



## Bloomer, Kent C., et al. *Body, Memory, and Architecture*. Yale University Press, 1979. \$32

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### BOOK REVIEW



### ABSTRACT

*Body, Memory, and Architecture* by Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore explores the human body's relation to enclosed and free spaces. The book emphasizes the importance of designing memorable places, and how the strength of an architectural or non-architectural space's value is measured by its association with memory. The authors discuss the emotional and functional value of architectural elements and provide practical solutions for creating meaningful spaces. They describe buildings from an emotional perspective, highlighting the importance of the heart of a residential house and how each building carries the treasured memories of its inhabitants. The authors also discuss the relationship between the body and spaces, how each body can see and define spaces differently through their emotional status, and the significance of paths in providing a considerable experience to viewers. The book explores the differences between previous and current architects in their design approach and highlights the importance of active experiences in previous centuries. The book provides a thought-provoking investigation of different emotions, interactions, relations, and visual perceptions between the body and architecture.

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In *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore illuminate the significance of crafting spaces that etch themselves into users' recollections, exemplifying the synergy between the built environment and memory. The authors discuss the connections between the body and buildings, and how each body perceives and understands spaces differently based on its emotional state and memory. Bloomer and Moore argue for a holistic understanding of architecture that integrates the sensory perceptions, movements, and experiences of the body.

In today's world, where research shows that people spend more than 90% of their time indoors, the significance of architecture has never been greater. As people navigate the challenges of the post-pandemic era and engage with their built environment in new ways, understanding how architecture impacts our bodies, memories, and experiences has become even more crucial. Despite its age, this book's applications and insights continue to be of utmost importance in shaping the future of architecture and its role in enhancing our well-being indoors.

The authors assert that the evaluation of any building or space should not be based solely on visual experiences but must also account for how it makes individuals feel. They emphasize that architecture can evoke a range of emotions and associations, such as welcome, home, dread, wonder, fear, comfort, purity, and more. Given this understanding, the authors advocate for an approach to design that accommodates this affective dimension. They urge architects and designers to shape environments that intentionally evoke certain emotions, nurture a sense of belonging, and create positive and meaningful experiences. This endeavor serves the broader purpose of enhancing human well-being and fostering sustainable connections within the built environment. Collectively, these arguments contribute to a fresh and interdisciplinary perspective on the complex interplay among body, memory, and architecture, expanding the discourse in the field and offering new insights into the ways in which architecture is experienced and understood.

The book incorporates perspectives from psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, aesthetics, and memory studies. The authors examine the neural processes involved in perceiving and experiencing architecture, analyze architecture's sociocultural implications, delve into philosophical and aesthetic dimensions, and investigate the role of architecture in triggering and preserving personal and collective memories. Drawing from these diverse fields of knowledge, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* not only enriches scholarly discourse but also offers insights for architects, philosophers, scholars, and anyone intrigued by the interplay between the built environment and human existence. The book's exploration of crafting memorable experiences through sensory engagement has significantly contributed to conversations surrounding multisensory design. Consequently, the book continues to be frequently cited, particularly when discussing how the integration of sensory elements can amplify user engagement and foster more profound interactions with architectural spaces. For example, the authors write that the heart of a residential house is its fireplace, a very comforting zone that contains important emotional objects to the family, such as portraits of residents' special ones.

Numerous contemporary authors have built upon the book's themes and ideas, including figures like Juhani Pallasmaa and Christian Norbert-Schulz. Pallasmaa's extensive writings on the emotional and sensory dimensions of architecture, such as *The Eyes of the Skin* and *The Thinking Hand*, delve into related subjects of sensory perception, memory, and embodiment within architectural design. Similarly, in works like *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Norbert-Schulz explores the phenomenological facets of architecture and its connections with human experiences and memory.

This lineage serves as a potent counterpoint to the increasing emphasis on energy-efficient design in response to the threat of climate change. Arguably, this focus has led to an overemphasis on mechanistic approaches that prioritize energy conservation through advanced materials and computational methodologies, while neglecting sensory engagement. The psychological consequences of such seamless design are often an afterthought if not largely disregarded. *Body, Memory, and Architecture* remains relevant by introducing a conceptual framework for understanding the embodied architectural experience.

The enduring resonance of this text can be seen in contemporary architecture's holistic, user-centered ethos and health-focused frameworks. For example, there are ongoing discussions that delve into how urban design shapes human experiences in modern cities and how technology redefines interactions with architecture. Urban design's influence on well-being and memory is being explored through factors like layout, density, and access to amenities. It is increasingly recognized by architects and others that elements such as green spaces, walkability, and social infrastructure play pivotal roles in shaping both physical and mental health. At the same time, technology such as digital tools, virtual reality, and intelligent systems are altering our perception of architecture and forcing us to revisit the principles laid out by Bloomer and Moore.

The book's first pages explore the emotional and functional value of several architectural elements. For instance, the authors suggested that a roof keeps rain out while serving as a crown on a building's top, like a human's head. Moreover, they discussed how a unique roof design can communicate the importance of a place, which is apparent in Chinese roofs, such as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Architects from China and Japan typically designed a sloped roof on all sides with a sharp pinpoint in its center. This roof's unique design automatically attracts the eyes to the center of that place in both directions, vertical and horizontal. These architects then made the building even more attractive by adding multiple roof layers. The authors suggested these are all aesthetic choices to highlight the importance of these buildings.

In addition to their discussion of the connection between the body and architectural spaces, the authors also argued that each individual's perception of a space is intrinsically linked to their emotional state. They contend that emotions serve as filters that influence how buildings communicate with their occupants. For example, emotions like joy or anxiety can significantly alter how individuals perceive architectural elements such as lighting and spatial arrangement. Low light levels, typically associated with quietness, may induce discomfort or depression in those experiencing anxiety, illustrating how emotions profoundly shape our interactions with architectural environments.

Bloomer and Moore also discuss how changes in human movement have altered our experiences. They state that individuals in the twentieth century moved faster and further than at any other time in human history. The authors describe the typical daily journey that a person takes to work. This individual takes a train or a subway, and sometimes shifts between them, walking three or four blocks before taking an elevator to a quarter mile in the sky. Paradoxically, despite the extensive distance traveled, the gained experiential value remains notably low. Throughout this journey, individuals are confined to interacting with artificial environments, such as indoor temperatures, artificial lighting, and mechanical sounds within enclosed steel capsules. The experience is considered passive. An experience of natural surroundings, air, sunlight, and so on is absent. By contrast, people's experience in previous centuries was much more active with various unique interactions with the surrounding atmosphere.

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a significant shift in people's interactions and engagement with architectural spaces. Public health measures like social distancing and remote work reduced face-to-face interactions and proximity, among individuals and with the outdoors. The shift to virtual communication platforms fostered detachment and a decrease in the amount of interaction with the surrounding environment of daily experiences. The once vibrant social dynamics in shared spaces faded, including casual conversations, impromptu meetings, and spontaneous encounters that fueled collaboration and community. This transition profoundly affected the human architectural experience, transforming bustling environments into quieter ones, lacking the energy of human interaction.

This pandemic-induced shift mirrors themes explored by Bloomer and Moore, linking memory and the body to architectural spaces. As the pandemic has reshaped our routines and engagements, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* invites us to ponder how this transformation yields new memories and alters our embodied experiences. The pandemic serves as a tangible instance of architecture's interaction with memory and the body, shaping our present, impacting how we recall the past, and suggesting new ways we might engage with spaces in the future. The pandemic has underscored

the complex relationship explored by Bloomer and Moore among architecture, memory, and the body. Because external forces reshape our experiences and interactions with our surroundings, the authors remind us of the need for architectural systems that reflect this understanding.

## DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this review are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author A conducted the review and authored the manuscript, while Author B contributed to data collection and participated in the revision process.

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