The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Stadium
Between Architectural Bigness and Urban Smallness

INTRODUCTION

Olympic sites are not merely sporting venues; they embody a social, political, cultural, and urban meaning that reflects their host cities. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games provide an interesting example: the design and construction process of the main Olympic stadium in Tokyo has been nothing less than controversial and has led to a profound and multi-faceted debate between design authorship and urban context, between a vision inspired by a *phenomenological* approach on the one hand, and the *autonomy* of design on the other, within the delicate framework embodied by the Japanese context.

Following the organisation of an international competition to design the new stadium by the Japan Sports Council (JSC), Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) was announced as the winners in November 2012. The aim was to complete the project by 2018, in time to host the 2019 Rugby World Cup, and serve as the primary venue for the 2020 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.
Over the years, however, the project faced a wide range of controversies, culminating in the scrapping of Hadid's proposal in 2015 and the adoption of the project designed by Kengo Kuma, which was deemed more suitable appropriate to the context. The criticism of Hadid's project which involved several renowned architects— Fumihiko Maki, Toyo Ito, Kengo Kuma, and Arata Isozaki, among others— stemmed from concerns related to the project's architectural design, the way the programme was managed and the urban consequences that such an architectural object would have, immediately conflicting the protagonists at the crossroads of their nature as architects and urban planners.

Focusing on this case study, this paper aims to portray the debate between two theoretical frameworks: *critical regionalism*[1] versus the *autonomy* of design.[2] The debate relates to a persistent and recurring question about the nature of uniqueness, or even the fact that there is a Japanese *Weltanschauung*. On the one hand, ZHA reflect their approach by designing an iconic building that celebrates the architectural object; on the other hand, Kengo Kuma, in line with his design approach, proposes a stadium that speaks to its context, and strives to reflect *Japan-ness*[3] in its formal, urban, and material choices. The paper presents the case of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Stadium and is structured around these two approaches. It begins with a discussion of the two theoretical frameworks, moving on to first discuss first Hadid's approach and proposal, and Kuma's. It concludes with a reflection on both frameworks in reference to *Japanese-ness*.

BETWEEN THE AUTONOMOUS AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL

The theoretical reasons that first generated and then led to the outcome of this controversy are multiple and reside on many different levels of meaning and interpretation. The case of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Stadium is one of the most obvious moments in which two different and alternative visions, both local and global, have been put against each other.
Two worldviews that contemporary architectural practice, criticism and theory have been exploring and defining, especially since the rise of theory and the various theoretical challenges to modernism articulated in the mid-1960s,[4] to the rise of critical theory and its challenges in the 1980s.[5] Depending on the place and time in which architecture is located, they have defined two possible areas of conception of the role of architecture, which define its field quite clearly: one defines its autonomous role, both historically and in terms of meaning, the other defines it in relation to the boundary conditions external to the project.[6]
The concept of experience, derived from phenomenological thinking,[7] is fundamental here, as it is in all architectural theories that consider the relationship with the context to be inescapable.[8] Geography, topography, the history of places, cultures and societies, climate, are the pre-existing conditions that constitute the experience of reality, our knowledge of place, whether natural, personal or cultural. All this plays an active role, directly or indirectly, in the design phase, informing the designer's choices; different forms of conceiving the *datum* of experience have been fundamental to different design approaches, influenced by different visions of the continuity of change in tradition, and therefore in the present, depending on their relationship to modernism and its ability to be a process linked to social and cultural needs.
Japanese architectural culture has also actively participated in this process of critical revision of the relationship between tradition and modernity, in ways that are widely discussed in historiography,[9] which finds in this emblematic case a further moment of confirmation of the value of a vision of architecture that understands tectonics as a reification of culture and history.

This is a particular vision of authorship, in which there is a constant attempt to rigorously capture a concrete moment of the transience of reality, in all its nuances, or at least in those that can be grasped and reproduced: if the project succeeds in capturing the qualities of the real, it will emerge more clearly and retain its vulnerability as a positive characteristic. By incorporating the accidents of place into the project, it returns the inevitability of choice, the constant perception and assimilation of the data of reality. The project is thus not a demiurgic act, a kind of *deus ex machina* that resolves the situation with its own autonomously imposed and inevitable language.
The phenomenological evidence makes the project the result of a cognitive journey of the context, accommodating its imperfections, facing also the impossibility of its true conclusion, welcoming in itself the possibility of its own incompleteness, which seems refractory and elusive to stylistic or formal classification, not relying on a predetermined order, except that of the approach.
On the contrary, on the other side of the modern and contemporary theoretical field, when the project becomes a text expressed in a language of its own, it distances architecture, as a kind of more or less critical object/text, from the traditional objectives, aesthetic or constructive, which are instead understood as aesthetic, functional or constructive, perceived instead as based on its logical processes, analytical, self-reflexive, in a kind of linguistic permutation that allows its signs to be interpreted as pure inscriptions, textual notations, always open to a broader analysis, an activity in which the syntactic moment of the discourse of form is privileged.[10]
Design activity is understood first and foremost as an ahistorical, transformative linguistic process that leaves behind all the traces it has produced. Aware that knowledge moves through fractions rather than coherence, it produces, within a continuous interference, an interchangeability between verbal, design and constructive writing, generating, according to post-structuralist and deconstructivist theses in particular[11], that shift of interest towards a textual object conceived as a fabric of constantly changing traces and interpretations, ready to destabilise any *a priori* truth, origin or idea, in order to exalt difference and absence as constructive and dynamic moments, in a programmatic disinterest in place, in all its possible declinations[12].

THE COMPETITION: SEARCHING FOR AN ICON

To understand the context of this debate, it is imperative to discuss the sequence of events that put the question on the table: should the next feature structure for the 2020 Olympic Games be an iconic building, or one that blends in with its surroundings? This debate coincides with growing local questions about host nations spending public funds on Olympic venues rather than of focusing on enhancing the quality of life for local residents.[13]
Following its failed bid for the 2016 Olympic Games, Tokyo submitted its bid for the 2020 Olympic Games in July 2011. In July 2012, the Japan Sport Council (JSC) announced the opening of a design competition for the construction of a new national stadium in Tokyo; a project developed as a national endeavour on an unprecedented scale: “What Japan needs now is the power of dreams”, announced JSC president Ichiro Kono.[14] He explained that the JSC’s aim was to create a new, ambitious project in an completely new way, with full public participation, and transparent process.
The competition brief included strict pre-qualification requirements, including that the participating architects are required to have experience in designing a stadium for at least 15,000 spectators, and must have won at least one of five major architectural awards.[15] The jury was chaired by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando.[16]
In early November 2012, the shortlist of 46 entries was published, with 11 finalists, including Zaha Hadid Architects.[17] In mid-November 2012, ZHA was awarded the first prize, Cox Architecture the second and SANAA with Nikken Sekkei the third. As a result, ZHA were appointed architects for the new stadium, and Ando, who was very enthusiastic about the winning design, commented: “The entry’s dynamic and futuristic design embodies the messages Japan would like to convey to the rest of the world.”[18] He believed that Hadid’s design would showcase Japan’s unique ability to build a stadium with such advanced technology and construction details.
After winning the competition, Zaha Hadid emphasised that ZHA’s 30 years of experience in Japan had enabled them to create a project that aligns with Japanese architectural and urban traditions. Hadid affirmed that “the stadium will become an integral element of Tokyo’s urban fabric, directly engaging with the surrounding cityscape to connect and carve the elegant forms of the design. The unique structure is both light and cohesive, defining a silhouette that integrates with the city. The perimeter of the stadium will be an inhabited bridge: a continuous exhibition space that creates an exciting new journey for visitors.”[19]
Based on this, the JSC’s qualifications requirements, released statements and the shortlist selected, it is possible to conclude that the JSC was looking to hire a *starchitect* from the outset, with the aim of creating an iconic structure that stands out. This was a promise to the International Olympic

Committee (IOC) that Tokyo could indeed host and deliver an unforgettable and exceptional Olympic event.

THE ICONIC OLYMPIC BID FOR TOKYO

In May 2012, Tokyo was shortlisted by the IOC along with Istanbul and Madrid, for the bidding to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. The Tokyo bid presented 32 venues, 15 of which were existing historic venues from the 1964 Games that would be renovated for the 2020 Games. It also included 11 temporary venues designed to serve the event itself, to be removed or re-adapted after the Games. The new stadium, one of the 11 new permanent venues, was an integral part of the bid and was the feature venue as an iconic piece, with cutting-edge technology. The plan was to have it replace the Kasumigaoka National Stadium, built in 1958 and used for the 1964 Olympic Games, which had a capacity of around 54,000 people, with an 80,000-capacity venue similar to London's Olympic Stadium.[20]

Tokyo's bid for the Olympic Games created two focal points within the city: the Heritage Zone and the Tokyo Bay Zone. The project for the Olympic Stadium is located in the Heritage Zone, part of Shinjuku Ward in the heart of one of Tokyo's urban centres, within the Meiji *Jingu Gaien* area and only 2 kilometers away from Yoyogi Park, the Meiji Shrine and the Yoyogi Olympic Stadium designed by Kenzo Tange for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The site is bounded to the north by the No. 4 Metropolitan Expressway, which separates it from the Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, and to the east by the Meiji Memorial Museum and the Akasaka Imperial Residence. To the west is the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, originally used for the 1964 Games, and the dense urban areas of Sendagaya and Jingumae. To the south lies the Jingu Baseball Stadium, the Prince Chichibu Memorial Rugby Ground, the famous Jingu Gaien Ginko Avenue and the high-end urban area of Minami-Aoyama.

In its 2013 Candidate City bid document, Tokyo presented the new ZHA Stadium as the centerpiece of the Games, describing it as a local and international sporting icon, the first in the history of the games to feature a retractable roof, and the latest in technological innovation in design and construction. The new stadium was due to be completed in 2019 to host the 2019 Rugby World Cup and was aimed to host the 2020 Olympics Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2020 Olympic Games, Athletics, Football, and Rugby, with the social, development and sustainability agendas in mind.

At its 125th Session in Buenos Aires in September 2013, the IOC awarded Tokyo the right to the host of the 2020 Summer Olympic Games. "Tokyo presented a very strong technical bid from the outset (…) Tokyo's bid resonated the most with the IOC membership, inviting us to *discover tomorrow*".[21] Unlike the 2016 bid, Tokyo 2020's main sports arena is in a central and prestigious location in the city, not in a peripheral area, facing the sea: a reason that seemed to be one the most important in the failure of the previous bid.

The presentation of Hadid's stadium proposal as part of the bid certainly played a key role in Tokyo's winning bid; the commitment to demolish the old stadium and replace it with a larger and more glamorous one was a convincing argument and showed that the city was committed to re-inventing itself, investing in infrastructure and sports facilities for the Olympics. Once again, the autonomous approach of iconic architectural objects proved effective in reflecting a powerful image of the city and the Japanese nation[22].

THE URBAN GAIEN AGAINST THE HADID STADIUM

Upon completion of the competition, the JSC signed a contract with the ZHA, who started collaborations with several Japanese consultants led by Nikken Sekkei Ltd[23] as the local and technical architects. The ZHA/Nikken Sekkei team continued to develop the project in line with the original vision set out in the 2012 competition submission.

However, despite winning the argument with the International Olympic Committee, the Hadid Stadium began to face opposition from within the Japanese context. The project was criticised by both the public and various Japanese architects, who raised concerns about the urban consequences of such an architectural object would have in such a sensitive context. In August 2013, Fumihiko Maki[24] led the way with an open criticism[25] of the project for its urban implications on its immediate context.[26] In October 2013, he organized a symposium entitled "Re-thinking the New National Olympic Stadium in historical background of *Jingu Gaien*" where the project was discussed and analysed. Maki criticised the JSC for selecting this specific site to develop a stadium of this size[27]. As the architect of the adjacent refurbished Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, Maki stressed the importance of the project scale. He claimed that when designing the project in the early 90s, his team had been keen to consider the overall height of the building and its influence on the sensitive and valuable urban heritage of the *Jingu Gaien* area. He believed that the decision to build an 80,000-seats stadium with unnecessary programmatic components was fundamentally inappropriate for this particular site.[28]

Maki encouraged the media and the public to mobilise against the project because of its deteriorating impact on the urban realm. He was joined by Toyo Ito and later by other Japanese architects,[29] who organised an online petition to "defend the ginkgo tree-lined landscape of blue sky and *Jingu* Outer Gardens from the [construction of Hadid's] oversized stadium".[30] Participants, including Sou Fujimoto, stressed that the protest was not directed against Hadid: "I hope that this protest is successful in shrinking the design to fit the context," Fujimoto affirmed, claiming that their comments were aimed at pushing for a better integration of the project into the urban context. With that in mind, the protest was directed at the size of the stadium, with the Japanese architects claiming that the footprint of the stadium and the overall built-up area were too large, and that the overall scale of the stadium would compromise the harmony within the existing urban context.[31] This criticism falls specifically within the theoretical debate about the nature of the design language itself.

SPIRALLING COSTS AND ABE'S ANNOUCEMENT

In line with their criticism of the size and scale of the stadium, the protest also concerned the construction cost of the project, which was initially estimated at ¥130 billion, at the time of the competition award. As the ZHA/Nikken Sekkei teams developed the design, they estimated the cost at ¥346 billion in August 2013, more than 2.5 times the original cost, sparking further controversy over the project. The soaring costs were widely discussed in the local media, and drew strong criticism due to the public nature of the project. This was attributed to the project's initially ambitious brief, which included a large built-up area, and the design's complex structure, with two 400-meter "keel arches" running the length of the stadium.

In July 2014, in response to these concerns, Hadid updated the stadium design in line with the JSC's requirements, simplifying the structural system, removing the retractable roof and reducing the built-up area by 20%, while maintaining the overall capacity of 80,000 seats.[32] Despite that, the cost of the project was estimated at ¥210 billion in February 2015.

The updated proposal sparked further criticism from Arata Isozaki.[33] He believed that the original competition proposal was a fascinating architectural gesture, whereas the proposed revision was unimpressive and unfit for the Olympics, or for Tokyo. He urged the JSC to give Hadid the opportunity to Hadid to propose an entirely new design proposal that would meet the updated site requirements.[34] The new design stood between these two poles: creating an iconic building on the one hand and striving to fit in with the context on the other; it clearly struggled to achieve both. The revised proposal was no longer this iconic, autonomous piece that stands out from its context, nor is it an architectural project that speaks to its immediate environment.

The spiralling costs, which reached ¥252 billion in July 2015,[35] and the further pressure from the media and the public opinion led to the announcement the abandonment of the Hadid stadium plans, which came directly from the Japanese Prime Minister:[36] "We have decided to go back to the start on the Tokyo Olympics-Paralympics Stadium plan and start over from zero". These were Abe's words on 17 July 2015, when he announced that the design of the stadium would start from scratch due to rising costs.[37]

HADID'S DEFENSE: A JAPANESE STADIUM

The news came as a shock to Hadid and their Japanese collaborators. In August 2015, Hadid released a statement and a 23-minute video presentation, defending their position and urging the Japanese officials to reconsider their decision. In the video and statement, they emphasised the fact that ZHA is an architectural practice with decades of successful experience working in a wide range of contexts, designing buildings that ware built on time and on budget.[38]

Most importantly, Hadid argued that the project was inspired by both Japan's past and its future, stating that the project envisioned a building that was not just a stadium or an arena, but that it aspired to go beyond mere function to become a symbol of Japan's renewal and a sort of optimistic vision of its future. The message here was clear: the ZHA stadium is *Japanese* from concept to construction; it is designed in line with the Japanese culture, creating a specific relationship between the stadium and the specific context of the *Gaien* area.

A fundamental element of the design is the articulation between the structure and public circulation, with a structure required to provide a roof over long spans without columns. The primary structure of two keel arches has a similar precedent, says Hadid, in the silhouette of traditional footbridges in Japanese gardens: this reference is another way of saying that the new stadium is based on a key motif of traditional Japanese landscape design and is a fitting addition to the sports landscape of the

Gaien area.
Furthermore, Hadid argues that the link between nature and the Japanese spirit is further embodied in the structure, which is so expressive that it creates a distinctive flower-petal geometry, so familiar both to Japanese nature and to the Japanese public, who are well-known to have a close affinity with nature as it passes through the seasons; the flower-petal geometry of the roof is continued in the façade, a structure that is also inhabited, with a series of diagonal staircases and elevated walkways that develop the stadium's envelope, making it both a stadium and an extension of the pedestrian landscape of the *Gaien* area, allowing for walks and perspective views of the city of Tokyo.
In terms of materials, Hadid opted for Japanese timber cladding to give the stadium what she calls 'a tactile familiarity,' reconnecting it to the fundamental material of the Japanese environment and experience. In fact, most of the façade is interrupted by the petal-like geometry and clad with Japanese wood louvres, so that the overall effect of the pedestrian level is a subtle interplay of Japanese wood cladding, offering the visitor the experience of a direct resonance with *Gaien*'s tree landscape and Japanese culture.

Hadid also claims that the majority of the roof structure is made up of catenary beams, again inspired by the innovative catenary beams used by Kenzo Tange used in his design for the Yoyogi National Gymnasium in Shibuya,[39] in the hope that the new stadium would visually and symbolically connect to this Japanese icon. According to Hadid, the *Japanese-ness* is evident in the way the arches, the catenary beams, and the light fabric covering the spectator seating create an overall effect that represents Japan's traditional craftsmanship and contemporary innovation. From a cost perspective, Hadid also provided a detailed explanation, attributing the rising costs to the Japanese construction market and the overall economic situation.[40] Finally, arguing that given the constraints of the site, size and height, Hadid claims to have created the most compact footprint possible for a multi-functional stadium, using their experience of previous Olympic stadium proposals.

The justification of these architectural and urban choices aims to respond precisely to one of the main concerns expressed by Maki, namely that the delicacy of the context did not create a true relationship with the stadium, which appears as an object completely unrelated to such a place.[41] This is an area that includes Maki's redesign of the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium,[42] the Meiji Memorial Museum of the 1920s, the most unique complex of gardens in the city, with the perspective view offered by the famous *Jingu Gaien* Ginkgo Avenue, one of the few such views in the entire city. From this point of view, Hadid defended their design proposal, stating that since their first submission to the competition in 2012, they had been aware of the delicacy of the site's location in relation to the size of the stadium, and that it was precisely for this reason that a saddle-shaped stadium was proposed, rather than a flat building of constant-height; a variable height would give a reduced visual impact from the outside, where the lowest point of the roof drops to 47 metres, making it appear lower from most vantage points.[43]

Against an autonomous approach to design, Hadid here rationalises form and design choices in relation to context. With this in mind, it is important to note Hadid's well-known position on this theoretical debate. Beginning her career with groundbreaking projects such as the Peak Competition, she gradually developed her architectural approach in relation to parametric design. Her view of creating architecture in relation to the environment is clear: "There is also the whole argument about regionalism, which is another conversation. I really don't know which has higher value - to know everything about a place or to know something about a place. If you are quite well trained, you can actually go in and make a certain observation about the place, which could be good but rather fickle. On the other hand, people in these places have also an ambition to live in a certain way. We may have a romantic idea of how they should live in China, but their idea of how they should live is very different. They want to be living as if they were living in New York. That's their aspiration."[44]

This is also reflected in Patrick Schumacher's writings on the topic: "My formula for this truism: *Form delivers Function*. My comprehensive theory of architecture […] identifies the distinction of form and function as the lead distinction of architecture, whereby form is the discipline's *internal reference*, i.e. our immediate responsibility, and function is the discipline's *external reference*, i.e. our ultimate responsibility to society mediated via our production of forms."[45] The quest to define the possibilities of the autonomy of form is a constant design horizon, focused on the analysis of the communicative content of architecture to justify design choices[46]. However, the statements of August 2015, relevant to the stadium, represent a paradox with regard to Hadid's approach to making architecture; the architectural proposition seems to strive to relate and connect with the Japanese history, cultural

references, and the specificities of the *Gaien* urban context.

KENGO KUMA'S STADIUM FOR TOKYO

Despite Hadid's announcements, the Japanese authorities were unconvinced and went ahead with their decision. With limited time, they had to act swiftly to meet the Olympic schedule. At this point, they had to go back to the drawing board and carefully consider their next steps, while at the same time responding to public opinion and meeting IOC requirements.

On 28 August 2015, following expert advice,[47], an open call for a "technical proposal of a restricted competition" invited architects and contractors to submit their proposals for the Tokyo Stadium according to the revised brief.[48] Only two teams registered for the competition,[49] and submitted two proposals in September 2015: 'Proposal A' was submitted by Kengo Kuma[50] and 'Proposal B' by Toyo Ito,[51] which were evaluated by a seven-member jury.[52] The two entries were advertised to the public in December 2015 and Kuma was announced as the winner on the 22nd of the same month. The project will ost of ¥149 billion and will take 36 months to complete.

The story provoked a negative reaction from architects in Japan and abroad, and the dispute led to a lawsuit between the ZHA and the JSC;[53] Hadid also claimed that Kuma's project bore substantial similarities to their own stadium, particularly in the design of the basic structure, the bowl and seating, sight lines, access points, infrastructure and functional reserve spaces. Kuma rejected these allegations, stressing that any similarities were derived from the needs of the site and the project programme.[54]

n addition to its reduced size and cost, Kuma's stadium design was the antithesis of the Hadid proposal, stemming directly from Kuma's approach to erasing architecture.[55] "First, we decided to keep the height as low as possible. The lighting towers for the previous stadium were 60 m in height, and Zaha Hadid's initial design (…), were 75 m. (…) During the twentieth century, much importance was attached to things that were big and tall, but, as we moved into the twenty-first century, I felt that being big and tall had become embarrassing."[56]

Kuma has been working for decades, on a sort of dematerialisation of architecture, where materials are used not only as a functional *datum* of the project, but as an active part of the design strategy. He involves materials in the project not only for the value of their immediate aesthetic perception, but also assigns them the function of searching for the simplification of form.

By becoming both the object and the support of the project, the materials reveal both their physical qualities and their own universe of relationships, both with themselves and with the environment in which the building will be located. There is often a search for a simplification and repetition of the materials and elements used, which is achieved by using, for example, wood, aluminium or glass as active subjects of the project, and no longer as subjects of the pure and simple need for the project to be built.[57]

This is a particular version of the concept of lightness, which, even in this stadium design, has a specific resonance with the place where the building will rise, establishing, as in this case, a link with the generative capacities of the place itself. The material is both envelope and structure, embodying a specifically Japanese variant of a relationship common to much modern architecture.

Through the presence of walls and ceilings that vary according to the relationship between nature and the body, whose surface reflects its material characteristics and expresses its potential in a sort of impressionistic value that dissolves in a crystallisation of the moment. This kind of transience resolves the enigma of the meaning of the value of materials, the oscillation between the necessary static physical value of the material used and an equally necessary aesthetic and sensitive value.

Kuma uses all this as a technique, here: *ars est celare artem*, art lies in concealing the artistic gesture. What is interesting in this all-Japanese insight of Kuma's is also the attempt to overcome the alternative between culture and nature, and all the implications between the time of nature and the time of culture, in a special ecology of the object.

Exemplary for Kuma is his research on the digital garden as a paradigm of the cancellation of architecture, in particular of the value associated with vision, and thus of the relationship between subject and object, metaphorically turning the architect into a gardener who, by being in the garden, eliminates the distance between subject, object, time, environment, world, making it a space that is both continuous and discontinuous.

The abstract nature of Kuma's stadium is conceived as a canvas, where there is a certain persistence of the presence of the concept of the *Jingu Gaien*, which adds a significant layer; it has to do with the Japanese vision of the presence of the transcendent in matter, a kind of *Deus sive Natura* according to which there is no separation, no elsewhere or additional dimension where the true essence of the

thing exists. An infinite manifestation, punctual and phenomenal, also leads Kuma to make this project a moment of that incessant, irregular but inevitable and necessary flow that is the natural order.

While this approach was the basis on which Kuma won this prestigious project, it is the same viewpoint that proved problematic for his practice at an earlier stage. In his book "Studies in Organic", Kuma clearly expresses some of the initial difficulties in winning first place in international design competitions using this design philosophy: "In a series of competitions in which I was unsuccessful led me to conclude that, inasmuch as fundamental change had taken place in the character of the ring, I had to change the way I fought […] There was an in-office discussion afterwards of the result[58], and the opinion was voiced that we would never be able to win an international competition with an approach focusing on erasing architecture. […] In what sort of period are we living? The hope that symbolic, sculptural works of architecture can play a major role in revitalizing cities has increased since the completion of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in 1998 […] Since the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, there is a greater likelihood that unique, sculptural work will be selected in a competition. The architect who seems to have benefited the most from the trend is Zaha Hadid. Hadid has by no means been eloquent or voluble at the hearings I have attended, but she is a formidable opponent. I have lost to her in the final stage of an open competition and in a number of limited competitions […] I continue to detest buildings that have been designed to stand out and to be symbolic virtue of their opposition to their respective environments."[59]
Hadid had already understood this dynamic, albeit from the opposite angle, four years earlier, in a 2005 interview in which she stated that: "Today, I think the scene has changed. Look at the whole Bilbao effect, which has really changed the practice and changed big clients' views about how they can achieve these new ideas."

AND THE BATTLE CONTINUES

The Tokyo Olympic Stadium may present a paradigm shift, similar to that of the Bilbao Effect—to which both Hadid and Kuma refer to in their writings—where the public demands architecture that not only contributes to the revitalisation of their cities, but also speaks their language. Again, it is inescapable to relate this theoretical and tectonic debate to the Japanese context. If this *Japanese-ness* exists, is it a dying concept, or if not, to what extent does it still inform Japan's sense of self? It is true that there is still a specific literary genre, dating back to the 18th century, called *Nihonjinron* ('theories about the Japanese');[60] it now refers to a series of sociological and psychological texts published in Japan since the post-war period, the purpose and *sine qua non* of which is to explain the peculiarities of Japanese culture and mentality, the qualities that define them, and the uniqueness of the Japanese people, through comparisons with cultures outside Japan, especially Europe and the United States.
However, one cannot help but notice that any perspective on the controversial issue of alleged Japanese identity lies in the paradox of the contemporary discourse on *Japanese-ness*, which also reverberates in this new dispute, which is not only architectural.
The Tokyo Olympic Stadium was completed on time, but the Olympic Games themselves were delayed by a whole year; the event will take place in July 2021, under strict Covid19 restrictions, without an audience. Kengo Kuma's stadium is now part of Tokyo's built environment and an integral part of the *Jingu Gaien* context. However, this specific heritage area is once again the subject of urban turbulence, as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government announced in February 2022 its plans to redevelop the area, demolishing many facilities and cutting down more than 1,000 trees to make way for several high-rise buildings: we will soon see to what extent *Japanese-ness* is a value or a reason for protection.[61]

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[1] Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an Architecture of Resistance", in *Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, WA: Bay Press), 16-20.
[2] Interestingly, one of the first critics to understand the value of Zaha Hadid's work was Kenneth Frampton. See in: Kenneth Frampton, "A Kufic Suprematist: The World Culture of Zaha Hadid," *AA Files* 6 (May 1984): 101-105.
[3] Arata Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).
[4] See in: Alan Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," *Arena: Architectural Association Journal* 83, n. 913 (June 1967): 11-14; Serge Chermayeff, and Christopher Alexander, *Toward a New Architecture of Humanism. Community and privacy* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963); Christopher Alexander, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Robert Stern, "Yale 1950-1965," *Oppositions* 4, (October 1974): 35-62; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 1965); George Baird, "Paradox in Regents Park: A Question of Interpretation," *Arena: The Architectural Association Journal* 81, no. 901 (April 1966): 272-276; George Baird, "La 'dimension amoureuse' in Architecture," *Arena: Architectural Association Journal*, 83, n. 913 (June 1967): 25-30; Françoise Choay, "Sémiologie et urbanisme," *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 132 (1967): 8-10; Alan Colquhoun, "Typology and Design Method," *Arena:*

Architectural Association Journal 83, n. 913 (June 1967): 11-14, and in *Perspecta* 12 (1969): 71-74; Henryk Skolimowsky, “Space in Architecture: a Phenomenological Analysis,” *Architectural Association Quarterly* 9, n. 2/3 (1969): 63-65; Manfredo Tafuri, “Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica,” *Contropiano* 1 (1969); Geoffrey Broadbent and Anthony Ward, eds., *Design Methods in Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries for the Architectural Association,1969).

[5] See in K. Michael Hays, “Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form,” *Perspecta* 21 (1984), in ‘Autonomous Architecture’, a special issue of H*arvard Architecture Review* 3 (Winter 1984), in Stanford Anderson, “Critical Conventionalism in Architecture,” A*ssemblage* 1 (October 1986), and in K. Michael Hays, “The Oppositions of Autonomy and History,” in *The Oppositions Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[6] See in: Mario Gandelsonas,” On Reading Architecture” *Progressive Architecture* 3 (1972): 68-87; Robert A.M. Stern, “Gray Architecture as Post-Modernism, or, Up and Down from Orthodoxy,” *Architecture d’aujour'hui* (Aug.-Sept. 1976); Diana Agrest, “Design versus Non-Design,” *Oppositions* 6 (Fall 1976); Peter Eisenman, “Post-Functionalism,” *Oppositions* 6 (Fall 1976); Anthony Vidler, “The Third Typology,” *Oppositions* 7 (Spring 1977); K. Michael Hays and Lauren Kogod, “Twenty Projects at the Boundaries of the Architectural Discipline Examined in Relation to the Historical and Contemporary Debates over Autonomy,” *Perspecta* 33 (Mining Autonomy, 2002), 54-71; Peter Eisenman, “Autonomy and the Will to the Critical,” A*ssemblage* 41, April 2000.

[7] Ernesto Nathan Rogers, “The Phenomenology of European Architecture” *Daedalus* 93 (1964): 358-372.

[8] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965); Christian Norberg-Schulz, “The Phenomenon of Place,” *Architectural Association Quarterly* 8, n. 4 (1976): 3-10; Joseph Rykwert, “Ornament is No Crime,” *Studio International* 190, n. 977 (September/October 1975): 91-97;
Gary J. Coates and David Seamon,” Toward a Phenomenology of Place and Place-Making: Interpreting Landscape, Lifeworld and Aesthetics” *Oz* 6 (January 1984): 6-9.

[9] To cite a few: Dana Buntrock, Materials and Meaning in Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tradition and Today (London: Routledge), 2010; James Steele, *Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tracing the Next Generation* (New York: Routledge) 2017; Kenneth Frampton, *A New Wave of Japanese Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1980.

[10] See in the Colin Rowe’s analytic-comparative readings, or in the early activity of Peter Eisenman, based on the Noam Chomsky’s theory of the principles of generative grammar.

[11] Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture* (New York, The Museum of Modern art, 1988), as cataolgue of the exhibition “Deconstructivist Architecture”, held at MoMA form 23 June to 30 August, 1988. Zaha Hadid was one of the seven architects invited to exhibit their work.

[12] Aida Hoteit, “Deconstructivism: Translation From Philosophy to Architecture,” *Canadian Social Science* 15 (2015): 1-13.

[13] To give few examples: the Athens Olympics (2004) Beijing Olympics (2008) Rio de Janeiro Olympics (2016) where massive stadia have been built for the Olympic events. Their use by the local communities after the Olympics ended was limited, and their maintenance costs became a burden for local councils.

[14] Kato Hideki, (2015, August 19). *The Olympic Stadium and the Anatomy of Failure.* Retrieved April 02, 2022, from Nippon: https://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00188/?pnum=2.

[15] This pertains to the Pritzker, the Premium Imperial in Honor of Prince Takamatsu, the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects, the Royal Institute of British Architects, or the Union Internationale des Architects.

[16] The committee also included nine other members: Hiroyuki Suzuki, Takayuki Kishii, Hiroshi Naito, Makoto Yasuoka, Junji Ogura, Shunichi Tokura, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, and Ichiro Kono.

[17] The shortlist also included Cox Architecture, Populous, GMP International with Hubert Nienhoff, Toyo Ito & Associates, SANAA and Nikken Sekkei Ltd, UNStudio with Yamashita Sekkei Inc, and Dorell, Ghotmeh, Tane.

[18] Architecture Journal (2013, November 15) *Zaha Hadid wins Japan national stadium contest.* Retrieved April 02, 2022: https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/zaha-hadid-wins-japan-national-stadium-contest.

[19] Guest Author for Architecture List. (2012, November 19). *New National Stadium, Tokyo / by Zaha Hadid Architects.* Retrieved June 18, 2022, from https://www.architecturelist.com/2012/11/19/new-national-stadium-tokyo-by-zaha-hadid-architects/.

[20] Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Bid Committee. (2013). *Tokyo 2020: Discover Tomorrow - Volume 2.* Retrieved April 05, 2022, from Olympic World Library: https://library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/70447/tokyo-2020-discover-tomorrow-tokyo-2020-olympic-games-bid-committee.

[21] IOC, (2013, September 7), *IOC selects Tokyo as host of 2020 Summer Olympic Games.* Retrieved April 02, 2022, from Olympics.com: http://olympics.com/en/news/ioc-selects-tokyo-as-host-of-2020-summer-olympic-games.

[22] Deyan Sudjic*, The Edifice Complex: The Architecture of Power*, (New York: Penguin Group), 2015.

[23] Nikken Sekkei is Japan’s largest architectural and engineering consultants’ firm, founded in 1900 with more than 3,000 employees. (Nikken Sekkei, 2022).

[24] Fumihiko Maki is the 1993 Pritzker Prize laurate and a well-respected architect in Japan. He helps illustrate the recent history of Japanese architecture. A pupil of Mayekawa, the direct link between Japan and Le Corbusier, he based his work on the traditional systems of construction in his country. Referring to his time in the United States and his involvement in the Metabolism movement, he cites his dual background in modern Western and Japanese architecture. Studying the forms and techniques of the vernacular architecture of traditional dwellings in Japan, and after addressing the dominant trends of modernism, Maki returns to the basic concepts of Japanese architectural space, which he combines with architecture that is distinctly modern in materials and forms.

[25] This was published in the Japanese Institute of Architects (JIA) Magazine.

[26] Fumihiko Maki, (2013, August): New National Stadium Plan: Thinking in the Historical Context of Jingu Gaien. *Japan Institute of Architects Magazine*(295), pp. 10-15. Retrieved July 20, 2022, from http://www.jia.or.jp/resources/bulletins/000/034/0000034/file/bE2fOwgf.pdf.
[27] Fumihiko Maki, *Nurturing Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 2008.
[28] He presented a comparison with other Olympic venues where the ratio of site area versus the overall stadium built-up area is much lower: the 2016 London stadium housed 80,000 seats with an overall area of 108,500 sq.m on a site of 16.2 ha, whereas the stipulated project for the Tokyo 2020 Games has an overall built-up area of 290,000 sq.m within a site of 11 ha. See in: Maki, F. (2014, February 4). *Why Tokyo's Olympic Stadium Should be Scrapped.* Retrieved June 30, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGODauPOBYE.
[29] Such as Kengo Kuma, Sou Fujimoto and Riken Yamamoto.
[30] Max Thompson, (2013, November 11). *Japanese architects file petition against Zaha's Tokyo Olympics stadium.* Retrieved April 03, 2022, from Architecture Journal: https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/japanese-architects-file-petition-against-zahas-tokyo-olympics-stadium#:~:text=Japanese%20architects%20slam%20Zaha's%20Tokyo,2020%20Olympics%20is%20too%20big.
[31] They stated that reducing the stadium seating from 80,000 to 50,000 would reduce the overall surface area; they proposed having the extra 30,000 seats as temporary seating that could be dismantled once the Games are over.
[32] Rory Stott (2014, July 10). *Zaha Hadid Architects Reveals Modified Tokyo National Stadium Designs.* Retrieved July 20, 2022, from Archdaily: https://www.archdaily.com/525708/zaha-hadid-architects-admits-modifications-to-tokyo-national-stadium-designs.
[33] In November 2014, Isozaki released a statement comparing the new proposal to "a turtle waiting for Japan to sink so that it can swim away", he added "if the stadium gets built the way it is, Tokyo will surely be burdened with a gigantic white elephant." In: Frearson, A. (2014, November 10). Zaha Hadid's Tokyo stadium will be "a disgrace to future generations" says Arata Isozaki. Retrieved May 29, 2022: https://www.dezeen.com/2014/11/10/zaha-hadid-tokyo-stadium-olympic-disgrace-arata-isozaki/.
[34] Arata Isozaki, (2014, November 19), *Tokyo Olympic Stadium Monumental Mistake or City Enhancement.* Retrieved July 15, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VYMn-2NyaA.
[35] Kazuo Iwamura, (2016, March 17). *The whole story about the New National Stadium Japan.* Retrieved April 2, 2022, from http://iwamura-atelier.com/wpat/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2016.3-New-National-Stadium-2S.pdf
[36] And not from the JSC, who was responsible for writing the project brief, organising the competition, and managing the stadium construction.
[37] Dan Howarth (2015, July 17), *Japan Stadium: Japan scraps Zaha Hadid's Tokyo 2020 Olympic Stadium.* Retrieved April 02, 2022, from Dezeen: https://www.dezeen.com/2015/07/17/japan-scraps-zaha-hadid-tokyo-2020-olympic-stadium/.
[38] The video presents the office's experience in the field of sports facilities in particular. Hadid referenced their London Aquatics Centre for the London 2012 Olympic Games, a project that had already been redesigned to fit the planned budget. It used a mix of temporary and permanent seating, which has become one of the most recognisable venues of the London 2012 and is now a very popular and much-used venue for the public. In addition, ZHA already had extensive experience in participating in stadium design competitions, having been involved in the design competitions for Singapore's new multi-purpose Sports Hub stadium at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Stadium, the 2006 Allianz Arena and the 2002 City of Manchester Stadium. See in: Zaha Hadid Architects. (2015, August 26). *ZHA New National Stadium Video Presentation.* Retrieved July 20, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWQGwz3vdb4
[39] The venue hosted the water sports of the 1964 Olympic Games took place and is widely celebrated as an architectural icon that symbolised Japan's recovery from World War II.
[40] One of the defense arguments offered by ZHA for why costs have risen so enormously is that, in Japan there are only five major contractors capable of tackling the construction of such a building, which offers limited competition and thus less pricing bargain. In their defense, ZHA proposed to their Japanese client to introduce more competitors among contractors, and even to open the floor to international contractors. They claimed that their design provides an appropriate response to the JSC brief and business plan; the high cost is a result of the project requirements, and the construction market conditions in Japan.
[41] It is important to note here that Maki was already critical of the project brief from the outset, even before Tokyo was chosen as Olympic site, given that he published his text 3 weeks before the winning announcement.
[42] The original structure was built in 1954 and Maki completed a re-design in 1990.
[43] This issue of overall height is one that Maki is also very concerned about in his criticism: he too was not allowed to build his Gymnasium higher than it was designed, in fact the swimming pool inside it was designed underground, so to mitigate the impact on the area.
[44] Zaha Hadid, "Zaha Hadid", *Perspecta* 37 (2005): 130-135.
[45] Patrick Schumacher, *Formalism and Formal Research* (2016). Retrieved 12 28, 2023, from Patrik Schumacher.com: https://www.patrikschumacher.com/Texts/Formalism%20and%20Formal%20Research.html.
[46] Patrick Schumacher, "The Autopoiesis of Architecture", Volume 1, *A New Framework for Architecture*, (London: John Wiley & Sons), 2010.
[47] On the 24th of July 2015, the Presidents of the 'Japanese Institute of Architects', the 'Japan Federation of Registered Architects & Building Engineers Associations', and the 'Japan Federation of Architectural Firms' issued an open letter advising the Japanese government on how to move forward, taking the following three steps: revising the design brief, reducing the re-design and construction periods, and devising an open and transparent procedure for sharing information with the public. In their letter, they issued a new proposed schedule

allocating 2 months for the brief revision and proposing two different scenarios for the design and construction process: Scenario 1 where the design process is separated from construction, and Scenario 2 where both processes are integrated together in the aim of completing the project by March 2020. See in:
Ashihara, T., Miisho, K., & Ohuchi, T. (2015, July 24). *Japanese Institute of Architects.* Retrieved July 22, 2022: http://www.jia.or.jp/resources/news/000/645/0000645/boUD3kBj.pdf.

[48] The new brief capped the project construction cost at ¥155 billion and reduced the seating to 68,000 instead of the original 80,000. Architects were required to submit their design proposal in association with a Japanese construction company (or companies) capable of executing a project of this scale, abiding by the budget and the limited timeframe.

[49] It is important to mention here, that the Japanese construction industry is dominated by the so-called "Zenekon", currently known as the Big Five: Kajima-Kensetsu, Shimizu-Kensetsu, Taisei-Kensetsu, Obayashi-Gumi and Takenaka Komuten, that control one-third of the construction in Japan: see in Zaha Hadid, "Zaha Hadid Architects: Redefining Architecture and Design" (Chadstone: Images Publishing Group Pty Ltd, 2017). ZHA expressed their interest to join the new competition, but they were unable to secure a collaboration with any of the Big Five.

[50] In association with Azusa Sekkei Inc. and Taisei Corporation.

[51] In association with Takenaka Komuten, Obayashi-Gumi and Shimizu-Kensetsu.

[52] The jury members were all Japanese professors affiliated with various universities in Tokyo.

[53] In January 2016, ZHA claimed that the JSC is refusing to release their last payment, unless the office agrees to give away all copyrights on the project and refrains from commenting on the project publicly; finally, an agreement was found, and ZHA definitely exited the project for the new Tokyo Olympic Stadium.

[54] The new design, the Kuma Stadium, has a minimum external height of 42.6 m, and 49.2 at its highest point, while Hadid's stadium had a minimum external height of 47 m and 70 m at its highest point.

[55] In his early work, Kuma focused on the idea of erasing architecture, specifically discussed in his book "Anti-Object" (first published in Japanese in 2000 by Chikuma Shobo, and translated to English in 2008, published by the Architectural Association London). In this book, he offers a criticism against buildings that are designed to stand out from their environment, celebrating the architect's ego.

[56] Kengo Kuma, *My Life as an Architect in Tokyo* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021): 42.

[57] Kengo Kuma, (2008), *Anti-Object* (London: AA Publishing, 2008); Kengo Kuma, *Material Immaterial: The New Work of Kengo Kuma* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press), 2009.

[58] Here Kuma refers to an international competition that his office lost.

[59] Kengo Kuma, *Studies in Organic* (Tokyo: TOTO Publishing), 2009: 38-40.

[60] Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of japanese Uniqueness* (London: Routledge), 1988.

[61] Taichi Kobayashi, (08 April 2022), *Tokyo gives the OK to redevelop leafy Meiji Jingu Gaien.* Retrieved from The Asahi Shimbun: https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14545449.