

Influence of Spirit and Not of Form: Antonín Raymond, Le Corbusier, and Architectural Piracy in the Transwar Era

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In a civilization without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.¹

In this text, “piracy,” as it relates to intellectual property and authorship, is explored through the architectural practice of two architects active within the transnational network located between Japan and Europe during the transwar era. My analysis focuses on work produced by Antonín Raymond (1888–1976), whose success as an architect in Japan was not only anchored in his talent and originality, but also in his sophisticated piracy. One particular relationship and one project will be used to illuminate the complexities related to the meaning of originality and synthesis in terms of design process and modernism, namely, the relationship between Raymond and Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and the notorious case of the “stolen design” of Karuizawa Summer House and Studio of 1935.

As architectural piracy has increasingly become recognized as a phenomenon, the number of identified cases seems to have increased exponentially, although as a result of the process of translation many of the results continue to remain hidden in the gaps of parallel history. Pirates, transgressive in their behavior, travel freely across the domains of commerce, law, trade, and territory. Piracy outlines spatial conditions that touch upon shifting physical and imaginary borders between modern nations. Borders no longer signify land-based inscriptions by imperial powers but translate into open, boundless areas of indiscriminate negotiation. Piracy has been discussed as a general phenomenon to elucidate multi-faceted connections between architecture, literature, maritime history, and urban planning.²

The most recently discussed example of architectural piracy was a copy elsewhere in China of Zaha Hadid’s Guangzhou Opera House design. In *Enduring Innocence: Globalization and Its Political Masquerades* (2005), architectural critic Keller Easterling explores piracy as a metaphor to define a type of liminal architecture that reacts to the changing trends of globalism.³ This is reflected in the piracy of Hadid’s designs in China. For example, the design of the Wangjing Soho complex is being copied, and a race has begun between the original design and the copy

¹ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 27.

² Further reading: Shannon Lee Dawdy and Joe Bonni, “Towards a General Theory of Piracy,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2012); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

³ Keller Easterling, “Seas” and “Piracy” in *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

to first complete construction. During this process, the vulnerability of digital data and the piracy of such material become inter-related. Ōhashi Satoshi, project director at Zaha Hadid Architects, says that the Chinese developers may have accessed and acquired some of the project's digital data. Further, according to an article in the magazine *Dezeen*, in a report on the legal aspects of the case, *China Intellectual Property Magazine* wrote: "Up to now, there is no special law in China which has specific provisions on IP rights related to architecture." Additionally, the article notes that one of the developers had dismissed accusations of copying claiming, "Never meant to copy, only want to surpass."⁴

Czech-American architect Antonín Raymond and his wife Noémi Raymond (1889–1980) used pirated ideas as a source of inspiration. They fused with their original approach and other inspirations to serve as bases for many of their projects. The recent exhibition of the Raymonds' work *Crafting a Modern World: The Architecture and Design of Antonin and Noémi Raymond* summarized the impressive legacy and history of the couple and produced a very kind and scholarly erudite image of their genius and impact.⁵ This short paper aims to show that while Antonín Raymond indeed took a lot of ideas from others and used them for the success of his office, this is sometimes exaggerated in popular writing and should not compromise his position of one of the key modernist architects in the Japanese context. Furthermore, Raymond stated clearly that the notion idea of "architectural borrowing," in quite a broad sense, was a firm part of his creative approach. Therefore, any accusations of "stealing" seem unnecessary. They cannot compromise his overall importance and the value of his architecture and design.

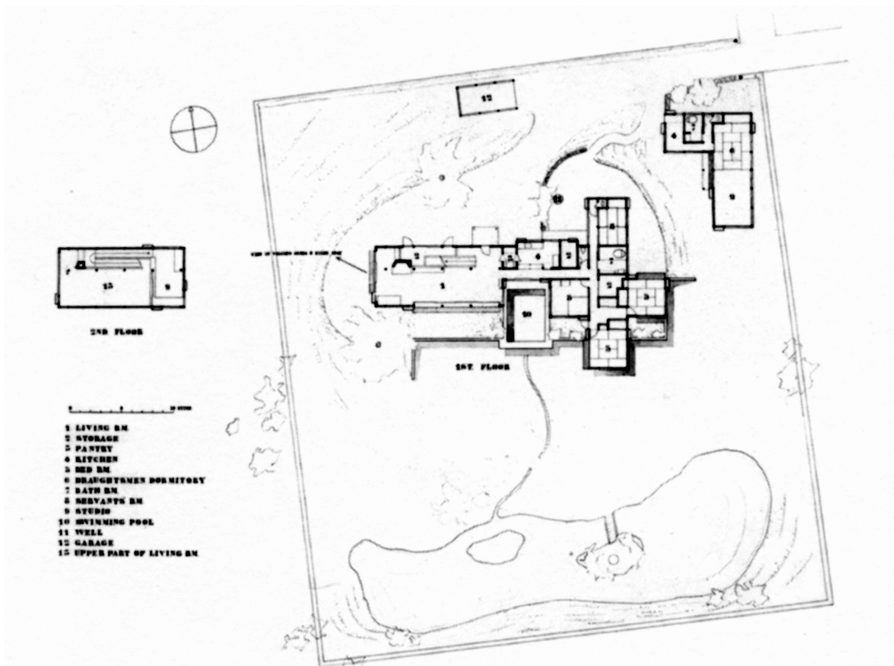
The first act that would classify Raymond as a pirate was the fraud that he committed as a young man, which opened the door to America for him. Raymond lived in rather humble circumstances as a youth, but was an unusually driven architecture student and a talented draughtsman. These situations lead him to steal some money from the Architectural Students' Club (SPA), of which he was a treasurer, and run away from Czech in 1914 to settle in New York where, with the help of the local Czechoslovak community, he landed a job at the prestigious office of Cass Gilbert. He regretted the theft deeply and later would give back more than double its amount. The consequences were, however, quite severe; once his act became known his reputation was put in jeopardy and he experienced general unpopularity among Czech architects, which lasted until recently. There is little doubt that without this piracy, however, his international career would have never taken off.⁶

In 1935, Raymond built one of his most well-regarded Japanese projects: the Karuizawa House and Studio in Nagano prefecture (1933–1935). The building is an example of Raymond's sensitive integration of regional Japanese architecture with paradigms of international modernism. The building is in fact a ferroconcrete structure with a decidedly Corbusian circulation pattern that is wrapped in local materials, such as cedar, chestnut, and grass straw, that help the building

⁴ "Zaha Hadid Building Pirated in China," *Dezeen*, <http://www.dezeen.com/2013/01/02/zaha-hadid-building-pirated-in-china/>, accessed 17 December 2015.

⁵ Kurt F. Helfrich and William Whitaker, ed., *Crafting a Modern World: The Architecture and Design of Antonin and Noémi Raymond* (exh. cat.) (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

⁶ More details in Helena Čapková, "Case Reimann," *Bedřich Feuerstein: Cesta do nejvýtvárnější země světa* (Prague: Aul a KANT Publishers, 2014), 46–47.



to melt into the spectacular landscape of the popular mountain retreat. The house is located in the middle of an open and dramatic landscape that highlights the relationship between architecture and nature, and therefore between man and nature. Raymond was responding to the “idea” that he had identified at the center of Japanese residential architecture: “The Japanese house resembles the evolution of a natural form. At every point it is related to an inner motive for which it had found an exact and fitting solution, not only practical but expressive of a profound understanding of the real values of life. . . . Compared with the Japanese, our love for Nature is very superficial. For him, she is the very key to the secret of existence. . . . He chooses materials which speak for her. Wood in its natural state, straw under foot, and sand on the walls.”⁷ Yet, the uncanny resemblance of Raymond’s design to Le Corbusier’s unbuilt project, the Mattias Errázuris House (1929–1930) has been the subject of on-going debate.

Le Corbusier was astonished to find out about the existence of Karuizawa House, advising Raymond in the letter that he should have consulted him before erecting it. However, he appreciated Raymond’s style and sensibility to the extent that he decided to feature it in the third edition of the *Oeuvre Complet* (1935). Le Corbusier communicated his reaction to the design in a letter from Paris mailed on 7th May 1935 to Raymond:

Dear Sir:

I received your letter of April the 8th and I found it on my return from a trip abroad.

I am glad to have news of you. There is between us no ill feeling, be sure of that, but as you say yourself—there was a little mistake on your side, that is, you omitted writing me a word at the time you published your house in Tokyo, which is really very good. I have no time to read reviews which I receive; my eyes were satisfied to see the illustrations and as I have rather quick reactions—and at that moment exactly, I was dictating the captions for the book published by Boesiger—I took this opportunity to slip in a little dart, to awaken the readers of the book. Incidentally, my remark is not mean; on the contrary, it eulogies and praises the technical capacities of Japan and the taste of your interpretation. I shall say more—that is that you have made such successful interpretation that page 52 of Boesiger’s book is probably the best of the entire work. I shall expand this compliment. I allow my works to be published in all the reviews, it is not in order that my ideas to remain buried in drawers. It is, on the contrary, that they may serve some useful purpose, it is a fact that I am often copied, but very badly or clumsily or stupidly. So that it is at this point that my compliment comes in. Your interpretation of my plans is entirely spiritual and this compliment is sincere. I even hope it will please you.

Be it as it may, be very certain, dear Mr. Raymond, that I bear you no grudge, and that am quite incapable of bearing any. The words which I am writing to you, you can use as you

⁷ A. Raymond, “An Architect’s Experience in Designing Modern Residences for Japan” (1935), in *Antonin Raymond: His Work in Japan, 1920–1935* (Tokyo: Johnan Shoin, 1936), 1–2.

wish—at the close of your letter you seem to invite me to an intervention which I do not completely understand. It is my turn to give you complete liberty to use this letter in any way which will seem agreeable to you.

Please believe in my best sentiments,

Le Corbusier⁸

In the letter, Le Corbusier is calling Raymond's design "a successful interpretation" of his idea. Regardless of the overall friendly tone, this letter is often understood quite simplistically as proof of Le Corbusier's greatness and, at the same time, as evidence of Raymond's architectural piracy. This one letter, however, is not the only piece of correspondence that exists between the two architects, who shared a network of friends. For example, a good friend of the Raymonds and the editor of the well-regarded architecture journal *L'Architecture vivante* Jean Badovici (1893–1956) mentioned Le Corbusier's compliments about Raymond's architecture in his correspondence. The concrete evidence of the mutual respect that the two architects had for each other, which adds complexity to the repeated assertions of the "scandalous" nature of the case of the Errázuriz house, is found in a letter by Le Corbusier to Raymond posted from Paris on 7th January 1940. This handwritten and informally composed letter reads as follows:

My dear Raymond,

Would you be so kind and do a great favour to me?

I was commissioned by the Turkish government to conceive urban planning for the city of Smyrna. Soon I will be leaving for Turkey.

The region is subject to earthquakes. I have not yet studied this set of problems. Would you mind to send me some documentation regarding this issue that you have been perfecting in Japan? There must be many publications about this topic, but I would prefer to rely on your experiences.

How are you getting on? I hope all is very well with you. Here, we are in the state of waiting for the future. If you happen to meet any of my friends, please send them my best regards.

Thank you very much for your kindness and I am,

With my deep sentiments,

Le Corbusier⁹

One possible interpretation of Raymond's Karuizawa house is to see it as a manifestation of the particular influence of traditional Japanese *sukiya* and *minka* architecture on his aesthetic values

⁸ This English translation of the original letter written in French was produced by Noémi Raymond. Both handwritten and typewritten copies are preserved in Raymond archive in Architecture Archives of the University of Pennsylvania.

⁹ The English translation of this letter preserved in the AA UPenn is mine.

and borrowings and quotations from the plans of Le Corbusier's unbuilt Errázuriz house. Le Corbusier's contribution is indeed invaluable, since it forms the basis of the project in terms of plan and volume. Nevertheless, it should be considered as only one of many elements that shaped the creation of Raymond's house, which belongs to a larger series of houses he designed under the influence of the "International style" between 1933 and 1935. However, according to Yola Gloaguen, "while Errázuriz house was designed as a white monolithic bloc, Karuizawa house marked the beginning of Raymond's experimenting with wooden structure in the field of modern residential design, a period which he himself qualified as a new era in [his] design."¹⁰ As Raymond stated, "the plans were drawn in four weeks, the house put up in six, by carpenters deft, speedy and understanding."¹¹ Raymond deeply admired the skill and craft of Japanese carpenters and surrounded himself with a team of talented collaborators. This, included carpenters who had worked with him on a number of projects, including the gem of this stage of Raymond's oeuvre, the Italian embassy summer villa in Nikkō (1929). With this team, Raymond was able to take "advantage of the wonderful ability of Japanese carpenters to work round lumber to perfection."¹²

In 1935, sixteen years after his arrival in Japan, Raymond wrote the following words in the introduction to his first book: "An architect working in Japan has the advantage of seeing materialized before him in Japanese architecture and civilization fundamental principles, the rediscovery of which is the goal of modern architecture. Occidentals, hampered as they are by deep-rooted materialism, have not yet realized these principles in all their purity, for this would demand a spiritual outlook. . . . The problem of Function, Form and Matter with which we struggle ponderously is solved with incomparable ease for it is seen in its right perspective, the exteriorisation of an idea."¹³ This "idea," which Raymond qualified as a "spiritual" or later as a "philosophical" idea, referred to the inner purpose behind the design. It was through the observation of Japanese residential architecture that Raymond realized that this "idea" could be expressed through the principles of "simplicity," "economy," "honesty," and "directness," which would become the key points of his architecture and by extension the principles of his architectural firm.¹⁴

Regarding his intentions for the design of the Karuizawa house, Raymond wrote that it was "to see what could be done if one did indeed seize the opportunity which was offered to build . . . a structure exactly suited to the life [he and his wife Noémi] wished to live."¹⁵ These words echoed a statement made by Le Corbusier and quoted by Raymond in the same text:

¹⁰ Yola Gloaguen, *Towards a Definition of Antonin Raymond's "Architectural Identity,"* PhD. Thesis, Kyoto University, Kyoto, 2008, 89, <http://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2433/57260/3/ykcgk02913.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2015).

¹¹ *Antonin Raymond: An Autobiography* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973), 130.

¹² *Ibid.*, 130.

¹³ A. Raymond, "An Architect's Experience in Designing Modern Residences for Japan", 1–2.

¹⁴ A. Raymond, "Lasting Values in Design" (1949), Kitazawa collection (a private archive by Kitazawa Kōichi), 7–11.

¹⁵ A. Raymond, "'Principles in Japanese Architecture' or 'The Common Ground of Traditional Japanese Architecture and Modern Architecture'" (Lecture at the Japan Institute of New York in 1940), Kitazawa collection, 12.

“Modern architecture is a Way of Life!”¹⁶ Le Corbusier developed this particular idea in the introduction to the second edition of his manifesto book *Towards a New Architecture* (1924, French edition). In his autobiography, Raymond asserted that his adaptation of Le Corbusier’s project was limited to the living room.¹⁷ However, comparing both plans shows that the “L” shaped part of the plan was also a source of inspiration. The placement of the kitchen is similar, even if the outdoor circulation has been brought indoors, and the idea of a recess was used to place the pool at the center of the plan. Despite the fact that the house was designed for summer, Raymond kept a fireplace. Built in concrete, it would create a warm atmosphere on cool evenings and become the center of family life. It was no doubt designed in the spirit of the sunken hearth (*irori* 囲炉裏) found in *minka*, and also recalled the fireplace always present at the heart of Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses, which Raymond would have experienced himself during his stay at Taliesin (May–Dec. 1916).

Gloguen’s comparison of the plans for the two houses with principles of traditional Japanese architecture shows how Raymond adapted Le Corbusier’s plan to a traditional Japanese proportion system.¹⁸ According to the principles of *sukiya* architecture, the tatami module determines the dimensions of the building not only in plan, but also in elevation. The comparison of the sections for the living room in Raymond and Le Corbusier’s designs shows that the height of the lowest point of the ceiling in the Karuizawa house is exactly the same as the one found in the Errázuriz house. But on the other hand, overlapping the tatami module grid over the section of the Karuizawa house shows that the height of both ends (east and west) of the room is directly connected to the proportion system based on the tatami.¹⁹

In his writings, Raymond gives details about some of the materials used in the Karuizawa house and the way in which they were used: “The aggregate for concrete retaining walls and other concrete parts of the building was the lava stone dug up from the ground.”²⁰ “The bearing columns were the grey trunks of chestnut (クリの木), the roof interplay of poles of hinoki (ヒノキ), the walls and planks of natural cedar (杉), the tin roofing was laid over with a thatch of larch twigs (唐松).”²¹ Raymond used materials available in the surroundings of Karuizawa as part of his effort to achieve “naturalness” and “economy.” In this aspect, he was directly inspired by *minka* architecture, which also uses natural materials found locally.

The Karuizawa house was a perfect synthesis of what Raymond had learned about architecture up until 1933 in his work with Frank Lloyd Wright and his study of Japanese architecture and of the influence he received from Perret and Le Corbusier through his collaborators, namely Bedřich Feuerstein and Maekawa Kunio. Karuizawa house stood as the product of synthesis between Japanese traditional architecture and Euroamerican modernist architecture, thereby reassessing their common grounds and compatibility. His design testifies for his allegiance to Japanese traditional types of architecture, while his borrowing of Le Corbusier’s

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ *Antonin Raymond*, 130.

¹⁸ Gloguen, *Towards a Definition of Antonin Raymond’s “Architectural Identity,”* 93–98.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁰ *Antonin Raymond*, 134.

²¹ A. Raymond, “Principles in Japanese Architecture,” 13.

scheme was a strong and clear statement of his intention to be a modern architect and to be considered as a member of the modern movement.

Two Japanese students of Le Corbusier, Raymond's collaborator Maekawa Kunio and Makino Masami, wrote about this process as a part of their account of European experiences. Makino worked for Le Corbusier in 1928 and wrote for the architectural magazine *Kokusai kenchiku* that tradition is something ever changing and that the tea ceremony, for example, became emblematic of traditional Japan only under the impact of Euroamerican culture and its interpretation of the country. Makino also noted that Le Corbusier and his usage of standardization and simplicity comes closer to Japanese architectural tradition than many Japanese architects and therefore modernism is not as far from Japanese tradition that many liked to claim.²² In Japan, Makino worked together with Bruno Taut and taught at the Japanese Bauhaus (founded by Kawakita Renshichirō) in the Mitsuki building on Ginza.²³

In his autobiography, Raymond considers Le Corbusier a great inspiration for the post-war Japanese architecture art scene. He highlights Le Corbusier's projects in India, in particular. As the first example of how Le Corbusier impacted on his own work, he recalls his own house, commonly called Reinanzaka, in Tokyo (1924–1926), and then the Tokyo Golf Club in Asaka built during the 1930s. Raymond's book *Architectural Details* (1938) absorbed Le Corbusier's ideas. Furthermore, Raymond described it as a way he influenced Japanese and other architects. An important acquaintance of Le Corbusier was the young architect František Sammer (1907–1973), who arrived in Japan from Moscow in 1937 and participated on the Golconde dormitory project for the Sri Aurobindo ashram in Puducherry, India (1935–1945). Sammer as well was inspired by Raymond and Le Corbusier; specifically, by the project of Karuizawa and Errazuris house. Upon being injured while fighting as a Czechoslovak citizen in British army in the World War II, Sammer was taken to Britain to recover. He enlisted from India where he stayed and worked on the Golconde project until 1942. During a brief period from 1946–48 when he returned to the Czechoslovak republic, he produced few sketches for houses for his friends and ex-wife Agnes, which show the influence very clearly, including the butterfly roof. This was however a transitory period for Sammer who turned to social realist style and produced several significant public housing projects and radical urbanistic solutions while being a delegated a major architectural position within a new Communist regime of the Czechoslovak republic.

In Raymond's view, the impact of Le Corbusier on Japan was much more positive in the pre-war era, when it inspired experimental work with concrete; in post-war the impact was more damaging and lead to "a shaggy super-brutalist" creations.²⁴

I will conclude by briefly considering the process of interpretation, synthesis, and dialectic between Japanese and non-Japanese way of construction and design. The misunderstanding from which, according to Friedrich D. Schleiermacher, every interpretation starts can be also fruitful in respect to the arts. It can perhaps be understood in terms of the pure and simple

²² Masami Makino, "Ru Korbyujie o katari Nihon ni oyobu" (On Le Corbusier and his Connection to Japan), in *Kokusai kenchiku* no. 5 (1929), 67–75.

²³ Akio Izutsu, *The Bauhaus: A Japanese Perspective and A Profile of Hans and Florence Schust Knoll* (Tokyo: Kajima Institute, 1992), 26.

²⁴ *Antonin Raymond*, 247–248.

otherness of the interlocutor, who, insofar as s/he is an “other” that disturbs the equilibrium, produces a modification and thereby forces a readjustment to restore equilibrium.²⁵ Walter Benjamin expressed this in his essay *The Task of the Translator*, when he wrote, “while content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.”²⁶ This is complemented by Homi Bhabha’s statement that these “folds” and small discrepancies between translated words give us new perspectives or contexts, in other words, bring *novum* to the world.²⁷ Schleiermacher’s ideas regarding the interpretation process relates to Benjamin’s “folds” and Bhabha’s *novum*. Furthermore, Bert Winther-Tamaki has suggested in his writing on the transfer of ideas, motifs, personnel, and materials between Japanese and American cultural contexts that these resulted in hybrid formations which, while perceived as creative by Bhabha, were not by contemporary witnesses.²⁸ In this context we could reconsider the relationship between Le Corbusier and Raymond: the former’s admiration of latter’s experience with earthquake-proof housing and the latter’s successful interpretation of the former’s idea for a modern house in Chile that was perfect for Japanese cultural and architectural context.

It was an American reviewer who pointed out the strong impact of Le Corbusier on Raymond. This in fact hinted at the larger issue with synthesis in the context of modernist design (as argued by Kurt Helfrich).²⁹ The debate over Raymond’s piracy began in the review of Raymond’s 1935 monograph *Antonin Raymond: His Work in Japan, 1920–1935*, which criticized the Karuizawa House for its obvious resemblance to the Errázuriz House. The negative criticism motivated Raymond to write a letter to the editor of *Architectural Forum*, in which in countered, “I feel . . . that you lay too much stress on the question of the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright and Corbusier on my work at the expense of those vital qualities which make it valuable. Even to speak of the Japanese influence in my work is to see the truth only from a superficial angle. There is a strong Japanese influence in my work, but it is one of spirit and not of form Should we be too afraid of precedent or influence we could do nothing at all. It does not matter from where we take anything but what we do with it.”³⁰

²⁵ Friedrich D. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Missoula MT: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977).

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 75.

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, “How Newness Enters the World. Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times, and the Trials of Cultural Translation,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 212–235.

²⁸ Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), chapters 1, 5.

²⁹ Helfrich and Whitaker, *Crafting a Modern World*, 26, 27, 154.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.