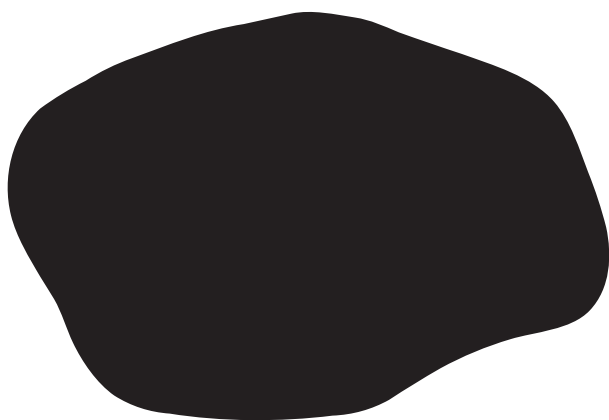


The  
Being  
of  
Things







Diplomarbeit

*“The Being of Things-  
in Search for a Dialogue with Nature or another Kind of Sustainability”*

ausgeführt zum Zwecke der Erlangung  
des akademischen Grades einer Diplom-Ingenieurin unter der Leitung von

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Im Zuge der globalen Situation heute versucht die Arbeit die statische Kategorie zu der sich Architektur entwickelt hat zu hinterfragen. Der anthropozentrische Blick auf die Architektur, welcher die reziproke Beziehung zur Natur vernachlässigt und dabei die Benutzer von seiner Umgebung isoliert - natürlich und künstlich- wird angezweifelt. Die Arbeit versteht Architektur als Vermittler zwischen uns und der Welt, auf der Suche nach einem Weg, das Design(er) und die Benutzer in eine Beziehung zur Welt einzubetten, unter der Anerkennung der einzelnen Verbindungen der Wechselbeziehung aller Dinge in einer ständig wachsenden globalen Gesellschaft, um ein (emotionales) nachhaltiges Design zu gestalten, als Verbündeter der Natur, nicht als Gegner.

Auf der Suche nach einem "Dialog mit der Natur" untersucht die Arbeit die Beziehung zur Natur in der japanischen Kultur und wie sie sich in ihrer Architektur und der Wahrnehmung manifestiert. Ästhetische und philosophische Konzepte werden untersucht, wobei der Fokus der Arbeit nicht auf der bloßen äußeren Erscheinung liegt, sondern die "unsichtbaren" Schichten umreist, die unsere Beziehung zur Welt erzeugen, denn der Kontext der japanischen Kultur führte zu einer Einbeziehung der Natur auf vielen Ebenen. Auf der Suche nach einer ästhetischen Sensibilität, die sich daraus entwickelte und nach einer Harmonie mit der Natur strebt, nähert sich die Arbeit an das Verständnis dieser Beziehung explizit durch die Literatur über den japanischen Garten an.

In the realm of the global situation today, the thesis questions the boundaries of the static category, that architecture has become. It tries to question our anthropocentric view on architecture neglecting its reciprocal relationship with nature, isolating the user from his environment- natural and artificial. Understanding architecture as a tool to mediate between us and the world, the work tries to search for a way to embed the design(er) and user in a relationship to the world, acknowledging the links in terms of an interrelatedness of all things in an ever growing global society, shaping an (emotional) endurable design as an ally of nature.

Searching for a “dialogue with nature”, the thesis explores the relationship with nature in the Japanese culture and how it manifests itself in Japanese architecture and in the perception of design, investigating aesthetic and philosophical concepts. The focus lies hereby not on the mere outer appearance, but outlines the “invisible” layers, that generate our relationship to the world, qualities that are often deprived by a rationalized architecture. The context of Japanese culture led to an inclusion of nature on many levels. Investigating an aesthetic sensibility, that seeks harmony with nature, the work approaches to gain an understanding of this relationship explicitly through the means of literature about the Japanese garden.

There is (almost) no house without a garden and  
there is no house without an object.  
And without us there would be just nature.



## Part I

I divided the thesis in three parts. I called the first part “stones”, because I felt that stones represent both- the different attitude towards objects and the nondualism of humans and nature in the ancient *Shintō* belief. They also form an important part of the drygardens of the Buddhist temples and thus are present in how Japanese “design” is perceived all over the world, which often merely extracts the visual appearance of the aesthetic-a mistake that is alleged to values, which the modernists exported from the Japanese architecture-the abstractness of a drygarden is not the same abstractness of the Bauhaus, as Atelier Bow Wow states (cf. Atelier Bow-Wow 2009). The part tries to examine the “form of being” and the “form of doing” (cf. *ibid.* 2009), while it tries to search for the possible reasons and some aspects how it differs from “our” view and how it is expressed in the “form of doing”, that shaped the Japanese culture historically.

## Part II

The second part is called “moss”. Firstly, for me moss is present in the everyday of the Japanese culture. We find it in the temple gardens and on the porches of the town houses in form of a *kokedama* (moss ball). For me moss shows opposing values to the West-as an agent of time and of the atmosphere of a place, that is concerned with mystic and not rationality. The concept of beauty found in the impermanent and not in the permanent. It also acts as an indicator for sense (e.g. materiality), as the softness of moss, its a subtle and modest beauty towards nature, that we encounter in the traditional Japanese house and gardens or the contemporary design aesthetic. For me moss is an indicator of the opposing values from the “West” and a tool to widen and refine our senses, which will be the topic of part II.

## Part III

Since paper is the outcome of a process, it is the last part of the thesis. It is named after the “final” product that is applied as a fragile material in Japanese architecture and has never been used as such in the Western style . As a conclusion I would like to consider some thoughts about the contemporary discourse regarding my thesis and the questions and aims I started with.

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•  
**prologue**



“When I first began to study architecture, and as a young architect, I thought that architecture was the buildings out there in the world. I have then gradually learned that architecture is a mediation between the world and our minds. So [good] architecture tells us something about the world. It tells us something about history, about culture, about how the society works and finally, it tells us who we are. And good architecture, or art in general, enables us to live a more dignified life than we could without art.” (Pallasmaa 2018)

When I think about where my thesis started, it was a question of how architecture or objects are perceived by us as designers and users alike. Architecture is often described and defined by structural and static elements, by its construction and its function, whilst an important feature of architecture (if not the most important), the ephemeral, invisible qualities that define our relation to things we use, is left undefined. The inside and outside or how things relate to each other are as crucial as the way our senses are touched. Things and feelings can be associated with different layers of meaning, or can transcend to a metaphor. These associations define the way we perceive and see things and define our position and relation to our surroundings and our own acts within the environment, natural and object-related.

The global situation today, especially regarding environmental and social issues, asks for an awareness towards a dialogue between nature and things, one that does not ignore the relativity of the individual to the whole. Because in an age of rationality, we seem to have lost our sensibility towards things and our environment, while we neglect our reciprocal relationship with nature, especially in the field of architecture. People

loosing their bond to their surroundings is not only a problem on a small scale, but I think also on larger scale, such as in architecture. People see things as disposable and as an object of consumerism. For Jonathan Chapman this consumerism or waste is a “symptom of failed relationship” (Chapman 2005: 65).

While the field of design has already tried to shift towards thoughts and practice of a sustainability, I feel that architects are still quite isolated from the thought of how sustainability or our dialogue with nature looks. This is why I would like to talk about the ephemeral or invisible things and their qualities. This is not a mere abstract philosophical approach but a way to understand the task of architecture in a different way, in terms of shaping our relationship and dialogue with things, mediating between us and the world. Where do houses begin, where does nature start, what is still architecture and what is not? Where is the line drawn between inside and outside?

In Europe or Western society these categories are definite and almost impossible to change, fixed in separated categories as architecture-garden-house-nature-human. So I ask myself, how are we able to form an alternative dialogue with our surroundings, and thus nature?

The search for a dialogue with our environment draws me to Japan. It is striking how Japanese culture works towards the aesthetic with nature. Wandering through the streets, you can feel the link between society, architecture and nature. You can sense this connection from how they prepare their green matcha sweets in form of a flower, to how the city is organized<sup>1</sup> and the fish swimming in waves on a *noren* of a traditional *machiya* (townhouse). These spaces have tiny backyards, that create whole universes within, like a bonsai. Such spaces form a retreat in the everyday world to contemplate, where we can become aware of relativity. Not only the traditional architecture and culture is defined by a sense for nature, but so are the contemporary voices in architecture. Old and young generations, seem to (again) seek an intense relationship with nature and

1.  
Japanese cities are  
“naturally grown”,  
not planned, in a  
constant flux of  
renewal, (e.g. cf.  
Kitayama et al. 2010)

the environment, hereby strongly referring in various ways to their own traditions.

Japanese culture- traditional or contemporary- seems to acknowledge its seamless embeddedness in the world, creating a consistent story of the world without creating a border and opposites. In Japan there is no clear distinction between inside and outside, it seems to be more a vague state. Here, the buildings echo nature. They appear to melt into the story of their surroundings. In this culture, due to the influence of *Shintō*, *Buddhism* and its geographical situation, a different notion of the concept human-nature, human-object, nature-object, is present: a culture that is based on a harmony with nature<sup>2</sup>. Hereby the sensibility towards their environment is build on recognizing the fragile bonds between all existence.

Therefore I would like to discuss the dialogue with nature in the Japanese culture and how this relationship manifests itself in Japanese architecture and in the way we experience things. The Japanese garden shall hereby serve as the main “explaining“ tool: First its design and experiencing represent the aesthetic sensibility and attitude towards nature, that has been shaped within a culture. Second in Japan the garden forms not a separate category to architecture as in Western culture. The garden is seen as a tool to refine our senses and especially “the Japanese garden wants to encourage us with its character, with its interpenetration of these interactions, to treat nature’s mere being with esteem and respect” (Platzek/ Kenji 2017:17).

In Japan, the bond with nature and objects has been completely opposite to ours. So therefore as Claude Lévi-Strauss puts it, I would like to look to the backside of the moon<sup>3</sup>. A country, where the beauty of the moon is probably more celebrated than the sun.

2. Ideas and concepts of Japanese design draw on an understanding of nature that has been created throughout time. The perception of the art and thus the perception of nature is distinctive for the Japanese cultural identity and strongly interwoven with aesthetic values, whereby aesthetics are more relevant to the Japanese culture and its society than they are to the West, according to e.g. Eiko Ikegami (Ikegami 2005)

3. the original translated title is “The Other Face of the Moon”, (Lévi-Strauss 2013)

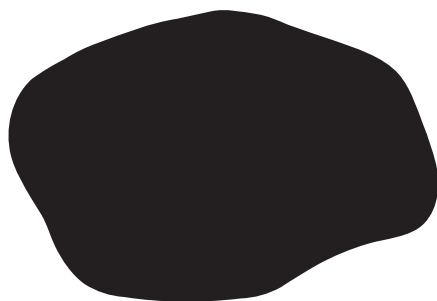




fig. 1

The sacred  
Mount Fuji is an  
important sym-  
bol for Japan,  
also lovingly  
called fuji-san.  
With the moon  
in the back, the  
picture tells the  
story of a mystic  
atmosphere.





Part I

•

Stones



1.

Dialogue with nature



approaching nature

Some say the Japanese house feels like a forest. With pillars as its trees, the tatami as the earthen dress, soft as walking on moss. The darkness is softly tinted from the white light of the *shoji* like the dense woods in the moonlight. Sometimes the shimmering green sparkles from the small gardens, that form the clearings. The traditional architecture of Japan is defined by a relationship to nature, where the garden is not part of the architecture but the architecture is part of the garden. Here both enter an intimate bond, where nature and architecture are deeply intertwined.

From the tiny enclosed gardens of the traditional townhouses (*machiya*) and Zen-temples, for example the Daisen-in, to the expansive gardens of the Shinden-zukuri palaces of the Heian period or even Imperial residences like the Katsura Rikyū- the structure speaks of an undeniable relationship between human and nature, where the connection of the architecture to nature defines space, where the transit between inside and outside is not abrupt, but many layers define the fragile bond, where the outside flows in and the inside flows out. Teiji Itō describes that “a lot of Japanese gardens literally start in the buildings. Or vice versa: the house starts in the garden”(Itō 1999:2-3). It can be said, that a typical layout of the architecture is spread out between the gardens, the building creating a continuum of the surrounding landscape, trying not to break the fluxus. This form of inclusion exists alongside Buddhist temples, Samurai and No-



ble residencies, such as Villa Katsura, which serves as icon in the Japanese canon and is said to embody this extraordinary connection to nature in its holistic architecture, especially in an exceptional way in the architecture of the *machiyas* (townhouses). Here, in a long, narrow parcel, which also gives them the name “sleeping places of the eels”, the architecture seems to form itself in the negative of the green spaces instead the other way round. The whole plot seems to be permeated by green spaces, like clearings in a forest. These small courtyard gardens, that are called *tsuboniwa*, can be, as their name implies, tiny as one *tsubo* (approx. 3,3 sqm) (Mizuno 2006). Especially this form of a garden, the *tsuboniwa*, making space in a dense urban patten, shows that architecture and nature in Japan are strongly linked and tied together and cannot be seen as something apart. It is a concept inherent of the culture, that is also part of the contemporary architecture, as the Moriyama House in Tokyo by Sanaa. When me move through such a space, we begin to realize that there are no opposites, all is one, the static category of inside and outside, as we have learned to think in, dissolved.

Elements like the *engawa* and sliding screens give the impression of being neither outside nor inside. Sometimes the *engawa* is even replaced by a patch of earth, stones and moss. The lower sliding track (*shikui*) for the outer sliding panels embedded in the moss covered earth, weaving a consistent story of a related environment, as in the traditional house Hayashiya, Kanazawa, or the private home designed by Sambuichi on Naoshima. Here, the outer *shoji* (sliding screens) can be closed and as such form a green corridor within the interior in the winter months (Itô 1999:2-3). Sometimes the garden is even drawn under the construction or into the building, sometimes the point where the *engawa* starts or ends cannot be made out clearly. There are also various examples, where the streams are drawn into the houses on the countryside and urban areas alike<sup>4</sup>, which depicts an intimate bond between the two and are for Kengo Kuma the “(...)prototype of the ancient Japanese impulse to embrace the outside, Nature, rather than distance oneself from it“ (Kuma 2010:60).

4. The inclusion of water in the Japanese Garden, as elementary, had developed-besides the ritual purpose in the practices of Shinto- probably also out of practical reasons, as fire safety, but also due to a perfect view onto the garden. (cf. Itô 1999)

No matter how small, or how vast, as in bringing in such a landscape scenery that is borrowed from afar (*shakkei*) The thoughts about embedding architecture in a continuum with the environment, are not just part of the traditional, but and are also part of the concerns of the current debate, as we can make it out in the concepts of e.g. Juniya Ishigami or Hiroshi Sambuichi.

In Japan, nature and human made form an entity, where there is no such thing as being separated from the outside, neither in the built structure nor in the frame of mind. When the sliding screens are open, there is a sense of being outside sheltered by an umbrella, where one can cramp together to avoid the trickle of the raindrops falling or where one can stretch out the arm and feel the drop on the skin, while the insects are chirping. It is an in-betweenness: in-between nature and human contemplation, the seasons and chirping of insects close, forming a symbiosis, as Kishō Kurokawa<sup>7</sup> describes (cf. Kurokawa 1997):

7.  
one of the founders of  
metabolism

“In Japanese homes and restaurants, the custom of keeping insects in cages so that guests can listen to their cries and be reminded of the season still exists. To the Japanese, the cries of insects are not noise; they are the ne of the insects, a natural music. (...) And this is further evidence that the Japanese prefer to live as friends with nature, linked intimately to it.” (Kurokawa 1997)

For Tetsurō Yoshida, “the sensation and thinking of the japanese people is focused on nature” that causes an adaption to nature instead of ruling over it (cf. Yoshida 1935:6). This finds expression in the small gardens that are present in every japanese house, in the openness of the architecture, the adaption to the climate, as the bearing of cold, and in the use of “raw” materials (ibid:7).

In the Japanese house, nature draws itself literally inside. The softness of the moss echoed inside. A muted atmosphere in dialogue with nature. below: a traditional structure, where the engawa is replaced by a bed of moss and served as a kind of winter garden.

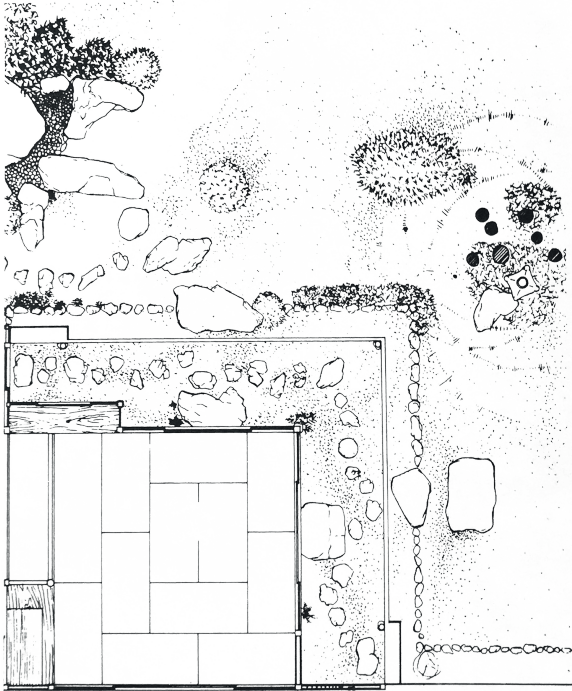


fig. 2  
House Hayashiya, Kanazawa



fig. 3

House Matabe,  
Honmura, Naoshima, 2017, Hiroshi Sambuichi

The Nomura Samurai Family Residence, located in the Nagamachi district, Kanazawa, is still well preserved today and is another example that bears witness of this bond. Here the water stretches out to the *engawa* and is protected under the roof that reaches far out, as shielding nature itself. The *engawa* hovering over the water surface, the stepping stones, that form the way through the garden, are placed in the pond, so one is able to step over the water.

In the Japanese house, we are involved in a deep dialogue with nature, where different elements are made to contemplate this relationship. ‘Where does architecture start and where does nature begin?’, here a question that is both, hard and easy to answer: there is no such question because there is drawn no line between these two realms in the Japanese culture. Hereby is the garden space always concerned to „contemplate the world and the being of life“ (Itō 1999:7). It is an architecture oriented towards a dialogue with nature, always extending to a larger whole and as Teiji Itō remarks, the garden and architecture a continuum.

The line between human and nature is vague and blurred, the experience of this extraordinary bond part of the culture, behind it the idea of making a cosmological order tangible. The transition of space is gentle. We experience it actively, but also at the same moment subconsciously. For Lazarin the vague boundaries and transitional spaces generate awareness and „are explicitly designed to facilitate Buddhist meditation“, where architecture or space is „more a matter of providing sites conducive to certain ways of dwelling in the world“ (Lazarin 2014:140). The architecture approaches nature and doesn’t create a boundary. It serves as a continuous space that gradually moves to the shadow of the inner (*oku*) and when we move, it moves with us, transitioning us gently into the “natural” surroundings or the “outside”. Lazarin describes the transitional character of the Japanese space as such a “sensation of continuity”:

„(...) the architectural construction is designed to give one the experience of the span being stretched out so as to blur the discrete boundaries into a

5.

This concept of singular entities, that creates harmony only in correlation with each other will be discussed more detailed in the matter of a complementary theory in the next chapters

sensation of continuity. Situated in this continuum, a moment of transcendence becomes possible not only in terms of consciousness but also in terms of the living body.“ (ibid. 2014:138)

The categorical terms of inside and outside are here not valid, as well as categorical thinking is not present as simple “either-or” in the Japanese culture, which I will discuss more in the following chapters. Two things as contrasting or opposing as they might seem for the European mind can stand here next to each other in a direct dialogue<sup>5</sup>. Stepping into the Japanese house is a stepping up, and being inside means as much as being drawn back into the shadows with a view out into the realm of the lush green garden (cf. Lazarin 2008). Nature itself creates an inviting gesture towards us by letting us enter naturally over a stone, while the structure hovers over the ground, providing space, that gives nature the possibility to be part of the building, like the cracks and spots we can leave for birds and small insects to live in. Atelier Bow-Wow note on the vanishing of these spaces that they once have been an inherent part of architecture. (cf. Atelier Bow-Wow 2009).<sup>6</sup>

6.

Such spaces as cracks have also been part of the European (vernacular) architecture. But such spaces irritated the functionality of the modernist movement.

No matter how small or vast the space is, the structure of the Japanese architecture is concerned „for the integration with their natural environment“ (Nishi and Hozumi 1983:11), where not only the use of the materials like wood, stone or paper connect back to nature, but „care is taken to incorporate a reminder of the natural world in the form of a garden, no matter how small“ (ibid.:12). Small can mean the single leaf of a flower arrangement (*ikebana*) thoughtfully put in the niche of the *tokonoma* (picture recess) or the raindrop that is caught by the stepping stone just meant for this purpose (see chapter moss and dew), which can encapsulate the world (Itō 1999:35). A constant reminder of the world outside is part of the architecture as well in the garden. Here different techniques as intentionally letting the tree reach over the fence or by borrowing a far away scenery to make it part of the garden, to remind us of the world beyond our fences and walls (a technique called *shakkei*) (Itō 1999:189).



fig. 4

Watanabe Residence



A house like a  
forest.

Moving through  
space feels like  
moving through a  
natural surround-  
ing, while also  
the atmosphere  
of the materials  
echo nature in  
their smell, feel  
and sound.

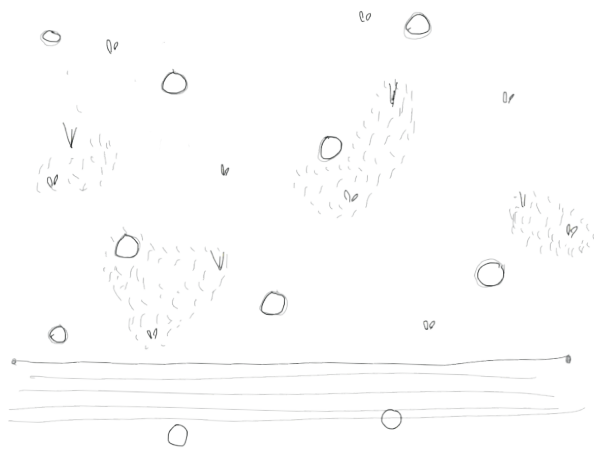


Nakasendo Trail, Kiso Valley, June 2018

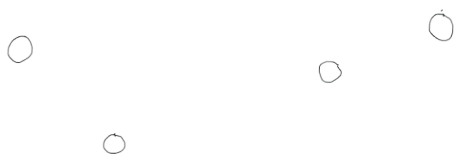


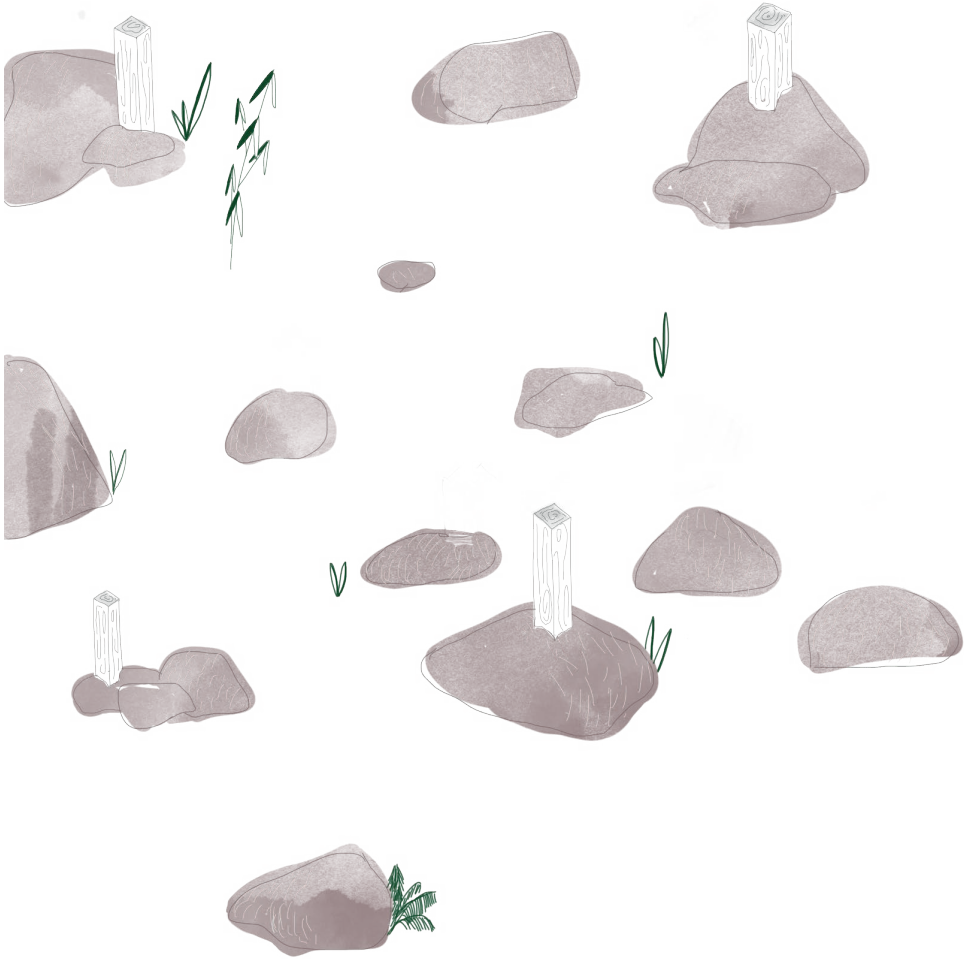
The traditional house is embedded in nature to such an extent that the transit between those two is like a walk in nature, the house like the shelter of a large tree. Not only the spatial experience but also the “form of doing” and the “form of being” (Atelier Bow-Wow 2009), as the indistinctiveness of the arrangement of trees and pillars, the feeling of stepping and tactility of materials seem to be continuous, the boundaries permeable.

nature



"inside"





the structure finding its place to dwell temporarily.

connection to earth

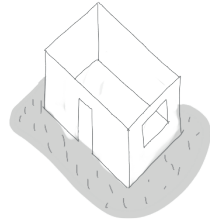
The structure seems to be placed naturally. Almost accidentally setting the pillars on stones, without harming nature. In the past it was avoided to root the building in the ground: according to fusuì, the fear was to hurt the veins of the dragon (Fehrer 2005).

jichin-sai

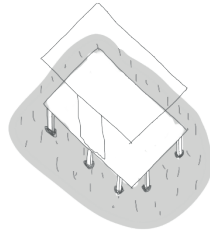
The "Ground-purification rite", in german it is called the "earth calming rite", a ceremony to calm the kami, who reside in teh natural place and purify the earth held before starting to build and is still common today.



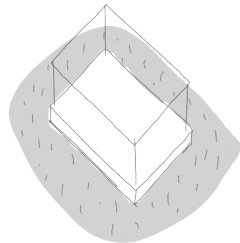
fig. 5  
jichin-sai



Western House "rooted" in earth



Japanese house floating over the earth



Chinese house on earth platform

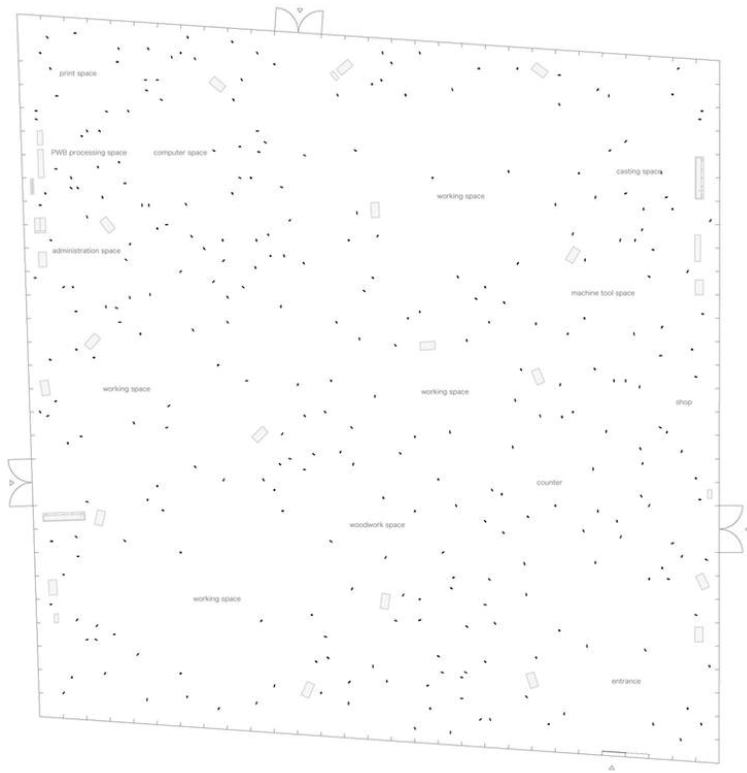


fig. 6  
KIT, 2010, Juniya Ishigami



fig. 7

KIT, 2010, Juniya Ishigami





Haruya Hostel, Kyôto 2018

The *tsuboniwa* (courtyard garden) appears like a clearing in the forest. Here the renovated *kyomachiya* in Southern Kyôto, Shimogyô-Ward, where I stayed. The *wasbi* of the *shoji* is (sadly) replaced by frosted glass and curtains.

But we still can feel the spatial layering, the *engawa* in between. We feel secure, womblike in the shadow, while heavy rain is pouring down outside.

Sliding open the “doors”, the room becomes airy, we settle in a dialogue with outside.

Before we enter a temple, private home or any kind of traditional building, the first act is to remove our shoes. We move through the space barefoot, socks or with slippers on. Not only the *tatami* are soft as a moss covered earth, but also the tactility of the wood is velvety, smoothened carefully by hand with a *kanna* (japanese plane).

Tōfuku-ji, Kyōto, June 2018





fig. 8  
Villa Katsura

We move through  
the space more  
like a Noh Actor  
or when we pass  
a long a path  
in nature: Not  
straight, but al-  
ways from “side  
to side”, “relying  
on our peripher-  
ical vision”, as  
Pallasmaa also  
notes (McCarter  
and Pallasmaa  
2012:377).

In their description of the Katsura Rikyū, McCarter and Pallasmaa describe the feeling of this relationship between the inside and outside as following: "When the outer walls are opened, the inside goes out into the garden and the garden outside comes in, and we feel the breeze and see wide views of the surrounding landscape carefully framed in the large openings. The shoji screens now appear even more ephemeral, glowing. Layered skins hovering at the edge of the space, and we move out on to the wood-floored veranda, under the overhanging roof." (McCarter and Pallasmaa 2012:379)

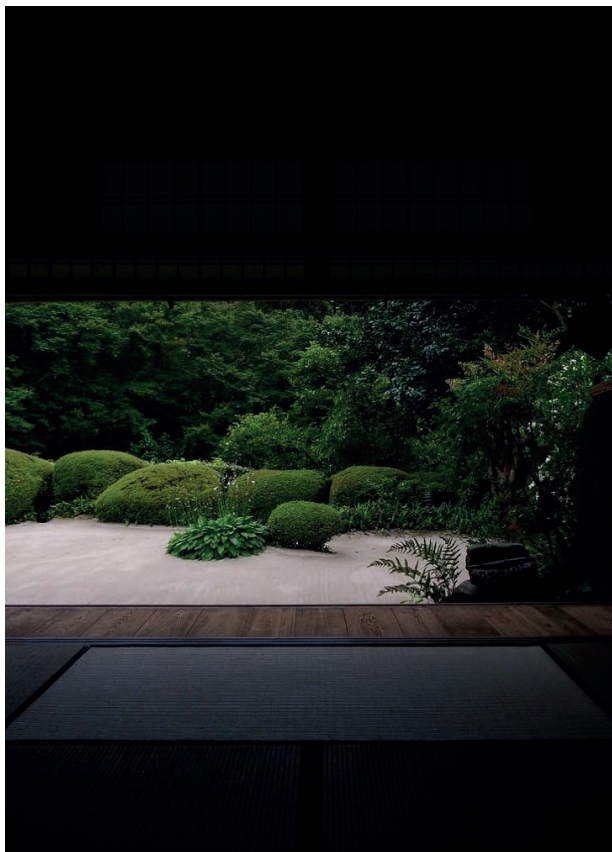


fig. 9



fig. 10  
Raikyū-ji Temple, Okayama Prefecture



Sou Fujimoto  
notes that once  
houses and forests  
“have been indis-  
tinguishable”. In  
his opinion one  
is able to create  
a house, that is  
house, city and  
forest are the  
same time.

fig. 11

House before House,  
Utsunomiya, 2009, Sou Fujimoto



typical floorplan  
of a machiya  
or "sleeping places  
of an eel".

- 1 entryhall (genkan)
- 2 shop space (mise-no-ma)
- 3 kitchen (daidokoro)
- 4 courtyard garden (tsuboniwa)
- 5 guestroom/house (zashiki)
- 6 picture recess (tokonoma)
- 7 courtyard garden (tsuboniwa)
- 8 store house (kura)

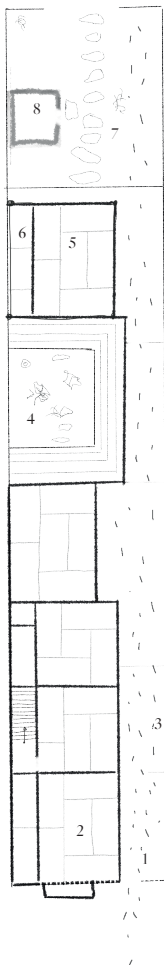


fig.12

earthen floor (doma)

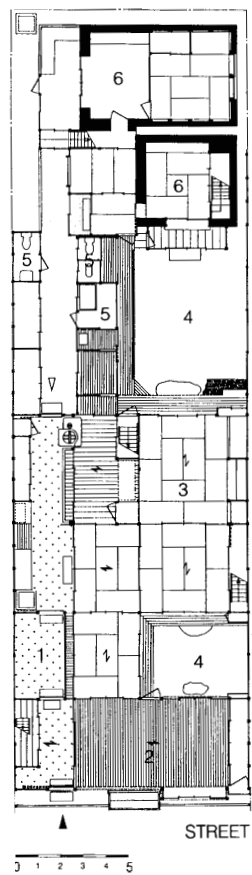






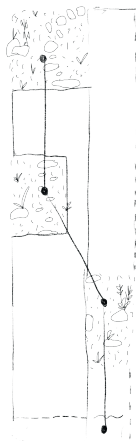
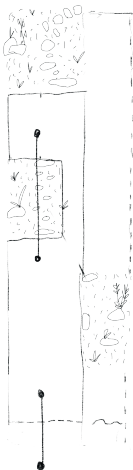
fig.13

tsuboniwa

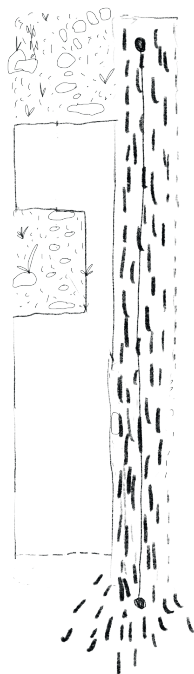


the long narrow parcel of the townhouses are premeates by small courtyard gardens (tsuboniwa). Besides reminding us of nature they form a connecting space between the adjacent rooms.

The tori-niwa with an earthen floor reaches from the city street to the very back of the machiya.



tsuboniwa

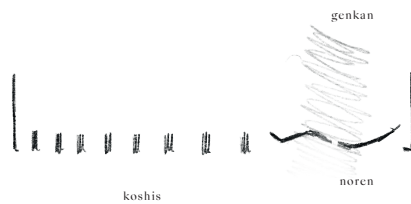


toriniwa

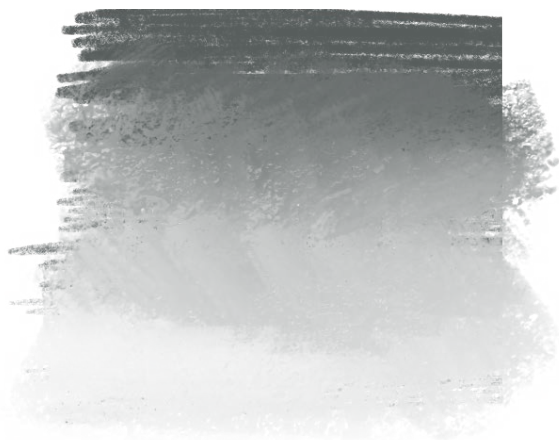




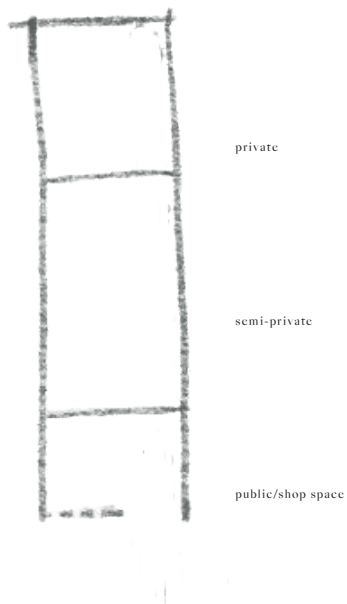
vague boundaries



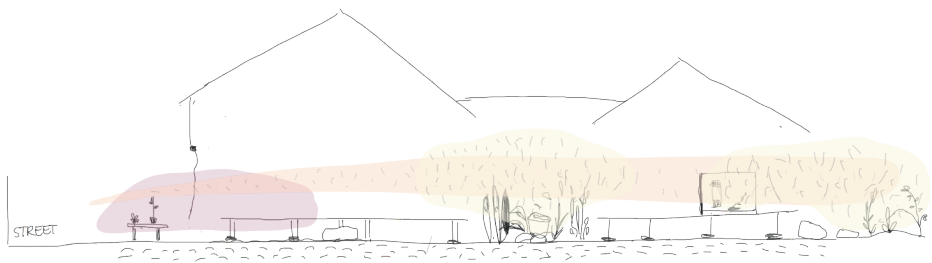
space between  
private and  
public are  
blurred, as  
well as the  
inside and  
outside. By  
various vague  
thresholds, the  
transition of  
space is gra-  
dient and not  
abrupt







the street  
space seems  
to reach far  
back, while the  
structure is  
defined by dif-  
ferent spatial  
situations lay-  
ered, nothings  
seperated but  
communicat-  
ing.



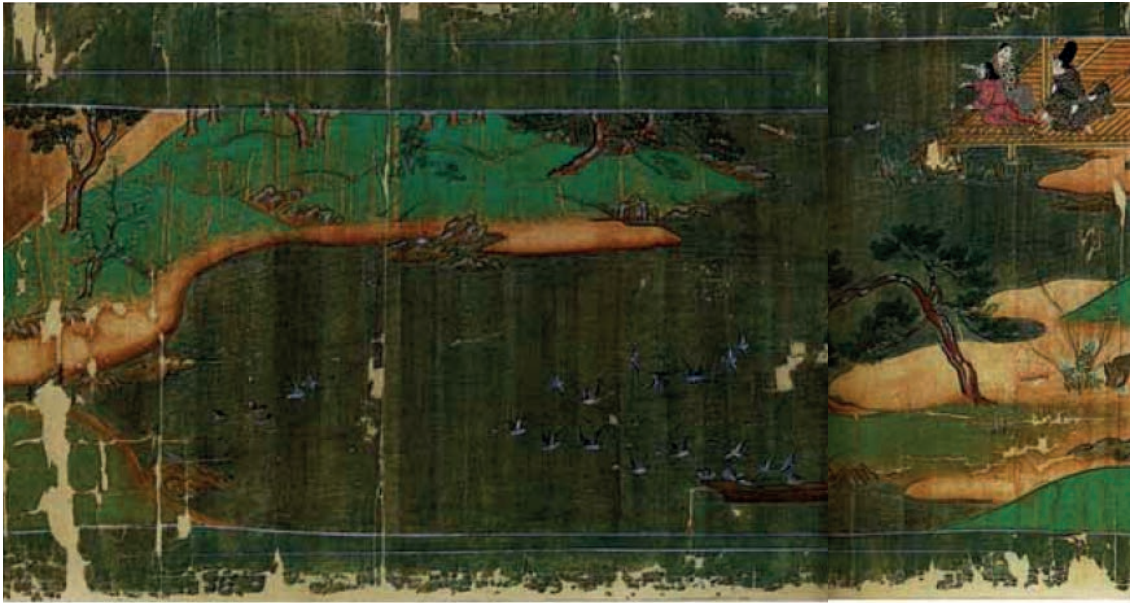
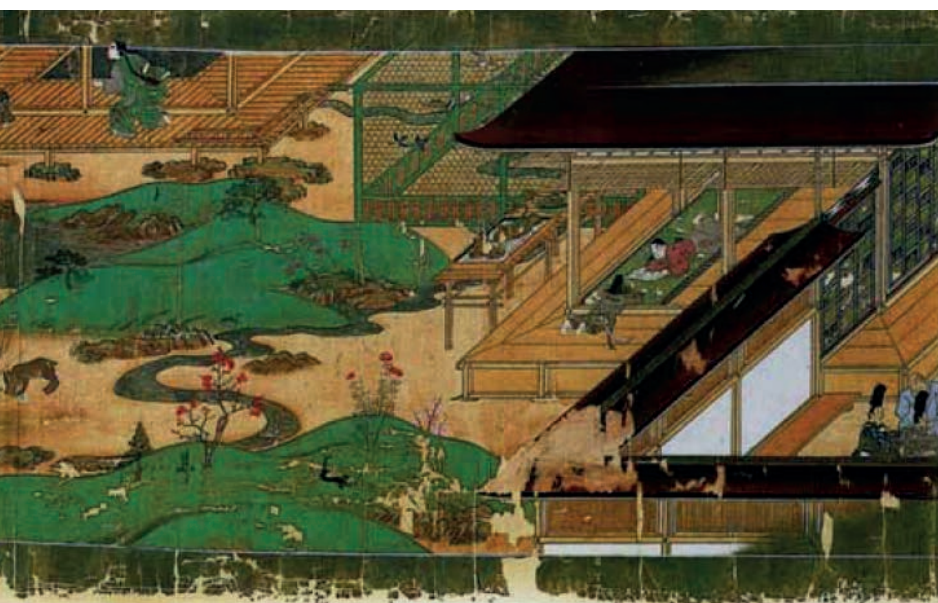


fig.15  
kasuga gongen kenki emaki, Takabane Takashina,  
1309, National Museum, Tokyo.



continuum of space

even old picture  
scrolls and screens  
depict always both-  
architecture and  
nature- simultane-  
ously while the roof  
is spared.

consistent weaving

In thought and model  
- often in realization- too, there is no  
distinction between  
nature and architecture, a concept that  
is still carried on and  
brought into a contemporary language  
by the Japanese  
architects, to seek a  
future for architecture that tries to live  
up to today's society.

fig.16  
Kennin-ji





fig.17

Venice Biennale Pavillon 2008, Juniya Ishigami.





8.

A *noren* is placed within the entrance gate and suggests that the shop is open or guests are welcome. It's vague language provides still enough privacy, whilst it excludes too much of the outside.. The *noren* is made out of a fine fabric as linen. The logo or the name of the owner is usually printed on it.

## Co-existing with nature

Here in Japan it seems that there is always some space found to express love for nature- no matter how tiny it is. Walking through the streets of Kyōto it seems that the people try to get nature's vibe even into the smallest cracks. Potted plants and *kokedama* hanging in front of their doors define the small or non-existent barrier between the realm of nature and humans. When you walk the streets it feels as if the private space unfolds into the urban, public space, like walking on a porch. There is no big door that shows the entryway but modest openings- sometimes a gate within a wall, a piece of fabric moving gently in the wind (*noren*)<sup>8</sup> implying that one might enter here. Using our hands to move the curtain aside we migrate gradually into an beyond that feels sheltered but not secluded from the world we just entered from. We automatically dip our heads, though the soft fabric wouldn't do any harm, a movement that changes our mindset. As Kengo Kuma describes:

“Very few people pass through a curtain without dipping their heads or parting the panels with their hands. The gentle motions of inclining the head or brushing aside the cloth is surprisingly amplified and makes us aware that we are passing into a space of different quality” (Kuma 2010:62)

After passing the *noren*, we enter the entry hall (*genkan*). It is dark here and the space feels like a threshold, where one is not yet completely „in-



side“, the floor here traditionally made out of rammed earth (*doma*)<sup>9</sup>. Nature’s and humans’ realm blur here on the city streets and within the *machiya*, where not only the potted plants show the bond between the Japanese and nature, but also the green of the matcha sweets that the shops sell on every corner. From the city street, the earthen floor of the *genkan* draws itself through the long narrow building all the way to the back. The long corridor (*tori-niwa*) connecting street and backgarden, permeates as a kind of exterior space or inbetween space, creating a space that feels like walking along a sheltered alleyway in the city rather than walking under the roof of a house.<sup>10</sup> The *toriniwa* means literally earthen passage or “passage garden”. It serves as ventilation and keeps the house cool. It serves as space, where one can fulfill tasks, that might cause some dirt-the kitchen is placed here.

9. *doma* is the area covered in rammed earth. The surface or the actual flooring is called *tataki*. It is “made by tamping the earth with water and bittern (a by-product of the process of making salt from seawater). The bittern helps to harden the earth and its use may be associated with shintō purification rites” (Locher 2010: 84)

As I have mentioned in the first section, space in Japan is thought of as a continuum, opposed to the Western concept of a „spatial confrontation“, as Fehrer describes Kishō Kurakawas analysis of the Japanese space. „The buildings are constructed to blend into their surroundings, always in mind to be a part of the whole and not focusing on the architectural composition. Consistently, a unity is the goal, where both nature and culture are seen as equally, complementary system“(Fehrer 2015:27). It is also expressed in the horizontality of Japanese buildings is seen as a consequence of this relationship, that locates the building within the environment and connects to the surroundings (ibid: 27). Architecture stays in a dialogue with nature, like the *rakuchu-rakugai-zu* paintings, where the city of Kyōto (*rakuchu*) is displayed in its context to its farmlife or the nature, surrounding the city (*rakugai*). The architecture is always seen in its relation to the outside, this style of painting is more proof of this bond.

10. The high ceiling creates the possibility to integrate mados (windows) for the purpose of light and air. (cf. handbook on kyo-machiya)

We could describe it as an architecture of good relationships that is based on a frame of mind of complementarity, as Lévi-Strauss describes in his writings of „The Other Face of the moon“. Things are set next to each other to form a whole, like in divisionist paintings, where an uncoun-

ble amount of single dots together assemble the picture (cf. Levi-Strauss 2013:26). Seemingly counterparts for the European vision stand next to each other in the Japanese culture and mutually enhance each other. They are “engaged in a dynamic relationship”, as “form and no-form are equally essential components of the whole” (Walker 2017:71). The elements keep their own characteristics and therefore create harmony. Without being mixed together, they create a dialogue, where the solid stands next to the fluid, like *Yin* and *Yang* are in a constant circle of mutual recreation<sup>11</sup>, a place where elegance and raw elements, nature and architecture don’t impose a conflict.

11.  
see chapter “setting stones” for the theory of fusui.

In this sense Japanese architecture and design is defined by a unique fusion with the garden. Here, a stone in the garden seems sometimes be more important than the roof of the house, the shadow as important as the snowy white light shining through the paper of the *shoji* as Jun’ichirō Tanizaki writes in his essay “In Praise of Shadows”<sup>12</sup>. Things as absence and presence, light and shadow, infinity and finity stand in a “harmonic opposition” (Lazarin 2014: 149). This distinctive dialogue and relation is seen as fundamental to experience and “explain” Japanese architecture, as Nitschke says (Nitschke 2003).

12.  
Jun’ichirō Tanizaki,  
In Praise of Shadow,  
1977.

Besides the apparent dichotomy of architecture and garden for the European eye, the main reason for its beauty and the uniqueness of this relationship is not due to the creation of two contrasting concepts. Opposed to the Western notion of a dualistic view, the beauty of the Japanese garden and architecture lies within one common, mutual concept<sup>13</sup>. The Japanese garden and its integration within the human environment is a consequence of the distinctive relationship of the Japanese with nature. Whereby the garden is seen as a way of an ethical being in the world, as implementing sincerity and sensibility. As Walker notes, the garden „encourages us to value sincerity, to be governed by a more responsible, more ethical way of being“ (Walker 2017:6). This doesn’t solely evolve from the garden itself but from the mindset with which the garden was designed

13.  
As we can extract from the language of concepts and built design, the garden or nature is ever present.

and is perceived. Also Teiji Itō describes that the value of the garden in the Japanese culture is proof of its distinctive relationship to nature (cf. Itō 1999). This quality which is part of the garden, lays in the Japanese dialogue with nature and can be also applied to architecture, above all because garden and architecture in Japan can't be seen as two separate things, because they are formed in unison over time. As Tadao Andō remarks in his essay "Architecture of the Garden":

"What is a garden? One answer could be 'the expression of the paradise in the minds of the people who live in that place'. A carefully selected location, the positioning of elements to make use of land features, the planning of the approach to the entrance, where a variegated sequence unfolds: all these elements of garden design articulate the dreamy world depicted by the people involved in its creation and the community. It is possible for the spatial composition of a garden, therefore, to help us understand the dispositions of the particular age, society and culture that created it.(...)This being so, what lies behind the culture of gardens in Japan - the place where I was born and continue to be based - cannot be anything other than a unique sensibility towards nature. Japanese garden culture is based on a set of values diametrically opposed to the Western view of the garden, which seeks to control nature as part of the artificial world." (Andō 2017:278)

Why I mention the possibilities of a garden is not only because Japanese architecture is undeniable interwoven with it, but because the way we perceive and design a garden culturally indicates how we perceive our position in the world. Opposed to the West, in Japan it roots in an approach to nature, where no radical line between man and nature is drawn, which is also illustrated in the following extract about the garden:

„The most important principle of the gardens in all these complexes always remained the approach to nature. The design followed a free conception and the principle of unfinished work. This is still true today. In Japanese gardens, there are no guidelines for arrangements that have to be followed in this way and not otherwise. Japanese gardens differ fundamentally from Western gardens, which are based on instructions and theories and therefore sometimes appear artificial. For Japanese garden design, it is of paramount importance not to lose contact with nature, but to connect with it.“ (Platzek 2017:14)

The garden is an important element in the construction of a Zen temple, but not only is it essential to the meditation of the monks, but also for the

daily life of aristocrats and common people, as merchants. Japanese architecture and its (spatial) experience stays in contact with nature and therefore the experience of the space can only be understood in its relation to the realm of nature and within its interwovenness. The interwovenness of a traditional building or an icon of contemporary architecture is undeniable. The weaving is consistent, the transition between the realm of nature and the realm of architecture gradient, not abrupt. Both are part of one (common) narrative thread, where the story of nature, as well as the story of the garden doesn't end by entering a building, but continues. But it is not just the unmissable link between garden and architecture but the significance of nature as a whole. Not just the fact, that architecture is part of the garden, but also the visible and non-visible symbols as well as the structure of the architecture situates itself in relation to its environment, and our experience within it- how we perceive it and how it generates value. What I mean by that is the attention and awareness we are faced with, whilst being in such a building. Such a space shapes a dialogue with nature and the environment, not a monologue with itself.

The architecture itself is defined by an openness, especially towards the outside or nature, not just structurally but especially concerning societal values. It draws a continuum, that doesn't perceive architecture as something that isn't part of nature. They are not part of contrasting realities, as in the Western society, but the Japanese „rather, (they) want to appear as inhabitants of the natural world and have integrated it to a large extent into their living environment“ (Itō 1999:38). As Teiji Itō states further: “It is true that many houses in the west today have large panorama windows which seem to ‘bring nature closer’. But in between there is always a glass surface: the contact between the people inside and the nature outside is purely visual. Different from the traditional Japanese house. Here, the distribution to the garden is created by sliding walls (shoji), which create access to the garden through large openings” (ibid.). While this first part dealt more with the exposition of the intense bond of architecture-nature/garden, the following will try to dive deeper into the metaphysical aspects, incorporated on a micro and macro level.



city(c)scapes

a walk from Tsumago to

Kibune.



Ikebana and Bonsais are not only considered high art, but are companions in the day to day life of the people. In front of every house, whether you are in a mountain village or in the dense city, the people surround themselves with “miniature” pieces of nature and arrange them carefully. Both pictures are from the posttown of Tsumago on the Nakasendo trail. It was a travel route between Tokyo and Kyoto back in the Edo era. Old buildings line the streets of the towns.







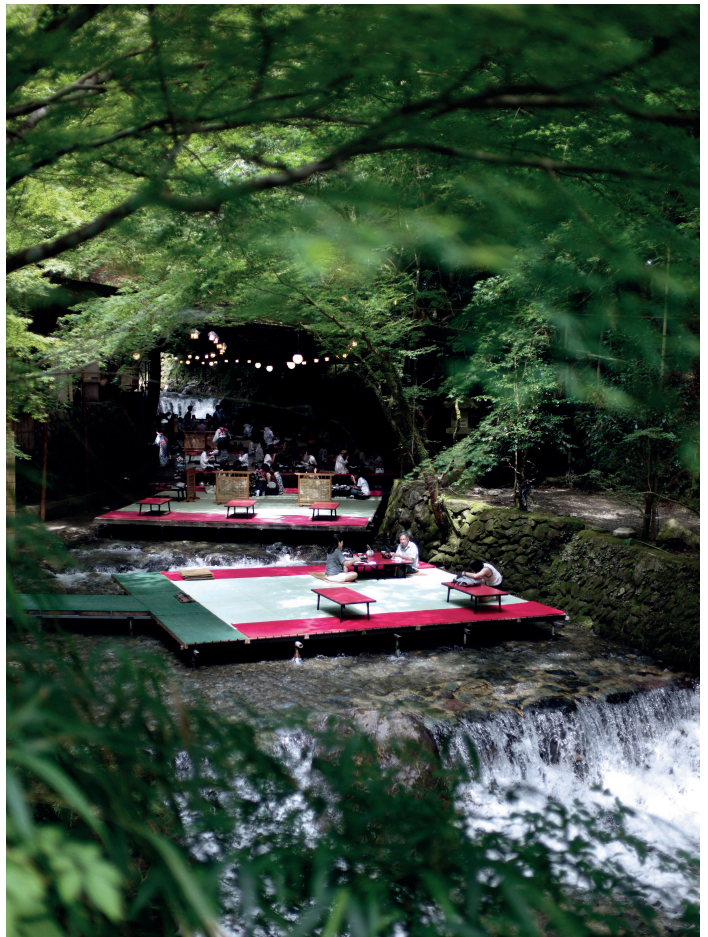


A typical cityscape in Kyoto- temple, house or public buildings are in a continuum and almost non-hierarchical, as well as the transition from street to door.



Despite Tokyo's metropolitan size, one feels hardly ever in a busy place as soon as one avoids the very central shopping districts. But even here, only a bend away into a small side streets lies quiet. Above is the House Moryama by Sanaa, that nestles seamlessly . The gaps are filled with green and used space, that is neither garden nor outside, neither private nor public.

At Kibune, a town in the northern mountains of Kyōto, simple wooden platforms are erected on which one can enjoy a natural fresh breeze of the cold mountain water to escape the heat and humidity in Kyōto. Whilst eating, nature is set in scene like a movie. The seating structure is only erected on the stones, being able to dismantle them quickly before heavy rainfalls.





Sweet rice wrapped in a leaf on the Nakasendo trail, Kiso Valley. The plastic a reminder of the co-existence of progress and tradition.





Women garden-  
ing on one of the  
many similar side-  
streets in Kyōto.  
The refined sense  
for nature and  
subtle changes  
of the seasons  
are also applied  
to food. The way  
food is wrapped  
and prepared is  
tactfully muted to  
the current event  
and season, to cel-  
ebrate the subtle  
moment.



## Contemplating nature

Japanese architecture is often built with devotion to the garden. The garden is an important topic and is always integrated as I have already mentioned, from as small as *Ikebena*, to as expansive as *shakkei*. It is seen to have the potential to shape our understanding and relationship to the world. The traditional Japanese building is a post-beam construction, where different movable elements like *shoji* and *fusuma* (sliding doors), folding screens, can be opened and closed as desired. It creates space bound to the moment, the room size and constellation vary accordingly. Wooden shutters are placed in the evening or when heavy rain falls and if closed the house creates a safe world within. The white paper of the *shoji* transmits a soft snowlike light, that lights the place dimly. When the sliding screens are opened up, the space brings in the outside and creates an extraordinary link between architecture and the surroundings, which can be meditated on the edge between the house and the garden, the *engawa*. A house that lives with the seasons, the garden and architecture a place to contemplate the passing of time. Sometimes we are allowed to enter the garden and sometimes we are only allowed to observe from the veranda space.

The sliding screens “evoke the infinite space of the world outside” (Kuma and Takai 2010:20), the architecture a frame to contemplate the outside (cf. Nitschke 2002). Often geometric shapes are inscribed into the panels



or walls as openings and create an even deeper focus on the matter. Openings are sometimes cut into the *shoji* in the form of a circle, bell or simple rectangle, to ensure ventilation and a peek through to the outside, also while the *shojis* are closed. Regardless the weather they enable us to view the garden beyond, like the snow-viewing *shoji*. Sometimes such an opening is the only view on the garden, centering our attention, as in Buddhist temples, for example the temple of Genkō-an or the Meigetsuin temple in Kamakura. These openings grasp and hold the universe within. The garden cannot be entered here, but solely the view draws you even more outside with your mind than with your feet. The act of “framing” the outside lets us perceive the garden almost like a painting. As Bergeijk describes:

“It distinguishes the work of art from its surroundings and separates itself from the viewer. It creates a distance, which enables the viewer to appreciate the work of art aesthetically. Through its frame, a work of art is immediately perceived as a unity, as a world in itself. The possibility of contemplation increases if the frame is completely different from the work of art, both in its material and conception.” (van Bergeijk 2001)

In the history of the Western garden, the wall functions as such a frame as in the *hortus conclusus*. But here it serves more for the sake of the protection of a paradise garden than to act as a guide for concentration on the subject matter. Here the paradise is something you must protect, it is property, while at the same time there is a need to protect it from the outside, so that it isn't able to destroy or have impact on the inside. This wall or frame is the symbol in the religiously influenced Western history to be seen in its context as a separating symbolism. Not only the garden wall but also the walls of the buildings create an exclusion of the external world. This separating from the external world is exactly the opposite of what the Japanese garden/architecture wants to communicate. It creates an imaginary world, to contemplate and to dream, but within the broad context of the universe. Though the gardens are often enclosed by walls, the intention is still to make a connection to the world outside, e.g. in form of the borrowed scenery.

The Genkō-an temple, built in the 14th century in the North West of Kyoto, is famous for spiritual contemplation. The seasons of the garden are framed, a visit to the temple most famous in autumn, when the leaves of the Japanese acer turn red (Discover Kyoto 2019). Here the garden is experienced through two openings, one square and one circle, in the *zendo* (meditation hall), that concentrates on the garden. The monk or visitor must first look through the circular window, „the window of confusion“, then through the rectangular window<sup>15</sup>, „the window of enlightenment“. The square window stands for the “the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism”<sup>15</sup>, the four equal sides “connect(s) to the next to form the whole“ (cf. Walker 2017:158). Together with the triangle, which is shaped by the meditating self, in the sitting pose of *zazen*, these three shapes create the *sanmi-san-gen*, the shapes of the universe and all existence in Zen-Buddhism. Shinto Priest Yukitaka Yamamoto explains: “The Principle of ‘Sanmi–Sangen’ explains the mystery of life. Sanmi–Sangen means the three elements that constitute the basis of all forms of existence. These basic symbols both explain the meaning of and guide the destiny of human life” (Yamamoto 1987). It embraces the characteristics of the cycle of life by watching nature changing its appearances while the seasons pass by<sup>16</sup>. Though it seems like a limited view, framed by shapes, it reminds us of the cosmological dependence of all things, where neither humans nor nature are excluded, whilst we actively take part with our mind (contemplating) and body (sitting pose) in this dialogue.

14.

While Buddhism relates the square to the mind, Da Vinci shows the relation of the square to the physical body (cf. ibid:158)

15.

The four noble truths in Buddhism are: suffering-*dukkha*, -cause of suffering -*samudaya*, cessation of suffering -*nirodha*, path to cessation of suffering – *magga* (Walker 2017:158)

16.

Impermanence or the transience of life, especially with the seasons and nature as constant reminder, is a relevant topic in the Japanese culture, which I will discuss in the ongoing chapters of this thesis as one of the central topics in terms of aesthetic sensibility.



fig. 18  
Entsu-ji, Kyōto

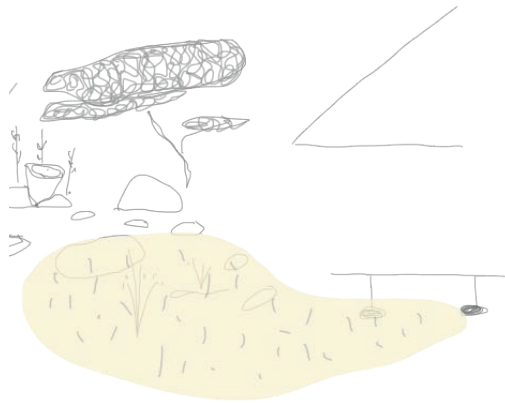
A landscape  
borrowed  
from afar is  
a common  
technique in  
japanese gar-  
den design  
and is called  
shakkei  
("borrowed  
scenery").





shakkei

examples of the ways nature reaches “inside”



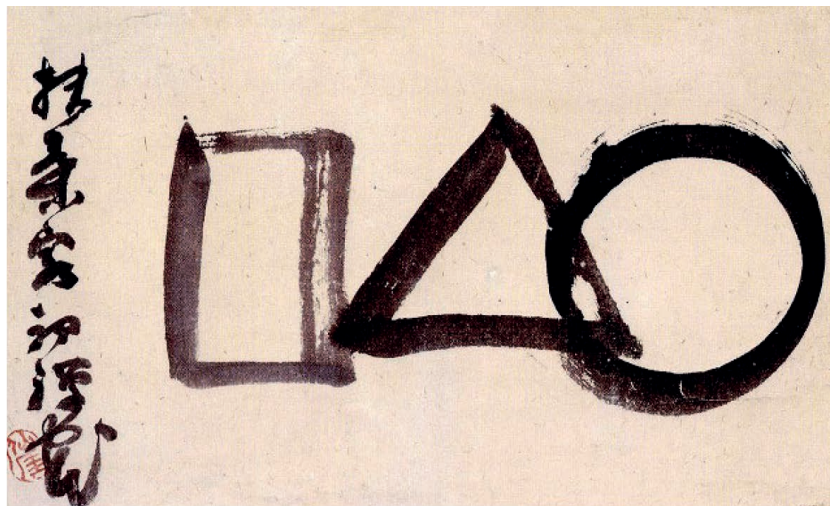
nature reaches under the hovering structure



fig. 19  
Genkō-an, Kyōto

The circle and square are inscribed for the purpose of a deep contemplation of our existence, while the meditation pose builds the triangle shape. Genkō-an is a temple of the buddhist Zoto sect, situated at the bottom of the mountains in north east Kyōto and its garden is famous for the colors of the season.

fig. 20  
the Universe, Sengai Gibon (1750-1837)





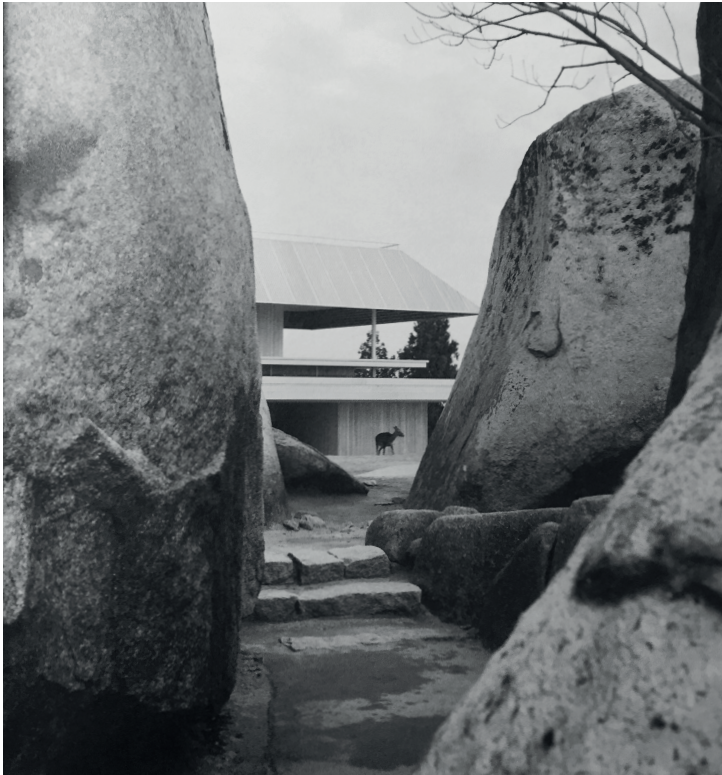


fig. 21



fig. 22

Miyajima Misen observatory, Miyajima, Hiroshi Sambuichi



## Shaping awareness

17.  
or <http://www.aistf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/k/kutsunugiishi.htm>

As soon as we pass the gate into the garden, we are confronted with an awareness of the space we move through. Walking along the paths that lead to the interior of a house or a temple, stimulates a contemplation of the dependency of all things, an awareness of the moment. The feeling deepens when we move through the flowing *noren* into the dark *genkan* space or when we step up onto the *engawa* to remove our shoes on the stone dedicated to this movement (*kutsunugi-ishi*)<sup>17</sup> (cf. Itô 1999). When we walk on the *tatami*, we feel the softness of the earth, the rice mats reminding us of where it once grew. The soft touch of the *tatami* changes our movements to a more careful speed, our footsteps hardly hearable. The *hinoki* and *sugi* wood used mainly for the construction is unbelievably soft to its touch, it smells like the woods of the Kiso valley. When we slide the doors, we need to either kneel down- as is usually done- or we have to bend down. By both acts we become thoughtful to the way we behave. We pay attention to the details, while we are opening the doors, we become aware of its source, stripped to bare essentials: We form a dialogue with our environment and vice versa.

We enter over a stone, inside the touch of our naked feet on the *tatami*- or socks and slippers- touches all of our senses. We are confronted with a tactility, like we walking through a landscape in wild nature, where all our senses are challenged and needed, as mentioned by Bachelard.

Once entered, sitting is the main pose in a Japanese house. This position makes one feel earthbound, not sublime. It is a pose, that “Japanese people consider (...) to be one of the most important acts”, as Hiroshi Sambuichi says. Though it is more and more common to use tables and chairs, sitting on the floor is still part of the daily life. This position close to the floor, enables a deep dialogue with nature and is “a posture oriented towards nature”(Sambuichi 2016 :47).

Sambuichi’s observatory on Mount Misen is an acknowledgment of old traditions and phenomenons, including the Buddhist temple and sacred sites. On the top of Mount Misen, at an *iwakura*, Sambuichi built the Miyajima Misen Observatory. “Seated reflection” lies at the heart of the concept, with a wide view onto the Seto Inland Sea, the primeval forest of Miyajima and the Oono Seto strait. Here on the top of the mountains one can meditate on the beauty, spreading out in front of the *engawa*, the vastness of the landscape integrated as borrowed scenery (*shakkei*). It is like a temple with its garden, only on top of a mountain. Underneath the *engawa* a second level reaches out, like a tray that holds within a drygarden. The deep eaves (*hisashi*) force us to sit down. An experience described in Sambuichi’s words:

“(...)what I want to be felt at Itsukushima is how, since ancient times, we Japanese will confront nature, how we fear and worship nature, how we ally ourselves with nature(...)” (Sambuichi 2016:42)

The posture of sitting is also related to the Buddhist practice of the meditation pose, called *zazen*. In the temples we too walk on the soft wooden boards, barefoot, before we reach the small gardens and sit down on the *engawa* to meditate. Compared to that: The act of sitting on a chair or on anything elevated from the ground in the Western society is for Baatz “a matter of making nature available and controllable (...)” (Baatz 1998:87). For her sitting elevated “literally embodies the Cartesian dualism of body and mind” as she also describes the (negative) affects of this physical pose:

“Sitting on chairs intervenes massively in the body and psyche of the human be-

ing: it immobilizes the body and dampens the affect. The chair-seater seems to have control over his affects, seems to be bodily and mentally self-directed and able to control the world through laws which thinking derives and formulates from the world. The thinking person sitting on the chair literally embodies the Cartesian dualism of body and mind”<sup>18</sup>(ibid:87)

18.  
the physiological  
aspects of our bodies  
are also influenced,  
such as breathing or  
peritoneal tension.  
(cf. ibid:87)

19.  
As Locher explains,  
“In many cultures,  
the commencement  
of the use of chairs  
corresponded to at  
least one of three  
objectives: to be  
removed from the  
damp ground, to  
express social hierar-  
chy, and to emulate  
a more advanced  
culture”(Locher  
2010:51)

20.  
the tokonoma origin-  
tated in the buddhist  
temples, where it was  
used for the rites of  
the monks, where  
-marked by a slightly  
higher floor- the  
incense was placed  
(cf. Yoshida 1954:59)

Though in other Asian countries, as for example China, the chair had been part of the culture since the Han dynasty (206bce - 220ce), “the Japanese continued to live on the floor”(Locher 2010:51)<sup>19</sup>. The structure is elevated about 70cm above ground (Yoshida 1935). Inside our experience of space is bound to the height of the eyes when we are sitting. Our preception of our surroundings is altered, we are closer to the floor. We encounter the shift in our cognition also in the movies of Ozu Yasujiro, where the camera is set at the height of the seated position. The elevation of the structure and the height of the eyes also relate different to the surrounding environment: Sitting on the floor is perfect to communicate with someone passing by, as many of the old paintings tell us.

Not only the acts of ourselves are shaped by an ongoing dialogue with the world, but the architecture is full of symbols of gestures towards nature. One of the most important elements in a Japanese building, temple or teahouse is the tokonoma, a small alcove inside the house dedicated to nature and to the concept of *ma*, a notion of (empty) space and time. According to the current season a hanging scroll (*kakemono*) and a flower arrangement (*ikebana*) are placed in the small alcove. The alcove is set slightly higher than the rest of the room, whilst the flooring is either *tatami* or wooden boards (*yuki*)<sup>20</sup>. A decorative column, the *tokobashira* (“alcove column”) is usually made of more precious wood, than the surrounding structure and is treated in various forms (cf. Locher 2012:52-53). Sometimes smoothed, accentuating the natural texture of the wood, sometimes stripped bare of the bark to indicate the natural shape of the tree, sometimes it seems that the tree is growing right here out of the floor, making its way through the tatami and the ceiling.

The *tokonoma* expresses the attitude and refined sense towards nature (of the host). It is a place of nature's worship, where there is no need for lush flower bouquets expressing the beauty and the dialogue with nature, but where a single bud not yet in bloom holds more richness of beauty. Therefore it can act representative for aesthetic sense in the Japanese culture, as I will discuss later. As Richie says, it is the beauty found in „the rightness of the placing of a single flower.“, which is „both the expression and the result of an awareness that comes from a highly self-conscious regard of nature“(Richie 2007:31)<sup>21</sup>. It is a vague boundary, that blurs and transcends, where one magnolia stands for a whole garden full of it. Influenced by buddhism and the wabi-cha, it worships our relationship, taking the fragile nature into our house and keeping it safe for a moment,, to bury it afterwards in the current of the river (Okakura 1906:139).

This awareness towards our environment is not just found on a small scale. On a larger scale, Kyōto's urban structure refers to nature and its element's cycle. The layout of Kyōto, formerly named Heian-kyō, which was founded in 794, is the result of the acknowledgment of the dependency of nature's forces. The location and its urban structure, is based on the model of the Chiense city Chang'an (today's Xi'an) (Salastie 1999) and the principle of the geomancy, which relates to the five elements of the earth. The city is located in a bay surrounded on three sides (north, west and east) by mountains, while a river flows from north to south, which is seen as a perfect auspicious site in geomancy. The residencies and palaces of the Heian period were placed within this structure, within this layout the plot is orientated to the basic principle of *fusui*, too. Thus, the layout of Kyōto can be read as mandala, „interpreted as microcosmic replicas of the universe“ (Nitschke 2002:36). Here we can see, that even the city was quasi planned based on nature, which transports itself into the city streets and into the houses. As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, when nature is mirrored in the *tokonoma* or in the backyard of the narrow townhouses, mirrored in the rice straw of the tatami, it creates an awareness of the relationship between all things, not thinking in either or, but “ambiguously”.

21.

Haruo Shirane calls these things a secondary nature, that had been started to be placed inside the house and taken to a high art during the Muromachi period, (cf. Shirane 2013)







fig. 24

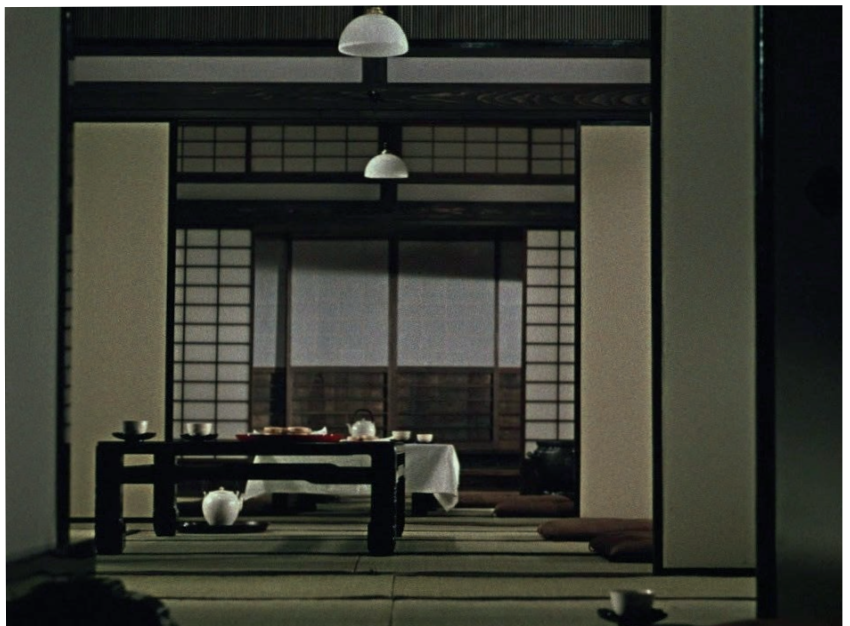
Filmstill , Floating Weeds, 1959, Yasujiro Ozu



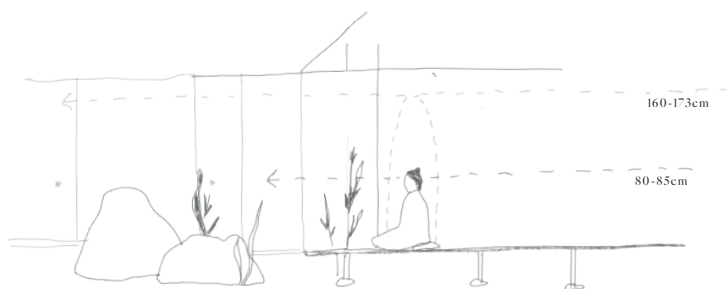
Eye per-  
spective of a  
sitting person.  
The whole film  
is shot in this  
perspective.

fig. 25

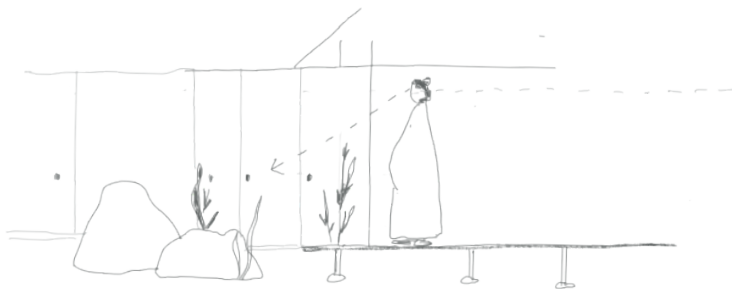
Filmstill, Late Autumn 1960, Yasujiro Ozu



sitting on the  
floor enables a  
deep dialogue  
with nature,  
This position  
makes one feel  
earthbound,  
not sublime.



down to earth



sublime



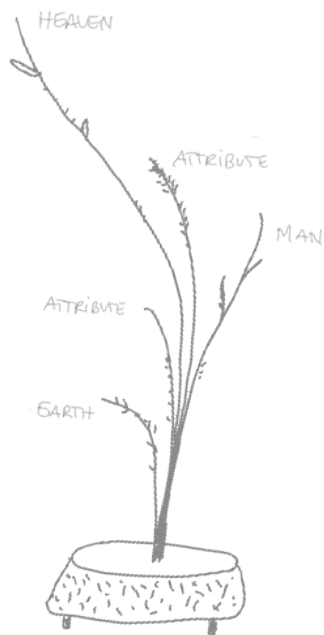
fig. 26  
tokonoma

While the technique of shakkei borrows a far away landscape to integrate as view, The tokonma and the way of the flower (*ikebana*) brings nature on a everyday basis into the house.

fig. 27  
contemporary ikebana



Ikebana or the way of flower (kado) is like the tea ceremony not only a simple flower arrangement, but like drinking tea or arranging stones a thoughtful process. For Teiji Ito it is the challenge "to value the small and the big, the absence and presence", for him inherent concepts rooted in the Japanese culture.



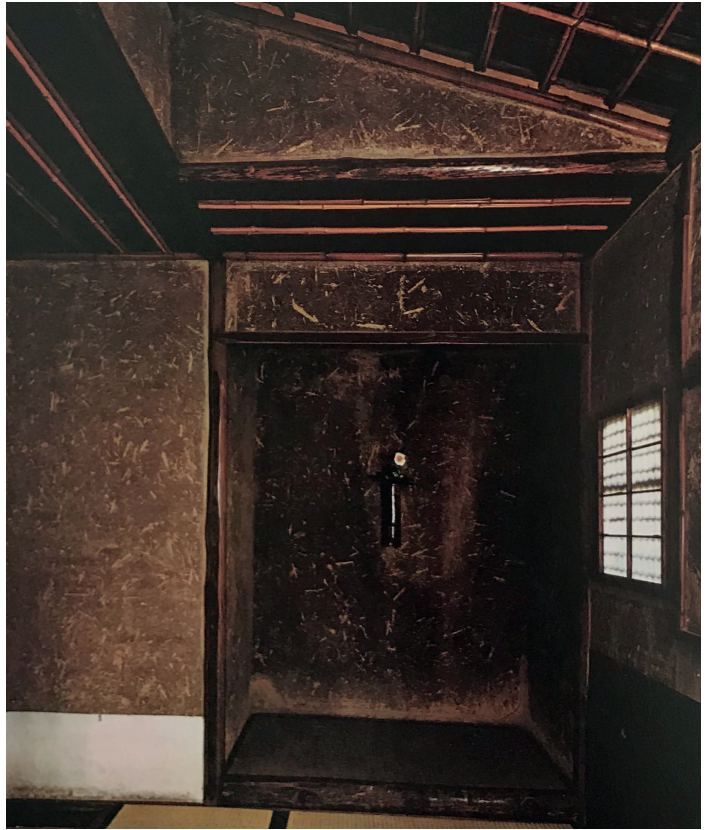
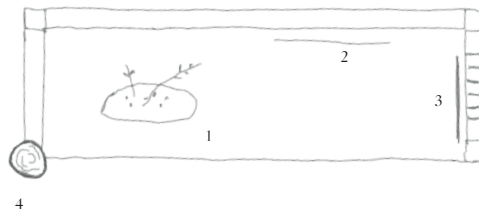


fig. 28

Sen no Rikyu, Tokonoma of Tai-an teahouse

Not only the wall of the tokonoma here is left bare, but the whole interior feels earthen, straw mixed into the mud wall in the famous teahouse of Sen no Rikyu.





- 1 ikebana (flower arrangement)
- 2 kakemono (hanging scroll)
- 3 shoin (writing nook) or small window (mado)
- 4 tokobashira (wooden pillar)

the decorative column, the tokobashira (4) is usually made of more precious wood than the surrounding structure. Sometimes smoothed, stressing the natural texture of the wood, so that sometimes strapped bare of the bark to indicate the natural shape of the tree, sometimes it seems that the tree is growing right here out of the floor, making its way through the tatami and the ceiling.

tokonoma and  
ikebana

Shadow and ma  
(empty space  
defines the  
space of the  
tokonoma. a  
sketch of the  
tokonoma of  
the guesthouse  
I stayed in  
Kyoto.



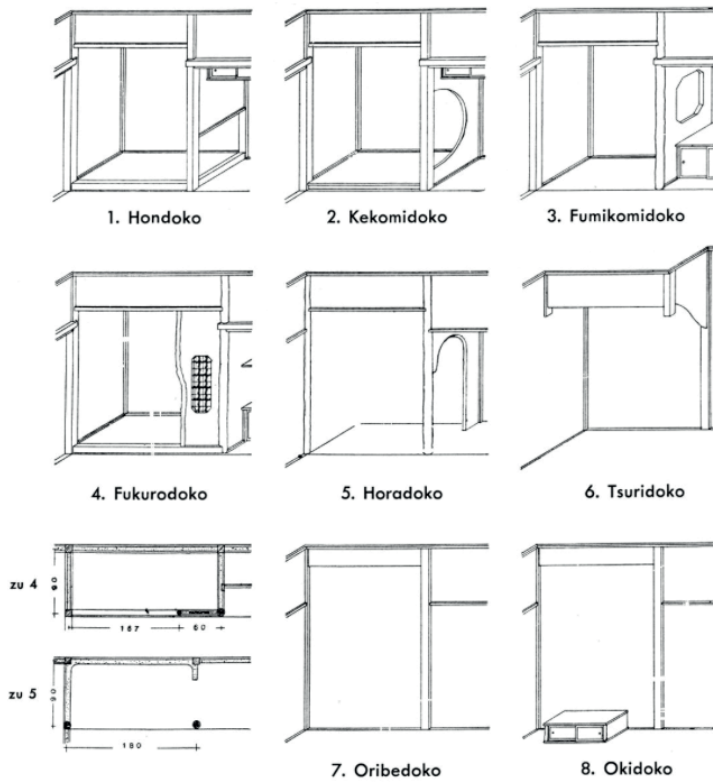


fig. 29  
different variations of the tokonoma

tokonoma of the echizen washi museum, July 2018





fig. 30

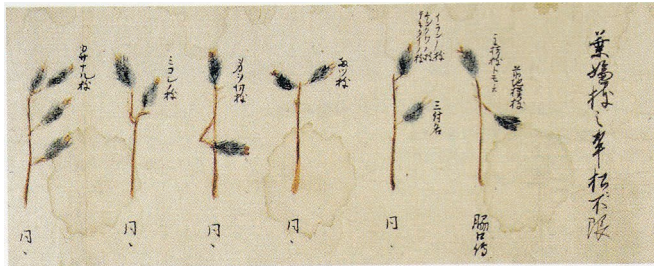


fig. 31

Illustration from the Kaō irai no Kadensho, believed to be the oldest extant manuscript of ikebana teaching, dating from a time shortly after that of Ikenobō Senkei. It shows various arranging styles(1486 and 1499)

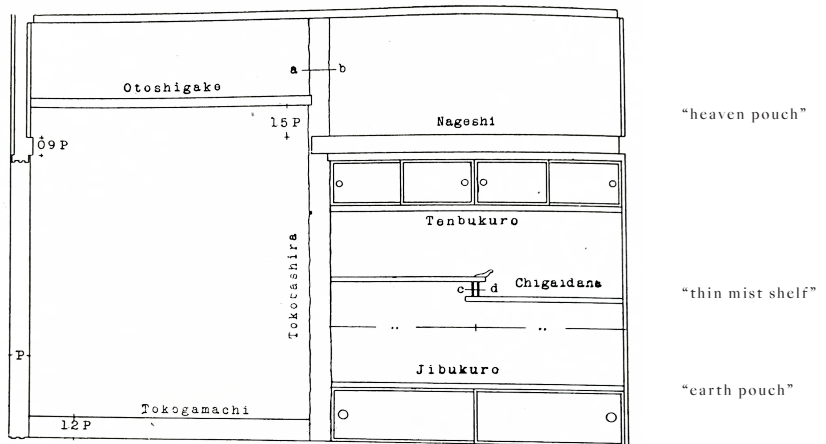
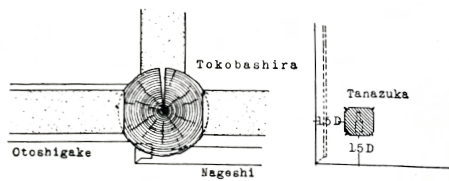


fig. 32



Adjacent to the tokonoma is the so called chigaidana. The shelves and drawers serve to display and keep various private objects, like utensils. The form and arrangement of the shelves shall remind of clouds, where the second name usukasumi-dana ("thin mist shelf") derives from.

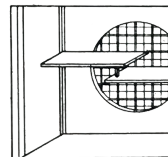
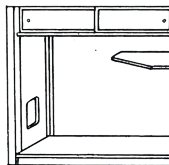
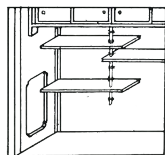


fig. 33

clouds of the Seto Inland sea, July 2018







fig. 34  
the school of ikenobo

instead of putting  
flowers in a vase,  
the single stems  
are stuck in a  
harmonic com-  
position on the  
nails of a so called  
kenzan, that is put  
at the bottom of  
the vessel.

fig. 35  
women arranging flowers





fig. 36

Juniya Ishigami's models are often like an arrangement of flowers

some contemporary designs seem almost like a form of ikebana. Not only Ishigami puts thought in every single tree and plant, that will be paper of the architectural experience. This perception of space widens the scale of architecture.

The architecture is dissolved into a flower, the pillars into a forest- the environment exists everywhere, the boundaries between man, architecture and nature blurred. Plants are not only in Ishigami's designs considered in their specific values. The meaning and character of certain plans derive from the century old art of the ikebana (flower arrangement).

fig. 37



077

ここに掲載された建案や都市は、現実のプロジェクトから、スタジオの途中に出てきたもの、また、そこから誕生したもの、さらに、まったく異なる現実のプロジェクト同士を同じテーマで考えるための施設として新たに考えた架空のプロジェクトまで、様々である。そういうさまざまなリアリティを一度、等価に並べてみることで、そこから何か見えてくるものがあるのではないかと思う。ジェネゾリア・ゼンサーとのプロジェクトをきっかけに、この本を制作した。

Juniya Ishigami (in Nuisijink:265)

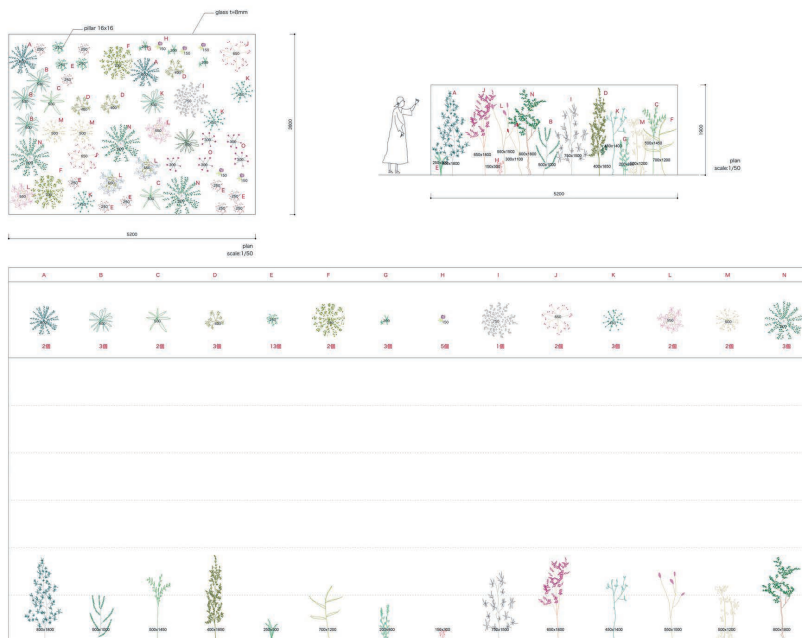


fig. 38  
drawings for Venice Biennale Pavillon 2008, Juniya Ishigami



fig. 39

Venice Biennale Pavillon 2008, Juniya Ishigami



## Vague boundaries

Space in Japan is defined by vague boundaries that don't draw a line between outside and inside, that make no difference between categories, which are not 'either-or'. Such transitory spaces create subtle passages, which are essential for the perception of the space. They are not only in-between spaces, but like thresholds, creating awareness of the moment, yet at the same time dissolving our location.

In Japan the fine paper of the shojis or the bamboo screens are in this sense not really made to protect from harsh weather like thick stone walls, but instead to create an airy environment. The house is build for the hot and humid summer (cf. Yoshida 1935). They differ from the "buildings out of walls that clearly differentiate interior and exterior" (Lazarin reciting Kurokawa 2008:106). For Kengo Kuma these soft boundaries made out of fabric, bamboo or paper, like the bamboo blinds (*sudare*) or the *shoji* screens (sliding paper doors)- sometimes just made up in our mind through spatial layering- are "joining and separating at the same time" (Kuma 2010 :61). The fragile boundaries trace back to the ancient traditions in the Shinto belief, where simple straw ropes (*shimenawa*) or the *torii* (gate) defined boundaries between the sacred and the profane:

"Different levels, pillars, signs- things such as these are employed to mark off sacred spaces. These are boundaries that delineate the outer as an object of worship and awe, transcending human knowledge." (Kuma 2010:77)



This “division” of space, that is in constant flux, can only be subtle. Vague boundaries divide the mundane world from the otherworldly, they separate “between the everyday and the extraordinary” (ibid:80). The *nijiriguchi* (crawling entrance or teahouse entrance), or the shoe-removing stone, the stepping stones and the gates belong to the realm of vague boundaries, that are connected to the ritual of purifying and the spatial experience of gradually diving deeper into the world and bound to the gradual layering of the space.<sup>22</sup> We can describe them as thresholds- but not dividing space, but blurring it.

The *engawa* is one of the vague boundaries. The soft wooden floorboards of the *engawa* protrude out of the house slightly, so one can enjoy nature under the protection of the eaves (*noki*), that reach far beyond the edge of the *engawa*, as if they were trying to protect the nature as best as they can. The *engawa* is a transitory space, a grey zone and has no “clear division” (Kuma 2010 :53). Situated between “inside” and “outside” it connects spaces or transcends them. It can be described as empty spaces (*ma*), constituting a state of in-betweenness, but at the same time connecting: “In Japanese, a bridging structure that has “*ma*” is said to have “*en*,” which means both “edge” and “connection.” (Lazarin 2014:138).

Sometimes the garden reaches out to the house, under the *engawa*. The water of the pond flowing, creating a moment for the visitor to engage in a perfect relationship with the garden. Sometimes, the architecture suddenly begins, like a walk in the forest, whilst climbing a hill of stones and then you would suddenly stand in a house. The start of the architecture is somehow abrupt, but somehow, maybe by the way it is elevated, it transits smoothly. It doesn't suggest a force and power by standing there, but a lightness, that tries carefully not to touch the earthen ground too much, lifting up his roof in favour to spend shelter. Intermediate zones or transitory spaces pervade this experience, where we are in more than one space at the same time. The *engawa*, that quasi-surrounds the building „is devoted to the garden's contemplation.” Inside and outside at the same

22.

Arata Isozaki even describes the geographical situation of Japan as having no real boundaries, except the water, which is rather *ma* or vague (cf. Isozaki 2018).

Space is defined by layers, that we pervade one after another until we reach the "inner", a spatial concept called *oku* and *ma*, revealing and hiding. Below is a typical spatial arrangement of Shinden and Shoin architecture.

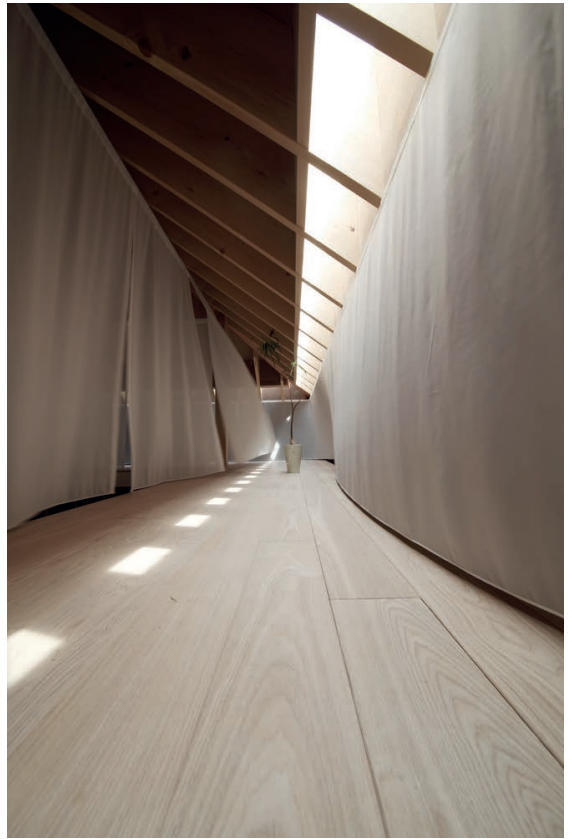


fig. 40

Wengawa House / Katsutoshi Sasaki + Associates

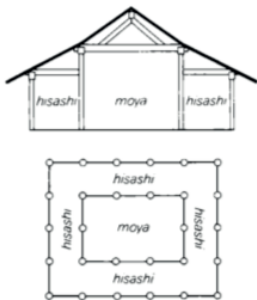


fig. 41



time, a threshold between nature and building, it is the dialogue of the house with its surroundings. As Lazarin describes it:

“It blurs the boundary, and through this haze, it establishes an aperture to view the garden and mountain beyond. The aim of this blurring is to construct an aesthetic illusion such that one appears to be projected toward the horizon of the visible world” (Lazarin 2014:144)

Sitting on the soft wood, it is the perfect place to contemplate under the shelter of the roof. The level is the same as the interior space, raised about 2 steps from the earthen ground. The *engawa* can be considered both as an extension and protection of the interior or living space as well as of the garden (Ito 1999:38), however, it may not be entered with shoes on. The space can be also be closed with sliding doors or *shojis* and creates then a kind of an inner corridor, a second layer, a shell, which is envelope like. A second form is the *nuri-en*, which is located outside of the sliding doors.

The vague boundaries are an essential of the Japanese architecture and culture, where “the whole house can be seen as a series of transitional spaces between the public world at the front and the natural world at the rear.” (Lazarin 2014:139). They are a manifestation of the spatial concept of *oku* and *ma*, the art of the veiling and unveiling, of the gradient. Entering the house feels like one is step for step guided towards something that is focussed totally inward, the innermost is called *oku*. Sometimes between the “building” and the *engawa* there is another space, that subtly connects the different spaces. The *sayanoma* (Sheath room), is a space similar to the *engawa*, also narrow and situated all around the house, but covered in tatami mats. It is a space that protects the “precious main building” with a “building built over it (sayado) as protective covering”(Kuma 2010:58).

These intermediate spaces are not seen as a third kind of space, but are rather the continuum. The between suggests something limitless, where “we imagine something unknown”. For Sou Fujimoto these “fuzzy boundaries”, as he calls them, bring (architectonic) qualities with them, that can

enrichen our senses and our experience of the world (Fujimoto 2010:131). Such gradient boundaries don't create a black and white but different hues of grey, outside and inside, light and shadow, nature and artificial are "simultaneously separated and connected". The space is like a forest:

"(...) you experience simultaneous feelings of being separated from your surroundings, yet at the same time a freedom and endless connection. (...) a zone including the sky and everything around you seems to stretch to infinity, creating the quality of being in some kind of transparent, man-made forest"  
(ibid :132)

The Japanese space or architecture finds itself in-between house and garden, devoting its layout to the contemplation of the natural world, where the garden is not there solely for its beauty, but is instead the „(...) microcosmos, peak of a long tradition in the art of gardening, which aims to animate the contemplation of the world and the being of life”(Itō 1999:7).







fig. 42  
seaside series, Hiroshi Sugimoto

“oceanizing”, calls  
Byung Chul Han  
the way of Japanese  
thinking. It is hard  
to make out, where  
the sky ends and the  
water begins, they  
transit gradiently,  
while the horizon is  
blurred in between,  
neither belonging to  
the sky nor the water.  
The gentle transi-  
tion of how we enter  
and move through a  
building.

The fine fabric  
of the noren  
creates a vague  
boundary and a  
gentle gesture  
when we enter.

Honmura, Naoshima, June 2018





Yui-an, Kiso Valley, June 2018





Honmura, Naoshima, June 2018

## II Genkan

with earthen floor (doma)



Yui-an, Kiso Valley, June 2018



fig. 43

gen = 'profound, abstruse, occult or mysterious'  
 kan = 'barrier, connection or turning point' 'gen' = 'profound, abstruse,  
 occult or mysterious'  
 (cf. Lazarin 2008)

The genkan is a space that is covered by the doma (earthen floor). It is an in between- a zone situated between the public and the private. A space, where the earth draws into the house. A typical genkan has a wooden raised platform, and can have also a so called dcima (a small tatami covered room). In the townhouses of the merchants (machiya) this space serves as the shop.



fig. 44

House with an Earthen Floor, 1963 Kazuo Shinohara

earthen floor  
hapticity  
as intro  
and vague  
boundary.  
The earthen  
floor draws  
itself inside.  
It is a mix-  
ture of clay,  
charcoal and  
brine spread,  
a prounded  
mortar

fig. 45

earthen floor of a minka







fig. 46  
 House with plants, 2012, Juniya Ishigami

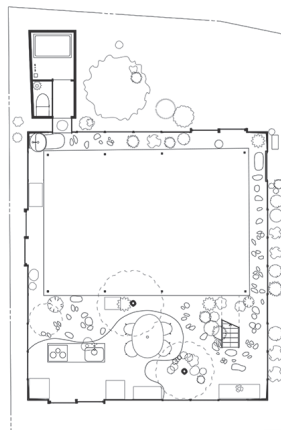


fig. 47

contemporary  
doma

The wall is almost  
inexistent, as thin as  
a layer of shoji. An  
actual boundary not  
anymore existent.  
All objects form  
“the elements of an  
inner landscape”

fig. 48

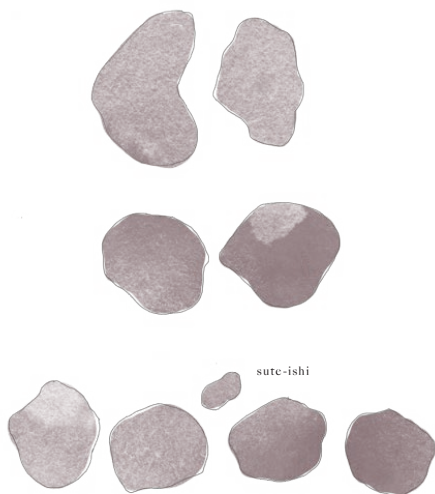




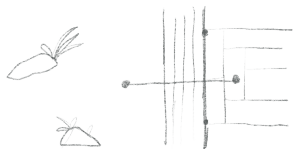
### III Stepping Stones



the layout of the stones is carefully done. while the stones have to be set in a harmony. so is the constellation above good, while the second one should be avoided. The sute-ishi a small stone, that fills a larger gap.



engawa as  
connecting  
(A) and space  
in-between  
(B)



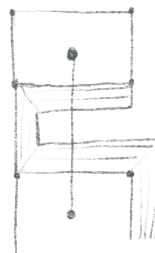
(A)

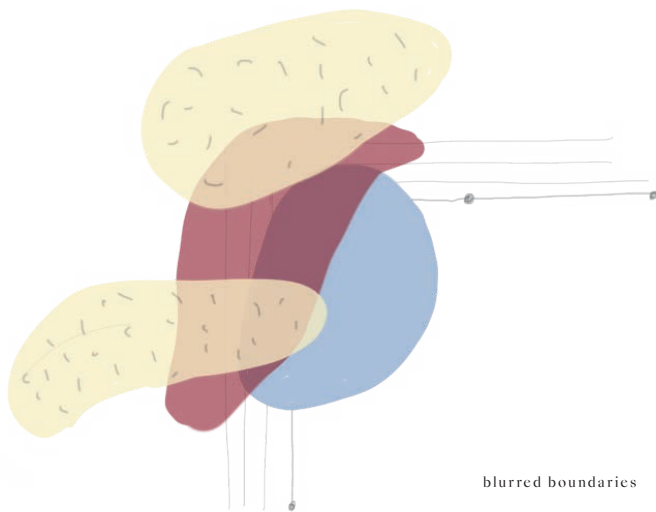


(B)

nature

house





blurred boundaries

the engawa  
serves also  
as connect-  
ing space  
between  
the rooms  
or as space  
in-between  
them that is  
neither nor.



Here not a man  
gives way to the  
house, but nature  
does. Entering on  
a stone creates  
an awareness  
and carefulness  
towards our move-  
ments. Not really  
touching the house,  
the stone seems  
like an object from  
nature bowing  
for us and making  
itself small so that  
we can step on na-  
ture's back to our  
needed shadow.

fig. 49





fig. 50

Watanabe Residence





fig. 51  
Shisen-do



we settle here in  
a deep dialogue  
with the garden.  
The architecture  
built to contem-  
pate the ahs of  
nature.



in-between

Ryogen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, July 2018



“The cries of the insects, sunbeams, the beautiful moon of autumn. The north wind, driving rain, the coldness of snow on the ground. Accepting blessings and adversity equally, just as they are. A place where one experiences the awe of nature, untamed.”  
(Kuma 2010:47)



fig. 52  
Nomura Samurai House, Kanazawa



fig. 53  
Scenes from Tale of Genji, 18th century

The space of the engawa is not only the inbetween or connection between outside and inside but also between the rooms. We can also learn a lot about how space was perceived and used, nature embedded from the old paintings. The emaki or picture scrolls tell us the story about the relationship between all things.

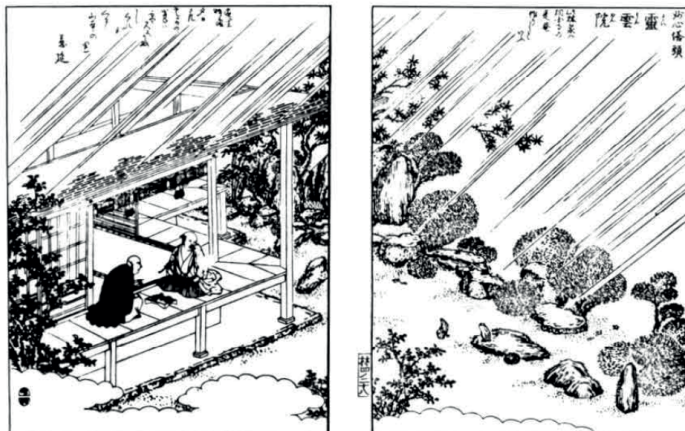


fig. 54

Reiun-in, the Spirit and cloud Temple, subtemple of Myoshin-ji, Kyoto,

"Miyako rinsen meissho zue", "the illustrated manual of Celebrated Gardens in the Capital", 1799



in-between

“the people of Japan have long ago perceived that we are more complex and contradictory organism than the simple digital operation of 1 and 0, “either-or” can explain.” (Kuma 2010:19)

Japanese architecture forms a place, where inside and outside become an entity, not a contrast. This form finds beauty in the expression of an in-between, in the vague and subtle rather than the concrete and obvious. It finds beauty in a state of uncertainty and ambiguity. It is a form of suggestion, like the Japanese language, where often vague instead of concrete expressions are used (Calza 2015). The vagueness also finds expression in the spatial concepts, such as soft, gradual layering of the space, enveloping, referred to as *oku* and *ma*. These concepts of vagueness and blurring are also applied in the work of the contemporary architecture, “which offer a radically different way of thinking about architecture” (Nuijsink 2018). By recognising that nothing is just one or the other, “different kinds of boundaries that do not completely separate outside and inside came to exist in Japan” (Kuma 2010:19). Like the *engawa*, that is perceived neither as inside or outside and which belongs to the Japanese house almost in the same manner as the roof:

„The traditional Shoin-style houses<sup>23</sup> all had veranda spaces that acted as the intermediate zone between the interior and the exterior, a formal detail of Shoin architecture. The blurring of the edges and boundaries creates a sense of vagueness that is an ingrained approach to many aspects of the Japanese culture. ‘The ambiguity of boundaries as layered ‘envelopes’ (*ma*), is closely related

23.

Also the former styles as the *Shinden* was defined by these intermediate zones



to the ambiguity of a center (oku) in architecture, urbanism, and other cultural forms” (Verghese 2003:168)

The state is an in-between, where things are set in relation to each other<sup>24</sup>, like the stone, that serves as entry point. It is not connected physically to the architectural structure nor does it seem firmly attached to the earthen ground. The stone seems as if it had fallen here naturally, having been here for centuries, before the architecture was built. Compared to the notion of the stairs, which obviously try to connect and create a physical connection from the architecture to the ground. Its state is definitive. Whereas the stepping stone is a manifestation of the space in-between.

24.

A further discussion of the relativity can be found in the chapter 3 and 5

In this in-between space the relation rather than the separation is emphasised. As Bruno Taut remarks in his analysis of Villa Katsura in 1934: “it is a style of relationships, so to say a built relativity”<sup>25</sup> (Taut 1997), where no stones or pillars meet in a line. A relativity that stresses the ,as well as‘, as Lévi-Strauss notes: “Japanese culture possesses an astonishing capacity to oscillate between extremes. (...) pleasure is even taken in juxtaposing contraries.” It’s myth besides history, rough work besides refinement, nature besides culture, as he further explains (Levi-Strauss 2013:22). A mixing of the elements is avoided in general, singular elements stay apart, but come together in a composition, just like the traditional cuisine or music. This approach is also visible in the architecture, by leaving elements separated, the singular elements are stressed by “an aesthetic presentation and a particular consistency” (ibid:57). Just as in handicrafts defined by this concept all sides are treated as equal, no side less valuable, every detail is taken care of whether it finally is visible, as Lévi-Strauss describes:

25.

While “European architects remain in a world of form, even as they advocate modernism. They remain in a violent world called form. On the other hand, Japanese architects have lived for centuries in a world of relationships.”

(Kuma quoting Taut 2010:17)

“(...) an extreme characteristics of the Japanese spirit, and in the first place, an extreme attention to enumerating and distinguishing all aspects of reality, without leaving any out, granting to each one an equal importance. This can be seen in your traditional manufactured objects, where the artisan treats with same care the inside and outside, the right side and the wrong side, the visible parts and those that are invisible. (...)”(ibid)

There is no “either-or”, there is no inside and outside, no finite, static relation. The character is a constant flux, the boundaries vague, movable, relative to the subject and time. Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, from *Atelier Bow-Wow*, remarks: “Privacy does not mean enclosed or introvert. A house can have different faces in one” (Tsukamoto 2018:107). The Japanese culture is one of both, while the Western mind splits the world into “binary oppositions such as being versus nothingness.” (...) while “the Japanese, have been uninterested in this dichotomy“ (cf. Verghese 2014 163).

26.  
Zen Master Dōgen  
brought the  
Chan-Buddhism  
from China to Japan.

The overcoming of dichotomy and static features roots in Buddhism, which for Okakura Kakuzō is “the worship of relativity”. He says further: ”One master defines Zen as the art of feeling the polar star in the southern sky. Truth can be reached only through the comprehension of opposites” (Okakura 1906:65). Furthermore it describes the feeling for the non-dualistic thinking of human and nature. Zen Master Dōgen (1200-1253)<sup>26</sup> said: “I came to realize clearly, that mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great earth.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast with the anthropocentric view of Western society, this attitude describes a oneness with all things, which, in Buddhism, is the starting point of awakening (Habito 2017:168).

27.  
This is quoted from  
Dōgen Zenji, Sok-  
ushin Ze-Butsu, in  
Shōbōgenzō, vol.3  
(Tokyo: Iwanami  
Bunko, 1939), p. 98. (Habito 2017:168)

Thinking is not human-centred, but rather the human being is perceived as part of the natural world and its causes- not as something different from it.<sup>28</sup> The common understanding is that, compared to the Western society, where nature is seen as constant thread, Asia has developed a different relationship with nature: „The Japanese don’t take in a confrontational attitude towards nature, they don’t perceive it as latent danger, which needs to be tamed“ (Itō 1999:32). In the Western society the connection of architecture and nature in every sense is often deprived. Culture and Nature seem here to be opponents and therefore “we can understand Eastern natural beauty only after overcoming the dichotomy of subject and object. Beauty can be perceived as a part of phenomena in the interrelated, ever-changing world in the Buddhist tradition” (Toyoda 2002 :52). Besides Shintō, the transcendental view of Buddhism had great influence on the

28.  
That is also why the  
dwelling itself is in  
Japan seen as some-  
thing non-permanent  
: “our dwellings in  
the world are merely  
temporary. A wall  
made from rushes,  
representing the  
traditional Japanese  
view of the home as  
evanescent things.”  
(Kuma 2010 :55)

Japanese art and culture. In the notion of Buddhism “the transcendental relationship between subject and object is fundamental (...) the Madhyamika school focuses on the interrelatedness of the world and overcomes the dichotomy between self and the world. This interpretation is used as a basis for achieving a selfless world view. (...) (this) transcendental relationship denies the separation of humans from the natural world” (ibid:53), the whole and its parts in its relationship are cared for equally.

The buildings are proof of this consistent dialogue with nature. As we can see the traditional buildings draw the outside into the inside or better said- the built houses are part of the outside. There is no notion of separating entities, but it is a culture, that accepts a this and that, which doesn't negate relativeness. The Japanese temple or house is for Byung Chul Han neither closed nor open compared to the Western idea of the house that is orientated inwards, following the idea of the „christian religion of the inwardness“ (Han 2007: 39). The Asian way of thinking does not „territorialize“, instead it „oceanizes“ and doesn't think in fixed and static matters (ibid:87). Whilst in the West there is explicitly a constraint for permanence and unambiguousness where nature was tried to conquer, the eastern concept is shaped by “a deep worldly trust” (ibid:118) and the non-dualistic thinking is, in a way, the adaption to this. For Han the ‘indifference’ is a culture of absence, visible in the continuous flow of things- as the garden flows into the home, the nature into the realm of the man made and vice versa. Also the subtle and diffused light of the *shojis*, that shimmers like snow, is a neither dark nor light situation- an in-between light (ibid:47).

The vagueness and non-state can manifest itself in spatial order, as well as in a state of being, that belongs more to the spiritual and aesthetic influence that shaped Japan's frame of mind. The first aspect I tried to draw out in the chapter vague boundaries, which had shortly examined more the aspects within the realm of architecture, while the following discussion of part II of the thesis deals with the history of the Japanese sense of aesthetic (regarding nature) and the influence on the culture that reaches

until today. It embraces the ephemeral, invisible and impermanent, the non-finito and vague, which developed a refined poetic sensitivity in dialogue with nature, that enhances the invisible qualities of things and shifts our perception towards the inner being, the essence.



## Destroying and Renewal



## Japan's environment (a travelogue)

„The Buddha taught that the ills of the world are born of ignorance, and that we must strive to recognize the world as it truly is. The garden is an everpresent, tangible tool for the contemplation of impermanence, framing nature. When autumn comes, no deciduous leaf is spared by nature's cycle; no flower blooms forever. The Buddhist world view embraces a poignant beauty that is burdened by fragility and by the prospect of its own death.“ (Walker 2017:200)

Japan is a country that is afflicted by extreme weather and frequent earthquakes, a country that is determined by the beauties and difficulties of water and mountains. While I was visiting Japan in June/July 2018, I was able to experience the moods of nature for myself. Very hot summer days were followed by heavy rainfalls, resulting in heavy floods and landslides. The days I spent in Kyoto were mostly marked by heavy rain showers, where you were soaked completely after 5 min even with umbrella and rain clothes. The water in the rivers rose so strongly that urban areas close to the shore were regarded to avoid. The Kamo river that had been calm a few days before, was now transcending its shore. The mountain areas, that surround Kyoto, were arestricted in access due to the danger of landslides, which for me on the one hand meant sadly to tick things off my list without having visited them but on the other hand meant also a better understanding of the environmental situation in which Japan is situated geographically.

Drawn back in a *kyō-machiya*<sup>29</sup>, that was partly poorly renovated<sup>30</sup>, in the southern part of Kyoto, Shimogyō-Ward, I could listen to the rain splash-

29.

The machiyas in Kyoto are called *kyōmachiyas*, the one in Nara *Nara-machiyas*, and *os on*

30.

Since the renovation of the machiyas is expensive a lot of them are run down, empty, cheaply renovated or sold. For a few years now, the request for machiyas has been rising, while there are different funds, to support the financial expenses, especially in Kyoto to keep the urban image



ing from the leaves in the small inner courtyard garden (*tsuboniwa*) onto the foliage covered ground, while the air absorbed even more moisture than it had already have. It all started to make sense. The rain pelted on the roof, while I felt secure under its protection. In the dull, diffuse light of the rainy sky, the green of the leaves shone even more intensely as if they were glowing from within. After one and a half week the rain finally began to stop, the slight coolness, that it had brought with it, had soon worn off, the sun again came out more often, the devastations caused by the rain became slowly visible-especially the southern part of Japan and the mountain areas, were severely struck. Now the heavy rainfall was replaced by an incredible heat wave. While the ferries were back in service, the intense heat was everywhere, even on Naoshima Island-despite the refreshing sea breeze. Back in Kyōto, the temperatures were almost unbearable: cycling and sightseeing besides early mornings and late evenings almost not endurable. But the Kamo and Katsura River, that had risen during the heavy rainfall, were back to normal, now offering a perfect place to cool off. The temples, that are situated at the foot of the surrounding mountains, provided a cooling atmosphere. The trees giving shade, the flora and fauna of the gardens gave a pleasant freshness, like a mountain walk. Every visible green had a cooling and regenerating effect solely through its existence. In the city streets, the inhabitants of Kyōto were wetting the streets with water<sup>31</sup>, while I was cycling through the streets, lined by *kyō- machiyas* and new buildings alike.

31.

This act is strongly criticized today due to the extreme water waste- however one must ask- how much water and additional electricity does a proper AC need?

Despite the natural conditions, which are not always muted positive, the traditional arts and architecture have evolved in deep connection to nature, perhaps precisely out of this reason. The tendency to embrace nature instead of excluding it, is an immanent topic in contemporary art and architecture, where the beauty of renewal is celebrated and its experience skillfully staged through spatial experiences (e.g. Calza 2015). This moment, when the leaves give off a cooling and soothing effect, Japanese people have enclosed in their heart and one can almost say defines their society. Constant renewal and impermanence have been part of the

concept of beauty in Japan, which is completely different from the concept of Western's notion of beauty, seeking immortality and permanence, that especially reached its peak with the rise of modernism.

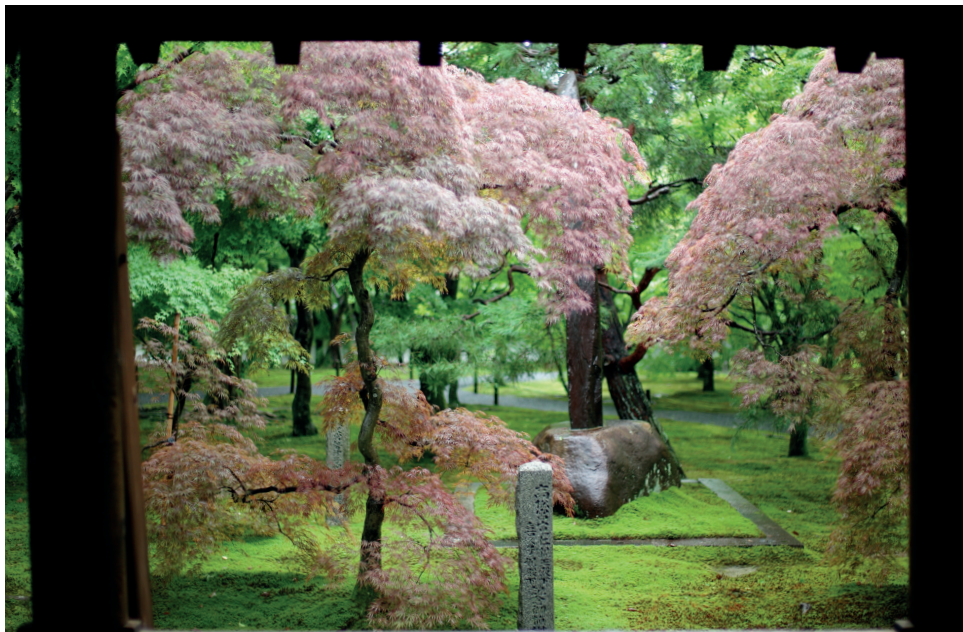
As Tanizaki Jun'ichirō puts it beautifully, the beauty of Japanese art "must always grow from the realities of life" (Tanizaki 1977). As nature is in a constant condition of renewal, like the seasons, where every year the same tree grows new buds, that flower, the dew that had been formed in the cold of the morning, disappearing while the day gets warmer. Japan refined the evanescence of life to their concept of art, where nature is the principle. I would like to outline here shortly the arrangement with what the European view would maybe call the arrangement with discomfort, which can be read as evidence for a modest attitude towards the position of the "human subject" within the world. Japanese culture has found beauty in the impermanent and the transient, in the shade and diffuse light, instead of the direct sunlight, more in the moon than in the bright blue sky, in the fog, subtle things, unpolished metal, that shows the wearing of time (Tanizaki 1977). Arranging themselves only with a small kotatsu (Yoshida 195:150) instead of inventing a central heating, while wearing a special padded winter kimono, that spends some additional warmth (Taut 1997).<sup>32</sup> As Yoshida remarks, the Japanese people have always tried to live in harmony with nature in summer as well in winter. One of the reasons is the Buddhist influence (ibid:145). Donald Richie notices:

"The Japanese traditionally maintain that we have been given a standard to use. (...) things as they are, or Nature itself. (...) Nature should be our model, we are to regard it, to learn from it." (Richie 2007:16)

This meets the garden concept as well as that of art and architecture. All of them nourish from an aesthetic that tries to learn from nature, which I will lay out in the following, using the model of the garden, to approach the sense and understanding of nature and environment, of the ephemeral qualities, that shape our notion of things.

32.

The kotatsu is still common in Japanese houses today, but gets more and more replaced by a central heating.



the mossy  
gardens, wet  
the stones  
glow almost  
from within  
after the  
humid weather  
and heavy  
rainfalls. The  
walkways in  
the temples  
are often  
roofed. Above  
the garden in  
Tofoku-ji.

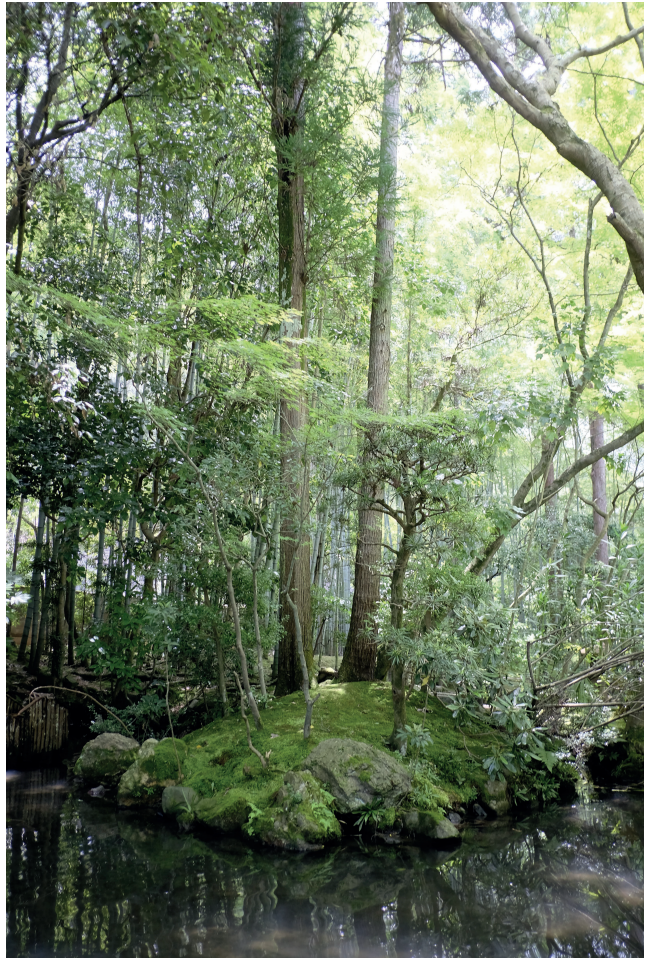
Japanese people  
are adjusted to  
heavy rainfalls and  
the humid climate.  
On the left side  
is the wall of the  
Sugimoto Resi-  
dence, Kyoto.



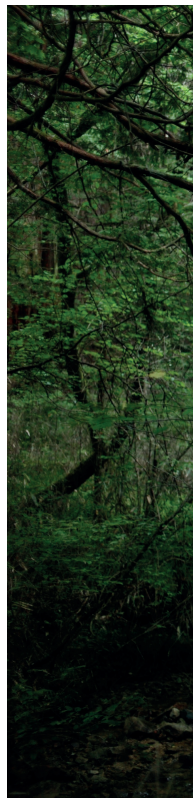


Ten-juan garden.  
It appears like a  
dense rainforest,  
but in truth it is  
not bigger than  
a walk around a  
pond

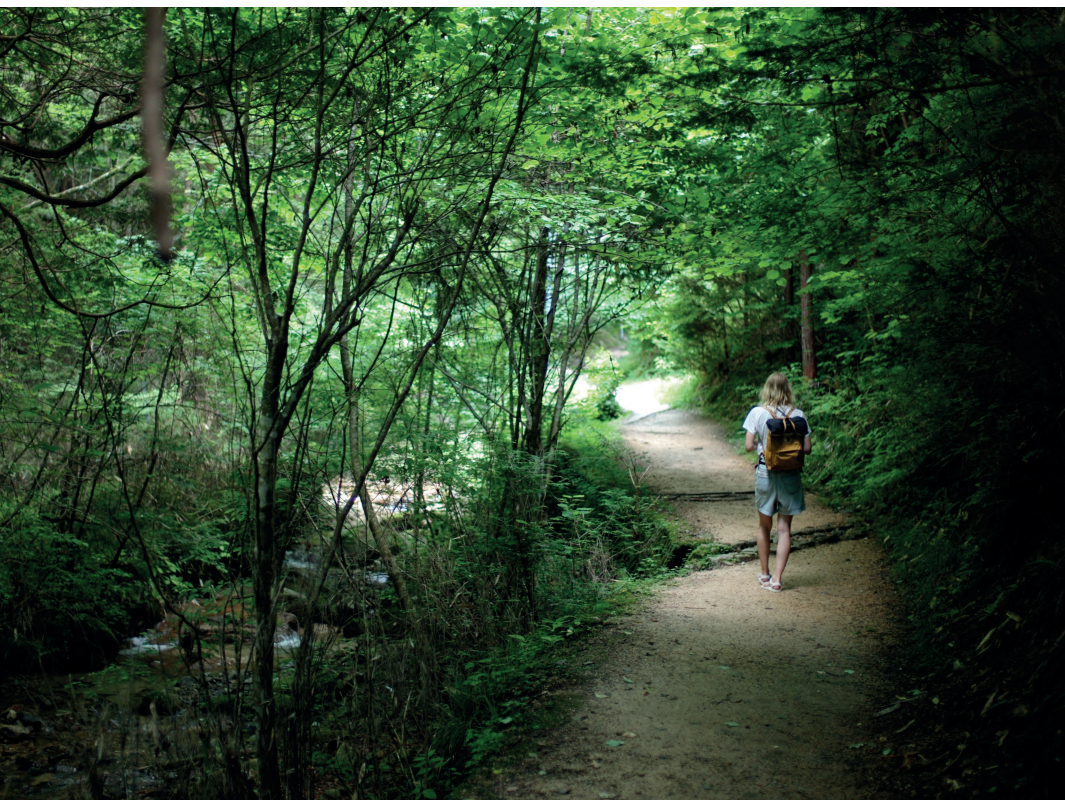




...walking on  
a desolate  
mountain path  
in the Kiso  
Valley, where a  
lot of sugi and  
hinoki wood  
grows. The  
smell is here  
as intense as  
the fresh wood  
in the houses  
and creates the  
bond between  
the material  
and it's source.









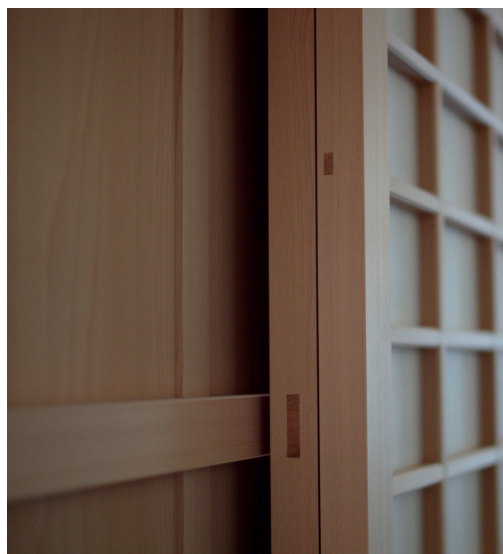
To experience the  
"form of being",  
which is the physical  
environment, and  
to bring them again  
into an echo of each  
other. An echo, that  
modern architecture  
took away from the  
buildings, as Atelier  
Bow -Wow describe  
in "Echo of Space"  
(cf. Atelier Bow-Wow  
2009:16)







The smell of the wood is fresh and rich, like breathing in the air of the mountains or the air after a rainfall in a cedar forest. Especially fresh wood diffuses the soothing scent of the Japanese sugi and hinoki. Samples and information at Tsumago.







Tsumago, Kiso Valley

on the upper level we can find the snow-viewing shoji. The koshis and front quite similar to the machiyas in the cities.





Tsumago, Kiso Valley







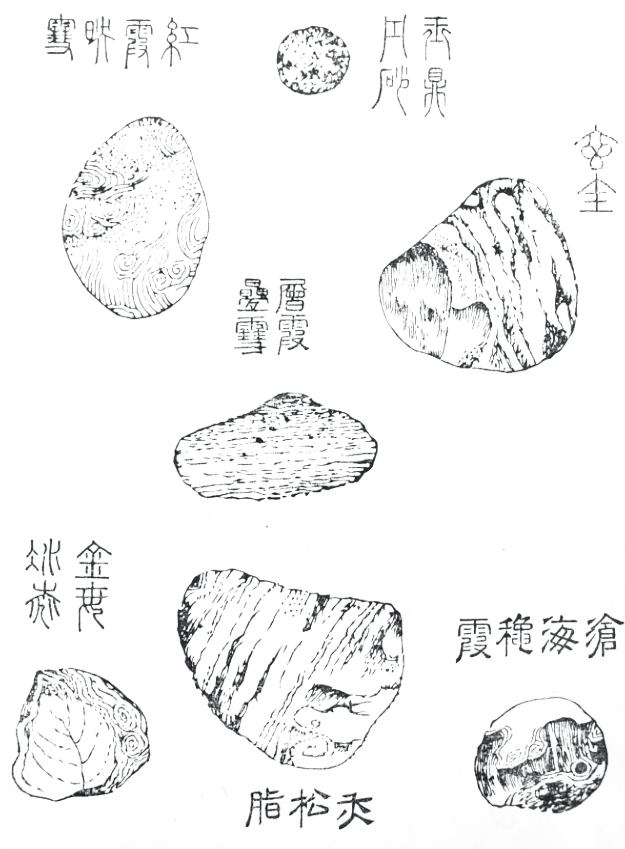


fig. 55

“Follow the request of the stone”

Sakuteiki

“When setting stones, first bring a number of different stones, both large and small, to the garden site and temporarily set them out on the ground. Set those that will be standing stones (tatsu beki ishi) with their “heads” upright, and those that will be reclining stones (fusu beki ishi) with their best side facing out. Compare various qualities of the stones and, keeping the overall garden plan in mind, pull the stones into place one by one.”

“choose a particularly splendid stone and set it as the Main Stone(onto ishi). Then, following the request of the first stone, set others accordingly”

“Visualize the famous landscapes of our country and come to understand their most interesting points. Recreate the essence of those scenes in the garden, but do so interpretatively, not strictly.”

Sakuteiki

(cf. Takei and Keane xx)

fig. 56

sakei, potted landscape, 53 Stations of the Tōkaidō as Potted Landscapes





sketch, Naoshima, July 2018



## Depicting nature

„An unknown eighth-century Chinese T'ang poet said, 'by studying organic patterns of heaven and earth, a fool can become a sage; and by watching the seasons of natural phenomena, we can become true philosophers.'" (Walker 2017:201)

The Japanese garden is perceived as a miniature landscape. Sometimes this laid out landscape is experienced by strolling through the garden, sometimes only sitting on the edge of the *engawa*. Often a famous scene of a real landscape is taken as role model and reshaped in the garden, as the famous *Amanohashidate*, one of the three scenic views of Japan (*meisho*), which is also recited in the garden of Katsura Rikyū (Isozaki & Sato 1993). Elements as hills, stones, water, moss covered earth, old trees like pines and weeping cherry trees, acer, that turns red in autumn, and bamboo forest find their place here in the garden. Often the gardens seem so natural that one keeps forgetting that the garden is actually surrounded by buildings. When we walk around the pond of Tenjuan Garden, the buildings of the temple complex is forgotten, next to it the small street for the supplying cars vanished.

Walking through a Japanese garden, one can enjoy the feeling of being in the mountains or at sandy beaches, rivers shedding harmoniously sounds when the water is turned by a careful set stone, and bushes like clouds flying by as in Shisen-do. The flow of the stream is just as fast to carry the fallen cherry blossoms away, implying the cycle of the seasons (Takei and

Keane 2008:23). Often you will find yourself with your imagination sitting on the foot of *Mount Fuji*, while you are actually sitting, sheltered by the overhanging eaves (*hishashi*) on an *engawa* in the middle of Kyōto. A garden in Kyōto can be as small as 1 *tsubo*, but can evoke the same feeling of being in the wild nature, the architecture providing shade to contemplate. Japanese gardens have been shaped to evoke a natural picture of the landscape, with „rocky seashores (*are iso*), cove beaches (*suhami*), wetland scenes (*numa ike*)“ or islands named „Mountain Isle“ and „Forest Isle“ (ibid:21). Hereby inspiration is drawn from Japan’s natural sceneries, its mountainous islands, surrounded by the sea. In the Japanese garden and architecture one is surrounded by the elements of nature in its purest form and meaning, where hills become mountains, the pond becomes the ocean. The hidden layers, as in the buildings, laid out in front of us, like a book to read.

### Mountain-Water (*san-sui*)

The Japanese term for landscape<sup>33</sup> - Mountain-Water (*san-sui*)- describes Japans geographic situation as well as it implies a form of a primordial vision of nature (Takei and Keane 2008:39).<sup>34</sup> It inspires the Japanese notion of beauty. The fluidity of the water and the firm, high mountains, embodying the in-between, the denial of dualism: solid and fluid elements create a harmonic picture (ibid:56). For Nitschke the complementary elements of mountain and water suggest the dialogue with which one is confronted in the Japanese concept of beauty and perception. He sees in the contemplation of *san-sui* one of the important metaphysical aspects that characterises the Japanese garden and which transports an important image or “visual dichotomy”, that the “western” term ‘landscape’ cannot achieve (Nitschke 2003). Seemingly contradictions influence each other and create a harmony, which furthermore marks the relation of architecture and

33.  
it is also the Chinese  
term

34.  
Shotoku no senzui  
is used as the term  
for landscape, means  
“natural constitution” or “innate  
disposition”, senzui  
is a former version of  
sansui. (Ibid:39)

nature and generate a powerful image (Nitschke 2003). Because mountains and water are not only representatives of nature itself, but create a figurative and physical dialogue between the solid and the fluid, the evanescence and the eternal (Takei and Keane 2008:39).

The water's movement is defined by set stones, like in real nature, where the river's stream is defined by natural barriers. Trees, that naturally grow close to waterfronts, also find their place near water in the garden, and the river's bendings are modelled on the rhythm of a river (ibid:53). The „artificial“ image of nature, that we experience, not only in the Japanese garden, follows literally the laws from nature, where the idea of the garden is similar to that of a mirrored nature (Platzek 2017: 62). Early as the *Sakuteiki*<sup>35</sup> was written, the Japanese tried to learn from nature and didn't design their built world superior to that of nature (ibid.). This aesthetic sense and attitude reflects itself throughout all arts, from painting, over tea ceremony, *ikebana*, and architecture. The advises in the *Sakuteiki* imply a form of an extraordinary sensibility, which I would like to outline shortly.

35.  
ancient garden manual from the Heian  
Era



“There is a line in a poem that reads:”blue mountains,  
green waters-they are my home.”(...)it enables one to  
understand the splendour of nature and how humans can  
merge to become one with it.(...)” (Sen Sōshitsu XV 2002:88)



fig. 56



fig. 57

Kitano Tenjin engi emaki

(Illustrated Legends of the Kitano Shrine), 1219, Heian period.



It depicts the landscape within the shinden-zukuri, the aristocratic residencies of the Heian Period. The vague boundaries are present in layers as the sliding hanging screens, sliding shutter. The adjustment of the river to the solid- the Japanese attitude is sometimes compared to the character of water. It is an element that adapts itself, is relative and in constant shift (gas, snow, ice, steam-fluid) (cf. Han). Water plays a great role in Japanese culture not only in the gardens but also as purifying element in Shinto.

In the dry gardens of the Zen-temple is the river the symbol of life- the stones, like in nature, are the moments -good or bad- that influence the current, the life defining moments, shaping life.

the top of the  
stone is called  
head, while the  
most precious  
side is called  
face. Stones  
areare spiritually  
and for pleasure  
equal important.  
Every part has  
its name, every  
single stone in  
the garden finds  
its exact place,  
after pounding  
about one.



fig. 58

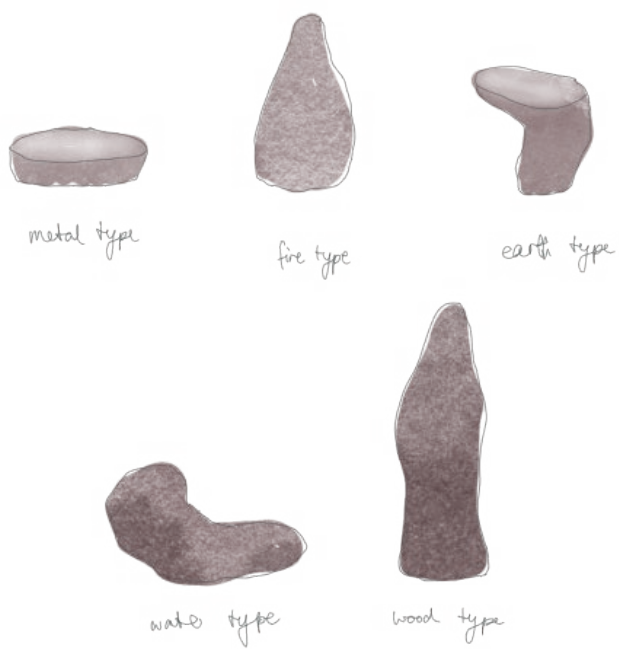


fig. 59

suski or  
bonkai is the  
art of stone  
appreciation.  
beautiful  
formed rocks  
found in  
nature are set  
in a tray, like  
a bonsai.

fig. 60  
Still Life with Bonsai, Suiseki, and 'Stroking Ox', 1829, Japan, Keisai Eisen





fig. 61





fig. 62

"The way to appreciate bonsai is to first look at it and gain an overall impression, and then to lower your line of sight to the same level as the art piece. Try to imagine yourself being small, looking at the tree in a natural environment." (Japan Guide Bonsai)



fig. 63

“But he discovers in the glass itself a slight deformation, which spreads deformation throughout the universe.(...)“Does the nature of the world change, or is it real nature that triumphs over appearances?”

(Bachelard 2014)

## Learning from nature

36.

These are also the famous first lines of the *Sakuteiki*, the oldest Japanese record of garden making from the Heian period. It is seen as an important “guideline” not only for the layout of a garden but for the sensitive mindset towards nature and things (cf. e.g. Takei and Keane 2008)

The art of the Japanese garden is often referred to as *ishi wa taten koten* - “the art of setting stones”.<sup>36</sup> Stones play such an important role that “(...) the simple act of standing a stone upright was so spiritually and aesthetically powerful (...), and so clearly central to the process of making a garden, that the act of setting stones became an appellation of gardening itself” (Takei and Keane 2008:3). From the ancient sites of worshipping, where beds of pebbles created the first types of gardens (*ibid.*) to the gardens of the *Heian* period, the dry and tea gardens of the Muromachi period, or the small inner courtyard gardens- stones have been always a strong and present element in the Japanese garden and culture. The fact that stones or any object hold a special position in the Japanese view of the world becomes clear not only in the spiritual aspects but form a central point in the *Sakuteiki*.

Here, this extraordinary sensitivity towards a stone is expressed by the author in different instructions on how or how not to put stones, trees, hills, water in relation to each other and to the cosmological whole of the building plot. Tanaka Masahiro finds here the “japanese soul”. The attitude and mindset propagated in the thoughts tells us about four principles that are incorporated in Japanese design until today: *shotoku no sansui* (the garden shall imitate nature as “found in nature”), *koan ni shitagae* (lit. obliging things), *suchigaete* (lit. Without balance) and *fuzei* (lit. Breeze of emotion/ sense) (cf. Nitschke 2003:60).

The Sakuteiki is an ancient record of garden manual, which was written in the Heian period (794-1185)<sup>37</sup> (Kuitert 2002). The manual contains instructions or advice for the layout of a garden. But besides visual aspects, which I have shortly described in the chapter before, like modelling a stream in the garden after the rolemodel of a river's stream in nature, it furthermore expresses the distinctive relationship of the Japanese people towards nature, which is still present today (cf. Platzek:2017). Besides an aesthetical understanding like the four terms I just described, the *Sakuteiki* draws back on “four allegorical meanings”, under which the garden and the architecture was and is still shaped: “images of nature”, “Chinese geomancy”, Buddhist motifs, and “taboos”. The first means modelling after nature's example, the others are based on the ancient tradition of the geomancy (Takei and Keane 2008:36).

37.

The definite author is still argued, but most likely the author of the *sakuteiki* is Tachibana no Toshitsuna, (cf. Kuitert 2002)

Not only the garden itself, but also the architecture follows these principles. Especially the shinden-zukuri style of the Heian period was based primarily on principles that are taught in the *Sakuteiki*. The residencies represent places of natural beauty. Besides the use of simple untreated wood, the large complexes were embedded in a scenery of a gardens to contemplate nature. Bridges stretching over rivers, “fishing” pavilions on the pond's island, trees, plants and stones put in harmony after the design principles of geomancy. Hereby various vague boundaries defined a gradually transit between nature and the human-made. The large complexes of the aristocrats were especially characterized by their relation towards the garden and the environment. For Takei and Keane “(...) the buildings of the Heian period served in many ways as stages offering advantageous views of the garden” (ibid.:17), looking for a deliberate connection to the “outside” instead of excluding it.

38.

Besides the Shintoistic layout of a site. See more in Nitschke 1993

The overall arrangement of the buildings and gardens followed the notion of geomancy or *fusui* (lit. wind-water)<sup>38</sup>. Feng Shui or *fusui* can be described as a “daostic” teaching of harmony. The aim is to create a balance between all things, as that of the humans with their environment or to keep

the gardenstone's natural energy upright and thus in balance.

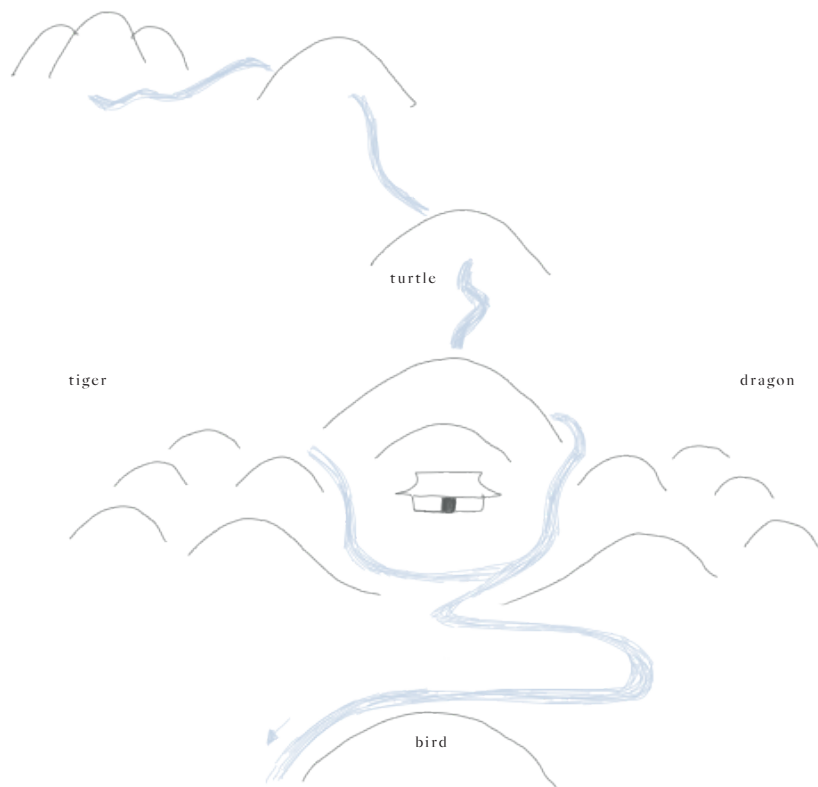
For architecture, at the heart of this concept lays to position buildings and gardens within an auspicious site.<sup>39</sup> Such a site is ideally enclosed by mountains on the back, hills on both sides and a river flowing from north to south, like an armchair. Fusui<sup>40</sup> originated in China and consists of different theories, as *Yin-Yang* (Theory of Mutual opposites), *Yi* (Theory of changes), *gogyō* (Theory of five phases or elements) (Nitschke:2003:36). An auspicious site and the right placing of the single elements within it ensures the right flow of *ki* (energy) and aims to achieve the “four guardian gods in balance” (*shijin sōō*) (Takei and Keane 2011:59). For Nitschke the theory of geomancy depicts a „profound awareness of the ecological relationship between man and the forces of nature.“ For him a cultural notion that the West had lost with the invention of science (Nitschke 2003:33).

39.

Within the fusui layout, the formation of the buildings can be freely chosen (cf. Ito 1999:26)

40.

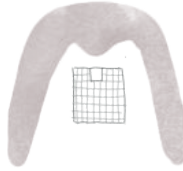
Fusui is the Japanese term for Feng Shui. It was brought to Japan from China in the 6th century, whereby the Japanese assimilated the theory gradually to their ideas. Chinese elements are replaced: for example trees, which represent in Japanese culture a place for the kami (see chapter the being of things). (cf. Takei and Keane 2008)



the geomantic  
compass is a  
“condensed model of the Chinese  
universe correlating phenomena of  
time and space  
occurring in outer  
nature and the  
inner psyche” (cf.  
Nitschke2003:33)



Ming-Tang



Kyōto



Shinden-zukuri



Kyōto



Kyōto's layout as well as the shinden-style palaces inside the city and temples from the Heian time can be read as mandala, influenced by school of esoteric buddhism.

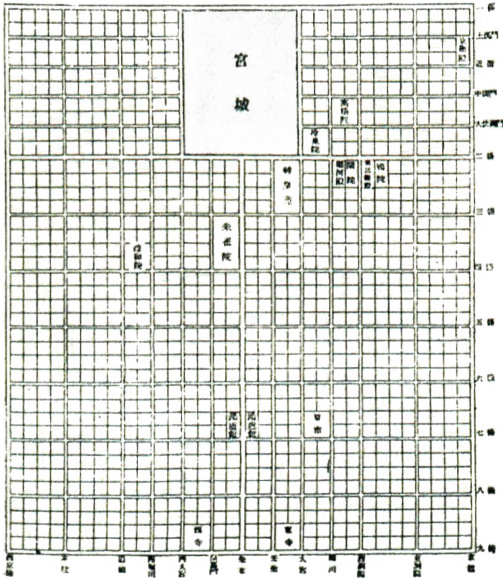


fig. 64  
city grid of Kyōto 793-1863

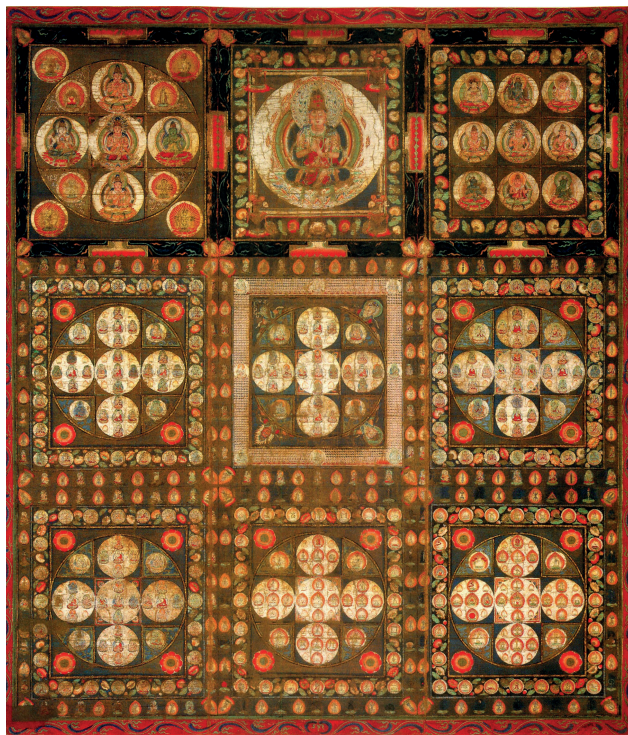
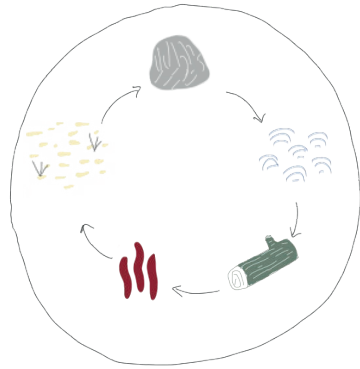


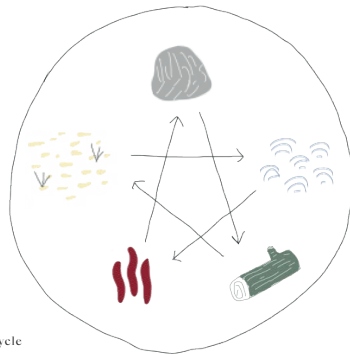
fig. 65

Kongōkai mandara,  
it is also called diamond realm or vajra-world. 9th century





gogyo



control cycle

originally from China (Wu Xing), gogyō or the theory of five phases teaches the interactions and relations, regarded as dynamic aspects of existence and development of the universe. While four elements overlap with the Greek system of elements, the phases are here in opposed to a fixed matter, in a constant mutual (ex-) change.



fig. 6"

Daisen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto

fig. 68  
siteplan of Daisen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto

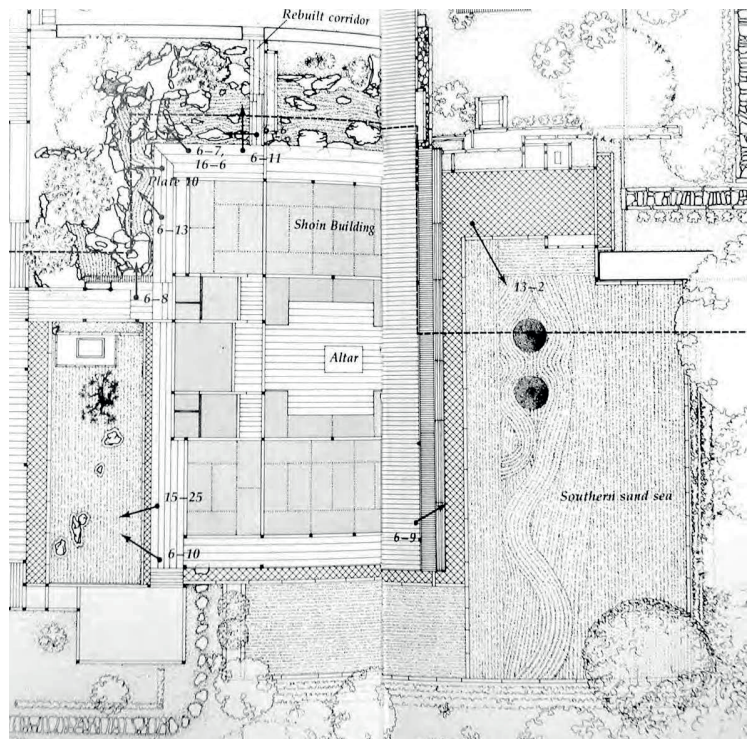






fig. 70

Daisen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto







## Setting things in relation to each other

The notion of “*koan ni shitagae*”, that is propagated in the Sakuteiki, plays an important role in Japanese art, the literal translation means obliging things. In this sense it means, that when one stone is set, this one will tell you where to put the next (cf. Platzek 2017:22). The approach of setting things in relation to each other instead of calculating the position plays also a great part in the structure of architecture. Here the position of columns are not measured or calculated, but it is more a technique of a relativity. The positioning or size of rooms is either a result of the relation to the layout and size of the tatami (*tatamiwari* or *uchinari hashirama-sei*), where one wooden pillar is put in the logic consequence to the next, relative to the *tatami*- the standard measurement of a *tatami* defines the area and positioning of pillars.<sup>41</sup> The second technique is relative to the centre of one column, that forms the starting point and defines the size of the room (*hashirawari* or *shinshin hashirama-sei*) (Engel 1985).

41.  
the size of the tatami  
is dependent on the  
area.  
Kyoto:  
“kyōma”:  
3,25x6,5 shaku  
(95cmx191cm)  
Tokyo:  
“edomma”:  
2,9x5,8 shaku  
(88x176cm)  
(Engel 1985)

In Japanese culture or design, instead of a calculated order, things are more likely to set “as found”<sup>42</sup>. A stone shall be put in the same position as it was found in its natural habitat: To ensure its source of energy (*ki*), a stone found upright shall also find a position as an upright stone in the garden. Through imitating nature’s essence, a natural form resulted, where straight lines in the layout are avoided and asymmetry is preferred over symmetry - because it simply does not exist in nature. So it is often avoid-

42.  
It is similar to the  
approach of the “as  
found” practice of  
Alison and Peter  
Smithson, which was  
probably inspired  
by their research in  
Japan.

ed to put things in one line and it is recommended that a pillar or column of the house should not be in one line with a stone of a garden and vice versa. For Nitschke these principles are proof, that the aim was to become one with nature and to follow its inner criteria (cf. Nitschke 2003). It is a combination of a natural outer form, laid out with an uttermost sensibility towards things, that started to form the core of Japanese aesthetics, as we know it today.

The beauty in Japan is found in an image of nature that follows a sort of “distillation” (Takei and Keane 2008) or “imitation” (*shotoku no sansui*). But the imitation is not a pure copy. Its essential understanding lies in the inner imitation, which is not just present in the ancient garden manual, but Japanese art in general. A famous example is here the Nō play. For Zeami the “Imitation of things” or *monomane* is the technique to dive into the inner being of things. Hereby for him the ideal imitation or ideal of beauty is that of a flower (Tsubaki 1971). Nitschke describes further:

“Imitation is thus seen as the means of penetrating beneath the surface. Once the actor has succeeded in imitating objects, the next step is to identify himself with them as completely as possible. “In the art of imitation there is a realm called ‘non-imitation’. When the actor pursues his art to its ultimate and truly grows into the object, he will not be aware of his art of imitation.”, says Zeami.” (Nitschke 2003:106)

This aesthetic technique recognises a “hidden beauty, which goes above and beyond the superficial beauty of nature” (Nitschke 2003:108). The layout hereby of the garden shall follow aesthetically and artistic skills without copying nature, where the “artificial” follows a different goal. The non-inconsistency of forming nature’s beauty artificially lays in the understanding that there is drawn no line/no difference between the “natural and the artificial” (Ito 1999 :34) to which I will come back later in chapter the being of things. In Japan there is seen no contradiction in keeping the natural beauty artificially alive, by neatly taking care of the finest detail, which requires a sensitivity in the figurative and literal sense.



fig. 71

Lee Ufan Museum, Naoshima

form

:a branch of mathematics that deals with the measurement, properties, and relationships of points, lines, angles, surfaces, and solids—broadly

:the study of properties of given elements that remain invariant under specified transformations

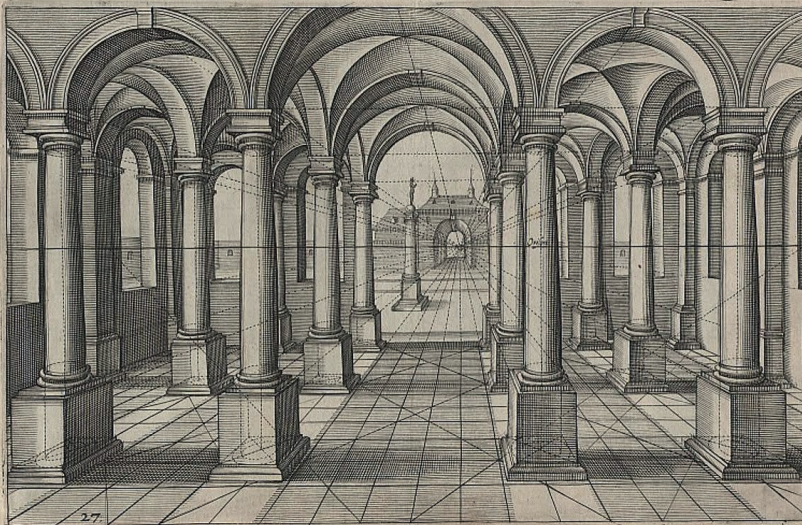


fig. 72



fig. 73

## Shape

:the visible makeup characteristic of a particular item

: a standard or universally recognized spatial form  
a stain in the shape of a perfect circle

:assumed appearance

:form of embodiment

:a mode of existence or form of being



## Essays on nature

The notion of beauty correlates with a certain talent to see and accept the current state of something as it is. This sensibility, we can not only find in the Japanese design of the gardens, is called *fuzei*. It means the atmosphere or sense of a place, which can be both found in nature and be created:

“The author of the Sakuteiki advises the readers to make a study of nature as a basis for garden design but also suggests that this knowledge must be applied in an artistic and interpretive manner. The word used in the Sakuteiki to describe this feeling is *fuzei*, which is written with two characters meaning “wind” and “emotion.” When *fuzei* is used in reference to a physical situation it can best be translated as the “spirit of the place” or “subtle atmosphere”(...)” (Keane and Takei 2008:40)

Hereby the learning from nature, is not about an analytic vision, but about grasping the sense of a place, that means the essence, as Kuitert puts it:

“Design was not concerned with material form, composition, or form; far more it was a question of exercising one’s poetic sense. Thus the Sakuteiki’s advises: When you place stones(...), it is first and foremost necessary to grasp the overall sense.” (Kuitert 2002:48)

It is an imitation instead of an accuracy in depicting the real world, as it was tried in Europe during that time. It describes an ephemeral sense that is an important part of the Japanese arts, where things and objects are put in order to evoke a feeling instead of their pure form. When we see abstract shrubs in the temple garden, they were not solely formed, but “trees and



shrubs were planted to furnish an elegant “wind of feeling”. Feeling, not form, was their purpose” (Kuitert 2002:52). The style of the garden or any image of nature is naturalistic, the notion is to grasp the beauty of nature in its essence, like the light weighted paintings, where the painting is not about an analytic knowledge, but about the intuition, that catches the temporarily form (of nature). Richie describes this as a form of suggestion:

“it was as though there was an agreement that the nature of Nature could not be presented through literal description. It could only be suggested, and the more subtle the suggestion (think haiku) the more tasteful the work of art.” (Richie 2007:19)

43.  
An example might be the Medici, who had a great influence on the Renaissance. They showed also great interest in nature but the depicting and grasping in the arts was rather “scientific humanistic” (Tomasi & Hirschauer 2002)

The fragile branch, that is bending slightly under the weight of the bird sitting on it, while one knows, that any second the bird will be flying away, the branch bouncing back. It is an essay on nature catching the atmosphere of a moment, bringing the subtlety into a piece of art, telling the story of a beyond. While a typical European painting was rather occupied with a scientific correctness in painting (light, perspective, details).<sup>44</sup>

Richie describes further:

“Ueda Makoto has phrased it, a distinctive feature of traditional aesthetic thought in Japan was a tendency to value symbolic representation over realistic delineation. Mimesis in its sense of an imitation of outward appearance was never an aim of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Rather, qualities existing under this outward surface were searched for and found. Beneath the glaze of a teacup were the qualities of wabi or sabi; in the sleeve of the kimono was discovered furu or iki” (ibid:23)

The Japanese found pleasure in the inimitable beauty of nature and have developed an extraordinary aesthetic with the means of nature, that differs from the European view on things (Nitschke 2003:10). They haven’t put themselves higher, but entered a dialogue with nature, whose goal is not to explain nature but is rather an “expression of nature’s mysteries and secrets (ibid:203). Instead of a rationalised view, where “the West seeks knowledge by taking things apart and looking at each separately, the East

takes another approach which is to put things together to look for the holistic nature of design, The East seek wisdom instead of knowledge” (Vergheze quoting Doczi 2003:163). The invention of the perspective can be seen as another tool to rule over nature, the geometrical layout of Versailles’s garden speaks of man as dominator over the world. As Tadaō Ando sums up:

“Japanese garden culture is based on a set of values diametrically opposed to the Western view of the garden, which seeks to control nature as part of the artificial world. The exquisitely beautiful garden covered in moss in Saiho-ji temple in Kyoto for example, presents the essence of Japanese gardens: the garden’s philosophy of ‘letting the moss thrive’ relies as much as possible on nature itself, accepting changes in nature and entrusting the future to it.” (Ando:2017)

Besides the central visual role of a garden, that favoured the natural form, invisible forces and the ‘animate’ in things became important in the Heian period. The essence or “distillation” is also found in the qualities of a being of a stone. Materials, as stones, were seen as “animated” and their “desires (of the stones) must be taken care of”. For Takei and Keane the phrases in the *sakuteiki* are an essential hint on a complete different concept of a garden (Takei and Keane 2008:14). The aristocrats of that time were highly engaged in the contemplation of nature’s poetic beauty, which is particularly expressed by the *Genji monogatari*, written by Murasaki Shikibu<sup>44</sup> in the early 11th century (Kuitert 2002:41).

44.  
It is also seen as the first - not only by a woman-novel ever written.

The *Sakuteiki* puts focus on raw and pure elements as stones, and treats them with a certain carefulness and awareness. One could say that they almost possess feelings, in the special way they are treated. This role of the stones, that is inscribed in them in the garden design appeal not solely through its appearance, but “ the importance of stones stems from several sources” (Takei and Keane 2008:3). As with the notion of the aesthetic and beauty in general, besides geomancy and *Buddhism*, one explanation is found within the ancient *Shintō* belief, where stones have been used on prayer sites since the beginning and where a form of the inner being of things was stressed.



fig. 74

Saiho-ji, also called mosstemple (kokedera)



“Select places within the property according to the scale of land and the ponds, and create a subtle atmosphere, reflecting again and again on one’s memories of wild nature.”

Sakuteiki,  
I. the basics  
(Takei and Keane  
2011:151)

fuzei

breath of emotion.  
A swift intuitive  
image instead of  
explaining it.

Sesshus painting  
marks the break,  
where the empti-  
ness, the poetic  
essence of some-  
thing became the  
relevant- more the  
atmosphere than  
"realistically"  
depicting things  
was strived for.



fig. 75

Haboku sansui (Broken Ink Land-  
scape scroll), 1495, Sesshū Tōyō  
(1420–1506).



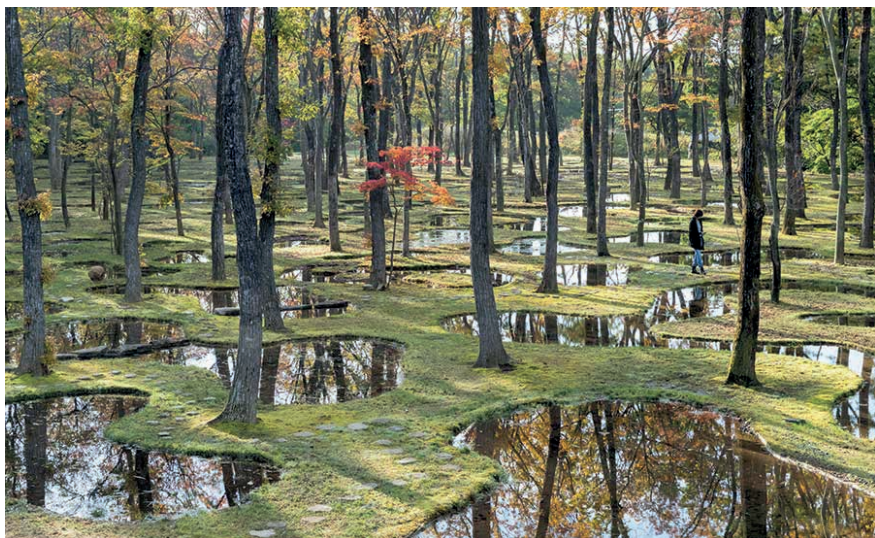


fig. 76

Water garden, Tochigi, Japan, by Juniya Ishigami.

Contradiction between artificiality and an extraordinary sense of grasping naturality.



3.

The Being of Things





fig. 77  
meoto iwa





## Objects of worship

No matter if it is a stone, a tree, a single blade of grass or any other object—any kind of substance matters. *Shintō* recognizes all as alive and with a soul. This capacity is seen as one of the reasons that explains the elaborateness that is put into setting a stone in the garden or the carefulness, which is put into the careful process of Japanese handicrafts or in the relation towards "things". As Seiki Kiyoshi says "the beauty of architecture lies not only in design or architectural techniques, but also derives from the soul that dwells inside the wood"<sup>45</sup>. The neatness, that characterizes the assembling of two wood pieces is set up on the same belief that shapes garden making. Beautiful stones in the gardens or the wooden structure of a house, the perception of such "things" can be traced back to ancient shintoistic belief, which I will shortly illustrate in the following.

45.  
I took this quote  
from the exhibition  
"Japan in Architecture: Genealogies of  
its Transformation"  
at Mori Art Museum,  
Tokyo, 2018.

*Shintō* is the indigenous belief in Japan, and can be traced back until 712 with the documentation of the *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters") (Locher 2012:24). It is called the "way of the gods" or also often referred to as religion of the 8 million gods (Hara 2010/2017:39). The relationship to nature, the non-dualistic thinking and the distinctive attitude towards their environment are said to root here. As I have already mentioned before, for Japan nature didn't constitute a conflict as it did in Europe, furthermore the belief refined a relationship with nature, which let them integrate nature in a large extent into their culture in a special and sensitive way, that still continues to shape their cultural identity and aesthetic culture.

Opposed to the Western monotheistic religion, with a human god as object of worship, *Shintō* is a polytheistic or animistic religion. Whether stones or wood, things are seen alive and need the same care as a human being. This distinctive view on things is regarded to have developed from the notion, that all things have grown over time- the same as we humans do. The assumption is that any things have grown out of very small things, and thus the life of a simple stone has grown to an importance that does not make him less important or different than anything human, as the Shintō priest Kami Kenji explains in Platzek's book "the Teaching of the Japanese Garden" (Platzek 2017:14). The idea, that a stone as small or as big has gone through the same process as we have: It has grown over a very long time to be the stone it is at the very moment you stumble across it, saturates the Japanese art with an distinctive beauty, that acknowledges the hidden layers of things.

*Kami* the central aspect of worshipping in *Shintō*. Very large stones, trees or particularly splendid places in nature are believed to form space, where the *kami* (spirits or deities) come to visit or where one can come into contact with them (Nitschke 1993:28). Over time, the places where they can visit or exist have spread and with it the number of the *kami*. There are *kami* who dwell in the toilet (*benjō-gami*) or in the well (*suijin*). Besides objects they can also embody ephemeral elements as fire, wind, water, rain.<sup>46</sup> The sacred sites, where the *kami* come to dwell, are solely marked by a *shimenawa*, a rice straw rope with folded white paper (*shide*). Sometimes a larger square marks such a place of worship surrounded by four (bamboo) poles and a ricestraw rope spanned between them. It defines a vague boundary between the realm of the sacred and the everyday (Kuma 2010:77).

The most important places to dwell in for the *kami* are the woods and the trees, the mountains and the stones. This belief manifests itself in the worshipping of certain objects in nature, as that of a certain stones (*iwakura*-shrine at a stone) or a high grown beautiful tree (*himorogi*- shrine at a tree) (Platzek 2017:16). With the spiritual appreciation or worshipping of these

46.

An important distinction between Shinto's kami and the deities of other religions is that kami are not perfect, infallible beings, but are of a dual nature, sometimes gentle and generous and sometimes destructive and violent, just like the changing faces of nature. (Soul of Japan 2013)

objects derives a certain awareness towards these materials. The spiritual approach pervades the Japanese culture, and plays an important part in an approach to understand the perception of and positioning within the environment: the shintoistic influence is part of the way Japanese culture has drawn - and still does- inspiration from nature and defines the way a building is built and experienced.

## Stones and Trees

Stones (*ishi*) are one of the most ancient places where *kamis* come to live and constitute an important element in ancient worshipping. While large stones and natural stone formations compose the sacred site of an *iwakura*, there are also ritual spaces, that were built by the people to invite the gods. These sites are formed by a circle of stones, that surround a larger stone and are called *iwasaka* ("god boundaries") (Nitschke 2003). Until today, the holy area of a shrine is defined by large areas of white pebbles or sand, as in the ancient Ise shrine (Keane 1996:333). Due to their spiritual role they probably inspired the use in the later dry gardens of the buddhist temples (Mansfield 2005:12). With the beginning influence of Buddhism, they were used to expressed buddhist ideas, as the representation of the cosmic mountain (*Shumi-sen* or *Mount Meru*), the buddhist view of the universe<sup>47</sup> (Nitschke 2003:22). Another important theme of the Mahayana Buddhism is the trinity stone. Nitschke remarks that the composition of the triad is influenced by the "chinese definition of the tripartite structure of the universe" consisting the elements of the heaven (*ten*), earth(*chi*), and man (*jīn*). This cosmological structure is part of almost any Japanese arts. It defines for example the arrangement and meaning of the traditional *ikebana* and also part of the *sakuteiki*.

But despite the archetypical function of the stones in the garden, art and spiritual worshipping, they were solely used as footing in architecture

47.  
Shumi-sen lies  
here in the centre of  
seven other golden  
mountain ranges  
with oceans spread  
out between them.  
(ibid.)

(Nitschke 2003:18). The house seems to balance on the stones, the building hardly impacting the natural terrain, gently putting the soft wood onto some stones that are happen to be here. A fragile bond, that seems to build up a mutual dialogue. It is similar to the gesture, when we enter and touch with one foot, then the next, the stones that leads us through a natural environment to the inner.

Another very important object of spiritual worshipping is the tree. Trees are said to be valued more than flowers in the garden, because a tree has the ability to show the time of its aging, but probably also because trees constitute also a place where *kamis* stay. Due to their spiritual worth, as a place that can be inhabited by *kamis*, it can be assumed that the reception of wood, as the material in general or a certain wooden pillar, is awarded with a symbolism that differs from that of the Western view. As Locher remarks:

“(...)their symbolism also may stem from ancient Shintō purification rites, in which sacred columns were erected in central locations in shrine compounds, ‘where they were placed as a means of approaching the gods...The aura of strength given off by such pillars would have come to be perceived as the divine authority that dwelled in them emanating into the surrounding space.’”(Locher 2002:53)

This particular attitude towards such objects as the pillar is also transported into everyday architecture as in for example the column of the *tokonoma*, the *tokobashira* or tearoom, the *nakabashira*, often expressing “natural forces that formed it” (Locher 2002:53). While in the early times of *shintō*, *shizen shintō*, the shrines were directly placed in nature and marked by a rope, Nitschke describes that the worshipping had developed further and the people started to bring the *kami* down from the mountains in form of a cut tree, which then often functioned as either a pillar of a built shrine or the tree being the object worshipped as for example in the *Kamigamo Jinja* (Shrine):

“The archetypical form of a deity in Japan is the hashira, the pillar; that is also the counter word for deities. One brings the deity down from the mountain in

form of a stick, pole, some branches or a whole tree, and ‘sets up and celebrates’ (tatematsuru) it on one’s field., or in one’s temporary, later permanent sanctuaries. The deity lives in an ‘object’.” (Nitschke 1993:28)

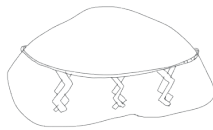
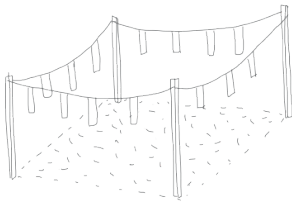
Hereby the deities or kami come and go with the passing of the seasons, welcomed and sent off by spiritual rites (cf. *ibid.*).





Go'o shrine on Naoshima, July 2018

Since early times fields of white pebbles defines the sacred sites and are considered as the first kind of Japanese garden.



## Shintō

Shin 神 meaning 'spirit'

Dao 道 from the Chinese,  
meaning philosophical  
path

„In the ancient Japan, the People think that god is from nature, and that god is everywhere in the world, on the mountain, and sitting beside a field, and sitting beside the villages, Sometimes in the deep sea.“  
(Hara 2018)

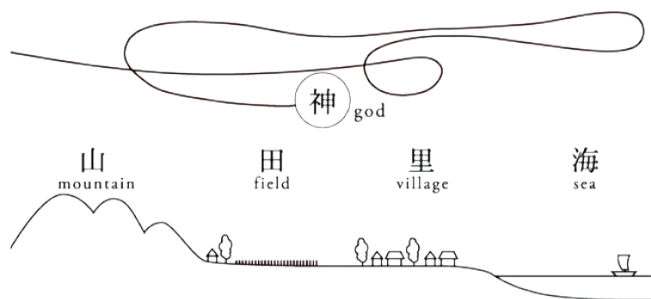


fig. 78



fig. 79

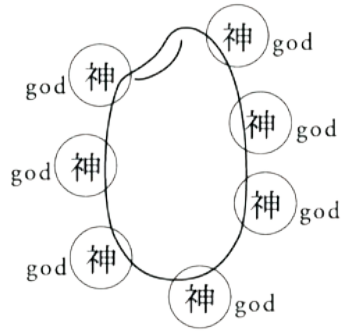


fig. 80



collected stones



## The invisible pillar<sup>48</sup>

48.

shiki no himorogi

Located in a sacred forest, the Ise Grand Shrine (*Ise Jingū*) is Japan's most ancient and important *Shintō* Shrine. The current state of the shrine was built around the 7th century. The whole shrine complex consists of around 125 smaller shrines, whereby the most important ones are the outer shrine of Ise (*geku*) and the inner shrine (*naikū*). While the outer shrine is dedicated to the food goddess *Toyouke*, the inner shrine is the most sanctuary and is dedicated to the sun goddess *Amaterasu*, who is present in form of a mirror. The main shrines are surrounded by layers of four fences and from the outermost one, one can catch a glimpse of the actual shrine building (*go-shoden*), where only high priests are allowed to enter (About Ise Jingu 2015). Besides the sacred mirror, which is displayed in the inner shrine (*naikū*), invisible at the centre of the two main shrines lies the so called heart pillar (*shin no mihashira*) without any constructional function. It acts as a kind of symbolic pillar and roots in the ceremonial praxis of bringing a deity in form of a pillar down from the mountains as ceremonial act. Hereby, a *kami* that lives in winter in the mountains is brought down to the valley in spring, while in autumn they are sent back by setting it on fire.<sup>49</sup>

49.

these ceremonial acts root in ancient tradition of harvesting rites. Also the act of shikinen sengu tied to ancient seasonal harvest rites, which starts in May, and ends in autumn, like the harvest rite of the farms. (cf. Nitschke 1993:8-32)

The act of revealing and veiling, of hiding and invisibility is part of the Japanese culture. Like the vague boundaries or the concept of *ma*, that transports always a non-state of being. It relies on suggestions rather than facts, as the *Sakuteiki* imposes to grasp the essence, to listen to the stone-



things we don't see, but define an uttermost awareness of and perception of our surroundings. In the Ise shrine this concept of the invisibility is present - or rather absent - in form of the pillar, that is never seen, while in the inner shrine, this pillar is even buried under the earth (Nitschke 1993:15-18). It stays hidden from us, unknown.

The Ise shrine is also marked by *shikinen sengū*, an act of renewal (ibid:15). Every 20 years the shrine is re-built on the ground next to it (*kodenshi*). The whole process lasts around 8 years with numerous ceremonial events<sup>50</sup> (Rituals and Ceremonies 2015). When finally the new shrine building is finished, the mirror switches places, the old *goshoden* (building) is dismantled and the parts reused in other buildings as the uji bridge or souvenirs (Richards 803:2018). Only the heart pillar, sheltered and hidden by a small hut of the teared down shrine stays on the ground for the next 20 years, surrounded by a large field of white pebbles, until on this very place, the new shrine is again rebuilt (Nitschke 1993:15-18). Teiji Itō sees in this ritual an inherent part of the Japanese understanding of nature, which builds on forces of renewal (Itō 1999:1). Destruction and renewal is not seen as something final, but seen as force and potential. Like nature does die and live with every season, the common notion developed that permanence is not part of nature's essence. Transience is inevitable, striving for permanence avoided. The evanescence of life grew, especially since the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the 8th century, to a strong concept, that pervades the Japanese culture and aesthetic concepts as *mono no aware*, *yugen*, *wabi sabi* and the concept of *ma*, which I will all discuss later.

50.  
more details can be  
found on the official  
homepage of Ise.

The Ise Grand Shrine serves not only as example of a certain awareness towards certain elements as a tree or pillar. Furthermore shintoistic attributes are present in the whole form of worshipping. The way the temple complexes are entered and experienced, the concept of something veiled or hidden, and the aspect of the seasons and the change, where a great aspect lies in the invisibility - a hidden pillar or the absence of a god - remarks Isozaki (cf. Isozaki 2011) or Keny Hara. Especially Hara explores the

51.

I will discuss Kenya Hara's concept of emptiness and white, also in terms of a concept called *mitate* and *ma*, in the second part of the thesis

topic of invisibility or the hidden in terms of emptiness: A shrine is also called *shiro*, the Japanese word for white, which for Hara constitutes the meaning of *ma* or emptiness<sup>51</sup> (Hara 2010/2017). It is again an expression of the subtle, of a maybe, where a god/*kami* might enter. This what "may" enter "can be seen as (the) essence of shinto, the thing that activates people's minds" (ibid.:39), a form of "suggesting".

The fresh cypress wood is "white" as restart. Though it is rebuilt in the process of *shikinen sengū* it is not quite the same, slightly changed through the act of redrawing, "transformed into a new 'unknown'" (ibid:43-44). For Hara the sensing of these subtle things, like the quality of seeing or sensing the nothingness or the recognition and adaption of different layers or hues that is embedded in a situation (symbolism), can be seen as a possible emotional refinement of our senses. The invisible or nothingness (*ma*) is for him, what demands and forms an increased awareness of our everyday environment as a whole and represents an important part of the Japanese culture and thus defines the design that comes from it (cf. Hara 2018).





fig. 81

Nine types of leaves and how to draw them, 1782, Ransai gafu



## Living with nature, not above

“A story was handed down by the french philosopher Blaise Pascal, that the human is a thinking reed. In the Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki) (...) usual humans are described metaphorically as aohitogusa.<sup>52</sup> That means literally that humans are like grown grass. Figuratively, this means, that humans as well as plants evolve and grow.” (Kaji Kenji in Platzek 2017:19)

52.  
lit. green-human-  
grass

The fact of *kami* in all (living) things leads to another important aspect that creates a different dialogue with nature. In *Shintō* the spirit is immanent, which means it can be found within the world, thus within our environment. This is also the common notion of Buddhism, which is also one reason why the influence of buddhist didn't create a conflict but a functioning symbiosis of both ideas. In contrast to this, the Western concept of god is transcendental and lives in a world above us (Williams 2004:12).

The *kami* or spirits are present in every part of nature and aren't always in a good mood, the impact marked by the many natural catastrophes, that Japan faces. The geographical situation makes the presence and force of nature often in a destructive way perceptible. But opposed to Europe, this to which didn't lead to an exclusion of nature, but to an even closer relationship:

“It explains, why we built shinto-shrines on rocks- we see nature as an important place and the deities come to visit such important places. This is the common shintoistic understanding of nature. Primarily Shinto encourages to draw no line between nature and human and to not grasp human existence as more valuable than that of animals or plants.(...) Therefore it is important to respect

every other form of life.” (Platzek 2017:17)

No difference is made between human and the natural world. Even in the smallest homes with no gardens: somewhere we will find a crooked tree, one leaf hanging as first sign of the beauty, that it will be one day, arranged in a mossy pot. To care about plants, Bonsai trees, flower arrangements or any being, is about building places, where the *kamis* can live and to put them into a positive mood (*ibid.*). But instead of creating an idealized picture of nature and excluding the essence of nature, Japanese people invited the very own realism of nature into their homes. In the Japanese *Shintō* belief everything as little or big is worshipped as a living being, even industrial products, which is expressed in an attitude called “*mot-tainai*” (*ibid.*). From the path of *shintō* or the *kannagara* stems the Japanese axiology and with it their honest and sincere relationship with every being (*cf. Picken 1994*). Here one can almost say that every being means literally every-thing. This dialogue with nature didn’t create a boundary between humans and nature, as it is also expressed in the brochure of the Ise shrine:

“Shinto places great value in the virtues of purity and honesty, yet as a faith, Shinto has no dogma, doctrine, or founder. Its origins can be seen in the relationship between the ancient Japanese and the power they found in the natural world. It is a relationship that continues to this day, defined by a great reverence for nature’s strength, and gratitude for nature’s bounty. Only by both receiving the blessings of nature and accepting its rage can we maintain a harmonious connection to the world around us.” (Soul of Japan 2013)





incorporation  
of a deity.

These two  
pictures  
depict for me  
the concrete  
picture of  
the opposing  
ideas of  
anthropo-  
centrism and  
spirituality.



fig. 82  
salvator mundi, Leonardo Davinci

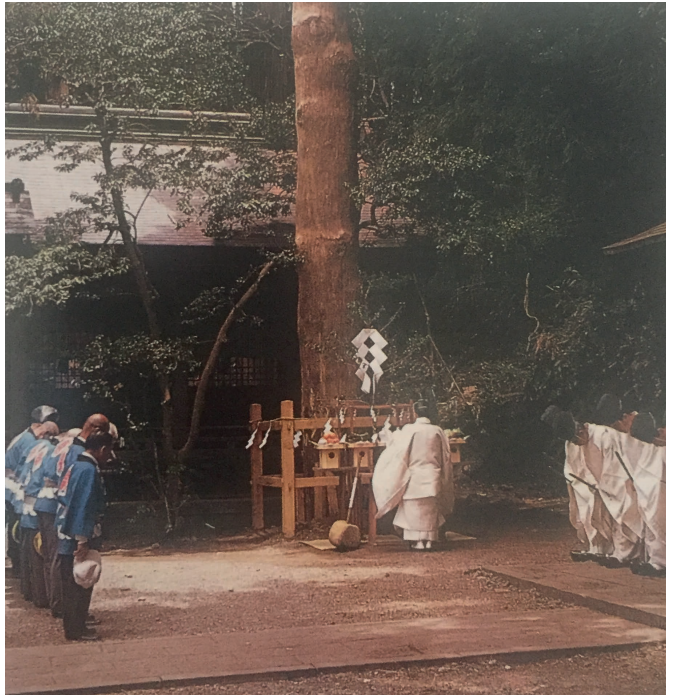


fig. 83  
shinto priest worshipping a tree



fig. 84  
Bhutanese thangka of Mt. Meru and the Buddhist Universe, 19th century

mount meru.

The Buddhist  
concept of  
the world  
is often  
depicted as  
a stone triad  
as heaven,  
earth, man.



fig. 85



fig. 86

A sacred  
tree (shin-  
boku), Omi-  
wara Shrine,  
Nara. a rope,  
the shimen-  
awa, defines  
the vague  
boundary  
between  
sacred and  
non-sacred.

“the beauty of architecture lies not only in design or architectural techniques, but also derives from the soul that dwells inside the wood“

Seiki Kiyoshi, Mori Art Museum, July 2018

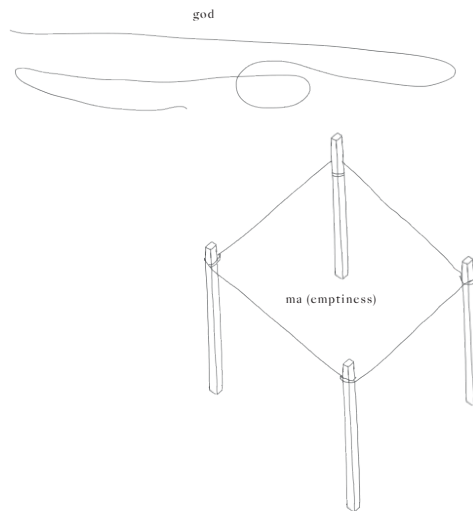


fig. 87



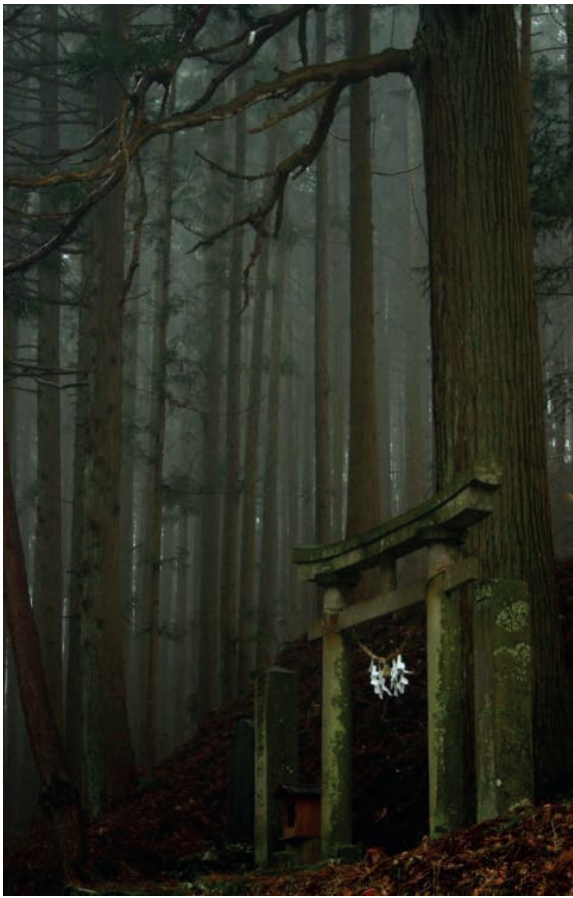


fig. 88

mysterious  
torii as entry  
to the sacred  
forest beyond.  
The *shintō*  
shrines are  
often placed  
in beautiful  
places of  
nature, the  
places where  
*kami* dwell

The brochure of the Ise Shrine “soul of Japan” states the relationship of human towards nature as shifted.



present day view of nature

Traditional Japanese view of nature







fig. 90  
Ise Shrine

The new and old Inner shrine (Naikū) of Ise Jingu. Every 20 years the shrine and its treasures are rebuilt, where the holy mirror is moved from the old to the new shrine to by the shinto priests. This renewal ceremony is called Shikinen Sengu and takes 8 years to complete.

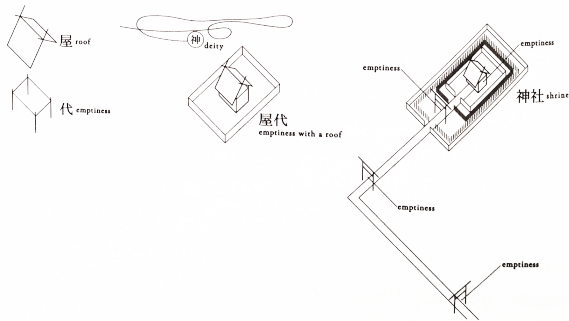


fig. 91

section with  
the heart pil-  
lar and Area  
Map of the  
outer Shrine  
of Ise Jingu  
(Gekū)

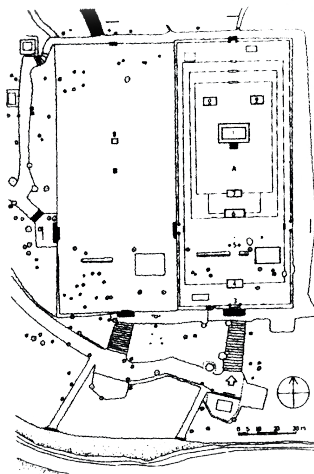
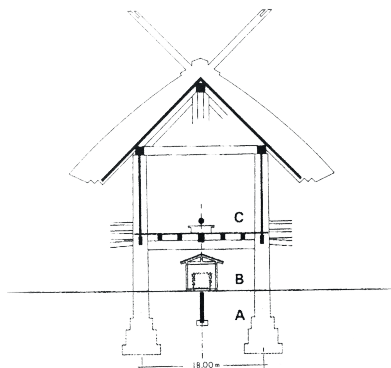


fig. 92



fig. 93



fig. 94  
Ise Shrine



## Paper or the tiny tree

The belief in *kami* and the non-hierarchical or non-dualistic structure in thinking is reflected in the awareness towards natural materials and the way it is handled. For Soetsu Yanagi this attitude is reflected in the Japanese craftsmanship, whose creating process is guided by the belief in *kami* (Yanagi 1989). The uttermost precision and the way a carpenter treats his wood lies in the notion of the inner being of things, that recognizes the “soul of a tree” even if it is fractured down to a “material” as paper.

53.  
see chapter the invisible and the hidden

In Japan, the function of paper is not limited to writing and painting, but as the pillar or the roof, is integral part of the Japanese house- as vague boundary or space for *mitate*<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore the filigree and gentle material is part of the contemporary architecture in form of detailed and playful models, and the character of fragility and strength inspiration for the architectural expression, where walls are as thin as paper.<sup>55</sup>

54.  
Often the the paper and its character of the vague and subtle division between “outside” and “inside” is dissolved even further by using thin translucent fabric.

Japan is said to produce the finest paper (*washi*) and has even the status of cultural heritage, some of the craftsmen are “living cultural heritage”. As Yanagi notes about the value of *washi* in Japan:

„Here we see one of the wonders and joys of Japan. There is no other country in the world that possesses such remarkable paper. It contributes immeasurably to the beauty of Japan, and its existence should never be forgotten.“ (Yanagi 2019 :259)

Paper is here not solely a material, but an object, that is able to embody *kami*. This manifests itself in the *kamifudas*, that are hung up in front of the houses, to bring luck, or in the form of folded paper strips (*shide*), that are part of the *shimenawa*. In a sort it represents the miniature version of a tree and thus it is not symbol for a “dead” material of consumerism, but has once been part of a living being and still constitutes this attitude even when we are able cut it with a scissor. It portrays a potential dwelling place for the spirits and therefore has to be dealt with carefully.

This sensibility towards the material is present in the process of producing one single sheet of paper until its final use. *Washi* functions as the gentle material for the shoji, that transmits the soft white light. The plant's shadows dancing on it. There are many varieties of the finest *washi*, but it always has a soft and warm touch. Often the fibers of the plant are still visible-depending on the desired character. Though it is quite durable, it has to be treated and handled with carefulness. So needs the washi of the shoji be replaced with new paper now and then, an act of renewal similar to the Ise Shrine. Processing such a material can stand as an example that stresses the awareness towards things in their unfinished as well as final state, that expresses the acknowledgement of the natural cycles of nature and internalizes the relativity of all things: Every single step in the process of the washi making is done with uttermost care and precise execution. Every detail, no matter how small, is concerned to contribute to the whole. In this sense -beside the garden or other arts- *washi*- or any kind of craftsmanship- is a perfect example of the fusion of shintoistic and buddhist beliefs and can stand for the approach to the environment of object and materiality in Japan, that inherits a sensitivity towards all- immaterial or material.

The use of paper in architecture depicts this quite well. In Europe- I guess- the mass of the population would never use “paper” windows- too much effort. Not only because paper seems to fragile to use, but also because it is too much effort to keep it “shiny”. Effortless or functionality,



propagated by modernism is not met by many of the natural materials- they need our attention and care. Today, materials that are not resistant to environmental or human impacts are often avoided. We exchange (natural) materials with those, who don't need our attention. Like plastic windows or easy to clean or maybe self-cleaning floors. But by simplifying or rather complicating these materials- simplified use, but made by a high technological production-, we lose contact to the source of material, to our environment. We lose the sensibility and relationship to the objects, that surround us, making them disposable.

When built in traditional style, using washi is still common in Japan and has not yet disappeared and speaks of a high regard of natural cycles. Paper -in my opinion- is a perfect example of the different values, Japan generates towards "simple" things as paper compared to Europe. In Europe there has never been put such a cultural, spiritual or philosophical value in paper. It has always been a resource, no value or symbolic worth has been added to it - only maybe in combination with the letter press. But in Japan the paper has a "hidden layer" of quality, that depicts a culture's relationship towards the world. In the process of making one sheet of washi paper and in the final use it transports a sense for something that lies beyond a "thing", that transports the picture of the whole, that can build an emotional relationship, that starts with thoughtful procedure, when it is created<sup>56</sup> and ends with the practical application. It includes a practical approach, how we can be aware from the very beginning on (of the production). It stops us to question our means of production, applying tenderness that generates our perception towards the "invisible" or "unknown" values and structure behind a thing.





paper making  
a visit to Echizen, July 2018



the process of washi starts with collecting the bark of the trees. From the beginning on it is a process of hands (and mind), that includes any steps until the finished sheet. The fibers are gained in a long process, where the fiber is removed diligently from the bark- a precise work of the hands and a long and hard labour, too. Attentiveness in this step effects the final quality of the washi. The finer and smaller the fibers are processed, the finer, whiter and translucent, the paper will become









washi is made  
of the fiber of  
the bark of the  
kozo, gampi or  
mitsumata tree or  
bush.

The raw material  
is only collected  
at one time in  
the year (winter),  
while it is taken  
care off, that only  
as much from the  
bushes is cut so  
that the plants  
can recover.











clear and good  
quality water is  
the foundation  
for the fine  
washi-paper,  
the reason why  
most of the  
paper making  
towns are still  
situated close  
or in the moun-  
tains, impuri-  
ties carefully  
removed.





washi from Echizen, Fukui

washi transmits  
a soft light with  
a gentle touch  
and sound. the  
atmosphere  
soothing as if we  
were under a bed  
sheet that filters  
the sunlight. The  
fibers are often  
still visible but  
can vary. In the  
finest washi, the  
fibers are almost  
invisible, but  
still present.



“Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree.” (Tanizaki 1977:10)

tree at the ikebana shrine, Kyōto, July 2018





shimenawa with kamifuda, are sign of a presence of shinto shrine.

Not only in the  
shrines, we  
stumble over  
kamifudas (folded  
paper) also in the  
daily life of the  
people. colorful  
paper, hang in  
front of doors, on  
trees- in the end  
it is present even  
in the tiny origami  
sculptures. They  
surround them  
with the positive  
spirit they as-  
cribed to the inner  
of things.

Tsumago, Kiso valley, June 2018







## The empathy towards things (*Mono no aware*)

“If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty”(Kenkō 1967)

The love for nature's beauty is not just limited to formal, visual appearance like untreated wood or the careful symbiosis with nature in architecture or the potted bonsais on the porch. As I have tried to point out and would like to go on further, it is especially more than this visual aspect, even the invisible, that defines a particular relationship towards nature in Japanese culture, as e.g. the „soul that dwells in wood“, that is expressed as far as in the use of paper.

But the „mysteries“ one can experience in the garden or architecture of the temples, design and also contemporary examples as on Naoshima Island, one can realize, that a very different concept of beauty lies at the heart of Japanese culture. A concept where the inner being of things or nature plays a great part. This awareness towards things and towards non permanent situations, the acceptance and dealing with „severity“ that nature brings (Soul of Japan 2013) permeates Japanese art and culture. One can almost say it is seen as elementary to experience it. One of these foundational aesthetic principles, that refers to this kind of (melancholic) beauty, is called *mono-no-aware* or “the empathy towards things”, which shifts the focus of quality towards an inner being. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) formed the term *mono-no-aware* in the Edo-Period(1603-1868) in

connection to Japanese literature, mainly the style of waka poetry, of the Heian Period like the famous *Genji monogatari*. With his literary analysis he showed that a pathos of things lies at the very core of Japanese aesthetics and “is depicted through poetic images of impermanence—scattered cherry blossoms, fading autumn leaves, dew falling from clover—all symbolic of the frailty of human life itself”(Odin 2001: 257). The meaning of the word *mono* is “thing” and *aware* was used to express a controlled sighing like “ah” in the Heian period, which is why the literal translation is also the “the ahh-ness of things”. But the verb of *aware* can also be translated as “to pity”, which is why *mono no aware* is commonly referred to as “pathos of things” or “empathy towards things” (Richie 2007:52).

Besides the sensitivity towards things or the acceptance of “the vitality of things”, the aesthetic principle of *mono no aware* stands for the awareness of impermanence, the buddhist principle *mujō*. It is the acceptance of the “unavoidable transience of the world” and the beauty of the ephemeral, like the falling cherry blossoms, that has developed over time in the Japanese culture. The awareness of the “impermanence” (*mujō* 無常 - “without constancy”) has arrived with the influence of Buddhism, which didn’t form a opponent to the indigenous belief, but they enhanced each other. So originates the notion of *mono no aware* in the sensibility of *Shintō*, which was highly sensitive to the awe-inspiring dimensions of the natural world. As a spiritual sensibility, the term is related to two other notions, namely, “the vitality of things” (*mono no ke*) and “the mood of things” (*mono no kokoro*<sup>59</sup>), while further the sensibility and feeling for things are also correlated to these expressions:

“In terms of religious practice, *Shintō* aims at the cultivation of heightened openness. In other words, one strives to capture “the mood of things” (*mono no kokoro*) or feel the tangible world, thereby realizing a profound sympathetic resonance with one’s environment. To be affectively and cognitively attuned to the things around us is the most intimate form of knowledge — that is, to know the heart-mind (*kokoro*) of a thing (*mono*). Thus, *mono no ke* and *mono no kokoro* provide the background against which *mono no aware* emerges as an aesthetic notion. *Mono no aware*, then, represents a refined sensibility indicating a sincere heart capable of resonating with the vital energy of things in a constantly changing world.” (cf. Park)

55.  
kokoro can also be  
translated as heart  
(cf. jisho)

The Heian time is seen as the beginning of a poetic beauty, where impermanent things as watching the seasons gained a high importance in the aesthetic. The aristocrat laid out their residences in favour to watch the beauty of the seasons (cf. Takei and Keane 2008). Lazarin describes this influence on architecture as the „blown away roof“, „where one gets glimpses of intimate moments but never a comprehensive view of the situation“. He sees this also manifested in the fragile language of the Japanese house, as he further points out: „(...) *mono-no-aware* describes the instability of Japanese buildings so easily knocked down by earthquakes or burned up in fires. One could ask: “Why not make sturdier buildings?”, but the Japanese attitude maintains that it is better to replace things than reinforce them.“ This approach is also reflected in contemporary architecture, as he describes Tadao Ando's thought about one of his museums where he answered that he did not care about such things“ (Lazarin 2014:136).

56.

The 24 seasons came from China, the Japanese calendar divided them finally into 72 seasons (ko).

The closeness to nature is for Marra the reason for this aesthetic sensibility (cf. Marra 1999). Things that are constantly in change, not things that are permanent, are seen as the most valuable moment of “the ephemeral beauty of a world in which change is the only constant” (Richie 2007:52). It refines our sense towards the impermanence and the inner quality of nature, its essence. A refinement of our senses, as the perception of twenty-four seasons (*sekki*)<sup>56</sup> instead of only four. With names like „fish rise from the ice“ „fireflies rise from the rotten grass“ or „a cool wind blows“, that associate the start every five days<sup>57</sup>. Especially *ha-na-mi*, flower watching is famous to spend time, *Sakura*, the time of the cherry blossom, still the most celebrated time of the year. This perception of more than only four seasons show once more a refinement of the perception and awareness towards our surroundings. In architecture this expressed in the *tokonoma*, the changing elements of vague boundaries and in daily life present until today in the meals and sweets one can buy in the shops.<sup>58</sup> The refined perception suggests different hues, which create a sensibility, as the perception of the seasons is gradient not abrupt like layers of vague boundaries.

58.

The topic of the season is endless. See for example: Haruo Shirane, The Culture of the Four seasons.

57.

I extracted this information from an app for a smartphone the app is called 72 seasons. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/72-seasons/id1059622777?mt=8>, last access: 15.04.2019



fig. 95

Genji monogatari, Chapter 34; Kashiwagi catches sight of the Third Princess.

fig. 96  
genji monogatari, chapter 4, The Twilight Beauty (Yûgao)





fig. 9"

enso



Influenced also by Buddhism, nature's cycle of renewal and decay is transported into a poetic sense of aesthetic and is an inherent topic of the Zen-temples. "The meaning of Zen lies in spontaneous response,. If thunder peals, we peal too; if an earthquake come sto shakeus, we oursleves shake with it." (Walker quoting Zen master Mokurai 2017:167)

fig. 98  
Kennin-ji







fig. 99  
River in Saitama

the time of the  
cherry blossom  
(sakura) is still one  
of the most famous  
event of the year  
in Japan. Watching  
flowers if called  
hanami, and there  
are various events  
all over Japan not  
only for the cherry  
blossoms, but  
almsot all kind of  
flowers.

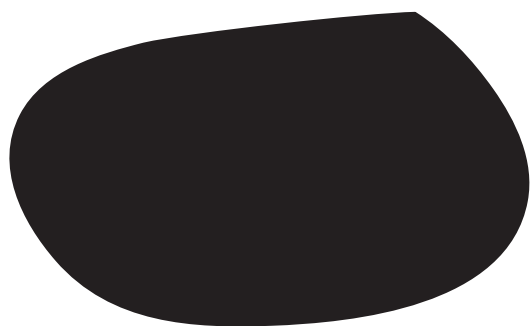
japanese sweet  
mimics moss on  
stone

the sweets and  
food are prepared  
according to the  
season. The fine  
sense and awareness  
towards subtle changes  
is reflected in the  
24 (or 72 ) seasons  
instead of 4. so i can  
happen, that there  
is almost every-  
day another sweet  
prepared.



fig. 100





**Part II**

•

**Moss**



## the Invisible and the Imagined



white (paper) as mitate





## The mountain in the garden or „the imagined“

„The Japanese saying goes, ‘One can learn the strength and firmness of a vast mountain from a single stone‘ (Walker 2017:119)

The Japanese garden is a place that awakens the refinement of our senses. It is a place where one’s mind wanders, watching the cherry blossoms fall or the leaves in autumn turn into a deep red. From the point on, when we move through the entrance gate, we are immersed by the space. All our senses are absorbed in the Japanese garden. Vague symbols give only hints on how to behave, a small stone in the way implying not to walk there, the fluxus of being and non-being, space and non-space in an evergoing complementarity.

It is a form of design that relies on our awareness to relate all things. It is based on an abstract beauty, that transcends what we see. Listening to the sound of a dry waterfall, experiencing the mountains laid out in the back of your house, stimulates intuition and fantasy. A bamboo cup represents the forest, a flower arrangement can stand representatively for the harmony of the universe. The concept which evokes the great mountain through a small stone, or evokes the forest by a simple patch of moss is called *mitate* and „ (...) lies at the heart of the abstract visions that permeate the Japanese garden.“ (Walker 2017:118). Tatsuo Miyajima explains *mitate* as following:

“Mitate is therefore an act of changing one’s own consciousness: It is the ability to see one thing as something different. This is linked to animistic thinking, or

the belief that all things have a soul. Since antiquity, the Japanese have had a history of, for example, comparing a steep mountain to a god to develop a form of worship, or stretching a shimenawa around a rock or tree to mark it sacred.” (Miyajima in Walker 2017)

This concept is not only part of the garden, but of Japanese design and culture that shows us “no meaning, only interpretation” (Hara 2017:48). A plant, that still grows, a ceramic bowl that seems to just have grown out of earth, still a clump of clay. Quality is found not in the finished, but the unfinished, where it is possible to still engage actively with our own minds. This practice roots in the buddhist practice of refusing “to satisfy our instincts or desire for fulfilment” (Walker 2017:156), where things are seen the most beautiful when they suggest the emotion of „unfinished“. The refusing of fulfilment inhabits a temporariness, because everything is in constant flux and transition, as the shadow of today won’t ever be the shadow of tomorrow or as the fallen leaf won’t be the leaf on the cherry tree when you walk by the very same tree next year- the cherry tree will have grown, the water that has just passed you won’t ever pass you again, therefore things won’t ever be. It is the acceptance of change and non-static concepts, starting as early as the Heian Period, as I have shortly drawn out in the chapter *mono no aware*, opposed to the Western idea of “ever-lasting” (Koren 2008:29).





Nanzen-ji, Kyōto, July 2018

devotion and  
caring about  
one's environ-  
ment on a daily  
basis creates a  
consciousness  
towards the real-  
tionship between  
human-onject,  
human-naure in  
the everyday (*ke*)



fig. 101



fig.102  
handgarden, Olafur Eliasson



lush green  
sceneries in  
the temple of  
Tōfuku-ji  
after the  
rainfall. Only  
looking at it  
evokes a cool-  
ing feeling.







## The unenterable garden<sup>59</sup>

59.

A poignant description used by Sophie Walker in her book (Walker 2017:156)

The uttermost experience of denial to fulfill our desire is found in the gardens, where you cannot enter. In these gardens, there are paths laid out not for your body but your mind to walk in (Walker 2017:156). Often they are set in front of a canvas (a wall, fence or surrounding buildings), where the nature is the layer of paint adding up to a rich symbolism. Only with our imagination we can enter the garden and strive through it, dissolving our location: we are here on the engawa, while at the same time we are touching the leaves of the tree, that stands out of our physical reach in the middle of the garden. It is another “tool” in Japanese art, that dissolves the categories we are used to think in, where a stone can be anything and the time can be then and now:

60.

The gardens in a temple are part of the daily routine of caring, whether they are naturalistic or more abstract-the gardens need to be taken care of. While taking care of something, like replacing parts or moving the winter elements to summer elements in the house, it creates a bond between us and the other.

“The unenterable garden is a deliberately inaccessible form of pathless garden laid out by the garden-maker in order to hide- but also to reveal. Composing it beyond our physical reach, the garden-maker employs walls, framing devices, precise sight lines and tricks of scale to compose a scene that stimulates our contemplation and aids assimilation. It challenges us to enter not with our feet, but with our own imaginations: it produces a dreamy reality between what we see and what we imagine. To deny entry is to defy expectation, and the challenge of the visitor is both psychologically demanding and potent.” (Walker 2017:156)

Such unenterable gardens are often part of the *machiya*s in form of the *tsuboniwa* or of buddhist temples, like the Daitoku-ji. They form a central topic in the temple architecture and daily life of the monks<sup>60</sup>. When

we visit the Daitoku-ji<sup>61</sup> in Northern Kyoto we first pass long pathways aligned with walls and just some trees, behind them, the actual temples. When we enter a gate that leads us to the sub-temple as the Daisen-in or the Ryōgen-in, the flora becomes more dense, the pathways narrower. The stone patterns we now walk on, changing now and then their rhythm. After passing a threshold- sometimes indicated by two larger stepping stones, we enter the *genkan* space, where we remove our shoes to step onto the elevated wooden boards, where we are free to roam.

We move through some quarters in the traditional Japanese style and then around the *hojo*, the main abbot's quarter, that is surrounded by small gardens. In the Daisen-in, Kogaku-zenji abstracted nature's essence to fit in the small space of the temple, created 490 years ago (1509 A.D.)<sup>62</sup>, expressing it through rocks and sand. After moving through the shade of the rooms we finally encounter sight of these spiritual gardens, where we sit down to experience their presence, or one can also say absence. Here, the architecture and one's own body and mind is engaged in a deep dialogue with nature. Those Zen-gardens can be experienced usually from the *engawa*, the meditation hall or the *hōjō* (the heart of the temple, room for the abbot), where also the monks sit and meditate (*ibid*:154). There are various forms, like landscapes full of shrubs, depicting clouds, varieties of trees and huge patches of moss, but often we will find nothing, a vastness of a field of pebble, which reminds us of the ancient Ise Jingu, where the empty site is waiting for 20 years to again be rebuilt.

The Daisen-in (Great Hermit temple) is one of the most famous examples of the drygarden. On the north east side lays a garden, which is only 3,7m wide. We sit here directly confronted with the garden, which we experience almost like a three dimensional painting<sup>63</sup>. Time feels very slow, the place is calming and soothing, while we listen to the invisible stream of water implied by a stream of pebbles. Mountains, canyons and some trees, a turtle swimming against the tide, while the water from the dry waterfall in the north east corner flows to the middle sea on the northern side of the *hōjō*. While walking around barefeet on the soft wooden floor, two piles in

61. Daitoku-ji temple was founded by the Rinzaï sect, which gains satori (enlightenment) by meditation. Also Sen no Rikyu spend his time here. The 23 single tempels of the large complex al have their own characteristics, which is visible in the different garden styles. (Arte 2016)

62. information retrieved visitor's brochure 2018 of Daisen-in

63. It is laid out in the stlye of Chinese northern song dynasty (960-1279) (Walker 2017:120)

a field of white pebbles form the last scenery. Here time almost stops.

In none of the gardens we are able to move through them physically. they incorporate absence or the notion of emptiness. In the abstract dry gardens, sometimes only a few stones are set in the vastness of white pebbles, which are raked daily by the temple monks. The gardens and the Muromachi Period in general mark a great change in the image of nature. The monks of the Zen-temples began to see a great possibility in abstract materials to express nature's essence in the limited area of the temple, "a tool with which to open or improve the garden's potential to conceptually challenge (...) to broaden its intellectual possibility" (ibid:182). It marks a great change to an even more abstract and ephemeral picture of nature, where the "may" became maybe the main topic, while the focus shifted more and more to what is not instead of what is. The gardens of those time „embody one of the main principles of Zen period gardens, which are not imitations of nature but a transcendent form of it, which, through artifice of design, reveals its essence“ (Mansfield 2005:31). The motifs in the garden were now "form of allegorical references that could be used not only for contemplation but also instruction in Zen teachings" (e.g. ibid:30).

64.

the dry mountain water gardens are often interpreted as the journey through life ,so is the garden of Daisen-in is often seen as "allegory for the passage of life" (Mansfield 2005:30)

The large beds of pebbles evoke the picture of the ocean or that of a river, the waves crushing on the mountains, that are formed by larger stones. The dry gardens (*kare* -dry, *san*-mountain, *sui*-water) evolved in the Muromachi Period (1336 – 1573) and embody the concept of *ma* (emptiness). Basically they "express a philosophical and spiritual concept in harmony with nature" (Arte 2016). The teaching of Zen-Buddhism relies on one person's own acting and efforts, which is why the abstract gardens are also often seen or laid out as a so called *kōan* (Zen-riddle), open to be interpreted freely. Walker remarks, that this (garden) space is different than visiting Western sacred places as a church, where the context is pre-given and not relative to one own's mind, as she notices:

"Visiting a Western cultural landmark - a palace or cathedral - cultural and historic context is unavoidable. But in the Japanese garden, context is deliberately

confused, as is scale. The unenterable garden space produces meanings that shift and become protracted. This garden demands a willingness to venture beyond knowledge and instinct, by forcing us to change our understanding of what we think we know. “ (Walker 2017:156)

*Mitate* means to see the small as big, the bamboo cup as forest or the stone as mountain. It is the layer of symbolism or our own associations. The concept applies not solely to the visible realm, like stones or hills, but is often bound especially to the nothingness or void, which is incorporated in the dry gardens (*kare-san-sui*). It is a concept so inherent to Japanese culture, where we shall not only see the visible, as the West does only appreciate, where there is seen no such potential in nothingness. But emptiness is here "alive with possibilities", inspired by the universe and nature that is creating itself out of nothingness (*shizen*=nature, means self creating). But this means also “while the universe destructs it also constructs” (Koren 2008:45).





fig.103

Daisen-in, Daitoku-ji





## ma

is a spiritual and philosophical concept, as well as it is a spatial concept. It has no singular meaning as such and in Japanese language and culture it is used to express all kinds of things, as Nitschke points out in his study "Ma-the japanese sense of place". It can mean the "sense of a place" as much as it can mean the span between two columns, or the pause in a sentence or of a poem, a left out space. Therefore it can literally translated as either gap, pause, space, time or interval (jisho), but primarily the overall conception to indicate *ma* is emptiness, and relates to the buddhist concept of *mu* (nothingness).

ma is the void between two stepping stones, that lets you pause while you're walking on them. But same as the engawa, ma is a connecting element, that underlines the relation of things, as it sews for example invisibly the stones in a kare-san-sui together. It is the relativity that underlies the buddhist concept of overcoming dichotomy.

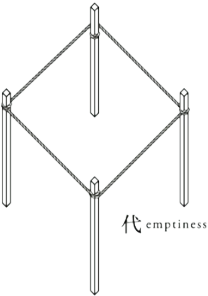
間

ma  
(emptiness)

月	+	門
moon		gate



fig.104  
Ise shrine



the dry-garden  
let's us contem-  
plate on our bare  
existence of all  
life, not only  
on the changing  
seasons. The meta-  
physical layer can  
be read in many  
ways.

fig.105

Daisen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto





## Stones and void

On the *engawa*, that is neither outside nor inside, a vast ocean spreads out in front of us. We cannot enter the garden of Tōfuku-ji, the purpose laid out for contemplation. The time in the dry-garden is not existent. It is in this sense a timeless place, where only the shadow implies a subtle passing of time. The concept of time dissolved, almost standing still, while around us, on the outside, there is the busy life, the speed growing faster every-day.

No trees, only stones and some mossy patches are here to evoke a picture greater than one would imagine. It is probably the most famous examples of the “Art of setting stones”. But the image of the *Sakuteiki* developed further, reducing nature to its simplest means, extracting the essence of it. Creating a pure dialogue with „abstract“ elements but still within nature’s rules, the stones are naturally chosen, the layout of the stones seems- as proposed by the *Sakuteiki*- to be the technique to put one stone and then the next, implying the beauty of natural coincidences (cf. Nitschke 2003).

The garden of Tōfuku-ji or any dry garden is often said to incorporate the concept of *ma* (emptiness) and are often referred to as gardens of the void. The nothingness a place, where our mind travels to the beachfront and hears the sound of the waves and wind (Walker 2017:184). It is full of void but this empty space is the perfect space to trigger lush imagination. The

space exists to “imitate nature at a newer, deeper level” (Nitschke 2003:6). Between the larger stones, a large plot of neatly raked gravels is spread out. Circles around the stones evoking the picture of water crushing onto the islands beach. Smaller stones or sand used in the *kare-san-sui* are used to create the picture of water, flowing around islands, formed by larger stones. We encounter inevitably the concept of *mitate* and *ma* (ibid:92). The abstract drygarden of Ryōan-ji<sup>65</sup> is probably the best-known example of a contemplation garden composed of emptiness. the garden consists only 15 larger stones, while only from one point in the temple all 15 stones can be seen. At the *hōjō*, a knot in the wooden flooring marks this point. From the other view points at least one of the stones stays always hidden, the task lays by the viewer to fulfill the missing piece. The reading of Ryōan-ji is not pre-given. One can find oneself at the shore of a vast ocean, ore one can see tigers with cubs, as the name of the garden implies. But overall, the feeling is that of emptiness. The water, floating between the stones, catches our thoughts, while we feel the wind’s breeze, like standing at the oceanside, the stains on the yellowish oil-earthen wall like a sign of the tides. The stones carefully put in relation to each other, in between existing nothing. The literal meaning, “Hermitage of the Eastern Sea” (cf. Walker 2017) making now sense.

65.

The garden was probably built around 1500. The garden plot measures approx 9x24m and is surrounded by a 180cm oil-earthen wall on the southern an western site(cf. Ryoanji temple)

In the dry gardens as in the subtemple Ryogenin of Daitoku-ji, we find ourselves at the edge of the *engawa*, a hermit looking out to the vastness of the ocean. <sup>66</sup> Sitting on the *engawa*, we experience the presence of the absence, looking out over the white sand. The *kare-san-sui* is an abstract painting, dissolving categories and boundaries, stimulating imagination and reflection. These gardens are not just like paintings, but have also the mystery and intuition of a so called *kōan*, where a Buddhist teacher asks his student a contradictory question as exercise. A *kōan* is supposed to sharpen the intuition of the mind, as the following question implies: „What is the sound of one clapping hand?“ (Lévi-Strauss 2013:100). Notably the empty space lets us think and reorder the assumptions to the things we actually see (the moss, the stones, the gravels). The void is a space for

66.

this feelings meets actually almost any kind of the abstract dry gardens

*mitate*. Looking at the stones, the space between influences our thoughts. The nothingness strikes us and let's us rethink the relations between the positive and negative, the invisible and the visible. As the poet Shinkei said: "In linked verse, put your mind to what is not." (cf. Nitschke 2002:108).

### The invisible twig

To underline the importance of the invisibility I'd like to discuss shortly Van Tonder and Lyon, who have been researching the Zen gardens in terms of its strong visual appeal, the design and calming effects. By applying the rules of figure-ground and visual grouping of the Gestalt psychology, they analyzed the abstract stone layouts of the Zen gardens in terms of these principles and made the negative space actually visible by using the "medial axis transformation (MAT)" used in the "visual 'ground'" analysis (Van Tonder und Lyons 2005:353). Van Tonder and Lyons come to the conclusion that "Humans do not consciously perceive medial axes in a visual scene, but the findings of Kovacs et al. demonstrate that, unconsciously, our vision is sensitized along these axes." by recognizing that "human sense of aesthetic is closely linked to visual perception" (*ibid*:366). Looking at Ryoanji, they found out that the negative space spread out between the visible, has additionally the shape of a tree or a branch (*ibid*:366). So this empty space we don't see, but which might be the most important part for our perception, is nature, an invisible branch, spreading out in front of us as viewer, being maybe one of the clues why these abstract stone gardens bring us down to earth, by shaping "a tree that exists only in our minds"<sup>67</sup>.

67.

Vgl. Interview van Tonder, living on earth, octobre 4, <https://www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?pro->





fig.106  
sea side series, Hiroshi Sugimoto

無

mu  
(nothing)

無常

mu-jō  
(impermanence)

everything is in constant change,  
therefore nothing exists in the world



fig.107  
kare-san-sui, Ryoan-ji, Kyoto

only the moss  
patches and the pa-  
tina of the temple  
walls are witness  
of time- otherwise  
it is rather a place  
of stillness, con-  
templating on the  
universe., where we  
cecvome a hermitage  
at the sea.





fig.108  
zazen, a form of mediation.



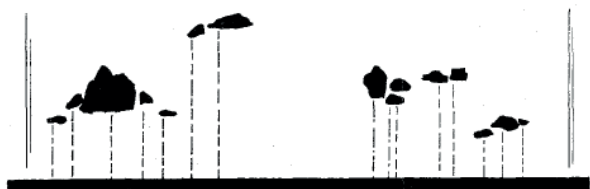


fig.109

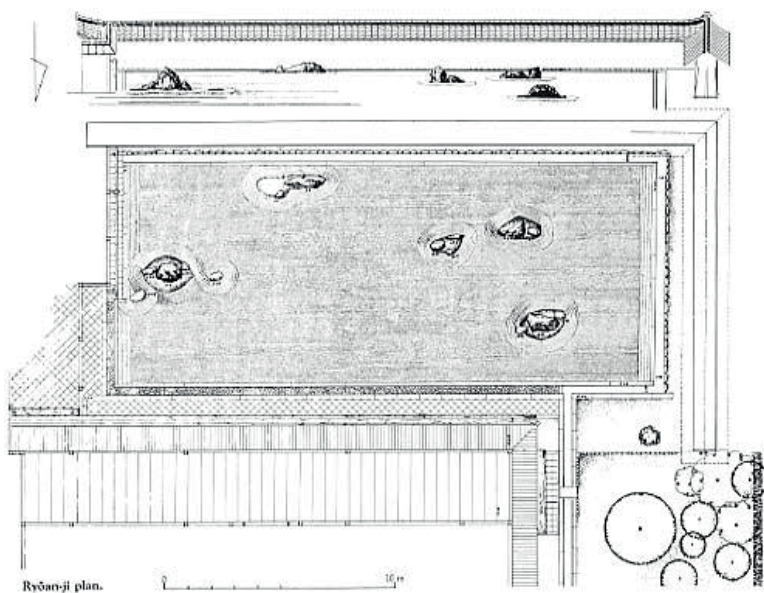


fig.110  
site plan, Ryōanji



## The Invisible

Japanese design challenges us often to put our minds to what is not. There is a sensitivity towards the non-visible, which is as highly weighted as the visible, where the aesthetic finds beauty not only in vague things as the moon hidden behind clouds or the Mount Fuji in the fog, but often what is most striking is exactly the blank spot, or left out space, that creates such a “vagueness”, that is open for interpretation. This concept is called *ma*. We find it between the stones in the abstract stone gardens, for Teiji Ito the space in between (*ma*) is a kind of “imaginary space” (Itō 1999). Like the empty space on a *washi* sheet left out by the ink-brush stroke, the pause in a *haiku*, or the gap between two stepping stones, where our mind is focused the most.

The things that are not, are often the most important feature, like the blank space of Hasegawa Tōhaku’s Pine Trees or the pause in the movement of a Nō actor - a moment of highest concentration and a moment for the spectator to engage with his mind (Tsubaki 1971). As Arata Isozaki notes about *ma*: “Nothingness, that is extravagant (...) no time and no space, but we have *ma*”, which is “emptiness between objects”. The pause and silence is *ma*, the in-between space is more important, as he states further (Isozaki 2018). The concept of emptiness reaches as far back as the oldest shinto shrines, as Hara in his book “white” or Arata Isozaki in his early exhibition point out. The concept of emptiness had been already part of



*Shintō*, where the kami dwell in the space, that is spread out between the *shimenawa* and 4 wooden pillars, where they might enter. This void, gap or in-betweenness is strongly intertwined with the Japanese culture. As Hara shows it is part of the daily life as in Japanese language, where pausing or a moment of silence is not felt as awkward (Hara 2017:44-47). Also Arata Isozaki explains that *ma* “is reflected even in contemporary Japan in the basic concepts underlying environmental and garden design, the arts of everyday living, architecture, the fine arts, music and theater, all of which are called ‘the art of *ma*.’” (Isozaki 1976).

Japanese design stems from the power of the void, that carries “a hidden system, that tries to express the non-existent aesthetically” (Fehrer 2005: 35). So as much as *ma* can simply explain the span between two columns, it is in the first place a metaphysical term, where it represents just one symbolic layer of the many. *Ma* is not only a spatial term indicating a rational space but far more it is rich in “imaginary potential”. The span of the column is relative, relating to the size of the *tatami* it is not a fixed category. *Ma* not bound to one function, it is space and before the adaption to Western “standards” to design was called *ma-dori*, creating empty space (Nitschke 1993:56). It is space and non-space at the same time.

The concept of *ma* (emptiness) is bound to the essential Buddhist concept, called *mu* or *ku* (nothingness) (e.g. Mansfield 2005:31) and is „a philosophical system intertwined in the Asian way of thinking“ (Fehrer 2005:17). It is the potential seen in the empty space of a vessel not in the form itself. This example drew Lao Tse to the conclusion that emptiness itself in daily life is indispensable, “that only in vacuum lay the truly essential” (Okakura 1906:16). Buddhism took it on as their „notion of ,nothingness“ “ (Fehrer 2005:17), to gain an “intuition of ultimate reality” (Britannica 2019) is constituted by voidness or emptiness (*Sūnyatā*), as also the famous heart *sutra* “Form is empty” expresses (Fehrer 2005). The Buddhist Mahayana teaching implies, that every phenomena or thing is in constant change and therefore “nothing exists in the world” (*mujo* =impermanence) (cf. Toyada 2002:63). Another thought hereby is that everything or any sort of force

derives from nothingness (*mu*), a potential of self creation, that is found in nature. The Japanese term for nature is *shizen*. The meaning suggests that nature creates itself from nothing, while in the end it becomes nothing again. This concept is represented in the contemplation of the dry gardens. The emptiness is somehow never final, always incomplete, but therefore it possesses the power of growth. *Ma* reminds us first that we should focus not on present things, but things that are not, will have and might become. Further it sets things in a non-static relation to each other, like the concept of the ancient garden manual *Sakuteiki*, where this principle is described as *koan ni shitagae*.

Verghese describes that “in Buddhist philosophy, the term *ma* refers to the in-between realm” (Verghese 2003:166). The stones stand alone, but are connected by the space in between them. This concept of relations and of „no-separation reminds us that everything in the world is interrelated. No one is living in a bubble“ (Kwan 2012:10). In the in-between space of the stones in Ryoanji or of one element set in connection to another lies the notion of relationships without dividing into categories. In this in-between space lies the notion of transition and fluxus, the „seamless“ weaving of the environment, where everything is interrelated and nothing is less important:

“In summary, *ma* in the subjective domain serves as an excellent unifying concept for Japanese awareness of polarity, of yin-yang interaction of ‘opposites’. There are polarities of form and no-form(...); of object and space(...); of sound and silence, action and non-action, movement and rest(...); and of person and society. Another way of looking at this sense of place or placement is in terms of the continuum that links the world into a single seamless structure. The concept of *ma* in the objective environment expresses the continuity of space and time, the time-structuring of space and the space-structuring of time. *Ma* in the subjective realm defines the continuum of event and experience, of external reality and internal mood.” (Nitschke 1993: 58)

The empty space is seen as the balance between things, like a dialogue such as when we experience the continuous transit of space through vague boundaries.



## White or the unknown

“Imagine every day, a world that will never be complete, and you can spend your life dreaming.” (Ishigami 2018)

68. Kenya Hara explores in his books as “White” or “Designing Design” the visual and philosophical aspects of emptiness.

The void or the space in-between we encounter in the dry gardens are for Kenya Hara<sup>52</sup> where our thoughts dwell, for him it is the space, where we can encounter the “unknown”. The experience is similar to a Japanese ink brush painting, where we fill in the left out space on the canvas with our fantasy, filling the void with our thoughts.

About the white space we encounter in Hasegawa Tōhaku’s *Pine Trees*, explains Hara, that by „floating on the empty air, the viewer can give many kinds of imagination to this picture“. The landscape painted by Tōhaku is not characterized by the painted parts, but rather by the left out space, a technique, that Zen-masters also call „painting by non-painting“ (cf. Fehrer 2005:17). By using a harsh brush technique, *haboku*, the picture leaves behind a swift image of movement, a dance of nature. Our thoughts flowing in the white space between the pine trees. The void we encounter let’s us feel a dense fog and humid air between the pine trees, the trees getting blurred by the thick air. We can feel the white settling onto the landscape, like on a mysterious foggy day. Painted in the tradition of Southern Sung, a style of chinese ink painting, *Pine Trees* “delineates the boundeness of empty space by blending the “subtle” and the “faint”.” As Hara describes:

“Tohaku’s “Pine Trees” seems to emphasize the empty space between the trees

rather than the trees themselves. (...) the pines look indistinct, being fused into the depth of whiteness. Far from signifying a state of nonbeing, the white empty space suggests the countless trees that stand behind the painted surface. The exquisitely dense atmosphere is filled with a subtle movement that leaves viewer's senses drifting in that space." (Hara2017:38)

In this blank space, which differs from Western painting, where white is implicated by adding white, the white of the left out space even differs in hues and saturation, creating a more distant and sensitive image of the drawn landscape. Thinking in hues even of the color white or empty space is a way that "awaken our senses" (ibid:37), refining our perception, as he explains further:

"Here, the surrounding scenery, from the nearest to the most distant view, lies buried in the hazy ground. Despite its vagueness, our senses are drawn into that white space, where they are left to sway back and forth. Japanese people have a high regard for this paradoxical expression of empty space in pictorial art and it has helped them develop an imaginative capability that moves far beyond natural descriptive detail."(ibid:38)

69. This empty space is immanent of Japanese art and one of the seven characteristics of the Zen-Arts (Nitschke 2003:104).

The beauty of the empty space is called *yohaku-no-bi*<sup>69</sup> (Nitschke 2003:104). It is visible as fog, clouds, mist in paintings, "reminder of the infinite potential that dwells within nature" (Scarlett 2016). The picture is seen as a key piece in understanding that "the foundation of Japanese aesthetics lies in that empty space and a host of meanings have been built upon it" (Hara 2017:38). As in the drygarden, what activates the mind is the void, levelling the beauty of an object to the unspoken, to the left out, to the invisible.

The identical *kanji* of white and *ma* inspired Hara to further research this connection in his book "white". Both represent for him a source of creativity, the condition of white or nothingness not meaning "energy-less" (ibid:36). For him as there are different kinds of white papers, the space of *Ma* differs too. It is a space for self-expression or reflection, like a sheet of paper can be a "creative catalyst" (ibid: 16). Also the *shojis* present *ma* or white space, where the shadows move like clouds or where we just imagine the sun outside shining, the fine paper, a canvas for our mind. For Hara

this “emptiness sets our brain to work” and “provides a space within which our imagination can run free, vastly enriching our powers of perception and our mutual comprehension”(ibid:60). This “mental process” of the space we see between two stones is present in Japanese culture, and was already approached by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō „from the standpoint of the shadow“ (ibid:2). With his analysis, Hara shows that emptiness is a strong concept of the Japanese philosophy:

„Emptiness is a possibility to be filled. God may enter. There is no certainty. This may have a very great importance. The possibility to be filled of the power or imagination of Japan.“ (Hara 2018)

This uncertainty creates an imaginary, a creative potential, “In Buddhism, nothingness is not seen as an end, but as a place that sets things in motion” (Platzek 2017:36). The quality of emptiness is an incorporation and manifestation of the consistent fluxus of all things, where nothing is (permanent).

We can look at *ma* as concept of nothingness, as in the quality of the non-space of a teapot, but also as a concept of “hidden qualities” of things, where we put our mind to what is not visible to us, like a crack in a pot and seeing the universe (Bachelard 2014). An empty space sets the mind into a thought process, where the negative or the “emptiness” is not a nothingness, but, as Hara states, that will eventually be filled with content. This potential is the “unknown” and for him “making things unknown” “create(s) interest about things.”(Hara 2018). An approach that reminds of the designs and ideas of Junya Ishigami, who is trying to find in his practice to “view space subjectively, enabling different uses. A freedom open to interpretations” (Ishigami 2018) *Ma* is the ephemeral, unknown and accepting it as present and actual quality. *Ma* forms a place that let us be aware of „the delicate coexistence between mankind and nature“ (Hara 2017:69), a place of uncertainty, where our own behaviour connects us to our surroundings.



Ryogen-in, Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, July 2018

like the  
waves of a  
raindrop or  
the waves  
crushing  
against an  
island in  
the sea.



Form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form. the heart sutra



form



ma

quality  
of an  
empty  
vessel

ma

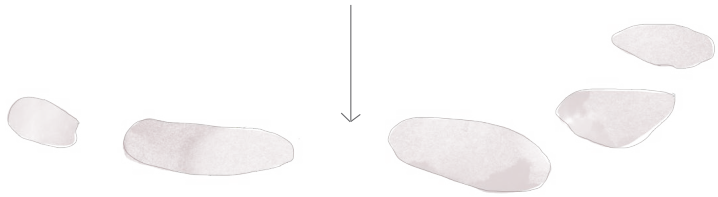




fig.III

Pine Trees (Shōrin-zu byōbu), 1580,

Hasegawa Tōhaku, Tokyo National Museum, museum,  
tokyo



Our thoughts flowing  
in the void, between  
the pine trees. The  
left out space let's us  
feel a dense fog and  
humid air between the  
pine trees, the trees  
getting blurred by the  
thick air. We can feel  
the white settling onto  
the landscape, like on a  
mysterious foggy day.  
It is the space, where  
our thoughts dwell,  
where we encounter the  
"unknown". Ma forms  
a place that let us be  
aware of „the delicate  
coexistence between  
mankind and nature“  
(Hara 2017:69).

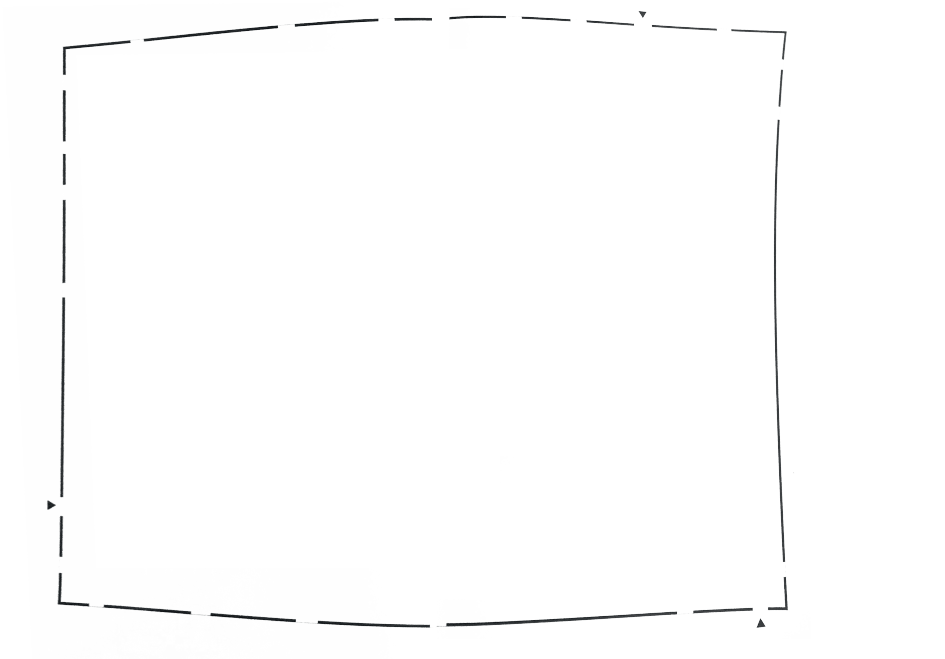


fig.112

“A ground plan with nothing on it. It may have nothings, but it does have shape.” (Ishigami 2018)



fig.113

Cloud Garden Nursery, Atsugi, Japan,  
Junya Ishigami + Associates

“Gazing at clouds,  
imagine a moun-  
tain and stand  
on top, gazing at  
clouds, think of bread  
and feel hungry, gaz-  
ing at clouds, be re-  
minded of monsters  
and feel scared, gaz-  
ing at clouds, sense  
a whale, climb on  
it and feel happy.  
Among endless  
imaginings, spaces  
of all sorts emerge.”  
(Ishigami 2018)



## The turtle's back

“Ma is the moment unbridled by contradictions-contrast between part and whole; it is the moment that allows one to be aware of and part of his surroundings.” (Verghese citing Matsumoto 2013)

Not only the garden and paintings are defined by gaps and what we not see, but also the architecture itself consists of these spaces.

Already when we step into a Japanese building, we are welcomed by a gap, ready to be filled with our minds. When we step touching the stepping stone (*kutsunugi-ishi*), we are already left to our minds with the imagination of the connection between ground and architecture. Not really touching the house, the stone seems like an object from nature bowing for us and making itself small so that we can step on nature's back to our needed shadow. When you step on it you suddenly feel the urge for a certain awareness and carefulness because it feels almost like stepping on a turtle's back. Here not a man gives way to the house, but nature does. As we've seen the emptiness is the quality of a teapot, so is the void the actual quality of architecture, as Bogner describes the designing, that was former called *madori* is made by “the grasping, creating, activating of *ma*” (Bogner 1988: 150).

Space and time are in Japan closely related. Arata Isozaki tried to bring the notion of *ma* closer to the western world with his exhibition about the topic in 1978, where he tried to grasp „Ma at that moment at which



time-and-space had not yet been disentangled and rendered as distinct notions.“ ( cf. Isozaki 2013).

By shaping space as a long , narrow paths, aligned by high growing bamboo or other greens we walk faster and our experience of space and time is extended. The way seems much longer when we arrive at the gate, after that a beyond waiting for us. Time (*ji-kan*) “is expressed in Japanese as ‘space in flow’, making time a dimension of space. Indeed, time is essential to human experience of place” (Nitschke 1993:53). Though all cultures had time expressed through space as with e.g. sundials, for Nitschke space in Japan is especially combined with time. He sees “all experience of space is a time-structured process, and all experience of time is a space-structured process” (ibid:54). The concept of time passing and the acceptance of this fact are not just important in terms of season passing by or the favor of used things as in the tea ceremony. It is an ongoing topic in japanese culture and is one part that creates a certain awareness of our time, the value and the awareness of time passing, generates awareness of the moment, slowing down time, making us aware of our being in the world.



tenjuan Garden, Nanzen-ji, June 2018



## Sensing nothingness

“There is no such thing as “white”, rather, “white exists solely in our perception. Therefore, we must not attempt to search for “white”. Instead, we must search for a way to feel the whiteness.”(Hara 2017:2)

We can grasp and feel every sound, every movement and no movement. The movement of the shadows, the awareness of time. Sensing nothingness (or the concept of *ma*) is part of the buddhist dao or thinking. It is the challenge to know and to experience what is missing, the important is the invisible, the left out, the blank space, the nothingness, that what we don't know. It is a way to seek our existence in relation to the world. A buddhist teacher gives his student a thought of something “unclear” to sensitize his intuition. It is a step towards the buddhist principle of nothingness. The arts, especially from the Muromachi Period on are strongly intertwined with Zen-Buddhism- or they are rather Zen-arts. Garden-making, tea ceremony, flowerarranging, to name just a few, they are all ways (*dō*= 道) to seek our existence, all arts of *ma*. To feel the whiteness or the void I would like to describe my experience of the artwork Backside of the Moon (1999) from James Turrell<sup>70</sup>. Located in one of the art houses of the art house project on Naoshima Island.

70.

In case you would ever like to visit: maybe skip this part, because it might spoil the experience

71.

The building was designed by Tadao Ando, the wood of the facade fired in the technique of shou sugi ban

Before we can enter Minamidera<sup>71</sup>, we wait for the group of people before us to come out. we enter slowly, walking in a row (1). By resting our hand on the wall (2), we guide ourselves to a bench. While the light slowly disappears and you are finally immersed in a complete blackness. After

a few steps and one turn, we are allowed to sit down, the space so dark that you can't even see your own hand (3). At first the atmosphere is quite unsettling. The time that is now passes very slowly. We feel the contradiction of the darkness- somehow complete empty, but soon this emptiness and lightness of the air turns dense, soon this nothingness becomes filled. After some time, the density and thickness is slowly fading away, while a large screen, shining subtle, emerges in the distance. The guide starts to ask whether we are able to see the faint light and explains that the screen has actually been there from the beginning on - we were just not able to see it.

The sense of our awareness has just become refined. We are now allowed to walk towards the screen to verify our experience. As soon as you think you reach the wall with the screen another impossible space opens up: The wall where the large screen should actually be attached is not there. There is nothing. Only empty space or *ma*, in which we are now immersed completely: our hands reaching through a large opening in the wall, encountering a complete void. You can look up and down- there is nothing, just white light playing in a dense fog. The artwork challenges what we think we see and what we think we don't see, the heavy weight of the darkness has dissolved into a moment of the unknown (*ma*). Naoshima Island is a place full of such dense atmospheric experiences, which I will describe more in the chapter naoshima.

- 1 entrance/exit
- 2 way inside
- 3 bench
- 4 empty space / "screen"
- 5 way out

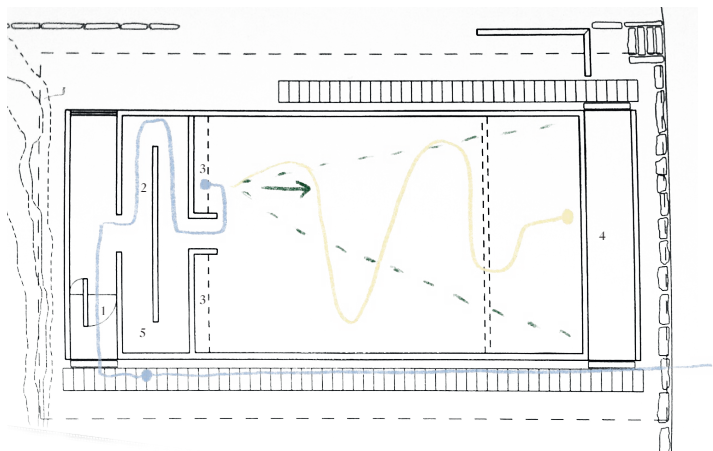


fig.114



way through Zugui-do, kyomizudera, Kyoto



The feeling of the darkness is an experience we also encounter in one of the subtemples at kyomizudera. At Zugui-do, entering the space underneath one of a subtemple promises a good fortune. One climbs the narrow stairs down until, there is only complete blackness- Quite claustrophobic, there is no option to turn around, the walls of massive stone damp- you need to feel your way via a rope until you make it to a small room, with a large stone. The stone is just lit as much to make it out in the darkness. After circling the stone, a similar dark and narrow path leads back to the temple entrance. above: floorplan of minamidara

Sensing nothingness  
(ma) is a way to seek  
our existence in rela-  
tion to the world and  
to refine our senses.  
The perception at the  
start, while the right  
page shows the slowly  
emerging "screen".  
Is the flag moving in  
the wind or is the wind  
moving the flag? (cf.  
Okakura 1906)  
*ma* lets us fill the emp-  
ty space with our own  
thoughts. It is the  
connecting space, that  
relates and weaves the  
things together, as in  
the stonegardens.



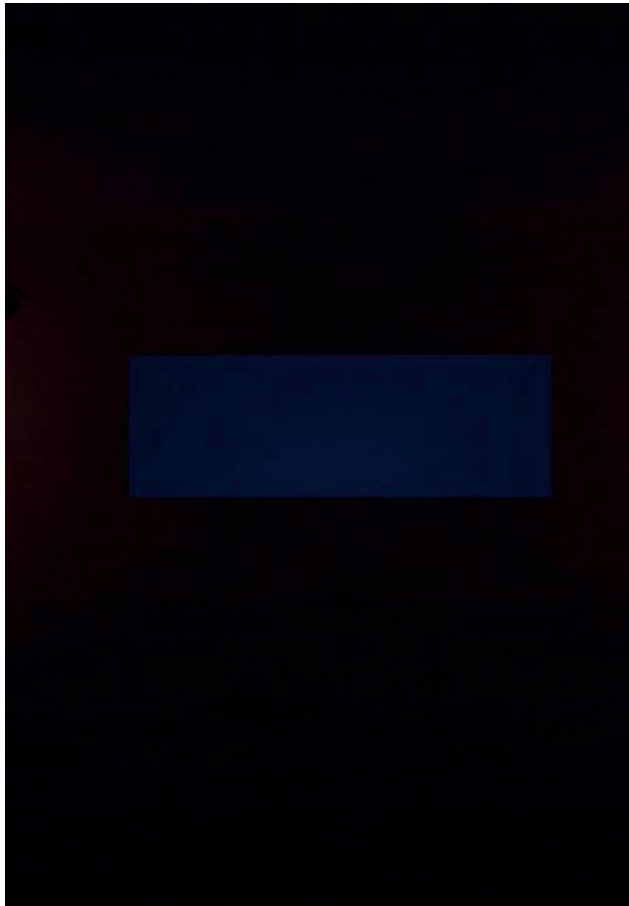


fig.115

Backside of the Moon 1999, Minamidera, James Turrell,  
Naoshima



The absence of water- at ginkaku-ji (1484) present present as "sea of silver sand" (ginsadan garden) and as kogetsudai, a cone of sand in which the moon's mirrored image is viewed. the Silver pavillon is coined as an important turn towards the humble aesthetic of the Sukiya style in architecture, built by the eighth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimasa.

fig.116  
kogetsudai, Ginkaku-ji, Kyoto





5.

darkness and fireflies



fig.11\*  
Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto

From time to time  
The clouds give rest  
To the moon beholders.

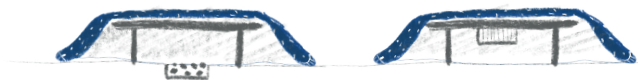
Basho



fig.118



irori, Ezichen, July 2018



#### humble living

In the cold time of the year, the only place that spent warmth was the kotatsu, a table with a blanket, underneath the irori (sunken hearth). Despite central heating is more and more integrated in new buildings, a kotatsu is still common in japanese homes. The traditional irori is here replaced by a small electric heated table.

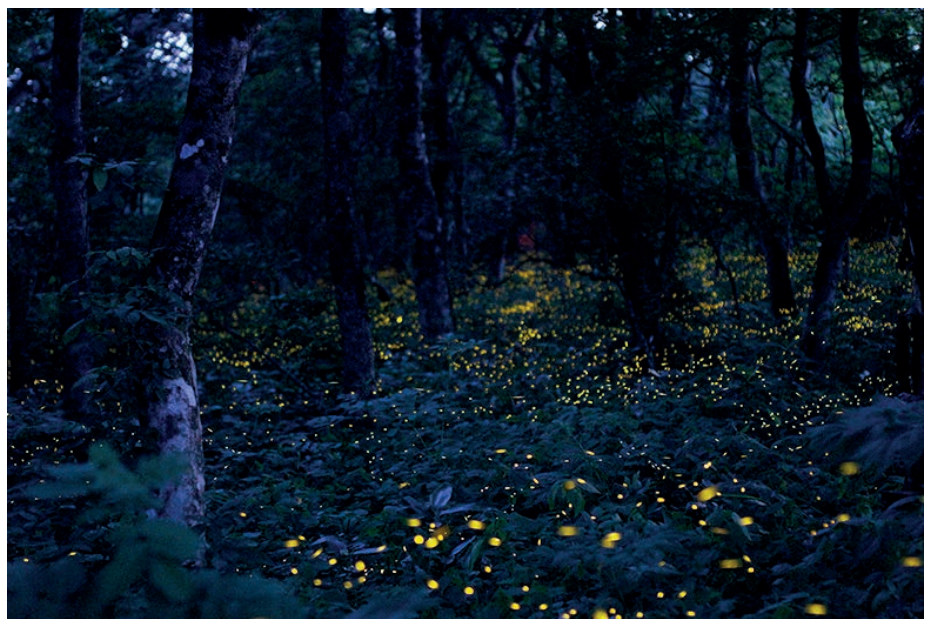


On the ridge of the hills,  
dimly shines the moonlight.  
Fireflies are flitting  
In their pale light.

Dōgen

(in: Takahashi 1983)

fig.119





## The hidden

Another characteristic of Japanese aesthetics is an atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery, which is called *yūgen*. It is the beauty of the subtle glow in the darkness, where a dim, tuned light shining through the shoji is more valued than the glazing sunlight. The beauty lies in the darkness, in a single glow, in the hidden, in the moss thriving, not in the rose flowering. As Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Okakura Kakuzō express in their books. It is a beauty found in the hidden and the mysterious.

72.

See discussion in the chapter before

While *ma* stands for the void itself, the term *yūgen* is more the feeling that comes with certain kinds of voidness. It is more a dark being, mysterious. While *ma* is invisible and hard to define, I imagine to feel the presence or absence of *yūgen* quite visible. *Ma* is colored white<sup>72</sup> or transparent, being the clouds hiding the mountain, the other is black and maybe the being of the shadow, or the mysterious beings Hayao Miyazaki imagines to live in the forests, Isozaki describes in his exhibition, spirits or *kami* come out of dark spots, where they transcend from their world to ours through gates (cf. Isozaki 1976). It is darkness, but not a darkness to fear as in western concepts, where the darkness and shadow signify often a negative connoted connection. It is the densest of densest fogs where you can't see your own hands, it is the Mount Fuji being the most perfect when it sits behind the clouds or the nothingness when Mount Fuji is not visible:

“When looking at autumn mountains through mist, the view be indistinct yet

have great depth. Although few autumn leaves may be visible through the mist, is is alluring. The limitless vista created in imagination far surpasses anything one can see more clearly.”(Koshiro quoting Kamo no Chōmei 1995)

*Yūgen*, mysterious but still part of the worldly, plays a vital role in understanding the perception of Japanese aesthetics. Deriving from the Chinese, the term *yūgen* means literal shadowy darkness, while *Yū* (幽) stands for faintness or dimness, and *gen* (玄) means dark, black or mystery, (Izutsu and Izutsu 1981:27). The term indicates a “profound mystery” (Odin 2001:104) and “usually has a link to darkness and abyss” (Kwan 2012). It creates a thick atmosphere, that one can almost touch with one's own hand, similar to the artwork of James Turrell's Backside of the Moon. One could say it has no color, or if, then it is deep in saturation and contrast, like it is glowing. It is the light and shadow, the night of the day. For Nitschke, who recites the ideas of famous landscape designer Shigemori Mirei about the Japanese aesthetical ideals, *yūgen* constitutes a “a profound and austere elegance concealing a multi-layered symbolism”(Nitschke 2003:105). This symbolism and deep metaphorical level, which is transported by poetic pictures in nature, is closely related to the pathos of things (*mono no aware*), which focuses on the inner qualities of a moment, thing or natural phenomena. While *ma* is rather an emptiness in which you don't step into, a place rather for *mitate* or *satori* (enlightenment), *yūgen* “invites you or seduces you to tumble into it, to lose yourself” (Sartwell 2006:113), to dream. It is the world of “the invisible things” where the “sense of being beyond reality” permeates” (Tsubaki 1971: 57). But it is not seen as another world but it is the world we live in, as Lazarin notices: “Yūgen is not only an aesthetic quality; it also means spiritual transcendence in the Zen Buddhist sense of living intensely in the present moment” (Lazarin 2014:149).

73. haiku is a form of poetry characterized by three lines, it's reference to nature's beauty and most important the break, pause or *ma*.

*Yūgen* manifests itself in the everyday phenomenon of nature, as the fog that hides Mount Fuji or the mysterious pause in a *haiku*<sup>73</sup> or Nō-theatre. It describes a high subtle state, where the appreciation of beauty aims for a mysterious darkness instead of fearing the unknown, that “sug-

gests an elegant beauty concealing profound depth, a beauty (...) tinged with the fundamental sadness of all evanescent life” (Nitschke, 2002:106). The deep metaphorical level of *yūgen* is influenced by the school of Zen and Dao scholars, which had a great influence on art and daily life in the Kamakura (1185-1333) and Muromachi period (1336-1573). The philosophical concept is based on the mediation of *zazen* or *shikan* (tranquility or insight), practiced by the Tendai School (Odin 2001:104). It is a concept of tranquility where “every phenomenon in nature (is seen) as a spontaneous manifestation of the Buddha nature itself” (Odin 2001:106). The *waka* poetry, especially in Dōgen’s poetry, are brought in connection to the concept of these aesthetic principles, where the contemplation of time-being and impermanence lie at the core. The concept of *yūgen* is based on tranquility and the ephemeral (*mujō*). It is found in the awareness of the present time or being-time (*uji*):

“Dōgen’s notion of impermanence-Buddha-nature (*mujō busshō*) in the flux of being-time (*uji*) reflects the aesthetic of perishability expressed by the ideal of *mono no aware*, the “sad beauty of things,” just as his notion of “presence of things as they are” (*genjōkōan*) reflects the aesthetic ideal of *yūgen*, hidden depths. (...) An example of Dōgen’s original *waka* poetry manifesting the mysterious beauty of *yūgen* in nature using the codified image of the full moon in the twilight darkness of an autumn evening(...)” (Odin 2001:110)

Accepting “things as they are”, as Odin states, a reflection on nature and beauty I have mentioned before, permeates Japanese culture, a beauty of reality. This aesthetic value, where nature is the manifestation of the beauty found in the present world. While it transports a sublimity, darkness and profundity at the same time (Nitschke 2003:106), in doing so it is also a way to refine our senses and emotions towards the world (Odin 2001:110), a quality we have lost in the world today as Eliasson and Hara criticize (Hara 2017).

The phenomenon of *yūgen* is expressed in the absence of something, therefore one can say in *ma*, the moon stays hidden, we can only imagine it, a great moment of transience as the moment will pass, too. This moment of

a break, the cutting act is also called *kire*. The void, the nothing, the invisible that focuses our attention and defines the atmosphere of the moment, in favor of the natural beauty, and not the permanence as in Western culture. This permanence and certainty is also expressed in architecture, maybe best met by Vitruvius's three principles, that embody a different concept of durability:

“When Vitruvius gazed into the heavens, he saw order and did his best to replicate these proportions in patterns which have defined Western architecture until modern times. Japanese see order in the great cycle of the Buddhist year, the eternal return, but they map it on the Earth with the maxim “make a circle, then break the circle.” Breaking the circle is the moment of “ha” which gives the building its aesthetic delight (*hana*), but it is also an occasion for transcendence (*yūgen*). This sense that the perfection of the circle is only achieved when the circle is momentarily broken is expressed in the well-known poem of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694): The old pond— frog jumping water sound. (*Furu ike ya Kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto*) (Lazarin 2014:51)

It is accepting the effort, while we could live more easily, marked by the invisible ephemeral and hidden things: the glow of the rainbow that might appear, the tides moved by the moon back and forth, like Sambuichi's architecture that works with these ephemeral elements of the earth.



fig.120



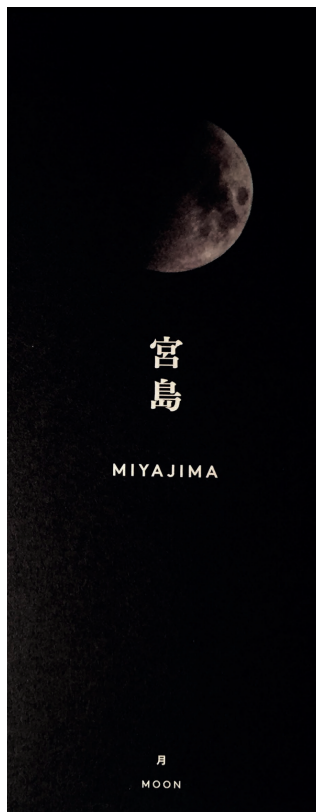


fig.121

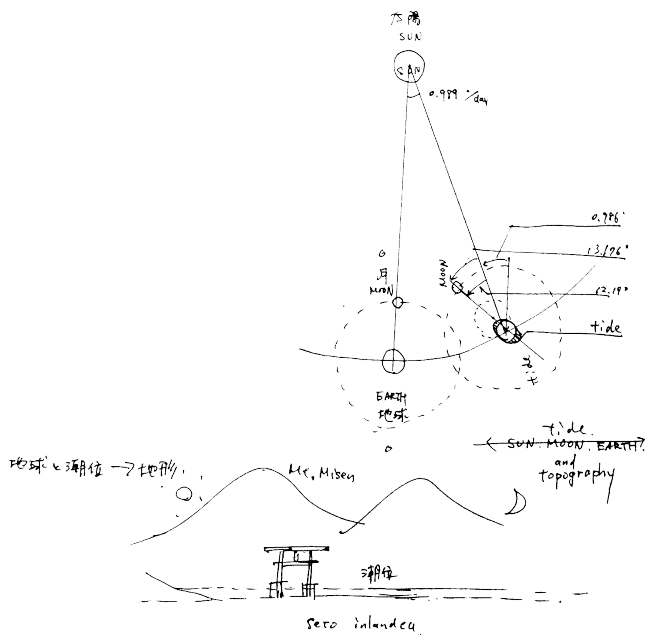


fig.121

the moon as ab-  
sence, it transmits  
no light by itself.

*fig.122*

Itsukushima Shrine





## moss and water

“I want you to understand, I want you to see and feel that moving materials and wind, water and sun are themselves aspects of the culture, history and customs of the villages that coexist with the terrain. In other words, they are basic elements of the wisest relationship between the activities of the people and the earth.”(Sambuichi 2017 :299)

The aesthetic of the ephemeral or transitory „manifests in subtle shifts of perception that are not at first obvious to the visitor“. In the installation by Hiroshi Sambuichi in the 'Cisterne', Copenhagen, patches of moss glow in the damp darkness, while sometimes, if one is patient, the sun and the artificial rainshower meet in the perfect moment, to create a beautiful rainbow dancing in the glow of light next to the darkness of the underground (Jensen 2017). 40sqm of moss from the Gribskoc forest create a small island, while the visitors can walk around the exhibition space filled with water on walkways, constructed of fine *hinoki* and *sugi* wood, imported from Japan, lit only by natural light. In traditional japanese boats (*tarai-bune*), the visitors could take a boat ride, a way to experience the garden, as if on a pond of the gardens in the Heian times.

Sambuichi's work opens up the hidden qualities of a space and „instead of creating physical boundary between nature and architecture, he creates a symbiosis“ (Hiroshi Sambuichi - the Water). The installation in the *Cisterne* was inspired by the moving water of the Itsukushima Shrine, which has been defined by the moon, „unchanged for a thousand years“ (Sambuichi 2017:19). Here at the Itsukushima Shrine<sup>74</sup>, located in Hatsukaichi, on the

74.  
Listed as UNESCO  
WORLD Heritage  
Site, and National  
Treasure

small island of Miyajima, Hiroshima, the ebb and flow define the picture of the water surface, that stays never still, that reveals and hides constantly. The shrine architecture is famous for its construction, floating over the water and the „floating“ *torii*, made from Camphor Wood. From here one can also see Mount Misen, one of the three famous views of Japan.

Hiroshis Sambuichi's work is - besides the project in Copenhagen- mainly located in the area of the Seto Inland Sea, his architecture including "moving materials of the area or village, such as the wind, water, and sun". His architecture, "where forces manifest themselves through the materials of the earth in all three states of matter": "Sambuichi considers his works of architecture as details of the Earth and its phenomena, blurring the distinction between the built and the natural landscapes" (Lee 2016 :14). For him the moving materials form the solid, and at the same time, the solid forms the fluid- like a riverbed forming its way- or the earth giving the flow of the water space. His observings are similar to the ideas of the *Sakuteiki*, where one has to grasp the principles of nature, to learn from it, trying to manifest the the ephemeral state.

His buildings on Naoshima Island are built examples, the wind part of the Naoshima Hall project and of the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum Museum on Inujima Island. Lee describes in his essay two approaches to architecture: the measurable reality and the "architectural intuition going by an idea of genius loci, with which the (...)architect can grasp an elusive but immortal and presumably changeless spirit of a place", the last one being Sambuichis approach. "In essence Sambuichi considers architecture as a plant" (cf. Lee 2016 :14), observing the everchanging cycle of the seasons and nature's forces. His projects display the character of something in between tradition and present-day. His works integrate the atmosphere of the ephemeral and pure materials, like the moon and the water, moss and wood, the constant change, and the absent, trying to shape awareness for the natural elements of the earth.



fig.123



## Tsukimi - moon viewing

The experienced in the Japanese garden is like waiting for something absent, as is the waiting for the moon. Longing and waiting is part of the Japanese culture, patience part of Zen Buddhism that implies one's „own act of waiting to see clearly” (cf. Walker 2017:71). The moon is present in Asian philosophy and central to spiritual thinking as Buddhism, Chinese geomantia or Confucianism. It controls the water, nature's moods and emits a poetic appeal onto the Japanese culture and arts. The Japanese calendar was based on the moon cycles until the opening to the western ideals in the modern era. The moon is subject of many pieces of art, especially in literature, and has been part of the Japanese culture since its beginnings, as in the Tale of Ise, where the sungoddess was married with her brother the god of the moon. The moon and the sun, part of the rich symbolic culture of Japan, have found their way also to the garden and architecture.

Japan has a „conscious and highly developed perception of the moon“ and moon viewing (*tsukimi*) has been part of Japanese culture in a poetic sense since the Heian Period (cf. Kuitert 2010:5). It is a central symbol for the aesthetics of *mono no aware* and *yūgen* and also a common theme in garden design. *Tsukimi-dai* (moon-viewing-deck or moon-viewing-platform) is part of temples and aristocratic architecture, especially from the 17th century on, when the ideal of impermanence and modesty found great approval.



But the beauty of the moon is not found in looking at it directly, but a mirrored picture of the moon is observed. From the *tsukimidai*, the reflection of the moon is looked at in the surface of a pond. It is the reflection which is viewed, the actual is hidden.<sup>75</sup>

A famous example is the moon viewing platform of the Katsura Imperial Villa. The Villa Katsura is famous for incorporating the typical *Sukiya* architecture<sup>76</sup> that found pleasure in the humble and modest, in the beauty of the essence of nature. A moon viewing platform is part of the old shoin and the Geppa-rō, a detached hut, located in the garden, the name translates as “Moon Wave Turret“. Inspired by the *Genji monogatari*, the moon viewing platform, as the Katsura as a whole, the story referring to the poems of the novel. The gardens of Katsura contain even rocks, that are laid out in favour of the moon watching: “Used for nighttime lunar rituals, this garden contains a number of unusually shaped rocks that have been positioned with care so that they align with one another as well as with the direction of the rising moon” (Keane 1996:333).

Another example is the Silver Pavillon, where the pond is replaced by a typical drygarden. Full of white pebbles it contains the *kogetsudai*, a cone out of gravels. At fullmoon nights, the view onto the cone from above is said to look like the mirrored picture of a moon in a pond.

Zen-buddhism and *yūgen* are both interested in “the true nature of reality that hides behind the illusory aspects of the world” (Nitschke 1993:105). The beauty of the ephemeral and the mysterious of the aesthetic is also part of architecture, where conditions such as shadows have been accepted as unavoidable and have been elevated to a refined beauty of natural spectacles, that are part of the (spatial) experience. Here nothing external is imposed on nature, but rather it acts in behalf of nature. The architecture does not only enter a close connection to nature through its openness towards the outside or through its special connectivity by gentle transitions, but also the contemplation of poetic ideals, which emerged from Buddhism

75.

A reason for studying the reflection might also come from the belief of shinto-priests. The direct gaze at the moon is said to make them mad. The mysterious power is too much to look at directly, so they studied the reflection of the moon (cf. Walker 2017)

76.

The style of architecture is strongly connected to the tea culture, which will be part of the discussion in the following chapter moss and dew

77.

lend form the title of Juniya Ishigami's exhibition at the Venice Biennale 2010, "how small? how vast? how architecture grows", He works with different kinds of scale in architecture, questioning our relationships to things. for him a cup is also architecture, also for Olafur Eliasson (cf. Eliasson 2012).

and *Shintō* (in connection with art), are part of the structure and spatial experience, that are set to relate us to our environment. No matter "how small or vast"<sup>77</sup>, it questions our current perception and condition, where we find ourselves ponding, contemplating on the invisible (*ma*), the inner being of things and source of life. The beauty of the ephemeral fluxus of nature is extracted as microcosmos und macrocosmos:

"The individual's existence is the same as the totality's, and the microcosm is amplified in the macrocosm. This is the unique aspect of this aesthetic experience." (Odin 2001:108)

Besides the moon viewing platform, Katsura embodies the ideals of the relationship to nature of the Japanese people (Isozaki and Sato 1993). *Mono no aware*, *yugen* and *wabi sabi* are part of the architecture and daily life, the large complex designed in dialogue with nature. An architecture that doesn't exclude the outside, but which is an inherent part of the design concept. The architecture of Katsura is built to tell a melancholic poetic story in harmony with nature, which is not made to surpass but wants to embrace the cosmological whole. While it marks also an example of how the ideals of beauty shifted once again: At that time the important has completely shifted to the non visible and vague pictures of (nature's) beauty, where finally the moon was not only the most beautiful when behind the fog or watched mirrored in a pond, but now the ideals was the crescent moon (Platzek 2017:62). Also daily things, as a cup of green tea found its way into a refined aesthetic realm, that embraces the path in the mountains and the power of a single flower, where not the sunlight is the ideal, but the different shades of silver moonlight. There is a wisdom in Zen: "what is mediated upon is nothing that is not of the moon". And the moon's „mood is associated with the Japanese aesthetic of wabi sabi- the acceptance that beauty and its brightness can only be imperfect and transient" (Walker 2017:73).

The Silver Pavillon I just mentioned before, where the moon is reflected on a mound of white sand is coined as another great shift in architecture and culture, that represents another great refinement of the aesthetic

ideals, in the way the world and nature is perceived, towards the aesthetics of *wabi* and *sabi*, the tea ceremony and its green and mossy gardens (Platzek 2017 :35). The Gold Pavillon (*Kinkaku-ji*), built in 1397, and the Silver Pavillon (*Ginkaku-Ji*), finished in 1490, are both located in Kyōto: the first one was built for the emperor and is decorated with gold leaves, the second one, was built for the emperor's grandson Yoshimasa. While the first is gilded, only the name of the second pavillon gives a hint of the silver light of the moon (Walker 2017:73)<sup>78</sup> and characterizes the Japanese aesthetic of the tea ceremony:

„(...)a profound change in the concept of beauty , which refrained from merely praising things, that could be immediatly grasped in its splendour. Instead, the sense of beauty turned to those things which revealed not their full appearance, but rather which lay hidden, which could even be unfinished. hese things were considered beautiful because the process of becoming and passing away was depicted in them- as in the movement of the moon. This way of thinking corresponds to wabi, and it led to the structure of empowerment of an applied spiritual art, the tea path.“ (Platzek 2017:35)

78.

it is not wrapped in silver as the gold pavilion is actually in gold, but it is also not clear, whether it was supposed to at first.  
(ibid.: :73)

Though the hidden, ephemeral and the nature of beauty was already part since the Heian times or maybe as far back as *Shintō*, the aesthetic of the tea ceremony applied the principles more to daily life. By choreographing daily tasks, consciousness was created towards the normal, with our senses towards things and environment refined, which I will discuss in the last part of the thesis.

- 1 Villa Katsura
- 2 moon viewing platform
- 3 Shokintei
- 4 Gepparo
- 5 Amanohashidate
- 6 main gate





fig.124  
Villa Katsura

Since ancient times Katsura village as location was famous for watching the moon rise over the river. The village of Katsura is seen as place where “the moon god’s sacred tree — the tree associated with the auspicious advent of food on earth — is supposed to have grown.” and Tsukuyomi no mikoto descended to the Katsura tree in the village. According to a Chinese tale a Katsura tree grows on the moon and cast the shadows. (cf. Piévé 2017) Imperial Villa Katsura is probably the most recited example in architecture

for the refined, humble and “natural” beauty, opposed to western ideals of the same time, so stand Versailles of Louis XIV and Katsura for opposing values and concepts of philosophy. Katsura played a great part in the interpretation of the Japanese architecture by the Western modernists. But instead of an overinterpreted “simplicity” and function, Villa Katsura is based on a profound poetic and philosophical understanding of nature.

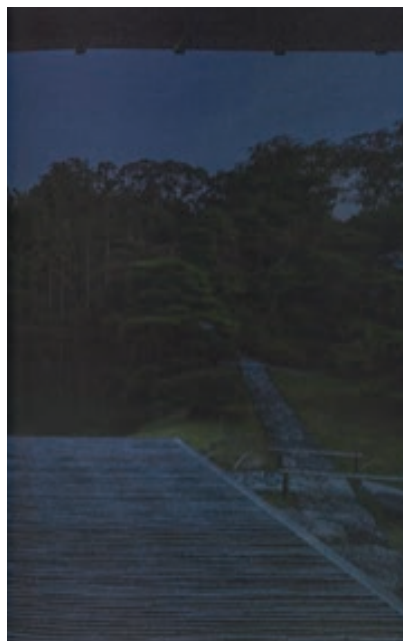
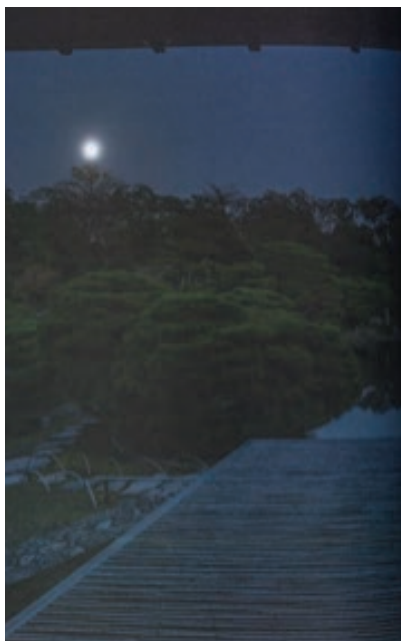


fig.125  
Villa Katsura

Tsuki no sumu  
Kawa no wochinaru  
Sato nareba  
Katsura no kage ha  
Nodokekaruran

“While you sojourn  
By the limpid river  
Mirror of the moon,  
How beautiful must be  
The reflection of the Katsura [in the water]”

genji monogatari



fig.127

stepping stones to the tsukimidai, Villa Katsura





fig.127  
teapavillon Shokintei (moon-wave teahouse),  
Villa Katsura









As (almost) concluding chapter of my thesis, I would like to discuss shortly the influence of the tea-ceremony in the style of *wabicha* on Japan's aesthetic ideals and the perception of our environment: "The tea ceremony represents with few means and in small space a certain mind and in this a conception of the universe. A teahut is a place that dissolves our everyday dispositions" (Platzek 2017).

It is a point in history, after a time of war, which is set at the same time as the European Renaissance: the Azuchi-Momoyama Period transported an aristocratic, poetic beauty and the spiritual thoughts of *shinto* and Buddhism to live in harmony with nature into a kind of an "everyday" philosophy. After a time of instability, the society favoured a tranquility and earthen vibe, even in aristocratic environments as the famous Katsura Villa. Despite the fact, that the traditional houses were already made out of simple natural materials as wood, *washi* and clay, now the use of these materials were now applied in a more raw and "unworked" condition, while a refined sense of elegance or beauty embedded the architecture and objects even more into nature. The aesthetic of *wabi* ("tranquil simplicity"), *sabi* ("patina of age") and *suki* (subtle or refined elegance) is the conclusion and summary of the concepts that have developed in Japan until then and created an everlasting influence on the Japanese culture and perception of things until today. Therefore, Itō describes it even as "essence of Japanese beauty" (Itō 1993), bringing sincerity towards existence to a peak.

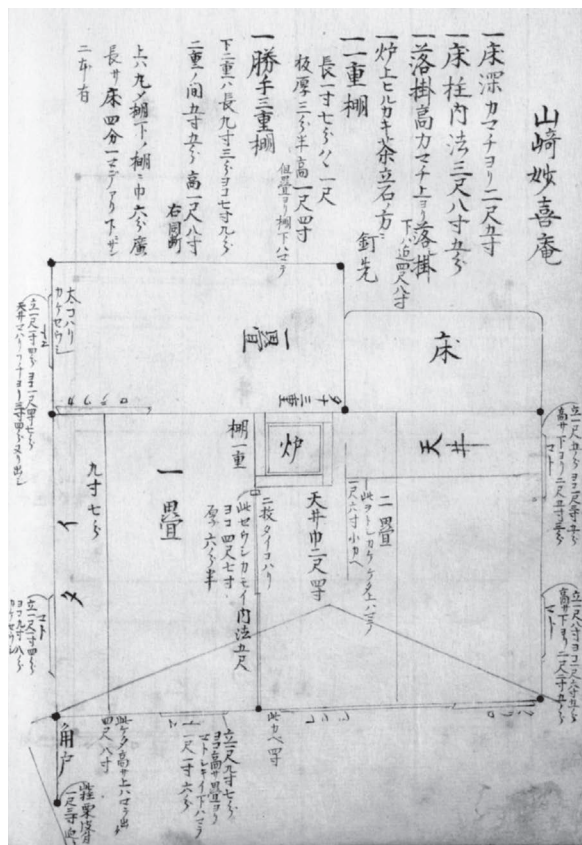


fig.128  
plan of tai-an

The illustration technique which was common at those times depict the idea of the teahouse being part of the garden. Stepping Stones and the teahouse are drawn in top view, the imagined atmosphere for the garden landscape is depicted frontal.



fig.129



## Moss and dew

“The afternoon glow is brightening the bamboos, the fountains are bubbling with delight, the sighing of the pines is heard in our kettle. Let us dream of evanescence, and linger in the beautiful foolishness of things.” (Okakura 1906)

79.

It is the first garden, that is designed for the purpose to walk in it. Before the garden experience was mostly limited to the view, one had from the veranda. (Ito 1999:84)

80. lit. hot water for tea

The teagarden's purpose is, opposed to the rock and temple gardens, to be entered and experienced physically<sup>79</sup>. The dewy path and fallen leaves after a rainfall, the smell, the sound of one's step on the stones, touching your senses and mind physically. It is a lush place, full of vegetation, glowing in different shades of green, moss always present, covering the earth. In the *roji* (dewy ground) (Fehrer 2005:105) the architecture and the garden are deeply intertwined and this intense connection is tangible, the garden stage for an immersive experience. Often placed in a dense urban, it opens a window to another world, beyond the daily life. The garden is part of the tea ceremony, that takes place in the teahut (*chanyou*). The birthplace of the *chanoyu*<sup>80</sup> in the style of the *wabicha* in the 16th century was the dense city of Kyōto. The gardens are laid out as a desolate mountain path, the teahut (*chashitsu* or *soan*) the hermit hut in the mountains. For the guest, who walk down the path the situation shall evoke the feeling, that the host is coming from a simple hut in the mountains (Fehrer 2005).

The stepping stones demand your full attention, while on the narrow path just one person can walk behind the other. The dew after a rainfall sits on



the moss or trickles down a green bamboo leaf, your mind, where the old forest has grown high and the grounds are covered with all kind of species, the air full of sounds. Mysterious like a path through the mountains, where the air is clear, the breeze is cool. The teagarden is a garden that reaches out to all of your senses- smell of the wet wood, the fresh ground, a fresh breeze. What Bachelard says is true here, “the trace of a scent, a fragile smell, can mean a whole climate of an imaginary world” (Bachelard 1957:204). Plants seem alive, rustling gently, the earth covered in different hues of green moss species. Moss is able to sense changes in the environment (cf. the guardian), as subtle as the moss’s senses yours will become here too.

At the heart of the teagarden (*rojī*) lies the impermanence and decay of nature. It is not empty and there is no actual visible void<sup>81</sup>. One will probably always find some fallen leaves on the ground or in a pit - have they been shattered or have they just fallen down? The leaves suggest that the path had just been cleaned (Okakura 1906).

While the garden is the first stage of the tea ceremony, the aim or last stage of the spatial experience is the teahut, in where the actual tea ceremony of drinking tea takes place. But before we are allowed to taste a bowl of powdered green tea (*matcha*), we need to pass through the teagarden. Here different elements break or cut the path now and then and demand our attention. We walk through small episodes, where different points mark the journey. A stone basin (*tsukubai*), a stone lantern (*ishidoro*), a fallen acer leaf, or a small stone, where a bamboo string is wrapped around. We pass through many gates, with each of them we move further away from the everyday world, we have just come from. Up to these days electrical light is avoided and creates the picture of a “phantastic-unreal world away from everyday reality”(Ito 1999:85). In that sense we find ourselves in a retreat within and of the urban city, a place to calm down, but which needs our full attention at the same time.

81.

The teahut itself is seen as *ma*.(cf. Fehrer 2005)

Nothing marks such a world beyond as clear as the passing of a gate

(*tori-i*). Gates define a threshold and give way for the contemplating of entering a new space. They are a symbol and physical experience that mark entering a world different from the one before. In shinto a gate, often painted in orange, traditionally means the threshold or division between the world (*zokkai*) and the divine or world of the gods (*shiniki*) (Kuma 2010), as in the famous Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyōto. Here, a physical and mental tunnel is created by placing one gate directly after the one before until we reach the top of the mountain.

There are various gates in the tea garden and all have their own names. The *nakakuguri* (the middle crawl-through gate), which as the name implies, stands just there, in the middle of the tea path, between the outer and the middle garden, the tiny hole around 60cmx60cm small, through which one has to crawl through and is greeted by the host. As Nitschke describes:

“it constitutes a device to increase one’s consciousness of oneself. Crawling through this strange gate makes one more conscious of one’s own body, and in addition, it requires everyone to bow and be humbled, regardless of social status in the ordinary world.”(Nitschke 1993:75)

These gates don’t only define a threshold to the beyond, but to ourselves and to our awareness. When we finally arrive at the teahouse, we have to crawl through another tiny opening, the *nijiriguchi* (crawl-through-entrance), an experience that lets us focus on the moment and environment, our crouching. Besides that such spatial tools shift the perception of a physical to a mental reality- making us small enlargens the feeling of the space that comes after (Nitschke 1993:75). Besides such gates, various kinds of path layouts structure our sense of place. In a tiny backyard garden we wander through different sceneries, while we never see the tea hut until we reach the last path, on which we walk towards it. Here the beauty is found in the natural, though it is “artificially” created, for example foliage or pineneedles are shattered on purpose. It is a way full of composed lookouts. Narrowed and cramped, the path is sprinkled with water and evokes a sense

of purity and freshness, that is called *sanro* (dew three times) (Ito 1999:84). The way to the grass thatched tea hut (soan) is choreographed, the steps on the stones define our perception of time and space. A larger stone telling us to wait for moment, to pause. The stepping stones (*tobi-ishi*) determine our rhythm and pace. There are larger stones set at certain points<sup>87</sup>, as kind of resting moment or lookout, where one can stand with two feet on them, and smaller ones, about 40cm in diameter, where just one foot finds place to step on. The gap (*ma*) between two stones is small, just 10cm, as large as one can step in a traditional kimono. There are special stones (*yaku-ishi*) reserved for special purposes, like stone for the host or the stone in front of the water basin (Fehrer 2005:111).

82.  
about 4 larger stones  
on 2m path (Ito  
1999)

Similar to Ryōan-ji, where it is as if most of the time denied to see all of the 15 stones, also the “whole” garden stays hidden: step for step we are just allowed to see an extract, our visual axis often disrupted. The technique is called *miegakure*, literal “hiding and revealing”, where “passing through creates a moment of highest concentration and attention” (Fehrer 2005:109). A space concept of depth and layering called *oku* (奥)<sup>83</sup>, that constantly veils like the translucent vague boundaries until we are in the “innermost area” (Fumihiko 1979), which is constituted here by the teahut. The more closer we get to the teahut, the smaller become the steps, while the stones wet and mossy, shall protrude the dewy ground as if they were growing out of the earth. The placing of the stones is done as careful as implied by the *Sakuteiki*, adding a rich aesthetical poetry: So is the *nor-ishi*, that is part of the stones just right in front of the teahouse, placed to exactly catch the raindrop falling down from the roof (Fehrer 2005:119).

83. the term was  
defined Maki  
Fumihiko, Japanese  
City Spaces and the  
Concept of Oku, in  
“The Japan Archi-  
tect”, 1979

fig.130





fig.131

nakakuguri, lit- middle crawl through gate,  
Omotesenke school, Kyoto

Sen no Sōtan  
threw a hand  
full of beans  
in front of the  
nijiriguchi and  
laid out the  
stepping stones  
according to  
the incinden-  
tically fallen  
beans, which  
gives this  
arrangement its  
name. (cf. Fehrer  
2005: 115)





group of two



group of three



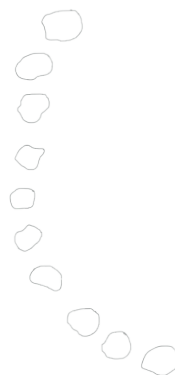
rain



flying geese formation  
(ganko haichi)



flat curve



wide curve



mame- make-ishi

("scattered bean  
stones") or also  
fallen petals





fig.133

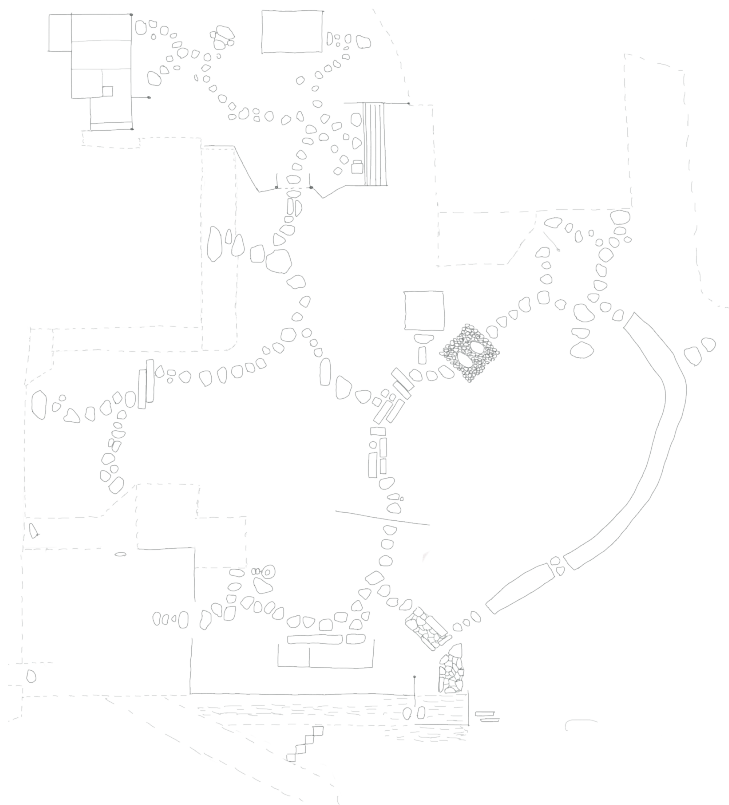
Villa Katsura

emphasizing  
the transitions  
as the passing  
of gates shape  
our awareness  
for the world  
we will en-  
counter beyond  
and reflection  
on the space  
we have just  
left behind .

fig.134

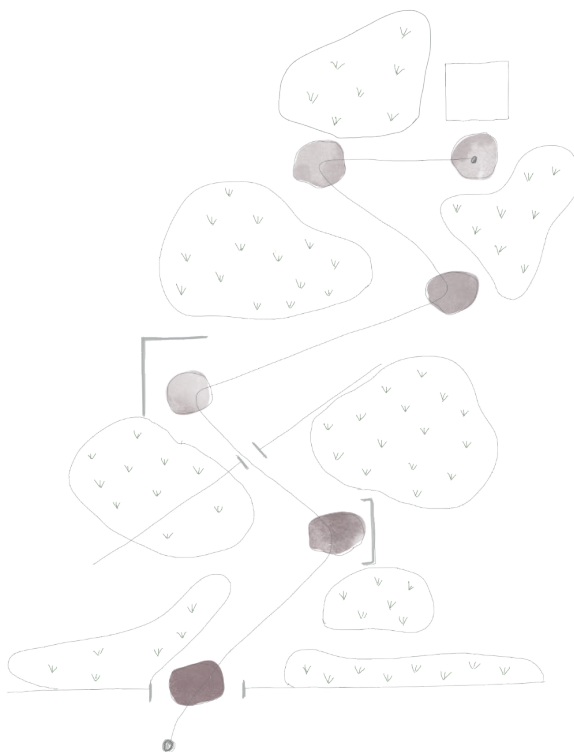
Upper Lawn Pavillon, 1959-1962, Alison and Peter Smithson





The technique of  
meigakure is not  
only applied to the  
teagarden, but the  
act of veiling and  
reveiling permeates  
Japanese architec-  
ture and culture.  
karger stones  
(fumiwake-ishi lit.  
path dividing) let  
us pause stone.

meigakure







the small  
crawling  
entrance to the  
teahouse let's  
us focus on the  
moment enter-  
ing, shifting  
our attention  
to all of our  
senses and the  
inner





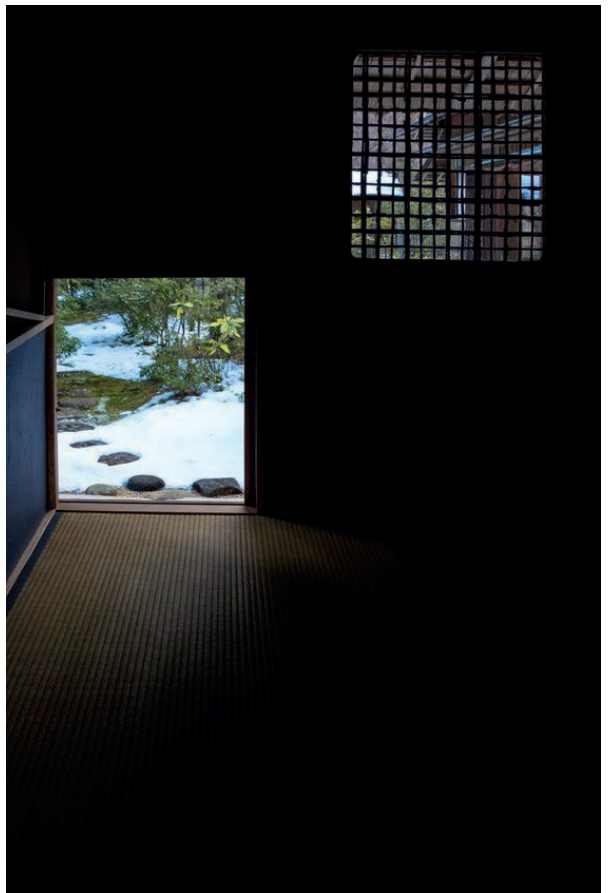
fig.135

The beauty of the everyday

the tea house  
is orientated  
inward, the  
space incor-  
porating ma.  
the interior  
defined by nat-  
ural materials  
in their raw  
state.

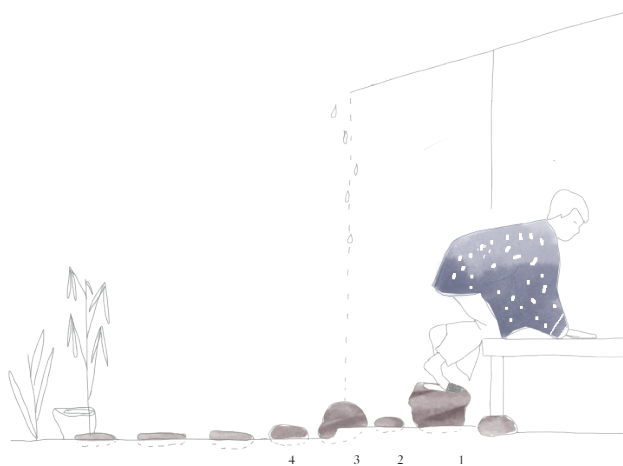
fig.136

the inner of the teahouse, ma



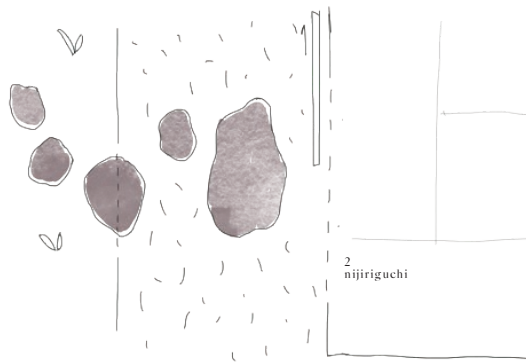


We need to  
focus on all the  
steps we take,  
laid out on  
humble stones.  
The nori-ishi is  
set exactly to  
catch the drops  
of water from  
dripping from  
the roof.



1 fumi-ishi  
2 ochi-ichi  
3 nori-ishi  
4 tobi-ishi

1 change of flooring+ edge of the roof





black clay

“When I open my eyes and look, the bowl is full of green tea. Within a small bowl Is a great expanse of nature. As I drink the tea quietly, the blue mountains and green waters become my home.” (Sen Sōshitsu XV 2002:88)<sup>84</sup>

The *wabicha* bears witness of the undeniable harmony with every being, every detail, where a cosmos can be encapsulated in a raindrop (cf. Ito 1999). The tea ceremony is a tool to refine our relationship with nature. The spiritual rituals of handling an object, that we encounter here, shift our focus to the importance of the inner being, as also Nute notes (cf. Nute 2004:56). The tea ceremony focuses on ordinary things, and heightens our attention to details, it let’s us rethink and reset our relationship to the objects and environment surrounding us. The presence in the Japanese culture undeniable as Okakura remarks:

“The long isolation of Japan from the rest of the world, so conducive to introspection, has been highly favourable to the development of Teaism. Our home and habits, costume and cuisine, porcelain, lacquer, painting—our very literature—all have been subject to its influence. No student of Japanese culture could ever ignore its presence.” (Okakura 1906:2)

Drinking tea is almost a “religion”. What it is for sure is a philosophical or spiritual path, a place where the boundaries between nature and humans blur and become one. The *chado* or *chanoyu* (path of tea) expresses not only an “aestheticism of the usual”, but encompasses the Japanese culture:

“It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life. The Philosophy of Tea is not mere aestheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for

84.  
Sen Sōshitsu XV  
belongs to the family  
line of Sen no Rikyu,  
which is called the  
Urasenke school

it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature.” (Okakura 1906/2001:4)

The teapath as such describes an experience and awareness towards the smallest details and therefor creates a bond with our environment. It is an expression of spiritual and aesthetic ideals of Zen Buddhism and is implemented in the *do* (path or way) (Okakura 1906/2001). The aesthetic culture, which is commonly known of as *wabi-sabi*, arose with the tea ceremony to a predominant aesthetic value, introduced by Sen no Rikyu. Its roots, meaning and explanation lays deeply in the tradition of the philosophical praxis of shintoism and Zen Buddhism. As Koren states, “Wabi-Sabi could even be called the “Zen of Things”, as it exemplifies many of Zen’s core spiritual-philosophical tenets”(Koren 2008:16).

The *chanyou* and the tradition of tea drinking have had a long history in Japan. But in the 15th century the celebration of drinking tea underwent a change and was transformed into an art form. First by Murata Jukō (1422-1502), he began to invite his guest into a tiny 4 and a half tatami mat teahouse instead of expansive pereception rooms, then Takeno Jōō and finally Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), who, influenced by the school of Zen buddhism, developed in the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1600) the classic *cha* into the *wabicha*, as it is commonly known today. He found beauty in ordinary things of life and most important nature itself (Sartwell 2015:116). The ideal teahouse for him was a grass thatched hut, living a simple, lonely life as an eremite. It is the style of the so called *soan*, whose size can be as small as 1 and a half *tatami* mat. It was a step towards an austere “poverty” and modesty that became the expression of the wabi-aesthetic: Instead of carry on the traditions in tea ceremony by using perfect white and blue porcelain from China, Sen no Rikyū also started to use things from daily life, often from a rural or peasent environment (Okakura 1906). It is a favour towards the simple, as Sen no Rikyū notices about the tea ceremony it is only boiling water, preparing the tea, drinking it (Fehrer 2005). The newly introduced objects by Rikyū were simple things, that were made by specialised craftsmen. An example is the famous simple bamboo vase or

85.  
chawan is a bowl for  
drinking matcha tea

the ceramics in the style of *raku*. The *raku-chawans*<sup>85</sup> are all made by hand, using intuitive, almost rough techniques to give it a “natural “look” and its “quiet simplicity”, the aesthetic of wabi sabi. His most favoured tea bowl was a dark black *rakuchawan* by Chojiro (Omotesenke 2005). The natural look of the *raku* tea bowl expresses the attitude towards nature and implements the wabi aesthetic.

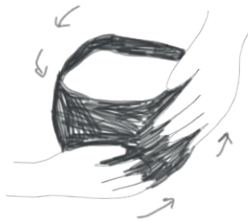
86. as in the Saku-  
teiki implies: that  
one must interpret  
it for oneself after  
learning from the  
master, which is open  
for interpretation as  
everyone is free to  
adjust it to their own  
kind of “school”.

Every detail and object is strictly<sup>86</sup> defined, the way the focus is put onto things questions our relation to the things surrounding us. How to hold the *chawan* for drinking, when and how to bow in front of the *ikebana*, how to eat the sweets- every procedure is determined. Every single movement in the tea ceremony, no matter how small, specified, choreographed and timed.<sup>71</sup> There are many small events involved in a tea ceremony, which can last up to 4 hours with various smaller and larger meals and different kinds of *matcha*, *koicha* (thick tea) and *usucha* (thin tea). On the homepage of the Omotesenke school for example, are more than 30 steps depicted in detail in a photographic series. Drinking tea is heightened to an art form, but through the experience we gain awareness and attention towards such things and details, that we had never before. That the direction of the chopsticks or the holding of a *chawan* can have a meaning might seem at first strange, but it makes us thoughtful and after leaving the *teahut*, we take with us a carefullness to the everyday world, where human, things and nature become the same care.

87.  
there are various  
tea schools and with  
them the procedure, also the arrangement  
and details of the  
teagarden and *teahut*  
varies. The most  
famous schools are  
the Omotesenke,  
Urasenke and  
Mushanokōjisenke,  
that are all derive  
from the school  
of Sen no Rikyu  
(Fehrer 2005)

The host and guests are devoted to every movement they make, the things itself were already manufactured with the greatest devotion of the craftsmen. The experience that lies beyond the everyday world, as Okakura says, but is at the same time what we take with us. Here in the *wabicha* developed not just “the idea of the ‘movement’ and the ‘sequenced aesthetical impressions’, but also the idea of misusing or repurposing of objects (Also just simple everyday objects) for a pure aesthetical appreciation.” Things as found, as stones from the side of the road or simple farmer objects “could be high in worth, through a sensibility, that was tuned in a modest, refined, wistful beauty and which is expressed through the terms of wabi and sabi” (Ito 1999:85).

All movements  
of the host and  
guest are pre-  
defined in the  
tea ceremony:  
The gestures  
receiving the  
teabowl, how  
we are supposed  
to place it on  
the palms of our  
hands, how turn  
it, how to wipe  
and give it back.  
All gestures to  
appreciate the  
subtlest and to  
be aware of the  
beauty of the  
ordinary.







We walk con-  
sciously the  
apths, while  
gaps and subtle  
hints let us  
pause.



Sen no Rikyu  
used daily  
objects with  
patina instead  
of the fine  
white blue  
porcelain from  
China. The  
arrangement of  
objects, *teh*  
details and  
the handling  
are diligently  
recorded.



fig.137

bamboo vase, Sen no Rikyu

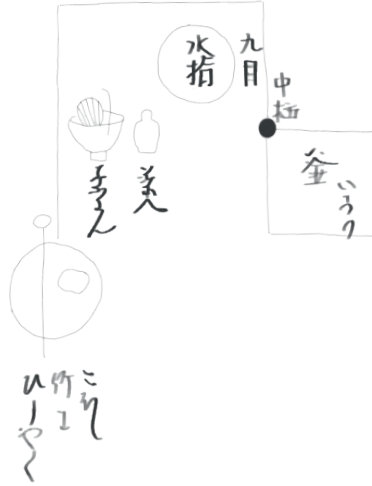


fig.138

"concerning the Seven Arrangements for the irori", Sen no Rikyu



## fallen leaves

“The kettle sings well, for pieces of iron are so arranged in the bottom as to produce a peculiar melody in which one may hear the echoes of a cataract muffled by clouds, of a distant sea breaking among the rocks, a rainstorm sweeping through a bamboo forest, or of the sighing of pines on some faraway hill.”  
(Okakura 1906)

The aesthetic of the *roji* is sensitive. It is the ephemeral, the untouchable. It is the motor of sensibility which drives the beauty of the Japanese relationship to the garden and nature: The beauty lies in the invisible, in one's own imagination, in the evanescence and impermanence, where one single blooming flower can evoke more than a bouquet. A teamaster stresses with the flower the moment of nature, the winter, a rainfall (cf. *ibid.*).

88.  
Perfection might be the wrong word because, wabi-sabi is not imperfect but is actually the most perfect situation of an object or being to be found on earth, because it is complete as nature itself. Imperfect is here seen as the western concept of perception of beauty and thus the modern concept of flawless, spotless and neat surfaces, which is actually imperfected nature and thus not complete.

The term or sensibility of *wabi-sabi* brings even more than a description of attributes, it shows again the deep relation and ongoing dialogue between things, non-things, nature and humans (Koren 2008:23). It is an aesthetic, where the beauty of the age is celebrated, the circle of death and life, the moment, the fragility and decay, more: a relationship to things based on invisible values.<sup>88</sup> It consists of the same flawlessness as life and nature does. This is it what makes it beautiful—it's pure dialogue in nature's spirit-while dust in the teahouse should be cleaned, a drop on the flower vase shall be kept as mental reminder of dew (Okakura 1906). Somehow it is melancholic and optimistic at the same time: “Wabi-Sabi is an aesthetic appreciation of the evanescence of life” (Koren 2008:54). This evanescence

is tangible in the garden as well as in objects. It is the perception, that the garden and the tsuboniwas are the most beautiful in winter, autumn or spring and not in summer, the aesthetic that sums it all are the words of *wabi sabi*, the “traditional Japanese beauty” (ibid:21), where small openings are cut into the *shoji* to watch the snow fall.

Sōetsu Yanagi describes the stage of the beauty of *wabi sabi* with the sweet-bitterness of the Japanese fruit called *shibui*<sup>89</sup>:

“A certain love of roughness is involved, behind which lurks a hidden beauty, to which we refer in our peculiar adjectives shibui, wabi and sabi.(. .) It is this beauty with inner implications that is referred to as shibui. It is not a beauty displayed before the viewer by its creator (...) a piece that will lead the viewer to draw beauty out of it for themselves. The world may abound with different aspects of beauty. Each person, according to his disposition and environment, will feel a special affinity to one or another aspect. But when their taste grows more refined, they will necessarily arrive at the beauty that is shibui.” (Yanagi 1989:123)

The taste of *shibui* is the refined taste of the “rustic” aesthetic, which is especially related to the *sukiya* style<sup>90</sup> besides the wabi tea ceremony (cf. Ito 1969), highlighting the natural patterns of the materials. Wandering through the tea garden (*roji*) is “a physical and mindful engagement with the space (...)” (Walker 2017:33) and was “designed to increase one’s consciousness” (Nitschke 1993:75). We meditate<sup>91</sup> here on ourselves, on objects, on a fallen leaf, on how to move our chawan bowl in our hands. Every step we take and every action we do it consciously, we become aware of what we are doing. While walking and passing the different gates one is concentrated and aware of the moment, of nature. It is immersive, while your curiosity is aroused. As little as it can be, often situated between the houses in the city, as much is there to explore. On the path to the teahouse (*sōan*) the time expands. Time passing, decay and impermanence are part of the teagarden and the teaceremony that follows at the end of the path. This garden “is also a place, where the visitor is made ‘aware of the pity of things’. The garden is a memento mori, that contemplates the passing of

89.

For Sartwell  
““shibui” can also  
mean “true”, “sim-  
ple,” or “chaste.” He  
also mentioned: “It  
captures a quality  
that is at once aes-  
thetic, ethical, and  
epistemological, that  
can be an aspect of  
what we make, what  
we are, and what we  
assert or express.”,  
for him to understand  
the bittersweetness, it  
is important to have  
understood yugen.  
(cf. Sartwell 2006:  
113)

90.

I will shortly outline  
the *sukiya* style at the  
end of the chapter

91.

Nitschke says, the  
teagarden is designed  
for meditation (cf.  
Nitschke 1993:75)

time and the passing of our own transient lives” (Walker 2017: 204).

The Teagarden is the realization of the aesthetic principles of *wabi-sabi*, and unites in the experience of the garden the sense of *yūgen*. The mysterious and melancholic vibe is part of it, as is the empathy for things (*mono no aware*) and the concept of *ma* (void). The term, that describes the ephemeral and a beauty of the impermanence and “austerity beauty” is called *wabi-sabi*, which is incorporated in the atmosphere of the tea ceremony. Here, the beauty lies in the aging, in the ordinary, in the normal, the path is mossy and dewy. *Wabi-sabi* implies a kind of vagueness, because it doesn’t rely on facts but is deeply connected to the spirit of nature. *Wabi* expresses an emotion, an expression of implicitness and rawness. It is also related to the sense of poetic loneliness of an eremite, “the misery of living alone in nature, away from society” (Koren 2008 21). Walker defines the term as following:

“The word *wabi* derives from the word *wa*, meaning balance and satisfaction, and is concerned with the lonely beauty of frugality, austerity and poverty. The verb *wabu* means to dwindle or fade, and *warubu* to grieve and worry, even to apologize - hinting at the implied humility. *Wabishii* is a word used to denote desolate place of loneliness, while *wabizumai* describes a frugal life of solitude, governed by the poetic principle of *wabi*.” (Walker 2017:201)

While *wabi* is more a state of being or a philosophy, *sabi* is seen more as the aesthetical term, often referred to as patina. Literal it can mean either “rusty” or also expresses a kind of melancholic and lyric “loneliness”, too:

“*Sabi*, perhaps the earlier of the terms, derives from a number of sources: *sabu*, a verb meaning “to wane;” and a noun, *susabi*, which can mean “desolation” and does so in the early poetry collection *Man’yōshū* (late eighth century). Other meanings include *sabiteru*, “to become rusty;” by extension “to become old;” and the adjective *sabishi* which meant, and still means, “lonely”“(Richie 2007:44)

Fallen leaves, rusty metal, stones, where moss patches start to grow, a crooked tree, a chawan, thrown in a spontaneous intuitive form, no a strict geometrical one. It evokes a feeling of incompleteness, a space like *ma*, like the space left blank on the canvas of the ink painting as



in Tohaku's Pine Trees, that is finished in our minds (*mitate*). Often the character of imperfection is ascribed to *wabi-sabi*, as used by Sartwell. But the meaning of imperfection is relative and implies in the Western mind often a feeling of non beauty and non ability- it is negative connoted. In this "imperfection" or unfinished moment (lat. imperfect=unfinished) one can find the beauty, that is immanent of Japanese culture. The unfinished we fill in like the blank space, with our own imaginary potential, as also Pallasmaa notes:

"Imperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of process and change. [...] And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies, which are not only signs of life but sources of beauty." (Pallasmaa quoting Ruskin. 2000:85)

It is the process and aesthetic, the *sakuteiki* was striving already for, the essential beauty in nature, realized in an distilled image. It is not the imperfection of the master's hand or an unfinished design but rather the combination of an utterly most penible perfection and intuition that implements the beauty of life/nature into an object. It is a perfection of the hand and heart, while implementing that something is fragile and still growing. "The coarse clay of the tea bowl might reveal the earthy soil of the deep countryside where the tea originated and, in the potter's glaze, we might make out the silhouette of distant mountains." (Walker 2017:201) or as Okakura says: "True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally completed the incomplete. The virility of life and art lay in its possibilities for growth." (Okakura 1906:95)

The feeling, that the *roji* and the aesthetic principle of *wabi-sabi* suggest might be better described as impermanence or fragility, what is deeply searched for by the masters. It is a stage, a craft or art designed to perfection to create this fine subtle realm of nature. The state of wornness, of aging, of patina is not solely achieved by time, but wearing and weathering can also be achieved artificially to reach this slight realm of impermanence, for there is no difference in artificial and natural realm as we have seen. The aesthetic values and sensitivity is strongly connected with the way of nature where in the end finally everything ceases to exist.

The teahut displays for Sen no Riku a simple hut, literally a grass thatched hut. The spatial concept incorporates the transience, dwelling on the world temporarily, not permanent. Time and space, tangible as one concept, as they are inseparable in the Japanese concept of the world, influenced by the Buddhist thought of non-attachment. The *soan* (grass thatched hut) was a temporary shelter for travellers. High grass was cut and bound together to make a tent of grass. The next morning by loosening the knot, the tent disappeared melting back into the environment. The essence lies within the ephemeral occurrence of a phenomenon and its evaporation after a short time, the being in the moment (cf. Okakura 1906).

The teahut is designed in such a way that the boundaries between man and the surrounding nature are infinitesimally small or non-existent: the teahut is embedded in a continuum of the garden, the stones leading to the entrance, the walls - weaved out of bamboo and coated with a layer of clay - are quite thin, which shall evoke the feeling to be in direct dialogue with nature, in harmony with the universe, space and time, suggesting the brevity. But the introverted space or non-space of the teahut is not limited to the tiny space, at the same time it is a tool to expand our consciousness indefinitely, where in every moment can be found an eternity (Koren 2008). A space of *ma* (emptiness) made for contemplation, where one could practice poverty and modesty, where "harmony, respect and purity formed the three ingredients of tranquillity and these, along with ideals of frugality (...)" (Cooper 2009:20). Though it is an act of detaching ourselves from things or materiality - the use of "simple" or modest objects, our shift of perception towards the space, surrounding us in the narrow teahut - we gain an appreciation towards things. As Zen Soshitsu XV explains the treatment of the objects, focusing on the inner being:

"A teaching poem instructs us that your attitude in handling tea utensils should be: "when releasing one utensil to pick up another, think as you would if you were parting from a loved one" (Sen Sôshitsu XV 2002:84)

The teahut wants to say, here is the empty space, the hidden, that we can find in ourselves, the *ma*, that is foundation of all nature.





fig.137  
Sagawa Art Museum

The Sagawa Art  
Museum was - like  
a teahouse- de-  
signed by Raku  
Kichizaemon, a  
descendent of a  
family of tea bowls  
masters.



## Mossy stones (*sabi*)

Wabi *sabi* or the tea ceremony is symbolic for a modest beauty, a beauty, that assembles an atmosphere, that adds up over time. Highlighting the wearing of things, the age, like the soup of Otafuku, Tokyo, where the broth is kept since 45 years, the teabowl, that seems to have worn over time to fit in the hands of the person drinking the tea. It embodies the *wabi sabi* spirit, that it is broken down to the mere essence without removing the poetic sensitivity, keep the things tidy and neat, but don't let them become sterile (Koren 2008). The earthen, pure clay, reflects the spirit and philosophy of the dialogue with nature. A dialogue with a modest attitude, that is also present in architecture: sitting on the *tatami* rather than the chair, kneeling down to slide the filigrane doors (*fusuma*). Every Tea bowl is made by hand and traditionally fired for a few days in a large kiln. As Raku Kichizaemon XV<sup>92</sup> explains:

92.  
hereditary head of  
the Raku family of  
tea-bowl makers

“Even if I try to express myself through a certain shape or glaze,” notes Kichizaemon, “in the end, everything is entrusted to the power of nature. It goes beyond the artist's ego and into the realm of prayer. The sense of nature that Japanese people have is strongly present in Raku ware.” (Raku Kichizaemon XV 2017)

It is the aesthetic combined with a spirituality and transcendental potential, that transports more than mere design as it was imported in the age of Japonism (*ibid.*). As in nature, none will come out exactly the same. It

is the moment, that will pass, once it is, the petals of the cherry blossoms that won't be exactly the same ones when the tree blooms again the following year, the natural form valued in the realm of impermanence.

Japanese aesthetic didn't find pleasure in Western ideals like symmetry, but natural forms and impermanence. Stains and signs of use like the breakage of a bowl does not mean the end of an object's life but an essential moment of its history. Something isn't really seen and hasn't really lived until it was fractured. The art of *kintsugi* stresses this a moment. It means "golden joinery" (*kin* = gold, *tsugi*=joinery), also called Kintsukuroi "golden repair", where broken ceramic is carefully reassembled in a form of high art. The lines of breaking aren't hidden, but visible. The fragility of an object is emphasized, manifesting itself in golden or silver shining lines. In *kintsugi*, the pieces are joined after shattering, using *urushi* (natural laquer), rock powder (*tonoko*), with gold, silver or other metal powder, that is mixed in. It is an art that "follows a slow and meticulous ceremonial, which requires patience and concentration" (cf. Greff). When we use Kor-en's categories (see table), in modern aesthetics the task would be to join it without any scar left to see, because this would state a moment of failing, if it was repaired at all, but with the eyes of the fragility of nature it is pure beauty, the beauty of life.

The moment in the history is being enhanced, the wearing present. *Sabi* is present in a fallen leaves, that slowly deceases. The patina of aging is seen as something so valuable, that there are even different kinds of *sabi*, like the garden-*sabi*, that evolves over time, it is the "Japanese sensitivity of change":

"The Japanese sensitivity to change also extends to the changes that the tooth of time, very, very slowly, brings about on stones. The patina (*sabi*) that the stone gets in its natural environment, be it beach, field or mountain, makes up a large part of its beauty and determines for which special landscaping purposes it is chosen. After being placed in the garden, the stones are given a new patina (called garden *sabi*), which is largely the responsibility of the person who takes care of the garden". (Ito 1999:38)

The beauty of the teagarden or *sukiya* style lies, as the hiding moon and a shadow moving, in a kind of unstable beauty. By actually never knowing if something is there, lies the acceptance that nothing in life is stable (buddhist concept of *mujo*), this perishability, where a moment can pass or arrive, is the “most distinctive japanese aesthetic ideal”, says Donald Keene. This expression is also visible in the architecture and design. Rather fragile and aging materials are preferred. Japanese people don’t fear to care and replace. Tactile surfaces, represent the taste for natural beauty with its nuances of light and shadow and uneven surfaces, where “permanence through materials (granite, marble, the Pyramids, the Parthenon) is seldom attempted. Rather, the claims of immortality are honored in another way“ (Richie 2007: 38). Leonard Koren, describes the atmosphere as following:

“Certain common sounds also suggest the sad-beautiful feeling of wabi-sabi. The mournful quarks and caws of seagulls and crows. The forlorn bellowing of foghorns. The walls of ambulance sirens echoing through canyons of big city buildings. Appreciation of the cosmic order. Wabi-sabi suggests the subtlest realms and all the mechanics and dynamics of existence, way beyond what our ordinary senses can perceive. (...)The materials out of which things wabi-sabi are made elicit these transcendent feelings. The way rice paper transmits light in a diffuse glow. The manner in which clay cracks as it dries. The color and textural metamorphosis of metal when it tarnishes and rusts. All these represent the physical forces and deep structures that underlie our everyday world.” (Koren 2008:22)

In the teaceremony, a green leaf of a plant is as celebratedone that has already started its process of decay. The rather intangible poetic, like the ephemeral of elements and the moon in temrs of yugen, seems now applied to the tangible realm, where the everyday becomes the poetry of nature, where drinking tea alone becomes a world action, where we become aware that we are embedded in the fluxus of time. It is a place, where the ephemeral becomes concrete, our relativeness clear:

“The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings. Taoism accepts the mundane as it is and, unlike the Confucians or the Buddhists, tries to find beauty in our world of woe and worry. (...)”



The Taoists claimed that the comedy of life could be made more interesting if everyone would preserve the unities. To keep the proportion of things and give place to others without losing one's own position was the secret of success in the mundane drama. 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.” (Okakura 1906)

The materiality itself expression of the spontaneity of nature. It seems accidental, intuitional, a manner and creative process that Lévi-Strauss describes as Bricoleur. He sees the creative process of the Bricoleur as a tool to make the interwovenness with nature visible and tangible, that finally flows into our daily life<sup>93</sup>(Lévi-Strauss 1966) . Irénée Scalbert states that “bricolage could lead to brilliant insights on the intellectual plane, for instance mythical thought.” Bricolage would mean to be “attentive to the nuances of human occupation and its effects on the fabric of buildings.” Further she sees in the bricolage a way to design architecture, using the environment, the surroundings as source for inspiration” (Scalbert 6a architects 2013:130). The ‘science of concrete’ means a sensibility towards our environment, seeing “the sensible world in sensible terms” and not trying to exceed it. “The scientist creating events (changing the world) by means of structures and the ‘bricoleur’ creating structures by means of events” (Lévi-Strauss 1966:16-22).

The aesthetic through the ages of Japan shift our attention towards a relationship to things. By the way the objects have been created and the way we are supposed to use them – cautiously- we establish a (emotional) relationship between us and “them”. It is an aesthetic and beauty found with our heart. As Sōetsu Yanagi notes: “In the East the foundation is in the heart and inspiration, which to the Western mind, with its emphasis on the intellect, must appear very strange, for the Eastern man jumps to his conclusions on wings of intuition” (Yanagi 1989:124). It nourishes from a consciousness of a philosophy in harmony with nature, which is not just expressed on an abstract or metaphorical level, as the dry garden in the temple, but becomes here tangible: the use of natural materials and the

93.

When we look at the comparison of the bricoleur and the ingénieur (ascribed to the western world), Duymedjian and Rüling differ this process in the categories of metaphysics (cosmological approach, where everything is connected and all elements equally important), epistemology (relationship between the matters, intimate relationship in the making process) and praxis (intuitively driven, using resources as found in the environment, process lies mainly in the craftsmen's hand e.g. washi making). (Duymedjian & Rüling 2010)

way of architectural construction. And by highlighting their source, highlighting their natural dips and buckles, grain and texture, they stay often true to the resource where they were drawn from, staying true. The materials are warm in their feel: despite its blackness, the chawan's texture and roughness, the mattness brings comfort. It is what Tanizaki describes as the opposite taste of the "Westerners". Non shining materials or shining materials, that once have been shiny and are now struck by time:

"We (Japanese) find it hard to be really at home with things that shine and glitter. The Westerner uses silver and steel and nickel tableware, and polishes it to a fine brilliance, but we object to the practice." (Tanizaki 1977:18)

The aesthetic influenced Japan's society and in architecture it created the so-called *sukiya* style (*sukiya* = refined taste), which is defined by its modesty and "rustic simplicity" (Nishi and Hozumi 1983). It is the style of the machiyas, whereby the most famous example is Katsura-Rikyū: the Imperial Villa speaks not only by its integration of the architecture into large natural garden sceneries of an undeniable dialogue with nature, but also with its outer appearance and inner attitude. The wood is untreated, unpolished, the pillars are not cut rectangular but the edges often stay raw, different to the usual *shoin* style.<sup>107</sup> Muted colors define the interior, while the wall is plastered in an earthen plaster mix. While the *shoin* residences of the warrior class were often expansive, the decoration here of the different elements stay modest, *sabi* elements and natural materials melt here into the environment. The rooms laid out in the "flying geese" formation, the stone lantern's (*ishi-doro*) light reflecting as fireflies in the adjacent pond, while even the prince climbed the large boulders and removed his shoes to walk over the soft tatami before he sat down to watch the moon, inspired by the *genji monogatari* (cf. Ito 1969).

94.

The Katsura Villa had gone through three building phases. Thus the style can be also seen as a mixture (Nishi and Hozumi 1983)

A work form  
the flyer of the  
kintsukuroi  
gallery “urujyu”  
in Kyoto, which  
I visited.



fig.140



fig.141

Koto-in tearoom, Daitoku-ji



fig.142  
Urakuen, Jo-an teahouse

The earthen,  
pure materials,  
their tactility  
reflect the spirit  
and philosophy  
of the dialogue  
with nature.

fig.143

red Raku tea bowl named Tarôbô, by Chôjirô



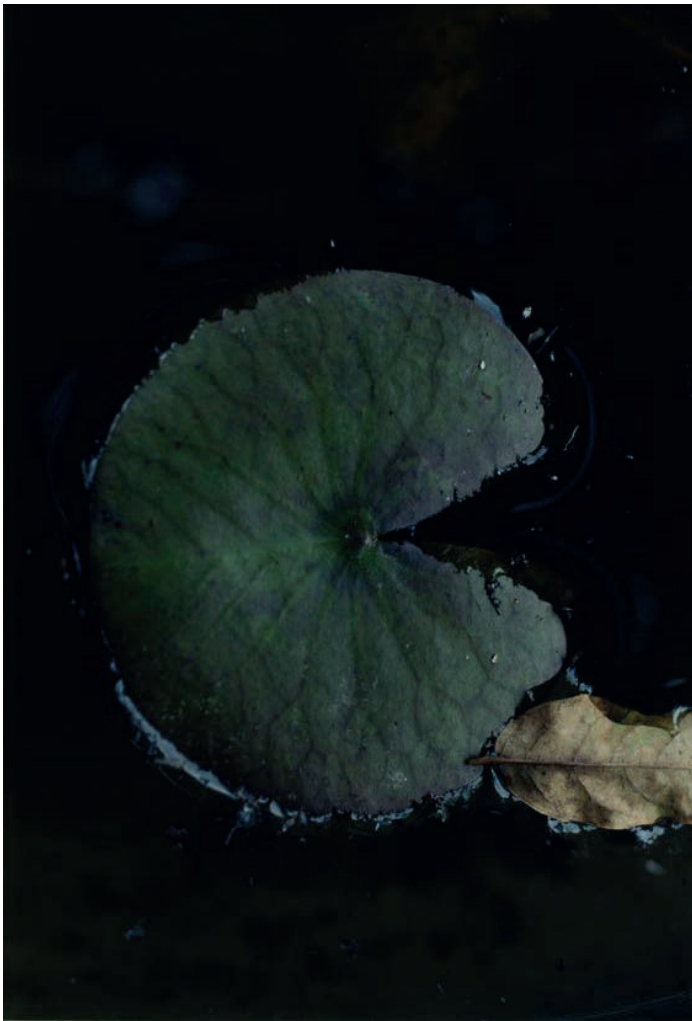


fig.144

a state of decay as form of beauty

fig.143







Naoshima July 2018

### Yaki-sugi

yaki=burning  
sugi=cypress

The wood is burnt  
on the surface and  
forms a natural  
defense against  
insects and be-  
comes waterproof.  
The flakes will  
chip off the  
walls finally. the  
technique is also  
called *Shou Sugi*  
*Ban*.

The wearing is  
particularly  
visible in the  
places we can  
reach. We can  
trace the ways,  
that other hands  
must have gone  
before us.

Gokaisho, Art House, Honmura, Naoshima July 2018





Daitoku-ji, Kyoto July 2018



## temple walls

The layering,  
which the walls  
collect over  
time, almost  
appears like  
landscapes  
in the far. All  
three are walls  
I encountered  
on my visit of  
Daitoku-ji.

I find Leonard  
Koren's comparison  
(Koren 2008:26-29)  
quite a good  
overview for  
the different  
aesthetical values  
of modernism and  
Japanese aesthetic.  
I for myself made  
some adjustments  
and additions, that  
is shown in italic  
letters.

## *wabi-sabi*

implies an intuitive worldview  
relative  
personal, idiosyncratic solutions  
one-of-a-kind (variable)  
*expresses faith in renewal*  
present orientated  
Believes in the fundamental uncontrollability of nature  
romanticizes nature  
people adapting to nature  
organic organization of form  
(soft, vague, *blurred shapes and edges*)  
the bowl as metaphor (free shape, *empty*)  
natural material  
ostensibly crude  
corrosion/impurity makes its expression richer  
solicits the reduction of expansion information  
ambiguity and contradiction *is inherent*  
warm  
generally dark and dim (shadow)  
function and utility are not so important  
perfect immateriality is an ideal  
*transient*  
*absence*

## *modernism*

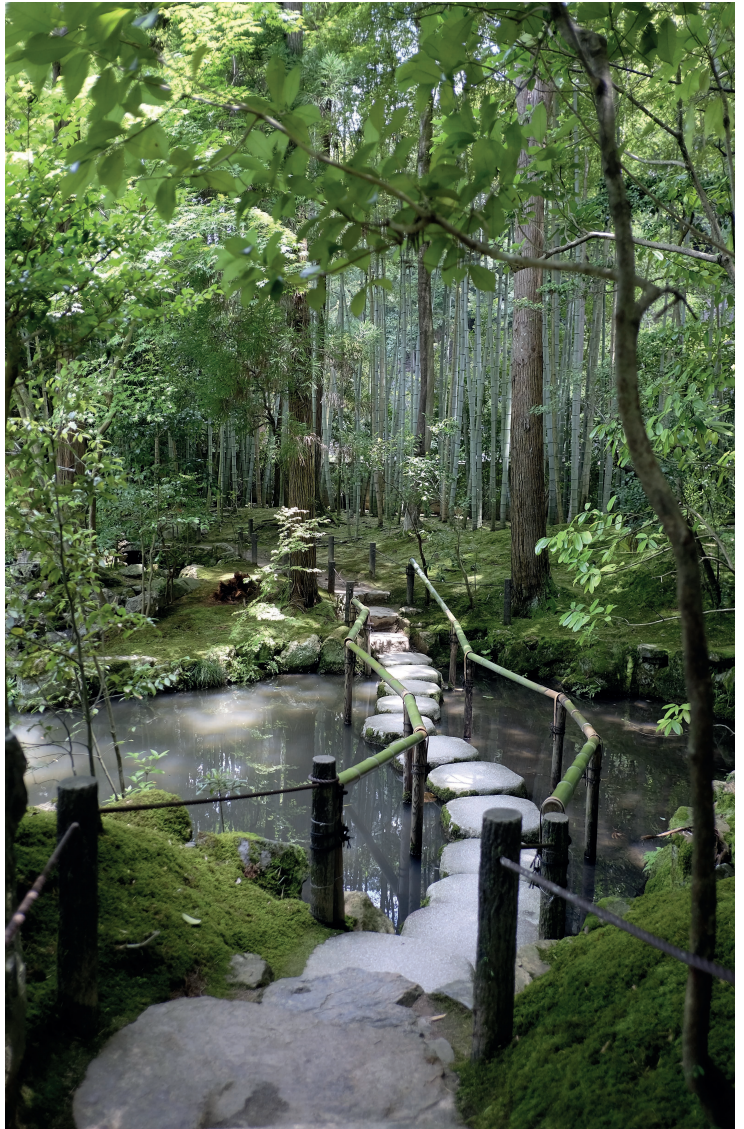
implies a logical, rational worldview  
absolute  
universal, prototypical solutions  
mass-produced/modular  
expresses faith in progress  
future orientated  
Believes in the control of nature  
romanticizes technology  
people adapting to machines  
geometric organization of form  
(sharp, precise, definite shapes and edges)  
the box as metaphor (rectilinear, precise, contained)  
manmade material  
ostensibly slick  
purity makes its expression richer  
solicits the reduction of sensory information  
is intolerant of ambiguity and contradiction  
cool  
generally light and bright (light)  
function and utility are primary values  
perfect materiality is an ideal  
everlasting  
*presence*

awareness

the quality or  
state of being  
aware, knowledge  
and under-  
standing that  
something is hap-  
pening or exists







Tenjuan, Kyoto July 2018



a resting point  
in the Dai-  
toku-ji temple  
complex, where  
hot tea is pro-  
vided for free.

Tradition and contemporary stand next to each other in the cultural rich city of kyoto. Here a restaurant entrance, that I passed on the way to the Daitoku-ji. In the small garden stands a tsukubai (stone basin), at the back the wooden planks have the appearance of a nijiriguchi (crawl entrance to the teahouse) Soba noodle restaurant wakuden.







Honmura, Naoshima July 2018

## Naoshima (travelogue II)

We can reach Naoshima Island by a small ferry or boat from the small terminal at Uno Port. Somewhere on the fast Shikanzen route, I changed to a local train to get here. From the main island Honshū, the journey by boat takes not too long, the boat ride calming, while crossing the Seto Inland Sea. When I arrived at the harbour of Naoshima, I was probably surprised by the quietness. I had expected the island quite crowded and busy due to the world wide reputation as “Art Islands”. But except of the well planned infrastructure to discover the art and a few tourists finding their way by bike, the Miyanoura Ferry Terminal by Sanaa was rather empty, it seemed lost, the dimension of the building somehow too large for the small town. So instead of a crowded place, I came upon an island, whose small fisher towns still embody the calm spirit of the past.

Naoshima is home to contemporary architecture as Tadao Ando’s works, place for artworks as James Turrell’s Ganzfelds or Monet’s water lillies. Together with its small neighbouring islands Teshima and Inujima, it is part of the project “Benessee Art Site”. The project was initiated by Soichiro Fukutake with the idea to revitalize and strengthen the local community, that had been declining over the decades and to form again a infrastructure that would make a self sufficient local community possible, independent of the large industry and capitalism of the cities, that once destroyed the community and nature here: not long ago the islands were

used to dump industrial and domestic waste (cf. Miki and Müller 2011)- a large chemical mill still settles on one end of Naoshima Island, a scenery not far away from the ones in “Isle of Dogs”<sup>95</sup> not far way. Also Inujima was highly industrialised, stone quarries and copper refineries leaving their traces behind. So is Sambuichi’s museum, that is built on such a quarry site, made with the byproducts of its own manufacturing, telling the story of the “exploitation of human and natural resources and the devastating degradation of the environment (Miki and Müller 2011:186).

95.  
Wes Anderson, Isle  
of Dogs 2018

Fukutake transformed the island into a place, where “art and architecture conspire with nature”<sup>96</sup>, where the people could live again in harmony with the natural environment. Since the 1990’s a collection of architecture and art, that deals with the deep connection to nature and the ancient culture of Japan, has been built and is still expanding.

96.  
subtitel of the publication “insular insight-where art and architecture conspire with nature”, (cf. Miki and Müller 2011)

The focus of the artworks and architecture lies on the mediation between human and nature, and tries to bring closer the relationship to nature that the Japanese once had (cf. Miki and Müller 2011). The connection to nature is experiential in a contemporary way. Hereby it emphasizes the ephemeral aesthetic ideals of the void, the mysterious and impermanence, that is incorporated in a raindrop falling, in sounds or pitch black space. The experience stays always in a constant and direct dialogue with nature, the architectural space is woven into the environment of the Seto Inland Sea, in the same way the traditional architecture is woven into the garden. Even though the remoteness of the island and the natural reservation could be endangered by architecture and tourism, the architecture takes itself back and is integrated to such a level, that it has to be found like an ancient *Shintō* temple in the middle of the forest, as the Go’o shrine by Hiroshi Sugimoto- it feels like a treasure hunt. While you’re discovering, you slowly calm down, breathing in the sea breeze, wondering what the rest of the world is doing at the very moment- the island itself almost a place of nothingness, a place where time expands. The art inside, as spiritual as the void in the garden of Ryōan-ji, choreographed by the spatial experiences,

the topics questioning the concepts of being and time.

Soon after the museums close, the few restaurants do to. Most of the tourists leave, while only a few stay here over night. The island becomes very quiet, the waves gently rocking the fisher boats, only a small corner shop run by an elder couple is still open in the small town of Honmura, the seven eleven in the harbour town 20min away by bike. The Art houses spread over Honmura town walking some steps up a hill stands the 'Go'o shrine. The almost classical structure of the shrine house sits in contrast to the glass stairs and the front structure, all elements embedded in a pit of white pebbles. Underground is a tunnel accessible to experience the in-betweenness of art, worldly and sacred (Sugimoto, "Appropriate proportion").

The experience in the rock chamber is similar to the experience of the darkness in Minamidera, and similar to the one in the rock chamber of the Zugui-do, Kyōmizudera, Kyōto. It is a place of *yūgen*, and a place of total void, the experience is something beyond but, still part of our world. Here we dive into a pitch black darkness, our eyes take a very long time to adjust. It is so dark that space almost becomes nothing, while we are not used to such a darkness-especially not nowadays where lights are on 24 hours. After some turns a subtle light becomes visible, with it a large boulder. After circling it twice you have to find your way back through the black air, soon reaching the stairs, leading up to where you had started. The sun glazing, your eyes slowly adjusting to the daylight, that welcomes you back in the world.

After passing some slopes, the sea below us, the bus reaches the stop for the chichu museum. But we are not yet quite there, because here we only find the building for the ticket counter- the actual museum is a short walk up the street. We are guided along a path of flowers, the garden of Monet. Gradially we are taken into the space, while an entrance gate sets our mind towards something other new, a beyond. Despite its inwardness, it creates an intense dialogue with nature. Dark shadows, glowing lights,

and a clear sky blue sky with birds singing, our relation to our environment reconsidered. Inside there is dense atmosphere, it is immersive. The main topics of the art reflect the interest in nature and the ephemeral, the architecture itself a place that reminds of the layout of a teagarden. We walk down a path, with our mind and literally with the body we are getting drawn deeper and deeper inside: stairs winding up and down, long and narrow paths in the shadow and light, like walking a trail in nature, where shadow and light of the forest and free space take turns, while we get drawn into an inner.

The Chichu Art Museum is embedded in nature, where we are drawn literally inside the earth: we feel comfort and calmness. A bench waits in the shadow, where we have to remove our shoes and change into slippers to enter the room dedicated to contemplate Monet's water lillies, the main artwork of the museum. The floor is covered in small white, matt tiles, that absorbs the faint light, the atmosphere similar like whirled up dust in the sunlight, that draws us inside. The space is lit solely by natural light- Inside the atmosphere is dense, transmitting light as filtered by soft washi paper. The muted atmosphere settles in our bodies, making it hard to leave the beauty of this space. Through the shadow we move through the space to the other artworks. James Turrells skylight, where we can listen to nature sounds while gazing up into the clouds. Outside meets us the glazing sunlight, the same way takes you back, again the path of flower, but now our senses seem more aware, experiencing the way back differently than before.

On Naoshima we can experience contemporary concepts as well as traditional values, still present striving through the villages or the Art House Projects, where 6 old structure were revitalised. The installations open up an immersive way to experience topics that have always occupied Japanese culture. The situations provide insight into the deep interwovenness of the contemporary production with the tradition and aesthetic that influences Japanese design. Naoshima represents an idea, which reflects precisely these aesthetic ideals that have been enticuled over time, the

art and architecture designed to bring closer the particular relationship between the Japanese and nature, to bring it again to the fore. The special connection to nature can be experienced here in a contemporary way, the otherwise intangible aesthetic ideals of Japanese art like emptiness (*ma*), *yugen* or *mono no aware*, tangible- always under the aspect that the experience is embedded in the context of the interwovenness of architectural space and “garden”. The projects appear to have the spiritual elegance of the Zen-temples, the topics weave themselves around the concept of being and time. As an active experience we experience the islands like a laid out stone path.

Here on Naoshima, the values of traditional culture are contemplated and the past is reconceptualized. The time passes much slower compared to Tōkyō or Kyōto. The island is a place like that of a teagarden or temple garden, that creates a world beyond the busy city life to contemplate and meditate. The art and architecture, that is open to the public, is like a contemporary mirror and interpretation of these traditional gardens and its culture. A search and re-manifestation of the (aesthetic) ideals of an ancient culture, which has developed over the centuries and has been losing ground since the opening to the Western society. The experience on the island leave behind the same “stillness” as the small gardens of the temples and houses. As Thu Huong Ha describes beautifully:

“It’s possible to travel thousands of miles to the other side of the world, to take a plane, three trains, two ferries and a bicycle, in order to stand completely still. It’s possible to see something so beautiful that your hyperconnected, over-informed thoughts calm into a wordless lullaby, one you can carry with you wherever you go next. As you side-step tourists waiting in line for New York ramen, mentally calibrating the shortest route to your next social event, you only have to recall that moment, and it ripples like wind through your mind, leaving behind a stillness” (Ha 2014)

The visit to the Naoshima gave me a deeper insight into the rather intangible and ephemeral themes<sup>97</sup>. Not only the artworks, but also the remoteness of the island gave me an opportunity to reflect on (Japan’s traditional)

97.

But Naoshima also depicts for me a typical (japanese) contradiction- though it is a community project, it is based on the art industry, though it is architecture and art conspiring with nature- the experience is not open to everyone, but privileged people spending a lot of money. Though it creates a stillness within one’s mind, it is also somehow not far away from the consumerism in the cities. It is almost as if we were “buying” us the stillness.

architecture in a variety of ways, cycling between the newly grown rice fields. It forms a place to strengthen the local (aging) community and question the values Japan developed since the influence of the modernism at the end of the 19th century, to gain again awareness for the culture that has lived once in harmony with nature and to serve as a global model to question the current status quo of our society (cf. Miki and Müller 2011).







Naoshima July 2018

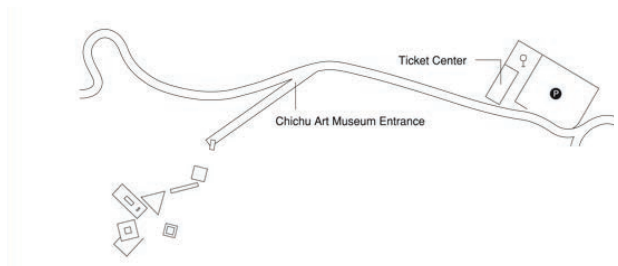


fig.145

Chichu Museum, Naoshima, Tadao Ando



We're drawn inside the  
earth and feel comfort.  
In the Shadow we have  
to remove our shoes  
and change into slip-  
pers to enter the room  
dedicated to watch  
Monet's water lillies.  
The dim light reaches  
out into a kind of  
buffer zone that  
transitionally guides  
us to the transcenden-  
tal experience of this  
space, where the void  
or the atmosphere of  
space or ma settles on  
our bodies.



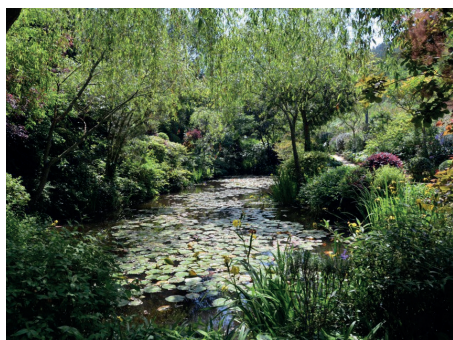
Chichu Garden, July 2018



Chichu Museum, July 2018



parts of the  
spatial sequence.  
though it is built  
out of concrete,  
wandering  
Chichu Museum  
is like a walk in  
nature. We are  
drawn gradually  
inside and back  
outside, like a  
accidental cave.



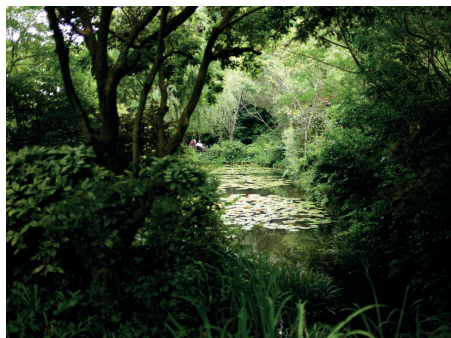




fig.146

Community Hall, Naoshima, Sambuichi

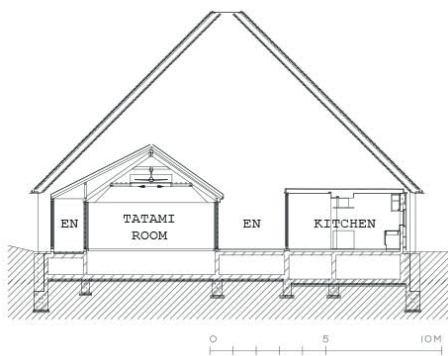


fig.147

Naoshima, July 2018







fig.149  
Matrix, Rei Naito, Teshima Art Museum

the atmosphere  
of transcendence  
is everywhere  
present on the  
art islands,  
making us  
aware of the  
delicate exist-  
ing of nature.

fig.148

Inujima Lifegarden Project, Sanaa





Sea of Time '98, by Tatsuo Miyajima, Naoshima July 2018

Awareness of the moment, of time and space. Every individual living on Naoshima made his or her contribution to the artwork of by setting the counter of time individually. Tradition and now are closely interrelated in Japan, the culture nourishes from a history intertwined with spiritual and philosophical concepts, concerning the relationship of all things, aware of every moment, trying to live in harmony with nature.

gion matsuri, Kyōto, July 2018





## Part III

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## Paper



—  
My journey began with the question, why the garden is an ever present topic in Japanese architecture, and why this is not so in an extent in Europe or the West. While I began to strive though the ideas and source of this bond, I was also able to encounter them on my own and could make up my own sense of the relationship, which is often a travel of many thoughts. It showed me that there is not always black and white, but a contraditiocon lays wihtin all things- the oldest cake shop, using bare and raw techniques wihtout any technical help of whatsoever, a place where still wooden calculaters are used, besides a world full of high technologies, where no wish is left unheard.

The the quintessential Kyōto aesthetic and attitude is known as *hannari*, literally “to become a flower” (Daniell 2010:9) and I think it meets Japan’s aesthetic, sense for beauty and experience well, that is based on an undeniable relationship to nature. While Europe’s attitude towards nature constitutes a confrontation with it, the Japanese culture imitated and interpreted her essence and found beauty in reality, manifestating this particular bond in daily life and art.

Nature and architecture are here no opposing categories, but enhance each other. We experience space with an awareness, where we melt into time and time into space, where the relativity of all things is celebrated, where we are stopped to pause to be able to experience and grasp the sense of a place or object. Not four but twentyfour seasons embrace the state of every moment, not the actual brushstroke, but the space that is



spared, shall absorb our mind. It all speaks of a refined feeling for things, that recognizes the quality in different subtle gradients not in black-white, but hues in grey or white. As Fujimoto says “If you rigidly divide inside and outside, you completely miss out on the richness of all gradations in between” (Fujimoto 2018:155). I think we should strive more towards an architecture that enhances our dialogue with the natural world and creates a natural empathy towards things, one who imposes against a secluded home, one that is concerned with its ‘form of being’ and ‘form of doing’ in harmony. Here we shall perceive life and meditate on it, while we are sheltered by the architecture like an umbrella, which is not at all like a cardbox with holes to peek out and catch breath.

The house, a design, every act of us is seen as a continuum of landscape, of nature. While we experience space, we experience *ma*, the hidden and the invisible, we experience the shadow moving, the moss growing, while in the inner of the house we settle in a deep dialogue with nature. It possesses an interwovenness with our environment, embracing “the cosmological whole”, where we don’t get separated from the external world. But furthermore we will find it in the nook, where the green of the *tatami* reminds us of the fields where it has grown. The feelings of things, of the natural lump of clay, the grass thatched tea hut, the shelf of clouds, we become aware of the inner being, that defines its character and let’s us relate to them- associations and stories shape an ongoing dialogue. It is a space where we are constantly reminded of the relationship of us and the world: when we slide a “paper” door, we need to take care, be attentive, while even the sound is gentle. The sliding doors are still made in the same way as they were made 200 years ago-with the same tools, the same technique and wood. They slide wood on wood, not metal hinges, the paper transferring the light into an ephemeral glow. Humble and earthen-bound are the gestures of the craftsmen and objects alike.

In the garden and architecture we become aware of the delicate existence of all things and the fragile bond between them. The material matter

stays true to itself, a truth in its causality and relativity. Based on a poetic sensibility, an aesthetic that works with the creative potential of our own minds. It seems like a form of “homeopathic architecture” that is defined by “the earth and the human scale of perception”(Fang 2016:166).



—

So I think here is where my thesis actually ends. When I think now about my motivation for my thesis, I could name the degree of the current destroy of nature, I could name the question of how most of the architecture is made in the realm of artificiality, trying to overcome nature's essence, or my curiosity about why Japanese design is so different in terms of a poetic sensibility, that often or mostly is inspired by nature's beauty. So in that terms of questioning I could have searched within the European realm of phenomenology, which would have led me to a similar ephemeral and sensible approach, that is based on our experience of the world in terms of shaping our relationship and situating us within our environment. But I would have stayed within my pre-given knowledge and thus not really able to shape an alternative view.

When I look at the designs or the things, that have value in Japan it seems to be quite opposed to an "Western" view. I feel they have an fundamental inherent sensibility towards things and nature, which is ever present in the Japanese culture, these symbols acting as societal value. It is a concept underlying the Japanese culture, which manifests itself in various aspects, as I have tried to point out. Today the designs of the contemporary Japanese architects are widely recited, and quickly imported into "Western" culture. But in terms of finding an (globally) "alternative" way of thinking, I think we should avoid importing solely visual aspects. It happens quickly to import tiny spaces or a garden filled architecture, a common mistake that is blamed on the modernists, as they imported "open" space and glassed

walls. Because such a hurried conclusion and import neglects the meta-physical value, that in truth adds the actual richness. Which in terms of modernism is the wide reception in the architectural theory in Japan. In truth the invisible values that we put on things, so to say our awareness, shape a qualitative space or design. It was important for me to question the source in order to understand the symbolism and value system, to understand the invisible values and meanings of layers, that have been shaped throughout history, which generate here in Japan a different kind of dialogue with our surroundings.

I hope I was able to give an insight, in which ways and to what extend the relationship of the Japanese people to things manifests itself in architecture and culture, an insight in how a dialogue with nature can look like, differing from Western conception - how (Japanese) aesthetic values can play a great role in forming a different dialogue, creating a possibility to reach a new kind of sustainability in a sense of an (emotionally) endurable design (Chapman 2005).

It seems often like mere abstract topics, but when we break these philosophical thoughts down to architecture, the Japanese approach can be seen as an alternate way towards an (emotional) kind of sustainability in architecture and design. What I mean by that is, that things like wearing and weathering, the contemplation of the relationship to things as the garden, a pillar, or one single flower are accompaniment of an aesthetically awareness, that is based on a concept of poetic sense, and furthermore- and maybe most important- it can also be seen as a way to gain a healthier and more sustainable approach to architecture and things. The close relationship to nature, we find in the Japanese culture can be seen as a way to build an “ethical consciousness towards nature”(Toyoda 2002:53), which can lead to a sustainability, that comes naturally.<sup>98</sup>

It is not a concern only of “traditional” architecture as temples, but especially that of the contemporary building culture too. The practice of

98.

Not only Locher remarks: “When observed from this new viewpoint, it is quite likely that Japan’s building tradition will be “rediscovered” as something very new. A great deal of knowledge to save the earth’s environment also is hidden within this tradition. I believe that the power to solve the earth’s environmental problems and the power to rescue the spirit of the people of this earth from the confusion of today is possessed within this tradition.” (Locher 2010:8)

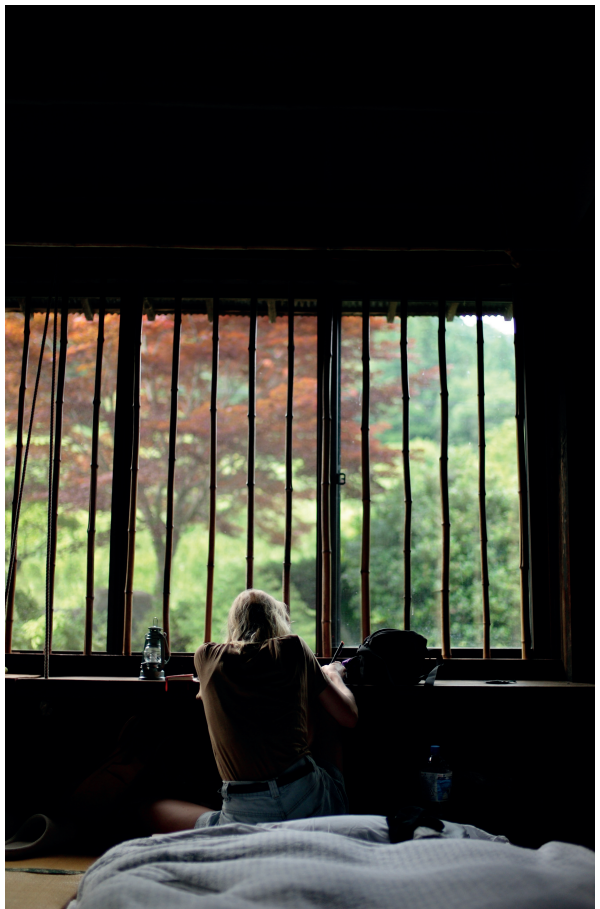
the contemporary designers and architects are pushing boundaries of our perception, based on century old crafts and traditions, always trying to gain a long lasting value instead of a short distance profit. They are spaces and design, that transcend our knowledge, they are beyond what we know. To end my thoughts in a contextual way, I would like to quote Juniya Ishigami's thought:

“Imagine a long narrow path extending out into tranquil waters, Strolling along it spying the shadows of a fish fitting in the shallows, spotting whales spouting in the distance. Without separating our day-to-day lives from the natural world all its immensity, our imposing force, the question is, how close can we smoothly bring these worlds?” (Ishigami 2014)

I think, I for myself found here inspiration in the way we can relate to our environment and to things we surround us with, to see the smallest part as important, to give attention to the subtlest detail, to ask what and how we as designer can shape to make a mediation and meditation on these “things” possible, to shape a long lasting dialogue with nature, where we focus on the story, the inner being, without losing touch that to what is already there instead of ruling it.

In Japan's culture we encounter things unknown. Maybe “the unknown” is also that you never know in nature what happens next. The unknown is maybe the patina that the material will have, but you don't know yet, instead of a material, that cannot age, because you will always know how it will behave. The unknown is the space of a traditional Japanese house, where one can get lost like in a forest, in the shadow, in the *ma*, the empty space, that can be this and that, the space changing with the moment, we changing it ourselves.









•  
epilogue

## The unknown

Hara notes: "Today, we seem to be experiencing a rationalizing of the senses. The art of refinement has been half forgotten, and attentiveness to detail, absorption, and slow engagement are neglected."  
(Hara 2017)

The use of a bare twig instead of industrial wood reminds us of the origin. Square instead of round make it more difficult to use the toilet paper-but in the end we become aware of the use- and maybe use less. an awareness that is also possible to apply to architecture as we have seen: gaps between stepping stones-instead of making everything easy and planing we could again shape an awareness and create a bond between object and user by integrating poetic "complicatedness".



fig.150  
toilet paper by Shigeru Ban

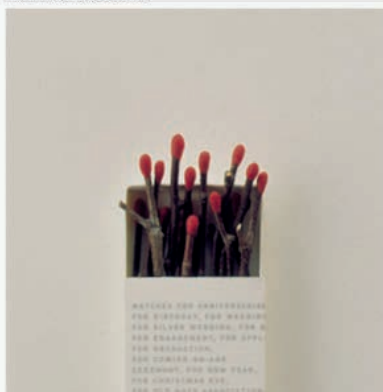


fig.151  
matches by Karuo Mende



fig.152  
 "structures that would become objects of affection", o+h

fig.153

"A House like a living creature", o+h





fig.154

Pony Garden, Atelier Bow-Wow shows also in an extreme to what extend the spatial concept of nature and architecture are intertwined and not neglected, trying to create the right "form of being".

## A short note on the house as animal

“Like a deer loitering in the woods, or an owl perched on a tree limb, I wanted the roof of the house to appear to float in the forest as naturally as possible. I began my design thinking of the structure of an organism, with its roof as the torso, and pillars extending down like skinny legs.” (Onishimaki + Hyakudayuki 2018:108)

Architecture shall be an active experience where we interact and take part. It shall not be seen as a functioning or living machine (as some of the modernist argued). The inner being, ephemeral qualities and symbolic character in the Japanese architecture seem to interact on the level of a kind of an emotional relationship, as the one that Chapman proposes. The way it talks to us and the way we perceive it, the house within its surroundings, the building itself, seems like more a being, an animal. It is nature inclusive, while the active quality and materiality shape our relationship towards the object.

Walking on a white tile floor or a soft, warm in color and feeling, *tatami*, makes a great difference for our senses and the way we behave towards things. While the *tatami* suggest the character of a moss covered earth or something natural, where it is normal of not being “perfect”, normal to cease. The first creates naturally a bond between us and the opposing matter, while the second might be more neutral. This comparison serves just as one example of one of the many factors, where for “Atelier Bow-Wow” the “modernist interpretation” had gone wrong, while they describe their thoughts on a house or architecture that should follow more the



concept of a “stuffed animal” (Atelier Bow-Wow 2009). Seeing the house as a being and thus shaping it like an animal we could generate more of a relationship for the user and create real bonds. Describing the expressions of a stuffed animal which lets us feel empathic by the way the abstract and the concrete come together, they see in this kind of imaginal abstraction a possibility for architecture to “become more enjoyable and friendlier”. Architecture should strive after a “dynamism between the concrete and the abstract” says Atelier Bow-Wow, like “stuffed animals” instead of “Bauhaus-like abstraction, which reduced objects to geometrical architectonics.” This led also to functionalism of material and things meaning often easy to clean, less effort to use, produced in the means of capitalism (Atelier Bow-Wow 2009:39).

These two kinds of abstractions create also exactly an opposite reaction for the user- the stuffed-animal imposes a reaction to the user (perception shaped by the human- individual experience/emotional experience), and is thus personal and relative, whereas the perception of a geometrical abstraction is first laid upon by the viewer, second universal:

“This abstraction of stuffed animals is different from the Bauhaus-like abstraction, which reduced objects to geometrical architectonics. In the geometrical abstraction, the observer is the one who determines the outer shape on an object directly facing it. By contrast, the stuffed animals, the material properties of cotton stuffing and felt skin defy concreteness, and therefore, approach the threshold between the observer and the object. The intrinsic materiality, of which the manufacturer has no control over, serves as the device for abstraction. If the process of geometrical abstraction is universal, the stuffed animals' abstraction is specific. The former is one-way passage from the concrete to the abstract, and the latter is the interconnectivity between them, the balance that stimulates not only our visual imagination but also tactile and even psychological affects. These are the charms of stuffed animals.” (Atelier Bow-Wow 2009:39)

The modernist way of abstracting things, as Atelier Bow-Wow describe here in “Echo of Spaces”, imported the wrong ideals of Japanese aesthetics. They missed that it was not about the abstraction in a geometrical way but about the abstraction of knowledge/understanding/stories. The

architecture wasn't simplicity for pure simplicity but the elements were reduced in this manner of abstraction due to an open reading and deeper meaning. The house, object and garden needed permanent care/maintenance, like a small Bonsai Tree. The elements changed according to the season, old or already ceased elements were replaced simply with a new part. One could say the modernists imported soulless ideals, whereas the Japanese architecture had been and still is full of ephemeral qualities, relativity and inbetweenness, where we can fill in the gaps with a subjectivity to create our bond (mitate) and not a concrete matter, as we do towards stuffed-animals.

This abstraction of things or thoughts and applying it to arts, design and culture, is visible in nature aesthetic that I have tried to describe in the last chapters. It is a contemporary way of *mono no aware*, that accepts transience, change and sees the inner character of things, transcending all to a level of animatedness. In a sense it is also a *in-betweenness*, "the constant oscillation between concrete and the abstract, moreover, makes architecture more interesting" (Atelier Bow-Wow 2009). The Japanese artists, architects and designers have been and are still strongly working with such references that can reach from the concept of "tea house too high", various tree houses as e.g. "Tree House" by Mount Fuji Architects or "Tree-ness House" by Akihisa Hirata to projects of "Houses you want to name", as Onishimaki + Hyakudayuki (o+h) describe. A work with associations that inhale the architecture with symbols that want to build up a relationship with the user.

"Like a creature in the forest", Onishimaki + Hyakudayuki (o+h) describe with this characteristic their project "Weekend house in Sengataki". Striving for an architecture of a "form with feelings", where solely the view of the material shall stimulate the sense of a touch. While with their project "Home for All" o+h created a collection of small movable buildings, that all have their own characters or "personalities", that would encourage the relationship between user and object, becoming an "object of affection", while the space of a house shall become more nested, "foster a new essence". (Onishimaki + Hyakudayuki 2018)



Instead of a tip  
in form of cash,  
in Japan usually  
a tiny origami  
sculpture made  
out of the  
chopstick paper  
is left behind to  
say 'thank you'  
to the host.

thank you

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## time periods

Jomon

c. 10500-3000 BC

Yayoi

300 BC -AD 300

Kofun

AD 300-552

Asuka

AD 552-710

Nara

AD 710-794

Heian

AD 794-1185

Kamakura

AD 1185-1333

Muromachi

1336-1537

Azuchi-Momoyama

1573-1603

Edo

1603-1868

Meiji

1868-1912



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## Figures

fig.1

Japan 1961, ©Burt Glinn,  
from: <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/CS.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&VIBID=2K1H2O4OYVDM9Z&SM-LS=1&RW=1623&RH=1332>

fig.2

Hous matabe, Hiroshi Sambuichi. in: Sambuichi, H. (2017). Hiroshi Sambuichi- Architecture of the Inland Sea. 2nd ed. Tokyo: TOTO LTD.

fig.3

floorplan, House Hayashiya, Kanazawa, in: Itō, Teiji. (1999). Die Gärten Japans. Translated by Dieter Kuhaupt. Köln: DuMont.

fig.4

Watanabe Residence (sekikawa-mura, Iwafune-gun, Niigata Prefecture),  
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fig.5

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fig.6

drawing of Kanagawa Institute of Technology, 2010, ©Juniya Ishigami, from: <http://interl3.aaschool.ac.uk/archive2015-2016/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Ishigami-J.-KIT-3.jpg>

fig.7

concept model of Kanagawa Institute of Technology, 2010, ©Juniya Ishigami, in: Contemporary Architect's Concept Series 2: Juniya Ishigami: small images. (2008). 1st ed. Tokyo: LIXIL.

fig.8

Katsura Imperial Villa, ©2013, Evan Chakroff,  
from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/evandagan/13755561413/in/photostream/>

fig.9

Shisendo temple, ©sskmsnr,  
from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shootingstarginga/2926370501/in/photostream>

fig.10

© Ben Simmons and Periplus, in: Locher, M. (2010).

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fig.11

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Wheat Fields running to the sea, Shikoku, Japan, 1961, © Burt Glinn, from: <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/Asset/-2S5RYDZGN00.html>

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Kitano Tenjin engi emaki (Illustrated Legends of the Kitano Shrine), 1219, Sugawara no Michizane in Heian, short before his exile. From: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kitano\\_Tenjin\\_Engi\\_Ema-ki\\_-\\_Iokyo\\_-\\_Michizane\\_before\\_exile.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kitano_Tenjin_Engi_Ema-ki_-_Iokyo_-_Michizane_before_exile.jpg)

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Bird on a Branch, early 18th century, Japan, Unkei Eii, Hanging scroll; ink on paper. The poem by Zen monk-poet Son'an (Kisei Reigen, 1402-1488), inscribed by Daitokuji temple prelate Daiko Shōkaku, reads: In the forest, when evening comes  
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Coupled birds remain in flight,  
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The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari), Chapter 34; Kashiwagi catches sight of the Third Princess. Tosa Mitsuoki. 17th century. Japanese folding screen. Freer and Sackler Galleries., from: <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/object/F1904.118/>

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Seascape: Baltic Sea, near Rügen, 1996, © Hiroshi Sugimoto, from: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/hiroshi-sugimoto/seascape-baltic-sea-near-r-gen-1996>

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Gold Pavillon, Kyoto, © Ferdinando Scianna/Magnum Photos, from: <https://pro.magnumphotos.com/Asset/-2TYRYDJDGDGD.html>

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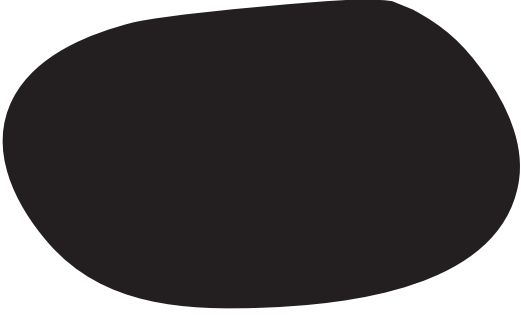


“For nature it is a garden with a house,  
for architects it is a house with a gar-  
den. So let's rethink.”









Denise Roth