

Performativity and Aesthetic Experience of the City

From the body of the flâneur to the soma of the Man in Gold

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In this essay, I do not want to focus on performativity as such and understand it as an aesthetic expression; instead, I would like to illustrate how performativity takes on the role consequential to an aesthetic experience. Specifically, I want to highlight how aesthetic experience takes place in the spatial contexts of the city. In this regard, I want to define the aesthetic-practical-sensory relationship of the soma, understood as a paradigm of a living body, that is, a body that moves and acts in space, by declining three historical moments that tell the story. I want to define three historical moments from the early twentieth century to the present through the soma-city relationship: 1) The first moment is inscribed in the emergence of the Baudelairian concept of the *flâneur*, a symbolic figure who introduces a relationship with the city characterized by a disenchanted gaze and a slow, wandering movement picked up, especially by Walter Benjamin in the *Paris Passages*; 2) The second moment is that of Situationism, in which Guy Debord introduces the concept of *dérive*, understood as an approach to the city marked by the experiential and emotional relationship; 3) The third and most recent moment concerns Richard Shusterman's embodiment of the somaesthetic exercise, in which the Avatar of the *Man in Gold*, enters into a relationship with the city, aspiring to reconnect urban spheres and not to a pure somaesthetic experience of the city. The last point to be made is that these three historical and aesthetic experience-based moments of the body in the city are marked by the body moving in space. In the case of the flâneur, the body wanders in an unresolved manner without a precise destination; in the case of the drift, the body is propelled by the many sensations and expressions of the city that are expressed through walking (urban Walkscapes); finally, in the case of the Man in Gold, there is a movement totally absorbed in the experience of places.

Keywords: Body, Soma, Aesthetic experience, City.

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1. Body and Soma: the scheme of the experience of the city.

The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. Man is a differentiating creature. His mind is stimulated by the difference between a momentary impression and the one which preceded it. Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these uses up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. Precisely in this connection the sophisticated character of metropolitan psychic life becomes understandable - as over against small town life which rests more upon deeply felt and emotional relationships.¹

The Aesthetic experience of the city is a phenomenon that affects everyone. Those who inhabit cities are accustomed to entering relationships with objects, spaces, and people that, in the rhythms of daily life, they do not pay attention to. In fact, the approach to the urban context echoes all the characteristics that can be found in the appropriation of a shared and at the same time private space. The connection of aesthetic experience facilitates understanding and knowledge of our surroundings. In this way, cities increasingly become personal hubs, where in times of passing, we can find relief. For example, airports and stations, ostensibly places of transfer, are increasingly designed to entertain a suspended time between trips. Urban objects such as benches or bus shelters are costumed with USB outlets for charging one's smartphones. Wi-Fi networks cover suburban routes. We remain hyper-connected to our hybrid and interactive relationships, and in doing so, cities from Metropolises have become Smart Cities. In this hybrid and digital form of cities, there is a need for a return to the material and sensitive approach of the city. A way with which to regain one's belonging to a place where we were born and raised or, a new way to interact with new habits.

¹ G. Simmel, *The Metropolis and the Mental Life*, adapted by D. Weinstein from Kurt Wolff (Trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Free Press, New York, 1950, p.410.

As Simmel reminds us, it is the Metropolis that induces our psychological conditions. It creates the "sensory" foundations that are fundamental to what we understand as aesthetic experience. Feeling is associated with our experience of the city. Even today, this association still works regarding new rhythms and scenarios of cities. The sensations that the city provokes here are to be found not in the virtual and digital contexts of a liquid approach, but from our bodily sensations.

In the 20th century, beginning with Merleau-Ponty's fundamental considerations in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body becomes the key to understanding knowledge: "The possession of a body implies the ability to change levels and to 'understand' space, just as the possession of a voice implies the ability to change key. The perceptual field corrects itself and at the conclusion of the experiment I identify it without any concept because I live in it, because I am borne wholly into the new spectacle and, so to speak, transfer my center of gravity into it".² To illustrate the everyday space experience, we can use the Merleau-Ponty concept about the body-subject and the lived embodiment. Places range from intimate to regional scale and include such environmental situations as a frequently used park bench, a cherished home, a favored neighborhood, a city associated with fond memories, or a geographical locale that is a regular vacation destination. Experientially, places are multivalent in their constitution and sophisticated in their dynamics. The experiential and perceptual properties of the body are associated with the importance of movement and the dynamism it expresses within space. This kinesthetic awareness is made possible by a pre-conscious system of bodily movements and spatial equivalences that Merleau-Ponty terms the "body schema". In contrast with the "positional spatiality" of things, the body has a "situational spatiality" that is oriented toward actual or possible tasks. The body's existence as "being-toward-the-world", as a projection toward lived goals, is therefore expressed through its spatiality, which forms the background against which objective space is constituted. The pre-historical pact between the body and the world informs our encounters with space, revealing a synthesis of space that is neither "spatialized" (as a pre-given container in which things are arranged) nor "spatializing" (like the homogenous and interchangeable relations of geometrical space):

² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, trans. By C. Smith, 2005, pp. 292, 293.

“I catch space at its source, and now think the relationships which underlie this word, realizing the that they live only through the medium of a subject who traces out and sustains them; and pass from spatialized to spatializing space. In the first case, my body and things, their concrete relationships expressed in such terms as top and bottom, right and left, near and far, may appear to me as an irreducibly manifold variety, whereas in the second case I discover a single and indivisible ability to trace out space. In the first case, I am concerned with physical space, with its variously qualified regions: in the second with geometrical space having interchangeable dimensions, homogeneous and isotropic, and here I can at least think of a pure change of place which would leave the moving body unchanged, and consequently a pure position distinct from the situation of the object in its concrete context.”³

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty, describes two places of dwelling that are fundamental to him: His home and his city of Paris. In both descriptions the body acquires a central role in developing sensitive knowledge. In the appartement, the body perceives the classical proxemics positions of high and low, left and right, etc.: “My flat is, for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain round about me only long as I still have ‘in my hands’ or ‘in my legs’ the main distances and directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it”.⁴ In the city of Paris, the body is part of a collective rhythmic made up of gestures, movements, and gaits that would be impossible to define without a bodily awareness: “Paris for me is not an object of many facets, a collection of perceptions, nor is it the law governing all these perceptions. Just as a person gives evidence of the same emotional essence in his gestures with his hands, in his way of walking and in the sound of his voice, each express perception occurring in my journey through Paris—the cafés, people’s faces, the poplars along the quays, the bends of the Seine— stands out against the city’s whole being, and merely confirms that there is a certain style or a certain significance which Paris possesses”.⁵

The perceptual approach mode of space allows for a continuous relationship to be drawn between the body and sensory knowledge. In this regard, Richard Shusterman, starting from the concept of proprioceptive and kinesthetic capacities, formulated the possibility of introducing into Merleau-Ponty thought, in addition to the body, the concept of the *soma*:

Sculpture and architecture cannot be properly perceived without the body’s moving around or through their works, and the full appreciation of their aesthetic qualities depends on subtle somatic sensations of touch,

³ *Ivi*, p. 284.

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 150.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 327.

kinaesthesia, and proprioception that cannot be properly represented in visual or conceptual terms. In giving primacy to perception, Merleau-Ponty liberates philosophy of art from the grip of Hegelian idealism that privileged the conceptual (hence literature) and the expression of transcendental truths through mediated reflection. He returns us to the pleasures of sensory perception and the beauty of the sensible world of immediate experience while showing us that there is not only aesthetic richness but also metaphysical depth to be grasped in that world.⁶

The bodily dimension developed Merleau-Ponty opens up new scenarios regarding aesthetic and sensory knowledge. However, it needs, Shusterman argues, further development. This is because the use of the "body" itself, does not appear to be sufficient as a somatic response to the sensitive knowledge of reality.

If Merleau-Ponty did not explicitly advocate this expansion of the aesthetic field, his work has certainly encouraged it, just as his somatic advocacy inspires the body's thematized use in contemporary performance art. This introduces the second major dimension where his contemporary influence is powerfully positive but needs further development. His reinterpretation of the body as perceiving subjectivity and visible object in the world should spur us to improve the body's skills of perception for both appreciating and creating art by training our body consciousness, but also to invent a richer palette of aesthetic images of bodily beauty.⁷

In fact, Shusterman, by introducing within the context of a Pragmatist Aesthetics, the advent of the discipline of Somaesthetics, goes deeper about the relationship between sentient body that should help us improve the quality of our lives: "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".⁸

⁶ R. Shusterman, *Merleau-Ponty's Somaesthetics*, in "Critique d'art" [Online], 37 | Printemps 2011, Online since 14 February 2012, connection on 08 August 2021.

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/1300>;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.1300>

⁷ *Ivi*

⁸ R. Shusterman, *Somaesthetics a disciplinary proposal*, in "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Vol.57, n°3, (Summer 1999), p.302, <https://academic.oup.com/jaac/article/57/3/299/6342209> , Last consultation 22.05.2023.

Regarding the aesthetic tradition, Shusterman directly confronts Baumgarten, noting that the use of the body, by way of sensory awareness, is part of an "artificial" aesthetic approach that does not originate with the properly sensitive approach.

§ 1 AESTHETICS (the theoretical aspect of liberal arts; lower gnoseology; the discipline of thinking with beauty; the discipline of analogical reasoning) is the systematic knowledge of sensorial cognition.

§ 3 The practical application of artificial aesthetics (§1), when added to the natural one, will be worthier than others, 1) by providing a good subject matter for those fields of study which are known primarily through the intellect; 2) by adapting the cognitions derived from formal study to the understanding of any person; 3) by extending the verification of cognition beyond the familiar limits of things which require distinct apprehension; 4) by providing good principles to all the more civilized occupations and to the liberal arts; 5) in the life of the community, when other factors are indifferent, by improving everything that is to be accomplished.⁹

And it is precisely because of this, that Shusterman decides to treat the sensitive and proprioceptive aspect from the absence of the body in much of classical aesthetic analysis and theorizing: Whatever Baumgarten's precise reasons for neglecting the body in aesthetics, they do not justify its continued neglect¹⁰. Similarly, however, Shusterman points to Merleau-Ponty, calling him "the patron saint of the body,"¹¹ for the lack of a body understood as an improving state of quality of life through *performance*. And in this regard, it is *performance* that induces our relationship with the city as an everyday aesthetic experience. Regarding performativity in the city, it should be recalled that especially in the world of architectural design, Steven Holl took on Merleau-Ponty's theories to show that perception does not remain solely in the world of experiencing but also of being, that is, of inhabiting and designing spaces through our perception. This parallelism then initiated in the 1990s a still open debate on the consideration of Phenomenology in architecture¹², with authors and architects such as Juhani Pallasmaa, Alberto Perez Gomez and Peter Zumthor. This means that the reading of the architectural context helps us even more, to understand that the contextualization of the performativity of the body in the urban world is not solely related to passive perception.

⁹ A. G. Baumgarten, *Ästhetik* (1750–58), Eng. Trans. By D. Mirbach, Volume 1: Latin-German. Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 2007, pp. 11.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p.301.

¹¹ R. Shusterman, *The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy*, in *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, 2012; and in R. Shusterman, *The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy*. In T. Carman & M. Hansen (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, pp. 151-180), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, DOI:10.1017/CCOL0521809894.007, pp. 151 – 180, p. 151.

¹² Cfr. S. Holl, J. Pallasmaa, A. Perez-Gomez, *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, A+U Architecture and Urbanism, Tokyo, 1994.

At this point, the Merleau-Ponty body is not sufficient to introduce the concept of performance of architectural space or the city as an aesthetic experiential activity. We must, in fact, emphasize the importance of the perceptual approach of the body in space but not only. It is necessary, to choose the description of "performance" not as an event detached from the daily life of the city, but as a radical element, capable of interpreting the city through different eyes. For this very reason, the three performances we are going to list are part of the relationship between man-collectivity-body (experiential) and the city.

2. The Flâneur, “the botanist of sidewalk”.

Regarding the figure of the flâneur linked to an aesthetic performativity of the city, I want to highlight two concepts: 1) The flâneur to be such must trace his or her birth to a city like Paris that allows the bourgeoisie to be born in the historical context of Modernity, as an alternative to the nineteenth-century aristocracy. Such social contextualization allows him to have an attitude of unresolvedness as he roams the streets of his city, 2) The flâneur is attracted to the collective sense of the great architectural works and the urban context, he plays the role of the protagonist of the new mass cultures.

“The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward-if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time of a childhood. But why that of the life he has lived? In the asphalt over which he passes, his steps awaken a surprising resonance. The gaslight that streams down on the paving stones throws an equivocal light on this double ground [M I, 2]”.¹³ Though the iconic figure of the *Passagen-Werk* Benjamin describes through analyze of the bourgeois interior of the 19th Century illustrates the power of domestic places to depict the characteristics and cultural transformations of a social group in a certain historical context. He points out how the domestic interior was built for the “private citizen in contrast to the workplace “by structuring the separation between the public and private spheres in a peculiar way. This would be the result of modern industrial and economic development, which led the bourgeois individual to an intensification of his public and

¹³ W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Trans. By H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2002, p. 416.

productive life. From this space one expects to be “cradled in one’s own illusions”. At the same time, around 1850, Baudelaire¹⁴ argued that traditional art was inadequate for the new and dynamic complications of modern life¹⁵. The social and economic changes caused by industrialization required the artist to immerse himself in the metropolis and become, in Baudelaire’s words, “a botanist of the sidewalk”:

Paris created the type of the flâneur. What is remarkable is that it wasn't Rome. And the reason? Does not dreaming itself take the high road in Rome? And isn't that city too full of temples, enclosed squares, national shrines, to be able to enter tout entire-with every cobblestone, every shop sign, every step, and every gateway- into the passerby's dream? The national character of the Italians may also have much to do with this. For it is not the foreigners but they themselves, the Parisians, who have made Paris the promised land of the flâneur-the "landscape built of sheer life;" as Hofmannsthal once put it. Landscape-that, in fact, is what Paris becomes for the flaneur. Or, more precisely: the city splits for him into its dialectical poles. It opens up to him as a landscape, even as it closes around him as a room [M I, 4).¹⁶

The emergence of the concept of flânerie, closely corresponds to the spatial context in which it develops. In this regard, the flâneur could not have been created in Rome, Benjamin writes, because in Rome one does not find the same effect of suspended time, in which the flâneur is exactly reflected in the streets of Paris, capable of accommodating that sense of "irresolution"¹⁷ difficult to find in another European city. Moreover, Paris lends itself to an aesthetic experience, typical of a historicization of Modernity, in which the flâneur represents a true "social legitimization" of his or her urban context: “Preformed in the figure of the flâneur is that of the detective. The flâneur required a social legitimation of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence presented as a plausible front, behind which hides the riveted attention of an observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight.”¹⁸

The flâneur, can be recognized in the architectural work that characterizes the Modern capital, the pavilions, department stores, passageways, panoramas, and all those activities that pertain to entertainment within the daily life of the city, are helpful in understanding how the performativity of the flâneur is constitutive of the act of flânerie itself: “The most characteristic building projects of the nineteenth century-railroad stations, exhibition halls, department stores (according to Giedion)- have matters of collective importance as

¹⁴ See C. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Phaidon Press, New York, 1995.

¹⁵ See. W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Paris – Exposé “*Paris Capital of Nineteenth Century*”, p. 3 – 14.

¹⁶ W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 417.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 425.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 442.

their object. The flâneur feels drawn to these "despised, everyday" structures, as Giedion calls them. In these constructions, the appearance of great masses on the stage of history was already foreseen. They form the eccentric frame within which the last privateers so readily displayed themselves. [M21a,2]"¹⁹. Indeed, the emergence of the flâneur, with respect to the social context of the crowd, is distanced from the desire to create a subject of the urban, but is associated with the need to refer directly to the flâneur's experience of the city: "Benjamin is more careful than Baudelaire to distinguish the flâneur from »the man of the crowd. Resisting the »manic behavior « of » metropolitan masses hectically bent on their practical pursuits, the flâneur distances himself from the crowd by his absence of practical purpose and urgency".²⁰

The performativity of flânerie, rooted in the urban fabric, not only to represent socially, historically, and politically a bourgeois attitude of the Modern, but as Shusterman points out, can illustrate the way we can learn from being in places:

However, Benjamin astutely realizes that the city streets also promise more than the personal pleasure of flânerie or an individual escape from alienated loneliness. Those streets can provide a cultural education for the crowd that, as a human collective, holds the promise of political transformation from an amorphous mass toward an effective public sphere. "Streets," claims Benjamin, "are the dwelling place of the collective. The collective is an eternally restless and eternally moving being that, in between the facades of buildings, undergoes (erlebt), experiences (erfährt), learns, contrives as much as individuals do within the privacy of their own four walls."²¹

3. Drifting through Walkscapes

For almost 30 years, exactly since 1995, Francesco Careri (Architect and Associate Professor in Architectural Composition at Roma Tre), has been working on a project based entirely on walking as an aesthetic experience. In fact, Careri is one of the founders of "Stalker – Osservatorio Nomade"²², a group that began as a form of activism to redeem the suburbs of Rome and later became a reference point for a practice, which has been theorized under the term "Walkscape." The acronym is very easy and refers to the

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 455.

²⁰ R. Shusterman, *Urban Scenes and Unseens*, in "Filozofski vestnik", Vol. 17, n°2, (1996): The Seen, p.178.

²¹ R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics and Critical Theory: A Personal Perspective on a Continuing Dialogue*, in "Scenari", n°16, 2022, p.215.

²² <https://www.spatialagency.net/database/stalkerosservatorio.nomade>

experience of walking within the urban landscape. Careri, adopts the exercise of walking as a practice to be done in groups or individually, without a precise destination but mostly directed by the emotions that the surrounding landscape expresses. The references²³ he often uses are of European stamp, starting with the Dadaists, the to arrive at the Situationist Movement. Although Careri does not call himself a Neo-Situationist, nevertheless the basic concept of walking as an aesthetic practice is based on the main dictates of psychogeography. What is interesting is that in addition to the pattern of psychogeography that I will elaborate on shortly, Careri highlights another fundamental aspect of walking as an aesthetic experience, namely that of wandering. After all, even the flâneur, as we have seen, wanders, and he does not have a precise goal. Wandering belongs to the more general concept of Nomadism, which never emancipates itself from the vague terrain, but remains hinged in this spirit of "unresolvedness".

This is the perspective in which we have taken a deeper look at three important moments of passage in art history ---all absolutely familiar to historians--- in which an experience linked to walking represented a turning point. These are the passages from Dada to Surrealism (1921-1924), from the Lettrist International to the Situationist International (1956-1957), and from Minimal Art to Land Art (1966-1967). By analyzing these episodes, we simultaneously obtain a history of the roamed city that goes from the banal city of Dada to the entropic city of Robert Smithson, passing through the unconscious and oneiric city of the Surrealists and the playful and nomadic city of the Situationists. What the roving of the artists discover is a liquid city, an amniotic fluid where the spaces of the elsewhere take spontaneous form, an urban archipelago in which to navigate by drifting. A city in which the spaces of staying are the islands in the great sea formed by the space of going.²⁴

Certainly, the Dadaist inspiration of "walking" is formally theorized with the advent of the Situationist Movement in the early 1950s, in which the International Lettrist, expresses a capacity for rupture through the mutation of feeling in everyday contexts: "Lettrist urban drifting was transformed into the construction of situations, experimenting with playful- creative behavior and unitary environments. Constant reworked Situationist theory to develop the idea of a nomadic city ----New Babylon-- bringing the theme of nomadism into the sphere of architecture and laying the groundwork for the radical avant-gardes of the years to follow"²⁵. The main goal of the Stalker project is to go "through,"

²³ F. Careri, *Walkscapes: camminare come pratica estetica*, Einaudi, Torino, 2006; F. Careri, *Walkscapes: walking as an aesthetic practice*, Culicidae Architectural Press, Ame, 2017.

²⁴ F. Careri, *Walkscapes El andar como práctica estética. Walking as an aesthetic practice*, Editoria Gustavo Gill, Barcelona, 2009, p. 21.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p.22.

that is, is to cross the design boundaries of space and walk within the landscape to restore the value of a place.

Today architecture could expand into the field of the path without encountering the pitfalls of anti-architecture. The transurbance between the edges of the discipline and the place of ex-change between the nomadic and the settled city can represent a first step. In this space of encounter walking is useful for architecture as a cognitive and design tool, as a means of recognizing a geography in the chaos of the peripheries, and a means through which to invent new ways to intervene in public metropolitan spaces, to investigate them and make them visible. The aim is not to encourage architects and landscape architects to leave their drawing boards behind, shouldering the backpack of nomadic transurbance, nor is it to theorize a total absence of paths to permit the citizen to get lost, although often *errare* could truly be seen as a value instead of an error. The aim is to indicate walking as an aesthetic tool capable of describing and modifying those metropolitan spaces that often have a nature still demanding comprehension, to be filled with meanings rather than designed and filled with things. Walking then turns out to be a tool which, precisely due to the simultaneous reading and writing of space intrinsic to it, lends itself to attending to and interacting with the mutability of those spaces, so as to intervene in their continuous becoming by acting in the field, in the here and now of their transformation, sharing from the inside in the mutations of these spaces that defy the conventional tools of contemporary design. Today architecture can transform the path from anti-architecture into a resource, expanding its field of disciplinary action toward something close by, taking a step in the direction of the path. The following reflections are intended to be a contribution in this direction.²⁶

About the relationship with the city, Situationism is the current referred to Careri's Walkscapes, which comes closest to our interest of the body moving in the city as an aesthetic act and sensitive knowledge. The urban conformation that interests the Situationists stems from the need to propose a new Manifesto of actions and experiences of the city, different from the classical canons. *The Situationist International* program is to create situations, defined as moments of life concretely and deliberately constructed through the collective organization of a unitary environment and a game of events. The Situationist International was a revolutionary movement in politics and art, with roots in Marxism, anarchism and the artistic avant-gardes of the early 20th century. Formed in 1957, it remained active in Europe throughout the 1960s, aspiring to major social and political transformations. "Situations" through Unitarian Urbanism create a new spatial environment of activity where can finally realize architecture, psychogeography, i.e. the practical exploration of the territory through drifts and the revolutionary idea potential of leisure time. Situationists propose to invent games of a new essence, expanding the non-mediocre part of life, diminishing, as far as possible, its null moments. In the first issue

²⁶ Ivi, p. 26, 27.

of the *Bulletin of the Situationist International*²⁷, published in 1958, psychogeography was defined as "the study of the precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously or unconsciously arranged, which directly affects the affective behavior of individuals".

In this sense, psychogeography is part of the trend of environmental determinism, which had already begun with Friedrich Ratzel in the mid-19th century, whereby the relationships between environment and nature are considered and analyzed in a univocal way i.e. from heart/architecture to man. It should be understood as a game and, at the same time, an effective method to determine the most suitable forms of deconstruction of a particular metropolitan area. The technique of psychogeographical exploration is *drift*. Guy Debord, one of the founders of the *Situationist International*, fine-tunes the drift formula through his approach to the city of Paris. He finds in the concept of drift, the possibility of remapping the city through the main purpose of getting lost within the city as "an expressive form of anti-art.

In the Belgian Surrealist magazine "Les Lèvres nues" directed and created by Marcel Mariën in 1953, Debord wrote about the spatial context of the drifting. The text later was reported by Debord himself, in the appendix in the 1958 issue 2 of the *Situationist International*:

The spatial field of a *dérive* may be precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself. It should not be forgotten that these two aspects of *dérives* overlap in so many ways that it is impossible to isolate one of them in a pure state. But the use of taxis, for example, can provide a clear enough dividing line: If in the course of a *dérive* one takes a taxi, either to get to a specific destination or simply to move, say, twenty minutes to the west, one is concerned primarily with personal disorientation. If, on the other hand, one sticks to the direct exploration of a particular terrain, one is concentrating primarily on research for a psychogeographical urbanism. In every case the spatial field depends first of all on the point of departure — the residence of the solo *derive* or the meeting place selected by a group. The maximum area of this spatial field does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs. At its minimum it can be limited to a small self-contained ambiance: a single neighborhood or even a single block of houses if it's interesting enough (the extreme case being a static-*derive* of an entire day within the Saint-Lazare train station).²⁸

²⁷ <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/index.html>

²⁸ *Situationist International Anthology*, Ed. & Trans. By K. Knabb, Berkley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, p. 121.

In this regard, it is interesting to note how the urban context can acquire new reading elements through the aesthetic experience of drifting. New ways of doing architecture arise precisely from situationist drift.

In this regard, the new way of doing architecture depends on our predisposition in space, our willingness to explore and be driven by our predisposition toward the city.

One can *dérive* alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness, since cross-checking these different groups' impressions makes it possible to arrive at more objective conclusions. It is preferable for the composition of these groups to change from one *dérive* to another. With more than four or five participants, the specifically *dérive* character rapidly diminishes, and in any case it is impossible for there to be more than ten or twelve people without the *dérive* fragmenting into several simultaneous *dérives*. The practice of such subdivision is in fact of great interest, but the difficulties it entails have so far prevented it from being organized on a sufficient scale. The average duration of a *dérive* is one day, considered as the time between two periods of sleep. The starting and ending times have no necessary relation to the solar day, but it should be noted that the last hours of the night are generally unsuitable for *dérives*. But this duration is merely a statistical average. For one thing, a *dérive* rarely occurs in its pure form: it is difficult for the participants to avoid setting aside an hour or two at the beginning or end of the day for taking care of banal tasks; and toward the end of the day fatigue tends to encourage such an abandonment. But more importantly, a *dérive* often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or it may last for several days without interruption. In spite of the cessations imposed by the need for sleep, certain *dérives* of a sufficient intensity have been sustained for three or four days, or even longer. It is true that in the case of a series of *dérives* over a rather long period of time it is almost impossible to determine precisely when the state of mind peculiar to one *dérive* gives way to that of another.²⁹

4. The Man in Gold: performance or aesthetic experience

As a final example, I left the Man in Gold one deliberately, because I think it is a new paradigm that can be used for a comprehensive analysis of what the aesthetic experience of the city means today. The Man in Gold is the expression: of the power of the possession³⁰, first encountered by Richard Shusterman on June 12, 2010, in the medieval Abbey of Royaumont. Indeed, Shusterman wonders why he opened himself in a totally spontaneous and immediate way, to this kind of possession. The first reason is

²⁹ *Ivi*, p.119, 120.

³⁰ R. Shusterman, Y. Toma, *The adventures of the man in gold. Paths between art and life. A philosophical tale. Les aventures de l'homme en or. Passages entre l'art et la vie. Conte philosophique*, Hermann, Paris, 2016, p.8.

contextualizable in the application or applicability in contemporary art of Somaesthetics doctrine. In fact, the response of artists' applied Somaesthetics, understood in gestures and artistic activity itself, has never been satisfactory enough. The second reason lies in Shusterman's approach to the aesthetic experience of photography. About a personal experience of his own, the American philosopher became convinced that the subject of his photographic works should be himself. The third decisive reason is denoted by Shusterman's meeting with artist Yann Toma.³¹ Yann Toma's input is crucial; in fact, before the Man in Gold was born, Toma invited Shusterman to pose for him as the subject of a photo exhibit. During his working days, Shusterman poses for Toma in the halls of the Abbey of Royaumont, but at some point this space becomes hostile to him, he begins to prefer the surrounding gardens, and at one point he loses control of his own soma: "By the time I reached the garden. I no longer knew what I was doing. More precise, I was no longer I."³²

The Man in Gold has a mother, a small dancing goddess Wu Xiaoxing, he at the time he appears, remains silent expressing himself only through gestures and movements: "The Man in Gold began to dance around the garden. Inventing choreographic narratives based on the venue's affordances and energies, he leaped over scrubs, knelt to smell the tinniest of flowers, and refreshed his sweating face and hands with water from the pond"³³. His dress, a costume from the Paris Opera Ballet: "a glitzy skin-tight body"³⁴.

The Man in Gold is expressed through the movements of the body and the depth of space. In his early days he did not immediately receive social, or collective, recognition. In 2011, the Man in Gold reappears briefly for the creation of the film "A Night with Richard Shusterman" and in the meantime, Shusterman begins to wonder if this avatar that strays far from self-representation might create problems for his identity or reputation as an academically recognized Professor. Indeed, it is interesting to understand how, although it is an act of tremendous creativity and artistic expression, the Man in Gold, can take on a different identity from its host: "The Man in Gold has no identity papers; ha has no nationality. A citizen of no country on earth, he may be regarded in some sense as extraterrestrial. I can Identify which such alien status, for reasons that will later become

³¹ *Ivi*, pp. 9 – 14.

³² *Ivi*, p. 30.

³³ *Ivi*, pp. 32,33.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 21.

clear”³⁵. The identity issue begins to add to another issue, that of social inclusion, in which the Man in Gold, in some circumstances finds many difficulties. For example, in 2011, Man in Gold appears in Cartagena, a very diverse and controversial city. Indeed, the approach of the preciously poetic and artistic Man in Gold is not immediately grasped, or in any case not all people are ready to welcome such extemporaneous diversity as expressed by his movements and figure. During one of his performances, the Man in Gold retreats to his hotel at night and is mocked by the night porters, who in the Hall begin to discriminate against him in public. And again, the next day, during a dinner at Fresco's, the Man in Gold appears among the tables and is overwhelmed by the aggressiveness and verbal violence of some of the diners.

What drives the Man in Gold to exist? Shusterman sometimes wonders about his host: fear and love³⁶ are the feelings that drive him to trust in another than himself. And the most interesting thing is the somatic analysis of his spatial predisposition: “He express him-self instead in posture, gesture and acture, to emulate the dancing beauties that he loves, and learn from, incarnations of the divine Wu Xiaoxing. In his ardor for beautiful dances the Man in Gold seems indifferent to sex or a magic master of it thtough ennobling erotic expression”³⁷.

Another performance by the Man in Gold, occurs in Paris, where he is drawn to the cityscape on the banks of the Seine, once again, he is subjected to verbal violence by a group of young people.

But this time, the stones and pylons supporting the bridges he passes under are more interesting than the hatred expressed by people not ready to welcome him: “I could imagine some key curative elements: an environment rich in natural charms and human affection, a place by the sea with radiant lights and boats, and even some sculptures”³⁸. This suggests that the Man in Gold, understood as a person without identity and social inclusion, can rediscover the city at night without being implicated by the urban dynamics

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 41, 42.; Regarding the image of the extraterrestrial as an individual without a precise identity or sexual gender within a social and urban context, I refer to two significant readings: P.B. Preciado, *An apartment on Uranus. Chronicles of the Crossing*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2020; A. Alison, *Can an Extra-terrestrial Dwell on Earth?*, in “ESPES – The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics, V.11, n°2, 2022, pp. 54 – 68, <https://espes.ff.unipo.sk/index.php/ESPES/article/view/270> , Last consultation 24.05.2023.

³⁶ R. Shusterman, Y. Toma, *The adventures of the man in gold. Paths between art and life. A philosophical tale. Les aventures de l'homme en or. Passages entre l'art et la vie. Conte philosophique*, p.52.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 58, 59.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p.71.

of everyday life. During the night, the city offers itself as a setting for the walk and aesthetic experience of the Man in Gold, without questioning his reality.

This kind of reaction of people opens up new scenarios about how people can experience the city today. Is it so important to be socially recognized by it? Wouldn't it be better, to live and experience it sensitively?

After all, weren't the historical flâneurs with the tortoise on a leash, the Dadaists and the Situationists, also people and individuals capable of experiencing the city without the need to receive social recognition?

I believe that the most interesting aspect of Man in Gold, in addition to identity redemption, is to experience the materials, the elements, and the texture of the city in a totally extemporaneous way that is untethered from any form of conditioning. This kind of extemporaneousness comes very close to the consideration one can have of the irresolution of the flâneur and the wandering of the situationist. These three forms of movement that the body and soma adopt to recognize the city are useful in reformulating the sensibility of place.

5. In the streets

Shusterman in 2019 wrote a beautiful essay "*Bodies in the Streets: The Soma, the City, and the Art of Living*", After giving a long pronouncement on the social differences that our soma within the city can express³⁹ he focuses on the similarities between *soma and city*. Cities have the same dialectic as soma, namely, size and growth. Just as the body by growing creates space within the polis, so the polis grows and increases through the presence of the soma:

In this way, the city is logically prior to effective family and personal life in the city, even if it historically developed from family units and villages. "The polis is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that" (Politics 1253b18).⁴⁰

³⁹ R. Shusterman, *Bodies in the Streets: The Soma, the City, and the Art of Living*, in *Bodies in the Streets and the Somaesthetics of City Life*, "Studies in Somaesthetics. Embodied Perspectives in Philosophy, the arts and the human sciences", Vol.2, pp. 13 – 37.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p.18.

In addition to the depiction of the city through the movements of the soma, social, collective, and organizational correspondences are all to be linked, according to Shusterman, to the relationship between soma and city. Shusterman reminds us how Baudelaire describes the crowd and how Benjamin takes up the distinction between crowd and flâneur. Indeed, the flâneur is distinguished by an innate autonomy, a willingness to experiment that is not reconciled with collective thinking. And so too the Man in Gold, decides to embrace the pylons along the bank of the Seine, and be happy to feel the city in his own way. So too Debord's Situationist, who attracted by his own perceptions of the city decides his own paths. In conclusion, I believe that these three figures: the flâneur, the situationist and the Man in Gold, have 10 points in common:

- 1) They have no social restrictions,
- 2) They have no identity restrictions,
- 3) They are not driven by time (they are not in a hurry),
- 4) They are outside ordinary life,
- 5) They have the desire to see through,
- 6) They have the will to discover,
- 7) They rediscover and redesign the city through their bodies,
- 8) Their movements are the expressive form of their aesthetic experience,
- 9) They have a judgment-free approach to architecture and space,
- 10) They are free.

These points are meant to be a reflection on how we can live and create experiences in the city and the architecture of cities.

A final suggestion is from my teaching in Landscape Aesthetics that I lead at Politecnico di Milano. Each year, after the theoretical part and frontal lectures, students are involved in preparing a small Workshop with three basic narrative and experiential exercises. Together with a logbook and a documentary video to prepare, they have the opportunity after the inspection of the project areas, to map their perceptual experience

on "Drift Maps" that are often used as a starting point for their projects often at landscape and urban scales. This exercise stimulates them and helps them focus their experience as a useful tool for improving abandoned or degraded areas. Playing "flâneurs" and "situationists," these future architects, appreciate more what the aesthetic experience of a space means, using Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord and Richard Shusterman as major references. I really hope that a new vision of architecture can arise through the importance of the soma with the space and so with the city.

We can all be flâneurs, situationists and performers, to rediscover and renew our beloved and shared spaces.