The Concept of Cultural Hybridity and its Application on Architect Kengo Kuma's Personhood and Constructions

Kraan, Killian van der

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Killian van der Kraan

(s1670336)

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Introduction

As a dedication to the necessary move away from cultural essentialism, this research explores one of its prominent counter-concepts, cultural hybridity, by combining the following research questions; What is meant by the concept of cultural hybridity? How does this concept apply to Kengo Kuma's (隈研吾) (1954-) life and his architecture?

One way to make a move towards new terminologies, theories, and an overall deeper understanding of intercultural connections, is to examine objects and people in transnational movement.[1] Such an examination pays homage to the entangled qualities of identified, delineated cultures, and acknowledges that the dynamics of globalization and modernity are inherently multiplicitous, dependent on different transnational and cross-cultural flows. This research opens up space for the consideration of cultural dynamics outside the established structures of essentialism through the following. First, chapter 1 explores the concept of culture and its entangled qualities. Second, chapter 2 explores the process of globalization and the theories regarding its starting point and end result. And third, chapter 3 features an in-depth analysis of the concept of cultural hybridity and its vices and virtues. The broad notions of culture and globalization are the fundamental principles that underlie this concept, which is why their exploration is preliminary. Furthermore, their exploration can help the reader deepen their understanding of cultural dynamics and support the on-going move away from cultural essentialism.

Following, chapter 4 and 5 focus on how the concept of cultural hybridity applies to architect Kuma's oeuvre through a consideration of him and his buildings' place within-, on-, and beyond the fringes of Japan's cultural borders. Kuma's work is often directly connected solely to Japanese national culture and discussed in the context of a supposed historically traceable Japanese history. This understanding of Kuma's architecture and personhood seems closely tied to cultural essentialism. The range of sub- and trans-national - as well as personal - influences that one finds in Kuma's work, suggest that it is in truth culturally hybrid. An examination of Kuma's work through the scope of cultural hybridity could prove the concept's viability as a counter to essentialism through its acknowledgement of intercultural flows outside of the prominent narrative of a distinct Japanese culture.

[1] van Schendel, "Geographies of knowing," 662.

1. Cultures as Entanglements

Because of its convoluted historical development within European languages, and its use in numerous distinct intellectual disciplines, culture has become a complicated concept with a broad range of implications. Originally the term 'culture' has its roots in the latin term cultura or 'cultivation'. Culture's primary meaning has thus long been "the tending of natural growth."[2] The term culture has also long been synonymous with that of 'civilization' and the notion of becoming 'civilized'.[3] Incidentally, it was commonly believed throughout the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, during the so called Age of Enlightenment, that it were the Europeans who were destined to spread this civil growth, and this belief served as one of the backbones of their colonialist endeavours.

In the late eighteenth-century Johann Gottfried Herder, a German philosopher, theologian, and writer, stated in *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784-91), that it was time to move beyond the assumption of 'culture' as the universal self-development of humanity led by the dominant Europeans.[4] In order to shift towards a concept of culture which also acknowledged the development of different nations and groups, Herder argued for the use of 'cultures', in the plural. As stated by anthropologist Jonathan Friedman in *Cultural Identity And Global Process*: "in this early anthropology it [culture] was associated with the entire repertoire of a people', usually very closely associated, that is, a 'people's defining characteristics."[5] Furthermore, cultures were understood to have implicit rankings based on the level of their development.

However, through the increasing awareness that language is a concept, not a truth, culture gradually became separate from the individual experience, as something 'out there'.[6] Today this implication of culture as something one participates in has gained prominence, but culture is still often seen as intrinsic within public discourse. According to a common, modern dictionary, culture is a noun defined as follows: "the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group."[7] Generally this concept of culture is used as a means through which groups are identified and distinguished from other

[2] Williams, *Keywords*, 49.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 51.
[5] Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, 67.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, "Culture".

groups. When certain characteristics of human behaviours, beliefs and symbols are neither universal nor limited to an individual the term ‘culture’ is often used to describe and define the specific collection of these characteristics and the people that behave accordingly.[8]

One way to understand the concept of culture within cultural studies is by characterizing it as an entanglement; an asymmetric kind of mixture whereof the extent to which each of its components is mixed cannot truly be specified. The combination of material and abstract attributes of which a specific culture is deemed to consist can then be seen as the surface of this entanglement. Examples of such attributes are language, religion, art, habits, rules, and values. Amongst others, these attributes are part of the process by which people navigate their way through life, and when multiple people include the same attributes in their ways of life they can be part of a cultural in-group. It is important to note that an entanglement, when considered hastily, can be seen as a complex mess, to be untangled and straightened out, like one often has to do with the wires of headphones. But, culture should not be seen in this way, its entangled character could better be compared to that of a tapestry, where numerous threads interweave to produce a whole, neat surface, where, for instance, cultural entities are delineated based on differences in the colors and motifs of the tapestry.

To state an example that is in-line with this research; Japanese culture is, under its surface, a mixture of a vast range of influences, mainly derived from the Asian continent’s mainland. This is evident in attributes such as the ‘Japanese’ characters and their pronunciation, in Zen, Shinto, and their ideologies and practices, in various artistic practices such as *sumi-e* 墨絵 monochrome painting, as well as in other supposedly distinct Japanese ‘traditions’. This inherent entanglement, which is also evident in other cultures, is however—mainly resulting from the postcolonialist stress on nationhood—often masked by an image of culture as being separate, homogenous and private. Friedman describes this adequately:

> Our construction and reification of other cultures is a highly reductionistic project whose rationalization is the concept of culture itself: the assumption that the world is made up of cultures, and that culture is a fundamental unit of understanding or even analysis. Culture, instead, might be seen as an enormous interplay of interpretations of a given social reality, in which the anthropologist has had the last word. … The

[8] Wallerstein, “Culture as the Ideological Battleground,” 31.

> substantialization of culture is a specific kind of practice of identification of others, an essentialization of otherness in which the product of the multiple practices of interpretation takes precedence over the practices themselves.[9]

Identity plays a key role in cultural formations. Cultures are, because of their entangled qualities, repeatedly perceived as existing both within space and time -and beyond space and time. The narratives that create such identities make cultures historically traceable, and, at the same time, the expression of a constant essence. So, despite its etymological roots in 'cultivation', and thus the connotation of culture as a naturally grown thing (developed from the inside-out), when speaking of a particular culture, it is actually produced from the outside, as a delineated abstraction of underlying flows, created by the rasterizing thoughts of humankind.

Without a narrative structure there can not be a cultural history. So, as cultural theorist Homi Bhabha stated in *The Location of Culture* (1994), representations of cultural difference should not be seen as reflections of pre-given truths, they are a part of perpetual negotiations that attempt to establish the aforementioned entanglements of material and abstract attributes (language, religion, art, etc) as a united, authorized way of life.[10] It is thus unreasonable to talk about a culture without acknowledging who is defining it, its constructed narratives, and the underlying power balances created by its relationship with 'others'.[11]

When assuming a position outside the cultural operating system—for as far as that is possible—one notices cultures' relativity and their indoctrinating qualities. Unlike one's natural qualities, like eye-color, one's cultural belonging is fragile. Cultures have always depended on intercultural borrowing, exchange and migration. Thus, scholars within cultural- and area studies have reached an overarching consensus; cultures should not be seen as bordered, geographically entrenched, static entities - but more as abstract delineations, defined through a inter-relational process of perpetual identification, of an ever changing, organic entanglement. They have recognized that the endless cycle of violence justified by the myth of group purity might be subdued when this notion of interculturality is introduced

[9] Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, 74.
[10] Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 3.
[11] Featherstone,. "Global Culture," 11.

in a theoretically useful way.[12] One of these theories is that of cultural hybridity, which will be explored later on in this research.

2. Globalization and Its Implications

The complexity of the global cultural flows of the twenty first-century seems to be supporting the demise of the prominent, essentialist model of cultures, as well as the introduction of theories concerning interculturality. Propelled by the power of transnational infrastructures, the globalization process is, simply said, widening spatial interactions and shortening time, and thus 'shrinking' the world.[13] Furthermore, as cultural analyst Nikos Papastergiadis suggests in the article *Hybridity and Ambivalence* (2005), the contradictory forces of integration and disintegration within the process of globalization have caused a diversity which cannot simply be captured by the binary notions of the 'local' and the 'global', the 'traditional' and the 'modern', or 'the West' and 'the rest'.[14] Through the process of globalization the borders between outside and inside are disintegrating.

Globalization was first mentioned and theorized in cultural terms - as the compression of the world - in sociologist Roland Robertson's *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992). However, depending on the discipline, the process now has different implications. Global studies and sociology professor Jan Nederveen Pieterse included a valuable overview of globalization's different implications according to social science disciplines (Fig. 1) in his book *Globalization and Culture* (2009). He writes that in cultural studies, globalization is generally perceived to have started in the 1970s and mainly refers to activity in the domain of mass media, ICT, advertising and consumption, whereas in the field of history and anthropology, globalization refers to humankind's spread across the globe, which has been going on since its beginnings.[15] Globalization is thus seen as a literal, empirical increase in economic and political connectivity, a historical truth, and an overall increasing awareness of global interrelations.

[12] Ashcroft, Bill. "Cutting the ground," 35.
[13] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 8.
[14] Papastergiadis, "Hybridity and Ambivalence," 55.
[15] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 16.

Disciplines	*Period*	*Agency, domain*	*Keywords*
Economics	1970s>	MNCs, banks, technologies	Global corporation, world product, global capitalism
	2000s>		New economy, dot.com
Cultural studies	1970s>	Mass media, ICT, advertising, consumption	Global village, CNN world, McDonaldization, Disneyfication, hybridization
Political science, international relations	1980s>	Internationalization of the state. Social movements, INGOs	Competitor states, post-international politics, global civil society
Geography	1900s>	Space and place, relativization of distance	Global-local dialectics, globalization
Sociology	1800s>	Modernity	Capitalism, nation states, industrialization, etc.
Philosophy	1700s>	Global reflexivity	Planetary ethics, universal morality
Political economy	1500s>	Capitalism	World market
History, anthropology	5000 BCE>	Cross-cultural trade, technologies, world religions. Evolution	Global flows, global ecumene. Widening scale of cooperation
Ecology		Global ecology, integration of ecosystems	Spaceship earth, global risk

Figure 1. Globalization's Different Implications According to Social Science Disciplines. (Source: Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture*, 16)

Despite the term's ambiguity, Nederveen Pieterse further states that there are some general agreements regarding globalization. Namely that the process is being shaped by technological change, that it involves the reconfiguration of states, that it also has effects of a smaller scale - such as on regional levels, and that it is uneven.[16] However a consideration of the relevant literature shows that there are also recurrent differences in opinion, even in cultural studies, concerning numerous issues of the globalization process, for example; If it is an old or new phenomenon, if it is manageable, if it is a form of new cultural imperialism, and if it leads to homogeneity, heterogeneity or something else. What follows is an exploration of the different opinions regarding the globalization process that are relevant for this research.

An increase in mobility of people, capital, goods and ideas has been a central trend since humanity's beginnings. These travelled along networks of routes (e.g. The Silk Road)

[16] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 8.

spanning both sea and land. Ancient trade networks like this can justifiably be compared to the modern day technological networks that connect the globe, and the process of globalization can be used to describe both humanities past and future. Sociologist Robert Holton, and Nederveen Pieterse, both avid analysts of the concept of globalization, are advocates of this notion of globalization as a historical truth. From a historical perspective, Nederveen Pieterse states; "it makes sense to distinguish different stages of globalization—such as ancient, modern, and contemporary."[17] Globalization can be defined as a historical truth because of the ancient population's movements across and between continents, their long-distance cross-cultural trade, and the cross-continental diffusion of technologies.[18]

The evident interculturality of the past is also used to dispute the existence of globalization by Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson in *Globalization in Question* (1996). They state that before 1914 the world was more internationalized than today and suggest the following; if intercultural relations have always been there, and globalization can be applied to the whole history of humankind, is it even a useful concept?[19] Their specific argument is however made from a solely economic perspective, meaning it focuses on global corporations and technologies from the 1970s onwards.[20] This thesis however understands globalization as a combination of the concepts used in history, anthropology and cultural studies, meaning globalization started at the dawn of civilization, and has increased exponentially through the advancement of technologies, especially the last decades advancements in telecommunication.

2.1 The Three Visions of a Globalized World

It's difficult to imagine that global relations can grow without a stop. So, among those who do believe in the existence of globalization, which seem to be the majority of scholars, opinions differ in terms of what the process of globalization will lead to. Generally their visions can be divided into three different versions of the future. First, there are those who believe that the major cultures will remain separate due to their inherently different qualities. Secondly, there are those who believe that all cultures will converge into one homogenous whole (this is

[17] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 28.
[18] Ibid., 27.
[19] Hirst and Thompson, *Globalization in question*, 27.
[20] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 16.

often referred to as a new form of cultural imperialism). Lastly, there are those who believe that the outcome of globalization will be - and in some ways already is - an open-ended, on-going process of mixage. This research is in favor of this third vision.

2.1.1 Cultural Differentiation

The first vision, of cultural differentiation and on-going wars of difference, is heavily rooted in the cultural theories of the aforementioned Johann Gottfried Herder. This belief in strong, inherent cultural boundaries is also intertwined in today's nation-state ideologies. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996) is one of the most famous examples of an academic vision of globalization as cultural differentiation. Although not necessarily as grim as Huntington's theory of violent conflict between cultures, there are more who believe cultural difference will be the undeniable outcome of globalization.

In the opening passage of sociologist Mike Featherstone's *Global Culture* (1990), he too argues that, as seen in the numerous responses to the concept of globalization, "there is little prospect of a unified global culture".[21] Furthermore, in *Towards a Global Culture?*, a chapter in this same book, sociologist Anthony D. Smith states that "If by 'culture' is meant a collective mode of life, or a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values and symbols, then we can only speak of cultures, never just culture ... the idea of a 'global culture' is a practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms."[22] Furthermore, the question; "the global, all-inclusive and unified, for whom is it?", as asked by Anthony King in *Spaces of Global Culture* (2004), show that he too, amongst more, like Pieterse, Appadurai and Hannerz (1995; 1996; 1996), remains skeptic of the notion of a homogeneous, global culture.[23]

2.1.2 Cultural Convergence

There are also those who believe that the globalization process will lead to cultural convergence, characterized by a growing sameness.[24] For example, many of the scholars analyzing globalization have considered that the notion of global culture might be nothing more than American cultural imperialism, meaning that the West would be the place from

[21] Featherstone,. "Global Culture," 10.
[22] Smith, "Towards A Global Culture?," 17.
[23] King, *Spaces of global cultures, 24*.
[24] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 44.

which a culture appropriate for standardization spreads.[25] The argument is then often tied to ideologies of national and ethnic subordination, and shows that globalization is supposedly a part of uneven power relations that should be considered in the long history of Western imperialism. In the words of Nederveen Pieterse from *Globalization and Culture* (2009): "If colonialism delivered Europeanization, neocolonialism under U.S. hegemony delivers Americanization."[26] The ambiguity and overlaps of modernization, Americanization and globalization means that they're frequently used as synonyms and often entail a vision of the future centered around Western culture (recently this vision has also entailed China as the potential center of cultural standardization).

However, just like the term 'glocalization' (coined by Sony chairman Akio Morito) implies, generally, globally distributed products often only succeed when they adapt themselves to local cultures. This can be seen, for example, in the global establishment of fast food restaurants, where the menu often varies according to its location. So, if globalization is a new form of imperialism, the export has to - instead of forcefully entering foreign countries - ease its way into localities through a form of cultural adaptation. Globalization is an unequal process, but it cannot just be seen as characterized by a direct advance of the West. Like cultural analyst John Tomlinson, states in *Globalization and Culture* (1999): " the threat of a more profound homogenization of culture can only be deduced by ignoring the complexity, reflexivity and sheer recalcitrance of actual, particular cultural responses to modernity."[27]

The binary oppositions of the 'local' and the 'global', the 'traditional' and the 'modern', or 'the West' and 'the East' are often used synonymously, meaning the 'local', 'traditional', and 'the East' are joined and understood as opposites of the 'global', 'modern' and 'the West'. Through these rudimentary separations global culture often suggests that which local culture is not.[28] A vision of a globalized world through this paradigm is much that of a stagnant, bland unity, characterized by mechanical lifestyles, and devoid of the colourful practices that often mark cultural communities. It would be more appropriate to envision the exchange between the local and global, and all binary oppositions for that matter, as co-constitutive. In the words of sociologist Ulrich Beck, taken from Roy Starr's *Modernism and Japanese Culture* (2011): "Cosmopolitanism without provincialism is empty, provincialism without

[25] King, *Spaces of global cultures, 29*.
[26] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 55.
[27] Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture*, 97.
[28] King, *Spaces of global cultures, 31*.

cosmopolitanism is blind."[29] When focussing on the co-constitutive, the future of a globalized world would not necessarily be envisioned as void of smaller-scale 'local' communities that deviate from a Western norm. This opens up the paradigm for the inclusion of multiple modernities, like Bhahba wrote: "each repetition of the sign of modernity is different, specific to its historical and cultural conditions of enunciation."[30]

2.1.3 On-going Mixage

It is evident from, amongst others, Chinese, Korean and Japanese export, that the globalization process is not a one way street protruding from the center of the West. This means that globalization cannot simply be seen as resulting in one Western centered cultural unity. In *Globalization's Cultural Consequences* (2000) Holton justifiably states that the general notion of globalization's move towards either cultural homogeneity or cultural heterogeneity most likely does not suffice to predict the multidimensional elements that constitute global processes and the complex history of endless borrowing and exchange.[31]

Some East Asian nations have passed 'the West' in terms of its propagated capitalist modernity and find resonance in the plural concept of Asian modernities.[32] However, despite modernity's understanding as mainly large scale processes, the concept's application on only continental and national scales seems to be a fallacy. As Bahba implies with his reference to "multiple modernities", the effects of modernization are also seen on sub-national and sub-cultural levels. An example would be that Japanese teenagers of the 1990s and 2000s, who can be called—quite fittingly—'Nintendo kids', generally have a contrastingly different set of perspectives and values than older generations due to their modern upbringing.[33]

3. The Concept of Cultural Hybridity

3.1 The Virtues of Cultural Hybridity

This brings us to consider—after the discussion of 'cultural differentiation' (a move towards stark heterogeneity) and 'cultural convergence' (a move towards stark homogeneity)—the

[29] Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture*, 273.
[30] Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 355.
[31] Holton, "Globalization's Cultural Consequences," 148.
[32] Iwabuchi, *Recentering globalization*, 204.
[33] Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture*, 15.

third and last general vision of a globalized world, namely that of an open-ended, on-going process of mixage. This suggests that globalization is influenced by countless cultural flows interweaving from countless 'localities' and, when crudely returning to the traditional dichotomy that renowned academic Edward Said highlighted in Orientalism (1978), it could be a process of both 'Westernization' and 'Easternization'. This more nuanced view of the process of globalization as on-going entanglement is most commonly held amongst cultural scientists and referred to in terms of 'hybridization'. Such a vision supports the transcendence of essentialist, cultural identities, without fully giving it up.[34]

The undeniable intercultural quality of communities and individuals has gained a strong presence within the field of cultural analysis, and especially cultural studies. The abstract and material attributes that are a part of people's identities, whilst often maintaining loyalty to specific localities or in-groups, are becoming more culturally diverse due to the 'shrinkage' of the globalization process.[35] Consequently, the notion of 'cultural hybridity' has become a key concept in the numerous postcolonialist, postmodernist and poststructuralist debates concerning globalization and identity. Cultural hybridity, as a concept that pays homage to the on-going, perpetual intermingling, entangling, and fluctuating characteristics of delineated cultural entities, has become a means to reflect on the intercultural situatedness of culture's material and abstract attributes, as well as people. According to Tomlinson the "intuitive appeal" of cultural hybridity simply follows the notion of 'deterritorialization' in the context of the globalization process.[36] The process of cultural hybridity is arguably, just like that of globalization, intrinsic to humanity's timeline, but it has definitely grown in value since the increase in connectivity caused by the technological advances of the last centuries.

Cultural hybridity has its somewhat controversial roots in the nineteenth-century theories of scientific racism, where it served as a metaphor for the negative effects of racial intermingling.[37] Essentialist notions regarding the purity and superiority of the cultures of colonialist powers made this past notion of hybridity a threat to selfhood.[38] In this context—amongst others—the mixed-race children of the 'colonizers' and the 'colonized' were discriminated against. However, despite these classical connotations of the concept of

[34] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 55.
[35] Ibid., 71.
[36] Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture*, 141.
[37] Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory," 258.
[38] Papastergiadis, *The turbulence of migration*, 167.

hybridity, modern debate has been primarily engaged in hybridity's boundary-breaking potential for inclusivity. According to Papastergiadis it is poststructuralist theory that freed it from these classic subjects of racial purity and superiority.[39]Accordingly, professor of social science and cultural studies May Joseph states the following;

> Although the foundational discourses of hybridity lie in the anthropological and biological discourses of conquest and colonization, the modern move to deploy hybridity as a disruptive democratic discourse of cultural citizenship is a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development.[40]

At its core the concept of cultural hybridity can be used to describe and examine instances of mixage in both the abstract and material attributes of cultures. It can thus be understood as directly challenging the idea of essentialism because it opposes the notion of cultures as confined entities.[41] Bhahba, who originally proposed the concept of cultural hybridity in the modern, inclusive sense in *The Location Of Culture* (1994), states that the concept opens up a "third space". Simply put, it is in this space where encounters between delineated cultural entities take place, and where people can come to terms with interculturality, difference and unevenness.

Scholar of global communication Marwan Kraidy states that, contrary to Said's focus on the overwhelming power of the colonizer, Bhabha's theory has proved valuable through its stress on the interplay across the colonial divide.[42] Tomlinson and other scholars' lean in this same direction, he states that this sense of the concept of cultural hybridity empowers marginality and thus became an ideological means to dispute Western predominance.[43] In *Performing Hybridity* (1999) writer Jennifer Natalya Fink makes a similar argument, stating that cultural hybridity is a useful concept to "decolonize the mind" because it "resists the colonizing notion of singular identity".[44] As mentioned before, Papastergiadis too is a strong advocate of the potential of cultural hybridity, stating that, through its acknowledgment of identity as created through the "negotiation of difference", it makes "presence of fissures, gaps and

[39] Werbner and Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, 21.
[40] May and Fink, *Performing Hybridity*, 1.
[41] Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh, "Globalization and Hybridization," 176.
[42] Kraidy, *Hybridity*, 6.
[43] Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture*, 145.
[44] May and Fink, *Performing Hybridity*, 249.

contradictions ... not necessarily a sign of failure."[45] The potential virtue of the concept of cultural hybridity is thus vast.

3.2 The Vices of Cultural Hybridity

Despite the consensus surrounding the cultural hybridity's potential, further examination of the cultural hybridity does expose some of its weaknesses. Firstly, according to Pieterse the delineation of the concept means that "it would have to prove itself by giving as neat as possible a version of messiness, or an unhybrid categorization of hybridities."[46] Not only is this a contradictory task, it becomes even more complicated because of the arguably universal quality of the hybrid. When defining hybridity as something that is intrinsic to the human condition its conceptual use quickly becomes a tautology in which, in the words of cultural media scholars Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh; "globalization has brought about nothing more than the hybridization of hybrid cultures."[47] One predominant criticism is thus that; because of the consensus surrounding the notion that all cultures are always intercultural and hybrid, cultural hybridity is theoretically useless.[48]

This pervasive quality can furthermore be extended into the argument that, if cultural hybridity only celebrates mixage, it neglects the inequalities that are usually part of these mixtures. Accordingly, Fink states that "hybridity can become simply another tool to dissolve difference, celebrate homogeneity and erase history."[49] According to some critics the concept of cultural hybridity could represent the gaze of those cosmopolitan elites that are adversaries of national and ethnic identities.[50] Although the literature on cultural hybridity does show a great awareness regarding this possible use of the concept to neglect inequalities, it remains a valuable concern. The move from a focus on essentialist notions of racial and ethnic distinctiveness to the highlighting of interculturality and connectedness in the intellectual sphere over the past decades could very much be seen as an assault on those marginalized communities who have found strength in the former.

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[45] Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory," 258.
[46] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 78.
[47] Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh, "Globalization and Hybridization," 176.
[48] Kraidy, *Hybridity*, 7.
[49] May and Fink, *Performing Hybridity*, 250.
[50] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 106.

Then there is another critique that suggests the uselessness of the concept of cultural hybridity, namely that the acknowledgement of the 'hybrid' is a suggestion of the 'pure'. Tomlinson states that, because no culture is ever in a pure original form; "the hybridity argument in this form seems to summon up … implicit originary myths."[51] It is then not surprising, given cultural hybridity's use in the colonial context, most early acknowledgments of the concept do so, in the words of Pieterse; "on a note of regret and loss—loss of purity, wholeness, authenticity."[52] However this implication of purity only makes sense when disregarding the aforementioned critique that cultural hybridity is a tautology. I think that the pervasive, tautological quality of cultural hybridity has an enormous positive potential because it makes the imagined boundaries between defined entities transparent, freeing them from the conflicting pressure they exert against each other.

Lastly, there is the critique that the ambiguous connotations of 'hybridity' vary across different fields, cultures and time periods. Apart from its use in the context of colonialism, the concept of hybridity is historically intertwined with the field of biology and botany, where it refers to the crossing of organisms. It is also often used in reference to the merging of humankind and technology, here its reference towards the crossing of species is appropriated to envision the future of humankind as that of 'cyborgs', modified by technological tools. As for its ambiguity within cultural studies, Kraidy states that "the hybrid model can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything. Since the essence of its borders is oscillation, these boundaries can be conveniently repositioned to include and exclude different peoples and communities."[53]

Cultural hybridity's connection to biology and cross-fertilization does however seem quite useful. For example, in *Modernism and Japanese Culture* (2011) Starrs writes, in reference to the historical 'truth' of cultural hybridity that; "as Goethe the botanist might have reminded them [cultural essentialists], it is the hardy hybrid plants that survive the winter frosts."[54] Here it seems timely to introduce the theory of cultural hybridity that is of particular interest for this research, namely that of 'hybridity cycles',which anthropologist Stross proposes in his article *The Hybridity Metaphor: From Biology to Culture* (1999). He states the following: "crossing 'pure' cultural traditions yields hybrids, just as does crossing 'pure' biological

[51] Tomlinson, *Globalization and culture*, 143.
[52] Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and culture*, 77.
[53] Kraidy, *Hybridity*, 7.
[54] Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture*, 275.

breeding stock".[55] Furthermore Stross states that "cultural hybridization implies a fertile and creative response to environmental pressures and opportunities", accordingly both biological and cultural hybridization are characterized by "a cycle in which purebred parents produce the hybrid that in time becomes a purebred parent, again to mate with another in the production of yet another hybrid".[56] When something is defined and delineated as a "pure" entity depends of course on when human convention finds it distinctive enough.

3.3 Cultural Hybridity: Conclusion

To conclude, what is meant by the concept of cultural hybridity is a way of understanding that suggests that delineated cultural entities are defined through an inter-relational process of perpetual identification, and are abstractions of an underlying entanglement of cultural flows. It implies that in reality there are no fixed cultures, their existence as delineated entities is imagined by humankind. In his reconsideration of cultural hybridity in *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (2015), Bhabha states that, through this implication, the concept of cultural hybridity has become a sign of cultural universalism and a tool for marginalization.[57] In the concluding chapter of this same book however, Papastergiadis suggests that the concept of cultural hybridity has remaining potential as long as the essentialist models remain part of scientific and public discourse.[58] The debate on cultural hybridity seems to be stuck between these two convictions. This thesis is based on a belief in the latter. Because boundaries are the place where conflict arises, the universalistic and disidentifying tendencies of cultural hybridity have enormous positive potential.

However this thesis does take these critiques of cultural hybridity seriously. To move beyond cultural hybridity's supposed status as a tool for marginalization, and to actualize the concept's potential as a counter to cultural-essentialism, a change from its mere implication to a framework with parameters might prove beneficial. In this way cultural hybridity's subversive quality could find nuance. Because abstractions are more or less a necessity for communication, the existence of cultures in humankind's realm of language needs to stay acknowledged and respected. On another note, the real counter to cultural essentialism might

[55] Stross, "The Hybrid Metaphor," 258.
[56] Ibid., 256.
[57] Werbner and Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, xi. (foreword by Bhabha)
[58] Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory," 279.

not be a theoretical revolution but rather just a growing awareness of cultural relations over time.

4. Japanese Cultural Identity and Architecture as Ideological Sign

Japan is a good example of cultural hybridity as the formation of its image as a culturally distinct nation highlights the entangled nature of defined cultural entities. Japan did not exist before the mid nineteenth-century. Japan, as we understand it presently, did not refer to a particular centralized authority nor to a significant group identity until the early Meiji period.[59] Before the Meiji restoration of 1867, which was essentially an effort to put Japan on the same plateau as foreign powers, any sense of a 'Japan' was not centered on the idea of a nation-state.[60] It was only when foreign powers appeared on the horizon, and the concept of 'outsiders' and 'insiders' emerged, that the people of the Japanese island region started to think of themselves as a nation in the modern sense. Supposed essential attributes like 'Japanese' morals, 'Japanese' cuisine and 'Japanese' architecture are often entanglements that originate from communities which have been historically independent from an overarching 'Japan', but were later standardized. Thus, one can say that when Japan discovered 'the West' it also discovered itself, and ideas of cultural distinctiveness and nationalist ideology began to take root after this encounter.[61]

This process was, through a so-called 'double-gaze', driven by reflections on Western opinion.[62] Japanese thinkers and statesmen were convinced that the foreign, colonialist threat of the nineteenth-century could only be subdued if Japan too became a ruler instead of a subject. Accordingly, between the late nineteenth- and the early twentieth-century two extremes were often pursued; a total submission of Japan to the - supposedly 'better' - 'modern' Western culture, and, born as its opposite; a prideful embolstering of 'traditional' Japanese culture. Japan becoming a cultural and political unity has had a significant function within the global context; it acted as a real and fictional counterbalance to the global context and resulted in Japan being on equal grounds with foreign powers.[63] This is yet another reason for the need to dissolve the old-fashioned, stark separations created by the essentialist

[59] Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*, 36.
[60] Ibid., 38.
[61] Ibid., 40.
[62] Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture*, 145.
[63] Arnason, "Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity," 232.

contradictions of the 'traditional' and the 'modern', the 'local' and the 'global', 'the East' and 'the West', and the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized', especially in the case of Japan. Japan does not fit into the mold of these binaries because of its elites' deliberate pursuit of Western modernization as well as its subsequent history as a colonizing country.[64]

Despite its period as a supposed close country, Japan has always been connected to the outside world through cultural appropriation and assimilation, making it - according to some - a living museum in which world civilizations exist.[65] Building on this, one could even argue that Japan has constructed its identity as, not in the space of the foreign powers, but in a third space between the notions of a 'traditional East' and a 'modern West'. In this space 'the East' would function as the image of Japan's past, and 'the West' as the standard to which Japan must become modernized.[66] This proposition is drawn from Japan's past imperial expansion through an 'inferior Asia' through the appropriation of the discourse on Japanese mixed-race origins and its existence outside the culturally imagined 'Asia' in the Japanese collective consciousness.[67] This narrative is also partly stimulated through Japan's geographical separation from the Asian mainland. Such a distinct image of Japan as a 'third space' of assimilation further supports the narrative of the region as a reconciling force between the East and the West. This narrative mainly suggests that, as an affluent, 'hybrid' cultural entity, Japan does not have to identify with either a 'traditional' East or 'modern' West, but rather as a nation mediating between those constructed entities.

4.1 The Significance of Architecture

So, Japanese artists have an interesting position in the context of a globalizing world. Cultural studies professor Koichi Iwabuchi often highlights the continuing need to imagine Japan as a distinct and far-off, exotic island and a place of 'otherness'. This form of orientalization and the subsequent essentialization of Japanese art is still deeply entrenched in public discourse. It is often still imagined—to put it somewhat crudely—as an extravaganza of samurai and hello kitty pop-culture. Not to mention that Japan also has a history of extreme nationalism, self-orientalization and self-essentialization. 'Global art' from Japan could be a means for the reformation of these distinctions and a great force in the move towards the new

[64] Liu, *Performing Hybridity,* 5.
[65] Iwabuchi, *Recentering globalization,* 66.
[66] Ibid., 7-8.
[67] Ibid.

understandings of cultural hybridity that cultural studies' scholars find so necessary. However, cultural historian Jacob Birken makes a valuable argument in *Spectres of 1989* (2018), stating that, although art does have the potential to challenge boundaries, it might not actually dissolve them:

> Considering the aporias of situatedness, its role within the logic of liberal capitalism and the very real power relations the latter constitutes, it becomes more and more evident that global art attempting to "dissolve the contradictions and dichotomies" (Weibel) of our world might not solve anything – just make it easier to swallow.[68]

The architectural realm is arguably the most important art space in which the conflict between delineated, essentialist notions takes place. Buildings are like giant, hollow sculptures, by giving such a material form to 'empty' space, architects create their own cosmosses, which can be experienced by the public.[69] One who moves through this space becomes in a sense one with its atmosphere, experiencing many things such as lights, scents, temperatures, sounds and textures. The multiplicity of ways in which architecture communicates with the public, through the senses, makes it an immersive form of art. Also, another—more common—way in which architecture communicates is through its outward aesthetic. People will most likely never enter the majority of buildings they set their sights on, but the very act of seeing and moving around them shapes their realities.

Through architecture's many qualities; its visuality, its materiality, its functionality, its proportions, its construction by diverse bodies of people, and its location in the sphere of everyday life, which is, contrary to most art, outside of galleries, museums or events, it might have a better chance in dissolving the on-going contradictions and dichotomies created by the essentialist system. When acknowledging the great force that architecture has on the realities of everyday lives, the role of buildings as ideological signs in society becomes extremely significant.

At strategically selected, visible spaces, monuments contend with each other in ideological wars of communal identities. For example, it is the White House and the Eiffel Tower which

[68] Birken, "Spectres of 1989," 49.
[69] Zevi, *Architecture as Space*, 22.

mediate the meaning of their nations to the rest of the world.[70] Furthermore, to state an example that is in line with the Japan's past struggle for favorable status in the global context; the unconstructed, 180 floor Millennium Tower in Tokyo, envisioned by architect Foster in 1989, was - amongst other things - meant to symbolize and open-up a period of 'new' Asian modernity.[71] In *Asia: Identity, Architecture and Modernity* (2013) professor of architecture Harpreet Mand calls this phenomenon of ideological warfare the discourse on "in what style should we build", in which essentialist connections between style, ancestry, nationhood and more are present.[72] Architectural styles are a great force to propagate ideologies of identity, and one can analyze these styles to speculate about this matter.

4.2 Japanese Minimalist Aesthetics and Modern Architecture

The further advance of the forces of globalization in the late twentieth century had made Japan even more open to international cultural flows. The exposure to Western architecture during this time has led to its adoption, as well as the creation of Japan's own architectural traditions. The earlier mentioned discourse of "in what style should we build" was most evident, and architecture and its history was used to construct the identity of the Japanese nation-state. Accordingly, old buildings were upheaved to the status of national monuments and placed in a historical narrative of traditional Japanese style.[73] The nationalistic political ideologies that formed the basis of Japanese endeavours during World War II became intertwined with that of architecture. For instance, the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park (1955), designed by architect Kenzo Tange (1913-2005), was actually based on plans for an earlier design that supported the Japanese war efforts.[74] This also suggests the lingering of nationalist ideologies after the war. What should be noted is that Tange later became a great influence for Kengo Kuma, the architect on which this research focuses to assess the concept of cultural hybridity.

As the Japanese architectural tradition was constructed through the double-gaze, the emergence of modern architecture in Japan was seen as derivative of the West, creating a sense of hegemony. In order to combat this sense, a link was made between 'traditional'

[70] King, *Spaces of global cultures, 4-5*.
[71] Ibid., 16.
[72] Mand, "Asia: identity, architecture and modernity," 65.
[73] Tagsold, "Cultural Translations," 206.
[74] Ibid., 209.

Japanese minimalist aesthetics and the prominent architectural style of Western modernism.[75] Instead of being an expression of Western superiority, architecture with this form enabled the retention of an imagined Japanese identity even during the extremely nationalist early- and mid-nineteenth century, because the modernist architectural style was then seen as having essentially Japanese characteristics. Modern architecture in Japan came to be seen as culturally specific, and not derivative of a universal Western style. In this way the Japanese architectural realm did not only reflect the country's imagened social and cultural identity, but actually constituted a great part of it.

5. Cultural Hybridity's Application on Kengo Kuma

5.1 Kengo Kuma: An Introduction

To reiterate, one way to make a move towards new terminologies, theories, and an overall deeper understanding of interculturality, as this research attempts to do, is to examine objects and people in transnational movement.[76] Such an examination acknowledges that the concepts of modernity and globalization are inherently multiplicitous, dependent on different transnational and cross-cultural flows, and pays homage to the entangled qualities of identified, delineated cultures. Accordingly, the following part of this research explores how the concept of cultural hybridity applies to architect Kengo Kuma and his work through a consideration of his life and his building's locations within-, on-, and beyond the fringes of Japan's cultural borders.

There remains the expectation that artists and architects can represent a nation, or transcend all cultural boundaries whatsoever, this means their ideas are caught between the contradictory structures of lingering essentialism and the newly emerging formation of cultural globalism.[77] Art historian Geniffer Weisenfeld writes that the anxiety that is created by East Asia's contemporary art's position on the fringes could perhaps be, because of its ability to reflect on a historical and present positions outside the widely established dichotomies (e.g. traditional and modern, colonizer and colonized, etc), its actual strength.[78] The role of Kuma's architecture in the literal and figurative construction of society, and its

[75] Tagsold, "Cultural Translations," 212.
[76] van Schendel, "Geographies of knowing," 662.
[77] Papastergiadis, Nikos. "Hybridity and Ambivalence," 58.
[78] Weisenfeld, Gennifer. "Reinscribing Tradition," 97.

supposed subverting strength, reinforce the importance of its examination regarding the concept of cultural hybridity.

Kuma states that he was heavily inspired by German architect Bruno Taut's (1880-1938) portrayal of the "essence of Japan's traditions."[79] This instance of an encounter with one's own cultural environment from the 'outside', through the 'other' is reminiscent of the notion of the aforementioned self-orientalizing, essentialist double-gaze through which people outside of 'the West' have often defined themselves; aside the dichotomies that resulted from Western orientalist discourse. The incorporation of 'traditional' Japanese elements in the architecture of Kuma could therefore arguably be an ideological response to the binary understanding that portrays the West as 'modern' and the East as 'traditional'. If this is the case it might be a deliberate construction of culturally hybrid architecture which' style is still rooted in the essentialist ideology of stark contrasts. However, in contrast, a consideration of Kuma's work through the perspective of cultural hybridity could also bring more nuance to the role of Japanese tradition in his work.

What is interesting to note is that Kuma himself has stated his aspiration to "bridge the traditional and the innovative, as well as the local and the global."[80] At first sight, Kuma's mention of this aspiration seems conflicting with the many references that scholars like architect Botond Bognar, professor of architecture Kristina Fridh, and anthropologist Sophie Houdart have made in regards to the essential role of Japanese tradition in his architecture. Through their understanding of Kuma's oeuvre as a direct continuation of a national cultural tradition, they evoke a sense of essentialist and maybe even hegemonic beliefs. This perception of Kuma's oeuvre could also be tied to the aforementioned construction of a link between 'traditional' Japanese minimalist aesthetics and Western modernist architectural styles in the nineteenth century.

Kuma himself seems aware of the fact of interculturality, through—amongst others—his aspiration to dissolve the boundaries between established dichotomies and him stating that "catchball is the mother of creation" in the 2016 V&A Dundee museum interview.[81] The addition of supposed Japanese traditional elements in Kuma's architecture, as well as his

[79] Bognar, Kengo Kuma Selected Works, 16-17.
[80] Ibid., 17.
[81] Kengo Kuma and Associates, "V&A Dundee".

conscious effort to ‘bridge’ established dichotomies seems most valuable for the exploration of the concept of cultural hybridity and the move towards a deeper understanding of interculturality. This will be done by assessing how the general concept of cultural hybridity, as well as Stross’s specific theory of hybridity cycles (1999), apply to Kuma’s personhood and architecture.

5.1.1 Kuma’s Life

Kengo Kuma was born in Yokohama, Japan, in 1954. His very first consideration of architecture was brought about by the wooden house in Yokohama in which he lived as a child.[82] Kuma’s decision to become an architect came later, at the age of 10, through his amazement at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics Yoyogi National Gymnasium designed by the aforementioned Kenzo Tange.[83] In the 2016 interview with V&A Dundee Kuma refers to Tange’s olympic gymnasium as a “masterpiece”.[84] Here it should be noted that he himself would later design the 2020 New Olympic Stadium (used in 2021 because of the postponement instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic) in Tokyo. Kuma graduated from Tokyo University in 1979 and started his own architectural office (Kengo Kuma and Associates) in 1985, after coming back from studying at Columbia University in New York.[85]

Kuma’s life in Japan, as well as his numerous adventures abroad as student and established architect, have certainly had an effect on the formation of his architecture. In a 2021 interview with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark , called *Architecture of Our Time,* Kuma stated that that which made him change the most was the time he traveled through Africa for two months to observe the life and architecture in local villages under the supervision of architect Hiroshi Hara (1963-), his professor at Tokyo University.[86] Kuma closes this interview advising those who are still young to travel to distant places.

Kuma was surely influenced by the architect Hiroshi Hara, who also became Kuma’s employer during his time as a student. Kenzo Tange (1913-2005), who was in turn Hara’s mentor, is also frequently mentioned as one of his inspirations. Both architects have designed

[82] Steele, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture*, 82.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Kengo Kuma and Associates, “Kengo Kuma in conversation”.
[85] Houdart, “How (Far) Does Culture Go?,” 23.
[86] Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, “Kengo Kuma Interview”.

a wide array of buildings located across Japan, as well as some buildings abroad. In Hara's case, prominent examples would be the Umeda Sky Building (1993) in Osaka, and Kyoto Central Station in Kyoto. As for Tange, examples would be the aforementioned Yoyogi National Gymnasium (1964) and Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park (1955), as well as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (1991), and the Mode Gakuen Cocoon Tower (2008). It is safe to say that Tange and Hara were heavily influenced by Western ideology, as was common for Japanese architects during the nineteenth- and twentieth century. The buildings they designed have become iconic landmarks shaping Japanese cityscapes.

In 2005 Kuma remarked that the aforementioned architect Taut has had a particularly strong influence on his view of architecture.[87] He states that, after his encounter with Taut's architecture (the Hyuga Residence) during his work on the Glass/Water villa (1995) in Atami, he passionately read a whole series of books by the German architect.[88] Taut had moved to Japan during World War II and stayed there from 1933 to 1963. Throughout this time he wrote *Houses and People of Japan* (1937), in which he praises The Katsura Imperial Villa (katsura rikyū 桂離宮) in Kyoto, which he was invited to by the Japan International Architectural Association when it was closed to the public.[89] In *Anti-Object* (2008) Kuma states that he was inspired by Taut's disregard of objects and consideration of 'connecting relationships' in architecture, as well as his surprise at the openness or absence of Japanese architecture itself.[90]

A deeper, philosophical as well as practical reflection regarding Taut's remarks in relation to modernist, constructivist, and phenomenologist theory in *Anti-Object,* ultimately led Kuma to conclude the need for a search of matter that does not take the form of an object. Kuma pursues this need through his long-standing goal to erase architecture. This simply means he wants to create buildings that—in contrast to the historically prominent architectural trends—blend in with their environment. In this pursuit Kuma has alluded to practices that are seen as belonging to the national culture of the Japanese island region, as well as many practices that find their origins outside this delineation. As an early example, Kuma's many references to architects Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) suggest

[87] Bognar, *Kengo Kuma Selected Works*, 14.
[88] Ibid., 15.
[89] Steele, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture*, 60.
[90] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 21-22.

that his style has been influenced by a consideration of attributes outside of the supposed Japanese national cultural realm.

At the time of this research, the Kengo Kuma and Associates website features a substantial list of on-going architectural projects in Japan, South-Korea, Indonesia, The Philippines, Italy, France, Denmark, Switzerland and Canada. It also features a staff list listing a total of 247 members situated in Japan, 45 members in China, and 37 members in France, as well as a timeline of an almost yearly growth of architectural projects, attesting to the great influence of Kuma's brand.[91] Furthermore the website features an extensive list of internationally published books, magazines, video's, photographs, and a series of on-going newsletters in both English and Japanese. Notably, Kuma has been named as the only architect in Time magazine's list of the 100 most influential people of 2021.[92]

5.1.2 Kuma's Career

Kuma's career can be divided into three phases. The first phase started with his return from Columbia University during the midst of Japan's bubble economy.[93] During this relatively short period, Kuma's architecture was seen as somewhat controversial, mainly because of his first major commission; the M2 building (Fig. 2), a Mazda automobile showroom constructed in 1991. He designed this mainly concrete structure, distinguished by a giant column, as a satirical reflection on postmodernism, as well as a reflection on the accompanying Western capitalist expansionism.[94] Postmodernism was at its height during Kuma's stay in America. In regards to globalized art and East Asian art's subversive strength, it is quite telling that Kuma critically reflected on the post modernist movement and the West's role in global cultural flows. Despite the evident passion in the M2 building's design, Kuma has admitted that he was unsatisfied and even embarrassed with its outcome.[95]

[91] Kengo Kuma and Associates, "Staff".
[92] Ravenscroft, "Time magazine names Kengo Kuma".
[93] Steele, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture*, 187.
[94] Ibid., 136.
[95] Frearson, "I feel embarrassed … says Kengo Kuma".

Figure 2. The M2 building (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

The second phase of Kuma's career is characterized by styles and locations necessitated by the economic restrictions that came after Japan's economic bubble burst. In *Kengo Kuma: Selected Works* (2006) architect Botond Bognar states that, because of the changes that came with the recession, it is then that Kuma's architecture "unfolded" and "matured".[96] The bold style that characterized the two buildings he built during the affluence of the bubble economy became more nuanced, and his newfound style ultimately came to contrast this earlier boldness. This is mainly due to Kuma's newfound goal to "erase" architecture, and the aesthetic that he employs for this goal.[97]

It is no coincidence that Kuma's goal of erasure happened to conform to the anti-materialist trends of the post-bubble era.[98] The first projects in which Kuma attempted to achieve his

[96] Bognar, *Kengo Kuma Selected Works*, 21.
[97] Ibid. and Bognar, *Material Immaterial,* 8.
[98] Steele, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture*, 188.

style of erasure were, because of the aforementioned economic restraints, situated in places outside of Kanto's urban region. These are the Kiro-San observatory (1994) on Ōshima island in the Shikoku prefecture, the Kitakami Canal Museum in Ishinomaki city in Miyagi prefecture (1994) and the Water/Glass villa in Atami city in Shizuoka prefecture (1995).

The third, on-going phase of Kuma's career is characterized by his increasing recognition abroad, which began around the start of the twenty first-century, with the construction of the Great (Bamboo) Wall (2000) building in Beijing. From then on Kuma has become one of Japan's most renowned architects, even celebrated internationally. As early as 2010 half of his commissions came from abroad.[99] Furthermore, he has often given lectures abroad, and he has held distinguished teaching positions at leading universities, like The University of Tokyo.[100] Moreover, he has been granted numerous international awards, such as - amongst others - the Spirit of Nature Wood Architecture Award (2002), the LEAF Award for innovative, trend-setting architecture (2008), the Restaurant & Bar Design Award (2012), the Global Award for Sustainable Architecture (2016), and the Architect of the Year Award (2020).

Kuma's aspiration to erase architecture has resulted in his current, on-going style, which can be described as modest, subtle, or even plain. According to Bognar, Kuma's style is a rejection of the flamboyant and decorative styles that characterized most of the architecture that was constructed in Japan throughout the period of economic prosperity in the 1980s and early 1990s.[101] Kuma skillfully integrates buildings into their environment by fragmenting construction materials into particles, creating see-through meshes. Furthermore, Kuma camouflages architecture by employing natural colours and materials that blend in with the environment, which he finds through an examination of the construction sites. The use of subtle, minimalist shapes also supports the relative disappearance of his architecture.

Kuma has undoubtedly been influenced by a plethora of phenomena. Considering the complexities of the everyday life of individuals, referring to the infinitude of information processed and decisions made, one could never have enough information to accurately narrativize the formation of Kuma's architecture, arguably not even Kuma himself. However,

[99] Bognar, *Material Immaterial,* 12.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 30.

a consideration of his many trips abroad during his time as a student and established architect, and the overall state of- and increase in global connectivity during his lifetime, renders it safe to say that the formation of Kuma's architecture, brand and even personhood has and is very much influenced by a plentitude of cross-cultural flows. Thus, in the descriptive sense of cultural hybridity, through its tautological character, it is possible to conclude that Kuma's life has been—and is—intercultural.

5.1.3 Kuma's Architecture and the Continuation of Japanese tradition

Bognar states that Kuma's architecture's relation to the natural environment is a continuation of the hallmark of traditional Japanese architecture, meaning that Kuma's whole style of erasure is closely tied to Japanese tradition.[102] This understanding of Kuma's style as a continuation of Japanese tradition is propagated by more scholars; Houdart and Fridh too are convinced that Kuma successfully established a meaningful relationship between Japanese tradition and international modernity.[103] According to Houdart in *How (Far) Does Culture Go?* (2009), Kuma's success relies "precisely" on his skill to meet global expectations whilst maintaining a method that is distinctly Japanese.[104] Furthermore, in *Material Immaterial* (2010) Bognar writes that Kuma exemplifies "the highest creative potential of contemporary Japanese architecture."[105]

So, most scholars focused on Kuma's architecture insist on the presence of a distinct 'Japaneseness' resulting from his continuation of Japanese tradition. However, claims like these are arguably an attempt to establish the underlying cultural entanglements as a united, authorized Japanese way of life, and are reminiscent of cultural essentialism. As John Clark states in *Formation of the Neotraditional,* a chapter of the book *Modern Asian Art* (1998), and as implied through the first half of this research, anything that is labeled as 'intrinsic' and 'traditional' is an invention motivated by ideology, which must be questioned.[106] Furthermore, Clark's writing suggests that such claims—and possibly Kuma's style

[102] Bognar, *Material Immaterial,* 42.
[103] Houdart, "How (Far) Does Culture Go?," 32.
Fridh, "From Japanese tradition," 128.
[104] Houdart, "How (Far) Does Culture Go?," 23.
[105] Bognar, *Material Immaterial,* 39.
[106] Clark, "Formation of the Neotraditional," 71.

itself—have ‘neotraditional’ qualities because they are structured in the context of the double-gaze.[107]

Labeling Kuma’s architecture as a continuation of an essential Japanese timeline through claims about the embeddedness of a ‘Japaneseness’, despite the relatively recent invention hereof after the Meiji revolution, could be legitimizing stereotyping of the past, and is questionable. Such claims allude to the existence of homogeneous national culture and could arguably be given more nuance through the acknowledgement and consideration of cultural hybridity. So, what follows is a consideration of a selection of Kuma’s architecture as culturally hybrid. First follows an examination of the Water/Glass villa, which through its acclaim brought about an increase in commissions of Kuma’s work[108], then follows an examination of the 2020 New Olympic Stadium, with a focus on Kuma’s method of localization and his use of wood. Last will be an examination of the five principles that underlie Kuma’s architectural style of erasure (particles, holes, softness, time and oblique) and the supposed role of Japanese tradition herein.

5.2 The Water/Glass Villa

Kuma’s Water/Glass villa, a small guest house located at Shizuoka’s seafront in Atami city, is one of the first buildings he designed that adheres to his now long-standing goal of erasing architecture. The villa’s structure consists mainly of glass, centered around a shallow pool. This pool flows around the perimeter of the structure and visually extends into- and blends with the sea (Fig. 3). The wrap-around pool, as well as the glass structure, blur the lines between inside and outside, and effectively establish a sense of connectedness between the building and its environment. The Water/Glass villa consists of two floors connected by glass stairs. These floors feature guest rooms, a meeting room, a bath and a courtyard.[109]

[107] Ibid., 75.

[108] Bognar, *Material Immaterial,* 26.
[109] Bognar, *Kengo Kuma Selected Works*, 51.

Figure 3. The Water/Glass villa (Source: Bognar, *Kengo Kuma*, 53)

Kuma states that he designed the Glass/Water villa as homage to Taut, because Taut had made him discover the qualities of Japanese architecture.[110] Kuma's use of supposed traditional Japanese styles, and his demarcation of these styles as opposite of supposed atomistic 'Western' styles suggests that, during the construction of the Water/Glass villa, he was enthralled by the idea of a contrast between Japan and the West. In *Anti-Object* he examines most of his architectural decisions through the double-gaze of this binary opposition. However his preference for the architectural techniques that originate from Japan does seem to be based solely on their functionality and not necessarily on his belonging to a Japanese in-group. The styles Kuma chooses to use in Water/Glass villa are simply befitting of his goal to erase architecture, which was originally inspired by Taut.

Kuma alludes to numerous architectural techniques that were historically used in the Japanese island region that he employed in the construction of the villa. First, he adopts what he calls the "floor form", which he directly opposes to a supposed Western "frame form."[111] He states that the floor form is open and inclusive, as a result of "the Japanese's" minimization of the use of walls, whereas the frame form is obstructive and objectifying, as a result of historically Western perception and expression.[112] Furthermore, he mentions Japanese noh theatre's spatial and temporal use of the floor as an inspiration for his focus on the horizontal plane.[113] Noh theatre also inspired the diagonal hallway, which Kuma says is based on the *hashigakari* 橋掛かり, a corridor or bridge shaped sub-section of the stage that connects the theatre's main stage with the dressing room.[114]

Secondly, the Glass/Water villa's pool, Kuma says, was inspired by the raised, wrap-around veranda (*engawa* 縁側) of The Katsura Imperial Villa.[115] Through an extension of the horizontal plane beyond that of the walls, the veranda of the Katsura Villa acts as a space that literally and figuratively connects the inside and outside, the villa and the garden. The Glass/Water villa's wrap-around pool was added to achieve this same connectivity, however as one cannot walk out upon the water, it only does so visually. In contrast, Katsura Villa's veranda can be walked upon, but it does not have the same reflective qualities as Kuma's pool. This means that when one looks out into Katsura Villa's garden from inside, the

[110] Kengo Kuma and Associates, "水/ガラス".
[111] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 35-36.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 43.
[114] Ibid., 45.
[115] Ibid., 38.

veranda, together with the ceiling, create the same 'frame form' effect that Kuma prescribed to be solely 'Western'. (Fig. 4)

Figure 4. The Supposed Western 'Frame Form' in Katsura Imperial Villa (Source: John Barr Architects)

Lastly, in reference to Japanese practices, Kuma shares his general consideration of *sukiya* 数奇屋 architecture when he designed the edges of the villa.[116] Katsura Villa too falls under the delineation that is *sukiya* style architecture, this style is based on the style of tea-ceremony rooms that were used in the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1574-1600) and onwards. It includes

[116] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 39.

the careful consideration of the boundaries of material, because its qualities, such as curvature, dictate the experience of the subject.[117]

Houdart states the following during her consideration of the Water/Glass villa; "the wood and water make Kuma an architect who cares about the environment; the louvers make him a Japanese architect."[118] First of all, Houdart contradicts Bognar's reference to the relation between buildings and the natural environment as being an instance of Japanese traditional values in Kuma's architecture. Furthermore, through this statement she implies an essentialist understanding of cultural identity. Rather than saying that Kuma is a Japanese architect because of his use of louvers, one could more appropriately state that he is a Japanese architect because he owns a Japanese passport. Would a 'foreign' architect that uses louvers be a Japanese architect? From Houdart's statement one can deduce that the conceptions of cultural membership are still exceedingly unclear.

Apart from his consideration and use of artistic techniques that have a history in Japan, Kuma also refers to the many 'foreign' influences in the Water/Glass villa in *Anti-Object*. However, analysts of Kuma's oeuvre, such as Bognar, Houdart and Fridh, neglect these. First of all, in *Anti-Object* Kuma includes an extensive examination of Aristotelian philosophy and neo-Platonic concepts regarding the design and blending functionality of the wrap-around pool. Kuma writes that he adopted the neo-Platonic concept of emanation to arrive at his idea to make the pool overflow and take less the form of a solid object.[119] Furthermore, Kuma shares how his experience with the construction of a lense in junior highschool, and a consideration of philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza's (1632-1677) work as a lens crafter inspired him to give the conference room an oval, lense-shape.[120] It was especially Spinoza's rejection of objects and his belief in the illusory qualities of time that resonated with Kuma. Then there are the extensive considerations of Taut's remarks on Japanese architecture, which makes any inherent 'Japaneseness', as it is often pointed out to be, actually constructed through a reflection on 'outside' opinion.

The negligence of these influences by critics and scholars is most likely caused by the prominence of the simpler, essentialist model of cultural dynamics, and the unwieldiness of

[117] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 39.
[118] Houdart, "How (Far) Does Culture Go?," 27.
[119] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 40.
[120] Ibid., 46.

concepts of interculturality. They suggest the continuing need to imagine Japan as a distinct and far-off, exotic island and a place of 'otherness', and the overall difficulty to discuss national culture without essentializing.

Considering the complexity of global cultural flows and identity formation, as suggested in the first half of this research, the many references to an inherent traditional 'Japaneseness' as a clarification for Kuma's oeuvre seem simplistic, and are arguably part of the dominant essentialist rhetoric of person- and nationhood. Through a dualistic understanding one could easily draw the conclusion that the Water/Glass villa is a combination of 'local', 'traditional', 'Eastern' style and ideology and 'global', 'modern', 'Western' material. However, these generalizations do not suffice to describe the complex, entangled qualities of cultural flows that constituted its construction. This ties neatly into Taut and Spinoza's alludance to the illusory qualities of demarcated entities. When acknowledging that Japan only came to be considered as one cultural entity after the Meiji restoration, the claims that the villa exudes a distinct Japaneseness can only be rooted in essentialist understanding. For example, the supposed Japanese noh theatre and *sukiya* architecture, which were of influence on the Water/Glass villa, can be traced back to sub- and transnational cultural flows that permeate the border of the imagined unified culture of Japan today. Furthermore, influences from 'outside' Asia, like that of Spinoza, as well as influences from Kuma's personal experience also evidently played a role in the design of the villa.

5.3 The 2020 New Olympic Stadium

One major method that Kuma uses in his pursuit to erase architecture is a form of localization. In an interview by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art he stated that he is very focused on including nature in his projects.[121] Every one of his constructions is designed after a thorough evaluation of the environment of the site. Kuma takes note of the colours, textures, and shapes of the building site and designs his architecture accordingly. To create a link between his architecture and its respective environment there is a variety of local, natural materials he relies on, like stone, wood, bamboo, and other plants. This is also one reason why Kuma has become known as an environmental architect.[122]

[121] Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, "Kengo Kuma Interview".
[122] Houdart, "How (Far) Does Culture Go?," 23.

The 2020 New Olympic Stadium is a good example of Kuma's method, and maybe even an amplification of this through its role as a national landmark. Located in Tokyo's Meiji-Jingu Park, the enormous oval structure is covered with 47.000 plants to blend it with its surroundings when they are fully grown (Fig. 5).[123] Furthermore, the stadium is covered, both on the inside and outside, by local wood from Japan's 47 prefectures.[124] To reduce its visual impact, despite its size, the stadium's roof was designed to be low and flat, and the arrangement of seats - of which there are 68,000 - was made compact.[125] It's main structure, made from reinforced concrete and steel, is designed to ventilate its inside with the support of natural winds, as well as keep out sunlight and rain. For this, the stadium's design uses upward slanted eaves, which also function as balconies for the plants.

[123] Crook, "Kengo Kuma's Japan National Stadium".
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.

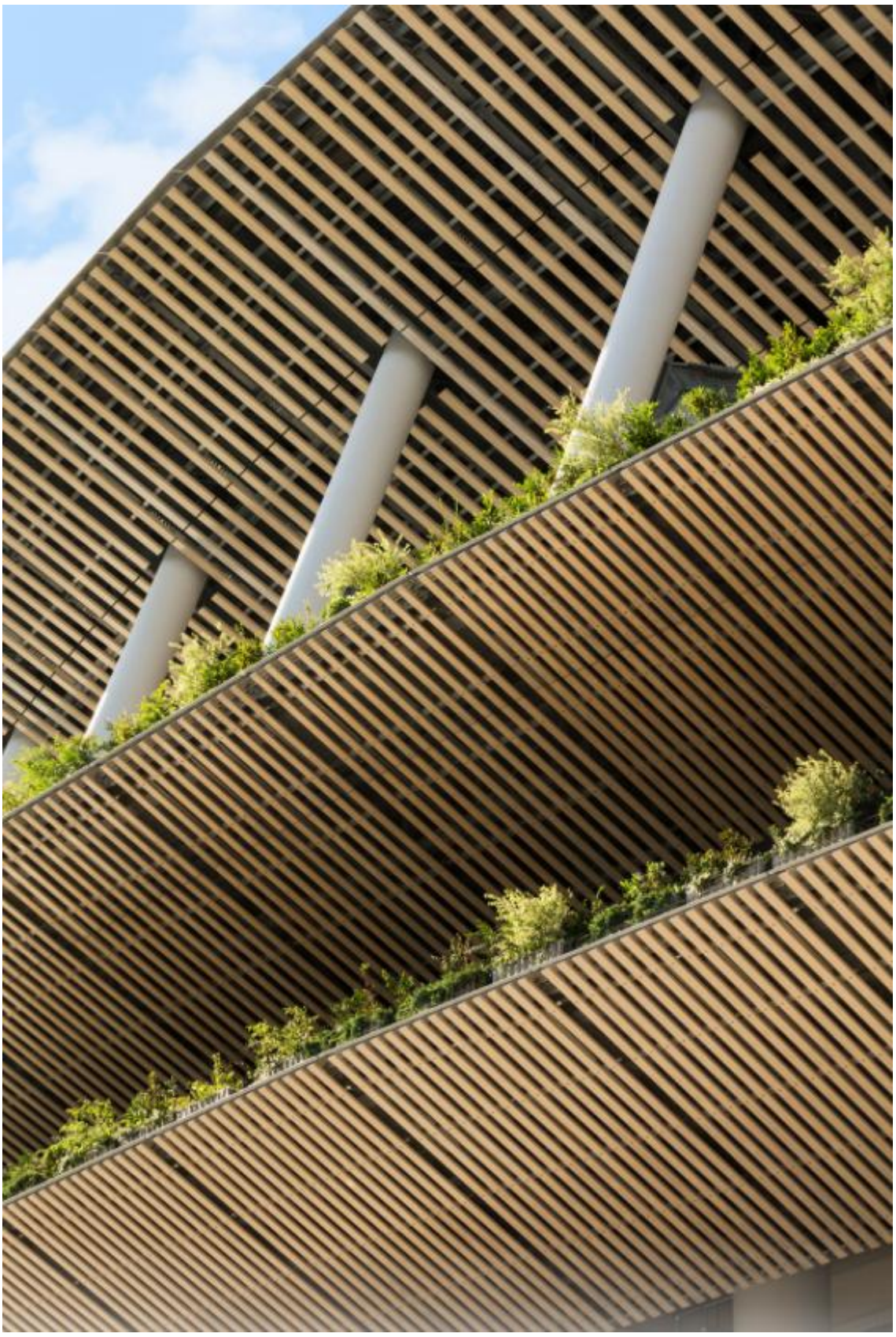

Figure 5. Utilizing Plants to Blend the Olympic Stadium with the Surrounding Park (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

During his 2016 presentation at Harvard university, *From Concrete to Wood: Why Wood Matters,* Kuma stated he got hints from Japanese historical architecture for the functionality of the stadium's eaves. This, plus the incorporation of regional wood, and the greenery that matches with the surrounding park, situate the architecture in the history, climate and topography of the island and the stadium's specific location in Tokyo. This practice of localization is what characterizes the majority of Kuma's architecture, this stadium just so happens to be 'localized' to the Japanese island region.

Kuma is a connoisseur of wood, and avidly promotes its use. Houdart suggests that Kuma's use of wood is an agreement upon a certain 'Japaneseness'.[126] However, this statement seems crude. In the interview with the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art Kuma states that he is most interested in wood because it is humankind's oldest friend.[127] Furthermore, he stated how he is often impressed and influenced by birds nests, which is evident in many of his wooden architecture, for example, in the exterior of ONE@Tokyo (2017) (Fig. 6), a hotel in Tokyo's Sumida ward. Kuma's favour for wood is thus highly personal, and goes further than his occasional references to supposed Japanese woodworking traditions with his references to wood's role in the shared history of humankind. On a related note, one could also be inclined to describe his recent architecture as exuding a certain 'Scandinavian-ness' as this is another region that has tied the use of wood into its narrative of cultural identity.

In his aforementioned 2016 presentation at Harvard university, Kuma stated that it is not necessary to use Japanese traditions because each of his projects is situated in its respective environment: "Sometimes I use a hint from Japanese tradition, but it's not necessary … We have many ideas behind us, not only Japanese. We are living in that kind of world … everybody is a mix of everything."[128] Moreover, he even suggests a distaste for any forced continuation of 'tradition', stating that he always tries to find a unique project for each site and 'never wants to push previous designs'.[129] When asked, Kuma denied that he felt the responsibility to demonstrate supposed Japanese principles at a global stage.[130] The sense of any 'Japaneseness' regarding the 2020 New Olympic Stadium comes from its location in the

[126] Houdart, "How (Far) Does Culture Go?," 32.
[127] Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, "Kengo Kuma Interview".
[128] The Harvard Graduate School of Design, "Kengo Kuma".
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

island region's capital and the subsequent design choices Kuma made. If it had been located outside of Japan, Kuma's method would have undoubtedly adapted it to that environment.

Figure 6. The Influence of Birds Nests in The Exterior of ONE@Tokyo (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

5.4 Kuma's Five Design Principles

Mentioned earlier was the fact that Kuma's efforts to erase architecture meshed well with the zeitgeist of 1990s Japan's post-bubble economy. However, this style of erasure still is Kuma's main endeavour at present, some 30 years later. He has combined this effort to blend architecture and the environment with the related aspiration to make architecture more human-friendly. In the 2021 *The Kengo Kuma Monologue,* a 50-minute documentary published by NHK WORLD-JAPAN, Kuma revealed the five architectural principles that actualize these aspirations of his; 'particles', 'holes', 'softness', 'time' and 'oblique'. What follows is an examination of these principles and what inspired them.

6.4.1 Particles

The most prominent principle Kuma uses to accomplish his style is fragmentation, or as he calls it, ‘particles’. This refers to his practice of breaking down the materials of his architecture into smaller particles, creating a permeable quality, and making the space connected to the environment. Through this method the experience of the architecture changes depending on the subject's perspective. Breaking up materials in this way has numerous effects on the play of light and shadow, temperature, airflow, and more factors of the architectural space that Kuma finds so important. He first established this characterizing fragmentary style with the use of louvers for the Stone Museum (2000) in Nasu, during which he decided to call the method ‘particlizing’.[131] (Fig. 7) He later relied fully on his newfound fragmentary style in his design for The Museum of Ando Hiroshige (2000) in Bato.

The design for The Museum of Ando Hiroshige (Fig. 8) uses extensive rows of wooden louvers, made from cedar trees local to the area.[132] Kuma states how the use of louvers creates an effect similar to a rainbow’s transparency and relative existence.[133] Furthermore, Kuma states how famous Japanese *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 artist Ando Hiroshige (1797-1885) was an early user of this method of fragmentation; “Hiroshige took note of the particles that constitute the natural worlds and his work showed the essence of nature by layering the particles.”[134] In this way Kuma ties a prominent figure from Japan’s national history into the narrative of the formation of his architecture.

However in *Anti-Object* Kuma proceeds to also tie practices from different places to his fragmentary style of particlizing. First he considers the nineteenth-century impressionists', and in particular painter George Seurat (1859-1891), use of pointillism to mix colours to also be a form of ‘particlization’.[135] Furthermore Kuma includes a consideration of the fragmentary practices in the styles of gothic architecture, industrial architecture and the art nouveau movement. The respective styles, he states, consist of small elements creating one whole, generally emanating a sense of lightness and fragility.[136]

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[131] Bognar, *Kengo Kuma Selected Works*, 16.
[132] Kengo Kuma and Associates, “那珂川町馬頭広重美術館”.
[133] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 99.
[134] Bognar, *Kengo Kuma Selected Works*, 16.
[135] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 99.
[136] Ibid., 99.

Figure 7. Kuma's Method of Particlizing in the Stone Museum (Source: Bognar, *Selected Works*, 86)

Figure 8. Kuma's Method of Particlizing in The Museum of Ando Hiroshige (Source: Bognar, *Selected Works*, 90)

5.4.2 Holes

Then there is the principle which Kuma calls 'holes'. He says his interest in the use of holes in his architecture grew out of his skepticism regarding monumental architecture, which is characterized by boxlike, heavyset designs.[137] Kuma is mainly focused on what these holes are connecting to- and from, like the entrance hole of the The Museum of Ando Hiroshige (Fig. 9), which connects the city of Nakagawa with the overgrown mountain next to it. Kuma compares this effect to that of a gate, which forms a connection between opposite sides.[138] Furthermore Kuma stresses holes' function as a safe space of concealment and protection, which he says was brought to his attention by observing cats.[139]

Figure 9. The Entrance Hole of The Museum of Ando Hiroshige (Source: Bognar, *Selected Works*, 92)

[137] NHK WORLD-JAPAN, "The Kengo Kuma Monologue".
[138] The Harvard Graduate School of Design, "Kengo Kuma".
[139] Ibid.

5.4.3 Softness

Kuma's third principle of 'softness' is less about aesthetics, and more about literal, tactile softness. He states the following; "The human body is very weak, and we are overwhelmed by hard materials. If we bump into them we will be injured, and if we lean against them we will feel cold."[140] This principle can be connected, like those of 'particles' and 'holes', to Kuma's consideration of the concept of *ma* 間.[141] In architecture, *ma* refers to the spatial void in-between perceived material objects, it is this space through which the body moves and in which humankind experiences things through the senses. This concept originally came to Japan through the Buddhist notion of 'nothingness' and its rejection of duality (e.g. subject and object, inner and outer, etc.)[142] Such a consideration of space has long played a role in—amongst others—religion, philosophy (metaphysics, phenomenology, existentialism) and architecture and is not limited to the Japanese island region. In *Anti-Object* Kuma himself substantiates his consideration of this concept with influences like the metaphysical philosophies of Plato, Spinoza and philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716).[143]

5.4.4 Time

With Kuma's principle of 'time' he honours its passage. Future oriented modernism and past oriented historical preservation attempt to subdue time, Kuma wants to break with this effort.[144] Furthermore, Kuma states how writer and activist Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) brought him to consider the principle of time; she suggested that the deterioration of buildings over time, and their subsequent drop in rent, enabled lower income business owners and residents to have a place in the community.[145] On a side note, the motivations that underlie Kuma's principle of time are a potential rebuttal to those who claim that Kuma's use of natural materials such as wood—which deteriorates rather quickly compared to concrete and steel—is unsustainable.

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[140] NHK WORLD-JAPAN, "The Kengo Kuma Monologue".
[141] Kengo Kuma and Associates, "Sensing Spaces".
[142] Marra, Michael. *Essays on Japan,* 59.
[143] Kuma, *Anti-Object*, 67.
[144] NHK WORLD-JAPAN, "The Kengo Kuma Monologue".
[145] Ibid.

5.4.5 Oblique

Lastly, there is the principle which Kuma calls ‘oblique’. The oblique, says Kuma, is ‘the resurrection of homo sapiens as creatures wandering freely’, before the time they were limited to life in boxes.[146] According to Kuma there is no need to restrict architecture just to the horizontal and vertical, which is why he often designs shapes that are slanted. Just like with his principle of ‘holes’, ‘oblique’ is influenced by the consideration of the life of cats.[147] Kuma’s principle of ‘oblique’ is evident in the majority of his architecture, but one good example is the V&A Dundee museum (2018) (Fig. 10), located in Scotland’s Dundee. In this museum’s design, which was inspired by Scotland’s natural cliffs, both the influence of Kuma’s method of localization and his other design principles are evident. To suggest that the many projects like these—localized to their specific site and designed through Kuma’s principles—are distinctly ‘Japanese’ or the highest creative potential of ‘Japanese’ architecture is - to be frank - crude.

Figure 10. Particles, Holes, the Oblique and Localization in the V&A Dundee Museum (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

[146] NHK WORLD-JAPAN, “The Kengo Kuma Monologue”.
[147] Ibid.

5.5 Kuma's Answer

What Kuma states about his architecture himself is arguably the most important way to determine how cultural tradition and the concept of cultural hybridity apply to his architecture. When revealing his five core design principles in 2021, not even once did Kuma allude to the principles as being connected to Japanese national cultural traditions. Furthermore, he has substantiated any practices that could be tied to the Japanese island region, like his use of wood, or his consideration of space, with many similar practices from 'outside' Japan as well as personal considerations. When questioned in interviews, Kuma has many times stressed the importance of his architecture's connection to a specific site's locality, and many times alluded to its hybrid qualities. I was fortunate enough to receive Kuma's thoughts on this matter via email in late November 202l, when I asked the following; "What is more appropriate, to interpret your architecture as a continuation of Japanese tradition, or as a culturally hybrid form of architecture?". In his response Kuma stated; "I consider my architecture as culturally hybrid." It is time then for critics to shift their focus from Kuma's national identity, to one that is more trans-national and cross-cultural.

5.6 Hybridity Cycles: Understanding Kuma's Architecture as a New 'Pure'

I conclude that the concept of cultural hybridity is most useful as a general counter against the still prominent essentialist understanding of cultures. When applying a culturally hybrid scope, Kuma's personhood and oeuvre are not necessarily an extension of a certain Japaneseness, mediated by supposed historical, homogenous tradition. Rather they can be seen—to put it eloquently—as an entanglement of trans- and sub-national cultural flows and a dialogue between the dichotomies entrenched in public discourse, manifested through the profundity of individual experience.

However, it becomes clear that what Bhabha remarked in one of the more recent examinations of the concept, *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (2015), had some truth to it. Namely, through the employment of the general concept of cultural hybridity one gets the tendency to neglect the temporal reality of cultural entities and communities, and so turns cultural hybridity into a tool for marginalization. When using the concept of cultural hybridity to point towards the hybrid qualities of Japanese culture, one subdues the

experience of those that find solace in its authenticity. Accordingly, for some the pervasive character of cultural hybridity is its shortcoming, as the concept actually points towards the entangled qualities of all manifestations, giving all that which is seen as separate an illusory quality.

Now, this does not seem incorrect, but it complicates how one can discuss cultural belonging. I feel that the pervasiveness of cultural hybridity is not a problem. To discuss something means to abstract it to the concept of words, there is no way to avoid this. When kept in mind, cultural hybridity softens the essentialist abstractions through which one would discuss cultural manifestations such as Kuma's architecture.

Apart from the hybrid qualities of Kuma's theoretical approach, when looking at an overview of Kuma's recent architecture, it becomes clear that it has also permeated delineated identifications in its visual appearance. Through the general application of the concept of cultural hybridity in Kuma's architecture, its style becomes an expression of universalism. This could also be a reason why one can be inclined to describe his style as plain, as it has no definite markers of a cultural in-group. I personally think that the universalistic and disidentifying tendencies of cultural hybridity have an enormous positive potential. Making the imagined boundaries between defined entities transparent through the acknowledgement of cultural hybridity frees them from the conflicting pressure they exert against each other. It is the acknowledgment that one can only discuss concepts, not reality.

However, as seen in chapter 3 of this research, many find the universalising tendency of cultural hybridity a vice. This could possibly be subverted by the addition of an underlying framework. So, what follows is a brief consideration of Kuma's architecture through one of those frameworks; Stross's concept of cultural hybridity cycles. To reiterate, Stross states that "cultural hybridization implies a fertile and creative response to environmental pressures and opportunities", he suggests that cultural hybridization is characterized by "a cycle in which purebred parents produce the hybrid that in time becomes a purebred parent, again to mate with another in the production of yet another hybrid".[148] This concept suggests that Kuma's style might be close to becoming a new and distinctive 'pure' cultural form, open for

[148] See page 15-16.

delineation and labeling. Of course, this style would not be an end result, but part of the theorized perpetual hybridity cycles.

Analysts are inclined to put Kuma's architecture within the parameters of a Japanese national culture. In cultural terms such perceived homogeneity or 'purity' results from labeling by humankind. As Stross states, for the 'pure' it is a matter of having less perceived internal variation, whereas a 'hybrid' has more perceived internal variation.[149] Variation constitutes adaptability, and just like biological hybrids would show signs of vigor, Stross writes, cultural hybrids too can be more vigorous.[150] Furthermore, whereas biological hybrids can only show attributes of mixage between two parents, cultural hybrids can have attributes (both consciously and unconsciously mixed) of a plethora of 'parent' entities.

The norm for the hybrid seems to be the presence of attributes that were contributed by established cultural entities or flows, perceived by humankind as authentic. Accordingly, the formation of Kuma's architecture can be broken up and said to consist of attributes taken from a range of influences from all over the world, some arbitrary examples he names in his 2008 manifesto *Anti-Object* are; the philosophies of Plato, Spinoza, Leibniz, Foucault (1926-1984) and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), the science of chemist Chevreul (1786-1889) and physicist Rood (1831-1902), *sukiya* architecture, gothic architecture, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, noh theatre, pointillism, as well as film and video games.

However the majority of Kuma's recent architecture gives a sense of visual uniformity. (Fig. 11) According to Stross's hybridity cycles, just like biological hybridization, this formation of Kuma's architecture can be understood as a response to a changing environment and subsequent contextual needs. Culturally hybrid forms generally come into existence to fill niches, and adopt attributes from certain 'parent' entities accordingly.[151] All of the attributes that are combined and refined in Kuma's architecture serve his goal of erasure, which in turn engages with the perceived ecological need for architecture that brings humankind and nature closer together.

[149] Stross, "The Hybrid Metaphor," 258.
[150] Ibid., 257.
[151] Ibid., 261.

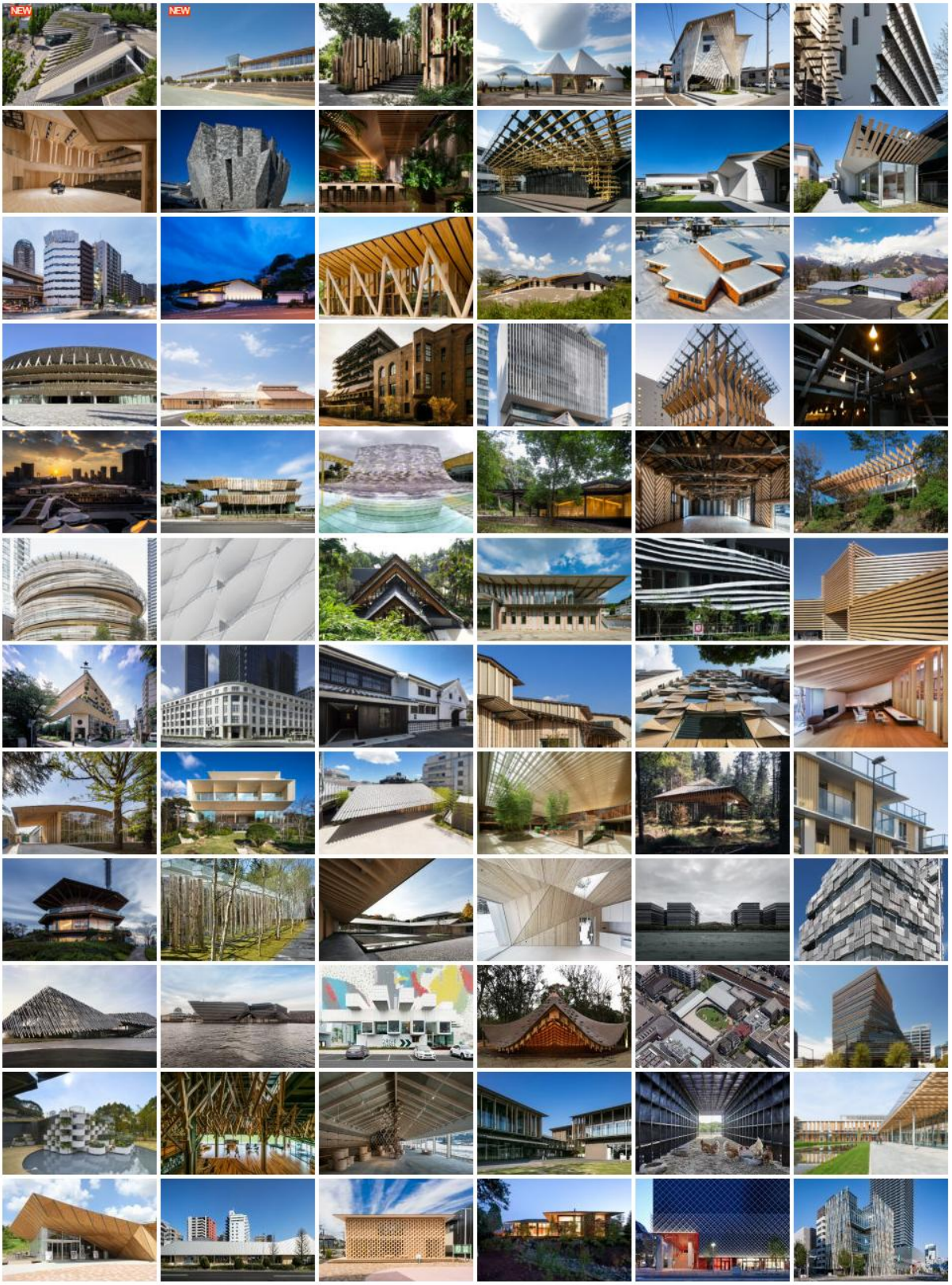

Figure 11. An Overview of Kuma's Recent and Evidently Hybrid Architecture (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

Because of their culturally hybrid qualities and locatedness in the environment of particular sites Kuma's recent constructions have no distinct cultural style - or contrast between styles (unless they were created for doctrinal purposes, such as the TAO (2018) taoist mausoleum in Taiwan's Xinpu mountains) (Fig. 12). This means that the earlier hypothesis suggesting that Kuma's incorporation of Japanese cultural elements is an ideological response to established dichotomies can be dismissed in regards to his recent architecture. According to the hybridity cycle, Kuma's architecture might have had strong 'Japanese' characteristics in its earlier stages, but it has become truly hybrid over the course of the last decades. So hybrid in fact, that one could say that it is close to the end of a cycle, and becoming a 'pure', 'parent' form. This identification as a pure form is of course reliant on humankind's judgement, which in this case is substantiated and proposed by myself.

When understanding the formation of Kuma's architecture through the model of cultural hybridity cycles, in Stross's terms Kuma's architectural style would have passed the "birth of the hybrid" and the "naming of the hybrid", and would now be at the stage of "refinement of the hybrid".[152] If Kuma's style of erasure became conventionalized through its adoption by more people, and thus identified with a substantial in-group, it might be labeled as a new 'pure' cultural form. At present, rather than being labeled as a new 'pure' cultural form, it could just be labeled as the style of Kengo Kuma and Associates' brand.

Kuma's brand's growing popularity and the present-day relevance of his ecological themes, as well as the on-going process of growing intercultural relations, suggest that his architectural style's move from a receiving 'hybrid', incorporating many relevant attributes from supposed 'pure' cultural entities or flows, to a transmitting 'pure', that is seen as being distinct enough to be identified as a new, defined—but of course entangled—entity, is a strong possibility. The acknowledgement of cultural forms as part of a cycle, gives cultural hybridity a framework that stresses both its pervasiveness and honours cultural realities. The fact that cycles happen to be one of the major ways through which nature sustains life, gives this theory more validity. Arguably, it is best to keep cultural hybridity's theorization as broad as that of hybridity cycles, for if it were broken into more pieces, culture would again be caught up in more abstractions, and only move further away from its reality.

[152] Stross, "The Hybrid Metaphor," 265.

Figure 12. Kuma's TAO Mausoleum in Taiwan's Xinpu mountains (Source: Kengo Kuma and Associates)

Conclusion

The concept of cultural hybridity is a useful tool for understanding the illusory qualities of the boundaries of delineated cultural entities. It acknowledges that they are constructed through an inter-relational process of perpetual identification, and that they are abstractions of an underlying entanglement of cultural flows. This understanding softens the imagined boundaries and opens up space for the consideration of their interrelations. In turn, the acknowledgement of their interrelations frees cultures from the conflicting pressure which their abstract, imagined boundaries exert against each other. In this way cultural hybridity supports the transcendence of essentialist identities and subdues the abstract and rudimentary system of cultural essentialism.

Because of its universalist implications some believe that the concept of cultural hybridity is vague and open for appropriation. One way to potentially eliminate this vice is by shifting the

concept from a general implication to a framework with parameters. As abstractions are more or less a necessity for communication, the existence of cultures in the linguistic realm of humankind needs to stay acknowledged and respected. The utilization of a framework that does this could mitigate cultural hybridity's subversiveness. This is why, in addition to the exploration and application of the general concept of cultural hybridity, this research also examined how Stross's theory of 'hybridity cycles' (1999) applies to architect Kengo Kuma's constructions.

Through cultural essentialist notions, the constructions of renowned architect Kengo Kuma are often directly connected solely to supposed Japanese national culture. However, the relatively recent inception of Japan's national culture, its construction through the double-gaze, and the acknowledgement of inherent cultural interrelations make such claims unrefined. When applying the concept of cultural hybridity one can acknowledge that the formation of Kuma's architecture is influenced by numerous intercultural flows. It has been informed by practices and philosophies from in- and outside the Japanese island region, and is underlied by an entanglement of sub- and trans-national—as well as personal—influences.

Stross's theory of 'hybridity cycles' enables an even more thorough understanding of cultural dynamics. When applied to Kuma's architecture, hybridity cycles suggest that, rather than it being entrenched in the neotraditional continuation and formalization of Japanese national culture, it could, because of the refinement of its hybrid qualities over the past decades, be labeled as a new distinct cultural form. This framework just requires the continuing acknowledgment that such a distinction only exists in the linguistic realm of humankind.

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