

Editorial

Artifacts, Bodies, and Aesthetics

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The relationship between the human body and cultural artifacts, such as design artifacts, artworks, and religious artifacts, is both fascinating and peculiar. For example, various art forms depict or use human and non-human bodies as a point of reference. However, philosophical aesthetics have neglected the material-energetic body of artifacts. Until recently, artifacts have been mainly viewed as “parenthetical” objects transcending strictly corporal matters because of the dominant aspects of the Western culture. Artworks and religious objects are predominantly represented as intrinsic aesthetic values or spiritual ideas that negate their physical relationship with the human body. Similarly, in addition to serving a functional purpose, design artifacts are also aesthetic objects that transcend their sensory and practical relationship with the user by focusing on the conveyance of narratives and ideas according to mainstream aesthetics.

For example, the rise of minimal art, performance art, and body art in the contemporary art world during the middle of the last century has prompted us to reconsider the complex interconnections between human materials, body senses, and artifacts by granting the artwork an *agential* body of its own. Fried (1997) classified minimal art as theater (rather than art) because the artifacts of minimal art create relationship situations with the onlooker. Furthermore, Danto (1999) claimed that artworks are representational entities that are marked by some sort of agency that is induced to the artwork because the onlooker is drawn into an interactional relationship with the artwork, which is now bestowed with subjectivity. However, the fact that artworks depend on human interaction does not mean that their “agency” can be taken away from them. Hermeneutics has frequently been used to explain the significance and importance of art as culture-instigating and world-instigating artifacts (see, e.g., Heidegger, 1950). It is unknown whether artworks and design artifacts become agential bodies that exhibit features that go beyond aesthetic forms and semiotic representations.

Advances in cognitive sciences (Newman et al., 2014), philosophy of mind and language (Muñoz-Corcuera, 2016), and law (Andina, 2017) have shown that art objects are more similar to us than we realize and that we tend to have serious intimate relationships with them. For instance, both humans and artworks retain their (ontological) identity over time even if they undergo various changes (e.g., growing old, being restored, or even being duplicated) and have legal rights that must be protected. Further, humans have moral obligations toward artworks because of their status as cultural heritage artifacts and historical witnesses, as well as their inner “truth” and the incorporated energy and spirit of their creators.

Although artifacts cannot sense, feel, or act as agents, humans often use them as both objects and subjects in passionate relationships such as love or hate, which are traditionally reserved for the animated world. Humans engage emotionally with art or design artifacts. The somaesthetic shift in the conceptualization of the human body and its affective, perceptual, agential, and emissive capabilities could be a promising starting point for reframing the bodily nature of artifacts and our embodied relationships with them. This is particularly evident when we consider artifacts that create experiential places via human interactions. Places are not mere sites; a site refers to a geographically and geometrically understood space, while a place is characterized by existential and interbody dimensions. Examples of such place- and body-oriented artforms are architecture, gardens, land art, installation art, and participatory art.

We believe that somaesthetics is a promising framework for investigating art or design artifacts as complex and relational “bodies” because the framework allows for practical, experiential dimensions to play a role in the analysis and theory development. Hence, somaesthetics creates a multifaceted, investigatory space of appreciation and analysis by focusing on the somatic relationships between artifactual and human bodies. Conversely, the concept of artifactual bodies as agential body anchors enhances and also questions the somatic dimensions of human existence. All contributions to this issue applied distinct aspects of somaesthetics when investigating the experiential significance of different cultural artifacts—their emotional appreciation, artistic value, function, and relationship with humans. The analyzed artifacts included artworks, manufactured design artifacts, and artifacts created by the author herself. In particular, all contributions used various approaches to emphasize the role these artifacts play in shaping the human sense of self because of their corporal existence. Based on the identity-shaping function of these artifacts, the somaesthetic relationship with seemingly silent and passive objects around us is illuminated and discussed.

The volume opens with Alessandro Bertinetto’s highly theoretical contribution, which is fueled by personal experience. In his paper “Body and Soul... and the Artifact. The Aesthetically Extended Self,” he analyzes the phenomena of feeling sorry for the loss or destruction of specific cultural material artifacts, such as musical instruments, artworks, or bikes. It is argued that this specific type of feeling or attitude results from the fact that cultural artifacts, which gain personal significance through the process of habituation and skilled repetitive practice of using them, complement ourselves and aid in developing our personality. Bertinetto argues that people become part of the virtual history of self through somaesthetic experiences with specific artifacts. “Thanks to the assiduity of a somaesthetic relationship, these objects enlarge not only our body but also our mind or “soul.” They become parts of our extended body and soul,” the owner and user. Thus, the loss or destruction of these objects causes us pain.

Chloe Cassidy’s article entitled “Healing, Reverie and Somaesthetic Anchors: Designing Objects of Soft Fascination to Move from Fight and Flight to Flow and Flourish” discusses how somaesthetic research can help deal with issues of post-traumatic stress disorder by enriching the

overall quality of life. The author developed a method based on cultivating aesthetic appreciation and somaesthetic experiences that can straighten a sense of safety through mastered body consciousness in order to secure two trauma-informed care principles: safety and empowerment. Cassidy presented self-designed and created artifacts that function as somaesthetic anchors that connect the subject to nature and the surrounding world on a sensory level. Establishing a sensory connection aids in the development of a sense of safety and empowerment as well as the healing process. Cassidy's article convincingly demonstrates the pragmatic and practical dimensions of somaesthetics.

"Handling Digital Reproductions of Artworks" is a contribution by Christian Sivertsen and Anders Sundnes Løvlie. The paper is based on empirical research into how people react to digital reproductions of visual artworks. In the experiment, onlookers were asked to "handle" (touch and hold) physical paintings as well as their two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) virtual representations. After a series of interviews with the viewers, careful analysis, and interpretation of the received data, the article concludes that by designing an aesthetic experience of digital reproductions of visual artworks that involves the body in a significant manner, we can bring back the somaesthetic dimensions of art experience that are currently lost in art galleries and museums, where onlookers are not allowed to touch and handle exhibited artworks. Virtual interactive exhibition spaces can create/recreate the experience of touching and handling art objects, providing a sense of genuineness that is sometimes lacking in modern museums and galleries.

The final contribution is "Object and Soma: Remarks on Aesthetic Appreciation of Design" by Monika Favara-Kurkowski and Adam Andrzejewski. The paper proposes a different interpretation of aesthetic appreciation of design artifacts. They claim that we appreciate and appraise design artifacts not only because of their functionality but also because of our physical reactions to them. Favara-Kurkowski and Andrzejewski challenge the notion of being bodily entangled with a design object by pointing out that when we experience a design object, we evaluate not only the object but also our own body. In other words, a conglomerate of an object, a subject, and their relationship is what is valued in the aesthetic experience of design artifacts.

This volume concluded with lengthy reviews of three books. Alexander Kremer reviewed Richard Shusterman's *Ars Erotica*, and Else Marie Bukdahl reviewed Allie Terry-Fritsch's book *Somaesthetic Experiences and the Viewer in Medicean Florence, Renaissance, Art and Political*. Finally, Kyo Tamamura had a critical look at Satochi Higuchi's recent book *Somaesthetics and the Philosophy of Culture: Projects in Japan*.