

A Phenomenology of Japanese Architecture: Heidegger and Derrida

Michael LAZARIN

The streaming river
 ever flows
 and yet the water
 never is
 the same.

Foam floats
 upon the pools,
 scattering, re-forming,
 never lingering long.

So it is with man
 and all his dwelling places
 here on earth.

So begins the *Hojoki* (*Visions of a Torn World*, 1212) of Kamo-no-Chomei (1155-1216). It expresses the basic Japanese insight that "transiency," the "ephemeral" is the ground of experienced reality. This is obvious enough in terms of man, since, as Heidegger puts it, "being-towards-death" is such an important constituent-even the decisive constituent-of our "being-in-the-world."

But, it is not so clear with "dwelling places," since buildings are made to last-even in Japan, with its fragile wooden architecture. For example, the pagoda, main hall, inner gate and most of the surrounding corridor of Horyuji are supposed to be the oldest wooden buildings in the world. The temple was begun in 587 and completed by Prince Shotoku in 607. Even if it is true that the temple was struck by lightning in 670 and repairs of the buildings were finally completed in 708, they are incredibly old for buildings of this kind.

Of course, wooden members have been replaced over the ages, and it is unlikely that any of the wood at Horyuji is older than the ceiling of Ojo-Gokuraku-in (Temple of Rebirth in the Pure Land) at Sanzen-in, which dates from 1143. But, with Horyuji, it is not so much the materials as the design that speaks of antiquity. This is especially true when one views the entasis of the columns of the surrounding corridor, which clearly show their ancient Greek heritage, closely resembling the form of the columns of the Temple of Poseidon/Hera II (460 BC) at Paestum.

This distinction between the materials and the design is worth noting. When Kamo-no-chomei speaks of dwelling places, the emphasis should be put on "dwelling" rather than the "places" in which this occurs. The image of the house in the *Hojoki* is a metaphor for all human designs, our way of being-in-the-world. It is not so much that artefacts are transient and ultimately become dust, but that even our way of making and using these things is transient, ever again lost to "forgetfulness."

The Meaning of Dwelling: Heidegger and Derrida

The essay "*Bauen Wohnen Denken*," was presented by Heidegger to a convention of architects and city planners in 1951. In the years just after the Second World War, Germany was faced with the enormous task of rebuilding cities that had been bombed by the Allied airforces: 2 million houses destroyed, 3 million homeless, and 13 million displaced as late as 1950. Given this situation, there was an especially pressing need to provide housing for the population in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. Heidegger took this opportunity to tell the architects and construction engineers gathered at the *Darmstadt Colloquium* that building was only incidentally a matter of enclosing space and devising construction plans.

He explained that the Old English and High German word for building/bauen '*buan*' is closely connected with the word 'to be' in '*ich bin*' and '*du bist*'. Further, he explained that the 'I am' and 'you are' in this connection mean *wohnen* (to dwell). The old Saxon '*wuan*' and Gothic '*wunian*' that stand behind '*wohnen*' mean not only to stay in one place, but to remain there in peace (Friede). In order to remain at peace, preservation and safety are important. From this, a dwelling place gains the meaning of shelter, something that saves and protects one from the elements and beasts. But peace is not simply a matter of physical well-being.

As early as 1925, in the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, Heidegger had already explained that *wohnen*, dwelling, has an important psychological dimension. He says that the archaic German word for '*domus*' or 'house' is the same as the English word 'inn' and that this word comes from '*innan*' which means 'to dwell'. "This dwelling primarily signifies "being familiar with" rather than anything spatial." (Section 19) Thus, dwelling has more to do with preservation (*bewahren*) and familiarity than with mere shelter and interior spaces.

Heidegger's intent is to reverse the usual order of priority in production that has been dominant since Plato and Aristotle, that is: producers make products for consumers, for example, poets write dramas for an audience; architects design

buildings for dwellers. In this model, responsibility for the presence of the work—and consequently, its reality—lies with the producer, since the author or designer actively imposes the structure or *eidos* on passive material [Plato] or the producer “energizes” the work (*ergon*) [Aristotle]. However, in Heidegger’s view, this “setting-the-work-in-motion” is dependent on a more fundamental activity of “setting-the-work-to-work” that occurs in the maintenance and development of the building through dwelling. In short, rather than a manipulation of materials, design is a matter of letting the materials be released to the activity of dwelling.

As a brief aside, I’d like to note that Heidegger’s argument does not rest with this reversal. In the *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935-36), he goes on to reverse his own argument in order to overcome a second error in the traditional model of production: that the work is separable from the production process. Both builder and dweller are joined at the hip, so to speak, by the activity of the work itself. As a result, architecture is more akin to practical science than productive science, that is, ethics than technology. (cf. Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* 152-168)

In the early Heidegger, familiarity, preservation, continuity are analyzed in terms of Dasein’s instrumental way of Being-in-the-world, that is, how Dasein uses things in a competent way without having to think about things very much at all. This instrumental way of relating to things is described as things being “ready-to-hand” (*Zuhandensein*). It is only when things break down, or more precisely, break out of the familiar flow of instrumentality, that they stand opposed to us as something “present-at-hand” (*Vorhandensein*). Nevertheless, despite this appearance of structure, regularity and familiarity, in the depths of the Being of modern Dasein, things have run off the rails. Dasein is fundamentally fallen, anxious and alienated from the world. The apparent familiarity is really a way of fleeing from the responsibilities and limitations of life.

Dwelling, as a fundamental way of Being-in-the-world, is ruination, homelessness. In the discussion of fear and anxiety in the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, Heidegger discusses the German word ‘*Unheimlichkeit*.’ For the sake of time, I would like to continue the discussion of this word through a nearly contemporary article by Sigmund Freud.

In the essay “*Das Unheimliche*” (1919), Sigmund Freud, following an insight of Friedrich Schiller, explains how the German word ‘*heimlich*’ can include the meanings of its apparent opposite ‘*unheimlich*’. The primary sense of ‘*heimlich*’ concerns positive associations of homelife (security and intimacy); however, the secondary sense of the word includes meanings such as secrecy, stealth, and estrangement, which is just what the word ‘*unheimlich*’ means. *Unheimlichkeit* is usually translated into English as “uncanniness.” This translation is misleading because “canny” denotes cognition, but *Unheimlichkeit* has nothing to do with

aporia of consciousness. Rather it has to do with an intervention of the unconscious in psychic life; and, the unconscious does not think—it works. For this reason, I choose to translate it as “estrangement.”

Freud explains that within the intimacy of family life there are also secrets which must be kept from the outside world. In this way, the home is not only the place of the hearth and familiarity, but also the “skeletons in the closet.” Family life is not only the source of the most intimate feelings of familiarity, but also the presence of estrangement. Freud’s discussion in “*Das Unheimliche*” is mainly intended to explain how modern, rational people can be frightened by horror or ghost stories. His answer is that irrational fears are hidden within the unconscious of a rational person. Thus, despite his interest in the co-presence of estrangement with familiarity, he cannot avoid thinking of them as opposed.

At this point, I would like to introduce some considerations based on the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. First, I would like to mention Derrida’s criticism of the logocentric bias of the Western metaphysical tradition. The bias consists in the belief that reason can give complete, adequate and clear explanations of anything. That reason has not yet done this is due to the opposition of irrational forces: emotional life, appetites and desires, inhospitable political regimes, etc. However, reason has the ability to silence these forces if only the proper educational discipline can be brought about. The problem with this is that what opposes reason is not some external force, according to Derrida, but the irrational aims of reason itself, especially the aim of universal knowledge and the aim of abolishing the transiency of existence through a doctrine of continuous presence. According to Derrida, the projects of reason are unreasonable; reason is itself irrational.

If we deconstruct Freud’s thesis—and the same could be said about Heidegger—along these lines, it could be said that the opposition between a wholly rational, scientific conscious mind and an irrational, spectre-ridden unconscious mind is an example of logocentrism. What this means in terms of the discussion about dwelling is that dwelling cannot be simply a process of preserving and making familiar, which is opposed by a dangerous and disorderly environment, whether the world or the unconscious. Dwelling is simultaneously a process of preserving and destroying; a dwelling place is simultaneously the site of familiarity and estrangement. Estrangement is the way that things show themselves as familiar, and things are familiar because they are always changing before our eyes.

If we recall the myth of the origin of architecture in *De Architectura* of Vitruvius, two senses of destruction and estrangement can be discerned. According to the myth, humans are driven from their habitat by a sudden conflagration. Later, of all the animals, humans alone return to witness the destruction. Remarkably, they find comfort in the warmth of the glowing embers

and decide to throw another log on the fire. Due to their ability to manipulate the environment with their hands, this first act of climate control inaugurates the beginning of human culture. Language and the construction of shelters soon follow.

However, Vitruvius notes a second power of humanity. Because people stand erect, they are capable of gazing at the magnificence (literally, the great making) of the stars (*astrorum magnificentiam aspicerent*). This human capacity is the condition for any accomplishment of technical mastery of materials. The hand may be the beginning of building, but the soul is the origin of architecture. The capacity for awe or wonder first brings humans back to the site of destruction. The image of the magnificence of the stars inspires them to transcend contingency.

Exactly what is magnificent in the stars is open to speculation. It could be astronomy, which for Vitruvius is mainly concerned with making clocks, measuring time, an image of eternity to oppose to the destructive contingencies of earthly life. Second, it could be the mathematical correlate of astronomy in the quadrivium, that is geometry, the measurement of the earth, the determination of locations. In short an image of ideal space. Or, finally, it might be the companion of astronomy in the quadrivium: music. And since we are dealing with a myth, we should also think of the mythic origin of music, the dithyrambic ode, a circle of dancers, musicians and singers dedicated to Dionysus. This dance celebrates the death and rebirth of nature, and according to Aristotle, is the origin of tragic drama. As Nietzsche remarks in *The Birth of Tragedy*, dance is the perfect art because it is the immediate unity of the arts of time and space.

For Vitruvius the basic elements of architecture are utility, strength and delight. Mastery of time and space are essential for the former two; the Dionysian spirit of music and dance, for the latter. It seems to me that Western architecture is too much taken with overcoming the destructive forces of nature through utility and strength. Delight is trivialized as the result of ornamentation. However, if we think of destruction not only as annihilation (emptiness) but also as transiency, becoming other, the movement of the dance, the destruction as a correlate of preservation, and estrangement as a correlate of familiarity can be thought as a transcendent capacity within the human soul.

According to the Japanese, since Japan is a storm-tossed, volcanic island, the will to impose permanent architectural structures never developed. Karatani Koujin writes in *Architecture as Metaphor*, "...in Japan, the will to architecture does not exist—a circumstance that allowed postmodernism to blossom in its own way. Unlike in the West, deconstructive forces are constantly at work in Japan. As strange as it may sound, being architectonic in Japan is actually radical and political." (p. xiv) Instead of permanent structures, the emphasis has been placed

on constructing spaces for transient, accidental encounters. And, the sorrowful experience of this transiency, in Japanese *mono no aware*, is the essence of aesthetic delight.

Thinking about dwelling in terms of the simultaneity of becoming familiar and estrangement perfectly describes our experience of living within a building. Living in a room is a continuous process of becoming familiar and becoming estranged, of arranging things and de-ranging things. Every time we straighten a picture frame or stack up the *zabuton*, we impose our own sense of order upon things. When things are arranged just as we would have them, our room becomes familiar, something that owes its way of being to us. At the same time, by displaying this picture rather than any other one, by setting *cushions* in this place rather than that, we are de-ranging the room.

Everyone who has spent some time in a hotel understands this process. Hotel rooms all over the world are pretty much the same; the bed, the nightstand, the dresser, TV, bathroom, plastic-covered cup have been seen and experienced many times. But despite this, they are never familiar. They are a representation of a room for human beings, not a room in which humans really live. In order to make the room familiar, it is necessary to de-range it somewhat. One must move the chair to the other side of the table, adjust the curtains, put one's own belongings on the dresser. Even so, hotel rooms remain alien. They are over-engineered, over-designed to make the most efficient use of the space and furniture. It takes a long time and a lot of freedom to get things out of order just as one would like them to be; or in other words, to shift things from the impersonal order of an architectural design to the personal arrangement/de-
rangement of one's own style.

In our daily life, we perform hundreds of acts of preservation and destruction and thereby constitute a world that is both familiar and estranged. This process of arranging and de-ranging describes the activity of dwelling. But, dwelling is not just a matter of moving things around in our rooms. Things are placed in certain ways in order to frame other things or frame a view of the garden. They are set up to permit or prohibit certain kinds of social interaction. Dwelling, as a process of becoming familiar and becoming estranged, as a process of preserving and destroying (in the sense of letting things change), is primarily a way of structuring relations between private and public life, between self and world.

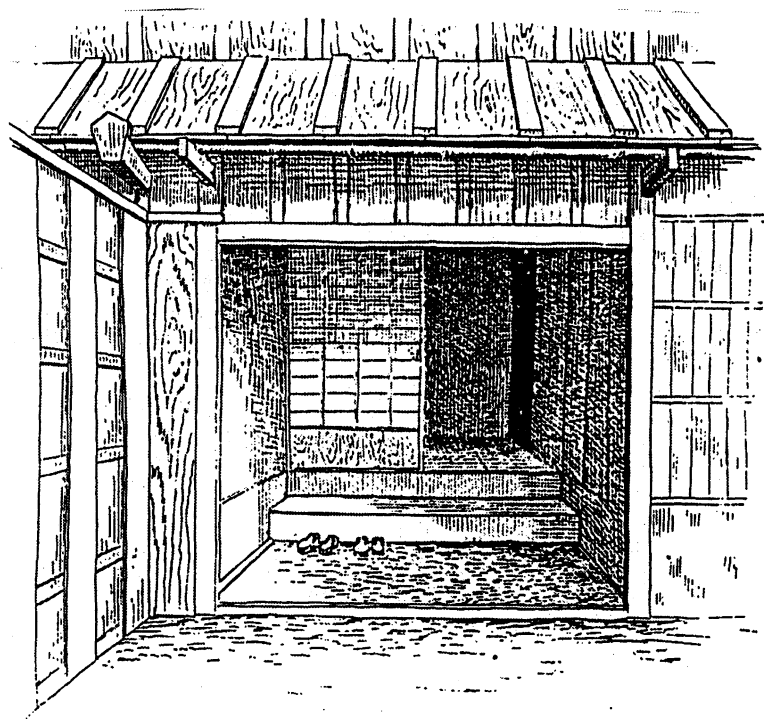
Dwelling in a Traditional Japanese House: Social Life

Next, I would like to describe the way of dwelling within traditional Japanese architecture. For the sake of time, I will focus on dwelling in terms of

familiarity and estrangement in this section, though the analysis could also be done in terms of preservation and destruction. I will reserve the analysis of preservation and destruction for the next section on the psychological life of dwelling within Japanese architecture.

Today, only 15 percent of the wooden houses in Kyoto at the end of the Second World War are still standing. In the past ten years, 40,000 *machiya* (townhouses) have been replaced by concrete apartment blocks and Western-style houses. These buildings usually preserve some references to traditional Japanese architecture, but these features are only simulacra, empty repetitions, of the original and do not allow one to dwell in them in the traditional way.

I will describe two features of traditional Japanese architecture: *genkan* and *engawa* in this section and *ima* in the next section. I will discuss these not so much in terms of their architectural or aesthetic merits, but rather in terms of their social and psychological functions.



Genkan

Genkan roughly corresponds to the foyer or entrance hall of Western architecture, but whereas the foyer clearly belongs to the interior of a Western building, the *genkan* is an intermediary zone between private and public space. Similarly, the *engawa* is an intermediary zone between the house and the garden something like a veranda. The concept of the “intermediary zone” has been developed by the architect Kurokawa Kisho. He argues that ambiguous spaces between interior and exterior distinguish Japanese architecture from Western

architecture. As he puts it, "Westerners build their buildings with walls, while Japanese make their buildings with windows."

Kurokawa's sense of intermediary zone can be discovered by looking at the two characters that make up the word *genkan*. The first (*gen*) means profound, abstruse, occult or mysterious; the second (*kan*) means barrier, connection or turning point. The range of senses of '*kan*' can be seen in other compound words such as '*nankan*' (difficulty, obstacle), '*kankei*' (relation, concerned with) and '*kansetsu*' (joint). A similar range of meanings can be found in the word '*engawa*' where '*gawa*' means side or edge and '*en*' means relationship. However, this word for relationship has a long history in Buddhist thought and is used to translate the word '*karma*' and has the sense of "a chance meeting that was fated to happen," for example, "love at first sight," or "a marriage made in heaven".

Something like this range of meanings can also be found in Western languages, for example, the English word 'cleave' means both to cut into two pieces and to join two pieces together. However, this conjunction of opposite meanings in a Western language is usually unsettling. This is precisely what attracted Freud to the word '*heimlich*', that it could turn into its opposite indicated to him that this word concealed a deep but important psychological conflict. On the other hand, the Japanese language and the Japanese mind seem much more comfortable with such contradictions. Indeed, such ambiguity is desirable. By intermediary zone, Kurokawa means a space which simultaneously connects and divides the interior and the exterior.

In fact, the interior and exterior of a Japanese house are not defined by vertical structures at all. Tanizaki Junichiro, in *In Praise of Shadows*, says that the essence of a Japanese house is the roof, *yane*, literally "house root." Wherever the roof casts a shadow is part of the interior of the house. The eaves of a Japanese house have extraordinarily wide soffits, so the shadow extends some way into the street and garden. On the other hand, one is clearly not inside a Japanese house until one has taken off one's shoes. This occurs when one steps up onto the platform of tatami mats: the Japanese say, "Step up" rather than "Come in." Even at this point, in larger houses, one is not properly inside the house. Often there is a small tatami room (*deima*) by the ground level of the *genkan* that corresponds to something like a lobby in a hotel. The important rooms of a Japanese house are at the back, so one passes through a succession of spaces with a greater sense of interiority until reaching the rooms with the *engawa*, and is thereby passing out of the house into the garden. In a sense, one is never really inside a Japanese house, but rather passing through an interval from the street to the garden.

Nevertheless, one would expect that there would be some point at which a Japanese feels, "I'm home." This is certainly the case, but this point of "being-at-

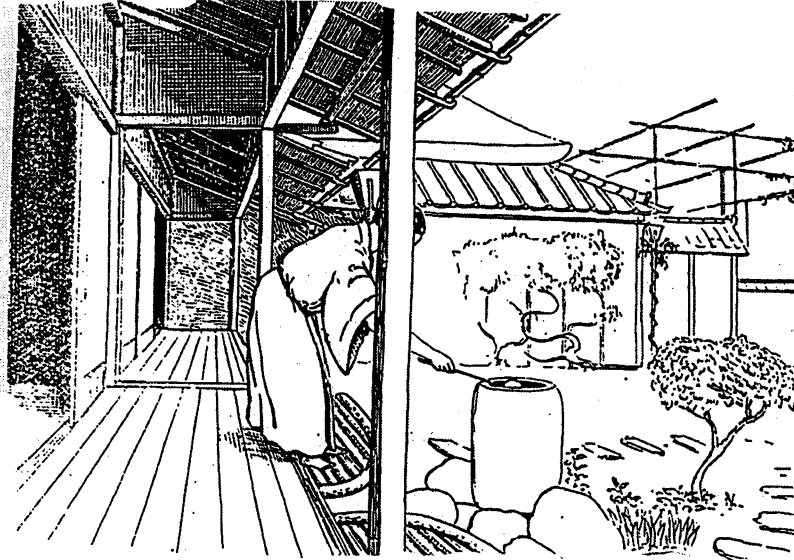
home" is always moving depending on the season, weather, and the presence and absence of other people.

In a Western house, the foyer provides a space near the entryway where casual dealings with visitors can take place. The interaction should be brief; otherwise the guest should be invited into the living room, study or other place suitable for social interaction. Though the foyer serves a kind of public function, it is clearly part of the interior of the house. A visitor would never enter the foyer of a Western house without being given permission to do so. Some years ago, a Japanese college student was shot by an American homeowner in Louisiana. The boy had mistaken the address, but thinking he had been invited to a party at this house simply entered the front door without knocking. When he got inside, he realized his mistake and left. The homeowner shot him as he was walking away from the house. The press made much of the fact that the boy did not understand the word "Freeze" when shouted by the homeowner. In fact, the real problem consisted in different understandings of what constitutes private and public space. By entering the foyer without permission the Japanese college student had violated the privacy of the house, but this is not the case in a Japanese house.

The *genkan* of a Japanese house is an intermediary zone between private and public life. Typically, a visitor opens the grated sliding doors that separate the *genkan* from the street, enters the *genkan* and calls out "*Gomen kudasai.*" The person inside the house enters the *deima* to greet the visitor. In contrast to the Western foyer, a great variety of social interactions can take place in the *genkan*. The two people can conduct a simple business transaction or have a pleasant chat for quite an extended period of time, drinking tea and snacking on cakes. The important point is that all of this can be done in an atmosphere of informality and ambiguity concerning the relationship. If the visitor were to be invited into the interior of the house, a great many formalities would have to be observed. It would be quite burdensome for the inhabitant of the house to entertain the guest. But, in the *genkan*, the visitor can remain standing or sit on the raised tatami floor, all the while keeping his or her shoes on. This "keeping the shoes on" preserves a sense of transiency, that the visitor is about to leave, even if the two people spend quite a long time with one another.

From this, we can see that the *genkan* is not simply a way of getting into or out of the house, a place for changing and storing shoes. It serves an important social function; it provides a way of getting around the excessive formalities of Japanese social life. It provides a way of being familiar with someone who, as visitor, is also estranged. It de-ranges the formalities in order to arrange social communication. Without such a space, people raised according to traditional standards of politeness would be at a loss. It seems to me that even

younger people who have been Westernized to the extent of putting aside some of the formalities of traditional Japanese social life are also at a loss.



Engawa

In the fifty years since the end of the Second World War, America has shifted much of its population from cities and towns to what are called in Japan “new towns.” In many modern American “gated communities,” Frederick Law Olmsted’s ideal of a community living together in a garden connected by a seamless flow of lawn has been subverted by the erection of fences, lines of hedges—sometimes even the lawn itself. In some places, there are no sidewalks because no one walks in these “new towns;” everyone drives to the air-conditioned shopping malls. Consequently, there is almost no social life in these “new towns.” This is a big change for American public life. One hundred-fifty years ago, the diary of an Amherst, Massachusetts woman of the 1850s records that she averaged sixteen social visits per week. These included sewing or quilting bees, bible reading sessions, afternoon teas and dinner parties, where everything from the price of pigs to the meaning of democracy was discussed. Now, most American social interaction occurs in the virtual reality of television. This is really de-socialization, and probably accounts for many of the social problems in American society, including crime, lawsuits and the shooting of an innocent Japanese college student.

The diary of a Japanese shopkeeper’s wife in Kyoto of the 1920s records four or five visits per day by neighbors, relatives or their servants. Most of these occurred at the *genkan* or in the alley (*roji*) behind the house. But, in modern Japanese buildings, these intermediary zones occur only as simulacra, as false representations. In an apartment, the *genkan* serves only as a place to change and

store shoes. Even in middle class houses, where the *genkan* is larger, there is no provision for social interaction. It appears to be a *genkan*, but it is really a Western foyer. The *engawa* might be referred to by a wooden board in the floor next to the sliding aluminum doors that lead to the balcony or a tiny garden. But there is no way to define various degrees of connection between the interior of the house and nature.

The way of social life, of dwelling in a Japanese house is quickly disappearing. As the city plan of Japanese cities becomes more and more Westernized, the same kind of social problems—the problems of social alienation—that occur in American towns and cities are beginning to occur. In fact, it will probably be even worse because there is no provision in Japanese city planning to provide “relief zones” from modern mechanical environment. As Western cities increased in scale and size, land was put aside for public squares and parks. This is not being done in Japanese cities.

The loss of intermediary zones, the way of dwelling in *genkan* and *engawa* is a threat to social life. It is also a threat to psychological life. To explain this, I would like to return to Derrida’s analysis of memory and repetition.

Dwelling in a Japanese House: Psychological Life

The key feature of traditional Japanese architecture is the intermediary zone, an ambiguous space between interior and exterior, private and public spheres, self and world. I have argued that Japanese social life requires these zones in order to circumvent the excessive formalities of Japanese politeness codes. The formalities of the politeness codes are repressive. For Westerners, with our tradition of individual autonomy and expression, they often seem oppressive. Many Westerners ask me if Japanese have any sense of humor or irony. I can assure you that they do—perhaps more than most Americans.

A phrase which is important in Buddhist thought as well as everyday life is *ishin denshin*, which can be roughly translated as “a meeting of the minds,” with the proviso that “minds” must be understood as both plural and singular. In Buddhism, it is the convergence of mind that occurs when a disciple gains enlightenment through the instruction of a teacher; in ordinary life, it describes profound “friendship.” The key word is “*shin*” (mind). The event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) that occurs in *ishin denshin* rests on *mu shin* (no mind), where “*mu*” (nothing) is understood in a dynamic sense of transition, transiency rather than emptiness (*ku*).

The excessive formalities of Japanese social life “bracket” the arbitrary, insignificant, wearisome events of life (ceremonies, meetings, lectures) and focus attention on the transitory joyful moments (festivals, parties, conversations). The

former usually occur in *Ōsetsushitsu* or *-ma* (reception room); the latter in *osetsuma* (drawing room). Both “*-shitsu*” and “*-ma*” are suffixes that denote room; the former connotes a structured, designated space, while the latter connotes an ambiguous, unspecified place. The basic word for the interior rooms of a traditional Japanese house is “*ima*,” which literally means “the interval of animate being.”

Ma is translated into English as ‘interval’, a word which also may be applied to both space and time. However, there is no English word which covers the following range of meanings for ‘*ma*’: *kono aida ni* (at that time) and *nagai aida* (for a long time). In these expressions, the same word is used to speak about a point in time and a duration of time, that which cuts time up into discrete moments and that which joins moments of time into a continuous flow. Similarly, in terms of space, “*ma*” denotes a specific unit of space (the interval between two pillars, about one meter) and an expanse of space. An *ima* is bounded by *fusuma* (interior, double-sided, paper sliding doors) or *shouji* (exterior, single-sided, paper, sliding doors). These sliding doors can be opened at continuously variable intervals to connect one room with another or frame a scene in the garden. They can even be completely removed.

The key architectural feature is flexibility in partitioning the plan of the house. The key psychological feature of “*ima*” is namelessness. Any activity of human dwelling—except for those performed in the kitchen and toilet—can be done in any “*ima*.” When I first invited my Japanese students to my house, I showed them around, and they noted that there were two pillows on the bed. A rumor that I had a secret lover soon spread among the student population, and when I asked them how they had come to this conclusion, they pointed to the two pillows. I explained that I liked to read in bed, the second pillow being use to prop up the head. They were astonished by this because they thought only sleeping could occur in a bedroom; all reading should be done in the office or study.

As in the case with excessive formalities in social relations, this excessive formalism in the designation of what kind of dwelling can occur in specific rooms highlights the ambiguity and transiency of life in a traditional Japanese *ima*. Because Western rooms have specific designations, Japanese cannot understand how one could do something else in the room. This is a misunderstanding of Western architectural space; nevertheless, there are greater limitations in how to use Western rooms than in the case of Japanese rooms. For example, I have slept in every room of my house. One room allows me to wake to the song of birds in the spring; another is warmer in the winter; the one with the bed certifies that I am going to bed; another room gives me the feeling of being on the road, staying at a friend’s house for the first time.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, dwelling as preservation corresponds to

memory, and dwelling as becoming familiar corresponds to repetition. Derrida points out that it is only through an experience being archived in memory that it can become the target of destructive impulses, targeted precisely by and on:

...that which permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction, and in truth menaces with destruction, in introducing, *a priori*, forgetfulness... The archive [memory] always works, and *a priori*, against itself. (Derrida, *Archive Fever* (Univ. of Chicago Press: 1995), p. 12.)

Further, it is only insofar as an experience bears repetition that something new can be envisioned,

Of course, the unprecedented is never possible without repetition, there is never something absolutely unprecedented, totally original or new; or rather, the new can only be new, radically new, to the extent that something is produced, that is, where there is memory and repetition. (From an interview of Derrida by Richard Beardsworth, "Nietzsche and the Machine," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 7 (1974), 7-66.

Forgetfulness is that which opposes memory, the psychological correlate of preservation. Freud calls forgetfulness the "death instinct" or the "death drive," which here means quite the opposite of Heidegger's recognition and acceptance of human finitude. The death instinct is destructive and aggressive. It is a gesture toward in-finitude, against finitude. It is also silent.

...this three named drive [death, destruction, aggression] is mute (*stumm*). It is at work, but since it always operates in silence, it never leaves any archives of its own. It destroys in advance its own archive ... It works to destroy the archive: on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own "proper" traces-which consequently cannot properly be called "proper." (Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 10.)

The death instinct is anarchic and contrasts with the reality principle and the pleasure principle in that it is no principle at all-only the destruction of principles. The anarchy drive is imperceptible, except, says Freud, when it "disguises itself in some erotic color," an erotic simulacrum that sustains the denial of the pleasure principle long enough for true pleasure to be forgotten.

Healthy psychic life requires that some experiences (transgression, erotic desire, but also ecstasy and rebellion) be recorded in a way that allows formal

details to be forgotten; yet at the same time, allows psychic energy and tension to carry through to the next experience. If experience is obsessively archived in memory, it becomes impossible to move forward not only (1) because experience becomes too structured but also (2) because the archive begins to undermine itself and nothing at all can be experienced. In architectural terms, a room that excessively preserves its layout has the same kind of deleterious effects. Consider, for example, the repetitive structures of power relations prescribed by a classroom compared to meeting one's classmates and teachers at a bar or a backyard barbecue.

Forgetting occurs in two ways: by intent and by accident. When experiences are forgotten by repression, the psychic intent is to archive the experience in the unconscious by distorting it, through displacement (putting it in another context) and condensation (wrapping it with another experience), because the conscious experience is a violation of the law (of conscience or social norms).

Let us remember that "archive" originally means the dwelling places of the *archons*, the ancient Athenian judges who served as chief magistrates, military commanders and religious officials (mid-7th-mid-5th c. BC). Due to the political power invested in them, their homes became the places where official documents were registered and stored, preserved for the future. And also, because of their political power, they had the right to interpret the laws and thereby make new laws. A legal interpretation is always a transgression of the law; the difference between a judgment and a crime is the the former is done for the sake of the common good, the latter is done for the sake of personal benefit. The dwelling place of the archon, the archive, is the place at which the private passes over to the public, the secrets are revealed, the individual decision becomes the general custom of the society.

It can be said that forgetting by repression is a way of keeping violations of the law secret within the very archive of the laws. Repression is a way of interiorizing the external (the violation), or at least, what should be kept external to the archive, the dwelling place of the laws. For Freud, this poses no problem in and of itself. The contradiction does not disturb the unconscious because the unconscious does not think; rather, it works. But, when repression begins to consume the whole of the unconscious, when it exercises an in-finitude of destructive and aggressive drives against the finitude of the archive (memory, preservation), then obsessive behaviour results.

When experience and the environment are obsessively structured, a more pernicious form of forgetfulness occurs. Things are forgotten by accident. This occurs when the memory (*mneme*) or the ability to remember (*anamnesis*) is supplemented by a memorandum, a notation, an aid to memory (*hypomnema*). Whenever any faculty of thought other than memory attends to a memory-

reflection or naming, for example--the memory is transformed into a memorandum, the remembering becomes a notation. As memorandum, it is already something that memory is not, that is, something that can be mistaken and thereby forgotten. Of course, for Derrida, this kind of supplementation is inevitable; it is generated by the need for the archive in the first place. The memorandum is a way of externalizing something internal. It becomes dangerous only when the logocentrism of the archive denies the activity of supplementation, that is, denies that the archive itself produced the possibility of its destruction. In this way, the experience or the psychic memory of the experience is completely effaced. Yet, this is precisely what happens in accidental forgetting.

For example, when a printed reproduction of a painting is used as an aid for remembering the painting itself, the experience of the painting can be forgotten. No reproduction, no matter how finely printed, can ever present the *luminosity* of a Vermeer or the *dynamism* of a Rothko. This forgetting can happen forwardly as well as backwardly, when a genuine experience of the painting is pre-empted by familiarity with painting mainly through reproductions. Further, even the paintings themselves can be transformed into memoranda of themselves through the practices of the archive. Since these paintings provide extraordinary experiences of luminosity and dynamism by tracing forms and colors on a canvass, it becomes important to preserve the canvass. This leads to the physical painting itself, perhaps worth more than the museum in which it is archived, being regarded as that which is possessed by the collection. The experience of luminosity or dynamism becomes secondary once the painting is established as an important work. Finally, the experience is forgotten, sometimes at the very moment the painting enters the archive. The manifestos of most art museums proclaim themselves to be archives of cultural heritage and resources for education; few claim to be sites of visual ecstasy.

This kind of forgetting is happening today in Japan. As public and residential architecture is slowly converted into Western designs, the experience of the intermediary zones, the *genkan*, *engawa* and *ima* is being lost in a way such that none of the psychic energy of the traditional way of dwelling is carried over into modern life. Because the experience of these intermediary zones gets confused with architectural features of the building, a simulation of the architectural features can replace the experience of dwelling within them. Further, since living in the simulacra of *genkan*, *engawa* and *ima* of modern architecture provide no experience of intermediary zones, they tend to efface and trivialize the traditional installations of these zones. As a result, more and more abstract or cursory references can satisfy the need of Japanese people for such zones. If the architect's plan labels a certain architectural space as a *genkan*, it is taken to be a *genkan*--even if it provides no facilities for the kind of social and psychic life that

should take place in a *genkan*. In this environment, the Japanese consciousness of ambiguous relations of interior and exterior, public and private, self and world fall into forgetfulness.

This forgetfulness of ambiguity, of the need for estrangement as well as familiarity, for transiency as well as preservation is abusive. It is an abuse of the culture by the archons and archives of the culture that rebounds against everything with which it comes in contact.

Such an abuse [of the in-finite against the finite] opens up the ethico-political dimension of the problem. There is not one archive fever [death, aggression, destruction drive], one limit or one suffering of memory among others: enlisting the in-finite, archive fever verges on radical evil. (Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp.19-20.)

Buddha taught
we must not be
attached.

Yet the way I love this hut
is itself attachment.

To be attached
to the quiet and serene
must likewise be a burden.

No more time shall I waste
speaking of useless pleasures.

The morning is quiet
and I have meditated much
on the holy teaching.

This is what I ask myself—

You left the world
to live in the woods,
to quiet your mind
and live the Holy Way.

But though you appear
to be a monk
your heart is soaked in sin.

Is your lowly life
--surely a consequence of past deeds--
troubling you now?

Has your discerning mind
just served to drive you mad?

To these questions of mind,
there is no answer.

So now

I use my impure tongue
to offer a few prayers
to Amida and then

silence

(Kamo-no-Chomei, *Hojoki*, final lines)

Works Cited

Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever*, translated by Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995).

_____. from an interview by Richard Beardsworth, "Nietzsche and the Machine," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 7 (1974).

Freud, Sigmund, "Das Unheimliche" (1919), in the *Standard Edition*, 17, 217-252, translated under the editorship of James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981).

Harries, Karsten, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

Heidegger, Martin, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

_____. "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

_____. *History of the Concept of Time*, translated by Theodore Kisiel, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Kamo-no-Chomei, *Hojoki: visions of a torn world*, translated by Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins, (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).

Karatani, Koujin, *Architecture as Metaphor*. Translated Kohso Sabu. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

Kurokawa, Kisho, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1988).

Nietzsche, Friedrich W., *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Walter Kaufman, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967)

Vitruvius, Pollio, *De Architectura*, *Perseus Project*, <<http://perseus.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0072>>

Illustrations

Genkan : Edward S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings*, (New York : Dover Publications, 1961).

Engawa : *Ibid.*