



**'haptic' [from Greek *haptesthai*]:
of, or pertaining to, touch**

We do not have only five senses. Psychologist J.J. Gibson (1979) argued, we have outward-orientated (exteroceptive) senses and inward-orientated (interoceptive) senses. But there are bodily senses that dancers and athletes know about that psychologists are only now getting to grips with. Proprioception is our awareness of our body's position in space, and the vestibular sense is concerned with balance. Kinaesthesia is the sense of movement through space.

These bodily (somatic) senses inform our perception of 'inside' and 'outside,' of inner and outer space. Rather than discrete and separate, these senses act in concert to help give us our embodied perceptions of space. Touch is not only of the skin surface, but also involves the tactile-muscular and tactile-kinaesthetic senses, and these are inherently spatial.

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Frozen Speed

The American physical landscape is not merely the setting for the culture and character of the nation. The world around us is, itself, a major player in how we experience our country, state, town, and neighborhood. Daily patterns of living are constructive of the self, and these daily patterns are often determined by the shape and structure of the physical environment.

The commute of an average American office-worker commonly involves a ten or twenty mile drive in personal automobile on a multi-lane highway⁵. Upon arrival to work, our typical American is propelled vertically upwards in a matter of seconds by an elevator to reach an upper floor of a multi-story office building. Despite traveling great distances, both horizontally and vertically, on his way to and from work everyday, this average American's body does not move *in relation to itself*. He exerts little physical effort beyond placing his foot on the gas pedal and pushing buttons in the elevator on this daily journey. The amount of energy he exerts is enormously disproportionate to the distance he travels. During the time he leaves home for work and arrives back home at the end of the day, he is isolated from his physical existence. His speed is *frozen*, he is not in motion but in anti-motion. His body is always propelled by external forces, the consequence of such a life being the loss of a physical center, the lack of any individual affirmation through the body.

It is not only the adult's commute between home and work that makes such a disembodied life a daily occurrence. The average suburban child of middle or high-school age is imprisoned in the supposed safety of her suburban environment where she is completely unchallenged, physically. This child is always dependent on some adult to drive her around and there is often nothing of interest close enough to home to which she can walk. She cannot run a simple errand for her parents, cannot bike to basic needs, often cannot walk to school. Most significantly, she is dependent on her parents at an age when she needs to experience herself independent of those who raised her. In a sense, the suburban child is "frozen in a form of infancy... bereft of the ability to introduce variety"¹⁰ into her life.

In a search for independence from the lives and inconveniences of others, the modernist imagines a free-floating intellect, disembodied from the self. This freedom comes at the expense of physical interaction and communication. We stop *inhabiting* our bodies; perhaps we lose the ability to empathize on a visceral and emotional level with the experiences of others. The dream of utter independence and individualism is not possible without sacrificing connection or our own bodies. Our contemporary suburban landscape does not offer the possibility of interaction and transaction between body and environment. It is a place in which the body cannot find meaning . With excessive resources and space, without creative limits, we have constructed worlds that do not have any meaning for our bodies. We have confused comfort with "the absence of sensation"⁵, making our bodies all but completely unnecessary appendages to our mind-driven selves.

