## АРХИ.ТЕК

#### TOPIC 10: CHALLENGE: DWELLING IN TOKYO

TOKYO JAPAN, 7 DAYS LATER. FIRST IMPRESSION: THE VASTNESS AND SHAMELESSNESS OF ITS UGLINESS.

BEING ON THE INTIMATE TERMS WITH THE Utilitarian is major strength: No Frills, ever.

EUROPE, AND EVE AMERICA, TRY (WITH MORE OR LESS SUCCESS) TO CREATE SITUATIONS WHERE EVERYTHING IS AS 'GOOD' AS POSSIBLE; JAPAN LIVES (SERENELY?) WITH DRASTIC SEGREGATION BETWEEN THE SUBLIME, THE UGLY, AND THE UTTERLY WITHOUT QUALITIES.

DOMINANCE OF THE LAST 2 CATEGORIES Makes mere presence of the first Stunning: When beauty 'happens', It is absolutely surprising.

#### - REM KOOLHAAS, SMLXL, P.88



WHEN WE THINK ABOUT JAPANESE CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE PRODUCTION, WHAT MOST ARCHITECTS IN EUROPE SEE IS A VERY LIMITED SELECTION OF EXTRAORDINARY (HOUSING) PROJECTS. A WONDERFUL PR. WE ADMIRE THE EXCEPTIONAL FORMAL QUALITIES, SPATIAL SOLUTIONS AND SHIFT IN TYPOLOGY. BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT THIS IS JUST A VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF THE LIVING SPACES AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN CITIES IN JAPAN. PEOPLE IN THE BIG JAPANESE CITIES SEEM TO 'LIVE THE CITY' IN EXTREME WAYS. ONE CAN SAY THEY ARE CONSUMING THE CITY AND WHAT IT HAS TO OFFER, OTHERS WOULD ARGUE THAT ITS CITIZENS ARE CONSUMED THEMSELVES BY THE EXTREME CONSUMERIST SOCIETY. CAN THE BOUNDARY OF THE DWELLING SPACE BE NEGOTIATED? FACING THE ONGOING CHANGES IN SOCIETY, HIGH RENT PRICES AND VERY DIFFERENT SOCIOCULTURAL VALUES AND EXPECTATIONS, THE IDEA OF 'DWELLING IN THE CITY' IS TRANSLATED INTO THE INTRIGUING BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF TOKYO - AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH, TO A GREAT EXTENT, SHAPES THE LIFESTYLE AND BEHAVIOR OF ITS INHABITANTS. WE WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS THIS CONVERSATION ON THE REALITY OF LIVING IN TOKYO, AND DISCUSS ABOUT ARCHITECTURE'S TOOLS AND POTENTIAL TO RESHAPE THE **RELATIONS AND BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACES,** AS PROFESSOR CHIBA WOULD SAY. IN ORDER TO MAKE THE CITY A BETTER HOME FOR ALL. ON BEHALF OF ARHI.TEK, GORDAN VITEVSKI TALKED WITH PROF. CHIBA MANABU AT HIS OFFICE IN TOKYO, SEPTEMBER 2017. CHIBA MANABU (1960) IS A JAPANESE ARCHITECT FROM TOKYO. HE WAS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR FOR TADAO ANDO AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO, WHERE HE IS A PROFESSOR AT THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE. HE ESTABLISHED CHIBA MANABU ARCHITECTS AS PRINCIPAL IN 2001. WWW.CHIBAMANABU.CO.JP

**A**: When we think about Japanese contemporary architecture production, what most architects in Europe see is a very limited selection of extraordinary (housing) projects. A wonderful PR. We admire the exceptional formal qualities, spatial solutions and shift in typology. But the truth is that this is just a very small percentage of the living spaces and the built environment in cities in Japan. Can you briefly introduce the general situation, where and how do most of the people in Tokyo live - What is the nature of living in the Japanese cities today?

**CHM:** It's a big topic. How to start... There are many, many aspects. I think basically it is not so different than the life in any other big city. You probably know the history of Japan. Especially after the war, the city went through a big disaster. After that, the government was trying to supply housing, to start the daily life. After that Japan went through rapid economic growth, a period in which everybody would be middle class. During that process Tokyo became more and more a place for working, whereas before the war Tokyo was a place for living. Following the rapid growth, the commercial and business district became the main area in Tokyo.

It is then when the suburb residential areas around Tokyo started to develop. That process is very much related to the concept of the family, a concept that is also changing. Before the war it was very common for several generations to live together. But in this process the family was reduced to parents and children. I think that concerning the social structure, as well as the urban structure – everything has been completely changed in a very short time. The city of Tokyo, from a place for living, became a place for working, a place for shopping and so on... The place for living shifted completely to the outside of the city.

Recently a reverse change happened – a change so rapid, I don't consider it so good. The people started to feel that having a nice house in the suburb, with a garden, a car... is not the reality of life. Even though the houses in downtown Tokyo are much smaller, which means they might not have a garden or a space for the car, people still wanted to move back to the city.

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 programmes... all of them are mixed and interact with each other. That kind of relation I think, in a way, is ideal for urban life. The house, even if not very big, I think is becoming more and more the base – it is more than a physical property, more like the base from where you start any kind of activity in the city, whether it's business or education related...

Because I grew up in Tokyo and went through all the changes in such a short time, I could see and I could feel the change – the good and the bad aspects altogether... Those very interactive activities all mixed up – I think it creates the reality of living in Tokyo.

**A**: Is it possible to describe, or to define this complex situation with few keywords or aspects which were important for its development in recent history, but that could also set path for future challenges of dwelling and being an architect in Tokyo?

**CHM**: It is also very much related to the community. For example, just after the war the downtown area was developed with row houses which were quite small, everything was pretty much attached and people started to develop their own intimate relationships. That is what created the downtown area atmosphere, the shtamachi atmosphere... But, after all these suburban developments, and coming back to central Tokyo and... of course the city itself became more mature – you can more easily access any kind of community in daily life.

**A**: The community - or the new kind of communities - in Japan potentially have a very strong impact, on one hand in the case of 'saving' the suburbs which get depopulated – on the other hand within the city, where living the 'salaryman' life led to isolation besides the big density...

**CHM**: 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.



#### SPECIAL THANKS TO PROOFREADER GRACIJA ATANASOVSKA

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**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.<sup>1</sup> 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 mansion<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.



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(ay Walkowiak's work is a complex mixture of installation, sculpture, video art and photography an ombines conceptual and post minimal strategies. In many of his works he explores the historical und socioculturally defined handling of form and questions its functional positing as a projectio urface for timeless utopias.

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