

**Keywords** Japanese architecture, media theory, manga, construction industry, architecture theory

**Abstract** General contractors in Japan such as the Kajima Corporation are not just construction companies but also multimedia conglomerates. This article considers the ways that companies like Kajima facilitate the intermedia movement of architecture from the design office into manga, and back again. First, it introduces the contours of what will be defined as the “architecture system”, a network of corporations and architects that have helped transform and popularize architectural media since the 1960s. Next, it considers how specific architectural representations, such as floor plans, have migrated into novels and “architecture manga”, emphasizing how successfully the architecture system has saturated everyday life. Lastly, addressing the recent work of Kengo Kuma, the article offers an example of how architecture’s intermedia splintering feeds back into contemporary practice. With a focus on corporate collaboration and the economic realities of building in Japan, this article argues architecture’s intermedia condition is created by interested parties out of the excesses of construction, turning architecture into a commodity and commodities into architecture.

**Résumé** Au Japon, les entreprises générales telles que Kajima Corporation ne sont pas seulement des sociétés de construction, mais aussi des conglomerats multimédias. Cet article examine la manière dont des entreprises comme Kajima initie un mouvement intermédial en architecture, depuis le bureau d’études jusqu’aux mangas, et vice-versa. Tout d’abord, il s’agit d’esquisser les contours de ce qui sera défini comme le « système de l’architecture », un réseau d’entreprises et architectes qui ont contribué à transformer et populariser les médias architecturaux depuis les années 1960. Ensuite, en examinant comment des représentations architecturales spécifiques telles que les plans d’étage ont migré vers le roman et le « manga d’architecture », nous verrons à quel point ce système a réussi à envahir tous les domaines de la vie quotidienne. Enfin, avec le travail récent de Kengo Kuma, nous montrerons comment cet éclatement intermédiatique de l’architecture se répercute sur la pratique contemporaine. En s’intéressant aux partenariats d’entreprises et aux réalités économiques de la construction au Japon, cet article soutient que la condition intermédiaire de l’architecture est créée par les parties prenantes des dérives du monde de la construction, transformant l’architecture en marchandise et les marchandises en architecture.

# Transformers: Intermedia Architecture in Japan

In 2019, the Japan Federation of Architects and Building Engineers tallied more than 370,000 “first-class” architects (*kenchikushi*) in its ranks.<sup>1</sup> One out of every 340 people in Japan is a registered architect, a remarkable number that makes the country the most architect-dense place in the world. The presence of so many designing hands is certainly felt when walking through the country’s cityscapes. Here the country’s “scrap-and-build” construction economy is on full display. Houses rarely last for more than a couple of decades before being “scrapped” in an ever-churning cycle of demolition and new building that refreshes the docket of firms big and small. Work is plentiful and architecture schools overflow with applications, but how does this superabundance of architects impact the practice itself?

The above statistics are more than just a curious piece of trivia. They describe a social reality where the sheer number of people with architectural expertise shapes mainstream culture. Unlike American popular media where the architect is either romanticized or maligned, in Japanese media, architects and the profession itself are both more common and more complexly portrayed. Fictionalized architects appear as protagonists in manga and anime, art galleries

brim with architecture exhibitions, and architectural images feature prominently in the country’s most viewed videos and best-selling novels. The way that architecture is transformed in this loop is neither determined by an original building nor guided by the logic of “remediation”, where a newer medium transforms an older medium (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 45). It is instead a more horizontal space of “intermedia” exchange, where architecture’s definition is constantly changed by being “in the midst of media” (Glaser, 2009: 20). There is no sense of primacy in this intermedia zone; the building and the comic are coequal and reflexively defined.

That the histories of modern architecture and media are intertwined is hardly a controversial statement (Lobsinger, 2016). The architectural discipline has absorbed Beatriz Colomina’s argument that “it is actually the emerging systems of communication that came to define twentieth-century culture—the mass media—that are the true site within which modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages” (Colomina, 1994: 14). The story goes that modern architects such as Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos, and Mies van der Rohe used mass media techniques including photomontage and the printed manifesto to both visualize their ideas and disseminate them widely. The representational richness of architecture made the “real” building a fugitive object, leaping

<sup>1</sup> For a full break-down of membership numbers, see <http://www.kenchikushikai.or.jp/touroku/meibo/tourokusu.html>.

from drawing to painting to photography, television, and even radio. Reciprocally, modern architects designed buildings in a way that reflected and accommodated a changing media environment. Walls mutated to accommodate electrical and radio wires, sightlines shifted to make buildings more photogenic, and floorplans opened to create more filmic programmes. What is not often noted, however, is the situational specificity of this story. The social and industrial networks, locations, languages, and theoretical voices are largely Euro-American in origin and orientation (Winthrop-Young, 2011: 2).<sup>2</sup> Focusing only on this narrow geographic tranche does a disservice to the multiplicity of architectural modernities and their situated media conditions. Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman have used the term “media ecology” to describe this “environmental” expanse of interactions between media, culture, politics, and the minds and bodies of people who occupy a media-saturated world (Strate, 2004).<sup>3</sup> While the networks of media transmission are undoubtedly global in scope, the mechanisms and lived reality of media ecologies are contingent, not universal. Japanese companies produced novel intermedia campaigns and media theorists named them as such. However, this is not to suggest that Japanese architecture and media are wholly unique; architects and theorists in Japan continually react to, translate, adapt, and transmit architectural media on a global scale. What is important to stress is that the intermedia nature of architecture in Japan emerges from a distinct set of political, economic, and historical contexts. What systems help architecture transform into so many different shapes?

### The Architecture System

To better understand architecture’s volatile media condition in Japan, the theoretical frameworks created by scholars of anime are particularly helpful. Though anime and architecture seem to be worlds apart, the systems governing their shared intermedia transformation are in fact very similar. Both are highly collaborative and rely on the cooperation of many different industries to successfully design, advertise, and produce a final product. The media theorist Marc Steinberg has described this complex Japanese media ecology as the “anime system”, a network of artists, corporations, and consumers that collaboratively facilitate the movement of characters and assets from television to manga and merchandise in order to maximize profit (Steinberg, 2012: viii–xii). Steinberg focuses on the many permutations of Astro Boy, a popular animated cartoon character who moved from manga to the television screen, and branded merchandise such as candies and toys. The anime system co-exists with what we can call the “architecture system”, where construction companies and material industries facilitate the transformation of architectural information across print media, film, manga, gallery exhibitions, and back again in a loop of constant transformation. If the anime system trades in cartoon characters, the “architecture system” trades in architects, images, and even theoretical concepts as transformable figures.

Echoing Steinberg’s analysis of anime as a “system of interconnected media and commodity forms”, I use the term “architecture system” to describe how the transformation of architectural media across different registers is shaped by corporate interest (Steinberg, 2012: viii). The scrap-and-build logic driving Japan’s never-ending construction boom generates a surplus of architects, capital, printed material, and square footage. In response, these surpluses produce interested readerships, investing power, printed detritus, and exhibition space, which are the raw materials of intermedia experimentation. The passage of architectural media such as plan drawings from design offices to manga is not direct or monocausal so much as it is ecological, moving across a non-linear

2 **The presumed universality of European architectural modernity is matched by what Geoffrey Winthrop-Young calls the “overwhelming presence of the Anglo-American academic industry in media and communication studies”. (Winthrop-Young, 2011: 2).**

3 **For early examples of “media ecology” as method, see McLuhan, 1962 and Postman, 1979.**

set of connections and crossing dependencies. As the historian Yuriko Furuhashi points out, architects and architectural thinking significantly influenced theories of media ecology in 1960s Japan (Furuhashi, 2022: 173–176).<sup>4</sup> Construction companies in particular nurtured the theory of media ecology and helped substantiate its reality by developing novel ways of multiplying architecture’s presence across television, magazines, and many other platforms. I call the corporations, architects, and artists that helped transition architecture into other mass media formats “transformers”. These actors used the intermedial potentiality of architecture to make profit in new markets, advertise architectural solutions, or simply reflect the complexity of the media environment itself.

Like anime, the architecture system consolidated in the 1960s. The decade was kicked off by one of the most famous examples of intermedia spectacle in Japanese postwar architecture: Tange Kenzō’s one-hour televised presentation of his 1960 Tokyo Bay project on the national broadcasting station NHK (Matsuyama, 2019: 46–50) (Fig. 1). To maximize the televisual legibility of the project, he and his lab at the University of Tokyo created an enormous model that could be propped vertically, filling up the camera frame. Tange stood beside the model and took on the role of a megastructure pitchman, explaining the benefits of connecting Tokyo and Chiba in a language appealing to both bureaucrats and casual TV viewers alike. In the anime system, characters such as Astro Boy may have begun as manga, but they were quickly reproduced and transformed to fit the affordances of different media. These transformations left their mark; as the branded image moved from the illustrated panel to animation cels, candy packaging, and mass produced toys, visual evidence of its hand-drawn animated origins followed (Steinberg, 2012: 76–79). Likewise, the new televisual architecture presented by Tange maintained some of the awkward origins as a studio model and brought the normally private architecture pitch to night-time

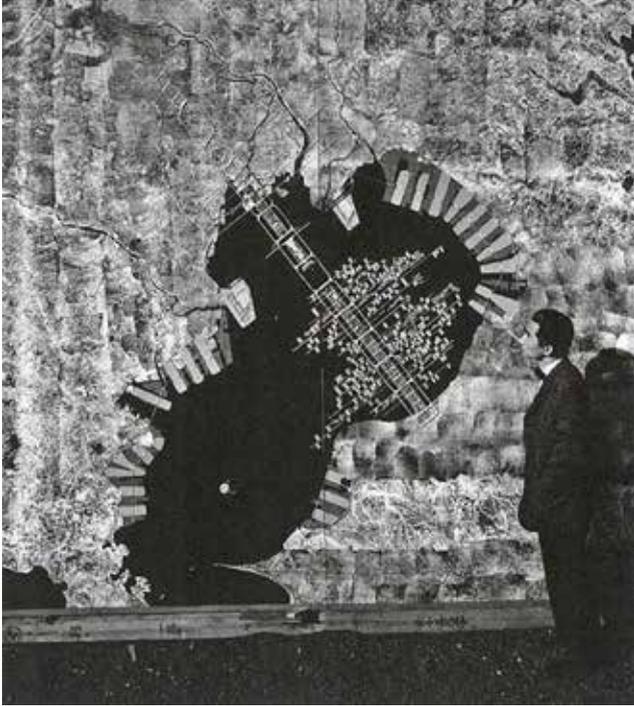
programming. Nonetheless, the megastructural model perfectly fit the technical specificities of television; it was visually legible on a small screen and bold enough to capture an audience’s attention. Most important, television and the megastructure were “totalizing strategies” based on national unification, one visual and the other spatial (Lamarre, 2018: 132).

### Kajima Corporation’s Media Mix

Tange’s televised appearance preceded a profound shift in advertising that saw architecture become a significant part of Japanese mass media. As John Durham Peters reminds us, “[W]here mass media are, there is usually power” and the power behind this shift was wielded by Japan’s construction companies (Durham Peters, 2010: 277). The largest and most influential was Kajima Corporation, a still dominant global megacontractor responsible for a huge variety of construction projects, including waste disposal sites, factory complexes, bridges, skyscrapers, arenas, hotels, and apartments (Fig. 2). The successful Obayashi Corporation and Shimizu Corporation worked at similar scales, but no other was as media savvy. Kajima Corporation promoted their services through a “media mix” (*media mikkusu*), or “advertising that used multiple media forms to deliver an advertising message to potential consumers” (Steinberg, 2012: 139).<sup>5</sup> This term was introduced by Japanese marketing firms in 1963, the very same year that Kajima launched Kajima Institute Publishing, whereby the firm expanded into the publishing industry (Steinberg, 2012: 138–139). The institute’s first publications were aimed at elites who could help fund their massive projects. Books such as *Construction Management: The Art of New Plans and Management*, *American Skyscraper Architecture*, and *How to Think About Diplomacy* failed to make the bestseller list, but that was not the point. They were exclusive channels of information connecting the

5 Kajima Corporation also used its publishing firm to produce and disseminate the company’s own history. See for example Kajima Institute, 1980.

4 See also Furuhashi, 2017.



1

**Fig. 1**

*Tokyo Plan*, 1960, Kenzō Tange presenting the large-scale model of 1960 Tokyo Bay project for NHK. © Photo: Akio Kawasumi.

**Fig. 2**

Kajima Corporation logo. Courtesy of Kajima Institute Publishing.

**Fig. 3**

Example page spread from *SD: Space Design*. The spread shows the meeting of theory and industry with an essay by the Metabolist architect Kurokawa Kisho on the right and an advertisement for Autoclaved Lightweight Concrete (ALC) panels on the left. Source: *SD: Space Design*, no. 11, 1965. Courtesy of Kajima Institute Publishing.



2



3

business of making buildings to the business of making nations.

In 1965, Kajima Institute Publishing broadened its reader base beyond experts and bureaucrats with the first issue of *SD: Space Design*. *SD* was aimed at a younger generation of designers whose countercultural perspectives were not being reflected in older, more established architectural publications such as *Shinkenchiku* (“New Architecture”). The magazine featured a monthly assortment of contemporary architecture reports, visual essays, art criticism, and translations of important architecture history and theory texts from around the world. The first issue exemplifies this new approach and includes a special section dedicated to “Italian Cities and Plazas”, a survey of new hotels in Japan, and a translated excerpt of Sigfried Giedion’s *The Eternal Present: The Beginnings of Art*.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the many independent “little magazines” of the 1960s and 1970s that distanced architecture theory from commerce, the publishers of *SD* freely combined radical politics and architectural industry (Colomina *et al.*, 2010). Psychedelic photo collages, manifestos, and articles by the well-known Marxist art critic Ichirō Haryū were presented alongside advertisements for new carpeting and lighting fixtures (Haryū, 1969) (Fig. 3).

*SD* was also the playground of the Metabolist group. Kurokawa Kisho and Kawazoe Noboru published some of their most significant work in the magazine, including capsule manifestos and theories of urban destruction. What are often described in the West as avant-garde ideas from a radical periphery were in fact first presented in a trade publication. Architecture history and theory had long been sold in books and magazines, but it was now neatly packaged and advertised alongside architectural materials and fixtures as something to be “consumed” (Ivy, 1989). And Kajima Corporation stood to make money on this new valuable commodity. The necessity of translating English, French, German, and Italian texts into Japanese turned Kajima Institute Publishing

into both the curator of and gatekeeper to architecture texts published in these languages. In tandem with *SD*, Kajima Institute Publishing launched a book series called *SD sensho* (“SD Anthology”) that cemented their place as the country’s authority on architectural translation (Fig. 4). The series is responsible for introducing a broad Japanese readership to the translated writings of Le Corbusier, Antonin Raymond, Ebenezer Howard, Bernard Rudofsky, Vincent Scully, Robert Venturi, and many more. The series currently has over 270 titles and continues to introduce landmark texts to Japanese audiences, most recently publishing the first translation of George Kubler’s *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. Today, nearly every major bookstore in Japan has a wall of black paperbacks striped with the series’s signature orange band (*obi*).

Kajima Corporation’s architectural “media mix” extended to film as well. In 1969, Kajima’s film division, Japan Technology Film Company, financed *Chōkōsō no Akebono* (“Dawn of the Skyscraper”) (Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> The film focused on the construction of Tokyo’s Kasumigaseki Building, a gleaming 36-storey office tower constructed by Kajima and hailed as the country’s first glass and steel skyscraper built after the 1963 revision of the Building Standard Law’s prohibition on buildings over 31 meters. What could have been a sober documentary crammed with shots of cranes and concrete mixers is instead a dramatic quasi-fictional retelling of the building’s design and construction with actors cast to play the parts of architects, engineers, and politicians. It is an example of what the film historian Alexander Zahlten calls an “industrial genre”, or “cases in which, on the level of meaning, film-industrial systems align with their audio-visual texts to propose or critique models of social organization” (Zahlten, 2017: 3). In other words, the film’s portrayal of architects, politicians, and an interested public collaborating towards the creation of a Kajima project mirrors the

6 See *SD: Space Design*, no. 1 (Jan., 1965).

7 Japanese Technology Film Company changed its name to Kajima Film in 1969 and to Kajima Vision in 1989.



4



5

**Fig. 4**  
Cover of the Japanese translation of Le Corbusier's *Journey to the East* originally published by SD Sensho in 1979. Courtesy of Kajima Institute Publishing.

**Fig. 5**  
Advertisement for *Chōkōsō no Akebono* ("Dawn of the Skyscraper"), 1969. © K-PROVISION Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

**Fig. 6**  
View of TOTO GALLERY MA in Tokyo, Japan, during a 2019 exhibition of work by architecten de vlyder vinck tallieu. ©TOTO GALLERY•MA.



promotional machinations of Kajima’s media mix. The film is most famous not for its quality but for Kajima Corporation’s aggressive marketing tactics upon its release. It bought and distributed thousands of tickets, effectively buying out weeks of time at Japanese cinemas (Tsuchiko, 1970). The promotional blitz shows what was at stake for the company. Kajima Corporation of course wanted to advertise their construction expertise, but they also targeted a broader public sceptical of skyscrapers towering over historical landmarks. *Dawn of the Skyscraper* helped turn the alien building and its many technical and political systems into a familiar filmic narrative, thus normalizing it for an urban, media-immersed populace.

Kajima Corporation’s experiments in the architectural media mix continue today. Kajima Institute Publishing is still in operation, and the company’s film group is now Kajima Vision, a digital media promotion and consulting firm that provides websites, films, and other marketing material for a variety of building industries. Kajima Corporation’s model has also been taken up by other major industrial players, namely those in the tile and toilet manufacturing sector. For example, in 1981, the ceramic tile company Ina Seito opened a gallery space called INA GALLERY dedicated to exhibitions on architecture, urbanism, ceramics, and design. The gallery’s existence prompted the creation of INAX Publishing to produce catalogues, but its focus soon outgrew the gallery. In 1994, INAX Publishing launched the immensely influential *10+1* magazine, the premier platform for architecture theory and translation for a post-SD generation. The magazine featured profiles on Rem Koolhaas and Jean Nouvel, commissioned translations of Manfredo Tafuri and Anthony Vidler, and spotlighted emerging voices in Japanese architecture history and theory such as Yatsuka Hajime and Igarashi Tarō.<sup>8</sup> Instead of the countercultural flair of *SD*, *10+1* was wrapped in the sober aesthetics of an academic journal, a conscious decision to reflect

a new architectural culture of restraint in the wake of the excesses of the so-called “bubble era” of the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

The Lixil Group, now the parent company that owns INAX, ceased its gallery and publishing operations in 2020 and 2021, but other companies remain active. The global toilet manufacturing juggernaut TOTO launched its publishing arm in 1989, and, like Ina Seito, opened a gallery space in 1985 called GALLERY·MA (today called TOTO GALLERY·MA) (Fig. 6). Located above a TOTO showroom displaying the company’s newest bathroom fixtures, the gallery exhibits drawings, models, and installations by key Japanese figures such as Shigeru Ban and SANAA, as well as European firms such as architecten de vylder vinck taillieu. The “gallery-ification” of architecture in the 1980s and 1990s expanded the architecture system’s reach to the artworld and its elite marketplace. The sale of architectural drawings and models of course had a profound effect on the discipline. In his book on the rise of the global architecture gallery system, Jordan Kauffmann describes the reciprocity between the sale of architectural drawings in specialized galleries and an architectural vanguard focused on drawing (Kauffmann, 2018: 3). As architectural drawings acquired a new monetary and intellectual value, architects such as Peter Eisenmann, Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas, and Zaha Hadid foregrounded drawing as a key part of their speculative practice.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, in Japan, Isozaki Arata printed and sold silkscreened multiples of his drawings and Tadao Ando was giving large-scale graphite drawings to major institutions (McQuaid, ed., 2002: 231). It is no coincidence then that Ando was on the founding committee of GALLERY·MA in the 1980s. Like the mutually reinforcing nature of Tange’s urban model and national television, Ando’s largescale, monochromatic drawings were perfectly suited to the white cubes made possible by TOTO.

8 For a full list of issues and contents, see the *10+1* digital archive, <https://db.10plus1.jp/>.

9 For a survey of “bubble-era” architecture in Japan, see Bognar, 2008.

10 For more on the intellectual community that fostered this new form of autonomous architectural drawing, see Marjanović and Howard, 2014.

### Transformations in YouTube, Fiction, and Manga

The most powerful players in the architecture system are undoubtedly construction and material companies, but to focus only on corporate actors neglects the agency of artists, designers, and consumers in transforming architectural media. The media theorist Henry Jenkins reminds us that media convergence “is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process” (Jenkins, 2006: 18). Jenkins was writing at the dawn of the age of smartphones and Web 2.0, amazed by a new “empowered consumer” who could contribute to reality television and movie franchises in a way that was ultimately co-opted by media conglomerates (Jenkins, 2006: 19). The meeting of corporation and customer in the architecture system is not always so linear, however.

The work of the pseudonymous writer and YouTuber Uketsu exemplifies the diffuse complexity of the contemporary architecture system. Uketsu first appeared on the Web in 2018 as a writer for the Japanese language website Omokoro, publishing image-based memes and YouTube videos. In 2020, they rocketed to (still anonymous) stardom with a video entitled *Fudōsan misuterii: Henna ie* (“Real Estate Mystery: Strange House”).<sup>11</sup> The video shows Uketsu in a white mask and black body suit talking to various characters on the phone to learn more about a house on the market. Uketsu asks about strange details they see on a floorplan drawing, including a doorless void in the kitchen, a curious window, and an illogical floor layout. As they learn more from raspy-voiced interlocutors, each of these small architectural details become key elements of a slowly unfolding horror story. The floorplan’s centrality makes it more than just scene-setting; it is a unique medium with its own conventions that are used to subvert audience expectations.

Soon after “going viral” (the video has logged over 11 million views), the Asuka

shinsha press published a collection of Uketsu’s “real estate mysteries” as a book called *Henna ie* (“Strange House”), which transforms the popular videos into horror stories told through printed floorplans.<sup>12</sup> As of this writing, the book has sold over 700,000 copies, indicating not only a love for the horror genre in Japan, but also a broad architectural literacy amongst the book-buying public. Nearly all Japanese high schoolers learn to read floorplans as a means of understanding the space and movement of characters in historical novels (Kawana, 2018). Once they graduate and enter the city looking for an apartment, they soon see their homework plastered on walls throughout the Japanese cityscape. Tokyo is packed with real estate agents whose windows are covered in floorplans of available apartments. Given the simultaneous decline in Japan’s population and the continued production of housing, there are now approximately 10 million excess units in the country, and thus 10 million excess floorplans that line the streets (Hori, 2022). Uketsu’s stories animate an urban wallpaper into a medium of memory, crime, and horror. The movement of architectural drawings from a design office to the window of a real estate firm, a YouTube video, and finally a book that will soon have printed and televised sequels demonstrates the circuitous nature of transformation in the architecture system. Though Kajima Corporation may not be directly responsible for funding Uketsu’s work, they have helped create an architectural and economic situation that makes their work possible.

Another key medium that benefits from the surpluses of the construction industry is manga. The manga industry, with its hierarchical power structure, questionable labour ethics, and cutthroat competition uncannily mirrors the business of architecture (Kinsella, 2000: 50–69). In the late 2000s and 2010s, these two worlds intersected in what can only be called an “architecture manga” boom.<sup>13</sup> Manga publishers’ familiar

<sup>12</sup> See Uketsu, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The term “architecture manga” (*kenchiku manga*) is occasionally used online by fans and artists, but it is not an industry-defined genre.

<sup>11</sup> Uketsu, “*Fudōsan misuterii: Henna ie*”, YouTube video, 21:54, 30 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBIL0eAwDs8>.



7

**Fig. 7**

Panpanya's nameless protagonist explores the city. Source: Panpanya. (2020) *Omusubi no korogaru machi* (*The Town of Rolling Omusubi*). Tokyo: Hakusensha, p. 81. © panpanya/Le Paradis/Hakusensha.

serialized stories of love, loss, professional success, and private trauma were suddenly filled with architects, construction workers, engineers, and zoning officials.

The portrayal of architecture in manga is rarely glamorous: no lone geniuses powering through the ranks or jet-setting starchitects; the stories are much more collaborative, socially contingent, and, frankly, mundane. For example, Kurashina Ryō and Satō Tomokazu's *Takumi sandai* ("Three Generations of Carpenters") (2010–13) centres on the family-owned Onodera Contractors, a small design and construction firm in Tokyo. The drama and dynamics of a multigenerational family business slowly come to the surface through episodic tales of design projects and their unique clients. Nishimoto Hideo's *Soro soro ie no hanashi wo shimashō* ("It's About Time to Talk About Your House") (2015–16) similarly uses the design office as a narrative engine that introduces clients and their design problems in order to deepen our understanding of the main characters and their relationships.

Although the architecture system has long been male-driven, architecture manga artists have used the gendered conventions of the publishing industry to disrupt architecture's diversity issues. Kino Hitoshi

translated his own experience working as an architect into *Ikkyūkenchikushi Kanako no sekkei shikō* ("First-Class Architect Kanako's Design Thinking") (2022), a story featuring a young female architect dealing with the practical details of design like zoning, material costs, and client negotiations in an almost documentary fashion. Yamashita Kazumi similarly translated her personal architectural experiences into autobiographical "essay manga". *Suki desu!* ("It's Refined!") (2011–13) follows a female protagonist building a *sukiya* style Japanese house and learning about related cultures of tea ceremony and kimono along the way. Yamashita continued her explorations of architecture history in *Setagaya ichi furui yōkan no iearuji ni naru* ("Becoming the Owner of the Oldest Western-Style House in Setagaya") (2021–22), telling the story of a protagonist who becomes enchanted with a historical property in Tokyo, discovers it may soon become the victim of redevelopment, and then launches a preservation campaign to save it.

Like Uketsu's horror stories, architecture manga artists incorporate architectural representation to unspool the narrative. Pages routinely alternate from close-ups of pained faces to plan drawings, site analysis

diagrams, and expense reports. The panel format of manga easily accepts all the similarly rectilinear static imagery associated with design and construction, turning it from a means for building to a means for narrative development. However, architecture manga is not limited to the portrayal of contemporary architectural labour. Other artists have incorporated the visual language of architectural representation and research to create new imaginary worlds. Nowhere is this more visible than in the work of the pseudonymous artist panpanya. Since 2013, panpanya has published eight collections of stories following the unpredictable adventures of a nameless young girl as she explores an alternative Japanese cityscape, speaks to strange fish creatures, discovers factories manufacturing new languages, and decodes mysterious inventions (Fig. 7). Panpanya is not concerned with character development or linear storytelling; the main character is instead used as an endless source of curiosity that encourages the reader to discover the minutiae of urban space. The drawing style is highly refined, full of sharp cross-hatching and intense detail. Each panel is photorealistic in terms of both legibility and perspective, with background scenery bent at the corners as if it was being seen through a fish-eye photographic lens. In addition to bearing the technical trademarks of an avid photographer, panpanya's drawing style also reflects their architectural fluency. For example, the young protagonist featured in almost every panel is often drawn at a lower resolution than her surroundings. She is given just a few pencilled outlines while the architectural world around her vibrates with detail. This discrepancy in detail is a visual recommendation to pay more attention to the environment than the main character. It is an approach that recalls architectural renderings where copied and pasted human models float in a high-definition architectural space, becoming translucent when they overlap with the building in order to not obscure the designer's hard work.

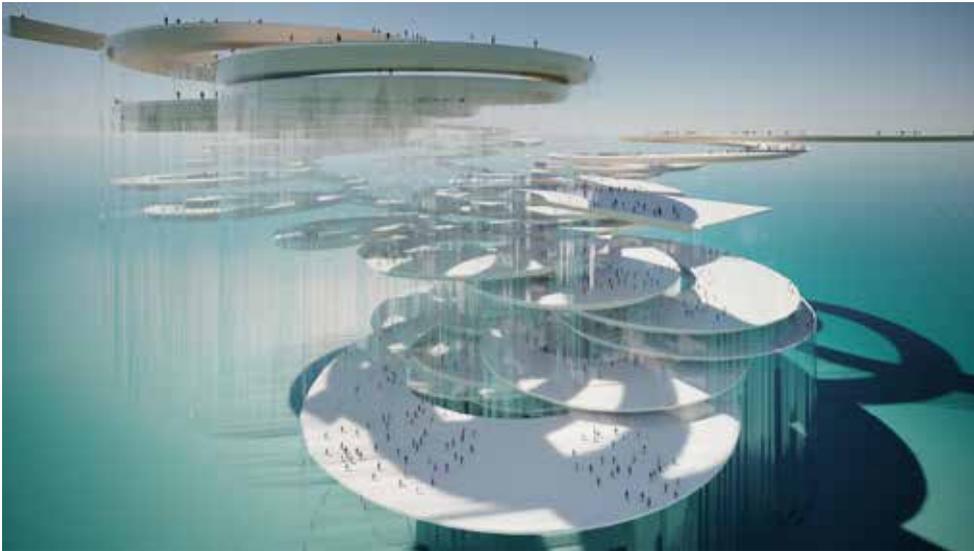
Panpanya's work is unlike any other architecture manga. It is also unlike anything else distributed by its publisher, Hakusensha, a major player in mainstream

manga owned by the same group that publishes blockbuster “adolescent” series such as *Shōnen Jump*. Hakusensha is also known for maximizing the profitability of its intellectual properties through a “media mix” of music CDs, radio programmes, and online distribution systems. Panpanya sits awkwardly in the roster, but the high-profile publisher has brought their work into contact with other mass media forms, including architecture. For example, in 2019, Japan's best-known philosophy and culture journal, *Gendai shisō* (“Contemporary Thought”), invited panpanya to contribute to a special issue called *Kōgengaku to ha nani ka* (“What is Modernology?”), alongside prominent voices in architecture like Fujimori Terunobu (panpanya, 2019: 81). The small group was assembled to consider the contemporary relevance of “modernology” (*kōgengaku*), a term coined by the Japanese designer Kon Wajirō in the 1920s to understand how “the explosion of consumerism in Japan—advertising, fashion, and marketing” impacted every facet of Japanese life and design, from shoes to architecture (Kuroishi, 2015: 199). He visualized these radical changes through methodical field drawings and novel forms of data visualization that tried to quantify the ways in which architecture reified national identity, gender, and class. Despite the difference in age and career path, panpanya and Fujimori share an appreciation of Kon's inventive drawings. Where panpanya took Kon's work into more fantastical territories, Fujimori developed a style of photographic research he called “street observation studies” (*rojō kansatsugaku*) to document the (often strange and amusing) ways in which cities bear the traces of rapid urban development (Sand: 2013: 88–109).<sup>14</sup> Unlike panpanya's whimsical cataloguing of architectural details, street observation reports are ironically distant and mock the cold bureaucracy of the real estate industry. The tone may be different, but both panpanya and Fujimori are interested in the ways in which the excesses of construction overflow into different media. That a manga artist and an

14 See Terunobu, 1989.



8



9

**Fig. 8**  
*Kadokawa Culture Museum,*  
Tokorozawa, Japan, 2020,  
Kengo Kuma and Associates  
© Kengo Kuma and Associates.

**Fig. 9**  
*Kadokawa Dwango Educational*  
*Institute VR Campus,* 2021,  
Kengo Kuma and Associates. ©  
Kengo Kuma and Associates.

architecture historian can bond over this passion in the pages of a popular philosophy journal evidences the breadth of Japan's intermedial architecture system.

### **Kengo Kuma's Transformations**

Uketsu's horror stories and panpanya's oneiric wanderings are not determined by the architecture system's major corporate players such as Kajima Corporation. Instead, they reflect the omnipresence of architectural media in the contemporary media environment. But how does architecture-inflected media such as manga make its way back into the design office? Looking into the recent work of Kengo Kuma & Associates provides some clues. In 2020, the firm completed the Kadokawa Culture Museum, a multi-use facility commissioned by the Kadokawa Corporation that combines a manga library, anime museum, art gallery, café, theatre, and a floor dedicated to the region's natural history (Fig. 8). The structure's combination of such diverse programmes mirrors the patron's intermedia innovations. The Kadokawa Corporation is a sprawling multimedia empire that extends from traditional publishing to video games and artificial intelligence research. In the 1970s, Kadokawa helped accelerate the industry's "media mix" by developing assets that operated simultaneously in manga, novels, music, and film, all under an intermedia-minded slogan: "Read it and then watch it? Or watch it and then read it?" (Steinberg, 2012: 152). A recent promotional video made by Kuma's office celebrates the museum as a continuation of this media mix strategy, and "a completely new type of centre for cultural transmission where high culture such as contemporary art, and low culture such as animation, are mixed" (KKAA, 2022). In programme and circulation, the museum captures the way in which Kadokawa profits from intermedia transformation. The media mix does not dissolve the boundaries between mass media formats. Instead, it brings them closer to maximize the efficiency of an asset's transformation and multiply revenue streams. Similarly, the culture museum consists of distinct programmatic

zones focused on art, books, and films, all connected via a continuous circulation path.

The museum building's façade, material, and orientation stand out amongst Kuma's recent oeuvre. Where most of his similarly scaled designs merge perpendicular planes of wood and glass, the museum is opaque, clad in granite, and meant to be explored in the round like a sculpture. Instead of light and transparency, we are faced with an undulating wall of black and white stone, at once resembling the grid of a bookshelf and the black and white panels of a manga removed from its binding and blown up to a monumental scale. The building also rejects any sense of direction or orientation. Moving around the volume, its silhouette shifts constantly, and any attempt to identify a "front" is frustrated by hidden windows and diminutive entryways obscuring the floor plates and means of circulation. The always shifting nature of the building's orientation represents the equally mercurial organization of the building's patron. Just as the building's elevation endlessly changes depending on one's vantage point, Kadokawa's corporate profile shifts according to your perspective as a consumer. One could engage with the corporation as a manga reader, film buff, gamer, or even company seeking consultation on issues related to AI and entertainment. Each person is given a different experience and vantage point onto the corporation, and yet it is all part of a single entity. Where Kadokawa Corporation's many ventures are united by a shared corporate hierarchy, the cultural museum is united by an interconnected steel frame. This robust steel skeleton was carried out not by Kuma's office, but by KAJIMA DESIGN, Kajima Corporation's design and construction subsidiary. The meeting of Kajima, Kadokawa, and Kuma in this one project succinctly captures the many intersections of the architecture system and mass media as a single crystalline volume.

Kuma's relationship with Kadokawa Corporation continued in 2021 with a totally virtual project, the Kadokawa Dwango Educational Institute VR Campus. In 2016, Kadokawa had opened N High School, a secondary school headquartered in Okinawa

focused on online correspondence classes for young people interested in entering the media and entertainment industries. The school offers classes in coding, writing, art, and design with special guest teaching from Kadokawa's stable of creative industry professionals. N High School now includes 33 campuses across the country, and recently entered the virtual realm with the help of Kengo Kuma and Associates. The firm designed a virtual hub for the school consisting of a series of floating spiral planes suspended in a sky-coloured void containing classrooms and common areas (Fig. 9). The virtual campus is open to members of the so-called "Premium" education plan, a VR-based course offered at the equivalent of €7,200 for three years of classes. In response to the alienation experienced by users of online education, N High School advertises the new virtual curriculum as a more immersive environment where students equipped with VR headsets will "learn more intensively and actively" (N High School, 2020).

Over the course of this article, I have introduced many examples of intermedia transformation, from the cameras of NHK turning a model into a television show, Kajima Corporation compressing architecture history and theory into a magazine, Ina Seito presenting architecture as a sellable art object, and artists using floorplans to tell stories. Each of these precedents took advantage of the intermedia potential of architecture to develop new markets. The newest virtual frontier of the architecture system uses the computer-designed three-dimensional model. What may have been used in the design process of a physical structure is now the final product. And it is selling a new commodity. Kuma's levitating spiral platforms are not leading to books or films but education, now commodified as an online subscription service expressly dedicated to training students to become future workers in the Kadokawa corporate ecosystem. The virtual campus shows that the intermedia potential of architecture is limited neither to print media nor to selling an elevation drawing in a TOTO-sponsored art gallery. More than just a digital lobby for anime-styled avatars, the VR campus is a symbol of the

tireless churn of the architecture system. Its rhizomatic platforms spiral upward, overlapping but never resolving, suggesting endless growth and countless new ways in which corporations use architectural media to open new revenue streams.

**Matthew Mullane** is an Assistant Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture at Radboud University in Nijmegen, NL. He received his PhD from Princeton University and was a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University's Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and Tokyo College, The University of Tokyo. His forthcoming book, *World Observation*, offers an alternative origin for global architecture history in 19th-century Japan and theorizes a new role for "observation" in architectural thought. His writing has appeared in *Architectural Theory Review*, *The Journal of Architecture*, *AA Files*, *Log*, and *Art Papers*, among other publications.

## REFERENCES

- Bognar, B.** (2008) *Beyond the Bubble: The New Japanese Architecture*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Bolter, J.D. and Grusin, R.** (2000) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Colomina, B.** (1994) *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Colomina, B. and Buckley, C., eds.** (2010) *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196X to 197X*. Barcelona: Actar Publishers.
- Fujimori, T.** (1989) *The Adventures of the Architecture Detectives: Tokyo Edition (Kenchiku tantei no bōken: Tokyo hen)*. Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.
- Furuhata, Y.** (2022) *Climatic Media: Transpacific Experiments in Atmospheric Control*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Furuhata, Y.** (2017) "Architecture as Atmospheric Media: Tange Lab and Cybernetics", in Steinberg, M. and Zahlten, A., eds. *Media Theory in Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 52–79.
- Glaser, S.A.** (2009) "Dynamics of Intermedial Inquiry", in Glaser, S.A. ed. *Media inter Media: Essays in Honor of Claus Clüver*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Haryū, I.** (1969) "Non-Relational Art", *SD: Space Design* (51), pp. 24–29.
- Hori, D.** (2022) "More empty homes: Japan's housing glut to hit 10m in 2023", *Nikkei Asia*, 11 September. Available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/More-empty-homes-Japan-s-housing-glut-to-hit-10m-in-2023>.
- Ivy, M.** (1989) "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts, The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan", in Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds. *Postmodernism and Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 21–46.
- Kajima Institute** (1980) *Kajima kensetsu: hyakuyonjū nen no Ayumi* ("Kajima Corporation: A Journey Through 140 Years"), Kajima Institute Publishing Editorial Department, ed. Tokyo: Kajima Institute Publishing.
- Kaufman, J.** (2018) *Drawing on Architecture: The Object of Lines, 1970–1990*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Kuroishi, I.** (2015) Introduction to "Selected Writings on Design and Modernology, 1924–47", *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design history, and Material Culture*, (22)2 (Fall–Winter), p. 199.
- Kawana, S.** (2018) *The Uses of Literature in Modern Japan: Histories and Cultures of the Book*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kinsella, S.** (2000) *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*. London: Routledge.
- Lamarre, T.** (2018) *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lobsinger, M.L.** (2016) "Architectural History: The Turn from Culture to Media", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 75(2), pp. 135–139.
- Marjanović, I. and Howard, J.** (2014) *Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association*. St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.
- Matsuyama, H.** (2019) *Terebi ni miru kōdōseichōki no Tōkyō: hōsō to shuto no 1964 nen* ("Seeing Tokyo's High-Growth Period on Television: Broadcasting and the City in 1964"), *Research and Examination in Broadcasting*, 69(1), pp. 36–53.
- McLuhan, M.** (1962) *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: The University of Toronto Press.
- McQuaid, M., ed.** (2002) *Envisioning Architecture: Drawings from the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Panpanya** (2019) *Kakū no tsūgakuro ni tsuite* ("On Imaginary School Routes"), *Gendai shisō* ("Contemporary Thought"), *Tokushū: Kōgengaku to ha nani ka—Kon Wajirō kara rojō kansatsugaku, soshite 'kurashi' no jidai he* ("Special Issue: What is Modernology? From Kon Wajirō and Street Observation Studies to the Age of Living"), p. 81.
- Peters, J.D.** (2010) "Mass Media", in Mitchell, W.J.T. and Hansen, M.B.N., eds. *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 266–279.
- Postman, N.** (1979) *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*. New York: Delacorte.
- Sand, J.** (2013) *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Steinberg, M.** (2012) *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Strate, L.** (2004) "A Media Ecology Review", *Communication Research Trends*, 22(2), pp. 3–48.
- Terunobu, F.** (1989) *The Adventures of the Architecture Detectives: Tokyo Edition* ("Kenchiku tantei no bōken: Tokyo hen"). Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.
- Tsuchiko, T., ed.** (1970) *Eiga nenkan* ("Film Almanac"). Tokyo: Jiji tsūshinsha.
- Uketsu** (2021) *Henna ie* ("Strange House"). Tokyo: Asuka shinsha.
- Winthrop-Young, G.** (2011) *Kittler and the Media*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Yamashita, K.** (2021) *Setagaya ichi furui yōkan no iearuji ni naru* ("Becoming the Owner of the Oldest Western-Style House in Setagaya"). Tokyo: Shūeisha.
- Zahlten, A.** (2017) *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.