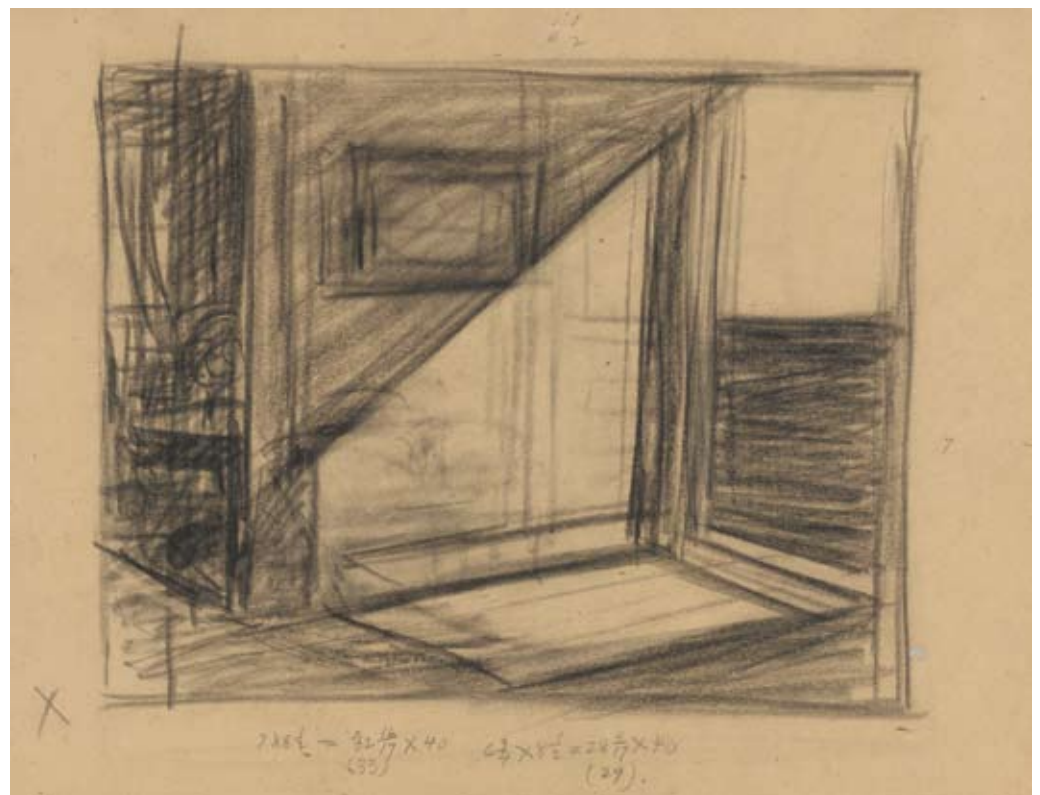


FIRENZE architettura

1&2.2014



Periodico semestrale
Anno XVIII n.1&2
Euro 7
Spedizione in abbonamento postale 70% Firenze

luce e materia

In copertina:
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FIRENZE
architettura

Periodico semestrale*

Anno XVIII n. 1&2 - 2014

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Firenze n. 4725 del 25.09.1997

ISSN 1826-0772 - ISSN 2035-4444 on line

Direttore - Maria Grazia Eccheli

Direttore responsabile - Saverio Mecca

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Grafica e Dtp - Massimo Battista

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Proprietà Università degli Studi di Firenze

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chiuso in redazione novembre 2014 - stampa Bandecchi & Vivaldi s.r.l., Pontedera (PI)

*consultabile su Internet <http://www.dida.unifi.it/vp-146-firenze-architettura.html>

FIRENZE architettura

1&2.2014

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Kengo Kuma: Risarciare i luoghi attraverso vedute e trasparenze

Andrea Volpe

«Non bisogna studiare ciò che gli antichi maestri facevano, ma quello che cercavano»
È con questa citazione tratta dall'*Oku no Hosomichi*,¹ la celebre cronaca di viaggio scritta nel XVII secolo dal poeta Bashō, che Bruno Taut² riassume la problematica relativa all'*ethos* dell'architettura giapponese moderna.³ Giudicata vittima di un fatale fraintendimento. Da un lato condizionata dalla pesante monumentalità degli edifici governativi e istituzionali costruiti in epoca Meiji, Taishō e Shōwa (frutto dell'ibridazione fra stili eclettici di importazione europea con i caratteri dell'architettura tradizionale). Dall'altro talmente irretita dalla nuova architettura proveniente dall'occidente da accettarla acriticamente attraverso edifici indifferenti ai caratteri dei luoghi, al clima ed alle tradizioni locali, che mimavano senza troppi scrupoli i bianchi e squadri volumi del Moderno Internazionale. Per Taut, in definitiva, la nuova architettura nipponica rischiava di ridursi ad una mera operazione di adesione stilistica. Timore confermato poi nel lungo resoconto sullo stato scritto per l'*Architecture d'Ajour d'hui* nel Novembre 1934 e pubblicato l'anno seguente.⁴ È dunque imprescindibile per Taut parlare dei tratti costitutivi della tradizione prima di affrontare un rigoroso discorso critico sulla produzione contemporanea locale. D'altronde fin dal giorno del suo cinquantesimo compleanno, il 4 maggio 1933, il secondo dal suo arrivo in Giappone, egli fu testimone -grazie ai buoni uffici di Isaburo Ueno- di un'esperienza straordinaria, sconvolgente, indimenticabile. Una serie di frasi spezzate, trascritte velocemente nel suo diario, testimoniano con efficacia l'emozione provata durante la nota, oramai mitologica, visita alla Villa

Imperiale di Katsura. Nell'architettura di una residenza principesca del XVII secolo in puro stile *sukiya* Taut trova dunque non solo il paradigma per misurare la bontà della produzione architettonica contemporanea giapponese ma un termine di paragone di valore universale, al pari della seconda meraviglia architettonica da lui visitata pochi mesi più tardi in Ottobre. Il santuario shintoista di Ise, con i suoi templi lignei ciclicamente ricostruiti, costituisce difatti l'altro polo significativo nella nuova geografia concettuale che l'architetto tedesco metterà a punto durante la sua permanenza in Giappone. Inevitabile dunque, dovendo parlare di Kengo Kuma, del particolare uso che egli fa della luce e dell'ombra nella sua architettura, richiamare alla mente un'altra scoperta -o meglio- un *nostos*. Un aneddoto che segna in qualche modo l'inizio della maturazione stilistica dell'architetto giapponese dopo i contraddittori esordi a Tokyo con opere connotate da un pesante (e forse già allora tardivo) uso di un codice, il *postmodern*, pur tuttavia declinato in modo da rispecchiare la frammentazione ed il caos polisemico della capitale giapponese.⁵
"Il [...] momento di svolta per me avvenne pochi mesi dopo quando mi fu proposto di disegnare una guesthouse ad Atami, in un lotto prospiciente l'oceano. Mentre stavo camminando attorno all'area fui avvicinato da un abitante del quartiere che mi raccontò che un famoso architetto era l'autore della sua casa. Mi invitò a visitarla nel caso fossi stato interessato. La sua casa dall'esterno sembrava del tutto ordinaria ma quando entrai dentro fui meravigliato dalla misteriosa atmosfera che vi regnava. Si trattava di Villa Hyuga -conosciuta anche come la



1

1
Noh stage in the forest, Toyoma (1996)
Particolare dell'ingresso ovest
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

2
Noh stage in the forest, Toyoma (1996)
L'area d'ingresso vista dalle sale espositive
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

Pagine successive:

3
Ando Hiroshige Museum, Bato (2000)
Veduta del museo dalla corte
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

4
Ando Hiroshige Museum, Bato (2000)
L'area d'ingresso vista dalle sale espositive
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

5
Takayanagi Community Center, Takayanagi (2000)
Il centro comunitario e la risaia
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

6
Takayanagi Community Center, Takayanagi (2000)
Lo shoji visto dall'interno
© Mitsumasa Fujitsuka





3

casa-fantasma- progettata dall'architetto tedesco Bruno Taut".⁶

Figlio di un appassionato d'arte, collezionista di molti degli oggetti disegnati da Taut in Giappone (tazze in ceramica, scatole in lacca e di altri complementi di arredo) Kengo Kuma può essere forse considerato, nonostante l'ovvia distanza temporale, uno dei migliori allievi giapponesi del maestro tedesco. La sua personale evoluzione poetica è del resto sintomatica di quella generazione di architetti nipponici nata nella seconda metà degli anni '50 che, dopo aver completato la propria formazione con esperienze all'estero -come lo stesso Kuma- o dopo aver lavorato per un periodo negli studi dei loro maestri, si è potuta inserire sul mercato solamente negli ultimi anni della *bubble economy*.

Kuma incontra l'opera di Taut in una fase particolare della sua carriera. Agli inizi degli anni '90 l'economia nipponica è crollata; e con essa le ragioni stesse del caos incredibilmente eccitante di Tokyo/Edo. Le occasioni professionali si trovano ora nelle province, generalmente me-

diate piccoli progetti attraverso i quali rimodulare il proprio approccio teorico anche in virtù del confronto diretto con gli artigiani del luogo.

Kuma, già allievo di Hiroshi Hara al campus di Roppongi della Tokyo University, non è infatti indifferente alla materialità dell'architettura. Ha partecipato da studente ai viaggi di studio in Africa organizzati dal suo professore. E con lui ha scoperto l'architettura vernacolare locale. Hara più interessato alle architetture dei deserti, con forme e piante forti costruite in terra cruda, Kuma forse già attratto dai leggeri intrecci di paglia, di rami o di fibre vegetali che connotano le capanne delle popolazioni centrafricane. Tangenze e differenze che comunque risulteranno fondamentali nella sua formazione.

Il primo incarico offerto dopo l'esplosione della bolla economica è dunque un osservatorio, situato in un'isola del mare interno del Giappone, nei pressi della città di Imabari.

"Il mio ultimo scopo è quello di cancellare l'architettura perché credo che un







5

*edificio debba essere una cosa sola con il luogo che lo ospita. Questo è ciò che ho sempre pensato e che continuerò a pensare. Come fare allora per dissolvere l'architettura?*⁷

L'osservatorio sul monte Kiro è un progetto invisibile. Scavato nella cima della montagna, è puro spazio senza alcuna facciata. Architettura sepolta, dissolta, fantasmatica come l'annesso progettato da Taut visitato pochi mesi dopo ad Atami. Non a caso è una casa-osservatorio quella che permetterà a Kuma di riconsiderare il suo punto di vista sull'architettura tradizionale. E di ripensare le sue architetture non più come figure frammentate nel caos urbano/dal caos urbano. Né solamente come ecologici spazi negativi affondati nella terra. Dunque è l'incontro con quella casa, così presente nella sua assenza, che plasmerà il progetto Water/Glass, completato nel 1995.

Costruita sulla balza di terreno immediatamente superiore a Villa Hyuga, la guesthouse è descritta da Kuma come un omaggio al suo maestro ritrovato.

"La casa in Atami mi impressionò così tanto che cominciai a 'divorare' tutta l'intera serie dei suoi libri. Anche se visse in Giappone solo tre anni la sua conoscenza della cultura giapponese era sorprendentemente profonda ed io ho imparato molto sul mio paese attraverso i suoi scritti

*[...]. Dopo aver letto i suoi libri ho deciso di concepire la guesthouse come un omaggio a Taut. Il primo passo è stato quello di costruire una veranda fatta d'acqua. Taut ha espresso una profonda ammirazione per gli engawa di Villa Katsura. Egli riteneva preziosi questi spazi di transizione fra esterno ed interno, in quanto elementi che collegavano il giardino all'edificio. Sono gli esili territori dove il luogo si fonde con lo spazio abitato dall'uomo".*⁸

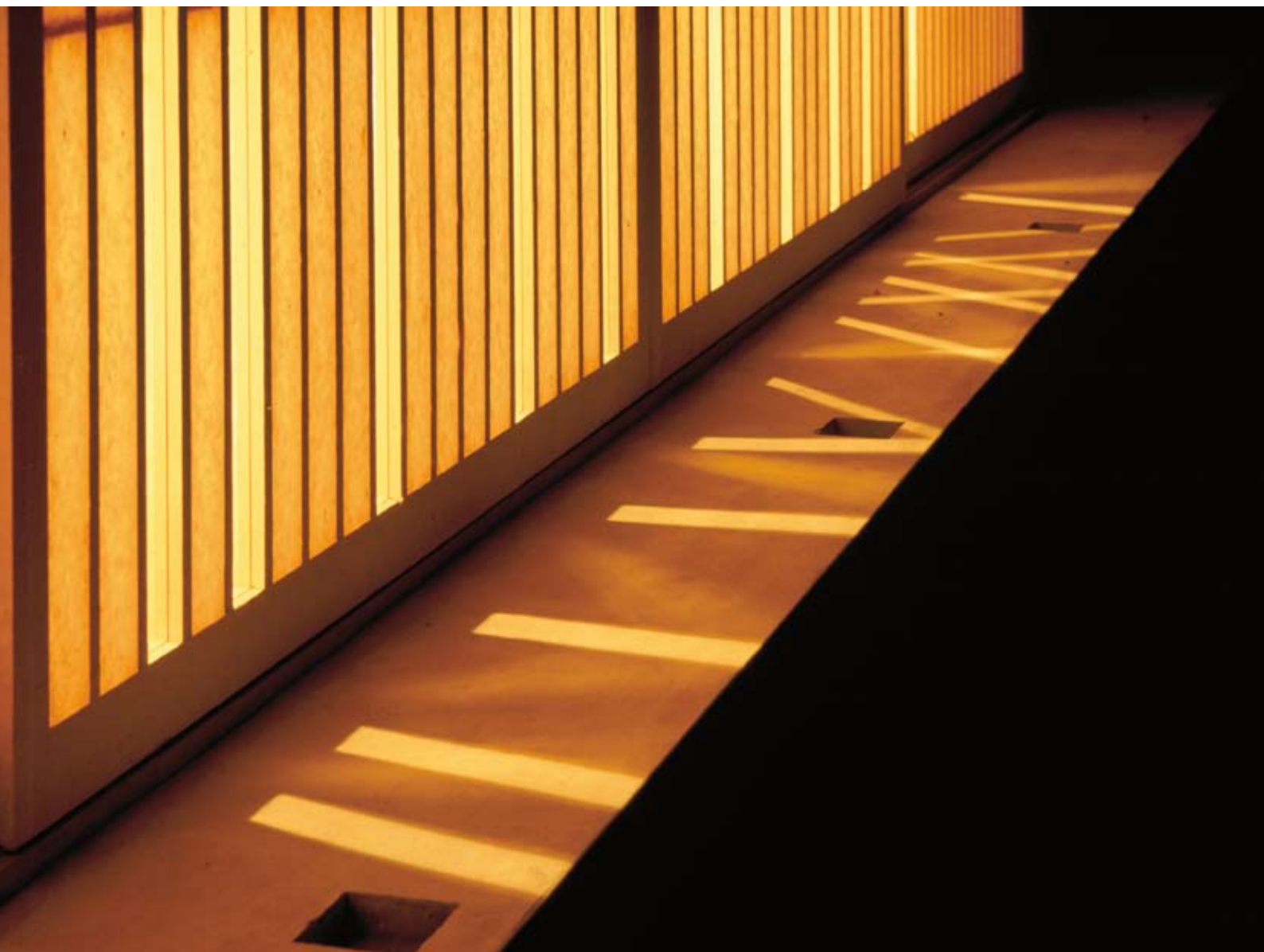
Ambiente iconico della guesthouse è una stanza con pareti in vetro, con arredi anch'essi trasparenti, che poggia su un 'isola' ellittica posta al centro di una liquida piattaforma. La stanza sfuma i propri confini nel panorama della baia. Il tutto è coperto da un leggero tetto, fatto di vetro e lamelle in acciaio, che filtra la luce e disegna le ombre. L'architettura non è più frammentata, né nascosta nel terreno. Adesso fluttua, leggera, immateriale ma inevitabilmente glaciale.

Forse il mistero di Villa Hyuga può aver avuto un ruolo nel successivo progetto per il Noh stage in the forest (1996). Un progetto che segna il riavvicinamento di Kuma alla tradizione, ai suoi materiali, colori e caratteri. Grazie a questa occasione aulica, il legno, la pietra, le stuoie, il bambù, la paglia, la carta tradizionale *washi* torneranno a comparire sempre più frequentemente nei suoi pro-



6







8

getti. Non c'è più bisogno di un'utopia della dissoluzione che frammenti la figura architettonica nel caos urbano perché d'ora in poi saranno i materiali ad essere tesi, lavorati, traforati, inseriti -per usare la terminologia di Kuma- in un processo di "particlization".⁹

Sul palcoscenico di 5,4 per 5,4 metri chiamato *butai*, lo spazio vuoto dove divino ed umano si incontrano, tutto in nuce è già presente: i campi di battaglia e le sale dei palazzi imperiali, le case degli eroi, le vedute poetiche sul paesaggio... e Katsura ed Ise. Un astratto spazio denso, posto sotto l'ombra del grande tetto che proiettandosi verso il giardino, in virtù dell'assenza di qualsiasi parete o schermatura, scioglie ambiguamente l'opposizione dialettica (tutta occidentale) fra l'esterno e l'interno. *"Bizzarro mondo d'ombra è quello del Noh. Mondo di bellezza e di intrinseca oscurità. Per noi appartiene all'universo delle illusioni teatrali; ma, ai nostri avi, forse non appariva molto distante dalla vita ordinaria. [...] Piacciono, a noi Orientali, i sortilegi che traggono il loro potere solo dai*

*giochi d'ombra. «Raccogliete sterpi e legateli. Una capanna. Scioglieteli. Lo sterpaio di prima.» Queste parole esprimono bene il nostro modo di pensare: non nella cosa in sé ma nei gradi d'ombra, e nei prodotti del chiaroscuro, risiede la beltà».*¹⁰

Concisione espressiva quella del Noh che indurrà progressivamente Kuma ad esaltare singoli elementi della tradizione, come il *sudare* (le tende avvolgibili in bambù) gli *shoji* (i pannelli scorrevoli in carta di riso e legno) o il *kōshi-do* (la schermatura costituita da una serie di travetti di legno) per farne ogni volta tema portante ed esclusivo del progetto. In particolare l'ultimo diverrà l'elemento più citato, la vera e propria cifra stilistica della produzione di questa fase.

È con l'Ando Hiroshige Museum completato a Bato nel 2000 (e con lo Stone Museum di Nasu dello stesso anno) che l'opera dell'architetto giapponese assurgerà al successo internazionale. A Bato i temi della cultura costruttiva giapponese sono piegati all'esplorazione dei principi di leggerezza e di sfumatura dello spazio. La vibrazione della luce, l'alternarsi fra pieni e

vuoti raggiunge qui il parossismo, funzionale alla diluizione dell'edificio nel luogo, in accordo con quello che forse è il principale aspetto concettuale dello spazio giapponese: lo *shizen*. La coesistenza armonica con la natura. Il museo include una strada pedonale pubblica diventando così una porta, aperta sulla retrostante montagna e dunque il vero ingresso al tempio posto sulla sommità di questa. La pelle del museo diviene per metonimia il bosco stesso che ha fornito il materiale per la sua costruzione. La natura filtra la luce, la natura è trapiantata dall'interno, nella luce.

Poco prima dell'iconico edificio di Bato, Kuma mette in opera due prove generali. Due opere forse meno famose ma parimenti importanti perché appartenenti a questo momento di conquista di una poetica tesa alla verifica continua dei modi della tradizione.

Nel centro comunitario di Takayanagi (2000) nei pressi di Niigata, i materiali consueti sono posti a contatto con i nuovi. Così la carta *washi* convive con lo *styrofoam* dell'isolamento, mentre la tecnica

tradizionale del tetto vegetale tipico delle *minka*, le case di campagna del nevoso Nord, è posta a contatto con le strutture pretensionate e con l'asfalto. Ma è soprattutto l'opalescenza degli scorrevoli in carta di riso e la nettezza dei ritmici tagli a costruire il mistero.

Nel Nasu History Museum di Ashino, una delle tappe dell'*Oku no Hosomichi*, è invece inserita della paglia all'interno dei pannelli scorrevoli racchiusi fra le lastre di lamiera stirata. La luce è filtrata dall'unione di elementi opposti, resi complementari nel nome della leggerezza. Un gioco dialettico, quello fra tradizione e rinnovamento, analogo a quello dell'ultimo Bashō.¹¹ Dove la struttura fatta di rivelazioni propria dell'*haiku* vive nella reiterazione di concetti non contraddittori bensì necessari l'uno all'altro.

“L'haiku è la concentrazione millimetrica nelle parole dello sguardo e di ciò che questo vede. L'haiku è il risultato di una sintesi, nello spazio e nel tempo, dell'occhio del poeta e dell'oggetto della sua visione. [...] Prima del momento dello sguardo e dopo non c'è nulla. Le parole dell'haiku appaiono fra un silenzio ed un altro, fra uno spazio e l'altro, fra un intervallo e l'altro. L'haiku sembra la traduzione di un incontro in un istante del viaggio, fra lo sguardo-pensiero del poeta e la natura”.¹²

È dunque una sequenza di istanti assoluti quella che ci pare di scorgere in queste prime opere di Kengo Kuma.

¹ Bashō Matsuo, *L'angusto sentiero del Nord*, Vallardi, 2009. Apice della sua produzione l'*Oku no Hosomichi* descrive in una prosa molto stilizzata inframezzata da brevi *haiku* il viaggio di cinque mesi che il poeta (in compagnia di un allievo) compie a piedi nel 1689 verso le remote province settentrionali dell'Impero. Considerato uno dei testi più importanti della letteratura classica giapponese, l'*Oku no Hosomichi* fu molto amato da Marguerite Yourcenar, tanto che negli ultimi anni della sua vita ne ripercorrerà le tracce seguendo l'itinerario di Bashō. E come il poeta raggiungendo Matsushima (una delle tre vedute celebri del Giappone) per vedere il chiaro di luna riflesso nelle acque dell'arcipelago. Cfr. M. Yourcenar, *Bashō on the road, in Il giro della prigione*, Bompiani, Milano, 1999.

² Invitato da Isaburo Ueno, portavoce dell'associazione giapponese per l'architettura internazionale, Bruno Taut (oramai in esilio dalla Germania nazista) sbarcò in Giappone il 3 Maggio 1933 pensando di rimanere solamente 3 mesi impegnato in conferenze, lezioni e visite per poi proseguire verso gli Stati Uniti. Rimase invece ben tre anni e mezzo, scrivendo quattro saggi sull'arte e l'architettura nipponica oltre a un ricchissimo diario di viaggio. Nel paese del Sol Levante riuscì a costruire un solo edificio mentre progettò e realizzò oltre 300 oggetti fra arredi e complementi di arredo. Il suo contributo alla conoscenza di Villa Katsura, intesa come manifesto ed esempio massimo della modernità dell'architettura tradizionale giapponese è stato fondamentale per più generazioni di architetti, soprattutto locali.

³ Più precisamente nel saggio *Getemono oder Haikara* ripubblicato in Manfred Speider, *Japanische Architektur. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1983, pp. 72-74.

⁴ *Architecture nouvelle in Japon*, in *l'Architecture d'Ajour d'hui*, n.4, 30 agosto 1935, pp. 46-83. Secondo lo Speider, nonostante gli esempi pubblicati, l'articolo in buona sostanza afferma che non esiste al momento

in Giappone un'architettura moderna. Su 220 fotografie inviate alla rivista francese ben 40 sono relative ad architetture tradizionali.

⁵ Cfr. <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/m2/> “Quando progettai l'edificio M2 (1989-91) a Tokyo agli inizi della mia carriera, ero convinto che se avessi creato un'architettura della frammentazione l'edificio stesso si sarebbe dissolto e fuso nel caos che lo circondava. Tokyo è spesso definita come «città del caos», dove il vecchio e il nuovo, la piccola e la grande scala, l'artificiale e il naturale sono mescolati insieme senza alcun ordine apparente. È possibile riscontrare questo fenomeno -che al tempo stesso è orribile ed attraente- in molte città asiatiche. Era particolarmente predominante nei tardi anni '80, quando Tokyo era piena di energia e l'economia era florida.”, Kengo Kuma, *Introduction*, in Botond Bogner, *Kengo Kuma, selected works*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005, p. 14.

⁶ Kengo Kuma, cit. Villa Hyuga rimane infatti l'unica architettura completata da Taut in Giappone. Si tratta di un annesso alla casa di Rihei Hyuga, facoltoso uomo di affari. La casa, posta su un pendio prospiciente l'oceano nella famosa località termale di Atami, era praticamente già completata. Per ottenere una porzione di suolo pianeggiante su cui organizzare il giardino panoramico i precedenti progettisti realizzarono una piattaforma in cemento armato sostenuta da una importante sostruzione. Taut lavorò all'interno di questa struttura ipogea (da qui il soprannome di Casa-fantasma, poiché invisibile dall'esterno in quanto posta sotto al giardino panoramico) successivamente collegata alla quota della casa principale da una rampa di scale. I tre ambienti così ricavati si configurano dunque come una sorta di sintesi fra architettura occidentale e nipponica. Non cercando una media ma esaltando al contrario in un'unica composizione i singoli elementi ed i differenti stili e caratteri. Il tentativo evidente era quello di declinare in un unico progetto di interni la lezione di Katsura dove “ogni elemento -la casa, l'acqua, l'imbarcadero, l'albero, la pietra, vive di una vita propria. Cerca soltanto buoni rapporti...qualcosa di simile ad una buona compagnia.”. Le tre sale, rispettivamente la Beethoven room (con pavimento in legno in cui ospitare serate danzanti o partite di ping pong che presenta un inedito uso del bambù impiegato nelle schermature, nei corrimano e negli arredi), la Mozart room (una sala di altezza maggiore, sempre in stile occidentale ovvero con pavimento in legno, concepita come un osservatorio sull'oceano contendendo al suo interno una gradinata con alzate in cromia alternata e pareti rivestite di seta rossa) ed infine la Bach room (l'ultimo ambiente in stile giapponese con pavimento in *tatami* ed un'ulteriore gradinata lignea in cui è ricavata la nicchia del tokonoma, un ambiente privato e gli arredi), sono collegate da una serie di porte scorrevoli che filtrano lo spazio e la luce richiamando così le prospettive e la profondità degli ambienti *shoin* attribuiti a Kobori Enshu.

⁷ Kuma, cit.

⁸ Kuma, *ibidem*

⁹ Kengo Kuma, *Relativity of materials, The Japan Architect*, n.38, 2000, p.86.

¹⁰ Junichiro Tanizaki, *Libro d'ombra*, Bompiani, Milano, 1982 [1935], pp. 57 e 64.

¹¹ “La grande novità apportata dall'opera di Bashō è consistita, come detto in apertura, nell'aver dato dignità ad un elemento della poesia a catena, l'hokku (oggi definito haiku). Elevandolo a elemento poetico autonomo; e nell'aver trasfuso in esso il frutto di una serrata ricerca letteraria e linguistica condotta con gli strumenti colti propri della cultura classica cinese e della filosofia zen. Una ricerca culminata, nel momento della maturità artistica di Bashō, in una poesia caratterizzata solo dagli elementi essenziali dell'estetica della povertà e della semplicità, e dalla riscoperta della bellezza della quotidianità. In questa forma poetica, caratterizzata da un linguaggio chiaro e conciso, essenziale e, nella sua liricità, quasi rarefatto, Bashō inserì infatti elementi del vivere quotidiano, spesso banali o umili, attraverso cui si colgono però i segni delle emozioni del poeta, immerso nella natura e in colloquio con gli antichi, in una mescolanza di bellezze universali e di oggetti comuni, di banale e caduco e di sublime e di eterno, che è forse per il lettore di oggi la massima espressione dell'opera del poeta.” Muramatsu Mariko, *Dall'haikai all'haiku: la poesia di Bashō in Matsuo Bashō, Poesie. Haiku e scritti poetici* a cura di Muramatsu M., La Vita Felice edizioni, Milano, 2010 [1996], pp. 14-15.

¹² Fabián Soberón, *El viaje y el poema*, in *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, n.31, 2005, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, p. 42



9

Pagine precedenti:

7

Takayanagi Community Center, Takayanagi (2000)

Giochi di luce sulla veranda esterna

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8

Takayanagi Community Center, Takayanagi (2000)

Veduta notturna dell'area d'ingresso del padiglione

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9

Nasu History Museum, Nasu (2000)

Veduta dell'attacco del museo con la porta esistente

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10 - 11

Nasu History Museum, Nasu (2000)

Veduta delle trasparenze interne attraverso i pannelli scorrevoli

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11

YungHoChangAtelierFCJZ-VerticalGlassHouse

Glass by Fabrizio Arrigoni

(page 54)



“Man weiß noch nicht, wie ein Saal wirkt, denn nur vom Licht durchlassenden Fußboden aus beleuchtet wird. Man könnte da auf dem Lichte gehen. Derartiges und vieles Andre müßte ausprobiert werden.”¹

Paul Scheerbar, *Glasarchitektur*

The Vertical Glass House is a prototype of an urban dwelling designed by Yung Ho Chang for the annual Shinken-chiku Residential Design Competition organized by Japan Architect Magazine. The project was awarded an Honorable Mention, but only twenty-two years later, in 2013, was the initial hypothesis, duly reworked by Atelier FCJZ, actually built, becoming one of the permanent pavilions of the West Bund Biennial of Architecture and Contemporary Art in Shanghai.² The pavilion's footprint is based on a square, each side measuring 6.60 meters, with a usable space of 40 square meters per floor. The vertical section is divided into three levels, to which should be added a fourth level, a basement 2.10 meters underground. Set back 70 cm from the edge of the pavement, the four modules are each 3.20 meters high, with the top floor having a double-volume ceiling. The reinforced-concrete curtain walls were poured using formwork whose shuttering enabled the achievement of a perfect dichotomy in the surfaces, even though both sides are of the same material: scabrous and irregular on the exterior while perfectly smooth on the interior. Contrasting with this gravitas, the floor slabs and roof are all made of sheets of composite tempered glass 7 cm thick. On the north and south sides, these glass slabs cut through the concrete walls to form narrow ribbon-like windows - 20 x 290 cm - cantilevered to project slightly from the facades. On the other sides, the wall's compactness is fully preserved in the rhythm of the divisions, immediately perceptible in the breaks and mismatches in the pattern left by the wooden formwork.³ The interior space is organized and supported by a square burnished steel post placed in the center; from it an intersection of steel beams divides the space geometrically into four quarters, one of which is occupied by the spiral staircase. A limited family of objects - the plumbing fixtures, living room furniture and kitchen fittings - furnish a carefully calibrated interior landscape as well as laconically determining the functional distribution of the house: "All the furniture were designed specifically for the rooms inside the Vertical Glass House to be true to the original design concept and keep a coherence appearance with its structures and stairs. Air conditioning was added to the house."⁴ The framework just described goes beyond its technical *raison d'être* to become the agent capable of offering anchoring, structure, and vertical thrust to the whole; explicit confirmation of this organizing role is its persistence at the top of the building where, its static purpose already fulfilled, its action as a sign - Wink - and conceptual role become manifest.

"It is curious to see how the tree has dominated the reality of the West and all of Western thought, from botany to biology, anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy... the taproot, *Grund*, roots and foundations." This note excerpted from *Mille plateaux*⁵ introduces a topic that is of great interest for deciphering the work; if its *punctum crucis* can be identified as the relationship, as peremptory as it is incisive, which this sets up between the corporal shell and the natural light, nonetheless this wellspring of the design has to be traced out within the vaster confines of a dialogue - and a comparison - between Western and Eastern motifs.⁶ It is a propensity towards exchange and intersection of themes and aptitudes evidenced, in the first place, by its designer's own life history - and this without attempting to force life and work into a direct, univocal corre-

spondence. Yung Ho Chang, born in Beijing in 1956, after finishing his studies (a master's degree in architecture from the University of California at Berkeley) taught in the United States for more than a decade before returning to China and opening, with Lu Lijia in 1993, the Atelier FCJZ (Fei Chang Jian Zhu),⁷ the country's first independent architectural firm. From 2005 to 2010 he headed the Department of Architecture at MIT in Cambridge, and parallel with his teaching activities, he was a frequent lecturer, analogous to an ancient *You shi* itinerant counselor, at Yale, Princeton, Cornell, SCI.Arc, Penn, Berkeley, the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University, and Tunghai University in Taiwan. It is in this *métissage* of contexts, experiences, and critical contributions that the firm has gradually delineated its own physiognomy and types of work: "In the past fifteen years, we have developed a body of work that ranged from interior design, building design, urban design, and master planning to art installation. In the process, our trajectory does go beyond a basic agenda from time to time, and ventures into the realms of culture, ecology, economy, and social/urban issues. This exhibition tries to map the development of FCJZ comprehensively and also includes a retrospective glimpse into some of the more hermetic design research I did prior to returning to China in order to establish the evolution of certain recurring ideas in our work."⁸ The Vertical Glass House is an exemplary case study in the way it presents itself as a specimen of research and experimentation and thus an exemplum far removed from current building production - centered around quantity, financial return and speed of completion - and from the strategies emanating from the offices that are vectors of social and economic globalization, with their congenial submissiveness to *novitas* and compulsion to impose an *ab-solutus*, dissonant mark on the landscape typical of the "iconic building": "I believe architecture is something more down to earth, and ultimately relates to how people live. Although I've done my share in some way, I don't think architects can just fly around and build structures anywhere, but rather they need to anchor themselves in one place. For example, you say Italian architects can still be the Marco Polos of today, and come to Beijing and stay for a year... and then there are actually Italian architects here, working and so on... but I'm suspicious of global practice. They may produce a very glorious kind of architecture, but it's not architecture that would belong somewhere. That being said, I think jet setters is very much a result of evolution. When I was younger, I remember I was so envious seeing the stars of my days talking about doing little sketches on their flights between locations, and that was the time for the architect to be creative. Now I would say what a lousy idea. You should really sit in your studio and work with materials and with your team."⁹ *Wen-hu* is the Chinese term which expresses the pair "culture-transformation" and can be associated/developed with the effort of translation, that is to say of the "transposition of one language into another by means of a continuity of transformations. Continuous spaces of transformation, not abstract religions of equality and resemblance, are the measure of translation."¹⁰ This is a semantic field which we can associate with the Vertical Glass House and the fact of its originating in a *historic signature* of Modernism itself; the designers themselves stress this place of origin, this genealogy, but at the same time the debt is redeemed, as it were, by the alterations and displacements, the metamorphoses and upheavals, to which it is deliberately subjected: "[the house] discusses the notion of transparency in verticality while serving as a critic of Modernist transparency in horizontality or a glass house that always opens to landscape and provides no privacy. While turning the classic glass house 90 degrees, Vertical Glass House is on one hand spiritual: With enclosed walls and transparent floors as well as roof, the house opens to the sky and the earth, positions the inhabitant right in the middle, and creates a place for meditation."¹¹ Erase the traces! *Verwisch die Spuren!* is Brecht's imperative adopted by Walter Benjamin.¹² Twentieth-century *Glaskultur* is a technique congenial to the *Neue Zeit*, the time of barbarism and poverty of experience ("Nein, soviel ist klar: die Erfahrung ist im Kurse gefallen...") and is primarily a process of dismantling and reducing the bourgeois *intérieur*, with its cozy intimacy (*Gemütlichkeit*), its countless protective shells (*Gehäuse*), its rooms crammed with things reflecting affections and habits, footprints of days on earth. Glass is a revolutionary virtue par excellence; it dissipates the "secret" and weakens possession until it slowly fades into oblivion, and where obstructions and opacity arise it replaces them with passages and communication. "Glass has no aura; it is cold, pure, devoid of meaning. Over it slide events and happenings without leaving a trace: "Glas ist nicht umsonst ein so hartes und glattes Material, an dem sich nichts festsetzt. Auch ein kaltes und nüchternes. Die Dinge aus Glas haben keine 'Aura'. Das Glas ist überhaupt der Feind des Geheimnisses. Es ist auch der Feind des Besitzes. Der große Dichter Andre Gide hat einmal gesagt: Jedes Ding, das ich besitzen will, wird mir undurchsichtig." We know about Benjamin's sincere and enduring interest in Paul Scheerbar; and yet their positions do not coincide. While they may share their repudiation of the Wilhelminian universe and Philistine humanism of the dominant classes, the *Glasarchitektur* of the Phantast nonetheless produces and preserves a regenerated sense of refuge, of drawing inwards - *Gespensterhafte Beleuchtung* - and a renewed balance between the soul and its place.¹³ The issue at stake is not liquidation of the interior by means of a profane, total visibility - *Sichtbarkeit* - but of knocking down the barriers that

block or limit the expansion of light-color "which wants to embrace everything and lives in the sheet of glass." Glass - "organ of the fantastic spirit" - is the alchemical agent of a transfiguration, a passage, by means of which the "interiorization of the exterior" will be accomplished, beyond any principle of transparency.¹⁴ The glass house is a *locus amoenus*, a magic lantern, a firefly, a small multicolored cosmos made up of iridescence, glimmers, flashes, secluded from what is around it: "When I am in my glass room, I do not want to hear or see anything of the outside world. If I miss the sky, the clouds, the woods, I can easily go outside..."¹⁵ The Vertical Glass House participates in this experience, contributing an unprecedented *Raumproblematik* reminiscent of Scheerbar's fairy-tale anti-functionalism, the liberating symbolism of Bruno Taut, the immanent elementarism of Adolf Behne.¹⁶ The blind walls prevent any extroversion or pressure outwards, letting introspection be sporadically violated by fortuitous views: safeguarding a *Leibraum* as reserved and spare as the polished concrete that envelops it, subtracting it from everything else, the equi-valent space of the Großstadt.¹⁷ Entering the first level through an iron door, the guest is immersed in a "heavenly well," a pit traversed by relations all fluctuating solely on the vertical axis. It is a polarity that operates in the junction-transition between earth and sky, low and high, dark and light, closed and open, fixed and mobile, constant and changing: the many species of the original nexus between the built phenomenon - lines and materials - and celestial space - air and light (of the sun, the moon, the stars).

Translation by Susan Scott

¹⁴ "At the moment, we do not yet know what effect a room illuminated only by a floor that lets the light through will have. With this, one could walk on the light. Things like this and many others too should be experimented." Paul Scheerbar, *Glasarchitektur*, 1914 (translated here from the Italian edition by M. Fabbri and G. Schiavoni, *Architettura di vetro*, Milan, Adelphi, 1982, p. 101.)

¹⁵ See <http://www.westbundbiennial.com>. The building is currently used as a temporary residence for artists and architects who are guests of the institution.

¹⁶ It should be emphasized that this difference in treatment of the openings is echoed in the building's structure, where the walls left solid are thicker than those pierced by windows. The attention to the actual making and the physical construction inherited from the tradition - a dense sum of knowledge, building techniques, and material skills - is an aspect shared by a new generation of Chinese architects, a sort of recovery of the paired terms *Formlehre* and *Werklehre* that underpinned the Bauhaus *Bauen*. In this regard, see the results of two exhibitions: *Positions. Portrait of a New Generation of Chinese Architects*, curated by F. Edelmann and F. Ged, Barcelona - New York, Actar-D, 2008; *From Research to Design. Selected Architects from Tongji University of Shanghai*, curated by Xiangning Li, Triennale di Milano, 2012; see also <http://www.domusweb.it/content/domusweb/it/notizie/2012/09/11/dalla-ricerca-al-progetto.html>.

¹⁷ Yung Ho Chang / FCJZ, *Vertical Glass House Description*.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1980, (here translated from the Italian edition by G. Passerone, *Millepiani. Capitalismo e schizofrenia*, 27, Rome, Castelvecchi, 2003).

¹⁹ On the legitimacy of recognizing an irreducible multiplicity at the heart of the *Kultur*, the following premise is valid here: "Culture cannot exist solely in the singular, and plurality, far from being merely a variant of it, is consubstantial with it. For if on one hand we see cultures borrowing from each other, assimilating, melding into something larger, canceling out their specific traits and becoming uniform, at the same time we observe also the inverse dynamic, that of a continuous re-specification and re-individualization. They continue to undergo an effect of globalization, and at the same time to reshape themselves into their local dimension; because culture is always tied to its native context, to an "environment," as Nietzsche would say: it is by its very nature an ecological matter." François Jullien, *De l'universel, de l'uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures*, Paris, Fayard, 2008 (here translated from the Italian edition by B. Piccoli Fioroni and A. De Michele, *L'universale e il comune. Il dialogo tra culture*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010; p. 154).

²⁰ The initials can be translated as meaning a unique, rare, unusual architecture.

²¹ Yung Ho Chang, *Develop: The Architecture of Yung Ho Chang/Atelier FCJZ*, SA+P, MIT School of Architecture+Planning, February 15-April 13 2007.

²² "Interview with Yung Ho Chang of Atelier FCJZ" in *Design Boom*, 25 September 2012. This stability is reflected in the quarters of Chang's firm in Beijing, in *Atelier Feichang Jianzhu*, http://www.chinese-architects.com/en/feichang/source:index_a_z/category:1/index:10/count:75.

²³ "Die Übersetzung ist die Überführung der einen Sprache in die andere durch ein Kontinuum von Verwandlungen. Kontinua der Verwandlung, nicht abstrakte Gleichheits- und Ähnlichkeitsbezirke durchmisst die Übersetzung." Walter Benjamin, *Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen*, 1916 (translated into Italian by R. Solmi, "Sulla lingua in generale e sulla lingua dell'uomo," in *Angelus Novus*, Turin, Einaudi, 1962, p. 64).

²⁴ Yung Ho Chang / FCJZ, *Vertical...* op. cit.

²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Erfahrung und Armut*, 1933 (Italian translation by M. Palma, "Esperienza e povertà," in *Scritti politici*, Rome, Editori Internazionali Riuniti, 2011, pp. 253-260).

²⁶ On these questions see Massimo Cacciari, "La catena di vetro," in *Dallo Steinhof. Prospettive viennesi di primo Novecento*, Milan, Adelphi, 1980, pp. 125-129.

²⁷ Fabrizio Desideri, introduction to Paul Scheerbar, *Lesabéndio*, Pordenone, Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1982, p. XII.

²⁸ Paul Scheerbar, *Glasarchitektur*, op. cit., p. 54. An interpretation that distinguishes the feeling of the Polish writer from the Klarheit of the modern in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream - Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 40, 1981, pp. 20-43.

²⁹ Adolf Behne, "Glasarchitektur Manifest," in *Frühlicht*, Heft 1, 1920.

³⁰ "Vertical transparency visually connects all the utilities, ductworks, furniture pieces on different levels, as well as the staircase, into a system of domesticity and provides another reading of the modern theory of 'Architecture as living machine,'" Yung Ho Chang / FCJZ, *Vertical...* op. cit. The pure-visibility

of the plumbing and electrical systems, drains, etc., more than being rhetoric or an exploration of the mechanical-technological aspect, seems to be a reiterated *Zeichen der Transparenz*.

Kengo Kuma: Recovering places through transparency and frames by Andrea Volpe

(page 62)



"Do not study what the ancient masters did, but what they sought". With this quote taken from Basho's celebrated 17th century travelogue *Oku no hosomichi*,¹ Bruno Taut² summed up his ideas on Japanese modern architecture.

According to the German master, Japan was unable to develop its own personality in architecture for two main reasons: on one hand, there was the persistent legacy of the monumental style typical of the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa eras; a redundant canon heavily influenced by western classicism and still used for all the new civic buildings of the Empire; on the other hand, there was the attitude of a fresh generation of enthusiast young Japanese architects who designed the expected white modernist buildings, totally indifferent both to the character of a site or to Japanese traditional building techniques and local climate conditions. Their naiveté led them to copy uncritically the latest architectural trends imported from Europe.

Bruno Taut's ability to understand that Japanese architects were conceiving their *ethos* only as a matter of style had been already exposed in his long reportage published in 1935 by "*L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui*".³ In that piece, Taut's critical strategy was crystal clear. He simply could not talk about any new architecture built in the Land of the Rising Sun without setting the constituent parts of Japanese architecture in a precise relationship with the extraordinary modern values of its traditional practices, represented by the luminous example he saw just the day after his arrival in Japan⁴ on his 53rd birthday; an unforgettable experience made possible through Isaburo Ueno's precious diplomatic work.

A series of broken phrases, quickly copied down by Taut in his diary, bear witness to the amazement he experienced during his notorious visit to Katsura Imperial Villa.

In the pure *sukiya* style of the 17th century palace, built in the western suburbs of Kyoto, Bruno Taut found not only a paradigmatic term of comparison he would always place in juxtaposition to modernist Japanese architecture, but a universal masterpiece of architecture itself, just like the other wonders he would visit a few months later in Mie prefecture: the wooden shrines of the Shinto sanctuary of Ise, which is rebuilt every 20 years as a part of the Shinto belief of the death and renewal of nature and the impermanence of all the things and as a way to pass building techniques from one generation to the next.

With his discovery of Katsura and Ise, Bruno Taut's new conceptual geography would be developed definitively around these two landmarks. Almost sixty years later the same path leading to Katsura would be followed by Kengo Kuma.

Kuma's body of architectural work is famously distinguished by the rhythmic use of natural light and shadows. This attitude mutated from the traditional themes of Japanese architecture and was literally rediscovered by Kuma after his early period "*architecture of fragmentation*" whose most iconic project, the M9 building built in Tokyo in 1991 and heavily influenced by a late postmodernist canon, is conceived as an inevitable reaction to the chaotic urban environment of the Japanese megalopolis.⁵

"The next important turning point for me came a few months later, when I was asked to design a guesthouse on a lot in Atami, which faced the Pacific Ocean. While I was walking around the premises, a neighbor approached me and told me that a famous architect designed his house. He invited me to drop by if I was interested. His home looked like an ordinary house from the outside, but when I set foot inside, I was truly amazed by the mysterious atmosphere that pervaded it: it was the Hyuga residence - also known as the Phantom House - designed by the German architect Bruno Taut."⁶

As the son of an art connoisseur and collector of the numerous objects designed by Taut in Japan, Kuma paradoxically could be considered one of the last heirs of the German master. After all, Kuma's personal design evolution

represents well the story of that generation of Japanese architects born in the second half of the fifties who, after having completed their studies abroad (like Kuma himself) or having practiced in the offices of their masters, started their professional careers in the late years of the so-called "bubble economy" era. Kengo Kuma's *rendez-vous* with Bruno Taut's work happened in this very delicate moment of Japan's recent history. After the golden economic boom of the eighties, during the first years of the following decade, the Japanese economy was in collapse due to the bankruptcy of businesses and the failure of financial institutions. Consequently the incredible, exciting, apparently never-ending growth of Tokyo/Edo dramatically slowed down. Professional commissions for architects became rare, downsized and mostly coming from the provinces. Nevertheless, through these small projects Kuma dared to redefine his personal approach towards architectural design through the application of traditional Japanese building techniques, a heritage kept alive by those artisans and craftsmen he met in the various building sites. As a disciple of Hiroshi Hara at the Roppongi campus during his student's year at Tokyo University, Kuma as trained to study and to appreciate the materiality of architecture since his field trips to Africa organized by his tutor. There they both studied local vernacular architecture. Hara was more interested in the architectures of the desert, built with adobe mud bricks and with strong plans and forms. Kuma perhaps was already interested in the lightness of the woven natural fibers screens of the typical huts built in Central African countries. Such similarities and differences with Hara's interests would become important in Kuma's academic training and in his subsequent professional career. The first important professional commission offered to Kengo Kuma after the bursting of the economic bubble was an observatory, placed on the top of Mount Kiro near Imabari City.

*"My ultimate aim is to "erase" architecture because I believe that a building should become one with its surroundings. This is how I have always felt; this is how I will continue to feel. How, then, can architecture be made disappear?"*⁷

The Mount Kiro observatory is an invisible project. Dug into the top of the mountain, it is conceived as a pure space without any facade. A sunken architecture designed to act like an experience or a phenomenon rather than as an object. It is almost an impressive anticipation of that other invisible annex designed by Taut and later re-discovered in Atami by Kuma: Villa Hyuga after all is just another observatory, one that would allow the Japanese architect to seriously reconsider his point of view on traditional architecture. The legacy of the German master would be received in its entirety: no more would fragmented postmodernist architectural figures mirroring the urban chaos of Tokyo or ecological negative spaces sunk deep in the ground shape Kuma's work from now on. The 1995 *Water/Glass* guesthouse project, built in a lot placed just above the Phantom House, explored the possibilities of a dialectic approach with vernacular architecture, becoming at the same both Kuma's manifesto of his new architecture design poetics and his personal tribute to Bruno Taut's unforgettable lesson.

*"Taut fled Germany in 1933 and moved to Japan. Although his life in Japan -German's ally during the war- was by no means a happy one, he completed two houses there. One was the house in Atami, which impressed me so much that I began to devour a whole series of books by the architect. Even though he stayed in Japan for only three years, his understanding of Japanese culture was surprisingly deep, and I learned a good deal about my country from his books. [...] As I read his books decided to make the Atami guesthouse an homage to Taut. My first step was to create a water deck. Taut had expressed admiration for the Katsura Villa 's dec made of bamboo. In his view, a deck is a medium that links the garden to the building; it is the place where the environment unites with the human elements."*⁸

The most iconic space of the guesthouse is the oval-shaped room surrounded by glass walls, almost an "island" floating on the cantilevered water deck. It is an environment which blurs the distinctions between inside and outside, erasing its borders with the landscape of the Atami bay: a view framed by the light glass and stainless-steel louvered roof which filters the light, casting neat shadows. Kuma's architecture now gently fluctuates, immaterial, lightweight but inevitably frozen in its cold materiality.

Maybe the mysterious warmth of Villa Hyuga's bamboos, lacquers, and high-quality wood work could have played a role in the subsequent project by Kengo Kuma: *Nō stage in the forest* (1996). As part of this noble commission, the Japanese architect started to explore his own Japanese identity through a more frequent use of natural materials like stone, wood, tatami mats, straw, bamboos and, last but not least, *washi*, the Japanese handmade paper.

Having dismissed utopia to make architecture disappear in the environment through its literal fragmentation, Kuma proposed simple architectural forms, whose enclosure walls, facades, borders will be progressively pierced, stretched, chiseled in an increasing process of so called "particle-ization".⁹ In Toyoma, Miyagi prefecture, the empty *Nō* stage defines a tense space where human and the divine elements blur into one another. Everything is simultaneously visible and invisible on the *butai*'s wooden floor: the battlefields and the houses of the heroes; the elegant halls of the Imperial palace and the poetic views of the landscape...and Katsura... and Ise. Placed under the heavy shadow of the roof, mysteriously projecting its limits toward the forest, Kuma's conceptual sacred space contains the infinite possibilities of the ritual *Nō* performances. Western thought's typical dialectical opposition between what is standing outside and what is contained inside does not make any sense here since it will be inevitably diluted within *Nō*'s dark holistic whole.

*"The darkness in which the Nō is shrouded and the beauty that emerges from it make a distinct world of shadows which today can be seen only on the stage; but in the past it could not have been far removed from daily life. [...] We Orientals, as I have suggested before, create a kind of beauty of the shadows we have made in out-of-the-way places. There is an old song that says «the brushwood we gather -stack it together, it makes a hut; pull it apart, a field once more». Such is our way of thinking -we find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadow, the light and the darkness, that one thing against the other creates."*¹⁰

The stylistic concision of *Nō* culture would inspire Kuma to exalt and to update every single traditional element: like the *sudare* (bamboo blinds), the *shoji* (door, window or room divider consisting of translucent paper over a frame and lattice made of wood) or the *kōshi-do* (wood lattice formed by closely placed bars used as screen for windows and doors). In the following works these vernacular elements would all be turned by Kuma into the main project theme - especially the latter, which would become a sort of constant trademark for the Japanese architect.

With the *Ando Hiroshige Museum*, completed in 2000, in Bato, Tochigi Prefecture (and with the *Stone Museum* in Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture, completed in the same year) the work of the Japanese architect will reach the status of international recognition.

In Bato the paroxysmal use of the traditional Japanese wood-lattice pattern is extended to form the skin, the roof, and the interior partitions of the building, which is conceived now as an ambiguous filtering space evoking at last -thanks to its alternated rhythm of light and shadows- one of the most important cornerstones of Japanese architecture philosophy: the *shizen* or the way to create an harmonic coexistence with nature.

The *Hiroshige Ando Museum* plays an important role in its environment. Placed on the pedestrian public road connecting the parking lot to the mountain and to the temple built on its top, the Museum may be also read as a sort of *Torii*: a gate open toward the near wilderness while its wooden, patterned skin becomes a clear metonymy for the trees used to build it. Undoubtedly Kuma created an osmotic architecture in Bato, a museum/membrane continuously interacting with nature, light, and darkness.

Beside the iconic *Ando Hiroshige Museum*, Kengo Kuma completed other two works, verifying once again his new poetics based on interpretation of the Japanese architecture vernacular themes.

The first is the *Takayanagi Community Center*, Niigata Prefecture (2000) where the architect presents traditional materials placed besides new ones: *Kadode-washi* paper, insulating styrofoam, the thatched roof (typical of the local northern country houses called *Minka*), asphalt and the diagonal post-tensioned synthetic tendons. The result is a small, extraordinary, building designed to serve various purposes for the rural community. One of its most impressive features is the meeting room with its open loft space, which reveals the wooden structural frame of the roof and its large floor, both covered with the softly textured white paper. Last but not least are the *shoji* screens, separating the interior from the exterior and becoming iconic with their cut open slits. The juxtaposition between their translucent surfaces and the neat, stark views of the rice field creates a seductive and mysterious rhythm whose structure is conceptually similar to the one which characterizes the Haiku poetic form.

The *Nasu History Museum* (2000) is the second of the two works. It is located in Ashino, Tochigi Prefecture, one of the stages described in Bashō's *Oku no Hosonichi* haiku diary. Here Kuma conceives another space, conceptually similar to the *Hiroshige Ando Museum*. A simple long glass building ties together the historic elements of the site: a restored gate, an old storehouse, a stone column from an earlier elementary school. On the inside a filtering process is obtained with sliding panels made of straw and aluminum mesh, two opposite materials joined by Kuma in a poetic gesture, a dialectical game set between innovation and tradition similar to the one that marked Bashō's late work.¹¹

In his last *haiku* poem, the wandering Zen monk conceived of a juxtaposition of apparently contradictory images to get a much stronger poetic effect.

*"Haiku is the millimetric concentration obtained with words of a gaze and of its visible object. Haiku is the result of a cutting process, a synthesis in space and in time of the Poet's look, mirrored in the object of his own interest. [...] Before and after that moment nothing exists. The haiku words appear in between two silent moments, in between one space and another, in between one entrance and another. Haiku is the result of a rendez-vous happening in one precise moment during the journey of life. An encounter which tie eternally the mindful gaze of the Poet and the natural environment which surrounds him."*¹²

In this author's humble opinion these early works of Kengo Kuma look exactly like *Haiku* written in the Japanese landscape; just like Bashō, Kuma conceives their syllabic meter through sequences of sublime illuminations.

1 Bashō Matsuo, *L'angusto sentiero del Nord*, Vallardi, 2009. In his masterpiece, Bashō describes with a very stylized prose interspersed with *haiku* the five-month-long journey he completed on foot in 1689 along the paths leading to the far northern provinces of the Empire. *The narrow road to the Deep North* is considered one of the major works in the whole of Japanese literature. This *haiku* diary was highly revered by Marguerite Yourcenar. In the last years of her life the Belgian writer followed the same itinerary visiting Matsushima (one of the famous 'Three Views of Japan' or 'Nihon Sankei') just to see the same moon light Bashō's saw reflected in the archipelago waters. Cfr. M. Yourcenar "Bashō on the road" in "Il giro della prigione", Bompiani, Milano, 1999.

² "Getemono oder Haikara" published in Manfred Speider, *Japanische Architektur. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1983, p.p. 72-74.

³ "Architecture nouvelle in Japon" in *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, n.4, 30 August 1935, p.p. 46-83. According to M. Speider, despite the modernist buildings published in the reportage, Taut claimed that in Japan there was no Modern Architecture at all. Among the 220 photographs sent to the Editorial Board of the French magazine, 40 illustrated traditional and historical architectures.

⁴ Isaburo Ueno, spokesman and founding member of the International Architecture Association of Japan, invited Taut to Japan for a series of lectures and visits to new and historic buildings. The German master planned a three-month stay in the Land of the Rising Sun. However, once he was banned from the Third Reich, he ended up living in Japan for three-and-a-half years, writing four essays about Japanese art and architecture and an important *carnet de voyage*. Taut built only one building in Japan. At the same time, though, he designed and produced almost 300 objects and pieces of furniture. Taut's contribution of critical praise of Villa Katsura as the brightest example of the proto-modernism latent in Japanese tradition is undoubtedly well known. His books, articles and essays have informed generations of Japanese architects.

⁵ Cfr. <http://kkaa.co.jp/works/architecture/m2/> "When I designed the M2 Building (1989-91) in Tokyo at the beginning of my career, I believed that if I created an architecture of fragmentation, the building would dissolve and blend into the chaos that surrounded it. Tokyo is often called a «city of chaos», where the old and the new, the small and the large, the artificial and the natural are mixed together without any discernible order. You will encounter this phenomenon -which is both a weakness and an attraction- in many Asian cities. It was particularly predominant in the late 1980's, when Tokyo was full of energy and business was booming", Kengo Kuma "Introduction" in Botond Bogner, *Kengo Kuma, selected works*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2005, p. 14.

⁶ Kengo Kuma, "Introduction". Villa Hyuga is the sole building designed entirely by Taut in Japan. It is an annex to an existing house built for Rhei Hyuga, a wealthy businessman. The existing house, placed on a lot facing the Pacific Ocean and Sagami Bay, was already completed. Its panoramic garden is organized on a foundational structure made of reinforced concrete built over the sloped ground. Taut worked inside this structure designing an underground series of spaces. The name Phantom House derives from this invisibility. The hidden annex is connected to the existing house through an underground staircase. The three halls designed by Taut are conceived as a sort of pavilion for guests and each of them is dedicated to a European composer. The first environment (the Beethoven room) has a wooden floor and a remarkable set of bamboo railings and detailing. Dancing parties or ping-pong matches used to be held there. The second one (the Mozart room) is still conceived in a Western style, with red silk facing the walls and an observatory deck -shaped as a tribune- overlooking the ocean. The last environment (the Bach room) is a traditional Japanese-style room with sliding *shoji* doors, *tatami* floor and a *tokonoma*. Villa Hyuga represents Taut's attempt to blend European and Japanese architecture in a unique series of spaces, trying not to reduce the two different traditions in one hybrid-like composition, but on the contrary enhancing their differences into one new, strong concept. The deep sequence of spaces is somehow in debt to the abstract perspectives seen by Taut in Kōbōri Enshū's *shoin* pavilions in Katsura.

⁷ Kengo Kuma, "Introduction", p. 14

⁸ Kengo Kuma, "Introduction", p. 15

⁹ Kengo Kuma, "Relativity of materials", *The Japan Architect*, n.38, 2000, p.86.

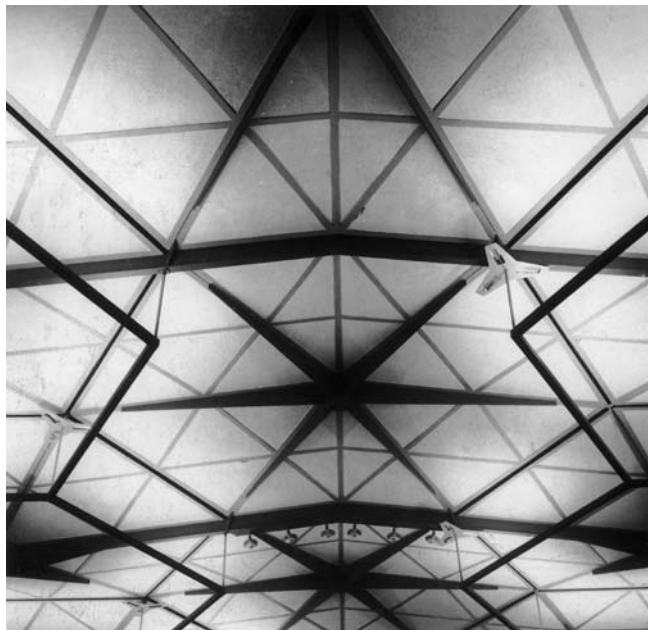
¹⁰ Junichiro Tanizaki, "Libro d'ombra" [In praise of shadow], *Bompiani*, Milano, 1982 [1935], pp. 57 e 64.

¹¹ See Muramatsu Mariko, "Dall'haikai all'haiku: la poesia di Bashō" in Matsuo Bashō, "Poesie. Haiku e scritti poetici" curated by Muramatsu M., *La Vita Felice edizioni*, Milan, 2010 [1996], pp. 14-15.

¹² Fabián Soberón, "El viaje y el poema" in *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios*, n.31, 2005, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, p. 42

Myths of ephemeral light by Alberto Pireddu

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In the memory of those who delve into the recent history of Spanish architecture, the image of some of the pavilions which during the twentieth

century represented the country at major universal and international exhibitions is as though indelible, with their suspended shapes in the only apparently irreducible contrast between production and representation, regionalism and internationalism, permanence and transience.

In Paris, in 1937, the airy transparency of the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the International Exposition dedicated to Art and Technology in Modern Life, the result of a complex and difficult collaboration between José Luis Sert and Luis Lacasa.

A three storey building organized around a large central patio-auditorium, barely covered by a *velarium*, in which the changing reflections and shadows of Alexander Calder's *Fuente de Mercurio* converse with the soft chiaroscuro *montage à séc* of the structure composed by prefabricated elements and the apocalyptic visions of Picasso's *Guernica*, the artist's outstanding contribution to the cause of the *República Española*.

In 1958, the Spanish Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair, designed by Ramón Vázquez Molezún and José Antonio Corrales, an archipelago of hexagonal modules, metaphysical umbrellas of different heights that made up a space of light, smart and clear, versatile and austere, brilliant as an idea more than as an object. It was built on a steep slope near a grove of trees, intending to preserve the diaphanous and transparent character of the forest in the lightness of supports made of galvanized steel, the roof made of wood fibre and concrete panels, in the dematerialization of boundaries in a clever alternation of glass and brick surfaces.

A few years later, in 1964, the Pavilion of Javier Carvajal Ferrer at the New York World Fair, with the extraordinary contrast between the severity of the exterior – a game of prismatic volumes of rough, white walls at the bottom and grey, regularly sorted blocks in the upper part – and the richness of the interior space. Like an Arabic palace guarding its treasures behind thick walls and labyrinthine paths. The centre of the composition was, once again, the patio, a heart of luminous vibrations accessible through a promenade populated by art works and intentionally left in the shade. Around it the exhibition space was arranged, designed in shades of wood and clay, with the windows illuminated by aluminium lamps whose shapes blended with those of the ceiling and welcomed the wide variety of the exhibits in an ongoing bid for integration between art and architecture.¹

At the dawn of the new century, the halls of Francisco Mangado and EMBT represent Spanish "modernity" for the Zaragoza International Exhibition in 2008 and the Expo 2010 Shanghai China.

Along the banks of the Ebro, Mangado entrusts to the refraction of warm, Aragonese light on the poorest materials (terracotta, cork, wood and galvanized steel) and the reflections of the water, from which the slender supports of the covering rise, the task of measuring that *paso del tiempo* which alone may determine the authentic representational capabilities of architecture, its density in terms of ideas and content, and its real continuity, beyond "momentary entertainment".

On the trapezoidal surface, intended for the Spanish Pavilion, appears a "forest" of columns with varying diameters intended to contrast a singular and poetic shape – of tessenowian memory – with the weak characterisation of the site: a large, deserted river bend to the north of the historic city. Like glades protected from direct sunlight in a gradual thickening of shadows, the real exhibition spaces are contained in two large vessels of glass, partially frosted, internally free from structural obstructions and accessible by means of calibrated paths lying on water. On the inside, the rhythm of the large wooden beams of the ceilings overrides the rhythm of the columns, arranged in a suspended game between order and chance. The chromatic vibration is intensified with the clever use of materials: galvanized steel supports, black-wood floors, cork which covers the interior of the great roofing; views multiply everywhere through the stained glass windows, beyond the endless grooves of clay and, to the south, towards the Ebro and the ancient city.

In Shanghai, the light gathered around a patio, Mediterranean and serene, of Paris and New York pavilions becomes a luminous waterfall that the thin umbrellas of Brussels and clay *pilares* of Zaragoza transform into the threads of an intricate, almost surreal, wicker basket.

Its surface tells stories of meetings: between West and East, Spain and China, Sun and Moon, Nature, trees, the sky, but also the eternal dualism between positive and negative, light and darkness, sound and silence, life and death, heat and cold, soul and body, male and female...

As if the work on the matter, its dissolution and subsequent re-composition to form a new genuine and current reality, were trying to express "something" that is beyond colour, shape, space and time: an unalterable substance - similar to light itself - which possesses a reality on one side and another on the opposite side.

If, however, "the revelation of space is an analogy for the revelation of light, colour and material",² interiors have an intensity not dissimilar to that of external spaces.

A large square presents the exhibition rooms, where the curved shapes of the pavilion accompany the visitor on a virtual experience of Spanish cities and culture: from the origins of Atapuerca and Altamira, lost in the mists of time, to the present days and those yet to come of Miguelín, the baby-giant, metaphor of an imagined future. In the entrance hall a suspended staircase leads to the restaurants and services block: offices, the auditorium, the press room, meeting rooms and staff spaces.

The structure of tubular steel columns, supporting the undulating wicker