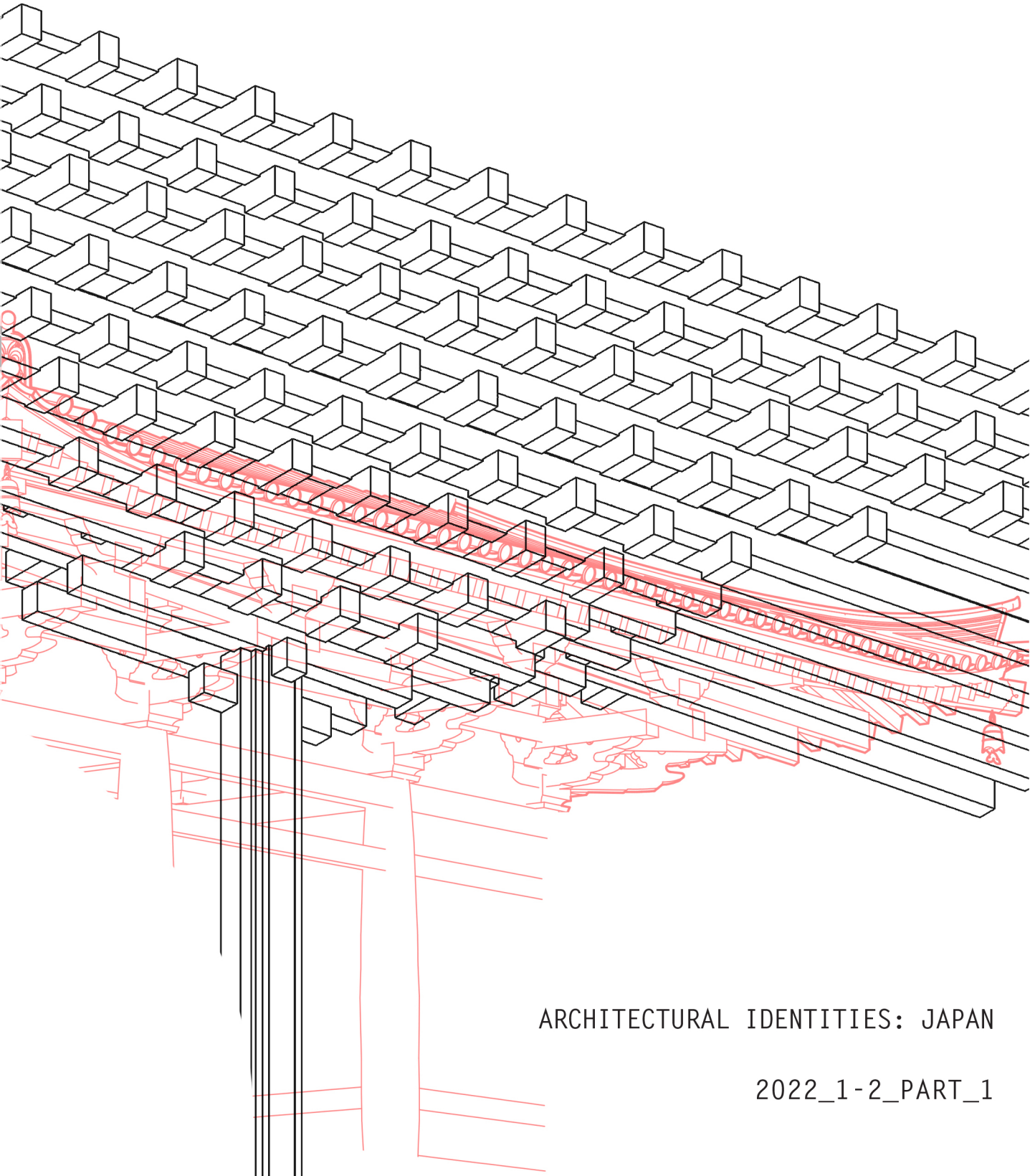


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S A J

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ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITIES: JAPAN

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ARCHITECTURAL
IDENTITIES: JAPAN

The thematic issue of the Serbian Architectural Journal titled *Architectural Identities: Japan* was conceived in an effort to cast a wide net and provide a veritable smorgasbord of research ideas. These in turn serve as a snapshot (Czarniawska, 2002) of contemporary thoughts on all things interconnecting Japan, identity and architecture.

Snapshots of any kind, and especially presented here, are particularly informative, essentially viewed as layers, stacked over time and contextualized, with one common thread throughout. This particular thread, the one that cannot be untangled and does not point out of the labyrinth, is the most precious aspect that unifies all the presented contributions. And the beauty is – you choose which one to pull!

Think of it all in terms of relational ontology, the philosophical position that postulates: what distinguishes the subject from a subject, the subject from an object or the object from the object is *mutual relation* rather than substance (Yannaras & Russell, 2011). We can examine the particularities, but more importantly, make a mental note of what is being omitted when discussing spatial manifestations and Japanese identity(-ies).

Ultimately, this thematic issue is meant to serve as a piece of a broader conversational puzzle, both in a personal and academic investigation, framing the questions of identity and architecture within a transnational, metanarrative understanding and research approach. Based on the quality of the presented texts, I am cautiously optimistic that we will not drown in the deeply superficial tropes.

An overwhelming challenge in identity research lies in the fact that every identity is, in a sense, a construct of the scholar investigating its incidence. In point of fact, an identity is not an inherent characteristic of a community (which possesses varied and complex modes of identification), but a theoretical analysis tool to be utilized in order to enhance knowledge or confirmation of certain ideological, political or other ideas. This does not mean, however, that identities are only and simply analytical constructions of researchers, not testifying on societal relations, culture and politics (Eriksen, 2010).

Interpretations of identity(-ies) of Japan in architecture and architecture in Japan have been praised (Isozaki, 2006), critiqued (Dale, 1986), vague-washed and, unfortunately, ultimately regurgitated numerous times before. As the proposed topic for this issue is complex, any and every attempt to view it as a ball of twine that can be untangled would essentially be foolish. Instead, a many-headed hydra metaphor is more apt: you cut off one head, and three more spring to life. But metaphors, like most things, although providing a valuable teaching moment, will only take you so far.

Speaking of lessons learned, when you take on the role of the Guest Editor and start, or I suppose when you start doing anything in life, you have a kind of extraordinary conceit; it doesn't really enter your mind how difficult the role is actually going to be. My own experience was not unsimilar to the previously described fact, but I'm glad I *didn't* look before leaping.

This undertaking was, in all honesty, a leap of faith for both the SAJ Editorial Board and myself: the cold call met with a warm response and the rest is yet-to-be-determined history. The proposed topic stemmed from my personal interests and the desire to (dis)respectfully poke, provoking a reaction by offering a topic unlike any previously presented within my primary target – the Serbian academic landscape.

As a trained architect, my research interests took me to Tokyo and, as a Japanese Government scholar, I obtained my Ph.D. in Engineering from Keio University. The core of my interest lies in interdisciplinary research on various modes of displaced spatial production and their effect on cities and the users of public space. Working in a foreign context, an outsider looking in, provided me with a unique opportunity to reframe and refine my hypotheses (not all academic), while simultaneously experiencing the practices of everyday life (De Certeau, 1984) and the conflictual character of the urban (Lefebvre, 2009) within an unfamiliar context on a 1:1 scale.

Deciding to share my experiences and provide others with the comparable opportunities I have had during my time at *co+labo*, Architecture and Urban Design Laboratory, headed by Professor dr Darko Radović, I decided to set up shop at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. As the year 2022 marked the 140th anniversary of friendly relations between Serbia and Japan (1882-2022), there were numerous opportunities for collaboration, with various exhibitions, workshops and lectures, all graciously supported by the Embassy of Japan in Serbia, for which I am both grateful and humbled.

The natural and subsequent question is – why this topic?

To answer this question, we must ask another: What are the ways in which architecture – as a discipline, cultural institutionalized practice, a text and a theory – is involved in the creation of the contents of identities?

It is my great pleasure to present a collection of selected texts that offer an invitation into the (un)known.

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I am thankful and much obliged to the Editorial Board of the Serbian Architectural Journal for their vision, the Editorial staff, Ms. Milica Mađanović, Ms. Desirée Tilinger and Ms. Jelena Šćekić, for their support, the elected Reviewers for their insights, all the authors, for dedicating their time and effort to publish their research within this journal, the diplomatic and local staff from the Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Serbia for their attentiveness and last but not least, Professor dr Darko Radović for his insightful comments.

A special thank-you must be made to you, dear reader, for having the interest to embark upon this literary adventure; may your takeaway be thought-provoking and precious.

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ON RESEARCH ACROSS CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Questions for streets with no names, where eyes never meet

INVITED ESSAY

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Non basta guardare, occorre guardare con occhi che vogliono vedere.
(It is not enough to look, one must look with eyes that want to see.)

Galileo Galilei

0. ON THE QUESTION OF WORDS

Research needs clarity, accuracy and use of definite terms, starting from keywords and research questions. Finding and formulating the right focus demands rigour. Ideally, one begins by asking what seems obvious and, as such, might remain unchallenged. The complexity of our theme here demands precisely such, fundamental yet seemingly simple questions. In this discussion, we need to first ask what does the term “architecture” mean and what do we think about when the word “identity” gets uttered, before entering any inquiry into their intersections. Then – what do we really think of when we say “*Japanese architecture*”, and so on.

That points at critical importance of language, at the question of words. Research gets communicated in languages. It, logically, follows that research conducted and presented in Japanese language uses Japanese terms. It also makes sense to assume how terminology used by these researchers captures the meaning *identical* to that used by their international peers. Particular words get chosen precisely in order to facilitate accurate communication and ensure the equivalence of meaning. But, are accuracy and equivalence possible?

1. THE QUESTION OF TRANSLATION

Our keywords here, architecture, identity, Japan, are complex and loaded with meaning.

The need for an equivalent of the Western term “architecture” came up in Japan only in the late 19th century, during the tumultuous Meiji Era (1868-1912). After 265 years of an almost total self-isolation (1603-1868), the newly promoted elites of Japan sought ways to connect, catch up with (and, not much later, to overcome) “the West”. Those efforts included modernisation of language, with numerous and fast borrowings, translations, or *kanji* transliterations from European and American vocabularies, or from the historically and culturally better grounded, but less appreciated near-West, China. As elaborated by Norihito Nakatani (2006), while seeking the synonym for architecture, “the word 建築, *kenchiku* was accidentally created when Japanese translators

saw a Chinese text containing two adjacent *kanjis* with a rather similar semantic content: *ken* meaning ‘building’ and *chiku* ‘construction’”. Thus, “‘architecture’ in modern Japan began from this ‘blank’ space carved out by the term ‘*kenchiku*’” which, for some reason, prevailed over an equally wrong (or, an equally right) permutation – *chikuken*. The history of that moment and debates that followed are well documented. One can only agree with Nakatani that translation of the term “architecture” into Japanese language remains impossible. Accepted neologism simply lacks the historically established associative field of ideas which frame term architecture. Over time, *kenchiku* has certainly created its own, equally culture-specific world of connotations, but what gets understood in Japan when “we” say “architecture” is *not* the same as what “they” mean by saying *kenchiku*.

The situation with our second keyword, “identity”, in Japan is even more complex. That term encapsulates a set of profound philosophical and metaphysical themes which take us into the realms of *id*, as in Latin *identitas*, and dialectics between the sameness and difference. In his *Identity and Difference*, building upon Leibniz and Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, Martin Heidegger has declared how “the principle of identity is considered the highest principle of thought” (1969). Yet, our inquiries confirm how in Japan that concept has attracted *some* interest only over the last 2-3 decades. Most often as the closest to “identity” is considered *jikodoitsusei* (自self 己 myself 同一 identical 性 sex), which is commonly used in administration, for pragmatic, mundane purposes (such as personal details, addresses, accounts). For Japanese understanding of identity, that was – sufficient. As in the case of *kenchiku*, the connotative field of *jikodoitsusei* is purely practical and, thus, dramatically different from what identity means within the cultural sphere of its origin, close to the original fabric of myths, histories and memories which are, logically, irrelevant to the East. As again Heidegger puts it succinctly, “translating and translating are not equivalents if in one instance what one is concerned with is a business letter and in another instance a poem. The former is translatable, the other is not.” (Heidegger, 1957). In other words, the pragmatism of *ken*, *chiku*, *construction*, and *building* gets translated easily, while terms such as *architecture* and *identity* do not.

An awareness of difficulties with translation (which we have elaborated elsewhere, cfr. Radović 2020a, 2020b, 2021) is necessary to set stage for further discussion. Here we will present only some peculiarities of relevance to our third keyword, Japan and its culture using a rather long, briefly annotated quotation. That is an extract from Michael Marra’s essay “On Japanese Things and Words” (2004), in which the linguist makes “a fictional reconstruction of

an actual meeting that Heidegger had with Tezuka Tomio [...]. In the dialogue the Inquirer (Heidegger) formulates a central question that, in my opinion, should be of fundamental interest to anyone seriously concerned with the study of Japan. The question is deceptively simple, at least compared with the difficulty of coming up with the answer - an answer that, as a matter of fact, the reader will not find fully formulated in the dialogue. ‘What is the Japanese word for ‘language’?’”

That is equivalent to asking our *deceptively simple* question – “what is the Japanese word for ‘architecture’?” (which should be of equal interest to anyone concerned with the study of culture and production of space in/of Japan). We need to also note Marra’s point that the reader was never going to find Tezuka’s fully formulated answer to Heidegger’s question.

Marra continues describing how “the Japanese visitor (Tezuka in Heidegger’s recollection) appears to have been caught off guard, as we can see from Heidegger’s parenthetical remark: ‘after further hesitation.’ Had Heidegger posed the same question to a Frenchman or an Italian, the answer would have been immediate: ‘*langue*’ or ‘*lingua*.’ The challenge for Tezuka was definitely higher since he had a variety of words from which to choose. He could have used, for example, the expression *genko*, a combination of two Chinese characters indicating ‘the speech of words’. Instead, he used an ancient Japanese word derived from the native Yamato vocabulary: *kotoba*, which literally means ‘the foliage of speech’.”

Several important aspects of relevance to Japanese *identity* feature in that paragraph. As the hesitation noticed by Heidegger suggests, in a rather deliberate way, over some easier and culturally closer Chinese and vernacular local alternatives Tezuka Tomio considers what his target *should* hear, aiming at nothing less but (production of) *an image of Japan* in the philosopher’s eyes. He reaches beyond straightforward functionality (as in our pragmatic *ken*, *chiku*, or *jikodoitsusei*), to delve deep into the strata where the reality and desired images of Japanese uniqueness blur. After all, the famous philosopher is also a human being.

Marra opines how “there should be little doubt that Tezuka’s choice was prompted by his desire to please Heidegger by playing the philosopher’s own game – something that Tezuka totally succeeded in doing, as Heidegger’s dialogue attests. Tezuka introduced a term that lent itself to etymological play – an enterprise very close to the heart of Heidegger, and one that was also very popular among Japanese thinkers. In fact, the expression *kotoba* incorporates the word *koto*, which means both ‘thing’ and ‘word [...] Heidegger points out

that never has the distance between things and *Sein* been as great as in modernity, when all distances in space and time have shrunk. Given the unflattering position that Heidegger had taken on the notion of ‘things,’ Tezuka was forced to come to the rescue of the Japanese word *kotoba* by endowing *koto* with the meaning of two Heideggerian keywords: ‘event’ (*kotogara*) and ‘affair’ (*Sache*). The thingly component of *kotoba* was not simply an objectifiable presence that can be counted, analyzed, and disposed of, but rather a poietic ‘act’ that has the power to create a reality by transforming the named thing (*koto*) into a real thing (*koto*).”

In what he sees as of fundamental interest to the study of Japan, professor of literature and hermeneutics Marra here points out that the translator has power to manipulate meanings by selection of “words from which to choose”, and he does so both because of his “desire to please”, and in order to come to “the rescue of the Japanese word” by bringing the answer that would be “close to the heart of Heidegger”. An expert translator has chosen a source-language term and finetuned its meaning towards a particular effect in the mind of his target, the Inquirer. His desire to tailor and to (re)present Japanese collective self in favourable light is obvious to Marra the Japanologist, as certainly was not the case with a total, and fascinated *gaijin* Martin Heidegger. The reasons for doing so include our keywords, identity and nation(alism), along with the commonly associated pride and (always depicted as deep, and as ancient as possible) roots – which have, in not so distant past, made issue of (collective) identity in German and Japanese cultures intersect tragically. In any case, what Tezuka has said and what Heidegger has heard was double-manipulated – first, when the translator took role of the creator of meaning, and then at the moment when the Inquirer was reduced from the one who asks to a mere recipient.

While our keywords “architecture” and “identity” do possess cultural charge that makes them special, there is nothing unique in their untranslatability. Much of the 20th century translation theory has been established precisely in recognition to, and in dealings with innumerable and, as pointedly formulated by Barbara Cassin in her book (2004) *significant* untranslatables. In sharp opposition to cultural arrogance and domination through simplification (Debordian *Spectacle*, 1988), translation theories provide ways to understand and deal with the blessings of cross-cultural (mis)understanding. Since my own early immersions into cultures of radical Other, I align with Antoine Berman’s demand for translation grounded in “the desire to open up *the Stranger as Stranger* to his own space of and in language [and] to recognize *the Other as Other* [my italics], which beautifully encapsulates what the ethics of cross-cultural encounter needs to be(come)” (Worton 1998; Radović, 2003, Radović et al. 2007).

In the very opening of her *Text, Typology and Translation*, Anna Trosborg (1997) states sharply that “equivalence can hardly be obtained in translation across cultures and languages, and it *may not even be a desirable goal*” (our italics; Radović, 2007). Our research confirms Derrida’s position that “what is lost in translation is often the best that can be found” (1998; Radović 2021). In dealing with complexity, the recognition and celebration of (non)equivalence are of critical importance.

2. THE QUESTION OF EQUIVALENCE

Tezuka Tomio has decided to lead his willing collocutor to the chasm, to a meaningful gap of non-equivalence.

What he did during that respectful discussion was neither (mis)translation nor a mistake. His “desire to please”, combined with fine, erudite ability to reach deep into the repertoire of his language and come to “the rescue of the Japanese word” which he considered essential, only point at that ultimate, fascinating impossibility of qualitative *identification* between the source and target languages. Japanese researchers have (at least) equal right to reach into murky waters of cultural mythology of Japan as the Westerners (say, Anglo-American researchers) do when invoking ancient and geographically distant Greek cultural origins as their own.

Discussions of identity are broad, ranging from that of being *same* (as in mathematical equation $A=A$, captured as Latin *identitas*), or being *exactly* alike, to a seemingly opposite quality of being *distinctive*, individual (L. *individuum*) identical to one’s own self only. The title of Heidegger’s book *Identity and Difference* succinctly captures the very essence of that pair, an inseparability of components and their limitless, dialectical productive capacity. When it comes to culture, non-equivalence points precisely at such capacity, at the innate value of difference in comparison to mere equivalence and sameness. Here we say “mere” equivalence in order to point at the critical moment when *culture* enters the equation, the moment of value judgment. Values and (ethical) positioning are central to critical thinking and, thus, to research. Tezuka offered to Heidegger not less, but more than factual translation; he has opened the way for Heidegger to enter the “text”.

Here we do not have space to discuss the multiple crises facing critical thought within current globalising trends. It suffices to reinstate the insightfulness of Guy Debord when he, more than five decades ago pointed at, and named *the*

Society of Spectacle (1988; originally published 1967) – or, let’s update and call that phenomenon Metaverse – as *the* reason for dramatic loss of experiential depth (Harvey, 1990) which we are living today precisely because, as lamented by Heidegger in 1954, the distance between things and Being has grown larger than ever. “The only sense which is fast enough to keep pace with the astounding increase of speed in the technological world is sight” (Pallasmaa, 2005), as best exemplified by ubiquitous, consumable and all-consuming “smart” gadgets. That was possible only by radical reduction (of experiences and quality) of life. The only power capable to simultaneously (re)produce and reduce itself to the perpetual catching up was an unrestrained, “free” market (Žižek, 2005). Meta glorification of “the world of the eye” indeed is “causing us to live increasingly in a perceptual present, flattened by speed and simultaneity” (Pallasmaa, *ibid.*), in the world of artificial realities which brutally reduces and simplifies the rest. In such world, where the “best-seller” status or the number of clicks define what quality is, banality rules. The depths of life captured by the shadows of Tanizaki, Rembrandt or Caravaggio vanish.

In order to question and to put an end to dystopia of the Spectacle, we need to regain precisely fuzziness of the “foliage of speech”. But, when seeking to combine accuracy and fussiness aren’t we contradicting ourselves? Well, yes we are. In search for a new, inclusive paradigm, for exploration of culturally complex terms which include sharp internal contradictions – such as identity and architecture do – we need robust intellectual apparatus of matching complexity. Using her field of life sciences as an example, Sandra Mitchell (2009) explains how, until recently, much of science was unable to deal with complexities of their fields of investigation precisely because they “adopted strategies involving reductive explanations designed to simplify the many complexities of nature, in order to understand them”, pointing that “many complex behaviors in biological and social sciences seem not to yield as well (as they do in physics) to a reductive approach” (*ibid.*). In architecture and urbanism, especially when dealing with spaces used, inhabited and lived, the complexity of investigated phenomena exceeds that of life sciences. Due to their inherent political and ideological charge, disciplines involved in production of space suffer from strict imposition of restrictive and reductive research strategies developed by and for “the world of the ¥€\$ regime” (OMA, 2003).

Critical thinking is in relentless search for questions, including inquiry into the reasons why certain positions never get questioned.

3. THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS

Complex issues need (seemingly) simple questions.

Complex thought seeks freedom to move beyond an expectation of equivalence, towards the opposite – the likelihood of non-equivalence, towards difference which might possess the paradigm-shattering charge. That includes radical repositioning of approaches to the world of cultures, kaleidoscopic plurals in themselves which involve unpredictable, irrational forces of creativity.

Henri Lefebvre's *Metaphilosophy* (2016) confidently navigates through these challenging and fascinating fields. His dialectical coupling of Power and Residual points precisely at an impossibility of equivalence between unequal terms, at Heidegger's "translating and translating" of *the simply factual*, and of *the simply complex* creative thought do. In my own explorations of cultural difference, conducted over the years of thinking *and living* Japan, the opus of François Jullien has provided for some of the most rewarding contextualisations of knowledge(s) acquired and developed elsewhere. In his *Book of Beginnings*, Jullien gives a simple formulation of one the most complex truths of cross-cultural research (and diverse realities of immersion and being-with there), combined with a blunt acknowledgment how, *when exploring the cultures and thought of the Other, "only crossing thresholds and 'entering' might be possible"* (Jullien, 2015). Such act of humility in front of (cultural) difference amounts to a much needed, formidable acknowledgment, an explicit act of appreciation of and respect for distance, of that *gap* which needs recognition over submission to simplification and reduction (to money, technology, or any other pitiful means of globalised uniformity).

In order to move beyond words and instrumentalise such sensibility Jullien introduces *écart*. *Écart* gets explained as *the exploratory divide between cultures* (ibid.), adding itself to our feast of untranslatability-as-complexity. In one of the footnotes to his *Landscape of unthought, or the Unthought-of in Reason* (2018; an irreducible title *par excellence*), Jullien's delicate translator Pedro Rodríguez (whose job *is* to translate the untranslatable) felt obliged to further elaborate that *écart* (which he *has* translated as "divide") "stands in contradistinction to the notion of comparison as practiced in cultural studies (e.g. comparative literature). Rather than set cultures side by side, Jullien places them on either side of an exploratory divide, so that they can 'reflect' each other. In so doing, they reveal each other's biases – or, to use another of Jullien's images, they discover each other's cultural headwaters – and thus bring forth new possibilities. According to Jullien, "the headwaters of

a particular culture lie too far upstream to be attained with the tools that the culture itself can fashion, because of the biases that flow out of those very headwaters“ (ibid.). In cross-cultural encounters of any kind, which include research, that has to be kept on mind.

Thus, adding to Mitchell’s reflections on investigations into complex phenomena of life sciences, Jullien elaborates that “in parallel with the rise of science and its new apparatus, there was the ever so powerful *subject-object* relation. Indeed, it came first. It was the original bias. In the definition of science, the ‘observer’ is on one side and ‘nature’ on the other. The two are separate, established in a vis-à-vis” (Mitchell, 2009). Using his approach to (Chinese, thus also Japanese) landscape, Jullien goes on to propose that one “must first distinguish between *divide* and *difference*. Difference merely classifies and specifies by distinction (as in the vast erudition of a naturalist, the erudition that goes into a herbarium). It puts things in order, sets them side by side in accordance with their appearance and properties, and arrives at various kinds of trees, minerals, flowers, and even clouds. A *divide* is a wholly different matter. Rather than a distinction, it introduces a distance. It sets in tension what it has separated. And in so doing opens an *interspace*, but the “interspace” is not a matter of the “in-itself.” It is *in*, or *by*, the *interspace* that opens between the high (of the mountain) and the low (of the water) – between the immobile and the shifting, the opaque and the transparent, the manifest and the rustling – that landscape deploys.” Precisely that is that chasm, the gap of non-equivalence to which Tezuka Tomio has brought Martin Heidegger, *écart* where the discussion of our triad – identity, architecture, Japan –finds itself best placed.

In research, one should seek equivalence in the questions asked (from the opposing sides of the chasm), not necessarily expecting it from answers. That should be kept on minds open to the possibility that the best answers, sometime, might indeed whisper from “the foliage of speech”.

9

P.S.FROM OUR INVESTIGATIONS OF ARCHITECTURE, IDENTITY, SPACES, GESTURES: INFRAORDINARY TOKYO

Research could be seen as the process of (establishment of) communication between the opposite sides of *écart*.

Asking questions about the other (side) is logical. But, what about questioning the side on which one stands, asking questions about our own position, with an awareness of, and the view of and from the other (side)?

...

Our work is about spaces and people, places and practices.

When we switch the language off, other ways of communication, other “languages” (need to) emerge. For instance, without spoken word our sensitivity to gestures increases. Those other, different languages open to, and they can even become an advantage for the foreigner. That is precisely how Japan has opened itself to the keen eye of Roland Barthes. “The murmuring mass of an unknown language” which to him (as it, in Japan, also does for me), “constitutes a delicious protection, envelops the foreigner ... in an auditory film which halts at his ears all the alienations of the mother tongue: the regional and social origins of whoever is speaking, his degree of culture, of intelligence, of taste, the image by which he constitutes himself as a person and which he asks you to recognize” (Barthes, 1982) helps observe. In order to, as Galileo’s epigraph to this essay asks, learn from what one sees, following Franco Ferrarotti I “decide that I prefer not to understand, rather than to colour and imprison the object of analysis with conceptions that are, in the final analysis, preconceptions” (Dale, 1986). Doing that is never easy but, over time, one does get better.

In Japan, Barthes notes his thoughts down as they come, as fresh reflections about the unthought, of what he has never thought about before. He lists *chopsticks, food decentered, the interstice, pachinko, center-city/empty-center, no address, the station, packages, the three writings, animate/inanimate, inside/outside, bowing, the breach of meaning, exemption of meaning ...* Those words became the contents page of his *Empire of Signs* (1982), elements for an informed, entitled even when naïve, often intuitive but always credible insights into an identity sought. To that, in making of our method the thought of Henri Lefebvre (perhaps precisely because he did not have a concrete experience and much to say about Japan as such) adds a critical awareness of accuracy of projections of society onto the ground; how (urban) spaces are simultaneously and relentlessly conceived, perceived and lived (especially that universally human, yet ever different *vécu*); significant irreducibles in the residual, which open superb infraordinary realities to our senses (Serres, 2008) directionally, towards an ultimate *jouissance* (Lefebvre, 2017). In research, such base demands fine, Perecean tactics of observation (Sheringham, 2006) which, in turn, invite sharp political edge of Debord and Situs ... and so on.

Our theory in the practice of urbanity begins there. For almost two decades now, our own research (the most significant of which was conducted at Keio University, 2009-21; Radović 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b) has dealt with diverse scales across which the lives of Tokyo seek their expressions. From

those explorations emerges *Tokyo – the one*, the largest urban conglomeration in the world, the grotesque size of which makes any comprehension possible only when reduced, to numbers, to images, to abstract expressions of diverse systems that make it function. While that Tokyo objectively does exist, it stays beyond the reach of human, subjective experience. Personal engagement with the city begins when metropolis dissolves into towns, with immersion into smaller scales. Those clusters make another plural Tokyo (Radović, 2008; 2021), *Tokyo – the many*, which in my early encounters with Nezu, Yanaka, Sendagi, Hongo, Marunouchi, Harajuku, Shibuya, Ginza, made this city feel as an archipelago of urbanities (Radović, 2008), which corresponds precisely to Kengo Kuma’s explanation of Kisho Kurokawa’s sense of this metropolis as an assemblage of 500 villages (see: Radović, with Kuma, Jinnai, 2021). That is where objective comprehension of Tokyo starts to overlap with and begins to fit into subjective sensations of its diverse characters. And then, there is the third and the finest of scales, *Tokyo – the infinite(simal)*, Tokyo dissolved. That is Tokyo *lived*, Tokyo *loved*, Tokyo *loved-in*, a concrete fabric of houses, homes (including our own and those of our neighbours), ubiquitous *afuredashi*, fine oases of micro greenery and other miniscule gestures intended to protect privacy, rich or bland sensorial stimuli, irreducibles, comprehensible realities including that (for a *gaijin*) precious, Barthesian murmur; then – the subjectivity, the familiarity, a smile or deliberate avoidance of my eyes by the neighbour.

That Tokyo speaks and whispers *to me*, it communicates, and it responds to *my* presence, in opens up or closes itself to *my* gaze and questions. That Tokyo can be generous with answers. The communication happens in strange “languages”, but it does happen – and much of my research of various expressions of urbanity of Tokyo (and beyond) sought openings and was receiving conclusions precisely there, in these deceptively simple expressions of ordinary, infraordinary *vécu*.

...

On that basis, if I had to touch the grand and slippery theme of identity of Japanese society and its projections in space, I would certainly be seeking answers there, at the level which empowers not only the speed of thought and that of the eye, but also the slowness of touch, smell, taste ..., as Michel Serres would put it, of our “six senses or more” (ibid.). I would not seek identity in extraordinary features of the Spectacular Tokyo, but in these infraordinary, dominant forms of life and their diverse spatial projections on both actual and metaphoric grounds of living *there*. That is not Tezuka’s self-conscious Japan, that is not a shop-window (capital A) Architecture, not the “superior” Nippon

in its World City, but my normal Japan, Tokyo, Meguro-ku, Midorigaoka, our street with no name, our neighbours, our house and our balcony there. My *mamachari*.

Japanese contribution to the world of architecture is, simply, formidable. Some of the best (known) Japanese architects have an ability to take *the foliage of speech* in, to translate it and bring to global, yet (somehow) still palpably Japanese heights. That is a fascinating (endlessly discussed, never explained) ability to find (dis)continuities of expression and innovate, while keeping recognisable cultural charge. Regardless its complexity, such architecture, to a significant degree remains architecture of, and for the eye.

While I might like much of that production, for a researcher in me of true identity of Japanese architecture remains in that unselfconscious Japan, shaded by the forest of speech and *its silences*. Those modest spatial projections of everyday life offer themselves to numerous registers of communication, which can help us open new questions. Some of the globally best recognised Japanese architecture also seeks its roots there – as often in Kuma’s emphasis on materiality (in the lightness of *shoji*, or the earthiness of *doma*), the perfection of detailing (*chidori* ... for instance). Precisely there, as in the third of our three scales of Tokyo, the infinite and infinitesimal, the limitless and incalculably small coexist.

If asked to be even more concrete, I would still (have to) think not one, but across those three scales, with responses reaching me from the very *concrete spaces and practices of living* in: (1) the neighbourhoods (especially the ones in which I have lived long), and local relationships (such as those which still reflect the strictures of *mukōsangen ryōdonari*, 向三軒両隣); (2) the streets with no name, where eyes never meet (reflecting, through education internalised, *dotoku*, 道徳, strictly enforced morality rules); (3) prefabricated buildings which create dominant, anonymous, introverted low-rise high-density urban fabric; and (4) interiors, their innate horizontality (still, wherever possible, with no chairs or beds, with *tatami* and *futons*, where the walls can slide away).

Those are concrete spaces where concrete lives get lived, the spaces shaped by everyday life. In them, an unmediated identity simply – *is*. Our seemingly simple questions start, and the answers might be also found there. As in Beckett’s “Fail better”, knowledge comes through return, repetition, the same “re” as in research, which asks us to search – again.

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THE INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE ON EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDES

ABSTRACT

There is a widespread consensus among architectural historians that the cultural and aesthetic revolution carried out by the avant-garde artistic currents at the end of the nineteenth century is a strictly Western issue. ‘Western’ means European culture of Greco-Roman derivation. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that when Westerners arrived in Japan during the Meiji Restoration era (1868-1889), Japan was already a ‘modern’ country. Western thought originated from the ontology of Being and metaphysical thought. In an antithetical way, the East has built its culture on a perception of reality that is less theoretical and more pragmatic. One culture has sought dualism and domination over nature, the other one, integration with it, and has considered dualities complementary terms. These differences have determined divergent aesthetic and formal outcomes. In the figurative arts, the contamination has occurred with greater force than in architecture because European architects found in Japan the exact characteristics of absoluteness they sought in modernity, though reluctant to admit it. Despite this, because of contingent and synchronic circumstances between Japan’s opening to the West and European society’s disquiet in the nineteenth century, when the avant-gardes artists met the Japoneries, they were fascinated and surprised.

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KEY WORDS

MODERNITY

EMPTINESS

DUALISM

SPATIAL LAYERING

MA, OKU, MIEGAKURE

1. INTRODUCTION

Before delving into the influence that the nineteenth century Japanese arts and crafts had on Western avant-garde, it is necessary to underline several reflections about the definition of the term ‘modernity’. Charles Baudelaire was one of the first poets who tried to interpret the concept of modernity. In an essay written in 1863, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, he defined ‘modernity’ in relation to the authenticity of artistic life and the ephemeral condition of real existence. At its core, he stated that ‘this transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with’ – and continues – ‘every old master possessed his own modernity’.¹

According to Baudelaire’s thought, for the visionary German writer Walter Benjamin, ‘modernity’ is *the new* in the context of what has always existed and every age is modern in the sense that it is constantly experiencing a crisis. In his unfinished work, *Paris, capital du XIX e siècle*, written between 1927 and 1940, Benjamin explains the complex dynamics of the socio-historical reality in the nineteenth century. He reveals the condition of modernity, recognizing the beginnings of its crisis, the commodity fetish, and the loss of the aura.

Octavio Paz was another poet who defined the term “modernity”. The Mexican poet, in *Che cos’è la modernità?*, an article published by Casabella in 1999, emphasizes the character of ambiguity and relativism of modernity according to the idea of contingency about which Baudelaire had written. Paz states that modernity is an ambiguous, uncertain, and arbitrary term because each society has its own type of modernity and claims:

If we are modern when compared to medieval times, are we perhaps the Middle Ages of a future modernity? Is a name that changes with time a real name? Modernity is a word in search of its meaning. Is it an idea, a mirage or a moment of history? Are we the children of modernity or its creators? Nobody knows for sure. It doesn’t matter much: we follow it, we pursue it. For me at that time modernity was fused with the present or rather produced it: the present was its last supreme flower. My case is neither unique nor exceptional: from the Symbolist period, all modern poets have chased after that magnetic and elusive figure that fascinates them. Baudelaire was the first. He was also the first to touch her and discover that she is nothing but time that crumbles in one’s hands.²

Considering all these definitions, it appears that the concept of modernity is free from the strictly modernist character of European industrial society in the

twentieth century. Guided by the utmost confidence in scientific progress, modern society has claimed the superiority of human rationality towards nature. However, this definition of modernity is contingent upon that particular historical period. Thus, it is possible to decode the modernity of European bourgeois society only in relation to the geopolitical configuration of Europe in the nineteenth century, the crisis that preceded it, and the industrial and technological revolution that ensued. The highest expression of that modernity was the Eiffel Tower. An expression of past modernity is, for example, baroque architecture. And once more, ‘what is postmodernism if not an even more modern modernity?’³

2. AVANT-GARDE ARCHITECTS IN JAPAN

When architect Bruno Taut arrived in Japan in 1933 as a political refugee, he was allowed to visit the Katsura imperial villa in Kyoto. He dedicated two specific chapters of *Nippon: seen by European eyes* and the entire volume of *Houses and People of Japan* to it. Within them, Taut tells the story of the extraordinary feeling felt in seeing for the first time a traditional Japanese home. It was a wonderful surprise and a sudden discovery. When he moved into his traditional Japanese home with his wife, he was initially overwhelmed by a feeling of bewilderment, followed by a sensation of deep fascination and curiosity. Giving details about his home, he wrote:

In the complete silence that reigned I became aware of clearly defined parallel lines made by sliding-doors, surfaces of plastered wall, which are void of paint or whitewash, of cedar woodwork entirely unornamented. There was nothing oppressive about the ceiling whose light boards and laths merely served, together with the delicate wooden framework, to define the room-space. The large alcove, or tokonoma, dominated an otherwise neutral room by the integrity of its artistic spirit. The room was empty; the straw mats alone - there were but six - gave a sense of content. These mats have a subtle quality of naturalness, a something that is neither soft, nor yet elastic, much less hard. They supply the essential functions fulfilled by furniture the world over, and actually replace chairs and armchairs, sofas and bedsteads, and to a large extent even tables [...] At last I was ready, extinguished my lantern and lay down. There we were, lying inside a paper lantern - for such the room seemed, filled as it was with moonlight. strangely soft and smooth.⁴

Taut wrote about standard measures that are determined by the dimensions of the mats (Tatami); about the wooden floors that are raised 1 ft. 4 inches to 2 ft. above the ground and are the only shining surface in a Japanese house; about wood construction that is a ‘skeleton-system’; about aesthetics, details, and sliding doors. Taut pays attention not only to natural materials but also the essential geometry, modular repetition, lack of symmetry, flexibility, slender structure, the synthesis between aesthetics and technique, the ‘art of omission, the art of essentiality and the truth of the construction. He was fascinated because he had recognized in the Katsura imperial villa the universality of values sought by modern European architects. For him, the Katsura imperial villa represented the confirmation of what was theorized until that moment. Several years after the publication of *Nippon: Seen by European Eyes*, the German architect, Walter Gropius, described the same feeling of surprise and wonder at the sight of the Katsura imperial villa and the Ryan-ji garden. In a postcard sent out in June 1954, he shared his admiration, enthusiasm and disbelief with his friend Le Corbusier.

Dear Corbu,

all what we have been fighting for has its parallel in old Japanese culture. This rock garden of Zen-monks in the 13th century—stones and raked white pebbles—could be by Arp or Brancusi—an elating spot of peace. You would be as excited as I am in this 2000-year-old space of cultural wisdom! The Japanese house is the best and most modern I know of and truly pre-fabricated. Hoping you are well. Greetings to you and Mme. Yours —
Gropius.⁵

Nevertheless, to understand a culture so different from the Western one, as the Italian writer Italo Calvino suggests, it is good ‘to move away from the mind words like ‘being and becoming’, because if everything is reduced to the language of the philosophy of the world from which we began, it is not worth the journey’.⁶ The society to which Italo Calvino refers is that of the pre-modern (1573–1868) age, influenced by the Chinese culture of an even more remote period between the sixth and eleventh centuries. In particular, during the Edo period, between 1600 and 1868, when shōguns were in power, Zen Buddhism was widely known and the discipline of essentiality to which samurai were educated was predominant. Although it was a period of absolute isolation for Japan from the rest of the world, art and crafts inspired by the Chán Buddhist principles developed widely. Essentially, the Japanese arts and crafts (Fig. 1) - *Chayoyu*, *Noh* theatre, *Sumi-e*, *Ukiyo-e* and *Haiku* poetry - were the celebration of

shunyata-emptiness, the final aim of meditation. During this period, theoretical and practical research into concepts such as vacuity, impermanence, emptiness, fleetingness and littleness began.

FIGURE 1: Sumi-e is an art of meditation. It means 'black ink drawing on paper'



The cultural development was so extraordinary that, during the succeeding Meiji Restoration (1868-1889), of renewal and modernization of the Cipangu,⁷ Westerners could admire and be surprised by everything that had hitherto been concealed in art and crafts. In addition, from a related socio-political perspective, for Japan, these were years of crisis for the feudal system, the rise of the mercantile class and opening up to ‘other’ cultures.

Western artists enthusiastically welcomed the *Japoneries* since they recognized the boldness of their own poetic and artistic research. In sum, it’s hardly surprising that they appreciated the formal, aesthetic, and compositional qualities, as well as the value of the represented spatiality, although they were astonished by the philosophical and spiritual apparatus of the underlying doctrine. Japanese art is, first of all, the creation of emptiness in the mind and then the transposition of this into art. It transposes concepts such as transience, ephemerality, incompleteness, exaltation of absence, and search for essence. Through the exaltation of *hic et nunc*, the Japanese return value and celebrate eternity. The Shinto shrine in Ise Jingū, dedicated to the Amaterasu-Omikami deity since 690, is the subject of a ritual named the *Shikinen Sengu*. In the period of twenty years, this temple was demolished and expertly rebuilt in an adjacent area. The value of this ritual lies in the handing down not the physical substance of the temple but the traditional knowledge and construction techniques. That which is changeable and perishable becomes, in this way, eternal. Spirituality, not materialism, is celebrated. Not finitude, but eternity. Europeans have a different cultural heritage based on epistemological and ontological considerations.

3. TRADITIONAL JAPANESE CULTURE

In the fervour of the Meiji restoration years, during the twentieth century, attention to the Eastern arts in Europe was at its highest. Many journeys were undertaken to the land of the Rising Sun by poets, writers, artists, and architects (to name but a few examples, Fosco Maraini, Roland Barthes, Italo Calvino, Goffredo Parise, Alberto Moravia among the writers and anthropologists, Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright among the architects) and their experiences were afterwards translated into texts of absolute reference for European academics - *Art Japonais* by Louis Gonse of 1883 or *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Arts* by Ernst Francisco Fenollosa of 1907. The French art historian and poet Henri Focillon recognized the keenness of Buddhist thought by anticipating it in *Technique et sentiment. Études sur l’art moderne*, what he later called ‘the genius of Japanese art’.⁸ The Italian Italo Calvino is absolutely amazed by the anthropological character of Japanese art and tells us about gardens, wooden temples, and purple kimonos. Among the places visited by Mr.

Palomar around the world, there is one in particular, ‘a small courtyard covered with white sand with large grains’. Arrived at the wooden platform from which to observe this ‘aiola’, Palomar, with great desire, is ready to strip himself of the ‘relativity of the individual self’ to intuit ‘the absolute self’. He captured the essence of Japanese spirituality. When describing the garden of the Katsura imperial villa, Calvino is attracted by the infinity of points of view, by the movement punctuated by steps, by the finite and infinite. Walking through the garden, one’s perception changes according to the place.

Even the Italian writer Goffredo Parise moved to the East in 1980, where he wrote several short diaries. Between the lines of *L’eleganza è frigida*, whose narration is rendered by the alter-ego Marco, he writes of a sensuality that comes from ‘silence and darkness, inside the folds of the kimonos or in the weave of the white and elastic skin like foam’.⁹ What are the characteristics of Japanese philosophy that the Europeans encountered? There are several concepts that represent the synthesis of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism and the transposition of thought into practical experience: Ma, Oku, Miegakure and Rikyū grey. In *Kanji* calligraphy, *Ma* is denoted by the ideogram 間, representing the moon inside a door. In opposition to the *Horror vacui* of European medieval barbarian art, *Ma* represents emptiness. It is simultaneously a doctrine, a philosophy, a practice, and an artistic expression. It is the purpose of meditation. To better understand this notion, it is suitable to mention the known Taoist manuscript, the *Daodejing, The Book of the Way and its Virtue*, from the fourth–third century BC, which reads:

The thirty spokes unite in the one nave; but it is on the empty space for the axle, that the use of the wheel depends. /Clay is fashioned into vessels; but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends. /The door and windows are cut out from the walls to form an apartment; but it is on the empty space within, that its use depends. /Therefore, what has a positive existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for actual usefulness.¹⁰

Ma is rendered by its opposite, fullness. Like for any opposite, if the emptiness were absolute, it would not be perceptible. The graphic expression of this principle is the Taoist symbol of the *taijitu*. Valid for every dialectic form – full and empty; dark and light; form and non-form- it expresses the idea of the change between complementary parts. If the dark surface represents the vacuum, the light one signifies the solid. Both contain the germ of the opposite. The seed of the solid in the vacuum, the seed of the empty in the fullness. The sinuosity of

the line between the two parts suggests movement.¹¹ Both are parts of the same substance. *Ma* is the substance that is free of concepts and conditioning. It means achieving emptiness first in the mind, then in ritual and art. It is to meticulously follow techniques and gestures to achieve the state of supreme freedom. In order to fully grasp the transposition of Zen Buddhism into art, it is not by observing the emptiness of a *Sumi-e*, white space between individual strokes, that it is taken the meditation. It is not by contemplating the *Karesansui* that the mind is freed. These rituals represent the manifestation of a void belonging to the thoughts of those who have grasped it. The *Nō* theatre, the *Haiku* poetry, the *Kanji* calligraphy and the *Sumi-e* painting are extreme transpositions of meditation as a practice of emptiness and a constitutive form of substance. Tadao Ando defines *Ma* as ‘the exaltation of nothing’.¹² For Augustin Berque, it is ‘a space full of meaning’.¹³

In architecture, the empty space of the *Ma* is created in the traditional dwelling, in the garden, in the tea room, in the *Sukiya* and the village. The concept that comes closest to the meaning of *ku-kan*, another way to define empty space, is similar to *in-between* space, with the difference that Westerners attribute a conceptualization to this idea of emptiness. They define it as the gestalt completion of a form, a place of memory or the tension of lines. For the Japanese, the space of *Ma* does not have a physical connotation. It is independent on form. It is a space of experience. It is changeable. It is the sense of the place. The space of *Ma* does not originate from the composition of parts and does not make use of three dimensions. Its spatiality proceeds by a succession of two-dimensional planes; the walls are mobile; the gaze is on the horizon; every aspect is governed by impermanence and temporality.

Oku 奥 is the inner space, the invisible centre, the core. If traditional Western architectural culture has used the verticality of the bell towers as iconic landmarks of a territory, Japanese culture seeks the core of things. The Western man looks for the peak of a sacred mountain, while the Japanese man looks for the core of it. In the West, the divine is sought by observing the sky as the gaze rises. In the East, the gaze is turned towards the horizon. The Gothic churches’ majestic verticality is combined with the deft use of stained glass to capture the dense light. In Japan, space is horizontal. There is no verticality, no centrality, but an ‘inside’, a hidden space, a concealed depth where the divinity resides. There are no squares in Japan, no centrality in plan or elevation. Streets are transitional spaces where people congregate during festivals. For Okakura Kakuzō, known for *The Book of Tea*, the secret to achieving such spaciousness is to suggest. A Shinto shrine or a Buddhist temple is sought through glimpses from which to scrutinize them.

Rikyū grey, or philosophy of grey, is the way to cancel the three-dimensionality of space. Rikyū grey was a widespread colour during the Edo period. The name, Rikyū-Nezumi, was found written in 1640 between the pages of *The Book of Tea* and indicates the state of sobriety. The gradations of grey are part of the narrative of traditional Japanese space (Fig. 2).

FIGURE 2: In the city of Kyoto,
the traditional architecture reflects the aesthetics of Ryukyu grey



On the contrary, European cities are meant to be illuminated by the sun. Sharp shadows reveal the qualities of three-dimensional space. In the Pyramids, the Acropolis, the Parthenon, the Baroque, the drama is reflected by the volumes and concavities. Antithetically, traditional Japanese architecture is veiled. Furthermore, the qualities of darkness contribute to the definition of this perception. Kishō Kurokawa, founding architect of Metabolism, writes about the philosophy of Rikyū grey and ‘the spatial qualities of the city of Kyoto’ that are shrouded in dusk. As Kurokawa argued,

roof tiles and plaster walls dissolve into shades of grey; they seem to lose all perspective and three-dimensionality [...]. Rikyū grey, or the ‘philosophy of grey’ shares all and is a medium of all these concepts. Needless to say, such concepts epitomize the special qualities imparted to Japanese culture by the pervasive influence of Buddhism [...] In Japanese architecture, including tearoom architecture, the traditional spatial elements of a design such as ceilings, alcoves, and walls are each autonomous, that is, they are on the independent planes of a two-dimensional world. The heterogeneous elements mutually deny any direct three-dimensional relationship. There are many examples, such as where the windows in two walls opposite each other are placed with total disregard to conformity in size, height or other measurements. This is one technique of encouraging the sense of two-dimensionality. In any case, Rikyū grey likewise is a medium in which three-dimensional, cubical, sculptural, substantial space of single meaning is rendered into plane, one-dimensional, no sensual space of multiple meaning.¹⁴

Among the writers, the famous Jun’ichirō Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* defines the different qualities of darkness, comparing the *Sumi-e* on *washi* paper to the traditional Japanese room. It is a notable essay on Japanese traditional aesthetics. *Washi* is different from Western paper. It retains light and vacuity. It absorbs darkness and ink. Similarly, the Japanese room has infinite shades of darkness. Soft light filters through walls made of *washi* and *shoji*. The *tokonoma*, instead, houses a denser darkness to hide the precious content. Between the niche and the walls, there are infinite shades of darkness.

The *Sukiya* is the room to practice the ritual of the tea ceremony. It is sober, has modest dimensions and is tremendously essential (Fig. 3-4). The words of Kakuzo Okakura in *Zen and the tea ceremony* allow us to grasp its qualities. *Sukiya* is ‘Abode of Fancy’ for its ephemeral character; it is not intended for posterity; it is ‘Abode of Vacancy’ for the sobriety of the elements of which it is

constituted and for the aspiration to change; it is ‘Abode of the Unsymmetrical’ for the character of imperfection it possesses; it is ‘Abode of Peace’ since even a samurai is obliged to leave his sword outside⁵. Similarly, the Zen monastery is a place of meditation. Both the *Sukiya* and the monastery are transpositions in the architecture of Buddhism’s core values. If the monastery consists of an empty room and a niche in which the statue of Bodhidharma is present, then the *Sukiya* is, similarly, an empty room in which the fireplace is positioned on the floor. Both Zen and tea serve to keep the mind awake (Fig. 5).

FIGURE 3: Traditional Japanese house





FIGURE 4: Traditional Japanese house

FIGURE 5: The hearth is the central element of the Sukiya



The sliding doors, the construction of the roof and the ceiling, the *tokobashira*, the *tokonoma*, whose wood is left raw, the *shoji*, the gloss of the black lacquer, the rough surface of the tools, the proportions of the room that follow the positions of the *tatami*, the economy of the materials, determine the Japanese traditional architecture concepts: imperfection; non-permanence; ephemeral; temporality; asymmetry; incompleteness.

The *Sukiya* garden, the *Soto-roji*, is also characterized by essentiality. The visitor, leaving behind the outside world, before starting their journey within the garden, awaits the host inside a space reserved for him. The stones of the garden are positioned like rocks inside a stream. Along this impervious path, resting his foot on every stone, the visitor is led to embark on his journey within himself, already perceiving, the dimension of emptiness before entering the *Sukiya*. To avoid a static perception, the asymmetry is returned by the reciprocal distance between the stones and their different heights. This condition forces the visitor to change their pace. Inevitably, time gets slower. The visitor is free to choose the walking speed to make his own way. Lanterns, bushes and rocks are wisely located to create different points of view. On a smaller scale, this pathway through the space is figuratively similar to the walking path of a hermit when crossing a forest to reach the most intimate dimension of the mountain and also of himself. After the *Soto-roji*, the visitor, crossing an opening, enters a second garden, the inner one, the *Uchi-roji*. It is a closed garden and has a frame. Its limitlessness determines the scale of measurement in relation to the surroundings. The stones' positioning and their variety, asymmetry and the degree of roughness determine the rhythm. The technique used for the gardens, for the *Sukiya* and the temples, is named 'Miegakure' (Fig. 6). That means 'to glimpse something that is hidden such as the moon passing behind clouds, it is a concept that embodies both the ephemeral and ambiguous'¹⁶. So, along the way, certain elements are expertly positioned and hidden 'to create surprise as to allow the mind the possibility of reconstructing a mental image of the entire edifice, and to reveal the beauty of change'¹⁷.

The Buddhist monk and reformer of the tea ceremony, Sen no Rikyū, designed the garden of the Nanshu-ji temple in Sakai, near Osaka. Inside the garden, Rikyū placed hedges that prevented direct observation of the sea. He placed a bowl of water on the ground within the visitor could wash his hands. Through this gesture, it is at that moment that the visitor places attention between the hedges and unexpectedly sees the sea. The smallness of his crouching is confronted with the greatness of infinity.

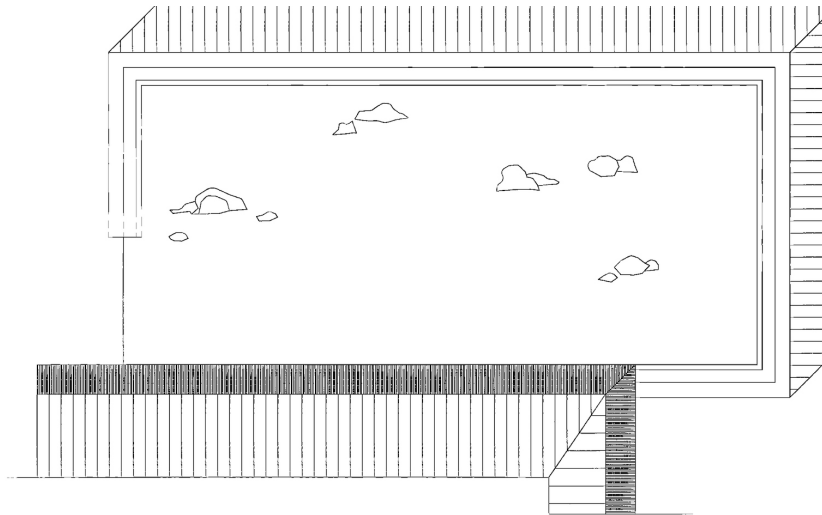
Here, just some water/There amidst the trees/The sea!
(Umi sukoschi/ Niwa ni izumi no/ Ko no ma ka na)¹⁸

FIGURE 6: The bowl of water where it is possible to wash hands before entering into the Soto-roji



Sen no Rikyū explains that the reason for such a minute size of the door of the *Sukiya* comes from Zen practice. The visitor is forced to droop. This gesture allows him to grasp the full spatiality of the room that would otherwise appear too small. As already mentioned, the interior of the hall is a celebration of essentiality. The *tokonoma*, the niche in which the gradation of grey is condensed, is the keeper of the *kakemono*, a silk or paper roll on which an ideogram or a *Sumi-e* is drawn. Both calligraphy and painting arise from the control of the pressure of the brush on *washi*. Both signs result from technical knowledge, repetition of gestures and exercise of the mind to create emptiness, firstly in the mind and then in the physical spatiality of an architecture or a sheet of paper. If the *Soto-roji* is a garden for crossing, the *Kare-san-sui* (Fig. 7) is a dry garden for viewing. Even sitting on one of its edges (a veranda or a walkway), the visitor takes a particular path inside itself. In order to grasp fullness, it is necessary to be aware of the vacuum represented. Ryōan-ji, Kyoto's Pacific Dragon Temple of the late sixteenth century, is one of the best-known examples of dry landscaped gardens. It could be defined as the metaphor of a tiger with its own tigers inside the sea, islands in the sea, or very high peaks surrounded by clouds. Above all, it is harmony between asymmetrical relationships. The mineral elements make the garden devoid of noticeable colours and no element is hierarchically preponderant. The rocks form three groups on an area of three hundred and thirty square meters. By observing them, there is no way to see the fifteen rocks simultaneously. The void is not absolute. It is perceptible only in relation to other elements a finite space that confronts the infinite. It is the manifestation of *Ma*, *Oku* and *Miegakure*.

FIGURE 7: In the Karesansui there is no possibility of seeing all fifteen rocks simultaneously



4. THE INFLUENCE ON THE EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDES

How was this modernity received by the twentieth century Europeans who first saw Japan? The relationship between avant-garde artistic currents and Japanese art is disruptive and widely argued in the figurative arts. The *Portrait of Emile Zola* by Edouard Manet; *The Vision after Sermon* by Paul Gauguin; the *Divan Japonais* by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec; the *Almond Blossom* by Vincent Van Gogh; the *Japanese Bridge* by Claude Monet; the ‘Fidèle émule d’Hokusai’ prove it. When European artists held the ukiyo-e in their hands, they were enthralled not only by what was depicted (the synthesis and boldness of the subject represented), but also by the set of pictorial fundamentals with which they were realized: flat and uniform chromatic drafting without chiaroscuro; brightness of the colours; lack of a geometric perspective; depth generated by the succession of two-dimensional planes; abstraction of the line; calligraphic outline; abstraction of nature; asymmetry of the composition; aerial view; bold use of the black line; dimensions of the supports and use of cartouches. The term *Uki-yo* originally referred to the world [yo] of suffering [uki] and assumed the meaning of impermanence, floating and fugacity of human life. However, the artists, the merchants and the painters of the time, wanting to ward off the suffering and pain of existence in a paradoxical way through the ukiyo-e prints, represented the same fleeting pleasures and attachments averted by Buddhist doctrine. In this way, they gave the ukiyo-e an eschatological meaning. The ‘floating world’ was characterized by joyful gatherings of merchants, intellectuals and courtesans of the time. This cultural ferment was reminiscent of the Bohemian diachronic salons of Paris during the Belle Époque. Thus, the iconography is both that of the natural landscapes and street life.

In architecture, such influences are not easily detected and are often denied. Among the determining factors of the revolution in twentieth century architecture, the Italian historian Bruno Zevi identified: ‘the natural evolution of taste’, ‘the scientific and technical progress of construction’, ‘new theories of aesthetic vision’ and ‘radical social transformation’. Yet, architectural theorist Charles Jencks wrote that:

the entire conceptual knowledge developed by the International Style has already been present in Japan for 400 years. Standardization, flexibility, modularity, use of natural materials, the unfinished, the enfatization of the structure, pilotis, asymmetrical geometry, etc. In order for the West to become modern, architects had to review all its constructive traditions while Japan was already modern.¹⁹

Certainly, three of the seven modern invariants identified by Zevi, ‘a-symmetry’, ‘anti-perspective three-dimensionality’ and ‘space temporality’²⁰ evoke precisely the principles of Japanese aesthetics: *Ma*, *Oku*, *Miegakure*, impermanence, asymmetry and layered spatiality. Piet Mondrian, the founder of De Stijl, investigated abstractionism, two-dimensional planes and the repetition of modular elements while avoiding the prospective depiction of Renaissance and academic nature. Although the results are similar, the vacuum depicted by Piet Mondrian is formal and arises for different reasons such as the decomposition of the box. The Neoplastic Movement uses horizontal and vertical planes distinguished by primary colours like red, yellow and blue or black and white to maintain the three-dimensionality of the space. Traditional Japanese architecture instead seeks a succession of two-dimensional planes tending towards the horizon.

The dissemination of Zen Buddhism and Taoism in Europe also comes thanks to the translations of different reference texts: *The Ideals of the East*, *The Book of Tea* by Kakuzō Okakura and *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* by Jiro Harada. The introduction of traditional Japanese architecture in the West also took place through universal expositions: Antwerp in 1885, Chicago in 1893 and Paris in 1931. In Chicago, the phoenix hall, *Hō-ō-den*, belonging to the Byōdō-in temple of Uji in Kyoto, was faithfully rebuilt by carpenters from Japan. What the architects and artists saw in *Hō-ō-den* were the same elements described by Taut or Gropius at the sight of the Katsura imperial villa: the spatiality generated by the succession of horizontal planes; the prevalence of voids over solids; the permeability; the sliding doors; the shades of grey; the materials; the wooden structure; the raised floor.

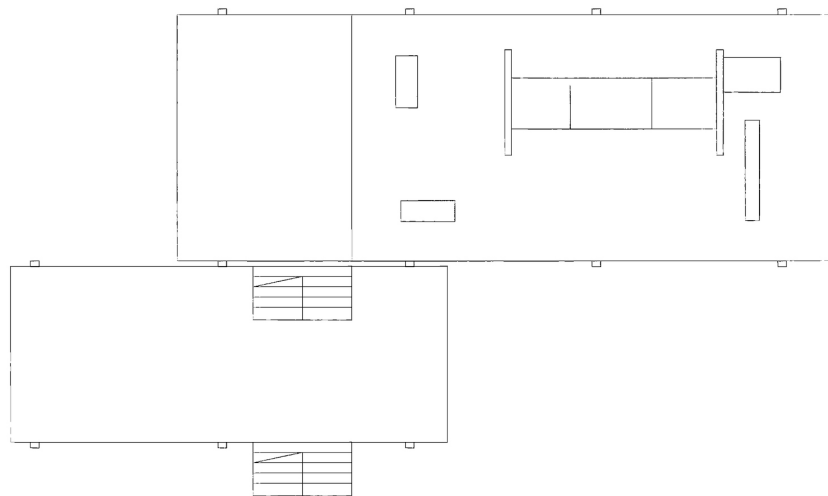
The architect Frank Lloyd Wright saw traditional Japanese architecture for the first time when he participated in the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago with his Lieber meister, architect Louis Sullivan. He had already read *The Ideals of the East*, *The Book of Tea*, and other texts concerning the thought of the philosopher Lao-tzu, relating to the doctrine of vacuity. Being a ravenous collector of ukiyo-e, Wright was well aware of the construction of the vanishing point-free perspective. In 1912, he wrote *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation*. He travelled to Japan between 1905 and 1922 and compared Japanese domestic architecture to a temple of supreme essentiality. Wright often denied that he was influenced by Japanese architecture, although acknowledging its similarities. Indeed, speaking to his students during the meetings in Taliesin in 1950, he stated:

See how simply they get in these planes: they rendered all this sense of distance, there is no lack of perspective here, as you’ll notice. They’re

supposed not to have known perspective. They knew all they wanted of it ... they didn't want much of it. [...] Because here he (Hiroshige) had an idea of swinging this horizontal into the vertical; and in doing that so handled everything to give you a continuous sense of space. Not something within the frame, as most of these others were, but something of which you caught a glimpse which gave you a sense of a great continuity. That element wasn't present in any of the previous things. But you see that go through all the series. The greatest idea in landscape that ever could be found. This is unique in the history of art. And this certainly was a great idea. Now here Hiroshige did, with a sense of space, very much what we have been doing with it in our architecture. Here you get a sense of tremendous, limitless space, instead of something confined within a picture. ... Now the non-objectivists are preaching that everything should be within the frame. That you choose a spot somewhere in it, and that everything should be concentrated on that spot. Well, I think that's absolutely the bunk when you see what can be done by disregarding any spot ... eliminating the spot. Where is the focus? Show me. On what is your attention focused? Nothing. You're right in the great breadth and spread of the scene.²¹

The architect Werner Blaser was one of the first to hypothesize the relationship between the architecture of Mies van der Rohe and the Orient in *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan*.

FIGURE 8: Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, 1945-1950



Mies never went to Japan, but soon came into contact with Japanese culture and became interested in reading the philosopher and master Zen Daisetz Suzuki through lectures by Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. The Swiss architect was certainly influenced by the architecture of Peter Behrens, Berlage's and Wright's architecture, the De Stijl and the Chicago school, but also by another 'style'.²²

In the *Farnsworth House* (Fig. 8), built between 1945 and 1950, eight pillars support the thin slabs of the ceiling and floor. The gaze is on the horizon. The space is isotropic and devoid of functions, like the *Sukiya*.

The lack of walls allows continuity between inside and outside. As a result, there are some potential similarities between the two cultures that are not difficult to identify: the development of the composition; the structure that becomes thin; the extreme lightness; the horizontality of the plans; the notion of truth; the reduction of the partition to a transparent skin; the continuity between internal and external space; the concept of empty. Nevertheless, like Wright, Mies openly denied that Japan had influenced his architecture.

Finally, from the studies of Mauro Pierconti, it emerges that even the Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa knew Japan even before visiting it in 1969 and 1978. If the assonances seen so far concern the construction of space, in the case of Carlo Scarpa, the analogy is traceable in the way he designs the shades of shadow and in the composition of the paths that, like the stones skilfully placed in the Japanese garden, require the visitor to adjust the cadence of his own pace. In Scarpa's masterpiece, the Tomba Brion Cemetery in San Vito d'Altivole, the protagonists are the light and the shadow. Like the atmosphere evocated in a *Sukiya* or a *Soto-roji*, the architecture invokes silence.

NOTES

- 1 Charles Baudelaire, *Il pittore della vita moderna* (Milan: Mondadori, 1863), 1285-1286.
- 2 Octavio Paz, “Che cos’è la modernità?” *Casabella* 664 (February 1999): 48-51.
- 3 Ibidem.
- 4 Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan* (London: John Gifford, 1937), 10-19.
- 5 Walter Gropius, ‘L’architettura in Giappone’ in *Katsura. La villa imperiale*, ed. Ponciroli Virginia (Milan: Electa, 2004), 389.
- 6 Italo Calvino, *Collezione di sabbia* (Milan: Mondadori 1984), 179.
- 7 Marco Polo’s name for Japan in *Il Milione*, thirteenth century.
- 8 Henri Focillon, *Essai sur le génie japonais* (Paris: Publications du Comité franco-japonais, 1918).
- 9 Goffredo Parise, *L’eleganza è frigida* (Milan: Adelphi, 1982), 76-77.
- 10 Jan Julius Lodewijk Duyvendak, *Tao Tè Ching. Il libro della via e della virtù* (Milan: Adelphi, 1975), 49.
- 11 Grazia M. Nicolosi, *Contaminazioni dal mondo fluttuante. A proposito di avanguardie*. (Catania: Malcor D’, 2019).
- 12 Tadao Ando, “Al di là del mondo chiuso dell’architettura moderna” in *Tadao Ando. Complete works*, ed. Francesco Dal Co (Milan: Electa, 1995), 446.
- 13 Augustin Berque, *Vivre l’espace au Japon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 63.
- 14 Kurokawa Kishō, *Each One a Hero: The Philosophy of Symbiosis* (Tokyo: Kodansha Amer Inc, 1997).
- 15 Kakuzo Okakura, *Lo zen e la cerimonia del tè* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2017), 43.
- 16 Levitt Brendon, “Veiled Sustainability: The Screen in the Work of Fumihiko Maki”, *Places* 17, no. 2 (2005).
- 17 Moniwa Teruyuki, “A Glossary of Spatial Concepts”, *Casabella* 608-609 (January-February 1994), 115.
- 18 Haiku poem by Sogi poet. In: I. Calvino, *Collezione di sabbia* (Milan: Mondadori 1984), 184-185.
- 19 Charles Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture and other essays* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), 98.
- 20 Bruno Zevi, *Il linguaggio moderno dell’architettura. Guida al codice anticlassico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).

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- 21 Japanese Print Party, tape transcript, Taliesin, 20 September 1950. In: Nute, K. (2000). *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- 22 Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985), 27-28.

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DATABASE MANAGEMENT: JAPAN, POSTMODERNITY & ARCHITECTURE'S DIGITAL TURN

ABSTRACT

This article offers a framing of the development and adoption of computer aided design tools by Japanese architects in the 1980s and early 1990s that counters the interpolation of their work into conventionalised narratives of a momentous “digital turn.” It combines media theoretic and cultural studies approaches to analyse the design practices and design outputs of Japanese architects engaged with computers alongside prevailing political-economic policies and contemporary popular cultural genres/forms such as database novels. The article thereby elaborates on the formation of a “database imagination” of Japan and information management practices through which computer use was framed domestically and internationally in relation to emerging theories of aesthetic and technical postmodernity. Setting these domestic and international framings against one another, the article shows how efforts to construct a particular image of Japan were used by multiple groups to position the country and its architectural production within larger narratives of cultural and technological change. Finally, this positioning is examined as a site through which the cultural specificity of Japan and the co-constructive encounter of Japanese architects with computers was and continues to be negotiated.

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KEY WORDS

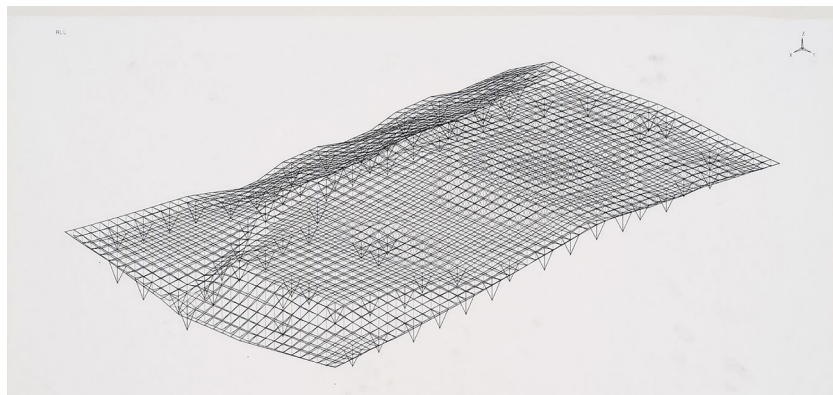
JAPAN
COMPUTER AIDED DESIGN
POSTMODERNISM
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
INFORMATION SOCIETY

1. INTRODUCTION

Japan and the work of Japanese architects such as Yoh Shoen and Isozaki Arata have been situated prominently as paradigm-defining examples of experimental and innovative uses of Computer Aided Design (CAD) tools within conventional histories of architecture's "Digital Turn"—the widespread adoption of computers for the design of novel architectural forms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yoh's digitally-sculpted roof surfaces at the Odawara Municipal Sports Complex (1991) [Figure 1] and the Galaxy Toyama gymnasium (1992), for example, were approvingly cited as important precedents by Greg Lynn, one of the leading protagonists and subsequent historians of the "Digital Turn," in a now canonical 1996 *Architecture New York (ANY) Magazine* article, "Blobs, or Why Tectonics is Square and Topology is Groovy."¹ However, the work of Yoh, Isozaki and many of their compatriots rarely required or was explicit about the use of CAD tools for their aesthetic design or material realisation, as Lynn's article and subsequent narrativisations of the digital turn have suggested. Similarly, the link between the use of computers and Japanese national identity that these narrativisations read into Yoh and Isozaki's work was, in fact, significantly more complex than what was implied.

With this in mind and building from an acknowledgement that many histories of architecture, including digital turn narratives, are predicated on a disciplinary distinction between design and more managerial activities, a reevaluation of the work of Yoh, Isozaki, and their contemporaries seems necessary.

FIGURE 1: Computer-generated image featured as part fo the Archaeology of the Digital exhibition at the Canadian Centre for Architecture:Perspective view of space frame, Odawara Municipal Sports Complex, Odawara Kanagawa, Japan. 1991. Digital Print on Paper. 34,2 x 56,9 cm. ARCH265924. Shoen Yoh fonds. Canadian Centre for Architecture. Gift of Shoen Yoh. © Shoen Yoh + Architects.



By attending in turn to the manners in which their work corresponded with contemporaneous political-economic projects of the Japanese government, managerial practices advanced by Japanese corporations and popular forms of cultural media; this reevaluation connects broad-based genres of cultural production that were emerging in Japan with the specific practices and media capacities employed by architects.

In doing so, it shows how architectural practices were employed in constructing a distinct imagination of Japan and of computers, as well as how these imaginations reciprocally shaped the work and reception of Japanese architects.

Rather than being seen as an early and model manifestation of a new globally applicable approach to architectural production in relation to the supposedly universal logics of newly available computer technologies, the work of architects such as Isozaki and Yoh might instead be seen as a co-constitutive with a framing of the Japan of the 1980s/early 1990s as synonymous with postmodernity. This framing, of which particular computer-related cultural practices were just one part, was cultivated by nationals and foreigners alike to negotiate the treatment of Japan and Japanese architecture as both idiosyncratic and indicative of a more general/global postmodern “condition”. Moreover, by discursively analysing these negotiations along with the media support and genres, they drew on, this article recovers some of the specificity of this historical moment. Doing so foregrounds the multi-directional exchanges of ideas and practices between architects and other specialists across various geographies. As such, it works to counter the long-ongoing co-construction of Japan as a constitutive Other or foil through/against which “the West” and its actions have been brought into relief, perpetuated in part by narratives such as those of a “Digital Turn.”²

2. MAKING JAPAN POSTMODERN

Despite its long history of being positioned as an uncanny and co-constitutive foil to the West by both foreign and domestic thinkers alike, Japan was not automatically emblematic of postmodernity or figured as a counter to Western modernisms. Japan had to be made postmodern just as Postmodernism, as an explanatory theoretical framework premised around a collapse of grand narratives and abstract structures of universalising order in the face of an emerging “late capitalism” had to be constructed to account for the different social, economic and political shifts being experienced by Japan and other countries.³ For Japan specifically, these shifts included a series of commodity crisis-related boom and bust cycles, student protests, information/

communication media network proliferations and a more general questioning of national identity and intellectual autonomy in the decades following the end of the Second World War and the subsequent occupation of Japan by the United States.⁴

The co-construction of Japan and Postmodernism around these transformations was made explicit in the widespread efforts by government officials, corporate leaders, writers, literary theorists and architects to both descriptively and protectively characterise their experience of the various productive crises composing communications technology-facilitated processes of post-industrialisation as the formation of an “information society”. Made by such publicly prominent figures as Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, former Mitsubishi Materials Corporation CEO Takeshi Nagano, architect Kurokawa Kisho and critic Asada Akira throughout the 1960s, 70s, 80s and up until the bursting of the “bubble economy” in early 1992, such characterisations brought discourses on postmodernity in economics, management, literature and architecture into connection with one another and consequently to broader public consciousness.⁵ The “information society” was framed by these figures in terms of a shift in the locus of power from the coordination, control, and deployment of materials and commodities towards the derivation of value from the applied and theoretical knowledge embodied in materials, assemblies, processes of production, and their organisation. As such, for many in this discursive milieu, “information society” served not only as a description of the particular political-economic and cultural formations around the proliferation of media and circulation of information occurring in Japan during this time, but as a metaphor for Japan itself. In at least Nakasone’s formulation of this metaphor, which conflated information, nature, and environment, Japan was to be seen “as the computer that best processes information.”⁶ Consumers, corporations, cultural producers and critics alike were encouraged to engage in this process by drawing on numerous media including magazines, radio, television and new government or corporate-funded computer networks to “playfully synthesize data from many different outlets rather than looking to one central authoritative source.”⁷ In this blurring of distinctions between production and consumption, information was to be understood not so much as a representation of the truth, but rather as a material to be manipulated.⁸

Cast in terms of the generation of formal, spatial, and conceptual complexity through practices of reference, collage or geometric experimentation which understood architecture in terms of semiotic organisations of information tied to a social/political project of difference, the work of Yoh, Isozaki and many of their contemporaries in Japan intersected almost seamlessly with

this understanding. It also intersected with the practices extending from literary theory and management discourse in which Japan figured prominently and through which concepts and practices of both postmodernity and the “information society” were being worked out. This was best captured in projects such as Yoh’s gymnasia or Isozaki’s Tsukuba Center which displayed their reconciliation of aesthetic and managerial projects that challenged modernist standardisation by showing how they had been computationally or combinatorially produced; forming an evocative smooth undulating surface from a precise arrangement of non-uniform wood modules in the former and organised space for significant activities from a collage of architectural references in the latter.⁹

The rendering of Japan as a kind of concrete abstraction within highly mediated informational networks was further built out in a multitude of venues that themselves collaged together managerial, literary and architectural production in a kind of trans-medial/transnational assemblage: the magazine *Japan Architect* where these buildings were presented alongside advertisements for exhibitions, books, and articles on Postmodernist architecture and personal computers; the government-funded exhibition, “Visions of Japan,” held at London’s Victoria & Albert Museum in 1991; the 1992 “Anywhere” conference held in Yufuin but broadcast on national radio featuring Isozaki and figures associated with theories or practices of postmodernism including Asada Akira, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Virilio; and international design competitions for prominent government buildings such as the new Tokyo City Hall (1986) or the Yokohama Port Terminal (1993).¹⁰ As the construction of this assemblage also figuratively and literally helped construct images of Japan, contemporary Japanese architectural production and the use of computers in Japan, it both explicitly and implicitly drew on and fed back into longstanding foreign and domestic conceptualisations of a specifically Japanese technological and aesthetic cultural identity—a unique mix of structural and expressive simplicity, open-ended forms of collective production based on recombination/flexible reorganisation, historical (dis)continuity and incorporation/adaptation of technologies. In architecture, at least, these conceptualisations dated from the post-Meiji Restoration travels of /publications by Bruno Taut, Frank Lloyd Wright and later Walter Gropius, Reyner Banham, and Charles Jencks within Japan as well as of Japanese architects abroad.¹¹ In the contemporary setting, however, they amounted to what Marc Yamada, borrowing from and historically extending the analysis of Azuma Hiroki, has called “the database imagination of Japanese postmodern culture”—a literal and metaphorical organisation of economic and cultural production through the decentered, hypertextually indexed and non-narrative form of the database with its capacity

to store, link, process and manage diverse information including history, as well as images/imaginings of Japan and the database imagination itself.¹²

The proliferation of this “database imagination”, marked by the near constant approving citation of Roland Barthes’ description of Japan as an “Empire of Signs”, was coincident with and crucial to what media and architecture historian Yuruki Furuhashi has described as “the rise of intellectual labor, economic synergy across industries, automation, and participatory democracy in which citizens actively engage in policy decision making through networked systems of communication feedback” that began in Japan in the 1970s.¹³ Both were advanced through a regional/prefectural decentralisation of governance undertaken in earnest starting in 1977, as well through the implementation of increasingly indirect, yet also individualised apparatuses of social, economic and political control modelled on the flexible organisations of databases, networks and systems of production that were expected to inform and be informed by a reformulation of material/cultural productions around contemporary needs. The latter was manifested in the growing investment in research/innovation activities at major corporations like Toyota and Panasonic in manufacturing and electronics, Nikken Sekkei and Takenaka in planning and construction and Yamanashi in broadcasting, as well as by derivative cross-media creative production in arts and literature. Linked with shifts in both the literal organisation of economic and intellectual production around continuously varying information flows as well as in the organising social metaphors that the “database imagination” represented, these efforts were seen as requiring new forms of management/governance.¹⁴

3. REALISING THE DATABASE IMAGINARY

Moreover, several of these new management practices such as Total Quality Control (TQC) and Just-In-Time (JIT) production pioneered by manufacturers including Toyota, design-build-manage contracts being implemented by large architecture and construction firms or government initiatives such as the informationalisation of bureaucracies were framed in terms of adopted/projected conceptions of Postmodernism as strategies of production/consumption that drew on and recombined various information channels and created a specific cultural affect or ethos that extended beyond their functional purview. Such appeals were used by political and corporate leaders in combination with analogies between managerial practices and popular forms of aesthetic production/consumption to render information society Japan and its database imagination as phenomena that were simultaneously contemporary and deeply rooted within specific formulations of national cultural history.¹⁵ This was important because the indirect apparatuses of control that the

information society was predicated upon were centred around the imperative to participate in or “buy-into” the processing/feedback of databased information; the voluntariness and adoption of flexibility and continual improvement as an ethos by all levels of organisation down to individuals was a defining feature of practices such as JIT and TQM.¹⁶ This structure of buy-in and feedback was based not on explicit rules, but on the circulation and adoption of such (meta) signs, like the computer, the database and Postmodernism that through their programmability, abstraction and aestheticisation could be used to link across different regimes of meaning, thus carrying the organisational frameworks, encodings and terms underwriting the discursive co-construction of the “information society” somewhat invisibly with them.¹⁷

Management of the perception of Japan as well as of the managerial and creative practices taking place in Japan both at home and abroad through the promotion and self-conscious adoption of particular Postmodernist formulations of works, individuals, organisations, the nation and their intersection in the information society was, therefore, a pressing and integrating project for all scales of government along with corporations and intellectuals. In other words, it was as much through the promotion of the imagination of Japan as a unique but also paradigmatic postmodern “information society” – a bit of both the past and the future in the present – as through any real organisations of production which this imagination referred to or helped realise that the various crises the country faced were to be transformed into new reciprocally reinforcing forms of productivity, investment and pluralist creativity such as tourism or process innovation that liberated and channelled local and global knowledge and desires.¹⁹ As it formed a nexus of material and cultural production, in both the organisation of architectural practices and the design of built forms was made into one of the prime vehicles for this project. If Japan was to be seen as a computer, it was to happen through the processing of domestic and global desires that its corporate, literary and most of all its architectural databases performed, as well as the imaginations of Japan as postmodern and the actual or possible roles of computers in this postmodernity that these databases made productively mobile.

4. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT MANAGEMENT

The co-formation of “information society” Japan, organisational management and postmodernism was supported, at least in part, by the adoption of emerging digital technologies in the fields of logistics and human resources. The global competitiveness of Japan-based corporations during the “high-growth years” leading up to the bursting of the bubble economy in the early 1990s was attributed by many, both in Japan and elsewhere, to a unique

mixture of technological efficiencies, monetary policies and management approaches such as TQM and JIT for addressing quality variation in labour/production rooted in the continual recording and statistical analysis of information about them. These management approaches, particularly the role of information in them drew the attention of management theorists, including Peter Drucker, advocating for what they called a postmodern approach to management. In addition, through their intentional export/adoption, often described as “Japanisation,” these approaches were made synonymous with Japan, information technology networks and flexible divisions/spatialisations of labour within the globally distributed late capitalist production organisations to which Postmodernism was linked.²⁰

Perhaps the central tenet of the postmodern management theories associated with Japan was a rejection of “modernist” social organisations of production, framed as vertical hierarchies of decision-making and information flow. Instead, these theories privileged a more “humane” process of group decision-making that was translated in terms of “information society” rhetoric as the decentralised, horizontal sharing, movement, and management of information.²¹ In this model, which was referred to as the *kaisha* system in corporations like Nikken Sekkei, individual workers were employed “for life”, and, with their institutional knowledge of the company and its practices, were to serve as nodes of information collection and transfer. Through its emergent aggregation, the information collected by and circulating amongst workers was expected to enhance production/processing capacity, reduce risk and increase corporate practice optimisation while also bringing consensus on the adoption of new technologies such as CAD.²² As a corollary, both the positions of workers within such systems, as well as the system itself, were meant to be flexibly reorganised based on the needs or opportunities discovered in the processes of information collection and communication. Working groups for a particular project would be (re)formed as called for and through constant worker (re)training in areas adjacent to their specialty, group members could be effectively interchanged.²³

Consequently, workplaces, much like Japan itself, were framed as laboratories for the continuous, collective production of knowledge about production, which could then be fed back into production processes to avoid waste and unevenness, thereby increasing the added value embodied in the products and services supporting the information society.²⁴ Whether or not such descriptions of the group decision-making purported to be the norm in Japanese corporations were, in fact, accurate or even represented a radical shift in business practices, they nevertheless became the terms by which both Japan and Postmodernism came to be defined within management discourses

of the 1980s as both foreign and domestic governments and corporations sought to gain or maintain the competitive economic edge these practices respectively were associated with.²⁵ By virtue of their foregrounding the collective, informational authorship of decisions, flexibility of organisation and technological adaptation, but also couching these in terms of nationally-specific cultural tradition sometimes referred to as “post-confucianism,” or else the particularity of the Japanese encounter with modernism, these practices, or at least their descriptions, fit well within the constructions of the information society and its associated database imaginary.²⁶ Not only was the information contained in the drawings and designs of Nikken Sekkei able to be linked, layered, processed, interchanged, and reproduced in new ways with the hypertextual structure and search capabilities of the CAD software the company was experimentally developing, but through the already-existing practices of distributed authorship and excerpting from previous designs this software extended, so to were its workers. Through these parallel linkings, employees of companies like Nikken Sekkei and the process of design more generally came to be seen as one of creating new value in the form of buildings and knowledge about them through the management of information movement across spaces, times and media. As the largest architecture firm, in both Japan and the world at the time, with projects around the globe, including designs on expansion into the architecture and construction industry in the United States, alongside other large Japanese firms; Nikken Sekkei’s information-centred management practices and uses of computer technology made it one of the corporations, like Toyota, Panasonic and Mitsubishi, involved in linking together the co-productive images/imaginings of Japan and a techno-managerial, if not necessarily aesthetic postmodernity.

5. MANAGEMENT AND METAFICTION: LITERATURE, ARCHITECTURE AND AESTHETIC POSTMODERNITY

More than other fields of cultural production, it was literature, and particularly a strain of literary criticism influenced by translations of concepts from French poststructuralists such as Derrida and Deleuze, that provided the discursive theoretical touchstone linking a more aesthetic construction of postmodernity with architectural production in Japan and the database imaginary of the information society. Many members of the post-Metabolist “New Wave” of Japanese architects, including Kurokawa Kisho, Isozaki, and the amorphous collective “ArchiteXt,” explicitly appropriated theories and practices from this strain of literary criticism, its proponents such as Asada Akira and Kojin Karatani, and the writing of Japanese authors to which this criticism was addressed. In this appropriation, these architects consciously adopted the

associations with both Japan and postmodernity these theories brought with them. One of the uniting forces for the diverse membership of ArchiteXt, for instance, was an interest in the “discontinuous continuity” of urban semiology – a reading of cities as text composed of physical, graphic, and literary signs. At the same time, Kurokawa, in his 1991 book *Intercultural Architecture: On the Philosophy of Symbiosis*, to which leading theorist of Postmodernism in architecture, Charles Jencks, provided the introduction, related his architecture to the information society through the Deleuzian conceptualisations of minor literature and the rhizome; arguing that postmodern design was the design of the information society because it embraced multiplicity and potentiality that allowed Japan to speak within as well as transform modernist architectural idioms.²⁷ Isozaki and Shinohara Kazuo, for their part, developed approaches to thinking about their work through literature as a metaphor that “combined diverse intentions, experiments, motifs, quotations and metaphors into a unique form of symbolism” that paralleled Kojin’s characterization of architecture as a metaphor for language, number, and money.²⁸ However, these direct theoretical adaptations and overlapping metaphors through which architects in Japan began to link themselves with Postmodernism were not the only ways in which the fields of architecture and literature influenced one another in their situation within the discursive and media milieus comprising the information society. There were also looser, more praxis-based overlaps that were manifested in a similar treatment of both architecture and literature as kinds of hypermedia for managing meaning, understood as an informational commodity, through how both were assembled together with a diverse array of signs, symbol systems and other media to produce a particular image/text/building as well as the more meta-images of Japan, architecture, literature and Postmodernism.

Linked to questions about the role of the author and the coherence of the subject characteristic of assemblage-based practices blurring creation and consumption in the broader media space of the information society, as well as the situation of these practices in specifically Japanese histories of transmedial, trans-authorial literary production through recombinations, reformulations and retellings, the hypermediatic aspects of literature contemporary with the information society were represented by a self-conscious focus on the metafictional. The works of writers such as Tanaka Yasuo, Takahashi Gen’ichirō and Kobayashi Kyōji were thus situated within multi-directional information flows similar to those characterising group decisionbased management structures through their intertextuality. They were intended to be read through/with other texts, sometimes included as alternative fragmented narratives, endnotes or catalogue elements, while other times relying on readers to act as co-author through the extended cultural knowledge they brought to bear through their reading.

In addition, they also had a simultaneous double function as both literary content and literary analysis. In other words, these metafictional works both told a story and deconstructed the historical and contemporary conditions of possibility for telling that story. Much as the citizens of Japan were encouraged by Prime Minister Nakasone and others to manage and synthesise the various flows of information and media composing the information society, so too were readers of this metafiction prompted to, and did, extend to literature the discontinuous information-based parsing, (re)combining, and “snacking” of canonical and noncanonical, textual and extratextual references, through which these provisional syntheses were achieved.²⁹

Tanaka’s *Nantonaku Kurisutaru* (Somehow, Crystal; 1980) perhaps provides the most literal example of this “snacking” synthesis as both protagonist and reader work their way through the informational landscape of urban Tokyo, supplemented by menus, phone directories and other texts included as endnotes. Beyond simply supplementing contemporary literary representations with information content from other places, times and media in ways intended to construct and draw on co-informing cultural histories or behaviours of interconnected reading, watching and listening, these practices also foregrounded derivative forms of literary production/consumption. This included the creation of new works by fans or other authors who, by extending and (re)combining narrative elements, characters or other aspects of existing works, reciprocally (re)informed broader patterns of form and content in literature through their proliferation alongside and later by way of the literal computer databases and exchange networks becoming available beyond the bounds of the national government and large corporations.³⁰ Both in its form and the active processes of simultaneous reading/writing, literature, self-consciously framed around the contemporary and historical dissolution of author and narrative underwritten by multi-directional exchanges of information, was thereby made to performatively participate in the database imaginary and its co-productive articulations with images of Japan and Postmodernism as framework and content.

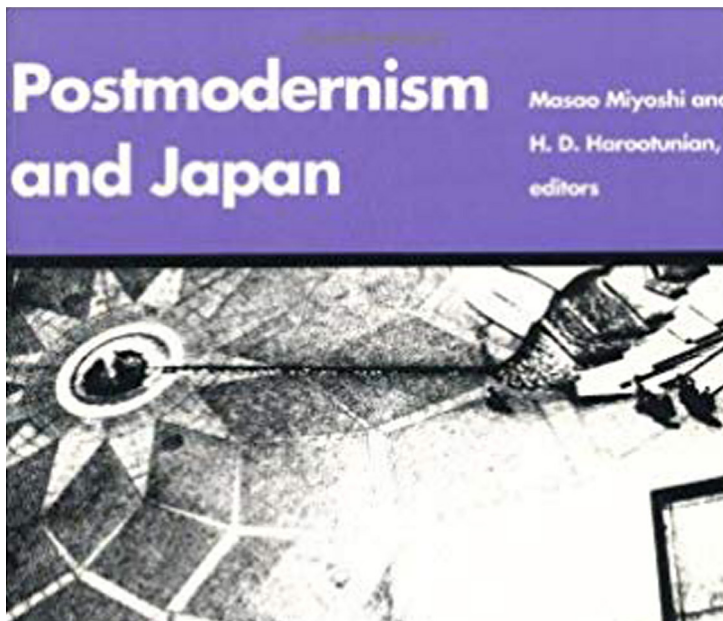
In architecture, this metafictional impulse and its double function as an analytical framework and content – to both create a building, but at the same time to (de)construct the particular figures of architecture, Japan, and postmodernity that were the conditions of possibility for the building as such through practices of managing multiply-authored fragmentary citations, allusions and other connections – was most evident in the work of “New Wave” alumni of the Metabolist movement or their acolytes. This group included Isozaki, Shinohara, Kurokawa, as well as Maki Fumihiko, Takamatsu Shin, Takeyama Minoru, Ishii Kazuhiro and Hasegawa Itsuko. Of them, Maki,

Kurokawa and Isozaki were perhaps the most theoretically inclined. Maki, for example, used his work to outline a concept of “group form” wherein materials, scales and abstracted formal elements were juxtaposed in a way that foregrounded individual parts, leaving the systems that emerged from their clustering open to expansion, multiple interpretations and a constantly ongoing dialogue with their dynamic surrounding context as in his 1985 Spiral Building or the decades-long Hillside Terrace project. Kurokawa, too, looked to exploit the tensions between part and whole to create “hybrid,” “mongrel” and “heterogenous” organisations that included mainstream and “minor elements” in what he explicitly called the “postmodern architecture... of the Information Society” centred on the production, exchange and management of history, culture and desire as forms of information. Exemplified by his reframing of the multivalent uses Tatami floor unit, the Tatami floored rooms of Kaikan all-purpose halls and the computer science term “time-sharing” through one another to arrive at a framework for spatial (re)programmability and variety, Kurokawa viewed this architecture of the information society as an intersectional strategy of spatial and social management. This management was achieved, according to Kurokawa, through the informational mediation of the production and experience of space—the changing of its constitutive signs and symbols or the framework of relationships among them.³¹

Isozaki, more than Maki and Kurokawa, worked to move outside the formal language of the architectural modernism associated with Metabolism and, in some ways, merged their approaches to make the effects of his hybrid theories/methods of “mannerism” and “rhetoric” immediately visually apparent. Through “manner,” or the drawing on semi-autonomous patterns and images already existing in art, history and everyday life treated as a kind of database of both content and relationships, Isozaki sought to update the modernist notion of architecture as a machine for living to the conditions of the information society, viewing architecture instead as “a machine for producing meaning” – a “semantic vehicle, that is, a form or series of forms capable of transmitting content” or “rhetoric.”³² In his combinations of recognisable forms as diverse as Michelangelo’s Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, Shinto landscape principles, multilayered abstract geometric grid permutations and the mega-formal legacy of Metabolism in projects such as the 1983 Tsukuba Center (featured on the cover of *Postmodernism and Japan*), [Figure 2] Isozaki used the principles of “manner” and “rhetoric” to manage the promiscuous interactions of multiple unstable informationalised and mobile symbols of Japan, architecture and Postmodernism to generate a building.

Collectively then, these buildings were designed by their architects to be open-ended assemblages of images that provided both framework and content for the pluralist information society in which individuals were encouraged to participate by bringing additional information to bear in the dialogic construction of multiple meanings. Extended to the organising and overseeing of often incongruous works by multiple architects, including Ando Tadao, Takasaki Masaharu, as well as numerous foreigners in the Kumamoto Artpolis collection of cultural buildings by Isozaki under the charge of Prefectural Governor and future Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro in 1988 as a cultural showcase and tourist draw, these strategies of Maki, Kurokawa and Isozaki simultaneously created and situated architecture and a Japanese cultural identity as ongoing constructions opportunistically pulling from contemporary and historical sources. Further, they dovetailed well with the strategies and patterns of rapid and piecemeal urban development fueling and fueled by the booming economy.³³

FIGURE 2: Arata Isozaki's Tsukuba Center Plaza (1983) as featured on the cover of the edited volume of essays *Postmodernism and Japan*, underscoring the connection of such projects with an imagination of Japan's position relative to contemporaneous notions of globalisation and Postmodernity. The close and seemingly fragmented view shown on the *Postmodernism and Japan* cover further emphasises the collaged, multinarrative strategies common to both Isozaki's design practice and the other forms of cultural production addressed by the book's contributors, of which architecture was frequently framed as being emblematic; Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian ed., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).



6. IMAGE MANAGEMENT: ARCHITECTURE AND POSTMODERNISM IN THE BOOM ECONOMY

In the booming economy's competitive landscape, prefectures eager for tourist dollars and other forms of investment capital, corporations vying for public awareness and individual landowners seeking to increase property value or rent rates came to treat buildings as informational products that the general public and critics helped construct by consuming them as images. Often cheaper than the land on which they were built, formally evocative buildings served as a means for garnering attention and consequently various forms of capital for owner, tenant and architect alike. In other words, buildings or collections of buildings, as in the Artpolis, were actively made meaningful through the database of references, allusions and media their designers and owners drew on to produce idiosyncratic and iconic images, as well as through their own insertion into and recirculation in media such as TV advertisements, magazines, and books as part of this database.

Takeyama's 1970 Ni-Ban-Khan (Building Number Two) provides the clearest example of this. An intentionally eye-catching collection of contrasting forms, graphics and signs that complicate any simple reading of the building's shape through their collapse and expansion of depth, Ni-Ban-Khan, on the one hand, provided an iconic informational image for the property owner, the drinking establishments much of the building was leased to, or the tourists and locals navigating Shinjuku nightlife. On the other hand, it was also elevated by critics eager to represent Japanese architecture as exemplary of postmodernist practices that foregrounded appearance through collaging disparate elements, while at the same time representing Postmodernism more generally as having innately Japanese characteristics.³⁴ Included on the covers of both the first (1977) and second (1978) editions of Jencks' seminal *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, though notably with a different painting scheme and changes to its external details, Ni-Ban-Khan was held up as a symbol of Japan, Postmodernism, and the booming economy as they all underwrote one another as conditions for contemporary architectural production; informing readers what to expect of each in a single glance.³⁵ Other architects, even including some predating the formal declaration of the information society, like Tange Kenzo consciously played up the formal and citational collage construction of their buildings and their role as communications conduits in his later works. However, these architects and their project less explicitly spoke or were spoken of in terms of Postmodernism. Ishii in his House with 54 Windows (1975), Takamatsu in both the Nishina Dental Clinic (1983) and Kirin Plaza (1987) and Shinohara in his computer-assisted design for the Tokodai Centennial Hall at the Tokyo Institute of Technology (1987), [Figure 3] for example, combined

ready-made or found forms, many of which were related to or drawn from manufacturing and communication technology, in order to evoke the tools and processes of industrial and informational production. As they were subsequently circulated in magazines, television and travel guides alongside other images of cultural production and advertisements for computer systems, these buildings came to provide a vocabulary or setting for narratives of the information society, with Takamatsu's buildings in particular often serving as film/anime locations.³⁶

For Tange, this focus on communications was slightly more literal, as most evident in the physicalisation of the database form of his 1966 Yamanashi Press and Broadcasting Center in Kofu. Designed as an extensible block of three-dimensional cells, each containing different programs and grouped according to media, the building was literally and visually subdivided and structurally/functionally stitched back together by sixteen cylindrical “communications cores” containing vertical circulation, mechanical systems, and telecom infrastructure.³⁷ Similarly, his winning entry for the 1986 New Tokyo City Hall competition, for which he and Isozaki both submitted computer-generated images produced by subcontractors, featured a “lattice-like pattern of windows and of marble and granite on the exterior of the buildings... intended to invoke the memory of geometric timber-frame buildings of Edo as well as the circuit board of a computer” in addition to allusions to the towers of gothic cathedrals and the contemporaneous Grands Projets of the Mitterrand government in France. [Figure 4]

FIGURE 3: Grid collage of computer-generated perspectives of Shinohara's Tokodai Centennial Hall, Tokyo Institute of Technology (right), and photograph of the completed building (left), emphasising collision of independent forms and non-privileging of any specific vantage or entrance point; Kazuo Shinohara, 1986; Unnamed photographer, 2009, Wikimedia Commons.



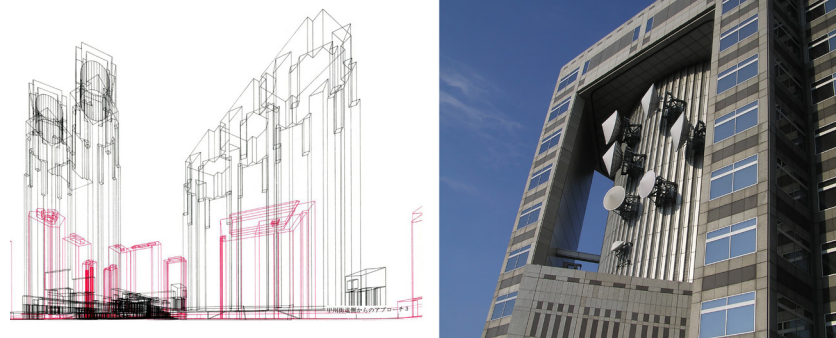
Combined with the “mushroom-like” constellation of satellite dishes on the upper reaches of the towers and the extra space on and between floors to accommodate the optical fibre cables of the city’s growing electronic information networks, these facade elements of Tange’s design for Tokyo Metropolitan Government were meant to not simply symbolically represent, but perform as part of the city’s informational governance: it provided an image in which this governance could be visibly embodied, circulated, and fed back through its articulations with the database of other images co-productive with Japan and Postmodernism.³⁸

7. MANAGEMENT IS THE MESSAGE: EARLY COMPUTER-AIDED DESIGN IN JAPAN

It was in this environment that Japanese architects who had already been rendered or self-consciously presented themselves as engaged in and surrounded by practices of productively managing continuously varying flows of information through their interactions with management discourse, literary theory and their conjunction in the database imaginary of the information society began exploring the use of Computer-Aided Design software in the late 1980s and early 1990s. To that end, from their own perspective, many were not doing anything particularly novel, but rather adapting newly available tools to existing organisational and theoretically-informed practices.

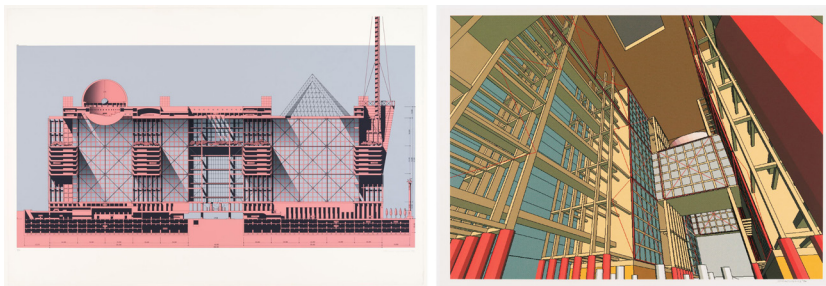
For both corporate firms like Nikken Sekkei and small/sole practitioners like Isozaki, Yoh and the other members of the “New Wave,” the specific capacities

FIGURE 4: Wireframe perspective image (left) of the proposal for New Tokyo City Hall developed by Kenzo Tange, 1986. Published in *Process*, “Proposals for the Competition of New Tokyo City Hall Complex,” Special Issue 4 (1986), courtesy of Tange Associates. Photograph of “mushroom-like” communications equipment near the apex of completed Tokyo City Hall towers; Unnamed photographer, 2003, Wikimedia Commons.



of CAD tools proliferating at the time to link and layer multiple formats of information, dynamically update cross-referenced information, precisely control compound curvature and produce images of an informational model from an infinite number of viewpoints were all combinations and extensions of familiar practices translated into a single new and newly available medium with its own particular protocols for information exchange and management.³⁹ Despite the difference in overall aesthetics and degree of refinement between the silkscreens and computer-generated images, Isozaki produced with the help of subcontractors for a number of his projects; the underlying processes by which the two sets of images were produced nonetheless had similar organising principles that were amenable to Isozaki's method of collaging referential forms and colours.⁴⁰ [Figure 5]

FIGURE 5: Final screen-printed and longitudinal section view of the proposal for New Tokyo City Hall, with colour separation indicating an understanding of layering procedures common to contemporaneous CAD software, and potentially themselves produced from computer generated models captured in additional in-process perspectives, produced by consultant firm ARC Yamigawa using the McDonnell Douglas-produced Graphic Design System with additional development by Applied Research of Cambridge (ARC); Left: Longitudinal Section of Main Building for the Tokyo City Hall Competition Entry. Printed 1986. Screen Print. 58,2 x 115.0 cm. DR1988.0274. Canadian Centre for Architecture. © Arata Isozaki; Right: View of Atrium, looking up for Tokyo City Hall Competition Entry. 1986. Computer-Aided Design Print. 76.8 x 108.6 cm. DR1988.0273. Canadian Centre for Architecture. © Arata Isozaki.



While in the silkscreens the drawings of linework and fields of each colour must be separated into a separate layer which is then exposed to a photosensitive screen to produce a series of negatives which must then be registered and recomposited layer by layer according to colour, in the CAD model and the resulting images, each major category of building element – structure, mechanical system, enclosure, etc., or any subdivision/combination thereof – can be placed on its own layer and assigned its own colour which is then broken down into colour channels for digital display or printing through mechanisms which also depend on photosensitivity. Even this difference in aesthetics was effectively reduced by the early 1990s, when Isozaki was working on his design for the Team Disney Building with its bright colours coordinated with its bold geometric forms presented in computer-produced images. [Figure 6]



FIGURE 6: Silkscreens prints developed from computer-generated renderings of Arata Isozaki's Team Disney Building, Orlando (1991) combining aspects of both layer-related colour and form management and intersections of independent formal volumes corresponding to database imagination and recombination practices; 1999, Estate of Arata Isozaki.

Several of Isozaki's contemporaries too, especially Shinohara, Hasegawa and Takamatsu, had by that time adapted their own design and image-making styles to CAD softwares. In contrast, others, including Watanabe Makoto Sei, Kikuchi Makoto, Aida Takefumi, Ando and even sometimes Isozaki, continued to experiment with ways to simultaneously show and perform the information management operations of which CAD software was now a part.⁴¹ That many of the capacities of CAD programs had parallels in practices associated with Postmodernism and the specifically Japanese cultural identity constructed in tandem with it through the database imaginary of the information society with their serial recombinations of elements into emergent assemblages based upon multi-directional information flows made them all the more appealing and easy to incorporate into existing organisational structures and design practices influenced by management discourse and literary theory that were themselves tied to images/imaginations of a postmodern Japan. Hasegawa, for instance, recalls being so fascinated with the 60-bit computer her younger brother used to play a virtual version of Go, that she used the computer's drawing program to create a cross section of a small house constructed with traditional timber joinery that she was struggling to develop using a minimum number of lines and connection types. She subsequently photographed the computer screen and "superimposed pictures of the same drawing with different colours" to represent her solution.⁴² [Figure 7]

Similarly, Yoh recalls his use of CAD software as bridging between modern fabrication and the timber construction associated with Japanese cultural traditions, with the software primarily serving as an aid for managing and optimising information about the many different lengths and orientations of wood required to build the undulating roofs of his gymnasium.⁴³ By providing a visual display linked to a reorganisable database which could be sent to and adjusted by engineers, manufacturers and builders, Yoh's software use quite literally drew on and embodied the complexities and enmeshments with material production of the database imaginary.

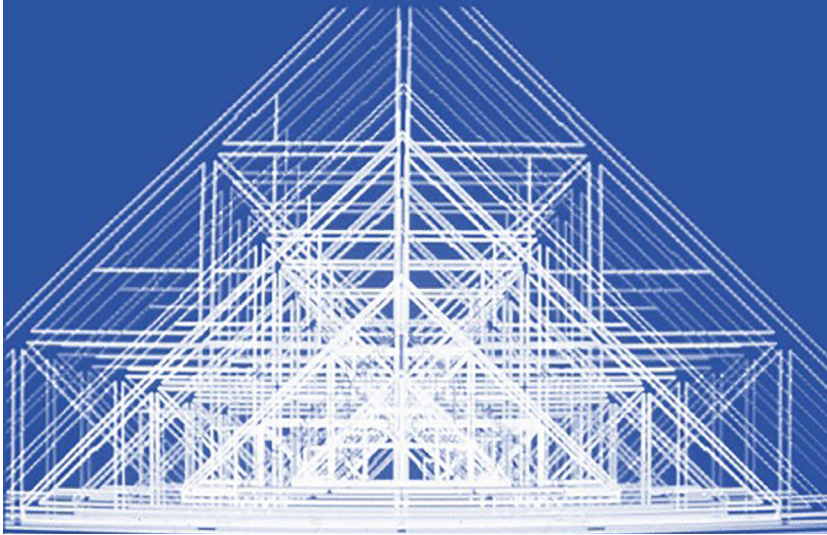


FIGURE 7: Print of compound drawing produced through the superimposition of photographs of a computer-generated wireframe section of House in Yaizu 2 (1977). Itsuko Hasegawa, 1985.

8. CONCLUSION

As these examples demonstrate, Japanese architects, both in reality and in characterisations by themselves and others, already had theoretical and practical information management tools through which they could understand and effectively put CAD programs to use in the production of actual buildings, but also in the production of narratives about themselves and their work prior to any sudden events or subsequent narratives of the “Digital Turn.” Much like Postmodernism, then, CAD software became a means by which Japanese architects and their work situated and were situated within transnational and trans-medial networks of architectural discourse and production during the 1980s and 1990s – an informationalised sign through which to manage the place of oneself, Japan and architecture within a changing social, economic and political landscape by way of participating in the emergent processes of its adoption, circulation and transformation. The medium of CAD software, then, was in some ways the message – a set of terms and practices through which other terms and practices could be made intelligible and mobile.

Returning to the digital turn narratives in which Japanese architects/architecture figured so prominently themselves, what becomes clear from laying out the complex intersections between literature, management theory, imaginations of Japan, Postmodernism and CAD software is the degree to which these

narratives appropriate and decontextualise the works of Yoh, Isozaki, and their compatriots. Plucked from the mediatic assemblages of discourse and production within the broad late-capitalist conditions that prevailed in Japan from the 1970s through the early 1990s, they were subsumed into the “Digital Turn” by way of references that were (re)combined and used to build a new narrative, featuring similar actors and storylines with a few twists and a new setting. What emerges in the stead of this narrative when the works of Japanese architects during this period are placed back within those assemblages of discourse and production is a picture of a specific encounter between technical, cultural and economic practices that as they gave architectural form to ideas from management theory and literature, both drew on existing images and helped form new domestic and international imaginations of a postmodern “information society” Japan.

NOTES

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A PRAGMATIC VIEW ON JAPANESE ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY: DEMYSTIFYING A MONOLITHIC CONSTRUCT

ABSTRACT

Why is Japan's architectural legacy and practice, seen from within, very different from its perception abroad? A country's architectural identity is shaped by several aspects, including its tangible heritage, relationship with the other arts, construction technology, and everyday professional practice. The result is a layered product whose appearance can be remodelled to suit particular contexts and audiences. This paper shows how certain aspects of Japanese architectural identity, considered quintessential and monolithic overseas (atelier-style firms, minimalist aesthetic, technological drive), are instead only one half of dichotomies. Who is responsible for this process of curation? Is it a conscious or unconscious effort? Should the receiving end (i.e. both expert and lay audiences abroad) be more critical in their reception? First, the paper introduces the *zenecon* model, a fundamental and native component of the Japanese AEC industry, consistently underrepresented in the international construction and architecture discourse. Second, it clarifies how the minimalist zen aesthetic is counterbalanced by a more exuberant and haptic tradition tracing its roots back to the Neolithic Age. Third, it shows how technological advancement in certain specialised construction domains contrasts with the average performance and comfort level of (residential) buildings.

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KEY WORDS

JAPANESE ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY
JAPANESE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY
CULTURAL BRANDING
ZENECON

1. INTRODUCTION

What I am about to communicate to you is the most astonishing thing...
the most talked about, and the most secret up to this day.

—Mme de Sévigné (1670)

Gates at Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines usually feature a pair of statues, being guardian deities or (mythological) animals: one character has its mouth open, the other shut. They represent the wholeness of the world by uniting two opposites, Ah (the open mouth) and Un (the closed mouth), deriving from the Sanskrit Ah and Om, the beginning and the end, alpha and omega. Despite the two concepts being inseparable and of equal importance, for some reason only the mantra Om has become known in the West. Much like passing through the gates of a shrine to enter its precincts, I would like to introduce a set of three opposites to reflect on the identity of Japanese architecture and construction from a pragmatic, practice-oriented standpoint. As is the case with ah-un, only one of the opposites has become familiar to the non-Japanese (non-Asian) audience; I would argue that this is a consequence of both cultural infatuation and purposeful projection of a curated image of the country abroad. The dichotomies addressed in the following sections relate to the aspects of firm size and workstyle, aesthetic traditions, and approach to technology. We will see how internal dynamics are only partially and selectively conveyed to audiences outside Japan.

While the overarching geographical and cultural distinction between outside and inside refers to the colloquial Japanese terms of *kokunai* (国内/domestic) and *kaigai* (海外/overseas), it is worth clarifying that the subject of this paper mainly addresses the socio-cultural relationship between Japan and the so-called West, with the addition of Commonwealth countries. The ties to other Asian countries—most notably China—are complex, long, and contested, and we cannot possibly account for such regional differences in this paper. Moreover, we do not imply that Japan is particularly unique in exhibiting what Kriska¹ has called an “us vs them” mentality; even though geographical insularity plays an undeniable role, this pattern can be seen in any society and at any scale, albeit at different degrees.

2. SCALE MATTERS: ATELIER VS ZENECON

The way the AEC (Architecture, Engineering, and Construction) industry in Japan thinks of itself contrasts sharply with the narrative it projects abroad. This is both a conscious and unconscious attitude, depending on the actors involved. First, let us examine how Japanese architecture is perceived overseas.

From an aesthetics point of view, the international architectural community and laypeople alike largely equate Japanese buildings with simplicity, permeability, openness to nature, spatial flexibility, and overall minimalism. This is consistent with the imagery projected by the other arts, where the cultural and philosophical connections to zen Buddhism and its supposedly “clean” and rigorous aesthetic ideals have been exploited in an effective effort of collective branding and marketing. This partly relies on a certain naivety of the international audience, often won over by a pinch of orientalism here and a supposedly untranslatable Japanese word there.

The impression of a rigorous, clean, and creative architectural environment is reinforced by the typical size and character of architectural firms featured in international media: a small-scale atelier with recognisable leaders who are usually the firm founders. Moreover, the short average lifespan of buildings (about 30 years for detached houses), the widespread use of timber construction, and the moderate construction costs compared to land costs create the condition for the proliferation of experimental projects, reinforcing the image of a small-scale industry.

The social status of architects in Japan can be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, seasoned star architects (e.g. Ando Tadao) enjoy broad popularity among the general public, drawing crowds to exhibitions of their work and appearing in popular media. It is a trend started in the aftermath of WWII: ‘from the late 1950s to the ‘70s Japan’s media lionises its architects with full sincerity’,² focusing especially on Tange Kenzo and the Metabolists. These architects feature on the cover of popular magazines, and Kurokawa Kisho even ran, unsuccessfully, for governor of Tokyo in 2007. An anecdote shall suffice here. I have once seen on a train the advertisement for a funeral house designed by Kuma Kengo; next to an interior and exterior photograph of the building was the face of the architect, extolling the virtues of the facility. To be sure, there are well-known architects in other countries too, but the way individual professionals are celebrated in Japan is special.

On the other hand, staff architects in atelier-style offices have to toil more often than not until late, receiving meagre compensation and no benefits, hoping

to establish their own firm someday. This pattern is consistent with a master-apprentice mentality, where one must sweat her way through learning the craft. Unfortunately, such a situation can quickly become exploitative if seen as the norm, and is increasingly ill-fitted to a profession where collaboration and critical thinking are crucial and where the role of technology and innovation puts more and more pressure on small firms.

While atelier-style firms represent the country egregiously abroad, they are only a part of the Japanese AEC industry. As a means of comparison, we can readily equate complex, high-rise projects in America, the UK, etc., with large firms having considerable specialised know-how, workforce, and corporate profile. In Japan, high-rise buildings abound and the local seismic conditions call for high-level engineering and applied research. How can small, atelier-like firms deliver such projects?

To understand what is missing from the equation, it is necessary to remember that Japan is considered a “construction state”, a term coined by McCormack³ based on the Japanese expression *doken kokka* (土建国家). Japanologist Alex Kerr⁴ has reiterated its foundational implication on the built environment, popularising the concept in a provocative publication: in simple terms, the industry is both prominent and influential. According to the United Nations,⁵ the Japanese construction industry was the third largest in the world in 2018.

As Ogasawara & Yashiro⁶ have remarked, in ‘Japan, “General Construction Companies” (GCCs) and “Design Firms” (DFs) are the two dominant players in designing large and complex buildings.’ The bedrock of this system, largely unknown abroad, is the *zenecon*. This portmanteau shortens and combines the words *general* (*zene*) and *contractor* (*con*) and is used to designate construction companies. It is often employed, though, in reference to the five main general contractors in the country (e.g. Obayashi), sometimes known as “super zenecon”.

These companies have thousands of employees, deal with large-scale and technically challenging projects, carry out considerable amounts of applied research, and tackle any typology, including civil engineering and infrastructure. It can be argued that they are the greatest force in architectural design and construction in Japan, being deeply embedded into the bureaucratic and political apparatus. Literature in English on the subject is scarce and it mainly addresses the role of the *zenecon* as a general contractor,⁷ leaving aside design work, which is a virtually unknown topic outside Japan (exceptions are Ogasawara & Yashiro,⁸ Buntrock).⁹

Two factors set the *zenecon* model apart from general contractors in other countries: their longevity and the large design department they host. All five leading *zenecon* firms were founded before 1900 and have been continuously in business since then. This not only testifies to the remarkable stability of the construction industry, but also to the unavoidable deep connection between these large general contractors and the establishment over the decades. In fact, the bulk of medium- to large-scale buildings in the country in the last 120 years has been built by one of these five firms. As such, they have literally constructed the architectural identity of the nation.

A second peculiarity is the large and high-quality design department hosted within a “super *zenecon*”: in fact, the architectural design division of any of these firms is larger than the largest design-only architectural firm in Japan, Nikken Sekkei.¹⁰ A major portion of a *zenecon*’s work is the design development, construction documentation, actual construction, and construction management of projects that design-only firms have schematically designed. In the case of foreign designers, *zenecon* often play the role of local architects. However, Japanese general contractors increasingly work on design-build (DB) projects rather than the once-standard design-bid-build (DBB). A historical explanation is that ‘Japan has a long tradition of master builders. They [were] in charge of both design and construction in woodwork. [...] As a result, Design-Build has been a well-received project delivery method in Japan. [...] Design-Build has either a contractor-led or a designer-led approach. In Japan, the contractor-led approach is far more common than the designer-led approach due to technical and financial capabilities assured by the general contractors’.¹¹

To be sure, this is in line with a global trend in the AEC industry to shorten project schedules and reduce costs by streamlining and overlapping project phases or to employ a so-called front-end loading, where contractors are taken on board early in the project so that details can be worked out in advance. However, if general contractors overseas tend to team with design architects external to the firm or to respond to an external project manager, a *zenecon* has a large design division composed of permanent employees in-house. It comprises any professional architectural figure, including structural and mechanical engineers. As such, it may be more fitting to describe such an approach as being close to the so-called integrated delivery model, where project stakeholders are on equal footing. Moreover, there is a high degree of collaboration between architects, contractors, and manufacturers, so that design decisions are not the exclusive responsibility of the architect.

In the case of complex and challenging projects, atelier-style firms usually

develop an initial concept and carry it through to the end of schematic design. In contrast, a *zenecon* usually carries out the detailing, design development, documentation, bidding, construction, and construction management. As we have mentioned, though, there seems to be a trend toward design-build project delivery, so that *zenecon* are increasingly trying to leverage their own design capabilities to tackle project design from the conceptual stage onward.

Until recently, the credit for innovative and original architectural projects showcased abroad or on international media platforms exclusively went to the project architect, i.e. the star architects we are familiar with. Since general contractors usually were not involved in the early design stages, their architectural contribution has been completely overlooked abroad. Without them taking care of the detailing, development, and technical design aspects, though, atelier firms would likely not be able to carry out the complete design package for bidding in the case of large and complex projects. Compounding this is a certain attitude of design-related media to snub corporate-style firms in favour of independent professionals.

While in Japan even lay people are familiar with the five main *zenecon* and their work, until the 2000s these companies have not invested in public relations and marketing overseas to promote their design skills and services. However, a declining population, tighter labour market and the ageing workforce have prompted the AEC industry to look for other construction markets, primarily in south-east Asia and the United States, calling for the creation of a brand-new identity abroad.¹² From this point of view, it is telling that 130- to 150-years old firms, known by virtually everyone domestically, are just now starting to shape their image in new markets.

3. THE RED AND THE WHITE: JOMON VS YAYOI

As we have seen, from an aesthetics point of view in the past few decades Japan has been equated abroad with zen-inspired minimalism and a strong connection with natural elements. While this is arguably true, it represents only one side of the story, the well-known *om*: this is the so-called *Yayoi* tradition, referring to a specific pre-modern historical period.

From an archaeological perspective, *Yayoi* (named after the Tokyo neighbourhood where artefacts of this era were first uncovered in the late 19th century) spanned a period between 500 BC to 300 AD (this is still up to debate) and has been described in aesthetic terms as having apollonian and feminine qualities. This is what (western) audiences have been familiar with: the refined architectural tradition later merging with zen that is at the root of the so-

called white school, represented by figures such as Ito Toyo, Sejima Kazuyo, or Fujimoto Sou. As Buntrock put it, the white school is ‘purist bent: spare structures, state of the art, smooth and swooping, scholarly and scientific’; it prefers ‘sparkling aluminium, steel and glass – stable durable and predictable’ materials, and it ‘appeals to the intellect in its crisp geometry.’¹³

What is usually overlooked—the *ah*—is the Dionysian, masculine side of the aesthetic tradition in the country, going back to the archaeological *Jomon* period (10’000–300 BC). On an anecdotal level, it shall suffice to examine a typical Japanese advertisement layout found in newspapers: the packed arrangement, jamboree of fonts, sizes, and styles could not be further away from the minimalistic image that Japanese visual arts project abroad. In contemporary architectural terms, the *Jomon* tradition is represented by the “red school”, including architects as diverse as Fujimori Terunobu and Atelier Zo. Borrowing again from Buntrock, this is ‘a rolling roster: raw and robust, raffish and ragtag, rambunctious and reckless, rough and rudimentary, refreshing and resplendent, risky and risqué, recalling Rikyu, regionally responsive. The Red School rots and inclines to ruin; it is made of rust, rammed earth, red brick, random rock rubble or recycled rubbish. It is about being rooted and having a roof. It is a rich rhapsody.’¹⁴

FIGURE 1: Typical Japanese print advertisement layout (scanned by the author).

The advertisement is a dense, multi-column layout for '高麗人參' (Goryeo Ginseng). It features several testimonial photos of people of various ages, including a prominent photo of a 90-year-old man. The text is highly stylized and repetitive, emphasizing the product's benefits. Key elements include:

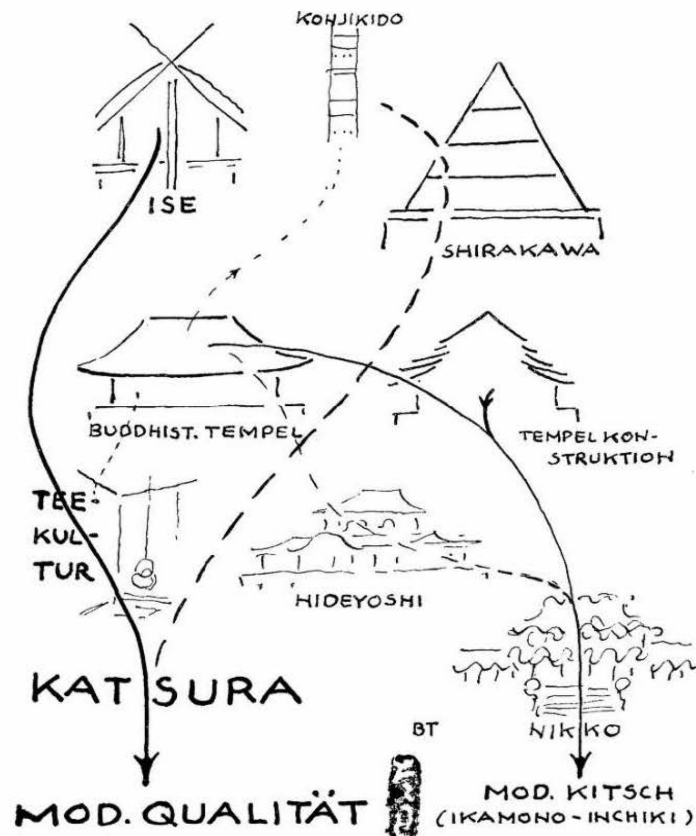
- Headline:** '高麗人參' (Goryeo Ginseng) in large, bold characters.
- Testimonials:** Photos of individuals with their ages (62, 82, 73, 90) and short descriptions of their health improvements.
- Price:** A large '500円' (500 yen) price tag is prominently displayed.
- Additional Text:** Phrases like '4000万突破!!' (40 million breakthrough!!) and '10秒に1個売れている' (1 unit sold every 10 seconds) are used to create a sense of popularity and urgency.
- Visuals:** Images of the product packaging and a small illustration of a person.
- Contact Info:** A phone number '0120-39-6677' is provided at the bottom.

During the modernisation, industrialisation, and postwar development of Japan, it was only natural that the white school became predominant, to the point that an architectural historian like Fujimori would pursue a parallel career in practice, designing extravagant structures with the self-appointed mission of keeping the red tradition alive. In fact, his practice is known as Jomon Company, and he has referred to himself as a sort of “neolithic daddy”.

The dichotomous *ah-un* or *Yayoi-Jomon* tradition in Japan has been noted since the late 19th century, with figures such as American biologist Edward Morse writing that ‘the objects from Japan divided themselves into two groups, — the one represented by objects [...] with a refinement and reserve of decoration; the other group, characterised by a more florid display and less delicacy of treatment.’¹⁵ Morse, who hailed from Boston and was part of a group of highly-educated professionals having early, official interactions with Japan—known as the Boston Circle, later influencing the career of F.L. Wright—played a pivotal role in the (re)discovery of the *Jomon* identity. In fact, he was the first to lead an excavation of *Jomon* artefacts in Tokyo in 1877, after noticing a mound while travelling by train.

FIGURE 2: Bruno Taut’s sketch intended to represent the dual genealogy of Japanese architecture.

On the one hand is the zen way linked to the imperial ruling power, starting with the Ise shrines and the pragmatic farmhouses in Shirakawa village, fusing with the tea ceremony culture epitomised in Katsura Villa, leading to a modern ideal of refinement. On the other hand is the decorative, kitschy way connected to the shogunate and related to the Chinese aesthetics of Buddhism (Taut 1936:25).



Other prominent figures have remarked on such aesthetic duality during the 20th century, although not strictly in *Yayoi-Jomon* terms. Above all Bruno Taut, who spent three years in exile in Japan from 1933 to 1936,¹⁶ slapped what he considered a spurious influence from China on the local architectural tradition. He thus remarked about the temple grounds built in honour of shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in the 1630s: ‘an excess of such bad art, executed at the order of the dictator, are shown in the Nikko structures. [...]. [T]here is an over-abundance of ornamentation and ostentation which replace the missing architecture.’¹⁷

On the other hand, he had the following remarks about Katsura Villa on the outskirts of Kyoto, built about the same time as the temples in Nikko: ‘all the simplicity and delicacy of Japan together with differentiation of crafts and the philosophic refinement of thought [...] is epitomised.’¹⁸

His well-known sketch traces the origin of pure (i.e., akin to European modernist ideals) Japanese architecture down to the Shinto shrine of Ise, the thatched farmhouses of Shirakawa village and the tea-culture aesthetics. In contrast, the origin of a kitschy strand would derive from the shogunate and its Chinese-influenced Buddhist flair.

4. RAISING THE BAR: HIGH-TECH VS EVERYDAY-TECH

Coexisting with the image of a culture that cherishes the relationship with nature, Japan is generally considered a high-tech country. This is due to the lasting impact of its technological advances in the second half of the 20th century and the well-known rigour and dedication associated with Japanese professionals. Popular culture has compounded this with an emphasis on robotics and futuristic representations.

To stay in the realm of the built environment, Japan offers valuable lessons in high-tech for earthquake resistance (a necessary measure), structural and constructive solutions (think of the 634m-high Skytree communications tower in Tokyo), and transportation (e.g. the shinkansen bullet train). Nevertheless, any architect who has worked on or examined construction details, or anybody with experience living in the country, would likely point out their puzzlement regarding the apparent backwardness of mundane aspects, such as the average level of insulation performance of buildings or their durability.

Architects often wonder how it is possible to design certain simple, clean, light details in Japanese buildings. Without undermining the level of mastery of local designers and contractors, one straightforward answer is the relatively

lax regulations of building environmental performance, specifically those regarding the building envelope. This goes hand-in-hand with an ingrained view of buildings as products with limited durability. It is thus not unusual to examine a detailed drawing of a building designed by prominent architects showing insufficient insulation, lack of weather protection, or outright disregard for maintenance. While there are exceptions, this is a noticeable pouch of low-tech, as Buntrock has exposed in a brilliant lecture.¹⁹ This is an issue that goes back to the early 20th century when Modern western architecture and construction were imported, giving precedence to form rather than to local adaptation and performance: even Japan-enthusiast Taut²⁰ had to remark how poor the indoor conditions were in many university lecture halls, turning professors and students alike into “sweat fountains”.²¹ Meanwhile, the recollections of his and his partner Erica’s living in a tiny house in rural Takasaki²² offer vivid hints into the level of comfort in traditional Japanese homes: while many aesthetic aspects relating to materiality and construction mastery were deeply appreciated, the couple had to grapple with the cold, lack of a proper kitchen, effort to keep the myriads nooks and crannies clean, and nasty rodents.

The low-tech *ah* contrasting the high-tech *un* is also visible in everyday life in matters such as payments (the transition to digital payment methods seems at last underway at the point of writing) and the ubiquitous use of print seals to stamp official documents instead of signatures (after the coronavirus pandemic, the government has decided to phase out their use gradually).

5. DISCUSSION

We have argued that selected aspects of Japanese architectural identity (in its full spectrum, from construction to aesthetics) have been privileged over others. This is, on the one hand, the result of both conscious and unconscious projections abroad of a curated image, resembling a branding effort, and an often naïve attitude at the receiving end on the other. Cultural dichotomies seen from within tend thus to appear as monads when seen from the outside: as such, this paper intended to shed some light on lesser-known traits integral to understanding how architecture is conceived and practised in the country. We shall speculate at this point whether a metaphorical pendulum, now in the *un* position, is indeed swinging back toward the *ah* side. The following are intuitive predictions, and I fully subscribe to planner John Friedmann’s view that ‘the world is a slippery place’, whose future remains unknown, no matter how expert we are.²³

Enter maximal

Over the past few decades, zen-inspired minimalism has been the hallmark of Japanese architectural aesthetics. The genealogy can be traced back to the early Meiji period, when the first foreigners to engage with the local culture after its period of isolation started reporting on craftsmanship and construction methods. Afterwards, Bruno Taut and other modern architects saw a parallel between their own ideals and traditional *sukiya*-style buildings, most prominently the Katsura Villa on the outskirts of Kyoto. In the aftermath of WWII, rapid standardisation and technological development favoured the high-tech-looking, sleek, and functional aspect of construction, merging with the increasing appeal of zen Buddhism. More recently, we have been witnessing a move from “cool” minimalism toward “warm” minimalism by switching to wooden structures in mid-rise and low-rise/large-scale buildings or using wooden and matte/natural finishes. This is not just an aesthetic move but rather entwined with a renewed environmental sensibility. Might this signify the beginning of a shift from the white school (minimal) to the red school (maximal) as the upcoming best fit to the changing sensibilities of our time?

Exposure of the *zenecon* model

Compared to the current standards in American architectural practice, the overall AEC industry in Japan lags behind in terms of automation of design processes, especially in adopting Building Information Modeling (BIM).²⁴ The situation is rapidly changing, though, while owners and governmental institutions increasingly appreciate the benefits of integrated project delivery, a trend that has been unfolding in the US since the late 1990s. While there will always be a place for design-only architectural firms of any size, a renewed emphasis on efficiency and performance, and an ever-increasing complexity of design to balance environmental and technical aspects of construction will increase the scope of work of the *zenecon*. Considering the recent successful and unsuccessful attempts in the US to integrate design and construction into single, large “vertical” or “horizontal” entities, once the stigma toward corporation style is broken and some of their work receives proper media exposure, I suspect there will be much interest abroad in the peculiarities of this business model.

Fixing the basics

The 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games were arguably a coordinated national attempt to reframe the image of Japan abroad from a techno-centric to a more down-to-

earth and environmentally conscious culture. There was a (largely unsuccessful) attempt to lower costs, reuse existing facilities, and build more sustainable architectural programs with natural materials. While there will still be a need for daring, technologically radical projects, the key will be to pragmatically push the constructive and regulatory boundaries of traditional materials, such as wood, to meet the requirements of different building programs and sizes, which have been the almost exclusive realm of concrete and steel construction for the past half-century. Moreover, simply changing the mindset toward more reuse, refurbishment, and renovation of existing structures, fixing the basics of energy efficiency and consumption, will redefine the meaning of contemporary Japanese architecture, its local understanding and projection abroad.

FIGURE 3: PortPlus is Japan's first fully wooden and fire-resistant high-rise structure: it is a 10-story building in Yokohama completed in 2022, designed and built by zenecon Obayashi (<https://www.oyproject.com/photos/>. Photographer: SS Inc.).



6. CONCLUSION

We have examined how the image of the Japanese AEC industry and the legacy of Japanese architecture have been the product of both conscious and unconscious selective narratives at play domestically and overseas. We have used the concepts of *ah* and *un/om*—the Buddhist equivalents of alpha and omega, the beginning and the end—as an epistemological metaphor: even though the two are inseparable and of equal importance, only the mantra *om* has become popularly known in the so-called western world. Similarly, the Japanese architectural discourse, essentially dichotomous when seen from within, appears monolithic to most external observers.

First, we have introduced the *zenecon* model, a fundamental and native component of the Japanese AEC industry, consistently underestimated and underrepresented in the international construction and architecture discourse. Second, we have clarified how the minimalist zen aesthetic is counterbalanced by a more exuberant and haptic tradition tracing its roots back to the Neolithic Age. Third, we have seen how technological advancement in certain specialised construction domains contrasts with the average performance and comfort level of buildings, especially in the realm of prosaic residential architecture.

For future research, we suggest a tighter approach between theory and practice, as architecture and the AEC industry have a fundamental pragmatic component; this does not diminish in any way the symbolic, socio-cultural role of the built environment, but it would ideally ground it so that observed phenomena can be better interpreted when cross-examined from multiple sides.

NOTES

- 1 L. Kriska, *The Business of We: The Proven Three-Step Process for Closing the Gap Between Us and Them in Your Workplace* (HarperCollins Leadership, 2021).
- 2 R. Koolhaas and H.U. Obrist, *Project Japan. Metabolism Talks....* (London: Taschen, 2011), 441.
- 3 G. McCormack and N. Field, “The Construction State: The Pathology of the Doken Kokka”, in *The Emptiness of Affluence in Japan*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 25–77. G. McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State: Contested Identity, Direction and Role* (Folkestone: Renaissance Books, 2018).
- 4 A. Kerr, *Dogs and Demons: The Fall of Modern Japan* (London: Penguin Group, 2002).
- 5 United Nations, “National accounts—Analysis of main aggregates (AMA),” 2018. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/Basic>
- 6 M. Ogasawara and T. Yashiro, “A Comparative Study of the Design Process in General Construction Companies and Design Firms in Japan,” *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 17, no. 1 (2018): 31. <https://doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.17.31>
- 7 K. Suzuki and L. Sui Pheng, *Japanese Contractors in Overseas Markets: Bridging Cultural and Communication Gaps* (Singapore: Springer, 2019).
- 8 Ogasawara and Yashiro, “A Comparative Study of the Design Process in General Construction Companies and Design Firms in Japan”.
- 9 D. Buntrock, *Japanese Architecture as a Collaborative Process: Opportunities in a Flexible Construction Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).
- 10 Ogasawara and Yashiro, “A Comparative Study of the Design Process in General Construction Companies and Design Firms in Japan”, 32.
- 11 Ogasawara and Yashiro, “A Comparative Study of the Design Process in General Construction Companies and Design Firms in Japan”, 31.
- 12 Suzuki and Sui Pheng, *Japanese Contractors in Overseas Markets: Bridging Cultural and Communication Gaps*.
- 13 D. Buntrock, *Materials and Meaning in Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tradition and Today* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 15, 32, 41.
- 14 Buntrock, *Materials and Meaning in Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tradition and Today*, 239. Buntrock also formulates the existence of a “pink school”, which includes Ando Tadao and Kuma Kengo, among others.
- 15 E.S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886), xxviii–xxix.
- 16 P. Scrivano and M. Capitano, “West of Japan/East of Europe: Translating architectural legacies and the case of Bruno Taut’s Hyuga Villa,” *Built Heritage* 2, no. 2 (2018): 50–61. <https://doi.org/10.1186/BF03545693>

- 17 B. Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1936), 11-18.
- 18 Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 19.
- 19 D. Buntrock, “What Could Go Wrong?”. School of Architecture, Georgia Tech, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Kj8m_R8x60
- 20 B. Taut, *Japans Kunst mit europäischen Augen gesehen*. Edited by Manfred Speidel (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2011), 170.
- 21 ‘Die Hörsäle von Universitäten liegen oft nach der schlechtesten Himmelsrichtung Japans, der Westseite; die heiße Nachmittagssonne und dazu keine Möglichkeit gründlicher Durchlüftung erzeugen eine brütende Hitze und wahre Schweißfontänen bei den Studenten und dem Professor.’
- 22 B. Taut, *Houses and people of Japan* (Tokyo: The Sanseido co., ltd., 1937).
- 23 J. Friedmann, *Insurgencies: Essays in planning theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 16.
- 24 One explanation for the half-hearted adoption of BIM in Japan is the high skill of carpenters and construction workers compared to that of other countries. Since major construction mistakes are uncommon, there has not been a real incentive to transition from 2D drawing representations to three dimensional BIM on the construction site. The declining number of skilled workers, though, is bound to propel automation and robotisation processes.

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USE IT OR LOSE IT: THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF INTERPRETING TRADITIONAL JAPANESE SPATIAL FORMS WITHIN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the indigenous characteristics of Japanese architectural space and how this distinctiveness, on a wider spatial scale, can be transferred and reinterpreted within contemporary Japanese architectural practice. One of the identified spatial elements utilised for research is *shinden-zukuri*, a type of annexe style, which can be viewed as a group of multiple buildings that can be recognised as a single building. In this paper, the researched element is extrapolated, transferred and interpreted within contemporary architectural practice. The examination of said identity, the open spatial form, confirms its widespread utilisation and deep-rooted nature in the mental landscape of the Japanese people. The findings indicate that contemporary Japanese architecture and architectural practice is beginning to reach a fork in the road: whether it can retain its observed spatial identity and resist, or assimilate the current trends suppressing the previously identified spatial values. The overall findings indicate that the condition of contemporary Japanese architecture oscillates between openness and closedness and will require attuning to the changing circumstances if the perceived spatial values are to endure.

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KEY WORDS

JAPAN

SPATIAL IDENTITY

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on traditional Japanese architectural forms in order to explore the indigenous identity of Japanese architectural space and how it is (re)interpreted within the contemporary architectural practice. Traditional Japanese architecture is known for its horizontal and vertical spatial composition with columns and beams, as well as the continuity between the interior and exterior, and its liberating visual qualities. However, these spatial characteristics are lost in contemporary Japan due to various factors. The social demand for the realisation and spread of environmentally friendly architecture has become more pressing than ever before, and the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions has made it a top priority to reduce the air conditioning load, resulting in contemporary buildings being designed to become “closed boxes” that are airtight and insulated.

Although “open Japanese architecture”, as typified by the traditional Japanese building form *shoin-zukuri*, is the most well-known characteristic of Japanese architecture, *shoin-zukuri* is not the only indigenous spatial form of Japanese architecture that can serve as its identity. This paper focuses on the existence of an architectural trend in contemporary Japan that is similar to the traditional Japanese architectural form of *shinden-zukuri* and describes design methods for establishing it as an architectural form in the modern age.

The research will present the concepts of traditional Japanese spatial forms of *shoin-zukuri* and *shinden-zukuri*, discussing their influence on contemporary architectural practice. An argument will be made that such spatial concepts and the previously identified qualities are being lost due to the requirements that largely ignore the context and value efficacy over the successful interpretation of indigenous architectural styles.

However, the emergence of practices that seek inspiration rooted in traditional spatial forms is becoming more prevalent. An analysis of contemporary interpretations will be presented, noting the genealogy of contemporary spatial form interpretations.

The provided research method examines the practices’ strategies that fully implement the original spatial postulations, with particular attention focused on its utilisation within contemporary architectural practice.

Discussion on the inherent dichotomy within the Japanese spatial identity, with openness in both spatial form and spatial use, concludes that the condition of contemporary Japanese architecture oscillates between openness and closedness and will require attuning to the changing circumstances if the perceived spatial values are to endure.

2. SHOIN-ZUKURI AND SHINDEN ZUKURI - THE TRADITIONAL FORM OF JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE

Until the birth of the shoin-zukuri architectural form, which is also used nowadays for contemporary Japanese residential development, Japanese interior architecture was defined by a single, one-room space. There were no walls to divide the space and the space was divided by placing freestanding panels such as byoju (folding screens). There were two main reasons for the one-room, wall-less interior space: the first is that Japanese architecture was based on a column-and-beam frame structure, not a wall structure. The other reason is that Japan's climate is classified as hot and humid, necessitating well-ventilated spaces. Since one building is one room, several buildings were connected by corridors in a mansion that required many rooms. This architectural form is called shinden-zukuri.¹ (Fig. 1) Although no remains of the shinden-zukuri have survived, from picture scrolls and later buildings that seem to be descended from the shinden-zukuri form, its known characteristics are defined as the horizontal and vertical spatial composition of pillars and beams, as well as the continuity and visual openness between the floor, porch, and garden.²

In the Muromachi period (1333-1568), shinden-zukuri changed to a form of architecture known as shoin-zukuri. In shoin-zukuri architecture, a large space could be divided to create multiple rooms within a single building.

FIGURE 1: Shinden-zukuri³



In shoin-zukuri buildings, sliding doors, rather than folding screens, were used to divide the space. In the Muromachi period, when shoin-zukuri architecture originated, woodworking techniques developed, and it became possible to carve straight grooves in the wood. Thin panels (hikido) could then be slid and fitted into these grooves. By arranging multiple hikido, it became possible to divide a space.⁴ Since hikido can be easily opened and closed, the space is not divided when opened and can be made into a single room space with adequate ventilation. The hikido can be viewed as a space divider suited to Japan's hot and humid climate.

The hikido is likewise used as a partition between indoors and outdoors. Opening the hikido eliminates the partition between indoors and outdoors and maximises ventilation. In this manner, an open Japanese architectural space in which the indoor and outdoor spaces are continuous (hereafter referred to as "open Japanese architecture") was introduced.⁵ Kazuo Shinohara describes the expression of Japanese space as "an open structure and style of residence, with greenery blown out into the open air, the nature of the garden surrounding it."⁶ Few would disagree that this highlighted spatial characteristic is one of the identities of Japanese architectural spaces. With an influx of foreign presence, Frank Lloyd Wright is said to have had an influence on this unique Japanese spatial structure. According to Terunobu Fujimori, architectural historian and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, when Frank Lloyd Wright visited the Japanese Pavilion (Hōōden) at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, he was struck by the planar composition of the building, which continuously flowed from room to room when the sliding doors were opened, and this posed an inspiration for his thoughts on European historicism.⁷

3. TRANSFORMATION WITHIN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE: A CLOSED BOX

In contemporary Japan, however, qualities of traditional spatial characteristics are being lost. It has been a long time since air conditioning was introduced, but nowadays, with global warming and the energy crisis becoming more pronounced, especially since the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011), subsequent social demands for the realisation and spread of environmentally friendly architecture have become even more significant. The need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions has made it an imperative to reduce the air conditioning load.^{8,9}

If measures are taken to stop the dependence on air conditioning in order to meet this proposition, the abovementioned identity will presumably be main-

tained, but this is not the case. The measure taken to meet the above proposition is to create an architectural space that maximises the efficiency of air conditioning. This means making the building space more airtight and increasing the insulation performance of the exterior walls (although there is room for debate as to whether this is a good idea, it is not the purpose of the presented research findings and will not be discussed in this paper). Thusly produced, a highly airtight and insulated building can be interpreted as a “closed box.” The identity of open Japanese architecture is in danger of disappearance in the accommodation process.

This is a matter of grave concern. While highly airtight and insulated spaces are important from an energy perspective, the fact that architecture becomes a “closed box” poses many problems. After experiencing the ongoing effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kengo Kuma stated:

“I think the major trend in the world is not toward concentration but toward autonomous decentralisation. In fact, even before the pandemic, AI (artificial intelligence) has been developed as a technology to enable people to decentralise themselves against the trend toward concentration. But just as humans themselves were putting off making decisions, stuck in the inertia of the past, nature and disasters forced humanity to make a decision. (...) However, I think that now everyone is seriously searching for an alternative solution to the box-like model of urban concentration. In that sense, I feel that the pandemic provided a very good opportunity. (...) Is autonomous decentralisation possible in architecture? I feel that the model can be found in the architecture of the past. Traditional Japanese architecture is actually a very good model of autonomous decentralised architecture, characterised by the fact that it is not complete as a box, but allows people to live comfortably while maintaining a good relationship with nature. (...) In the 20th century, the factory model, in which people are crammed into a single space called a factory and made to work efficiently, was widely spread. The same concept was applied to intellectual labor in today’s office buildings. These ideas should be rethought. Prior to this, there was more diversity in the way people worked, and the relationship between residence and labor was continuously connected. Japan has a culture of living and working in machiya houses, and there are still many people who admire this lifestyle.”¹⁰

The question that ought to be posed remains: Is there no inheritable Japanese architectural identity? The answer is – yes, there is.

4. THE ATTEMPT TO INHERIT AND REINTERPRET THE IDENTITY OF THE JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE - CONTEMPORARY SHINDEN-ZUKURI

Open Japanese architecture, as typified by shoin-zukuri, is the most well-known characteristic of Japanese architecture, but shoin-zukuri is not the only indigenous spatial form of Japanese architecture that can serve as a base identity. This paper focuses on shinden-zukuri as one of them.

As already mentioned, shinden-zukuri is a building (i.e., a group of multiple buildings) consisting of a single room space connected by a corridor and, in terms of general architectural form, it is a type of an annexe. Simply put, it can be viewed as a group of multiple buildings recognised as a single building. In this paper, this same type of contemporary architecture is defined as *contemporary shinden-zukuri*.

According to Terunobu Fujimori, the origins of contemporary shinden-zukuri (Fujimori writes that this is the idea of dispersing the various functions and rooms of a house within a single site and even toward the city) can be traced back to the architecture of Michizo Tachihara in the 1930s. Tachihara was a contemporary of Kenzo Tange, both of whom graduated from the Department of Architecture at the University of Tokyo (then Tokyo Imperial University) and both of whom won the Tatsuno Prize, the University's award for the best architectural design. Tange became one of Japan's leading architects in the following years. Tachihara, on the other hand, did not, as he died at the young age of 24 (1914-1939). In his discussion of Tachihara's architecture, Fujimori notes the following about the ideas of young Japanese architects since the 2000s:

“The living room, bedroom, and even a villa are dispersed and arranged on the same plot of land, and you go out the door and open the door again to enter another room. I think this is a phenomenon only in Japan, but in the image of some young people, the life of one family under one roof, which is already what the modern nation-state demanded, what the peaceful and democratic society of postwar Japan demanded, has already been dismantled.”¹¹

Since it is not the main purpose of this paper to describe the history of contemporary shinden-zukuri, we will not describe the historical background in detail, but what is important to note is that the number of contemporary shinden-zukuri architecture has been increasing since the 2000s. The point is that this trend is an attempt to somehow inherit and reinterpret the identity of

Japanese architecture at a time when traditional open Japanese architecture is in decline. Even if individual buildings become closed boxes, contemporary shinden-zukuri (architecture as a group of buildings) is possible, and this trend can be seen as the inheritor of Japanese identity.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

In this paper, we first summarise the genealogy of the aforementioned modern shinden-zukuri and also categorise the aforementioned contemporary shinden-zukuri. Next, the design process and methods of the building (Dragon Court Village), designed by the design team, including the author, in accordance with the current trend of contemporary shinden-zukuri, are described in detail, and the design issues and measures are summarised. Then, by comparing Dragon Court Village with buildings designed in the same period and having similar architectural structures, the generality of the design method of contemporary shinden-zukuri was verified.

The exploratory case study was chosen as one of the representatives of the observed spatial characteristic because of its interpretation of traditional Japanese spatial characteristics, from inception to implementation. The familiarity of the author's standpoint also provides valuable insight into the contemporary Japanese architectural practice, as well as the outcomes of such lived spaces.¹²

The most observable facet of the exploratory case study, Dragon Court Village, lies in its ability to accommodate various activities, primarily small-scale, locally-run businesses. Dragon Court Village became a destination for those who did not fit into the standardised model of suburban residential rental housing, which made it almost impossible for them to find satisfactory housing.

6. GENEALOGY OF CONTEMPORARY SHINDEN-ZUKURI

The following section briefly discusses the genealogy leading to the contemporary shinden-zukuri trend since the 2000s. The earliest attempts at contemporary shinden-zukuri by living Japanese architects are Yamakawa Sanso (1977) and House in Okayama (1992) by Riken Yamamoto. Although Yamakawa Sanso's project comprises a single building, its architectural concept can be interpreted as a contemporary shinden-zukuri. Yamamoto is an architect who takes a critical attitude toward the Japanese family form i.e. the nuclear family, which emerged in the modern era and is known for his

work with Chizuko Ueno, a sociologist who advocates the “Kazoku wo koeru hako (box beyond the family)” a spatial discussion of the pros and cons of the modern family form.¹³ What Yamamoto did with the House in Okayama and Yamakawa Sanso was not to design the residence as a single unit (i.e., a box to hold the family, based on the institutional unit of the family), but to break the house down into smaller rooms and redefine it as a group of rooms that are assembled at a certain distance from each other. While attempts to redefine a house as a collection of small rooms had already been made in works such as “Koshitsu-gun-jukyo” by Takashi Kurosawa (1968), Koshitsu-gun-jukyo was simply a house in which the interior of a single building was divided into individual rooms. What Yamamoto did was to design a house as multiple buildings (i.e., rooms), rather than designing a house as a single building, which can be appropriately classified as a contemporary shinden-zukuri.¹⁴

Yamakawa Sanso is a house in which the bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and lavatory are all independently located and roofed over (Fig. 2), based on Yamamoto’s idea that “only the utilitarian functions are needed, and it does not matter where they are located, whether they are connected or disconnected.” (Fig. 2). To go from the bedroom to the latrine, one has to go outside. The space between the bedroom and the latrine is roofed, so it is not affected by the elements but is exposed to the outside air.^{15, 16}

FIGURE 2: Yamakawa Sanso²



There is no roof in the House in Okayama, as there was in Yamakawa Sanso's, and the three buildings are dispersed throughout the site (Fig. 3). (Roofless contemporary shinden-zukuri. (Hereafter, contemporary shinden-zukuri - NR type) "The private rooms, kitchen, and bathrooms are arranged discretely around a courtyard. In front of each room there is a terrace covered by a huge eave that is larger in area than the room".¹⁷ The box of the house has been dismantled, and the outdoors, such as terraces and courtyards, have become the stage of life. As was the case with shinden-zukuri.

Contemporary shinden-zukuri was completed in an avant-garde yet simple form with the Moriyama House (2005) designed by Ryue Nishizawa. Moriyama House is a group of buildings in which a house is broken down into ten rooms, which are dispersed throughout the site (Fig. 4).

FIGURE 3: House in Okayama¹⁹



Although each room (building) is small (around 10-15sqm), the outdoor space between the buildings is also a living space, and the entire site, including the outdoor space, is designed as a "house". For example, a courtyard is created by placing four boxes apart, or a kitchen is made small and placed facing a sunny garden, creating a single environment within site by the arrangement and size of the rooms.²⁰

Examples of contemporary shinden-zukuri following Moriyama House include "House in Buzen" (WR-type, 2009) designed by Makoto Tanijiri, "Calling a plan a map" (NR-type, 2012) designed by Ondesign, and "Row of Houses"

(NR-type, 2016) designed by studio velocity. “House in Buzen” is a detached house in a local city (Fig. 5). Here, an alley with a glass roof is created between the disparate buildings, creating a space that is at once a corridor and a street, a private and a public space, an interior and an exterior, and a space between furnishings.²² “Calling a plan a map” is an apartment complex standing in a suburban area rich in nature (Fig. 6). Here, a group of buildings, divided into small sections, are arranged on a vast site that is gently zoned according to the “theme of expected use.” Each building is composed of diverse sizes, ranging from furniture-like structures that are too small for people to fit inside, to those that allow several people to gather inside the building²³ “Row of Houses” is a building that combines a residence and a beauty salon, standing in a residential area in a local city (Fig. 7). The house is divided into smaller wings for each function, making a total of 26 wings. The space between the beauty parlour

FIGURE 4: Moriyama House²¹



and the residential building is densely planted with trees to serve as a blindfold between the two buildings and is also used as a walking path for neighbours to pass through.²⁴ In 2014, nine years after the completion of the Moriyama Residence, Nishizawa completed the “Terasaki House” - a house on a hill in the suburbs of Tokyo (Fig. 8). The surrounding area has abundant greenery, including a large park and farms. The site is located at the edge of a hill, with a large park nearby, offering an open view and a sense of spatial openness. To take advantage of this sense of openness, a large roof was erected to unite the rooms and courtyard into one, creating an open space in which the interior, courtyard, and exterior are continuous.²⁵ This example can also be interpreted as an architectural form

(WR-type) in which a roof covers the outdoor space of the Moriyama House.

As mentioned above, contemporary shinden-zukuri has been one of the architectural trends in Japan since the 2000s and is forming the architectural identity of contemporary Japan. However, when comparing the NR-type and the WR-type, one notices that the WR-type has a spatiality similar to “open Japanese architecture.” The contemporary shinden-zukuri WR-type can be



UP: FIGURE 5: House in Buzen²⁶

DOWN: FIGURE 6: Calling a plan a map²⁷



regarded as a design technique for realising “open Japanese architecture” by making highly open spaces outdoors and eliminating the need for air conditioning in a time when architecture tends to become a “closed box” in order to minimise the air conditioning load. This paper finds a contemporary Japanese architectural identity in the contemporary shinden-zukuri WR-type, which seems to be a fusion of shinden-zukuri and shoin-zukuri and discusses its design in individual concrete terms.



UP: FIGURE 7: Row of Houses²⁸

DOWN: FIGURE 8: Terasaki House²⁹

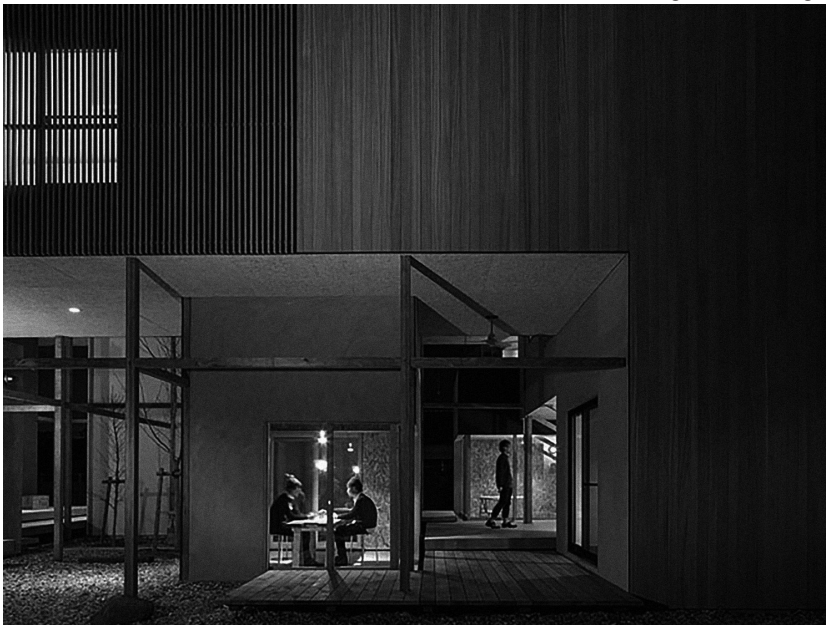


7. LEARNING THROUGH PRACTICE - DRAGON COURT VILLAGE

In this section, we discuss one specific building designed in accordance with the contemporary shinden-zukuri trend described above. “Dragon Court Village” is a wooden housing complex completed in 2013 by the architecture office “Eureka” (Fig. 9). The ground level, accessible directly from the street, is a contemporary shinden-zukuri, with a series of L-shaped massing that also serves as roofs on the upper floor.^{30,31} While most of the contemporary shinden-zukuri buildings listed in the previous chapters were one-story buildings, this one is a two-story building, with the main living space on the upper floor.

It consists of a group of small rooms dispersed on the ground level, with an L-shaped massing on top of them. This project was conceived in reference to Yamakawa Sanso and Moriyama House. What differentiates Dragon Court Village from these houses is that it has an “orthodox” living space (in the Western sense) on the upper floor. Since Dragon Court Village is an apartment building, it needed to be able to accommodate “orthodox” living. Therefore, the need was met by making the upper floor an orthodox living space. The problem that arose due to this decision was that the small rooms on the ground level were not relevant to the lives of the building’s inhabitants, which is not surprising since the upper floor was designed to be a complete living space.

FIGURE 9: Dragon Court Village³²



A similar residential building is “Yokohama Apartments” (2009), designed by Ondesign (Fig. 10). The four triangular wall pillars raise the apartments to the upper floor, and the ground floor is a semi-outdoor common space called a “plaza”. The stairs to the private rooms are located around each of the four wall pillars and, since all the rooms except for the bedrooms and bathrooms are located on the ground floor, there are many natural opportunities for residents to interact with each other. Although the private area is small here, the area usable by residents is considerably larger because of the shared plaza and, unlike ordinary housing complexes, the shared area is larger than the private area, an inversion of the usual situation.³³

The small rooms on the ground level of Yokohama Apartments are used for storage. They are spaces that people only enter for loading and unloading and have little to do with the living spaces on the upper floors. While the total floor area of Dragon Court Village is 508 square meters, the total floor area of Yokohama Apartments is only 152 square meters, so there is no major problem in Yokohama Apartments even if the small rooms on the ground level have nothing to do with the lives of the apartment residents. In other words, the small rooms in Yokohama Apartments are too small to be called rooms and are more like “thick walls,” so their use cannot be a major issue.

Because Dragon Court Village is larger in scale than Yokohama Apartments, not all ground-level space could be used for inaccessible uses such as storage. It had to be designed with a set of uses that could be used by the apartment

FIGURE 10: Yokohama Apartments³⁴



residents.³⁵ In other words, it was necessary to come up with an answer to two design conditions that could be described as incompatible: a space that is unrelated to the living space on the upper floor, but that can be used by the residents of the apartment building.

The design team of the Dragon Court Village responded by accepting the two conditions as they were. Because it was thought that a space that accepted the two conditions as they were would be the same type of space as, for example, a house with a store (a residential form with a store on the ground level and living space on the upper floor), and would be a feasible form. The design team named the group of small rooms scattered around the ground level “annexes,” and designed them as spaces that can be freely used by the apartment residents as stores, SOHOs, etc.

However, there were concerns: in the contemporary age, houses that are “purely” for living are considered the mainstream, and it is rare to see a form of housing with a store with a space for use unrelated to “living” anymore. Some old houses were initially built as store houses and still exist without being rebuilt, but they are either vacant or used only as stores. Today, living while doing business is no longer a common lifestyle. In addition, Dragon Court Village is a rental apartment complex built in a suburban residential area and there was concern about the number of people using the “Annex.”

For those who do not use the Annex, the rent would be wasted and would mean paying unnecessarily high rents. Rental housing is a business for the client, and if the “Annex with Rental Housing” did not meet the needs of contemporary Japan and its region, it risked failing as a business.

As a result, Dragon Court Village became a viable business. Dragon Court Village became a destination for those who did not fit into the standardised model of suburban residential rental housing, which made it almost impossible for them to find satisfactory housing.

8. LATEST EXAMPLES OF CONTEMPORARY SHINZEN-ZUKURI

Through the practice at Dragon Court Village, we were able to discover the effectiveness of the design technique of creating a group of small rooms as non-residential space at the ground level and residential space on the upper floor in order to establish the contemporary shinden-zukuri WR-type as a house. Of course, one case study has yet to clarify under what conditions it would be effective. It will not work effectively in all conditions. However, it is clear that Dragon Court Village is not a unique case in contemporary Japan, as there have been many examples in the past decade of homes incorporating non-residential space, comparable to the Dragon Court Village. The following are examples of such projects: “Apartments with a Small Restaurant” (2014) designed by Naka Architects’ Studio, “House / Café in Kyodo” (2016) designed by Naruse-Inokuma Architects, “Dragon Court Village” (2016) designed by Tsubame Architects, and “The House/Café in Kyodo” (2016) designed by Naka Architects’ Studio. (2016), and “Bonus Track” (2020) designed by Tsubame Architects.

“Apartments with a Small Restaurant” is a building that focuses on a “small economy” in an urban residential area, with a living environment open to the surrounding community and its users (Fig. 11). It consists of five SOHO units, a shared office in a semi-basement, and a dining room on the first floor, and is a complex of multiple uses related to the small economy. It is a mix of work and residence, loosely connected to the city.³⁶ “House/Café in Kyodo” is a 50-year-old detached wooden house in an urban residential area that was dismantled to its skeleton, leaving as much of the existing structural frame as possible, and renovated as a storefront residence with a cafe on the first floor and a residence on the second floor (Fig. 12). The residential area and the café area are connected in plan by a table space in the back and the area is designed to be handled in a variable manner by opening and closing the fittings.³⁷ “Bonus Track” is a dual-use residential and commercial building located in a corner of “Shimokita Railroad Street” on a former railroad site created by the undergrounding of urban railroad tracks (Fig. 13). 10 units of dual-use housing are designed as SOHO, with eaves and exterior walls that can be selected later by the residents. Concrete jump-outs were planned along the openings and foundations of the building to serve as counters and benches.³⁸



LEFT UP: FIGURE 11: Apartments with a Small Restaurant³⁹

LEFT DOWN: FIGURE 12: House / Café in Kyodo⁴⁰

RIGHT UP: FIGURE 13: Bonus Track⁴¹





9. DISCUSSION: BETWEEN OPENNESS AND CLOSEDNESS

When we call the state of having different uses (e.g., a house with non-residential space) rather than a single-use contained in architecture as a closed box an open space use, then what we have said so far in this paper can be rephrased as “open space use is necessary to establish openness as a spatial form”. Both are the identity of Japanese architecture and are complementary and a pair. Fluid urban spaces in which a wide variety of uses are blended, rather than single-use spaces, exist in various cities, especially in Asia, and the indigenous urban space in Japan is one of the representative examples, which, together with the open spatial form, forms a spatial identity. This identity is widespread and deeply ingrained in the Japanese people. The “Otoko-ha-Tsuraiyo” series of Japanese films (48 films in all, 1969-1995) by film director Yoji Yamada is recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest film series (number of films) in the world and is popular on a national level. The main character’s (Tora-san’s) house is located in downtown Tokyo (Shibamata, Katsushika-ku) and is depicted as a space with openness in form and use. The ground level of the house, with the exception of a tatami-matted space, is an earthen floor (storefront) that is freely accessible to customers and neighbours. (Fig. 14) The bedrooms are on the upper floor, which is accessed by a staircase facing the earthen floor.



FIGURE 14: Tora-san's house in *Otoko-ha-Tsuraiyo*⁴²

In this space, not only Tora-san's family, but also the neighbours and visitors from far away, become one in a human comedy drama. The reason for the popularity of the series, which spanned 26 years and 48 films in all, is that the landscape that Yoji Yamada depicts in this film series (the scenery of daily life, including Tora-san and other people) is the original landscape of the Japanese people. It was not a "traditional" landscape of the distant past. It was a "normal" landscape that existed unmistakably in contemporary Japan, but with a slightly nostalgic feeling. In other words, it is the identity of Japan.

Although Tadao Ando's architecture remains the most widely known contemporary Japanese architecture in the world, Ando's buildings were closed boxes to urban space, as was the case with "House in Sumiyoshi" (1976). (Fig. 15) In the late 1960s and 1970s, Japanese architects designed boxes closed to the city. The outstanding achievements of contemporary Japanese residential architecture, such as "House of White" designed by Kazuo Shinohara in 1966 (Fig. 16) and "House in Nakanohoncho" designed by Toyo Ito in 1976 (Fig. 17), were all closed boxes. Ito describes this period as "a reaction to the big urban projects of the 60's led by the Metabolists, and in the 70's, after the oil crisis, there was a tendency to go inward. It was a time when the desire to create an inner utopia, no matter how small, was very strong."⁴³

A quarter of a century later, contemporary Japanese architects are now trying to open the house to the city and to the surrounding environment. On the other hand, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, there is a strong trend toward making architecture a closed box from an energy perspective to reduce the air conditioning load. It goes without saying that this is a global and universal architectural typology. Japanese architecture is now at the crossroads of whether or not it can retain its Japanese identity.



UP: FIGURE 15: House in Sumiyoshi¹⁴

DOWN: FIGURE 16: House of White⁴⁵



FIGURE 17: House in Nakanohoncho⁴⁶

10. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the indigenous identity of Japanese architectural space and how this identity can be transferred and reinterpreted within contemporary Japanese architectural practice. One of the spatial elements utilised for the study is the shinden-zukuri, a type of annexe style that can be viewed as a group of multiple buildings perceived as a single building. This paper interprets this element by transferring it into contemporary architectural practice. It also uses the unique Japanese urban space as a representative example to generate a spatial identity in conjunction with an open spatial form. This identity is widely and deeply inscribed in the spatial mentality of the Japanese. We have discovered the effectiveness of the design technique of creating a group of small rooms as non-residential space on the ground level and residential space on the upper floor in establishing the contemporary shinden-zukuri WR-type as a house, mainly through the practice in Dragon Court Village. Although we have not yet clarified in a single case study the conditions under which this method is effective, we continue to verify it by practising the design method for establishing the modern Sindenzukuri WR-type under various conditions. The condition of contemporary Japanese architecture oscillates between openness and closedness. Examining open architectural spaces such as contemporary shinden-zukuri is an important issue in terms of whether it is possible to maintain a Japanese identity without being dominated by a global, universal, closed box architectural typology.

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A B S T R A C T S : S E R B I A N

UTICAJ JAPANSKE ARHITEKTURE NA EVROPSKE AVANGARDE

Grazia Maria Nicolosi

Među istoričarima arhitekture postoji široko rasprostranjen konsenzus da je kulturna i estetska revolucija koju su izvele avangardne umetničke struje na kraju devetnaestog veka strogo zapadnjačko pitanje. Termin „Zapadna“ podrazumeva evropsku kulturu grčko-rimskog porekla. Ipak, moguće je reći da je Japan, u trenutku dolaska zapadnjaka tokom ere Meidži restauracije (1868-1889), već bio „moderna“ država. Zapadna misao je nastala iz ontologije Bića i metafizičke misli. Na antitetički način, Istok je izgradio svoju kulturu na percepciji stvarnosti koja je manje teorijska i više pragmatična. Jedna kultura je tražila dualizam i dominaciju nad prirodom, druga integraciju sa njom, a dualnosti je smatrala komplementarnim pojmovima. Ove razlike su odredile divergentne estetske i formalne ishode. U figurativnoj umetnosti uticaj je bio snažniji nego u arhitekturi, jer su evropski arhitekti u Japanu pronašli upravo one karakteristike apsolutnosti koje su tražili u modernosti, iako to nerado priznaju. Uprkos tome, zbog kontingentnih i sinhronih okolnosti između otvaranja Japana ka Zapadu i uznemirenosti evropskog društva u devetnaestom veku; kada su avangardni umetnici upoznali Japance, bili su fascinirani i iznenađeni.

KLJUČNE REČI: MODERNOST, PRAZNINA, DUALIZAM, PROSTORNA SLOJEVITOST, MA, OKU, MIEGAKURE

UPRAVLJANJE BAZAMA PODATAKA: JAPAN, POSTMODERNOST

I DIGITALNI PREOKRET ARHITEKTURE

Aaron Tobey

Rad predstavlja pregled razvoja i usvajanja kompjuterskih alata za projektovanje od strane japanskih arhitekata 1980-ih i ranih 1990-ih, što je u suprotnosti sa interpolacijom njihovog rada u konvencionalne narative značajnog „digitalnog preokreta“. Kako bi se to postiglo, kombinuju se pristupi teorija medija i kulturoloških studija, sa ciljem ispitivanja dizajnerske prakse i rezultata dizajna japanskih arhitekata koji se bave računarima, uz preovlađujuće političko-ekonomske polise i savremene popularne kulturne žanrove/forme kao što su noviteti u bazama podataka. Rad se fokusira na formiranje „imaginacije baze podataka“ Japana i praksi upravljanja informacijama kroz koje je korišćenje računara uokvireno na domaćem i međunarodnom nivou u odnosu na nove teorije estetske i tehničke postmodernosti. Postavljajući ove domaće i međunarodne okvire jedne naspram drugih, članak pokazuje kako je više grupa koristilo napore da se konstruiše određena slika Japana, da se zemlja i njena arhitektonska produkcija pozicioniraju u okviru većih narativa o kulturnim i tehnološkim promenama. Pozicioniranje se ispituje kao mesto kroz koje se pregovaralo i nastavlja se pregovarati o kulturnoj specifičnosti Japana i konstruktivnom susretu japanskih arhitekata sa računarima.

KLJUČNE REČI: JAPAN, DIZAJN POMOĆU RAČUNARA, POSTMODERNIZAM, UPRAVLJANJE INFORMACIJAMA, INFORMACIONO DRUŠTVO

PRAGMATIČAN POGLED NA JAPANSKI ARHITEKTONSKI IDENTITET: DEMISTIFIKACIJA MONOLITNOG KONSTRUKTA

Marco Capitanio

Zašto se japansko arhitektonsko nasleđe i praksa, gledano iznutra, veoma razlikuju od njegove percepcije u inostranstvu? Arhitektonski identitet jedne zemlje oblikuje nekoliko aspekata, uključujući njeno materijalno nasleđe, odnos sa drugim umetnostima, građevinsku tehnologiju i svakodnevnu profesionalnu praksu. Rezultat je slojevit proizvod čija pojavnost se može preoblikovati u skladu sa određenim kontekstima i publikom. Ovaj rad pokazuje kako određeni aspekti japanskog arhitektonskog identiteta, koji se u inostranstvu smatraju kvintesencijalnim i monolitnim (firme u stilu ateljea, minimalistička estetika, tehnološki pogon), čine samo polovinu dihotomija. Ko je odgovoran za ovaj proces selekcije? Da li je on svesni ili nesvesni napor? Da li primajuća strana (tj. i stručna i laička publika u inostranstvu) treba da bude kritičnija u svom prijemu? Ovaj rad, pre svega, uvodi zenecon model, fundamentalnu i izvornu komponentu japanske AEC industrije, dosledno nedovoljno zastupljenu u međunarodnom građevinskom i arhitektonskom diskursu. Zatim, rad pojašnjava kako je minimalističkoj zen estetici protivteža bujnija i haptička tradicija čiji koreni dosežu u period neolita. Takođe, rad pokazuje kako je tehnološki napredak u određenim specijalizovanim građevinskim domenima u suprotnosti sa prosečnim performansama i stepenom komfora u (stambenim) zgradama.

KLJUČNE REČI: JAPANSKI ARHITEKTONSKI IDENTITET, JAPANSKA GRAĐEVINSKA INDUSTRIJA, BRENDIRANJE KULTURE, ZENECON

ISKORISTI ILI IZGUBI: (NE)MOGUĆNOST INTERPRETACIJE TRADICIONALNIH JAPANSKIH PROSTORNIH FORMI U SAVREMENOJ ARHITEKTONSKOJ PRAKSI

Satoshi Sano, Naoki Saito

Ovaj rad istražuje autohtone karakteristike japanskog arhitektonskog prostora i kako se ta posebnost, na široj prostornoj skali, može prevesti i reinterpretirati u okviru savremene japanske arhitektonske prakse. Jedan od prepoznatih prostornih elemenata koji se koristi za istraživanje jeste shinden-zukuri, tip aneksa, koji se može posmatrati kao grupa više zgrada koje se tumače kao jedna zgrada. U ovom radu, istraženi element se ekstrapolira, prenosi i interpretira u okviru savremene arhitektonske prakse. Ispitivanje pomenutog identiteta, otvorene prostorne forme, potvrđuje njegovu široko rasprostranjenu upotrebu i duboko ukorenjenu prirodu u mentalnom pejzažu japanskog naroda. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da između savremene japanske arhitekture i arhitektonske prakse počinje da dolazi do račvanja: da li može da zadrži svoj uočeni prostorni identitet i da se odupre, ili da asimiluje trenutne trendove potiskujući prethodno identifikovane prostorne vrednosti. Krajnji rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da stanje savremene japanske arhitekture oscilira između otvorenosti i zatvorenosti i da će zahtevati prilagođavanje promenljivim okolnostima ako se percipirane prostorne vrednosti žele održati.

KLJUČNE REČI: JAPAN, PROSTORNI IDENTITET, TRADICIONALNA ARHITEKTURA, SAVREMENA ARHITEKTURA



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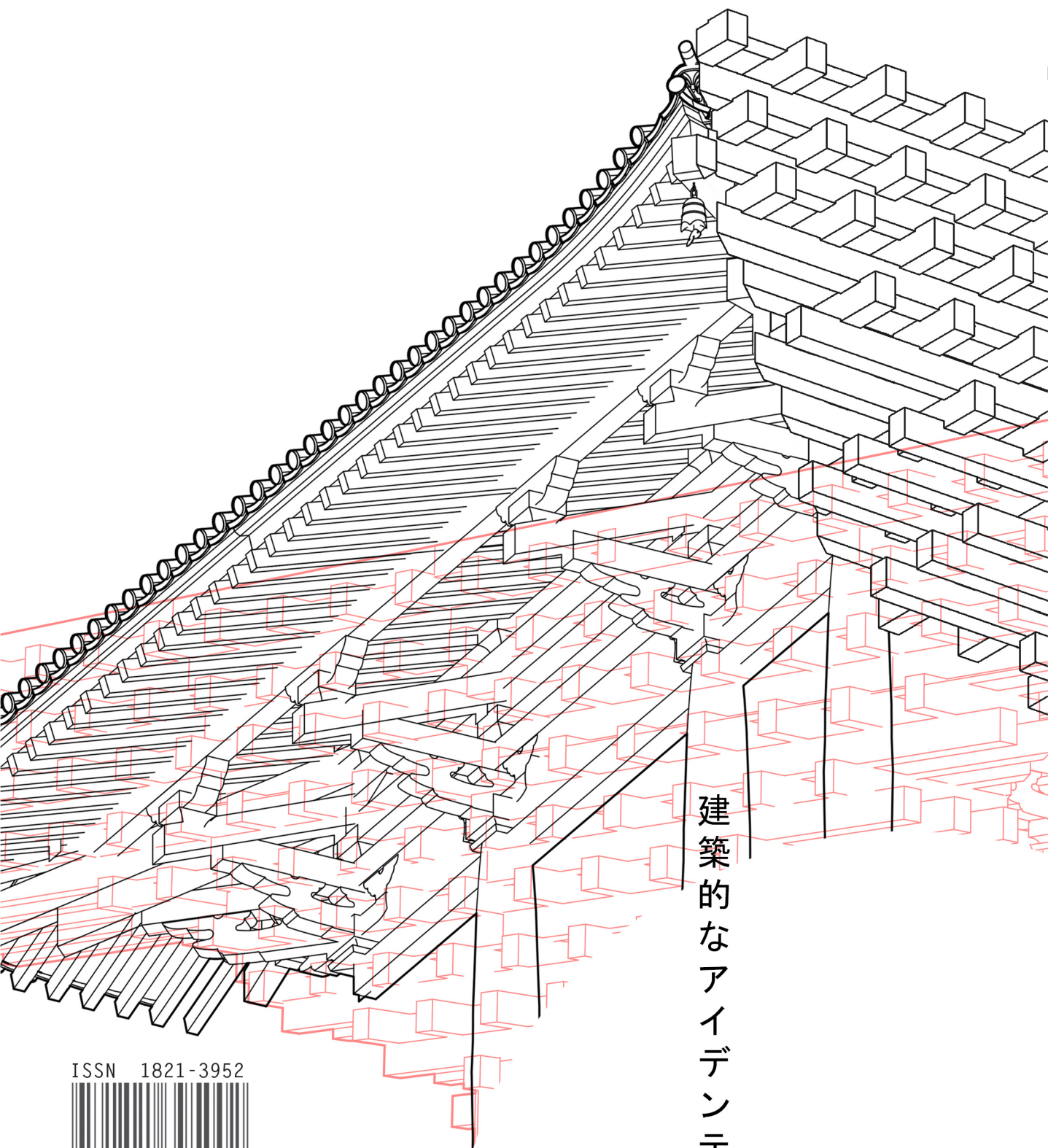
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