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Having first established himself as an architectural historian, Terunobu Fujimori (b. 1946) is now more famous for his design work than for his academic publications. He has even been praised as ‘the most influential architect in Japan’ by the critic Kenjiro Okazaki (2006). Fujimori’s popularity is attributable in particular to the fairy tale-like image of his architecture, which tends to appear playful as well as natural and nostalgic. However, this research focuses on the other side of the ‘fairy tale’—specifically, the strangely unfamiliar, even unsettling, feeling that his architecture evokes. Using Freud’s and Vidler’s notions of ‘the uncanny’ for analysis, this study identifies the contradictory sentiment residing in the hidden clashes between the natural and artificial qualities of his design. Arguably, the uncanny aspect of Fujimori’s architecture stems from a post-apocalyptic sensibility imprinted in the Japanese unconscious, which is haunted by the trauma of ruin, whether caused by natural or man-made disaster. This research focus can lead to a broader cultural discourse beyond the scope of a single architect’s work, relevant to all ‘modern unhomely’ societies.

Introduction

Terunobu Fujimori (b. 1946), who began his career as an architectural historian, is now more popular for his design work than for his academic publications, and has even been praised as ‘the most influential architect in Japan’ by the critic Kenjiro Okazaki (2006). Whilst his achievements as a history professor at the University of Tokyo continued to grow, he suddenly made his debut, in his mid-forties, as an architect with the completion of the Jinchokan Moriya Historical Museum (1989–91; Fig. 1). Since then, he has completed more than twenty buildings, though the number is much higher if we include his small teahouses and urban design proposals for exhibitions, which have been widely reported in many publications. Fujimori’s participation in the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale for the Japanese Pavilion (Fig. 2) can be considered as a watershed moment in his career since it greatly increased his recognition on the international stage. His invited exhibitions in Melbourne (2009), London (2010) and Munich (2012), as well as several projects in Taiwan, highlight his expanding worldwide fame. Peter Cook (2008), the leading member of the legendary British group Archigram, stated that Fujimori was the person he most wanted to meet. Fujimori’s work and ideas occupy a central role in Dana Buntrock’s Materials and Meaning in Contemporary Japanese Architecture (Abingdon, Routledge, 2010). Finally, the ‘communicative and expressive’ form of his design was given as an example of ‘Radical Post-Modernism’ in Architectural Design (2011) under the aegis of Charles Jencks.
The basic theme of Fujimori’s design concept, developed over the past two decades, primarily concerns naturalising the finish of buildings. As manifested in the Venice Biennale catalogue, he emphasises the use of natural materials and roof planting, adopting a methodology generally based on simple workmanship, with some playful nuances. As a result, his designs appear natural and nostalgic, and it is these characteristics, often combined with a fairy tale-like cuteness, that attract the public’s attention. However, his designs also assume a quality of unintended unfamiliarity and are, arguably, even unsettling at times. This contradictory sentiment has been hinted at in the commentary of other architects, albeit vaguely and from different perspectives without any gloomy connotations. According to Kengo Kuma (1992), Fujimori’s architecture conveys ‘nostalgia like nothing you’ve ever seen’, and Toyo Ito (2010) remarked that ‘not only does it look vernacular but it also appears to have flown from an alien world and landed on its site’. This paper insists that the rather strange emotion evoked by Fujimori’s work deserves more attention and should be discussed in terms of the
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Sigmund Freud undertook an aesthetic investigation into the concept of the uncanny from a psychoanalytical viewpoint in his essay ‘Das Unheimliche’ or ‘The Uncanny’ (1919), thus offering a powerful insight for later cultural critics and practitioners. Despite his acknowledgement that this category of ‘the frightening’ is not easily definable, it was clear to Freud that ‘the uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed’. What is notable about this observation is the original familiarity of the eerie feeling, which is ultimately related to our longing for our first home—that is, the womb. This characteristic is recognisable in Fujimori’s nostalgic but somewhat alien design. It was Anthony Vidler who tackled the notion of the uncanny in architectural

Figure 2. Japanese Pavilion at the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale (photograph courtesy of Peter Blundell Jones).
hermeneutics. In *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992), 14 he briefly historicises various ideas about the uncanny, from pre-Freudian concepts (eg, the eighteenth-century aesthetic concept of ‘the sublime’) to post-Freudian ones (eg, the latest post-structuralist, post-colonial and feminist positions), pivoting on the Freudian uncanny itself. Vidler then projects the quality of uncomfortable-ness onto late twentieth-century architecture and urbanism, from deconstructivist dismembered buildings to ‘homes for cyborgs’, and from ‘post-urban-ism’ to the ‘psycho-metropolis’, all of which evoke the different depths and structures of ‘the modern unhomely’. For Vidler, the ‘social and individual estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness’ reflected in contemporary architectural and urban spaces are a critical representation of ‘a fundamentally unlivable modern condition’. 15

Yet, Vidler’s frame of the uncanny does not always appear to fit with Fujimori’s design, and, at worst, its application risks resorting to the kind of formalism that Vidler warns against.16 (Contrary to Vidler’s emphasis on space, Fujimori seems to have more interest in form, and he has never used the notion of the uncanny to explain his designs.17) Nevertheless, this paper maintains that the odd sensibility tangible in Fujimori’s architecture is worthy of study, partly relying on and partly bypassing Vidler, let alone Freud, whose essay ‘The Uncanny’ is itself uncanny.18 This is because Vidler’s and Freud’s notions of uncanniness are not necessarily fixed;19 rather, they are flexible and therefore still provide a theoretical common ground for interpreting Fujimori. More importantly, Fujimori’s fairy tale suggests a fresh aspect of the uncanny in the context of the recent architectural climate.

Although his strange primitivism developed slightly late to be noticed by Vidler, it can be said that it perhaps belongs to the stage that might come after what Vidler calls ‘a techno-uncanny’20 (although the chronology is often blurred), considering the development of post-war Japanese architecture. Fujimori’s architecture should be read within the Japanese context, which formed the uniqueness of his uncanniness. The word ‘unheimlich’, or ‘uncanny’, is usually translated as *bukimi* [不気味] in Japanese to indicate an ominous sensation (literally, *bu* signifies ‘negative’ while *kimi* means ‘feeling’) and is paraphrased as *kimyo-na shinmitsu-sa* [奇妙な親密さ; ‘strange intimacy’] (the very Freudian idea).21 Meanwhile, expressions such as *kikai* [奇怪; ‘grotesque’ or ‘weird’] and *fushigi* [不思議; ‘mysterious’ or ‘strange’] are also sometimes used to convey the meaning. *Bukimi* has been associated with diverse Japanese cultural genres, from pre-modern folktales and fictions to religious practices and post-war pop culture.22 This paper will argue that such cultural manifestations are condensed and reflected in Fujimori’s designs, explicitly or implicitly.

The present study of the Fujimorian uncanny is expected to provide a balanced and critical understanding of this increasingly popular architect’s designs. Moreover, the discussion can lead to a broader cultural discourse, based on Japanese culture but relevant to all ‘modern unhomely’ societies. Before beginning the investigation, however, we should first cover the more widely recognised side of his story.
The fairy tale of Terunobu Fujimori starts with his debut, the Jinchokan Moriya Historical Museum. Built in his home village of Chino—part of the Suwa district in Nagano Prefecture—this museum was intended to store and display the Moriya family’s historic materials related to local Shintoism, with which Fujimori had been well acquainted since childhood. When consulted on the project, he was supposed to recommend a suitable architect, possibly the famous Toyo Ito who had also grown up in the Suwa area. He decided, however, to take on the project himself, concluding that the building could not be properly designed without an adequate knowledge of the unique vernacular faith.23 Thus, consideration of the regional context was a precondition for the project from the beginning. More accurately, it was a good excuse for Fujimori to break into the world of design. (His interest in designing a building, which had lain dormant for twenty years since his graduation from Tohoku University, was revived around that time.24)

As a consequence, the Jinchokan needed to reflect vernacular tradition, a trait that is effectively expressed in its naturalistic appearance. The two masses comprising the building are all finished with natural or natural-looking materials: split-wood panels for the exhibition hall exterior and mud-coloured mortar with cut straw for the storage mass; this latter material also covers the whole interior of the building. In addition, the traditional slate tiles on the sloped roof enhance its regional identity, and the four tree-like columns piercing the eave at the entrance recall the onbashira (Fig. 3), or the freestanding wooden pillars that demarcate the boundaries of Suwa Shinto shrines.25 Not at all a traditional building, the Jinchokan is well matched with the local context and arouses a profound sense of nostalgia. The building thus established the direction of Fujimori’s design methodology and the way his creations would be perceived in the future.

Realising that subsequent projects would not be given so easily, Fujimori initiated the design for his
own house near Tokyo. This was Tanpopo House (1994–95), in which roof planting—the other theme of his architecture, along with the use of natural materials—was first introduced (Fig. 4). He attempted the idea of a ‘Grass House’—a pun on ‘Glass House’—by planting tanpopo, or dandelions, on its roof and parts of the walls. Although the experiment proved unsuccessful when they all dried up, he continued to apply this idea in diversified ways in his next designs: for example, Nira House (1996–97; Fig. 5), Ipponmatsu House (1997–98) and Tsubaki Castle (2000; Fig. 6). Of course, these buildings also required the use of natural materials; in fact, roof planting can be considered a subcategory of this bigger issue. Meanwhile, common people began to perform simple manual construction work on Fujimori-designed buildings voluntarily, including tasks such as roof planting, mud application and copper-sheet bending. The first such instance involved the planting of nira, or leeks, on the roof of Nira House.

Since the builders refused to do this unexpected work, it had to be carried out by the client’s friends. This resulted in the formation of the
'Jomon Kenchiku-dan', or Jomon Architecture Group. As implied by the word *Jomon*, which refers to the Japanese Neolithic period, this group —whose core members are Fujimori’s friends from the ROJO (Roadway Observation) Society— created a myth that laymen enjoy making buildings by hand using only Stone Age skills. For Fujimori, the act of building is obviously enjoyable and playful, and this pleasure in building should be evident in the final appearance as well. While the piercing columns of the Jinchokan and the dandelions of Tanpopo House are no doubt playful, Fujimori’s playfulness has evolved with the completion of subsequent buildings. The physiognomic impression of Lamune Onsen House (2005), for instance, with pine trees on top of its towers, is playful, humorous and also very ‘cute’ (Fig. 7). Nonetheless, the architectural type that best illustrates the playfulness of Fujimori’s design is the teahouse. This stems from the fact that the Japanese teahouse signifies something beyond its practical function and is small in size, or can be reduced to a very small size, if required. His own Takasugi-an, or Too-High Teahouse (2003–04), is distinctive.
for being elevated high off the ground on two long legs (Fig. 8). In addition, several teahouses made for the recent exhibitions—such as Black Teahouse (Melbourne, 2009) and Beetle’s House (London, 2010)—are so tiny and ‘cute’ that they look more like miniature toys than real buildings (Fig. 9). Perhaps the finest design that dramatises Fujimori’s playful vision is Soradobu Dorobune, or Flying Mud Boat (2010; Fig. 10). Also fabricated for an exhibition, this time at the Chino City Museum of Art, which aimed to celebrate the native Chino man’s distinguished achievements, this shell-shaped teahouse stimulates various amusing associations, whether nostalgic or futuristic. Local people were invited to participate in the manufacturing process for this work as well; in particular, the mud-coated lower shell was well-thumbed by their children. The mud boat’s most conspicuous feature, however, is its desire to fly, denying the principal architectural condition of being rooted in the earth. Although it cannot truly fly, but is simply suspended by metal wires, the Dorobune is an exemplary case representing the Fujimorian fairy tale in a humorous way.
The clash between the natural and the artificial, and the uncanny

Even so, there is always a dark side in fairy tales. As noted earlier, Fujimori’s natural and nostalgic design also evokes a strangely uncanny feeling, and the uncanny is not incompatible with the nostalgic. Vidler confirmed that the uncanny has been regarded as a prime ingredient of ‘modern nostalgia’ in relation to the Freudian ‘impossible desire to return to the womb’.

It would be interesting to observe a plausible parallel between the human desire for the womb and the architecture’s desire for nature: architecture can be understood by comparison with the human destiny to be repressed. Since humankind was banished from Paradise, architecture—as a projected human paradise—has been unable to recover the perfect nature; instead, it has only dreamed of it through artificial nature. Architecture’s desire to return to nature, though never fully abandoned, is probably an unattainable goal.

The recognition of this reality cannot help but lead to impotence in architecture. After all, architecture has two choices: give up on becoming nature or pretend to become nature.
Fujimori chose the latter (though he still appears to pursue the ‘ideal relationship between architecture and nature’ without accepting the reality), as implied by his statement, ‘I dressed science and technology in nature.’ He makes architecture either look like nature or look natural, even through the use of ‘unnatural’ make-up. In other words, he does not hesitate to counterfeit his buildings to attain naturalness. However, the underlying unnaturalness is inevitably revealed from time to time. Arguably, it is this intentional artificiality, introduced to compensate for the architecture’s impossible desire to return to nature, that generates the uncanny. In this context, the idea of *bukimi-no tani* [不気味の谷] or ‘the uncanny valley’ proposed by the robotics scholar Masahiro Mori (1970) is worth noting. According to this theory, the more a robot looks like an actual human, the more our affinity for it increases, but only until we experience a sudden sense of revulsion. (Here, the ‘valley’ indi-
cates a dip in the graph of ‘the human likeness of an entity’ versus ‘the perceiver’s affinity for it.’)\(^{38}\) Just as a human replica that looks ‘almost human’ but is not exactly the same produces an uncanny feeling, Fujimori’s buildings that look ‘almost natural’ but are critically artificial evoke a similar emotion.

The intentional artificiality of Fujimori’s designs also began with the Jinchokan, while its spatial qualities, too, assume an uncanny sense. (Fujimori describes the interior space of this building as ‘a cave of mud’, where darkness and primitiveness, along with the display of stuffed animals, evoke a certain feeling of the grotesque. Despite his general indifference to space itself in design, he showed a keen interest in employing a cave-like space in his design—whose undifferentiated plan Ito characterised as ‘a plan before planning’\(^{39}\)— and developed his own theory of cave spaces.\(^{40}\) This cave space can be understood as representing the womb, our first home, which is familiar but estranged, and therefore uncanny.)\(^{41}\) The mud-wall appearance of the building would probably be mentioned first as the element reflecting such artificiality. This is because the image was created by applying the above-mentioned fake mud to the concrete surface,\(^{42}\) risking discordance between the internal structure and the outer skin; moreover, Fujimori openly explained why and how he created the artificial image.\(^{43}\)

Yet, the simulation is even more drastic with the piercing columns in the front. (For the wall, at least, he had experimented with real mud and found that mimicking a mud wall was unavoidable.) This is not simply because the columns look like trees; it is because they were made to look structural despite their non-structural character. In truth, the wooden columns, or posts, just stand independently without any real connection to the building’s load-bearing parts. The columns pass through holes in the roof without actually touching it, and the way they intersect with the beams is largely for visual effect. Close observation reveals that the pseudo-beams from the column side do not reach the wall but suddenly stop at the exterior cladding plane (Fig. 11). Certainly, one would be unsettled rather than excited by this camouflage.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, the columns have another nostalgic but artificial
element that arouses an uncanny feeling. It is the metal bird called nagigama, originating from the blade of a scythe, several of which are mounted on the upper part of the modern onbashira (Fig. 12).

In the Suwa region, it is a Shintoist practice to replace the onbashira every six years through a ritual that involves hammering nagigama into a tree trunk that is to be used as a new onbashira. In ancient Japan, the bird was a spiritual symbol that was believed to mediate between this life and eternity. Although the Jinchokan’s metal bird may well be considered a ‘natural’ and successful application of vernacular tradition to contemporary architecture, this strong religious nuance can induce a sudden fright, especially for outsiders who are unfamiliar with the indigenous faith. As Freud put it, “everything we now find “uncanny” […] is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity.”
As Fujimori designs more buildings, the clash between naturalness and artificiality becomes more bold and clever. Let us set aside for now a discussion of typical roof planting, in which artificiality is detected rather easily. What matters here is the kind of artificial naturalness that looks almost natural, elaborately concealing its artificiality. For example, the rafter-like sticks of the Ku-an tearoom (2002–03) are just attachments screwed into the wall with no real structural function aside from, at best, partially supporting a gutter (Fig. 13). The wooden columns of Yakisugi House (2006–07) create the illusion that trees grew and pierced through the roof (Fig. 14); in reality, the upper branches above the roof are separate from the columns under the roof. As indicated by the title of the 1998 exhibition ‘Y’avant-garde’ (an interesting combination of avant-garde and the Japanese word yaban [野蠻], which means ‘barbarism’), Fujimori’s design signifies a barbaric avant-gardism that wildly violates common-sense architectural principles. Even though the drastically fabricated naturalness of his architecture produces a nostalgic and playful image, the hidden unnaturalness beneath the surface generates flashes of discomfort.

If this is the case, how was the natural-artificial conflict possible for Fujimori? Or, how could it be justified? A hint is found, again, in the Jinchokan project. According to Fujimori, he encountered a dilemma in the design wherein he could not avoid committing a ‘crime’, either spiritual or architectural. Because of building regulations, the museum had to have a reinforced concrete structure, but its outer expression was another matter. He thought that exposing the modern materials would constitute a ‘spiritual crime’ since it would betray the Moriya family’s naturalistic faith. However, hiding the structure beneath heterogeneous materials would mean committing an ‘architectural crime’, alluding to Adolf Loos’s ‘Ornament and Crime’ (1908). His decision to commit an architectural crime for the vernacular clothing was actually predetermined, as already described. Once the decision was made, he dreamed of a ‘perfect crime’; and afterwards, his Y’avant-garde venture developed playfully but uncannily. In fact, Fujimori’s design uniqueness can be seen as resulting from the pressure of his own

Figure 12. Metal birds called nagigama on the Jinchokan column (photograph by the Author).
rule that ‘the building should not resemble anyone else’s building, past or present’, this eventually became a strategic choice for him to differentiate his architecture from that of others. This strategy is disclosed at the end of History of Humankind and Architecture (2005), which he wrote for the general public: ‘A small minority of architects [in the twenty-first century] wants to see a fundamentally fresh form, even counterfeiting history, and if necessary to retreat into history.’ Although he never mentions his own architecture in the book, this sentence is easily read as a justification for his radical design approach.

Ruin and rebirth: The post-apocalyptic sensibility
The clash between natural and artificial in Fujimori’s architecture would appear to be intentional, except
Figure 14. Eastern part of Yakisugi House, Nagano, 2006–07 (photograph by the Author).
that he probably does not want the conflict (which
does not seem to be a conflict at all to him) to be
uncovered, and he absolutely does not intend the
generation of uncanny feelings. This leads us to
ask some critical questions: What does the
uncanny effect symptomise, and how can it be expli-
cated in terms of cultural symbolism? This paper
argues that the answer can be sought through
Vidler’s suggestion of ‘a fundamentally unlivable
modern condition’, especially by relating it to the
poor state of modern technological civilisation,
which might have reached an impasse. Science
and technology is obviously the protagonist that
has spurred progress, but it also poses a potentially
dreadful threat to human beings. Now, the total
destruction of civilisation and a new start can be
imagined, as described in many apocalyptic and
post-apocalyptic fictions.53 ‘The imagination of dis-
aster’, which Susan Sontag (1966) identified in
post-war science fiction films, is generally anchored
in an ‘irresponsible use of science’, typically, ‘the
possibility of nuclear holocaust and its aftermath’. It is
further stimulated by ‘ecological catastrophes’
owing to pollution, global warming and so forth.54

In architectural history, it can be said that Archi-
gram in Britain marked the climax of technological
utopianism in 1960s, whilst the Japanese Metabolist
architects developed their own version of technocen-
trism on the other side of the globe.55 However, Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) warned
about the possible collapse of this gleaming vision
in his dystopian lithograph ‘Another Utopia’
(1973), in which Archigram’s ‘Walking City’ falls to
ruin through a certain disaster (Fig. 15). The only
hope hinted at here is that mother nature’s patient
resilience will endure the tragedy. In the last
decade of the twentieth century, the American
architect Lebbeus Woods (1940–2012) represented
the crisis of modern society in a more straightfor-
ward way. One sketch for the ‘War and Architecture’
project (1992) pictures a seriously bombed skyscra-
per,56 as if predicting the attacks of 9/11, one of
the most symbolic catastrophes in recent history.
Although his architectural prescription for recovery
from ruin was rather metaphorical,57 his recognition
of crisis was based on reality; that is, various types of
ongoing ‘wars’ occurring around the world. These
are earthquakes and commercial battles, as well as
physical wars in the conventional sense. To him,
the problem of the present crisis is that ‘it pretends
there is no crisis’.58

The Japanese people’s experience of ruin may very
well be traumatic, as seen in their fear of both
natural and man-made disasters; the 3/11 calamity
in the Tohoku area was a mixture of the two. Suffer-
ing from earthquakes and tsunamis is chronic in
Japan,59 and the nightmare of atomic bombs and
consequent defeat in the Second World War
haunts the Japanese psyche. This is why many Japa-
nese films concern memories and imaginations of
ruin, as interpreted by numerous commentators.60
The animations by the director Hayao Miyazaki (b.
1941) are no exception. His directorial debut Mi
rai
Shonen Conan, or ‘Conan, The Boy in the Future’
(1978), depicts a half-primitive, half-industrial
society springing from an earth that has been
heavily devastated by ultra-magnetic weapons
(which are considered much more powerful than
nuclear bombs) and subsequent environmental
changes.61 This post-apocalyptic scenario has con-
Figure 15. Ettore Sottsass, ‘Another Utopia’, 1973, depicting a disaster that ruined Archigram’s ‘Walking City’ (Ron Herron, 1964; courtesy of Archivio Ettore Sottsass).
continued to underlie his later works, notably *Nausicaā of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) where the recovery of a polluted ecosystem is a key issue. Interestingly, the nostalgic buildings and scenery—amid a somewhat distorted setting—seen in Miyazaki’s animations recall Fujimori’s architecture. This allusion suggests a possible connection between the latter and ‘the imagination of disaster’, another clue to the uncanny aspect of his design.

Regarding the connection of Japanese culture with the experience of ruin, the contemporary artist Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) should also be mentioned since he made a psychoanalytic argument about it in the 2005 New York exhibition ‘Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture’. Two points that are relevant to this research can be extracted from his insights. First, post-nuclear trauma (the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August, 1945, was nicknamed ‘Little Boy’) has produced complex national emotions of humiliation, powerlessness and anxiety which pervade Japanese (sub)cultural forms, from *manga* and animation to children’s toys. Furthermore, all of these outlets of Japan’s so-called *otaku*, or ‘geek’, tendency assume *bukimi*: that is, an ‘air of the grotesque’ or the uncanny. This pop cultural phenomenon naturally parallels the architectural uncanny, although Murakami rarely crossed into the architectural area.

Second, geek fantasy is reflected in the obsession with not only drastically violent and sexually distorted forms but also extremely *kawaii* or ‘cute’ qualities, as epitomised by the ‘Hello Kitty’ character. This *kawaii* sense has further evolved into a sympathetic feeling of *yuru*, which means ‘loose’ and ‘lethargic’, such that *Yuru Chara* (‘Yurui Characters’), local icons in Japan, signify ‘lovable loser’ and ‘self-deprecating humour’.

It is likely that the excessive *kawaii*-ness in Fujimori’s designs is not isolated from this Japanese cultural context, regardless of its direct link to the *otaku* tendency. In this way, his architecture is readable with reference to the traumatised psyche of post-war Japan, which might be called ‘the Japanese collective unconscious’, as in Murakami’s exhibition. According to Carl Jung, the ‘collective unconscious’, different from the ‘personal unconscious’ that develops from individual experience, is inherited by the whole of humankind, or a specific group of people, and occupies a deeper universal layer of the unconscious. Assuming that the Japanese people’s trauma from disasters is not only possibly inherited but also actually caused by real experiences, Jung’s notion is not seamlessly applicable. Nevertheless, the idea is still pertinent because we may consider that the hypersensitivity to potential catastrophes has formed collectively beyond a personal plane, originating from not only the conscious mind but also the unconscious one. In addition, the Jungian ‘archetypes’, or contents of the collective unconscious that are often expressed through myths and fairy tales, are likely to share many ‘mythemes’ with Japanese science fiction stories, especially those with the typical narrative of salvation from apocalyptic disaster.

A similar narrative seems inherent in Fujimori’s design, most noticeably in his diploma project at Tohoku University entitled ‘Bridge: The Method of Ledoux for Giving Reality to Images through Illusion’ (1971; Fig. 16). Whilst the machine-like streamlined structure of the bridge influenced by the ‘Walking
City’ is fascinating (remarkably so when compared with the vernacular look of his buildings since the Jinchokan), no less intriguing is the underlying plot of ruin and rebirth. A closer look at the project’s background shows that he proposed, before constructing the new bridge, to ruin completely the contaminated Hirose River area in Sendai and wait until nature covered the ruins in lush green vegetation (see page 02 of Fig. 16). This reminds us of Miyazaki’s Nausicaä, which was inspired by the mercury pollution of Minamata Bay, and of Sottsass’s dystopian scenario mentioned above. It is clear that the ruin of modern technological society was a foundation for the young Fujimori’s design. However, his imagery of ruin and rebirth needed a methodological medium to be virtualised. That was Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s method of ‘illusion’, as mentioned in the project’s subtitle. Accordingly, Fujimori copied Ledoux’s eye—‘Coup d’oeil du Theatre de Besançon’ (c. 1780)—on the cover page of the project drawings but blanked out its pupil. Whilst the blank pupil is itself uncanny, it can be interpreted as an illusory screen onto which surreal images and narratives are projected to gain reality, just as the inside-outside inversion of an actor’s eye in the original Ledoux creates a fantasy that actualises a fiction on stage.

Fujimori’s conception of ruin, mediated by Ledoux’s surrealist filter, is not particularly special considering the overall atmosphere of postwar Japan. Above all, the influential Arata Isozaki (b. 1931), whom Fujimori greatly admired in his student days, is noteworthy. Aside from Isozaki’s own references to the French revolutionary architect, he clarified through many designs—e.g., the collage
‘Re-ruined Hiroshima’ (1968) and the executed Tsukuba Centre Building (1979–83)—and writings that his architecture ‘start[ed] from the ruins—the degree zero where nothing remained’. Such a ruin-rebirth idea with certain surrealist nuances must be the unconscious base of Fujimori’s own work. Let us consider ‘Tokyo Plan 2107’ (2002/2007) as another example (Fig. 17). As a direct response to global warming and the rise in sea levels that can cause the submersion and destruction of modern cities, this project recommends growing forests and building wooden high-rises with stucco finishes to absorb CO₂ in the air. Even though there is a gap between fantasy and reality, the proposal is meaningful because it reveals his concern with a potential catastrophe, and also because its scenery could be considered a perfect stage set for his fairy tale. In other words, his weirdly naturalistic and peaceful buildings look, in retrospect, as if they were devised for the post-catastrophic landscape of ‘Tokyo Plan 2107’. They are also comparable to those of the ecotopic society rebuilt after a cataclysm, often illustrated in science fiction, as seen in Miyazaki’s animations.

**Conclusion: a Fujimorian version of posthistoire architecture?**

The arguments raised in this paper can be encapsulated in two points. First, Fujimori’s architecture—which is generally viewed as natural, nostalgic and
playful—has an uncanny aspect, and this unexpected quality is detected when the hidden clash between natural and artificial is uncovered. Second, whilst the camouflaged unnaturalness is the immediate source of the Fujimorian uncanny, this eerie anxiety fundamentally originates from the post-apocalyptic sensibility deeply imprinted in the Japanese unconscious, which is haunted by the trauma of ruin. As suggested in the introduction above, these two points give us a more balanced view of the architect and help us to interpret architecture as a whole within a wider cultural horizon. In particular, this paper reconfirmed the Japanese-ness of Fujimori’s designs in terms of their uncanny characteristics and their implications of ruin and rebirth, their naturalistic features often related to vernacular faith, frustrated technological utopianism, surrealistic nuances, excessive *kawaii*-ness, humour and so on.

The post-apocalyptic symbolism that the uncanny side of Fujimori’s architecture connotes needs to be examined—in anticipation of future research—along with his hypothesis of history. Although he does not imply any drastic ruin by physical catastrophe, he supposes that history might come to an end in the late-twentieth century, when no ‘essential change and progress’ in human civilisation could be envisioned. It is not coincidental that this historical view seems to have much in common with ‘the “voids” described by *posthistoire* philosophy’ that Vidler implicitly suggests as a problematic backdrop to the architectural uncanny in his *fin-de-siècle* context. Intriguingly, Fujimori identifies his historical conception with the state of ‘an asymptotic curve’ that comes ever closer to ‘an architectural vanishing point’. On the Cartesian coordinates, the materiality of architecture can never meet the axis, even though modernist *avant-gardes* have ceaselessly pursued ‘lighter and more transparent space’ towards ‘the ultimate abstraction of the zero point’. His breakthrough for this deadlock, as quoted earlier, is ‘to retreat into history’ to create ‘a fundamentally fresh form’, using natural materials in particular and adopting Stone Age techniques in part.

However, the idea is not to restore history to what it was but to appropriate it—even by ‘counterfeiting’ it—in his fairy tale-like way. The uncannily nostalgic form is the outcome of this approach. Considering that ‘architectural forms’ are the places where the opposite poles of ‘the absolute negation of the past and full “restoration” of the past’ inevitably meet (even in the *posthistoire*), the Fujimorian form is perhaps located not on the straight line between the poles but rather somewhere else on a strange locus between them. This position can be, but only partly, explained by his design rule of ‘adopting anonymous principles of prehistoric buildings not to resemble any architecture in history’. Yet, there is another critical reason why his design cannot help but be distinguished even from real prehistoric buildings (despite his aspirations towards the first international architecture of the Stone Age). Specifically, numerous layers and indelible memories of the rise and fall of human history have been compressed into and engraved upon the primitive form of his design in the milieu of ‘the end of history’. Although there are diversified attempts to fill the void of the presumable (but controversial) *posthistoire*, this would be the Fujimorian version of *posthistoire*.
architecture. How fruitful will this mode of architecture prove to be? Perhaps we need a little more time to find out.

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Notes and references
1. After finishing his undergraduate work at Tohoku University, Sendai, in 1971, Fujimori entered the University of Tokyo to study history and completed a PhD in 1980 with a focus on the urban planning of Meiji-period Tokyo. This work was published as Meiji-no Tokyo Keikaku (1982). Afterwards, he published numerous books, notably Showa Jutaku Monogatari ['Story of Houses in the Showa Period'] (1990), Nihon-no Kindai Shisou Taikei 19: Toshi Kenchiku ['Outline of Modern Japanese Thought 19: Urbanism Architecture'] (1990), Kenzo Tange (2002) and Jinrui-to Kenchiku-no Rekishi ['History of Humankind and Architecture'] (2005).


lion (Tokyo, Japan Foundation, 2006a); Fujimori Terunobu Architecture (Tokyo, TOTO, 2007); M. Buhrs, H. Rössler, eds, Terunobu Fujimori Architect (Munich, Villa Stuck, 2012).


5. See the Fujimori special issue of TOTO Tsuishin ['TOTO Communications'], 54, no. 3 (2010).


7. This book is basically structured around Fujimori’s grouping of Japanese architects —‘Red’ (regional or concrete) and ‘White’ (international or abstract)— and illustrates a spectrum of the Red group, in which Fujimori is a central figure. For more about the grouping, see D. Buntrock, ‘Terunobu Fujimori’s Fairy Tales’, in, M. Buhrs, H. Rössler, eds, Terunobu Fujimori Architect, op. cit., pp. 50–59.


11. Etymologically, the English equivalent of ‘das unheimlich’ is ‘the unhomely’ but it was translated into ‘the uncanny’ owing to its semantic proximity to the German meaning: S. Freud, The Uncanny (London, Penguin Books, 2003; first published in German in 1919), pp. 121–162.

12. Ibid., p. 148.
13. Ibid., pp. 124–125. What distinguishes Freud from earlier writers such as E. Jentsch, whose reading of ‘The Sand-Man’ by E. T. A. Hoffmann he re-considered, is his emphasis on the original familiarity of the unfamiliar. Thus, he overcomes Jentsch’s idea that something is frightening ‘because it is unknown and unfamiliar’.


15. Historically utilises many theories to explain other buildings as an historian, he has said he tries not to say too much about his own design concepts as an architect (although he has in fact established some important principles regarding his architecture), because it can prevent the seed of an idea from fermenting and developing: T. Fujimori, ‘Kenchiku-to Shijen-no Kankai-o Dousuruka?’ [‘How to deal with the relation between architecture and nature?’], a lecture delivered at the Symposium ‘Architectural World of Terunobu Fujimori’, Korea University, Seoul (29th March, 2013).


17. For more recent discussions of the uncanny, see N. Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, Routledge, 2003).


19. For more recent discussions of the uncanny, see N. Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, Routledge, 2003).


22. Above all, the word *bukimi* can be linked not only to many mystery stories but also to some vernacular religion-related practices. One example of the latter is the *sekkyobushi* [説経部], an act of reciting narrative that originated in mediaeval Japan in relation to local faiths and Buddhism. See M. Kuzuwata, ‘Sekkyobushi-no Kojo: bukimi-na mono-o megudde’ [‘The Structure of Sekkyobushiki: concerning the uncanny’], *Okinawa International University Journal*, 3, no. 2 (1999), pp. 71–93. In the modern context, however, the term is used more often in relation to the trauma of the post-nuclear disaster and the characteristics of ‘cuteness’, which are discussed in the latter part of this paper. See P. K. Saint-Amour, ‘Bombing and the Symptom: Traumatic Earliness and the Nuclear Uncanny’, *Diacritics*, 30, no. 4 (2000), pp. 59–82 and M. Ivy, ‘The Art of Cute Little Things: Nara Yoshimoto’s Parapolitics’, *Mechademia*, 5 (2010), pp. 3–29.

23. Although Ito had grown up in the same rural area, Fujimori thought his urbane aesthetics did not conform to the characteristics of the region. Several publications give his account of taking on the project and the client’s originally different intention. See the publications listed in notes 2 and 3 above, as well as T. Fujimori, *Tanpopo House-no Dekiru-made* [‘Until Tanpopo House was Completed’] (Tokyo, Asahibunko, 2001), pp. 42–45.


26. By contrasting the idea of a ‘Grass House’ with that of the modernist ‘Glass House’, he distances himself from
the contemporary mainstream architects who are obsessed with the modernist idiom of lightness and transparency. In Japanese, there is no difference between the pronunciations of ‘grass’ and ‘glass’.

27. Fujimori traces the origin of roof planting to the Japanese shibamune [‘planted roof ridge’] tradition and also provides some French precedents. See T. Fujimori, *Architecture of Terunobu Fujimori—Venice Biennale*, 2006, op. cit., p. 4. However, his methods of roof planting are diverse: they include planting vegetation in a line (Tanpopo House) or one by one (Nira House), as well as planting a tree on the peak of the roof (Ipponmatsu House) or turfing the whole roof (Tsubaki Castle).


29. The ROJO Society, founded in 1986, has observed the streets and recorded interesting objects with a camera. It was a co-participant in the 2006 Venice Biennale Japanese Pavilion and the 2012 Munich Exhibition. The Nira House’s client, the novelist and artist Genpei Akasegawa, with Fujimori, are the key members of the society. T. Fujimori, *Objects collected by the ROJO Society 1970–2006 —Venice Biennale, 2006*, op. cit.


34. The subject of architecture was the ‘imitation of nature’ in the Classical and Renaissance worlds, as manifested in Alberti’s treatise (Book 9). Also, the modern movement and the subsequent architecture of the twentieth century connotated a reliance on natural analogy. For the relationship between nature and architecture, as well as the usefulness and perniciousness of the analogy in architecture, see P. Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological analogy in architecture and the applied arts* (London, Routledge, 2008, 2nd ed.). Recently, owing to the sustainability issue, (the question of) nature has resurfaced in architectural discourse, but not without accompanying ‘complex social, political, cultural dimensions’. For the ongoing diversified approaches to this theme, see P. S. Cohen, E. Naginski, eds, *The Return of Nature: Sustaining Architecture in the Face of Sustainability* (London, Routledge, 2014). On the other hand, closer to Fujimori’s context, the Japanese researcher Taro Igarashi investigated the relationship between architecture and plants in his book, *Kenchiku-to Shokubutsu* [‘Architecture and Plants’] (Kyoto, INAX, 2008), pp. 5–18. Originally devised to overcome nature, architecture is anti-natural in itself despite its efforts to imitate nature.

35. T. Fujimori, *Architecture of Terunobu Fujimori—Venice Biennale*, 2006, op. cit., p. 4. In the recent Korea University lecture (2013) mentioned above (note 17), he clarified that his goal is to reconcile man-made buildings with God-created nature (eg, plants).

37. In this paper, the former means that his building mimics the formal appearance of nature; the latter means it appears as if it were formed reasonably and logically within its circumstances, regardless of nature per se. Both types of unnaturalness are equally important in this research.


41. For an in-depth analysis of Fujimori’s cave theory, see the Author’s recent article: H. Kim, ‘A Study on the Concept of a Cave in Terunobu Fujimori’s Architecture’ (text in Korean with English abstract), *Journal of Architectural History*, 95 (2014), pp. 7–17.

42. However, this mud-wall image does not create an uncanny feeling because its appearance does not actually differ from that of a real mud wall: see Mori’s graph of the uncanny valley.

43. *Fujimori Terunobu Architecture*, op. cit.

44. For further discussion, see H. Kim, ‘A Study on the Piercing Column of Terunobu Fujimori Architecture’ (text in Korean with English abstract), *Journal of Architectural History*, 85 (2012c), pp. 35–44.


47. S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, op. cit., p. 147.

48. Although the plants on his buildings—e.g., Tanpopo House, Nira House and Ipponmatsu House—look natural, their artificiality is easily recognisable.


51. Ibid.

52. T. Fujimori, *Jinrui-to Kenchiku-no Rekishi*, op. cit., p. 168 (Author’s translation).


54. Ibid.


59. Because of the disasters, however, Japan could develop a discourse of seismicity in culture and modern technology. Gregory Clancey shows how continual earthquakes formed modern Japan in terms of


61. This animation series, which first appeared on NHK in 1978, was based on the American writer Alexander Key’s science fiction novel *The Incredible Tide* (1970), now available in e-book format (New York, Open Road, 2014). One of the most noticeable images in the animation is Conan’s house composed of a crash-landed spaceship and a primitive hut, which is reminiscent of Sottsass’s ‘Another Utopia’.


65. For him, the trauma basically originates from the catastrophic aftermath of the atomic bombings, but it also stems from the contradictory relationship with the USA, which as both protector and repressor has prevented the country—the ‘little boy’ state—from growing up.

66. The *otaku* culture, which is the subject of this Exhibition, was initially categorised as a subculture but is now merging with the mainstream. Regardless of its status, it ‘remain[s] unable to shed’ a sort of ‘bukimi’ or uncanny feeling, according to Murakami. As described in the Introduction, Freud’s ‘unheimlich’ is usually translated as ‘bukimi’ in Japanese, but Murakami’s original Japanese ‘bukimi’ was translated as ‘grotesque’ in the bilingual book. T. Murakami, ed., *Little Boy*, op. cit., pp. 132–134.

67. Ibid., pp. 82–87, 136-138: the term was coined by the popular illustrator Miura Jun.

68. Although Okazaki had praised Fujimori’s architecture highly (see Note 2 above), he later became more reserved in his enthusiasm due to Fujimori’s growing inclination towards *kawaii*-ness. (Author’s recorded conversation with Okazaki at his home in Kokubunji, near Tokyo, 6th August, 2012.) However, this paper maintains that his design deserves more attention because of its *kawaii*-ness, which represents one pole of contemporary Japanese culture. For Japanese *kawaii* culture, see M. Ivy, ‘The Art of Cute Little Things’, op. cit. and M. Okazaki, G. Johnson, *Kawaii! Japan’s Culture of Cute* (Munich, Prestel, 2013).


71. A typical criticism of Jung’s ‘collective unconscious’ concerns its Lamarckian standpoint regarding the inheritance of acquired characteristics. However, his idea is not easily dismissed since it can also be explained through the more widely accepted evolutionary theory of mutation and natural selection. C. S. Hall, V. J. Nordby, *A Primer of Jungian Psychology* (New York, New American Library, 1973), p. 40, and A. M. Dry, *The Psychology of Jung*, op. cit., p. 108.

72. C. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, op. cit., p. 5. According to Jung, ‘archetypes’ correspond to ‘motifs’ in mythological research, ‘représentation collectives’ in the psychology of primitives, ‘categories of the imagination’ in comparative religion, and Adolf Bastian’s ‘primordial thoughts’ (pp. 42–43). There are numerous archetypes, eg, those of birth and rebirth, death, the mother or Earth Mother, the child, God, the demon, the wise old man, (objects of) nature, etc.

73. Let us borrow Lévi-Strauss’s term despite his dismissal of Jung. Their opposing approaches to a myth—say, ‘syntactic’ (Lévi-Strauss) versus ‘semantic’ (Jung)—make no difference for the purposes of this paper. According to the former, ‘mythemes’ are irreducible units in a myth—like ‘phonemes, morphemes, and sememes’ in linguistics—and their relationships are diversely bundled to produce diverse meanings. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, Basic Books, 1963), pp. 206–231.

74. This scenario was mentioned in his conversation with Ito: T. Ito, T. Fujimori, ‘Akogare-to Kenkyu, Genten-to Sekkei’, op. cit.


76. Coincidently, this alludes to Hoffmann’s ‘Sand-Man’, who was thought to have plucked out the eyes of naughty children. In Freud’s reinterpretation of the story, ‘fear for the eye’ is another form of ‘fear of castration’, the primary source of the uncanny. (See Note 13 above.)


78. Fujimori’s direct adoption of surrealist motifs is found in the Ku-an, where he installed a drooping grass band in the courtyard inspired by Salvador Dalí. For a surrealist interpretation of Fujimori, see K. Okazaki, ‘Surrealist Architect Terunobu Fujimori’, *Eureka*, 499 (2004), pp. 98–102.


80. This was the only choice in architecture for Isozaki, who had experienced the disaster of war in his early years: A. Isozaki, ‘Writing on Architecture’, in, K. T. Oshima, ed., *Arata Isozaki* (London, Phaidon, 2009), pp. 6–9.
81. For more about the project, see T. Fujimori, ‘Toward an Architecture of Humankind’, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–15.

82. Also, see the Roof House (2007–09), in which the roof itself forms a picturesque scene, as well as ‘New York 2109’ (2009) and ‘Vegetable City’ (2010).


85. T. Fujimori, *Jinrui-to Kenchiku-no Rekishi*, *op. cit.*