

Fumihiko Maki

Contributing to the debate on the development of modern architecture in the Asian countries, in March 2017, Ana Tostões interviewed Fumihiko Maki, one of the greatest Asian architects engaged with the modern project, and member of the Metabolism group. Maki is currently developing a number of projects in Asia, including the Taipei Main Station Redevelopment in Taiwan, Shenzhen Sea World Culture and Arts Center in China, and the New City Hall of Yokohama, Japan.

AT: Being modern is a way to answer to society and society is in constant transformation, so the modern project is a work in progress. I believe you are perhaps one of the most unique architects in this respect since the very beginning of your career in the 1950s, until today, with constant improvement.

FM: Paradoxically, architects always work with expected processes: an expected layout and an expected program, but I see your point. Maintaining quality is very important for me. I often compare buildings with human beings. Both are born and survive to a certain old age, let's say, 80 or 90 years old, but are always hoping to maintain good health. Buildings must also be healthy, so I too praise construction details. But it is also about life; buildings must be appreciated by people who use them and have society's agreement on their life. Vitruvius defined the virtues of architecture as *utilitas*, *firmitas* and *venustas*. *Venustas* has been defined as beauty but some scholars in Europe recently argued that Vitruvius meant being in a state of delight. Overall, these values are necessary for keeping a building alive and that is what we try to do; those values are important in keeping a building healthy.

So, architecture is really like a human being. We have to make the building good to live in, so it is loved and – at the same time, to express something for society. I have been working under this philosophy for almost 60 years and I haven't changed it, but I don't stick to one style, or partic-

ular materials. Mies, for instance, was the kind of architect who tried to limit his expression, his use of materials, and make it deeper throughout his life. I like to vary depending on the project and the resources: when I did 4 World Trade Center Tower, glass was the basic material while, on the Aga Khan Museum, we wanted to reflect light in a stone facade and used a Brazilian stone that suited this intention. For the MediaCorp building in Singapore, just completed this year, we had a budget that allowed us to use stainless steel panels instead of aluminium. Currently we are finishing the Bihar Museum, in Patna, India. We have learnt from the experience of Corbusier in India that exposed concrete isn't the best option, so instead we used Corten steel and stone to protect the building surface, so the building can have a long life, even if not properly maintained.

We have to be careful with projects in India, especially in the choice of materials, because maintenance is not so good. In Switzerland, in my experience with Novartis Campus in Basel, we didn't have to worry about maintenance. Each country has a different attitude towards architecture, towards the life of architecture. We always learn from what we have done and try to do something better next time.

AT: Indeed, you have extensive work around the world. You have already been faced with many different cultures, nations, continents...



01 Tokyo, Japan. © Ana Tostões, 2017.

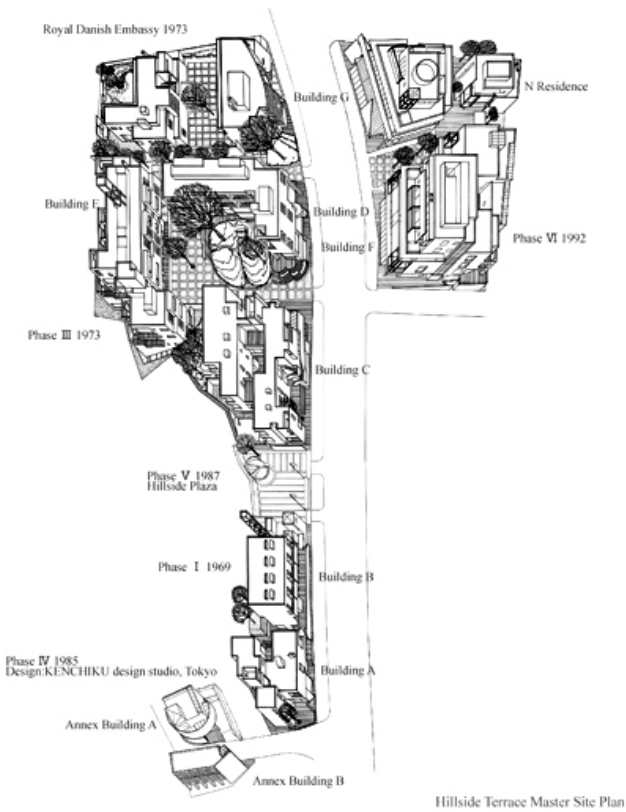


02 Osaka, Japan. © Ana Tostões, 2017.

03 Fumihiko Maki, Hillside Terrace, Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan, 1968. © Kaneaki Monma.



04 Maki and Associates, Square 3, Novartis headquarters, Basel, Switzerland, 2009. © Maki and Associates.



05 Fumihiko Maki, Hillside Terrace, Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan, 1968. © Maki and Associates.



06 Fumihiko Maki, Hillside Terrace, Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan, 1968. © Toshitaru Kitajima.

FM: ...and different clients, that's very important in architecture too!

AT: I believe the Hillside Terrace project reflects a good relationship with the client.

FM: True. In the case of Hillside Terrace – it will be the 50th anniversary of the building in two years – it was a lucky case. I was around 40 years old when I met the client Mr. Asakura and he was about the same age. We became good friends because we were able to share in the spirit of the time; of course, I don't know if his son or grandson will have the same attitude. Mr. Asakura and I keep discussing this issue of longevity. Looking back, nomadic people were not so concerned with material longevity: they constantly moved around and found shelter in certain places. But then, people began to settle and started agriculture, and certain community attitudes developed with it, as well as the concern for the longevity of shelters.

This reflects our lives in cities. In Tokyo people come in from different areas, and they start to establish relationships with new groups of people, but some are not so open. We are often criticized for not opening ourselves enough much to outsiders. When compared with Europeans, we are known for being too confined by ourselves, and this can be a problem. As an architect, I have chances to observe these things. I don't consider myself an anthropologist, but I'm interested in people.

AT: You were able to address real urban questions – not only the objects of architecture, but how to connect and simplify the lives of people in cities. It is amazing to realize how, today in 2017, these cities with millions of inhabitants work well and move so fluidly.

FM: I think one of the characteristics of Japanese is gentleness – even when we are in a very crowded place, we try not to touch too much. I have written a short article on Japanese gentleness. I also have an article that relates this gentleness with the city – it is called “The DNA of the City”. It was published as an article in one of my latest books on modernism¹.

Regarding public transportation, the Japanese can be proud of their punctual systems. People are seldom late for their appointments. It is reliable; taking a car, you can easily be 20 or 30 minutes late due to traffic jams.

AT: Traffic jams are a problem all around the world. For instance, take Brasília – such a good project with good neighborhood unity, but the public transportation system is missing. Metabolism was really important and only now we are seeing the results, almost 60 years later; it was not only an architectural movement, but a kind of utopia that became real. Having lived to see these results, what is your vision of Asia nowadays – I mean, the relation between Japan and other Asian countries in terms of architecture?

FM: I have only done buildings in China, Singapore and India, so I can't have a comprehensive opinion on Asia. A vision for Asia is, however, of enormous importance for us. Many Asian countries were once colonized by Europeans. Japan was not colonized. The development of Japanese modernism was always steady and self-disciplined. In China, architects in my generation were hurt by the Great Cultural Revolution. But I believe that a younger generation of architects are coming up in China, Korea and other Asian countries, and I have big expectations for those younger generations. In the meantime, architects from Japan and Europe are doing many important projects in Asia, but this



07 Approaches to collective form: “compositional form”, “megaform”, “group form”, respectively. © Fumihiko Maki, Buildings and Projects, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1997, p. 209.

08-09 Maki and Associates, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada, 2014.
© Shinkenichiku-sha.



10 Maki and Associates, Bihar Museum, Patna, India, 2015.
© Maki and Associates.



may not be permanent. I am sure the younger generations in Asia will make good buildings by themselves soon.

AT: I agree with you, let's hope the new generation can take over Asia, not only just Japan. After the war, Japan had to pull itself together, and the post-war was very positive. Architecture's answers to the problems of reconstruction were impressive – if we see the work of Kenzo Tange, Maekawa, and Junzo Sakakura we can confirm that. Japan is a paradise for architecture. You were in Harvard and in the States working with Josep Lluís Sert. You had time for teaching, for studying, and you were preparing yourself to be one [and the second] of the five Japanese Pritzker Prize winners. Do you think your engagement in all these activities helped you to become a better man and architect?

FM: I believe these things I have mentioned are all related to each other. I haven't stopped looking back at all my past as a way to be better for the future. Architecture gives you a tremendous opportunity to think about human beings, cultures and technology, and I have never stopped thinking about them. I enjoy doing so.

Notes

- 1 Fumihiko Maki, "Zanzo no Modernism", Iwanami publisher. September 2017.

Fumihiko Maki

(b. 1928, Tokyo). He studied architecture at the University of Tokyo (BSc, 1952) and then attended the Cranbrook Academy of Art (MSc, 1953) and the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (MSc, 1954). After his graduation, Maki remained in the United States and worked in the office of SOM (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill), in New York, in the office of Sert, Jackson and Associates, in Cambridge, and in the campus planning office of Washington University, in St. Louis. He also taught architecture and urban design at Harvard and Washington University.

When he returned to Japan in 1965, he established his own architectural firm, Maki & Associates, in Tokyo, where he also became a professor at Tokyo University, until 1987.

As one of the most prominent architects in Japan, Maki has been internationally highly honoured by many awards, including the Japan Institute of Architects' Award (1985), the American Institute of Architects' Reynolds Award (1987), the Wolf Prize, from Israel (1988), the Pritzker Architecture Prize (1993), the UIA Gold Medal Prize (1993), the Prince of Wales Prize in Urban Design, by the Harvard University (1993), the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Arts Association (1999) and the Arnold Brunner Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1999).

Maki's publications include *Metabolism 1960* (Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1960), "Investigations in Collective Form" (The School of Architecture, St. Louis, Washington University, 1964), *Kioku no Keisbo* (Chikuma Publishing Company, 1992), *Nurturing Dreams: Collected Essays on Architecture and the City* (MIT Press, 2008) and *Fumihiko Maki: Selected Buildings and Projects 1960–2012* (Phaidon Press, 2009)..