The PostModer Hermits

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[ABSTRACT]

Metropolitan cities to grow at unfathomable rates, forming a new scale of geography known as Megaregions. And as these settlements continue to develop with the principal focus on the consequences of economy and environment, the psychological, mental health of the inhabitants becomes neglected.

Japan, the archetypal example of a highly developed country, despite its economic and technological advantages, has been plagued by social isolation, suicides, and mental health issues among its people. With 541,000 young Japanese labeled as hikikomori, a term describing young people who isolate themselves in their rooms for months or years at a time, their memories of the city begs stimulation and their stories needs attention.

The Post-modern Hermits is the project that seeks to redefine the relationship between people, architecture and time within the context of Japan. Using openness as a conceptual design strategy to form a memorial park which rejects the absolute completion. I intend to develop my project to share similar characteristics and features of Hejduk’s work adapted through the chosen site of Aokigahara forest. Within the Aokigahara forest, follies will take shape according to the existing morphologies. With hybrid as the principal design formula, proposed follies seek to combine basic tectonics of found urban fabrics, collective memory fragments of Tokyo and the stories of Hikikomori to present facts as a way to call attention to the stories of the victims and to rethink how such social issues are dealt with.
**The Postmodern Hermits**
From Stories to Follies

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<th>Xuechen, Li</th>
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Syracuse University School of Architecture
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"I don't want to talk to anybody. I don't want to do anything. I don't even have the will to pick up the phone. Just what am I supposed to do?"
Living in a city means rubbing shoulders with millions of people every day – on public transport, in apartment buildings and on the streets. That might at first glance seem like an antidote to loneliness. Yet cities can be isolating, solitary places where many of us live entirely anonymously – never knowing who are neighbours are or who lives in the flat downstairs.

With the development of big cities, stressful and loneliness Life brings more and more pressure to people. Everyone wants to retreat from the world sometimes, some Japanese people find themselves spending months—sometimes years—of their lives in their bedrooms, only slipping out for midnight treks to the nearest convenience store. Usually male and usually in their twenties, these are Japan’s “missing million,” otherwise known as hikikomori.

This thesis is primarily based on the social phenomenon of hikikomori throughout Japan. It specifically examines such an urban phenomenon in the context Tokyo to derive a set of design approach to raise awareness for the psychological, emotional issues of the hikikomori.
Hikikomori are reclusive adolescents or adults who withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement. Hikikomori refers to both the phenomenon in general and the recluses themselves. Hikikomori have been described as loners or modern-day hermits. Estimates suggest that nearly half a million Japanese youth have become social recluses.⁴

"I started to blame myself and my parents also blamed me for not going to school. The pressure started to build up."³

"It's like being in a self-imposed jail."⁴
In 2003, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare established the following criteria for hikikomori:

- **A lifestyle centered at home**
- **No interest or willingness to attend school or work**
- **Symptom duration of at least 6 months**
- **Among those with no interest or willingness to attend school or work, those who maintain personal relationships have been excluded.**
- **Mental disorders have been excluded.**

Some News about hikikomori:

- In 2002, the BBC documentary “Mystery of the Missing Million” brought the plight of Japan’s social recluses, the hikikomori, to mainstream English-language media.
- A daily story shared that a hikikomori usually has few social relationships. There are some outlookingly “gregarious” hikikomoris, but they have only a few friends whom they open their hearts towards.
- Among those with no interest or willingness to attend school or work, those who maintain personal relationships have been excluded.
- Mental disorders have been excluded.
- In 2002, the BBC documentary “Mystery of the Missing Million” brought the plight of Japan’s social recluses, the hikikomori, to mainstream English-language media.
- I imagine this way of making few relationships might be originated somehow from the first prototypical one between mother and child, whether their mother-child relationship superficially looks good or bad.
- Angry teens playing video games in isolation, ashamed parents speaking off-camera about physical abuse from their withdrawn offspring, and news reports of mentally ill hikikomori as kidnappers and murderers created a wildly imbalanced portrait of the million or more Japanese who live in self-confinement.
- Hikikomori want to establish ties with society, but do not find it possible to do so. Social withdrawal may be their last-resort strategy for staying alive within this society, and the only option left for them to preserve their own dignity.
You are basically shut yourself in your room and never come out. You even have your own fridge. All you need is a PS4 and you are happy. You are anti-social, and do not like people putting their nose into your business. You weren’t like that before, though. You used to be quite the sweet child. Try going outside and experiencing the worldhaps your friendliness will come back.
The social phenomenon of people who experience loneliness and mental health issues is not only present in Japan. In fact, it has been a rising issue across the globe, with nations such as US, UK, and Japan recognizing loneliness as a public health issue. In Japan, specifically, loneliness has become a pressing concern within the society.

People in the U.K. and Japan more often say loneliness is a public health problem than an individual problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage Reporting Loneliness or Social Isolation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most people in Japan view Hikikomori as serious problems.

The social group of people who experience this type of prolonged loneliness and isolation is referred to as a Hikikomori. As this form of social group continues to receive no attention on the society, people end their lives as a result.
Rising isolation and loneliness are global problems, and are reflected by the demographics of the largest cities in the developed world. It is really dangerous for a country that people feel strong isolation in their home, it could cause a lot of urban issues. High suicide rate is one of them.
"Groups of lonely young people meet online, organising group suicides in a forest at the foot of Mount Fuji."

In the absence of immediate social networks and friendship groups Tokyo's isolated youth often turn to the impersonal anonymity of the online world. The emergence of online communities dedicated to suicide—often populated by hikikomori—has been a disturbing manifestation of this sense of isolation. Groups of lonely young people meet online, organising group suicides in a forest at the foot of Mount Fuji known as the 'Sea of Trees'.

Source: https://medium.com/the-megacities-issue/lonely-in-tokyo-e4d0b89c17f
Aokigahara is a dense forest at the base of Mount Fuji in Japan. The foliage here is so thick that it has come to be known as 'Sea of Trees'. The forest thrives on 20 sq. km of volcanic land and is just around 2-hour journey from Tokyo city. The Aokigahara forest in Japan has the unfortunate distinction of being the world's second most popular place to end one's life. Japanese authorities no longer release exact numbers of the people who commit suicide in Aokigahara. Some estimates claim that as many as 100 people a year successfully kill themselves here.
Called “the perfect place to die,” the Aokigahara forest in Japan has the unfortunate distinction of being the world’s third most popular place to die by suicide.
The Aokigahara forest has been featured in several bestselling novels and movies, like *The Forest* and *The Sea of Trees*.

The Forest is a 2016 American supernatural horror film directed by Jason Zada and written by Ben Ketai, Nick Antosca, and Sarah Cornwell. Starring Natalie Dormer and Taylor Kinney, it follows a young woman who travels to Aokigahara (the suicide forest) to find her sister.

The Sea of trees is a 2015 film directed by Gus Van Sant. It is about a suicidal American man lost in a forest near Mt. Fuji and the two search for a way out.
THE SITE

Mount Fuji

Aokigahara forest

Suicide victims found in the forest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1998's main suicide motives:

- Health: 27%
- Economic: 30%
- Family: 10%
- Employment: 8%
- Others: 7%
- Unknown: 8%

Mount Fuji

Aokigahara forest

Suicide victims found in the forest:

1998's main suicide motives:

- Health: 27%
- Economic: 30%
- Family: 10%
- Employment: 8%
- Others: 7%
- Unknown: 8%

Data from Aokigahara/uni2010jukai: Suicide and Amnesia in Mt. Fuji's Black Forest

2010 Average suicide number: 54
- North: 23
- South: 31

Populated zone 18%
Depopulated zone 82%
**THE SITE**

The Aokigahara forest is 10 square miles site densely populated by trees. The whole has 2 main bus routes connecting the access points. It is also defined by two zones, with one populated (18%), and the other unpopulated (82%). As it has been a site where suicides often take place, the yearly average of suicides in the forest is 54, with 23 on the north side, and 31 on the south, a place where entry is prohibited. Given that there are 23 victims, 23 follies will be conceived in the site.

Within the designated site in the populated zone of the forest, 9 points of attraction are chosen. According to the existing programatic context of the attraction points, the follies will have programmes which best adapt to, and complement the existing programmes.

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![Diagram of Aokigahara forest with population zones and suicide statistics.](image)

2010 Average suicide number: 54
North: 23
South: 31
Data from Aokigahara/jukai Suicide and Amnesia in Mt. Fuji’s Black Forest
SYNTHESIS
AMBITION

Metropolitan Social issue Hikikomori Suicide Forest

CALL ATTENTION
AMBITION

☐ Deal with the urban phenomenon
☐ Send a dark message to the audience
☐ Memorial to the Victims of Hikikomori
☐ Call attention

Monument
Call attention
Record history
Social issue
Send a message
VICTIMS

THE POSTMODERN HERMITS
CASE STUDY 1

Green Archipelago 1977
Oswald Mathias Ungers

Given the post-war condition of Berlin, Unger's proposal envisions Berlin as a green archipelago. As debris of the bombed-out areas are gradually cleared, it is apparent that there exists a hyper vastness in some destroyed areas, which starkly contrasts the density.

While architecture has been preoccupied with growth, the primary focus of this project is to plan the denouement for the city. In the act of cancellation, erasure, can the frictions between programme and containment be suspended. Urban context understood as an aggregation of fragments.

By selecting existing urban morphology, Ungers demolishes and infills. He sees these urban fabrics, which are culturally significant, as found objects, off of which the rest of the city could pasture. By breaking the whole, each individual part is under a process of analysis.


Fig.17 Green archipelago
CASE STUDY 2

La Defense 1991
OMA

What would happen if, even in Europe – especially Europe – we declare every buildings in the zone that is older than 25 years worthless – null and void- or at least potentially removable?

How does such a question change the parameters and interpretation of this project.—We analysed this question in numerical terms and discovered that if we laundered the site in five-year increments by simply erasing all buildings over the age of 25, vast areas would gradually be liberated.¹⁶

We would preserve buildings of merit, of buildings of sentimental value – Nanterre, a very beautiful court house, a park, a station- and of course we would keep the Grande Arche, the CNIT, and the Tour Fiat as a kind of 20th century acropolis.’ Rem Koolhaas.

By the erasure of buildings older than 25 years old, the intention was to re-interpret valuable pieces of architecture and placing them on a pedastal. The imposition of the grid.

CASE STUDY 3

Parc de La Villette 1987
Bernard Tschumi

The primary design logic was to make clear a vision of an era and to project into the future the economic and cultural progression of Paris. Inspired by ideas of deconstructivism, Tschumi’s vision aimed to encourage movements, freedom, and exploration of the space, as activities themselves will become a part of the architecture.

Hosting a catalogue of 10 gardens installment, with each one created as a different representation of deconstructivism. Furthermore, there are a total of 35 red folly installments, which follows the order of a grid, helping the users in circulating through the park.15

What is the most interesting, though, is that Tscumi deliberately creates two intersecting grids, one of the follies and other of the surfaces and lines. The intersection serves as a disruption to the rationality of the grid, allowing sporadic spatial qualities.

CASE STUDY 4

Exodus 1972
Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis

Taking the Berlin wall as inspiration, the primary design logic of this project was to reinforce the boundaries between different parts of the city. And by clearly demarcating a strip of metropolitan desirability, people make themselves the voluntary prisoner of the architecture.17

"Within the void created by the walls would be eleven autonomous squares into which various monuments could be relocated from elsewhere. Divested of their original content and removed from their former context, these monuments would serve as the focus of collective meditation, 'social condensers.'"
CASE STUDY 5

Victims 1984
John Hejduk

As a competition entry to a memorial park in Berlin, the victims is a project which imposes an intervention developed over time.\textsuperscript{17}

The primary design intention was that of an "openess". By utilizing each architectural masques as a tool to revive the collective figures that inhabited a place by putting them in direct relation with the citizens of today. It serves as a reminder of the terror of the site, and its former function. (Gestapo torture chamber)

The self-contained quality of the project is borrowed from Unger's notion of islands within islands. It is challenging the relationship between autonomous infrastructures, nature grids, and time sequences and memories.\textsuperscript{18}

The fact that the citizens of Berlin take part in building the project places emphasis on the action. The action of building makes the users take part in remembering and re-remembering the horror of the past.


Fig.21 Victims 1984
According to the case studies, I found one of them has high similarity with my intention, which is Hejduk’s Victims 1984. From the statement of PAP competition, it also want to propose a memorial park for the victims of the war. Therefore, I would choose Victims 1984 as my main case study, and adapted his openness strategy and design formula to my design.

The Post-modern Hermits is using openness as a conceptual design strategy to form a memorial park which rejects the absolute completion. This unstable future will imply a continual process of unfolding and unveiling over time by other people taking part in realizing the design used to be quite the sweet child. Try going outside and experiencing the worldhaps your friendliness will come back.

I intend to develop my project to share similar characteristics and features of Hejduk’s work adapted through the chosen site of Aokigahara forest. Within the Aokigahara forest, follies will take shape according to the existing morphologies.
My proposal is aimed to create a memorial park which has two stages. In the first stage, 9 chosen follies (out of 23) of varying programme will be constructed according to existing points of attraction. From there, as people receive the message, they are to partake in realizing the rest of the follies. Their physical participation, as a form of conversation between the body and the monument, will call attention to Hikikomori. For the next stage, it is a strategy to make people involved in the construction, these activities will reinforce people’s memory and at the same time further call people’s attention.

Since the stories are still happening in our daily life, the total number of Follies is also kept increasing with time. The intention of this growing Follies is to make people be aware of this social issue and it can’t be ignored anymore.
From Hejduk's Victims, I learned his design strategy is aimed to create a new architectural language. So he is using rational structural form and combined irrational emotional story as a formula to generate a series of follies.

With hybrid as the principal design formula, proposed follies seek to combine basic tectonics of found urban fabrics, collective memory fragments of Tokyo and the stories of Hikikomori to present facts as a way to call attention.
DESIGN STRATEGY

1. Horticulturist
   2. Gardener
   3. Rose woman
   4. Metal man
   5. Park attendant
   6. Inhabitants
   7. Drawbridge man

8. Trolley man
   9. Mechanic
  10. Operator
  11. Children JJ
  12. Children SP
  13. Children SB
  14. Drawbridge

15. Merry-Go-Round
  16. Children SP2
  17. Spinner
  18. Children PT
  19. Physician
  20. Nurse
  21. Optometrist

22. Painter
  23. Musicians
  24. Poet
  25. Soloist
  26. Musicians
  27. Dancer
  28. Librarian

29. Typesetter
  30. Poem
  31. Mask repairman
  32. Watch repairman
  33. Paper restorer
  34. Carpenter
  35. Plumber

36. Shoe repairman
  37. Clothman
  38. Crochet lady
  39. Shade woman
  40. Security
  41. Researcher
  42. Identity card man

39. Crochet chair
  40. Record hall
  41. Key place
  42. House of the keys
  43. Ice house
  44. Fire place
  45. Zoologist

46. Moving stair
  47. Door for those who looked the other way
  48. Time keeper
  49. Taker of the keys
  50. The dead
  51. The travellers

52. Collector's place
  53. Cat fish pond
  54. People
  55. Child
  56. Judge
  57. Room for thought

58. Room of the innocent
  59. Passport building
  60. Silo passage
  61. Toll taker
  62. Trolley
  63. The dead

64. Room A
  65. The exiles
  66. The disappeared
  67. The application

Xuechen Li
Upon investigating Victim’s programmes, Hejduk conceives of a general programme set for the memorial park. This project learns by applying the same general programme, but also attempts to adapt to existing local morphologies presented on the site.

When trying to go outside and experiencing the world, it’s possible your friendliness will come back.

Upon investigating Victim’s programmes, Hejduk conceives of a general programme set for the memorial park. This project learns by applying the same general programme, but also attempts to adapt to existing local morphologies presented on the site.

Existing attractive points

1. Mmshuku guest houses
2. Gomisso Hotel
3. Bat cave entrance
4. Mmshuku village
5. Ryugu cave entrance
6. Wind cave
7. Ice cave
8. Mmshuku Trail
9. Wind bird park
Design Strategy

Stories

Reviewed personal stories from Online or Video to generate 9 topic title

Bus station
Shrine
Double side cabin
Classroom
Hospital
Chapel
Twin house
Bloon house
Stair tower
STORIES

DOUBLE SIDE CABIN

Take one as example, the story is about travel: a young Japanese boy move from countryside to Tokyo, but he can not get with the fast tempo of life and feel a strong segregation and isolation in the big city. I use a wall to divided a cabin to express the sense of isolation, and use different material to provide different feeling of city. And because it located in a lake as a meditation room, so i make it higher and also has four columns.

MEDITATION ROOM
FOLLIES - Double side cabin/Meditation room
FOLLIES-Twin house/Shops

[Image of the FOLLIES-Twin house/Shops architecture]

[Map of the location of the FOLLIES-Twin house/Shops]

[Diagram of the internal layout of the FOLLIES-Twin house/Shops]

[Xuechen Li]
FOLLIES-Chapel/Memorial hall

Xuechen Li
FOLLIES-Stair tower/Playstructure

FOLLIES-Hospital/Gallery
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

Synthesis

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Fig.6: Ibid.

Fig.7: Ibid.

Fig.8: Ibid.

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Fig.10: Ibid.


Fig.12: “Figure 2f From: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic Revision of Rochefortia Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). Biodiversity Data Journal 4: E7720. Https://doi.org/10.3897/bdj.4.e7720.figure2f.” doi:10.3897/bdj.4.e7720.figure2f.

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Fig.14: Ibid.

Fig.15: Ibid.

Fig.16: Ibid.


Analysis
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11. Ibid.

Synthesis