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Interview with Tadao Ando

Author(s): Hiroshi Maruyama and Tadao Ando

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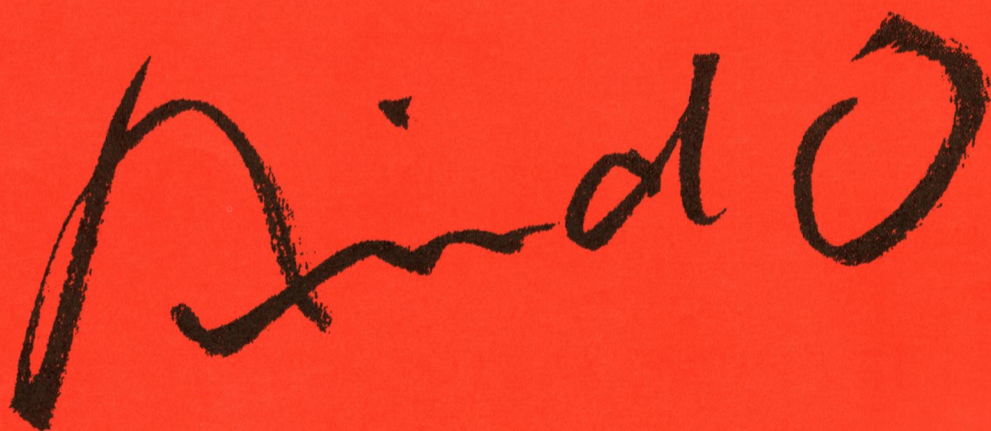
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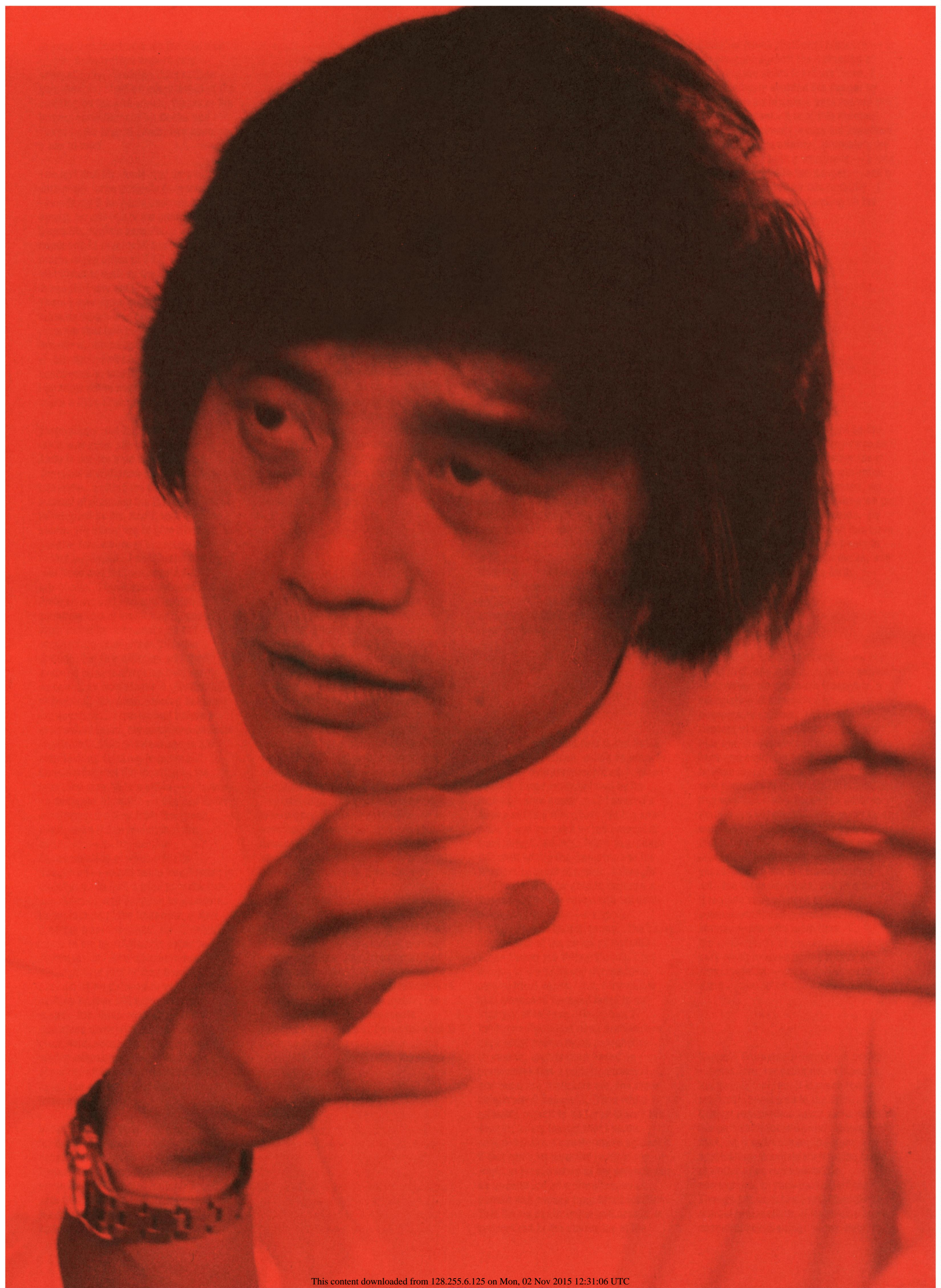
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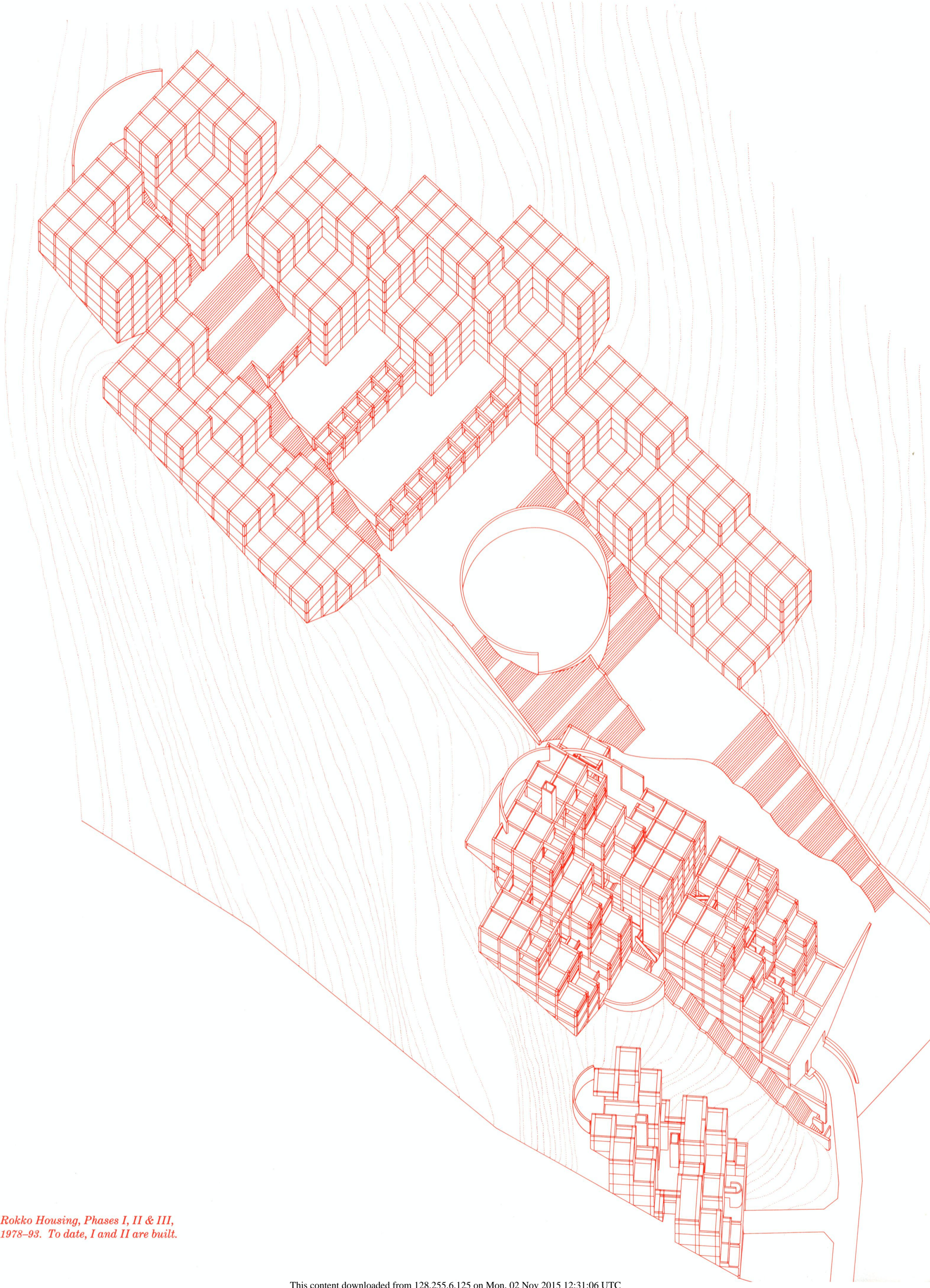
HIROSHI MARUYAMA: INTERVIEW WITH TADA0 ANDO

The date of the interview was set for the evening of February 15, 1994, but I received a message from Mr. Ando saying that he wanted me to visit his office beforehand to join him on a visit to the construction site of the Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum, which was nearing completion. Arriving at 12:00 a.m. sharp, I recognized the usual atmosphere at the office: everyone silently concentrating on their work. Not long ago I heard a rumor that Ando's office had introduced a computer in the design process, so naturally my eyes wandered around in search of it. No success. I didn't dare ask him about it because I knew that whether or not the rumor was true, Mr Ando would ask, "who under the sun told you?"

Greeting Ando, I noticed that he looked different. Instead of his usual sweater and jeans, he wore work clothes, which reminded me of our planned excursion to the museum. During the next five hours — three hours for the round-trip on the







*Rokko Housing, Phases I, II & III,
1978-93. To date, I and II are built.*

subway and two hours for the site visit — Mr. Ando walked around very energetically. Wearing thick rubber galoshes, he checked every detail of the building on the site which, thanks to the largest snowstorm to hit Osaka and Tokyo in the last 40 years, had become a sea of mud.

The fact that Mr. Ando was very busy with many large projects concerned me. I wondered if he could keep up his energy for our interview later that night. Since Mr. Ando's associates were expecting to meet with him upon our return to the office at 6:00 p.m., I was instructed to wait on the fourth floor, a space that was not in use at the time. There I saw some models and a big table on which was placed a small tape recorder that had been prepared for the interview. Since noon — for six hours — Mr. Ando and I had been talking continuously, and the idea of the interview yet to come was beginning to seem a little tiresome, even to me.

Surprisingly, the tape recorder on the table was quite old-fashioned — Mr. Ando is not the kind of person who demands a Walkman Professional for an interview. Letting my mind wander, instead of planning the interview, I was interrupted by Mr. Ando, who came in alone. He asked me to give him the general framework of the interview before we began. I suggested that there was none and that we should talk informally. I have accompanied Mr. Ando on several visits to foreign countries to see architecture, and have often found his eloquence on the architecture of others to be quite striking, but in a different way than when he speaks about his own work. As usual, he was eloquent. Rather than answering, Mr. Ando seemed to divine my questions. I feared that before I even asked them, my questions became implicated in his answers and in his architectural thinking in general. Considering that the location of the interview was Ando's office — a space he designed himself — I decided to let our discussion flow from the space itself, even if that meant that the interview — an impossible documentation of what actually transpired — might seem fragmented or disjointed. In fact, I tried to allow the questions to drift as much as possible. In the middle of the interview, a staff member from the office, Mr. Shinbori, came to the fourth floor to listen to our conversation. After the interview, Mr. Shinbori said that he had become anxious as he listened to my questions, shifting as they did among various topics. Mr. Ando answered all my questions sincerely, without leaving the room even once. And though he was visibly exhausted, Mr. Ando kindly observed after we had finished that he found the unusual interview quite interesting.

In Ando's office there is a guest room for overnight accommodation which I usually take advantage of when I visit Osaka. On this evening, however, I jumped into the bullet train for Tokyo with the tape from the old tape recorder, leaving unanswered the question of Ando's computer.

Hiroshi Maruyama: How is your work related to traditional Japanese spatial concepts such as *ma* [the space in-between] and *oku* [depth]? What comes to mind when you compare these Japanese spatial concepts to those of the West?

Tadao Ando: These are rather abstract questions. It is very difficult to talk about *ma* or *oku* in a straightforward way; besides, I do not actively think about such things when I conceptualize my architecture. As a Japanese, however, I do have those spatial senses buried within my subconscious.

Oku evokes an image of layers and layers of overlappings; by contrast, until the early 20th century, the dominant Western spatial concept was that of perspective. The concept remained dominant until the late 1960s, when Christopher Alexander called it into question. It was at that time that the concept of perspective began to crumble, and antiperspective became mainstream. In opposition to the traditional Western concept of space, Alexander proposed the nontree or semilattice, and at the same time there emerged corresponding attempts by French philosophers.

Is this to say that you were influenced more by the spatial concepts of Alexander and the Western antiperspective trend than by traditional Japanese concepts?

No. It is rather that it is easier to understand the nontree or semilattice of Alexander. If Japanese concepts were considered in this way, it would become clear that they take the form of the semilattice. In Japanese space every element is textured as a semilattice, and the Japanese subconsciously perceive this in their spatial experiences. Certain Japanese discern *oku*, for example, in the entangled state of the semilattice; this idea was completely alien to Western concepts of space, dominated as they were by perspective. *Oku* thus appeared mysterious to Westerners. Some Westerners associate the experience of *oku* with the fictional world of Kobo Abe, whose novels, especially popular in America, appear mysterious in a similar way.

In my own architecture I do not organize new spatial experiences by deliberately destroying perspectival concepts in a rationally and rigidly planned manner; rather, Japanese spatial sensibilities and, more particularly, customary senses of measurement and manners of spacing inhere in me as a maker. As a physical being with these innate Japanese sensitivities, I am also able to produce Western architectonic space rationally. My work results, then, in a mysterious fusion.

I would like to ask you about the distinction between perspective and the semilattice in one example of your work. I am thinking of the RAIKA Headquarters Building in Osaka, in particular. It is perhaps the same size as the Pantheon, which is considered one of the archetypal examples of Western space. In this sense, the work can be seen as a fusion of the Western

and the Eastern. Can we interpret what you just said using the RAIKA Headquarters Building and the Pantheon?

Let me explain it in more practical terms. For example, a typical Chinese temple plan represents a perfect symmetry, while the Japanese plan is subtly off. It is this shift that plays the pivotal role in leading visitors into a mysterious realm. Although the RAIKA Headquarters Building is the approximate size of the Pantheon, it offers a different experience mainly through the manipulation of light and the shifts that occur between various elements.

In addition to the manipulation of light, the installation of the staircases in various spots decenters our focus, too, doesn't it?

A conceptual shift can also be produced by Western reason. But it must be remembered that we always process architecture through corporeal spatial experience. The requirements of the body always produce a discrepancy in relation to a complete architecture, and it is this that causes the mysterious shift. The design of the RAIKA Headquarters Building is based, on the one hand, on the same concentric circle, while, on the other hand, one feels that the concentric circle shifts as one goes around it. I did not make this shift consciously; rather, it resulted from the tension in my making process between a rational way of planning architecture and my desire to realize it according to my own sensual requirements.

Many have claimed that Western architecture is basically perspectival. What made you aware of perspective's dominance and how have you become dissatisfied with it?

What comes to mind first is the Scala Regia at the Vatican, which appears to me to be "overperspectivized." When I saw it, I was overwhelmed by its incomparable power, and I sensed a strong shifting maneuver. At the same time, I was shocked by the amount of trouble that had been taken to produce this shift within the framework of the Western concept of space. I thought that one should be able to produce a deeper and richer space without such bombastic gestures — a space experienced in human terms. The same can be said of the forms of Palladio. When I enter the Villa Rotunda, I am thrown into a perfectly perspectival, symmetrical space. Yet, I inevitably feel repressed because there is no moment of release. Here, too, I intuited a limitation of an architecture dependent primarily on perspective. Of course, architecture based on perspective has a certain attraction, and the more it attracts me, the more dangerous it becomes. Thus while allowing myself to be lured toward the danger, every instant that I sense danger I make a countermove against it. If this can't be detected in all of my work, at least certain of my projects can be understood as a simultaneous pursuit and escape from this attraction. This theme of attraction and danger is concretized in the staircases of the

Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum — in my struggle against the seduction of pursuing the stairs for stairs' sake, I unconsciously avoided the danger by pulling the architecture back toward the human element. It is at this moment that I unconsciously invoke the Japanese conception of spatiality. Ultimately my work contains both a weakness — being unable to persist in the danger — and a fascination caused by this inability. I feel that I am always standing on the very edge of this conflict.

At the Anywhere conference in Kyushu in 1992 you said, "Through architecture I strive to make the wind dance and the land and the sky reverberate for this can awaken the movement of genius loci to fresh vigor and restore vitality to its life."¹ I do not know whether this is the first time you used the term, but what is its importance for you? How do you attempt to activate the spirit rooted in a particular location — genius loci — through architecture?

The best example of this might be the TIME'S project in Kyoto. The power or spirit that resides in a particular locus functions and stimulates our essential being. When we first see a place, we wonder how to respond to it; then we go into the realm of the imagination. By answering the question "What has been invoked from the locus?" we begin to speculate on what we are to evoke, and the true genius loci issues forth.

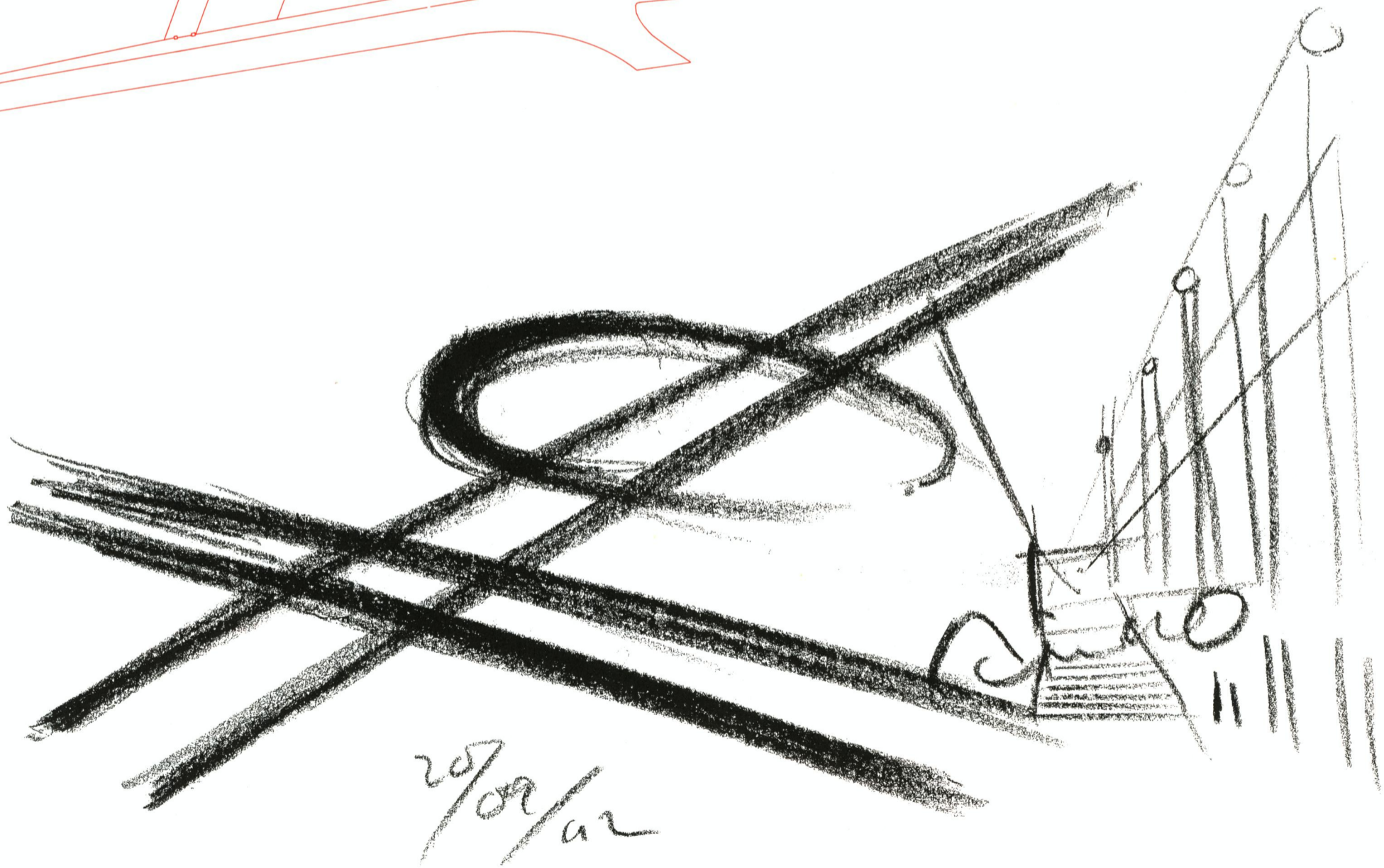
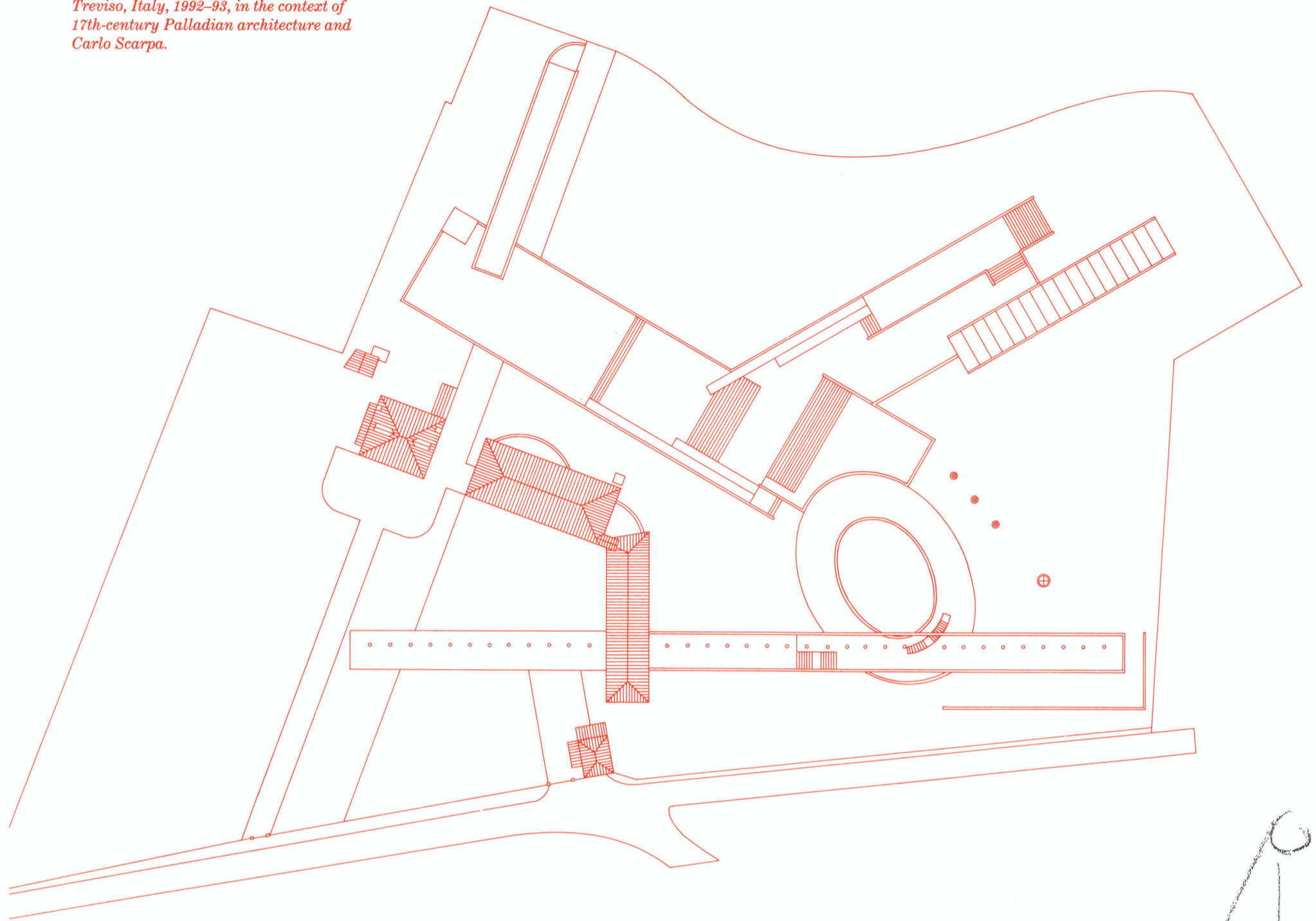
Do you mean that the genius loci does not come alive by itself unless we act upon it subjectively?

That's right. In other words, there is a locus first, and then its spirit — genius loci. When we approach it actively, a stimulating contradiction or conversation arises. The dominant concept of locus has been to consider how one makes oneself fit into it, in the here and now. On the contrary, I believe that it is more important to bring new concepts to the locus. It is only in this way that a new locus can emerge. People are not affected very much by an architecture made by an imagination that fails to form a genius in the first moment of inspiration. Architecture is essentially an act of communicating with the locus or object, and in order for it to open such a space of communication, the architect must communicate with them first. So far, the problematic of genius loci has been very much focused on the issues of representation — of material, gestalt, margin, and so on.

That is to say that dependence on the given image is insufficient.

Kenneth Frampton's concept of critical regionalism, for example, is close to the genius loci, but it is much too practical, compared to the latter. Critical regionalism takes as its premise the particular location and region, and then, as it searches for the right application, it considers how the issue of material as representation corresponds to such particularities. Though my work has been identified as critical regionalism, it involves a more essential questioning. In my view, if

*FABRICA (Benetton Research Center),
Treviso, Italy, 1992-93, in the context of
17th-century Palladian architecture and
Carlo Scarpa.*



*Tadao Ando, conceptual sketch for
FABRICA.*

the architect does not intend to inject new inspiration into a particular locus, the genius loci will never surface. Many have invoked genius loci in order to “read” landscape/topos, while I, on the other hand, stress the importance of how to create the topos.

As I see it, the landscape/topos is not only concerned with the gestalt of the land, but also with its inherent nature, which must be excavated. With the TIME'S project, the architecture creates a new landscape/topos over the existing locus. Simply following the dictates of a locus and considering appropriate architectonic applications only involves a passive reading. The often discussed concept of *fen sui* is not sufficient either, because it remains a way of reading. A new *fen sui* must be created that is stimulated by the existing one. It is with this conviction that I produce my architecture.

Since you answered my question on a highly metaphysical level, I would now like to question you more directly. Everyone feels the spirit that derives from the locations of TIME'S and the Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum. By comparison, one does not sense the genius loci in the location of offices in a typical Osaka urban district. How do you respond to these very different locations? Differently in each? Is it possible to discover the genius loci in a mundane urban district?

Just like the location of this office, my early Row House, Sumiyoshi (Azuma House) is located in a traditional Japanese downtown area where tenement buildings are ubiquitous. When I stand in such a place, I meditate on the peculiar space that defines the life of the Japanese, and wonder what they are thinking. The traditional Japanese urban dwelling has been meticulously contrived by common people to create a rich microcosm within a narrow and limited space. To counter its narrowness, the traditional house seeks a vastness of space; the richness that results lies in its ability to achieve a “potential depth” [*okuyuki*], which means less a physical scale and depth than a space that consists of layers of images. In this office, too, we consider to what extent potential depth can exist in a narrow space, and more specifically how this depth forms a dialogue with our minds. Spatial experience, after all, is a world of the imagination, and the question is how to stimulate the imagination — and we often do so by inverting the given impression. Seen from the exterior, this office looks like a plain box, yet once you enter, a large space suddenly unfolds, and when you go underground, still another dimension is revealed. Visitors who experience this space are betrayed at every instance of its articulation; here, one is able to enjoy a completely unexpected spatial experience. The Japanese have produced similar urban houses that reflect the occupant's view of nature. Like Japanese urban houses, Spanish and Greek urban houses have inner yards, but they do not have the same potential depth — the whole space can be grasped instantaneously. In the

Japanese house depth is fully unfolded by a fundamentally different spatial concept. To be more precise, the sense of genius loci in the Japanese town house is more a matter of how much “spirit” one can perceive instantaneously in the unfolding of the potential depth.

Geometry clearly plays a pivotal role in your architecture; in your drawings it is expressed as lines. How is the geometrical element of your drawings reflected in the actual form?

In Western planning, geometry is substantially and solidly expressed as a space; while my hope is that in my architecture geometry remains something that cannot be expressed directly in space. Granted, geometry and reason are inseparable; the point was the first invention after the development of reason. A straight line produced by connecting two points — the product of archaic geometry — is contradictory to the organic world of nature. There has not been much discussion about whether these two can coexist in one and the same locus. From now on, I would like to think about what kind of expression can be made when the organic and geometric collide in one space. I assume that Peter Eisenman is attempting the same thing.

In Eisenman's architecture lines in drawings are directly transferred into buildings. You would criticize this, wouldn't you?

An architect such as Eisenman exists by such direct expression in which case it is better that way. Conversely, I would rather not have geometry exist as it is. Isn't it interesting that totally different levels of expression can be executed by applying the same geometry?

When you use geometry or form in general — rational, systematic, and Western — how do you connect it to Japanese culture?

Geometry is a form produced by sheer reason, but architecture can hardly be produced by reason alone. Though it grows along with reason, human desire is uncontrollable. For example, within a geometric space, can you create a space that fully satisfies human desire? I think it would be difficult to do so. An architecture produced through a purely formal approach would create an authoritarian and righteous world. But there always exists in the human mind the desire to subtly shift the formal approach. The ideational world of form and geometry alone cannot provide the space for the individual to exist: we live spiritually in that minute shift in space or discrepancy that occurs within formal geometric architecture. Since we live both in physical and spiritual worlds at the same time, a formal, geometric architecture produced solely by reason is insufficient, isn't it? And isn't it in this very shift that the human spirit resides? We grow tired when entrapped in an architecture without the spiritual shift. I consider it indispensable to produce in my architecture a shift within the geometric form, even if it appears to be totally dependent upon geometry. Because of this shift my architecture

achieves a comfortable space, even if it appears to be simple. In the architecture of Albert Speer, scale, form, and geometry are pushed to the limit — to perfection. Don't you sense an insanity in that? Or reason coupled with insanity? Perhaps one can sense only insanity and not reason. An architecture of insanity, such as Speer's, tends to go beyond and even ignore architecture. It is an architecture that exists in collusion with absolute power.

You appear to keep a distance from Western rationalism while at the same time criticizing it. Do you criticize Japanese culture as well?

Speaking of Japanese culture in terms of architecture alone I find that it lacks reason and is overemotional.

Do you think that Japanese tradition constrains the work?

I don't think it is a constraint, but it exists in my subconscious.

Does that mean that, for you, traditional Japanese culture in architecture is something that should neither be protected nor destroyed?

It is not so much an issue of protecting or destroying. I feel within myself certain spirits that are critical of both Western and Japanese traditions. These spirits produce something that cannot be easily defined. Even if I interrogated myself, I could not get a straight answer to the whether-or-not question.

A critic has claimed that your architecture is neo-traditionalist, primarily because you appear to completely ignore such things as computer games, cyberspace, and virtual reality, with which many Japanese are, at present, obsessed. In this sense, your position might in fact be called neo-traditionalist. Do you define yourself as a conservative architect? And how would you react to the electronic environment that surrounds us today?

What precisely do you mean by the electronic environment?

Fax and computers are transforming our lives. It might not be too much to say that all Japanese are intoxicated by it. For example, Toyo Ito does not hesitate to play with the electronic environment.

I do not know much about anyone else, but I have the opposite impression. Although Ito seems to participate in the electronic environment trend, isn't he, in essence, very distant from it? Conversely, even though I may appear to ignore the trend completely, I accept the computer, fax, and the like as realities of life. But however radically our environment is changed by technology, the human factor cannot be forgotten altogether inasmuch as the computer is programmed by the human brain. On the other hand, it is true that our ability to perceive has been drastically altered by the electronic environment, which is accepted more and more as the status quo. In this case, culture will of course be altered. For me, however, it is only human

existence that can powerfully affect spirit and being.

Computers can be useful in making us forget the spiritual, can't they?

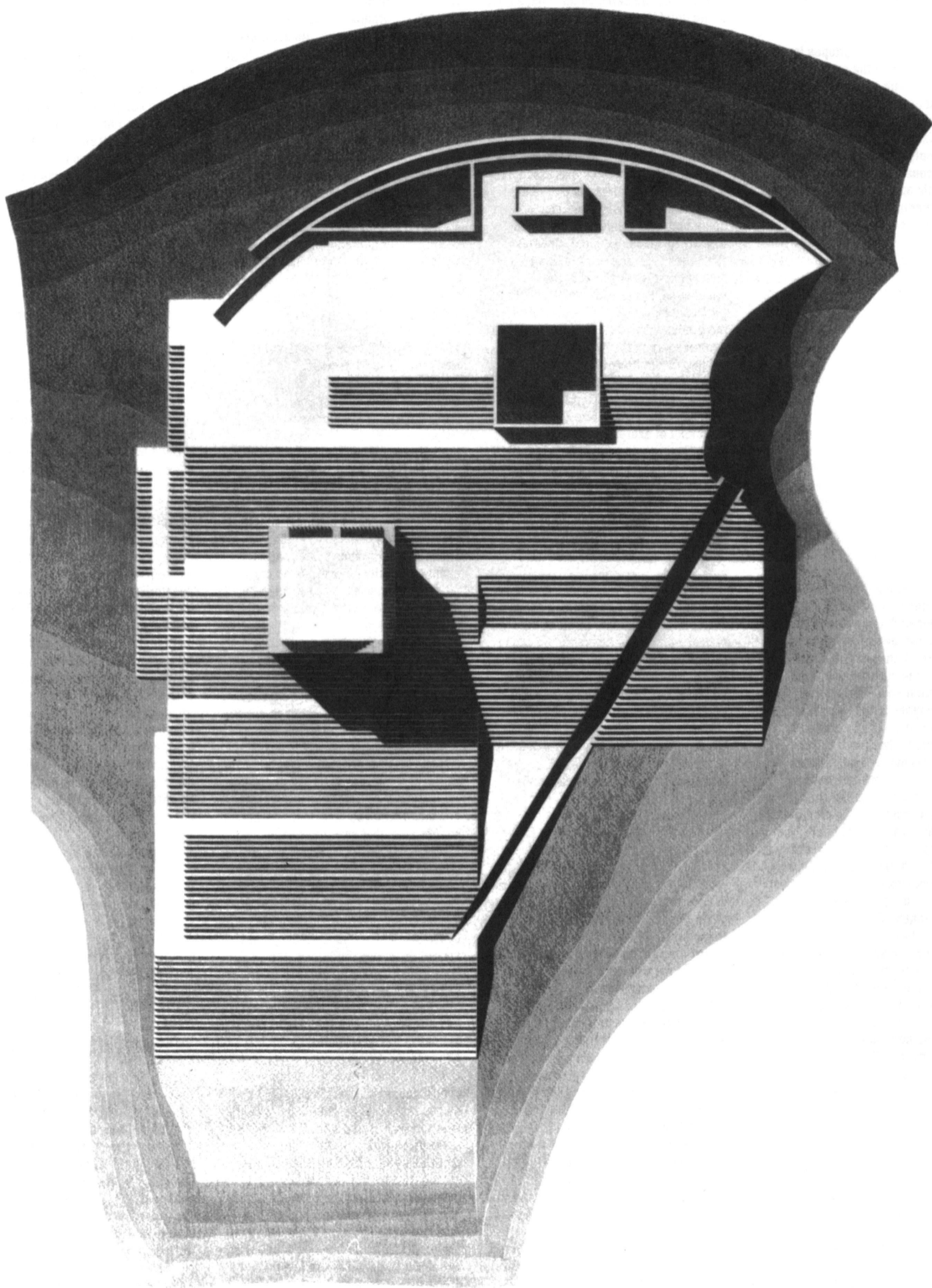
One can also say the reverse is true. But for those of us who attempt to make architecture — a marginal culture that is inseparable from the demands of other social functions — it is unlikely that the computer, which lacks spirituality, can bring about a new worldview by itself. Yet it might be possible for humans to bring about a new worldview by receiving stimulation from the computer. In any event the computer must feed back to the self in order for it to speculate upon the human condition.

Some Japanese architects, whom I will not name, find inspiration for their architectural vision in computer images. Does this seem totally nonsensical to you?

If one receives inspiration while at the same time accepting feedback, I support the attempt. However, in the now fashionable representation of images related to the computer, this hardly seems to be the case. On the other hand, in Peter Eisenman's work one can see the strong, primal world of his imagination into which the world of the computer is inserted, including the process of feedback. For although computer technology is itself more developed than the conceptualization of the computer seen in Eisenman's work of 10 years ago, his rapport with the medium has been consistent, allowing little alteration. Eisenman first internalizes the received image of the computer, then unleashes it into the architectonic world. The computer is utilized as a stimulus to drive his imagination into a new realm — it is a tool that he uses to express his peculiar three-dimensional entities. What Eisenman introduces into architecture is not directly borrowed from such shapes.

These days quite a few American and European architects are designing work in Japan. What do you think is the difference between your Rokko Housing I and II and the housing projects built by Rem Koolhaas and Steven Holl in Kyushu? Also, what do you think of the difference between your TIME'S project and Frank Gehry's Fish Dance Restaurant in Kobe?

My initial impression on seeing Rem Koolhaas's and Steven Holl's housing projects in Kyushu was that their conception of the projects in general, if not each element, is detached from the institution of Japanese architecture. Imagine if our conception were detached from institutional considerations — it is a near impossible situation. We commonly work with a subliminal understanding of institutional requirements. In contrast, since they were completely disconnected from the Japanese lifestyle, both Koolhaas and Holl in their housing blocks exhibit sensibilities different from that of a Japanese. Yet even if they are detached from Japanese institutions, it does not mean that they ignore regulations;



*Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum,
Osaka, begun in 1985 and now under
construction.*

because they are so detached, their imaginations induce a kind of cultural stimulation, which, for some Japanese, must be truly exciting. Speculation from outside our institution — the creation of an independent freedom or liberty — offers a different sort of stimulation than that found in our work. On the other hand, Rokko Housing I and II were designed to break with previous institutions; they make small rather than big differences. The accumulation of such small differences can, however, produce a drastic result.

The first floor of Koolhaas's housing is formed by a pure grid, like that of a prison. Not only do we not know how to use it, neither do we know how to imagine it.

In my use of the grid there always exists a shift both in plan and section; it is for this reason that one comes to unconsciously forget the grid. It is my intention to make the grid oblivious while at the same time employing it. This is not to say that I want to avoid reason entirely. I want to give it a role, too.

And the difference between the TIME'S and the Fish Dance?

I feel a spirit of freedom in some of Gehry's work in Los Angeles, but his Fish Dance Restaurant in Kobe appears to me to be the opposite. I believe that Gehry's importance lies in his expression of freedom. Unfortunately, in the Fish Dance this was not the case. Since I made the TIME'S in order to destroy the institution from within, my consciousness is fully expressed there. The many visitors to the building who are architectural outsiders — novelists, philosophers, and scientists, those who share the desire to get out of the institution, in other words, to achieve freedom — seem to be strongly affected by this work.

Aside from the Fish Dance, then, Gehry's work in L.A. and your work are similar in that they both attempt to draw freedom out of something. Don't you feel this similarity?

I believe that Gehry is the freest of the architects working in the last quarter of the 20th century; this derives from his spirit. He is representative of a rare attempt to merge architecture and contemporary art. Because he is an architect of freedom, I hope he keeps on being free.

This relates to another issue. Is your minimalism at all related to Donald Judd's and Richard Serra's work? Furthermore, since the minimalist position is a sort of origin of the modernist aesthetic, what do you think is the rapport between your minimalism and that of Mies and Le Corbusier?

I would like to speak of my relationship with minimalism aside from my personal acquaintance with Donald Judd or Richard Serra. Judd appeared in the early 1960s, and I first became aware of his work through Shiro Kuramata.² It was around 1958 that I began to be concerned with contemporary art. I was looking at works by Jiro Yoshiwara and

Syuji Mukai of the Gutai Group.³ Mukai was painting only signs. Thanks to my friendship with them, my interest in contemporary art grew. It was my feeling that minimal art, as opposed to painting that is depicted in "perspective," could go beyond painting. This still concerns me, though now I am interested in Cy Twombly; I feel that he is someone who has the possibility of expressing something beyond painting. In music I think Brian Eno pursues the same thing. My relationship with Judd and these other artists familiarized me with contemporary art. It is not that my architecture became minimal because of this, but that I wanted to make architecture that organizes a life with potential depth, even though its expression is minimal. I have always wanted the so-called contradictory desires of being simple and complex to coexist in the same locus. Even within the boundaries of minimalist expression I would like to produce a rich spatial world that is completely beyond minimalism. When you actually go into Mies's Farnsworth House, you experience a rich and deep space, despite its minimalist exterior guise. And I think this is one of the best architectural legacies of the 20th century.

What you are talking about was once expressed by Mies as less is more. For you, however, it also means that perspective remains, doesn't it?

Yes.

Do you think that the Japanese notion of architecture has been changed because of the many works of foreign architects that have been built in Japan? And, conversely, have we Japanese architects influenced Western architects?

When someone asks whether there is a freedom, a total detachment from our social constraints that foreigners enjoy when they work in Japan, it means that person has been influenced a great deal. I think that "freedom" is a culture of the *imaginaire*. We in Japan received from foreign architects a strong world of the imagination. But it is worrisome if Japanese architects are influenced only in terms of design or method. This implies that they are being affected only superficially. On the other hand, with regard to the influence of Japanese architecture on Western architects, when Westerners see Japanese traditional architecture and engage in conversations with such figures as Arata Isozaki or Fumihiko Maki, they begin to realize that there is something in this work that is not the product of reason alone.

When you have commissions abroad, do you approach the work in the same way as you would in Japan? Do you think that architecture is always bound to the locus in this sense?

Let's take as examples the Benetton Research Center in Italy, now under construction in the Venetian suburb of Treviso, and the Vitra Conference Pavilion in Weil am Rhein, a suburb of Basel. The Vitra project is inspired by

the locus — next to a museum by Frank Gehry. In contrast to the movement and freedom that emanate from Gehry's work, it was my intention to express a stoic freedom — a coexistence of tranquillity and freedom. My imagination was formed against the locus where Gehry already existed. Thus my architecture will converse with Gehry's work and the work of Claes Oldenburg that is installed between the two buildings. From a distance a low, flat wall is barely perceptible. While the exterior impression is stoic, a dynamic spatial experience is introduced in the interior. In contrast to the Japanese landscape garden in the go-around [*kaiyushiki*] style, which forms flat movements, I introduced something like the three-dimensional garden in the go-round style, and with this I hope to produce an alternative to the Japanese way of making space.

My approach to conceptualizing the Benetton Research Center was different from Vitra. The context was the Palladian style architecture of the 17th century that remains on the site. I made this work while meditating on the difference between the Japanese way of making and that of the West, and their respective notions of the thing-in-itself. Having to respond to 17th-century architecture made me conscious of Carlo Scarpa and his process of building. Because Scarpa's work is so artisanal — so carefully crafted — it made me realize not only the necessity of rational, abstract thinking, but that the best architecture is both rational and artisanal. Simultaneously, a more distanced, ideational way of making — like that of Rem Koolhaas's work in Japan — also gave me a hint. Considering the occasion — a Japanese making architecture in Italy, the cradle of Western architecture — I thought that I should approach the challenge with my own unique understanding and interpretation. With all due respect to the history of Italian architecture, I thought I should introduce something new that might promote an active conversation — a stimulating integration of the Italian affection for ancient architecture and of contemporary Japanese architecture. But I also wanted to allow each to retain its own coarse grain. In a practical sense, the new architecture penetrates the old architecture, which remains in its own position. Following the Western manner of restoration, which is centered on preservation and conservancy, one would not follow such a bold method. But Japanese architects working in the West are like Western architects working in Japan — they are unable to follow their natural inclinations as they might in their native countries. Creators are always looking for spiritual sublimation and stimulation; as for me, I conceptualize my work comparatively freely wherever I am.

While you were working in Japan, did you ever have occasion to think of Scarpa?

When I saw him in the context of Japan, I had the impression that he was making architecture in a craftlike and artisanal manner; every part of his architecture

vocalizes something. I find such a garrulous architecture odd. I would have let some parts speak, let the echo flow past some parts, and let other parts receive the echo. Having so many voices conveys a certain excess, a lush fleshiness. For Japanese architects, who generally have a vegetarian sensitivity, such an architecture feels oppressive. John Soane's house in London also made a strong impression on me; when I entered it, I felt as if I were being attacked by some unknown entity. At Benetton I learned from these negative experiences and determined to make something different. From the Western point of view it may appear to be too plain; I began to wonder even if it might be too austere. But I was surprised that my impression was somewhat altered after returning to Japan and seeing the pictures of the construction site. From this perspective it appeared unexpectedly European, a site of elaborate manual labor.

I am sure that you were spiritually influenced by Le Corbusier. Could you point out some elements of this influence in your architectonic vocabulary?

Putting practical examples aside, I was moved by the intense rationality of the Dom-ino system and the scale of his imagination. In his manner of thinking I sensed a possibility for the future. On the other hand, at Ronchamp I felt only human desire, not reason. In contrast to the Villa Savoye, which derived from the Dom-ino system, at Ronchamp Corbusier expressed a moment in which desire goes far beyond reason. Such desire appears when human life is finally, completely, burned out. The irrational attempt, such as that at the Ronchamp chapel, has a feeling of desperation about it — I do not feel reason in it at all. This is an architecture totally driven by desire.

How would you compare your work to that of Louis Kahn or the Ticinese School?

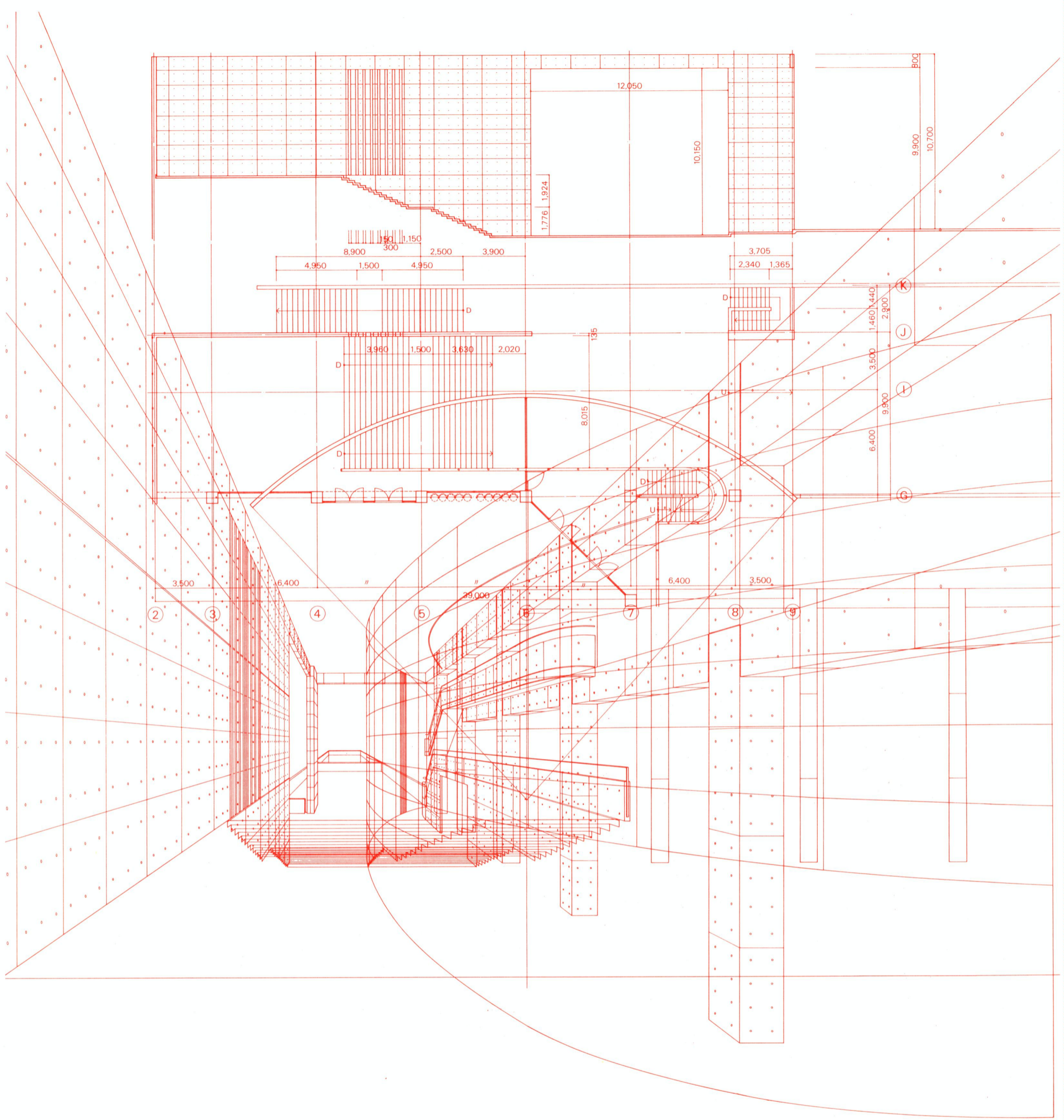
Louis Kahn had a firm belief in human existence; he trusted human strength. I, on the other hand, feel that though we appear to be strong, we in fact are weak; this marks a drastic difference in our modes of expression.

Your grid is subtly shifted, implying the necessity of an opening not only for reason but also for desire. What about the Ticinese architects?

It seems that they use concrete in quite an easygoing manner. By filling the landscape with geometric, concrete architecture, they sing the pleasures of life. In fact, their work is closer to the Japanese style of modern living — pursuing the richness of life — of the 1960s and 1970s, than it is an architectural expression. Except for Mario Botta's single-family house in Riva San Vitale, which seems rational to me.

In your work one finds a consistency in material and vocabulary. Why do you always use concrete?

Making different spaces by employing the same material and the same tectonic



Perspective, plan, and elevation of outdoor stairs, JUN Port Island Building, Kobe, Hyogo, 1983-85.

is similar to producing a complex space through a simple procedure. I organize actual spaces so that as one visits the real site, one notices completely different expressions evoked by the same material. Herein lies the desire of a creator to enjoy tension: under a self-imposed limitation on materials — by burdening myself with a restriction — I set out to make totally different places that are stimulating spaces.

Preferences for concrete differ. It seems to vary according to a country's aesthetic traditions.

Japanese like concrete because they feel that it is close to the sense of the exposed materiality found in their traditional housing; they have long made simple rooms using raw material in an extremely rich manner. The Japanese unconsciously love the space of nothingness; I suppose they like the mood that concrete produces.

This may seem a strange question, but do you think your use of concrete is masculine or feminine?

Because of the predominance of concrete in my architecture, it may seem to be masculine. But my architecture is rather feminine, inasmuch as one feels enveloped by the work in its real site, rather than suppressed by its strong existence.

Will you continue using concrete?

Even at present I use various materials; but the core is and will continue to be concrete.

You have made small-scale projects such as the TIME'S project and the Church of the Light, and also larger projects such as the RAIKA Headquarters Building, the Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum, and also the Design Museum in Tempoan. How do you jump between different scales?

“To jump” is a very abstract expression. What do you mean by that?

How do you approach the problem of differing scales?

The scale of the TIME'S project and the Church of the Light is a human one. The RAIKA Headquarters Building, the Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum, and the Design Museum in Tempoan surpass human scale, and as such there is a need to bring them back, at least once, to the human scale. In the Chikatsu-Asuka Historical Museum, for example, the staircases became vital in order to humanize the scale. Unless the human scale changes, the rise of a staircase will forever repeat itself — at a height of 150 millimeters.

The size of the staircase is the same, though, in the larger building, and that is why I felt that the larger scale felt even larger. Is this my misperception?

By increasing the number of steps the intensity of the stair increases, as in Aldo Rossi's housing complex in the Gallarate quarter. Applying the same logic, I tried to intensify the staircase in

Chikatsu-Asuka through repetition. Whether successful or not, I have always attempted to insert elements that destroy a sense of scale in the larger projects. In the enormous cylindrical space of the RAIKA Headquarters Building slopes are placed in many locations for the same effect. In the Church of Light, a smaller scale building, there was an effort to make it look larger. Architects need a way to make space that gives a strong impression, but that is not dependent on scale — an architecture beyond scale.

When one speaks of the problem of differing scales, for example in the Row House, Sumiyoshi, the ceiling height is often cited as two meters 25 centimeters, which is a module of traditional Japanese architecture. In this sense, do you always think of Japanese tradition in the context of scale, or is it only in certain cases?

Well, it varies according to case, but I always consider traditional scaling, especially for houses. This two meters 25 centimeters is a good size for small buildings like town houses; if the ceiling height were raised to three meters in a town house, the space would become unstable. Being stable or unstable is always a concern of mine: instability becomes expression, while stability becomes life. I utilize stability and instability differently. We can't fully exist if only stability pervades a space; stability and instability must subtly overlap. The unstable locus of the Row House Sumiyoshi is probably the courtyard: the space there reaches not only double height but, one might say, to the sky, while the ceiling is limited to two stories. It is by this very instability that the Row House, Sumiyoshi keeps its subtle balance.

Do you approach scale differently when you attempt a project of nearly town planning size, such as in Rokko Housing I and II?

In that case the unit is determined by the most apparent factor, human life itself. There are two considerations, the repetition of the unit and the formation of the whole; the simultaneous processing of part and whole make an architecture. In designing and planning, one often begins with a consideration of either the whole or the part; in principle, however, planning a town and designing architecture are one and the same thing. In town planning one cannot forget the house as a unit, and in architectural design one cannot afford to forget the town as a whole — they form an absolutely simultaneous process of creation. What should be noted in this process is that a set of units does not necessarily become a town, nor does a set of functions automatically become a town. Some fictional element is required. The pivotal point is how something irrational, which transgresses function, appears in the process as a necessity. A collection of functions, achieved in a functional manner, will not add up to a sufficient life; and yet if a resident cannot enjoy a comfortable life there, this process will have to be regarded as an example of the domination of sheer irrationality. Thus

we must look for an expression that fulfills simultaneously both the rationality and the irrationality that exist beyond a set of mere functions. Looking at examples of town planning from the past, every single plan has been weighted one way or the other.

That seems to me to be inevitable.

I would rather think of it this way: instead of accepting it as inevitable, or of pursuing conformity between the whole and the part, I aggressively look for the shift and chasm made by layering the whole and the part. What is important to me is the impossibility of conformity itself.

Between Rokko Housing I and II there seems to be, at first glance, a considerable difference in scale. If one actually visits them, however, your attempt to bridge the gap between them can be sensed. What do you think?

The ways that the public spaces are disposed in the two projects (including their scales) differ drastically. The irrational element intrudes upon the consideration of balance differently in each case. The will to persist in creation always confronts the societal and institutional tendency toward realistic and rational problematics. Instead of favoring either of them, I believe they must overlap.

As an architect, have you ever desired to go to the extreme of either tendency, whether morally good or bad?

Probably the Berlin of Speer is such an extreme. In architecture, it is reason that stops the desire for the extreme; perhaps to sustain it is a responsibility for humanity.

You once stressed the importance of the pursuit of three elements — “material with dignity, pure geometry, and ordered nature” — and also said that an architecture comes into existence as a crystallization of the three. What does the crystallization of architecture mean to you in a practical sense? How would you crystallize material, geometry, and ordered nature?

In order to incorporate the three, another factor, the human factor, must be interjected. What is at stake here is how human beings exist. I believe that architecture can attain a life and begin to sing only when a subject who experiences the space achieves a certain imagination and energy that resides on another level. It is when imagination takes root in the subject's mind that the architecture is crystallized. The architecture itself is never physically crystallized, but the person who enters it comes to embrace an image that goes beyond his/her physical experience. Only in this way can architecture become crystallized. For example, while standing alone in the marble square that faces the ocean at Louis Kahn's laboratory buildings at the Salk Institute, an image of another level grew in me. I felt that this architecture was crystallized upon my existence, that is, my imagination was stimulated.

The perspective that we have described is a way of ordering, and there have been many other attempts to find a right way of ordering nature.

I think that in the 20th century we have been groping for a new worldview, while at the same time we have been facing the collapse of the concept of perspective. If the 20th century's conceptual endeavor succeeds in posing an alternative to the idea of perspective that has dominated since the Renaissance, we will be able to regard this century as fruitful in many respects.

What kind of influence do you think your architecture has had on contemporary Japan?

I would like to stress the idea of freedom as opposed to the condition of architecture that is always produced within the institution. In this context, I would like to continue questioning whether my work can be sufficient as an architectural expression at the same time that it sustains freedom. My three slogans, “freedom,” “expression,” and “social critique,” have had some influence over a certain group of people, though I feel that my struggle has not yet been fully understood.

Translated from the Japanese by Sabu Kohso.

Hiroshi Maruyama is an architect living in Tokyo.

Notes

1. See Tadao Ando, “Genius Loci,” in *Anywhere*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (New York: Rizzoli, 1992).
2. Shiro Kuramata (1936–1991) was an internationally recognized Japanese designer.
3. Jiro Yoshiwara and Syuji Mukai were members of the avant-garde group Gutai.