

## **Perform (D)ance space/ Educational Center/ Experiential Space**

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### **1 ABSTRACT**

The program of the studio was developed through 3 subsequent years. Originally the students were asked to design a performance/ dance space (with all necessary associated elements) and a dance studio and finally to design an experiential educational space for people with corporeal or sensory impairments.

The investigation begins with the exploration of the human body - skeletal and muscular, and the sensory mechanisms. The analysis, study and reinterpretation of the human body were both directly and indirectly linked to spatial conditions.

For students to fully understand their bodies and the way they could move and sense the space, we created a series of workshops with choreographers in order to better explore body movements and our ability to create and define space through that movement. The students were asked to investigate thresholds, dualities of public-private, in-out, and movement-pause. All the exercises/workshops were recorded through a series of photographic stills and films spliced with drawings, 3d models, graphics, diagrams, and sketching.

Students were asked to make a 1:1 scale body apparatus or 'attachment' pushing them to deal with construction issues and materiality. This apparatus had to be used by the students to script or create new forms or creations of movement and sensory spatial conditions. By 'wearing' and 'performing' their apparatus they had to define a new relationship between their bodies and space – these could either be accidental and/or predetermined.

These investigations and the results and analysis then had to be drawn/translated into the design of their performance/dance space or the experiential educational space. The students dealt with water related sites in Cyprus and other countries.

### **2 PERFORM (D)ANCE SPACE/ EDUCATIONAL CENTER/ EXPERIENTIAL SPACE**

The course described in this paper was written and created as the main architectural design studio for second year, second semester architecture students at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. The goal of the architecture studio is to challenge students in new ways of thinking throughout the design process from concept development to construction techniques, materiality and structural analysis and thought. Hands on, one to one scale construction or 'making' was emphasized.

#### **2.1 A Fresh New Architecture Programme**

The Architecture Programme of the University of Nicosia was started in 2006. The generator of the formation of the identity of the Programme was the responsibility towards the students and the society in offering an architectural education that nurtures the future continuators and creators of the builders of the artificial environment of the island of Cyprus. The broadening of the gained knowledge and experience is a priority in the Programme.

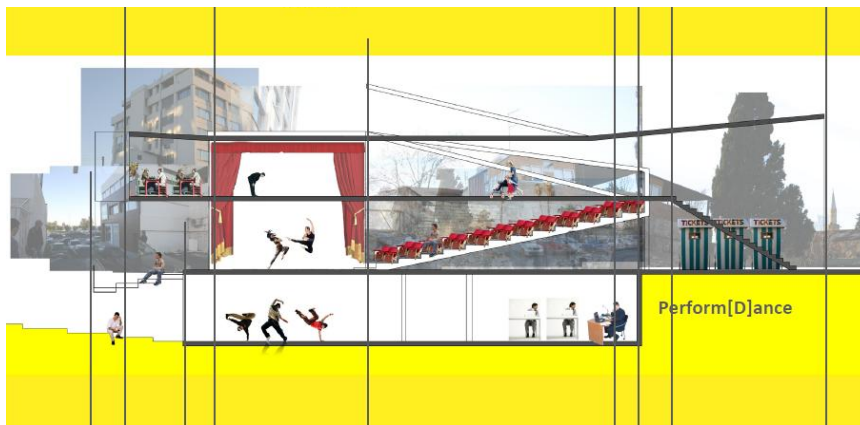


## 2.2 Connecting the human body and senses

We as faculty members, architects and administrators of the Department are interested in focusing on the human (being and body) as the generator of all the interventions in relationships with the built and natural environment. This obsession urged us to build up an architectural studio course that incorporates both the corporeal and sensory qualities of the human, explored in interdisciplinary environments in order to facilitate an in-depth dexterity of final architectural interventions augmenting a social sensitivity.

## 2.3 The Architectural Studio's history:

The program of the studio was developed through 3 subsequent years. Originally the students were asked to ultimately design a performance/ dance space (with all necessary associated elements) and a dance studio. They had to both realize and explore architectural conditions or spaces created for performance that were related to a specific site yet were derived from the movement and the exploration of the human body.



### Site related intervention:

In the first year that we offered the studio (Spring 2009), students could choose from an option of 2 rural (and highly inspiring sites) of Cyprus, either up in the mountains or down on the seashore plain. The first site is the artificially made lake, the Dam Xyliatos, surrounded by forested peaks of the mountain range Troodos. The second site is Liopetri 'river', a 'fjord like' narrow insertion of the sea into the land, which functions as a small fishing shelter. Both sites deal with issues of water, tide and edge conditions, and the relationship of the natural to the artificial or human-made.

### From the rural to the urban conditions:

The site conditions for the second year of the studio (Spring 2010) were shifted to the urban environment of the coastal town of Limassol. The site faced the sea-front of the artificial extension of the ground. The specificity of the urban conditions and the interaction of the proposal with the town itself and its use by

various groups of people was an additional requirement for which the response to the social issues should be generating the approach.

### **From a performance/dance space/theater to an experiential educational space for people with corporeal or sensory impairments:**

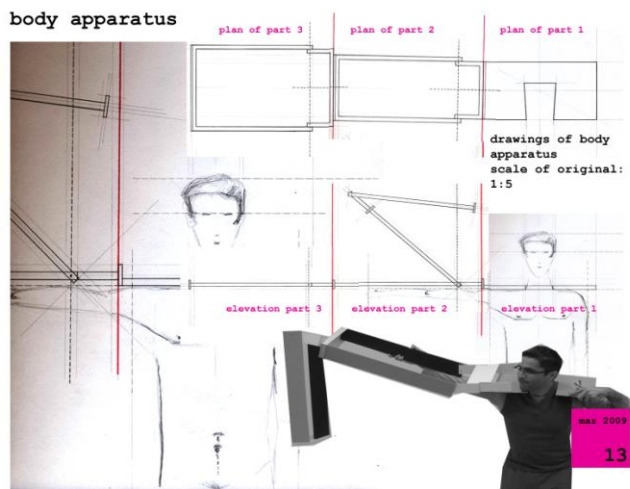
In order to enhance the students' awareness of sensitive social issues, the last studio (Spring 2011) was developed into a project for an experiential educational space for people with corporeal or sensory impairments. The choice of the site was from four densely populated and complex cities – Mogadishu, Kyoto, Paris and Colombo. The sites were bound y existing buildings on two sites and also linked to a water related condition.

## **3 THE ARCHITECTURAL STUDIO'S PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENT STAGES**

### **3.1 Initial investigations**

#### **The Human body as the starting point:**

As the starting point for the studio we aimed to drive the students directly to what we believe is the origin or generator of a performance space project – the human body. This was done through a series of research and explorative exercises.

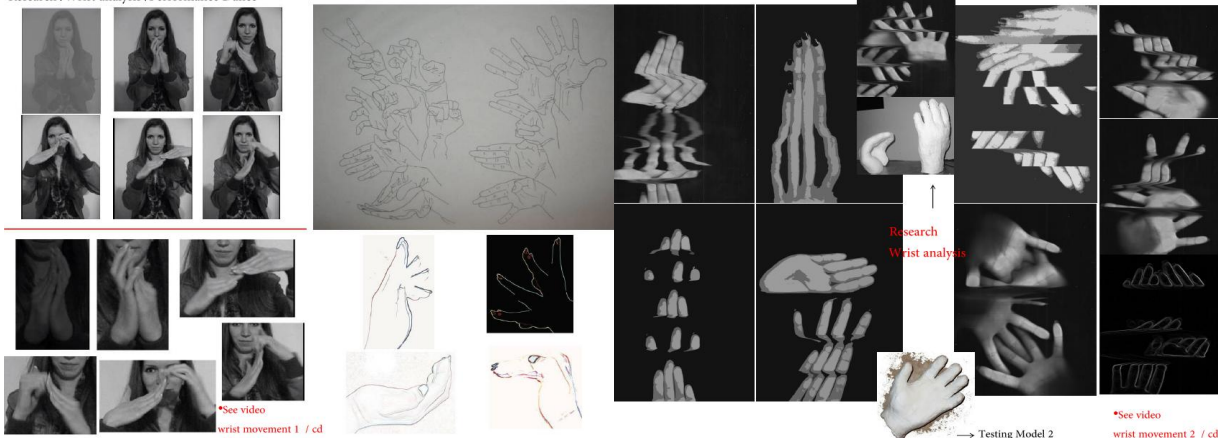


#### **Anatomy:**

The studio began with the investigation and exploration of the biological and anatomical aspects of the human body - both skeletal and muscular. Students could immerse into the human anatomy and understand it as a scientist. First, they had to fully understand how the body moves - so research, analysis and study models were used to conduct in-depth investigations. Students had to understand what allows us to move and what stops us from losing control of our bodies. Students were then asked to choose a joint/link/connection found within the body and relate it to our physical movement. They had to extract it, interpret it, analyze it, take it apart, and re-design it to work in an alternative way. Students were free to pay attention only to the bone joints, or their combination with the muscles, cartridges, or even their function.

#### **Real skeleton and flesh:**

Students were also asked to make connections between the senses and the reaction from the brain, through the muscles to the bones and the junctions/connectors of these elements. In order to urge/usher students to immerse into the human by analyzing and understanding the mechanisms and all the components, scrutinizing major or minor details, besides the presence of the a 1:1 skeleton in the class, each student was asked to bring a bone and dissect it and reconnect it with other materials (metal, plastic, wood) to create a new joint that would enable the body to move or function in a new way.

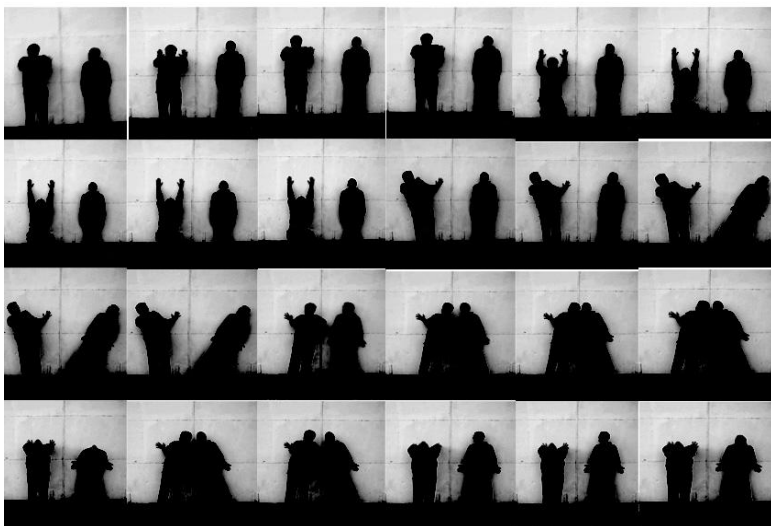


### Promote 'bionic' assistance:

This exercise was further developed through the second and third year by focusing to assist people with corporeal and sensory impairments to be able to function even in more diverse and developed ways than the 'normal' people.

### Sharing investigations/ group work:

Students could share amongst themselves findings and explorations from other joints to incorporate them into their own chosen body joint. During the third year, the students were divided in two groups in order to explore either a body joint or one of the senses, and were expected to share their findings and explorations. This group exercise successfully pushed students to develop their ability of creative collaboration and understanding of the usefulness of the teamwork. The analysis, study and reinterpretation in an alternative way were directed towards and ultimately linked to spatial conditions.



### Culture and Art:

After introducing the students to notions of explorative-contemporary dance and movements of the body, they were asked to investigate and critically present a series of lectures on ancient, traditional and contemporary performances, performers, artists and performing spaces. These examples questioned the role and the relationship of the spectator and the viewer, re-examining and redefining the performance (and dance) itself and the spaces for performance. This part of the investigation gradually gained a more sensitive social awareness by studying the needs of impaired people and their relatives. Students investigated the nuances in the way people move and contact each other in different cultural environments. They also looked



into the choice of activities relevant to the needs of the impaired in order to finally propose an experiential space where they can coexist and function in equivalent terms with those who are not impaired.

### 3.2 Workshops with choreographers:

For students to fully understand their bodies and the way they could move, as well as the way dancers and performers are trained to work and move – we created a series of participatory workshops. Arianna Economou, Lia Haraki and Eleni Drogari, local, contemporary dancers/choreographers worked with our students (in large renovated exhibition spaces) in a series of exercises exploring body movements and the human ability to create and define space through that movement, and to examine the physical and psychological relationships of the body to space. The exercises pushed the students to: sense the vertical axis of the body, sense someone's position in a space, detect a movement analysis and explore the various joint capabilities, explore negative or empty spaces, find a relative notion of movement (what moves and what stays still) polarizing the space, leave body 'ink' or imprint on the floor, mentally trace the memory of the body's movement, pattern the rhythm and grid, freeze time, link systems, and to explore flows, groups, and clusters. Students were actively involved in questioning the exercises and discussing with the choreographer as well as filming and sketching the 'performances'. Students also had to create impromptu performances throughout the workshops and sense how the movement can change the space and how a perception of space can change through the movement.

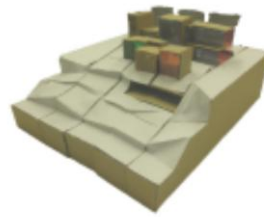
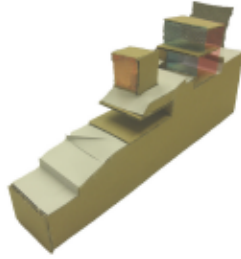


### 3.3 Relationship of the body and an architectural element:

Simultaneously the students were asked to 'write' a scripted performance for their body and its relationship to a constructed 'item' (stair, ramp, rail, door, wall). In this exercise they were investigating the space in relationship to their body (they were also allowed to incorporate more bodies) and the 'item', the closeness and openness, the filling of the emptiness, alternative ways of using their joints etc. This was recorded through a series of photographic stills and films spliced with drawings and/or 3d models.

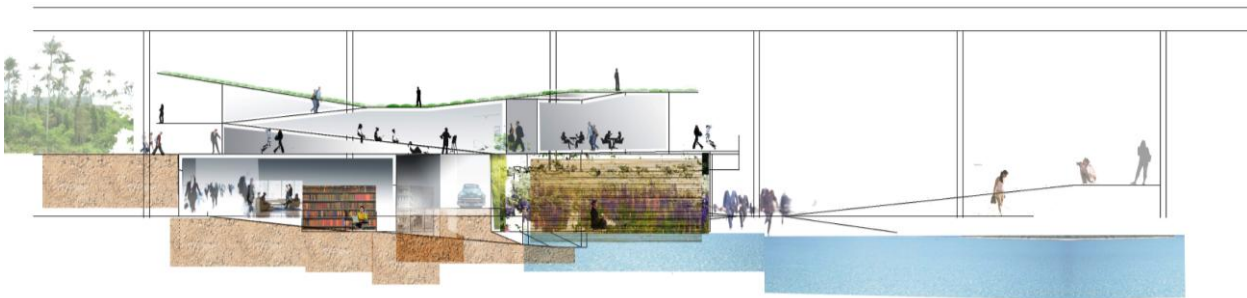
#### Codification of the movement in relation to time sequences:

A second workshop investigated systems of recording and analyzing body movements through graphic, digital and 3d modeling techniques. After emptying the studio of all its contents and defining and observing the empty space, they were asked to locate themselves on a point of a grid, created by extending their arms to touch the person next to them. The grid was marked (each student created their own symbol for tracking purposes) as were their subsequent new positions. The students then began to create a script of their individual movement and the collisions or relationships made as they came into contact with others.



### **Movement and site:**

Every student was asked to understand the chosen site and communicate this through a series of 2d and 3d mappings of the site. Students were expected to focus on the existing movements of the site, its topography and identifying characteristics, the interlocking of the natural features with the artificial interventions, the scale and climatic conditions. The resulting studies enabled students to link or disconnect, to bring together, unify or disperse information through an insertion of 3d diagrammatic evolutions of the flows interweaving the proposal with the site.



### **3.4 Apparatus:**

For the final project before the midterm review of the term, the students were asked to make a 1:1 scale body apparatus or 'attachment', pushing them to deal with construction issues, mechanisms and materiality. This apparatus had to be used by the students to script or create new forms or creations of new movement. By 'wearing' and 'performing' their apparatus they had to define a new relationship between their bodies and space – these could either be accidental and/or predetermined, pushing the boundaries with a single part of their bodies or possibly extending out from the body to interact with the surrounding space and people. The students (either alone or with the incorporation of other people or 'bodies' into their work) could generate the use of the apparatus in order to redefine connectivity and conductivity issues. Students tested and explored (through the creation of their 'apparatus'): levels of exposure, notions of private and public conditions, an endless unfolding in the space or an ultimate shrinking into an almost non-existence, interconnectivity of body components with constituent elements, inclusion and enhancement of the senses, thresholds, dualities of the notion of "in- out", the concept of movement to pause.

All the exercises/workshops and the apparatus were recorded through a series of photographic stills and films spliced with drawings, 3d models, graphics, diagrams, sketching, texts etc.



#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABOVE EXPLORATIONS INTO A FINAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN PROJECT**

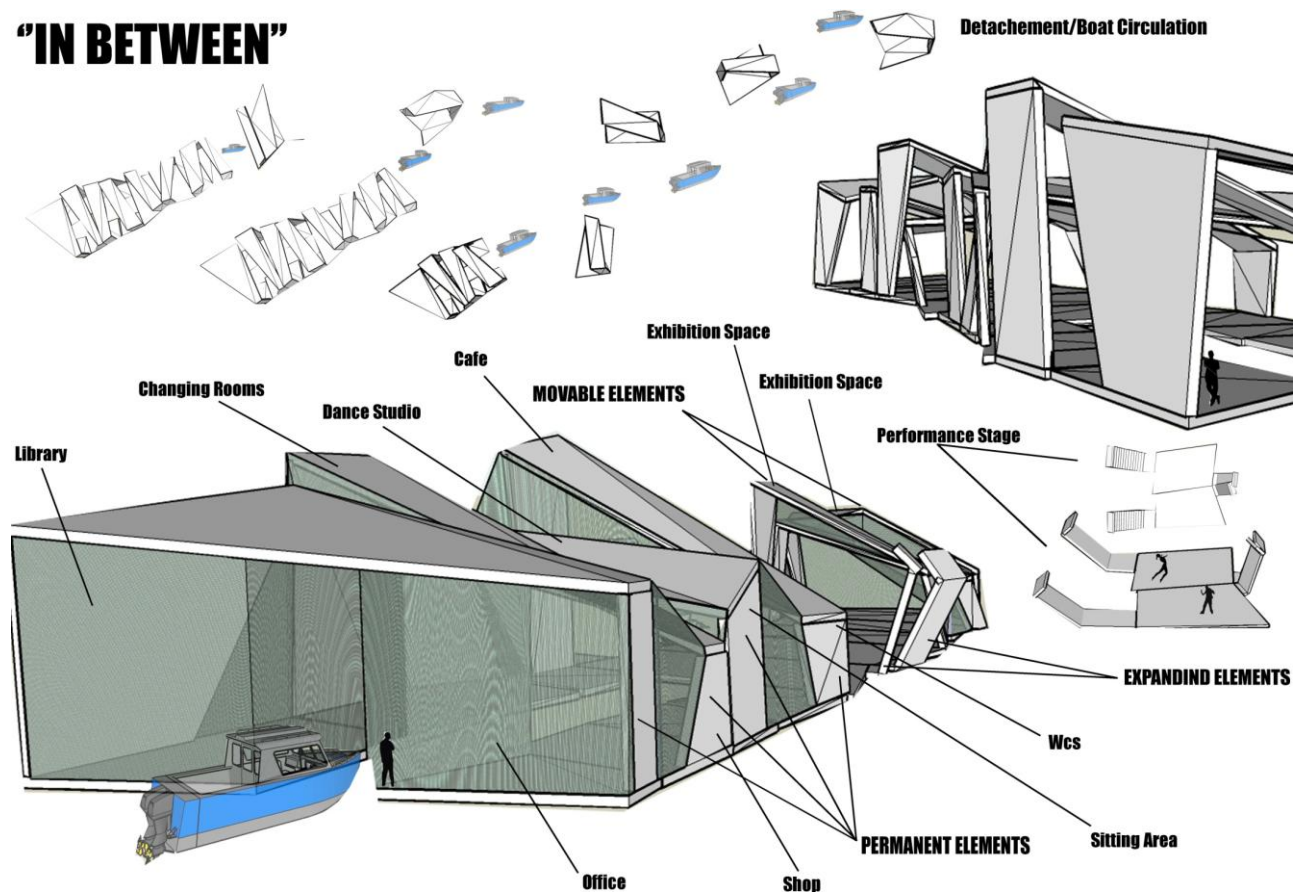
##### **4.1 Rural site:**

After the development of the ‘apparatus’, all the investigations, results and analysis that had been conducted by students in the course had to be drawn into the design of a performance/dance space.

Students had to comprehend the diversity of form and spatial solutions and use this knowledge creatively in their own design project to function within a site specific context.

During the first year, as mentioned above, the students had an option of 2 sites; a mountain dam and narrow coastal inlet. The main difference between the two sites was the scale factor. In the coastal inlet the human scale was strongly present as was an interesting variety of artificial materials (the make-shift fisherman’s docks). The contrary condition was found at the dam site where the vastness of the mountains and the width of the body of water prevailed and often overwhelmed the students. The students had to tackle the scale issue as they began to reinterpret their previous investigations and link them into their chosen site. The sequences of inhabitable and performance spaces began to generate or push an interaction between the ‘spectator’ and the ‘spectacle’. These subtle or extreme relationships were at times difficult to detect – where visitors and performers often became interchangeable. The proposals were dissolved into or fused with the existing landscape. They were treated as an almost imperceptible extension of the existing landscape or added as a new landscape, stated as a piece of sculptural intervention, placed in the water or on the soil, and always addressed the condition of the “in-between”.

# "IN BETWEEN"



## 4.2 Urban Site:

The shifting to the urban condition of the coastal town of Limassol generated new approaches for the implementation of the previous rich and diverse investigations.

Students were asked to address the following in innovative ways: The real needs of the town in relation to various diverse and quite sensitive issues, the co-inhabitation of the project by disparate social groups, the vibrant atmosphere of the city center, the immediacy to the cultural heritage monuments of the town, and the relation to the pulsating artificially made coastal zone. Students were expected to clearly show the impact that the town had on their project, but mostly to explore the reciprocal impact that the project itself had on the town, utilizing a regeneration approach. The proposals varied; some blended the project within the existing urban conditions, others regenerated a new townscape, or transformed the area into a vibrant contemporary park, others made the project into a significant a town's landmark, others saw the project as an experiential space that fulfilled a far more active function than the requested programme.

## 4.3 International sites and the creation of an Experiential Educational space for people with corporeal or sensory impairments:

In 2011 we decided to have the students explore conditions beyond those of Cyprus. Whether in Kyoto, Mogadishu, Manila or Paris, the students directed their proposals depending on further investigations in relation to the identity of the cities and their people, the everyday life, the ways of socializing and contacting each other. The cultural identity of the project is further forged by the choice of the site and the consequent social, climatic, economic, topographical and other varying conditions or characteristics. The issue of the identity of the project by its main programme - experiential educational space for people with corporeal or sensory impairments, the students were expected to tackle such issues as how the users and their relatives or friends could use the spaces together. Students investigated how experiential activities and spaces could help those without 'impairments' to begin to understand the various issues faced on a daily basis by those with certain disabilities. A specific workshop on the complex topic of 'identity' took place with the participation of '109 architects' from Beirut.



## 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Creative documentation:

Students had to record all of their work digitally in a visual diary. All sketches, research, models, analysis and thought process and recordings of the workshops had to be transferred into digital format and printed in a small format book/visual diary. Films, sound recordings, 3d renderings and walkthroughs, videos of their apparatus performances had to be interwoven into their visual diaries. The design, layout and construction of a 2d-3d diary of this were a key part of the studio. All work from the later part of the studio also had to be recorded in this visual diary, students had to photograph physical models and incorporate digital or hand drawings. The diary was carefully designed to correspond to the individual student project and concept - many of them were quite elaborate and complex.

### 5.2 Reviews as an inspirational Event:

At both the midterm and the final reviews, students were asked to reflect through their presentations the identity of their project, performing as actors and using mixed media in a 3d installation of the produced material. The reviews were 'grand' happenings where the evidence of the energy and enthusiasm were articulated and reflected in generating creative, festive and atmospheric proposals! As an interdisciplinary, hands on approach, the jury consisted of a group of guests from various disciplines.



### 5.3 Reflections:

Through this course we tried to explore ways in which students could merge conceptual thought and creativity with a hands-on approach to construction and materiality. They themselves had to perform and build or construct their apparatus. They had to understand how dancers work and move in order to design a 'building' or space for them to perform in. They had to work with a structural engineer to design their systems and build a large-scale sectional model to test those ideas. They had to deal with issues of creating public spaces that had a deep respect and sensitivity to the natural environment they were placed in, and have an understanding of site and environmental issues. Students had to think about natural and artificial light, orientation, and materiality, senses, boundaries, users, social issues, activities, usage of space, and privacy issues.

Students in fact worked simultaneously in both directions: creating architectural conditions of 1-1 scale structures and solving landscape and general planning issues. Our aim was to have them investigate how the 'inside conditions' affects the whole and how the whole can respectively influence the 'inside conditions'. The investigations and experimentations made by the students were derived from the human body and manipulated to generate a fascinating variety of 'built' relationships, conditions, forms and interactions.

Could all the students successfully manage the above targets? Could they eventually succeeded in transferring their earlier investigations into their 'final project'? Whatever level the students might have reached, their enthusiasm and energy drove their abilities further than either our or their expectations. The series of investigations and projects definitely helped them to become richer, more competent and sensitive architecture students, in that they began to sculpt and manipulate creative spaces directly linked to and formed out of the use and exploration of their body and senses.