

This special edition in the *Laboratorium* series is an outcome of a collaboration between Hochschule Luzern – Technik & Architektur, Institut für Architektur (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Institute of Architecture) and Kyoto Institute of Technology – KYOTO Design Lab in the periode of 2018–2023.

Edited by

GEISSBÜHLER Dieter
KÄFERSTEIN Johannes
KIMURA Hiroyuki
KINOSHITA Masashiro
SUN BUSCHOR Mulan

Laboratorium Switzerland – Japan

TWO LAKES

ふたつのみずうみ

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A Comparative Study on the Culture of Water

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MOLO Ludovica
WETTSTEIN Felix

“We are subject to *venustas*, not *firmitas*; it is beauty that enchants us, that makes us curious about life and ourselves, that awakens and stimulates us.”

Jacques Herzog

LAKE LUCERNE – AN ABSOLUTE BEAUTY?

Lake Lucerne and its landscape are undoubtedly perceived as beautiful. The horizontal surface of the lake contrasts with the mostly steep slopes and the striking mountains on the horizon. Unspoiled natural landscapes, intact settlement structures and impressing infrastructure are part of an overall picture that is read as the “Swiss myth”. On closer inspection, however, even this supposedly perfect landscape shows cracks and fissures. The pressure exerted by modern society leads to conflicts of interest that leave their mark on land use, from industrial areas to urban sprawl.

We were searching for the “hidden beauty” in these places. The beauty of a site is not always visible and has to be discovered first. Is there a hidden beauty under the cloak of banality? How can this beauty be discovered and kissed awake?

We looked at these problematic and “unsightly” locations, the places that have potential for improvement in terms of urban development and architecture. The places are located at the ends, at the tips of Lake Lucerne, where the urban areas are located due to the topographical conditions. They are characterised by industrial areas, infrastructure buildings and mostly poor architecture. Urban development is not present – as is often the case on the periphery, at the difficult transitions between city and countryside.

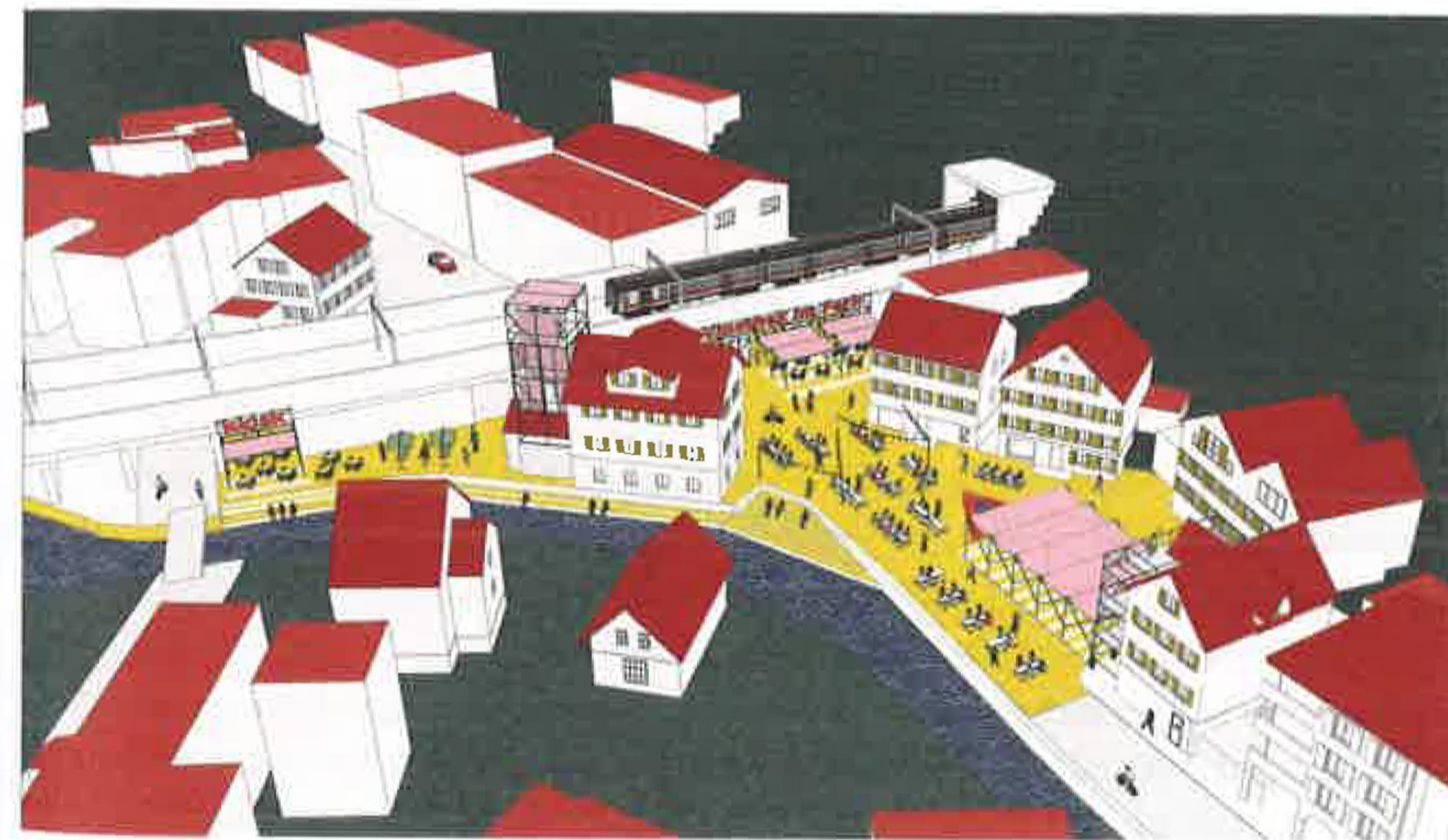
Water & Danger	Lake Lucerne	Hazard Map
	Lake Biwa	Hazard Map
Water & Beauty	Lake Lucerne	Hidden Beauty
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JANA MULLE _ THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

Brunnen is known for its prominent location at the transition from Lake Uri to Lake Gersau. From the prestigious lakeside promenade, the view sweeps eastwards to the Bürgenstock and southwards to the Gotthard massif. Brunnen owes its importance as a tourist resort on Lake Lucerne to this scenic beauty. Less attractive is the rear of the village, where the river, railroad, highway and roads are squeezed into a confined space. MULLE Jana has taken on this forgotten and conflict-ridden location. She complements the existing buildings with light, ephemeral structures and uses them to enliven the public space. In doing so, she discovers the hidden beauty of the existing buildings, the diversity, the space in between, and thus gives a face and an independent public life to a place that has maintained a shadowy existence to this day. The attention and careful upgrading give the public space back its dignity, life and thus its specific beauty.

THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS' TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY

Lake Lucerne corresponds to the Western concept of beauty, which goes back to Greek philosophy. The allure of beauty captivated the ancient Greeks to an unparalleled extent, surpassing prior and subsequent societies. Arguably, the most impactful exploration of beauty during this era stems from Plato's Socratic dialogues. Within these dialogues, Plato defines beauty as one of the ultimate values, alongside truth and justice. He posits that if something possesses beauty, it inherently holds moral goodness. According to Plato, the intertwining of



MULLE Jana: The space in between, Brunnen

beauty and goodness is reciprocal – whatever is good is beautiful, and whatever is beautiful is also good. Additionally, Plato extends his perspective by equating beauty with truth and truth with beauty.

Throughout the centuries, renowned philosophers have labeled truth, goodness and beauty as transcendentals – cosmic values that exist beyond the confines of the time-space-matter world. The term “transcendental” denotes a universal reality that surpasses our everyday sensory experiences, characterised as non-physical, immaterial, conceptual or even spiritual. In the realm of philosophy, the transcendental seeks to elucidate the nature of reality or being, portraying these values as timeless universals and inherent attributes of existence.

Therefore, Western beauty ideals often revolve around the pursuit of perfection, influenced by classical Greek notions of ideal forms. The emphasis is on flawless symmetry and proportion. At the same time the Western concept often values beauty that appears timeless and unchanging.

Vitruvius, the most important architect and architectural theorist of Roman antiquity also described *venustas*, i.e., beauty, as the most important requirement of architecture alongside *firmitas* and *utilitas*, strength and usability. Until the early 20th century, the five orders of columns were regarded as the essential structural system in architectural education. This knowledge formed the basis for harmonious proportions and the pursuit of order. Beauty was defined with precise rules, with numbers and measures and thus with mathematics. With modernism, *utilitas* gained the upper hand over *venustas* and “form follows function” became the new dictum. Beauty took a back seat and was limited to the result of a functional approach. Since then, we have struggled with the concept of beauty questioning the idea of a universal standard, embracing diversity and often celebrating the unconventional.

The term has been largely banished from teaching and architectural discourse. More recently, however, there has been a noticeable change in thinking. We once again dare to think about beauty without being labeled as old-fashioned. This is less about pure aesthetics and more about an expanded and more openly defined concept of beauty that encompasses perception as well as the meaning and sustainability of architecture.

AL JAWHARAH AL ZAMIL _ A BOWL IN THE WATER

Küssnacht lies at the tip of the north-eastern arm of Lake Lucerne. The town is primarily known for the Rigi, the Queen of the Mountains, which lies to the south. The horizontal surface of the lake forms the perfect counterpoint to the majestic topography of the mountains. AL JAWHARAH al Zamil has carefully studied the horizontality of the water surface. Through precise research, she discovered that

the lake's water level is regulated, but not constant. The difference in height between the lowest levels in winter and the highest levels in early summer due to meltwater is around 50 centimetres. A circular, funnel-shaped bowl with a radius of 100 metres lies in the water. The water enters the bowl via an opening at the lowest point and spreads out depending on the water level, whereby the outer ring always remains accessible. The pool becomes a magical attraction, inviting visitors to linger and bathe. Beyond this, however, it tells the story of the lake mirror and the perfection of geometry. The result is poetry and pure beauty.

WABI-SABI

Interestingly, the Japanese culture seems to have a more relaxed approach to beauty than the Western world, despite the fact that aesthetics is celebrated in all areas of life, from the preparation of food to the design of gardens and architecture.

The Japanese aesthetic philosophy Wabi-Sabi embraces the beauty of imperfection, transience and simplicity. Originally, the term “wabi” conveyed a sense of misery, loneliness and being lost. Over time, this evolved into an appreciation for the joy found in the austerity of solitude and silence. The true depth of this concept emerged when paired with “sabi” – the quality of being old, showing patina and possessing maturity. This unique combination forms an untranslatable conceptual unit that has become the standard in Japanese art appreciation.

In this philosophy, the highest form of beauty is not overt but veiled, not the direct brilliance of the sun but the refracted light of the moon. Objects like the mossy rock, grassy thatched roof, gnarled pine tree and slightly rusty tea kettle are emblematic of this ideal beauty. They serve as symbols of the majesty concealed within the seemingly inconspicuous, representing an austere simplicity that reveals the charms of beauty to those with a nuanced understanding. Beyond visual aesthetics, Wabi-Sabi influences a broader approach to life, emphasising imperfection, maturity and an acknowledgement of the transient nature of existence. Wabi-Sabi sees imperfections as integral to the essence of beauty. A cracked tea bowl or a weathered piece of pottery is not discarded but cherished for the uniqueness and history it carries.

Simplicity and modesty lie at the heart of Japanese aesthetics. It esteems the unadorned and the understated, embracing minimalism in both design and lifestyle. At the centre lies a profound connection to nature. Drawing inspiration from the irregularities inherent in rocks, plants and landscapes, this aesthetic philosophy encourages the integration of nature into daily life. Practices such as incorporating bonsai trees or arranging simple floral displays serve to bring the serene beauty of the outdoors indoors.



AL ZAMIL Al Jawharah:
A bowl in the water, Küssnacht

It nourishes everything that is authentic, as it recognises three simple truths: nothing remains, nothing is complete and nothing is perfect.

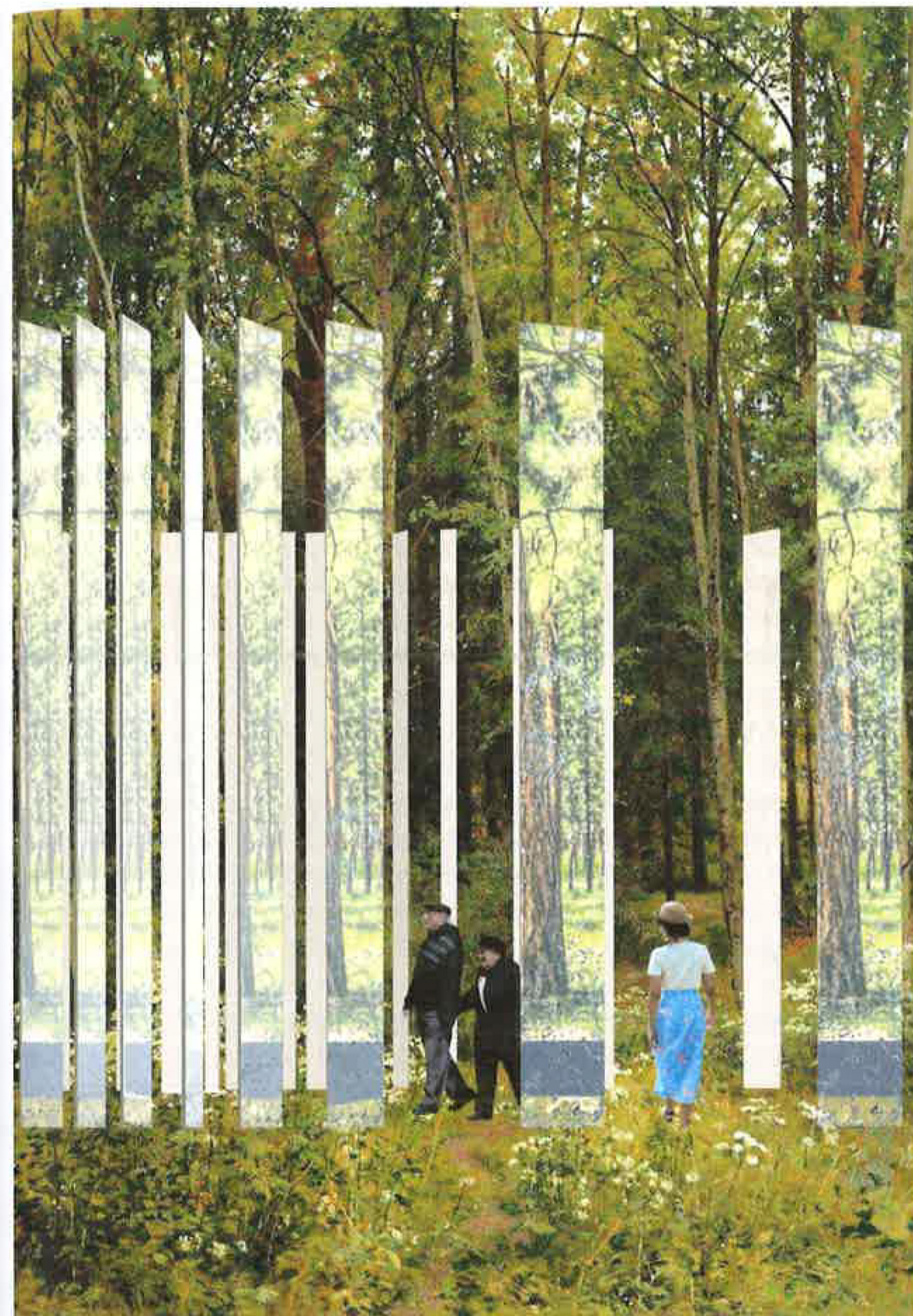
Richard R. Powell

OKINO JUN _ MUSIC IN THE MIRROR

The city, the lake, the mountains – and the music. Lucerne is praised as a city of music. Jean Nouvel's KKL is already an architectural jewel in the most prominent location. Further south, on a headland, the composer Richard Wagner lived in the Tribschen country house in the middle of the 19th century. Today, the house with its large park is open to the public as the Richard Wagner Museum. OKINO Jun has added a concert hall to the museum. More than a hall, it is a space in the park. The rectangular room is defined by 6-metre-high, mirrored steles. These are aligned to create optimal acoustic conditions. As in René Magritte's famous painting *The Blank Signature*, different levels, foreground, and background interweave to create a new, mysterious world. The mirror, as a symbol of the immaterial, thus reflects not only the nature of the park, but also the sound of the music. Image and sound, appearance and truth combine to create a uniquely beautiful space.

“Beauty is not a marginal luxury that our society can or cannot afford; it is a vital dimension and a prerequisite for culture.”

Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani



OKINO Jun:
Soundscape, Lucerne