Architecture and Embodyment
by Helle Brabrand

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Architecture and embodment designates my artistic development works in which body, space and movement interact.

These works are impelled by architectural passion immediately linked with a sense of movement. I see the kinaesthetic sense as a determining dimension in the space generating power of imagination, directly distended by my own body or visualised in other movements – in a dancing body, for instance, or in a procedural gesture.

Gesture movement is a key concept for my work. In a statement summarised from *Gestus* by Francois Lyotard[1], 'a work of art is a distortion – a twist of a bodily object in a bodily object – a twisted gesture presenting itself because the work demands that the body sensuously, ie. in its own space/time/matter, witnesses that it does not belong to this space/time/matter'.

The following pages present material from two of my projects *spacebody actual virtual* and *mixed movements in the composition plane*. Each project appears as an open composition plane interweaving the turnings of creation with body-space's own fields of movement – the non-homogeneous forces and logics of the material exchange across the ways of how we empirically know the body-space phenomena and events of the world.

The projects, each in its own manner, draw the spectator into the sensuous and comprehension-based experience of the composition plane: via the film and the animation format of *spacebody* and as interactive game in *mixed movements*. *Spacebody actual virtual* is a work that is fully finalised based on the bodily movements as consciously expressed in the dance, created and presented in the form of a video. *Mixed movements in the composition plane* is a piece of work-in-progress that is being developed based on the 'subconscious' bodies of everyday life.

Both projects are artistic development works under the research plan for the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, Institute 1, Copenhagen, Denmark.

The work as procedural gesture

Any work of art is a unique offer for exchange of values. A work of art lets 'being become presentation'[2] and any art form contributes with its unique field of values and presentation forms. The field of architecture is the 'habitation' of space – the field is about dynamic dimensions such as our notion of and sensuous absorption of space. One of the potentials of architectural development work is that it can focus and present these dimensions – it can present specific architectural reflections and architectural expressions at the same time and thus open up to questions about being at other levels than that of a building or a building-focused project.

In the following I will approach the meaning of the procedural gesture from a supplementary angle, with reference to *New Philosophy for New Media* by Mark B. Hansen.[3]

MBH uses the word 'affectivity' to describe the impact of the sensory-motor system of the body in which affectivity designates the intensities generated within the 'reflective' of self-affection. Affectivity is controlled by the sensations and movements arising through the perception of outer stimuli and acts as an apperceptive meter with an ability to integrate 'prostheses' in the motor apparatus thus expanding the action repertoire of the body.

MBH combines the bodily action mode of self-affection and the impact on the perception with the procedural mode of 'the digital image' tied to bodily activity. He refers to new media art as a field that to an increasing degree focuses on the body's procedural framing of data using the computer as an embodied prosthesis that lets us experience movement proper. The computer functions as 'a visual instrument to view form in time' where seeing means calculating with your body – internalise connections between process and perception and correlating them to an infinity of inner rhythms and cycles. As an example one of the works of new media art delves into the spectator's perceptual jumps between the various media interfaces and the image presentation at varying levels of reality. The spectator is able to interweave the non-homogeneous techniques and images only by intuitively perceiving that the ability to delimit information is the very origin of the inner or affectively experienced values that on a concrete level are outside; in the structure of the work. The work unfolds the 'operational value' of the digital as a trigger of the transspatial synthesis in a manner that exposes the virtual as an inherent feature of the self-affective body.

Footnotes

1. Lyotard J-F. 1992 *Gestus.* Det Kongelige danske Kunstakademi, Copenhagen.
2. Gadamer H-G. 2004 *Sandhed og metode.* Systime, Copenhagen.
3. Hansen M.B. 2004 *New Philosophy for New Media.* MIT Press Cambridge, MA.

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SPACEBODY ACTUAL VIRTUAL

The project is created in collaboration with Jytte Kjøbek, choreographer. The work is published as a video on the DVD *Spacebody actual virtual;* architecture: Helle Brabrand, choreography: Jytte Kjøbek, music: Gert Sørensen, dance: Mette Bødtcher.

And published in the form of reflections in text and notations at the website: www.spacebody.dk.

Publication is in progress at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, *Arkitektskolens Forlag,* Copenhagen.

Spacebody crosses the embodyments of body and space. Although architecture and dance share a common ground – body and space – each of the two art forms integrates only one of the two as its primary and conscious substance of expression. From an architectural and a choreographic point of view this fact is challenged – *Spacebody* dissolves the contradiction by sliding between conscious and subconscious forces of movement and mixing architectural and choreographic figures of perception and creation.

The video *spacebody actual virtual* gathers body-space-movements as event in which the rhythm and materiality of the images functions as immediate links to the spectator's self-affective reaction. The experience becomes part of the composition plane's production of new mediated body-spaces with their own rules and opportunities; a dancing body that animates space and an architectural space that meters and visualises the kin-aesthetic energy of the body. At the same time the video explores the various levels of movement and consciousness. The format of the film combines recordings of the analogue movements of the body with computerised editing of the bodily substance and construction and animation of architectural space – the combined media opens up to exploration and sensualisation of relations between concrete and imagined movements and creation of space.

The text and notations of the project reflect and discuss the movement material in interchange with the creation of the film. At the same time the material is presented in its own right as a *mapping* of movement forces presented in non-identical series of space figures, a *composition* of figures organised in diagrams that put movements into resonance, and a *presentation* of body, space- and image movements collected and mediated in the timeline of the film.

Scenarios

Frames from the film on opposite page. The rows of frames relate two and two to the text below and to the following pages 4–9. The upper parts of the pages show frames from the film, the lower parts show notations from the project 'text'. The following text offers three directions of reading across the film and the sequences:

1) Movement in and between the phenomena of body and space of the project.

p. 58 and 59: Ordinary movements performed by the body – the body gets up, walks about and 'throw-out' power lines that the contours of the space is wraped about successively. Subsequently, the space is set into motion with light from varying angles – the light spaces animate the body to dance in a dialogue with the changing figures and tones of the spaces.

p. 60 and 61: The human body is 'split up' by the structural body – the human body reacts by doubling its orientations.

p. 62 and 63: The body- and space figures pulsate unadjusted. The project material is read again and restructured – potentially a new series of body-space exchanges starts.

2) Movement as a sign of the compositional and choreographic figures of the project:

p. 58 and 59: The progress of ordinary bodily movements is drawn as a gathering track controlling the space contour.

In addition, sequences of movement positions are drawn as lines that interchange with the articulation of spaces of contours and light.

p. 60 and 61: Figures are generated by the turning of the space.

Also the gathering track is restructured into signs governing the structural body – the gathering tracks of bodily movements are transformed into the split-up mass of the structural body – the human body draws 'its movement' as the other body of the structure.

p. 62 and 63: Figures are generated by the turning of the body.

In addition, the figures produced by the drawing process are challenged – drawings and signs are explored and re-displayed as several series, each articulated with minor differences.

3) Movement as shifts in visual angels and modes of presentation gathered in the exchange between the filmic image and the spectator.

p. 58 and 59: Body and space seen from the same permanent visual angel, with the space conventionally drawn up as plan, section and perspective – only the scales relating to body and space change.

p. 60 and 61: The split-up structural body is seen from the outside towards the structural body and the human body and from within from the changing visual angles of the human body. At the same time the human body is seen in a double view, at two speeds and orientations.

p. 62 and 63: Various material from the project is seen as a sampling of various visual angles, image processing and ways of drawing. The material is viewed intermixed in unadjusted exchanges that create their very own rhythms and figures, open to new interpretations.
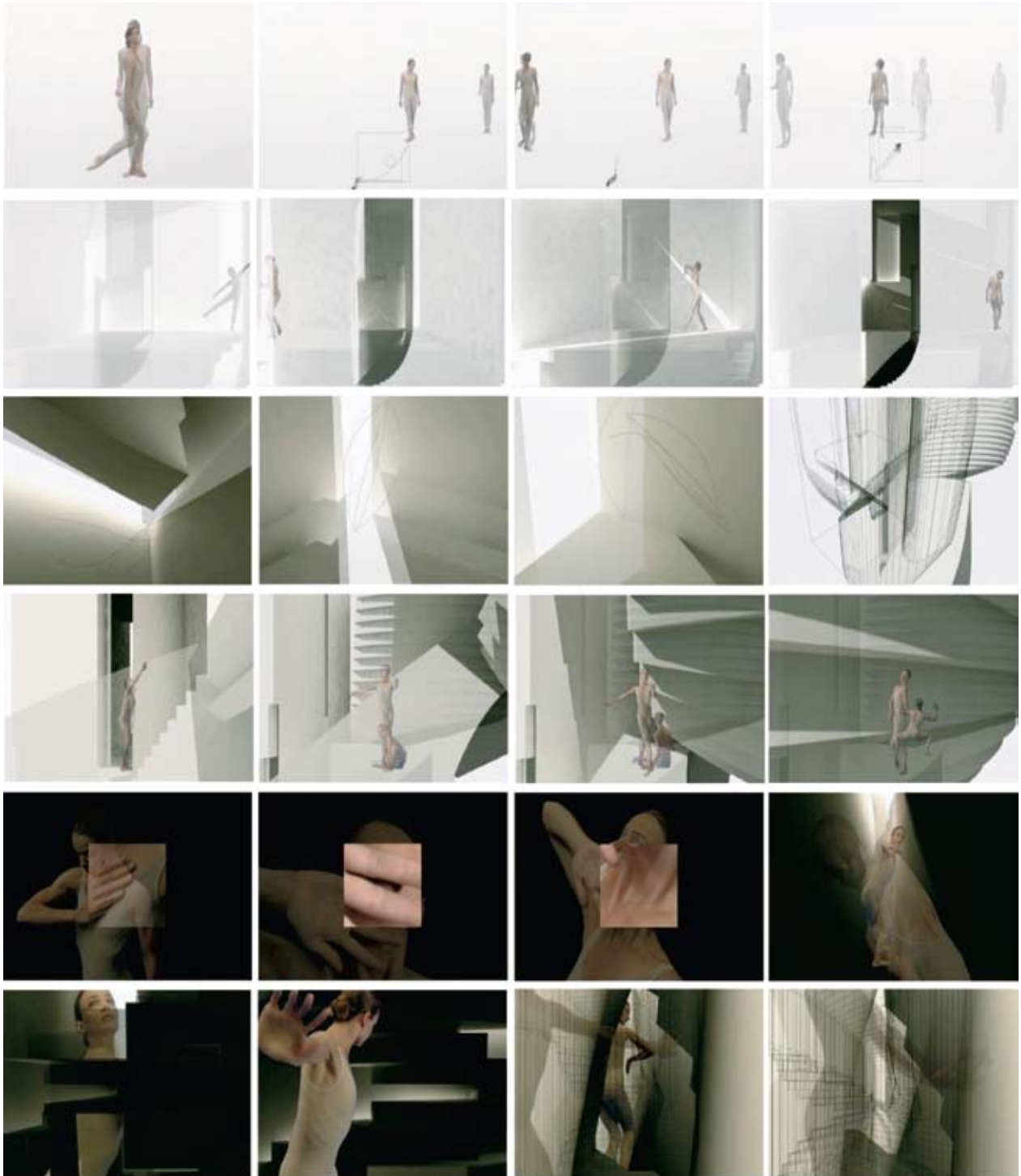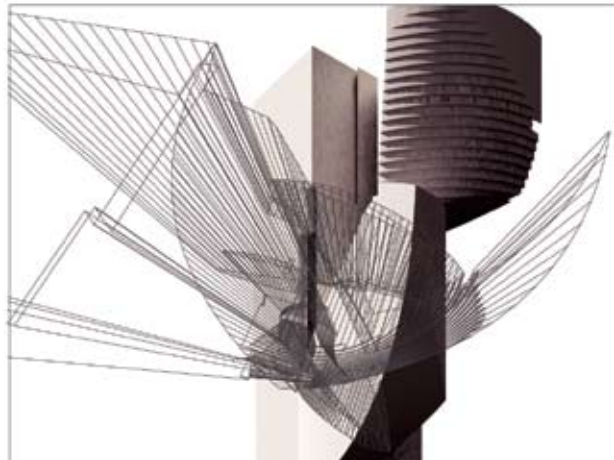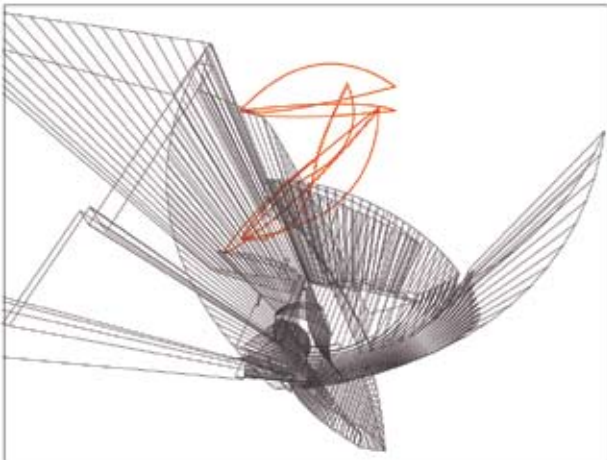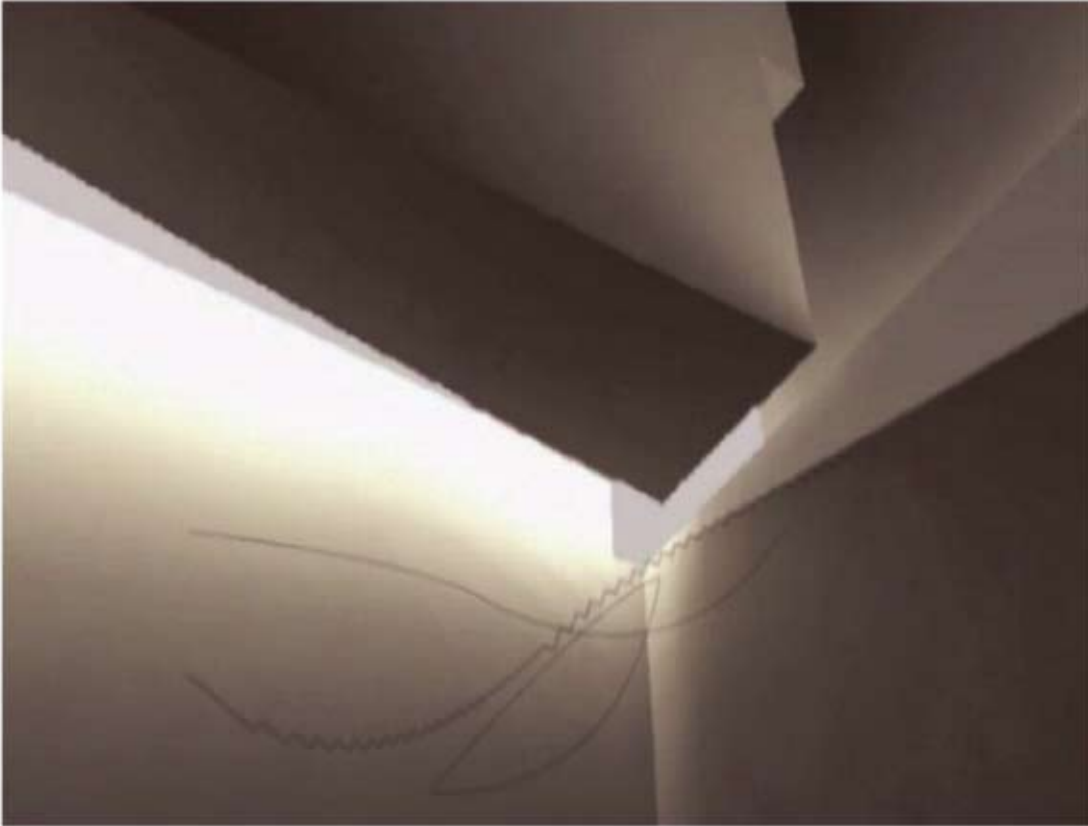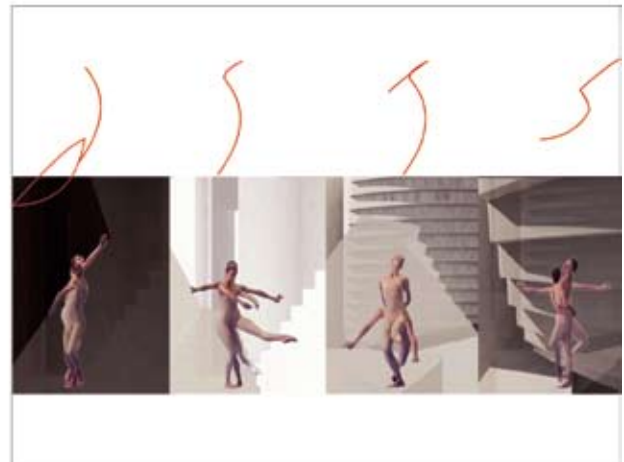
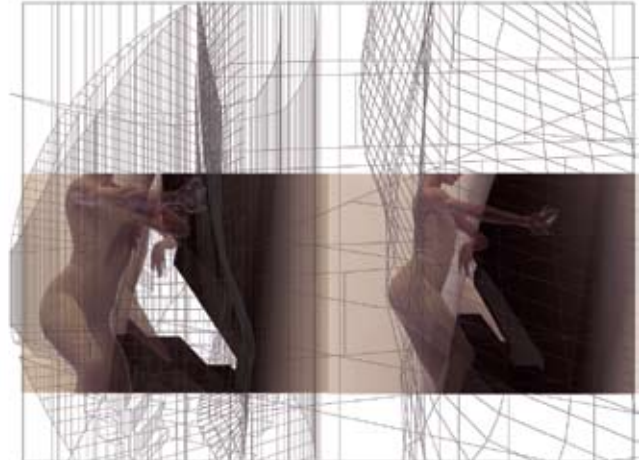Spacebody actual virtual – frames from the video
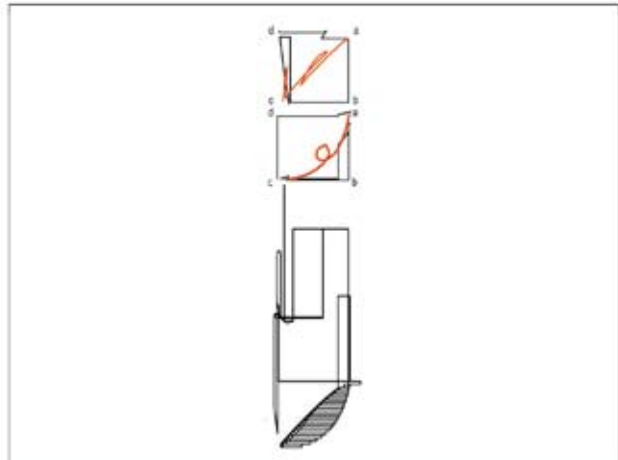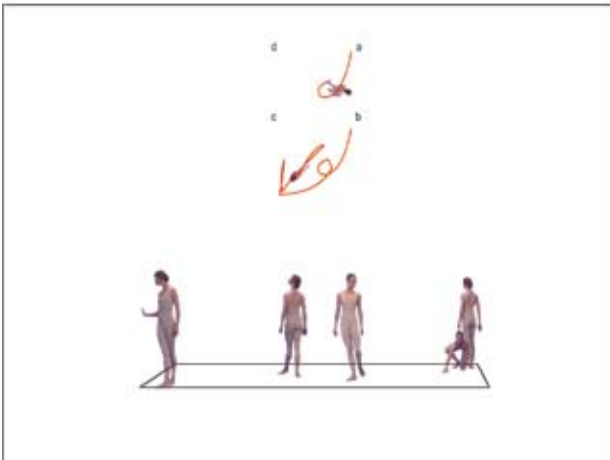
Spacebody actual virtual – frame from the video, notations
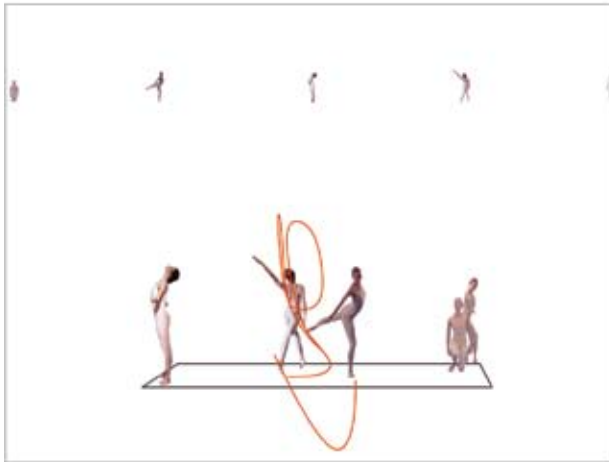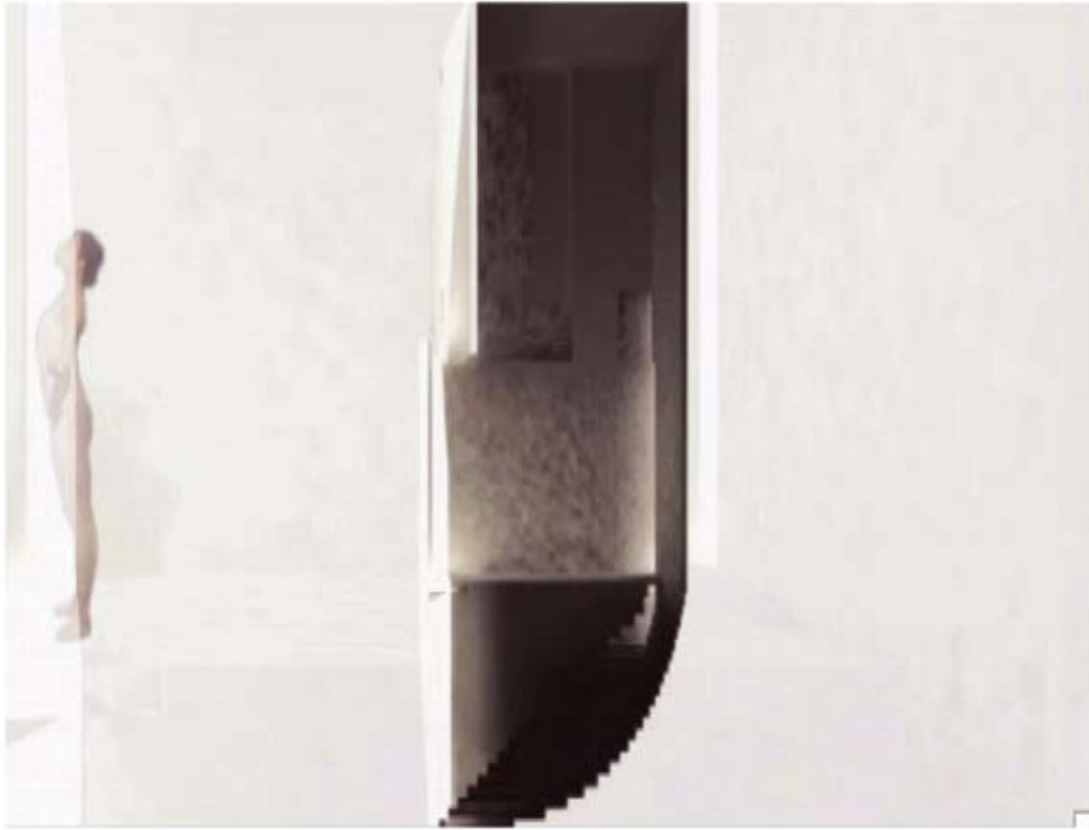
Spacebody actual virtual – frame from the video, notations

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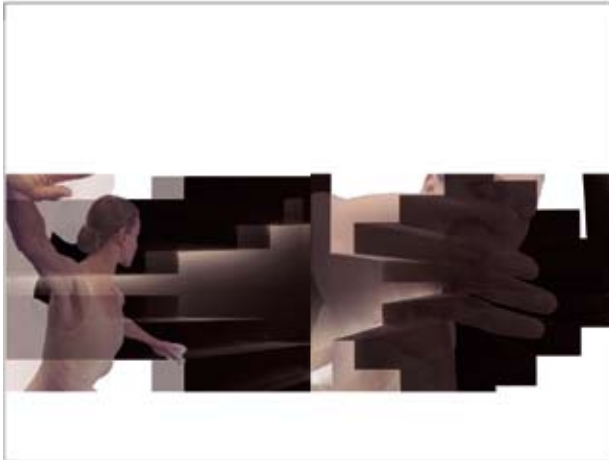
Spacebody actual virtual – frame from the video, notations

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MIXED MOVEMENTS IN THE COMPOSITION PLANE

This project is developed in a collaborative effort with Jacob Kirkegaard, audio artist, and Niels Damsgaard, architect and computer games developer. The project is work-in-progress. The materials displayed are working models that neither represent the appearance of the finished project nor a fully developed strategy. The project at this stage will be published as a 'teaser'.

Mixed movements starts as an everyday bodily movement. This movement is positioned in the composition plane, organised as a space machine. As its format the project uses the 'game engine' of the computer game with its potential for intuitive dissemination of the sensuous movement of the body and for intelligent' communication between non-homogeneous perspectives and sensuous fields.

The plot of the project makes the player active in the creation of the game spaces. The game compels the participant to exchange and compose, control and surrender to a number of 'opposing' architectural conditions, exposed via actual and virtual movements in the composition plane of the game.

A computer game is structured as a vertical assemblage of sound and space elements/game spaces and modes of action and presentation/interface features. And as a horizontal assemblage of the player's movements in and of elements, determined by rules that launch interpretations constantly back-tracking into the game in the form of new or altered points of departure.

In *mixed movements* elements are organised in varying levels of creation and as varying layers of presentation. The elements are both architectural components and 'external' layers of sound and images. Player movements are organised in actual and virtual ways of moving by action rules designed as operative diagrams. The player is always active in several dimensions at the same time – crossing between levels or operating at the same level between layers of nonidentical tools and view points.

Setup

Outlines for setup on opposite page. The game is organised based on a forward progressive bodily movement. The movement is video recorded and transformed into animated geometries that are cut and selected, e.g. in an 18–38 cut, decoded and signcoded as a rhythm of topological figures drawn into the cuts. The topology slides between introvertly and extrovertly focused forces, compiled in two series, so far denoted the 'eye se-ries' and the 'ear series'. The topological figures are given 'depth' (distance between cut-frames) as markers of movement and function as open maps of components and attractors. In parallel with this a series of 'sound topologies' is being developed.

The eye series, which is generated in the form of sequences, cut figures 24, 25, 28 and 30, starts the game at component level. The components are developed via a reintroduction of the forward progressive bodily movement, now seen as varying relations between body/movement and demarcation/contour. The introduction gives rise to a field of strategies as variables of movement-contour open to transformation.

The ear series is generated as varying contractions of cut figures 18–24 and starts the game at attractor level. At present the development of this series is not as far advanced as the eye series.

Scenarios

The eye series – outlined in elements in three conditions 1, 2 and 3, p. 66:

Condition 1: The player enters into a rhythm of recognizable and transformed movements and randomly selects his starting position and figure – e.g. component 25: right-left/mirroring.

Layer 1: 25 is seen as a proto component, as a mask, a split front coupled with topos figure and 'grid'. The player can deform the grid trappings sideways until movement and surfaces constitute a simple sign of 25's gathering-splitting condition – the sign gives the player access to 25 as a component in full 3D.

Layer 2: Film sequence, split-up, is part of the player's work with the sign and a effect of the conditions sliding between 2D and 3D.

Condition 2: The player moves about in component 25.

Layer 1: The component transformed to flux component – when the player visits 'ambiguous places' she teases the component to fluctuate between 25–24, 25–28 and 25–30. These fluctuations push the player about – the player cannot make up her mind as to which of various strategies to choose, then takes a 'firm' stand and releases a diagram for e.g. cross component 25–24.

Layer 2: Film sequence transformed to material effects.

Condition 3: The player activates cross component 25–24.

Layer 1: The diagram for cross component 25–24 shows 25–24 as 'movement object', modulated with 25–24 as form generator and 24 as movement generator.

Layer 2: Split-up film sequence transformed by the movement mode of 24 are an integral part of the diagram. The player may operate in the image plane, stop the movement object and access it as a 3D cross component.

Condition 4: Via the turns performed by the cross component the player may enter the new domain of component 24.
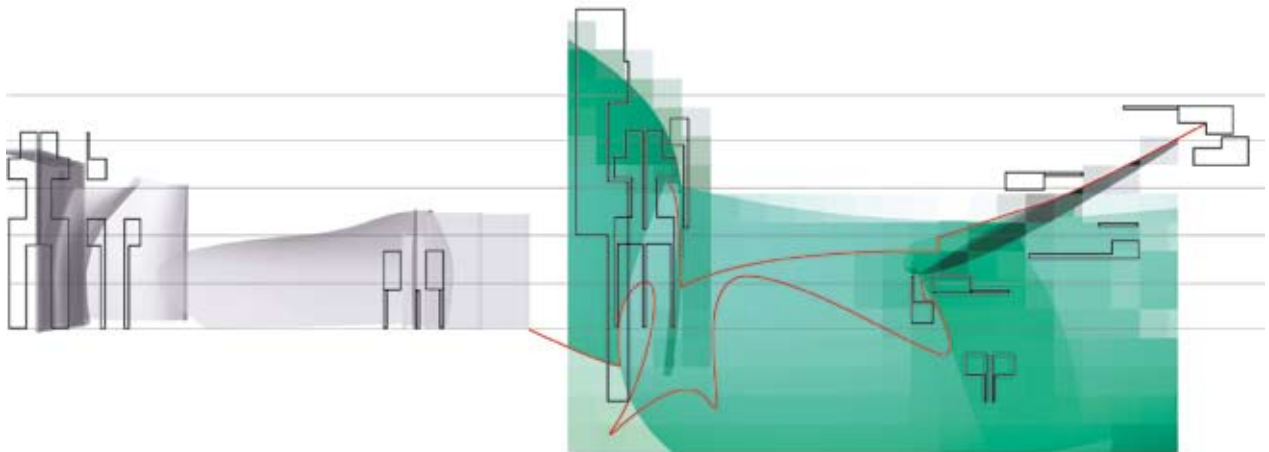
Ear series – outlined p. 67: Ear topology and attractor/'worm hole' unfolded as an affective diagram, i.e. layers and archives of sounds, images, and signs. The player may draw up 'escape lines' and local 'proto places'.

18   19   20   21   22   24   25   28   30   38
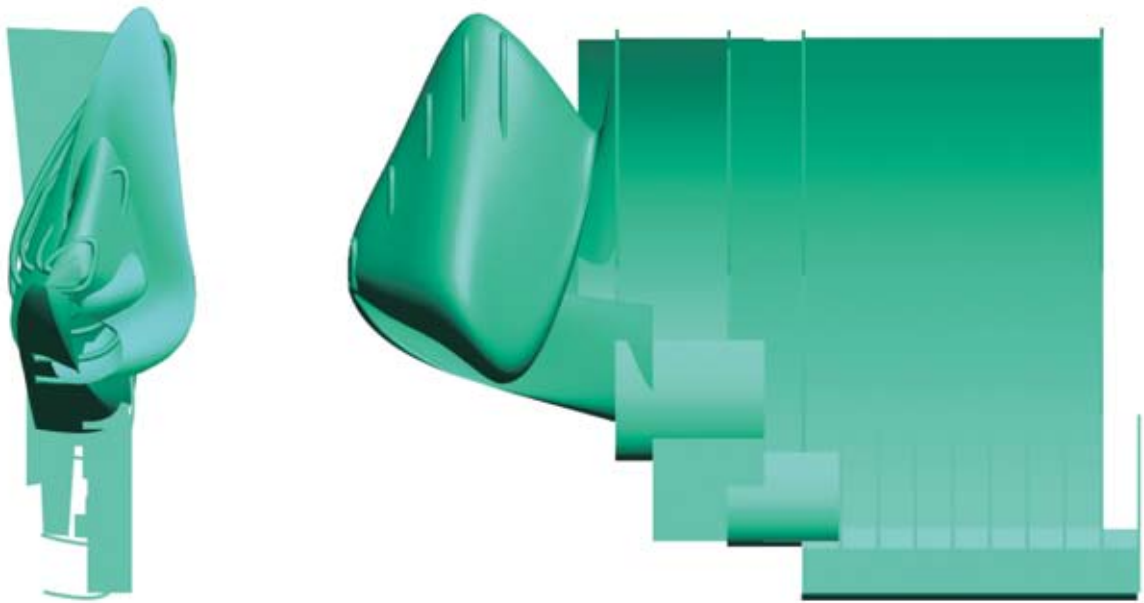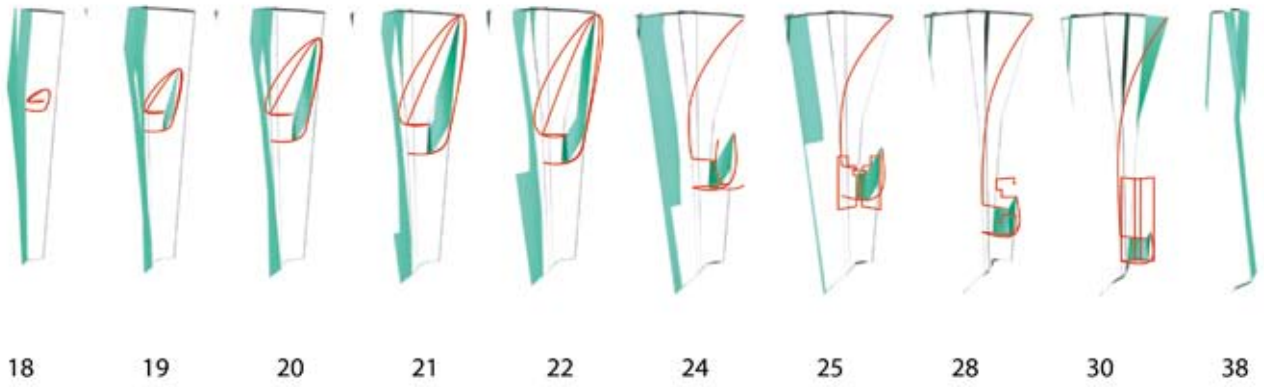
Mixed Movement – setup
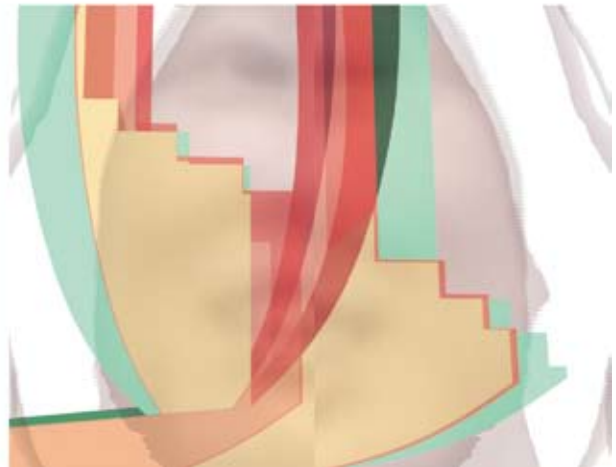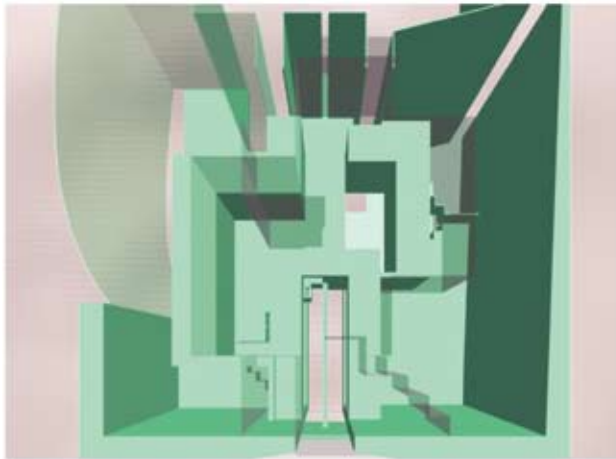
Mixed Movement – proto-component 25, component 25, flux-component 25–24 and diagram cross-component 25–24

Mixed Movement – topology/attractor, affective diagram