

Acarón, T. (2016). Shape-in(g) space: Body, boundaries, and violence. *Space and Culture*, 19(2), 139-149.

Synopsis

This article was a discussion of movement theory and spatial analysis applied to interpersonal relationships to further the understanding of how the physical space bodies occupy can represent power dynamics and social relationships. Acarón defined both space and body ambiguously, with more emphasis on the relationship between the two; she used social and movement theories to make sense of how bodies shape and affect space and vice versa. Fitting with the cross-disciplinary approach of the paper overall, the definitions of key concepts were derived from scholars in social theory, human geography, architecture, and philosophy. These definitions of body centrality and dynamic embodied space contributed to the construction of several spatial categorizations: portability, extensibility, social flexibility, and transversality. These categorizations formed several lenses through which movement and occupation of space can be interpreted, understood, and related to social concepts such as agency, identity, safety, consent, and dominance. Finally, Acarón used these categorizations to drive a discussion of the shaping relationship between bodies and the space they occupy, and concluded that “body shapes space shapes body” (p. 145).

Key Concepts

- **Body centrality:** the concept of centering the body and marking it as the center of “a culturally defined, corporeal-sensual field of significant distances” (p. 141).
- **Embodied space:** a conceptual middle-ground between conventional definition of personal space and movement; Acarón used this definition to describe “body’s ability to act as a protagonist/antagonist in its relationships to space and others...(and) ability to effect and receive change through movement, and by extension, to language” (p. 141).
- **Social Flexibility:** “the modulation of space in order to disable or enable social experience, aiming to regulate interaction an intrapersonal processes” (p. 144.).

Key Quotes

- "Space has been deemed both a means to establish and preserve power and also a way to unify social relations. The body, as the nexus of experience, acts as both a receiver and actor, producing and being produced by spatial relations” (p. 139).
- “When space becomes personal, as a means for social transaction and negotiation, it can become a tangible measurable area of one’s comfort, safety, and sense of trust in others and the environment” (p. 144).
- “The body is not in a vacuum, it coexists within embodied space with its surroundings, is conditioned by its history, culture, gender, race, age, and class. This is what makes the discourse around violence, body, and space so relevant” (p. 147).

Essential Question

- How do bodies and spatial relationships reflect and indicate unspoken meaning in terms of concepts of power, dominance, and communication?
- Can bodily responses that sit at the intersection of biological imperative and cultural training – e.g., fight, flight, or freeze responses – be and create hegemonic structures?