

1-1-1999

Giving Distance to Time

Takashi Yamaguchi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/oz>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Yamaguchi, Takashi (1999) "Giving Distance to Time," *Oz*: Vol. 21. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2378-5853.1334>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Oz* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Giving Distance to Time

Takashi Yamaguchi

The language of architecture describes architecture and nothing else. I wanted to find a clear logic in the descriptive method of architecture and verify it within the relationship of architecture to geometry. In this project, therefore, I have attempted to clarify logic and structure, and to visualize their relationship. I have sought to cast light on the relationship joining architecture to place, on the topographic context of the site, and on the relationship of the site to the existing buildings. I have also tried to examine plan to section relationships, mutual phases between spaces, relationships between surfaces, and the relationship between architecture and nature.

I performed these investigations within a virtual reference space, displaced from reality. Discovering traces and variances within the real, I transferred them to this reference space. Then, grafting on a new logic, I returned this space to the real world. Out of this series of transfers, the site came to have a new meaning, and the architecture acquired physical form. The architecture was conceived within this dialogue between the real and the virtual reference space.

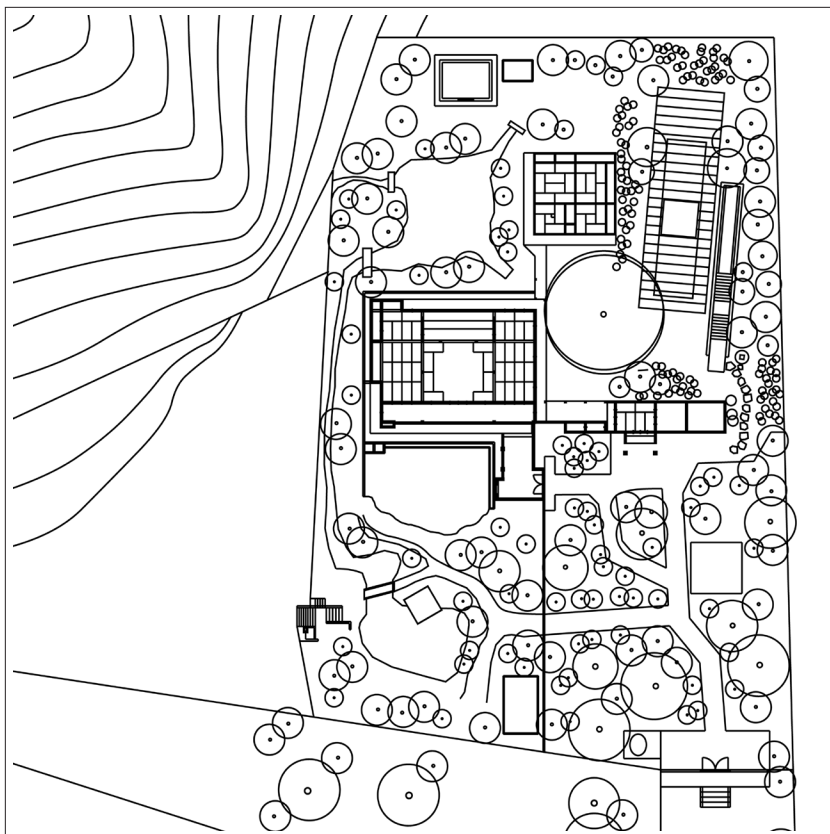
A situation arose, calling for the placement of a new building among a group of traditional buildings. In beginning this project, it was first necessary to understand the site and its surround-



ings, because a new architectural space should not be produced without discovering a relationship with its context. When inserting a new architecture in a place of historical character, one must first discover the existing axis that penetrates that place and perform the courtesy of receiving it. There are manners one must observe in approaching such a place, valuing and accepting its old culture and

imagery, for instance. One must not forget one's courtesy and ignore such things or cut them away. At the same time, that which is newly created must not be subordinated to these things of the past. The old and the new must each be placed in an autonomous position from which to influence and give distinction to each other's existence. I regard the creation of architecture as an intervention in the continual flow

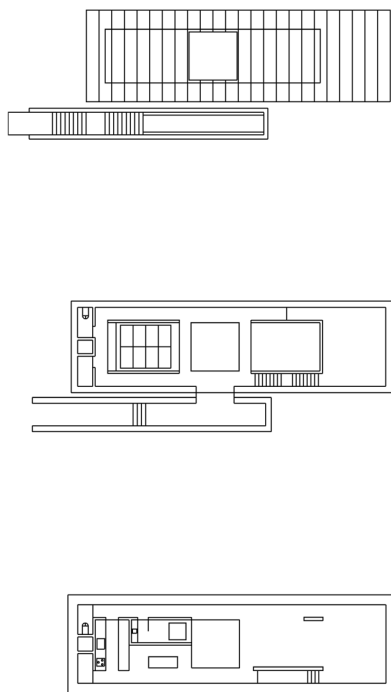
of time in order to alter the text. By reading as a text the logic and meaning possessed by the site, one can add strata and rewrite. By writing on the original text, one can transform it, giving it continuing life as a text. The creation of architecture is a point of inflection within the axis of time. At each point of inflection, refraction and variance occur, and act conjunctively to give the future continuance with the



past, while the manner of their entwining produces the texture and weave of history. The real is complex, but it is possible to read and draw into abstraction the simple logic and structure that runs through it. By bringing things of heterogenous nature into contact with the existing structure, conflict is produced, and the existing framework grows vibrant. What must be revealed and understood is an unapparent

logic—the individual spirit of a place. If the unapparent logic of a place is not uncovered, any new construction will be estranged from the historical character of the place, and continuance with the past will be lost. On the other hand, to simply preserve the logic of the past without recognizing future potential would be to freeze the flow of time. Thus, it is necessary to rewrite within the context of what exists.





Uncovering the logic that dwells in a place, among its layers of history, and rewriting that logic—these two ways of engendering relationship with a place demand our attention, above all, when we prepare to insert architecture into a history-rich territory.

The site is located at the foot of Mt. Funayama, one of five northern Kyoto hills famed for their summer bonfires, burnt to suggest souls entering paradise. Reigenkou-ji is an imperial temple built by Emperor Gomizunoo in 1638, within the scenic splendor of Kyoto's Nishikamo district. Gomizunoo, who is perhaps best known for creating the Shugakuin Imperial Temple, constructed Reigenkou-ji for the priest Isshibunshu. After Isshibunshu's death in 1671, the retired emperor, wishing to honor the site where the priest had lived and taught, went to great trouble to move the Seiryō-den (emperor's quarters) from the Imperial Palace



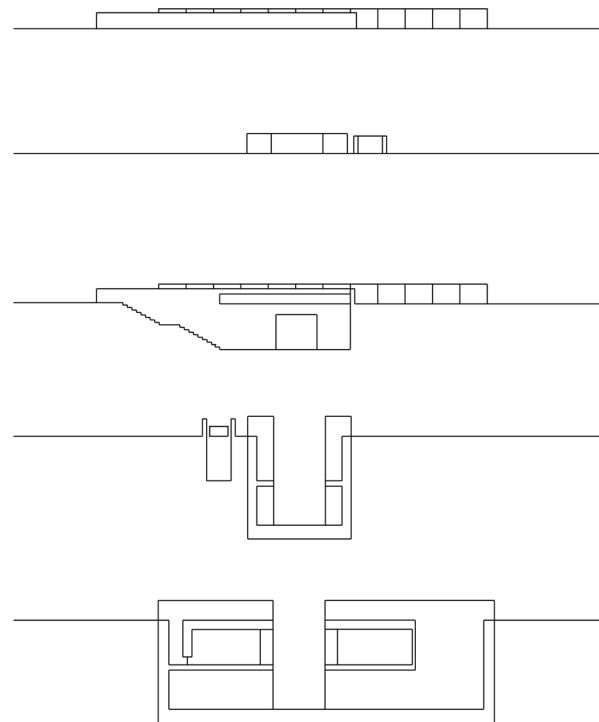


to this temple for its reconstruction as a Butsuden (Main Hall). Today, Reigenkou-ji remains a temple for rites of imperial prayer.

When I first visited the temple compound, I felt that my mission would be to respect its long and dignified history and, at the same time, to convey to the future the transparent teachings and pure white spirit of the priest Isshibunshu. The Butsuden (Main Hall), with its slightly convex roofline and the light upswing of its eaves, presented a graceful figure. Originally, the roof had been thatched with shingles, the historical record said. Later, when evidence of that shingle roof was discovered during restoration work on the building, I saw clearly how this building had lived and “breathed” within the flow of time from past to present, and I wanted to ensure the continuance of its life into the future.

Working, thus, within the flow of time, I sought to overlay our own time on the past in a way that would render it distinct. This was a necessary courtesy, I felt, in intervening in this place of our ancestors, and a matter of proper form in addressing history. In its relationship with the existing buildings, the site could be perceived in terms of four territories. Each—the cherry tree garden, rock garden, pond garden, and maple tree garden—presented a different expression. The new building would be placed in the maple tree garden. A maple tree growing on the site since ancient times was as conspicuous in its presence as the Main Hall.

The new building was conceived as an architecturalization of the garden. The entire building was placed underground. With exceeding care, I situated a void—6x22m in plan and 6m deep—at a slight, 5-degree angle to the Main Hall and Study, centering on the maple tree. Inside the void I inserted



a white volume, 15x3.6m in plan and 6m high. Only a transparent glass box appears above ground, as a top light for the white underground space.

A light court of frosted glass vertically penetrates the building. This court is a void, in terms of the exterior, but within the building it is perceived as a volume of light. Thus, the relationship of void to volume in this building reverses as one travels between its interior and exterior spaces. A soft, balanced light diffuses through the frosted glass into the interior space. A different kind of light penetrates the transparent glass of the top light, imparted a contrasting expression within the building. All light that enters the building is amplified in the space of the white interior, so that it erases all form and contour.

Above ground, the garden is spread with white gravel. Through the arbitration of the garden, the new space responds to, and finds connection with, the existing Main Hall and Study.

Enveloped by the lush natural greenery of Nishikamo, the new building and the old buildings from the ancient past stand mutually independent, yet joined in a relationship of harmony for their journey to the future.

All Photos courtesy of Takashi Yamaguchi except page 23 upper right courtesy of Vladimir Kristic.

