

Stylos and Stilus and the Japanese Understanding of Architectural Change

Vladimir Mako

Vladimir.Mako@vuw.ac.nz

The aim of this paper is to discuss particular issues differentiating a small number of concepts of transformation in architecture, and specifically how they are perceived and understood. Accounting for particular instances of cultural difference, and thus specific views on the spatial and temporal dimensions of architectural expressions and their potential transformations, we will compare some ideas developed in the Western world with those evolved in Japanese culture. By so doing, we can gain a better insight into the role of individual and collective cultural components operating in the process of stylistic transformations within different cultures and aesthetic concepts.

Keywords: Stylos, Stilus, Transformation, Superposition, Impermanency

The Speculative Starting Point

The aim of this paper is to discuss particular issues differentiating a small number of concepts of transformation in architecture, and specifically how they are perceived and understood. Accounting for particular instances of cultural difference, and thus specific views on the spatial and temporal dimensions of architectural expressions and their potential transformations, we will compare some ideas developed in the Western world with those evolved in Japanese culture. By so doing, we can gain a better insight into the role of individual and collective cultural components operating in the process of stylistic transformations within different cultures and aesthetic concepts.

To begin this discourse we will use a well-known analysis of two important etymons, Stylos and Stilus, contributed by Kubler to the general field of stylistic studies.¹ Although Ackerman regards

Kubler's definition as 'too orderly,' it may nonetheless be accepted as clearly established and available as a conceptual start point for our present discussion.² Ackerman's hesitation stems from the differentiation of these two terms according to their spatial and temporal character, and how they, in that sense, pertain to the arts: stylos relates to spatial organization as stilus does to temporal organization. However, Kubler's stance, contained in his analysis of these two etymons, that the Western distinction between 'time and space from one another' can be criticized in much stronger terms.

Despite this criticism, Kubler's characterization of styles as concepts, not as objects, and therefore his understanding that style depends on 'synchronous choices among synonymous possibilities' remains valuable for our further analysis; this is especially so if we consider the emphasis he placed on the importance of subjective perceptual values in space and time conceptualized by different styles.³

This approach to the character of stylistic formation reminds us that the experience of space and time may actually be conceived as a relevant criterion in defining the nature of stylistic values, and thus the process and, particularly, the nature of their transformation.

However, even the results of Kubler's etymological analysis can be employed in a speculative attempt to better understand stylistic transformations in architecture as reflections of important philosophical and cultural considerations. Its potential implementation is present in the process of defining the potential space-time experience of transformation in architecture, particularly implicating different aesthetic systems within that process. Shifting from a formal to a conceptual definition of the etymons *stylos* and *stilus*, we can positively reflect on basic aspects differentiating cultural concepts of styles and the aesthetic nature of their transformations.

In that context, and taking some liberty in establishing an openly speculative discussion, the notion of *stylos* as an etymon defining the formation of spatial arts and *stilus* as defining arts based on temporality can be adopted into the process of identifying different cultural and aesthetic characteristics of transformation in architecture, in which time and space form crucial categories.

Three Studies of Transformation in Architecture

Stylos: Transformation and the Ontological Time and Space

From the Greek origin of the etymon *stylos* we can speculate on its potential value as a reflection of

the character of transformation in Classical architecture and thus of its overall experience of transformation.

According to Vitruvius, the main criterion in the aesthetic evaluation of architecture deduced from a foundation of the existence of transcendental and absolute truth, which has by its own nature a particular spatial character.⁴ Its manifestation in the material world of architectural creation is twofold. On the macro level it appears in a form of natural laws, and on the micro level as an architect's talent. However, the process of the aesthetic evaluation of architecture reflects, more or less, different degrees to which transcendental and truthful aspects of perceived values are recognized. Vitruvius' critique reveals that, usually in public judgment based mainly on social implications and the fashion of the time, higher appreciation was accorded that architecture that exceeded the ordered expression of values generated from natural laws. His comment thus exposes important ideas regarding transformation and appearance of styles in architecture.

It should be noted that Vitruvius' Treatise does not discuss styles or their transformation explicitly. His comments are rather on the good and bad appreciation of architecture. Architects either have sufficient knowledge to create good architecture, or they do not; people, likewise, either have enough knowledge to recognize real value in a work, or they do not. In that context, Vitruvius defines change in architecture as a consequence of architects' knowledgably using elements, structures and patterns, the 'real' existence of which belongs to the sphere of transcendental values. Order as a knowledgeable structuralized whole is opposed to those examples demonstrating a more liberal approach to patterns, thus defined as a display of ignorance, low talent, and appalling judgment.

However, Vitruvius accepts as positive changes in architecture: first, a knowledgeable transformation of structure preserving the outward appearance of a building⁵; second, as a result of the advancement of taste pertaining to elegance and subtlety in proportions⁶; and finally, as part of an almost mythologized tradition shown, for example, in his account of the discovery of the Corinthian capital.⁷ Thus, acceptable transformations in architecture are based on the structural and aesthetic advancement of generally (i.e. transcendently) pre-defined forms. However, historical time does not figure importantly in the formal transformation of architecture. These forms do not develop along a pattern of succession, but rather crystallize a direct link between individual knowledge and transcendental truth. This results from a particular spatial connection where the material manifestation of a space is directly transferred from the region of its transcendental ideal existence.

In that context, we acknowledge the invention of new architectural Orders as a mythological event. It is a process of uncovering a fascinating structure corresponding equally to a natural law of evolution and to a previously established and recognized Order of artistic expression. In that sense, taste and architectural form are refined in a mythological space, but beyond a comprehensible time frame, and thus escaping historical periodization.

Advancement in knowledge and taste is not seen as a potential factor for drastic changes in architecture or for the development of new styles separated from the established Orders. Based on the Classical Greek tradition and the Platonic view of art, Vitruvius is concerned with architectural form as an expression of transcendental truth, the manifestation of an absolute idea.⁸ Through a better education and more refined taste, one necessarily draws closer to the idea of absolute

truth and its formal expression.

In that sense, advancements in knowledge and taste as part of an ontological aesthetic concept confirms, rather than transforming into opposite conditions, the constant values established as expression of 'real' transcendental existence. In that sense, constant aspects of the defined Orders have always been confirmed by aesthetically active variables. Only undeveloped taste and insufficient talent results in the separation of forms and structures from the truthful use of patterns. Architectural forms defined as contra-standard to the Orders are aesthetically active but in a negative way, a consequence of ignorance. They are not regarded as potentially informing further development or the confirmation of architectural forms, structures, and concepts based on 'real' values, but as a degradation of the truthful manifestation of an absolute idea.

Time exists as a factor of one's advancement in knowledge and refinement of taste. It enables the creation of material forms and structures closer to their transcendental source, without provoking a successive, historical development of architectural concepts. In that sense, time defines a mythical, vertical connection between the material and transcendental existence of space and form. Established architectural Orders and their potential transformations largely reflect the state of ideas, their truthfulness and the clarity of their expression, rather than a search for new spatio-temporal formations. Accordingly, the etymon *stylos* corresponds to a particular understanding what constitutes truthful expression of a transcendental idea of space in architecture (and consequently in all arts), rather than simply to the spatial organization of an art form.

Stilus: Transformation and the Sense of

Aesthetic Continuity in Architecture

Following the disciplinary establishment of art history in eighteenth century Europe, the processes of transforming principles, structures and spatial expressions was regarded as an activity destroying a clear sense of stylistic continuity in art and architecture.

However, for the benefit of our investigation the sense of historicism embodied in those opinions requires confrontation in particular terms: exposing the characteristics of a creative process implementing the transformation of architectural expression in accordance with a particular sense of continuity in aesthetic sensibility over a longer period of time. We can argue that the existential conditions of such a sense should rely on a particular aesthetic appreciation of the creative process and of value judgments, use of similar architectural elements, and on an undefined sense of stylistic development over time.

In that context, our analysis of a few concepts that treat the aesthetic sense of continuity of architectural concepts in Western Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth century can be especially instructive. It is already established that these centuries demonstrate a huge disparity between the character of architectural expression and the undeveloped consciousness of historical differentiation of architectural style.⁹

The lack of historicism in judging aesthetic values in architecture during these centuries may be due to the appreciation of such general Albertian aesthetic criteria as firmness and delight, the exact character of which was not always precisely defined.¹⁰ However, their value was accepted as universal and relevant in the architecture of the 'ancients' and the 'moderns,' strengthening the aesthetic sense of continuity in the development of

architecture through different periods, and even cultures. Formal differences, clearly exposed and emphasized in our present historical understanding of artist and architectural development, were primarily accounted for as a possibility in the aesthetic appreciation and unity of firmness and delight.

The sixteenth century designation of 'modern' architecture of the time containing the prefix 'Roman' or 'Antique' is a proof enough of how strongly this idea of aesthetic continuity was rooted in European culture.¹¹ This enabled such intellectuals as Gabriel Quiroga de San Antonio, a late seventeenth missionary to Cambodia, to prize the architecture of Angkor Wat as 'Roman'.¹² Applying the aesthetic criteria of his time in judgment of Khmer architecture, Quiroga neglected historicism and cultural difference in defining style. He simply recognized and confirmed aesthetic values contained in his own education, accepting formal differences as one possible expression of these values.¹³

The transformation of architectural expression existed as a principle of development in architecture, and not as an activity causing different styles. In that context, based on universal aesthetic criteria and in accordance with their character, the process of change has its own value as a creative process. The aesthetic criteria of firmness and delight do not reflect the ontological existence of ideas, forms and structures, but rather idealistic principles require satisfaction in a process overseeing the advancement of taste and knowledge, and in a search for new possibilities of architectural expression.

Individual effort guided creative process not to 'uncover' a proper form of pre-existing transcendental ideas, but to 'discover' different possibilities of advanced expression within

generally accepted aesthetic criteria. In that context, the principle of transformation of existing patterns formed a necessary tool in a process involving the creation and exploration of new possibilities in architecture, but which remained divorced from stylistic definition and differentiation. However, even exposed in this manner, the process of transformation in architecture establishes the notion of succession in architectural expressions and concepts. Its constant production of variables becomes a standard characteristic of a particular aesthetic system in which the process of architectural transformation developed within a linear progression in time, bounded by a sense of attachment to one style.

Consequently, the etymon *stilus* can be used to identify this particular sense of continuous transformation within one aesthetic formation. Architectural expression between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries were, in their own time, understood as results of one aesthetic appreciation of values within a constantly evolving taste. This appreciation even accounted for Gothic architecture within that continuous process, based on particular temporal reinterpretation of ancient Orders.¹⁴ While the exact differentiation between historical periods remained an unknown field, consciousness of temporal development and refinement of generally accepted aesthetic categories was recognized as an important aspect of an innovative approach to architecture. This sense of temporality in development was a unifying factor, and not one that would differentiate stylistic forms.

Superposition of Styles: Transformation and the Sense of Continuous Impermanency

To shift our discussion to Japanese examples, we should remind ourselves of a few basic principles

characterizing artistic activity in relation to the existence of different concepts of aesthetic transformation in architecture.

In Japanese culture, the process of artistic creativity as part of an artist's own life and experience of society, history, nature, etc. assumes an importance at least equal to, if not higher, than the formal properties resulting from this activity.¹⁵ Accordingly, architectural expression is a transformable value producing constant variables within an accepted pattern. Variability in the interpretation of patterns is thus standard to Japanese art.

Nevertheless, a creative process so defined emphasizes subjectivity as an essential dimension, which in turn contributes its own nature to the principle of transformability. It is well known that the process of aesthetic transformation in art and architecture is principally activated through subjective artistic activity, which in Japanese culture participates in the definition of the artistic and creative principle of impermanency.¹⁶ Manifesting an essential element of a broader philosophical understanding of formal multiplicity, such as the essence of being and existence in the world, impermanency also exists in the aesthetic experience of form, space and time, and their different emotional characteristics.

Inseparable from material existence, the experience of aesthetic categories is basically related to the process of appearance and disappearance of material forms. In that sense, transformability as an essential principle of aesthetic activity relates equally to natural and artistic forms, but also to social activities as an indivisible part of aesthetic architectural experience. However, based on permanent appearance and the disappearance of materially expressed aesthetic categories, impermanency

manifests itself as a continuous, cyclic process in so far as it also manifests eternity.

Reflecting the process of development in Japanese architecture, the principle of impermanency reveals that each style defines a particular form of beauty, structure, experience and social activity within spatio-temporal formations. Differences between styles, the constant process of their transformation and integration defines the principle of impermanency in a particular way. Through continuous impermanency manifest as transformability and mutability, and consequently in various emotional experiences, the variability of architectural expression became a standard facet of Japanese architecture.

However, continuous impermanency is not manifest in the succession of styles over a linear definition of time. It appears to be the nucleus of the phenomenon of superposition: continuous and parallel existence of various architectural styles, based on aesthetic communication appearing within the process of their interaction and integration.¹⁷ Although aesthetic categories and consequently our experience of them appear through individual forms and structures through that process, they transcend individuality through an overall, environmental effect. The spectator's senses are engaged on a broader level of self-projection into the permanency of appearance and the disappearance of various forms, and forced to respond to an environmental effect.¹⁸

The appearance of a style results from more than a particular feeling at a precise moment. It is better defined as an emotional response to an environmental condition in which appears particular aesthetic categories than as a matter of permanently distinct taste. If patterns are products of imagination,¹⁹ then styles too should consist of a particular vision in which spectators'

self-projection into the vision forms an inseparable element of the experience.²⁰ In that sense, styles provide patterns and possibilities for emotional responses open to various forms of expression. Therefore, styles and patterns are not isolated in a world of self-existence, and there is nothing corresponding to the Western notion of constant stylistic value.

Accomplishment in defining a stylistic value is manifest in the spectator's emotional response to spatio-temporal conditions of a social event placed within an architectural space.²¹ The fact that the spectator finalizes the aesthetic existence of a style indicates that its values are inseparable from spatio-temporal experience. Different stylistic values do not succeed one another in time, but are superimposed through past, present and future conditions of a potential emotional response. In that context, we can define stylistic flexibility, transformability, variability, and mutability in Japanese culture. Consequently, a particular stylistic expression and its potential transformability and mutability is not a direct reflection of one's experience, but a construction of the 'atmosphere' in which one feels and experiences spatio-temporal aesthetic categories.

However, this particular construction is just one of many possibilities in expressing environmental conditions as an element of one's aesthetic experience. In that context, 'real' value of aesthetic categories radiate through various expressions that materialize different experiences of these categories. Essentially, this process of materialization cannot be defined as a search for absolutely new forms of expression. It forms a more emotional redefinition of already existing forms and feelings, and of constructing 'atmospheres' of previously defined experiences. However, by its nature, this process provokes a particular temporal condition, a feeling of

continuity in time based on memory rather than on material fact.²² In Japanese culture, style as imaginative reflection of historical experience incorporates past into present, and vice versa. In that process ones relation to historical patterns is the same as to natural patterns, revealing its impermanency through the appearance of variables. In this sense, impermanency consists of the transformable nature of ideas and their expression in a social environment, and not on factual preservation of historical forms.

Style in Japanese architecture may thus be equally thought of as an expression of social actions in space and time, incorporating their perception in the given environment. However, in this context action means interaction, which defines a more complex the nature of style.²³ Change in stylistic expression means also transformation of social interaction within architectural space and time. While perception is unavoidably emotionally defined, this change needs not be absolutely formal, implementing completely new values.

It is evident that a style such as 'sukiya zukuri' can be defined as a structure existing not simply as a precisely defined form.²⁴ The structure of a style, in that sense, embodies aspects of an overall existence: cultural and social interactions, emotional reflections, activity and procedures of social events in space in time, construction and material appearance; and all these as a reflection of patterns and a sense of historical continuity. It accounts for psychological conditions of perception, including the perceiver's emotional state, which on some levels of experience can divide an approach to 'space' from stylistic intentions. Accordingly, 'space' is a permanent value, while 'style' is an impermanent aesthetic category.

However, this principle allows for the interaction

of two or more styles in Japanese architecture without producing a surrogate or mechanical unification of different elements. Transformation in this sense reflects more on change of an actual action in space, and the mutation of related emotional reflections over time and seasons. We can thus talk about various styles implementing similar formal structures and concepts, which in the process of their integration unifies the emotional responses to each.

The spectator's self-projection, as important aesthetic aspect, is more complex, engaging time and space on a higher level of aesthetic communication with architecture and social activities. For this reason, formal change in one architectural element or its materialization, or the different arrangement of transportable elements and even clothes specific to different social events, should not be seen as irrelevant or illogical factors in stylistic transformation.²⁵ It indicates change in the character of action and interaction in space and time, and by extension the transforming perception of the whole structure and its emotional experience. This kind of change activates the process of imaginative rethinking of one architectural style, which provides elements for constituting another. Consequently, it indicates the feeling of a different style, no matter if this emotional response is articulated momentarily or over a sustained time frame.

This, however, does not render architecture stylistically neutral. It means that people's action in space and time, their interaction in a social event, with removable interior objects and clothing, etc. is considered on the same level of importance with formal architectural elements and concepts. In Japanese culture these activities and objects are inseparable from architecture, its style and aesthetic perception, and thus from its transformative process. This confirms that one

mode of activity and emotional interaction with space, materiality, and society, corresponds to a particular sense of architectural style. Changes to one aspect inevitably precede stylistic mutation in architecture.

However, in Japanese architecture, such a sense of style and its particular transformative character blocks the appearance of a new style that would confront existing ones. That means that differences between styles do not result from contra-standard properties, but from continuously developing variables. Their continuous confirmation as transformable standard properties indicates the process of transformation in architecture as a principle of rethinking and reminiscence, or better, as a reinterpretation of historical examples and concepts. This concept is closely related to emotional reflections, and personal and collective memory as an activating agent for the emergence of a new style.

It is a sense of the spirit of ancient times and architectural examples rather than recognition of their material remains that guides stylistic transformation and the appearance of new forms in Japanese architecture. In that sense, notions of the stylistic preservation of styles and the perception of their individual uniqueness is inseparable from the process of their integration through time. This process of preservation is not, as in Western architecture, linked to a temporally formal isolation. The parallel existence of many styles in Japanese architectural history can be understood as a result of active and continuous mental reflections on historical examples. In that context, a particular feeling of historicity occurs as the essence of an existing stylistic form and its potential transformability.

Conclusion

In the transformation of architectural expression, time and space figure as equal factors. The complexity and character of their appearance in architecture and its perception corresponds to the level and character of philosophical, psychological, social, and aesthetical determination of particular cultural conditions. In that sense the phenomenon of architectural transformation exceeds the primal importance of its material and formal manifestation, rather reflecting different spatio-temporal concepts of particular cultural formations. It also appears that differentiating the etymons 'Stylos' and 'Stilus' according to the spatial or temporal formal organization in art does not have primary importance to the process of transformation and its recognition in arts and architecture. Nevertheless, we should seriously confront the presumption that time and space are separate in this context.

Time as material measure of eternity defines number and consequently space. In that sense, the spatial condition governing the appearance of an Order or 'Stylos' already incorporates time as a reflection of eternity. Therefore, time is never autonomous of space, and neither is one's experience of them in the perception of architecture. They are simply present in a particular way, strongly guiding even the transformation of architectural form in that sense.

Mythical time and space are still time and space. However, one's experience of mythical time and space is essentially different from the specific recognition of a periodic succession within historically defined linear time, and of space as a definite formation belonging to particular moments of time thus defined. In that sense, transformation in architecture as a process incorporating ontological spatio-temporal conditions defines advancement in form as a result of the permanent and unavoidable appearance of transcendental truth

and order, and not as evolution of ideas.

Similarly 'Stilos' need not be linked simply to a temporal conception of an art form. The notion of an artistic expression continuously developing and transforming through time can be clearly linked to spatial qualities. As we have seen, generally established and permanently accepted aesthetic categories may define spatial values as constant parameters in a continuous process of architectural transformation. The crucial factor of this spatio-temporal condition represents the developed consciousness of belonging to a universal aesthetic formation. Abstracting and summarizing elements and concepts of spatial organization to the level of omnipresent aesthetic categories, the continuous transformation of architectural structures in time cannot be confronted with the sense of one style in continuous development.

As for the nature of our argumentation, the character of the transformative process and its perception in Japanese architecture can be similarly summarized. The superposition of various architectural expressions defines the category of time and accordingly the process governing the transformation of architectural space differently to previous cases. It falls within neither a strictly defined ontological concept nor a succession of expressions developed within a period of time, although a number of constituent aspects of these concepts may be recognized in the principle of stylistic superposition in Japanese architecture. However, aspects of emotionality, and more particularly the processes of rethinking and reinterpreting historical examples without a sense of their temporal succession define the character of architectural transformation according to spatio-temporal conditions essentially different to Western concepts.

However, despite the existence of basic differences

in the examples we might propose, it appears that the transformation of architectural expression, in general, consists of aspects more flexible than fixed in time and space. A strictly defined spatial and temporal organization of art forms plays a secondary role in that process. Transformation in architecture, such as the definition of stylistic characteristics, therefore belongs to a particularly active field of aesthetic concepts and cultural formations, in which collective and subjective perceptive elements and aesthetic categories play an equally important part. The process of collective and individual self-projection informs a particular aesthetic experience of architecture and the process of its formal and conceptual transformations. Space and time, in that context, can hardly be isolated one from another. Moreover, the notion of their coexistence may be thought of as the concept of transformation of architectural styles.

Endnotes

¹ (Kubler 1979, p.121)

² (Ackerman 1991, p.21)

³ (Kubler 1979, p.126)

⁴ (Vitruvius 1999, Book 3, pp.46-50)

⁵ (Vitruvius 1999, Book 3, p.49)

⁶ (Vitruvius 1999, Book 4, p.55)

⁷ (Vitruvius 1999, Book 4, p.55)

⁸ (Vitruvius 1999, Book 3, p.46; Plato 1937, 656e)

⁹ (Smith 1992, pp.63-67; Thomson 1993, p.101)

¹⁰ (Smith 1992, p.60)

¹¹ (Thomson 1993, p.101)

¹² (Finot 2001, p.129)

¹³ (Mako 2004)

¹⁴ (Smith 1992, p.62)

¹⁵ (Amagasaki 2001)

¹⁶ (Marra 2001)

¹⁷ (Kato 1971, p.4)

¹⁸ (Sasaki 2001, p.32)

¹⁹ (Yanagi 1989, pp.114-117)

²⁰ (Okakura 1920, p.166)

²¹ (Broner-Bauer 2001; Imone 1985, pp.170,171; Carver 1993, p.41; Hashimoto 1981, pp.36-43)

²² (Nishida 2004)

²³ (Kuma 1999, pp.39,40)

²⁴ (Okawa 1975, p.110)

²⁵ (Teiji 1978, pp.94,154,221)

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