

The skin remembers

By

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Illustration

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EVEN THOUGH THE TITLE OF MY

COLUMN APPEARS, on this occasion, to stem from the pen of a suffering poet who longs for better times as almost all poets do, the contents of same are, in fact, very far removed from this.

The outside covering of the body, the skin, is the largest bodily organ and engages in a series of vital functions. It serves as a protective barrier against microorganisms, acts as an insulator against heat and cold, and helps to eliminate waste matter from the body in the form of sweat. It offers protection against excessive exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun, producing a protective pigment and helping to produce the supply of vitamin D from the organism. Its sensorial receivers allow the body to feel pain, cold, heat, sensation and pressure; however, a recent study carried out by University College, London, (UCL) puts forward the theory that the skin possesses memory. This idea is not new, since a lot has been written as to how children, in their first stages of development, walking barefoot, develop a greater intelligence, since they accumulate more incentives.

It is also well known how the sun, by contact with the skin, acts as a stimulant and generates the production of endorphins which act as neurotransmitters, and help to eliminate part of the stress accumulated in the body. The interesting part of the UCL study is that, for the first time, the attribute of memory is conferred on the skin; that is, not only as a filter or protection against the environment, transmitting incentives to the brain and that is all; but that these incentives are processed from the central part of the nervous system.

This theory establishes the possibility that the memory process involves not only the brain but, in fact, commences with the skin.



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This explains why an individual can possess many incentives of which his brain is not aware. One of the most important consequences of this theory is development of the hypothesis called embodied cognition, which is the idea that, if the skin retains information in its memory, the incentives we receive in the brain have already been filtered on passing through the skin and its memory; that is, the cognitive process in human beings does not begin, therefore, in the brain, but that, in actual fact, our cognitive processes start in the skin and in the body. This converts the theory of memory of the skin into one of the most important recent beliefs for the world of architecture and, principally, for interior design.

If our cognitive processes commence in the body (embodied cognition), then the containers in which the body is located and which end with

modification in the course of use and are, moreover, the basis of incentives, could represent, in actual fact, an extension of our cognitive processes (extended cognition).

Extended cognition assumes that architecture and interior space are an extension of the cognitive processes; and therefore, in cases such as the development of plans of study for education, architecture should be considered as a fundamental part of the learning process. In many fields such as pedagogy, for example, the theory of extended cognition has already begun to be one of those most accepted in the new manner of preparing students.

Now, the challenge for the design industry is to understand architecture not only as a container, but also as a cognitive process. This will be one of the principal challenges for our generation and those of the future and, in order for it to be achieved, we must reconsider how to educate, and how to establish architecture.

We are, without doubt, going through emotional times as the result of technological, medical and social advances, but we, the designers, must rise to the occasion of this historic moment. **g**