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JAPAN AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE 1945–1970

Discourse in the mid-20th-century Europe

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Declaration of Originality | Prohlášení

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work and that I wrote it independently, using only duly listed and properly cited sources and references; and that it has not been submitted in connection with any other university course or in fulfilment of the requirements of the same degree or of any other.

Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci napsal samostatně s využitím pouze uvedených a řádně citovaných pramenů a literatury a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Note on Languages

This text works with several languages. When quoting from texts other than English, I held on to the English translation where it already existed, though I have consulted the original whenever possible. In cases where I made the translation into English, the original quote is in the footnote. Like this dissertation, quite a number of the English sources I use was written by non-native English speakers (mostly Germans), which may explain an occasional linguistic oddity in the quotes.

As for Japanese, it occurs just sporadically in the text, mostly in the form of names. I use the standard, Japanese transcription of the Hepburn system, with the long vowels marked by a macron (rōmaji ロウマジ ロウマ字). This transcription comes reasonably close to the Japanese phonetics, and allows quite a smooth transition back to Japanese, for those who would like to go on working with Japanese resources. I make exceptions for names which are so commonly used in English that they can be considered English words (Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, shogun), and proper names where the name's bearer chose otherwise (Daisetz Tentaro Suzuki).

The mix of transcriptions, although they may be correct by themselves, continues to cause considerable confusion. The Japanese, as well as the scholars in the field of Japanese studies, contribute to it in some cases, for instance by alternately mentioning Japanese proper names in the order usual in Japanese, i.e. surname and then first name (Tange Kenzō), and the other way round, as it is usual in most Western languages (Kenzō Tange). The family-name-first is common in Japanese and Chinese, but also for example in Hungarian. Particularly in this work about Japan as seen from the outside, I believe it is more convenient to use the given-name-first order, just like Hungarian names are normally swapped when written in another Western language (László Moholy-Nagy). This is also the practice used by many Japanese whose name is often mentioned in the international context, such as Kenzō Tange.

For the few Chinese words I use the standard *pinyin* transcription, which may diverge from the older transcriptions used in older texts I quote.

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PART I

I.1. INTRODUCTION

The initial trigger to tackle this subject may have been a mix of vexation and curiosity. It is usual to hear that a contemporary design “has something Japanese about it”, “is Japanizing”, or has “a Japanese flair”. To be sure – we are not speaking about objects that actually are Japanese, or are made by people from this country. Such likening must come out from something perceptible, but more than often it is as though it were assigned to something residing somewhere deeper. It is baffling because of how vague it is – the speaker often confuses his impression with a supposed intention - but often also, how uncannily accurate it is. As always, once we focus on this sort of expression, we soon start hearing it often around... we even found ourselves saying it on occasion.

The background, but not the main problem here is not Japonism, the Japanese inspiration in Western arts beginning around mid-19th century, or even older objects made for an exotic effect. Our query should start at the moment when 20th century Modernist architects, who were careful to maintain a distance from any decoration, and from the Japonism-infused 19th century in general, started spotting similarities between their own endeavours and Japanese houses. If we are at least somewhat familiar with architectural Modernism, there are certain traits which are indeed striking when we look at quite any traditional Japanese house. To keep things simple, let us take the notorious five points of modern architecture of Le Corbusier as a yardstick¹. These points are constructive principles, so a truly modern house should have 1. *pilotis* (load-bearing stilts that carry the weight of the building), 2. a free ground plan, 3. a free façade, 4. horizontal windows, and 5., a roof garden. Looking at a traditional Japanese building, we can see that it typically stands elevated above the ground supported by wooden stilts or pillars. This tallies with the first point, and enables the introduction of the next ones. The plan looks indeed free as far as we can see, and is often asymmetrical. The requirement of the free façade and horizontal windows is more than fulfilled: There is little of a “façade” to speak of, since it consists of panels which are sliding or removable, and the house can be open practically all along its perimeter. This definitely is a horizontal opening, casting natural light indoors. The roof garden – a point which Le Corbusier himself rarely applied – is not to be found: The Japanese roof is large and heavy, and by no means flat. But a garden is always there, at least a small one, in the immediate vicinity of the house. Another great goal of the Modernists, prefabrication, found its counterpart in how the Japanese assembled their houses from components that were made and sold separately: best known are probably the *tatami* mats which cover the floor and are also units of area measurement. But all these things are already results of seeking how things are made. The Japanese house

¹ I refer here to the five points of modern architecture (*cinq points d'architecture moderne*) that Le Corbusier developed in his articles for his magazine *L'esprit nouveau* in the 1920s, and as they are usually abstracted from his book *Towards an Architecture: Le Corbusier, Vers une architecture* (Paris 1923).

already appealed to the Modernists with its aesthetics: it is dominated by a rectangular pattern of verticals and horizontals, the construction is admitted in the interior, materials are used in an unfinished form, the decoration is kept minimal, there is little furniture, rooms are not visibly defined as to their use, all inclines towards modesty, simplicity and flexibility.

Where, when and how could such a similarity occur, and how can we grasp it? No description is neutral, not even the comparison we have just made – we could immediately start asking what does “modest”, “simple” and “flexible” mean. The interest to examine such seemingly commonplace notions was actually another impulse for my research. Historically, it remains certain that many modern architects themselves did notice these parallels between their own endeavour and the Japanese tradition, and many of them expressed them in very similar terms. First such observations date from around 1930.

A nice illustration which came out in the German magazine *Moderne Bauformen* in 1931 shows what this closeness could look like. The German-trained Japanese architect Motono Seigo² made a drawing of a 17th century teahouse called *Shigure-tei* standing in the garden of the Kōdaiji Zen temple in Kyoto, and imagined how it would look only slightly altered, with a flat roof instead of the traditional thatched one, and its visible wooden skeleton effaced³. The result is a modernist-looking house of distinctly geometric forms, so that the publisher wrote about “a house of a universal validity, showing accordance with Europe.”⁴

Flipping through European architectural magazines quickly confirms a suspicion that Japan was indeed given special attention in the times when Modernism was at its peak, in the 1950s and 1960s. Japan is often present on the pages of these magazines, in any case in a much higher ratio than any other country outside the Western cultural circles. Browsing around the “Japanese” bookshelf in a well-equipped library soon provides us with an armload of books on Japanese architecture, published in these decades.

² Motono Seigo (1882–1944), considered to be one of the first Japanese modern architects, worked for two years in Berlin (1909), and picked up a lot from Werkbund, the Wiener Werkstätte and especially from the works of Peter Behrens for AEG.

³ Manfred Speidel refers to this article and picture in his text: Manfred Speidel, *Träume vom Anderen. Japanische Architektur mit europäischen Augen gesehen. Einige Aspekte zur Rezeption zwischen 1900 und 1950. Archimaera* 1 (2008) (Fremdsehen), 79-96. Slightly incorrect is his caption (p. 92) referring to the picture as “Teehäuser Kasa-tei and Shigure-tei”. These two tea-rooms, quite atypical for the Japanese tradition, actually stand next to each other in the Kōdaiji garden, connected by a short roofed corridor, but Motono Seigo’s drawing depicts only the two-storey Shigure-tei, showing it from two different angles, and not the umbrella-roofed Kasa-tei.

⁴ “Ein Haus der allgemeine Gültigkeit (...) zeigt europäische Übereinstimmung.” – “Ein Wohnhaus der Kobori-Enshu, Kioto Anfang 17. Jh.,” — *Moderne Bauformen*, 30, 1931, Heft 5, p. 237. The teahouse and the surrounding garden design are indeed traditionally ascribed to the famous tea master Kobori Enshū (1579–1647), but it is of course no dwelling as the erroneous caption states.

Now then, it is clear that there is indeed a relationship of some kind between modernism and Japan, and it has been commented on by word and image. That seems like a good basis for a study. Running through available literature reflecting on the subject, I soon found out that on the academic level, this relationship of Western architecture and design to Japan has hardly ever been seriously studied in its full scope. Considering how often the relationship has been stated, this is surprising. Is the closeness of old Japan – or even its influence on Modernism – something so well-known that is taken for granted?

Further questions come soon. Were the modernists somehow inspired by Japan? Is it a random similarity, or should we look for some common denominator? Is this even an actual similarity, or a pure projection, possible maybe thanks to a shared illusion? Why Japan of all countries? No simple answers seem to be in reach, and this is where the problem starts to call for a more profound study. I have decided to tackle this in the form of this thesis.

I.2. INITIAL QUESTIONS

In the centre of this investigation, there is something that seems to be an utter paradox: Why could Modernists, who largely refused history as a model for their work, see a similarity, inspiration or even model in historical buildings from another culture; a culture so distant historically, culturally, geographically and technically? This question will keep coming back, and will never cease to astonish.

Several hypotheses concerning the nature of this interaction come to mind. They may be contradictory, some may confirm each other, others can apply simultaneously. It is this research which can examine them:

- Japan entered Modernist architecture as a formal inspiration. It could serve as a source of practical solutions, irrespective of the architects' understanding of the original context.
- Japan was a source of “purposeful misreading” or a “creative misunderstanding” (ambiguous but productive variety). This suggests a reaction in which something new comes into existence from the two (or more) different entities.
- Modern architects found in Japan something we can call a “prosthetic history”. They refused their own tradition, but were still set to look for prototypes and models.
- Japan entered Modern architecture and became a catalyst of architectural thinking. This idea borrows a metaphor from chemistry: a catalyst is an additional substance which enables a reaction but is not consumed in the catalysed reaction.

I.3. SPECIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT

I.3.1. Drawing the framework

Seeing the similarity between Japanese and modernist architecture, it is tempting, and almost a compulsion for art historians, to instantly start looking for direct inspirations in artists' products, in our case similarities in the designs of Western architects and Japan. This was indeed how I started initially, thinking that I would trace the elements in European architects' work that were inspired by Japan. This may be something very enjoyable, and this work does finally provide tools for concrete case studies. As my work on the topic proceeded, however, my initial attitude changed. If we simply accept our first hypothesis, saying that Japan was a source of direct inspiration, we can be right in some cases, maybe even many. Why I suggest to suspend the urge to exult at each sliding door or straw mat we find in a 1950s house is that this would mean missing something very important: the occasion to learn why it could happen. To sidestep the causes and motivations would mean to miss a chance to understand and learn something new – an understudied aspect of the 20th century architecture. Architecture, too, primarily works with ideas and concepts, and if we want to understand how forms come into being, it is first good to understand how ideas occurred, formed, and spread. Reading the resources about Japan confirm that to go beyond mere visual copying, sourcebook for imitation was also the prevalent interest of the authors back then. Starting with the “product” – a building for instance – thus seems as clumsy as telling a story from its end.

I therefore steered this research, in the first place, towards investigating the sphere of thinking, or discourse, if you wish. I may have a penchant for going to the roots of problems, but concerning this topic, it does not come as a whim, but as a necessary condition if we want to reach some meaningful knowledge in the end. My ultimate goal in this research is to demonstrate what, in the context of architecture, was possible, how Japan has been regarded, what it was connected with.

It is thus apparent that I am less interested in showing Japan as a source of direct formal inspiration for architects. I am not avoiding such cases as illustrations, however I see it as much more important to reconstruct the framework of ideas and thoughts which the reception of Japan has created in the architectural discourse and imagination. This may have had a less immediate and less visible impact, but I believe it may help to demonstrate the evolution of thinking about architecture in general, a subject with much longer lasting effects. As far as I can judge from my research, these effects are indeed very relevant to understand such themes as writing modernism's relationship to history, or some phenomena that still dominate not only architectural thinking today: Can individual needs harmonize with the industrial society? What does space mean in architecture? How can we build in accordance

with nature, and what does it mean? Is simplicity and minimalism a form of luxury or necessity?

1.3.2. Image

Japan has been a country which caters well to people's imagination. Nowadays, there are many imaginary "Japans" next to each other: Japan of anime, martial arts, robotic technology, Zen monks, and worship of a pebble – or of a giant phallus for that matter. No doubt all other cultures have the ability to evoke diverse imaginations, which may seem contradictory. What makes Japan special may be this rich tradition of producing imaginary worlds of its own, and also the ability to give them visual shape. It is not the right question which one of these is the correct one. Each of these images has its validity, and at the same time is, necessarily, partial.

The more I continued researching on the subject, the more was I aware of this diversity even in architecture: The significance of associations linked to "Japan" changed quite a lot, depending on who is speaking. Historically the diversity seems to grow in time as one approaches today. This does not mean that there are no patterns in the various views of Japan. On the contrary, it may be these patterns which are crucial.

This is a study about an image of Japan. What is an image? Definitely more than a "picture". It is a metaphor of course, but a very convenient one, both because it carries visual connotations and because image also means representation. It is both an outward presentation and the resulting impression. "Image" speaks both about vision and about thinking. This is a study about Western architectural thinking.

1.3.3. Architectural media

Apart from buildings, where and how does such thinking manifest itself? For a historian, it seems sensible to have a method open enough to take into account all resources that his sources mention. In our case, it can be a visit to a tearoom or meeting a Japanese friend. The number of this kind of resources, however, is potentially endless, and for the need of a thorough study we do need limits. This study therefore uses printed media as the primary resource. *Media* became a frequently used word in the very period we focus at mainly thanks to Marshall McLuhan. If we accept the division of media into "hot" and "cool" that he coined, ours would be the "hot" ones⁵: mainly the printed media – books, magazines, but also

⁵ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* (McGraw – Hill, 1964);

important exhibitions, as well as radio emissions. Although the term “architectural media” can also refer to any means of architectural expression, in this work we will refer to by it to the printed media which deal with architecture, mostly architectural magazines and books on architecture.

The “image” that we get of course depends on the media we choose. The choice is based on several criteria. As the main focus is on Europe, I worked on European resources. I got the occasion to preform my research in several countries, and I worked with resources in English, German, French, Italian, Norwegian, Danish, and in my native Czech. I did not include sources written in Japanese.

With some persistence, one might note almost everything that was published on Japan in the context of architecture until Wold War II; but the rampant rise of Japan-related media after 1945 makes such a task scarcely possible, and practically meaningless. Repetition of both information and style became very common. This fact, however, makes it easy to see patterns in which information circulated. In the following analysis, we therefore focus on a selection of magazines, articles and books that fulfil one or more of the following criteria: they are symptomatic, typical, influential, or mark a turning point.

Our next question can then be formulated as: What could an architect in the given time know about Japan? This is not the same question as what information was available in the given time. Architects occasionally browsed through scholarly magazines, but the way information spread can be detected from their references, notes, or even, after some reading, from their phrasing. These point to books, architectural magazines, photographs, and exhibitions.

Those who read Japanese, especially scholars, obviously knew more than others, and specialized magazines could also bring much more detailed information. The academic interest sometimes overcame difficulties posed by the external conditions. In 1943, for instance, Dietrich Seckel (1910–2007), a German art historian, published a review of illustrated publications on Japanese architecture, then newly published in Japan, in *Monumenta Nipponica*⁶. Seckel wrote his article in Japan, where he spent the years 1937 to 1947 as a lecturer of German⁷, and the audience that could appreciate it obviously remained limited to the few scholars who could read both German and Japanese, and were able to gain access to the books, books that the reviewer praised as beautifully illustrated, but the format of the review did not allow to reproduce any of them.

—, „Hot and cool media,

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105107935>

⁶ Dietrich Seckel, Neue Bilderwerke zur japanischen Architektur, *Monumenta Nipponica*, 5(1) (Jan. 1942): 208-213.

⁷ Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Seckel

1.3.4. Modernism

The protagonists of our study are people who created the content of the architectural media. These were most commonly architect themselves, as well as critics and historians. A good deal of this work consists of analysing and comparing the individual authors' perspectives of Japan, and if they are sometimes referred to as Modernists, it is to underline their affiliation to the discourse that dominated the Western architecture from the 1930s till the 1960s. (To distinguish common use of modern as “new,” and the derivative to the Modern movement, the spelling of “Modernism” is capitalised.) It would make little sense to try bring yet another new definition of Modernism here, but this research can contribute to show it as more ambivalent than it is often understood: When facing Japan, those who are considered fierce promoters of Modernism as ideology expressed questions and doubts about their own premises. We will see how encountering Japan inflicted change, at least a change in rhetoric.

I have been frequently asked whether I am writing about the reception of old Japanese architecture or the new – or else if I am “doing Metabolism”. The answer is, roughly speaking, that this study starts and ends with the essential question of the fascination of Modernists with the Japanese traditional forms, and key principles as they were seen in the Japanese traditional architecture, or in the Japanese treatment of space. But putting the question like this implies that the traditional Japanese architecture itself was something given and always at hand during the entire time. It was not. The notion of what is traditional Japan significantly changed during the post-WW2 period, as did the connotation of what was contemporary. There was and still is a certain confusion about this, and for several different reasons.

Despite sharing a lot of interest with the Metabolist movement, Arata Isozaki (born 1931) kept a distance from them. He dedicated a lot of provoking thoughts to the problem he call Japan-ness (Nihon-rashisa 日本らしさ).⁸ He claims that “from its inception the problematic of ‘Japan-ness’ has belonged to an external gaze, that gaze directed toward Japan from beyond this insular nation” (...) Only when a gaze from without supervenes has a response to be formulated in an effort of introspection bound to shape aesthetic tastes. Throughout history, the problematic of Japan-ness surfaces wherever an encounter has occurred on the archipelago’s perimeter, that is, at the edge of the lapping ocean.”⁹ Isozaki thus argues Japan, being an archipelago, has no need for introspection on its own, and that search for identity occurred only when the country encountered an external power – from the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907), to the American occupation after World War II. “Thus, from the very beginning, the Japan-ness commonly considered as Japanese conformed, in fact, to an

⁸ Arata Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006)

⁹ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 3.

external gaze.”¹⁰ While these observations say a lot about the entire Japanese culture, his interest – as well as our – is architecture. In his collection of essays, he documents how this happened in architecture, focussing on the historical interpretation and the “second life” of three important historical buildings.

Reading this, we may well say that our study complements to Isozaki’s definition from the other side. If “Japan-ness” was something constructed from within Japan under an external gaze, it is exactly this gaze that is our subject of interest.

Timewise, Isozaki suggests that the main period of Japan-ness started intensely in the 1930s, and ended after 1970, or at least changed unrecognizably in the postmodern era.

He asserts that “the external gaze that had long provoked Japan-ness was at last irrelevant,”¹¹. Without previous knowledge, Isozaki’s idea that the time has come to “view Japanese Japan-ness from a meaningful distance” wonderfully coincides the goal of this work, and comes as a confirmation of the timeframe I have chosen for it.

1.3.5. Timeframe

I have set the main interest of this research between the years 1945 and 1970, with some necessary elasticity. It would be, for instance, quite silly to speak about Charlotte Perriand’s articles about Japan after 1945 and not to mention the main experience that formed her knowledge about the country, her stay in Japan from 1940–1943.

Why 1945 to 1970? The first reason is the current state of research. As I have mentioned, the interest of Modern architects in Japan can be detected as soon as they started defining their own positions, noticeably from the 1920s onwards. Most of these early manifestations have already been a subject of research. We can easily understand the historians’ interest in mapping the origins of a phenomenon, and it does not mean there nothing more to find out, but the result is that practically no one has systematically worked on this later, post-war period, when the relationship of Japan and the West flourished and intensified.

Manfred Speidel wrote that „only in the 1950s, (...), the representatives of modern architecture of the West, especially Europe, have come to appreciate traditional Japanese architecture in its full extent, saw there the principles of their own modern building

¹⁰ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 4.

¹¹ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 93.

prefigured, and started to prefer its aesthetics to all other historical models.“¹² If this is true and no systematic study of this period exists, it is one good reason to undertake it.

The other reason is that 1945 created a split, as there came a substantial change in the scale and scope of the interest in Japan. In the years following 1945, the United States occupied Japan, and the so called economic miracle began, and the image of Japan changed as profoundly as probably never before or after. From a defeated, occupied country at its lowest point, with cities bombed and devastated, to a country that bustles with life, crossed by bullet trains, the second world-leading economy. I later develop on the idea that while in 1945 Japan was a country associated mostly with the past, in 1970, on the contrary, it was regarded as the country of the future (see chapters II.2. and II.6). The years 1945 and 1970 are convenient as they mark exactly a quarter of a century, but to pin down our study precisely in these years also has a symbolic value. 1945 was the year of the atomic bomb and the subsequent capitulation, year zero in many senses. 1970 was the year of the Osaka Expo, the first World exhibition to take place outside Europe and America, perceived as a manifestation of overabundance and technology developing so quickly that it was still lacking a meaningful use. Less drastically than 1945, 1970 also brought a split: The rapid Japanese economic growth started to slow down, and some events put Japan's progressive image in doubt.

I.3.6. What this is work not

An “exhausting study” is way too often a term that describes not only the quality of research, but also its effect on the reader. Yet it behoves to the author to warn the reader and to prevent false expectations.

As it should be clear from the previous paragraphs, this is not a work from the field of Japanese studies, which is not my scholarly field. But it is of course open to be read and criticised from this viewpoint, ideally a Japanese public may find the subject of their own external image interesting.

¹² „Erst in den fünfziger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts, so meine These, haben Vertreter der modernen Architektur des Westens, vor allem Europas, die traditionelle japanische Architektur in vollem Umfange schätzen gelernt, Prinzipien ihres eigenen modernen Bauens dort vorgebildet gesehen und deren Ästhetik über andere historische Vorbilder gestellt.“ (Speidel then only makes an exception Frank Lloyd Wright and Bruno Taut). Manfred Speidel, *Stolze Leere. Die langsame Entdeckung der Architektur Japans durch die Moderne*, In *Japan und der Westen. Die erfüllte Leere*. (Katalog anlässlich der gleichnamigen Ausstellung vom 22. September 2007 bis 13. Januar 2008 im Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2008).

There are other subjects that could be included, or those that this study touches but does not follow in depth. Some very interesting topics are put aside, other are only foreshadowed.

Those interested in the movement of Metabolism may also be a little disappointed here. I do address Metabolism's impact on the image of Japan in architecture. We will see that in the media abroad, the movement unprecedentedly wide publication. As a result, Metabolism also has been a subject of academic study. I have not ventured in the direction of further research, possibly exploring its relationship to European movements such as *Archigram*.

Some chapters and passages would be a good subject for a more thorough study, especially the subjects included in the synthesis.

Limited on the post-war decades and ending in 1970, this work builds up a basis for continuing this kind of research for later years, until our current time. It suggests that the modern encounter with Japan has sown seeds of phenomena that play a decisive role in today's architecture and culture. An example of such a subject can be the Japanese roots of contemporary minimalism in architecture (and even lifestyle), another one a perception of Japanese urban space, as we detected it in the 1960s writing.

1.3.7. Current state of research

Written attempts to grasp the relationship of European Modernism and Japan are surprisingly few. In general, the existing books deal specifically with individuals or countries' relationship to Japan, and studies with a broader scope consist of scattered articles and university dissertations. Let us now look at the main literature on our topic.

From an art historical perspective, a book impossible to avoid is Siegfried Wichmann's *Japonisme*¹³, in which the set up to trace the similarities between Japanese and Western visual art – paintings, drawings, and designed objects. In this bulky volume, Japonisme is not limited historically and continues well into mid-20th century. Wichmann piled up dozens of striking visual parallels, which are truly the most impressive merit of this work. In his text though, these parallels do not get much explanation except from what one can immediately see. Typically, a thing just “betrays” a Japanese “influence”. But what is the motivation, processing, or quality of this so called “influence”? Among painting, graphic design and other arts that clearly constitute Wichmann's main interest, architecture is given one short chapter.

¹³ Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858*, (Thames and Hudson, 1981). (Translation of *Japonismus: Ostasien und Europa, Begegnungen in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, 1980.)

It is structured more historically than the rest, brings several interesting ideas, but leaves the reader with many uncertainties.¹⁴

As for individual studies about architects' relationship to Japan: Bruno Taut's stay in Japan (1933–1936) and his writing from this time have been treated by Manfred Speidel, resulting in articles and a commented edition of his diaries. There are independent monographies dealing with the relationship to Japan of a couple of other architects: A richly illustrated book by Jacques Barsac is dedicated to Charlotte Perriand and Japan,¹⁵ and separate books were also dedicated to Carlo Scarpa¹⁶, Le Corbusier,¹⁷ Ludwig Mies van der Rohe¹⁸; and an article to Alvar Aalto.¹⁹

Another group of studies limit themselves to individual countries. It is probably not surprising that the country where many of the protagonists came from also shows some more progress in research. In Germany, the interest in the relationship between Japan and Modern architecture has brought varied results²⁰. Although the German researchers occasionally noted the international scope of the subject, their main focus on the German-Japanese relationship. These include important contributions concerning mainly the first half of the 20th century; the aforementioned Manfred Speidel, beyond his work on Bruno Taut, published a couple of other texts with a broader scope²¹. Speidel phrased his interest in a way unusually close to mine, asking “how the Modern architects learned to appreciate Japanese traditional architecture, what did they see in it as a model for their own modern building, and why did they put this model over any other historical examples.”

For Danish art, Mirjam Gelfer Jørgensen set out in the footsteps of Wichmann to look for a very broadly conceived “Japonism”. Her book is more coherent than Wichmann's and brings a lot of interesting information, even on architecture.²²

¹⁴ Wichmann's key sources were dated already in the 1970s: he mainly draws from Testurō Yoshida's and Bruno Taut's books (see chapter II.1.) written in the 1930s.

¹⁵ Jacques Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon* (Paris: Norma 2008).

¹⁶ Maurizio Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, Florence, 2007.

¹⁷ Gérard Monnier (ed.), *Le Corbusier et le Japon* (Paris 2007).

¹⁸ Werner Blaser, *West Meets East - Mies van der Rohe* (Basel 1996).

¹⁹ Chen-Yu Chiu, Aino Niskanen, Ke Song, Humanizing Modern Architecture: The Role of *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* in Alvar Aalto's Design for His Own House and Studio in Riihitie. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, vol.16 no.1 (January 2017).

²⁰ Karin Kirsch, *Die Neue Wohnung und das Alte Japan* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1996)

²¹ Manfred Speidel, *Stolze Leere: Die langsame Entdeckung der Architektur Japans durch die Moderne*; Manfred Speidel, *Träume vom Anderen, Japanische Architektur mit europäischen Augen gesehen*.

²² Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Influences from Japan in Danish Art and Design* (Danish Architectural Press, Copenhagen, 2013).

Different from our interest, yet still not totally disconnected, is the research on the more developed relationship between America and Japan. In the mid-20th century, Clay Lancaster addressed the 19th century “Japanese influence in America” in his studies published in the *Art Bulletin*, gathered in his book from 1963²³. Another prominent subject concerning American architecture is Frank Lloyd Wright’s relationship to Japan, the main subject to Kevin Nute’s monograph²⁴.

A few interesting dissertations and theses have also been written in the recent years in various countries and languages²⁵.

Two relatively short articles by Hyon-Sob Kim have been helpful in my research in the beginnings²⁶. More recently, Helena Čapková added more knowledge about individual stories of relationships between Japan and the rest of the world, such as the Japanese students at the Bauhaus, revealing a rich but hitherto little known network of transcultural connections²⁷.

Concerning Japanese architecture as such, the literature is of course extremely rich, and outside of the scope of this overview. One excellent book has been already mentioned above, Arata Isozaki’s collection of essays called *Japan-ness in Architecture*²⁸. Isozaki’s role is ambiguous, as he is both an accomplished scholar and an active player in Japanese architecture of the last 60 years. Although his studies defy classical academic attitudes, his metahistorical studies are still thought-provoking. For instance, his deconstruction of the photographic strategies used by his former boss Kenzō Tange for Katsura has been very illustrative, regardless of the fact that his agenda was also to replace the Modernist interpretation with his own, one of a post-modern ambiguity (see chapter II. 5.). Jonathan Reynolds’ study on Ise and its change

²³ Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: W. H. Rawls, 1963).

²⁴ Kevin Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan* (Routledge: London, 2000).

²⁵ Julia Odenthal, *Andere Räume – Räume der Anderen: Die Rezeptionsgeschichte der japanischen Architektur in der deutschen und japanischen Kunst- und Architekturgeschichte (1850–1950)* (2015); Irène Vogel-Chevroulet, *La création d'une japonité moderne (1870-1940) ou le regard des architectes européens sur le Japon: J. Conder, R. Mallet-Stevens, B. Taut et C. Perriand* (Doctoral thesis, Laboratoire de théorie et recherche, École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, 2009); Corinna Elsesser, *Die Rezeption der japanischen Architektur bei Josef Frank und Bruno Taut* (Doctoral thesis, Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Zürich, 2004); Agnès Salacroup, *Le Japonisme en architecture* (Travail personnel de fin d'études pour l'obtention du diplôme d'architecte à l'École d'Architecture de Normandie – Darnétal, 1993); Helena Čapková, *Žnovoobjevení Nipponu. Obraz Japonska ve středoevropském modernismu 1920-1940* (MA Thesis, 2008); Lise-Mari Valle Olsen, *Stolper, furu og familie. En studie av Per og Molle Cappelen's Enebolig Blichner (1965-67) og Sverre Fehns Enebolig Sparre (1966-70)* (MA Thesis, University of Oslo, 2012).

²⁶ Hyon-Sob Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida (1894–1956) and architectural interchange between East and West, *Arq* 12 01 (2008); Hyon-Sob Kim, Cross-Current Contribution: A Study on East Asian Influence on Modern Architecture in Europe, *Architectural Research*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (December 2009): 9-18.

²⁷ See Helena Čapková, Bauhaus and Tea Ceremony. A Study of Mutual Impact in Design Education between Germany and Japan in the Interwar Period. Carolien Stolte and Yoshiyuki Kikuchi (eds.), *Eurasian Encounters: Museums, Missions, Modernities*. Amsterdam: 2017.

²⁸ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*.

from a nationalist monument to a modernist prototype continues in a similar vein as Isozaki's.²⁹ Yasufumi Nakamori focussed on Katsura again and retraced even more in detail the process of making and manipulating of Yasuhiro Ishimoto's photography, demonstrating its key role in the fabrication of the modern view of the monument.³⁰ To sum up on Katsura, Dana Buntrock wrote a useful commented bibliography of all the books ever published on Katsura, long enough even though only titles specifically focussing on this building are included³¹.

The *Katsura Imperial villa* (2005) collected the texts written on Katsura from Taut, Tange, Gropius and Isozaki, adding relatively short explanatory studies by Francesco del Co and Manfred Speidel. Apart from excellent photography, this may seem like not much new, but simply having all of the texts next to each other in one volume already is handy and thought-provoking.³²

²⁹ Jonathan M. Reynolds, Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition, *The Art Bulletin*, 83 (2), (2001): 316-341.

³⁰ Yasufumi Nakamori, *Katsura: Picturing Modernism in Japanese Architecture. Photographs by Ishimoto Yasuhiro*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2010.

³¹ Dana Buntrock, Katsura Imperial Villa: A Brief Descriptive Bibliography, *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 3 (June 2012).

³² Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa* (Milano: Electa, 2005).

I.4. PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION: AN OUTLINE

I have divided this work into three parts: the first, present part introduces the subject. After formulating the hypotheses and specifying the subject of research (I.3.) on the previous pages, I further expand on the methodology (I.5.). The Prologue (I.6.) then serves as a bridge between the methodical the main body of research, providing some necessary context for the following study.

Part II is the main part. Here we can follow the image of Japan in European architectural discourse bringing together various authors, countries, and media in seven chapters. In search for origin of these ideas, Chapter II.1. briefly sums how Japanese architecture met the world in the time with a special attention to facts and writings which influenced later views on Japan among architects. These could be books which circulated among architects for years to follow, without necessarily dealing too with architecture. Examples can be Lafcadio Hearn's writings from around 1900 and Kakuzō Okakura's *Book of Tea* (1905). I then focussed on two architects-writers from the 1930s who, as it soon comes out, began presenting Japan from a distinctly Modernist perspective: The Japanese architect Tetsurō Yoshida, who published his important book, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* in Germany in 1935, and Bruno Taut, a German architect who spent three years in a Japanese exile (1933–1936). In the short chapter II.2., the period between 1945 and 1970 is introduced. The next one, “Modernists meet Japan”, is dedicated to Charlotte Perriand and to Walter Gropius, two Modernists of the first generation. Each one of them encountered Japan differently, yet for both it was a decisive experience. Chapter II.4. presents the boom of Japanese-related publications that followed in the second half of the 1950s: I go through articles and books from the Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Czechoslovakia. Little by little identifying the main themes connected to Japan, Heinrich Engel's monumental book *Japanese house* (1964) is given a special attention. The fifth chapter of the second part, “Japan enters the debate,” stands in the middle as an intermezzo: I examine here the the increasingly proactive role of the Japanese architects in interpreting their own tradition for the Western public. I first note the English mutation of *Shinkenchiku/Japan architect*, and then we will look into books on Japanese tradition with which the Japanese architect Kenzō Tange was involved: *Katsura – Tradition and Creation in Japanese architecture*³³, and *Ise – Prototype of Japanese architecture*³⁴. Chapter II.6. returns to Europe continuing to follow magazines such as *Architectural Design* or. The discourse during the 1960s was more diverse, with newly emerging approaches towards Japan. Japanese contemporary architecture astounded the world in the projects of Tange, the Metabolism, which culminated in the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, and in the Osaka Expo

³³ Tange, Kenzō; Gropius, Walter: *Katsura. Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*. Yale University Press, 1960.

³⁴ Tange, Kenzō; Kawazoe, Noboru: *Ise. Prototype of Japanese architecture*. M.I.T. Press, 1965.

in 1970. But Japan was also increasingly criticised, and its actual development in the cities gave even fear to many. We will see that some authors tried to overcome by searching deeper in the Japanese culture that would connect the old and the new. Then there is Bernard Rudofsky, largely working outside these trends, who also brought insights on Japan that were to be. In Chapter II.7., I again focuss on two other Modernists: Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. There are few direct contacts between them and Japan, so the actual subject matter is interpretation.

Part III basically builds on the same body of research, but proceeds differently. It points out the ideas which had a prominent place in the discourse of architects about Japan. Chapter III.1. presents an overview, and a synthesis. Simple words often stood for rich cluster of meanings. These key words that can be observed are given a detailed attention : ‘Material, ‘construction’, ‘standardization’, ‘nature’, are presented not just in a descriptive sense, but as links between the architectural debates of their time and the discovering of Japan. ‘Space,’ the most complex from these key words, is subject of a separate study, which constitutes the final chapter (III.2.)

I. 5. METHODOLOGY

This part explains the way this work is written, its inner logic as well as the ideas and methodologies that helped to shape it. It also positions it in a frame given by both existing theories and problems. Last but not least, some conceptual issues connected to this kind of study are discussed: nation, reception, influence, Orientalism, and translation.

I.5.1. Media analysis

As already mentioned, architectural media are our main source, and what we can call architectural discourse is where we operate. A good deal about the method has already been told by defining these subjects. I offer in this thesis a close reading of the selected media, gradually analyse and critically assess them in a comparative way (Part II.). Subsequently, I go deeper into some key terms that dominated this discourse, presenting them in the context of the Western architectural thinking.

The main idea here is thus that the printed media contributed and shaped a specific architectural discourse. Discourse is of course a popular word, but to avoid vagueness one should approach it in a way that pay a special attention to language. Adrian Forty's *Words and Buildings* are instructive in this respect³⁵. Especially Part II of his book, the historical and critical dictionary, was a direct inspiration for my analysis of key terms. An classic in studying the role of media as means employed by modern architects is Beatriz Colomina's study on Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*³⁶. Here, the use of photography is given due attention, which is also important for us here.

I.5.2. Intercultural history, Trans-national history

My main focus has been the image of Japan in Europe. Given by the limited chance to actually study American architecture directly on the spot, the focus on Europe is a deliberate limitation. To ignore the United States altogether is, however, impossible. For political and historical reasons, the US played a role of filter that further shaped the worldwide reception of Japan, especially after 1945. Thence the limited presence of American authors in this text

³⁵ Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (Thames and Hudson, 2000).

³⁶ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity Architecture and Mass Media* (MIT Press, 1996).

– seeing a “Japonism” in Europe may actually turn out to be a reaction to Frank Lloyd Wright’s work, for instance; the two possibilities are not necessarily being exclusive.

A concept of a national art history would be hard to maintain in this research: with printed media as the main source, one soon finds out how their distribution and impact crossed the borders. The world of publications became naturally international; European researchers published in America, and American books were commonly distributed in Europe – and Japan. There were apparently centres and peripheries, for instance British architectural journalism had a broad impact beyond the United Kingdom after 1945, also thanks to the expansion of English as an international language. The same reason helped the rise of American publications, which were widely read also over the ocean and as we will see, served often as second-hand media providing knowledge to the Japanese culture. Since they entered in Europe, they also enter our study on Europe to a certain extent. This is also the case for the Japanese media published in English, aiming clearly at the western reader. Being aware of this broader context, I nevertheless preferred presenting European resources even from smaller countries like Norway or Czechoslovakia, where the reception of Japan in architecture has been barely studied at all.

After 1945 the world may have been on its way towards globalization, but the diffusion of media was not always easy, and it was not always motivated by pure freedom of thought or hunger for knowledge: Bruno Taut’s writings from the 1930s, for instance, could not be read in his native tongue until after his death because of the political censorship in Germany, but it appeared in French and English translations. Entire countries falling under the Soviet rule after the World War II were cut off from the free exchange of information at least for some time, relying on snippets of news smuggled by the more fortunate ones who managed to get abroad, still more rarely to Japan itself. This caused a general delay in developing debates about Japan, as we will see in the case of Czechoslovakia.

Of all Europe, the authors from the German speaking language area turned out to be distinctively productive. After 1933, many intellectuals had to leave Germany and later the occupied Europe, fleeing from the Nazi regime because of their origin, conviction, or both. This was the case of the Bauhaus teacher Walter Gropius (II.3.) Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (II.7.), László Moholy-Nagy (III.2.), theorists and historians Nikolaus Pevsner and Sigfried Giedion, as well as Bruno Taut (II.1.), Ernst Gutkind (II.4.), and Bernard Rudofsky (II.6.). Except from Taut, these architects settled in English speaking countries and profoundly shaped both the practice and theory of their new home countries. With this wave of influential émigrés, it becomes impossible to write about nationality without using a hyphen or several. Could the architects who chose or were forced to work in different countries and languages also been more open to a yet more different culture of Japan?

While studying the image of Japan in the periodicals, one can detect certain differences in reception of Japan in the individual European countries. These differences were also

discussed in the period we study. Bernard Rudofsky – an Austrian who settled in the United States – wrote in one of his texts following his Japanese journey: “Of course, it has been said over and over again that it is impossible to judge Japan and Japanese art by Western standards; that the two races are unable to think in the same terms. But then, does anybody flatter himself to be able to think of Greek art in terms of the ancient Greeks? Or, for that matter, do Europeans and Americans ever see eye to eye on art, if only on the art of living?”

Americans are perhaps least equipped to project themselves into other people’s thoughts. As the anthropologist Ruth Benedict says in her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, “the study of comparative cultures cannot flourish when men are so defensive about their own way of life that it appears to them to be by definition the sole solution in the world.” It is, one feels, much easier for a European to enjoy Japan than it is for an American.”³⁷

Rudofsky’s remark about race may put us off at first, but in this place he simply reflects on the vocabulary of his time. Of course, the ideas always changed in time and according to the actual need of those who uttered them. In 1943 Ernst Neufert called the Japanese, perhaps for their apparent sense of order, “Prussians of the East” in his *Bauordnungslehre*³⁸; a few years later, on the contrary, Antonin Raymond told Kenzō Tange in an interview that “there is something German, opposite to the Japanese philosophy, in the worship of durability and heaviness.” (see chapter II.5.) Nowadays it makes little sense to develop this kind of contemplations, yet it is still useful to keep in mind which national stereotypes were still at work in the period we study. We should also ask how these ideas have emerged: did they reflect values shared by the entire society and based in a local building tradition, or were they just a result of the current taste of the editors? I can suggest one potentially productive attitude for approaching such local specificities, staying away from the charged and misleading concepts of national character or inborn predispositions. Seeing that architecture is always first a human reaction to natural conditions and uses available materials, this attitude might build on geographical conditions. It may become an argument for instance when discussing the often noted sensitivity of Scandinavian architects towards Japan³⁹. Natural conditions of Northern Europe and Japan are indeed comparable in certain aspects: a look at a geo-botanical map reveals that the large green belt of taiga (boreal coniferous forest) actually connects Scandinavia with the north of Japan, meeting the ocean in a form of a very articulate coast on both sides. Densely wooded areas meet oceanic climate in a climate a lot of precipitation (with an abundance of snow in winter in some areas) created conditions to which the traditional architecture reacted. It would take more to turn these facts in a tool of study, but as we will see in this dissertation, architecture’s relationship to

³⁷ Andrea Bocco Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky: A Humane Designer* (Wien/NewYork: Springer, 2003), 219.

³⁸ Ernst Neufert, *Bauordnungslehre* (Berlin, 1943)

³⁹ This subject is brought to the fore by the documentary film *Kochuu. Japanese Architecture: Influence and Origin*. dir. Jesper Wachtmeister, Sweden, 2003.

nature was indeed one of the main themes associated with Japanese architecture (see III.1.6., section Nature).

I.5.3. Reception history

Scholars have dealt with subjects similar to ours either studying the development in both Japan and the West and their mutual interpenetration, or in terms of reception of Japan in the West (or vice versa). The first authors frequently introduce new terms to describe these relationships, such as “cross-current contribution”⁴⁰ and “transnational”⁴¹. The others focus on one side of the relationship, most often a single author or country. They often term their research “reception history,” but even some of these end up crossing the line and writing about both Japan and the West. For instance, Julia Odenthal’s dissertation written with a similar interest as mine, but from a German viewpoint, has a complicated subtitle: *Die Rezeptionsgeschichte der japanischen Architektur in der deutschen und japanischen Kunst- und Architekturgeschichte (1850–1950)* (reception of Japanese art in German and Japanese art history and architectural history, 1850–1950), and deals at length with Japan in the German debate, but also about Itō Chūta’s 20th century study of Japanese history. It is easy to understand why this happens: The Japanese context is by far not clear to the Western reader and in order to keep some sense of comprehension of their writing, it needs to be explained. I also had to compromise the original rule not to write about Japan itself to a certain extent. This is the case mainly in the chapter (II.5.) where I describe how the Japanese architects themselves entered the debate in the European architectural media. The simple rule of language, however, proves useful here: the texts we deal with are those that appeared in Western languages (mostly English in this case), and were on pages in Western architectural magazines. After all, the concept of “reception history”/ “Rezeptionsgeschichte”, has some proponents and offers theoretical background,⁴² and it is a framework in which this dissertation can be read.

Speaking about reception refers, moreover, to the area of communication studies. The hypothesis about the “creative misunderstanding” might be able to draw from the theory about “aberrant decoding”, originally coined by Umberto Eco⁴³. Its application on architecture would yet have to be worked out, and this is no more than a conjecture. This dissertation, however, may provide good material for further theorizing in this direction.

⁴⁰ Hyon-Sob Kim, Cross-Current Contribution.

⁴¹ Helena Čapková, Transnational networkers – Iwao and Michiko Yamawaki and the formation of Japanese Modernist design, *Journal of Design History*. 27, 4 (2014): 370-385;

⁴² The historian Harold Marcuse says that "Reception history is the history of the meanings that have been imputed to historical events. This approach traces the different ways in which participants, observers, and historians and other retrospective interpreters have attempted to make sense of events, both as they unfolded, and over time since then, to make those events meaningful for the present in which they lived and live." <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/receptionhist.htm>, retrieved 9. 1. 2018.

⁴³ Umberto Eco, Towards a Semiotic Inquiry Into the Television Message (trans. Paola Splendore), *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. University of Birmingham, 3 (1972), 103–121.

1.5.4. The problem of influence

If I have avoided the word “influence” so far, or have put it in quotation marks, it was on purpose. *Influence* is a tempting word, and one frequently used in art history, especially when it comes to a relationship between two cultural phenomena.

Since its implications are far-reaching, although seldom properly considered, it is good to pause for a while and think what *influence* actually means. Of Latin origin, influence (preposition *in-* + the verb *fluō, fluere, fluxi, fluxum*, to flow) evokes the world of liquids, especially water. Streams or rivers create flow together in a *confluence*, the smaller stream thus always *influences* the larger one. This works as a powerful metaphor. A bit way too powerful in fact.

To use it very carefully is not merely intellectual acrobatics. *Influence* continues to dominate art history and criticism, despite the fact that Michael Baxandall has already made clear in his *Patterns of Intention* in 1985 that this is a very problematic notion. His comment describes the “curse” of *influence* with such a precision that it is worth quoting at length:

“‘Influence’ is a curse of art criticism primarily because of its wrong-headed grammatical prejudice about who is the agent and who the patient: it seems to reverse the active/passive relation which the historical actor experiences and the inferential beholder will wish to take into account. If one says that X influenced Y it does seem that one is saying that X did something to Y rather than Y did something to X. But in the consideration of good pictures and painters the second is always the more lively reality. If we think of Y rather than X as the agent, the vocabulary is much richer and more attractively diversified: draw on, resort to, avail oneself of, appropriate from, have recourse to, adapt, misunderstand, refer to, pick up, take on, engage with, react to, quote... copy, address, paraphrase, absorb, make a variation on, revive, continue, remodel, ape, emulate, travesty, parody.... Most of these relations cannot be stated the other way around – in terms of X acting on Y rather than Y acting on X. “44

Building on empirical tradition, Baxandall reverts the perspective, turning the attention to the active role of the creator. The plethora of alternative verbs he offers however does not necessarily exclude thinking about synchronicity, or even unconscious reception of ideas (“react to”, “absorb”).

This is very useful in our case. Despite taking his example from painting, Baxandall identifies exactly the problem that we also face. What he calls the ‘plague’ of influence indeed hit the area of the Japan-Europe relationship. There is something very natural about causal thinking

⁴⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention* (London, 1985), 58-59.

– in art history as well as actually most sciences, the first instinct is to look for a common cause where one sees similar qualities. Yet causal explanations soon reach their limits, as other there are simply similar phenomena, it is not a matter of banning “influence” from use, but of being fully aware of its meaning. As we will see, the need to think in terms of a relationship other than influence kept busy already the authors in the 1945–1970 period, and still is a challenge an occasion to a methodological rethinking.

The French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque, without taking the idea too far, revisits the motives of meeting of the Japanese and occidental culture in his book *Du geste à la cité*. Like other researchers, he states that while Japonism / Japonisme faded around 1900, “something has been born from Japonism which cannot be understood in terms of influence, but rather of encounter and emergence; something that, since then, far exceeds the temporal and spatial framework of this influence. In fact, something constitutive has happened in our ways of seeing, understanding and even developing the world, which is still valid today.”⁴⁵

Berque’s broadly based thinking and writing, has my understanding of Japan far beyond this quote, since he was my thesis tutor during the one year I have studied at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS) in Paris.

1.5.5. Orientalism

A term that unmistakably springs up when dealing with the reception of any Asian culture is *Orientalism*. Most often, it is associated with the eponymous book by Edward Said, which in turn is one of the foundation stones of the entire influential field of postcolonial studies. The application of the concept of Orientalism on architecture has also been quite limited, and Said himself claims that he did not work out his theories for Japan, or East Asia in general

The concept of Orientalism brought some observations relevant for us. We will see how Western architects approached Japan with received notions a mind-set that corresponds to figures of speech associated with the Orient close to what Said and others described – “its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ « (...) quelque chose est né du japonisme que l’on ne peut comprendre en termes d’influence, mais plutôt de rencontre et d’émergence ; et qui, dès lors, dépasse largement le cadre temporel et spatial de cette influence. Là en effet, s’est passé quelque chose de constitutif dans nos manières de voir, de comprendre et même d’aménager le monde, qui vaut aujourd’hui encore. » Augustin Berque, *Du geste à la cité* (Paris, 1993), 224-225.

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 72.

One important characteristic of the Orientalist attitude is seeing the other culture as static. We will see how the preference among many architects, from Bruno Taut to Günther Nitschke, was clearly on the side of the “old Japan”. This preference for the past that can arguably be considered as a fixed image surfaced in their refusal of the change that Japan was undergoing, and threatened to efface the traditional habits and buildings. Even those who were vocal supporters of progress and industrialization in their homeland, such as Charlotte Perriand and Walter Gropius, experienced a sense of nostalgia after seeing the abrupt changes under way in Japan. This may indeed be diagnosed as a reaction to the fact that “the Other”, or more exactly its image, is fading away, and Japan began to look more and more like the West. Japanese Critics of Bruno Taut in confronted him with the argument that he acts as a foreign agent, and he wishes to impede Japanese progress through his praise of the Japanese tradition. Perriand and Gropius were both branded as conservatives in Japan.

Another possible case of Orientalism we can easily detect is the patronizing attitude of some Western authors towards the Japanese. Charlotte Perriand, Bruno Taut, and even younger authors, despite their will to understand Japan could quickly become arbiters of what is genuinely Japanese and what is not⁴⁷. This attitude also morphed into its opposite when Westerners admired Japan. In this perspective, Japan appeared as a more developed culture, or a culture that kept an old wisdom which we Western had lost, and it should come and learn from it. This included architecture, as we will see. Such a stance can be read as continuing a tradition of thought of civilization criticism dating back to Rousseau’s “noble savage”, as well as overcoming of the colonialist attitude.

Nonetheless, Charlotte Perriand was in Japan in the role of a Japanese government-paid design advisor, and to remain just an attentive observer was hardly possible. She describes how she was often literally asked by the Japanese students and colleagues: “What should we do?” Many Japanese authors argue that external impulses were vital for the culture’s development, and the demand for the new and foreign was high. This will be seen on many occasions throughout our work: Japan espoused modern architecture and developed it so fast that it soon astonished the West.

Something called reverse Orientalism has also been described in Japan, in which the “Orientals” accept some of the image for their communication with the Westerners, and present themselves in ways that meet Western expectations. Japonism, and japonaiserie, and the modernist “Japan-ness” as Arata Isozaki interprets it can be regarded as specifically Japanese cases of this self-inflicted Orientalism.

The attitudes branded as Orientalist are however more ambiguous and structured than it may seem. If the Western affection for old Japan may be read as a classic case of colonialists

⁴⁷ See for instance Chapter II.2, Engel, *The Japanese House*, 272, when Engel speaks about garden stone lamps.

idealizing the Other, it is also true that the interest in old Japan was a reaction to mass destruction of its buildings due to earthquakes and the war, facing an actual loss of cultural heritage. Practically no nostalgia for the built matter on the side of Japanese officials and a corrupt political system allowed a profound change of the urban landscape in a very short time – and this change was for not always for the well-being of Japanese people. In the West, preservation movements have sprung out from civic engagement and individualism and a specific view of history, which served as a critical tool for development. These attitudes, too, are distinctly Western and were hardly found in Japan. The Westerners did import a lot of the means of destruction, but the worldwide interest in the Japanese culture which they helped to raise also contributed to the preservation of the Japanese monuments.

There are also facts of the Japanese situation that belie the post-colonialist concepts⁴⁸. Technically speaking, Japan never was a colony, although it can be argued that the American occupation in 1945–53 was a de facto colonisation. Moreover, there are justified claims to identify the post-colonial attitudes in Japan itself, since the Japanese adopted colonialism and exercised a strong sense of cultural superiority over other Asian peoples: Koreans, Chinese, and the citizens of Southeast Asia, whose territories Japan occupied from the 1890s to 1945, most intensely in the v1930s and 1940s. After 1945, Japan resembled Europe and the United States more than other Asian countries in its social, economic and social development. None of these facts alone denies that colonialist approach could be at work in the heads of Europeans.

It is also important to note that there was a vivid critical debate about Japan that entailed elements of post-colonial critique already in the very period we are interested in, that is before the rise of academic post-colonial studies. Back then there were voices that criticised or denied the false nostalgia and patronizing attitude of the Westerners. The increased options to travel, study, and explore did bring a palpable change in thinking. Those who studied Japanese architecture in depth were more and more aware that the physical form of architecture grows out from the social and cultural patterns, and it is then hardly possible to keep it in the same form in a rapidly changing society. As we will demonstrate, the discourse between 1945–1970 was becoming increasingly multi-faceted and self-reflexive. One of my main arguments is that between 1945–1970 the image of Japan profoundly changed towards a plurality that is impossible encapsulate under one idea. Heinrich Engel's book *The Japanese House*, published in 1964, patiently dismantled most usual ideas about architecture that were common in the discourse of the period.

In short, the critique of Orientalism and the post-colonial studies were not a theory that would easily fit this subject. I preferred a more inductive approach while staying open to the

⁴⁸ Daisuke Nishihara, Said, Orientalism, and Japan, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 25, 241–253.

important revelations and the much needed change of perspective that these fields had brought.

I.5.6. Translation

A concept which seems more helpful here is translation in architecture, as Esra Akcan develops it in her studies on Turkey, and on Bruno Taut (1880–1938)⁴⁹. It is even more relevant here since Taut directly concerns this research (see chapter II.1.) as an early protagonist of the Modern reception of Japan. One of the goals Akcan expresses is very close to this work: to “exemplify a cultural practice that complicates the received notions about modernism's relation with ‘non-Western’ countries.” Although our subject of interest here is different from Akcan’s, the concept of translation offers a more open framework and a more inclusive approach that enables to assess architecture previously considered as hybrid. In the way Akcan puts it, it even leaves little space for criticising such result since “Mistranslation in architecture is an oxymoron.”⁵⁰

Where this dissertation can definitely join Akcan’s concept of translation is rethinking the content of Modernism: Presenting it as a rich and ambiguous stream of thought and creation rather than simply condemning it (or admiring) it for filling the world with ‘monotonous blocks, devoid of local specificity’ in the understanding of the so called International style.

The alternative that the concept of translation may offer is in “coming to terms with the complexities of cross-cultural relations” in a certain period: “The increased geographic mobility, collaboration, and confrontation between professionals from different countries throughout the twentieth century have continuously produced new hybrids and dialectical relations. In this sense, there is no pure regional or international style of expression, no pure architecture produced at a location completely closed to other locations. The definition of the local is always in flux.”⁵¹

Akcan defines translation as “the study of a field that explores and evaluates different experiences of the foreign, of the ‘other,’ of what had yet remained outside, in a given context, at a given moment. It is through translation that a country opens itself to the foreign, modifies and enriches itself while negotiating its domestic norms with those of the other. However,

⁴⁹ Esra Akcan, Toward a Cosmopolitan Ethics in Architecture: Bruno Taut's Translations out of Germany, *New German Critique* 99, (Fall, 2006): 7- 39; Esra Akcan, *Architecture in translation* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Akcan, *Architecture in translation*, 8.

⁵¹ Akcan, Towards a Cosmopolitan Ethics, 9.

translation is not removed from the geographic distribution of power. It can hardly be considered a neutral exchange between equals or a "bridge" between cultures that are smoothly translatable. Translation must thus be treated as a contested zone where geographic differences are discovered, reconciled, or opposed and where conflicts between westernization and nationalization are negotiated or intensified."⁵²

Translation may give an overarching to what we do, but the notion itself does not include any instant theoretical tool. Theories of translation have been developed in the field of literary studies, and to transfer them to the visual, and even to architectural realm requires a good deal of theoretical work. In literature, there is always a translator, and expert whose only task is to provide the translation. In visual art and architecture, a historian or a theorist can play the role of an interpreter, but if a painting or building is an equivalent of a translated book, each creator makes his own translation in the end. Akcan speaks about the sphere of the visual in addition to the linguistic, while I would add that in architecture there are more aspects at work. Akcan's argument is nevertheless convincing in the particular context. In our case, our interest in of language it may seem closer to the original meaning of translation, yet the opposite is true: there is one more step included. What we are dealing with is not a 'translation' from from language to language or from image to image, but from Japanese visual and spatial reality into a culturally different language.

⁵² Akcan, *Towards a Cosmopolitan Ethics*, 9.

I.7. PROLOGUE: ISSUES OF APPROACHING JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE

“The city I am talking about [Tokyo] offers this precious paradox: it does possess a center, but this center is empty. The entire city turns around a site both forbidden and indifferent, a residence concealed beneath foliage, protected by moats, inhabited by an emperor who is never seen, which is to say, literally, by no one knows who. Daily, in their rapid, energetic, bullet-like trajectories, the taxis avoid this circle, whose low crest, the visible form of invisibility, hides the sacred ‘nothing’. One of the two most powerful cities of modernity is thereby built around an opaque ring of walls, streams, roofs, and trees whose center is no more than an evaporated notion, subsisting here, not in order to irradiate power, but to give the entire urban movement the support of its central emptiness, forcing the traffic to make a perpetual detour. In this manner, we are told, the system of the imaginary is spread circularly, by detours and length of an empty subject.”

– Roland Barthes, 1970⁵³

I.7.1. Introduction

Sometimes it may seem that Japan is there just to show the Westerners how different things can get, for good or bad. As I have noticed during my work on this topic, even in the academia Japan keeps a certain charm, but also a flair apparent inaccessibility. The astonishment about the differences can, however, be turned into an eye-opener, and can make the arbitrariness of our own categories more visible. The following section is meant to bridge certain gaps in understanding for those used to reading about art and architecture in general, but less about Japanese traditional culture, whereas readers with a long-term scholarly interest in Japan would probably not miss much by skipping it.

Our study is of course selective in its focus on architecture. Yet architecture can hardly be understood outside its cultural anchoring. This is something that the architects from the modernist generation usually perceived and tried to overcome to some extent. Understanding Japan presents difficulties on many levels. Chaos and disorientation, too, became a subject of discussion within the architecture and urban realm as we will see, but rarely if ever did our authors confide with the actual difficulties they had to overcome. Bernard Rudofsky was an exception, noting that sometimes “Japan shuts like an oyster” for him (see chapter II.6.) Sometimes the Westerners fell victims to misunderstandings, sometimes they misread the signals on purpose, but often they were also able to change

⁵³ Roland Barthes: *The Empire of Signs*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982 (1970), pp. 30–32.

preconceptions. Saying this half a century later, we silently assume that our current understanding is better now. That may or may not be the case. The relatively easy access to the resources, people, and travel offers a good chance to overcome limits which our predecessors had to face, but gives no guarantee that they are actually used. Japan, too, has changed profoundly since then, and visitors in the 1950s, 1960s and today saw in many ways a different country.

Before we delve into the mid-20th century discourse on Japan, it is useful to briefly comment on some facts about Japan which often gave and still seem to give rise to misconceptions. “Japanese traditional architecture” are three seemingly clear words, but they contain enough ambiguity to start from them.

1.7.2. What Architecture?

The word *architecture* deserves attention. Nowadays, even if the discipline of architecture shows a certain interest in defining its own limits on the academic level, the content of the architects’ job is essentially clear, defined by the globalized practice – a scene where some of the contemporary Japanese architects have become important actors – and fostered by the curricula of architecture schools based mainly on engineering. Who would think, seeing of the stardom of some Japanese architects, that it is not all that natural to start speaking about “architecture” in reference to Japan? In Japan, even the notion of architect is quite recent. There was historically no idea of an architect as an artist; strictly speaking, no idea of architect at all. The Japanese house was made by carpenters in the first place, and then plasterers, stone masons, sawyers, thatchers, and other craftsmen.

Nevertheless, there is no shortage of sources both in Japanese and in Western languages on “Japanese traditional architecture”, its history, features, and styles⁵⁴. The books usually refer to a group of buildings which comprises dwellings, temples and shrines, pagodas, palaces, castles, bridges, and even gardens. Grouping all these building of different purpose, shape and size together, however, includes a good deal of Western perspective, albeit to a great extent accepted and applied by the Japanese themselves. There obviously is a Japanese word for architecture – *kenchiku* 建築. It is, however, of modern use and refers more directly to building (a fact that Mies van der Rohe would have appreciated, had he known Japanese, see chapter II.7.).

Western art history has been told as a series of successive historical “styles”, most often

⁵⁴ Let us name at least Mira Locher, *Japanese Architecture: An Exploration of Elements & Forms*, Tuttle, 2010; David, and Michiko Young. *Introduction to Japanese Architecture*, Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2004; Kazuo Nishi – Kazuo Hozumi. *What is Japanese Architecture* 1983. Last but not least, the book that is subject of our study, Heinrich Engel’s *Japanese House* remains unsurpassed in its documentary value.

opposing the previous one: the rational, balanced renaissance “defeating” the pious, vertically extending Gothic, classicism coming after the “excessive” baroque. Revivals or reactions were understood as a sort of confirmation of this reading of history. More recently, this model has been called into question and other models have been proposed, seeing the development more as overlapping continuities (as in the perspective of historians of the *longue durée*), the diachronic perspective still dominates a lot of our Western thinking, as can be seen from most school curricula on art history. On the contrary, Japan hardly knew this idea of successive denial of styles in the past; new styles and innovations did not necessarily mean denying the old ones. Yet it does definitely have distinct styles, although these may blend when seen by a foreigner’s eye: The new styles could break through but then also quickly be abandoned, only to be picked up centuries later. Plurality of styles was a common practice (a fact that has not escaped the post-modernists).

Despite rapid destruction of Western visitors in in the post-war decades could still see a lot from the Japanese tradition in building. One could easily recognize the different building types: palaces, shrines and temples, *machiya* 町家 – the deep-stretching merchant’s houses running in rows in city streets and running , and the more diverse types of *minka* 民家, rural houses in the countryside⁵⁵. With some study they could distinguish between old buildings in different styles: *shinden-zukuri* 寝殿造, based on the style of medieval aristocracy with symmetrical buildings connected by roofed corridors of open pavilions; *shoin-zukuri* 書院造, with closely stacked rooms separated by *shōji* 障子 and *fusuma* 襖(sliding panels and screens); *sukiya-zukuri* 数寄屋造, the more modest-looking and relaxed style, originally of the teahouses. Despite their difference, however, all these the Japanese traditional houses had many features in common, strengthened by the standardization and borrowings in the Edo period. As a result, practically all dwelling regardless of location, size and purpose had a wooden frame, an elevated construction, and used paper in the wall panels and rice-straw *tatami* 畳 mats covered the floor.

1.7.3. What is Japanese?

What is actually Japanese? A trivial question, as it may seem at first, has kept generations of intellectuals busy, both Japanese and foreign. From the foreign perspective, Japan has often been described as a land of paradoxes, an idea that we will encounter again and again. Ruth Benedict, for one, opens her *Chrysanthemum and a Sword* (1946) by recalling a series of “but also’s” that characterise the Japanese people: „both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and

⁵⁵ Properly speaking, *minka* is a general term for vernacular dwellings of the ancient, medieval, or premodern periods, including the *machiya*. In the common use, however, the term is used only for rural dwellings.

resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways“. They are said to be “rigid in their behavior”, but also „they adapt themselves readily to extreme innovations“⁵⁶.

As the first apparent paradox we can take the polarity between the indigenous and the imported: The Japanese ability of learning and absorbing elements from other cultures on the one hand, and on the other the tendency to close itself off, and subsequently to transform the elements to its own image, sometimes beyond recognition. A good illustration of this is the writing system. Japanese is linguistically unrelated to any other language (some common traits with Korean have been detected, but they are far from enabling any comprehension). It is today written down partly in Chinese characters (these have several possible readings in Japanese), partly by two syllabic Japanese alphabets (the *kanas* once created in Japan by simplifying traits of the Chinese characters), and Western (i.e. Arabic) numerals are used. One line of a common Japanese newspaper text can thus easily use all these alphabets at once, as well as the Latin alphabet, used for instance in advertising. What looks like something made all too complicated almost on purpose, is for anyone who knows Japanese, of course, a normal recording of the language, and any heterogeneity isn't usually perceived⁵⁷. An analogous situation can be seen in architecture and urbanism: what is perceived as a weird mix of the hyper-modern city with a highly aestheticized nature worship, is simply a continuous, everyday environment for most Japanese. In 2001 the exhibition *Japan: towards urbanscape* tried to focus on this common urban fabric rather than on the extremes⁵⁸.

When the East Asian wares started flowing from the “Far East”, it was not always an easy task to tell the Chinese objects from Japanese for the Westerners. Historically, apart from the oldest, prehistorical cultures, it was indeed China which was originally the main source of cultural imports for the Japanese, including architecture. Japan periodically absorbed new impulses from China, notably in its formative period (between 7th and 9th Century). From their several missions to China, the Japanese brought not just script, but also religion, art, and tea. These imports were usually not forgotten even centuries later, sometimes preserving elements which had already died out in China. For instance, the habit of drinking tea crushed into powder (*maccha*) was usual in Song China (10th – 13th century), but subsequently died out; however, it is still drunk this way in Japan. Some painters meticulously copied Chinese models, other took just the basic elements and went their own way. Typically, one attitude did not exclude the other and both styles could prosper side by side.

⁵⁶ Ruth Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Boston 1946, 2.

⁵⁷ Of course, less common characters may pose problems to some native users, as do less usual words in Western language.

⁵⁸ Moriko Kira (ed.) *Japan: Towards Total-scape*, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2001.

A case in point is the urbanism of today's Kyoto (Kyōtō), the newly founded capital of the Heian Dynasty, established in 794 as Heiankyō, whose grid-like plan defines even the contemporary city. This rectangular plan was based on the one of Chang'an (today's Xi'an), then the capital of Tang China, which was also a model for its predecessor capital, Heijōkyō (today's Nara). An optimal location for the city has been found according to geomantic principles (popularly known today under the Chinese name *feng-shui*): a flat location surrounded by mountain from the North, East, and West, open to the South, with a river flowing in this direction. In its foundation it has a strictly geometric plan, with streets running in a rectangular grid, a larger plot given to the imperial palace. The first change was the scale of the plan – Heiankyō, as large as it was (about 4.5 x 5.3 km), was still only about one quarter of the size of the Chinese model. Within the plots, small aberrations soon started to inscribe a different logic into the large frame, especially where the terrain got in the way, and the subdivision of plots created small streets. Outside the perimeter of the planned city grid, important temples started growing at the foot of the steeply raising hills blending with their greenery. That means the important centres of power (including today's tourist highlights like The Golden and Silver Pavilions, and Kiyomizu-dēra temple) were now located outside the meticulously planned grid, outweighing the balance outwards, on its perimeter.

Another paradox that bewilders a Western observer is the close proximity of old and new in archaic and futuristic the everyday Japanese life. On a city street, even one crammed with modern buildings, one sooner rather than later meets a shrine or temple, often just a tiny cupboard-like sanctuary squeezed into a nook. Its wood can be equally new as the steel beams towering over it, but formally, it clearly represents tradition. The old Japanese religion is a worship of *kami*, who are spirits of place, residing in stones, trees, but can also be a distant mountain or waterfall. This complex of animist cults is called *shintō* (with an “-ism” in Western languages it appears more like a system). This religion is not merely a matter of antiquities, but a very living everyday practice. Shrines and temples are still commonly used, the favour of *kami* being asked for success in business and everyday matters, and, commonly, people get married there. Before construction of a building begins, a ground-breaking ceremony (*jichinsai* 地鎮祭) is performed to reconcile the local *kami*. Through China and Korea, Buddhist teachings came to Japan in several waves and took the form of many schools of thought and sects. Buddhism gradually took care of not just spiritual and philosophical issues, but also aesthetic and bureaucratic ones. The two religions usually peacefully coexisted with each other and often merged. Shinto shrines then often share precincts with Buddhist temples, and even this separation of the individual temples and shrines is recent, ordered in 1868 together with the restoration of the imperial power in order to diminish the power of Buddhist monks⁵⁹. Equally, Shintoism and Buddhism share space in the Japanese

⁵⁹ (Nowadays the of the Shinto cult buildings are consistently denoted as ‘shrines’, while ‘temple’ is reserved for the Buddhist ones.)

household – commonly in a modern apartment, too –, where the family maintains both the Shinto shelf and a Buddhist family altar. Swiss architectural anthropologist Nold Egenter argues that “... in order to understand the Japanese house one has to take account of its immanent topological system of highest values, or of that which in our regions is called religion,” and that “dwelling in Japan does not just mean ‘architecture’. Firstly, it shows a human dimension of spiritually impregnated behaviour.”⁶⁰

Despite these contrasts, most people nowadays do have quite a clear idea of a Japan-ness, even without being able to name a single building, or painting. The reason why Japan appears this very compact lies in its history preceding the Meiji opening in 1868. When the Portuguese Missionaries first stepped on Japanese land in the 16th century, the country was politically instable. At the time, however, it saw some rapid development, e.g. the fire guns imported from the West led to development of stone castles. The new aestheticism of the tea ceremony was also born around this time, coming out from the seemingly improbable connection of Zen philosophy and the peasant origin of some of the new elites. In 1603, the country was politically unified in the long period of authoritarian peace that lasted until 1868 under the rule of the so called shōgun, thence the name Shogunate for this system. The capital was established in Edo (today’s Tokyo), where the feudal lords (*daimyōs*) from the entire country had to move their families, and they resided there for at least one year themselves. This reduced the possibility of rebellion and led to a long-term peace; at the same time a strict social order based on Confucianism was introduced. This stabilization was soon followed by introducing a policy of national seclusion implemented in 1639, partly as a reaction to the activity of the Christian missionaries. The country was thus isolated from any direct contact with foreigners; the only exception was the Dutch trading post at the tiny artificial island of Dejima at Nagasaki. Effects of this isolation under a strictly centralised government led to a consolidation of Japanese culture, no matter how diverse the original ingredients were, but finally also to stagnation and cultural conservatism. The country had basically no industry until its opening to the world in the mid-19th century. “Tradition” then, worked in its original meaning in the sense was the only way of handing down information, customs as habits only happened personally from master to pupil, and through carpenter manuals or treatises on garden design : The “Japanese tradition” as a matter of lived, everyday practice was not subject of further reflection as long as there was nothing else everyday facts of life for the Japanese could only appear as such from an outside perspective, after the country started its own rapid transformation⁶¹. This determined the image of Japan when Westerners started (re-)discovering it after the mid- 19th century.

Although the idea of national art history seems increasingly difficult to keep, the notions of “state” or “nation” cannot be banned from use in our historical research. In the image of Japan, the state perspective was still present inasmuch as it was present in people’s minds.

⁶⁰ Nold Egenter. *The Japanese House or, why the Western architect has difficulties to understand it.* <http://home.worldcom.ch/negenter/410JapHouseTxE1.html> retrieved 1. 1. 2010.

⁶¹ Locher, *Traditional Japanese Architecture*, 36.

On the political level, nation and nationality became of course especially important since the Japanese themselves embraced the Western concept of nationalism⁶². The long period of isolation created a fertile ground for the modern version of nationalism that Japan adopted, and it thrived at the late 19th and early 20th century, together with the country's growing power and ambitions. As is very well known, it finally took the country to the war, with disastrous results. In reaction to the war, the spirit of internationalism has grown strong in the post-1945 years. In Japan, however, the transition from the nationalist period was peculiar: Emperor Hirohito, for whose name the suicidal soldiers fought, remained on the throne until 1989. Kenzō Tange, who started his career with traditionally shaped projects for the conquered Japanese territories in Manchuria and Thailand, has smoothly transitioned to a Modernist style by swapping the traditionally shaped roofs from these projects for flat roofs and by using brute concrete in his winning project for the Hiroshima peace centre, and his work became a widely respected symbol of Modern and bold Japanese architecture (see chapter II.5).⁶³ The English readers of Jiro Harada's book *Lesson in Japanese Architecture* (see chapter II.1.), could still read in the 1954 re-edition of the 1936 book that during the "present, [ie. the] third nationalisation" the "reaction [to the period of Western influence] was inevitable", and "especially since Japan's succession from the League of Nations, the national spirit has begun to reassert itself in all directions."⁶⁴ It was still there even in the 1985 American reprint, with just a note in the beginning alerting the reader that the text is outdated.

The singular image of Japan was challenged by the modern development. Many visitors felt like Noel Moffett, who in 1958 spoke about two coexisting "Japans, old and new" (see chapter II.4.) As Arata Isozaki argues, however, it was exactly the opening and the external gaze which entailed a construction of a modern "Japan-ness". Looking at that the Brutalist "fortress" of Kenzō Tange's Yamanashi Radio and Broadcasting centre (1966) and, then, in contrast, on the delicate, almost fragile lattices of the 16th century Katsura villa, we might think they could hardly look more different. Nonetheless, we will see how Tange and other Japanese modernists actively entered the discourse on Japanese tradition, and used it for their own goals (see chapter II.5.). The continuity was supposed not to be found so much in forms, but in the governing principles – including the principle of recurrent demolition, as is the case with the Ise shrine as well as some megastructure projects by Kishō Kurokawa from the 1960s. To make things even more complicated, the Japanese modernists did use, on other occasions, a lot from the formal vocabulary of the Japanese tradition, from Tetsurō Yoshida (see chapter II.1.) over Sutemi Horiguchi who started as a modernist and ended as a

⁶² See Ian Buruma. *Inventing Japan, 1853–1964*. Modern Library Chronicles, 2003.

⁶³ See also: Rem Koolhaas –, Hans Ulrich Obrist. *Project Japan. Metabolism Talks*. Köln: Taschen, 2011.

⁶⁴ Jiro Harada, *The Lesson of Japanese architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1936), p. 25
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015048226941;view=1up;seq=31>

traditionalist, to Kenzō Tange again, who built his own house (1953) with translucent sliding screens and tatamis on the floor.

I.7.4. Conclusion

Studying Japan as Westerners, are we not condemned to go in circles around the centre and never reach the core it like the traffic in Tokyo avoids the central area of the Imperial palace in Barthes' description from the *Empire of Signs* (quoted above)? The French thinker's observation includes the answer is to be: The Japanese capital is indeed empty and the core of the city is almost void, but that its is a centre of the symbolical power, and, we can add, an island of relative stability. This is a different order, almost inverse to the Western tradition, but this recognition can already be a basis for an understanding.

We have just recapitulated some more or less obvious facts, for they immediately concern problems the following chapters. We will follow the adventure of discovering of Japan as it happened in the minds of Western architects. Yet the subject naturally invites not just another interesting story to add to the history of the 20th century modernist architecture, but also invites to rethink some basic questions of culture, perception and understanding.

PART II

II. I. WESTERN ARCHITECTURE AND JAPAN UNTIL 1945

“Here the eye thinks!”

– Bruno Taut about villa Katsura, 1934⁶⁵

II. I. I. Introduction

As a historical introduction, we will first sum up the development in thinking about Japan between around 1900 and 1945, with an important stop in the 1930s. The main question remains: What changed that instead of print collectors and aesthetes it was suddenly modern architects who were interested in Japan? To reveal the agents of this change, diverse contexts related to architecture are briefly mentioned in the first half of this chapter: Western architects writing about everything Japanese except houses, or conversely, railway engineers or zoologists writing about Japanese architecture, else, Japanese writers longing for the past whose quotes ended up in avant-garde architects’ notebooks. Arriving to the 1930s in the second half of this chapter gives an occasion to zoom in. The ideas about the closeness of Japan and Modernism were by then were are first pronounced and expounded. In this respect, two authors come out worth special attention: Tetsurō Yoshida and Bruno Taut. We focus on them in the light of both their impact and anticipation of what came afterwards.

⁶⁵ Bruno Taut in Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 332.

II. I.2. Japonisme and beyond

After the opening of the Japanese ports to trade in 1853 and the Meiji restoration in 1868, things started moving at a fast pace. And not just things to sell and buy: Japan, until then kept almost sealed off from industrialization, started quickly catching up with the developed world at all fronts.

At the same time in the West, the industrialisation was already running at full blast in countries like England and Germany, and its downsides and risks – inequality, exploitation of people's relationships and pollution – were criticised both from conservative and progressive positions. No wonder that people like Robert Morris, the founder of the Arts and Crafts movements, saw in Japan with its exquisite handicraft tradition a possible source of inspiration. What proved more important, though, was the capacity of Japan to cater to Western imagination from a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir. A mutual enchantment was under way. Adolf Loos, at this time not yet an architect, but a sharp columnist writing on design and everyday life, wrote in 1898:

“The East built a great reservoir from which more and more seeds flowed in the West. [...] In the Middle Ages, after all, one only needed to travel to Spain to discover a new world of forms, the masters of the Renaissance had to go to Persia and India, the Rococo to China, while literally only Japan has been left to us. But now it is over. What, then, is Japanese? First, Japanese is giving up symmetry. Next comes the disembodiment of the represented objects. The Japanese depict flowers, but they are pressed flowers. They depict humans, but they are pressed people. This is styling, made to decorate the surface while remaining naturalistic.”⁶⁶

In just a few sentences, Loos manages here to get to the gist of the *Japonism* fashionable in his time (giving up symmetry, a preference for flatness), in an ironic shortcut, and even outline a caricature of Western orientalism, anticipating much later criticism of a Said or Foucault.

The “discovery” of Japanese woodblock prints was crucial for Western art of the second half of the 19th century: its impact on the Impressionists, van Gogh, and the *Nabis* group is also

⁶⁶ „Der Osten bildete das große Reservoir, aus dem immer neuer Samen in das Abendland strömte. [...] Im Mittelalter brauchte man allerdings nur bis Spanien zu reisen, um eine neue Formenwelt zu entdecken, die Meister der Renaissance mußten bis Persien und Indien, das Rokoko nach China gehen, während uns buchstäblich nur noch Japan übrig blieb. Nun aber ist es Schluß. Was ist nun japanisch? Japanisch ist in erster Linie das Aufgeben der Symmetrie. In zweiter Linie kommt die Entkörperlichung der darzustellenden Gegenstände dazu. Die Japaner stellen Blumen dar, aber es sind gepreßte Blumen. Sie stellen Menschen dar, aber es sind gepreßte Menschen. Das ist ein Stilisieren, wie geschaffen dazu, die Fläche zu dekorieren und dabei doch naturalistisch bleiben zu können.“

– Adolf Loos, *Kunstgewerbliche Rundschau* (1898), in: Adolf Opel (ed.), *Adolf Loos, Ins Leere gesprochen, 1897-1900* (Wien 1981), 38.

well known to art history⁶⁷. The history of “Japonaiseries”, decorative objects made using traditional Japanese crafts and skills, typically lacquer, but applied on objects for western use, is, a rewarding field of study, but it brings little progress to the study of architecture. If woodblock prints revolutionized painting, the Japanese craft had a notoriously big impact on the art nouveau décor. It was the ornamental Art Nouveau style of the Viennese Secession in Austria which truly provoked Loos’s sarcasm. Knowing this, it may come as a surprise that in 1930, towards the end of his life, during a lecture, Loos uttered while holding a picture of his then recently finished house Kuhn:

“*Modern Architecture is: Japanese Culture plus European Tradition!*”

What caused this change, where at the start is an idea of something decorative and kitschy and at the end a sober symbol of modern, or even future architecture?⁶⁸

Considering the craze that took over Europe in the second half of 19th century for all things Japanese, it is stunning how little attention Japanese architecture drew at first. It may be, as we can presume, that because among all those colourful fabrics, boxes and vases, Japanese houses looked unappealing, dark and even drab. Moreover, houses also travel much less easily than people, and their depiction on the woodblock prints was definitely not enough for any kind of appreciation. There is one important exception to this two-dimensional restraint: the world exhibitions, where Japan has built its pavilion: New York in 1853, London in 1862, Paris in 1860, and 1878 in Chicago – to name just the more important ones. Here, Japanese buildings could be experienced directly, although in a specific context, and they indeed made a certain impact on some of the architects who could see it.

Nonetheless, there were more Western architects who came to Japan, invited by the Japanese government as advisors and professors, but also engineers and builders of the rapidly advancing country. These men sometimes stayed for years, although spending most life in the country, like the Brit Josiah Conder (1852–1920), was rather an exception. Conder cultivated an interest in Japanese culture, and wrote books about landscape gardening and flower arrangement (*ikebana*, which he even studied in Japan), and painting. Several Germans also made projects in Japan, the most famous one of them being Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927). Muthesius spent three years in Japan (from 1887 to 1890), without commenting on the local architecture with a single word⁶⁹. In this first period, the flow of architecture seemed to go one-directionally, from the West towards Japan.

⁶⁷ Sigfried Wichmann’s *Japonisme* presents some compelling visual parallels in this respect. Sigfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858* (Thames and Hudson, 1981).

⁶⁸ „die häuser der zukunft werden nicht aus eisenbeton sein, [...] das haus der zukunft ist aus holz! wie die kleinen japanischen häuser. es hat verschiebbare wände! moderne architektur ist: japanische kultur plus europäische tradition!“ – Claire Loos – Adolf Opel: *Adolf Loos Privat*. (H. Böhlaus, 1985), 104.

⁶⁹ See Manfred Speidel, Träume vom Anderen. Japanische Architektur mit europäischen Augen gesehen. Einige Aspekte zur Rezeption zwischen 1900 und 1950. *Archimaera* 1, Fremdsehen (Januar 2008), 79–96.

The authors who did write about Japanese architecture were often not architects; which matters little since their books are an important document of how Japanese cities looked like before they were thoroughly changed by the rapid modernization, and – in the Kantō region around Tokyo – by the 1923 earthquake. Worth noting are Christopher Dresser, designer, who wrote *Japan, its Architecture, Art and Art Manufactures* (London, 1882) and the railway engineer Franz Baltzer (*Das japanische Haus – The Japanese House*, Berlin, 1903)⁷⁰. Widely read books came also from Americans like Edward Sylvester Morse, a zoologist (*Japanese Homes and their Surroundings*, Boston, 1886)⁷¹, or R. A. Cram (*Impressions of Japanese Architecture and Allied Arts*, New York, 1905),⁷² remaining in circulation long after their first editions. Architecture was naturally also a subject of published travel diaries and guidebooks, such as Isabella Lucy Bird's *Unbeaten Track in Japan* (1881)⁷³ or Basil Chamberlain's *Handbook for Travelers in Japan* (1893)⁷⁴.

⁷⁰ Franz Adolf Wilhelm Baltzer, *Das Japanische Haus* (München 1903).

⁷¹ Edward Sylvester Morse, *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* (Boston, 1886)

⁷² Ralph Adams Cram, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture* (The Baker & Taylor Company, 1905).

⁷³ Isabella Lucy Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan. An Account of Travels in the Interior Including Visits to the Aborigines of Yezo and the Shrines of Nikko* (New York: ICG Muse, 2000 (1881)).

⁷⁴ Basil Hall Chamberlain, *A Handbook for Travelers in Japan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893).

II.1.3. Demons, Tea, Zen: Hearn, Okakura, Suzuki

Even in the relatively specialized studies focussed on architecture buildings were mostly treated together with other spheres of culture, and the changes that the Japanese cities underwent were often perceived just as the most physical manifestation of the profoundly changing Japanese society. The intensified cultural contacts, and the increasing number of visitors to Japan, however, helped to create a broader public that wished to understand the civilization, seemingly on its way to disappearance. Western writers learned Japanese, and Japanese were better able to explain their culture in Western terms. Literary quality was as important as the insight, and there were a couple of titles which earned the status of a popular, widely read introduction to Japanese culture. They were the first books that many of those interested in Japan, including architects, took in hand. Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), a prolific writer who settled, married and died in Japan, gathered fairy tales and ghost stories (e.g. *Kwaidan/Kaidan*, 1903) and wrote his own narratives about Japanese culture (e.g. *Kokoro*, 1896), although he never learned Japanese.

Of all the treatises on Japanese culture, Kakuzō Okakura's (1862–1913) *Book of Tea* (1906) has become a modern classic of sorts. Written by a Japanese writer, but in a very polished English, it aimed primarily at the Western public. The essay succeeded in conveying of the essentials of Japanese aesthetics in a compelling way. Introducing the concept of “teaism”, it suggests that tea, and the entire culture rooted in the tea ceremony, reaches far beyond the drink itself, and is the essence of Japanese aesthetics. Architects were, as our research will show, among the many who took a liking to Okakura's essay. In the fourth chapter, explaining the principles of the tea hut, the author touches architecture directly:

„To European architects brought up on the traditions of stone and brick construction, our Japanese method of building with wood and bamboo seems scarcely worthy to be ranked as architecture. It is but quite recently that a competent student of Western architecture has recognised and paid tribute to the remarkable perfection of our great temples. Such being the case as regards our classic architecture, we could hardly expect the outsider to appreciate the subtle beauty of the tea-room, its principles of construction and decoration being entirely different from those of the West.“⁷⁵

No matter how small and specific such tea-houses were, the *sukiya* (teahouse, either “Abode of Fancy”, “abode of vacancy”, or “abode of the Unsymmetrical” in Okakura's translation) indeed exists in Japanese architecture as a distinct style (*sukiya-zukuri*), affecting the entire concept of the Japanese dwelling and interior decoration:

⁷⁵ Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea* (Shambhala Publications, 2003 (1906)), 53.

„The ideals of Teatism have since the sixteenth century influenced our architecture to such degree that the ordinary Japanese interior of the present day, on account of the extreme simplicity and chasteness of its scheme of decoration, appears to foreigners almost barren.“⁷⁶

Okakura may have been right in downplaying the appeal of these “straw huts” to the Western architects of his time, but not long afterwards, the values of modesty, purity and simplicity that he describes resonated already much more among an audience one generation younger, including architects.

Another nowadays widely read and referenced essay, *In Praise of Shadows*, by Jun’ichirō Tanizaki (1933), is equally interesting as for its literary qualities, but even more directly addresses issues of architecture, famously starting with the explication of the aesthetic exquisiteness of the Japanese privy. But Tanizaki wrote in Japanese, and a Western reader could only in 1954 read several translated snippets by Edward Seidensticker, published in *Japan Quarterly*. Here Bernard Rudofsky apparently, found them during his diligent study of Japanese culture.⁷⁷ The entire Tanizaki’s book, however, remained untranslated to a Western language until 1977⁷⁸.

In the *Book of Tea*, Okakura also underlined in his the philosophical background, namely the importance of Zen Buddhist philosophy for Japanese aesthetics – “Zennism” as he calls it in his westernizing parlance⁷⁹. Okakura also writes about the Chinese Taoism which, in its turn, influenced Zen, paraphrasing the words by Laozi⁸⁰ about void, or “vacuum”:

“We must know the whole play in order to properly act our parts; the conception of totality must never be lost in that of the individual. This Laotse illustrates by his favourite metaphor of the Vacuum. He claimed that only in vacuum lay the truly essential. The reality of a room, for instance, was to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and the walls, not in the roof and walls themselves. The usefulness of a water pitcher dwelt in the emptiness where water might be put, not in the form of the pitcher or the material of which it was made. Vacuum is all potent because all containing. In vacuum alone motion becomes possible.”⁸¹

⁷⁶ Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 54.

⁷⁷ E. G. Seidensticker, *In Praise of Shadows: A Prose Elegy by Tanizaki*, *Japan Quarterly*, 1 (Oct, 1954): 46–52. Rudofsky refers to the article in *The Kimono Mind: An Informal Guide to Japan and the Japanese* (1965), 118.

⁷⁸ See Tanizaki, Jun’ichirō, *In Praise of Shadows* (Leete's Island Books, 1977).

⁷⁹ Zen comes from the Chinese word *chan* 禪, which in turn comes from the Sanskrit word *dhjāna* – mediation.

⁸⁰ Laozi, *Daodejing*, 11th verse. (I use the pinyin transcription for Chinese, other authors in the past used various transcriptions, hence the differences like Laozi / Laotse.)

⁸¹ Okakura, *The Book of Tea*, 43.

What he actually quotes here is the 11th verse of Daodejing, which has later become very popular with architects both in Okakura's interpretation, and in direct translations. The West was of course, especially from the 19th century, avid for Eastern spirituality and philosophy, Buddhism being one of the most attractive teachings. Zen, specifically, drew attention for its emphasis on meditation practice, rigorous self-control, individual expression, direct experience, and sudden enlightenment. While Okakura was not the first one to write about Zen in the West, it was his concise essay which raised a broad attention, even among philosophers (some scholars propose it could have inspired certain thoughts of Martin Heidegger⁸²).

Zen Buddhism, which came to Japan from China in the 13th century Kamakura period as one of the Buddhist sects, has been especially conducive to the development of all kinds of art, despite its central focus on seated meditation (*zazen*). In Japan, it flourished more than in China, and helped to give a specifically Japanese character to many arts: The Japanese Zen temples dismissed pagodas and built from bare wood temple complexes of asymmetrical plans, the monks fostered arts such as highly abstract painting and calligraphy, creation of dry gardens, haiku writing and many other activities that permeated the entire Japanese culture. In the 20th Century, the Zen philosophy has become known worldwide, and a sort of key to understanding Japanese culture for many Westerners.

It was Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870–1966) who contributed the most to Zen Buddhism's publicity in the West. From the 1920s Suzuki made several lecture tours in the USA as well as in Europe, and wrote several books. For his success, proficiency in English was as important as much as his extensive scholarship and familiarity with Western thought concepts and trends – Suzuki lived in the United States for periods of his life, married an American woman, and was active in the Theosophical society for a certain time. Suzuki spoke and wrote both on the philosophical and cultural aspects of Zen, as well as on other subject concerning Japanese culture. Suzuki always remarked that Zen, originally a Chinese sect, incorporated a lot of Chinese Taoism, and was well learned about Buddhism's Indian roots. At the same time, however, he continued to explain how Zen decisively helped to craft an unmistakably Japanese way of thinking, moral, and imagery. As far as we can judge from architects' formulations and their bibliographical references, Suzuki may seem to have had almost a monopoly on explaining Zen to broader public. His probably most successful book is the *Zen and Japanese Culture*, a collection of essays on what impact Zen had on various cultural areas, art, but also on swordsmanship, first published in 1938, and again in an expanded edition in

⁸² Hans-Peter Hempel, *Heidegger und Zen* (Hain, 1992).

1959.⁸³ Thanks to his long life, Suzuki remained an active and respected figure well into the 1960s.

⁸³ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959).

II.1.4. Japan turns modern

In the United States, architectural development diverged from Europe, at least as far as the relations to Japan go, and it was not just because the American West coast really *is* geographically closer to Japan. Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), famously, was an avid collector of Japanese prints, and his interpreters soon noticed similarities between his attitude to design (“breaking the box”), and the asymmetrical, horizontal Japanese houses. Wright, in his turn, never ceased to deny any Japanese influence on his work. Thanks to studies such as Kevin Nute’s⁸⁴, the subject is quite well mapped, and also other American-Japanese issues in architecture have become the subject of study, already in the 1950s⁸⁵. Wright’s own work brought him to Japan for his Imperial hotel repeatedly between 1913 and 1922, bringing a young architect, Czech by origin Antonin Raymond (1888–1976) with him from the US. Raymond became a crucial, even if controversial, figure.⁸⁶ He substantially contributed to the development of modernism in Japan, finding ways to connect both cultures within his designs. Before the Imperial hotel was finished, he established his own office in 1921 in Tokyo, which exists until today. Socially adept, Raymond quickly started getting commissions from Western institutions residing in Japan, first a Catholic university, and soon also embassies and consuls’ residencies. He pioneered concrete building in Japan, oscillating between styles inspired by Auguste Perret and Le Corbusier – to the extent that the latter, after seeing the Nanzan University in Nagoya (1962–1964), accused Raymond of plagiarism⁸⁷. In the eclectic and massive production of Raymond’s studio, that later reached even outside Japan, the level fluctuates, but for example the harmonica-like construction of the Ongaku music centre in Gunma (1955–1961), and church designs (St. Anselm Church in Meguro, Tokyo, 1954), are no doubt valuable and original. A different kind of importance can be seen in Raymond’s smaller projects, where he achieved a convincing synthesis of the principles of Western and Japanese architecture, such as his two studios in Karuizawa (the first one from 1933, and his New Studio from 1960–1963, both are conserved), or the Italian embassy’s residence in Nikkō (1928). For us here it is worth noting that besides running a busy studio practice, Raymond continued his role of a cultural ambassador (officially working for Czechoslovakia in 1926–1938), and of an informal mediator, who provided visiting Westerners all sorts of information about Japan.

⁸⁴ Kevin Nute, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan* (London: Routledge, 2000; 1st ed. 1993)

⁸⁵ Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: W. H. Rawls, 1963)

⁸⁶ Raymond left Japan during WW2 and worked for the American intelligence. There are speculations that he helped with bombing Japanese cities, but also that he used this position to save Kyoto.

⁸⁷ For explanation of the more complex roots of this case see Helena Čapková, Influence of Spirit and Not of Form: Antonín Raymond, Le Corbusier, and Architectural Piracy in the Transwar Era. In *A Pirate’s View of World History: A Reversed Perception of the Order of Things From a Global Perspective*, 85–93. International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2017.

Two other young architects born in Austria-Hungary, Rudolf Schindler (1887–1953) and Richard Neutra (1892–1970), both disciples of Adolf Loos, came to work in Wright's office after having admired his work in books, and settled in California. Some aspects of their work (especially some of Schindler's wood-built designs) bear a striking similarity to traditional Japanese architecture. More importantly for our interest in Europe, it was Neutra who, already as an American resident, acquainted the German public with the modern architecture in Japan for the first time, in a series of articles in the magazine *Die Form* during 1931⁸⁸. The articles were a result of his journey to Japan in the previous year, enabled by his Japanese friends.

Individual travels to distant countries were rare and costly, and could hardly happen without support from people in the target country. All the more attention deserve the progressive minded, educated Japanese, who travelled to Europe and the United States, and often stayed for extended periods to study, gain new experience, and work⁸⁹. To mention at least two whose stories are better known, let us name Le Corbusier's Japanese disciples, Kunio Maekawa (1905–1986), and Junzō Sakakura (1901–1969) – the latter stayed for seven years in Paris and rose to the position of studio head⁹⁰. After their return to Japan, these architects and other artists often became key figures in their own right. Moreover, thanks to their contacts abroad and the knowledge of a foreign language, they played the role of cultural mediators. We could sometimes forget that because of the language and other cultural barriers, the Westerners largely depended on their Japanese hosts. It was usually them who not only enabled the journey, but also largely determined what the Western visitors saw in Japan, and informed their ideas about it. This was also the case of Richard Neutra's 1930 trip to Japan which we just mentioned: the journey was enabled by his Japanese friends, Kameki Tsuchiura and his wife Nobuko, whom he met during a stay in Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin in the USA from 1924 until 1926. Junzō Sakakura forged a friendship with Charlotte Perriand, a young designer and architect during the years he spent in Le Corbusier's studio in rue de Sèvres, and provided her an official invitation to Japan, where she stayed between 1940 and 1943. As an illustration of the importance of contacts, let us see Charlotte Perriand's recollection of meeting Kunio Maekawa, whom she knew from Le Corbusier's studio, on her way to Japan in Shanghai. In her memoirs, she remembered: "Kunio Maekawa was on the quayside. I hadn't seen him since he left the atelier [1930]. But separation doesn't matter when there's true friendship and the camaraderie that comes from working together. As he gave me news about Saka [Sakakura], I realized that there was a

⁸⁸ Richard Neutra, Gegenwärtige Bauarbeit in Japan, *Die Form*, 6(1) (1931): 22-28; Richard Neutra, Japanische Wohnung, Ableitung, Schwierigkeiten, *Die Form*, 6(3) (1931): 92–97; Richard Neutra, Neue Architektur in Japan, *Die Form*, 6(9) (1931): 333-340.

⁸⁹ The personal level of networking between Japan and Europe is subject of Helena Čapková's research: See for instance Helena Čapková, Transnational networkers – Iwao and Michiko Yamawaki and the formation of Japanese Modernist design, *Journal of Design History*, 27, 4 (2014): 370-385.

⁹⁰ Jonathan M. Reynolds, *Maekawa Kunio and the Emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture* (University of California Press, 2001).

certain distance between them. Suddenly I understood that I was in Japan as a member of the Sakakura clan. I was under his responsibility and protection. There were subtleties that I had to take into account, but they in no way diminished my affection for Kunio, who was in China to build schools.”⁹¹

As a matter of fact, Maekawa was not in Shanghai merely to “build schools”, but worked on a large-scale plan, effectively an entire new city neighbourhood that was part of the latest colonial expansion of Japan, one that followed the occupation of Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria. This conquest also meant an occasion for vast urban projects, a *tabula rasa* hitherto unthinkable in the densely populated Japan⁹². When facing European countries, however, the Japanese politics evolved more ambiguously. Although the country was on a way towards its sort of fascism, some officials understood the importance of representing the country abroad with a modern image. For the World exhibition in Paris in 1937, famous for the physically and symbolically opposing monumental pavilions of the German and Soviet totalitarian regimes, Japan had a sleek, modern-looking pavilion which got a broad recognition in the architectural press. The story behind is revealing: Originally, Maekawa won the competition, his project was then scrapped as too modern-looking, but France later insisted on building with local contractors, so Junzō Sakakura – who just spent seven years working for Le Corbusier –, got the commission⁹³. No less important appears one much more modest building that was erected in 1935 in Stockholm: a simple tea pavilion built as a present from the Japanese in the traditional style next to the ethnographic museum in Stockholm, called *Zui-ki-tei*, received an equally admiring attention from Scandinavian Modernists in the following years⁹⁴.

How was it possible that a modest traditional teahouse garnered attention of modern architects just as a modern pavilion? The content of what is “modern” obviously changed with time, but a more concrete answer emerges if we look at what the architects could see and hear about Japan in the 1930s. In this decade, it was already clear that interest in Japanese architecture was growing, and first Japanese authors started addressing it, aiming directly at Western public. In a *Tourist library* edition, for instance, architect and historian Hideto Kishida (1899–1966) published a succinct historical overview of Japanese architecture in English. Jirō Harada (1894–1989), an art historian on the staff of the Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo, held a lecture series the United States in 1936, and his *Lesson in Japanese architecture*, published in the same year, is noteworthy for its numerous re-editions

⁹¹ Perriand, *A Life of Creation*, 136.

⁹² See also Koolhaas – Obrist, *Project Japan*, 56–77.

⁹³ Reynolds, *Maekawa Kunio and the Emergence of Japanese Modernist Architecture*.

⁹⁴ "The first Zui-Kui-Tei was built in 1935, close to the location of the current tea house."

<http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/etnografiskamuseet/programme/the-japanese-tea-house/>, retrieved 23. 1. 2018.

even decades later⁹⁵. The reason for the re-editions was mostly the quality of the photography in the book, less so Harada's brief text that was kept despite its nationalist passages. It was the American publisher who wrapped the book as a "lesson" of Japanese architecture for the Western world and specified it right away as "standardisation, variety in unity, conformity to a mode of living, simplicity and, of course, usefulness of purpose." The author supposed that "modern Western architects are not blind to the value of some of these qualities," but they "have not arrived however, at a solution of their own. Their solutions are for the most part one-sided." But he concurrently expressed a hope that "from the study of a complete and mature form of structure, which offer in detail some amazing likeness to their own efforts, they may find the clues they need."⁹⁶

These and several other sources about Japan appeared in Europe before the war, but in the European, and modernist context, there is one other book that deserves a more detailed attention: Tetsurō Yoshida's *Japanese House*.

⁹⁵ Hideto Kishida, *Japanese Architecture*, Japan Travel Bureau, 1948 [1936].

⁹⁶ Jiro Harada, *The Lesson of Japanese architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1936), 9.

II.1.5. Tetsurō Yoshida: Modern Japanese architect brings his tradition to the West

Ambitions and curiosity about Modernist building – and a year given to travel around the world from his employer – brought a young Japanese architect Tetsurō Yoshida (1894–1956) to Europe for one year, 1931–1932⁹⁷. Then in his thirties, he was already a successful architect, working for the Ministry of Communications, and had just finished a large building of the Tokyo post-office (1927–1931). Yoshida stayed in Berlin and made trips to other European destinations from there, and on occasion also lectured about Japanese architecture. After one of these lectures, he was approached by two German Modernist architects, Ludwig Hilberseimer and Hugo Häring, who suggested he should write a book. It is remarkable and quite significant for what happened later is that the interest in Japan was expressed by two architects of quite different approaches to Modernism: Hilberseimer, an utterly rational author, and Häring, propagator of the “organic” branch of Modernism.

Yoshida took their incentive seriously, and in 1935, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (The Japanese House) came out in the prestigious Wasmuth’s publishing house. The book got by with its sleek Bauhaus-style layout, but pretty much everything else changed in Germany within the few years that Yoshida worked on the book, with Hitler in power and Modernism either silenced, or ousted from the country. Yoshida does not speak about the link with Western Modernism directly, yet the book has found its public mostly among architects, and has actually become the most used reference book about Japanese architecture, reaching beyond the German speaking area. After the second world war, it still had its validity in the competition of other newly published books, as confirmed by the English translation (1955), and Yoshida’s two other books on Japanese architecture (1952), and Japanese gardens (1957)⁹⁸.

The reasons for the success *The Japanese House* are several: It was arguably the first book written *by* a modern Japanese architect *for* modern architects. It provided thorough information focussed not on temples and palaces, but on the dwelling. It however did provide a solid historical introduction to the development of Japanese architecture, and notably for the first time introduced the Katsura villa, the 16th Century mansion on the outskirts of Tokyo, pointing out the modern looking features. First and foremost, it explicitly invited the readers to read the forms of Japanese tradition as modern. In the beginning of the book, Yoshida lists the characteristics of Japanese architecture, accenting the qualities that appealed to Modern architects. The advantages he lists are:

⁹⁷ More on Yoshida and the circumstances see Manfred Speidel: *Dreams of the Other*, The Presence of Japanese Architecture in German Magazines and Books 1900–1950. (manuscript from the author, text for a symposium in Kobe. Kim. *Cross-Current Contribution*.)

⁹⁸ Tetsuro Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (Berlin 1935); English translation: Testuro Yoshida, *The Japanese House and Garden* (New York, 1955); Testuro Yoshida, *Japanische Architektur* (Tübingen, 1952).

- “1. *The unity of the house and garden, and the relationship between the house and garden (...),*
2. *flexibility of the plan, i.e. the variability of the room separation and freeing of the rooms (...),*
3. *the numerous and large door and window openings and spaces open to the outside this way (...),*
4. *the inbuilt furniture and the practical measure, allowing for the full use of the rooms,*
5. *the use of natural materials for building (...),*
6. *the use of the [aesthetic effects of the] wood, with its natural colour and texture visible because no paint is used,*
7. *the close connection between the construction and the architectural beauty,*
8. *the simple, clear and good taste,*
9. *the standardization of the room size and building components down to the smallest details, allowing for a fast and easy assembling of the house.”⁹⁹*

With *The Japanese House*, Yoshida created not just a successful book that was lucky enough to spread widely, but he also created a strategy that would later be used by other publications about Japanese architecture for the Western public. The success of the book was greatly helped, if not decided, by the convincing renditions of buildings both in drawing and photography. There are tables, precise measurements, plans, cuts, and perspectives of

⁹⁹ "Gegenüber dem heutigen Stand der Technik zeigt die japanische Wohnung gewisse Rückständigkeit; auf der anderen Seite jedoch hat sie ihre ganz besonderen Vorzüge. Diese bestehen im wesentlichen:

darin, daß das japanische Haus Einzelhaus mit Garten ist, und daß zwischen Haus und Garten eine günstige Beziehung besteht,

in der Elastizität der Grundrisses, d. h. der leichten Veränderlichkeit der Raumeinteilung und in der Auflockerung der Räume,

in den vielen und großen Tür- und Fensteröffnungen und nach außen offenen Räumen, wodurch eine starke Verbundenheit mit der Natur hergestellt ist,

in den praktisch eingebauten Möbeln und den Maßnahmen, welche eine volle Raumausnutzung gestatten,

in der Verwendung natürlicher Baustoffe, und zwar ohne jede Bearbeitung, aber in künstlerisch schöner Anwendung,

in der Verwendung des bearbeiteten Holzes meistens ohne Anstrich, wodurch die Maserung und die Naturfarbe des Holzes sichtbar bleiben,

in der engen Verbindung zwischen der Konstruktion und der architektonischen Schönheit,

in dem einfachen, klaren und guten Geschmack,

in der Normung der Zimmergröße und der Bauteile bis in die kleinsten Einzelheiten, was eine schnelle und leichte Herstellung des Hauses ermöglicht.

Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 10.

interiors with roof removed that were exactly what the eye of a contemporary architect formed by the New Objectivity liked to see. Yet the typological arrangement of drawings of architectural elements is actually similar to, and probably draws from, the graphic presentation of traditional Japanese carpenters' sample books. When it came to contemporary Japanese dwellings, Yoshida aptly used the occasion to present his own recent design, the large Baba residence in Tokyo (1928)¹⁰⁰. For his public buildings, like the Tokyo post office built around the same time, he skilfully used a reinforced concrete skeleton and porcelain tile claddings, but for this private residence he largely employs the traditional Japanese forms. On the pages of the book, the contemporary development in Japanese residential architecture is shown in a clear continuity, as modern *and* traditional at the same time. For the Western reader with a lack of other resources to compare, the old and new Japan could have seemed almost indistinguishable on the black-and-white photos, yet never outdated. What it could have corroborated was the already strongly rooted finding that the Japanese live a double life; as when they dress Western in public, but remain Japanese in private, changing into their yukata or kimono. In any case, including his own project in a successful history overview obviously did no harm to Yoshida's own career back home in Japan.

Many others borrowed both ideas and pictures from Yoshida's work – firstly those who met him in person in during his stay in Europe, and secondly, readers of his book. This impact has been briefly outlined by Manfred Speidel and by Hyon-Sob Kim.¹⁰¹ It seems that Scandinavian architects have been especially receptive to Japanese architecture: for instance the Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund, soon after meeting Yoshida in 1931, used the photos of the latter's Baba residence in his inaugural lecture on becoming professor at Stockholm's Royal Institute of Technology, pondering: "Maybe we in Western Europe are coming closer to the Japanese idea of the house, as a not too fixed, heavy, and permanent object. Maybe we will adopt what has long been practised in Japan, changing our houses from one season to the next, from one inhabitant to the next, according to requirements. Remove entire walls during the summer for increased ventilation, just as the Japanese do."¹⁰² It also seems that Alvar Aalto used Yoshida's book almost as a sample book for certain details in his designs, especially the villa Mairea (1938–1939)¹⁰³. Josef Frank, an Austrian architect (who later moved to Sweden) met Yoshida in Vienna and was also very receptive to Japanese architecture very early, praising it in his *Architecture as Symbol* (1931)¹⁰⁴. From the younger

¹⁰⁰ Speidel, *Dreams of the Other*.

¹⁰¹ Speidel, *Dreams of the Other*; Hyon-Sob Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida (1894–1956) and architectural interchange between East and West, *Arq* 12(1)(2008): 43-57.

¹⁰² Erik Gunnar Asplund, 'Var arkitektoniska rumsuppfattning', in: *Byggmästaren: Arkitektupplagan* (1931), 203–210, trans. by Simon Unwin and Christina Johnsson as 'Our architectural conception of space', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, 4 (2000), 151–160. Quoted in: Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida, 53.

¹⁰³ See Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida, 50, and more in detail in Kim, *Cross-Current Contribution*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Josef Frank, 'Ostasien', *Architektur als Symbol* (Wien: Löcker Verlag, 1931), 146–147.

generation, the German architect Egon Eiermann (1904–1970) is told to mention Yoshida’s book so often to his students at the *Technische Hochschule* in Karlsruhe, that his students said he must have “slept with the book under his pillow”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Kirsch, *Die Neue Wohnung und das Alte Japan*, 160.

II.1.6. Bruno Taut: German architect enchanted by Japan

But not everyone was entirely positive about Yoshida's book. Quite a severe criticism came from Bruno Taut (1880–1938), who reproached Yoshida his excessive describing of technical details: “*Can there be any German architect that is going to build a Japanese house in Berlin on the basis of the size and detail of the Japanese architecture? Even if there is one, this book lacks descriptions of some important details like the ceiling structure or the roof construction method.*”¹⁰⁶ It is quite surprising, since Taut had known Yoshida in person and praised him personally as “one of the most excellent” contemporary Japanese architects¹⁰⁷. Though these words came with some authority since Taut was German architect who had the best immediate experience of his generation with Japan, spending there three years between 1933 and 1936. Taut was in Japan when Yoshida's book was published. But what did Taut offer instead, where did his ideas come from, and how did he get to Japan in the first place?

Taut arrived to Japan in spring 1933, fleeing from persecution in his homeland because of his Jewish origin¹⁰⁸. From a temporary exile in Switzerland, he wrote a letter to his Japanese friends that he knew already from Germany, and they procured him an official invitation. Knowing the history of World War II, Japan seems an unlikely place to flee from the Nazi Germany, yet that is exactly what Taut did in 1933. His original plan was to make a stop in Japan on his way to the United States. However, his “stop” finally lasted three and a half years, and he never reached America. Taut had, as he claimed, admired Japan long before, and he indeed dedicated a couple of paragraphs to Japanese architecture already in his book *Die neue Wohnung* from 1924.¹⁰⁹ He mentioned some the basics facts about Japanese buildings and muses about the role colour, his favourite subject, pointing out the contrast between the bare walls of the Japanese dwelling and the colourful clothes worn by their inhabitants, and about his hope that the Japanese would be able to transform their tradition into contemporary materials. As an illustration, he also reproduced photos of two historical Japanese interiors. Now, facing the Japanese reality, he was ready to appreciate the culture, and also make judgements. Taut travelled and lectured intensely within the country during his stay, and also wrote extensively. His stay resulted in four books, and many pages of diaries, only recently published.¹¹⁰ The reasons why Taut wrote so much during his Japanese stay

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida, 48-50. Here is also the information about Taut criticising Yoshida.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Kim, Tetsuro Yoshida, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Manfred Speidel, Bruno Taut and the Katsura Villa, in Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial villa*, 319-329.

¹⁰⁹ Bruno Taut, *Die neue Wohnung. Die Frau als Schöpferin* (Leipzig 1924). Taut writes about Japan on pp. 27–31, reproducing the photographs of Sambo-in shinden in Daigo-ji (1598), and a living room of the Shinju-an in Daitokuji, both in Kyoto (though Shinju-an is incorrectly located to “Yamashiro”). Surprisingly, Taut did not try to visit these temples when he later stayed in Japan, as Manfred Speidel notes.

¹¹⁰ Manfred Speidel (ed.), *Bruno Taut in Japan. Das Tagebuch, Ester Band* (1933) (Mann 2013) – *Zweiter Band* (1934) (Mann, 2014) – *Dritter Band* (1935–36) (Mann, 2016).

were also material: His practice as an architect never took off in the new country as he hoped. A single building by Taut remains standing in Japan, an annex to the Hyuga villa in Atami finished in 1936. Finally, in the same year, he left Japan, a country for which he declared so much affection, accepting an offer for a professorship in Turkey, where he died in late 1938.

Despite Taut's prolific writing, the publishing of his texts posed problems. Understandably because of the political situation, none of Taut's texts from Japan could be read in his home country during his life. First, at the request of the Japanese architects, he bashed out a book on his impression from Japan, *Nippon durch europäischen Augen gesehen*, the first draft ready after just three months in Japan¹¹¹. He managed to have an article published in a French translation in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*¹¹² in 1935, and Taut's personal narrative from the first year of his stay in Japan, titled *Houses and People of Japan*, was published in an English translation by a Japanese publisher in 1937.¹¹³ One of his longer lectures for the Japanese public from the end of 1935 came out as *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*¹¹⁴. Otherwise, Taut's writing on Japan could spread only after 1945, when it already faced a competition of many other publications.

Compared to Yoshida's quasi-scientific, analytical representation of Japanese architecture, the style of Taut's writing can almost stand as its antidote. Taut wrote in first person in an expressive, passionate style. Worth noting is the quasi-Japanese style of drawing that he adopted in Japan, using a brush and ink in various concentrations, with added touches of colour. These drawings are often accompanied by text, or single emphatic exclamations.

To understand the origins of this unusual style, it is useful to mention some facts from Taut's life. A particular ability to connect alternate modes of thinking seems to be characteristic for Taut's entire career. The beginnings of his career are linked with expressionism, a strong movement in German architecture. It was Taut who designed what is probably the iconic building of this style, the *Glashaus*, a temporary Glass pavilion of the German *Werkbund* at the Cologne exhibition in 1914. During World War I Taut explored the fantastic vein of Expressionist architecture, getting quite far, and high up so to say, in his *Alpine Architektur*, an album of pure architectural phantasies, where the Alpine summits are topped with colourful glass crystal matching their massive scale. Expressionist dreams notwithstanding, right after the war Taut was able to continue working on an absolutely practical level, one which he started already before the war as a partisan of the Garden City movement, as can be seen in his Falkenberg Siedlung in Berlin. During the Weimar republic, he worked first as a city

¹¹¹ German edition: Manfred Speidel (ed.), *Nippon mit europäischen Augen gesehen* (Mann, 2009).

¹¹² Bruno Taut, *Architecture Nouvelle au Japon*, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 4 (1935): 46–83.

¹¹³ Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 1937. Second edition: Senseido Co., 1958. An edition of the original German text did not appear until 1997.

¹¹⁴ Bruno Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese architecture* (Tokyo: Kokusai bunka shinkokai /The Society for International Cultural Relations, 1936).

architect in the city of Magdeburg, and then in Berlin, in collaboration with Martin Wagner, giving form to the large-scale social democratic housing schemes. These estates (“Moderne Siedlungen”) are still homes to thousands of people, and are protected now by Unesco. Taut’s stylistic development is less relevant for us, but seeing his perception of Japan, it is worth noting the change in his designs from very colourful schemes, often designed according to the orientation of the streets (the housing at Falkenberg is nicknamed “Tuschkastensiedlung” – colourful ink boxes), towards a much soberer, white and cubic style in the late 1920s and early 1930s, close to the style of the international modern style.

Taut’s view of Japan, as expressed in his writing, is compelling yet full of incongruities, sometimes intentional, sometimes not. His altering of writing styles indicates the spirit of his musings. At the very first page *Houses and People of Japan*, he claims allegiance to a scientific approach: Upon his arrival to Japan he wanted to approach “even cultural things from a biological angle. I held that, in every subject of enquiry, it was at first necessity to discover the conditioning factors, but that there is comparatively little value in an appraisal, aesthetic, technical or otherwise, of external appearances alone (...)”¹¹⁵, only to describe, on the next page, his horror while facing the “intolerable garishness” of the contemporary Japanese city as seen through a window car for the first time: “Being sensitively organized, I yielded to a mood of acute depression. Not a word escaped my lips but I was seriously regretting that I had ever ventured on the journey to Japan.”¹¹⁶ What follows, moreover, is a whimsical description of a Westerner learning the principles of Japanese architecture by direct physical experience, bumping his head against a beam, or later, woken up by the rats.

What is truly remarkable about Taut, however, is to what extent his seeing of Japan anticipated Western perception of Japanese architecture in the following years. First, he is the first one to critically assess the Western writing about Japanese architecture until then. He correctly points out, for instance, the selectiveness of how Europeans chose the *ukiyo-e* woodcuts, and completely omitted the scroll painting, a genre traditionally much more highly valued in Japan. He also notes how the values changed in time: Morse, in 1886, paid attention mostly to the ornamental aspects of Japanese architecture, while fifty years later it is the “simple reserved aspects” of Japan which attract architects, including, of course, Taut himself. Though further in the same lecture he admits the reality still falls behind this wish, Taut now proclaims the era of exoticism as finished: “It seems therefore that the exotic no longer exists in Europe for Japan, or in Japan for Europe.”¹¹⁷

All along, he is reflecting on his own position:

¹¹⁵ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 1.

¹¹⁶ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 8.

*“As an architect, my attitude toward the historic is necessarily conditioned by the artistic conception which I myself endeavour to realize. From this it follows that artists must speak and write subjectively about art.”*¹¹⁸

This is partly an excuse for some harsh judgements he later makes. He says both in self-defence, and apodictically: “Indeed, it is always ourselves to whom a work of art speaks, and if it speaks significantly, we are grateful to it and commend its quality. Thus criticism of ancient art becomes a battlefield of the inclinations and tendencies of the present time.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 8.

II.1.7. Bruno Taut: Finding the Fundamentals of Japanese architecture

Discovering the Katsura villa

The Katsura Imperial Villa, or Katsura Detached Place (Katsura Rikyū 桂離宮, henceforth in this text as Katsura villa, or Katsura) is an aristocratic villa on a country estate in the suburbs of Kyoto, built over several decades starting in the beginning of the 17th century. The villa consists from a complex of residential buildings and a large garden, with a pond and artificial islands, with teahouses and pavilions scattered around it. It was built for members of the imperial family, deprived of all political power under the new regime shogun, but still revered. The founder, prince Hachijō Toshihito (1579–1629), conceived the villa as a place of leisure, and the concept largely built on his cultural inspirations came: a profound knowledge of ancient Japanese and Chinese literature, the lifestyle ideal of the ancient Heian aristocracy, but also the newly developing aesthetics of tea ceremony, developed by Zen priests. The ensemble of the buildings and garden is thus an intricate blend of historical reminiscences, rural elements refined the newly developing *sukiya* (tearoom) style, and original artistic innovation. The main palace includes relatively modest rooms (*shoin*), a broad veranda open to the garden, and an open-air terrace for viewing the moon. The garden is designed for strolls, with many carefully chosen stepping stones and stops that connect several tea-houses; besides, the compound could also be accessed by boat. The original main building (the so called Old *shoin*, finished around 1624) was later expanded by asymmetrical additions by Toshihito's son Toshitada (Middle *shoin*, after 1641), who finally also added another wing for the visiting retired emperor Go-Mizunoo (New Goten, after 1654).

Today, the Katsura villa is widely accepted as a major achievement of Japanese architecture and garden design, and an epitome of the simple, refined style so often considered as the quintessence of Japanese architecture. Back in 1933, however, it was not even normally open to the public. But on 4 May 1933, a group of architects from Osaka arranged a visit to villa Katsura for Taut, on the day of his birthday. It was only his second day in Japan and he was enchanted, scribbling enthusiastic notes in his diary.

In effect, it was Taut who largely contributed to the fame of the Katsura villas among the Japanese themselves. This is still confirmed by most literature, even if some researchers recently tend to mitigate the claims that Taut “discovered” Katsura, pointing out that a photographic documentation had been finished shortly before he came¹²⁰.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Dana Buntrock. Katsura Imperial Villa: A Brief Descriptive Bibliography, with Illustrations. In: *Cross-Currents. East Asian History and Culture Review* E-Journal No. 3 (June 2012) <http://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-3>

Yoshida, too, used the photos of Katsura in his book. The use of the photos of this exclusive residence in a book primarily dealing with ordinary people's houses was, ironically, another thing that Taut criticised. One year later, Taut came back to Katsura and subsequently produced a sketchbook of drawings, entitled *Gedanken nach dem Besuch in Katsura* ("Thoughts after a visit to Katsura"), and further worked on it in his following treatises. Everyone who came after Taut confronted, willingly or not, his interpretation. The subsequent history of Katsura's interpretations all but the Japanese architectural history in a nutshell, as we will see in the following chapters.

The information Taut had was incomplete, and sometimes he misunderstood things – a thorough historical research has been done in Katsura only years later. That did not stop him from commending the villa:

*"In world architecture this palace is one of the soundest examples of complete and perfect realization and function; indeed, in the functions of beauty and spirituality as well as in that of utility. The extent to which each detail has been brought to perfect proportion with every other is worthy of great admiration. This has been so well done that although even the smallest details have their own individuality, no one of them predominates to the detriment of their unity as a whole."*¹²¹

But there was more than just details or perfect proportion. For Taut, Katsura represents what is essential not just in Japanese architecture, but in architecture as such¹²²:

*„Thus the Katsura Palace is a completely isolated miracle in the civilized world. One must speak of its “eternal beauty”, which admonishes us to create in the same spirit much more than it is the case with the Parthenon, with the Gothic cathedral, or with the Isé [sic] shrine. That which is peculiar to Japan, the local, is insignificant, but the principle is absolutely modern and of complete validity for any contemporary architecture.“*¹²³

According to Taut, this perfection is attained thanks to a unique “overwhelming freedom of intellect which does not subordinate any element of the structure or the garden to some rigid system”¹²⁴. Freedom is the key word for Taut. Significant, albeit erroneous, is his need to identify a mythical creator – an architect. He insists that Katsura, “whatever the facts may be,” was “conceivable in Japanese history only as the superior production of an ingenious artist.”¹²⁵ Taut found him, based on a legend that actually circulated, in the famous tea

¹²¹ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 34.

¹²² For this part, I have also consulted the commentary in Yann Nussaume's French-language anthology: Yann Nussaume, *Anthologie critique de la théorie architecturale japonaise* (Bruxelles 2004).

¹²³ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 20.

¹²⁴ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 19.

¹²⁵ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 19.

master Kobori Enshū (Kobori Masakazu, 1579–1647). Taut believes Enshū's, personality must have been “entirely modern, in spite of the lapse of almost three centuries,”¹²⁶ admiring in him, with a self-projecting bent, “audacity and originality that bear no imitation in them” by “a man who must have been an authority on taste and had a remarkable quality of invention.”¹²⁷

Taut obviously knew that “this prince was certainly no architect in the modern sense of the word. He did not sit at the desk and worry about contractors.” Yet he couldn't help not to mention a tale saying that Kobori Enshū was able to set conditions that any architect can only dream about: “It is said that he only began a task after three conditions had been accepted. They were: firstly, no time limits for finishing the building, secondly, no fixed cost for its construction and thirdly, no visits by the employer to the site before the work was terminated.”¹²⁸ Taut was not a historian and did not claim to be one. It is true that some traits of Katsura's design are connected to the tea ceremony and its aesthetics,¹²⁹ but the authorship is a legend that, however, fit well to Taut's very Western and very romantic idea of a legendary creator¹³⁰.

At the same time, in Taut's view a true genius should be able to transcend subjectivity and the vanity of self-expression: seeing Katsura, he exclaimed: “Not an individualistic building everything seems egalitarian.”¹³¹ It is interesting that for Taut, the ideal of freedom seems to be expressed by the architectural elements themselves: “Why is that not a single line line of the house is continued to the garden? Because each element – house, water, landing stage, tree, stone – has an independent life. It only seeks good relationships – like a good society.”¹³² *Taut's Reflections on the visit of Katsura* look like a spontaneous sketchbook at first glance, but it systematically confronts general ideas with details.

¹²⁶ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 303.

¹²⁷ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 301.

¹²⁸ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 301.

¹²⁹ The plan of the main palace building was called the “flying geese” because of the diagonal composition of rooms. According to Arata Isozaki, this can be read as derived from certain spatial organisation of utensils during the tea ceremony. Arata Isozaki, *A Diagonal Strategy: Katsura as Envisioned by “Enshū's Taste”*, in Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial villa*, 330-347, 9-41.

¹³⁰ As Manfred Speidel notes, Taut's search for a legendary creator is very similar to Goethe's eulogy of the Strasbourg cathedral, and its purported author. Manfred Speidel, *Bruno Taut and the Katsura Villa*, in Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 325.

¹³¹ As Manfred Speidel noticed, many of the ideas that Taut connected to Katsura are already manifest in his book *Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika* (1929). Manfred Speidel, *Bruno Taut and the Katsura Villa*, in Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 325.

¹³² “Warum setzt sich keine Linie des Hauses im Garten fort? Weil jedes Element – Haus, Wasser, Bootstelle, Baum, Stein, sein Eigenleben hat. Es sucht nur gute Beziehungen – wie eine gute Gesellschaft.” Bruno Taut, *Gedanken nach dem Besuch in Katsura (Reflections after a Visit to Katsura)*, folio 12, reproduced in: Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 339.

It is true that the ideas of a genius creator and of an ideal of an egalitarian architect who blends to anonymous, may seem contradictory. This dilemma of course connects to the conflicts inherent in Taut's own creation: the individualist, expressionist phantasies of the Alpine architecture – where Taut gave way to his artistic inclinations, and the practical city planner of mass-scale housing – where his personality stepped back to produce an anonymous, egalitarian quality.

The root of Taut's excitement about Japan and specifically about Katsura is that he apparently found here something he was seeking for years before: a possibility to reconcile opposites not only in a higher "unity of opposites", but in an actual singularity within design. It was exactly this "formal progression from the simple and useful to the artistic and spiritual that Taut believed he had found in Japan."¹³³

The qualities that Taut identified are universal. Katsura only exemplifies them in an outstanding way. What Taut finally praises the most is Japanese simplicity (*Einfachheit*) – It gets an entire page in his Katsura album: "Art is Sense. In the greatest simplicity lies the highest Art." And on the next page: "Utmost simplicity. Modesty / and therefore freedom."¹³⁴ But he identifies the same simplicity in rural houses: "The life in the traditional house is in harmony with its forms. Economy is the supreme law, even in very rich houses: the entire domestic life is reduced to the greatest simplicity."¹³⁵

Identifying the Fundamentals

Fundamentals of Japanese architecture, written as a lecture near the end his stay in Japan, are Taut's most concise attempt to organize his flamboyant thoughts about Japanese architecture systematically. The main theoretical tool that Taut uses in his interpretation is a Western idea of "antagonistic principles", basically the dialectic principle dating back to Hegel. On one hand, Taut used examples that he actually saw on his own eyes, on the other hand, he derives general principles from them and subsequently projects onto the entire history of Japanese architecture. This attitude allows him to easily connect buildings across the centuries.

The Katsura villa, with its pure and simple architectural style, expresses for him a force that goes back to the very origins of Japanese architecture. As the history of Japanese architecture

¹³³ Speidel in Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 319.

¹³⁴ Taut in Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 340.

¹³⁵ Taut, *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, 47. "La vie dans la maison traditionnelle est en harmonie avec ses formes. L'économie est la loi suprême, même dans des maisons très riches: toute la vie domestique est réduite à la plus grande simplicité."

is of course much longer, this origin as such, has to be sought elsewhere, best in the allegedly oldest architecture to be seen in Japan: The Ise shrine.

The Ise Grand Shrine (*Ise Jingū* 伊勢神宮, henceforth in this text as Ise shrine or Ise) is the main and – according to the tradition – the oldest Shinto shrine in Japan, founded probably in the 7th century AD. Located in the Mie prefecture, it is a complex of scattered buildings located in a forest, consisting of two main compounds approximately six kilometres apart: the inner shrine (Naikū) and the outer shrine (Gekū). The Inner shrine is dedicated to the worship of the goddess Amaterasu, whose mirror is kept in the shrine as one of the main sacred objects. The Japanese imperial family is considered to be her direct descendants.

The main religious buildings of Ise and the bridge over the river Isuzu are regularly dismantled and new ones are built every twenty years, a trait that has often been connected with the Shinto belief in impermanence, and as we will see, continues to have impact on thinking on Japanese architectural thought. The area of the main shrines, separated by a high fence and accessible only to the priests, consists of two plots covered with white pebbles, used alternately during the twenty-year cycles. One of them is therefore always empty, except for a small shed protecting the stub of the sacred pillar (*shin-no-hashira*). The building style is unique, archaic but relatively simple, using simplified elements of ancient storehouse building dating back to the Kofun period (250-538 AD). The individual shrines are built on pillars set directly in the ground, and their walls are formed by precisely stacked planks; all is made only by wooden joinery. The central pillar *shin-no-bashira* in the middle has mostly symbolical function, two main pillars (*munamochi-bashira*) support the roof directly. The roofs are a distinctive feature, and actually the most visible part for the visitors who can only peek over the gate. They are made of thatched reed, with short decorative logs, or billets (*katsuogi*) placed on top of the roof's ridge. The bargeboards project beyond the roof, forming diagonally crossed decorative finials (*chigi*).

In the Ise shrine, Taut found the much needed historical evidence for his ideas about what is essential in Japanese architecture, in his words, what is fundamental. The context in which Taut learned about this ancient monument, however, was quite special. While Katsura, well-kept but unopen to broader public, was a bit of a discovery even for the Japanese in 1933, Taut saw Ise – then freshly after its 58th rebuilding – as place of pilgrimage that was given a nation-wide importance from official places. Because of its connection to the goddess Amaterasu and thus to the creation myth of Japan, the shrine was always important in the religious sense, but only in the 18th and 19th century it became a mass place of pilgrimage, with millions of visitors per year. The national, and increasingly nationalistic significance given to the sanctuary grew in the Meiji era, with the restoration of the imperial family's power, and actually a modern effort to create a modern state-bound religion from the animistic Shinto cults.

By the late 19th century, first Western visitors had the occasion to see Ise. But then, used to

their domestic architectural standards, they were generally unimpressed by the sanctuary's plain architecture. Moreover, the access to the main shrines was restricted, and fenced off, even more strictly than it is until today. Basil Chamberlain in his tour guide (1893) paraphrased an imaginary disappointed tourist saying "there is nothing to see, and they won't let you see it," but still he felt obliged to warn the potential tourist about the "remarkable plainness of the Shinto architecture."¹³⁶ For the American architect Ralph Adams Cram in 1898, Ise was "sufficiently ugly and barbarous."¹³⁷ Only the natural setting – the majestic forest in which the shrines are set – could save the impression from the trip. Nonetheless, Ise slowly got to be appreciated by Japanese architectural history not just for its significance, but also for architectural form. It then happened, as Jonathan M. Reynolds writes, that the "Japanese government's effort to promote Ise as a bulwark of the imperial institution coincided with the development of architectural history as an academic discipline."¹³⁸ Particularly one article by historian Chūta Itō (1867–1954) from 1921 was crucial for promoting Ise as a cornerstone of national culture, pointing out the practice of its perpetual rebuilding every 20 years as unique in the world, and described it as an "architecture that manifests the spirit of simplicity that is characteristic of the Japanese people."¹³⁹

Taut met Chūta Itō in Japan and absorbed a lot of the opinions that the Japanese scholar disseminated in his own appraisal. Under this influence, Taut identified in Ise's archaic architectural form the beginning of the essentially Japanese tradition in its purest form. But to express it, he employed his Western background, promptly comparing Ise to Parthenon:

*"The posts and other structural members did no need to follow any static calculation. Here one is dealing not with engineering but with architecture, such as is the case with the Parthenon where the last definite form has also been created – there in marble and here in wood and straw. Just as the Parthenon receives its form, as to proportions and profiles, from the clear and transparent air of Greece, so the Isé shrine receives its form from the thickly and rainy air of Japan. Under these very divergent fundamental conditions, in both cases, the human spirit has created the purest architectonic form. Everything in Isé is artistic, nothing is artificial."*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Basil Hall Chamberlain, *A Handbook for Travelers in Japan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 24. Quoted in Jonathan M. Reynolds, *Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition*. *The Art Bulletin*, 83 (2), (2001): 316-341; quote from 320–321. Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*

¹³⁷ Ralph Adams Cram, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts*, p. 59. Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1981. Quoted by Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*, 321.

¹³⁸ Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*, 322.

¹³⁹ Chūta, Itō, *Ise Daijingu*, first published in *Tōkyō in nichi nichi shinbun* (1921), reprinted in Chūta, Itō, *Nihon kenchiku no kenkyū*, vol. 2 of Ito Chuta chosakushū, 2 vols. Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1982, vol. 2. Quoted by Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*, 322–323.

¹⁴⁰ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese architecture*, 15.

Another of Taut's oft-repeated ideals, the unity of man and nature, thus finds its perfect expression in Japan:

“These structures have their origin in the Japanese climate, which has much of both sunshine and dampness so that while the air is not transparent, the sky is brilliant. From this come not only the deep green of the surroundings, but also the particular feeling of the Japanese for nature.”¹⁴¹

The significance of the perpetual rebuilding, too, did not escape the attention of a modernist, since it literally brings modernity close to its original sense – novelty, with the beneficial effect of throwing away ornament along the way:

“Japanese often pretend that the atmosphere of age exerts a particular fascination on them, and they include a while artistic conception under the term wabi (to become, or appear, antique); but at the Isé shrine, nothing is wabi. It is always new, and it is precisely this which seems to me to be a specifically Japanese thing. The oppressive musty smell of age is banished, and with it, all non-architectural accessories, all ornaments contradicting pure architecture. They are only ballast anyway, and were omitted because their perpetual repetition every twenty-one years was seen to be nonsensical.”¹⁴²

A third group of buildings that Taut values very highly are folk dwellings. Taut saw many different examples of countryside vernacular around the country, and his article in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* even begins with pointing out their variety. Looking for the “fundamentals”, however, Taut chose only the large farmhouses he could see in the Shirakawa valley, Gifu prefecture. Here, with a steep roof are adapted to the heavy snowfall in the region, their beams joint with a system of ropes to resist the earthquakes. The weak resistance to earthquakes is actually an aspect that Taut pointed as the weakest point in Japanese architecture. In this respect, the Shirakawa houses are thus unique, and not typical for Japan. But according to Taut, they conserved the best of the unspoilt, Japanese building skills close to their original form, precisely thanks to their location in the isolated mountain valleys. This dubious explanation was Taut's way to justify including this relatively building unique type as a prototype in his scheme. But for that, Taut also needed to show the universal qualities that the Shirakawa farms bear. Taut “inspected the largest house up to the topmost point of its roof and found that everything shows the same logic of carpentry as the European,” adding in another wild comparison that “one could just call this construction Gothic.” In any case, these native dwellings, too, are built “in harmony with nature, suiting the climate, the construction means and the site.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 26.

¹⁴² Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 16.

¹⁴³ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 17.

In Taut's dialectic, the negative tradition comes to Japan with the Chinese imports, and is best visible at Buddhist temples. Nonetheless, its symbol is the Shinto shrine with a mausoleum of the first shogun, Ieyasu Tokugawa, in Nikkō (Nikkō Tōshō-gū 日光東照宮). Contemporary with the design of Katsura, the Nikkō buildings stand in stark contrast to it, with ample decoration and colourful ornament. Yet it was these buildings that were one of the first goals of Japanese tourists, and were also the first historical monuments which appealed to the Westerner visitors. In Taut's time, as they are today, they were on the programme of most tourist round-trips. Denying the Japan-ness of Nikkō's monuments, or at least stating their decadence is a something that took root in the architectural circles after Taut started it, as we will see.

Taut illustrated his lecture about the *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* with a schematic rendering of its historical development, which recalls the now notorious genealogy scheme of modern artistic movements Cubism and Abstract Art, published on the dust cover of the by Alfred J. Barr – coincidentally – in the same time (1936)¹⁴⁴. We see here the two roots of the “authentic” Japanese tradition, one side, Ise and the folk dwellings of Shirakawa, and the other, the “negative” one, influenced by China and Buddhism. The “positive” line originating in Ise represents the principles of “rational construction”. Materials “remain architectural” in it, and Katsura, one thousand years newer than Ise, continued in this same line thanks to an “intellectual assimilation of existing influences”. On the contrary, the “negative” line has been corrupt by a “dictated decorative style”, represented by Nikkō, an “undigested importation”¹⁴⁵. The scheme quickly leads all the way to the present challenges:

*“In these two contrasting forms Japan holds a unique mirror to the world: here, the free art of the geniuses, there, a dictated accumulation that can never become architecture. Japan's architectural arts could not rise higher than Katsura, nor sink lower than Nikko; for Nikko was indigested importation, but Katsura was an intellectual assimilation of existing influences. Contemporary Japan thus has a clear choice between these two poles.”*¹⁴⁶

In the schema, this clash of principles shows itself cast onto centuries of development when the “positive” line results in a “modern quality”, while the negative one (channelled by the Nikkō mausoleum) leads to “modern kitsch”. This schema gave Taut a graphic instrument to flatter his Japanese public by confirming the Japanese sense of superiority, but also a means to criticise it thanks to the relative vagueness about what “kitsch” actually includes.

¹⁴⁴ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 27.

¹⁴⁵ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 20–21.

In Taut's footprints

It would be easy, in the light of our current historical knowledge, to laugh off Taut's schematic view, but it is also very instructive in what we can learn from it. As could see so far, there were two major factors that informed Taut's interpretation of Japan. The first one was the situation that he encountered in Japan, the other was his formative background from Germany and his previous creative endeavours.

In 1933, when Taut fled Germany and arrived to Japan, the country just left the League of Nations, headed toward an increasingly militaristic regime. A debate about what is "truly" Japanese which run since the rapid modernization of the Meiji reforms began, intensified in nationalistic atmosphere, and of course concerned architecture, too. Most Taut's Japanese friends and acquaintances participated in it, and it seems understandable that their opinions informed Taut's judgements¹⁴⁷. As we could just see in his denigration of foreign influences, he sometimes naively adopted positions close to the Japanese nationalism, on the other hand, he dismissed the neo-imperialist architectural, so called *teikan* style of the Tokyo National Museum.

Isozaki reminds that in this respect, Taut acted in a way that supported the goals of his Japanese friends, without being fully aware of the political implications. His identification of a "good" and "bad" tradition served well the purpose of the Japanese who were on the side of the modernistic, yet still nationalistic Japan. In Isozaki's account, Taut appears only as an instrument, almost as a puppet of his Japanese hosts. That is too extreme. As Sandra Kaji O'Grady wrote, "the larger argument in which Taut's claim to the modernity of Katsura is made does not, however, simply reflect the wants of his hosts. Taut's writings on Japanese architecture maintained values specific to his earlier activities as an intellectual in Germany."¹⁴⁸

Taut's formative background in German historical-philosophical thinking was also fed but more widely shared culture of his time, which we saw in his urge to look for a mythical creator, recurrent principles, and their origins¹⁴⁹. Two decades later, Taut's German peer Walter Gropius will approach Japan with some peculiarly similar formulations without even mentioning him. That can be only explained by the common intellectual milieu of the early 20th century Germany that they both soaked in their early years.

¹⁴⁷ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*.

¹⁴⁸ Sandra Kaji O'Grady, Authentic Japanese architecture after Bruno Taut: the problem of Eclecticism, *Fabrications*, 11(2) (September 2001), 3.

¹⁴⁹ Sandra Kaji O'Grady, too, shows the continuity within Taut's thinking, pointing to his previous writings from the Expressionist years, 1910-1920. Kaji O'Grady, Authentic Japanese architecture after Bruno Taut.

Taut's principal contribution may have shown itself only after he was long gone. Just as Yoshida, Taut was keen to point out the topicality of the Japanese tradition for the contemporary architecture. In Katsura, he saw "an absolute proof of [his] theory, which I have seen as a basis for a contemporary architecture." Leaving the Shūgakuin park in Kyoto, he was keen to point out even a surprising detail: the simplicity of the compound's wooden and bamboo gate and its harmony with the car parked in front of it. Taut used the picture of this strange encounter in several of his publications, commenting: "The automobile in this picture is not at all incongruous in the setting."¹⁵⁰ and it bears a conspicuous similarity to the evocation of the "modern spirit" that Le Corbusier used in juxtaposing an image of a car with one of the Greek temples in *Vers une architecture*¹⁵¹, or yet the iconic photo of his house of his villa in the Weissenhof estate in Stuttgart with a car parked in front.

It was often the Japanese audience that Taut addressed in the first place. After praising the results of the Japanese tradition, he naturally picks up the question whether can be applied while designing contemporary houses. He holds that Japan does have a capacity to create new architecture, which he imagines to be based on a spatial and aesthetic synthesis of Japan and the West.¹⁵² He does not shy off from advising his Japanese colleagues which traits of their own tradition are fruitful. Yet with a self-reflective irony, he quotes what the above mentioned Chūta Itō once told him: "Fifty years ago Europeans came and told us, 'Nikkō is the most valuable,' and we thought so too; now Bruno Taut has come and told us, 'It is Isé and Katsura which are the most valuable,' and again we believe." – Responding, Taut shows some openness to different thought systems than his own, although he does not think out the potentially radical implications of Itō's remark: "Fine oriental irony, and superior to our systematization".¹⁵³

Nonetheless, what Taut did soon was turning his newly acquired knowledge of Japan into a critical tool. He used it against contemporary architectural practice, both in Japan and in the West. His ideal of a new architecture did not necessarily coincide with that which his former colleagues from Germany – Gropius, Mies, and Hilberseimer – just started promoting in the US; Taut was a modernist but outside so called International style. More or less directly, he warned that the modern architecture is in a danger of schematisation:

¹⁵⁰ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese architecture*, 15.

¹⁵¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a new architecture* (London: John Rodker, 1931 (1923)), 134–135.

¹⁵² „[I declare] bizarrerie and abstruseness, in short, all that attracts most visitors to Japan as exotic – to be a phenomenon of degeneration, and in fact non-Japanese. All Japanese who wish to make their country a new organism with regard to technique, construction and town-planning ought to be gratified if such a presumption were correct, for it implies that the Japanese spirit may work rationally as well as aesthetically and be justified in hoping to solve the difficult contemporary task of finding a synthesis of Japan and the West.“ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 13.

¹⁵³ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*, 6.

*“Above all, it is necessary to know how to identify the specifically Japanese features in this [contemporary] architecture. It is as important for Europe as it is for Japan. For Europe, this knowledge of architecture, born under very specific conditions, will combat a widespread schematism that begins to hinder the development of modern architecture.”*¹⁵⁴

Japanese architecture serves him as a model of architecture which is not schematic and boring; and he instantly uses this realization for a criticism: “Simplicity is not nudity, drought, boredom. Modern architecture should be aware of it.”¹⁵⁵

Taut’s Contribution

Regardless of all the contradictions, Taut’s contribution to understanding Japan and its architectural tradition is unique. Japanese architecture here appears as an embodiment of an ideal, and an incentive for contemporary creation. Taut at least verbally refused seeing Japan as exotic, and went to lengths addressing the closeness of the modern principles and the Japanese tradition. He reflected both on the changing nature of Western interpretations, and on his own position, acknowledging it as necessarily subjective. At the same time, he questioned what this modernity should be and what will it become.

Taut’s early death in the Turkish exile, as well as the historical victory of the other branch of Modernism (spread in a large part by his German colleagues who, unlike him, did reach America), were not favourable for the further fate of his work. His passionate, personal writing style also did not help to spread his message in the clearest possible way. The impact of his writings and lectures, however, did not get lost in Japan itself, as witnessed by Charlotte Perriand, who came to Japan four years after Taut left (see chapter II.3.).

¹⁵⁴ « Surtout, il faut savoir identifier les traits spécifiquement japonais dans cette architecture [contemporaine]. C’est aussi important pour l’Europe que pour le Japon. Pour l’Europe, cette connaissance d’une architecture, née dans des conditions très particulières, permettra de combattre un schématisme trop répandu et qui commence à gêner le développement d’une architecture moderne. » – Taut, *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, 46.

¹⁵⁵ « La simplicité n’est pas la nudité, la sécheresse, l’ennui. L’architecture moderne devrait en avoir conscience. » Taut, *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, 47.

II. I.8. Conclusion

All in all, it seems that the reception of Japanese arts in the West followed steps which are not totally unexpected. It proceeded from relatively small objects, easily diffused and transportable (paper, print), to craft objects, in the 19th century, and only later reached architecture, which is very difficult to grasp, both physically and mentally. We have seen that at the beginning of the 20th century, Adolf Loos was contemptuous about the Japanese inspiration in architecture, which he saw as just another exotic inspiration that is soon bound to the past. Three decades later, his opinion apparently changed, as he compared his own designs to Japan, and saw Japan as a hope for the future, promising a possible synthesis of Japanese and Western principles. By then, he was not alone. We have tried to explain what could have happened to cause such a different perception, stressing how the information about Japanese architecture spread – exhibitions, publication, and sometimes mediators, who enabled visits and lectures in person. We stopped at authors and events important for the changing image of Japan within the first three decades of the 20th century. It seems clearer then that an idea of closeness in principles between the modern movement and the Japanese tradition – that is the idea that we will continue to follow in our further investigations – germinated around 1930. To illustrate these origins, we needed to read more closely two authors, whose writings championed this approach, and remained relevant in the following years: Tetsurō Yoshida and Bruno Taut. Yoshida, with his *Japanese House*, succeeded in providing Western architects information in detail hitherto unknown, while tacitly suggesting their closeness to the Modern Architecture. Taut, in a different style, tackled several important themes at once. With a good deal of intuition, he stressed the importance of the Katsura villa, which, partly thanks to him, later became the Modernists' key to the Japanese tradition. While his approach certainly mirrored his own artistic interests and, Taut's view of Japan in pioneering in several senses. He was the first who explicitly refused to see Japan as exotic, he was vocal about the proximity of principles in modern building and Japanese tradition, and he used this comparison as a critical tool to reflect on modernity. His writing highlights most of the difficulties of such an endeavour and is not free of contradictions, but Taut was the first one who raises the questions central for our following interest in their full scope.

II.2. JAPAN BETWEEN 1945 AND 1970

II.2.1. First image: Hiroshima, 1945

1945 is often called Year Zero and besides Germany, Japan is where this name fits the best¹⁵⁶. By the end of August, Japanese cities lie in ruins: „The massive area bombings, followed by rapidly spreading firestorms, had left virtually nothing, apart from a few stone chimneys of public bathhouses, which still stood out pathetically in the charred debris.“¹⁵⁷ From mid-1944, over one hundred of them were a target of firebombing, but the picture that transfixed the world was of course the atomic cloud over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August.

In Hiroshima, after the ash settled, the only structure to remain standing in the centre of the city after the atomic explosion is a scorched ruin with a distinctive dome, the former Prefectural Industrial Exhibition Hall, built in 1915 by the Czech architect Jan Letzel in Western style. It is obvious to choose this only remaining building as a memorial, leaving it damaged as it was as a memento. The ruin of the building will become a memorial by itself. Kenzō Tange, a young Japanese architect wins the architectural competition for a new museum and park nearby; the ruin, called Peace memorial building or A-Bomb Dome, will now dominate the central axis of the newly built memorial park, surrounded by cherry trees.

II.2.2. Second image: Osaka, 1970

“Noise. Apart from the continual haranguing by the public address the air at expo is filled with muzak – the Western kind – with a preponderance of medleys from Broadway musicals and a frequently repeated, and somewhat less than inspiring rendering of ‘Around the World in 80 Days’. Only in? the early morning and late at night does authentic Japanese music greet the ears, and on the latter occasion, with the brightly lit Theme pavilion standing out against the sky and the last remnants of the day’s 250 000 visitors fleeing down the moving footway tubes the image of EXPO is at its most urbane and most futuristic. A quotation from H. G. Wells dating from 1898 comes to mind: ‘The tumultuous memory of the moving platforms and the huge facades of those wonderful streets reasserted itself. The shouting multitudes came back clear and vivid... he felt himself a little figure, very small and ineffectual, pitifully conspicuous. And all about him the world was – strange.’”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Both countries experienced a somewhat analogous situation. The expression “year Zero” is used, for instance in the film by Roberto Rossellini (dir.), Germany: Year Zero (Germania anno zero, 1948).

¹⁵⁷ Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ — Expo ABZ. *Architectural Design* 6-7/1970, 277.

The international exhibition in Osaka, master-planned by the leading architect Kenzō Tange, and dotted with often bizarre pavilions designed by the members of the Metabolist group, seems to be an ending point of sorts. Critics predict this may be the last International exhibition – and it indeed was for two decades. Monorail trains circle all around the expo ground, moving crowds of visitors hither and thither. On the grounds, robots are the new obsession of the day. “Clearly, the Japanese are obsessed by the idea of robots. At least 26 Japanese companies are manufacturing them, 24 or more are on the verge of doing so.”¹⁵⁹

The whole conveys an image of an unbridled abundance. Most of the quarter-a-million daily visitors are domestic; long queues forming everywhere make it impossible to see more than four of the more popular pavilions, sensory overload and money spent on what are apparently overgrown toys, there seems to be simply too much of everything. A sense of exhaustion is here three years before the oil crisis actually put an end to the era.

How can one country host so contrasting images, only 25 years apart?

II.2.3. “Japan is the rage”

Ruth Benedict, a famous anthropologist, published in 1946 what became one of the most popular books on Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Though it was written at the invitation of the US office of war information during the war and the author could not go to Japan for research, Benedict, as an excellent anthropologist, tries to “use Japanese behavior in war as an asset in understanding them, not as a liability.”¹⁶⁰

The capitulation, following the use of the atomic bombs in 1945, started an 8-year American occupation of the country. While general Douglas MacArthur de facto governed the country throughout this time, the Emperor remained at the throne, acquitted from responsibility for any war crimes. The American influence was omnipresent in Japan, and the country’s image in the rest of the world was filtered, to a great extent, by the United States. This relationship changed Japan profoundly, from politics to popular sports and meals. Mc Arthur called the Japanese nation “a 12-year old boy”, meaning that they have a better chance to change

¹⁵⁹ Martin Pawley, Architecture versus the Movies, *Architectural Design* 6-7 (1970): 294.

¹⁶⁰ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston, 1946), 7. “It examines Japanese assumptions about the conduct of life. It describes these assumptions as they have manifested themselves whatever the activity in hand. It is about what makes Japan a nation of Japanese.” Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 29.

direction and get rid of their cruel habits¹⁶¹. The image of Japanese as children remains influential long afterwards, and everything from their small stature and passion for comic books falls under it. Children can be raised. The idea of the “Jap” as an enemy did not last very long, at least in the West.

Speaking about children, there were actually many of them around. Japan always felt densely populated to travellers, due to the limited area that is not taken by steep mountains and can thus be built up. But now the population growth is felt everywhere. The country’s population exceeded 100 million by the end of the 1960s, growing from the 72 million in 1945, when Japan was decimated by war losses. Tokyo Metropolitan area became largest city in the world by 1965¹⁶², Tokyo metro is running at a 2-minute interval but its capacity does not suffice, and several new lines are being built. Trains are always packed.

Japan quickly shook off its poverty, growing ever richer. The three decades after the World War II, *trente glorieuses*, were a period of growth in most of the Western world, but the Japanese live what is commonly called an economic miracle. High literacy already from the pre-war years, social stability, and demilitarization which allowed to invest the armament money elsewhere boost the economy so that the Japanese economy grew steadily from 1945, by an average of 10 % in 1960s. By 1967, Japan was the second largest economy of the world according to the World Bank¹⁶³. A further boost and display of this wealth were the Olympics in Tokyo, and the 1970 Expo takes place on one of the last free pieces of land near Osaka. These two big events crowned this image of success in a symbolic way, since they were both originally scheduled to take place in Japan already in 1940, but were cancelled because of the raising Japanese militarism, and ultimately the outbreak of the war. Japan got a chance that does not come often, a chance to rectify history: the change of Japan’s image was completed. The change was soon felt at every turn. Japanese consumer products, electronics, cameras, were no more perceived as imitations and became an epitome of precision, with an ever increasing export to the entire world.

¹⁶¹ "Measured by the standards of modern civilization, [Japan] would be like a boy of twelve as compared with [the Anglo-Saxon] development of 45 years," General McArthur during his Congressional hearing on his dismissal as Commander of US Forces in Korea in 1951. Quoted by Ronald Dore, *Japan and The U.S.: An Odd Couple*, in Rosa Caroli and Duccio Basosi, (eds.), *Legacies of the U.S. Occupation of Japan: Appraisals after Sixty Years*, 2.

¹⁶² Tertius Chandler, *Four Thousand Years of Urban Growth: An Historical Census* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987). Chandler defined a city as a continuously built-up area (urban) with suburbs but without farmland inside the municipality.

¹⁶³ Source: <http://en.classora.com/reports/t24369/general/ranking-of-the-worlds-richest-countries-by-gdp?edition=1967&fields=> retrieved 21. 1 2018.

The rapid growth, nevertheless, led to contrasts that appear incongruent to visitors, something the *Architectural Design* could not ignore even when reporting from the seemingly otherworldly Osaka Expo:

“One of the curious things about Japan is the apparent poverty and deprivation in any sense clearly understood by a West European city dweller. The priorities around which family and social life revolve are utterly different from ours and as a consequence direct comparisons are practically impossible. To give an example: a teacher in Kyoto with a wife, three sons, a daughter and the wife and daughter of one of his sons, lives in a small, six-roomed traditional Japanese timber house. There is no bathroom or kitchen or internal lavatory. Cooking is carried out on the floor in any room by means of long flexible connections to a calor gas bottle outside, food preparation can take place anywhere. The only service provided in the same manner as in the West is electricity. At the same time the family will have two or three colour TV sets, three cars (one for each of the sons), and will lead a much more extensive social life (tea rooms, public baths, theatres) than in Europe. With the almost non-existent acoustic separation offered by paper partitions, and the almost complete absence of thermal insulation, the house seems to lend itself to various kinds of discomfort as well as an absence of privacy – particularly in view of the studious nature of the household in question. To these people in particular the concept of a one-person bath inside a hotel suite seemed to exercise a powerful fascination. One night the eldest son insisted on taking a bath in it at 2 AM, on the following his mother – who never wore Western clothes – came especially to view the installation but declined to employ it.”¹⁶⁴

All along, Japanese culture expanded in all directions, and quickly made a name for itself abroad. Japanese get Nobel prizes (Hideki Yukawa in 1949 and Shin'ichirō Tomonaga 1965 for physics, and Yasunari Kabawata in 1968 for literature). Japanese films entered world cinemas, and change a hitherto mostly static image of Japan in a moving one. Award-winning directors like Akira Kurosawa (*Rashōmon*, 1950) or Teinosuke Kinugasa (*Gate of Hell*, 1953) drew from the rich and attractive culture of old Japan. Other, such as Yasujirō Ozu, masterly depicted the how the social changes change individual behaviour. Ozu's films are also worth mentioning from an architectural viewpoint, depicting the Japanese interiors from a particularly low angle. Some more anxious aspects of modern life penetrated to 1960s films, like those directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara (*The Woman of the Dunes*, 1964; *The Face of Another*, 1966).

Japanese culture enthralled the world, and the world was still more exposed to it. At the same time, the Japanese fell for the Western consumer culture. Bernard Rudofsky (1905–1988), architect, designer, traveller and writer, noted the mutual enchantment of America and Japan already in his article written for *Domus* in 1956:

¹⁶⁴ — Expo ABZ : *Architectural Design* 6-7/1970, 271.

“Today, we are no doubt fairly well instructed in the more intimate aspects of every-day life in Japan, information has become easy to come by. The current popularity of all things Japanese released torrents of publications on any subject from Ainu culture to Zen philosophy. To come across Japanese magazines in the U.S. is not uncommon anymore, and Japanese moving pictures are by now as familiar as Italian ones. To top it all, and to give Americans a tangible taste of Japanese atmosphere, The Museum of Modern art in New built in its garden a museum version of a Japanese house. In short, Japan is the rage. In Japan, the situation is, if anything, reversed – the craze is for everything American. Ever since 1853, when an American fleet dropped anchor at the mouth of what today is called Tokyo Bay, putting an end to japans splendid isolation, the Japanese have been westernizing their country unrelentingly.”¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the year 1970 however marked also a sense of end. If Japan was source to clashing images, but generally attractive images of both past and future, two events which happened this year showed a grisly form of both past and future. On 31 March, a left-wing terrorist group kidnapped an airplane of the Japanese airlines, with 129 hostages on board, introducing the modern form of international terrorism. They eventually released the hostages before the hijackers flew to North Korea, where they god asylum. On 25 November, another event recalled the demons of the Japanese nationalism. The foremost Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, ended his life in a theatrical way. Having fostered a peculiar form of Japanese nationalism, he founded a small right-wing militia and tried to get hold of a military base by force, hoping to provoke a coup d'état that would restore the emperor's powers. Not unexpectedly the attempt failed and the writer immediately committed *seppuku*, the ritual suicide.

¹⁶⁵ Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky: a Humane Designer*, 209.

II.3. MODERNISTS MEET JAPAN

“Dear Corbu, all what we have been fighting for has its parallel in old Japanese culture.”

– Walter Gropius, 1954¹⁶⁶

II.3.1. Introduction

This chapter consists of two studies about individual creators and their discovery of Japan, one about Charlotte Perriand, French designer and architect and a collaborator of Le Corbusier, and the other about Walter Gropius, architect, the founder and director of the Bauhaus, later a Harvard professor. Since Gropius, and Perriand to a great degree, were both one of the shapers of the “heroic” Modern movement, they require a slightly different approach from the rest of the research. Extensive biographies of both of them are available, but the main focus here is the question of a formative role of their respective encounters with Japan – in the case of Perriand, it is her long-time stay in Japan, and for Gropius, the highlighted, even if retrospective identification of his modernist creative principles with the Japanese tradition.

One generation apart by age, one French and the other German, they both significantly contributed to the development of the modern architecture, first in their own country, and soon also on the international level. Both belonged to the modern movement with an increasingly internationalist spirit – manifested in the CIAM –, they were part of the single modern movement, and they met in person around 1929 at a reception at the German embassy in Paris.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the career of each of them, as well as their encounter with Japan followed different routes. Charlotte Perriand went to Japan first, aged 36, in 1940, and stayed for three years, and returned later for extended periods. Almost twice her age, Walter Gropius only visited Japan in 1954 for three months, after what he called a long anticipation. On the latter occasion the two met again, sharing their affection for old Japan, as well as their dismay about its modern development.

¹⁶⁶ Postcard sent from Japan by Walter Gropius to Le Corbusier, June 1954; reproduced in Francesco del Co, « La princesse est modeste », in: Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa* (Milano 2005), 386-389.

¹⁶⁷ Charlotte Perriand, *A Life of Creation. An Autobiography*. (New York 2003).

II.3.2. First encounter: Charlotte Perriand

Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) was the most prominent member of the 1920s avant-garde movement who stayed in Japan for a longer period and who was motivated to connect its traditional culture with modern design. Unlike Bruno Taut, who never got the chance to return home with his message from Japan, Perriand turned into an active propagator of Japanese culture after 1945, introducing it in exhibitions, writings, photographs, radio emissions, and transforming it in her designs. Nowadays, Perriand attracts due attention as an accomplished designer with successful forays into architecture, a woman who succeeded in a predominantly male profession – even as a collaborator of Le Corbusier and Jean Prouvé –, and thanks to her very long life also as a direct witness of the avant-garde movement. In the last one of these roles, she was able to narrate the history of modernism from her first-hand experience of an active participant well into the end of the 20th century, and left behind an exciting book of memoirs¹⁶⁸. Most importantly for us, Japan was not a mere footnote in her life but a formative experience, one that changed her creative outlook and had a direct, visible impact on design work.

Thanks to a great interest of scholars, even if belated, there is now no lack of literature about Perriand, focussing on her interesting life story and her work in its immediate context; including her relationship to Japan. What is still missing is a critical assessment, setting her work in a broader context, to which we can contribute here by demonstrating her ways of introducing Japan to Europe.

Perriand's first contacts with Japan were on a personal level: Shortly after she started working in Le Corbusier's studio in 1927, new colleagues came there from Japan, first Kunio Maekawa (1905–1986), who spent the years 1928 to 1930 in Paris; soon after he left, Junzō Sakakura (1901–1969) arrived. She forged a friendship especially with Sakakura, who stayed until 1937 and became Le Corbusier's studio head. It was Sakakura who donated her, in 1932, a French translation of Kakuzō Okakura's *Book of Tea*, a book that she instantly liked and quoted until the end of her life. The essay appealed to her from the beginning, as she later claimed, in touching her favourite subjects – cleanliness and the economy of means. In the beginning of the book Okakura writes: „The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism (...). It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it is economics, for it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly.“¹⁶⁹ The hygiene movement and the economy of means were among the essential impulses of the architectural Modernism. Perriand though, in her memoirs connects these values and her liking of Japanese culture with in a single

¹⁶⁸ Charlotte Perriand, *Une vie de création* (Paris 1998). English translation: Charlotte Perriand, *A Life of Creation. An Autobiography* (New York: Monacelli, 2003.)

¹⁶⁹ Okakura, *Book of Tea*,. 2.

memory from her childhood: When she was ten and had to spend some time in a hospital to have her appendix removed, she showed a liking for the white, aseptic empty space:

*“I liked the place; it was white and the stark room looked onto a courtyard planted with trees. My mother brought me champagne mixed with orange juice, to boost my spirits and physical well-being. Back home, the clutter of furniture and objects accosted me and I began to cry. The hospital’s asceticism had suited me better. For the first time, I discovered the power of the void – or, as Kakuzo Okakura observed in 1906 in *The Book of Tea*, that ‘vacuum is all potent, because all containing.’”¹⁷⁰*

Another important affinity with Japan was the love of nature. Perriand was an avid hiker, mountaineer and skier. With Pierre Jeanneret¹⁷¹ she devoted herself to the photography of natural objects such as pebbles, branches or seashells, which were a direct source of inspiration for their work¹⁷². This preference for outdoor activities, planted already in her childhood in Burgundy, drew her also more to the countryside, in contrast to many ultimately urban avant-gardists. In Japan, she stood at the very beginnings of skiing in Japan, and was proud to have taught the Japanese a French skiing style instead of the Tyrolian than they had begun to learn.

The first time Perriand expressed her interest in Japan in writing was in 1935 in *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, a leading French Modernist magazine, founded in 1930 by André Bloc (1896–1966). Perriand published a comparative study about the traditional dwellings in France, Norway, Switzerland, Westphalia, Macao – and Japan, with captions about Japan written by Sakakura¹⁷³. A few months before, coincidentally, the same magazine published Bruno Taut’s text *L’architecture nouvelle au Japon*.¹⁷⁴ Although there was no direct connection, the two articles share a common idea that traditional architecture contains the essential elements for modern architecture, an idea of which Perriand would become a big promoter after the war. Already in this text she describes the characteristics of traditional Japanese architecture: sliding doors, the geometrical and flexible space of the rooms, built-in cupboards, standardization of the components. Such elements were something that definitely corresponded to her and Jeanneret’s creative interests, such as their experiments with minimal building cells (study of a 14 m² cell, 1929–31).

¹⁷⁰ Perriand, *A Life of Creation*, 12. The sentence is actually not so much Okakura’s observation as his paraphrasing of the 11th chapter of Laozi’s *Dao De Jing*.

¹⁷¹ Pierre Jeanneret (1896–1967), Le Corbusier’s cousin, collaborator in the architecture studio and her partner in the 1930s.

¹⁷² See also Jacques Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et la photographie – L’œil en éventail* (Paris 2011).

¹⁷³ Charlotte Perriand, L’habitation familiale, son développement économique et social, *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* 1 (1935): 25–30.

¹⁷⁴ Bruno Taut, Architecture Nouvelle au Japon. In: *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 4 (1935): 46–83.

Perriand in Japan

Perrinad was a left-wing activist in France, but in 1940 when she got an invitation from the Japanese Trade ministry to come to Japan as a design consultant in decorative arts, she accepted. She finally left Paris on the day of German occupation, and in Marseille she boarded *Hakusan Maru*, a big ship that took her to Japan travelling over Lisbon and around Africa, since the Suez Canal was closed due to the war events. She describes the weeks-long voyage in her vivid memoirs, including the interesting encounters that gradually gave her more knowledge about Japanese culture.¹⁷⁵

In Japan, her task fell within the tradition of inviting Western experts to Japan, practiced since the Meiji reform, aimed at teaching the Japanese a knowledge they did not have. Her main official mission in Japan was to work as a design consultant for the government, working on a selection of quality design products suitable for export, and preparing a big exhibition from them as well as her own work. Choosing Perriand for the field of interior design made good sense, since she previously made outstanding exhibitions on fairs and other events – the exhibition of her early steel tube chairs actually convinced Le Corbusier to hire her back in 1927. The word *selection* was a key for her attitude: instead of exporting Western formulas, she took a lot of time to travel intensely around the country's manufactures, as well as design schools, and made a great effort to discuss the problems with the locals. All along, she tried to point out what is viable from the current Japanese production. She soon developed a liking for Japanese traditional handicraft, and tried to encourage the Japanese to use it as a basis for larger scale production. She was, however, all the more disappointed to find the Japanese industry flooded with what she called “kitsch” or “pastiche”, products trying to imitate Western ones. “In Japan, there is no enthusiasm for experimenting. One does not dare. As a result, one waits for what other countries are doing, what has a success, and copies it.”¹⁷⁶ Her advice was relentless: “Do not copy the West,” repeated she again and again¹⁷⁷.

Trying to be didactic, she once took an object designed in what she called a “Tyrolian style” and placed it in the *tokonoma*, the recess traditionally designated for an artistic object in a tea room. Her goal was to achieve an effect of desecration, to demonstrate how the object is not

¹⁷⁵ Description of the voyage: Perriand, *A Life of Creation*, 121–137.

¹⁷⁶ « Au Japon, il n’y a pas d’enthousiasme pour faire des expériences. On n’ose pas. Résultat : on attend ce que font les autres pays, ce qui a du succès, et on copie. » Charlotte Perriand, Memo Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, September, 1940 (Archive Charlotte Perriand). Quoted in: Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 64.

¹⁷⁷ Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 64.

worth it.¹⁷⁸ Instead, she invited the Japanese to base their effort on the sensible use of material.¹⁷⁹

Perriand describes the Japanese as being somewhat clueless about the speed of their country's industrial progress, often directly asking for advice on how to do things. She recalls being flooded by questions during her travels: "Should they continue to sit on the floor on cushions, or sit on chairs? Should they sleep in beds? Eat with chopsticks? Should women continue to wear kimonos? Should they live in houses built of solid materials? What did I think of my visits in Japan, of the way the people lived?"¹⁸⁰

A situation in which a Westerner, especially in a position of an authority, is being asked for advice was not uncommon and of course has to be taken into account when we criticise any symptoms of an orientalist attitude. Reading the records from her first Japanese stay, Perriand's approach to Japan shows both signs of a genuine and deep interest in all aspects of Japanese culture, and traces of Corbusean sermonizing rhetoric. Perriand herself and subsequently her biographers stress the aspect of learning about and from Japan, and in the light her later work there is little dispute about that. Yet this had its obvious limitations, as Perriand herself was only learning about the Japanese culture during the process. Still, her own narrative shows that discriminating what in Japan is in accordance with the "modern spirit" and what is "kitsch" was something she was able to do instantly, building on her previous experience.

Perriand's work in Japan culminated in an exhibition titled "Contribution to the interior equipment of a dwelling, 2601, selection, tradition, creation" (*Contribution à l'équipement intérieur de l'habitation, Japon 2601. Sélection, tradition, création*), which opened in 1941¹⁸¹.

At the entrance of the exhibition, Perriand set two big blow-ups against each other: on one side, the Katsura villa, and on the other side the week-end house built in La Celle Saint-Cloud by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret in 1935: two buildings distant in time and space, which were supposed to embody similar principles according to Perriand. The commentary would have left no one in doubt about the main idea:

"The same concern for purity. The same law of penetrating plans. A house, an expression of life itself. The modern spirit is kindred with the traditional principles of Japan. Free plan, free facades fully

¹⁷⁸ Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 64.

¹⁷⁹ « Il ne faut absolument pas utiliser tout faire avec tout, mais employer chaque matériau dans sa qualité propre. » quoted in Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 66.

¹⁸⁰ Perriand, *A Life of Creation*, 144–145.

¹⁸¹ Japan used the so called Imperial year system (*kōki*) from 1872 to 1945, especially during the nationalist times, in order to differentiate Japan from the West. Imperial year 1 was set to the year when the legendary Emperor Jimmu founded Japan – 660 BC according to the Gregorian Calendar. 1941 was thus year *kōki* 2601.

open to nature. Penetration of nature in the house, extension of the house in the recreated nature. Flexibility of space through sliding doors, storage space incorporated into the architecture. What should be added to a Japanese house to live in the European style? Seating and tables, of course...”¹⁸²

The last note clearly aimed at the main theme of the exhibition as well as at Perriand’s own design activity, furniture design. If there was nothing to add to the perfection of the Japanese house, there would be little space for creation. In the accompanying publication, Perriand re-states the idea of “similitude of between the traditional Japanese principles and the modern spirit”, enumerating the qualities of the Japanese house almost as after Le Corbusier’s list of architectural principles: completely open façade, side walls taking advantage of the light, penetration of nature to the house, penetration of the rooms into each other thanks to sliding door. She then also adds that “Japanese architecture is made within standards, which gives it its unity. Example: Height of doors and shoji of 1.75 meters, whence the standard height of bamboo blinds. On surface, the *tatami* is the basic measure of the rooms.”¹⁸³

Her conviction about the value of the Japanese tradition did not always meet with the ideas of the progressive-minded Japanese, and for this reason the exhibition has been strongly criticised for instance by the Bauhaus graduate Isao Yamawaki¹⁸⁴. The difference in thinking was sometimes striking. Inspired by what she saw as Japanese appreciation of nature, she also exhibited a simple table made from a thick slice of a tree trunk with the bark and annual rings visible, an object from her previous work with Jeanneret. Some of the Japanese perceived this intended correspondence, but opposed it as *passéism*, like the young Katsumi:

“(Katsumi): For us young, all this [traditional Japanese] culture needs to be rationalized. It is unhealthy to exhibit explicit references to nature in a civilized everyday context.”

¹⁸² « Le même souci de pureté. La même loi de pénétration des plans. La maison, expression même de la vie. L’esprit moderne présente une grande parenté avec les principes traditionnels du Japon. Plan libre, façades libre entièrement ouvertes sur la nature. Pénétration de la nature dans la maison, prolongement de la maison dans la nature recréée. Flexibilité de l’espace par portes coulissantes, les rangements incorporés à l’architecture. Que faudrait-il ajouter à une maison japonaise pour vivre à l’européenne ? Des sièges et des tables, bien sûr.... »

Charlotte Perriand, *Contact avec l’art japonais. Sélection, tradition création*. Tôkyô: éditions Kujio Koyama, 1941. Quoted in Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 136.

¹⁸³ « Dans l’esprit moderne, il faut remarquer une grande similitude avec les principes traditionnels du Japon : une façade entièrement ouverte sur le jardin par les portes coulissantes sans retour de pan de mur, les murs latéraux profitant directement de la lumière, pénétration de la nature dans la maison, de la maison dans la nature, pénétration de pièces les uns dans les autres, par des portes coulissantes. [...] L’architecture japonaise est faite dans les standards, c’est ce qui lui confère son unité. Exemple : hauteur des portes et des *shoji* de 1,75 mètre, d’où hauteur standard des stores en bambou. En surface, le *tatami* est la mesure de base des pièces. » Charlotte Perriand, *Contribution à l’équipement intérieur de l’habitation au Japon. Tradition, sélection, création* (Editions Kugio Koyama, 1941).

¹⁸⁴ Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 144.

(Perriand:) I consider that this is one of the beautiful aspects of Japanese architecture, as shown by the Katsura villa.”¹⁸⁵

Perriand went to Japan also to promote *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* magazine, directed by her good acquaintance André Bloc. Parallel to her busy job preparing the exhibition, she worked on a book about Japan. It was never published, but the selection of photos from professional, mainly Japanese photographers exists, showing her preference for the Japanese crafts and landscape¹⁸⁶. In addition, Perriand was an accomplished photographer herself, and soon also used photography as a powerful tool in her interpretation of Japan.

Due the escalation of the war, Perriand had to leave Japan in 1943 and she was forced to an exile in Indochina, then a French colony, for the rest of the war. Perriand travelled to Indochina already a year earlier from Japan, and gave there her first lecture about Japan in Hanoi on 8 January 1942, entitled *La mission au Japon. Contacts avec l'art japonais*. She later recalled her strategy almost as a cunning trick that turned out well: “I had carefully alternated sixteenth-century Japanese buildings with the most avant-garde architecture, that of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Mies van der Rohe, and Alvar Aalto. The affinities were so strong that laypeople – who made up the audience – could not perceive differences between them. The spirit of truth in the designs had erased time.”¹⁸⁷ While in Hanoi, Perriand also for the first time used elements taken from Japanese architecture in her own design, in the Pavilion of crafts (1943). But to use Japanese forms too explicitly was not politically acceptable, because at the same time, south-east Asia was largely under the expanding Japanese influence.

Perriand on Japan: *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *Techniques et architecture*, *Casabella continuità*

After the war, Perriand wrote several magazine texts concerning Japan, most of them in the late 1940s and 1950s. Seeing her broad interest in Japanese culture, it may not be a big surprise that her first text for *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* after she returned from Japan was dedicated neither to architecture nor design, but to Japanese theatre¹⁸⁸. This article from

¹⁸⁵ (Katsumi) « Pour nous jeunes, toute cette culture [traditionnelle japonaise] demande à être rationalisée. C'est malsain de vouloir exhiber des références explicites à la nature dans un contexte quotidien civilisé. », Perriand) : « Moi je considère que c'est là l'un des beaux aspects de l'architecture japonaise, comme le montre la villa Katsura-rikyû (...).” *Kôgei kenkyû zadankai ki: Perian joshi sôsakuhinten ni tsuite kiku*” *Kôgei nyûsu*, 11-17. Traduction Anne Gossot; quoted in Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 144.

¹⁸⁶ As part of the Charlotte Perriand archive, and Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon* presents a good choice of the photographs.

¹⁸⁷ Perriand, *A Life of Creation*, 170.

¹⁸⁸ Charlotte Perriand, *L'art de spectacle*, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 23 (May 1949).

1949 mainly shows a passion fascination with kabuki theatre masks. A year later though, in 1950, she prepared another special issue for the magazine *Techniques et architecture*, entitled *L'art d'habiter*¹⁸⁹. The article is a manifesto of sorts, drawing examples from various world cultures such as ancient Greece and Rome, and vernacular buildings from French countryside, yet there is no doubt where the main inspiration comes from: the article opens with a picture of the Katsura villa. Shifting attention from the purely design issues towards architecture, the main goal in this text is to draw attention of architects to the importance of interior design.

Five years after the end of the war, the less appealing symptoms of the post-war reconstruction and mass housing were already visible in Europe, with an often criticised monotony and a general dullness. Perriand, accepted this criticism, but as a protagonist Modern movements, naturally wanted to defend Modernism as such. In the beginning of her text she claims that design should not take into consideration only “material data”, but that it should create “conditions for a human balance, and the liberation of the human spirit.” This, as she tries to demonstrate, can be very well found in Japan¹⁹⁰.

Again, Perriand largely builds up her argument with the help of photography. She apparently remembered her favourite strategy and juxtaposed photographs of Western modernist houses and Japanese traditional buildings to achieve the desired effect of showing the “unity of spirit”: several pages in a row show such pairs, composed always as a view from the interior towards the outside garden. This, too, served a purpose: to underline her idea that interior design, architecture and urbanism are closely interconnected and have to be solved together and, especially, the need to cultivate the connection of habitat with nature. Looking for positive models from the occidental architecture, she now included contemporary buildings that later became more commonly compared to Japan, Richard Neutra’s American villas and Aalto’s villa Mairea, which on the pages of the magazine found themselves confronted with a Ryūkū royal villa, and a traditional restaurant in Tokyo, respectively.

Hygiene is given a special attention in this 1950 issue. While in Japan, Perriand developed a liking for the Japanese hot bath (*ofuro*), as well as the public *onsen*, and promoted it ever after, not only in her writings but also in her design: in 1952, she presented a new bathroom design at the *Salon des arts ménagers* that uses the principle of the Japanese bath. In her commentary, she refuted a suspicion that enjoying it may be anachronistic.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Charlotte Perriand, *L'art d'habiter*, *Techniques et architecture* 9-10 (August 1950).

¹⁹⁰ « Non seulement l'habitat doit réaliser les données matérielles, mais créer les conditions de l'équilibre humain et de la libération de l'esprit. » Charlotte Perriand, *L'art d'habiter*.

¹⁹¹ Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et le Japon*, 196.

Perriand was still very active as a designer, and never lost interest in the current developments in Japan. In October 1953, just when she turned fifty, she left for Japan for another two years, working there intensely. In 1954, she could welcome here Walter Gropius with his wife Ise, who was on his way of discovering a culture that he found to “precede his own endeavours at the Bauhaus for 300 years.”

After her return to France, the new experience with changing Japan resulted in another series of texts, and also radio emissions at the Radio France. The change happening in Japan is evident in her words, her optimism regarding the productive force of Japanese design is at least shaken. *La crisi del gesto al Giappone* (“The crisis of gesture in Japan”) came out in the Italian magazine in *Casabella continuità* in 1956¹⁹². The changes she witnessed in just more than a decade lead her to comment on the social background of Japan: “Before the war, only a few rich Japanese living traditionally had one European-style room. Today, other rich Japanese have a European-style house with a Japanese room.”¹⁹³ Perriand used the word “gesture” in a way encompassing a broad sphere of culture, and the “crisis of gesture” then largely concerns the cracking of an entire cultural network.

She also helped to put together the first monothematic issue of *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* on Japan, number 56 from 1956, credited by the editors as a *guide clairvoyant*. Here she also contributed with her own text, titled *Une tradition vivante (A Living Tradition)*, where she gives a brief introduction into Japanese culture while revisiting some of her preferred subjects.

Although it is not a subject of this study, one cannot ignore that Perriand’s main work remains her designs, and some of it shows applications of elements from Japan. When representing the Japanese house, she stressed the importance of storage places, something that she also dealt with in her interior design; her cupboard *Nuage* (Cloud) is quite a direct reference to a cupboard in Katsura villa. Perriand’s popularity after the war, and the display of her designs at exhibitions (these too designed by herself), increased her impact on contemporary culture. Close contacts with Japan brought her commissions for the Japanese house in Paris (1957), the offices of Air France in Tokyo (1959), the residency of the Japanese ambassador in Paris (1966–69) and the showroom for *Shiki fabric house*, also in Paris (1975). In a more private sphere, her own mountain chalet in Méribel in Savoie shows a unique mixture of Japanese and elements of the mountain vernacular.

¹⁹² Charlotte Perriand, *Crisi del gesto al Giappone*, *Casabella continuità* 210 (1956). Published also in the French original: Charlotte Perriand, *la crise du geste au Japon*. *Combat*, Mars 6-17, 1957.

¹⁹³ “Avant guerre, seuls quelques riches Japonais vivant traditionnellement possédaient une pièce à l’européenne. Aujourd’hui, d’autres riches Japonais possèdent une maison à l’européenne avec une pièce japonaise.” Charlotte Perriand, *La crise du geste au Japon*. In: *Combat*, Mars 6-17, 1957.

When Perriand tried to assess the significance of Japan for her own work, and on Modernism in general in 1956, she refused an to speak about an “influence”, but admitted there a “meeting of conceptions”:

“Japanese architecture did not influence us, there was a meeting of conceptions, and this meeting was made at the moment when we abandoned our load-bearing walls which condemned us to have windows in the facade and to remain cut off from nature.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ “ L’architecture japonaise ne nous a pas influencés, il y eut une rencontre des conceptions, et cette rencontre s’est faite au moment où nous avons abandonnées nos murs portants qui nous condamnaient à avoir des fenêtres dans la façade et à rester coupés de la nature.” Perriand, Charlotte: La crise du geste au Japon.

II.3.3. Second encounter: Walter Gropius

If we looked for one person among many to embody both Modernism and an explicit interest in Japan, Walter Gropius (1883–1969) would be the first one to consider. Without much exaggeration, Gropius counts as *the* personalization of the Bauhaus, one of the cornerstones of Modernist design in architecture. His enthusiasm for Japan is outspoken, although his personal discovery of a real, built Japanese architecture came too late to have any real impact on his own designs. Gropius visited Japan only in 1954, at the age of seventy-one, but then he turned into an avid propagator of Japanese architecture and its relevance for the entire world.

Gropius' late fervour for Japan gives the impression that a long-term interest, though somehow latent, finally found its way out. As he professed, and his biographer Walter Isaacs repeated, Gropius had been interested in Japan for “half a century” through reading, pictures and artworks¹⁹⁵. This claim has further encouraged the researchers on Gropius' work to descend deep down to his early career while looking for possible origins of a Japanese connection. There are basically three ways how to approach this: indirectly, looking for connections between the Bauhaus and Japan, studying his own designs, and reading his writings.

Walter Gropius was director of the Bauhaus from its beginnings in Weimar in 1919 until 1928. When he emigrated to the United States in 1937 he continued to promote the school's educational system and values, which seemed to merge more and more with his own artistic convictions. For a long time, the attempts to find a link between the Bauhaus and Japan did not get beyond stating more or less close parallels¹⁹⁶ and the Japanese who studied on the Bauhaus¹⁹⁷. There is no scarcity of findings about the influence of Bauhaus

¹⁹⁵ Reginald Isaacs, *Walter Gropius. Der Mensch und sein Werk, Bd 2* (Berlin, 1984).

¹⁹⁶ Hansjörg Gadiant, Rein und schön: Japan und das Bauhaus, *Schweizer Ingenieur und Architekt* 118 (2000): 888-892.

¹⁹⁷ Johannes Itten, of one of the founding teachers at the Bauhaus had interest in the Oriental cultures, but that do not seem to concern Gropius to a great extent. Most recently, Helena Čapková brought much more research on the question of these Japanese student on Bauhaus. (Helena Čapková, *Helena: Bauhaus and Tea Ceremony. A Study of Mutual Impact in Design Education between Germany and Japan in the Interwar Period*. In Carolien Stolte and Yoshiyuki Kikuchi (eds), *Eurasian Encounters: Museums, Missions, Modernities*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.)

There were four Japanese students on the Bauhaus altogether. Two of them were Imao Yamawaki and his wife Michiko who stayed in Germany from 1930 to 1932 and witnessed the pressure of the Nazis, and Imao Yamawaki's most famous collage from 1932 aptly represents the political situation, providently, one year before the Bauhaus was actually closed. Thanks to the Yamawaki couple who founded the Bauhaus archive in Tokyo after their return to Japan the Bauhaus method and style are highly appreciated in Japan until today. Michiko later wrote a book on the Bauhaus and the Japanese tea ceremony: Michiko Yamawaki, *Bauhausu to chanoyu* (Tokyo, 1995).

in Japan, but few in the opposite direction. One such case is the Japanese architect Tetsurō Yoshida who held a lecture on the Japanese house at the Bauhaus before publishing his popular book 1932, seemingly too late for any possible impact on the school as a whole.

There is not much to find on Japan in Gropius' building projects either. According to Karin Kirsch, the beginnings of Walter Gropius' Japanese inspiration lie "in the dark" as she suggests in her narrative of the houses that the architect built for himself. Kirsch writes about the *Direktorenhaus* in Dessau, and Gropius' house built in 1938 in Lincoln after he moved to the USA. There have been Chinese and Japanese wood carvings in his personal library, which can indicate an openness to Japanese culture¹⁹⁸, but in this he was definitely not alone. Claiming that already long before "he felt Japan without having seen it"¹⁹⁹ or searching for a "basic Japonism" as an unconscious wisdom of sorts can hardly take us anywhere²⁰⁰. From a more concrete standpoint, Hansjörg Gadiant tried to bring up the similarity between Gropius' and Adolf Mayer's Haus Sommerfeld in Berlin (1920–21) and the façade of the Shōsō-in, a part of the Tōdai-ji temple complex in Nara from 752 AD²⁰¹. A direct inspiration for Gropius could have allegedly come from the early Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten, who actually owned a book depicting the mentioned building. The similarity of the two buildings looks indeed convincing on the photos, but no further analysis of them is given, and we can guess that it is the rather unusual use of wood on the German house that fuelled this comparison. In another way, Gadiant presumes, a Japanese inspiration can be seen already in the Bauhaus manifesto, in the passage expressing an idea of a smooth transition between artist and artisan²⁰². This is indeed close to the Japanese practice, but such a situation can be equally seen in other cultures, as well as in pre-Renaissance Europe. What seems more fruitful is to approach the problem through a close study Gropius's writings, like Julia Odenthal did²⁰³. Besides looking for direct remarks about Japan, she pointed out the more general ideas about art that Gropius gained in his early years, and which later found their confirmation facing Japan.

¹⁹⁸ Kirsch, *Die Neue Wohnung und das alte Japan*, 155-6. Kirsch even wonders about books that cannot be found in his library, suggesting they might have been given away: „Es ist erstaunlich, dass dies Schrifte Suzukis nicht im Nachlass vorhanden sind, da doch offenkundig einen sehr persönliche beziehung bestand. Sie werden früh in andere Hände übergegangen sein.”

¹⁹⁹ “Er fühlte Japan, ohne es gesehen zu haben”. Kirsch, *Die Neue Wohnung und das alte Japan*, 155.

²⁰⁰ Kirsch, *Die Neue Wohnung und das alte Japan*, 7 („Basic Japonism' möchte ich nennen, was Künstler und Architekten nach der Beschäftigung mit Japans Kunst durchging, oft ohne dass sie es wussten.“)

²⁰¹ Gadiant, Rein und Schön: Japan und das Bauhaus, 891.

²⁰² “Der Künstler ist eine Steigerung des Handwerkers.” Gadiant, Rein und Schön: Japan und das Bauhaus, 891.

²⁰³ Julia Odenthal, Japonismus am Bauhaus? Der Architekt Walter Gropius und seine Japan-Rezeption. In Michiko Mae and Elisabeth Scherer (eds), *Nipponspiration. Japonismus und japanische Populärkultur im deutschsprachigen Raum*, 113–149 (Köln – Weimar – Wien, 2013). A different version of the text appeared also in her thesis: Odenthal, *Andere Räume – Räume der Anderen*, 170–177, 254–258.

Gropius in and about Japan

By the end of 1952, Gropius retired as Chairman at the Department of Architecture at Harvard, and freed from his academic commitments, began to travel widely. The 70-year old architect anticipated his long-awaited journey to the “Orient” with great expectations – in December 1953 he wrote to a friend, Professor Mizutani: “I am looking forward to this trip as for many years I have wanted to see the Orient and, since long before the war, I have been absorbed by the Japanese art and architecture.”²⁰⁴

In the winter of 1953 Gropius visited South America and the following year he journeyed with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation over Hawaii, Fiji, Australia, the Philippines and Okinawa, arriving on 20 May 1954 to Japan²⁰⁵, where he spent three months. His stay included visits of different Japanese cities, monuments, a kabuki play. He also held several lectures and discussions with architects²⁰⁶. He met the Yamawakis, the former Bauhaus students, as well as Charlotte Perriand (who also took some photos of Gropius and his wife Ise on a sea coast on the occasion).

He was clearly excited about what he saw, as can be seen from the numerous postcards he sent around. One of them, depicting the famous Zen dry garden in Ryōanji, was addressed to Le Corbusier on 23 June, exulting: „Dear Corbu, all what we have been fighting for has its parallel in old Japanese culture. This rock-garden of Zen-monks in the 13. 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 years old space of cultural wisdom! The Japanese house is the best and most modern I know of and truly prefabricated.“²⁰⁷

After his return, Gropius soon described the eye-opening experience in a long essay which appeared in several versions on different occasions. The first one, *Architecture in Japan*, came out in *Perspecta* in 1955²⁰⁸, the second, edited for language issues and extended, appeared under the same title together with a text by Kenzō Tange and photographs by Yasuhiro Ishimoto in the exquisite book on the Katsura villa in 1960²⁰⁹. Lastly, another version with some more text on Japanese contemporary architecture was published in Italian in the

²⁰⁴ An unpublished letter to Prof. T. Mizutani, 03.12.1953. Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv. Quoted by: Odenthal, Japonismus am Bauhaus, 125.

²⁰⁵ Francesco Dal Co, La Princesse est Modeste, in Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 387.

²⁰⁶ The stay was organized by the *International House*

²⁰⁷ Postcard sent from Japan by Walter Gropius to Le Corbusier, June 1954; reproduced in: Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 386 and 389.

²⁰⁸ Walter Gropius, Architecture in Japan, *Perspecta*, 3 (1955): 9-80.

²⁰⁹ Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange, and Yasuhiro Ishimoto (photographs). *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*. New Haven – Tokyo, 1960.

same year ²¹⁰, later available in the original German in his collection of essays, *Apollo in der Demokratie*, as *Japan – Land der Architektur*.²¹¹ In addition to professional photographs that accompanied all the texts, this last version also includes pictures from Gropius' own camera, with an apology for their quality – some of them are indeed tilted. All these texts have been read and studied, but the differences among the different versions were surprisingly not noted.

The essay sets the mood with a gracious attitude of an “old man who is privileged to travel the world (...) and having the opportunity to compare human activities while trying to discriminate the essential and the incidental,”²¹² providing an account of his journey to Japan and his impressions from some of the important monuments he visited. It is soon clear that Gropius saw in Japan something quite exceptional, having “never seen an example of a better integrated culture”²¹³. From the beginning, he shows his enthusiasm not just for the architecture, but for many aspects of Japanese culture. Noting that “the old hand-made Japanese house had already all the essential features demanded today for a modern prefabricated house”, he also admires the “deep understanding of nature”²¹⁴, as well as the Zen philosophy. In a final paragraph that has been dropped from the later versions of the text, Gropius wrote a personal confession: “Leaving Japan I felt that an important chapter in my life had come to an end, a great surprise at a time when I did not expect the world could still hold such wonders in readiness for me. It is their living, present-day value that I cherish and wish to share with others.”²¹⁵

Rewriting Modernism

Why Gropius felt so “deeply moved,” nevertheless, had a lot to do with his own self-determination. Already the postcard sent to Le Corbusier made this clear. Learning about the principles of Zen in “innumerable discussions” he concluded that his “own trend of thought, as exemplified in the Bauhaus, was here startlingly confirmed.”²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Walter Gropius, *Architettura in Giappone*, *Architettura Cantiere* 23 (1960).

²¹¹ I have worked here with the German edition: Walter Gropius, *Japan, Land der Architektur*, in *Apollo in der Demokratie*, (Kupferberg, 1967), 82–107. English edition: Walter Gropius, *Apollo in the democracy: the cultural obligation of the architect* (McGraw-Hill, 1968).

²¹² Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 9.

²¹³ Walter Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, in Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa* (Milano 2005). Originally published in: Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange and Yasuhiro Ishimoto, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*.

²¹⁴ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 21.

²¹⁵ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 80.

²¹⁶ Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 353.

His own, long sought goal of attaining “the missing ingredient in our own civilization, the coherent effort in attaining *unity in diversity*,”²¹⁷ an aim which Gropius kept repeating on different occasions, found a perfect fulfilment in Japan. “Rarely has an explorer gone into another country so determined to find what he so transparently hoped to find,” commented Reyner Banham in his 1985 essay *The Japonization of World Architecture*.²¹⁸

While writing about Japan, Gropius works almost as a self-proclaimed historian; his own past and the history of Modernism overlap in this retrospective view. Gropius had been already during his life convicted of altering his own past thoughts retrospectively in order to fit into a more coherent vision. He claimed to have set the programme of the Bauhaus on a de-personalized, quality design for the industrial age from the beginning, while in fact originally it was much more based on an individual, artistic attitude, grown from expressionist roots of most teachers²¹⁹. Japan, however, seems to have given yet a new twist to this rewriting of his own philosophy, provoking him to a reassessment of the techno-optimistic view from a humanist perspective. He wonders what happens when “an old culture like the Japanese meets head-on with an civilization that has decided to abandon most of the cultural values of a pre-industrial era in favor of establishing a new basis created by science and technique, which is able to raise the standards of material living to an unprecedented height, but has as yet often failed to enlist the emotional loyalties of the very people who developed it.”²²⁰

To paraphrase this thought, it still seems a question of time before the Westerners finally wake up to fully appreciate the technical civilization. But now there is the Japanese tradition, which offers an image of true modernity with its inherent contradictions effaced, connecting the “emotional” and technical side of humanity in one. It offers it now – if we know where to look –, and it even has had it for centuries.

*“The Japanese house is so strikingly modern because it contains perfect solutions, already centuries old, for problems which the contemporary Western architect is still wrestling with today: complete flexibility of movable exterior and interior walls, changeability and multi-use of spaces, modular coordination of building parts. (...) The flexibility of use of these component parts is so great that they can provide the seemingly self-contradictory requirement of providing unity and diversity of expression at the same time. Such an achievement of continuity is always indicative of great depth and ramification of cultural development.”*²²¹

²¹⁷ Walter Gropius, Foreword in Heinrich Engel, *The Japanese House* (Rutland (Vt.) and Tokyo, 1964), 17-18.

²¹⁸ Banham, *Japonization of World Architecture*, 17.

²¹⁹ Gropius and Itten had divergent ideas about the orientation of the school, which ended with Itten’s departure in 1923, after which he founded a private school in Berlin. Reyner Banham, for instance, pointed out the fact in his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1960).

²²⁰ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan* (1955), 9.

²²¹ Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 353.

Gropius firmly insists on the value of the Japanese tradition for today: “The Japanese achievements [are] not representative only of a feudal past; as it is, they are still pregnant with unrealized potentialities and it would seem to need only an eye-opening act on the side of objective bystanders to make these people believe in their own cultural strength.”²²²

This is an idea that he takes up later, in an introduction to Heinrich Engel’s monumental book, *The Japanese House* (1964):

*“The author [H. E.] concentrates particularly on those features of the Japanese architectural tradition that appeal so strongly to the modern architect of the Western world. He shows that it is not just the result of a fashionable trend toward Oriental motives, but that it is based on certain discoveries in the realm of form creation have permanent significance for all branches of human society. (...) The Japanese example of dedication of a whole nation to the task of giving form and substance to recognized spiritual values comes here as an eye-opener to all those who doubted that such unity of purpose could ever exist.”*²²³

The idea of a closeness between Modernism and Japan apparently took off and lived its own life. As a result, a conjecture soon occurred that Western Modernism had been *influenced* by Japan. This was mainly a subject of discussion on Frank Lloyd Wright. There were good arguments for seeing Japan as a model for some elements in Wright’s work, but the American architect always refused any such ideas. And so did Gropius. In 1960, he added a paragraph on the subject to his newly edited essay for the publication *Katsura. Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture* when addressing the comparison between European Modernism and Japanese tradition: “Some people have ventured to say that the modern European-American movement in architecture has been strongly influenced by the Japanese conception.” With his authority, Gropius remonstrated:

“The truth is that the extraordinary visual manifestations of the old Japanese culture and the twentieth-century conception of the West originated independently from very different premises. The Japanese approach was based on an age-old, articulate philosophy which had thoroughly permeated and formed the living habits of its society. Our Western approach is a new beginning, taking the first steps towards a new integration of thought and action in a changing world.”²²⁴

²²² Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 353.

²²³ Walter Gropius, Foreword. In Engel, *The Japanese House*, 17-18.

²²⁴ Gropius 1960 (2005), p. 353.

Japan as panacea

In many aspects, one can detect elements of an orientalist attitude, just as post-colonial studies describe them. In places, however, the Japanese experience lead Gropius to revert this in stating an inferiority of the Western culture. While general Douglas MacArthur compared the Japanese to a 12-year old boy a few years before, Gropius says something opposite: “We, with our offhand manner, must often appear to the Japanese like so many unformed youngsters who go to an incredible waste of material because we never learned the significance of economy in matter and spirit, coming, as we do, from a civilization which produces the present overabundance of shapes and forms.”²²⁵

The “lesson” from Japan, it is already clear, should go far beyond architecture according to Gropius:

“A better understanding of Oriental culture might also help to reinstate neglected values and open our eyes to experiences that are now missing in our lives.”²²⁶ And further on: “The Western mind, in its restless desire to seek new horizons in the physical world, would do well to learn a lesson in spiritual intensification from the Oriental mind, that is, how to seek new horizons in the inner worlds.”²²⁷

It is conspicuous how little space Gropius dedicated to contemporary Japanese architecture. Clearly, he and the Japanese architects trying to find solutions for the acute housing crisis were talking past each other²²⁸. His commentary consists mostly of giving advice to the young Japanese architects, and musings about the challenges they face, as well as their country as a whole²²⁹ in a “chiding and minatory” tone, as Banham commented, saying that “Gropius, as had become usual with him by that date, is Olympian and opinionated.”²³⁰ Yet when Gropius urges the Japanese “not to cast away wholly overboard the great spirit of their traditional architecture, to hold on to the great advantages of the Japanese tradition, for I felt that it is still full of new potentialities for a modern way of life,”²³¹ he sounds indeed distressed to see how the Japanese tradition loses its value for the contemporary generation. “Right now they are ready to cast away everything that determined the past. I have listened

²²⁵ Gropius 1960 (2005), p. 352.

²²⁶ Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 350.

²²⁷ Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 349.

²²⁸ As noted also by Yukio Lippit, <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/exhibition/distillations-gropius-japan-1954/>, retrieved 14. 12. 2017.

²²⁹ Though Gropius expanded this subject for the last version of the text. Walter Gropius, Japan, Land der Architektur, in *Apollo in der Demokratie*, 82–107.

²³⁰ Banham, Japonization of World Architecture, p. 17

²³¹ In Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 356.

with sorrow to their self-abuse.”²³² This is an attitude he shared with earlier Western Modernists who learned about Japanese tradition in this period of Japan’s rapid change. Twenty years before Gropius, Bruno Taut deplored the rapid loss of tradition in Japan, and so did Charlotte Perriand ten years earlier. This led to a somewhat surprising situation when the veteran of architectural avant-garde became an ardent defender of heritage:

“So deep was my impression of the Japanese architecture of old, that, to the surprise of my Japanese colleagues who knowing me as a rebel and innovator expected me to act accordingly, I implored them not to discard the great spirit of their traditional architecture, for I felt that it is still full of new potentialities for a modern way of life.”²³³

It is clear that the impression of Japan on Gropius was strong, and his feelings facing the tumultuous development of the country were mixed. He clearly felt that as a modern architect he was playing a role in what is happening, but he justified himself, trying to find a tenable position for modern architecture at the moment at which he saw it destroying a tradition that he admired so much.

II.3.4. Conclusion

If we try to look back on the relationship Charlotte Perriand and Japan from the perspective of architectural history, is manifest on several levels: her personal activity as a mediator and consultant, her articles and lectures, and her own design work.

Her relationship to Japan was always based on strong personal contacts, started already in Le Corbusier’s studio with Le Corbusier’s disciples, who were later to become important Japanese architects. Perriand then spent entire years of her life in Japan (1943–1943, 1953–1955) so her experience far exceeds that of a mere visitor. She played a role on both sides: she made an important contribution to Japanese furniture design and later on she was very helpful in presenting Japanese culture in Europe. Otherwise, considering her rich personal experience, her writing about Japan alone might look less innovative at the first sight. Very early, she developed formulas about Japan that she used later on, often returning to Kakuzō Okakura’s *Book of Tea*. In contrast, her visual production conveys a broad cultural interest, including even subjects less often noted by other architects: her choice of photos for the unpublished book, as well some of the photographs she took herself are telling in this sense.

Perriand also saw herself as an ambassador of international modernism, and her reading of Japanese architecture was clearly within the coordinates given by the movement. Although

²³² Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 16.

²³³ Ponciroli (ed), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 356.

she kept some distance from the German interpreters, which can be explained by a language barrier as well as the wartime defiance to everything German, she expressed her ideas about the similarity of principles between Japan and Modernism in a manner very similar to the previous words of Testurō Yoshida and Bruno Taut. Her later accord with Gropius was, in any case clear and outspoken: both exponents of progressive architecture admonished the Japanese not to fall for a blind progressivism, and to re-evaluate their own tradition instead.

Although most of her work falls into the category of design, she was an accomplished architect, and she worked intensely on overcoming the borders between disciplines. She pointed out a continuity between furnishings, interior and exterior design – both in terms of the concept (architects, and urban planners should collaborate) and literally (the house should be open and allow contact with the environment). This contiguity she wished to achieve by her own work was something where Japan served as a good model.

Walter Gropius, no matter how long beforehand actually cultivated an interest in Japan, when he finally arrived to Japan, he did not come unprepared. Finding links between this newly acquired enthusiasm for Japan and his late designs would be interesting but it is quite certain that the main impact in his time remained in what he said and wrote. His reputation as a survivor of the heroic phase of the modern movement and the position of a Harvard professor naturally increased the impact of any praise he made, or criticism he pronounced.

Gropius was a skilled narrator of his own story, and he adjusted the past throughout his life. In his later years, Japan seems to have supported another adjustment of his narrative, giving a more humanist tone and returning an artistic aspect to modern architecture in the time when the less palatable effects of modernist building started to be criticised after World War II.

Gropius praised the Japanese house for qualities that coincide with the modern ones, an idea he joyfully spread in his lectures and writings in the 1950s and 1960s. Gropius claimed not only that already centuries ago, Japan had the solutions that the Bauhaus, – that is mainly himself – came up with in the 1920s, but also that Japan was “pregnant with potential” to offer solutions for problems that the present is still struggling with. He was mainly fascinated by prefabrication of elements and the resulting harmony between “unity and diversity,” an idea that became his motto in these years. But he also made clear that the relationship between Japan and Modernism does not have a character of an “influence”.

Neither had Gropius any qualms about giving advice: he detracted the Japanese from hastily destroying their past and suggested how the country should develop, and he invited everyone in the world to learn from the Japanese tradition: “I am convinced that invaluable benefits await a contemporary student of art and architecture from a visit to Japan. Here he will find

sublime, mature solutions of the intricate problems of space and of human scale-the very media for the art of architectural creation.”²³⁴

²³⁴ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 80.

II.4. JAPAN IN THE ARCHITECTURAL MEDIA

II.4.1. Introduction

With some persistence, one might note almost everything that was published on Japan in the context of architecture until World War II; but the rampant rise of Japan-related media after 1945 makes such a task scarcely possible, and practically meaningless. Repetition of both information and style became very common. This fact, however, makes it easy to see patterns in which information circulated. In the following analysis, we therefore focus on a selection of magazines, articles and books that fulfil one or more of the following criteria: they are symptomatic, typical, influential, or mark a turning point.

Our choice of architectural media is of course incomplete, but rather than an exhausting list of publications we aim at getting a plastic picture of how the image of Japan was formed. We do not want to claim that the printed media were the only ones to set the discourse on Japan, but any account on the subject would hardly make sense without them. Flipping through the pages of the architectural magazines from the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, already a brief glance tells us something about the attention given to Japan. The economic and social development of the country rapidly changed, as so did the contexts in which Japan was perceived. The magazines reflect this change. It is illuminating to follow the pages of printed architectural media in a diachronic way, noting how the different themes associated with Japanese architecture appeared and evolved in time. The primary question we ask here is relatively simple – how did the image of Japan evolve in these media? Subsequently, we will revisit the main subjects and analyse the main themes associated with Japan in a greater depth.

We will spend some time with the British *Architectural Design* magazine in this chapter and the two following ones. The magazine brought varied and abundant writings on Japan, and is therefore an especially good resource for showing the changing ideas in the course of time. The image of Japan in Europe was far from being formed just by media that were published in Europe, and despite our preference for these European resources, we occasionally have to look elsewhere, too. In particular, we mention Arthur Drexler's *Architecture of Japan*, an American title which had a large impact on European understanding of Japan. Back in Europe, we will follow the evolution of Japan's image in the Swiss publications conceived by the architect and publicist Werner Blaser (*Japanese Temple and Teahouses, Classical Dwelling Houses in Japan, Structure and Form in Japan*). We will continue with the Swiss magazine *Werk* (where Blaser initially also wrote on Japan); in France, *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, as well as

individual authors from other countries for a comparison (Italian *Domus*, Norwegian *Byggekunst*, Czechoslovak *Architektura ČSR*).

As we will see, all the media – books, magazines and exhibitions – influenced each other through direct borrowings of content, ideas, referring mutually to reviews and polemics. This is also the reason why we address all these types of media together in this study. In the magazines, the richest source are monothematic issues, a format that requires the highest degree of editorial effort. They were – as they are today – often put together by a guest curator or editor. A smaller version of this format is a thematic block, a row of mutually related articles. It is, however, worth going through the entire issues and years, and follow the context, including texts that do not relate to Japan. Even a random vicinity, including advertising, can tell us a lot. What follows or precedes is often not random, like when an article about Japanese architecture, where the standardization in Japanese architecture is stressed, is followed by an article on current standardization efforts.

II.4.2. Architectural Design, Great Britain, 1953–1958

The British *Architectural Design* magazine is a particularly good case in point showing how the representation of Japanese architecture evolved in the changing context of the time. During the more than 30-year period in which Monica Pidgeon (1913–2009) was the editor of *Architectural Design* (1946–1975), the magazine not only witnessed various turns in British and European architecture, but also actively participated in shaping them. The years immediately after World War II, like in almost entire Europe, were epitomized by looking for solutions for the urgent lack of housing, as well as for models from the countries where architecture thrived, at least to some extent, even during the war. The first of these interests brought an especially strong attention for standardization, prefabrication, and modules in building. A combination of both interests led to the publication of many projects from Scandinavian countries. Until the 1950s, countries outside Europe and the USA were hardly ever found on the pages of *Architectural Design*. At least not until 1953, when a remarkable series of articles opened in the first issue of the year, called *How Other Peoples Dwell and Build*.

Introducing “the Other” cultures and Japan: Erwin A. Gutkind, 1953

The entire series *How Other Peoples Dwell and Build* was penned by Erwin Anton Gutkind (1886–1968), a German Jewish architect. Like many of his compatriots at the time, Gutkind fled from Germany in 1933 with no personal possessions, interrupting a successful career in Berlin, and risking one more return to help his family to emigrate²³⁵. Gutkind finally settled in London and renewed his practice here. During World War II he began to focus on more general planning questions²³⁶ (*Creative Demobilisation*, 1943), and increasingly on architectural theory and history²³⁷. Worth noting is his eminent and historically early interest in “environment”. In 1956, at the age of seventy, he married for a second time to Anneliese Bulling, a sinologist, and moved to a new country again, this time to Philadelphia, where he was invited to lecture at the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania,

²³⁵ Gutkind’s buildings from the 1920s all stand out among the architecture of the time thanks to their quality, and are today a subject of preservation. He first worked out the garden city model in more remote outskirts of Berlin (Siedlung Neu Jerusalem, Berlin-Staaken, 1923-1925) and city blocks combining concrete, brick, and mortar, achieving a well-balanced connection between the expressive and rationalist tendencies in architecture (e.g. Wohnanlage Sonnenhof, Berlin-Lichtenberg, 1920-1930).

²³⁶ Erwin A. Gutkind, *Creative Demobilisation* (London 1943).

²³⁷ Erwin A. Gutkind, *Revolution of Environment*. London 1946; —, *Our World from the Air. An International Survey of Man and his Environment*. London 1952; —, *Community and Environment. A Discourse on Social Ecology*. London 1953; *The Expanding Environment. The End of Cities, the Rise of Communities*. London 1953.

mainly on the history of cities. This culminated in a 8-band book series *International History of City Development* (1964–1968), finished in the year of his death.

Gutkind's entire series of articles presents, one by one, the building traditions of a number of non-Western cultures: the "Southern Seas" (January), Japan (February), China (March), as well as "Indigenous Houses of Africa" (May), "Mohamedan Houses" (June), and the "Houses of North American Indians" (July). Presenting dwellings of these distant and mutually diverse traditions was not motivated by a mere ethnographic interest, and even less, as the author stresses, by a wish "to describe in isolation a few building methods which may or may not be of interest to modern architects in search of 'fashionable' and therefore superficial stimuli, or to provide them with a sort of pattern-book from which they can draw their inspiration."

Gutkind, in contrast, expresses his serious concerns for the present state of building. Understandably for the early 1950s, he stresses the housing crisis, which eight years after the end of the war was still a growing problem: "(...) the positive reasons which I have tried to emphasize in these articles are of the utmost importance, the more so as the world-wide fight against housing shortage."²³⁸

But Gutkind's concerns are not confined to Britain, and not even to Europe – they are outspokenly global, as they are social. Quoting the report of the United Nations on housing shortage, he implicitly addresses a British or European architect who would be designing houses. He warns against seeing the problem as only technical: "A standardized solution which would fulfil only the bare technical needs is out of the question."²³⁹ In opposition, he points out that we, as Westerners, "have lost the high sense of social awareness, which distinguished [the primitive and past] societies, and we fail to express in most of our dwellings, in their layout and in their architectural composition, those values which bind people together in a spirit of community."²⁴⁰

Then, bridging this interest in fostering a community spirit through design, and the striving for a physical openness, Gutkind ends up pointing towards Japan as a possible model for the future. Japan, together with the Southern seas, are "perhaps particularly relevant to modern architecture because these buildings belong to what may be called a membrane-type houses – opening the interior to the outside, not separating them and their inhabitants from their environment by thick walls, and enclosing them in 'my-home-is-my-castle' boxes. Especially," continues Gutkind, "the houses of Japan are open-air interiors and as such come very near to some of the best modern buildings with their fusion of architecture and nature."²⁴¹

²³⁸ Erwin A. Gutkind, How Other Nations Dwell and Build, *Architectural Design* (January 1953), 2.

²³⁹ Gutkind, How Other Nations Dwell and Build, 2.

²⁴⁰ Gutkind, How Other Nations Dwell and Build, 2.

²⁴¹ Gutkind, How Other Nations Dwell and Build, 2.

The immediately following text on the "Southern Seas" focusses mainly on the domestic architecture of Polynesia and Melanesia. The boat is a basic form here also for architecture, but Gutkind points out certain common traits with modernism: "There are single houses; 'blocks of flats' where all families of the village live

This is even enhanced in the article that actually was on Japan, in the February issue. The Japanese house is introduced here literally as “*the most perfect product of domestic architecture which has ever been created.*”²⁴² The reasons for this are its “*extreme simplicity, great refinement of proportions, structure, and forms.*” Moreover, “*in the whole history of architecture, the Japanese house is unique in its logical consequence and its identity of form and function. The distinction between structural elements as actively supporting and passively enclosing members cannot be told in a more beautiful language of form.*” Interpreting this language, then, Gutkind nears the language of biology. There are no solid walls except the one of the *tokonoma*, as we are reminded repeatedly. The individual “wholeness” of the house is not divided by the individual “space-units” – they are only enclosed and partitioned by the sliding screens “like a membrane,” and “like a membrane they do not hide the organism of the house but make it apparent in the same way as the organs of the body can be felt through the skin.”²⁴³

This is a metaphor to remember: The house is seen an organism, separated from the environment by “membranes”.

With no disparaging tone, the article then recalls the ancient ritual roots of Japanese architecture, based on the Shinto religion, and the spatial organization respecting the geomantic principles. Respective elements of the house are pointed out: The construction, based on a wooden frame, stands “only at small stones and thus does not directly touch the ground”, which may “appear flimsy”, but is “as a matter of fact solid; the roof is heavy and, together with the walls, it gives a sufficient weight to the house .”²⁴⁴ Gutkind closes his text with probably the most attractive aspect of the Japanese architecture for the Modernist architecture: its standardization, “an unsurpassed achievement.”

Gutkind indeed saw these qualities in Japan more than in other cultures. His text on the architecture of the Islamic countries (actually mostly North African) presents their architecture as “introverted”, both on the level of houses and towns, which makes them an opposite of Japan: “The buildings of the Mohamedans are the exact opposite of those of the Japanese, Chinese and Polynesians which we described in the previous articles. They rely on solid walls, that is on uninterrupted support and massive support rather than on an elaborate

together – obviously the forerunner of Le Corbusier’s collective housing experiment at Marseille[s]; separate housings for the men, for meetings for secret societies (the ‘political clubs’ of St. James Street); family houses; and buildings for sacred purposes. (...) The construction of the houses in the south seas is far in advance of the cumbersome and unimaginative manner of the overwhelming majority of modern buildings. The canoe principle is to be found everywhere, either in direct imitation of the canoe-form in accordance of the cage-like model of Tangaroa’s remains, or simply as a framework on a square or rectangular ground-plan.” (p. 4)

²⁴² E. A. Gutkind, Japan, *Architectural Design* (February, 1953), 31.

²⁴³ Gutkind, Japan, 31.

²⁴⁴ Gutkind, Japan, 34.

system of supporting members each fulfilling a definite function. Roofs do not play a role in the composition as they are mostly flat, except (...) the cupolas.”²⁴⁵

Gutkind’s general introduction may not have brought any new information that could not be found at the time in books specialized on Japan, but it is much less usual that this writing comes from a distinguished Modernist architect, and on pages of a magazine of contemporary architecture. Certain features of this article series are noteworthy: Japan, on the one hand, is presented among a row of other “exotic” countries, and treated as an interesting, but still a very distant culture. On the other hand, of all the cultures, Japan is singled out as particularly relevant for modern architecture. One of the most popular aspects of Japanese architecture was standardization, which Gutkind duly points out. In the February issue of 1953, Gutkind’s text on Japan was followed by a report on the standardization procedures in British architecture, making the “ancient model – contemporary application” pattern stands out more clearly. Moreover, considering the later development, Gutkind’s text brings in themes which would resonate later: the “connection with nature”, as well as the theme of openness in its social aspect – “destruction of the ‘my-home-is-my-castle’”. The sometimes self-deprecating attitude towards the Oriental ‘Other’ in Gutkind’s writing finally gives way to a an attempt to understand the culture in more depth.

Discovering the changing Japan: Noel Moffett, 1958

Five years after Erwin Gutkind wrote his commending text on Japanese architecture, in 1958, the *Architectural Design* brought another monothematic block dedicated to Japan in its April issue. This time, it was written more from a personal standpoint, as the British architect Noel Moffett (1912–1994) framed the text as a report from his own stay in Japan, accompanying it mostly with photographs he made. The opening image brings a bit of drollery to the issue, showing the author clad in the traditional Japanese *yukata*, too short for this unusually tall stature,²⁴⁶ and the caption reads: “It should of course reach the wearer’s ankles.”²⁴⁷

Quite in line with of writing set by Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Moffett opens his treatise by naming a series of paradoxes. But his are different paradoxes, more linked to architect’s observation, and reflecting on the tumultuous time that had already elapsed since the World War II:

²⁴⁵ Erwin A. Gutkind, Mohamedan Houses, *Architectural Design* (June 1953): 161–162.

²⁴⁶ To find a well-fitting yukata was probably difficult as Moffett was “impressively tall”, according to Dennis Sharp, Obituary: Noel Moffett, *The Independent*, Thursday 19 May 1994.

²⁴⁷ Noel Moffett, Japan, *Architectural Design*, April, 1958, 131.

*“There are, of course, two Japans. There is pre-Meiji Japan, closed to the influence of the outside world and the Japan of to-day, open to progressive and up-to-date ideas; there is the Japan of the kimono and the yukata and of the jeans and the dungarees; formal, mysterious, secret Nippon and casual, progressive, boisterous Japan; zoka and tokonoma, brise-soleils and bye-law housing, cedar and pine, steel and concrete; shoji, curtain wall, tatami, thermoplastic tile; village carpenter’s shop, automatic factory; Kyoto, Tokyo.”*²⁴⁸

A supreme irony for Moffett is the realization that what is new for a Westerner is old for a Japanese, and vice versa:

*“The characteristics of the traditional Japanese architecture, which we in the West so much admire – qualities of restraint, simplicity, elegance and fine proportion, the decorative use of structural elements, flexibility of plan and section, sensitive landscaping, and the close relation of indoor and outdoor areas. These characteristics have had a stronger influence on the development of the modern movement in Europe and in America, particularly in the past ten or twelve years, than in Japan itself.”*²⁴⁹

Moffett’s main argument revolves around the conflict of “old and new” in Japan, but his ultimate objective is to explain contemporary Japanese architecture to his readers. This is new in writing about Japan. While “*in Europe, a contemporary way of life has come to being in an evolutionary way, (...) in Japan, the new has NOT evolved from the old rather the new exist side by side.*”²⁵⁰ After some praise for Japanese hospitality – a common motive among Western visitors, he resumes what he learned about the situation of the Japanese architect: “*The dilemma which the Japanese architect of to-day finds himself: He knows that much of the traditional architecture of his country is universally admired, not only by the Japanese people themselves – often including his clients – but also by architects and people of taste and sensitivity abroad; but at the same time he cannot and will not allow a study of his traditional architecture basically to influence his work of to-day (...)*”²⁵¹ The architect in Japan mostly emulates Western art and “Japanese influence” is “only secondary”, best visible in the “handling of interior space and the use of materials. For a Westerner to understand this dilemma”, he continues, it is necessary to understand, “the reasons for the form and character of traditional Jap. arch., attitude of the modern Japanese architect to his work, and the nature of the most important problems which he is called upon to solve.”

Addressing the Japanese tradition, Moffett was equipped with Laozi’s *Daodejing* (Tao Te Ching), or at least by Kakuzō Okakura already refers in his *Book of Tea* where the notorious “space-defining” 11th strophe is paraphrased: “The reality of a building does not consist in walls and roof, but in the space within to be lived in”. The British architect felt that It is in

²⁴⁸ Moffett, Japan, 131.

²⁴⁹ Moffett, Japan, 132.

²⁵⁰ Moffett, Japan, 131.

²⁵¹ Moffett, Japan, 132

Japan where the Chinese philosopher's maxim has found its best fulfilment: "Certainly in Japan it is evident that this architectural truth has been understood for a very long time and it is remarkable how essentially 'modern' in form and character are many of their temples and palaces from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."²⁵² In accordance with the priority given to space by the Modernists, he stresses the priority of space in Japanese design: "The interior of a Japanese house is a proof of Laotse's dictum: it is not a series of room from one another by walls, partitions and doors, it is rather 'one large space within to be lived in', a space subdivided by will in many different ways."

Further inspirational aspects of the Japanese tradition that Moffett calls out are flexibility (which comes, however, "at the cost of privacy (...) But privacy does not seem important in a country where the bathroom is the hotel lounge, where people walk barefooted in public places and where, from the window of a train, one shares the private lives of hundreds of families"), the treatment of material ("Japanese treat their wood as a living thing with feelings, preferences and susceptibilities, and it is rare, even to-day, to find carpenters using nails screws or other barbaric instruments of torture"²⁵³), cleanliness ("the floors of the oft-visited temples are cleaner than our kitchen tables"), and – coming to the most popular theme – standardization and modules. He leaves the readers in no doubt whether the tradition is still alive, as the carpenter "is still – outside the large industrial centres – the key man in the building industry."

In modern architecture, the traditional influence, Moffett says, is still very strong in "housing – both private and public – and restaurants." He also deals with landscape design: "In Japan, there is no separate profession of 'landscape architect'; architects usually design the settings of their park. Here, too, tradition is the major influence. To-day, as at seventeenth-century Katsura, the architect will go to extraordinary lengths to obtain exactly the desired in the design of the garden: Kunio Maekawa, architect of the Japanese pavilion at this year's Brussels international Exhibition, recently dispatched two shiploads of stones from Yokohama, for the pavilion garden, after he had searched Europe in vain for stones of the right size, shape, texture, and colour."²⁵⁴ He goes on explaining the contemporary situation in Japan concerning housing, designing against earthquakes, the history of the modern movement in Japan (Le Corbusier has a big influence in Japan through his disciples, Maekawa, Sakakura, and Yoshimura. Mies has a big admirer in Tange. Frank Lloyd Wright, on the contrary, has little impact.)

²⁵² Moffett, Japan, 132

²⁵³ Moffett, Japan, 135

²⁵⁴ Moffett, Japan, 138

Following Moffett's text, the issue then presented the work of contemporary Japanese architects: Sutemi Horiguchi (his projects where he turns to the Japanese tradition), Antonin Raymond, Kunio Maekawa, Junzō Sakakura, Shimizu Construction Co., Kenzō Tange, and Hiroshi Oe.

II.4.3. Arthur Drexler: *The Architecture of Japan*

If there is one American publication on Japanese traditional architecture to be mentioned among the European ones, it is Arthur Drexler's *The Architecture of Japan*. Drexler (1925–1987) was invited to New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) by Philip Johnson (1906–2005) as curator in the architecture and design department, which he directed from 1956. In 1954 the museum temporarily built a “traditional” Japanese house in its garden. The house, designed by modern Japanese architect Junzō Yoshimura, was designed and first built in Japan in the preceding year, and then recreated in the garden of MoMA under the supervision of Japanese craftsmen. Even though all visitors had to remove their shoes before entering, the house met an unusual interest of the public, one thousand per day on average, and after some necessary reparation it reopened in 1955.²⁵⁵

Drexler wrote an entire book on the occasion – a diligent historical account of Japanese architecture, mapping its cultural background, structure and design and history from the oldest archaeological findings to contemporary architecture. It provided a well-written and state-of-the-art information, while the choice of subjects and images was influenced by the Modernist attitude – for instance, the famous Karamon gate in the Nikkō mausoleum complex, disparaged already by Bruno Taut for its exuberant decoration, is described by referring to an alleged “decline of taste” of the Tokugawa shoguns.

The rich black and white photographic accompaniment included many images from the Ise shrine, taken during its recent reconstruction in 1953 by Yoshio Watanabe (1907–2000), as well as the Katsura villa, pictured by the Japanese-American photographer Yasuhiro Ishimoto (1921–2012). Besides, Drexler's monography used pictures by many other photographers including Isamu Noguchi, as well as Drexler himself, but it is worth to mention Ishimoto and Watanabe since this was the first time when their architectural images

²⁵⁵ According to MoMA's press release from 8 October 1954, announcing an extension of the exhibition, “the Japanese house has proved to be one of the most popular exhibitions ever held at the Museum of Modern Art. Over 95 000 people have already visited the house, making the average attendance to almost a thousand a day since the house opened in late June. Comparable attendance figures taken at the Museum's two previous full-scale exhibition houses, the Breuer House in 1949 and the Ain House in 1950, show the Japanese House to be more than twice as popular.” – Press release of MoMA: *Japanese Exhibition House to Remain Open Additional 12 Days*. 8 October 1954, retrieved 3 January 2018. Source: https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/research-resources/press_archives/1950s/1954/3?high_contrast=false

were presented to Western public²⁵⁶. A few years later, this time with a full credit and in a large format, their photographs appeared in two publications conceived by Kenzō Tange: *Katsura. Tradition and Creation in Contemporary Architecture* (1960)²⁵⁷, and *Ise: The prototype of Japanese architecture* (1962 in Japanese, 1965 in English)²⁵⁸, codifying in their way the Modernist gaze on Japanese tradition.

The principal question is, of course, why show “an intact phase of Japanese architecture as it originally appeared” in the Museum of *Modern Art*? Jonathan M. Reynolds called “the construction of the Japanese Exhibition house at this Western modernist stronghold (...) an especially aggressive assertion of the argument that premodern Japanese architecture had something to teach the contemporary western world.”²⁵⁹ In Drexler’s book, however, there is little argument in this respect, since he simply assumes that “the relevance of Japan’s architectural tradition to contemporary western building is well known,” and continues: “Modern Western practice, with its general use of steel skeleton frame, has developed effects known to Japanese architecture at least since the eighth century. Walls which do not support a roof but are instead hung like curtains on a structural framework are today a commonplace in Western building. Frank Lloyd Wright made fundamental to his work a Japanese respect for the beauty of natural materials, as well as the hovering, insistently horizontal roofs essential to the Japanese conception of a house. Open interiors and plain surfaces, as in the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, are other ideas characteristic of Japan which we have been developing in our own way.”²⁶⁰

Only towards the end of the book when Drexler has to deal with contemporary architecture, he suggests that Western Modernism had an impact *on* Japan, tentatively bringing up some similarities with Mies van der Rohe but promptly denying his actual influence in Japan. And only in the supplement, dedicated to the Museum Exhibition House, the “unique relevance” of Japan to modern Western architecture is revisited: “The characteristics which give it this relevance are post and lintel skeleton frame construction; flexibility of plan, close relation to indoor and outdoor areas; and the decorative use of structural elements.”²⁶¹ Further on, he justifies the choice of the style of the house to be exhibited, a *samurai* house in the *shoin-zukuri* style dating from the 16th and 17th centuries: “The Museum’s Exhibition House was chosen to illustrate some of the characteristics of buildings considered by the Japanese to be masterpieces, and considered by the Western architects to be of continuing relevance to our

²⁵⁶ A selection of Watanabe’s photographs appeared the same year in *Architectural Beauty in Japan*, Shinkokai Koksai Bunka [Society for International Cultural Relations], 1955.

²⁵⁷ Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange, and Yasuhiro Ishimoto (photographs). *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*, 1960.

²⁵⁸ Kenzo Tange, Noboru Kawazoe, Watanabe Yoshio, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture* (MIT Press, 1965.)

²⁵⁹ Reynolds, *Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition*, 327.

²⁶⁰ Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 6.

²⁶¹ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 262.

own building activities. These requirements called for a more disciplined esthetic and a wider technical range than is found in tea houses or farm buildings, however beautiful they may be.”²⁶²

²⁶² Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 262.

II.4.4. Image of Japan in a French magazine: *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*

***L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 1956**

In the 1950s *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* (“*The Architecture of Today*”) was still under the direction of André Bloc (1896–1966), who founded the magazine in 1930 and turned it into a leading French Modernist medium. Its first issue on Japan came out in 1956, and contained more than one hundred pages on both ancient and contemporary Japanese architecture. The Japanese ambassador in France, in his foreword, picks up on the architects’ rhetoric:

“*The ancient Japanese architecture, the constant care about harmonising the house with nature, and the necessity to secure a maximum utility in a minimum of space, for instance, begin today to inspire the Western architects.*”²⁶³

The issue was created with the help of the respected Japanese architect Junzō Sakakura, and Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999), whom we met at length in chapter II.4.1., called *un guide clairvoyant* in the editor’s introduction. The two already collaborated on a text about world vernacular architecture, including examples from Japan, in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* twenty years before, in 1935. Back then, both were working in Le Corbusier’s studio, forging a friendship that led to Perriand’s extensive stays in Japan (1940–1943, 1953–1955). Her own text in the issue, called *Une tradition vivante (A Living Tradition)* delivers a brief introduction into Japanese culture. Perriand repeats how important the relationship to nature is, adding a few personal memories and thoughts from her favourite read, Okakura’s *Book of Tea*.

An article by Jacques Belmont addressed the appealing theme of standardisation in Japan was, written. He briefly gives an overview of the different standards development of the standards throughout the Japanese history, adding a complaint about the refusal of tradition by contemporary architects. Apparently familiar with Walter Gropius’ slogan of ‘unity in diversity’, Belmont rephrases it by saying: “The Japanese module allows, at the scale of the house, diversity in unity, and at the scale of the city, unity in diversity.”²⁶⁴

To introduce the traditional Japanese architecture to the French public, a choice of historical buildings takes up the first pages of the issue. It includes what can already be called canonical

²⁶³ “L’architecture japonaise ancienne, le souci constant d’harmoniser la maison à la nature, et la nécessité d’assurer un maximum d’utilité dans un minimum d’espace, par exemple, commencent aujourd’hui à inspirer les architectes occidentaux.” *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 65 (1956), p. 2.

²⁶⁴ “Le module japonais permet, à l’échelle de la maison, la diversité dans l’unité, et à l’échelle de la ville, l’unité dans la diversité.” Jacques Belmont, La standardization au Japon, *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 65 (1956): 22-24.

buildings, which could be known to the readers already from Bruno Taut, as well as from more contemporary titles: The Ise shrine, Katsura villa, and the Imperial Palace of Kyoto. Slightly less usual is the inclusion of the *shōsō-in*, the treasure house of the Tōdaiji temple in Nara, an exceptional construction with walls made of timber.

***L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 1961**

If the first monothematic issue of *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* dedicated to Japan served as a sort of introduction for the French readers, the second one, published five years later, took this interest further. This time, the editors underlined their effort to “accent what is, in the current Japanese architecture, the most representative and has roots in the specifically national concept, while keeping the most valuable principles of contemporary architecture.”²⁶⁵ The two introductory essays are personal accounts, criss-crossed in their perspectives: First, a Japanese architect (Yoshinobu Ashihara) writes about his experience with the Western culture, and then a French photographer, Lucien Hervé, gives his perspective on Japanese architecture.

Yoshinobu Ashihara (1918–2003) first absorbed some European experience working for Le Corbusier’s former collaborator Junzō Sakakura in Tokyo, and subsequently stayed in the United States at Harvard. By this time, he emerged as an eloquent comparatist of the Japanese and Western architectures. In his *Notes about the architecture in Japan*, written for this issue of *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, he compares the Japanese concept of space to the Western one, and finds them “totally opposed”²⁶⁶. He makes a parallel with space in painting, alluding to the figure-ground theory: for instance, a Western still life is painted around the depicted objects (positive space), while on an East Asian ink painting, the objects are composed “around” the empty space (negative space). If we agree that architecture is there to contain space, and accept this parallel, it is a plausible idea that it is much more a “background” than a “figure”. “Figures will be, of course, the inhabitants and users.” This implies, in Ashihara’s view, that the Japanese attitude is inherently more “architectural”. He then applies his theory even to cities, pointing out a “hidden order” of the Japanese city. This way, Ashihara introduces an idea of a dichotomy between the East and the West, which spread around his time among certain architects, including members of Metabolist movement. (Ashihara’s own writing in this vein culminated later on in an entire book on “hidden order”, where he put in opposition European cities like Paris, orderly on the outside,

²⁶⁵ “(...) mettre l’accent sur ce qui, dans l’architecture actuelle du Japon, est le plus représentatif et prend ces racines dans des conceptions spécifiquement nationales, tout en conservant les principes les plus valables de l’architecture contemporaine.” – *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 98 (1961), p. 1.

²⁶⁶ « Je pense pouvoir considérer la conception japonaise de l’espace et celle d’Occident comme deux conceptions totalement opposés. » Yoshinobu Ashihara, Notes sur l’architecture au Japon, *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 98 (1961), 4.

but stiff and incapable of change, to the Asian, specifically Japanese cities, outwardly chaotic, but driven by a 'hidden order'.²⁶⁷)

Lucien Hervé (1910–2007), a French photographer who came to Japan on his long voyage in Asia, relates how different Japan feels at the end of such a trip. In his article, he presents a visual journey through both contemporary and old architecture of Japan. Quite like Charlotte Perriand five years before, Hervé stresses the role of people in Japanese architecture: “Architecture, built around emptiness, reserves a noble place for people. In all the mansions visited, so inconspicuous that he wants to stay there, is his own statue without a pedestal, without excess.”²⁶⁸ This may sound curious since not a single human can be seen in his photographs, but it can underline his assertion that Japanese architecture remains “full of the invisible presence of man (...) despite being “mathematical”, modularized, reasonable, cartesian [!]”²⁶⁹

As a photographer, Hervé worked mainly with visual means, often putting together architectural details and fragments in parallels and confrontations. Juxtaposing, on a single page, the image of a traditional temple, and a contemporary building (e.g. by Kenzō Tange and Mooto Take²⁷⁰), the shots focus on a single trait of both – the way their beams cross on the corners. To support the idea of continuity between the old and new Japan, Hervé employs a particularly rich vocabulary in his captions: in the case we mentioned, the contemporary buildings are “not copies, but particularly successful transpositions”²⁷¹. In another caption, there is a *similitude*, and where images do not suffice, the verbal means sometimes do all the work: “It would be insolent trying to seek a formal resemblance among the fields in the Japanese countryside, the purely commercial inscriptions of a large modern shop, and the plastic warp of the university library by Maekawa, and the back and side façade by Tange. There is no ‘resemblance’. But what a kinship!”²⁷² The word he uses, *parenté*, suggests a common origin of things, may it be just the banal fact that all these are patterns

²⁶⁷ Yoshinobu Ashihara, *Hidden Order. Tokyo Through the Twentieth Century* (Kodansha USA Inc, 1989).

²⁶⁸ « L’architecture, bâti autour de vide, réserve une place noble aux hommes. Dans toutes les demeures visitées, si effacé qu’il veuille rester, est sa propre statue sans piédestal, sans démesure. » Lucien Hervé, Japon: Prallèles et divergences, *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 98 (1961), 6–15.

The absence of sculpture as one of its main difference traits is stated also by Erwin A. Gutkind, Japan, 31.

²⁶⁹ Hervé, Japon: Prallèles et divergences, 13.

²⁷⁰ Hervé, Japon: Prallèles et divergences, 11.

²⁷¹ “pas des copies mais des transpositions particulièrement réussites”, Hervé, Japon: Prallèles et divergences, 11

²⁷² « Il serait outrecuidant de chercher une ressemblance formelle entre les champs labourés de la campagne japonaise, les inscriptions purement commerciales d’un grand magasin moderne, ou la trame plastique des ouvertures de la bibliothèque universitaire de Kunio Maekawa a Tokyo et les façades postérieure et latérale d’une administration commerciale par Tange. Il n’y a pas de “resemblance”. Mais quelle parenté ! » Hervé, Japon: Prallèles et divergences, 8.

produced in Japan. In any case, by no means can we deny that Hervé was creative in finding names for mutual relationships between things.

The issue then brings an unusually rich choice of projects by Japanese architects on more than a hundred pages, but commenced by the recently finished Museum of Modern art in Tokyo by Le Corbusier, continuing with four projects of his collaborator Kunio Maekawa. The rest of the issue takes the reader from the usual suspects (Tange, of course including his *Tokyo Bay Plan*), to lesser known names such as Takeo Aramo. Ashihara presents himself, apart from his theorizing in the essay, also as a practitioner with three of his buildings.

II.4.5. Werner Blaser and assembling the image of Japan

Prelude: *Werk*, 1947–1950

The impact of Switzerland on world architecture far exceeds the size of the country. During and immediately after the World War II, its political and economic stability remained unbroken, a situation which was in a sharp contrast with other German speaking countries, and with most of Europe. While this stability and thoroughness, together with a degree of conservatism, did not necessarily link the image of Switzerland with the latest cries of the avant-garde, Swiss modern architecture's reputation was high, thanks to the high technical level of their engineering, and also thanks to the promotion of Sigfried Giedion who wrote about builders like the bridge constructor Robert Maillart. The *Werk* magazine²⁷³ catered to this worldwide interest in Switzerland. The motives on its front page of course changed in the course of years, but it remained printed entirely in red all through the first three decades after World War II – a sign of a Swiss stability maybe. The introduction of Japan in *Werk* was not large in terms of extent, but benefitted from rather interesting contexts thanks to the space regularly given – unlike in other architectural magazines – to art and art history.

Japan first found its way to the pages of *Werk* in a marginal way, but the way it happened is still worth noting. It already happened before the war that some authors writing about other subjects used a photograph from Japan as an illustration to their broader argument, with no apparent need to explore it more. In 1947 Alfred Roth (1903–1998), in his theoretical article titled *Considerations on architecture*, used one photo of a traditional Japanese interior to support his thesis that “differentiation and simplicity are characteristics of genuine culture”²⁷⁴. Three years later, an article on the relationship of housing and greenery opened with a large photo of a Japanese garden – without any further commentary.²⁷⁵ It seems almost like starting from the end: as if Japan had been already fully present in the consciousness of the architects, and needed no further explanation. More, however, was to come a few years later, introduced by Werner Blaser.

²⁷³ To avoid confusion: Today's *Werk*, *Bauen und Wohnen* is a successor of two hitherto independent Swiss magazines, *Werk*, and *Bauen und Wohnen*, created by their merger in 1981.

²⁷⁴ „Differenzierung und Einfachheit als Merkmal einer wahrer Kultur (Japan).“ Alfred Roth, *Zeitgemässe Architekturbetrachtungen*, *Werk* (1947): 182-187, Image caption from p. 186.

²⁷⁵ "Japanischer Garten" (image caption), Rotzler, Willy, *Wohnbau und Grünfläche*, *Werk* (1950), p. 65.

Werner Blaser, 1955–1963

Werner Blaser (born 1924) finished his training as a furniture designer in Basel, and in 1949, he left for Scandinavia to work, among others, as a practitioner for Alvar Aalto. Passionate for architecture, he went to study at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 1951, where he also completed a photography course. In 1953, he travelled to Japan, and spent some time in Kyoto. Photography, the architecture and design of Scandinavia and Japan, and the work of Mies van der Rohe, constituted his main areas of interest for the upcoming years, often intertwined. In 1956 Blaser got a teaching position at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. As an outcome of his stay in Japan, he completed several books, which had a broad success, being published in German as well as in international editions. First, *The Japanese Temple and Tea-House (Tempel und Teehaus in Japan)* came out in 1955, with an English and French edition published in the following years²⁷⁶; then came *Classical Dwelling Houses in Japan (Wohnen und Bauen in Japan, 1958)*²⁷⁷, and *Structure and Form in Japan (Struktur und Gestalt in Japan, 1963)*²⁷⁸ completed after Blaser's second visit of Japan in 1961.

In *The Japanese Temple and Tea-House*, he defines his goal as twofold: “To show (...) what lies at the heart of the Japanese living, and then to suggest how we might learn from the Japanese example to see our own architectural designs and activities in a perspective which, once common enough to the West, would appear to have been since forgotten.”²⁷⁹ Blaser joins those who criticised modern architecture for its “lack of spirit”, and sets Japan as an opposite and a possible model. Blaser examines the historical, technical, and spiritual sources for Japanese architecture, and he suggests that what gave it its form was the modern utilitarian seeking of comfort, but primarily spiritual forces. He finds the basis of this attitude in Shinto, Zen, and especially in the tea ceremony. Blaser therefore considered the temple and the teahouse “prototypes” of Japanese architecture. That also explains the name of his first book on Japan, which actually shows not only temples and teahouses, but also palaces and dwellings.

Blaser addresses his subject through photography, drawing and text. It was the writing that raised most doubts. A typical example is noted by the reviewer of the English edition of Blaser's first book on Japan in *The Journal of Asian Studies*: In his opinion, Blaser, very probably an avid reader of Dt. T. Suzuki, goes “in his enthusiasm for his subject” a bit too far in

²⁷⁶ Werner Blaser, *Tempel und Teehaus in Japan* (Olten: Urs-Graf-Verl., 1955); Werner Blaser, *Japanese Temples and Tea-Houses* (F. W. Dodge, New York 1957); Werner Blaser, *Temples et jardins au Japon* (Paris: Morancé, 1956).

²⁷⁷ Werner Blaser, *Wohnen und Bauen in Japan* (Teufen, Schweiz: Niggli, 1958).

²⁷⁸ Werner Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1963; bilingual edition).

²⁷⁹ Blaser, *Japanese Temples and Tea-Houses*, 6.

stressing Zen as the source of literally everything in Japanese culture, for example in claiming that “the intimacy between the master and his material was [...] a Zen virtue. One result of this was that craftsmen achieved a great skill in sawing and planing.”²⁸⁰

While Blaser’s texts raised some objections in the reviews, the photographs received an almost unanimous praise for their quality. Seen retrospectively they are indeed the main quality, and the main source of novelty. Typically, Blaser’s images are frontal, or focussed on pure, isolated objects. His speciality in pictures of traditional Japanese architecture is combining drawing and photos where he wanted to stress the mutual penetration of the exterior and interior space. Such photos were originally taken from the interior looking outside, which leads the viewer’s sight to the outside, typically a garden in the Japanese traditional houses. The parts of the house which are in view – the floor, posts, and the ceiling – are then erased from the photo and replaced by a line drawing. The result is in fact a photographic collage, something that may have been a technical answer to the usually high contrast in lighting between the outside and the inside, where the interior comes out black. More importantly, effacing the material side of architecture of course underlines the idea of immateriality of the Japanese house.

Beyond this post-processing of his own photos, Blaser employed more visual strategies, starting from the format of the entire book (typically square), the distribution of photographs within it, and their sizing, angles, format, and cutting. To suggest similarities between objects and spaces, he employed a well-considered juxtaposition of pictures (just as Lucien Hervé did in his text for *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* in 1961). Blaser further developed this in his later publications, where he advocates the parallels between the Japanese tradition and western modernism even more straightforwardly.²⁸¹ He came up with a very suggestive and original method of visual interpretation of architecture. The advantages are obvious: instead of attempting verbal description, the author lets the images “speak for themselves”, an appealing approach for everyone who refuses to reduce architecture to mere words. But even a minimal knowledge of visual theory, of course, should make the viewer alert: The choice of subject, angle, the framing and editing are conscious strategies, all results of the author’s shaping and manipulation. With visual comparisons the author can create similarities which do not exist anywhere else than on the photograph.

²⁸⁰ G. M. Grosjean, Japanese Temples and Teahouses by Werner Blaser (review), *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 18(3) (1959): 395-396.

²⁸¹ Werner Blaser, *West Meets East – Mies van der Rohe* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1996).

Werk, Switzerland, 1956–62

In 1955, Blaser also introduced Japan to the readers of *Werk* – for the first time in a more extensive article in this magazine – by presenting extracts from his book that was just about to be published. He then continued to promote his view of Japan in *Werk* both by word and image: In 1960, he wrote a text on measuring systems and proportions in Japan, focussed on the *tatami* mats, and two years later, he spoke about the conflict between old and new in Japan. Using material that would soon appear in his book *Structure and Form in Japan*²⁸², photographs, he confronts some objects of the tea ceremony with the most common objects of daily use, pointing out the utmost simplicity these “high” and “low” objects – feather brush and rice scoop made of bamboo – have in common. Blaser sees a totally different attitude in the Western tradition, which he illustrates with the case of porcelain: “Whereas the Europeans wanted to eat from carved, copper, silver and even golden plates, the East Asians did not care about the material itself, but about what was made out of it. Only when the French king melted his silverware for coins during the Seven-year’s war, and Madame Pompadour gave him the secret of kaolin, has the West unintentionally learned a bit of life culture.”²⁸³

This text was actually a quasi-interview with Blaser written down by Lucius Burckhardt, just then in 1962, a newly appointed editor in chief of *Werk*.²⁸⁴ The October issue of 1962 was also the first monothematic block dedicated to Japan in *Werk*. It opens by restating the fact that the Japanese tradition was able not just to adapt to the West, and even affect its modern development:

*“As around the middle of the 19th century Japan opened its gates to the West and prepared itself to become an industrial nation, many admirers of the Japanese culture and art predicted that it would come to an abrupt end. They did not count that in the Japanese lifestyle there are inherent elements which will also be useful in the modern and will even reverberate in the industrial nations.”*²⁸⁵

²⁸² Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1963, bilingual edition).

²⁸³ „Beinahe symbolisch für diese Haltung ist ja das Porzellan: während die Europäer auf zimmerten, kupfernen, und silbernen und sogar goldenen Tellern essen wollte, kam es dem Ostasiaten nicht auf das Material an, sondern darauf, was daraus gemacht wurde. Erst als im Siebenjährigem Krieg der französische König sein Tafelsilber zur Münze trug und ihm Madame de Pompadour das Geheimnis des Kaolinbrandes verschaffte, hatte der Westen ungewollt ein Stückchen Lebenskultur gelernt.“ Lucius Burckhardt, *Alt und neu. Gedanken aus einem Gespräch mit Werner Blaser* SWB, Basel, *Werk* (October 1962): 357–360 (quote from p. 358)

²⁸⁴ Burckhardt (1925–2003) was a sociologist by education, engaged with art and architecture for most of his career. He was an important teacher at several Swiss and German schools, and later coined the science of “strollology” (Promenadologie). He worked as the chief editor of *Werk* between 1962 and 1972.

²⁸⁵ —, *Werk* (1962): 339.

Like Blaser's contribution, the other texts in this issue revolve around a historical reflection on this Japan-West relationship, and the question of Japanese "originality". The first text is a translation of – according to the editors' opinion – "an extreme statement" by the Japanese architect Shinji Koike, then director of the *Japan Design House*. His purportedly "extreme" ideas, however, are quite in accord with the observation of some Westerners about a coexistence of old and new in Japanese life and, subsequently, in Japanese design. Recalling his recent journey to Europe, the Japanese architect notes the 'dualism' of his fellow countrymen. For instance, when they embrace the modern lifestyle in the work life, but coming home, they gladly return to their tatami mats, and dress in kimonos (which was then still true for the older generation). Koike, however, makes quite a radical conclusion when he claims that this split thwarts the ability to establish any reasonable criteria of taste. The Japanese will therefore have to overcome this 'dualism' if they want to a genuinely Japanese design.²⁸⁶

The following page, entitled "*Europeans write...*"²⁸⁷, prefigures the interest of our study: it provides a historical reflection on the ideas of European who wrote about Japan. Bringing together several snippets of texts from the 19th and 20th centuries, the quotes wind around the questions of the originality in Japan; for instance, the extract from Otto Fischer's *Wanderfahrten eines Kunstfreundes in China und Japan* from 1939 recalls a symptomatic conversation between a Japanese host and the Western visitor: "Mr. Ohazama stresses, to the German visitor's surprise, that 'Japan was never original'", and Fischer opposes by pointing out that the Japanese were always able to thaw the foreign impulses into something new, and "to take to good models, not the bad one" The different opinions are then, almost dialectically, overcome by a common dreaming about a future world art (Weltkunst), "whose beginning are already showing in architecture."²⁸⁸

A couple of pages further, Aligül Ayverdi (1935–1986), a Turkish architect then living in Japan, begins with a surprisingly clear preconception, taking already for granted that the Modernists created "under the influence" of Japan from the beginning: "No one can deny that the traditional Japanese architecture preceded the Modern in its concept by several centuries. For this reason, the international modern architecture got under the influence of the traditional Japanese building – we mean the theoretical and practical works of the leaders of the second generation: Gropius, Wright, Mies van der Rohe. Also in the works of the younger generation this influence continues. But using of a tradition without its proper understanding is not only useless, but dangerous: The tradition becomes a fashion, a decoration. This danger now threatens the international modern architecture. (...) The eternal fallacy of humankind," Ayverdi continues in an admonishing tone, "is that it takes

²⁸⁶ Shinji Koike, Design als Problem der Kultur, *Werk* (October 1962), 338. Text translated from *Japan Design House*, vol. 1, April 1961.

²⁸⁷ — Europäer schreiben..., *Werk* (1962): 339. the selection is unsigned, prepared by editors of *Werk*.

²⁸⁸ —: Europäer schreiben..., *Werk* (1962): 339.

the appearance for the essence and the means for the goal. No one takes the effort to clarify the other and to actually understand it. From this state of ignorance arises literature that starts with the words ‘It is not easy for a foreigner...’, followed by a note about the meaning of the building, the brand of the camera and the difficulty of being allowed to enter the building.”²⁸⁹

This may well have been a sarcastic but apt note of some of the literature of the times, but a more important question is how and where the real understanding of “the other” should come from. Ayverdi directs his readers to the countryside, and adds many observations about the struggle of traditional modernity in Japan, based on his experience from the country. Coming back to his theme from the start, he closes with the following remark:

*“... yet Japan is a country where prognoses are difficult. A lot of things dreamy dwell in Japan, even the science works with dreams; but in the middle of these dreams there is always reality. The West can, regardless of what it had learned from the Japanese architecture, also learn a lot more that it had already forgotten from dealing with these things.”*²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Aligül Ayverdi, Tradition und Moderne in der Japanischen Architektur, *Werk* (1962): 344.

²⁹⁰ Ayverdi, Tradition und Moderne, 347.

II.4.6. Arne Korsmo, Jørn Utzon: Sittings crossed in the tearoom. Japanese architecture and Scandinavia

Arne Korsmo in *Byggekunst*, Norway, 1956

To look into architectural periodicals outside the usual centres can sometimes be a tedious crawl through second- or third-hand information, taken often with mistakes from elsewhere, but it can also bring some interesting lessons. Norway, after the damage caused by the German occupation and before the discovery of oil at the end of the 1960s, was still a relatively poor country. Nonetheless, it had a strong tradition of wooden buildings, as well as excellent modern architects. The small population and peripheral location were balanced by the tightly-knit relationships with other Scandinavian countries, corroborated by wartime exile of some Danes and Norwegians in the neutral Sweden. Arne Korsmo (1900–1968) was no doubt a distinguished Modernist architect, and it was him who introduced Japanese architecture on the pages on *Byggekunst*²⁹¹, the country's main architectural magazine, in 1956²⁹².

His article is most interesting for the very personal twist which the author gives to the subject, opening up about a possible application of the values that Japanese architecture brings. The resources that Korsmo uses show titles already familiar to us. The first half of the text sums up his reading of Kakuzō Okakura's notorious *Book of Tea*, a classic in Japanese aesthetics. Korsmo does not just present his reader's diary, but also adds his personal experience with the Japanese aesthetic: "One spring day in 1945, Jørn Utzon and I sat, legs crossed, on the famous Japanese mats over a small square recess that represents the fireplace in the teahouse."²⁹³ The teahouse, called Zui-ki-tei, was built in Stockholm's Djurgården, in the garden of the Ethnographic museum, as a present from the Japanese already in the 1930s, and Korsmo's younger friend and colleague, and a fellow sitting on the *tatami* mat on this occasion, was Jørn Utzon (1918–2008), the Danish architect, internationally famous for his Sydney opera design. This teahouse, a "little masterpiece", claims Korsmo, has introduced him to the "deepest secrets" of Japanese architecture: the light wooden construction, transience, and, more broadly, the immaterial aspects also disclosed by Okakura's essay. However, then Korsmo closes this book and he is "back to the mighty imagery of nowadays

²⁹¹ The magazine has been founded in 1919 and renamed to *Arkitektur N* in 2007.

²⁹² Arne Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, *Byggekunst* 3 (1956): 70–75.

²⁹³ "En vårdag i 1945 satt Jørn Utzon og jeg med bena over kors på de berømmelige japanske matter omkring en liten firkantet forsenkning som representer ildstedet i et theus." Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, 70.

architectural work, art and consumer goods, and I am asking myself – have we got the great renewal he hoped for? Are we heading for a renewed understanding of the order and the whole? One must be confused with such a question.”²⁹⁴

This seems to be the main thing on Korsmo’s mind. While he ventures in summarizing up the relationships in architecture between Japan and the West, concluding: “... much of today’s architecture is difficult to understand when we don’t understand the Japanese one. The impulses went both ways,”²⁹⁵ he is nonetheless clear that neither formal reception nor historical research are his main interests: “One can try – as it is done here – to demonstrate the Japanese impulses. But the story of such development is so complicated that one should rather refrain from superficial, purely aesthetic appraising of similarities. To experience one’s own development and influences is already such a slow clarification process that one should be extremely careful. What struck me was the silence and simplicity that the author of the *Book of Tea* talks about, something I feel strongly related to. The intense activation of modern life may also be a reason why we Western people need both nature and contemplation to recreate – and that we as architects motivate and seek materials for space experiences to achieve peace, silence, calmness and order.”²⁹⁶

The personal reiteration allows Korsmo to link general values with practical design work, without forcibly looking for imitations. He demonstrates this sort of inspiration by referring to a design of his own home. It was one of a row of three houses built in 1952–1955 in Oslo’s Planetveien, co-designed with Christian Norberg-Schulz (not reproduced in this issue of the magazine). Apparently still excited by his recently finished home and the new spatial possibilities it offered, he speaks about the large living room, which “expresses how I live and want to experience the room itself”, and he stresses the role of the fireplace, which “satisfies a need to sit down and watch the fire’s movement and listen to its sound, bringing together everyone who comes into the house to a ritual like the one of the tea, easily, sometimes

²⁹⁴ „Jeg lukker boken og er tilbake ved helle det mektige billedstoff av våre dagers arkitekturarbeider, kunst og bruksvarer og spør meg selv – har vi fått den store fornyelsen han håpet på? Er vi på vei mot en fornyet forståelse av orden og helhet? Man må forvirres ved et slikt spørsmål.” Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, 73–74.

²⁹⁵ „Altså er meget av vår tids arkitektur vanskelig å forstå uten at man også forstår Japans. Det var vært et impulsarbeid begge veier.” Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, 74. Korsmo recapitulates here an article from *Architectural Forum*, January 1953, by Ryūichi Hamaguchi. Later he also quotes Lewis Mumford.

²⁹⁶ „Man kan – som her er gjort – foreta forsøk på å påvise japanske impulser. Men dette er en så komplisert utviklingshistorie at man helst bør avstå fra rent overfladisk estetisk likhetsvurdering. For en selv er opplevelsen av egen utvikling og av påvirkninger allerede en så langsom avklaringsprosess at man skal være ytterst forsiktig. Men det har slått meg at den stillhet og enkelhet som the-bokens forfatter taler om, den føler, man seg sterkt beslektet med. Det moderne livs intense aktivisering er kanskje også en grunn til at vi Vestens folk trenger både natur og kontemplasjon for å rekreasere oss – og at vi som arkitekter motiverer og søker materialer for vare romopplevelser for å oppnå fred, stilhet, ro og orden.” Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, 74.

elevated by a contemplative silence, even when many are here together.”²⁹⁷ He also mentions the new role that paintings get in this new space: “there are new possibilities for experiencing the qualities of painting, because the paintings can be moved as one wants to experience them in the outside and light shadow relationships.” The paintings’ space then expands the space of the room, a possible parallel to the evocation of depth by using landscape painting in the Japanese interiors – exchanged on occasion and according to season, as well as the walls and screens painted with landscape motives, expanding and altering thus the perception of space in the room.

Korsmo’s text is remarkable for at least two reasons. In its own way, it confirms an observation, already suggested by our inquiry, that there were titles and authors that could be considered key mediators, limited in number, but strong in impact. As architects primarily reached for the best available resources to feed their interest, these mediators determined, to a great extent, the image of Japanese architecture. In this particular case, we get a good idea what from Japan could reach an architect in Norway in the mid 1950s. The resources Korsmo uses for both ideas and illustrations are Werner Blaser’s *Temple and Teahouse in Japan* (1955), and Jiro Harada’s *Lesson of Japanese architecture* (1936). From magazines, he quotes Swiss *Werk* (a review of Blaser’s book by Alfred Roth) and the Japanese *Kenchiku bunka*. Korsmo read American sources as well – he mentions the magazines *Architectural Forum* and *Arts & Architecture*. A prominent role in his readings, however, still had Kakuzō Okakura’s *Book of Tea*, an essay fifty years old at this time. In spite of all the literature, however, the crucial impulse for Korsmo, at least how he tells it, was his direct personal experience of a Japanese building, even if just a small teahouse – the Zui-ki-tei in Stockholm. The other aspect of Korsmo’s text important for us is that even though he does not give up the ambition to bring objective information, Korsmo vividly connects the lesson of Japanese architecture with his own experience, and indicates implications for practice, including his own. In this sense, Korsmo’s writing, especially in the 1950s when a lecturing style prevailed, is a refreshing exception among the texts written by architects.

Jørn Utzon – “Japanese house is a delicate, bridge-like platform”

As we just learned, Korsmo was introduced to the Japanese house on the floor of the Stockholm *Zui-ki-tei* teahouse sitting next to his younger friend, Jørn Utzon in the spring of 1945. Utzon, who generally did not write much, did not leave a memory of this particular moment. Yet he travelled widely, and unlike his friend, he got to see Japan in the flesh. Utzon kept bringing even quite unusual resources from his travels, such as the *Yingzao Fashi* 營造法

²⁹⁷ „Peisen tilfredsstillter for eksempel et behov for å falle til ro mot ildens bevegelse og lyd og samler alle som kommer i huset som til et rituale lik theens, enkelt, stundimellom av opphøyet kontemplativ stillhet – selv når mange er samlet.” Korsmo, Japan og Vestens arkitektur, 75.

式, a 11th century Chinese building manual, which he got to know already as a student and purchased in China in 1958²⁹⁸. During his years in Australia, while working on his most celebrated project, the Sydney Opera House (1957–1973), Utzon “was a regular visitor to Japan,” as his biography says. The experience of non-European building was crucial for Utzon. Rather than Japan, though, it was Chinese and ancient Mexican architecture that occupied his mind when he wrote his short article called *Platforms and plateaus* in 1962. This text complements well Korsmo’s writing with a similar emphasis put on the physical experience from the Japanese house; though Utzon’s main interest remains the construction. Among examples of a platform-like construction from different countries, “the floor in a traditional Japanese house is a delicate bridge-like platform. This Japanese platform is like a table top and you do not walk on a table top. It is a piece of furniture. The floor here attracts you as the wall does in a European house. You want to sit close to the wall in a European house, and here in Japan, you want to sit on the floor and not walk on it. All life in Japanese houses is expressed in sitting, lying or crawling movements. Contrary to the Mexican rock-like feeling of the platform, here you have a feeling similar to the one you have when standing on a small wooden bridge, dimensioned to take just your weight and nothing more. A refined addition to the expression of the platform in the Japanese house is the horizontal emphasis provided by the movements of the sliding doors and screens, and the black pattern made by the edges of the floor mats accentuate the surface. An almost violent, but highly effective and wonderful contrast to this calm, linear, natural coloured architecture is created by the Japanese women moving noiselessly around like exotic butterflies in their gaily coloured silk kimonos.”²⁹⁹

Richard Weston argues that the Japanese inspiration can be seen in several of Utzon’s buildings: At the villa Banck near Helsingborg (1958), where “the dominant inspiration was Oriental, and more specifically, Japanese.”³⁰⁰ In the undated sketches for the intended Bayview house Utzon wanted to build himself in Australia, the quest for adapting architecture to local climatic conditions “involved an intriguing excursion into a system of plywood structural elements designed to interlock like pieces of a giant jigsaw and emulate the gently curved roofs of traditional Japanese houses – which were sketched, with their associated framing, amidst explorations of the interplay of platforms and steps.”³⁰¹

Prefabrication was a subject of great interest for Utzon’s in his work, and in Japan he was fascinated by the traditional prefabrication. “You could buy windows in one street, doors in another, wall panels in a third,” he explained on one occasion to Mogens Prip-Buus, Utzon’s his senior staff assistant at the Sydney Opera house. In in 1964, “to celebrate the fact that

²⁹⁸ Richard Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture* (Edition Blømdal, 2008), 252.

²⁹⁹ Jørn Utzon, *Platforms and Plateaus*. *Zodiac* 10, 1962, 113–140.

³⁰⁰ Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 76.

³⁰¹ Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 241.

the shells [of the Sydney opera] were finally growing successfully,”³⁰², Utzon even presented Prip-Buus a copy of the then newly published book *The Japanese House* by Heinrich Engel.

Representatives of the Danish Timber Association approached Utzon in 1969 inviting him to develop a prefabrication system for timber houses, and, potentially, other small houses. The result, called *Espansiva* system “not surprisingly, looks distinctly Japanese.” According to Weston, it “gave Utzon the ideal opportunity to emulate the traditional building systems of Japan and China that he admired since his student days.”³⁰³

Japan in Scandinavia

Arne Korsmo’s career took place mostly in Norway, while his younger colleague Jørn Utzon made projects far abroad and travelled widely. Both of them, however, initially approached Japanese culture from the background they that their home countries offered. The broader question of the reception of Japanese traditional architecture in Scandinavia, which we opened already when in connection with Tetsurō Yoshida (see chapter II.1.), returns here. Let us remind briefly at least some facts that give us a better context in which to set Korsmo’s and Utzon’s encounters with Japan.

In 1955, a design exhibition called H55 took place in the Swedish Helsingborg, close to Denmark, with a Japanese house that draw great attention of architects and designers. It consisted of two parts, one old-style and one contemporary, yet even the latter was made in the traditional style³⁰⁴. In 1958, a long article entitles *Traditions in Japanese Building (Traditioner i japansk bygningskunst)* appeared in *Arkitektur DK*³⁰⁵. Just like most European architectural magazines in the second half of the 1950s, the main Danish periodical also had its initiation to Japanese tradition. The unusually long penned by the architect Per Lassen retold Japanese architectural history from the ancient Buddhist temples to teahouses and villa Katsura that is considered a culmination, in the tradition set by Bruno Taut, and also large images, including one in colour. Incidentally, or not so incidentally, immediately after the article followed two new buildings by Danish architect Wilhelm Wohlert that have been often associated with Japanese principles: The garden pavilion for Niels Bohr, a long rectangle that can be opened along one side “like a cupboard,” and the first extension of the Louisiana museum near Copenhagen (Wilhelm Wohlert with Jørgen Bo, 1958)³⁰⁶.

³⁰² Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 252.

³⁰³ Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 266–268.

³⁰⁴ Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Influences from Japan in Danish Art and Design*, 228.

³⁰⁵ Per Lassen, *Traditioner i japansk bygningskunst*, *Arkitektur DK* (1958): 121–138.

³⁰⁶ —, Annex til sommerbolig i Tibirke Lunde : *Arkitektur DK* (1958): 139–143.

Were the Scandinavian architects somehow especially susceptible to Japanese architectural tradition? In Utzon's monography, Weston quotes in full all the points of Japanese architecture from Yoshida's *Japanese House* (see chapter II.1.) saying that the "Japanese ideals, mediated by Wright and European Modernism, were appropriated not as a form of exoticism, but because they provided contemporary Danish architects with a way of assimilating and transforming their own traditions."³⁰⁷ Without going to much detail, he reveals the difficulty of the subject by suggesting that the similarity between Japan and Denmark can well also be "mediated through Wright and European modernism". In a similar way, Nils-Ole Lund suggests that the 1950s, the Danish "japonisme" was more than anything else related to the American Bay area style. The closeness, affinity or kinds of relationship between Japan and the Scandinavian architects is often stated, but much less analysed. One reason is no doubt the verbal thrift of the Scandinavian architects themselves. The other is the innate parallel between the Japanese and Scandinavian vernacular: mainly use of wood, native to the vernacular of most Sweden, Norway and Finland. Formally, the highly appreciated culture of Danish family houses of the 1950 and 1960s, and is a lesser extent in other Scandinavian countries, indeed bears signs of approximation to certain features of the Japanese building: the street entrance is almost hidden, often behind a protective wall, and in contrast, opening of the house to the garden side.

A good example is Sverre Fehn's (1924–2009) villa Schreiner in Oslo (1959–1964). This was Fehn's first family house, which the architect himself named *Hommage au Japon*, or a "greeting to Japan"³⁰⁸. Almost completely closed off from the street side, the house has none but glass walls towards the garden and the adjacent forest. Elevated on stilts, it even has a porch running along the outer side of the house, an intermediate space very similar to the Japanese *engawa*. Except from the unhewn rock pedestals on which on which stand the perimeter columns, no Japanese features are directly replicated. The doors slide just like the Japanese *fusuma*, although here Jean Prouvé may have been a source of inspiration³⁰⁹.

Fehn himself never visited Japan, although he got a scholarship to go there. As he said later in in a documentary film, he "spent the money on meals."³¹⁰ Arne Korsmo – Fehn's teacher at the Oslo architecture may have provided impulses. Francesco dal Co wrote that "Fehn cultivated an interest, which he never neglected, in Japanese architecture, to which his works owe a great debt. This debt is most noticeable in Fehn's installations and in the many wooden

³⁰⁷ Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 56-58.

³⁰⁸ Jesper Wachtmeister (ed), *Kochuu. Japanese Architecture: Influence and Origin* (Sweden, 2003)

³⁰⁹ Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture*, 56-58.

³¹⁰ Wachtmeister (ed.), *Kochuu. Japanese Architecture: Influence and Origin*.

structures he has built.”³¹¹ Giving examples of two of his later villas, he does develop the question much further.

The research got further in Denmark thanks to Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen, who set seeking the parallels between Japan and Danish art as her main goal, going in the footsteps of Wichmann seeking a broadly defined Japonisme. Concerning architecture, she shows a few more examples that indeed look strikingly similar to Japanese architecture especially when their photos are put next to pictures from Japan: Halldor Gunnlögsson’s house in Rungsted (1958–59), the interior of Erik-Christian Sørensen’s own house in Ordrup (1954), and maybe most strikingly, the summer house by Erik Korshagen in Rørvig (1960 with later extensions).

Yet almost always, there is an ambiguity. Quite any of the alleged “Japan-nesses” in the architect’s work equally well through yet a different similarity. In the work of Sverre Fehn, the effects of wood building could also have come from the architect’s fascination with the construction of Viking ships³¹². In the case of Erik Korshagen, the prominent straw roof that make his summer house look so Japanese, the thatching technique is actually a local tradition in Denmark and northern Germany. As far as mapping the architectural thinking that enabled this widespread connection to Japanese architecture, Gelfer-Jørgensen does not get much farther than stating that “instead of using the word ‘inspiration’ here it would be probably reasonable to see Japonisme as an expression of an “aesthetic kinship.”³¹³ An expression she uses in the end about gardens is equally fitting: “it should be noted that many such elements of Japonisme are by now so well integrated that that we no longer perceive them as external influences.”³¹⁴

Scandinavian modernism has been often seen as an architecture that avoided the extremes of the international modernism thanks to its care of material, local climate and sensitivity to nature. These qualities often appear when evaluating the Japanese architecture, too. The fact that has been, so far, difficult to demonstrate a relationship between them unequivocally does not, however, make the subject less interesting.

³¹¹ Francesco dal Co, *Between Earth and Sea: The Architecture of Sverre Fehn*, in Christian Norberg-Schulz and Gennaro Postiglione (ed.), *Sverre Fehn: Works, Projects, Writings, 1949–1996* (New York 1997), 10.

³¹² Co, *Between Earth and Sea*, 10.

³¹³ Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Influences from Japan in Danish Art and Design*, 225.

³¹⁴ Gelfer-Jørgensen, *Influences from Japan in Danish Art and Design*, 243.

II.4.7. Václav Hliský and Vlasta Hliská: Introducing Japanese architecture to Czechoslovakia

The article *Architecture in Japan* (*Architektura v Japonsku*) by the Czech architect Václav Hliský (1909–2001) that came out in 1967 in the main official magazine *Architektura ČSR* reads almost as a summary of all the main points that Modernists made about Japan from the 1930 till the 1960s³¹⁵. Starting an introduction for the Czechoslovak architectural public from scratch, Hliský dedicated the first half of his essay to traditional architecture, “which had, to a certain extent, an influence even on modern architecture of the world.”³¹⁶ He starts with stating the Japanese “very fine sense for the beauty of nature”³¹⁷, when compared to Europe. As for the traditional Japanese house, he names most of what was deemed relevant by other modernists: construction from the “exactly modulated wooden skeleton”, standardization of both the sliding walls and mats, material (“beauty of the natural wood”). Among the less material principles, he stresses the dominance of the horizontal line, “asymmetry, simplicity and purity of the spatial expression.”³¹⁸

By this time, Katsura villa was an almost obligatory item on any architect’s travel list, and Hliský cannot omit it. Assessing it, he aligns with the usual judgement saying that “it is essentially a modern architecture built on entirely modern and valid artistic principles,”³¹⁹ and adds a less common gender-based judgement: “Both the building and the garden form a delicate whole, I would say almost effeminate.”³²⁰

Speaking about contemporary architecture, Hliský does not share the current interest about megastructure projects of the Metabolists, which was anyway fading away by the second half of 1960s. He rather stays on a firm ground, pointing out elements that connect tradition and contemporary building. This is where he does choose a project by a member of the Metabolist group, Kiyonori Kikutake’s Hotel Tokoen in Tottori (1964) as a particularly good example, a “metamorphosis of wooden construction into wood-imprinted concrete with a very interesting structure, which supposedly very well resists the earthquakes. In this example,

³¹⁵ Václav Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*. *Architektura ČSR*, 1967, 296–302.

³¹⁶ Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 296.

³¹⁷ Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 296, 297.

³¹⁸ Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 297–298.

³¹⁹ „Je to v podstatě zcela moderní architektura budována na úplně moderních a dnes platných uměleckých principech.“, Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 298.

³²⁰ „Stavba i zahrada vytvářejí jemný celek, řekl bych až zženštilý.“ Hliský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 298.

high-quality of modern architecture, the influence of ancient Japanese tradition is best seen.”³²¹

Hilský saw the problems of the Japanese cities in a very pragmatic perspective. He points out the problems of Japanese urbanism, connected to lack of will to make large plans, and the high price of land. An occasion to build a “genuinely modern city” was lost in Tokyo after the city’s destruction after the war, he muses; chaos and exaggerated individualism are the main impression: “the chaotic situation comes as a result of the unsolved construction of Japanese cities. The spontaneity of building is also reflected in architecture, where each individual building is solved individually, regardless of wider urban relationships and the overall appearance of spaces and avenues.”³²² Hilský’s report is also an interesting snapshot from the mid-1960s Tokyo where elevated roads were already built above the existing ones, but the height of buildings was still restricted to 31 meters, a ban lifted only in 1966.

Hilský then naturally, with a point to criticise conditions back home, sees the Japanese problems as opposed to those in Czechoslovakia: “This situation is completely different from our current architecture, where we have good conditions for town-planning solutions of entire towns and their ensembles, but because of the inflexible prefabrication and a small product variety, we have achieved results that are often uniform and impersonal.”³²³

If Hilský’s text corresponds to all the commonplace ideas about Japan as they circulated among modern architects, seeing the date of its publication – 1967, it is of course belated when compared to where the debate about Japan got in other countries, as we could see in the British, German or Swiss magazines. The explanation cannot but point to the political background: For Czechoslovak citizens, including specialists on foreign countries, it was still very difficult to travel, and Japan was especially hard to reach due to its close relationship to the United States. This said, among Czech architects Hilský was perhaps someone who had the best position for learning about the Japanese culture. His wife, Vlasta Hilská (1909–1968), was a scholar in Japanese studies and a translator, who first travelled to Japan already before the World War II. Without her, Hilský would probably never go to Japan, and her knowledge of the Japanese language may have facilitated a lot – Hilský mentions a live conversation he had with Kenzō Tange Kunio Maekawa.

³²¹ „je to vlastně metamorfosa dřevěné konstrukce provedené v odšalovaném betonu s velmi zajímavou konstrukcí, která prý velmi dobře vzdoruje zemětřesení. Na tomto případě kvalitní moderní architektury je nejlépe patrný vliv staré japonské tradice.“ Hilský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 300.

³²² „Živelnost ve výstavbě se projevuje i v architektuře, kde je každý jednotlivý objekt řešen zcela individuálně bez ohledu na širší urbanistické vztahy a celkový vzhled prostorů a tříd.“ Hilský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 302

³²³ „Je to situace zcela opačná ve srovnání s naší současnou architekturou, kde máme dobré podmínky pro urbanistická řešení celých měst a jejich souborů, ale vlivem nepružně chápané prefabrikace a malého sortimentu výrobků docházíme k výsledkům, které jsou často uniformní a neosobní.“ Hilský, *Architektura v Japonsku*, 302

Moreover, Hilská herself authored a rather general historical introduction to Japanese architecture for a photobook by Drahomír Illík published in 1970³²⁴. Conceptually, it was a rather conservative overview of Japanese historical architecture, yet it was also published in English and German versions³²⁵. Published after Hilská's premature death, the first part of her text is almost identical with the one her husband published three years earlier in *Architektura ČSR*, suggesting they probably worked on it together. The later text signed by Hilská provides a more precise historical detail, but keeps some expressions which sound almost like a literal quote from Bruno Taut, such as the condemnation of the richly decorated shogun's mausoleum in Nikkō: "This Chinese Baroque with its sumptuous beauty is far from from the Japanese architecture's own concept, one that strives for simplicity and purity of expression."³²⁶

Both Hilskýs' texts show how the general appropriation of the ideas about Japan slowly settled on certain themes, and spread in the architectural discourse. Its slightly delayed penetration to Czechoslovakia is just an example documenting the spread of these ideas beyond the so called Iron curtain, a subject where further research could bring more knowledge.

³²⁴ Drahomír Illík and Vlasta Hilská, *Ľaponská architektura* (Praha: Odeon, 1970)

³²⁵ Drahoslav Illík and Vlasta Hilská, *Traditionelle Japanische Architektur* (Praha: Artia, 1970) (curiously, the author figures under an alternate name on the cover of the German version); Drahomír Illík and Vlasta Hilská, *The Great Architecture of Japan* (Praha: Artia / London: Hamlyn, 1970).

³²⁶ "Tento čínský barok je svou okázalou nádherou vzdálen vlastnímu pojetí japonské architektury, usilující o prostotu a čistotu výrazu." Illík and Hilská, *Ľaponská architektura*, 6.

II.4.8. Heinrich Engel: *The Japanese House*

Already its dimensions make *Heinrich Engel's The Japanese House. A Tradition for Contemporary Architecture* a title impossible to miss. Its level of detail, as well as its ambition to explain the Japanese dwelling in its philosophical and social context mean the book is one of the main sources on Japanese traditional architecture until today. Nevertheless, it has a special interest for us when studying the connections of Western architectural modernism and Japanese tradition. It is this very problem, the significance of Japanese tradition for contemporary architecture, which is Engel's main and clearly defined preoccupation – as already the subtitle betrays. Throughout our study, we will return to Engel's book when relevant topics will require it. Right now, we will focus on the book's main theoretical ideas, and try to assess them in the context of the time, and we will outline its significance.

The book entered an atmosphere where the Modernist eulogy of old Japan was at its peak. In a foreword to the book, Walter Gropius, the matador of the modern movement, calls all architects' attention to Japan in his praise of the book: "Of course, many of its premises that seem related to our Western modern architecture have developed from entirely different premises. But our modern architectural requirements of simplicity, of outdoor-indoor relation, of flexibility, of modular coordination and prefabrication, and, most importantly, of variety of expression have found such fascinating answers in the classic domestic architecture of Japan that no architect should neglect its stimulating study."³²⁷

The entire volume was written by a young German architect called Heinrich Engel. Engel travelled around Asia in the early 1950s, a journey that finally led him to Japan where he stayed for three years, and worked on his dissertation, which he finished after his return to Germany. Engel's teacher, and the first inspirer of his interest in Japan, was Ernst Neufert (1900–1986), originally a Bauhaus student and collaborator of Gropius, who developed a systematic method to present vast areas of knowledge for practical purposes of the designer. This method builds on system, standardization, typology, categorisation, and demonstration through drawings. Neufert's *Architect's Data (Bauteurwufslehre)*, first published in 1936³²⁸, has become a standard classic, and with its forty-one editions (as of 2016) and seventeen translations it remains a staple in architects' libraries. Neufert's attitude is also characteristic for Engel's work in *The Japanese House*. What is the first chapter of the book was in 1959 accepted as his dissertation at the university of Darmstadt. The mentor's influence is clearly seen in the almost obsessive measuring of all dimensions, including humans. Equally 'Neufertian' is the priority given to technical drawings of all conceivable elements, from

³²⁷ Walter Gropius, Foreword. In: Engel, Heinrich: *The Japanese House. A Tradition for Contemporary Architecture* (Rutland (Vt.) and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1964), p. 17.

³²⁸ Ernst Neufert, *Bauteurwufslehre* (1936) Published in English as *Architect's data*.

individual components to plans of entire houses with gardens. The drawings are plentiful and detailed and the author himself considers them as the main quality that sets his book against most current literature. Photographical plates are only of secondary importance in author's own judgement. However, Engel also has more general ambitions in his writing, far exceeding a mere documentation. In what may seem contradictory to the attitude of his mentor Neufert, Engel opens his work with stating the "alienation of contemporary art (...) and emotional indifference of the forms created by science and technique." He even adds: "The tragedy of the present is that any such spiritual search for the meaning of man's existence in the contemporary epoch is no longer a noble expression of man's inner desire for enlightenment, but a necessity forced upon him by technical-scientific progress."³²⁹ The "...major problem of contemporary architecture is essentially of philosophical nature."³³⁰

Why it should be Japan where we turn for a possible solution to this crisis? According to Engel, this culture has unique qualities, where

"the spiritual order of the epoch was successful in a unique way:

- it brought man into intimate emotional relationship to most simple shelter and most humble living;*
- it gave aesthetic expression to an architecture that was a pure expression and necessity;*
- it humanized an environment that was largely standardized and prefabricated;*
- it established an accord between feeling and thinking."³³¹*

Engel also suggests that Japanese architecture can effectively offer a new yardstick to judge architecture, alternative to our current ones still based on the classical Vitruvian triad (*firmitas, utilitas, venustas*): "Contemporary architecture does not possess qualitative standards other than those applied to any industrial product: efficiency, economy, and visual beauty. Research into the spiritual backgrounds of Japanese architecture will show how philosophy, religion, ethics of family, and individuality are manifested in the Japanese house, in spite of standardization and prefabrication, and will uncover these properties that distinguish architecture from mere industrial products."³³²

The initial questioning proceeds from Japanese tradition to the contemporary West quite directly:

"What are the distinct qualities of the ordinary residential architecture in Japan?"

³²⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 21.

³³⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 483.

³³¹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 21.

³³² Engel, *The Japanese House*, 24–25.

What correlations do these qualities have to contemporary architectural creation?

What universal values for residential architecture are contained in these correlations?

*What bearing, then, do these values have upon the solution of problems in contemporary architecture?*³³³

Engel sets out the main idea of the book as the “confrontation of the characteristics of Japanese residential architecture with the respective phenomena in contemporary architecture.”³³⁴ The subject that he chose is then “the ordinary Japanese dwelling as it evolved in 17th and 18th centuries, [and] reached a rare architectural perfection in 19th century.”³³⁵ This is a welcome precision of the generic “Japanese tradition” that was in circulation in contemporary literature. But the author is also aware that “the Japanese dwelling itself belongs unmistakably to the past.”³³⁶

This is the most important paradox that challenged not only Engel, but all the numerous architectural writers dealing with traditional Japanese tradition: How come that modern architecture should seek inspiration in a culture so distant in time and space? Engel addressed this question directly and obviously was determined to answer it. He understood his treatise as an attempt to establish a link between these two cultures³³⁷. In the beginning, he therefore orders different aspects of the “singular significance of the Japanese house for contemporary architecture” into a list, which is worth quoting in its entirety. Listing general qualities of Japanese tradition, filtered through the eye of a Modernist, was not unusual, but Engel explicitly points out both the common characteristics and the contrasting ones here:

“1. Its unique characteristic is spiritual and physical order that stands in contrast to contemporary disorder in residential building.

2. Its comprehensive standardization of detail and system has effected principles in design and construction that bear direct analogies to contemporary building.

³³³ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 23.

³³⁴ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 23.

³³⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 23.

³³⁶ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 24.

³³⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 485.

3. *Its formative forces are essentially determined by economic factors, as in the case in contemporary architectural creation.*
4. *Its individual diversity, in spite of rigid standardization, differs favorably from the uniformity of contemporary housing developments.*
5. *Its representation of family morals and social ethics discloses relationships hardly ever found in contemporary housing.*
6. *Its aestheticism of simplicity and restraint stands out against against the modern simplicity brought about by economization and mechanization of building.*
7. *Its organization of the total interior space is unique because of a highly efficient flexibility, which in principle is also desirable for contemporary houses.*
8. *Its relationship to the garden is distinct, manifesting spatial principles that contrast with contemporary confusion in space interpretation.*³³⁸

The list also basically corresponds to the structure Engel gave to his book: Four parts, containing fifteen chapters. The first part, “measure”, focuses on the measurable aspects of architecture – “fabric”, measure, “design” (mainly the process of designing) and construction; the second part, *Organism*, describes those aspects which usually escape measuring, although technical drawings are used throughout: separate chapters address Family, Space, Garden, and Seclusion (in fact, the Tea-house). Part three, *Environment*, then gives a broader context of Japanese architecture, from climate to society and philosophy. The fourth part then tackles the aesthetics of Japanese architecture in three chapters. In a didactic spirit, each chapter is closed by a section entitled “for contemporary architecture”, where the individual lesson is drawn, while the author often continues in his speculation.

In the end, Engel announces to have found the link between contemporary architecture and the Japanese past somewhere else than usual:

*“not [...] in external form or in interior or space decoration, which time and again have served as material for providing the alleged “modern” quality of the Japanese house. Regardless of how closely these features resemble contemporary expression in building, they do so only by coincidence, because the causes and motivations of these expressions were of an essentially different nature. The significance of Japanese architecture has been found on a much deeper level, in the discussion of cause rather than effect, of motivation rather than reaction, of source rather than product.”*³³⁹

³³⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 23–24.

³³⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 485.

Another apparent paradox opening up here is the approach to form: while Engel, on each of his meticulous drawings, gives all the measures down to centimetres, he inveighs against taking the form as the main purpose of his work. He goes out of his way to discourage those “who look for exotic information or novel forms directly applicable in either [their] home or [their] design” and to distance his book from “most of the current tendency in architectural literature, which owing to its primary pictorial presentation, serves as the architect’s copybook from which to get “ideas” or as the art lover’s book with which to demonstrate his ‘culture’”. His readers, instead, should not “shy away from strenuous reading and tedious studying.” In the conclusion, he then directly criticizes the “modern *sukiya* style in Japan and the current pseudo-Japanese style in America’s West” as eclectic “fashions that cease to be fashionable from the moment they have become fashion.”³⁴⁰

The issue for an architect is then, of course, how to make use of all this knowledge, once the copying of forms is out of the question. After all, Engel defines the purpose of his book as “making the architecture of the past seizable for the contemporary”³⁴¹. Engel faces this inherent paradox by calling his work an “attempt to interpret the outstanding achievement of a prior architecture, not as forms of obscure causes and motivations, but as forms that actively state a particular order of values, by discussing architectural causes rather than merely comparing architectural forms the analysis of Japanese residential architecture will deal with the very core of the problems of contemporary architecture.”³⁴²

This goes so far that he sometimes seems to de facto contradict his meticulous documentation of houses, by insisting on “disclosure of causes and motives”, and “contributing forces”, rather than superficial copying of form. In an effort to reconcile these divergent attitudes he proposes to redefine what is usually understood as ‘tradition’:

*“Tradition in this sense is the formative presence and constructive force of previous attainments in present creation, both physical and spiritual. Form or product preserved from the past is not tradition; it is instead that which has been recognized for its timeless merit and has been introduced as a regenerating force in establishing a culture that is contemporary.”*³⁴³

To sum up, Japanese architecture is “less developed technically”, but “far more efficient in establishing culture.”³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 479.

³⁴¹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 24.

³⁴² Engel, *The Japanese House*, 24.

³⁴³ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 484.

³⁴⁴ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 483.

Progress, in this understanding, does not oppose tradition, but conversely, happens on its account:

“The direct value that Japanese residential architecture of the past contains for building in the contemporary West shows that creative tradition is by no means bound to locality, nor is it inevitably the property of the nation of its origin. Whatever prior generations have created, no present society has the right to claim as its own merit or contribution. Tradition is not simply given, but must be attained. Each society, each epoch, chooses its own traditions that become the crystallizing agents in the growth of a genuine culture, and there is no question that Japanese residential architecture qualifies to become one of the traditions for contemporary architectural creation in its efforts to establish culture.”³⁴⁵ Engel literally says that building of the future will “benefit from creatively using achievements of different time and location, i.e. it will progress by being traditional.”³⁴⁶

From beginning to end, a constant effort of Engel’s is to “dissolve existing misconceptions”. As it is clear already from our several quotations, distancing himself from “most existing literature” is indeed a recurrent rhetorical figure in the entire book. Seen from a distance, Engel’s study is doubtlessly based on a deeper study of the subject than most architects’ writing of his time. But since he never gives any names, quotes or references which would illustrate the pilloried misconceptions, this always remains a polemic with virtual, “other”, interpreters. This takes some sharpness off his argument. Moreover, his own writing is hardly free from value judgements: When he feels the need to justify choosing residential building as a case for his study, he claims that “(...) residential architecture is the most honest, because the most unconscious, expression of people’s temperament, ideals, and intellect (...)”³⁴⁷ Like most of the never-to-be-named “other” interpreters, Engel sometimes becomes an arbiter of what is genuinely Japanese and what is not: Writing about stone lamps in Japanese gardens, he writes that “[t]he forms are multiple and not always beautiful, and filling up small gardens with many of these lanterns is a regrettable practice that is in contradiction to the original idea of the Japanese design.”³⁴⁸ Such assessments are not unusual in books written by active artists, but the “non-biased” stance that Engel takes wouldn’t make such statements easy to defend – in case it entered the vivid discussions of the time. But this hardly ever happened.

It may seem strange that such a thorough book did not enter more in the contemporary debate, reviews were scarce and brief, though generally positive. There is little evidence that the ambitious goals, announced by the author, to make his work a “challenge to the traditional education in architectural history” and an “attempt to establish definitions for basic architectural terms to enable precise understanding and to stimulate similar attempts,” have come true. The reasons could have been several. One of them might be precisely the

³⁴⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 484.

³⁴⁶ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 484.

³⁴⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 25.

³⁴⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 272.

fact that the book stood out so much, inciting awe by its dimensions, level of detail, and exhausting descriptions. The dense and repetitive style of the book conveys a general sense of definitiveness and authority made it hard for his ideas to be criticised. The author resisted attempts at rewriting the text by a professional editor, as a rather odd publisher's note informs us: "This is a difficult book," it reads in the beginning, almost as if to put the readers off. The text "remains essentially the same as it was handed to us in manuscript, and the decision to leave it as such was based on our conviction that this book is something important, something well worth the effort of understanding."³⁴⁹

Being published in 1964, the book also entered the debate just a bit too late. This does not mean it hasn't found an audience in the course of time, but in the architectural press, the intense interest in the Japanese tradition, around 1960, quickly gave way to the fascination with contemporary projects and utopian experiments of the Metabolist group, as we will soon be able to see. Finally, Heinrich Engel never published any other texts on Japanese architecture. He remained basically an author of one book and further followed his profession of architect, publishing only a technically oriented overview of Structure systems (*Tragsysteme*, 1967³⁵⁰); the 1985 *Measure and Construction in the Japanese house*³⁵¹ was then just a re-edition of a bit more than two chapters singled out from his *opus magnum*.

³⁴⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 16.

³⁵⁰ Heino Engel, *Tragsysteme / Structure systems* (Hatje, 1967). (Engel's later books are published under a different variant of his first name.)

³⁵¹ Heino Engel, *Measure and Construction in the Japanese house* (Tuttle, 1985).

II.4.9. Conclusion

With this coming to an end we may already have a fair idea of how the presentation Japanese architecture looked like in Europe until from the end of World War II until around 1960. We looked in architectural magazines in different European countries for articles on Japan, and delved into several influential books on the topic.

In the United Kingdom, we looked into *Architectural Design*, which first in 1953 brought in an article a series on non-Western architecture by E. A. Gutkind, yet pointing out Japan's unique relevance for contemporary architecture, and a direct report from Japan by Noel Moffett five years later. Arthur Drexler's book published on the occasion of exhibiting an entire Japanese house in MoMA in New York was also our subject. In France, we followed the important Modernist magazine *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, which dedicated to special issues to Japan in 1956 and in 1961. Werner Blaser's publication then offered first occasion to examine in more detail the visual presentation and representation of Japanese architecture in the Modernist coordinates. A look to Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, and Czechoslovakia illustrated the reception of Japan in smaller countries. Jørn Utzon, a cosmopolitan Danish architect, offered an occasion to ask new questions about the problem locality. In case of Scandinavia, we detoured briefly to the image of Japan as it got and opened some issues connected with interpreting the practice. It is, as we saw, often a tricky area of ambivalent readings.

Finally, we got familiar with *The Japanese House* by the German architect Heinrich Engel, which addressed this entire discourse, questioning many of the key terms and offer offered their study on a much deeper and detailed level.

The attitudes to Japan differed in form depending on authors, and it is worth noting the diversity of, languages, as well as visual means of depicting Japanese architecture. Yet in retrospect, it is the common traits that are most important. It is by adding up all the texts together that allows us to draw a plastic image of Japan in architectural discourse. And in this image we can already distinguish certain patterns quite clearly.

Not an altogether new impression, but one felt with an increasing urgency was the contrast between the old and new in Japan. This impression necessarily had to conflict another basic notion: the idea one that it is the Japanese tradition that is close and may possible offer qualities that have something to teach contemporary Western world and its architecture.

These main characteristics were multiple. From the 1930s when Yoshida and Taut first expressed them, over 1940s and 1950s when Charlotte Perriand and Walter Gropius continued to promote them emphatically, they now settled on quite a fixed list of notions. Around 1960 one we may pick almost any medium of the time to find very similar ideas

about what are the modern qualities of traditional Japanese architecture. To choose one for all, Noel Moffett may have expressed them most typical way in 1958:

“Qualities of restraint, simplicity, elegance and fine proportion, the decorative use of structural elements, flexibility of plan and section, sensitive landscaping, and the close relation of indoor and outdoor areas. These characteristics have had a stronger influence on the development of the modern movement in Europe and in America, particularly in the past ten or twelve years, than in Japan itself.”³⁵²

These are obviously quite abstract qualities, and simply stating them is not an end by itself, but a beginning for further discussion. Their content will turn out to be slightly more fluid under a closer investigation when we analyse them in much more detail in Part III. Before that, however, we will see how the discourse changed during the 1960s.

³⁵² Noel Moffett, *Japan*, 132.

II.5. JAPAN ENTERS THE DEBATE

To claim that Western architects saw Japanese traditional architecture only as a source of eternal values with no contact with actual Japanese people would not be quite correct. Architects who travelled to Japan were politely welcome with all due respect, shown around and even asked questions that often provoked them to quick judgements. They were occasionally also coaxed to debate with the inquisitive Japanese. But for Western architectural audience up to the 1950s it was still very rare to see Japanese architects live, actively presenting their architecture, not to speak about starting a polemic. The exceptions, such as Tetsurō Yoshida lecturing in Germany in the early 1930s, were met with genuine curiosity.

This, however, started changing rather quickly by the end of the 1950s. This chapter seeks to show when and how this change occurred: it was the active attitude of the Japanese modernist architects which fuelled not only an ever increasing general interest in the country, but also sought to alter the Western interest in the Japanese tradition. As we can already guess, the Japanese self-interpretation sometimes greatly differed from the conclusions that the Western observers made about Japan. But the occasions to hear the voice of the Japanese themselves multiplied, such as when a Japanese architectural magazine began to come out in English – which happened with *Shinkenchiku* in 1956.

Historians sometimes tend to reduce reality to individual stories, not always for the benefit of giving a good image of an epoch, but in Japanese architecture of the 1950s and 1960s Kenzō Tange is really the man to point at. Many threads lead to him: he worked as architect, educator, propagator, speaker, and sponsor. A substantial part of this chapter thus revolves around Tange's activities and ideas, in an attempt to demonstrate the often paradoxical ways he conveyed Japanese tradition into the modern context. In a very calm manner, he brought in a polemic spirit echoing the heated debates that took place in Japan at the time. His projects filled both Japanese and Western magazines. He participated on international forums such as the CIAM in Otterlo in 1959. He published books that reinterpreted the Japanese tradition through a modernist camera lens. Not all of this was his solo activity and other architects were also beginning to reach Western audiences. But their work was often perceived in the frame he set.

II.5.1. *Shinkenchiku* / *Japan Architect*, Japan, 1956

If the interest in Japan grew step by step, there is one thing that meant a definite leap, and this is when the Japanese magazine *Shinkenchiku* 新建築 started its international edition in 1956, later known as *Japan Architect*. Almost immediately afterwards, we can see the increase in both visual and textual publications on Japan in the European architectural media, and very often *Japan Architect* is either a direct or indirect source. *Shinkenchiku* (literally “New Architecture” or “New Building”), founded already in 1925, was a Japanese modernist medium. In 1953, the 27-year-old architect and historian Noboru Kawazoe (1926–2015) became an editor, and two years later editor-in-chief. After the recent era of an exalted nationalism, and during times of the American occupation, the character of the national culture seemed like an urgent subject. Under Kawazoe’s direction, this self-reflective debate got a large space on the pages of the magazine.³⁵³ The architect Seiichi Shirai (1905–1983), the painter and sculptor Tarō Okamoto (1911–1996), as well as Kenzō Tange (1913–2005) and others brought the ancient roots of Japanese culture to the fore, arguing for the merits of different historical periods and building types. Echoes of these debates, more or less directly, reached Europe in the translated texts of Japanese architects written originally for a Japanese audience, and in the way in which the Japanese architects spoke about their work. A remarkable trend is that Japanese architects and artists in the midst of an active creative career adopted roles of historians presenting elaborate historical studies, often using a broad knowledge of archaeology. Japanese architects’ scholarship stands out in comparison to their Western peers; which does not mean their scholarly claims did not bend according to their current creative interests.

Moreover, the self-confidence of Japanese architecture was now raised to another level by publishing a monthly in English. Just one year after Kawazoe became the chief editor of *Shinkenchiku*, the English-language edition started with the June issue of 1956. The name changed gradually during the first months: on the cover of the first issue, the Japanese characters still dominated, and just a small title “Sinketiku” was hiding on the lower part of the front page; from the February issue of 1958, the transcription changed to *Shinkenchiku*, and finally, from the following year, the English name “Japan Architect” appeared. The English edition was not a mere translation of the Japanese magazine, but included additional content, especially – as the editors announced – material on traditional Japanese building. The interest on the side of the Westerners, as well as the need of the Japanese to secure their position, is shown in the very first English issue in the “Messages from foreign Architects and Critics”: The greeters included Marcel Breuer, the British modernist Wells Coates (“I was born in Tokyo”), Sigfried Giedion (the Swiss historian added the longest note, about “the

³⁵³ Half a century later, Kawazoe revisited this debate in the interviews with Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist: Koolhaas, Rem; Obrist, Hans Ulrich: *Project Japan. Metabolism talks...* Köln: Taschen, 2011.

West longing to the East and the East longing to the West”), Walter Gropius (“After my trip to Japan in 1954, I have been convinced that the Japanese contribution to modern architecture is of essential value to the civilized world today.”), Nikolaus Pevsner, Gio Ponti, and Jose Luis Sert (praising the “very happy idea that your magazine shows both the old and the new Japanese architecture”).³⁵⁴

The first English-language issues brought, apart from the usual project presentations, texts echoing the historically oriented disputes among Japanese architects and artists. The readers could read, for instance, Tarō Okamoto’s essay about the significance of stones in traditional Japanese gardens,³⁵⁵ Seiichi Shirai revisited the creative force of Jōmon, the most ancient Japanese culture, in an article accompanied by remarkable photographs by the Japanese-American photographer Yasuhiro Ishimoto (1921–2012), the architect Tomoya Masuda presented the moss garden of the Saihōji temple in Kyoto. Occasionally, also Westerners published in the magazine, among them the young French architecture student Alain Villeminot (1933 [?]-2017), who was then in Japan, and who submitted a series of schematic drawings, a sort of visual analysis of the Japanese garden/house relationship.³⁵⁶

Subscriptions went up and *Japan Architect* became a staple of the bookshelves of architects all over the world. Even those who did not read the magazine still came across a lot from its content second-hand, as it was taken over by European periodicals. This new and vigorous influx to the increasingly global stream of architectural magazines was certainly felt.

³⁵⁴ All who wrote their greetings were: Pietro Belluschi, Marcel Breuer, Wells Coates, Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, Nikolaus Pevsner, Gio Ponti, J. M. Richards from the *Architectural review*, Jose Luis Sert, and Konrad Wachsmann. See *Sinketiku* 6/1956, 3-4.

³⁵⁵ *Sinketiku* 6/1956, 8-9.

³⁵⁶ Alain Villeminot, The Unity between House and Garden in Japanese Architecture, *Sinketiku*, (1956): 53–55.

II.5.2. Kenzo Tange as the animator of events

Stating the similarities between the Japanese tradition and Modern architecture was already commonplace by the end of 1950s, and Japanese contemporary architecture gained an increasing interest. On the pages of Western architectural magazines, the occasional writing on Japanese traditional buildings gave way to a strong and constant flux of designs by contemporary Japanese architects, causing an increasing amazement among the Western public.

It is no exaggeration to say that at this time, the pivotal figure behind this change of perception was Kenzō Tange (1913–2005). As an architect, he drew a worldwide attention with his Hiroshima peace Museum and Park (1950–1955), raised some eyebrows with his sculptural Brutalist designs in the late 1950s, and transfixed, as least measured by the scale of publishing, the world of architecture in 1960 with a utopian design for Tokyo Bay, proposing a new large scale city over the sea. But the main reason of Tange's success was that he worked on several fronts in parallel. Besides his design practice, he was also an educator, researcher, and was engaged in changing the status of the profession both in Japan and abroad. Early on, he founded the *Tange Lab* at Tokyo university, an educational-practical unit that he led, training an entire generation of architects. Basically all important members of the next architectural generation spent at least some time at the *Tange Lab*. As a result, Tange is also a father figure of Japanese modern architecture – most architects of the following generation were Tange's disciples, most notably members the Metabolist group (1960–1970). That some of them sooner or later criticised their mentor only confirms his influence.

Tange's own education came from a relatively conservative professor Hideto Kishida (1899–1966) at the university of Tokyo, and from his first job at the office of Kunio Maekawa, Le Corbusier's former collaborator. Both these men were active in urban projects in the territories occupied by Japan, and Tange's first successes also came during the war, at the peak of Japanese Imperialism, when he won competitions where Kishida presided the jury: In 1942, the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in Tokyo, and next year the Japanese–Thai Culture Centre in Bangkok. Neither of these projects materialized due to the end of the war, but Tange, attracted mostly by Le Corbusier's style, transitioned in a peculiarly smooth way to a modernist style by taking off the monumental roofs used in his nationalist-style designs, and won the Hiroshima memorial park competition. Abroad, this last project was noticed by Josep Lluís Sert, who invited him to the 8th CIAM congress in Hoddesdon in 1951, together with Kunio Maekawa. Tange's career then quickly progressed: at the end of the 1959, he spent some time at the MIT as visiting professor, and participated in the last CIAM meeting in Otterlo. He was also the first Asian architect to have a monography published in

the USA in 1962³⁵⁷. Western architectural public was increasingly exposed to Japanese architecture in media, but also live, on debates and conferences.

³⁵⁷ Robin Boyd, *Kenzo Tange* (New York: George Braziller, 1962).

II.5.3. Japanese architects in discussion

Tange at XI. CIAM Congress, 1959

Around 1960, Tange was arguably at the peak of his career. For the Western audience, he was already a well-known architect, but still someone able to come with a surprise. Tange's speech from the CIAM congress in Otterlo appeared in the May 1960 issue of *Architectural Design*, entitled simply *Statement*, and a year later in the files from the congress, edited for language and truncated by the section criticising the situation in Japan³⁵⁸. In print, it is not the clearest reading, but it is worth attention as a document of the increasing self-confidence of the Japanese, as well as the reception of Japanese architecture by their Western peers.

Tange begins with what sounds like a radical challenge to his Western colleagues, blaming them for their limited horizons while thinking about the role of architecture in society: "They assume that the existing social order contains many dilemmas within itself; but they are mostly curable one way or another." The Japanese architect, seeing the speed of society's development, doubts the sustainability of the current development: "Simply, our existing society cannot take its own ever-increasing productivity any more. The conflicts and dilemmas arise from the very nature of our present technological society, no matter how one contrives to eliminate them. This kind of society cannot revitalize its own order. Therefore, our reality itself is a dilemma."³⁵⁹ An important move in Tange's argumentation is trying to turn his different geographical perspective into an advantage, building in this way a base for criticism of the West: "One strong current in the Western hemisphere which I call 'aestheticism'. Calling for a refusal of this aestheticism and 'facing reality', Tange claims allegiance to Le Corbusier's "three basic conditions of our life: sun, green, and fresh air. (...) We must admit that these three principles and modes of life will be ever valid in future as long as our life is fundamentally biological," adding that "the introduction of new technology, however, will change the meaning of these principles and the internal structure of these modes of life."³⁶⁰

He then proposes his own: "Against aestheticism, there is a new force, which I call 'vitalism'". Tange is not very specific about what this force is supposed to be like. He claims that "Vitalism itself is not regionalism; it is an attitude to 'aufheben' regional characteristics through vital forces." The German expression he uses (to "to elevate") point to where he drew inspiration for these thoughts, and his entire concept of seems to quite indebted to

³⁵⁸ Kenzo Tange, *Statement*, *Architectural Design* (May 1960): 201–202.

³⁵⁹ Newman and Bakema, *CIAM '59 Otterlo*, p. 170.

³⁶⁰ Tange, *Statement*, 201

Western dialectic thinking: “there is no vitality where no dilemma exists,”³⁶¹ adding in the edited book version “...or where no one sees the reality itself as a dilemma.”³⁶² Continuing the argument from a global socio-political perspective, Tange confides claims that he believes “there is always the vitality of the masses underneath societies (...) “When one takes a look to contemporary Afro-Asian regions, they are rapidly gaining their own independence and freedom from old colonial powers. Their reality is still severe; yet the more severe the reality the more I feel the vitality in their roots.”³⁶³

The “vital energy” is the force which can turn difficulties into something meaningful, even at the cost of destruction: “all I said above starts from a positive denial of making order out of the reality. Vitalism is always destructive to our reality, but constructive to the future.”³⁶⁴ “Creation”, then, is apparently the way in which an individual can harness this impersonal vital force. To exemplify this very abstract proposal, Tange moves on to describe the current situation of creation in Japan, where he soon finds himself in a delicate position of judging the current work of his colleagues, and his own. This does not allow him to be too direct. He sketches the Japanese situation by making a division into two tendencies, both of them negative, “two sides of a coin”: universalization versus individualization. Looking back at Japanese architecture of the time, we can only guess whom Tange meant when denouncing a “stereotyped modernism”, and “naïve functionalism”. He neither names any names in his criticism, nor shows any illustration. Ultimately though, this speech also gives off something from the dilemmas of his own creation.

More interesting for us, and certainly more pungent for his mostly Western audience at the conference, was when Tange touched upon the modern Western fascination with Japanese tradition. It gave birth to a style he calls ‘Japonica’, something with a “pronounced degree of decadent” in it³⁶⁵. “Stereotyped modernism (...) has affinities with the savour of traditional Japanese architecture and its knack for details of technique, which has led to a trend to overvalue this tradition. I think this also lies behind the world-wide attention now being paid to Japanese traditional architecture. Japanese architects, in turn, are tempted into designing a ‘Japonica’ style echoing the interest abroad. In the attitude towards creation represented by stereotyped modernism and its queer offspring, the ‘Japonica’ style, there lurk the traditional mood from ‘mono-no-aware’ to ‘sabi’. There is a pronounced element of decadence in all this. Such modernism has been accepted most favourably in the sphere of speculative and commercial construction in present Japan.”

³⁶¹ Tange, Statement, 201.

³⁶² Newman and Bakema, *CIAM '59 Otterlo*, p. 170.

³⁶³ Tange, Statement, 201.

³⁶⁴ Tange, Statement, 202.

³⁶⁵ Tange, Statement, 202.

It is clear that Tange's words had a lot to do with defining his own position at the domestic scene in Japan, which makes them obscure to the Western reader in some places. What rocks the boat, however, is the suggestion that the Westerners helped to create a new trend of architecture in Japan, based on commercially motivated imitation of the the "overvalued" Japanese tradition. This 'japonica style' is an architectural analogy of the exotic objects from ceramics or wood produced for the Western market a hundred years before.

"It just so happens by accident of history"

At the CIAM congress in Otterlo, Tange continued his presentation with two of his recently finished projects, both built for local governments: The Tokyo Metropolitan City Hall (1952–1957), and the Kagawa Prefectural Office in Takamatsu (1954–1958). He spoke mostly of functional issues or of questions of public building for democracy that was had little tradition in Japan. A short debate followed and not entirely to Tange's pleasure it revolved around the Japan-ness of his work, as if the audience decided to ignore his initial proposition "the popular tendency to use regional characters for decorating building façades, must be rejected."³⁶⁶ Not that there would be nothing to point at in the projects he showed: In the Tokyo Metropolitan City Hall, he mentioned the ceramic mural whose theme is "the spirit of the tea ceremony"³⁶⁷, and in the Kagawa prefectural office, marking Tange's stylistic shift to more plastic expression of the concrete, it could be the garden in the courtyard designed by Tange himself and, in a more abstract way, the outer pattern of the beams and continuous balconies that can be read as "the architectonic of steel and reinforced concrete (...) translated into the proportional system long ago developed in Japanese traditional wooden architecture," as Arata Isozaki later wrote³⁶⁸. But no such details come up when the debating Western architects refer to a generic "Japan-ness," over and over. Ernesto Rogers stressed the word translation, seeing the projects as "a very up-to-date and modern language, applied or if I may say so, *translated* into the Japanese language."³⁶⁹ Tange tried to defy any presence of regionalism in his work, but had little chance. Jerzy Soltan basically wanted to endorse Tange, yet still felt the urge to call the projects "extremely Japanese." Finally, Peter Smithson, "a bit wary of what Rogers says," tried to change direction of the debate: "It just so happens by accident of history that the aesthetics of the old Japanese architecture, which has a certain openness in its construction, corresponds to a feeling we have for an open aesthetic with its

³⁶⁶ Newman and Bakema, *CIAM '59 Otterlo*, 177.

³⁶⁷ Newman and Bakema, *CIAM '59 Otterlo*, 177.

³⁶⁸ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 264.

³⁶⁹ Oscar Newman and Jacob Bakema (ed.), *CIAM '59 Otterlo* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer, 1961), 182 (emphasis in original).

possibilities of cycles of fixed things, and so on. Now if Tange had not lived in Japan he would have had to invent that language. He has, however, the possibility of using his language, but no one of us has... We simply do not have Tange's possibilities. As a rule, I can see no point in suggesting that we should look into our stylistic past in each country."³⁷⁰ Smithson clearly saw the exaggerated accent on regional and traditional qualities as a possible threat for architects' creative autonomy, which made him implicitly agree with Tange's claim that the tradition by itself has no immediate value. But the presence of a "Japanese language" in the contemporary design remained undisputed as well as unexplained.

Tange – Raymond Interview

A year after the Otterlo conference, almost as a sequel to Tange's speech, a conversation between him and Antonin Raymond took place on the Japan radio, which was printed in the February 1961 issue of *Architectural Design*. Tange is here formally to interview Raymond, the originally Czech architect, a collaborator of Frank Lloyd Wright and the founding father of Japanese modernism built from concrete (see chapter II.1.). But further on in the interview, they move on towards a dialogue.³⁷¹ The interview brings several interesting parts worth reading at full length. Japanese tradition becomes a theme as soon as Raymond picks up the topic himself in his first answer. (We can, in the beginning, also note the absence of noting of Frank Lloyd Wright for whom Raymond worked around 1920 and who actually brought him to Japan):

“As I was a participant in the new movement in Europe and practically alone at that time, 1920, in U.S.A., imagine my surprise on arriving to Japan to find here expressed in Japanese farms and ‘Shinto shrines’ like Ise, all the features which we so ardently desired to re-create in the new architecture, but which we were still far from realizing and perhaps never will be able to realize. A Japanese farm at the time of my arrival in Japan forty years ago was a marvel of integration, complete and perhaps not to be found anywhere else in the world. It grew out of the ground like a mushroom or a tree, natural and true, it developed from the inside function absolutely honestly; all structural members were expressed positively on the outside, the structure itself was the finish and the only ornament, all materials were natural, selected and worked by true artisans; everything in it and around it was simple, direct, functional, economical. The people, their dress, their utensils, their pottery, paintings, gardens all expressed a marvellous unity of purpose clearly developed through ages by a natural process like anything else in nature. It clearly showed to me an unparalleled love of nature and a Divine guidance. Ever since then, I tried to learn from it, grateful for its existence and realizing that it contained absolute principles, which were always, and will always be the same, immutable,

³⁷⁰ Newman and Bakema, *CIAM '59 Otterlo*, 182.

³⁷¹ —, Dialogue: Questions by Mr. Kenzo Tange and Answers by Mr. Antonin Raymond Broadcast on April 27th, 28th and 29th, 1960 in Japanese. *Architectural Design*, (February 1961), 55-57 (transcript of a radio interview).

unchangeable and which must guide us in trying to attain true beauty in architectural design. Those principles could be expressed in a simplified version to be: the simplest, the most natural, the truly functional, the most direct, and the most economical only, is truly divinely beautiful. To attain that one must design from inside out, honestly, not from outside in.”

Tange responds:

“People talk too much about tradition these days. It seems to me that what you have understood as the tradition of Japanese architecture is different from that conceived by our young architects. I would like to hear your critical comment on the works of young Japanese architects in which they have employed in some respects what they believe to be the tradition of their country’s architecture.”³⁷²

Even from the transcript of the radio interview, the reader can sense a bit of misunderstanding. As was more than usual in conversations between the Japanese and Westerners, it stemmed from the elementary questions of language: Raymond says he fails to understand Tange’s use of the English word “tradition”, after the Japanese architect used the English term. Tange is asking for criticism of contemporary Japan and Raymond agrees to give some, but it immediately seems to turn against Tange: “I am forced to criticize some work of the Japanese architects because their work seems to be the opposite of the immortal principles mentioned by me before. Their work is designed from outside in, like sculpture. It is not simple, it is not natural, it is not truly functional, it is too sophisticated and it is criminally uneconomical, for a poor country like Japan, in using more materials than necessary.”³⁷³ Was this a Raymond’s allusion to the sculptural works of Tange was working in this period, such as the Kagawa prefectural office (1954–1958), or the just finished Kurashiki city Hall (1960)?

Tange seems to get the cue:

“That is quite a severe criticism. But there really is a tendency such as you have pointed out among young Japanese architects, including myself [!]. ... we believe there are two tendencies in our tradition (...) the delicately refined but not durable (...) the other is the farmhouse, like the one Mr. Raymond has described. ... We certainly began to pay attention to the tradition of this sort (...)”³⁷⁴

Raymond answers:

“I certainly advocate designing reasonably solid structures and objects away from the over-delicate and refined but I do not see any object in designing in the other direction, massive, over-designed, giving the impression of a diseased desire of reaction to the Tokugawa [Nikkō mausoleum, disgraced already by Taut], or an unhealthy influence of Corbusier’s latest church [most probably refers to the

³⁷² Tange – Raymond, Dialogue 55-57

³⁷³ Tange – Raymond, Dialogue, p. 55

³⁷⁴ Tange – Raymond, Dialogue 55-57

Notre Dame du Haut chapel in Ronchamp, finished in 1954]. I must once again express my serious interest in tradition as a principle of life. I adopted shoji 35 years ago because I found it to be an excellent insulator (...), I also replaced the stupid and dirty Victorian curtain and (it is?) also beautiful when sunshine casts shadows of morning leaves on it.”³⁷⁵

What follows is a long row of compliments, which is almost a parade of clichés about the Japanese national assets, here with implications for architecture:

“I admire the hardihood of the Japanese, their discipline, their capacity to endure, to retain dignity and nobility, where other races have become abject and ignoble. Their closeness to Nature, feeling themselves at one and integrated with Nature. Their reliance on their heart rather than mind, their intuition rather than brain, To make durability an essential seems [s]o frightfully materialistic in a Nature-loving people who [...] the exquisite significance, as no other people on Earth, of the permanent and impermanent qualities of things.”³⁷⁶

With nothing visibly German in sight, Raymond concludes: “There is something German, opposite to the Japanese philosophy, in the worship of durability and heaviness.” Raymond, who had then lived in Japan for years, still chides the Japanese: Since too heavy construction are too expensive, he advises the Japanese: “Do not forget the duty to your country which is rather poor at present.” Raymond, born in 1888, grew up in an environment where speaking about racial virtues was quite usual, and Tange tactfully passed the offensive aspect of this praise. Instead, he used Raymond’s words about the Japanese tradition as an “ingenious combination of strong and resilient”, i.e. durable and changeable, in favour of his own argument for building durable structures in times when “times are changing too fast”, reminding Raymond aptly that it was him who introduced the technique of concrete contraction in Japan.³⁷⁷ The debate, then, turns towards building from concrete and its plastic qualities, a subject where the two find more agreement.

Reviewing the talks with Tange in retrospect, both the interview with Raymond, one generation older, and the debate at Otterlo congress with his mostly younger colleagues, it is interesting to notice how it is always the Western partner who brings up the modern qualities of the traditional Japanese house.

³⁷⁵ Tange – Raymond, Dialogue 56.

³⁷⁶ Tange – Raymond, Dialogue 56.

³⁷⁷ Tange – Raymond, Dialogue 57.

II.5.4. Tange and the use of tradition

Regarding the modern Japanese architects' relationship to tradition, especially Tange's, there are two misconceptions that we may have. At first, hearing the remarks about the "overvalued" tradition might make us think that Tange refused it as a whole, either out of spite to the Westerners' admiration of the Japanese tradition, or simply to seek space for an individual creative autonomy. When Tange declined his Westerner colleagues' propositions about what is truly Japanese, and about what is Japanese in his own work, he quite understandably acted in the frame of a debate set by the others. To the printed version of his Otterlo speech, however, Kenzō Tange added an asterisked note saying: "I became interested in Japanese tradition a good many years ago, and since that time I have read a number of history books and seen as many architectural relics as possible. My study has led me to the conclusion that tradition cannot continue to live of its own force, and that it cannot be considered in itself a creative energy. To be transformed into something creative, tradition must be denied and, in a sense, destroyed. Instead of being apotheosized, it must be desecrated."³⁷⁸

Here, Tange says something else: he, as a Japanese with an education, did have an unbiased and cliché-free knowledge of his own tradition, but he still did not see any direct use for it in contemporary creation. However, a closer look at the actual history gives yet another, more complex picture. First, Tange's interpretation of tradition was based on quite a thorough study, different, but not necessarily less biased than the one of his Western colleagues, and he demonstrably employed Western means in his understanding the Japanese history. Second, Tange's interest in architectural relics was not just a personal hobby, but he purposefully used the interpretation of the Japanese tradition as a strategy for his own architectural ideas to succeed. And not just his own – this strategy was used to change the understanding of the entire Japanese architecture, first on the domestic scene and later to promote it abroad. In Japan before Tange, "modernism had simply been equated with Functionalism, conceived as an opposing concept to traditionalism."³⁷⁹ Hiroshi Hara said that it was Tange who first "stepped in and said he was going to create a new style of Japanese modernism by assimilating tradition."³⁸⁰

As we already mentioned, in-depth essays on Japanese architectural history and art by Tange as well as others came out in *Shinkechiku* magazine between 1953 and 1957, when Noboru Kawazoe was its editor. These debates clearly set the tone of the two publications conceived by Tange: *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese architecture* and *Ise: Prototype of Japanese architecture* (1962, 1965 in English). It can really seem surprising how much time and energy

³⁷⁸ Tange, Statement, 201.

³⁷⁹ Koolhaas – Obrist, *Project Japan*, p. 19.

³⁸⁰ Koolhaas – Obrist, *Project Japan*, p. 19.

Tange consecrated to studying the ancient Japanese history at the height of his busy design career. If tradition could “not be considered itself a creative energy,” in the two publications on historical Japanese buildings that he was working on at the very same time, Tange turned the visual representation of this tradition into a powerful tool.

Tange’s designs from the late 1950s provoked different interpretations. On one hand, Noboru Kawazoe did compare some historical buildings to Tange’s current designs. On the other hand, the projects included mostly heavily sculpted concrete building in an urban environment, which signalled that the continuity between old and new Japan could not be simply based on what meets the eye. These apparent contradictions were puzzling, but helped to raise the curiosity about his work – and Tange masterly used it in his advantage. To understand the intricate way in which Tange used history for his purposes, we have to look the publications on Japanese historical monuments he conceived.

II.5.5. Katsura and Ise

In the histories of Japanese architecture, there are two historical complexes to which a special role is attributed, far beyond being outstanding monuments of the past: the Katsura imperial villa, and the Shinto shrine in Ise. They have been branded and commonly referred to as “symbols“ or “prototypes” of traditional Japanese architecture, but also as epitomes of what is vigorous and inspirational in it for the present. Nonetheless, choosing these two buildings, is not an ancient tradition, but an ultimately modern act. Why did precisely these two buildings become so acclaimed among architects?

Around 1960, the two key publications dedicated to Katsura villa and Ise shrine came out, aiming at the Western public. Tange stood behind both of them but was just one of the authors, who included the foremost personalities in photography, as well as graphic design. The two books, quite unlike the rest of the profuse writing and photographing of Japanese architecture in the period after World War II, were also subject of academic studies and already received a profound critical reflection. In fact, the meta-histories of both Katsura and Ise would make for a full history of reception of Japanese architecture.

Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture (1960)

Looking back after 25 years, Reyner Banham called 1960 “a crucial year in Western/Japanese misunderstandings”³⁸¹, referring to a single book: *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*. How could one book, and exactly this one, symbolize such a far-reaching confusion?

The key lies exactly in the formal perfection that the book conveys, a perfection that, according to some authors, makes it the most perfect embodiment of the Modernist delusion about Japanese tradition. In Dana Buntrock’s words, “its photography and book design emphasized a powerful modernist abstraction effectively marrying Katsura’s architecture to a twentieth-century Bauhaus-inspired aesthetic, and suggesting modernism to be timeless, too.”³⁸² That is, broadly speaking, the idea that Banham articulated, criticising mainly

³⁸¹ Banham, *Japonization of World Architecture*, p. 17.

³⁸² Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 10. Katsura has a history of publications that, including Japanese publications, goes to dozens, as Dana Buntrock shows in her descriptive bibliography – she mentions only titles that dealt with Katsura explicitly as their main subject, not general histories and overviews which also often gave the building an ample space.

Gropius' essay in the book³⁸³. Banham was always a sharp critic, but it is of course no coincidence that this kind of reflection came in the 1980s, together with a growing disapproval of modernism in general. Shortly before Banham, Arata Isozaki challenged his mentor Tange's interpretation as employed in the same book.³⁸⁴ Nowadays, the crucial and controversial role of the 1960 Katsura book is widely recognized, having provoked further meta-historical research on Modernist reflections on Japanese tradition³⁸⁵.

What made this book so special that it keeps drawing so much attention? Taking the book in the hands, one sees a large square tome full of exquisite black-and white photography from the historical buildings, accompanied by two long essays. It is dedicated to a single historical monument: the Katsura imperial Villa, or Katsura Detached Palace (Katsura Rikyū 桂離宮), an aristocratic villa and garden built for the leisure of the retired emperor between the end of 16th century and mid-17th Century, as a complex of residential buildings and teahouses set in a large garden, located in the suburbs of Kyoto. The names of the tree authors stand on the cover: Tange, Gropius, Ishimoto. Yasuhiro Ishimoto (1921–2012) was a Japanese-American photographer, author of all the images in the book. Walter Gropius was by then a respectable Harvard professor, benefitting from a rich personal history as the founding director of the Bauhaus, “a man of mature years,” privileged “to travel around the world and and to have the opportunity to compare human activities while trying to discriminate the essential and the incidental,” as he introduced himself in the beginning of his essay³⁸⁶. Kenzō Tange was just at this time aspiring for a similar status of a founding father of modernist architecture in Japan. He just returned from teaching a semester at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was the author of the other essay, as well as the person who stood behind this publication.

Even if this book certainly drew a special attention, it was by far not the first and only publication on Katsura. The exceptional status of the building had already been both confirmed and fabricated by plenty of publications. But this second life of the building happened in a surprisingly short time, starting basically with the (re-)discovery of Katsura by Bruno Taut in 1933. We have already noted Taut's enthusiasm about Katsura. His own sketchbook with handwritten notes came out first in Japanese translation, printed in a

³⁸³ Reyner Banham, *Japonization Of World Architecture*. Hiroyuki Suzuki; Reyner Banham; Katsuhiro Kobayashi: *Contemporary Architecture of Japan 1958–1984*, New York 1985.

³⁸⁴ Arata Isozaki / 磯崎新. *Katsura Rikyū : kūkan to katachi / 桂離宮 : 空間と形 [Katsura Imperial Retreat: Space and Form]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten / 岩波書店, 1983). (Photography by Yasuhiro Ishimoto / 石元泰博). An English translation came out four years later: Arata Isozaki, *Katsura Villa: The Ambiguity of Its Space* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987). (Photography by Yasuhiro Ishimoto, and notes by Osamu Satō.)

³⁸⁵ See Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*; Yasufumi Nakamori, *Katsura: Picturing Modernism in Japanese Architecture. (Photographs by Ishimoto Yasuhiro)* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2010.)

³⁸⁶ Gropius in: Ponciroli 2005, p. 349.

Japanese harmonica-like format³⁸⁷. After Taut, an interest drew architects and historians alike to this building modernist, and a number of studies came out. Among them, a historically well researched 1953 Japanese publication by the architect Sutemi Horiguchi (1895–1984) was accessible for the Western reader thanks to an English synopsis and captions³⁸⁸. The increasing role of photographic presentation is manifest in this book, too, as it is the first publication on Katsura to acknowledge the photographer on the cover³⁸⁹.

By 1955, Bernard Rudofsky could already write:

*“Sometimes the very familiarity of the photographic image is liable to spoil what little remains of the pleasure of exploring. A case in point is Katsura palace, the imperial summer villa near Kyoto. Ever since its belated promotion to an architectural monument par excellence, it has been described, discussed, and depicted so exhaustively that when confronted with it at last, one feels one could walk blindfolded through its buildings and gardens.”*³⁹⁰

At the same time, there was a demand for visually representative publications from the increasing number of tourists, as the villa became their popular destination. The tourists were mostly domestic in the beginning, but from the 1950s, Japan worked more systematically on attracting international tourists.

In 1960, then, the Tange – Gropius – Ishimoto book joined the row of books on Katsura. But what were the “misunderstandings” that Banham spoke about in connection with 1960? Couldn’t a book with essays by leading architects from different countries and generations, side by side, speak about a good mutual understanding? To untangle this problem, we have to look closer at how architecture is presented visually, and read closely the actual content of the architects’ writings in it.

The first thing that conveyed a subliminal message was the graphic design, made by a respected Austrian-American designer Herbert Bayer (1900–1985), a graduate of the German Bauhaus. He connects the pure, geometric aesthetics of this school with Japanese elements: the book is square in format and a white circle in the middle, reminiscent of the Japanese flag, appears when taking off the dust cover. Next was the photography – a distinctive view of the main building, several tearooms and the adjacent garden. On the photographs, we see both interiors and exteriors taken from a frontal viewpoint, both larger ensembles and details, but set in a very specific aesthetic, a far cry from any guidebook. The photographer, Yasuhiro Ishimoto, was born in 1921 in the United States to Japanese

³⁸⁷ Bruno Taut, Reflections on Katsura, in Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 330–347. The Japanese edition(s) noted by Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 6.

³⁸⁸ Sutemi Horiguchi / 堀口捨己, *The Katsura Imperial Villa / Katsura Rikyū / 桂離宮*. Photography by Tatsuzo Satō / 佐藤辰三. (Tokyo, Osaka and Moji: The Mainichi Newspapers, 1953).

³⁸⁹ According to Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 8.

³⁹⁰ Rudofsky, *Kimono Mind* (1965), 66.

immigrant parents, who returned to Japan with him when he was three. He later returned to the US, and during the war he was interned because of his Japanese origin between 1942 and 1945. He then studied at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, and came again to Japan only in 1953, together with Arthur Drexler who was on his own mission to prepare the Japanese house exhibition in New York which took place the following year. When he visited Katsura for the first time with Drexler, he reportedly exclaimed that it is “mondrianesque”³⁹¹. Next year, Ishimoto returned for one month to work on his project of photographing historical Japanese architecture. The resulting photographs are clearly shaped by his Modernist education. One can see how the seeking of clear lines and contrasting compositions, maybe a reminiscence of the famous Dutch abstractionist, leads the photographer’s vision. Motives were carefully and strictly selected, notably excluding the very prominent concave roofs that determine the impression of the buildings in reality. The impression of depth is effaced by using a long focal length, the horizontal and vertical structural lines of the architecture align with the frame of the images, creating rectangular patterns. The formats are sometimes cut to unusual proportions; details – such as the garden stepping stones – are isolated. Nevertheless, the photos also pay great attention to the rich and haptic effect of the different materials and surfaces, many of them bring the natural patterns of wood, stones or moss into contrasting effect with the geometric abstraction of the buildings. In any case, the result is no doubt convincing, but also disorienting as for the actual spatial relationships of the buildings. Tange actually admits in the preface that decomposing the historical buildings was a deliberate strategy: “This is a visual record of the living Katsura as it exists in the minds of an architect and a photographer. We who made the record may conceivably be accused of dismembering Katsura, and those who come to know the palace from the pictures given here may be well disappointed to find upon actually visiting it that it is different from what they had expected.”³⁹²

Ishimoto returned to Katsura three decades later to take a new series in 1981 after a general reconstruction of the villa; shot in colour and a short focal length, letting the previously ousted elements back in the view, they got as far apart as they could get from his earlier pictures (“it is nearly impossible to believe we are seeing the same Katsura”³⁹³). Arata Isozaki used them in his own 1983 book on Katsura, where he developed a brilliant deconstruction of the previous Modernists interpretations. All following research, including the present one, owe a lot to this study of his. At the same time, Isozaki coined his own, alternative idea of “ambivalence” as a governing principle in Katsura, which in his opinion had been previously concealed and suppressed by the modernist visual agenda. It is good to be aware that Isozaki

³⁹¹ Lecture of Yasufumi Nakamori at TAMU College of Architecture, Texas A&M University, <https://vimeo.com/41143779>. See also Nakamori, *Katsura: Picturing Modernism in Japanese Architecture*.

³⁹² Gropius, Tange and Ishimoto, *Katsura: Tradition and Creation*, 35.

³⁹³ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 252.

also followed his own creative interest as an architect, even if we do not necessarily need to call it “oedipal” towards his mentor Tange as Dana Buntrock does³⁹⁴.

But back to the 1960 book. Kenzō Tange, who had a long-term interest in Japanese tradition and in Katsura, got to know Ishimoto and his work, and it was agreed that the photos would be used in a book project on Katsura announced already in 1955³⁹⁵. The project took quite some time: six years passed between making the images (1954) and the publication of the book (1960). A lot happened in between. Ishimoto was back in the United States and purportedly had not heard from Tange all this time, until he received the already printed book. During his recent research, Yasufumi Nakamori was able not only to get to Ishimoto’s originals, but also to Kenzō Tange’s own snapshots from Katsura, and he argues that Tange played a decisive role not only in how and where the photos were used, but actively manipulated them to fit into his own vision³⁹⁶. During the preparation of the book, the photographs were substantially manipulated for the purpose of the publication, using extreme cropping and enlargement. These modifications further emphasized the intention of nearing the vision of old Japan and abstract art. *Fusuma* laths and paper became isolated rectangular patterns, bamboo fences turned into broad rhythmic stripes, pebbles filled an entire page. Maybe the most notable example is the absence of roofs. As we have already noted, the large and heavy roof is the most visible point where the Japanese architectural tradition does not tally with the principles of Western modernism. In Japan, this development happened in a tardy but condensed way, switching from the nationalist style used for official buildings until the 1940s, to Modernism with flat roofs – a shift which happened also within Tange’s own early work. However, Nakamori argues that these manipulations of the photos closely followed Tange’s own design interests. Noboru Kawazoe even mentioned that the photographer, Ishimoto, was effectively directed by Tange where and how to take the photos in Katsura. No matter how cogent this argument is, Ishimoto himself never confirmed such a violation of his work, and opposed Kawazoe’s assertion about being directed. Either way, it is quite certain that at least one level of Tange’s interest in Katsura was closely connected to his current creative endeavours – for instance, his Hiroshima Memorial Museum uses column ratios based on Katsura³⁹⁷.

Still, Tange had enough space to express his ideas in words in the book. He used his long essay to convey his own vision of Japanese art history, starting from its early phases.

Tange claims that he “looked at the Katsura palace as an architect, not as a historian, and I am interested here primarily in the freedom and originality I find in the building and its compound. I shall leave the historical problems to the historians, therefore, and turn instead

³⁹⁴ Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 18.

³⁹⁵ Nakamori, *Katsura: Picturing Modernism in Japanese Architecture*.

³⁹⁶ Nakamori, *Katsura: Picturing Modernism in Japanese Architecture*.

³⁹⁷ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 17.

to a discussion of the tradition behind them of the extent to which the builders relied on it, and, finally, of the innovations they introduced into it.”³⁹⁸

This actually means that he does dedicate plenty of text to history in his essay, narrating “the tradition leading up to Katsura”. Not only the declared search for “freedom and originality” recalls Bruno Taut, but just like Taut, Tange also employs a dialectic principle to overarch the entire history of Japanese architecture. The main two principles he identifies with two ancient cultures of Japan, Jōmon (ca. 10 000 – 300 BC) and Yayoi (300 BC – 300 AD). This dialectic first surfaced in Japan in the mid-1950s, as part of a search for a measure of judgement about both contemporary art and architecture, and was developed by Tange, his friend, sculptor Tarō Okamoto and others. It appeared in text on the pages of *Shinkenchiku*, and even reached the non-Japanese readers in the English version of the magazine³⁹⁹. As we saw, Tange also built on it in his speech in Otterlo, speaking about “vitality.” He linked this vitality to Jōmon, the culture named after the rope pattern on ceramics vessels, “exceedingly free in design and rich in both mass and vigor (...) One pictures through them a stubborn yet sensitive people engaged in a grand yet high-spirited battle with nature. The forms created show no comprehension of geometrical order, but the vital pulsations of life are there, along with a strong sense of space and volume.”⁴⁰⁰

Against it, the historically younger Yayoi culture is set, which developed in the age of agriculture: “man and nature are synthesised to create a calm lyricism, acknowledging nature’s blessings. A passive attitude, submitting to the surroundings, prevails. A flat equilibrium and quiet balance with no dynamism are left in a transient mood.”⁴⁰¹

“In general, Jōmon culture may be considered a source of sheer vitality, while Yayoi culture resulted from a process of thought which imposed a recognizable order on vitality.”

It is quite clear to which side Tange inclines, although he still maintains that both are needed in a mutual connection. He even sketches a comparison of Jōmon and Yayoi as principles to the Dionysian and Apollonian in ancient Greece, as developed by Nietzsche, although he adds some reservations. Still almost as in an unrecognized dialogue with Taut, who compared the Ise shrine to Parthenon, Tange does the same: Ise definitely belongs to the Yayoi culture, but “still there is something here which cannot be described as Yayoi,

³⁹⁸ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 361.

³⁹⁹ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, p. 39

⁴⁰⁰ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 361.

⁴⁰¹ Tange, Kenzō: Transformation in Japan’s traditions, *Asahi Shinbun*, April 21, 1959. Quoted in Koolhaas – Obirst, *Project Japan*, 127.

something which lacks both the Apollonian brightness and the ethereal quality of the Yayoi culture.”⁴⁰²

What follows is a retelling of Japanese history through the optics of these two intertwining principles. It gets a distinctly Marxist tinge when Tange argues that the Jōmon vigour or “spirit” survived in the vernacular culture, the culture of people that had to face the “real difficulties nature poses to a farmer”. In opposition the meek, passive spirit of Yayoi thrived among the aristocracy, who could admire the beauty of nature only in the aesthetic sense: “To the Heian nobleman in his spacious mansion the seasons were in a sense moods.”⁴⁰³ Because of its high social status, the latter principle prevailed in Japan for centuries, leading to the development of both the *shinden-zukuri* and *shoin-zukuri* architectural styles. Tange ascribes to it a “lack of realism” and “passivity”, and even connects it to the failure to develop science and technology in Japan: “If man has no wish to subdue nature, techniques do not develop.”⁴⁰⁴ In architecture, this led to substantial deficiencies: the fact that Japan did not develop more than a simple span, and even that it developed only horizontally and never felt the need to build in height, which led to “the much discussed openness of Japanese houses, foreign to the traditional dwellings of Japanese farmers”⁴⁰⁵ and is guilty of deficiencies in the development in architecture:

The Katsura villa, the main subject of the book, comes in relatively late in this narrative, and Tange hardly describes it at all. In accord both with Taut and Japanese historians such as Sutemi Horiguchi and his teacher Hideto Kishida, Tange confirms the “startling originality” of the building and garden. Within the dialectic story that Tange just laboriously expounded, however, an imperial villa primarily designated for viewing the moon, contemplating changes of seasons and other pastimes cannot but fall to the passive, “Yayoi” side, the one that Tange blames for hampering Japan’s development. Tange’s elegant way out of the problem is taking his dialectic system and applying it once again on the scale of the villa. He arrives at the conclusion that a “conflict between the Jōmon and Yayoi principles is to be found throughout Katsura Palace. It is this conflict which gives the palace its creative tension.”⁴⁰⁶ Historically, Katsura is supposed to stand at a moment when the two principles collided for the first time, and this accounts for its special status and originality. The Jōmon element should have got in through the Zen aesthetics, that actually adopted a lot of rustic

⁴⁰² Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 364.

⁴⁰³ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 366.

⁴⁰⁴ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 367.

⁴⁰⁵ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 367.

⁴⁰⁶ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 381. See also the previous passage: “The creativeness seen in the Katsura Palace stems in part from the aristocratic tradition of the *shinden-zukuri* and the *shoin-zukuri* styles. At the same time, the palace embodies something of the plebeian tradition, which did not constitute a formal culture or aesthetic but was simply an inchoate force implicit in the daily life of the people. In Rikyu’s style [of the tea ceremony] this force was subdued; but at Katsura its collision with the aristocratic tradition is ever-present. It is the germinating impulse which gives the palace its startling originality.” — p. 375.

elements from farmers' houses, and Tange explains that this is to be sensed in the tearooms, the garden rock arrangements, and in the stepping stones that engage the walker in an active experiencing of the garden. He finally repeats his verdict about Katsura as a "dialectical resolution of tradition and antitradition."⁴⁰⁷ As for the implicit question about the significance for the present, Tange concludes: "The cultural energy which budded in Katsura can, I think, be brought to full bloom in this new period. In this sense I stand on the Katsura tradition. At the same time, if I express the hope that the tradition be superseded, it is because I believe that we of the present age are faced with the same dialectic of tradition and creation that Katsura exemplifies."⁴⁰⁸

Tange's essay on Katsura villa shows two things. First, a good scholarship about the villa which was clearly a result of a long-term vivid interest in its significance for the contemporary architects. Second, it exemplifies the tendency of Japanese authors to adopt Western schemes when historicizing their past.

Walter Gropius, as we noted, rewrote for the occasion his essay *Architecture in Japan*, which already appeared five years earlier. Compared to Tange, he deals with different, yet parallel questions of tradition and modernity. The main paradox between seeing the Japanese tradition as essentially modern, and at the same time opposing the actual modern development of the country as something that destroys this tradition, remains unresolved. Gropius expanded the passage dedicated to Katsura. As can be expected, he praises the building, despite it being built by a prince, for its "restraint of means and simplicity." And he continues, supporting his recently found humanist accent in the theory of architecture: "A truly noble edifice has been created in which a sense of freedom and peace resides as an inherent quality. We feel tremendously attracted to this building even now because man and his own way of living were the focus of the conception. No vanity, no pretentious monumentalism was in the mind of the designers, but only the desire to create a balanced container for beautiful living."⁴⁰⁹ In other words, the building fulfils an utmost goal for any contemporary buildings. Among all the praise, Gropius also found two paragraphs to list some "traces of decline." These were place which "we should recognize lest we fail to judge properly [Katsura's] influence on Japanese tradition as well as on our own modern architecture wherever it searches for new visual expression." These he saw mainly in the latest phase of the New palace (after 1658): "added-on ornamental elements in the interior, like the all-too-sophisticated bronze hardware on and above the sliding doors, the purely decorative *ranma* panels (fixed panel walls above the doors), the too elaborate cabinets and shelves (*chigaidana*), and the Chinese window (*tsukejoin*) in the First Room."

⁴⁰⁷ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 382.

⁴⁰⁸ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 383.

⁴⁰⁹ Tange in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 355.

Moreover, “if we judge by the highest standards, some weak point can be found even in Katsura’s garden”, namely in its “overemphasis on playful details”.⁴¹⁰

What is remarkable is that many of these places mention the same elements that already Bruno Taut disliked, although Gropius does not mention him a single time. May he have come to the same conclusions, coming from similar premises?

The Katsura book was published separately in Japanese and English versions, the latter by the prestigious Yale University press. This academic backing definitely helped to promote it, despite the proclamation stated in the introduction, that “this book does not tell everything there is to tell about the Katsura palace. It is neither a definitive introduction nor a historical study.”⁴¹¹ The book, in any case, was an great success, it “went into seven printings and is often found in the libraries of leading architects around the world” until now⁴¹².

II.5.6. Ise: *The prototype of Japanese architecture*

After the Katsura publication, linking modernism and tradition was still far from finished for Tange. Soon afterwards, he stood behind yet another publication, *Ise: The prototype of Japanese architecture*. It came out in Japanese in 1962, and it was available to the Western readers in 1965, five years after *Katsura. Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*. At the first glance, the book obviously wants to build on the success of the *Katsura* book: the same square format, the core of the book consisting of generous glossy print of black-and-white photography, flanked by two essays. Less overtly, the two books belong together also for their main subject. If Katsura was seen as a symbol of Japanese architecture, Ise was, as the book’s name claimed, a prototype. At first, joining these two monuments, different in purpose, age, and appearance may seem to make little sense. It is true that the connection of these two buildings is an act of historiography, and specifically the modernist one: as we saw (chapter II.1.), it was Bruno Taut who chose them as “fundamentals”.

Let us remind briefly that the sanctuary main Shinto shrine in Ise dates back to the 7th century but is perpetually rebuilt every 20 years, which makes it both ancient and new. Its modern history, too, is different from Katsura: Back in the Edo era, the place became a popular destination of religious pilgrimage, and an early tourist goal. As the main place worship of the Sun goddess Amaterasu, the mythical ancestor of the imperial family, it earned more official importance after the Meiji reforms, which fabricated Shinto as state religion. Jonathan M. Reynolds’s study on the changing interpretations of the shrine,

⁴¹⁰ Gropius in Ponciroli (ed.) *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 356.

⁴¹¹ Tange 1960, page v.

⁴¹² Buntrock, *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 11.

proceeding somewhat analogously to Arata Isozaki's study on Katsura, focusses on the strategies employed in the 1965 book.⁴¹³ Reynolds revealed that the promotion of Ise as the linchpin of national culture coincided with the development of architectural history in Japan, and the art historian Itō Chūta supported this opinion in the 1920s⁴¹⁴.

This was the situation when Bruno Taut arrived in 1933: his Japanese friends introduced Ise to him as an important monument, and he instantly grew fond of the stripped-down, simple buildings, scattered in the forest. His modernist criteria allowed him to appreciate the essential plainness of Ise's buildings that seemed so boring to his predecessors three decades earlier, and his basically artistic view did not let himself be disturbed too much by the nationalistic context of this time. In 1934, Taut wrote: "it is forbidden to photograph there: for a good reason by the way: the few photos that exist cannot convey anything of the reality. Nowhere else more than here have I felt that integral architecture cannot really stand the lens. After seeing a few photos, I myself didn't believe that the trip to Ise would be of any use. Only rarely do foreigners visit this truly sacred place. Yet all true architects of the world should make the pilgrimage."⁴¹⁵

After the war, the religious status of the shrine remained unchanged – and its inner gates normally remained closed to any visitor – even after Japan was defeated and the emperor officially announced that he was not to be considered a god anymore. The intense nationalist connotations of the Shinto religions were quietly side-lined. Now it was art and architecture that came to rewrite the image of Ise. Another of the costly rebuildings, the 59th, took place in 1953. This time, however, the unheard of was allowed, and laymen were granted permission to access the precincts. Kenzō Tange and the photographer Yoshio Watanabe could get around the strict ban to enter the inner precincts by actually entering and photographing the new shrine before its consecration. The availability of a new photographic documentation of a place usually unseen, and moreover, a new interpretation by the lens of a modernist photographer, was obviously a major turn in the rebranding of the shrine.

Tange and Watanabe joined forces with Noboru Kawazoe, an accomplished scholar and Tange's collaborator and supporter. The result was *Ise. The Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, a book this time fully made by Japanese authors, even in its English version, yet again

⁴¹³ Jonathan M. Reynolds, Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition, *The Art Bulletin*, 83 (2), (2001): 316-341. Isozaki also writes about Ise in one of his essays; see Part II: A Mimicry of Origin: Emperor Temmu's Ise Jingū, in Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 117– 169.

⁴¹⁴ Reynolds, Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction, 322.

⁴¹⁵ « Il y est interdit de photographier : avec raison, d'ailleurs : les quelques photos qui en existent ne peuvent rien transmettre de la réalité. Nulle part plus qu'ici j'ai senti que l'architecture intégrale ne supporte pas l'objectif. Moi-même d'après les quelques photos vues, je n'avais pas cru très utile le voyage à Ise. Ce n'est que rarement que les étrangers visitent ce lieu vraiment sacré. Pourtant, tous les vrais architectes du monde entier devraient faire ce pèlerinage. » – Taut, *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, 46.

published by a prestigious American academic publisher, this time MIT Press⁴¹⁶. While in the Katsura book, it was Walter Gropius who wrote a subjective visitor's narrative and Tange explained "how things really are" – his strongly opinionated piece gave an impression of a "fairly straightforward historical essay"⁴¹⁷ – now it was Tange who introduced the subject in a personal way, leaving the main historical explanation to Kawazoe. Back when Kawazoe was editor-in-chief of *Shinkechiku*, the most intense debate on history took place on the pages of the magazine. Tange's and Kawazoe's texts in the Ise book are now in accord, both evoking the mythical past and atmosphere of the very tall *hinoki* trees, only to dismiss them soon and replace the Shinto religion with a "secular religion of aestheticism."⁴¹⁸

As for Watanabe's photos, some of them already reached a broader audience through other publications, such as Drexler's book from 1955 (see chapter II. 3.). The large format, however, enabled the presentation of many more of them, and let them fully stand out; the book even features a page spread over one meter wide. While some of the images depict the entire buildings in a relatively standard way, taken from a medium distance, and could thus appear in an "objective", documentary context, other were more experimental. An entire page is dedicated to a down-to-the feet view of water in the Isuzu River. Crossing it over a bridge marks the entrance to the Inner shrine, where the pilgrims can wash themselves ritually. Watanabe also toys with diagonal views of the buildings, which themselves already have conspicuous diagonal elements at their thatched roof, and the *chigi*, the distinctive forked finials of the projecting bargeboards at the ends of the roof ridge. They contrast with the *katsuogi*, short decorative logs placed horizontally on the roof ridge. When taking the photos, Watanabe often approached the buildings at a close distance and then pointed the camera upwards, achieving visually a near vicinity of normally distant elements. This attitude towards the photographed subject betrays Watanabe's admiration for the German photography of Erich Mendelsohn and Alfred Renger-Platzsch⁴¹⁹. Another quite unusual choice of his was to use photos taken on a bright sunny day, bringing a contrasting yet radiant effect, underlined by the brand new, light-coloured and non-weathered *hinoki* wood, and the white pebbles that cover the ground of the inner precinct. Furthermore, the book also brings a couple of air photographs, reminiscent of the end of Tange's essay that brings an odd counterpoint to his previous evocation of ancient times and religious mystery:

"As our helicopter went high into the air above Ise, the inner precincts of Naiku and Geku recede from view as if swallowed by the dense wood around them. The form of Ise, born out of the depths of the primeval nature, seemed to sink once more into the forest. But one sensed that even today countless deities live down there. The feeling overcame me that I was gazing

⁴¹⁶ Tange, Watanabe and Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*.

⁴¹⁷ Banham, *Japonization of World Architecture*, 17.

⁴¹⁸ As noted by Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*, 338

⁴¹⁹ Reynolds, *Ise Shrine*, 325.

into the innermost recesses of the soul of the Japanese people.”

Tange repeats his formula that the “tradition by itself cannot function as the driving force for creativeness, but it always bears within itself the chance to stimulate creativeness.” But this time, “to find this chance I have roamed through tradition until at its furthest limits, I was confronted by Ise, by the fountainhead of Japanese tradition. I found the form of Ise; behind lies primeval nature.” The lesson of Ise is left deliberately untold, ending the essay with questions: “Will the form of Ise continue to be a symbol of the spirit for us also hereafter? Will we seek in it a spur to creativeness? It is for us, the present generation, to produce the answers. Whatever they will be, the form of Ise will always challenge us anew with the question: “What are the symbols of the present?”⁴²⁰

Kunio Maekawa: Thoughts on civilization and architecture

Also in 1965, in a special issue of *Architectural Design* entitled *Japanese architecture today*, the prime architect and Tange’s first mentor, Kunio Maekawa (1905–1986), introduced an overview of his built work with a theoretical essay, providing thus a still not-so-often-heard word of a Japanese architect⁴²¹. The first half of his essay hardly mentions his architecture as such, instead addressing some general questions of cultural understanding – or rather, misunderstanding.

“For the last 100 years,” he begins, “we Japanese have been in a ceaseless effort to assimilate the civilization and institutions of Western society, not only to protect ourselves, but also because of our cravings for the amenities of the Western way of life.” Japan, then, faced two problems: the ignorance of the “spiritual background” of the West when “implanting” its civilization, and “that Western civilization bears in itself seeds of self-destruction.” But while British historian Toynbee wrote that Christianity “has at its very roots an innate spirit of intolerance” and pronounced a sympathy for Buddhism, Maekawa senses “that such plunge into Buddhism is too abrupt for Westerners.”

On the pages of *Architectural design* that at this time presented Japanese architecture both with a great zeal and criticism, Maekawa adds a voice “from the other side”. Though very cautiously worded, it is a voice that suggests that there may be serious misunderstandings under way:

“If I may digress for a moment, I should like to confess that when holding discussions with Westerners I am frequently bothered by an irritating feeling that we cannot develop a sensitive rapport between us. Of course, a great deal of this impatience is attributable to semantics. However, even at that, I

⁴²⁰ Tange, Watanabe and Kawazoe, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, 52.

⁴²¹ Kunio Maekawa, Thoughts on civilization and architecture, *Architectural Design*, 5 (1965): 229-230.

often feel that the differences in emphasis in our arguments and, consequently, our misunderstandings of each other are quite serious. On careful consideration, it seems to me that the basic assumptions which each side assumes to be self-evident are by no means self-evident; rather, each party is merely flailing the air empty on the basis of its own assumptions which do not have validity for the other person. there is a deep divergence in thought patterns and in the human relationships between persons (...) these ingrained divergences seem to be more and more important when one thinks of them."⁴²²

We have earlier seen some limited capacity to understand the Japanese on the side of the Westerners, so Maekawa's rather sceptical proposition seems justified.

Maekawa then moves on to deliberate on the role of technology in its relationship to architecture: "Modern architecture attained its true awakening as modern architecture in Europe, when it awoke to its responsibility to humanity. In spite of this deep sense of mission and this profound pride, architecture has with the passage of time been forced to betray the expectations ledged in it by humanity." The reasons were various, but the architect argues that we cannot simply turn back, facing the change of the world: "Whereas science and engineering are products of human brains the modern architecture and the modern cities which are built by them tend to become inhuman."⁴²³

Maekawa brings up a possible destruction of humankind by technology, an idea which he and some Western visitors seem to share at last. As a faithful modernist, Maekawa claims allegiance to the original universalist, humanist mission of architecture. "Humanity must recall its rudiments, its initial principles as human architecture."⁴²⁴

Very loosely connected, both of the broad subjects that Maekawa tackles – cultural misunderstanding and the threats of technology – are of great interest in these times. At a time when Japanese architecture was seemingly emancipated with the rest of the world, he speaks about serious miscommunication, difference of language in the most general sense. At a time when most attention went to the Metabolist group that championed technology, he shows concerns about the limits of its use.

⁴²² Maekawa, Thoughts on civilization and architecture, 230.

⁴²³ Maekawa, Thoughts on civilization and architecture, 230.

⁴²⁴ Maekawa, Thoughts on civilization and architecture, 230.

II.5.6. Conclusion

We examined to what extent the Japanese architects actively shaped the image of their tradition. The publication of a fully English version of a Japanese magazine on architecture met an already existing demand, as can be seen from the first issues, blessed by the foremost architectural authorities of the world. Nonetheless, the *Shinkenchiku*, soon to become *Japan Architect*, did change the landscape of architectural magazines of its time.

It is beyond doubt that Kenzō Tange brought a new perspective to the international forum. He skilfully bolstered the international position of Japanese architecture – and his own – in advance, and his voice was heard because of his respected role of an architect. The sheer space Tange received, measured by pages in printed media, has no precedent among non-European architects. How he used this space was of course no less important: he actively participated in discussions with Western colleagues, and as we saw in his speech from the CIAM congress in Otterlo, he was not afraid to start off a polemic exchange. Other Japanese architects slowly started to follow in his footsteps.

However, in these debates one still cannot miss a certain sense of miscomprehension, palpable for instance in the Tange–Raymond interview. While it is wise not to underestimate the simple but decisive language barrier and different ways of exchanging opinions, it mainly seems that the Japanese and Western architects found themselves on different trajectories as regards their ideas and goals. The Westerners were still interested in the common features between the modern architectural principles and the Japanese tradition, and taken aback by the speed of the country's change. The Japanese, on the contrary, were fascinated by different aspects of the Western modernism, and were eager to emancipate their profession. Partly under the Western influence, they re-examined their tradition and used some of it as sources of negative self-definition, inspiration, or a trade-mark for abroad. Around 1960, these different concepts met on international platforms and in debates.

Tange, on whom we focussed, neither refused tradition, nor had a more objective understanding of it. He saw it differently from the prevailing Western image, but skilfully used it for his own cause. The two books he conceived and partly wrote around 1960 – one about Katsura villa, one about Ise shrine –, showed this at an international level. Although the modernist interest in these particular buildings was prepared already by Bruno Taut, the two books set a new way of looking at ancient Japanese architecture, by joining historical knowledge and the modernist interpretation with a radical photographic visuality.

Finally, one thing should be stressed. Reading the Japanese sources alone, together with the convincing narratives of an Arata Isozaki, one may easily believe that the image of Japan in the West was fully Japan-made. Recognition of the active role that the Japanese played, as in the case of Kenzō Tange, however, is not the same as understanding the very nature of the Western interest in Japanese architecture. As we could see, the Western interest preceded

the Japanese self-presentation, which was then not always fully accepted, or even understood by the Westerners. In other words, the Western interest in Japan cannot be simply seen as a result of a successful “marketing”. We may rather speak – if we want to use such economical metaphors – about a Japanese supply to a Western demand.

II.6. 1960S: EMANCIPATION, CRITICISM

“Japan cannot be fathomed as matter-of-factly as England, Holland, or Disneyland.”

– Bernard Rudofsky, 1965⁴²⁵

II.6.1. Introduction

The following chapter picks up where the previous two left us. We saw certain patterns formed in thinking about Japan in the West, and we also saw how the Japanese architects shaped, or at least tried to shape the debate about their own tradition and its image abroad. This chapter, dedicated to the evolution 1960s image of Japan in the West, actually follows the aftermath of the “rebirth of Japanese architecture,” as *Architectural Design* named its February 1961 issue.

The 1960s brought, as we will see, profound changes in the perception of Japan. Yet there is still a reason to continue, somewhat stubbornly, in our main inquiry.

The biggest change we can observe from around 1960 is the sheer amount of presence of Japan in the architectural media: many more projects were presented than before, and the range of subjects connected to Japan expanded radically. While before, the works of the modern western-trained masters (Maekawa, Sakakura, and a few other favourites) occasionally occurred in books and magazines, they now gradually give way to an extensive coverage of the projects of the Metabolist generation. The events such as the Tokyo Olympics 1964, the Osaka Expo in 1970 were presented by means of their architecture, and they gave further material for discussion and filled Western magazines with Japanese-bound content. We will see how these events were covered and discussed in the British magazine *Architectural Design*, a magazine which again be one of our main sources in this chapter. For comparison, we will look into other media on occasion (such as *Werk*).

The ideas continue to meet and evolve, but it would be to no avail to expect their harmonious synthesis. We will see diverse discourses about Japan: they sometimes went past each other, sometimes brushed against each other, sometimes collided. Three trends stand out in the 1960s: The apparent emancipation of Japanese contemporary architecture, which, however, also gave rise to criticism, a growing interest in the urban realm, and a focus on the governing principles behind architectural and urban phenomena.

⁴²⁵ Rudofsky, *Kimono Mind. An Informal Guide to Japan and the Japanese* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 9.

Contemporary Japanese architecture was now widely presented, and quickly developed a status of high quality, often causing admiration, and discussion. That also meant, however, that it could be subject to criticism – which could get quite harsh, as we will see. Critical and often negative impressions are also often to be heard about the Japanese urban space. If almost each author in the previous decade either ignored the newly arising urban landscape in Japan, or briefly mentioned its ugliness, during the 1960s we see more and more comments on the apparent chaos of the Japanese cityscape, causing disorientation, sensory oversaturation, and even fear. Reactions ranged from apprehension about the future – not just of Japan but of the entire developed world – to tentatively embracing it as a new experience. Bernard Rudofsky, whose first articles about Japan appeared in the Italian *Domus* already in the mid-1950s, but were enriched and expanded in the 1960s to his book *Kimono Mind* actually had a role in the 1960s debate, even though he cultivated a nonconformist status. General principles, such as flexibility, standardization, or transience were commonly mentioned when describing the Japanese house, and the role of philosophy and religion was also taken into consideration. In the 1960s, Günther Nitschke in his long articles published in German Magazines and mainly *Architectural Design*, as well as other such Peter Güller in *Werk* connected this interest in general principles with urbanism and landscape, trying to reveal even deeper formative forces at work: place-making, hierarchy, relativization.

II.6.2. The ‘Rebirth of Japanese Architecture’

Metabolist movement as a utopia and as continuity of a tradition

Tokyo hosted the World design conference 1960, an event which marked the emancipation of Japan in the realm of design and architecture. Officially presided by Junzō Sakakura, the attendees included Louis Kahn, Jean Prouvé, Balkrishna Doshi and Peter Smithson. It was an achievement by itself that all these people came to Japan. Here the Metabolist movement introduced itself to the scene, selling their printed manifesto pamphlet to the conference members. Kiyonori Kikutake (1928–2011), Kishō Kurokawa (1934–2007), Fumihiko Maki (* 1928), Kenji Ekuan (1929–2015), Masato Otaka (1923–2010) (all originally from the Tange Lab) and several others secured in this way an almost immediate world-wide attention to their upcoming activities. Tange became recognized as a paternal figure, although he was not a direct initiator of the movement. In his conference speech, later published also in *Architectural Design*⁴²⁶, he addressed two challenges that architecture has to face: mobility, and mass communication. Using biological metaphors throughout his talk, he compared city to an organism. That is not so special, but he said at last: “The organism lives, however, because of the metabolism of the cells.” Hereby, Tange indirectly supported his young disciples by mentioning “metabolism”, assimilating his rhetoric with theirs.

Nowadays, Metabolism is a very well mapped movement in architectural history, and it is not our goal here to add new research to it, or even to recapitulate its history. The massive presence of the Metabolist projects in the printed media can however not be avoided. Thanks to their assiduously sought media success, worldwide building activities lasting decades, and continuous promotion of its members – especially the ever attention-seeking Kishō Kurokawa – Metabolism has been a subject to a number of exhibitions, research, and both academic and non-academic studies⁴²⁷.

Tange’s own megastructure project, the Tokyo Bay plan (1960) that planned to solve the problem of Japan’s overpopulated metropolis by building a city on the sea, has been published in almost every relevant architectural magazine in Europe, and associated him more closely with Metabolism. But works of Kikutake, Kurokawa, Maki and others quickly started filling pages of architectural magazines in the West as well. The largely utopian projects all but transfixed the architecture world. Metabolists clearly dominated the scene for the entire decade, culminating in the 1970 Expo in Osaka. The attention given to the

⁴²⁶ Kenzo Tange, Technology and Humanity: Speech at the World Design Conference 1960, *Architectural Design* (February 1961): 68.

⁴²⁷ Worth mentioning is the documentation-packed interview volume *Project Japan. Metabolism Talks*, Kooolhaas – Obirst 2011.

movement was so strong that even Arata Isozaki, who took a distance from the movement from its beginnings, was often presented as one of them. Western architectural media gave an unprecedented space to the Metabolist movement, which for a while almost pushed out all other Japanese architects, at least in the Western architectural media.

Without doubt, the Metabolists have substantially changed the notion of what was understood as Japanese architecture. At the same time, they could build on the basic ideas linked to Japanese tradition, and Japanese culture in general. For instance, they did consciously use the often repeated idea of the Japanese “closeness to nature”, but shifted its content by using metaphors from science. Kiyonori Kikutake – the only architect who already had some projects built and thus got the most attention in the beginning of the movement – drew inspiration from marine organisms, such as jellyfish, sea plant, and water lilies. Kisho (Noriyaki) Kurokawa amazed with his Helix City (1961) and later on kept adding various biological metaphors into his eclectic writing about Metabolism. The very name of the movement has an admittedly biological sound to it. Educated in Japanese history, but also inspired by Marxism and theoretical biology, it was Noboru Kawazoe (1926–2015), now the theorist of the group, who coined the English name. In their manifesto, the young Japanese claimed: “We regard human society as a vital process - a continuous development from atom to nebula. The reason why we use such a biological word, metabolism, is that we believe design and technology should be a denotation of human vitality. We are not going to accept metabolism as a natural process, but try to encourage active metabolic development of our society through our proposals”⁴²⁸.

As it is often the case with Japan, new meanings arise with incomplete translations. The story of the genesis of the name of the Metabolism movement is remarkable: Kawazoe, in search for an English name which the new movement could use internationally, looked up a translation of *shinchintaisha* 新陳代謝, a term that he had read in the Japanese translation of Friedrich Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*. The -ism ending came as an unexpected, yet very suitable bonus that enabled to read the name both as a biological process, which was in the centre of their interest, and as an artistic movement⁴²⁹.

The Metabolists’ allegiance to Japanese tradition, if not in forms, then in principles, often confuses Western observers who see it as the “last avant-garde”, and thus something automatically anti-traditional. Their appropriation of tradition truly did not come not without apparent contradictions on their side, since it was sometimes the destructive aspects of the Japanese tradition they embraced.

⁴²⁸ Koolhaas – Obrist 2011, p. 207.

⁴²⁹ Koolhaas – Obrist 2011, p. 235.

Architectural Design, 1961

We already cited widely the Tange–Raymond interview (chapter II.5.) and Tange’s World design conference speech in the February 1961 issue of *Architectural Design*. It was the star duo of the Team 10 and the New Brutalism, Alison and Peter Smithson, that guest edited this issue, entitled “The Rebirth of Japanese architecture”⁴³⁰. Its cover shone with a bold, red-and yellow pattern derived from a traditional Japanese mask, but this strangely contrasted with the editors’ proclamation right at the beginning: “The revival of architecture in Japan can be regarded as the direct result of Le Corbusier’s work in India”. The Smithsons deliberately omit any older Japanese tradition, as well as roots of the “new tradition” other than Le Corbusier. They met with Kenzō Tange on various occasions, including the last CIAM congress in Otterlo and the World Design Conference in Tokyo, and this claim seems to confirm his words about the “overvalued tradition”.

On one hand, deriving literally all Japanese modernism directly from the genealogy of the Western models is of course extremely reductive, even if the Japanese architects themselves “recognize this indebtedness.” It would be easy to disprove it. It signalled, on the other hand, a will to do away with exoticising Japan, wishfully declared 25 years earlier by Bruno Taut. This seems to be the gist of Smithsons’ proposition: From now on, works of individual architects will be judged in their own right, without the necessity to introduce their cultural background each time.

The reality was, in fact, more complicated: the subject of tradition crept in again in the Tange-Raymond interview that followed right after Smithsons’s editorial (as we saw, see chapter II.5.), and came back occasionally in the same issue while dealing with contemporary projects by Tange, Raymond, and Maekawa. Kikutake’s Sky House already published in the magazine in November 1959, was published this time, however, with a critical note for using the “historicistic elements,” appearing to the editor be the “most *art nouveau* flank of Japanese modern architecture.”⁴³¹ In this last remark Smithson, negatively critical, seems to dislike using the same traditional Japanese elements that many other Westerners liked.

But on a more general level, it signifies one more thing which the emancipation of Japanese architecture implied: seeing Japan at par with European architecture meant it can henceforth be measured by the same critical tools. Smithson himself, with some delay, published his own criticism of Tange’s Tokyo Bay Plan, in 1964⁴³². Although he mostly points out the issues with traffic circulation and not the idea of building a new city on the sea,

⁴³⁰ Alison and Peter Smithson, The Rebirth of Japanese Architecture, *Architectural Design* (February 1961), 55.

⁴³¹ — Photo caption, 66-67

⁴³² *Architectural Design*, October 1964, 479-480.

this same issue of *Architectural Design* also brought the first of a series of long texts by a young German architect Günther Nitschke (* 1934), where fascination with Japan went hand in hand with criticism. It is worth a closer look.

II.6.3. Olympic Planning versus Dream Planning

The end of the “post-war” era was officially declared by the Japanese government in 1955, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics symbolically opened a new era for Japan, attracting thousands of foreign visitors. The country’s rapid economic and population growth, had, however, a less appealing side on the urban level, bringing clogged streets, overcrowded trains, and chaotic building. Around the same time when Tokyo hosted the Olympics, it became the biggest city of the world⁴³³. As the Olympics were supposed to make an impression abroad, development plans were made. These pre-Olympic preparations and plans were the theme of the first of the thematic blocks on Japan prepared by a young German architect Günther Nitschke (*1934) for *Architectural Design*⁴³⁴. Nitschke begins with an ambiguity typical for his further contributions for the magazine: Rich, meticulously prepared content is accompanied with questioning, often subjective impressions. His long block, which assembles copious information, statistics and graphs, starts with the following words: “Tokyo 1964: to write about it, impossible; to live in it, impossible. I am European.” This is indeed a new tone in referring to Japan. Nitschke outspokenly highlights his role as a “human being” as opposed to his perspective as an “architect”. His *Prologue* then continues with an almost verse-like expression of his dislike, even fear of urban Tokyo:

“I am a human being

Thus, Tokyo presents to me two distinct faces:

The crowded:

The crowded are frightening, in subways, at stations, in mechanized amusement halls, at festivities.

The silent:

The silent are frightening; it is not a silence of an English town. This silence is sound, is repression. It is the sound of suffering, of oppression by this metropolitan existence.

(...)

“But this year, everything is different. Everything is drowned in the Olympic enthusiasm.

⁴³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_cities_throughout_history, retrieved 30. 1. 2018.

⁴³⁴ Günther Nitschke, Tokyo/'Olympic Planning' versus 'Dream Planning', *Architectural Design* (October 1964): 482-508.

It seems unbelievable how a social illusion like that one is able to release such an enormous constructive energy.

(...) our folly and lack of vision is the same in every place. God, send us poets!" ⁴³⁵

The text then gets more matter-of-fact, and presents two ways of city planning – the “official future” versus the “dreamed future” of Tokyo. The official plans are “the measures undertaken and planned officially to tackle the problems arising in the conurbation of the 10-million class like that one of Tokyo – I call it ‘Olympic planning’ here, because the officially recognized importance of these Games as a whole was used to release enough money for the planning measures needed.” Against these stand the utopian visions of architects “poet-planners”, more or less associated with the Metabolist movement⁴³⁶.

In the same issue, Nitschke also brought a first comprehensive presentation of the Metabolist movement, previously published in the German magazine *Bauwelt*⁴³⁷. An entire issue was still not enough and only two months later a supplement followed⁴³⁸.

From the beginning, Nitschke presented the architecture of megastructures in terms of traditional cultural principles, drawing a lot from writings of Kishō Kurokawa. The youngest member of the Metabolist movement was a very active writer, in the end author of more than a hundred books during the following decades – according to his own words. His eclectic and vorticose writing revolved around the essential character of “change” in nature, in architecture and in the Japanese spirit.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Nitschke, Tokyo/'Olympic Planning' versus 'Dream Planning', 482

⁴³⁶ Noriaki [Kishō] Kurokawa: Human Type Pattern, Akui and Nozawa's Neo-Mastaba, Kenzo Tange's Plan for Tokyo 1960, published already several times before in *Architectural Design* (pp. 496-498) Kiyonori Kikutake: 'Ocean City Unabara' (pp. 507-508).

⁴³⁷ Günther Nitschke, Die Metabolisten Japans, *Bauwelt* 18/19 (1964): 506; Nitschke, The Metabolists of Japan, *Architectural Design* (October 1964): 509–524. In this issue, he presented Noriyaki [Kishō] Kurokawa, Kiyonori Kikutake, Fumihiko Maki, Masato Ohtaka [Ōtaka], Kenzō Tange, Arata Isozaki.

⁴³⁸ *Architectural Design*, December 1964, pp. 603–613, The issue included works of the following architects: Noriaki (later Kishō) Kurokawa: 'The architecture of Action' (theoretical text), Kyoto conference centre (competition entry, competition and project built won by Sachio Otani), Factory for the Niisho-Shokuin Company, Art University, Osaka; Kiyonori Kikutake: Kyoto Conference Centre and Ichigaya project, Tatebayashi City Hall, Seconic Factory and the Great Shrine of Izumo Taisha; Arata Isozaki: Library at Ōita.

⁴³⁹ From Kurokawa's many books, worth noting is “The Philosophy of Symbiosis” – 1994

The article on Metabolism starts with the character *eki* 易 (to change, exchange). The “three roots” of change in Japanese culture are: Shinto religion, kanji (the Chinese characters used in Japanese), and Zen Buddhism. The principle of impermanence, in fact, an expression of an ancient cyclic understanding of time, should be best seen in the Ise shrine, periodically dismantled and rebuilt every twenty years. The already familiar, oft-quoted principles of Japanese architecture – flexibility and prefabrication – connect with culture in this perspective:

“Similarly in the Japanese dwelling, life expresses itself in terms of the dynamic of our existence. It provides a space that is eminently interchangeable, and therefore functionally flexible. (...) The Japanese house possesses, in fact, all the qualities for which we strive in modern architecture. These qualities are present, moreover, in the proposals of the ‘Metabolists’ with their pre-fabrication of structural elements, which when modularly coordinated provides for the complete flexibility of the space-enclosing parts and thereby for:

- (a) susceptibility of change between rooms*
- (b) flexibility of functions on rooms*
- (c) reciprocity between outside and inside”⁴⁴⁰*

⁴⁴⁰ p. 509.

In the Japanese tea-house, Zen created and translated into architectural terms, a room which strove to express the transience of all things in this world, the world of forms. Therefore the demand for asymmetrical compositions, and for only what appears as unideal, incomplete; still in the process of living and therefore unfinished, i.e. asymmetrical in respect of form. Similarly, in the Japanese dwelling, life expresses itself in terms of the dynamic of our existence. It provides a space that is eminently changeable, and therefore functionally flexible. The Japanese house possesses in fact all the qualities for which we strive in modern architecture. These qualities are present, moreover, in the proposals of the ‘metabolists’ with their pre-fabrication of structural elements, which when modularly coordinated provides for the complete flexibility of the space-enclosing parts and thereby for:

- (a) susceptibility of change between rooms;
- (b) flexibility of functions in rooms; and
- (c) reciprocity between inside and outside.

Thus the Japanese dwelling can fulfil, for us, the inconsistent requirement: inexhaustible individual variation within a common, higher, formal whole.

Following the ideas of Kurokawa, Nitschke is eager to find connections between the Japanese tradition and new architecture. Truly new things here were two: the broad attention dedicated to urban issues, and, at the same time, an open expression of the anxiety that the Japanese metropolitan space induces in a European.

II.6.4. Apprehending the urban realm

Issues dedicated to urban problems become much more prominent in the following years. The Swiss magazine *Werk*, for instance, dedicated an issue to the “Image of the City” (*Stadtbild*), then a hotly debated topic thanks to the newly published book by Kevin Lynch of the same name. In the very beginning, Japan entered it issue right as an introduction to Fumihiko Maki’s text on “Group Form”.⁴⁴¹

Japanese architecture was again on the front cover of *Architectural Design* after just half a year in May 1965: This time, Tange’s Yoyogi Olympic Halls.⁴⁴² But it was not just the spectacular features of the Olympic construction which garnered attention, but the entire urban megalopolis of Tokyo. “In Tokyo, there is less than one square yard of open space per person, and it continues to fall as the population builds up at the rate of 300 000 a year in Tokyo alone. One must actually consider the whole conurbation of Tokyo – Kawasaki – Yokohama, whose total population is some twenty million, in thinking of urban problems of these cities.”⁴⁴³ Jeremy Dodd tackled the issue of the staggering urbanization in Japan a broader manner. “The virtual destruction of the Japanese industry made a new start inevitable, the process of reconstruction from scratch has given the country a chance to re-organize and re-equip.”⁴⁴⁴ Little city planning, however, was actually carried out: “Tokyo and Osaka (...) have risen from the delicate piles of wood-ash to become fantastic, sprawling jungles of buildings of all shapes and sizes, built on tiny plots (...).”⁴⁴⁵ Canals, which used to provide some open space as well as definition to the various ‘quarters’ were now gradually converted into expressways, parks were filled with buildings “with the justification that the buildings are for public purposes.” The city’s streets and alleys were until now “just right for the pedestrian, bicycle or even scooter; but in the ordinary streets there is no pavement and the citizens are increasingly pushed around by vehicles – the poles supporting the dense overhead wirescape often provide the only safe refuge! (...) Public transportation above the ground packed to capacity ... a monorail has been constructed – the world’s longest.” In building, “each individual building owner follows his fancy, which results in a varying degree of chaos these days.” In short, the experience of the Japanese city was distressing and chaotic.

⁴⁴¹ Fumihiko Maki, Group Form, *Werk* 7 (“Stadtbild”) (1963): 258-263.

⁴⁴² AD May 1965: Contemporary Japanese architecture

⁴⁴³ Jeremy Dodd, Japanese Architecture Today, *Architectural Design* (May 1965): 216.

⁴⁴⁴ Dodd, Japanese Architecture Today, 216.

⁴⁴⁵ Dodd, Japanese Architecture Today, 216.

With the elevated expressways, a new spatial experience entered Japan, inducing a sense of emptiness, disconnected from the chaotic but still human life of the Japanese street. A few years later, for example, Andrei Tarkovsky used a long shot taken from a car driving in Tokyo to introduce a profoundly dystopian atmosphere in his film *Solaris* (Солярис, 1972).

The rather confusing and stressful impression from the public areas – probably similar to the one from other Asian countries – quickly retreats, when speaking about interiors. Dodd returns to the calming role of tradition, and stresses its role for the contemporary: “The interior of the Japanese house, with its flexible spatial character is already well known. But in any study of Japanese modern architecture it is well to remember its deep underlying influence. The quality of light available through the translucent *shoji*, or soft rice paper reflected from natural materials like the wooden framework, corridor floor and ceilings, the heavy paper of the *fusuma* or sliding doors used between rooms, and the tatami, or woven rice straw mat units, is something known to all Japanese. Foreign styles and fashions have some influence on the public, but there is still a strong preference for natural materials.”⁴⁴⁶

Well aware of the planning initiatives from contemporary Japanese architects, Dodd curiously saw the perspective for Japanese architecture in terms of the development in Europe, and its mistakes: “Japanese architecture seems to be forward looking and vigorous. At its best it is continuing of modern architecture in Western Europe [!] and develop it further. Many mistakes are made, and clichés from other lands are incorporated that must be expected with the rapid growth of architecture in this country.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ Dodd, *Japanese Architecture Today*, 216.

⁴⁴⁷ Dodd, *Japanese Architecture Today*, 217.

II.6.5. Bernard Rudofsky, *Domus* (1956–1957), and *The Kimono Mind* (1965)

When Bernard Rudofsky began introducing Japan in the Italian magazine *Domus* in the first of his articles in 1956⁴⁴⁸, he was not an unknown author in this magazine to which he occasionally contributed since the 1930s. But seeing how things were written about Japan in other architectural magazines in the 1950s, this was indeed something very different. Austrian by origin, Bernard Rudofsky (1905–1988), born in Zauchtel in Moravia (today's Suchdol nad Odrou in Czechia) adopted several homes including Italy and Brazil before emigrating to the United States in 1941, and travelled extensively his entire life. Japan played a special role for him. He travelled there in 1955 and then again in 1958–1960, staying for a year and a half. The first stay resulted in a series of articles for *Domus*, published in three issues in 1956 and 1957. These texts were included and extended, together with several others, in a book called *The Kimono Mind*⁴⁴⁹ (1965).

Rudofsky's position both within and without the Modern movement is already a subject of an interesting debate, although his rich and diverse body of work still deserves more research.⁴⁵⁰ Rudofsky was able to simultaneously ironize modern architecture and collaborate with the New York MoMA from the 1940s onwards, when it was a beacon of modernism. His most famous exhibition was *Architecture Without Architects* (1964) which toured around the world for years, and resulted in a much requested catalogue⁴⁵¹.

During his second extensive stay in Japan between 1958 and 1960, Rudofsky gathered Japanese vernacular graphics, from which he prepared an exhibition for MoMA in 1961⁴⁵². It consisted of “maps, illustrated books and other graphic material executed by anonymous craftsmen over the past 250 years.”⁴⁵³ This collection was then also the source of illustrations

⁴⁴⁸ Bernard Rudofsky, Introduzione al Giappone (I), *Domus* 319 (June 1956): 45–49. The three articles published in 1956–1957 in *Domus* in an Italian translation, plus a fourth one, previously unpublished, are available in their English original in: Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky: A Humane Designer*, 209–226.

⁴⁴⁹ Rudofsky, *Kimono Mind. An Informal Guide to Japan and the Japanese*.

⁴⁵⁰ See Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky*; Felicity Scott, Underneath Aesthetics and Utility. The Untransposable Fetish of Bernard Rudofsky, *Assemblage*, 38 (Apr., 1999): 58-89; Architekturzentrum Wien (ed.), *Lessons from Bernard Rudofsky. Life as a voyage* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007).

⁴⁵¹ Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects. A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (New York: MoMA, 1964).

⁴⁵² The exhibition took place June 3 – July 13, 1961. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3413>

⁴⁵³ MoMA, Press release, June 3, 1961, available at https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326237.pdf, retrieved 31. 7. 2017.

for *The Kimono Mind*. Besides, Rudofsky prepared several lectures that remained unpublished, and his biography lists also a non-realized exhibition about Japan from 1972⁴⁵⁴.

His readers, first in *Domus* and then of *The Kimono Mind*, which came out a year after *Architecture Without Architects*, were presented with a combination of travelogue and cultural criticism in a series of witty essays determined to go beyond the usual ways. The scope of topics that Rudofsky writes about is extremely broad, but different almost in every way from the mainstream of other architects. His approach is roughly speaking anthropological, with a preference for observation of everyday life, habits, and rituals instead of describing forms, and shows a penchant for peculiarities. The themes range from his long-term interest in clothing and footwear, as already the title (*The Kimono Mind*) signals, over hot baths (*Hedonism of the Destitute*), gender roles (*Ladies Last*), to eating habits and train travel. Among all these, he does dedicate a chapter to the Japanese house (*A House for the Summer*⁴⁵⁵), and another one to the urban realm. This last essay, *Forbidden Directions*, belongs to his most interesting ones.

We already saw that in Japan even modernists were impressed by the past. Rudofsky, however, embraces history with affection and profound study. Although he did not understand Japanese, he read all kinds of Western sources about Japan down to the first notes of the Jesuit missionaries, and Lafcadio Hearn (whom he calls “a demon of Japan lovers”). He was thus more prone to critically grasp the conditions of learning about a different culture, and to distance himself from the actual intellectual fashions, often recurring to the history of Western (mis-)understandings of Japan, indulging in long, humorous digressions. What he does quite systematically is therefore trying to subvert the established ways of representing Japanese culture.

This does not mean he would always be correct, or that he would abstain from subjective comments. Quite the opposite: Rudofsky is often very personal and opinionated. One source of amusement is his own confusion and clumsiness as a Westerner encountering Japanese reality. Yet these difficulties are ultimately turned into a more profound reflection on understanding cultural codes. Rudofsky did not pretend exploration of a distant culture goes always smoothly: “Although maps have long been declassified as top secret, the country is by no means an open book. The foreigner who tries to escape the routine of orthodox sight-seeing finds himself immobilized by unexpected obstacles. Mountains become inaccessible, roads impassable, waters dangerous, inns unaccommodating. Japan shuts up like an oyster.”⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁴ Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky*.

⁴⁵⁵ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 112–131.

⁴⁵⁶ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 85

Recently, Felicity D. Scott looked at Rudofsky's opinions about visual communication and orientation, presenting his Japanese experience as central⁴⁵⁷. Her well-documented research in the archives also revealed that Rudofsky's contending with Japanese culture had phases that were less jocular than his published writings may suggest. After his first stay in Japan in 1955, he expressed an intention of studying Westernization of Japan and the Japanese house and city as a "rear-view mirror" of the lifestyle in the United States, but this "strategy failed in face of what he encountered: a more complex and less discernible (at least to him) assemblage of sociocultural and economic forces at work," Scott comments.⁴⁵⁸

It should be clear now that Rudofsky's goals were largely different from his architectural colleagues, although he actively discussed the subject with them, such as Walter Gropius, who endorsed Rudofsky's Fulbright application which enabled him a second stay of eighteen months as a visiting professor in Japan in 1958–1960.

One quality Rudofsky observed in Japan is approaching problems in an oblique, indirect manner. Rudofsky's own writing is often ambiguous in its message, both confirming and challenging the "us and them" attitude of a Western mind toward the other. Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is another obvious inspiration⁴⁵⁹, as can be seen when he writes about the changing clothing habits in Japan:

*"When felt hats, leather boots, and tubular dress were decreed by law, and an imperial edict informed the nation that European clothes were concomitants of a more civilized life, the Japanese found a compromise in retaining the native costume for intramural use and as holiday dress. Their genius for avoiding clear-cut solutions enables them to assimilate things foreign without budging in their own way. Not for them the anguish of having to make a choice, not for them the scruples of a convert. (...) As so often in their history the Japanese were able to have their cake and eat it too."*⁴⁶⁰

A reviewer of Rudofsky's book speaks rather sympathetically about "small inaccuracies, half-truths and overstatements", these however "rather enhance the atmosphere of a gallant adventurer's exploring new land."⁴⁶¹

A stratagem of Rudofsky to waken up his reader was to deliberately renounce using photography in his book, although he shot very good photos in Japan and made a vivid

⁴⁵⁷ Felicity Scott, *Disorientation: Bernard Rudofsky in the Empire of Signs* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

⁴⁵⁸ Scott, *Disorientation*, referring to Rudofsky's letter to Serge Chermayeff, November 13, 1960.

⁴⁵⁹ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

⁴⁶⁰ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 59.

⁴⁶¹ Makoto Ueda, Review of *Kimono Mind*, *Pacific Affairs*, 41(2) (1968): 285-286. Quote from p. 286.

collage for the dust cover of *The Kimono Mind*. “In a period when all travel books were having recourse to the appeal of photographic image,”⁴⁶² Rudofsky relies fully on old woodcuts and drawings. Rudofsky thought that any images are inadequate, and the one he picks are “primarily meant to convey some of the *aroma* of the Japanese cultural climate,” since “Japan cannot be fathomed as matter-of-factly as England, Holland, or Disneyland.”⁴⁶³ This said, Rudofsky’s choice of illustrations is extraordinary, drawing almost uniquely from his personal collection of black-and white woodcut prints, adding also a contemporary restaurant menu full of ridiculous mistranslations.

When writing about buildings, Rudofsky never thought of them outside of the rich fabric of culture. Like Bruno Taut, Rudofsky maintains that “the most interesting feature of the house is not its material appearance but its life.”⁴⁶⁴

„The Japanese house has defied dispassionate analysis. From the lukewarm notices of the earliest Western chroniclers – the Jesuit missionaries and Dutch merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – to the panegyrics of contemporary travelers, it represents a stout paradox. Taken by many to be the most elegant shelter ever design for a man, it also marks the furthest departure from common sense.”⁴⁶⁵

Rudofsky quickly recognized the modernists had seen the Japanese house in a heavily abstracted way, yet he still deemed this misappropriation as “not only perfectly valid but invaluable,” as he wrote to Walter Gropius in a private letter. He also explained that Japan developed “standardization, prefabrication, and mobility [...] as possibilities centuries before.”⁴⁶⁶ Finally, he saw the qualities of the traditional Japanese house as distinctive and not so dissimilar from the other modernists after all: “The Japanese house – more precisely, the traditional Japanese house, a venerable institution which has been the object of much admiration and occasionally of scorn – is but one of the houses that have proved immune to the fashions of the day.”⁴⁶⁷

“Nothing too much is in it. Protest against ostentation. Serenity, introspection. Modesty, formality, nobility, and reserve. It is opposed to everything that is garish, and loud. (...) [It is] The oriental house at its best... it is all house, all shelter, a true sanctuary for man.”⁴⁶⁸ Yet still, his description of these values is highly original: “It is a house turned outside in,

⁴⁶² Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky*, 57.

⁴⁶³ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 9.

⁴⁶⁴ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 191.

⁴⁶⁵ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 116-118.

⁴⁶⁶ Scott, *Disorientation*, 64, referring to an unpublished letter of Rudofsky to Gropius, 23 November 1959.

⁴⁶⁷ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 113.

⁴⁶⁸ Bernard Rudofsky, unpublished lecture about Japan, with slides, 1960. Quoted in: Guarneri, *Bernard Rudofsky*, 44.

except that there never was much of an outside. There are no windows to look out from or into and subsequently no window curtains. No carpets or rugs eclipse the floor; no chairs, no beds encroach on its void. Apart from the annual replacement of the floor mats, the house is near-immutable. Long regarded as the conceit of practical jokers, of late the Japanese house has been looked upon as a triumph of ingenuity, indeed, a work of art.”⁴⁶⁹

The significance of Rudofsky’s work for the understanding of Japan may sometimes hide beneath the satire. It eventually lies in his original reading of cultural codes. What he offered can be seen as subversive: In the age when transparency and openness was one of the prime values of a modern house, Rudofsky praised the obscurity of the Japanese house and the indirectness of wayfinding in it. The novelty approach may be best seen in his approach to the urban space: In the age when his modernist colleagues called for restrictions on street signs to avoid chaos and bad typography, Rudofsky, relished on the overload of incomprehensible Japanese advertising lights glowing in the cities at night⁴⁷⁰. In the times when the emerging Japanese cityscape appeared threatening and downright ugly even to architects who loved the Japanese houses, Rudofsky suggested to expand the interest in Japanese architecture onto the urban realm.

⁴⁶⁹ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 113.

⁴⁷⁰ This is the well expounded of the first half of Felicity Scott’s book, see Scott, *Disorientation*, 11–56.

II.6.6. Underlying principles

So far we have noticed two strong trends that changed the perception of Japanese architecture in the 1960s. If contemporary Japanese projects were one and the urban realm was another, there was still a strong continuing interest in Japanese traditional architecture. Yet compared to the previous times, the focus shifted from observing historical objects to formulating more general principles that give birth to forms. Just as in the case of Rudofsky, this required deeper forays into Japanese culture, where the connection to architecture was not always immediately obvious. Monothematic issues – an increasingly common format – were especially suitable for these ambitious studies.

MA – The Japanese Sense of Place

In March 1966, the readers of *Architectural Design* faced quite a surprising content – at least unusual for a contemporary architecture magazine: Most of the content was about historical architecture of Japan. The cover of the issue shows a black-and-white plan of the Japanese castle in Himeji, overlaid by a large red *kanji* character, *ma* 間⁴⁷¹. This announced a long text, again by Günther Nitschke, which took up most of the issue. The 40-page long essay can be seen as a culmination of Nitschke's contributions. With this issue, Nitschke hoped to

*“increase understanding of our control of space through the disposition of forms and objects and, in addition, [...] manage to destroy that facile attraction of Japanese architecture that resulted in so many meaningless imitations in the West during the past decade and replace it with with a deeper comprehension of the magnificent architecture of Japan.”*⁴⁷²

Some of Nitschke's strategies were also familiar to the readers, such as the occasional use of Japanese characters with a vocabulary pertaining to the topic. But this time, it was taken to another level, opening with a full-page detailed explanation of Japanese characters pertaining to space and place, to the bewilderment of contemporary architecture magazine readers. The entire essay then went on to give an explanation of the traditional Japanese “spatial composition”, demonstrated mostly on temple precincts, but also with with help of mandala patterns explaining the ancient symmetrical urban forms. Most of the material was historical, only on the last pages the focus turned to contemporary architecture. The issue actually largely drew from the special issue of the Japanese magazine *Kenchiku bunka* from 1963, edited by a team of architects including Teiji Ito and Arata Isozaki, dedicated to the character 間 (pronounced *ma*, *aida*, *ken*, *gen* or *kan*), and its relevance for understanding

⁴⁷¹ Günther Nitschke, MA – The Japanese Sense of Place, *Architectural Design* (March 1966): 116–156.

⁴⁷² Nitschke, MA, 156.

architecture⁴⁷³. This character is shown to have a rich tangle of meanings, some of which touch the very roots of architecture as such. This text shows itself very relevant in the discussion about the Western understanding of Japanese space (see chapter III.2., where we come back to it in more detail).

***Werk*, October 1967**

In 1967, another remarkable issue of the Swiss *Werk* came out. The author of the main thematic block, Peter Güller, claims that the issue is “not about Japan, but about problems of structure, observed on Japan.”⁴⁷⁴ Güller, a Swiss architect, actually made an exhibition two years earlier for the museum in Zurich, comparing the “rhythmic peculiarities” in Japanese architecture and music.⁴⁷⁵

The author wants to show the governing principles in Japanese arts and is therefore very abstracting and analytical – sometimes on the verge of comprehensibility, obscuring the by message by his dense language. In a several texts, Güller covers a broad range of subjects from urban planning over music to pottery. Structure is his guiding term, and so sets up several general “structures” valid across disciplines: composition; *Überstrahlung* (overshining/overcasting – pointing out a specific space e.g. by lighting, such as in a theatre stage, or the Japanese *tokonoma*); *Patinierung* (weathering), *Gleichformigkeit* (uniformity); hierarchy. They are quite abstract, of course, but Japan serves here as their materialization. These structural principles seemed too static, and so Güller adds more dynamic principles such as “partial fixation” and “relativization.” which react with the previous ones. Only from this reaction, gradually developed in history, come results which are specifically Japanese.⁴⁷⁶ For example, the basis of the load-bearing posts in Japanese houses is originally regular, but some posts have been moved away from the axis, first slightly, then more. On this and other examples from urban planning and music, Güller argues that Japanese architecture stands on rational foundations, which are, however, subsequently relativized (“*relativiert*”). This relativization is elevated to a creative principle in the Japanese teahouse, where it manifests in several ways: the seemingly random positioning of the window and door openings, variation of materials (several kinds of wood and their surface treatment), and discrepancy of the scales (*tatami* mats, same size as in a normal house, versus the windows and doors, as

⁴⁷³ Teiji Itoh, Arata Isozaki, Akira Tsuchida et al. (ed.), *Nihon no toshi kukan* (Japanese Urban Space). Special issue of *Kenchiku bunka*, 12 (1963).

⁴⁷⁴ *Werk* 6 / 1967 Struktur – Freiheit - Relativierung – Japan und Unsere Gestaltungsprobleme (Peter Güller – unsigned, his authorship only mentioned in text)

⁴⁷⁵ Relativierung in Japan. Rhythmische Eigenarten in der Architektur un Musik Japans. Kunstgewerbemuseum Zürich, 23. October – 21. November 1965.

⁴⁷⁶ *Werk* 10 / 1967, p. 326.

well as the generally small scale of the room.) In short, “the rational order and freely shaped forms overlay.”⁴⁷⁷ The result, however, is always harmonious in Japan.

⁴⁷⁷ “Rationale Ordnung und frei gestaltete Formen überlagern sich.” Peter Güller, Rhythmische und harmonische Eigenarten in der Architektur und der Musik Japans, *Werk*, 10 (1967): 335.

II.6.7. Japanese architecture exposed and criticised

Generally speaking, independent architectural criticism was always a problematic discipline, for architectural magazines are caught in the middle of various interests. Architects were (and are) often also authors, which does not create an entirely favourable environment for open criticising. Moreover, a building is hardly a fruit of one creative mind, but depends on many variables – contractors, changes of commissioner’s ideas, budget drops and other factors. To criticise architecture in foreign countries without being superficial is even harder. On the British islands the tradition of critical thinking has longer roots than, for instance, in central Europe; *Architectural Design*’s chief editor Monica Pidgeon however initially refused to publish criticism. This changed during the second half of the 1960s, when criticism sprung up in the short news at the beginning of the issues, as well as in longer articles.

Günther Nitschke’s text, titled *Japan’s Second Heroic Age – The Age of Barbarism?*, is a first attempt at an extensive, overt criticism of contemporary architectural development in Japan⁴⁷⁸. The author, however, tries not to aim it directly at the work of the “externals”, i.e. the architects whose work he presented in the same magazine just a few issues back, but at the more general conditions of architecture in Japan, calling for a “change of depth in understanding”. Nitschke’s attitude could be called phenomenological, and he also draws from the Japanese philosopher of “non-dualism,” Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945). Nitschke claims that “our world has destroyed its interior order. We can expect no remedy from a new social order or from any heroic structural orders which are of necessity no more than any clumsy reflections of them”.

First, Nitschke has to deflect the “jibe of most Japanese architects” that his criticism is a “naïve hankering of a traveller from the extroverted western culture, who has found that intellect and rationalism have contributed little to inner happiness and who has thus found great attraction in the mystic, introverted culture of old Japan.” His aim is to “discover what is indeed happening behind the façade of breath-taking architectural developments in Japan today.”⁴⁷⁹

The visual form Nitschke chose for his criticism is interesting for its didactic format. It consists of setting couples of photographs against each other, and commenting on the difference. The very first couple of photos, for instance, is dedicated to the treatment of rocks: “The *poetry* of the stone and sand garden of the Zen temple” in Ryōanji versus the “*realism* of the stone and water garden by Kenzō Tange in the Takamatsu prefectural offices”. Naturalness of stone placing stands here against the artificiality of the pose, the “uneasy verticality, balance versus

⁴⁷⁸ Günther Nitschke, *Japan’s Second Heroic Age – The Age of Barbarism?* *Architectural Design* (May 1965): 218–221.

⁴⁷⁹ Nitschke, *Japan’s Second Heroic Age*, 218.

unbalance.”⁴⁸⁰ Here, the difference more or less corresponds to Tange’s own interpretations, but further on Nitschke confronts, for instance the Katsura villa and Kikutake’s Marine City project. While the 17th Century residence is a symbol of integration of man and nature, the new project separates man from nature. That may lead to a new barbarism, Nitschke warns. Time and again, Nitschke’s interest in philosophy surfaces: “true freedom is to be found within and needs no towers in the air or plunges into the sea.”⁴⁸¹

In the end, he indirectly points to Tange, who denigrated as “decadent” the traditional Japanese concepts of *mono-no-aware* (“emotion of thing”), *suki*, *sabi*, and *furyo* (“floating with the wind”) of the Edo period (see chapter II.5.). Nitschke understands that for the new Japanese generation, these attitudes symbolize an “unwillingness to fight against destiny, against nature”, but he sees more negatives in the ideology of progress. Not unlike previous Western critics, Nitschke regrets that “sadly, [The Japanese] have accepted too eagerly the science and technology of the West and have embraced with it the affirmative, aggressive attitude to nature. They have perhaps moved from one extreme to another. They have forgotten the teachings of their old masters.” He concludes that “any single-minded development is – though it may bring momentum – a sign of barbarism.”⁴⁸²

Notwithstanding, the same issue of *Architectural Design* continues with presentation of Junzō Sakakura, Kunio Maekawa and, as if nothing had just been written, Kenzō Tange with his Yoyogi Olympic stadiums – published for the 3rd time within a short period in *Architectural Design*.

Negative critical turn

If we want to follow the changes in the representation of Japanese architecture, it is good to think about the changing context in which it appeared in the changing media. These changes can be seen at first sight when leafing through magazines such as *Architectural Design*, especially in the second half of the 1960s. Visually, colour becomes still more common, first as only one added colour to some pages. Utopian projects of radical groups such as Archigram fill its pages, there are more temporary structures, mobile architecture, inflatables. The writing addresses a broader scope of issues and is more daring and critical and less technical.

Japanese architecture, as we already saw, became a staple not just in frequent articles, but also in the short news, usually taken from other magazines and published with the staff’s commentary, which mention a Japanese project in almost every issue. With its emancipation,

⁴⁸⁰ Nitschke, *Japan's Second Heroic Age*, 218–219.

⁴⁸¹ Nitschke, *Japan's Second Heroic Age*, 219.

⁴⁸² Nitschke, *Japan's Second Heroic Age*, 221.

Japanese architecture lost the protective veil of strangeness, that previously made any criticism look like a potential cultural misunderstanding. Criticism became a commonplace practice even in these brief, unsigned texts, many of them probably written by Nitschke. We can illustrate this shift from one pole to another within a few years with two examples. The first one, a commentary on the city hall in Kure by Junzō Sakakura from 1962, is a positive criticism bolstered by a generally positive judgement of Modern Japanese architecture:

“It is hard to understand the inexhaustible capacity that the Japanese apparently possess for building one magnificent city hall after another, each subsequent hall being an architectural tour de force which, when complete, is destined to become the symbol of an ideal twentieth-century environment for yet another largely wooden Japanese city. Japanese architecture is, in any case, as intrinsically preoccupied with abstract ideal geometries as is the architecture of Mies or Louis Kahn. Fortunately for the Japanese, however, they have inherited a profound tradition of ‘freedom’ residing comfortably within the ‘ideal’ and this tradition, in conjunction with handsome space standards, appears to aid them considerably in achieving such monuments as this hall and auditorium by Sakakura.”⁴⁸³ In 1969, another city hall, one in Hagi, received a smashing verdict. Its author was Kiyonori Kikutake, the architect, earlier admired for his Ocean City project (1959), and Mova Block (1958): “*The dullness of the package that Kiyonori Kikutake and Associates have designed for Hagi City Hall is almost pretentious in its evasiveness. The crash and interplay of forms is pretentious in its assertiveness – and no doubt highly irritating. Yet it is the outcome not of one man’s perversity, but of the effort of no less than three teams of architects.*”⁴⁸⁴

On a more general level, the favour started turning against Japanese architecture, especially as represented by the Metabolists. As we just saw, the tone turned from enthusiasm in the beginning of the 1960s towards a notable scepticism in the second half of the decade. In January 1967, two texts, one named *Afflatus or inflatus?* (“Inspired, or inflated” in Latin), and a brief account on the “School of Tange”, signed by Nitschke, condemns their architecture practically wholesale:

“And what of the school of Tange? No doubt the Metabolists are pursuing their private (and universal) fantasies and attempting to make them real. (...) Y. Hayashi’s house in Seijogiakoen-mae, Tokyo, is a banal, scaleless box, while A. Isozaki has permitted himself a display of concrete sculptural form in Oita library of which he will not, one hopes, one day be proud.”⁴⁸⁵

While this was a rather short comment, this criticism was soon substantially expanded, in a text in the April 1967 issue called *Whatever happened to the Metabolists?* It was a summary by Mike Jérôme of another long text by Nitschke written originally in German. Three years

⁴⁸³ —, In: *Architectural Design*, October 1962.

⁴⁸⁴ —, In: *Architectural Design*, May 1969, p. 411.

⁴⁸⁵ Günther Nitschke, School of Tange, *Architectural Design* (January 1967): 3.

after AD has presented the architects of the group at length, they did not seem to fulfil the expectations, neither as a movement nor with their individual projects: "...most of them are in practices of their own, building individual buildings of questionable merit, and producing few, if any, of the Mega-Urban ideas one associates with the movement. The group has not 'metabolized' in the way one hoped that they might."⁴⁸⁶ The text goes on to explain not just why the movement's results are a failure, but also the wrongs of their thinking.

"In fact many of their projects published in 1964 were hair-raisingly inappropriate, and not at all what one felt understood by metabolism; but in their way these exuberant excesses were both encouraging and liberating". But the latest news show "a plethora of muddled self-deception – self-deception, because after three years the structures still bear no resemblance to the group's better ideas, and tend to be the real reason of many of the worst."

Flexibility, which was often ascribed to traditional Japanese architecture, was a self-proclaimed quality of the the Metabolist buildings which they derived from the dynamics of the contemporary city. But this was a "hypocrisy" – "[their buildings] do not, or suggest, or symbolize change."⁴⁸⁷

On the following pages of the issue, the Metabolist projects are presented once again, together with quotes by their architects, this time, accompanied, however, by caustic comments. Criticism is taken on the verge of denunciation here. The already notorious Plan for Tokyo by Tange is the first to receive such a blast. One of its deficiencies, already politely mentioned by Peter Smithson in 1963, is the impossibility to avoid the central axis of the city when moving among any two point in the city, – essentially a problem of traffic. The same idea was now told in a sharper way: "Commuting made glorious, and very nearly sacred, by this doyen of Japanese modern architecture. When stretching the centre is the only way left, which central urban interest is going to be persuaded to pay to have its existing centre interests devaluated? Discounting earthquake or tidal catastrophe, readers are invited to speculate on the capacity to change."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Mark Jérôme, *Whatever Happened to the Metabolists?* *Architectural Design* (April 1967): 208.

⁴⁸⁷ The base of the critique is essentially a discrepancy of ideas and practice. Metabolists, in Nitschke/Jérôme's view, attempted to "define the undefinable". They tried to give an alluring shape to a vision, but they approached the problem with the usual means of architects, that is, by pre-defined shapes. But "we must find new methods of buildings rather than new shapes. Shape is against mobility, against individual participations in city decisions – unless it is a changing shape." As humankind has no such means yet, the only change that the Metabolists were able to provide was a planned demolition, "the crudest and most brutal change that man was ever able to invent." The example of the Ise sanctuary and its perpetual destruction, used often by the Japanese architects, apparently failed to convince the Western critic. — p. 208.

⁴⁸⁸ *Architectural Design*, May 1967, p. 209.

Urban space was now becoming a central question when dealing with Japan. Fumihiko Maki, a Harvard graduate, differed from his fellow Metabolist colleagues in the questions he asked and the ways in which he worked. He was well aware of this decisive cultural difference, and tried to open the subject not from the perspective usual for architects, but rather from the perspective of perception. He is briefly quoted: “The chaos in our cities is not due to lack of structure, but to the difficulty of perceiving it. The problem is not one of restructuring but of making understanding easier.” Two projects by Maki are shown, but his ideas, rather than provoking a discussion, are a pretext for sarcasm: “It could possibly be *all* in the mind you know! (...) F. Maki makes long lyrical explanations on these structures, which suggests that quite a lot *is* in the mind.”⁴⁸⁹

Motives for the critique

Reasons for criticising contemporary Japanese architecture were several. First, there is the question of projection of ideas on the Westerners. The contemporary Japanese architects first amazed the architecture world, but they did it in a way that largely diverged from the values connected with traditional Japan, and even from the projections of Japan’s immediate future – the latter should have grown from the former.

Already since Bruno Taut, the contrast between “old and new Japan”, but also their parallel coexistence has been stated. And from the beginning, the new was seen as a threat to the old. The rapid development of the 1960s let these differences escalate, often betraying a good deal of disappointment. Nitschke’s text about New Barbarism that we mentioned above⁴⁹⁰ is a good example of putting the “new” in an unfavourable contrast to the “old”. For many Westerners, the idea about the Japanese past also determined their projections of what the Japanese future should be like, and they were then disenchanted to see that contemporary Japanese architecture was taking a different path. Reyner Banham named this projection, in 1985, a “fictitious future of Japanese architecture”:

“The wish (...) was that the Japanese modern would not develop in the same way as that of the West but would remain a kind of pure and uncompromised example of what Western modern architecture ought to be like in a perfect world, an exotic version of the work of Mies van der Rohe: spare, slender, light, and open. The wish was so powerful that it seemed to be treated almost as a fact, a prediction of how the future of modern architecture must inevitably develop.

We see now all too clearly that the wish was a self-deception and the prediction false, yet it deserves more than passing attention because it accounts – in part – for the sense of persistent strangeness that pervades Western understandings (and misunderstandings) of what has happened in Japanese modern,

⁴⁸⁹ *Architectural Design*, May 1967, p. 212.

⁴⁹⁰ Nitschke, Japan’s Second Heroic Age, 218–221.

*and because it contained elements of genuine perception of everything but the future.*⁴⁹¹

With an overstatement typical for Banham, this does sound like one plausible explanation of a lot what we could see in the 1960s magazines.

Nevertheless, it is not the only explanation. Motives for criticising the Metabolist movement were also real, anchored in comparing their own proclamations with reality. On the urban level, the growing crevice between the projections, no matter if official or utopian, and the actual capacity of authorities to make positive changes in the built environment was real. The corrupt emerging system of intertwined politics, business and building industry was quickly changing Japan into a vast, unappealing urban sprawl⁴⁹². The experience of chaos and dystopia – even if defamed just by the Westerners – was, to some degree, genuine. And it as we saw with Rudofsky, the chaos and lack of direct understanding could be even indulged. All these aspects of Japanese culture surfaced in the Osaka Expo in 1970, in a concentrated way.

⁴⁹¹ Banham, *Japonization of World Architecture*, 16-17.

⁴⁹² See Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan, 1853–1964* (2003)

II.6.7. The Osaka Expo: Japan as a symbol of the Future

June 1970 – Martin Pawley: Architecture versus the Movies or Form versus Content, Expo ABZ

The year 1970 brought, in retrospective, the end in many senses: Japanese economy stopped its searing growth of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet It also brought a culmination in form of another big event: the Expo in Osaka. The exhibition's master plan team was conceived by Kenzō Tange, who invited 12 other architects, mostly his disciples and former collaborators to the team. This was of course a unique occasion for Japanese architecture. Members of the Metabolist group worked together, or at least in the same location, so that their designs could be seen and compared in one place for the first time. Tange himself was responsible for the large Festival Plaza, covered by a large roof, pierced by the monstrous sculpture by Tarō Okamoto. The team included Arata Isozaki, who hated the sculpture, "looking like a giant phallus, penetrating the soft membrane of the roof."⁴⁹³ Isozaki himself designed two 20-meter tall robots which moved around the main Festival Plaza and could emit smoking, control lighting and set up the stage for daily shows such as fashion shows and concerts⁴⁹⁴. Kiyonori Kikutake built the *Landmark Tower*, a stub with a couple of cells on it, and Kishō Kurokawa designed several buildings, such as the Takara "Beautilion" designed together with Kenji Ekuan, a structure suggesting a possibly infinite growth by its additive components. In general, the exhibition was a good terrain for experiments, although the temporary character of the event did not allow to test the reality of the actual long-term life of the buildings, that is, to test whether and how they are actually able to "metabolise" in time. Due to budget cuts, however, these experiments were finally mostly under a corporate direction.

Architectural Design covered the Expo extensively in the entire June 1970 issue, gathering material from several correspondents and commentators. Two specials were penned by a then young critic, an AA School graduate, Martin Pawley (1938–2008), this report from Japan being his first bigger assignment for *Architectural Design*⁴⁹⁵. An article called *Architecture*

⁴⁹³ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 56.

⁴⁹⁴ Rem Koolhaas – Hans Ulrich Obrist: *Project Japan. Metabolism Talks*. Köln: Taschen, 2011, p. 522.

⁴⁹⁵ Martin Pawley, Architecture versus the Movies or Form versus Content, *Architectural Design* (May 1969): 411; Peter Murray, 'Martin Pawley: Radical, prescient architecture critic', *The Independent*, 11 April 2008. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/martin-pawley-radical-prescient-architecture-critic-808182.html>, retrieved 3. 2. 2018.

versus the Movies or Form versus Content introduced the exhibition. Pawleys's choice of topics was broad and from the excessive number of pavilions, he dealt with most of them, and also chose 9 most interesting pavilions. None of the 78 national pavilions qualified for his selection, "for not only are they the most reactionary in display terms, but the conflict between formal conception and formal meaning is almost never resolved except in terms of subordinating the latter to the former."⁴⁹⁶ He sorted the choice by adjectives, from the most magnificent, the most surprising, to the most cumbersome, the most disappoint, etc. Another text titled *ABZ of Expo* was a collection of short text, a quasi-encyclopaedia of Japan at this peculiar time. Each letter of the alphabet was used once, for instance, I for inflatables, N for noise, or Y for yesterday.

Visually, the generally hip graphic design of AD in these years actively corroborated the idea of the tumultuous event, working with collage, and black-and white photographs printed over with bright colours. To introduce the essentially cinematic character of the Expo, the front page of *Architecture versus the Movies* section used a poster of the Japanese film *Gamera vs Jiger*⁴⁹⁷ – the sixth film in a *Gamera* series, where the main hero is a giant, sabre-toothed turtle that can spit fire and fly with what looks like propulsion-jets. In this feature, partly filmed on the actual grounds of the Expo before its completion, *Gamera* comes to fight a triceratops-like monster that threatens to destroy the Expo site, attracted by an ancient statue exhibited here. An introduction to the Expo for children is included, and in the end, the exhibition is saved, including the tallest, dangerously projecting Soviet pavilion topped with hammer and sickle. In the section called *Expo ABZ*, the entry called "Yesterday", mentioning the relationship of the Japanese to their recent past, showed a row of blue-coloured Expo flowers (pavilion hostesses), lined up in their matching outfits, against a background of an orange nuclear mushroom cloud.⁴⁹⁸

International exhibitions were always, in a way, both standing outside of their place and time, and a concentrate of them. It is, however, still justified to ask how the Expo '70 contributed to the perception of Japan in the West, not only because beyond the obvious fact that it took place in Japan and the master plan was made by Japanese architects. This was the first international exhibition in Asia, and the way it was presented was much more as a Japanese event than the Expo 58 as a Belgian, or the Expo '67 as a Canadian event.

⁴⁹⁶ — p. 296.

⁴⁹⁷ *Gamera tai Daimajū Jigā* ガメラ対大魔獣ジャイガ, dir. Noriaki Yuasa, Japan, 1970. This page in the AD (*Architectural Design* 6-7/1970, p. 288), refers to it as Monsters; the film is also known in English as *Gamera vs. Monster X*, *Monsters Invade Expo '70*, *War of the Monsters*. (Another film poster is used on the same page, not referenced: *Tomei kenshi* 透明剣士 *The Invisible Swordsman*, dir. Yoshiyuki Kuroda, 1970)

⁴⁹⁸ —, *Architectural Design* 6-7/1970, 284.

About this time, Japan sealed its image as a country where the future is already happening. The exhibition area was reached by a brand new elevated monorail train line, large robots roamed the festival plaza, the Sanyo pavilion demonstrated an ultrasonic bath. Two “time capsules,”

“special containers from stainless steel with a capacity of 50 000 cubic centimetres and a weight of 1.6 tons”, were first exhibited in the Matsushita pavilion and then buried after the end of the exhibition in the Osaka park: One was “to be open in the year 6970, the other in 2000 and thereafter in 100-year intervals. The contents of the capsules – which are identical – was decided by a special committee after seeking the opinion of ‘632 distinguished people from 36 nations’. In the end 2068 separate items were selected in Three basic categories of Natural Science, Sociology and Art and in the form of either articles or records. The items include four lecture scrolls of contemporary Japanese life, ‘a science report for the people of the future,’ a general atlas to pinpoint Japan’s position in the world, a capsule collection of literature, and a film containing ‘facial expressions of contemporary people.’ The containers themselves are to be exhausted and filled with argon gas before internment in order to increase the resistance of the contents to ageing.”⁴⁹⁹

Japanese technology and electronics, at this time, surpassed an image of a well-made imitation of the Western product. That had an immediate impact both on the architecture of the exhibition, as well as on Japanese architecture of the following years. The national pavilions were mostly marginalized (deemed “reactionary” in Pawley’s words), and the main attention of both the visitors and critics was aimed at the pavilions of Japanese electronics companies like Fuji, Hitachi, or Ricoh. The pavilions were inflatable, hovering, full of audio-visual shows, and attracted the most visitors. As Pawley wrote, the overall impression was that “movies” take over the role of architecture. Pawley elaborates on the dominance of the media, namely the audio-visual media, over architecture. The preponderance of the pavilions built only to host various multi-media shows makes him conclude that “the proliferation of multi-media displays, robot experiments and synchronous sensory stimulation in general – which even a cursory comparison with Montreal’s Expo ’67 makes evident – has had an astonishing effect upon the form and meaning of the pavilions constructed to house such magic. Expo ’70 reveals the obsolescence of daring architectural design in a way which – until the development of media reached its present level – would have been impossible.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Time Capsule – ABZ Expo, ... p. 282.

⁵⁰⁰ Pawley, Architecture and the movies, 289.

Pawley then addressed the increasing role of image in architecture, replacing construction with perception:

“The problem posed by Expo ’70 is this. If the environment of the future is to be created according to the principles governing perception rather than those of construction, if the exhausting tramp over acres of concrete is to be avoided; if the monster space frame or geodesic dome is soon to master acres of previously open exhibition or townscape; the design of that environment, with its accompanying software, is going to become the de facto province of systems and media men, electronics and computer experts, film directors and editors, photographers and yes, shopfitters. Architects who cannot manipulate sound and projection systems and their associated optics and electronics will be about as much use as demonologists in a cancer research hospital.”⁵⁰¹

To illuminate the predominance of media on the Osaka Expo, Pawley sums up briefly the history of audio-visual exhibitions ⁵⁰². He briefly recalls the historical development of movies, and then focusses specifically on multi-media projection in international exhibitions. These were not exactly new, having already entered the scene with the Philips pavilion by Le Corbusier and Edgar Varèse in Brussels from 1958, and in Montreal in 1967. In the Japanese exhibition, however, this attitude proliferated so much that it stopped being just a distraction, or even the main attraction, but posed serious questions about the future of architecture.

The facts that the Osaka Expo marked an end of the World exhibitions for some time, as well as the the end of the Metabolist movement as a group have some historical significance. For us, however, the questions and doubts that the event raised seem to be more important. The motto of the Osaka Expo was *Progress and Harmony of the Humankind*. It definitely conveyed an idea of the progress, even though the notion of progress was not as unequivocal as only a few years before. As for harmony, the exhibition apparently failed, causing a certain malaise instead. The event, inducing feelings of surfeit and futility, mainly raised questions about the future of built environment, and some of these questions very well anticipated what was to come. Wasn’t architecture really to become “a province of systems and media men, electronics and computer experts, film directors and editors, photographers and shopfitters,” as Pawley wrote while considering what he saw in Osaka?

⁵⁰¹ Pawley, Martin: The Image Considered as a Structural System, In: *Architectural Design* June 1970, p. 292.

⁵⁰² Pawley, Martin: The Movies: How They got that way, In: *Architectural Design* June 1970, p. 291.

II.6.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have viewed three main trends that characterised the 1960s image of Japan in the architectural discourse. After its rapid emancipation around 1960, contemporary Japanese architecture was quickly given unprecedented space and attention: e.g. Peter and Alison Smithson, *The Rebirth of Japanese Architecture* (1961). This emancipation entailed a critical attention. Focussing on the development and instruments of this criticism in architectural magazines – as we saw on the case of *Architectural Design* – we could see how the initial reluctance to publish criticism gave way to an increasing courage in making negative judgements (Peter Smithson: *Reflections on Kenzo Tange's Tokyo Bay plan* (1964); Günther Nitschke: *Japan's Second Heroic Age – The Age of Barbarism?* – (1965), *Afflatus or Inflatus*, – (1967). Another important trend was a shift of attention towards urban issues, which became more palpable with Japan's rapid development, and became more exposed thanks to the increased number of foreign visitors – including architect – during events like the World Design conference (1960), the Tokyo Olympics (1964), and the Expo in Osaka (1970). Experiencing the urban city proved to be chaotic and confusing (Nitschke: *Olympic planning vs. Dream Planning* (1964), Jeremy Dodd – *Japanese Architecture Today* (1965), Václav Hilský (1967, see chapter II.3.). Finally, we have seen a tendency to look for underlying cultural tendencies as more or less hidden generators of spatial order, often revisiting the theme of tradition (Nitschke: *MA – Place-making in Japanese architecture* (1966), Peter Güller in *Werk* (1967)).

The three trends have of course a lot in common, especially if we look for their deeper motives, they connect on either side: The critical exposure of contemporary Japanese architecture came out from the chaotic feelings Western visitors got when experiencing Japanese urban space. The chaotic urban space, in its turn, served as an incentive to look for order elsewhere, namely in the underlying forces and principles.

We gave a closer look at the critical texts on contemporary Japanese architecture to show two things: How a critical reflection of Japanese architecture emerged and evolved, and what means were used in this criticism. We saw two essentially critical instruments: a comparison with the Japanese tradition, and the confrontation of the architects' vision with the experienced reality. Looking for the roots of this criticism background, we found both some possibly disappointed hopes resulting from Western projection, as well as a relatively well-founded confrontation of the Japanese dreams and reality.

Moreover, the reactions to the experience of chaos could not only be dissenting, but also productive, as we saw in the case of Bernard Rudofsky, who was able to transform the difficulty of understanding the Japanese cultural codes as a humorous, revelatory, and even revelatory experience. Another answer to the chaos was the quest for the underlying forces that shape Japan, as we saw in Nitschke's texts, and in Peter Güller's issue of *Werk*. All their imperfections notwithstanding, we can say that these were ultimately tendencies that fostered an interest in the "otherness" of Japan, rather than in simply looking for parallels with Western modernity, or models for it.

All this happened against a background of the changing general atmosphere of the 1960s. The general attention of the late 1960s steered towards social issues and environmental threats, and Modernist concepts which believed in answering all these problems with formal design solutions were rapidly losing ground. These tendencies intensified around the end of the decade, and profoundly changed the discipline of architecture.

In the light of the trends we have observed during the 1960s, the Osaka Expo in 1970 was a culmination, and a turning point. The event was a concentrate of contemporary Japanese architecture, and a harbinger of what was to come. If traditional Japanese often symbolized harmony with its inner order, or connection with natural environment In an extreme way, it materialized the already widespread impression that travelling to Japan offers a glimpse of what the world will become in the future. Despite its artificial and temporary character, the exhibition provoked thoughts about the future – not just about the future of exhibitions, or Japan, but of built environment as such, and civilization in general. As we could see in the the rich coverage in *Architectural Design*.

II.7. JAPANESE INSPIRATION VERSUS LE CORBUSIER AND LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE

II.7.1. Introduction

This chapter turns the point of view: Until now we have been reading the actors of architectural discourse on Japan, people who actively dealt with Japan in writing. Here we focus on two authors who figure in this relationship differently. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) and Le Corbusier (1887-1965) said almost nothing about Japan themselves, and yet they figure in the history of the relationship between Western modern architecture and Japan in quite an important way. This relationship, which none of them sought actively, can be seen as an inner affinity, or as a projection made by others – the image of Japanese architecture has been projected onto their work, or vice versa.

As we know well from every history of modern architecture, both Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe were important personae of the architectural world and enjoyed a relatively long period of their individual glory. Their relationship to Japan has been discussed mainly in their late years, especially after World War II. It is hardly a surprise that this period – from 1945 to 1970 – overlaps with the peak of their fame, as well as with the heyday of Western architectures' interest in Japanese tradition.

II.7.2. Le Corbusier

The work of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known mostly under his moniker Le Corbusier, has become almost a synonym of what we call Modern architecture. If one examines the relationship of modern architecture and Japan, it is almost unavoidable to ask about Le Corbusier. Looking for his relationship to Japan, his contemporaries and later scholars have followed three different ways. The first one is to look for analogies between traditional Japanese principles and Le Corbusier's work, the second follows the contacts between the architect and Japan through his collaborators, and the third focuses on his stay in Japan connected to his only project for Japan – The Tokyo Museum of Western Art.

Le Corbusier in Japan

While Le Corbusier's own remarks on Japan are rare, they exist. He visited Japan in 1955 – a year after Walter Gropius – to discuss the Japanese government's commission to design the National Museum of Western art in Tokyo. Like Gropius, he visited Nara and Kyoto and spent some time at the Katsura villa. Like everywhere on his travels, Le Corbusier made sketches in a notebook (Carnet J37 in Le Corbusier archive)⁵⁰³. One page of these notes is dedicated to Katsura: he sketched two views of the garden, noting briefly the moss, and one of the bridges formed by one piece of stone.

He also made a drawing of the interior of one of the rooms in the palace, one with a small floor area of four floor mats (*tatami*), he noted their sizes and numbered them. He was obviously surprised by the frugality of these imperial abodes: “The princess is modest,” noted he – not knowing the room was never used by a “princess.” According to Arata Isozaki, however, Le Corbusier was overall not too impressed by the design of the interiors, commenting they have “too many lines, making the architecture busy.”⁵⁰⁴ No more public reactions to Japanese architecture followed in Le Corbusier's utterings after his visit – in contrast to Walter Gropius (see chapter II.3.). We may understand how distant Katsura is to anything from the heavy plasticity that Le Corbusier was occupied with at the time. Apparently, Le Corbusier was not much interested in Japan, in contrast to many of his peers. We could simply close this chapter with this, but there are other connecting aspects which are interesting to follow. Among the plethora of publications on the architect, one is

⁵⁰³ This information draws from Co, Francesco del, *La princesse est modeste*, in Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 388.

⁵⁰⁴ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 45. Isozaki, however, does not provide a source of this comment.

particularly interesting for us: the acts from a symposium on Le Corbusier and Japan held in 1997 has been published in a French version⁵⁰⁵. Most of the contributions turn around Le Corbusier's impact on Japan.

Analogies and affinities

In the introduction of this dissertation, we have used Le Corbusier's five points of architecture as the first example of the principles of Modern architecture, a programme that Le Corbusier set down in his articles in his magazine *L'esprit nouveau*⁵⁰⁶: Building on stilts (*pilotis*), open plan, free façade, horizontal windows, and the roof garden. We have stated that with the exception of the roof garden, all these points can find their corresponding features in traditional Japan. It was, nonetheless, never Le Corbusier himself who remarked on this closeness, but others, often following his model, or laying down similar points that emphasized the similarity between modern architecture and Japan⁵⁰⁷.

Another possible analogy with Japan is the treatment of landscape in Le Corbusier's houses. When one looks at Le Corbusier's projects from his early period, a salient feature is the meticulously framed opening towards the landscape – as in villa Savoye's (1928–31) upper floor with its horizontal windows. This framing, as Beatriz Colomina noted, has a lot to do with Le Corbusier's obsession with views and seeing. In his didactic sketches, a lone eye often floats in the space. While designing a house, he always carefully selected the desirable views and framed them by windows, and blocked the rest by walls. This way in which he “domesticated” the views⁵⁰⁸ gives an unexpected twist to his notorious phrase that “house is a machine for living”: “If the window is a lens, the house itself is a camera pointed at nature.”⁵⁰⁹ The interest in bringing views into the house includes more distant landscapes, such as in the case of the Beistegui apartment in Paris (1929–31). Here, a substantial part of the excellent view of Paris is blocked by a deliberately high wall, creating a surreal-like, cut-off line of Paris landmarks for the viewer, usually the visitor of the flat. In another side of the

⁵⁰⁵ Gérard Monnier (ed.), *Le Corbusier et le Japon* (Paris 2007).

⁵⁰⁶ Later published in Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris 1923).

⁵⁰⁷ Wells Coates for instance, whose deep interest in coincidence of the Japanese and modern architectural principles has been studied by Anna Basham in her unpublished work: Anna Basham, *From Victorian to Modernist: the changing perceptions of Japanese architecture encapsulated in Wells Coates' Japonisme dovetailing East and West*, London 2007. See also Anna Basham, ‘At the crossroads of Modernism and Japonisme: Wells Coates and the British Modern Movement’ (paper presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of SAH, Pittsburgh PA).

⁵⁰⁸ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity Architecture and Mass Media* (MIT Press, 1996), 315.

⁵⁰⁹ Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Architectural Press), 125.

same roof terrace, a fence of bushes plays a similar role. Later, at the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille, a similar strategy pulls the mountains on the horizon into the visual field surrounding the habitable roof terrace. This perceptual leap from the first plan straight to the background plan of the horizon, blocking out the immediate surroundings, has its counterpart in the Japanese garden tradition. “Borrowed landscape”, *shakkei* 借景 is an analogous method used to create an imitation of nature even in a small Japanese garden, which brings the mountains on the horizon – a common thing in the Japanese landscape – into the visual field of the garden. The mountains thus become part of the garden in a perceptual way.

Another affinity with Japan has been found in Le Corbusier’s less famous and more modest projects. His weekend house near Paris (*maison de week-end*) from 1935 is so light and transparent that Charlotte Perriand chose it to demonstrate the common points with Japanese tradition (see chapter II.3.). Then there is his hut, *cabanon* at Requebrune-Cap-Martin, built near the seaside in 1951–1952 as a summer retreat for the architect and his wife. Because of its modest dimensions (only 3,66 by 3,66 m), construction of wood, and also its purpose (a reclusive space in nature), it has been compared to a Japanese tea pavilion. Le Corbusier used his modular system, the so called *Modulor*, and the square floor plan thus recalls a traditional tearoom in the size of four-and-a-half *tatami* (*yojohan* 四畳半).⁵¹⁰

Modulor and tatami

Modulor, Corbusier’s own attempt to introduce standardization, deriving it from the measure of the human body, drew a great attention in Japan, especially after it had been applied on the Museum of Western art in Tokyo⁵¹¹. Is *Modulor* close to the Japanese *tatami* one way or another? It is certain that both *tatami* and *Modulor* are based on a module. A closer look, however, reveals more differences. The roots of Le Corbusier’s endeavour are clearly in the tradition of Renaissance and enlightenment, (see Chapter III.1.) and we can calmly dismiss the question of “influence” of Japan on Le Corbusier. The scholars who have studied the meaning of *tatami*⁵¹², and the general terms of modularity in Japan⁵¹³ have rather point out the differences than similarities. They stress especially the impossibility to

⁵¹⁰ Monnier (ed.), *Le Corbusier et le Japon*.

⁵¹¹ Fujiki Tadayoshi, The Modular in the National Museum of Western Art, *Japan Architect* (August 1959): 48.

⁵¹² Augustin Berque, L'éco-symbole de *tatami*, in *Du geste à la cité* (Paris 1993), 71-76. Augustin Berque develops here the « eco-symbolism » of the *tatami*.

⁵¹³ Mizuki Cruz-Saito, Masatsugu Nishida, and Philippe Bonnin, Le *tatami* et la spatialité japonaise, *Ebisu*, 38 (2007): 55-82.

confuse the two conceptions in detail⁵¹⁴ reminding us of an important fact: Le Corbusier's goal as he proposed it in the Modulor is to create a new system of measure capable of ending the disorder reigning in the world's industrial production. On the contrary, tatami resists industrialisation, as Heinrich Engel pointed out⁵¹⁵.

Museum of Western Art in Tokyo

Nearing the age of seventy, Le Corbusier was commissioned for his first project in East Asia, the National museum of Western Art in Tokyo. Facing the task of representing western art in Japan, the French investors of the building insisted on giving the project to a living symbol of Modern France (despite his Swiss origin). The museum opened in March 1959, celebrating the renewal of the diplomatic contact between France and Japan. Although the Master has hardly sought contact with Japanese architects, he never prevented them from coming to him. At this time, two major Modern architects in Japan were Kunio Maekawa and Junzō Sakakura, both once apprentices working in Le Corbusier's studio. A third architect, Takamasa Yoshizaka (1917–1981), spent the years 1950-53 in Paris becoming interested in the sculptural possibilities of the Brutalist style that Le Corbusier developed after the World War II. All three Japanese came to learn from Le Corbusier in the first place, and subsequently adapted his principles to the Japanese conditions in their own work. They were probably not in a position to influence Le Corbusier or even interested in doing so. Yet now, in the late 1950s, all three met as architects responsible for the construction of the museum, drawing most of the details.

The Western art museum comes out from on an idea which Le Corbusier conceived already thirty years earlier, a “musée en croissance infinie” (an infinitely growing museum) based on what can be simply described as a square spiral. It is a principle allowing for a potentially infinite growth, coiling the spiral further on the outer side. This possibility is of course limited by the site restriction: when Kunio Maekawa designed an annexe to the building twenty years later, he did not take on the pattern, but added another box-like wing to the museum.

The early period of Le Corbusier's work shows a tendency towards the notorious “lightness” and “transparency,” qualities so often mentioned in connection to Japan. In his later work however, it is easy to find more traits opposed to Japanese tradition, such as forming his buildings from massive volumes of raw concrete, or composing them from sculptural elements, as well as his use of bright colours. As a young man, Le Corbusier travelled around

⁵¹⁴ « Le tatami se situe ainsi loin du monde de Neufert, vantant les mérites de la normalisation, loin aussi du modulator abstrait et universel de Le Corbusier. » Cruz-Saito et al, *Le tatami et la spatialité japonaise*, 56.

⁵¹⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House. A Tradition for Contemporary Architecture*.

Turkey and the Arab countries and brought plenty of long-lasting inspiration from there. By the time he could meet Japanese building live, he was already an elderly man, foremost an architect with an office working on large projects like the city of Chandigarh. Le Corbusier's view of architecture as *the masterly, correct and magnificent interplay of masses brought together in light*⁵¹⁶ could make little use of the *praise of shadows* of the Japanese house, to use Jun'inchirō Tanizaki's words⁵¹⁷.

In summary, we can say that Le Corbusier's relationship to Japan is one of a respectful passing. Despite all the analogies, Le Corbusier showed little attention to the traditional Japanese building, and even less traces of direct inspiration. The more interesting are the indirect connections created by his work or others around him. The most important one by far was his collaborator between 1927 and 1937, Charlotte Perriand, to whom we dedicated an entire section (see Chapter II.3.). Her rich experience with Japan, however, began only after she left her job in Le Corbusier's studio.

⁵¹⁶ “*le jeu, savant, correct et magnifique des volumes sous la lumière*” – see Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris, 1923).

⁵¹⁷ Jun'inchirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New York 1977) (The original text, *In'ei Raisan* 陰翳礼讃 has been published in Japanese in 1933).

II.7.3. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

Also in the case of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, “Japanese” aspects have been recognized. Yet to begin with cold facts, Mies never visited Japan, and he never said anything particular about it. Even if we consider his notoriously taciturn nature, this silence can be surprising. His works, epitomes of free plan and transparency, have become symbols of the minimalist tendency in architecture, materialized in buildings with such diverse functions as the Farnsworth House (1945–1951), Seagram Building (finished 1958) or the National Gallery in Berlin (1965–1968).

Simplicity and restraint, attention to material were admired in the works of Mies work, as well as in Japan. A stone carver’s son with an interest in philosophy, Mies van der Rohe has never been a big speaker or writer. After he moved to the United States in 1938, he was constrained in expression by his non-native English, and often limited his utterances to short mottos. Apparent simplicity of his buildings corresponded to simplicity of his words. His most famous quote, “less is more”, inspires and provokes many. According to Augustin Berque, the rhetoric of this statement reveals a “meeting of ideas” in Japan and the modern West.⁵¹⁸ This is an interesting idea, yet hardly enough to build on.

Others embarked on connecting Mies and Japan already during the architect’s life. Although he never intervened, it turned out to be a risky terrain of conflicting opinions. A case of two authors may be anecdotic, but is very illustrative. Both Arthur Drexler and Werner Blaser indicated a connection between Mies and Japan in their respective publications incidentally in the same year, 1955. The reactions were critical in both cases, but for opposite reasons. The first one to mention this was perhaps. In his *Architecture of Japan*, a book that accompanied the 1954 exhibition house in the garden of MoMA, Drexler’s main interest is the traditional architecture in Japan. Close to the end, Drexler tentatively suggests that Mies had had “relatively little influence in Japan”⁵¹⁹, the reason being a “resemblance, perhaps superficial,” of his work and the Japanese tradition, “ignored” in modern Japan according to Blaser. In other words, the work of Mies was way too similar to Japanese tradition for the architects from this country find it interesting. Looking at some Japanese architecture of the time, such as Junzō Sakakura’s Art Museum in Kamakura (1951), one could argue against this. Though in his review of the book, Philip Thiel was critical for a different reason: By “failing to comprehend the absolute identity of spirit and significance of the symbolical structural clarity, and the feeling for material, between the Japanese traditional work and Mies’ work, the

⁵¹⁸ « En proclamant que ‘less is more’, Mies van der Rohe n’avait pas conscience d’exprimer rien d’autre que le vieux principe de la *litote* – l’incomplétude, la retenue et l’omission volontaire – qui gouverne traditionnellement l’esthétique japonaise... Effectivement, la logique du *less is more*, qui a transformé notre environnement bâti, n’a rien d’un emprunt : c’est le propre de la configuration émergente qui s’est formée, en termes d’architecture, à la rencontre de l’Europe moderne et du Japon. » In Augustin Berque, *Du geste à la cité*, 225.

⁵¹⁹ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 253

author again suggests the superficiality of his understanding.”⁵²⁰ But Thiel himself did not develop his words about the “absolute unity of spirit” any further.

It was Werner Blaser, a Swiss architect and photographer, who first brought the parallels between Mies and Japan to the light, by means of photography. Blaser, as we already mentioned, met Mies during his studies at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 1951, where he also took photography courses. He subsequently travelled to Japan and the first book he drew from this stay, *Temples and Tea Houses in Japan* (*Tempel und Teehaus in Japan*, 1955, see chapter II.4.)⁵²¹ had a success. Allegedly, Mies knew the book and liked it so much that he bought fifty of them as presents for friends. Later he invited Blaser to work on his monography⁵²². Blaser indeed came to meet Mies in Chicago again and soon he got to photograph the iconic Farnsworth house. He remembered that when he hung the photo of the Farnsworth house to dry after developing it, and architecture professor – who was supposed to know Mies’ work well – came by and asked: “Is this Japan?”⁵²³. Merely putting the images of the Farnsworth house and a traditional Japanese one next to each other seemed to create a relationship; and that was also how Blaser proceeded in his later publications, using a specific way of imposing similarities. In a later book, *East Meets West*⁵²⁴, for instance, Blaser exploits the possibilities of this juxtaposition strategy to demonstrate more similarities between the Asian tradition and Modern architecture.

Yet Blaser also extensively addressed Mies in the text of his first book on Japan; in fact, he took Mies as the only representative of the modern West with an “affinity” with old Japan. Seeing how much he wrote about Mies, Blaser justifies the prominence of Mies in his

⁵²⁰ Philip Thiel, Japanese Influences on Western Architecture, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 16(2) (Feb. 1957): 271-274.

⁵²¹ Werner Blaser, *Tempel und Teehaus in Japan* (1955). English translation: Werner Blaser, *Japanese Temples and Tea Houses* (New York, 1956).

⁵²² „Das war eine unglaubliche Geschichte! Als Mies gerade das Farnsworth House und die Apartmenttürme am Lake Shore Drive fertigstellte, kam ich nach Chicago. Ich hatte Gelegenheit dieses Weekend House zu besuchen. Das erste Foto, das ich mit meiner eigenen Kamera machte, war von der damals noch komplett offenen Veranda des Farnsworth! Und das war eine wahnsinnige Erfahrung: Ich war in diesem Raum und ich sah nach außen in die Natur mit dem Fox River – diese Situation habe ich mit der Kamera eingefangen. Leider ist das heute nicht mehr in dieser Weise möglich, weil die Veranda bei der ersten Sanierung wegen der vielen Flussmücken komplett verschlossen wurde. In meinem Fotokurs habe ich den Abzug des Farnsworth in der Dunkelkammer ins Tauchbad gelegt und dann draußen aufgehängt, um die Belichtung abzuwarten. Da kam ein Architekturprofessor vorbei und fragte: „Ist das Japan?“ Da dachte ich: „Um Gottes willen, der sollte doch Mies' Architektur kennen!“

Mies war einfach Mies!, interview for Cube magazine 03/2013, pp. 32–33. Source: <http://www.cube-magazin.de/duesseldorf/architektur/interviews/mies-war-einfach-mies.html>, retrieved

⁵²³ Blaser, Mies war einfach Mies!

⁵²⁴ Werner Blaser, *West Meets East – Mies van der Rohe* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1996)

explanations at the very end: “without being under [Japan’s] direct influence he bore outstanding witness to the special relevance of Japanese architecture to us in the West.”

Blaser insists from the beginning on a similarity of principles: “Mies van der Rohe was led by his own reflections to architectural results which embody a disciplined structural grammar such as we find in classical Japanese buildings, especially in temples and tea-houses.”⁵²⁵ This “structural grammar” that Mies shares with Japan should be manifest in “a clearly marked difference between purely structural elements and those which merely clothe the framework. (...) The precision described above is also to be found in the work of Mies van der Rohe. In his designs every rivet in the steel frame has a place allotted to it by the essential character of the building.”⁵²⁶ The difference in the use of material is the most obvious dissimilarity between Mies and traditional Japan. To get over it, Blaser argues that “from a formal point of view it is a matter of indifference what material is used. It is only important that the material should have the requisite power of expression in the part it is intended to play.”⁵²⁷ While Mies never went to Japan, he “sought his own way to this style which approaches the classical architecture of Japan. In his conception of building and in this relationship with Nature his affinity with Japanese building is evident.”⁵²⁸

“Mies van der Rohe’s point of departure in his designs was an ultimate, indivisible element on which the whole plan and elevation was constructed. This process is akin to the Japanese method where the basic dimension of architectural discipline is found in the tatami, the smallest Japanese living unit. The tatami is perfect as a module of architectural expression in Japan, for over and above its aesthetic importance, it is spiritual in that it represents as a sitting and sleeping area the smallest possible unit of living-space. Mies van der Rohe proceeded on entirely similar lines when he sought for each of his buildings a basic proportion discoverable in some technical element which differs from building to building. Just as in Japan the plan rose from the gridiron of tatami as the smallest living cells, so Mies van der Rohe’s plan originated in a gridiron formed by the smallest building units in each structure.”⁵²⁹

Worth noting is the vocabulary Blaser employs to grasp the non-causal relationship between Mies and Japan: “affinity,” “approaching,” “...is akin to.” Alfred Roth, a Swiss architect with a pronounced interest in Japan, who reviewed the book in *Werk*, praised the book, but was not convinced: “Only one point is questionable, namely the final remarks on the

⁵²⁵ Blaser, *The Japanese Te* 1955, translation quoted from a re-edition: ... 1988, p. 35.

⁵²⁶ Blaser 1988 (1955), p. 35 and p. 38.

⁵²⁷ Blaser 1988 (1955), p. 38.

⁵²⁸ Blaser 1988 (1955), p. 39.

⁵²⁹ Blaser 1988 (1955), p. 39.

relationship between ancient Japanese architecture and contemporary Western creation. Blaser mentions in this connection Mies van der Rohe as the only name. Admittedly, purely aesthetically speaking, the buildings of Mies are directly reminiscent of the Japanese design with their subtle proportions and the forms bordering on their utmost simplification. In terms of space psychology, however, there is no connection whatsoever in my opinion, and the repeatedly praised material culture of this architect, is actually within very narrow limits. Why Blaser does not primarily refer to Frank Lloyd Wright is incomprehensible.”⁵³⁰

Roth then continues to explain why it is Wright who is the closest to Japan: “Wright's spiritual world is much closer to that of Japan than the one of Mies, and that is why Wright did not allow himself to be carried away and excited by the outward form, but by the spiritual nature of Japanese art and culture.”⁵³¹ Somewhat contradictory is that the only two illustrations that Roth added to his review were supposed to demonstrate this closeness visually: they were ground plans of the Katsura villa and Frank Lloyd Wright's Jacob's House in Madison (Wisconsin; 1937).

Clearly, the ways people saw the Japan-like qualities in the works of Mies were at variance with each other. In the United States Philip Thiel rebuked Arthur Drexler for not stressing enough on the “absolute unity of spirit” between Japan and Mies; in Switzerland Werner Blaser did write about such unity, but was dismissed by Alfred Roth who saw the similarity as “purely aesthetical”. As amusing as it is, the case is illustrative in how contradictory the perceptions could be of people who were basically sharing the same interest. There is of course no objective answer as to who was “right”. In any case, Mies' relationship to Japan is open to new interpretations⁵³².

⁵³⁰ Nur in einem Punkte drängt sich ein Fragezeichen auf und zwar in den Schlußbetrachtungen über das Verhältnis der altjapanischen Architektur zum modern abendländischen Schaffen. Blaser nennt in diesem Zusammenhange als einzigen Namen Mies van der Rohe. Zugeben, rein ästhetisch betrachtet, erinnern die Bauten von Mies mit ihren subtilen Proportionen und der an letzte Vereinfachung grenzenden Form unmittelbar an die japanische Gestaltungsanfassung. Raumpsychologisch jedoch besteht meines Erachtens überhaupt kein Zusammenhang, und die immer wieder gepriesene Materialkultur dieses Architekten bewegt sich in Wirklichkeit doch in sehr engen Grenzen. Wieso Blaser nicht in erster Linie Frank Lloyd Wright zitiert, ist unbegreiflich.“

– Alfred Roth, Review of Blaser, Tempel und Teehaus in Japan. *Werk*, 3 (1956): 53.

⁵³¹ „Wright's geistige Welt steht derjenigen Japan viel näher als die von Mies, und deswegen hat sich auch Wright nicht von der äußeren Form, sondern vom geistigen Wesen der Japanischen Kunst und Kultur hinreißen und anregen lassen.“. Alfred Roth, review of Blaser, 53.

⁵³² At the time of writing of this text, a new book has been announced but not yet published about Mies and Japan: Inge Andritz, *Mies van der Rohe und Japan* (Muery Salzman, 2018).

II.7.4. Conclusion

With Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, we have seen the power of interpretation. None of the two foremost modernists either publicly supported ideas about the closeness of Japan and Modernism, or used Japanese elements in their designs. Yet several interpretations suggested different sorts of similarities and affinities with Japan, and possible shared principles.

Instead of dropping the case for lack of evidence, we were interested how this type of thinking arose and evolved during the period we focus on. In these interpretations, the architects got a 'second life' already during their lifetime. We have noted some signs of professional interest in le Corbusier's sketchbook during his visits in his later years, when he was working on the Museum of Western art in Tokyo. But his overall relationship to Japan can be called a "respectful passing." In any case the impact of his work on Japan far exceeds any impact in the opposite direction. The field of possible similarities offered more possibilities: the five points of construction of modern architecture he formulated in the 1920 tally with the principles of Japanese architecture. His careful framing and cutting of views of the outside landscape recall the Japanese architecture, especially when he drew the distant landscape in the horizon closer, he came close to the ancient Japanese principle of *shakkei*. His hut in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin has been compared to a Japanese teahouse.

The Japan-ness of Mies van der Rohe became a subject of disputes in the 1950s. He never intervened in them, while contradictory opinions emerged: some spoke about the "absolute unity of spirit" in Mies and Japan (Philip Thiel), other refused any resemblance as superficial (Alfred Roth). The work of Werner Blaser, who directly collaborated with Mies, got probably the farthest in finding a connection, both in writing and in image. Although we have seen some quite obvious cases of wishful thinking along the way, it should be stressed that the goal here was not to disprove or even ridicule these interpreters. Their role was active and inasmuch as it the similarity gained importance, it has its validity within the history of modern architecture. In is in this sense that Le Corbusier and Mies to a much greater extent have become more Japanese, just as Japanese tradition has become closer to modern architecture.

PART III

III. I. SYNTHESIS: MODERNIST QUALITIES OF THE JAPANESE HOUSE

In part III, we shift the attention from the history as represented by people and media to a more synthetic attitude. This chapter is partly analytic, partly synthetic: We revisit many of the authors already familiar to us from the previous narrative, but also add some hitherto unmentioned authors. We revisit the key terms of the discourse on Japan in architecture and focus on certain words that appeared conspicuously often in the discourse. Although a more attentive reader may have already abstracted many of these notions himself, putting such key terms in the centre of attention is an important step in what we want to find out about our problem. Beyond their complacent meaning, the words like “material,” “construction,” or “nature” are notions carrying a meaning charged with a rich background and implications. After we identify the key terms, we set them in an overview, and then investigate some of them in a broader context.

III.1.1. Prologue: The Japanese house seen from the West: an example, parallel, a model, a priority

One very common attitude in the western discourse on Japanese architecture could be paraphrased as “the Japanese have known it all before.” This attitude sees the old Japan as an anticipatory “Vorbild” (literally “pre-image”, translates as “example” or “paragon”).

In the fifth edition of his *Space, Time, and Architecture*, The veteran of modern architectural history, Sigfried Giedion conceded that “the West is again becoming conscious of something that the Japanese civilization never forgot: The continuity of human experience.”⁵³³

“The continuity of human experience,” is quite a moderate recognition that the Japanese have something we lost. Others insisted more strongly that the Japanese history anticipated the modern development in the West. Walter Gropius expressed such an idea much emphatically in 1954 on a postcard from Japan to Le Corbusier (see chapter II.4.): “Dear Corbu, all what we have been fighting for has its parallel in old Japanese culture.”⁵³⁴

In a similar manner, the foreword to Werner Blasers 1958 book *Wohnen und Bauen in Japan* claimed: “And yet! Beyond the technical and social abyss that divides our current housing and construction problems from those of Old Japan, the aesthetic, spiritual, and human exemplary nature of the old Japanese residential building still fully stands for our present day,”⁵³⁵

Steen Eiler Rasmussen (1898–1990) mentions Japan only briefly in his popular classic *Experiencing Architecture* (Danish in 1957, English 1959). While he still insists on the superiority of the West to the “primitive” Japan with respect to the knowledge of perspective, it seems to matter less when Rasmussen admits that

“the new style which in Europe was considered the last word of modernity resembled in many ways that which was traditional in Japan. (...) This architecture of the Far East may be considered as at a more primitive stage than our own. The European learned something during the Renaissance which the Japanese has never grasped. Broadly speaking we can say that his imagination is two-dimensional where ours has three dimensions. But within its limits Japanese art has reached the highest state of refinement. It has a message for us because it employs the very qualities that we have tried to bring

⁵³³ Giedion, Sigfried: Introduction: Architecture in the 1960s: Hopes and Fears, in: *Space, Time, and Architecture* (5th Edition), xxxviii-xxxix.

⁵³⁴ Postcard sent from Japan by Walter Gropius to Le Corbusier, June 1954 ; reproduced in Francesco del Co, *La princesse est modeste*, in Virginia Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, pp. 386-389.

⁵³⁵ “Und dennoch! Über den technischen und gesellschaftlichen Abgrund hinweg, der unsere heutigen Wohn- und Bauprobleme von denen Alt-Japans scheidet, bleibt die Ästhetische, geistige und menschliche Vorbildlichkeit des altjapanischen Wohnhauses auch für unsere Gegenwart voll bestehen.” Georg Schmidt, Vorwort. In Werner Blaser, *Wohnen und Bauen in Japan* (Teufen, 1958).

*out in modern western culture. The entire mode of life and the philosophy of the Japanese have something of the emancipation that we are striving for.*⁵³⁶

Bernard Rudofsky, too, wrote: “The traditional Japanese house antedates our so-called modern architecture by several centuries. Skeleton structure, open plan, sliding walls have only recently entered our architecture, while removable walls and resilient floors are still in the future.”⁵³⁷

An Epigram by Edward E. Kirkbridge was published as epilogue to Heinrich Engels books, adding a number of other possibilities to express this relationship. Certainly an unusual genre in modern architecture writing, these strophes exude the same idea of Japanese priority in so many variants that it is worth reading several of them⁵³⁸:

*“Japan
and architecture:
How very beautiful their marriage.
Moderns
and architecture:
man estranged from the world he created.*

*Japan,
its architecture
scents the air with thoughtful beauty.
Modern
architecture
empty when naked, searching ashamed for a leaf.*

*Japan
finds architecture:
each facet ordered and full of meaning.
Moderns
lose architecture:
a labyrinth of coin and thoughtlessness.*

*Japan
knows architecture:
Each home, the palette and canvas of man’s life.*

⁵³⁶ Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, 99–100.

⁵³⁷ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 222.

⁵³⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 486-487.

*Moderns
lack architecture:
no depth or search, just surface pleasure.*

*Japan
is architecture:
Man is house, and house is life
Modern
architecture:
Sit and listen and think and profit.*

(...)

*What
lesson, architecture?
The space: image and envelope of human life.
It is
humanity,
architecture's cause and destiny, its alpha and omega.*"⁵³⁹

The Swiss magazine *Werk* introduced its issue dedicated to Japan in 1962 wrote in a similar fashion:

*“When, around the middle of the last century, Japan opened its doors to the West and set out to become a modern industrialized nation, many admirers of Japanese culture and art predicted it a quick end. They had not expected that the Japanese way of life would have inherent elements which come in useful especially in the conditions of modern times, and which would even be reflected back to the industrial nations.”*⁵⁴⁰

There were not only qualities that “may come in useful”. Another idea appears here in the words about “reflecting back” (*Zurückstrahlung*), that is of the direct *impact* of Japan on the West. Further on in the same issue of the magazine, Aligül Ayverdi pushes this idea even further:

⁵³⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 486–487.

⁵⁴⁰ „Als um die Mitte des vergangenen Jahrhunderts Japan seine Tore dem Westen öffnete und sich anschickte, eine moderne Industrienation zu werden, haben viele Bewunderer der japanischen Kultur und Kunst ein rasches Ende vorausgesagt. Sie hatten nicht damit gerechnet, daß dem japanischen Lebensstil Elemente innewohnen, die ihm gerade unter den Bedingungen der Neuzeit zustatten kommen und die sogar auf die industriellen Nationen zurückstrahlen werden.“ Reference?

“No one can deny that the traditional Japanese architecture preceded the Modern in its concept by several centuries. For this reason, the international modern architecture got under the influence of the traditional Japanese building – we mean the theoretical and practical works of the leaders of the second generation: Gropius, Wright, Mies van der Rohe. Also in the works of the younger generation this influence continues. But using of a tradition without its proper understanding is not only useless, but dangerous: The tradition becomes a fashion, a decoration. This danger now threatens the international modern architecture” ⁵⁴¹

Although it may seem unimportant in a perfunctory sense, priority in time is not the same as being the cause of something. As we have seen the idea of a direct inspiration from Japan, a Japanese “influence” of Japan in the foundation, was explicitly refused by Gropius and Charlotte Perriand. And the historical evidence, in this case, rather supports their words (see chapter II.4.) We are then left in the area of “parallels”, “resemblances” “becoming conscious of something that the Japanese never forgot.” The only way out seems to zoom in and look closer at these purported qualities one by one.

⁵⁴¹ “Niemand kann leugnen, daß die traditionelle japanische Architektur in ihrer Konzeption die Moderne um mehrere Jahrhunderte vorausnahm...” Aligül Ayverdi, Tradition und Moderne in der Japanischen Architektur, *Werk* (1962), 344.

III.1.2. Synoptic table

„The Japanese house has defied dispassionate analysis. From the lukewarm notices of the earliest Western chroniclers – the Jesuit missionaries and Dutch merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – to the panegyrics of contemporary travelers, it represents a stout paradox. Taken by many to be the most elegant shelter ever designed for a man, it also marks the furthest departure from common sense.”

– Bernard Rudofsky, 1965⁵⁴²

As someone well-read in the historical resources, in 1965 Bernard Rudofsky could not but see the enthusiasm of his time for the Japanese architecture as a “stout paradox.” Writing in the heyday of the “panegyrics” about the Japanese house, the divergence in opinion was indeed startling. In defiance to Rudofsky’s claim, let us now try to be “dispassionately analytical”. Looking back across the three decades in the mid-20th century, some themes connected to Japanese architecture, and especially the traditional Japanese house, do stand out. They were by no means identical in style and purpose, but some essentials remained strikingly consistent: The same ideas, often the very same expressions appear time and again in different texts by different authors.

Let us assume that words are not just neutral means to denote things, but that they tell a lot about the background of the authors, and about the inner dynamics Western discourse. This is not to bring unnecessary complication to the subject. A close examination of key terms can help reveal new dimensions, connecting what was said about Japanese architecture to architectural thinking in general of the time.

Luckily, we do not need to speculate about unconscious slips or hidden motivations here. Many architects, from Yoshida and Taut, to Heinrich Engel with his exhaustive study, listed the “advantages” of the Japanese house themselves, in most cases with an explicit didactic goal for contemporary architecture. In other words, they wrote their essay in order to highlight the particular qualities of old Japan relevant for the contemporary West.

Let us to look exactly at the recurrent terms in a synoptic way, in the form of a table.

It compares the qualities of Japanese architecture as mentioned by different authors, assembling ideas that are expressed in the same or similar way. There are some ideas that contradict the mainstream – their ideas are marked in italics.

The table is arranged, roughly speaking, from the more “material” aspects on the left to those more “abstract,” principles on the right. This separation, of course, has been made just for the need of our analysis and comparison – the original sources in most cases treat the

⁵⁴² Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 116-118.

aspects together, the most concise authors often mentioned several of them in a single sentence. Many of these aspects were seen to be implications of others, such as the “strong relationship to Nature” which explained the treatment of natural wood. The interest in how things are made, what is the cause, and what are the effects got often mixed.

	material	construction	standardization	openness of space	nature	flexibility	simplicity, clarity
Yoshida 1935	<p>the use of natural materials for building;</p> <p>the use of [the aesthetic effects of] wood, with its natural colour and texture visible because no paint is used</p>		<p>the standardization of the room size and building components down to the smallest details, allowing for a fast and easy assembling of the house</p>	<p>numerous and large door and window openings and spaces open to the outside</p>	<p>unity of the house and garden, and the relationship between the house and garden</p>	<p>flexibility of the plan, i.e. the variability of the room separation and freeing of the rooms</p>	<p>the simple, clear and good taste</p>
Harada 1936⁵⁴³			<p>standardization</p>		<p>connection with nature</p>		<p>simplicity</p>
Taut 1936⁵⁴⁴, 1937	<p>love for the use of genuine material ('37)</p>	<p>Lack of elementary conceptions of construction ('36)</p> <p>Japanese house is simply a house of cards ('37)</p>	<p>“the Japanese standardization does not mean a manufacturing for stock in the modern way” ('37)</p>	<p>on account of the complete openness of the rooms the garden is actually part of the house reaching as far as the fence</p>			<p>all the simplicity and delicacy of Japan (demonstrated in Katsura) ('36)</p>

⁵⁴³ Harada, *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture*

⁵⁴⁴ Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*

	material	construction	standardization	openness of space	nature	flexibility	simplicity, clarity
Perriand 1941, 1950, 1956⁵⁴⁵		The structure is a simple skeleton of post and beams ('41)	Japanese architecture is made within standards, which gives it its unity. ('41)	law of penetrating plans; open plan, free façades entirely open ('41)	Penetration of nature in the house, extension of the house in the recreated nature. ('41)/ Japanese architecture sneaked into the Nature whose laws it respected and exalted ('56)	Flexibility of space thanks to the sliding doors ('41)	
Drexler 1955⁵⁴⁶		post-and-beam skeleton		close relationship of outdoors and indoors		flexibility of plan	
Gropius 1955⁵⁴⁷ 1960⁵⁴⁸			modular coordination of all the building parts and coordination		understanding of nature has been all-prevailing throughout the land	complete flexibility of movable interior and exterior walls, changeability and multi-use of spaces (21)	
Blaser 1955/1957⁵⁴⁹, 1963⁵⁵⁰						sensibility, flexibility, and integration ('63)	

⁵⁴⁵ “La maison traditionnelle japonaise est le contraire de la nôtre, elle procède de l’intérieur vers l’extérieur, l’horizon est le prolongement de la nature, la nature de la maison. (...) Et tandis que nos demeures de pierres se posaient tel un bloc retenant l’homme secrètement dans ses murs, le soustrayant à ses origines, le condamnant à exprimer sa « propre » personnalité et à l’affirmer, l’architecture japonaise se faufilait dans la nature dont elle respectait et exaltait ses lois, les Japonais juxtaposaient des coffres en bois pour ranger ses trésors.” Charlotte Perriand, *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, n° 65, février 1956 16.

⁵⁴⁶ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 1955

⁵⁴⁷ Walter Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, *Perspecta* 3 (1955): 9-80.

⁵⁴⁸ Gropius, Tange, and Ishimoto, *Katsura. Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture*.

⁵⁴⁹ Werner Blaser, *Tempel und Teehaus in Japan* (Olten 1955) (English: Werner Blaser, *Japanese Temples and Tea-Houses* (New York 1957).

⁵⁵⁰ Werner Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1963, bilingual edition).

	material	construction	standardization	openness of space	nature	flexibility	simplicity, clarity
Moffett 1958 ⁵⁵¹	Japanese treat their wood as a living thing			close relation of indoor and outdoor areas	sensitive landscaping	flexibility of plan and section	restraint, simplicity
Engel 1964 ⁵⁵²			comprehensive standardization of detail and system	individual diversity, in spite of rigid standardization, differs favorably from the uniformity of contemporary housing developments	The Japanese Love of nature is a sweeping generalization Its relationship to garden is distinct / the Japanese garden unmistakably not natural	Its organization of the total interior space is unique because of a highly efficient flexibility	Its aestheticism of simplicity and restraint stands out against the modern simplicity brought by economization and mechanization of building
Kawazoe 1965 ⁵⁵³	centrality of wood	preference for structures that relied on a grid of horizontal and vertical members	standardization, grid planning	Interpenetration of interior and exterior space	practice of building attuned to natural processes	Free and open use of space	plain, unadorned surfaces (of wood)
Nitschke 1964 ⁵⁵⁴ , 1966 ⁵⁵⁵					Intimacy with nature means, to Japanese sensitivity, more than just resisting raping it, it means adopting nature's rhythm of change for human creation. ('66)	provides a space that is eminently interchangeable, and therefore functionally flexible ('64)	

⁵⁵¹ Noel Moffett, Japan, *Architectural Design* (April 1958).

⁵⁵² Engel, *The Japanese House*.

⁵⁵³ Noboru Kawazoe, The Ise Shrine and its Cultural Context, in Kenzo Tange, Noboru Kawazoe, and Watanabe Yoshio, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, (MIT Press, 1965), 166–206.

⁵⁵⁴ Günther Nitschke, The Metabolists of Japan, *Architectural Design* (October 1964): 509–524.

⁵⁵⁵ Nitschke, MA.

	material	construction	standardization	openness of space	nature	flexibility	simplicity, clarity
Hilský 1967⁵⁵⁶	beauty of the natural wood	exactly modulated wooden skeleton	standardization of both the sliding walls and mats				simplicity and purity of the spatial expression

(The quotes are paraphrased and shortened from the original; they are revisited with full references in the following text.)

The table helps to reveal several facts: The main qualities and principles were very clearly defined from the the first important authors that mediated it in terms of modern architecture (Yoshida, Taut). The later authors could obviously read the previous ones, and often did, but the similarity of thought can also be a result of a common background rather than mere copying.

While a table is a useful tool, it shows but does not explain. The following text clears out the context and background of four of these terms: material, construction, standardization, and nature. The theme of “openness,” of the Japanese required more space for itself, and is presented in a separate study, which follows as a separate chapter (III.2.). The remaining two categories – flexibility and simplicity/purity - are propositions for further research.

⁵⁵⁶ Noboru Kawazoe, *The Ise Shrine and its Cultural Context*, in Kenzo Tange, Noboru Kawazoe, and Watanabe Yoshio, *Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, (MIT Press, 1965), 166–206.

III. I. 3. Material

Traditionally, Japanese used all sorts of material for building – wood, bamboo, paper, clay, stone; but the almost complete dominance of wood in construction is definitely the feature that makes it unique. One reason for this are of course the natural conditions: Despite a high population density (336 people per square kilometre on average), two thirds of Japanese territory are still forested (67 %) ⁵⁵⁷. Even in a relative proximity of densely populated areas, woody hills are surprisingly near. Japan has thus plenty of trees, and wood was naturally the best available building material to make everything from heavy timber posts and beams to fine lattice and delicate joinery. The art of carpentry has achieved a very high level both in large scale and elaborate detail.

Among the many kinds of wood used, the most important were the Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*, *sugi* 杉), and Japanese cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*, *hinoki* 檜). These trees grow straight and long enough to provide beams of a span that covers the entire house, and the resinous bark was also used for thatching roofs.

The Japanese have mastered other building materials than wood on an excellent level, as can be seen, for instance, from the foundation stones, platforms, staircases, or the massive dry stone walls of Japanese castles. The Japanese preference for wood is not a mere result of given conditions, but also a choice of value. Temples and palaces are thus made out wood just like the commoner's houses, in a city or in countryside. Wood in Japan was preferred for both constructive and symbolic reasons, and Japanese architecture made its use eloquent by its treatment: Wood was treated with respect and usually not concealed by paint or other coatings, its grain and veins standing out.

Western architects have soon started noting this specific status of wood in Japanese building. Noel Moffett wrote in 1958:

*“Wood has always been regarded in Japan as a living thing with feelings, preferences and susceptibilities, and it is rare, even to-day, to find carpenters using nails, screws or other barbaric instruments of torture. This attitude has made carpenter the most important man in the building industry and is the reason of this superb skill. (...) Wood surfaces are sometimes treated with a colourless, transparent preservative, but it is more usual to keep them scrupulously clean; even the floors of the oft-visited temples are cleaner than our kitchen tables.”*⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁷ Source: Wikipedia

⁵⁵⁸ Moffett, Japan, 135.

Werner Blaser seconded:

*“Old Japanese buildings are variations on the theme of wood. For the Japanese, wood is never inert matter. In his hands it acquires new vitality, it is cut and joined, as its nature demands, without nails, without glue and without paint.”*⁵⁵⁹

The European tradition, simply speaking, is opposite: although the North and East part of the continent and all the mountain areas have a long tradition of building in wood, the important, representative buildings were always made of brick or stone, because the tradition of ‘high’ architecture was always a work of masonry. Modernism added new materials – concrete and glass – to this repertoire, but wood may still have been seen as a material of the past. Yet we can also remember the somewhat surprising declaration of Adolf Loos, who was apparently carried away by his newly discovered ardour for timber building in 1931: “The houses of the future will not be from ferroconcrete, (...) the house of the future is from wood! Like the small Japanese houses. They have sliding walls! Modern architecture is: Japanese culture plus European tradition!”⁵⁶⁰ Modernist architects and designers who were serious about their social goals sometimes turned to wood thanks to its low price, in order to turn their products less exclusive. Such was the case with Charlotte Perriand, who traded steel tubes for wood in her furniture designs in the 1930s.. The choice of wood was always an easier option for Scandinavian architects, especially in Finland and Norway where wood is abundant and has reached a certain prestige in architecture. In Norway, for instance, there is a yearly Wood building prize (*Treprisen*) which is awarded since 1961⁵⁶¹.

In the mainstream modern architecture wood was still a material of necessity rather than of choice. What resonated with the modern sensibility of the Western architects was not wood, but the way the Japanese treated their material. Tetsurō Yoshida was quite outspoken about this while listing the advantages of the Japanese house. He listed “the use of natural materials for building, without any processing, but in an artistically beautiful application,” and “the use of the [aesthetic effects of the] wood, with its natural colour and texture visible because no paint is used.”⁵⁶² Bruno Taut was one of the first to connect the treatment of material and the “love of nature.”⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Werner Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan*, 9.

⁵⁶⁰ "die häuser der zukunft werden nicht aus eisenbeton sein, [...] das haus der zukunft ist aus holz! wie die kleinen japanischen häuser. es hat verschiebbare wände! moderne architektur ist: japanische kultur plus europäische tradition!" – Claire Loos – Adolf Opel: *Adolf Loos Privat*. (H. Böhlaus, 1985), 104.

⁵⁶¹ See <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treprisen>.

⁵⁶² Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 10. For the full list, see chapter II.1.

⁵⁶³ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 130.

The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto wrote to the Japanese ambassador in 1941: “There is a very special affinity between us modern architects and the well-balanced architecture of your country. I believe that it is a deeper understanding of the language of materials which unites us.”⁵⁶⁴

If Aalto who claimed to understand of the “language of material”, was a shared knowledge among the Modern architects as he implied? The early Modernist attitude to material, on one hand, largely built on “honest use” of material, but on the other hand, Bauhaus and De Stijl developed quite a strict formal aesthetics of their own, closely connected to abstract painting: their shaping was often based on formal criteria such as geometric forms, flat surfaces and primary colours. Diverging from the flat white planes – as is best visible in Le Corbusier’s work – after World War II, Brutalism introduced appreciation of rougher surfaces. A confirmation of this can be the fact that when the primary aesthetics of the avant-garde movement gave way, after the World War II, to Brutalism, Japanese tradition became even more interesting for Western architects. In Japan, there seemed to be enough for everyone in this respect: many Japanese forms in design could be and indeed were perceived in terms of either of these different aesthetics. Those whose liked lightness and geometry were able find as much of inspiration in Japan as those with a taste for the tactile quality of surface.

Heinrich Engel, usually cautious in stating direct parallels between Japan and contemporary architecture, confirms that the traditional treatment of clay in walls in Japan resembles Western Brutalism:

“One of the most expressive features in the Japanese house, though the least regarded as such by Western writers, is the solid wall. (...) In Western architecture, the substance of the wall is hardly expressive. In order for the wall to lose its anonymity it needs another factor in the form of additional color, panels, veneers, pictures, paintings or, in terms of proportion as a whole, contrast to another fabric, ornamentation, or sculptural treatment. In the Japanese wall the two factors are one. Substance is color, proportion, texture, and decoration in itself. No doubt this phenomenon resembles a trend in contemporary architecture of giving self-expression to walls by exposing their constituent fabrics, such as brick and concrete.”⁵⁶⁵ Werner Blaser wrote directly that “material thus treated makes it possible to elaborate space in to a work of art.”⁵⁶⁶

The true lesson from the Japanese use of material in architecture, according to Heinrich Engel, was not to be sought in one specific aesthetics or another, but rather in the non-

⁵⁶⁴ Quoted in Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (Alvar Aalto Museo, 2007), 360-361.

⁵⁶⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 32–33.

⁵⁶⁶ Blaser – ref.?

dogmatic approach of the Japanese in the use of materials: “In this regard, the role of fabric in the Japanese house is very instructive. Here, a unique and convincing expression in all constituent materials is achieved without any dogmatic approach.”⁵⁶⁷

Eventually this appreciation of feeling of the fabric opens to another aspect, much more relevant from the 1960s on: the environmental aspect. The basis for this was there from the beginning: authors linked the “natural” use of material with the abstract and philosophical level, the relationship to nature. Where else than in architecture, after all, should these different levels meet? We return in more detail to further discussion on nature in Japanese architecture in the chapter III.1.6.

⁵⁶⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 46.

III.1.4. Construction

The material question – What are things made of? – closely connects to the question of construction – How are things made? Construction on stilts and the absence of load bearing walls is what largely determines the similarities between Japanese tradition and Modernism. Moreover, this grid had an immediate aesthetic effect, since it is left visible both on the outside and inside.

The Japanese construction was more often than not a subject of admiration in the Modernist discourse. According to Blaser, the Japanese construction was devoid of meaningless elements, and thus suits the idea of functionalism:

“A pure and clear sense of construction is evinced. There is not an element which is not meaningfully related to the law governing the whole.”⁵⁶⁸

The differences, of course, are not negligible: The construction of the Japanese house is entirely wooden, the house has no foundations and its poles repose on ground-level stones, and its substantial part is the large and heavy roof that relies on a very elaborate trussing. The differences we not denied, but understandably less thematised.

What resonated with some modern architects was the simple, orthogonal grid of the construction, the image of construction that the Japanese house was able to convey. The Japanese historian Noboru Kawazoe supported this by pointing out the “structural beauty, known as the ‘Mondrian pattern’, which relies on interplay of horizontals and verticals.”⁵⁶⁹ Most explicitly, this was expressed in the black-and-white photos of the Katsura villa by Yasuhiro Ishimoto (see chapter II.5.) On the contrary, this constructive grid left visibly exposed in Japan meant “too many lines” for Le Corbusier, leaving him unaffected.⁵⁷⁰

But this all speaks merely about the visual effect of construction. What truly excited modern architects was how the Japanese house was made: The Western house consists of the “hardware,” that is the building itself made out of walls, floors and roof, and the “software”: that is the furnishing. The Japanese house, simply said, merges both hardware and software into one. In the design of the house, the carpenter has the main word, and the house, which has very few “furnishings”, integrates most functions that a Western house solves with furniture: the storage space is integrated in the house, and one sits on the floor, which is not cold like the Western because the entire house is elevated, and matted with *tatami*. Charlotte Perriand’s main task in her mission in the 1940s was thus to design furniture, something that

⁵⁶⁸ Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan*, 11.

⁵⁶⁹ Kawazoe, Noboru: The Basis of Japanese Architecture. Main forces at work in the shaping of the basic forms of Japanese architecture. In Kenzo Tange, Noboru Kawazoe, Yoshio Watanabe, *Ise. Prototype of Japanese Architecture*, 200-206.

⁵⁷⁰ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 45. Isozaki, however, does not provide a source of this comment.

the Japanese barely needed until then. The shoes are always taken off before entering the elevated part of the house, and inviting someone “inside” is expressed as “come up” in Japanese. The Japanese house integrates the function of furniture into architecture, and it is light, both perceptually and literally. This led some authors to compare the Japanese house itself to a piece of furniture: “The whole building gives the impression of being a huge piece of furniture fashioned with infinite care and art and set amidst the beautiful garden.”⁵⁷¹ The same formulation pops up surprisingly often. Jørn Utzon, in 1962, compared different types of platform construction. The floor in a traditional Japanese house, in this context, was for Utzon

*“a delicate bridge-like platform. This Japanese platform is like a table top and you do not walk on a table top. It is a piece of furniture. The floor here attracts you as the wall does in a European house. You want to sit close to the wall in a European house, and here in Japan, you want to sit on the floor and not walk on it. All life in Japanese houses is expressed in sitting, lying or crawling movements.”*⁵⁷²

Utzon may have read the book by his compatriot Steen Eiler Rasmussen, who mentions Japan exactly when he needs to speak about lightness of construction – a lightness that is characteristic for Japanese culture: The Japanese

*“have a pictorial art without perspective or shadows, a line and color art with strange, weightless figures. The Japanese has difficulty in thinking in terms of perspective and when he puts houses in his pictures they become a system of abstract lines. This also characterizes his real architecture. It is not that he has gotten heavy walls to look thin, as in venetian houses. The walls are thin. He forms his houses of screens: paper walls mounted on frames between wooden posts built up over a simple square grid. Many of the screens can be slid aside, transforming the interiors. They do not enclose rooms but form light frames around the inhabitants and their few possessions, flattering openings out towards Nature. The idea of a house built upon a firm substance is unknown. Japanese houses stand on the ground like furniture in a garden. They have wooden legs which raise the matting covered floors above the soil. With their verandas, sliding walls, and grass mats more like finely made furniture than what we mean by houses.”*⁵⁷³

The lightness impressed Bruno Taut as well. Remembering his first night spent in a traditional Japanese house, everything was new: “Undressing was something of a gymnastic novelty and there were no chairs in the room.” The walls looked paper-thin, sliding panels and doors were made out of paper in wooden frames. Taut and his wife went to sleep,

⁵⁷¹ Blaser 1956, p. 92.

⁵⁷² Jørn Utzon, *Platforms and Plateaus*, *Zodiac* n° 10, Milano, 1962, pp.

⁵⁷³ Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture* (MIT Press, 1959), 99–100.

extinguished their lantern and laid down. “There we were, lying inside a paper lantern – for such the room seemed, filled as it was with light strangely soft and smooth.”⁵⁷⁴

From the 1950s onwards, the word of the day was “structure,” used synonymously with construction, but it also had more abstract connotations. In Dutch architecture, some writers even coin the term “structuralism” for a movement in architecture, with a heyday in the late 1950s and 1960s. Writing about Japan, Werner Blaser, for instance, treated his diverse Japanese subjects in terms of “structure” in his 1963 book *Structure and Form in Japan*⁵⁷⁵.

Nevertheless, there were also those who saw the construction of the Japanese house as deficient, and definitely did not recommend it to the Japanese themselves, and even less as a model for the West. The first one who expressed this opinion was once again Bruno Taut: In his view, the alarming fact is that the Japanese house very badly resists to earthquakes, to disastrous effects. In his opinion, the heavy roof does not secure the construction against earthquakes by putting pressure on it, but conversely, enhances the destructive effects because the earth does not shake vertically but rather in a horizontal or diagonal direction. For this reason, with a lot of well-meant advice, Taut repeatedly discredited the Japanese traditional construction as a possible model for anyone, Japanese or Europeans. This observation was later confirmed by Heinrich Engel, who after a much more thorough study than Taut reached the same conclusion.

⁵⁷⁴ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 19.

⁵⁷⁵ Blaser, *Struktur und Gestalt in Japan / Structure and Form in Japan*.

III.1.5. Standardization

If we had to choose the most symptomatic term of the architecture discourse in the years immediately after World War II, it would be *standardization*, and together with it the closely related, though not synonymous notions of *prefabrication*, *modules* and *modular coordination*. Facing Japanese architecture, practically none of the Western architects missed a chance to mention this phenomenon and for many among them it was clearly the most fascinating aspect. It appeared to be a direct link between Japanese architecture and modernity, crossing the centuries and all cultural differences. An apparition of sorts. More than anywhere else, the old Japan seemed to provide a confirmation of the current efforts in the West, and even to show the way out of problems related to prefabrication.

Today, standardization probably is recognized as a useful means, but hardly evokes any excitement. Why was standardization so attractive, and what was its significance in mid-20th century?

Development and implementation of standards is with no exaggeration a process concurrent, and in many ways synonymous, with the progress of civilization as such. Its significance touches vast areas: industry, politics, trade, technology, labour, culture. Standardization in architecture connects to all of them. The interest in using standard measures arose in trade, and was implemented by political power for most of human history.⁵⁷⁶

Standardization was not merely a method or a technical problem. From the French revolution, it was part of an enlightenment project with didactic goals: “rational minds needed rational measures.”⁵⁷⁷ The standard order is easy to understand and acquire. One group in the new French Republic argued that regular weights and measures served a pedagogical function: ‘Even the least practiced minds will acquire a taste for this order once they come to know it.’⁵⁷⁸ This egalitarian idea still resonates in the Modernist goals in the 20th century.

With the industrial revolution, standardization has had a considerable impact on societies. By radically lowering the costs and increasing the speed of production, technical standards offered the potential to make life easier, create wealth and leisure, liberate people from slavery and women from household chores. Given a just distribution of the profits, these goals were gradually fulfilled. But simultaneously, standardization and mechanization (machine-based standardization of work procedures) – or ‘Taylorism’ in a popular term of

⁵⁷⁶ Andrew Russell, *Standardization in History: A Review Essay with an Eye to the Future*. In Sherrie Bolin (ed.), *The Standards Edge: Future Generations*, 247-260 (Ann Arbor, MI: Sheridan Press, 2005). Accessible at arussell.org/papers/futuregeneration-russell.pdf, retrieved 11 January 2018, – Quote from p.2 in this version.

⁵⁷⁷ Russell, *Standardization in History*, 8.

⁵⁷⁸ Russell, *Standardization in History*, 8.

the period –, seemed to threaten human freedom when extended beyond the factory: it conveyed monotony, suppression of human personality, and lack of originality⁵⁷⁹.

Division of tasks into segments enforced by standardized working procedures changed the nature of human labour thoroughly. Many ancient crafts disappeared, but architecture entered the 20th century as a profession where the architect was still responsible for the whole work on a building as an individual. In an industrialized society, architecture therefore seemed to have lost grip on its time, at least in the eyes of architects like Le Corbusier or Walter Gropius. That is why the more radical members of the Bauhaus, or the Czech Karel Teige, called for the fastest possible standardizations, even if it entailed the end of the architects' profession: architecture was to be considered a branch of industry and became performed almost uniquely in prefabricated building⁵⁸⁰.

Yet the left-wing avant-garde was by far not alone to extol about the advantages of standardization. Paradoxically, in this single interest they were in accord with industrial capitalists, as well as militarists.

The name of Ernst Neufert is probably an epitome of norms and standards for every architect, since almost every one owns a copy of his *Architect's Data (Bauentwurfslehre)*, first published in 1936 and since then updated and extended until the present 42nd edition (2016).⁵⁸¹ One of the first students on the Bauhaus (1919), Neufert stayed in Germany and continued to work through the Nazi era; by 1944 he was in charge of planning the entire post-war reconstruction of Germany's war-ravaged cities.⁵⁸² After the success of *Architect's Data*, Neufert published a second book in 1943, *Bauordnungslehre*, where a more urgent tone towards standardization and rationalization joined with its justification in broader culture. Albert Speer, in a foreword to the book, wrote about the importance of “concentration of all powers” in the total war, to which Neufert's work excellently contributes. Nonetheless, the book also

⁵⁷⁹ A literary dystopian image of the effects of rationalization and standardization can be read in Yevgeni Zamyatin's *We (Mi)*, 1920)

⁵⁸⁰ Kimberly Elman Zarecor described especially well the contiguity of this line of thinking between the avant-garde between the wars and in the case of Czechoslovakia. Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011)

⁵⁸¹ In his recent book, Reinier de Graaf summed up Neufert's story, extraordinary and conformist at the same time. Reinier de Graaf, *Four Walls and a Roof: The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

Born in 1900, Neufert was one of the first students at the studied in at the Bauhaus in Weimar (1919), and became a professor in 1926. From the beginning, he focussed on rationalization of the design process and normative standards.

Neufert's obsession with measure included humans, and got to amusing levels from time to time, such as when the first editions of which book gave even “the overall height of the giant Flemish rabbit with ears upright” „Gesamthöhe den belgischen Riesen bei aufgestelltem Ohr.“ See <http://www.neufert-stiftung.de/buecher/geschichte.html>, retrieved. 17. 12. 2017.

⁵⁸² Graaf, *Four Walls and a Roof*.

presented the roots of standardization and norms in the past and foreign cultures, and dedicated no less than twelve pages to Japan. This was definitely a lot, compared to 4 pages for Greece, 2 pages for India, and 2 pages for China.

Emphasizing a special affinity with Japan, Neufert says that “The house-building method of the Japanese, the ‘Prussians’ of the East, has always occupied German architects.”⁵⁸³ Neufert drew from several older authors like Baltzer (1903)⁵⁸⁴ and Morse (1904), but mainly from Tetsurō Yoshida’s *Japanese House (Das Japanische Wohnhaus, 1935)*⁵⁸⁵. As we mentioned (chapter II.1.), Yoshida’s book became a widely used source of inspiration to European Modernist architects. Listing the advantages of Japanese house, Yoshida pointed out “the standardization of the room size and building components down to the smallest details, allowing for a fast and easy assembling of the house,”⁵⁸⁶ and documented his well-illustrated book with examples. References to Japanese elements found their way even to the internationally widespread editions of *Architect’s Data* (though the chosen building, the Buddhist treasure house, is not the most characteristic building for Japan⁵⁸⁷).

Such a prominent presence of Japan in a general architecture “textbook, a handbook and a reference,”⁵⁸⁸ had of course a great importance for the perception of Japan. In Czechoslovakia, for instance, which became one of the pioneering countries to develop prefabrication technologies in the newly established Eastern bloc, a scheme of Japanese *tatami mats* reprinted from Yoshida’s *Japanese House* in the official magazine *Architektura ČSR*, was used as an illustration for an article on prefabrication in 1949.⁵⁸⁹

Unlike many other ideas, standardization suffered no harm after the defeat of Germany. Neufert, who was never a member of the Nazi party, continued his career as a professor, and lived until 1985. The war industry fuelled progress in mechanization in many fields of technology, but the war also created an urgent need for housing for millions of people who were looking for a new home. Combination of the two factors created conditions for the quick effort to standardize the building process. The next step was prefabrication of increasingly bigger components – modules. This was not just a continuation of the technical process, but effectively a turn in the Western thinking about architecture: “Hitherto

⁵⁸³ „Die Hausbaumethode der Japaner, der „Preußen“ des Ostens, hat die deutschen Architekten schon von jeher beschäftigt.“ Neufert, *Bauordnungslehre*, 75.

⁵⁸⁴ Baltzer, *Das Japanische Haus*.

⁵⁸⁵ Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*.

⁵⁸⁶ „[die] Normung der Zimmergröße und der Bauteile bis in die kleinsten Einzelheiten, was eine schnelle und leichte Herstellung des Hauses ermöglicht.“ – Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 10.

⁵⁸⁷ Neufert, *Bauentwurfslehre*, 36

⁵⁸⁸ (de Graaf), *Four Walls and a Roof*.

⁵⁸⁹ *Architektura ČSR*, 1946/49. About the development in Czechoslovakia see Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*.

architectural design has begun with a plan of a certain size and subdivided it into its parts. Modular architecture proceeds in the opposite manner.”⁵⁹⁰

To the resentment of Le Corbusier, his own proposition for a set of standards called Modulor, never took root on a mass scale. In Europe, it was the German standards that were carried through – Great Britain for instance accepted them right after the war in 1946⁵⁹¹.

Despite being a powerful tool for many contradictory policies, standardization seemed to be ideologically and politically immune: It served the left avant-gardists seeking to alleviate the burden of the workers and housewives, capitalist industrialists seeking to cut down production costs, Nazi war enthusiasts looking for maximum efficiency in the “absolute war”, builders of the democratic welfare state to provide housing for everyone, as well as repressive East European regimes to build entire new cities.

Reduction of building costs and acceleration of the construction that prefabrication allowed temporarily silenced the critics. Still, when the first ensembles of the “prefab” housing were finished, fears rose about the effects of this built environment. Was the simplification and interchangeability of parts not going to take its toll on the inhabitants in the form of monotony and disorientation?

It was Sigfried Giedion who brought a timely reflection in his book on the “anonymous history” of the production of everyday objects, *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), balancing the negatives and positives in a historical perspective.⁵⁹²

Standardization in Japan

Japanese architecture is indeed based on standards, at least partially. The standard features, which came closest to a systematization during the Edo Period, make a distinctive feature of traditional Japanese houses. Generally, the system for measuring out the wooden components called *kiwari* 木割 (literally wood-cutting) is based on the dimensions of the rafters, and the remaining proportions are then calculated according to a formula based on the size of the rafter. This formula is specific to the building in question, and does not have a fixed length or ratio; however, in the Edo period the basic unit for building was fixated on dimensions oscillating around 6x6 feet. Building manuals called *kiwarisho* 木割書 helped to spread these measures over the country. There were two methods of measure. One is based

⁵⁹⁰ – Architectural Design, January 1953, p. 7

⁵⁹¹ The German standards determine everyday norms until today. The European standards of paper size, the DIN series, is of German origin, also thanks to Neufert’s promotion by publishing his *Architect’s data* in A4 format.

⁵⁹² Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948).

on the unified dimension of *ken* 間, the span between two columns, the other on the unified dimension of the *tatami* mats. *Tatami* 畳 is the rice straw mat that covers the indoor floor area of a house, sized in a 1:2 ratio (about 6x3 feet) to comfortably accommodate two seated people or one person sleeping. Even if these two measures are very close and the houses may look quite similar as a result, each one is based on a different principle: The *inakama* 田舎間 method comes out from standardized *ken*, measured from centre to centre of the column. The columns have their thickness, so the size of the *tatami* has to vary in order to fit them tightly to each other. The other method, *kyō-ma* 京間, is based on standardised *tatami* size and variable column distances. The layout of the *tatami* on the floor is also subject to standardized habits, so that there can be rooms of 4½, 6, 8, 10, 12 *tatami*. Knowing the number of *tatami* thus already gives a good idea of the room size. *Tatami*, in this system means both the mat and a unit of surface measure. Plans of more complex buildings, such as the Katsura villa, were also drawn with their *tatami* visible, and were a favourite subject of reproduction of the literature of the time. The *tatami* themselves, however, slightly differed in size according to region. The Tokyo mat, for instance, measured usually 0.88 m by 1.76 m, while in Kyoto, where building got the closest to unified standardization while using the *kyō-ma* method, the *tatami* measured 0.955 m by 1.91 m.

In sum, there was never one unified standard in Japan, but several overlapping standards. There were attempts to create a unified system only after World War II, in parallel to the Western efforts. This also ultimately prevented any serious attempts at actually adopting Japanese standards anywhere else, despite the amazement of the Westerners.

Those who looked closer, saw a more precise and complicated reality. The cognizance of standardization existing in Japan nevertheless raised great expectations, and Japanese architecture seemed to meet them.

The homeland of the module

Charlotte Perriand wrote in 1942: “Japanese architecture is made within standards, which gives it its unity. Example: Height of doors and *shoji* of 1.75 meters, whence the standard height of bamboo blinds. On surface, the *tatami* is the basic measure of the rooms.”⁵⁹³

Between 1945 and 1970, the fact that Japanese architecture is standardized was emphasized by almost everyone. Erwin Gutkind, in a 1953 article in *Architectural design*, saw this standardization as “an unsurpassed achievement (...) We should closely study the general

⁵⁹³ « L'architecture japonaise est faite dans les standards, c'est ce qui lui confère son unité. Exemple : hauteur des portes et des *shoji* de 1,75 mètre, d'où hauteur standard des stores en bambou. En surface, le *tatami* est la mesure de base des pièces. » Charlotte Perriand, *Contribution à l'équipement intérieur de l'habitation au Japon. Tradition, sélection, création*. Editions Kugio Koyama, 1942. Quoted in Barsac,

principles which govern its application. The ken (6 ft), used for measuring the intervals between the columns, together with tatami rice straw mats, the number of which measures the size of a room make a system of standardization: It is not at all out of date as some of the ‘progressive’ architects would want us to believe.”⁵⁹⁴

Walter Gropius was “deeply moved” when finally coming “face to face with these houses” when he arrived to Japan in 1954: “The old hand-made Japanese house had already all the essential features demanded today for a modern prefabricated house; namely, modular coordination-the standard mat, a unit of about 3 x 6 feet- and movable wall panels.”⁵⁹⁵ He was delighted to see prefabrication which “did not, however, stifle individual variation.” His ultimate philosophical goal which he repeated on different occasions, “unity in diversity,” was attained this way. Writing to Le Corbusier, Gropius cheered that the Japanese house is “the best and most modern I know of and truly prefabricated.”⁵⁹⁶ “There is thus a strict unity between plan and elevation,” wrote the Swiss Werner Blaser about the same time. “The tatamis provide what leading modern architects term ‘modulated coordinations’ and underlie the aesthetic proportions of the plan and elevation both outside and inside.”⁵⁹⁷

In his book on *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, Robin Boyd still found it relevant to restate the facts in 1968: “Indeed, the module of the hand fabricated, 1x2 meters tatami mat, whose dimensions and layouts dictated room sizes, makes the most remarkable philosophical link between Japanese traditional and the international modern, which always enjoyed conforming to industrial standards. The Japanese tradition even had a respect for function as the departure point of design that is closer to the international modern mood than anything in official historical Western architecture.”⁵⁹⁸

In the 1950, the Western visitors saw the traditional building practice still alive, albeit quickly disappearing. It was common to see tradesmen with *tatami*, *fusuma* and other parts to replace in one’s home could be seen sold in the street. “Even to-day [the carpenter] is still – outside the large industrial centres – the key man in the building industry,” reported Noel Moffett in 1958.⁵⁹⁹ As we noted (II.4.6.), Jørn Utzon was a regular visitor to Japan during his years in Sydney, and prefabrication was a subject of his eminent interest; he explained to his collaborators “that you could buy windows in one street, doors in another, wall panels in a

⁵⁹⁴ Gutkind, Japan, 34.

⁵⁹⁵ Gropius, Architecture in Japan. In Ponciroli (ed.), *Katsura Imperial Villa*, 350

⁵⁹⁶ Published by Francesco Dal Co in: Arata Isozaki et.al., *Katsura, La villa imperiale*, Milano 2004, p. 386 and 389

⁵⁹⁷ Blaser 1955, p. 22.

⁵⁹⁸ Robin Boyd, *New Directions in Japanese Architecture* (London – New York, 1968), 9.

⁵⁹⁹ Moffett, Japan, 135-136.

third.”⁶⁰⁰ the French architect Alain Villeminot remembered that in 1956, while staying in Tokyo with his fellow traveller Nicolas Bouvier on a very low budget and looking for a cheap accommodation, they had a small house assembled by a carpenter on the spot, in a short time⁶⁰¹.

The architect Gullik Kollandsrud even nicknamed Japan, in the title of his long article in the Norwegian *Byggekunst* from 1959, a “*Homeland of the module*” (*Modulens hjemland*).⁶⁰²

Standardization versus prefabrication

Detailed information on Japanese standardization – like the one the Norwegian reader got in Kollandsrud’s text – started appearing in the second half of the 1950s when entire articles in architectural magazines covered the subject. In the first special issue of *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* on Japan in 1956, Jacques Belmont wrote a well-informed history of the development of standardization in Japan, despite excusing himself for “offering just his first impressions – a subjective view of an architect”⁶⁰³. He pointed out that as a result of the widespread standardization, the Japanese houses are quick and cheap to build and easy to maintain. Just like many other Western authors, he adds a sigh about the fading of this tradition, especially the contempt of young Japanese architects towards their past. Belmont correctly noted that Japanese architecture is standardized, but it is not prefabricated; but he insisted that it “bears in it all signs of prefabrication.” Japan might therefore offer a positive answer to those who hesitate to move into a prefabricated house: “Japanese house reminds us that this prefabrication is not only a function of the means of production, or of transportation, but also of the inhabitant who will use it. In this respect, standardization has often been criticized: suppression of personality, lack of originality, monotony, etc. People who will live in the increasingly prefabricated houses should stay in Japan for some time. They would discover that Japanese houses, despite being fully standardized, are as unsystematic as possible.”⁶⁰⁴ In the end, without directly quoting Walter Gropius’ slogan of ‘unity in diversity’, Belmont rephrases it by saying: “The Japanese module allows, at the scale of the house, diversity in unity, and at the scale of the city, unity in diversity.”⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁰ As recalled by Mogens Prip-Buus, his senior staff assistant. See Richard Weston, *Utzon. Inspiration. Vision. Architecture* (Edition Blømdal, 2008), 252.

⁶⁰¹ Interview from 2015 see: <https://vimeo.com/126198070>

⁶⁰² Gullik Kollandsrud, *Modulens hjemland*, *Byggekunst* 2 (1959): 41–56..

⁶⁰³ Belmont, *La standardization au Japon*, 22-24.

⁶⁰⁴ Belmont, *La standardization au Japon*, 22-24.

⁶⁰⁵ “Le module japonais permet, à l’échelle de la maison, la diversité dans l’unité, et à l’échelle de la ville, l’unité dans la diversité.” Belmont, *La standardization au Japon*, 22-24.

Better than Western prefabrication

“Standardization so often means uglification,”⁶⁰⁶ said Alfred Bossom, giving the example of serially produced windows. He was not fighting against standards in building, on the contrary, this was a lecture announcing the foundation of Modular Society in the United Kingdom in a lecture given at the Royal Society of Arts. The goal was an improvement standardization, simple, cheap and fast, but without the drab image it already acquired. In the same magazine, Erwin Gutkind actually saw Japan as superior, and a source of inspiration: the

“depressing ‘prefabs’, which we have the courage to offer as living places to thousands of families. Standardization is by no means identical with uniformity and rigidity. If applied with imagination and cultured taste, it is more likely to produce stimulating results than the ugly prefabricated panels and the disingenuous layout of the Government-sponsored houses. If ingeniously adapted to our needs, the principle which the Japanese have applied to their standardized houses may be an excellent vehicle for housing the masses of these islands, and at the same time for initiating a better architecture than we can show at the moment.”⁶⁰⁷

In Czechoslovakia, where prefabricated housing was being built on a mass scale by the state, open criticism was restricted. Only in the 1960s the atmosphere got more open, so that Václav Hilský could, after seeing the chaotic development of Tokyo in the 1960s, write: “This situation is completely different from our current architecture, following commentary where we have good conditions for town-planning solutions of entire towns and their ensembles, but because of the inflexible prefabrication and a small product variety, we have achieved results that are often uniform and impersonal.”⁶⁰⁸

Eventually, Japan may have offered inspiration, but the Japanese system *kizari* would never become a model for any building standards in the West, except of course where an imitation of a Japanese form was the goal. Bruno Taut underlined it already in his *Houses and People of Japan*: “As this [book] is not meant as a compendium for erecting Japanese houses in Europe or America, we had better go no further in our study of measurements and sizes. Indeed, the work of construction cannot be done merely mechanically for all the helpful standardizing and normalizing. The carpenters take the greatest pains to make everything fit properly and the mat-plaiter too specially works the mats that have to fit in the rooms of a new building, making them so exactly to their prescribed size that is impossible even to

⁶⁰⁶ Modular Co-ordination. Its contribution to Cheaper Building. Extracts* from the Alfred Bossom lecture given at the Royal Society of Arts given on 10 December 1952. In: *Architectural Design*, January 1953, p. 7.

⁶⁰⁷ Gutkind, Japan, 31.

⁶⁰⁸ „Je to situace zcela opačná ve srovnání s naší současnou architekturou, kde máme dobré podmínky pro urbanistická řešení celých měst a jejich souborů, ale vlivem nepružně chápané prefabrikace a malého sortimentu výrobků docházíme k výsledkům, které jsou často uniformní a neosobní.“ – Hilský 1967, p. 302

stick a piece of paper in between the joints. Thus the Japanese standardization does not mean a manufacturing for stock in the modern way; it does not mechanize construction or Japanese handicraft. The mats, the most standardized element of Japan, are made by hand entirely.”⁶⁰⁹

Discrepancy between the Japanese concept of standardization and prefabrication of equal, interchangeable parts was the reason why the Japanese method could not be possibly exported, as Bonnin, Cruz Saito and Nishida argue:

“The traditional house would be based on unstable standards. It is not standardized because its measurements are predefined but rather because it fits into a logic of harmony between the whole and the parts, between the components and the compound they generate.”⁶¹⁰

Finally, these practical reasons may have not the main reason why the interest in Japanese standardization faded out. Since the history of fascination with standards overlaps quite exactly with the history of Modernism, it is no wonder that it also ended with Modernism, or more precisely its “heroic” phase after 1970. Standards continued to be used and spread – and arguably taken to another level by the onset of computers –, but the excitements they were able to raise in the post-war decades was gone for good.

⁶⁰⁹ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 207-208.

⁶¹⁰ “La maison traditionnelle reposerait sur des standards instables. Cette dernière n'est pas standardisée parce que ses mesures sont prédéfinies mais plutôt parce qu'elle s'insère dans une logique d'harmonie entre le tout et les parties, entre les composants et le composé qu'ils génèrent.” Mizuki Cruz-Saito, Masatsugu Nishida and Philippe Bonnin, *Le tatami et la spatialité japonaise*, 64.

III.1.6. Nature

The relationship to nature is one thing that almost no author forgot to mention in any characteristics of Japanese culture, and architecture is no exception. Even the contemporary edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* does not fail to inform in the second sentence of the entry on Japanese architecture that “A pervasive characteristic of Japanese architecture — and, indeed, of all the visual arts of Japan — is an understanding of the natural world as a source of spiritual insight and an instructive mirror of human emotion.”⁶¹¹

“Nature” is, of course, so broad a term that it serves as a container for very diverse concepts. Adrian Forty found, from the renaissance to the 20th century, at least nine different meanings within the field of architecture⁶¹². Nature was successively seen as the origin of architecture, the source of its beauty, a model for its principles; nature justified artistic licence, and was a metaphor for freedom. Romanticism first set nature as an antidote to culture, which may have increased its appreciation in art, but ultimately led to a rejection of nature in architectural thinking. This culminated in Futurism and its invocation of technology as the source of architecture. Technology was a basis also for the avant-garde movements of the 1920s, yet nature crept back into architects’ vocabulary here and there. The interesting reason why and how this happened are beyond the scope of this narrative, but it is safe to say that an interest in East Asia was by no means necessary for this renewed appreciation of nature.

From the beginning of the encounters of the modern West with Japanese architecture, the idea about harmony with nature was a key term with which Japanese culture was described and became a cornerstone of sorts. The Japanese authors writing for the Western public supported this: Four out of nine “advantages” of Japanese architecture as named by Tetsurō Yoshida in his 1935 book concern nature: “The unity of the house and garden, and the relationship between the house and garden, the numerous and large door and window openings and spaces open to the outside this way, as well as the use of material in its natural, untreated state.”⁶¹³ Thirty years later, Noboru Kawazoe still reassured the readers that the Japanese “use natural materials in a natural way” and a tradition exists “of harmony between architecture and nature.”⁶¹⁴

It was not a matter of believing what was written or said; the visitors saw the different attitude to nature themselves. Bruno Taut wrote about the Japanese that “the fundamental principle

⁶¹¹ James T. Ulak, Japanese architecture, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, online version, retrieved 1. 1. 2018.

⁶¹² See Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 220–239.

⁶¹³ Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 9.

⁶¹⁴ Kawazoe, Ise 1965.

of their thinking is no doubt an integral harmony of nature and art,”⁶¹⁵ and Walter Gropius recalled an anecdote where the Japanese “deep understanding of nature” showed itself:

*“Japanese man-made landscape and gardens are so beautiful because a deep understanding of nature has been all-prevailing throughout the land. The Japanese approach of persuading and stimulating nature will have a greater future value than the present Western method of “conquering” and “exploiting” her. I was driving once through a small place in the vicinity of Tokyo, when, at one point, our car was momentarily blocked by a large, beautiful tree standing awkwardly in the middle of the highway. It bore a big sign which, my interpreter explained to me said: ‘Let’s love this tree.’ It had been put up by the townspeople who felt they just couldn’t part, for the sake of traffic, with this impressive individual.”*⁶¹⁶

Western authors often connected the close relation to nature in Japanese to philosophy, spirituality and religion:

“Christianity dissolved nature worship and the discoveries of the Renaissance made nature an object of study and exploration, in the East Buddhism refined the early identification of man with animal and nature and stated their absolute oneness. In Japan, it was especially the teaching of the Zen sect of Buddhism that tremendously stimulated the feeling of nature not only by sharpening sensitivity to environment, but by providing the metaphysical and religious background that could also satisfy the growing inquisitiveness of man in his intellectual evolution.”⁶¹⁷

The close relation to nature was sometimes idealized, like when Nitschke wrote: “Intimacy with nature means, to Japanese sensitivity, more than the just resisting raping it, it means adopting nature’s rhythm of change for human creation.”⁶¹⁸

Both Engel and Nitschke, as many others, were readers of D. T. Suzuki’s essays (see II.1.). Suzuki writes a lot about Nature in his Zen and Japanese culture, and insists that:⁶¹⁹ “to understand the cultural life and its different aspects, including their love of Nature (...) it is essential, (...) to delve into the secrets of Zen Buddhism.”⁶²⁰ And many Westerners did.

However, some also had reservations about this all-encompassing closeness of the Japanese

⁶¹⁵ “Le principe fondamental de leur pensée est sans doute l’harmonie intégrale de la nature et de l’art.” Taut, *Architecture nouvelle au Japon*, 45.

⁶¹⁶ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, 21.

⁶¹⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 256.

⁶¹⁸ Nitschke, *MA*, 133.

⁶¹⁹ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Love of nature*, in *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 1959.

⁶²⁰ Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 345.

culture to nature. All was a matter of choice: The Japanese had no less qualms in exploiting natural resources than the West. Rudofsky noted the selective character of the Japanese approach to nature: “Nature is a Japanese child’s playground and shop. Yet he is told to keep it at a proper distance. He is not allowed to go barefoot outdoors or sit on the ground. He must wear a hat in summer, carry an umbrella in the rain. Thus, his mind is clearly impregnated with ideas of cleanliness (...) In his language, clean stands for beautiful, and vice versa.” 621

As Blaser noted, the different relation to nature lies rather in the way of thinking: “The spirituality of the East is characterised by the integration of disparate elements in the ‘Both-And’ relationship. Nature, for example, is to the Eastern mind not an object in our sense of the word as opposed to the subject. it is a part of universe in which man is so rapt in meditation that he conceives himself to be of a piece with it [sic]. The Western mind thinks in terms of ‘Either-Or’.”⁶²²

Four ways of relating to nature

As much as the ideas play the decisive role, architecture requires both material and plan. How did this relationship to nature actually manifest themselves in the Japanese house? Building on the literature available between 1945 and 1970, let us try to abstract ways of relating of Japanese architecture and nature. We can find four: adaptation, integration, presentation, and representation.

Adaptation

When judging architecture there was one criterion which could be considered contradictory to the Modernist premises: Adaptation. Its lack was later used by Modernism’s adversaries, but adaptation actually grew in importance within the Modernist discourse already during World War II. Compared to modern Europe, the Japanese way of building is seen as better adapted to the climate and topographical conditions, capable to react to seasonal mutations, thus adapting itself to nature, and creating a formative energy from this adaptation.

Charlotte Perriand wrote: “The traditional Japanese house is the opposite of ours, it proceeds from the inside to the outside, the horizon is the extension of nature, the nature of the house (...) And while our stone dwellings stood like a block holding the man secretly within his walls, removing him from his origins, condemning him to express his "own" personality and

⁶²¹ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 230-231.

⁶²² Blaser 1956, p. 35

to affirm it, Japanese architecture sneaked into the Nature whose laws it respected and exalted, the Japanese juxtaposed wooden chests to store her treasures.”⁶²³

In a very similar manner, Werner Blaser saw the core difference between the Japanese and the Western house rooted in the different relationship to nature: “The differences between the eastern and Western mind is particularly clear in architecture. In Japan there is only a thin membrane of paper to separate living space from Nature. Everything is open so as to unite Man and Nature. Nature pervades the room. The room is part of Nature itself. It is at the same time the stage where the interplay between Man and Nature begins in meditation.”⁶²⁴ This physical merging of house and nature happens when the house “enters nature like a snake slithering into in the grass,” as Antonin Raymond wrote in 1935⁶²⁵.

Historically, one characteristic thing which happened during the process of the appropriation of Buddhist architectural forms, a symptom of their “Japonizing,” was a tendency to turn symmetry into asymmetry, often reacting to the irregular topography of the place. Günther Nitschke demonstrated this on the Buddhist temple precincts of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries for instance the large pilgrimage place of the Shingon Buddhist at Kōya-san, and explained it by the adaptation to natural conditions: “the flat sites close to the big cities where the precincts were laid out along clear-cut geometrical lines gave way to irregular mountain sites where a closer relationship with natural forms was required. Man attempted to build now in conformity with nature.”⁶²⁶

Finally, this was also true also on the urban level: “Neither Kyoto nor Nara had any city wall or moat or another peripheral definition, so it was easy for surrounding nature to ‘flow’ into the city (still felt today in open-ended, unpunctuated streets), and for the city to ‘flow’ into nature.”⁶²⁷

The adaptation to nature did not take place only in the sphere of vision and form, but also of experience felt by other senses. Quite common is the complaint of Westerners about the winter cold in the traditional houses, but this is largely outweighed by the excellent

⁶²³ “La maison traditionnelle japonaise est le contraire de la nôtre, elle procède de l’intérieur vers l’extérieur, l’horizon est le prolongement de la nature, la nature de la maison. (...) Et tandis que nos demeures de pierres se posaient tel un bloc retenant l’homme secrètement dans ses murs, le soustrayant à ses origines, le condamnant à exprimer sa « propre » personnalité et à l’affirmer, l’architecture japonaise se faufilait dans la nature dont elle respectait et exaltait ses lois, les Japonais juxtaposaient des coffres en bois pour ranger ses trésors.” Perriand, *La crise du geste au Japon*, 16.

⁶²⁴ Blaser 1956, p. 35.

⁶²⁵ „...zahrada prostupuje do domu a dům zalézá do zahrady jako had do trávy.” Antonín Raymond, *O architektuře japonského domu*, *Volné směry*, Roč. 31 (1935): 168–174

⁶²⁶ Nitschke, MA, 134.

⁶²⁷ Nitschke, MA, 128.

adaptation of the house to the hot and humid summer, thanks to its elevation from the ground and openings allowing for air circulation.

These weaknesses were, according to Engel, result of the “passivity toward the adverse forces of nature, However, it was this passivity and the resulting exposure to climatic environment that led the Japanese to develop a highly refined climate control within the realm of the existing. Thus the Japanese house breathes in simultaneous pulse with the seasons and is in continuous organic charge. Life is consciously experienced in its multiple forms and changes, and the beauty inherent in the change itself is keenly felt.” 362

“The Japanese house,” Engel writes, “shows that beauty of living is not merely a passive awareness of certain values, but is the sensitive reaction to them and the practical participation in them. Therefore, in accordance with the change of weather the manners of living change just as does building itself, resulting in a closely synchronized pulse of nature, house, and man.”⁶²⁸

While the early human sought mainly a shelter from the elements in his dwelling, it was mainly art which “raised the awareness of the beauty in nature. Therefore, in a reverse trend, man again wishes for, if not necessarily physical, then psychological, participation in the inherent beauty of the changing weather. Architectural progress, then, was responsible for climate gradually losing its stigma of hostility to human life.”⁶²⁹ The Japanese quality is thus desirable for the contemporary house, which, “even though modern technology has provided the possibility to visually appreciate the exterior change of seasons from a well-conditioned and well-protected space, it has not yet made use of the architectural possibilities of physically expressing climatic changes within the house interior or of employing artistic adaptations of the different seasons in décor and furniture.”⁶³⁰

Integration

Connection to nature through adaptation could bring gushes of wind, splashes of rain or flocks of snow – especially if sitting on an open *engawa* – but there is one privileged way of experiencing nature in the form of plants, stones, and sand: the Japanese garden. As has been often mentioned, Japanese houses of all classes included a garden at least in a minimum area, there could be a garden running around its perimeter, and even small gardens within. The most reduced forms of a garden are probably the miniaturized landscapes on a tray, *bonseki* 盆石, and the hanging balls of living moss, *kokedama* 苔玉.

⁶²⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 363.

⁶²⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 362.

⁶³⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 363.

A garden is not a building, yet in Japan, there is little left that is not designed. This is quite obvious in the famous dry gardens (*karesansui*) made entirely from raked sand, pebbles, and rocks, but even in the gardens that do include greenery the trees are pruned and cut to achieve desired shapes. Gardening comes thus closer to architecture, but further from the notion of “nature” as it was often presented. “Gardening and landscaping fall within responsibility of architectural work,”⁶³¹ insisted Heinrich Engel in what was a description of reality in Japan and a wish for the West.

We cannot go any deeper into the subject of gardens here, but since the garden was recognized an integral part of the traditional Japanese house, it was naturally also a subject in discussing it. Even those who did not wish to delve into studying the complex realm of the Japanese horticulture could simply not ignore the physical presence of gardens in close vicinity and even within Japanese houses.

In contrast to the West, where the garden has been historically fairly independent from the house, in Japan the integration of garden and the house is close and intimate. The two characters for “home” (*katei* 家庭) mean literally house-garden. While in the West, garden was a luxury, in Japan, literally every house has a garden. Thanks to the standardized elements and gardening manuals, Japanese garden was accessible to common classes.⁶³² Alain Villeminot expressed the intimacy of the Japanese house and garden in a series of schematic drawings that he published in the Japanese magazine *Shinkenchiku*.⁶³³

There was of course the question to what extent are Japanese gardens and nature the same. Bernard Rudofsky stressed the great dissemblance between wilderness and the Japanese garden: “Complex associations are the chief characteristic of the Japanese worship of nature there is no malice in saying that the Japanese love nature best when it follows art. Uncouth, uncontrolled nature evokes little response in them. Gardens rather than groves tally with their ideal blueprint for good taste. A pinch of abstraction, a few touches of symbolism, greatly help to attune nature to their aesthetic wavelength. (...) This makes for an exciting lore but somehow the lofty examples of their art of gardening smack of the taxidermist rather than the gardener.” His “own sympathies lean toward the plebeian gardens that Japanese city dwellers cultivate in their backyards.”⁶³⁴

Engel was aware of this contradiction, and put in doubt the whole idea about the Japanese “love of nature”: “The Japanese Love of nature is one of those sweeping generalizations that

⁶³¹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 254.

⁶³² Engel, *The Japanese House*, 264.

⁶³³ Alain Villeminot. The Unity between House and Garden in Japanese Architecture. *Sinketiku*, 11 (1956): 53–55.

⁶³⁴ Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*, 233-234.

only too often obscure the very issue of the matter.”⁶³⁵ He then went on to explain by describing nature as indifferent, or to human life, he also had to define it as “inhuman”⁶³⁶, and logically concluded also that “the Japanese garden unmistakably not natural.”⁶³⁷

There was a dilemma in this: How come that such a nature-bound society built gardens which are “unmistakably non-natural,” or even give an impression of being stuffed? The best plausible answer was found in the mediating function of garden. “Garden not as a piece of wilderness, but as a concentrate of nature,” wrote Gerda Gollwitzer in an article for the Swiss magazine *Werk* in 1965⁶³⁸. And Engel writes: “It is a mediating agent that bridges the enormous gap between the opposites of humanized and natural environment.”⁶³⁹ Such an attitude has potentially far-reaching implications, countering the traditional Western conviction dating back to Romanticism that nature is the opposite of artifice.

Presentation and Representation

If we change the point of view from composition to experience and from the exterior to the interior, nature will appear not just “present” thanks to the tight integration of natural elements and the house, but also displayed, “presented”. Many of the smaller Japanese gardens are composed to be seen and appreciated from the interior of the house. Being in the first plane of vision while looking outside, the garden becomes an “outside wall”, connecting practical purposes with the need for beauty⁶⁴⁰. Slender wooden columns do not obstruct the view and effectively work as a frame in this vision. The sense of display is achieved also by enclosure, which is as important as the opening. A boarded fence blocking off the view can be, in the case of densely built-up cities, just one meter away from the perimeter of the house. Still, the orchestration of views in the Japanese includes much more. Another effect of the enclosure is blocking the views in the second plane, which is usually less “green” in an urban context, and instead visually drawing in the distant mountains that usually line the horizon in the mountainous Japanese terrain. An element from the classical gardening repertoire, this is called “borrowed landscape”, *shakkei*, a technique that has been compared to a similar strategy used by Le Corbusier in some of his projects (see chapter II.7.)

⁶³⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 276.

⁶³⁶ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 276.

⁶³⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 277.

⁶³⁸ Gollwitzer in *Werk* 1965, 288

⁶³⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 277.

⁶⁴⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 258.

The last of the four ways in which we set out to describe the ways in which Japanese architecture interacts with nature is representation. Besides direct display of natural objects, nature can also be represented indirectly. The most familiar example of representation is rendering through art. In Japan and China, unlike in the West, the most highly valued genres of painting were depictions of non-human nature: plants, animals and birds and above all landscapes. Unique for Japan is the way the painting connects to the building: Since wall panels and folding screens are made from paper, they are surfaces ready to be painted on. This turns the representative notably close to architecture.

It must be said that the attitudes we called integration, presentation and representation are often combined in actual practice. One of the main characteristics of Japanese art and design is that it mingles objects taken straight from nature, geometric abstraction, and representative forms in a continuous interplay. A good example is *tokonoma*, the recess or alcove designated for art, originally developed for tearooms in the *sukiya* style, sometimes built also in the interior of the house. Being rectangular in shape, it either hosts a vase with flowers (the flower arrangement, *ikebana*, is another highly regarded art), or a hanging picture scroll that can be exchanged. The whole place is a concentrate of representation to nature based on direct presentation and symbolical references: “The intimate relationship [with nature] is strongly symbolized by the display in the picture recess, *tokonoma*. The hanging picture scroll in the alcove, which may be but a few Chinese ideographs or a depiction of nature, together with the flower in the vase below, has meaning only if associated with a particular season; and the foreigner is bewildered because of its inability to comprehend the principles of such an association that seems to be keenly felt even by the youngest children of the family.”⁶⁴¹

One pillar in the *tokonoma* is often made from naturally crooked wood, exhibiting its knots to the view. When describing its function, Heinrich Engel almost gave in to pure poetry: “The suggestive power of this natural irregular column, in the subdued light of the intimate tearoom, may even carry one to the desolateness of the rugged mountains, where the life of a daring young pine tree has come to an untimely end because of cold and lack of food among the vastness of rocks, while the singing of the teakettle may be heard as the tremendous howl of the storm that brings the tree’s final downfall.”⁶⁴² It is no doubt the tearoom, closed off from all views to the outside, where the celebration of nature through representation reached its peak. In a less exalted way, the Japanese house contains many other natural elements. Not just because it uses local materials – that is true for any vernacular building –, but because of their purposeful display. As we mentioned above (II.1.3.) the pattern of the wood is exposed to view, in the Japanese house. Another example is the *tatami* matted floor – the *tatami* are traditionally made out of rice straw; when new they are green, before they get their characteristic beige-ish colour. Bruno Taut recalled a

⁶⁴¹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 362.

⁶⁴² Engel, *The Japanese House*, 289.

“statement by a “poet-farmer”: The mats really represent a grass-plot.”⁶⁴³ In smaller details, the building materials included natural elements for aesthetic effect, such as small maple leaves pressed inside the translucent paper of the sliding screens: conceptually, another example on an interplay between the presentation and representation of nature.

What can we draw from the many-sided relationship of Japanese architecture to nature? Some authors were explicit about a lesson to be learned. Charlotte Perriand saw the direction of architecture in a synthesis of modern technology and the Japanese feeling for nature: “We will leave our houses of stone. We can already let our habitat merge with nature thanks to steel and concrete technology while meeting the planning regulations of big density. Such as the traditional Japanese house with its wooden frame, no more bearing walls, a *façade* and an *open plan*. We get back in touch with the sky. It is the task for the young Japanese, currently split between two civilizations, two apparently contradictory lifestyles, to make the synthesis from them. Our modern techniques holding hands with the traditional Japanese spirit and our avant-garde, we can already make a bridge (“joli pont sur l’onde”).⁶⁴⁴

Finally, Philip Thiel wrote in 1963:

“As the despoilers of nature do we long to possess that which we destroy, and perhaps hope to learn from those with whom nature seems to carry on a secret dialogue? Having all material resources do we understand none, and perhaps covet the disciplines of necessity which have been a Japanese source of strength? Swamped by our mutating cities are we perhaps drawn to where the urban problems are much worse than our own, and thus look through the new eastern windows for new answers to new problems?”⁶⁴⁵

In these questions, Thiel of course continues in the self-critical vein of Western thinking but goes on to turn the experience with Japan into a potentially productive approach: a more sensitive exchange with nature, restraint with using resources, and urban problems. As we know today, these were issues that grew much more in relevance.

⁶⁴³ Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 21.

⁶⁴⁴ “Nous allons délaissier nos maisons de pierre. Nous pouvons déjà grâce à la technique du béton et de l’acier faire communier notre habitat avec la nature, tout en répondant aux règles d’urbanisme des grandes concentrations. Telle la maison traditionnelle japonaise, à l’ossature du bois, plus de murs portants, une *façade* et un *plan libre*. Nous reprenons contact avec le ciel. Il appartient à la jeunesse japonaise, actuellement écartée entre deux civilisations, deux modes de vie apparemment contradictoires, de réaliser la synthèse. Nos techniques modernes à l’esprit traditionnel japonais et par notre avant-garde, nous faisons déjà un « joli pont sur l’onde ». Perriand, *La crise du geste au Japon*, 15.

⁶⁴⁵ Philip Thiel, Kenzo Tange by Robin Boyd, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 18(2) (Sep. 1963): 29-30.

III. 2. SPACE

“Japanese space can raise claim to being the most misinterpreted intangible characteristic of the Japanese house. There is hardly a book on Japanese architecture that does not at length discuss the “secret” of Japanese space, and there is equally no book that does not leave the reader in utter bewilderment as to the essence of Japanese space. Rather, (...) the reader is finally led to believe more firmly than ever in the “secret” of the Japanese space”

– Heinrich Engel, 1964⁶⁴⁶

II.2.1. Introduction

Because it seems that ‘space’ concerns most of the other topics that I consider in this entire dissertation, presenting it as just one chapter among several other key terms was not enough. In this chapter, I therefore propose to address the Japanese architectural space as it appeared to the Western eyes in the mid- 20th Century. It builds on a comparison of many authors who wrote about Japan between 1930s and 1960s. Two of them, however, are prominent: Heinrich Engel and his study *The Japanese House*, and Günther Nitschke’s articles published in the British magazine *Architectural Design* in the mid-1960s (see II.6.3, II.6.4, II.6.6). The proposition proceeds in three steps: Considering the importance of ‘space’ in the Modernist architectural thinking, we first examine interpretation which saw the traditional Japanese in equal or similar terms as the Modernist “open”, “continuous” or “flowing” space. Second, we will follow the argument denying these claims: Engel, who studied the Japanese house in much depth defined the space an enclosed and clearly defined. While this may seem as a conservative return to an older Western definition of space, in the third part, we will see that Engel, were able to find properties that could actually overcome Western conception and show an alternative understanding of architectural space: by redefining space as connected to time, and to human experience.

⁶⁴⁶ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 245.

III.2.2. “Space” in Modern Discourse on Architecture

The word ‘space’ has an elusive quality to it. It refers to the qualities of the sensory realm, but also requires a good deal of abstraction. It is something that we may point our finger at, but the person we are showing it to will hardly understand without any previous understanding of the concept.

‘Space’ is nowadays quite universally accepted as the key principle of architecture; it was however not always so. Surprisingly enough, the occurrence of the word ‘space’ is relatively recent in the architectural context. In *Words and Buildings* (2000), Adrian Forty writes that there is “little agreement as to what is meant by ‘space’”⁶⁴⁷.

Tacitly or not, we still seem to accept the Modernist idea that space is one of the main elements of architecture – if not the main one. But this dominance of space, as we will soon see, is far from eternal, and far from general. The best way to show why is to actually delve into the history of the use of the term. Yet ‘space’ is indeed a very common currency in the architectural parlance, and jumps out from every other corner. To tackle this apparent omnipresence, I limit myself in this study mostly to places where ‘space’ is mentioned literally, and receives a particular attention. It will soon be obvious that its dominance has not always been taken for granted. “Despite the tendency of speakers to imply that they are talking about an immutable absolute, ‘space’ is no less transient a term than any other in architecture.”⁶⁴⁸

Space as a term in architecture is a product of several currents in thought, which have continued to intertwine and mingle until today. Although here we cannot follow the entire history, a basic familiarity with the provenance of the diverse meanings of ‘space’ is essential to understand the situation in the mid-20th Century.

Historically speaking, the interest in space arose surprisingly late. It was only at the turn of the 19th Century that a debate on space flourished in the field of aesthetics and art theory. It was, however, almost uniquely in the German speaking countries, and by no coincidence: The German word ‘Raum’, included both abstract and concrete meaning (it translates to ‘space’ as well as to ‘room’), something that was not as prominent in other languages. The writings of August Schmarsow, Theodor Lipps and Adolf Hildebrand, and several others, have produced entire clusters of ideas concerning space within a relatively short period of time⁶⁴⁹. Architects, as far as we can trace, have entered these debates only later, although quite vigorously. In the avant-garde movements of the 1910s and 1920s we can see a rapid

⁶⁴⁷ Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 256.

⁶⁴⁸ Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 257.

⁷⁰⁶ For the origins of the use of ‘space’, see also the debate between two Czech art historians, Rostislav Švácha and Jindřich Vybíral: Švácha 2002, Vybíral 2003.

expansion of the use ‘space’ as a term in architecture. At the same time, the scope of its meanings was expanding. The discourse of architecture absorbed various meanings of ‘space’ from art, psychology, and physics. In 1929, in his *New Vision (Von Material zu Architektur)*, the Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy already lists over 40 kinds of “space” (il). Moholy-Nagy’s goals in the text are both programmatic and didactic, and his text witnesses that space is not only becoming a central term in architectural thinking, but is placed in the centre of the educational process. This is clearly different from the previous times: Space is no more just a word to describe architecture, but it starts to be understood as a force, as a means of creation.

What, then, is space in architecture? To sum up the various meanings, as they have developed at the peak of the ‘space’ debate in the 1920s, Adrian Forty suggests to distinguish three attitudes: Space as enclosure, space as continuum, and space as an extension of the body.

“Space as enclosure” is the closest to the traditional conception of space, and still arguably the most widespread understanding of space in most Western languages. It can be traced back to Aristotle, who defines space as a container of things. For architecture in modern times it was Gottfried Semper who, in his theories, defined space quite simply as a three-dimensional extension. The concept was still relevant several decades later; for example, for Hendrik-Petrus Berlage, or Adolf Loos and his *Raumplan*.

On the contrary, “space as continuum” was a new, original understanding developed in the 1920s, which we can paraphrase as “breaking the box”: the building’s interior is now understood just as a part of universal space. The architecture should help to open the house radically by putting as few obstacles as possible. This concept was embraced by De Stijl group, and the Bauhaus circles around El Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy. Frederick Kiesler, an Austrian architect who was a member of De Stijl group, referred to his 1925 installation “City in Space” as “a system of tension in free space / a change of space into urbanism / no foundation, no walls / detachment from the earth, suppression of the static axis (...)”⁶⁵⁰. His installation can still serve as a good visualisation of this attitude.

The third concept sees space as a force field, generated by the dynamism of a bodily movement. Turning the attention to the subject, it draws from the Romantic tradition and it was August Schmarsow who formulated it specifically for interpreting architecture. A graphic illustration of this attitude can be found in the work of Oskar Schlemmer, a creator of the Bauhaus stage design. (See, for instance, the image from his publication *Bühne im Bauhaus*).

Another attitude, which shaped the ‘space’ debate, came from cubist painting. If we add it to the previous list it would be a fourth one, and, coincidentally, it has become common to

⁶⁵⁰ Quoted in: Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 266.

introduce time as a fourth dimension. This was an interpretation of Einstein's relativity theory and other important turns in physics of those times, namely the cognition that time and space are hinged. In culture, it was cinema that further helped to combine the experience of time and space, as did avant-garde forays into kinetic art. "Space-time" has thus become the key-term for influential propagators of Modernism like Moholy-Nagy or Giedion. Thanks to their prolific activities, "space-time" was now another catch-word.

Thanks to Giedion and Moholy-Nagy, as well as many other German speaking émigrés to the United States and to Great Britain such as Nikolaus Pevsner, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Raum' only then entered into English as 'space'. This newly gained importance can be seen already from the title of Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture*, the book that sealed the hegemony of the modern movement (the book was a printed version of his Harvard lectures).⁶⁵¹ In Forty's words, "through Giedion's influence, and the authority carried by the first generation of modernist architects, space had by the 1950s and 1960s become a normal category in architectural discourse throughout the world."⁶⁵² Another promoter of space as a notion essential both for understanding and designing architecture was the Italian historian Bruno Zevi, who also stayed in exile in the US during the war. His widely read and, in the post-war decades, often translated book *Saper vedere l'architettura* ("How to Look at Architecture" 1948) got in its English translation (1957) an even more instructive name: *Architecture as Space*, relegating the original title to a subtitle. The spread of 'space' as a key term in this second wave turned global, together with English language taking over the world from the 1940s on. Even Le Corbusier, after having spent years opposing the German speaking theorists and their theories about 'space', now gave in. In his 1946 *Modulor*, he adopts the idea that space is the key principle of all arts⁶⁵³. Other architects, who were less engaged in verbal skirmishes, slowly accepted space as the best formulation of their own endeavours.

⁶⁵¹ Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (Harvard lectures from 1938/39), 1941.

⁶⁵² "... leading Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown to remark in 1972, in *Learning from Las Vegas*, „perhaps the most tyrannical element in our architecture now is space." In Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 258.

⁶⁵³ In Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor*, quoted by Ven, *Space in Architecture*, p. 190.

III.2.3. Interest of Modernist Architects in Japan

It is tempting to confront this 'spatial' fascination with the interest in Japanese traditional architecture, shared by many Modernists. Since the period of 1945-1970 witnessed a boom of interest in Japan and 'space' just became the buzzword, it is no wonder that the two often went hand in hand. If we noticed that the interest in space came from Germans and German-English expatriates, we will see that the architects and writers interested in Japan by architects were most often the same origin, although they were not necessarily the same people.

In an investigation of the Modernist interest in Japan, we can ask: Was it the treatment of space that intrigued the Westerners in Japanese architecture? If it was, what made them think that Japanese tradition connects to modern ideas about space?

'Space' in Japan?

When confronted with actual Japanese building, we can easily sense how the void – an empty space – can be seen as one of its main traits, and why this space can be perceived as “open”. Thanks to the construction of the house, no walls are load-bearing, they are just paper-thin and often removable. The very size of the rooms is flexible this way, and can be adjusted by adding screens or movable paper walls. When the partitions are actually removed, the effect of connection of spaces in depth when one sees from a room to another is different from the one, say, of an *enfilade* in a European chateau: in Japan, the opening reaches nearly the height of the wall, leaving only a small band on top, and in width, the wall can disappear completely. The impression of openness applies even more to the rooms neighbouring the outer side of the building, which can open along their full length to the outside. The communication with the outside is, however, mediated by a porch or veranda (*engawa*) at the floor level, and by the overhanging eaves overhead. Engawa, running around the outer perimeter of the house has a special interest from the viewpoint of space, for it is a mediating space, located both inside and outside. One who steps on it has to take off the shoes, which makes it a part of the “upstairs”, and thus interior of the house, but it is also open and the communication is clearer with those “outside” the house, in the garden.

The composition of the Japanese house further contributes to the impression of openness. The frame that makes the construction of the house, is at least partly bare and visible from the inside, and so are the beams of the ceiling. The addition of rooms in a house is as is asymmetrical, which is historically a Japanese innovation. The individual rooms thus often connect irregularly to each other, which brings diagonal views. A specific way of adjoining the rooms diagonally, which can be seen in the main palace of the Katsura villa, is called the *flying geese* formation, and here the asymmetrical composition of spaces reaches a new level of refinement. Hardly any aspect of Katsura has escaped the interpreters and this one, as we will see soon, was no exception.

Traditionally, the Japanese houses were open during daytime and closed for the night for protection from cold and perpetrators; the impression of the house thus changed substantially. But even in its closed state, the rooms may make an impression of containing empty space; simply because there is not much in the way inside. All rooms have sliding doors; thus, no part of the door enters the room on either side. Moreover, the Japanese used very little furniture, sitting down on cushions or on the bare floor by low tables (sometimes considered to be benches by early Western visitors⁶⁵⁴). For sleeping, there were no beds, the sleeping *futons* were laid out each night, and the choice of the room for sleeping could vary. This may have looked familiar: Some Western Modernists had various objections to beds, and came up with a very similar practice. For example, the Czech architect Jaromír Krejcar did not own a bed and let his maid unfold a mattress every night before sleeping and fold it again in the morning⁶⁵⁵. The flexibility of use of all rooms except the kitchen makes Japanese rooms look basically neutral, which is why they can also look “empty”, at least compared to Western dwellings. Aesthetic factors, too, contribute to the effect of the void: the tendency towards restraint and poverty was not just a necessity of the houses of the poor, but became, in a refined form, a choice of taste of the higher classes. The tidiness of the Japanese, which of course shows in their houses, can be another factor that contributed to the “modern” impression: “*The Japanese don’t leave knitting and newspapers and old football boots all over the floor*”⁶⁵⁶. What could, however, overly enhance the impression of void – if a Western visitor knew the Japanese room just from photographs, or visits of preserved historical dwellings – was the absence of humans. Because of the modest size of the Japanese room, the presence or absence of humans is much more important than in Western monumental architecture, if only to grasp the overall scale. As Engel wrote: “*the Japanese house appears dwarfishly small in comparison to the Western residence, far greater than the difference in figure would indicate.*”⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁴ See Rudofsky, *The Kimono Mind*

⁶⁵⁵ Rostislav Švácha, *Od moderny k funkcionalismu* (Praha: Odeon), 269 (quoting Gusta Fučíková)

⁶⁵⁶ An observation by Sir Hugh Casson, quoted without reference by Banham, p. 16.

⁶⁵⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 234-235.

III.2.4. “Open”, “continuous”, “flowing” space in Japan?

The resources of the time confirm that, for Western modernist architects, the allure of ‘space’ – or what was seen as space – in the Japanese architecture, was indeed strong. Walter Gropius wrote in 1955 on the 17th century Katsura villa, which has become a symbol of Japanese architecture:

*“The Katsura Villa and its gardens represent the highest form of Japanese genius for creating architectural space of truly human scale. Here spirit has triumphed over matter. Greatness of conception is expressed by means of utter simplicity, the intangible by the tangible. The timeless modernity of this prototype of the Japanese residence is striking: outdoors and indoors the building and the garden are one continuous space composition; a sequence of interior spaces suggests unlimited flexibility by sliding walls and windows, no static spaces, no symmetry, no center focus. Space – here the only medium of artistic stimulation – appears to be magically floating. This is the lofty abode of man in equilibrium, in serenity.”*⁶⁵⁸

‘Space’ is mentioned here no less than five times: it is “open”, “magically floating”, it “suggests endless flexibility”, “continuous space composition”, even “human scale” – all these are qualities which Gropius strove for in his own creations, or at least retrospectively wanted to claim for them. It is worth noting that Gropius, when he edited his text for the publication on villa Katsura in 1960, he reworked this passage and avoided the word ‘space’ altogether.

Even younger ones saw a clear parallel between Japan and the space avant-garde movements. The German architect and writer Manfred Speidel (b. 1937), who came to Japan in 1966 with just a basic knowledge about the contemporary Japanese architecture and almost nothing about the Japanese past, recalls that he was much more surprised by the Japanese tradition that he discovered only on the spot. In particular, again in Katsura, the spatial composition of the room, all the way to the asymmetrically composed cupboard – “a space in in space” (“ein Raum im Raum“) – reminded him of the Dutch de Stijl movement. “*And something like this from the 17. Century, the age of the European Baroque?*” wondered he.⁶⁵⁹

Werner Blaser (see II.4.), saw the openness as a necessary result of what one already sees in Japanese painting:

⁶⁵⁸ Gropius, *Architecture in Japan*, p.4.

⁶⁵⁹ “Wie überrascht war ich – damals dürfte man die Bauten auch innen sehen – über die freie Übereck-Komposition aus Flächen, Linien und Körpern der Regalnische – ein Raum im Raum – im Neuen Shoin, der mich spontan an die Kompositionsmanifeste der holländischen De Stijl Bewegung von 1917 erinnerte. Und so etwas aus dem 17. Jahrhundert, dem "europäischen Barock-Zeitalter?“. See Speidel, *Träume vom Anderen*, 82

“Empty space is imperishable. Just as in paintings executed in China ink the picture consists not only of black but also of the empty surfaces of the paper, so the room is created not out of solid and objectified but out of the space between objects. In Japanese painting it is not the black itself which is important, but rather the unbounded expanse of white. In Japanese building it is not the boundaries formed by the three dimensions that matter but the empty space they create, i.e. the spatiality itself as shaped by light, shadow, and construction. That is why the plan [of the house] must be completely open, open towards the exterior and open in the relationship of one room to another. The constructional has been reduced to what is (...) indispensable, for empty space is achieved through the art of omission. The open design of the plan allows the garden and the living-room to interpenetrate. Interior and exterior are not strictly demarcated and yet everywhere boundaries are given exquisite definition. The paper-covered sliding doors make it possible to unify the garden scene into the picture presented by the interior.”⁶⁶⁰

The notion of emptiness stands at the very core of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy, and linking it to the visual emptiness in the East Asian painting is a commonplace interpretation. The essays of François Cheng expound on the subject of emptiness and void in Chinese art⁶⁶¹. The architectural public could read already in the December 1956 issue of the Swiss magazine *Werk*, Albert Theile’s article called *Der Begriff der Leere in der Kunst Ostasiens* (The notion of Emptiness in the art of East Asia). To apply it on architecture seems to be quite a conceptual leap: Note that in Blaser’s view, the treatment of space in Japanese painting is not only *compared* to architecture, but is presented as something even supposed to make architecture behave in a similar way. The more empirical minds, were, quite understandably, more cautious in this.

⁶⁶⁰ Blaser, *Japanese Temples and Teahouses*, 15-16

⁶⁶¹ François Cheng, *Vide et plein* (Seuil: Paris, 1991).

III.2.5. “It does not flow”

As we have seen in the previous chapters, many authorities of Modern architecture in the West, including the Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius, enthused about the Japanese tradition. Free asymmetrical plan, non-bearing walls allowing for movable openings and partitions, standardized elements, the openness to the exterior, structures and materials with minimum decoration... it seems that it was indeed the set of qualities that they called space that attracted them in Japan.

Books and magazines of the period did not hesitate to speak about Japanese architectural space, but not all found the phenomenon worth a deeper analysis. Two researchers, however, deserve a special attention. They both travelled to Japan and spent there several years studying architecture: The first one is Heinrich Engel and his *Japanese House* (1964). Engel's teacher was Ernst Neufert (1900 – 1986, see III.1.5.), whose *Bauentwurfslehre*, first published in 1936⁶⁶², has become a staple in every architects library and remains there until today. Neufert, as we saw in the previous chapter, developed a systematic method to present vast areas of knowledge for practical purposes of the designer. This method builds on order, categorisation, and demonstration through analytical drawings. These features also permeate Engel's work in *The Japanese House*. The second one is Günther Nitschke, who wrote several texts for *Architectural Design* and other magazines during the 1960s. Nitschke had worked with the German ‘organic’ Modernist Hugo Häring, as well as with Peter Smithson, one of the most prominent members of second generation of Modernist, and an important voice of the Team X.

Heinrich Engel confirms the observation that the “Japanese residential architecture ... used the three-dimensional void, space, as the primary stuff of architecture,” that “[it] is concerned only with space, its demarcation only by material elements, its inner-room organization and its interior-exterior relationship.” And finally also that “in the Japanese house, space itself is the expressive medium”.

But at the same time, Engel blames most hitherto written texts about Japanese space of confusion, a lament which runs through his entire treatise. One of the main mistakes is that these texts muddle different types of space, just as Blaser does in the quote above. Like Moholy-Nagy, Engel reminds us of the diversity of meanings of ‘space’:

“Most interpretations have little significance for contemporary architects, because they are based on subjective-emotional impressions instead of objective-factual observations; they profess the existence of only one unique Japanese space instead of distinguishing between residential and ecclesiastical space, urban and rural space, private and public space, even less between the different meanings of space in the various stages of its evolution; they constantly confuse universal (infinite) space, volumetric (three-

⁶⁶² Neufert, *Bauentwurfslehre*. Published in English as *Architect's data* (many editions)

*dimensional), pictorial (two-dimensional) space, and even mental (philosophical) space; and they top the confusion by stating that the idea behind Japanese space was consciously conceived for architectural purposes.*⁶⁶³

This is, however, not a reason to give up ‘space’ as such. Engel dedicates an entire chapter to it in his book after all. Definition literally means setting limits or ends. The first limitation which Engel sets for his subject is to deal only with the three-dimensional, “volumetric” space. The further conceivable dimensions are “*subjective qualities of the three-dimensional space*”⁶⁶⁴ and thus they do not play a role in his account – at least for the moment. (The fourth dimension should refer to the temporal dimension and the fifth one to human participation. Despite his exclusion here, Engel returns to them later; and so do we in this text.) This conception of three-dimensional space is then firmly anchored in the definition of space as an extension, in the tradition that we mentioned with Gottfried Semper or Berlage.

With this down-to earth attitude, Engel clearly distances himself from speculations and any murky mysticism – at least for the moment. This brings quite some clarity at this point, where everybody is speaking about the Japanese space as such. A very pertinent idea of his is to define precisely the actual set of buildings on which the ideas of space are based. It is, in his case, traditional residential architecture, which he distinguishes from monumental architecture. Such an architecture – the vernacular – has had hardly any detectable concept even in the West, and even less in Japan.

*“Space in Japanese residential architecture is a phenomenon that has no equal in any stage of spatial growth in Western architecture. Its similarity to contemporary concepts is frequently mentioned by architect-writers and hailed as a proof of progressive thought, but this analoguousness is more seeming than real. There is even reason to doubt whether Japanese space, as distinct as it is, is the result of a real intellectual concept a priori, for there is no evidence at all that the spatial characteristics of the Japanese house were conceived in advance.”*⁶⁶⁵

Günther Nitschke, too, counters the enticing idea that Japanese would conceive space in the same way that modernists dreamt about, tagging it directly as a “myth”:

“According to Giedion, Western consciousness of space as revealed in its architecture at any period is directly related to the comprehension of science and mathematics current at that particular time. The traditional Japanese consciousness of space is totally different from the time/space theory. That any similarity exists, is a myth that has haunted European architects for decades and which must be destroyed once and for all. The deception was all too easily induced by a superficial external similarity

⁶⁶³ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 246.

⁶⁶⁴ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 233.

⁶⁶⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 234.

– extreme transparency, flexibility, and lightness sought by modern Western architecture and already mastered in the traditional phase of Japanese architecture.”⁶⁶⁶

It is then the specific way of delimitation of the Japanese room which is Engel’s main key to reading its space. It is not necessarily the physical limits that make the difference, but also visual ones:

“The two different orders of space definition [sic] and space control – the vertical planes for marking the individual rooms, the horizontal planes for marking the house interior – are the keys for understanding Japanese space. In spite of all openness, the quality of space, though easily transformable, remains static and crystallinely defined. There is no interchange of space between interior and exterior, nor does space flow from room to room; there is no continuity of space ad infinitum in one direction.”

Arthur Drexler observed, in a similar way, that the borders of the Japanese room are strongly present, but merely as a hint on the physical level, the rest being left to perception:

“The limits of each room are not given not by the sliding screens but by the band of white plaster wall above them. Together with the ceiling this raised wall makes the upper part of a room a kind of lid floating just above eye level. When the sliding screens are opened to the view, it is the band of the solid wall which seems to keep the inhabitants from falling out into the landscape.”⁶⁶⁷

In this perspective, any idea of free movement, caricatured by Drexler as “falling out to the landscape”, is excluded. The space is not “continuous” or “flowing”. On the contrary, in Engel’s words, it “remains arrested”, and the space is a way of capturing the void; the room appears as a sort of receptacle. Although the Japanese space is “partly open”, it is always clearly delimited. This is supposed to be illustrated on two plates, showing the same room with its slides open and closed. The caption reads: “Expression of the void. The space, open to all sides and empty, yet static and controlled, allows optimum freedom for both mind and body.”⁶⁶⁸

What is underlined here is that the open space can always be closed – as it indeed used to be, on a daily basis. (Worth noting is, by the way, how often Engel uses the word ‘control’ in his writing). “*It does not flow,*” we are assured again about the Japanese space, and the ideas that it is “open” and “flowing” in the sense that so many Westerners presumed to know from their modern architecture, is firmly denied.

Drexler, in his turn, was actually one of the first authors who address the subject of Japanese architectural space more in detail. His interpretation comes out from how the Japanese house

⁶⁶⁶ Nitschke, MA, 117.

⁶⁶⁷ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 73.

⁶⁶⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 464-465

is built, in the first place: “...the skeleton frame is the discipline of the Japanese architecture, and it is a physical outline of a conception of space.”⁶⁶⁹ He sees the space in Japanese architecture as “additive. A room is a closed volume adjoined by other closed volumes. Though they may vary in scale, they are seldom intended to express those over-riding preoccupations of the Western architect with spatial sequences processing from major to minor. Japanese architectural characteristically knows no beginning, middle, and end.”⁶⁷⁰ It appears then, that the “endlessness” of the Japanese space that looked so familiar to the Modernists was a different sense of orientation in the Japanese space, or rather its lack. This is, after Drexler, well illustrated on the Japanese horizontal scrolls, the so called *emaki-mono* paintings. When it comes to architecture, their pictorial rules show indeed something of an analytical perspective, typically depicting them from an angle raised above the ground level, and even omit the heavy roof, so that they allow us to peek inside: “One looks down on a cluster of cells partitioned like a tray of ice cubes.” Japanese painters used a different pictorial perspective, so that the depth does not depend on a vanishing point. “Thus the conventions of painting and perspective present a house as an aggregate of rectangular spaces, strictly delimited and often so alike as to be interchangeable.”⁶⁷¹

Additive principle as such is nothing specific for Japan, it is a one of the basic attitudes of architecture in different cultures, especially for buildings created over longer periods of time architecture it is actually common to many. In composition of bigger ensembles, the additive quality stands out as a more conceptual element:

“Another effect proper to the Japanese architecture, but infrequently exploited, is the arrangement of the rooms in a building so that not all of them directly adjoin each other. Like boxes of varying sizes packed unevenly in a carton, rooms may be separated from each other by an unused, wasted space. In practice this ambiguous area may serve as a passageway or, perhaps, as in the example at Katsura Palace, as a dressing room. Considered as an esthetic device alone, the function of such an irregular space is to reveal the corners of the rooms adjoining it, thus making it possible to experience those rooms both from within and without as complete, independent volumes. Such an arrangement unexpectedly emphasizes Japanese architecture’s underlying concept of additive, cellular space, even though it requires the introduction of a secondary space which, like an organ-point in musical composition, remains free of the harmonies it supports.”⁶⁷²

In Drexler’s interpretation, the Japanese rooms behave like cells, in spite of their perceptual openness – like cells in an organism. This observation comes as interesting because the additive principle did enter again into modernism in work of certain post-war architects branded as Structuralists in the Netherlands, Giancarlo de Carlo in Italy, Roland Simounet

⁶⁶⁹ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 55.

⁶⁷⁰ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 55.

⁶⁷¹ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 56.

⁶⁷² Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 7

in France or, back in Japan – in Kisho Kurokawa’s Nakagin capsule tower where the clustering of cells is three-dimensional. These are, however, stories for later times.

With some simplification, we can distinguish between two approaches here: one, mostly enthusiastic, which dominated in the 1950s, and the other, mostly analytical, partly coming as a reaction later, during the 1960s. While the “architects-enthusiasts” were fascinated by the Japanese space, the “architects-scholars” have busted their “myths” already during the 1960s. The disproof of the initial identification of the Modernist and Japanese space was thorough enough that the very subject of Japanese space may seem to lose any value, at least for a discussion about architecture. But that is not what the “scholars” meant to do, despite all their scepticism. As Engel wrote denying the sameness of the Japanese concept of space to the ones Modernists wanted to see in it “...does not deprive this space of its significance for contemporary architecture. Rather, since it contains certain features that have gained new interpretation and substantiation in contemporary architecture, the analysis of Japanese space is more than just an alien and abstract study of things past.”⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 234.

III.2.6. The implications of *ma* 間

It is one thing to identify a quality – such as ‘space’ – in an existing reality – such as a building – and another thing to develop a discourse to generate this quality and discuss it. Knowing how productive the ‘space’ debate was in modern Europe, and knowing the apparent similarities between the spatial qualities of modernism and Japanese architecture, there is no wonder that an explanation has been sought somewhat deeper than just by stating this similarity. Since anything close to the concept of ‘discourse’ is barely known in traditional Japanese architecture, the debate could easily be cut short. Nevertheless, the problems can be seen from different perspectives. Various studies did address the notion of space in Japan: geography, anthropology, linguistics, and others. A remarkable read in this respect is Augustin Berque’s book *Vivre l’espace au Japon* (re-edited as *Le sens de l’espace au Japon*⁶⁷⁴). With a phenomenological bias, Berque links various pieces of knowledge in an attempt to understand how the Japanese experience space, how they “live” it⁶⁷⁵. What, among other subjects, becomes clear here is that the Japanese themselves have been far from passive receivers of the international debate about architectural space. A Japanese work, Mitsuo Inoue’s 1969 *Space in Japanese architecture*, revisits the entire Japanese building history from the earliest times, trying to use the optics of ‘space’ as developed in the West (referring to Nikolaus Pevsner)⁶⁷⁶.

The foregoing problem of the apparent misinterpretation Japanese space may have a deeper cause than a mere projection of architects’ own ideas. Although Engel, like most authors writing about Japan from the period, almost completely avoided the issues of language, he noted a considerable deficiency in Western language: “... *the development of language is but a reflected evolution of human consciousness, and the words therein are but external substantiation of man’s intellect. Consequently, the absence of any vocabulary directly pertaining to architectural space demonstrates human unawareness of the essence of architecture, controlled humanized space. Therefore, even though the very importance of space is realized in contemporary architecture, thought, talk, and action in regard to space have remained vague, unscientific, and without conviction.*”⁶⁷⁷ Once we agree that space is the primary substance of architecture, the consequences of such a lack of vocabulary are serious for the discipline: “*The architects’ inability to think and to act with a direct focus on space is not so much a matter of inadequate training, but the result of a lack of words that stand for concepts that constitute the essence of space. Doubtless, this has been the major reason that architectural science, architectural history, architectural practice, and architectural education are primarily concerned with the material aspect of building and not with*

⁶⁷⁴ Augustin Berque, *Vivre l’espace au Japon* (Paris, 1982); Augustin Berque and Maurice Sauzet, *Le sens de l’espace au Japon. Vivre, penser, bâtir* (Paris, 2004).

⁶⁷⁵ The “lived” space (*espace vécu*) as used by Berque, draws from the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre.

⁶⁷⁶ See Mitsuo Inoue, *Space in Japanese Architecture* (New York, 1985). (English translation of Inoue’s Japanese work)

⁶⁷⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 251.

its very essence, space.”⁶⁷⁸ He therefore speaks about an urgency to develop a new language pertaining to space in architecture, hopefully mending these insufficiencies. Although there is no direct communication between Engel and Nitschke in their texts, the latter may have tried to provide an answer for such an urgency. The language in question was Japanese.

In 1966, the entire March issue of the British Architectural Design magazine was dedicated to a 40-page long essay then went on giving an explanation of the traditional Japanese “spatial composition”, demonstrated mostly on temple precincts, but also with mandalas. All this on pages of a contemporary architecture magazine. Nitschke believed that in order to understand the spatial issues we should look deeper into language, but it was not him who started this peculiar interest. His inspiration came from contemporary Japanese architects revisiting their tradition. Already in 1963, a team of architects, including Teiji Ito and Arata Isozaki, dedicated a special issue of the magazine *Kenchiku bunka* to the character 間 (pronounced *ma*, *aida*, *ken*, *gen* or *kan*), and its relevance for understanding architecture. This character is shown to have a rich tangle of meanings, some of which touch the very roots of the Japanese understanding of architecture⁶⁷⁹. From this issue, Günther Nitschke took over a lot for his text, with which he hoped to “increase understanding of our control of space through the disposition of forms and objects and, in addition, [...] manage to destroy that facile attraction of Japanese architecture that resulted in so many meaningless imitations in the West during the past decade and replace it with with a deeper comprehension of the magnificent architecture of Japan.”⁶⁸⁰

Readers in this issue of AD could learn, right at the beginning, that the Japanese (originally Chinese) character 間 consisted originally of two elements – a gate, door 門, and the character for moon 月; the latter has nowadays changed to sun 日. (The original meaning of the character can thus be visualised as a ray of moonlight, or just light coming through a crevice in a door ajar⁶⁸¹). Conjoining not only the abstract and material connotations, but even time and space, *ma* 間 seemed to be a good candidate for a Japanese counterpart for the Western term of space. Meanings of *ma* span several dimensions: The first is a linear space measurement – the character 間 alone, read as *ken*, is a standard unit of measurement in architecture, measuring six feet and being the standard distance between two poles. Similarly, 梁間 *harima* is a beam span. In the realm of two dimensions, it can be a surface area (*roku jō no ma* 六畳の間, a 6-tatami room). Not listed by Nitschke, but illustrative for his argument, is the fact that the three-dimensional meanings of *ma* also include rooms of the

⁶⁷⁸ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 251.

⁶⁷⁹ Teiji Itoh, Arata Isozaki, Akira Tsuchida et al. (ed.), *Nihon no toshi kukan* (Japanese Urban Space), Special issue of *Kenchiku bunka*, 12 (1963).

⁶⁸⁰ Nitschke, MA, 156.

⁶⁸¹ Bernhard Karlgren, *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (Paul Geunthner, 1923), 130.

house. The Japanese rooms are actually more precisely designated as for purpose than they look⁶⁸²: *chanoma* 茶の間 (literally “room of tea”), for instance, was the traditional living and dining room; *hiroma* 広間 means anteroom; *ima* 居間 is a modern translation a Western “living room”. *Tokonoma* 床の間 is the alcove where art or flowers are displayed. Finally, there is also the term for “empty space” (*ku-kan* 空間), which is, however, a relatively recent addition to the Japanese language, coined precisely to represent the idea of Western three-dimensional space⁶⁸³.

Where *ma* 間 becomes really exciting from the Western viewpoint, however, is at the realisation that the range of the character’s use does not stop at the level of physical, one- to three- dimensional space, but that it extends equally to the realms of time and experience. It can denote simply a linear measure of time, in a common expression such as *ichi-ji-kan* 一時間 (one hour), or a temporal interval (*ichi-ji to ni-ji no aida* 一時と二時の間– “between one and two o’clock”). In arts, the temporal quality of *ma* is obvious in the *nō* theatre, where actors pause for a while, creating a “charged void” in time. Or in music. After Goethe called architecture “frozen music”; it has become almost a trite metaphor. Arthur Drexler, however, uses the comparison with music to actually explain something – and comes, too, to the importance of intervals:

*“In the view which regards architecture as a kind of music, Japanese architecture is a thoughtful meandering along a keyboard. Each not struck is another column; the intervals of silence are the spaces they delimit. Crescendos are rare, the art of the fugue is unknown, and, to the Western observer there seems to be no reason why this architectural ‘music’ can not continue forever across the landscape.”*⁶⁸⁴

The fact that *ma* 間 refers both to space and time excellently meets the need to express the connection between these two, the need which Giedion tried to solve by a hyphen in English: “space-time”. The effect of this parallel is the idea that Japan is both archaic *and* ultra-modern at once, because in the Japanese tradition these categories have actually never been separated. Arata Isozaki, who organized several exhibitions trying to express the meanings of *ma*, supports this interpretation⁶⁸⁵. Retrospectively, he commented:

⁶⁸² A fact also stressed and described by Engel.

⁶⁸³ The use of the ancient character *ma* 間, however, influenced and changed the meaning of the whole by its own connotations.

⁶⁸⁴ Drexler, *The Architecture of Japan*, 56.

⁶⁸⁵ MANtransFORMS: Aspects of Design, October 7, 1976 – February 6, 1977, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design, NYC (curated by Hans Hollein, opening exhibition of the museum) - Isozaki contributes with an installation called *Angel cage*; Festival d’automne 1978, Isozaki’s contribution is called centres around MA; this is shown a year later in Cooper-Hewitt as *MA – Space-Time in Japan* (1979). See also Chapter 6: Ma (interstice) and Rubble, in: Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 81-100.

*“I wanted (...) to grasp ma at the moment at which time-and-space had not yet been disentangled and rendered as distinct notions. I hoped to present the way in which ma shows up in different modalities of thought and speech: logical, visual, and performative.”*⁶⁸⁶

The “performative” modality that Isozaki mentions points to yet another dimension, a fifth one in Nitschke’s terms, introducing the human element, “taste and subjective imagination”⁶⁸⁷. Nitschke exemplifies it with expressions like *ma-ga-warui* 間が悪い (literally “the ‘ma’ is bad, meaning “I am embarrassed”), *hanashi no ma gu umai* 話の間が旨い (literally “the *ma* of the speech is excellent, meaning “it is an excellent speech”), or *ningen* 人間 (literally “among people“, meaning „man in the philosophical sense” but also, “humankind” – an expression almost impossible to translate). This shows how the Japanese pay attention to aspects of life that Westerners are often scarcely able to name: an emotionally charged space of human interaction, or assessing the quality of speech from its rhythm, with a special focus on the pauses. It is not always easy to understand to what extent the Japanese speech tends to include the subject and context, and often covers aspects that depend on a particular situation, so these qualities often get lost in translation.

It may now seem we have got far from architecture, and we may indeed wonder how the readers of an architectural magazine reacted to all this information. But this is just a way to get to the basics. It is already clear that one trait which all the various meanings of *ma* 間 have in common is that they denote an interval – spatial or temporal – while always being aware of two poles or multiple objects – or subjects – among which it occurs. *Ma* 間 is never an absolute, boundless space. Which may help to confirm the previous observation that the Japanese rooms, however open they look, can hardly “flow”: The Japanese thinking is structured differently. The word “interval” (*inter* means between, or among in Latin) seems more fitting as a translation than “space”. Dictionaries then offer translations such as “space-time interval“, but they also fall back on the prepositions „between“ or “among“. The Japanese word for “design”, “plan of the house”, *madori* 間取り, literally means “grasping of space”⁶⁸⁸. Isn’t this something that touches the very conditions of dealing with space, and thus the preconditions of architecture in general?

Nitschke was of the few Western architects of his time who tackled Japanese language, although in the 1960s he was, in his own words, only at the beginning of learning the it, and the text exudes the zeal of someone who is just discovering a new intellectual field⁶⁸⁹. His

⁶⁸⁶ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, 95.

⁶⁸⁷ Nitschke, MA, 152.

⁶⁸⁸ Adrian Snodgrass, Thinking Through the Gap: The Space of Japanese Architecture, *Architectural Theory Review*, 9(2) (2004): 65.

⁶⁸⁹ “Originally not knowing Japanese, my keen interest in MA in Japan was restricted to a few rather insufficient translations of some short essays in Japanese at that time, such as Kurita Isamu’s *Ma to nihon no kukan* (Ma and Japanese Space) in 1963 and *Dento no gyakusetsu* (The Paradox of Tradition), as well as a special

text, despite the amount of information it brings, addresses its main subject – “Japanese sense of place” – mostly in an oblique manner⁶⁹⁰. Nitschke was however not the first one to introduce *ma* 間 with an ambition of exemplifying more general problems concerning space. In his 1966 book *The Hidden Dimension*, anthropologist Edward T. Hall uses *ma* 間 as a means to reveal a pattern in Western thinking about space. When Westerners think and talk about space,

*“they mean the distance between objects. In the West, we are taught to perceive and react to the arrangements of objects and to think of space as ‘empty’. The meaning of this becomes clear only when it is contrasted with the Japanese, who are trained to give meaning to spaces to perceive the shape and arrangements of spaces; for this they have a word: ma. The ma, or interval, is a basic building block in all Japanese spatial experience. It is functional not only in flower arrangements but apparently is a hidden consideration in the layout of all other spaces. Japanese skill in the handling and arrangement of the ma is extraordinary and produces admiration and occasionally even awe in Europeans.”*⁶⁹¹

As we can already sense, this is not an easy area to operate for an architect. There are few direct translations of both Western and Eastern concepts, which is a good basis for interpretations, but also for misunderstandings. Shifts in meanings constantly redraw the issue, and create new problems. A similar degree of complexity, but not the same sort of complexity, can be found in both of these two cultures, while they continue to intertwine. Nitschke himself noted, after all, that “now the confusion is so great that 90 per cent of the writing about space by Japanese architects is not understood by even their peers.”⁶⁹²

The main value of such investigation lies in the opening of the view. It provokes to rethink the basics of thinking about architecture’s conditions, and the confrontation with the other – Japan here – helps to make this explicit. Later, largely thanks to the ongoing activity of Arata Isozaki with his exhibitions, *ma* 間 has been subject of several space-related studies by authors of various disciplines.⁶⁹³

copy of the Japanese Architectural Magazine *Kenchiku bunka*, No. 12, 1963 entitled *Nihon no toshi kukan* (Japanese Urban Space), (...). The editors of that magazine also generously allowed AD to use various illustrations of that issue for my 1966 essay.” Nitschke, MA, 152

⁶⁹⁰ Nitschke’s text is critically mentioned by Berque and Sauzet, *Le sens de l’espace au Japon*, 29-33. See there also for more on the meanings of *ma* and its implications.

⁶⁹¹ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York 1966), 153..

⁶⁹² Nitschke, MA, 152.

⁶⁹³ See, among others Berque and Sauzet, *Le sens de l’espace au Japon*, 29-33-

III.2.7. Seclusion and the space of man

“In Japan I experienced this unity of architectural space and living space for myself. It is the purpose of this book to convey this experience to others and thus provide the material and stimulus for a new awareness of the spiritual basis on which our architecture rests.”

– Werner Blaser, 1956⁶⁹⁴

What then can be drawn from all of this as a lesson for contemporary architecture, and for treatment of space? Heinrich Engel saw Japanese space as *“instructive in disclosing certain basic elements that are intrinsic to architectural space. One such revelation is that man himself is an essential component of space.”* This – continues Engel – is what *“distinguishes architectural space from the space of other creative arts.”* He concludes that *“Architectural space integrates man – a property that it shares with music.”* That is a definitely a compelling idea. But why do we need to go to Japan to see this?

“While in Western architecture the human element in space is represented by furniture or decoration, and human memories linger in photographs and paintings without requiring actual human presence, Japanese space obtains human significance only by man’s immediate presence. Man is indeed an essential component of Japanese space itself.”⁶⁹⁵

What urgency could this observation, however important, have at that particular moment? Let us remind ourselves of the situation: After 1945, Western Modernism is institutionalised, and the modernist architects themselves become institutions of sorts. The Modernist principles now dominate not just the theory, but also the global building process. A technocratic attitude rules, as it seems to be the best answer to the acute housing crisis. At a fast pace, building is industrialised through the use of prefabricated elements, and even the traditional brick building is subordinated to the speed of construction and the need to build flats in the highest possible numbers. This leads to neglect of certain aspects of the life of humans who inhabit these spaces. Criticism rises, and we hear it echoed in Engel’s writing. Instruments for this criticism are found in Japan, as well as possible remedies.

Some of the most interesting ideas in this respect surprisingly came from the study of the smallest, arguably most modest room ever: the teahouse. The Japanese teahouse is a tiny building, or a room, built with a single purpose: hosting the tea ceremony. A unique combination of courtesy, meditation, ritual, refreshment, aestheticism and human communion, the Japanese tea ceremony has grown around the preparation and drinking of the powdered *matcha* tea, and the Zen philosophy. Plenty has been written about the various schools of tea ceremony, gracious movements, minute details of the interior and equipment

⁶⁹⁴ Blaser *The Japanese Temple and Teahouse*, 40.

⁶⁹⁵ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 251.

– down to the bamboo tea scoop. However, it is essentially a time spent in contemplation in a well-chosen environment, in a company of courteous people and several carefully chosen objects. There are several types of teahouses, but the dimensions of all are very modest: the ceiling is often lower than an adult to stand in, and the standard size is for and a half *tatami*. The entrance is typically a square only about forty centimetres wide, which forces all the guests, regardless of their status or class (the samurais had to put away their swords), to kneel down when entering. As a formalized tradition – including the specially designed space – it started as a pastime of the nobility, developed by Zen priests. Despite its aristocratic origin, however, it became accepted by a big part of the population, and eventually pervaded the aesthetic of the entire Japanese house. A building simple in construction, small as a garden shed (from its looks, some could actually think it is a garden shed), and designated a very specific cultural tradition might seem to have little to offer to the general questions of building and space. But the results exceed the expectations.

Engel revisits the subject of space in chapter 8 of his book, called Seclusion, which is dedicated to the Japanese teahouse and the “cult of tea”. Here, an interesting change in style happens in his writing: while the structure of the chapter is in keeping with the general attitude of his book, giving detailed descriptions and drawings, the text suddenly becomes philosophical in tone. This contrasts with his previous matter-of-factness. If the dimensions of space that reach beyond what is measurable had been ousted from his definition of space at first, they come back here.

As Engel’s title indicates, the main lesson for contemporary architecture should be seclusion, which he defines as “*both the state and place of being in solitude*”, a “*space where man is sole content*”. If man was the main component of Japanese space in general, in the “*neutral environment of the tea house (...) becomes meaningful only through man’s presence*”. Seclusion is even seen as the “*dominant quality of early architectural space*”, when a shelter from the elements. Tearoom is presented as something that may let us come down to the very basics of building: The “*simplicity and primitivity [sic] of the tearoom may symbolize the ‘original abode’, i.e. the human space*” (italics by Engel)⁶⁹⁶. What is the relevance for contemporary architecture at this time? Because a space enabling thought and contemplation is something that we, modern people, desperately lack, despite the degree of freedom material saturation that we have got. Modern residential architecture is both a symptom and the culprit:

*“Modern man does not know what the destination of his existence is nor what leisure hours are for, because neither society nor the architect has provided a space where man can be alone and where he can strive for the more essential values of life as the Japanese can in the seclusion of the tearoom.”*⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 283.

⁶⁹⁷ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 292.

Modern architecture fails to provide a “space for man’s self-reflection.” The seclusion is not, as Engel stresses, antisocial, but is essential to grasp man’s own being as an individual, and practically enables him to think (certainly a very personal experience of someone who wrote a dissertation as large as *The Japanese House*). A lack of human scale was another failure that Modernism was commonly blamed of. And even where “human scale” has been used in the public debate, it referred purely to size and proportions. Here are we invited to rethink the basic human conditions of designing space. Seclusion, by allowing a withdrawal to the self, allows to maintain such human dimensions. Ultimately, it is human freedom which is at stake here⁶⁹⁸: “*Only in seclusion can the mind free itself,*” insists Engel⁶⁹⁹. The empty space – as we witness it in the tearoom – has a meaning for man’s inner development:

*“Except for flower and hanging picture scroll that respond to a temporary aesthetic mood, the room conveys a feeling of being vacant and empty. The reality of the room, is its void, not its walls, ceiling, and floor, even less its furniture or decoration; and the reality of the teacup is its hollowness, not its material form. Vacuum is all-potent because it grants infinity of use and freedom, both in spirit and material; only in vacuum can the full extent of man’s physical and intellectual, moral and spiritual limitation be overcome.”*⁷⁰⁰

In the “emptiness of the teacup”, resonating with the empty room, and most importantly with emptying the human mind during Zen meditation, we hear clearly the popular Zen interpreter D. T. Suzuki, probably Engel’s main source for this passage, as well as the quote of Laozi used by Van de Ven, which we quoted above.

Finally, the meditation on the teahouse makes Engel – in a book that first seemed to be concerned with measuring and exactness – become unabashedly philosophical, while setting goals for a new architecture:

*“Here the Japanese residence states clearly the fundamental task of architecture: creation of that residential and urban space that allows man to free himself from his continuous concern with the material world and helps him to come to terms with the self; to form ideas and to reappear with a plan for action; to act in accordance with that plan upon the material environment and upon other men: the destiny of man. This would be granted by a space of seclusion, of solitude, of retreat. And its absence in contemporary architecture uncovers the most tragic truth that while man learned to master the art of building he forgot the art of living.”*⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁸ Engel, in a book with almost no references, refers to José Ortega y Gasset here (Engel, Engel, *The Japanese House*, 300.)

⁶⁹⁹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 289.

⁷⁰⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 289-290.

⁷⁰¹ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 300.

If there were any doubts about the relevance of the study of such a distant topic as Japanese space, Engel gives a compelling answer here: architectural space can show us nothing less than how to live. Touching an old question whether and how can a built environment form man, this is of course a bold claim which would deserve further discussion. At any case, Engel eventually draws conclusions apparently no less radical than Nitschke: it is necessary to rethink the basics of design, including the role of people inhabiting it.

III.2.8. Conclusion

As we could see, in the time after WW2, the interest in Japanese space flourished among Western architect-writers, although this interest was expressed in different forms. Many were initially fascinated by the apparent similarities between how they saw a truly modern architectural space, and the space of Japanese traditional architecture. Only a couple of them, however, surveyed this attractive similarity more closely, as did Arthur Drexler, Heinrich Engel and Günther Nitschke, authors to whom we paid a closer attention. Their attitude, too, was shaped by the background and mind-set they brought from home, but as we saw, it also echoed the development of the understanding of space in the architectural discourse. In their work, however, we mainly follow a challenge to the initial idea: namely how some of the initial semblance of “sameness” had to be overcome, and the architects became effectively historians, anthropologists, religious scholars, philosophers.

Japan appeared as a culture in which certain rifts never even occurred, in particular the rifts that both constitute the very basics of European culture, and are at the core of some its problems. To use the distinction made by the German architect Hugo Häring, the separation of the “organic” (natural) and geometric (classical) order never happened. Because of the undeniable visual similarities of the architecture, it first seemed that the concept of space in Modernism and the Japanese one are also principally the same. This idea was still common in the 1950s, but has been rebutted in the 1960s. This rebuttal took different shapes; Heinrich Engel, for instance, insisted that the Japanese space is fundamentally different from the one of modernism, Nitschke called it a “myth”, and they both tried to bust the myth through extensive documentation.

However, noticing a substantial difference led neither Engel nor the others to a loss of interest in Japanese space, quite the opposite. What they called into question was mainly the alleged ‘openness’ of the Japanese space, conceived in the same terms as the idea of the “free flowing space” as formulated by avant-garde Modernism, such as we saw before in Moholy-Nagy’s writings and de Stijl movement. On the other hand, other interpretations of Japanese space approached possibilities that Modernism projected as rather theoretical ones: space as extension of the body, and the integration of space and time.

Japanese architects themselves also raised an interest in the issue. The interest in the Japanese understanding of space in the architectural discourse was further invigorated by the interpretation of the character *ma*, endeavoured by certain Japanese architects, chiefly by Isozaki, and taken on by Nitschke. Thanks to these activities, there emerged a broadly shared agreement that Japan and its space can bring important lessons for contemporary architecture, despite all the cultural differences. The Japanese space was interpreted as something that bears in itself a “hidden dimension” (James T. Hall), in the essential role of

human animation of the space. This led to a realization that “*Man is indeed the essential component of the Japanese space itself.*”⁷⁰²

Although it sounds like a truism, it was pertinent to remind this in times when the building practice, based on the then well-established Modernism, seemed to neglect this dimension altogether, possibly with dire consequences. An insight to Japan offered an occasion to rethink Western design concepts, while still keeping space at the centre. In Engel’s words, the Japanese house may “*contribute to (...) a more sound theory of design. It may also show the weakness of approaches (...) that make man the passive beholder of art and décor on display in architectural space (...).*”⁷⁰³ Engel’s work also shows how studying Japan offered both critical instruments and means of remedy. His criticism, calling for a change of perspective, was by far not the only voice of this kind in these times.

More specifically, the Japanese space was shown to be able to reveal a deep human need of seclusion. Especially the tiny, but meaningful space of the Japanese teahouse was shown to be able to demonstrate the very basics of building in its resemblance to the “primitive hut” and, in a philosophical scope, to be able to create favourable conditions for the liberation of human mind.

New ways of grasping the Japanese space are suggested, potentially no less productive as lessons to be learned for the Westerners: Drexler describes the Japanese principle as adding cells, Engel stresses the static, well balanced void. In a more ambitious, almost sweeping turn of mind, Nitschke (and Engel) suggest that rethinking architectural space primarily as place of human existence, one where architecture might. In this way they anticipated ideas that are otherwise getting their way to architectural theory much later, e.g. with the thinking of Henri Lefèbvre. In all these cases show how the deepening knowledge of the Japanese culture gave a new turn to the discussion about space in architecture that accompanied the entire history of Modernism.

When the position of authority that Modernists held in architecture started to crumble, it inevitably affected the importance that ‘space’ enjoyed until then. For the post-modernists, the concept of space became a symbol of Modernism, and thus also an object of hatred. In *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown claim that “*perhaps the most tyrannical element in our architecture now is space.*”⁷⁰⁴ They were interested in other aspects of architecture, especially the role of symbolism. Architecture was interpreted in different terms. A certain lull in the interest in space followed in the 1970s, but the debate about space did not end, and even less the interest in Japan, but at least for some time it became less

⁷⁰² Engel, *The Japanese House*, 251.

⁷⁰³ Engel, *The Japanese House*, 251.

⁷⁰⁴ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 148. Also quoted in Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 268.

prominent. But the stunning moment when Japanese space cast a spell over Modernism was gone.

PART IV

IV. I. EPILOGUE: TOWARDS A JAPANIZED WORLD

*“We put off going to Japan for many years, despite the fact that we are Modern architects – or perhaps because of the ways Modern architects, from Bruno Taut to Wright, Gropius, and others, promoted the classic architecture of Kyoto. Each generation of Western architects has seen in Japan what it wanted to see. The interpretation our generation was exposed to was extra-selective, it corresponded to the minimalist, structuralist, modular purity of early modern architecture and focused on the villas and shrines of Kyoto. These images of a particular Japanese architecture, conveyed and cropped through the early Modernists’ cameras and the cropping of their photographs, made us think of Japanese architecture as “goody-goody”.”*⁷⁰⁵

In architecture, the era dominant by Modernism was coming to an end around 1970. Only by then could fully come out how specific were some of its tenets; and the representation of Japan certainly belonged to it. As we can judge from what Denise-Brown and Venturi wrote, the Modernist image was prevalent enough to make a distinct impression on those who never visited the country. It took two decades – and probably also a good deal of work of other interpreters such as Arata Isozaki, who purposefully bombarded the Modernist interpretation with his view of Japanese ambiguity, to shake this image. As we know today, the Postmodernists were a bit too hasty in burying Modernism: It did not quite die, but certainly mutated into something else. The image forged in the 1940-1970 did not disappear, but had to share space with other images, and became part of history.

Post-Modernism, too – which in Japan was connected with the so called Bubble economy –, has come to an abrupt end in 1991 when the bubble burst. Still even in these conditions, Japanese architecture did not cease to amaze, and Japanese architects continue to perplex the world with their projects and collect architectural prizes prizes. At the same time, the earlier images of Japan continue to live their own life – for instance, in form of the books that we analysed.

Contemporary minimalism, for instance, would be hardly conceivable without the encounter with Japanese culture – as John Pawson testifies: “Sitting in the Katsura Palace, looking over the moon-viewing lake, with traditional cake and tea, is a distillation of everything that

⁷⁰⁵ Venturi Robert – Scott Brown, Denise: *Two Naifs in Japan.: Architecture and Decorative Arts*, Kajima, Japan, 1991.

attracts me to simplicity. Nothing is wrong, not one thing, the table, the tray, the view, the lake, the process of getting there, and then of leaving again. Everything is perfect.”⁷⁰⁶ Any serious research about the origins of this origins cannot avoid the period we dealt with.

A convergence between Japan and the West was evident already to the Modernists, as we could already see. When Steen Eiler Rasmussen commented on it he illustrated it on clothing:

“The entire mode of life and the philosophy of the Japanese have something of the emancipation that we are striving for. (...) Sixty years ago [around 1900], Hearn described the Japanese and his way of life as opposed to the one of the white man’s. It is interesting to note how much closer we have approached each other since that time. The starched white shirt is no longer a common article of dress simply because we have become much more mobile than we were. We have given up many other superfluous things and in return have come to appreciate nature much more, to have a greater desire to make it part of our daily lives. This is apparent in our houses and their design.”⁷⁰⁷

In a very simple manner, Rasmussen’s comment about the convergence of Western and Japanese clothing points to the basis of the amazing transcultural similarity. If the 20th-Century in which Europeans started resemble, in some ways, to the old Japanese building, it was also because of a change of values and lifestyle which led to change a base in design; even if the particular solutions were decisions of individual designers. The reason why Japan was so attractive was partly in that the traditional culture harbours possibilities that appear contradictory.

⁷⁰⁶ John Pawson: *Minimum*, London, 1996, 13.

⁷⁰⁷ Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1961, p. 100-102.

IV.2. SUMMARY

In this dissertation, we dealt with ideas about Japanese architecture in the Western discourse in times of the Modernist architecture was at its peak, between 1945 and 1970. Some architects commented about certain similarities between the Modernist principles and traditional Japanese architecture already from the 1920s. Beginning with visual parallels, the interest in Japan soon encompassed principles of construction, handling of material, the treatment of space, the philosophy and aesthetics of simplicity, and the relationship of architecture to both man and the environment. To examine the origins of these ideas we went back to the early 1930s, but the period we have set as our main interest began in 1945, “year zero” in Japanese history when Japan was defeated and occupied, starting its economic miracle, and ended 1970, when this development culminated.

We found out that the similarities between modernism and the Japanese tradition sparked a wide interest among the architectural public, which led to numerous publications on Japan unprecedented in scope and depth when compared with any other non-Western culture.

It was the notion of ‘image’ that guided and backed our inquiries. We have analysed the image of as it appeared in text and visual means, mainly photographs. A detailed analysis of these various representations of Japan in the architectural media makes up the main part of the research presented here.

We saw trends that were surprisingly constant when seeing Japanese traditional architecture: Japanese tradition was seen as having qualities that put her especially relevant for modern life, and for the future such as standardization, or universal values simplicity, relationship to nature, and the experience of space.

Yet have also seen an evolution in this discourse about Japanese architecture, especially in the 1960s, when the dynamism of the country triggered reactions that were often critical.

Very simply, we can say that for the Westerners, Japan was always a subject of certain extrapolation: within our relatively short period of 25 years, we have witnessed a shift from an imaginary past to an imaginary future. Initially, Japan was a symbol of the past – although this was a rather mythical past that carried timeless qualities of harmonious order and function, and full of possibilities for the present. By 1970, Japan with its chaotic urban space

and omnipresent high technology was perceived as future that is already happening; and it was n not always a future that one wished for.

IV.3. CONCLUSION

Japanese architecture has meant a number of different things to the Western architects. To the lesser it has served as one more source from which to borrow, as a substitute for original thinking. To others, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, it has been a catalytic agent in the development of a new vision of form; while to a third group it is seen as a surpassingly clear expression of fundamental principles which they were struggling to re-discover.

– Philip Thiel, 1957⁷⁰⁸

In the beginning, we have proposed four hypotheses: that Japan was a source of formal inspiration, that Japan was a source of “purposeful misreading” or a “creative misunderstanding”, that Japan became a catalyst of architectural thinking, and finally that the Western Modern movement has found a “prosthetic history” after having refused the traditional historical models.

Can we now get a better idea of what different things Japan has meant to Modern architects? Returning to our initial hypotheses, let us suggest the answers in a recapitulation.

Was Japan a formal model for architects? A source of practical solutions, irrespective of the architects’ understanding of the original context? From the beginning, I doubted the this first proposition in a . Not because one could not find examples of direct borrowings: For example, we came across some cases where books by Testurō Yoshida and others served a source books for designing (like for Alvar Aalto, mentioned in II.1.4.); another such detail, for instance, was the stone foundation of a pillar of the Schreiner villa by Sverre Fehn in Oslo (II.4.6.), a house, moreover, nicknamed *Hommage au Japon* by the architect himself. Such isolated observations, however, could not offer much answers and understanding of the more essential question, why and how exactly it could happen.

⁷⁰⁸ Thiel, Philip: Japanese Influences on Western Architecture, in: *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Feb., 1957), pp. 271-274.

Was Japan a source of “purposeful misreading” or a “creative misunderstanding”? Projection and confirmation of one’s own ideas was indeed of the Modernist interest in Japan. For a Walter Gropius (II.4.3.), finding in Japan what he saw as parallel to his lifetime effort certainly had a touch of personal satisfaction, as far as we can sense from his writing. The motivation, was to “prove the alleged universality of the architect's own principles,”⁷⁰⁹

A need to find a confirmation of current endeavour sometimes led to purely instrumental use of Japanese examples – as we saw in the case of prefabrication (III.1.), the system of *tatami* appeared out of context only to show that they have a universal value. Heinrich Engel complained about it already in 1964:

*“Many Western publications on Japanese architecture are strongly biased by the wish to find affirmation of current theories in architecture and do not show serious attempts to uncover serious backgrounds. They have misinterpreted both the merits and defects in Japanese architecture.”*⁷¹⁰

One visual approach which we encountered time and again is worth a special remark in when speaking of the purposeful misreading. It is juxtaposition, assisted by editing different images to “help” them look similar. Photography, increasingly accessible in the period we followed, was widely used in this way: We saw this strategy used by different creators to convey the idea of closeness of Japanese tradition and Modern principles: Charlotte Perriand, Werner Blaser, Lucien Hervé juxtaposed pictures taken from a similar angled. Yoshio Watanabe and Yasuhiro Ishimoto, helped by Tange (as we saw in the chapter II.5.,) were even more radical in the sense that they creatively dissected photographs of the foremost historical monuments to meet an imagery building up on visual art of the avant-garde. In this sense, we could amass a lot of proofs that Japan has indeed been interpreted and misinterpreted. Yet the last case – if not any others – also underline a the creative part about this misunderstanding: what began, could still turn to something new and unprecedented

This leads us to the next question. Did Japan enter Modern architecture and become a catalyst of architectural thinking?

The “lesson” to be learned from Japanese architecture was always ambiguous, but generally speaking the (re-)interpretation of Japanese culture helped the modernists to reflect on their

⁷⁰⁹ Akcan, *Towards a Cosmopolitan Ethics*, p. 11.

⁷¹⁰ Engel, *The Japanese House*, p. 24.

own starting points and to understand their limits, and could even point towards overcoming them. Seeing the close connection of the Japanese house to the garden, and the multifaceted way nature entered the Japanese house, made the Western authors almost denounce their Western attitude (Günther Nitschke); other started imagining a new synthesis of the best of the two cultures (Charlotte Perriand, Heinrich Engel): ideally a house that would react to nature as the Japanese one, but would be comfortable as the Western one. All the concepts discussed in the synthesis (Material, Construction, Standardization, Nature) and mainly in the further section on Space (III.2.) show signs of similar evolution of thought. From all authors we read, probably Heinrich Engel was the most systematic in attempting to use Japan as a “mirror” to contemporary architectural development. Conversely to the positive examples as seen in the tradition, in the 1960s, when Japan’s development accelerated, the mirror may have served as a sort of a warning against the effects of forces of spectacle and commercialization.

And finally, did modern architects, having refused their own tradition, find a something like a 'prosthetic history' in Japan, which could provide prototypes and models? “

An agenda of ours was, throughout this study, to notice words that pertain to relationship, without this relationship being causal. Lucien Hervé, the photographer (II.4.), together with finding visual parallel, was also inventive is a good example inventive both bringing together

We can then say that there was definitely a case of ‘prosthetic history,’ seen in Japan, if we do not confuse history with genealogy. The discussions about the common traits allowed, ultimately to look for what is essential in architecture.

The question of history was put also more directly by the actors themselves. Japanese architecture was admired for having certain unique qualities. These qualities were either seen as specific to Japan – and therefore untransportable –, or they were something that West used to have and lost, something of eternal archetypes – and therefore accessible. Different understandings of history were at the core of many disputes and misunderstanding about history when Western architects encountered Japan. We documented many claims, in the first part of our synthesis (III.1.1.) that “the Japanese have known it all before”. Claims about influence, however, always sparked controversies.

Philip Thiel noted already in 1957 the time when fascination with Japan peaked that “architecture has meant a number of different things to the Western architects,” from “a source from which to borrow” to a “catalytic agent.” (quote above) The multiplicity of voices that Japan attracted and which we encountered in this dissertation, the consists of many individual experiences, and the space we gave to various authors was also to help appreciate this plurality. Reducing the significance of all the authors Modern architects to a single explanation would not be possible, for they were perceived as a hindrance of creative freedom.

Each of the propositions that we set in the beginning therefore contributes to the understanding, but is not an ultimate explanation alone.

Understandably, the extremes are attractive. One would be almost tempted like say that “each wanted to see in Japan what they wanted to see” (like Scott Brown and Venturi in the quote above), or in contrast argue that Japan was a decisive formative impact on Modern architecture.

What we actually found, though, is a fluid and dynamic discourse that some of the discussions clearly began as offshoots of dominant discourse at home, but grew into unexpected directions when meeting actual Japan. We registered authors who received ideas of their time and never went to see Japan. This was interesting because a polyphony of these voices constituted the widely shared ideas of the time. But quite naturally we also inclined to original thinker who defied the usual conceptions.

Not by coincidence, two authors who most escape the clear-cut categories as expressed by our initial hypotheses appeared often throughout this work: Heinrich Engel and Bernard Rudofsky. Both were architects, but their attitude is mutually almost opposite: Heinrich Engel, who prudently build up a large body of work a Bernard Rudofsky, a globetrotter one generation older, well read and witty. The differences in means of expression can be misleading after all: both wanted to debunk the preconceived ideas of their peers and in order to do that, they had to make considerable efforts to first learn something themselves.

One thing Japan showed to the rest of the world was a surprisingly easy coexistence of apparent opposites. The Western “either-or” attitude encountered the Eastern “Both-and”: an oft repeated observation, which we heard mouthed by Werner Blaser while speaking about nature (III.1.). From the beginning Japan was described as a series of paradoxes, which

could lead to confusion and distress. Gradually, we were able to see glimpses of accepting the paradox as a value of its own right.

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Appendix

Images