

2006 Shinkenchiku Design Competition  
The Planless House  
Arch 384 – Sophia Radev

## THE EPHEMERAL SHELTER

*'The works of the past always influence us, whether or not we care to admit it, or to structure an understanding of how that influence occurs. The past is not just that which we know, it is that which we use, in a variety of ways, in the making of new work.... The typology argument today asserts that despite the diversity of our culture there are still roots of this kind which allow us to speak of the idea of a library, a museum, a city hall or a house. The continuity of these ideas of type, such as they are, and the esteemed examples which have established their identity and assured their continued cultural resonance, constitute an established line of inquiry in which new work may be effectively grounded.'*<sup>1</sup>

Our lives are fragmented and though we think we follow a cycle of daily activities there is an absence in the way we live. This absence is an abandonment of our domestic environment for the sake of living well in the future. The 2006 Shinkenchiku Design Competition asked students to design in a plan-less condition. The competition is directed by architect Kengo Kuma, whom is interested in finding a descriptive method of spatial division in everyday living conditions by erasing walls.

*'My ultimate aim is to "erase" architecture, because I believe that a building should become one with its surroundings. How, then can architecture be made to disappear'?*<sup>2</sup>

The wall becomes a psychological barrier between people and the space they are occupying. Spaces and the people which occupy the barriers in today's high speed societies control their activities accordingly to the technology

---

<sup>1</sup> Hancock E., John. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent.

<sup>2</sup> Bognar, Botond. Kengo Kuma Selected Works. 14.

invented to improve daily living. This is, the standard belief of technology improving the way we live. For example, it can be coined as “normalism” which is a term that could be used to characterize the particular strand of modernism one encounters.<sup>3</sup> For example, in The Netherlands: no matter what modern innovation brings, it must make itself relevant in the arena of popular culture and fit the mold of everyday life.

In The Netherlands every piece of land is considered because of the minimum amount of land usage. Therefore, the erasure of architecture contributes to the existing conditions in order to adapt and belong to its natural environment. In Japanese architecture the Japanese sense the large glass panel not as a wall.<sup>4</sup> Kengo Kuma designs with an ephemeral transparency in mind to reveal the landscape beyond and to let soft light fill into the interior by the use of glass and shoji screens.



Man made materials co existing with the materials of the earth should be in

balance. Simultaneously, people should have an understanding of the various effects each can have on the interior and exterior of a shelter to essentially live well with nature. There develops a sense of ambiguity

<sup>3</sup> Betsky, Aaron; Eeuwens, Adam. False Flat: Why Dutch Design Is so Good. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Summer Living and the Elements. <http://int.kateigaho.com/jun04/summer-water.html>.

implemented in the lives of the people, for example, living in The Netherlands. The forces of the earth are larger than any human invention thus making the inhabitants more humble and aware of their landscape in relation to their interior spaces.

*'The wind always blows here, producing a sky that reminds the Dutch of the unpredictability and of the larger forces against which they must struggle'* <sup>3</sup>



View of Delft, by Johannes Vermeer, c. 1660

The Japanese have a similar awareness of their surrounding conditions and try to implement the lifestyle of the earth into the lifestyle of the people. Having an awareness of our surroundings but not applying it to well living, manufactures our idea of the psychological barrier of space which ultimately

disconnects the interior separate from the exterior. The Ephemeral Shelter wants to break away from defining boundaries; instead it is a space, a place, and a trace for contemplation on the way people are presently living.

The ephemeral space is controlled by the movement of the earth rather than the daily household objects and technology that control our lives. For instance, the water pavilion designed by Dutch architect Lars Spuybroek is a space that is intended to constantly change depending on the activities of the visitors.



Water Pavilion

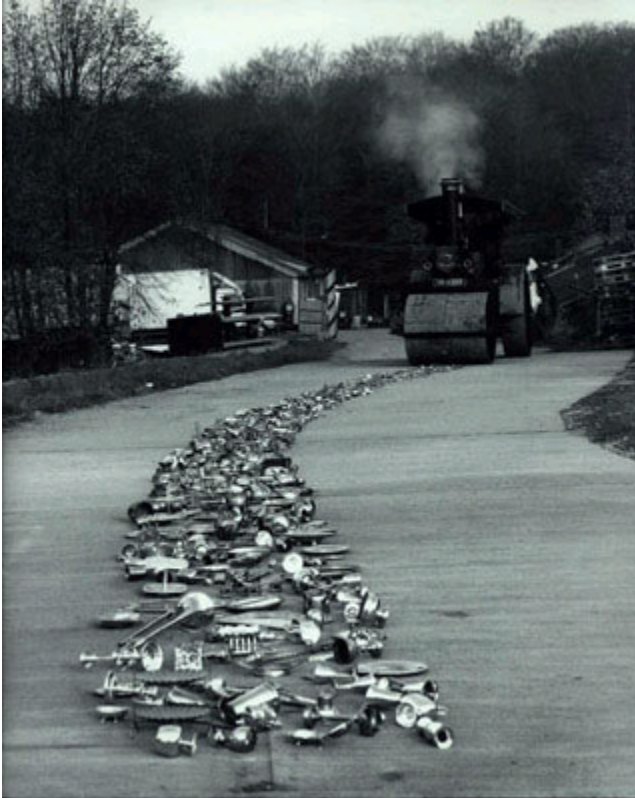
The water pavilion reacts to the senses of the visitors and changes to adapt or surprise their moods.

Likewise, The Ephemeral Shelter is unstable and adapts to the conditions of where it is to be

situated. On contrary to the water pavilion the Ephemeral Shelter tries to adapt to the shifting and natural ways of the landscape and movement of the earth rather than implementing technology to adjust the senses of people at specified instances in time. It is not a space defined by its plan but a space that is defined surrounding an installation of various pieces of household objects attached in a spherical cluster. The cluster is the earth and the converging roof towards the interior portrays the weight people have put on the earth to adapt to their lifestyles rather than trying to adapt to the natural environment.

With efficiency of living at a faster pace there comes a sacrifice. Artist Cornelia Parker reflects on the sacrifice of the earth towards living inefficient lives with pompous personal and household possessions.

*'...the objects are landmarks in people's lives. I wanted to change their meaning, their visibility, their worth, that is why I flattened them, consigning them to all the same fate...'*<sup>5</sup>



Thirty Pieces of Silver

Parker shows her viewer the unnecessary items we have and then dispose of sometime in our lives. The many possessions we do have are not personal but temporary and we feel obligated to them. Thus, The Ephemeral Shelter is a space to reconsider the objects we possess and if they really do improve our living. Rather than physically separating ourselves in

compartments of a house to control individual activities the spaces should be communal and used entirely. Another installation by Cornelia Parker called *Cold Dark Matter* provokes ethereal to worldly visuals by a shelter having been exploded into fragments and suspended in air to capture the moment in time it was demolished.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, Jessica. Cornelia Parker. 16.



## Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View



The act of deconstructing the shelter suggests the consumption and disposal of material. The residue left becomes part of the surroundings reflected by the shadows created from the artificial light. Parker seems to focus on the entire space when the light is turned on. In relationship the Ephemeral Shelter now becomes a place to experience, as Kengo Kuma believes rather than creating a physical entity or object (a space); the Ephemeral Shelter is architecture as atmosphere.

A space should not be separated from its nature. It should be part of the place it surrounds. For the Ephemeral Shelter to become part of a place it must inscribe itself to the surrounding land and by the use of materiality. The shelter must grow or deplete with the earth's conditions. It must function accordingly to the relation of landscape and history, and of the consciousness of place. Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni seeks clarification *vis-à-vis* diverse modes of landscape representation in his films.

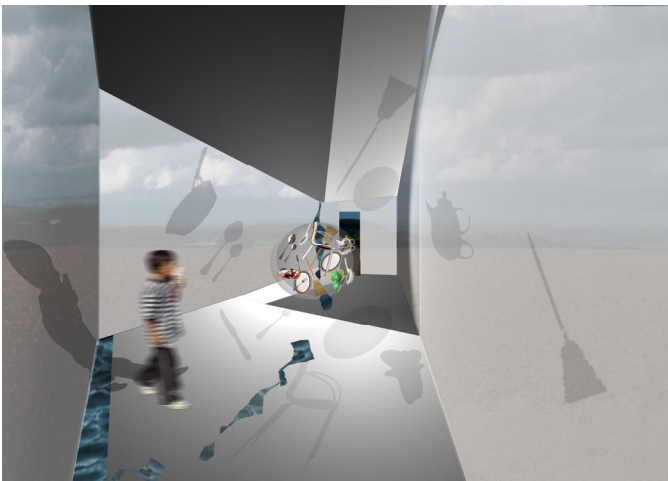
Antonioni maintains a notion of *genius loci* – a spirit of a place. The River Po, for instance is viewed in his 1943 film about the destiny of the river and of the region it runs through as a whole.

*'...the years did not pass in vain [not for people and] not even for things. There came also for the Po the time to awaken. And then there came iron bridges on which long trains clanged day and night, there came six-story buildings spotted with enormous windows vomiting dust and noise, there came steam boats, docks, factories, fuming chimneys, even more canals with cemented levees; this was, in short, an altogether modern, mechanical, industrialized world that came to turn upside down the harmony of the old one. And yet in the midst of this dissolution of their world, the population had no regrets.'*<sup>6</sup>



River Po outside of Turin, Italy

As the years passed the river became more populated and industrialized. There is no cause for nostalgia but to only adjust human imagination to modernity. The built up environment along the River Po is part of every place along the river. In juxtaposition to The Ephemeral Shelter, natural rain water runs through the converging roof cleansing the representational environment of household



The Ephemeral Shelter – water running through objects

<sup>6</sup> Steimatsky, Noa. From The Air: A Genealogy of Antonioni's Modernism. 184.

objects and collecting at the far end of the shelter and out into the earth. Water has innate powers of purification.<sup>4</sup> In Japanese traditions it is sprinkled on walkways before guests arrive. It is poured over the hands before praying reverence at a Shinto shrine. Yet these traditions seem to have been forgotten or not oblige to other cultures. We see that the population along the River Po had no regrets towards modernity; perhaps the past was not so golden or harmonious after all. With precedence of the river and the population inhabiting the area the built environment has become part of the architecture that surrounds the river. Returning ourselves to nature is important to remind us of our natural time and recalibrate our lives to take time out and enjoy the places that surround us. From the built up fabric along the River Po has taken away fragments of the influence from the towns and cities which pass it by with various debris and fallen man made objects which are passed along to the river.

The Ephemeral Shelter - artifacts clustered as earth



The River Po is reminiscent to Cornelia Parker's installations of exploded objects and debris suspended in space becoming part of the atmosphere. It is a place shared with many and is echoed by the river keeping everything in harmony.

<sup>4</sup> Summer Living and the Elements. <http://int.kateigaho.com/jun04/summer-water.html>.



Materiality is an important concept behind the idea of The Ephemeral Shelter in becoming part of the place it is situated. Intended to be a visual ambiguity throughout the day and night it is made of Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FPR) in order to achieve the desired qualities of lightness and openness. Kengo Kuma uses FPR panels to achieve the freedom and substitute the international methods of construction into a more personal and local tradition of place.



Therefore, light only filters through to receive a mistiness which vaguely mirrors the shadows onto the paneled screens never losing sight of the distance beyond the interior. The Ephemeral Shelter needs to be amorphous



to the environment at any time of day. At night it is more artificial when a light is turned on, this is to represent the synthetic objects we use to supposedly reduce the time to work and make time to enjoy living.

We need a cause for nostalgia reminding us of the past and looking towards the future. The past becomes a trace leading to a journey of the future.

Traces of architecture are important in determining the history of previous construction methods, living arrangements, and loose artifacts. A trace is only possible through an envisioned space that becomes part of a place. A good trace can be viewed in multiple ways but the most powerful are human and architectural. We inhabit spaces to leave a trace, for example in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, whom was trained in architecture but more intrigued by buildings about to be destroyed, he found the priority of cutting through spaces. In a project called *Conical Intersect* the idea was to cut a unity of shape as it traversed more than one architectural structure. In an interview Gordon Matta-Clark describes it as:

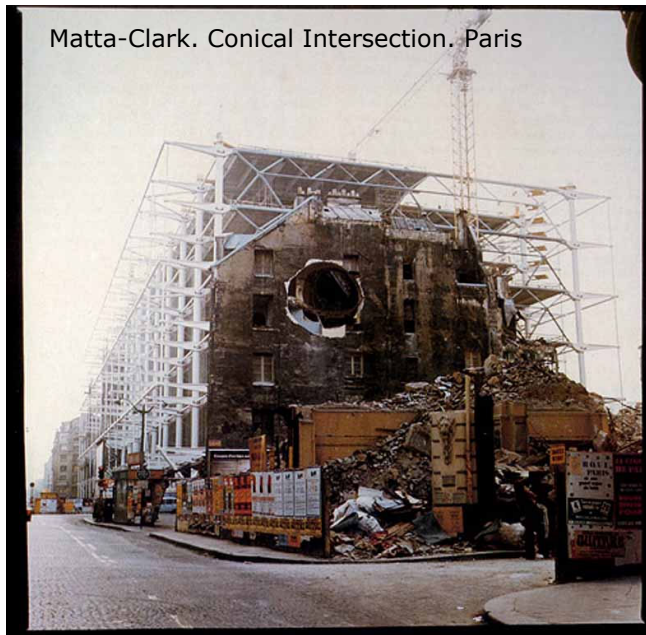
*'throwing a ball in space and being able to pass through surfaces...it's basically mental projections or projectiles, and you spend all that grimy time to realize them.'*<sup>8</sup>

He creates his own trace into the architecture before nature or technology take over to make their trace of history. Before making a trace Matta-Clark makes the architecture part of a larger space throwing away the perfect plan to then open the space to the place it stands around. Adjacent to the Centre Pompidou in Paris the *Conical Intersect* through traditional Parisian apartment blocks may suggest to the viewer a certain voyeurism of its

---

<sup>8</sup> Diserens, Corinne. Gordon Matta-Clark. 95.

interior make up but also of letting exterior conditions adapt to the opening interior conditions of what was once an idealized place for living well.



Matta-Clark. Conical Intersection. Paris



Spaces combined

Juxtaposed to an architectural structure manifesting technology, the Centre

Pompidou is in contrast a machine to let people trace and control their senses when moving inside. It is rather a place for tracing human movement and reacting to make the architecture fit peoples current needs in time, where the deconstructed buildings of Matta-Clark take a slower precession to adapt to the environment rather than the immediate needs of the people. In this case The Ephemeral Shelter does not trace human movement but traces the shifting of the earth. The shelter also deposits its traces gradually with pieces of the clustered artifacts that are cleansed and are released by the rain water falling onto and with time into the earth. A short essay by Edgar Allan Poe called '*The Philosophy of Furniture*' describes the interior of a house

is also the interior of the body.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the interior of space can also be the exterior of its environment.

Lars Spuybroek manifests of machining architecture proposing that human habits are adaptable to making a better architecture. His architecture is amorphous to its surroundings and dictates an idea that change emerges from the self and that it is enforced from the outside.<sup>10</sup> Taking what is on



the inside of a person and operating their interior to adapt to their exterior. The Ephemeral Shelter tries to integrate a similar idea where the interior of the shelter becomes more important to its surroundings and the inhabitant must adapt to them rather than the architecture adapting to the inhabitant. Living in controlled environments The Ephemeral Shelter tries to free the

---

<sup>9</sup> Allan Poe, Edgar. *The Philosophy of Furniture*. [www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/518/](http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/518/).

<sup>10</sup> Spuybroek, Lars. *NOX: Machining Architecture*. 270.

architecture and to integrate an environment that is not dictated by a plan but by its space, place and the trace by the environment and its inhabitants.

## WORKS CITED

- Allan Poe, Edgar. The Philosophy of Furniture. [www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/518/](http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/518/). [world wide web] 8 September 2006.
- Allen, Richard; Turvey, Malcolm. Camera Obscura Camera Lucida. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003.
- Betsky, Aaron; Eeuwens, Adam. False Flat: Why Dutch Design Is so Good. New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2004.
- Bognar, Botond. Kengo Kuma Selected Works. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.
- Diserens, Corinne. Gordon Matta-Clark. New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2003.
- Hancock E., John. Between History and Tradition: Notes Toward a Theory of Precedent. The Harvard Architectural Review: Volume 5.
- Morgan, Jessica. Cornelia Parker. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 2000.
- Shinkenchiu Residential Design Competition 2006. [www.japan-architect.co.jp/english/5info/topics/skcompe2006/index.html](http://www.japan-architect.co.jp/english/5info/topics/skcompe2006/index.html). [world wide web] 28 December 2005.
- Spuybroek, Lars. NOX: Machining Architecture. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Steimatsky, Noa. From The Air: A Genealogy of Antonioni's Modernism. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003.
- Summer Living and the Elements. <http://int.kateigaho.com/jun04/summer-water.html>. [world wide web] 2004 Summer issue.