

Japanese house.....

OUVERTURE.....

“Is your house a J-a-p-a-n-e-s-e house....?”

Full of expectation for the right answer, Japanese people ask me this question over and over again.

Well, I did not ask them to show me their passport, but I am convinced that all ground-workers, construction workers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, roof specialists and so many more, are Japanese, without exception, the architect, building contractor and my spouse included. Furthermore the surrounding with many rice-fields is typical Japanese, as are our neighbors. The Landhuis is embedded in historical, terraced former rice-fields. We drink Japanese crystal clear water from Japanese mountains, we are happy with a Japanese *washi tatami* room, a large *ofuro*, we enjoy our *demado* in our sleeping room and sit happily inside our *azumaya* when it's fine weather. Entering our home, we put our shoes off.

O O K I.....!!

is the repeating, spontaneous single-word exclamation from Japanese, who see our house for the first time: *o o k i.....*[large / big]; they say the same at the second and third time too. It evidently expresses surprise -sometimes I even imagine to hear a-kind-of-complaint or reproach- but definitely this single word expresses a serious lack of vocabulary, a human register and imagination, it expresses furthermore a serious indoctrination concerning space, as well as laziness of reflection and a typical example of 'thinking inside the box'.

My sad conclusion is, that Japanese, *Nihonjin*, have no framework for living-space, space even being no category, at best in a negative sense, as a minimum. There is only the norm: 1 person can [must] do with id est 4 or 7 *tatami*, a family of two [plus one] should be happy with 80 m² or so, and so on. The standard, the rule, is a minimum of square meters. I consider this as a form of repression. I see, except in shrines, temples, some parks, stadiums, golf- and baseball fields, no availability of space for private Japanese persons.

One of our points of attention in our briefing for Teruaki Uchino was: space, inside and outside, not only in terms of square meters, but also referring to the [different] heights

of ceilings and floors. It's surely nice to have a stockroom or a guestroom, a private room for the lady of the house to be able to withdraw herself sometimes, but that is only a part of the respect and appreciation for space. **Space should be enjoyed for space's sake.**

Italians, among others, understand that so well: they created huge open squares in the centers of many of their cities, just creating S P A C E !! Citizens and visitors come regularly to those open spaces to enjoy.....space.....I am aware, that I am repeating myself, but even famous Japanese architects, being jury-members of a prestigious architectural contest, select and award first and for all designs of small houses [!] and turn down designs for larger private houses, thus qualifying themselves as obsessed ambassadors of the square millimeter. 'Japan' is seriously biased about space and there seems to exist a boycott on the full concept of space for private persons. Language about space is non-existent. *"Your language is forbidden.*

It is dead.

No one is allowed to speak your language.

Your language no longer exists.

Any questions ?" 1)

O O K I ...is not an innocent slip-of-the-tongue, but a pathological symptom of an infection of the mind. Unfortunately, Japanese in general are deprived from living within space for no good reasons. 2)

Let me ask a [rhetorical] question: is *o o k i* "not Japanese" ?, notwithstanding the Japanese *Minka* houses, which seem to be totally forgotten and landed on the cultural refuse dump. In contrast with my quote above I recite a partial, much more spacious text of a Portugese fado. *"I spread my wings and without fear was flown !*

I was to become everything I'd always wanted to be for we are the ones who define our limits and rid ourselves of them if we wish to. But we've got to really want it." 3)

The 'Landhuis' is theatrical

[but no theatre...]

I will give 7 sound reasons.

The already well-known dramatic roof form with its generous, majestic, melodic, -moderato- and frank, horizontal line, at the same time being extremely modest, because transparent and desiring to 'disappear' in the surrounding landscape. Its light grey colored, dansante form is loosened from underneath by the earth-dark-brown color of the building, seen from the public road. The roof-shape has a genuine musicality: dolce.

The ground-plan of the design could be called a butterfly of sorts, showing a cuirassed body with two lighter wings just before leaving the earth, specially at night. In this context I would like to quote compatriot Vincent van Gogh, who observed:

*..." often it seems to me
that the night is more
vivid and colorful
than the day"*

We were also pointed at this phenomenon by the professional photographer of the Landhuis, Akira Yonezu-san, during making pictures at night. The photographer's appealing color picture of the Landhuis, taken at 5.00 o'clock a. m. in the late part of 2008, resembles a Buddha, fulfilled in the landscape.

The middle part is a reinforced, concrete rather high 'cave', our living room [even with a small stage], which functions as a acoustically marvelous sound-box; listening to music is a delight.

We asked in our briefing different heights in ceilings and floors, the latter showing among others wide steps.

A 'reflection-pond' at the full length of the south side throws light, vivid and joyful moving sunlight -as an allegretto- into the inner space, even on the concrete ceiling.

Is a 50 ton rock in the center of our living space 'theatrical' ?

The 'night-wing' is hidden behind a wide grey curtain.

Theatrical ?

Yes. Explosive, modest and a lot to experience.

The 'Landhuis' presents rhythm.

The physical, even mighty power of rhythm can be seen in the living room: huge, organic and fluently bend impressive 'muscles' under the ceiling from north to south and from east to west, resting on fierce, rectangular columns, which together carry and

at the same time follow the form of the waved concrete roof.

On the roof of the former Amsterdam city-office, now a queen's palace, stands ostentatious high in the sky: A T L A S, the one who carries the world. In Sakawa's Landhuis we are allowed to see the inner anatomical structures, the really heavy work, necessary to carry a materially heavy mass and a visually light design, an exiting cohabitation and synthesis of two contrasting antitheses. Both, the extremely heavy weight of the massive concrete roof and the ultra light form of the design defy and almost hold gravity in contempt, anyhow it beggars description.

The rhythm of a surprising poetic and functional composition; the design does not show any hesitation, is decisive, here and there lyrical and expressive; there is an overall elegance.

All three parts, both wings and the center, are absolute independent -polyphonic- entities, not imitating each other: they serve the three cycles of every 24 hours. Nevertheless they also interact with each other on their mutual boundaries:

a SONATA A TRE

Rhythm is [ir]regular alternating movement and wave. This is not as cryptic as it sounds, because it could for instance carry slow and quiet gentleness, as is the original Italian meaning of adagio, avoiding all emotional tenseness, thus offering enough time and space to caress all 'notes'. This fits the Landhuis.

There are rhythmic contrasts -or "collisions"- like the soft, waxed concrete living-room-floor in squares of 150 cm., diagonal contra the metre [metrum] of the hard white 60 cm. square tiles of the day-wing, both however united in their 'squareness', contrasting a repetition and variation of the vertical south windows-front wave. The light sand-color of the entire south façade is contrasting with the other three earth-dark-brown walls of the building, kind-of-saying "I am not present!"...The light colored south façade however embraces the valley at the south; a significant and evident contrast in temperament, I would like to say. 4)

All of the multi-voiced Landhuis-design shows evidence of heterophony, so to speak, the simultaneous playing of the same melody by different instruments each expressing the line in a manner characteristic to the instrument with individualized ornamentation. Uchino-san did not use ornamentation as loose effect. Ostinato, the repetition of patterns and cycles, appear regularly. The totality of the temporal composition can be seen as an inhalation and exhalation; its inhabitants live in a natural and unaffected way.

The rhythm in Uchino's composition is not visibly, but tightly organized to create an ingenious multidimensional structure. The real Sonata a Tre is his total design, which encapsulates all other movements, thus letting several movements and fragments reoccur in a new, surpassing context.

A honorable design strives towards balance, and is a direct symbol for higher unity, as dissipation of conflicting forces. Naturally, architectural climaxes and counter forces are evident in a house design, however, external contrasts are only the surface behind which lies the principle of unity showing itself in variety. Behind a variegated external presentation, a higher unity awaits. An architectural design doesn't [..should not..] exist just in and for itself as an 'art for art's sake'. Instead it is a manifestation of honesty, and true dignity in terms of functionality, durability / sustainability, investment, space, even spirituality, sincere esthetics, focusing on respect for nature and surpassing the fashion of the moment. 5)

Architectural idiom can benefit from music-terms and should be an equivalent of timeless rhythm. Architecture is listening with one's eyes.

Die Unvollendete 6) or *last but not least.....*

Austrian composer Franz Schubert's 'Unvollendete' has to be performed as allegro moderato. That qualification also fits architect Teruaki Uchino's creation.

At the same time this title is in another aspect quite to the point, as the reflection of the Landhuis cannot be finished in just a few words; the manifold angles of the construction and it's site doesn't allow me to close the book. It might be a fruitful suggestion to offer a prize and issue an international contest, describing the Landhuis.

A word of gratitude in favor of ALL persons involved is highly appropriate 7); without so many person's dedication, the Landhuis could never have been built.

"A dream you dream alone is only a dream.

A dream you dream together is a reality."

8)

The role and use of power of architects has to be discussed more as has the necessity of mega-cities, the integration of structures with surroundings, the jungle of unhealthy, homophonic, space lacking private Japanese 'houses', the list is pretty long. To my honest conviction, the bottom line is NOT about making a French or a 'Japanese

house', not about a cute, a fashionable, a functional-only or a 'jazzy' house -tasteful or not'. By the way, "nationality" is an invention, [in 'Japan'] done around 150 years ago with the aim to better control masses. People's natural roots lie into era, not in an abstraction ,which 'nationality' is. The premise for Japanese architects is simple: make human houses. Architects: analyze your own bias, unconditionally !

*"One day, bridges broken with the unreal world,
I'll go to springs where promised splendour
lives. Oh!, I'll drink the light, the down, and in
that promise's voice, I'll fulfill my very being." 9)*

Ars longa, vita brevis. 10)

The Landhuis is a theatrical house with a lot of musicality and is [may be therefore] already a rich source of numerous and interesting stories, stories which will grow in numbers and quality.

Temporary I make a break, but not before sharing a pastoral, my never ending surprise about the eternal flow of clear, fresh water coming from the south-west upper-part, running into our south pond. Skilled hands made underground pipes, which lead the water to our reflection pond at the full length of our living room, disappearing -also by underground pipes- into a lovely small and whispering stream, being our east border.

And.....before I forget.....: it's a Japanese house !

Sakawa, January 11th and 30th ,2009.

Dolf van Graas.

- 1) Harold Pinter, Mountain language [a short political play]
- 2) In a speech with the title "As a city-born male I learned walking after my 33rd birthday" on the occasion of the visit of 30 architects from Shikoku, May 25th, 2008, I made the following statement: "[2.] The simple truth however is, that you and I are biological creatures, animals. And animals are not meant to be locked up all their lives

long in ugly unhealthy concrete zoos. Animals have to use their muscles, all their senses and in a proper way their brain. Animals have to hear the sound of birds, of the sea, of the wind and rain. Our type of animal has to use their feet in order to walk, though many persons don't understand that verb anymore."

3) In Portuguese [Mafalda Arnauth, singer / Louis Oliveira]

"Sem Limite

E abri as asas

E fui voar

E fui ser tudo o que eu sempre quis

Que o meu limite

Sou eu que traco

E que desfacio

Sempre que eu assim quiser."

In a completely different genre the Beatles say the same [in a more moralistic way]:

"Nowhere man please listen

You don't know what you're missing

Nowhere man

The world is at your command."

4) There are many ways to sing the same song, like the one I did on November 23rd, 2008, as a speech for architects in Sakawa's Landhuis: "[...]a rhapsody of squares, combined with curved lines, different heights [of floors and ceilings], single, naughty, playful small notes next to a big *BANG* on a *taiko* [the 50 ton rock in the center of the living room], a pipe-*matsuri* in the kitchen, floating lights, the contrasts of hard and soft, fire and water, wide and cozy, altogether united through an appreciation of quite some differences, like life itself. The architect as a composer."

5) This contemplation is strongly based on the reflections of Dutch composer Ton de Leeuw, though somewhat out of context.

6) the Unfinished

7) Text of my speech on the occasion of the celebration, that the roof was completed, the *muneage shiki*, October 22nd, 2007: "Tento. Today, here we stand in front of our **TENTO**, which became as far as it is now already by the manifold of skillful hands and some intelligent brains. We feel most grateful. My travels through Japan with rucksack and tent end here -completely unexpected- ; this scenario annex choreography does not quite resemble a human's planning."

8) Yoko Ono [the Japan times, December 27th, 2008: "Yoko Ono opens up about her past" (Miranda Sawyer)]

9) See also 3) “As Fontes” [Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen / Luis Oliveira]

“Um dia quebrarei todas as pontes
Que ligam o meu ser, vivo e total
A agitacao do mundo do irreal,
E calma subirei ate as fonts.”

10) Art is long, life is short.