

# Considering the Relationship between Architecture and Philosophy: Toyo Ito's Conceptual Architecture

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**Abstract**—The aim of this paper is to exemplify the relation of architecture and philosophy over the Japanese architect Toyo Ito's conceptual architecture. The study is practiced in 'Architecture and Philosophy Readings' elective course with 22 sophomore architecture students in Karadeniz Technical University Department of Architecture. It is planned as a workshop, which discusses the design philosophy of Toyo Ito's buildings and the reflections of concept in his intellectual architecture. So, the paper contains Toyo Ito's philosophy, his discourses and buildings and also thinking similarities with philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Thus, the workshop of course is about architecture and philosophy relationship. With this aspect, a holistic graphic representation is aimed for Toyo Ito who thinks that everything composes a whole. As a result, it can be said that architect and philosopher interaction in architecture and philosophy relation supports creative thinking. Conceptual architecture of Toyo Ito has philosophical roots and his philosophy can be read over his buildings and can be represent totally via a holistic pattern.

**Keywords**—Architecture, philosophy, Toyo Ito, conceptual architecture, Gilles Deleuze.

## I. INTRODUCTION

PHILOSOPHY lies at the heart of the relationship between architecture and theory. Above all, philosophy is related with thought; teaching/learning philosophy requires a perspective internalizing philosophical thought. Because philosophy 'is a diligent and special form of conversation... It is an aggregation of words with a certain direction, providing a descriptive picture of certain concepts...' [1].

The philosopher is someone who is always on the road, and yet who can never reach to an ultimate destination. A person engaged in philosophy always goes after various illusions and finds material for questioning in her environment, leading to continuous reproduction [2]. The architect, on the other hand, engages in intellectual production, by coming up with ideas and concepts through the design process. She works on the problems in the environment, and feels an excitement with the development of different routes to thought. Philosophy is also a part of the act of design. Architecture, in contrast, can evolve into a space for the philosopher to develop thought. The intellectual initiatives, which a thinker brings to architects, clarify the concepts by helping locate the architect within the wider framework of architectural thought [3], [4]. That is why architects and philosophers, who had hitherto contributed immensely to world literature, are members of disciplines, which have now virtually amalgamated in each other.

The relationship between architecture and philosophy, as discussed in this paper, on the other hand, is depicted through the efforts to make a concrete presentation of architect Toyo Ito's conceptual architecture, in the form of a workshop. In this context, the workshop was carried out with 22 sophomore students enrolled in KTU Department of Architecture, within the framework of the elective course 'Architecture and Philosophy Readings'. The analysis culminated in an effort to test the theoretical knowledge acquired through the course/semester, with reference to a practical, utilitarian and interdisciplinary perspective.

## II. ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY RELATION

When discussing the association of architecture and philosophy, one can refer to a number of distinct thoughts, movements, concepts, individuals, and events. Because thought reserves a creative aspect. In contrast to conventional modes of thought, creative thinking is paramount in both architecture, and in philosophy different perspectives necessitate reinterpretation and generation of meaning [5].

The act of design is ultimately about an integral whole wherein the object, event or state is defined with reference to a desired result. Design education aims to develop creativity, innovation, participation and critical perspective. On the other hand, it has a theoretical infrastructure supporting the teaching of various techniques and a multi-dimensional perspective of the problem. Against this background, interdisciplinary associations play an effective role in developing distinctive perspectives.

The earliest practices of thought in architecture education arise during the design courses offered in the first year. Abstraction refers to the representation of thought through representations drawn on paper, and yet, is essentially an intellectual process. That is why, it refers to a perception case suggesting the existence of the design process from the beginning to the end [6], [7]. Concepts, on the other hand, are the means to render this intellectual process even more crucial.

Concept refers to "the corpus of transitional meanings a word assumes as a replacement of other words at the time of use, with reference to their conceptual meanings which became a part and parcel of the language as a means to signify" [8]. On the other hand, secondary and tertiary meanings of a concept can refer to wildly different starting points. For, seeking an outlet to express their designs, architects can often look for an approach by gaining hold of certain concepts based on the philosophical and

theoretical works of thinkers [3]. This is the exact point where design commences with philosophy. Enabling thought and the capability of thought, philosophy is an area of knowledge, which generates new questions and problems as long as discussions persist. Philosophy is ever present; wherever thought exists. Practice of architecture as an activity independent of thought is not possible. Discussing the thought of a discipline, on the other hand, involves a subjective side and is about interpretation. This is essentially a mode of thought called deconstruction. Deconstructivist philosophy offers distinct perspectives for standing out, and reproducing meaning [9]. The object of this study, Toyo Ito architecture and his conceptual architecture, stands out as an example of deconstruction within the framework of the relationship between philosophy and architecture.

Ito's works are often considered conceptualization running parallel to the ideas of philosopher Gilles Deleuze. According to Deleuze [10], philosophy had always been about concepts. Philosophizing, on the other hand, is the struggle for inventing or creating concepts. Deleuze [11] questions the subject, images, phenomena and certain concepts the modern world imbues us with, effectively deconstructing them.

Deleuze sees in philosophy an art of creating or inventing concepts, or ascribing new uses to existing concepts [12]. Deleuze ve Guattari [13], in concepts we have to find means to go beyond our experience, to enable a vision of new horizons. In Deleuze's thought, concepts evolve into a mechanism enabling a whole new rethinking beyond the existing experience [12]. At this junction, one can argue that Deleuze's vision of 'creating a new conceptual world' has affected Toyo Ito's 'conceptual architecture'. In this perspective, Toyo Ito draws attention as an architect with an eye for distinctive, the new, and the creative, as a vision applied to architecture with reference to the intellectual link established with Deleuze.

### III. TOYO ITO AND CONCEPTUAL ARCHITECTURE

Toyo Ito was born in 1941, in Seoul, which is now the capital

of South Korea. In 1965, he graduated from Tokyo University, Department of Architecture. In 1971, he founded his own architecture office. He won the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2013. Toyo Ito's success in architecture stems from the fact that his works focus in and around Tokyo. The architectural environment in Tokyo had always been about trying the frontiers, even during a period where the world seemed stuck with historical obsessions [14]. This state of affairs paves the way for new horizons for architects focusing on infinity rather than limits. With his works completely overturning the hierarchy of structure, material and form in planning, Toyo Ito managed to come up with a distinctive interface through modern architecture.

The modern space, which develops homogeneity as a fruit of Cartesian grid, and which destroys the material as much as possible with a view to ensuring the supremacy of sight, leaving only pure structure and function [15], was evolved and revitalized in Toyo Ito's "Blurring Architecture". Through this term "Blurring Architecture", the architect refers to such three crucial characteristics of architecture [14]: First of all, the space in question should be built with flexible and soft (or with architect's term blurring) borders responding to natural components such as light, water, or wind, analogous to a sensor, or human skin, rather than walls which insulate and isolate the human from the nature. Secondly, the algorithm coding the users' actions in the interiors should allow differentiation and transformation with reference to changes occurring, in contrast to cases which are simplified and which completely stand apart from each other. Finally, Ito notes that deteriorations caused by the phenomenon of flow in a void, which can destroy even the human, in such a fluid space, should definitely come to pass. Hence, an architecture where the concept of 'location' once again gains prominence, despite all the homogeneity and transparency [16], Blurring Architecture was applied in the architect's Sendai Mediatheque project (Fig. 1). As a result, once separate portions of life have come to overlap, blurring the lines between work and leisure, presence and absence, and what is tangible versus what is virtual [17].

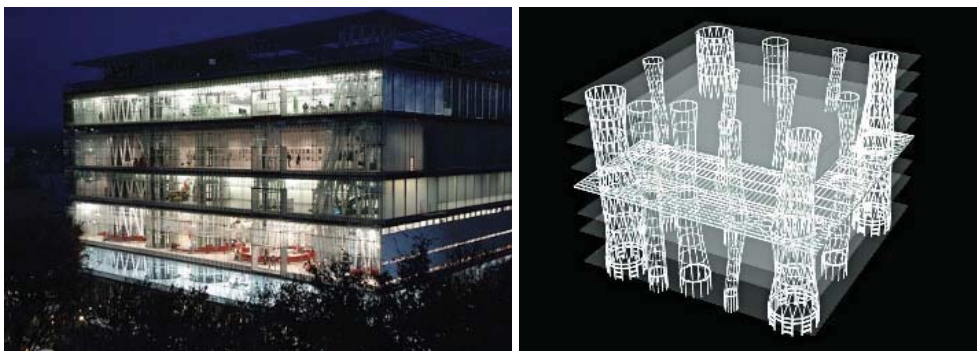


Fig. 1 Sendai Mediatheque, Toyo Ito, 1995-2000 [20]



Fig. 2 Tod's Omotesando building, Toyo Ito, 2004; Tama Art University Library in Tokyo, Toyo Ito, 2007; Mikimoto building in Ginza, Toyo Ito, 2005 [21]

Instead of using modern concepts to explain away the modern world, Toyo Ito built a brand new conceptual world. Ito's architecture, particularly its examples in the contemporary Japanese metropolis, is often considered a form of "clothing" for the urbanites. This theme revolves around a balance between one's private life and public life. According to Ito's philosophy of architecture, the surface, as the element of design, itself is the material, face, and structure all at once. Such an analysis leads to a planning beyond further dismembering where everything is an element of the whole, rather than one based on a distinction between interiors and exteriors (Fig. 2)

What makes Toyo Ito particularly stand out among his contemporaries is his pioneering of conceptual architecture, combining ideas and concepts from various areas, with architecture. Conceptual architecture is characterized by an amalgam of the ideas and concepts from outside the field, with the field itself, with a view to expanding the discipline of architecture. According to conceptual architecture philosophy, a building defined as a product is not as important as the ideas providing guidance to it. Above all, these ideas are composed of text and/or diagrams.

In his 'Difference and Repetition' book, Deleuze developed the theory of body-without-organs, in cooperation with Guattari [18]. Deleuze will develop his theory of the body-without-

organs in his collaboration with Félix Guattari, to which we now turn. As we shall see, the concept of the body-without-organs is put to work in a complex naturalistic philosophy of 'desiring-production' that moves far beyond the question of sense into the realms of nature, history, and politics. In the same vein Ito [19]; arguing that "... the new technology is not antagonistic to nature. Rather, it is creating a new kind of nature. If nature as we have always known it is to be considered real, then this artificial nature should probably be called virtual. And we people of the modern age are provided with two types of body to match these two types of nature: The real body which is linked with the real world by the fluids flowing inside it, and the virtual body linked with the world by the flow of electrons..." lent support to the ideas of Deleuze.

In line with the technological developments experienced in the field of design and architecture, Toyo Ito's works can be categorized in two groups: pre-digital and post-digital works. The pre-digital projects focus on analytical calculations and well-defined geometric forms. One can observe an emphasis on more organic lines instead of the conventional rigid rectangular boxes (Fig. 3). His post-digital works, on the other hand, is characterized by a design philosophy serving fluidity, transparency, and temporality, seeking to think of what had been left un-thought.



Fig. 3 White U house in Tokyo, Toyo Ito, 1975-1976; Dome in Toyo Ito, 1993-1997 [21]

Ito is an innovative, extraordinary and open-minded architect who can do away with and rebuild all rules with a determination to reach the objective. The buildings of Ito, who is called the architect of timeless structures, can come to end, but his

thoughts are not thus handicapped. His every touch is imbued with meaning. At one point, he confessed a feeling of realization of his inadequacies in the aftermath of every project he completed [19]. It is clear that Toyo Ito's discourse not only



involves elements comparable to that of Deleuze, but also can be observed in its successful applied form.

#### IV. PHILOSOPHY WORKSHOP: ARCHITECTURE OF TOYO ITO

The aim of the Architecture and Philosophy Readings course is to instill the skill of developing ideas and concepts via philosophy, early on in the semester. Toyo Ito was chosen as the architect under focus of discussions to take place through the semester within the framework of the course about how the discipline of architecture applies philosophy. In light of the remarks provided in the previous section, the reason for choosing Ito can be summarized with reference to his conceptual architecture, design philosophy, and innovative perspective. In this context, a majority of Toyo Ito's buildings from the early period to his later works were assigned to students for review (Table I). The students were asked to engage in research on the topic, for a period of four weeks, and then present their findings in a report/presentation. The whole process was followed by a philosophy workshop detailed below. The details of the workshop were shared with the students one week in advance, and the students were asked to show up well prepared.

TABLE I

##### SELECTED TOYO ITO BUILDINGS AND DATA FOR PHILOSOPHY WORKSHOP

National Taiwan University, College of Social Sciences (2006-2013 Taipei, Taiwan)
Songshan Taipei New Horizon Building (2008-2013 Taipei, Taiwan)
Tokyo Mother's Clinic (2009-2011, Tokyo, Japan)
Ken Iwata Mother and Child Museum, Imabari City (2009- 2011 Imabari, Ehime, Japan)
Torres Porta Fira Hotel-Office (2004-2009, Barcelona, Spain)
The Main Stadium for the World Games 2009 in Kaohsiung (2006.9-2009.1 Kaohsiung, Taiwan)
White O (2004 - 2009 Marbella, Chile)
Extension for "The Fair of Barcelona Gran Via venue" Entrance Hall, Pavilion 1 (2004-2007 Barcelona, Spain)
Tama Art University Library (2004-2007 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan)
Crematorium in Kakamigahara (2004-2006 Kakamigahara, Gifu, Japan)
Aluminium Brick Housing in Groningen (2001-2005 Groningen, Netherlands)
Mahler 4 Block 5 (2000-2005 Amsterdam, Netherlands)
Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (2002, Kensington Gardens, London, UK)
Sendai Mediatheque (1995-2000 Aoba-ku, Sendai, Miyagi, Japan)
Tsukuba South Parking Building (1991-1994 Tsukuba, Ibaragi, Japan)
Old People's House in Yatsushiro (1992-1994 Yatsushiro, Kumamoto, Japan)
Hotel P (1991-1992 Shari-gun, Hokkaido, Japan)
Gallery 8 in Yatsushiro (1990-1991 Yatsushiro, Kumamoto, Japan)
Tower of Winds in Yokohama (1986-1986, Yokohama, Kanagawa, Japan)
M-Building in Kanda (1985-1986 Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan)
White U (1975-1976 Nakano-ku, Tokyo, Japan)
Hotel D (1974-1977 Chiisagata-gun, Nagano, Japan)

- **Philosophy Workshop:** Toyo Ito Architecture and Philosophy
- **Subject:** Form-Concept-Philosophy in Toyo Ito Architecture
- **Field of Study:** 15cm x 15cm square Styrofoam workspace
- **Materials:**
  - 15 cm x 15 cm square Styrofoam (5 mm thick, black or white colour)
  - Your building's colourful image of Toyo Ito (max. size 9x13 cm)
  - Black, white and red colours fund cardboards with different textures
  - Sketch papers in A4 size for drafts
  - Glues, scissors, rulers...
  - Charcoals, colored pencils, markers with different thickness...
- **Preparation before workshop:**
  - Paste your building's colourful image to back of 15 cm x 15 cm square Styrofoam workspace vertically or horizontally.
  - Write down your building data to back side of square Styrofoam
  - Think your building and make a sketch according the problem below.
  - Bring with you the black, white and red colours fund cardboards.
- **Problem:** Think a concept or an image, which represents the philosophy of Toyo Ito within the frame of the presentations from your friends and information along the semester. Make a GRAPHIC study with this concept/ image by interpreting Toyo Ito building. Graphic study can be mentioned only a concept/a form or both concept and form together.
- **Interpretation-Discussion:** RE-READ the architecture and philosophy of Toyo Ito over the performed graphic studies. Discuss the "Chronological" and "Formal Resemblance" expressions in-group, compose the final product.

The procedure to be applied in the workshop was announced during the workshop itself. The procedure involves 5 steps. **In the first step**, the students converging around a round table were first asked to prepare a sketch of the buildings they were assigned with (Fig. 4). In this context, they were asked to come up with various drawings with reference to an image or concept representing the building, and then describe the sketch, which developed as the culmination of their decisions, to another student. At this stage, the students were encouraged to comment on the sketches drawn by fellow students, within the framework of the photo of the building and the presentations they just received (Fig. 5)

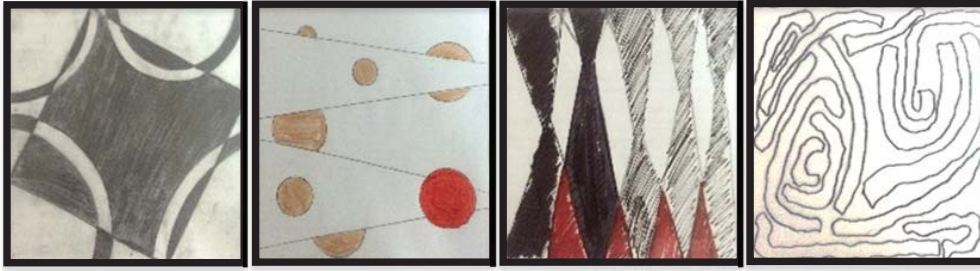


Fig. 4 Sketch studies from students (© Serap Durmus)



Fig. 5 First studies for workshop (© Serap Durmus)

*In the second step*, the students were asked to depict the section, part, or color of their sketches they deem the most prominent, on a square workspace of 15 x 15 cm, using fund cardboards. *In the third step*, the students were requested to remove their sketches from the table. Then, a circle was developed whereby each student delivered his or her work to the third student to his/her right. Students who face a new Toyo Ito building were, thus, made accustomed to new works, thanks to the concepts they heard from their friends, as well as the images drawn on the back of the styrofoam. The students who were expected to implement the second part of the work made additions by introducing their own interpretations/ perceptions regarding the structure, as they would be unable to remember the exact sketch. This intervention took place in an air dominated by the excitement and wonder imposed by the method.

*In the fourth step*, the state of affairs, which took a fun as well as unpredictable turn, was made even more complicated with the request for extension of the material once again to the third student to right. Now, each student has a two-step graphic, and a new building. Their thoughts when doing so, and the steps required were made subject of interpretation by almost ascribing a subjective perspective. The students were then reminded that the fourth step is the step before the last one, and that it was imperative for them to revise their additions accordingly. *In the fifth step*, the same process was repeated, to deliver the plots to the third student to right. After affecting their last additions and moves, the students then concluded their work. These were followed by individual interpretation on part of the students, of the interventions on these stages. Everyone

involved then read the identity of the building they held, and showed its final state. The student to which the building was originally assigned, on the other hand, provided a review to his/her group mates, of the stages the first conceptual sketch underwent. Some found the end result sufficient, while others found them beyond their wildest imaginations. Yet, in general, the students remarked that the workshop was an effective and fun way of understanding a building.

Once the individual and group-wide reviews were completed, the discussion on “Chronological” and “Formal Resemblance” as noted in the interpretation-discussion section of the description sheet of the workshop commenced. In this context, the students were asked to act as a group. All works carried out were then brought together, and ordered chronologically with reference to the building dates noted behind the images (Fig. 6). According to this pattern, the practice of narrating the evolution of architecture in a chronological setting was successful. The inquiry about formal resemblance, on the other hand, once again saw the other sides of the sketches. This time, the students were asked to place similar Toyo Ito buildings next to and on top of each other. The reversal of the sketches led to the formal pattern of Toyo Ito’s works (Fig. 7).

The chronological and formal resemblance arrangements thus created were discussed with reference to the buildings, which maintained their position and which saw replacement, as well as the philosophy inherent in such buildings. Both patterns thus developed were photographed, and comparisons were effected (Figs. 8 and 9).





Fig. 6 Chronological holistic pattern of Toyo Ito's buildings/architecture (© Serap Durmus)



Fig. 7 Formal Resemblance holistic pattern of Toyo Ito's buildings/architecture (© Serap Durmus)



Fig. 8 Chronological holistic pattern of Toyo Ito's buildings and formal/conceptual representations (© Serap Durmus)



Fig. 9 Formal Resemblance holistic pattern of Toyo Ito's buildings and formal/conceptual representations (© Serap Durmus)  
In conclusion of the comparison, the buildings below, and

therefore their graphical representations, were found to maintain their positions in both formal resemblance and chronological placement patterns (Fig. 10). In this context, seven buildings –four in Japan, one in Taiwan, and two in the Netherlands– and representations thereof took the center stage.



Fig. 10 Common buildings and representations in Chronological and Formal Resemblance

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper, which aims to think philosophy in architectural education, is an interpretation example of Toyo Ito and his conceptual architecture in architecture discipline. Theoretical knowledge which aims to introduce an architect's frame of mind and examine the relationship between philosophy and architecture, is testified that how it will be settled knowledge via workshop. In this context, conclusion part can be arranged as gains in respect of whole process below:

- Architecture and philosophy relation is tested practically and theoretically.
- An architect and his philosophy is recognized closely.
- Significance and place of philosophy in architecture education is discussed.
- An interactive training model is tested.
- Relationship between architecture and philosophy is emphasized influentially.
- Extensive knowledge about Toyo Ito and his buildings is obtained.

- Obtained knowledge about architect and his buildings reflected on conceptual two-dimensional graphic designs.
- Understanding an architect's intellectual world is helped new interpretations.
- Workshop final products are welcomed excitedly.
- It is watched out that students represent their ideas easily.
- Students' personal comments came into prominence.

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