





Image from *Spawn/The Changing Room* by Dr Carol Brown completed as part of her AHRB Research Fellowship. Photograph by Mattias EK

**Anatomies and architecture:  
Choreographing the body within  
new architectural models of space**

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The concept of an ideal city, as an integral part of civic life based on humanistic principles of architecture and scientific naturalism, has been considered in the past by thinkers such as Vitruvius, Leon Baptista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci. This idea is still relevant, as experts question how to bring people and architecture together to study how the human body fits into its surroundings and the impact this has upon culture.

Dr Carol Brown of Roehampton University received an AHRB Research Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts to undertake research into how the city can be communicated via the body, through collaborations with experts in the fields of architecture and computer science.

Dr Brown, who is based at the University's Centre for Dance, has wide experience of the interplay between performance and the environment. During the fellowship

her research has led to the creation of six performative pieces which challenge traditional choreographic ideals. For example, in *Nerve Chamber*, she collaborated with architect Stewart Dodd to contest the conventions of a dance surface as a flat plane through a forty minute duet performed between two surfaces, an asphalt 'road' and a suspended mesh skin. This was accompanied by the film, *The Idea of Sea*, created with video artist Tobin Rothlein, which uses various modes of transport, such as skateboarding, subway, train and car to explore the surfaces of the city.

Another piece, *Spawn*, resulted in the invention of a unique interactive stage, which has attracted wide media interest. A camera tracking system interprets the physical presence of a performer, statistical data generated by this system is used to kinetically model a virtual dance partner. The interface examines the sense of presence in the virtual environment through experiments with live dancers. This was another collaborative project, involving Professor Bernard Buxton, Head of the Vision Imaging and Virtual Environment Group at University College

London, and architect Mette Ramsgard Thomsen of the University of Brighton.

Dr Brown also draws the audience into her projects, for example through the installation *Tower of Touch*, in which the audience is led through a tall wrapped stairway into an 'anatomical theatre' where the performance is viewed by peering through a narrow slot. This work was created in collaboration with architects from the School of Art and Design, Massey University, New Zealand and the Prague Institute for Global Urban Development.

"As a practicing choreographer it is important to find environments which support and sustain the long-term level of activity required to maintain the focus of research and creation", says Dr Brown. "The AHRB fellowship has enabled me to evolve a radically new approach to making and performing, consolidating the curve of creation and providing opportunities for me to make a significant contribution to academic dance scholarship and professional practice, particularly around questions of methodology for practical research, interdisciplinarity and collaboration."