From Victorian to Modernist: the changing perceptions of Japanese architecture encapsulated in Wells Coates' Japonisme dovetailing East and West

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Abstract

This thesis chronicles the change in perception of Japanese architecture from the Victorian, where it was little recognised, to an inspiration for inter-war modernist architecture and lifestyle; to record, to a lesser extent, how Japanese art, particularly the way in which it was displayed, underwent a similar renaissance, and the part played by architect-engineer, Wells Coates, in this reversal of opinion. Japanese 'influence' on British design from the mid-1850s until the development of Art Nouveau is generally accepted but during the inter-war period inspiration from Japan is less readily acknowledged. However, this experience continued during the 1920s and 1930s and can be perceived as an important inspiration on modernist design and architecture, as the work of Wells Coates demonstrates.

Born in Tokyo, Coates was an eminent figure within the British modern movement and was responsible for some of the most advanced modernist designs in Britain during the inter-war period. He frequently referred to his formative upbringing in the East and it is palpable that this childhood influence had a profound effect upon his work. Coates was fond of listing the skills he had acquired as a child in Japan and explaining how this Eastern training had been dovetailed into his Western scientific education. He considered Japan to be more advanced than the West in many aspects of design and living; an exemplar for a free, uncluttered, modern lifestyle and an inspiration for modern architecture.

However, Coates was not the only modernist designer in Britain to be inspired by Japan. In this thesis I shall discuss Coates' dissemination of knowledge relating to Japan and Japanese architecture, analyse the use of features taken from the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling by modernist architects-designers in Britain, and to question whether this Japanese inspiration could be considered a continuation of Japonisme during the inter-war period.

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Was Japan an inspirational source for British modernism? This question resulted from my MA research and dissertation, 'The denial of influence: Japan and British Design 1919-1939' (2001), in which I sought to illustrate the significance of Japanese art and design in the development of Art Deco by examining the motifs, patterns and design details present in the British suburban housing of the inter-war period. It was whilst researching for this project that I discovered the architect-engineer, Wells Coates (1895-1958), citing the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling as an inspirational source. I was intrigued by the possibility that this inspiration, dependent on Coates' significance, could have played an important part in the development of the work of the British modern movement in relation to architecture, interior and landscape design. This premise raised a further question whether Coates' Japanese inspiration be could considered a continuation of Japonisme during the inter-war years?

Japonisme, the term coined by Philippe Burty in 1872 to describe the enthusiasm for Japanese art and culture, is well documented and readily acknowledged in British design from the mid 1850s until the end of the 19th century and the development of Art Nouveau; Victorian designers, such as Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), incorporated Japanese design devices into their work. However, there has been little written on Japonisme during the inter-war period as it has been less readily acknowledged; examples that have been cited are in fashion and the work of the potter, Bernard Leach (1887-1979).

This thesis has been written in a chronological order, structured into three parts; Part One – Japonisme in Architecture consists of chapters one and two. In chapter one the theoretical framework of Japonisme/Orientalism is considered through a literature review of texts on Japonisme and a discussion on the relevance of Edward Said's *Orientalism* to this research. British Japonisme in the historical context of Anglo-Japanese relations is examined. We shall observe the various opportunities to view things Japanese, with particular reference to Japanese architecture, from the 17th century onwards, and to determine whether a deteriorating political relationship could have a detrimental effect on the perception of Japanese art and design. Within the scope of this thesis it will not be possible to discuss in detail the breadth and depth of Japonisme in Britain during the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century; I shall concentrate on key moments in the dissemination of information on Japanese architecture in order to illustrate the early responses to this alien form of construction.

Of all the Japanese arts, architecture appears to have been the last to receive recognition. Although the architect, Josiah Conder (1852-1920), and Dresser were

promoting Japanese architecture from the late 1870s, others considered Japan to have no architecture; being prone to earthquakes and building primarily in wood disqualified Japan, in the eyes of some, from having any lasting architecture or architectural heritage. In chapter two we shall examine the response of Victorian architect-designers to the exhibitions of Japanese artefacts identified in chapter one, and by studying contemporary texts on Japanese architecture we shall seek to ascertain the Victorian attitude towards this foreign phenomenon. We shall continue our study of texts until the 1910s, including articles published in the new art journals launched in the 1890s, in order to identify those writers on Japanese architecture, in particular, the traditional dwelling, and those writing on more detailed aspects of Japanese living, who identify elements that will become key factors to the modernist architects of the inter-war period.

In Part Two, chapter three we examine modernism, commencing with an overview of the origins, aims and utopian ideals, and the response to these primarily Continental notions in Britain. Modernism was considered to be not just another style but a philosophy for life. Although modernism during the 1920s and 30s also referred to fine art, literature, music, film and photography, in the context of this research I am referring to modernism, primarily, in architectural, interior and landscape design. The architecture to which I refer is that described by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in their 1932 seminal text *The International Style: architecture since 1922*. There appears to be much confusion when deciding when modernism began; start dates can vary from the 18th century until 1914, the date chosen by the V&A for their 2006 exhibition believing modernism in design was not 'fully-developed' until after World War One (2006, p. 17). Much of the chapter is based on my journals research, which is explained in 'methodology' below. My most in depth study has been of the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (RIBAJ) and it is here we discover the RIBA members' concerns over modernism and contrast these to the reception of and discussion on modernism within *The Architectural Review*.

The inter-war years were a confusing time; modernism and Art Deco were often considered to be one and the same. Osbert Lancaster, the author of *Pillar to Post*, used the terms functional for modernism and modernistic for Art Deco, which possibly enhanced the confusion. The name Art Deco was coined during the 1960s and derives from the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*. This style was also known as moderne, jazz modern, streamlinist, zigzag and Paris style. It seems there was a desire to discover the forefathers of modernism; to give the movement a pedigree, which is odd when one considers this was a movement that advocated breaking with the past. The battle lines for the 'Tradition versus Modernism' debate were clearly

drawn by the end of the 1920s prompting John Betjeman to announce 'The Death of Modernism' in 1931 (AR, vol. 70, p. 61).

Part Three consists of three chapters; chapters four and five are devoted to Wells Coates. Described in January 2005 as 'the comeback kid' (Croft, 2005 p. 13) Coates' work appears to be undergoing something of a revival with the completed renovation of Lawn Road flats, now known as the Isokon flats, the refurbishment of Embassy Court, Brighton, and at 10 Palace Gate, the restoration work and development of the penthouse. Today predominantly black and white photographs are the main source of information on Coates' interior design work as most of his interiors have been destroyed. Whilst, in some cases the quality of these images is excellent, the lack of colour can lead us to believe these interiors were cold un-textured spaces. I was fortunate in gaining access to Lawn Road flats, Hampstead, and Embassy Court, Brighton, before the renovations and, in Surrey, I was successful in locating Coates' remaining Sunspan houses. Within this thesis, there is insufficient space to address Coates' love of sailing, a passion he developed as a child in Japan, or his boat and sail designs; also I have not dealt in detail with his designs for electrical appliances, and furniture designs for B Burkle & Sons, P E Gane, Hilmor, Isokon and PEL, but have concentrated primarily on his domestic architectural and interior designs.

Born in Japan in 1895 to Canadian Methodist Missionaries, Coates a was founder member of the Twentieth Century Group, Unit One, Chairman of the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) Group, the British branch of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne). He was responsible for some of the most advanced modernist designs in Britain during the inter-war years and is probably best known for his radio designs for Ekco and as the architect of Lawn Road Flats in which his 'minimum' flat design was realised. Throughout his life Coates frequently referred to his formative upbringing in the East and it is palpable that this childhood influence had a profound effect upon his work. He was fond of listing the skills he had acquired as a child in Japan and explaining how this Eastern training had been dovetailed into his Western scientific education.

His life and work are discussed in chapter four to ascertain the nature and degree to which his work demonstrates inspiration from Japan. We shall observe his childhood in Japan to discover: did he have a bona fide interest and knowledge of Japan? We shall examine both his written and design work in order to determine: is there evidence of Japanese inspiration? His involvement, during the 1930s, with contemporary architectural, art and design groups, institutes and associations are examined in chapter five, in order to establish: how significant was Coates within the British modern movement? This in turn

will help to establish: what role if any did Coates play in the dissemination of knowledge relating to Japan and Japanese architecture during the inter-war period in Britain?

In chapter 6, 'Japonisme during the inter-war years 1919-1939' we shall consider the aesthetic views on Japan post World War One; 'the mystification of the Orient' and the work of the potter, Bernard Leach. In this final chapter a thematic approach is taken to the aspects of Japanese architecture and living that are suggested as inspirational sources for modernist architecture and lifestyle. We identify the writings and designs of those writers, critics, architects and designers who in addition to Coates, refer to Japan, and we shall discover whether Coates' ideas were taken up by other members of the British modern movement. By questioning Coates' possible position as a disseminator of knowledge on Japan and Japanese architecture a further proposition is raised: could Coates' inspiration from Japan be considered to be Japonisme? If this is the case, might it be feasible to suggest Japonisme continued during the inter-war period?

Methodology

The key strands of the theoretical framework for this PhD are Japonisme/Orientalism and modernism. However a good understanding and knowledge of the Anglo-Japanese relationship, both cultural and political, in the 19th and 20th century is also necessary. My main methodology is archival research which can be divided into two parts: the study of texts, primarily architectural and design journals, and archives, in particular, the Wells Coates Archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montréal. This archival research has been combined with analytical critical tools on Japonisme and modernism. The theoretical framework of Japonisme/Orientalism has been established through a literature review of texts on Japonisme. An examination of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and post-Said criticisms was undertaken to establish the relevance of Said's text to this research. The issue of 'mystification of the Orient' with regard to Bernard Leach has been studied in order to establish a British aesthetic perspective of Japan in the 1920s and 30s. The review of British Japonisme within the historical context of Anglo-Japanese relations has been examined through the study of primary and secondary source texts.

This thesis has been written in a chronological order to facilitate clarity, particularly in relation to Part One, chapter two 'An appraisal of the response to Japanese architecture and art before 1919'. These texts, although well known in some instances, have not, I believe, been collated before to demonstrate the development of the discussion surrounding Japanese architecture prior to 1920. As the publication date of these texts and the order in which they appeared is significant to our understanding of the evolution of the

debate, a vertical structure was chosen as opposed to a thematic one. The decision to introduce my case study, Wells Coates in Part Three was taken as I wished to contextualise Coates' work within modernism and the previous Japonisme.

My methodology was to look in the least likely place for the acceptance of modernism, the RIBAJ, to catalogue this reaction and any mention of Japan or Coates. If any discussion on these was to be found it could then be perceived that these were valid areas worthy of debate. Once recorded, this data could be contrasted with that of journals I knew would include modernism and the work of Coates, *The Architectural Review,* and promote Japan, *The Studio.* By undertaking this detailed journal analysis I hoped to gain a holist view of inter-war attitudes towards modernism and Japan, to identify Coates' significance, contribution to the British modern movement and to Japonisme. In my listings I have included articles on foreign modern architecture, however I have not discussed these in detail within this thesis as I wish to focus purely on a British interpretation of modernism and to demonstrate that there was discussion and realised projects in this country albeit on a smaller scale than in Europe and America.

Initially, a detailed study was made of the RIBAJ for the years 1919-1939 to assess the RIBA's attitude towards modernism and to discover if there was a continuation of discussion on Japanese architecture and interest in Japan during the inter-war period. The RIBAJ was chosen because it is the journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a learned society representing the established and accepted principles of the profession. Its journal, therefore, would be unlikely to acknowledge new ideas as readily as less august publications. I considered it important to seek the response to modernism in a periodical where it would be less likely to find immediate acceptance, in order to gauge the extent of the reaction to modernism in architecture. Josiah Conder and Christopher Dresser had contributed to the dissemination of knowledge on traditional Japanese architecture at learned architectural societies through lectures and papers during the 1870s and 1880s, a time when Japonisme was at its height in Britain; did this discussion continue during the 1920s and 1930s within the RIBAJ? I considered that should a continuation of the discussion on Japan and Japanese architecture and discussion on modernism exist within the RIBAJ then these were topics for serious architectural debate during the inter-war years. This RIBAJ research has been compiled into a listing of references on modernism, Japan and Wells Coates, and is submitted as Appendix 11 to this thesis.

The purpose of studying the RIBAJ was to search an area where it would not be expected to find an enthusiasm for either modernism or Japonisme and to contrast this with a study of journals that are known for their interest in both. These were *The Architectural Review, The Studio* and to a lesser extent *The Architect's Journal*; these publications

regularly promoted modern architecture from the Continent, therefore it would be less likely to find, within their pages, reaction against modernism. *The Studio* was a keen promoter of things Japanese; *The Architects' Journal* and *The Architectural Review* published articles by Coates, including one in November 1931 entitled 'Inspiration from Japan'. I have also consulted *Design for To-day,* the journal of the Design and Industries Association in search of reference to Coates' work. The study of the journals was undertaken in order to analyse and compare: the response to modernism, discussion on Japan, Japanese art and architecture, the inclusion and review of Coates' work.

To ascertain, in greater detail, whether Japan was cited by others as an inspirational source for modern design during the 1920s and 30s, I compiled two lists of published texts in date order; one a list of texts on, primarily, British modern architecture, design and landscape design, published in Britain from 1919, and the other a list of texts on Japanese architecture, design and landscape design, published in Britain from the 1860s. The discrepancy in the publishing dates occurred because I felt it necessary to understand the extent of published material on Japanese architecture before the inter-war period in order to ascertain the degree of exposure there had been to this subject prior to 1919. I inserted into the lists, relevant texts from my earlier journals research, which helped clarify the protagonists.

In studying the texts on modern architecture, design and landscape from 1919, I have been searching for references to Coates in order to establish his significance within the British modern movement, for references that associate his work with Japanese design, and for references to Japanese architecture, design and landscape, particularly those which cite Japan as an example for modernist design. In the texts on Japanese architecture, design and landscape it is possible to trace a positive discussion on Japanese architecture started by Conder in 1878. By cross referencing these two lists of annotated texts on modern and Japanese architecture it was hoped a bridging between to the two would emerge bringing into visibility a previously hidden dialogue on Japonisme.

My two week study at the Wells Coates Archive at the CCA in September 2004, was essential as through examining Coates' diaries and papers, I have been able to ascertain the extent to which he was exposed to Japanese culture whilst growing-up in Japan. This research has informed my analysis of his designs and writing, his reference to traditional Japanese domestic architecture and his contribution to modernism in British design. This archive was sold to the CCA in 1988 by Coates' daughter, Laura Cohn, and at the time of my visit, appeared to be still in the state in which it had been received; individual documents, collated in boxes, were un-numbered. Within the Wells Coates biography file at the RIBA library there is a 'copy of catalogue of Wells Coates' papers

sold to the CCA ... by Mrs. Cohn on 20 February 1988'; this original catalogue, although retyped, was still in use at the CCA in 2004. One diary for the year 1911 and part of the 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland' are written entirely in shorthand and at the time of my visit there were no plans for transcription. Although Coates appears to have used the Pitman shorthand system I was unable to attempt any transcribing due to time restrictions.

Other archives that have been studied in relation to Coates are: The Pritchard Papers at University of East Anglia (UEA), the Wells Coates Unit One papers at the Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Britain and the RIBA library.

Part One – Japonisme in Architecture

Chapter 1 – Historical context of Anglo-Japanese Relations: Japonisme, Orientalism and Japanese architecture

Introduction

In this first chapter we shall examine Anglo-Japanese political and cultural contact in order to contextualise our study of Japonisme and Japanese architecture. As Edward Said wrote, '... ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied' (1995 p. 5). We shall discuss the symbiotic nature of the Anglo-Japanese relationship; the motivation for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; the change in the West's perception of Japan after the Japanese victories in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars; Japanese involvement in World War I and the deterioration of Anglo-Japanese political relations during the inter-war period.

Much has been written on Victorian Japonisme and Japanese inspiration on Art Nouveau. Within the limits of this thesis it will not be possible to cover all the fascinating aspects of this earlier inspiration from Japan; we shall, therefore, examine certain aspects of 19th century Japonisme in order to contextualise the response to Japanese architecture during this period. Japonisme in the first two decades of the 20th century, except for inspiration on Art Nouveau, has been less well documented. Contemporary texts on early 20th century Japonisme attributed Japanese inspiration in areas such as the theatre, fashion, graphic design and pottery.

To further contextualise this research we shall begin with a discussion on published texts relating to 19th and early 20th century Japonisme/Orientalism and question, how relevant is Said's *Orientalism* to Japonisme, in which the understanding of the word Orientalism metamorphosed from an academic discipline to that of Western authority over the East.

Texts on Japonisme

It is generally accepted the term Japonisme was first used by the French art critic Philippe Burty in 1872, to describe the study of the enthusiasm for Japanese art, design and culture so prevalent in Europe from the 1870s. Research by Gabriel P. Weisberg on Burty and French Japonisme testifies to Burty's significance (Watanabe, 1991 pp. 13-14). Whilst defining terms we should consider the other French terms of Japonaiserie and Japonnerie or Japonerie. Toshio Watanabe explains the history and use of these terms considering

there to be little difference in meaning but should there be a contrast Japonisme would indicate a Western demonstration of 'a pro-Japan attitude' and Japonaiserie deals more directly with items of Japanese art and design (1991 p. 15); Gabriel and Yvonne Weisburg suggest Japonaiserie or Japonerie to indicate a 'knickknack' or 'trinket' (1990, p. xxvii). It is considered that after the work of the French art historian, Henri Focillon, in 1923, there was little discussion on Japonisme in the West until the 1940s (Watanabe, 1991 p. 19).

Nicholaus Pevsner wrote in 1936: 'The history of the part played by China and Japan in European art since 1860 has not yet been written' (1960, p. 150). It was Pevsner who in 1936 re-introduced the work of the Victorian designer, Christopher Dresser, to Britain in *Pioneers of the Modern Movement.* Published in *The Architectural Review* in early 1937 Pevsner's article 'Christopher Dresser Industrial Designer' briefly mentions Dresser's interest in and visit to Japan in 1877/8.

Texts published during the 1950s, 60s and 70s

In an article 'Art Furniture of the Eighteen-Seventies' for *The Architectural Review* some 17 years later Pevsner gives an account of Japonisme in the context of Victorian design, quoting Charles Eastlake's comments on bad taste and Japan as an example of superior taste: 'So here, in Eastlake's book, appreciation of the Gothic style appears at least for a moment, side by side with appreciation of Japan' (*AR*, 1952 p. 46).

In the 1950s there was a diversification in the study of Japonisme, in which the subject developed to include the examination of Japanese inspiration on Art Nouveau. One such example is Stephan Tschudi Madsen's *Sources of Art Nouveau* (1956). Madsen gives prominence to the work of Dresser and praises his use of form and function considering Dresser's designs to be objects of admiration in the 20th century. In relation to interior design Madsen believes that Japanese 'influence' inspired a greater sophistication arousing an 'interest in simple and rectilinear construction' with 'a special feeling for the light and airy' (1980, p. 205).

Research into Japonisme increased during the 1960s and 70s, primarily interest centred on French Japonisme, for example Gabriel Weisburg's 1967 PhD thesis 'The Early Years of Philippe Burty: Art Critic, Amateur and Japoniste' (Watanabe, 1991 pp, 26-27). However, Robin Spencer examines British Japonisme in *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* published in 1972, developed from his MA thesis 'James McNeill Whistler and his circle. A Study of his work from the mid-1860s to mid 1870s'. Spencer's text traces Japanese inspiration from Whistler to Mackintosh and notes Dresser's connection with Japan, describing him as 'a practising designer who had actually visited Japan in 1877 and published a very thorough account of its architecture, art and art manufacturers' (1972,

p. 87). American Japonisme was examined comprehensively by Clay Lancaster in his 1963 text *The Japanese Influence in America,* an innovative work which expanded the framework of Japanese inspiration from Europe to the United States (Watanabe, 1991 p. 27).

Publications in the 1980s and 90s

Published in English in 1981 Siegfried Wichmann's *Japonisme: the Japanese influence on Western art since 1858* employs a method of comparison to illustrate Japanese inspiration on the West. Wichmann places specimens of Japanese motifs and formats such as bamboo, the wave, waterfowl, pillar pictures, trellis and grille, alongside equivalent examples found in Western art and design. Whilst being an interesting form of analysis and visually pleasing, some of the comparisons are somewhat doubtful. However Wichmann's chapter 'House and garden' in which he discusses the Japanese house, garden and interior is of significance to this research. He lists the architects: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Bruno Taut as employing frame construction and open planning 'The results, always hovering between construction and design, bear a structure similar to the Japanese building method' (1981, p. 362). However, in the comparative sets of photographs, the majority of the Western architecture is post-war American; the only inter-war architecture is that of Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye and Salvation Army Hostel, Paris. In this chapter there is no connection made between modern British architecture and Japonisme during the inter-war period or after World War Two.

Gabriel and Yvonne Weisburg's *Japonisme an annotated bibliography* (1990) is a useful source of texts, including reference to Edward Strange's 1897 article 'Architecture in Japan' published in *The Architectural Review.* However, there is no mention of Ralph Adams Cram's article 'Japanese Domestic Interiors' also published in *The Architectural Review* three years later in 1900 or his subsequent book *Impressions of Japanese architecture and the allied arts* published in 1905. The omission of Cram's texts may be due to the fact that texts on Japonisme have tended to focus on the pictorial arts; Strange's text on architecture would have been included as he is primarily noted for his knowledge of the Japanese print.[1]

Edited by Tomoko Sato and Toshio Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930,* the catalogue to the exhibition held at the Barbican Art Gallery in 1991, is a key text in the understanding of the relationship, both political and cultural,

[1] For example Strange's 1925 text *The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige.*

between Britain and Japan. However, the inter-war discussion is on the potter, Bernard Leach; there is no mention of Japonisme in relation to architecture and the British modern movement. Also published in 1991 *High Victorian Japonisme* by Toshio Watanabe not only gives a detailed account of Japonisme scholarship in both the West and Japan, but discusses Victorian design theorists and the Japan inspired work of architect-designers William Burges, William Eden Nesfield, Richard Norman Shaw and E. W. Godwin, in addition to that of the artist James McNeill Whistler. The text examines Japonisme during the 1850s and 60s before the ubiquity of 'the cult of Japan'. Both these texts are often cited by writers on Orientalism and Japonisme and extend post-Said criticism.

Books published in the 21st century

Ayako Ono also discusses Japanese inspiration on the work of Whistler, Burges and Godwin in *Japonisme in Britain, Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel and nineteenth-century Japan* published in 2003, but as the title suggests, she also examines the work of later artists. Ono considers Japonisme to have existed only until 1920, the beginning of the period under discussion within this thesis. Her examination of the artist and follower of Whistler, Mortimer Menpes' house at 25 Cadogan Square, is of interest to us in the study of the interpretation of the Japanese house in Britain. In this house, designed by the architect, A. H. Mackmurdo (1851-1942), Menpes created room after room with artefacts brought from Japan. We shall return to Cadogan Square in chapter two but it is fascinating to contemplate that on the other side of the world, in Japan, Western rooms were the height of fashion (Sand, 2003).

A recent publication on Japonisme is that of the former head of painting at the V&A, Lionel Lambourne's *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West* (2005).[2] In this text Lambourne does consider Japonisme to continue beyond 1920 by citing the work of poster design artist, Tom Purvis (1888-1957) for the London and North Eastern Railway in 1925; Charles Ricketts' costume designs for *The Mikado* at the Princess Theatre, London in 1926, and the potter, Bernard Leach. Lambourne continues his cultural exchanges into the post-war era with mention of visits to Japan by the composer, Benjamin Britten and fashion photographer Cecil Beaton (1904-80). Whilst describing Japanese inspiration on garden design to the present day, Lambourne does not mention any modernist landscape ideals during the inter-war period or any inspiration on modernist architecture or interiors. He quotes the critic Roger Fry (1866-1934) describing him as the 'High Priest of Modernism': 'It is partly due to Japanese influence that our own

[2] Lambourne was head of painting at the V&A from 1986 to 1993.

impressionists have made an attempt to get back to ... ultra primitiveness of vision. Indeed they deliberately sought to de-conceptualize art' (2005, p. 217). Lambourne's belief that modernist interest in African art eclipsed that of Japan in the 1900s may have lead him to conclude there was no modernist interest in Japan during the inter-war years.

As we have observed, Japonisme was originally discussed as a Victorian phenomenon but gradually Japanese inspiration has been considered on Art Nouveau until today when Japonisme is examined in relation to post-war art and design. Although discussion commenced in the 1950s on Japonisme and Art Nouveau, it took a further 50 years for Japanese inspiration on Art Deco to be acknowledged; the V&A's *Art Deco 1910-1939* exhibition made such a connection (Baddeley, 2003 pp. 58-9). This unwillingness to acknowledge inspiration from Japan, referred to only as oriental influence, during the inter-war period is puzzling; it is possible this lack of recognition came about as a result of post-war interpretation of the 1920s and 30s. Certainly within the portrayal of the formation of the British modern movement in the 1960s and 70s inspiration from Japan is rarely mentioned. We shall now examine oriental influence and Orientalism through a discussion on Said's text.

Orientalism

The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated offers two definitions of Orientalism: Eastern idiom or custom and scholarship in Eastern languages and literature (1968 p. 1385). However, in *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, Edward Said gives three definitions: i) The academic understanding of the word; the knowledge of oriental languages and literature; ii) The illustration of the difference between the Orient and the Occident; Orientalism says more about the West than it does the East; iii) Western authority over the East; imperial and colonial rule, the rule of empire. Although much criticised, Said's seminal work is an obligatory text in the study of any East/West transcultural dialogue. The text has created great debate and controversy; Said's third definition has invoked criticism that Orientalism has come to be associated only with Western authority over the East and that the word could no longer be used in its scholarly sense.

John M MacKenzie, an historian of British imperialism, believes Said uses a contemporary reading of events rather than placing them in the context of their historical moment, therefore Orientalism: 'lost its status as a sympathetic concept, a product of scholarly admiration for diverse and exotic cultures, and became the literary means of creating a stereotypical and mythic East through which European rule could be more readily asserted' (MacKenzie, 1995 p. xii). MacKenzie's *Orientalism: History, theory and*

the arts contributes to the understanding and critique of Orientalism; his discussion on music and theatre are fascinating, although in the realm of art and design he is indebted to the work of Sato and Watanabe, *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue.*

Said deals primarily with the Near East and with the British and French, and after the Second World War, the American rule in that area. He does not profess to deal with the whole global issue of Orientalism but concentrates on an area where he feels he has most experience. The area discussed is not necessarily significant as beliefs, prejudices and set forms of behaviour can be applied equally well by a dominant power to any subordinate country and its inhabitants. However, Japan does not fit so easily into Said's idea of the Orient as her position, politically, was very different from that of other Eastern countries. Japan was never a colonial member, but an empire builder, and from 1902 to 1923 was an ally of Britain. Japan's victory in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War also raised the consciousness of other Asian countries, particularly India, by showing it was possible for Asians to defeat Europeans, without foreign officers, in modern conventional warfare.

Culturally, again there is a difficulty in placing Japan into Said's 'European superiority over Oriental backwardness' (1995 p. 7). Quite the reverse appears to have been the case in Britain; some Victorian medievalists welcomed the introduction of Japanese art and design. In Japan's feudal society of the mid 1800s they saw the living proof of the theories they expounded '[a]t times the debate gives the impression that some critics saw no difference between the Orient and the medieval West. This gives an interesting twist to the theory of Orientalism propounded by Edward Said' (Kikuchi & Watanabe, 2002 p. 153).

Said gives an insightful understanding of the possible effects of cultural dominance but power domination is not necessarily the main issue in all cultural relationships. Within Victorian commentary on Japan, Japanese art and design there is often a superior and condescending tone to the texts. It would seem to us today quite arrogant to suggest a country has no architecture, but these texts are the product of their time when there was a strict hierarchy and a didactic approach to imparting knowledge. However, the majority of these texts praise Japanese workmanship and design, offering Japan as an inspirational source for British designers[3], as this 1863 extract from 'Japanese Ornamentation' published anonymously in *The Builder* testifies:[4]

> While we cannot approve of copying the ornaments of any style, we yet think that more real art is to be found in Japan than in many countries whose ornament

[3] Watanabe debates the superiority of Oriental design over that of Occidental in 'Owen Jones' 'The Grammar of Ornament': 'Orientalism" subverted?' (1994).

[4] Considered by Widar Halén to have been written by Christopher Dresser (1993 p. 36).

> we largely use; hence, if we cannot produce original decorations, and must copy others, we may, with advantage, study and appropriate Japanese ornaments. (*The Builder*, 13 June, 1863 p. 424)

Cultural exchanges tend to be too diverse to be viewed in a singular manner of Western domination of the East; in the case of Victorian Britain and Japan there was much mutual admiration.[5]

Since publication in 1978, Said's *Orientalism* has become a canonical text. However, there has been much criticism of this work, particularly regarding the notion of Western authority over the East. Certainly within the relationship between Japan and Britain, both politically and culturally, Said's theory does not apply. While it would be incorrect to suggest there were no desires to colonise and no instances of Occidental superiority in Victorian Britain, there is evidence to indicate that there was a good deal of admiration of Japan and her people and in many incidences Japanese design was considered superior to that of European countries.

Anglo-Japanese Relations

British awareness of Japan before 1853

The catalyst for the West's interest in things Japanese is attributed to the arrival off Uraga of the 'black ships' led by Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy in 1853; the subsequent treaties and trading agreements made between Japan and Western nations effectively ending Japan's two centuries of self-imposed isolation. However, Britain's initial contact with Japan can be traced to 1600 when Will Adams, an English pilot on a Dutch ship was shipwrecked off the Kyûshû coast and in 1613 the first English traders arrived in Japan. The London East India Company opened the 'English House' but as restrictions on foreign merchants increased, the warehouse closed in 1623 (Beasley, 1981 pp. 19-20).

Porcelain and lacquer ware were the main exports of the English traders in Japan; the popularity of Japanese lacquer ware contributed the words to the English language: 'japan', for all types of lacquer work, and 'japanning', referring to imitation of the process. In 1688, a manual, *A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing*, published by John Stalker and George Parker, was one of the first books in Europe to describe this technique from Japan

[5] There is further discussion on Orientalism/Japonisme in Part Three, chapter six 'The mystification of the Orient' in relation to Bernard Leach and the *Mingei* movement.

and in which the quality and artistry of Japanese work is praised (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 16-17).

In the mid 1600s Japanese porcelain was also increasing in popularity, although by this time the Dutch were the only Western traders permitted to remain in Japan with their activities severely restricted by their location on a small artificial island, Dejima, in Nagasaki harbour. It was primarily through this Dutch trade and via China that after 1623 Japanese artefacts reached Britain. From the mid 17th century until the latter half of the 19th century many Japanese items were believed to be of Chinese origin and contributed as inspiration for the exotic style of 'chinoiserie' a European fantasy of the East.

Items from Japan were displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 but these were included in the Chinese section, organised by Rutherford Alcock, the British Consul in Shanghai (Halén, 1993 p. 33). There were sightings of known Japanese artefacts prior to the opening of the Crystal Palace; in 1825 the 'Japanese Antiquities' of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles were on show in London; in 1823 William Beckford's and in 1842 Horace Walpole's Arita and Imari collections were auctioned. These were included in *Collections towards a History of Pottery and Porcelain* by Joseph Marryat, which would have been one of textbooks at the School of Design attended by Christopher Dresser (Halén, 1993 p. 33).

It has been suggested that the work of the artist, William Blake, 'shows his familiarity with Japanese printmaking' (Duncan, 1994 p. 13). This is a fascinating connection, and it is possible that Blake could have had access to this information through publications on Japan as Widar Halén comments in his PhD thesis 'Christopher Dresser and the Cult of Japan' that travellers and missionaries in the 18th century noted the availability of Japanese art in Peking [Beijing].[6] Depictions of buildings on Japanese artefacts and prints would have been one of the first visual sources of information on Japanese architecture to reach the West.

'A fresh well of art'

The opening of Japanese ports to Western trade undoubtedly initiated a new interest in the country, which had been shrouded in mystery for over two hundred years, and created a subsequent surge of Japanese imports into the West. This increased availability of Japanese artefacts seems to have occurred at a most apposite time when, following the Great Exhibition, there was mounting concern over British design standards.

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[6] Father Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix (1736) *Histoire et Description Generale due Japon* also Engelbert Kaempfer (1727) *History of Japan.*

Design reformer, Sir Henry Cole (1808-82), noted in his 1852 *Lectures on the Result of the Great Exhibition*: 'It was from the East that the most impressive lesson was to be learnt. Here was revealed a fresh well of art, the general principles of which were the same as those in the best period of art of all nations' (p. 112).

The great wave of Japanese goods into Britain may have seemed advantageous to the improvement of Victorian design but Japan was not the only source of inspiration for artists and designers. In previous centuries Indian, Chinese, Persian and Egyptian artefacts had proved inspirational for British art and design, and in the 19th century art and design practitioners were still drawing upon these earlier examples; the work of Owen Jones, and his pupil, Christopher Dresser bear testimony to this. However, a defined 'Cult of Japan' enchanted by things Japanese did emerge during the early 1870s and appears to have remained constant for a number of years. There were several importers of oriental goods, but the most famous, Liberty's, opened in 1875 and there are accounts of queues, frequented by artists, forming when shipments of fans and other bric-a-brac were heard to have arrived from Japan.

British Japonisme and the cult of Japan

Exhibitions played an important role in the dissemination of knowledge on Japan. At the 1862 International Exhibition, London, Rutherford Alcock, by this time British Minister in Japan, provided the exhibits for the Japanese section. Alcock's collection was to be 'a fair sample of the industrial arts of the Japanese, and their capabilities of production in rivalry with the nations of the West' (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 80) although Ellen Conant believes most of his collection was recently manufactured and already 'influenced by Western models and produced for Western markets' (1991, p. 80). Nevertheless, this exhibition was significant as it was the first opportunity in Britain to view Japanese art and design in any quantity. The Japanese Court (fig. 1) proved to be particularly popular with the British public as well as artists and designers, which in turn promoted discussion on Japanese design. Dresser attributed his initial interest in and collection of Japanese objects to this exhibition.

Japanese sections were included in a number of international exhibitions including Paris in 1867 and London in 1871, 1872 and 1873. At the Vienna International Exhibition, also in 1873, for the first time, the Japanese government was responsible for the organisation of their section.[7] Following this exhibition Dresser was involved in the

[7] At the international exhibitions in London, Alcock showed examples from his Japanese collection in 1872, and in 1873 the Japanese section was organised by Dresser and Sir Philip Cunliffe Owen, the director of the South Kensington Museum [present day V&A].

relocation of the 'entire Japanese colony' from Vienna to Alexandra Palace (Gere & Whiteway, 2004 p. 38). The Alexandra Palace Company, with Dresser as art director, aimed to construct oriental settings for the retailing of ethnic goods; Moorish and Egyptian villas sat alongside the Japanese village. The recently formed Japanese company, Kiritsu Kôshô Kaisha supplied the goods for the Japanese village and 'were responsible for promoting some of the most distinguished contemporary Japanese artists in the West' (Halén, 1993 p. 39). This would have been the first opportunity for the British public to experience Japanese architecture (fig. 2).

1885 saw the construction of a second Japanese village, this time in Knightsbridge, opened by Sir Rutherford Alcock on 10 January. The village consisted of five streets filled with stalls, tea houses, and workshops manned by over 200 Japanese inhabitants. A contemporary review of the village published by *The Magazine of Art* in February 1885 describes 'lively narrow streets, with their open summer-temple-like shops, all in a light fawn-coloured key, crowded with picturesque people, and quick with gay decorative colour' (p. xviii) and concludes:

> When you regain the open, and the damp and grimy air of London which induces such solid building such dull colour, such miry ways, such sombre clothing, such a struggle for life, such peremptory habits, and such careworn faces, it is forced upon you as with a blow, that the antic and delightful humanity you have left behind you must assuredly be yearning for Tokio and the hill Fuji; and you feel that – from more than one point of view – they are right. (p. xviii)

The experience of escapism encapsulated within the Japanese village described by the writer may in part explain the success of the Savoy Theatre's operetta *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan. In order to improve authenticity, Gilbert is believed to have sought the help of employees of the Knightsbridge Japanese village (Yokoyama, 1987 p. xix) and Sullivan's music was derived from Japanese tunes (MacKenzie, 1995 pp. 194-5). In a review of *The Mikado,* the *Daily Telegraph,* whilst praising the production, pronounced 'we are all being more or less Japanned' (16 March 1885).

The Mikado was the first of a number of musical compositions based on Japan, in the following year Sidney Jones' *The Geisha* was not only popular in Britain but also in Europe (MacKenzie, 1995 p. 195). This genre continued into the early 20th century with for example in Europe, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*; in Britain a new version of *The Mikado* was produced in 1926 with stage and costume design by Charles Ricketts (fig. 3), and as contemporary sheet music entitled 'In Old Japan' 'The Vision of Fuji San' and 'From a Japanese Screen' would suggest, melodies inspired by Japan were still popular with the general public in the 1920s (fig. 4).

In 1889 Oscar Wilde wrote 'the Japanese people are ... simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art' (1994 p. 1088). *Punch* cartoonists were not slow in lampooning this penchant for all things Japanese, initially by depicting the use of Japanese artefacts in the home (fig. 5); the Japanese village and *The Mikado* did not avoid the caricaturists' pen (figs 6, 7 & 8). By 1888 when the cult of Japan was well established in Britain *Punch* introduced the fictitious character Lika Joko, a supposedly famous Japanese artist on a visit to Britain; 'Our Japanneries' a series of 21 cartoons ran from 26 May until 10 November 1888. These full-page images depict Lika Joko visiting British government & legal establishments: the Law Courts, the Houses of Lords and Commons, undertaking traditional British sports: shooting, fishing, yachting, cricket, and more simple activities such as picnicking and a day at the seaside. In all these cartoons Britain is depicted as Japan and the composition is that of the genre of a Japanese print (figs. 9, 10 & 11). The character appears again in 'Punch's Almanack for 1889' when four cartoons illustrate Lika Joko's pantomime (fig. 12). The portrayal of this imaginary Japanese figure in an Anglo-Japanese setting demonstrates the extent to which Japan had entered the Victorian British psyche.

The pages of *Punch* are equally informative regarding the political relationship between Britain and Japan, which was paramount to the flow of artefacts and information from Japan.

'Our best friends in the East'

As we noted earlier, the first contact between Britain and Japan occurred in the 1600s, and despite Japan's self-imposed seclusion several trading attempts were made by Britain during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Japanese appear not to have been particularly perturbed by these attempts but the 1839-42 British Opium Wars with China did cause concern: 'How can we know', a Confucian scholar wrote in 1847 'whether the mist gathering over China will not come down as frost in Japan?' (Beasley, 1981 p. 21) Britain and Japan signed their first official treaty in 1854, followed by the Treaty of Edo in August 1858. This 1858 treaty assured commercial and diplomatic relations between the two countries and gave Britain 'most-favoured-nation' standing (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 14).

The first British residents arrived in Japan the following year; the majority settled at Yokohama although some went to Nagasaki and Hakodate. In the early 1860s there was considerable antagonism towards foreigners in Japan, particularly among some factions of the samurai; the Satsuma clan was suspected of the 1862 murder of a British merchant. During the next year the British fleet bombarded the Satsuma clan's capital, Kagoshima in

southern Kyûshû. In 1864 a joint British, French, Dutch and American expedition destroyed batteries, which were firing on foreign ships in the Straits of Shimonoseki; these straits, between Honshû and Kyushû, had been closed by the Chôshû clan (Cortazzi, 1987 pp. x-xi). However, anticipating the shift in power from the Tokugawa to the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Britain made a tactical move by transferring her support to the Satsuma and Chôshû clans, despite previous animosities. This switch of loyalty gave the British an advantage over the French whose allegiance had remained with the Tokugawa, thus 'Japan was Great Britain's foremost friend in the East and Britain Japan's in the West' (Wolfers, 1981 p. 15). Britain a successful empire builder, not accustomed to treating non-Westerners as equal was allying herself with a country that was emerging from feudalism.

Modernisation/Westernisation

One of the main objectives of the new Japanese government was to modernise/Westernise the country in order to compete with the West. Many Japanese were sent abroad to learn new skills and to witness Western ways. Many Westerners were invited to Japan to teach the new technology but were asked to leave as soon as they could be supplanted by a newly trained Japanese replacement. There then followed an extraordinary period in which Japan embarked on her own industrial revolution and in 20 years achieved what had taken Britain two hundred years to attain.

In addition to the need to produce goods quickly and cheaply for the ever growing export market, which accordingly necessitated better communications and finance systems, Japan was profoundly aware of her vulnerability to naval attack. The Meiji government sought to build a modern navy by purchasing British warships and employing British instructors. In a comparatively short time Japan was able to build her own destroyers and torpedo boats, and 'her repair facilities were capable of supporting a large fleet' (Glover, 1980 p. 181). The Japanese army was also modernising and strengthening; national conscription was introduced: 'the Japanese defence force proved itself able to fight well, in accord with western techniques and conventions of warfare' (Holmes, 1988 p. 69). Again Britain and other Western powers assisted by providing trainers, technology and equipment.

'They are eminently warlike'

Japan's military modernisation/Westernisation was tested in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 over competing interests in Korea. Japan's victory over China and her participation with other Western nations in the Boxer rebellion of 1900, by sending an expeditionary force to Peking [Beijing], made Japan an ideal political and military ally for

Britain; although, Japan's assistance in China is viewed somewhat cynically in *Punch* (fig. 13). The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed in 1902, with revisions in 1905 and 1911 (Nish, 1972 p. 1). At the beginning of the 20th century Britain needed to create alliances in order to counteract the increase in armed forces worldwide; America, initially favoured for this coalition, wished to remain isolated, therefore Japan became the chosen country for an alliance. This alliance was also to ensure that Russian interests in the Far East were controlled, which was achieved by the defeat of Russia in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese War. With Japan controlling Russian interests in the Far East, Britain was able to form, in 1907, an alliance with Russia to safeguard British India and to prevent a Russo-German alliance. There was great concern over the development of Germany's military power, particularly naval, and Britain was eager to negotiate alliances in Europe, first with France and then Russia, as defence against Germany's increasing strength (Trevelyan, 1965 pp. 438-442).

As a result of Japanese supremacy in warfare the country was treated with a new respect, the irony of which was noted by the Japanese scholar, Kakuzô Okakura in 1906:

> The average Westerner, in his sleek complacency, will see in the tea ceremony but another instance of the thousand and one oddities which constitutes the quaintness and childishness of the East to him. He was wont to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace; he calls her civilised since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields. (Okakura, 1956, p. 6)

In 1907 similar sentiments were echoed by Arthur Diosy, an original member of the Japan Society, and associate of Christopher Dresser, in *Harmsworth History of the World*:[8]

> It is quite certain that no amount of progress in education, in arts, science, commerce, and industries ... would have earned for Japan the position among nations that she has made for herself by the use of her keen-edged sword ... we need only carry our thoughts back to the Occidental opinion of Japan before her victory over China in 1895 to realise that opened the eyes of the purblind West to the fact that a new Great Power was arising in the Far East. (Harmsworth, 1907 p. 586)

Inevitably comparisons were made between China and Japan; Britain's new respect for Japan is clearly demonstrated by W E Garrett Fisher's 'An Alphabet of the World's Races' also published in *Harmsworth History of the World*. Of the Japanese he states:

> A race of the Northern Mongolian family, probably originating in Korea, whence they spread to Japan and dispossessed the Ainu aborigines, about the dawn of the Christian era. The most enterprising and civilised people

[8] *Harmsworth History of the World*, consisted of eight volumes, published between 1907 and 1909, purporting to be 'the story of the world, then, yesterday and today' (p. 2).

> in Asia, often called "The English of the Far East." They possess a singularly high standard of honour and patriotism, which was the main factor in their recent victory over Russia, and they are eminently warlike, besides producing industrious agriculturists and enterprising traders. Of short but sturdy stature, white skin and yellow or sallowish complexion, oblique eyes, black hair. (Harmsworth, 1907 p. 332)

However, in his description of the Chinese we learn more on Fisher's views of the Japanese :

> ... They [the Chinese] are yellow-skinned, short in stature, with obliquely set eyes, high check-bones, long skulls, and broad faces, with slight prognathism. They possess an ancient and highly organised civilisation, which is characterised by its conservatism and slowness to accept new ideas – so different in this from the Japanese. The Chinese are naturally frugal, industrious, and patient; they are excellent agriculturists, and very gregarious; they despise war, but make excellent soldiers when drilled by Europeans or Japanese ... (Harmsworth, 1907 p. 324)

It is apparent the qualities the British admire in the Japanese are their adaptability and their leadership skills. These texts were typical of Britain's imperialistic approach to non-Westerners and appear somewhat racist today, but they do display, atypically, a desire to demonstrate the similarities rather than the differences between the British and 'the English of the Far East'. Britain was unaccustomed to treating Eastern countries as equals, so it is, therefore, all the more fascinating to observe the visual attempt to depict the Japanese (no. 20) on a par with the Anglo-Saxon (no. 1) and the Celtic (no. 3) by the identical positioning of the head and strong jaw line in this early 20th century anthropological catalogue of humanity (fig. 14). Homi Bhabha describes skin 'as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference' (1994, p. 78) and it is noticeable within the two descriptions that the Japanese are described as having white skin which could be interpreted as a further attempt to demonstrate their closeness to the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic.

Japan-British Exhibition 1910

The Anglo-Japanese collaboration was celebrated at the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition; a private initiative primarily to promote trade. The site at White City, London, also provided an opportunity for Japan to display dioramas of her recent victories, native villages, and crafts from her colonies of Formosa, Kwantung and Korea. There was a reawakening to the beauty of Japanese goods: 'Europeans inured to the cheap Japanese goods that had flooded the continent in recent years were all the more impressed by the fine artistic workmanship, the tasteful display and dignity of the Japanese section' (Conant, 1991 p. 87).

In May 1910 *The Studio* magazine's 'Studio-Talk' section, a descriptive listing of exhibitions and events in Britain and overseas, the Japan-British exhibition was announced as 'a bounteous feast' (p. 303) for art lovers. At this exhibition, held from 14 May to 29 October at White City, Shepherds Bush, London, in addition to architectural models (fig. 15) it was possible to see a reconstruction of a Japanese village (fig. 16), a street (fig. 17) and gardens (fig. 18). Although there had been opportunities before in London to experience Japanese architecture, at Christopher Dresser's Japanese village, Alexandra Park in the 1870s (Halén, 1993), and in 1885 the Japanese village in Knightsbridge, the architecture at the 1910 exhibition seems to have been more extensive and on a grander scale; a replica of the *Chokushimon* [the Imperial Messenger's Gate], four-fifths the size of the original west gate in Nishi Honganji Temple in Kyoto, formed the entrance to the Kyoto Pavilion (fig. 19).[9] All the buildings and materials for the Japanese gardens were shipped from Japan; the buildings were first constructed and then dismantled for transportation and erected in London by Japanese workers (fig. 20) (Hotta-Lister, 1999).

The two Japanese gardens were popular with both the public and the press. Architecture, on the other hand, whilst praised, tended to be judged by Western standards. However, it is apparent the Japanese village was considered a poor representation by Japanese visitors to the exhibition: '... the Japanese Village is a mere sketch of the life of the lowest class of peasants in the north-east of Japan and is a sight which must fill Japanese gentlemen with nothing but displeasure and shame' (Hotta-Lister, 1999 p. 133). Despite its shortcomings this exhibition is further evidence of the dissemination of information on Japanese architecture and was to provide *The Studio* with a useful contact, their own Japanese correspondent, which shall be discussed further in chapter two.

Japanese participation in WWI

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was important to Britain's success in the First World War, as Japan provided protection in the Far East from German naval attack and gave assistance in the Mediterranean (Trevelyan, 1965 p. 439). At the end of the war Britain thanked the ships of Japan's Mediterranean squadron by inviting them to Britain:

> A special supplement of the *Illustrated London News* was printed, showing the Japanese sailors, well wrapped up to encounter the London fogs of January 1919, going round the capital in a convoy of hansom-cabs waving Union Jacks and Hinomaru flags. Britain was well pleased to pay public tribute to the Japanese naval contribution. (Nish, 1972 p. 254)

[9] After the exhibition the *Chokushismon* was transferred in Kew Gardens.

After the First World War Japan wished to continue to expand her empire in the Far East but victorious European countries, whilst retaining their own empires, considered any further Japanese expansion unacceptable. Japan was admitted to the League of Nations in 1920 and although Britain relinquished her alliance with Japan in August 1923 after more than 21 years (Nish, 1972 p. 1), Japan continued to be perceived as a friend during the 1920s (Taylor, 1965 p. 227).

Manchuria, 1931

However, in the early 1930s Japan became a cause for global anxiety, as indicated in this contemporary text:

> In 1931 the delicately poised balance of power in the Far East, so carefully preserved by the joint efforts of the Great Powers through forty years of change, was dramatically upset by the action of the Japanese army in occupying and virtually annexing the "Three Eastern provinces" of China, known to the world as Manchuria. By that operation, begun on the night of September 18, 1931, and swiftly and methodically completed, despite the efforts of the League of Nations and the concern of the other Powers, an area as large as France and Germany combined has been in fact, if not in form, added to the Japanese Empire. (Etherton & Tiltman, 1933 p. 11)

Unwilling to curtail her expansionist ambitions Japan left the League of Nations in 1933 and her special friendship with Britain would appear to have come to an end. It is generally assumed that from this point onwards all things Japanese were rejected, however, this was not necessarily the case. In 1996 at the Sunningdale workshop of the Anglo-Japanese History Project on Anglo-Japanese relations between the wars, cultural historians presented evidence to indicate positive British views of Japan whereas political and military historians considered Britain's view to have been negative (Kikuchi & Watanabe, 2002, p. 159).

Cultural reaction to Japanese hostilities

I too have found little evidence to suggest Japanese art and design was adversely affected by Japanese military aggression during the 1930s. Sparse mention is made within *The Architectural Review* or *The Studio* of the difficult political position, which existed with Japan during the inter-war period; the situation was only referred to twice in the RIBAJ. Once in 1932 in a poem which had originally appeared in *The Times*:

> BALLADE OF DEVASTATION
> They're breaking down the bridge at Waterloo;
> They've daubed the house of Henry James at Rye;
> They've caught a man and put him in the Zoo;

> They've let the Japanese into Shanghai ... (RIBAJ, vol. 39, p.336)

The second occasion was on 20 December 1937 in the discussion session after a paper given by E J Carter on 'The Case for a Learned Society' when R C Fisher spoke of the threat not only to architecture but to world culture; he referred to the recent destruction by bombing of 23 universities and colleges in China. He went on to say: 'This evening, for instance, we hear that a Japanese army is now marching on the city of Hangchow, which is full of beautiful old temples and pagodas' (RIBAJ, vol. 45, p. 230). These remarks passed without further comment. In fact, the RIBAJ continued to review Japanese architecture journals into the 1940s.

Another anomaly would appear to be that of a memorial to Will Adams, the first Englishman to live in Japan, which was constructed in 1926 at his birthplace of Gillingham in Kent. This monument was not formally unveiled until 11 May 1934 when the Japanese Ambassador was invited to officiate at the ceremony; an inauspicious action if there was general animosity towards Japan, as contemporary imagery shows the Japanese national flag flying high over the A2 London to Dover road (fig. 21).

We may find a clue if we turn to the *Picture Post* for 1938 which, whilst reporting graphically on the Japanese invasion and bombing of China, also featured on 22 October: 'General Ugaki Japan's deposed leader in his home' (fig. 22), describing him as 'a friend of Britain' hated in Japan by the militarists for his disarmament policies in the 1920s and now forced out of power by the extremists. In this three-page article, with photographs depicting Kazushige Ugaki at home and on horseback, the author would appear to be differentiating between the Japanese of the Anglo-Japanese alliance days and the new fascist military regime. Perhaps it was still possible during the 1930s to make this clear distinction? It is particularly fascinating as although in 1938 Ugaki was unable to reach agreement in talks with the British ambassador, Sir Robert Craigie, he was still considered pro-British. Reflecting on the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the history of the Second World War 'Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952' held in July 1979 Chihiro Hosoya commented:

> A review of the 1930s seems to show that the road to war narrowed step by step. The year 1936 marked a parting of the ways between Britain and Japan; after that the danger of military collision gradually increased; 1938 saw the disagreements of the Ugaki-Craigie talks ... (Hosoya, 1982 p. 284)

The *Picture Post* article demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of Anglo-Japanese politics prior to World War II, which in turn allowed for the continuation of appreciation of Japanese cultural qualities whilst disapproving of new military strategies.

The wish to put aside political disputes in order to maintain cultural ties was also expressed in Japan; Count Aisuké[sic.] Kayama wrote in 1937:

> One of our eminent scholars has said that as we increase our knowledge of other peoples we realize more and more that all the higher interests of a nation are in harmony with the welfare of the whole human race, and that those interests are best served by cooperation among the nations of the earth. This statement is true, and we are firmly convinced that only through the mutual exchange among nations of their respective cultural ideas is to be found the secret of sympathetic understanding indispensable for mutual respect and goodwill. Especially at this time do we feel called upon to make our utmost endeavours to cultivate a sense of interdependence and unity among the nations of the world, and to avail ourselves of every opportunity to develop mutual understanding in the higher realms of thought and spirit ... (Harada, 1937 p. v)

A cynical interpretation could suggest this to be purely conciliatory rhetoric nevertheless these examples from Japan and Britain would indicate there was a wish to continue with cultural exchange despite mounting political hostility.

Scholar of East and West

The work of the poet and scholar, Laurence Binyon (1868-1943), is also apposite in our examination of inter-war cultural relations. Binyon joined the Print Room at the British Museum in 1895 as a Second Class Assistant (Hatcher, 1995 p. 40), and developed the collection of Oriental art, particularly Japanese, held by the museum's Department of Prints and Drawing. He catalogued, lectured and wrote books on the Japanese collection at the British Museum: *Pictures by Japanese Artists* (1908); *Paintings in the Far East: An Introduction to the History of Pictorial Art in Asia, Especially China and Japan* (1908, revised editions 1913, 1923, 1934); *Japanese Art* (1909); *The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan, Based on Original Sources* (1911); *A Catalogue of Japanese and Chinese Woodcuts Preserved in the Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (1916); *Japanese Colour Prints*, with J J O'Brien Saxton (1923). He also produced texts on Japanese poetry: *Little Poems from the Japanese: Rendered into English Verse by Laurence Binyon* (1925); *Koya San: Four Poems from Japan* (1932) (Hatcher, 1995 pp. 300-1). Finally in October 1929, Binyon visited Japan for two months, where he was already recognised as an advocate of Japanese art and as a poet. At a time when Anglo-Japanese relations politically were deteriorating, Binyon was nurturing cultural links between the two.

Summary

The beginning of the 20th century was a particularly favourable time politically for Britain and Japan; the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 was further reinforced by the 1910 Anglo-Japanese exhibition where Japan and Britain jointly displayed their imperial status. Japanese culture was also on show, and it was at this time *The Studio* magazine found their own Japanese correspondent. It is possible to witness a continued interest in things Japanese through the pages of *The Studio* during this period and we shall examine some of these articles in relation to our interest in the promotion of Japanese architecture in the next chapter. Japonisme continued to flourish in Britain at the beginning of the 20th century in the music hall, theatre, opera, fashion and graphic design: 'Japan was no longer, as it had been for the Pre-Raphaelites and men such as William Burges, a charming fantasy as distant in space as the Middle Ages was in time. It was contemporary, emphatically post Victorian' wrote Binyon's biographer, John Hatcher (1995 p. 68).

We have witnessed within Anglo-Japanese relations, despite Britain's hegemonic tendencies there appears to be a desire by Britain to give Japan equal status thus making it problematical to apply Edward Said's theories to this East/West relationship. Equally Homi Bhahba's postcolonial concept of 'cultural difference' would also appear to be difficult to apply here (1994, p. 34), as emphasis was placed on the similarities between Japan and Britain rather than differences. Whilst it would be incorrect to suggest there had been no prejudice or stereotyping of the Japanese in the 19th or early 20th century, there is evidence to suggest that the homogeneity of the two countries was stressed more than any disparity. However, this wish to stress the similarities between Britain and Japan could be cynically interpreted as a justification for the alliance.

Whilst it has not been possible within the remit of this thesis to discuss in great depth aspects of the Anglo-Japanese political relationship, it has been possible to show that in the 1930s it was still permissible to admire Japanese culture whilst disapproving of Japanese military aggression. Inspiration from Japan during the inter-war years has rarely been acknowledged in post World War II publications. Today, it is intriguing that television documentaries on the Second World War rarely mention the Anglo-Japanese alliance when contextualising the war in the Pacific.

In the next chapter we shall continue our examination of Victorian and Edwardian Japonisme by identifying the architect-designers who were inspired by Japan and those who were responsible for the dissemination of information on Japanese architecture.

Chapter 2 – An appraisal of the response to Japanese architecture and art before 1919

Introduction

'They do not have any architecture' (p. 279) wrote Rutherford Alcock (1809-1897), the British Minister to Japan and organiser of the Japanese Court of the 1862 London International Exhibition, in his first book on Japan, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, published in 1863. Of all the Japanese arts, architecture appears to have been the last to receive recognition. Alcock was not alone in his view; others also considered Japan to have no architecture, believing that, amongst other reasons, being prone to earthquakes and building primarily in wood was a disqualification from having any lasting architecture or architectural heritage. This train of thought led to a second disqualification, which was, if architecture is the mother of all the arts then the Japanese could also be considered not to have any bona fide fine art.

In chapter one we considered the historical context of the 'cult of Japan' and the exhibitions that raised awareness of Japanese design and architecture. In this second chapter, we shall examine the response of Victorian architect-designers to these events and to the exposure of things Japanese. Also, by studying contemporary texts, we shall seek to assess the Victorian attitude towards Japanese architecture, and continue to trace interest in this subject until the second decade of the 20th century. By so doing, it is anticipated we shall be able to identify those disseminators of knowledge on the architecture of Japan, and in particular, those who discuss the traditional Japanese dwelling.

The pre-1919 perception of the interior of the Japanese house, the use of space and the identification of certain features are significant to our understanding of the review of this dwelling during the 1920s and 30s. Texts chosen include articles published in the newly founded arts journals of the late 19th century, where it is hoped may be found descriptions of the more detailed aspects of Japanese living. However, we shall commence with a discussion on those Victorian architect-designers who were inspired by the Japanese Court at the 1862 International Exhibition, London.

Victorian Gothic and Japonisme: Burges, Nesfield, Shaw, Jeckyll and Godwin

As we noted in chapter one, the Japanese section was particularly popular with both the general public and the art and design fraternity. It was this display that ignited the enthusiasm for Japan amongst the Victorian medievalists. The Gothic revivalist architect-designer, William Burges (1827-1881), was so impressed by the Japanese Court that he entreated fellow neo-Gothic devotees in his review of the Japanese section for the

Gentleman's Magazine: '... an hour, or even a day or two, spent in the Japanese department will by no means be lost time, for these hitherto unknown barbarians appear not only to know all that the Middle Ages knew, but in some respects are beyond them and us as well' (Sept. 1862 p. 254). Burges became a collector of things Japanese (Watanabe, 1991 p. 169), and J Mordaunt Crook believes that, in the collecting of Japanese prints, he was probably among the first (Crook, 1981 p. 53). He remained true to Gothicism, incorporating Japanese design motifs into his work thus creating a style which was very much his own (Watanabe, 1991 p. 170). Burges was a school friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1883) and close to the Pre-Raphaelite circle who also were admirers of Japanese art and objects (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 pp. 20, 115).

Also a Gothic revivalist and a collector of Japanese artefacts, the architect-designer, William Eden Nesfield (1835-1888), was aware of Japanese art and design by 1862 (Watanabe, 1991 p. 179). He incorporated what he described as 'pies' into his designs; Watanabe attributes the inspiration for these 'pies' to both medieval and Japanese design. The earlier disc designs he believes are medieval in character and states: 'Some of the Gothic revivalists had already used these medievalising disc motifs, for example in William Butterfield's fireplace design for Milton Ernest Hall in Bedfordshire (1853-1858)' (Watanabe, 1991 p. 179). However, in his designs for Cloveley Hall, Shropshire (1865-1870) Nesfield's 'pies' (fig. 23) show greater affinity with Japanese family crest [*mon*] (fig. 24) (Watanabe, 1991 p. 182).

Nesfield was not alone in the use of *mon*, these design motifs were illustrated frequently in books on Japanese design and appear to have held a fascination for the Victorian designer. Christopher Dresser applied *mon* to his silverware (fig. 25), and described them in both picture (fig. 26) and word, in his text on his visit to Japan (1882 p. 275). These unique, well presented and instantly useable design devices were the source of much admiration and utilisation by designers of all disciplines from the mid 1800s until today.

Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) worked at the office of the noted neo-Gothic architect, George Edmund Street (1824-1881) before going into partnership with Nesfield in 1862 (Spencer, 1972 p. 43). It is apparent that despite being partners they did not work closely together on projects and Watanabe suggests that whilst both were inspired by Japanese art and design their approach was different; Nesfield employed Japanese design devices and Shaw, after 1862, took asymmetry (Watanabe, 1991, pp. 184-185). Unlike Burges, Nesfield and Shaw's Gothic evolved into the later style of 'Queen Anne' of which Crook states: 'Then came Queen Anne, a flexible urban argot, sash-windowed, brick-

ribbed, based on late seventeenth-century vernacular classicism, Dutch, French, Flemish, German and English – all seasoned with a dash of Japanese' (Crook, 1987 p. 170).

Another probable Gothic revivalist visitor to the 1862 Japanese Court was the architect-designer, Thomas Jeckyll (1827-1881), whose work shows substantial Japanese inspiration. Possibly his most memorable work in the genre are his wrought iron sunflowers and the 1876 Peacock Room. Commissioned by Fredrick Leyland, the Peacock Room was extravagantly defined by Oscar Wilde (Wilde, 1994 p. 916), and is described by Watanabe as showing 'less Japanese elements than are sometimes ascribed to it' (Watanabe, 1991, p. 196). It is in fact 'Whistler's wall decorations' (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 117) which produced the stunning example of Victorian Japonisme. The American artist, James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) was a particularly important figure in Victorian Japonisme in the West for his interpretation of Japanese aesthetic within his own work (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 106).

Edward William Godwin (1833-1886), a close friend of Burges and Whistler, is considered to be one of British Japonisme's predominant figures (Watanabe, 1991 p. 185). During the 1860s his designs show their Japanese inspiration with the development of his Anglo-Japanese furniture, in particular the buffet, first design for himself in 1867 and in 1877 for the Earl of Limerick at Dromore Castle (Spencer, 1972 p. 60), which demonstrates his understanding of Japanese methods of construction. Godwin's move away from the neo-Gothic can be identified in the exterior design for Whistler's White House, Tite Street, Chelsea, 1877-8; 'What Whistler required was a house with a comfortable but sparsely-furnished interior in the Japanese style ...' (Spencer, 1972 p. 61). We know that as early as 1862 Godwin had sought a simple interior for his own home in Bristol, with plain walls, bare floorboards covered with oriental rugs and delicate furniture (Kinchin & Stirton, 2005 p. 10). However, what makes Godwin of particular interest to this research is the way that he responded to Japanese architecture, which we shall discover shortly in our examination of Victorian texts on the architecture and art of Japan.

Negative views of Japanese architecture and art: Rutherford Alcock and J J Jarves

We commence our examination of 19th century texts relating to Japanese architecture with two negative reactions; the first by James Jackson Jarves, a cultured American diplomat, who wrote in 1876:[10]

> Architecture, in its noblest condition, is equally unknown in Japan ...
> Indeed, painting, sculpture, and architecture, in their supreme significance, –

[10] In 1869 Jarves wrote on Japanese art in the *Art Journal* (Watanabe, 1991 pp. 159-160).

> the *fine* arts, with the human soul and form as their fundamental motives, and human excellences or spiritual loveliness as their distinctive aims in expression, – are not found in the aesthetic constitution of the Japanese. (Jarves, 1876, pp. 21-22)

In *The Capital of the Tycoon*, Alcock describes the Japanese house: 'Houses for dwelling in seldom consist of more than one story ... are all constructed of solid wooden frames strongly knit together, the walls merely a thin layer of mud and laths to keep out the cold and heat' (p. 279). Alcock believes the only Japanese architecture worthy of consideration is the temples and provides an example, which he calls 'a very fair specimen of all their temple and gateway architecture' (p. 280) (fig. 27). Jarves, on the other hand, whilst appearing to have studied the Japanese dwelling more closely, does not think they are solid constructions, and considers this insubstantiality a cause of the Japanese love of nature, derived from the necessity for an out-door existence:

> Built of the flimsiest materials in the lightest but neatest manner, held together only by wooden pins, containing the most combustible articles, they burn like Lucifer matches ... This alone is sufficient to hinder the growth of those profound associations with a family hearth-stone, dear to the Anglo-Saxon heart and so conducive to an indoor art and luxury, and to throw our Japanese brother more upon his out-door resources for social happiness. (Jarves, 1876, p. 114)

Alcock praises Japanese design in porcelain, enamels, bronzes, textiles, lacquer and metalwork; Jarves states: 'Any fair collection of Japanese decorative art makes the average European look distorted, pretentious or pitiful' (p. 142). However, despite admiring Japanese workmanship, Alcock is damning in their ability to produce a noteworthy piece of fine art, believing landscapes in particular to be poor : 'Their knowledge of perspective is too limited, and aërial effects have scarcely yet entered into their conception' (pp. 281-282). Jarves compares the use and display of art in the Japanese home with the West:

> Instead of costly framed landscapes hung on their walls, the nobles make their rooms scrupulously clean, airy and spacious, with movable divisions or screens, which can be so arranged as to leave open, as if inclosed [sic.] in frames, attractive vistas of out-door scenery. Often the screens themselves are made of the finest materials and either elaborately worked in gold or silk, or richly painted with landscapes, and scenes from national myths and history, or curious and capricious devices, so aesthetically ingenious as to afford an endless entertainment to the eye, and which are as readily shifted as the scenes of a theatre. (Jarves, 1876 pp. 115-6).

It is apparent that Jarves, though also perceiving the Japanese to have no architecture, describes the Japanese house more closely than Alcock. Whilst still

considering Japan to have no architecture, a more detailed description of the Japanese house is given by Alcock in *Art and Art Industries of Japan,* published in 1878:

> In architecture, the Japanese, like their neighbours the Chinese, have produced scarcely anything ... A roof supported on wooden pillars which rest on the surface of the ground, and are tied together above by connecting beams, the whole building rarely rising beyond a first story ... Walls are with them but screens to keep out the weather or secure privacy, and are never used for supports to the roof. (Alcock, 1878 p. 16)

In defence of Japanese architecture: E W Godwin

As we noted earlier, Godwin's 1860s interiors and by the early 1870s his architecture denoted his Japanese inspiration (Kinchin & Stirton, 2005 p. 97) so it is perhaps not surprising that he should have come to the defence of Japanese architecture in an article 'Japanese building' published in *The British Architect,* on 30 August 1878. In this one page text Godwin expresses his astonishment at the reaction he received when discussing Japanese architecture with friends:

> ... we were not quite prepared for the attack which our artist friends launched against Japanese architecture. "A flimsy wood and paper construction", said one; "A congregation of pagodas", said another. Indeed, the estimate formed by most people of Japanese architecture rests on no better or surer foundation than that exhibited years since in regard to their perspective or their ideas of female beauty – an estimate based on most deficient premises. (Godwin, August 1878 p. 85)

Godwin continues by describing constructional methods and elements of Japan's architecture; this information he has gleaned from 'a work on Japanese building, an elementary book, it is true, but still a work devoted to the speciality of architecture' (p. 85). The book to which he refers is the text by Aimé Humbert (2 vols. 1870) *Le Japon illustré* (Kinchin & Stirton, 2005 p. 97). Godwin seems amazed that despite the availability of well informed accounts on Japanese architecture there still appeared to be a lack of knowledge on the subject:

> ... and yet only last week a writer in the Saturday Review – curiously like our artist friends above-mentioned – thinks the Japanese do not understand perspective, while all he can tell us of their architecture is that they make everything of wood and "raise their houses on stages or platforms under which the air can blow." – information of the cheap book and twopenny hand-screen type. (Godwin, August 1878, p.85)

In putting the case for Japanese architecture Godwin suggests it should not be judged by taking the lowest form 'the Tea houses and the inferior Temples', and comparing them

with the highest form of Greek architecture 'the Parthenon or even the Propyleion' and concludes:

> But even assuming that Japan possesses only timber constructed buildings, is there, think you, no style – no architectural art – in that wood construction worthy of our admiration or even of our emulation? We are bold to say that there is, that in their wood building there is an art full of refinement and capable of wide adaptation: that we may learn much from their arrangement of masses, their shaping of outlines, the combination and the opposition of delicacy and of strength, that they exhibit in all their detail: and that nowhere shall we see a simple building purpose fulfilled with greater propriety, more modesty, or a keener sense of beauty. (Godwin, August 1878, p.85)

Godwin is probably one of the first to suggest Japanese architecture worthy of emulating in the West; he identifies factors which will become significant to the modernists in the next century. However, from the text it is possible to deduce he was most likely to be unaware of Conder's paper published five months earlier. Unlike Conder, Godwin had not visited Japan, which perhaps makes his observations all the more remarkable.

Positive views of Japanese architecture

Josiah Conder (1852-1920)

It was also in 1878, on 4 March, that a paper on Japanese architecture was read before the RIBA. This paper, written by Josiah Conder, was subsequently published in the transactions of the RIBA.[11] Conder trained in the offices of, the architect, T Roger Smith, and the Gothic revivalist and Japan enthusiast, William Burges; in 1876 he was awarded the RIBA's Soane Medal. He asked to use his Soane Travelling Studentship prize on study in Italy and Japan, where he had gained employment as Professor of Architecture at the Imperial College of Engineering, Tokyo.[12] J Mordaunt Crook commenting on Conder's decision to work in Japan states: 'The Anglo-Japanese nexus was, of course, basic to progressive aesthetics in the 1860s and 1870s – witness the work of Burges, Godwin and Dresser. Conder, therefore, hardly felt aesthetically out of place (Crook, 1981 p. 81).

'Notes on Japanese Architecture' was written when Conder had been in Japan for only a year and he acknowledges his limited study of the subject: 'I beg permission to lay before you my scanty notes, hoping for a future opportunity to enlarging upon them after longer and closer observation and more extended travel in the country' (p. 179). Although

[11] The paper was read by T Roger Smith, a relation of Conder's and his former employer, in his absence.
[12] RIBA archive LC16/4/29.

Conder believes temples and tombs to be the more significant forms of architecture in Japan (fig. 28), he gives a detailed description of the Japanese house:

> In the ordinary houses one external wall or more, and most of the internal walls, are not covered with plaster, but are open between the uprights, being filled in merely with light wooden screens sliding past one another in grooves formed in the heads and cills of the framework, so that the whole partition can be thrown open at any part. When light is required, these screens are formed of thin wooden framework, divided into rectangles of some simple design, and filled in with tough translucent paper, or in some cases in interiors they are covered with paper, decorated with patterns or paintings. (Conder, 1878 p. 180).

Conder is here describing the *shôji,* a translucent sliding screen and the *fusuma,* opaque sliding screen (fig. 29), but at this stage he does not use the Japanese names for these screens. He explains clearly the use of *tatami* mats, but again does not identify them by their Japanese name: 'These mats are always manufactured of one dimension (namely, 2 ft. 11 in. by 5 ft. 10in., being twice as long as their width), and a room is invariably built, measured, and described, not according to its actual dimensions, but by its number of mats' (p. 180). Conder also identifies, but does not name, the *tokonoma*:

> There is generally in one wall of a room a small recess formed in the framework, in which are placed one or two rows of shelves, moulded, polished, and lacquered. These shelves are generally arranged in some quaint unsymmetrical manner, and form an ornament to the room themselves, while they serve for the display of vases or small ornaments. Even the lowest classes of the Japanese shew great taste in judiciously disposing small treasures of good shape and colour to the adornment of their dwellings. (Conder, 1878, p. 180)

He comments on the furnishing of a Japanese house: 'The simple habits of the Japanese, both as regards resting and feeding, render but little furniture necessary for the complete comfort of the householder. Small low tables, more like what we call trays, are used for serving up food – one being set before each guest', and briefly describes the garden: 'They convert the smallest strip of land into a miniature garden, which they plant with well trained shrubs and flowers' (p. 180). He also describes tea houses, hotels, higher class dwellings, palaces and military buildings before discussing temples and tombs. It is significant that despite considering temples to be 'by far the most interesting and instructive' (p. 186) Conder includes a detailed description of the Japanese house which, until this point, has been deemed to be of no interest.

The following year Conder sent a further article to Britain, 'Theatres in Japan', published in *The Builder* on 5 April 1879. Although, as the title would suggest the

predominant subject is Japanese theatre, Conder includes within this text a description of the Japanese dwelling:

> A Japanese house has low rooms, is often only of one story, and is mostly thrown entirely open in the front. Even in the cold weather it is quite common to see the whole front of the house thrown quite open by removing or sliding back the light paper slides (*shojis*), of which nearly the whole front consists ... The internal posts of the passage forming the walls of the rooms can also be filled in or left open according to the weather, so that on a fine summer's day the whole interior can be thrown open, presenting a vista of matted rooms, and groups of posts. (Conder, 1879 p. 368)

It is noticeable that in a year Conder's knowledge and confidence in writing on Japanese architecture has grown, and he refers to the translucent screens by their Japanese name *shôji*. Seven years later, his paper 'Further notes on Japanese Architecture', read at the RIBA on 31 May 1886, dealt only with Japanese temples[13]. However, Conder sent a further paper, to RIBA, 'Domestic Architecture in Japan', which was reproduced in the transactions for 1886/7 and published as a separate pamphlet in 1887[14]. Conder commences this detailed text by describing ordinary houses and it is possible to deduce his knowledge of the Japanese domestic dwelling has greatly increased in the eight years he has lived in Japan, as he is able to articulate concisely the functions of the house:

> In the winter, which is one of considerable severity, it is not uncommon in fine weather to see the whole house thrown open to admit the sunshine ... the walls and paper slides offering no resistance to the penetration of heat in the summer, the only idea of coolness is that of throwing the whole house open to the breezes. Sunshine in winter, and air in summer are the two essentials of a Japanese dwelling; and, it may be that this out-door arbour-like life has contributed in no small measure to the instinctive love of nature possessed by the Japanese people. (Conder, 1887 pp. 104-5)

Here Conder draws a similar conclusion to Jarves as to the origins of the nature loving tendencies of the Japanese. In the next extract the development of Conder's understanding of the Japanese dwelling can be observed:

> The bedroom, as a distinct apartment, can hardly be said to exist ... As a general rule, any room is converted into a bed-chamber by spreading sleeping quilts and pillows upon the matted floor. During the daytime such bedding is secreted in spacious closets arranged between the walls of the different rooms. (Conder, 1887 p. 106)

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[13] Read in his absence by his brother, Roger T Conder.
[14] Also read by Conder's brother, Roger T Conder.

This is the first occasion on which Conder mentions the multi-purpose room and the arrangement and storage of bedding, an idea that must have seemed very strange to the British in the 1880s. He explains the size and function of matting, which he refers to by its Japanese name *tatami,* and continues by describing the serving of food:

> Food is served to the different rooms upon small trays, one tray of provisions being placed before each individual, and all being removed together at the completion of the meal. Each member of the family, and each visitor, is provided with a soft cushion-mat to sit upon, but it is not usual to leave such mats as part of the furniture of a room. (Conder, 1887 p. 106)

Although similar to the description in Conder's first paper in 1878 this later version gives more information on the provision of seating and room furnishing. In the final extract, it is again noticeable that he has acquired a greater understanding of the Japanese house:

> In every house one room or more will be provided with an alcove or recess, called *tokonoma,* and a corresponding recess, occupied either by ornamental shelves or by a closed store-closet ... The *tokonoma* is generally adorned with a vase of flowers or some other single ornament, and its back wall is hung with *kakimonos*[sic.]. If the householder be a wealthy man he will possess, perhaps, a large selection of flower vases and pictures, but these he will keep in his fire-proof store, to be displayed only one or two at a time. The comparative absence of furniture in a Japanese room gives it a very refreshing air of neatness. (Conder, 1887 p. 107)

Having described the basic elements of the Japanese house, including sleeping and eating arrangements, Conder continues to describe middle-class and upper-class houses, feudal and public entertainment houses, military, imperial and summer palaces, but within these first few extracts of his paper we have the elements of the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling. The detailed illustrations, which accompany the paper, further enhance our understanding of this architecture: a drawing of a small middle-class house in elevation and plan (fig. 30); six drawings of the shelving found next to the *tokonoma* (fig. 31); a plan of a larger house, in which the modular nature of the Japanese house is clearly visible (fig. 32); a photograph of a rather ornate *tokonoma,* which was perhaps selected to appeal to a Victorian penchant for decoration (fig. 33); a photograph depicting the setting of a house within a garden, which demonstrates the relationship of architecture to landscape in Japan (fig. 34). There is further description of the *tokonoma,* and the relationship of the house to the garden is discussed in the appendix to this paper 'A Japanese Gentleman's House at Tokio' written by Conder's brother, also an architect, Roger T Conder. In this appendix

we additionally learn that Josiah Conder brought a model of a summer pavilion to Britain, which was then at the Queen's Park Museum, Manchester.[15]

Josiah Conder decided to remain in Japan at the conclusion of his contract; he took a Japanese wife, and continued to practise as an architect. He learnt painting from a Japanese master, Kawanabe Kyôsai, and published texts on Japanese art, landscape gardening and flower arranging which we shall discuss later in this chapter. Today, he is probably better known in Japan, where he is considered to be the father of modern architecture, than in Britain. Several of his Japanese students went on to become prominent architects and he designed many significant public and private buildings. Conder's dissemination of information on Japanese architecture and, in particular the Japanese house, is important to our understanding of the information available in Britain on Japanese architecture in the latter half of the 19th century. A measure of the extent of this dissemination can be determined by the distribution list on the back cover of the pamphlet 'Domestic Architecture in Japan' (Appendix 1). Conder was one of the first in Britain to believe this architecture was worthy of attention, and even though he considered temple and shrine architecture to be more interesting, as perhaps their ornamentation best reflected the current taste, he did described in detail the traditional Japanese dwelling, identifying the key elements which would come to interest the next generation of architects. However Conder was not alone in promoting Japanese architecture in Britain.

Christopher Dresser (1834-1904)

Dresser was another admirer of the Japanese Court at the 1862 International Exhibition, London, however his interpretation of the artefacts on show is in stark contrast to that of the Gothic revivalists we observed earlier; he was not seeking an alternative medieval culture but in the lucid, refined style of the Japanese art and design on display, he perceived a possible inspirational source for the mass production of goods. Dresser's enthusiasm for the Japanese exhibits brought him in contact with Rutherford Alcock and a friendship was struck. It is therefore, not surprising that in *Japan: Its Architecture, Art and Art Manufactures*, published in 1882, Dresser only briefly mentions the Japanese house. The book is an account of his three month visit to Japan, which commenced on 26 December 1877; publication of the text was delayed due to ill health. It should also be remembered that Dresser's time in Japan was comparatively short when one considers Conder's residency in that country. Dresser's comments on the traditional Japanese dwelling, although brief, are not entirely uncomplimentary; he states:

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[15] The Queen's Park Museum is no longer open to the public and there seems to be some confusion as to the whereabouts of the exhibits.

> All Japanese houses, when seen in masses from above, have rather the aspect of hovels or a thatched Irish village, than of English towns. It is only when we view them in detail that we see their beauties, and in many cases it is the interior which is calculated to charm rather than the external aspect. (Dresser, 1882 p. 39)

Although there is no single detailed description of an interior of a Japanese house, Dresser does experience, first hand, various aspects of Japanese living, which he describes, and it is possible to build gradually a vision of the parts that comprise a Japanese dwelling. However, Dresser does give a general outline of the Japanese house:

> The Japanese seek shelter from the rain, and they desire houses which give shade from the sun. They also require buildings which allow of the freest circulation of air. They are a hardy people, and can stand cold, and in the warmer season lead what is practically an outdoor life. At this period of the year, and indeed through most of the winter days, the window-like surroundings of their houses are removed, when all that remains is a roof supported on uprights. (Dresser, 1882 p. 234)

Here Dresser has identified the key structural elements of the Japanese house; the non-load bearing walls and removable screens. Nevertheless he does describe in great detail the temples that he visits, and he is particularly in awe of the shrine at Nikkô (fig. 35) and writes of his admiration for 'the conscientiousness of the work, the loveliness of the compositions, the harmoniousness of the colours, and the beauty of the surroundings' (Dresser, 1882 p. 209). It is apparent that the ornate style of the Nikkô shrine appealed to Dresser's Victorian understanding of ornamentation. This interest in the ornamented architecture of Japan contrasts sharply with Dresser's own design development upon his return to Britain, when it is noticeable his designs, particularly for metalwork, become striking in their simplicity of form.[16]

Within the illustrations to the text there are many drawings of design details from temples, but none of the traditional Japanese house. However a comment on the Japanese house Dresser made during his visit was recorded: 'Japanese houses are well done, and fitted with beautiful garden vantages, and the interiors are also refined and elegant. As a result, one has a sense of extreme purity when entering a Japanese room, one that greatly surpasses that of Western architecture' (Sato, 2002 p. 65). This statement, translated from Japanese, was originally published in an article 'Nihon dendô[sic.] kenchiku no hyôron'

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[16] We shall return to Dresser and his 1880 designs in chapter three when discussed by Nikolaus Pevsner in 1937 as a pioneer of modernism.

[Critique of Japanese Temple and Shrine Architecture] *Dainihon bijutsu shinpô*, September 1885.

Whilst in Japan Dresser commissioned a photographer to record details of architecture and unique objects, approximately 1,000 photographs were taken; he also engaged an artist to capture in colour the design of temple ornaments. On his return to Britain, he gave lectures in Liverpool, Glasgow and London, at the Architectural Association. To illustrate these talks he utilised the visual documentation gained in Japan, and also examples of Japanese workmanship he brought back or had sent from Japan. These lectures were subsequently published in the *Furniture Gazette* 'Japanese Art Workmanship' and *The Architect* 'Some Features of Japanese Architecture and Ornament' respectively (Halén, 1988).

Isabella L Bird (1831-1904)

Dresser was not the only traveller to Japan to recount his experience of the Japanese house, by the 1870s many Westerners were visiting and living in Japan. Within the context of this thesis it is not possible to discuss these fascinating accounts in detail, although we shall take time to examine one, that of the English Victorian travel writer, Isabella Bird, who due to poor health had been advised by her doctors to take 'a change of air'. Rather than the usual stay at a seaside resort or retreat in the country Bird took the opportunity to travel the world alone, visiting America, Japan, Hong Kong, Hawaii and Egypt. To support herself she wrote about her travels and in 1880 *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, an account of her 1878 visit to Japan, was published. She was the first woman Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and Fellow of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Bird prided herself on giving truthful accounts of her travels and was keen to depict Japan as she saw it, despite the possibility of depriving her readers of their romantic notions of the country. However in an account of her stay in, what she considered to be, a Japanese middle class home[17] there is no such fear of any disenchantment in the description of the house and garden:

> Kanaya's, Nikkô, June 15.
> I don't know what to write about my house. It is a Japanese idyll; there is nothing within or without which does not please the eye ... Two verandahs are highly polished, so are the entrance and the stairs which lead to my room, and the mats are so fine and white that I almost fear to walk over them, even in my stockings. The polished stairs lead to a

[17] Kanaya' house was, in fact, the famous Kanaya Hotel, opened in 1874, for foreign visitors. However, Bird did not perceive it as a hotel, but as a private home where some rooms were let to foreigners who brought letters of introduction (Bird, 1984 p. 57).

> highly polished, broad verandah with a beautiful view, from which you enter one large room, which, being too large, was at once made into two... The whole front of my room is composed of *shôji*, which slide back during the day ... At one end are two alcoves with floors of polished wood, called *tokonoma*. In one hangs a *kakemono*, or wall-picture, a painting of a blooming branch of the cherry on white silk – a perfect piece of art, which in itself fills the room with freshness and beauty ... On a shelf in the other alcove is a very valuable cabinet with sliding doors, on which peonies are painted on a gold ground. A single spray of rose azalea in a pure white vase hanging on one of the polished posts, and a single iris in another, are the only decorations. The mats are very fine and white, but the only furniture is a folding screen with some suggestions of landscape in Indian ink. I almost wish that the rooms were a little less exquisite, for I am in constant dread of spilling the ink, indenting the mats, or tearing the paper windows. (Bird, 1984 pp. 55-57)

Bird, in this particularly favourable account of the Japanese house, describes the key elements, which will inspire the British modern movement during the inter-war period. An illustration of Kanaya's house is provided (fig. 36); three illustrations to the text were by an unnamed Japanese artist, the remainder are engravings from either Bird's own drawings or from Japanese photographs.

Photographs of Japan, taken by both Western and native photographers, were collated into albums of which a significant number were exported to the West; these images played a consequential role in the understanding or misunderstanding of Japan. Although many of the photographs were staged, helping to perpetuate the romantic myth (fig. 37), others were more pictorially explicit, for example Felix Beato's 'The Execution Ground' 1867-68 (Worswick, 1980 p. 32). Nevertheless these photographs, many hand coloured, would have contributed to the dissemination of information on Japanese architecture.

Edward S. Morse (1838-1925)

Published six years after Bird's text, four years after that of Dresser's and in the same year as Josiah Conder's paper 'Domestic Architecture in Japan' was read at the RIBA, *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* was published commercially in America.[18] This text, written by Edward S Morse who originally travelled to Tokyo in 1877 to lecture on zoology at the Imperial University, became a seminal work on Japanese domestic architecture particularly in America. Morse was persuaded to leave his study of brachiopods and concentrate on the research he had started on the traditional Japanese house which was changing drastically, due to Westernisation/modernisation, and it was

[18] *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* was first published by the Peabody Academy of Science in 1885 and subsequently published by Ticknor & Co in 1886.

feared, would soon be lost (Lancaster, 1960). Described as 'unquestionably the most careful Western observer of Japanese dwelling architecture in the 19th century' (Sand, 2003 p. 397), Morse produced a detailed account of the various house types, their construction, interior design, function and gardens. He is conscious of his American audience's preconceived notions of a home and wishing not to alienate them against the Japanese house he takes care in explaining:

> An American finds it difficult indeed to consider such a structure as a dwelling, when so many features are absent that go to make up a dwelling at home, - no doors or windows such as he has been familiar with; no attic or cellar; no chimneys, and within no fire-place, and of course no customary mantle; no permanently enclosed rooms; and as for furniture, no beds or tables, chairs or similar articles, - at least, so it appears at first sight. (Morse, 1886 p. 7)

In an initial description of the Japanese house Morse lists the differences: frame construction, no fixed internal walls, sliding screens which replace walls, doors and windows, and unpainted surfaces. He describes the *tokonoma* 'In this place hang one or more pictures, and upon its floor, which is slightly raised above the mats, rests a flower vase, incense burner, or some other object' (p. 8). He also discusses the concealment of cupboards behind sliding doors.

Morse believes the Japanese house receives much criticism from foreigners; 'an Englishman particularly' (p. 10) disliked what he considered to be a flimsy structure which lacked foundations. Considering the Japanese dwelling to have been assessed only from a Western point of view, Morse writes: 'a Japanese builds such a house as he can afford, and one that after all is as thoroughly adapted to his habits and wants as ours is to our habits and wants' (p. 10). He clearly wishes his audience to have an open minded and balanced approach and to this end he gives his own candid opinion:

> For my part, I find much to admire in a Japanese house, and some things not to my comfort. The sitting posture on the floor is painful until one gets accustomed to it; and, naturally, I find that our chairs are painful to the Japanese, until they become accustomed to them. I found the Japanese house in winter extremely cold and uncomfortable; but I question whether their cold rooms in winter are not more conducive to health than our apartments with our blistering stoves, hot furnaces or steam-heaters ... (Morse, 1886 p. 12)

Despite any Western thoughts on the shortcomings in either plan or construction, for Morse, the Japanese house fits the purpose for which it was intended. He explains in detail the building methods, materials and tools of the Japanese carpenter; differentiates house types, architectural features, roofing methods and materials in the various regions of Japan. To aid his readers' understanding, Morse even designates rooms in the Western manner on the plan of a Japanese house (fig. 38) and explains:

> As no room contains any article of furniture like a bedstead, - the bed consisting of wadded comforters, being made up temporarily in any room in the house. The absence of nearly all furniture gives one an uninterrupted sweep of the floor, so that the entire floor can be covered with sleepers if necessary, - a great convenience certainly when one has to entertain unexpectedly a crowd of guests over-night. (Morse, 1886 p. 112)

This idea must have seemed extremely alien to those whose homes were described by James Jackson Jarves as '... crammed with inappropriate objects, neither useful nor beautiful. They *furnish*, or are charitably supposed to, one may guess in conjecturing the cause of their existence' (1876 p. 142). Morse also comments on accumulation of clutter in an American home quoting the writer, Percival Lowell, 'the waste and aimlessness of our American luxury, which is an abject enslavement to tawdry upholstery' (p. 116).

Morse devotes 16 pages to the description and illustration of the *tokonoma* and the *chigaidana*, the recess next to the *tokonoma* containing shelving (fig. 39). He comments on the asymmetry of these and their positioning within the room, contrasting this to the symmetry found in American rooms. He writes of 'ornamental openings or windows' (p. 141), and painted *fusuma* providing decoration to what appears initially to be a simple unadorned room. Despite giving precise dimensions and comparisons of the *tokonoma* in various dwellings he had observed, Morse does not explain the purpose of this recess. However later in the text he does describe the use of flowers:

> In the *tokonoma* ... a vase of bronze or pottery in which flowers are placed, - not the heterogeneous mass of colour comprised in a jumble of flowers, as is too often the case with us; but a few flowers of one kind, or a big branch of cherry or plum blossoms are quite enough to satisfy the refined taste of these people. (Morse, 1886 p. 303)

In the comparison Morse makes between the American home and that of the Japanese, it is apparent that he considers, in many aspects, the Japanese home to be the superior because of its simplicity and cleanliness. Perhaps he feels his praise of the Japanese house has been too great when he concludes:

> Believing that the Japanese show infinitely greater refinement in their methods of house-adornment than we do and convinced that their tastes are normally artistic, I have endeavored to emphasize my convictions by holding up in contrast our usual methods of house-furnishing and outside embellishments. By so doing I do not mean to imply that we do not have in America interiors that show the most perfect refinement and taste; or that in Japan, on the other hand interiors may not be found in which good taste is wanting. (Morse, 1886, p. 348)

This text is possibly the first example of the traditional Japanese dwelling being offered as an exemplar to the West for an alternative mode of living. Whilst the book was considered of significance in America, in Britain it appears to have been viewed slightly differently. The text was perhaps considered too emotive for British taste; the British diplomat and Japanologist, Basil Hall Chamberlain describes Morse's book as '... a delightful account, not only of Japanese architecture, but of every detail of Japanese domestic life, even down to the water bucket and the kitchen tongs' (1905, p. 72). Chamberlain believes Morse's view of Japan to be idealistic and insufficiently objective:

> The only drawback is the author's set purpose of viewing everything through rose-coloured spectacles, which makes those who would fain be instructed feel that they are listening to a special pleader rather than to a judge. Unfortunately for sober science, the fascination exercised by Japan is so potent that a similar fault impairs the value of several otherwise first-rate works. (Chamberlain, 1905 p. 72)

Whilst one can concur with Chamberlain, nevertheless, the text is important in our understanding of the dissemination of information on traditional Japanese domestic architecture and in the promotion of this architecture as an inspirational source for the West; we know that Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) owned a copy of Morse's text (Jackson, 2000 p. 109).

The positive put into practice: Charles Rennie Mackintosh

The work of Glaswegian architect-designer, Mackintosh, demonstrates the practical application of this Japanese inspiration in both his interior and architectural designs during the 1890s and early 20th century. His rooms are light, plain walled, open clutter free spaces, decorated with a few carefully chosen objects and an arrangement or two of flowers. In the reconstruction of his 1906 drawing room (fig. 40) the quadruple pendant light fittings bear great similarity to that of the Japanese lantern. Much reference to Japan can be detected in his Glasgow School of Art 1897-1909; the external metalwork (fig. 41) clearly demonstrates his knowledge of *mon*. Mackintosh was part of a larger group of artists and designers working in Glasgow whose work reflected a keen interest in Japanese art and design. John MacKenzie attributes this to the opportunity in Glasgow during the 1870s and 80s to study Japanese artefacts, which he describes as: '... an outstanding collection of Japanese wares, some one thousand items in all ... which included, furniture, lacquer-work, musical instruments, ceramics, metalware, textiles and paper' (1995 p. 67).

Despite Mackintosh's work showing direct inspiration from Japanese motifs, he never admitted to this inspiration source, or to any other for that matter, although it is

known he had a regard for things Japanese as his home at 120 Mains Street: '... was decorated with Japanese woodcuts and flower arrangements' (Sato & Watanabe, 1991 p. 153). Mackintosh's designs were held in higher esteem on the Continent than they were in Britain. His inspiration on European proto-modernists elevated him to the position of a pioneer of modernism during inter-war re-evaluation of his work, which we shall discuss further in the next chapter.

We have examined texts published from 1878 to 1886 written by Josiah Conder, Christopher Dresser and Edward Morse in which it is apparent that Japan does have an architecture worthy of consideration. It is, therefore, surprising to discover that as late as 1893 it was still thought, by some, that Japan had no architecture.

Further negativity on Japanese architecture and art: William Morris (1834-1896)

In an essay entitled 'Textiles', first published in 1893, William Morris wrote:

> ... the Japanese have no architectural, and therefore no decorative, instinct. Their works of art are isolated and blankly individualistic, and in consequence, unless where they rise, as they sometimes do, to the dignity of a suggestion for a picture (always devoid of human interest), they remain mere wonderful toys, things quite outside the pale of the evolution of art, which, I repeat, cannot be carried out without the architectural sense that connects it with the history of mankind. (Morris, 1899 p. 35)

These comments were partly in response to the obsession with Japanese design, which had swept across Europe and America during the latter half of the 19th century; much of which had been poorly imitated. Morris was familiar with Alcock's writing (Watanabe, 1991 p. 208), and it is most probable that Morris' views on Japanese architecture and art would have been informed by that source.

Aymer Vallance in his biography *The Life and Work of William Morris,* published a year after Morris' death in 1897, comments on this reference to the Japanese having no architecture and therefore no art. Although Vallance considers this was intended to be a light hearted, amusing comment, he believes there is scientific evidence to suggest that Morris' statement was correct. Research undertaken by Professor John Milne and Herr Oscar Munsterberg, Vallance suggests, concur with the notion that because the main building material in Japan was wood, due to susceptibility to earthquakes, there can be no true architecture and therefore no art. However, Vallance does not explain the nature of this investigation.

He finds further evidence to suggest the Japanese are incapable of producing art by quoting from the 1 October 1896 edition of the *Daily Graphic.* In this article earthquakes are again cited as the cause of Japan's inability to create any form of significant art:

> Their houses are in reality simply spaces divided up with light movable partitions. With such insecure walls there is no possibility of suspending works of art in Academy frames ... and hence their mural decorations take the form of strips of either silk or paper, upon which the artist has to elaborate and confine his ideas. These strips are hung up, and can be rolled ... and packed away at will. Hence here again the scope of art has been contracted ... (Vallance, 1897 pp. 434-5)

The purpose of Vallance's inclusion of these two citations, where Japan is considered unable to ever equal the architecture and art of the West, is to provide independent collaboration for Morris' statement. Whilst we may conclude that this belief was an accepted view, by some, at the time and that it was also, in part, a reaction to the flood of things Japanese entering the country in recent years, there is another point to consider. The recent Japanese victory over the Chinese in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 caused some consternation within Europe, which may have lead to anti-Japanese feelings at this time. Nevertheless, it is surprising to find that only 20 years or so before the inter-war period, Japan was still believed to have neither architecture nor art.

Japanese architecture in *The Architectural Review*

The first edition of *The Architectural Review* 'For the Artist and Craftsman'[19] was published in November 1896; the journal had evolved from *The Builder's Journal and Architectural Review*.[20]

'Architecture in Japan' 1896

Edward F Strange (1862-1929) is probably better known for his writing on Japanese prints during the early 20th century. However, in 1896 his article 'Architecture in Japan' was one of the first to be published in the new journal. In this text Strange warns against using European architectural ideals to measure Japanese achievement. He explains that because of isolation there are few historical styles in Japan, as a result house and temple building have changed little over hundreds of years. Strange commends the use of wood as the primary building material for climatic reasons, stating that this was a material chosen by the Japanese in preference to stone, and that the making of tiles had been known in Japan since the 7th century. He gives a description of the Japanese house:

> These requirements at once explain certain characteristics of the Japanese houses; a stout framework of timber supporting a strong tiled – or thatched – roof, with walls which are only light and easily movable screens. In summer,

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[19] By 1919 the journal had become 'A Magazine of Architecture and Decoration'.
[20] *The Builder's Journal* had been launched separately in 1895.

> during the day, the house is a mere skeleton; but the nights are often cold throughout the year, and the building can be closed as easily as opened. (Strange, AR vol. 1 p. 128)

Strange surprisingly questions the suitability of these building methods and materials for an area subject to earthquakes, and cites research by Brunton and Milne which suggests the weight of the roof tiles is a cause for concern. Strange believes it is safer to build in brick or stone even in a region prone to earthquakes. Wood construction is further criticised for the destruction of forests and climate change. Praise is given to the workmanship found in small items but fault is found in construction methods of buildings and 'the exclusion of style' (p. 131), however temples and shrines are praised as having 'more pretensions to style' (p. 132).

There is no mention of the *tokonoma*, although Strange does comment on the minimum use of decorative objects in a room 'a single picture and a vase or two will always suffice' (p. 135). He notes how the constructional materials of the house are used as part of the decoration: 'the grain and colour of the wood are important considerations' (p. 135) and concludes the article by stating:

> This ingenuity in the development of the decorative effect of material is perhaps the most instructive point in Japanese Architecture for the consideration of Europeans. We are, let us hope, beginning to grow out of the epoch of stucco-statuary and its kindred frauds. This age, at least, may claim credit for a revived appreciation of the beauties of unplastered brickwork or terra-cotta. And those who love the simplicity and dignity of unpretending material and honest workmanship will sympathise with and enjoy many of the minor achievements of the Japanese carpenter-architect. (Strange, AR vol.1 p. 135)

In this statement, while giving rather a demeaning view of Japanese architectural prowess, Strange anticipates the aspect of Japanese architecture, which will inspire a future generation of architects.

The illustrations to the article are ascribed to 'native architects and painters' (p. 126) Strange believes that these will depict 'that not unimportant consideration in Architecture, the decorative effect of a building' (p. 133). Given his knowledge of the Japanese print, the illustration of the text by this medium would seem a natural choice, and Strange gives a description of each print selected (fig. 42). In this text Strange, whilst allaying previous criticism of Japanese architecture, raises concerns over the suitability of the architecture in a seismic capacity, whereas the ability to withstand earthquakes is the usual explanation given for this alien architecture. Although the text is a somewhat perplexing portrayal of traditional Japanese domestic architecture it is, nevertheless, a

further example of the dissemination of information on the frame construction method and the notion of flexibility of indoor and outdoor space. It is significant that one of the first articles to be published in the newly launched journal, *The Architectural Review*, should be on Japanese architecture.

'Japanese Domestic Interiors' 1900

Another article on Japanese architecture 'Japanese Domestic Interiors' by the American architect and writer, Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942), appeared in *The Architectural Review* in January 1900. Like Edward Morse before him, Cram is concerned for the preservation of Japanese domestic architecture in the face of Westernisation/ modernisation; he cites the scholar, Kakuzô Okakura and Kashiwagi, an architect friend: 'whose house is a faultless model of native architecture' (p. 9), as men fighting this tide of change, crediting them and the conservative nature of the middle classes for preserving the traditional Japanese dwelling. He believes that this architecture, whilst considered to be 'filmsy, erratic, undignified' (p. 9) will, one day, be rightfully recognised as firm and as logical as any in the West. Cram had travelled to Japan in January 1898 and spent four months in the country discussing an abortive architecture commission.

Cram identifies and describes the four components of the house, their qualities and treatment: the use of wood in its natural state, unpainted or varnished; tinted plaster 'In Japan it has the solidity of stone, the colour of smoke and mist and ethereal vapours, and the texture of velvet.' (p. 10); woven straw of the *tatami*; rice paper 'creamy white, thin, and tough' (p. 10) used to cover *shôji* and a thicker version used for covering *fusuma*. 'Not an ambitious collection of materials, and yet for refinement, reserve, subtle colour and perfection of artistic composition and ultimate effect, I know of few things to compare with the interior of a Japanese house' (p. 10).

The furnishing of the room is discussed and kneeling cushions, *tansu* (chest of drawers), *andon* (lamp with rice papered wooden frame), lower tables, *hibachi* (portable brazier) and *byôbu* (folding screen) are all described and Cram reflects: 'Under ordinary circumstances, a living room, even of the better class, contains nothing in the way of furniture except what appears in the *tokonoma and chigaidana'* (p. 10). He describes the multi-functions of a Japanese room, the use of cushions by day, bedding by night, small tables for the serving of food; Cram feels that far from giving the impression of stark bareness, the room engenders a sense of calm: 'It is impossible, after a time, not to feel that the Japanese have adopted an idea of the function of a room, and the method of best expressing this, far in advance of that which we have made our own' (p. 10). Cram

believes the space to be a relief and escape from the over-cluttered home of the West (fig. 43).

He explains how the 'simple and modest' (p. 11) decoration in the room is contained within the *tokonoma* and *chigaidana*: 'they show to perfection the wonderful artistic feeling of the race, for in line and colour and form the combination of picture-flower, and bric-à-brac is beyond criticism' (p. 11). Cram continues:

> The whole basis of artistic combination may be gained in a study of Japanese *tokonoma,* for in them one finds preserved all the matchless refinement of feeling, all the result of centuries of artistic life that raised the art of Japan to the dizzy height from which Europe and America are now engaged in casting it ignominiously down. (Cram, AR vol. 7 p. 12)

The sentiments expressed in this text are similar to those of Edward Morse's: both are concerned at the potential loss of the traditional Japanese dwelling as a result of Westernisation/modernisation, comparisons are made between the cluttered interior of the West and the airy spacious calm of the Japanese interior, and each believes this more serene living space could be an exemplar for the Western house. However, these texts may have been considered somewhat hagiographical in their approach to the Japanese home; the similarity in the texts is probably no coincidence as Morse and Cram were both in Boston and it is, therefore, more than likely they were acquainted.

Early 20th Century Texts on Japanese Architecture: positive and negative views

Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts 1905

The article 'Japanese Domestic Interiors' formed a chapter in Cram's 1905 publication *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts.* In this book Cram describes the treatment of Japanese architecture by the West as 'unjust and superficial' although he concedes it is difficult for Westerners to interpret as, although the architecture is 'logical, historical, ethnic, is, of course, profoundly Oriental' (p, 35). Cram states:

> Japanese architecture is undoubtedly less well known and less appreciated than the architecture of any other civilized nation. Not only this, but it is almost universally misjudged, and while we have by degrees come to know and admire the pictorial and industrial arts of Japan, her architecture, which is the root and vehicle of all other modes of art, is passed over with a casual reference to its fantastic quality or a patronizing tribute to the excellence of some of its carved decoration. (Cram, 1905 p. 35)

Cram is dismayed that those who write eloquently on Japan and her arts virtually ignore her architecture, and when architecture is discussed it is only that of the Tokugawa period,

in particular the shrines at Nikkô, which are considered worthy of attention while castle and domestic architecture are ignored.

Japanese domestic architecture, Cram believes, has a 'salutary' lesson to teach the West. Despite the concept being entirely alien and not suitable for cold climates:

> It has certain qualities, however, that we could imitate to advantage. One of these is the perfect simplicity of each room, with its soft mats, its beautiful wood, its subtle colouring, its reserved and satisfying decorations. A Japanese room is full of repose, and after one has come to feel these qualities fully, one remembers with a kind of horror the stuffy chaos of the apartments in a modern American dwelling. (Cram, 1905 p. 76)

Again Cram's ideas seem close to those of Morse. This text is of significance in our examination of the reception of Japanese architecture before 1919 and in our search for Japonisme during the inter-war period as Cram's book was republished in 1930, and we shall return to this text again in Part Three, chapters five and six.

Kakuzô Okakura (1862-1913)

Okakura, who Cram cites as a campaigner for the preservation of the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling in his 1900 text, writes in *The Book of Tea* on the Westerner's understanding of his native architecture:

> To European architects brought up on the traditions of stone and brick construction, our Japanese method of building with wood and bamboo seems scarcely worthy to be ranked as architecture. It is but quite recently that a competent student of Western architecture has recognised and paid tribute to the remarkable perfection of our great temples. Such being the case as regards our classic architecture, we could hardly expect the outsider to appreciate the subtle beauty of the tea-room, its principles of construction and decoration being entirely different from those of the West. (Okakura, 1956 pp. 53-54)

The Book of Tea was written shortly after Okakura arrived in America, and was read to the aestheticians of Boston prior to publication in 1906. Perhaps it was a desire to retain the perception of a misconstrued country or to perpetuate the mystical, as the descriptions whilst being evocative are somewhat rhetorical. We are not told the identity of the 'competent student', but as we have discovered there was a growing appreciation of all aspects of Japanese architecture particularly in the light of Cram's text published only a year earlier. It could therefore appear a little disingenuous to suggest that a Western architect was incapable of comprehending the tea-room aesthetic. However, it is evident from Cram's text above that he and Okakura shared similar views on the portrayal in general of Japanese architecture in the West and as both Cram and Okakura were in Boston

it is more than likely they were associated. Conceivably the following text would be one to cause them both dismay.

***Things Japanese* 1905**

Published in the same year as Cram's text, *Things Japanese* by Basil Hall Chamberlain has already been mentioned in connection with Morse's text. Described in the title as 'being notes on various subjects connected with Japan for the use of travellers and others' the subjects to be discussed are arranged in alphabetical order; 'Architecture' is allotted seven pages. Chamberlain concurs with Rutherford Alcock's view of Japanese architecture, whilst considering the Japanese able to produce the most beautiful small items, Chamberlain describes their ability for architecture thus: 'The massive, the spacious, the grand, is less congenial to their mental attitude. Hence they achieve less success in architecture than in the other arts' (p. 34). He believes the shrines at Nikkô and Shiba to be only of interest for their ornate decorative qualities but cannot be considered as architecture in the Western sense. He again mentions Morse's *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings*:

> It was a true instinct that led Professor Morse to give to his charming monograph on Japanese architecture the title of *Japanese Homes,* the interest of Japanese buildings lying less in the buildings themselves than in the neat domestic ways of their denizens, and in the delightful little bits of ornamentation that meet one at every turn ... (Chamberlain, 1905 pp. 34-35)

This is perhaps a slight deviation in the intended understanding of the text proffered by Morse. Chamberlain gives his own description of the Japanese house in which he lists all the features: no solid walls, sliding screens, *shôji* and *fusuma*, flexibility of space, blurring of indoor and outdoor space, *tatami* matting and unit sizing of rooms. He describes the *tokonoma*: 'They generally have a recess or alcove, ornamented with a painted or written scroll (*kakemono*) and a vase of flowers' (p. 36). Chamberlain does not call the *tokonoma* by name or fully explains its function. He comments on the lack of furniture, describes sleeping and eating arrangements, and notes the built-in storage: 'Cupboards are, for the most part, openings in the wall, screened by paper slides, – not separate, moveable entities' (p. 36).

Chamberlain contemplates only three positive aspects of the Japanese house: it is cheap to build, it suits the indigenous population, and it is considered to be hygienic and clean. He summarises his description of the dwelling:

> These details will probably suggest a very uncomfortable sum total; and Japanese houses *are* supremely uncomfortable to ninety-nine

> Europeans out of a hundred. Nothing to sit on, nothing but a brazier to warm oneself by, and yet abundant danger of fire, no solidity, no privacy, the deafening clatter twice daily of the opening and shutting of the outer wooden slides, draughts insidiously pouring in through innumerable chinks and crannies, darkness whenever heavy rain makes it necessary to shut up one or more sides of the house – to these and various other enormities Japanese houses must plead guilty.
> (Chamberlain, 1905 pp. 36-37)

It is fascinating to note that, while some of the discomforts mentioned above are also cited by those in the West who praise the Japanese house, some of the features which appear to Chamberlain to be negative aspects of the dwelling are the very features that recommend the Japanese house as an inspiration for the West, for example the lack of furniture and an airy spaciousness. Although Chamberlain's description of the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling appears to give a poor account, nevertheless, it contributes to the dissemination of information on this subject by listing all the features which will later come to be of relevance during the inter-war period.

Japanese architecture and art in *The Studio* magazine

The first issue of *The Studio* appeared in 1893, three years before the launch of *The Architectural Review*. The magazine, founded by Charles Holme (1848-1923)[21], was edited by him until 1921-22. Holme had a profound interest in Japan; in 1878 he formed a business partnership with Christopher Dresser, and a year later the import company of Japanese artefacts, Dresser & Holme, opened showrooms in London and a branch office in Kôbe, Japan. In 1888-9 Holme travelled to Japan with Arthur Lasenby Liberty, founder of the Regent Street store; following their visit both Holme and Liberty wrote knowledgeably on Japanese design (Halén, 1993). Holme was a founder member and vice-president of the Japan Society in London, and received the Order of the Rising Sun in recognition for his work in promoting understanding between Japan and the West.[22] Holme considered Japanese objects 'examples of an aesthetic principle which he believed was of immense potential value in the West' (Laszlo, 1933 p. 212). It is therefore, perhaps not surprising to find within the pages of *The Studio* frequent review of Japanese art and design.

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[21] Not to be confused with the painter, art critic, director of the National Gallery, Charles Holmes (1868-1936).

[22] The Japan Society was founded in 1891. Information on Charles Holme's association with the Society is taken from a 40 year appraisal of *The Studio* and its editor, written, in part, by Holme's son and then editor, C G Holme (vol. 105 April 1933). However, other sources suggest Holme enrolled with the society in 1892 and was Honorary Secretary in 1894.

In this section we shall examine key texts and events that feature in the *The Studio,* which give further information on Japanese architecture or are written by those we have already identified as disseminators of the subject.

'Japanese Flower Arrangement' – Josiah Conder

We have examined Conder's papers on Japanese architecture already in this chapter, but his Japanese studies were not restricted to those of his profession. Conder wrote a number of books on Japanese gardens and flower arranging: *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893), *Supplement to Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893), *The Flowers of Japan and the Art of Flower Arrangement* (1891), *The Floral Art of Japan* (1899), *The Theory of Japanese Flower Arrangements* (1935).[23]

In October 1896 the first in a series of three articles entitled 'Japanese Flower Arrangement' appeared in *The Studio.* Conder commences with an explanation of the differences between Japanese flower arranging and that of the West: 'Out of this pastime, however, the Japanese have elaborated a method distinctly their own, which upon examination reveals aesthetic principles of a high order and of great originality' (p. 14). In this first article he describes the treatment of the flowers and other materials used, explaining the structure of the arrangement and its asymmetrical composition (fig. 44), finally identifying the different schools and styles started by various masters. The second article deals with the choice of flower and Conder explains that this also includes grasses, ferns and branches of trees; he also discusses the seasonal selection of plant material and the combining of particular species 'The natural place that trees and plants occupy in the landscape must be kept in mind when using their cuttings for flower designs' (p. 178) (fig. 45). Containers and fastening methods used to secure the arrangement are discussed in the final article, in which Conder describes the types of vessels, their shapes and materials of construction (fig. 46). He concludes with further explanation on composition.

It is apparent from this serialisation of Conder's authoritative writing, he has detailed knowledge of Japanese flower arranging, and although he does not mention by name the *tokonoma* it is apparent he understands the function of the flower arrangement within this alcove:

> A certain harmony is sought between the vessel used in the floral arrangement. This harmony may be one of proportion, shape, material or decoration. It often happens that the flowers used, the design of the vase in which they are placed, and the picture suspended to the wall behind are parts of a connected composition or idea. (Conder, *The Studio,* vol. 9 p. 246)

[23] A reprint of paper read by Conder in 1889 at the Asiatic Society of Japan.

A prodigious quantity of photographs depicting flower arrangements illustrate the text, 30 in total, and one cannot help but wonder how these decidedly unusual images were received in late Victorian Britain (fig. 47). Perhaps it was refreshing to have such a clear and detailed explanation of a Japanese art form, which exemplified Charles Holme's view of Japan where 'living itself was an art' (Laszlo, 1933 p. 212).

Conder's knowledge of Japanese flora is demonstrated in the text; we have already noted Conder's writing on the Japanese landscape garden. *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893) was one of the first comprehensive texts on the subject, and is today regarded as a seminal work. The 1893 *Supplement to Landscape Gardening in Japan* included photographs, which in many cases demonstrate the relationship between landscape and architecture (fig. 48). Of this relationship Conder wrote:

> The subjection of a garden to the lines and disposition of the adjoining buildings is by no means disregarded. It is, however, a subordination entirely different from that followed in Western styles, and in its own manner far more complete ... The aspect most desirable for the dwelling rooms, and the external prospect which they are intended to command, govern the whole arrangement of plan, to which any irregularity may be given, so long as it assists in providing important chambers with a desirable outlook. (Conder, 1893, p. 28)

Conder's text was possibly the first to bring to the attention of the West Japanese ideas concerning the relationship between landscape and domestic architecture.

'An Experiment in the Application of Japanese Ornament to the Decoration of an English House'

The above titled article appeared in the 1899 August edition of *The Studio* in which the interior of 25 Cadogan Gardens, London, designed by the architect, A H Mackmurdo, for the artist, Mortimer Menpes (1859-1938), is discussed. Menpes, a follower of the Japan inspired artist James McNeill Whistler, travelled to Japan in 1887 and 1896; in 1901 Menpes' book *Japan: a record in colour* was published. The idea of using Japanese objects to decorate an interior was not a new one particularly amongst artists, both Whistler and the Pre-Raphaelite artist, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, are known to have had collections of Japanese items displayed in their rooms. However Menpes seems to have approached his interior in a different way.

The writer of the article is not identified, although we can suspect from the style of writing and subject matter it was most probably Charles Holme. He questions whether it is possible to 'borrow anything from this beautiful style of Japanese decoration' (p. 172) as

the difference between a Western and Japanese room is so great: no movable furniture only built-in storage, small tables which are immediately removed after use, no fireplaces and glazed windows: 'A condition of things so entirely differing from Western necessities is opposed, on the face of it, to transplantation' (p. 172). It is considered therefore the only borrowings could be from small individual features of decoration. Although previous attempts to incorporate Japanese ornament into Western building had been less than satisfactory, the writer believes Menpes has been quite successful: 'Probably no more favourable example could be found than this remarkable house of the adaptation of Japanese ornament ...' (p. 173).

Within the text we learn that during his recent trip to Japan Menpes had made a particular examination of the interior design of Japanese houses, commissioning Japanese carpenters and craftsmen to construct the interior fittings for his new house 'the whole being so constructed as to be readily taken to pieces, packed, and put together again in London' (p. 172). These consisted of ceilings, wall panelling made up of *ramma* [carved openwork ventilation panels] and lattice work, secondary windows of *shôji* like screens, items of furniture and light fittings; many of the textiles used appear also to have originated in Japan. The idea of *tatami* matting was abandoned, due to Western footwear, and replaced with plan carpeting, and sliding doors were not adopted, although, not mentioned in the text, something similar to a *shôji* is present in the drawing room (fig. 49).

It is not altogether obvious how the writer feels about this hybrid interior; Menpes is praised for his treatment of walls: 'The simple methods of panelling, the absence of mouldings, the entirely plain wall-surfaces, are in excellent taste and follow entirely Japanese precedents' (p. 174) but he is rebuked for his choice of chairs and dining room overmantel: 'while of simple and inoffensive structure, is an example of unnecessary pandering to modern conventionalities' (p. 176). The writer notes that the small square wooden tables used for the display artefacts are of 'Chinese form' (p. 176). There is a concern expressed that the Japanese interior should not just be copied but interpreted for Western needs:

> Mr. Menpes, by his free application of gold and colours and by his display in European fashion of numerous ornaments, has rather gone beyond Japanese custom in domestic interiors, but in doing so he has not acted unadvisedly, as he has wished to adapt from rather than slavishly imitate the prototype. (*The Studio,* vol. 17 p. 173)

We can conclude from this article and the accompanying photographs Menpes has an understanding of not only the Japanese house but also its culture (Ono, 2003). It is difficult from these monochrome photographs to get a sense of the colours employed; we

are, for example, unable to appreciate the gold background applied to the carved wooden ceilings and *ramma.* At first glance these hybrid spaces appear to be rather gloomy less cluttered Victorian rooms with strange furniture, but on closer inspection one gradually starts to notice objects and design details from the Japanese dwelling, for example the unit consisting of shelves, cupboards and drawers at the far end the studio (fig. 50). In the inner hall some of the details, particularly the balustrade, are reminiscent of the work of the architect-designer, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and the asymmetry of space is striking (fig. 51).

Whilst there appears to be no apparent link with the interior spaces depicted, and the modernist rooms of the inter-war period, this article is of significance in our search for the dissemination of knowledge on Japanese architecture. In this text we are reminded of the interior of the Japanese house with its simplicity, an attribute which is recommended by the writer:

> Let ornament be used as sparingly as may be desired, but whatever there is of it, let it be the best. Plain structural forms and plain surfaces add to rather than detract from the beauty of a house, provided their proportions are duly considered and that they are so placed that they relieve in effect some object of consummate decorative value. (*The Studio*, vol. 17 p. 178)

Within the photographs it is possible to deduce some signs of built-in furniture (fig. 51), and there appears to be a number of references to somewhat crowded *tokonoma* (figs. 49 & 52). In this text, not only the elements of the traditional Japanese dwelling are cited, which will interest the modernist architect in the 1920s and 30s, but we have an example of an attempt to incorporate some of these elements into a British interior space.

Jiro Harada (1878-1974)

In chapter one we examined *The Studio*'s review of the 1910 Japan-Britain Exhibition, and noted that this event provided the magazine with a useful contact. It was during his stay in London as an attaché of His Imperial Majesty's Commission to the Japan-British Exhibition, that *The Studio* made the acquaintance of Jiro Harada, describing him as a professor of the Nagoya College of Technology (vol. 50 p. 98). Educated in Japan until his early teens, Harada travelled to America where he received a high school education and studied at the University of California, Berkeley. Aged 27 he returned to Japan in 1905, where he taught in two government colleges until 1916. From 1909 to 1911 he was sent by the Japanese Government to London to work for the commission responsible for organising and overseeing the 1910 exhibition. It was in July 1910 that

Harada wrote the first of many articles for *The Studio*; becoming the magazine's corresponding editor for the Far East in 1911. Between 1914 and 1916 he was sent to San Francisco as one of His Majesty's Commissioners to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. In 1920 he was sent to Genoa, Italy, and in 1921, 1925, 1928 to Geneva, Switzerland as an attaché of the Government Delegates to the International Labour Conferences. Harada joined the staff of the Imperial Household Museum in 1925. He contributed to the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on Japanese architecture, sculpture, interior decoration, ivory carving, gardens, the tea ceremony and Noh drama. During the 1930s he lectured at American universities on Japanese art and culture (Harada, 1937).

Harada's first articles for *The Studio* were for a series consisting of five texts on modern Japanese art entitled 'Japanese art and artists of today'; he wrote on three subjects out of the five : I 'Painting', July 1910; IV 'Wood and Ivory Carving,' November 1910; V Metal-work, March 1911.[24] Other texts by Harada also appeared in *The Studio* at that time, including: 'Japanese Temples and their Treasures', published in January 1911, and 'Old Japanese Folding Screens' in November 1911.

In the majority of these articles Harada mentions details of the interior of the Japanese house, in particular, the *tokonoma.* In 'Wood and Ivory Carving' he explains the function of the alcove:

> ... in Japanese houses only on a *tokonoma* – a special place slightly raised from the floor and cut into the wall as an alcove – are art objects placed, and generally one at a time ... In a Japanese house this [wooden statue] would most probably be placed on a *tokonoma* in front of a scroll of a plum tree, as the statue represent Michizane in boyhood composing a poem on plum blossoms ... these two objects would, no doubt, constitute the whole of the decoration. (Harada, *The Studio,* vol. 51 p. 118)

In 'Japanese Temples and their Treasures' Harada briefly describes the use of 'a tree with the bark and perhaps a branch or two in its natural state for the post on the *tokonoma*' (*The Studio,* vol. 51 p. 306). This article is a description of the three volumes of the same name, which were prepared under the auspices of the Department of the Interior of the Japanese Government, and were produced in commemoration of the Japan-British exhibition: 'it has been customary for the Government to present the nations of the West with some valuable publication of singular attraction, which stand out amidst the hundreds of books and pamphlets usually distributed on such occasions' (p. 299). The first of these three volumes deals with architecture, photographs from which illustrate the

[24] Other contributors were: H. Shugio – II 'Ceramic Artists', September 1910; Wilson Crewdson – III Textiles and embroidery, October 1910.

article (fig. 53). The RIBA library was presented with a set of these volumes in November 1922 thus contributing to the information already available on Japanese architecture within that institution.[25]

Harada commences his article 'Old Japanese Folding Screens' with a note on the decoration of a Japanese room:

> In an artistic country like Japan, Europeans are often surprised to find so few objects of art that are used to decorate the room, and to note the almost total absence of furniture of any kind. They will find in the room of an ancient house reputed to contain a large collection of treasures merely a *kakemono* (a hanging picture), or a pair of them, adorning the wall of the *tokonoma* ... with a vase of flowers arranged in an artistic style ... but the bulk of the treasures are stored away in the godown waiting for their turn to appear ... and nothing has assumed such an important position in the Japanese house among these few objects that are ornamental as well as useful as the *byobu*, or folding screens, which are now admired so much in the West ... (Harada, *The Studio*, vol. 54 p.110)

In addition to discussing the *byôbu* (fig. 54) Harada also mentions the *fusuma*, sliding screen which divide rooms, stating that apart from performing a similar function they both offer 'some of the largest surfaces for decorative painting' (p. 117). A further mention of the *tokonoma* is made by Harada in his contribution to Oliver Wheatley's 'Japanese Ornamental Basket Work', February 1911 (fig. 55).

Within these articles Harada gives us a glimpse of the interior of the Japanese house; these texts build on the knowledge already made available through *The Studio* and are important to our understanding of the dissemination of knowledge on the traditional Japanese dwelling. Whilst Harada observes the Western deficiency in appreciation of Japanese art, he empathises with the difficulty in comprehending cultural differences: 'This failure to grasp the essence of Japanese art is, after all, a natural one. To really understand the civilisation of a nation entirely different to one's own is an arduous and sometimes an almost impossible task' (*The Studio*, vol. 50 pp. 98-99). With this statement Harada appears to be absolving previous misjudgement; within the pages of *The Studio* his is perceived as the authoritative, authentic voice on the arts of Japan. A native of the country, but through education, articulate in a Western genre, and as such, he validates Japanese architecture and art. Harada continued to write for the magazine during the 1920s and 30s, contributing articles and providing copy for 'Studio-Talk'; we shall discuss more of his texts in chapter six.

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[25] The volumes were presented by G. Kiralfy (RIBAJ, vol. 30 pp. 17-18).

Summary

It is extraordinary to discover how diverse the reactions of Victorian architect-designers were to the display of Japanese art and design, especially the Japanese Court at the 1862 International Exhibition, London, which we examined at the beginning of this chapter. The Gothic revivalists found within the exhibits from Japan exquisitely hand crafted artefacts epitomising the lost medieval world which they sought. Conversely Christopher Dresser, and other members of the Cole group, perceived in these Japanese artefacts a simplicity of form and decoration that could be an exemplar for industrial production.

In our examination of texts from the latter half of the 19th century we have encountered both positive and negative responses to Japanese architecture from American, British and Japanese writers. It is surprising to find that, despite favourable reports, as late as 1905 there was still negativity regarding the architecture of Japan, particularly in relation to the traditional domestic dwelling. However, the key elements of the Japanese house: frame construction, the use of sliding doors to partition rooms, the relationship of indoor and outdoor space, built-in furniture, and the display of objects of art in the *tokonoma*, are enunciated, and it is reference to these we shall be seeking in the following chapter on modernism in Part Two.

Part Two – Modernism

Chapter 3

Introduction

Although modernism during the 1920s and 30s also referred to fine art, literature, music, film and photography, in the context of this thesis we shall be examining modernism chiefly in relation to architecture, interior design and landscape design in Britain. Modernism arose from a desire to create order from the chaos of industrialisation and the carnage of the First World War. In architecture, it sought a clean ordered world where truth, like sunlight, would stream through the new larger windows. Modernism was more than just another style it was a philosophy for living.

To define the beginning of modernism is problematical as opinions differ; some give the starting date of 1880, others the close of the 18th century or conversely 1910. The 2006 V&A exhibition *Modernism: designing a new world* commenced with the year 1914. Paul Greenhalgh in his introduction to *Modernism in Design* divides modernism into three phases: proto-modernism – 1880-1914, pioneer – 1914-1929/32, and International Style – from 1932 (1990 pp. 2-5). The period under discussion in this research falls within two of Greeenhalgh's phases: pioneer and International Style. We shall be focusing primarily on the latter and the architectural style described by Hitchcock and Johnson in their similarly titled 1932 seminal work *The International Style: architecture since 1922.*

Much of the discussion in this chapter has been informed by my examination of journals during the inter-war period, which for this section, focuses primarily on the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (RIBAJ) and *The Architectural Review* for response to modernist architecture in Britain. Due to the duplication of material, *The Architects' Journal,* a technical and trade orientated weekly publication by the same company that produced *The Architectural Review*, was not consulted in relation to this aspect of the research because it covered, in considerable detail, the proceedings of the RIBA and reviews of forthcoming issues of *The Architectural Review.* Although informative on British modernism in art and design, *The Studio* infrequently mentioned British modern architecture; most information on modernism in architecture came from Europe and America particularly after 1931 when *The Studio* was published, in its entirety, in the US under the title *Atelier.* We shall examine the debates regarding modernism that were current during the inter-war period: tradition versus modern, the functional and the modernistic, the pioneers of the modern movement and the promoters, but firstly we shall consider the origins and aims of modernism.

The origins and aims of modernism: utopian ideals

Modernism developed in continental Europe through a cross fertilisation of ideas from Britain, Europe and America; it was an optimistic belief that the world could be a better place despite industrialisation and war. The consensus of opinion is that the origins of modernism began in the late 19th century, with the period before the First World War a time of experiment, investigation and new ideas. It was thought the machine should not be discarded, as recommended by John Ruskin and William Morris, but it should be used to produce well designed, functional and inexpensive products for the good of all. Modernism developed at a time of change; technological, natural and social sciences, psychology and philosophy advances were challenging the old order.

However, in reality many of the aims of modernism did echo Morris' sentiments. Equality in the arts: no one art should have greater status than another; truth to materials: one fabric should not imitate another and the avoidance of unnecessary ornament. In 1908, the Viennese architect, Adolf Loos' essay 'Ornament and Crime' suggested that ornament was associated with primitives, degenerates and criminals; civilisation would liberate objects from ornament. The elimination of embellishment became a fundamental principle of those who advocated and practised modernism; the Swiss born French architect, Le Corbusier promoted Loos' essay thus creating '... an essential catalyst for architecture's conversion away from historicism of the nineteenth century to modernism' (Canales & Herscher, 2005 p. 235).

The functionality of an object was of great importance. Form should follow function in as much as the design of an item should be informed by its use; this theory should be applied equally to as small and as simple an item as a potato peeler, as to a car or even a house. New materials and techniques made it feasible, at least in theory, for well designed, mass-produced items made of the newest materials to be available for the general public at affordable prices. Morris had sadly failed to improve the life of all but the affluent in his pursuit of emulating medieval methods of hand crafting artefacts, conversely modernism proposed using technical advances to mass produce components to enhance the lives of even the poorest citizens.

Advancement was also seen as the goal: it was believed that an aesthetic advancement in design could emulate the linear development achieved in the sciences. The modernist was to look forward to science and technology for design solutions and not to the past. Anti-historicism is considered a key element in modernist ideals but it is confusing as whilst considering the past to be of no significance the tracing of those responsible for initiating modernism is frequently sought; *The Architectural Review*, as we

shall see later in this chapter, published several articles on modernism's prophets during the 1930s. A further anomaly arises when one glances at the history of the word 'modernism'. *The Oxford Universal Dictionary Illustrated* gives the year 1737 in which the employment of 'modernism' to mean 'a usage, expression, or peculiarity of style, etc., characteristic of modern times' first occurred (1967 p. 1268). However, the use of 'modern' meaning 'just now' is attributed to the year 1500 and 'modernist' to 1588 (1967 p. 1268), thus making this an ironic choice of name for a movement that purported to be breaking with the past by the rejection of historicism.

The 1910 publication of a folio of drawings of building plans and designs by Frank Lloyd Wright *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* in Berlin by Ernst Wasmuth had a profound effect on European modernist architects. Dutch De Stijl architect, Robert van't Hoff travelled to America to work for Wright in 1913. Wright's inspiration from the Japanese architecture at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair is reflected in these drawings. Another De Stijl architect, Gerrit Rietveld, in 1924 demonstrated this inspirational source in his designs for a house in Utrecht. Described by the British modernist architect, Raymond McGrath, in 1934 as 'sharp and Japanese' (p. 15), the upper floor of the Schöder House was a single space divided by sliding screens to create separate rooms (fig. 67).[26]

The horror and devastation of the First World War promoted further development of modernist ideology as the magnitude of the problems to be solved increased; this was a cultural and social agenda with no boundaries, truly international. In Germany, the Bauhaus has had a far-reaching influence in art and design since its formation in 1919. During its 14 years span, until its forced closure by the National Socialists in 1933, it has been associated with eminent architects, artists and designers including László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius who fled Nazi Germany for Britain in the 1930s. The directorship of this progressive and influencial school of art and design was initially undertaken by Gropius; in 1930 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe took over the position. Mies van der Rohe's ideology of 'less is more' is articulated in the simplicity of his designs, and this concept became synonymous with modernism. The Barcelona Pavilion is a particularly good example of 'less is more'; the juxtapositional composition of building

[26] The use of flat rectangular planes, some in primary colours, is reminiscent of the two dimensional work of fellow De Stijl's member, the artist Piet Mondrian whose work has also been associated with Japanese architecture: 'A traditional Japanese farmhouse, which uses structural wood framing laid out according to an irregular plan not unlike Mondrian's. It is likely that Modrian knew this kind of Japanese imagery from photographs' (Rawson, 1987 p. 77).

and water is suggestive of the Japanese aesthetic relationship between architecture and landscape (fig. 57).

In France, Le Corbusier's 1923 *Vers une Architecture* (English translation 1927 *Towards a New Architecture*) was a seminal work for members of the British modern movement but Corbusier's notion of a house as a machine for living caused heated debate in Britain, as we shall discover later in the chapter. In 1914-15 Corbusier developed the Dom-ino plan (fig. 58), from which the Citrohan House developed; this form of framework construction is synonymous with Japanese architecture.

These European modernist concepts of functionality, internationalism, anti-historicism, anti-ornamentation, anti-segregation of the arts, mechanisation, the use of technological improvements, and above all advancement, that through design it would be possible to not only develop a superior new world but also a happier, healthier population, was an exciting and heady mix for fledgling architects and designers in Britain in the mid 1920s.

The response to modernism in Britain

The images of unadorned, geometric shaped constructions of concrete, steel and glass, that was European modernist architecture were regularly featured during the 1920s in British publications, for example, *The Studio* and *The Architectural Review*, but in Britain modernism was slow to flourish despite the efforts of the Vorticists, led by Wyndham Lewis, before the First World War.[27] Nevertheless, there was a modern movement in Britain, although less prolific, and in common with the Continent, the British modern movement embraced all the arts. Although aware of the European modernism through periodicals and books, Britain's reluctance to embrace the new movement has been attributed to inherent conservatism, in conjunction with economic and social reasons; 'England is always conservative in adopting new ideas, and mistrustful of extremes' (Casteels, 1931 p. 31).

At the turn of the century Britain was not entirely seduced by the style of Art Nouveau and remained constant to the dual themes of the Arts and Crafts and the English Domestic Revival. Garden Cities were also a preoccupation; Letchworth Garden City in 1904 and Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1906. In the early twentieth century Britain lost its lead in architecture. After the First World War, due to the economic climate and the prevailing taste a stripped Classicism or its Gothic equivalent were favoured. Slum clearance and social housing were matters for discussion; 'homes fit for heroes' did not

[27] Lewis' theories on social change through art were to become an inspirational source for the young British modernist architects.

fully materialise. In December 1926 the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was inaugurated in response to what was seen as the rape of the countryside; the construction of new roads, ribbon developments and advertising hoardings. Many of the houses built during the inter-war period were not designed by architects but were the work of the speculative builder. It is fascinating to note that the speculative builder favoured the modernist style, although he rarely built using modern techniques preferring to use brick walls and render to give the impression of concrete, to reduce costs. However, these imitations of modern design were not popular with prospective suburban home owners. The acceptance of modernism in architecture in Britain can be monitored through the pages of the conservative journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBAJ).

Modernism and the RIBA

A brief history of the RIBAJ

The RIBAJ developed in 1893 from two separate RIBA publications; Proceedings and Transactions. A detailed account of this amalgamation and a description of publications from 1834 was given by Edward Carter, the then librarian and editor of the journal, in *The Growth and Work of the Royal Institute of British Architects 1834-1934*, edited by J A Gotch and published in 1934. In 1918 G Northover was editor; on his retirement in 1921, the librarian, Rudolf Dircks, became editor and Edward Carter became librarian-editor when Dircks retired in 1930 (Gotch, 1934). Under Carter's editorship the journal underwent major modernisation in November 1931, and in October a warning of these forthcoming changes was printed in the journal:

> To make changes in such a revered and ancient institution as the RIBA Journal is a venture not lightly faced ... Meanwhile our modernists and our traditionalists can both hope, and both perhaps gain some assurance from the fact that the Journal committee has had the distinguished help from Stanley Morison and Eric Gill. (RIBAJ, vol. 38, p. 756)

Volume 39 was printed on superior quality paper; the layout and typeface were improved by Morison, and Gill designed a new badge. The changed format included a two page editorial entitled 'Journal' and a clearly defined 'Accessions to the Library' and a 'Review of Periodicals' section which continued to evolve and expand until the outbreak of war in 1939. In 1933 a technical editor, E L Bird, was appointed thus enabling technical discussion on contemporary building which had, until this point, been addressed superficially or avoided (Gotch, 1934).

Angela Mace wrote of Carter's 'enthusiasm for modern architecture, his wide acquaintance with British and foreign architects' (1986, p. 98) and in an obituary to Carter,

published in *The Architectural Review* in September 1982, David Dean describes the institute as being run by the secretary, Sir Ian MacAlister, and by Carter:

> Between them they had to produce an organisation acceptable to three main groups: the powerful Architectural Knights; those whom Carter described as 'middle-aged, middle-class, widely cultivated men – no women – with middle-sized practices'; and the young Turks, whose endlessly resourceful advocate Carter was. (September 1982, pp.5-6)

Discussion on modernism within the RIBAJ can be divided into two parts: before 1930; 1930 and after.

Modernism and the RIBA before 1930

During the period under discussion, the first mention of modernism was made by W R Lethaby in November 1918 when an extract from a series of articles written for *The Builder* entitled 'A National Architecture' was reproduced in the journal. In this text, although he says he has no love for modernism, Lethaby does appear to uphold some modernist principles when he states: 'Whenever our buildings are again designed for their purpose as directly as a fiddle, a gun or even a motor or airplane, they will be romantic once more' (RIBAJ, vol. 26, p. 13).

Reference to a new style of architecture is made during the reading of a paper by the architect and later President of the RIBA 1937-9, H S Goodhart-Rendel[28] (1887-1959) entitled 'A Talk About Contemporary British Architecture and its Immediate Ancestry' given on 10 November 1920:

> And yet the reaction from this school which followed in the 'nineties was not towards architectural planning. It was rather towards a sort of elaborate baldness in design. This curious movement can best be studied in the pages of the *Studio*, where will be found fervent exhortations to the art of architecture to strip off all its garments and ride through the streets like Lady Godiva for the common weal. (RIBAJ, vol 28, p. 256)

The fact that *The Studio* is cited as the journal representing this style is of interest because of its connection with Christopher Dresser and its readiness to promote things Japanese. However Goodhart-Rendel rather clung to his theme of nudity when commenting 12 years later on the RIBA Building competition entries he stated: 'Most of the designs look very undressed indeed, and many of them it would have been a real kindness to cover up a little' (Dean, 1983 p. 19) but he was not alone. In 1924, under the title 'The Emergence of a

[28] Goodhart-Rendell was also Director of the Architectural Association 1936-8 and architect of Hay's Wharf 1929-31.

New Style', Sydney Kitson reviewed Professor C H Reilly's series of articles for the *Weekly Westminster* on modern architecture:

> The style's leading feature, however – called "starkness" by Professor Reilly and "nakedness" by the intelligent layman – demands a high standard of skill and scholarship in its execution and an utter absence of affection. We look to the schools of architecture, for which Professor Reilly has done so much, to supply men capable of visualising this new high seriousness of purpose ... (RIBJ, vol. 31, p. 255)

Reilly was Head of the Liverpool School of Architecture, a nurturing ground for modern architecture, and of which the British modernist architect and life-long friend of Wells Coates, E Maxwell Fry was a pupil.

There were a number of papers and articles on modernism and the modern movement published in volumes 31, 33 and 34 of the journals. In 1924, 'The Modern Movement in Architecture' (RIBAJ, vol. 31, pp. 267-274) by A E Richardson, Professor of Architecture at the University of London, was read at Manchester University before the Manchester Society of Architects on 27 February; from this paper it is apparent that Professor Richardson was in favour of a new architecture that avoided 'the pitfalls of archaeology and pedantry' (p. 274) and he raises the question 'Am I right in placing reliance entirely on my knowledge of the past?' (p. 267). He discusses in detail the role and responsibilities of the architect:

> It is now understood that architecture is an intellectual and a spiritual accomplishment, as well as being scientific and functional. The public, while demanding fitness of purpose, also look for a high efficiency of artistic attainment, and realise that expressive forms are wanted in place of caricatures of past styles. (RIBAJ, vol. 31, p. 269)

Richardson questions the use of the term 'modern'. 'In so far as building is concerned it is taken to imply the latest expression of newness and the gloss of novelty' (p. 269). He goes on to say: 'The term modern in itself is ambiguous; does it refer to the past year or the past quarter of a century?' (p. 269). However, he embraces a number of the modern movement's theories: 'Commonsense points to the re-establishment of basic principles – that is to say, a return to the primary theory that use and function determine structure, and that good structure will give originality of form' (p. 273). It would appear that Richardson, while not necessarily agreeing with all the philosophical aspects of modernism, saw the need for architecture to concentrate on form and function and to utilise new materials and building methods.

> The present thought – it is not Bolshevik – aims not so much at creating

> a new order of designing and fashioning, but a return to the structural principles of building, which alone can be used to express modern conditions. To my way of thinking, it is hopeless to be original by referring to past originality... (RIBAJ, vol. 31, p. 272)

Howard Robertson wrote in a paper on 'Modern Architecture of the North' (RIBAJ, vol. 32, pp. 273-280) published in the journal in March 1925: 'There are unmistakable signs at the present moment of a movement in England towards an architecture which is a direct expression of a modern outlook and a solution, as far as may be possible, of modern problems' (p. 273). He continues by stating that this movement was not new to England as it originated through architects such as Charles Voysey and Charles Rennie Mackintosh[sic.]. However it had not developed in England as it has on the Continent because these architects 'are considered abroad as originators to a degree not perhaps felt in England' (p. 273). Four years later, after Mackintosh's death, Robertson wrote the obituary 'The Contribution of Charles Rennie Mackintosh' (RIBAJ, vol. 36, p. 211) published on 12 January 1929. He describes Mackintosh's designs as 'prophetic of much that is happening in the advanced modern movement' (p. 211). He also states that Mackintosh's designs are reflected in the work of men such as Gropius, Le Corbusier and Lloyd Wright.

Robertson, Director of Education at the Architectural Association School, was considered to be in favour of modernism, nevertheless, as we shall see in chapter five, he was deemed by Wells Coates not to qualify for membership of the MARS Group. Nevertheless, it is apparent Robertson was reluctant to enter into a discussion on modernism in his paper 'Modern French Architecture' (RIBAJ, vol. 34, pp. 323-337) read before the RIBA on Monday 14 March 1927: 'The title of my paper at once brings me face to face with the unfortunate word "modern." Some people are thrilled by the very sound of this word, but to others it only suggests a term of opprobrium' (p. 323). He successfully side steps the issue by the use of some lengthy French quotations on the subject and by choosing to discuss earlier French architecture; he does not return to the subject until the end of the paper when he enters into a discussion on Le Corbusier. Not surprisingly, Robertson in his description and analysis does not seem entirely opposed to the work:

> Externally we have a clean simplicity. It would be unfair to criticise this architecture as mannered, for, on the contrary, it is a sincere and earnest expression. Internally we see the effort to obtain effects of space and vista, and a process of elimination of detail which obviously calls for a readjustment of our values and ideas as to what should constitute the atmosphere of home. (RIBAJ, vol. 34, p. 333)

The comments in the discussion that follows are somewhat more succinct; Goodhart-Rendel believed '... Some modern French houses are the most perfect modern houses of any I have seen. In those things the French are, as they always have been, supreme. It would be deplored that Le Corbusier is taken as representative of a very characteristic French tendency (p. 336)'. H M Fletcher questioned Le Corbusier's constructional methods:

> But when you come to Corbusier, he did not support anything upon anything. A 2-in. window-frame was considered good enough to carry miles of wall, and I do not think that is any-thing but an experiment from which other people may learn what to avoid. In general, it goes to show that if we consider the laws of architecture and abide by them, we shall not go wrong. (RIBAJ, vol. 34, p. 336)

In reply Robertson stated there were some misconceptions regarding Le Corbusier in that he was more logical than he appeared. He explained his construction techniques and stated: 'The function of Corbusier is to stimulate the diehards. He makes people think, and is, therefore, valuable' (p. 337).

These various discussions culminated in a debate 'Modernism in Architecture' (RIBAJ, vol. 35, pp. 511-523) at the RIBA on Monday 21 May 1928; the president, Walter Tapper, A.R.A. was in the chair. This was the first debate wholly dedicated to the subject of modernism and it was initially necessary to establish what was meant by modernism. There was less of a problem in accepting modernism 'in the sense of using modern materials in modern days for fulfilling modern needs' (p. 515) but modernism meaning a style was less acceptable.

Again, Le Corbusier was under attack; he was described by one speaker as: 'being the essential voice of the modern movement' (p. 515). Goodhart-Rendel was in disagreement: 'I do not think he is that, in any sense. I think he is one of those men who are born old-fashioned. I think he has the worst Victorian ethical view of architecture, and he only manages to be heard because he talks a great deal and is very noisy...' (p. 515). Le Corbusier 'may be a fine writer' (p. 519) but he was not considered a good architect by H W Chester and although he favours the 'Modernist school' he did not think Corbusier's work was typical of the new architecture. 'This term "Modernist" is unfortunate. It has come to be applied to the architecture which Corbusier has boomed so much in his books' (p. 519).

There was much talk of the Greeks, Romans and Goths; historic references were so numerous that A H Gerrard commented: 'To me this seems to be rather a lesson on the history of architecture than a debate on Modernism...' (p. 516). There appeared to be a genuine concern that it was not possible to design good architecture without historical

knowledge. Anti-historicism was one of the principles of modernism but H A Pakington believed: 'the best Modernists do look back, to find out what it was that other men discovered. Corbusier, I believe, has his office full of beautiful antique furniture' (p. 518).

More philosophical arguments were raised in favour of modernism by R A Duncan, architect of the 1928 Ideal Home Exhibition 'House of the Future', who believed: '... Modernism to be a different method of looking at the Universe, enquiring into it, and discovering its inspiration, its systems of law and order; it is this which is disturbing the old empirical methods of art, of politics, of economics, of religion, and of industry' (p. 517). Robertson thought that essentially modernism was a way of looking at architectural problems and less to do with Le Corbusier and the concrete house. 'The Modernist is the man who is inclined to apply the brain once more, after it has been stagnant for a hundred years, to a fresh view of problems which are fresh today...' (p. 519).

Professor Lethaby who had been unable to attend the debate contributed by letter:

> ... I should like to have had the chance of making the remark that there are two quite opposed things which go by the name of "Modernism in Architecture." One, reasonable building, and the other just another form of "crank" cubism, and jazzery jump. Many people appear to be all agog about this latter as something they may call "style" and imitate from the Continent. The first variety of "Modernism" we shall surely have to attempt some time within, say, 20 or 200 years, but I am afraid we shall put it off until we can think of that too as a "style" we may copy. Of course, it is properly an experimental way like the steamship and aeroplane styles. (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 521)

Arts and crafts architect-designer, C F A Voysey (1857-1941) who was later to be horrified to discover he was considered a pioneer of modernism[29] was therefore less compromising in his views expressed in a contribution to the debate 'Is Architecture still the Mother of the Arts' at the V&A on 26 July 1928 and reviewed in the RIBAJ (vol. 35, pp. 648-650):

> The architectural mother of to-day, like the human modern mother, favours small families ... But the modern architect too often contents himself with the bastard children of the mass-producing machine. And so, much so-called modern architecture is not architecture at all, but merely commercial building, therefore the children of so corrupt a mother can never exhibit the aristocratic qualities that architects fostered before they flirted with foreign styles ... My answer to the question, then, is yes! Architecture is still the mother of the arts, but her children are, generally speaking, illegitimate. (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 650)

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[29] In a reported conversation with Nikolaus Pevsner published in *The Architectural Reivew*: 'He fiercely objected when I once talked to him about his paternity to the Modern Movement. "I have only wanted to carry on tradition," he insisted ...' (AR 1937, vol. 82, p. 36).

Short out-bursts on modernism appear where they would not necessarily be expected. Read before the RIBA on Monday 31 January 1927, Professor J Hubert Worthington, half-way through his 'Address to Students' (RIBAJ, vol. 34, pp. 235-240) considered modernism to be synonymous with Bolshevism but felt, although controversial, must be faced. He advised students if modernism is 'logical, harmonious and well-composed' (p. 239) it will be acceptable but it was necessary to remember architecture lasted and he warned 'Never make your so-called Modernism an excuse for sloppy technique, to cover up an incapacity to design, to draw, to carve' (p. 239). It is not entirely clear whether Professor Worthington was making a distinction between the functional and the modernistic in this address.

However, The President, Walter Tapper, was more distinct in his Inaugural Address in November 1927 in offering congratulations that British architecture was not 'liable to the vagaries of the Cubist and the Futurist' (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 8). He believed architecture and the arts in general were making steady progress:

> Take music, it is true we have a great deal of jazz rubbish, but also, there is always an audience for the great classic masters, and if we want this universally, we shall get it in due time, and so it is with our art. There is a great deal of jazz architecture but there is a greater quality of good work than was the case some years ago. (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 8)

There are other papers where a discourse on modernism would have been expected but is found lacking. When presenting "Modern Architectural Colour' (RIBAJ, vol. 32 pp. 281-283) in March 1925, L H Bucknell pleaded with his audience, the Liverpool Architectural Society: 'I hope you will not ask me to define "modern," but I will say at once that I do not mean "jazz." This distressing word has already led to much confusion and should be quietly buried' (p. 281). However, there is no reference to modernism or the modern movement in this article.

Lieut. Colonel H W G Cole, C.S.I., O.B.E. admits to no architectural technical knowledge therefore his paper, 'Paris Exhibition of Decorative Art' (RIBAJ, vol. 33, pp. 270-286), read on 1 March 1926, gives a more general view of the exhibition; held in 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratif* is credited with initiating the style moderne, later to be known as Art Deco. In this description of the exhibition only one reference is made to modernism: 'At the other end you have a school of virulent modernity, striving to take opportunity from the unhealthy reactions of the age to satisfy an unhealthy appetite for hideous and unnatural forms' (p. 283). Whether Cole was referring to the functional or the modernistic is unclear. The paper is of interest, not from what has been included, rather

for that which has been omitted. There is no mention of Le Corbusier or the Pavillion de L'Esprit Nouveau either in the text or in the photographs selected to illustrate the paper.

As the only tangible modernism in architecture mainly occurred abroad during the 1920s books that were reviewed on modernist architecture tended to be texts by or on architects from the Continent. In 1928 Frederick Etchell's translation, *Towards a New Architecture* (1927), of Le Corbusier's *Vers Une Architecture* (1923) [30] received two reviews; one by A S J Butler on 25 February (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 269) and another on 10 March by Maurice B Adams (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 305). Neither Fellow seemed unduly impressed by Le Corbusier's publication; Butler seemed to be of the opinion that it was perfectly valid to have a look at it but do not be too enthusiastic and hopefully it may go away. Whereas Adams was of the view this was Bolshevik architecture and cited Sir Edwin Lutyens: 'the Robotism of Architecture' as further description. They both took a dislike to Le Corbusier's delight in the machine and point out that, buildings do not move, as Butler states:

> ...there is below the entertaining flutter of its sentences, I think, some confusion of thought. One might call it heresy. It appears that we must have architecture which has the beauty of machines not the beauty of architecture. We are to have buildings designed with all the hard, polished, snappy obviousness of an aeroplane. But why should we? Houses do not fly about; most factories do not float. (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 269)

However, Butler's review does end on a more positive note, proclaiming the book to be both 'stimulating' and 'excitingly illustrated but written in a most exhausting style' (p. 269).

Le Corbusier fairs little better in a review of *Examples of French Architecture* edited by Howard Robertson and F R Yerbury, when the reviewer, D Theodore Fyfe, in November 1928, stated: 'The Corbusier houses seem to go unnecessarily out of their way to resemble the bridge decks of steamers where they do not resemble cardboard boxes ...' (RIBAJ, vol. 36, p. 68).

In 1929 the German architect, Bruno Taut's *Modern Architecture* received a short review which, though mainly describing the structure of the text, does mention Taut's thesis for the new aesthetic 'The aim of architecture is the creation of the perfect, and, therefore, also beautiful, efficiency'. The book was commissioned by *The Studio*, who is described as 'always been keenly alive to the development of the arts abroad' (RIBAJ, vol. 37, p. 204).

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[30] Etchell's insertion of 'new' in the title has not been without controversy.

Summary of the RIBA's response to modernism before 1930

It is fascinating to note the use of the word 'modernism' as early as 1918; the term is generally considered to be associated more with subsequent discourses on modernity. Debate was slow to commence in the journal; modernism was considered a foreign phenomenon and it was hoped by some that it would remain abroad. Gradually discussion was generated and this was stimulated by the journal's regular review of Continental architecture, through book reviews and exhibitions, particularly during the early 1920s when there was little if any that could be described as British modernism in architecture.

The response to papers and debate on modernism can be summarised as follows: some believed that modernism equalled Bolshevism, but it was generally considered that it was not necessary to: 'be afraid of modernism at the present day... the English people are much too sensible' (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 521). There occasionally seemed to be some confusion by what was meant by modernism; functional or modernistic were not always defined. It was considered fortunate that most of the experimental architecture was taking place abroad and if any good did come out of it, then would be the time to embrace the new movement and not before. Le Corbusier met with a mixed reception; although he was Swiss he was principally working in France and it cannot be discounted that some of the historical hostilities towards France may have influenced judgement.

It is understandable how older members were reluctant to accept the new ideas as it was apparent that many Victorian ethics were still present. Modernism was considered a young man's affliction and it was generally hoped that they would regain their sense of history. However, modernism in the sense of using modern methods and materials was acceptable; modernism as a style should be in 'a clear field and have not to consider your neighbours' (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 520); there was much mention of un-neighbourliness and good and bad manners in architecture.

Modernism and the RIBA: 1930 and after

Following the 'Modernism in Architecture' debate at the RIBA in May 1928, modernism gradually became a subject for almost constant discussion; this debate was a catalyst, which enabled open discussion on the modern architecture. Modernism ceased to be considered an experimental architecture taking place abroad and as it became more prevalent in Britain the discussion shifted from the use of modern materials versus modernism as a style, to an argument between traditionalism and originality. This then quickly developed into the Traditionalists versus the Modernists; these terms was first muted during the 1928 debate on modernism (RIBAJ, vol. 33, pp. 511-523). Comparisons were drawn with the Victorian era and the battle between Classic and Gothic architecture.

Le Corbusier still received a mixed reception, although his work was reviewed regularly and his writings were included in the 'Accessions to the Library' section. However, Walter Gropius was well received in 1934 and, during his stay in Britain, both he and his work continued to be treated with respect and admiration. Frank Lloyd Wright gave four lectures at the RIBA in May 1939; this visit had been postponed from November 1938. Wright seems to have been somewhat of a disappointment; his lectures were considered ill-prepared and contradictory. John Gloag, who had initiated Wright's visit was en route to America when Wright's talks took place, was blamed in a lively debate within the 'Correspondence' that ensued until December 1939 when a letter from the University of London Professor of Town Planning, Patrick Abercombie, was published:

> For years he [Gloag] has punctuated nearly all of his delightful writings and talks on architecture with the three magic monosyllables; he has built up a wonderful legend, and then when the Prophet was to be displayed, Mr. Gloag skipped off to America without acting as producer, with that inimitable flair for publicity for others which he possesses. Never has a Prophet been worse treated by his disciple ... (RIBAJ, vol. 47, p.44)[31]

Charles Rennie Mackintosh is mentioned on a number of occasions as a forerunner and pioneer of modernism; an unsung hero in his own country but much admired on the Continent. These points were emphasised when the RIBA held their annual conference at Glasgow in June 1935; on the conference visits and tours the Glasgow School of Art was 'almost the sole example of his amazing genius that we could be shown' (RIBAJ, vol. 42, p. 978). The RIBAJ was not alone in citing Mackintosh in this way; *The Architectural Review* published similar views as we shall see later in the chapter.

The arguments for and against modernism continued; functionalism and fitness of purpose, un-neighbourliness and good manners in architecture, which in part were aimed at modernist building (fig. 59), and the ongoing confusion between modernism and modernistic all prevailed. Other topics emerged: skyscrapers, slum clearance, housing the masses, the speculative builder; though not new subjects they gained in significance during the depression of the 1930s.

The Inaugural Addresses continued to provide an insight to the progress of the acceptance of modernism. In November 1930, Sir Banister Fletcher stated: 'Every architect should remember that streets and roadways are our common property, ... and not erect buildings resembling the Mappin Terraces suitable for tigers at the Zoo, or something so ultra-modern that it quarrels violently with its quiet elderly neighbours' (RIBAJ, vol. 38, p. 11). Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, in his Inaugural Address in 1933 discusses the fight

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[31] Wright's lectures are discussed again in chapter six.

between the Gothic and Classic schools of his grandfather's day 'conducted with as much, if not more vigour than the present issue of Traditionalism and Modernism ... In architecture, I think this is a consoling thought that extreme Traditionalists and extreme Modernists are serving a useful purpose in cancelling each other out!' (RIBAJ, vol. 41, pp. 5-6). By 1938 modernism, though not always liked, was being accepted as a fait accompli, as is evident in the July 1938 'President's Inaugural Address':

> A bit of Victorianism or a bit of Edwardianism or even a bit of modernism, cannot harm any robust village if the Victorianism, the Edwardianism or the modernism is naked and unashamed. Unfortunately, Victorianism and Edwardianism was much apt to be ashamed, and to hide its nakedness in garments from the historical costumiers. Nobody would accuse modernism of shame, but its self-assertiveness often makes it unpleasant in any surroundings, old or new ... (RIBAJ, vol 45, p. 850)

Modernism was causing excitement; not everyone disliked the 'operating-theatre' style. Sydney Kitson in September 1931 believed: 'It seems to me that never, since the early days of the Renaissance in Italy, was there a more difficult and a more thrilling time for the young architect' (RIBAJ, vol. 38, p. 727). The work of younger architects, Maxwell Fry, Raymond McGrath, Serge Chermayeff and F R S Yorke was beginning to receive attention. Yorke's *The Modern House* was reviewed by EJC [Edward Carter] in July 1934 and concludes:

> This review would never have been so long if *The Modern House* had not proved to be such a delightful and provocative book which must obviously find a place on every architect's bookshelf, so that he can train and entertain himself by puzzling out how half the buildings in the book came to be there except on their purely aesthetic merits. (RIBAJ, vol. 41, p. 930)

These architects and others, including Wells Coates, became members of the MARS Group.[32] The work of the group was followed, from its inception in 1933, by the journal. The group's exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries, in January 1938 was mentioned in the editorial on 24 January which entreats: 'we can ... try our best in a line or two to say something that will draw or drive members of the profession to what is undoubtedly the most brilliantly presented statement of an architectural idea that has yet been offered to the public or the profession ...' (RIBAJ, vol. 45, p. 271). There are two illustrated reviews of the exhibition:

> In the second room, shown in the bottom picture, one wall, that on the left,

[32] There is further discussion on the MARS Group in chapter five.

> is covered with a photo mural showing modern architecture in the English landscape; a heartfelt exhibit from a group almost every one of whose members can now almost count it an honour to have had a building banned by some reactionary authority. The pergola suggests the alliance of house and garden ... (RIBAJ, vol. 45, p. 242) (fig. 114)

The modernist holistic approach to architecture demanded that the relationship between the building and landscape be considered; landscape architecture achieved greater prominence with the inauguration in 1930 of the Institute of Landscape Architects. The RIBAJ regularly reviewed texts on gardens and landscape and in March 1939 a review of *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* by the landscape architect, Christopher Tunnard, was published: '... He [Tunnard] has noticed, however, that "contemporary garden design has not even yet caught up with contemporary trends in architecture," and he is determined that it shall "catch up"' (RIBAJ, vol. 46, pp. 464-465). Although the review is reasonably detailed it fails to mention Tunnard's interest in Japan, which we shall examine in chapter six.

Summary of the RIBA's response to Modernism: 1930 and after

Modernism by the end of the 1930s had been accepted; not welcome by all but generally accepted if somewhat grudgingly. It was constantly discussed and in May 1939 it was even the subject of the RIBA Dramatic Society's play 'The Three Architects'. This drama highlighted the dilemma facing contemporary architectural practice; the characters, the traditionalist senior partner, the young modernist Jewish refugee, and the partner who 'stands somewhere between the two, and is typical of the present generation in that he can see both sides with equal force, but cannot decide which course should be his ...' (RIBAJ, vol. 46, p. 786)

The journal had been modernised under a new editor and the Institute itself was embracing new technology: in 1936 a film was made of the RIBA, in which the president gave a commentary on the Portland Place building (RIBAJ, vol. 43). Also in 1936 the first television broadcast on architecture was transmitted. 'Seated on steel chairs before a horizontally barred window, Mr. John Gloag and Mr. Serge Chermayeff discussed "The Modern House"' (RIBAJ, vol. 44, p. 163).

However, it was still possible to find negativity towards modernism as the writer, J B Priestley's comments at the opening ceremony of the Small House Exhibition indicate:

> I was glad to see in the exhibition that we are getting away from the tendency which was prevalent a few years ago, when modern architects who had had a little trip to France and Italy and Sweden and America brought back a kind of architecture which was unsuited to our climate. (RIBAJ, vol. 45, p. 25)

Nevertheless, the views given by Professor W G Holford in his paper 'The Next Twenty Years' read in December 1938 possibly give a more accurate position of the views on modernism held within the RIBAJ by the end of the 1930s:

> ... All modern work is experimental to some extent: and the man who makes a contribution to our architectural powers, who fuses method, materials, and building needs into a creative design, is making architectural history ... it is necessary to state that there *is* such a thing as "the New Architecture" (RIBAJ, vol. 46, p. 169).

It is apparent through the study of RIBAJ that there was substantial discussion on modernism; it is therefore difficult to agree with Jeremy Gould's view expressed in *Modern Houses in Britain, 1919-1939* that '... any building in the "Modern Style" was considered by the architectural press to be almost beyond reproach, so that throughout the 1930s very little informed architectural criticism was published' (1977 p. 14).

Early modernist houses in Britain

As we have noted, towards the end of the 1920s modernism was being discussed in the RIBAJ more readily and by the 1930s it was a predominate topic. Whilst the debate gathered momentum so too had the construction of the modernist house in Britain. In 1926, the first private commission was that of the German architect Peter Behrens' 'New Ways', Northampton, (fig. 60) for W J Bassett-Lowke, a model train manufacturer.[33] Charles Rennie Mackintosh had redesigned Bassett-Lowke's previous home at 78 Derngate, Northampton (fig. 61), and it is fascinating to discover that the hall from this house was reconstructed as the study in the 'New Ways' (fig. 62); an important fact in our search for Japanese inspiration on British modernism because, not only have we observed in chapter two Mackintosh's use of Japanese motifs but in this chapter we have already discovered, within the pages of the RIBAJ, Mackintosh is hailed as a prophet of modernism.

'New Ways' was featured in *The Architectural Review* in 1926 (vol. 60, pp. 176-9) and although not constructed of concrete, but brick, every modern convenience was incorporated, including central heating and built-in storage. The appearance of the building, particularly the interior seems to some extent more modernistic than modern. Nevertheless 'New Ways' appeared again in *The Architectural Review* in 1928 in series of photographs and plans of 'Recent English Domestic Architecture' (vol. 64, pp. 233-336).

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[33] Started in 1919, the first modernist houses, constructed of concrete blocks, had been designed by W F Crittall and C H B Quennell for the Crittall steel window factory workers at Braintree, Essex (AR 1919, vol. 45 pp. 64-66).

Also included were examples of the development of modernist homes at Silver End, Essex. These dwellings, designed by Thomas S Tait, were commissioned by the steel window manufacturers Crittalls for their workers (fig. 63). The houses were also constructed in brick and show strong reference to Behrens' 'New Ways' modernistic style. Photographs of these houses and 'New Ways' appeared in Bruno Taut's *Modern Architecture* (1929) as examples of modern architecture in Britain.

However, it is generally considered that the British modern movement did not make any substantial progress in architecture until 1929, and the start in that year of Amyas Connell's 'High and Over', Amersham; composed of a concrete frame and rendered brick infill, this dwelling is deemed to mark the point when the construction of modernist architecture began in Britain. Commissioned by Bernard Ashmole, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the London University, 'High and Over' was completed in 1931 and was featured in *The Architectural Review* 'Straight Lines and Straight Thinking' (fig. 64) (AR 1932 vol. 72, p. 211). This journal followed closely the progress of modern building at home and abroad, unlike *The Studio* who, as already noted in the RIBAJ, featured predominantly foreign modernist architects and architecture.

The reporting of modernism in *The Architectural Review*

As we noted in chapter two, *The Architectural Review* was first published as a separate periodical in 1896. To celebrate its centenary in May 1996 the journal published a special edition entitled 'The First 100 Years'. This issue gives a detailed history of the periodical from which, in part, the information below has been extracted; other details have been observed through the examination of the journal.

A brief history of *The Architectural Review*

Unlike the RIBAJ, *The Architectural Review* was owned by a publishing company and the fate of the editors depended somewhat on the financial success of the journal. In 1927 Hubert de Cronin Hastings, son of Percy Hastings, became editor of *The Architectural Review* and *The Architects' Journal,* formerly *The Builders' Journal*; both journals were owned in part by Percy Hastings and it has been suggested that he was eager for the business to remain in the family (AR, vol. 199, p. 43). It is at this point that the journal became more adventurous, with the appointment of John Betjeman, poet, essayist and later poet laureate, as assistant editor in 1928 and the diversity of contributors extended to other writers and social commentators including Hilaire Belloc, D H Lawrence and Evelyn Waugh. Under Betjeman's assistant editorship the journal reviewed all the

arts; painting, sculpture and film were all regularly featured. In the early 1930s the work and words of the young 'turks' of modernism Serge Chermayeff, Wells Coates, Raymond McGrath and F R S Yorke also frequently appeared.

Upon Betjeman's resignation in 1935 the periodical became a more serious architectural journal with the succession of J M Richards to the post of assistant editor, modernism was documented and analysed; Herbert Read and Nikolaus Pevsner joined John Gloag as commentators and critics. Of Pevsner Richards recalled 'how good those early articles were in content, but what a lot of work he had to do on them at first to turn them into acceptable English' (Clifton-Taylor, 1985 p. 2). Richards had transferred from *The Architect's Journal,* which he joined in 1933 and where he held a similar position; H. de C. Hastings remained executive editor of *The Architectural Review* and *The Architects' Journal.* Richards became editor in 1937 and remained so until he was called to undertake war service in 1942 (AR, vol. 199, p. 55).

A comparison of *The Architectural Review* and the RIBAJ

The Architectural Review was produced in a substantially larger format than that of the RIBAJ[34]; it was printed on high quality paper, which permitted a superior reproduction of illustrations. During Betjeman's editorship textured and coloured paper with illustrations or photographs attached were introduced, as were samples of wallpaper. The typeface employed was large as were the margins of the pages. However as the 1930s progressed the typeface size decreased as did the margins but the use of photographs increased prompting a letter from the designer and architect, Basil Ionides, to the editor suggesting the journal should be 're-christened "The Photographic Review", as the quality of the photographs so far exceed the subjects of the photographs' (AR, vol. 73, p. 48). Conversely, the RIBAJ placed the importance on text above that of illustration with the use of a smaller format, typeface and also size of illustration. However, during the 1930s, under Carter's editorship, larger photographs were used more frequently but the results were never as lavish as those reproduced in *The Architectural Review.*

Within *The Architectural Review,* unlike the RIBAJ, modernism is less openly criticised. Many architectural examples are described and illustrated but there appears to be less obvious debate; discussion on modernism does exist but is contained within the correspondence and articles on Le Corbusier for example. Under Richards' editorship modernism was closely examined. It would be incorrect to suggest the RIBAJ did not publish discussion on all the arts, however, *The Architectural Review,* particularly under Betjeman's leadership, took a particularly holistic approach. The reaction to modernism

[34] RIBAJ – 20 x 27 cm. AR – 26 x 35 cm. approximately.

within *The Architectural Review* is less polarised than that of the RIBAJ; fundamentally the response is pro modernism, although adverse criticism does exist, it is less distinct.

It is discernible that the debate on modernism within the RIBAJ questioned several of the ideological points of the modern movement: baldness, starkness, nakedness (lack of ornamentation); anti-historicism; form follows function and fitness for purpose (functionality) and the use of new materials and building methods (technological advancement). Other issues were also highlighted: the confusion between modernist functional and the modernistic jazzy; traditionalism versus modernism and we have noted that there was some wish to identify, or perhaps blame, those pioneers or prophets of modernism; Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Charles Voysey who were discussed by Howard Robertson. However, within *The Architectural Review* there was a strong desire to investigate the origins of modernism; an attempt to place in an historical context a movement that claims to have broken with the past poses a fascinating conundrum, which we shall now examine.

The pioneers and prophets of modernism

Nikolaus Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936) is probably the best known work on the subject in which he cites members of the British design reform movement as precursors of modernism.[35] Although his approach has been considered 'dated' in recent years (Woodham, 1997) Pevsner, as we have already seen within the pages of the RIBAJ, was not alone in seeking a lineage for modernity.

Bruno Taut in his *Modern Architecture* (1929), commissioned by *The Studio*, devotes a chapter to 'Early Developments of Modern Architecture'. To illustrate this point Taut provides evidence by citing, and amply illustrating (fig. 65) the work of Mackintosh as influential: '... and Mackintosh, with his tense, masculine treatment of interiors, strike me as being of special significance' (p. 42). Taut also gives importance to Frank Lloyd Wright in the development of the new movement and describes Wright as an 'heroic figure' (p. 68) continuing:

> His great horizontal and projecting planes are wonderfully expressive of a new age with its newness of thought and expression – evolved by him at the turn of the century, to become the fashionable craze in Germany, thirty years later! He is still very much alive and progressive himself. His own farm set on broadly rolling slopes is of fairylike attraction, like a *pastorale,* and its sensitive atmosphere has qualities akin to those produced by the Japanese love of nature. (Taut, 1929 p. 69)

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[35] Re-titled in 1960 *Pioneers of Modern Design: from William Morris to Walter Gropius.*

During the 1930s Taut lived and worked in Japan for three years and whilst in the East he wrote on Japanese architecture; these texts are discussed in chapter six.

Published three years later, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's seminal work *The International Style: architecture since 1922* whilst believing: 'There are certain times when a new period truly begins despite all the preparation that may be traced behind the event' (p. 44) refer to the work of Wright on several occasions, for example:

> He introduced many innovations, particularly in domestic building, quite as important as those of the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil in France and Germany. His open planning broke the mould of the traditional house, to which Europe clung down to the War. He also was the first to conceive of architectural design in terms of planes existing freely in three dimensions rather than in terms of enclosed blocks. (Hitchcock & Johnson, 1995, p. 41)

It is apparent that even a text that advocates a break with the past was unable to completely disengage from erstwhile architecture.

The Architectural Review's search for the origins of modernist architecture

As early as 1922 *The Architectural Review* was publishing articles on the beginnings of modernism in architecture. Percy S Worthington wrote of the Renaissance architect Brunelleschi that he was an innovator who '... became the first and has remained one the greatest modern architects' (AR, vol. 51, p. 166) in a text entitled 'The Beginnings of Modern Architecture. Brunelleschi: the first modern architect' believing him to be not only '... a great and original artist, but the pioneer of a new system' (p. 168). In 1934 John Gloag in 'An Early Victorian goes Modern' (AR, vol. 75, pp. 77-78) considered Samuel Sidney, a 19th century writer on agriculture and economics, was asking the same questions on design and architecture in 1851 that were being raised in the early 1930s, thus making him a prototype modernist.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh

In May 1933 a memorial exhibition of Mackintosh's work at the McLellan Galleries, Glasgow was mentioned. In this short text he is described as 'the father of modern architecture' but although 'unknown and ignored in England, has long been honoured in Scotland and in Europe.' A photograph of the Glasgow School of Art accompanies the text, describing the building as his main achievement showing 'in the details of its ironwork, the influence of Javanese[sic.] art which was popular at the time' (AR, vol. 73, opp. p. 153 plate i). The editor of *The Studio* also acknowledged

Mackintosh's contribution to modern architecture in a short note accompanying 'A Neglected Genius Charles Rennie Mackintosh':

> Particular interest attaches to the subject of this article as one of the British architects who, in the early years of the century, anticipated the trend of development observable to-day. Mackintosh worked and had considerable influence in Vienna and so over all the Continent: his buildings and designs already display the cardinal points of present-day practice.
> (*The Studio* 1933, vol. 105 p. 345)

George Walton

However, another Glaswegian architect, George Walton, after his death in December 1933, was described as 'an even earlier pioneer than Mackintosh' (AR, vol. 75, opp. p.1 plate I). Walton stated in a letter to *The Architectural Review* earlier in 1933 his architectural work had been 'influenced considerably by Whistler' (AR, vol. 74, p. 43). Nikolaus Pevsner wrote in a paper 'George Walton his life and work', published by the RIBAJ in 1939 (vol. 46, pp. 537-548) that:

> George Walton's name should never have been left out of a book on the pioneers of the modern movement. His designs, mainly those of 1895 to 1905, are amongst the most brilliant and historically most significant examples of the rapid and constructive progress of Britain away from William Morris towards a new style of the new century (RIBAJ, vol. 46, p. 543)

Pevsner describes Walton and Mackintosh's work coming together thus creating 'a Glasgow style of 1900' (p. 545); as we shall see, this Glaswegian mode did not appeal to all.

'Scenario for a Human Drama'

P Morton Shand's series 'Scenario for a Human Drama'[36] was an in depth examination of the development of British architecture, 'to bridge the gap that lies between the eighteenth-century English house and the modern house' (AR vol. 77, p. 61), commencing with F R S Yorke's *The Modern House* (AR, vol. 76, pp. 9-16) of which Shand wrote in 1934:

> This is a memorable book, for it is the first in English which liberates architecture from its narrower self, and shows us the modern house as a technical product it really is against the background of the cystallizing discoveries and resultant complications of modern life. (AR, vol. 76, p. 9)

[36] The articles were published in the issues for July, August, September and October 1934 and January, February and March 1935.

In this succession of seven articles Shand attempts to trace the pedigree of the modern house: '... which will seek to establish some continuous concatenation of effect and cause in the home's slow emancipation from forms that dictated plan to forms that are the expression of plan alone' (AR, vol. 76, p. 9). Episode I was predominately written by Yorke; entitled 'To-day' was a summary of his book *The Modern House*. In his text Yorke also gives a lineage for the new architecture: 'William Morris, Philip Webb, and the New Art Movement' (p. 11) followed by the Dutch 'Mondriaan[sic.], using clean rectangles of colour and straight lines, influenced men like Dudok and Rietveld' (p. 11) followed by '... a period of purification and, largely under the influence of le[sic.] Corbusier, the unnecessary was eliminated' (pp. 11-12).

Yorke describes the function of a modern home:

> The home is no longer permanent from generation to generation: family ties, inconsistent with freedom of living, are broken. We demand spaciousness, release from encumbrances, from furniture and trappings that overload our rooms, possessions that tie us and tools that are obsolete. (AR vol. 76, p. 13)

In this extract he reiterates sentiments expressed two years earlier in an article by Wells Coates, *Furniture Today – Furniture Tomorrow* (chapter four, AR 1932, vol. 72, pp. 30-34). Yorke also discusses framework construction and the ability to open up interior space to the exterior (fig. 66). However he does not attribute inspiration for this innovation.

Shand's following three episodes of 'Scenario for a Human Drama' deal with 'Immediate Background' (AR vol. 76, p. 39), ' Peter Behrens' (AR vol. 76 p. 83-86), and 'Van de Velde to Wagner' (AR vol. 76, p. 131-134) which includes discussion on Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffman. The fifth in the series 'Glasgow Interlude' (AR vol. 77, pp. 23-26) focused on Charles Rennie Mackintosh, however Shand does not consider Mackintosh to be a pioneer of modernism in architecture:

> What Mackintosh *was* the father of ... was something quite different. He was undoubtedly the founder of that revolutionary architectonic formalism that Germans call the *Jugendstil,* the first architect to translate *art nouveau* decorative motifs from graphic into glyptic terms. (AR vol. 77, p. 23)

Shand suggests that the Glaswegian locomotive engineer, John F McIntosh, who designed the 'Dunalaistair' express train was more the 'originator of the inornate functional simplicity of modern forms' (p. 24) than Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Shand's detailed account of Mackintosh's career is not entirely flattering, although he does describe the interior of Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art as: 'certainly by far the most original *architectural* design of its day' (p. 26) but only once stripped of decoration and concludes:

> Mackintosh was the first British architect since Adam to be a name abroad, and the only one who has ever become a rallying point of a Continental school of design. British cultural prestige had never stood higher across the Channel. With much the same authoritarian finality as Herbert Spencer removing his ear-trumpet, Adolf Loos used then to clinch every argument about design by saying, 'Well, anyhow, that is how they do it in England!' (AR vol. 77, p. 26)

The sixth episode in the series 'La machine-à habiter to the house of character' discusses the contribution from the de Stijl group in Holland and Frank Lloyd Wright in America. Shand lists Wright's achievements:

> He helped to carry most previous rationalizing tendencies a step further: free-planning ... the elimination of ceremonial rooms, logical construction and equipment, built-in fixtures ... Moreover, he gave a powerful stimulus to making the world machine-conscious in the right sense, though it must not be forgotten that the predominant influence on Wright (as on Mackintosh) was Japanese. (AR vol. 77, p. 64)

Shand refers to the Dutch architect, Hendrik Berlage's comment on Wright's use of the protective projecting roof, describing him as 'a slave to an essentially Oriental motif' (p. 64) (fig. 67). Wright's choice of 'exterior decoration' is considered eclectic: '... now Roman, now Japanese, now Neo-Mayan, and now "engineer-romantic"' (p. 64). Wright had worked in the Chicago office of the architect, Louis Sullivan, during the late 1880s and was familiar with the steel framed skyscraper; Shand believed this experience had given Wright an advantage in spatial perception.

'VII. Looping the Loop' was the concluding article in the 'Scenario for a Human Drama' (AR vol. 77, pp. 99-104); in this final instalment Shand discusses the work of William Morris and John Ruskin as an inspirational source on British architects: Philip Webb, Eden Nesfield, Norman Shaw who were contemporaries of Morris and a second generation: Voysey, Walton, Baillie Scott, Ashbee, Lethaby, Newton, early Lutyens who were contemporaries of Mackintosh (AR vol. 77, p. 99). Under the heading 'Poetry and the Wall' Shand explains the lack of development in the British house prior to 1920; poetry standing for romantic picturesque notions, and the wall 'or rather the vent in it – the window' (p. 100). He cites, as 'The unconscious prophet of the modern house', the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace for his line 'stone walls do not a prison make' (p. 100). In this last episode Shand retraces his steps from the 1930s, to the start of art nouveau, identifying Morris' influence and closing with the Regency house. Nikolaus Pevsner's

text, published the following year, would cover the same ground as 'Scenario for a Human Drama' but in the sequential order.[37]

Victorian 'Prophets of the Modern Movement'

Two years later, in a 1937 article 'Prophets of the Modern Movement' (AR vol. 81, pp. 49-50) design historian, Nicolette Gray, suggested the criticisms regarding the standard of design in British artefacts at the 1851 Great Exhibition, raised by Pevsner in *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936) were the same criticisms that were made at the time. She cites contemporary comment:

> The principle that designs on all textile surfaces should be flat, that only drastically conventionalized representations of natural objects are compatible with the primary necessity of preserving the unit of the surface which they decorate, is emphatically stated; and attention is drawn to Oriental examples. (AR vol. 81, p. 49)

Gray identifies the painter, Richard Redgrave (1804-88), the architect, Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820-77), the designer, Owen Jones (1809-74) who were involved in the Great Exhibition, and Jones' work associate, Henry Noel Humphries (1810-79) as holding predominantly modernist views in as much as they were against revivalism and in favour of the use of new materials and methods for 'new needs and ways of living' (p. 49). Gray puts forward a convincing argument quoting all four men in which, the issues under discussion in the 1850s were still to be found in the 1930s: 'fitness of purpose', form to follow function, the embrace of new technology and science, and concern about over-ornamentation. Finally Gray questions why it was that these new ideas of uniting art and technology were not put into practise after the Great Exhibition:

> Largely, of course, because of lack of genius. But then, how did it happen that from 1835 to 1850 men of average ability could see things in a way which seems to us today to be rational while their contemporaries of real genius like Pugin and Ruskin, for all their penetration, were in the main hopelessly astray? What were the social and intellectual conditions which made this possible? (AR vol. 81, p. 50)

Christopher Dresser

In Pevsner's article, published shortly after Gray's, on another Victorian 'Christopher Dresser Industrial Designer' (AR vol. 81, pp. 183-186), we are presented with

[37] There was polite animosity between Shand & Pevsner, which is demonstrated in Shand's review of *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* published in *The Architectural Review* (AR 1936, vol. 80 pp. 218-9) (Mowl, 2000 pp. 83-4).

answers and not questions. It was this seminal article that re-established Dresser as a principal designer of the period; in his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement,* Pevsner had already commented, briefly, on Dresser's ' ... simplicity and creative daring ...' and described his designs for a cruet set and tea-kettle as: '... in every detail reduced to fundamentals' (p. 55) but it was in this article that Dresser's reputation as one of the first modern industrial designer was re-created. Pevsner is eager to demonstrate Dresser's 'modern' approach to design: 'Nevertheless he teaches ... that, for modern use, "a repetition of ancient forms is not appropriate; for ornament, like architecture, must express the sentiments of the age in which it is created ... perfect regard to fitness can alone save art from suffering condemnation"' (p. 183). Pevsner believes Dresser appears ahead of his time:

> While one is quite prepared to admire Dresser's genius in putting forward such a good case for "regard to fitness" more than fifty years before "fitness to purpose" became the slogan of the supporters of a twentieth-century style in industrial art, it would be historically incorrect not to look first for a possible derivation of this revolutionary-sounding doctrine of Dresser's. (AR vol. 81, p. 183)

Pugin, Ruskin and Owen Jones are considered to be Dresser's inspirational sources; Pevsner notes Dresser's 1876/7 trip to Japan, his subsequent publication and his interest in Japanese art and design since 1862, however there is no mention of Japan as an inspiration on Dresser's work. Although Pevsner does identify a change of style in the 1880s, particularly in metalwork (fig. 68):

> The Back-to Fundamentals attitude of these square and uncompromising shapes is unexpected in the seventies, and a group of sketches in the account books ... shows that he was all the time ... experimenting with new shapes. Many of them are odd, some are decidedly ugly, some are extremely interesting as endeavours towards functionalism, but scarcely any are conventional or dull. (AR vol. 81, p. 186)

Despite recognising a dramatic transformation in Dresser's designs, Pevsner makes no connection between this and Dresser's visit to Japan. Nevertheless, Pevsner was not unaware of the inspiration from Japan on art and design; in his 1936 *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* Pevsner does question the role of East as an inspirational source: 'The history of the part played by China and Japan in European art since 1860 has not yet been written. It would be very interesting to show the influence of the East ...' (1960, p. 150).

We have discovered, within the pages of *The Architectural Review,* the desire to establish a pedigree in order to perhaps bestow legitimacy on modernist architecture and design. The line, generally speaking in the simplest of terms, commences with Morris and

Ruskin, then passes to Mackintosh and his inspiration on the Continent, alongside that of Wright in America, through the style of art nouveau into various European factions, primarily: De Stijl in Holland, Bauhaus in Germany, Le Corbusier in France. J Mordaunt Crook describes this lineage as a 'mythology' (1987 p. 225), which is 'largely based on wishful thinking' (p. 226).

However the 'myth' was perpetuated in a 1938 text published in the *The Studio* 'Baillie Scott and the "Architecture of Escape" (vol. 116, pp. 177-180) in which John Betjeman briefly passes judgement on some prototype modernists: 'Voysey, Walton, Mackintosh and Ashbee are hailed as pioneers of the modern architecture. Of these the first is unwilling to have this label tied to him, the two middle ones are dead and the last is aware of the significance of what they all were doing' (p. 177). In *Ghastly Good Taste* (1933) Betjeman discusses Mackintosh's work: 'He may be said to have founded "modern" architecture as it is to be seen in Germany ... We would have none of his work in England, such as that practised by that master genius, Peter Behrens, was known in Germany as *Mackintoshismus*'; Betjeman continues: 'The lily roots and twisted horrors of Art Nouveau had been straightened out, and the simple architecture goes on today with the work, among others, of practical men like Frederick Etchells, Wells Coates, Joseph Emberton and a few others' (p. 104).

Betjeman and Pevsner

As already noted Betjeman was an English poet and his views on architecture cannot be described as always consistent. Conversely, Pevsner was a respected German art historian forced to leave Germany like many others caught up in the diaspora of the 1930s. It is apparent that colleagues at *The Architectural Review* found Pevsner's thorough methodical working practice intimidating; Timothy Mowl describes the 'sheer professionalism of Pevsner's work' (2000 p. 84). Although, Betjeman had resigned from *The Architectural Review* before Pevsner became a regular contributor, a rivalry developed which continued for a considerable number of years and is discussed in Mowl's *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman versus Pevsner*; there seemed little common ground between Betjeman's romantic fluidity and Pevsner's precise Germanic style.

Tradition versus modern

It was Betjeman who addressed the much discussed issue, within the RIBAJ, by providing an alternative perspective on the 'Tradition versus Modernism' debate in 1931 when his single page article entitled 'The Death of Modernism' was published in *The Architectural Review*. He argues there should be no 'Battle of the Styles' and suggests

this expression 'can only have been coined by the stupid extremists of either side. There is no battle for the intelligent artist. The older men gradually discard superfluities. The younger men do not ignore the necessary devices of the past' (AR, vol. 70, p. 161). Betjeman discusses what he perceives as the misuse of words, such as Gothic and Traditional, to mean only styles when these words, in fact, encapsulate architectural ideals; he explains Gothic meant 'the architecture of necessity' and not 'the trappings of medievalism'. He concludes:

> The word "modern" is becoming old-fashioned. It is used by one writer to describe the latest effort of the oldest old stager, by another, some building by Corbusier. Perhaps it were better to do away with it altogether and to discriminate traditional from what poses as such. (AR 1931, vol. 70, p. 161)

Within the RIBAJ, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the conflict was compared to the Victorian battle between Classic and Gothic architecture. J Mordaunt Crook places the Gothic versus Classic stylistic encounter in the 1850s, followed by: 'the Battle for a Style – the pursuit of novelty at all costs – was a phenomenon of the 1860s' (1987 p. 180). He also identifies during the 1930s the elderly architect, Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942) as 'a last-ditch defender of Classicism' (p. 249). Blomfield, in his 1934 anti-modernism text, *Modernismus*,[38] clearly draws the battle lines:

> In these studies I have endeavoured to raise a definite issue between the Modernism which deliberately turns its back on the past, and Traditionalism which recognises the past, and advances on technical lines which hitherto have been followed as a matter of course. Are we to accept this Modernism as a step forward or are we to regard it as a step downhill which, if unchecked, will end in the bankruptcy of Literature and the Arts? (Blomfield, 1934 pp. v-vi)

Blomfield strongly disliked the internationalism and standardisation of modernism: 'I am for the hill on which I was born[39]; France for the French; Germany for the German; England for the Englishman ... Each people with a great historic past has its own tradition ...' (p. 82).

In the text Blomfield discusses the architecture symposium 'Is Modern architecture on the right track?' organised by *The Listener*. On 26 July 1933 the results of a series of questions they had posed to a group of well-known architects were published. Blomfield, Charles Holden, A E Richardson, W Curtis Green, Maxwell Fry, Frederic Towndrow, M H

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[38] Blomfield chose the title *Modernismus* to emphasis what he perceived to be the Germanic connection.

[39] David Dean recalls Amyas Connell's witty but wicked response: 'Home-keeping youth hath ever homely wit' (Dean, 1883 p. 37).

Baillie-Scott, Joseph Emberton, Christian Barman and Wells Coates were the architects invited to respond to the following questions:

1. Is the engineer making the architect unnecessary to-day?
2. Has 'functionalism' in building gone too far?
3. Can the English town and country ever properly assimilate the new architecture?
4. Is the new architecture ugly?
5. What will the next generation think of the ultra-modern style of present day buildings, including the ultra modern house?
6. Are we likely to evolve in the near future a new style of architectural ornament? (Blomfield, 1934 p. 160)

It is apparent that Curtis Green, Richardson, Holden and Baillie Scott basically concur with Blomfield's view 'that traditionalism rightly understood, is a movement forward, not backwards' (p. 161). Blomfield thought Maxwell Fry had: 'confused traditionalism with revivalism, to which it has no relation whatsoever' (p. 161) and Towndrow had made a mistake in believing that beauty would follow function: Blomfield quotes and comments on Towndrow's response:

> He asserts with confidence that the English people will admire "the strange-looking building of the new architecture ... just as they admire the motor-car and the aeroplane and all things that do their job" and that in future people must ask "not whether the buildings are beautiful, but whether they fit their functions" (Blomfield, 1934 p. 161)

Blomfield lists his own responses to *The Listener*'s questions which he believes are a summary of his views on modern architecture: functionalism fails when the past is not considered; the new architecture cannot be assimilated into either town or country as it is non-English; any architecture that does not consider the past is of no interest to him; what is good in modern architecture will be retained, what is not will be thrown away and finally 'as to ornament, if the new architecture is really great it can do without any ornament at all' (p. 165). It should be remembered Blomfield was no stranger to the functional for it was he who designed the electricity pylons. David Dean considers Blomfield's jingoistic attack on modernist architecture was 'written out of moral duty' resulting from a desire to return to 'the broad pastures of Edwardian empire' (Dean, 1983 p. 37) to escape the turmoil and upheaval created by the First World War. J Mordaunt Crook likens Blomfield's Classic to Pugin's Gothic in which both 'limited architectural excellence to a single architectural style' (1987 p. 251). Comparing modernism with Victorian Gothic Crook believes: 'And like the Gothic Revival , the Modern Movement eventually dwindled into a fashion. It became modernistic' (p. 251).

The functional and the modernistic

Crook's assessment of the modern movement's decline into nothing more than the style of Art Deco is questionable. He was writing at the end of the 1980s, just before the start of the 1990s reassessment of inter-war modernism in Britain; a time of post-modernism when the perception of modern architecture had reached an all time low. Modernist architecture continued to be built in Britain up to the start of the Second World War as did the modernistic. As we observed within the RIBAJ there was confusion over what was truly modern.

The contemporary caricaturist and writer, Osbert Lancaster employed the terms functional for modernism and modernistic for what today we call Art Deco, a name coined in the 1960s for the style originating from the 1925 Paris exhibition; moderne or jazz-modern were the more often used terms during the inter-war period. Lancaster provides us with graphic depictions of the functional and the modernistic (fig. 69) with equally vivid written descriptions; of the functional dwelling he observes:

> Thus the style which now emerged was one of the utmost austerity, relying for its effect on planning and proportion alone, and faithfully fulfilling the one condition to which every importance was attached, of 'fitness for purpose' ... the new architects could seldom resist making a house fit for purposes such as sun-bathing, which the English climate and environment frequently rendered impossible of fulfilment ... (Lancaster, 1963 p. 94)

Of the modernistic he writes:

> The foundation was provided by that Jazz style that enjoyed a mercifully brief period of popularity ... which was itself the fruit of a fearful union between the flashier side of Ballets Russes and a hopelessly vulgarized version of Cubism. To this were added elements derived from ... the Paris Exhibition of 1927[sic.], such as an all too generous use of the obscure and more hideous woods, and a half-hearted simplicity that derived from a complete misunderstanding of the ideals of the Corbusier-Gropius school of architects and found uneasy expression in unvarnished wood and chromium plate, relentlessly misapplied. (Lancaster, 1946 p. 72)

The writer, design critic and broadcaster, Anthony Bertram was a strong supporter of modernism; in his 1938 text *Design* it is possible to realise the abhorrence he felt for the modernistic:

> But we are in danger to-day of another kind of fancy-dress – the modernistic. The modernistic is bogus modern ... If a house is built by new methods, of new materials, for new needs, it automatically has certain features. It has large windows, for example, sometimes at corners to catch the maximum sun. It has no fancy ornament ... But what the modernistic builder does is build an old-fashioned villa with the old-fashioned plan in the old fashioned way, and

> then he "streamlines" it, tacking on his modern features ... And then because genuine modern architecture is too severe for his degenerate taste, he jazzes things up a bit. Vague and ignorant ideas about cubism suggest to him all sorts of loathsome jagged zig-zagging meaningless ornaments ... (Bertram, 1938 p. 64)

Bertram gives a clear definition of the modernistic (fig. 70) and the modern. However confusion still exists today; houses in 'Britain's First Modernist Town: The Frinton Park Development Scheme' (*Building* 1934, pp. 482-487) are described by the media and local estates agents as Art Deco (fig. 71).

The artist and commentator on modernist aesthetic, Roger Fry believed style was 'an admirable thing' providing it was 'the result of ease and coherence of feeling, but unfortunately a borrowed style is an even stronger proof of muddled and befogged emotions than the total absence of style' (1937 p. 221). Fry advocates in 'A Possible Domestic Architecture', a 1918 text first published in *Vogue*, that the design of a house should be the result of the needs of the occupants. In 1912 Fry founded the Omega Workshops, which are considered to be a forerunner of the British modernist groups formed in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The collaborations of the British modern movement

Omega Workshops

In setting up the Omega Workshops, Fry was not seeking to reform society or rebel against industrialisation; he sought equality between fine art and design, and to provide his friends with a livelihood designing and decorating household objects which they could undertake in tandem with their work as artists. Original members included, briefly the artists Wyndham Lewis and Edward Wadsworth, and Bloomsbury group members Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. Paul Nash was critical of their work: 'The result was that everything was painted. Chairs, tables, bowls, stools, candlesticks and couches all were animated by a fluid calligraphy of Post-Impressionist design and then varnished or glazed' (1932 p. 24); conversely, the workshops were praised by Nikolaus Pevsner in *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (1937).

The British modernist fraternities of the Twentieth Century Group, Unit One and the MARS Group were keen to emphasis equality in the arts and to assimilate new technology. The formation and aims of these groups are discussed in chapter five 'Wells Coates and the British Modern Movement'. However, there are two consortia whose aims were similar to the above, of which Coates was not a member.

Circle

The manifesto *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (1937) was edited by the artist and former Unit One member, Ben Nicholson, constructivist sculptor N Gabo, and architect, J L Martin. The publication was intended to demonstrate the union of the arts and architecture with science. The book is divided into four parts: painting, sculpture, architecture, art and life. The architectural section contains illustrations of projects and completed work in Europe, Britain and American including designs by Serge Chermayeff, Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, E Maxwell Fry, Gropius and Maxwell Fry, J L Martin, Lubetkin and Tecton, F R S Yorke, Yorke and Breuer; Christopher Nicholson and the Austrian émigré architect Richard J Neutra. Texts follow written by Richards, Maxwell Fry, Breuer, Neutra, Alberto Sartoris, and Martin, with subject matter ranging from architectural identity, town planning, unit construction and the current state of architecture. Despite Neutra's mention of workers' apartments in Osaka and Tokyo (p. 206) there seems little innovative thought in this section. When reviewed by *The Studio* the opinion was similar:

> Not intended to be an impartial and disinterested survey of every kind of modern art, this book endeavours to advance the "constructive trend," being inspired by the idea that a new cultural unity is slowly emerging ... The abstract painting and architectural projects with which *Circle* is concerned is already a lost cause in many ways. The editors may be credited with gallantry in supporting it ... (*The Studio,* November 1937, p. 277)

Siegfried Giedion's informative text 'The work of the C.I.A.M. (Congrès Internationaux d'Achitecture Modernè)' (pp. 272-278) gives the history and aims of the organisation but barely mentions the MARS Group.

The ATO (Architects' and Technicians' Organisation)

The formation in 1935 of the ATO, by Berthold Lubetkin and R T F Skinner of Tecton, was in part a response to the MARS Group's lack of political involvement in its objectives for social change. In January 1933 Lubetkin wrote to Coates expressing concern over the group's lack of a theoretical framework (Appendix 2). Lubetkin and his firm Tecton, formed in 1932, were politically motivated and socially aware, believing the new architecture should 'serve society' (Coe & Reading, 1981 p. 53). Tecton undertook several social projects one of which was the Finsbury Health Centre, completed 1938. The group challenged government housing policies, during the Spanish Civil War arranged events to embarrass the government in action against fascism, and from 1937 developed air raid protection for the civilian population.

Summary

In 1983 David Dean believed the inter-war British modern movement groups to have had little impact on either architecture or society. However, the activities of both the MARS Group and the ATO received much attention in the architectural journals at the time. Dean was writing in the 1980s a time, as we have noted with J Mordaunt Crook, of anti-modernism feeling. The perceived reception of modernism in architecture is dependent upon the era in which it is reviewed; texts written in the 1950s and early 1960s are in favour of the modern but texts written during the 1970s and 1980s, in the wake of the 1968 collapse of the Ronan Point tower block, tend to be less complementary. In the 1990s and after, a reassessed view is offered.

Published in 1961, *A History of Architecture* was a collaborative text produced by the RIBA and the University of London that was written at a time when modernism was seen as the answer to the British housing problem. The examples chosen to illustrate the period between the wars are: the Boots Chemical Factory, Beeston, Notts (1930-2), the Penguin Pool, Regent's Park Zoo, London (1933-5), the 'Daily Express' Offices, Fleet Street, London (*c.* 1933), the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, Sussex (1935), and the Peter Jones Store, Sloane Square, London (1935-6). Neither the Penguin Pool nor the De La Warr Pavilion received much editorial comment or discussion in the RIBAJ during the inter-war years.

In 1961 the Penguin Pool is described as: 'a spatial adventure in form which was among the earliest wholly modern designs to be executed in Britain, demonstrating that even the most improbable subjects are capable of yielding high-quality architecture' (Fletcher, 1961 p.1048). Lubetkin's work is described somewhat differently by J Mordaunt Crook in 1987: 'At first, working with the Tecton partnership, Lubetkin experimented on animals: in the Gorilla House (1932) and Penguin Pool (1934) at London Zoo' (Crook, 1987 p. 245). In 1996 Richard Weston gives a complementary description: 'This exuberant essay in reinforced concrete created a perfect setting for its inhabitants and quickly caught the public's imagination' (Weston, 1996 p. 185).

Taking the De La Warr Pavilion, it is again fascinating to compare the three publications; the 1961 description reads as follows:

> ... a contribution to British architecture by two distinguished foreigners, conveying a distinctly Continental and progressive air. The long body of the hall, its sheer white walls perfectly plain apart from a circular decorative inscription, forms a striking contrast with the semicircular bay at the restaurant end, busy with its tiers of balconies and translucent wall through which the convolutions of the ascending staircase can be seen.
> (Fletcher, 1961 p.1048)

Crook gives a favourable appraisal in 1987: 'Such buildings – like Mendelsohn and Chermayeff's Bexhill Pavilion (1934-6) – introduced England to a veritable new work of design. They must have seemed a revelation: as strange and exotic as artefacts from another planet' (Crook, 1987 p. 237). A factual account is given by Weston: 'Commissioned by the Socialist Mayor, Earl de la Warr, and designed by two central European exiles, the Pavilion was intended to introduce the British public to Modern architecture (Weston, 1996 p. 182). These portrayals are a far cry from the outrage evoked by the perceived émigré winners of the competition; in 1934 Mendelsohn and Chermayeff were accused of taking work from British architects.[40]

We have observed reference to Japanese architectural aesthetic in the work of pioneering protagonists of modern architecture in Europe. In chapter two we examined texts on Japanese architecture that were available in Britain from the 1870s and it became apparent that there was considerable information available for the interested British architect. The same was true in Europe and there is every reason to suppose that Rietveld, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier would have been aware of the Japanese house and garden.[41] Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Frank Lloyd Wright have been cited as pioneers of the modern movement and their inspiration from Japan was commented upon but no suggestion has been made at this stage that this Japanese inspirational source may also have contributed to the design of the modern architecture.

The response in Britain to modernism in architecture has been assessed through an examination of the inter-war RIBAJ, *The Architectural Review* and to a lesser extent *The Studio*. In the RIBAJ modernism was treated sparingly until the 1930s and even then the interest was of a controlled nature. Conversely *The Architectural Review* produced lavish articles on modern design illustrated with large detailed photographs. Today, with hindsight, the role of the British modern movement within the history of architecture is perhaps easier to define. Britain was slow to adopt modernism, perceiving it as foreign, alien and against the principles of historicism and tradition. The use of new technology and materials was of concern; modernist ideology was considered to be at best questionable and at worst Bolshevik.

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[40] Chermayeff was not a recent émigré, he was brought to England in 1910 to attend a Hampstead preparatory school (Powers, 2001 p. 9).

[41] Current research into texts held in Le Corbusier studio: Irène Vogel Chevroulet and Yasushi Zenno 'Japan 1940-41: Imprint and resonance in Charlotte Perriand's designs', paper read at the Society of Architectural Historians 60th Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Omni William Penn Hotel, April 2007.

For a final comparison of publications it is of relevance to observe the position attributed to Wells Coates within the British modern movement. During the 1930s Coates received little editorial mention in the RIBAJ, but frequent, detailed reports of his work appeared in *The Architectural Review*. In the 1961 *History of Architecture* he is given pride of place: 'The British architects, and those from the Commonwealth working in Britain, who first practised it [modern architecture] included Wells Coates ...' (Fletcher, 1961 p. 995). Crook is analytical:

> But Wells Coates designed his own radio with a transparent glass front: that was the faith of a romantic functionalist ... Coates was, in fact, a self-taught industrial designer of ingenuity and talent: the D-shaped handle became his trade-mark. Perhaps he was a better designer than he was an architect ... (Crook, 1987 p. 242)

Weston (1996) mentions Coates as a founder member of CIAM, the designer of Lawn Road Flats and Ekco radios. In the next two chapters we shall examine the life and work of Coates, his position within the British modern movement and his role as a disseminator on Japan and Japanese architecture.

Part Three – Wells Coates and Modernist Japonisme

Chapter 4 – Wells Coates (1895-1958)

Introduction

In the next two chapters we shall examine the life and work of Wells Coates; in this chapter we shall explore Coates' Japanese inspiration, and in the next, his position within the British modern movement. The examination of his design work, journal articles and papers will be primarily limited to the time before the Second War World, 1928 to 1939, and will concentrate mainly on his architectural and interior design commissions (Appendix 3). It is not widely known that Coates was born in Japan and lived there until the age of 17. His formative upbringing in the East, to which he often referred, had a palpable effect upon his subsequent design work. Equally, Coates' significance within the British modern movement has been somewhat diminished in the retelling of the history of this movement.

Therefore, these two chapters on Coates seek to address the following questions: Did Coates have an interest and knowledge of Japan? Is there evidence of Japanese inspiration in his design work? Was he sufficiently influential within the British modern movement for his ideas to have any relevance? Was he an important disseminator of knowledge relating to Japan and Japanese architecture? Coates' Japanese inspiration will be examined by observing his childhood exposure to Japanese culture, discussing his transfer to the West and identifying the way in which his experience of Japan inspired his designs, and in chapter five, his involvement with contemporary architectural, art and design groups, institutes and associations during the 1930s will seek to establish his position within the British modern movement.

Described as 'one of the leading British industrial designers' (Gloag, 1946 p. 177) architect-engineer, Coates was an eminent figure within the British modern movement; a founder member of the Twentieth Century Group, Unit One and Chairman of the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) Group, the British branch of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne). He was responsible for some of the most innovative and advanced modernist designs in Britain during the inter-war period; his work includes the Cresta Silks shop fronts and interiors, domestic interior design conversions, three blocks of flats, several houses, studios for the BBC at Broadcasting House, London and Newcastle, electrical equipment and furniture design. Coates is probably best known in Britain for his radio designs for Ekco and as the architect of Lawn Road Flats in Hampstead, London.

In September 2004, I was fortunate enough to travel to Canada to study the Wells Coates Archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal; the archive[42] was sold to the CCA in 1988 by Coates' daughter, Laura Cohn. Through studying Coates' diaries and papers, preserved within the archive, I have been able to ascertain the extent to which he was exposed to Japanese culture whilst growing up in Japan. This research has informed my analysis of Coates' designs and writings, his reference to traditional Japanese domestic architecture and his contribution to modernism in British design. I shall begin by reviewing the texts written on Coates in a search for: reference to, and analysis of, his Japanese inspiration.

Texts on Coates

Published books on Coates are few: Sherban Cantacuzino's *Wells Coates: a Monograph* (1978), *Wells Coates: architect and designer, 1895-1958* (1979) an exhibition catalogue edited by Coates' daughter, Laura Cohn, and *The door to a secret room: a portrait of Wells Coates* (1999) written by Cohn. Two unpublished texts have also been written on Coates: F H Elgohary's PhD thesis 'Wells Coates and his position in the beginning of the Modern Movement in England' (1966), University College London, edited by Laura Cohn [sic.] and, within the Wells Coates Archive at the CCA, Moya Walsh's BA History of Art dissertation 'The Japanese Influences on Wells Coates: A Way of Seeing'(1982), Oxford Polytechnic.

The first text to be written on Coates was Eloghary's PhD thesis in 1966; I have studied two versions of this thesis. The first at the CCA[43] which was incomplete and in draft form with many handwritten corrective notes, and the second at University College London, where Elgohary completed his doctorate under the supervision of Dr. Reyner Banham. It is apparent from the acknowledgements that Cohn edited the manuscript which would explain the existence of the draft within the WCA. In the mid 1960s many of Coates contemporaries were still living and Elgohary was able to interview, for example: Serge Chermayeff, Maxwell Fry, Dr. Siegfried Giedion, Patrick Gwynne, T H Heron, Denys Lasdun, Colin Lucas, Raymond McGrath, Molly and Jack Pritchard, which have resulted in some memorable quotes.

Elgohary acknowledges Coates' Japanese inspiration on interior conversions at: No 1 Kensington Palace Gardens, 2 Devonshire Street, 34 Gordon Square and 18 Yeoman's Row and he states:

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[42] Hereafter referred to as WCA.
[43] WCA, Box 13-A.

> Wells Coates studied philosophy and science against the background of the meticulous traditional Japanese art of living. Japanese tradition had achieved an austere order and dignity by practising a discipline which rejected the superfluous and this had coloured his whole outlook. (1966, p. 127).

Although poorly referenced, as the first attempt to assess the role of Coates within the British modern movement, Elgohary has been reasonably successful in untangling the facts. This thesis was written prior to the re-evaluation of the British modern movement, which took place during the 1970s and for that his task was all the greater.

Published in 1978, Cantacuzino's monograph has been the definitive work on Coates for the last 29 years. The strengths of this book lie in the detailed description, analysis and evaluation of Coates' design work. There are also select bibliographies for architectural, design work, articles and books. The text is illustrated with many contemporary black and white photographs of the designs; plans and diagrams have been included. In addition to Cohn's Wells Coates archive, Cantacuzino also acknowledges his indebtedness to Elgohary's thesis. Although Cantacuzino mentions Coates' upbringing in Japan and Coates' reference to his inspiration from Japan, he does not discuss this inspiration in relation to any of Coates' designs when analysing or evaluating his work. An example of this is in the discussion of the conversion of Coates' own studio flat at 18 Yeoman's Row, London, which had been designed as a space in which to live and work. Cantacuzino believes the design of the flat to have been influenced by boat design and does not discuss the Japanese inspiration cited by Coates: 'I do not like big sofas and easy chairs so I make a hearth scene *à la Japonais*, penned off by a shaped fitting which is a bookcase on one side and a backrest for cushions on the other' (1978 p. 76).

The catalogue, *Wells Coates: Architect and Designer 1895-1958,* was produced to accompany a travelling exhibition which opened at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford in July 1979; the subsequent tour venues included: the Polytechnic of the South Bank, Manchester University School of Architecture, Hull College of Higher Education and Brighton Pavilion Art Gallery. Edited by Cohn, with an introduction by Cantacuzino, the catalogue also includes a piece on Coates by Randal Bell, client of the10 Palace Gate Flats, and a reprint of Coates' 1951 paper 'Freedom and Responsibility in the Experience of the Architect' as well as photographs, plans and texts on works included in the exhibition. There is one reference to Coates' Japanese inspiration, ironically in relation to Yeoman's Row: 'The influence on Coates of his years in Japan is clearly reflected in the interior design' (1979 p. 20). However, it is not possible to deduce, from the catalogue, the author of this text.

The second of the unpublished texts, Walsh's 'Japanese Influences on Wells Coates: a way of seeing', a well written BA dissertation, commences with a postcard sent from Japan by Gropius to Coates in the early 1950s and continues in a methodical way to analysis Coates' interiors. Walsh argues that, although Coates' designs are perceived to be based on modernist ideals, they are, primarily inspired by Japanese aesthetic. She does not progress her argument to conclude that Japan could have been an inspirational source for the British modern movement.

Coates' inspiration from Japan is also discussed in Cohn's *The Door to a Secret Room: a portrait of Wells Coates.* Chapter one is entitled 'Japan' and deals briefly with Coates' childhood in Japan and illustrates design examples inspired by Japanese architecture. As in Walsh's dissertation, Cohn's chapter also starts with the Japanese post card from Gropius. Diary pages and letters from Coates are also reproduced recounting his early experiences in this short and descriptive chapter. The book is a personal portrayal of a father by his daughter and is intended to 'illustrate the conflicts, qualities and disappointments of an extraordinary man', (1999 dust jacket) and gives insight into Coates' work by providing some personal detail on, not only his successes, but also his difficulties. It was reviewed by Cantacuzino for *The Architectural Review* in the year of publication. This book was published 11 years after Cohn sold the archive to the CCA so it is open to conjecture as to how and when this text was actually written.[44]

Whilst it would be incorrect to suggest that Coates' Japanese inspiration had not been discussed, texts on him have not considered that his inspiration from Japan may also have been an inspiration for the British modern movement. It would appear that Cantacuzino, Elgohary and Walsh were given fairly free access by Cohn to the Wells Coates Archive which was then still in her possession. Understandably, Cohn has had a considerable input into these texts and equally has drawn on them for her own writings on her father.

Texts by Coates

Coates often spoke of writing a book to be entitled 'Materials for Architecture' circa 1932,[45] which was changed to 'Dwellings for Tomorrow'.[46] In biographical notes dated 25 January 1955 he states: 'In progress: book on principles and practise of

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[44] I enquired at the CCA whether Cohn had made a visit to the archive in relation to her book but I did not receive an answer.
[45] WCA Box 04-D biographical outline for the BBC.
[46] WCA Box 06-30e notes for proposed book.

architecture, no title.'[47] 18 months later, in July 1956, a title is given: 'The Language of Architecture'.[48] However, financial difficulties seem to have prevented him from having sufficient time to commit his design theories to a format greater than a paper or a journal article. Though few in number, these papers and articles give an insight to Coates' ideals.

Japanese beginnings: 'The atmosphere of cultured Japan is the best of nurseries'[49]

Coates, the eldest of six children, was born in Tokyo to Canadian Methodist missionary parents in 1895 and it is necessary in the understanding of Coates to take time to investigate his parentage. In 1889, his father, The Reverend Dr. Harper Havelock Coates was posted to Kôfu; he came to Japan under the Canadian Methodist mission's Self-Support scheme; a system of supplying auxiliary workers to the mission without cost to the Mission Board, whereby young Canadian Methodists fulfilled the demand for English teachers in Japanese schools. In 1886, Coates' mother, Agnes Wintemute, joined the women missionaries in Tokyo and from there she was sent to Kôfu to establish a girls' school (Ion, 1990); his parents married in 1893.

Harper Coates was noted for his knowledge of the Japanese language and his interest in Buddhism. He worked with Ryûgaku Ishizuka to translate 14th century Japanese texts relating to Hônen, a 12th century Buddhist monk. Published in 1925, *Hônen, the Buddhist Saint: his life and teachings*, is a work of over 1,000 pages which took 16 years to complete. Ishizuka's 'Translator's Preface' gives a detailed history of his collaboration with Harper Coates including many personal details. Wells Coates, in a letter dated 30 March 1926, stated that: 'It was the day of the great Japanese earthquake. Worried about father, whom I knew to be in Hokone [sic. Hakone], living in a temple, writing vast volumes on Buddhism.'[50] Harper Coates was Professor of Philosophy and Comparative Religion, at the Aoyama Theological College, Tokyo until April 1916 when he was appointed Superintendent of the Tôtômi Mission (Coates & Ishizuka, 1925); he and his wife served at the Central Tabernacle in Tokyo, Hamamatsu, Kanazawa and Nagoya, where he died in 1935. According to Ishizuka the Coates family also had a summer home at Takayama, near Shiogama (1925).

It would appear that both Coates' parents returned to Canada in 1913 probably to make arrangements for the education of their children. By studying the contact details in Coates' World War One diaries it has been possible to establish that, by 1917, Harper

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[47] WCA Box 04-D biographical notes, 25th January 1955.
[48] WCA Box 04-D biographical notes, 1st July 1956, New York City.
[49] WCA Box 35-B 'Letter to Mark' p. 78.
[50] WCA Box 35-A 'Letter to Marion' p. 40.

Coates was in Hamamatsu and his wife joined him some time in 1918.[51] On her return to Japan, Agnes Coates studied nutrition, working closely with Dr. Saiki and other Japanese nutritional authorities. She was considered to have had a keen, analytical mind and a wonderful knowledge of the Japanese language: 'Her husband was a scholar in the language. Few knew it as he did, but in speaking it she was still more fluent.'[52] Agnes Coates was a close friend of Motoko Hani, founder and editor of 'Home Companion', *Katei no Tomo,*[53] and taught for many years in the Freedom School for girls, *Jiyû Gakuen,* established by Motoko Hani.

After her husband's death and despite an invitation from one of her daughters to live in Canada, Agnes Coates decided to remain in Japan as she considered her work there to be unfinished. At the outbreak of war in the Pacific she again chose to stay in Japan as she believed her friends would look after her; she died in Shanghai in June 1945. In September 1945, an insightful obituary to Agnes Coates appeared in the *Church Observer* concluding:

> Shortly before the outbreak of war in the Pacific, an article appeared in a Tokyo paper in appreciation of Mrs. Coates. She had been giving class advice on the cooking of rice and as already the food situation was becoming serious, this was warmly welcomed. The writer spoke, too, of Mrs. Coates' desire to remain in Japan in spite of her children's urgent plea that she return to Canada. This article reflected nothing but the warmest affection and admiration for one whom they regarded as a true friend.[54]

It can be deduced that Coates' parents held a sincere and high regard for Japan and the Japanese people; they understood and spoke the language. The fact that they wished to instil in their children a similar regard is born out in Coates' diary entitled 'Sights and Experiences of Japan'.[55] Written in 1909, when he was 13 years old, 'Our Summer Trip' is a description of a journey undertaken by the Rev. and Mrs. Harper Coates with their six children. The trip commences on 7 July with a journey to Kôfu to visit the girls' school built by Coates' mother 20 years earlier; there are also visits to crystal stores and a silk factory. Their journey continues to Kusakabe, Ôtsuki, Yoshida, Gotenba, Hamamatsu and Nagoya where a visit is made to the castle; then on to Gifu and a trip to see cormorant fishing. The family stay in Kyoto for two days visiting palaces, temples, silk weaving premises, a pottery, a cloisonné factory and the house in which Harper Coates lived during

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[51] WCA Box 05 Diaries 1917-1918.
[52] WCA Box 04-D *Church Observer,* 15 September 1945.
[53] 'Home Companion', *Katei no Tomo* later became 'Ladies Companion', *Fujin no Tomo.*
[54] WCA Box 04-D *Church Observer,* 15 September 1945.
[55] WCA Box 05 Diaries 1909 'Sights and Experiences in Japan'.

his stay in Kyoto. During the next nine days the family travel to Osaka where they visit the mint and the ironworks; then on to Kôbe, Nara and Tsu, Harper Coates' first posting in Japan, where he lived and taught. Seto pottery is also visited; other activities en route include catching butterflies and stopping at several tea houses, taking hot spring baths at Yumoto, a street car to Kôzu, a train to Kamakura; sea bathing, visiting Kannon temple, the Daibutsu and the cave at Enoshima. The family return by train via Kamakura to Tokyo; the journey ends on Saturday 24 July 1909.

Throughout this 18 day journey, the visits to Japanese temples, palaces and places of cultural significance are interspersed with visits to family friends, both Westerners and Japanese, Christian churches and schools; this 'Summer Trip' could be considered as a form of pilgrimage undertaking by Coates' parents to assist their children in contextualising and understanding their life in Japan.

From entries in this diary it is possible to realise that Coates had a keen eye for detail, particularly with regard to engineering and architecture; he gives information on the number and length of tunnels on the train journey to Kôfu, the electric power station run by water at Enkyô [Saruhashi], and at the Nijô Palace in Kyoto he notes 'it had very many old paintings on the "shoji" ...'[56] This was not the first time Coates has mentioned *shôji*; he noted on a visit to the Shiba Temples on 3 October 1908 when 12 years old: 'In the six "shoji" or Japanese sliding doors are painted six lions ...'[57] The sliding doors or screens which Coates describes as *shôji* are more likely to have been *fusuma* which are opaque, thickly papered on both sides, and frequently decorated, unlike *shôji* which are semi-translucent, papered on one side, and plain (fig. 29).

Although it is understood Coates' parents encouraged him to keep diaries (Cohn, 1999), it is not altogether clear how, as a child, Coates was educated. The situation is not helped by the fact that Coates' own description of his education in Japan, which he was fond of mentioning, 'developed' as the years passed. In an 'Autobiographical Description' written for the BBC in 1931 he states:

> No schools for English-speaking children existed at that time in Japan ... Manual (eye-and-hand) training formed a large part of my early education; I was put at an early age under the tutorship of a Japanese Painting Master, who taught me to draw with a brush, and of a Japanese Architect-Builder, who taught me the principles of his art, and the way to use a craftsman's tools ... For "Western" subjects I was put under an English tutor, G. E. L. Gauntlett Esq., F.R.G.S. [Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society] the most versatile teacher I have ever known. He prepared me for

[56] WCA Box 05 Diaries 1909 'Sights and Experiences of Japan' 'Our Summer Trip, 1909 Wednesday, July 7'.
[57] WCA Box 05 Diaries 1909 'Sights and Experiences of Japan' 'The Shiba Temples'.

> Matriculation in the usual subjects, and also taught me shorthand and typewriting ... draughtsmanship according to the Western method with set-squares and compasses; mechanics and analytical geometry ...[58]

Coates' assertion that there were no schools for English-speaking children is not entirely correct; there was an American School in Tokyo from the beginning of the 20th century.

By 1957, in an address to the students at the University of British Columbia, Coates' description of his education in Japan had expanded considerably to include:

> A French governess, a Japanese painting master who taught drawing with a brush,
> A Japanese architect-builder, who taught the skills of shaping materials
> Into elements of structure, and the arts of regulation of dimensions
> Pleasing to the eye and to the mind – and – well, among others.
> A German violin teacher, whose dimensional generosities
> Might well have been today the envy of a Lollobrigida or a Marilyn Monroe...
> But above all – my future course was marked out for me
> By an English tutor (from whom I derive my accent)
> Whose name was George Edward Luckmana Gauntlett, the most versatile person I have ever known ... [59]

Whilst there is some scepticism expressed by Cohn and Cantacuzino regarding Coates' claim to such a broad education, it is noted that Gauntlett could possibly have introduced Coates to many manual skills (Cantacuzino, 1978).[60] However, it is clear that Coates believed Gauntlett to have had the greatest influence on him; in his 1957 address Coates continues by saying this of Gauntlett:

> He spoke nine languages – and he played four musical instruments –
> He wrote three systems of shorthand – he was a painter, a superb draftsman, an expert in illuminated manuscripts,
> He was an explorer, an artist and above all, a great teacher...
> He it was who kept instilling into me the notion of the importance
> Of Learning first the ways of the world and of men
> Of living with them in all circumstances and places
> Before making the final decision as to what to do with one's life –
> And he claimed this should not be before the age of thirty.[61]

But who was George Edward Luckmana Gauntlett? It would appear that he came originally from Wales; he lived in southern Japan, possibly at Yamaguchi, with his Japanese wife and seven children.[62] Gauntlett became a respected figure in Japan as he contributed to many aspects of Japanese life: he taught Latin and English at colleges in

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[58] WCA Box 04-D 'Autobiographical Description' p.1.
[59] WCA Box 06-29, p. 1.
[60] WCA Box 13-C. Walsh 1982 p. 21 note 14.
[61] WCA Box 06-29, p. 1.
[62] WCA Box 35-A 'Letter to Marion' p. 20.

Tokyo, Okayama and Yamaguchi, also at Okayama he taught Esperanto; he was active in the study of the history of Japanese music, the history of education and shorthand; he played the organ, contributed to the study of organ music in Japan and was an inspiration to his brother-in-law, Kôsaku Yamada, the well-known composer of Western classical music; he published a paper 'The Caves of Yamaguchi' on his exploration of the akiyoshi cave in a British journal in 1909.[63] He was decorated posthumously by the emperor for his service to Japan and there is a statue to his memory at the Akiyoshidai Museum.

Coates was sent to live with Gauntlett in order, perhaps, to help him to prepare for his matriculation. In a letter to her daughter, Coates' wife Marion wrote in May 1968: 'Wells thought of his childhood in Japan as idyllic, but it was lonely. He was the oldest son of Canadian missionaries with a family of six, but he was sent to live with a tutor (who had a Japanese wife) and the younger ones were not ...'[64]

On Wednesday, 5 March 1913 Coates left Japan with his father and tutor on the SS Cleveland; he was 17 years of age and would never again return to Japan. Although there is no detailed documentation within the WCA of Coates' childhood in Japan, it is possible to conclude he was encouraged, by his parents and his tutor, to observe and understand Japanese culture and, as we shall discover, Japan would remain Coates' reference point for many years to come.

Arrival in the West: 'The man whose eyes have been trained in the East will rarely want to open them in the West'[65]

Coates was leaving Japan to travel to Canada to study engineering at McGill University and he records the journey in a journal entitled 'Diary and Log: Our Trip around the world by S. S. Cleveland'.[66] This diary makes fascinating reading and is reminiscent of a young Indiana Jones; he writes of the life on board ship and gives detailed accounts of the many trips ashore:

> Monday, March 10th. After dinner we went into the main dining room to hear "Impressions of Japan" by any one who wished to say something. First we had a talk about Tsingtau[sic.] [Qingdao], at which place we arrive tomorrow ...
> Tuesday, March 11th. Tsingtau[sic.] [Qingdao] ... principal city of the German territory in China ... very much like a modern Germany town, they say. It was acquired/grabbed by the Germans in 1897 in return for the death of two missionaries, who were killed by the Chinese ... The ship left promptly

[63] <http://www.showcaves.com/english/jp/showcaves/Akiyoshi> 12.01.06
[64] WCA Box 35-C 'Letters to Laura' folder 4 Statement on Wells Coates by Marion. May 1968, p.1.
[65] WCA Box 04-D 'Autobiographical Description' p.2.
[66] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland'.

at 6 o'clock and we were soon out of sight of our first glimpse of China – although much Germanized.[67]

The voyage continued to Hong Kong and Canton [Guangdong]; it is only possible to glimpse Coates' experiences in China as it is at this point, and for the next 18 pages, he writes the diary in shorthand. However on page 34 he writes in longhand *naka-niwa* [courtyard] and it is possible he is making some comparison between Chinese and Japanese gardens.[68] Fortunately, due to the shaking of the ship, Coates reverts to longhand by the time Singapore and Burma are reached. It is noticeable that Coates compares many of the sights he sees with his experiences in Japan, for example, at the Great Shiva Wagon Pagoda: 'One thing we didn't see much of in Japan was the continual burning of candles in these temples making the floors walls and steps all slippery with wax.'[69] Calcutta, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and Bombay are visited; all trips ashore involve visits to temples and places of cultural interest. The ship passed through the Suez canal to Cairo where once again it is apparent that Japan is Coates' reference point, when, in the museum, he stated that some ancient Egyptian sandals are 'much like Japanese'.[70]

Although described as a world cruise, little was seen of Europe; from Port Said, where Harper Coates left the ship to take a personal trip through the Holy Land, the SS Cleveland sailed to Naples, Gibraltar and Southampton, where the ship was refitted to take European immigrants to America. Whilst this refitting was taking place Coates and Gauntlett spent six days in and around London; Coates is somewhat horrified by the conditions that greet him on his return to the S. S. Cleveland: '... motley gang of raw immigrants, Poles, Finns, Hungarians, Dutch, German, Jew, Russians and also most every nation on the globe ... we now have a population of 2400 on board ...'[71] as opposed to the 950 including passengers and crew before Naples. It is apparent from comments made by Coates about the steerage, that he held races from the East in greater esteem than those from the West. The S. S. Cleveland docked in New York on Tuesday 3 June; Coates was met by a cousin and spent three weeks in New York, where he visited the new Woolworth building, and Maplewood, New Jersey sightseeing and visiting relations, two weeks in

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[67] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland', pp. 18-29.
[68] Within the WCA Coates' 1911 diary is also written entirely in shorthand. In September 2004 the CCA had no plans to transcribe Coates' shorthand, and due to time restrictions I was unable to undertake any transcription.
[69] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland', p. 64.
[70] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland', p. 136.
[71] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland', Sunday, May 25th.

Prescott with his father, again visiting family and friends: 'Father stayed east while I travelled to Vancouver arriving there July 14th. Found mother waiting for me there and saw all my relatives etc ... everyone happy and in good spirits. Thus ends my trip around the world'.[72]

Coates does not mention his matriculation examinations at the McGill University, Montreal for which he has been studying during the voyage. In September 1913 he commenced an engineering degree at the McGill University, [now British Columbia] Vancouver. Coates had difficulty adjusting to life in the West:

> Some one has said: "The man whose eyes have been trained in the East will only rarely want to open them in the West." The first part of my university life in Canada was bewildering and shocking to me. I had difficulties with my studies and with the methods of study, but gradually I concentrated on applied science, mechanical and electrical and structural engineering, and switched my course for the B.A. over to the double course for the B.A. and B.Sc.[73]

At the age of 19 Coates left McGill University to fight in the First World War; he had wanted to join earlier but his parents would not permit it. He initially became a gunner in the 21st Howitzer Battery and served in Northern France. In 1918 he took the opportunity to train as a pilot and became a scout pilot operating in Italy. Whilst travelling through the Italian Alps, on a train journey from Paris to Italy, on 13 November 1918, Coates observed '... almost like Japan, with terraced hills and vineyards and yet different again ...'[74] It is important to note that Japan has not lost any significance for Coates and is still a point of reference for him.

In 1919 Coates returned to McGill University, completing his BA in June 1920 and BSc in June 1922. In September 1922 he was accepted for a research degree at London University, receiving a PhD in engineering in June 1924 for a thesis entitled 'On the Gas Temperatures of the Diesel Cycle'. However, this did not lead to a career in science and Coates spent the next few years in different occupations, including working in various capacities for the Daily Express; firstly in Paris covering society events and then back in London as the Science correspondent (see Appendix 4 for list of cuttings held within the WCA). Coates describes this part of his life as his roving period; a time when he pursued private study. He read Hermann Keyserling, Wyndham Lewis and D H Lawrence, wrote poetry and studied the work of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright.

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[72] WCA Box 05 1913 'Diary and Log: Our trip around the world by S.S. Cleveland'. Saturday, June 7th.
[73] WCA Box 04-D 'Autobiographical Description' p. 2.
[74] WCA Box 05 1918-19 diary 2/Lt Wells W. Coates RAF.

Opinions differ as to his architectural training; Cantacuzino states that Coates was employed by the firm of architects, Adams and Thompson[75], not as a draughtsman but in a secretarial capacity (1978) others disagree. His wife believed his only architectural training came from reading *The Honeywood File* by H B Creswell:

> ... Wells bought a book called "Honeywood House" [sic. File] by Cresswell. It was an odd piece of semi-humorous fiction about the building of a house, step by step. The writer was an architect, and he described first the dealings with the client, then with the builders, the inspection of materials, the condemnation of certain work, the client's changes of mind – even of payment. We read it together and laughed over it. It was the only architectural training that he ever had.[76]

This entertaining and insightful little book gives beneficial advice as to how the protagonist, a young architect named James Spinlove, should conduct his business and handle ticklish situations. Coates obviously studied this book quite closely as he later quotes Spinlove when trying to obtain payment from a client.[77]

Nevertheless by 1928 Coates was working as an architect; he believed that a conventional architectural training was a disadvantage, stating that: 'Architects are mostly finished – at least in England. In France, Le Corbusier and Mallet-Stevens (two engineers) have done wonderful things' (Elgohary, 1966 p. 20). His lack of an architectural education would continue to haunt him and in later life he thought it necessary to 'improve' his architectural credentials by stating: '... There was my mother – who was the first woman, I suppose, to train and practise as an architect – She had studied under Louis Sullivan in Chicago, at the same time as Frank Lloyd Wright ...'[78] Whilst Cantacuzino acknowledges Coates' mother planned the school in Kôfu and three family homes in Canada he does not believe Agnes Coates was a trained architect (1978), and as Wright did not join Sullivan's office until 1888, two years after Agnes Coates arrival in Tokyo, it would seem Coates' statement is unlikely to be true.

Information on Coates' life in the mid 1920s is contradictory. However, it can be established that he decided to remain in Britain and to become an architect. He married Marion Grove in 1927 and their daughter Laura was born in 1930. Coates was conscious of the fact he lacked a conventional English public school education but during this period he found a way of coming to terms with his different upbringing: 'my early "Eastern"

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[75] Whilst working at Adams and Thompson Coates meet fellow employee, E. Maxwell Fry, who became a life-long friend.
[76] WCA Box 35-C Statement on Wells Coates by Marion, May 1968.
[77] Pritchard Papers PP/23/2/54 letter from Coates to Jack Pritchard 29/03/1931.
[78] WCA Box 06-29 Address to 1957 Graduation Banquet, University of British Columbia School of Architecture.

training had been sufficiently dovetailed (as I now see it) into my "Western" scientific training to give me the confidence to practise my profession alone'.[79]

Theory and Practice: 'Inspiration from Japan'

From 1929 to 1935 Coates was at his most prolific; it is helpful in our understanding and identification of his Japanese inspiration to examine his early work chronologically to witness a thematic development.

Crysede and Cresta Shops

In 1928, Coates' first professional architectural design commission, a shop front and interior in Cambridge for Crysede Silks, founded by textile designer Alec Walker and Tom Heron, not only received the approval of the Cambridge Preservation Trust[80] but brought his work to the attention of the entrepreneur, Jack Pritchard, then working as a salesman for the plywood manufacturers Venesta. Pritchard wrote to Coates in March 1929:

> Dear Sir, We understand you did an interesting job at Cambridge for Messrs. Crysede Ltd., in which you used Venesta Birch stained, we think, by Drytone Ltd.
> The Writer would be very interested to see this job as we are trying to make a collection of photographs where Venesta Plywood has been used in various ways. Could you, therefore, let us have the address of the job in question at Cambridge, and let us know whether we might be allowed to take photographs? Full acknowledgement, of course, would be made whenever such photographs were used.[81]

This was the start of an association between two men with a common interest but with different goals; one was an idealist who wanted to revolutionise architecture and thought money would turn up when needed; the other, whilst also wanting to change architecture was not opposed to financial gain.

Coates continued to design shop fronts and interiors for the newly formed Cresta Silks, founded by Heron after a split with Walker, in London, Bournemouth, Brighton and Bromley from 1929 to 1932 and a factory interior for Cresta Silks at Welwyn Garden City in 1929. Already it is possible in these designs to see Coates' inspiration from Japan in the *shôji* like screens that enclose the shop front and uncluttered interiors with built-in cupboards. Considered by F R S Yorke in *The Architectural Review* to be '... in the front

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[79] WCA Box 04-D 'Autobiographical Description' p. 2.
[80] WCA Box 07-E letter from Cambridge Preservation Trust to shop manageress dated 28 May 1929.
[81] Pritchard Papers PP/23/2/2

rank of modern work and their showrooms have a refinement and simplicity combined with an air of comfort ... in which there is a harmony in the curves of the chairs, table, and electric light fittings' (vol. 70, pp. 174-175), photographs of the Cresta shops and factory were featured in the journal during 1931 and continued to be reproduced as examples of good design through the 1930s (fig. 72). Coates' views on shop design were recorded in his journal article 'Modern Shops and Modern Materials' published by *Building* in December 1932. Interior design commissions were often the only work available to architects during the austere years of the early 1930s. Unable to design buildings the architect was faced with the dilemma of taking on interior design and thus running the risk of being considered no more than a decorator. However, some interior design projects required greater technical ability and received much publicity as illustrated by that of the BBC commission.

BBC Studios, Broadcasting House, London

1931 was an important year for Coates, not only had his shop fronts and interiors brought him to the attention of the architectural press which was, aided in part, by Pritchard's connections but he also designed three trade stands for Venesta and the News and Dramatic Effects studios for the BBC at Broadcasting House, London. The BBC selected Coates, Raymond McGrath and Serge Chermayeff individually: '... unaware that they had already formed a group working in close harmony' (AR, vol. 72 p. 54). McGrath, a young Australian architect and protégé of the Cambridge don, Mansfield Forbes, was appointed as Decoration Consultant to co-ordinate the project. Referred to as the 'Three Musketeers' (Powers, 2001) Coates, McGrath and Chermayeff were members of the Twentieth Century Group which will be discussed in the next chapter. Coates was responsible for designing the more technically demanding areas within Broadcasting House: a dramatic control room, four dramatic effects studios, two news studios, a news editor's lobby and waiting lounge. Unveiled in 1932, Broadcasting House received much critical appraisal and was reviewed at length in *The Architectural Review* in August 1932; Coates' contribution received favourable comment: 'Mr. Coates' rooms and their fittings are the finest achievement in the building and they show what the phrase "design in industry" could mean if an introduction were effected between Mr. Coates and a few industrialists' (AR, vol. 72 p. 49). The photographs illustrating the review were utilised in other publications to illustrate design excellence. *Design in the Home*, edited by Noel Carrington includes two photographs of Coates' work at Broadcasting House; a door and

built-in unit and the waiting lounge which he describes as: '... suggestive of a Japanese interior' (1933 p. 43) (fig. 73).[82]

The use of *shôji*

Also in 1931 Coates undertook two domestic interior design conversions. These were not the first interiors undertaken by Coates; he had transformed his and Marion's first marital home in Bloomsbury Square with plain furniture, carpet, curtains and a built-in gas cooker and used Japanese matting [*tatami*] in their flat in Welwyn Garden City (Cantacuzino, 1978). However, the interior conversion for actors Elsa Lanchester and Charles Laughton, at 34 Gordon Square, London[83], was probably Coates' first professional domestic interior design project, that contained a key element which was to become a recurring theme in Coates' early interior designs; the use of sliding screens or *shôji* (fig. 74).[84]

The second domestic interior conversion undertaken in 1931 and completed in 1932 was for the Labour MP, George Strauss, and his wife at No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens, London. This conversion, of a particularly cluttered Victorian interior into a modern flat, provided an excellent opportunity to compare 'before and after' photographs, a popular contemporary genre. In June 1932 these images were published in *The Architectural Review's* 'Craftsman's Portfolio', and in part, were used to illustrate Coates' article 'Furniture Today – Furniture Tomorrow' which will be discussed below. The photographs of the conversion show Coates use of the *shôji*; the red lacquered sliding screen in the entrance hall has pale green glass in the place of paper, and in the dining room and living room, shantung silk (fig. 75). Carrington chose to use 'before and after' shots of the dining room, stating: '... we see the same rooms after their re-design by Mr. Wells Coates. The beauty of form derives directly from purpose. We are back to the simplicity of the Japanese' (Carrington, 1933 p.13).

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[82] It is fascinating to note that one of Chermayeff's interiors at Broadcasting House, the debates studio, was also considered to evoke Japanese design; described by *The Architectural Review* in August 1932: '... the effect is of simplicity almost Japanese' (vol. 72, p. 55).

[83] 34 Gordon Square was destroyed by enemy bombing during WW2.

[84] Elizabeth Darling did not attribute Japanese inspiration to 34 Gordon Square and No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens in her paper '...[T]he scene in which the daily drama of personal life takes place': towards the modern interior in early 1930s Britain. Or how the bride of Frankenstein made a home' read at the Modernity, Modernism and the Interior 1870-1970, Dorich House Annual Conference, Kingston University, May 2005.

Published articles 1931-1932

'Inspiration from Japan'

Coates' first articles were published in *The Architects' Journal* on 4 November 1931, and it is the first time he advocates Japan as an inspirational source for British modernism, but perhaps not the most auspicious time to be writing of Japan following the recent activities of the Japanese army in Manchuria. 'Inspiration from Japan' is a short essay illustrated by a full page of line drawings, executed by Coates and entitled: 'typical details of the "first room" in a Japanese "dwelling of the first class"' (fig. 76). In the text Coates proposes the traditional domestic architecture of Japan as an example of inspiration for modern design: 'Sound design has existed in Japan for centuries. It is an architecture which could not possibly be imitated in the European climate; it is an *inspiration* not a *precedent.* Its principles, however (which are similar to our own), are easily apprehended.' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 586). Within this article, Coates describes details of the Japanese house which will become features in his own interior designs; the *shôji* 'the sliding screens are framed in wood, with usually a solid panel at the bottom, the remainder being papered with various qualities of translucent paper ...', the *tokonoma* 'the formal alcove, where, and where alone, a single painting scroll or poetry scroll is placed, and, at either side, the shelves, which usually bear one bronze or other *objet*, or a vase of very carefully arranged flowers or branches of flowering trees ...' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 586) and the ceremonial window which Coates describes as being used for the purpose of framing the garden beyond.[85] Mention also is made of the construction of the Japanese dwelling: 'All the structural members are of wood, and the construction is "post and lintel," with cantilevered roof members. There are no supporting walls' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 586): a building method he discusses further in his next article 'Materials for Architecture.'

Within the Wells Coates Archive at the CCA there is a blurred carbon copy of a three page memo from Coates to the assistant editor of *The Architects' Journal,* headed: 'Re: proposed paragraph in explanation of the illustrations for "Materials for Architecture" by Wells Coates'.[86] These three pages of notes demonstrate how the article 'Inspiration from Japan' developed from what was to be an explanatory paragraph for an illustration to a small article in its own right. The article which was published was approximately 600 words; the typed notes are 1,062 words. The final paragraph of the notes subsequently appeared in Coates' article for *The Architectural Review* 'Furniture Today – Furniture

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[85] It is intriguing to note Coates' reference to a 'ceremonial window' which suggests he was familiar with Edward Morse's text *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings,* as I have discovered, so far in my research, Morse is unique in describing the window in this manner.

[86] WCA Box 06-4 'Materials of Architecture' article, p. 1.

Tomorrow', published in July 1932.

'Materials for Architecture'

Coates' second article, 'Materials for Architecture', published in the same edition of *The Architects' Journal,* follows on from 'Inspiration from Japan' and the illustration. In this text Coates discusses the virtues of the use of new materials, namely steel, steel-concrete and glass; he advocates that new materials should be used for new structures: ' ... *new forms*, inherent in the new materials. (The new forms were "of the thing itself, never on it" as my Japanese tutor first taught me)' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 588). Coates discusses the properties of steel, explaining how it is possible to build using steel as a frame; no longer needing walls to be load bearing. He cites Japan as an example of this form of structure: 'In Japan, for instance, walls have been screens for centuries' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 589). This constructional method appears as the first of three aesthetic principles in the seminal work on modern architecture, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, published in 1932. In Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's text the first principle is explained: 'In traditional masonry construction the walls were themselves the supports. Now the walls are merely subordinate elements fitted like screens between the supports or carried like a shell outside of them' (p. 40). Coates has identified and attributed to Japan one of the fundamental principles of modernist architecture as perceived by Hitchcock and Johnson one year before the publication of their book in which no mention is made of Japan as an inspirational source.

Also within 'Materials for Architecture' Coates suggests that built-in cupboards can be used as partitions between rooms, acting as sound-proofing; this theory was later realised within the construction of the 'Sunspan' house in 1934. He believes that most furniture should be fitted: 'Very soon it will be considered quite as fantastic to move accompanied by wardrobes, tables and beds, as it would seem today to remove the bath, or the heating-system, including the pipes' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 589).

'Furniture Today – Furniture Tomorrow'

Coates develops the concept of built-in furniture in his first article for *The Architectural Review* in July 1932, 'Furniture Today – Furniture Tomorrow'. This text is significant for two reasons: firstly for Coates' reference to Japan and secondly for the accompanying photographs of the interior of No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens which demonstrate Coates' Japanese inspiration. In this article he refers to the home as 'this dwelling scene' and defines the changes brought about by what he perceives as modern society: 'The "home" is no longer a permanent place from one generation to another ...

We move after work, easily, at least within national frontiers; we move for holidays across frontiers; we get rid of our belongings and make for a new, an exciting freedom' (AR, vol. 72, p. 32). This may have been true of Coates' life but few in Britain, except for the wealthy, took holidays abroad in 1932. However, Coates believes that our only furniture will be our personal belongings and he describes how this will be achieved: 'The dwelling-scene of tomorrow will contain as part of its structure nearly all that today is carried about for the purpose of "furnishing" one house after another' (AR, vol. 72, p. 34). Therefore, the only 'furniture' will be items of clothing, bedding, utensils, books, pictures; in other words personal possessions.

As an example of the existence of this mode of living, Coates cites Japan, where this type of 'dwelling-scene' has been in use for many centuries:

> By the way, there is no furniture, properly speaking. Trays for food are usually provided with short legs, so that the tray forms the individual table for the squatting diner. Beds are simply mattresses and coverlets, pulled out of structural cupboard-spaces [*oshiire*]. The structure and internal organization of the scene permits any room to be a bedroom... (AR, vol. 72, p. 34)

Coates' theories on the 'dwelling scene' will be realised in his designs for the 'minimum' flat.

'Response to Tradition'

Published in November 1932, 'Response to Tradition' was included in *The Architectural Review's* special supplement 'Steel and Concrete' which surveyed the historical use of these materials in architecture, engineering and transport; other authors in this survey included: Sir Edwin Lutyens, Owen Williams, P Morton Shand and F R S Yorke. This article was developed from the unpublished 'Sketch Plan for a New Aesthetic', a paper read by Coates at a meeting of the Twentieth Century Group held at the Savoy on 26 February 1931 (Powers, 2001). Considered to be '... Wells's most carefully written statement of his architectural ideals ...' (Cohn, 1999 p. 46), it was a text from which Coates would often quote.

Coates cites I A Richards' use of scientific methodology for assessing meaning in language when he questions the meaning of words, the use and misuse of language in relation to architecture, art, building and beauty in the first part of this article;[87] in the second, analysis of aesthetic apprehension and appreciation is discussed, and in the final section Coates explores the 'immense theatre-sets for architecture', heavily ornamented

[87] I A Richards was an English department colleague of the Cambridge don, Mansfield Forbes who was instrumental in forming the Twentieth Century Group (Chapter 5).

steel frame buildings, found in the streets of London, 'held up, by calculation for all the extra steel and concrete required to carry their *literally* dead weight' (AR, vol. 72 p. 167). What is of interest to us is that for this exploration Coates selects as a tour guide '... a stranger to the West, one born and brought up according to the inflexible customs of an ancient civilization of the East'; in 'Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic' the guide is a *samurai*.[88] He continues:

> The "inheritance of culture" by the children of our epoch is a glib phrase inaptly applied to the study of, say, the novel writers of a certain era, coupled with a brief visit or two to the more important art galleries of Europe. In the East it is not so. The cultured man is one who is himself an artist of living; one who has been trained sensually to the aesthetic apprehension, who inherits a culture perpetually resurrected in his own eyes, voice, hands and movements. (AR vol. 72, 'Response to Tradition' p. 167.)

From this it would appear Coates considers Eastern culture to be superior to that of the West. He tells of the guide's preparations for his visit to the West: 'He has been told that a man whose eyes have been trained in the East will only rarely want to open them in the West.' This phrase, much used by Coates, has most likely been adapted from Count Herman Keyserling's *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher*: 'The man whose eyes have been trained in Japan will only rarely want to open them in Europe' (1925 p. 181). We know Coates read Keyserling during his auto-didactic period in the 1920s but we can only conjecture as to why he decided to change 'Japan' and 'Europe' to 'West' and 'East'. Keyserling continues 'How barbaric is our habit of overloading! How seldom does an object stand in the place which correlation appoints to it!' (p. 181). Coates has his Eastern guide repeat these words but continues: 'What is the meaning of this ugliness, banality and squalor which meets the eye as it travels up practically any street in London ...' (AR, vol. 72 p.168).

Coates mentions the non-load bearing function of walls but on this occasion does not suggest a Japanese origin, as he did in 'Materials for Architecture'. The Japanese reference in this article has been obscured by substituting 'Japan' for the 'East'. After 1932 Coates refers less to Japan but continues to cite Eastern philosophy. However his interior design work continues to demonstrate his Japanese inspiration.

'The Living Room To-day'

2 Devonshire Street, Portland Place, London W1 was an interior design conversion by Coates with David Pleydell-Bouverie; this partnership lasted from the latter half of

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[88] WCA Box 06-03a

1932 until June 1934.[89] It was featured in the May 1933 edition of *Design for Today*, the journal of the Design and Industries Association. Under the title 'The English Living Room To-day' this double page spread illustrates the flat with four photographs, a plan and notes by the architect. Originally consisting of four rooms, a bathroom and corridor, this conversion treats the whole area as one, and by the use of sliding and folding screens defined areas are created for a bedroom, dining room, study and living room. Built-in furniture is prevalent within the design and includes a panel which concealed an electric train set, fitted cupboards and wardrobes, built-in desk and gramophone cabinet, both include storage. The colour scheme of green upholstery, brown carpets, lacquered copper tubular steel chairs and flashed sapele mahogany is lost in the black and white illustrations. The dividing screens or *shôji* are of cedar-wood and shantung silk as at No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens. In this open planned and clutter free environment Coates' Japanese inspiration can be easily recognised (fig. 77).

The four photographs which illustrate the article were used by several design manuals during the 1930s, as examples of good design. Design critic, John Gloag included the photograph of the dining area in his *English Furniture,* and discusses the trend in the use of lower level furniture thus: 'Tall pieces of furniture give place to low horizontal cabinets and bookcases. There is something Japanese about this conception of scale ...' (Gloag, 1934 p. 167). Roger Smithells and S John Woods' 1936 *The Modern Home: its decoration, furnishing and equipment,* 1939 *Decoration for the Home, The Studio* and *The Architects' Journal* also utilised the images; the most frequently used was that of the built-in desk and radiogram cabinet.

Following on from 'The English Living Room To-day' in *Design for Today*, 'The Living Room Abroad To-day', another double page spread, looks at rooms in Sweden, Germany, Austria and Japan (fig. 78). The photograph of the Japanese interior has been provided by Coates and the accompanying text, although not stated, would appear to have been written by him:

> The spaciousness and beauty of almost empty rooms, which is one of the features of modern interior architecture, is a tradition of Japan. The "first room" (of the master of the house), in a traditional Japanese dwelling of the first class, is usually placed at one end of the long leg of an L-shaped plan. One "wall" is screened by sliding *shoji* of wood frames faced with translucent rice-paper... (p. 15)

This text, in part, has been adapted from Coates' 1931 article 'Inspiration from Japan' as he refers to '... a ceremonial window framing the special view of the garden beyond'; he

[89] Pritchard Papers PP/23/2/132

appears to be the only writer on Japanese architecture, apart from Edward Morse, to refer to a 'ceremonial' window. It is fascinating that it should appear immediately after the 2 Devonshire Street conversion. This article was published a short time after Japanese's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

The Minimum Flat

Minimum space requirements were of concern to the modernist architects and had been examined by Le Corbusier, J J P Oud and Walter Gropius and were discussed at the 1929 CIAM conference. Although at this stage Coates was not involved with the CIAM he too was interested in the utilisation of mass production and standardisation for the provision of dwelling units. He wrote in 1932:

> As architects of the ultimate human and material scenes of the new order, we are not so much concerned with the formal problems of "style" as with an *architectural* solution of the social and economic problems of today ... (Response to Tradition, AR, vol. 72, p. 168)

This interest was shared by the founders of Isokon, Jack Pritchard and his wife Molly whom, as we have seen, Coates first met in 1929. It was in conjunction with Isokon that Coates developed his minimum space designs which were incorporated in his first architectural commission, Lawn Road flats; 22 of the 30 flats were of the single multi-purpose room variety. Of the others three were studio flats, four two-roomed flats and one penthouse flat for the Pritchards (fig. 79).

The 'minimum' flat was first seen at the 'Exhibition of British Art in Relation to the Home' held at Dorland Hall in the summer of 1933, when a full size replica was shown. It was anticipated that this exhibit would generate interest and deposits from prospective tenants. The following description appeared in the exhibition catalogue:

> *The Minimum Flat* is an exact replica (except that one wall is left out) of one of the flats in a block designed by ... [Wells Coates] for Messrs. Isokon, which is to be erected on a site in Hampstead this summer. Drawings of the complete block are on view in an alcove near the entrance to the Flat.
> The Flat is designed primarily for one person. It contains a large living room with bed-settee in alcove; a bathroom, a dressing room and a kitchenette.
> *The Living Room* is lit by a large window (on the wall opposite the entrance) ... The room is equipped with a mahogany dining table arranged to slide away into the corner; two steel chairs; two easy chairs; a bed-settee with zipp-fastened coverlet; and two plywood book units and an electric fire designed together to form a 'hearth-scene'. The fitting containing the projecting electric fire also houses an electric radio with built-in loudspeaker. Access to the *Dressing Room* is by means of a sliding door. The dressing room contains a hand-basin, with cupboard under, a dressing table and stool, with mirror over,

> and an accommodating wardrobe with sliding folding doors; a long mirror; a linen cupboard; and compartments fitted with trays. This room is divided from the *Bathroom* by means of a glazed screen and door, framed in steel. The bathroom contains a panelled bath and a w.c.
> *The Kitchenette* is compactly fitted with an electric cooker with pan-cupboard under, a sink and draining-board and plate-rack, and a completely equipped kitchen cabinet with a small refrigerator under; and store cupboards.
> (1933 pp. 19-21) (fig. 80)

These small flats, with fitted cupboards, sliding doors and built-in furniture, were designed for those who travelled with few possessions and were much favoured by those fleeing Germany in the 1930s; famous occupants of Lawn Road have included Agatha Christie, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Moholy-Nagy. Described as 'a brilliant feat of intellectual conpression[sic]' by *The Architectural Review* (AR vol. 74, p. 23), the 'minimum' flat received favourable critical appraisal both at Dorland Hall and upon the opening of Lawn Road flats in July 1934.

However, the 'minimum' flat was not liked by all; a reviewer in the *Studio* magazine bemoaned the fact that:

> No one will be able to collect anything. Nobody will have a private library. All the odds and ends which make a home – family records, collections of MSS. [manuscripts], old portraits and so forth – will have to be consigned to the incinerator, lest they should occupy space and collect dust.
> (*The Studio*, vol. 108 pp. 153-4)

Despite some criticism the 'minimum' flat was held as an example of design excellence and was featured in many of the ubiquitous design publications produced during the 1930s; photographs of the kitchen and the living-room possibly appearing most frequently.

But what was the inspiration for this 'minimum' flat? It has been suggested that: Lawn Road flats, were inspired by Le Corbusier's studies for the 'minimum dwelling' (Cantacuzino 1978, p. 51); J M Richards, in his obituary to Coates, stated: 'it is nearer to the *machine à habiter* than anything Le Corbusier ever designed' (1958 AR vol. 134 p. 359). It is certainly true that Coates wished to be inspired by Le Corbusier as the following extract from a letter from Coates to Pritchard in February 1930 shows:

> ... By the way, I didn't mention having taken the Corbusier photos from your Frenchman. Thanks awfully – shall I keep them for a while and return them when you come back? I should like to have them by me when I am getting down to details on your job; they are what you call "inspiring" – I mean they help one to be in the right frame of mind ...[90]

[90] Pritchard Papers, PP/23/2/6

If we look again at the 'minimum' flat it is possible to deduce Coates' Japanese inspiration. As we have seen the concept of a single room for living, eating and sleeping is one that Coates readily attributes to Japan. In the compact composition of the 'minimum' flat Coates incorporates the use of a five foot wide space, running parallel to the multi-purpose room, which is divided into kitchenette, dressing room and bathroom, a plan similar to that shown in an illustration to Josiah Conder's paper 'Domestic Architecture in Japan' read before the RIBA in the late 1880s (fig. 30). The dressing room and bathroom in the 'minimum' flat are concealed from the main room by a sliding door or screen similar to the opaque *fusuma* or sliding screens used in traditional Japanese architecture. In the illustrations, from Jiro Harada's *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* (1936), here the *fusuma* are concealing *tansu* (chest of drawers) (fig. 81).

Both the kitchenette and dressing room are equipped with built-in storage, as is the living room; *oshiire* (built-in wall-cupboards) are prevalent in the Japanese interior. The low height of the built-in furniture in the living room of the 'minimum' flat is also indicative of its Japanese origins. An earlier interior design by Coates, a waiting lounge at Broadcasting House, which incorporates built-in furniture of a similar height is described as: 'suggestive of a Japanese interior' in Noel Carrington's 1933 publication *Design in the Home* and John Gloag's comments on how the low height of furniture was reminiscent of Japanese design, have already been noted. 'Wells Coates's enthusiasm for built-in storage space had it roots in the traditional architecture of Japan ...' wrote Alastair Grieves in an essay on Isokon in *Modern Britain 1929-1939* published to accompany the Design Museum's exhibition in 1999.[91]

Whilst Coates was an admirer of Le Corbusier, the 'minimum' flat incorporates design details, *fusuma* (sliding screen) and *oshiire* (built-in storage), associated with the multi-purpose traditional Japanese room for living, dining and sleeping. It could be argued that Coates was able to arrive at a better understanding of minimal living from his knowledge and experience of the Japanese multi-purpose room, with its built-in cupboards and sliding doors, and was, therefore, able to produce a more effective design solution.

The Sunspan House

The Sunspan house, exhibited at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia 1934[92] was another project undertaken with David Pleydell-Bouverie (fig. 82). Initially designed for

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[91] This essay 'Isokon' was originally published 25 years earlier in the 1974 Camden Art Centre's, *Hampstead in the Thirties: a committed decade,* exhibition catalogue.

[92] Sunspan House, included in the 'The Village of Tomorrow' which consisted of only International Style homes, and described as '... the only house in the Exhibition to be fully

Isokon, Coates was threatened with a breach of contract when he gave the designs to the builders E & L Berg.[93] The Sunspan house received a favourable review from the architectural critic, P Morton Shand:

> The "Sunspan" house, now on exhibition at Olympia, is perhaps the first serious English contribution to domestic plan-forms since that famous discovery of the "free, open planning" of the English country house took the Continent by storm at the beginning of the century. As such it may well prove to be epoch-making ... (AJ, vol. 79 p. 607)

Raymond McGrath included illustrations of the Sunspan house in *Twentieth Century Houses* (1934) and wrote this of Coates and the house:

> As much as any other of the younger English architects he is a strong supporter of the International Idea or in Gropius's words "einheitlichen geistigen Weltbildes". The Sunspan House (ex. 32) (fig. 83) is a working out of such an international idea – an idea in fact which has taken up the thoughts of a great number of architects in the last year or two – that of a completely free plan which would make it possible to have the size of the rooms changed whenever necessary by taking space from one and giving it to another ... (1934 p. 104)

In the interior of the Sunspan house Coates again alludes to the Japanese multi-purpose room by the use of dividing screens and built-in furniture: 'The drawing room and study are separated from the reception room by sliding, folding screens [*byôbu*]. What a glorious room the three become when the partitions are withdrawn to convert them into one spacious lounge!'[94] This reception room also included sliding and folding windows which opened the room to the fresh air from outside. These windows were also fitted in the seafront block of flats, Embassy Court, Brighton, completed in 1935 and, in 1936, at the Hampden Nursery School, Holland Park, London (fig.84).

Although well received, few houses were built and they are not easy to locate; a problem Coates also encountered, as can be deduced from his letter to Berg in February 1935:

> I have been looking through the correspondence in regard to the number of "Sunspan" houses built by you, and I find it very difficult to arrive at a figure ... On the 13th November 1934 you stated that you had build 3 on your Coombe Estate, 2 on your Hinchley Wood Estate, 1 at Southend

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equipped and furnished to the architects' specifications and was designed as a prototype for mass-production' (Ryan, 1997 p. 72).

[93] Pritchard Papers, PP/23/2/127. Although this threat was not carried out, by the end of 1935 some of Coates' designs were being discontinued by Isokon, PP/23/2/139.

[94] WCA Box 04-E, Sunspan leaflet.

> and 1 at Burnham ... Since then you mention a further house at Three Bridges, Sussex, one in York, one at West Kingston Estate, Angmering, two further houses at Hinchley Wood and more recently one at Inverness.[95]

The Sunspan houses built in Surrey received little publicity (fig. 85). However the larger Sunspan house at Angmering and a Sunspan bungalow at Welwyn did receive greater coverage. The bungalow was featured in: *The Architectural Review*'s special issue on the modern house in December 1936; *Modern Architecture in England,* Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1937; F R S Yorke's *The Modern House in England* 1937 (fig. 86); Alan Hastings's *Weekend houses, cottages and bungalows* 1939 and also in 1939 Roger Smithells' *The Country Life book of small houses.*

Embassy Court, Brighton

In the design of Embassy Court, situated on the seafront at Brighton, Coates attempted to blur the notion of indoor and outdoor space by providing every flat with a glazed sun-room fitted with sliding and folding windows in order to open the whole balcony to sun and sea air (fig. 87). Only the larger corner flats appear to have had sliding doors, which divide the drawing and living room. As at Lawn Road flats, all kitchens were fully fitted but there were less fitted cupboards and built-in furniture in the living room and bedrooms; the rugs are by Marion Dorn, the china by John Armstrong and the painting in the living room by Paul Nash (AR, vol. 78 p. 173) (fig. 88).

This second and largest block of flats designed by Coates in 1935, consisting of 12 floors and a total of 69 flats of nine different types, received much coverage in the architectural press both before and after its completion. Professor C H Reilly considered Embassy Court to be 'the building of the year' in his review of 1935 for *The Architects' Journal*, stating:

> Frankly, I have seen no big really modern building at home or abroad which, as a whole, satisfied me more. If I were not tied down I would sell my old junk ... move into the Wells Coates machine tomorrow, and try to live the cleaner, franker, less encumbered, more youthful and upright life such a building calls for. (AJ, vol. 83 p. 110)

In our search for Coates' Japanese inspiration the communal spaces in this building are of significance. The outer corridor behind the waiting hall is reminiscent of the corridors in the Japanese house described in his 1931 article 'Inspiration from Japan'. The glass window panels forming the corridor, although not movable, correspond with the *shôji*

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[95] WCA Box 07-A. Sunspan Housing 1934-35.

of the Japanese dwelling, by permitting light into a confined space (fig. 89). Also in the waiting hall there is a purpose built niche for a flower arrangement. It is possible that this citing of a vase of flowers is a reference to the *tokomona* which Coates also describes in 'Inspiration from Japan' (fig. 90). Flower arrangements frequently appear in his interiors and are often placed close to an item of artwork. He also alludes to 'a hearth scene' in the description of the 'minimum' flat and his own flat at 18 Yeoman's Row.

18 Yeoman's Row, London

'I do not like big sofas and easy chairs, so I make a hearth scene, *à la japonais*, penned off by a shaped fitting which is a bookcase on one side and a back-rest for the cushions on the other' wrote Coates in a description of the conversion of his own studio flat at 18 Yeoman's Row, London undertaken in 1935 (AR vol. 82, p. 53).[96] In the accompanying photograph a vase of flowers have been placed to the right of the electric fireplace and the floor of this 'hearth scene' is covered by one inch of cushion-rubber with *tatami* matting stretched over (fig. 91). Is Coates making reference to the hearth as *tokonoma*? In the early Prairie House, Frank Lloyd Wright equates the hearth, of the Western-style house, with the *tokonoma* (Nute, 2000 pp. 61-64). Coates was familiar with Wright's work; 'Notes for the Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic' and other writings by Coates include quotations from Wright.[97]

18 Yeoman's Row was a small studio flat converted by Coates to provide himself with both living and working accommodation. From 1935 he suffered, as did many other architects, from a drop in commissions; consequently, he could no longer afford his office at 15 Elizabeth Street, SW1, situated above the recently built Victoria Coach Station. At Yeoman's Row Coates again demonstrates, as with the 'minimum' flat, his ability to design an innovative multi-purpose room drawing from his knowledge and experience of Japanese domestic architecture. Even in this small flat Coates achieves an interface between internal and external space by creating a 'window garden' which he describes thus:

> The huge studio window creates its own special values, and it is double glazed, for warmth and to keep out the sounds in the streets beyond. There is a window garden between you and the outside world, the external glass is obscured enough to omit the detail of the houses on the other side of the Row, but not enough to make you feel they are not there.
> (AR, vol. 83 p. 53) (fig. 92)

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[96] Coates' use of French here could indicate a concern of possible British anti-Japanese feeling as political relations with Japan worsened.
[97] WCA Box 06-3(b) 'Notes for the Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic'.

The Yeoman's Row conversion was Coates' first design to include a 2-1 section, in which he divided a small area to the rear of the room horizontally, to create two sleeping areas with ladder access (fig. 93). Photographs of the Yeoman's Row conversion illustrated Coates' article 'Planning in Section' published in *The Architectural Review*, in August 1937 and one photograph of the conversion appeared in the *Modern Architecture in England* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Although the image is not reproduced in the accompanying publication, there are favourable comments: 'Certainly the immense superiority of Wells Coates' own apartment ... is in very large part due to the ingenuity and elegance in the use of curved and oblique forms as well as to the superior execution' (1937, p.38). Photographs of the conversion were included in the MARS Group exhibition in 1938 and *The Book of the Modern House: a panoramic survey of contemporary domestic design* published in 1939.

The impact of tubular steel furniture and ladders of ivory, copper and Eton blue, shelving in Eton blue, Honduras mahogany desk and bookcase, light oak coloured flooring, and a variety of shades of white used for the walls and ceiling is drastically reduced in the contemporary black and white images of this conversion (AR, vol. 83 p. 54).

'Shipwrights', Hadleigh, Essex

'Shipwrights', a detached three bedroomed house situated in the Essex countryside and overlooking Canvey Island, is further example of Coates' use of sliding partitions to create a multi-purpose space. The main living space, consisting of living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, bathroom and WC, was located on the first floor; living room, upper hall and bedroom one could be converted into one 'L' shaped area affording views to both country and sea (fig. 94). Sherban Cantacuzino believes 'Shipwrights' inspiration from Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye is apparent in the use of pillars supporting the first floor at the rear (1978). However, this sheltered external space is also suggestive of the veranda of the traditional Japanese house (fig. 95).

Designed in 1936, 'Shipwrights', originally intended as a week-end house, was commissioned by John Wyborne of E K Cole Ltd (Ekco) the electrical appliances manufacturers. Coates started designing wireless sets for Ekco in 1934 after winning a competition with his circular design (fig. 96) and he continued to design for Ekco until after the Second World War. 'Shipwrights' was featured in a number of publications including *Weekend houses, cottages and bungalows* (1939) (fig. 97) and *The Architects' Journal.*

'Homewood', Esher, Surrey

As with 'Shipwrights', Cantacuzino believes 'Homewood' was inspired by Le Corbusier; as these two houses, though different in scale, are similar in design by having the main living area on the first floor and by the use of pillars to support this floor. He also believes, particularly in the case of 'Homewood', that the main architect is more likely to have been Patrick Gwynne who worked in Coates' office and was the son of the client, Commander Gwynne (1978). Current opinion, (Powers, 2004) and the National Trust, attribute 'Homewood' solely to Gwynne but *The Architectural Review* in September 1939 gave Gwynne and Coates equal credit in their 14 page feature on the property (fig. 98). It is possible Coates had little involvement with the final design, but nevertheless his presence is felt in the lightness of touch in the airy free-flowing rooms with built-in fitments, where the living room and dining room are divided by a folding screen, sliding glass doors open on to the balcony creating a blurring of indoor and outdoor space (fig. 99).

10 Palace Gate, Kensington

The planning of 10 Palace Gate was considered revolutionary, as this was the first building in Britain to use a 'three-two' system; the height of two living rooms equalled the height of three bedrooms (fig. 100).[98] Coates devised the scheme to provide great flexibility and economy of space and was developed from the '1-2' section at Yeoman's Row. Few photographs exist of the interiors; the best impression of the flats can be gleaned from an article in *The Architectural Review*, April 1939. However, it is possible to identify design details that continue to demonstrate Coates' Japanese inspiration. The construction of the large window which illuminates the entrance hall, although fixed, is reminiscent of *shôji*. Within the flats provision was made for the subdivision of the living room; in the penthouse flat the living room had glass sliding folding doors to make it one with the balcony, and folding doors to divide it from the dining room (fig. 101). The choice of Christopher Tunnard as garden architect for the site is of relevance in our search for Japanese inspiration; author of *The Garden in the Modern Landscape* (1938), Tunnard advocates both the Japanese house and garden as an inspirational source for British modernist designer.

10 Palace Gate, the third and final block of flats designed by Coates, is considered to have been the most successful; these flats have not suffered from external maintenance problems due, in part, to the insistence of the client, Randal Bell, that the reinforced

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[98] The 'three-two' system had been used in Moscow in the 1920s.

concrete be faced with artificial stone slabs. Completed only months before the outbreak of the Second World War 10 Palace Gate received limited publicity but was reviewed in *Focus* in November 1939, *Architectural Record*, New York in February 1940 and was favourably commented on by Professor C H Reilly in 'The Year's Work':

> ... the most interesting of all, is the Wells Coates block in Palace Gate, Kensington. This is interesting as a very complete expression of a ferro-concrete building, simple, direct and homogeneous ... It is interesting, too, in its planning. On the two-three principle, which allows certain rooms to be reasonably higher than the others without having to be double the height as in the duplex system. It seems to me this is a great advance, getting over as it does in an economical way the monotony of height in an ordinary flat ... We should all be very grateful to Wells Coates for being first to demonstrate its possibilities on a good scale in this country. (AJ, vol. 91 pp. 98-99)

Coates describes the construction of 10 Palace Gate in his article 'Planning in Section' published in *The Architectural Review* in August 1937 using the conversion of Yeoman's Row to illustrate the concept.

Published and unpublished writing 1938-1939

'The Conditions for an Architecture for To-day'

Coates ceases to write of Japan, most probably due to the deteriorating political relationship, although he continues to cite Eastern philosophy, in a paper, 'The Conditions for an Architecture for To-day' read by Coates at the Architectural Association's general meeting on 22 March 1938 and published one month later in the AA Journal. He begins by rejecting: '... the usual Western method of analysis and synthesis, of dissection into minute particular elements, and of assembly into circumscribed theory' in favour of 'the Eastern method, which begins by saying that you cannot understand what is in *that* (the external, material world) until you know what is in *this* (the human, individual world)' (p. 448).

Coates continues by quoting the 15th century Chinese philosopher, Wang Yangming, as an example of the difficulties in investigating material things and later quotes Laozi: 'Where laws and regulations multiply, the world will be full of robbers and thieves' (p. 452) in relation to the increase in building regulations. Coates suggests architecture is an expression of society; a view expressed by Owen Jones in the mid 1850s.[99] Coates believes society to be in transition and consequently architecture. He returns to the notion of the home no longer being 'a permanent place from one generation

[99] Proposition 2 in *The Grammar of Ornament.*

to another' which he discussed in 'Furniture Today- Furniture Tomorrow' (AR, vol. 72, p. 32) and the Victorian interior of No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens. He comments on ownership of property and the plight of the poor in Europe and draws an analogy between the production line car and the possible mass-produced dwelling.

'Notes on Dwellings for To-morrow'

'Notes on Dwellings for To-morrow' was adapted from the AA paper; this shortened text appeared as a chapter in *Flats: municipal and private enterprise* published also in 1938 by the Ascot Gas Water Heaters company. Other contributors include: Howard Robertson, F R Yerbury, E Maxwell Fry and Elizabeth Denby. The review of the publication by the RIBAJ was enthusiastic: 'Mr. Wells Coates damns almost the whole of contemporary building in a chapter on dwellings for to-morrow, which is, by the way, an extremely good general theorisation of the bases of modern architecture' (RIBAJ, vol. 46 p. 940).

Notes for lecture, Reimann School, 14th June 1939[100]

In these unpublished notes Coates returns to Japan as an inspirational source. Beginning with the planning of flats and the '3-2' section used in, the just completed, 10 Palace Gate flats, Coates continues by discussing furniture in a reworking of 'Furniture Today – Furniture Tomorrow' and states:

> As an example of this principle actually carried out over a number of centuries, it is possible to describe as I have found myself doing, the structure and interior organisation of the household in a typical Japanese dwelling scene, without a single reference to furniture, and to end with the words "By the way, there is no furniture, properly speaking. Trays for food are usually provided with short legs, so that the tray forms the individual table for the squatting diner. Beds are simply mattresses and coverlets, pulled out of structural cupboard-spaces. The structure and internal organisation of the scene permits any room to be a bedroom, ..." and so forth. (pp. 15-16)

In this lecture Coates reiterates the same sentiments he expressed at the beginning of the 1930s and we can conclude his belief that traditional Japanese domestic architecture should be an inspiration for modern design has not diminished.

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[100] WCA Box 06-10.

Recurring themes

We have already observed Coates' interest in *shôji* as noted in his 1908-9 diary 'Sights and Experiences in Japan'. Sliding and folding doors and windows are incorporated into many designs; the sliding screen in the entrance of No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens has glass, in the place of paper and in the dining room and living room, shantung silk. Sliding screens were employed at 34 Gordon Square and at 2 Devonshire Street: 'The whole area of the four rooms has been treated as one, divisible at will by movable screens' (AJ vol. 77, p.755).

The sliding door [fusuma] is used as a space saving device in Coates' 'minimum' flat design, first shown at 'The Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home', Dorland Hall in 1933 and realised in the Lawn Road Flats completed in 1934. In the Sunspan House and 'Shipwrights', for example, Coates' continued interest in the multi-purpose room is shown in his desire to design spaces that can be either one large area or divided to create separate rooms for eating, sleeping and living.

Built-in furniture is a key element in Coates' interiors which he attributes to Japan. Lawn Road flats provided the ideal space for his theories on the modern 'dwelling scene' to be put into practice. The Sunspan house also was designed as a complete concept and was the only house at the Ideal Home Exhibition to be fully equipped (Ryan, 1997).

Coates' use of flower arrangements within his interiors is fascinating as it is apparent that with these vases of flowers he is alluding to the *tokonoma.* These floral displays are often placed in close proximity to an artwork; in the reception area of Embassy Court a small niche is especially provided for an arrangement of flowers. Also Coates makes reference to the hearth scene in the 'minimum' flat and at Yeoman's Row. Frank Lloyd Wright, whom we know Coates studied, makes reference to the hearth scene as *tokonoma*; is Coates doing the same?

The circle, as a framing device and as a mirror, is a key feature in Coates' interiors; a large circular mirror is used in the entrance hall of No. 1 Kensington Palace Gardens invoking the sense of the circular window of the tea-house; the circular mirror appears in an interior at Embassy Court. The doors to the studios designed by Coates for the BBC have circular windows and at 10 Palace Gate there are circular windows in the balcony access doors. A row of four round windows are placed beneath an external staircase on the side wall of 'Shipwrights'; it could be suggested that in this case the windows might be a nautical reference as the name of the house may imply.[101] However, Coates would have been aware of the Japanese cultural significance of the round mirror and the circle and it is

[101] Shipwrights Wood is in close proximity to the house and the name may have been taken from this local landmark.

apparent that he naturally gravitates to the choice of the circle as a design motif; Ekco radio designs, open mesh dust covers on speakers, and stools in the Cresta shops are all circular.

The relationship between indoor and outdoor space is important in Coates' work particularly when dealing with the limited potential of balconies; the sun room at Embassy Court is an example. When space permits, as at 'Shipwrights', Coates creates the impression of a veranda. He would have understood the Japanese architectural relationship between inside and outside space; the principle of opening the interior space to the exterior. Where it was not possible to remove rigid barriers he attempts to blur the divide, as with the window garden at Yeoman's Row.

Coates' ability to design light, airy, clutter-free rooms which include neatly compacted storage areas can be attributed to his knowledge and inspiration from the traditional Japanese dwelling; he does not copy, but takes reference from Japan.

Summary

We have observed Coates' childhood in Japan, his transfer and adjustment to the West, and from these observations we can deduce he has an interest and a knowledge of Japan. In both his design and writing we have observed Coates' Japanese inspiration. With the exception of the Reimann School lecture, as the 1930s progressed and the political situation declined Coates, in his writing, ceases to refer to Japan but cites the East and Eastern philosophy. Also in his interior design Coates's reference to Japan becomes more oblique; his first screens and partitions are reminiscent of *shôji* but these give way to *fumusa*, a plainer and less discernibly Japanese design device. However, Coates' inspiration from Japanese continues to be demonstrated within his design work throughout the 1930s. To ascertain the significance of Coates' work, in the next chapter we shall examine his position within the British modern movement.

Chapter 5 – Wells Coates and the British Modern Movement

Introduction

During the early 1930s Coates was a significant and founding member of three groups: Twentieth Century Group (1930), Unit One (1933) and the MARS (Modern Architectural Research) Group (1933), the British branch of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne). In this chapter we shall examine his participation within these organisations in order to established his relevance and position within the British modern movement. However, as we shall see in the retelling of this period, his position within these groups has, in some cases, been somewhat lessened.

A brief outline history of each group to which Coates was associated will be given in order to contextualise his role and to demonstrate his significance within the group. In the examination of each group I shall establish existing knowledge of Coates' involvement by referring to the key texts on Coates: Sherban Cantacuzino's *Wells Coates: a monograph* (1978), Laura Cohn's *Wells Coates: architect and designer, 1895-1958* (1979), *A Door to a Secret Room: a portrait of Wells Coates* (1999), and Farouk Eloghary's 'Wells Coates and his position in the beginning of the modern movement in England' (1966). Contemporary texts, followed by more recent re-examinations of these early British modern movement groups will be identified and considered in conjunction with archival research. Coates was also a member of the Design and Industries Association (DIA), and somewhat belatedly in 1938, a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and these too will be discussed.

Twentieth Century Group

In July 1930 an announcement in *The Architects' Journal* heralded the inauguration of the Twentieth Century Group. The group had been encouraged by Mansfield Forbes, a fellow of Clare College, Cambridge, who was influential in promoting modern architectural solutions during the late 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s. In 1927 it was he who commissioned the young Antipodean architect, Raymond McGrath to undertake an interior design conversion of his house 'Finella' which was praised in the architectural press and *The Studio.*[102] 'Finella' provided an ideal backdrop for parties where: 'men and women of every age and profession, as well as students, met and talked and went away filled with fresh enthusiasm and fresh ideas' (McGrath, AR vol. 79 p. 174). It is possible Coates was introduced to Forbes by Jack Pritchard.

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[102] Finella. A house for Mansfield D. Forbes. Esq. *The Architectural Review,* vol. 66 265-272; Aladdin at Cambridge or the magic lamp, *The Studio,* vol. 99 184-185.

McGrath records the first meeting of the group taking place in September 1930 at the Travellers' Club, Forbes' London pied-à-terre, which Coates attended (AR, vol. 79 p.175). At a further meeting in January 1931 a committee was elected. Elgohary in his thesis on Coates gives a full listing for the group's executive committee as: Chairman – Col. J Delahaye; Vice Chairman – Mansfield Forbes; Secretary – A Gibbons Grinling; Members – Noel Carrington, Jack Pritchard, Raymond McGrath, C A Richter, S Chermayeff, Wells Coates and Howard Robertson. Others have been less detailed: Cantacuzino, in his monograph on Coates, gives Pritchard, McGrath, Chermayeff, Wells Coates, Frederick Etchells and Howard Robertson as members of the first executive council; this list is repeated in David Dean's *The Thirties: recalling the English architectural scene* (1983 p.113). There is no mention of the Twentieth Century Group in either the exhibition catalogue edited by Cohn or in her book on her father. Coates' inclusion in this early modernist architectural group indicates his involvement at the very beginning of the British modern movement; the omission of this from Cohn's texts has possibly been a contributing factor in the diminishing of Coates' significance in the re-telling of the movement's history.

Coates' activities within the group are not easily discernible; Elgohary mentions a talk for the group given by Coates entitled 'Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic'. Described by architectural historian, Alan Powers, as 'a complex and emotional paper ... which reveals much about Coates' wide ranging hopes for the transformation which modern design might achieve in English society' (2001 p. 39), 'Sketch Plan for a New Aesthetic' was read by Coates at a large lunchtime meeting of the Twentieth Century Group held at the Savoy on 26 February 1931, attended by 80 people (Powers, 2001 p. 39). Two typescripts under the heading 'Notes for the Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic' exist within the Wells Coates Archive at the CCA; the first text entitled 'Notes for the Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic Response to Tradition' discusses, in part, the reactions of an 'artistic samurai' when confronted with the architecture of London.[103] This text, previously discussed in chapter 4, formed the basis of Coates' November 1932 article 'Response to Tradition', published in *The Architectural Review*. Elgohary includes in the appendices of his thesis the text of 'Sketch Plan of a New Aesthetic', a statement by the Twentieth Century Group of the aims and outline of their constitution and a memorandum of a meeting on 3 December 1931.

Cantacuzino outlines the aims of the group, which were to identify ideal standards for modern design and to publicise these principles by showing the combined skills of contemporary designers in promotional exhibitions. The group's council wished to

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[103] WCA, Box 06-3A

undertake, within a three year time scale, an ambitious exhibition to rival the Swedish exhibition of 1930 which was to include 'a complete housing scheme with mass-produced and standardised equipment' (1978 p. 32). The motto of the Swedish exhibition was 'An Ideal Home for Everyone' (RIBAJ, vol. 37 pp. 557-558). An exhibition in conjunction with the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition was planned for 1933; in 1931 Coates presented an itemised plan detailing:

> ... how to use the space to create a 'street of today' with a variety of houses designed for people of different incomes. In the space under the gallery various flat types and mass-produced furniture would be exhibited, while the gallery itself would be divided into stalls for the display of materials, fittings and equipment by selected firms. (Cantacuzino, 1978 p. 32)

Had this exhibition taken place it would have promoted modern architecture in Britain five years before the MARS Group's 1938 exhibition. Although the 1933 exhibition did not come to fruition Coates, as we have already seen, did participate in the 1934 Ideal Home Exhibition ' The Village of Tomorrow'.

By the beginning of 1932 it is apparent there was discord within the group; Cantacuzino cites a letter from Forbes to Coates, dated 17 February 1932, in which Forbes expresses his disappointment at the collapse of the group and was 'much sick with the inability of the practitioners to fall together' (Cantacuzino, 1978 p. 32). Forbes' frustration with the group's inability for action is quoted by McGrath:

> I hear there was no end of time wasted by absurd disputes re arbitrage of 'modernism' – as tho' the whole point of summoning so select a number of individuals, in the first place, was not on the tacit understanding and premise that the *least* modernistic thing the *dud-est* of the Group could do would pass the minimum, *pessimum* Criterion for the exhibition. (AR, vol. 79 p. 175)

Powers believes Forbes, Serge Chermayeff and Coates saw themselves as 'the guardians of ideological purity' (2001 p. 40) and although the group continued to meet until 1933 the lack of cohesion among members and the formation of the MARS group caused its demise. Elgohary and Cantacuzino consider the Twentieth Century Group to have been the forerunner and foundation for the more successful MARS Group.

Coates' association with Forbes and the Twentieth Century Group is believed to have been instrumental in his being offered interior design work at Broadcasting House in conjunction with McGrath and Chermayeff; referred to by Forbes as 'the three

musketeers'.[104] Powers considers Coates to have been one of the principal participants within the group: 'The three main members of the Twentieth Century Group were introduced, through Forbes's patronage, to the BBC and commissioned to design interiors for the new Broadcasting House' (Powers, 1999 p. 25). Powers has also suggested Coates was too much of a loner to be able to work with others and would break up any organisation he joined.[105] However by 1933 Coates was involved with the formation of two other groups: Unit One and the MARS Group.

Unit One

Unit One, the idea of Paul Nash and described as 'The Modern Movement in English architecture, painting and sculpture' (Read, 1934 p. 1), was a group composed of seven painters, two sculptors and two architects. The origins and inspiration of this group are generally attributed to the exhibition 'Recent Developments in British Painting' held at the Tooth Gallery in October 1931 but it is also possible Nash's publication *Room and Book* and the accompanying exhibition may have played a formative role in the development of Unit One.

***Room and Book*: a prelude to Unit One?**

Room and Book is the title of a book and an exhibition; the book written by the artist Paul Nash was published in 1932, and the exhibition, held in conjunction with the book, took place at the Zwemmer Gallery from 2 to 25 April of the same year. The book is a small volume of some 100 pages divided into two parts as the title suggests, consisting of a 'collection of essays upon aesthetic values' (1932 p. xv). It was written in the hope of raising public awareness of the role and value of the arts and aesthetics in every day life: 'In England we are not given to considering things aesthetically. It is thought to be a little unwholesome. We have our moral standard and our business code ...' (1932 p. xvii). Nash champions the cause of contemporary artists and designers and questions the lack of recognition by both nation and industry: 'At the present time we possess a number of first-class designers in nearly every department of applied art ... yet I can think of no instance where one is employed by any considerable firm' (1932 p. xviii).

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[104] Alan Powers during lecture on Raymond McGrath, 20th Century Society, 4th November 2004. Although in *Serge Chermayeff: Designer Architect Teacher* he attributes the giving of the name to Hubert de Cronin Hastings (2001).

[105] Alan Powers during lecture on Raymond McGrath, 20th Century Society, 4th November 2004. Powers had spoken to Jack Pritchard and this portrayal of Coates may have been influenced by Pritchard who had differences with Coates over Lawn Road Flats.

The first section of the book, entitled 'Room', comprises three chapters. Chapter one, 'The Modern Aesthetic', was published in *The Architectural Review* in 1930 under the title 'Modern English Furnishing'. Nash decries Victorian eclecticism and includes Japan in the 'invasions by foreign fashions'. Whilst welcoming Frederick Etchell's translation of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*, and believing this text to have 'clearly expounded the essential ideas of the new aesthetic' (1932 p. 8), Nash calls for a national design style: '... what is wanted in England is greater mental independence, an intelligent unprejudiced study of modern movements and methods, combined with an ideal to form standards for ourselves ...' (Nash, 1932 p. 8).

Chapter two, 'Modern English Furniture', includes a discussion on John Betjeman's views on the development of the English modern movement. Nash concurs with Betjeman in the case of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and C F A Voysey: 'In the work of two architects Mackintosh and Voysey we find the return to consciousness of that all-important faculty, the architectural sense' (1932 p. 22). The Omega workshops, initiated by Roger Fry and including Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell are debated and concluded: 'To cut a sad story short, the charming inventions of the Omega were engulfed in the new vogue of Jazz which lingers in Suburbia to this day' (1932 p.25). Nash completes the essay by citing artists and craftsmen who he considers to be making an important contribution to the English modern movement. The first to be mentioned is Frederick Etchells for, in particular, his translation of *Towards a New Architecture*; the next is Coates:

> Few people know the name of Wells Coates, but of the younger architects, he is certainly one of those who possess a clear conception of modern principles and the ability to put them into practice. His early training at the hands of Japanese builders inculcated a sense of just those values which are needed to-day in modern architecture. (1932 p. 28)

Nash places Coates before Raymond McGrath whom he describes as a capable architect-decorator and a talented writer, and before Serge Chermayeff whom he includes amongst 'those decorators who are not architects in the accepted sense but have been such an important influence affecting the interiors of modern houses' (1932 p 32). Unlike Coates, McGrath and Chermayeff had received an academic education in architecture and were members of the RIBA.[106]

There appears to be little written on the relationship between Nash and Coates, prior to the formation of Unit One. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain why Nash held

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[106] McGrath was elected as an Associate on 3 December 1928 (RIBAJ, vol. 36 p.131) and Chermayeff a Fellow on 9 January 1933 (RIBAJ, vol. 40 p. 111)

Coates and his work in such high esteem. It is possible Coates and Nash first met during the late 1920s (Cantacuzino 1978). Both were commissioned by Tom Heron of Cresta silk shops; Coates to design shops and Nash for textile designs (Cohn, 1999). However, by the early 1930s, Nash was suitably impressed by Coates' work to recommend him to the BBC for the job of designing technical studios at Broadcasting House.[107]

In the third chapter, 'The Room Equipped' Nash makes reference to recently published, *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* by Ralph Adams Cram in 1930.[108] In this text Cram compares the Japanese use of light with the Western glazed window; whilst not entirely agreeing with Cram's comments, Nash states:

> On the other hand, we might learn from the wisdom of the Japanese, who, in cases where the 'ceremonial' window is a feature of the room, use it as an important part of the decoration, framing the formal garden outside which is planned and developed in harmony with the scheme of the interior. (1932 p. 47)

This description of the ceremonial window is similar to Coates' 1931 account of the window in his article 'Inspiration from Japan': 'The ceremonial window ... is there for the specific purpose of framing the picture to the formal garden beyond' (AJ, vol. 74, p. 586). However Nash does not cite Coates in this instance but continues with the discussion on light, metal and wood: 'In the matter of wood we are beginning to learn what the East has known for many centuries' (1932 pp. 51-52). Nash does cite Coates' article 'Inspiration from Japan' and a recently published article in *The Listener* by Herbert Read as examples of austerity in design, where the Japanese interior and a modern interior are compared; Nash would appear to be referring to the *tokonoma* when he states:

> Both writers have been struck by the principles of formal arrangement which obviously underlie the composition of the Eastern room and our modern interiors. There is, of course, one great disparity, for, whereas the Japanese room is the expression of an unvarying tradition, our rooms are, and will always be, the result of individualism. One detail at least, we should learn from the experience of Eastern philosophy, the exalting of important decorative objects, such as pictures, rugs, or even flowers. These should be the chief centres of pattern, therefore they should be the best. It is saner to have one decorative object we can bear to contemplate continually than half a dozen indifferent compositions. (1932 p. 53)

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[107] Letter to Coates from the BBC dated 25 March 1931 WCA box 07-C.

[108] Described by Nash as 'lately been published' (1932 pp. 46-47) Cram's *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts* was originally published in 1905 and the section of the text referred to by Nash was also included in an article 'Japanese Domestic Interiors' published by *The Architectural Review* in 1900.

Two photographs accompanying the text illustrate the similarity between the Japanese and modern interior. The first, 'Modern Continental room' (fig. 102), a photograph from *Modern Interiors* by Herbert Hoffman, in which the accompanying text draws attention to the similarity to a Japanese interior. The second, 'Japanese interior' (fig. 103) a photograph from Cram's *Impressions of Japanese Architecture*; in the description beneath the photograph a comparison is again made between the traditional domestic Japanese interior and the continental modern interior. Nash makes a clear distinction that Japan is an inspiration for a continental modern interior; Read's comparison is 'between a Japanese interior and a modern French room' (1932 pp. 52-53); Coates makes no such distinction. Nash is seeking a national style developed from free thought and unbiased understanding of foreign modernism, adapted to English ways; Coates is for a broader internationalism.

Room and Book was an influential publication; reviewed by in excess of 20 newspapers and journals (Causey, 2000), it was mentioned frequently in texts on interior design during the 1930s. It is significant in our understanding of Coates' role as a disseminator of knowledge on Japan and Japanese architecture, that Nash not only praises Coates' design work but discusses his Japanese inspiration; by so doing Nash is bringing Coates' suggestion that Japanese architecture should be an inspiration source for modern design to a larger audience.

It is surprising to find in the *Room and Book* exhibition catalogue Coates is not a named exhibitor. However, the work of his friends and associates are represented: Serge Chermayeff showed furniture and fabric designs; the furniture manufacturers Pel, for whom Coates designed, exhibited three items; three items of furniture were also exhibited by Coates' soon to be partner David Pleydell-Bouverie; a display of plywood walls was provided by Venesta Ltd, the firm Jack Pritchard joined in 1925. At this exhibition also the work of the seven painters and two sculptors who were to form part of the Unit One group was also exhibited thus making this show a prelude to Unit One.

A further exhibition at the Zwemmer Gallery, *Artists of To-day,* held from 24 May to 17 June 1933, is noted by Farouk Elgohary, in his 1966 thesis on Coates, as being the first show by Unit One. However, fewer of the artist members of the group exhibited in this show than in the *Room and Book* exhibition; a total of seven including Tristram Hillier who replaced Frances Hodgkins when she left the group at the end of 1933. However Coates' involvement with this exhibition is clearly defined as he and Pleydell-Bouverie are credited with equipping the exhibition.

The formation of Unit One

Nash wished to form a group to cover, what he considered to be, all the arts: architecture, painting and sculpture. Discussion on the development of such a group was underway by the end of 1932 when meetings were held at the Café Royal between Nash, Coates (architect), Edward Wadsworth (painter) and Henry Moore (sculptor); one representative of each of the arts to be included. Two lists of additional members were drawn up and by March 1933 membership of the group had been decided except for a second architect member. Nash suggested Frederick Etchells but Coates had his reservations:

> About Etchells: I honestly think he will have to be counted out, on his recent work and more importantly, his recent pronouncements about architecture and art in general. He has unfortunately gone ga-ga in the last two years, and is really an old man in his second babbling phase.[109]

It was decided finally the choice of the second architect should be Coates' decision; the list of members announced in Nash's letter to *The Times* on 12June 1933 was as follows: Architects: Wells Coates, Colin Lucas. Sculptors: Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth. Painters: Edward Wadsworth, Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash, Frances Hodgkins [replaced by Tristram Hillier], Edward Burra, John Bigge and John Armstrong (fig 104).

Coates' involvement in the setting up of the group was fundamental; not only in the selection of members but in the selection of a name. Herbert Read, reminiscing in an article 'A Nest of Gentle Artists' for the art journal *Apollo* in 1962 could not remember why the group was called Unit One. Nash had considered calling the group 'the English Contemporary Group' but Coates suggested a name following the Soviet system of shortened clipped words; 'The One' had been a previous idea.[110] The notion that Coates was responsible for the name of the group is confirmed by Alastair Grieve (1999, p.85). Unit One appears to be the accepted name of the group by mid March 1933.

Through a study of Coates' Unit One correspondence held within the Tate Gallery archive it has been possible to establish Coates position within the group and to ascertain his involvement in the day to day running; most of the typing and despatching was undertaken by Coates' office at 15 Elizabeth Street, London SW1. He is open to Nash's suggestion that he should design a room for the group at Dudley Tooth's gallery:

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[109] Tate Gallery Archive, hereafter referred to as TGA 9120.12 letter from Coates to Nash dated 22/03/1933.

[110] TGA 9120.3 letter from Coates to Nash dated 29/01/1933.

> About the room at Tooth's: of course I shall do a scheme for Unit One with no charge to anybody. I am sure we can think of a suitable scheme which will not cost Tooth's much. It would be hopeless for Chermayeff to have anything to do with it; Tooth had his house done by him and knows his stuff costs! I suppose that's why he's fighting shy. I shall in the meantime go and have a look at the room ...'[111]

This did not come about as it was decided the newly refurbished Mayor Gallery 'is the only really modern gallery in the country and so much attention is concentrated on it there are some obvious reasons for identifying Unit One with this really vital place ...' Nash wrote to Coates in May 1933.[112] It is apparent that Nash valued Coates' opinion as did Nicholson and Moore, and his participation in the setting up of the group was important.

Coates was instrumental in organising the article on the group which appeared in *The Architectural Review* in October 1933; he wrote to Christian Barman in July asking for one illustration per member plus 1,500 words by Herbert Read amounting to four pages '... could these be reserved, in order that we can make a layout for you?'[113] However, in May 1933 with the announcement of the formation of the MARS Group, of which Coates was chairman and his membership of the Design and Industries Association later in the year, which Coates described as 'voluntary activities'[114], his commitments increased and he began to find difficulty in fulfilling the requests and deadlines of the group.

Perhaps it was this inability to meet deadlines that has informed later texts on Coates' involvement with the group. However Elgohary in his thesis does credit Coates as being part of the formative group meeting at the Café Royal; Cantacuzino in his monograph on Coates gives little more than a brief history of group and lists Coates as a member; in the exhibition catalogue, edited by Cohn, Unit One is passed over briefly as an event that took place in 1933; although several references are made to Unit One in Cohn's portrait of her father, there is no analysis of Coates' role within the group.

Unit One exhibition and book

In April 1934 the Unit One exhibition took place at the Mayor Gallery, 18 Cork Street, W1; this was to be the group's only show. After a month in London the exhibition went on tour to the provinces: first to the Walker Gallery, Liverpool where a total of 30,000 visitors to the exhibition was recorded; followed by showings in Manchester,

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[111] TGA 9120.12 letter from Coates to Nash dated 22/03/1933
[112] TGA 9120.18 letter from Nash to Coates undated c. beginning of May 1933
[113] TGA 9120.39 letter from Coates to Barman 03/07/1933
[114] TGA 9120.98 letter from Coates to Nash 30/11/1934

Hanley, Derby, Swansea and Belfast. Coates contributed seven items to the London show (fig. 105) and five to the provincial tour: 'I am enclosing a catalogue of the present show with the numbers marked – five in all – of the exhibits which may go out for the travelling show. I have decided I cannot be without the two models for so long a period'.[115]

In conjunction with the exhibition a book *Unit One*, edited by Herbert Read, was to be published. Providing material for the book proved testing for Coates; he missed many deadlines. Writing on 21 January 1934, to Douglas Cooper of the Mayor Gallery he stated:

> I write with fear and trepidation. I know I have held you up in all kinds of ways, but believe me I have been absolutely snowed under with work. I am usually to be found slaving away until my office building finally closes its doors on me at midnight, and at week-ends I am so exhausted that I stay in bed ... I have half finished my notes for the article for Unit One, and am really going to cut out time this week to complete it.[116]

Coates did eventually provide the necessary material for the publication including six illustrations of his work (fig. 106). He did not, however, provide the head, hands and studio photographs which had been requested; both sculptors and all of the seven painters, excluding John Armstrong, readily conformed. The text Coates did eventually supply was not in answer to the questionnaire sent out by Read but Coates was not alone in this as Read remarks in his introduction to *Unit One*:

> It will be seen in the pages that follow that some of the members of the Unit preferred to ignore the questionnaire altogether; that some apparently read it and then set it aside, but wrote nevertheless on topics suggested by the questionnaire; that others answered specific questions directly. But whatever the response, I think it will be generally admitted that we have here a body of statements by significant artists such as has rarely been seen before ... (Read, 1934 p.15)

Coates' three page text contribution to *Unit One* was primarily taken from his article 'Response to Tradition' which had appeared in the November 1932 issue of *The Architectural Review*; Coates includes, although slightly modified, his two more frequently used phrases: '... a man whose eyes have been trained in the East ...' and 'the inheritance of culture by the children of our epoch ...' (p. 109). Although at least two thirds of this writing had previously been published two new themes had been worked into the text. Possibly due to his involvement with the CIAM, Coates was becoming more aware of social housing issues:

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[115] TGA 9120.67 letter from Coates to the Mayor Gallery dated 30/04/1934
[116] TGA 9120.61 letter from Coates to Douglas Cooper, Mayor Gallery dated 21/01/1934

> What is the essential intention of the art of architecture? Reduced to its simplest elements, architecture is the art of providing *ordered shelter* for a multitude of human activities ... The whole complex of human impulses, needs, expectations, satisfactions, surprisals, disappointments and attitudes, is the first of the architect's raw materials. Every change in human conditions brings with it new possibilities of relationships of human needs, and the necessity to order them anew, to give them form, and freedom, and fullness and richness of life ... Communal amenity is rarely considered. And there are always practitioners in architecture who will irresponsibly provide what men ignorantly and wrongly and anti-socially desire for their own personal ends. (p. 108)

Coates concludes with the second of his new themes; the value and inspiration of art on his own work:

> It is said that a man whose eyes have been trained in the East will only rarely want to open them in the West. For my part, I shall say that I have, in Europe, derived more visual inspiration and design-experience from the study of the works of modern painters and sculptors than from any works of architecture ... The reason must surely be clear: the work of artists such as those with whom I am associated in this friendly group Unit One, is, reduced to its simplest elements, linear and spacial research work. They have helped me to know the difference in value between a merely surprising trick and a noble invention; to know what subtle combinations and resolutions of human impulses make up the values of an enclosed and habitable space; and to discover what are the ingredients of this particular quality of *residual repose* which buildings alone can possess... (p. 109)

While it is undoubtedly true Coates would have drawn inspiration from his association with Unit One, this does appear to be a rather generous description of his relationship with the group.

Critical review of exhibition and book

As an exercise in publicity Unit One was a success; there was plenty of coverage but a mixed response. The following three reviews in the *Apollo, The Architectural Review* and *The Studio* indicate the response to the inclusion of architecture. The reviewer for the *Apollo* was fairly damning, complaining 'the sculpture and paintings have no organic connection with the architecture' and continues by describing the architecture as 'pleasantly "modern" and as it were non-commital' concluding that of the sculpture '... the more I see of it the less I like it' and suggests a more suitable form of art for modern architecture was that of Egyptian painting and Assyrian reliefs.[117]

Unit One, the book, was reviewed in *The Architectural Review* by Osbert Lancaster who welcomed the book being written but deplored the 'state of affairs in the world of art

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[117] TGA 9120.68 Extract from *Apollo*, London May 1934.

which renders necessary so much exclamatory self-justification' (AR, vol. 75 p. 212). With his usual sardonic wit Lancaster dissects the publication but leaves the architects relatively unscathed:

> As for the two architect members of the group, Mr. Wells Coates and Mr. Colin Lucas, annoying as their presence must be to other architects, one cannot help feeling glad that they are represented here, though the admirable quality of their work calls for no explanation by themselves or anyone else. Of all the arts, architecture surely is, or should be, the most self-explanatory, and the simple direct lines of the buildings of these two architects, here reproduced in drawings and photographs, speak for themselves. (AR, vol. 75 p. 211-12)

A further review of the book was published in *The Studio*. This detailed analysis of the text and the works contained within it concentrates on the painters, giving only a short acknowledgement of the architects: 'As yet the architects have the best of it. No one is going to buy an architectural self-portrait, and Mr. Wells Coates's personal art is admirably subjected to public needs that have provided its occasions' (*The Studio*, vol. 108 p.220).

Raymond McGrath, also mentions Unit One in *Twentieth Century Houses* (1934) by commenting on Coates and Lucas' membership of the group. He briefly paraphrases Lucas' essay but 'quotes' extensively from Coates' text; *Twentieth Century Houses* was written in 'basic English' therefore McGrath has rewritten the extracts; e.g. 'It is said that a man whose eyes have been trained in the East will not frequently have any desire to keep them open in the West. For my part ...' (p. 104) [second extract from Unit One essay quoted above]. McGrath concludes the section on Coates with a further extract based on the Unit One essay:

> One day those false rules of behaviour which now have no living force and the tendency to make a religion of the past in design will be no more. Till then there is no hope that building will have its true purpose again as an art. Most men have no chance or power to make for themselves, as they did in less complex, less expert times, the forms which give them a full existence. The first rule of the art of building is to go for that order which gives a fuller and freer way of living. The art of building is the servant of the purposes of men and not only of the beautiful.
> (McGrath, 1934 p. 105)

Unit One, in part, resulted from a desire to treat the arts holistically; Lucas and Coates were perceived, by some, to be boundary breaking, somewhat avant-garde and particularly modern.

The demise of Unit One

Following the exhibition and publication of the book in April 1934, perhaps because of Nash absence due to ill health, Unit One began to disintegrate. There were attempts to reform the group in which Coates appears to have played a major part. Nash also sought Read's advice on reconstituting the group; Read wrote to Nash in September 1934:

> As you know, I am very loath to interfere, except to encourage the idea and at all costs keep it going. You have done right to get Wells into the new constitution right away: the Unit must, if it is to be at all real, have an architectural basis ... to so reconstitute yourselves that you can operate as a practical unit in the industrial system. The Unit as a unit should be prepared to undertake the designing of a building in every detail – architecture, fittings, interior decoration and furniture ...[118]

The desire to develop Unit One along the lines of the Bauhaus seems to have been almost a political move after an unsuccessful secret ballot in which only Moore and Nash received a unanimous vote. It was hoped that by placing more emphasis on industrial art some members would find this unacceptable and leave. A number of new line-ups for membership was proposed in which Coates was included and various schemes were proposed for electing members: 'The following plan has now been adopted for electing members to the Unit. Artists will be elected in groups of three. An architect, a painter and a sculptor – following this group a painter will be elected, making in all four members at a time.'[119] Coates was active in correspondence and the setting up of meetings, however in March 1935 there was a discrepancy over the minutes of a meeting when Read considered Coates to have misrepresented proceedings; Nash wrote to Coates:

> Dear Wells, Two opinions on the minutes in question –
> Yourself 'I honestly do not see why you should take exception to the statements made'.
> Herbert 'The last item of the minutes is a distortion of anything that took place at the meeting'.
> I don't feel that any other comment is necessary. I shall support Herbert's suggestion that at the next meeting, on a motion to pass the minutes, it be moved that the last paragraph be deleted and that, in short, the whole business be washed out ...[120]

By April 1935 there was a desire to dispose with Unit One and a letter, to be sent to all members, was drafted announcing the end of the group (Appendix 5). Although this was not to be the end of the ideals of Unit One as there was one more final abortive

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[118] TGA 9120.99 letter from Read to Nash 23/11/34
[119] TGA 9120.113 announcement headed 'Unit One' no date
[120] TGA 9120. 132 letter from Nash to Coates 22/03/1935

attempt at a new organisation.[121] A meeting of the new group, 'The Artists' Unit' was held in May 1935 attended by Read, Coates, Moore, Nash, McKnight Kauffer, John Grierson and Douglas Cooper. The minutes were taken by Read and it is apparent that Coates was still actively involved as he and Read prepared a draft statement of aims for the meeting. By the format of the document and the writing style it is possible to deduce Coates' substantial contribution in the preparation of the statement which was subsequently toned down by Read (Appendix 6).

In our examination of Coates' role within Unit One we have been able to deduce that it was both formative and active, from the selection of the second architectural member to the drafting of the final statement of aims. Let us now examine the portrayal, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, of the formation and activities of the group.

Interpretation of Unit One

Herbert Read's relationship with Coates seems somewhat ambivalent; in the first edition of Read's *Art and Industry* published in 1934 Coates is included in the list of designers in the index but in subsequent editions his name has been removed, although he is still cited in the acknowledgements. Similarly in the catalogue to the 1965 exhibition *Art in Britain 1930-40 centred around Axis Circle Unit One* in which Read's *Apollo* article 'A Nest of Gentle Artists' (1962) is reproduced, Read admits to a poor memory but Coates' role within Unit One is cited only as that of one of the architect members; no sense is given of Coates involvement with the group.

There is little mention of Coates involvement within Unit One in the 1978 catalogue for the 'Unit One' exhibition held at the Portsmouth City Museum and Art Gallery, which was based on the original 1934 exhibition at the Mayor Gallery. In the catalogue introduction Coates is mentioned as taking part in initial discussions for Unit One and he is described as 'a prominent figure among younger designers and architects' (p. 1). The catalogue contains individual essays on each member of the group which contextualise the exhibits but gives no further account of their role within the group. The essay on Coates is written by Sherban Cantacuzino shortly before his monograph on Coates was published.

Six year later a further exhibition 'Unit One: spirit of the 30's' was held at the Mayor Gallery in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first Unit One exhibition. In the foreword to the accompanying catalogue J M Richards describes Coates:

... Wells Coates, the other architect-member of Unit One, was thoroughly

[121] TGA 9120.141 letter headed 'Unit One' no date

> outward-looking. He was at the centre of the Modern Movement then establishing itself in England, a founder of the MARS Group and indefatigable in promoting meetings and attending conferences. For him such activities had to be a substitute for building, for which he got too few opportunities considering how real his talents were. Having been trained as an engineer he had a grasp of fundamentals but this was concealed beneath a line of talk which I know gave potential clients a totally misleading impression. (p. 7)

Read's *Apollo* article is cited and the fact that he could not remember why the group was called Unit One is recorded in the main essay by Mark Glazebrook, 'Unit One: spirit of the 'thirties'. Glazebrook believes Coates to have been the eighth member of the group and to have brought in Colin Lucas, although he does consider Coates to be part of the 'inner cabinet' (p. 9). Little mention is made of Coates in the essay or his role within the group, except in the penultimate paragraph: 'There is no better evidence that the members of Unit One were in tune with the spirit of the age than the wireless designed by Wells Coates symbolising the revolution both in communications and design' (p. 23).

It could be argued that the review of Unit One has been from a fine art, and not an architectural point of view, which may partly be why Coates' role within the group has not been highlighted in these catalogues of the 1960s, 70s and 80s.[122] Nevertheless, due to these omissions, the part played by Coates in the formation and continuation of the group has been diminished. However, in a 1933 article for *The Listener* Nash wrote:

> While the composition of the group was still undecided, a conversation with Mr. Wells Coates determined its character. Mr. Coates was then forming his architectural research group at the invitation of the secretariat of the International Congress of Modern Architecture, representing nineteen national groups, but not, up till then, including Great Britain. It seemed obvious that the interest we all had in mind should somehow fuse, and the whole project was rediscussed from the point view of including architecture ... (pp. 15-16)

Although the study of Unit One does not give us any further information on Coates' dissemination of his Japanese inspiration on modern design, it is an example of how he has been forgotten in the recording of a history of the group's activities and is indicative of how the perception of his significance within the British modern movement has been lessened.

The MARS Group (Modern Architectural Research Group)

The situation with the MARS Group is somewhat different as Coates' position as chairman of the group was, and has continued to be acknowledged. All four keys texts on

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[122] Jack Pritchard is listed in the acknowledgements of the *Art in Britain 1930-40* and *Unit One: spirit of the 30's* catalogues.

Coates discuss his involvement with both the MARS Group and the CIAM.[123] However, is it possible to locate any Japanese inspiration within the group?

The formation of the MARS Group

In the announcement of the group's inauguration in May 1933, which was widely reported in the architectural press, Coates is credited as the founder.[124] On the recommendation of the architectural journalist P Morton Shand, Sigfried Giedion, Secretary of CIAM, wrote to Coates asking him to co-ordinate an English national group:

> To our great regret no English group of the Congresses has been formed. Mr. Robertson [Howard] and some of his friends attended our Brussels Congress, but they afterwards informed us that no interest in our movement existed in England. ('Das in England kein Interesse für unsere Bewegnung Zu finden sei.')
> We regretted this all the more because our Congress is more actively organized for work today than ever ... Please let us know if interest in the new architecture is still so lukewarm in England, and whether there are really no young men to be found there who have the courage, and feel it their duty, to form a collective organisation, and establish contact with us? (AJ, vol. 77 p. 623)[125]

The formal constitution was drafted at a meeting on 28 February 1933 attended by Coates, Maxwell Fry, Pleydell-Bouverie, architects, and Shand, H de Cronin Hastings, John Gloag, journalists and critics. The aims of the group were those taken from CIAM namely: to identify contemporary architectural problems, to represent the modern architectural idea, to promote and disseminate the concept of modern architecture and finally, to attempt to solve contemporary architectural problems (Cantacuzino, 1978 p. 47).

Membership was to include not only architects but others involved in building construction: engineers, surveyors, town-planners, other technical experts, journalists, critics and commentators who were interested in the objectives of the group. Coates issued guidelines on membership on 1 March 1933 in a confidential memo to those who attended the 28 February meeting, which confirmed the group's desire to be small and select:

> ... that the initial selection of architect and engineer members will be an extremely difficult and delicate affair. Certain people who are popularly and notoriously known as 'modern' architects obviously do not qualify in our sense, e.g. Howard Robertson, Grey Wornum, Oliver Hill, Walmesley Lewis, Oswald Milne, etc. Others working in the modern idiom, and professing what have been called 'functional' principles, are really professional ensemblier-practitioners, or decorative specialists, or colourists, etc ...

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[123] The CIAM was founded in 1928 as a forum for modern architectural debate.
[124] AJ, vol. 77 p. 580; AR, vol. 73 p. 268; RIBAJ, vol. 40 p. 571.
[125] The translation of 'no interest in our movement existed in England' is a little strong; 'seemed to exist' or 'as if perhaps' are closer to the German.

(Cohn, 1999 pp. 41-43).

Despite this rather elitist approach to membership, which can have done little to win Coates friends and allies outside the MARS Group, by 25 April 1933 there were 14 members: architects – Coates, Maxwell Fry, Pleydell-Bouverie, Amyas Connell, Basil Ward, Colin Lucas, (of Connell, Ward & Lucas), R T F Skinner, Godfrey Samuel, Berthold Lubetkin (of Tecton) and F R S Yorke; poet and critic – John Betjeman; architectural journalists – Shand, de C Hastings, and Gloag. Geoffrey Boumphrey, commentator, and Cyril Sweett, surveyor joined by the summer of 1933 (Reading, 1986 p. 22).

CIAM participation

In June 1933 Boumphrey, Coates, Shand, Samuel and Yorke attended the fourth CIAM congress aboard the SS Patris II, which sailed between Marseilles and Athens; the MARS Group was the 20th national member of the CIAM. This would most likely have been Coates' first opportunity to meet modernist architects of international standing such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. Coates appears to have enjoyed the internationalism of the CIAM congresses and he remained the principle British delegate into the 1950s; J M Richards recalled Coates' participation:

> The international atmosphere of these congresses suited him perfectly, because he was a man of no fixed roots, with the ability of many such to seem at home everywhere. He could take his place unselfconsciously alongside the internationally known figures who presided at these congresses – Le Corbusier, Giedion, Sert, van Eesteren, Gropius – and his gaiety on these occasions was unforced as, in the hot summer sunshine, shirt-sleeved but immaculate, he busied himself with meeting after meeting ... (AR, vol.134 p. 358)

'New Homes for Old'

The MARS Group contributed to the 1934 'New Homes for Old' exhibition held at the Building Trades' Exhibition, Olympia in November which was considered to be, by J A Ledeboer, the organising chairman, 'a most important contribution to the exhibition' (*Design for To-day,* vol. II, p. 408), and was praised for its method of displaying the analysis of social facts. This was part of an analysis of slum clearance and housing already undertaken by the group focusing on the borough of Bethnal Green in which Coates had played a major role. As this exhibition showed, the purpose of the MARS Group was primarily that of research but for some members there was surfeit of aesthetic statements and dearth of practical research. There were disagreements between, Lubetkin, Ward,

Connell, Lucas and Coates; all were subsequently missing from MARS Group meetings in the spring of 1936. Farouk Elgohary states, in his thesis, that Coates absented himself until the 1938 exhibition in which he participated in the organisation and designed a fully equipped living room for the show (1966 p. 91). Elgohary also reveals that the RIBA offered space for the MARS exhibition, which Coates did not accept (p. 89).

'New Architecture' exhibition January 1938

Some confusion has evolved over this next exhibition and a number of texts mention two exhibitions taking place: one in June 1937 and another in January 1938. In fact, three of the key texts on Coates state there were two exhibitions: Cantacuzino's monograph and Cohn's exhibition catalogue and *The Door to a Secret Room.* The misunderstanding has occurred because the exhibition, originally planned for June 1937, was postponed until January 1938.[126] An artist's impression of the 'Modern Architecture Exhibition 1937' was printed (fig. 107) and an article by Richards, 'Modern Architecture and the Public: the M.A.R.S. exhibition', published by *The Architectural Review* in the spring of 1937 have, no doubt, added to the confusion. Within the Wells Coates Archive there are only two files relating to MARS and the CIAM; Cohn admits 'All the archive and files of the MARS group were inadvertently and carelessly lost. These two are apparently all that survive, having been kept by Wells with his own papers'.[127] The loss of these documents may have contributed to the confusion but one wonders if they were lost before or after Elgohary wrote his thesis as his account would appear to be the more accurate.

The long awaited MARS Group 'New Architecture' exhibition took place at the New Burlington Galleries, Burlington Gardens, London W1 from 12 to 29 January 1938. One of the 7,000 visitors to the exhibition was Le Corbusier (fig. 108) who wrote:

> On January 19th I dropped out of an airplane into the midst of a charming demonstration of youth, which revealed the architecture of tomorrow to be as smiling as it is self-reliant. Much has certainly been accomplished. It is no longer a case of fighting a battle all over the world, but of a victory already won in every part of it. (AR, vol. 83, p. 109)

The exhibition catalogue, with a foreword by Bernard Shaw, enunciated the aims:

> In this exhibition we have tried to put modern architecture before you in a form of a consistent, self-explanatory statement, in a setting sympathetic to the spirit of the movement. We have tried to indicate the main relation-

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[126] RIBAJ, vol. 44 5 June 1937 p. 794 – opening postponed until October 1937. RIBAJ, vol. 45 6 December 1937 p. 130 – opening 11 January 1938.

[127] Wells Coates biography file, RIBA copy of catalogue of Wells Coates' papers sold to CCA by Mrs. Cohn on 20 February 1988.

> ships of modern architecture – its relation to everyday life, to scientific knowledge and to the world of aesthetic experience. The exhibition is, if you like, propaganda. But we do not seek converts. All we hope to do is to win the loyalty of those who have not already made up their minds. (p. 6)

The premise of the exhibition was Sir Henry Wotton's 1624 paraphrasing of Vitruvius: 'Well building hath three conditions, Commoditie, firmenes, and delight' (1938, p. 8) (fig. 109). Individual displays are not credited (see Appendix 7 for contributors), but it is most likely Coates was responsible for the 'second room' which represented 'delight' which 'is interpreted in the work of the architect, set forth in a review of the achievements of the modern movement' (1938, p. 8) (fig. 110). In addition to an architectural discourse, the exhibition included town planning, social services, transport and a technical section 'today the scientist the engineer the manufacturer provide the means of building ...' (p. 14).

'À la japonais'

Coates' further contribution to the exhibition can be deduced from the catalogue: a photograph of 18 Yeoman's Row appears under 'building needs for habitation' (p. 10) (fig 111); in the list of photographs at the end of the catalogue nos. 43 and 44 are attributed to Coates and noted as 'Inside a Nursery School in Holland Park.' Over half the catalogue consists of advertisements including ones for Isokon and E K Cole Ltd. The Cole advertisement is of significance as the depiction of Coates' Thermovent heater would appear to be a reference to the *tokonoma* (fig. 112). An adaptation of this heater was used in the 'second room' which also included an integral radio and television set (fig. 113). It can be seen that Coates has created a hearth scene in this living-room similar to that of 18 Yeoman's Row which he stated was '*à la japonais*' (AR vol. 82, p. 53).

In our quest for Japanese inspiration the 'Architecture: garden landscape' section is noteworthy: 'There must be no antagonism between architecture and its natural setting. The architecture of the house embraces the garden. House and garden coalesce, a single unit in the landscape' (*New Architecture*, 1938, p. 20) (fig. 114). Although there is no indication Christopher Tunnard was responsible for this section his name does appear on the list of contributors as responsible for flowers and plants (Appendix 7); he was also a member of the MARS 1936 town planning committee (Elgohary, 1966 p. 93). As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Tunnard was well versed in Japanese garden aesthetic and would have fully understood the sentiments expressed in the catalogue.

Critical appraisal

The exhibition received mixed reviews: *The Architectural Review* devoted eight pages to describing and illustrating the show but gave no critical comment. The RIBAJ ran two articles on the exhibition: on 10 January 1938 just before the opening which described what could be expected (vol. 45 p. 242) and on 24 January 1938 when a more critical appraisal of the show was given:

> If the Mars Group have tried to put the ideals of modern architecture to the ordinary man, they have certainly used the wrong method. But if, on the other hand, they have aimed at justifying their outlook to their brother architects and to that lay class who for want of a better name have been labelled the "intelligentsia," they have succeeded very well indeed. To the person who is tickled and not frightened by an abstract composition, who gets a kick out of good shapes and colours, and who (this is very important) already knows a good deal about architecture, the Exhibition is stimulating, and even exciting. (RIBAJ, vol. 45 p. 292).

The MARS exhibition was eagerly awaited and considered to be of significance as the two RIBAJ articles testify. However, in the re-evaluation of the group and exhibition there has been a tendency to challenge its importance, for example: David Dean considers none of the 1930s groups to be 'of towering significance' (1983 p. 113); Louise Campbell in her 1985 article 'challenges the MARS Group's reputation as the most progressive faction within English architecture during the 1930s' (p. 69). Although, whilst discussing Lubetkin's dissatisfaction with the MARS Group, Peter Coe and Malcolm Reading did not wish to imply the group's impact on English architecture was superficial (1981 p. 92).

On the webpage for the 2003 exhibition staged by the Design Museum the MARS Group is described as 'a "think tank" for British modernism';[128] this show commemorated the 70th anniversary of the formation of the group. Coates' role within the group has been remembered since 1933 to the present day, even though the significance of the group has been challenged. This has not been the case with other groups with which Coates has been associated. Japanese inspiration was found within Coates' design for the living-room and also within Tunnard's possible contribution to the exhibition.

The Design and Industries Association (DIA)

Coates' involvement in the DIA appears to have been almost forgotten; the four key texts on him mention his involvement with the DIA's Dorland Hall 1933 exhibition only in relation to his 'minimum flat' exhibit. However, from the exhibition catalogue, it is possible to deduce a greater participation; Coates was chairman of the selection

[128] http://designmuseum.org/designerex/the-mars-group.htm 05.12.04

committee on kitchens and vice-chairman on the display committee (p. iii), arranger of the national gas exhibit (p. 173), designer of a gas kitchen (p. 176), and two cabinets for radio-gramophones (p. 182) (fig. 115).

'Fitness for purpose', the DIA slogan, expressed the aim of the association which was to improve the design of everyday things. This was to be achieved by persuading the artist into industry and the manufacturer to utilise the services of the artist/designer to achieve well designed products. Founded in 1915, the DIA saw itself as providing a meeting ground for manufacturers and designers, and as an advisory agency for members of the general public who were looking for well designed artefacts. How successful they were at this is open to debate; Coates was not afraid to criticise the 1934 Dorland Hall exhibition. He was the first signatory to a letter published in the association's journal in November 1934 (Appendix 8) which criticised the event as a 'luxury exhibition' (p. 451) and lamented the use of many luxury items which were too expensive for the general public thus undermining the aim of the association and turning it into an elitist organisation. The seventh signatory to the letter was fellow MARS Group member and chairman of the DIA, Maxwell Fry.

As a member of the DIA council and general purposes committee (see Appendix 9 for council members), it is possible Coates was required to increase membership of the association. He wished to nominate Herbert Read for membership but Read believed as a critic he should remain independent.[129] Similarly, Coates approached Henry Moore in December 1934:

> There is another matter which I should like to discuss with you, and that is the Design and Industries Association. You probably know of this Association, which has been rather a mothers' meeting sort of affair during the past years; but attempts are now being made to install new blood into it, and I am wondering whether you would accept my suggestion that you should become a member and eventually a member of its council. The cost is a guinea a year, for which you get the magazine "Design for Today" free of charge (not much I know, but it is a group of people composed not only of designers ... but also of manufacturers and commercial people through whom proper ideas of modern design can best be projected into larger fields of activity). [130]

It appears Coates was more successful in persuading Moore than he had been with Read; Moore replied three days later: '... thanks for the suggestion about the Design & Industries Association. I know very little or nothing about it activities. But as you are a member I'll

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[129] WCA Box 07-E correspondence with friends, colleagues, etc. 1929-38.
[130] TGA 9120.102 letter from Coates to Moore 27/12/1934.

be very willing to join also – and be what help I can ...'[131] So far in my research I have been unable to find any evidence to suggest Moore did join, however this correspondence indicates that Coates and his opinions were held in high esteem.

The *tokonoma*

Design for To-day, the journal of the DIA, to which Coates refers in his letter to Moore, although only published from 1933 to 1936[132] is a useful source of information on Coates' work and his inspiration from Japan. As we observed in the previous chapter, not only Coates' interior design conversion of 2 Devonshire Street received a two page spread but on the following pages a Japanese room was shown and described as having features to which modern interior architecture aspires. One year later, in May 1934, fellow MARS Group member, John Betjeman, in an article entitled 'Using Pictures', recommends hanging pictures 'one at a time' (p. 168). Although in the text Betjeman does not cite Japan as an example of this, the accompanying photograph and caption are quite clear: 'The Japanese method of using pictures. The Tokonoma, an alcove in which alone painted scrolls, bronzes or vases are displayed' (vol. II p. 169) (fig. 116). The caption text is reminiscent of Coates' writing style and on the following page Coates' own reference to the *tokonoma* appears (fig. 117) in the photograph of the study in the Sunspan house as it appeared at Olympia: 'Wells Coates places a Cézanne reproduction[133] – an economical form of decoration – in true relationship to the built-in furniture which he has also designed (p. 170)'. The Cézanne reproduction has perhaps been chosen with care for its resemblance to Mount Fuji and to suggest a Japanese inspiration.

Coates' Isokon plywood furniture designs are illustrated in both the features and advertisement sections of the journal (fig. 118); this is not surprising as Jack Pritchard was also a member of the DIA council and it was he who put Coates up for membership.[134] Other manufacturers featured Coates' work in their advertisements within the journal: Handmade Gramphones Ltd, Welwyn Builders and Gordon Russell Ltd; E & L. Berg Ltd featured the Sunspan House (fig. 119). It is difficult to deduce whether Coates had any influence on publishing policy or decision making within the journal, but nevertheless his work is regularly featured and his Japanese inspiration is depicted and taken up by others. It is, therefore, surprising to find that Coates' contribution to the DIA and its journal, *Design for To-day,* appears to have been virtually forgotten.

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[131] TGA 9120.103 letter from Moore to Coates 30/12/1934.
[132] *Design for Today* was replaced by *Trend* in June 1936.
[133] 'La tranchée avec la montagne Sainte-Victoire'.
[134] Pritchard Papers PP/23/2/121 letter from Pritchard to Coates.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

The other organisation of which Coates was a member was the RIBA. Unable to become an Associate member because he had not taken the necessary architectural examinations, he became a Licentiate member on 11 January 1937 (RIBAJ, vol. 44 p. 306); Licentiate membership was granted if architectural work of a suitable nature had been completed. In December 1937 Coates sent his 'application to the Examiners to qualify for candidature as a Fellow of the RIBA. I have thought it best to send you complete plans, details and photographs of one recent work': this work was 'Shipwrights', Benfleet Essex. Coates also sent photographs of:

> Lawn Road Flats: "Sunspan" Bungalow, Welwyn: BBC Studios, London and Newcastle: my own flat, London [18 Yeoman's Row]: Flat at Bristol [probably designed for P E Gane]: Nursery School, London [Hampden Nursery School, Holland Park]. [135]

On 9 May 1938 Coates' application to become a Fellow of the RIBA was successful (RIBAJ, vol. 45 p. 722); he was proposed by Professor C H Reilly, H Austen Hall and C H James (RIBAJ, vol. 45 p. 565). However in biographical notes written by Coates during the 1950s he gives the year of his FRIBA status as 1934; this date of 1934 has been quoted by Elgohary in his 1966 thesis on Coates and appears in the 'Chronology' of the exhibition catalogue edited by Cohn; Cantacuzino does not mention Coates' membership of the RIBA.

It is debatable whether Coates would have taken the trouble to become a fellow of the RIBA but for the Architects Registration Act. For many years the RIBA had been calling for an Architects Registration Act, in order that only registered architects could practise. It was not until the 1930s that the Bill began to gather momentum; in 1931 an Architects Registration Act was passed but registration was voluntary. The RIBA pressed for registration to become compulsory; this explanation of the need for the Registration Act was given in the editorial on 20 December 1937: 'The broad reason for the Bill is that the public do not understand the difference between a registered architect and an architect and there is nothing to prevent any person from masquerading under the title of an architect although he has no qualification' (RIBAJ, vol. 45, pp. 163-4). On 17 December 1937 the Bill went before the House of Commons, was passed in 1938 and became law on 1 August 1940. It was, therefore, necessary for any person wishing to practise as an architect to be registered.

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[135] WCA 07-E letter from Coates to Sir Ian MacAlister, Secretary, RIBA.

Coates' inclusion in the RIBAJ

It would be reasonable to suggest that Coates' work did not receive as much attention in the RIBAJ as his contemporaries, Serge Chermayeff, Maxwell Fry, Raymond McGrath and F R S Yorke who were active members of the RIBA from the early 1930s. The RIBA indicated membership status in the journal by [*A.*] for Associate, [*F.*] for Fellow and so on; as Coates did not become a member until the end of the 1930s, was this lack of status a contributing factor to his work receiving only brief and infrequent coverage within the journal during the 1930s?

However, although not cited in the RIBAJ's review of the exhibition, Coates' work was included in the 'International Architecture 1924-1934' centenary exhibition held at the RIBA from 1 December 1934 to 2 January 1935. Raymond McGrath was responsible for the 'Planning the Dwelling' section in which two photographs of Lawn Road Flats were shown under the heading 'Housing Schemes and Flats in Great Britain' (nos. 52 & 55). As in his book *Twentieth Century Houses* (1934), McGrath included photographs of contemporary houses in Japan designed by Antonin Raymond, Sutemi Horiguchi, Kameki Tsuchiura, and Mamoru Yamada; McGrath's inclusion of Japanese modernism will be discussed in the next chapter.

The first time Coates' work is mentioned in the RIBAJ is on 11 February 1933 in a Technical Article 'Glass in Modern Building' by M L Anderson in which Coates' design for a sound proof observation window at Broadcasting House was illustrated by both plan and photograph but it is not discussed in the text (RIBAJ, vol. 40 pp. 262-263) (fig. 120). The editorial on 27 May 1933 discussed the setting up of the MARS Group:

> We therefore welcome the formation of the new Modern Architectural Research Group (commonly known as "Mars") which, with Mr. Wells Coates as Chairman and Mr. F.R.S. Yorke [*A.*] as secretary, is to co-operate in the programme of the next and future International Congresses of Modern Architecture. (RIBAJ, vol. 40, p. 571)

This is the only occasion in the RIBAJ when Coates is cited as chairman and the only time his name is connected with the MARS Group; in subsequent reviews of the group he is not mentioned.

"Is Modern Architecture on the Right Track?" was the subject for an Architecture Symposium published in *The Listener* on 26 July 1933; Coates was among the panel of architects selected for the debate which is given an editorial review in the journal on 9 September 1933 (RIBAJ, vol. 40 p. 788). Examples of Coates' minimum flat and shop designs are cited in a paper read before the RIBA on 4 December by Charles Marriott entitled 'Contemporary London Buildings'. Coates' work is described as good taste and

typical of modern treatment, 'setting a good example in a direction that is bound to be followed' (RIBAJ, vol. 41, p. 116).

During 1934 several complimentary comments on Lawn Road Flats and the designs for Embassy Court, Brighton are found within the Review of Periodicals section and in March 1935 Coates' designs for the BBC Newcastle Studios are noted. Embassy Court is mentioned in 'Planning and Architectural Developments at the Seaside' by Wesley Dougill which was read before the RIBA on 30 November 1936. The value of the design is not discussed; it is only used to illustrate the tendency towards the construction of higher buildings on the seafront: 'It is a multi-storey block of flats' (RIBAJ, vol. 44, p. 119).

The paper read by Coates at the AA in March 1938,'The Conditions for an Architecture for To-day', and published by the Architectural Association Journal in April 1938 is listed in the Review of Periodicals section on 25 April 1938 (RIBAJ, vol. 45 p. 619); there was a further mention on 23 January 1939 of an article in *Focus*: 'Flats at Palace Gate, London by Wells Coates [*F.*], in course of construction. The section is on the "three-two" system, three service and bedroom floors occupying the same height as two living-room floors' (RIBAJ, vol. 46, p. 308). Palace Gate Flats are again listed on 24 April 1939 in an article in *The Architectural Review* and 19 February 1940 the flats are featured in the American journal *Architectural Record* published in New York in November 1939 (RIBAJ, vol. 47 p. 88).

Coates' work appears twice in the Book Reviews during 1939. *The Book of the Modern House: A Panoramic Survey of Contemporary Domestic Design*, edited by Patrick Abercrombie, is described as a selective survey of domestic architecture of the last twenty years; Coates' Shipwrights, commissioned by the Ekco radio company as a weekend retreat for company executives, was included in the selection (RIBAJ, vol. 46 pp. 788-789). The second review, the Ascot Gas Water Heaters publication *Flats, Municipal and Private Enterprise* consisted of contributions from a number of architects of which Coates was one (RIBAJ, vol. 46 p. 940) has been discussed in chapter four 'Notes on Dwelling for To-morrow'.

Only two photographs of Coates' work appear in the RIBAJ. The first in 1933, the observation window at Broadcasting House, previously mentioned; the second in February 1937 in a review of the 'Airport and Airways Exhibition' in which the dramatic control panel at Broadcasting House, designed by Coates in 1931, is used as an example of good design: 'Compared with so good an example of design as the B.B.C. Dramatic Control Panel, it cannot be said that the Airport Control Officer's desk takes one's breath away by its beauty ...' (RIBAJ, vol. 44 p. 450). However, Coates is not credited as the designer (fig. 121).

The relationship between Coates and the RIBA seems to be somewhat ambiguous. He wrote to Maxwell Fry in December 1949:

> I had been told to await developments on the BBC TV side: that the original conception for White City (a national competition) would delay matters and then an appointment would be made. It was, with the result you know: Graham Dawbarn, Howard Robertson and Bill Holford. I can only think that I have few friends within the RIBA. Here was a job right up my technical street: before the war, Reith had promised me the TV job ...
> (Cohn, 1999 pp. 197-9)

The RIBA was not the type of organisation to which Coates would have naturally gravitated in the early 1930s but towards the end of the decade, with the threat of war in Europe, architectural commissions were becoming scarcer and with the pending Architects Registration Act poised to become law, Coates possibly felt he had no alternative but to become a member. Nevertheless, this newly acquired FRIBA status appears to have had little positive effect upon his subsequent career.

After 1939

The extract from Coates' 1949 letter to Maxwell Fry was symptomatic of his plight after the Second World War. He had been away from the construction business since the outbreak of World War II having volunteered for military service; his application for a commission in the Administration and Special Duties Branch of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve was confirmed on 20 December 1939.[136] Although Coates received an OBE for his service in the RAF during the war, and in 1945 was elected to the Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry by the Royal Society of Arts, he was unable to secure regular employment as an architect. He designed the Telekinema for the Festival of Britain in 1951 but post-war building material shortages meant few architectural commissions. Coates' desperation can be witnessed by the inclusion of all his awards and qualifications on his letterhead: 'Wells Coates, OBE, RDI, FRIBA, PhD, BA, BSc. Chartered Architect and Royal Designer for Industry, 18 Yeoman's Row, Brompton Road, London, S.W.3.'[137] In 1955 Coates left Britain and spent some time at Harvard during 1955 and 1956 as a visiting professor in the Graduate School of Design; on 7 October 1955 he gave a lecture on Japanese Domestic Architecture.[138] In June 1958 Coates, aged 62, died of a heart attack on the beach at Vancouver. He had returned to Canada in search of work, with little success.

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[136] WCA Box 04-D.
[137] Pritchard Papers PP/23/2/162 letter from Coates to Pritchard 07/01/1952.
[138] WCA Box 30-B.

All his life Coates felt he was an outsider '... practically outcast, a rebel and a revolutionary too ...'[139]; he was born and raised in the East but was not an Oriental; to him the West was an alien place and at first he had great difficulty adjusting. To him the West was the 'other'. He spoke and wrote of Japanese architecture, lifestyle and Eastern philosophy; he was fond of quoting Laozi; a fondness he shared with Frank Lloyd Wright who frequently quoted the Daoist philosopher. To Coates the East is superior to the West. However, Coates' references to Japan were perhaps not always well received, as these lines from J M Richards' obituary to Coates seem to imply:

> A compactly built man with a Ronald Colman moustache and crispy waving hair, well dressed for all occasions with a way of switching on social charm as though it was a beam from an electric torch; a voluble conversationist [sic.] whose talk was spiced with Services terminology and *avant-garde* jargon; ingratiatingly attentive to women, with a line of talk about places he had been to like Japan, which other people hadn't ... (AR December 1958, p. 357.)[140]

The Wells Coates memorial fund

After Coates' death a memorial fund was set up in order to commemorate his life and work; proposals were put forward by the Architectural Association for an exhibition and book. Several meeting took place in the mid 1960s; the advisory committee on the Wells Coates Exhibition included: Maxwell Fry, Farouk Elgohary, Jack Pritchard, J M Richards, Trevor Dannat and John Gloag.[141] Edward Carter, former librarian at the RIBA and editor of the RIBAJ during the 1930s, was director of the AA at this time and expressed his doubts to Jane Drew, architect and wife of Maxwell Fry, about the appropriateness of a solo show for Coates: 'A history of MARS would give ample place to Wells who would stand nobly in the historical perspective – as a prime-mover of a great and successful movement, rather than as a tortured, lonely and not really successful chap on his own.'[142]

From Drew's reply it is apparent that Coates' ability is unquestioned by his contemporary architectural colleagues: '... As you know it was generally agreed that the exhibition on Wells would be one which would not deal with his private life but with his work, which in as much as it was well designed, was considered to be successful'.[143] One can begin to deduce the origins of Coates' lack of recognition and his slide from his

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[139] Pritchard Papers PP/23/1/26 letter from Coates to Pritchard 13/07/1930.
[140] In 1963 Richards' *An Architectural Journey in Japan* was published; an account of an 18 day visit to Japan in which there is no mention of Coates.
[141] Pritchard Papers PP/23/4/19 Friday 22 January 1965 – AA advisory committee meeting.
[142] Pritchard Papers PP/23/4/16 letter from Edward Carter to Jane Drew 15/06/1964.
[143] Pritchard Papers PP/23/4/17 letter from Jane Drew to Edward Carter 16/06/1964.

influential position within the British modern movement. Following the exhibition it was hoped to have a Wells Coates scholarship; unfortunately neither occurred.

Finally in 1978 a book on Coates was published, Sherban Cantacuzino's monograph, and in 1979, at the Musuem of Modern Art, Oxford, an exhibition on Coates was organised by students of the Oxford Polytechnic, as a two-term history project. The exhibition had been the idea of Laura Cohn, Coates' daughter, who lectured on the publishing course at the Polytechnic. The exhibition and catalogue, *Wells Coates: Architect and Designer 1895-1958* were financed from the memorial fund. The exhibition was expected to tour for two years; between May and August 1980 the exhibition visited the Polytechnic of the South Bank, Manchester University School of Architecture, Hull College of Higher Education and the Brighton Royal Pavilion Art Gallery (*Designer*, May 1980).

Summary

By examining Coates' participation in the British modernist groups of the 1930s, the Twentieth Century Group, Unit One and the MARS Group, it is possible to recognise his importance within these groups and to understand that he was a leading figure within the British modern movement during the 1930s. However, his significance in the development of British modernism in architecture, interior and industrial design has been somewhat diminished in the re-telling of the history of the British modern movement during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Perhaps the origin of Coates' demise can be attributed to the first of these re-tellings in the 1960s when Edward Carter considered him unsuccessful. Coates was included in the first edition of Herbert Read's 1934 *Art and Industry* (p. 104) but was omitted from subsequent editions of this important didactic text; thus his name no longer appeared beneath Serge Chermayeff in the index of 'designers' which, no doubt, helped to perpetuate the notion of his insignificance. Today, it seems Coates' reputation for being difficult and his ability to disintegrate groups are better remembered than his skill as an inaugurator of organisations; at other times the pasting years have blurred the memory as with Read's account of Unit One in his 1962 *Apollo* article 'A Nest of Gentle Artists'.

Taking into account his reputation for arrogance it would be easy to assume Coates put to good use his childhood experiences in Japan by exploiting an already established interest in Oriental aesthetics. But it could be argued Coates was not exploiting a trend but was in fact leading it. His Japanese inspiration for modernist design is discussed by Paul Nash in *Room and Book*; the DIA's journal *Design for To-day* regularly featured Coates' work and cited the traditional Japanese interior and *tokonoma* as an example of a precedent

for a modernist lifestyle; in Coates' contribution to the MARS Group's 1938 exhibition it is possible to identify a Japanese inspiration which is also discernible in the garden landscape exhibit. As Coates' ideas on Japan are taken up by others they are disseminated; this will be discussed in the next chapter when Japonisme during the inter-war period will be examined.

Chapter 6 – Japonisme during the inter-war years 1919-1939

Introduction

In chapter two we examined Victorian and Edwardian Japonisme; Rutherford Alcock and William Morris's belief that there was no architecture in Japan therefore, no fine art, counterbalanced by Josiah Conder and Christopher Dresser's promotion of Japanese architecture. In this final chapter we shall seek to identify a continuation of Japonisme between the two world wars, again focusing primarily on architecture, interior and landscape design. The political climate is of significance at this time; as discussed in chapter one, Anglo-Japanese relations before and during the First World War were cordial but deteriorated as the inter-war period progressed.

In the previous two chapters Wells Coates' suggestion that traditional Japanese domestic architecture should be an exemplar for British modern architecture has been examined; we have discovered how his Japanese inspiration was reported and commented on, which contributed to the dissemination of his ideas. In this chapter we shall search for others who also advocate Japan as a source of inspiration for the British modernist. We shall seek to discover texts and imagery depicting Japan, which were published during the inter-war years. This will be undertaken through a study of both contemporary texts on British/Western modern architecture, design and landscape and contemporary texts on Japanese/Eastern modern and traditional architecture, design and landscape.

The recurring themes which emerged from our study of Coates' work in chapter four will be investigated further in this chapter; in particular the *tokonoma,* and the relationship between indoor and outdoor space. Due to the nature of his commissions during the 1930s, Coates had little opportunity to develop his ideas in relation to the unity of the dwelling within its environment. However, in a review of his 1939 block of flats at 10 Palace Gate, Kensington, (AR, vol. 85 pp. 173-184) Christopher Tunnard is named as the garden architect for the site and we shall investigate Tunnard's concepts and inspiration for the modernist landscape.

In an attempt to establish prevailing aesthetic views on Japan after the First World War, and to contextualise Coates' work and his promotion of Japanese architecture and lifestyle as a British modernist ideal during the 1930s, we shall commence with a brief study of the potter, Bernard Leach (1887-1979).

The mystification of the Orient

It was believed in Britain that Leach had some natural affinity with the East (de Waal, 1997). In 1920 he brought Japanese enlightenment, at least in the realms of pottery,

back to British shores. However, what ideology was Leach bringing to Britain with his 'mystical' and 'childlike' ideas of Japan and the Japanese people? 'Children play with pebbles with a similar awakening of perception, and Orientals have lost touch with the fresh wonder of childhood less than we have' (Leach, 1965 p. 37). Were Leach's ideas of spirituality and mystification gleaned from his association with the *Mingei* (folk crafts) movement?

Leach was born in Hong Kong; his mother's death in childbirth caused him to spend the first three years of his life with his maternal missionary grandparents in Japan before returning to Hong Kong in 1890 when his father remarried. At the age of ten he was sent to England for his education. Leach was educated by Jesuits and although he rejected Catholicism he seems to have continued to search for a spirituality to fill the void left by the religion of his youth. He studied drawing at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks and etching under Frank Brangwyn at the London School of Art (Leach, 1978). In 1909 Leach returned to Japan as a teacher of etching; he associated with the *Mingei* movement, and completed an apprenticeship with Kenzan VI becoming a master potter in his own right and in so doing made Japanese pottery his own.

The concept that Leach had a natural connection with the East is confirmed by his life-long friend, creator of *Mingei* theory and founder of the *Mingei* movement, Sôetsu Yanagi, in his introduction to *A Potter's Book* 'Leach in Japan':

> But above all, the outstanding character of his work is the union of East and West. All his ideas, life and endeavour seem to have been focussed on this one point. English by blood, born in China, educated near London, who learned his art in Japan and now works in England, he feels this union to be the special task of this life. (Leach, 1965 p.xx)

Leach's *A Potter's Book*, which has been described as the most influential text on pottery in the post-war period, contains a dogmatic rendering on the aesthetics of Eastern pottery. The text was published in 1940; an inauspicious time for a book containing reference to Japan. Leach himself described it 'like hatching an egg in a thunderstorm' (Birks & Digby, 1990 p. 11).

The *Mingei* movement was initially concerned with beauty; the beauty of everyday objects made by simple craftsmen not only in Japan but also in the regions of Japan's expanding empire: Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria. Leach became involved with the movement in 1910; his relationship with Yanagi was of symbiotic nature. Leach was keen to learn about Eastern crafts and Yanagi found in Leach a source of knowledge on the British Arts and Crafts movement (Kikuchi, 1994 p. 258). Although the theories

expounded by this movement are considered, by some, to be entirely original, research by Yuko Kikuchi, Brian Moeran and Edmund de Waal demonstrate a different understanding.

Moeran in *Folk Art Potters of Japan: Beyond an Anthropology of Aesthetics* investigates Yanagi's interest in John Ruskin, William Morris and the British Arts and Crafts movement and the bearing these had on the development of the *Mingei* theory. As the title suggests this text is written with an anthropological bias: 'the anthropology of Japan has often been guilty of a social Orientalism which Yanagi practised in the aesthetic realm' (Moeran, 1997 p. 42). Nevertheless there is informative and well debated discussion on the *Mingei* movement. Moeran questions whether Japonisme should be separated from or seen as part of Orientalism. He argues that the West became interested in the East because of a desire to return to a pre-industrial society, this was 'out of opposition to, rather than a consensus with, established power structures' (Moeran, 1997, p. 224-5). He states that Orientalism is not fixed, it is constantly changing and developing. Japan is able to participate and influence and is, therefore, no longer the subject of Occidental dominated discourse. He questions whether the *Mingei* theory is a type of Western aesthetic Orientalism or does it 'derive from an independent Japanese aesthetic tradition?' (Moeran, 1997, p. 225-6).

Moeran's proposal is developed by Kikuchi in her text *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (2004) she argues that Yanagi used Western ideas of Orientalism to examine and discuss the folk-crafts with which the movement chose to illustrate their ideals of national cultural achievement. The text is divided in four parts: Orientalism: the foundation of *Mingei* theory, Appropriation of Orientalism, 'Oriental Orientalism' and Reverse Orientalism: the development of *Mingei* theory into national and international modernism. Was Leach returning to Britain an ideology, which had been developed through an interpretation using Western Orientalist methods? Kikuchi believes he was:

> Orientalism also affected how *Mingei* theory was evaluated. Although *Mingei* theory is clearly a Modernist theory, it was deemed, particularly in the Occident, to be an 'authentic and traditional' Oriental theory. This was partly due to Yanagi himself who created the impression of Orientalness by using Buddhist rhetoric. In Britain this belief was reinforced through the 'Oriental aesthetic' polemicized by Bernard Leach, father of 'studio pottery'. (Kikuchi, 1997 p. 344)

'Oriental Orientalism' does not correlate well with Said's notion of Occidental domination of the Orient; here we have a Western practice used in the East to interpret other Eastern cultures and subsequently given back to the West as a purely Eastern ideology. 'Orientalism is not a rigid one-way phenomenon ... It is an infectious

phenomenon open to appropriation by 'others', at least in the case of modern Japan.' (Kikuchi, 1997, p. 343)

De Waal (1997), in his monograph, suggests that Leach's Orientalism was a product of his time; educated within the echoes of Victorian Japonisme his view of Japan particularly appealed to Yanagi. Between them they fused ideas of East and West and this ideology of the East Leach brought to Britain in 1920 where it became a given truth. De Waal quotes George Wingfield Digby's comments on studio pottery in 1952: 'As is well known, in general terms the East stands for the importance of the inner life over the external, psychological insight over material forms, the inspiration and generative forces of the artist over the technical triumphs of execution' (Wingfield Digby, 1952 pp. 25-6).

Kikuchi identifies Leach's significance in the formation of *Mingei* theory and his attraction to the primitive art of Japan's colonies (2004, pp. 14-15).

Bernard Leach and Wells Coates – a comparison

Wells Coates does not appear to share Leach's interest in 'romantic primitivism' (Kikuchi, 2004 p. 14). Although initially their childhoods are similar, but Coates remained with his missionary parents and was educated in Japan; he seemed to have been less exposed to Western views of the East unlike Leach who was enchanted by Lafcadio Hearn's stories of Japan. In his writing, Coates does not refer to the Japanese as 'childlike' nor does he attempt to mystify the East although he was fond of using Buddhist and Confucianist rhetoric and liked to think of himself as mystical (Cantacuzino, 1978 p. 11). As discussed in chapter four, his father, the Reverend Dr. Harper Coates, spent many years collaborating in the translation of Buddhist texts thus attempting to de-mystify and make the religion more accessible to the West. Perhaps it was this parental approach that influenced Coates' more pragmatic view of Japan. By the 1920s Coates would have been aware of modernist theories, including primitivism. However, he considered Japan to be more advanced than the West in many aspects of design and living; an exemplar for a free modern life style and an inspiration for modern architecture. Coates' enthusiasm for Japanese design was as an ideal for a clutter free modernist life style; he was not seeking an example of a pre-Renaissance idyll.

A comparison between two interiors, a 1934 sitting room designed by Leach (fig. 122) and a living room, by Coates (fig. 123) executed a year earlier in 1933, illustrates this point. Although designed for different audiences, Leach's hybrid sitting room, shown at an exhibition of contemporary Japanese folk crafts appears rustic and cluttered, whereas Coates' interior is streamlined and modern. Both display elements of the traditional Japanese domestic interior, including built-in furniture, sliding doors and reference to the

tokonoma. Leach's *tokonoma* contained a Japanese-style dining table (Kikuchi, 2004 p. 68) and Coates creates the sense of a *tokonoma* by the placing of flowers and object on a built-in cupboard before a window (fig. 124). Leach has emphasised the craft element of naturally shaped wood surrounding the *tokonoma* which is found in the *chashitsu* (tea ceremony house); Coates has taken the refined simplicity of the *shôji* as a precedent for dividing living space; both rooms are inspired by Japan but the results are quite different. Leach's sitting room is a strange concoction of English cottage style stripped bare combined with *chashitsu* features, whereas Coates has taken elements from Japanese architecture, but he has interpreted them to create a modern room suitable for the new modern lifestyle.

Despite moving in similar circles, evidence suggesting Coates and Leach met has yet to be discovered. However, they would have been aware of each other's work. In *Beyond East and West* (1978) Leach recalls an evening spent at Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester's flat in Bloomsbury during the mid-1930s after Laughton purchased 'many of my best pieces' (1978 p. 223) from an exhibition at the Little Gallery:

> Laughton had an intuitive appreciation of beauty; he recognized the incomparable quality of Hamada's work, and purchased many pieces. He was making a Rembrandt film, and the room was filled with large photos of details of that great artist's paintings. What a depth of study! He told me that of all his work, Lincoln's Gettysburg speech from the film *Ruggles of Red Gap* was his favourite. How well they foiled each other, he and his wife; how delightfully and spontaneously they proceeded to act and play the fool round a sofa in that room! I showed them the sixteen-millimetre films I had taken in Japan ... (Leach, 1978 p. 223-224)

Frustratingly, Leach does not describe the flat in detail, as this would have been the flat Coates converted in 1931 (fig. 74). In the 1920s Coates and Laughton were members of the relatively left-wing '1917 Club' in Gerrard Street (Cohn, 1999) and their friendship continued during the 1930s; in 1938 Coates wrote to Walter Gropius from Laughton's country home in Surrey.[144] Laughton was fond of all things Japanese, from Hokusai prints to the tea-cermony (Callow, 1990).

It is probable Coates attended the 'Room and Book' exhibition held in April of 1932 at the Zwemmer Gallery; exhibitors included Bernard Leach, Serge Chermayeff and David Pleydell-Bouverie, who became Coates' partner later that year. The following year, at the Zwemmer Gallery, Coates and Pleydell-Bouverie designed the 'Artists of To-day'

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[144] WCA box 07-E. Correspondence with friends, colleagues, etc. 1929-38; letter dated 18/04/1938.

exhibition in which Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie, who in 1924 had joined Leach's St. Ives Pottery as a student, showed four pieces of stoneware.

Another possible meeting place for Coates and Leach could have been Dartington Hall School where, from 1932, Leach taught and had a pottery, and where Coates sent his daughter in September 1937 (Cohn, 1999) until the outbreak of the Second World War. As Coates travelled to Devon to see his daughter at weekends while she was attending Dartington Hall there could have been opportunities for a meeting with Leach.

Although it appears Leach's Eastern ideology was accepted by many potters in Britain during the inter-war years, the significance of Leach's Eastern theories outside the pottery domain, particularly in relation to the British modern architectural movement is considered to be less significant.[145] However, landscape architect, Christopher Tunnard (1910-1979) acknowledges Leach for 'information concerning Japanese art' in *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* and he seems to have assimilated some of Leach's views as he states: 'The phenomenon of Japanese art most significant to modern designers should be the feeling for a spiritual quality in inanimate objects...' (Tunnard, 1938 p. 89); his understanding of a Japanese aesthetic would appear to be closer to the views of Leach or Jiro Harada, than to those of Coates, when he states:

> ... it may be said that a sense of personal identification with Nature and with the flow of the creative forces of the universe is expressive of the beliefs of some of our modern philosophers, whose individual and personal mysticism would seem to spring from the same root ... the Western man has imagined himself and Nature as being in antithesis ... the truth which the Orient now reveals to him is that his identity is not separate from Nature ... until the European has learned to cultivate the empathic attitude and has discovered that apart from the symbolism of the East and behind it is an aesthetic antithetical and complementary to his symmetrical classic conception of composition, the universality of art can never become an accomplished fact. (Tunnard, 1938 pp. 89-90)

'Being almost one with nature'[146]

As we have seen in chapter three, the relationship of the garden and landscape to architecture was an important consideration in modernist architectural ideals. 'Trees and vines are a further decoration for modern architecture. Natural surroundings are at once a contrast and a back-ground emphasizing the artificial values created by architects' wrote Hitchcock and Johnson in 1932 (1995 p. 88); the MARS Group exhibition of 1938 advocated the house and garden should exist as one (*New Architecture*, 1938).

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[145] In conversation with Edmund de Waal 25/01/05.
[146] Tunnard, 1938 p. 90.

Christopher Tunnard

We noted in chapter five Tunnard was a member of the MARS Group and contributed to the 'New Architecture' exhibition. Born in Canada, he came to England in 1929 and studied horticulture, becoming an associate of the newly formed Institute of Landscape Architects;[147] he was employed for three years by garden architect, Percy Cane. Tunnard worked with all of the 'Three Musketeers' designers of the Broadcasting House interiors. We have already discovered in chapter four that Tunnard was the garden architect for the 1939 10 Palace Gate flats designed by Coates (fig. 125); in 1938 he worked with Serge Chermayeff on the landscaping of the gardens for Chermayeff's own home at Bentley Wood, Sussex (fig. 126); in 1935-6 he was the landscape architect for St Ann's Hill, Chertsey, Surrey, the house his partner, Gerald Schlesinger, commissioned Raymond McGrath to design (fig. 127). All three projects were featured at length in *The Architecture Review.*[148] By studying the photographs in figs. 126 & 127 one is struck by two similarities: the framing of vistas and the opening up of the interior space to the exterior. There is also a sense of framing the view at Coates' flats at 10 Palace Gate (fig. 125) where the large rectangular multi-paned reception windows look out onto the planted areas (fig. 101). The concept of framing was described by Coates, in his 1931 article 'Inspiration from Japan'. Although in this text Coates makes no mention of the removal of *shôji* to open the house to the garden, we have seen in his own work he demonstrates the desire to blur the interface between indoor and outdoor space.

Gardens in the Modern Landscape

It is perhaps not surprising to find, in *Gardens in the Modern Landscape,* Tunnard citing the Japanese house as an example for British modern architectural and landscape design, as we have witnessed his association with Coates both in the MARS Group and at 10 Palace Gate. Tunnard's acquaintance with McGrath cannot be discounted as further simulating his interest in the East. In the section entitled 'The Oriental Aesthetic'[149] Tunnard states:

> Japan has for long had a genius for building. The typical Japanese house

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[147] The Institute of Landscape Architects (ILA) was founded in early 1930 to promote the study and practice of landscape architecture (RIBAJ, vol. 37 p. 270).

[148] 10 Palace Gate AR 1939, vol. 85 173-184; Bentley Wood AR 1939, vol. 85 63-78; St Ann's Hill AR 1937, vol. 82 117-122.

[149] In the 2nd edition of *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* published in 1948, in the chapter 'Towards a New Technique' although the text is mainly unchanged the heading 'Section III – The Oriental Aesthetic' has been omitted. Perhaps immediately after the Second World War it was considered unwise to emphasise Japan as an inspirational source.

> is an example of great skill in the use of native materials, the management of space and the distribution of rooms. It differs from, say, the pre-war English house in being almost one with Nature. In warm weather the house becomes part of the garden, the sliding paper screens, which keep out the cold blasts and snow of winter, being easily removable so that the whole side of the room may be thrown open to let in the cool summer winds. Since the advent of steel frame construction ... it has been possible to build houses in this way ... but it has not been thought necessary to do so in England until the present time, when with the advent of the modern house, experiments in this direction are being carried out. The sliding-folding window may help to break down the rigid barrier between the house and garden ... (Tunnard, 1938 pp. 90-91)

Tunnard lists Josiah Conder's *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893) in his bibliography but his description of the Japanese house is reminiscent of Conder's explanation given in a paper 'Domestic Architecture in Japan' read at the RIBA in 1887 in which Conder states: '... the walls and paper slides offering no resistance to the penetration of heat in the summer, the only idea of coolness is that of throwing the whole house open to the breezes ...' (RIBA transactions, 1886/7 pp. 104-105). McGrath's *Twentieth Century Houses* (1934) is also listed in the bibliography and Tunnard's debt to McGrath's text is noticeable; of the relationship between house and garden McGrath writes: 'The placing of the house in its garden and in the countryside is an art to which in the past special attention was given chiefly in England and Japan' (1934 p. 43). Whilst it is apparent Tunnard gleaned much from McGrath, a sense of Coates' ideas is also apparent. His employer, Percy Cane, also should be considered as a Japanese inspirational source, as we shall discover later in this chapter.

Perhaps the more fascinating element of this section of the book is Tunnard's choice of illustrations, not a series of photographs depicting traditional Japanese architecture but images of modern Japanese homes and gardens; the first (fig. 128) is taken from *The Studio*'s correspondent in Japan, Jiro Harada's *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* 'House of Mr. Noda, Kyoto' (1936 p. 93) and from the choice of this photograph we may deduce Tunnard was familiar with Harada's work. Three photographs are taken from *Twentieth Century Houses* (fig. 129); Tunnard's caption for the photographs states:

> Japanese principles of garden design have had their influence on the new architecture of the West in which interest is shown in the architectural utilization of plant life ... Japan itself shows examples of a modern equivalent of her own type of garden ... Antonin Raymond's house in Tokio[sic.], which continues the tradition of the feudal interior garden ... gardens views of a modern Japanese house by Sutemi Horiguti [sic.] ... (p. 90)

It is particularly unusual to see modern Japanese architecture used to illustrate examples of modernist ideals from Japan, more commonly the traditional house and garden are shown. There is a discrepancy with the third photograph as McGrath correctly credits Mamoru Yamada for this interior (fig. 130). Mention is made in Tunnard's 'acknowledgements' to McGrath but the illustrations, which he uses from *Twentieth Century Houses* are not identified. McGrath's interest in modern Japanese architecture was noted in chapter five and will be discussed further in this chapter under 'British texts on modern architecture and design'.

On examining Tunnard's inspirational sources for the modern landscape we find he offers: functionalism, the Orient and modern art. To him the only Oriental country to study is Japan: 'It is to the gardens of Kyoto that we must turn, some of them centuries old, but all possessed of a secret which only intimacy with Nature can reveal' (p. 88). Tunnard believes Western garden designers have not really understood Japanese landscape design despite the vast quantity of information on things Japanese reaching the West. He cites Whistler as a rare example of a painter who understood the Japanese print. In architecture he credits Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier as acknowledging 'a debt to the native building, in which a remarkable unity exists between the nature of architecture and its materials' (p. 88).

Asymmetry as a technique acquired from the East is discussed:

> The next step, taking us still further from symmetry, and into a new field of conscious exploration, reveals the existence of a form of balance ... It is essentially a relative quality depending on the interplay of background and foreground, height and depth, motion and rest, but as such it can be reduced to a science ... (p. 84)

Tunnard gives as one example of the natural use of this asymmetry by 'primitive peoples' (p. 84), of the placement of a flower behind the ear thus altering the symmetry of the human face. He believes framing is necessary in order to maintain this balance in gardens and landscape and gives a diagram of a Japanese garden from the Edo period as an example where fences define limits and assist balance (fig. 131). Tunnard continues:

> The use of asymmetrical principles is being stressed for a good reason. We are searching for a new technique for the contemporary garden, for a garden design to be a complement of contemporary architecture, which embodies to a large extent the principle of asymmetrical balance. (p. 85)

Tunnard's interest in Japanese notions of asymmetry and balance is not new; these were discussed by John Leighton in 1863[150] and commented on by Sir Rutherford Alcock in *Art and Art Industries in Japan* when he described how balance was achieved by the avoidance of equal parts (1878 pp. 22-23).

In addition to asymmetrical design, simple geometric shapes are advocated and the square and chequerboard are illustrated. However if we compare Tunnard's illustrations with photographs of the gardens at Tôfukuji, Kyoto (fig. 132), particularly of the chequerboard pattern *inchimatsu moyô*, we find similarities. We have discovered Tunnard's familiarity with Harada's *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* (1936); it is therefore probable he would have also known of Harada's *Gardens in Japan* (1928) and the photograph of the chequerboard patterned front court of Kaisandô, Tôfukuji. In the British modern garden the simplicity of the square paving stone complements the cuboidal nature of the architecture, and in the Japanese garden, creates a contrast with the natural shapes of the planting (fig. 133).

Tunnard's *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* was serialised, prior to publication, in *The Architectural Review* (vol. 82) from the latter half of 1937. The book was reviewed by *The Studio* in 1939; the reviewer [G.D.] considers the writing 'clever and analytical' (vol. 117 p. 184) but was not convinced by the argument. The reviewer does not mention Tunnard's references to Japan which is surprising when one considers the frequency with which all things Japanese were featured by *The Studio*; perhaps the illustrations of modern Japanese houses and gardens were not of a Japan *The Studio* wished to promote.

At the time of publication both Tunnard and the book were considered to be of some significance; from January 1939 he continued to contribute a regular feature to *The Architectural Review* entitled 'Garden and Landscape'. He worked on garden layout and planting with the architect Elizabeth Denby on 'The All-Europe House' project in 1939 (RIBAJ, vol. 46 pp. 813-819). However, until recently in Britain, *Gardens in the Modern Landscape* and Tunnard had all but been forgotten; a fate anticipated by the RIBAJ reviewer, W A Eden, who, in March 1939, described the text as 'a period piece' (RIBAJ, vol. 46 p. 464). In general gardening terms, the text was not rated highly; Miles Hadfield, founder of the Garden History Society and author of *A History of British Gardening* considers Tunnard's text deserving of some consideration but thought that by separating garden design from horticulture Tunnard 'failed to comprehend the true nature of gardening'; Hadfield continues: 'It ... delves into the past without much understanding,

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[150] Leighton also draws attention to the Japanese symmetry, 'On Japanese Art' *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 24 July 1863, pp. 596-599.

while it misses the present and points to a future that does not arrive' (1985 p. 424). This in itself is a rare subsequent review of Tunnard's text.

At the onset of World War Two Tunnard emigrated to America where today his work is better known; he taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design at the invitation of Walter Gropius and later at Yale.

Texts on Japanese Gardens

Although Hadfield does not comment on Tunnard's references to Japan, he does discuss earlier Japanese inspiration on British gardening. However, it is surprising he cites Josiah Conder's *The Theory of Japanese Flower Arrangements* but fails to mention *Landscape Gardening in Japan.* Of flower arranging Hadfield states: 'From Japan we move naturally to that fashion peculiar to the twentieth century: the decorative use of cut flowers in water' (p. 423) and we will return to this subject later in this section, but first we shall consider some texts on Japanese gardens, published primarily by *The Studio,* during the inter-war period.

Gardens of Japan

We observed the likelihood of Tunnard's knowledge of Harada's *Gardens of Japan,* in which Harada outlines the importance of the garden in Japan, the unity of the dwelling within its environment and the blurring of internal and external space:

> Our house to live in is not complete without its proper surrounding – without a garden. From the very nature of architecture, it requires a garden for a setting to be looked upon from the rooms, the entire length of which may be thrown open to the outside view, or to have a swaying foliage silhouetted on its paper sliding screens. (1928 p. 1)

Prior to *The Studio*'s publication of the book in 1928 Harada wrote a number of articles for the journal on Japanese gardens which included: in 1922 'The Japanese Garden' (vol. 84 pp. 264-270) followed in 1927 by 'Marquis Saigo's Garden' (vol. 93 pp. 260-261), 'The Garden of Marquis Asano's Home in Tokyo' (vol. 93 pp. 413-414), and in 1928 'Viscount Shibuzawa's Garden' (vol. 95 pp. 184-187). These texts, and a further 1930 article 'Gardens of Ninnaji, Kyoto' (vol. 99 pp. 144-145), are purely illustrated descriptions of gardens (fig. 134) in which Harada makes no suggestion that the Japanese garden should be an inspirational source for Western gardens. *Gardens of Japan* also gives no precise directive except to offer the Japanese garden 'in view of the modern interest in gardens which are capable of adaptation to the small scale, and as a companion volume to the highly successful work already published, "Modern Gardens, British and

Foreign"' (1928, p. viii). Design ideas for the smaller garden were needed as the trend in suburban development continued to increase during the inter-war period.

Modern Gardens, British and Foreign

The text, written by garden architect and employer of Tunnard, Percy Cane, and edited by C Geoffrey Holme and Shirley B Wainwright, was a 1926-27 special winter number of *The Studio.* This text was considered by *The Studio* to address the subject: 'of extreme interest and attraction, namely the development of the modern garden' (vol. 92 p. 315). Cane appears well versed in the Japanese garden; earlier in the year he wrote: '... the skill of the Japanese in creating wonderfully-balanced effects – often in the most unpromising places ...' (vol. 92 p. 107). However, the three page text on Japan lacks Harada's knowledgeable and authoritative style, and a sense of an earlier Victorian Japonisme can be detected in the prose: 'One naturally associates a Japanese garden with almond blossom and flower-laden plum and cherry trees, with wistaria and acacias and Japanese Maples, with iris and much colour generally ...' (1926-7 p. 24); 'beautiful' and 'charming' are used to describe garden features. Although reference is made to the garden being in harmony with the dwelling, there is no mention of the blurring of indoor and outdoor space. As we have already seen the Japanese garden was of interest because it could be adapted to suit the smaller plot and the notion of borrowed landscape (*shakkei)* is described:

> Proportion is the root of all successful design, and this is the case to an even greater degree with landscape than with formal gardens. It is partly owing to this, and to the fact that their garden scenery is so skilfully related to the distant landscape, that the small Japanese garden appears so much larger than it really is. (1926-7 p. 23)

It is also suggested that because of its comparative smallness the Japanese garden has a greater feeling of maturity; an ideal quality for a new garden. Ten photographs illustrate the text; three of which are 'under snow' (fig. 135). However, none of the gardens illustrated appear to be particularly small. Photographs of Japanese gardens which appeared in *The Studio Year-book of Decorative Art* for the years 1924, 1925 and 1926 better demonstrate the possibilities for the smaller garden (fig. 136).

The Japanese garden was not liked by all; the writer, Peter Quennell, travelled to Tokyo in 1930 to take up a university teaching post, and it is apparent he did not share *The Studio's* enthusiasm. His views of the trees and shrubs in his own Japanese garden are recorded in his 1932 text *A Superficial Journey through Tokyo and Peking*:

> They banked up in a straggling line along the fence, queer evergreens with five-fingered glossy leaves which throve prodigiously yet always look dishevelled ... More unstable with every inch they gain in height, the weak limbs crack hideously beneath the snow or sag and nod despairingly to the ground. Hapless and disconsolate on stormy days, they are oppressive and close-smelling in the warm weather, when they assume a pose of stringy self-importance and collect dust in the sprawling shadow around their feet. (Quennell, 1980 p. 169)

Nevertheless, British interest in the Japanese garden remained prevalent, as a Liberty's advertisement for Japanese stone lanterns in the 1936 year-book testifies (fig. 137).

The Lesson of Japanese Architecture

Also in 1936 *The Studio* published Harada's *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* in which he again explains the relationship between the Japanese dwelling and the landscape:

> The close relation existing between the house and the garden should not be overlooked when considering Japanese dwelling-houses. For many centuries the Japanese house was developed as a part of the garden whenever the premises were large enough. No house is considered complete without a garden of some sort, and the garden is almost an integral part of the house. (1936, p. 55)

However, this is no longer a purely descriptive text as Harada now suggests the Japanese house and garden as an example to the West: 'In simplicity and in harmony, deliberately contrived between the structure and its surroundings, so that it becomes a part of the landscape, the exterior of the Japanese house offers many suggestions to the West' (1936, p. 57). We discovered in chapter one that Harada was an employee of the Japanese Government and this fact we need to remember when we return to this text later in the chapter.

A Glimpse of Japanese Ideals

Harada's 'Rocks in a Japanese Garden' was published in *The Studio Gardening Annual* for 1938. An advertisement in the journal for March 1938 stated: 'This highly interesting article has been specially written for us by Professor Jiro Harada, of the Tokyo University' (vol. 115 inside cover). However, it is possible that this article was adapted from 'Japanese Gardens' a lecture given by Harada at Oregon State Agricultural College, and subsequently published in *A Glimpse of Japanese Ideals.* This third book by Harada was published in 1937 but, unlike the other two texts this collection of lectures on Japanese

art and culture, given during 1935 and 1936 whilst undertaking a visiting lectureship in America at the University of Oregon, was published in Japan by Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (The Society for International Cultural Relations).

As an indication to the relevance of the Japanese garden it is fascinating to note that in 1937 L E Kuck's *One hundred Kyoto gardens* was added to the RIBA library ('Accessions to the library' RIBAJ, vol. 44) and in 1935 a reprint of Josiah Conder's *The theory of Japanese flower arrangements*[151] was also included (RIBAJ, vol. 43).

Ikebana

The art of flower arranging was a subject of some significance during the inter-war period. The actor and Japan enthusiast, Charles Laughton, for whom Wells Coates designed the interior at 34 Gordon Square, was a skilled flower arranger; a practice he would attribute to his wife, Elsa Lanchester, to avoid embarrassment (Callow, 1990).[152] *The Studio* published several articles and reviewed books on primarily *ikebana* (Japanese flower arranging), but some Western flower arranging was included particularly if it displayed Japanese tendencies; the work of floral artist, Elaine Goddard, featured in 1939, is admired for its simplicity which 'owes something to the traditional art of Japanese flower arrangement' (vol. 118 p. 25).

The work of Professor J Suzuki was featured in August 1928 (fig. 138) and one month later a German example was shown and praised for its simplicity (fig. 139). In October Suzuki described the work of three of his pupils from the Japan Society's flower arranging class with a suggestion for Western usage (fig. 140) (vol. 96). Harada, in 1929, reviewed the work of a tea and flower master from Nagoya, Sôken Miyazaki, and explained the role of *ikebana* within the *tokonoma*:

> *Ikebana* occupies an important position in the *tokonoma* (a recess in the wall where the objects of art are placed to decorate the room). But, according to custom in Nippon, *ikebana* is subordinated to the painting, which forms the central feature of decoration. The flowers should be an accompaniment to the painting and harmonious with other ornaments that may be placed in the *tokonoma*. (*The Studio* 1929, vol. 98 p. 908).

Harada had written previously on the use of vases and baskets for flowers, explaining that, although flower arranging was an ancient art, it was still much practised in the decoration

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[151] Paper first read before the Asiatic Society of Japan in 1889.

[152] Hamada's and Leach's pots were perhaps acquired for flower arranging purposes. The well known flower arranger Constance Spry was a good friend of Laughton. (Callow, 1990).

of Japanese homes; photographs from recent exhibitions of *hana-kago* (bamboo baskets for flowers) illustrate the texts (fig. 141) (vol. 86 p. 346 & vol. 88 p. 176).

Harada also reviewed *Japanese Art of Flower Arrangement* (Nihon Kadô Bitjutsu Zenshû), edited by Mirei Shigemori. In this text Harada points out the variety of receptacles used for flowers and the positioning:

> ... and again to observe the consideration given in the choice and composition of flowers according to whether the vessel is to be placed on the floor of the *tokonoma* or to be suspended from the ceiling, or hung on the post or wall of the *tokonoma*, or to be placed on the table to be admired from all round as the modern mode of life has come to require. (*The Studio*, vol. 102 p. 142)

The Art of Japanese Flower Arrangement (Ikebana) by Alfred Koen and *The Art of Flower Arrangement in Japan* by A L Sadler, Professor of Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney and Professor of Japanese at the Royal Military College of Australia, were also reviewed but by an anonymous reviewer. The first is a guide to the principles of *ikebana*, and the second a history of the art; both are recommended as containing examples to be followed in the West: 'In the study of this art will be found certain universal laws which are essential to the serious student of display whether it be flowers or the arrangement of a shop window' and 'If you would wish really to understand flowers and the compliment that can be paid to them by arranging them properly, a study of this book ... is strongly recommended' (1934, vol. 108, p. 106). No mention is made of the role of *ikebana* within the *tokonoma*.

The *tokonoma*

Wells Coates describes the *tokonoma* in his 1931 article 'Inspiration from Japan':

> the formal alcove, where, and where alone, a single painting scroll or poetry scroll is placed, and, at either side, the shelves, which usually bear one bronze or other *objet*, or a vase of very carefully arranged flowers or branches of flowering trees, with cupboards for the paintings, *objets*, etc., not actually displayed. (AJ 1931, vol. 74, p. 586).

As we have seen in chapter one, Coates was not the first to describe this feature of the traditional Japanese room; Josiah Conder appears to be the first in 1878 (RIBA transactions 1877-78, pp. 179-192). We shall now seek to discover how the *tokonoma* was discussed during the inter-war period.

A Japanese view of the *tokonoma*

'Decorations in the Tokonoma', an article by Jiro Harada was published by *The Studio* in September 1923, in which a detailed description is given of the physical

dimensions, the decoration, the role and purpose of the *tokonoma*; the text is generously illustrated with three pages of photographs demonstrating various ways of decorating this recess (fig. 142). Described as: 'The triumph of the traditional style of home architecture in Nippon' (vol. 86 p. 141) much emphasis is placed on the simplicity of the decoration:

> Instead of presenting striking effects to the eye, the decoration should impart serene tranquillity, full of spiritual peace. Instead of suggesting luxurious profusion, it should express noble simplicity and a quiet beauty that reveals itself by gradual appreciation. This is the principle involved in decorating a Nippon home. (*The Studio* 1923, vol. 86 p. 141)

Harada tells us the *kakemono* or hanging scroll provides the central theme and all other objects placed in the *tokonoma* should be selected to enhance this principal artwork. When the *kakemono* is changed, according to the season or in preparation for a visitor, the scroll is rolled and put away. As we have already noted in Harada's articles on *ikebana*, flowers play an important role in this decorative arrangement and should be chosen with care not to clash or copy the subject matter of the *kakemono*; Harada gives an example of a perfect combination:

> In order to forget the intense heat of summer, the writer now has in his *tokonoma* before him in the study a *kakemono* of a dashing waterfall. On the floor of the *tokonoma*, slightly to the left, there are some water-lilies put at the corner of a large open bronze basin filled to the brim with water. On the other side of the *tokonoma* there is a rock shaped like a grand old mountain with a suggestion of the glow of dawn in its colour. (*The Studio* 1923, vol. 86 p. 141)

Harada advises on the selection of objects, counselling against symmetry by suggesting creating balance by offsetting objects of different height, size, shape and colour; he concludes this somewhat jingoistic text by stating:

> The scheme of decoration in Nippon homes, as well as gardens and other branches of art, has for centuries been influenced by *cha-no-yu*. It has taught the people to look for charm in the commonplace, beauty under the surface, and to revel in fragrant suggestions of the higher things of life. These characterstics are manifested in the decoration in the *tokonoma*. (*The Studio* 1923, vol. 86 p. 142)

Harada's text on the *tokonoma* would have done much to inspire the British reader of 1923 with modernist leanings; his emphasis on simplicity, lack of clutter and serenity fulfils the modernist concerns over unnecessary ornamentation. Harada portrays a room of calm aesthetic restraint, where the few objects that are displayed have been chosen with the utmost care to reflect either the season or to please a guest.

A Western view of the *tokonoma*

The *tokonoma* is also described in 'Japanese Domestic Interiors', a chapter in the 1930 edition of Ralph Adams Cram's 1905 *Impressions of Japanese Architecture and the Allied Arts*:

> One picture only is exposed in each room, and this is changed daily. Is the master going a-fishing? Then some appropriate *kakimono*[sic.] is hung in its place. Is it cherry time, or the time of chrysanthemums, or peonies, or any other wonderful flowers of Japan? Then this feeling is echoed in the *kakimono*[sic.] and in the flowers that stand in front. The whole basis of artistic combination may be gained in a study of Japanese *tokonoma* ... (AR 1900, vol. 7 p. 12)

This non-native view of the *tokomona* appears superficial when compared to Harada's account and betrays the Japonisme of the era in which it was written; the main body of the 1930 edition of Cram's text remains unaltered from the 1905 edition, except for minor revisions, and the section on the *tokomona* is as it appeared in *The Architectural Review* of 1900. Cram thought it best to leave the text in its original state as he had not visited Japan during the intervening years, although less ornate illustrations have been selected, perhaps to reflect the simpler modern taste (fig. 143). However, as we discovered in chapter five, this text was considered to be a recent publication of some significance by Paul Nash who commented on it in *Room and Book* (1932 pp. 46-47).

Other texts that mention the *tokonoma* during the inter-war years are Jiro Harada's 1936 *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture*, which contains a substantial paragraph on the construction of the *tokonoma* in 'The Japanese House Today' (p. 54) and several photographs of this alcove are included in the illustrations (fig. 144). Reference to the *tokonoma* is found in Bruno Taut's two texts written in Japan during his three year stay from 1933 to 1936. Described simply as a place which 'provides an admirable background for the hanging scroll, the flower vase and the incense-burner ...' in *Houses and People of Japan* (Taut, 1938 p. 32), it is surprising to find Taut advocating its imitation in *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture*: 'The *tokonoma*, as a place fixed for things of culture, art and the spirit, represents a unique creation of Japan and a solution of absolute validity which deserves to be imitated in changed form in each time and in each country' (Taut, 1936 p. 11). We will return to these texts later in the chapter but should note at this stage Taut was in the employ of the Japanese Government.[153]

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[153] During his stay in Japan Taut was employed as an advisor to the Industrial Arts Research Institute (IARI, Kôgei Shidôsho) (Kikuchi, 2004 p. 95). The French designer and associate of Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, held the same position in 1940-2.

British modern ideals inspired by the *tokonoma*

The British modernist appears to have been inspired in a number of ways by the Japanese *tokonoma*. The notion of showing only a single image, which should be changed according to circumstance, seems to have captured the imagination of several writers and critics.

'Holidays for Pictures'

In the previous chapter we noted John Betjeman's recommendation of hanging pictures singularly and although there was no mention of Japan in the text, the accompanying illustrations left little doubt that this method had been inspired by the *tokonoma* (fig. 116), and a British example of this practice was depicted by a photograph of a Wells Coates interior (fig. 117).

The idea of showing a single image is advocated in 'Holidays for Pictures' an article by the editor of *The Studio,* C Geoffrey Holme, published in September 1934 (fig. 145). As the title suggests, all pictures, barring one per room, should be rested, put away, to prevent boredom by overexposure. Holme believes that in Britain, as living accommodation becomes smaller, it would be advisable to adopt the Japanese approach to compact living, especially in relation to displaying pictures in the home.

> The average Japanese room, though admittedly constructed with walls that slide and even pack away in a case, is four-sided, and is in this respect similar to rooms in Europe. The sun in Japan, on its daily path, behaves in a very similar manner ... for it illuminates, in turn, walls of a western, southern and eastern aspect and produces a circumstance that, according to the time of day, one wall may be more suitably lit for picture viewing purposes than another. It is this fact that induces the lover of art to select the most suitable position to construct, perhaps, the most permanent part of his home – the picture recess (tokonoma) where the work of art is displayed with the assurance that it will be seen to the best advantage during that period of the day when the room is to be used. (*The Studio* 1934, vol. 108, p. 140)

As would be expected, Holme, as editor of *The Studio,* is well versed in things Japanese, and is able to give a lucid explanation of the principles of the *tokonoma* (fig. 146) and the changing of the *kakemono*:

> In the more cultured circles in Japan, at any rate, it has long been recognised that a work of art will work for you just as long as the life of flowers in a bowl of water. After that it requires a rest and may be put to bed in its covering of silk or cotton and put away in its box till the following year, when in[sic.] emerges again as fresh as a daisy.' (*The Studio* 1934, vol. 108 p. 140)

Holme considers this method of image display desirable and concludes the text by giving practical advice on the storage of artwork (fig. 147).

Betjeman and Holme were not alone in recommending the Japanese way of showing images; broadcaster, writer and critic, Anthony Bertram suggested: 'A store of pictures from which one can be brought out at a time, on the Japanese principle, is politer to the painters and to our sensibilities than to cover the wall with pictures' (1935, p. 109). It is fascinating to discover that this recommendation was put into practice by friends and clients of Wells Coates: the actress and wife of Charles Laughton, Elsa Lanchester, recalls how at their Gordon Square flat they would hang a picture for only a few months before putting it away and replacing it with another (Callow, 1990).

By the 1930s the earlier criticisms of Japan having no art particularly because of the mode of display have been turned around so that the Japanese method of showing images is considered superior and is not only recommended for adoption in Britain but is also practised. However this concept of showing artwork was taken further by one architect in 1939.

Imitating the *tokonoma*

Born in Budapest, Ernö Goldfinger (1902-1987) moved to England in 1934 having studied architecture in Paris under Auguste Perret during the 1920s; he associated with and was inspired by Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos. In his capacity as secretary of the French branch of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) Goldfinger attended the CIAM IV congress in the summer of 1934 where he and Coates first met and became friends (Warburton, 2004). Goldfinger was a member of the MARS Group and designed a 'Mother and Child' section for the 1938 'New Architecture' exhibition (Dean, 1983).[154] In 1936 Goldfinger commenced designing for the site at Willow Road, Hampstead where he wished to incorporate his family home.

2 Willow Road

After several redesigns, alterations and great controversy, the building at 1-3 Willow Road was completed in the summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Goldfinger's family occupied the middle house and their new home was featured in the 1941 edition of *The Studio Year-book of Decorative Art* (fig. 148). It is the description of the living room, illustration 2, which is of interest to us: 'Well lit by floor to ceiling windows, a framed panel is set apart for the display of pictures,

[154] It is possible this design was not used as there is no reference to a 'Mother and Child' section in the 'New Architecture' catalogue and the plan of the section reproduced in Dean's book is different from the illustration of the 'Children' section in the catalogue.

objects[sic.] d'art. It is an interesting Western version of the far eastern "Tokonoma" seen in the Japanese house' (Fiell, 2000 p. 134).

This non-Japanese *tokonoma* would appear to be fulfilling Bruno Taut's recommendation that this alcove was worthy of imitation. However, in recently published texts on Goldfinger and 2 Willow Road this *tokonoma* is no longer recognised. Robert Elwall (1996) makes no mention of the feature and neither does Nigel Warburton (2004). The property is now owned by the National Trust and in their official guide, written by Alan Powers, the *tokonoma* is described thus: 'The framed screen in the Living Room is a Surrealist device and was used to display a changing collection of the Goldfingers' pictures' (1996, p. 7). It is, therefore, understandable that the guide on a tour of 2 Willow Road, taken in November 2003, was also unaware of any *tokonoma.*

It could be argued that the 2 Willow Road *tokonoma* was an invention of the pro-Japanese journal *The Studio.* However, there are other features in the house whose origins can be traced to Japan: folding and sliding doors that open up the living room to the balcony (fig. 149); rooms divided by sliding and folding partitions which open to create a single space (fig. 150); built-in furniture consisting not only of cupboards but also drawers under the step up to the living room (fig. 151). It is perhaps no surprise to discover Goldfinger, like Coates, was an admirer of Japanese architecture; at the Paris 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes he watched, for many hours, while the numbered, tissue paper wrapped pieces of the traditional style Japanese pavilion were unpacked and admired the constructional logic, describing the experience as 'a revelation' (Warburton, 2004 p. 40). It is, therefore quite probable that this framed wall space was indeed a *tokonoma.*

The *tokonoma* as hearth

We have observed Coates' use of the flower arrangement in chapter four, considering it to be a possible reference to the *tokonoma*; the placing of a vase of flowers in relation to some type of artwork or, as in the reception area of Embassy Court, creating a special niche. Jiro Harada stresses the importance of the flower arrangement in the *tokonoma* and it is quite likely Coates would have understood this significance of the flower arrangement as he repeatedly places a vase of flowers on to built-in units which often incorporate an electric fire (fig. 152, also figs. 88, 91, 110 & 111), thus creating a 'hearth scene, *à la japonais*' as he described at Yeoman's Row (AR vol. 82, p. 53). The notion of equating the Western-style hearth with the *tokonoma* was not a new concept. In Western style rooms in Japan the hearth was: 'often described as like the *tokonoma* alcove of the Japanese room, and decoration of the mantel was treated with similar formal rigor'

(Sand, 2003 p. 104) (fig. 153); the fact of which Coates was most probably aware, as he visited Japanese homes during his childhood in Japan.

Due to his first hand knowledge of Japanese architecture, it is possible Coates may have been aware of Frank Lloyd Wright's apparent translation of the *tokonoma* into the integral fireplace in the early Prairie House from his observations of the Hôôden (Phoenix Hall) Japanese pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago in 1893. It is believed that, in the Prairie House, Wright transposed the *tokonoma* to a central free standing chimney; both being a focal point at the centre of the home (Nute, 2000 pp. 61-64). Although, it seems Wright does not substantiate this theory. However, Coates appears to have been an avid reader of Wright and would, no doubt, have been familiar with Wright's 1931 *Modern Architecture.*

Frank Lloyd Wright and the Japanese dwelling

Wright's 1930 Kahn Lectures, given to Princeton undergraduates, form the basis of this book in which he writes of Japan. In the first text, 'Machinery, Materials and Men' he describes the Japanese as 'profound builders of the Orient' (p. 4) and in the second text 'Style in Industry' he discusses 'Old Japan' before the 19th century contact with the West, when Japan was an island where 'perfect Style in Industry was supreme and native' (p. 28). Wright describes how Japanese inspiration has developed in the West and continues:

> Artists, even great ones, are singularly ungrateful to sources of inspiration ... No sooner does the lesser artist receive a lesson or perceive an idea or even receive the Objects of Art from another source, than he soon becomes anxious to forget the suggestion, conceal the facts, or, if impossible to do this, to minimize, by detraction, the "gift". And as Culture expands, we soon, too soon, deny outright the original sources of our inspiration as a suspected reproach to our own superiority. This you may quite generally find in the Modern Art World. At this moment in our development Japan particularly is thus the "great insulted." (Wright, 1931, p. 33)

This comment is particularly poignant as, in later life, Wright himself was to deny Japan as a source of inspiration on his own work (Greenhalgh, 1988). However, in 1930 he believes Japan to be a country with much to offer the modern world. In the quest for 'Style in Industry' Wright recommends 'this humble [Japanese] dwelling that is a veritable sermon on our subject' (p. 33). He writes of cleanliness, simplicity, spirituality and organic nature: 'this "Plastic-ideal" *attained by organic means*' (p. 34) and continues:

> Also the modern process of standardizing, as we now face it on every side, sterilized by it, prostrate to it, was in Japan known and practised with artistic perfection by freedom of choice many centuries ago, in this

> dwelling we are considering. The removable (for cleaning) floor mats or "tatami" of Japanese buildings were all of one size, 3'0" by 6'0". The shape of all the houses were determined by the size and shape of assembled mats ... All the sliding interior partitions occur on the joint lines of the mats. The ... polished wood posts that carry ceilings and roof – all stand at intersections of the mats. The light sliding paper shoji or outside wall-screens are likewise removable – for cleaning. The plan for any Japanese dwelling was an effective study in sublimated mathematics ... Consider too that, "Be Clean" – "the simplest way without waste" – was dignified as *ceremonial* in Old Japan. (Wright, 1931 p. 34)

Wright is offering Japanese constructional methods as an example for modern standardisation and mass production; he equates the clean lines produced by machinery with the clean lines and orderliness of the Japanese house:

> Today, it seems to me, we hear this cry "Be Clean" from the depths of our own need. It is almost as though the Machine itself had, by force, issued edict similar to Shinto – "Be Clean." Clean lines – clean surfaces – clean purposes ... When this edict inspires organic results and not the mere picture-making that curses so-called "Modernism," we will here find the basic elements of STYLE in our own Industry to be the same by machine as they were by hand back there in the beginning of the history of a unique [Japanese] civilization. (Wright, 1931 p. 35)

Wright believes that an example of the modernist ideals of the clean, uncluttered and fitness for purpose home can be found in the traditional handmade home of Japan; in Europe similar views were expressed by Walter Gropius. Three years later in 'The Formation and Technical Problems of Modern Architecture and Planning', a paper read to the DIA on 16 May 1934 and reported in the RIBAJ, Gropius discussing the opposition to mass production states:

> The second objection, that mass-production of dwellings would cause the destruction of handicrafts, can be countered by the pertinent example of the Japanese, who for centuries have been making completely standardised houses of the highest quality carried out entirely by manual labour. (RIBAJ 1934, vol. 41 p. 688)

This statement would indicate there was a widely held belief that the traditional Japanese dwelling was a paradigm for the modernist goal of well designed housing for all; it is also apparent that Gropius is quite familiar with the Japanese house.

Wright visited Britain in May 1939; he gave a series of somewhat contentious lectures at the RIBA: 'An Organic Architecture: the architecture of democracy'.[155] In these

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[155] Following Wright's departure, a debate ensued within the 'Correspondence' section of the RIBAJ (vol. 46).

lectures Wright spoke of the Chinese Daoist philosopher, Laozi, and cited the Japanese domestic dwelling; in the second lecture, as an example of truly organic architecture (Wright, 1970), and in the third when describing the pleasing quality of light at the desert camp of the Talesin Fellowship: 'I have experienced nothing like it elsewhere except in Japan, somewhat, in their houses with sliding paper walls or "shoji"' (1970, p. 23). Whilst one may expect Wright to hold eulogistic views on the architecture of Japan, described by J M Richards as 'going only to the Japanese for foreign inspiration' (1940, p. 65). Still it is perhaps surprising that, during the 1930s, he so clearly offers the traditional Japanese dwelling as an example for modern design and mass production. It is similarly unexpected to find these sentiments echoed by Gropius who, in 1952, wrote from Japan on a post card to Wells Coates: 'The old Japanese house is the most modern in conception I know of – a real revelation for me' (Cohn, 1999, pp. 11-12).

We shall now seek to discover other texts published in Britain during the inter-war period that recommend or acknowledge Japan and the Japanese house as an inspirational source for the modern house and Coates' association, if any, with the authors.

Identifying Japanese architecture with the modernist plan:
British text on modern architecture and design

We have already noted three texts on modern architecture and design where the writers refer to Japan in relation to modernism and there are known connections with Coates: Paul Nash's *Room and Book,* Noel Carrington's *Design in the Home,* and John Gloag's *English Furniture.* A fourth text is *The Book of the Modern House: a panoramic survey of contemporary domestic design* (1939) edited by Patrick Abercrombie in which Coates work is featured: the house 'Shipwrights' at Hadleigh, Essex, kitchens at Lawn Road Flats, Hampstead and Embassy Court, Brighton, furniture at his studio flat at 18 Yeoman's Row, London, and a convection heater for E K Cole & Co. The Japanese house is cited as an 'apposite prototype' in Oliver Hill's chapter 'The Contemporary House'; Hill states '... with its lightness of construction and absence of non-essential decoration and elasticity, the latter afforded by removable screens so that house and garden become one' (1939 p. 226). Coates and Hill had been acquainted since 1930 and Coates was a member of the panel of consultant architects for Hill's 1935 Frinton Park Estate.

An earlier text had also commented upon the movable screens of the Japanese house. The similarity between Japanese architecture and modernist Dutch architecture is noted in *Balbus, or the future of architecture* (1926) in which the author and architect, Christian Barman discusses a modern Dutch house which has no fixed internal walls; rooms are created by the use of movable screens and compares this to the Japanese house:

> This is, of course, how houses are mostly constructed in Japan, but it should be remembered that, though the Japanese house is built entirely without walls, whether internal or external, it yet exhibits the utmost complexity and formal refinement in the general lines of its design. The plan is there, though only its skeleton is permanent, and wall-divisions are made movable ... (1926, p. 34)

In 1926 it would have been difficult to find a modern British house with which to compare the Japanese house.[156] However, this text clearly associated Japan with the concept of a skeleton construction where the walls are non-load bearing and rooms are divided by sliding screens.

Texts within the RIBA Journal

There are two instances within the RIBAJ where Japanese architecture is linked to modernism. The first occurs in 1929 in an item cited under 'Allied Societies' in which a report is given on a lecture 'Modern Design and Decoration' by the architect and Principal of the Architectural Association School, Howard Robertson:

> The Orient, particularly Japan, has been a source of inspiration, to the modernist. Flat tones, plain surfaces, colour combinations of red and black, yellow and green, the use of lacquers are typical of Japanese art, and very popular today. And rhythm, which is fundamental in decoration of the Orient, is a basic factor in present-day design. The modern movement has come to stay, because it is real and vital; and the twentieth century will be one of the great periods of a living art. (RIBAJ, vol. 36, p. 447)

Although Robertson and Coates were both members of the Twentieth Century Group in 1930, it is perhaps unlikely that Coates would have known either Barman or Robertson before these two texts were published.

The second citing of Japan as an inspirational source for modernism is in an article, published in January 1936, by R. Furneaux Jordan entitled 'Modern Building in Timber'. In this text on modern wooden architectural constructions Jordan describes the advantages of the timber house and identifies the modern flexible plan with that of the traditional Japanese house:

> This means that in the timber house we may have the open and flexible plan, the roof terraces, the overhanging balconies and the long stretches of window to which concrete and steel have made us so accustomed. How "concrete-like" are the proportions of the openings in the mediaeval

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[156] 'New Ways', designed by Peter Behrens and completed in 1926, is generally considered to be the first modernist house in Britain (chapter 3). The house, featured in *The Architecture Review* in November 1926 (vol. 60 pp. 175-179) appears to have fixed internal walls and no sliding doors.

Japanese house ... (RIBAJ, vol. 43 p. 229)

Also he compares the plan of the great houses and palaces of Japan with the work of modernist architects:

> This palace [Katsura Palace at Kyôto] ... is typical of the larger Japanese houses of sixteenth and succeeding centuries. Its plan is astonishingly modern in many respects and shows a freedom and flexibility which would only be possible in a very light construction. It seems to have realised some of those qualities which have been striven for by Frank Lloyd Wright and by Corbusier, and it shows that the idea of arranging a series of apartments, each well proportioned and well lit for its purpose, in convenient relationship to each other, was an idea which was fully developed in the Far East many centuries ago. The paper and fibre-covered partitions, so similar in appearance to plywood, and the long proportions of wide-spanned openings as well as the general simplicity of treatment, all help to give a very modern aspect to the interior. (RIBAJ, vol. 43, p. 238)

Included in the illustrations are: a plan of Katsura Palace, Kyoto, and three photographs of Japanese architecture: Rinshunkaku Pavilion, reception room in a Tokyo house, and Rinuntei Pavilion, Shugakuin Palace; two of which depict the traditional Japanese interior (fig. 154). Although one is dated 1653 and the other 1928 both photographs display the qualities of the airy, clutter free and adaptable space so sought after in the modern interior. In this text, as in others we have noted, Jordan observes the similarities between traditional Japanese architecture and the aspirations of the modernist architect.

These references in the RIBAJ identifying Japan with the ideals of modern architecture are significant as they are authenticated by their inclusion. The journal, the publication of a learned architectural society, representing the established, accepted principles of the profession, took its responsibility particularly seriously during the inter-war years.

Modern Japanese architecture

Another fascinating discovery within the RIBAJ, between the wars and into the 1940s, is the review of Japanese architectural journals, *Kenchiku Sekai* and *Kenchiku Zassi* [sic.] (Journal of the Institute of Japanese Architects), items from these journals on traditional and modern Japanese architecture were regularly listed in the 'Review of Periodicals'. Japanese architecture, modern and traditional, was also reviewed in European and American journals (Appendix 10). It is generally considered Japanese modern architecture was not known in Britain at this time. However, it is now apparent that it was possible for British architects to follow Japanese architectural developments during the inter-war period.

The RIBA centenary exhibition 'International Architecture 1924-1934', in which two photographs of Wells Coates' work was exhibited, also included modern Japanese architecture in two sections of the show. Organised by the architect of the 1928 'House of the Future', R A Duncan,[157] 'The Architecture of Transport' section included two photographs of filling stations, designed by Antonin Raymond, in Tokyo (fig. 155) and Yokohama. 'Planning the Dwelling' section was the responsibility of Raymond McGrath, previously mentioned in chapter five. In this section McGrath included ten photographic examples of modern architecture from Japan: designed by Antonin Raymond: 'Architect's summer quarters in Karuizawa' (three photographs), 'Weekend cottage for Mr S Akaboshi in Fujisawa' (fig. 156), 'House for Kisuke Akaboshi in Tokyo' and 'Villa in Nikko'; 'House, Kitikawa [sic.], Tokyo' by Sutemi Horiguchi (two photographs); 'Bedroom in the House Yamamoto' by Kameki Tsuchiura; 'House, Tsurumi (the Japanese room)' by Mamoru Yamada.

Several of the photographs exhibited appear in McGrath's *Twentieth Century Houses*; a text we have already noted in connection with Christopher Tunnard earlier in this chapter and with Coates in chapters 4 and 5. Antonin Raymond's house in Tokyo for Kisuke Akaboshi and his summer home at Mount Asama, Karuizawa, appear in examples 116, 117 and 118 respectively (fig. 157), and Horiguchi's House Kitikawa[sic.] is shown on example 113 (fig. 130). Although the work of Tsuchiura and Yamada is featured in McGrath's examples, the photographs shown at the RIBA exhibition do not appear to have been included; Tsuchiura's House Yamamoto is featured on examples 119 and 120 but a photograph of a bedroom is not featured and the Japanese room in Yamada' House Sakio Tsurumi is not shown in either example 114 or 115 (fig. 130). It is apparent that McGrath has a knowledge and understanding of modern Japanese architecture but it is not obvious how or why this interest had developed.

Raymond McGrath, Japan and the twentieth century house

We have noted that McGrath was a friend of Mansfield Forbes, a member of the Twentieth Century Group and Decoration Consultant for the BBC studios at Broadcasting House where he worked with Serge Chermayeff and Coates. McGrath studied architecture at the University of Sydney where it appears he also studied Oriental history and produced a short illustrated text on the history of Chinese architecture (AR, vol. 67). In 1926 he received a postgraduate travel scholarship that he utilised to study in England where he became the first research student in architecture at Cambridge University (AR, vol, 72).

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[157] Shown at the 1928 Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia.

McGrath's first book *Twentieth Century Houses* was one of the most reviewed and discussed books in the architectural press during the 1930s, and is probably best known of the period today, in conjunction with F R S Yorke's *The Modern House* (1934) and *The Modern House in Britain* (1937). However, McGrath's text deviates from other books of the time by including nine examples of modern Japanese architecture; a similar number as Austria and the United States. It has been suggested that McGrath's interest in modern Japanese architecture may have been prompted through his association with Coates.[158] The inclusion of examples from an Eastern country becomes clearer when McGrath describes his love of China: 'Her art and outlook seemed better to me than those of the West. I had a feeling that there was something new and special to myself in this wise and certain art' (p. 85). McGrath's knowledge of Chinese architecture is demonstrated in his text on Japan where he writes of 'Fengshui' and the Chinese house for which, he explains, he has no modern examples:

> For this book I have not been able to get any examples of Chinese houses after 1900. In Shanghai, Peking and other places there are new houses put up by European architects but they are of little interest. China, most unchanging of all countries in her ways of building – she has had the same forms for the last 4000 years – has not made any start so far in putting her old wine into new bottles. So we have to go back to Japan to see what the new building is like in the East. (McGrath, 1934 p. 187)

Due to McGrath admiration of Chinese architecture he was anxious to include examples from the East. Although it would appear Japan is featured by default, McGrath is familiar with Japanese architecture, traditional and modern, including the training of Japanese architects. He is quick to note the Japanese inspiration in the work of the Dutch architects: 'Then came Oud with his clean sense of form, Rietveld, sharp and Japanese as in his surprising house at Utrecht (1924)' (p. 15) and he notes:

> In the last ten years it has been seen that the great architects of the present day – Wright in America, Corbusier in France, Oud in Holland and Miës in Germany – are all at work in a way in which, almost for the first time in the history of art, East and West come together. (McGrath, 1934 pp, 185-6)

McGrath offers example 114 (fig. 158) as an illustration of the coming together of Orient and Occident as he believes: 'The death of ornament is the chief reason why East and West and North and South are more in agreement now than they have ever been before' (p. 186).

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[158] In conversation with Alan Powers 4/11/04.

This coming together of East and West can also be witnessed in example 120 (fig. 159), which shows two rooms, the Japanese room and the living room, in Tsuchiura's House Yamamoto. In these two images the *shôji* and *fusuma* of the Japanese room, are similarly situated to the glass doors opening on to the garden and the sliding folding doors that partition the dining area. Although the Japanese room is on traditional lines, including a *tokonoma*, and the living room appears entirely modern, when placed one above the other, the possibility of one having inspire the other is striking. In part IV 'Planning and Building' McGrath, recommends the use of screens 'The living-room may be used for reading, writing, music or taking meals, and the parts so used cut off from one another by screens and folding-doors so that when necessary the complete space may be made one' (p. 39). In this instance Japan is not cited despite the description being reminiscent of the Japanese multi-purpose room. However in the last part of the text McGrath does associate the moveable doors and screens of the modern interior with Japan: 'Free planning is an outcome of these new conditions and as natural an outcome as the free planning in the old Japanese house. When the walls are walls no longer but screens between inside and outside and room and room, it is natural for them to be used almost as curtains' (p. 204).

We observed Christopher Tunnard's inspiration from McGrath in *Gardens in the Modern Landscape*: McGrath explains the important relationship between the Japanese house and garden:

> One is open to the other. The rain and wind are not shut out. The rain has to be seen falling on the leaves. The wind has to be in hearing when it goes about in the branches. The colour of the sky has to be seen when the dark comes on at nightfall. In this way the Japanese house is a design for living. (McGrath, 1934 p. 187)

McGrath writes eloquently and evocatively on the architecture of Japan and to him inspiration from Japan is a natural part of the coming together of East and West. With his knowledge of Chinese architecture he is able to give an authoritative and comparative account for all aspects of the Japanese house both traditional and modern. McGrath was not alone in discussing the merits of Eastern architecture; several texts were published in *The Architectural Review*, during the inter-war years, on Oriental architecture and design.

British texts on Oriental architecture and design

We observed in chapter two articles on Japanese architecture had been published in the journal since 1897. This trend continued during the inter-war years; in 1921 two articles 'Architecture in Japan' and 'Architecture in Japan – II' by W G Blaikie Murdoch

appear in the journal.[159] These describe and place in historical context Japanese temples and shrines, referred to as 'ecclesiastical architecture', castles and houses. Both articles are quite substantial, the first consists of five pages and the second of seven pages, including a full page photograph of the pagoda at Hôryûji, and both are amply illustrated including photographs of buildings at Nara, Nikkô and the Yamato plain, examples of temple statues and decoration. These articles are much in the same vein of the earlier texts and do not suggest Japanese architecture as an inspirational source for the West, but a concern is expressed that Japan is losing her traditional architecture in her attempt to mimic the West.

'The Classic Architecture of the Orient'

Similar sentiments are expressed in another text published in March 1930 'The Classic Architecture of the Orient' by the architect and writer, A Trystan Edwards, and illustrated by McGrath's drawings from his brief history of Chinese architecture produced during his student days in Australia (fig. 160). Edwards laments the penetration of Western architecture into China and Japan and suggests: 'It will be a paradoxical result if Europe, after failing for so many centuries to appreciate the architecture of the Far East, has now to instruct the Chinese and Japanese themselves concerning the greatness of their own architectural heritage and help them to preserve it' (AR, vol. 67, p. 113). Edwards finds similarities between the constructional methods of the East and the modern Western use of steel and reinforced concrete and suggests that the construction methods employed in the East for wooden buildings could be adopted in the West for the new materials of steel and concrete:

> The architecture of China and Japan seems to belong more intimately to Nature than does that of any other country. It is a style peculiarly adapted to post and beam, especially when these members are of slender dimensions and are exposed to view. But are not these the very qualities of reinforced concrete construction? If those experimentalists who are so anxious to evolve a new style especially adapted to modern construction methods were to turn their eyes eastwards, they would find a more important source of inspiration than anywhere else. (AR, 1930 vol. 67, p. 118)

Although Edwards appears better versed in Chinese than in Japanese architecture, the article is significant as another example of the identification and association of the modern frame construction with Japan.

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[159] Excerpts from these two articles were published as one text 'Architecture in Japan' in *The Architects' Journal* (vol. 58 pp. 380-382) following the 1923 earthquake in Japan.

'The Glamorous East'

In March 1936 a further text on the Orient appeared in *The Architectural Review*, published in response to a predicted 'Chinese Vogue in interior decoration' (p. 101) precipitated by the International Exhibition of Chinese Art which opened at the Royal Academy on 28 November 1935. 'The Glamorous East: Some Oriental Episodes in the History of English Taste' was written by, the satirical writer and author of *From Pillar to Post* and *Home Sweet Home,* Osbert Lancaster, and is a journey through all that is perceived to be bad in Chinoiserie and later Victorian eclectic taste. He decries late 19th century Japonisme:

> By the turn of the century the confusion had become indescribable, even the tolerably sane Arts and Crafts movement abandoned the doctrines of Morris and, entering into an unholy alliance with the siren from Japan, brought forth that misbegotten off spring, Art Nouveau. (AR 1936, vol. 79, p. 105)

Nevertheless, amid the disparaging remarks is the suggestion that with a greater comprehension of Oriental philosophy and aesthetics it has been possible to understand the value placed on extreme simplicity by the Chinese and Japanese and therefore 'For the first time those who were working for a simplified and rational style in architecture and decoration could regard the Far Eastern influence as a possible ally' (AR, vol. 79, p. 108).

Of these four articles, two solely on Japanese traditional architecture, one on Chinese and Japanese architecture and one on primarily Chinese and Japanese style, two recommend the East for modern architectural inspiration.

Oriental architecture within the RIBA Journal

Although within the RIBAJ there were no articles solely on traditional Japanese architecture there was a continuation of the discussion initiated by Josiah Conder and Christopher Dresser who we observed in chapter two. In 1928 an article was published on Chinese Pagodas, which prompted a dialogue in the *Correspondence* that referred to papers by Dresser, 'Japanese Architecture', Conder, 'Domestic and Civil Architecture of Japan' and extracts of a letter written by Conder to the journal in April 1883 disagreeing with Dresser's theory on the central post of timber built pagodas. These letters are of significance as they demonstrate a tradition of discussion through the pages of the RIBAJ on Japanese architecture which was still continuing 40 years later (RIBAJ, vol. 35, pp. 567 & 611-2).

Also published in 1928 was an article entitled 'Chinese Architecture' in which the architect and writer, Arnold Silcock, laments the lack of study of the Chinese arts:

> It is extraordinary that the literature of all branches of Japanese art is much more comprehensive than that on Chinese, especially when one considers that the whole culture of Japan is merely an outgrowth of the earlier Chinese civilisation. In most of the arts the Japanese have been thorough plagiarists, and it is therefore all the more remarkable that the tributary has received so much attention while the parent stream has remained comparatively unexplored. This is especially true of architecture, for the construction and decoration of Japanese structures owe everything to Chinese inspiration and influence ... (RIBAJ, vol. 35, p. 180)

It becomes clear through the RIBAJ that Silcock is a promoter of things Chinese and he is not particularly taken with modernism. It is also noteworthy that Japanese architecture is mentioned in articles and papers relating to other eastern architecture: Indian (RIBAJ, vol. 36) and Himalayan (RIBAJ, vol. 37).

Throughout the inter-war years Japanese books and books on Japan are listed in the 'Accessions to the Library' section; subject matter includes: temples and their treasures, architecture, the dwelling house, castles, tea houses, flower arranging, gardens, landscape design, earthquakes, Bruno Taut's *Houses and People of Japan* and Antonin Raymond's work in Japan.

Texts from Japan on Japanese architecture

On the 5 December 1936 in the RIBAJ a third reference to Japan as an inspiration on modernism is to be found within the 'Book Reviews' section. In this anonymous review of Jiro Harada's *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* entitled 'Houses in Japan' the reviewer recognises similarities between the Japanese dwelling and the modernist building:

> ... Japanese domestic architecture has a factual as well as a spiritual lesson for people in Western Europe: that Japan can be to the modern Englishman as Rome was to his ancestors ... so we can make a livelier contact with the standardisation, variety in unity, conformity to a mode of living, connection with nature, simplicity, and, of course, usefulness to purpose of the Japanese building. If this is Mr. Holme's purpose, it is one that interprets well our needs and our achievements. Without conscious imitation, or even spiritual contact, much modern architecture has developed in a way that shows a definite affinity, in plan particularly, with Japanese work. (RIBAJ, vol. 44, p. 144)

A particularly complementary description is given of the Japanese house and lifestyle which we are told, are integral, simple and unadulterated:

> Japanese house building is the perfect example of building entirely integrated with life. Nothing is added that is not exactly or humanly related in a spiritual or physical element of Japanese living. There are no extraneous decorative elements. The elements of the structure are no more thrust forward than

> decorative elements. The only reason why modern Europeans have not succeeded in producing an architecture comparable in "virtue" to that of Japan is because we have not yet learnt the lessons of Japanese living; though most of us, perhaps, could hardly acknowledge with truth that we have tried. In the meantime, while we battle with the uncertainty of our muddled lives, we can be grateful to the Studio for introducing such an informative book on a subject of such value. (RIBAJ, vol. 44, p. 144)

Whilst praising the virtuous architecture of Japan, the reviewer simultaneously is aware of the didactic nature of the text and considers C G Holme, as editor, to be the perpetrator of this 'lesson', believing Harada to be disinterested in instructing Western architects on the relevance of Japanese architecture to their modernist ideals.

Jiro Harada

When we considered Harada's text in relation to the Japanese garden we observed he advocates the close relationship between the house and garden in Japan as an example to the West. We shall now discover if he offers any other suggestions to the Western architect.

Only a few pages into the book we are greeted by an account of the intentions of the text which is not to be a comprehensive history on the subject but, by the use of photographs, is to offer a vision of the current state of Japanese architecture as a suggested potential exemplar for the solution of a worldwide problem that of modern housing needs. An analysis of the benefits to be gained from a study of Japanese architecture are clearly defined in the introduction written by the editor, C G Holme, who feels the solutions of the modernist architect of the West have, so far, not been entirely successful: 'It may be that from the study of a complete and mature form of structure, which offers in detail some amazing likenesses to their own efforts, they may find the clues they need' (p. 9). Holme gives a brief history of cultural contact with the Far East and Japan and discusses Art Nouveau's recognition of Japanese architectural simplicity:

> Already, therefore, Japanese architecture has taught us something and when it has not directly taught us, there are likenesses because of a likeness in principle. It remains to make full use of these principles to distinguish between what can be adapted and what cannot be adapted, and to resolve some of our doubts and difficulties by reference to the Japanese solution. (p. 10)

In interior design Holme believes the Western architect has been more successful in interpreting the Japanese principle, which he describes:

> The rooms are devoid of detail but not bare. The clean lines and the absence of furniture without any relation to the room give an impression of restfulness.

> Built-in cupboards allow of the storing away of household goods not in use. A recess contains a work of art which thus acquires a special importance. Sliding panels permit of the room being thrown entirely open to the outer light and air; or of being combined when need be with another to make one large room. (p. 11)

Japanese methods of standardisation have already been noted in texts by Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius; Holme believes the Western architect is behind his Japanese counterpart: 'Faced as we are with the problem of mass production, we can learn from this [*tatami* unit] the possibility of producing a house of standardised parts which nevertheless allow scope for variety in arrangement' (p. 11).

Holme concludes his introduction with a brief explanation of how the Japanese house has evolved through the philosophy of the tea-ceremony; it is a place of refinement and designed for living. His final sentence appears to be a reprimand to the West: 'Japanese architecture is not to be considered as an exotic or eccentric importation, but a reminder of good manners when such is badly wanted' (p. 12).

In the main body of the text Harada gives a historical perspective of Japanese architecture, which is followed by photographs of historic buildings. He considers these photographs: 'though less applicable to Western aims than purely domestic work, are important as the most elaborate type of architecture produced by the country and as the precursors of domestic style' (p. 27). The construction methods and materials, and cultural considerations are discussed in general terms. Harada describes the present day Japanese house but it is useful to have an understanding of his notion of the present:

> Present: Third Nationalisation
> A reaction [against Western influence] was inevitable. Especially since Japan's secession from the League of Nations, the national spirit has begun to reassert itself in all directions. Already its influence is being felt on architecture, designers reproducing buildings in traditional forms in reinforced concrete, and otherwise trying to reveal the native characteristics of the people while meeting the advanced requirements of the age. (Harada, 1936 p. 26)

These sentiments about the present in part help to explain the jingoistic nature of the text, which appears particularly apparent when Harada approaches the selection of photographs depicting the Japanese interior:

> The problem which the modern Western architect has set himself to solve has been dealt with by the Japanese in an inspiring manner. Built-in storage room, the perfection of simplicity, window-walls admitting the maximum air and light, rooms of adjustable size, are here to be found in plenty. (Harada, 1936 p. 143)

All features of the Japanese house are illustrated in detail: sliding screens, *shôji* and *fusuma*, *tokonoma* and built-in storage (fig. 161). This lesson of Japanese architecture is not a particularly new teaching, as the text reiterates ideals already raised in many of the earlier texts we have examined: frame structure, standardisation, flexibility of space, sliding screens, built-in storage, relationship between indoor and outdoor space and the *tokonoma*, these have been identified as inspirational sources for the modernist architect.

The raison d'être of this text is better understood when one becomes aware of the aim of the Japanese Government during the mid 1930s, which was to promote a new Japonisme in the West.[160] We noted in chapter one that Harada was a member of staff of the Imperial Household Museum and as such was in the employ of the Government. He was, therefore, ideally placed to assist with this task, with his connections in the West and in particular his long association with *The Studio*.

However, in Harada's next text 'Japanese architecture', a lecture given at Seattle Art Museum during the academic year 1935/6 and reproduced in *A Glimpse of Japanese Ideals*, published in Japan one year later, there is no desire to educate the Western architect to Japanese ways. Although the text is mainly taken from *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture* the emphasis is now on the purity of Japanese architecture that is in danger of being tainted by the West. There are no photographs of Japanese houses; all photographs illustrating the text, bar two, are of temples and shrines dating from before 1636 (fig. 162). The two photographs of domestic architecture depict the traditional Japanese interior (fig. 163).

In this text Harada repeats his definition of the 'Present' and concludes:

> ... we see a remarkable increase of apartment houses in cities and foreign-style domestic buildings of questionable nature called by the alluring name of *bunka jûtaku* (cultured residences) going up in the suburbs like mushrooms after rain, and we cannot help wondering about the future of our architecture. For that matter, it is not the future of our architecture alone, but also the future of many other phases of our national life, the consideration of which bewilders us and causes us anxious thought. But somehow I feel the strength of the spirit of old and true Japan can preserve itself against the encroachment of foreign influences, and reassert itself in time to save Japan even if she may seemingly be carried away by the zeal to welcome things new.
> (Harada, 1937 p. 87)

This extreme nationalistic view would appear to be at odds with the view expressed by Count Ayské[sic.] Kabayama in the foreword to the book, in which he promotes the notion

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[160] Yasuko Suga's paper 'Craft, Feminism and Nation: a Japanese female designer's modernist experience', read at the Design History Society Annual Conference, London Metropolitan University, September 2005.

of harmony between nations through a greater cultural understanding. This seems an extraordinary view to express in 1937, the year Japan declared war on China. However Harada's jingoistic sentiments did not prevent the book receiving a short but favourable review by *The Studio* in August 1938:

> Jiro Harada has been for many years The Studio correspondent in Japan. Steeped in the traditional art of his native land, his refined and scholarly appreciation is distinguished by his awareness of that "elusive, but very precious quality of beauty in art and nature" called in Japan *shibumi* ... Mr. Harada deals with gardens, buildings, the *Noh* drama, the tea ceremony ... This is the expression not of Westernisation but of a cultured art of living. (vol. 116 pp. 128)

In spite of the fact *The Studio* considered itself to be a modern publication discussing modern cultural issues it seems to want to cling to the 'old true Japan' of which Harada writes. By seeking only a traditional Japan perhaps the journal was attempting to distance itself from the military ambitions of Japan in 1938. Nevertheless, there was little mention made in either *The Studio or The Architectural Review* of the difficult political position, which existed with Japan during the inter-war period and the situation was only referred to twice in the RIBAJ.

Bruno Taut

There were other texts from Japan in 1936, written in English, on Japanese architecture. We noted earlier in this chapter Bruno Taut's three year stay in Japan when he was also working for the Japanese Government; the first of his two texts, written whilst living in Japan, *Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture* was published in 1936 by Kokusai Bunka Shinkôkai (The Society for International Cultural Relations), publishers of *A Glimpse of Japanese Ideals*, and this text is also produced with the intention of promoting understanding between nations and is the result of a lecture.[161] Taut was taken to Katsura Imperial Villa by members of the Nihon Intânashonaru Kenchikukai (Japan International Architectural Association) (Isozaki, 2006 pp. 9-11). He was particularly impressed by the palace considering its beauty to be 'eternal' (Taut, 1936 p. 8); in Katsura he saw the model for a truly international architecture. Taut is credited with re-introducing the Japanese to their architectural heritage 'a masterpiece according to the measure of modern architecture' (Isozaki, 2006 p. 12). His observations on the role of Japan in the development of modern art and design in the West are significant. Taut believes that exoticism no longer exists in the West or Japan, therefore a more pragmatic approach to aesthetics may be taken; he

[161] Lecture given of 30 October 1935 at the Peer's Club as part of 'Lecture Series on Japanese Culture' arranged by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkôkai (Taut, 1936 p.4).

considers Japanese simplicity to have been the main inspiration on modernist design from 1900, and he identifies the particular inspiration the architect derived from Japan:

> Of Japan they had an idealized conception of cleanliness, clarity, simplicity, cheerfulness and faithfulness to the materials of nature, and for the greater part they still retain that conception. This gave them a liking for things in Japan quite at variance with the preferences of the general public in the West and this divergence has continued to the present time. (Taut, 1936 p. 9)

We have already observed Taut's suggestion that the *tokonoma* of the Japanese interior was worthy of imitation; he also believes that the origin of the uncluttered, airy, modern room can be traced to Japan. In this text Taut attributes Japanese inspiration on modernist architecture prior to the inter-war period and ascribes many of the features of the modernist ideal to Japan.

We are left in little doubt to the reasons behind the publication of this text: 'The Japanese people have been so engrossed in studying, appraising and adopting aspects of Western civilization that they have given very little thought to making their own civilization and culture known abroad' (p. 3). One cannot help but question the validity of this statement when one considers the quantity of literature and imagery on Japan available in the West by 1936; Harada alone had been writing on the Japanese arts in *The Studio* for 25 years.

Taut's second text *Houses and People of Japan,* first published by Sanseido, Tokyo in 1937,[162] is a detailed description written from personal experience of living in a Japanese house during the 1930s, in which he not only delineates the features of many aspects of the architecture, but also gives an account of living conditions in the country. Taut writes of skeleton construction, sliding doors, built-in cupboards and, as we have already noted, the *tokonoma* (fig. 164). However, he questions the validity of his text:

> Thus I wrote down the description of our little house. I read it through and began to doubt very much the value of this work. For me culture is the bridge between peoples, Japanese culture being one of the posts of this bridge. But how do such descriptions help? Can any single person that has not been to Japan get a clear notion of it? Would he not also, if by chance he had got hold of a picture of a Japanese room, hold it the wrong way round, so that the mats would form the ceiling, the *tokonoma* a sort of bath and the set up vase a ceiling-lamp, as I had often seen done in the illustrations of architectural books and magazines in Europe? (p. 37)

The description of the Japanese house is a particularly detailed, personal account by a European experiencing Japan for the first time; Taut wrote only about what he actually saw

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[162] Also published in Germany, and England in 1938.

in Japan and was concerned the text would be insufficiently comprehensive. Whatever his misgivings, Taut's text contributes further to the dissemination of information on Japan and Japanese architecture, though this text is less likely to have been sponsored by the Japanese Government.

Tourist Library publications

During the inter-war period, the Japanese Government Railways, Board of Tourist Industry began to produce a series of volumes, 'Tourist Library', on Japanese culture. By 1936, these pocket sized books totalled ten in number and covered subjects ranging from: *Hiroshige and Japanese Landscapes, Hot Springs in Japan* and *What is Shintô*? These texts included a bibliography for further study, and were a serious attempt to instruct the 'foreign student of Japan' (p. 5) in the ways of the country, as it was anticipated the series would ultimately consist of 100 titles. Several of these small volumes found their way to the RIBA library during the 1930s, including *Japanese Architecture* (1935).[163] The author, Professor H Kishida, gives a history of Japanese architecture, describing shrines, temples and the dwelling house. Of the *chashitsu* (tea ceremony house) he writes:

> Its simple but radical construction, its light and clear expression are remarkable. The Cha-shitsu, in its relation to materials, construction and living quarters, is nothing but a simple primitive structure as a building; but when we see Cha-shitsu from the point of architectural form it has a complete beauty of the highest degree. Moreover, I think there are found some strong influences of these Japanese Cha-shitsu in modern architecture in France, Germany and other European countries. (Kishida, 1935 p, 91)

Kishida identifies the *chashitsu* as an inspirational source on European modernist architecture and provides us with another example of Japan as an inspirational source on modernism. The desire to confirm Japan's place within the modern world is clearly demonstrated by the inclusion of photographs of modern office buildings and Japanese homes (fig. 165). For this type of publication, the photographs are of a high standard. The book was published too early to include in its bibliography Harada's 1936 *The Lesson of Japanese Architecture*; however, in a companion volume, *Japanese Gardens*, Harada's 1928 *Gardens in Japan* is listed.

Summary

The mid 1930s texts on Japanese architecture, supported by the Japanese Government to promote a new modern Japonisme in the West are fascinating in their own

[163] 'Accessions to the library' RIBAJ, vol. 43, 9 November 1935, 34.

jingoistic way, but this proffering of Japanese architecture as inspiration for the modern architect of the West, as we have observed through the study of earlier texts, was not a new idea. Christian Barman and Howard Robertson had recognised this inspiration in the 1920s and Wells Coates offered the domestic house of Japan as an inspirational source in 1931. Nevertheless these texts from Japan contribute to the dissemination and add validity to the debate.

It is fascinating to discover the quantity of texts and imagery that was available on Japanese architecture during the inter-war years; the quality of the photographs, particularly those illustrating the texts from Japan is of a high standard. These sharply focussed images portray the attributes of the architecture and contrast markedly with the softer hand tinted photographs of the previous century. *The Studio* continued to promote things Japanese but it is apparent they did not wish to promote a modern Japan, perhaps equating a modern Japan with Westernisation; unlike the RIBAJ who showed interest in both modern and traditional Japanese architecture. The discovery of the review of modern Japanese architecture is particularly significant, as it is considered Britain was unaware, until the 1970s, of modernist inter-war architecture in Japan. However, it is surprising to discover how little effect the political climate had on this discourse.

We have observed the citing of Japan in relation to modernist ideals by associates of Coates: Anthony Bertram, Noel Carrington, John Gloag, Paul Nash, Oliver Hill, and MARS Group members: John Betjeman, Ernö Goldfinger, Raymond McGrath and Christopher Tunnard. It is noteworthy that several of the texts identify Japanese inspiration in the work of principal modernist architects in Europe: Le Corbusier, J J P Oud, Mies van der Rohe, and less surprisingly Frank Lloyd Wright in the USA. The recurring themes identified in Coates' work: the use of sliding doors to partition space, the blurring of indoor and outdoor space, built-in furniture, reference to the *tokonoma,* are noted in these texts.

It is apparent that the *tokonoma* is a principal source of inspiration in a number of ways: simplifying the mode of showing artwork, reducing clutter and the use of the flower arrangement. John Betjeman, Anthony Bertram and C Geoffrey Holme all recommend the Japanese method of the hanging of a single painting. It is intriguing to discover friends and clients of Coates, the actors, Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester were living the lifestyle. In this final chapter it has become evident that Coates was not alone in advocating Japan as an inspirational source for the British modernist.

Conclusion

This thesis chronicles the history of how Japanese architecture went from being little recognised in the 19th century, to being considered a source of inspiration for modernist architecture during the inter-war period; to record, to a lesser extent, how Japanese art, particularly the way in which it was displayed, underwent a similar renaissance, and the part played by Wells Coates in this reversal of opinion. It is argued here that 19th century Japonisme, filtered through the notions of early modernism, produced a new form of Japonisme that prevailed during the inter-war period.

In Part One, chapter one the theoretical framework of Japonisme/Orientalism was discussed through a literature review of 20th and early 21st century texts on Japonisme. The relevance of Edward Said's *Orientalism* to this research was examined, but as the study of Anglo-Japanese political and cultural relations showed, Japan does not fit easily into Said's theory. Homi Bhabba's postcolonial concept of 'cultural difference' is equally difficult to apply to the relationship between Japan and Britain. We examined the phenomenon of 'the cult of Japan' to gain a perspective of the display of things Japanese. Victorian and Edwardian Japonisme was discussed in the historical context of Anglo-Japanese relations and it was discovered that despite the worsening political position, leading up to the Second World War, this did not appear to have an adverse effect on the response to things Japanese by critics, writers, designers and architects.

We observed during the 1930s there seemed to be a sophisticated understanding of Anglo-Japanese politics prior to World War II, when a clear distinction could be made between the Japanese who wished to maintain cultural exchange and those of the new fascist military regime. It was therefore possible to admire Japanese culture whilst disapproving of military aggression. Japanese inspiration during the inter-war period is seldom mentioned in post-war published texts, and that has led to our current ignorance of inter-war inspiration from Japan on modernist design and architecture. This thesis has revealed post-war rewriting of British design history and has raised a historiographical question.

In chapter two we learned of the diversity in the architect-designers' response to the Victorian displays of Japanese art and design, particularly at the Japanese Court at the 1862 London International Exhibition. It was here that both the Gothic revivalists and Christopher Dresser, considered in the 1930s to be a pioneer of modernism and proto-industrial designer, found inspiration. The neo-Gothic admired the quality of the hand crafted goods on display, seeing in Japan the medieval society they sought to emulate,

whereas Dresser perceived the refined style and decoration as an exemplar for industrial production.

We ascertained the significance of Josiah Conder as one of the first disseminators of knowledge on Japanese architecture and, in particular, the domestic dwelling. As Conder was resident in Japan he had first hand experience, and it is fascinating to observe his understanding of this architecture develop, over a number of years, in the papers he sent to RIBA; the fact that these and Dresser's contribution on Japan were remembered by RIBA members in 1928 is significant to this research as it demonstrates that there was a pre-existing knowledge of Japanese architecture amongst British architects. Conder's texts on Japanese gardens, landscape and flower arranging also augmented the understanding of Japanese culture at the end of the 19th century. Jiro Harada's contribution to *The Studio*, which began in 1910, is also important as his authoritative style gave an authentic note to these articles on Japanese art and culture.

It was surprising to find as late as 1905 there was still negativity surrounding Japanese architecture, particularly the Japanese house. However, all the texts both negative and positive contributed to the increasing quantity of writing on Japanese architecture. In the texts examined we found reference to the principle aspects of frame construction, the use of sliding doors as room partitions, the relationship of indoor to outdoor space, built-in furniture, the *tokonoma* and the display of artwork which were to become fundamental factors in the design of the modern house during the inter-war period.

In our examination of modernism, in Part Two, chapter three, we detected in the work of prominent early modernist architects, Gerrit Rietveld, Mies Van de Rohe and Le Corbusier, the suggestion of Japanese inspiration. When one considers the quantity of information on Japan that reached the West during the latter part of the 19th century, and the subsequent availability of literature on all things Japanese, this is perhaps not so remarkable. The key elements of the Japanese dwelling, as described above, construction, room division, relationship to garden and integral furniture, are found within examples of modern houses but they are not necessarily attributed to Japan.

The desire to identify a lineage for modernism is something of a conundrum for a movement that wished to severe connections with the past. This aspiration began before Nikolaus Pevsner's 1936 text *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* and was particularly rife within *The Architectural Review*. It is intriguing to discover that Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work was inspired by Japanese architecture and design, were cited as prophets of modernism. Although this inspiration is mentioned it was not, at this stage, suggested Japan could also have been an inspirational source for modernist architecture.

From the proceedings at the RIBA it is possible to deduce there was a reluctance to accept modernism within the British architectural establishment. However, after the 1928 debate there is a gradual, if somewhat grudging acceptance as more modern constructions were completed in Britain. The review of this era from a post-war perspective is intriguing; texts published prior to the 1968 collapse of the Ronan Point tower block are quite favourable, but during the 1970s and 80s are inclined to be less complementary, reaching a particularly low point at the end of the 1980s just before the start of 1990s reassessment of the modern movement in Britain.

Coates' position within the British modern movement seems to have diminished in the post 1960s re-telling of the history of the movement. From examining, in Part Three, chapter four, Coates' diaries and his childhood in Japan where we observed his parents' integration with Japanese life and culture, we can conclude that he did have a bona fide interest and knowledge of Japan. [164]

Evidence of Japanese inspiration was found within Coates' written and design work; in his first three articles he identifies five key elements in the traditional Japanese house which were to become fundamental features in the construction of the modern dwelling, namely:

1. Frame construction, facilitating non-load bearing walls, which in turn permit larger apertures and internal flexibility.
2. The awareness of the relationship between indoor/outdoor space resulting in the breaking down and blurring of divisional barriers.
3. The use of sliding screens, *shôji* [translucent] and *fusuma* [opaque] for dividing rooms providing greater flexibility of space.
4. Built-in furniture [*oshiire*].
5. The notion of the *tokonoma* as a modern systematic device for displaying works of art and providing decoration to the interior.

These five factors taken from the Japanese dwelling are evident in Coates' architectural and interior designs during the 1930s. It is noticeable that as the 1930s progressed his references to Japan became more oblique. This may have been due to the deteriorating political situation with Japan. However, he may have also become aware, as highlighted by J M Richards in his obituary to Coates, that his references to Japan could be perceived as a form of boasting. In his diary for 1955 Coates records a visit he made on

[164] Agnes Wintemute Coates' life in Japan is an area for further research.

Sunday 17 April: 'There after spent the afternoon discussing Japan where Walter and Ise [Gropius] spent three months last year ...'.[165] A letter sent, after Coates' death, from Walter Gropius to Laura Cohn, Coates' daughter, recalls this meeting:

> We had known him best, of course, in those years in London before the war ... But we didn't know how difficult it was for him to reconcile the contrasting trends which his early background, his later training and his own searching mind had established in him and it was only later when we came ourselves to the 'New World" and particularly when we finally also saw Japan that we began to understand his problems and various allegiances.
> I wish you could have been with us when he visited us after we had just returned from Japan. It was as if a door to a secret room had suddenly been opened and he became more and more entranced after our remarks about Japanese culture had started a whole reaction in himself. His deep tenderness for his early Oriental experiences made him really glow and he felt so relieved that all those emotions which had been reluctantly buried during the war years could be brought out again before sympathetic ears. That was a memorable evening and I think we came closer to understanding him than at any time before. (Cohn, 1999 pp. 20-21)

This poignant letter reveals to us Coates' feelings towards Japan.

In our examination of the early British modern movement groups, in chapter five, we realised that Coates had been of consequence in the formation of the Twentieth Century Group, Unit One and the MARS group, playing an important role in the organisation and running of these associations. However, as we observed in the retelling of the history of Unit One, his significance within the group had all but been forgotten. Herbert Read's lack of recall regarding Coates' part in Unit One and Coates' exclusion from later editions of Read's *Art and Industry* have, no doubt, contributed to his demise. Nevertheless during the 1930s Coates was a respected, leading presence within the British modern movement and his ideas were taken seriously.

Today Coates' position as an important figure in the development of British modernism is being realised, but it is difficult to understand why his status was obscured in the recounting of the history of the British modern movement during the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps Edward Carter's opinion of Coates as a '... tortured, lonely and not really successful chap on his own' was the consensus view.[166] Certainly Jack Pritchard's comment on Coates would seem to corroborate this perception: 'Wells Coates was always destroying himself, he was a total architect but not a total person, as he made life difficult for himself. But it was obvious that Wells Coates was as something across the river, he was a great innovator' (Elgohary, 1966 p. 298). Another commentator and writer of his obituary (AR 1958, vol.134, pp. 357-360), J W Richards is considered by Cohn to have

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[165] WCA Box 30-B Diary and notes.
[166] Pritchard Papers PP/24/4/16 letter from Edward Carter to Jane Drew 15/06/1964.

been a loyal friend (1999 p. 213). However, Richards' comments on Coates tend to contain a 'sting in the tail', for example in describing Coates' CIAM participation (cited in chapter 5) the quotation concludes: '... There Wells was in the centre of everything, talking enthusiastically in French with a demonstratively Gallic accent and flourish of the hands – even to foreigners whose English required neither' (AR 1958, vol. 134 pp. 358). It was to these men, Carter, Pritchard and Richards, that the next generation of architectural historians spoke, which could explain, in part, the demise of Coates in the subsequent rewriting, when it appears character defect was apt to over shadow design ability and status.

It could be suggested that Coates was exploiting his Japanese childhood to assume an interest in an already established Eastern aesthetic, but equally it could be argued he was not taking advantage of a trend but leading it. Gradually his suggestions of Japan as an inspiration on modern design are discussed and disseminated; Paul Nash in *Room and Book,* Noel Carrington notes on several occasions the Japanese inspiration in Coates' designs. His work was regularly featured in the DIA's journal *Design for Today*, which also cited the traditional Japanese interior and *tokonoma* as a precedent for the modernist interior; it is possible Coates was also responsible for these items.

Yet as we revealed in our examination of Japonisme, in chapter six, during the inter-war period Coates was not the only modernist designer in Britain to be inspired by the Japanese house, nor were his texts alone in recommending the Japanese interior as an exemplar for modern living. The work of friends and associates of Coates: Anthony Bertram, John Betjeman, Noel Carrington, Serge Chermayeff, John Gloag, Ernö Goldfinger, Oliver Hill, Raymond McGrath, Paul Nash, and Christopher Tunnard, demonstrate reference to Japan either in texts or designs. Whilst it would be incorrect to propose their interest in Japan came solely from Coates, it is nevertheless fascinating to realise that the work of these friends and associates was produced after his first articles and interior designs. These facts, considered in relation to Coates' influential role within the British modern movement, would lead one to believe that indeed he was an important disseminator of knowledge on Japan and Japanese architecture during the 1930s.

The volume of texts and images available on Japanese architecture during the inter-war years is surprising. Many of the texts came from Japan, including Jiro Harada's articles published in *The Studio* and his three books on gardens, houses, art and culture; it was illuminating to realise his role in the promotion of a new modern Japonisme in the West. The information on modern Japanese architecture is particularly exciting, as it is generally believed that there was no knowledge in Britain of inter-war modern architecture

in Japan until the 1970s. This is an area that requires further research; the texts (Appendix 10) are still held at the RIBA library.

The availability of all this information on Japan and Japanese architecture, the published suggestions that this architecture should inform modern design and lifestyle, the realisation of this inspiration in British architectural and interior design confirms the conclusion that Japonisme did continue in Britain during the inter-war period and indeed, Japan was an inspirational source for British modernism. This new form of Japonisme that is part of British modernism is clearly evident in the work of Wells Coates. He does not copy Japanese design motifs but takes reference from the traditional Japanese domestic dwelling to create a modern streamlined interior suitable for a new liberated lifestyle.

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