terms, to modernism’s poker face. If *Sir John Soane: An English Architect, An American Legacy* reminds the viewer of the value of the sexing-up of architecture and of Soane’s pursuit of mood as an endeavor worth taking seriously, it will have proved a success.

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Notes
3. Ibid., 25.

Jesper Wachtmeister, director
**Kochuu: Japanese Architecture/Influence & Origin**

Jesper Wachtmeister’s *Kochuu: Japanese Architecture/Influence & Origin* boldly begins with seven different architects’ perspectives from inside and outside Japan. Viewers hear Tadao Andô explain, “I want visitors before they enter the building to be able to reflect on what kind of architecture it is,” while they watch footage of people walking through his minimal concrete Benesse House art village (1992–2006) set within the dramatic landscape of Naoshima Island in Japan’s Inland Sea. Tōyō Itô describes his interest in the ambiguity between outdoors and indoors in traditional Japanese architecture as the camera captures the ride up a glazed elevator within the open structural cores of his glass and steel Sendai Mediatheque (2001). In stark contrast, architect/theorist Juhani Pallasmaa is pictured in front of Alvar Aalto’s Villa Mairea (1937–39) citing the power of Japanese influence on Finnish architects, and Sverre Fehn affirms that, for him, “the flexibility of Japanese buildings was exciting.” Finnish architect Kristian Gullichsen discusses his long interest in “the Japanese tradition of building in wood,” while architect Kazuo Shinohara, set within his stainless steel Tokyo Institute of Technology Centennial Hall (1987), proclaims that “chaos is not necessarily bad.” Further mystifying this picture, Kishô Kurokawa asserts, “Even using modern high-tech, we want the ‘invisible’ Japanese traditions to be present.”

Despite the seemingly contradictory and separate nature of these themes—modern versus traditional Japanese architecture from domestic and international perspectives—the Scandinavian filmmaker Wachtmeister attempts to bring them together through the notion of “kochuu 蓋中,” which literally translates as “in the jar.” This is a reference to the tradition of constructing microworlds in Japan such as tiny tea houses that Kurokawa describes as “small space[s] filled with big thoughts.” Kurokawa argues that this notion is pervasive in contemporary Japanese architecture, and it thus becomes the theme of Wachtmeister’s relatively short film filled with big thoughts.

The strength of *Kochuu* is its vivid depiction of the dynamics of “Japanese Architecture” conveyed as a virtual visit from the perspective of both the observer and architect. Like the format of Nathaniel Kahn’s film *My Architect* (2003) and Sydney Pollack’s *Sketches of Frank Gehry* (2005), both of which include footage of buildings and interviews, *Kochuu* goes beyond the still architectural photograph to include the promenade to and through buildings. These moving images are brilliantly shaped by subtle background noises such as cicadas chirping or sounds of geta (wooden clogs) on a stone path to a tea-house. In contrast to typical still photographs of Andô’s architecture, almost always shot with a blue-sky background so that gray exposed concrete walls do not disappear against a gray sky, the film footage captures the character of his absolutely smooth concrete surfaces in the rain or the effect of gentle waves in the concrete lotus pond of his Water Temple (Awajishima Island, 1991). Moreover, rather than hearing Andô’s dubbed voice, the viewer listens to the particular character of his Osaka-dialect while reading subtitles.

Wachtmeister’s film footage of architects describing their design ideas within their realized buildings is a veritable historical document. The viewer understands the bodily experience of the
different translucent and transparent interior spaces of the Sendai Mediatheque in relationship to Itô’s own proportions and movement. The film also features rare footage of Shinohara, Itô’s mentor, and the inside of the landmark Centennial Hall at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. It provides interior views of the areas created by the spaceship-like steel structure that transforms through the movement of oversized doors, and the viewer hears Shinohara’s description of his amusement upon discovering that the Centennial Hall had been nicknamed “Gundam,” after the animated robot, by the popular press. The hall, built at the intersection of a busy suburban railway crossing and the university where Shinohara was a professor, expresses what he describes as a positive design outlook on the chaos of Japanese urbanism. Moreover, as Shinohara passed away in 2006, this film footage is one of the last personal accounts of his design career.

Despite the film’s documentary strengths, its overdramatized sound track falls into the trope of exoticizing Japan. While the sounds of electronic synthesizers intensify visual footage, one of the most egregious examples of this mystification is footage of a child listening with headphones in the Sendai Mediatheque juxtaposed with a sound track of a Kabuki performance, to which the child certainly would not be listening. Another misleading conflation occurs when Shinohara speaks about his architectural design philosophy while the Okayama Police Station (1996), designed by Arata Isozaki, appears on the screen. Although the dialogue flows along with the overall direction of the film, these details add to the viewer’s confusion rather than further understanding.

To counter a sense of Japan and Japanese-ness as self-enclosed, ineffable, and immutable, the film boldly presents a Nordic-Japanese crosscurrent through the perceptions of architects from both countries. Pallasmaa affirms that “in almost all Nordic architects’ work you see traits of the Japanese. That is true of Alvar Aalto, Arne Korsmo, and Gunnar Asplund.” Pallasmaa traces this influence to the construction of the Ziu-Ki-Tei Japanese Teahouse (1935) in Stockholm and then describes his first visit to the seventeenth-century Katsura Villa as a déjà vu experience that recalled Aalto’s Villa Mairea. Fehn freely explains that he incorporated his admiration for the “flexibility of Japanese buildings” in his Villa Schreiner design. By contrast, Wachtmeister’s film highlights the fact that Ando himself made his own pilgrimage to Finland to see Aarno Ruusuvuori’s Huutoniemi Church (1964) in Vasa.

While crosscurrents between Japan and Scandinavia comprise a potent theme that could be discussed broadly in terms of attitudes toward natural landscapes and materials, the film only alludes to the complexity of this interchange. Fehn admits in the film that he never actually visited Japan. This would yield insight into his idealized perception of absolute flexibility in a Japanese interior without fixed furniture and his inability to see a less obvious, but distinct hierarchical, organization of use. The film also does not highlight the direct influence of Kaiza and Heikki Siren’s Otaniemi Technical University Chapel on Ando’s Church on the Water (1988), both oriented toward an outdoor cross.

Perhaps the greatest shortcomings of Kochuu stem from not fully historically contextualizing architectural works or exploring the complex nature of “Japanese traditional architecture.” In response to Kurokawa’s assertion that “we [Japanese] want the ‘invisible’ Japanese traditions to be present,” the specific period of Japanese history in which these traditions emerged goes unmentioned. There are no distinctions made between the giant Buddhist Tôdai-ji Temple and the courtly Katsura Villa, or discussions of Chinese, Korean, and Western influences upon Japan. Furthermore, the film does not distinguish between works of the senior generation of architects, including Kenzo Tange and Kazuo Shinohara, and the subsequent generations, including Kurokawa and Itô. These aspects of history and lineage are far more critically examined in the 1988 film, The Third Generation of Avant-Garde Japanese Architects, written and narrated by Kenneth Frampton and produced and directed by Michael Blackwood. At this point in the early twenty-first century, Blackwood’s film may seem dated; yet, it remains a valuable historical document of a pivotal period in contemporary Japanese architecture.

In the end, the fifty-three-minute film Kochuu lives up to its name and remains a small film with big thoughts. It is a record of the admirable aspirations of its filmmaker, but it is also an incomplete project that needs to be untangled so as to critically analyze what “Japanese architecture” is and in what specific ways it is traditional, modern, or both. Is Japanese architecture defined by geographical region, a way of building, or particular attitudes that can transcend a particular time or place? Having opened the jar, so to speak, Wachtmeister’s film underscores the need for further multimedia explorations of the many Japanese and Scandinavian architects and buildings that create a dynamic dialogue in design spanning the past, present, and future.

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