

- REM KOOLHAAS, SMLXL, P.88



SPECIAL THANKS TO PROOFREADER GRACIJA ATANASOVSKA

The redevelopment of the city and the suburb was very much affecting the way we understand and enjoy the city. Recently, I feel that life in Tokyo has become quite unique because of the large programme diversity - commercial, business, school, residential

GHM: Yes... Before that rapid process (the last turn) the community was based on business. The company was the big community for Japanese people. The husband working, the wife – a housewife, staying within the neighborhood community. Another community was the school – with education being very important in the process of the economic growth. But recently this is also changing. The working style has changed quite a lot, so has the school... the neighborhood community as well...the boundary is getting more and more ambiguous. I think those social frameworks have changed a lot.



Tadao Ando, Azuma House, or row house in Sumiyoshi, 1976

A: *The topic, the idea of boundary is something that is very present in your work. How would you reflect on the development of boundary (condition) of the house, as a base of the daily life and the neighborhood, or even the city? (physical or whatever it can be)*

CHM: What I find interesting is that before the war in Japan there were many row houses that shared a wall. After the war all the property was divided into small parcels and that is why people could easily become isolated... They could do any kind of design without thinking of the neighborhood or the community. But it is not that easy, once you start living somewhere you definitely have to make some relation in the urban situation. The void – the leftover space places, the outdoor spaces or the kind of garden – it’s a place where people can participate easily and that could be a very interesting boundary condition. That could work like, kind of adjustment factor for the neighborhood, for instance if you go to the downtown area then you see lots of pots with plants... People start to work on many other textures of life.. sometimes you have plants, sometimes you just have the laundry space or of course – sometimes you make a beautiful garden... those activities are an important expression of the boundary condition between private and public space.

A: *Working as a practicing architect... In reality what are the tools architects can use to (re)establish and materialize relations and communities in these situations?*

CHM: The community is hard to define now, the neighborhood is not that strong anymore regarding business, hobbies or other activities... So now that kind of community is more and more invisible and the architecture is in a way hard to support it. The architectural resolution can be, on one side, basically, set up to support not the community, but the individual, to create space for the individual person. That can be the space for forming delicate relationships to other people. So instead of being oriented towards social groups or neighborhoods, architecture is more oriented towards the individual person who now starts to create new kind of relationships. That is why I think the shared house, as a new type of housing, is now easily accepted in Japan.

A: *We wonder if it is possible to change the city house by house... or if we can afford to imagine the brave new world of the Metabolists? To what scale can architects today bring the change (in daily life)?*

CHM: In the past, just after World War Two, architects didn’t believe that designing a housing complex was

their task. It was the work of the public offices or the big development companies. That is why very homogeneous and extensive housing areas were supplied. I remember clearly that architects began to show interest in housing design in the 1960s and 70s, when there was one movement of designing cooperative housing.¹ One group of architects was trying to create some kind of community through the design of these cooperative housing complexes... but it was a very special case since the rest of the housing was still very unified and homogeneous. After several years of those housing complexes, whose housing unit was based on the typical family consisted of husband and wife and two children, in the 1980s developers started to design the so called one room mansion² complexes. They were focusing on the individual person that didn’t want to live in an old timber structure apartment, but wanted to have a nice package for one person. Very soon people started to accept those new homes which were quite small, but had a nice bathroom, toilet, small kitchen and started to be called one room mansions. After several years of the one room mansion movement – architects started to show some criticism towards that, because although people wanted to live by themselves, we still need to think about the social relations in terms of people, networks, community... In the 1980s, reacting to this, architects got involved with developers and started to (re)design these mansions... I believe that was an important change.

A:*Still, most of the (young) people in Japan today seem to like the idea of living in one room mansions. Having in mind what we discussed...the ambiguous boundaries and the need for rebuilding the community – how do you approach the designing of a multi-family mansion, or apartment building, or just homes for people in this environment?*

CHM: I try to make some kind of connection with the neighborhood or the environment or.... Instead of making a nice closed package of a house or unit, I try to always create diversity of relations with other people or with the urban texture... there are many things! So basically I try to make housing more open. Open doesn’t mean just glass...

A: *How difficult is it to communicate these dwelling ideas with all parties involved in the process?*

CHB: Yes, I think it is quite difficult to convince clients and developers. They went through the period of the big developments with homogeneous type of units. Because of the rapid growth, there was no failure so that is why they can be confident that another project

like that will be successful. But I don’t think that will last many more years...

It is especially difficult with housing. You know, with small detached houses it’s easy in a way because they can just build what they like and don’t need to actually care about the other people. Of course, the neighborhood is kind of tight in Japan, so if you want to build a new house or any other project, there will be criticism or comment from the neighbors like: we don’t want a new house here or another big house here or so... I think one of the symbolic projects was Tadao Ando’s row house in Sumiyoshi that showed strongly that the house, even though it is small – it can create a nice environment. It can provide a nice space inside the house even if you can block out the outside. That was a strong statement by Tadao Ando. I think that it clearly shows that any kind of small house can be isolated, separated from the neighbor, but it can still provide a nice daily life in the city. On the other hand, housing complexes are normally projects that are developed by a developer who wants to do business. That is why their logic is business oriented. There is no other model for them.

A: *Working as a professor... What do you think are the possibilities for, and the responsibilities of young architects in Japan (or ones that we can learn from Japan)?*

CHM: Young architects should think of the sense of the common! Sometimes the common is space... but sometimes the common could be just the visual interaction, activities and so on. I think that it should be considered in design in all scales. There are many ways of common. On one side these are very interesting and important words, but on the other side they can be very dangerous. The sense of the common or the space of the common can vary according to the community, the neighborhood or the urban fabric. I think Tokyo has a very strong character, even its small areas are different, as well as the variety of people; you can find many different characters, and I think that is very influential in terms of the design of the housing.

¹ Cooperative housing is a form of ownership, in which the property (homes) is owned by an organization and sold as shares to its employees. In the ‘70ies and ‘80ies in Japan, during the period of rapid economic growth, these complexes were owned by big companies that provided stable lifetime employment for Japanese people.

² Mansion is commonly used for high rise residential building with reinforced concrete structure. It provides first-rate housing units regarding heat, noise insulation and safety. One room mansions are consisted of one-room-housing-units including small kitchen and a separate (usually prefabricated unit) bathroom.



Neda Firfova, Kay Walkowiak

YOU ARE HERE, 2008

Series of site-specific interventions with three posters

Photo documentation courtesy of Firfova, Probst and Walkowiak.

Neda Firfova's research and practice question paper and the printed medium as symbols of established truth and inquire in their relation to architecture, design and the human body. Her work is often articulated in—or speculating with—printed media, making use of modes of production typical for totalitarian and authoritarian political and historical contexts. These experiments contribute to a mode of inquiry that reframes and repurposes the way graphic designers claim authorship and authority by delivering work exclusively on paper and by means of multiplication.

nedafrfova.com

Kay Walkowiak's work is a complex mixture of installation, sculpture, video art and photography and combines conceptual and post minimal strategies. In many of his works he explores the historically and socioculturally defined handling of form and questions its functional posting as a projection surface for time-less utopias.

kaywalkowiak.com