CHAPTERS FROM THE HISTORY AND THEORIES OF

JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

"It is precisely in, and through, an understanding of alien cultures that we can come to a more sensitive and critical understanding of our own culture and of those prejudices that may lie hidden from us."

Richard J. Bernstein

Japanese architecture both as a present practice and a course of history provides us with particular features and unique examples. On the one hand, they are deeply rooted in cultural patterns highlighting important differences between the approaches to design in the East and the West; on the other hand, they are also derivative of Japan's contemporary conditions: advanced technology, modes of production and consumption, social developments, mode of urbanization, etc., which altogether have by now yielded one of the most innovative, future oriented, and critical practices in the world of urban architecture today.

The lecture course introduces the major issues characterizing Japanese architecture in the past and, more importantly, as well as more in detail, the present. The emphasis is on postwar developments including the most recent ones today. Special attention will be given to "stages" of urbanization and various interpretations of the city by generations of Japanese architects. The weekly lectures add up to basically a theory course with the necessary references to history. Contemporary design philosophies and intentions will be outlined in the context of traditions and the wider international scene of the past fifty or so years. The course will also investigate the work of such internationally renowned architects as Kenzo Tange, Togo Murano, Fumihiko Maki, Arata Isozaki, Yoshio Taniguchi, Tadao Ando, Toyo Ito, Hiroshi Hara, Kengo Kuma, Shigeru Ban, SANAA, Atelier Bow Wow, and many others.

The purpose of the course is to expose you, the students, to various architectural design philosophies, methodologies and practices in an urban and cultural environment different from ours, thus provide you with an additional tool to further develop your awareness of the built environment as a cultural phenomenon, as well as a form of political and ideological discourse within society. In so doing, the course ultimately aims at helping you to come to a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between society and architecture or, in general, the built environment, plus the role of the architect in guiding this relationship.

Course requirements will include: students, working in teams of two, will keep their class notes up to date; preparing one well-formulated written question for each class from which a few selected ones will be discussed at the beginning of each class; a short final paper on a building selected from a list prepared by your instructor, and building a small (1:300 scale) and a larger (1:50 scale) sectional model of the very building about which the short paper will also be written.

I look forward to working with you all.

Botond Bognar
Professor and Edgar Tafel Endowed Chair in Architecture
Kengo Kuma, Cultural Village of the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon, 2017. Photo © B. Bognar