Zeitschrift: Pamphlet
Herausgeber: Professur für Landschaftsarchitektur, Christophe Girot, ETH Zürich
Band: - (2023)
Heft: 27: Terrain vogue

Artikel: Kyoto garden dialogues
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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1044308

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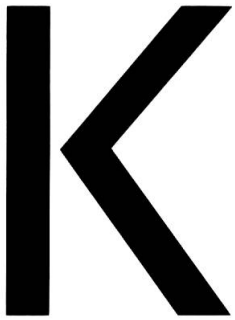

KYOTO

KYOTO GARDEN DIALOGUES

Matthias Vollmer, Dennis Häusler

Curiosity, the desire to experience something new, moves people to relentlessly explore and experiment. In 2014 the Chair of Landscape Architecture of Christophe Girot at ETH Zurich traveled to Japan on a study trip. While in Kyoto, our group marveled at the countless and incredibly beautiful gardens, most likely without understanding exactly what we were looking at. As visitors from another part of the world it was impossible for us to fully grasp the nuances, the contrasts, and the depth of these incredible garden designs.

When language as a means of communication has reached its limits in discussions about gardens, architecture, and space, the shift to another medium such as a sketch, an image, or a model can help to communicate ideas and thoughts. A series of on-site workshops in the following years paved the way step by step for an alternative understanding. We used laser scanners and microphones to map and model the spatial composition and to record the acoustic dimension of these intangible gardens. Seeing the four-hundred-year-old garden of Shisen-dô in Kyoto as a point cloud model was foreign yet familiar. This experience became the starting point of years of knowledge exchange between ETH Zurich and the Design Lab at the Kyoto Institute of Technology (KIT).

With point cloud modeling, we found a communication tool that was intuitively understood by workshop participants from both Zurich and Kyoto. The immediate legibility of a point cloud model stems from the high level of detail and the associated recognizability of objects, artifacts, and features. It facilitates access and enables discussion around space, architecture, and landscape where linguistic translation or the paraphrasing of terms creates more difficulties than it solves. Over the duration of the exchange between KIT and ETH Zurich, a differentiated discussion based on point cloud models has revealed the differences and similarities of spatial concepts regarding the two cultures and created the basis for a deeper understanding both of the perception and conception of space and of its cultural connotations.

Japanese and Swiss students collaborated to develop short point

Section through Shisen-dô, Kyoto

cloud animations with sound compositions from Japanese gardens as a method for exploring space. The animations gave the students a form of expression in which language does not play the primary role and which allows them to bypass familiar and distracting patterns of spatial representation. Point cloud representation allows a shift from the culturally shaped perspectives and their historical connotations. Views and paths that are impossible for human perception on site provide a structure in which new, unfamiliar concepts can be implemented. The transparency of the model creates ambiguities that appear and disappear during an animation. They introduce another contribution to the spatiotemporal experience. The ephemeral quality of the representation, the transparency of the spatial separation, the connection with neighboring spaces—of the context and the landscape—evoke analogies to Japanese architecture and to historical representations of Japanese landscapes.[1] Seeing things from another perspective enables us to see the new and unfamiliar—like the flight of a dragonfly through the garden of Dainei-ken—and in the best sense to never fully understand it.

Pond in Dainei-ken, Kyoto

▶ Follow this link to experience a Kyoto Garden as point cloud.[2]
https://youtu.be/7OAYQfDNjUM

This article is related to the *Pamphlet* "Sampling Kyoto Gardens," published in 2017, which allows an in-depth look at the perception of Japanese garden culture.

1 See, for example, the left panel of Tôhaku Hasegawa's *Pine Trees Screen* or Katsushika Hokusai's *Fuji from Inume Pass*.

2 Arata Kinukawa and Ken Kishimoto, "Hydro Garden," point clouds recorded in Kyoto, 2017, MOV video, 02:53, ETH Zurich and Kyoto Institute of Technology, https://doi.10.3929/ethz-b-000600281.