

Realising the Endless:

The work of Jürgen Mayer H. and the legacy of Frederick Kiesler

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Abstract

Frederick Kiesler realised that the perception of our physical reality is triggered by the swinging pendulum of the psyche. More than eighty years after the surrealist revolution and Kiesler's unrealised tempo-spatial concept of architecture, his spirit and his never-ending need to reveal the unconscious in his art and spatial design can still be found in contemporary architecture. This paper examines and analyses the subconscious relationship between space and the psyche in the different design schemes of Kiesler and the contemporary architect Mayer H., showing that the theory of the 'endless' is about to be realised and that Kiesler's 'endless' space can finally become a reality.

The Jewish architect Frederick Kiesler, a prominent figure in the surrealist group, was never able to realise his dream of the *Endless House*. Even when he wrote to Breton in 1959 that 'finally, after thirty years of hibernation in New York, not me, but the world around me has awakened and I am able to do things while I had always hoped for and never was quite able to reach out for,' the 'endless' project had still not come to fruition.¹ Is it possible that 40 years after Kiesler's continued efforts to realise his vision, the *Metropol Parasol* project designed by the German architect Jürgen Mayer H. succeeded to put the spirit and vision that Kiesler spoke of into a real form?

In order to understand the unconscious relations between Mayer H. and Kiesler and the manifestation of the 'endless' in the *Metropol Parasol* project one must look at the broad spectrum of their work. In contrast to the growing attention that Kiesler's work has received in recent years as the inspiration for many digital architects, whose work formally resembles Kiesler's spatial vocabulary, the relationship between Mayer H.'s architecture and Kiesler's legacy deserves a deeper and more complex reading.² The resonance between them can be related more to the vision Salvador Dalí had in 1935 of the rise of a great 'soft' period of flexible, sticky and convulsive buildings that would not only be places to live in, but places that would serve our innermost burning dreams. Mayer H., like Kiesler before him, had to spend years convincing the world that art, architecture and technology could be as one. He has described his early years when he had to hold his ground and not give up on his dreams or end up working in a 'no man's land'.³ In his continual efforts to transform his dream space into a concrete space, Kiesler spoke in similar terms:

Here again looms the great question for me: to build or not to build. I feel like an imaginary totem pole built of ice blocks held together by red-hot iron bars, all enwrapped in screaming steam. Have I to quit the job because the compromise is too great, or am I to



keep on fighting to save something that most probably would no longer pertain to my basic ideas, but only be a satisfaction to the committee and perhaps of some financial gain for me? I feel so often like a beggar who is truly rich and extends his hand for alms only to give pleasure to the giver.⁴



Figure 1: Frederick Kiesler, *Correalist Instrument and Rocker*, re-edition of 2002, in cooperation with Wittmann Möbelwerkstätten. Photographs by Bernhard Angerer. Courtesy Wittmann Möbelwerkstätten.

Mayer H. was able gradually to establish a unique architectural language that sees in a piece of furniture much more than we are used to seeing. Like the experiments of Kiesler before him, he is well aware of the possibilities of using and adjusting a single object. Using the same free forms made by cutting and pressing techniques that Kiesler (in his object designs) and Jean Arp (in his minimal paintings and reliefs) were keen on (while under the influence of the surrealist group), Mayer H. can show us how complexity is achieved through simple means leaving our imagination to work overtime and letting inner impulses and the laws of chance complete the design. Kiesler, in the surrealist gallery he designed for Peggy Guggenheim in 1942 (for the Art of this Century exhibition), revealed his multi-purpose furniture that could stand any way up, functioning simultaneously as a bench, a table, a sculpture, a display area and a chair among its other eighteen uses [fig. 1]. The innumerable uses of Mayer H.'s works also interact constantly with the user and the observer, loading the piece of furniture



with our ever-changing desires [fig. 2]. In the work of both, there is a great and important need to feel and touch their objects. In this way, our perception and understanding is deeper compared to the information we get through just looking. Even a simple single object can become organic, functional, modular, adaptable, meaningful and in a way 'endless,' even, due to its continuous surface and multiple possibilities. Recently, Mayer H. used the same principles of his interior design upon an entire building (in the case of the food factory and curiosity centre of the Danfoss project) blurring even more the traditional distinctions we would have expected to find between the functions of different kinds of space.

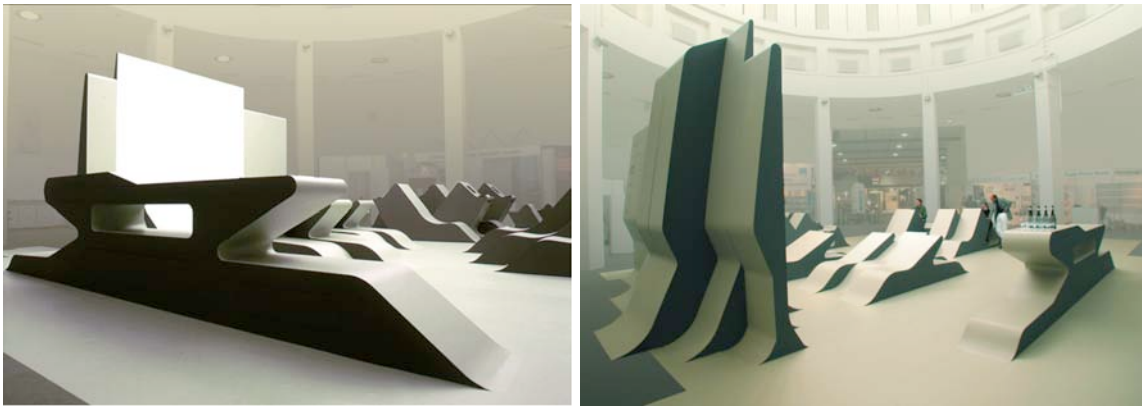


Figure 2: Jürgen Mayer H., *Stylepark Lounge* at UIA Congress, Berlin, 2002. Photograph by Uwe Walter, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.

Kiesler's own approach prefigured this challenge to spatial distinctions, as the following passage from his writings on the *Endless House* shows:

The traditional art object, be it painting, a sculpture, a piece of architecture, is no longer seen as an isolated entity, but must be considered within the context of this expanding environment. The environment becomes equally as important as the object, if not more so, because the object breathes into the surrounding and also inhales the realities of the environment no matter in what space, close or wide apart, open air or indoor. No object, of nature or art, exists without environment, As a matter of fact, the object itself can expand to a degree where it becomes its own environment (see my wooden galaxy exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951). Thus we have to shift our focus from the object to the environment and the only way we can bind them together is through an objective, a clarification of life's purpose – otherwise the whole composite picture in time and space will fall apart.⁵

Early on in his career Kiesler too wrote in his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display* (1930) about our need to stimulate desire and to blur the distinctions between everything. In this very theatrically-informed text Kiesler asked, for instance, 'why doesn't the show window hold, instead of display- a play? A stage play. Where Mr. Hat and Miss Glove are partners. The window is a



veritable peepshow stage. Let the street be your auditorium with its ever-changing audience.’ This was the beginning of his design philosophy, which we will continue to explore in this article.



Figure 3: Jürgen Mayer H., *October 2*, 2005. Photograph courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.



Figure 4: Frederick Kiesler, *Surrealist Gallery*, Art of this Century Gallery, New York, 1942. Photograph Kiesler Foundation archive © Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna, 2007.

The use of a large scale, reflecting this expansion of the object into its wider environment, is apparent in Mayer H.’s projects *October 1* and *October 2*, the first instances in his work of breaking the barriers between floor, wall and ceiling [fig. 3]. These efforts contain again a remote echo of Kiesler’s pioneering work in his Art of this Century exhibition design for Peggy Guggenheim [fig. 4].



Mayer H. only once made a direct conscious reference to Kiesler, in his *In Heat* installation [fig. 5]. The architect placed a text on his website that openly states this inspiration:

Stems from Friedrich Kiesler's design for the 1947 *Blood Flames* exhibition at the Hugo Gallery, New York. His radical new concept proposed merging art, architecture and the viewer into a continuation of painted walls and floors which hosts and interconnects the artwork. *In Heat* develops this confusion of art, viewer and space into an even more radical way by introducing thermosensitive coating as interactive paintings where the viewer, creating a temperature shadow by touching, melts into the overall exhibition design. Everything gets flattened into an architectural surface with depth in time.⁶

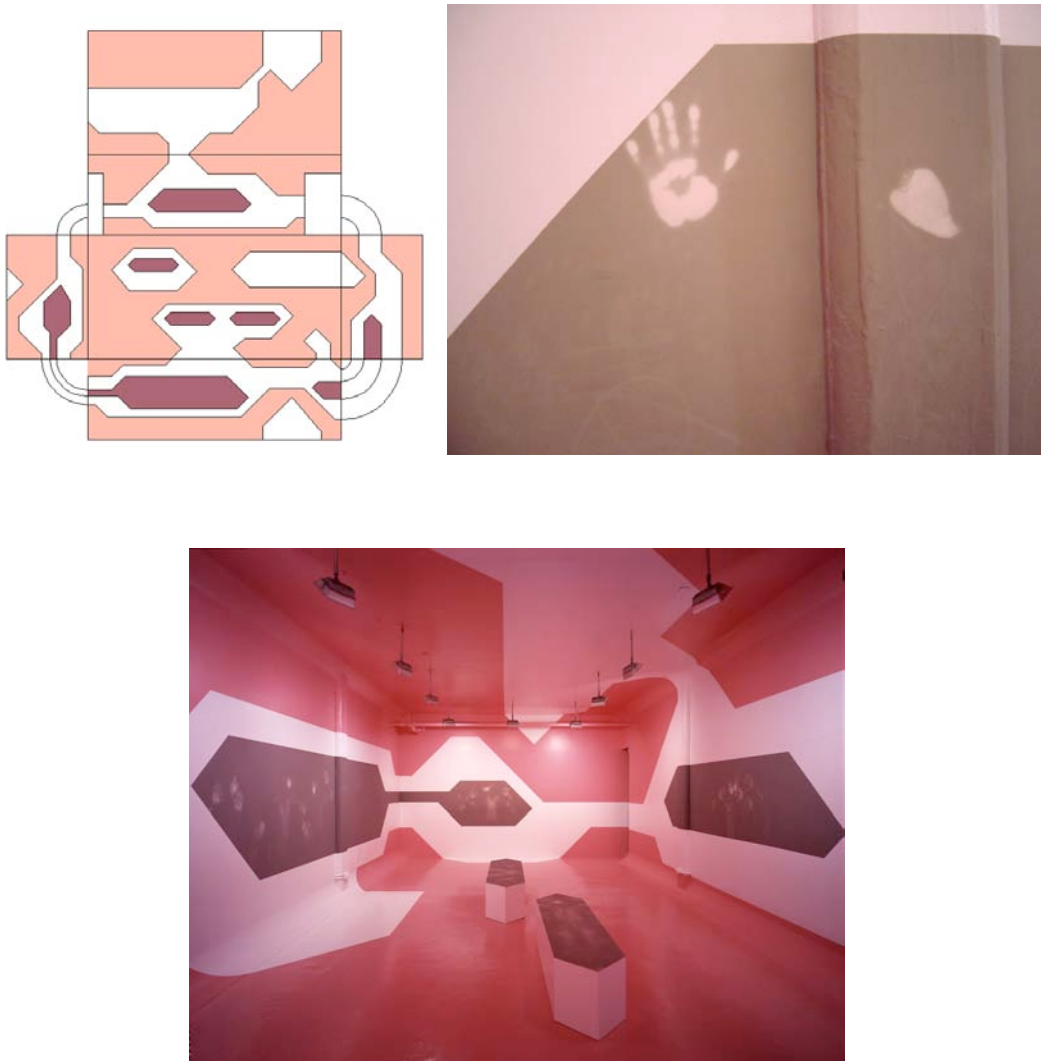


Figure 5: Jürgen Mayer H., *In Heat* installation at Henry Urbach Architecture, New York City, April-May 2005. Photograph by Mauro Restiffe, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.





Figure 6: Frederick Kiesler, *Blood Flames*, Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947. Photograph Kiesler Foundation archive © Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna, 2007.

This gesture to Kiesler's *Blood Flames* exhibition from 1947 [fig. 6] is a fresh and technologically-informed reinterpretation of Kiesler's philosophy, trying to merge everything together, including the viewer. Like in the surrealist game of the 'exquisite corpse,' Mayer H. continues from where Kiesler had left off, making a new but yet connected spatial drawing, letting the visitors proceed with this game without being fully aware of previous artistic attempts. The viewer becomes conscious not only of installation history, technology, art and architecture, but mostly of him- or herself. The viewer becomes a participant, while the thin line between Kiesler and Mayer H. disappears, bridging past and present into a collective work of art. The welding of walls, floors and ceilings consumes everything that comes into the architectural site, including the observer, who now becomes observed in turn as Kiesler originally intended:

The wall, the floor, the ceiling, are no longer segregated planes, they flow into one another, colors and lighting, breathing heavily and lightly; so-called paintings no longer created with standard forms and planes, sculptures no longer on pedestals, nor harbored in niches, like frozen custard, nor conglomerations of parts, animal and mechanical, motorized or made mortal, nor pictures hung along walls like laundry on washlines. No. There is a breaking down of barriers of separation between the constituents of architecture, which itself is



contained within the flow of nature's forces. Thus the creative genius of man can express itself once more with the power of his own time.⁷

Kiesler's intention was that all of us, the inheritors of chaos, must become the architects of a new unity in his exhibition projects. The dramatic way in which he wanted us to view paintings on display is being enhanced in Mayer H.'s work, as the viewer becomes the object of display itself, thus fulfilling Kiesler's desire to overcome the failure of modernism as he saw it, asking for example 'Are those your questions? Whether the walls have ornaments or not? We couldn't care less! Skip the walls.'⁸

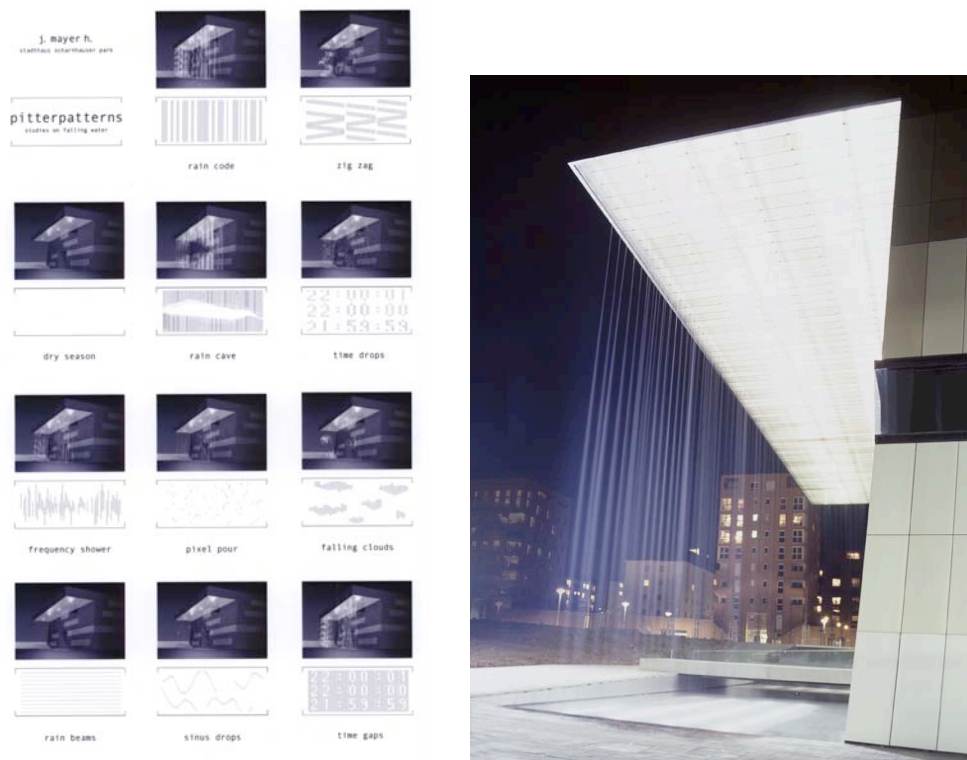


Figure 7: Jürgen Mayer H., *Pitterpatterns*, Stadt.haus Scharnhauer Park, Ostfildern, Germany, 1998-2002: computer animated artificial rain dripping from underneath the flat cantilevered roof, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.

Experiencing architecture through motion in space is the ultimate challenge to an architect. Mayer H.'s architecture is becoming a moving phenomenon through different mediums such as light, shadow, temperature sensitive surfaces, water, wind and so on. By making experiments with 'technology that is activated by nature' and 'nature that is activated by technology'⁹ Mayer H. is subconsciously using a surreal method of ambiguity and reversed meaning such as one can find in René Magritte's or Dalí's work. Using such a method allows one to continue to explore new territories, ask new questions and doubt existing conventions. For example, the sheltering roof that is supposed to keep us away from rain in his *Municipal Building* project, becomes the producer of rain [fig. 7]:



Light and water animations are an integral part of the *stadt.haus* and include a subtle relationship between nature and technology. Framing the main entrance visitors will have to walk through a computer animated artificial rain dripping from underneath the flat cantilevered roof. *Wind.light* is a light installation next to the *stadt.haus*. Hanging glass fibre cables project points of light onto the ground, animated by the movement of the wind. Built-in webcams collect all light points with a surveillance software and send a live image of its dynamic constellation into the *stadt.haus* and onto the website of the City of Ostfildern. The *stadt.haus* and square construct a new public building prototype by offering simultaneity of city life in real, mediated and virtual space.¹⁰

This is truly a surreal technique (one that Dalí used inside his famous *Rainy Taxi* for the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism) that makes the initial interaction between the viewer and the building a completely surprising mixture of real and unreal effects. This project captures the genuine and immediate response of the viewer's unconsciousness like a kind of automatic architecture, attempting to break the barrier between man and his subconscious – in this honest moment that is not influenced by formalistic boundaries and controls one can find one's true self. The dadaist notion of a playful environment is here combined with a surrealist notion of mythical thought. Kiesler too experimented with similar effects: in many of his conceptual sketches for the *Shrine of the Book*, in the heart of the shrine was a water-jet that was supposed to rise from a bronze vase (above the main display case of biblical manuscripts) through a hole in a dome and beyond it into the open air, running down on the outside surface of the dome that was cooled in the opposite direction by surrounding water-sprays. Len Pitkowsky, who was for many years Kiesler's assistant and also worked on this project, told me in an interview of 2005 that all the inner plumbing was already in place but that this idea to have water running so close to the fragile scrolls was not approved at the last minute.

Returning to a smaller scale, the *E-gram* project, which Mayer H. also calls the *Glass House*, is a way of bringing materiality back into the terrain of the conceptual [fig. 8]. This little glass cube holds within it a dreamlike space that was made through light (laser beams) produced by programmed information, causing microscopic cracks in an unreachable parallel dimension. One can even suggest that the effect is like looking into one of Joseph Cornell's boxes, Alberto Giacometti's *Palace at 4 a.m.*, or at one of Man Ray's roentgen-technique photographs known as *Rayographs*. The effect is certainly of a building that shows more than meets the eye. Unlike the random strings in Duchamp's installation for the *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942) or the cracks that occurred accidentally in his *Large Glass* revealing the importance of chance – the *E-gram* cracks are carefully programmed giving the modern designer the elusive feeling of controlling chaos.



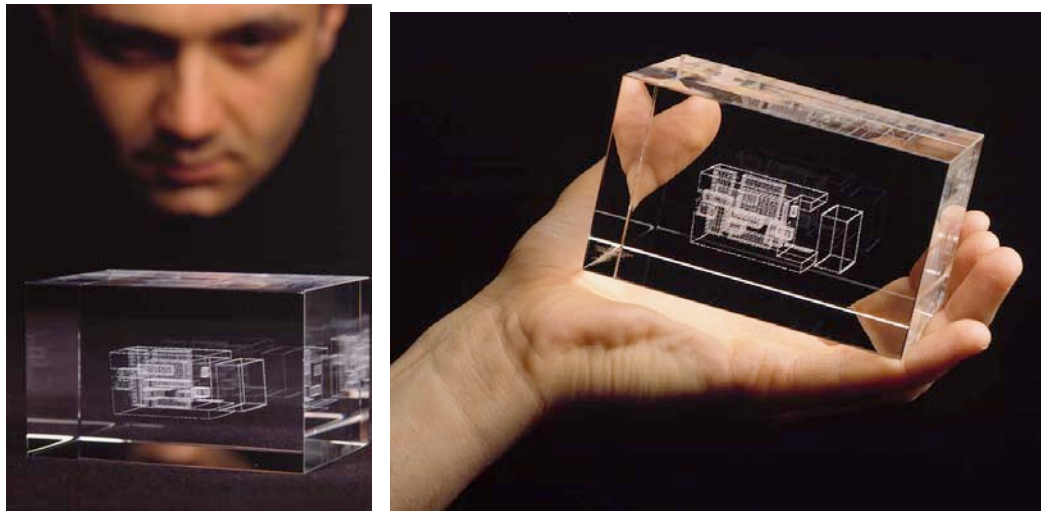


Figure 8: Jürgen Mayer H., *E-gram*, 2000, Museum of Modern Art, New York, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.

It is important to mention that Kiesler was the first to promote the significance of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. Kiesler also wrote about the discovery of x-rays in his article 'Design-Correlation.'¹¹ He himself had a sustained concern with the notion of continuity held together by invisible nothingness (what he termed 'galaxies'), while this 'nothing' was nothing else but the breath of the cosmos itself, as he saw it. Even before 1930 he wrote about windows being the most direct method of human contact, because we live mainly by the eye that observes, calculates and advises us about things quickly. Ten years later while inventing his 'vision machine,' he wrote:

Through this demonstration we learn that neither light, nor eye, nor brain, alone or in association, can see. But rather, we see only through the total coordination of human experiences; and even then, it is our own conceived image, and not really the actual object which we perceive. We learn, therefore, that we see by creative ability and not by mechanical reproduction. The transformation of light impulse reflected from the real object through man's physiology creates an image, which hides the original object. All parts of this object, built from transparent synthetic and other materials, are connected mechanically, except the object, which remains a separate unit. From the beginning to the end, a talking apparatus gives a synchronized explanation with the unfolding of the process in demonstration.¹²

Kiesler was obsessed with his 'vision machine,' which was also influenced by the historic *camera obscura* technique of projecting a scene of nature through a minute hole. He wrote in 1937 that these kinds of experiments were based on the desire of man to project himself beyond the moment of his being.



Kiesler, seemingly able to pre-empt future artistic developments, promoted novel ideas that entailed new ways of representing spatial environments, as in his support for Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The following extended passage makes this clear:

Duchamp's 'Big Glass' [sic] created 1912-1923 in New York City's Fourteenth Street, known at that time only to a small group, is in 1937 acclaimed by the progressive professionals throughout the world. It surpasses in creative ingenuity any painting since the great Illusion-Builder SEURAT, anticipating as well as continuing the line of development Picasso-Miro-Dali, X., Y., Z. It will fit any description such as: abstract, constructivist, real, super-and-surrealist without being affected. It lives on its own eugenics. It is nothing short of being the masterpiece of the first quarter of twentieth-century painting. It is architecture, sculpture, and painting in ONE. To create such an X-ray painting of space, materiae and psychic, one needs as a lens (a) oneself, well focused and dusted off, (b) the subconscious as camera obscura, (c) a super-consciousness as sensitizer, and (d) the clash of this trinity to illuminate the scene. The glass plate cracked 1931, cutting strokes across the pane that would have broken any other composition, but not this singular masterpiece of tectonic integration. Strange for factualist is the magic of subconscious creation with which the outburst of broken glass-streaks which now veins the whole picture was anticipated by Marcel Duchamp. A preparatory drawing of 1914 ... already showed radiating lines abstractly superimposed upon the reality of the main theme of the design. But it seems to me that not until the breakage had actually occurred was the cycle of perfect fusion of the subconscious image with its realization completed, and the time ripe to give its message to the public.¹³

Mayer H. with his rich artistic background also seems to deal with new ways of capturing building space, in certain works evoking a feel of miniaturisation like that of the small Duchamp models from his *Boîte-en-valise* series. This technique of representing an existing work of art on an even smaller and private scale holds within it many layers and associations which cannot be found in the original full scale building. Just as it was impossible for André Breton to consider a picture as anything but a window, we might wonder onto what Mayer H.'s work looks out. The glazed *E-gram* brings magic back into architecture and gives us the ability to see through the window into the inside of our intentions, following Breton's image of a transparent dwelling: 'I myself shall continue living in my glass house where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where who I am will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond.'¹⁴



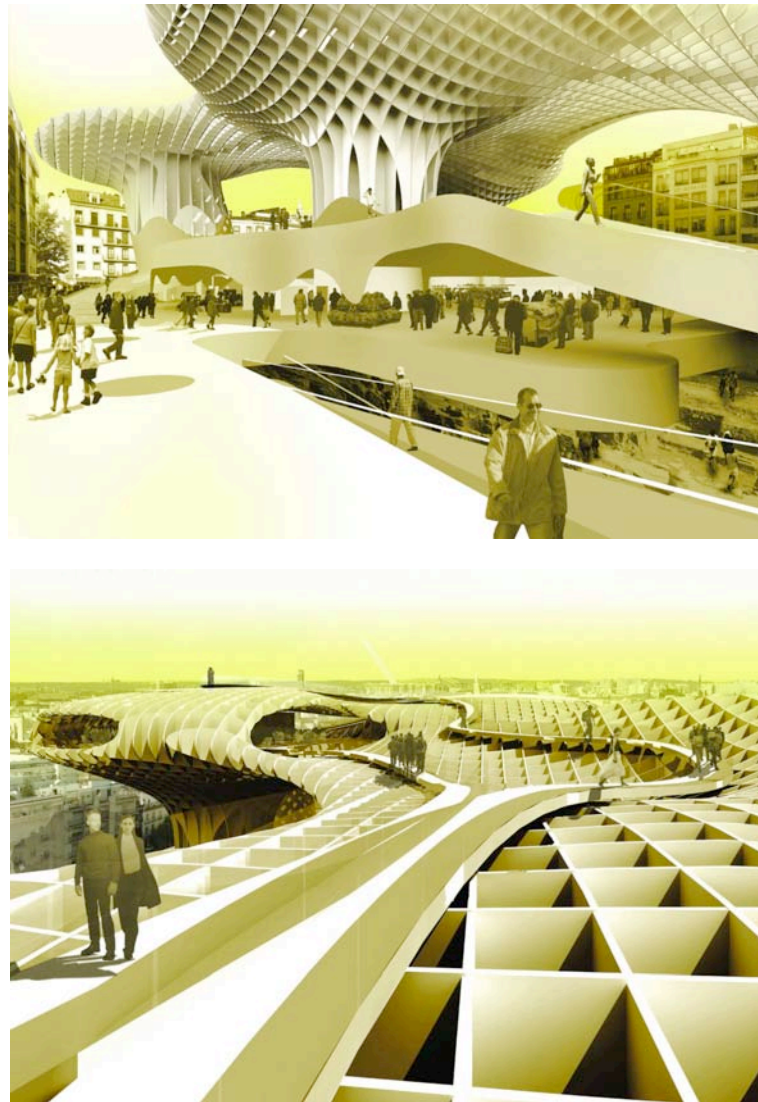


Figure 9: Jürgen Mayer H., *Metropol Parasol*, Plaza de la Encarnacion, Seville, Spain, begun in 2004, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.

All of the above brings us to explore more closely the hidden layers behind Mayer's *Metropol Parasol* project in Seville [fig. 9]. Mayer H. reveals the origins of this project on his website:

Metropol Parasol is the new icon project for Sevilla, - a place of identification and to articulate Sevilla's role as one of Spain's most fascinating cultural destinations. Metropol Parasol explores the potential of the Plaza de la Encarnacion to become the new contemporary urban centre. Its role as a unique urban space within the dense fabric of the medieval inner city of Sevilla allows for a great variety of activities such as memory, leisure and commerce. A highly developed infrastructure helps to activate the square, making it an attractive destination for tourists and locals alike.



The Metropol Parasol scheme with its large mushroom like structures offers an archeological site, a farmers market, an elevated plaza, multiple bars and restaurants underneath and inside the parasols, as well as a panorama terrace on the very top of the parasols. Thought of as a light metal structure, the parasols grow out of the archeological excavation site into a contemporary landmark. The columns become prominent points of access to the museum below as well as to the plaza and panorama deck above, defining a unique relationship between the historical and the contemporary city. Metropol Parasol's mixed-use character initiates a dynamic development for culture and commerce in the heart of Sevilla.¹⁵

The very location of this project in the heart of Seville on top of an archeological site, its duality and its surprising relations between past and present, bring to mind Freud's writings on Pompeii's remains and rebirth as a parallel to the subconscious mind, as well as the surrealist approach towards romantic ruins. It was the pre-surrealist poet Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse) who wrote long before Freud in *Les Chants de Maldoror* that it is important to look at the ruins of cities but it is even more important to look into the ruins of the human being, suggesting that the human soul is more intriguing than concrete reality. The past will always haunt the present from the surrealist as well as from the psychoanalyst point of view. Dalí even selected a ruined theatre to house his museum in Figueres.¹⁶ Benjamin Péret published in *Minotaure* in 1939 a wonderful article called 'Ruines: Ruine des Ruines,' in which he hoped that one day in the future a strange dinosaur skeleton-like ruin revealed from the earth would turn out to be nothing less than the Eiffel tower itself [fig. 10]. For these surrealists it was important to forget and to neglect the most amazing things in order to rediscover them again at a later time.



Figure 10: Church ruins, Dobrokoz, Hungary, *Minotaure* 12-13, 1939,165



Kiesler saw modern (machine-age) houses as living ruins – one box next to another, one box below and another above, proliferating until they grew into skyscraper-tumours, suffocating all the life from the city and in a way making our modern existence like the aftermath of Pompeii, a way of ‘living’ without noticing that we are already dead:

What are our houses but coffins towering up from the earth into the air? One storey, two storeys – a thousand storeys. Walled up on two sides, on ten sides. Stone entombed – or wood, clay, concrete. Coffins with airholes.

Cemeteries have more air for the skeletons of their dead than our cities for the lungs of their living. Each grave has its lawn, its piece of meadow, a gravelled path to separate it from its neighbors. Each grave an islet of green. Each his own master: each his own settlement.

And our cities? walls, walls, WALLS... We will have NO MORE WALLS, these armories for body and soul, this whole armored civilization; with or without ornament. We want:

1. Transformation of the surrounding area of space into cities.
2. Liberation from the ground, abolition of the static axis.
3. No walls, no foundations.
4. A system of spans (tension) in free SPACE.
5. Creation of new kinds of living, and, through them, the demands which will remould society.

We are satiated with architecture. We want no new editions, be they ever so well contrived. Instead of the old bedazzened single-faced models, plain four-faced models; for baroque curves, straight lines; for ogival windows, rectangular windows. The expert is bankrupt. What interests everyone is: how does one LIVE among these curved or straight walls? from what sort of life, of NEW life, do these four or x faces arise?¹⁷

In reaction against its state at the time, Kiesler thought that architecture should be a kind of magic – a creation of life and a creation of freedom. He wished that the outer and inner worlds should meet in architecture. Kiesler, like Lautréamont and many other surrealists, realised that the human body itself is the most extraordinary universe. He claimed for instance that his *Endless House* merited this name because ‘... all ends meet, and meet continuously. It is endless like the human body – there is no beginning and no end to it. The “Endless” is rather sensuous, more like the female body in contrast to sharp-angled male architecture. All ends meet in the “Endless” as they meet in life. Life’s rhythms are cyclical ... They touch one another with the kiss of Time.’¹⁸





Figure 11: Frederick Kiesler, *Model of Endless House*, 1959, Cement and wire mesh, 96.5 x 243.8 x 106.7 cm. Photograph Kiesler Foundation archive © Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna, 2007.

A long-neglected archeological site in Seville is being rediscovered, reborn and reshaped in Mayer H.'s project. The cave-like feeling of the curved inner space of Mayer H.'s project, started with infiltrating light, evokes the same spatial and social questions that Kiesler asked while working on his *Endless House* [fig. 11]. Kiesler once said that archeology is the art of digging out the past, while architecture is the art of digging the future into the present: 'One is digging out, the other is digging in. The archeologist can never tell about the future or the present, but the artist can – and will.'¹⁹ Like in the work of a skilled psychologist who unveils different layers while trying to get to the bottom of the patient's problem, the needle point approach of the *Metropol Parasol* is not apparently damaging the site, and is trying even to heal the wounds inflicted by time on this historical urban setting. We can see in Mayer H.'s work that the voids play the same rule as the mass of the building, reminding us again of Kiesler's approach to void and space:

Space, so hard to define, is so translucent in its endlessness that until coagulated into solid form, it cannot be perceived. Space in nature always seems to be a void – an emptiness encompassing solid bodies. The endlessness of space once had meaning only in connection with the 'outer cosmos.' But modern research taught us that space can also be endless in the inner sanctum of the micro-atom.²⁰

In regard to the cave-like feeling created in his work, Kiesler himself wrote in his *Manifesto on Correalism* (1947):



The magnetism that held us together is gone, and our force of attraction is exhausted. Backtrack. Let us go back within ourselves and become cave dwellers. We would be able to scrawl our beliefs on the walls once again. For all caves look alike and all scratchings are similar. Then we will live together! The walled cells will become a continuous support for a boundless edifice.

Giving back life to a historical place or culture is indeed a great responsibility for an architect, who must use all of his or her sociological and psychological skills to merge the past reborn with the people of the ever-changing present. Kiesler dedicated his work to this, and hoped others would follow this concept of rebirth:

I wonder if one could find a plastic expression for the idea of 'rebirth' – that is, an architectural concept that would make visitors feel the necessity for each person to renew himself while yet on this earth. To give birth to oneself – not to be satisfied with the birth by a mother, but to recreate one's own being in the image of his own life experience. This is not, of course, rebirth after death, but rebirth during one's very own lifetime. Perhaps, a Sanctuary of Silence, with the flow and return of water suggesting to everyone the Second Coming of himself. Such an architecture would indeed be worth searching for.²¹

On the conscious and visual level, the arches that Mayer H. is using in his Seville project are linked to the gothic curves of the nearby cathedral or to the bent trees near the site, as the architect himself pointed out in recent interviews with me. One can even relate them to the work of Antoni Gaudí. Mayer H. adds his interpretation to these historical layers by deforming and transforming the original cathedral into what he calls an 'open democratic cathedral,' a structure that is open, all-embracing and connects to the open sky and to local history.²² Time is being revealed here through patterns of light penetrating the continuous structural canopy of a very light latticework (unlike the ribbed concrete walls of Kiesler's *Shrine*). The openings are mediators between the viewer and the environment. The light that passes through is in the viewer's mind a constant reminder of nature and its constant flux. Kiesler's hope was that the atmosphere in his 'endless' structures would be characterised by processes of flowing, opening, softness, and inhabitation, and that the feeling of being inside his *Endless House* would be like living inside a sculpture that was changing every second with the light. I dare to say that a similar feeling will be achieved in Mayer H.'s *Metropol Parasol*. The alchemical feeling of a structure ever changing through light suggests that architecture should not be only about completion and perfection but rather about constant experiencing and searching. Mayer H.'s strong social vision of architecture as a gift to the people and the environment reflects the surrealists' and Kiesler's vision of a quest for total equality and humanity.



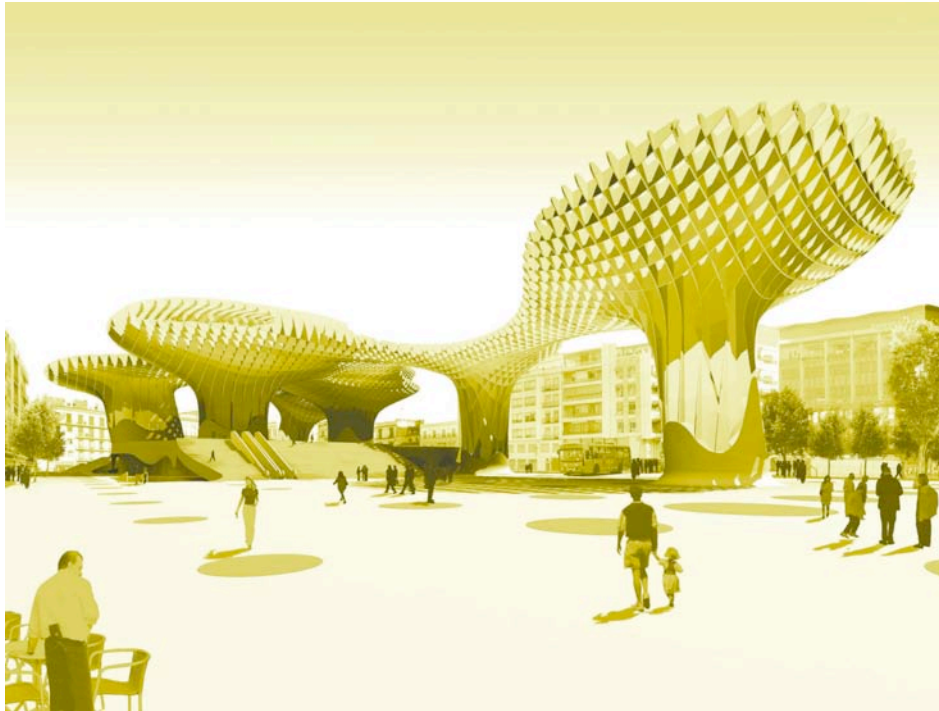


Figure 12: Jürgen Mayer H., *Metropol Parasol*, Plaza de la Encarnacion, Seville, Spain, begun in 2004, courtesy the J. Mayer H. archive, Berlin.

A knowledge of Kiesler's philosophy of the 'endless,' his time-space concept of architecture, can help us to read more layers into the *Metropol Parasol* [fig. 12]. Kiesler's work is derived from his conception that art and architecture must express the act of living inside time and space. Therefore the spectator of his work must be inspired to participate in it, both actively and passively, as he liked to say. Kiesler understood intuitively the strength of the oval shape and tried with no real success to anchor this feeling for experimental architecture in concrete forms. The walls of his 'endless' projects became invitations into new spaces that are often read as architectural wombs (corresponding to the concept of rebirth). The *Endless House* was for Kiesler the last sanctuary for man. Returning to Mayer H.'s *Metropol Parasol* – if it is possible to compare a project for a domestic dwelling with a public building – the effect of freeing the ground by putting the entire structure on pillars, together with the floating cloud forms and intertwining promenade on top, can be considered as a contemporary representation of the principles of Kiesler's *Endless House*. Mayer H.'s innovative structure is a subconscious updating of Kiesler's unidentified theoretical cloud, fixing it in everyday reality without losing out or making compromises, in this collision between the ideal world and the real world.

To become one with nature was one of Kiesler's goals in his *Endless House* sketches that in my opinion is being finally fulfilled. Mayer H. embraces in his project nature, technology, art and design as well as communication with the people who are at the centre of all architecture. While working on the *Shrine of the Book* Kiesler wrote in 1958: 'The Dead Sea Scrolls unfold a new life for me,



architecturally speaking – demanding a blunt reality, not a theory ... Evidently a new architecture in spirit, form and materials will have to be found. I must retire to the no man's land of my inner sanctum waiting for guidance. Only a belief, and not the intellect, will help to find a solution.²³ Kiesler did his best to retain his notion of the 'endless' in his last masterpiece, but this project still only reflected a fragment of his entire design philosophy. Mayer H. is able to realise fifty years later this dream of the 'endless' by simply knowing when these complex ideas need to be frozen and applied using feasible materials and tangible spaces. By knowing when the 'endless' must reach its end and where theory must become a reality, Mayer H. enables us to appreciate it more, to understand it better and to capture a small piece of the 'endless' in his own timeless architecture.

Surrealism was an attempt to use the mechanisms of inspiration and imagination scientifically, in order to explore the world of dreams and that of repressed desires, and to apply the conclusions of this investigation to concrete reality. This article has briefly shown how well surrealist artists (long before modern architects) used different methods of revealing the subconscious in art, interior design and even architecture. Bernard Tschumi claimed in an interview with myself of 2005 that in his opinion architecture was not ready at the time to explore the spaces of the unconscious.²⁴ But is architecture capable of exploring the spaces of the unconscious now? After analysing the subconscious and historical relations especially to Kiesler's work, I can draw my conclusion that the spatial ideals of Mayer H.'s *Metropol Parasol*, together with other examples of his contemporary work, are deeply rooted in the surrealist past while pointing to the future, showing that space and psyche are always connected and it is the duty of the architect to rediscover this link. Like a true alchemist, Mayer H., just like Kiesler before him, is able to melt architecture into a shiny surrealist gold realising not only his own but also our own dreams.



- 1 Letter from Frederick Kiesler to André Breton, 10.07.59, archive of the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna.
- 2 Dieter Bogner, ed., *Friedrich J. Kiesler's Endless Space*, texts by Dieter Bogner, Greg Lynn, Peter Noever, Lisa Phillips, Lebbeus Woods, Vienna 1997.
- 3 Interview with Jürgen Mayer H. by Joseph Cory, Berlin, 23.03.06.
- 4 Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House: Art, People and Architecture*, New York 1966, 77.
- 5 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 573.
- 6 <http://www.jmayerh.de/home.htm>. (10.05.06)
- 7 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 157.
- 8 Kiesler, *Rethinking the Endless Symposium*, Witte de With Cahier 6, July 1997, 73.
- 9 Interview with Mayer H. by Joseph Cory, Jerusalem, 25.04.06.
- 10 <http://www.jmayerh.de/home.htm>. (10.05.06)
- 11 Kiesler, 'Design-Correlation,' *Architectural Record*, July 1937, 89.
- 12 Kiesler, *Rethinking the Endless Symposium*, 85.
- 13 Kiesler, 'Design-Correlation', 54.
- 14 André Breton, *Nadja*, London 1999, 18.
- 15 <http://www.jmayerh.de/home.htm>. (10.05.06)
- 16 'Here is your new museum. It is a ready made!' said Duchamp to Dalí according to a statement by Morse from his unfinished essays and writings on the theme of 'Dalí and Science,' archives of the Salvador Dalí museum in Saint Petersburg, Florida.
- 17 Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display*, New York 1930, 48.
- 18 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 566-67.
- 19 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 32.
- 20 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 394.
- 21 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 323.
- 22 Interview with Mayer H. by Joseph Cory, Berlin, 23.03.06.
- 23 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, 318.
- 24 Interview with Bernard Tschumi by Joseph Cory, New York, 07.09.05.

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