

1,000 MILE CITY



Architecture in the New Megalopolis
Arch 409/506 Traveling Studio, Spring 2008
University of Michigan @ Tokyo University of Science
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"Japan is a test, a challenge to think the unthinkable, a place where meaning is finally banished. Paradise, indeed, for the great student of signs." – Edmund White

From southern Kyushu to the northern tip of Honshu island, the Tokaido corridor stretches approximately 1,000 miles across the eastern seaboard of Japan, uniting the majority of the Japanese population within a vibrant, intensely-interconnected urban artery. As a result, the bulk of Japanese commercial, governmental, institutional, and cultural activities are consolidated within the Tokaido megalopolis. To understand the density experienced along this route, one must remember the fact that Japan has roughly twice the number of people in the U.S. situated within only 11% of the land area of California.

Such intense interconnectivity has its advantages, however. Japan boasts the most advanced transportation system in the world, and many of the technological, artistic, and cultural exchanges that transpire along this seamless network are unparalleled in their quality and sophistication. Moreover, because Japan imports nearly 80% of its resources, this efficient system allows the optimization of energy and material use within complex, interdependent social structures.

What architectural possibilities are unleashed within the 1,000 mile city? How does a scale this massive relate to the scale of material details? How are conflicts resolved between privacy and publicity, modernism and tradition, or Western and Japanese? Participants in this traveling design studio will attempt to address these and other questions through in-depth documentation, analysis, and critical design proposals situated within Tokyo and beyond. Working in a loose collaboration with students and faculty from the Tokyo University of Science, participants will also be exposed to meaningful aspects of Japanese culture and daily life that go beyond a typical tourist's superficial perspective of Japan.