

## ***Body Regained: translations between dance and interior***

Architecture's contingent and indeterminate nature can be understood through the relationship between body and interior, a relationship that, in the ocular-centric world of design representation, is too often repressed. Whereas the intervention of bodies in architecture presents an inconvenient distraction to the architectural ideal, dance practice, on the other hand, is fully engaged with the movement of bodies unfolding in space. This paper examines inter-disciplinary practices between dance and architecture with the intention of questioning the scopic hegemony of conventional design representation while exploring a different spatio-temporality that goes beyond mere form. Modes of representation in dance practices and architecture are juxtaposed with the aim of opening up questions about the status of the body in the production of the interior. For this I will be looking primarily at work by Belgian choreographer Frederic Flamand, who has operated at the cusp between architecture and dance since 1978, collaborating with many artists, architects and designers including Diller and Scofidio, Jean Nouvel, Thom Mayne and Zaha Hadid. Flamand's dance-architecture collaborations provide a useful inter-disciplinary juxtaposition through which notions of temporality, body and building can be synthesised.

This paper will question how inter-disciplinary practices between architecture and dance might help to understand the becoming nature of interior space. My enquiry will look at how representational techniques used in dance might help to re-orientate the body in conceptions of the interior, with consideration for how re-orientation might be brought into the field of design practice and pedagogy.

### **Convergence**

How, it might be asked, can a study of dance provide anything useful to understanding of interior space? Dance and architecture are two forms of practice that have little in common; there appears to be little convergence between the mute solidity of architecture, and the dynamic ephemerality of dance. However it is evident that a shared concern for the moving body in space provides potential for inter-disciplinary practice to be mutually informative.

To architect, Elizabeth Diller,

Architecture (is) an event that can be choreographed....(and) that choreography is the design of time, bodies in time.<sup>1</sup>

while to choreographer, William Forsyth,

Choreography is the organisation of movement in time and space.<sup>2</sup>

Dance and theatrical practices described by choreo-*graphy* and sceno-*graphy*, indicate an inscriptive mode

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<sup>1</sup> Weinstein, B. 'Flamand and his Architectural Entourage', *Journal of Architectural Education*, (2008)

<sup>2</sup> Birringer, J. 'Dance and Not Dance', *Performing Arts Journal* v 27 n 2 (May 2005).

of production shared with architecture and design. Representation of dance movements, for example, in dance notation, can be compared with architectural drawings, although dance notation has its own ontology, not necessarily immanent to production. In contrast to the production of architecture and design, dance has a momentary existence, leaving little trace after the performance.

### Silent Collisions

Flamand's 2004 production, *Silent Collisions*, was developed in collaboration with Thom Mayne of Morphosis. Originally produced for the first Venice Dance Biennale in 2003, *Silent Collisions* was thematically devised to explore connectivity between bodies and technology.<sup>3</sup> It is a piece which overlays a number of different temporalities.

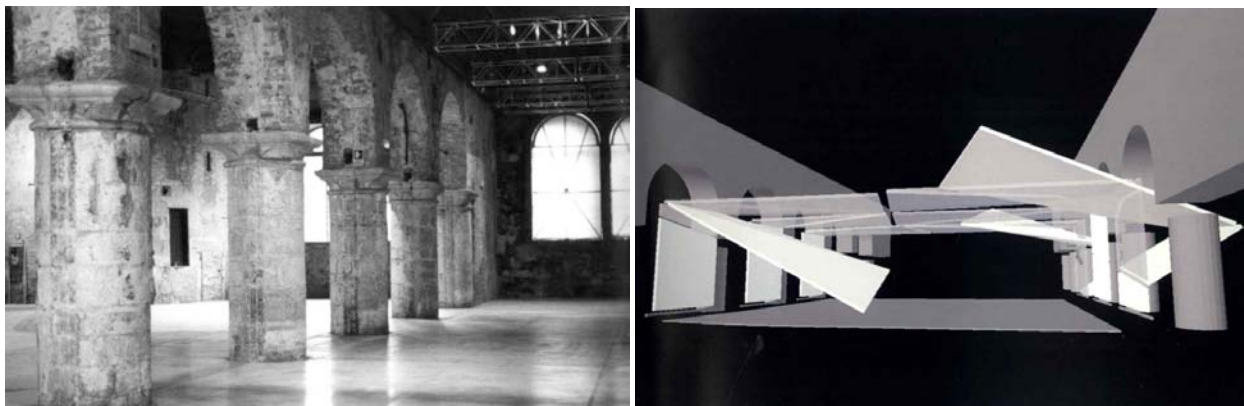


Figure 1. *Silent Collisions*. Spatio-temporal zones: the 500 year old solidity Teatro all Tese, Venice Arsenale juxtaposed with the Mayne's mutable and dynamic structures.

The piece was conceived as a carefully scripted architectural design in which a series of wing-like structures move to initiate response from the dancers. Set inside the historic former rope works of the Venice Arsenale, Mayne's scenography employs a geometric form described by articulated panels that fold both in and out of themselves. This is an architecture that performs in its own right, enacting Dorita Hannah's description of a 'lifeless object that may be perceived as the performing subject'<sup>4</sup>

Flamand's collaboration with architects and designers tends to be a detached relationship that enables a work to evolve in the spaces 'between chance and will'.<sup>5</sup> Working with Thom Mayne on *Silent Collisions*, for example, took place between Belgium, New York and Venice, a spatial detachment that allowed the two to develop ideas autonomously. This design process gave rise to a conceptualisation of the dance space even before the choreography had been determined. Mayne's concept of a transformative structure,

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<sup>3</sup> Flamand, F. and Mayne, T. *Silent Collisions*, (Charleroi/Danses, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Hannah, D. and Mehzoud, S. 'Presentation/Representation/Re-Presentation: Fragments out of the Dark to a lived Experience', *Prague Quadrennial for Performance Design and Space*, (June 2011).

<sup>5</sup> *The John Edwards Lecture: Thom Mayne, Morphosis, in dialogue with Frederic Flamand*, (2009).

presents an infinite number of permutations to the choreographer and dancers. These mutable forms enable a conception of architecture in which, as Mayne puts it,

‘the transitory itself becomes a site and the human body becomes situated in motion. The city is revealed as a cinematic space of continuous unfolding and simultaneous erasure.’<sup>6</sup>

The scenography of *Silent Collisions* has a range of possibilities which initiate the dancers’ movement, and these are governed by the articulation of its architecture, which in turn is organised in response to the architecture of the site. These different time frames reflect concepts of time in the dance narrative, based on Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, expressing how space is produced through its design and occupation in different spatio-temporal zones.<sup>7</sup> Clearly there is a divergent temporality between these two architectures, one mobile, fleeting and light; the other immobile, timeless, and heavy. In exploring some of the commonalities between dance and architecture, for example space, movement and contingency, Mayne’s architectural concept is aimed at, ‘exploring the wilful or chance movement of the body against a moving site’.<sup>8</sup>

Photographs of Mayne’s models shown alongside production stills illustrate the concept clearly, juxtaposing the implied movement of folded planes against the massed arches and columns of the Arsenale sheds. It is a powerful image; the abstraction of Mayne’s vision in the absence of body, suggesting dominance of architectural form over bodily presence.

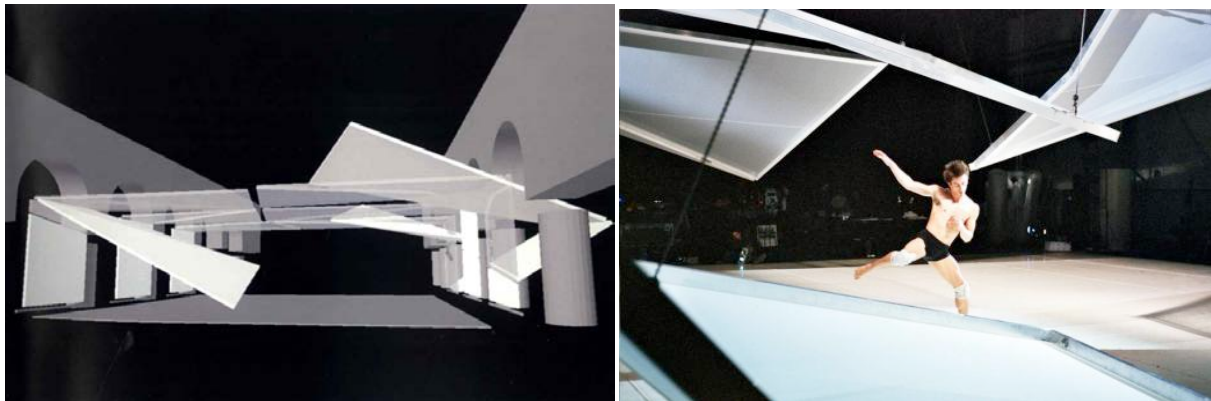


Figure 2. *Silent Collisions*: Although the scenography of *Silent Collisions* has a range of possibilities in initiating the dancers’ movement, these are governed by the articulation of its architecture, which in turn is organised in response to the architecture of the site.

These models were used by Mayne’s office to pre-determine ways in which the architecture could perform, Flmand then allowed his dancers to respond to the moving structures. The constant changing of the architectural form, created, according to Flmand, a difficult and dangerous environment for the dancers to work in, pushing and compressing bodies in order to avoid collision.

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<sup>6</sup> *The John Edwards Lecture, (2009).*

<sup>7</sup> *The John Edwards Lecture, (2009).*

<sup>8</sup> *The John Edwards Lecture, (2009).*

This thematic of body and mutable space is explored by Kenneth Warriner, who refers to the indeterminate space of the body as 'space-in-the-making' as distinct from the 'ready made space' of architectural design.<sup>9</sup> Similar to Lefebvre's notion of 'lived space', this view of space appears to posit the body as the centre of becoming in a space produced through time and movement. Flamand describes a body defined by its relation to its environment and this idea is translated in Mayne's structures for *Silent Collisions* which both transform body movement, and are themselves transformed through bodily interaction.

### Ex Machina

Ex Machina is another production in which Flamand's engagement with existing architectural space gives insight into how one discipline can inform another. Ex Machina, 1993 was staged in an abandoned swimming pool in Charleroi, Belgium. The dance itself investigates the interiorizing effect of advancing communications technology on society, expressed in the contemporary urban condition termed by Flamand, 'Connected Isolation'.



Figure 3. Ex Machina combines a digital scenography projected onto the surfaces of the pool, interchanged with live choreography within the space of the building to create a grand unity.

Made in collaboration with architect/designer Fabrizio Plessi, the performance combines a digital scenography projected onto the surfaces of the building, interchanged with live dance movement within the spaces of the building. A feedback circuit superimposes a live view of the audience onto a virtual image of the pool, enabling image and choreography to interact directly, allowing the body of the audience to occupy the space of performance. In this doubling of virtual and actual space, object and subject merge into one transparent unity.

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<sup>9</sup> Bronet, F. Schumacher, J. 'Design in Movement: The Prospects of Interdisciplinary Design', *Journal of Architectural Education*, v53 n2, (November 1999).



Figure 4. Brouchetterre Swimming Pool, Charleroi. Nowhere is the passage of time more apparent in architecture than in derelict and disused buildings. The abjectness of abandonment, brought about by lack of function, serving as a reminder of their inability to perform.

Images of the empty swimming pool are highly evocative of what might be. The abjectness of its abandonment made manifest by the absence of bodies, once so key to its functionality, a reminder of its inability to perform. What Flamand's choreography reveals is neither an architecture that has ceased to perform, nor that lack of occupation is a measure of its uselessness.

### **Performance and Use**

When we speak of buildings performing, it is usually in connection with how the human body is supported in its environment. Architecture's interior can be understood to perform through the body, a context in which performance and functionality can be seen as interchangeable. Architecture's technical concern for the body in its environment from the twentieth century onwards can be seen as developing from modern notions of functionalism. The Frankfurt Kitchen, for example, is predicated on a body paradigm derived from the instrumentalism of factory production, a deterministic functionalism by which Modernism has often been equated with an absence of body from architecture, particularly in its representation<sup>10</sup>

Attempts to reinstate the body in, for example, Le Corbusier's highly ocular-centric Architectural Promenade, make recognition of a moving subject. Bernard Tschumi's Manhattan Transcripts, on the other hand, speculated on reinstating the body in his architecture of movement and event, interestingly with significant reference to dance notation.

The choreographic occupation of the interior can be seen as a different type of spatial occupation, one that

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<sup>10</sup> Vidler, A. *The Body and Architecture in Post-Modern Culture*, London: A A Files, (1999).



arises from the body. Conventional media representations of buildings often deny the body in the suggestion of past or future use. Images of yet-to-be-occupied spaces have the same pull on the imagination as abandoned spaces which are fascinating simply for their emptiness. Design representation similarly denies a spatio-temporality in the production of ready-made space.<sup>11</sup> The space of occupation resists representation in two-dimensional design conventions such as plan and section, modes of production that tend to fix form and deny the body. Dance, on the other hand, as a production brought about by the performing body, requires bodily presence.

### Drawings and Dancers

Flamand declares an affinity with architectural practice, 'Architects', he says, 'allow space to explode'.<sup>12</sup> His own practice involves a mode of inscription similar to architectural drawing showing him as not only a dancer and a director but also a maker. In the course of production he makes drawings that say something about a different process of production to that of architectural design.

Evidence from the archive reveals Flamand's working method to be one that embraces potentiality. He uses sketches or graphemes, not as instructions or intent, but to initiate discussion with both collaborators and dancers. Graphemes such as those prepared for *Ex Machina*, are typical of preparatory sketches in which can be found indications of movement suggestive of a restless immediacy. The delineation of time and movement in the inscriptions of the sketch suggests a changing state; not a static one of clear intent, but of what might be. They represent an action in the course of its becoming, the initiation for which is recognised by Flamand to reside in the dancer's body. His indications to this end are fluid and inherently transformative.

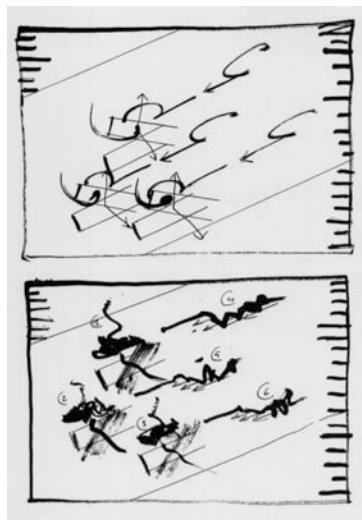


Figure 5. Frederic Flamand, Graphemes for *Ex Machina*. The delineation of time and movement in the inscriptions of the sketch suggests a changing state; not a static one of clear intent, but of what might be. They represent an action in the course of its becoming, the initiation for which is recognised by Flamand to reside in the dancer's body.

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11 Bronet, F. Schumacher, J. (1999).

12 The John Edwards Lecture, (2009).

While Flamand's sketches are a useful insight into the process of production, they also retain a trace of the work as it has unfolded. Though not intended for archival purposes, they serve to represent an event that has now passed. In this sense they can be contrasted with methods of dance notation, such as Labanotation, which are used to record and convey predetermined choreographic sequences. Similar to design production such modes delimit the body by restricting movement within a prescribed pattern. But I would argue that they differ insofar as they arise out of the desire to avoid setting intentions; they are an opening to intent, not a closed limitation. Flamand's intuition allows the drawing to create a conduit for his thoughts, which in recognising an element of contingency, could be described as performative.

### Traces, Drawing and the Performative

The performative utterance, in linguistic terms, enables something to come into existence. The transformative power of the performative gives a significance to the words themselves that effects change, bringing something forth into the world. An example would be the marriage vow 'I will', in the context of the marriage ceremony, or the verdict 'guilty' issued by a judge.<sup>13</sup>

Performativity lies in the realm of becoming, a shifting, time-imbued concept which, when applied to spatial praxis such as architecture and dance, opens a field of possibilities for the reimagining of both. In relation to representing the moving body in space, the performative is a useful theoretical model through which to critique the becoming nature of spatial production.

One problem in representing performance is its ephemerality, it exists only in the present of its own duration. However much a performance is repeated, each repeat is a unique event. To Peggy Phelan, the reproduction of a performance cannot be repeated without becoming something else, the act of reproduction and its reception being in itself, performative. 'Performance, she says, becomes itself through disappearance'.<sup>14</sup>

The issue for performance in discourse on dance-architecture lies in the ability of representation to bring performance, of either dance or architecture, into existence. If the performative 'bringing-forth'<sup>15</sup> is an act of revealing, and performance becomes itself through disappearance, then it remains to the representation of performance to establish its being. In Heidegger's words, 'Bringing forth propriates only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment, revealing in the Greek word *veritas*, not truth but correctness of representation.'<sup>16</sup>

The role of drawing in Flamand's production acknowledges a potentiality whereby the performance is completed by dancers, collaborators or audience, who fill the gaps in order to create a moving whole. Drawing can be seen in this context as a performative medium, bringing action into being. The abstraction of architectural drawing, on the other hand, is a language that tends to favour the fixed rather than the

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<sup>13</sup> Leitch, V. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, New York: Norton and Co, (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Phelan, P. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London:Routledge, (1996).

<sup>15</sup> Hawkins, K. *Browsing the Performative*, <http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/browsing-the-performative-a-search-for-sincerity/>, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> June (2011).

<sup>16</sup> Hawkins, K. *Browsing the Performative*, (2011).

fluctuating. In plotting the designer's intent any notions of change and the dimension of time and movement of the body are absent in the fixity of the drawing. However where architectural drawing is limited to representing permanence, Flamand's graphemes convey body movement in time and space through the use of direction indicators, line weight and speed.

### **Digital Translations: Carol Brown and Mette Ramsgaard**

Recent developments in digital technologies give added potential to the representation of spatio-temporality that brings practices of architecture and dance closer together, allowing appraisal of how the two might inform each other. Generative modelling programmes are beginning to transform the parameters of architectural drawing to represent event and duration, using digital technology as a performative medium, through which direct interaction with space can be made. I propose here to discuss emerging interdisciplinary work that expands the exploration of new spatial territories, made possible through new computer technologies.<sup>17</sup>

Convergence between dance and architecture is now at a point where practices shared between the two are generating new spatio-temporal paradigms, Carol Brown and Mette Ramsgaard, for example engage in an interaction with digital technology, a medium which by its very nature leaves traces. The fluidity made possible by body-computer interaction, and its ability to define contingency, creates what they call an event-space, 'which unfolds and becomes along the temporal axes of experience.'<sup>18</sup>

This notion of a transformative space, that develops out of a continuous becoming of itself, is different to becoming out of a site of fixity. Where Flamand takes architectural space as a point of departure, Brown and Ramsgaard's event space is deeply embedded in performance, a condition that arises out of the merging of practice and production; performance and representation, so that they become one. Their work *SeaUnSea*, for example, sets up a territory for drawing and dancing to come together using digital technology to map body, space and temporal relationships. Three-dimensional geometries of moving bodies merge with the two dimensional screen plane to interact as a document of the unfolding performance. The act of drawing is simultaneous with the act of creation, creating both a drawn and danced performance at the same time.

Brown and Ramsgaard's collaborative piece *Sea UnSea* is a digital reworking of inscriptive dances by American choreographer Trisha Brown, who in works such as *It's a Draw: Live Feed*, explore the two-dimensional representation of three- and four-dimensional actions.<sup>19</sup> In exploring the drawing as performative, Brown and Ramsgaard employ digital technology as an extension of the body, a direct expression of movement. *Sea Unsea* develops the direct interaction *It's a Draw: Live Feed*, into digital space; by using digital tracking to map the body in space in real time the dancer's body is simultaneously projected as a computer generated image onto a screen.

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<sup>17</sup> Spurr, S. 'Chance Encounters between body and buildings: New technologies in architecture and dance, Sydney: UTS Press, (2007).

<sup>18</sup> Ramsgard Thomsen, M. 'Sites of flux: imagined space in the dance-architectures of *The Changing Room* and *Sea Unsea*', *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, London:Springer-Verlag, (2007).

<sup>19</sup> Hannah, D. and Harsløf, O. eds. *Performance Design*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, (2008).



## Conclusion

Whilst dance-architectures by Brown and Ramsgaard are drastically different to anything by Flamand, what is shown in all these works is the ability of representation itself to be performative. Analysis of Flamand's graphemes, for example, shows how drawing can be a performative act in the production process, allowing for the creativity and agency of various players and collaborators.<sup>20</sup> The body-centring of performance in dance works can be considered as a constantly moving and changing thematic in the conception of space.

Normative representation of architecture as static, material, and atemporal can be seen as an unhelpful model if the interior is to be understood as space-in-the-making. Elizabeth Grosz suggests that, in order to understand space and time means conceiving them through the body, while understanding the role of the body means placing the body in a spatial and temporal context. To understand space as lived means questioning the hegemony of architectural modes of representation, and their inability to recognise time, the body and its movement in space. Grosz detects in architecture an absence of body, which she sees as a form of denial. Her view is that, although the body is there, it isn't recognised or accepted.

'Architecture does not need to bring the body back to itself because it's already there... Bodies are absent in architecture but they remain architecture's unspoken condition.'<sup>21</sup>

Translating the interdisciplinary practices of dance-architecture into the context of design practice and pedagogy, creates the potential for a critical engagement with the contingent and ephemeral. The availability of technologies such as motion capture has allowed us to explore spatio-temporality in our undergraduate interiors programme to reveal design potentiality through body movement. Although still at early stages of integration into studio practice, such technologies enable a recognition of temporality and an understanding in our students that design is not just predicated on the limited potential of the purely visual.

Whether this can translate into design practice is open to question, but as Bronet and Schumacher point out, a lack of definitive answers to the problem of representing becoming-space, or 'space-in-the-making', should not be seen as problematic.<sup>22</sup> If nothing else, experimentation through inter-disciplinarity in dance-architecture can raise an awareness of the limitations of an ocular-centricity that fails to recognise the body. I would contend that this is an essential stage of reorientation if the body is to be regained at the centre of an interior production whose state is a constant and dynamic becoming.

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<sup>20</sup> Magrou, R. *Frederic Flamand*, Arles: Actes sud, (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Grosz, E. *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*, Cambridge, Massachusetts.: MIT Press, (2001).

<sup>22</sup> Bronet, F. Schumacher, J., (1999).