

SOMATIC ARCHITECTURE:

A MANIFESTO

(Annotated for Neuroaffective Architecture Research)

by Eleni Danesi

Abstract:

Somatic Architecture is the reciprocal shaping of body and space. It is the design process of a revisited self, and simultaneously, the structural configuration of visible and invisible matter that occurs when a body shapes its environment. This manifesto grounds the concept in three interdependent pillars—FUN, FLOWERS, FREEDOM—and situates it in dialogue with neuroaffective research, embodied cognition, ecological philosophy, and participatory design practices.

1. The Body is the First Architecture – FLOWERS

Architecture originates in posture, breath, and touch. Before plans, there is proprioception; before structures, there is skeletal alignment.

Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996) and *The Thinking Hand* (2009) argue for architecture as an extension of embodied perception, a position I expanded in *WOMB Architecture* by working with the primal gestational space as the first environment shaping the human nervous system. Here, architecture is lived before it is conceived, its "blueprints" drawn in fascia and breath patterns.

Flowers root this principle: every architectural gesture begins in a living system that grows and adapts from within.

2. Spaces Think With Us – FUN

In Somatic Architecture, space is an active cognitive and affective agent.[1] Through BODY-MIND CENTERING® (Cohen, 1993) and Axis Syllabus methodology (Skar, 2004), I engage spaces as co-movers, allowing architectural form to be informed by joint articulations, spirals, and kinetic pathways.

In the Panjika Cooperative climbing projects, temporary architectures emerged through the dialogue between human movement and the geological formations of Leonidio.

Fun here is a neuroaffective strategy: a play-state that facilitates adaptability, problem-solving, and heightened spatial engagement.[2]

3. Mapping as a Somatic Act – FREEDOM

Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960) positioned mapping as a cognitive task; my *Neuroaffective Landscapes* reframes it as a somatosensory process. Walking, climbing, and spiraling become forms of spatial notation, registering shifts in interoception and exteroception.

Freedom is spatial agency: the capacity to reconfigure one's cognitive and emotional relationship to the environment through movement.

4. The Designer is a Body in Flux – FLOWERS

Somatic Architecture assumes the instability of the designer. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980), I approach design as a negotiation between human and nonhuman forces, mediated through movement.

In *Radical Motherhood*, structures were adapted daily according to states of exhaustion, resilience, and care—revealing the organic adaptability of form.

Flowers embody this adaptive principle: responsive morphology shaped by environmental feedback.

5. Movement as Structural Intelligence – FUN

Movement is not an afterthought in design—it is the origin. Axis Syllabus analysis of kinetic efficiency parallels the architect's structural problem-solving. In *Resonating Matter*, bodily postures activated material responses—architecture became an instrument of co-creation.

Fun operates as both a physiological motivator and a spatial design tool, aligning with findings in embodied cognition that pleasure optimizes sensorimotor learning.[3]

6. Somatic Architecture is Ecological – *FREEDOM*

To design somatically is to accept the body as an open system intertwined with more-than-human agents—fungi, winds, microbial life, urban ecologies.

My Neuroaffective Architecture research examines how sensory and material cues affect emotional regulation and collective belonging, extending ecological thinking into architectural practice (Morton, 2010; Ingold, 2011).

Freedom is reciprocity: the right for environments to alter us as much as we alter them.

7. Imagination as Spatial Muscle – *FUN*

Imagination is an embodied act: it activates neural pathways, modulates breath, and prepares the body for spatial possibilities.[4]

In Embodied Un-Design, participants prototype spaces through somatic improvisation, treating imagination as pre-material architecture rehearsed in the body.

Fun is the generative field where risk becomes curiosity and speculative design becomes neurologically tangible.

8. Materiality as Nervous System – *FLOWERS*

Materials are affective agents. Neuroscience confirms that tactile interaction with surfaces modulates affective states and physiological arousal (Spence & Gallace, 2011).

In Resonating Matter, stone and concrete acted as conductors of vibration, creating a direct interface between external matter and internal rhythms.

Flowers remind us that materiality is never inert—it cycles, decays, transforms, and responds.

9. Somatic Architecture as a Political Practice – *FREEDOM*

Somatic Architecture resists the dominance of visual-centric, efficiency-driven, and profit-led architectural paradigms. It asserts multisensory inclusion, the legitimacy of embodied and affective knowledge, and ecological reciprocity as design imperatives.

In Sikruku's participatory planning for Leonidio, neuroaffective strategies reconnected architectural heritage with community nervous systems—merging preservation with agency.

Freedom is the right to architectures that activate, welcome, and co-create with diverse bodies.

Somatic Architecture is a methodology that links embodied cognition, neuroaffective processes, and ecological ethics. It is rooted in **FUN** as an activator, **FLOWERS** as an adaptive morphology, and **FREEDOM** as a political and ecological necessity. It is a practice that moves with and through the body, continually revisiting the self and the world it inhabits.

*"The body does not enter spaces;
it becomes them and with them."*

—Eleni Danesi

