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THE ROOM AS A STARTING POINT IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN: CHILDHOOD MEMORY AND THE FORMATION OF SPATIAL UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

This paper portrays the room as the fundamental beginning of architecture, exploring how our earliest spatial memories shape the way we perceive and understand architectural space. Drawing on Louis Kahn's philosophical reflections on the room as architecture's elemental unit, the insights of Peter Zumthor and other architects on childhood memories, and empirical evidence from 78 architecture students' representations of their earliest spatial recollections, this paper explores the formative role of early spatial perception in the development of architectural consciousness. Our analysis identifies seven recurring themes in spatial memory that resonate with Kahn's theoretical framework: the primacy of light and openings, the significance of haptic experience, child-scale perception, the room as a refuge, the integration of organic elements, spaces defined by movement, and rooms activated by human presence. These findings suggest that architectural theory is rooted not merely in intellectual construction but in universal human experience. The room emerges as a complex constellation of memory, identity, and embodied experience—an elemental starting point from which architecture evolves both individually and collectively.

Keywords: *Kahn, childhood memory, architecture, room*

1. WHICH HOUSE HAS LEFT A LASTING IMPRESSION ON YOU?

This question, deceptively simple yet profoundly revealing, invites us to return to the spaces that have shaped our most fundamental understanding of architecture. It calls us, at its most essential level, to consider not only the physical attributes of these significant spaces but also their emotional resonance and enduring impact on our perception. Through this inquiry, we begin to uncover the very beginning of architecture, which often traces back to our earliest spatial memories and experiences. In shaping this reflection, inspiration is drawn from Peter Zumthor's *Dear to Me*, an exhibition presented at Kunsthaus Bregenz in celebration of the twentieth anniversary. Held from September 2017 to January 2018, *Dear to Me* explores the places, memories, and emotional experiences that profoundly influenced Zumthor's architectural thinking, offering a personal model for researching the very beginning of spatial understanding. At the heart of *Dear to Me* was a simple yet profound question that Zumthor posed to each of his dialogue partners—individuals from a wide array of disciplines and backgrounds: "Which house has left a lasting impression on you?" [1] This question became the thread that wove together the diverse voices of the exhibition, anchoring each conversation in a shared exploration of memory, place, and the emotional resonance of architecture. Zumthor elaborated, "I collect stories about houses. Could you describe a house to me? Perhaps a house where you once lived, the sense of your first love, a place you think about even if it no longer exists? Those are the kinds of stories I collect. We architects sometimes speak of the soul of a house." [1] In this way, the exhibition became a meditation on how places hold and reflect our inner lives—how they become, in his words, "repositories of memory."

This idea finds further resonance in Zumthor's reflections, where childhood memories awaken within us a profound sense of presence, often accompanied by the joy of creation. These memories reveal a deep-rooted connection between remembrance and the act of making—where architecture becomes an expression shaped by the emotional and sensory imprints of the past. Such a perspective acknowledges that our earliest spatial experiences in childhood form the foundation upon which all subsequent understanding of architecture is built.

This inquiry into houses recorded in our childhood memories—depicting our earliest experiences of space—offers a compelling starting point for exploring architecture as fundamentally shaped by memory. In this paper, we explore how these early spatial recollections resonate with Louis Kahn's philosophical concept of 'the room' as the elemental unit of architecture. By examining both Kahn's theoretical framework and empirical findings drawn from architecture students' depictions of their earliest spatial memories, we seek to illuminate the connections between pre-theoretical experience and architectural understanding, offering new insights into how architecture is conceptualized, taught, and practiced. This approach marks a progression from personal recollection to conceptual foundation—a journey we explore in the following sections.

2. CHILDHOOD SENSORY EXPERIENCE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF MEMORY

As architects and designers, our professional training and experience shape how we perceive space, allowing us to experience it differently from most people. While an ordinary individual may first notice objects, colors, or decorations upon entering a room, we instinctively perceive its fundamental qualities—its volume, height, depth, and the interplay of light. These primary spatial characteristics form the basis of our architectural

understanding, with boundaries and details only becoming apparent afterwards [2]. This distinction in perception is not only a product of education and training, but it is also deeply rooted in our earliest encounters with space, particularly those formative experiences in childhood.

This paper explores the relationship between our earliest spatial memories and the formation of architectural consciousness. Framed through Louis Kahn's philosophy of the room as the beginning of architecture, we seek to illuminate how these early experiences of space are woven into the way we later conceive, interpret, and create architecture. At the heart of this inquiry lies a question both simple and profound: how do our first spatial memories shape the foundations of our architectural understanding, and how might recognizing this connection enrich architectural pedagogy and practice?

Children, in their initial years, engage with space in a deeply sensory and affective manner, forming a bond with their environment. Unlike adults—whose perception of space is characterized by object-oriented and functional relationships—children experience space as an integrative whole. Their perception is defined by vivid sensory impressions, emotionally charged relationships, and a profound sense of identity and centrality [3, 4]. For children, space is not merely a backdrop but a realm with which they interact—a place where time is felt and materialized, and symbols are imbued with meaning. As Rasmussen elaborates in *Experiencing Architecture*, drawing from childhood experiences, "At an early age the child discovers that some things are hard, others soft, and some so plastic." [5] Before the age of three, space does not exist as a separate, material reality for the child; rather, they are immersed within it, inseparable from their surroundings. As Piaget notes: "The child animates the external world by materializing it through an internal universe." [3] This suggests that a child's perception of space is intricately woven with their emotional and sensory experience—space is understood not just through physical dimensions but as a living extension of their body and self.

As children grow, they gradually learn that objects exist independently of their own movement and position. In this process, basic structures of perception begin to emerge. This shift is conditioned by the child's separation from the totality of the environment, which parallels the development of ego and language. After the age of three, as the capacity for representation and abstraction unfolds alongside the development of speech, children begin to perceive space as a distinct entity. Though still unique, their perception starts to resemble adult spatial understanding [3, 4].

At this stage, a child's understanding of spatiality forms an essential framework through which they establish a direct and profound relationship with the environment. It is during this period that the concept of the house as an extension of the body takes root—an intimate, multisensory experience in which space and time merge into one unified whole. This quality, evident in well-designed architecture, is a direct manifestation of the child's embodied experience of space.

This early, pre-cultural, and pre-linguistic relationship with space serves as the foundation for all more complex spatial understandings that later evolve through language and culture, shaped by various socio-cultural factors [3]. There exists, in the mother's womb, a moment of absolute belonging—a sense of complete presence and security, where one feels as though they no longer have skin [6]. It is skin to the sensation of diving—a profound unity with both oneself and one's surroundings—reminiscent of the intrauterine state before birth. This state of total integration is a condition that art constantly seeks to capture: a

moment of perfect unity where the boundaries between self and space dissolve, and the individual is wholly at one with their environment.

This understanding of spatial and sensory experience in childhood finds profound resonance in the works and writings of Peter Zumthor, Louis Kahn, and Juhani Pallasmaa. In an era increasingly dominated by visual culture, these architects remain deeply committed to the sensory foundations of architecture. They remind us that architectural meaning does not arise from compositional technique alone but from embodied perception—from the way spaces are felt, remembered, and inhabited.

For Zumthor, architecture aspires to qualities such as "composure, self-evidence, durability, presence and integrity, as well as warmth and sensuousness" [7]. He emphasizes that the essence of architecture resides in the tangible qualities of materials and their interaction with human perception. As he states: "The sense that I try to instil into materials is beyond all rules of composition, and their tangibility, smell, and acoustic qualities are merely elements of the language we are obliged to use." [7] This perspective underscores the importance of materiality, multisensory engagement, and the emotional resonance of space.

Kahn's approach closely aligns with this sensibility, positioning "the room" as the very beginning of architecture. His philosophy asserts that the experience of spaces begins not with theory but with the human condition—our primordial needs for enclosure, light, interaction, and belonging.

Similarly, Pallasmaa emphasizes the multisensory nature of architectural experience, arguing that architecture is never purely visual but emerges through "several realms of sensory experience which interact and fuse into each other" [8]. Building on Bloomer and Moore's concept of body-image, he dissolves the boundary between body and space, proposing that the perception of architecture is fundamentally shaped by embodied experience—especially deeply imprinted memories of early life [9].

Together, these perspectives illuminate the essential role of childhood spatial experience in shaping architectural understanding. The perception of space, the depth of psychological connections, and the capacity of spatial relationships to generate memory and meaning—all grounded in early life—form the bedrock of how we conceive, inhabit, and create architecture. It is through the lens of the child that we come closest to grasping the primary truths of space.

The space in which this interaction unfolds is key to understanding our future spatial memory and identity. The language of architecture—and especially its connection to the spaces of our childhood—often defines the ways in which we construct our consciousness of space and of ourselves. Thus, the room emerges as the first image of upbringing and the foundational point from which architectural inquiry should begin.

3. THE ROOM: KAHN'S ARCHITECTURAL THOUGHT AND TEACHING OF ARCHITECTURE

The Room is an iconic drawing by American architect Louis I. Kahn, created for the 1971 *City/2* exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [10]. Having established in our introduction Kahn's foundational assertion that "Architecture comes from the making of a room," we now delve more deeply into how this drawing encapsulates his philosophical approach to architectural creation (Fig.1). For Kahn, the room was far more than a spatial

enclosure; it is the beginning of architecture itself—"the place of mind"—where architecture transcends physical form, becoming a catalyst for human experience [11]. In this view, the room is not simply a container for human activity but a transformative space that shapes perception, interaction and, ultimately, the nature of being.

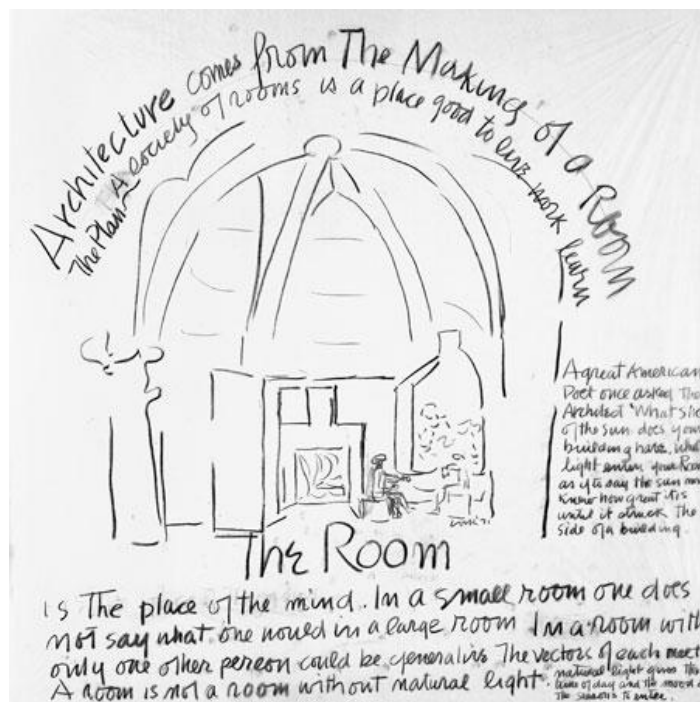


Figure 1. *The Room* by Louis Kahn. Architecture comes from the room. (Drawing by Louis Kahn)

In *the Room*, Kahn presents a constellation of elemental architectural elements: the window, the hearth placed at its center, the wall on the right, and a column positioned on the left. These elements are not arbitrary but deliberate, carefully selected to establish a framework of formal and spatial relationships that articulate the essence of architecture [10]. Among these, the window holds a place of particular reverence. "Of the elements of a room, the window is the most marvelous", Kahn once remarked [11]. For him, the window was not merely an opening in a wall but a sacred aperture through which light enters, and space is revealed. Kahn drew a clear distinction between mass—understood rationally as a matter of structure—and space, which he conceived as more mystically shaped and animated natural light, "the energy that brought space to life" [12]. The making of the room, then, necessitated the deliberate orchestration of both structure and light. The manipulation is no afterthought but essential, for Kahn believed the light itself was a fundamental compositional component of architecture. In this synthesis of the rational and mystical, the material and immaterial, Kahn's room emerges as an archetype space—one that is not merely constructed but brought into being through light, presence and stillness of form.

This vision reflects Kahn's enduring belief in the transformative power of natural light in shaping human experience. In his written reflections accompanying *the Room*, he affirms: "The room is not a room without natural light"; "the natural light gives to time of day and

the seasons of the year enter." [10] In these words, Kahn articulates a deeper truth: that light is not simply a functional necessity but an essential component of a room's identity—its spirit. His thoughts echo the poetic inquiry posed by a great American poet, "What slice of the sun does your building have? What light enters?"—a question that captures the intimate relationship between architecture and the sun, between space and illumination [10]. In this sense, the identity of space becomes contingent upon the nature of the light that enters it. Sunlight, Kahn suggests, finds its full expression only when it engages with the structure of the space. As he put it, the very structure of the room is "the giver of light"—the framework through which light gains meaning, its transformative power and illuminating the human experience within it [11].

The figures within the Room occupy a central position, engaging in a profound and silent dialogue—one captured not through speech but through their posture and gesture. The interaction is not passive; it embodies Kahn's belief in the power of generative individuals. As Kahn wrote: "In a room with only one person, the other person could be generative" [10]. For Kahn, a generative individual is not a mere observer but a catalyst—one whose presence can inspire, create, or provoke thought and ignite the inner life of others. Even in the most intimate setting, the presence of another person can foster intellectual and emotional growth. It can challenge assumptions, steer conversations into uncharted territory, and open new avenues of thought—thus shaping not only relationships but the very space they inhabit.

The idea is further elaborated through Kahn's enigmatic phrase, "The vectors of each meet" [10]. Here, the interaction between individuals is envisioned as a deliberate convergence—an intersection of intention, will and purpose. These vectors do not drift aimlessly; they are directed forces, each contributing to a shared moment of understanding. In such convergence, space becomes charged—with meaning, with potential, with human presence. The room, then, becomes more than architecture—it becomes a vessel for intellectual and spiritual exchange, a living space where ideas intersect, resonate and evolve.

Out of such interactions arises what Kahn called 'human agreement'. This agreement is not a passive consensus but an active phenomenon—an "immediacy of rapport"—a mutual recognition of commonality that binds individuals together [13]. It is through this collective acknowledgement that a room is truly animated, transcending its material boundaries to become a dynamic and responsive environment. The room, in this sense, lives through the presence and relationships it holds, and its meaning is continuously redefined through human exchange. Kahn extends this vision of the room beyond the personal toward the social and the civic. He proposes that the creation of a room must respond to the needs of society, enriching the broader human experience. Architecture, he argues, cannot fulfil Hannah Arendt's notion of a "space of human appearance" unless it is intrinsically tied to the collective life and memory of society [14]. The room, then, becomes a space not merely inhabited but a stage upon which human meanings unfold—it is a site of memory, presence, and shared becoming.

Rooted in the archaic and timeless essence of space, Kahn's conception of the room reasserts the primacy of the human scale in architecture. The room is not simply a functional container—it is a space of presence, of dwelling, of identity. It stands in deliberate contrast to modernist approaches such as Le Corbusier's *plan libre*—the free plan—which emphasizes flexibility and openness, often at the expense of intimacy and human-centered architecture [15]. In Kahn's vision, the room reclaims its ancient role: a space of orientation

and encounter, where the boundaries of function and form converge to reflect the human condition. Kahn's "archaic" resists the fluidity of industrialized modernism. It asserts a spatial order that is not abstract but grounded in the human experience. It is a return—not to the past—but to the essence: to the very beginning of architecture as a space made for and by human presence.

3.1. FROM PHILOSOPHY TO PEDAGOGY: KAHN'S PROCESS OF ARCHITECTURAL CREATION

This profound understanding of the room was not merely a theoretical position for Kahn but a cornerstone of his teaching approach. Kahn's conceptualization of space was deeply embedded in his educational philosophy. Through his lectures and conversations with students, Kahn sought to provoke critical reflection on fundamental questions of architectural creation: "How does a building come to be? How does the architect get in touch with his ideas and translate them from head to paper—the actual (the room)?" [16] In this dialogue, Kahn aimed not only to teach architecture but also to engage his students in a deeper philosophical process: the discovery and manifestation of architectural form, specifically through the concept of the room [17].

Rather than beginning with function, construction or precedents, Kahn encouraged his students to start by reflecting on architecture itself—specifically, the nature of space. His architectural philosophy evolved into a broader pedagogical framework that prioritized inquiry and reflection over the immediate production of technical drawings. At the heart of this framework was a threefold process for making architecture: understanding **the nature of space, establishing order, and developing design** (Fig.2).

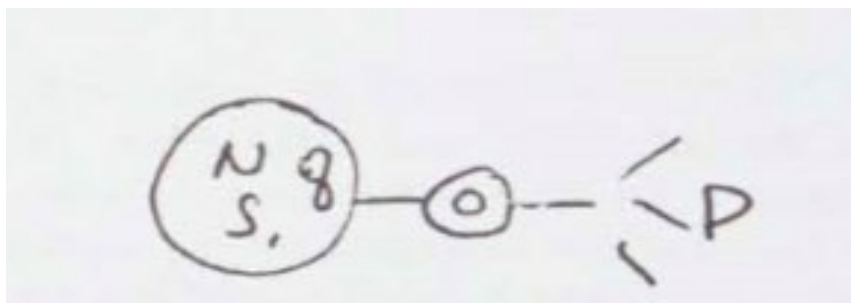


Figure 2. Kahn's conception of his nature – of space – order – design in 1953 (Drawing by Louis I. Kahn).

The nature of space forms the first inquiry: What do spaces want to be? This stage demands a deep understanding of the spatial experience the architect hopes to evoke, probing the essential desires and intentions that give rise to architectural form. From this meditation emerges *order*—conceived as the seed of architecture—a search for underlying principles that bring structure and coherence. As Kahn framed it, order is the invisible logic through which form finds clarity.

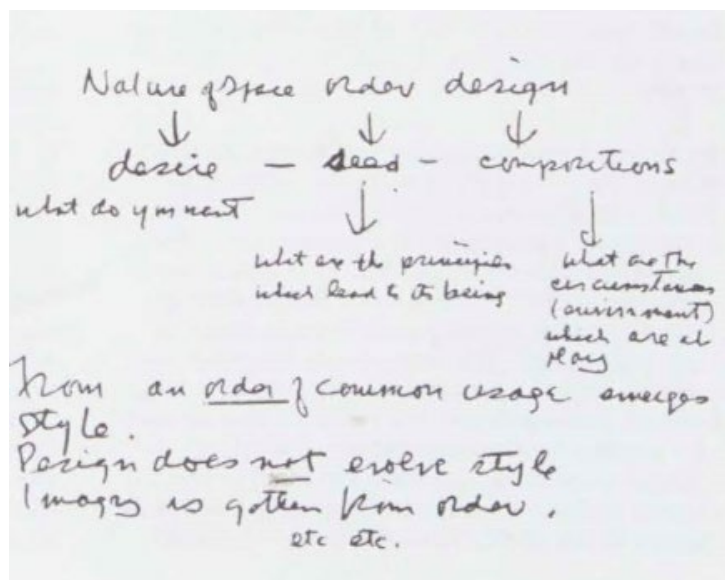


Figure 3. This meets the approval of George Howe: the design process as Kahn envisioned it in 1954 (Drawing by Louis I. Kahn)

Finally, **Design** becomes the stage of realization: the articulation of how space and environment respond to one another. Here, the guiding question becomes: "What are the encounters at play?" This stage addresses the dynamic relationship between architecture and its inhabitants—how space is to be used, inhabited, and experienced (Fig. 3).

By the early 1960s, Kahn had refined these ideas into a mature concept of space centered on the duality of **Form and Design** (Fig.4). In this model, earlier notions, such as **the nature of the space** and **of the order**, are subsumed under **Form**, which Kahn described as timeless and universal—the essence of what architecture wants to be. **Design**, by contrast, is its tangible manifestation in the world—the measurable and responsive act through which **Form** takes shape.

For Kahn, the act of making architecture begins from the personal—the inner realm of the architect's mind, where feeling and thought operate in parallel. Feeling represents the longing to create—the intuitive, generative source of ideas—while thought supplies the means, the discipline, and the structure. "Thought is capable of transcending into philosophy (presence of order) and feeling is capable of transcending into religion." [10] In these terms, architecture emerges not only from intellect but from a metaphysical process of synthesis.

Through this transcendence, the interplay of thought and feeling gives birth to **Form**—the realization that resonates intellectually and spiritually. By referencing philosophy and religion, Kahn invoked systems of meaning that transcend the individual, striking at the universal human experience. Thus, architecture becomes not merely a technical or stylistic endeavor, but a profound act of expression that engages the full depth of human consciousness.

The pursuit of **Form**, for Kahn, is a metaphorical return to the essence of architecture: the room. In this context, form is anchored in a "sense of appropriateness" or "sense of commonality," emerging from the interweaving of personal and collective experience [8]. As one of Kahn's students observed: "It is not a place to go but a place from which you come.

In spirit, it must be defined by where you come from, not where you are going" [17]. The room, then, becomes more than a physical space—it is a vessel of memory, a marker of experience, and a space of becoming.

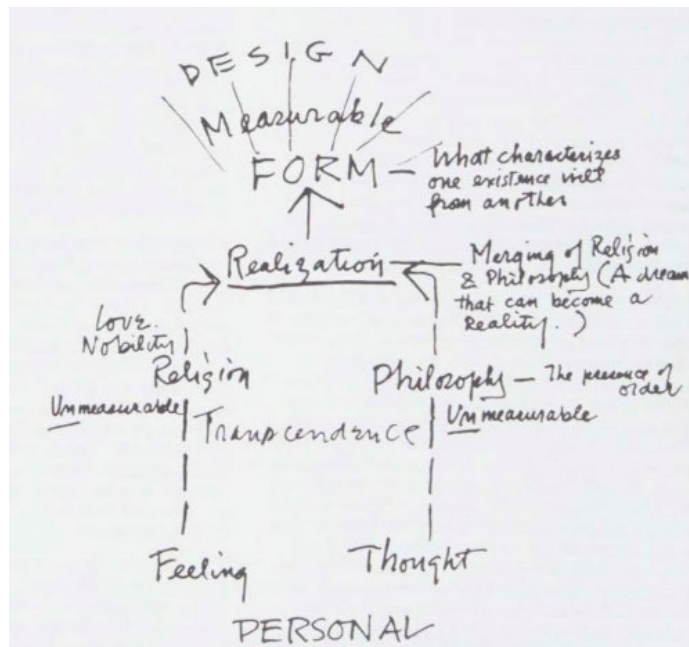


Figure 4. The process by which the transcendent forms of thinking and feeling produce the realization of form (Drawing by Louis I. Kahn)

Ultimately, architecture, in Kahn's vision, is not merely shelter or structure—it is a living reflection of who we are and where we come from. It is deeply rooted in both individual and shared histories, shaped by thought and animated by feeling. To make architecture, then, is to engage in an existential act—one that bridges the metaphysical with the material, the timeless with the human experience. This approach to architectural creation, grounded in the concept of the room, touches upon the profound origins of spatial understanding—guiding students toward elemental questions about the meaning and essence of architecture itself.

4. WHERE MEMORY BEGINS: A STUDY OF FIRST SPATIAL IMPRESSIONS

4.1. MEMORY AS METHOD: A FRAMEWORK FOR ARCHITECTURAL INQUIRY

To examine the relationship between earliest spatial memories and Kahn's concept of the room, we designed a qualitative research study grounded in visual research methods and phenomenological approaches to spatial memory. Our methodology was guided by two core considerations: the importance of assessing preverbal or early verbal, spatial memories that shape the roots of architectural consciousness and the need to allow these memories to emerge organically without theoretical preconditioning.

The study involved 78 first-year architecture and interior design students at the Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, University of Banja Luka. We intentionally selected first-year students, recognizing them as being at a formative threshold—

individuals who have chosen to enter the field of architecture but are not yet fully shaped by its formalized theories and methodologies. This made it possible to access their memories that reside in the space between personal experience and the early formation of architectural awareness.

The data collection protocol was structured as a two-part exercise, integrating memory recall with spatial representation. Students were guided through a brief introspective exercise, prompted with the instruction: "Close your eyes for 30 seconds and recall the earliest space you remember—your first clear memory of a room or space in which you stayed." This phrasing was intentionally crafted to avoid architectural terminology or references to specific spatial elements, ensuring that the recollections expressed through drawings emerged from personal memory, conveying emotional and sensory impressions rather than technical precision or architectural accuracy.

For analysis, we developed a systematic framework that examines three key dimensions of the drawings:

- **Formal spatial elements:** Identification of recurring architectural components such as windows, boundaries, furniture, and light sources.
- **Spatial relationships:** Analysis of perspective, scale, and proportions as represented in the drawings.
- **Experiential qualities:** Documentation of sensory and emotional indicators, with an emphasis on light, texture, and human presence.

Through iterative comparative analysis, we identified recurring patterns across the drawings and organized them into thematic categories. This method enables us to move beyond anecdotal interpretation, allowing for a systematic identification of motifs that could be critically examined in relation to Kahn's theoretical framework of the room. Importantly, Kahn's ideas were not introduced to the students until after the drawing exercise, ensuring that their representations emerged authentically from memory rather than being shaped by prior theoretical exposure.

This methodology bridges phenomenological approaches with empirical inquiry, offering valuable insights into how early spatial memories may inform architectural consciousness and pedagogical approaches in architectural education.

The students' drawings revealed seven recurring patterns that resonate deeply with Kahn's philosophical understanding of the room—not as a physical container, but as a generative space composed of essential elements that shape our experience and memory:

- **Openings of Memory: Light as the First Gesture (Figure 5):** A majority of students positioned windows as a central—sometimes even dominant—element in their recorded spatial memories. One drawing captured a room in which the entire spatial atmosphere was shaped by light entering through a single window, casting patterns on the floors and walls. This emphasis on natural illumination directly echoes Kahn's conviction that "The room is not a room without natural light" and his reverence for the window as "the most marvelous" element of architecture.



Figure 5: Students drew a room where the central point of the window and light defines the spatial experience (Drawing by Luka Pažin).

- **Memory of Touch: Haptic Traces of Space (Figure 6):** Several students foregrounded the haptic qualities of space: the plushness of a sofa, the softness of a carpet, and the texture of familiar fabrics. One student recalled the room in which touch seemed to suppress vision, drawing attention not to scale or dimension but to the embodied sensation of lying on a sofa and carpet. These depictions align with Pallasmaa's notion of haptic perception and resonate with Kahn's own multisensory spatial thinking, where architecture is not only seen but also felt.

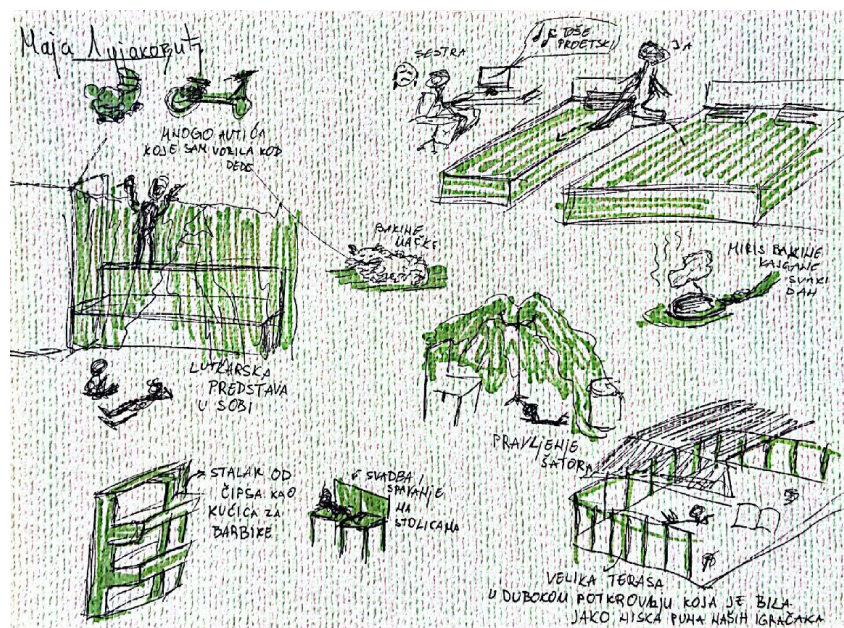


Figure 6: The student's drawing is focused on sensory and tactile memory. It is a collage of recorded childhood memories, indicating the potential of sensory stimuli rooted deeply in our experience (Drawing by Maja Lujaković).

- **Architecture at Eye-Level: Spatial Memory from a Child's Eye (Figure 7):** Some drawings revealed a literal return to the bodily scale of childhood. One student drew a scene from a notably low vantage point—showing the underside of a table—with no detail above 80 cm. This compressed vertical frame captured the limited but intense perceptual field of a small child, underscoring how spatial memory is grounded in the physical reality of early embodied encounters with the world.

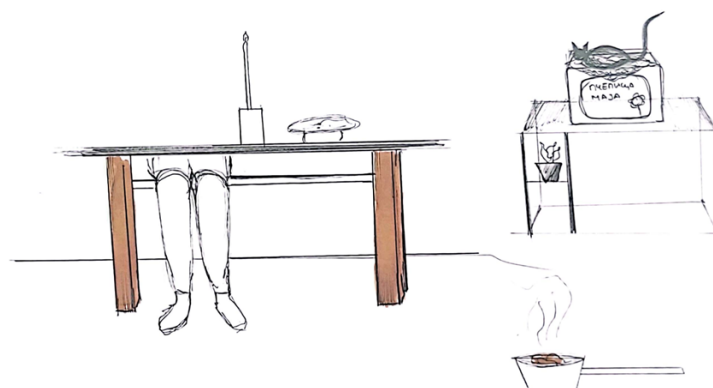


Figure 7: The student's drawing illustrates a child's-eye view of a room—a table under which the child had crawled, with visible legs, perhaps those of parents, and floor-bound objects dominating the scene, while the ceiling remains out of reach (Drawing by Marija Bojanić).

- **Architecture as Refuge: The Memory of Limits (Figure 8):** Several students' drawings evoked enclosures—cribs, beds with railings, defined parameters—as their first remembered spaces. These drawings suggest the room as a space of refuge and containment, highlighting Kahn's view of the room as a protective vessel: a defined volume that provides both physical and psychological security.

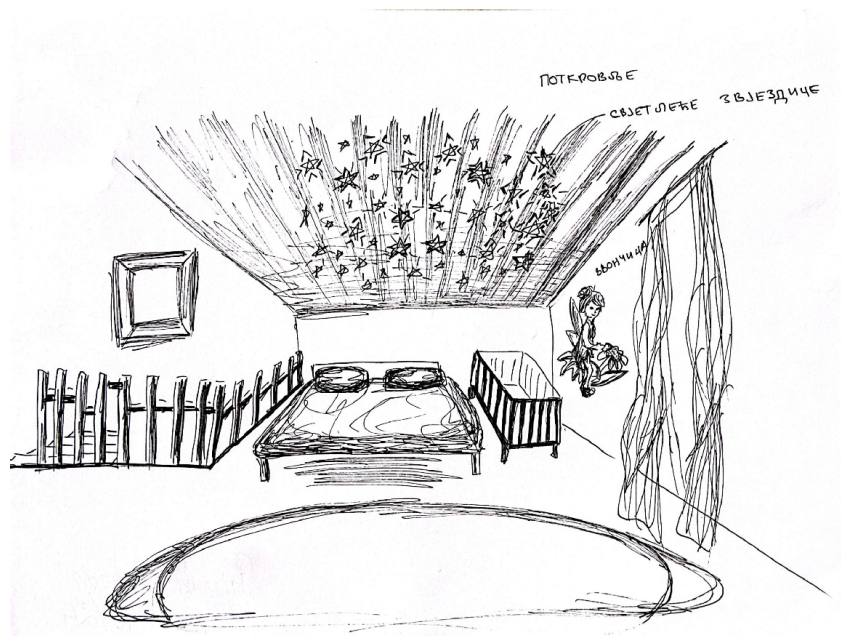


Figure 8: The student's drawing of a crib edge and encircling walls evokes a memory of limits, shaped by the feeling of being held within (Drawing by Anđela Raičić).

- **Rooted in Space: Organic Elements in Early Memory (Figure 9):** One student recalled a childhood memory by drawing a single opening—a door overgrown with plants—revealing how natural elements can become integral to our spatial memory and understanding of space light.



Figure 9: The student's drawing of a room, with plants weaving through and around openings, suggests a memory shaped by organic immersion (Drawing by Jovana Pojić).

- **The Room in Motion: Tracing Energies and Gestures (Figure 10):** A number of drawings incorporated dynamic trajectories—paths of childhood motion through a room, the flutter of a curtain, or a burst of movement around a central object. These gestures suggest a spatial experience not of stasis but of energy, echoing Kahn's idea of the room as a confluence of vectors, where bodies, light, and sound intersect to animate form.

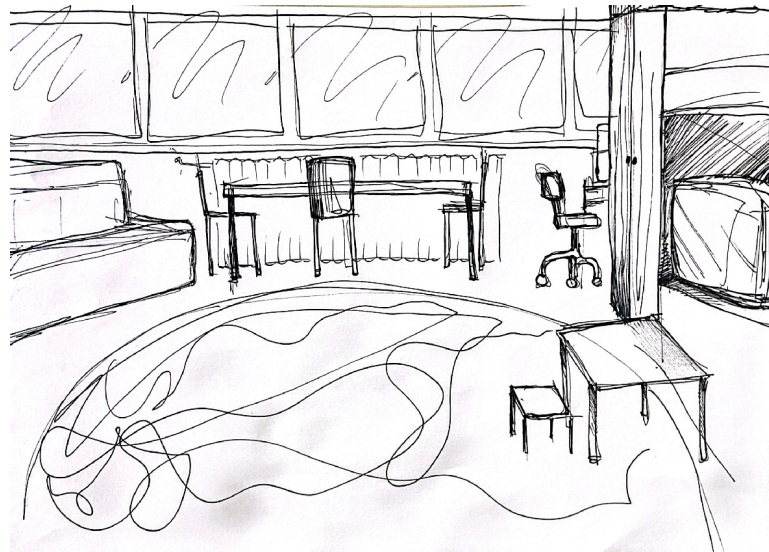


Figure 10: The student's drawing of a room showing a bed, windows and implied motion — memory captured as spatial energy in flux (Drawing by an anonymous student)

- **Space between us: Memory and Human Presence (Figure 11):** In several drawings, two human figures were captured mid-conversation or play, with the surrounding space emerging not through walls or objects but through their interaction. This memory recalls

Kahn's idea of 'generative individuals'—those whose presence and movement activate the room—and his notion that space is not inert but composed through relational vectors: "The vectors of each meet."

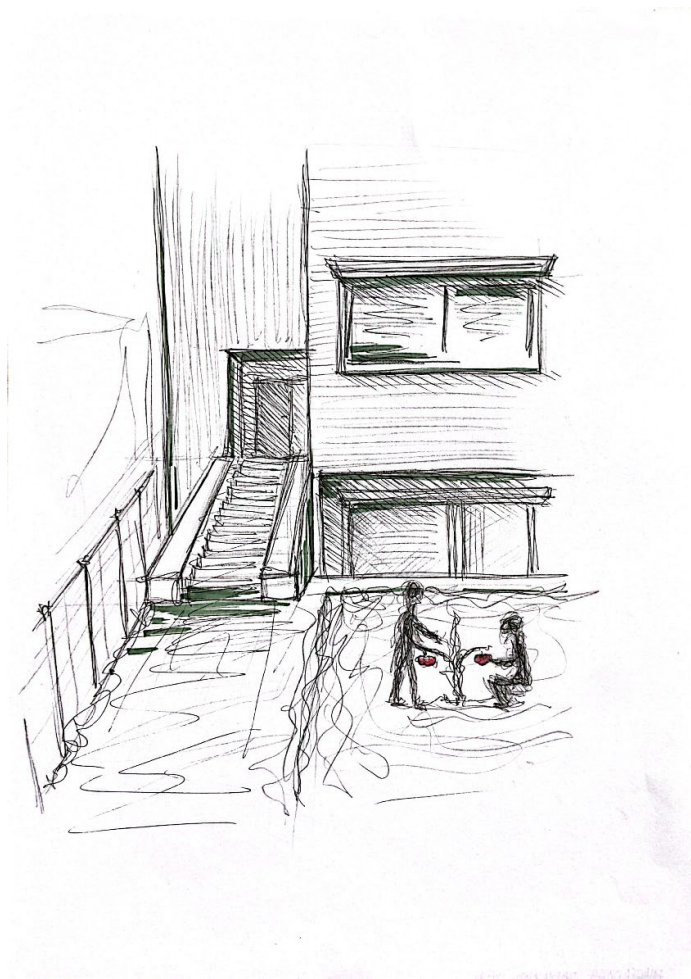


Figure 11: The student's drawing illustrates a sense of human interaction that defines the space rather than architectural form (Drawing by Anastasija Starčević).

What is particularly striking about these drawings is how they affirm Kahn's theoretical framework—intuitively and without prompting. When asked to recall their earliest spatial memories, students naturally emphasized elements such as windows, light, texture, human presence, and boundaries—precisely the fundamental components that Kahn identified as essential to the room. Their responses—expressed through drawings—were not shaped by theory, yet they resonated with it.

This convergence suggests that Kahn's architectural philosophy is not merely an intellectual construct but rather one deeply anchored in universal human experiences—especially in the formative, often pre-verbal encounters of childhood. As we reflected in our concluding discussion with students: "What we want to say is that the room is a crucial space for growing up and forming personality—essential to life through the processes that unfold within it."

These empirical insights support the notion that the room, in Kahn's terms, is not an abstract starting point but a lived beginning of architecture itself. The students' drawings demonstrate that our understanding of space originates in early sensory, emotional, and embodied impressions—experiences that continue to shape our spatial sensibilities throughout life.

4.2. ARCHITECTURE BEGINS IN THE ROOM: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This convergence between early spatial memory and theoretical reflections offers valuable insights for architectural education. By inverting the traditional theory-to-practice sequence, experiential knowledge becomes the foundation upon which theoretical understanding is constructed. The patterns observed in students' drawings—light, haptic qualities, scale, boundaries, organic elements, movement, and human presence—underscore this approach, informing both pedagogical methods and criteria for spatial evaluation and bridging the gap between human experience and formal architectural education.

As students engaged with their earliest spatial memories, they began to recognize shared foundations that transcend cultural boundaries. In this context, architectural education can nurture design sensibilities rooted in both personal memory and collective spatial consciousness. By acknowledging these earliest spatial memories as legitimate forms of knowledge, educators empower students to discover theory not as an abstract imposition but as an articulation of something that they already intuitively understand.

This approach recognizes that engaging with early spatial memories helps students identify shared experiential foundations that transcend cultural and theoretical differences. By acknowledging these common roots, architectural education can foster design sensibilities that connect with both personal memory and collective spatial consciousness.

5. THE ROOM AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Drawing on Kahn's philosophy, Zumthor's reflections on childhood memory, and the empirical insights drawn from student drawings, the room reveals itself not merely as a collection of architectural elements but as a complex constellation of relationships. It emerges as both an intimate, formative space shaping our earliest spatial memories and as a node within an architectural plan whose meaning arises through the interrelation of its parts. Kahn dissects the room into essential components and binds them into a unified architectural plan, positioning the room as the very nucleus of architectural thought. In his vision, "The plan is a society of rooms"—a society built not of walls and voids but of shared presence, mutual respect and intellectual exchange. The room, then, is not just a container for life but also a generator of it: a "space as experience" where we live, work and coexist—a space where architecture becomes an inspiring force for dialogue, community, and coexistence [18]. As Robert McCarter and Juhani Pallasmaa argue in *Understanding Architecture*, the study of architecture begins with the understanding that it cannot be truly evaluated or appreciated without engaging our direct, human experience of space [19].

Our student drawing exercise affirms that the room must be understood through multiple dimensions—beyond structure, beyond enclosure. These drawings revealed that the room is not simply a physical setting with walls, floors, and ceilings but a primary space for emotional development and personality formation. The room may be external and internal,

actual or remembered, singular or nested—a room within a room. It embodies both cultural memory and human experience, standing at the intersection of body, memory and space.

Kahn's notion of 'human agreement' deepens our understanding of architecture's social dimension. For him, this agreement is not a contractual arrangement but rather "the immediacy of rapport, the inspiring force that recognizes commonality and must be part of human life, supported by people" [9]. When viewed through this lens, architecture emerges as a manifestation of common values—spaces shaped not only by design and by intention but also by the collective will to inhabit, belong, and relate. Our study reveals that the theoretical foundations of architecture often find intuitive resonance in our earliest spatial memories, suggesting that architectural understanding is not merely acquired through education but arises from fundamental human experience.

Thus, the room is not merely the beginning of architecture in a formal or chronological sense—it is its existential foundation. As one of Kahn's students insightfully noted, architecture is "not a place to go, but a place from which you come" [17]. Our spatial understanding is rooted in those first rooms, which continue to quietly inform how we design, perceive, and dwell in space. As Kahn himself said: "I love beginnings. I marvel at beginnings. I think it is beginning that confirms constitution" [20].

Returning to our title, "The Most Inspirational Starting Point in Understanding Architectural Design: The Room," we can now affirm with renewed clarity that the room is more than a didactic starting point—it is the very origin of architecture, deeply rooted in human experience. The room is both profoundly personal and universally shared; it is at once individual and collective, fleeting and continuous. As Kahn understood, it represents the true beginning of architecture—not merely as a profession or practice but as a fundamental and enduring condition of collective life.

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СОБА КАО ПОЛАЗИШТЕ У ПРОЦЕСУ АРХИТЕКТОНСКОГ ПРОЈЕКТОВАЊА: СЈЕЋАЊА ИЗ ДЈЕТИЊСТВА И ФОРМИРАЊЕ ПРОСТОРНИХ ОДНОСА

Сажетак: Овај рад представља собу као темељни почетак архитектуре, истражујући како наша најранија просторна сјећања обликују начин на који доживљавамо и разумијемо архитектонски простор. Ослањајући се на филозофска размишљања Луиса Кана о соби као елементарној јединици архитектуре, увиде Петера Цумтора и других архитеката о улози сјећања из дјетињства, те емпиријске доказе из цртежа најранијих просторних сјећања 78 студената архитектуре, истражујемо формативну улогу ране просторне перцепције у архитектонској свијести. Анализом је идентификовано седам тема о просторном сјећању које се подударају са Кановим теоријским оквиром: доминантност свијетлости и отвора, значај тактилног искуства, дјечија перспектива простора, соба као уточиште, присуство природних елемената, просторне слике инспирисане покретом и простор оживљен људским присуством. Ова истраживања показују да архитектонска теорија није заснована само на интелектуалним конструкцијама, већ на универзалном људском искуству. Соба се тако појављује као сложена мрежа сјећања, идентитета и тјелесног искуства—суштинска полазна тачка из које се архитектура развија, како на индивидуалном тако и на колективном нивоу.

Кључне ријечи: Kahn, сјећање из дјетињства, архитектура, соба