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**Autor:** Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu / Kaijima, Momoya / Kuroda, Junzo  
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Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, Momoya Kaijima, Junzo Kuroda,  
translated by Marika Neustrupny



Mini House

# MIT = Made in Tokyo

Hybrid Structures in Tokyo. A Publication by Atelier Bow-wow, Tokyo

**When returning to Tokyo, especially from Europe, I'm often surprised. Roads and trainlines run over buildings, expressways wind themselves over rivers, cars can drive up ramps to the rooftop of a 6 storey building, the huge volume of a golf practice net billows over a tiny residential district. A Survey.**

## **The Appearance and Disappearance of Shamelessness**

The main cities of Europe are still using the buildings from previous centuries, and are not modernised in terms of building stock renewal. By comparison, almost all buildings in Tokyo have been built within the last 30 or 40 years, utilising modern technology. This technology has formed a background to the appearance of shameless spatial compositions and functional combinations, unthinkable in the traditional European city. What is this city of Tokyo, which can allow such unthinkable productions? How have we managed to arrive at such a different place to European modernity despite having the same building technology?

But one week later, these sorts of questions disappear from my mind.

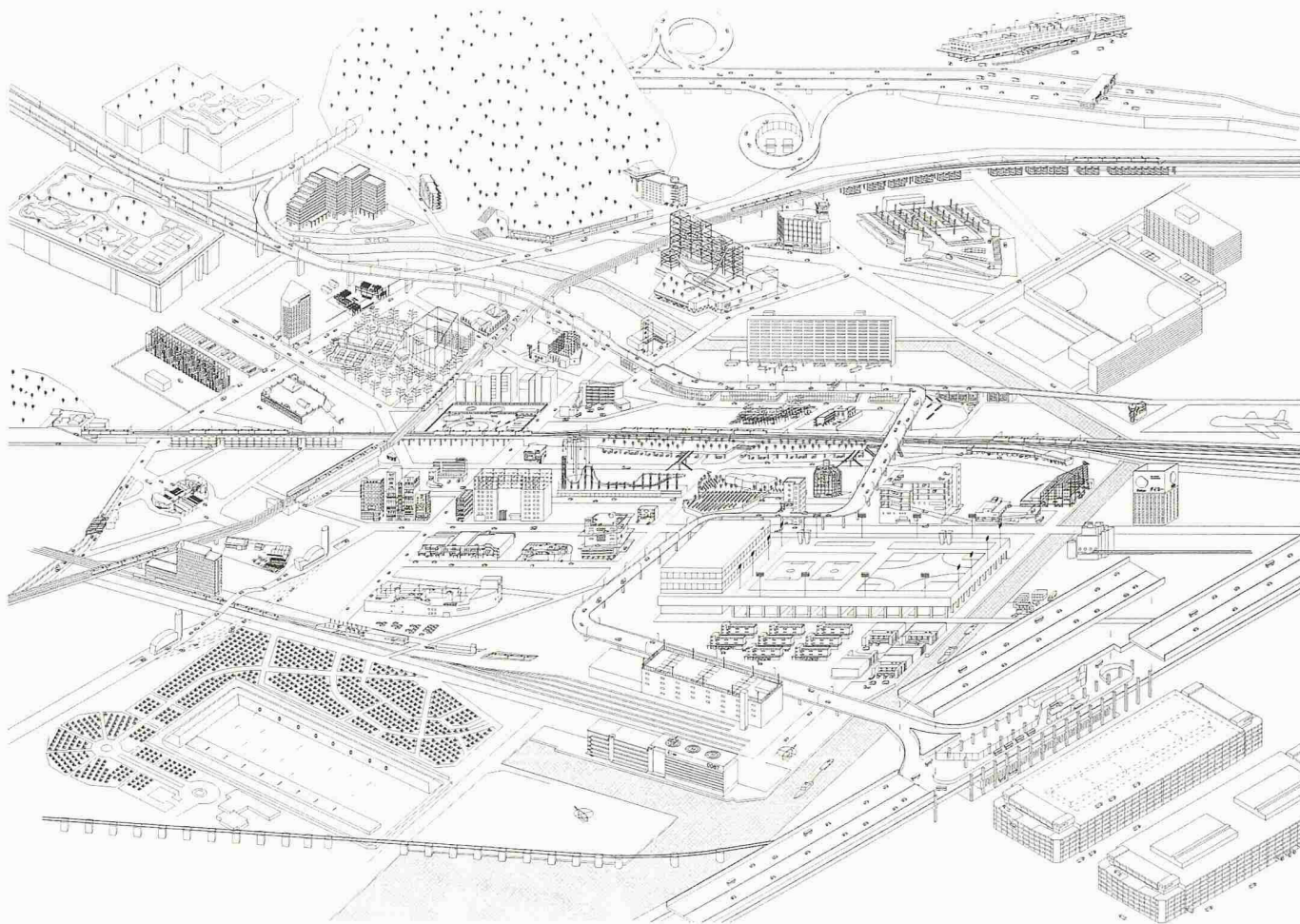
## **Changing our Surroundings into Resources**

If we return to our everyday architectural life, architectural magazines and university textbooks are filled with famous works, east and west, old and new. Specialists, such as practitioners and critics find their criteria by looking at overseas examples and Japanese classics. This is correct and necessary, but the values woven by this situation show up this city as covered by disgusting buildings. If our footsteps are actually embedded in a pitiful urban landscape, the idea of using famous architecture as a criteria base seems to be just an attempt to express good taste. Photographic books amplify a desire for an architecture which simply can't be found in our surroundings. If it comes to this, then suddenly architectural design holds no interest anymore; the future of such work appears depressing. However, the reality of Tokyo is that it is already fully occupied by such «disgusting» buildings. If we can't try to turn them into resources, then there is no reason to particularly stay in Tokyo. Surely we can start to think about how to take advantage of them, rather than trying to run away. Shamelessness can become useful. So let's start by considering that these shameless buildings are not collapsible into the concept of «chaos», but are in fact an intricate reporting of the concrete urban situation.

## **Survey Beginnings**

In 1991, we discovered a narrow spaghetti shop wrenched into the space under a baseball batting centre hanging from a steep incline. Neither a spaghetti shop nor a batting centre are unusual in Tokyo, but the packaging of the two together cannot be explained rationally. Despite an apparent convenience in their unity, there is no necessity to hit baseballs towards the opposite hotel, sweat, and then eat at a spaghetti shop. In addition, it is difficult to judge whether this is an amusement machine, or a strange architecture. This building simul-





taneously invited a feeling of suspicion that it was pure nonsense, and expectation in its joyful and willful energy. But we also felt how «very Tokyo» are those buildings which accompany this ambiguous feeling. Having been struck by how interesting they are, we set out to photograph them, just as though we were visiting a foreign city for the first time. This is the beginning of «Made in Tokyo», a survey of nameless and strange buildings of this city.

### **Da-me Architecture**

The buildings we were attracted to were ones giving a priority to stubborn honesty in response to their surroundings and programmatic requirements, without insisting on architectural aesthetic and form. We decided to call them «Da-me Architecture» (no-good architecture), with all our love and disdain. Most of them are anonymous buildings, not beautiful, and not accepted in architectural culture to date. In fact, they are the sort of building which has been regarded as exactly what architecture should not become. But if you look closely, there is just one strong point to them. In terms of observing the reality of Tokyo through building form, they seem to us to be better than anything designed by architects. We thought that these buildings are not explained by the city of Tokyo, but they do explain what Tokyo is. So, by collecting and aligning them, we thought that the nature of Tokyo's urban space could become apparent. At the time, there was a best selling

guide book of Tokyo, full of architect designed works, but it did not show the bare Tokyo which we felt. It couldn't answer the question of what kind of potentials are in this place we are standing in? What can it mean to think about and design architecture beside da-me architecture?

### **Flatness**

The starting hypothesis for the survey is that in any city, the situation and value system of that city should be directly reflected through unique buildings. In the case of Tokyo, we suspect that da-me architecture contains hints to think about the city and architecture. However, the definition of da-me architecture was not necessarily clear from the beginning. We debated at length over each example as we collected them. During these debates, we took care to not think about the city as a conceptual model. In the 1980s there was a background of chaos affirming theory and Tokyology, and the spatial expression of architectural works displayed confusing urban landscape as a metaphor. We strongly wanted to get away from the attitude that the city can be summarised by metaphorical expression. Then again, from the very start, we avoided considering examples which can be read as stereo-typical images such as stylistic eclecticism and contrast between pre- and super-modern. Although we agreed with the Institute of Street Observation's emphasis on pleasure, we felt uncomfortable with the importance attached to modesty and wistful-



ness. We decided to try to not work with nostalgia. The examples we stuck with were based more on particularity in the way they related directly to use. By treating the relation between elements as the major issue, we tried to see the object without pre-conditioned meanings and categories. We tried to look at everything flatly, by eliminating the divisions between high and low cultures, beauty and ugliness, good and bad. We thought that such a way of seeing is called for by the urban space of Tokyo, which is a gigantic agglomeration of an endless variety of physical structures.

### Guidebook

The result of the observation also depends on the method of representation. If the method doesn't suit the observation, the result often can't be grasped. Therefore it is important to develop a method of representation which doesn't lose observational quality. The format we chose was that of a guidebook. Tokyo is a giant maze-like city without physical navigational aids such as axes or urban boundary. Perhaps because of this, there are innumerable guidebooks on every facet of life in this city. Tokyo has already been edited to suit every possible objective. Even if they form a kind of

software after the fact, in terms of organising the way the city is used, guidebooks can become a tool for urban planning. However, a guidebook doesn't need a conclusion, clear beginning or order. This seems suitable for Tokyo, where the scene is of never ending construction and destruction.

What kind of awareness will be opened up by the buildings made in Tokyo?

### From «Architecture» towards «Building»

The buildings of Made in Tokyo are not beautiful. They are not perfect examples of architectural planning. They are not A-grade cultural building types, such as libraries and museums. They are B-grade building types, such as parking, bathing centres, or hybrid containers including architectural and civil engineering works. They are not «pieces» designed by famous architects. What is nonetheless respectable about these buildings is that they don't have a speck of fat. What is important right now is constructed in a practical manner by the possible elements of that place. They don't respond to cultural context and history. Their highly economically efficient answers are guided by minimum effort. In Tokyo, such direct answers are expected. They



«Super car school»; function: supermarket + driving school/site: kanamachi, katsushika-ku: on top of the double layer supermarket lands a layer of driving school – the site includes the parcels of other people's property which could not be purchased – the condition of the site, framed by the curve of the railroad, is expressed directly in the extruded volume of the building – the entry ramp is framed above by the practice slopes for hand brake starts learner cars, etc.





are not imbued with the scent of culture; they are simply physical «building». Moreover, Tokyo is really such a contradictory place, because it is in fact these «buildings» which most clearly reflect the quality of urban space. The translation of issues of place through history and design seems like a fabrication: this is Tokyo. Where cultural interest is low, interest in practical issues is high. Whether civil engineering structures, rooftops, walls or gaps between buildings, they utilise whatever is at hand. What is important is the discovery of how to establish a second role to each environmental element. With this doubling up, it becomes possible to re-use spatial by-products. The material is not given, but is discovered through our own proposition of how to use it. It might be termed «affordance» of the urban environment. Further to this, cross categorical hybrids such as expressways and department stores, can arise. In this example, the department store depends on the expressway for its structure. On the other hand, the expressway depends on the department store for its validity in such a busy commercial area. So neither can exist on their own: they are interdependent. Such existence seems anti-aesthetic, anti-historic, anti-planning, anti-classification. It releases the architecture of over-definition towards generic «building». The buildings of Made in Tokyo are not necessarily after such ends, but they simply arrive at this position through their desperate response to the here and now. This is what is so refreshing about them.

#### **Moca Haus. Nakano-ku, Tokio, Februar bis Juli 2000 Atelier Bow-wow**

(Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, Momoya Kaijima und Shun Takagi)  
Wohnung mit einem Geschäft: Grundstücksfläche 52m<sup>2</sup>,  
Grundfläche 30 m<sup>2</sup>, Geschossfläche 24 m<sup>2</sup> / Stahlbeton

Dicht umgeben von Nachbargebäuden, grenzt das schmale Baugrundstück von 5,5 auf 8,2 m nördlich an einen Bahnsteig. Wenig Sonne, Lärm und Erschütterungen von der Schnellbahn sind zwar eklatant schlechte Wohnbedingungen, aber die unmittelbare Nachbarschaft zur Shinjuku-Haltestelle ist attraktiv genug für Grossstadt-Singles: Hier ist ihr Apartmenthaus!

Geltenden Vorschriften über Bauhöhen, Abstandsflächen und Brandschutz entspricht ein Turm mit Lücken zu den Nachbarn am besten. In diesem versorgen Leitungen, Fluchtwege und Treppen das Gebäude direkt über die Brandwände; typische Elemente von Apartmenthäusern wie Korridore, Balkone oder Installationsschächte fehlen. In die geforderte Neigung des oberen Teils der Hauptfassade ist eine Maisonette-Wohnung im dritten und vierten Geschoss eingepasst. Im ersten und zweiten Geschoss gibt es Einzimmer-Apartments, ebenerdig einen Laden.

Um die Konstruktion vor Staub und Luftverschmutzung zu schützen, sind alle Aussenflächen mit Feuerschutzplatten bekleidet, Hauptfassade und Dach zudem mit Schiefertafeln. Die Innenräume werden durch Betonoberflächen um die präzise Anordnung der Flächen und Einbauten bestimmt. So konnten selbst an dieser Stelle interessante Räume für Singles geschaffen werden – sie sollen einfach Grossstadtgefühl ausdrücken.





### Adjacency and «Environmental Unit»

Our interest is in the diverse methods of making and using coherent environments within the city, together with urban ecologies seen there. This includes the unexpected adjacency of function created by cross categorical hybrids, the co-existence of unrelated functions in a single structure, the joint utilisation of several differing and adjacent buildings and structures, or the packaging of an unusual urban ecology in a single building. In Tokyo's urban density, there are examples of a coherency which cross over categorical or physical building boundaries. It is something which differs from the architecture of self-standing completeness. Rather, any particular building of this kind can perform several roles within multiple urban sets. They cannot be specifically classified as architecture, or as civil engineering, city or landscape. We decided to name such coherent environments of adjacency «Environmental Units». In Tokyo, the external envelope does not act to divide public and private, as in the traditionally understood idea of a facade. We are in a fluid situation, where rigid distinctions such as between shallowness and depth or front and back, are easily overturned by a shift in the setting of the ecological unit. The magnificent architecture of architects retains distinctions between categories, rationalises physical structure, pushes preconceived use onto that structure, and tries to be self-contained. This is even though there are so many diverse ways to define environmental unities. It is a method

### Mini Haus. Nerima-ku, Tokio, April bis Oktober 1998

#### Atelier Bow-wow

Einfamilienhaus: Grundstücksfläche 77 m<sup>2</sup>, Grundfläche 41 m<sup>2</sup>, Geschossfläche 90 m<sup>2</sup> / Keller Stahlbeton, Stahlskelett

Das Grundstück liegt an einer schmalen Strasse nach Osten und einer Sperrfläche für eine geplante Ringstrasse nach Westen. Diese amtliche Planung zerstört das städtische Gefüge des dichten Wohnbezirks entlang der alten Kawagoer Strasse, und es ist schwierig, sich vorzustellen, was einmal konkret geschehen wird. Die winzige Grundstücksgrösse ist in Tokio keine Ausnahme, trotzdem muss das Gebäude mit der unbeständigen Situation fertig werden. Dabei entscheidet das Gefühl von Distanz zwischen Architektur und Umgebung. Für uns ist es wichtig, Sensibilität für die Ausrichtung und Bezüge über das Baugrundstück hinaus zu entwickeln und den fließenden Aspekt positiv zu nutzen. Der dreigeschossige Haustyp hält Abstand zu den Grundstücksgrenzen und hat Fenster und Vorsprünge in alle Richtungen – wie Arme und Augen. Wir wollen gleichzeitig am Entwurf der Innenräume arbeiten und daran, Aussenräume wirksam werden zu lassen. Diese Wechselbeziehungen zeigen, was es bedeutet, in Tokio Wohnhäuser zu bauen.

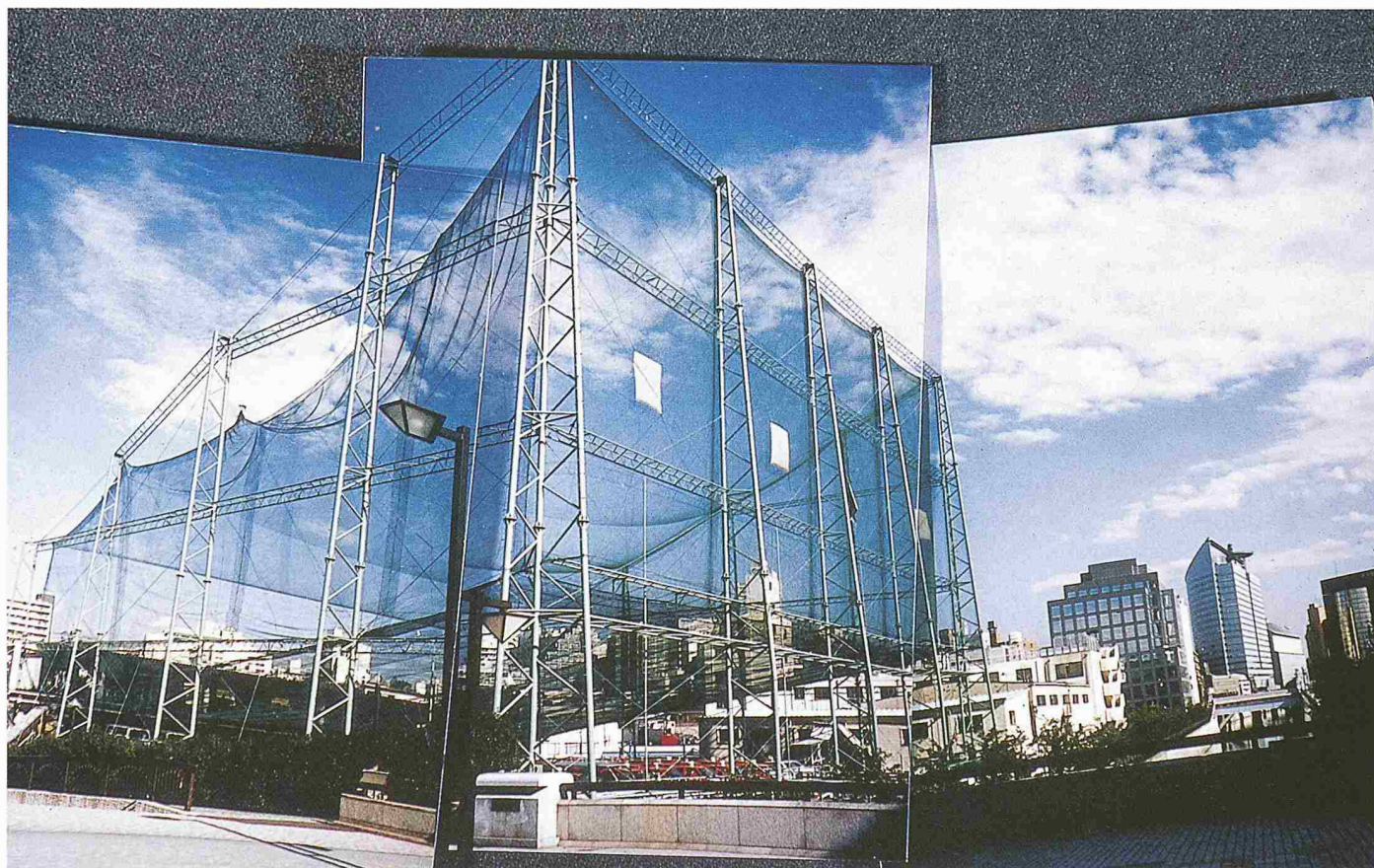


that Modernism has passed down to us, and the precision of its ways is becoming stronger and stronger. Yet, everyday life is made up of traversing various buildings. Living space is constituted by connections between various adjacent environmental conditions, rather than by any single building. Can't we draw out the potential of this situation and project that into the future? If we can, it may be possible to counter the typical Japanese Modernist public facilities which are cut off from their surroundings and packaged into a single box. We can place attention on the issue of how usage (software) can set up a network, where public facilities can be dispersed into the city whilst interlapping with the adjacent environment. Spaces for living can penetrate into various urban situations and thereby set up new relations amongst them. The possibilities for urban dwelling expand.

### On/Off

We can find an overlapping of 3 orders which set up the «Environmental Unit». They are based on category, structure and use. If we take again the example of the hybrid between expressway and department store, the traffic above and the shopping below are simply sha-

ring the same structure, but belong to different categories and have no use relation. In other words, it is only structural order which unites this example. Maybe it is not that the example is impossible to evaluate within the existing cultural value system, but rather that the sense of unity is full of dubiousness which is the essential reason that this example is da-me architecture. We can say that when any of the 3 orders are operating, they are «on», whereas when they do not take effect they are «off». This system starts to incorporate all the value poles which seem to form such an important role in the recognition and indeed the very existence of da-me architecture. We can recognise that the examples of Made in Tokyo almost always comprise some aspect of being «off». The only vacant endpoint to the Made in Tokyo chart that includes an aspect of «off», is the position which might be filled by the continuous street facades of Paris. By contrast, the magnificent buildings of architects are «on», «on», «on». Often, the Parisian streetscape and the Modern city are held to be in opposition, but the abundant examples of Made in Tokyo show that they are not necessarily bipolar. They simply exist within a score of on and off.



«Golf taxi building»; function: golf driving range + taxi office + taxi parking garage/site: meguro, meguro-ku: along the meguro river, facing the meguro city hall – from on top of the taxi company office, the golfers practice driving towards the river – the ceiling of the taxi parking is a huge sloping, netted cage, through which driven balls fly and roll back towards the office and golfers – in the evening, it becomes a green cage of light, reflected in the water surface of the river





«Electric passage»; function: railway bridge + shopping arcade/ site: sotokanda, chiyoda-ku: In front of the west exit, Akihabara Station, Sobu Line – stacking and extension of the railway line and electric goods district – the railway tracks become a roof to 3 floors of electric goods shopping – 300 m length of shopping arcade – the scale of the frontage of each shop divides this section of railway into smaller and smaller proportions

Anyway, surely too much «on» can't be good for our mental landscape. If we switch all 3 orders «on», there is only one possibility for achieving satisfying architecture, but if we allow any or all aspects to be «off», then suddenly the possibilities for variation explode to 8 (2 to the power of 3). This establishes a huge release for those who are designers. When we say that we can sense the pulse of Tokyo in the «da-me architecture» which includes some aspect of being «off», it means that even though the urban space of this city appears to be chaotic, in exchange, it contains a quality of freedom for production. Furthermore, we hope in our design work to clearly represent possibilities for the urban future by being consistent with the principle findings of our research. The observations can only gain a certain clarity once they have been studied through design and vice versa. Such interactive feedback between observation and design is one efficient method through which to contribute to the city through the scale of architecture.

Atelier Bow-wow, Nanpeidei 16–29 Ishikawa build.  
3F, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, Japan, #150-0036.  
tsukamot@arch.titech.ac.jp

#### ASP

Das Atelier Bow-wow hat die Redaktion anlässlich des Architektur Symposiums Pontresina kennen gelernt. Toyo Ito hatte Yoshiharu Tsukamoto und Momoyo Kaijima als seine Gäste eingeladen.

#### Bilder

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