



Today is the last lecture in this series **Architecture in the Modern Era**. I will be presenting my own work, beginning with my education and concluding with my current practice in residential design, of which I believe much like Kiesler, **the family to be a study of the smallest unit of human coexistence.**

Before I begin, I would like to **thank all of you for attending these lectures**, it has been a **true pleasure to discuss these topics** with you and my hope is that I have been able to **offer something of value.**

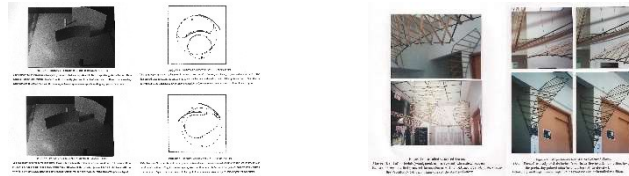
I attended Ohio State University School of Architecture as an Undergraduate in the late 1980s, when theorists **Jeffrey Kipnis and Peter Eisenman** were developing the concept of **Event-Structure** and **Weak Form**: a structure of such a form that facilitates **juxtapositions of unplanned** events – the basis of the creative act.



Seeking a stronger understanding of the articulation and visual perception of form, as a Graduate at Pratt Institute in the early 1990s, I studied under **John Johansen**, himself a student of Marcel Breuer a **descendant of the German Bauhaus.**

But more importantly, I sought out **William Fogler and Martin Skalski** in the Industrial Design Department, who were teaching a **phenomenological seeing**: the **feel of space**, studying **perceptual envelopes and thresholds, refining lines and surfaces** in very subtle ways.

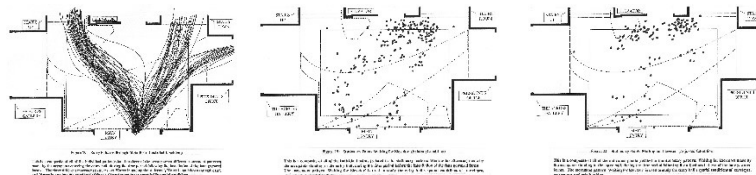
**The act of ‘standing up’ or ‘lying down’** is a body language that often speaks louder than words. And as Victor Hugo believed **architectural form to be the original written language**, an architect must have a **sincere understanding how it speaks.**



So my thesis, Gestured Form and Activated Space (1994) was **an investigative research study into the visual perception of architectural space, exploring the proxemics relationships between the inhabitant and inhabitable form.**

Advised by Martin Skalski, **gestured form** models were studied of **scaled figures** enveloped in **activated space**. Gestured forms were **adjusted and refined** to **expand and contract** space, shifting **thresholds, enveloping and isolating** the scaled figures.

Four full-scale gestured forms were then created and installed in the entrance lobby leading to the President's office, to **study their influence on human movements** through the lobby **through refined adjustments**.



**27 isolated movement patterns** were identified and studied, in addition to **stationary points** where people stood still waiting on the arrival of the elevator.

By **adjusting two of the forms** (one adjacent the elevator door and one overhead the main entry door), the **stationary points shifted in proxemic response, resulting in fewer obstructions to the movement patterns through the lobby.**

Aside from finding refinements in the gestured forms to influence human behavior, more interesting was the debate that ensued in my review, on whether architecture is **a subjective act by designer as an individual** as Wright believed or whether it should be **a science of human nature and building design** as Kiesler believed.



Richard Serra's **Torqued Torus Inversion** (2006), 2 ellipses in plan, with vertical surfaces curved in section, convinced me of **the power of form on perception**.

One that leaned inward, created **a sense of embrace, a cave-like enclosure**. However, it was the other one that leaned outward, but more importantly, with a convex curve from the interior that **transcended its materiality, its weight**. 15 foot in high, 2 inch thick solid steel plates weighing tens of tons, became **weightless simply by the gesture of its form** – bending the top edge outward, taking the eye upward, out into flight.



However, in my professional practice, what I have come to realize is that **architectural space is subjektiv**, perceived differently by each individual.

Daily life is **filled with feelings, intuition, premonitions, internal things**, often too personal to share. Things that define our being.

**Our being filters, shapes, distorts the external world to make it our own personal space.**

This personal space, an **internal space in the mind, is where we live our lives**. Actions occur in the external world, but it is our perceptions, **where we find meaning in those actions, this occurs inside our mind**.

And, our true **home is not some physical house, it is inside, our being**. The most intimate space of all architectural space.

This is what Wright was speaking of in the Japanese Temple as the **'within' space**, the same space Corbusier found in the **solitary cells** of the Carthusian Monastery, or the **tensile relationships** of family members in Kiesler's concept of Correalism.

During the construction of my house, **Villa Vuoto** (2002-2004), I would take progress photos and one day from the hillside, my oldest son Oskar was with me. Wondering around, he **struck a curious pose** looking at the house, so I quickly backed up to get him within the frame of the picture.

Years later, it occurred to me that his posture in this photo, **hands behind his back, wrist in hand**, I find myself doing and gestures my father does from time to time.

Likely hereditary, could be learned subconsciously, whichever what resonates with me is the **continuation - preferences that are passed along through generations**.

These preferences fascinate me. Like a **palimpsest, remnants of ancestral preferences still resonating within me**.

Preferences I have for particular spices, colors, sounds define me individually, but also reveal a **bond to my origins**.

I use them as a tool to pin point my ancestral origins.

**A continuum through time, a symbiotic relationship to a larger whole.**

For my son Oskar, our house modeled around these preferences from ancestors still alive within him, **gives him a sense of grounding, a familiar feeling, a place of belonging**.



**Clay tile roof, hand troweled plaster, vine covered arbors**, reminiscent of my wife's Mediterranean heritage, overlay the architectural form of the house, creating **preferential space, meaningful to our family**.



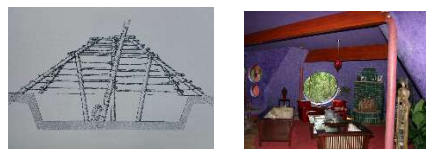
**Circular form**, with varying radii spiraling in plan, **indigenous morphology** – in contrast to modern era, standardized, massed produced, rectilinear form.



These circular forms that evolved historically over long periods of time in isolation, have an **inherent logic in relation to** site specific materials, construction methods and **the human condition**.



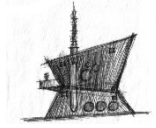
Upper floor bedrooms raised to treetops on pilotis, have circular **walls leaning out** as Adena wigwam, **opening space, releasing, uplifting, to relax and rejuvenate**.



Main floor living rooms are rooted in the hillside, with circular **walls leaning in** as Plateau Pit House, **enclosing space, embracing, intimacy, to curl up and shelter**.

**This phenomenological sense from my thesis work, gestured walls leaning in and out, experienced by the body's perceptions in felt immediacy.**

**Human sensations, 'within' space, defining inhabitable form.**



I am often asked, ‘Where did the design of this come from?’

What is the source of an idea?

After completing construction, I wrote a manifesto to state my reasoning. But ultimately, it became a **search for the source of creativity**.



Creativity is a **directional flow**, roots of a tree that **gathers from many sources and channels through a single trunk**, dispersed into **multiple fruits of influence**,

An example, when I was an undergraduate at Ohio State, in Senior Studio, my professor Jeffrey Kipnis gave us a design program based on a competition Peter Eisenman was involved in, to create a skyscraper at a former site of the Berlin Wall.

My project questioned the traditional form of a skyscraper, historically to that point only rendered a vertical spire, ever reaching higher than the last.

My solution folded the structure over, **stretching across a wall that now only existed in the mind** (die Mauer im Kopf: the wall in the mind).

Mr. Eisenman was intrigued and took the idea one step further – a **Möbius strip**, circling back under ground, to form a complete ring, a **continuum**.

He didn’t get the design built, but Mr. Koolhaas saw publications of the competition and used the idea for his commission in Beijing, to design a “**high-rise not about height**”. “Defining place, not simply occupying it”.

So here is a single idea, **redefining for the first time the nature of a skyscraper**, traveling half way around the world, clearly **on a linear trajectory**, but also **gathering other sources of inspiration** along the way, modifying, some may say enhancing, a final outcome.





Creativity is an endless cycle, channeling its flow is often more productive than trying to locate its origin.

Another example, my Master Bath shower's hanging glass curtain. The original idea was to combine the **elegance of a glass enclosure** with the **ethereal nature of a hanging curtain**.

However, the cost to temper custom glass panels was prohibitive.

Using **cost as a conduit**, I explored the absolute minimum expense possible: Discontinued glass plates suspended on fishing line with binder clips. Aquatic metaphors inspired by the consequence of lapping plates to shed water and visual distortions from circular plates mimicking effect of looking through water. Unexpected results (weak form), simply by embracing limitations presented.



As a child, I played outdoors in treehouses, in the front yard or down the block. But, when my sisters and I were at my grandmother's house, play was indoors, **under the orange vinyl chairs**.

My middle sister and I would talk silly into a tape recorder, shyness subdued by the visual screen of the chair back and seat. There was always a desire to perform, just never the nerve to do so in front of an audience, the **chairs provided confidence**.

Children find ways to play with anything, under chairs, laughing, singing, silly talk. Only adults sit up right on a chair, raised off the floor, to **sit on a floor is improper**.

Somewhere along the way, we **grow up, sit up, rise up off the floor**, become adult, **forget how to act silly, play on the floor under a chair**, curiosity to explore, look.

Growing 'up', we lose that **creative energy of a child**, forget **how to channel it**. Creativity is simply remembering how to **be a child again, curious, wonder**.



(BWE KB 2011)

After we moved into our house, we frequently invited groups of students to visit.

The youngest students, kindergarteners intrigued me most, they still had that **playful spirit** and so I sought out **a way to capture their perceptions.**



(Christina)

Before visiting our house, their teacher would ask them to ‘**draw a picture of a house**’ (left picture). The day after visiting, back in school, they were asked the same prompt again, the second picture (right) **documents perceptual influence.**



(Olivia)

For a child, it is **not the visual features**, edge, surface, size, that define an object. It is the **emotional gestures the object expresses** that resonate, happy, sad, funny.

What **adults consider ‘inanimate’ objects, children find still alive with persona.**

Our house, Villa Vuoto, tries to hold onto some of that **life in the mind of a child**, so the kids who visit see its OK to hold onto these **childhood sensitivities** as adults.

[5 minute break]





While writing my manifesto, one day I was searching the internet for images of the Death Valley Sailing Stones and something popped up unexpected, an image that changed my perspective irreversibly from that moment forward.



A young Sudanese child crawling to a UN food camp, still a kilometer away, slumped over nearly an hour gathering energy to continue. A vulture stands waiting. [Kevin Carter (March 1993) won Pulitzer Prize (April 1994), suicide July 1994.]

What kind of a world do we live in, where a child is left to fend for themselves?

Have we **become numb** to such things? Are we in denial or become **desensitized**?

I believe it is a product of our modern age, an illustration:



Earlier this summer I traveled to Pompeii, to visit the House of a Tragic Poet, Corbusier wrote of in his manifesto Towards a New Architecture. I learned of the small pieces of white marble they placed in the corners of the larger stones that paved their streets. These small white pieces would reflect the moonlight at night, appearing as if **stars in the sky, to find their way** in the dark of the night.

Do we have the same **sensitivity to light** as these people 2 thousand years ago? Light was everything to Corbusier, do we perceive reflections of faint moonlight?

I don't think we do.

Maybe a few, but certainly the masses would not notice.

**Sensitivities have dulled, over time, I don't think anyone has taken measure.**

What is our need for lamp posts at night?

What is our **fear of night**, that we must drown out the dark? ...the unknown?

Our world is illuminated day and night, has this dulled our sensitivity to light?

Worse, lamp posts have masked the **stars only visible at night**.

Today, in the modern age of electric light, most people will live their entire lives never seeing with their own eyes the Milky Way arc across the sky.

Once a source of wonder, visible every night, stars now only appear in **storybooks**. It has been said that the Natives' eyes could even see stars in daylight.

**What have we lost?**

Not just our sensitivities, but our sensibilities.

Awe no longer greets us naturally each night.

What about the noises of city life? Drowning out the **bird songs**.

Air conditioners taking away our perceptions of **seasonal change**?

Standardized, mass produced, box houses depriving us of **circular space**?

Curtains and blinds drawn across windows and doors **separating us from nature**?

Domesticated pets **taming our perceptions of wild animals**?

**We are experiencing an easing of precision by distancing from tactile existence.**

Our modern age of **over stimulation results in habituation** of the senses to cope.

We are **separating at a safe distance for fear of the unknown**.



Separation is useful in certain situations, but the **disconnect has consequence**.

The *Dào Dé Jīng* written by Taoist sage Lǎozǐ during the Zhou Dynasty (500 BC) is one of the most widely translated books in print.

I am currently working on a new translation of the original *zhuànshū* (seal script) calligraphy using Google Translate (version 4.4.13869).

This translation for the Modern Era is to illustrate the disconnect we live with in so many ways, often without even noticing.

**Automated technology rendering a sublimely poetic and paradoxical canon opaque.**

**Nuance and meaning lost by separation.** If a vessel holds no water, what is use?

This passage (chapter 11) is the one Wright wrote about (Future of Architecture) when he discovered the Book of Tea (written by Okakura Kakuzo, 1906), describing **the reality of a room is to be found in the space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves** – the Japanese Temple's concept of the **'within' space**.

Verses 5 & 6 traditionally translated (Henricks): We chisel out doors and windows; it is precisely in these empty spaces, that we find the usefulness of the room.

Google: Chisel windows and doors that room, when is not, there is room also.

2:20pm



How do we **re-connect, find meaning** in modern times? Another detail I notice on my visit to Pompeii, were these brightly colored mosaics of precious Italian stone. After seeing these, it made sense to me, my wife's mosaic work coloring our home.



Her preference for bright mosaic is more than her individuality, it is a remnant of her Italian ancestry, **connection to a continuum**, by **channeling this tendency brings fullness** to her house and thereby fullness to **her being, her home**.

**We are trees in a forest.**

**Our individual being** is something **other than the sum of body parts** (Gestalt), **Our fullness of being** is preference for a more **meaningful whole** (Prägnanz), We seek harmony and balance with a greater continuum.

2:23pm



Victor Hugo declared the printed book will kill architecture as the record of man,

I believe **storytelling**, with origins in an oral tradition, often best illustrates a truth.

**Truths that may return meaningfulness to our architecture.**

I would like to end today with one such story I wrote with a client of mine, titled **Cherry Blossoms**:

Not long ago, I was invited into the home of a Quaker woman. We sat in her kitchen filled with colorful memories, as a winters afternoon sunlight filtered in across a well worn table. She had tutored a young Iraqi woman in English, who had immigrated with her husband. They had a daughter and a second on the way. The woman's heart had grown close to this family, and the **two bedroom house, one more than needed**, had planted a seed in her mind.

As we sat at this painted wood table, its **surface a witness to a lifetime of home making**, she explained to me how she wanted to add on a mother-in-law suite to her home, one she could move into so that this Iraqi family could have her existing house. As she said, "**My happiest times are when I have people sitting around the fire circle, talking, laughing, singing into a night sky. Why not create a home to have more experiences like that?**"

So, we met a few more times at this table, reviewing drawings, discussing plans to build such an addition. The **table's four legs defined a space we shared** in those meetings, just as **four tall trees stood sentry outdoors at the corners of her home**, defining a space for this new suite to be placed. The original house was a gabled box, painted blue siding, with an entry in an oddly placed side door. We decided to create a new entry, **a connector** between her new suite, modeled in character but scaled slightly smaller, and the original house now paired. In the spring construction began, as her excitement spilled over into endless smiles each time I saw her. Walls were painted, wood floors laid, cabinetry placed. It wasn't long before her new family moved in, their first night on Thanksgiving day. I imagine the fire that night was memorable for all of them, **a new family made from two homes of distant cultures, now close in proximity** of space and hearts.

I returned the following year, after some time settled in. The kitchen table was still there, in the same spot snuggled against that window **facing a setting sun**. However, **now the top was masked** by a printed cloth trimmed with embroidery. Much of her original furnishings remained, handed down along with the house, for another lifetime of use. But the space had changed, **a new layer was added** to the stories these things told, **rendering something different, something special**.

“In such instances we see the full significance of the flower sacrifice. Perhaps the **flowers appreciate the full significance** of it. They are **not cowards, like men**. Some flowers glory in death - certainly the Japanese cherry blossoms do, as they **freely surrender themselves to the winds**. Anyone who has stood before the fragrant avalanche at Yoshino must realize this. For a moment they hover like bejeweled clouds and dance; then, as they sail away on laughing waters, they seem to say: Farewell, O Spring! **We are on to Eternity.**” (Book of Tea, p.60)

If an architect is lucky, just such a flower blossom drifts by, offering a rare gift into **the true measure of a home**. It is not the timbers felled, squared and plumbed to support a roof overhead. It is not the room they define, decorated with finger paintings, tablecloths, and flowerpots. Nor is it the people living inside, sheltered, warmed, sharing their time together. It is the mixture of all these things, **a blending** that makes a home.

An aged painted table, edges eased by endless caresses, hands in conversation, communal meals, moments shared. An aged tree canopy, limbs lowered sheltering shade, protective of this woman **reading stories to a granddaughter, making a happy place**.



Portrait of my client Marcy (Luek), taken on our second meeting (2012).  
 The 2013 mother-in-law addition (left) to the original house (right).  
 Her new family Mohammad and Israa, with daughters Maryam and Danna.

**This woman created an addition, surrounded herself with children, thereby finding continuation,**