

For this project, I began by researching comfort. Using topography, I chose to explore comfort in my own body. I created my piece by taking pictures of myself from several angles while lying in the fetal position. I charted how many layers of 3/8<sup>th</sup> inch medium density fiberboard would be needed to create a realistic recreation of myself, and to identify where my body made its most dramatic transitions.

My goal was just as much about accuracy as it was about creating an interesting dialogue between the layers. I made forty individual pieces so that it was as accurate as possible and met the height I mapped out. I feel I was able to capture a level of psychospiritual comfort and positive self-esteem through the choice of paint color, my own skin color.

Through my writing and art-making process, this project forced me to examine my own level of comfort. My own increasing sensitivity to personal comfort convinces me that comfort is something everyone should consider. Every person should learn what aspects add to or detract from their ability to find comfort. Examine how you feel and how the surrounding environment impacts your sense of comfort.

Lucy

Imagine you are lying on a blanket on a grassy field near the ocean. The blanket is effortlessly soft and each corner is weighted down so it doesn't fly up with the breeze. You don't have to move at all because all of your needs have been met, so you can just relax on the blanket in the grass that isn't too itchy or prickly, but is soft and lush. The sun is shining down on you but there is a salty sea breeze from the ocean, so you are the perfect combination of warm and cool; never too hot or too cold. It is the middle of the afternoon on a Sunday and there is nothing you need to do and nowhere you need to be. The people you love surround you and everyone is enjoying each others company. You remain completely undisturbed by anything or anyone. You are wearing your favorite t-shirt. The air is filled with sounds of laughter in the distance. You lie like this for hours, undisturbed, and infinitely comfortable.

...

Comfort is something that everyone subconsciously thinks about everyday, whether they know it or not. People, by nature, strive for contentment, and in order to be content, being comfortable is important. It affects every aspect of our lives. What makes a space comfortable? I want to explore this question through three lenses: architecture, sculpture, and my personal experience.

Katharine Kolcaba's book, *Comfort Theory and Practice: A Vision for Holistic Health Care and Research*, details the four contexts where comfort occurs. Kolcaba became interested in the topic of comfort when she was Head Nurse in a dementia wing at St. Luke's Hospital School of Nursing in Cleveland. She was in need of a word that effectively identified the times her patients were not exhibiting excess disabilities (EDs), times when they were manic, or in a state of unrest. When her patients were comfortable, they exhibited optimal functionality; they were social, calm, and cooperated with staff members (Kolcaba 1–5). In her book, Kolcaba writes, "When my residents were in a state of comfort (comfortable) they socialized informally with others, wandered casually, sat easily, napped, cooperated with staff, laughed, or hummed, and generally displayed ease and contentment with their surroundings" (Kolcaba 4).

In Kolcaba's research, she found that there are three types of comfort and four contexts in which they occur. The three types of comfort are: relief, ease, and transcendence (Kolcaba 9). Relief is the experience of a patient who has a specific comfort need met. Ease is a state of calm or contentment. Transcendence is a state in which one rises above problems or pain (Kolcaba 9). The four contexts in which comfort can occur are: physical, psychospiritual, sociocultural, and environmental (Kolcaba 11–14). Physical comfort pertains to health and wellness like rest, relaxation, level of nutrition and hydration (Kolcaba 11). Psychospiritual comfort pertains to self-esteem in relation to one's faith in God, being independent and informed, feeling relaxed and feeling useful (Kolcaba 12). Sociocultural comfort pertains to interpersonal, family and societal relationships, including financial and educational support (Kolcaba 14). Environmental comfort is pertaining to a person's interaction with their external surroundings, conditions and influences (Kolcaba 13). Relief, ease, transcendence, physical, sociocultural, psychospiritual and environmental contentment work together to achieve absolute comfort for every individual. In order to feel completely comfortable, Kolcaba argues that all of these types of comfort must be fulfilled. There are many people

who have struggled with the idea of comfort and where they find it and how. Henry David Thoreau was one of these people. He wanted to know what the essentials of life were for comfort and survival. He believed, “The necessities of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success”(Thoreau 10). Thoreau believes all a person needs to be comfortable is food, fuel, shelter and clothing so focusing on the greater challenges of life is easier. He doesn't think personal interaction is crucial in the same ways as Kolcaba does. He thinks they must be authentic and cooperative, when Kolcaba thinks any and all human interacting is essential. Using the definitions of comfort from both Thoreau and Kolcaba, I am going to explore not only how comfort affects the way architects and artists create their work, but also what aspects of their work reference comfort. Through this exploration I will also discuss my own sense of comfort.

A student of Kolcaba's wrote an interpretive poem in response to her work.

*Comfort may be a blanket or breeze,  
Some ointment here to soothe my knees;  
A listening ear to hear my woes,  
A pair of footies to warm my toes;  
A PRN medication to ease my pain,  
Someone to reassure me one again;  
A call from a doctor or even a friend,  
A rabbi or priest as my life nears the end.  
Comfort is whatever I perceive it to be,  
A necessary thing defined only by me.  
-S.D. Lawrence (student nurse)  
(Kolcaba 1)*

He wrote this about the way he interpreted Kolcaba's research. The student, S.D. Lawrence, interprets comfort as an individual and personal sensation, and acknowledges that comfort is simultaneously a physical, environmental, sociocultural, and psychospiritual experience. He recognizes that though he is studying the scientific and medical sense of the word comfort, it is very personal and determined by a connection between a person and their surroundings. In the poem, he details things that can make a person comfortable.

In her book, Kolcaba references Margaret Burkhardt, a researcher in the field of environmental comfort, specifically the application of comfort. Burkhardt defines environmental comfort– the context of comfort that I will be focusing on in this paper– as “an understanding of the human person as unity where mind, body, spirit and environment are descriptors of the interrelated manifestations of the person” (Burkhardt 60). Burkhardt contends that the right environment is conducive to optimal comfort. She writes about how connected all of the kinds and contexts of comfort are and acknowledges that in order for complete contentment, they all must work together simultaneously. When Kolcaba considers environmental comfort she talks about its relationship to color, noise, light, ambiance, temperature, views from windows, access to nature and natural versus synthetic elements of the space (Kolcaba 13). In many ways,

Burkhardt, Kolcaba, and Lawrence have the overlapping theories about comfort and where it is most readily achieved. They all believe it stems from the interdependent relationship between the environment and the person in it. They also universally write about the variety of stimuli and aspects of the environment that can cause comfort and a lack thereof. The work of these researchers and the theories they propose made me want to know: How does environmental comfort or a lack thereof, affects the way architects and artists make their work? What is the effect of comfort on the creative process?

### Architecture and Comfort

While comfort in architecture is not vital for the success of the structure, I believe that it is key to the overall success of architecture. It seems counterintuitive to create a structure that would not be a welcome environment for a person. Why would anyone want to inhabit an uncomfortable building? In order to investigate where architects include comfort in their designs, I will be analyzing structures from Andrea Zittel, Frank Lloyd Wright and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris (better known as Le Corbusier). At first look, their work could be considered different in line, form, scale, intention, and outcome, but upon further inquiry, they each embody aspects of Kolcaba's type of comfort and contexts in which comfort can occur. Through this lens, we can see their similarities are stronger than their differences.

Andrea Zittel is an American-born sculptor whose work ranges from clothing to small living cubicles. For this essay, I am looking at her body of work entitled "Living Units," pods which could be installed within private apartments. Zittel created an immersive

sculpture called *Comfort Unit* in 1994 as part of "Living Units."



This piece uses blue fabric and wood to create a spare yet aesthetically pleasing presentation and successfully compartmentalizes the essential functions of a living space into an extremely intimate environment. The organization and compactness creates a sense of closeness and comfort due to the safety one feels within walls but without feeling enclosed. I can imagine a sense of ease—

one of Kolcaba's types of comfort—washing over the inhabitant of *Comfort Unit* (Kolcaba 13). I find myself drawn to spaces similar to *Comfort Unit* in my life. My comfort in this space would be derived from the sense that the space is hugging but not strangling me.

Frank Lloyd Wright was an American-born architect who created over 1,000 designs and witnessed the construction of 532 of them. His designs were greatly influenced by the environment in which they were designed to be built. *Fallingwater*, created in 1935, is no exception.



*Fallingwater* was a vacation home designed for the Kaufmann family in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. The home is striking, beautiful and noteworthy, but where this building gets its name is from the seamless relationship between the architecture and its natural surroundings. A stream runs along the side and, through architectural intention, also seemingly inside of the structure through an integrated open plan bridge. A waterfall, which can be seen from inside the home as well as balconies on several floors above, is the root of the inspiration for the building. The architecture echoes the rock formations that surround the stream and waterfall. According to Kolcaba's contexts of comfort, this building can be considered comfortable especially because of its closeness to nature (Kolcaba 13). *Fallingwater's* location in the woods and proximity to water is optimal for comfort. Wright creates comfort around nature with this building by utilizing the natural environment which here is water. Similarly, Wright creates comfort through the natural environment at *Taliesin West*, completed in 1937, but here it is through the arid, desert landscape. All of Wright's buildings interact with the environment they inhabit, causing each building to be unique to its habitat; the color schemes all relate to those of the world around the building.

Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as "Le Corbusier" was a Swiss-born architect and painter. Similar to Wright, his work acknowledges the environment, but less through the shape and line of his structures and more through the introduction of natural light. His architecture was very simple and modern. Unlike Wright's use of environmentally integrated palettes, white was a color Le Corbusier used often in his work. This gave his buildings an open, airy feeling.



The sense of space and light—unlike Zittel's sense of enclosure and security—made Le Corbusier's buildings comfortable. The extensive use of windows and the introduction of natural light creates a sense of comfort through interaction with the external environment (Kolcaba 13).

#### Sculpture and Comfort

How do other artists incorporate comfort into their pieces? Architects and sculptors are similar in that they both dictate the way a viewer experiences a space, but dissimilar in that art can intend to engage the audience by creating a sense of discomfort. I looked at four artists who explore ideas about what it means to be comfortable: Ernesto Neto, John Chamberlin, James Turrell, and Ann Hamilton.

Ernesto Neto is a Brazilian-born contemporary visual artist who has had international exhibitions showcasing his large-scale soft sculptures. His viewers interact with his work. For example in his work, *Humanoids Family*, 2001, the viewer is meant to insert their whole body inside the forms.



The sculpture has a head-hole and armholes so that the viewer feels sandwiched between the two parts of the piece. This sculpture is considered comfortable because the environment in which the viewer is immersed is soft and warm – two conditions conducive to optimal comfort (Kolcaba 13). I can also imagine that the sculpture would feel like a hug. Other works of Neto’s would also be considered comfortable for their soft textures

and pleasing colors (Burkhardt 60). In an interview, Neto talks about who inspired his work. He talks about Donald Judd, Walter De Maria and Sol LeWitt. About them all, he says “The minimalist guys and the arte poeiva people are extremely important to me.”

Similarly to Neto, John Chamberlain creates soft sculptures onto which the viewers are encouraged to completely immerse themselves. John Chamberlain is known mainly for his work with automobile parts, but I find the work he did with foam very compelling in relation to comfort. In Marfa, Texas, Chamberlain constructed *Barge Marfa*, which uses a very large block of foam with a TV on a small platform in front of it.



The work is meant to be laid upon and interacted with and it feels similar to a bed. The foam itself has a piece of fabric over it, similar to a sheet, so it feels soft and squishy, rather than the way that the foam would feel without the sheet. This sculpture is considered comfortable because it is large enough for at least three people to be completely sprawled

out on it and it is impressionable, like a bed.

James Turrell is an American-born artist whose portfolio largely consists of playing with light and affecting the way light is experienced by the viewer. For there to be comfort, there must be discomfort and Turrell’s work is so large it can feel like you are being swallowed whole. Turrell’s piece, *Aten Reign*, 2013, is a multi-tiered work rising upwards.



The piece gradates from darkest where it is closest to the viewer and lightest at the top. Its purples and pinks are definitely conducive to comfort because they are soothing and quite beautiful. In Turrell's work, light becomes tangible and his use of open sky is inspiring. Turrell says, "it's about perception. For me, it's using light as a material to influence or affect the medium of perception." Because his work represents an unexpected closeness with nature and it uses soothing light, it would be considered comfortable. The eyes don't have to strain when interacting with Turrell's work and therefore is allowing physical comfort as well as environmental comfort. Kolcaba's research in the field of comfort allows us to know that the kind of light that Turrell produces with his pieces, not too overpowering but also not too dark, is absolutely optimal for comfort (Kolcaba

13). A person's interaction with his work is definitely unique to each installation, but also to any other art being created today.

Ann Hamilton is an American-born visual artist known for her large-scale multimedia installations that have been showcased worldwide. Both Turrell and Hamilton completely manipulate the space their work inhabits so that you feel exactly how they intend. Their works are so consuming of a space that they take up, the state of the space before the work was installed is unrecognizable. Hamilton's work, *The Event of a Thread*, 2012, was a huge installation at the Park Avenue Armory and was made up of swings, large curtains, birds and two people writing at a table.

This installation was highly interactive and everyone who attended filled the room with cheerful ambiance. Hamilton's piece is similar to Neto's work because of the effect on participants. For both installation pieces, the audience thoroughly enjoyed interacting with them. Hamilton was successful in making her sculpture comfortable because even though the space was enclosed, it was so large that it felt like you were in a new environment, she brought the outside in with birds, she made the event fun for her audience and she created an experience that truly evoked happiness due to the community it created in the space (Kolcaba 13). Having interacted with *The Event of a Thread*, I know that it was sincerely comfortable.



While trying to answer my essential question: “what makes a space comfortable?” I looked outward to artists, architects and designers. But comfort is personal and arbitrary and no one would be better at answering what makes a space or environment comfortable to me than me. I know what makes me comfortable. I know how to achieve comfort for myself. I know where I am most comfortable. I also know what discomfort is. I know where I feel uncomfortable. I didn’t always have this self-knowledge. It has taken time for me to find comfort. When Katharine Kolcaba was doing research about comfort, she found that the way that comfort was defined was by what was uncomfortable. Being comfortable does not come easily for me. The last time I can remember feeling truly comfortable is when I left Oxbow for my free weekend. I went to St. Louis to meet my family at my brother’s college. My family is a huge part of my ability to be comfortable. I know that it doesn’t matter how I act around them because they will always love me and stay by my side. I can’t push them away by being too moody or wanting to be alone. They love me unconditionally and achieving comfort without them is not possible. My family, however, is not constrained to my brothers, mom and dad. I have very close extended family and certain friends I have known for so long that no matter what, I know they will be there for me when I need them and give me space when I don’t. In this sense, I have a huge family of people who love me and who I love unconditionally. Every time I see them it is an epic family reunion.

Though my family is large, we are also very spread out. The times I get to see them are the best times I have had in my life. The birthday parties themselves were never the part of the memory that were important to me, the fact that everyone rallied to come together was the best comfort in the world for me. I find such warm comfort in the embrace of family; I could stay there forever. I feel like it doesn’t matter who I marry someday, because I know exactly who will be there to celebrate with me. And that is the most comforting feeling in the whole world. Why am I so interested in comfort in the context of interactive sculpture and architecture? I want to know that I can create a space for myself where I can feel as comfortable as I do surrounded by the people I love.

## Bibliography

- "Alex Katz." *Alex Katz*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.
- Anish Kapoor. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009. Print. 1 Nov. 2015.
- "Bauhaus Movement, Artists and Major Works." *The Art Story*. Modern Art Insight, n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2015.
- Bryson, Bill. *Bill Bryson at Home*. N.p.: Doubleday, 2010. Print.
- Burkhardt, Margaret A. "Spirituality." *Holistic Nursing Practice* 3.3 (1989): 60. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
- "Comfort." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. 31 Oct. 2015.
- Chamberlain, John. *Thordis' Barge*. 1980-81.
- Chamberlain, John. *Untitled*. 1966.
- "Feng Shui." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. 05 Nov. 2015.
- Eames, Charles & Ray. *Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman*. 1956.
- Eames, Charles & Ray. *Rocking Chair Lounge*. 1950.
- "EGODESIGN.CA The First Canadian Webzine Dedicated to Global Design." *EGODESIGN.CA The First Canadian Webzine Dedicated to Global Design*. Ego Design, 30 Sept. 2007. Web. 05 Nov. 2015.
- "Ernesto Neto - Artists - Tanya Bonakdar Gallery." *Ernesto Neto - Artists - Tanya Bonakdar Gallery*. Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, n.d. Web. 06 Nov. 2015.
- "Ernesto Neto." *Artspace*. Artspace, 2015. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.
- Govan, Michael. "James Turrell." *Interview Magazine*. Interview Magazine, 30 June 2011. Web. 31 Oct. 2015.
- Hamilton, Ann. *The Event of a Thread*. 2012.
- Hamilton, Joan. "Comfort and the HOSPITALIZED CHRONICALLY ILL." *Journal of Gerontological Nursing J Gerontol Nurs* 15.4 (1989): n. pag. *Europe PubMed Central*. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
- Horiuchi-MacAdam, Toshiko. *Wonder Space II*.
- Jeanneret, Charles-Édouard. *Curutchet House*. 1949053
- "John Chamberlain Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works." *The Art Story*. The Art Story: Modern Art Insight, n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.
- Kolcaba, Katharine. "A Taxonomic Structure for the Concept Comfort." *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 23.4 (1991): n. pag. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.
- Kolcaba, Katharine. *Comfort Theory and Practice: A Vision for Holistic Health Care and Research*. New York: Springer Pub., 2003. Print. 30 Oct. 2015.
- Lawrence, S.D. "Comfort" 1995. Poem.
- Lloyd Wright, Frank. *Fallingwater*. 1964.
- Lloyd Wright, Frank. *Taliesin West*. 1937.
- Ernesto Neto, *Anthropodino*. 2009.
- Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig. *Barcelona Day Bed*. 1930.
- Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig. *Cantilever Chair*. 1929.
- Neto, Ernesto. *Humanoids Family*. 2001.
- Neto, Ernesto. *Navedenga*. 1998.
- Playing with Space and Light*. Perf. Olafur Eliasson. Ted Talk, 2009. Online Video.
- "The Genius of Frank Lloyd Wright (Imagination): American Treasures of the Library of Congress." *The Genius of Frank Lloyd Wright (Imagination): American*

- Treasures of the Library of Congress*. American Treasures of the Library of Congress, n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2015.
- Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience: Authoritative Texts, Background, Reviews, and Essays in Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1966. Print.
- Turrell, James. *Aten Reign*. 2013.
- Turrell, James. *Installation at the Gagosian Gallery, London*. 2010.
- Zittel, Andrea. "A-Z." *A-Z*. Andrea Zittel, n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2015.
- Zittel, Andrea. *A-Z Cellular Compartment Communities #5*. 2002.
- Zittel, Andrea. *A-Z Comfort Unit II*. 1994.