Identity in the Work of Tadao Ando
An exploratory essay on the problems of how to model identity

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The growth of the global economy carries with it a enormous range of products around the world and the tendency for them to be used uncritically, both regional products and imported ones. This has affected our architecture and cities around the world which are becoming generic: generic cities without history and without identity. Is there no way to escape from this monotonous world? The critical regionalists believe that there is. They do not long for a city that never changes, they long for a city which critically changes, critical towards products of our global economy as much as critical of the region itself. This critical architecture is related to what we could call critical identity, which we want to explore in this article.
The objective of this article is to describe what a critical identity could be and its dynamics using a project of the Japanese architect Tadao Ando called Museum Langen Foundation in Neuss, Germany, 2004. Thus the article tries to make a first step toward modeling the concept of identity.

Keywords: identity, place, critical regionalism, architecture

1. Introduction

How can we generate designs which reinforce the identity of a place? How can we model it?

It seems that the first question to be answered is what the meaning of identity is. The concept of Identity has multiple facets which were discussed at earlier GA conferences. One may speak for example, about the identity of the architect, the identity of the users of a future building, as well as about the identity of the building and the identity of the place. Critical Regionalists make a plea for a critical identity arguing that architects should critically consider the use, the potentiality of the place (including cultural and political backgrounds) as well as the use of products of globalization (including new technologies and new materials). They speak about an identity with reference to continuation and change but also about an identity which is produced by a critical position away from the picturesque due to the use of defamiliarization.

This article explores how architects deal with the identity of the place during the design process and takes the position of the critical regionalists toward a critical architecture. However, it also gives attention to the architects' identity. The research is based on the analysis of one case. First, the article gives its approach toward the concept of identity and its role within the critical regionalist's theoretical approach;

secondly, the article describes Tadao Ando's design approach. The description of the designer's approach toward identity is intended to give insights into how the architect deals with this concept; thirdly, the article describes Ando's design for the Langen Foundation in Neuss, Germany 2004; and finally we identify the sort of identities and the identity dynamics that we could recognize in his design approach and in this project.

The ultimate goal of this article is to assist researchers in the difficult task of modeling identity.

2. The concept of Identity[1]

What is identity? One may talk about reinforcing the identity of a place or creating a new identity such as, respectively, Ignazio Gardella's Casa Zattere (1953-1962) in Venice and Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles. The Critical Regionalists, whose approach is analyzed in this article, seem to propose something in between.

Does identity refer to a constant, unchanging, permanent condition? It seems interesting to note that although the notion of identity seems to be directly opposed to the notions of change and time, this is not strictly true. Adolf Loos, in his story "The Poor Rich Man" (Loos 1921), depicts the life of a newly rich man living in a house furnished by a designer who also designed the owner's clothes and defined where he had to use each of the garments (even his shoes) throughout the house. For the designer, nothing should change, neither by moving them around nor by adding new objects such as family portraits on the bookshelves. The objective behind Loos' story was to show the architects of the Secession that their houses were like a sarcophagus (Heynen 1999, pp. 75-76) because life was frozen in the perfection of an unchangeable moment. The owner was living in a house that reflected his new status of a rich man, his "new identity". However, a person's life is about change and his/her identity changes accordingly. Identity is about continuation and change.

Manuel Castells, in The Power of Identity, speaks of the dynamics of identities which switch power over time[2]. So an identity of resistance can transform over the years into an institutional, political power in society. Wherever people conduct normal, everyday life, there will be still changes related to political, economic and social issues and consequently changes to the physical environment itself (Castells 2004). He is speaking about the dynamics of identities on the level of the society.

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[1] The main ideas of this part of the essay were discussed in GA2004 article "Precedent & Identity"

[2] Manuel Castells divides identity into three kinds: legitimizing identities (such as those which refer to an institution or the civil state; resistance identities which are formed by agents marginalized by legitimizing identities and which may also become very oppressive toward their members; and project identities. Project identity is often created around resistance identity, but in contrast, it is not focused on resistance but on constructing a new situation.

On the level of the individual, identity refers to perception. We identify characteristics in people, series of objects, buildings, cities and so forth, classify these elements and compare them all the time. Abrupt changes in the direct environment over time are thus part of the creation of a new identity. If a city loses its current identity, it is simultaneously creating a new one.

3. The role of Identity in Critical Regionalism

The main task of Critical Regionalism[3] is, according to Lefaivre and Tzonis, "to rethink architecture through the concept of region." Critical Regionalism differs from Regionalism because it "does not support the emancipation of a regional group nor does it set up one group against another" (Tzonis, Lefaivre 1990, p. 31). Critical Regionalism is critical of the products of globalization as much as it is of regionalism itself. In Tropical Architecture: *Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization*, Tzonis and Lefaivre maintain: "Critical regionalism should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory to trends toward higher technology and a more global economy and culture. It opposes only their undesirable, contingent by-products due to private interests and public mindlessness" (Tzonis and Lefaivre 2001, pp. 8-9).
For Critical Regionalists, region/place does not coincide with a nation or a territory of an ethnic group as in the Heideggerian way of thinking. But it is mindful of local potentials. As Tzonis says in *Critical Regionalism, Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World*, critical regionalists are "opposed to mindlessly adopting the narcissistic dogmas in the name of universality, leading to environments that are economically costly and ecologically destructive to the human community" (Tzonis, Lefaivre 2003, p. 20).
Considering that this critical position separates them from the picturesque and kitsch, we may say that for the critical regionalists, places are being continuously reinvented, and this everyday "reinventing" of a "place" seems to be linked to Castells' "project identity", which critically refers to continuation (local potential) and change (new technologies, new materials, products of globalization); to the homely and unhomely. Lefaivre and Tzonis do not provide a checklist or a method for designing a "proper" architecture. However, they suggest the use of the modernist technique of defamiliarization to deal with an often over-familiarized idea of home and place. They argue: "Defamiliarization is at the heart of what distinguishes critical regionalism from other forms of regionalism and its capability to create a renewed versus an atavistic, sense of place in our time […] The critical approach of contemporary regionalist architecture reacts against this explosion of regionalist counterfeit setting [as used in Romantic regionalism] by employing defamiliarization. Critical regionalism is interested in specific elements from the region, those that have acted as agents of contact and community, the place-defining elements, and incorporates them

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[3] The notion of Critical Regionalism was introduced 25 years ago by Alexander Tzonis to draw attention to the approach taken by a group of young German architects in Europe. This group was working on an alternative to the postmodernism that, with few exceptions, had not really taken architecture, as it meant to do, out of a state of stagnation and disrepute by the reintroduction of historical knowledge and cultural issues in design (Tzonis, Lefaivre 2003, p. 10).

'strangely', rather than familiarly, it makes them appear strange, distant, difficult even disturbing. It disrupts the sentimental 'embracing' between buildings and their consumers and instead makes an attempt at 'pricking the conscience'."
Defamiliarization, a word coined by Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky[4], is in Critical Regionalism a device which makes the familiar strange and makes the recollection of a precedent critical rather than a picturesque manifestation of the past. Linking this defamiliarization with the work of Tadao Ando that we will analyze in the next section, we refer to an interview of Tadao Ando with Philip Jodidio for the book "Tadao Ando" (Jodidio 2007). In this interview, Ando says, "I am interested in a dialogue with the architecture of the past but it must be filtered through my own vision and my own experience. I am indebted to Le Corbusier or to Mies van der Rohe, but in the same way, I take what they did and interpret it in my own fashion." This refers for a kind of defamiliarization and it seems that this defamiliarization is not only used in his autonomous moment but it is used to enter in dialogue with the users of his designs. For this we can take as an example the use of nature in its abstract form in most of his buildings referring to the use of nature in Japanese everyday life which is being lost in the metropolis of Japan.

4. Tadao Ando's Langen Foundation Neuss, Germany: a case

Tadao Ando was born in Osaka, Japan in 1941. He is an autodidact architect who traveled to Europe, the United States of America and Africa from 1962 to 1969 to study the architecture of these continents. In 1969 he opened his architectural office in Osaka. In 1976 Ando receive the Japanese Architectural Association Prize for his Azuma House in Sumiyoshi and after many other prizes he won the Pritzker Prize in 1995.

The reasons for choosing Ando as an object of study are the availability of written material, especially that of Kenneth Frampton who links Ando to the Critical Regionalists and phenomenology as well as the availability of designs. One of the main sources on the characteristics of Ando's world view is Frampton's "The Work of Tadao Ando" in *Tadao Ando*, edited by Yukio Futagawa (Frampton 1987.

The Museum Langen Foundation was selected because it is a project conceived for Germany and not for Japan, which can give insights into the purpose of using traditional Japanese architecture.

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[4]   According to my editor Marcus Richardson, he didn't coin the word as such. He coined a word in Russian which has been translated into English as "defamiliarization", but a more literal translation of the Russian word would be "making strange".

4.1 Tadao Ando's design approach

In "The Work of Tadao Ando", Frampton describes Ando's design strategies. He describes a set of principles followed by Ando, mentions the influences of Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn in Ando's work, as well as the relationship between Ando's work and phenomenology.

I will briefly describe here some of these characteristics with particular reference to the identity of the architect and of the place. The aim here is to identify relevant sources of identities represented in the work of Ando. As mentioned above, we try to discern an identity of the architect that he carries as his worldview from the identity of the place, which he considers for that specific location as well as other identities considered in the design process such as the identity of the users and the identity of the institution (the building itself). Naturally, identities may only be subdivided in a theoretical attempt to get insights into the complexity of their aspects. In fact, these identities are all part of the architect's interpretation of the world, the site and the users. Therefore, a design often shows ambiguous characteristics with ambiguous meaning which represent more than one kind of identity. Ando argues, "I create enclosed spaces mainly by means of thick walls. The primary reason is to create a place for the individual, a zone for oneself within the society. When the external factors of a city environment required the wall to be without openings, the interior must be especially full and satisfying" [biography on the Pritzker Prize website]. One can say that here he reinforces the idea of belonging of the dweller (the user) by creating a place protected from the city environment.

The spirit of the wabi in Ando's position refers to a resistance towards what could be called the lost of Walter Benjamin's Erfahrung and the homelessness of the modern man. Frampton argues, "Ando's insistence on the 'homelessness' of modern man, reflects […] his affinity for negative thought of the Krausian circle". This negativity, Frampton says, is represented in Ando's designs by "the monotonality of his architecture" and a "sense of nihilistic muteness" reminiscent of Adolf Loos. If I recall Loos' principles, I can link this to Loos' principle of the Mask that is represented in his architecture by the reinforced separation between private and public; by windows meant to bring light to the house interior and not for an overview; the almost obsession with having no ornaments; and indeed, monotonality (at least in what concerns the façade). In Ando's architecture the muteness is also achieved by the relation between walls and pillars as well as the play between translucence and opacity; creating spaces which are penetrated through a ceremonial route (the labyrinth) marked by sequential elements and a play with natural light.

Frampton links Ando to phenomenology by calling him a builder who, despite his minimalism, aims to provide a dwelling; a builder who is also the farmer occupied not only with the cultivation of land but the cultivation of the species and who understands that "the topos of the site only comes into being with being". It is unavoidable to speak about "place" without bringing Noberg-Schulz's "The phenomenon of place" and his description of the structure of the place recalling elements and aspects which "come only into being" through perception. According to Frampton, Tadao Ando is also a builder in the sense of "evocation of a resistant pre-

bourgeois, pre-renaissance set of values", a builder also due his ontological and material presence of tectonic form.

Ando uses Japanese traditional architecture, Le Corbusier[5] and Louis Kahn's architecture as precedents. It goes without saying that his use of such precedents refers to his interpretation and recombination of the principles underlying each precedent. It is not about copying the morphology in a historicist fashion, but their essential operations (the "how" question). The use and recombination of these principles in Ando's work is meant to give gestalt to his own interpretation of the world.

4.2 Tadao Ando's design approach to Langen Foundation

The Museum Langen Foundation was built in Neuss, Germany in 2004. It was built at a special site within the former Hombroich Missile Base which was transformed by Karl-Heinrich Müller into a synthesis of architecture and art. Visitors stroll around in the park where they encounter pieces of art that belong to diverse periods and diverse styles without a rigid chronological order. On sunny days, the doors of the buildings in this park are kept open so that one may stroll from nature into a building and from there once more into nature.

The Missile Base is a protected site cut off from the outside world which justifies the use of the sparkling glass envelope which composes part of Ando's museum. Ando guides the visitor though a gateway into a promenade architecturale. This gateway clearly refers to Chinese and Japanese traditional gardens. However, it is not a moon gate on a flat wall; instead you find a rectangular entrance cut into a semi-circle concrete wall. This wall sets a boundary to the place beyond and at the same time invites the visitor to pass through it by providing them with a pictorial view of the building. The path that penetrates the gate invites the visitors to approach the building via the cherry trees and the artificial pond. Indeed it is not necessary to reinforce the character of the entrance. The path, the cherry trees, the pond, the glass envelope all guide the visitor toward its flush entrance. Air, water, wind and light are part of the experience of the visitor, making them fully awaked to and integrated with the nature around. Inside the glass envelope there is an exhibition space enclosed by thick concrete walls. The translucency of the glass envelope, where one feels integrated with the nature outside, is juxtaposed with the opacity of the concrete box.

The glass envelope is interlocked with a second part of the complex, with a rectangular volume at an angle of 45 degrees which is cut by a staircase through its longitudinal side dividing the interior spaces into two wings. This rectangular volume stands 3.45 meters above ground level, and extends 6 meters underground. The visitors enter this rectangular volume from the glass envelope, making their way onto

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[5] Ando says about a book he acquired on the work of Le Corbusier: "I traced the drawings of his early period so many times that all the pages turned black. In my mind, I quite often wonder how Le Corbusier would have thought about this project or that."[Pritzker Prize website]

a balcony. The underground exhibition spaces are reached via a ramp linking the balcony with the left wing or via a staircase which is part of an interlocked volume penetrating both the balcony and the right wing. From the right wing visitors can make their way out of the building. The natural light in these exhibition wings and inside the concrete box within the glass envelope comes mostly from the ceiling.

5. Conclusion: Tadao Ando's Langen Foundation and the modes of identity

Ando seems to have paid lots of attention to the identity of the place and in this sense provides an exploratory journey for the user. He provides a boundary with the position of the semi-circular wall and with the gateway creates the perception of being inside or outside. Also, with the thin and transparent glass envelope he sets a slight boundary between inside and outside, between man and nature, integrating them more than separating them. The concrete wall seems to be more to provide a contrasting experience and to protect the art collection from environmental changes than to protect man from modern society, since the Langen Foundation is located in a place within a place (former Hombroich Missile Base). Also, it seems that in order to integrate the building in the park and minimalize its impact, Ando built the second volume mostly underground.

From the design description one can see how complex it is to discern one kind of identity from the other. Only by the fact that the building is located in Germany, one can understand that the abstract or defamiliarized elements of Japanese traditional architecture of his designs are not really used to prick the mind of the local people. Just like Le Corbusier's promenade architecturale, Japanese traditional architecture is used as a precedent which is defamiliarized and recombined to represent Ando's worldview.

One may say that this says more about the architect's identity that belongs to the autonomous moment of the architect than about a his original resistance position such as the one against the homelessness in the Japanese metropolis (a concern about the identity of the user). In fact, this building would probably have a more symbolic meaning for Japanese people due to its reference to their tradition and it could be called a critical architecture in the sense of the critical regionalists if built in Japan.

It seems that the use of Ando's precedents grew out a concern toward the local cultural potential (identity of the place and of the users) and became part of his worldview (the identity of the architect). It is quite possible that the use of Japanese traditional architecture, the confrontation with (abstract) nature, and the mystic use of light was meant – in a defamiliarized fashion and in unexpected recombination – to prick the mind of his Japanese contemporaries and that these are sources of the identity of the user as interpreted by Ando. This is at least what Ando's statement on the Pritzker Prize website seems to suggest: "I was born and raised in Japan; I do my work here [in Japan]." But it became part of his vocabulary.

This all shows the dynamics of the identities involved in Ando's design process where issues that were on one occasion circumstantial become part of the body of knowledge and of the poetics of an architect. This shift in his design process turns Ando not less creative, but it distances his work from the critical regionalism.

Finally, after this brief description of Ando's project, we hope to have made it clear that this dynamics may be a source of complication and in need of research for those trying to model the concept of identity for programmatic purposes.

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