

Arch. 576/BB Lecture / Seminar Course  
**Minimalism in Japanese Architecture**  
Fall Semester 2021

Professor **Botond BOGNAR**  
Time: Tuesdays 5:00 - 7:50 pm.  
Place: 17 TBH

## MINIMALISM IN JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE

*"It is precisely in, and through, an understanding of alien cultures that we can come to a more sensitive and critical understanding of our own culture and of those prejudices that may lie hidden from us."*

Richard J. Bernstein

Japanese architecture both as a present practice and a course of history provides us with particular features and unique examples. On the one hand, they are deeply rooted in *cultural patterns* highlighting important differences between the approaches to design in the East and the West; on the other hand, they are also derivative of Japan's contemporary conditions: advanced technology, modes of production and consumption, social developments, types of urbanization, etc., which altogether have by now yielded one of the most innovative, future oriented, and critical practices in the world of architecture today.

The course introduces the idea or theories of minimalism, a significant, although not an exclusive, feature characterizing Japanese architecture in the past and, more importantly, as well as more in detail, in the *present*. The covered material emphasizes the various post-bubble developments of this important design strain in Japan, discussing its roots, social, cultural, and environmental background. Students learn about the architectures of such prominent designers as Tadao Ando, Kengo Kuma, Hiroshi Sambuichi, Hiroshi Nakamura, Toyo Ito, SANAA, Kazuyo Sejima, Ryue Nishizawa, Junya Ishigami, Sou Fujimoto, and many others.

While concentrating on the subject of minimalism, the purpose of the course is to expose the students to the architectural design philosophies, methodologies, and practices of these architects in an urban and cultural environment different from ours, thus provide them with an additional tool to further develop their awareness of the built environment as a cultural phenomenon, as well as a form of political and ideological discourse within society. In so doing, the course ultimately aims at helping students to come to a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between society and architecture as well as, architecture and the built and natural environment, plus the role of the architect in guiding this relationship.

The course is made up of two parts. In the first one your instructor provides lecture presentations followed by discussions. In the second part, students—working in **teams of two**—prepare and make weekly presentations on assigned buildings. Other requirements include: keeping class notes (about the instructor's presentations) up to date, then write a short final research paper on a building selected from a list prepared by your instructor, and building a physical model of the very building about which the paper is written.

I look forward to working with you all.

Botond Bognar  
Professor and Edgar A. Tafel Endowed Chair in Architecture



Kengo Kuma, Cultural Village of the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon, 2017. Photo © B.Bognar