

Not-Not as Another Spatial Logic of Constitutive Negation: Revisiting Hiroshi Hara as an Early Cosmotechanical Turn in Japan

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Abstract

This review introduces Japanese architect Hiroshi Hara (b. 1936) and his creative criticism against unilateral globalisation in the 1970 and '80s as a unique legacy of pioneering cosmotechinics in Japan. The growing discourses of cosmotechinics initiated by Yuk Hui has offered opportunities to revisit legacies of alternative perspectives on architecture, urbanisation and technology and thereby redefine the role of architecture as a major world-making agency in the Anthropocene. Joining such efforts, I examine Hara's 1987 collection *Kūkan: Kinou Kara Yōsō E* (space: from function to modality). I focus on three essays from this volume to trace the trajectory of his three main concepts 'function', 'homogeneous space' and 'modality'. Following Hara's appropriation of the Heideggerian 'tool' as a pivot to articulate 'modality' and not-not [*arazu arazu*], from its Buddhist roots through Japanese medieval arts, I show the relevance of these

ideas in contemporary cosmotechinical criticism, and the similarities between Hara and Hui on geometrical space and Eastern traditions of constitutive negation. I highlight Hara's non-essentialist approach, which avoids the East-West axis while decentralising globalisation from beyond his own horizon in Japan.

Keywords

Hiroshi Hara, space, cosmotechinics, technology, globalisation, Japanese architecture

Hiroshi Hara and a cosmotechinical turn in Japan, c. 1970

Japan has experienced a range of modernisation processes since its reformation in 1868, parallel to but nearly always after the West, with the constant lag offering a creative distance for reflecting on its twisted relation to globalisation. As a term consciously imported from and drawing on Western modernism, the 'modern' and its derivatives like 'modern architecture' were never free of quotation marks in Japan, having inspired ironical criticism of Japan's self-imposed assimilation to Western modernity in the form of global industrialisation from neither occidental nor oriental traditions.¹ If anything is quintessentially Japanese in its modernity, it is that Japan cannot claim any convincing cultural essentialism, let alone representing the East as the Other.

Although still obscure in the Anglophone world due to limited translation of his work, Hiroshi Hara (b. 1936) is one of the most influential architect-thinkers from this school of thought in Japan.² Having earned a PhD in architecture in 1964 at the University of Tokyo, Hara started teaching and practising as an architect while contributing to artistic experiments in the late 1960s. After the generation of architects who undertook the country's material

reconstruction through high growth periods, including the Metabolists, Hara advanced more conceptual reflection on the agency of architecture in its pre-materialised phases from the 1967 publication of his first book, *Kenchiku ni Nani ga Dekiruka* (What can architecture do?).

Exemplary of a cosmotechnical turn in Japan, I briefly introduce here Hara's second book from 1987, *Kūkan: Kinou Kara Yōsō E* (Space: From function to modality), focusing on three essays in it, namely 'Kinshitsu Kūkan Ron' (On homogenous space) from 1975, 'Kinou Kara Yōsō E' (From function to modality) from 1986, and 'Arazu Arazu To Nihon No Kūkan-teki Dentō' (Not-not and a spatial tradition of Japan) from the same year.³ As the book's title indicates, the fundamental framework, space, is investigated in a transition from function to modality, where function is designated the principle of modern architecture, and modality that of future architecture. Between function and modality lies 'homogeneous space' as the status quo, which continues to this day. The book can be divided in two parts: the opening 1975 essay as a piece of empirical criticism, and the rest as speculative explorations culminating in the two 1986 essays. Tracing the trajectory from function via homogeneous space to modality, I contextualise Hara in cosmotechnical discourses initiated by Yuk Hui, through some similarities and differences between their respective reinvestigations of geometrical space and Eastern traditions of constitutive negation.

From function to homogeneous space

As the foundation of this book, 'On homogenous space' investigates the global expansion of generic cities and the material-semiotic consequences of this growth across architectural, urban, and cosmological scales through what he calls homogeneous space. Yuk Hui observes that 'the [western] history of cosmology from its mythical origins up to modern astronomy... is fundamentally a geometrical question'; similarly, Hara also identifies the metrics of space as the kernel of modernity, suspecting that 'our imagination itself is constrained' by the 'hegemonic "space"... already embodied in architecture', even when we look up at the sky.⁴

Starting from the immediate architectural example of ubiquitous high-rises, Hara explains the essence of homogeneous space in architecture as the abandonment of function. His terminology defines function as integrating 'human life and things holistically' and therefore assuming biunique 'relations' between objects and purposes teleologically.⁵ Due to intrinsic contradictions in specifying complex human activities, however, function was gradually redirected to an opposite tendency to neutralise architecture, to which Walter Gropius's *International Architecture* (1925) ironically put the final touch by

abstracting individuals and nations into the universal human. Unfettered from specific local and historical conditions, the placeless imagination proliferates in Miesian universal space, which Mies van der Rohe prototyped in 1919 and 1921 in Europe and materialised in the US three decades later. Hara characterises this building type technologically: a cubic lattice mainly of steel and reinforced concrete, with vertical transportation and air-conditioning systems, enabling flexible planning, efficient modularity, and an independent constant microclimate. Hara coins the term 'homogeneous space' as the 'form of space that such buildings envision as an ideal', which is 'not limited to buildings alone'.⁶

Accordingly, Hara applies the concept of homogeneity to urban space as 'another receptacle that avoids the fixation of particular relations [functions] and abandons the identification of places' while stressing irreducible material complexity in the city.⁷ Yet, with ubiquitous high-rises as the material-semiotic vehicles of homogeneous space, the city-wide abstraction is enacted among interchangeable fragments constructed under the same principle and mobilised through various networking technologies, including transportation, telecommunication, logistics, water and energy infrastructures. Despite the impossibility of its full materialisation, the mobility-driven spatial homogeneity becomes an ideological slippage between the perceptible and the conceivable, neutralising material heterogeneities into 'mere extension'.⁸ With this ideal/material duality ever maintained, urban homogeneous space intensifies its oppressed contradictions. [Fig. 1]

Beyond tangible buildings and cities, homogeneous space also extends to cosmological imagination as a pure, thus non-contradictory ideality. Exploring its genesis in shifting cartographic representations, Hara contrasts medieval T-O maps and the cosmological worldviews they express with later Portolan charts that reduce places into 'objects to be measured'.⁹ The latter lack cosmological contents, but implicate a particular cosmological space outside of their frame: 'the world is already placed within a spatial container'; that container assumes 'the role of coordinates' and is 'big enough to encompass the world'.¹⁰ To contextualise technology with this turn from plural concentric worlds into the world within one uniform receptacle, Hara explains the 'long time span from the conception of Cartesian space to its projection to Mies's architecture' by stating that 'technology had been preparing for making Mies's sketch possible' behind centuries of stylistic explorations.¹¹ Coupled with modern construction technologies, homogeneous space finally descended from heaven to earth, interlocking the three scales through its common qualities: 'nullification of place and meaning, detachment from nature, idealisation, measurability,



Fig. 1: Conceptual drawing of the Umeda Sky Building by Hara Hiroshi. The cloud is a prime example of modality, as Hara explains: 'clouds, fog, rainbows, mirages, and so on, are all analogies for architecture and the city'. Source: Hiroshi Hara, *YET*.

container-ness, objectification of phenomena, ... manipulability, and, ultimately, its isotropic, homogeneous and continuous nature'.¹²

This historical entanglement between modern cosmology and technology into homogeneous space resists further changes, despite newer spatial conceptions and techno-scientific developments that would have challenged its Cartesian-Newtonian absolutism. Hara mentions Riemannian geometry, field theory and topology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as examples, as well as more recent distance-shrinking communication and transportation technologies. Thus, questioning what it is that has perpetuated homogeneous space, Hara turns to broader technics preceding modern technology, specifically the 'toolset' for spatial representation:

Today we know new images of space ... Nevertheless, our imagination is not liberated, insofar as it is surrounded by tools that are integrated with homogeneous space. For it is this integrity of space and its toolset that becomes the dominant surface of a culture and defines the inertia of things. We may need to begin with the task of replacing the toolset, namely, the method of representation, before directly exploring new space that would encompass our culture.¹³

Hui quotes Bernard Stiegler to discuss 'drawing in the sand' in Plato's *Meno* as a 'technical tool' that retained geometrically-intuited space and modern western cosmology subsequently; in a similar move, Hara regards Mies's sketch as a resolute support for far more massive homogeneous space.¹⁴ Hara thus started out by exploring words and images as cosmotechnical tools to challenge the hegemonic representational framework. He later extended this work by translating homogeneous space into 'a glass case' and calling for 'a sketch that can replace this glass case', which is 'a glassy illusion like Newtonian absolute space' but 'built up materially in cities across the globe'.¹⁵

Continuing this departure from the status quo toward future possibilities, his essays in the following decade discuss homogeneous space rather briefly as the background against which its alternatives are proposed. For example, because homogeneous space is a receptacle of fragments with no intrinsic organising principle, except totalised 'statistically or probabilistically', 'Bricolage about the logic of parts and the whole' in 1980 examines old settlements across the globe as 'reified logics' that spatially integrate buildings into a transindividual whole.¹⁶ Because homogeneous space is 'a space without [heterogeneous] parts' as 'modernity tries to erase borders', 'On the Border' in 1981 rearticulates it with three overlapping symbolic borders: 'enclosure', a perforated insulator

signifying its own inside/outside, 'floor', a field of activities that defines its own ambiguous boundary, and 'roof', an aggregator embracing heterogeneous enclosures and floors into a hybrid whole.¹⁷ Because homogeneous space is dominant but just one of possible spatial cosmologies, 'On Spatial Schemata' in 1985 declares that 'space is to be designed' in this cosmological scope and propounds a pluriversal framework called 'the space of spaces' as a real entity that retains once-exteriorised spatial conceptions in amorphous, overlapping potentialities.¹⁸

What comes after homogeneous space: 'modality' through 'not-not'

At the convergence of all these explorations, 'From function to modality' in 1986 redefines Hara's function concept in a Heideggerian context and proposes modality to replace homogeneous space, while 'Not-not and a spatial tradition of Japan' in the same year develops *arazu-arazu* (literally not-not) as a logic to evoke the transition. In brief, modality is an attitude to grasp an object with its phenomenological 'potentialities,' and the logic of not-not helps the reframing by perpetually negating the finality of actualities.¹⁹ To advance this argument, Hara first associates Heideggerian equipmentality with a functionalist ethos: 'Heidegger's "tool" was a conceptual device that represented the machine era. The machine is a concept that visualises mutual relations among things', while emphasising its dependency on industrialised imagination: 'although physics had already elucidated a world in which [mechanistic] causality is validated; it must be only after the emergence of various mechanical objects that people started recognising such necessary relations'.²⁰ Affirming the agency of things teleologically, this ironical effort to mechanise the equipmental structure of life into transparent causal systems failed to seize the complexity of human activities.

Homogeneous space thus scrapped Heideggerian tools, together with the impossible rationalist endeavour, by 'abandoning any setting of relations' as a simple solution to forget all the purposeful human activities and subordinate various kinds of things to the reproduction of a single flexible container.²¹ In a coincidental association with the essence of technology Heidegger identifies in 'enframing', which 'precedes all' and 'demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve', Hara stresses technology's pre-architectural dominance as already 'materialised hegemonically by socio-economic forces prior to [a new kind of] architecture that would have emerged through the dissociation of [functional] relations as its theoretical foundation'.²² Reassessing the suspended possibility, Hara proposes modality to reaffirm material and locational contingencies beyond functionalist understanding of architecture

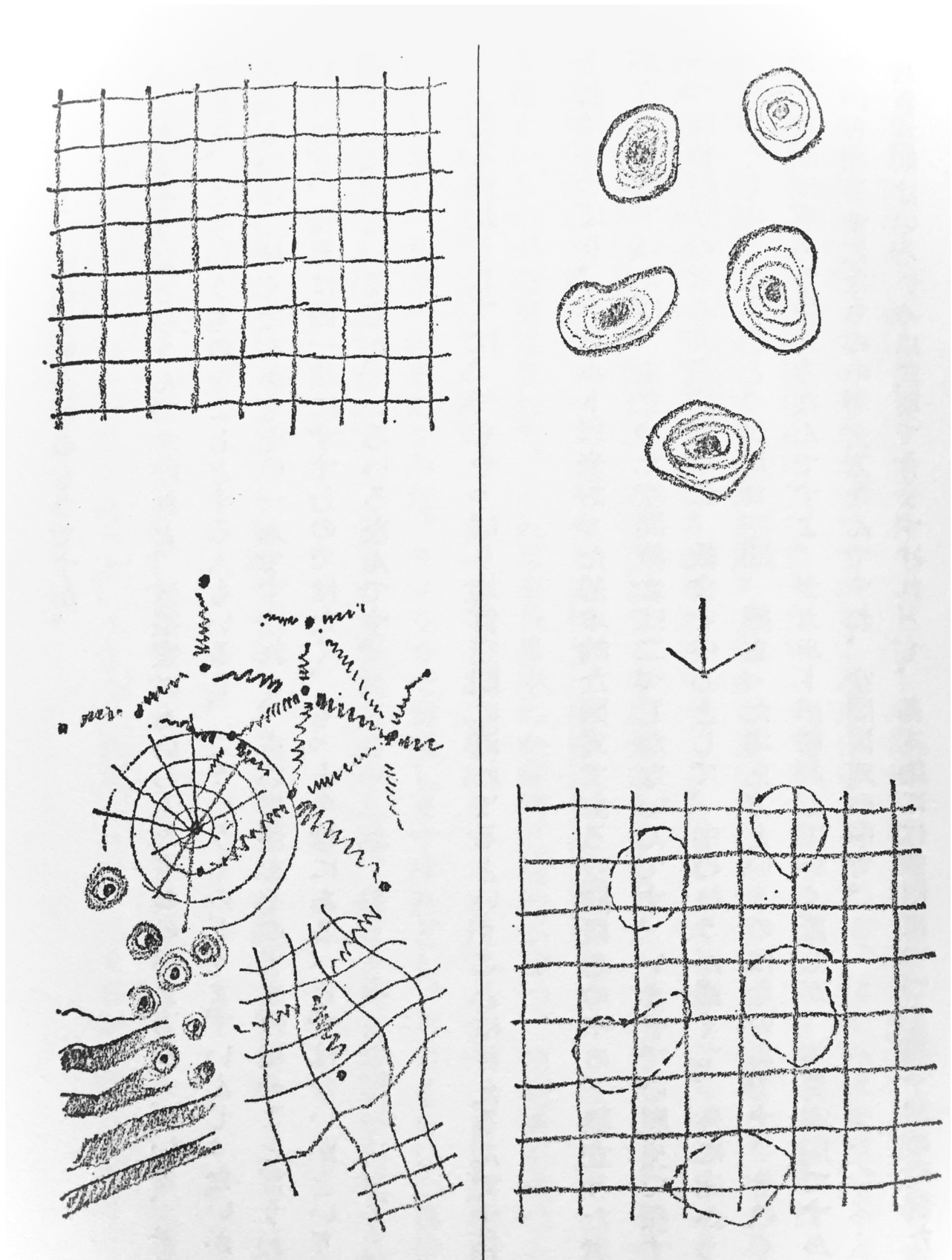


Fig. 2: Explanatory sketches by Hara Hiroshi. Left: Homogeneous space vs the space of heterogeneous systems. Right: Abstraction of plural concentric worlds into a geometric coordinate system. Hara's original caption reads: 'Modernity has erased borders and homogenised space'. Source: Hiroshi Hara and Senji Kuroi, *Conceptualizing Human and Space: Lecture on City/Dwelling*.

as a tool, stating that 'a tool also entails [diverse] appearances' and that 'a certain set of [functional] relations can effect diverse denotations' depending on how it is materialised and among what other things it is placed.²³

Such contingent qualities are not fully transient, but 'bundled' and 'overlapped' successively into an amorphous whole, like a cloud.²⁴ In contrast to a functionally individualised tool, Hara compares this becoming of modality to a 'scene', where an infinitely complex environment meets the human as its negentropic interpreter to form 'an integrated system that generates meanings'.²⁵ Hara further associates the conceptual pair tool-scene with technology: tool with 'modern architecture: function - (physical) body - machine', and scene with 'contemporary architecture: modality - consciousness - electronic equipment'.²⁶ However, the two sets are not mutually exclusive, since Hara designates 'scene' as encompassing 'tool'. Similar to Robert Venturi's 1994 manifesto, 'electronic equipment' here is a metaphorical guide to the semantic, just as 'machine' is a technical image of causality, and thus has little to do with the literal application of new technologies.²⁷ Hara sees electronic equipment as offering imageries and vocabularies to help us 'look into consciousness' and hold elusive processes as a scene of modality.²⁸ [Fig. 2]

Shifting from modality itself to its generative logic, Hara re-examines Japanese medieval arts as an example of a particular form of constitutive negation, which he labels 'not-not' in contrast to dialectics as "'two springs" of culture'.²⁹ Warning that the 'Japanese tradition to be discussed is not unique to Japan', Hara quotes a medieval poem depicting an autumn scene at dusk with maples and flowers fading into darkness, which induces the 'ineffable modality of space' through the dis/appearance of the landscape simultaneously becoming 'a double image, ambiguously overlapping, or neither of both'.³⁰ Such modal contingency also characterises tea room architecture with its interfacial borders inducing constant fluxes and the potential inversion of contrasted qualities, such as front-back and outer-inner, which maintains 'fictionality' against brutal actualism.³¹ Thus assuming that 'everything[-actual]-contains-everything[-potential]', Hara introduces Japanese Buddhist poet Kamo no Chōmei's Hōjō-an as an architectural paragon of not-not. Documented in his essay *Hōjō-ki* (The ten foot square hut) (1212), the Buddhist poet lived as a recluse in the three by three metre shed after moving twice in his lifetime; the floor area of this living space was a thousandth of his first residence. Hara explains its spatial quality 'unfolding while contracting,' or 'expanding while shrinking' in a clearer not-not opposition, as the physical contraction inverts factual and fictional spaces and alludes to the universe in the very negation of physical extension toward it.³²

Exploring its Buddhist roots, Hara identifies not-not in consecutive negation – like 'A is neither a1, nor a2, nor...' – by which a series of negated predicates endows the subject with an inexhaustible number of properties. This redundant rhetoric is minimised into a cascading all-sided negation by Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna in *The Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (Root verses on the middle way) (c. 2–3 CE): 'Everything is true; and is not true; and is true and not-true; and is neither not-true nor true'.³³ Later called a Tetralemma, this form itself unfolds a given subject into all its logically possible oppositions, among which overlapping associated qualities are harboured. The resulting semantic field of connotations holds the space of not-not as embracing 'the world of holistic mood' or of changing 'appearances', which tool-oriented 'functionalism cannot step into'.³⁴

Like dialectics in western traditions, constitutive negation is not unfamiliar in Eastern traditions, as Hui makes clear when he challenges logocentric modernism by introducing 'the negation of logos' through the Japanese monk Dōgen's 'think of not-thinking' as a 'pure negation' that induces the third way 'between thinking (*shiryō*) and not-thinking (*fushiryō*)... which is non-thinking (*hishiryō*)'.³⁵ Similarly, Hara understands negation as simultaneously denoting 'not-true' and connoting 'other possibilities', while emphasising its 'concurrent' spatiality against more progressive modern dialectics: 'not-not...postulates the spatialisation of time in its simultaneous unfolding, thus horizontal and synchronic in comparison with dialectics'.³⁶ Here is a complementary coincidence with Hui's criticism that geometrisation as the 'spatialisation of time' in the West initiated 'the mechanisation of causal relations'.³⁷ It is also the path to what Hara criticises as 'function' and its disposal into homogeneous space. Not-not thus offers an alternative of a non-geometrical 'spatialisation of time' without mechanistic presumptions, and Hara articulates its unsettling nature against more totalising dialectics: 'with regard to its [resulting] whole, dialectics defines its contour while not-not abandons the attempt. While the former regards a place as a receptacle, the latter comprehends it as a field. Also, while the former excludes ambiguity, the latter generates it'.³⁸ Thus unravelling the contour of identity into interfaces with its alterities, the space of not-not, or 'a space becoming in the border of its concurrent being and not-being' inserts momentary scenes of modality onto the flawless ideal of homogeneous space, revealing how porous it is toward underlying heterogeneity.³⁹

From the east-west axis to non-essentialist decentralisation

I have given an overview of the way Hara's magnum opus criticises function and homogeneous space, and

proposes modality through not-not as a path to change the globally hegemonic, modern spatial cosmology. Although I inevitably had to reduce the rich nuances of his metaphysics, realism, and ontology of space through the uniquely material-semiotic agency of architecture. Until Hara's theoretical work is fully translated, I want this review to assert the relevance of his work to ongoing cosmotechnical discourse, as well as to established criticism of hyper-flexible planetary urbanisation, including Henri Lefebvre's abstract space, David Harvey's time-space compression, and Rem Koolhaas' junkspace.⁴⁰

In closing, it is worth noting that Hara carefully avoids the East-West dichotomy while pursuing pluralist decentralisation, perhaps reflecting Japan's twisted modernity. But, more fundamentally, he shows the general context of architecture entangled with the globalised production of homogeneous space more materially and technologically than other technical activities. Hara begins 'Not-Not and a spatial tradition of Japan' by extricating tradition from essentialism, saying that it belongs 'to internationalism rather than nationalism'.⁴¹ He concludes the essay by admitting: 'I have glimpsed some spaces of not-not in Europe and other places', and citing Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology* (c. 5–6 CE) as epitomising not-not in Western traditions.⁴² Even beyond Hara's own horizon, the concurrent negation of not-not can be found in Hegelian modal contingency as the 'absolute restlessness of becoming' (*absolute Unruhe des Werdens*).⁴³ Trusting that 'any culture must have some logic to maintain ambiguity in its undercurrent', Hara's own exploration of modality is exteriorised in his architectural works and representations. Thus inscribed in what he calls 'the space of spaces', a public sphere of our spatial imaginations, the legacy is open toward many yet-unknown and never fully identified peoples, places and traditions equally under the homogenising forces of unilateral globalisation.

Nearly four decades ago, Hara announced with characteristic understatement: 'this book lacks direct discussion about technology', and continued: 'I would venture to say this book has substituted "scene" for "tool" [as a technical] interface to reality'.⁴⁴ This humble yet confident ambition must be easier to understand today amid the growing vocabularies of cosmotechnics.

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Notes

1. See Noboru Kawazoe, *Gendai Kenchiku Wo Tsukuru Mono* (What creates contemporary architecture) (Tokyo: Shokokusha, 1958) for a discussion of post-war Japanese architecture in ambivalent contradictions with western cultural, political and industrial influences; see also Gabriel Kogan and Masamichi Tamura, 'Architecture Against Tradition', *Ronko* (2022) for technological aspects of 'tradition' in the period.
2. All translations of Hara's titles and of quotations from his work are my own. There are published English translations of some of Hara's texts available in *GA Architect 13: Hiroshi Hara*, ed. Yukio Futagawa (Tokyo: ADA Editra, 1993): 'Yukotai Theory' (1968/1993), 'Reflection and Inversion' (1978), 'Learning from Villages: 100 Lessons' (1987), 'From Function to Modality' (revised excerpt) (1986/1993), and 'Field Work on Two Belts' (1991), all translated by David B. Stewart and Yanai Takashi. In addition, *YET* (Tokyo: TOTO Publishing, 2009) by Hara himself includes short essays and project descriptions translated in English by Thomas Daniel. Other English materials on Hara include *Hiroshi Hara: The 'Floating World' of his Architecture* (New York: Wiley-Academy, 2001) by Botond Bogнар.
3. Hiroshi Hara, *Kūkan: Kinou Kara Yōsō E* (Space: from function to modality) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987). The book includes four earlier essays: 'Kinshitsu Kūkan Ron' (On Homogeneous Space) (1975), 'Bubun to Zentai no Ronri ni Tsuiteno Bricolage' (Bricolage about the logic of parts and the whole) (1980), 'Kyōkai Ron' (On the border) (1981) and 'Kūkan Zushiki Ron' (On spatial schemata) (1985); two new essays: 'Kinou Kara Yōsō E' (From function to modality) (1986) and *Arazu Arazu to Nihon No Kūkan-teki Dentō* (Not-Not and a spatial tradition of Japan) (1986); and an introduction and commentaries that interconnect all these essays as a coherent criticism of unilateral globalisation.
4. Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016), 208; Hara, *Space*, 25–26.
5. *Ibid.*, 49.
6. *Ibid.*, 31–32, 38.

7. Ibid., 59.
8. Ibid., 60.
9. Ibid., 65. Identified in the seventh century, the T-O map is a cartographic method that represents the entirety of a cosmological worldview as non-Euclidian symbolic relations, which characteristically consists of an O-shaped outline and a T-shaped dividing line within it. Portolan charts were developed since the thirteenth century to represent geographical characteristics of ports more realistically, which Hara sees as prototypical of the geometrical imagination to be fully systematised by the Mercator projection in the mid-sixteenth century.
10. Ibid., 65.
11. Ibid., 70.
12. Ibid., 70.
13. Ibid., 81–82.
14. Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*, 40, 214.
15. Hara, *Space*, 22.
16. Ibid., 73, 103.
17. Ibid., 162; Hiroshi Hara and Senji Kuroi, *Hito, Kūkan Wo Kōsō Suru: Toshi Jūkyō Ron Kōugi* (Conceptualising human and space: Lecture on city/dwelling) (Tokyo: Asahi Publishing, 1985), 52.
18. Hara, *Space*, 186, 205–6.
19. Hiroshi Hara, 'From Function to Modality' in *GA Architect 13: Hiroshi Hara*, ed. Yukio Futagawa (Tokyo: ADA Edita, 1993), 128–129.
20. Hara, *Space*, 211–12.
21. Ibid., 220.
22. Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), 303–4; Hara *Space*, 220.
23. Ibid., 222.
24. Ibid., 228.
25. Ibid., 182.
26. Ibid., 239.
27. Robert Venturi, *Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).
28. Hara, *Space*, 240.
29. Ibid., 266.
30. Ibid., 246, 248.
31. Ibid., 174.
32. Ibid., 273.
33. Ibid., 254.
34. Ibid., 249.
35. Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China*, 273, 278.
36. Ibid., 14, 265–66.
37. Ibid., 209.
38. Hara, *Space*, 265–66.
39. Ibid., 274.
40. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 49–50; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 147; Rem Koolhaas, 'Junkspace', *October* 100, *Obsolescence* (Spring, 2002): 175–90.
41. Hara, *Space*, 245.
42. Ibid., 274.
43. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic: Book II*, trans. Tatehito Takechi (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1960), 236.
44. Hara, *Space*, 16.

Biography

Masamichi Tamura is doctoral student of Tsukamoto Yoshiharu laboratory at the architecture department of Tokyo Institute of Technology (Institute of Science Tokyo from October 2024). His research focuses on material-semiotic entanglements between architectural concepts and techno-social environments, including 'space' after the mid-nineteenth century, 'tradition' in mid-twentieth century Japan, and 'urban ecology' in contemporary Tokyo. He also participates in the Canadian Centre for Architecture's CCA-Mellon Multidisciplinary Research Program 'In the Hurricane, On the Land,' conducting a field survey that follows multiple forms of water in the built environment of Tokyo. In a long-term search for alternative urban spatial practices in broader contexts than architecture proper, Tamura has also worked as an independent curator of contemporary art since 2010 and as a local community organiser while co-chairing the Ageing Wellbeing and Parks Committee of World Urban Parks since 2022.

