

The Katsura Imperial Villa in the Japan of Carlo Scarpa and Fernando Távora

Carlo Scarpa, Fernando Távora, Katsura Imperial Villa, Castelvecchio Museum, Pousada Mosteiro de Guimarães

/Abstract

Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978) and Fernando Távora (1923-2005) are key figures for understanding the architecture of Italy and Portugal in the second half of the twentieth century. The two architects are also linked by their shared interest in Japanese culture. Távora visited Japan in 1960; Scarpa in 1969, and again in 1978. They both visited the Katsura Imperial Villa. The drawings that Távora made at the time and the notes he took about the villa reveal a certain awe and fascination. Távora confirmed that all of the so-called Modern was there. The accounts of Scarpa's visit to the villa show an almost religious and, at all times, contagious enthusiasm, which was confirmed by his son, Tobia Scarpa (b. 1935). The paper aims to compare Japan's meanings and architecture in the works of Carlo Scarpa and Fernando Távora, based on their visits to Katsura Imperial Villa. It revisits the modernity of this seventeenth-century Japanese architectural masterpiece.

/Authors

Maria João Moreira Soares
Lusiada University, Lisbon
mj.soares@sapo.pt

João Miguel Couto Duarte
Lusiada University, Lisbon
joao.mc.duarte@gmail.com

Maria João Moreira Soares (1964) is a Lisbon-born Portuguese architect practicing since 1988, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts, Lusiada University, Lisbon, where she has taught since 1989, and a research fellow at Arnaldo Araújo Research Centre [CEAA]. She is a member of CEAA's Board of Directors. She is also a film producer. Maria João holds a degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture, Technical University of Lisbon, 1987, and a PhD in Architecture from Lusiada University, Lisbon (2004).

João Miguel Couto Duarte (1966) is a Lisbon-born Portuguese architect practicing since 1990 and an assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts, Lusiada University, Lisbon, where he teaches since 1991, and a research fellow at Arnaldo Araújo Research Centre [CEAA]. He is also a film producer. João holds a degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture, Technical University of Lisbon (1990), an MSc in Art Theories from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (2005) and a PhD in Architecture from Faculty of Architecture, University of Lisbon (2016).

Initial Considerations

Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978), from Venice, Italy, and Fernando Távora (1923-2005), from Porto, Portugal, remain key figures for understanding the architecture of Italy and Portugal in the second half of the twentieth century.

A previously felt need to re-examine the Modern Movement materialised in contrast with what was most dogmatic and universal concerning it. That need was to be based on new approaches to architecture, fuelled, among other things, by a more sensitive attention to the circumstances of each place and situation. Their shared obsession with drawing, their cultured and attentive interpretation of contexts, their work on the long history of architecture, and their desire to reconcile tradition with contemporaneity were ties that bound Scarpa and Távora. They also shared an interest in Japan and its culture. This interest manifested itself early on and was gradually fuelled by reading.

Traditional Japanese architecture appeared alongside Modern examples that incorporated traditional spatial values. Both men's interest in Japan was very much firm consolidated, accompanying and consolidating the diversity of their work as architects. Scarpa and Távora were able to visit Japan in the 1960s – Távora in May 1960; Scarpa in September 1969. Scarpa returned in 1978. The visit to the Katsura Imperial Villa, an imperial residence and its gardens built in the seventeenth century on the outskirts of Kyoto, greatly impacted both, which is confirmed by their reactions to the villa. They recognised Katsura's huge degree of modernity, which was all the more extraordinary given that it was built centuries before.

Fernando Távora and Carlo Scarpa's encounters with Katsura are the pretext to revisit the interest they both had in Japan and its architecture and verify the ways in which those encounters manifested themselves in their oeuvres.

The Modernity of Katsura Imperial Villa

The Katsura Imperial Villa [桂離宮], which comprises an imperial residence and gardens, owes its existence to the will of Prince Hachijō Toshihito (1579-1629), which was continued by his son, Prince Hachijō Toshitada (1619-1662). [Fig. 1] Toshihito was passionate about poetry, and a deep connoisseur of The Tale of Genji [源氏物語, Genji monogatari].¹ Perhaps Toshihito wanted to evoke the villa that had existed on the site, and which had apparently served as the basis for some of the events of the Tale of Genji. The exact dates of the start and completion of the complex are unknown, although it is believed that its initial project dates back to 1615 and that the villa was already finished in 1663.²

¹ The Tale of Genji is a tenth-century work by Murasaki Shikibu (ca. 978–ca. 1014), a Japanese court lady of the Heian period (794–1185). It is regarded as the first novel ever written. See Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. and ed. Royall Tyler (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

² Arata Isozaki, "The Diagonal Strategy: Katsura as Envisioned by 'Enshu's Taste,'" in *Katsura: Imperial Villa*, ed. Virginia Ponciroli (Milan: Electa Architecture, 2005), 9.

Its author is also unknown.³ The belief that it was Kobori Enshu (1579-1647), an architect and creator of Japanese gardens who was a recognised master of the tea ceremony, was fuelled by the fact that Prince Hachijō Yakahito (1703-1762), who owned Katsura, referred to some of the sections of the gardens as *Enshugonomi* [遠州ごのみ], which means in the Enshu's taste/style of Enshu.⁴ In the seventeenth century, the Western notion of authorship was foreign to the Japanese reality. Katsura was the result of the joint work of Toshihito and then Toshitada and the *daiku* [大工], the master builders or carpenters who worked on the project.

The Katsura Imperial Villa – its architecture and gardens – was built during a period of transformation in Japanese architecture, during which two distinct styles of residential architecture coexisted. On the one hand, there was the *shoin zukuri* [書院造] style, with medieval roots, which was adopted above all in samurai residences, and which appeared in the most formal and magnificent spaces. It was based on *kiwari* [木割], a system of proportions for the wooden bones of buildings that had been refined by the *daiku*. On the other hand, the *sukiya zukuri style* [数寄屋造り], used in the more common houses and soan tea pavilions, was more stripped down and was marked by the taste of the owners, thus assuming a freer adoption of *kiwari* and other construction precepts. Katsura has characteristics of both styles, in a complex and not always discernible coexistence. Beneath its apparent serene unity, especially to Western eyes, a play of distinct, if not contradictory values is revealed – aesthetic values, of course, but also political and social ones – which naturally offers itself up to multiple interpretations, which are not always clear cut either. “Indeed, Katsura is charged with contradictory, conflicting elements, which signal a number of messages at the same time. Such is Katsura’s ambiguity.”⁵

The reopening of Japan to the West, forced by the USA in 1853 and ending a period of more than two centuries of fruitful self-imposed isolationism, revealed to the world an architecture that had long been forgotten and which could only be reached through scarce images and always relative in rigour. Interest in Katsura wasn't immediate, and the villa was ignored in the first Western books on traditional Japanese architecture. It was the German Bruno Taut (1880-1938) who rescued Katsura from this oblivion. Taut visited Katsura for the first time on 4 May 1933, his birthday. He had recently arrived in Japan with his wife, Erica Wittich (1893-1975), fleeing the Nazi regime in Germany. In his diary, his notes reveal great astonishment – “Infinite and so rich in relationships that you are overwhelmed.”⁶ He returned to Katsura a year later. The impact was greater – “It does not leave you inebriated, but something more: you savour it deeply with the senses.”⁷ The drawings he made at the time, in which one discovers a desired

3 Isozaki, “The Diagonal Strategy,” 9.

4 Isozaki, “The Diagonal Strategy,” 9.

5 Isozaki, “The Diagonal Strategy,” 19.

6 Bruno Taut, “Reflections on Katsura,” in *Katsura: Imperial Villa*, ed. Virginia Ponciroli (Milan: Electa Architecture, 2005), 331.

7 Taut, “Reflections on Katsura,” 343.



1

approximation to Japanese designs, confirm his interest in the relationship between architecture and gardens. Taut's great appreciation of Katsura was first expressed in the book *Nippon. Japan, seen through European eyes* [ニッポン—ヨーロッパ人の眼で見た, *Nippon. Yōroppa-jin no me de mita*], published in Tokyo in 1934, in Japanese.⁸ The fact that the pioneering affirmation of Katsura's value came from a foreigner caused some hurt among Japanese architects. Taut returned to Katsura in *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*,⁹ from 1936, and soon after, in *Houses and People of Japan*,¹⁰ from 1937, both published in Tokyo. The English text helped spread the villa and affirm its modernity. “What would you call this architecture in modern terms? I asked my friends. After some talk, we came to the conclusion that it was an architecture of function or one might call it an architecture of motive.”¹¹ This confirmed a widespread and long-lasting interest in Katsura, at the same time as it was included in the group of reference works for Modern Architecture, making Katsura a major and universal moment in Japanese architecture.

Taut's initial contact with Katsura became central to his understanding of Japanese architecture. Through his books, this understanding helped determine the way Japan's architecture was valued. Taut praises Katsura's simplicity,

8 Isozaki, “The Diagonal Strategy,” 19.

9 Bruno Taut, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1936).

10 Bruno Taut, *Houses and People of Japan* (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1937).

11 Taut, *Houses and People of Japan*, 291.

Fig. 1

Katsura Imperial Villa, Kyoto, Japan, seventeenth century. (Maria João Moreira Soares, 2016)

the absolute relationship between the architecture and the gardens, the way every detail is defined, in a balance between individuality and submission to the unity of the whole. In contrast, the ostentation he finds in the Tōshō-gū temple [東照宮] in Nikkō is met with disdain.

Carlo Scarpa and Fernando Távora, a note on travelling and reading

The Japanese writer and poet Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) was a traveller. During his travels, Bashō wrote diaries, combining prose with poetry, which placed him in the time and space of a seventeenth-century Japan on its way to isolationism. In one of these diaries, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* [奥の細道, Oku no hosomichi], he wrote:

Months and days are the wayfarers of a hundred generations, the years too, going and coming, are wanderers. For those who drift life away on a boat, for those who meet age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey, the journey itself home. Among Ancients, too, many died on a journey. And so, I too – for how many years – drawn by a cloud wisp wind, have been unable to stop thoughts of rambling.¹²

Carlo Scarpa died while travelling in Sendai, Japan, in 1978, the victim of a fall. He was trying to retrace Bashō's steps.¹³ Scarpa's first trip to Japan took place in 1969. Scarpa travelled with his son, Tobia Scarpa (b. 1935), at the invitation of Cesare Cassina (1909-1979), to visit the Tokyo Furniture Salon, which opened in August of that year.¹⁴ The Scarpas didn't travel until September. Nine years earlier, in May 1960, Fernando Távora had visited Japan. This was one of the most significant stages of a four-month trip that had taken him to the USA and Mexico, as well as Thailand, Pakistan, Egypt and Greece. Scarpa also visited Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries after his tour of Japan. Like Scarpa, Távora's trip to Japan was also prompted by an international event, the World Design Conference [WoDeCo], which opened in Tokyo in May 1960. Like Bashō, Távora recorded his trip in a *Diário de "Bordo"* [Logbook], writing and drawing.¹⁵ He thus left his memories of what was a particular moment in his life.

Scarpa waited until he was 63 years old to make his long-desired trip to Japan. His contact with Japanese culture had various origins, including the phenomenon of Japanism that reached Italy at the time, particularly Venice.¹⁶ It is likely that his admiration for Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), who visited Japan for the first time in 1905, played a strong role in Scarpa's interest. Scarpa had long been collecting books on Japanese art and customs. *Taccuino giapponese*

12 Matsuo Bashō, *Bashō's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Bashō*, trans. David Landis Barnhill (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 49.

13 Silvia Catitti, "The Japanese Roots of Carlo Scarpa's Poetic Architecture," in *Italia e Giappone a confronto: cultura, psicologia, arti*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli, 2017), 54.

14 Mauro Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone* (Milan: Mondadori, 2017), 28.

15 Fernando Távora, *Diário de "bordo"*, ed. Rita Marnoto (Porto: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012).

16 Catitti, "The Japanese Roots," 34.

[Japanese notebook],¹⁷ written by Mario Gromo (1901-1960) in 1959, in which Scarpa had left abundant signs and annotations in his own hand, was decisive in preparing for the trip.¹⁸

Távora was 36 years old when he visited Japan. Thanks to his family background, characterised by his father's interest in the arts, he had a precocious and thorough knowledge of the country and its culture.¹⁹ Before the trip to Japan was even decided, Távora owned a book on Japanese art and several books on traditional Japanese architecture written by Japanese authors.²⁰ On the 1960 trip, Távora's initial focus was on the USA and the possibility of seeing the oeuvre of Frank Lloyd Wright. His visit to Taliesin East deeply moved him.²¹ The chance to visit Japan was a last minute decision, but it was one of the most important moments in the four months that Távora was away from Portugal. Távora and Scarpa acquired more books during their stays in Japan. Their interest in works on Japanese culture and architecture continued in subsequent years.

Scarpa's and Távora's encounters with Katsura Imperial Villa

Registering my father on a visit to Katsura would make a whole film today. [...] [i]t would be a symphony of exclamations and endless reminders: look at this, you see, how good. An endless story. I am grateful to him for buying a crate of rare books with a loan from me because they are now mine and bear his unmistakable scent.²²

Tobia Scarpa thus expresses his memories of his father's first encounter with the Katsura Imperial Villa. Katsura and the Ise Shrine [伊勢神宮], or Jingū [神宮], became fundamental references for Scarpa's work, constituting models that contained within them the codes of sophistication and constructive organisation of Japanese architecture.²³ Scarpa had enormous expectations of Katsura and its riches, aroused by careful reading, years before his 1969 trip, of Mario Gromo's book²⁴ and also Fosco Maraini's (1912-2004) book, *Ore giapponesi* [Japanese Hours],²⁵ published in 1956. Gromo and Maraini had Taut as a reference. Curiously, Scarpa didn't own any of Taut's books on Japan.²⁶ Despite these readings, Scarpa is confronted with the "fiume in piena", [river in full spate]

17 Mario Gromo, *Taccuino giapponese* (Turin: Paravia, 1959).

18 Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, 29.

19 João Miguel Couto Duarte and Maria João Moreira Soares, "Fernando Távora's Japan through books: A fascination with tradition in search of innovation," in *Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Maria do Rosário Monteiro, Mário Ming Kong, and Maria João Pereira Neto (Leiden: CRC Press, 2021), 180.

20 Duarte and Soares, "Fernando Távora's Japan through books."

21 Távora, *Diário de "bordo"*, 235.

22 Tobia Scarpa, "Di qualche ricordo di un viaggio fatto con mio padre e maestro in Giappone," in *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, ed. Mauro Pierconti (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2017), 137. All the translations in English were done by the authors.

23 Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, 53.

24 Gromo, *Taccuino giapponese*.

25 Fosco Maraini, *Ore giapponesi* (Bari: Leonardo da Vinci, 1956).

26 Catitti, "The Japanese Roots," 50.

as Mauro Pierconti writes,²⁷ which is the overwhelming experience of living Katsura, – one doesn't believe what one sees because of the excess of what is beyond one's gaze. In the unity that is Katsura, in its construction juxtaposed in time, which is characteristic of its elegance, so much appreciated by Scarpa, there is a humble luxury that reveals itself in a reciprocity between the whole and the detail. It's an astonishing modesty, an unrivalled festivity. It's something "capable of producing a wealth that we are willing to spend."²⁸ An endless story.

Távora visited Villa Katsura on 23 May. He had long been familiar with the site through books. The visit took place in a group, although Távora would have preferred to do it alone. The hour he spent in the complex proved to be too short and controlled. The notes he left in his diary are scarce, but they confirm the enormous satisfaction Katsura gave him.

As I expected, it's a jewel. There's nothing palatial about it to our European ideals. No major dimensions, no gold. It's a kind of bourgeois house, perhaps somewhere between an ordinary dwelling and a palace. But perhaps the great charm lies in the whole house-garden. It's not a house plus a garden – it's a whole.²⁹

Távora was particularly sensitive to the garden, as revealed by the only drawing he made during the visit, where he combines views of the entrance to the main pavilion and the *engawa* [縁側] that surrounds the middle pavilion with written notes on architectural materials and paths. The line is fine, as was his habit, trying to retain the delicacy of the relationship between the architecture and the gardens. There wasn't time for longer records. The desire to retain Katsura, which the drawing seeks to perpetuate, did not prevent a more rational reflection on the meaning and relevance of the work for contemporary times. "What a discovery Katsura might have been for modern architects (and Mondrian, of course, among others)!"³⁰ Távora confirms Katsura's Modern value, in a line of continuity with Taut. "Of course it's of immense interest to us, but the principles are those that have been injected into us for twenty or thirty years. All of the so-called Modern is there – Mies, Corbusianish, Wright (the latter less so, in formal terms)."³¹ Significantly, Távora bought the 1958 edition of *Houses and People of Japan* in Japan.³² He expressed his desire to return to Japan when he left but was unable to fulfil this wish.

"An endless story"

In a photograph taken on the eve of his death, Carlo Scarpa is shown touching, almost caressing, a rope that ties together two tubular elements of a spatial

27 Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, 56.

28 Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, 55.

29 Távora, *Diário de "bordo,"* 330.

30 Távora, *Diário de "bordo,"* 330.

31 Távora, *Diário de "bordo,"* 330.

32 Duarte and Soares, "Fernando Távora's Japan through books," 184.

structure: one vertical, made of metal; the other horizontal, made of bamboo. In their simplicity and complexity, these two elements and the knot that unites them evoke an articulation of Japanese space: successions of modules that multiply spatially in horizontally unravelled layers. Pierconti points out that the knot touched by Scarpa is both articulation and decoration,³³ adding that Katsura should be considered the place where the transfiguration of this simultaneity into a total work of art is most evident. This explains Scarpa's fascination with Katsura perhaps.

In 1977, a year before his final visit to Japan, the first monograph on Scarpa was published in the magazine *SD: Space Design*. In a conversation included in the monograph,³⁴ Harata Isozaki (1931-2022) and Tadashi Yokoyama (b. 1939) discuss Scarpa's affinity with the Dutch *de Stijl* movement,³⁵ in which Wright dominates. In this affinity, and in a certain liberation from Wright's yoke, Yokoyama mentions that Scarpa "appears to have discovered a different way of presence for walls as an entity vested with a 'fictional' feeling of some kind."³⁶ Isozaki goes on to say that "Scarpa primarily stages spatial stratification in the existing ambience by designing the floor covering, the wall, or the ceiling. Not only walls but differentiated horizontal and vertical surfaces form permeable spatial boundaries."³⁷ Yokoyama and Isozaki's observations suggest that Scarpa followed an architectural process based on a stratification of mobile layers. In the documentary *Il padiglione sull'acqua* [The pavilion on the water],³⁸ from 2023, Japanese philosopher Ryosuke Ohashi (b. 1944) wonders what is familiar about Scarpa's work and what makes it so Japanese. The answer lies beyond appearance. Ohashi finds the Buddhist concept *mujō* [無常] in Scarpa. *Mujō*, which means impermanence, or transience, relates to reality that is always changing, in transition.³⁹ In this impermanence, this ephemeral constancy, there are no definitive measurements, memories or defined borders. Everything disappears, everything dies, but because there is transience, everything acquires renewed meaning. Paradoxically, Isozaki says that Scarpa's work needs the concrete 'thing', because "[Scarpa] uses the reverse method of leading the connection of parts to form the whole."⁴⁰ In this method, what the eye sees and what the hand feels are fundamental. It's the hand whose finger touches the string while the eye observes it. In this touch, there is a layering of layers. Articulation is always necessary, acting as a hinge. Perhaps Scarpa's work lives in this paradox between impermanence and touch – just as Katsura presents himself. It was,

33 Pierconti, *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, 54.

34 Arata Isozaki and Tadashi Yokoyama, "Dialogue: Speaking of Carlo Scarpa (Summary)," *SD: Space Design*, no. 153 (June 1977): 3–4.

35 Carlo Scarpa designed the Piet Mondrian exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome in 1956.

36 Isozaki and Yokoyama, "Dialogue," 3.

37 Isozaki and Yokoyama, "Dialogue," 3.

38 *Il padiglione sull'acqua* [The Pavilion on the Water], documentary film, directed by Stefano Croci and Silvia Siberini (Bologna: Caucaso Factory, 2023).

39 Murielle Hladick, "Mujō – l'impermanence," in *Vocabulaire de la spatialité japonaise*, ed. Philippe Bonnin, Nishida Masatsugu, and Inaga Shigemitsu (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2014), 356–58.

40 Isozaki and Yokoyama, "Dialogue," 3.

after all, a hinge like this that Scarpa designed for Castelvecchio (1957-1964) in the passage that joins Reggia to Caserna. The passage opens up space for impermanence, while at the same time tying these two bodies together like a knot. Katsura's Japan also resides in Verona, Italy. [Fig. 2]

In an interview in 2001, Fernando Távora said:

I can hardly forget the deep relationship that exists between me and my work, a family relationship. [...]. And I always keep a photograph with me of my parents taken in the cloister of the Convent of Santa Marinha da Costa, in 1915, when I was not yet born. // Relationships, fatality.⁴¹

These reflections by Távora, made later on in his life, reveal a closeness to his work that reflects affection, which goes far beyond a circumstantial connection, to inscribe itself in a broad and lasting temporal dimension, where permanence relativises any transience. Architecture, being contemporary, as he always defended from an early age, participates in a continuum that precedes and succeeds it. Távora's relationship with Japan was one that was very much fuelled by fascination. The encounter with Japan confirmed this fascination, especially with the country's traditional architecture and most ancient customs. These were testimonies over a long period of time, fuelled by traditions and precepts, even if, from Távora's perspective, the acceleration of the 1960s seemed to be irreparably jeopardising them. Several of the drawings in the *Diário de 'Bordo'* made in Japan confirm Távora's preoccupation with the details of architecture, especially traditional interior spaces, an obsession with measuring everything to capture everything. He was interested in proportions, materials, proximity to the body and the simplicity of space. He was also interested in the relationship between space and the outside, particularly gardens. It's easy to imagine Távora touching the architecture – the wooden structures, the *shōji* [障子], the almost always rough stones – responding to the call of what he saw.

Katsura was certainly one of the architectural works that Távora most appreciated during his visit to Japan. The combination of architecture and gardens, remarkable as it was, revealed a huge and questioning modernity. Katsura is not immediately and explicitly reflected in Távora's work, but it is possible to find its subtle presence in the new wing of rooms at the Pousada Mosteiro de Guimarães (1972-1989), an intervention full of affection rather than familiarity. Távora always referred to the Minho origins of the new body of the pousada⁴². However, Katsura is present in the abstraction of the wooden planes that enclose the rooms, in the concealment of details, in the way it approaches a large piece of furniture, in the merger of the transition between the interior spaces and the garden. Katsura is present, above all, in the serene incorporation of the new wing into a continuum of time, which tends towards a history that could be infinite. It's a kind of fatality. [Fig. 3]

41 Fernando Távora, *Fernando Távora: as raízes e os frutos; palavra, desenho, obra, vol. 1.1*, ed. Manuel Mendes (Porto: Fundação Instituto José Marques da Silva, 2021), xxvi.

42 The Pousada Mosteiro de Guimarães is located in Minho, the northernmost region of Portugal.



2



3

Fig. 2

Carlo Scarpa, Oblique passage, Castelvecchio Museum, Verona, Italy, 1964 (Maria João Moreira Soares, 2014)

Fig. 3

Fernando Távora, new wing, Pousada Mosteiro de Guimarães, Guimarães, Portugal, 1972-1984 (Maria João Moreira Soares, 2022)

Final considerations

“So it is that Katsura is a text rich with ambiguity where architectural languages of spatially and temporally different sources are juxtaposed.”⁴³

Beneath its seemingly serene existence, the Katsura Imperial Villa unfolds into an unexpected complexity in which multiple measurements of different thicknesses and meanings can be discerned. Starting with Bruno Taut, the Modern Movement recognised in Katsura the clarity of the spaces and their organisation, and the sincerity in the way this organisation was materialised, values that were clearly in line with modern ambitions.

Carlo Scarpa and Fernando Távora were aware of this modern appreciation, but their views are more nuanced, confirming the overlaps in Katsura. Távora is sensitive to the unity of the villa and its contemporaneity, discerning a continuum of time-based overlaps; Scarpa rejoices in the details and their relationship to the architectural work as a whole, revealing an empathy with the conceptual dimension of Japanese spatial organisation and the successive overlaps of space-time that it entails. This notion of superimposition is perhaps the most compelling echo of the Katsura Imperial Villa in the works of Scarpa and Távora – in Távora, that echo is present in the work with successive time-based layers; in Scarpa, the echo permeates an abstract space-time complex.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., within the project UID/04041/2025 - Arnaldo Araújo Research Centre.

43 Isozaki, “The Diagonal Strategy,” 10.

Bibliography

- Bashō, Matsuo. *Bashō's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Bashō*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Catitti, Silvia. “The Japanese Roots of Carlo Scarpa’s Poetic Architecture.” In *Italia e Giappone a confronto: Cultura, psicologia, arti*, edited by Stefano U. Baldassarri, 33–59. Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2017.
- Gromo, Mario. *Taccuino giapponese*. Turin: Paravia, 1959.
- Hladik, Murielle. “Mujō – L’impermanence.” In *Vocabulaire de la spatialité japonaise*, edited by Philippe Bonnin, Nishida Masatsugu, and Inaga Shigemi, 356–58. Paris: CNRS, 2014.
- Isozaki, Arata. “The Diagonal Strategy: Katsura as Envisioned by ‘Enshu’s Taste’.” In *Katsura: Imperial Villa*, edited by Virginia Ponciroli, 9–41. Milan: Electa Architecture, 2005.
- Isozaki, Arata, and Tadashi Yokoyama. “Dialogue: Speaking of Carlo Scarpa (Summary).” *SD: Space Design*, no. 153 (June 1977): 3–4.
- Maraini, Fosco. *Ore giapponesi*. Bari: Leonardo da Vinci, 1956.
- Pierconti, Mauro. *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*. Milan: Mondadori, 2017.
- Scarpa, Tobia. “Di qualche ricordo di un viaggio fatto con mio padre e maestro in Giappone.” In *Carlo Scarpa e il Giappone*, edited by Mauro Pierconti, 136–37. Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2017.
- Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji*. Edited and translated by Royall Tyler. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Speidel, Manfred. “Bruno Taut and the Katsura Villa.” In *Katsura: Imperial Villa*, edited by Virginia Ponciroli, 319–29. Milan: Electa Architecture, 2005.
- Taut, Bruno. *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*. Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1936.
- Taut, Bruno. *Houses and People of Japan*. Tokyo: Sanseido, 1937.
- Taut, Bruno. “Reflections on Katsura.” In *Katsura: Imperial Villa*, edited by Virginia Ponciroli, 330–47. Milan: Electa Architecture, 2005.
- Távora, Fernando. *Diário de “bordo”*. Edited by Rita Marnoto. Porto: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012.
- Távora, Fernando. *Fernando Távora: As raízes e os frutos; Palavra, desenho, obra. Vol. 1.1*, edited by Manuel Mendes. Porto: Fundação Instituto José Marques da Silva, 2021.