense emotional tie to ancestral roots; the freeing and acceptance of self; and the endless supply of mouth watering home cooked delicacies, encouraging one to engage in gluttonous behaviour.

To gain an encompassing experience of Trinidad Carnival, I arrived on the island ten days prior to Carnival, and remained ten days after the extravaganza to observe both the build-up/tear-down, re-awakening/renewing nature of the festival. I have spent much time in Trinidad over the past several years, including Port of Spain where the majority of Carnival festivities take place. I must admit, however, that I was quite in awe as I witnessed the various manners

in which the city was able to transform itself to accommodate Carnival and all that the event entailed. This thesis shall further elaborate on this topic while describing the many experiences and observations I obtained while attending, observing, and participating in the following significant Carnival events: The *Machel Montano Alternative Concept 4 fete*;<sup>62</sup> the carnival *Mas Camp*; *Panorama*; *Jouvay*; Carnival Monday; and Carnival Tuesday. Each of these events possesses either a unique, portable, or ephemeral aspect to their existence and successful execution, which are vital aspects to the architecture this thesis proposes in replacement of the soon defunct Grandstand situated in the Queen's Park Savannah.

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<sup>62</sup> **fete** A party with music, dance, and food, from the French word *fête* meaning festival. Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary". Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge) 2004, 287.

## chapter 6 . the fete

saturday february 18<sup>th</sup> 2006 . **machel montano alternative concept 4**

My second night in Trinidad, I am whisked away from San Fernando to attend the *Machel Montano Alternative Concept 4 fete* being held in The Carnival Global Village<sup>63</sup> of Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain.<sup>64</sup> The Alternative Concept *fete* is a highly anticipated event which is being held in the middle of the Savannah for the first time ever. To put things into perspective, a site of flat, open grass is transformed, practically overnight, to enclose and accommodate the event. It consists of an enormous bandshell shaped performance stage, dozens of performers, food and bar tents, sanitary facilities, media, tens of thousands of patrons, and the equipment to supply the enormous quantity of electricity required to adequately accommodate such a complex, large scale event. For this reason, this *fete* is a prime example of the powerful ability and possibilities of ephemeral architecture in facilitating large-scale events on the chosen site of the Queen's Park Savannah.

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<sup>63</sup> **The Carnival Global Village** A series of temporary food and craft stalls and tents erected on the Queen's park Savannah grounds in front of the Grandstand during carnival time.

<sup>64</sup> It is important to note that San Fernando is at least one hour's drive from 'town' and during Carnival festivities, although it is better to find accommodation in the city, many people travel as long as two hours on a given night to attend a Carnival event. During Carnival season, many traffic jams occur due to thousands of people traveling the nation's two-lane winding roads and four-lane divided highways in order to attend various *fetes* and competitions.

As we approach Port of Spain by car, it quickly becomes evident that an exceptionally large crowd is gathering for that night's *fete*. Traffic begins to slow down long before we turn onto the final stretch of the Beetham Highway that leads us to into the city. Immediately surrounding the Savannah, three lanes of traffic are congested as people try to find parking and entrances to the party. A missed turn-off means that already anxious partygoers would have to re-circle the Savannah's entire perimeter in order to re-access their desired destination. After twice circling Queen's Park, we safely get out of the car. From there we walk to the venue, after dangerously crossing the chaotic traffic separating us and the Savannah grounds.



*Figure 18* . Traces of the three lanes of speeding traffic framing Queen's Park Savannah can be seen in the foreground; Bright lights of Machel Montano Alternative Concept IV can be seen in the distance. Photograph by author, 2006.

The event affords artist and paid VIP parking in lots within the perimeter of the park. The Savannah's greens, however, thrive given the volume of heavy vehicular, structural, and pedestrian traffic they incur every carnival season.

Seeing cars parked on the grassy surface is disconcerting, but, given the erratic nature of Trinidad driving and parking in any available space (designated or not), the park grounds are the prime, simple, temporary and profitable solution to get vehicles off of the road for such occasions.

We walk across the Savannah's luscious turf towards the venue with lighting so powerful that the stage glows like a jewel in the dark tropical night. Although the majority of the activity is concealed by high plywood makeshift walls, from a distance, the image of the site is spectacular. A large white, luminescent bandshell rises above the barriers, flanked by two enormous yellow construction cranes. Their main task is to suspend large sets of audio speakers on either side of the stage, equipping the event with a sound so clear and resounding that it could be heard from kilometers away.



Figure 19 . Approaching the event from the west the temporary stage and two cranes suspending several substantial audio speakers can be seen. Photograph by author, 2006.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> **Note** The various degrees of unfocused images depicting the *Machel Montano Alternative Concept 4* speak much of the *fete's* vibrant energy. The character of this event was completely contrary to crisp, static images traditionally used as appropriate visual representation.

The lateral boundaries of the event are so well secured that the scene appears to be a fortress in the middle of the open park. A bustling electric energy steadily grows, hovering above the fenced space, ready to take flight at the first possible opportunity. A small one-person slit in the exterior barrier of the compound affords us a \$400TT (\$75CDN) admission into the VIP section shortly after 11:30pm.<sup>66</sup> Once past security and inside the wooden barriers, there is no feeling of enclosure as the main focus becomes the stage, the crowd and the night sky. Indeed, the party's expanse seems to extend for kilometers. As one of the main perks of the all-inclusive VIP section, we are each given eight drink and three food tickets to serve as our sole sustenance throughout the course of the night and into the early-morning hours. The VIP area, separated from the general admission area by a tall metal wire fence, is already full with hundreds of patrons by the time we arrive, offering a less than desirable oblique view to the stage.

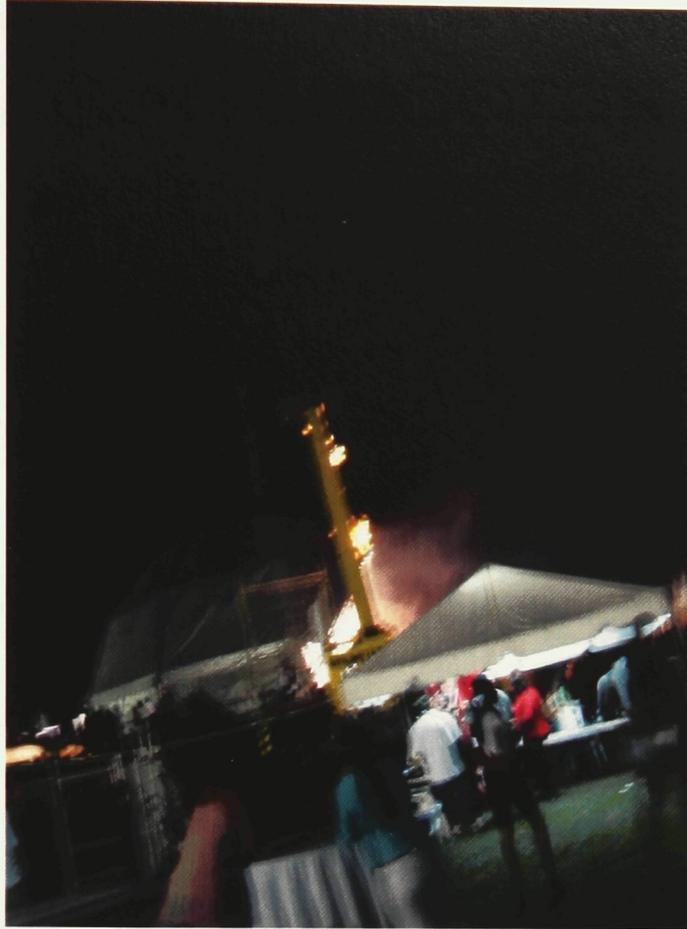
What happened next, is a prime example of the potential dangers of inadequate facilities for such a temporary, self-sustaining events. The bar consisting of one tent with approximately eight workers serving on three sides attempts to provide service to hundreds, if not a thousand, VIP revelers. This concept quickly proves quite inefficient for the patrons whose culture prides itself in twinning alcohol and partying. Ordering drinks from the bar becomes a protracted nightmare as my party of four is subject to many elbows in the sides and trampling feet from a crowd who is as furious as we are over the bar's

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<sup>66</sup> General admission into the event ranged from \$125-200TT (\$23-\$37CDN).

extreme state of confusion. It is of no consequence, however, if one only desires a bottle of water or some fruit juice—the endless wait in the vicious arena is the same. There is much pushing and shoving as the crowds' drink orders are shouted in vain. The temper of the people, many already partially intoxicated, keeps rising as the pressure from an impenetrable ring of tightly packed bodies causes the bar tent to begin to sway. In all the chaos, several patrons storm the bar, jumping over the counters to serve themselves. It is only the arrival and continued presence of police officers that manage to quell the potential riot that is minutes away from erupting. From this unsavoury incident, it is evident to all that this type of inadequate planning and facility accommodation is highly unacceptable. Considering that guests willingly pay a pricey sum in order to obtain the ultimate party experience, they are instead left feeling cheated with a marred memory of the *fete*.

With that said, the *Alternative Concept 4's* entertainment is phenomenal and the remainder of the temporary facilities are of excellent quality. The stage, erected within a day or two, possesses a superior, sturdy and permanent quality, as though it could be an eternal fixture within the Queen's Park Savannah. As seen in *figures 19, 20 and 21*, the temporary stage is fashioned in a bandshell structure, formed of metal trusses, which in turn, serves as supports for the many lighting fixtures used in the intense illumination of the stage. The shell's cladding consists of a pure white flexible fabric skin. It stretches taut over the rib-like metal truss structure providing a lightweight, affordable, spacious, waterproof, minimalist yet aesthetically pleasing shelter for the scores of performers.



*Figure 20 . The bandshell shaped temporary stage as seen from the west inside of the VIP area, with its white fabric skin stretched taut over the supporting structure. Photograph by author, 2006.*



*Figure 21 . The demountable metal truss system can be seen framing the interior edge of the stage's opening. Photograph by author, 2006.*

The food and toilet facilities provided for the event are well organized. Their use is appropriately forecast given the expected turnout, leading to little or no waiting. Several food tents (identical to the tent in the foreground of *figure 20*) line the inner periphery of the site. Here one could find a variety of ways to redeem one's refreshment tickets. Several meters away, a u-shaped bank of portable toilet facilities stands forming a semi-private washroom. Each mechanically 'flushable' compartment is well equipped and emits a pleasant fragrance. After each use, an attendant is on hand to clean and refresh the compartment. Not far away, a freestanding plastic lavatory stands issuing running water supplied by a large, elevated water tank. The small details in the design of this facility make all the difference in ensuring that comfort and functionality are key elements of the overall experience. This attention to detail outlines the degree to which design of temporary, autonomous architecture is taken seriously for this festival.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the *Alternative Concept 4* is the astounding fact that within a day or two post-event, one would have no physical evidence of its fleeting existence. Nothing is left with the exception of media coverage, and the few stray morsels of rubbish left behind by otherwise diligent sanitation crews. Standing on the vacant site, one would only hear the many tales of the event's greatness.

The majority of Carnival events in Trinidad and Tobago are held in open air due to the favourable tropical weather and warm nights. In many cases, rain is most welcomed—the show, the competition, the party carries on regardless of

the weather. Nothing short of a natural disaster can hinder the mounting of a much anticipated, and outstanding *fete*. At times, a flash rain shower is the perfect prescription for rejuvenating fading revelers, parched from heat, dehydrated of sweat. More importantly, however, is the ability of an open-air venue to enhance the true freeing notion of *fete*. In comparison, based on personal experience an enclosed permanent architecture seems to limit the degree to which one is able to let go of inhibitions and feelings of oppression. This notion has long been the purpose of Carnival and its encompassing activities. The weighty structure of a roof, perhaps, acts as a barrier impeding the body's release of troubles. A feeling of total enclosure prompted by certain types of large venue permanent architecture contradicts the deep-rooted carnival concepts of emancipation and limitless bounds. Such a concept is fully manifested through gathering and *fete* under swaying palms and crystalline stars suspended in endless depths of night sky.

Such outdoor temporary venues greatly add to the rich flavour and surreal experience of the Carnival event. There is a certain amount of excitement attached to such circumstances—one feels privileged to experience a spectacular event—a spectacle so significant, impressive, and ephemeral by nature: there for a moment, gone the next. Pertaining to Carnival's highly experiential nature, the memory of the event cannot be justly shared with someone who has not been in attendance. It is nearly impossible for one to imagine or for one to accurately convey their feelings to another as each individual, no doubt, fosters different emotions and impressions from the same

experience. Accordingly, it is possible that this experiential aspect of the *fete* contributes to the 'ah can't miss it' mentality, which spurs many Trinbagonians to attend as many events and *fetes* as humanly and financially possible during the carnival season. Due to these aforementioned phenomena, I believe the memory of such an event is accentuated when revisiting the naked site. Standing upon the flat grassland, the thought of it supporting such an enormous, vibrant event is difficult to fathom. This is where the surreal aspect of the event lies: the transformation of a well-known site, peacefully quiet on an average afternoon, into a fantastically fanciful extravaganza lasting mere hours, only to be swiftly torn down and the site returned to its previous hushed existence.

## chapter 7 . the making

saturday, february 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 . the *mas* camp

***mas camp*** The location where the costumes of a specific band [or section] are assembled and distributed and where rehearsals, if any, are held.  
(Martin, 289)<sup>67</sup>

Having made contact with a family friend in Toronto before departing to Trinidad and explaining the nature of my thesis-related travel, she excitedly informs me that two of her brothers are putting out a section<sup>68</sup> for *Trini Revellers*, a well celebrated *mas* band in Trinidad Carnival. As is the Trinidadian way, she immediately provides me with their contact information and notifies them to anticipate my arrival.

Upon my arrival in Trinidad, I contact my carnival connections and arrange to obtain first-hand knowledge of *mas* in production. As Carnival Saturday finally rolls around, I travel the two and a half hours north from Point Fortin to the capital to observe and volunteer at the carnival *mas* camp. Located in St. James, Port of Spain, the *mas* camp (*figure 22*) is comfortably nestled in a small old-time house<sup>69</sup> rented to the designers for a couple of weeks prior to Carnival's main

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<sup>67</sup> Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" *Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 289.

<sup>68</sup> '***putting out a section***': the designing and fabrication of costumes for one particular segment of a larger Carnival *mas* band, led by another designer. A section is a sub-theme of the overall theme of the band, typically consisting of matching, if not directly related, male and female costumes.

Sections of a larger band typically range from 80 to several hundred masqueraders.

<sup>69</sup> 'Old-time house' or 'Caribbean popular house' or 'case' originally consisted of a porch, a gallery, and a three-room dwelling (two bedrooms, 1 sitting room), to which a kitchen and a fourth room were later added, as well as a detached structure of toilet and shower compartments and an outdoor lavatory in the back yard of the home. This housing type emerged in post-

festivities. The three designers, Curtis and Brian Aitchison, and Brian Gittens, all born and raised in Trinidad, form a group called Kommess Possee.<sup>70</sup> This year, Kommess Possee designed a section entitled “The Siege of Carthage” as a part of *Trini Revellers’* large band whose 2006 presentation was themed “Rome—The Empire”.



Figure 22 . Kommess Possee mas camp 2006. Based on ‘old-time’ or ‘case’ type dwelling, located in St. James, Port of Spain. Photograph by author, 2006.

emancipation times when freed slaves and indentured labourers desired a simple, affordable construction to shelter growing families.

Suzanne Slesin, Stafford Cliff et al. *Caribbean Style*. (United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson, 1996) 280-281.

<sup>70</sup> **Note** Curtis Aitchison, in particular, grew up in Belmont, Port of Spain, and was surrounded by mas from an early age. As with many Carnival designers, he has now lived abroad for several years annually designing for Toronto’s thriving diaspora Carnival known as *Caribana*.<sup>70</sup> Aitchison makes the annual pilgrimage home to Trinidad and often designs sections for larger bands.

**Caribana** Toronto’s diasporic carnival, firmly based upon and rooted in Trinidad Carnival. Caribana was organized by Trinidadians and fellow West Indians who relocated to Canada during the ‘great brain-drain’ of the 1960’s. Caribana is the largest of its type of carnival in Canada. Held on the Civic Holiday weekend, the one-day parade is preceded by two weeks of related events.

“The diasporic Caribbean carnivals have developed into a means to affirm cultural identity and promote sociopolitical integration within the Caribbean diasporic community as well as with the host society. The diversity in participation suggests that the diasporic Caribbean carnivals have become multicultural or polyethnic festivals (Cohen 1982; 1993). For instance, Manning (1990:35) argues that the diasporic Caribbean carnivals provide a kind of social therapy that overcomes the separation and isolation imposed by the diaspora and restores to West Indian immigrants both a sense of community with each other and sense of connection to the culture that they claim as a birthright.”

Keith Nurse. “Globalization in Reverse: Diaspora and the export of Trinidad Carnival”. *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 248.

Many of the smaller and time-consuming pieces of the costumes such as belts and suits were fabricated in Toronto, Canada and shipped to Trinidad. The larger, more delicate pieces, mainly the large feathered headpieces, men's armour, and standards<sup>71</sup> are fabricated in the Trinidad *mas* camp once the designers arrive two and a half weeks prior to Carnival. As I first enter the camp that afternoon two days before Carnival, I am immediately put to work after I identify myself, but before I am able to put down my bags. The afternoon is sweltering. The heat inside this modest house is amplified as several bodies are in a hurried, constant motion, engaged in the last minute rush of completing costumes; fitting masqueraders there to pick up costumes; making necessary alterations; outfitting late registrants; and collecting final payments. A lone pedestal fan is frivolously oscillating in a vain effort to cool down the camp's occupants. The camp is a scene of slightly controlled chaos. While on the floor on my hands and knees, being stepped on and pushed aside while cutting endless pieces of uncooperative fabric to size, I am engulfed in a sea of beads and glitter, feathers and red—everything red, waiting to be collected by masqueraders.

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<sup>71</sup> **standard** a tall flag-like pole, decorated to compliment a mas costume. Masqueraders often carry a standard, waving it high in the air while parading. The added height to a mass of masqueraders creates a spectacular volume and motion when seen from afar.

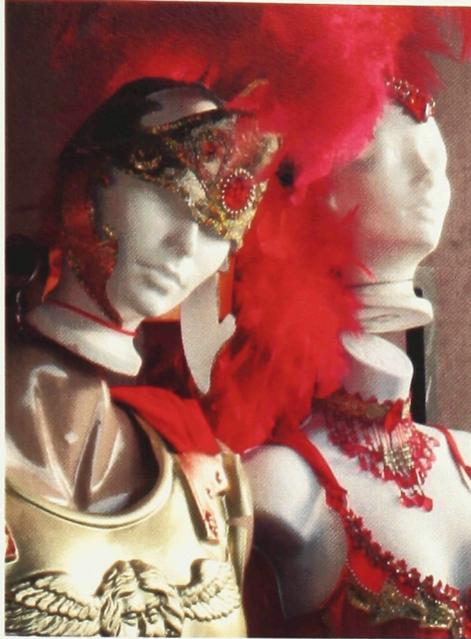


Figure 23 . Mannequins outfitted and displayed in the gallery in Kommiss Possee's *mas* camp for their 2006 presentation "The Siege of Carthage". Photograph by author, 2006.

While working and sweating on the old peeling floor, I am a part of the drama, yet feel like a fly on the wall, privy to the bearing of emotions in this overflowing house. Some *mas* makers equate the spirit of making and the act of fabrication to religion, to a spiritual ritual that pours love, laughter, sweat, trials, and triumphs into a mask—a costume. In his epic novel revealing Trinidad Carnival and the human spirit entitled *The Dragon Can't Dance*, author Earl Lovelace pays homage to this act of making through his character Aldrick's devotion to the making of a dragon costume each carnival season:

With the door of his little shack half open, Aldrick worked solemnly on his dragon costume, saying nothing to Basil, the little boy of ten who came from somewhere in the neighbourhood of Alice Street, appeared just so a year before, in the ragged khaki pants and sleeveless merino that was his uniform all that year, and stood at the door and gazed in at the dragon costume Aldrick was then making, looking from the costume to Aldrick with a fullness of wonderment and fascination and awe, leaving, only when dark fell, to return the next day and the next all through the making of the dragon costume, maintaining that attitude of reverence throughout, as if he were in the presence of holiness, until one day Aldrick asked him to run to Miss Cleothilda's parlour and buy him a pack of cigarettes; and cemented in that act the boy's apprenticeship to dragon making. So the boy was here again this year. And, working now,

he seemed to divine exactly which tool or piece of material Aldrick needed for his work, and he handed it to him with a ceremonial solemnity as if he, the boy were an acolyte, and Aldrick the priest.

In truth, it was in the spirit of priesthood that Aldrick addressed his work; for, the making of his dragon costume was to him always a new miracle, a new test not only of his skill but of his faith: for though he knew exactly what he had to do, it was only by faith that he could bring alive from these scraps of cloth and tin that dragon, its mouth breathing fire, its tail threshing the ground, its nine chains rattling, that would contain the beauty and threat and terror that was the message he took each year to Port of Spain. It was in this message that he asserted before the world his self. It was through it that he demanded that others see him, recognize his personhood, be warned of his dangerousness.

(Lovelace, 27)<sup>72</sup>

It is in this spirit that each person feverishly works in this *mas* camp. This tiny house seems to be busting at the seams, hardly a bare spot on the floor, a free chair, or standing room that is not in someone else's path of fabrication.

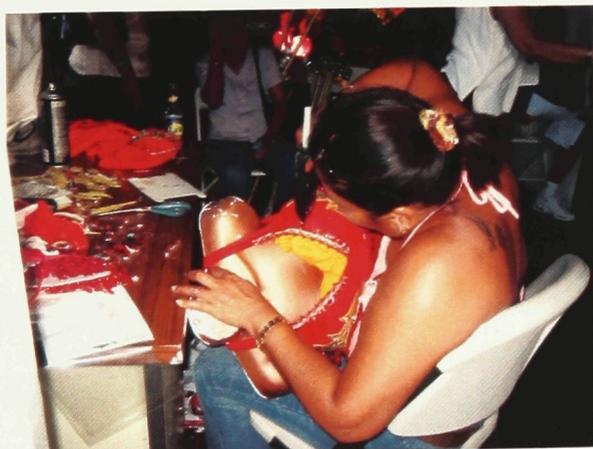


Figure 24 . A faithful volunteer attaches gold trim to a female costume amidst the chaos of the camp. Photograph by author, 2006.



Figure 25 . Designer Curtis Aitchison fits a male masquerader with a gold chest plate and cape, ensuring the piece fits just right. Photograph by author, 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Earl Lovelace. The Dragon Can't Dance. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979) 27.



Figure 26 . Plumed headpieces hang from the camp's mesh-covered windows; hundreds of costume pieces lie in a workroom among Carnival Monday t-shirts; masqueraders spill out onto the camp's gallery; Curtis chats with a few section members as they leave the camp with costumes in bags, and standards in hands. Photographs by author, 2006.

The People—the friends, the creators, the masqueraders—some could hardly contain their joy and excitement upon seeing completed costumes of gorgeous vibrant red, plush, rich plumes waiting to crown heads, the extravagantly beaded gold and jeweled accents. Broad smiles light beautiful faces as costumes are tried on. But nothing tops the moment of witnessing the true transformation as a headpiece is finally placed upon one's head—a gasp escapes, the posture straightens, the body poses, and eyes can't help flirting with the stunning image in the mirror, sneaking peaks from all possible angles.

The designers, in addition to being exhausted from many late nights fabricating, have to deal with little frustrations that come with designing a section. A difficult part of their job is dealing with a very small number of overly picky revelers who are quite demanding, expecting everything to be exactly as they desire. Perhaps this mind-set goes back to the history of masking and the desire to be something you are not for a day. Perhaps this fantasy or surreal aspect must be completely fulfilled for the sweet memory of *mas* to last until next

Carnival rolls around. Many masqueraders playing pretty *mas*<sup>73</sup> wish to be queen (or king) for a day, therefore, not satisfied until everything looks and fits perfectly. I see many final payment transactions being made as people pick up their costumes. The topic of money and carnival is one that produces several different opinions, from many different points of view. In colonial times, Trinidad Carnival was not typically associated with money nor the desire to generate profits. In the early days, the festival was purely based on principle: power, and the right to power; the human condition; pride and respect and or the lack thereof; and of the resilience of the human spirit. Groups of masqueraders would convene and parade, dressed from whatever they could find or make themselves. In times past, Carnival's essence was the making and the masking. There was a ceremonious rite associated with the fabrication of one's own costume, or in the assistance of others. Somewhere along its evolution, as Carnival became more an organized event with specific *mas* bands and themes and the growth of pretty *mas*, commercialization came into play. Now, not all aspects of commercialization are bad, and it may be fair to say that were it not for commercialization, Trinidad Carnival may not be the large-scale spectacle it is today. In the scope of today's Carnival, however, it is impossible for a *mas* band to survive and continually improve without the generation of some sort of profit.

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<sup>73</sup> **pretty mas, fancy mas** Today's dominant form of masquerade emphasizing beautiful costumes with elaborate decorations. To some extent, pretty *mas* developed as middle-class participation in carnival increased, although the Afro-Creole carnival also emphasized "dressing up and looking good," from early on in the nineteenth century. Some feel that growth of pretty *mas* has led to the decline of traditional characters, the eclipse of *ole mas*, and commercialization of carnival. Many pretty costumes are now decorated bikini-style garments.

Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 292.

In a developing nation where wages and average expenses are relative, \$1000-4000TT (\$188-754 CDN) per costume is a large sum of money for the average citizen. Many Trinbagonians' love for *mas* is so strong that, even though they will bawl, "hmm, like dey tryin' to KILL meh with price!", they will save for weeks or months to put aside 'Carnival money'. What then, would encourage tens of thousands of people to annually spend such large amounts on costumes that will get one use? It is not only about the costumes—it is the fact that in modern Carnival, revelers desire the ultimate carnival experience. As Trinidad Carnival continues to evolve and become more elaborate, people have started paying for exclusive services. In this modern age of carnival, money does play a large factor in the renewal and growth of the festival and in the renewal of the islands as a major contributor to the nation's economy. The issue goes full circle, as the money generated from one carnival can assist locals in other endeavours of development, as well as fuel the next round of revelry. Many argue that the commercialization of *mas* takes away from the valued traditions of yesterday, but they fail to acknowledge that the same commercialization may have its advantages as well, and could potentially serve to carry the nation into a successful and developed future.

It is necessary to discuss this topic of money, *mas*, *mas* bands, and designers in order to realize the true power of Trinidad Carnival. Yes, when looked at superficially, masqueraders and designers relish in the sparkle and flash of Carnival that costs much money. At the same time, it is crucial to realize the amount of power which lies in the hands of *mas* makers. They, themselves,

who really love *mas* and embrace it as a way of life, realize its full potential to uplift and carry the nation, a notion that still goes back to those very first days of colonial carnival, though transformed in modern times. *Mas* camps are true spaces of creativity and fabrication. They steadily grow, then overflow with bursts of life come carnival time. Many experience this awesome energy and inhabitation of space, only to be abandoned within weeks, leaving scraps and stained floors behind. Though the conceptual ideas for next year's *mas* begin once Ash Wednesday arrives, some *mas* camps fall into slumber until it is time, in a month or two, for next year's physical preparation to begin. Despite growing concerns with the state of the festival's commercialization, the traditional spirit of masking, the spirit of creativity, and the spirit of making shall remain alive in Trinidad *mas* camps, and camps abroad, for centuries to come.

Come evening this crazy Carnival Saturday when I begin to help out in the *mas* camp, I, too am exhausted but completely mesmerized by the spirit of the camp and the spirit of Trinbagonians who, though strangers, seem so familiar. By the time the designers, their nephew Jesse and I leave the camp at night to attend Panorama, I am enthralled, captivated, and set on playing *mas* on Carnival Tuesday, although I had originally intended to remain an active observer. This is one of the powers of *mas*—at one glimpse, one listen, one jump up, it seizes you, grabs hold, and doesn't let go until you surrender to the spectacle and all its splendour.



*Figure 27 . A quiet room of the mas camp on Carnival Saturday evening. Everything is still as the camp is locked up after a very busy day. Photograph by author, 2006.*

## chapter 8 . the event

saturday, february 25<sup>th</sup> 2006 . **panorama finals**

After the long exhausting day at the *mas* camp, the designers cannot wait to reach Panorama.<sup>74</sup> The steelpan<sup>75</sup> is a long time love of theirs. They are rooting for a well-seasoned band by the name of Desperadoes, hoping the band will take home the crown for Carnival 2006. The *Alternative Concept 4* the previous weekend had been my first event attended at the Queen's Park Savannah, but Panorama would be my first true taste of Trinidad Carnival. I am going to be seated in the Savannah's famous stands, seeing a live spectacle upon the legendary Carnival stage. The Aitchison's and their nephew Jesse already have tickets in hand for the popular competition. The mission is to get tickets for myself in the often sold-out Grandstand. As soon as we approached the entrance gates, men were buzzing about, looking shady but selling legitimate tickets at the standard price. A seat in the Northstand<sup>76</sup> is half the price of the

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<sup>74</sup> **Panorama** The carnival season *steelband* competition begun in 1963, with the finals currently held on the weekend before Ash Wednesday. Under the control of Pan Trinbago, Panorama has four competition divisions: North, South, East, and West. It is divided into preliminary competitions (prelims), semifinals, and finals. Regional competitions are part of the national competition, though each region has its own champion. Panorama prelims are legendary for the energy of its supporters in the *North Stands* of the Queen's Park Savannah. Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 291.

<sup>75</sup> **pan [steelpan]** A melodic percussion instrument unique to Trinidad, the steeldrum, made initially out of discarded oil drums. Sometimes refers to other metal containers such as biscuit tins, or to the music created by beating pan. Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 291.

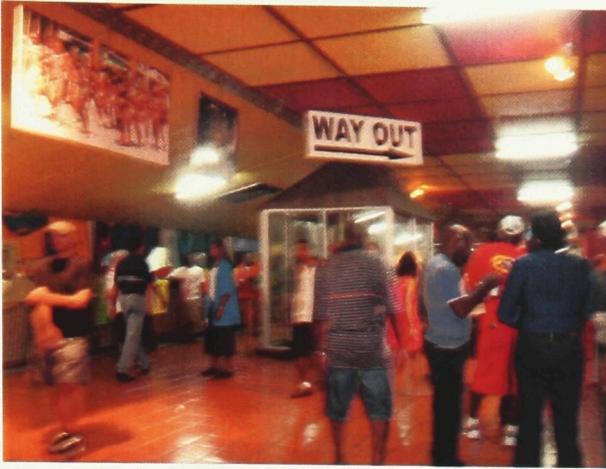
<sup>76</sup> **Northstand** An annually mounted and demounted seating stand erected for Carnival directly north of the Grandstand.

\$300TT(\$56 CDN) Grandstand tickets. I choose seating in the Grandstand where I will have full view and access to the night's action. With my ticket in hand, I can barely contain my anxious curiosity. One can barely picture any sort of magic happening within the Grandstand which, when seen from afar, appears to be a dilapidated corrugated metal shed. The first time I ever laid my eyes on it, I could not understand how such a structure, deemed an eyesore by many Trinbagonians, could be the revered site of greatness. The Grandstand, however, looks larger than life this night; it had always looked so small from the road, seated far back on the Savannah grass. Despite its many cherished and disdained characteristics, my entire experience within this peculiar, aged structure is surreal, producing a dream-like sensation.

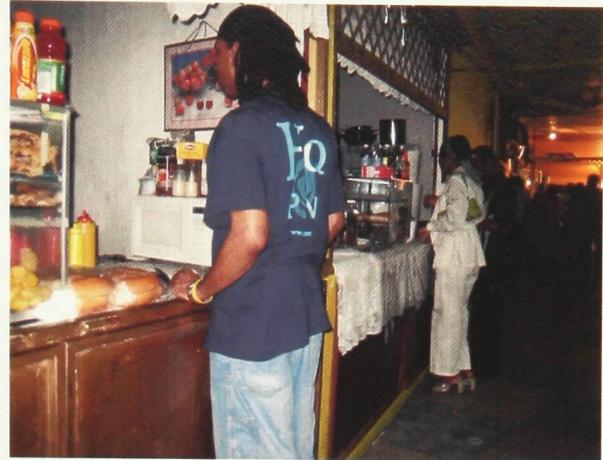
As I hand my ticket to an usher and pass through a large metal turnstyle, my eyes are confronted with a mystically dim, yellow glow inside of the main hall of the Grandstand. There is a long, narrow hall housing concession stands, display cases, washroom facilities. It also acts as a service corridor and a transition layer before entering the main stand itself. The plan is quite simple and seems to have been designed out of necessity and not with the goal of efficiency or maximum functionality in mind. The Grandstand, originally erected for the viewing of horse racing more than fifty years ago against the regulation that no permanent structure should sit on the Savannah's grass,<sup>77</sup> has evolved over the years to facilitate the viewing of carnival spectacles.

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Mason. Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 35.



*Figure 28 . Long entry corridor of Grandstand, with low, sloped roof, is lined with concession stands and display cases filled with past carnival costumes. Photograph by author, 2006.*



*Figure 29 . Jesse orders bake and shark and beverages from one of the concession stands in a small wing off of the entrance corridor. Photograph by author, 2006.*

The main stand is accessed by two vomitories passing under the upper tier of seating. The seating of the Grandstand is dark and covered, but open to the stage, the Northstand, and the warm night air. We are seated on the floor at ground level, viewing up to the elevated performers on stage. The seating at ground level, more comfortable than the seating in the temporary and cheaper Northstand, is comprised of segments of plastic fold-down seats screwed into the concrete ground. After several decades of use, many rows of seating are no longer bolted to the ground and as one person shifts in his or her seat, the whole row of chairs jolts in an unsettling manner.

Feb 26, 2006

LAST NIGHT → Feb 25  
Paradise @ QPS

- grandstand \$300
- northstand \$150
- sat in grandstand
  - "pod hall @ back"
  - driveway to stand lined w/ craft (pod tents)
  - parking on grass again (donorland + QP West)
  - ppl. hustling tickets @ door but for some price
- enter gates, take tickets
- "pod" hall → corridor lined w/ pod stalls, display cases in middle (catered)
  - power that out in section when we were there
  - basic plan

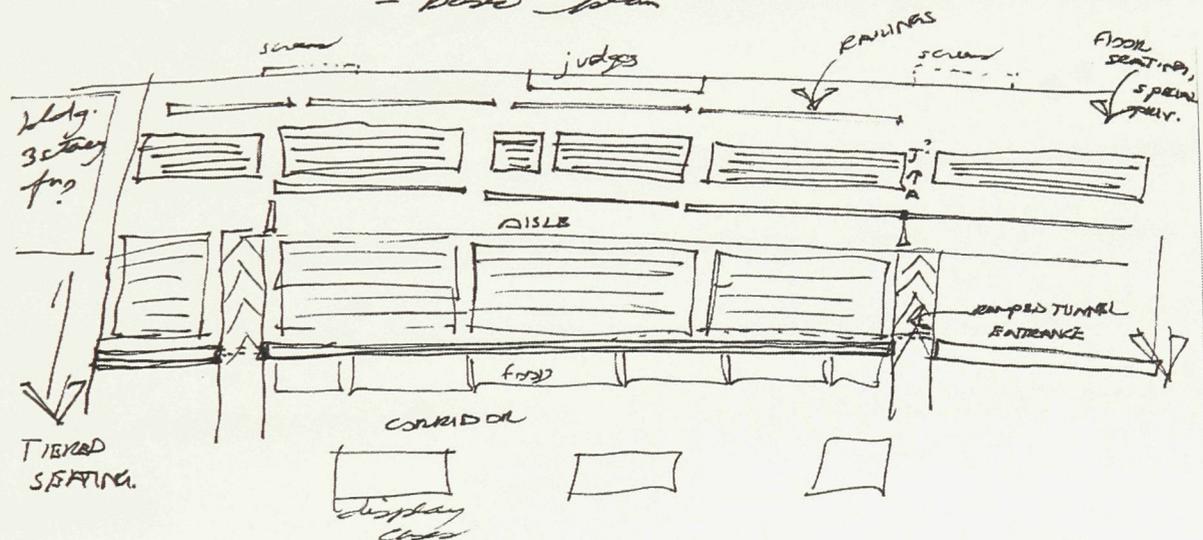


Figure 30 . Plan of existing Grandstand. Notes and sketch by author, 2006.

Once the show is underway, the intense hunger I am feeling can no longer be ignored. I anxiously await one of the many fifteen-minute breaks between performances, within which one band would exit the runway-like stage while another entered essentially on their heels. These breaks are welcomed by the crowd as each band, ranging from approximately thirty-five to 120 musicians, played for a maximum of eight intense minutes. During the moving and setting-up of steelbands, the crowd leaves their seats to socialize with friends, refresh

their drinks, or make a quick stop in the washroom. Given the first opportunity, Jesse and I decide to go out to the concession stands to order a famously delicious bake and shark. Out in the concessions area, we pass many food stalls, scrutinizing each one. Promptly after ordering the carnival fast food treat of homemade quality, the current goes out in the small section of concessions in which we are standing. When the electricity is not restored within a few minutes, the vendors, particularly the woman who is attending to us, begins to cuss. She is upset, asking no one in particular how she is supposed to sell food without current. She is quite comical, despite her vexation. I was in heaven as I returned to my seat, took a bite, heard an explosion of pan, and washed my snack down with a mini Peardrax.<sup>78</sup>

Panorama is unlike any other spectacle I have ever seen. The quality of the music and exceptional skill of the musicians, some young children, is phenomenal. The crisp melodic sounds of the instruments ring clear in the fresh night air, producing extremely big sound which resonates in the slit between the two stands.

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<sup>78</sup> **Peardrax** a non-alcoholic sparking pear flavoured drink popular in Trinidad and Tobago. This drink is common to everyday consumption, yet in some households, is increasingly consumed during the Christmas season.





Figure 32 . View from the Grandstand of a steelband competing on the Carnival stage.  
Photograph by author, 2006.

As each band performs upon the stage, they are required to have a banner proclaiming their name, sponsors, and place of origin. These banners are held by spicily clad young women who dance around the stage. Some bands add yet more flavour to their presentations with the presence of *moko jumbies*,<sup>79</sup> who are dancing and mimicking beating pan. All steelbands are decked out to the fullest as their members play and dance with every ounce of energy they have in their bodies, having practiced and waited for these moments all year.

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<sup>79</sup> **Moko Jumbie** When this stilt-walking traditional character is asked where he is from, he responds that he has walked all the way across the Atlantic Ocean from the West Coast of Africa. A Moko Jumbie is the spirit of Moko, the Orisha (god) of fate and retribution who emphasizes that even as he endured centuries of brutal treatment he remains “tall, tall, tall.” His head touches the sky, as he stands astride the crossroads to waylay unwary late-night travelers. Moko Jumbies are found throughout the West Indies. Traditional Moko Jumbies wear long pants or skirts (covering the stilts) and cover their faces. Now, any stilt walker in carnival might be called a Moko Jumbie.

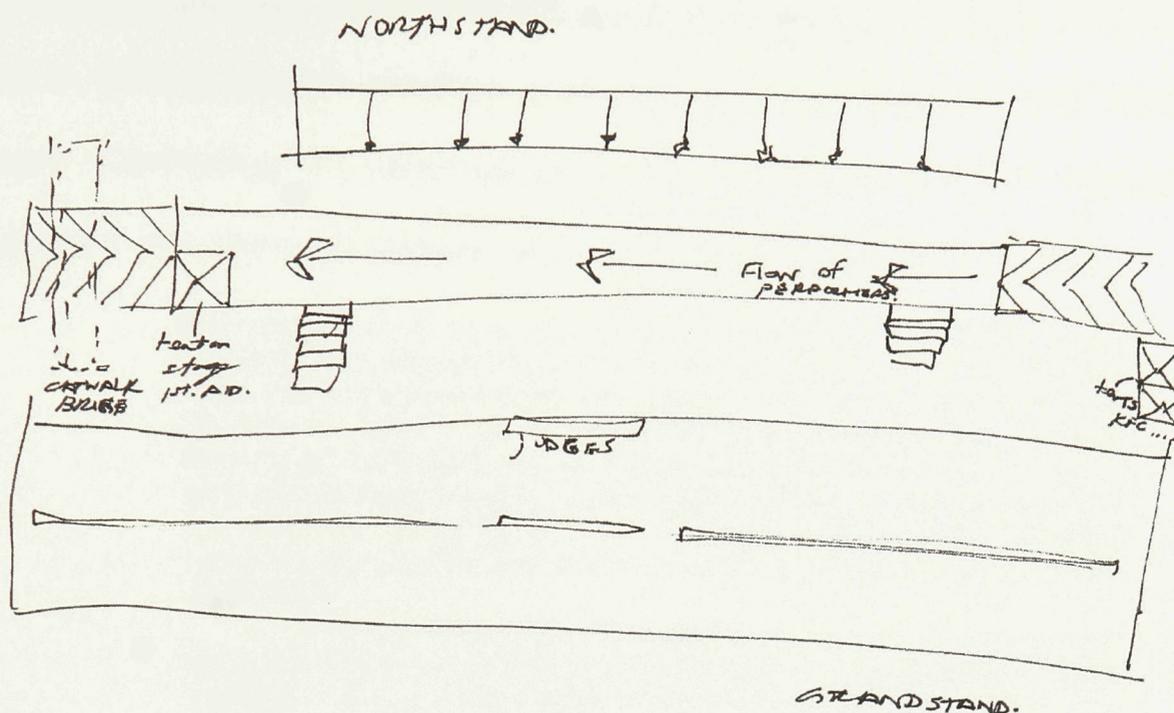
Carol Martin. “Trinidad Carnival Glossary” Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 290.



Figure 33. Young *moko jumbies* dance on the Carnival stage as a steelband performs. The temporary Northstand can be seen in the background, the Grandstand audience sits in the foreground. Photograph by author, 2006.

The stage, completely open to the sky, is set up in a linear configuration and raised approximately one meter off of the ground. It is ramped at both ends for ease of rolling steelbands and large costumes on and off. The stage also functions as a runway lying approximately 183 meters, the whole length of the Grandstand, accommodating one band after another as it does during the Carnival parade itself. The width of this oddly configured and proportioned temporary arena spans approximately forty-six meters.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Peter Mason. Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 35.



- linear stage works very well.
- prob. w/ N.S. only seeing back of everything
- need to change plan/flow....

Figure 34 . Plan of Northstand, Carnival Stage, and Grandstand, Queen's Park Savannah. Sketch by author, 2006.

The sketch in *figure 34* shows the rough layout of the temporary arena, including a media bridge straddling the western end of the stage; a temporary tent housing a first aid station just east of the bridge; and temporary food tents (presumably for performers) located south of the eastern end of the stage. The official “front” of the stage always faces the Grandstand where the judges, dignitaries, and middle to upper class are traditionally seated. As a result, the musicians perform facing the Grandstand, and always have their backs to the Northstand audience; though in calypso, king and queen competitions, both audiences are equally addressed. There is an unofficial status/class stigma attached to the inhabitants of the North- and Grandstands. This mentality seems preposterous during a

festival that proudly boasts racial and social unity among nationals, in a country that is striving towards reaching a developed status within the next fourteen years. Concerning this circumstance and the underlying issues of segregation present in the viewing of Carnival spectacles, author Peter Mason writes:

The cheaper north stand, where the 'real people' go, creates the bulk of the noise and excitement as the spectators knock back rum in plastic cups, delve into cooler boxes full of food, stand on their seats and shout for their favourite. This is one of the year's biggest 'limes', a prime example of the heightened Trinidadian capacity for enjoyment, even if it only comes from hanging around doing nothing, cracking jokes and watching the world go by. The average Trinidadian is a skilled commentator and observer of almost anything, from a cricket match to a car accident.....

While the north stand famously brings the tent atmosphere into the bigger arena, the grandstand is notoriously more restrained, a stiffer, wealthier counterpoint to the exuberant unwashed hordes opposite. It is all relative, of course, because the grandstand crowd would still seem unrestrained by most world standards, but this is where the better-off tend to congregate, and manners are consequently more important.

(Mason, 37)<sup>81</sup>

For most performers, Mason writes, during Carnival finals it is of more importance to gain the support and approval of the Northstand audience as they represent the voice of the masses—the average Trinbagonian. The issue of implied segregation is one that this thesis shall address in the design of a new Grandstand for Trinidad Carnival. It is a form of disrespect for a paying member of any audience, no matter how financially or socially situated, to be seated where they are subject to viewing the backs of performers. The Northstand audience still pays a substantial sum of money to enjoy Carnival shows, yet their viewing experience is compromised. In addition to superior viewing conditions of the spectacle, the Grandstand audience also benefits from close proximity of the concession stands, standard washroom facilities, large digital screens

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<sup>81</sup> Peter Mason. Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 37.

highlighting the intricate movements of the performers, as well as the presence of security guards and ushers. Despite this less than favourable condition, a great time is had by all in attendance. By the time the big contenders for the large steelband category are competing, it is well after midnight. As the Neal and Massy Trinidad All Stars play Maximus Dan's 2006 soca entitled *Soca Warrior*, the entire crowd goes absolutely wild. The song, celebrating the Trinidad and Tobago soccer team and their qualification for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, is definitely the crowd favourite. Rowdiness is now rampant in the Grandstand. The music is purely infectious. It is impossible to sit still during such a moving performance. The audience is on its feet singing, dancing, shouting, and stamping. Even the rastafarian nutsman, with his large crocus sack slung over his shoulder performs a few fancy steps, dancing through the aisles to the sweet, sweet music as he shouts "get your salt nuts, roasted nuts, nuuuuuts...."



Figure 35 . Grandstand crowd socializes in the aisles as a large band sets up its instruments on the Carnival stage in preparation to perform. Photograph by author, 2006.

Panorama, which starts at 7:00 p.m., does not come to a close until all bands have performed and the judges have announced the winners well after 3:00 a.m. By this time, the thinned out crowd is anxiously chatting in efforts to pre-determine the final standings of the bands. By the time the announcer reveals the sixth place band, the stage and its occupants are wet with a sudden burst of rain and the crowd is in a frenzy. There is a slight commotion on the stage as a few people scatter seeking shelter under a tiny fold-up tent and the crowd is in an uproar over the results of the judges. The crowd favourite has placed a questionable second. There is much noisy chatter, excitement, disappointment and several faces of disbelief as scores of people file out of the Grandstand in the wee hours of the morning. Nevertheless, the audience is truly satisfied with the caliber of mastery and entertainment showcased this Carnival Saturday night. My ride arrives amongst a barrage of cars at the entrance of the Grandstand, charged from his own carnival activities that night, ready to take our time making the two and a half hour trip back down into the country. I bid my companions farewell, with the promise that I will return the next day and stay with the family for a few days to enjoy the *mas*. They wave goodnight as they commence their familiar carnival walk home to Belmont.

## chapter 9 . the spectacle

february 26, 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 . **jouvay . yellow devils**  
st. james, port of spain

**jouvay, j'ouvert, jouvert, jourvert, jour ouvert, jou ouvert** Trinidadian *jouvay* is derived from the French *jour ouvert*, the opening day of carnival which begins (often officially 2:00 a.m.) the Monday morning before Ash Wednesday. *Jouvay* is a nocturnal *mas* that breaks up shortly after dawn. Thousands of revelers in old clothes covered with mud, or as *Blue* or *Red Devils*, or drenched in black oil (Oil Men) fill the streets. They chip and wine as they follow steelbands or sound systems on tractor-trailers, or they create their own music by beating biscuit tins. Contemporary *jouvay*, the two days of celebration before Ash Wednesday, was originally a celebration of emancipation. Especially among middle-class Trinidadians "j'ouvert" has again regained popular usage. For some, the French pronunciation obscures the Trinidadian transformation of carnival from a celebration of the European plantocracy to the African-inspired carnival of emancipation.

(Martin, 288)<sup>82</sup>

Staying in Belmont with the Aitchison's, their nephew Jesse becomes my chaperone for Carnival. He has already made plans to play *jouvay* with his friend Nila and asks me to come along with them. *Dimanche Gras*<sup>83</sup> evening, I again return to the *mas* camp. From there, Jesse and I decided to attend a party at the Boyscout's Headquarters<sup>84</sup> where several big-name soca artists are scheduled to perform. We leave the party at 2:00 a.m. to walk home, change clothes, and walk back into town to meet up with the *Yellow Devils jouvay* band, with whom we will be jumping that morning. In our *Yellow Devils* t-shirts and wristbands, we

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<sup>82</sup> Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 288.

<sup>83</sup> **Dimanche Gras** French for "fat Sunday", the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. *Dimanche Gras* activities of various kinds take place throughout the island, including the *Dimanche Gras* show at *Queen's Park Savannah*.

Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 286.

<sup>84</sup>Countless organizations, companies and individuals host all-inclusive parties during the carnival season all over the island. On any given night, there could be several large-scale events to choose to attend.

sit on the side of a residential street waiting for the remainder of the band to assemble and commence parading at 4:00 a.m. Our band has one truck filled with buckets of yellow paint which are being thrown and splashed on the masqueraders and the surrounding crowd as they jump and dance in the twilight hours. Anything lying in the path of the paint becomes fair game. If a member of the band or the crowd appears too clean to another person, they immediately received their share of mess by any of the following methods: they are mercilessly attacked with a bottle of this yellow paint or a band member hugs and rubs, and touches and squeezes them until the paint job is complete to satisfaction. Being out on the streets *jouvay* morning means surrendering your body and your cleanliness to the unruly masses. Here lies the old Trini<sup>85</sup> saying that “you cyar play *mas* an’ fraid powder”,<sup>86</sup> (you can’t play *mas* if you’re afraid of powder), meaning, you can’t take part in *jouvay* celebrations if you’re afraid of getting dirty amidst the debauchery. The underlying meaning of this phrase allows it to be used pertaining to several aspects of Trinbagonian life throughout the year.

The band is a delicious mess by the time we rounded the second corner—there is paint, mud, drinks, and water flying in every direction. Hands are roaming everywhere, and strangers are openly gyrating with one another. The band is partying without fear, ruling those streets, dirtying everyone and everything in their path, including members of other *jouvay* bands. This form of *mas* “is the closest remaining link to the ‘ole mas’ of the post-emancipation days of the mid-

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<sup>85</sup> *Trini* A colloquial shortening of the term “Trinidadian”.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Mason. *Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad*. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 90.

1800's, when former slaves ridiculed their plight with greased bodies and chained ankles. It has the feel of the spirit world of the dark continent, mingled with the European fear of Satan. It celebrates the darker side of life, revels in misbehaviour, gives vent to free expression and is fuelled by alcohol and adrenaline". (Mason, 91)<sup>87</sup>

Anytime the *Yellow Devils* run into another band passing in the street, different colours of mud and paint start flying as the dj's upon the large trucks engaged in sound wars to determine whose band had the biggest and wickedest sound deserving of the right of way on the streets.

People are getting on absolutely wildly with friends and with strangers alike. The band grows in numbers as we chip on throughout the morning, picking up people as we pass through St. James' streets. The dancing becomes progressively freeing, daring, and raunchy as dawn's light approaches. There is a surreal aspect to this event as many inversions of gender roles can be seen. Women are scantily clad, showcasing their feminine curves and the fullness of their behinds. Some have an aggressive energy to them that, in some cases, is displayed in a manner akin to a male hyped up with extra testosterone. It is quite different to see these women acting brash, while maintaining sensuous feminine movements. On the other end of the spectrum, several males are dressed up as the famed *Dame Lorraine*<sup>88</sup> for *jouvay*. This is perhaps one of the only times of

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Mason. Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad. (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publications, 1998) 91.

<sup>88</sup> **Dame Lorraine** A traditional carnival character who originally mocked French plantation wives. In carnival, cross-dressing men as well as women played the character, but it is now primarily a female masquerade. The all-over floral print dress of this *mas* is augmented with a padded posterior and breasts, and sometimes a pregnant belly. Formerly this masquerade took the form of Dame Lorraine *plays*.

the year when men can publicly cross-dress, and both sexes can act scandalous, and not feel judged the next day when they return to their normal roles in society. Nila, one of our companions, is a tall, thick, nicely shaped young woman with an outrageous personality. She is having a great time *getting on bad* with the young men, enticing them with her movements. Given her stature and fiery nature, she is a challenge for any man. Her behaviour, though not scandalous, is a stretch for many women. At one point in the *jouvay* celebrations, she befriends a relatively short but muscled man. They make an odd pair as they comically wine together, and, when it was least expected, Nila swiftly picks him off of the ground, his legs wrapped around her waist. As they dance, she walks forward while carrying him. The crowd loves it—this strange surreal image of the inversion of roles performed in such a spontaneous manner, which truly speaks of the wild possibilities of Trinidadian *mas*.

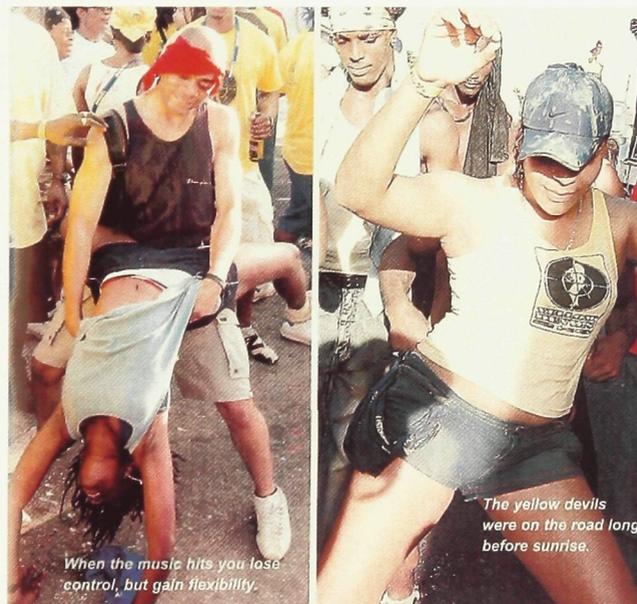


Figure 36 . Yellow Devils enjoy themselves in the early morning sun, partially washed clean of yellow paint. *Jouvay* morning, Port of Spain. Photographer Unknown, 2006.<sup>89</sup>

Carol Martin. "Trinidad Carnival Glossary" Carnival: Culture in Action – The Trinidad Experience. (New York: Routledge, 2004) 286.

<sup>89</sup> Della Ann Stewart, ed. Trinidad & Tobago Carnival Magazine 2006. (Port of Spain: Trinidad Express Newspapers, 2006) 25.

Once the sun rises and the tropical heat begins to intensify, a large water truck comes by and wets down the entire crowd with powerful blasts of cool water to add to the madness and keep the sun's heat bearable to masqueraders. It feels wonderful, being soaked right to the skin, after being hot and dirty and after not having slept for almost thirty hours. During one of these wet downs, I snap back to reality for a split second and notice my surroundings: the *Yellow Devils* are jamming on the highway, with motorists speeding past us in the next lane. Our band has swollen to at least four hundred people, and it is quite a sight to see a sea of people dancing, completely dirty, on a six-lane highway. This display is definitely an example of carnival's tendency to appropriate spaces of the city. In this situation, the masqueraders are in charge, we are in control as the morning traffic has to yield to our band. I feel an incredible feeling of power being amongst carefree people, engaging in outrageously forbidden behaviour.

We reach the end of the route shortly after dancing the length of the highway's off ramp. As we reach the Savannah, we head straight to the temporary sheds housing food vendors in search of breakfast. My feet are so sore from the hours of dancing and jumping that we have to rest at the edge of the Savannah before attempting the daunting walk home.

february, 27<sup>th</sup> 2006 . **Carnival Monday**

I awake sometime late Carnival Monday afternoon, exhausted and barely able to move from the intense *feteing*, and twists and turns my body underwent that morning. Having missed playing casual Carnival Monday *mas* with the *Trini Revellers*, Jesse and I decide to head down to the *mas* camp to assist in any last minute work that needs to be completed for the next morning. Walking to the camp through dark and dirtied streets, there is residual carnival energy in the air, as many people are out liming, milking the last bit of revelry the day has to offer. After liming outside the locked camp with a couple of beers, the designers arrive, looking weary with fatigue, but joyful of the day's festivities.

Inside the camp, half a dozen costumes remain to be fabricated, completed, or altered. Curtis has reached a limit of exhaustion that is impossible to fight. After making one costume, he finally surrenders to sleep. After a quick study, I am put to the task of fabricating the first phase of the remaining costumes. Brian brings them to completion by adding the capes and final touches to ensure all pieces are adequately secure.

During my time at the *mas* camp, I discover the complex nature of making *mas*: the precise organization; the importance of dedicated volunteers; and the keen business sense required to successfully bring out a section or a band. This process is an extreme undertaking, which can only thrive through the satisfaction of bringing joy to others and through a sincere love of making.

Perhaps the most fascinating is the transition of the space of the *mas* camp. The house, in a state of decay, is reawakened in feverish production in the weeks leading up to carnival, and hits its peak a few days before the festival parade. Two days following Carnival, the camp is completely cleared out, the entire fabrication and occupation of space a distant memory. Several traces of this ephemeral inhabitation of space are left behind. Stray feathers from headpieces lie dormant, unmoved by the still air in the old house; spray paint patterns mark surfaces; daubs of hardened glue texture the floor; and shiny runaway beads are static, hiding in now darkened corners. It is amazing how the transient inhabitation of this modest adaptable space creates conditions where greatness, and great spectacles, can materialize.

february, 28<sup>th</sup> 2006 . **Carnival Tuesday**

Carnival Tuesday morning, I can barely cling to any sense of composure as I perform my own ritual of masking, putting on my costume and make-up. I gingerly secure one piece at a time, jumping every now and then, making certain that the costume will remain intact. I cannot tear my gaze away from the mirror while I am dressing. The transformation from ordinary to jeweled diva is felt and seen in my posture and in my movements.

When first walking through the streets in the morning on the way to the Savannah, I feel as if I am a lone spectacle on display, being ogled by countless pairs of eyes. I feel somewhat self-conscious, relaxing once I think back to Earl Lovelace's *Florence*<sup>90</sup> and remind myself that the gazes come from the onlookers' approval and appreciation of my willingness to bare my *self* to the city, thereby claiming it as my own. Once in context, within a sea of *mas*, these thoughts drift from my mind as I fully assimilate. I feel as though it is normal to showcase my bikini-wearing body to a world of people. The delusional feeling of royalty, enhanced by the sexy Roman inspired costume, equips me with the fresh attitude rampant on Carnival streets.

Our band is assembled by 8:00 a.m. and is lined up, ready to cross the Savannah stage for the last time as Trinbagonians know it. For me, it is ironically

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<sup>90</sup> **Note** *Florence* is Earl Lovelace's character in the novel Salt, referenced in Chapter 3 . Carnival & the Appropriation of Space & Architecture.

my first time savouring this experience, for others, this final crossing signifies the end of an era. This dance across the stage holds much meaning for thousands of masqueraders as there is a sentimentality attached to the act. For many Trinbagonians, they have literally come into them(*self*)s, maturing while performing a ritual crossing of the stage year after year after year.



Figure 37 . Carnival Tuesday, *Trini Revellers* file prepare to perform on the Carnival stage. The Grandstand (left), and the Northstand (right), can be seen in the background. Photograph by author, 2006.



Figure 38. *Trini Revellers* section “The Siege of Carthage” dances before judges upon the Carnival stage on Carnival Tuesday morning. Photograph by author, 2006.

After documenting and making observations of the experience of dancing on the Carnival stage, of the people around me, of the judges, and of the structures that are temporarily erected to facilitate this festival, I become completely lost: I become lost in the motion of my section; lost in the task of impressing the judges; and lost in the process of first releasing my inhibitions upon that enormous length of stage. I become oblivious to the fact that all eyes are on me, on us—the section, the band, the nation. I become lost in the intense rhythm of the music; I become lost in the smiles around me; I become lost within my body and the outside forces which seem to move it; I become lost in the liberation I feel. Crossing the stage, I feel that I have finally come to know the true meaning of

this spectacle—to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, and to experience an intense engagement of all of the senses. The festivities are breathtaking. It is a time of family, friendship, and public friendliness. On the parade route this Carnival Tuesday after many interactions with all kinds of people, I feel that yes, “all o we is one”. If only the nation can truly live according to this mantra every day of the year.



Figure 39 . (l-r) Jesse and I pause along the parade route. Photograph by author, 2006.



Figure 40 . (l-r) Two men stand on a truck stacked with speakers which crawls at the pace of the crowd; Brian Gittens poses with two of his section's masqueraders; *Trini Revellers* pause for lunch on the Brian Lara Promenade in Port of Spain; a soca artiste hangs onto the side of a moving truck as she performs for the crowd. Photograph by author, 2006.



Figure 41 . The parade route extends for kilometers as thousands of masqueraders fill Port of Spain's streets on Carnival Tuesday. Photograph by author, 2006.

We play *mas* for several hours and well into the night. We decide that we are content with Carnival 2006 and start the long walk home after more than twelve straight hours of *feteing*. In the days following the festival, the city is restored to its previous state of cleanliness while we patiently await to hear the results of the judging of the parade uptown (on the Savannah stage), and downtown (on Independence Square). *Trini Revellers* win the prestigious title of "Band of the Year" for the third year in a row.



## **part IV . The Process & The Design**

## The Process

This selected thesis topic is one which is greatly driven by process. Just as Trinidad Carnival is centered around the processes of making, creating, translating, and fabricating, so too are the investigations to date, as well as the resulting design. Much time has been spent studying the costumes produced for Trinidad Carnival, from the smallest to largest of scales. In an attempt to better understand these creations in their complexity, a series of costumes were modeled to scale on wooden mannequins. These exercises have revealed much about balance, counter-balance, form, structure, and materiality. At all scales architectural qualities, such as shelter and enclosure, have begun to emerge given that many of these structures are physically realized at the scale of traditional architecture reaching several meters in all directions.



Figure 42 . A figure/ground exercise placing the costume models at the end of the Carnival stage. The Grandstand can be seen in the background. Montage by author, 2006.

Among the several branches of this thesis, a focus has been placed on the body and its movement and its relationship to the costume structures which have begun to be modeled. One of the first emerging qualities of these structures is the flex and flux of materials in response to motion. After reading some of legendary *mas* maker Peter Minshall's writings, further exploration involved studying how even the smallest to most intricate movement is echoed and amplified throughout all parts of structure. Upon capturing the essence of successful Carnival King and Queen costumes, Minshall writes:

The challenge of mobility in *mas* is to transmit the movement of the performer to his apparel, to magnify it, and see it articulated in the far reaches of the structure, yards away from the body. As *mas* is performed to music, the essential movement of the masquerader is his dance. The greatest kinetic potential, then, is to base the mobility of the

costume on that movement, so that the mas expresses the dance, and the rhythm of the music can be read high in the air.

(Minshall, 2003)<sup>91</sup>

After furthering these studies in order to understand the assembly of these large costumes, their components, and ties to architecture, Minshall's quote served as one of the driving forces for the next series of investigations. These figure studies also revealed conditions of the body as scaffolding for the costume, as well as, the structure becoming architecture housing the body. After studying the motion of these structures, photographs were taken of these models, and the images were then montaged in an effort to reveal forms that may be related to the architecture of the thesis. These montages start to create layers of space which relate the figure of the body to the structures of the costumes.



Figure 43 . Montage of third body/structure study. This montage reveals forms within the structure which begin to relate to architectonic forms. Montage by author, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Minshall. "The Kings and Queens". The Callaloo Company. [Online] [http://www.callaloo.co.tt/kings\\_queens/default.HTML](http://www.callaloo.co.tt/kings_queens/default.HTML) , December 2003.



Figure 44 . Montages of body/structure studies. These montages begin to reflect the depth of the carnival masquerade. Montages by author, 2005.

Additionally, the models of these figures act as a study of the ways in which energy is transferred and reflected in these types of carnival structures, both on an individual scale, and among masses of masqueraders and revelers. Investigating ‘the costume’ in this manner—movement, form, materiality, connectivity—begins to inform the architecture of this thesis, as well as influencing the architectural program.

The next phase of investigation involved looking at scale, carried over from the various scales of the costumes created in the previous investigation. In particular, the condition of the body becoming the scale of the surrounding architecture, i.e. *moko jumbies*, as seen in the montages in figures 45 and 46.



Figure 45 . The *moko jumbie* juxtaposed against colonial-inspired houses of Port of Spain signifying the scale of Trinidad Carnival in relation to the residential streetscapes the festival engages. Montage by author, 2006.



Figure 46 . The *moko jumbie* is scaled against the scenes of downtown Port of Spain: the colonial-inspired institutional architecture, the Queen’s Park Savannah, and the busy streets of the downtown core. Montage by author, 2006.

These montages reflect much about social and political shifts in scale based on colonial constructs. Following these montages, models were made in an effort to capture the scale and volume of the carnival parade in relation to the streetscapes of Port of Spain. This investigation opened discussions on the spontaneous occurrence of the event within the spectacle. It explores possible architectural interventions that may exist along the parade route in response to the nature of the activity in the streets. The resulting functional intervention was designed in response to the appropriation of space and architecture and the protective caging of certain buildings in order to prevent physical contact from revelers. Some citizens, however, do not prescribe to this necessary sense of appropriation of the city. In the days approaching Carnival, many commercial and institutional edifices fence off or board up their perimeters with metal cages. This act, carried out in the understandable hopes of preventing physical property damage, is probably not meant to offend masqueraders. Its execution, however, is completed in a demeaning manner, as if masqueraders are an animalistic version of Jane M. Jacob's *Other* which need to be caged-out/in in order to be controlled. The idea is to re-create this architectural mask in a manner that does not insult the institution of Carnival, and serves a functional purpose: a series of demountable shade canopies whose supports serve as both fencing, seating and viewing platforms along the parade route.



Figure 47 . Port of Spain Gas station fenced with metal caging. Photograph by author, 2006.



Figure 48 . Gas station fenced with proposed architectural intervention of demountable tensile fabric shade canopies. Montage by author, 2006.

This method of masking harmoniously unites protection and appropriation. As a result, the function of exclusion turns negative expectations of “destructive revelry” into positive, functional, and aesthetically pleasing architecture which effectively enhances the temporal and spatial experience of observing the spectacle.<sup>92</sup>

Site analysis, carried out through research, culminated in a composite drawing reflecting the past, present and future potential of the Queen’s Park Savannah and the siting of Trinidad Carnival. The drawing follows the site’s evolution and cyclical nature of renewal from its function as a colonial sugar plantation to the existence of the Grandstand, to the arena of modern *mas*.

<sup>92</sup> It may be important to note that although many buildings in Port of Spain insist on erecting barricades around their perimeters reinforcing Jane Jacob’s notions of *Self* and *Other*, as it is mainly institutions in positions equal to the modern *Self*, i.e. banks, private enterprises...ect., that feel the need to ward off the *Other*. Needless to say, the vast majority of architecture which invites “the people” to appropriate its surfaces remains unharmed during the carnival season.

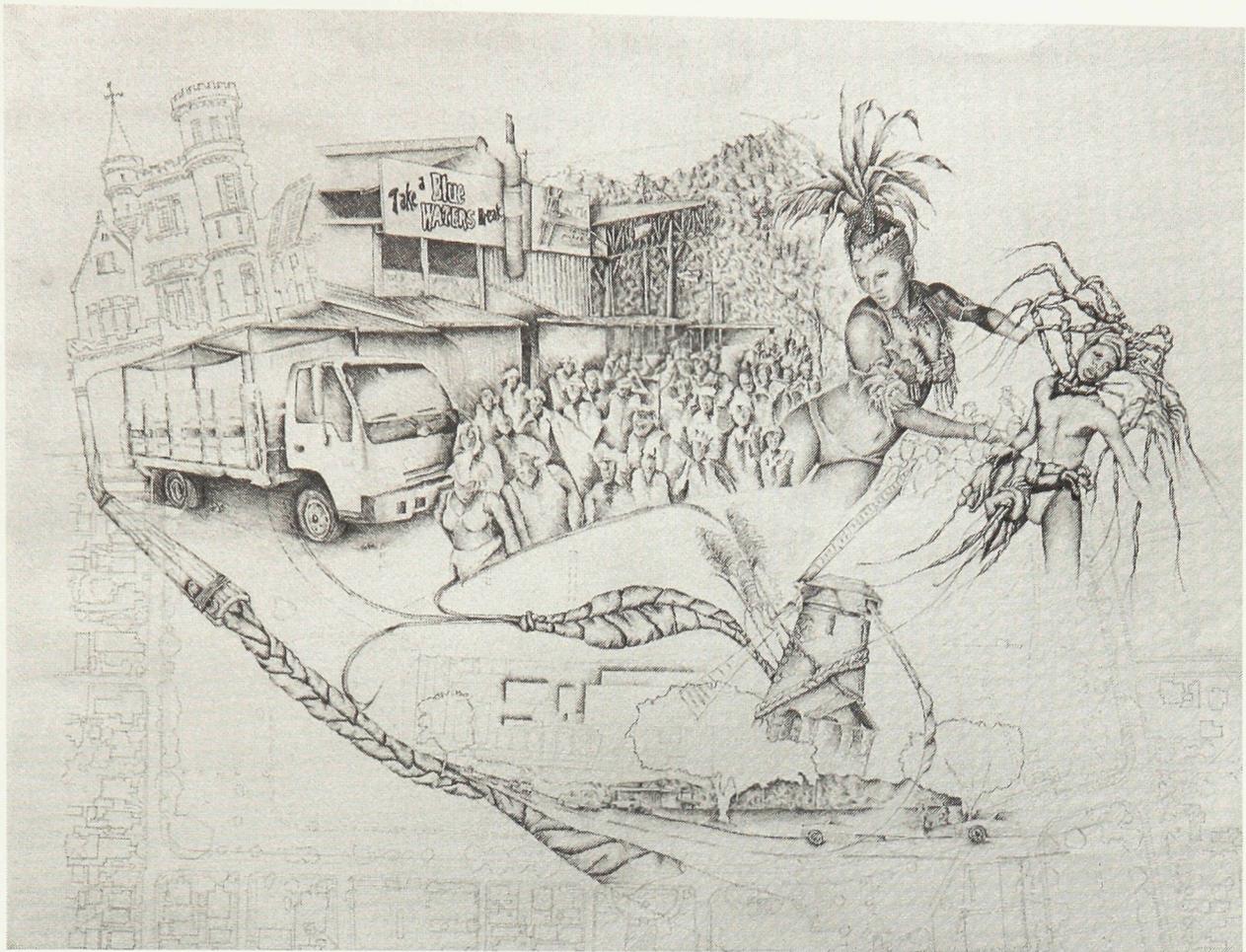


Figure 49 . Composite research of the thesis site: Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain, Trinidad. Drawing by author, 2006.

The most informative stage of the process was traveling to Trinidad & Tobago to personally experience the immersion into this cultural phenomenon. Attending Carnival 2006 was the true catalyst of the design process resulting with a better understanding of the functional and spontaneous necessities required to facilitate the events of the festival. During this time, this thesis was inspired by the people, music, creations, and Trinbagonian spirit. These four elements were carefully documented through photographs and video and began to draw out key aspects of the design portion of this thesis. While playing *mas*, the movements, behaviours, attitudes, physical and social conditions of the spectacle were keenly observed.

After this close, hands-on study of *mas* and its encompassing phenomena, a study of “before & after” narratives, as seen in *Chapter 5 . Before & After Trinidad Carnival*, was completed in keeping with the ephemeral nature of Trinidad Carnival. The three conditions explored in these narratives are: the body before and after the costume; the city before and after Carnival; and the self before and after the mask. These rich conditions revealed much about the site and the society in which Trinidad Carnival was born.

The notion of “narrative” has played a large role in this thesis as Carnival itself is a festival comprised of an infinite number of narratives which unite to form a richly textured whole. The text of this thesis has been interwoven with excerpts from Trinidadian author Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*—a classic Caribbean novel from 1979 that succeeds in exposing the guts of Carnival. Lovelace’s vivid imagery tells of “the people”, their spirits, their desires, their daily struggles, and the shared solace and rejuvenation they are able to find in Trinidad Carnival.

As the design process began to unfold, several conceptual models were fabricated with the aforementioned carnival theory as the driving force.

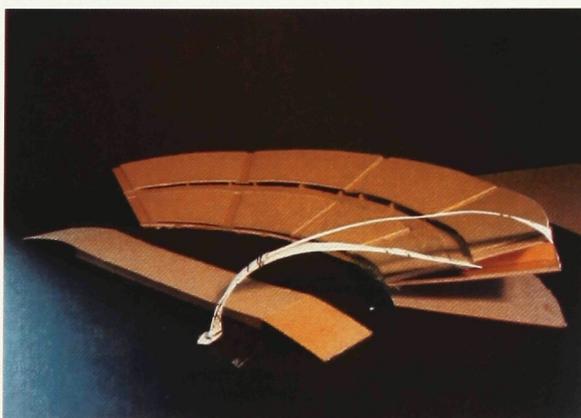


Figure 50 . First model of proposed Grandstand configuration. Model by author, 2006.

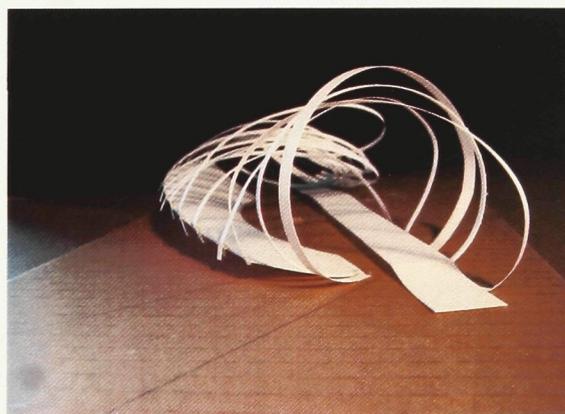


Figure 51 . Conceptual model of proposed Grandstand and stage. Model by author, 2006.

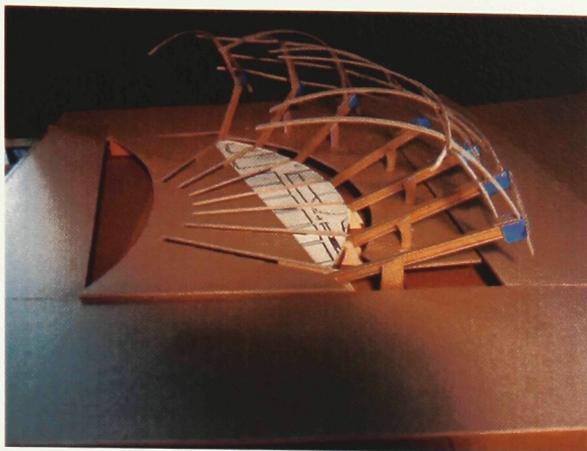


Figure 52 . Conceptual model of demountable structure which folds down into the ground. Model by author, 2006.

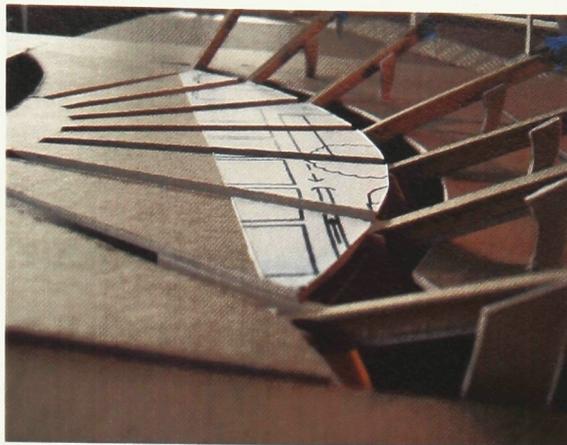


Figure 53 . Detail of demountable conceptual model.

The design, modeling, and drawing of this thesis were further related to the social, political, physical and ephemeral qualities of focus through an additional video investigation. This informative investigation became an effort to capture the ephemerality of the design by introducing the unique temporal qualities of *mas* which are essential attributes of Trinidad Carnival and the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. The video investigation related these temporal qualities—best expressed in the narratives of this thesis—to the ephemeral qualities of the proposed architectural design.

## The Design

This thesis proposes designs which are best described as architectural masks within the site and throughout the city that blossom for a short period of time. This ephemeral architecture echoes the ephemerality of *mas*, whereby the true *self* comes out to play by temporarily subverting the masked *other*. Several of the architectural strategies this thesis proposes are in response to social and political issues dating back to Colonial times, that have managed to prevail in various shapes and forms in modern society.

In Colonial times, architectural masks existed as grand edifices towering in stark contrast to the inhumane abodes of slaves. These masks were erected to create the illusion of superiority and establish Jane M. Jacob's unmistakable roles of *Self* (colonizer) and *Other* (colonized).

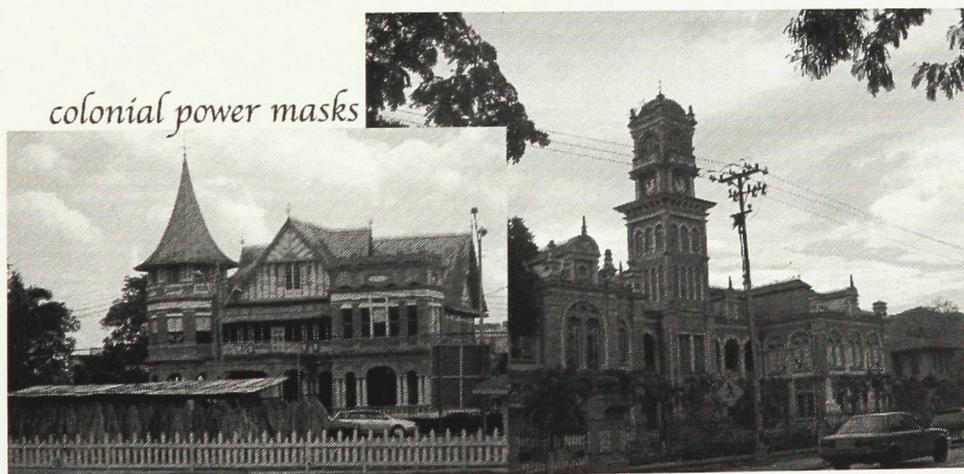


Figure 54 . Colonial Power Masks. Architecture as masks. Knowsley House (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Queen's Royal College border the Savannah in Port of Spain. Photographs and montage by author, 2006.

Modern architectural masks may surface at Carnival time, masking traditional architectural power masks with faces of the true *self*. These modern masks along the city's streets, aforementioned in *Chapter 12 . The Process*, are proposed in response to the need for the *self* to appropriate the city during Carnival time.

The design for a *National Centre for Carnival and Culture* consists of contrasting faces which support two different, yet interconnected programs. For ease of differentiation, these two faces shall be referred to as the *closed mask* (and or *other*), and the *open self*. The two programs consist of the following:

**The *closed mask*:**

**Ground Level**

- shaded seating, vending and picnic areas
- water features, including a large reflecting pool
- viewing and seating areas for local sporting events i.e. cricket matches, soccer games

**Below Ground, Beneath the Grandstand**

- permanent headquarters for the National Carnival Commission (NCC), Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organization (TUCO), and Pan Trinbago which are well established Carnival institutions
- a large boardroom for the use of the Carnival institutions
- a great hall for both formal and informal receptions and dinner events
- a large kitchen facility
- a gallery for the display and celebration of local art and culture
- a large theatre/auditorium
- a restaurant and café
- a large storage and maintenance facility used to house the temporary structure which is assembled each carnival
- gardens transitioning the exterior and interior spaces below grade

## The *open self*:

### Ground Level

- a grandstand to seat 15 000 viewers
- a linear stage for the parade of *mas* bands and all major carnival competitions
- concession and vendor “tents” located under the slope of the grandstand
- elevated media bridges providing unobstructed views of Carnival events
- a judging booth
- a backstage preparation area

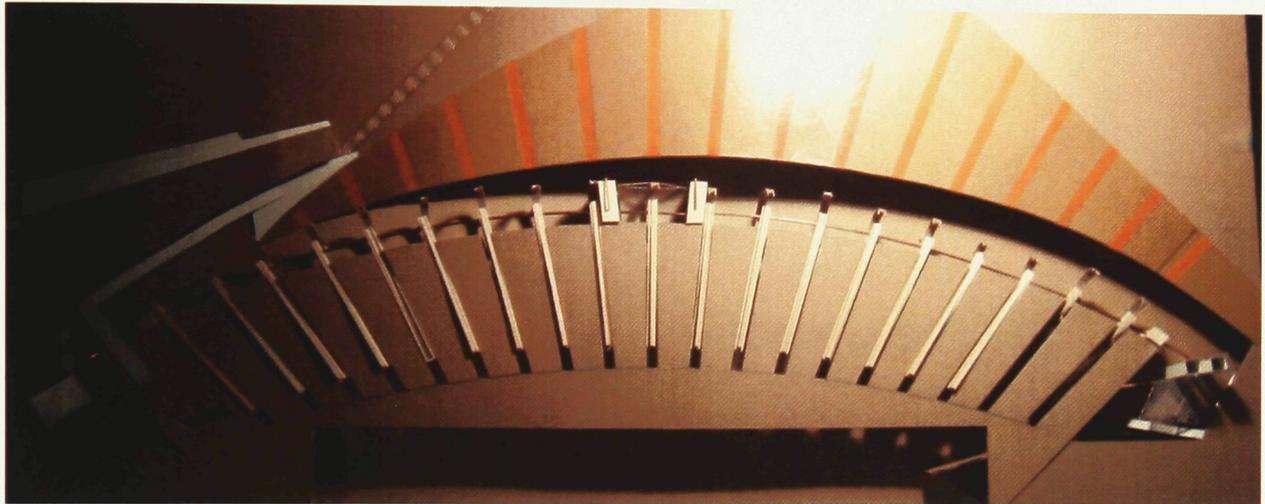


Figure 55 . The closed mask (*other*) of the Grandstand seen in plan. 1:200 model. Model by author, 2006.



Figure 56 . The open self of the Grandstand, looking east. Model and montage by author, 2006.

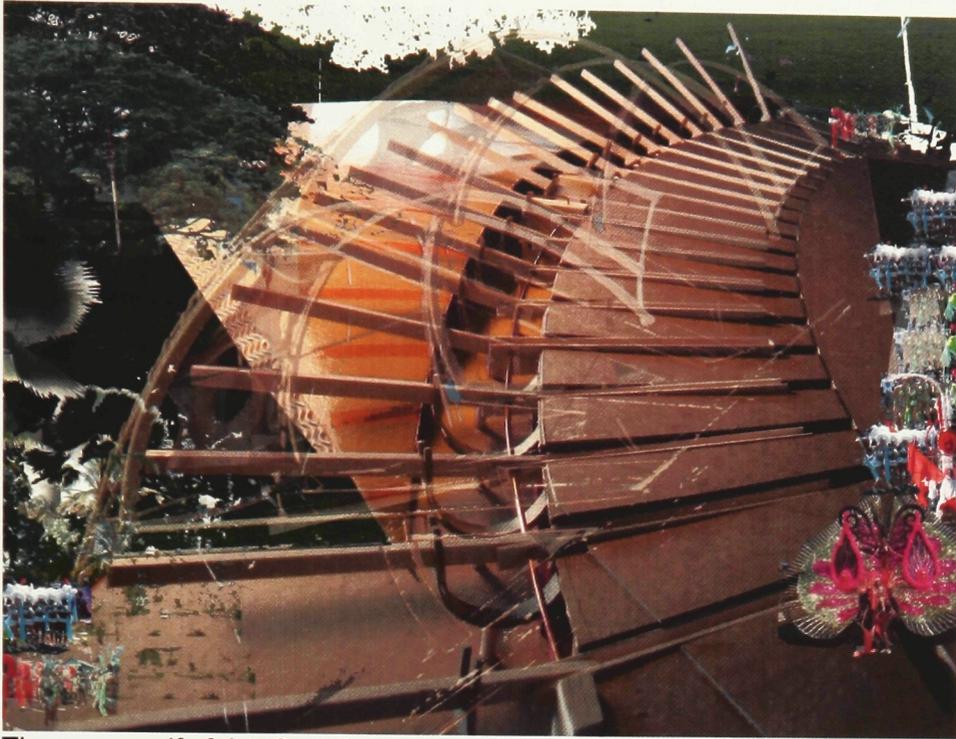


Figure 57 . The open *self* of the Grandstand, looking west. Model and montage by author, 2006.

The permanent program for the Centre for Carnival and Culture exists nestled underground, leaving the Savannah grounds flexible for the spontaneous, informal use of nationals for the majority of the year. This structure was specifically designed with the intention that it would belong to the people—allowing the *self* to openly engage with the structure and the site on a daily basis.

The proposed Grandstand is demounted annually while maintaining traces and memory of the spectacle. This action reflects the tradition of the previous Northstand, and the build up and tear down nature of the festival. This quality of renewal speaks of Carnival's ability to renew the mind, body, and spirit of the nation. Additionally, the annual erection of the proposed structure speaks of the cyclical nature of making required to produce each Carnival. The unearthing of the structure becomes a spectacle in itself, heralding the carnival season.

The traditional formal configuration, however, of the Grand- and Northstands has been re-designed in response to the previous “class” stigma associated with the rowdy, “unrefined” Northstand audience and the privileged, “influential” members of society seated in the Grandstand. This proposal seats the entire audience with similar vantage points in an effort to break down long-standing societal myths of inferiority and to balance the respect given to all Trinbagonians. This new orientation faces the Northern Range, a majestic mountain chain, providing a glorious backdrop for *mas*.



Figure 58 . Site map of Queen's Park Savannah and proposed Grandstand.

The *National Centre for Carnival and Culture*, measuring more than two hundred meters in length, is anchored in the ground by massive concrete piers supporting lighter materials above. The large structural members supporting the seating are fabricated from large steel I-beams which fold down into the turf and can be hoisted out of the ground with cranes—machinery commonly used in the assembly of temporary Carnival constructions. These nineteen I-beams pivot and are received and supported by large, circular, almost sculptural, metal structures. When in *open self* position, these I-beams rest to create a rising wave giving the illusion that the seating stand is peeling up from the ground.

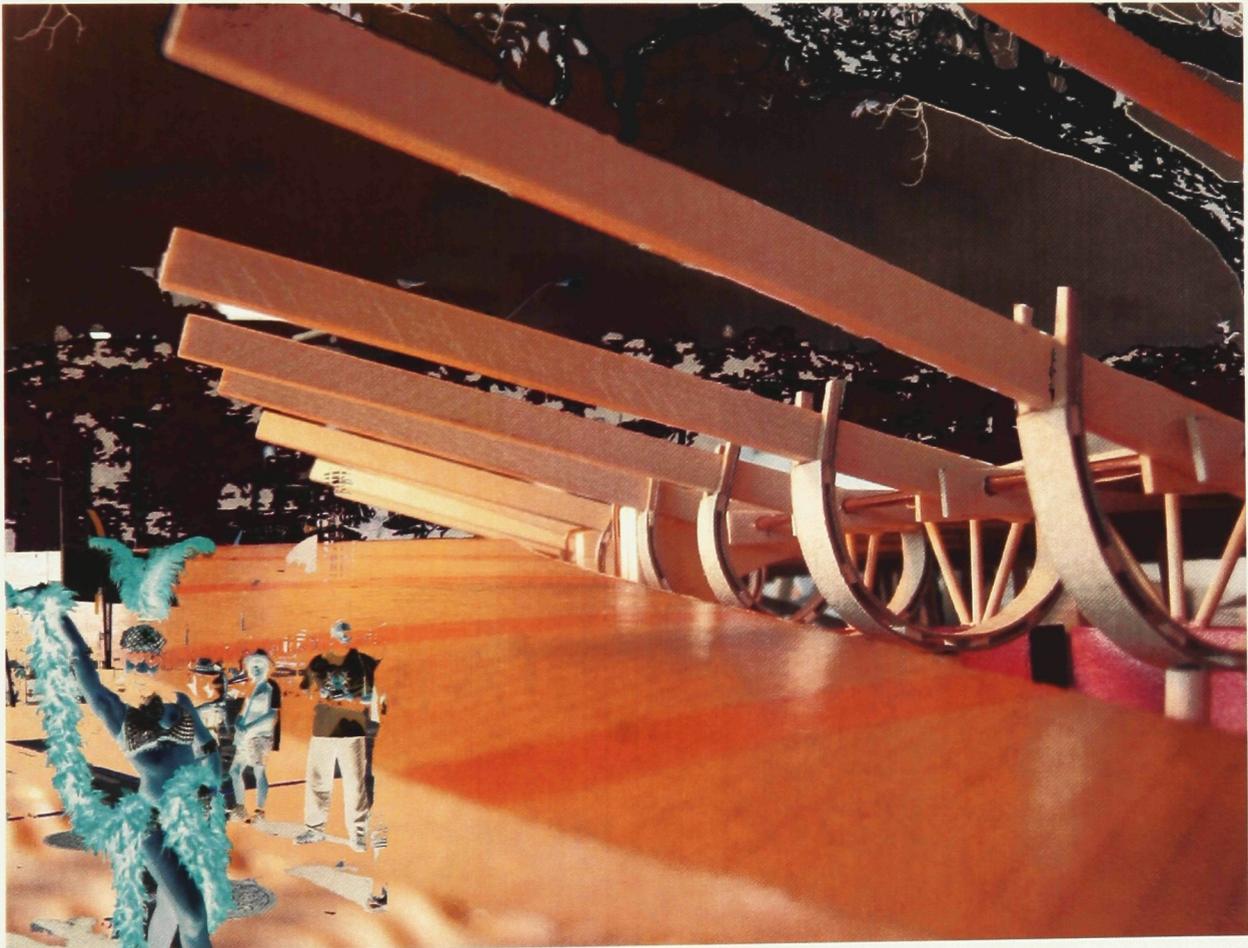


Figure 59 . Large I -beams pivot and are supported by circular structure.



Figure 60 . Preliminary plan of National Centre for Carnival and Culture. Sketch by author.

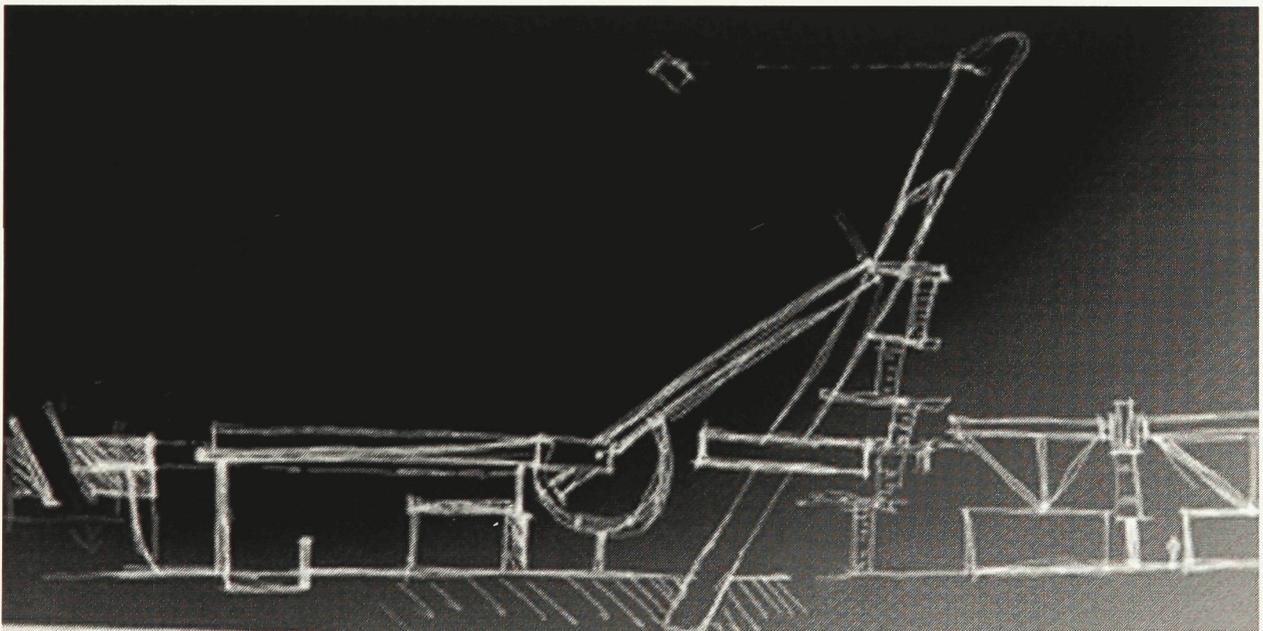


Figure 61 . Preliminary section of National Centre for Carnival and Culture. Sketch by author.



Figure 62 . Ground plan of proposed *National Centre for Carnival and Culture*. Plan and model by author, 2006.

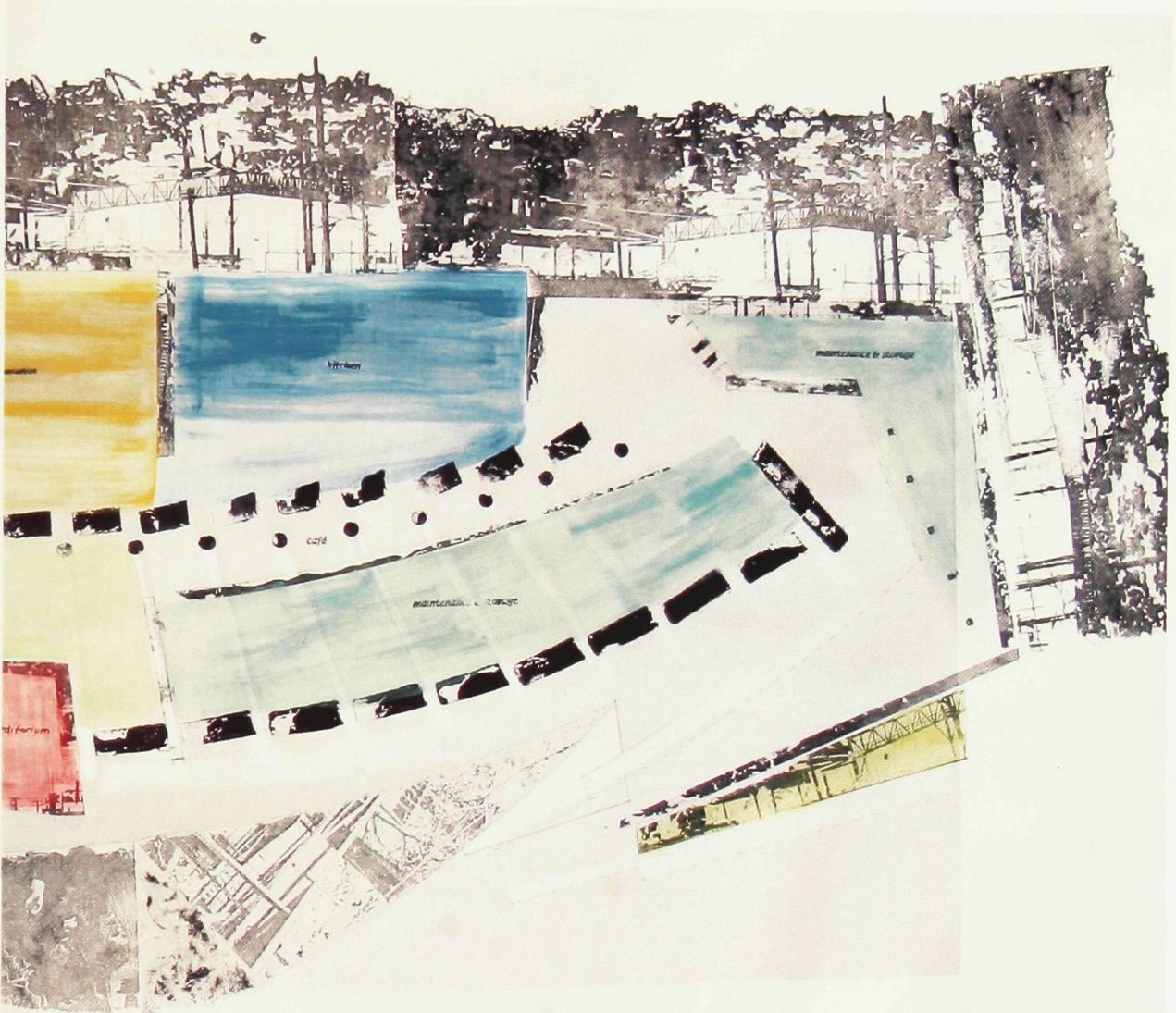


- 1 main entrance
- 2 Grandstand
- 3 Carnival vending
- 4 site access from Queen's Park West
- 5 cricket/soccer green
- 6 small seating stand
- 7 maintenance entrance
- 8 structural supports/benches
- 9 reflecting pool
- 10 Carnival stage

scale 1:1280



Figure 63 . Below ground plan of proposed *National Centre for Carnival and Culture*. Plan by author, 2006.



scale 1:1280

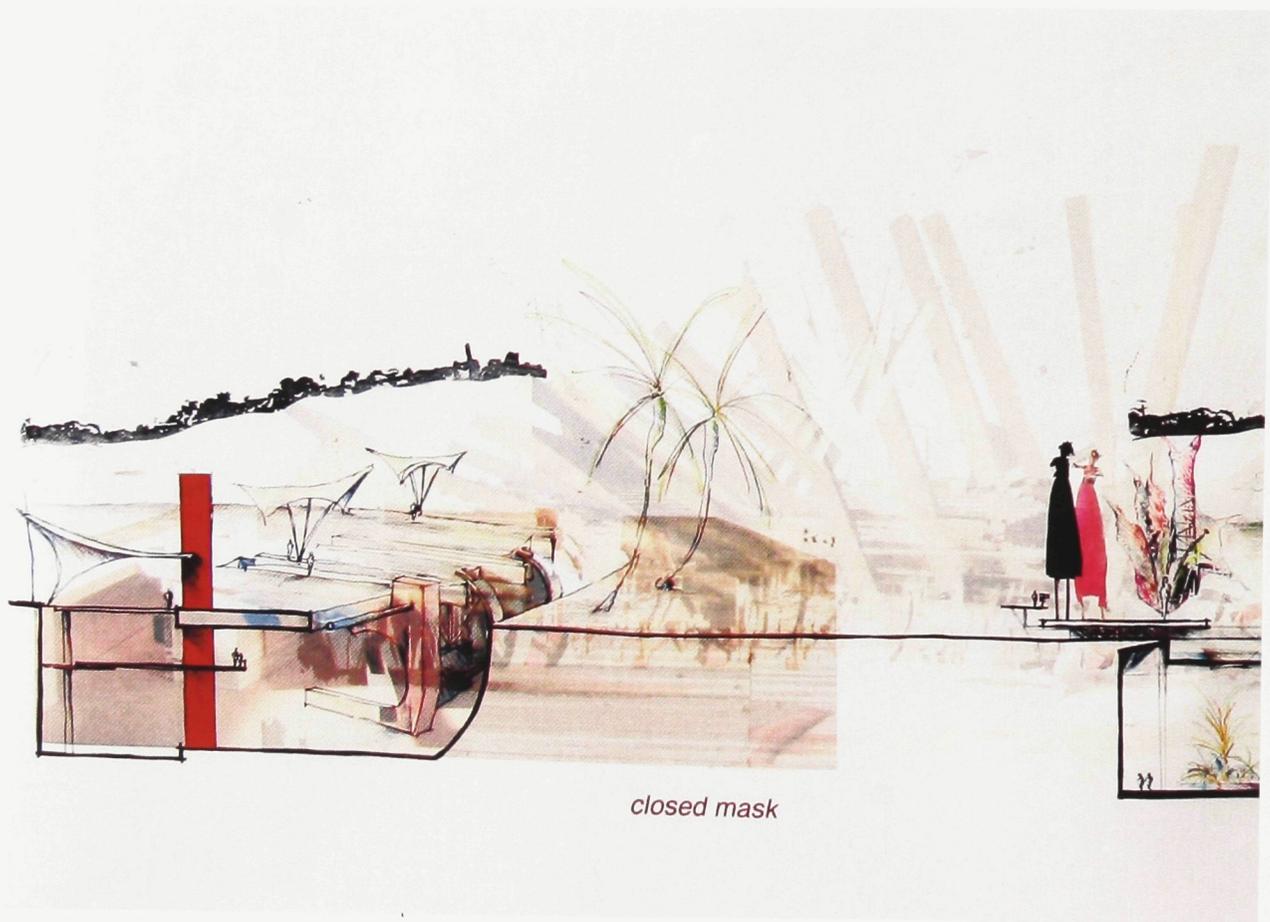
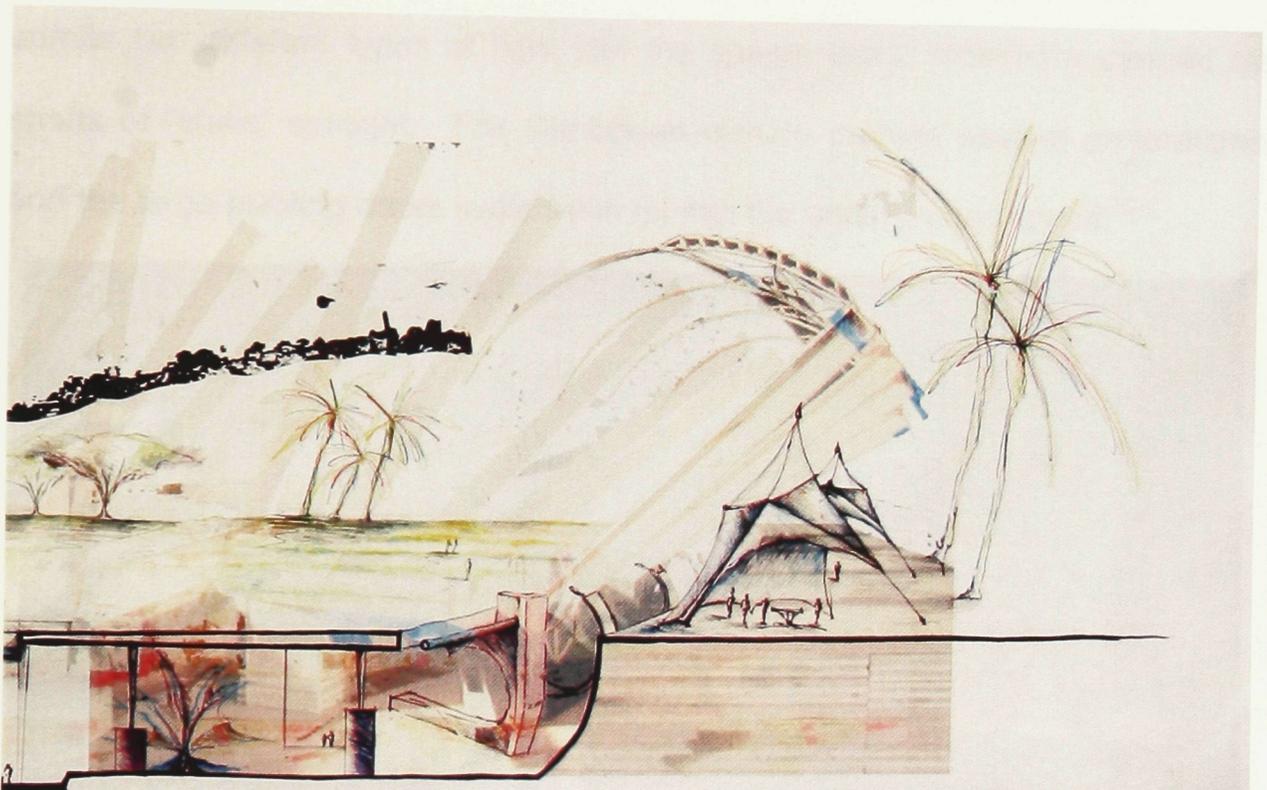


Figure 64 . Sections, looking east, showing the two faces of the proposed Grandstand: the *closed mask* and the *open self*. Sections by author, 2006.



*open self*

sections looking east  
scale 1:800

Although the *National Centre for Carnival and Culture* burrows into the ground, its interiors remain washed in sunlight due to several cuts in the ground plane. The openings for the I-beam supports allow slivers of light to graze the floors below. The fifteen metre cut on the southern side of the plan carves out grade and gives the circular structural supports ample room to breathe while enabling sunlight to touch the gardens below. A large reflecting pool in the administrative and institutional areas, which can be seen from the great hall, admits two different types of light into the space: water reflections pierced by shafts of “static” sunlight. The Caribbean climate permits several perforations and the large pivoting doors invite fresh air into the underground space.

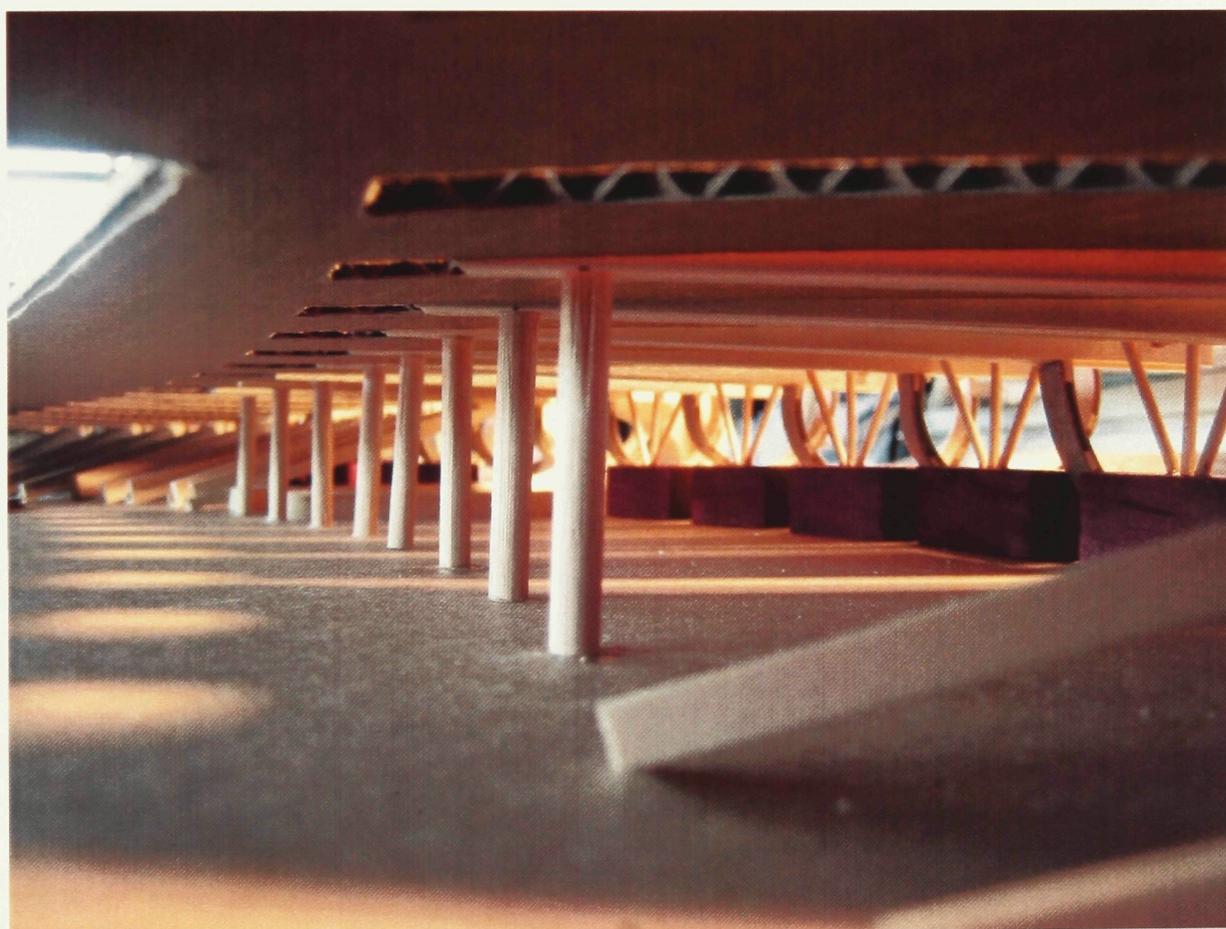


Figure 65 . The interiors of the underground *National Centre for Carnival and Culture* are washed with sunlight. Model by author, 2006.



Figure 66 . Atrium below reflecting pool is bathed in sunlight. Model by author, 2006.

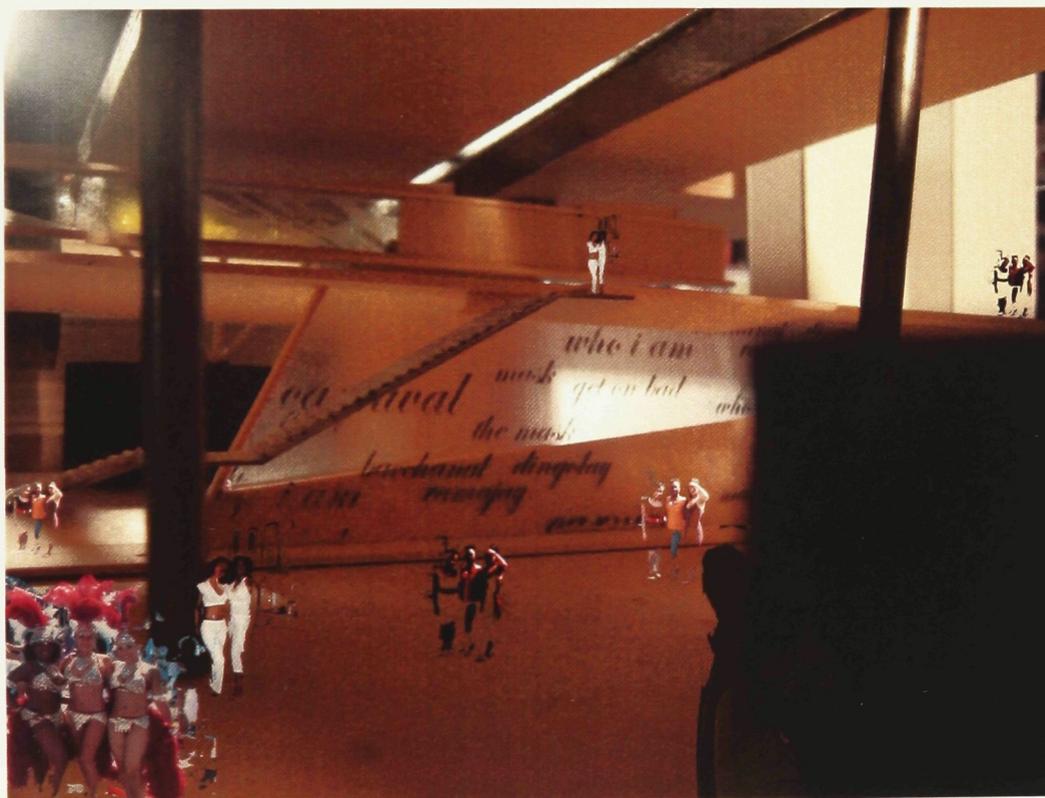


Figure 67 . Main entrance receives sunlight from slits highlighting the above structure. Model by author, 2006.



Figure 68 . Gallery of National Centre for Carnival and Culture receives ample natural light. Model by author, 2006.

The demountable portions of the proposed Grandstand are fabricated with lightweight and flexible metals, cables, and tensile waterproof fabrics for ease of mounting, demounting, and storing.

The large canopy, which signifies the grand presence of the Carnival Grandstand, was inspired by Brian MacFarlane's Carnival King *Dance and Rejoice* from his 2006 *Threads of Joy* presentation. MacFarlane's King was in turn inspired by Peter Minshall's *Midnight Robber* of 1980.

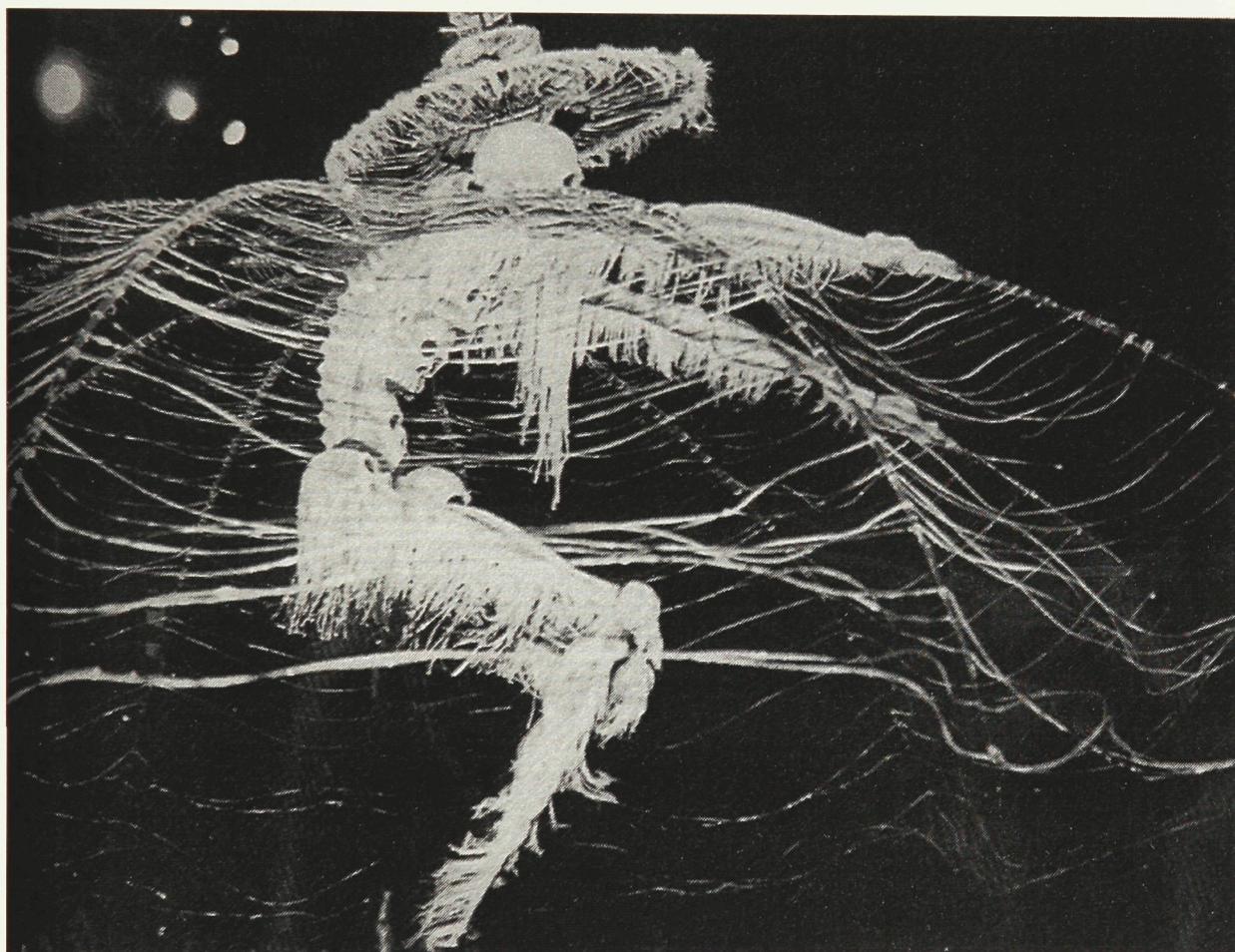


Figure 69 . Peter Minshall's *Midnight Robber* of 1980 from the band *Danse Macabre*, Photograph by Noel Norton.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Errol Hill. The Trinidad Carnival. (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1997) Color Plate 1.



Figure 70 . Brian MacFarlane's 2006 Carnival King *Dance and Rejoice* for the band *Threads of Joy* being assembled before competition. Photographer unknown.<sup>94</sup>

These *mas* pieces, each worn and manipulated by a stilt walker, embody a fluid motion reflective of the movements of Carnival and *mas* as a whole. This movement is graceful and dream-like—like the movements of a jellyfish—with each step and simple gesture the masquerader makes. The structure of these costumes amplifies the minutest movement of the body. The canopy of the proposed Grandstand consists of a long cantilevered portion echoing the flexible extension of the body on Minshall's *Midnight Robber* and MacFarlane's *Dance and Rejoice*. This form also echoes the natural curve of the back and arms of the body that is bent in motion.

<sup>94</sup> [Caribbeanfreephoto](http://flickr.com/photos/georgiap/100685507/in/set-72057594065634557/). "Kings & Queens Prelims" [Online]  
<http://flickr.com/photos/georgiap/100685507/in/set-72057594065634557/> Carnival 2006.

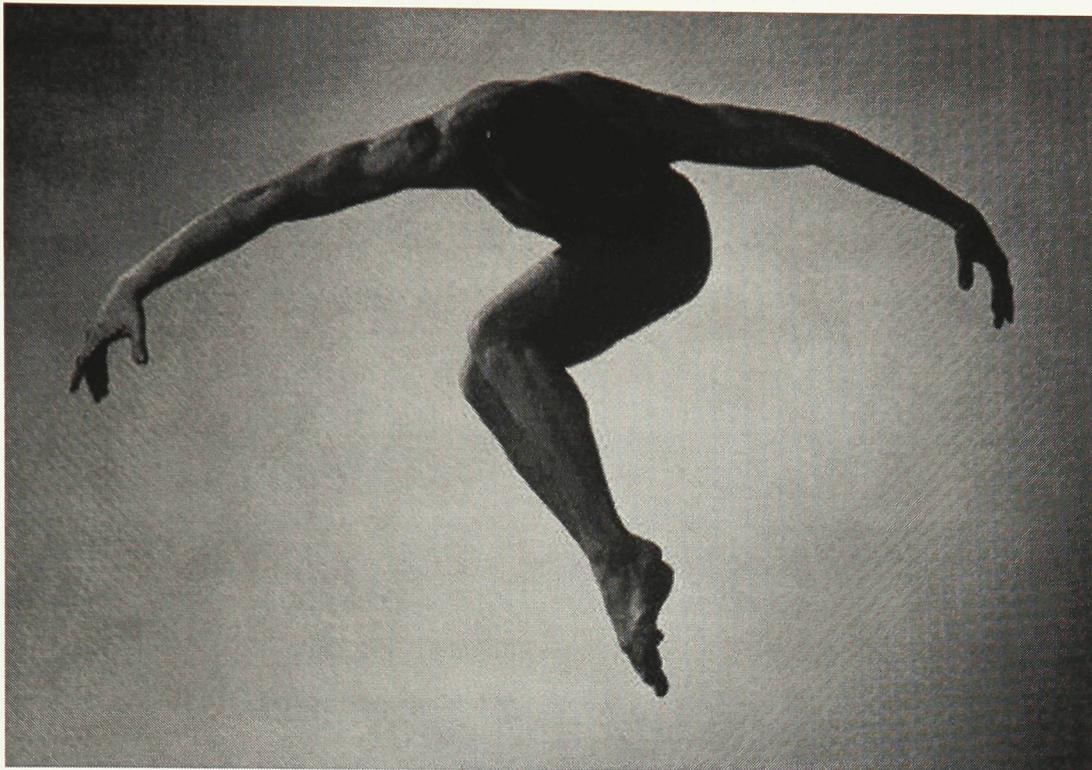


Figure 71 . This form of the body in motion inspired the form of the proposed Grandstand's canopy. Photograph by Stuart McIntyre.<sup>95</sup>

The cantilevering of the canopy allows the structure to freely, yet securely sway in the breeze, or to respond to the vibrations of the boisterous crowd seated below. The canopy hangs at its midpoint from four stair towers to the south which allow the large audience alternate routes for disembarking the seating stand, and act as observation towers in the *closed mask* position.

The tensile fabrics shading the proposed Grandstand and their structural supports were inspired by several sources. Though tensile fabric architecture is a relatively innovative technology in the Caribbean, several precedents were called upon for a simple and functional, yet expressive and dynamic design.

Tensile fabric and structural precedents:

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<sup>95</sup> Stuart McIntyre. [Getty Images](http://creative.gettyimages.com/source/classes/FrameSet.aspx?&UQR=mvtymw&pk=4&source=front&lightboxView=1&txtSearch=black%20nudes&sellImageType=7&chkLicensed=on&chkRoyaltyFree=on). [Online]

<http://creative.gettyimages.com/source/classes/FrameSet.aspx?&UQR=mvtymw&pk=4&source=front&lightboxView=1&txtSearch=black%20nudes&sellImageType=7&chkLicensed=on&chkRoyaltyFree=on> n.d.



Figure 72 . Olympia roof, Munich. Behnisch & Partner, Frei Otto, Leonhardt & Andrä, 1972.<sup>96</sup>

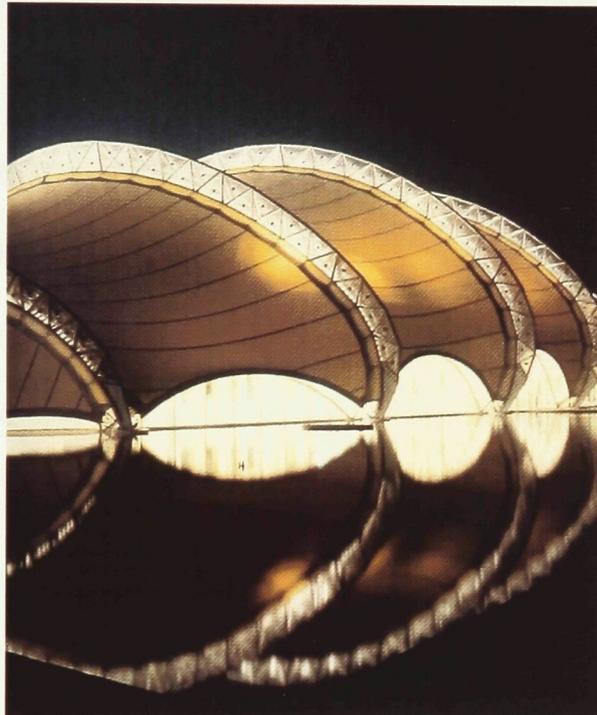


Figure 73 . Research Laboratory, Venafro, Italy. Samyn and Partners, 1999.<sup>97</sup>

The form of the fabric panels was designed to shield the intense tropical sun blazing from the south, yet allow sun patterns and dancing shadows to grace the ground between the seating stands and the stage.

<sup>96</sup> Klaus-Michael Koch. Membrane Structures: Innovative Building With Film and Fabric. (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004) 34.

<sup>97</sup> Alejandro Bahamón. The Magic of Tents Transforming Space. (New York: Harper Design International, 2004) 25.



Figure 74 . 1:100 sketch model of Grandstand's temporary tensile fabric canopy. Model by author, 2006.

The design of this Grandstand can be ever changing. The structure provides a framework upon which many masks or costumes may be placed. The tensile fabric shading the canopy can be easily and economically replaced, changing the face of the entire structure. This possibility reinforces Trinidad Carnival's spirit of design and making, keeping it alive and allowing the reinvention of the *self* from year to year. The architecture, in itself, becomes a type of *mas*—even though the proposed Grandstand represents the *self* come Carnival season, it too bears a mask as it becomes dressed up, and in turn dresses up the city.

## Conclusion

Trinidad and Tobago is a resilient nation whose small population managed to withstand hundreds of years of slavery and oppression under colonial rule. Possessing vibrant and determined spirits, Trinbagonians have been able to overcome turmoil and strife to emerge as talented and creative people, largely due to their ability to find positive humour and beauty in the direst of situations. Perhaps these qualities, along with sharp and fiery wit, are the reasons why this nation has been able to create the poetic spectacle of *Trinidad Carnival* from the dark and ruthless times of colonialism. Somewhat ironically, the art of masking during Carnival allowed slaves to either reveal their true selves in a release of emotion and expression that was otherwise suppressed; or to revel in satirical mimics of their oppressors. Colonialism established notions of *Self* (colonizer) and *Other* (colonized); and *self* (true face of the *Other*) and *other* (the submissive face of the *Other* portrayed to the *Self*). These daily masks existed as a mechanism of survival for the *self*, and still apply to certain conditions of modern society. Perhaps these masks are not necessary for modern survival, but they are often necessary for maximum achievement in modern life. Due to this continued, yet evolved condition, the roots of Trinidad Carnival are alive and thriving in modern society.

Masking has played an integral role in the foundation and continued celebration of the festival of *Trinidad Carnival*. The mask, manifesting itself in several forms both literal and figurative, provides the *self* with an escape from the every day, and instills the ominous *Self* with feelings of—and the right to—power. In response to these social and political conditions, this thesis has investigated the possibility of architecture either becoming or being used as a mask. This type of architecture is quite ephemeral by either temporarily dressing up the city; becoming a fleeting functional figure within a ground (i.e. a viewing platform attached to a lamppost, or a shade canopy hanging from a fence or verandah); and or transforming itself thereby hiding or obscuring its true function or *self*.

This thesis draws parallels between *Trinidad Carnival's* apparently transient nature and architecture's potential to embody ephemeral characteristics. This festival is imbedded with countless passing glimpses into the lives of people—rich moments that can last but for the blink of an eye. These isolated moments interconnect, overlap and culminate into one large spectacle which in turn becomes ephemeral in nature.

The architecture proposed in this thesis is ephemeral as it literally emerges each carnival season making a grand statement, itself becoming an event within the spectacle of Carnival. At the abrupt end of *mas*—the stroke of midnight signaling Ash Wednesday—the structure's function as a Carnival Grandstand comes to a close for yet another year. The structure is gradually demounted, retuning to its state of slumber beneath the Savannah's grounds. This dormant state does, however, leave behind traces of the spectacle, acting

as a constant reminder of the festival and its subliminal presence throughout the year. The burrowing of the program and structure underground reflect the burrowing of the *self* behind the *other*, dating back to colonial times but which still maintains relevance in modern society. In modern times, the *Self* becomes civic authorities, the law, large institutions (i.e. banks, commercial enterprises...), developed nations, etc.

The process of this thesis has been one based on play and the release of preconceived notions of traditional architecture. This thesis has equated the making of *mas* to the making of architecture, in terms of the use of intuitive forms and making use of resources, no matter how mundane they may be. The process of making takes the mundane and transforms or masks them into something beautiful, poetic, and functional. This form of making is an attitude long engrained in the culture, where nothing goes to waste. This philosophy is perhaps best exemplified in the creation of the steel pan—transforming empty discarded oil drums into musical instruments with heavenly tones. The enormous yet joyous task of making *mas* is one that is faithfully started afresh each year. Similarly, the design proposed by this thesis calls for the architecture of the Grandstand to be “made” each year. This act of making architecture reinforces Carnival’s keen spirit of making. Both the process of making *mas* and the design of the *National Centre for Carnival and Culture* respond to intuition. They respectively respond to narrative—narratives of the human condition, human movement, and human expression.

The design for the *National Centre for Carnival and Culture* is quite playful, yet is founded upon serious conditions, in keeping with the nature of *Trinidad Carnival*. On a serious note, the lightweight tensile canopy of the proposed Grandstand alludes to a spirit of ingenuity and Trinidad and Tobago's desire to push forward into the developed world while prescribing to traditional Trinbagonian values, climate, and cultural practices. The approach of creating an ephemeral structure rather than re-creating a large, permanent, intrusive seating stand similar to the outdated Grandstand was of great importance in order to maintain the site's integrity with its original function as a recreational park. The playfulness of the structure lessens the official and rigid status often attached to national institutional architecture. Such a formal architecture would have likely restricted public access to the site thereby deterring residents from recreational use of the Queen's Park Savannah grounds. The design calls for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to freely appropriate the space and the structure, with the sentiment that the city and the nation, truly belong to them, and further reinforcing the fact that *Trinidad Carnival* belongs to them.

This thesis proposes architecture that begins to respond to ideas of motion. As a national structure, this design and its technological advancement in terms of traditional Caribbean construction, speaks of the nation's desire to move into the future on par with developed nations. The ephemerality of the design, and its literal structural movement, mounting and demounting, refers to the constant making, disassembling, re-using, re-creating, re-generating and

transforming of *mas* and all of its constituents. The flex and vibration of the cantilevered canopy alludes to *mas* being an extension of the body in which the simplest movement is amplified. The configuration of the immediate site and the surrounding grade effectively direct masses of revelers and masqueraders in a fluid and functional flow. Similarly, the proposed architectural interventions along the parade route strategically facilitate viewing of the spectacle as thousands of people flow through the streets of Port of Spain.

The true spirit of *Trinidad Carnival* results from a rich layering of social values and circumstances: colonialism, slavery, emancipation, religion, a play against good and evil, a celebration of life, the art of disguise, the validity of all human beings, perseverance, strength, creativity, and unity. These values are deeply rooted in Trinbagonian culture resulting in the continued strength and overwhelming power of the festival. The sacredness of *Trinidad Carnival* and *mas* has often been referred to in religious terms by Trinbagonians as they have tremendous power to heal the spirit and cleanse the city and nation. Calypsonian David Rudder portrays this best in his 1998 calypso entitled *High*

*Mas I:*

Our Father who have given us this art  
 So that we can all feel a part  
 Of this earthly (lesser) heaven....amen  
 Forgive us this day our daily weaknesses  
 As we seek to cast our mortal burdens on this city....amen  
 Oh merciful Father, in this bacchanal season  
 Where some men will lose their reason  
 But most of us just want to wine and have a good time  
 While we looking for a lime, Because we feeling fine, Lord....amen  
 And as we jump up and down in this crazy town  
 Send us some music for some healing....amen

Our Father who has given us this art

So that we can all feel as if we are a part  
Of your heaven....amen  
Forgive us this day our daily weaknesses  
As we seek to cast our mortal burdens on this painful city....amen  
And on this day when we come out to play and sway  
And do a little breakaway  
Some will say what they have to say  
But only you know the pain we're feeling....amen  
(*High Mas I*, David Michael Rudder, 1998)<sup>98</sup>

Like the original Grandstand, the proposed thesis design becomes a beacon within the city at carnival time, calling to the souls and passions of revelers and masqueraders alike. Trinidad *mas* is faith and cleansing salvation. Trinidad Carnival is culture. *Mas* is the art of revealing and disguising. *Mas* is ephemeral: *mas* is fluid, vibrant, and ever changing. In the design for a *National Centre for Carnival and Culture*, architecture becomes the ephemeral mask of a nation in motion.

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<sup>98</sup> David Michael Rudder. High Mas I. 1998

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