Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Standardized Flexibility and Its Predicament

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• Abstract (300 words):
During the first half of the twentieth century in the US, researchers and architects studied human behaviors at work and home. It was part of the efforts to reestablish architecture on a rational and scientific basis. Human activities, including labor, were systematically and scientifically analyzed, and family living was carefully examined. From Motion Study (1911) by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth to Charles Ramsey and Harold Sleeper’s Architectural Graphic Standards (1932), analytical approaches to human activities made a significant contribution to the modernization of architecture.

However, grid patterns on the façades resulting from modular production often became associated with the monotony and rigidity of calcified modern form and space. In the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of flexible space was often proposed as an antidote to the deadly dullness and inefficiency of modern interior design. Bürolandschaft and the
Action Office by Herman Miller are good examples. In these cases, the dichotomy of flexible space vs. rigid form was apparent.

However, the idea of flexibility was imbedded in the standardization and mass production of building components. Researchers and industrialists believed that standardization would give maximum flexibility to the end-users and builders as well as the manufacturers.

This paper contends that the concept of flexible space was crucial to the industrialization of a building in the early research on prefabrication. As the central case-study, it deals with the John B. Pierce Foundation (and its architectural collaborator, SOM) in the 1940s. The Foundation’s research on prefabrication, industrial engineering, ergonomics, psychology, and physiology, as well as investigation on dimensions of domestic objects, provides much more complex theorization of flexible space than we have known it. This paper concludes that the dichotomy of interior vs. exterior is untenable and that the boundary of flexible space is predetermined.

**Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Hyun-Tae Jung is an Associate Professor of Architecture at the New York Institute of Technology. Jung received a Doctorate in History and Theory of Architecture from Columbia University with a dissertation, *Organization and Abstraction: The Architecture of SOM from 1936 to 1956*, which deals with the rise of corporate architecture in the mid-twentieth century. Dr. Jung has worked on theories of architecture, urbanism, sociology, and globalization as well as architectural design. He is currently working on a book, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: The Architecture of Organization from the Great Depression to the Cold War*. He taught at Columbia University, Parson School of Design, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Lehigh University. He was a Visiting Professor at Louisiana State University and Visiting Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania.