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**“How Will We Live Together?”: The
Japanese Answer to the 2021 Venice
Architecture Biennale**

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“HOW WILL WE LIVE TOGETHER?”: THE JAPANESE ANSWER TO THE 2021 VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE

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Introduction

As affirmed by Professor Richard Burdett from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the role played by architecture in the era of globalization is to look for an answer that could be “socially and environmentally more sustainable”¹. International architecture exhibitions started to represent the most suitable framework where this research could flourish and grow into concrete solutions. By turning into opportunities for dialogue and discussion among countries, leading events such as the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Biennial allow architects to find innovative ways to practice architecture “combined with the demands and opportunities of a global world”². In particular, this project mainly focuses on one of the most recent initiatives in the field, the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. The 17th International Architecture Exhibition, curated by Hashim Sarkis, proves to be a good example to discuss to what extent today’s “temporary biennials mirror the flexible, dynamic and unstable conditions”³ of the globalized world. The event was to take place in 2020 but was later postponed to 2021 because of the spread of coronavirus on a global scale. The health emergency constantly ended up jeopardizing “the realization, transport, and presence of the works”⁴ and countries at the exhibition. This condition for sure made this edition completely different from the previous ones, but certainly very interesting for the way curators and artists tried to manage their shows and handle the exhibition theme “How Will We Live Together?”. This question appeared prophetic but even more urgent. Sarkis directly asked participating architects to provide solutions to hotly debated global issues usually faced by policies of the States, such as climate change, population

¹ R. Burdett, *Interview*, A. Levy, W. Menking, London: 17 May 2010, in *Architecture on Display on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, edited by A. Levy, W. Menking, London: Architectural Association London, 2010, pp. 127-140, p. 137.

² B. Nicolai, *Architectural History After Globalization*, in “e-flux Architecture”, 3 November 2017, e-flux.com; <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/history-theory/159238/architectural-history-after-globalization/> [last access on January 20 2022].

³ B. Wyss, J. Scheller, *Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle*, in *Starting from Venice*, edited by C. Ricci, Milano: et.al., 2010, pp. 50-61, here p. cit., p. 52.

⁴ La Biennale di Venezia, *New Dates for the Biennale Architettura and the Biennale Arte*, 1 June 2020, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/new-dates-biennale-architettura-and-biennale-arte> [last access on January 8 2022].

displacements, social, economic, and racial inequalities⁵. In view of the lack of politics' action against these problems⁶, the Venice Biennale reacted by trying to define a personal space and political statement on these questions.

But, how did architects answer this question? How did they face and manage to overcome the obstacles of this pandemic edition? In this respect, the Japanese participation in the event developed in me a peculiar interest as the curator conceived the challenges in the transport's management and set up of his exhibition as an opportunity to create a dialogue and share ideas and objectives with the other participating countries. Entitled "Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements" and curated by architect Kozo Kadowaki, the proposal arose from extensive awareness and widespread collaboration with the pavilions of the Philippines, United Arab Emirates, Korea, Russia, and Venetian artisans⁷. This resulted in a project that conceptually dealt with global issues but also provided a solution aimed at being included into architectural life when the Venice Biennale was over. The Japanese answer to the question "How Will We Live Together?" overcame social, economic, and racial inequalities and finally pursued a very current objective thanks to a shared architectural action that also looked at the future. In the history of architecture exhibitions, this might represent a new meaning that future events could embody. As evidenced by this case study, international architecture exhibits could have great potential in establishing and strengthening the network between different cultures to go beyond their concepts on display and leave a mark for future generations.

Yet, what defined the character and meanings of today's architecture exhibitions? How do the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale and Japanese participation in the event fit into the history of architecture exhibitions? Has architecture always been conceived as a powerful instrument to pursue social objectives or deal with global issues? The first chapter focuses on these question marks in the cautious attempt to offer the reader an overview on the matter. The first developments, meanings, and characteristics of architecture exhibitions are analysed and commented. In particular, the investigation focuses on the role that architecture played in shows over a period starting from 19th

⁵ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, in "La Biennale di Venezia", [labiennale.org; https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/statement-hashim-sarkis](https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/statement-hashim-sarkis) [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

and early 20th centuries World Expositions and ending with the most recent editions held at the Venice Biennale. From a methodological point of view, the present analysis is based on significant examples of exhibits. According to Bruce Altshuler, one of the most prominent scholars of Exhibitions Studies, exhibitions are involved in “local, national economic development and political activity of various kind”⁸. That is why they are here deepened and considered as useful “critical subjects of research”⁹ to delineate the history and the respective meanings of the events dedicated to architecture.

However, this cultural narrative did not appear sufficient to deepen the meanings and characteristics of Japanese exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. As argued by landscape architect and Professor of Environmental Studies (Seoul National University) Wybe Kuitert, even though today’s architecture exhibitions pursue “a theme that brings states globally and durably together”¹⁰, the single national participations “should be fundamentally inserted into what society, locality, the region, and the landscape system have to offer and can offer”¹¹ to this cultural narrative. This explains why the architecture exhibitions discussed in the first chapter become in the second one an opportunity to investigate the social, local meanings of Japanese participation in this kind of event. What emerges from this analysis is that, despite some exceptions deriving from historical, political reasons, Japan has often exhibited an architecture as traditional as possible¹² to convey a distinct and unique image of the country to the world. This kind of architecture is deeply rooted in Japanese aesthetics¹³ and presents a set of traditional architectural motifs that recurrently appear in manifold participation of the country in architecture exhibitions. In addition, this investigation sheds light on three Japan’s approaches to architecture in the 21st century. They are respectively the relevance of the single component, cooperation and coexistence, and awareness of the implacability of change. These aspects appeared evident not only in

⁸ B. Altshuler, *Exhibition History and the Biennale*, in *Starting from Venice*, cit., pp. 17-27, here p. 17.

⁹ Ivi, p. 18.

¹⁰ W. Kuitert, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, in “Journal of Environmental Studies”, vol. 60, September 2017, pp. 4-13, here p. 13.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² J.-M. Alagon Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, in *Japon y Occidente. El Patrimonio Cultural Como Punto de Encuentro*, edited by A. Gomez Aragon, Sevilla: Aconcagua Libros, 2016, pp. 627-634, here p. 633.

¹³ T., T. Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*, The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981, p. IV.

Japan's participation in architecture exhibitions in the era of globalization but also even when the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games were organized. Sport venues made from sustainable materials were erected¹⁴ on this occasion and their projects seemed to embody these three peculiar characteristics. All these reflections prove to be useful to better understand the meanings of "Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements" exhibition in Venice. The concept's show in question, held at the same time as the Olympics, clearly demonstrated and confirmed these Japanese ways of doing architecture in the 21st century. However, given the topicality of the issues dealt and the lack of literature on the topic, it is relevant to point out that this analysis is the result of my interpretation on the subject.

If therefore the investigation on Japanese participation in architecture exhibitions aim to outline a term of comparison that can allow the reader to grasp the political, economic, and historical factors that determined "Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements" exhibit, the history of architecture events highlights those aspects that defined the character of the 17th international architecture exhibition in Venice. These two case studies presented in the third chapter are discussed to take a step forward in the literature of exhibition studies by adding a new contribution to the field. Even though nowadays the sector of architecture exhibitions is scarcely explored in exhibitions' studies and literature on the matter is rather limited, the topic becomes every day more attractive as it impacts not only "contemporary culture but also architectural life, or at least of how we imagine to represent and display that life"¹⁵. For these reasons, the relevance of these initiatives in the field of architecture results particularly impressive and worth of further investigation on its meanings, dynamics and still hidden potential. In addition, the reason why I dealt with the Japanese participation in the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale is closely related to my university studies and my work in Venice. When I began attending the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, I considered the overseas mobility proposed by the university

¹⁴ Sustainability Times, *Tokyo a Major Step Forward for Sustainable, Climate-Friendly Olympics*, in "Sustainability Times", 3 August 2021, sustainability-times.com; <https://www.sustainability-times.com/environmental-protection/tokyo-a-major-step-forward-for-sustainable-climate-friendly-olympics/#:~:text=The%20Tokyo%20Olympics%20are%20also,phones%20and%20other%20electric%20devices> [last access on January 20 2022].

¹⁵ B. Steele, *Preface*, in in *Architecture on Display on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, cit., pp. 7-10, here p. 7.

the perfect opportunity to focus on research for my final thesis during the time spent abroad. In particular, I sent an application to the Keio University of Tokyo, in Japan. I chose this country because I have always been fascinated by Japanese culture and aesthetics by reading articles, books, and essays on these topics. When the Japanese university accepted my application, I looked for a theme that could merge the city of Venice and Tokyo. One day I accidentally read an article about the Japanese participation in the 2020 Venice Architecture Biennale, and it caught my attention immediately. I got extremely intrigued by the concept and the meanings behind the exhibition and my interest led me to think that this precise topic must have been the perfect theme to develop a research study on it. By connecting the two latitudes I also saw the chance to combine my great interests: Japanese architecture and International Exhibitions.

However, the spread of COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from leaving Italy and having this experience. I, therefore, decided to undertake a cognitive journey (at safe distance) to what I aimed to know. In the meantime, I had the occasion to work as an exhibition attendant at the 17th international architecture exhibition in Venice. This was for me an incredible experience and a great source of inspiration that enriched my cultural background and fascinated me during the research. I had the chance to daily see and investigate closely on the exhibitions and places on which I was writing this dissertation. I also had the opportunity to meet and talk with the curators Wael Al Awar and Sudarshan V. Khadka Jr., respectively of the United Arab Emirates and Philippines' exhibitions. The two confirmed to have cooperated with Kozo Kadowaki in the organization of their exhibitions. Additionally, in May 2021, I was able to get an interview with him through email, as he did not travel to Venice until August 2021 because of pandemic restrictions. His words¹⁶ were incredibly inspiring and his answers and insights on the show resulted fundamental to develop the analysis of this study.

Before concluding, it is relevant for research purposes to note that investigating on the history of architecture exhibitions and Japanese participation in these events was challenging. As a matter of fact, a lack of specific studies on this issue had emerged,

¹⁶ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, C. Bondesan, Venice-Tokyo: 25 April_2021.

as already mentioned. In my opinion, this aspect might be due to two reasons. The first concerns the late recognition of architecture as an autonomous and independent branch from the other arts. Architecture had been for many years conceived as an art not at the same level as painting and sculpture¹⁷. As explained in chapter one, this resulted in the organization of its related international events only in the first half of the 20th century. The first international architecture exhibition dates back to 1932 in the U.S., and temporary art biennials such as the São Paulo Biennial and the Venice Biennale started organizing this kind of show only in the second half of 1900, just to mention an example. The second reason is linked to the difficulty in the organization of this kind of initiative instead. As argued by Paolo Baratta, “an exhibition of architecture is in itself a contradiction”¹⁸. It has always been hard to find a way to exhibit something as technical as architecture and make it accessible to everyone. This still represents today a great challenge for many curators, directors, and cultural institutions. However, precisely for these reasons, this project tries to provide a small contribution to the field. In view of the relevant role played today by architecture exhibitions and their impact on real life, it tries to shed light on this topic and hopefully aims to be developed thanks to new studies that could arise from future events dedicated to architecture.

¹⁷ A. Crawford, *Ideas and Objects: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain*, in “Design Issues”, vol. 13, no. 1, issue: “Designing the Modern Experience, 1885-1945”, Spring 1997, pp. 15-26, here p. 16.

¹⁸ P. Baratta, *Interview*, A. Levy, W. Menking, Rome: 18 December 2009, in *Architecture on Display: on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, cit., pp. 181-202. here p. 182.

Chapter 1: Trajectories of Architecture Exhibitions

1.1 Introduction to Architecture Exhibitions

1.1.1 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions

Before starting with the analysis of the role played by architecture in the context of 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions, it is noteworthy to point out that the phenomenon and the spread of international architecture exhibitions are “relatively modern”¹. Therefore, when dealing with World Exhibitions, it must be taken into consideration that their effective object was not architecture. Since one of the main purposes of these exhibitions was the commercial exchange of industrial products between nations, the architectures characterizing such events were not conceived to be on display as the artifacts they were supposed to contain. They were mostly considered as containers and monumental showrooms”² of the objects on sale. However, it must be noted that these constructions represented the starting point that led to the 20th century architecture expositions *stricto sensu*³. It is precisely for this reason that they are considered worthy of an investigation.

Narrowing on the central issue of the paragraph, starting from 1851 with the so-called “Great Exhibition” held in London, international events started to display the cultural and industrial achievements of the participating nations, inviting them to compete for awards. On the one hand, these exhibitions generated a cross-cultural dialogue on countries’ history and creativity. On the other, they were used as an important instrument to “create national identity”⁴ and “to promote national unity”⁵. As claimed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm, in a period when traditions were ‘invented’⁶ to build up the national character, the States organizing such international

¹ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, in “arq.urb”, issue: 20, September-December_2017, pp. 121-134, here p.121.

² R.-F. Betts, *Structuring the Ephemeral: the Cultural Significance of World’s Fair Architecture*, in “The Kentucky Review”, vol. 2, no. 1, article 4, 1980, pp. 20-36, here p. 21.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ W. Kuitert, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, cit., p. 4.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1-14, here p.1.

art exhibitions were able “to establish themselves as cultural and commercial centres”⁷ and to compete with other nations to maintain this status. According to architect Isaac López César, this precise kind of struggle for the leading position in the art world resulted in the use and “experimentation with new materials or research into new shapes”⁸ that could create giant constructions, outdoing the ones erected in the previous Expositions.

A significant example is the Crystal Palace. This construction was built for the 1851 London Expo and clearly explains the role that architecture played during the 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions. This huge pavilion (563 meters long), made of iron and glass, showed the industrial and commercial achievements that Great Britain went through because of the Industrial Revolution⁹. During the following World Expositions, this exemplary gigantic architecture had been outdated by many other buildings. In this context, the famous Tour Eiffel and the Galerie des Machines, erected for the 1889 Paris Expo, deserve to be mentioned as valid examples. Both structures, with their respectively 300 meters¹⁰ high, 900,000 square feet¹¹, were erected pursuing the ideal of building “the highest structures in the world”¹². The objective was to celebrate the grandeur of France in the celebration’s year of the “centenary of the French Revolution”¹³. In particular, these few examples of giant architectures represented the reason why César coined the term “gigantism”¹⁴ for the architectural period of World Expos ranging from 1851 to the early 20th century. The main intention was to stress the protagonism of a nation using architecture “as a symbol of modernity”¹⁵.

⁷ B. Altshuler, *Exhibition History and the Biennale*, cit., p. 25.

⁸ I. López-César, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, in “Bureau International des Expositions”, February 2019, bie-paris.org; <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/focus/entry/world-expos-and-architectonic-structures-an-intimate-relationship> [last access on January 20_2022].

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ J.-W. Stamper, *The Galerie des Machines of the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, in “Technology and Culture”, vol. 30, no. 2, issue: “Essays in Honor of Carl W. Condit”, April_1989, pp. 330-353, here p. 333.

¹² Bureau International des Expositions, *Expo 1889 Paris*, bie-paris.org; <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/1889-paris> [last access on January 20_2022].

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ I. López-César, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, cit..

¹⁵ Ibidem.

Drawing on these notions, some questions might arise: what happened after these exhibits have served their commercial purpose and ended? What became of the huge architectures representing the power of a nation and showcases for commercial exchange between countries? In this regard, Professor Raymond F. Betts of the University of Kentucky used the term “desolation”¹⁶ to describe what followed the closing of these great World Expos. As a matter of fact, “the drama of the world’s fair”¹⁷ was the dismantling of the architectures that were built for such occasions. That is why these buildings were provisional and transitory and, more precisely, ephemeral¹⁸ structures. According to the Oxford dictionary, this word, deriving from Ancient Greek “*ephemeros*” composed of “*epi*” (on) + “*emera*” (day), stands for “short-lived or of brief duration”¹⁹. On the one hand, this aspect confirmed the close link between architecture and the economic function in the Expo. And, as soon as the World Exhibition ended these constructions became useless. On the other hand, the Italian art critic Gillo Dorfles claimed that architects built pavilions that had never been built before²⁰ precisely because of their provisional nature. This might explain the reason why some buildings were not dismantled but turned into permanent and lasting buildings. They also became icons of the Western world because of their magnificence. A case in point is the already mentioned Eiffel tower in Paris.

1.1.2 Early 20th century Architecture Exhibitions

As argued by Fernando Guillermo Vázquez Ramos, when discussing architecture exhibitions in the strict sense, one must refer to the 20th century when they rose²¹. As a matter of fact, the “first exhibitions truly dedicated to architecture”²² were promoted in the early 1900s and their first initiators were Austria and Germany. As regards the

¹⁶ R.-F. Betts., *Structuring the Ephemeral: the Cultural Significance of World’s Fair Architecture*, cit., p. 35.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ I. López-Cézar, *World Expos and architectonic structures. An intimate relationship*, cit..

¹⁹ Oxford Reference, s.v., “*Ephemeral*”, oxfordreference.com; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095754281> [last access on January 20_2022].

²⁰ G. Dorfles, *L’Effimero nell’Architettura*, in “L’Arca”, July-August_1988, pp. 6-7, here p. 6.

²¹ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 122.

²² Ibidem.

Austrian case, Vienna followed the principle of unity of the arts²³, animated by the British Arts and Crafts movement (1880-1920). This movement opposed the arts' hierarchy that considered only "painting and sculpture at the top as fine arts"²⁴. This was one of the first steps towards the recognition of architecture as an art at the same level as the others. The late 19th century exhibitions of Vienna Secession, organized by the Austrian architect Joseph Maria Olbrich, started working toward this direction by unifying painters, sculptors, architects and decorative artists²⁵, and by considering them "on an equal footing"²⁶. This line of thought also characterized Germany, where the centrality of architecture started to be recognized in the shows²⁷. In this context, "the first striking exhibition certainly was "Deutscher Werkbund Ausstellung" ("Exhibition of the German Building Association")"²⁸. Organized in Cologne in 1914, it aimed at fostering "links between artists and German industrialists to develop a German identity through design and architecture"²⁹.

One of the most influential exhibitors participating in the event was architect Walter Gropius who, starting from the innovative principles promoted by the 1914 event, continued the reflection on architecture through the foundation of the Bauhaus school in 1919³⁰. Journalist John Astbury recalled that, as a flyer by Gropius declared, the objective of this school was to "create an alliance of the arts under the wing of architecture"³¹. Consequently, Germans started organizing exhibitions that focused specifically on this art field and recognized its independence. In this context, one of the most significant shows³² was "Ausstellung für unbekannte Architekten" ("Exhibition of Unknown Architects") of 1919. Directed by architect Bruno Taut, it

²³ Ivi, p. 124.

²⁴ A. Crawford, *Ideas and Objects: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain*, cit., p. 16.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 124.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 123.

²⁹ Gwendolen, *Deutscher Werkbund*, in "A Dictionary of Modern Architecture-University of Chicago", 16 November 2015, voices.uchicago.edu; <https://voices.uchicago.edu/201504arth15709-01a2/2015/11/16/deutscher-werkbund/> [last access on January 20_2022].

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ J. Astbury, *Walter Gropius: the Ideas Man Who Founded the Bauhaus*, in "dezeen", 2 November 2018, dezeen.com; <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/11/02/walter-gropius-bauhaus-100-founder-director-architecture-design/> [last access on January 20_2022].

³² F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 123.

presented a set of collages, drawings and projects, proposing a reflection on the role of architecture in the city. Such event also involved “the presence of members of Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter”³³ and art critics from magazines who began so far as to conceive architecture as “an art in which the others may meet and operate a synthesis”³⁴.

According to Fernando Guillermo Vázquez Ramos, the German recognition of the centrality of architecture in shows primarily stemmed from “the conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”) so coveted in the twentieth century”³⁵. The term was introduced in Richard Wagner’s essays *Die Kunst und die Revolution* and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*³⁶. In particular, it defines “the sublimating agent that would bring together art, society in one great, redeeming gesture”³⁷. The intention was to restore the “coherence between style and socio-historical conditions”³⁸ and the consequent “perfect correlation between spirit and matter”³⁹ characterizing ancient Greek art. Wagner explained that modern society was in crisis as it had lost consistency between “inner beliefs and outer manifestations”⁴⁰ and the solution could be found in a unified and unifying style in the arts which could serve as consolidator of modern times as a true epoch⁴¹. It was for this reason that, thanks to the early 20th century architecture exhibitions, also architecture was intended as functional to forge “Germany’s modernism and cultural politics”⁴². Consequently, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* conception was extended to the architectural field. After all, what could be more functional than the monumentality of architecture to express the cultural policy of a country and its national identity?

As regards the exhibition format, the 1919 show was based on the presentation of projects and exemplificative plastics for historiographic purposes. As recalled by Fernando Guillermo Vázquez Ramos, the Russian artist El Lissitzky defined this

³³ Ivi, p. 124.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ M. Hvattum, *Crisis and Correspondence: Style in the Nineteenth Century*, in “Architectural Histories”, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-8, here p. 7.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 6.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 4.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 2.

⁴² K.-M. Kuenzli, *Architecture, Individualism, and Nation: Henry Van de Velde’s 1914 Werkbund Theater*, in “The Art Bulletin”, vol. 94, no. 2, June_2012, pp. 251-273, here p. 254.

model of the exhibit as passive distinguishing it from the active one⁴³. The latter was used to propose a reflection on architecture by the means of involving installations⁴⁴. In this respect, an exemplificative show was “De Stijl” (“The Style”) that was organized in 1923 at the Galerie de “L’Effort Moderne” in Paris⁴⁵. At the event, the spaces were conceived as experimentation sites “for the evolution of the ‘practical’ architecture”⁴⁶. With this term, the organizing architects Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren aimed to define the architectural style of *Neo-plasticism* (also known as *De Stijl*)⁴⁷. The word was first coined by Dutch artist Piet Mondrian to define “his own type of abstract painting which used only horizontal and vertical lines and primary colours”⁴⁸. As explained in the 1923 show, it was later extended to indicate its related architectural style. In conclusion, the Dutch case perfectly fits into the cultural context of that time. On the one hand, the extension of Mondrian’s *Neo-plasticism* to the architectural field again testifies a recognition of architecture as an art on the same level as the others. On the other hand, the word *de stijl* standing for “the style” also matches with the German idea of creating a single movement unifying different arts under the same wing. However, it is relevant to point out that whether it was an active or passive format of architecture exhibit, both German, Austrian, and Dutch exhibitions were organized for educational and historiographic purposes. The primary intention was to spread modern thinking using art and architecture shows. For this reason, such events were mostly considered as “pure reflective propaganda”⁴⁹.

1.1.3 International architecture exhibitions: the case of MoMA (1932)

As seen, until the late 19th century, World Exhibitions made France the center of artistic momentum. Nonetheless, starting from the 1920s, “contemporary art also was

⁴³ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 125.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Y.-A. Bois, *Mondrian and the Theory of Architecture*, in “Assemblage”, no. 4, October_1987, pp. 102-130, here p. 112.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ TATE, *Art Term. Neo-Plasticism*, tate.org.uk; <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/neo-plasticism> [last access on January 12_2022].

⁴⁹ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 125.

increasingly welcomed into U.S. institutions”⁵⁰. The primary intention was to spread abstract expressionism whose main supporter, together with other art critics, was Clement Greenberg. Later considered as the New York’s spokesman⁵¹, he accurately defined the characters of modernist painting in his essay *Modernist Painting* in 1960. He elevated American abstract art to a universal artistic canon to be pursued because of its intrinsic concept of ‘purity’⁵² and ‘independence’⁵³ from any economic, political and social factor. According to art history professor Serge Guilbaut, this led the United States to establish itself as a cultural centre and “even replace Paris as the cultural symbol of the Western World”⁵⁴. Guilbaut did not conceive New York’s cultural politics as a simple shift of “the pedigree for modern art”⁵⁵ from France to America. As indicated in his book’s title *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, he affirmed that Americans ‘stole’ the French idea to affirm a hegemonic position in the art world. That’s why, according to Eva Cockcroft, modern art ended up characterizing the cultural weapon used by the American superpower during Cold War as an alternative to Eastern socialist realism⁵⁶.

At this point of research, it is relevant to consider how the city of New York obtained the primacy of cultural centre. In this regard, the foundation of the Museum of Modern Art by the art historian Alfred J. Barr played a central role. Founded in 1929 as an educational institution⁵⁷, the museum’s goal was to instruct artists, students, critics, and the general public on abstract art⁵⁸ that was conceived as the quintessence of modernism. With this purpose aimed at holding and maintaining a central position

⁵⁰ B. Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond - Exhibitions that Made Art History – 1962-2002*, London: Phaidon, 2013, p. 12.

⁵¹ S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, translated by A. Goldhammer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 5.

⁵² C. Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, in *Art Theory 1900-1990: An Anthropology of Changing Ideas*, edited by C. Harrison, P. Wood, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, pp 754-760, here p. 755.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, cit., p. 5.

⁵⁵ MoMA, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, 2 March-19 April 1936, moma.org; <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2748> [last access on January 20 2022].

⁵⁶ E. Cockcroft, *Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War*, in “ArtForum”, vol. 12, no. 10, June 1974, pp. 39-41, here p. 39.

⁵⁷ MoMa, *MoMA*, moma.org; <https://www.moma.org/about/who-we-are/moma> [last access on January 20 2022].

⁵⁸ A.-J. Barr, *A New Museum*, New York: Vogue, 26 October 1929, pp. 85 and 108, here p. 85. Available in “Vogue Archive”, archive.vogue.com; <https://archive.vogue.com/article/1929/10/26/a-new-museum> [last access on January 20 2022].

in the art world, in the 1930s, MoMa’s founder made use of a visual strategy based on the canonization, definition, and simplification of all possible influences that contributed to this completely western outcome⁵⁹ (Figure 1.1).

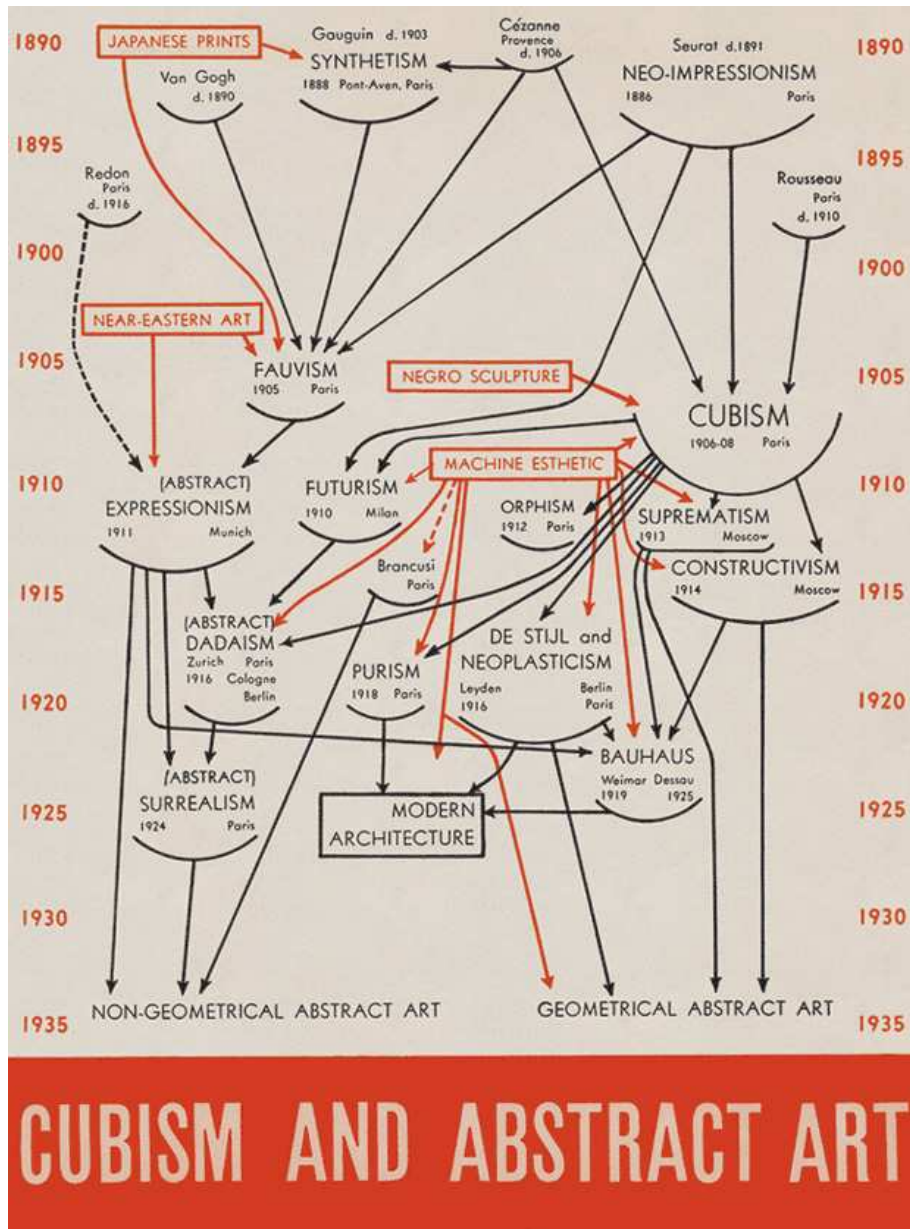


Figure 1.1 Cover’s catalogue for the exhibition “Cubism and Abstract Art”, held at MoMA in 1936: A.-J. Barr’s diagram representing the history of modern art.

⁵⁹ A.-J. Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exhibition catalogue (New York, MoMA, 1936), New York: MoMA, 1936, p. 11. Available in “MoMA Archive”, https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2748_300086869.pdf?_ga=2.74252498.1362142490.1624271595-488203148.1624174307 [last access on January 20, 2022].

Published as the catalogue's cover of the "Cubism and Abstract Art" exhibition, held at MoMA in 1936, the scheme proposed by Barr visualized a genealogy of modern art through a fluid structure from its first page. Specifically, it showed the history of influences that had an impact on the development of two final outcomes: non-geometrical abstract art and geometrical abstract art. One of the most interesting features of this diagram was also the inclusion of non-European trends such as "Japanese Prints", "Near Eastern Art", "Negro Sculpture" and "Machine Aesthetic". Highlighted with a different label and colour, these influences were indicated as external ones but that still had an impact on the American contribution to modernism. According to art historian Piotr Piotrowski, Russian Constructivism and Suprematism were also added in the diagram because it was "not so much an innovation as a basic obligation"⁶⁰. As a matter of fact, these trends could not "be overstated"⁶¹ because they were functional to canonize the history of American abstract art.

As regards architecture, the term *international style* or *internationalism* was coined precisely in this context that looked for canonization. The word was defined by US architect Philip Johnson to denote "the style of architecture that emerged in Holland, France, and Germany after WWI"⁶² and that was exhibited at the 1932 "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York⁶³. The intention of the show was didactic and introduced "Americans to a new and important style of architecture"⁶⁴, based "primarily upon the nature of modern materials and structure and upon modern requirements in planning"⁶⁵. In doing so, the

⁶⁰ P. Piotrowski, *On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History*, in "Umeni", vol. 56, issue: 5, 2008, pp. 378-383, here p. 378.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Getty Research Institute, s.v., "*International Style*", in "Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online", getty.edu; <http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=international+style&logic=AND¬e=&page=1&subjectid=300021472> [last access on January 20_2022].

⁶³ G. Merin, *Ad Classics: Modern Architecture International exhibition/Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock*, in "ArchDaily", 2 August_2013, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/409918/ad-classics-modern-architecture-international-exhibition-philip-johnson-and-henry-russell-hitchcock> [last access on January 20_2022].

⁶⁴ Phaidon, *A movement in a momento: The International Style*, phaidon.com; <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/architecture/articles/2016/june/30/a-movement-in-a-moment-the-international-style/> [last access on January 20_2022].

⁶⁵ A.-J. Barr, *Foreword*, in *Modern Architecture*, exhibition catalogue (New York, MoMA, 1932) edited by MoMA, New York: MoMA, 1932, pp. 12-17, here p. 14. Available in Online MoMA Archive, assets.moma.org;

https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2044_300061855.pdf?_ga=2.204246032.1242172513.1624270510-1943538855.1624181698 [last access on January 20_2022].

MoMA was considered a relevant cultural centre in spreading modern thinking. In addition, it also expanded the activity of the museum that previously only focused on paintings and sculptures⁶⁶. In this context, it is noteworthy that New York was also the first promoter of international architecture exhibitions. As written in the press release of the American show, the event was “the first international exhibition of this nature ever prepared”⁶⁷. Drawings, models, photographs, and plastics by modern architects coming from fifteen different countries⁶⁸ (even Russia and Japan⁶⁹) were on display and finally took part in the didactic project curated by Henry-Russel Hitchcock and Philip Johnson. This exhibition model was conceived as a reference format for architecture shows in the USA until the Second World War⁷⁰.

1.1.4 International Architecture Exhibitions during the Cold War

According to the Getty Research Institute dictionary, internationalism continued to “spread throughout the world, becoming the dominant architectural style until the 1970s”⁷¹. As stated by the American historian Richard Gid Powers, it also occurred because the American style during Cold War was “the ubiquitous vocabulary the power structure”⁷² of U.S. “employed to legitimize its hegemony”⁷³ over the eastern bloc. This type of architecture, like modernism, however, was not only promoted by the American superpower but also defined the cultural agenda of the cities and countries that aimed at being integrated into the international art scene or being considered as an aligned faction to the west. As claimed by Anthony Gardner and

⁶⁶ G. Merin, *Ad Classics: Modern Architecture International exhibition/Philip Johnson and Henry-Russel Hitchcock*, cit..

⁶⁷ MoMA, *Press Release for the Exhibition: Modern Architecture*, New York: MoMA, January 17_1932, pp.1-2, here p. 1. Available in Online MoMA Archive, assets.moma.org; https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_324956.pdf?_ga=2.208470418.1242172513.1624270510-1943538855.1624181698 [last access on January 20_2022].

⁶⁸ G. Merin, *Ad Classics: Modern Architecture International exhibition/Philip Johnson and Henry-Russel Hitchcock*, cit..

⁶⁹ P. Johnson, A.-J. Barr, *Extent of Modern Architecture*, in *Modern Architecture*, cit., pp. 21-24, here p. 23-24.

⁷⁰ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 126.

⁷¹ Getty Research Institute, s.v., “International style”, cit. .

⁷² R.-G. Powers, *The Cold War in the Rockies: American Ideology and the Air Force Academy Design*, in “Art Journal”, vol. 33, no. 4, Summer_1974, pp. 304-313, here p. 307.

⁷³ Ibidem.

Charles Green this was possible by “importing traditional biennial models to ‘peripheral’ locations”⁷⁴ in the attempt of undermining the dichotomy between centre and periphery deeply investigated by global studies.

This is exactly what happened when the São Paulo Biennial opened in Brazil. Founded in 1951, it tried to establish a city of the so-called “global south” as an important cultural centre for the spread of contemporary art⁷⁵. The objective was to oppose the idea that only New York could hold this status. This was one of the first attempts of cultural institutions to propose a southern perspective of the art world. A later example of this *modus operandi* was the foundation of Bienal de la Habana in 1983. This institution even challenged “the US-USSR binary of Cold War power to create ‘South-South’ exchanges and alignment of ‘non-aligned’ cultures”⁷⁶. However, returning to the São Paulo Biennial, although the primary intention was to represent an alternative to the New York’s artistic momentum, early years activity of the institution exactly seemed to use modernism and internationalism to achieve inclusion and visibility.

One might only think of Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion. Designed by Oscar Niemeyer in 1957, this construction hosted the following editions of the São Paulo Biennial and was built according to the international style⁷⁷. The collaboration⁷⁸ that the Biennial created with MoMA in 1953 for the organization of the architecture exhibition “Built in USA: Post-war Architecture” was even more illustrative of the Brazil’s *modus operandi*. The show unified projects by modern architects currently living and working in the U.S. like Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright, and many others. According to Peter Minosh and Hunter Palmer Wright, historians at the University of Toronto, the intention was to allow American post-war modernism to be framed “as an alternative to Soviet Socialist Realism⁷⁹”. The fact that the São Paulo Biennial

⁷⁴ A. Gardner, C. Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art*, Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2016, p. 10.

⁷⁵ B. Altshuler, *Exhibition History and the Biennale*, cit., p. 25.

⁷⁶ A. Gardner, C. Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art*, cit., p. 10.

⁷⁷ C. Hosni, *The Exhibition Design in the 29th São Paulo Biennial: Moving Image Art Works Inside the Modernist Pavilion*, Glasgow: Screen Conference, 2019, p. 1.

⁷⁸ P. Minosh, H. Palmer Wright, *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture Midcentury Architecture as a Vehicle for American Foreign Policy*, in “Histories of Post-War Architecture”, vol. 2, no. 4, issue: “Mass media and the International Spread of Post-war Architecture”, 2019, pp. 163-177, here p. 165.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

presented this exhibition and rewarded American participation⁸⁰ contributed to this aim. As a result, the international event of Brazil received great recognition from the American superpower. The U.S. defined it as “the most important international art exhibition in the Western Hemisphere”⁸¹. Consequently, Brazil no longer held a peripheral position but was even included in the western world. In addition, the São Paulo Biennial is noteworthy as it included a section dedicated to architecture for the very first time, phenomenon that will be repeated at the Venice Biennale almost 30 years later, just to mention an example.

It can be therefore concluded that the Cold War rigorously defined how the biennials organized their exhibitions and interacted with the host countries. This influence was, however, not only exerted on the international events that were held every two years, but also on the World Expositions⁸². That is why Isaac López César defined the countries’ participation in the events ranging from Brussels Expo in 1958 up to Seville Expo in 1992, as “structural rebirth”⁸³. The Cold War atmosphere had in fact pushed each country to develop the best technology and, consequently, the world exhibitions were designed as the perfect sites to show it and allowed, in this way, the participating Nations to maintain a competitive position with the others. An exemplary international event was the one held in Montreal in 1967. According to Lewis Siegelbaum, it represented “the major battleground in the Cultural Cold War”⁸⁴. Both the American and Soviet superpowers showed their progress in space race technology. Erected with steel and acrylic cells by Richard Buckminster Fuller in collaboration with Japanese engineer Shoji Sadao, the U.S. pavilion was designed according to a computerized climate control that aspired to atmospheric control for the future “human settlement in other worlds⁸⁵”. Projected by architect A.-N. Kondrat’ev, the URSS

⁸⁰ The International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, *American artists win recognition at São Paulo Bienal*, New York: MoMA, 20 September_1957, p.1. Available in Online MoMA Archive, moma.org; https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2248/releases/MOMA_1957_0106.pdf [last access on January 20_2022].

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² I. López-César, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, cit..

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ L. Siegelbaum, *Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder*, in “Journal of Contemporary Art History”, vol. 47, no. 1, issue: “Sites of Convergence-The USSR and Communist Eastern Europe at International Fairs Abroad and at Home”, January_2012, pp. 120-136, here p. 120.

⁸⁵ I. López-César, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, cit..

pavilion instead was modern in structure but primarily focused on the presentation of its centerpiece: Sputnik replica. It was an eastern soviet space technology that allowed the first launch in the space of an artificial Earth satellite. The audience, that was led by curiosity, far exceeded⁸⁶ in number the one that visited the American pavilion and the Montreal Expo basked USSR “in the reflective glow of its scientific and technological achievements”⁸⁷.

In this context, another World Exposition worth mentioning was the one held in Osaka in 1970 (*Figure 1.2*). This event was considered “one of the largest and best attended expositions in history”⁸⁸.



Figure 1.2 Osaka World Exposition, in 1970.

Although it was the first expo organized in Japan, the exhibition was visited by 64 million people⁸⁹ and involved the participation of 77 countries. In this way, the country finally showed “its place among the world’s leading nations”⁹⁰. This was primarily due to the consolidated trade partnership the country realized with the United States.

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁸⁷ L. Siegelbaum, *Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder*, cit., p. 121.

⁸⁸ ArchDaily, *Osaka World Expo 1970*, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/93208/osaka-world-expo-1970> [last access on January 12_2022].

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ A. Shea, E. Schoen, J. Martens, K. Adams, *Osaka 1970 World Exposition. Progress and Harmony for Mankind*, in “ArcGIS StoryMaps”, 18 February 2021, storymaps.arcgis.com; <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/124619e6e4604b3ab39750b7d4429f52> [last access on January 12_2022].

This allowed Japan to get access to American modern technology to recover from the defeat it had suffered during Cold War⁹¹. At the Osaka Expo, not by chance, the Metabolist movement, combining American technology and Japanese tradition and aesthetics, was shown to the world⁹². Furthermore, the event always showcased the “evolution of building types and technologies”⁹³ and “gave people a glimpse of what is to come”⁹⁴. Moreover, it was still far from the effective end of the cold war and this kind of exhibition was still animated by the tension characterizing both sides of the iron curtain. However, the Japanese expo also showed that the tension in those years had moderated and proposed the theme “Progress and Harmony for Mankind”. Although ambitious for that time, the intention was to make use of architecture to build a “high quality of life and peace throughout the world”⁹⁵. This aspect can be considered a possible first change in the purposes and character of architecture exhibitions.

1.1.4.1 Venice International Architecture Exhibition: a new model

This paragraph and the following one dedicate an investigation of the Venice Architecture Biennale for two reasons. The first concerns the fact that the Venetian institution represents the cultural context in which the object of this thesis on the Japanese exhibition took place. Instead, the second reason is linked to the important contribution it represented in the development and evolution of architecture events. On the one hand, Venice Biennale was the first biennial to recognize and conceive the autonomy of its architecture sector and to organize a full-fledged international architecture exhibition⁹⁶. On the other, primarily thanks to its cultural agenda, the focus of following architecture exhibitions was no longer on the structure or cutting-edge construction representing the technological and scientific advancement of a state, but rather on a reflection on architecture⁹⁷ and its functions in relation with citizens

⁹¹ James Kehl Design, *Metabolism and the Unit*, jkehl-design.com; <https://www.jkehl-design.com/metabolism> [last access on January 25_2022].

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ ArchDaily, *Osaka World Expo 1970*, cit. .

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ La Biennale di Venezia, *Biennale Architettura History*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/history-biennale-architettura> [last access on January 20_2022].

⁹⁷ F.-G. Vázquez Ramos, *Architecture Exhibitions: Chronology of a Modern Cultural Phenomenon and Some Inquietude*, cit., p. 129.

and urban landscape. In addition, it should be noted that when dealing with architecture events in Venice, one must refer to the editions that followed the first one in 1980. Before this year, so much space had never been dedicated to this kind of art, but certainly historical and political changes ended up determining its inevitable inclusion in the international exhibition. These factors are here investigated to explain the reasons and the meaning of architecture exhibitions in Venice, which would also have ended up distinguishing the approach to this type of event in the years to come. With this purpose, it is considered useful to analyse its origins and the historical and political factors that determined its today's character.

Founded in 1895, the institution aimed to support and reinforce the Venetian “cultural status and to encourage tourism in line with the growing European trend of creating international exhibitions”⁹⁸. For these reasons, it was no coincidence that its first main reference models were the World Fairs characterizing the 19th century. It absorbed their architectural form and, starting from the 1900s, it constructed national pavilions that ended up characterizing the Biennale experience⁹⁹. Their structure was “more permanent than the quickly erected ephemeral structures that formed their counterpart at the universal expositions”¹⁰⁰. For this reason, they were even more “bound up with a projection of a national identity”¹⁰¹ because of their firmness and architectural style. However, at the same time, these architectures were subject to constant changes over the years. This was due to the political and historical context characterizing the Nation in question. As recalled by scholar Joel Robinson quoting architectural historian Raymond Quek, the ‘national identity is always under construction’¹⁰². Therefore, the style of these architectures needed “to match up with the most current image of the nation”¹⁰³. The Hungarian pavilion is an example of this. Constructed in 1907 by architect Géza Maróti, it was later restyled by Agost Benkhard in 1958, under socialism. The intention was to get rid of all the decorative elements

⁹⁸ B. Altshuler, *Exhibition History and the Biennale*, cit., p. 20.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ J. Robinson, *Folkloric Modernism: Venice's Giardini della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture*, in “Open Arts Journal”, no. 2, Winter_2013-2014, pp. 1-24, here p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

that reminded visitors of the previous political context of Hungary when it represented the second soul of the Austro-Hungarian empire¹⁰⁴.

It is relevant for research purposes to discuss the history of another pavilion at the Venice biennale: the Japanese one. Designed in 1956 by architect Takamasa Yoshizaka at the Giardini della Biennale in Venice, the project took inspiration from the modernist avant-gardes¹⁰⁵. In those years, Japan referred to them to modernize the country and define its own national identity¹⁰⁶. This represents the reason why, as further explained in the second chapter, Japanese architecture took distance from its tradition and welcomed instead the lesson of Western architects¹⁰⁷. As regards the Venetian pavilion, the American architect Le Corbusier¹⁰⁸ represented the main source of inspiration. In 1926, he rigorously defined the five pillars (pilotis, free design of the ground plan, free design of the façade, horizontal window and roof garden) “that would have become the foundations for modern architecture”¹⁰⁹. These characteristics found their materialization in the Villa Savoye project¹¹⁰ (1929) (*Figure 1.3*) and started to “influence the most diverse contemporary architectural projects to this day”¹¹¹. The construction of the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale (*Figure 1.4*) is proof of this. The pictures here inserted explain that Yoshizaka adopted the innovation of Le Corbusier’s architecture except for some principles that were not respected (horizontal window and roof garden). This aspect shows the Western architectural style’s influence on the Eastern one. Not by chance, the Japanese architect was also working with the American urban planner to build the National Museum of Western Art in

¹⁰⁴ Ludwig Múzeum, *History of the Hungarian Pavilion. Venice, Giardini di Castello*, ludwigmuseum.hu; <https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/history> [last access on January 12_2022].

¹⁰⁵ Japan Foundation, *Biennale di Venezia – Padiglione Giappone*, jfroma.it; <https://jfroma.it/istituto/la-biennale-di-venezias/> [last access on January 12_2022].

¹⁰⁶ Facing History & Ourselves, *Meiji Period in Japan*, facinghistory.org; <https://www.facinghistory.org/nanjing-atrocities/nation-building/meiji-period-japan> [last access on January 12_2022].

¹⁰⁷ P. McNeil, *Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design and the West, c. 1920-1940*, in “Journal of Design History”, vol. 5, no. 4, 1992, pp. 281-294 here p. 283.

¹⁰⁸ Japan Foundation, *Biennale di Venezia – Padiglione Giappone*, cit. .

¹⁰⁹ S. Moreira, *The Five Points of Modern Architecture in Contemporary Projects*, translated by T. Duduch, in “ArchDaily”, 30 September_2020, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/948273/the-5-points-of-modern-architecture-in-contemporary-projects> [last access on January 12_2022].

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Ibidem.

Tokyo (1959) at that time.¹¹² The two, therefore, knew each other and, in collaboration with the architects Kunio Maekawa and Junzo Sakakura, projected “the only building Le Corbusier designed in all of East Asia”¹¹³ (*Figure 1.5*). The structure takes up the American pillars and shows the growing influence of modernism in Japan. This impact also stemmed from an earlier circulation of modernist texts that had finally been translated into Japanese¹¹⁴. Therefore, it is possible to consider the Japanese pavilion of the 1937 World Expo as based on Le Corbusier’s five pillars even before the effective collaboration between the two architects in the 1950s.



Figure 1.3 The modernist Villa Savoye, located in Poissy, on the outskirts of Paris (France) and designed by architect Le Corbusier in 1929.



Figure 1.4 Japan’s pavilion at the Venice Biennale, designed by Takamasa Yoshizaka in 1956.

¹¹² N. Saval, *How Le Corbusier Became Big in Japan*, in “The New York Style Magazine”, 8 August 2018, nytimes.com; <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/08/t-magazine/le-corbusier-japan-modernism.html> [last access on January 14 2022]

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ P. McNeil, *Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design and the West, c. 1920-1940*, cit., p. 283.



Figure 1.5 National Museum of Western Art designed in 1959 by Le Corbusier in collaboration with architects Takamasa Yoshizaka, Junzo Sakakura and Kunio Maekawa in Tokyo.

The overall conclusion is that the Hungarian and Japanese pavilions have told and still transmit the materialized history of the political and economic factors that have characterized the individual countries. In addition, they represent only a few of the examples of buildings that made the national participation at the Venice Biennale acquire a dense geopolitical significance¹¹⁵. If this rigid pavilions' scheme could be valid in the years of great nationalism, it implied instead consideration of architecture as a cultural form of violence¹¹⁶ in the second post-war period. That is why it was no longer well accepted by curators, artists, and students in the 1960s and the Venetian institution was subject to complaints that culminated in the edition of 1968¹¹⁷. In that year, artists boycotted¹¹⁸, and those who participated, like Gastone Novelli, turned their canvases against the wall as a protest¹¹⁹. In this context, students also threatened to burn down the national pavilions¹²⁰ in the effort to put an end to the “ethos of nation building”¹²¹. What they were fighting for was a modernization of the cultural policy previously adopted by the Venice Biennale. They strongly believed that it needed to be more democratic and should have left behind the imperial expansion and the fascist bellicosity that pavilions had embodied for so many years¹²².

¹¹⁵ J. Robinson, *Folkloric Modernism: Venice's Giardini della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture*, cit., p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Ivi, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ C. Di Stefano, *The 1968 Biennale. Boycotting the Exhibition: An Account of Three Extraordinary Days*, in *Starting from Venice*, cit., pp. 130-133, here p. 130.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 132.

¹²⁰ J. Robinson, *Folkloric Modernism: Venice's Giardini della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture*, cit., p. 6.

¹²¹ Ivi, p. 4.

¹²² Ibidem.

In reaction to these protests, Venice Biennale proposed a modernization plan. The goal was to get rid of its old vocabulary to develop a more democratic approach, open to debates, and above all anti-fascist¹²³. This found its concretization in the four-year's activity plan (1974 - 1977). It would have characterized the events to follow and the commitments that the new Biennale would have taken on¹²⁴. On the one hand, the institution set out to be “of a different social use”¹²⁵ with greater social objectives. On the other hand, it aimed at contributing “to a wider democratic perspective of popular participation”¹²⁶. According to Aaron Levy, the necessity of social responsiveness¹²⁷ became “a prerequisite of the biennale following its highly politicised opening in 1968”¹²⁸. Carlo Ripa di Meana was fully aware of this when he directed the 1975 Venice Biennale. That is why he tried to “bring culture to bear on administrative decisions”¹²⁹ and welcomed the architecture show “A Proposito del Mulino Stucky” (“On the Subject of the Stucky Mill”).

Curated by Vittorio Gregotti, this event was later considered as “a formative development for architecture at the biennale”¹³⁰ of Venice. It also defined the exhibition approach that ended up characterizing the following editions at the Venetian institution. Organized at the Salt Warehouses (Magazzini del Sale), the exhibition made use of architecture not for propaganda purposes, but with a completely different objective. It invited international participants to compete in projecting a renewal for the Molino Stucky in the island of Giudecca. This construction was an abandoned industrial mill that caused a giant industrial and economic loss for the city of Venice¹³¹. In this context, Gregotti's choice completely represented a new approach to architecture exhibitions. The 1975 exhibition of architecture became in fact a place for discussion to find a possible solution to a local urban problem. In addition, architecture was finally considered a potential tool of great impact on the economy of the city also

¹²³ La Biennale di Venezia, *The General Four-Year Plan of Activities and Events (1974-1978)* in “Annuario 1975: Eventi del 1974”, Venezia: La Biennale, pp. 71-75, here p. 71.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ A. Levy, *Introduction*, in *Architecture on Display on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture* cit., p. 15.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

¹²⁹ Ibidem.

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 14.

¹³¹ M. De Michelis, A.-L. Price, *Architecture Meets in Venice*, in “Log”, no. 20, issue: Curating Architecture, Fall_2010, pp. 29-34, here p. 29.

in relation to its residents. It can be stated that, at this event, the relationship between architecture and the power of a nation seemed to have ended.

However, it is important to note that “A Proposito del Mulino Stucky” was not “a universal event, but rather an experimental thematic exhibition”¹³². It was primarily intended as “an extension of the traditional territories of the visual arts, rather than as its own peculiarity autonomous field”¹³³. As already stated, the architecture sector became completely independent at Venice Biennale in 1980, when the first international exhibition entirely dedicated to architecture was organized. Considered as the first official Architecture Biennale, “Strada Novissima”, (themed as “The Presence of the Past”), directed by Paolo Portoghesi, continued and extended the reflection on architecture through a reappropriation of its past¹³⁴. The goal of this curatorial choice was to consider its present condition and character in the world. At this event, the participating countries were invited to erect buildings’ facades which would have constituted an imaginary street in the space of Corderie dell’Arsenale (“an area that had previously been closed to the public”¹³⁵). Portoghesi aimed to refer to the ephemeral structures that characterized the spectacles and the festivals held in the city in the sixteenth century¹³⁶. This was a model that was also taken up by the architect Aldo Rossi¹³⁷ in the construction of “Teatro del Mondo” at the “Venezia e lo Spazio Scenico” exhibition in 1979. In doing so, the objective of both architects was to reconnect architecture to ordinary life and citizens¹³⁸. According to their opinion, Gregotti’s exhibition lack of this aspect and architecture was wrongly conceived as an “elitist”¹³⁹ art aimed only at architects.

As regards the curatorial approach, it is possible to recognize the influence that art historian Harald Szeemann had in the artistic field at that time. According to Altshuler, he was able to move the curatorial practice “from reporting to thematizing”¹⁴⁰, making

¹³² Ivi, p. 30

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ M. Savorra, *Venezia 1980. La Biennale del Post-modern e la “Fine del Proibizionismo”*, in “CASABELLA”, no. 877, September_2017, pp. 92-96, here p. 93.

¹³⁵ M. De Michelis, A.-L. Price, *Architecture Meets in Venice*, cit., p. 30.

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

¹³⁷ Ibidem.

¹³⁸ P. Portoghesi, *Interview*, A. Levy & W. Menking, Calcata: 19 December_2009, in *Architecture on Display: on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, cit., pp. 35-47, p. 40.

¹³⁹ Ivi, p. 37.

¹⁴⁰ B. Altshuler, *Exhibition History and the Biennale*, cit., p. 22.

the show become an occasion of discussion and experimentation site for artists. This was exactly what happened in the 1980's Portoghesi show. The exhibition model far departed from the model pursued by German and American architects: there were no traditional drawings, models, and photographs trying "to substitute the absence of the architectural work"¹⁴¹, but "the architectural project came to coincide with the exhibition design"¹⁴². The show was a sort of laboratory and project in which each country was invited to contribute.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the exhibition was later popularized as a Western cultural attempt to maintain a central position in the art world. According to Charles Jencks, the show was strictly connected to the promotion of post-modernism¹⁴³. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg considered it a desperate endeavour pursued by the West at the end of modernism. In their opinion, the intention was "to become modern in a different way"¹⁴⁴. These considerations fuelled a heated debate on the objectives of the 1980 Venice Biennale, but Paolo Portoghesi always denied these assumptions¹⁴⁵. That is why the show may be considered the first step towards the awareness that the presentation of "the ideas of modernism and postmodernism"¹⁴⁶ could not "communicate the changes"¹⁴⁷ that would have followed the end of the Cold War. What began to matter for the directors of architecture events was the experience, the concept, and the reflection that this art could transmit. An interview by Aaron Levy and William Menking with Paolo Portoghesi in 2009 is proof of this:

The fact that my exhibition was in a certain sense connected to postmodernism has led it to be misinterpreted. The idea of postmodernism, in relation to the exhibition, was generated by Charles Jencks, who was present in the commission. He was a friend, but his approach was very different. In Europe postmodernism

¹⁴¹ M. De Michelis, A.-L. Price, *Architecture Meets in Venice*, cit., p. 30.

¹⁴² Ibidem.

¹⁴³ C. Jencks, *La Strada Novissima: The 1980: Venice Biennale*, in "domus", 610, October 1980, domusweb.it; <https://www.domusweb.it/en/from-the-archive/2012/08/25/-em-la-strada-novissima-em-the-1980-venice-biennale.html> [last access on January 20_2022].

¹⁴⁴ H. Belting, A. Buddensieg, *Introduction*, in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, edited by ZKM-Museum of Contemporary Art, Cambridge-London-Karlsruhe: MIT Press, 2013, pp. 6-8, here p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ P. Portoghesi, *Interview*, cit., p. 38.

¹⁴⁶ A. Gardner, C. Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art*, cit., 2016, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

is associated with the spectacular, the superficial. I was more interested in the Venturi experience¹⁴⁸.

With the expression “Venturi experience”, he referred to the activity of the American architect Robert Venturi. His work was very similar to the one of Portoghesi¹⁴⁹. Both considered it relevant to look at the history of architecture to restore its opening towards humanity¹⁵⁰. It was therefore necessary to start from the collective memory of the past and introduce innovative elements only when those of the ancient models were inappropriate¹⁵¹. From their point of view, it was possible to get architecture closer to people and to get a new source of content and ideas¹⁵² in this way.

1.1.5 International Architecture Exhibitions in the Era of Globalization

According to scholars Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller, the end of the Cold War is considered the beginning of globalization¹⁵³. When barriers fell, borders began to be “maintained only by political systems”¹⁵⁴. Consequently, a new mapping of the world and “a new cartography of art”¹⁵⁵ were defined. There was no “dominance of Western cultural centers”¹⁵⁶ in spreading an artistic canon¹⁵⁷, but art historian Eisenstadt stated that “a continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs”¹⁵⁸ began to characterize the new globalized world. In this context, there was a significant “cultural transfer”¹⁵⁹ between the different States which inevitably also impacted the character of international architecture exhibitions. These events have

¹⁴⁸ P. Portoghesi, *Interview*, cit., p. 38.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁰ P. Portoghesi, *Robert Venturi e Roma*, in “l’architetto”, no. 5, September - October 2019, larchitetto.it; <https://larchitetto.it/articoli/robert-venturi-e-roma/> [last access on January 12 2022].

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

¹⁵³ B. Wyss, J. Scheller, *Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle*, cit., p. 56.

¹⁵⁴ H. Belting, A. Buddensieg, *Introduction*, cit., p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ P. Weibel, *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of Ne Art Worlds* (2013), in “900 Transnational”, vol.1, no. 1, March 2017, pp. 9-22, here p. 16.

¹⁵⁶ B. Wyss, J. Scheller, *Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle*, cit., p. 58.

¹⁵⁷ B. Groys, *Europe and Its Others*, in *Art Power*, edited by B. Groys, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 173-181, here p. 173.

¹⁵⁸ S.-N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, in “Daedalus”, vol. 129, no. 1, issue: “Multiple Modernities”, Winter 2000, pp. 1-29, here p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ T. Paleczny, *The Identity of Cultural Transfer*, in “Politeja”, no. 20/1, issue: “Jagiellonian Cultural Studies Mobility of Cultures”, 2012, pp. 51-72, here p. 52.

increasingly become meeting places for discussion among different countries about new ways to practice art “combined with the demands and opportunities of a global world”¹⁶⁰. These new world’s needs require solutions to problems such as “economic-globalization, transnational terrorism and global warming”¹⁶¹. This time, they are issues that go “beyond the power of the old order of nation-states”¹⁶² and ask for cooperation that the centralized political and administrative systems of the 19th and most of the 20th century, could no longer support themselves. That is why the architecture exhibited during international events could not represent the power of a nation, but rather necessitated to become the tool by which countries came together to discuss their future.

As already claimed, Venice Biennale has shown a certain sensitivity to this matter. It has considered architecture as a useful means by which it is possible to determine the way people could live together in the future. The 1996 Venice Biennale themed as “Sensing the Future. The architect as Seismograph”, is an example of this. The director Hans Hollein continued the reflection of Gregotti’s show (1975) and questioned the future role of architecture¹⁶³. However, this time, he related this art to all the people and not only to the activity of architects. Also, Massimiliano Fuksas, director of the Venice Architecture Biennale “Less Aesthetic, More Ethics” in 2000, focused on this aspect. Starting from the analysis of the city, since 50% of the world was living there, he reflected on future architecture not as a carrier of aesthetics, but rather as a seat of “ethical”¹⁶⁴ values. Architecture again needed to be conceived as the instrument that could help people in their urgency and their need to know how to “live together”¹⁶⁵. In this regard, this is exactly what, regarding his show, architect Fuksas stated in an interview in 2010:

Our home is old, and by home I don’t mean the United States or London or even Rome; I mean our sense of community. I don’t know how, but we have to learn to live together¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁰ B. Nicolai, *Architectural History After Globalization*, cit. .

¹⁶¹ W. Kuitert, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, cit., p. 12.

¹⁶² Ibidem.

¹⁶³ H. Hollein, *Interview*, A. Levy & W. Menking, New York: 15 May_2010, in *Architecture on Display: on the History of the Venice Biennale of Architecture*, cit., pp. 57-77, p. 69.

¹⁶⁴ M. Fuksas, *Interview*, A. Levy & W. Menking, Paris: 19 May_2010, in Ivi, pp. 79-92, p. 79.

¹⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 83.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

“Community” is a central word in the speech because it refuses any form of localization and definition by nations, but it expresses a shared and heterogeneous system looking for solutions to global problems. According to Wayne Kuitert, a dangerous threat to this community has been represented by consumerism¹⁶⁷. It is the result of the capitalist system and has led to irresponsible exploitation of the earth’s resources also “destroying the psychological well-being”¹⁶⁸. In the architectural field, examples of this were 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions. Exclusively conceived as functional to transmit the power of the Nations, they did not care about the waste and discard of the materials that they caused by continually dismantling architectures.

In reaction to this fact, starting from the 1990s, the global citizen has ended up denouncing consumerism and has begun to strive for sustainability¹⁶⁹. This was possible by requiring a new “human endeavour”¹⁷⁰ and by searching for new “cultural patterns”¹⁷¹ that could fight and prevent the collapse of the community itself¹⁷². In this regard, architecture exhibitions have mirrored this transformation: they have increasingly become experimentation sites with structures made of sustainable materials. The objective is to reduce waste and pollution to safeguard the entire world¹⁷³. The Hannover Universal Exposition themed as “Man, Nature, Technology” in 2000 can be analysed in this context because it proposed a set of architectures made with recyclable materials that required “the minimum energy consumption”¹⁷⁴. According to Isaac López César, this exhibition model ended up being pursued by many other events, becoming almost the norm in the 21st century¹⁷⁵. The 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale, “Cities: Architecture and Society” is a later example of this aspect. Directed by Richard Burdett, the exhibition investigated sustainability and mobility issues in a metropolis such as Tokyo, Mumbai, and Bogotá¹⁷⁶. The intention

¹⁶⁷ W. Kuitert, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, cit., p. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ I. López-César, *World Expos and architectonic structures. An intimate relationship*, cit. .

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ R. Burdett, *Interview*, cit., p. 127.

was to look for “an architectural response”¹⁷⁷ that could be “socially and environmentally more sustainable”¹⁷⁸

What emerges from this analysis is a global cultural narrative of sustainability and reflection on architecture that characterizes contemporary international shows. However, according to Wayne Kuteirt, it should not be forgotten that the choice of the site to tell it is always inserted in a specific social system, place, and region that determines a difference in contributions to such a narrative¹⁷⁹. The Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima was keenly aware of this when she directed the international architecture exhibition at the 2010 Venice Biennale. The show was themed as “People meet in architecture” and, as claimed by the Japanese architect, aimed at showing as many “possibilities of architecture”¹⁸⁰ as cultures characterizing them. She, therefore, conceived these manifold architectural possibilities as full-fledged “different ways of living”¹⁸¹. Despite these considerations, the objective of the event was also to intend architecture as an opportunity for dialogue between nations and a meeting place for common thriving growth.

Faced with this possibility of dialogue between different cultures, a consequent potential shared architectural action derived. This is what happened when the 2021 international architecture exhibition in Venice was planned. Themed as “How Will We Live Together?”, the event considered the awareness of diversity as a starting point that valorises the culture of each country, but that it is also able to push it to work in an international context encouraging and enhancing the idea of community. Architecture finally becomes the soil and the “creative synthesis”¹⁸² representing “all aspects of human living”¹⁸³ trying to overcome the social, economic differences. The objective was to interpret the different architectural proposals as a single one that could be possible to be applied for common living together. This didn’t occur only in the

¹⁷⁷ R. Burdett, *Interview*, cit., p. 137.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ W. Kuteirt, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, cit., p. 13.

¹⁸⁰ K. Cliento, *12th International Architecture Exhibition Venice*, in “ArchDaily”, 16 August 2010, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/73301/12th-international-architecture-exhibition-venice> [last access on January 20 2022].

¹⁸¹ Ibidem.

¹⁸² R. Cicutto, *A Need for Architecture*, in “La Biennale di Venezia”, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/declaration-roberto-cicutto> [last access on January 20 2022].

¹⁸³ Ibidem.

form of a utopian reflection that was destined to run out once the show ended. This time, the event tried to look for an efficient proposal that could go beyond the exhibition space to enter architectural life. In this regard, this is where the case study of Japan's national participation in the 2021 Venice Biennale fits in. It may represent proof of this thought and a strong example to claim that future architecture exhibitions could go beyond their conception on display and cultural differences to embrace societies and lives even more. At this point of the analysis, a question may arise: "Could "How will we live together?" be the actual beginning and putting into practice of that much-requested lesson of living together, already questioned by architect Fuksas in 2000¹⁸⁴?

¹⁸⁴ M. Fuksas, *Interview*, cit., p. 83.

Chapter 2: Trajectories of Japan at Architecture Exhibitions

2.1 Brief Introduction to Traditional Japanese Architecture

Before discussing Japan's participation in international architecture exhibitions, it is necessary to introduce and invite the Western reader to take a completely different point of view. In order to understand Japanese architecture, the "practical, theoretical, formal and rationalization processes"¹ of the West must be abandoned to undertake a completely different cognitive journey that is instead deeply rooted in aesthetics. The strict relationship between this branch of philosophy and Japanese architecture is here relevant because it can be considered the founding element of the traditional architecture that has been mostly exhibited by Japan at architecture events. In this regard, it is noteworthy to underline that Japan's aesthetics is heavily influenced by the religious thoughts of the country (Shinto and even more Buddhism²). They are in fact considered as "dominating the whole functional domain of the Japanese sense of beauty"³. That's why they are "sovereign in every realm, quotidian or exceptional"⁴ and also define the character of the country's architecture.

As claimed by art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Japan has always been the site of massive "natural disasters of various kinds: earthquakes, typhoons, floods and volcanic eruptions"⁵. It has constantly faced the unpredictable power of nature and the cyclical destruction of its architecture. Consequently, an idea of the impossibility of permanence and eternity derived and manifested itself in the awareness and firm

¹ S. Kalberg, *Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History*, in "The American Journal of Sociology", vol. 85, no. 5, 5 March_1980, pp. 1145-1179, here p. 1145.

² V.-L. Mawis, *Religiosity of Japanese Aesthetics*, in "INQUIRER.NET", 20 July_2019, business.inquirer.net; <https://business.inquirer.net/275023/religiosity-of-japanese-aesthetics> [last access on January 25_2022].

³ T., T. Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*, cit., p. IV.

⁴ J.-N. Erzen, *Tadao Ando's Architecture in the Light of Japanese Aesthetics*, in "METU JFA", vol. 1-2, no. 21, 2004, pp. 67-80, here p. 67.

⁵ H.-U. Obrist, *Architecture, Art and Metabolism*, in "urbanNext", urbannext.net; <https://urbannext.net/architecture-art-metabolism/> [last access on January 25_2022].

conviction of “the implacability of change”⁶. According to the Buddhist doctrine and as claimed by orientalist Clay Lancaster, the nature of both humans and matter is perceived as transient and always towards a path of either disintegration or death⁷. With this awareness, the real suffering for the Japanese doesn’t lie in the ephemeral of reality, but in the spasmodic research and belief of a possible “idea of permanent self”⁸. Therefore, it is in accepting, instead, the “impermanence of physical phenomena”⁹ that the believer can free himself from hardship and get closer to Buddha.

In the architectural field, this creed traditionally materializes in a harmonious relationship and acceptance towards the unpredictability of nature. The architecture is conceived as a dialogue’s site between man’s living space and the natural one surrounding it. These two opposite and different places are thought as linked to each other and in a state of conjunction and complementarity.



Figure 2.1 Traditional Japanese architecture: *en* structures allowing a dialogue between man’s living space and natural one.

This complementarity has its foundation in the Chinese concept of *yin and yang*. As stated by Xi Fe, like light (Yang) and shadow (Ying), nature and architecture are

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ C. Lancaster, *Metaphysical Beliefs and Architectural Principles*, in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism”, vol. 14, no. 3, March_1956, pp. 287-303, here p. 292.

⁸ H.-U. Obrist, *Architecture, Art and Metabolism*, cit. .

⁹ C. Lancaster, *Metaphysical Beliefs and Architectural Principles*, cit., p. 291.

“consistently united”¹⁰, “as one thing depends on its counterpart to have it defined”¹¹. Therefore, “both interior and exterior work as one. They can complement each other”¹² and their architectural connection is traditionally welded and solidified through the construction of a passageway or transitional space¹³ which is called *engawa* (縁側/縁側). This structure consists of a *shoji* or space’s divider (*Figure 2.1*), usually made with *washi* paper (Japanese paper derived from mulberry). This material is translucent and can create a dialogue between the two rooms thanks to the filtering of natural light. The visitor who enters the house is not a stranger to this harmonious communication, but rather becomes part of it through an introspective path of reflection and meditation, called *oku* (奥). As stated by architect Fumihiko Maki, *oku* allows him to regenerate and to profess his or her belief by walking through a “multi-layered, dense spatial composition, which may well be linked to the layers of an onion”¹⁴. Therefore, entering traditional Japanese architecture should be understood as a spiritual experience. It is lived through the passage of rooms, connected by *en* structures up to the centre of the building that metaphysically stands for the innermost area¹⁵ of individuals.

The harmony between spaces does not only concern physical places, but also the individual constituents that define their nature. What constitutes matter, even if it is very small, is highly reputed according to Japanese aesthetics as it always represents the constant change to which individuals and objects are subjected. Architectures are, in fact, traditionally built with wood or perishable materials¹⁶ in anticipation and acceptance of their destructibility destiny. This conscious choice strongly differs from the western one. In the case of Europe, starting from classicism, the countries have been using resistant materials such as brick and stones¹⁷ to realize eternal buildings

¹⁰ X. Fe, *Yin-Yang Idea in Architectural Design-Following Rather Than Altering the Objects’ Nature*, in “International Journal of Architecture Arts and Applications”, vol. 3, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-10, here p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² E. Beita, A. Fujii, *Harmonization Between Architecture and Nature Through Traditional Japanese Screens*, in “International Journal of Design & Nature and Ecodynamics”, vol. 8, no. 1, 2013, pp. 29-40, here p. 29.

¹³ M. Lazarin, *Phenomenology of Japanese Architecture: En (Edge, Connection, Destiny)*, in “Studia Phaenomenologica”, no. 14, 2014, pp. 133-159, here p. 133.

¹⁴ F. Maki, *The City and Inner Space*, in “Ekistics”, vol. 46, no. 278, September-October_1979, pp. 328-334, here p. 328.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ G. Nitschke, *Architecture and Aesthetic of an Island People*, translated by I. Taylor, in *Japan Architecture, Constructions, Ambiances*, edited by C. Schittich, Munich: Birkhauser, 2012, pp. 15-32, here p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

that could affirm the powerful firmness of their own culture. However, it cannot be inferred that the idea of permanence exists in Japanese culture¹⁸. The durability of the matter is possible through continuous “cycles and rebirth”¹⁹ of the single component constituting the “thing itself”²⁰, which, on the other hand, is destined to disappear.

In this context, the Ise Grand Shrine in the Mie prefecture of Japan can be mentioned as a good example²¹ that shows to what extent the metaphysical belief is rooted in Japanese architecture (*Figure 2.2*). It is a Shinto sanctuary that celebrates death and renewal through a continuous process of construction, dismantling of it, that occurs every twenty years. The permanence of the building is in this case sought the constant reorganization of its wooden materials. They are the only components that remain and transform themselves, while the shape of the Ise Grand Shrine, instead, is never permanent. This example also proves to be functional to the investigation on the Japanese exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. The third chapter dedicates a further investigation on this project, but it can be anticipated that the idea of starting from the dismantling of an architectonic structure and then building another one, by using perishable constituents, is recurrent.



Figure 2.2 Ise Grand Shrine in the Mie Prefecture of Japan.

¹⁸ J. Armada, *Sustainable Ephemeral: Temporary Spaces with Lasting Impact*, in “Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects”, no. 111, 1 May_2012, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ C. Lancaster, *Metaphysical Beliefs and Architectural Principles*, cit., p. 291.

²¹ J. Armada, *Sustainable Ephemeral: Temporary Spaces with Lasting Impact*, cit., p. 9.

It can be therefore concluded that when discussing traditional Japanese architecture, the value of aesthetics and the importance attributed to the materials have to be taken into consideration before reaching conclusions that may be dictated by the Western perspective.

2.2 Japan at the 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions

At this point of the investigation, it is considered noteworthy to analyse Japan's participation in the World Expos of the 19th and early 20th centuries as it can be considered one of the terms of comparison with the Japanese project presented at the 2021 Venice Biennale²². With this objective, the following investigation shows to what extent Japan adapted itself to the western tendency of considering pavilions as representative of a nation choosing to show an architecture that could best represent its finally reached national identity. In the *Meiji Restoration*, the Eastern country aimed at modernizing its social, political, and economic systems to define a new national identity. The objective was to leave behind the outdated government and society, based on the *shogunate* (military dictatorship) that characterised the *Tokugawa* era (1603-1867)²³. Consequently, Japan decided to participate in international exhibitions to enhance its nationalistic spirit and present the country as a full-fledged nation that could “deal with the West on equal terms”²⁴. However, at first, this goal did not find a level ground. Japan was not recognized as autonomous but rather confused with other Asian countries in the Western imaginary. In this regard, the following analysis of the eastern country's participation in World Expositions of 1867, 1889, 1900, 1937, and 1939 is useful to understand that it was precisely traditional Japanese architecture that was able to play a central role in making Japan's participation distinct and unique. Its recurring motifs, such as gardens, temples, and tea houses founded on aesthetics, attracted a lot of curiosity in the western world.

²² Japanisch - Deutsches Zentrum Berlin, *Co-Ownership of Action. The Japan Pavilion at Biennale 2021*, in “Radikal Modern”, no. 04, 19 November 2020, youtube.com; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6U6-w_ygQ8&t=1167s [last access on January 25_2022].

²³ Britannica, *Meiji Restoration. Japanese History*, britannica.com; <https://www.britannica.com/event/Meiji-Restoration> [last access on January 25_2022].

²⁴ M.-J. Mayo, *Nationalist Revolution in Japan*, in “Monumenta Nipponica”, vol. 29, no. 1, Spring_1974, pp. 83-91, here p. 84.

2.2.1 The 1867 Paris World Expo and the explosion of *Japonisme*

Although from the 1853 Great Industrial Exposition in Dublin, Japan had already made its appearance through industrial products collected by Europeans, the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867 is considered “the first government-sponsored participation in any event of this sort”²⁵. According to Teramoto Noriko, a researcher at the Seikei University (Musashino, Japan), this exhibition is reputed relevant for two reasons: the recognition of Japanese culture as different from that of the other Asian countries and the consequent beginning of *Japonisme*²⁶. First of all, the recognition of the country as independent and also inspiring for not only French but also European nations was a very slow and not immediate process. In the beginning, from a west-centric point of view, Japan’s identity was confused and “buried in a monotone image of Asia”²⁷. Therefore, all the objects produced by the entire continent fell into the western category of *chinoiserie*²⁸. This happened because of the ignorance of Europe about Asian countries²⁹ but also because Americans always attempted to canonize and consider the art of the “other” as a simplified external influence on what was considered art history at that time. As already stated, according to art critic Hans Belting, at the end of modernism, art history “has long been considered a narrative about European art”³⁰. This meant that the space dedicated to the “other” cultures was limited to the function they played in the Western narrative. As in the case of *chinoiserie*, it was even simplified and extended to represent the style not only of China but of the entire Asian continent.

However, although there were these premises for the 1867 World Exposition, Japan was able to be recognized as distinct from its neighbours and to “go beyond *chinoiserie*”³¹. This was possible because the Chinese participation in the 1867 Expo

²⁵ M. Chaiklin, *The Fine Art of Imperialism: Japan’s Participation in International Expositions of the Nineteenth Century*, in “Japanese Studies Review”, vol. 12, 2008, pp. 71-79, here p. 72.

²⁶ T. Noriko, *Struggle of a Non-European Country in the World Fairs: The Case of Japan*, in “Journal of Environmental Studies”, cit., pp. 25-33, here p. 25.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ M. Martin, *Staging China, Japan, and Siam at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867*, in *Beyond Chinoiserie. Artistic Exchange Between China and the West during the Late Qing Dynasty (1796-1911)*, edited by P. Doesschate Chu, J. Milam, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019, pp. 122-148, here p.125.

²⁹ T. Noriko, *Struggle of a Non-European Country in the World Fairs: The Case of Japan*, cit., p. 27.

³⁰ H. Belting, *Art History After Modernism*, translated by C. Saltzwedel, M. Cohen, K. Northcott, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 62.

³¹ M. Martin, *Staging China, Japan, and Siam at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867*, cit., p. 125.

was criticized to be unofficial (China could not officially participate because it had to face the drastic consequences of the Opium war) and to be backward and outdated in terms of artifacts presented³². This aspect led the attention of visitors to the products of Japan that, on the contrary, showed to be “innovative, modern”³³ and interesting for the French audience because they were “eagerly oriented to the West”³⁴. Japanese artifacts exactly represented what Paris was looking for at that time. Faced with England that because of the Industrial Revolution was a potential competitor in the attempt of leading a central position in Europe, the French nation considered the new Japanese motifs an opportunity to supersede the English country³⁵. That is why Japan was “welcomed with significant wave”³⁶ determining in the West the “explosion of Japanese influenced design known as *Japonisme*”³⁷.

The term, coined by art critic Philippe Burty in 1872, indicates and describes the 19th century imitation of Japanese motifs in European art, culture, and aesthetics³⁸. Through the circulation of artifacts, due to world expos, but also due to shops, like *La Porte Chinoise*, opened in 1862 by Madame Desoye, specialized in selling oriental objects, European artists and customers like Manet, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Mucha, and many others could have access to the Japanese culture buying prints and porcelains that later inspired and influenced their works³⁹. The works of art of these painters were characterised by brushstrokes of violent colours, they broke with the traditional European linear perspective and the two-dimensionality that derived from Japanese *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵), of which “the best-known Japanese painter in the world, especially in Western countries”⁴⁰ was Katsushika Hokusai. The Japanese style did not lie only in the technique used by European artists, but also in the choice of the subjects

³² T. Noriko, *Struggle of a Non-European Country in the World Fairs: The Case of Japan*, cit., p. 27.

³³ M. Martin, *Staging China, Japan, and Siam at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867*, cit., p. 134.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ T. Noriko, *Struggle of a Non-European Country in the World Fairs: The Case of Japan*, cit., p. 28.

³⁶ N. Yasuyuki, M. Yoshitake, *Japan World Exposition-Reconsidering Expo Art*, in “Review of Japanese Culture and Society”, vol. 23, issue: “Expo ’70 and Japanese Art: Dissonant Voices”, December 2011, pp. 13-25, p.14.

³⁷ M. Chaiklin, *The Fine Art of Imperialism: Japan’s Participation in International Espositions of the Nineteenth Century*, cit., p. 2.

³⁸ N. Yasuyuki, M. Yoshitake, *Japan World Exposition-Reconsidering Expo Art*, cit., p. 24.

³⁹ Y. Chiba, *Japonisme: East-West Renaissance in the Late 19th Century*, in “Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal”, vol. 31, no. 2, issue: “The Interarts Project: Part Two, Cultural Agendas, June 1998, pp. 1-20, here p. 5.

⁴⁰ I. Shigemi, *The Making of Hokusai’s Reputation in the Context of Japonisme*, in “Japan Review”, no. 15, 2003, pp. 77-100, here p. 77.

represented. From Manet to Mucha, up to Van Gogh, where it is more appropriate to talk about *Neo-Japonisme*, there are new subjects, such as geishas, gardens, temples, sumo wrestlers, and tea houses. These traditional motifs of Japanese culture could be received by the Western world not only through prints, ceramics, and porcelain exhibited at the world exhibitions but also through the architecture at these events. These structures were erected to convey a traditional image of the country which could generate a great fascination and that could be well-received in the West also thanks to the involvement of the visitor into an extraordinary experience made of purely traditional Japanese practices such as tea ceremonies. In the following paragraphs, all these factors are analysed to better understand how Japan succeeded in distinguishing itself and reaching new investors in Europe that would have paved the way for its destiny as a world superpower.

2.2.2 The 1867 Paris World Expo: a traditional Japanese Tea House (茶室)



Figure 2.3 Japanese pavilion at the 1867 Paris World Exposition: a traditional tea house.

At the 1867 Paris World Exposition, a traditional Japanese tea house (*Chashitsu*, 茶室) was erected at the Champs de Mars⁴¹ (Figure 2.3). The architectural space was

⁴¹ J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 628.

divided into three rooms: in one of them the tea ceremony was performed⁴², in another one, there were three geishas⁴³, respectively Kane, Sumi and Sato⁴⁴ who showed their customs, and in the third, instead, there was an exhibition of Japanese ceramics and bronzes⁴⁵. As regards the tea ceremony, it must be said that in Japan it has a “long and varied history”⁴⁶ and tradition practiced with different purposes. According to Iris March, it has been considered as a moment of enjoyment and sharing and a spiritual opportunity for meditation⁴⁷. In Zen Buddhism, the term *satori* stands for “enlightenment” which represents the ultimate goal that a person should pursue. In this regard, any practice carried out with care and dedication has to be considered valid to achieve this aim. Some of these activities are *judô*, *kendo*, *shodô*. All these words end with the suffix “-dô” which stands for the “way” by which it is possible to reach *satori*⁴⁸. In this respect, also the *chadô* or “the way of tea” is functional to this purpose. In Japan, the practice of tea drinking is in fact an *aisthosphere*⁴⁹, an experience of deep religious concentration and meditation which involves all the senses, from taste and touch to sight. For this reason, also the place where the tea ceremony takes place needs to be a meaningful “framework for the arrangement of the desired *aisthosphere*”⁵⁰. Therefore, the architecture of *chashitsu* is traditionally erected according to the idea that the visitor should focus on reflection and meditation. Few openings, covered by translucent paper screens (*shoji*) are usually built to avoid creating any form of “deviation or distraction by outside factors”⁵¹ for the person practicing the ceremony. Narrowing on the central issue of the paragraph, it must be said that all these aesthetic principles were taken into consideration when the tea house was erected at the 1867 World Expo. In this context, the structure was a symbol of Japanese tradition, never known before, but finally also experienced in the West.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ A. Lockyer, *Japan at the Exhibition, 1867-1877: From Representation to Practice*, in “Senri Ethnological Studies”, no. 54, 2001, pp. 67-76, here p. 67.

⁴⁵ J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 628.

⁴⁶ I. March, *Chashitsu-The Japanese Teahouse: An Aesthetic System*, in *Folk Architecture-Vernacular Architecture*, conference proceedings (An International Conference, Hungary, 2012), Wien: TU Wien, 2012, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 2.

2.2.3 The 1873 Wien World Exposition: a traditional Japanese Garden (日本庭園)



Figure 2.4 Japanese pavilion at the 1873 Vienna World Exposition: a traditional garden.

Japan built a traditional garden⁵² at the 1873 Wien World Expo (*Figure 2.4*). With regards to the tradition of gardens in the eastern country, one must consider that its history has started a long time ago. and since the Asuka period (approximately the Sixth and Seventh centuries) when “the Chinese ideology of landscaping was introduced to Japan”⁵³, it has evolved in meaning and modality becoming an effective design practice. It was for the first time theorized in the book “*Satukeiki*” (“The book of Gardening”), written by Tachibana no Toshitsuna at the end of the 11th century⁵⁴. The intention was to provide the right instructions to realize a designed natural space that could be functional to spiritual meditation. Therefore, Japanese gardens’ composition (stones, trees, and plants) had never been casual, but the architect of a “garden in pre and early modern times had the rather daunting task”⁵⁵ of constituting

⁵² J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 629.

⁵³ C.-S. Zhao, N. Matsumoto, T.-F. Liu, Y.-Q. Yuan, K. Katsuhiro, *A Study on the Image of Landscape of Japanese and Chinese Gardens*, in “Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering”, vol. 2, no. 2, 2003, pp. 69-76, here p. 69.

⁵⁴ N. Nonaka, *The Japanese Garden: The Art of Setting Stones*, in “SiteLINES: A Journal of Place”, vol. 4, no. 1, Fall_2008, pp. 5-8. here p. 5.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 5.

the most suitable place for this religious purpose⁵⁶. In this context, it must be said that this long Japanese tradition was finally known in the Western world not only through the effective reproduction of gardens at World Fairs but also through their miniaturized version, the *bonsai* (tray gardens). According to Japanese aesthetics, dwarf trees are conceived to banish evil passions, leading people to pure contemplation and serenity. This is because, like gardens, they are designed to contribute to the constitution of restful and tranquil views⁵⁷ that allow “to escape from urban noise, stress”⁵⁸. For this reason, *bonsai* were received with great curiosity at the 1889 Paris Expo (it has been considered as one of the first events in which they were on display in the West⁵⁹). Returning instead to the architectural motif of the garden, after having already been proposed in 1873, it also occurred in 1904 at the St. Louis World Fair⁶⁰ (*Figure 2.5*) and the 1939 New York Exposition⁶¹ (*Figure 2.12*).



Figure 2.5 Japanese pavilion at the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition: a traditional garden.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ A. Haijima, *Nature in Miniature in Modern Japanese Urban Space. Tsuboniwa-Pocket Gardens*, in *Rethinking Nature in Contemporary Japan. From Tradition to Modernity*, edited by B. Ruperti, S. Vesco, C. Negri, in “Ca’Foscari Japanese Studies”, no. 7, Venezia: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari-Digital Publishing, 2017, pp. 27-63, p. 58

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 630.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 631.

⁶¹ Ivi, p. 633.

2.2.4 The 1900 Paris World Exposition: a traditional Japanese Temple (寺)



Figure 2.6 Hōryūji temple (Nara): the two structures that influenced Japanese pavilion in 1900 at the Paris World Expo.

Another recurring motif of Japanese pavilions at the 19th and early 20th centuries World Exposition was the temple. At the 1900 Paris Universal Expo, the architecture of the Japanese pavilion was inspired by the Hōryūji temple in Nara⁶² (Figure 2.6). It is a very ancient set of buildings dating back to the Asuka era (552-710) when Emperor Yōmei ordered the construction of the building that then burned in 670⁶³. What it is called today Hōryūji are the four structures that survived the fire. In particular, “the five-story pagoda in the central grounds, the centrepiece of the temple complex, along with the Golden Hall (*Kondō*) next to it”⁶⁴ were influential in the Japanese pavilion of the 1900 Paris World Exposition. The choice of selecting these sections was not casual. They are strongly representative of Japanese tradition and philosophical thought. In particular, the pagoda was considered relevant because it traditionally contains the relics of Buddha, while the *Kondō* is the place that welcomes the religious icon worshiped in the temple⁶⁵. What emerges from this analysis is again the relevance that eastern aesthetics has in the architectures erected by Japan at the 19th and early 20th

⁶² Ivi, p. 631.

⁶³ Asian Historical Architecture, Hōryū-ji Temple - 法隆寺 (built 7th-9th centuries onward), [orientalarchitecture.com](https://www.orientalarchitecture.com); <https://www.orientalarchitecture.com/sid/217/japan/nara/horyu-ji-temple> [last access on January 25_2022].

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

centuries World exhibitions. In addition, it also testifies the Nation's interest in showing a kind of architecture, which, as already claimed, was as traditional as possible to tell its history and making, in this way, its national character distinct and unique in the Western imaginary.

2.3 Momentary detachment of Japanese architecture from tradition: the case of MoMA (1932) and 1937 Paris World Expo

After Japanese pavilions in the 19th century World Expos had great success, in the years that followed, many Western architects decided to find inspiration for their practice traveling to Japan. In Europe, Charlotte Perriand is worthy of mention. She was a French architect and designer to whom also the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale paid homage through the collateral exhibition “Charlotte Perriand and I” at the Venetian Espace Louis Vuitton. After her first travel to Japan in 1940, her architecture was deeply influenced by the Japanese one. This happened to such a state that many of her works embody the motifs of traditional Japanese architecture⁶⁶. The 1934 beach house project (*Figure 2.7*) can be a good example of this.



Figure 2.7 Plastic at the “Charlotte Perriand and I” collateral event of 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale: beach house project by French architect Charlotte Perriand.

⁶⁶ C. Leleu, *Charlotte Perriand and Japan*, in “pen”, 1 January 2020, pen-online.com; <https://pen-online.com/culture/charlotte-perriand-and-japan/> [last access on January 14].

The building, that was previously unrealised and then constructed by the fashion house Louis Vuitton⁶⁷, creates a constant dialogue not only between the different interior spaces but also between the latter and the outside that surrounds them. It seems to refer in a way to the Japanese aesthetic principles of *oku* and *engawa*. Even more representative of Perriand's curiosity towards Japanese architecture is her later participation in the design of a tea house for the UNESCO's Paris headquarters in 1993⁶⁸. Her knowledge about Japanese culture allowed her to create a structure that perfectly "provided the quiet and peaceful atmosphere that the tea ceremony requires"⁶⁹ (Figure 2.8).



Figure 2.8 Tea House at the UNESCO's Paris headquarters in 1993: a project by Charlotte Perriand.

However, it must be said that Japanese art and architecture influenced not only Europe but also America. Alfred J. Barr was keenly aware of this when he founded the New York's Museum of Modern Art. In his diagram, he considered Japanese prints a determining trend in the development of modern art. In this regard, it is also relevant to underline that, according to the MoMA's founder, Eastern art previously influenced

⁶⁷ D. Howarth, *Louis Vuitton Realises Unbuilt Charlotte Perriand Beach House in Miami*, in "dezeen", 5 December 2013, <https://www.dezeen.com/2013/12/05/louis-vuitton-charlotte-perriand-beach-house-at-design-miami/> [last access on January 14 2022].

⁶⁸ M. López García, *Maison du Thé*, in "Hidden Architecture", 1 August 2018, <http://hiddenarchitecture.net/maison-du-the/> [last access on January 14 2022].

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

Fauvism in France that, subsequently, flow into Abstract Expressionism in Germany, which, in turn, also determined Bauhaus. This aspect means that some of the features of Japanese prints had a following in the German architectural school from which finally also modern architecture descended (*Figure 2.9*).

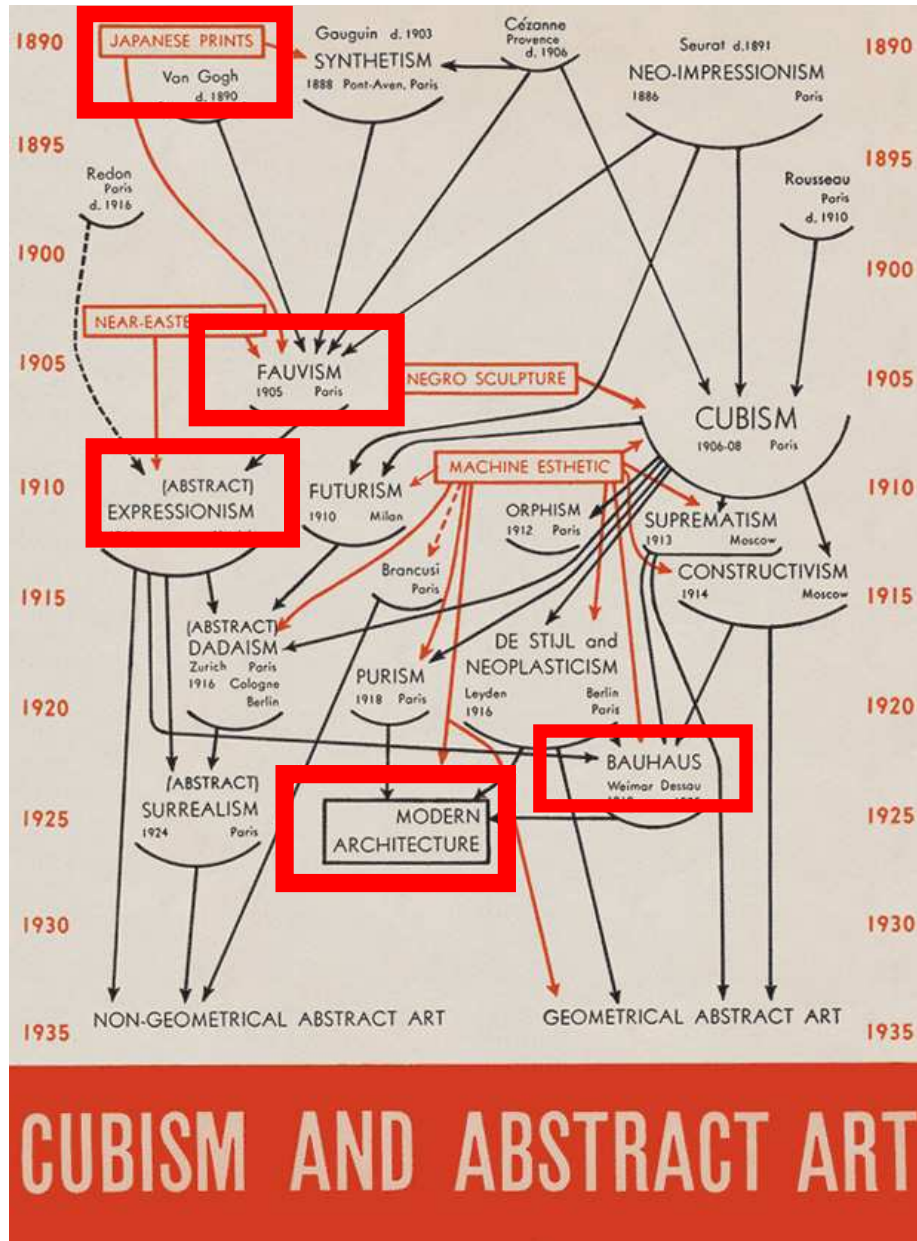


Figure 2.9 Focus on the influence of “Japanese prints” on the development of “Modern Architecture” in A.-J. Barr’s diagram representing the history of modern art (1936).

If Japan’s participation in the 19th and early 20th centuries preserved its cultural and historical roots, the increasing country’s need for modernization led Japanese to

adopt a renewed political system, social reforms, but also artistic and architectonic patterns that looked at the West as the main source of inspiration⁷⁰. This means that in the period after WWI not only an acquisition by the West of the Japanese motifs occurred but also a cultural influence that was exercised by America and Europe on the Eastern country. As far as architecture is concerned, this was possible through the publication and translation of modernist texts in the Japanese language⁷¹ and thanks to important cultural mediators such as Bruno Taut and Richard Neutra. They were able to allow the East to access the motifs and pillars of Western architecture whose big design philosophers were Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe⁷². Consequently, the impact of Euro-American architecture on the Asian one ended up characterizing the 1920s and 1930s⁷³ and deeply influenced the activity of Japanese architects such as Yamada Mamoru (1894-1966), Horiguchi Sutemi (1895-1984)⁷⁴, and Isaburo Ueno (1872-1925). As stated by Natsuko Akagawa, that is why Japan's architecture at that time contributed to the "lived experience of international architecture design"⁷⁵.

What emerges from this analysis is that both the influence that Japanese culture had in the development of modern architecture and the contribution that the country gave to the international style may be considered as possible factors that brought Americans to welcome Japan's participation in the first international architecture exhibition held at MoMA in 1932. Modernist projects and photographs of the buildings "Star Bar" at Kyoto (1931) and "Electrical Laboratory" at Tokyo (1930) (*Figure 2.10*), respectively by Isaburo Ueno and Mamoru Yamada⁷⁶ can be interpreted as functional to the American intent of spreading and educating its visitors to the modern thinking. As already stated, modern architecture was the style spread by the city of New York to be the main cultural centre in the world. This approach to architecture exhibitions

⁷⁰ Facing History & Ourselves, *Meiji Period in Japan*, facinghistory.org; <https://www.facinghistory.org/nanjing-atrocities/nation-building/meiji-period-japan> [last access on January 25_2022].

⁷¹ P. McNeil, *Myths of Modernism: Japanese Architecture, Interior Design and the West, c. 1920-1940*, cit., p. 283.

⁷² Ivi, p. 292.

⁷³ Ivi, p. 281.

⁷⁴ N. Akagawa, *The International Nature of Modernity*, in "The Review", no. 65, Autumn_2013, pp. 18-19, here p. 18.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ MoMA, *Modern Architecture*, cit., p. 26.

implied a detachment from the traditional aesthetic ideals characterising Japanese pavilions at the late 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions. In addition, also the materials constituting some of Japan's architectures were Western ones.



Figure 2.10 “Electrical laboratory” at Tokyo, designed by architect Mamoru Yamada. The project was on display at the “Modern Architecture” exhibition, held at MoMA in 1932.

The country's participation in the 1937 Paris World Exhibition⁷⁷ is a good example of this. At the event, a structure made of steel, glass, and concrete (*Figure 2.11*), “exemplified the early International Style as interpreted by the Japanese architect”⁷⁸. The project carried out by a disciple of Le Corbusier, Junzo Sakakura, fully adapted to the French request to use its materials and not the perishable or wood ones that previously characterized traditional Japanese architecture⁷⁹. However, it must be added that the two examples just provided represented in the history of architecture exhibitions only momentary detachments from traditional Japanese architecture. As a

⁷⁷ J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 632.

⁷⁸ N. Kruger, *A Sense of Promise: The Junzo Sakakura Exhibition*, in “artscape Japan”, last update: 1 June 2021, artscape.jp; https://artscape.jp/artscape/eng/focus/0908_02.html [last access on January 25 2022].

⁷⁹ S. Yamamoto, *From the Representation of Japan in Wartime World's Fairs. Modernists and “Japaneseness”*, translated by F. Aoki, J. Jordan, P.-W. Ricketts, in “Review of Japanese Culture and Society”, vol. 26, issue: “Commensurable Distinctions: Intercultural Negotiations of Modern and Contemporary Japanese Visual Culture”, December 2014, pp. 104-134, here p. 107.

matter of fact, Japan again reproduced a traditional garden⁸⁰ at the 1939 New York World Expo (*Figure 2.12*). In addition, even if the show was dedicated to a reflection on the future of architecture (the theme was “The World of Tomorrow”), the eastern country demonstrated to the world that its cultural tradition could not be forgotten in the development of a future approach to buildings.



Figure 2.11 Japanese pavilion at the 1937 Paris World Exposition: a project by architect Junzo Sakakura, a disciple of Le Corbusier.



Figure 2.12 Japanese pavilion at the 1939 New York World Exposition: a traditional garden.

⁸⁰ J.-M. Alagón Laste, *La Imagen del Japon Tradicional a Traves de las Exposiciones Universales*, cit., p. 633.

2.4 Japan at the Cold War International Architecture Exhibitions

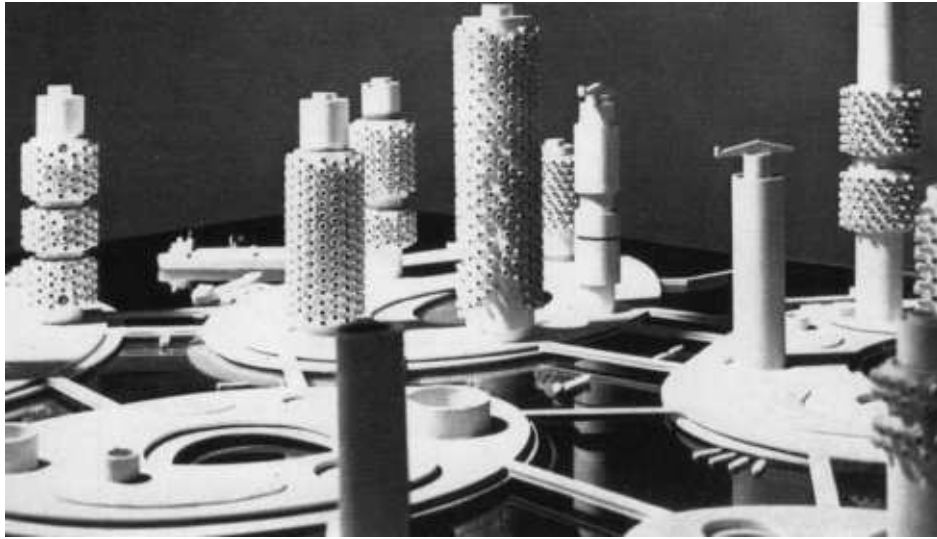


Figure 2.13 “Marine City” project designed by Kikutake Kiyonori at the “Visionary Architecture” exhibition, held at MoMA in 1957.

Japan’s participation in international architecture exhibitions after WWII and during the Cold War perfectly fits in the period of “structural rebirth”⁸¹ characterising the World Expositions analysed in the first chapter. As a matter of fact, the Japanese contribution to architecture exhibitions was focused on the use of innovative materials and constructions that could show technological development to other world superpowers. At the same time, unlike the west, Japanese participation was also representative of the country’s reaction to the destruction and defeat it had suffered during WWII. Starting from the 1950s, many Japanese cities were in ruins because of the bombings, or even “no blade of grass”⁸² remained of them. This is exactly what happened in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, destroyed by the atomic bombs in 1945. Faced with this catastrophe, “survival necessitated the rapid reconstruction of cities and housing”⁸³.

In this urgent need for architecture, a new Japanese style of modernism called the Metabolist movement (*Shinchintaisha*, 新陳代謝, in Japanese, recalling the “change

⁸¹ I. López-César, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, cit..

⁸² M. Schalk, *The Architecture of Metabolist. Inventing a Culture of Resilience*, in “arts”, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 279-297, here p. 281.

⁸³ James Kehl Design, *Metabolism and the Unit*, cit. .

and renewal”⁸⁴ status characterizing living organism⁸⁵) was founded. As stated by Meike Schalk, associate professor at KTH School Stockholm, it represented a “cultural resilience”⁸⁶ in front of the *tabula rasa* left by the bombed cities. What mostly characterised this kind of architecture resided in the architect’s attitude to not look to the Western forms⁸⁷, but rather reconnect to traditional Japanese aesthetic, which this time, was conceived as the only possible way to reconstruct national identity. Therefore, re-embracing the Japanese tradition that considers transformation as the indisputable principle of all things, Metabolist architects erected large infrastructures with systems of “customized cells and adaptable temporary configurations of dwellings. They could in this way expand, shrink, and change according to the need”⁸⁸ that the architecture needed to face.

In addition, it cannot be omitted that the reconstruction of Japanese cities did not take place with the help of America. If, on the one hand, Americans adopted a “Cold-war policy of rehabilitation and alliance to gain an ally against Soviet expansion”⁸⁹, Japanese, on the other hand, accessed the American market and technology. This would have allowed the country to become an “industrial and techno-manufacturing powerhouse”⁹⁰ shortly afterwards. Moreover, this explains why Metabolist architectures, although deeply rooted in Japanese aesthetics, were mainly made of exported “modernized industrial facilities”⁹¹ and materials deriving from the trade partnership with America. Consequently, Metabolism entered the history of architecture as part of modernism and got the chance to exhibit its projects at the international architecture show “Visionary Architecture” of 1957, held at MoMA in New York. At this event, Japan showed the capability of Metabolist architecture of

⁸⁴ H.-U. Obrist, *Architecture, Art and Metabolism*, cit. .

⁸⁵ CNN Style, *The Japanese Architects Who Treated Buildings like Living Organisms*, 23 August 2019, edition.cnn.com; <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/metabolism-japanese-architecture-artsy/index.html> [last access on January 25 2022]. The term refers to the chemical status of living organisms because Metabolist architects treated buildings as such.

⁸⁶ M. Schalk, *The Architecture of Metabolist. Inventing a Culture of Resilience*, cit., p. 280.

⁸⁷ H.-U. Obrist, *Architecture, Art and Metabolism*, cit. . The shape in Japanese architecture could no longer be the starting point for reconstruction since nothing but cinder remained of what had previously been built. This could be valid, instead, for the Western world because in its cities like London and Dresden (whose buildings were built with resistant materials), even if bombed, rubble and stones represented the occasions from “which new ideas could grow”.

⁸⁸ M. Schalk, *The Architecture of Metabolist. Inventing a Culture of Resilience*, cit., p. 280.

⁸⁹ James Kehl Design, *Metabolism and the Unit*, cit. .

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

“responding to the changing needs of the contemporary era”⁹² and provided a possible solution to the actual and “urgent social and economic problems”⁹³ on which the American museum asked its participating countries to reflect. In this regard, one of the most significant projects presented by Japan was “Marine City”. Designed by architect Kikutake Kiyonori, it consisted of a megastructure floating into the sea. The main objective was to face the rapid rising of the population⁹⁴ (*Figure 2.13*). The theme of the MoMa’s event and the Japanese participation can be considered innovative. They both reflected on the future use of architecture with respect to citizens. However, the American show must be analysed as the terrain of the increasingly fortified⁹⁵ alliance between America and Japan. This alliance would have ended representing the Western side of the iron curtain during the Cold War. In this regard, it is not surprising that in 1970, at the Universal Exposition of Osaka, Japanese Metabolist architect Kishō Kurokawa built the so-called Takara Beautilion Pavilion⁹⁶ (*Figure 2.14*).



Figure 2.14 Japanese pavilion, designed by architect Kishō Kurokawa at the Osaka World Exposition in 1970.

⁹² ArchEyes, *Marine City Megastructure/Kiyonori Kikutake*, 8 May_2020, archeeyes.com; <https://archeyes.com/marine-city-megastructure-kiyonori-kikutake/> [last access on January 25_2022].

⁹³ MoMA, *Press Release for the Exhibition “Visionary Architecture”*, New York: MoMA, September 29_1960, pp. 1-17, here p. 1. Available in Online MoMA Archive, assets.moma.org; https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_press-release_326200.pdf?_ga=2.217011408.719698266.1624802544-488203148.1624174307 [last access on January 25_2022].

⁹⁴ MoMA, *Press Release for the Exhibition “Visionary Architecture”*, cit., p. 8.

⁹⁵ James Kehl Design, *Metabolism and the Unit*, cit. .

⁹⁶ I. López-Cézar, *World Expos and Architectonic Structures. An Intimate Relationship*, cit..

The intention was to show, like the American and Soviet architectures, the structural and material innovation that Japan was able to achieve by the adoption of an increasingly export-oriented economy next to its precious U.S. ally⁹⁷.

2.4.1 Japan at the 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale



Figure 2.15 Japan's participation in 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale: a project by architect Arata Isozaki.

The exhibition model presented at the first Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980 (based on a reflection on the role played by architecture in the contemporary world rather than in the presentation of the technological progress) certainly did not leave the nations that participated in the event indifferent. In the case of Japan, although one of the dominant movements in the country was the Metabolist one, its participation in the Venetian show was not aimed at showing the country's technological advancement but rather reflected on the principles and the characteristics that mostly connote its traditional architecture. This happened to such an extent that, as concerns the style and

⁹⁷ James Kehl Design, *Metabolism and the Unit*, cit. .

the materials used for the project’s realization, the 1980 Eastern country’s participation can be compared to the pavilions erected by Japan at the 19th and early 20th centuries World Expositions. The Japanese contribution to “Strada Novissima” by Paolo Portoghesi consisted of a façade of a typical house in a traditional street of Japan⁹⁸ (Figure 2.15). The structure, entirely made of wood, through two cracks allowed the visitor to enter a space that was not a living interior, but a garden. In addition, the two slots, one long and narrow, while the other one, squared and level with the floor, were two typical enters of Japanese buildings⁹⁹. The first slot, in Japanese *kuguri-do*, is usually used as a service entrance of a townhouse. On the other hand, the second one, *nijiri-guchi* (Figure 2.16), represents the traditional entrance to the tea ceremony house.

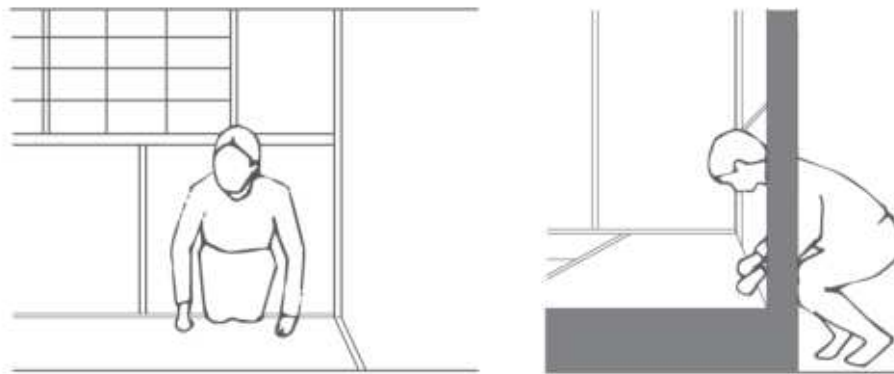


Figure 2.16 *Nijiri-guchi*: entrance to a traditional Japanese tea house.

The shape of the latter is useful in Japan to push the visitor to crawl to access the structure. The consequent act of physical and psychological flexion aims to prepare the celebrant for meditation into “the special world of Tea”¹⁰⁰. As already stated, this place is conceived as a completely different dimension from the exterior space because of its meanings.

Although architect Arata Isozaki’s project was a return to traditional Japanese architecture through motifs that refer to gardens and tea houses, Japan’s participation

⁹⁸ Architecture Biennale Wiki, *A typical House Facade Located in a Traditional Japanese Street*, [biennalewiki.org; https://biennalewiki.org/?p=6769](https://biennalewiki.org/?p=6769) [last access on January 25_2022].

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ K. Isao, P. McMillan, *Rexamining Tea: “Yuisho”, “Suki”, “Yatsushi” and “Furumai”*, in “Monumenta Nipponica”, vol. 57, no. 1, Spring_2002, pp. 1-42, here p. 25

in the exhibition may be considered innovative for the presentation of the façade of a traditional house of the country. This aspect represents an important contact point and similarity with what will be analysed in the following chapter regarding Japan's exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale (*Figure 3.9*). In both cases, in fact, the object of the show is a traditional Japanese house. The difference lies in the fact that in the 2021 event only the materials constituting this structure were on display (*Figure 2.24*). This choice can be primarily considered as a change of the country's attitude toward architecture exhibitions. This also derives from the new meanings that international events have adopted in the era of globalization.

2.5 Japan at the International Architecture Exhibitions in the Era of Globalization

As already claimed in the first chapter, the character of international architecture exhibitions has changed at the end of the Cold War. Its aim is to question more and more the role of architecture intertwined with global problems and demands involving all the world. Therefore, also the national participations have manifested this new line of thinking. As regards Japan's national participation in these years of profound change, it is possible to identify three aspects strictly linked to Japanese tradition that appear recurrently in the participation of the country in architecture exhibitions:

- Relevance of the single component
- Cooperation and coexistence
- Awareness of the implacability of change

Since literature on the matter is rather limited, it is important to note that the following paragraphs are the result of a personal investigation on this issue. In addition, this analysis mainly focuses on the Japanese participation in Venice Biennale because it is the context in which “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” was held. All the factors below are functional to better understand and highlight the character of the 2021 show. That is why it is now possible to start making some comparisons and

draw some possible conclusions on the different concepts presented by Japan at the institution.

2.5.1 Relevance of the single component

The first of these concepts taken into consideration and deepened by Japan is the prestige of the material or the single constituent of a building. In particular, it was investigated from two different points of view at architecture exhibitions. The first concerns the value of the individual component constituting the architecture, while the second resides in its type or the material used to build it. As regards the recognition of the importance of the founding element of architecture, the exhibition “Fractures” by Arata Isozaki at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale is a good example (*Figure 2.17*). Themed as “Sensing the Future - The Architect as Seismograph”, the Japanese participation exhibited photographs and rubble to document the natural disaster caused by the 1995 Kobe earthquake. For this purpose, some of the ruins of the 200 000 Kobe’s destroyed houses were transported to create a provocation in Venice¹⁰¹. The Japanese show was in fact a reaction to the optimistic theme presented by the international show. As stated by Carrie Cushman, the director of the event, Hans Hollein, considered the architect’s potential to act as a seismograph “to sense stylistic shifts and experimental tremblers in contemporary design”¹⁰². Japan instead used the rubble to discuss new questions such as “how to design for the future with the knowledge that it could all turn to ruin in an instant?”¹⁰³ or “how to respond when hundreds of thousands are left homeless?”¹⁰⁴. These new questionings did not involve only the reality of Japan, but also that of the entire world. Moreover, the fracture generated in the country in 1995 was due to an environmental catastrophe that could affect any city at any time. As proof of this Japanese awareness, in the plan for the exhibition, hung in the pavilion as a pamphlet, Arata Isozaki wrote that the fractures

¹⁰¹ C. Cushman, “*Inside Me, the Earthquake*”: *Materiality and Embodiment in the 1996 Fractures Exhibition*, in “Interventions”, vol. 4, issue 1: Object Lesson, 22 January 2015, interventionsjournal.wordpress.com; <https://interventionsjournal.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/inside-me-the-earthquake-materiality-and-embodiment-in-the-1996-fractures-exhibition/> [last access on January 25 2022].

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

of 1995 emerged not only in Koke but also raced across the world¹⁰⁵ cracking streets, skyscrapers, and cities. In this concept, the single ruin gained great importance because, on the one hand, it was intended as the starting point for the buildings that would have followed, but on the other, it was also relevant because it embraced the memory of what happened. Consequently, the visitor who entered the 1996 Japanese pavilion was involved in a completely sensory experience. This atmosphere was able to evoke the trauma of the earthquake¹⁰⁶ through the rubble (that's why it was later studied and examined in the context of Material Culture Studies¹⁰⁷). The jury got so impressed that in the end decided to award Arata Isozaki's project with the first golden lion of architecture at the Venice Biennale¹⁰⁸.



Figure 2.17 “Fractures”, Japanese exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 1996: a project by architect Arata Isozaki.

As regards instead the reflection on the material used at architecture exhibitions, the Japanese participation in the 2000 Hannover international exposition, themed as “Man, Nature, and Technology: Origin of a new world” is strongly illustrative. It can

¹⁰⁵ A. Isozaki, *Plan for the 1996 Venice Biennale-Japanese Pavilion “Fractures”*, 1996, p. 1, venezia-biennale-japan.jpf.go.jp; https://venezia-biennale-japan.jpf.go.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/VBA-1996-6th-ISOZAKI-Arata_page-0002.pdf [last access on January 25 2022].

¹⁰⁶ C. Cushman, “*Inside Me, the Earthquake*”: *Materiality and Embodiment in the 1996 Fractures Exhibition*, cit. .

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

be considered in line with other countries' spasmodic research in those years for a sustainable architecture to reduce and cope with the waste of which global economies became more and more aware¹⁰⁹. For this purpose, Japanese architect Shigeru Ban worked in collaboration with the German architect Frei Otto to realize one of the largest paper structures ever built (*Figure 2.18*).



Figure 2.18 Japanese pavilion at the 2000 Hannover World Exposition.

“With an area of 3000 square meters”¹¹⁰, the pavilion stood out for the use of paper, which once the exhibition ended, could be reused¹¹¹. Also the foundations were made of sustainable materials such as sand and steel. Architects preferred these perishable constituents rather than concrete because they were easier to dispose of and reuse¹¹². In addition, Japan’s choice of using sustainable materials did not stop at their display in exhibitions, but even ended up characterizing several architectural projects in the country in the following years. In this context, a very current example is the construction of the “Ariake Gymnastic centre” in Tokyo. Built for the country’s Olympic Games in 2021 (*Figure 2.19*) and conceived by the architectural firm Nikken

¹⁰⁹ W. Kuitert, *On World Expos and East Asia-Introduction*, cit., p. 12.

¹¹⁰ Architecture Viva, *Expo 2000 Japan Pavilion, Hannover*, [arquiteturaviva.com](https://arquiteturaviva.com/works/pabellon-de-japon-en-expo-2000-9); <https://arquiteturaviva.com/works/pabellon-de-japon-en-expo-2000-9> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹¹¹ World Architects, *Shigeru Ban*, [world-architects.com](https://www.world-architects.com/en/shigeru-ban-architects-tokyo/project/japan-pavilion-expo-2000?nonav=1); <https://www.world-architects.com/en/shigeru-ban-architects-tokyo/project/japan-pavilion-expo-2000?nonav=1> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

Sekkei as a sporting venue, the structure was made of sustainably sourced timber and was erected to reuse it as an exhibition space¹¹³ when the sport event was over.



Figure 2.19 Timber Gymnastics Center for Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021: a project by the architectural firm Nikken Sekkei.

The examples already described might be considered a predisposition of Japan to two behaviours. Firstly, the sustainability ideas presented at the exhibitions may be the basis on which architecture is conceived in real life. In this regard, the exhibition “Co-Ownership of Action: trajectories of elements” at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale represents a further example of this, but even more significant. In this case, not only the concept but also the materials are functional to the future construction of a building. This attitude can be considered strongly confident of the value that international architecture exhibitions can have today. Before the construction, the show can represent an opportunity to compare projects and opinions that can be significant for their full-fledged results in everyday life. Secondly, a certain predisposition of Japan to cooperate and, thus, to work together with other countries to pursue a shared aim can be mentioned. The Shigeru Ban’s building is proof of this because it involved the work of not only Japanese architects but also the German

¹¹³ P. Stevens, *Nikken Sekkei Completes Timber Gymnastics Center for Tokyo Olympic Games*, in “designboom”, 23 July 2020, designboom.com; <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/nikken-sekkei-timber-gymnastics-center-tokyo-olympic-games-07-23-2020/> [last access on January 14, 2022].

architect Frei Otto, the British engineering firm Buro Happold and the paper manufacturer Sonoco Europe¹¹⁴.

2.5.2 Cooperation and Coexistence

Cooperation represents the second aspect that recurrently appears in the national participation of Japan in architecture exhibitions. For example, the “Architectural ethnography” project, proposed by curator Momoyo Kaijima at the 2018 Venice Biennale, can be analysed in these terms. The international event, themed as “Free Space”, required its participating countries to use architecture to build a “democratic space”¹¹⁵, where “a generosity of spirit”¹¹⁶ and a “sense of humanity”¹¹⁷ aimed to set the agenda of architecture itself. In this regard, Japan’s participation consisted of a collection of 42 architectural drawings exhibiting ideas and research projects by universities, architecture, and design studios from all over the world¹¹⁸. Ranging from Leeds Beckett University, ETH Zürich, the University of Johannesburg to KU Leuven¹¹⁹, exhibitors reflected on the relation between the city space and its citizens and questioned “the nature of architecture and its role in society”¹²⁰ after globalization. Although the results were different, the goal was to create an “architectural ethnography” to which, in the end, each participation was functional and significant. The Japanese architect Kaijima, therefore, expressed the intent of building a full-fledged cooperation. The project took the form of a sort of small international show within the event of the Venice Biennale.

¹¹⁴ Architecture Viva, *Expo 2000 Japan Pavilion, Hannover*, cit. .

¹¹⁵ Y. Farrell, S. McNamara, *Freespace*, in “Brochure for the Biennale Architettura 2018 - Venezia May 26 - November 11”, p. 2. Available in “La Biennale di Venezia”, labiennale.org; <https://static.labiennale.org/files/architettura/Documenti/brochure-freespace-910.pdf> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ Japan Foundation, *Press Release for Japan Pavilion at the 16th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. “Architectural Ethnography”, the Exhibition Aims to Develop the Discussion About Our Society in the Future*, p. 1, jpf.go.jp; <https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/about/press/2018/dl/2018-004.pdf> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹¹⁹ Ivi, p. 3.

¹²⁰ J. Testado, “Architectural Ethnography”: *Japan’s 2018 Venice Biennale Pavilion Depicts City Life in Architectural Drawings From the Last 20 Years*, in “Architect News”, 31 May_2018, architect.com; <https://archinect.com/news/article/150067002/architectural-ethnography-japan-s-2018-venice-biennale-pavilion-depicts-city-life-in-architectural-drawings-from-the-last-20-years> [last access on January 25_2022].

Similar to the word “*cooperation*”, because of the prefix *co-*, defining a single action made of several different parts together¹²¹, there is the term “*coexistence*”: living together. This aspect can also be considered recurring in the definition of Japanese participation in architecture exhibitions. In this context, a distinction between two concepts must be made: coexistence between spaces and coexistence between people. As for the former, one can refer to the “Extreme Nature: Landscape of Ambiguous Spaces” show to explain it.



Figure 2.20 “Extreme Nature: Landscape of Ambiguous Spaces”, Japanese exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2008: a project by architect Junya Ishigami.

Presented by architect Junya Ishigami and botanist Hideaki Ohba at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2008 (*Figure 2.20*), it responded to the theme of the event “Out There, Architecture Beyond Building”. Ishigami designed an ephemeral system of greenhouses around the solidity of the Japanese pavilion to create a dialogue between interior and exterior spaces¹²². According to commissioner Taro Igarashi, Japanese architecture presented at previous international exhibitions could no longer stop and reflect on the past of destruction characterizing it, but it had to innovate and seek its future just as the first World Expo in London in 1851 did through the construction of

¹²¹ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, s.v., “Co-“, [oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com; https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/co_3](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/co_3) [last access on January 25_2022].

¹²² Architecture Biennale Wiki, *Extreme Nature: Landscape of Ambiguous Spaces*, [biennalewiki.org, https://biennalewiki.org/?p=1373](https://biennalewiki.org/?p=1373) [last access on January 25_2022].

the innovative Crystal Palace¹²³. Precisely for this reason, at the event, the Japanese architect decided to repropose the greenhouse motif taking inspiration from the British model. However, this time, the intention was not to use innovative materials for its realization, but rather to transmit the concept of simultaneity among spaces, or better, the coexistence between them. The structures, were, in fact, not characterized by a controlled air system¹²⁴, but a constant dialogue between these constructions and the external space was established through the specific botanical choices of Hideaki Ohba¹²⁵. In addition, furniture was positioned in the greenhouse environment generating in the visitor the sensation of wandering in ambiguous spaces. They represented the coexistence of concepts such as interior and exterior, nature and artificial space, cultivated nature and wild nature.



Figure 2.21 Olympic Stadium in Tokyo: a project by architect Kengo Kuma.

In this context, the stadium by architect Kengo Kuma designed in 2018 for the 2021 Olympic Games¹²⁶ (*Figure 2.21*) might be a good example as it supports the idea

¹²³ T. Igarashi, *Junya Ishigami Has Designed a Group of Small Greenhouses Around the Japanese Pavilion*, in “Japan Foundation”, [jpf.go.jp; https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/project/culture/exhibit/international/venezia-biennale/arc/11/01.html](https://www.jpf.go.jp/e/project/culture/exhibit/international/venezia-biennale/arc/11/01.html) [last access on January 25_2022].

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ S. Senda, *Exclusive First Images of Kengo Kuma’s Completed Olympic Stadium for Tokyo 2020*, in “designboom”, 20 January_2020, [designboom.com; https://www.designboom.com/architecture/exclusive-first-images-kengo-kuma-olympic-stadium-tokyo-01-20-2020/](https://www.designboom.com/architecture/exclusive-first-images-kengo-kuma-olympic-stadium-tokyo-01-20-2020/) [last access on January 14_2022].

that the character of architecture presented in exhibitions may find a continuation in real structures erected in Japan. The building was conceived to “fit in with the surrounding nature including the large green space close by”¹²⁷. As stated by Shuhei Senda, it was intended by Kuma as a ‘living tree’ in the city¹²⁸. Therefore, even in this case, it is possible to deduce Japan’s intention to create a dialogue between the architectural space and the natural one through the effective realization of a co-existence between different spaces.

As regards the second type of coexistence that characterizes people, the project “Architecture. Possible here? Home-for-All” by architect Toyō Itō is strongly illustrative. Exhibited at the 2012 Venice Biennale, the show aimed at discussing with its visitors the project “A Home for All” (*Figure 2.22*). Born after the 2011 “Great East Japan Earthquake”, it consisted of the construction of a space of encounter, dialogue, and coexistence for people who had lost their homes following the huge natural disaster¹²⁹. The first¹³⁰ of these houses was built in Miyagino-ku (Sendai) and was characterized by having been projected by architects who maintained a continuous dialogue with the people who would have lived there. The needs and ideas of the Japanese were listened, and, in the end, architects built a house that united and welcomed them together. In this way, Itō’s project distanced itself from the modern architecture which “had been rated highest for its individual originality”¹³¹, returning to an idea of architecture as a site based on coexistence between people rather than individuals. Even more significant than this was the sharing of “Home for All” at the 2012 Venice Biennale. “By displaying details of all the discussion surrounding the project”¹³², designed this time for the city of Rikuzentakata, even the visitors were invited to join and “contemplate the best way forward for architecture”¹³³. In the investigation on Kozo Kadowaki’s exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, the 2012 Japanese show could be seen as similar for the intention to create

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

¹²⁹ D. Basulto, *Venice Biennale 2012: Architecture. Possible here? Home – For – All/Japan Pavilion*, in “ArchDaily”, 30 August_2012, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/268426/venice-biennale-2012-architecture-possible-here-home-for-all-japan-pavilion> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ Ibidem.

a building at the end of the event. The only difference is that, in Toyō Itō’s project, the actual construction of “Home for All” in the city of Rikuzentakata (*Figure 2.23*) already had a role model (the project realized in Miyagino-ku).



Figure 2.22 “Architecture. Possible Here? Home-for-All”, Japanese exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012: a project by architect Toyō Itō.



Figure 2.23 “A Home for All” in the city of Rikuzentakata, Japan: a project realized in 2012-2013 by Toyō Itō.

Therefore, the objective of the 2012 show mainly consisted of a reflection on the effective project’s meanings and results. In the case of “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements”, instead, the exhibition gave a solution to a local problem

but also an answer to the global question “How Will We Live Together?”. The 2021 exhibition did not refer to previous buildings nor it was an answer to any catastrophic event. Yet, it cautiously provided a solution, a way through, where architecture could play a crucial role as meeting place for different nationalities and countries, allowing them to mingle and discuss shared goals, such as sustainable aims, and spread a collective vision of the world as a whole, not fragmented in individual countries.

2.5.3 Awareness of the Implacability of Change

“Awareness of the implacability of change” is here presented as the third aspect in the analysis of the main themes addressed by Japanese participation in architecture exhibitions. It is linked to an aesthetic principle of relentless change deeply rooted in the culture of the country. As already discussed, it also ended up characterising the Metabolist architecture erected in Japan after WWII. In 2010, because of the 50th anniversary of this architectural movement¹³⁴, Japan presented the show “Tokyo Metabolizing” at the Venice Biennale. Themed as “People meet in Architecture”, the event was curated by Kazuyo Sejima. At this exhibition, architects Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Ryūe Nishizawa investigated the Metabolist movement in the urban context of Tokyo, considering its conformation as dependent on the character of its single buildings. If these structures “were constantly going through a state of alteration and transformation”¹³⁵, the resulting image of the city was a “living organism going through an almost bacterial effect of transformation”¹³⁶. This concept was primarily conveyed to the visitor through a video at accelerated tape which showed the constant change Tokyo was and is still undergoing today. According to Japanese aesthetics, it also corresponds to the citizen’s life cycle. However, the project recognized in the transformation principle the appearance of a new urban landscape¹³⁷ “being born out

¹³⁴ E. Kim, *Japanese Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2010*, in “designboom”, 14 September 2010, designboom.com; <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/japanese-pavilion-at-venice-biennale-2010/> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹³⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

¹³⁷ E-Flux, *The Japan Foundation Presents the Japan Pavilion at the 12th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, 18 August 2010, e-flux.com; <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/36561/the-japan-foundation-presents-the-japan-pavilion-at-the-12th-international-architecture-exhibition-la-biennale-di-venezia/> [last access on January 25_2022].

of a ubiquitous yet weak form of power”¹³⁸ which determines its democracy. According to architects Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Ryūe Nishizawa, it is precisely this type of architecture that should be built in the future as it can “support our lives as a symbiosis between environment and city, and as a community”¹³⁹.

2.5.4 “Co-ownership of action: trajectories of elements” at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale



Figure 2.24 “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements”, Japanese exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021: a project by architect Kozo Kadowaki.

Considering the concepts that have been analysed as recurrent in Japan’s participation in architecture exhibitions in the era of globalization, some conclusions on the project presented by architect Kozo Kadowaki at the 2021 Venice Biennale can be drawn (*Figure 2.24*). Starting from the title of the Japanese exhibition, “Co-ownership of action: trajectories of elements”, the recurrence of the three aspects can be deduced (relevance of the single component, cooperation, and coexistence, awareness of the implacability of change). Analysing the first term of the exhibition’s name, “Co-ownership”, an affinity with the concepts of cooperation and coexistence

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

because of the prefix “*co-*” can be taken into consideration. However, according to the Oxford dictionary, the word this time refers to “the state of right of owning something”¹⁴⁰. In this case, it means the property of the “action” which, like the existence or the operation, is considered “jointly with another or others”¹⁴¹ and not belonging to an individual.

Instead, the term “trajectories”, defined as an “object moving under the action of given forces”¹⁴², implies a dynamism and a denied immobility of the thing to which the term refers. In addition, the trajectory, also considered as the “projectile flying”¹⁴³, determines a movement aimed at leaving a trace of its change of direction and displacement. For this reason, it shows certain proximity to the concept of transformation, called “awareness of implacability of change”. Finally, “elements”, representing the object which moves, also intended as “the essential or characteristic part of something”¹⁴⁴, echoes in the project the importance and the relevance that, according to Japanese tradition, was attributed to the single constituent of the matter. Overall, it can be concluded that Japan’s participation in the last Venice Architecture Biennale also proposed some of the traditional motifs that are conceived as rooted in the country’s culture. However, without neglecting the context, which is always determined by historical, political, and economic factors, these concepts deserve to be deepened with respect to what happened in recent years not only in Tokyo but also in the world. If this chapter has provided an overview of the Japanese cultural context in which the exhibition by Kozo Kadowaki was held, the following paragraphs deepen the social and political background that has determined it and try to outline the possible effective meanings it conveyed in the history of contemporary architecture events.

¹⁴⁰ Oxford Lexico, s.v., “*Co-Ownership*”, lexico.com; <https://www.lexico.com/definition/co-ownership> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹⁴¹ Ibidem.

¹⁴² Oxford Lexico, s.v., “*Trajectory*”, lexico.com; <https://www.lexico.com/definition/trajectory> [last access on January 25_2022].

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴ Oxford Lexico, s.v., “*Element*”, lexico.com; <https://www.lexico.com/definition/element> [last access on January 25_2022].

Chapter 3: “How Will We Live Together?”: The Japanese Answer

3.1 “How Will We Live Together?”: The Venice Architecture Biennale of 2021

This paragraph provides an in-depth analysis of the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, themed “How Will We Live Together?”. The event, scheduled for May 2020, was later postponed to the following year due to the coronavirus pandemic. This context strongly impacted the setting up of the exhibition and the logistics of the participating countries’ projects. In an interview realized by Emilio Marin, curator of Chile’s pavilion, it was affirmed that “the delivery of materials, the timing, the availability of materials, the possibility of traveling”¹ were undermined by the “constant threat of the cancellation of the event”². Nevertheless, these difficulties were partly overcome, and the opening of the show was possible in May 2021. However, what was the result of this pandemic edition? And how does it relate to the previous history of architecture events? In this respect, the following section tries to deepen the meanings of the 2021 Venice Biennale and gives a possible answer to these question marks.

3.1.1 What Is Architecture Fighting Against?

As argued by scholars Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller, unlike museums with their permanent collections, events such as “temporary biennials mirror the flexible, dynamic and unstable conditions of the globalized world”³. This aspect is also fully confirmed by the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. In his statement on the exhibition, Roberto Cicutto, president of La Biennale di Venezia, affirmed the inevitable awareness and need of curators and workers to meet the demands and

¹ E. Marin, *Interview*, C. Bondesan, Venice-Chile: 17 June_2021.

² *Ibidem*.

³ B. Wyss, J. Scheller, *Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle*, cit., p. 52.

questions of the contemporary world through their activity on display⁴. Consequently, during the event, they “imagined solutions to the difficulties coming from global issues”⁵ in the attempt to respond to the exhibition’s theme “How Will We Live Together?”. The question is as old as present⁶ and seems to require crosstalk between the different participating countries. This led not only to a dialogue but also to an exchange of ideas and concepts. In this context, one might ask what were the effective global problems that the biennial was trying to tackle with its architectural proposals. As stated by Lebanese and American curator Hashim Sarkis, “the intensifying climate crisis, massive population displacements, political instabilities around the world, and growing racial, social, and economic inequalities”⁷ were key factors that led to the phrasing of the question/theme of the 17th international architecture exhibition in Venice.

There is growing evidence that global issues are rapidly emerging leading to popular demonstrations and movements that require more and more attention, awareness, and action by governments. It is possible to think of global warming which has led to a drastic increase in natural catastrophes⁸ and huge economic losses in the affected states over the years. According to the report by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), 396 environmental disasters have been recorded in 2019 against an annual average of 343 events that had occurred in the previous decade (2009-2018)⁹. These data underwent a further increase in 2020 when the Weather Climate & Catastrophe Insight has noted 416 natural disaster events¹⁰ resulting in an economic loss of USD 268 billion (10% above 21st century average)¹¹. Due to these growing data, the lack of action on the climate crisis has pushed young people and adults to protest in front of parliaments to increase awareness of these

⁴ R. Cicutto., *A Need for Architecture*, cit. .

⁵ H. Sarkis, *Staging the World. Interview with Hashim Sarkis*, in “VeNews”, no. 251-252, May-June 2021, pp. 12-13, here p. 13.

⁶ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ USGS Science for a Changing World, *How Can Climate Change Affect Natural Disasters?*, usgs.gov; https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/how-can-climate-change-affect-natural-disasters-1?qt-news_science_products=0#qt-news_science_products [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁹ Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), *Natural Disasters 2019*, Brussels: CRED, 2020, p. 5.

¹⁰ AON, *Weather Climate & Catastrophe Insight. 2020 Annual Report*, Chicago: AON, 2021, pp. 1-80, here p. 5.

¹¹ Ivi, p.1.

issues. In this connection, it is worthy of mention the constitution of the Friday for Future movement, which since 2018 has gained great popular consensus (*Figure 3.1*) and has occupied the streets in many cities of the world asking governments for a reduction in the emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂, one of the major causes of global warming)¹².



Figure 3.1 27 September 2019: young people joining Friday for Future movement in Rome.

In this context of discontent, another problem the world is now trying to face is the exponential growth of population displacements. This is mainly due to “persecution, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order”¹³, to which also political instability can be added. In this regard, 86.5 million people, mainly from the Syrian Arab Republic, South Sudan, and Afghanistan¹⁴, left their country at the end of 2019¹⁵ (a number that has more than doubled compared to 36.4 million refugees that had been recorded in 2009¹⁶).

As a consequence, but also as a trigger of this situation there are inequalities both on a social, economic and racial level. They are increasingly causing a huge global

¹² J. Watts, *Greta Thunberg, Schoolgirl Climate Change Warrior: ‘Some People Can Let Things Go. I Can’t’*, in “The Guardian”, May 11 2019, [theguardian.com; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/greta-thunberg-schoolgirl-climate-change-warrior-some-people-can-let-things-go-i-cant](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/11/greta-thunberg-schoolgirl-climate-change-warrior-some-people-can-let-things-go-i-cant) [last access on January 2 2022].

¹³ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2020*, [unhcr.org; https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/](https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/) [last access on January 2 2022].

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 5.

¹⁵ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), *Global Report 2019*, Geneva: UNHCR, 2020, p.5.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 9.

uproar. In particular, this aspect became even more evident in 2020 when George Floyd, “a 46-year-old Black man”¹⁷ was killed by Minneapolis police. This episode of racism has not only “sparked the largest racial justice protests in the United States since the Civil Rights Movement”¹⁸ but has also determined warm support for the Black Lives Matter movement in the world. Large groups of demonstrators have marched “for freedom, liberation, and justice”¹⁹ trying to fight racial inequalities. The network between these people has become even stronger through social platforms like Facebook and Instagram. As claimed by journalists Emily Stewart and Shirin Ghaffary, these media are getting more and more political digital places of discussion and organization of the movement²⁰. This aspect has not only characterized anti-racism activism, but also any protest against discrimination. Scrolling through social media, the black boxes (in support of the Black Lives Matter movement) were joined by those of rainbows representing the defense of rights of the L.G.B.T.Q. community²¹. This is another hotly issue that, particularly in Italy, has created unending debate²² on the draft law against homophobia. Known as the *ddl Zan*, the bill proposed by Alessandro Zan, a member of the Italian parliament, has been the subject of heated discussions on its approval in the senate. Its recognition has always been postponed until it has been defeated at the end of October 2021²³. This decision has generated great popular discontent and protests that once again have flooded social platforms to spread ideas

¹⁷ N. Bogel-Burroughs, *How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody*, in “The New York Times”, 31 May 2020, nytimes.com; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html> [last access on January 2 2022].

¹⁸ J. Silverstein, *The Global Impact of George Floyd: How Black Lives Matter Protests Shaped Movements Around the World*, 4 June 2021, in “CBS NEWS”, cbsnews.com; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-floyd-black-lives-matter-impact/> [last access on January 2 2022].

¹⁹ Black Lives Matter, *Take Action*, blacklivesmatter.com; https://blacklivesmatter.com/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=pmd_Yb6PNM6Fuv.4BowOLSd8jeKOw6483M90HGF2w_RfD_c-1634207555-0-gqNtZGzNAiWjcnBszQlR [last access on January 2 2022].

²⁰ E. Stewart, S. Ghaffary, *It's Not Just Your Feed. Political Content Has Taken Over Instagram*, in “Vox”, 24 June 2020, vox.com; <https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/6/24/21300631/instagram-black-lives-matter-politics-blackout-tuesday> [last access on January 2 2022].

²¹ N. Gonzalez, *How Did Rainbow Flag Become a Symbol of LGBTQ Pride?*, in “Britannica”, britannica.com; <https://www.britannica.com/story/how-did-the-rainbow-flag-become-a-symbol-of-lgbt-pride> [last access on January 2 2022].

²² A. Carlo, *How a Bill to Fight Homophobia Has Polarised Italy and Sparked a Culture War*, in “euronews”, 9 August 2021, euronews.com; <https://www.euronews.com/2021/08/09/how-a-bill-to-fight-homophobia-has-polarised-italy-and-sparked-a-culture-war> [last access on January 2 2022].

²³ N. Cottone, *Ddl Zan Contro Omofobia Affossato al Senato con 154 Voti Contro 131. Si alla Tagliola, Stop all'Esame*, in “Il Sole 24 Ore”, 25 October 2021, ilsole24ore.com; https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/ddl-zan-27-ottobre-prova-voto-aula-AEoTuIs?refresh_ce=1 [last access on January 6 2022].

in support of the community. In this connection, many artists, actors, and singers have expressed their dissent through digital content and have found the support of people who are feeling not represented by the political system.²⁴ However, if on the one hand, this digital action is undoubtedly a potential tool to disseminate online and real-time information, on the other, it can create a great deal of confusion and spread of fake news that in the absence of a reliable voice can jeopardize and put a strain on living together. As a matter of fact, such protests sometimes lead to forms of violence in the community²⁵.

In addition, these strikes have intensified following the WHO (World Health Organization)'s recognition of the coronavirus outbreak in China as a public health emergency of international concern in 2020²⁶. In this context, as if looking for a scapegoat, some politicians started to blame the Asian country for the huge economic, social, and health crisis generated in the world²⁷. According to a CNN study, this aspect has led to an increase in discrimination against Asian people which has occurred in the form of harassment and assault on not only Chinese but also Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino²⁸. In this regard, Asian people have demonstrated and taken to the street asking governments for a valid action against xenophobia and scaremongering (*Figure 3.2*). According to Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, it is precisely against all forms of racism that the immunity of our societies²⁹ must be strengthened. In this regard, it is not surprising that Brett Milano, contributing editor at "Harvard Law Today", reported that also Aaron Bernstein

²⁴ B. Visentin, *Mahmood a Sostegno della Legge Zan: Dopo Fedez ed Elodie le Parole del Cantante su Instagram*, in "Corriere della Sera", 1 April 2021, https://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/21_aprile_01/anche-mahmood-sostegno-legge-zan-fedez-ed-elodie-parole-cantante-instagram-0cfcdf2-92eb-11eb-ae39-fda5c018b220.shtml [last access on January 2 2022].

²⁵ E. Stewart, S. Ghaffary, *It's Not Just Your Feed. Political Content Has Taken Over Instagram*, cit. .

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide. National Action Plans Needed to Counter Intolerance*, 12 May 2020, [hrw.org; https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide) [last access on January 2 2022].

²⁷ M. Toh, M. Cohen, L. Cook, *Attacked at Work, Rejected for Jobs and Harassed by Colleagues*, in "CNN Business", 7 June 2021, [edition.cnn.com; https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/business/asians-workplace-discrimination-covid/](https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/business/asians-workplace-discrimination-covid/) [last access on January 2 2022].

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ A. Guterres, *We Must Act Now to Strengthen the Immunity of Our Societies Against the Virus of Hate*, in "United Nations", [un.org; https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/we-must-act-now-strengthen-immunity-our-societies-against-virus-hate](https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/we-must-act-now-strengthen-immunity-our-societies-against-virus-hate) [last access on January 2 2022].

(interim director of the Centre for Climate, Health and the Global Environment at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health) has considered covid not so much as a trigger for global problems but as a ‘stress test’ that has finally highlighted what already before and now more than ever “we need to fix in the world”³⁰. In this regard, he also added:

We have so many festering problems that have been too hard for many to see, until now. Our ‘built’ environment was built for cars, not people. Our food system was built for industry, not for health. And arguably our government, our policies were built to benefit white people before others. We poke along as best we can until a stress test, like COVID or climate change, rips these seams open³¹.



Figure 3.2 Asian people protesting in front of governments for anti-racism measures.

Returning to the Venetian exhibition, this is a speech that seems to be in full agreement with what was claimed by curator Hashim Sarkis when he considered the pandemic as the resulting factor³² of the global problems that his Biennale is committed to face. In addition, another point can be commented. If the environment, the food system, and the policies have been ‘built’ according to purposes that have proved to be inadequate to welcome today’s people, it is precisely in the redesign,

³⁰ B. Milano, *With Covid Spread, ‘Racism-Not Race-is the Risk Factor’*, in “The Harvard Gazette”, 22 April 2021, newsharvard.edu; <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/04/with-covid-spread-racism-not-race-is-the-risk-factor/> [last access on January 2 2022].

³¹ Ibidem.

³² H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

restructuring, and re-discussing of these systems that it is possible to think of a new solution for living together. In view of these statements, there is a global need for new actions to address the present condition. According to Hashim Sarkis, in the context of the 2021 Venice Biennale, they can be provided by the work of architects. That is why the event had among its primary purposes “that of increasing the desire for Architecture”³³ and, in this connection, Roberto Cicutto also added that “we have never before had such a need”³⁴.

3.1.2 Why Can Architecture Be the Answer?: Between Space Contracts and Liquid Modernity

Before drawing conclusions, it is necessary to make a few comments and contextualize the theme of the 2021 Venice Biennale in the Western world that phrased it. Starting from the classics such as Aristotle and the politicians in the period of the American and French revolution, Hashim Sarkis recognized the historical importance of finding a way to live together³⁵. This *modus operandi* might suggest a certain presumption of the Western world to only consider his cultural point of view on such an issue. Thinkers such as Boris Groys³⁶ have long investigated to what extent art was used in the past as a powerful instrument to express Western values as universal ones asserting the consequent superiority of the West over any other culture. However, in my opinion, Sarkis’ choice in the 21st century should be read as linked to the Western tradition because it was simply in this context that the Venice Biennale took place. Therefore, also the following analysis must be read in this way. It investigates the theme only from the Western point of view because it was in this backdrop that the event was held. Nevertheless, because of the ever-increasing vast commitment of international exhibitions in addressing global issues, it could be interesting that future editions could develop a theme embracing the “multiplicity of cultural programs”³⁷ now characterizing the era of globalization.

³³ R. Cicutto, *A Need for Architecture*, cit. .

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

³⁶ B. Groys, *Europe and Its Others*, cit., p. 173.

³⁷ S.-N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, cit., p. 2.

Back to the analysis, what is now missing is the reason why people do need architecture. Therefore, the main focus here is to understand why, in the context of the Venice Biennale, architecture and the re-discussion of the systems within which the world has used to live can be interpreted as the tools by which it is possible to provide an answer to the question “how will we live together?”. In this regard, what emerges from the problems, addressed above, is a popular discontent due to an action either considered as inadequate or completely lacking by the policies adopted by the different world’s countries. This is precisely the reason why the curator of the 17th International Exhibition in Venice claimed the need to ask architects this question, arguing the lack of satisfaction in the answers given by politics³⁸. This consideration sanctions an important position by Hashim Sarkis and can be interpreted as an important reflection point that marks or is the very signal of a profound change in the conception of politics, community, society in today’s world. First of all, the Lebanese curator claimed that the issue “is at once ancient and urgent”³⁹. In particular, he mentioned Babylonians and Aristotle⁴⁰ as initiators of a debate which would urgently have ended up characterizing contemporaneity as well. However, if research is carried out on the answers that have been presented by theorists in the past, the choice on whom should deal with the question seems to have always been up to politics.

In ancient Greece, with philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC), living together was conceived according to the political system which used to organize the *polis* (the city)⁴¹. This aspect was mainly due to the human nature, which the Greek philosopher defined as that of a *zoon politikon* (political animal) that means that if a man “is by nature and not merely by fortune city-less is either low in the scale of humanity or above it”⁴². With these words, he made a distinction between the animal and divine condition and the human one. What characterizes man’s nature is his faculty of *logos* (speech). This is not only to make sounds, but also to “indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong”⁴³. It is precisely in this human

³⁸ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Aristotle, *Politics*, in “Perseus Digital Library”, 1.1253a section, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0058%3Abook%3D1%3Asection%3D1253a> [last access on January 2_2022].

⁴³ Ibidem.

property that he can relate to others and establish a dialogue that is best represented by the city-state, also conceived as “prior in nature to the household and each of us individually”⁴⁴. Therefore, according to Aristotle, the answer to living together lay in the Greek *polis*, where human nature can find its greatest fulfillment. However, the latter is not considered a determinant for the city but a necessary part of that whole⁴⁵. The definition given by the Greek dictionary by Franco Montanari is also proof of this. Here, *politikos* defines a subject who is “suitable to be a citizen and made to live in a civil community”⁴⁶. This definition also seems to allude to what was previously argued. The political animal is by nature made for living in a city-state and, for this reason, the *polis* precedes the individual. Returning to the analysis of this paragraph, what emerges is the centrality that politics has in formulating a response to living together. This view has been maintained also in the conception of later theorists in the years to come. As claimed by Hashim Sarkis, the reason lies in the fact that “politics and policies lay out the terms and processes for collective living”⁴⁷. That is why *contractualist* theories by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) also shared this point of view. However, contrary to what Aristotle argued, according to them, a civilized society was the direct consequence of human nature’s state⁴⁸. It was for this reason that they theorized the usual conclusion of a social contract in history between governors and governed people. They considered it completely necessary to appease a state of nature that would otherwise be the same as the animal one⁴⁹.

According to the British philosopher Hobbes, such a need derives from the recognition of pre-civilized human life as a war condition in which “every man is enemy to every man”⁵⁰. Nature defined in men a strong instinct of individual self-preservation creating men equal in rationality and appearance⁵¹. The result is a struggle for survival that, using the words (often associated with the British philosopher) of the

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ F. Montanari, *GI-Vocabolario della Lingua Greca*, Torino: Loescher, 1995, p. 1619.

⁴⁷ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

⁴⁸ B. Duignan, *The Social Contract and Philosophy*, in “Britannica”, britannica.com; <https://www.britannica.com/story/the-social-contract-and-philosophy> [last access on January 2_2022].

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ T. Hobbes, *Hobbes’ Leviathan* (1651), reprinted by Oxford University, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909, p. 96.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 94.

Roman playwright Tito Maccio Plauto, makes the man wolf to the other man (“lupus est homo homini, non homo”)⁵². In this human nature, the individual appears as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”⁵³ and his faculty of *logos*, that was so much acclaimed by Aristotle, affirms neither losers nor winners since equality exists among all men⁵⁴. As claimed by Hobbes, what happens in history to avoid self-destruction is the absolute surrender of the rights of each man to the power of the ‘King of the Proud’, the so-called Leviathan⁵⁵. This is the figure he used to represent the sovereignty of the state, which invested with this power from God, can impose the law that would otherwise not exist without his strength to which individuals completely submit⁵⁶. However, what it is important to underline is the fact that the Leviathan’s power does not impose itself upon the subjects but is required by people as a way to prevent their self-destruction⁵⁷. Therefore, the question concerning living together is addressed to the State because it is considered the only system that can allow coexistence. Even the theories of Locke and Rousseau seem to convey the same meaning. The difference between these two and Hobbes lies in the limitations of the powers conferred on the State⁵⁸. Locke, for example, recognizes the possession by individuals of liberties such as that of life, liberty, and property⁵⁹. Since these liberties are conceived real pre-social rights (belonging to the human state of nature), it is up to the state to protect them, and it can also be subverted if it does not complete this task⁶⁰. This reflection was further expanded and deepened by Rousseau. He even affirmed the full-fledged representation of the general will in the authority of the State⁶¹.

As already stated, albeit with the appropriate differences, what these three theorists have in common is the definition of a social contract theory, intended as the idea that “persons’ moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or

⁵² S. Grillo, *Thomas Hobbes, il Naturale Egoismo Umano: Homo Homini Lupus*, in “Metropolitan Magazine”, 5 April 2020, metropolitanmagazine.it; <https://metropolitanmagazine.it/thomas-hobbes/> [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁵³ T. Hobbes, *Hobbes’ Leviathan* (1651), cit., p. 97.

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 94.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 246.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 121.

⁵⁸ B. Duignan, *The Social Contract and Philosophy*, cit. .

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

agreement among them to form the society in which they live”⁶². According to Hashim Sarkis, this kind of agreement “determines the freedoms lost and gained in order for people to enter society”⁶³ manifesting the possible mutual trust that can exist between politics and individuals. However, the Lebanese curator seemed to wonder what happens if this mutual trust is broken and can no longer be considered appropriate in allowing a way for living together⁶⁴. As already mentioned above, in this regard, he considered the decisions taken by politicians for common living together as no longer stimulating⁶⁵ because generating a great popular discontent. Consequently, in the context of the Venice Biennale, he defined a new kind of agreement that is not social, but spatial⁶⁶. According to his opinion, referring and in contrast with *contractualist* theories, this agreement “determines the methods by which people negotiate these freedoms through their spatial interactions”⁶⁷. In his point of view, it is in fact the space that defines the relationships between people and can also shape the social contract⁶⁸. In support of this thesis, he referred to Aristotle, affirming that even the Greek philosopher considered the space, in the form of *polis*, as the starting point to conceive the ideal democracy⁶⁹. If it is therefore the space and not so much the politics or the state to which one appeals to relate to others, the consequence is to entrust the demand for living together with the custodians of this new contract: the architects. Since politicians do not give the right answers to tackle problems, such as global warming, social and racial inequalities, and population displacements, the Venice Biennale provided architects with the possibility of redesigning the systems people live within. The Venetian institution also had faith in their potential to “suggest possible social organization”⁷⁰ and connect spaces allowing the constitution of a “common language that enables the public to debate and communicate its experiences and cultures”⁷¹. This consideration has a lot in common with what Kazuyo Sejima declared when she

⁶² Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *Social Contract Theory*, iep.utm.edu; <https://iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/> [last access on January 2_2022].

⁶³ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

considered architecture as a meeting place between different multiplicities (Venice Architecture Biennale 2012)⁷².

Yet, what meaning can such a statement have today? What can it represent to ask this question to architects and not to politicians? What can this gesture express today? Before trying to answer these questions, it is considered relevant to analyze the character of the modernity that people are experiencing following globalization. In this regard, the text *Liquid Modernity* by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is certainly illuminating. In his opinion, contemporaneity is characterized by a *liquefaction* of the solid systems that used to characterize past eras⁷³. The rights, the obligations, and “any dense and tight network of social bonds”⁷⁴ represent a kind of obstacle for global powers. That is why they are constantly being dismantled⁷⁵ to give way to “processes of deregulation, liberalization and ‘flexibilization’”⁷⁶. As a result, “the disintegration of the social network, the falling apart of effective agencies of collective action”⁷⁷ occur, but also generate a condition of great confusion. When patterns of dependence and interaction have dissolved, also the “individual choices in collective projects and actions”⁷⁸ have interlocked. People, without “pre-allocated reference groups”⁷⁹ to rely on any longer, have consequently begun to oppose to this uncertainty the need to affirm their own space. According to the review of *Liquid Modernity* by Nicholas Gane, they have started taking “responsibility for their own self-determination”⁸⁰ and pursuing their “chosen life politics without external intervention”⁸¹. This condition causes a lot of anxiety among individuals⁸². That is why they feel obliged to move like nomads and hunters, only interested in pursuing “another ‘kill’, big enough to fill their game-bags to capacity”⁸³. Specifically, Bauman

⁷² K. Sejima, *Interview*, cit., p. 167.

⁷³ Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 14.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 7.

⁸⁰ N. Gane, *Zygmunt Bauman: Liquid Modernity and Beyond*, in “Acta Sociologica”, vol. 44, no. 3, 2001, pp. 267-275, here p. p. 270.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 269.

⁸² Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, cit., p. 14.

⁸³ Z. Bauman, M. Haugaard, *Liquid Modernity and Power: A dialogue with Zygmunt Bauman*, in “Journal of Political Power”, vol. 1, no. 2, 2008, pp. 111-130, here p. 113.

explained that this is exactly the “unanticipated 'side effect’”⁸⁴ of the technique of new global powers.

These statements, although dated (2000), are always current. The continuous uprisings and constitutions of political movements generated by discontent due to government decisions can be analyzed as proof of the absence of solid reference points that can define limits to individual choices. It is precisely in the name of this freedom conferred on individuals that barriers previously set by solid systems dissolve. Consequently, uncertainty and confusion are generated and know no end and solution except the constitution of personal spaces of action. In the face of the “increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power”⁸⁵, they are considered a kind of relief and illusory stability. This has also occurred in the cultural field. Returning to the 2021 Venice Biennale, it is possible to claim that asking architects a question/theme, previously strictly pertinent to policies’ tasks, can be interpreted as another attempt to define a personal political statement against the liquid modernity that people are experiencing. In this interpretation, as if the event was a street demonstration, the international architecture exhibition in Venice tried to define its solutions to global issues against the ones missing or adopted by politics. It is for this reason that the event is here considered another symptom of the present modernity, already prophesized by Bauman in 2000, but that always proves to be current.

3.1.3 How Can Architecture Be the Answer?

In this paragraph, it is considered relevant to investigate the effective ways in which architecture tried to handle the theme. For this purpose, the analysis of some architectural projects on display in the exhibition is here provided. The aim is to discuss to what extent architects had seriously felt the need to deal with global issues proposing different ideas. These exhibitions also confirm Hashim Sarkis’ awareness of being able to have not a single response but multiple answers to his question⁸⁶. In this regard, the first issue that Sarkis asked architects to face was the intensification of

⁸⁴ Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, cit., p. 14.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

the climate crisis⁸⁷. With this question, in the projects on display, two attitudes can be identified: limitation and resilience. As regards the first of these two, the “Wetland” exhibition of the United Arab Emirates can be mentioned as an example (*Figure 3.3*).



Figure 3.3 “Wetland”, United Arab Emirates’ exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Curated by architects Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, the pavilion was awarded the Golden Lion Award for best National Participation⁸⁸. According to the jury’s president, Kazuyo Sejima, the motivation for this honor laid in the presentation of a bold experiment that “opens us to new construction possibilities between craft and high-technology”⁸⁹. The UAE’s exhibition proposed the use of “an innovative, environmentally friendly cement made of recycled industrial waste brine”⁹⁰ to reduce the excessive emission of CO₂ caused by the construction industry. In this respect, the attempt to provide an answer to the question of Hashim Sarkis can be considered efficient. The United Arab Emirates succeeded in providing an alternative way that can limit the impact that the industry can have on climate change.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ National Pavilion UAE, 2021 *Wetland*, [nationalpavilionuae.org; https://nationalpavilionuae.org/architecture/2020-2/](https://nationalpavilionuae.org/architecture/2020-2/) [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁸⁹ La Biennale di Venezia, *Awards of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition*, [labiennale.org; https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/awards-17th-international-architecture-exhibition](https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/awards-17th-international-architecture-exhibition) [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁹⁰ National Pavilion UAE, 2021 *Wetland*, cit. .

If the exhibition by Al Awar and Teramoto can be intended as a limitation's form of the climatic situation, the ways by which the Italian pavilion dealt with this global problem might fall into the category of resilience. Entitled "Comunità Resilienti" and curated by Alessandro Melis, the show provided a series of projects and reflections aimed at tackling climate change⁹¹ (Figure 3.4). The goal was to promote an attitude of resistance and reaction to the huge natural disasters deriving from it⁹². The concept of resilience also characterized the development of "Resilience of Venice", a project by Laura Fregolent and Paola Malanotte-Rizzoli. The two researchers investigated on the city's ability to react to sea level rise and its consequent economic impact. In addition, this investigation emphasized both the strength and fragility that distinguish the Venetian lagoon⁹³.



Figure 3.4 "Comunità Resilienti", Italy's exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Differently, the Australian pavilion can be considered a valid example of a project presented to address the issue of growing population displacement. The curators Tristan Wong and Jefa Greenaway showed the "architecture's capacity to strengthen

⁹¹ La Biennale di Venezia, *Italia Comunità Resilienti*, [labiennale.org; https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/italy](https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/italy) [last access on January 2_2022].

⁹² Ministero della Cultura (MiC), *Comunità Resilienti. Padiglione Italia 2021*, [comunitaresilienti.com, https://www.comunitaresilienti.com/](https://www.comunitaresilienti.com/) [last access on January 2_2022].

⁹³ La Biennale di Venezia, *Laura Fregolent; Paola Melanotte-Rizzoli. Resilience of Venice*, [labiennale.org; https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/co-habitats/laura-fregolent-paola-malanotte-rizzoli](https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/co-habitats/laura-fregolent-paola-malanotte-rizzoli) [last access on January 2_2022].

cultural connections and understanding between non-indigenous and first nations peoples”⁹⁴. According to journalist Dima Stouhi, they promoted “building connections, recognition and sharing with neighbors”⁹⁵ by investigating on the impact of European occupation and colonization in the nations of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. In the context of the Venice Biennale, this desired coexistence between individuals was not a theme only aimed at healing relationships between people, but also between them and animals. For example, the Thai pavilion’s curators have exhibited a co-living project that could benefit the ethnic community of Kuy and the elephants in the Tha Tum District⁹⁶.



Figure 3.5 “Elephant”, Thailand’s exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. In picture, a model of house aimed at welcoming Kuy’s community and elephants.

Following the deforestation of the place, they have been forced to migrate homeless to the large tourist cities of Thailand⁹⁷. For this reason, the project presented at the Venice Biennale illustrated a home model aimed at welcoming the people back to their district

⁹⁴ Australian Institute of Architects, *Inbetween 2021*, inbetween2021.com.au; <https://inbetween2021.com.au/> [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁹⁵ D. Stouhi, *Australian Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale Explores Indigenous Design and Co-authorship*, in “ArchDaily”, 1 June 2021, [archdaily.com](https://www.archdaily.com/962565/australian-pavilion-at-the-2021-venice-biennale-explores-indigenous-design-and-co-authorship); <https://www.archdaily.com/962565/australian-pavilion-at-the-2021-venice-biennale-explores-indigenous-design-and-co-authorship> [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁹⁶ Association of Siamese Architects under Royal Patronage, *Thai Pavilion*, [asa.or.th](https://asa.or.th/thai-pavilion/); <https://asa.or.th/thai-pavilion/> [last access on January 2, 2022].

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

with elephants⁹⁸ (Figure 3.5). Another exhibition that challenged the need for coexistence between individuals and animals is the one presented by the Israel pavilion, entitled “Land. Milk. Honey.” (Figure 3.6). The curators investigated the impact of 20th century “urbanization, infrastructural projects, mechanized agriculture, intensive afforestation and the manipulation of animal bodies into food-producing machines”⁹⁹ on the Israeli environment. In addition, in line with Sarkis’ desire to establish a new space contract, the Israeli curators emphasized the need to establish an agreement based on the co-living between humans, animals, and the environment¹⁰⁰.



Figure 3.6 “Land.Milk.Honey. Animal Stories in Imagined Landscapes”, Israel’s exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

If the previously described pavilion's curators addressed the need to establish a conscious coexistence either between individuals or between them and the animal and plant world, the analysis of the two following exhibitions shows to what extent Sarkis agreed on the idea that modernity must take an intelligent approach towards digitization. It has already been claimed that, due to their great power to establish communication and connection between different parties, the use of digital devices and social networks is everyday more relevant. However, the other side of this great

⁹⁸ Ibidem.

⁹⁹ La Biennale di Venezia, *Israel. Land. Milk. Honey. Animal Stories in Imagined Landscapes*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/israel> [last access on January 2, 2022].

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

opportunity lies in an inadequate and incorrect use that can damage the living together to which it so aspires. In the context of the Venice Biennale, the countries of Latvia and Russia focused on this point. The Latvian curators stressed “the need to help people learn to live together with today’s intelligent machines”¹⁰¹, while the Russian project, “Open!”, focused on the civic responsibility and social relevance that cultural institutions have today in both the physical and digital environment¹⁰² (Figure 3.7). Therefore, it can be concluded that both shows dealt with an urgent theme which can strongly undermine living together generating confusion if the right attention is not paid to it. In addition, in this investigation on the 2021 Venice Biennale, it is important to underline that the Russian curators had considered education and the approach to new technologies as a task belonging to a culture. This statement seems to be completely in line with Sarkis’ concept: even, in this case, civic responsibility falls on cultural institutions rather than politics.



Figure 3.7 “Open!”, Russia’s exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Finally, according to Lebanese curator, the “growing racial, social, and economic inequalities”¹⁰³ represented another thorny problem faced by the 2021 Venice

¹⁰¹ La Biennale di Venezia, *Latvia. It’s Not for You! It’s for the Building*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/latvia> [last access on January 2_2022].

¹⁰² PavilionRus, *Open*, pavilionrus.com; <https://www.pavilionrus.com/en> [last access on January 2_2022].

¹⁰³ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

Biennale. As already claimed, population displacements were an issue that the international show and the Australian exhibition aimed at tackling. Similarly, the Mexican curators Natalia de la Rosa, Isadora Hastings, Mauricio Rocha, and Elena Tudela investigated on the consequent rise of “inequalities, environmental deterioration, risk of disasters and various types of violence”¹⁰⁴ (economic, social, racial and gender) that have sadly characterized Mexico. Due to these disparities, they have considered architecture as a tool to build places of “belonging, reconciliation, narration, exchange, recovery, assimilation, forgiveness and resistance derived from displacement”¹⁰⁵. This concept doesn’t differ much from the one presented at the pavilion of applied arts (*Figure 3.8*).



Figure 3.8 “Three British Mosques”, pavilion of applied arts at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Born by the collaboration between La Biennale di Venezia and London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, the project focused on an example of multiculturalism and successful integration: the Islamic community in Britain. Through the Shaded Saleem’s investigation on three British mosques, the show featured “stories of

¹⁰⁴ La Biennale di Venezia, *Mexico. Displacements/Desplazamientos*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/mexico> [last access on January 2_2022].

¹⁰⁵ Equipo ArchDaily Mexico, *Mexican Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale Explores the Value of Mexican Contemporary Architecture*, translated by N. Valencia, in “ArchDaily”, 20 May_2021, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/961998/mexican-pavilion-at-the-2021-venice-biennale-explores-the-value-of-mexican-contemporary-architecture> [last access on January 2_2022].

immigration, identity and community aspiration”¹⁰⁶. This is another example that demonstrated the effective involvement of architects’ work on display at the 2021 Venice Biennale in social and political issues concerning the whole world. These exhibitions just analysed are evidently in support of this thesis and are representative of a completion of what was argued in the first chapter.

3.2 “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements”: The Japanese Answer to the 2021 Venice Biennale

In the context of the 2021 Venice Biennale, another noteworthy exhibition is the national participation of Japan which is also the actual subject of this dissertation. The objective of this paragraph is to deepen the discourse on this show and make the reader aware of the great impact that future architecture exhibitions may also have on real life. For this purpose, this section made use of first-hand sources such as the exhibition’s catalogue, the official show’s website, social networks, and journal articles that had mentioned its relevance. In addition, as already stated, in May 2021, it was possible to interview the curator Kozo Kadowaki. This conversation proved to be helpful for the development of further reflection in support of this research project.

3.2.1 The Concept

3.2.1.1 From Tokyo...

This exhibition consists of an extremely ordinary Japanese wooden house. A country at the forefront of the world in population decline, Japan is awash in houses that have outlived their usefulness and sit there awaiting demolition¹⁰⁷.

The first sentence of this excerpt describes the subject of the exhibition curated by Kozo Kadowaki. It consisted of an ordinary Japanese wooden house. The religious significance and aesthetical relevance in the country of perishable materials such as wood in architecture have already been discussed in the second chapter. In addition,

¹⁰⁶ La Biennale di Venezia, *Special Project Pavilion of Applied Arts. La Biennale di Venezia with the Victoria and Albert Museum, London*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/pavilion-applied-arts> [last access on January 2, 2022].

¹⁰⁷ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, vba2020.jp; <https://www.vba2020.jp/overview/> [last access on January 7, 2022].

according to Yamato Satoshi, it must be stated that 90% of Japanese “temples, castles, upper-class residences, vernacular farmhouses and townhouses, and western-style buildings”¹⁰⁸ is made of wood. The reason for this is that this material is considered an elementary and direct “product of the rich forest environment”¹⁰⁹ of Japan. Therefore, it can be claimed that it is very common to come across wooden architecture in the country. That is why even the house object of the Venetian exhibition is defined as ordinary (*Figure 3.9*).



Figure 3.9 The object (exterior) of “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” exhibition at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale: an extremely ordinary Japanese wooden house in Tokyo Setagaya’s ward.

As regards the Japanese exhibition’s concept, a digression on the Grand Shrine of Ise also proves to be useful. As already stated, this is a religious architecture that makes use of wood to pursue its aimed religious process of renewal every twenty years. Specifically, it derives from the cryptomeria woods that surround it¹¹⁰. These forests are mainly composed of broad-leaved evergreen trees and are one of the most dominant species in the country¹¹¹. The choice to use this wood type rather than another one is not only due to its greater presence in the territory but also to the

¹⁰⁸ Y. Satoshi, *The Tradition of Wooden Architecture in Japan*, Nara: ACCU, 2006 p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ivi, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ R.-S. Ellwood, *Harvest and Renewal at the Grand Shrine of Ise*, in “Numen”, vol. 15, no. 3, November_1968, pp. 165-190, here p. 169.

¹¹¹ Forestry Agency Japan, *State of Japan’s Forests and Forest Management - 3rd country Report of Japan to the Montreal Process-*, Tokyo: Forestry Agency, July_2019, p. 32.

meaning it stands for. “Cryptomeria shows the ability to sprout new growth from old wood”¹¹² maintaining themselves green all year around. For these reasons, they might be considered symbols of rejuvenation and renewal. In addition, because of the unwillingness to pursue the construction of permanent buildings, they are all qualities that Japanese architecture aspires to have¹¹³ in the aesthetic attempt to embrace the constant change to which objects and people are subjected¹¹⁴. Returning to the “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” exhibition, this reflection on the wood deriving from the cryptomeria forests is not accidental.



Figure 3.10 Interior of Takamizawa House: people who lived there had marked their heights on the wall. It can be considered as a sign that the house embodies the stories of its tenants.

Looking at the database of elements that made up the house/object of the show, it is evident the recurrence of this wood type¹¹⁵. A lower percentage of pine and plywood was added to the latter¹¹⁶, but they all contributed to make this habitation a fully-fledged wooden architecture like the Grand Shrine of Ise. Although common to many

¹¹² G. Veronese, *The Sacred Giants of Yakushima*, in “Giulio Veronese”, [giulioveronese.com; http://giulioveronese.com/sacred-giants-yakushima/](http://giulioveronese.com/sacred-giants-yakushima/) [last access on January 2_2022].

¹¹³ C. Lancaster, *Metaphysical Beliefs and Architectural Principles*, cit., p. 291.

¹¹⁴ Ivi, p. 292.

¹¹⁵ VBA 2020, *Database of Elements*, in “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview”, cit. .

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

other buildings in Tokyo's Setagaya Ward, where the house was located¹¹⁷, the home chosen by the Japanese curator embodies a unique story linked to those who had lived there (*Figure 3.10*). That is why the team of architects who worked on this project decided to name it "Takamizawa house in honor of its original owner"¹¹⁸. In addition, the continuous restorations, and renovations to which it had been subjected over the years represent all factors that distinguish it from the other homes in Tokyo. Built in 1954, Takamizawa house had constantly changed its layout. From a "small wooden structure with a residence and two attached shops"¹¹⁹ that it was at its beginning, it underwent further transformations according to the innovations of the period (*Figure 3.11*). These restorations led it to appear as a new enlarged residence in 1982¹²⁰. That is why the curator argued that "the house contains the strata of successive periods in the history of postwar Japanese housing"¹²¹. This architecture not only keeps traces of its tenants but also the signs (materials) of the change that the Japanese construction industry has experienced¹²² over the years.

The drastic consequences that Japan faced after Second World War led the country to recognize the urgent need to rebuild the cities that had been destroyed. In this regard, how Metabolist architecture became a form of effective resilience combining Eastern tradition and Western technology has already been discussed. However, it is important to underline that the movement became more successful in the country until after its concretization at the World Design Conference in 1960¹²³. At this event, the manifesto "Metabolism 1960: Proposals for a New Urbanism" was presented as a valid response to the country's need for reconstruction¹²⁴. This means that Metabolist architectures were sporadically erected or were still discussed in their project form in previous years. That happened during the "Visionary Architecture" exhibition, held at MoMA in 1957 when the Metabolist design of "Marine City" by architect Kitutake Kiyonori was on

¹¹⁷ N. Aoyagi, *Designing an Industrial Continuum in Architectural Production: Takamizawa House as "Industrial Chimera"*, in *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, edited by K. Kadowaki, Tokyo: TOTO Publishing, 2020, pp. 16- 35, here p. 22.

¹¹⁸ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹¹⁹ N. Aoyagi, *Designing an Industrial Continuum in Architectural Production: Takamizawa House as "Industrial Chimera"*, cit., p. 22.

¹²⁰ Ivi, p. 28.

¹²¹ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹²² K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 10.

¹²³ CNN Style, *The Japanese Architects Who Treated Buildings like Living Organisms*, cit. .

¹²⁴ M. Schalk, *The Architecture of Metabolist. Inventing a Culture of Resilience*, cit., p. 280.

display¹²⁵. Therefore, when Takamizawa House was built in 1954, the habitation was very different from the massive interchangeable cell structures characterizing the 1960s. However, in 1957 it already proved the change that the Japanese construction industry started to show.

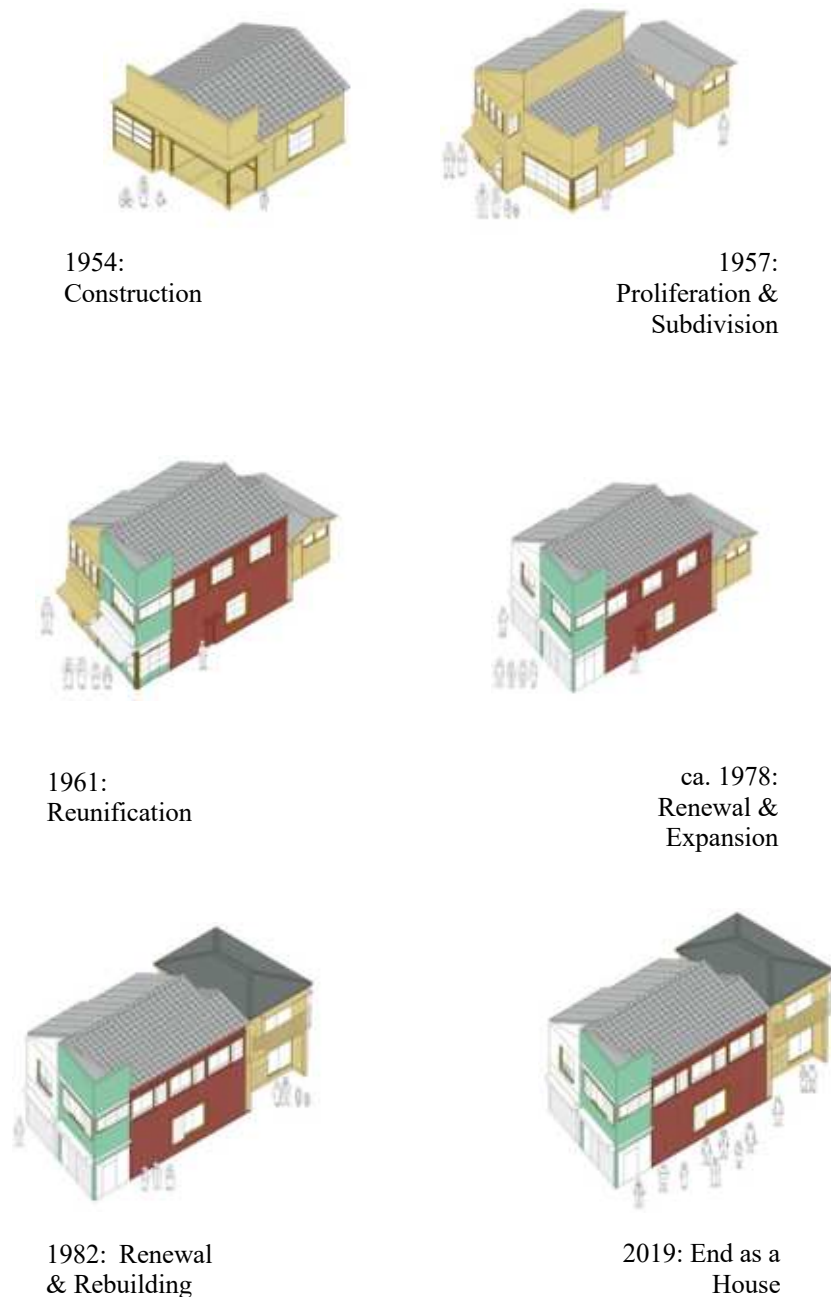


Figure 3.11 Takamizawa House: a unique story of renovations.

¹²⁵ MoMA, *Press Release for the Exhibition “Visionary Architecture”*, cit., p. 8.

At its origins, “the earliest elements were primarily hand-made”¹²⁶, deriving from the traditional manual craftwork. Since 1957, more modern materials or mass-produced goods, on the contrary, replaced them and were added to them¹²⁷. This occurred in conformity with the need for modernization that Japan experienced as early as the Meiji period. That made the country open to innovations, especially Western, to face the problem of the houses razed to the ground after WWII. However, this process was slow and not immediate, but Takamizawa house, combining traditional and modern (industrial) elements, can be considered as representative of this metamorphosis¹²⁸. For this reason, it can be interpreted as proof of Japan’s change and approach to the West whose peak was reached by the Metabolist movement. Not by chance, because of these qualities, constantly changed over time, it was compared to a living organism by architectural historian Norimasa Aoyagi¹²⁹. Even if the Japanese house doesn’t fall into this category, it must be said that this definition is very similar to the one describing Metabolist architectures of the 1960s¹³⁰.

At this point of the research, it is relevant to investigate the local context and the reason why only the materials of Takamizawa House were transported to Venice. At the beginning of this paragraph, the second and third sentences refer to a problem that Japan has had to deal with in recent years. It consists of a decrease in the population. This fact has led to the demolition of many homes that have remained vacant. Referring to the data, children born in Japan in 2018 were 25000 fewer than those born in 2017¹³¹. As regards the deaths, a population decline of 448000 has been estimated¹³². “As the number of households decreases”¹³³, a drastic drop in demand for homes resulted in the so-called phenomenon of empty ghost homes. Such habitations instead of increasing in value (like it usually happens in other countries)

¹²⁶ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ N. Aoyagi, *Designing an Industrial Continuum in Architectural Production: Takamizawa House as “Industrial Chimera”*, cit., p. 30.

¹²⁹ Ibidem.

¹³⁰ CNN Style, *The Japanese Architects Who Treated Buildings like Living Organisms*, cit. .

¹³¹ J. McCurry, *Japan Shrinking as Birthrate Falls to Lowest Level in History*, in “The Guardian”, 27 December 2018, theguardian.com; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/27/japan-shrinking-as-birthrate-falls-to-lowest-level-in-history> [last access on January 7 2022].

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ M. Shibata, *What Will Japan Do with All of Its Empty ‘Ghost’ Homes?*, in “BBC”, 31 October 2019, bbc.com; <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20191023-what-will-japan-do-with-all-of-its-empty-ghost-homes> [last access on January 7 2022].

undergo a depreciation over time¹³⁴. Many of these buildings were erected in the immediate post-war period. For this reason, they feature some backward and low-quality materials that do not make them as safe and livable as the most modern houses. Their cheap construction immediately responded to the urgent need for reconstruction, yet they now represent the reason why trying to sell them is difficult¹³⁵. Their value is almost null. Therefore, they are left vacant in the hands of owners who don't know what to do with them¹³⁶. In addition, these homes are usually empty and waiting for demolition. The problem is that they also “may collapse, be fire traps and sanitation hazard and disturb the look of the neighborhood”¹³⁷ in this state.

In view of this situation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs enacted in 2014 a national-level legislation to address the problem. Known in Japan as the Special Measures Act on Promotion of Measures on Vacant Houses, the text requires the municipal government to

give recommendations to the owners to maintain or to demolish the property and give them warnings if they do not take sufficient remedial measures. If the owners still do not take adequate action, the municipal governments can institute measures, including the demolition of houses, and demand payment for the costs¹³⁸.

The act declares the promotion of houses' demolition and the direct on-site intervention due to the lack of action (sale or dismantling) by the respective owner. But more precisely, what does it mean to promote buildings' demolition? According to an American study by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), when architecture is demolished, the materials and the energy they contain are destroyed. Researchers explain that

¹³⁴ L. Alexander, *Japanese Homes Aren't Built to Last – and That's the Point*, in “Robb Report”, 8 May 2021, robbreport.com; <https://robbreport.com/shelter/home-design/japanese-homes-are-ephemeral-facing-demolition-just-22-years-in-heres-why-1234608438/> [last access on January 7 2022].

¹³⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁶ Library of Congress, *Japan: New Law and Tax Measure to Promote Demolition and Reuse of Abandoned Houses*, 5 December 2014, loc.gov; <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2014-12-05/japan-new-law-and-tax-measure-to-promote-demolition-and-reuse-of-abandoned-houses/> [last access on January 7 2022].

¹³⁷ Ibidem.

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

examining embodied energy helps to get at the true costs of teardowns and links it to issues of air pollution and climate change (from the transport of materials and labor), natural resource depletion (forests, metals, gravel) and the environmental consequences of extracting materials¹³⁹.

This aspect means that on one hand, a local problem can find a solution thanks to that legislation, but on the other one, another global issue is magnified. It is now known that global warming becomes more and more a concrete problem with the consequent increase in catastrophic environmental damages. Demolition, therefore, can only worsen an already precarious situation. It was probably for this reason that the Ministry of Internal Affairs also declared the promotion of the reuse of these vacant spaces. Specifically, the legislation adds that “municipal governments are encouraged to create vacant house databases and provide information for the public, to promote the reuse of these properties”¹⁴⁰.

Returning to Takamizawa House, this previous analysis allows the reader to consider this habitation as part of those vacant buildings destined for dismantling in Tokyo¹⁴¹. However, in the context of the Venice Biennale, its exhibit aimed at addressing both a local and global problem. For this purpose, the object of “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” was not the ordinary wooden structure, but the dismantled components that used to constitute it. Takamizawa house wasn’t demolished in Japan, but its elements were saved for exhibition’s purposes before, and then for the development of a project that will be later deepened. The components were therefore removed from the building “by hand, one at a time”¹⁴² (*Figure 3.12*). “The house could not simply be demolished with heavy equipment”¹⁴³ otherwise it would have lost not only its shape but also what in the Venetian project would have been reused. This curatorial choice can be compared with Arata Isozaki’s project at the 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale. If at the “La Strada Novissima” exhibition directed by Paolo Portoghesi, a façade of a traditional house was

¹³⁹ N. Joseph, *When a House is Demolished, More Than the Home is Lost*, in “The Conversation”, 21 July 2015, [theconversation.com](https://theconversation.com/when-a-house-is-demolished-more-than-the-home-is-lost-42579); <https://theconversation.com/when-a-house-is-demolished-more-than-the-home-is-lost-42579> [last access on January 7 2022].

¹⁴⁰ Library of Congress, *Japan: New Law and Tax Measure to Promote Demolition and Reuse of Abandoned Houses*, cit. .

¹⁴¹ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹⁴² Ivi, p. 9

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

reproduced¹⁴⁴, the materials constituting a real habitation in Tokyo were transported to Venice and put on display in 2021¹⁴⁵. For this reason, it could be claimed that the overall appearance of the building was completely lost.



Figure 3.12 Dismantling of Takamizawa house in 2019.

After this long and delicate work, all the dismantled components were scanned. The materials were transported to the studio of architect Taichi Sunayama at the end of 2019. Here, teamwork attempted to “carry out a 3D scan of each element as it arrived from the dismantling site”¹⁴⁶. In addition, they tried to catalog them by creating a label that had its equivalent in a digital database of elements (*Figure 3.13*). Because of both the lack of budget (personnel, electronic devices’ costs) and the limited memory on computers, this project became much more difficult. The result was the scanning of only a tenth of the materials that had been transported to Sunayama’s studio¹⁴⁷. However, what happened here provided food for thought for Kadowaki. Intelligent machines are usually required when human nature appears insufficient. In this case, even technology was not enough to accomplish such work. This aspect reveals that the number of materials constituting a building is so large that both the human mind and computer memory cannot support it. Consequently, also the energy

¹⁴⁴ Architecture Biennale Wiki, *A typical House Facade Located in a Traditional Japanese Street*, cit. .

¹⁴⁵ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem.

and the labor that they embody are unimaginable. According to the Japanese curator, that is why materials in their raw state deserve to be investigated and are worth being displayed in architecture exhibitions¹⁴⁸.



Figure 3.13 Creation of labels with QR code for Takamizawa House components.

3.2.1.2 ...*The Transport...*

Takamizawa house did not arrive in Venice intact. To fit it into the shipping containers we had to dismantle it, a process that entailed the loss of many of its parts¹⁴⁹.

The transport of Takamizawa House's materials to Venice must be considered an integral part of the Japanese exhibition at the 2021 Venice Biennale. One of the desired objectives of the project was to make this movement visible¹⁵⁰. Since transport usually represents a "large proportion of the total budget"¹⁵¹, Kadowaki decided to dedicate a part of its show to it. In support of his choice, the curator affirmed that both transport and movement are "increasingly a frenetic aspect of contemporary society"¹⁵². Specifically, he also considered the trajectories taken by wooden elements very similar

¹⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹⁵⁰ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

to the ones traveled by population displacements¹⁵³. Therefore, he made them visible in Venice also to give people an image of the globalized world. This was made possible through the exhibit of the dismantled components. He didn't try to reconstruct the house as it was in Tokyo because otherwise, it would have hidden the possible changes that occurred in the materials during the transport from Tokyo to Venice (Figure 3.14).



Figure 3.14 Transport of Takamizawa House.

Before discussing the Venetian show, it is relevant to also consider the distances covered by the dismantled building before arriving in Italy. As previously stated, Takamizawa house's components were transported to Sunayama's studio in October 2019. This first journey was followed by many others which prompted Kadowaki and his team of architects to plan the sea transport only in January 2020¹⁵⁴. These frequent travels to which the elements had been subjected led to the loss of some building's components¹⁵⁵. This aspect was considered as an inevitable fate of the objects that were transported. In addition, it can be interpreted as an expression of a further change that the ordinary Japanese house had experienced in its story. The fact that its movement was also slowed down and stopped because of the spread of Coronavirus¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁴ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

¹⁵⁵ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

is also proof of this. Got to Venice only in May 2020¹⁵⁷ (*Figure 3.15*), the materials remained useless until their effective exhibition in 2021. There is no doubt that this slowdown entailed an increase in the show costs.



Figure 3.15 Transport of Takamizawa house: arrival in Venice in May 2020.

In the meantime, the project had further and new developments in its digital form. In the period of restrictions to limit contagion of SARS-Cov-2, online lectures, information, updates, and post videos on social networks and official websites were available for data subjects. This meant the planning and scheduling of the different project’s digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook which had undoubtedly doubled the work to do. Now, it’s common knowledge that, during the pandemic, social distancing strategies implying the limitation of physical contact and interaction have increased “the use of and dependence upon social media platforms to stay connected for work, education and social platforms”¹⁵⁸. In the artistic field, this aspect has led several institutions to organize online exhibitions or digital events that still

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ A. Wong, S. Ho, O. Olusanya, M.-V. Antonini, D. Lyness, *The Use of Social Media and Online Communications in Times of Pandemic COVID-19*, in “Journal of the Intensive Care Society”, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021, pp. 255-260, here p. 255.

could allow access to culture¹⁵⁹. The scheduled show “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” in Venice must be analyzed in this context.

Kadowaki had organized a series of Zoom meetings explaining and discussing the exhibition’s concept in the months before the setting up. The online lecture, planned by Deutsches Zentrum in Berlin for November 2020, is a good example of this. At this online event, the Japanese curator and his team of architects were interviewed to describe the meaning of their show in Venice¹⁶⁰. Some project’s images had been shown and reflections on Japan’s previous national participations in architecture exhibitions were developed¹⁶¹. This theme represented a source of inspiration for this dissertation. In addition, also the use of social media is worthy of an investigation. Since July 2019, the Instagram page “vba2020jp” (the name still refers to the year for which the exhibition was previously planned) has posted different contents and pictures of Takamizawa house’s movement to keep followers updated¹⁶². What emerges here is an attempt to digitally draw the path traveled by the building’s elements from Tokyo to Venice. On the one hand, it can be deduced that the social platform was a useful tool both to tell the story of the Takamizawa house and to make that movement visible (*Figure 3.16*). On the other, it also represented a way to customize advertising campaigns linked to and in support of the project. For example, the publication of the exhibition’s catalog by Kozo Kadowaki had been advertised on Instagram¹⁶³. Published in August 2020, this book was one of the major sources for the writing of this dissertation. It contains explanatory images of the Takamizawa house and provides philosophical, aesthetic, and historical reflections by great experts in the field. What architectural historian Norimasa Aoyagi claimed in his essay, part of the book¹⁶⁴, was useful to better understand the change that Japan’s construction

¹⁵⁹ L. Feinstein, ‘*Beginning of a New Era*’: *How Culture Went Virtual in the Face of Crisis*, in “The Guardian”, 8 April 2020, theguardian.com; <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/apr/08/art-virtual-reality-coronavirus-vr> [last access on January 7_2022].

¹⁶⁰ Japanisch - Deutsches Zentrum Berlin, *Co-Ownership of Action. The Japan Pavilion at Biennale 2021*, cit. .

¹⁶¹ Ibidem.

¹⁶² VBA 2020, *vba2020jp*, in “Instagram”, Instagram.com, <https://www.instagram.com/vba2020jp/> [last access on January 7_2022].

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ N. Aoyagi, *Designing an Industrial Continuum in Architectural Production: Takamizawa House as “Industrial Chimera”*, cit., p. 30.

industry has experienced over the years, for instance. In addition, in my opinion, it was precisely Instagram to suggest the possibility to get access and buy the catalog.

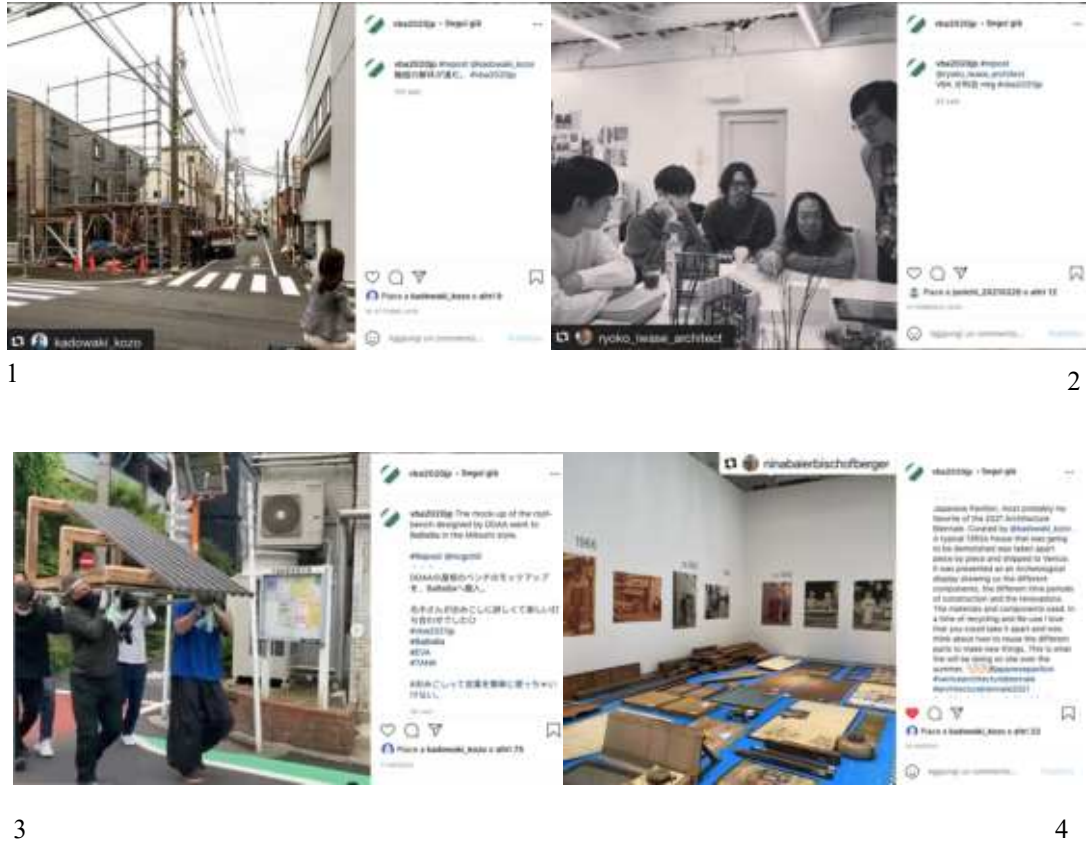


Figure 3.16 vba2020jp: post 1_dismantling of Takamizawa house in Tokyo (October 16, 2019), post 2_meeting and discussion on the project (February 21, 2020), post 3_transport of Takamizawa house (May 11, 2021), post 4_the exhibition in Venice (May 24, 2021).

The power of social media was not undervalued when Kadowaki and his team of architects also decided to use them to advertise the launch of a crowdfunding campaign¹⁶⁵. It was primarily organized in August 2020 to raise money in support of the exhibition after its postponement¹⁶⁶. According to Kozo Kadowaki in an interview given in May 2021, it proved to be profitable to cover part of the total costs of the project¹⁶⁷. It included the award of prizes such as design objects and furniture. Specifically, they were artistic compositions made with the dismantled components of

¹⁶⁵ VBA 2020, *vba2020jp*, cit. .

¹⁶⁶ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem.

the ordinary wooden house¹⁶⁸. In the story of Takamizawa house, these works can be considered a first attempt to reuse its elements for another purpose. Some of its components were recycled to raise funds for the effective exhibition in Venice¹⁶⁹. In the picture, the Instagram post that advertised the crowdfunding campaign is presented (Figure 3.17).



Figure 3.17 Crowdfunding campaign: Instagram post (August 13, 2020).

In addition, it is possible to see one of the prizes produced for the occasion. Called “Flower Vase”, it was designed by architect Daisuke Motogi making use of the Takamizawa house’s materials¹⁷⁰. In conclusion, this paragraph analysed transport because it was considered an integral part of the exhibition. Reflections on the strategies adopted by Japan to face Venice Biennale’s postponement were also taken into consideration. The reason for this choice lies in the perception of these alternative solutions as further trajectories covered by the project. These ways had undermined the linearity of the planned transport and ended up enriching the story of Takamizawa house. In this regard, philosopher Masaya Chiba claims that all these movements

¹⁶⁸ VBA 2020, *vba2020jp*, cit. .

¹⁶⁹ K. Kadowaki, *I Want to Liven Up the Japan Pavilion - Related Project of the Venice Biennale Architecture Exhibition, Which Was Postponed Due to the Corona Disaster*, in “CampFire”, *campfire.jp*; <https://camp-fire.jp/projects/view/240092?list=watched> [last access on January 7_2022].

¹⁷⁰ VBA 2020, *vba2020jp*, cit. .

sometimes interrupted or slowed down aimed at being “a metaphor for the world we live in”¹⁷¹.

3.2.1.3 ...To Venice...



Figure 3.18 Setting up of “Co-ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” exhibition at the Japanese pavilion in Giardini di Castello.

Our team of architects replaced these lost elements with new materials or those obtained on-site in the course of working with local artisans to restore and reconstruct the house in Venice. Nor did we attempt to restore Takamizawa house to its original state. Instead, we repurposed its elements into objects appropriate for the Venice site, converting the roof, for example, into benches¹⁷².

The pandemic not only postponed the exhibition in Venice but also made it difficult for Japanese architects and artisans to travel and work on-site. For this reason, as stated by Kadowaki, “it became necessary to collaborate with Venetian artisans online”¹⁷³. Thanks to their help once the materials of the Takamizawa house arrived in Venice, it was possible to organize their setting up¹⁷⁴ (*Figure 3.18*). This aspect is evidence of the first cooperation made by the Japanese exhibition in the 2021 Venice

¹⁷¹ M. Chiba, *Et Tu, Object?!*, in *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., pp. 92-102, here p. 92.

¹⁷² VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹⁷³ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

Biennale. Local woodworkers were invited to contribute to the project but, consequently, they also increased its international scope. This purpose would not have been achieved in the same way if the team of artisans had been only Japanese. It can be therefore deduced that the pandemic in the context of the Venice Biennale led some countries to constitute collaborations with not only other participating countries but also with other realities. The result was the intertwining of the Japanese cultural field with that of Venetian craftsmanship. This fact allowed, in turn, to broaden the perspective of the exhibition even more and might be another proof supporting the ever-increasing reciprocal influence between architecture exhibitions and real life.

As regards the setting up, the “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” exhibition was held inside the Japanese pavilion, located in the largest Venetian garden, Giardini di Castello¹⁷⁵. The show included three spaces¹⁷⁶. The first one, immediately visible to visitors, was the garden of the building designed by architect Takamasa Yoshizaka. In this place, Takamizawa house’s components were used to build structures and enjoyed “new life in new configurations”¹⁷⁷. Some elements of the ordinary wooden roof were reassembled and transformed into benches¹⁷⁸, just to mention an example. Other materials were, instead, combined to create a green structure. This construction aimed at recalling the façade of the building that once was in Tokyo Setagaya’s ward. Consequently, the present condition and history of the Japanese wooden house are compared. On the one hand, the benches suggested successful potential reuse of the dismantled parts of the ordinary habitation. On the other, the green architecture reminded the visitor of the historical energy that those components once embodied. At the conceptual level, thanks to this curatorial choice, the continuity of the trajectory covered by the building at the two different times is perceived (*Figure 3.19*). Furthermore, it is relevant to consider Kadowaki’s decision to extend the exhibition also in the space outside the Yoshizaka’s pavilion. This aspect has much to do with the setting up of the “Extreme Nature: Landscape of Ambiguous Spaces” exhibition, held at the Venice Biennale of 2008 (*Figure 2.20*). As explained in the second chapter, the show was curated by architect Junya Ishigami and, according

¹⁷⁵ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 139.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁷ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

to Kadowaki, the concept “of turning the garden of the Japanese pavilion into an exhibition space was informative”¹⁷⁹ for the development of the 2021 project. In fact, they both shared the intention to create a communication and continuity between the interior and exterior spaces¹⁸⁰ of Yoshizaka’s building in the end. In addition, Kadowaki justified his choice as “an implicit critique of the rigid framework of the Venice Biennale”¹⁸¹ because still too “predicated on competition among nation-states”¹⁸². Although the biennial was held in 2021, years after Giardini’s area was criticized in 1968 because of its rigid mapping¹⁸³, it is interesting to consider how this issue in a globalized world is still subject to discussion between the participating countries in the event.



Figure 3.19 Exhibition view: the garden of the Japanese pavilion. Benches made with Takamizawa house’s recycled materials and a green structure recalling the past history of the habitation.

Back to the analysis, the second space that was set up for the Japanese exhibition at the 2021 Venice Biennale was the interior of the pavilion (*Figure 3.20*). Photographs

¹⁷⁹ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

¹⁸⁰ T. Igarashi, *Junya Ishigami Has Designed a Group of Small Greenhouses Around the Japanese Pavilion*, cit. .

¹⁸¹ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 141.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*.

¹⁸³ J. Robinson, *Folkloric Modernism: Venice’s Giardini della Biennale and the Geopolitics of Architecture*, cit., p. 6.

were showing the history and the trajectories covered by Takamizawa house from Tokyo to Venice. They were hung on the walls' building in chronological order.



Figure 3.20 Exhibition view: the interior of the pavilion. A blue sheet covers the floor, photographs are hung on the walls and materials are arranged on the floor of the space.

The habitation materials on the floor corresponded to them at the same time. In this way, interested visitors could better grasp the differences in terms of quality and materials' type that the constant renewals of the home had caused. Some personal items like a puzzle were also on display to tell the story of those who lived in the building. This micro-history mixed with the macro one (the change that the Japanese construction industry has experienced over the years) represented by the different house's components on the floor. The result was the perception of an intertwining in which several parts ended up constituting the whole which continues to be even in its latest creation, the exhibition itself. Finally, the interior of the pavilion was characterized by a blue sheet that covered and protected the floor. This object is often used in building sites¹⁸⁴.

The third place in which “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” was set up is the so-called *piloti* space¹⁸⁵ (Figure 3.21). As already claimed, it is precisely the area characterized by structures that follow the pattern of Le Corbusier's

¹⁸⁴ K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 141.

¹⁸⁵ Ivi, 142.

architecture. Specifically, there were tables and chairs, always made with the recycled materials of Takamizawa house. In addition, also brooms, architectural designs, helmets, and harnesses were on display.



Figure 3.21 Exhibition view: *piloti* space. Brooms, helmets and harnesses are arranged in the pavilion.

Because of these characteristics, this place of the show seemed to take the form of a construction site. In a way, it seemed that the setting up ended up coinciding with the exhibition itself. It is possible to recognize similarities between the image showing the setting up of the pavilion's interior (*Figure 3.18*) and the one characterising *piloti* space. The only difference is the order in which the objects were arranged. In this connection, it is relevant to analyze how the pandemic led to further developments of the exhibition in Venice. It was already discussed to what extent the restrictions, imposed by governments, to reduce the spread of Covid made it difficult for foreigners to come and visit the pavilion in Venice. For example, the curator arrived in Italy only in August 2021¹⁸⁶ for the award ceremony. Therefore, Kadowaki decided to develop a contemporary project to the one organized in Italy¹⁸⁷. This proposal gave the possibility to Japanese people to understand the concept behind the Venetian show

¹⁸⁶ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

without leaving the country. Specifically, it was a collateral exhibit, set up in Tokyo and entitled “Dear Takamizawa House” (*Figure 3.22*).



Figure 3.22 Exhibition view: “Dear Takamizawa House” show at the BaBaBa space in Tokyo.

It was organized at the BaBaBa space in Shinjuku district and was inaugurated on the 22nd of April lasting until the 13th of June 2021¹⁸⁸. The show documented “the process behind the exhibition in Venice”¹⁸⁹ and organized different talks (also available online) with the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale Japan Pavilion design team¹⁹⁰ (VBA). In this way, the project could also reach the people who found it difficult to go to Italy. For this purpose, photographs by artist Jan Vranovsky and the materials that once made-up Takamizawa house were on display¹⁹¹.

At this point, following this investigation on the exhibition spaces of the Japanese show, some reflections can be made. The four spaces analysed above have two characteristics in common. The first one is the intention to show the possible reuse of Takamizawa house’s materials. As already stated, these components found new configurations in benches, chairs, and tables. The second aspect is the use of such

¹⁸⁸ BaBaBa, *Dear Takamizawa House*, bababa.jp; <https://bababa.jp/dear-takamizawa-house/dear-takamizawa-house/> [last access on January 7_2022].

¹⁸⁹ VVAA, *Dear Takamizawa House*, vvaa-studio.com; <https://www.vvaa-studio.com/projects/dear-takamizawa-house> [last access on January 7_2022].

¹⁹⁰ BaBaBa, *Dear Takamizawa House*, cit. .

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

spaces as warehouses for the project¹⁹². Not all elements were reassembled, but some of them were left on the floor to enhance their potential reuse. In this regard, the exhibition seemed a moment of transition and also another of the milestones reached by the movement of the Takamizawa house. This fact suggests that his end doesn't coincide with the exhibit's design but, instead, develops in a project that goes beyond its concept on display.

3.2.1.4 ...After Exhibition...

Every building is just a temporary aggregation of many elements. It is in this sense that architecture exists amid a vast space-time continuum, one in which the actions of countless people are constantly appearing and disappearing. We believe it should be possible to find a common platform for diverse actors to live together within that continuum.¹⁹³

As already stated, many exhibitions at international architecture exhibitions were primarily organized to pursue an economic objective in the past. Consequently, the structures that were erected at these exhibits were often demolished causing the waste of their materials and labor when the events were over. In this connection, the Japanese participation in the 2021 Venice Biennale proved a completely different approach to such initiatives. “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” must be considered, in fact, as a stage of a larger project. This aspect is also suggested by the setting up of the objects on display. The pavilion took on the character of a warehouse or construction site to allude to the following construction of something else. This means that one of the main exhibit's objectives was also to create a continuum of the concept on display after the exhibition. In my opinion, this proposal represented the effective answer to Hashim Sarkis' question. Thanks to the cooperation with different countries, the Venetian project by Kadowaki aimed to be extended to the construction of a building in architectural life. Specifically, it is “the common platform for diverse actors”¹⁹⁴ which the above extract refers to.

¹⁹² K. Kadowaki, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements*, cit., p. 139.

¹⁹³ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem.

Since “architecture exists amid a vast space-time continuum”¹⁹⁵, Takamizawa house aimed at continuing its path by renovating a greenhouse to welcome the Sletteløkka community in Oslo (Norway)¹⁹⁶. The Philippines’ pavilion at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale also contributed to this action¹⁹⁷ (Figure 3.23).



Figure 3.23 “Structures of Mutual Support”, Philippines’ exhibition the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Curated by Framework Collaborative, this project particularly focused on the Norwegian Dugnad and Filipino Bayanihan’s ability to find “a method of architectural praxis that engages issues of resilience, transformation, climate change, and structures of power and resistance”¹⁹⁸. These are precisely “traditions of mutual support, which allow members of communities to thrive and live together”¹⁹⁹ by “challenging dominant discourses of sustainability in architectural practice and the larger global context”²⁰⁰. The structure on display at the Filipino pavilion was an example of this

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁶ VBA 2020, *Presentation Document for Grant Application*, in “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview, cit. .

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁸ La Biennale di Venezia, *Philippines. Structures of Mutual Support*, labiennale.org; <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2021/philippines> [last access on January 7 2022].

¹⁹⁹ Italy Architecture News, *The Philippines Pavilion Unfolds Bayanihan Tradition of Mutual Support at Venice Biennale*, in “World Architecture”, 3 June 2021, worldarchitecture.org; <https://worldarchitecture.org/article-links/evhc/the-philippines-pavilion-unfolds-bayanihan-tradition-of-mutual-support-at-venice-biennale.html> [last access on January 7 2022].

²⁰⁰ D. Stouhi, *The Philippines Pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale Explores Bayanihan in the Times of COVID-19*, in “ArchDaily”, 24 May 2021, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/962202/the->

possible mutual support between different communities. It was a library intended as a conflict-resolution space aimed at overcoming social and racial inequalities²⁰¹. In this regard, the curators also added that their main point of interest in Sarkis' question was to emphasize "the need for a shared sense of ownership and a stronger sense of belonging"²⁰². It was precisely in this necessity that it is now possible to consider that Filipino and Japanese found a point of contact between their two projects. This common ground also represented the starting point for the construction of a new sustainable architecture at the end of the Venice Biennale. Both curators decided to investigate on local tradition and then jointly provided a shared continuum to their concepts and architectures that were on display in Venice. In this regard, also Kadowaki affirmed that this cooperation was born from a "mutual sympathy for each other's theme"²⁰³.

"With sustainability principles in mind and the temporal nature of Biennales"²⁰⁴, the project following the 17th international architecture exhibition in Venice consists of the renewal of a greenhouse in Sletteløkka (*Figure 3.24-3.25*). For this purpose, both the constituent materials of the Japanese exhibition and of the Filipino library will be relocated to Oslo at the end of the show²⁰⁵ (November 2021). The intention is to build a new meeting place for the Norwegian community. In this regard, the renovation work was planned for February 2022 and will feature a design that aims at creatively reinterpreting the original greenhouse's structure through the shapes and materials of Japanese and Filipino architectures²⁰⁶. However, it is important to highlight one point that also represents a difference between the two countries' participation at the Venice Biennale. If, in fact, Kadowaki's show already presents its materials arranged for their immediate reuse after the exhibition, the Filipino pavilion will instead be forced to dismantle the library to obtain the components needed for the project in Norway. The

[philippines-pavilion-at-the-2021-venice-biennale-explore-bayanihan-in-the-times-of-covid-19](#) [last access on January 7_2022].

²⁰¹ M. Mongcal, *The Philippines' Architectural Triumph at the Venice Biennale 2021*, in "BluPrint", 8 September_2021, [bluprint.onemega.com; https://bluprint.onemega.com/the-philippines-architectural-triumph-at-the-venice-biennale-2021/](https://bluprint.onemega.com/the-philippines-architectural-triumph-at-the-venice-biennale-2021/) [last access on January 7_2022].

²⁰² Italy Architecture News, *The Philippines Pavilion Unfolds Bayanihan Tradition of Mutual Support at Venice Biennale*, cit. .

²⁰³ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

²⁰⁴ VBA 2020, *Presentation Document for Grant Application*, cit. .

²⁰⁵ Ibidem.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem.

two projects indeed pursued different purposes, but it is also obvious that, because of a potential after-exhibition, “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” will have saved work energies.

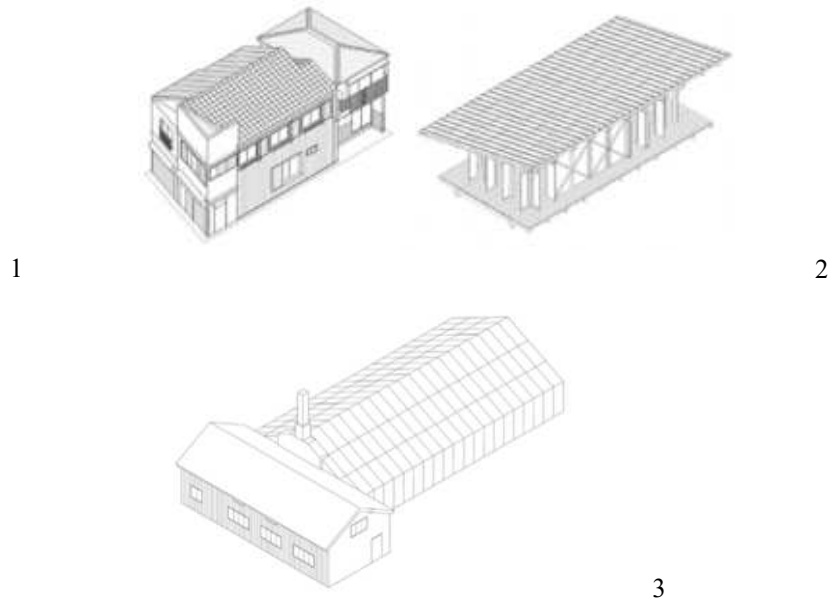


Figure 3.24 In image 1: Takamizawa House. In image 2: the library built by Philippines on the occasion of the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. Materials of 1 and 2 will be reassembled and renovate a greenhouse in Oslo (image 3).



Figure 3.25 Drawing of the project in Oslo. The greenhouse of Sletteløkka will enjoy a new configuration thanks to the materials of Filipino and Japanese exhibitions in 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

Before concluding, it is important to add that, in the interview realized by Kozo Kadowaki, “perhaps due to the influence of this project, projects that utilize waste material are being conceived by architects and students” in Tokyo²⁰⁷. However, this architectural choice was not the first one in Tokyo. Jo Nagasaka, an architect member of the VBA team, already recycled materials for the construction of a shop in 2010 (*Figure 3.26*). Specifically, he made use of the materials reclaimed from a demolished house²⁰⁸ and built an interior for the Australian skincare brand, Aesop. Such architecture mixed traditional components with modern ones²⁰⁹.



Figure 3.26 Aesop Aoyama shop in Tokyo: a project realized by Japanese architect Jo Nagasaka of Schemata Architecture Office. The interior was made with the materials reclaimed from the demolition of a traditional Japanese house.

The result was a building that like an industrial chimera²¹⁰ is conceptually very similar to the project aimed to be realized in Oslo and Takamizawa House status before dismantlement. It influenced the development of Kadowaki’s exhibition at the 2021

²⁰⁷ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

²⁰⁸ C. Warmann, *Aesop Aoyama by Schemata Architecture Office*, in “dezeen”, 23 December 2010, <https://www.dezeen.com/2010/12/23/aesop-aoyama-by-schemata-architecture-office/> [last access on January 10 2022].

²⁰⁹ Aesop, *Aesop Aoyama*, [aesop.com; https://www.aesop.com/it/r/aesop-aoyama](https://www.aesop.com/it/r/aesop-aoyama) [last access on January 10 2022].

²¹⁰ N. Aoyagi, *Designing an Industrial Continuum in Architectural Production: Takamizawa House as “Industrial Chimera*, cit., p. 30.

Venice Biennale²¹¹, but it was precisely this show that exhibited this choice to the world by proposing it as a solution to a global and not just a local problem.

3.2.2 Relevance of the Single Component, Cooperation and Coexistence, Implacability of Change

At the end of the second chapter, the recurrence of three motifs (relevance of the single component, cooperation and coexistence, and implacability of change) in Japan's national participation in architecture contemporary events was claimed. Referring to the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, it was explained how the title "Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements" of the Japanese exhibition seemed to embody these values rooted in the country's culture. At this point, it results interesting to deepen the discourse on what has already been widely explained and commented through an analysis based on these criteria.

As regards the relevance attributed to the single component constituting a traditional Japanese architecture, it is inevitable to interpret Kadowaki's decision to show the dismantled materials of Takamizawa house as a desire to convey the meaning and importance that each of them represents²¹². This objective would not have been achieved if the curator had decided to exhibit an effective reconstruction of the building in Venice. In this way, instead, he was able to transmit the idea that a single element can embody work energy, craftsmanship, transport, and design by also telling the history of the architecture to which it belongs and showing signs of the people who lived there. Thanks to these structural features, each element became a memory of the period which constituted it. However, as the past created it, also the present can modify and transform it. That is why some of the materials were reassembled constituting benches, chairs, and other objects. Even this curatorial choice was strictly rooted in the religious thought of the country and might prove the recurrence in the show of another motif, the awareness of the implacability of change. This was also evident when the photographs inside the pavilion showed the change to which the ordinary wooden house had been subjected over the years. In addition, such transformation of

²¹¹ Japanisch - Deutsches Zentrum Berlin, *Co-Ownership of Action. The Japan Pavilion at Biennale 2021*, cit. .

²¹² K. Kadowaki, *Interview*, cit. .

Takamizawa house did not end with its dismantling and exhibition in Venice but was destined to continue in the Norwegian project and its future. This new location was aimed at welcoming today's community as well as that of the years to come with the awareness of the relentlessness of change to which both people and objects are subjected. This is the reason why Kadowaki argued the constant appearance and disappearance of the action of countless people in his project²¹³. In this respect, another reflection can be made. In the second chapter, the idea of permanence in Japanese architecture is considered possible only through continuous processes of renewal and renovations. In this regard, also the reassembly in Oslo's greenhouse of both Filipino elements and Japanese components may be analyzed from this point of view. The permanence of the building was conceived through a process of transformation and rejuvenation of the components of the buildings to which they belonged. In this connection, it can briefly be claimed that what you own is the co-ownership of today's action for the future.

What was argued above is functional to introduce the last motif to take into consideration when discussing Japan's national participation in architecture exhibitions. The just mentioned co-ownership has an affinity to the concepts of cooperation and coexistence. These terms refer to an action that is shared. As regards Kadowaki's show in Venice, it is possible to recognize their relevance. Starting from cooperation and coexistence, both ideas may be considered relevant in the setting up of "Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements". In this regard, it was already discussed that the project included the work of Venetian artisans. In addition to that, it must be stated that also Russia and Korea contributed to the project. This was due to the simple proximity of the Japanese pavilion to those of other countries participating in the event²¹⁴. Such network was further strengthened when Kadowaki constituted a collaboration with the, already mentioned, Filipino and the United Arab Emirates exhibitions, located in the Arsenale area. Such cooperation, instead, was based on the mutual sharing of themes²¹⁵ such as climate crisis and sustainability. Overall, Kadowaki recognized that it was precisely thanks to all these contributions²¹⁶ that

²¹³ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

²¹⁴ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

²¹⁵ Ibidem.

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

“Takamizawa house will be moving on”²¹⁷. Even the project in Oslo continued this line of thought. The architecture that will be built in Norway aims to create a human, technical cultural exchange through this shared action²¹⁸. It represents, in a way, a physical collage of Japanese, Filipino, Norwegian values, and attitudes²¹⁹ that will provide “a common platform for coexistence among a diversity of actors”²²⁰ both in the present and in the future. This aspect is justified by the fact that, according to Kadowaki, the materials must be interpreted “as something to be shared among all members of society”²²¹. “A work of architecture cannot be said to belong to a specific individual”²²², but, as demonstrated in the Norwegian project, it becomes the “collaborative creation of all those people”²²³ (Japanese, Filipino and Norwegian). Concluding, it must be deduced that also cooperation, co-existence, and co-ownership are all aspects that once again were deepened by the show of Kadowaki. In addition, it is relevant to claim that all these factors are also proof of the high potential of today’s Venice Biennale in allowing a widespread collaboration between the participating countries. This cooperation can push countries to go beyond the mere rigid mapping of Giardini’s pavilions to provide national shows which can also share common objectives, points of view, and, finally, action.

3.2.3 Returning to “How Will We Live Together?”

At this point of the investigation, it is possible to return to Hashim Sarkis’ question/theme and draw some conclusions. As previously stated, the Lebanese curator asked participating countries to address issues such as global warming, population displacements, political instabilities, and racial, social, and economic inequalities. In this context, “Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements” provided a solution to reduce the impact of the construction industry on climate change. Its proposal to reuse the dismantled materials of an ordinary house destined

²¹⁷ Ibidem.

²¹⁸ VBA 2020, *Presentation Document for Grant Application*, cit. .

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

²²⁰ VBA 2020, *Co-Ownership of Action: Trajectories of Elements. Overview*, cit. .

²²¹ K. Kadowaki, *In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale*, cit. .

²²² Ibidem.

²²³ Ibidem.

for demolition must be considered, in fact, as a sustainable architectural choice. In this regard, the Japanese exhibition demonstrated that the large emissions of CO₂ caused by the continuous buildings' constructions and demolitions (one of the most known triggers of rising temperatures) can be reduced by recycling what was previously been built. In paragraph 3.2.3, such an answer would fall into the category of limitation. The Japanese pavilion proved to provide a proposal that can limit the damages caused by air pollution. However, it might also be considered a resilient response to natural disasters. Kadowaki affirmed that the awareness that building materials "are our common property may be useful in disaster recovery situations"²²⁴. For example, it was already discussed how the project "A Home for All" by Toyō Itō at the 2012 Venice Biennale turned out to be an efficient reaction to the earthquake that hit Japan in 2011. However, it must be considered that environmental damage cannot be countered with the construction of new architectures involving the future waste of further energy. Therefore, the reuse, instead of already existing materials could prove to be an optimal alternative solution in situations like these.

With less evidence than the previous problem had, as regards the other global issues that Sarkis asked architects to deal with, some considerations can be drawn. The intention to create a continuum of the exhibition in Oslo, aiming at creating a human, social and cultural exchange proved the desire for openness and to overcome the differences that are so undermining the globalized world. In addition, as already stated, the project became a metaphor for the world of displacements that are now characterizing contemporaneity. In this regard, awareness of this aspect can also help the community to find a way by which it is possible to live together.

3.3 Good Reviews of 2021 Venice Biennale Are "Few Kernels of Wheat Amid the Chaff"

Although the 2021 Venice Biennale set out to tackle a theme that "could not be more urgent"²²⁵, it became an object of heavy criticism. For example, Oliver Wainwright, a journalist for the newspaper *The Guardian*, claimed that this pandemic

²²⁴ Ibidem.

²²⁵ H. Sarkis, *Statement*, cit. .

edition was “an exhibition as confusing as it is confused”²²⁶. He also affirmed the lack of concrete and effective proposals that could in any way answer Hashim Sarkis’ question²²⁷. According to the writer, the result was the realization of “projects that use global crises as the inspiration for installation art [...] each served up with a generous garnish of inedible word salad”²²⁸. In his opinion, the exhibition of very few countries provided efficient proposals “addressing how our cities and habitats might be rethought for a more equitable future”²²⁹. The Japanese show is enumerated among these exhibitions. Wainwright wrote that “given the embodied carbon of new construction”²³⁰, the recognition of the importance of materials’ re-use became crucial. Indeed, because of an “easy, cheap and infinitely flexible”²³¹ use of wood, also the American pavilion was reputed a triumph and part of “a few kernels of wheat amid the chaff”²³² of the event.

Another criticism was made by Roberto Zancan, a researcher associated with the UNESCO Chair in Conservation and Regeneration of the Urban Heritage of the University of Venice, who wrote a review and summarized criticism as a general discontent derived from Sarkis’ curatorial choice²³³. He explained that the 2021 Venice Biennale manifested “the inability to manage an event based essentially on temporary installations”²³⁴ without really considering in practice the concrete answers it had set out to provide. In his words, therefore, the event appeared as an ambitious attempt to save the world “by making masses of objects and people move without taking into account how these people travel and how these objects are created”²³⁵. In my opinion, this aspect was deeply considered by the Japanese exhibition. One of its objectives was to make transport and movement visible going beyond the concept on display. However, Zancan argued that if the event lacks this care in contemporaneity, the loss

²²⁶ O. Wainwright, *Venice Architecture Biennale 2021 Review – A Pick’n’ Mix of Conceptual Posturing*, in “The Guardian”, 21 May 2021, [theguardian.com; https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/may/21/venice-architecture-biennale-2021-review-how-will-we-live-together](https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/may/21/venice-architecture-biennale-2021-review-how-will-we-live-together) [last access on January 10_2022].

²²⁷ Ibidem.

²²⁸ Ibidem.

²²⁹ Ibidem.

²³⁰ Ibidem.

²³¹ Ibidem.

²³² Ibidem.

²³³ R. Zancan, *Biennale, Stop Making Sense!*, cit. .

²³⁴ Ibidem.

²³⁵ Ibidem.

“of partiality of the globalism represented”²³⁶ occurs. In his opinion, it was something that became even more evident when countries were missing at the biennial. Specifically, they were the African, Oceanic ones and China, India, Canada²³⁷.

In view of these statements, many associations began to accuse the Italian Ministry of Culture of having invested in an event that had met the needs of tourism, without giving support to local services²³⁸. These facilities were, in fact, heavily damaged by the financial loss because of both the November 2019 *acqua alta* and the pandemic. Therefore, according to them, the best choice would have been to cancel such an event in 2021 and to invest in the city for its local economic recovery. However, according to Zancan, since this biennial did not meet the expectations, it deserved to be visited. In his words, it became a relevant object to be discussed as it was representative of the end of an era²³⁹. With a very optimistic approach, he also added that the new biennial won't give utopian answers to this so dystopian world, but it will provide an occasion to understand that “architecture, urbanism, planning and design can be cumulative knowledge”²⁴⁰. In his opinion, the event will be even more enriched when the historical archive of Venice Biennale, currently in Mestre, will be relocated in Venice²⁴¹. Zancan considered this move as representative of a great source of inspiration for the biennials to come.

This investigation on the negative reviews of the 2021 Venice Biennale could go on for many pages. Other critics argued that it came to a “*horror vacui*, sensory overload and debatable design choices”²⁴². Still, others considered it as featuring projects that “were more like conceptual flights of fancy than plans for built environments”²⁴³. However, there were some positive opinions on the show. Some of these primarily recognized the urgency and actuality of Hashim Sarkis' theme. Journalist Amah Rose Abrams wrote that the biennial was able to “ponder on questions

²³⁶ Ibidem.

²³⁷ Ibidem.

²³⁸ Ibidem.

²³⁹ Ibidem.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem.

²⁴¹ Ibidem.

²⁴² B. Casavecchia, *The 17th Venice Architecture Biennale's Misguided Optimism*, in “FRIEZE”, 4 June 2021, frieze.com; <https://www.frieze.com/article/how-will-we-live-together-17-venice-architecture-biennale-2021-review> [last access on January 18 2022].

²⁴³ E. Povoledo, *Solving the World's Problems at the Venice Architecture Biennale*, in “The New York Times”, 2 June 2021, nytimes.com; <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/arts/design/venice-architecture-biennale.html> [last access on January 18 2022].

that are more timely than ever”²⁴⁴, for instance. Others instead considered the range of contributors a triumph. Specifically, journalist Andrew Pasquier stated that the main exhibition drew “together a geographically and ethnically diverse pool of a smaller-scale firms and research teams”²⁴⁵ by successfully “illustrating how Sarkis’s vision for a new spatial contract might look if we learn to live together differently”²⁴⁶. In addition, he considered the Japanese pavilion as a “clever ode to the sustainable afterlife of building materials”²⁴⁷ that was able to constitute “one of the most touching moments of Biennale by retelling the personal history of one wooden house”²⁴⁸. Nevertheless, what emerges from this analysis is that positive reviews of the 17th international architecture exhibition were few kernels of wheat amid the chaff²⁴⁹ of criticism. The event proved to be confusing for most of the critics with some rare proposals that were efficient in addressing such an urgent theme. In this context, it is relevant to claim that the Japanese pavilion was often mentioned as one of the few truly useful responses that the biennial planned to provide. But overall, it must be stated that the 2021 Venice Biennale generated great discontent in the cultural field.

The biennial, which set the goal of responding to people’s dissatisfaction with politics, seemed to have generated further malcontent in not having provided on the whole the answers so much needed. That’s why, returning to the analysis of the first chapter and considering the negative reviews of the event, one may even conclude that the 17th international architecture exhibition was far away from that much-requested lesson of living together, already questioned by architect Fuksas in 2000²⁵⁰. Indeed, it almost seems that there is unfinished business to still attend. That is why, just like what happened in the article by Zancan, some questions about the future of the institution arise: How will the next edition be? Will it hold a civic responsibility in providing a way to live together? Will it provide efficient proposals in architectural life? And what

²⁴⁴ A.-R. Abrams, *Venice Architecture Biennale 2021: a Year Late but Somehow Right on Time*, in “Wallpaper”, 26 May 2021, wallpaper.com; <https://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/hashim-sarkis-2021-venice-architecture-biennale-opens-italy> [last access on January 18 2022].

²⁴⁵ A. Pasquier, *In Search of a New Spatial Contract at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale*, in “PIN-UP”, pinupmagazine.org; <https://pinupmagazine.org/articles/andrew-pasquier-venice-architecture-biennale-review-2021> [last access on January 20 2022].

²⁴⁶ Ibidem.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem.

²⁴⁸ Ibidem.

²⁴⁹ O. Wainwright, *Venice Architecture Biennale 2021 Review – A Pick’n’ Mix of Conceptual Posturing*, cit. .

²⁵⁰ M. Fuksas, *Interview*, cit., p. 83.

about the national participation of Japan? Will the three criteria, rooted in the country's culture, still be developed? There is no answer to these question marks yet. However, what emerges from the opinions by journalists who complained about the lack of efficient proposals to live together is that there is an implicit request for future architecture exhibitions to deal with the problems of the globalized world conceptually, but also to actively try to intervene in architectural life. Concluding, what remains after the 17th international architecture exhibition is the “need for architecture”²⁵¹, that considered as the reason for the opening of the pandemic edition and part satisfied after the show, will be the same as it will get people to visit the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale and, why not, the Japanese pavilion.

²⁵¹ R. Cicutto, *A Need for Architecture*, cit. .

Conclusion

One of the objectives of this project was to consider the ever-increasing mirror image between today's international architecture exhibitions and the globalized world. After having analyzed one of the most recent events in this field, it is possible to draw some possible conclusions on this topic. First of all, an interpretation, regarding what was discussed about liquid modernity, can be made. As already claimed, the 2021 Venice Biennale provides further evidence of the increasing distrust of society towards politics showing that historical reference points have liquefied. Architects were invited to exhibit their point of view on issues, usually handled by the policies of the States. However, these individual proposals were considered confused and inefficient¹. Precisely for these reasons it is possible to make a comparison between this cultural "chaff"² and the instability of the historical period that people are living in. It was discussed, for instance, how governments also restricted access to culture to limit the spread of coronavirus. Slowdowns, financial difficulties in organizing the event are therefore to be considered plausible in this global situation. However, this aspect doesn't represent a justification of the shortcomings identified by journalists but aims at making the reader aware of the time of emergency within which the Venice Biennale was held. The pandemic edition was undoubtedly not similar to the previous ones because of external conditions.

The no-show of some countries at the international exhibition should be interpreted according to this perspective. This aspect should not be considered as a missed globalism represented³ but as a mirror image of the difficulties that not all countries had the opportunity to overcome to participate in the exhibit. As it happened in the immediate post-war periods, the 2021 Venice Biennale provided an overall picture of the world that again highlighted the economic, social disparities that now more than ever mark the globalized world. It is for this reason that it is possible to conclude that "How Will We Live Together?" represented a valid example on the extent to which international architecture exhibitions mirror the "dynamic and unstable conditions of

¹ O. Wainwright, *Venice Architecture Biennale 2021 Review – A Pick'n' Mix of Conceptual Posturing*, cit. .

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

the globalized world”⁴. Following these statements, it is important to consider that this awareness could cast a deep shadow on the future purposes of such events by leading one to conclude that a suffering global situation corresponds to an exhibition with the same characteristics. However, this aspect should instead push the Venice Biennale to identify the aspects that have renewed its architecture events and can pave the way for future exhibitions even more efficient in their purposes. That is why in this project it is considered relevant to highlight some innovative aspects of the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale. These positive features make it representative not of the end of an era⁵, but as a stage through which something new can be developed.

First of all, it is important to recognize that the event represented an attempt to answer a question that was for the first time addressed to culture. Previous international architecture exhibitions were themed as affirmations followed by other statements by the participating countries. This approach cannot lead to dialogue, but to a series of considerations that end in themselves. The question/theme proposed by Hashim Sarkis instead doesn't start from a sentence with a fixed point but asks participating countries to extrapolate a personal one from a question mark. Such a method has much to do with the Socratic *maieutics*. The Oxford dictionary defines this term as a “Socratic method of questioning”⁶ by which the “learners are guided by careful questioning, to come up with answers they had not consciously known they possessed”⁷. As in a Platonic dialogue, the 2021 Venice Biennale seemed to extract from countries some possible ways that allow living together. Consequently, the result took the form of a symposium of ideas and different opinions. It is plausible that some of them can be confusing or less compelling and found it difficult to answer such a global and urgent question. However, there were also occasions in which some proposals shared contact points and decided to cooperate. The cooperation established between the Japanese exhibition and the United Arab Emirates, Philippines, Korea, and Russia's pavilions is proof of this. That is why, in my opinion, this approach to architecture exhibitions should be considered innovative and fruitful for future editions.

⁴ B. Wyss, J. Scheller, *Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle*, cit., p.52.

⁵ R. Zancan, *Biennale, Stop Making Sense!*, cit. .

⁶ Oxford Reference, s.v., “*Maieutic*”, oxfordreference.com; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100127153> [last access on January 10_2022].

⁷ Ibidem.

Finally, another innovative aspect that should be recognized when discussing the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale is the role that academic research played in the event. The curator considered research as functional to support the work of architecture in finding a way to live together. Sarkis looked, for example, to the past to conceive the theme of the 2021 Venice Biennale. As previously claimed, he investigated on great thinkers' theories such as Aristotle and Rousseau's ones by checking whether they are still able to provide good answers in contemporaneity. In addition to that, it could also be claimed that the same thing was done by the Japanese exhibition which provided a sustainable project that looks to the future by questioning its tradition and current history. Therefore, in the end, both Kadowaki and Sarkis looked at the past to work on something destined to have a continuum. On one hand, the history of Takamizawa House will continue after the exhibition in Venice and after its design in Oslo thanks to the reassembly of its components. On the other, the question by Hashim Sarkis remains open to further developments where academic research occupies an aspired central role. Either way, what emerges is that there is still a necessity to discuss and deepen both the history of architecture exhibitions and the architectural practice because of their high potential in real life.

Before concluding, it is important to stress that such recognition of architecture as a powerful instrument in society was due to the activity of architect Vittorio Gregotti. As already claimed, this reflection allowed the development of an architecture section within the Venetian institution in 1975⁸. Starting from these years, architecture has been conceived not only as an *ars poetica* but also as the most refined form of civil commitment⁹. Gregotti was strongly committed to exploring “what architecture can do to the world and in the world”¹⁰ changing the history of this field at the Venice Biennale. This is the reason why Sarkis decided to award him not only the Special Golden Lion in 2020 but also with an edition that tried to continue his ideas from where they stopped. Therefore, recognizing that his definition of architecture was not so

⁸ A. Levy, *Introduction*, cit., p. 14.

⁹ C. Olmo, *Vittorio Gregotti (1927-2020): L'Architettura come Forma d'Impegno Civile*, in “Il Giornale dell'Architettura”, 17 March 2020, [ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com; https://ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/2020/03/17/vittorio-gregotti-1927-2020-larchitettura-come-forma-dimpegno-civile/](https://ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/2020/03/17/vittorio-gregotti-1927-2020-larchitettura-come-forma-dimpegno-civile/) [last access on January 6 2022].

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 17.

much a utopia or a dream but today's global duty¹¹, he organized an exhibition aimed at asking architects to meet their civic tasks against global issues. Overall, it must be stated that there is still a great deal to be done. In this regard, also Sarkis recognized that Gregotti's "readings are yet to be fully fleshed out and his ambitious project for architecture is yet to be continued"¹². However, the event tried to pave the way for future editions with such purposes. As evidenced by the case study, some countries moved away from the mere utopian reflections on architecture of previous editions and actively provided new possible ways through which it is possible to learn how to live together, cooperate and, finally, change the world.

After these considerations, I wish to conclude this dissertation with an image that deeply influenced the entire project. This is the art installation, "The Listener" by Giuseppe Penone. The sculpture, part of the 2021 Venice Biennale and located in the Arsenale area, consists of a trunk that comes out of the water and holds a large stone between its branches¹³. "The water evokes the fluidity of which we are part of"¹⁴, said the artist. This is a human condition that seems to refer to what Bauman also stated about contemporary society. Nevertheless, the tree seems to grow from that water that becomes its lifeblood and then, welcomes something different: a stone. In the work of art, a relationship between different nature's elements, such as water, earth, and the air is established and aims at transmitting the possibility of cooperation and connection that can exist among them¹⁵ (*Figure 3.27*). The message of the artist is therefore to reflect on "the vitality and magic of what listening can bring to the inner and outer worlds"¹⁶. It was for this reason that he chose the tree. In his opinion, "it holds the wisdom of listening as it has listened to earth and all the living beings for centuries"¹⁷.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² H. Sarkis, *Vittorio Gregotti To Be Continued: Hashim Sarkis' Tribute to the Late Architect*, in "ArchDaily", 20 March_2020, archdaily.com; <https://www.archdaily.com/935962/vittorio-gregotti-to-be-continued-hashim-sarkis-tribute-to-the-late-architect> [last access on January 6_2022].

¹³ G. Harris, *Giuseppe Penone's Monumental Tree Rises from Venetian Lagoon as Architecture Biennale Opens*, in "The Art Newspaper", 21 May_2021, theartnewspaper.com; <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/05/21/giuseppe-penones-monumental-tree-rises-from-venetian-lagoon-as-architecture-biennale-opens> [last access on January 10_2022].

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Y. Karam, *A Tree Planted in Water at The Venice Biennale Represents the Wisdom of Listening*, in "designboom", 20 May_2021, designboom.com; <https://www.designboom.com/art/giuseppe-penone-the-listener-venice-biennale-05-20-2021/> [last access on January 10_2022].

¹⁷ Ibidem.

Specifically, this dissertation wished to be a “listener”¹⁸ of Japanese architecture. It shows to what extent national participation in architecture exhibitions can be different for history, culture, and traditions, but still able to provide a solution that, if listened to, can try to answer a global question that people will never stop asking themselves: “How Will We Live Together?”.



Figure 3.27 “The Listener” by artist Giuseppe Penone at the 2021 Venice Biennale. The installation reflects on the possibility to create spaces for listening in the 21st century society.

¹⁸ G. Harris, *Giuseppe Penone’s Monumental Tree Rises from Venetian Lagoon as Architecture Biennale Opens*, cit. .

In Conversation with Kozo Kadowaki – Interview with the curator of the Japanese pavilion at the 2021 Venice Biennale (25 April 2021)

1) How does your concept try to provide an answer to the question/theme of the 2021 Venice Biennale?

At the level of its constituent parts, every building is just a temporary aggregation of a vast number of elements. Hence a work of architecture cannot be said to belong to a specific individual or individuals. A building stands atop the countless cumulative actions of countless people. In that sense, a building—or a city, as an aggregation of buildings—is the collaborative creation of all those people. We might add that building materials—or any materials, for that matter—may therefore be construed as something to be shared among all members of society.

Architecture exists amid the vastness of the space-time continuum. We believe it should be possible to find a common platform for coexistence among a diversity of actors within that continuum. It's our answer to Hashim's question.

2) Were other countries involved in the development of this project? If so, what are they and why?

The postponement due to the pandemic created a platform for discussion among curators. In the process, two collaborations were born, one with the Philippines Pavilion and the other with the UAE Pavilion. This was due to our mutual sympathy for each other's themes.

Collaborations with the Russian and Korean pavilions have also been created. This is due to the fact that the two pavilions are located next to the Japan Pavilion.

3) What is the message you want to convey?

In addition to the message I wrote in response to question 1, I would like to convey that even a single building carries more information than a single person can comprehend.

4) Has the pandemic slowed down or modified your project and its setting up?

Since architects and artisans could no longer travel to Venice, it became necessary to collaborate with Venetian artisans online.

Also, for those who cannot go to Venice to see the exhibition, we are trying to increase the role of the website in the exhibition and create an exhibition experience that moves between the actual space and the online space.

5) How and when was Takamizawa House's transport during the pandemic?

The Takamizawa House left Japan in early February, before the pandemic, and was supposed to arrive in Venice in about a month, but due to logistical disruptions, it did not arrive until May.

6) After having investigated on the project, it emerged that Takamizawa house's materials will be located in Oslo at the end of the international exhibition. Why did you choose this place and what will be their function there?

The move to Oslo is a joint project with the Philippine Pavilion. We owe this opportunity to the curators Sudarshan Khadka and Alexander Eriksson Furunes of the Philippine Pavilion at the Biennale. They have an ongoing community project in Oslo, and thanks to their good offices, Takamizawa House will be moving on.

7) Your idea seems to provide a possible solution to the social and economic problem of buildings' demolition in Tokyo. Do you think that this concept can be applied to other places, becoming a current way to think about architecture?

I don't believe that this idea can be directly applied to actual projects, but I do believe that the most important essence of the idea can influence projects in Tokyo. In fact, perhaps due to the influence of this project, projects that utilize waste materials are being conceived by architects and students.

8) From an economic point of view, was the project expensive? Was the crowdfunding campaign useful in supporting your exhibition?

Economically, there were many difficulties. In addition to crowdfunding, we have received support from several companies who have agreed with our aims.

9) Was the project inspired by previous editions of Venice Biennale? Reading articles and essays, I was wondering if you agree with Kazuyo Sejima's opinion that architecture represents a meeting place for different individuals. What do you think about this?

The fundamental idea is strongly based on my own personal architectural philosophy and discussions with the Exhibiting Architects.

Although not really related to a specific biennale project, Junya Ishigami's idea of turning the garden of the Japanese pavilion into an exhibition space was informative. Of course, Kazuyo Sejima and we have had some correspondence in the Japanese architecture world, so I think her ideas have influenced us, but not directly.

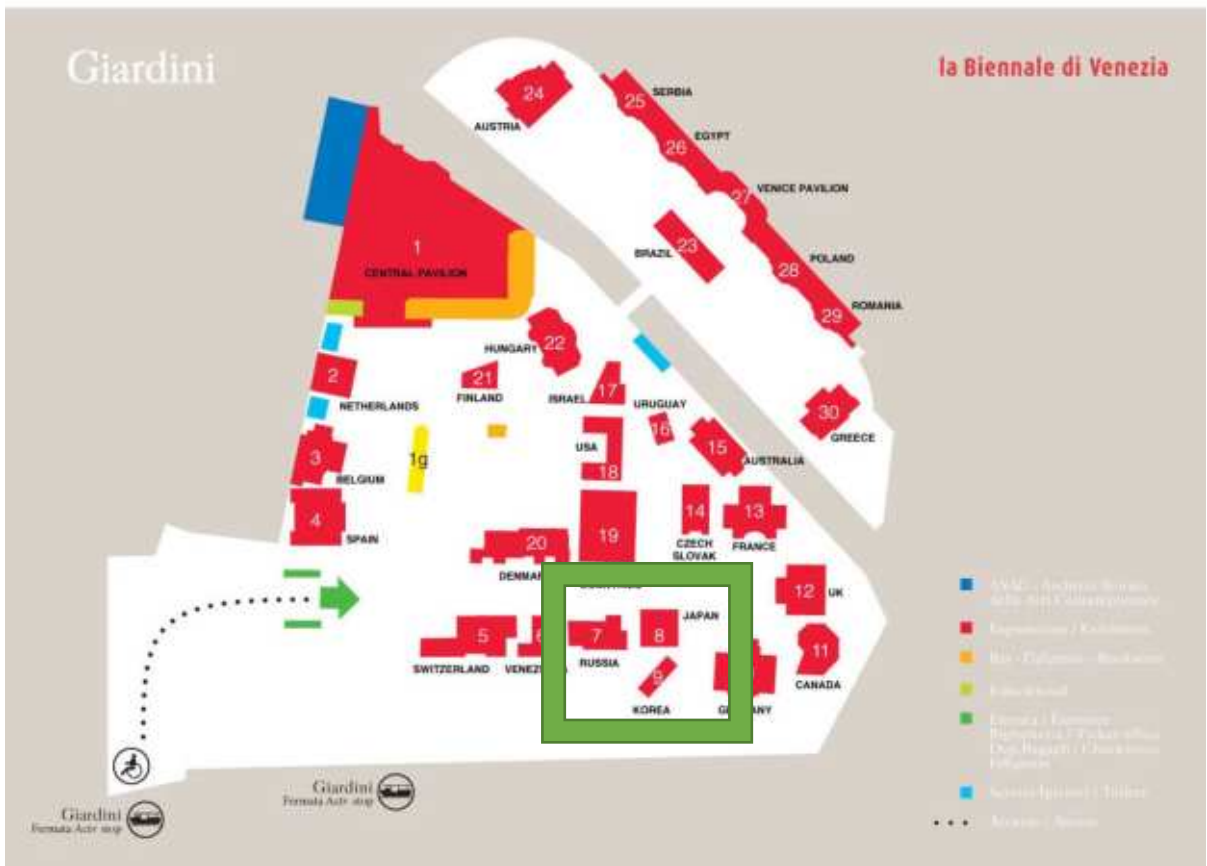
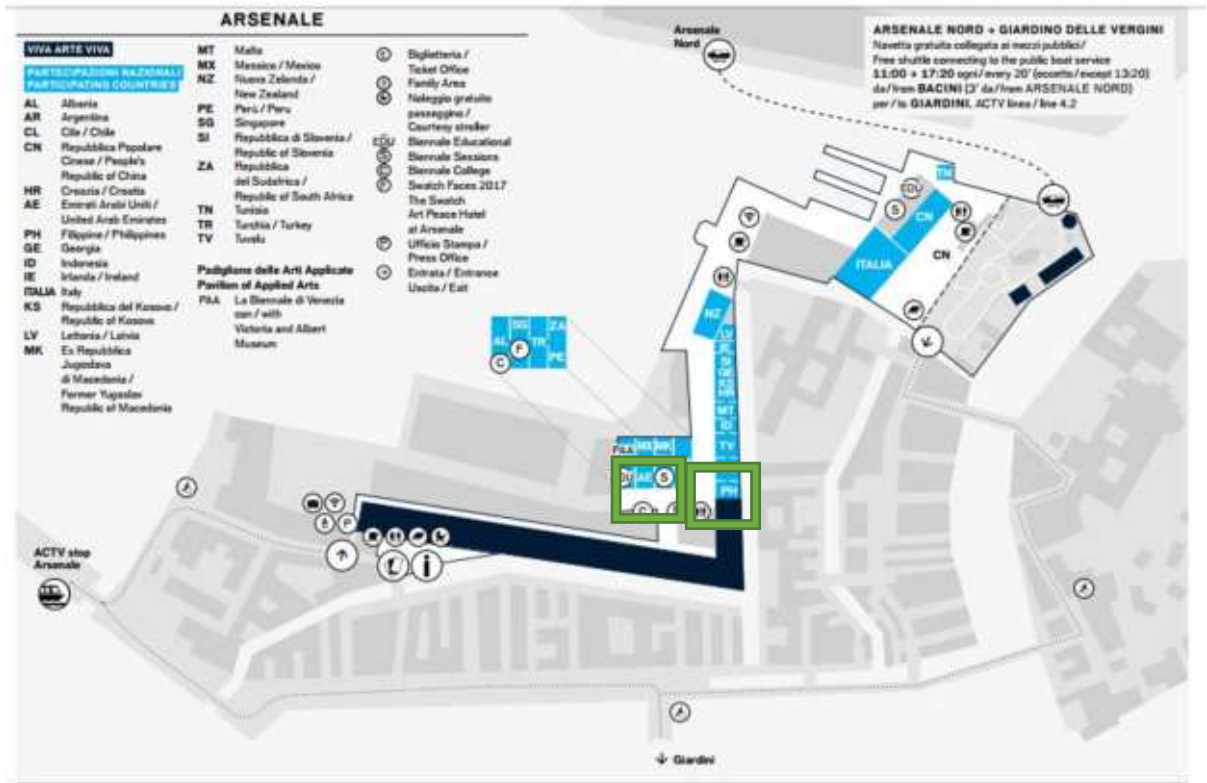


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Figure 2.17: Kastuhiro M. (photographer), *Image* (1996) in “interventions”, <https://interventionsjournal.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/inside-me-the-earthquake-materiality-and-embodiment-in-the-1996-fractures-exhibition/> [last access on January 3_2022].

Figure 2.18: Halbe R. (photographer), *Image* in “Arquitectura Viva”, <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/pabellon-de-japon-en-expo-2000-9> [last access on January 3_2022].

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Chapter 3: “How Will We Live Together?”: The Japanese Answer

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Figure 3.5: Bangkok Project Studio (photographer), *Image* in “designboom”, designboom.com; <https://www.designboom.com/architecture/thai-pavilion-venice-biennale-architecture-elephants-humans-05-17-2021/> [last access on January 3_2022].

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Figure 3.19-20-21: see Figure 3.3.

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