

Body and building: the relationship of architecture and the human body

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



Architecture and the human body have always had a very close relationship. The body is one of the main drives in architectural design in historical and present-day contexts. But the uses of and regard to the human body are different in modern day and historical examples.

The Parthenon and the La Tourette are great representations, of the different approaches to what the relation between body and building is. Ancient Greece has some of the most prolific examples of what the relation between body and building was in the past. Their temples offering some of the greatest insight on how the physical qualities of a building can make a person feel in a space. One of Greece's most famous buildings the Parthenon showcases its sensitivity to the body in many ways. The most visible at first glance is the tall fluted Doric columns that make up the structure. These columns are a core piece of how people experience the space and are designed perfectly to conform to human's visual perspective. As pointed out in lecture there are many ways in which the columns do this including column shift and entasis. Marcus Vitruvius studied the proportioning of "intercolumniation" and how this column shifting affected the way buildings used these to create different experiences. Vitruvius once said, " Nothing requires the architect's care more than the due proportions of buildings". The Parthenon really shows the care to proportions and this shows the Greek's thoughts and detail towards a perfect human representation of the structure.

Another detail the Parthenon exhibits is the usage of a frieze and metopes used as a piece of the entablature of the structure. Although being mostly

destroyed in the present day we can assume it was once a beautiful piece depicting Ancient Greeks. This frieze is a formal usage of the body as part of the building in a sense, although not as in dominant for say as using Caryatids. Perhaps Caryatids are a stronger symbolism of body as building, but friezes and metopes do portray humans on the architectural façade as a detail, that conveys to observers a story. This story symbolizes the culture, place and people in which the architecture represents in a context in which observers can analyze quickly and closely. This analysis may bring upon thoughts and new perspectives of the building and the context. Providing observers with a new way with to relate to the architecture. An observer may also dive deeper into the Parthenon by experiencing and researching the spiritual purpose of the building. Designed as a temple for the Greek god Athena, the temple was purposed to encapsulate a statue of the Goddess. As a place built for a god this was meant to be a sacred temple that religious followers would travel to praise their god. This meant the physical movement of people to the space to experience it in a spiritual sense. People arriving the Parthenon would experience all the other features on the way and during their spiritual experience. This would provide a type of connection one can not get by just looking at the building, it makes you feel connected to it. Once connected with the building spiritually one would think about it more deeply and start to take note of the more minor details. Spiritual sense is not something that can not always be felt until in the building which therefore would provide this deeper connection.

Spiritual connection also is featured in the Sainte Marie de La Tourette designed by Le Corbusier near Lyon, France. Designed as a monastery this is a large concrete structure featuring a strategic layout, thoughtful lighting, and deliberate material choices. All these aspects come together to form a building designed for the body and the different senses you feel. As Le Corbusier said, " Space and light and order. Those are the thing men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep". This quote sums up very well how Le Corbusier thinks about the relation between body and building, with thoughtful architecture being as important as other basic human needs. Spaces within the building vary in size and lighted qualities based on the function of the room. Large more sacred rooms, such as the sanctuary have carefully placed openings to allow light into specific areas of the room. Private rooms are typically smaller and characterized by a more standard window allowing just enough light in. Public rooms like the cafeteria are lined with large windows to let much light in throughout the day. These different programs for window and openings allow for people to have experiences in the different room types. However, you still have a sense of the program of the room based on the lighting patterns. Heightening the experience that the building portrays on the body through designed experiences.

Layout of the La Tourette is designed to feel distanced from its surroundings and even convey this experience over to the sacred area compared to the bedrooms and other necessities required. This distance creates a feeling of solidarity from other environments allowing the monks and other visitors to

experience the architecture with a different perspective towards the area around. With all this feeling of distancing from the world, the materiality of concrete really helps tie it together, so it does not feel like you are completely out there. Its solid materiality provides a feeling of comfort, neutrality and security that materials such as wood would not in this situation. The different textures created with wood maintain the variety and different experiences that the lighting qualities enrich and conform to. Both buildings provide very solid basis in their own respect of how they enhance, improve and depict the body and building in the architecture. Although they do possess different meanings of this relationship.

The Parthenon creates a blending between architectural details designed to be perfect for the human perspective. It creates a space for holding a spiritual piece that is monumental and decorative. It allows the body to experience a visually perfect structure while also providing an example of the building as a body. The creation of the building for a god could also be argued as an example of how the building was made as a body. On the contrary La Tourette aims to create an architecture that is experienced by creating distance from the world. Creating experiences for the body through lighting, material and spatial design. It makes an experience quite different from the Parthenon using modern techniques for a spiritual place.

In my opinion both accomplish what they aim to very well, spiritual centers in their own respect. I do however think that La Tourette is more successful in its connection between body and building. The spaces and experiences throughout are far vaster than that of the Parthenon. The Parthenon is

minimal in the ways one can experience and connect to the building.

Although this is not to say it is incorrect, but to me I think the connection between body and building is that of how one experiences the building. This includes the complexity of experiences, types of experiences, and how one can experience those situations. The Parthenon is although a grand example of this connection of body and building as a more solid material approach, which to me is more powerful as a short-term experience, whereas one could spend many days, weeks, or even longer in La Tourette and still have a different experience between building and body. Additionally, Le Corbusier's use of modular pieces which allowed for a faster, more mass production of his building created a type of connection that somewhat took humans out of the labor side of building. For him this was a positive thing, although I do see the down side in not using human labor more in the project, because when more human labor is used it makes the building feel more designed for people rather than by and for machine.

In the case of La Tourette though, I don't think this mass production style is that visible thanks to Le Corbusier's innovative thinking. The body and building connection are one that will still be ever changing and with new ideas, come new iterations of the ideas that were once started in the ancient days. Examining past examples as inspiration for new ideas will allow architects to once again redefine this relationship. I feel that the Parthenon and La Tourette provide great examples of how past architects have thought about this relationship, and a great basis for new ideas about the relationship of body and building to begin.