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Urbanisms with Japanese culture and its living style

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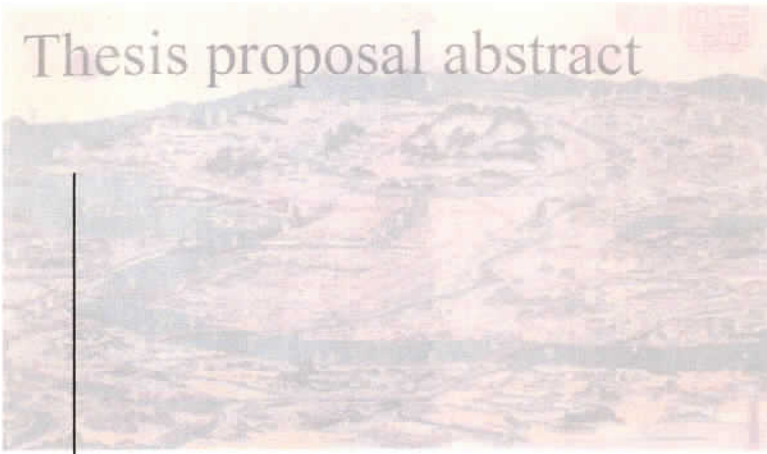
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Thesis proposal abstract



Type of Building Housing
Place Tokyo
Interest Urbanism within Japanese culture and its living style

Madoka Yuasa
Arc505
Nov. 7th, 2002

Committee:

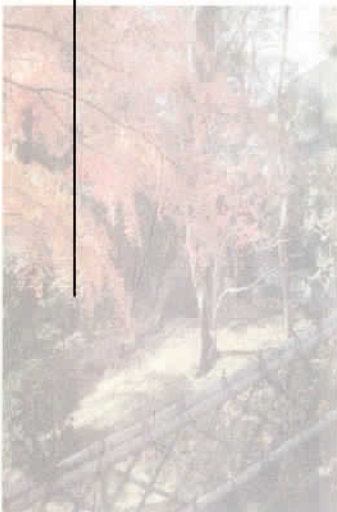
C. Gray
J. Massey

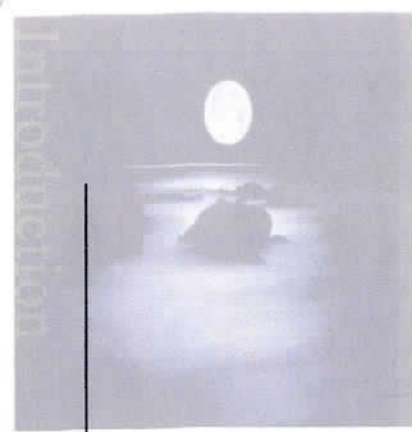




Thesis statement

The current urban Japanese houses have lost its richness closely related to its nature, landscapes, and seasonal events which their traditional architectural spaces had an important role as a part of their lives. This situation is due to rapid economic grows they followed in the process of modernization after the WWII, and the urban situation with respect to architecture in their city is complex. In this project, I would like to propose a housing system that has their traditional design aspects to incorporate five senses with nature and also complex contemporary urban situation to enhance their livings.





Introduction

Although the tradition of architectural and cultural structure of Japanese city is abandoned after the WWII in order to restore the city and the economy, there is a long traditional cultural relationship between man and nature in Japan. Referring to Kenneth Frampton's theory in the critical regionalism, there is dilemma between two poles, one on a local culture of non-industrialized civilization in the past and the other on a global culture of industrial civilization today. In his essay, he quotes the passage by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, "In order to get on to the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past which has been the *raison d'être* of a nation?...Whence the paradox: on the one hand, the nation has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit, and unfurl this spiritual and cultural revendication before the colonialist's personality. But in order to take part in modern civilization, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandon of a whole cultural past." By this, he means "the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization." (Paul Ricoeur) I myself have this dilemma growing up and living in Japan where historical development, industrialism, traditionalism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Functionalism, Western philosophy, and Eastern philosophy all coexist. In this critical regionalism, I am interested in how I could integrate those two polarized views into the work of architecture by looking at works of architects such as Humihiko Maki and Tadao Ando who try to incorporate the traditional Japanese architectural and cultural structure into their works in the means of modernity.



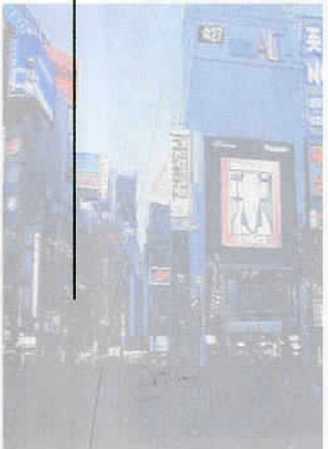


Being separated from the country in which I grew up makes me realize my own identity. There are cultural and architectural aspects we can find in this component of identity. For example I remember seeing soft and warm winter light coming through *shouji*, Japanese sliding paper screen, into a *tatami* mat room, looking at rain hitting a large rock in a garden, lying down on a veranda and looking at the sky between trees, touching the breath in cold winter morning, a picnic under the cherry blossom with soft wind in the spring, and moon viewing in autumn with songs of insects. They are the symbols that consist of fundamental part of my identity, and that sensitivity is still latent in Japanese culture. Going away from my home country is not only a good opportunity for one to broaden one's horizon in the world but also to see a kind of environment one is situated. The urban landscape of Tokyo today is very dry and lacks close relationship between man and nature. Instead, there is a superficial layout of ugliness created by modern rectangle box shaped buildings taking over the city. Moreover, Tokyo is a mishmash where people are surrounded by enormous amount of commercial information, images, and things constantly flowing in the city. Everyday, people are busy with consuming new things one after another, and its surface structure of commercialism never lasts long and never lasts long in people's mind. It was a critical decision to distance myself from overwhelmed consuming culture we have in Tokyo that I felt people could easily lose their sensibility to the nature, in other words the richness of Japanese cultural roots that were lost in the process of modernization.





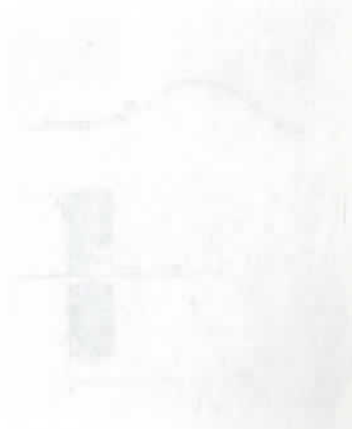
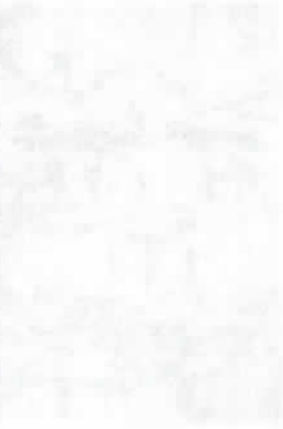
However, Tokyo is very interesting and fascinating city because the city has a lot of excitement which one cannot find in the Western cities. In the Western culture, a house is the center of people's lives and all of the home functions are in a home where people invite friends for a dinner. Whereas all Japanese domestic home functions are distributed in the city, and all the houses are very small. Consequently, people use outside of a house more so that their urban life is functionally displaced into city. For instance, the most comfortable living room you have would be a local bar, or the most comfortable bathroom might be a public bath or a bath at a sports club, or if you want to have privacy for your love life you go to a love hotel. It gives dense mix of small components that are hidden in simple buildings with a lot of signboards. If you go to the central spots of the city, there are always people doing something in any time of the day, and the city has incredible vitality. It is a very stimulating way of living, and it is more of the younger person's way of life. Yet there are old people living in the city and you see the mix of younger generation and older generation in the back streets of those central spots. Furthermore, when you start to look beyond the front street, there is a depth. You go behind one main street with buildings of five to seven stories; there is a little street, and old ladies putting flowerpots and canaries outside. That space becomes an outside living space, and they have some kind of communication across the passage. Those little street patterns and building scales are from Edo period, and they remains respectably as they were. When you first come to Tokyo, you don't see those things, and the whole image of Tokyo in a second is much harder to picture in your mind and the structure of the city is much more complicated than any other European cities. They are the things I am interested in the urban condition in Tokyo, and I like to incorporate them into my design work.





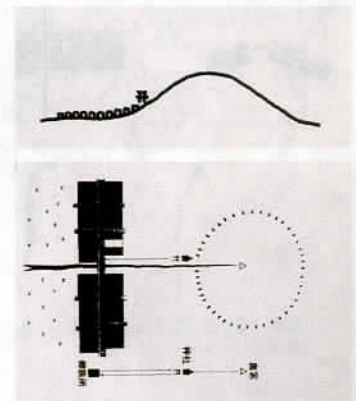
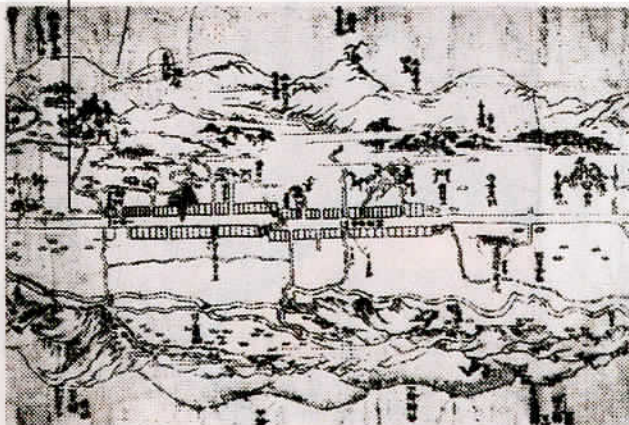
History

After the WWII and during last 50 years in Japan, the Japanese life style has rapidly changed as well as the city itself. Tokyo was heavily bombed and almost every thing on ground level was destroyed during the war. However, reconstruction was based on the old street grid from the Edo period (before Tokyo) without any modern city planning. Yet style of building clearly changed from a Japanese style to a western style. There coexist two very different types in the city that is the chaotic urban condition that is due to Westernized city planning on non-western city. Having experienced defeat of war a destroyed city, and also deep economic depression, Japan followed a western style of living. Japan sought to have a western style of education, economic system, buildings, houses, and lifestyle for better living. Consequently, Japan became one of the economically and technologically "advanced" countries in the world. "The result of this rapid economic grows led the city overly populated and dense that made it impossible to preserve the richness of Japanese traditional urban and architectural spaces such as *Oku* illustrated by the architect Fumihiko Maki. Their traditional spatial notion of *Oku* is the distinctive character that created spiritual and cultural roots. *Oku*'s fragmentation still exists in Japanese cities and is mixed with contemporary situation, most of them hardly kept its original form.



Oku

To explain *Oku*, it is necessary to see their formation of original community and their view of nature raised within. According to Maki, *Oku* is the unique spatial notion that exists in Japan and played an important role in forming their community structure since the Yayoi period, 4A.D. Yayoi is the period when people started to cultivate rice and crops and settled in houses. Around this time, people began to separate the living environment in the foot of a mountain and special environment in mountain. The mountain gradually became highly a secret sanctity, and eventually became an object for worshipping. This made the original characteristic of religious formation worshipping in nature, which later became the framework of Shinto. A village usually had rice paddy fields and houses along a road in the foot of mountain. Perpendicular to its road is the path connecting to a mountain where the Shinto frontal shrine and Oku shrine were further back in the forest. Moreover, the placement of a village was usually based on the mountain with a shrine and a religious and social center of a community. Opposite to the western sense of creating city, it was placed further back in the forest and not in the center of a village. It became their ritual to place important things to the extent that one cannot see or implication of the invisible existence of that sort, and this notion was established within their manner of forming society. For instance, a shrine surrounded by trees further back from a main street is the implication of *Oku* that we can still find within major Japanese cities (Maki 118).

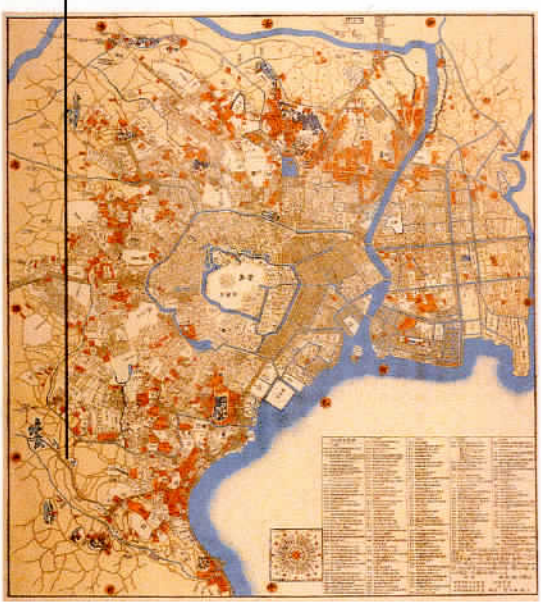




Edo city

Edo City (former city of Tokyo)

It is often said that Edo is a city that consisted of many little villages. If we take a close look at the spatial structure of Edo, it would help us to see that this spatial notion of *oku* existed in the city. In Edo, we find temples and shrines distributed at either the edge of the mountains, surrounded by quiet forests, or near the edge of the land, next to a broad expanse of water. In both cases, they were far from the secular spaces of city streets, and the arrangement of their paths of approach represented the process by which one is drawn from the profane world into a quiet, religious realm (Jinnai 131).



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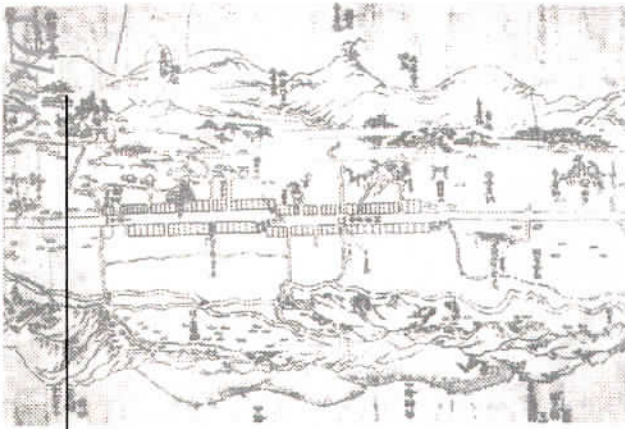
Henry D. Smith II The Edo-Tokyo Transition: in Search of Common Ground



Japanese cities after the WWII

After the WWII and during last 50 years in Japan, the Japanese life style has rapidly changed as well as the city itself. Tokyo was heavily bombed and almost every thing on ground level was destroyed during the war. However, reconstruction was based on the old street grid from the Edo period (before Tokyo) without any modern city planning. Yet style of building clearly changed from a Japanese style to a western style. Having experienced defeat of war a destroyed city, and also deep economic depression, Japan followed a western style of living. Japan sought to have a western style of education, economic system, buildings, houses, and lifestyle for better living. Consequently, Japan became one of the economically and technologically "advanced" countries in the world. However it drew deteriorating urban conditions such as congestion, pollution, the erosion of privacy. Many architects started to react to this conditions, and Tadao Ando and Maki Humihiko are the one of the distinguished architects who reacts to this deterioration by incorporating Japanese traditional technique of place making into their works.

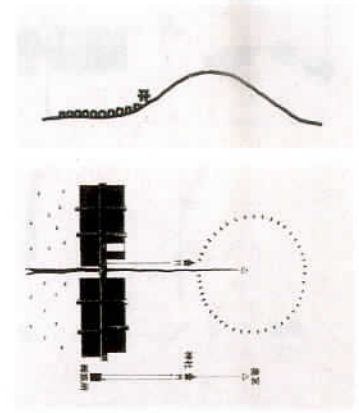




Oku

Japanese traditional spatial connection with nature of *Oku*, which formed their traditional cities, is the distinctive character still underlies in street grids within the contemporary city of Tokyo. Maki writes in his essay, "*Oku* emphasizes the horizontality and seeks its symbolism in an intrinsic depth" (Maki 219)

To explain fundamental structure of Tokyo, it is necessary to see their formation of original community and their view of nature raised within. According to Maki, *Oku* is the unique spatial notion that exists in Japan and played an important role in forming their community structure since the Yayoi period, 4A.D. Yayoi is the period when people started to cultivate rice and crops and settled in houses. Around this time, people began to separate the living environment in the foot of a mountain and special environment in mountain. The mountain gradually became highly a secret sanctity, and eventually became an object for worshipping. This made the original characteristic of religious formation worshipping in nature, which later became the framework of Shinto. A village usually had rice paddy fields and houses along a road in the foot of mountain. Perpendicular to its road is the path connecting to a mountain where the Shinto frontal shrine and *Oku* shrine were further back in the forest. Moreover, the placement of a village was usually based on the mountain with a shrine which was a religious and social center of a community. Opposite to the western sense of creating city, it was placed further back in the forest and not in the center of a village. It became their ritual to place important things to the extent that one cannot see or implication of the invisible existence of that sort, and it was established within their manner of forming community.

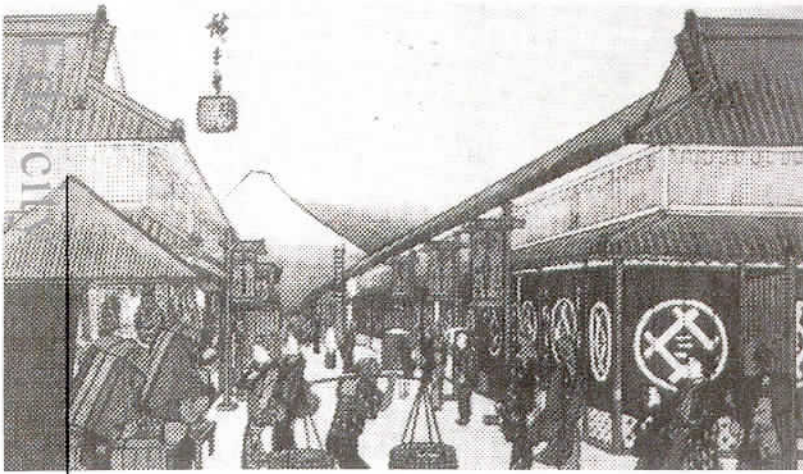




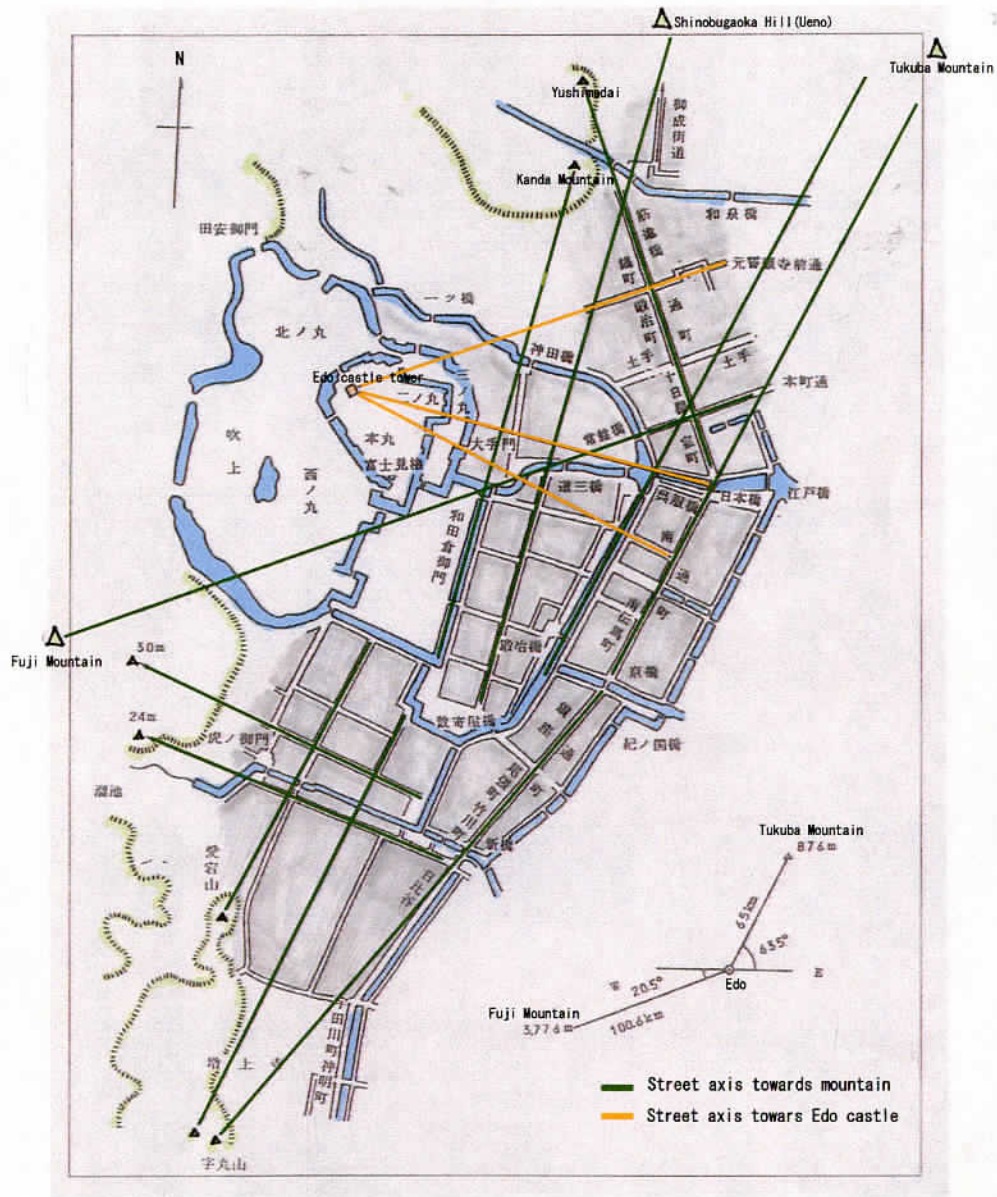
Streets in Edo City (former city of Tokyo)

Edo city was on the vast expanse of a plain called Kanto plain surrounded three sides by mountains, North, South, and West, and East side facing ocean. The major mountains seen from the city was considered the edge of the city, and was important landmarks for people to recognize their location in the city. From the early Edo period, the scenery of Fuji, Takuba, and Musashino mountains were famous scenery and often depicted in a wood engraving and published as the sights of Edo. According to Mazirou Kirishiki, urban Tokyo researcher, the city grid of Edo at first glance seems to have no order, but when we change our viewpoints from two-dimensional to three-dimensional and considering formation process of Edo consists of Yamanote hillsides and flat reclaimed ground of Shitamachi, viewing from low point to hillsides, it is obvious that city planning was based on technique of viewing mountain scenery. It is the extensive use of Japanese traditional garden making technique called "Syakkei", caching surrounding nature scenery into the garden. The axes of main streets were set towards the Fuji Mountain or other mountains around Edo, therefore; the whole grid structure of Edo is the mix of different and each completed units, and each one of them has different focal points of existent natural mountains and hills outside the city (Wakazuki118-124). When Edo became Tokyo and the urban landscape changed with modern buildings of five to seven stories, the focal points disappeared from the city leaving its appearance simply in confusion. From this point, the correspondent relation between Edo's loose and open grid system as a whole and autonomous parts could only reach with great sensibility and consideration to natural landscapes.





Study of street axis



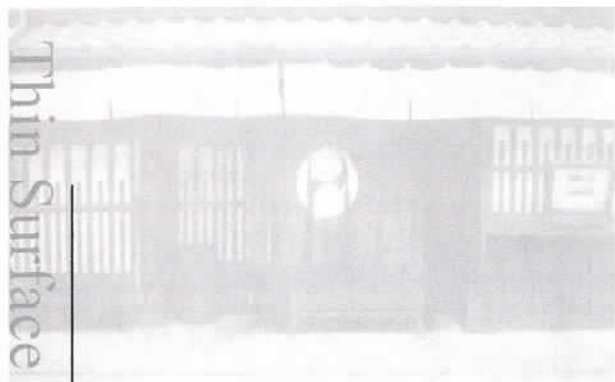


Roji (Alley)

In Japanese traditional cities, there used to be many little streets called "Roji" between small two-story houses one behind main streets. They were neither public nor private creating outside living space closely related to people's everyday lives. Walking into this little passageway, you would feel as if entering someone else's property partly because there are flower pots, clotheslines, pickle pots, washing machines, boxes, and rubbishes the things you normally see in a back yard are out on the passage. Another reason would be its closeness to the outside the. They are usually narrow and dead ends or bent in S, L or U shapes so that people at a main street could not see through these passageways (Wakatuki151). Therefore, even though they have public appearance as a street, there are almost no public circulation from main streets. It enabled people who live on the passageway to extend their personal space and establish intimate relationship with neighbors.

However, we live in the society where commercialism, politics, and economics take over. And I am concerned with the fact that this kind of public space is disappearing, the space where people could have normal social communication and people could feel that they are the ones who actually activate the city.



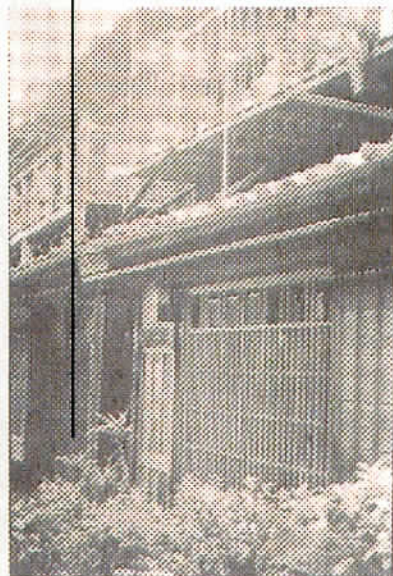


Thin surface

The surface of Japanese traditional buildings is very thin, light, and transparent. First of all, thin means physically thin and weak. Comparing with the thickness of a Japanese wooden wall, and a Western stonewall, the wooden wall is very thin and week. The elements they use for room partitions like Syouji, Husuma(wood framed and papered with opaque paper room partition), bamboo blind, and Noren(fabric shop curtain) are also thin and requires caring for handling.

Second of all, thin means light. They look light and it is light, and for its lightness they are removable. They are removed, and added throughout year in seasonal change and special occasions.

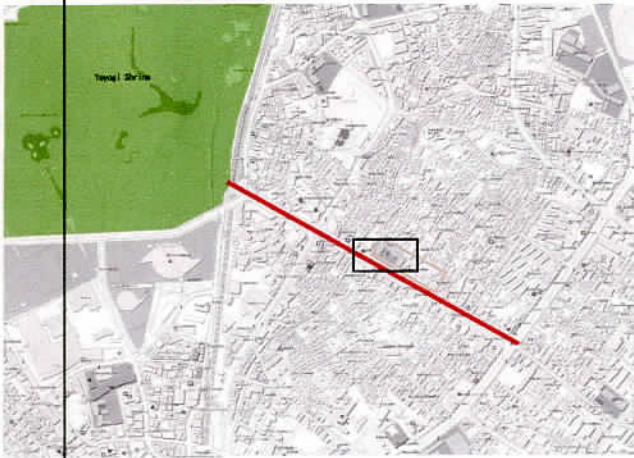
The last one is the transparency. Lattice window on street side filters lights from outside and cast the shadow of people walking outside street. Its surface has a function not to seclude inside and outside, but with light, it filters or takes the outside scene into inside.

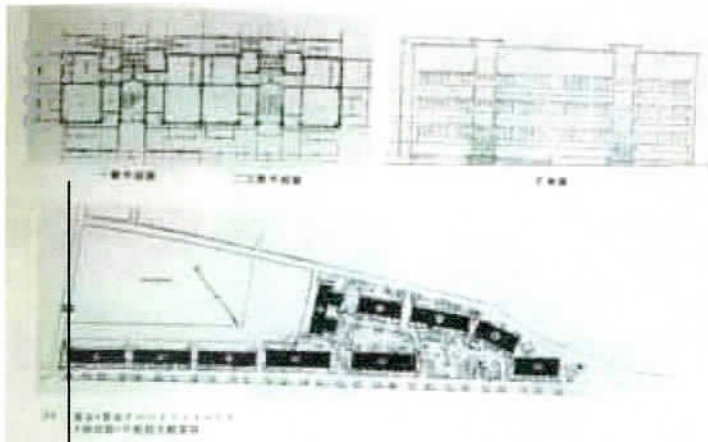




Site location

The site is in the path of the approach to Meiji shrine called Ometesando Street and is one of the Tokyo's central spots.





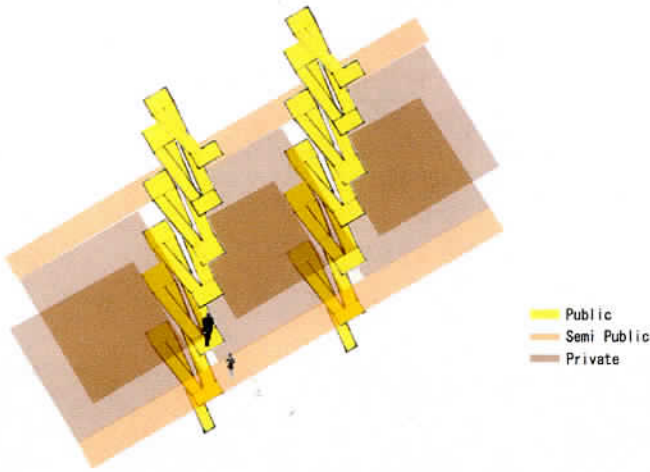
Douzyunkai Aoyama Apartment

On the site, there are existing apartments along the street called Douzyunkai Aoyama apartments which were built about 78 years ago by government-founded organization called Douzyunkai after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 to provide fire and earthquake-proof construction housing for people who lost their houses in the earthquake. Between 1925 to 1934, Douzyunkai built a series of reinforced concrete construction apartments in fifteen different places, have a good access to public transportations, around Tokyo and Yokohama. Aoyama apartment was one of them. Looking at the design, its feature is quite appearing. There was a great consideration and searching not only for new style of urban living at the beginning of new industrial age but also for the means of collective living. The designer adopts the reinforced concrete construction system and Western living style, and also the apartments incorporate with welfare facilities such as public amusement room, public dining room, and public bath. Those apartments were very successful and their works are marked as milestone within Japanese urban housing history. Aoyama Apartment is the one of the few that exist today, and its look with colonnade of trees along the street is very popular among people today.

Unfortunately, this existing apartment is decrepit. There are very few people live in the apartment, otherwise housing units especially on the first floor turned into shops. The building is barely functioning as housing building and needs remodeling.

Proposing and taking one of the great housing works at the beginning of modern age in Japan, now it can be transformed into a new form to test what it means to be the contemporary modern housing in Tokyo.

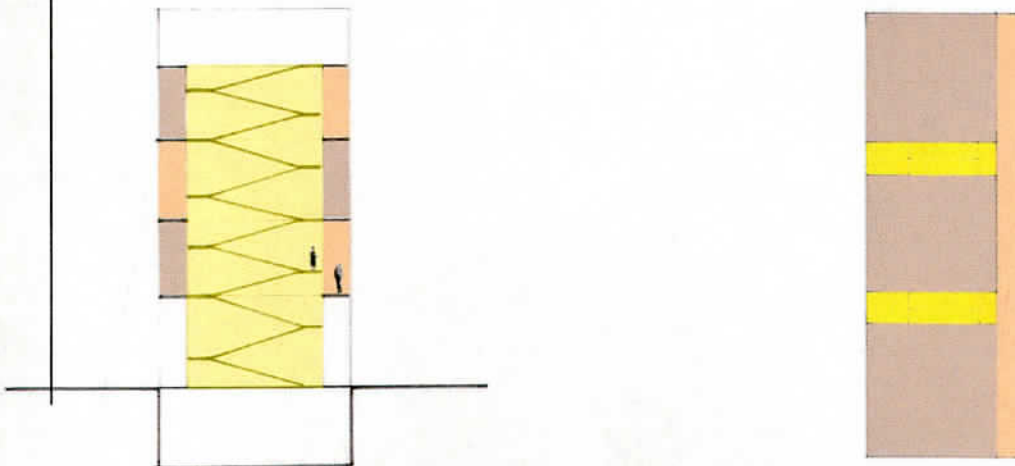


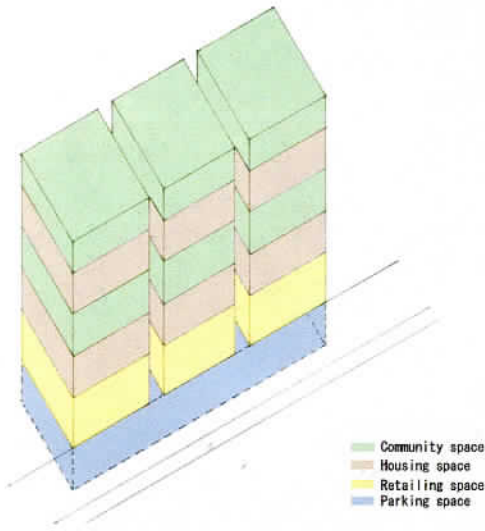


Program

In Tokyo, Places to have simple communication with neighbors is disappearing in the process of rapid urban development. The programs in this housing project will provide the lost community spaces in the city by transforming aspects of Japanese traditional community space of street, street surface, and *Oku* into this housing complex of 5 to 7 story building. Sustaining the connection to outside, the street is drawn into the building and all the programs would be connected by this street.

This housing not only challenges the current Japanese urban situation of community space loss, but also reconnects people to their cultural roots.





Street

Taking feature of a Japanese traditional back street, it provides outside living space as a place for people to communicate with neighbors

Housing

To make this housing open to variety of people, the housing units should have different type of dwellings.

Housing Units:

- One person dwelling
- Two person dwelling
- Nuclear family dwelling
- Extended family dwelling

Number of Units: 15 to 20

Community gathering space

To provide space for meetings and different kind of activities held by inhabitants, this space supports inhabitants' social communication.

Public bath

Public bath is not only for people who live in this housing but also open for people who lives around the site providing communication space, and making the building open to public.

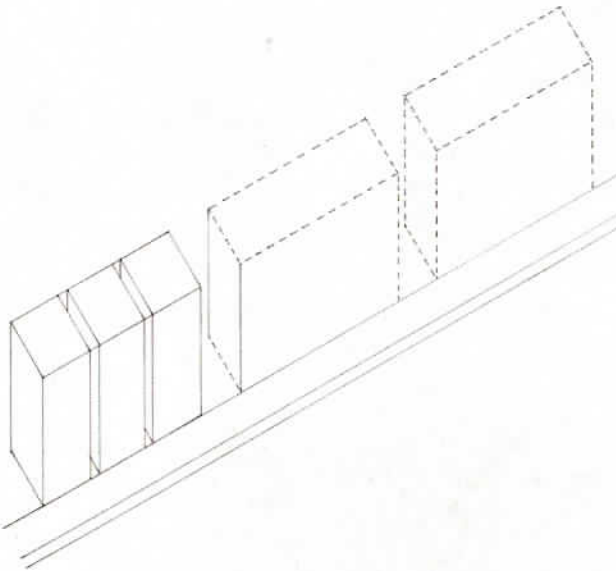
Retails

Since the site is in one of the major central spots in Tokyo, it has great selling potential for shops, and offers interaction between people on a main street and inhabitants.

Parking

- Public parking
- Parking for inhabitants

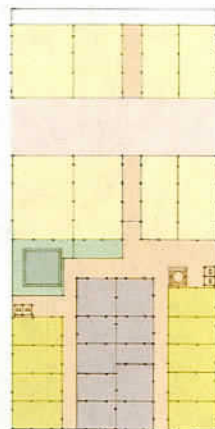
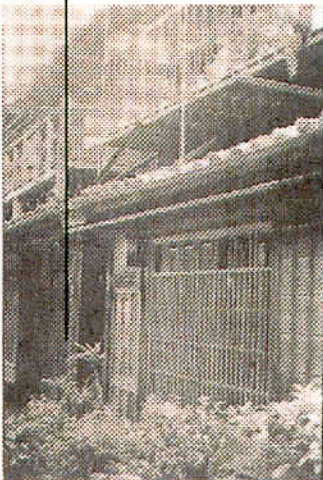
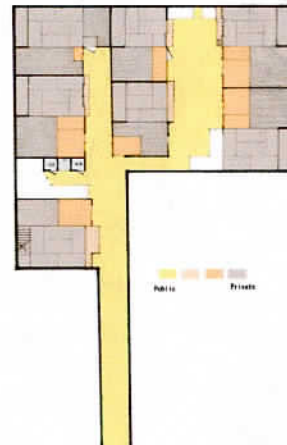
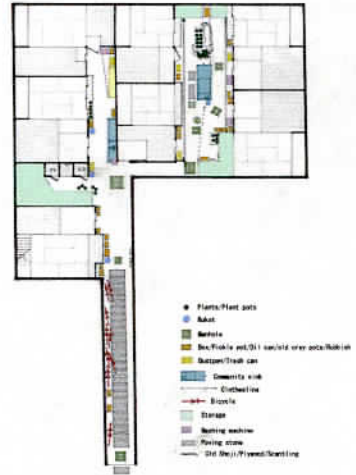
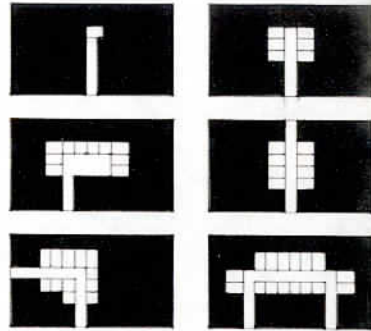
Roof garden



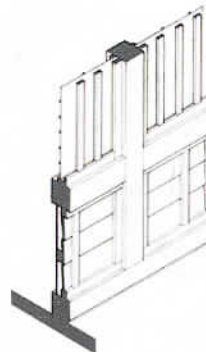


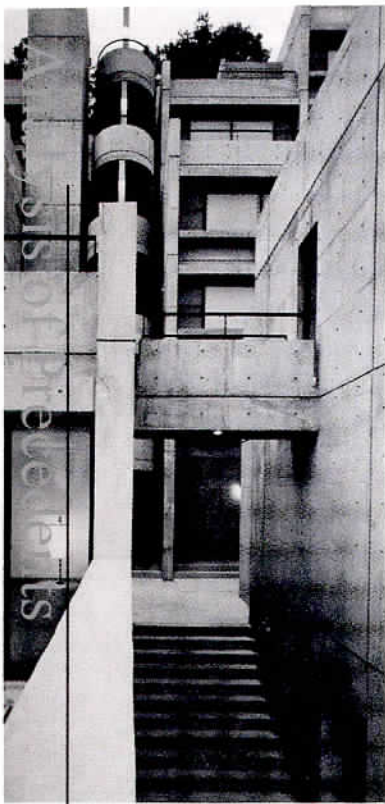
Analysis of Presidents

Japanese row houses and back street, Tokyo, Japan

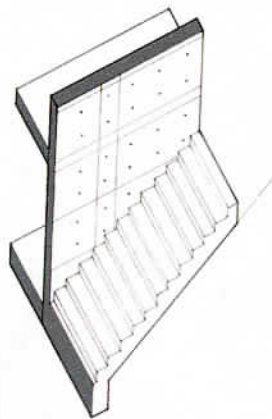
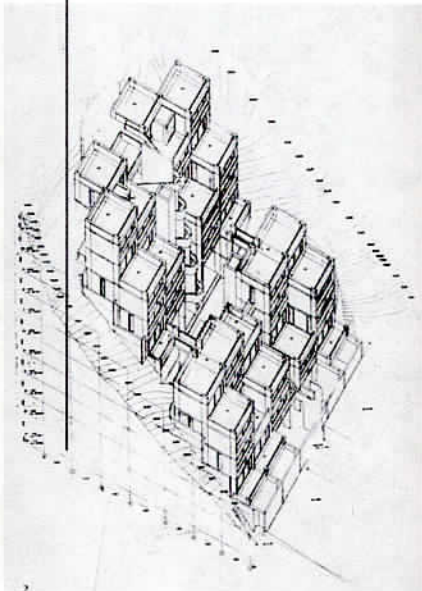
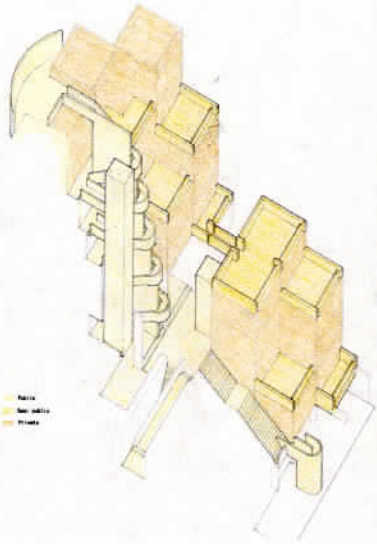
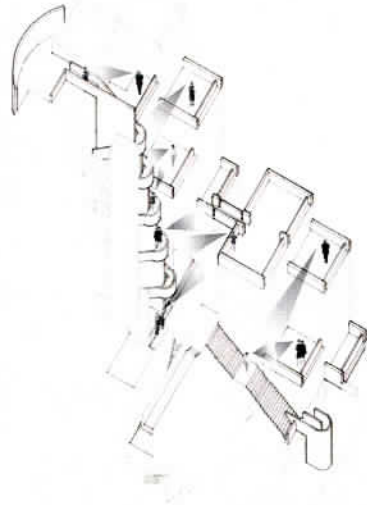


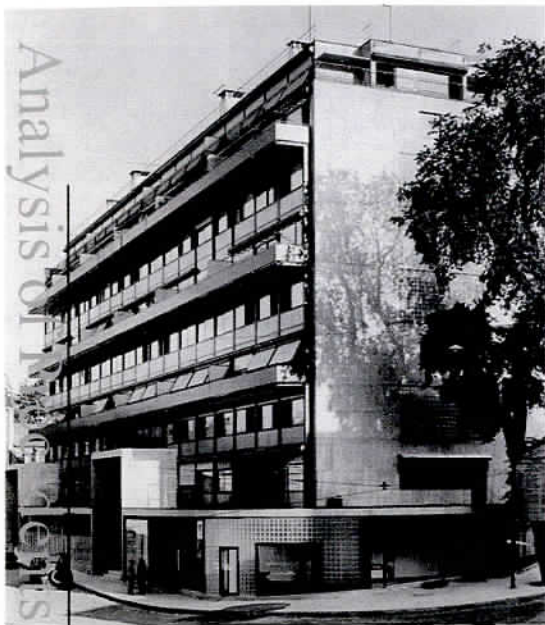
- Front Street
- Back Street
- Front Store
- Back Store
- Row House
- Store House



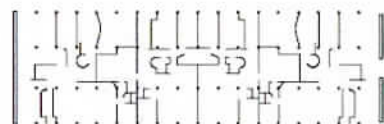
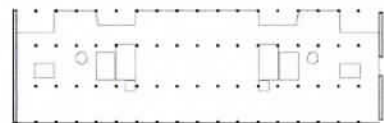
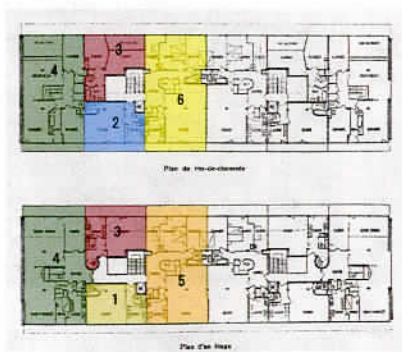
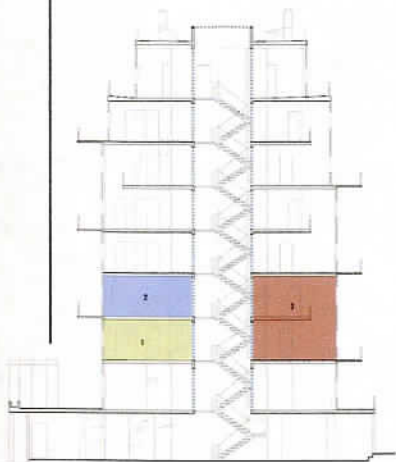
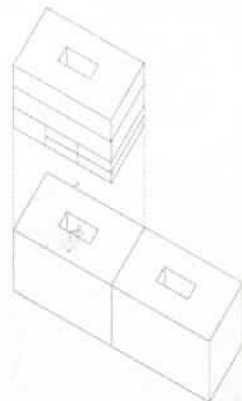
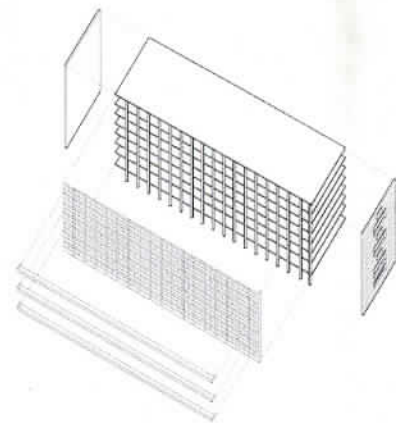


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Zardini, Mirko

Rokko Housing / Tadao Ando

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