View of Tokyo Tower, Roppongi, Tokyo

Chapter 9
The Western Genome in Japanese Architecture

The eminent American architect Robert Venturi's first trip to Japan came as late as 1990. Two and a half decades earlier, he had authored "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," a path-breaking volume calling out Modern architecture's nihilism to history and tradition, spelling out its cultural limitations and arguing for a far more reflective and inclusive attitude.[1] From the backdrop of this seminal contribution, more than two decades of critical observation, and more than half a century of Japan's transformation separated him from former reflections on the Far East by other Western architects such as Bruno Taut, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jorn Utzorn and Walter Gropius.

Venturi criticized his Modernist predecessors for having missed the point: They had limited their perceptions to the sublime austerity and structural clarity of traditional Japanese buildings. They had failed to notice, or at least include in their writings, the simultaneous contradiction of the vivid hues of moving *kimonos* or the myriad colors of the Japanese garden. Venturi argued that the decorative foreground was as much a part of the aesthetic comprehension of Japan as its austere backdrop of buildings; the contradiction was necessary to complete the aesthetic equation. Tokyo, the dense collage of traditional dwellings amidst corporate high-rises, old wooden streets amidst regiments of commercial signs, juxtapositions of micro and macro capitalism, of ancient shrines and zesty neons seemed to "have its act together."[2] He marveled how "taxis, always immaculate, whose roof lanterns, in a variety of forms, symbols, graphics, and colors (made) cockeyed configurations……in an urban infrastructure of straight streets and wide avenues lined with trees or regiments of commercial signs, or crooked lanes lined with utility poles draped with myriad wires."[3]

Venturi's provocative reaction was as much the result of his personal ambivalence towards Modernism, as the time in which he saw Japan for the first time. In 1990, he was witnessing the most remarkable offspring of an entire century of confluences between Japan and the West. From the time Japan opened its doors to the Western world, Japanese architecture had become the subject of a two-sided dialectic. The Western intrigue with Japan was only as strong as the Japanese zest for Western import. The not-so-long-ago self-sufficient culture became a new intellectual forum for the Western world, and this seemingly complex dialectic in turn, a

Figure 9.1 Top: Ginza, circa 1920 showing streetcars. They disappeared by 1972 with the rise of buses and taxis.

Figure 9.2 Opposite page: Early Western architectural influences. Left: Diet Building; Right: Kyoto City Hall

newfound catalyst for emerging Japanese architects to seek new interpretations of their own traditions. In many ways, these confluences with the West remain some of the most paradigmatic and transformative junctures in Japan's history, and are therefore fundamental to a deeper understanding of its contemporary built condition. What follows is a broad survey of these exchanges, tracing how the idea of Japanese architecture morphed into the ambiguous compound that evades any cogent identity, and into the complex cross-cultural phenomenon we find today at the ocean's edge.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS

Japan's first interactions with Western culture started in the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese with trading basis in Goa and Macao established contacts with the insular archipelago. Saint Francis Xavier had arrived in Japan in 1549 and founded the first Jesuit mission, and by the early 1600s, nearly half-a-million natives had been christened. In 1615, the first Spanish ship arrived from the Mexican port of Acapulco, at the behest of King Philip III. That same year, a Japanese delegation from the city of Sendai left for Rome to meet Pope Paul V Borghese. But even as a new period of cross-cultural relations appeared to be growing, the anti-Christian Hitedada became Shogun, and suppressed Christian zeal over the next two decades through the merciless persecution of converted natives. Japan was closed to all outside influence. Only a tiny Dutch trading settlement in the port town of Nagasaki maintained an indirect tie with Europe by a ship that would arrive from Macao once a year.

Not until 1853 would Japan emerge from this self-imposed isolation. Four American "black ships" commanded by Commodore M.C. Perry had set anchor threateningly in the Edo bay. They would force Japan to embark on a new period of trade, with the first American-Japanese treaty drawn up in 1854. In 1868, the Tokugawa Era found an end in the Meiji Restoration, with the abdication of Shogun Tokugawa Keiki and his military shogunate and the restoration of Emperor Mutsuhito.[4] The capital was moved from Kyoto to Tokyo. With the new government aimed to make Japan a democratic state, the boundaries between the social classes

of the Tokugawa regime were gradually broken down. To transform the former agrarian economy into a developed industrial engine, many Japanese scholars were sent abroad to study Western science and languages, while foreign experts were brought in to teach and share their knowledge and talents.

IMPORTING THE WEST

Early Meiji architecture was initially influenced by the colonial architecture from Chinese treaty ports such as Hong Kong. In the port town of Nagasaki, the British trader Thomas Glover, for instance, built his own house in just such a colonial-influenced idiom using the skill of local carpenters. His influence helped the career of British architect Thomas Waters who had designed the Mint in 1868, in Osaka, as a long, low building in brick and stone with a central pedimented portico, as well as the Commercial Museum in Tokyo, thought to have been the city's first brick building. In 1872, Ginza, the central district where Tokugawa Ieyasu had minted his first coins in the 1600s was destroyed by a fire, and a zealously Westernizing Meiji government entrusted Waters the task of replacing the tinderbox maze of wooden buildings with fireproof materials (elaborated in Chapter 8). Waters redesigned Ginza as a western oddity, with brick buildings and wide tree-lined boulevards *(Fig 9.1)* and it was eventually leveled in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and rebuilt as a shopping and entertainment district. Ginza was one of Japan's first significant Western architectural imports on a grand scale.

Another such effort of significance was the Diet building *(Fig 9.2)*. From 1886-87, two German architects, Wilhelm Böckmann and Hermann Ende were invited to Tokyo to draw up two plans for a Diet building. Böckmann's initial plan was a masonry structure with a dome and flanking wings, which would form the center of a large government ring south of the Imperial Palace. However, there was public resistance in Japan to Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru's internationalist policies, compelling the architects to also submit a more Japanese design that introduced traditional Japanese architectural features in many parts of the building. These designs were never built, but were used for the Tokyo District Court and Ministry of Justice buildings. In 1898, Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi interviewed the American architect

Figure 9.3 Top: Early Western architectural influences. left: Tokyo Station; Right: Daiichi Sogyo Offices

Figure 9.4 Opposite page: National Museum, Ueno Park, Tokyo

Ralph Adams Cram, who in turn proposed a design featuring tiled roofs and a large enclosure of walls and gates. But the Itō government fell as Cram was en route to the United States, and the project was dropped.[5] In 1910, the Finance Ministry in an attempt to take control over the new Diet building, recommended that the new building emulate an Italian Renaissance architectural style, but this was criticized as too arbitrary. The ministry subsequently sponsored a public design competition in 1918, and 118 designs were submitted for the new building. The first prize winner, Watanabe Fukuzo, produced a design similar to Ende and Böckmann's, and the Diet Building was eventually constructed with a floor plan based on Watanabe's entry. The roof and tower of the building were inspired by another entrant, third prize winner Takeuchi Shinshichi, chosen because it reflected a hybrid architecture compared to the purely European and East Asian designs proposed by other architects. Thus, contrary to what one may think from a distance, the Diet building remains a significant paradigm in the recent history of Japanese architecture, offering insights into the Japanese reluctance to fully embrace Westernization in its early stages, while allowing both Western and native architects to flirt with ideas that were essentially non-Japanese to begin with.

"The first sight of a Japanese home is disappointing….. it is unsubstantial in appearance and there is a meagerness of color," wrote Edward Sylvester Morse in his 1888 book "Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings."[6] He was noting the austere, monochromatic traditional Japanese interior as compared to its ornate Western counterpart in what would be the first Western narration on Japanese life. The marine biologist, who first visited Japan in 1877 to study brachiopods had accepted the professorship of zoology from the Japanese government in the Imperial University of Tokyo. He shared his vast knowledge of Japan with Americans in numerous public lectures, especially the 1881 Lowell lectures on collecting Japanese art and artifacts. Simultaneously, the introduction of Japanese prints in the 1862 London Exhibition and the 1867 Paris Exhibition had made an enormous impact on European Impressionist painters, including Manet and Van Gogh.[7] Intrigued by these new ideas from another land many Westerners left for Japan just before the inception of the Modern movement in their homeland.

Josiah Conder was the first European architect to enter Japan. He established a design studio in 1877 and become the avant-garde architect of the Meiji period.

He designed approximately seventy buildings that attempted to merge Eastern ideas with historic styles from his native land. His Mitsui building completed in 1894 introduced the Victorian style for the first time in Japanese history. His sensitivity to Japanese gardens also resulted in an influential book "Landscape Gardening in Japan" (1893).[8] It was arguably this book that remained the literary backdrop for the re-known American architect Frank Lloyd Wright when he was commissioned in 1916 to design the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

By 1922, when Wright was completing the Imperial Hotel, Japan had already dived into an era dominated by the import of Western ideas and goods. Everything Western was suddenly good and desirable; every style of Western building was dotting the Japanese landscape *(Fig. 9.3. 9.4)*. Thus Wright, himself a Japan enthusiast hardly felt the need to emphasize literal "Japan-ness." He chose instead to create a building that remained in his own words "true to the spirit of old Japan" but "was not for apologists – but for enquiries, not for fakirs busy with superficial taste and morality, but for seekers of evidence of the vital creative power of man."[9] With the Japanese looking for something American and the Americans for something Japanese, Wright's building did not escape attention. The basic axial plan of the hotel with common facilities in the center with two symmetrical bedroom wings was reminiscent of the Phoenix Hall of the famous Byodo-in Temple in Uji. One Japanese architect, Kikutaro Shimoda (1866-1931) who had also submitted a proposal for the hotel competition before Wright's involvement, claimed that Wright had plagiarized his concept, and transformed it from the proposed Japanese-style tiled roof to a flatter one on a stone and concrete building. The protest was ignored and Wright's building was constructed. But Shimoda's outrage drew attention to the prevalent trend of Japanese architecture that was being increasingly undermined.[10]

That trend was the *teikan* style. It was a "Japanese nationalist" concept that had begun in the late 1920's as a way of amalgamating Japanese and Western architecture. Sutemi Horiguchi (1895 –1984) was one of its pioneers having designed the Shien-so (House of Purple Haze) in 1926 as an Art-Deco style box with a tea hut-like thatched roof. Major competitions in the 1930s and 40s were all dominated by this trend. Even Kenzo Tange who would go on to become one of Japan's greatest Modern architects had designed the winning competition entry for the Nittai Bunka

Figure 9.5 Top: Gamble House designed by Green & Greene, Pasadena, California – west-facing façade

Figure 9.6 Opposite page: Kings Road House designed by Rudolph Schindler, Los Angeles, California

Kaikan (Japan Cultural Center in Bangkok) in 1943 with large roofs and columns visibly inspired by the Imperial Palace in Kyoto.[11]

The 1920s also saw the emergence of another Western model of community living in Denenchofu (discussed in Chapter 8). The Kanto earthquake of 1923 had drawn attention away from Edo's dense urban neighborhoods to the safety of the Japanese countryside inspiring a new village-like lifestyle based on British town-planner Ebenezer Howard's Garden City model. Denenchofu opened in the late twenties, its plan replicating Howard's garden city diagram with concentric and radial streets with a rail station and park as its commercial center. Residential lots originally platted between 360 to 1000 square meters were gradually subdivided to accommodate more than 30,000 residents who lived in garden fronted dwellings on tree-lined streets. Despite all the historic references, it seemed more Western than anything else Japan had seen at the time.

EXPORTING JAPAN

To complete this discussion, one must not forget the concurrent genomes of Japanese architecture that found their way to the West. Here, I focus on three early influences, primarily because they suggest the breadth and nuance of this exchange, before the onslaught of the International style. The work of the brothers Charles and Henry Greene (1868-1957 and 1870-1954) in California, at the turn of the century, is one of the more obvious instances. As Kevin Nute notes,"the Greenes themselves made no secret of their admiration for Japanese art and architecture, and in some of their early designs in particular even employed several overtly Japanese motifs, including the *iriimoya* roof form."[12] Their masterworks such as the Gamble House in Pasadena suggest Japonisme through its, raw timber details, intricate joinery, extended eaves, stone lanterns and the use of the roof as a dominant formal element recalling Japan's magnificent timber buildings *(Fig 9.5)*.

Another known example is the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, who while freely acknowledging an important philosophical debt to Japanese art, and to the woodblock print in particular, consistently rejected suggestions that Japanese architecture had any direct impact on his work. Kevin Nute has provided the most scholarly

insight into this nexus to date. In his book "Frank Lloyd Wright and Japan: The Role of Traditional Japanese Art and Architecture in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," Nute excavates several parallels: The goiige-style plan form of the Nikko Taiyu-in-byo versus the Plan of Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois; the gongen-style plan form of the Nikko Tosho-gu, Tochigi Prefecture versus the Johnson Administration Building, Racine, Wisconsin; and the vertical section of the east pagoda of the Yakushi-ji Temple versus the vertical section of Wright's un-built St. Mark's Tower project as well as that of the Johnson Research Tower in Racine, Wisconsin.[13]

One case that has been speculated about, but not elaborated on is the Kings Road House designed by Rudolph Schindler for himself in Los Angeles in the 1920s. Shindler had never visited Japan. It was his training with Frank Lloyd Wright that had perhaps opened him to Japanese notions. The Kings Road House elicits a delicate Japonisme in a number of ways: it connotes an almost *wabi-sabi*-like aesthetic of conscious rusticity, its spaces filled with ambiguous dark, dim, shadows playing in a void recalling Tanizaki's narratives of Japanese homes. The walls are bare and the floors are naked. During its heyday, the furniture was rather minimal for a Western residential interior. The spatial experience of the house is a series of autonomous frontal planes along a sequential path, like the subtleties of walking through the additive spaces of the Katsura Villa. All rooms are low and horizontal with an abstinence from double height spaces or vertical volumes. And its pinwheel plan with three 'L' shapes spinning out from a central fireplace, pull the arms into yards bringing the garden to interface all rooms in the dwelling *(Fig. 9.6),* making the room feel like a *shoin*.

What stands out in these three relatively contemporaneous cases is their differences in inspirational sources and subsequent interpretation. As Nute points out, most of the similarities between the work of Weight and Japanese structures tends to be "at the level of plan and section rather than in superficial details."[14] In the work of the Greens, it is traditional Japanese form more than space that frames the extent of the concepts. The Gamble House for instance is Western in plan, organized around a hierarchy of shaped rooms and furniture, influenced less by Japanese spatial notions, and more by the regional Southern California Bungalow. The Kings Road House as discussed above appears to be Japanese in space, not in form. Seen

Figure 9.7 Top: National Museum of Western Art designed by Le Corbusier, Ueno Park, Tokyo

Figure 9.8 Opposite page: Tokyo Tower, Roppongi, Tokyo

from the standpoint of Japanese history, these examples have escaped recognition as significant paradigms in Modern architecture, even as it was being rigorously embraced in a changing democratic Japan of the twenties. While Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye was hailed as an new paradigm, written and spoken enough to exert its imprint beyond the West to Japan, the Kings Road House for instance was suppressed and ignored amidst the stampede to stigmatize the 'machine ideology', outcast as having no place in the International style as a coherent stylistic movement, and left to a lonely exile in Los Angeles.[15]

EMBRACING MODERNISM

Returning back to Japan, we now turn to German expatriate architect Bruno Taut, who went on have significant influence on the rubric through which Japanese architecture would be understood in the West for decades to come. In 1933, when he was documenting traditional Japanese houses, he lamented on their increasing propensity towards adopting Western lifestyles. Booming Tokyo appeared to him as a "nauseating" monstrosity.[16] Favoring traditional puritanism, his influential book "Houses and People of Japan" spelt out what was to become the generic Western understanding of Japanese domestic architecture for decades.[17] But more than the book, it was his eulogy on the Ise Shrine and Katsura Villa as discussed in Chapter 1 that remained the force behind the changing scene. The rustic monochromes that had disappointed Morse particularly wooed Taut. He condemned the Toshogu Shrine at Nikko for its polychromatic ornamentations as he fell in love with the austerity and rusticity of the Katsura Villa. Taut had successfully managed to recast the impression of traditional Japanese architecture through his own Modernist bias for functional minimalism.

By the mid thirties, fueled by, yet hardly limited to Taut's influential proclaim, Modern architecture began to hold sway in a Japan ever ready for more change. The American architect Antonin Raymond who came to Japan to assist Frank Lloyd Wright on the Tokyo Imperial Hotel experimented with the idea of the Western vertical living room in his own house in 1923. His designs such as the Kawasaki Residence (1934) were dominated by this feature along with a Japanese garden on

one side and a *kura* (storage space) on the other. Raymond went on became a major force in Japanese architecture, his Readers Digest Tokyo Office (1951) showcasing how reinforced concrete construction could in fact express the same lightness as traditional Japanese buildings. By the fifties, with many young Japanese architects such as Kunio Maiekawa and Junzo Yoshimura completing their training in his office, the era of Japanese Modern architecture had begun.

The decision to invite the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier, one of Modern architecture's foremost figures, to design the National Museum of Western Art in 1950 was not unpredictable[18] *(Fig. 9.7)*. When Corbusier arrived in Japan in 1957 to oversee the construction, he too visited the Katsura Villa and made drawings and notes. But unlike Taut, his proclamations on Japanese architecture were limited to merely how the tea hut interior seemed busy with too many lines, and how the stool-like seats in the arbor were shaped like a swastika. Whether Corbusier remained unimpressed by the non-sculptural qualities and aesthetic minimalism of Katsura or not, his tryst with Japanese architecture was amazingly evasive, brief and innocuous.

Le Corbusier was not the first Modern architectural celebrity to engage in this exchange. It was Walter Gropius, who would more than any of his peers, extend the intellectual dimension of this East-West exchange. When he visited the Katsura Villa in 1954, his awe at the building's simplicity deepened his own convictions about structural purity. Through two significant figures, Kenzo Tange, a then emerging architect, and Robin Boyd, a young Australian architectural critic, Gropius' intentional support manifested in four major texts on Japanese architecture. Tange published "Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japan" (1960) and "Ise: Prototype of Japanese Architecture" (1965) Boyd published "Kenzo Tange" (1962), the first ever English language monograph on an oriental architect and, "New Directions In Japanese Architecture" (1968), an informative study on the current architectural development in Japan.[19] The book on Katsura was significant in many ways: First, it officially re-surfaced the rustic retreat as a Japanese architectural masterpiece reinforcing Bruno Taut's earlier proclamation. Second, it began with a foreword by none other than Gropius himself, banking on his international reputation to reassure the world of its architectural relevance. And third, it presented the Katsura Villa through exclusive photos that carefully cropped off any curve or landscape, reducing the presentation

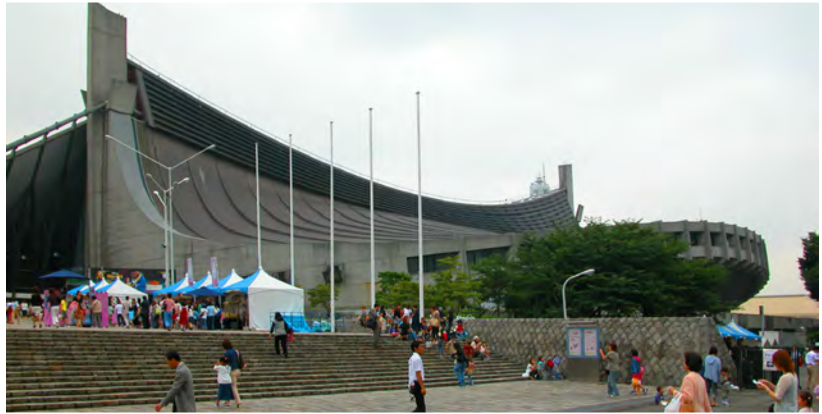

Figure 9.9 Top and opposite page: Yoyogi Stadium designed by Kenzo Tange, Tokyo

to a series of abstract Piet Mondrian-like paintings of straight lines and rectilinear shapes as elaborated in Chapter 4. The Katsura rhetoric was a well-timed tactic. Its widespread acceptance in both Japan and the West affirmed the thin line that now separated Euro-American Modernist ideals with Japan's architectural desires.

In 1958, when no building in Tokyo exceeded ten stories, the Nikken Sekkei's Tokyo Tower appeared in Shiba-Koen, one of the city's busiest areas. The 333-meter landmark was a copy of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, but slightly higher than its French original. It not only broke the existing building height barrier of ten stories, but also symbolized the increasingly blurry boundary that now separated Japanese Modernization from Westernization. Japan had embraced the West. It had provided a mirror for every major Western architect to see what he had wanted to see in its architectural traditions. The myriad seeds of Western Modern architecture were beginning to take root within Japan's seemingly open-ended ideals. Japanese Westernization and Modernization now seemed mutually indistinguishable *(Fig 9.8)*.

This entry of Japan into the mainstream of Modern architecture had not gone unnoticed. In 1966, Harvard architectural historian Siegfried Giedion published the fifth edition of his esteemed book "Space, Time and Architecture."[20] He wrote a special page on Japan's ongoing tendencies as an important Modern regional development. He was impressed by Kenzo Tange's sports facilities for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, with their curving tensile steel roofs referencing Japan's traditional roofscapes. Giedion saw this as a key to successfully amalgamating Western and Eastern spirits. Evidently a distinctive Japanese Modern architecture based on an aggressive use of modern technology was beginning to emerge, representing a new dialogue with Western Modernism *(Fig. 9.9)*.

REGURGITATING MODERNISM – METABOLISM & BEYOND

In this new Japan of industrial pluralism, where the emblematic question was now about finding deeper social meanings to an increasingly westernizing culture, one of the answers centered around grandiose utopia. The Metabolism Group (whose work was surprisingly close to the English Archigram) reacting to the pressures of Japanese overcrowding, proposed constantly growing and adapting plug-in me-

ga-structures where the living cells were prefabricated pods clipped on to tall vertical cores.[21] They argued that unlike the architecture of the past, contemporary architecture had to be changeable and flexible to both reflect and meet Japan's dynamic reality. The most exhibited of these proposals was the 1960 "Plan for Tokyo" by Kenzo Tange & URTEC, a visionary scheme for expanding Tokyo across the bay in a series of nine linear interlocking multi-tiered infrastructure loops, with large urban spaces under ten-story high sloping roofs, bridging off the central spine.[22] None of these grand visions came into realization, but the seeds of such ideas conceptually impregnated their smaller works such as Kisho Kurokawa's Nakagin Capsule Tower and Kenzo Tange's Yamanashi Press and Radio Center, and Fuji TV Building *(Fig. 9.10)*. At its best, the smaller Metabolist work succeeded in its own way at pointing the finger that Giedion had prophesized: In many examples it suggested the character of a modern technological mechanism whilst recalling the constructional clarity of Japan's traditional post and beam construction. But this rhetorical avant gardism, too far a cry even for Japanese optimism, met its deserving assessment as a "fuss" of "change-loving structures", a "mere anachronism, a thousand years out of date, or to say the least, not an advance of modern architecture in terms of theory and practice."[23] It eventually began its evident decline at the Osaka Expo in 1970.[24]

Ironically, the most profound critique against such futurist protocols came from one of the Metabolism's founding members, the Cranbrook and Harvard trained Fumihiko Maki. Though as part of the Metabolist coterie, his name became associated with large-scale urban designs and plans, his buildings were anything but mega-structures – a term that ironically he had invented. Deploring the separation of architecture and planning, he criticized in his 1964 essay "Some Thoughts on Collective Forms" the ongoing tendency towards "static compositions of individual buildings" that bore little semblance to the grain of the city.[25] He argued against mega-structuring and for "the vital image of group form" that was derived from "the dynamic equilibrium of generative elements and not a composition of stylized and finished objects."[26] The Hillside Terrace Complex in Tokyo started in 1969 would exemplify Maki's realization of the significance of traditional town-making methods *(Fig 9.11)*. The mixed-use project would be designed and built incrementally over the next 25 years, its flexible master plan absorbing radical changes in layout and build-

Figure 9.10 Top: Fuji TV Headquarters designed by Kenzo Tange, Minato, Tokyo

Figure 9.11 Opposite page. Left: Hillside Terrace Complex designed by Fumihiko Maki; Right: Spiral, a multi-use building, with gallery space, multipurpose hall, cafe, restaurant and bar, salon, and shops designed by Maki, in Minato, Tokyo

ing typologies, whilst maintaining the open character of its public space, its intimate courts and meandering passageways. Maki's emphasis on the spatial design of the public realm was a pioneering effort amidst the Japanese architectural cacophony – nothing like it had been seen in Japan's recent past.

Unfortunately priorities of those like Maki remained relatively peripheral. The succeeding work of the "Japanese New Wave" though comparatively modest in scale seemed far more accepting of the notion that one could in the Japan of the seventies and eighties, hardly hope to achieve any meaningful relationship between the single building and the urban fabric as a whole. Assuming an almost fatalistic attitude towards the megalopolis, it was Toyo Ito that clarified a new cultural notion of closed domains to counteract the disorder of Japan's "Non-Place Urban Realm". Arguing in his 1978 essay "Collage and Superficiality in Architecture", that richness in the Japanese city was perceived less through the historical accumulation of buildings, and more "out of a nostalgia for [a] lost architectural past which is indiscriminately mixed with the superficial icons of the present", he defined the goal of his architecture, not as the pursuit of that nostalgic satisfaction, but as the expressing of a certain "superficiality of expression in order to reveal the nature of the void hidden beneath."[27]

Prompted by its advancing information society, the gradual shift from an architecture of industrial "hardware" towards one of intangible "software" was hardly difficult.[28] Without renouncing the tectonic and engineering bravura of its earlier modernism, architecture was now concerned with the ephemeral, striving less for monumental permanence and more for an ambiguity in meaning. The increasing use of both lighter ordinary materials such as Teflon fabrics, perforated aluminum, wire mesh, cloth and paper, as well as the latest technologies in lighting, including lasers and computer controlled spatial simulations intended buildings as parts of the rapidly changing environment rather than permanent and deterministic forms. Tokyo, where thousands of structures and buildings got demolished and replaced every day, affirmed the fierce and fleeting reality of the emerging Japanese megalopolis.[29]

When American architect Charles Moore, one of the most audible voices against the placelessness of Modern urbanism visited Japan in 1977, he could not help but voice in his essay "Impressions of Japanese Architecture" how his con-

tinuing awe at Japan's "magic gardens of purest peace" was defiled by its "endless degrading sprawl; the bad air; the shapeless, scattered mass that connects the suburbs from the land, engulfs the real places, and dims the hopes for continuing occupancy of the planet."[30] Thus while Japanese megalopolises seemed to be as chaotic and alienating as any in the West, it was the recognition of this impoverished urban realm that saw the emergence of the introverted enclave, a critical attitude most evident in Tadao Ando's austere concrete. His tension with universal modernism and idiosyncratic tradition had prompted an essay "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture toward Universality" as early as 1962, distilling a methodology of "closed modern architecture" in response to a non-feudal, overpopulating, post-war Japan.[31] Lamenting the loss of its most persistent architectural tradition – the "intimate connection with nature and openness to the natural world"[32] – his small austere courtyards, such as in the Koshino House (1981) and Kidosaki (1986) House, sought through detail, light and wind, a contemplative perception that was "overlooked in (the) utilitarian affairs of everyday."[33] Ando's work represented a refreshing Modern paradigm for the contemporary Japanese metropolis while bearing enough theoretical and tectonic innovation for Western intrigue. Perhaps his Modern austerity appealed to contemporary Western architects, just as Japan's traditional austerity had to early Western Modernists *(Fig 9.12)*.

GLOBAL STARCHITECTURE

The contemporary Japanese urban landscape is today a seemingly chaotic collage of Western and Japanese architecture at all scales – from colossal mega-structures and modestly sized yet impeccably detailed showrooms, to iconic towers *(Fig. 9.13)*. In the case of mega-structures, one effort that stands out is the Rafael Vinoly designed immense Tokyo International Forum, because it was among other things born through the first open competition ever announced in Japan in 1989, receiving nearly 400 tenders from 68 countries *(Fig. 9.14)*. Located in the Marunouchi district of Tokyo, the program includes three massive auditoriums, a large exhibition hall and a huge underground station among other facilities. It was completed in 1996, with a remarkable transparent Glass Hall, "an elongated, narrow lens whose

Figure 9.12 Top left: Church of Light designed by Tadao Ando;

Figure 9.13 Top right: Asakusa Culture and Tourist Information Center designed by Kengo Kuma

Figure 9.14 Opposite page top left: Tokyo International Forum designed by Raphael Vinoli

Figure 9.15 Opposite page bottom: NTT Docomo Yoyogi Building, Shibuya designed by Kajima Design, Tokyo

Figure 9.16 Opposite page top right: Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building designed by Kenzo Tange, Shinjuku, Tokyo

planimetry is such that it 'leans' on the Japan Railway tracks, with its trains….rushing silently by"[34] creating interior views of "extraordinary effects of psychological suspension."[35] Another case is the Port Terminal in Yokohama (2002), won in an international competition by the Office of Foreign Architects, that realizes a dynamic "liquid" architecture wherein "horizontal floors bend and meet one another with no separating walls; glass sheets close the remaining openings."[36]

In turn, Japan's iconic towers range from the Norman Foster designed Century Tower in Bunkyo (1991) to Cesar Pelli's Mori Towers in Roppongi (2001). I call out two cases here because of their imagery to the Japanese skyline, not as technical marvels, but as semantic objects, implying provocative meanings and symbolisms. One is the Art-Deco-like NTT Docomo Yoyogi Building (2000), a skyscraper located in Shibuya in Tokyo, Japan *(Fig. 9.15)*. At 240 meters (790 ft) tall, it is the third tallest building in Tokyo. After the installation of a clock in 2002, it was the tallest clock tower in the world, surpassed in 2011 by the Mecca Royal Hotel Clock Tower in Saudi Arabia. The tallest and most prominent tower is Tokyo in the Metropolitan Main building No.1 (Discussed further in Chapter 10). This 48-story complex is located in Shinjuku with three levels below ground *(Fig. 9.16)*. The design of the building by architect Kenzo Tange has many symbolic touches, most notably the split at the 33rd floor which spurts twin-towers above the base and creates an iconic profile that has now given the label of Japan's "Gothic cathedral."[37]

Even modest sizes efforts such as the deconstructivist Koizumi Lighting Theater in Chiyoda-ku by Peter Eisenman (1990), and the Showroom Ambiente in Minato-ku by Aldo Rossi (1991), have offered Western architects a canvas to display signature styles associates with their international repute. Other efforts have offered both Western and Japanese architects an opportunity to generate cutting-edge buildings, experimenting with materials, spatial configurations, and programmatic organization. Renzo Piano's 15-story Hermes building is sited on one of Ginza's most crowded corners, entirely faced with specially forged glass bricks featuring "mobile, vibratile surfaces bordered with mirror silvering."[38] Along Omotesando, the formal boulevard fronting the Meiji Jingu, is the Jaques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron-designed transparent edifice for Prada, with a six-story blue-green glass facade enclosed in a continuous diagonal beehive steel mesh, as well as a number

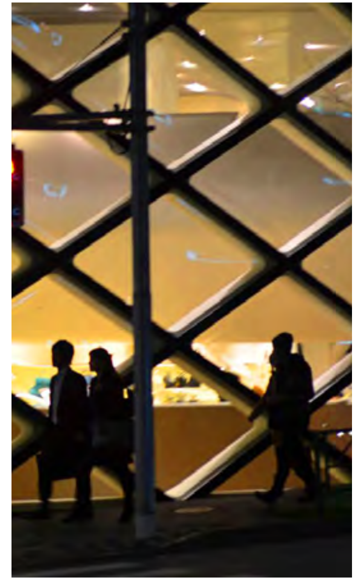

Figure 9.17 Buildings along Omotesando. left to right: Dior Showroom; Louis Vuitton Showroom; Prada Showroom

Figure 9.18 Opposite page: TOD building designed by Toyo Ito

of exceptionally detailed other high-budget buildings *(Fig. 9.17)*. On the same street is the TOD building by Toyo Ito wrapped in a skin of criss-crossed concrete braces *(Fig. 9.18)*. Light enters the building through the clear glass that fills the gaps between the braces on the north side with opaque glass towards the south, facing rows of low private houses. The concrete braces also serve as space dividers inside the building where natural materials, stone, wood and leather, reflect the quality of TOD's leather goods.

Two other small-scale efforts by Ito – who in 2013 became the fourth Japanese architect to win the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, joining Kenzo Tange (1987), Fumihiko Maki (1993), and Tadao Ando (1995) – deserve particular mention.[39] The Tower of Winds, designed in 1986, captures the visual complexity of Tokyo metaphorically in terms of a never-ceasing, ever-changing wind. The tower, a light sculpture that responds to wind speed and directions, was designed years before anyone else explored the use of photo-responsive glass in the same way. Ito's Sendai Mediatheque, a library that opened in 2001 is also an exemplary proposal conceptually rooted in an idea of a "fluid" space of technology discussed in his 1997 article "Tarzan in the Media Jungle."[40] Rather than viewing media as a foreign element to nature, Ito embraces new media and computing as an integral part of the contemporary urban environment. The building is conceived as a transparent cube through which thin floor plates are suspended on seaweed-like "tubes" all linked with the Mediatheque's mission to be barrier-free.

Another Japanese architect whose work has deservedly gained global attention is Shigeru Ban. His experiments with alternative materiality, particularly paper tubing came as early as 1986 before any of his programmatic commissions. His early work focused on paper's structural integrity particularly through paper tubes used by manufacturers in textile factories. In 1994, when a magnitude 7.2 Richter scale earthquake devastated Kobe, it offered him a unique reconstruction project: Not

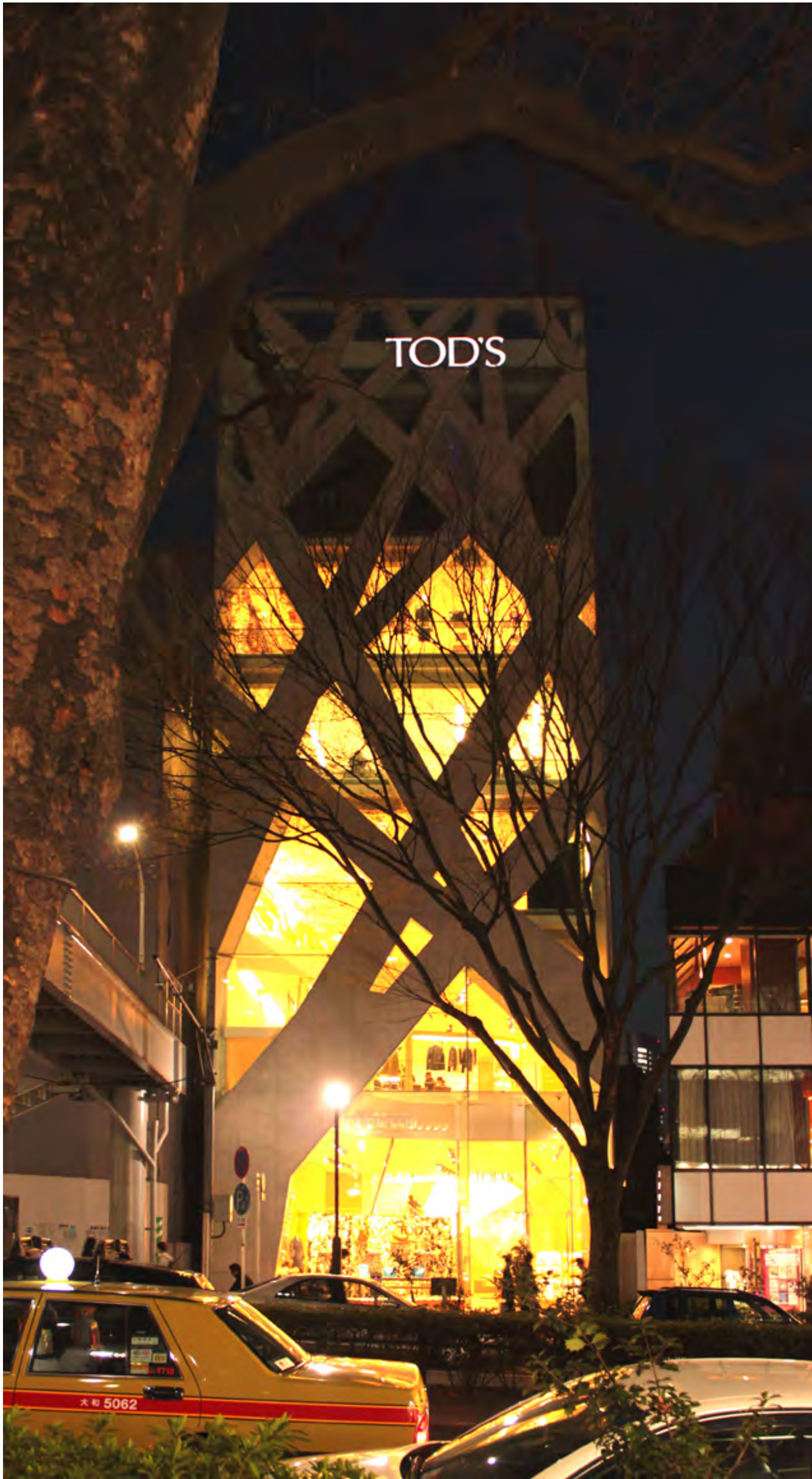
TOD'S
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Figure 9.19 Opposite page: Everyday objects: Knick-knacks, dolls & fans

only were his temporary shelters cheap and easy to develop, they also incorporate community participation, and offer more versatile living conditions compared to traditionally used tents. The 172-square-feet modules have paper tubing for walls with small gaps between each member to allow ventilation and can also be taped up for insulation. The roof is made up of a waterproof tenting material while the foundation consists of donated beer crates filled with sandbags. In the subsequent design of his "Paper Dome" in 1998, straight paper tube joists were connected by laminated timber joints which are independently expensive but coupled with paper tubing created an inexpensive budget.[41] Ban's work assumes particular relevance amidst the problems in finding an alternative construction material to wood, even as the use of trees for framing continues to create significant deforestation problems in Japan.

VENTURI'S JAPAN

It is against these unequivocal trends that Robert Venturi's reaction on his first visit to Japan in 1990 remains significant. He too saw in Japan, a bit of himself, and thus what had been nauseating to Taut was enchanting to him. For him western architects had isolated their views to ancient Japanese shrines and buildings, excluding the markets along the way that teemed with varieties and juxtapositions of color, pattern and scale making the simple shrines even more sublime against this complex context. He returned home not with the imprint of Japan's traditional austerity, but with an intricate collection of the colorful and spontaneous Japanese everyday *(Fig. 9.19)*. He brought back myriad little objects and fetishes from Japan's streets and flea markets – "dolls, dishes, balls, boxes-in-boxes, hairpins, statues, chopsticks, chopstick holders, comic books, and idols, made of, among other things, plaster, porcelain, paper, bamboo and lacquered wood, all skillfully crafted and colored." He displayed them at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1995 calling it "Skill, Care and Wit: Miscellaneous Objects from Japanese Markets."[42] Venturi had refreshed the outlook on Japan, resurfacing the colorful Japonisme of painters like Manet and Monet that lay buried in the Western mind under heaps of Modern Japanese imagery.

あづま横丁
はろうきてぃ
ちりめん日本人形
¥500
¥600
¥300

Figure 9.20 Japan's East-West dialectic

Almost half a century since its first Western perceptions, Robert Venturi had stretched the Japanese metaphor from the rustic monochrome to the hued riot, challenging the entire palette of disappointments and eulogies from Morse to Taut. Charmed as much by the culture's high-tech gadgetry as its myriad flea market fetishes, it was this complex palette of the indigenous and global, that he found an effective ensemble. Like Ruth Benedict who in her 1946 book "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" first hinted to understanding Japan as a paradoxical culture – pacifistic yet warlike, conservative yet given to innovation – Venturi implied the Buddha Hall of Todaiji, the Katsura Villa, and the Ise shrine as necessary yet incomplete ingredients of the neo-modern Japanese consciousness.[43]

Venturi seemed determined to present the turn-of-the-century Japan as a natural outburst of paradoxical fantasy. Two decades earlier in his book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," he had justified the necessary position of commonplace elements in architecture to "accommodate existing needs for variety and communication." He recognized Japan's neo-modern clichés, banality and mess as the context for its current architecture, and this new architecture in turn as a context for them. With the publication of his essay "Two Naifs in Japan" (1991) that included a sketch "Learning from Tokyo" to express what he called the "hidden order of the kimono,"[44] Venturi affirmed his assessment of the cultural realities confronting Japan as "a convincing chaos… an ambiguity without anguish."[45] Having not traveled to Japan before and spared of witnessing the panorama of Japanese modernization, he was more than many others able to perceive a complex monoculture with completely unbiased eyes. He embraced it with the same caution as he had the honky-tonk elements in the Nevada desert which he wrote about in his other influential book "Learning from Las Vegas."[46] He thus implied that what he liked in Japan might not have been acceptable to him elsewhere. Just as Rome had been his inspiration behind "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," Japan two decades later was his lens to revisit the East-West dialectic that was for long lying dormant in the West.

CONCLUSION

One can argue that the entry of the Western genome in Japan, its gradual embrace, subsequent establishment through Modernism, and eventual mutation through ideas such a Metabolism, in a way expands the same complex tapestry of Japan's foreign versus indigenous cultural threads for another age and time. The difference, I would argue, is that here more than any other time in Japanese history, one finds many paradigmatic moments of sudden mutations and shifts. The sheer thrust of these forces – many of them unexpected – generate, unlike Japan's historic examples, equally sudden and instant cultural reactions and reflexes that were hardly contemplated or reflected upon.

"Japan-ness moves roughly in 25-30-year cycles" notes Arata Isozaki in "Japan-ness in Architecture", his refreshing discourse on the dilemmas of Japanese architecture in an increasingly globalizing milieu.[47] It also suggests his personal struggle to marry Japanese and Western thought: "For Japanese Modernists – and I include myself – it is impossible not to begin with Western concepts. That is to say, we all begin with a modicum of alienation, but derive a curious satisfaction – as if things were finally set in order – when Western logic is dismantled and returned to ancient Japanese phonemes. After this we stop questioning."[48]

These words can be read as a Japanese metaphor for a hundred-year love affair with the West. In this affair, both Japan and the West seem to have no idea how much they really love each other. Their mutual feelings show many shades – craving, respect, awe, curiosity, and even competitiveness. They remind us of the fascinating ways in which cultures dream and fantasize about one another, and the complex modes through which opposites attract. For in a way, nothing could be more opposite than Japan and the West, nothing could be more antipodean, both in the manner these cultures have understood the world and in turn expressed it. The offspring of this long love affair are therefore unprecedented. They belong to both worlds and none. They have their own identities. They are as Japanese as they are Western depending on who is looking at them, and where from. Their only true identity drifts somewhere between Japan and the West, somewhere between Japan's own nostalgia and utopia, recurrently contradicting itself and evading any fixed recognition *(Fig 9.20)*.