

# Editorial

## Body, Space, Architecture

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The relationship between body and architecture is substantial. It can be regarded as the principle according to which the design of habitability is connected to that of the body living and relating in space. The body moves in the surrounding space and, in addition to figuring itself as a biological and natural presence, it is configured to all those meanings that correspond to it. In fact, space, as well as being architectural, can be social, cultural, institutional, and political. And so can the body.

About the involvement and reconnection of the body with architectural design, Maurizio Vitta, a historian and theorist of architecture and design, refers us to the principle of “habitability”:

*The dwelling tells the story of the inhabitant, draws the figure of the inhabitant, represents the inhabitant before others and for others to the extent that it is shaped by those who inhabit it. The way of shaping the architectural environment through the use of space, the distribution of furnishings, the choice of furniture and furnishings, the subtle hierarchy imposed on objects, the patterns of use of utensils, the laborious selection of images, are so many narratives of a personality that is inscribed, mostly unconsciously, in the domestic environment in order to be reflected in it. (Vitta, 2008, p. 27)*

Beginning with Vitruvius, classical thought emphasized the correspondence between the body and the architectural complex as an example of beauty and harmony. The *homo bene figuratus* becomes a canon of perfection, in which the concepts of measure and proximity correspond. Similarly, Le Corbusier’s Modulor has affected modern culture not only in terms of the correspondence of the body’s distance in space but especially regarding the conception of a mode of measurement stemming from the body itself.

The identity relationship between space and *Leib* is consequential; architecture lends itself to the reasons of the living body, a body that is not reduced solely to physical presence but also includes a set of symbolic and pragmatic meanings: “Very roughly speaking for the moment, Körper denotes the physical body as object, while Leib typically signifies the lived, feeling body or the body as intentionality or subject” (Shusterman, 2010, p. 207). The pragmatic value of the body is reflected in its improvement, and in this regard, the distinction that Richard Shusterman introduces regarding *soma* and the body is evident:

*Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it. If we put aside traditional philosophical prejudice against the body and instead simply recall philosophy's central aims of knowledge, self-knowledge, right action, and its quest for the good life, then the philosophical value of somaesthetics should become clear in several ways. (Shusterman, 1999, p. 302)*

The key to understanding Somaesthetics is in is in the enhanced quality of life that is achieved through the enhancement of valuing of the body. This dynamic, according to Shusterman, also applies to the relationship between *soma* and architecture: “If architecture is the articulation of space for the purposes of enhancing our living, dwelling, and experience, then the soma provides the most basic tool for all spatial articulation by constituting the point from which space can be seen and articulated” (Shusterman, 2011, p. 288). Architecture, beginning with the soma, can be conceived as a necessary tool for the improvement of our lives—visual coordinates, depth, verticality, size, gestures, and the relationship with our surroundings are all features aimed at being able to improve the quality of habitability and thus of being (Shusterman, 2011, pp. 288–290). In addition to these, there are real identifications in which *soma* is reflected in the structure of the building; in fact, to be qualitatively appreciable, a building must be appreciated for its beauty and function—must ideologically represent a space—and so must the body (Shusterman, 2023).

There is a correspondence between somatic conditions and architecture, and increasingly architects and designers are using this relationship to highlight people's use of shared and private spaces. In recent years, discussion has developed about the somatic use and experience of spaces, particularly in the city, but also of objects and private spaces. In this regard, Shusterman has often dwelt on these issues by addressing the issue of Somaesthetics as a principle that can be used in design and architectural projects. At the International Conference organized at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow in 2021, “Body and Public Space,” he presented a lecture entitled “Soma as and in Space: Public and Private.” In 2022, he presented a lecture entitled “Somaesthetics and Design” at the Cyprus University of Technology (Department of Fine Arts); and in 2023, he delivered a talk entitled “Soma and Space” at the International Conference organized by the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna dedicated to “The Historical City as a Critical Reference and Role Model for Innovative Urban and Metropolitan Development.”

The interest on the part of engineers, architects, and planners in general has been increasingly directed toward this dialogue, in which the *soma* acquires a double value, as follows: 1) that of experience in relation to the perceived reality and 2) that of the pragmaticity in relation to the reality to be built. It is with this in mind that the idea of dedicating this issue to the relationship between the body, space, and architecture was born. Indeed, the body and architecture dialogue through the concept of space, which is declined in increasingly transdisciplinary ways.

Indeed, in the contributions, we find many keywords such as city, experience, soma, gesture, relationship, urbanism, built, environment, and virtual. In fact, the distribution of articles is based on the multidisciplinary encounter and experimental reading of the relationship between *soma* and urban, private, and virtual spaces.

The argument of the body as a relationship between emotional experience and architecture is the focus of the article “Motion and Emotion: Understanding Urban Architecture through Diverse Multisensorial Engagements” by Tenna D. O. Tvedebrink, Lars B. Fich, Elisabetta Canepa, Zakaria Djebbara, Asbjørn C. Carstens, Dylan Chau Huynh, and Ole B. Jensen. The authors consider some experiences located in Budolfi Square in downtown Aalborg in northern Denmark. In addition to the livability of Budolfi Square, this paper addresses a very interesting proposal—that of using a *body-centered approach* to analyze the relationship between human body sensations and the urban context. The article also presents a discussion of the relationship between somaesthetics and architecture, in which the authors focus on the *living body* as theorized by Shusterman and the elaboration of Neuro-Architecture—that is, the *empathic* experience—from a neurophysiological background. The moving body, in this way, becomes the object not only through the theorizing but also through the planning of living spaces. The experiential approach to architecture is at the center of the discussion.

Lukáš Makky’s paper “Aesthetic, Somatic, and Somaesthetic Experience of the City” emphasizes the somatic and aesthetic aspects of the experience of the city. In fact, Makky argues, like Shusterman, that architecture provides the framework for experience. The body is always the starting point, but in this case, the direct references are to John Dewey and Walter Benjamin regarding an aesthetic sensibility capable of experiencing. All the inhabitants of a city can consider themselves involved in the aesthetic experience of the everyday. Similarly, the experience of the city can be considered from the *somatic* point of view—that is, through the living body. Makky, at the end of his argument, inserts the case study of Alcazaba, the Phoenician fortress in Malaga on which the city’s strong identity—and consequently the experiences that could be created—depend.

In addition to the topic of aesthetic experience, this issue makes apparent two other aspects—that of inclusive design and that of digital change in new conceptions of virtual reality (VR) spaces. In Mark Tschaepé’s essay “Somaesthetics of Discomfort and Wayfinding: Encouraging Inclusive Architectural Design,” the object of analysis is the body’s orientation within cities and public spaces, often directed by satellite navigators. Tschaepé highlights the sense of discomfort and anxiety at the moment we lose our orientation in an unfamiliar place. In this regard, he uses discomfort as a starting point to be developed through somaesthetics, with a view to better orienting people in a city. That discomfort not only makes it possible to design, through somaesthetics, better spaces, such as hospitals, where discomfort is related to a physiological need or lack, and garages, as in the case of orientation.

VR is another area showing the applicability of somaesthetics in the design and perceptual fields. In Jessica Fiala’s essay, “Sensing the Virtual: Atmosphere and Somaesthetics in VR,”

interest lies in the new avenues that virtual application offers to the realms of atmosphere and the body, moving simultaneously in both real and virtual space. Indeed, the sensation of space amplifies our perceptions, bringing the place of the virtual closer to concreteness. In the studio projects of Design I/O (<https://www.design-io.com>), Fiala emphasizes the designers' interest in creating a virtual environment capable of simultaneous interaction with the virtual body and the physical body. In this way, the proprioceptive aspects of somaesthetics are stimulated by two conditions—the programmed and the instantaneous. Another very interesting example is the documentary *Munduruku: The Fight to Defend the Heart of the Amazon* made by the Munduruku community in 2017. With this film, the audience is immersed in the Amazon basin via the reconstruction of the sensory elements of the Amazon rainforest that are appreciable in different booths. Here, the five senses are stimulated by smells, noises, lights, and materials that augment the virtual reality and vice versa.

Complementing these contributions are two *essays* and an *artistic statement*, which emphasize the importance of an artistic and pragmatist analysis of the relationship between somaesthetics and built, political, and design environments. The topics of these pieces are based on somaesthetic involvement, which is analyzed through specific contexts, including soundscape, design, and politics. In architecture, in fact, the importance of sound or silence is often argued; the issue of hearing has been researched several times in the fields of atmosphere and architecture (Zumthor, 2006). In this regard, the paper by Bálint Veres, “Notes on the Aural Aspects of Built Environment,” connects the built environment with the acoustic dimension. Here, the multisensory dimension of the *kinesphere* cannot be excluded in the design world. Veres offers a reflection regarding our sensations and perceptions of architectural and artistic environments, capable of considering acoustics as a physical term.

In this way, the art world has increasingly used the sphere of somaesthetics, and Bartłomiej Struzik offers an *artistic statement* exposing a new configuration of somactive art in his contribution “Is Space Recognizing a Form? A Contributory Study for the Theory of Somactive Art.” The subject of his exposition is that of sculptural art connected to places, which together create and restore memory. Moreover, the movement of the body in space amplifies the identity recognition of space. The materiality of sculpture, in this context, can do two things: in the case of the artist, one can recognize oneself in the act of creation; in the case of the audience, one can recognize the identity of what is created.

In addition to artistic performativity and fruition, in built environments, some contexts relate back to somaesthetic involvement. For instance, gesture is a form of expression and communication but also a symbolization in political and social realms. Pradeep A. Dhillon, in *Architectural Gestures in International Relations*, manages to provide a careful analysis of the gestural relationship with established forms of expression in the embassies of Belgium and the United States in New Delhi, India, and Finland in Canberra, Australia. The somatic dimension of the Wittgensteinian gesture is not only the signification of the architectural project but also of what happens *somatically* in the configuration of the project itself. Dhillon's reference to

Wittgenstein is inspired by Kantian transcendental idealism, in which the function of the body is no longer to be considered solely as a *medium* but also as a *bonding* element, a network capable of being the backdrop for our activities in the everyday, private, and public spheres.

Increasingly, somaesthetics is being taught and illustrated in schools of architecture and academies of fine arts in order to understand how the livability of places is rooted in a connective tissue that is within everyone's reach. This democratic reading of the discipline helps us to understand how everyday life can also be improved through a new design reading of spaces and objects. I have had the good fortune of introducing the theory of somaesthetics on several academic occasions—the first time was in 2021 within a doctoral course, “Philosophy of the Architectural Interior,” in the Department of Architecture and the Department of Humanistic Studies at the Federico II University of Naples, during a lecture entitled “Somaesthetics. From Architecture to Design.” For a second time in the same year, I introduced this theory during a three-day workshop at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, entitled *The Living Body: A Multimedia Experience*. Most recently, in 2022 in a lecture, entitled “From Gestalt to Somaesthetics” at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, I presented these ideas. Simply from the titles of these contributions, the importance of the aesthetic discipline in many areas of performance and design is evident.

Even more so, from reading the rich contributions of this issue, what emerges is the openness of using somaesthetics in the development of architectural contexts, as well as design in virtual worlds and those of augmented reality. This means that resorting to primary sensations still remains a fundamental matrix of our knowledge.

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