

Communal Ecologies: Conversations with Young Japanese Architects

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A heartfelt thank you to all the architects featured in this book for generously sharing their time and welcoming us into their studios, allowing us to capture their ideas and environments. We hope this book inspires readers as deeply as we were moved by the architects' thought-provoking ideas and radical work – a rich collection of communal ecologies.

Samuel Michaëlsson and Marc Goodwin,
Summer, 2025.

Communal Ecologies

Conversations with Young Japanese Architects

Samuel Michaëlsson

In 2016, through the kind introduction of UC Berkeley Professor Emerita Dana Buntrock, I had the privilege to meet architect and historian Terunobu Fujimori to discuss his ongoing efforts to push the boundaries of the Japanese tea house. This was my first real interaction with the Japanese architecture scene, and when I returned some years later, my ambition was to meet a younger generation. During an intense three-month period, I interviewed around 25 different architects, with nine of those conversations compiled in this very book. Over the past six years I have traveled back and forth to Japan to continue these conversations, and I am deeply grateful for the generosity and hospitality shown by the architects I met, each of whom has contributed to this publication in their own way.

I come from a Scandinavian, and specifically Swedish, context, which has throughout this project naturally been a point of reference and a lens through which I have approached the Japanese architectural scene. Capturing the full breadth and complexity of the Japanese architecture world is, of course, an immense challenge; it is a field that is remarkably diverse, deeply layered, and constantly evolving. I have therefore opted for a more personal and perhaps subjective approach – utilizing interviews as the mode for presenting these offices, as well as the environments in which they operate. The following conversations and essays reflect a specific moment in Japanese architecture, and my hope is that they can help broaden the understanding of the architectural landscape in Japan.

I reached out to the architectural photographer Marc Goodwin, with whom I had collaborated previously, as he documented most of Terunobu Fujimori's buildings all across Japan. He has for many years conducted

his own research with his studio Archmospheres. Through photographic documentation, he has created a typology of different architecture offices around the globe – an atlas of architecture studios, if you will. By bringing these two projects together, we hope to offer the reader a more comprehensive understanding of the environments and atmospheres in which these young practitioners operate. Goodwin also expands on the experience of documenting these spaces in an essay.

To provide the reader with greater context and help frame the world in which this generation of architects works, Yosuke Tsuga and Shinichi Kawakatsu have each contributed an essay. Yosuke Tsuga is an architect, curator, and researcher, based in Tokyo. Over the past decade, he has established strong ties with the Scandinavian architectural community and conducted research on public spaces in both Japan and Sweden. Shinichi Kawakatsu is an architect, curator and writer, based in Kyoto, and is currently running the architecture gallery CoAK (Centre for Co-Architecture Kyoto). In a concluding afterword, Kyoto-based Professor Thomas Daniell reflects on how a major national crisis prompted a deep reevaluation of architectural values in Japan.

An architecture of networks

At the start of this project I had, like many people coming from a European and Western architectural context, primarily witnessed the Japanese architecture scene through the lens of magazines and online media platforms such as *ArchDaily*, *Architectural Review*, and *A+U*. Over the past twenty years this coverage has been dominated by the works of SANAA, Sou Fujimoto, Jun'ya Ishigami and their contemporaries. Their expertly engineered, seemingly weightless, white spaces have proved well-suited to being exported in an increasingly visual culture. As I began my research it became clear that the current generation was moving in a very different direction. Many of the young architects that I met were interested in developing another type of architecture, rougher, and with a growing interest in social aspects such as community and network building, as well as a reconsideration of architecture's relationship with nature. While reflection on the relationship to nature has long been central to Japanese architecture, there appears to have been a shift – from what

Koji Ichikawa describes as being, in the early 2000s, a “fascination with conceptual natural mimicry”¹ to today’s more grounded, earnest efforts to rethink human relationships with nature and ecology.

The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, and its aftermath, is often mentioned as a driving factor in this generation’s ambition to understand and visualize the networks of energy consumption, as well as to document the extraction and movement of resources. The catastrophe made visible just how fragile these connections were, and created a shift in ways of thinking, moving away from viewing architecture as a static object and instead as a part of larger networks and ecosystems. Takuto Sando of Tsubame Architects reflects on the period following the earthquake: “...the atmosphere in the studio changed a little bit. The professor and the students started to think more and more about the social aspects of architecture.” What Chie Konno of teco describes as a state of “being in a black box” refers to the lack of awareness of the hidden networks and systems that underpin not only the building industry but society as a whole. This generation can be said to have taken a step out of this figurative black box, with the ambition to uncover and reconnect some of those networks. This heightened awareness of social and ecological issues, combined with lessening opportunities in the residential designs and single-family homes that are conventionally associated with young Japanese architects, has pushed this generation to explore renovation projects as well as various grassroots and community-based projects. There has also been a growing interest in traditional ecological knowledge and local craftsmanship, particularly in rural areas.

An important name that came up in several of the interviews is that of the late philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour, and his concept of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).² Though architecture historically has been a field that is quick to adopt various philosophical trends, ANT was developed in the 1980s and appears to have been popularized in the Japanese architecture scene through the laboratory of Yoshiharu Tsukamoto. Tsukamoto recounts how Latour’s idea of “hybrids” helped clarify his thinking in the wake of the 2011 earthquake, as he began to imagine an architecture that tran-

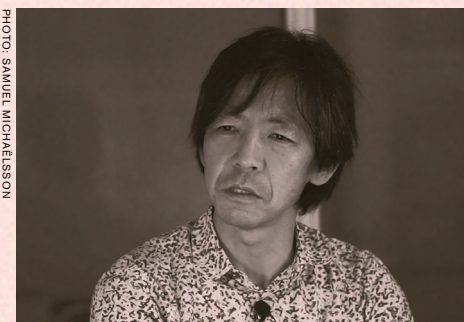


PHOTO: SAMUEL MICHAELSSON

Architect and professor Yoshiharu Tsukamoto.

scends the dominant industrial systems that so often dictate the design process.³ The concept of exploring architecture through various network flows has since been developed in different ways by offices such as teco, Ondesign and tomito architects, through meticulous mapping and documentation of various connections and site conditions, and in a more environmental and ecological sense in the work of Fuminori Nousaku, Mio Tsuneyama, and Norihisa Kawashima.

Two architects featured in the book who embody a more radical – or “red,” as Terunobu Fujimori might put it⁴ – approach to nature and ecology are Kengo Sato and Takashi Fujino of Ikimono Architects. Sato, who studied under the influential avant-garde architect Osamu Ishiyama, works across diverse contexts – from Fukushima and Tokyo to India. Traversing these vastly different locations, he both designs and constructs his often raw and unconventional objects and buildings in close collaboration with local actors, drawing inspiration from the surrounding landscapes. Takashi Fujino of Ikimono Architects channels his experience of living in extreme environments – from Kisho Kurokawa’s Capsule Tower to a small wooden hut in the cold north of Japan – culminating in the design of their own office, Atelier Tenjinyama, a beautifully simple yet powerful space where nature and architecture seamlessly merge.

Learning from the city

In my conversation with Fuminori Nousaku, he brought up the fact that Fumihiko Maki in 1979 used the term *nobushi* (masterless samurai) to describe the generation of architects active at the time, including Toyo Ito, Tadao Ando, and Itsuko Hasegawa. They were designing very radical and expressive private houses and embracing a sort of “samurai attitude.” This was intended to contrast with the *guntai* (army) generation of Kenzo Tange, Arata Isozaki, and others, who were designing huge public projects in the postwar era. In the 2017 book *Afterimage Modernism*, Maki once again used a military metaphor, pointing out that the new generation of architects were instead operating as a kind of militia, working with community projects from the ground up.⁵ I mentioned this in a conversation with Fujimori, and he put this into question, while also poking a bit of fun at Kenzo Tange.

Many young architects talk about the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake because it was the first major disaster they experienced themselves. Before that, Japan went through World War II, the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, and several other devastating events – Tokyo, for instance, was completely destroyed twice. Those earlier disasters had a huge impact on architects at the time. I’m sure the 2011 earthquake was also a major shock for today’s younger generation, and it seems to have made them more socially aware, at least for a while. But historically, not many architects have been able to truly grapple with social or political issues through their work. After looking into this new generation, I’ve found that I’m less interested in their social commentary – because that tends to change – and more interested in the actual buildings they’re designing.

Architects’ ideas and theories come and go, but what really lasts is the architecture itself. As Tsutomu Ikuta, a University of Tokyo professor and close friend of Kenzo Tange, once said, “You can trust Kenzo Tange’s work, but not his words.”

As both a practicing architect and an architectural historian, Fujimori views this generation in relation to those that came before. While it’s often “easier” to engage with political and social issues early in one’s career – when working on smaller projects with fewer financial constraints and less liability – I hope this generation will prove him wrong by continuing to prioritize social aspects even as they take on larger, more complex commissions. The work of Ondesign, Tsubame Architects, and Nori Architects demonstrates the potential of increasing the scale of at least some of these aspects, in projects such as Bonus Track and Good Cycle Building.

Both dot architects (located in western Osaka) and BASE (the joint office of teco and Unemori Architects, located in the Asakusa area of Tokyo) highlight the potential of actively engaging with their immediate surroundings and local communities. At BASE, the two offices operate in a renovated building with a flexible ground floor that creates a welcoming threshold to the street and attempts to initiate a dialogue with the city. The office of dot architects and shared space Coop Kitakagaya function slightly differently. Toshikatsu Ienari, one of the founders, talks about it as a membership space – something that is in between a public and private space. Situating aspects of their practice across several nearby locations by, for example, occasionally running a bar within Chidori Bunka – a community

space, gallery, and restaurant – they effectively weave themselves into the fabric of the neighborhood. 403architecture [dajiba] present an even more intense way of interacting with the city. Based in Hamamatsu, halfway between Kyoto and Tokyo, they have, despite their young age, amassed a large number of projects in close proximity to their home base, developing a sort of hyper locality. Their methodology reflects what Takuma Tsuji described in our interview as an ongoing feedback loop with the city, where “the architect must first learn, as a person, and then channel that back into the architecture and the city.”



Takuma Tsuji of 403architecture [dajiba].

Communal Ecologies

Communal Ecologies represent two strands of network thinking – social and ecological – but as became evident through the conversations in this book, all of these architects move seamlessly over and between these categories. Perhaps more than ever before, these practitioners tend to look outside the traditional framework of architecture in search of responses to an increasingly challenging and complex world. *Communal Ecologies* seeks to capture the spirit and atmosphere of an emerging generation of young practitioners, pointing toward a potential future for the profession – one that embraces the creative possibilities that emerge when conventional pathways and structures are no longer available. Speaking with these young architects has been deeply inspiring, opening up entirely new ways of working, practicing, and reimagining the role of the architect in the twenty-first century. I hope that this book will inspire readers in the same way. ●

1. Koji Ichikawa, “A Generation that Questions the Conditions,” in *Make Do With Now: New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, eds. Yuma Shinohara and Andreas Ruby (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2022), 32–39.
2. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a theoretical approach that considers both human and non-human entities as active participants (“actors”) in complex networks, where meaning and influence emerge from their interactions rather than from predetermined structures or hierarchies. In other words, architecture can be seen as an entity that interacts with people, society, and the environment, and that also transforms the actions and relationships that arise from this. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
3. Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, Manabu Chiba, Seng Kuan, Tsuyoshi Tane, *How is Life?* (Tokyo: TOTO Publishing, 2023).
4. Terunobu Fujimori’s “Red and White School,” a conceptual framework introduced in 1990 in the magazine *Kenchiku Bunka*, divides Japanese architecture into two distinct tendencies. The “White School” represents purity, abstraction, and refined minimalism, while the “Red School” emphasizes warmth, imperfection, natural materials, and a deep connection to human experience.
5. Fumihiko Maki, *Afterimage Modernism* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2017).

Why Mediate Experience?

Marc Goodwin

What is the atmosphere of an office? How can it be determined and put into words in a way that is intersubjectively meaningful? Often it can't. But pictures may help. This becomes especially true when the site of meaning is completely foreign to the observer. Any pretense of verbalised knowledge vanishes upon hearing an incomprehensible language registered as sound, style, and patterns. Message not received, just observed. I try to photograph with a similar spirit in mind. The task is to be attentive, not interpretive or discursive. Being there, and trying not to miss things, is enough.

Atmosphere first supplanted ideology for me when my thesis supervisor made me aware of the writings of Gernot Böhme, Juhani Pallasmaa, and, of course, Peter Zumthor. Scenography and architecture provide a space of encounter that is directed and purposeful without needing to be read like a text – the efforts of all the deconstructionists and deconstructivists notwithstanding! So much for the work of these designers who create spaces that evoke feelings and focus attention. But what about their places of work?

Is there anything of a designer's creations in their workplace? This question has motivated me to photograph 335 studios in 26 cities across Asia, Europe, and the Americas. It borders on an obsession, with something of the compulsive quality of a collector. There is no end in sight, yet I am no closer to an answer to that question, beyond saying "sometimes."

In the case of these studios, however, I would say it was closer to "most of the time," if not, in fact, always. The experience of photographing these studios has not only given me a second wind to continue this project which, though compulsive, is also grueling. But it constantly renews my faith in architecture. For there is nothing more disheartening than an architect's studio that is merely an office: rows and rows of computers at which people might be tasked with anything. The atmosphere of the

office is oddly liminal – an event horizon around the black hole of deadlines that endlessly suck away light, not to mention hope. Shouldn't studios be filled with models and drawings and renders and photographs? One hopes to see eager, earnest groups of people solving problems with techniques as old as civilization, and as new as today. To a large extent, that is what I encountered in Japan, but these studios went one step further. Places such as Atelier Tenjinyama are more of a "duck" than a decorated "shed." They manifest not only their purpose, but also what Sontag called an "erotics of art." You can sense the predilections of the architect. They remind us that taste is a sense, not a convention. The same is true for the ad hoc, open-ended, collaborative, artisanal investigations of Coop Kitakagaya, Kengo Sato, and, in varying ways, all of the participants in this project.

As images take up more and more of our time and imagination, it is tempting to resist them. Words can come as a relief in a world of constant visual documentation. Why mediate experience? But I still think the midcentury architectural photographer Eric de Maré was right when he said that photography is an excellent way to appreciate architecture because doing it focuses your attention both in the instant and repeatedly over the course of a career. Hence sharing photography is an opportunity to share that attention, which itself becomes an intersubjective experience. ●

Politics of Living

A conversation with Toshikatsu Ienari of dot architects

“Everything we have accomplished, we owe to the experience and encounters made here. In all of our activities, we endeavour to traverse the realms of ‘designing,’ ‘creating,’ and ‘using,’ going beyond the narrow role of what is typically demanded of an architect. Everything we are involved in, we deem to be the practice of architecture.”¹

This statement by dot architects, from the book *Politics of Living*, reminds me of a well-known line attributed to Albert Camus: “Ce que je sais de la morale, c’est au foot que je le dois” (“All that I know most surely about morality, I owe to football”).² Where Camus referred to the collective spirit in football, Toshikatsu Ienari, one of the founders of dot architects, instead talks about the power of their shared workplace, Coop Kitakagaya. When Yosuke Tsuga and I, guided by Ienari-san, walked through the labyrinthine spaces, I could truly see what he meant. Located in the western harbour area of Osaka, in the outskirts of the city, the very raw and rough space of a former lumberyard now accommodates a myriad of different actors and activities, all seemingly coexisting and feeding off each other. This includes NPOs, journalists, artists, researchers and a space for makers, among others. During my visit to Coop Kitakagaya, the large entrance space was being used to test various ideas for an upcoming exhibition, but could also be transformed into a social space with a bar. It is apparent that the architecture and spaces of dot architects are influenced by the creative, and slightly chaotic nature of Coop Kitakagaya, and as Ienari-san points out, it is a place where they can “practice another kind of society.”



I recall reading that you had quite an unusual path into architecture.

I worked at a construction site when I was a high school student, and my interest in architecture stems from that time. My bachelor degree is in law, but after I graduated from university, I worked as a bartender. Another bartender that I worked with had studied architecture at university and told me that it was a very interesting subject. He suggested that I study it at another university, so I went to Osaka College of Technology and took evening classes. After graduating, I established a studio together with some friends. One year later we broke up the team, and I did some interior design projects and constructed some small objects. In 2004 I started dot architects together with Takeshi Shakushiro. From the outset we were not only designing things, but also building and constructing, operating more like carpenters.

What you are doing at Coop Kitakagaya is really inspiring, and this type of cross-pollination of different fields is important in challenging the role and purpose of architects. I strongly believe that the space itself, as a physical meeting place as well as a platform for architects, artists, and other creative practices, is vital. A problem that often emerges in these situations is that of high rents and lack of space in the city. Creating a sustainable organization is quite difficult. For example, many artists must rely on government grants. How do you deal with such challenges when it comes to the physical space itself? I know you went to Italy to research how community centers are organised there.

The center of Osaka is very expensive, so we could not afford to rent a place there. The outskirts of the city have many possibilities in how the place can be used. Sometimes the city expands, and in fact, the rent of our studio was going to go up dramatically later this year. I've convinced the owner not to raise the rent, but it will most probably

happen in the future. Then we might have to move to another space.

I think it's very important to have a physical space, in order for people to gather. Our next project will be to work within a rural area with a vineyard and rice fields, together with local farmers. In many cases, some of the farmers are now over 70, and their children work in offices in the city center. They don't take over their parents' fields, so there are opportunities for us to create some space for our community there. The vineyard we're working with is located in Kobe city, close to Rokko mountain. It has already been there for 30 years.

How do you work with the community here in Kitakagaya?

We have a studio here, but we weren't initially very proactive in engaging with the local community. As we're also trained as bartenders, we wanted to open up a bit more at Chidori Bunka, to find out what people in the area are thinking. It's a place for connections, and a way for us to find out who lives in this area. The space at Coop became more and more of a workshop, and we were running out of gallery space, so we started to create a gallery at Chidori Bunka. The media is all centered in Tokyo, and it is very difficult to broadcast anything from the Kansai region, so we are trying to create such a platform ourselves.

The place that we have been trying to create here at Coop Kitakagaya is almost exactly the



PHOTO: YOSHIRO MASUDA

Chidori Bunka is a multi-purpose community space, gallery, restaurant, and shop located in the Kitakagaya area of southwest Osaka.



same as the community centers we visited in northern Italy, with basically no hierarchy, and communally organised. The community is very fluid, and people are frequently coming in and going out of the space. My friends once rode on a “chicken bus” in Guatemala. The driver was chatting to his lover sitting next to him, while some people were selling things, and others were talking to their grandmothers. So there were a lot of different people on the same bus, getting on and off. I want our community to be like a chicken bus.

Is this something that can be described as almost public?

The meaning of the word public is not functioning very well in Japan at the moment. People no longer believe in the big stories of politics, the economy, the state, and so on. We are trying to create a place where we can do activities that we find interesting and fun. Public spaces, such as parks, community centers or culture centers, are established in cooperation with so-called public administration. But in the end, the public spaces that are established in this way are not made up of face-to-face relationships. I don't really believe in the relationships between citizens and public authorities. Here it's a bit more direct, a place where people can interact freely with each other. But it's not a place where just anyone can wander in. It's OK if it's someone you know. What would you call it? It's neither a private nor a public place. It's somewhere in between.

Our place here is run by people who are really close to each other, and there's also a certain political attitude. It's a place where these people can come together to give lectures and hold events. At the same time, it's a place where artists can create artworks, and we can design and make things. There's a woodworkshop and a fab lab, so we can produce a lot of different things with our own hands. The only thing that we are lacking here is a farm.

One important point is that Coop Kitakagaya is not operating as a commercial base. Our catchphrase is that it is a studio for practising another kind of society, wherein circles of architecture, NPOs, community study groups and the like can gather. This other kind of soci-

ety is not a centralised, indirect democracy, with the so-called state at the top, or the kind of situation that is established under a capitalist system. It entails more of an anti-capitalist, hierarchy-free membership. That is how we operate here. So, commerce does not enter very often, and some of the events we hold here are funded by donations. We used to run a bar, but the money we made from it was used to fund the work we are doing on the facilities.

I don't know if you can call that public, but our image is that it's more like a membership space, not really open to everyone, or even to a lot of people. So it's difficult to say whether or not it is public.

What are public spaces in Japan like?

Public spaces in Japan are already almost dead. I don't like the lack of creativity in the way that everyone just sits where they are told to sit. The architecture controls the space and makes people sit there like that. I think it's very important to have variation that comes from the users – being creative and infiltrating more, using and adapting the place for themselves. There is no such situation in Japan. If you skateboard, you are punished. If you sing a song, you are punished, and the police will come immediately. Public space is almost dead, or rather in a moribund state. I consider it to be terrible. Yet, they do experiments and sell food in mobile kitchens in large areas, where the public has no way of getting around. If you are going to do experiments, I think it would be better to let other people use places in more interesting ways. It's like selling cookies but no coffee – your mouth gets dry. I wonder what they are aiming for. I don't think such usages are dynamic at all, so neither is public space in Japan. I am opposed to the kind of public spaces that the government is providing and servicing. I think there should be different ways of doing things.

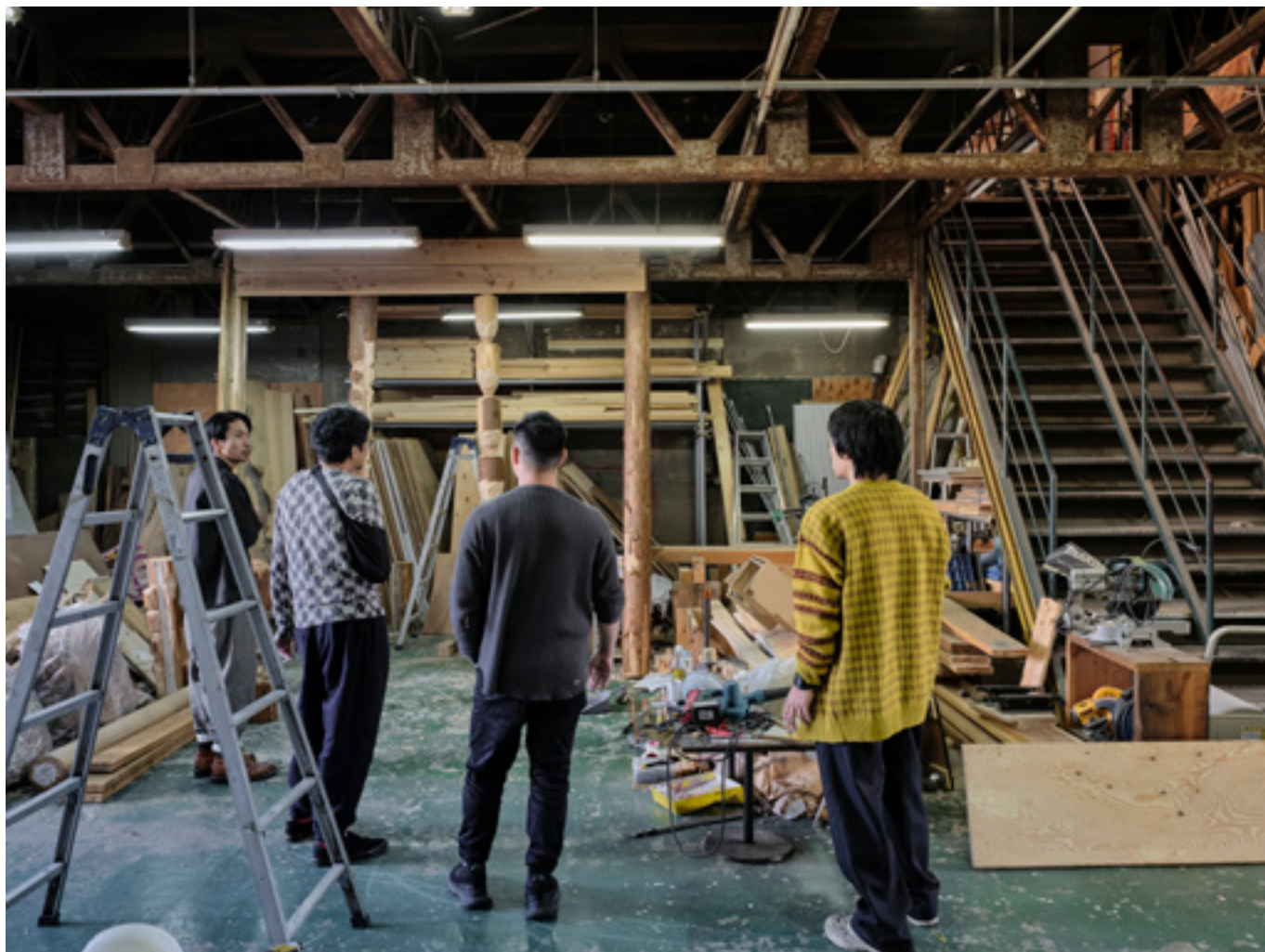
Historically the plazas in front of traditional shrines and temples were used by the community, and I think there were face-to-face relationships. Nowadays, for example, public spaces such as parks are for the citizens, but everything is very partitioned and there are signs everywhere telling you what you can and cannot do. It's terrible, don't you think?

















The role of visible shrines and temples is becoming smaller and smaller in urban areas, so I think it makes sense for us to create places where we can have these kinds of face-to-face relationships, through membership circles, for example. I think that, in our everyday lives, we have become too accustomed to exchanging services for money. Everything we buy, including our houses, we exchange for money. In the process, we are losing the skills to create something on our own, and we are becoming increasingly entangled in a web of exchange of money and services. But if we have materials that are essentially local and the tools and skills to make them ourselves, we can create spaces where we can gather. We go to various places and make things with the people we meet there in order to share those skills with everyone. We make everything ourselves. Capitalism should go down the drain one day, so we are aware that we are preparing for that time, or rather, we are returning to such a community.

When I spoke to Takuma Tsuji from 403architecture [dajiba], I got the sense that their practice is similar to dot architects in its focus on hyper-locality and a workflow based on establishing concrete relationships through feedback from the city and the users. This way of working can be rather difficult to fit into the very pragmatic systems of the building industry, however. Is there any hope for the wider industry, and working on bigger projects? Is it essentially possible to scale this type of workflow?

It's very hard to apply this kind of strategy on a bigger scale, as the industry is very much based on the networks and supply chains. These are very big systems, and industrial networks are very complicated. I think half of my body lives in the 'indirect' capitalist world, and half of my body lives in a very 'direct' world, with agriculture and making with tools, where I take wood from the mountain and make something, for example. Now I may be half and half, but in the future I hope to be living around 70% in the direct world, and 30% in the indirect world. In the far future I hope to live fully in the direct world. It's a long process of disentanglement

from the systems in which we are trapped.

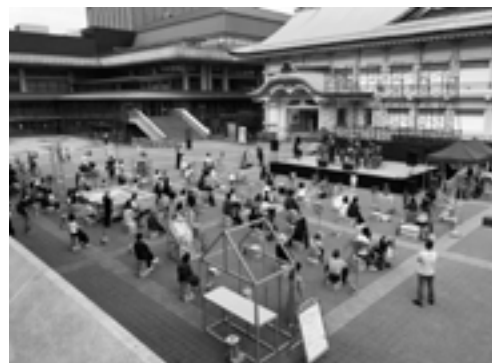
I think that big skyscrapers and office buildings are actually short-term projects. In most people's eyes the scale of these buildings is very big, but in the vineyard project that we are working on, for example, the area is around six hectares. We make soil, and our team changed them from using pesticide to organic farming, which requires a lot of time and a huge amount of land. There is almost no architecture in terms of buildings, so in that sense it could be considered a small project. But the time span and the agricultural aspect of the project make it very big. Bigger than an office project, I think.

You have mentioned that there's a limit to how many projects that you can work on simultaneously. Can you expand on that?

When it comes to going into a town and talking to the people who live there, I think the limit is around three places. Beyond that it's difficult to achieve deep relationships with a lot of people. I'm currently working in Shodoshima, Kitakagaya, and one more district in Shiga Prefecture. I think those three places will be it for now. If I wanted to just go and make things, I could go to various places and do so, but if I want to be involved in those three places on a long-term basis, they are the only places where I will go. We're in the groove of working with these communities and building long-term relationships with the local people. I think it is very important that you are present, that you are living there, and that you are making something locally. It doesn't have to be me personally of course. It can be other team members, but it's important that someone is there. But we each have only one body, so there are limits.

What's the role of the architect in the future?

When I was 20, around 1995, a big earthquake happened in Kobe city. My house was destroyed, and people all around me helped



Garden of Fragments – Okazaki Park Stage, Kyoto, 2020.

PHOTO: DOT ARCHITECTS

each other to survive. I was studying law at the time, but I could see how certain rules and laws were being circumvented in order to survive. People made up the rules by themselves, creating shelters, and finding food and water. I went to my friend's house to borrow his bathtub. We made *onigiri* in his house and went to the evacuation center to hand them out. I think that architecture comprises certain rules and systems. I now design architecture, but I also try to get involved with the construction sites as a carpenter. This spring I will start a vineyard to make some wine. To me, architecture concerns agriculture, culture, art, and everything in between. Since the nineteenth century, people have been assigned to certain roles in society and tend to work only within that role. A carpenter only makes houses, for example, and in the service industries there are clear distinctions between the providers and the receivers. I want to try to blur these boundaries and also just attain many skills for living.

How do you achieve this in your projects?

I'm always very particular about what kind of feeling I want to create, rather than focusing on the kind of architectural details produced by house builders and the building industry. I'm interested in designing details and structures that we can create with our own hands. That is why we are making things that are not sophisticated or, to put it better, wild. Tsukamoto pointed out that the interesting thing is that we are saying, "This is sufficient." Architects are all hard working people, so they tend to go solely in the direction of refining details, making them thinner and lighter, or, conversely, thicker and more massive. In other words, the architectural industry is increasingly concerned with spatial issues, but we don't compete in that way. We are thinking about how we can make it easier, how we can cut corners.

Perhaps the role of architects will change considerably in the future. To put it extremely simply,

I think that architects don't have to be that good. When people get together to do something, there is always a need for a physical place, so I think the role of architects is to think together about how to build such a place. I think the role of designing facilities and so on will no longer be necessary. Of course, such projects are going ahead, and architects can intervene to improve them, but I don't think we have to do that.

Your architecture seems to be very much about the process.

We're going to have an exhibition at Gallery Ma³ later this year, and we're talking about creating a museum for people to see the things we usually make and the various little things we collect. We are pushing the idea that it's possible to make such an exhibition by ourselves, rather than the big, fancy ones we are used to seeing in museums and galleries. Rather than spending a huge budget to create something magnificent, I think it is possible to create something more interesting with the tools, objects, and ideas that are within easy reach, so that's what I'm focusing on.

In Japan, and especially in this generation of architects, there are very interesting approaches for how to think sustainably. You've written on the practice of repurposing, training yourselves to see past the intended purpose of tools and materials, and rather treat them as a starting point that can later be deconstructed or repurposed. In Sweden, discussions regarding sustainability largely seem to be reduced to whether we use wood or concrete, and it can sometimes be a tool for marketing, merely putting on a green stamp, rather than actually reconsidering the systems that we're all working within.

Usually, when demolishing a house, the wooden posts and beams and so on are considered as waste, or recycled. I thought that there might be another process or way of reusing these materials rather than them becoming waste. Many materials today are being created for a single purpose, and when they no longer fulfil that purpose they are recycled or disposed of. We think that some materials can



PHOTO: SAMUEL MICHAELSSON

Preparing for the exhibition at Gallery Ma in 2023.

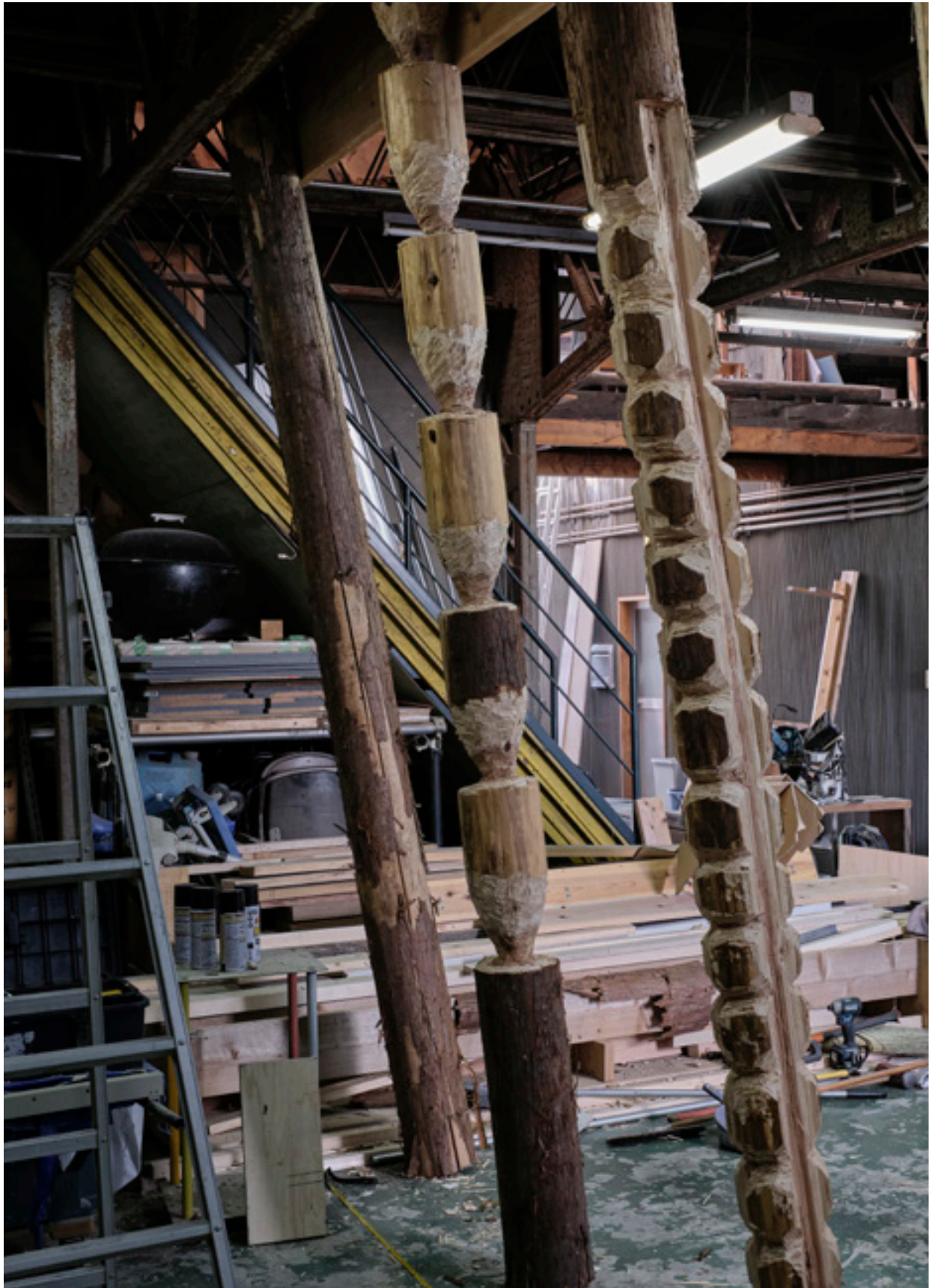
become tools, and some tools can be turned into materials. By detaching an object, material or a tool from its intended purpose, we can be more free in how we repurpose them. There are some alternative industries appearing that are not based on capitalist ideas.

You've worked with a lot of temporary spaces, including theatres, installations and other small interventions.

I'm really interested in temporary spaces. Architects tend to think about how long a building will last, but we were influenced by a book by Hakim Bey called *Temporary Autonomous Zone*,⁴ in which he writes that even a temporary party

or something ephemeral like that can result in a meaningful space. That's why I think of long-lasting and temporary in the same way. I think that the temporary shouldn't be considered inferior. Precisely because it is temporary, it provides many opportunities and potentials in the city. When I was asked to create an installation for an art festival in Kobe, I designed a club space under a bridge. I think it's important to experiment with such ways of hacking or using public space, even if it's mostly temporary. I also think that if the people who use the place, even if it truly was temporary, could see the potential in using the space in this way, their view of the city might slightly change. ●

1. dot architects, *Politics of Living* (Tokyo: TOTO Publishing, 2023)
2. While this phrase does not appear verbatim in Camus's writings, it captures the spirit of his reflections on sport, fairness, and ethical experience. It is actually derived from a televised interview in 1959: "Vraiment, le peu de morale que je sais, je l'ai appris sur les terrains de football et les scènes de théâtre qui resteront mes vraies universités" (Truly, the little morality I know, I learned on the football fields and theater stages which will remain my true universities). Accessed 6/7/2025, <https://intellectualsandthemedias.org>
3. Gallery Ma is located in Tokyo, and is one of the most prestigious spaces to exhibit as a Japanese architect. The gallery is run and operated by Toto Ltd, one of Japan's biggest sanitary product manufacturers, as well as being a prominent architecture and design publisher.
4. Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991)



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Yosuke Tsuga (b. 1983) is an architect and founder of TGA Architects & Partners, established in 2016. He graduated from the University of Tsukuba with degrees in Social Engineering (2005) and Design (2008), and pursued postgraduate studies at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Since 2019, Tsuga has been engaged in the research project “Hiroba – Learning from Japanese Public Space” in collaboration with Samuel Michaëlsson and Anna Kawai, exploring public spaces in Japan and Sweden. Alongside his research work in Sweden, he has also served as a guest critic at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

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Colophon

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