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## ARCHITECTURAL BODY: PERFORMANCE AS DESIGN METHODOLOGY FACILITATING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

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**Keywords:** Performance, body, experience, multidisciplinary, transformative

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## Abstract

This paper will discuss multidisciplinary and experimental pedagogical case studies that place the importance of the body firmly back into architectural education. The advanced digital technologies currently employed almost universally in architectural education generate increasingly virtual and augmented design, resulting from processes that tend to be devoid of imagination of the body. The case studies discussed in this paper involved students' direct participation in performative acts during the design process, facilitating positive transformative learning through direct experience. These include design briefs for Chelsea College of Arts (London, UK, 2009–2013), modules for the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) (London, UK, 2009-2014), leading to the project 'Tales from the Woods' (2014) that transformed august Georgian buildings into an immersive theatre for the occasion of AA's 167th anniversary; conceived, designed, planned, constructed and performed by the student project team through a process of intensive choreographic workshops. Working with performance inherently provokes layers of architectural design concerns; such as notion of time and narrative; spatial relationships between the bodies, objects, space, and site; movement, occupation and inhabitation; collaboration and logistics; representation and documentation; and communication of the vision in order to create audience experience. The process encourages each student to generate critical and coherent views of the world that they are proposing, while motivating active commitment and solid ownership of the project. This performance methodology in architectural education promotes transformative learning by going through a journey where rational and analytical reflections, as well as emotional intelligence are challenged and nurtured.

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T. HASEGAWA<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This paper will discuss multidisciplinary and experimental pedagogical case studies that place the importance of the body firmly back into architectural education. The advanced digital technologies currently employed almost universally in architectural education generate increasingly virtual and augmented design, resulting from processes that tend to be devoid of imagination of the body. The case studies discussed in this paper involved students' direct participation in performative acts during the design process, facilitating positive transformative learning through direct experience. These include design briefs for Chelsea College of Arts (London, UK, 2009–2013), modules for the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) (London, UK, 2009–2014), leading to the project 'Tales from the Woods' (2014) that transformed august Georgian buildings into an immersive theatre for the occasion of AA's 167th anniversary; conceived, designed, planned, constructed and performed by the student project team through a process of intensive choreographic workshops. Working with performance inherently provokes layers of architectural design concerns; such as notion of time and narrative; spatial relationships between the bodies, objects, space, and site; movement, occupation and inhabitation; collaboration and logistics; representation and documentation; and communication of the vision in order to create audience experience. The process encourages each student to generate critical and coherent views of the world that they are proposing, while motivating active commitment and solid ownership of the project. This performance methodology in architectural education promotes transformative learning by going through a journey where rational and analytical reflections, as well as emotional intelligence are challenged and nurtured.*

## KEYWORDS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The studio methodology I have been developing over the last 10 years encourages students to activate and test the project ideas through choreographed performance at various stages of project development. Interdisciplinary in its approach, the studio teaching experiments with and learns from choreographic thinking and its creative process as a multifaceted method of inquiry and media of exploration. The body firmly regains its position at the core of exploration and experimentation throughout the research and design process. The notion of time in architecture is also challenged and explored in various manifestations. Strongly valuing the creative process itself, the performance methodology facilitates transformative learning by educating the person rather than mere knowledge-transfer. The enactment produces design materials, artefacts and phased resolutions, as well as various documentations along the way, contributing to further development. It also pushes the practical aspects of architectural project; such as dealing with logistics, time

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management, and crucially, collaborative partnership. Importantly, this direct engagement facilitates students' positive commitment and ownership of project by honouring intuitions and personal discoveries.

This teaching approach derives from my own view that perceives architecture and its experience through choreography, and as choreography. That is to say, architecture as shifting experience, constantly changing relative to the journey of our body and mind, and its various context that is also transient in relation to all physical, personal, emotional, social, cultural, political, philosophical, and natural changes in time and space. Choreographic practice shares much territory with architecture in terms of creation of space and time, centred around the body. Working with choreographic thinking enables us to view and conceive architecture as a series of movements articulating and manifesting embodied ideas, intentions, and structures in complex multiple layers as the site for life and experience.

Based on this core thinking, the performance methodology lets the students go through the creative journey that leads to unknown territories by taking risks. By actually physically moving, and mobilising various factors, students develop a keen awareness towards both their own thinking and the environment in context. They learn to trust their own perspectives and engagement with the world, with the confidence gained through performing actions that naturally question all that is involved in relation to one another, and to the environment. Students also quickly become a solid team by working collaboratively.

This paper will begin with an exploration of context within architectural history in relation to the body and movement, while discussing the validity of learning from choreographic practice. Before looking at the problems and challenges that architectural education inherently presents, it will discuss the core motivations and aims of this pedagogical approach. It will then introduce the first two case studies addressing the various intentions and concerns discussed above, before touching upon the theoretical references. The final case study will explore a journey of experimentation that realised architecture and its experience as one-night ephemera.

## **2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Choreography in the Context of Architecture**

The notion of the body and movement in architecture has a long-distinguished legacy. Throughout the history, many architects have positioned the body as central to design, and many have regarded various changing factors – movement and flow, light and shadow, views and perspectives, and activities and events - as inherent design motivations. The body was idealised and abstracted by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, and manifested itself within the architectural order while diminishing the boundaries of various forms of art and creative disciplines. More recently, Bernard Tschumi and Archigram's theories and practices brought the idea of time, narrative and event into architectural discourses. The architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Alvaro Siza imply body and movement in space when we experience the unfolding and shifting views as we walk through their buildings. In very different ways, Carlo Scarpa and Peter Zumthor invite our eyes to appreciate the details and materiality, volume and scale that immerse our own presence in the architectural space. Phenomenology plays an important role in conceiving the architecture of Steven Holl, while Cedric Price explored notion of participation. Norman Foster wrote a tribute to Oscar Niemeyer, stating that Niemeyer was a 'choreographer' who built Brasilia with 'each of its fluidly-composed pieces (of buildings) seems to stand, like a dancer, on its points frozen in a moment of absolute balance.'

### **2.2 Cross Disciplinary Approach**

Architecture has always been inspired by and experimenting with other creative fields both in technical evolutions and conceptual explorations. Pushing its own boundary is architecture's nature creating new values and propositions for the purpose of enhancing the

quality of human life. Learning from a way of working that is external to architecture has always positively contributed to the broadening and deepening of architectural discourse and creative exploration. It is the most powerful when different fields of expertise collide and spark, giving birth to exciting fresh possibilities. And often, only by cross-referencing external views are we able to distinguish who we are and what our goals might be.

### 2.3 Architectural Choreography

Choreography, in short, is the art of designing sequences of movements in which motion, form, or both, are specified. For the discussion purpose in this paper, 'choreographic practice' refers to time-based, live art forms that offer audience experience, especially contemporary dance in this context, as well as performance and theatre. Both multidisciplinary in nature, architectural thinking and choreographic practice have much resonance with one another, sharing philosophies and perceptions, as well as the creation of space in relation to the body and our senses. Both are ways of investigating, exploring and connecting various physical, intellectual and emotional channels. Dance, for instance, is a cerebral inquiry through the physicality of the body in time and space with complex and multiple layers: while architecture, in my view, is also a series of movements articulating and manifesting embodied ideas, intentions and structures. In my research and teaching practice, the notion of choreography extends further from the everyday to urban life, and the global and beyond, that operates at different scales and speed, affecting bodies, senses, experiences and the way of life. While the idea of the body, movement and time have long been present in the architectural discourses, the approach that directly cross-fertilises with choreography presents fresh possibilities that let us go through a different path to arrive at new horizons.

## 3. MOTIVATIONS AND AIMS

### 3.1 Valuing the Process

Learning from direct actions serves as a vehicle in the design studio I teach. The live-testing of ideas, such as putting up a performance or an installation, helps identify the vital building blocks of the project, both for conceptual development as well as practical logistics and deployment. Combined with the incorporation of the body, the live performative investigations are set at various project development stages; such as site survey and mapping of ideas, testing early speculations, and performing with specifically-designed devices and prototypes. The final resolutions can also be presented as performance. Every aspect of these activities requires practical and logistical management as well while working collaboratively. It also demands coordinating choreographed sequences with the co-performing students, requiring them to work with time in relation to spatial organisations. By working with materiality and tactility; the physical aspect of architecture; the project relates directly to the human scale, senses and experience. The studio encourages a way of working that pushes the physical and sensual reality in relation to augmented and virtual realms. The process goes through much iteration of 'rehearsals' - opportunities to diversify and evaluate towards the best outcomes while refining the project thesis.

### 3.2 Body and Subjectivity: Looking through the Frame of Choreography

The way we relate and engage with our environment inevitably affects our understanding and the consequent response to it. For the best learning exploration in the studio, a keen awareness of the body as an exploration tool becomes critical. By actually moving and performing, the body acquires enhanced perceptions and awareness as conscious vehicle for the mind. By inhabiting, occupying, navigating and activating the site and the design concerns, students develop their individual ways of reading and relating, whether that is visible or invisible, or tangible or intangible. The iterative performative inquiries enable the students to develop fresh understandings that question the way we habitually know and do in architectural

design process. And the outcomes are often beyond one's expectations. The re-introduction of the body encourages the students to experiment directly with the physical context, human feelings and experiences; leading to key discoveries from individual perspectives, that each student will firmly own. This will also allow students' subjectivity and intuition as something to value. By gaining the choreographic body, way of seeing and thinking, our perception acquires further sensitivities enabling us to explore architecture in a new light.

### **3.3 Nature of Architecture and Challenges in Architectural Education**

The teaching processes and experimentations intend to work with some of the inherent challenges in architectural education.

One of the characteristics of architecture is that the resulting work cannot be experienced in reality during the design phase. Unlike most of other art and design disciplines, the product cannot be held in a hand until it gets built in full scale with actual building materials. Various conventions and innovations in visual communication in architecture; physical or virtual; are due to this basic fact. This nature of architectural design presents interesting challenges to the students' creative development. Since the project doesn't exist in any real physical sense, it is often difficult for untrained eyes to associate and assess the potentials or problems that the design might present. This remoteness can be problematic, as it often blocks the extension of imagination, and the design decisions might end up arbitrary if the student is inexperienced.

On the other hand, the advanced digital technologies currently employed almost universally in architectural design and education generate increasingly virtual and augmented design, resulting from processes that tend to be devoid of imagination of the body. While it is truly remarkable how digital technologies constantly open up ever-new horizons in architecture with far-reaching capabilities and possibilities, it also diminishes direct engagement with the design process. While these digital realms are more and more combined with physical outcomes that promise exciting future prospects, it is also debatable that the digital design processes are often scale-less and produce spectacles that divide social, cultural, and professional appreciation.

### **3.4 Sensibility, Choreographic Practice and Architecture**

By nature, the architectural design process is objective and analytical, and stays critically outside of the body, and for a good reason as architecture has social responsibilities. During its design and making, feelings and emotions are often tricky subjects to discuss, although architecture also exists in personal responses and sensitivities that shape our life. Also importantly, we cannot escape from our own subjectivity, that is to say, how and where we are present, in the mind and the body, in the context of our time.

There are some aspects that choreographic practice does very well that architecture can learn from – aspect of emotion and feelings; the senses; the way that they do brilliantly in creating experiences, making us engage from our own personal point of view. Dance, especially contemporary dance, is a manifestation of inner dialogue, communicated via bodily expressions and movement. The motivation of movement is from within, assisted by external eyes of observation and analysis, and refined by practice. We could say that dance is an abstract idea that is manifested through the physicality of the body, and architecture is also an abstract idea created often into a physical existence that embodies abstract thought. Working with choreography in architectural design process will help identify, articulate and frame those intangible yet important aspects of the quality of architecture in meaningful and applicable ways. It would elevate the personal experiences to valuable design resource and vocabulary.

There are countless different approaches towards architecture with each distinctive philosophy, visual language and ways of doing things. In the design studio environment, the students are exposed to the tutor's particular philosophy while they cultivate their own. It is hoped that the exploration through performance and choreography would equip students with valid and rewarding perspectives towards architecture that brings the body firmly back into the

discourse enabling the process of design from within, with human scale, senses and feelings. Taking risks is the only way to arrive at an unknown that is capable of exceeding one's expectations, ultimately leading to a transformative learning experience.

#### 4. CASE STUDIES

The following two case studies have helped create solid foundations for the approach in my teaching practice.

##### 4.1 Case study 1: Chelsea College of Arts, Interior and Spatial Design (London, UK, 2009-2013)

###### 4.1.1 Context

My engagement as a design studio tutor started in 2006-7 academic year as a 3rd year studio tutor in a BA course. In 2009, the studios became vertical with the mix of 2nd and 3rd year students at which point the difference in their skills and experience needed to be taken into consideration. The questions I acknowledged at that time were:

- How can the students motivate themselves to subjectively engage with design problems and agenda overcoming the remote nature of architectural design?
- How can the students be encouraged to produce works as they go, without putting off till the last moment?
- How can the students acquire visual language while simultaneously developing the project?
- How should the academic year be programmed so that the students sustain their commitment over the whole academic year?

Around those years, more and more experimental and interactive performances were emerging that challenged audience engagement as mere spectators into more active participants, while performers themselves got out of the theatre and into the urban environment. As an audience, I had been cultivating the idea of employing performance as a tool for the process of architecture, having been convinced that these forms of contemporary art had so much to experiment with in relation to the architectural design process. Great choreography has a power of conveying and constructing relationships of the body, space, objects, movement, time, narrative and emotion, while all the precise details are at work on physical, sensory and psychological perception and landscape; all of which are also common to architecture.

###### 4.1.2 Short workshop trials

The performance aspect was put to an initial experimentation in weeklong workshops between Chelsea MA and Musashino Art University Tokyo. In the 2008 workshop, the brief asked the students to 'perform' the results. It was a great success, generating both effective working processes and interesting outcomes. In order to perform, the students had to plan well to construct a scenario, build props and mock-ups, and rehearse with dialogues and choreography. The necessity to complete all the preparations in the tight constraints of time motivated the students, with well-distributed tasks and a sense of responsibility. The presence of an audience also encouraged hard working. This small intervention was repeated in the following year, with another success that made me convinced to develop this into a design methodology. The aim was not about producing performance pieces as the end product. Instead, the intention of implementing performance as a full educational intervention was to use the subjective bodily experience as a tool for the process of design. A journey of discovering and developing ideas and concepts, developing a way of thinking, and working these into resolution, are all part of this process that the performance

methodology would provoke; these were the thoughts at the beginning of this educational experimentation.

#### 4.1.3 The year's programme

The anticipation was that introducing 'performance' as a design tool would help overcome many questions described earlier. For instance, in order to investigate certain spatial relationships, students would simply put themselves into the situation in question and do something there. This simple performing act will let them subjectively experience the situation in question, helping come to their own discovery and understanding. It will not only help diminish the remoteness, but will also generate works by documenting the act, thus helping produce works as they go. Every phase of the design development can be punctuated by employing performance to varying purpose of exploration, so that the process will be on a spiral cycle culminating into a final design solution. In a studio environment where one project often lasts over a course of an entire academic year, this punctuation will also help sustain the students' engagement throughout the endeavour.

As the year's overview, performance was first used as a thinking, observational and analytical tool for site investigation, concept building, and demonstration of initial responses. The preparation for the public event demanded various logistics and cooperation, with rewarding learning experience. Through these direct activities, students were made aware of the relationships, dynamics and tensions between mind, body, and physical environment. Whenever possible, the role of performance was emphasised to make them aware of what's intended and what's possible to achieve. Students were also often questioned to think what they were actually doing and what the learning was. Workshops and other activities encompassed both objective observations and subjective experiences, affording a basic contextual understanding as well as direct engagement with the site. The year achieved final design projects that carefully choreographed spaces, in which the activities and interactions; the relationship between the observer and the observed; the views and perspectives; spatial strategies and flow; light and other ephemeral aspects; were all carefully considered and addressed.

#### 4.1.4 Feedback and evaluation

To follow are some of the students' self-evaluations at midyear. The public performance event proved to be a good manifestation as to how the students were taking in the process. The feedback gave insights into how the methodology was working and what the students were learning by adapting to it.

- At first performance was a quite difficult process as it was unfamiliar. But by doing the project work, a small change has happened and I was able to make emotional mapping from the perspective of each user.
- It was only after my performance in context I realised how powerful my device was. I discovered the site in a different way.
- I feel I got into the subject in depth. It was risk taking for me to perform, but it lead to inspirational ideas. I feel I've developed not only my drawings but also the ideas from the performance.
- Performing in public was a truly exhilarating and mind stimulating experience. The device was powerful, it had a huge impact on my feelings, senses and made me focused and be aware of all spatial details of the city as I walked along.
- When I tried to put myself in a position of my character, it made me understand his needs and problems.
- It feels fulfilling when the input of ideas let the work grow much faster by interactive performance activity.

- The performance event was one of the most important aspects as a teamwork; how we organise ourselves to work and have everything on time and to be done.
- I now understand that I can make discoveries while moving and working. It's exciting not to know what is going on and where it is leading.

The foremost objective of introducing performance methodology was that the students gain direct experience to formulate their own understanding towards subject matter. This case study shows that the act of performing helped them observe and analyse both the physical and psychological environment from their own point of view, so that the discoveries bore strong meaning to them. The majority of students were eager to describe their views gained from their experience, generating healthy enthusiasm and a vibrant sense of community within the studio. The sense of ownership also helped tutorial dialogues, as students had their own points to convey. Often what was needed was encouragement for them to think through and try out, rather than tutor's further inputs. As in the feedback, even capable students were at times confused. However, after finding their way, their engagement strengthened and they absolutely come to own the project. Through this transformative process, the attitude changed from being passive and waiting for instructions, to active participants to their own project process.

## 4.2 Case study 2: AA School of Architecture, Foundation Course (London, UK, 2011-2014)

### 4.2.1 Further motivation

The several academic year cycles of the choreographic process at Chelsea College have successfully proved to promote positive learning experience and outcomes. At this point, the power of 'moving', as well as direct and live engagement itself has presented further creative possibilities. The prominent interest was how the spatial practice of choreography can inform, provoke and create architecture. Motivation was also to test that moving together would facilitate collaborative minds who work creatively as a team.

### 4.2.2 Movement workshop

The AA Foundation Course 'offers a cross-disciplinary art and design based education in the context of an architectural school. Students develop conceptual ideas by experimenting with wide range of skills and media, while developing intellectual and process-based abilities.' (Modified extract from the AA prospectus) The projects were mostly three-week cycles in the early part of the academic year with incremented themes and agendas broadening students' interests and creative territories.

As the foundation studio master, I conducted movement workshops at the beginning of term 2, after students worked with objects, places, and materiality, amongst other ideas. It was set at the beginning of a project to survey the body, with an objective to design and discuss the interface between the body and its environment. After a brief introduction to the history of the body in art and design, as well as contemporary choreographic practice, the workshop asked the students to observe, record and experiment with the body in motion. The aim was to encourage fresh eyes in observing and analysing the body in action in relation to its own physical structures and functions; to other bodies; objects such as furniture; immediate surroundings of the studio space; and the wider context of space and architecture. By creating various settings in the studio, students took turns in moving, drawing and recording each other, initiating both direct experience and observation, often inventing new and interesting ways with which the moving bodies and actions can be tested. Students also worked directly with a dancer and were made aware of the body in space and motion. Ideas of balance, gravity,

weight, speed, mass, positioning, voice & sound, sight, gestures, etc., were all explored. At the end, students created sequences of movement in groups within the AA building, responding to the quality and the elements in space, and the activities taking place there. This final exercise yielded intriguing results. Students were inquisitive in choreographing sequences responding to the particular quality of space and people; a series of mini theatres. These were re-enacted back in the studio, when we discussed the compositions themselves, and their various relationships. The learning from these direct actions and observations formed the food for thoughts and curiosities for their further explorations in the year.

#### 4.2.3 Learning and embedded outcomes

The movement workshop is not a skill workshop; what it values is the transition of the mind by moving, into an awareness of all levels of relations, both intellectually and emotionally, also physically and spatially. It also asks questions about what we often take for granted. The day-to-day studio teaching also encourages direct experience of activating ideas in various manners. In my view, these activities nourish intuitions and physical intelligence, which are essential qualities for future architects. The outcomes from these activities, having become various seeds and foundations, manifest themselves in various indirect and embedded manners in the student works. They may not be necessarily obvious outcomes; rather they become the bones and muscles for creative processes. The performance methodology trains the mind to think, and facilitates transformative learning.

### 5. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Before moving onto the final case study, this section reflects on a number of pedagogical theories that helped me critically contextualise my teaching practice.

As discussed in the above case study 1, the briefs were set out to iterate several cycles of creative process (Cowdroy & Graaff, 2005), so that the learning will be on a double-loop spiral. (Brookbank & McGill 2007) I believe that true understanding comes only from one's own experience. Intuition is an accumulation of experiences that grows capable of spontaneous decision-making, which plays an important role in creativity. (Cowdroy & Williams, 2006) Performance methodology was set up to create situations where students go through subjective experience helping to gain their own perspectives and understanding that brings 'aha' moments. (McGonigal, 2005) It is the means and the work at the same time, in which the performing act works as a process of discovery, simultaneously generating a piece of work. It was hoped for the students to intellectually and emotionally (Brookbank & McGill 2007) claim a committed ownership (Brookbank & McGill 2007) to the resulting ideas and the products. (Cowdroy & Graaff, 2005) The purpose of education, in my belief, is to nurture these attitudes towards their unknown goals, so that the person can think (Cowdroy & Williams, 2006) and work independently with underlying ambition.

Often the process becomes invisible after the completion of a project, especially when the area of study is linked directly to industry where only the end product can bear a value. (Harpe, et al. 2009) This inclination to more vocationally oriented learning objectives and expected outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007) only encourages surface learning (Brookbank & McGill 2007) where 'good looking and feel better' craft based work (Cowdroy & Graaff, 2005) would be valued. In case of architectural education, where the end product stays virtual until it's handed over to the maker of physical final product, (Cowdroy & Williams, 2006) the process and the person (Harpe, et al. 2009) development should be evaluated, to assess whether the student went through transformational learning (McGonigal, 2005) to grow into a professional. If it is person, not the product, we are educating, we need to look at how the person grew.

From Sims (2008), it's interesting that the core ideas for performance practitioners can be read as ones for architecture. It draws from her research that 'Performance discipline is the body in

space and time.’ ‘Developing from that foundation are relationships and interaction, narrative and story telling using creativity, metaphor, visual language.’ Performing act can be an unknown territory for architectural students therefore might be perceived as troublesome (Meyer & Land, 2003). However, as students start to learn from doing (Sims, 2008), there opens a whole new landscape that invites the learner to acquire a new perspective. The paradigm shift (McGonigal, 2005) inevitably gives rise to feeling of fear and confusion as it challenges unconscious assumption. As McGonigal (2005) states, being forced to consider, evaluate, and revise one’s underlying assumptions can be an emotionally charged experience, and this is the key process for facilitating transformative learning. (McGonigal, 2005)

## 6. TALES FROM THE WOODS

The final section of the paper discusses the whole making process of an event that took place at the AA on the occasion of its 176th anniversary celebration.

### 6.1 Context: AA’s Legacy of Performance

A strong thread of performance and event-based projects has run through the history of education at the AA since the 19th Century. The projects ranged from satirical drama productions, anarchist happenings, carnivals, multi-media events, presentations and open reviews, to the work of specific units under teachers such as Bernard Tschumi and Nigel Coates. Mining the resources at the AA, there are countless numbers of drawings, texts, photographs and documents that richly illustrate its legacy. We can trace how performance has been acting as a pedagogical tool, driving educational and academic motivations. The exemplary projects presented valuable opportunities from which the students learnt first-hand. These projects were not extra-curriculum, but the main body of work that constituted architectural proposals, and were assessed and marked at the end of the year. There were also self-organised student activities such as lyric club, drama club, and various theatrical plays and events.

In the last 20 years or so, however, these opportunities were mostly handed over to external professionals who were hired to provide entertainment for various celebratory occasions. In the backgrounds were, as I understand, students’ busier life with heavier demands on production of works, in relation to the shift in educational approaches in contemporary architectural context. This was coinciding with the advancement of digital technology that escalated the expectation of the rate and quality of productions and outcomes.

The strong motivation, therefore, to realise an event of a significant scale was to reintroduce AA’s legacy of performance as a pedagogical model, while experimenting with the new possibilities of performance-driven process in architectural education.

Coincidentally, the AA started celebrating its birthdays annually for the first time in 2013 - since its very start in 1847. This provided a perfect opportunity to host a school-wide event inviting guests from all corners of the world. Brett Steele, the AA director, supported my proposal, and the project has kicked off.

### 6.2 The Process Overview

The ambition of the project was to reintroduce the AA’s legacy of theatre and performance with a contemporary twist – by transforming the Georgian buildings comprising the AA’s home into an immersive theatre for one night only on Friday 10 October 2014 for its 167th Anniversary. The core design team of AA students past and present, myself included as director, worked throughout the process from the concept idea to the delivery of the event. Starting with choreographic workshops in early summer, the team learnt first hand from theatre and dance professionals, then applied what we learnt straight over to the planning of expansive event programme and spatial schemes, as well as publicity strategy. The team developed and tested early ideas of scenarios and performances, while discussing every detail of the theatrical experience that we wanted to share with the guests. The team resumed after

the summer to finalise the event details, then immediately started making the spatial installations, while intensively rehearsing performance routines and music. The team was also joined by 60 first year students, as well as the construction team. As new academic year started, the challenge against time, spatial and logistical constraints were beyond what we imagined. Finally, with the dedicated team effort and indispensable supports of the AA staff from various departments, the AA was transformed into an internal forest where the series of performances unfolded amongst various theatrical settings. Our determination to make it happen was rewarded with an amazing audience responses, possibly the biggest number of guests that the AA has ever seen in one night, and the celebration continued into the early hours...

### 6.3 The Educational Intention

The teaching methodology that I had been developing was put to the ultimate test during the above process. The opportunity afforded me to experiment with various aspects of merging the choreographic methods and architectural project ideas. Thanks to the enormous contributions from the workshop leaders who are all leading professionals in theatre and dance, the team members bravely ventured into new territories with an acute learning curve, with such a sense of joy and creativity. As anticipated, members quickly developed trust to each other by moving collectively, and valued each strength and personalities into the project ideas. The team shared the vision with dedication and enthusiasm towards realising the project ideal and the target date that we had to meet.

### 6.4 'Tales from the Woods' the Event

Right from the beginning of the project in early summer, our aim was to alter the familiar into a physically augmented space to disorientate, and to host wonders of experience. Trees from Hooke Park, the AA's Dorset woodland campus, were transported into the AA's home of 36 Bedford Square, providing an intriguing environment for the performance and happenings to take place. Undeniably beautiful, yet powerfully alien within the Georgian interior space, the trees' presence instantly transformed our perception of the familiar. Attention to detail was also important to sustain the constructed views of the world: each space was altered by varied spatial installations as 'forest', 'meadows', 'trails', 'cabins', and 'belvedere'... all connected by sound via AA Radio, with theatrical lighting adding ambience, complete with the smell of the forest lingering throughout; each element contributing to creating the theatre of 'Tales from the Woods'.

The sequence of event was carefully programmed and repeatedly rehearsed within time and spatial constraints. The Birthday team and the first year cohort were the inhabitants of the Woods enticing the audience with fragmented stories throughout the evening. Guests encountered choreographed sequences, traveling music, spot drama with character works, and dining performance and more; all variously layered in time and space, while the AA's prodigious musical talents staged further enjoyment.

However, the dominant factor of the evening, it turned out, was the mass of bodies and energy of the guests occupying everywhere. The success of the evening meant that the woodland almost diminished within the sea of crowd; an interesting sense of reversal by inhabitation. As the evening unfolded as live one-night ephemera, the team of performers negotiated ever-shrinking space for movement, adopting and improvising, chance encounters taken to the extremes. A strong presence was also the strange white bodies of the first year students, who superbly designed and crafted the white costumes, performed lively and bravely amongst the crowd, enhancing the sense of celebration.



Fig.1 Views from 'The Tales from the Woods' AA's 167th Anniversary Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, United Kingdom  
Reference: Photographed by Zac Carey, 10 October 2014

The project witnessed nothing short of the process of architecture, from the conception to materialisation, even completed with demolition. In the early summer in June, the team developed ideas and visions through intensive choreographic workshops, discussed how to deliver them as realities. Battling with the constraints, the space came alive, then altered by inhabitation, while all the original intentions resonating in the Woods. Then the whole thing disappeared in a blink of an eye. The Woods now only exist in the minds of the residents of the night, also in the scenes shared via recorded evidences. The ephemera are here to stay with us even after the physical architecture is no longer.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Choreographically-driven design process in architectural education

- A. Provokes explorations in inherent architectural design concerns and motivations
- B. Questions the way we habitually know and do in architectural design process
- C. Initiates change
- D. Re-position the body as the conscious vehicle for architectural exploration and experimentation
- E. Values the creative process itself
- F. Promotes awareness in the relationships, dynamics and tensions between mind, body, space, and its context
- G. Facilitates collaborative minds who can work creatively as a team, generating a sense of responsibility and a sense of community
- H. Motivates active commitment and healthy ownership of projects
- I. Facilitates transformative learning where rational and analytical reflections as well as emotional intelligence are challenged and nurtured

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