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**Taut’s Emphasis on Climate: a Reaction to
the Aesthetic Canon of International Style.**

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This paper is a survey of Taut’s written material, that is, his architectural discourse, to highlight his position towards the notions of climate, and the concepts, International and its dichotomy National. Although it is quite clear from Taut’s written materials and practiced architecture, that he is among the pioneers of ‘Modern Architecture,’ paradoxically he is, at the same time, one of its earliest critics.¹ He firmly believes that only through criticism would Modern Architecture be able to continue its progress and existence. His critical analysis is focused on two major themes: the first one being the machine aesthetics; Though not named, his main target is Le Corbusier, with his overemphasis on machine as well as the general inclination of using dynamic and moving vehicles as models in architecture which exists through its stability.² Taut’s second point of criticism is on ‘allerweltsstil’³ (commonplace style) which will be the main focus of this paper. In ‘Mimari Bilgisi’ Taut will call this phenomenon ‘allerweltsarchitektur’⁴ (commonplace architecture). Throughout his texts it is easy to trace that Allerweltsstil is used synonymously with the term International Style, and Allerweltsarchitektur with International Architecture.⁵

1932 was the year in which an exhibition called ‘Modern Architecture: International Style’ was opened in New York, in the Museum of Modern Arts, organized by Philip Johnson. The exhibition aimed to promote European Modern Architecture in the United States of America in the canon of a ‘style’.⁶ Bruno Taut was not represented in this exhibition. His absence could possibly be related to his early criticism and warnings that modern architecture was becoming an international ‘style’, with its own rules and trends as well as limitations. Especially after the World War II, proving Taut right, International Style would come to be criticized with an inflationist tendency.

The term ‘International’ indicates going beyond national borders, with connotations of unification and elimination of diversities. In its inherent properties one can sense the inclination towards an extermination of the distinguishing factors of regions and climates, to achieve a homogenous whole. The concept ‘International’ in Europe, began to spread after the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries through the ideas of thinkers like

Kant, Montesquieu, Rousseau, etc. In 1847 with the Communist Manifesto the working class was called to organize under a unifying international unity. Thus for Taut with his political convictions the term itself would have been familiar and sympathetic, to say the least. As a devoted socialist for Taut internationality is a positive category indicating the brother/sisterhood of the whole world. This is visible in his early utopian work 'Auflösung der Staedte' (Dissolution of Cities).⁷ His criticism on internationality is aimed at what was then understood and practiced as 'International Architecture', that is, an imitation of the forms alone. Taut claims that the spreading of the same formal expressions all over the world should be avoided as it would without doubt lead to a spread of sameness.⁸ In hindsight, Frampton also deduces that International style was never really universal, it simply established certain universal methods such as light construction, modern materials and standard elements. These methods brought on formalism, when they contrasted with the cultural, climatic and economical realities.⁹

Taut, in 1927, would emphasize that an International Architecture Movement was on its way.¹⁰ For Taut, its expression, however, differs from nation to nation due to the soil on which it is growing, even when it is similar in its essence. Its symptoms may be partly explained by the influence of the climate.¹¹ Notice Taut's mention of the soil as the reason of the difference between nations, Taut is indicating that the soil and climate, that is, nature can be the key for richness and variety in architecture; an assumption which would mature in the following years of his career.

In 1928 Taut asserts that some main features of the act of building are international, as the new building art had achieved a certain veracity in fulfilling function and construction.¹² This statement indicates that as of yet Taut acknowledges the concept 'International' as positive. Still, in the very same paragraph, he displays his mistrust in the future of the concept.

"Its [the New Building Art] continued development is dependant on how it would avoid the danger of stencil, arbitrariness and worst of all, stenciled arbitrariness"¹³

Here in the same text, once again, Taut proposes climate as an agent active in the process of differentiation of the New Building Art, resulting in enrichment and multiform.

Taut's concern with the concept of internationality in architecture lies in its contents. In 1929, he states that one can speak of the internationality of the 'present' architecture.¹⁴ Still this is not a negative property for Taut as it is no different from the spread of the old styles over the borders of countries. It becomes a negative category once it comes to mean a transportation of forms only. He claims that 'Internationality' should be molded with the basic principles of building so as to secure its longevity and validity. These principles should rest on prerequisites for building rather than the form. Taut identifies these principles as to be based on utility, function, natural properties of the materials and the elegance of construction.¹⁵ If these principles were not fulfilled then this would result in a sameness, which was even then spreading all around the world. Here Taut's use of the term internationality is synonymous with Europeanization.¹⁶ It should not mislead however, as Taut is not of the opinion that such a spread of Europeanization is appalling, on the contrary, it is desirable but only if the term is given the right content. He believes that

“this should not occur in exterior formality, as a diluted topping that covered the whole world,”¹⁷

but only through the spreading of its basics. Taut, against the current sameness in International Architecture, proposes that the properties of land, climate and the folk should be taken into account.¹⁸

During his stay in Japan, Taut continued to study the subject of Internationality. Concerning ‘Foreign’ Modern Architecture practiced in Japan, Taut states that it would

“probably take some time for Japan to create the right and optimal conditions in its own soil for this plant, which was native to a foreign soil.”¹⁹

This is a direct criticism of Modern Architecture, which practiced without any content, was just transported from a foreign region as merely a formal entity, just like International Architecture. Taut, on encountering many remarkable similarities between the farmhouses in Japan and the ones all over Europe, states that the reason for these similarities, is to be searched in the lifestyle of the farmers all around the world.²⁰ Thus this must be taken as a result of the similar routine of agricultural societies. Nature and everyday life with its most basic functions to be fulfilled, have established this natural – vernacular architecture, thus it has universal properties. Taut argues that climate is the essential agent in the shaping of the traditional Japanese house and lifestyle. Still, when he encounters the weak points of the houses during winter, he sarcastically articulates that this was due to the Japanese not accepting winter as a reality but perceiving it merely as an illusion, which they chose to ignore completely with their way of constructing houses.²¹ Thus it could be stated that Taut though believing in the potency of climate and its effects on architecture and societies, around which he constructed his theories, was unable to architecturally explain such a ‘defect’.

‘Mimari Bilgisi’, partly written in Japan then in Turkey and first published in Turkish, is Taut’s last theoretical work, and thus reflects the sum of Taut’s general architectural experiences and his way of thinking on architecture. The gradual process with which Taut approached the effects of climate on architecture, reaches its climax. Taut deems it to be the most effective tool against the spreading sameness that he criticized to such a degree. Climate is emphasized as the most important input to create the region’s own architecture, without being slave to the canon of international style. It is a factor that when taken into account, prevents buildings from being similar to each other; a result of universal technology, as is evident in the design of vehicles. Taut identifies climate thus nature, as the universal reality.

“Being appropriate to climate, the building gets its universal character.”²²

Additionally, architecture, as an art of proportioning as Taut puts it, is under its influence as climate is the natural element responsible for the temperaments of the societies. Furthermore the human bodies are effectively the embodiment of those temperaments

and architecture is strictly tied to the proportions of the human body.²³ Taut claims that climate is the one and only tool for creating the right architecture.

Why is climate given such an important role in architecture by Taut? As even Taut at one point voices his doubts stating that

“it seems pathetic when one, in the present circumstances, can not find anything other than climate to ground a great art [architecture] on,”²⁴

but he continues that one has to start somewhere. He would use this starting point in his struggle against the sameness, that is, international architecture without content which was spreading, sweeping away the architectural significances of regions and nations. Even in his criticism towards international architecture, the concept of ‘National Architecture,’²⁵ for Taut, was not a secure domain. Within his works it is apparent that when he uses the concept ‘national’, he does so almost always in reference to the region and climate, that is, the soil the architecture was grounded on. He argues that these components play essential roles in the shaping of architecture. This leaning towards region and climate may have been largely due to the fact that the concept ‘nation’ and its inherent political content were ethically contradictory with his political beliefs.

After the National Socialists took over in Germany, nationalist tendencies started to spread all around the world, something that affected Taut on a personal level. As Taut arrived in Turkey, the political climate was already influenced by the prevailing nationalistic sentiment in Europe. Thus Taut could not avoid coming into contact with the current and vigorous discourse on the concepts of International and National. Thus Taut was very cautious when he had to use the term ‘National Architecture’ so as to remove any political nuances such as national identity, which was inherent in the term. He praises the old times, when Art and politics were not mixed together and the term ‘nation’ was not known.²⁶

In this regard Taut, referring to Hansen, states that “every good architecture is national (but) every National Architecture is bad.”²⁷ Aspiring to create a National Architecture seldom results in good architectural works, as the aspiration itself poses as a limiting and shaping influence, removing any discerning diversities. Taut claims that when the architects are forced to practice a National Architecture either by modern means or by using historical styles, the end result would only be a kind of costume production,²⁸ while the architecture that was created without the compulsion of national identity would, in the end, be embraced into that very identity simply because of its quality. The freedom of the architect in his profession is proportionate with the quality of his work.²⁹ Taut emphasizes this by suggesting that “every good architecture will be a National Architecture.”³⁰

Taking into account Taut’s political leanings and their effect on his theoretical work, one should point out a certain irony concerning his works and their reception in Japan. Taut had used the time he spent in Japan for researching Japanese art and culture. His fascination with Japanese tradition is visible in many of his texts. He especially admires

the 'Emperor' tradition, which he classifies as 'good' tradition, the 'Shogun' tradition, on the other hand he categorizes as 'bad'.³¹ His praise for this 'good' tradition follows concepts such as "simplicity, plainness, purity, clarity"³², or "simplicity in line', 'clarity of line', 'faithfulness to the material', 'beauty of proportion';³³ properties he was familiar with from Modern Architecture. Especially his reverence to Ise Shrine and its universal and eternal architectural truths are to be read through the principles of Modern architecture.³⁴

Taut's convincing message that

"'Japaneseness' and universal 'modern' are compatible ... was extremely encouraging for the nation which had been trying to catch up with the west."³⁵

Being described and accepted as 'universal' through a western eye, was a stimulation for the national pride of Japan. Taut's writings became especially popular in Japan,³⁶ after he left in 1936. These texts and his theories on traditional Japanese Culture and Art would trigger a wave of nationalistic sentiments. Especially Taut's 'Nihon bunka shikan' (A personal view of Japanese culture), has played a role in furthering the feeling of nationalistic superiority in Japan just before the Second World War. Kawazoe Noboru on Taut's influence states:

"Works by Taut and books by him were being published one right after the other. Obsessed, I bought them and read them. They were what pulled me into the world of Japans Romantics. Before I knew it, I had stopped skipping school and was enthusiastically taking part in the military drills and labor conscription. Without noticing the contradictions, it struck me that Japan was a very good country, and must win the war."³⁷

However these works, in their definition of Japanese culture, also caused reactions. Despite Taut's efforts to perceive Japan from the inside, in some cases he was accused of Orientalism,³⁸ due to his explicit distinction of East and West and his comparison of Japanese culture with European culture.³⁹ In 1942 an essay, 'Nihon bunka shikan' (A personal view of Japanese culture) by Sakaguchi Ango was published, with the exact title as Taut's book. As Dorsey renders at first glance the text was an attack on what Taut had glorified as Japanese art, but when carefully read, following Dorsey, Ango's critique is by no means simplistically reactionary.⁴⁰ By tearing down Taut's chosen icons, such as the Katsura Detached Palace, Kyoto or Horyuji, Ango, instead of icons "substitutes spirit for established tradition as the measure of the culture"⁴¹ That Taut provoked such a debate on the narration and perception of Japanese Culture, speaks for the resonance of his works within Japan.

It is important to point out the irony of the fact that an architect such as Bruno Taut, who early in his career, in 1917, composed the Alpine Architecture, an architectural peace manifest⁴² and later struggled to avoid 'nationalism', had unwittingly called forth Japanese patriotism. His texts, when spread to the general public of Japan, evoked a strong nationalistic consciousness and pride, a reaction he himself would probably have strived to avoid no matter what. The situation in Japan is perhaps the best explanation as to why Taut chooses to avoid any mention or suggestion that was in anyway connected to the concept 'nation' in his architectural discourse. Thus Taut's caution with the term

'national' has led him to focus on the geographical properties and climate of regions. He found that climate was and could be an effective tool in shaping architecture. For Taut it was the origin of much needed diversity within architecture. This increasing emphasis, especially on climate, throughout his career, affirms that Taut perceived climate as the one and only universal reality in architecture.

¹ There are some works, published or unpublished, after 1995 on Bruno Taut, some of them I would like to refer, Sibel Bozdoğan "Against Style: Bruno Taut's Pedagogical Program In Turkey", in Marta Pollak ed., *The Education of the Architect, Hystography, Urbanism and The Growth of Architectural Knowledge* (Cambridge Massachuset: MIT Press, 1997), Bernd Nicolei, *Moderne und Exil: Deutschsprachige Architekten in der Türkei 1925-1955*, (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1998), Esra Akcan. "Öteki Dünyanın Melankolisi: Bruno Taut'un Doğu Deneyimi," *Domus m* (February-Marc 2001), pp. 36 – 41., Uysal Zeynep Cigdem, *Architectural Interpretations of Modernity and Cultural Identity: A Comparative Study on Sedat Hakki Eldem and Bruno Taut in Early Republican Turkey*, unpublished Master Thesis, (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2004), Akcan Esra, "Towards a Cosmopolitan Ethics in Architecture: Bruno Taut's Translations out of Germany", in *New German Critique* 99, Vol.33, No. 3, Fall 2006.

² Boyacioglu E, 'Bruno Taut Promoter and Critic of Modern Architecture' Unpublished Article.

³ Taut Bruno, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann Verlag, 1929) p. 67

⁴ Bruno Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, trans. Adnan Kolatan (Istanbul: Guzel Sanatlar Akademisi Nesriyati, 1938) p.86. Within this essay this first publication in Turkish was used together with the German publication: Bruno Taut, *Architekturlehre*, Tilmann Heinisch, Goerd Peschken, ed., (Hamburg: VSA, 1977) p.69

⁵ Bruno Taut, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 67. and also see Bruno Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 86, Bruno Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p. 69

⁶ Henry Matthews states that it was first Jane Heap who published examples of avant-garde architecture of 1920s and organized a the Machine Age Exhibition with a broader spectrum of design than Hitchcock and Johnsons, including the works of Le Corbusier and Gropius, in his article "The Promotion of Modern Architecture by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s" *Journal of Design History*, Vol.7, No.1 (1994), p. 46

⁷ Bruno Taut, "die Erde eine gute Wohnung," in *Bruno Taut, 1880 – 1938* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1980), pp.187-188.

⁸ Taut, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 67.

⁹ Kenneth Frampton, *Die Architektur der Moderne*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anschlag, 1987) p.212

¹⁰ Taut in *Bauen: Der neue Wohnbau* (Building: The new House), (Leipzig: Klinghart&Biermann, 1927)IV, 75S.; überw. III, while debating against German traditionalist institutions such as 'Heimatschutzbewegung' (motherland preservation movement, building police), gives many examples of modern house buildings from all over Europe as well as his own 'Siedlungen'.

¹¹ Taut, *Bauen: Der Neue Wohnbau*, ch.V.

¹² Taut, "Architekturkrise?" in *Bruno Taut, 1880 – 1938* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1980), p. 214.

¹³ Taut, "Architekturkrise?" p. 214.

¹⁴ Taut Bruno, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 7

¹⁵ Taut Bruno *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 6

- ¹⁶ Taut Bruno, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 67
- ¹⁷ Taut Bruno, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 67
- ¹⁸ Taut Bruno, *Die Neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika*, p. 54
- ¹⁹ Taut, *Das japanische Haus und sein Leben*, Manfred Speidel, ed., (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000) p.260.
- ²⁰ Taut, *Das japanische Haus und sein Leben*, p. 110
- ²¹ Taut, *Das japanische Haus und sein Leben* p. 95.
- ²² Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 92, *Architekturlehre*, p.72
- ²³ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 65 *Architekturlehre*, p. 63
- ²⁴ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 74, *Architekturlehre*, p.69
- ²⁵ See also Uysal Zeynep Cigdem, *Architectural Interpretations of Modernity and Cultural Identity: A Comparative Study on Sedat Hakki Eldem and Bruno Taut in Early Republican Turkey*, unpublished Master Thesis, (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2004).
- ²⁶ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 47, Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p. 50
- ²⁷ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 333., Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p.183
- ²⁸ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 334. Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p.184
- ²⁹ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi*, p. 335 Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p.184
- ³⁰ Taut, *Mimari Bilgisi* p. 336. Taut, *Architekturlehre*, p.185
- ³¹ Nishikawa Nagao, *Two Interpretations of Japanese Culture*, Transl. by Mikiko Murata and Gavan McCormack, in *Multicultural Japan: Paleolithic to Postmodern*, ed. Donald Denoon, Mark Hudson , Gavan McCormack and Tessa Morris-Suzuki (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 252
- ³² p. 2 Nishikawa Nagao, *Two Interpretations of Japanese Culture*,53.
- ³³ Kikuchi Yuko, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 96.
- ³⁴ Jonathan M. Reynolds "Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, no.2. (jun., 2001), p. 321
- ³⁵ Kikuchi Yuko, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), p. 99.
- ³⁶ As James Dorsey renders, " Taut is best known for three books: *Nippon: Yoroppajin no me de mita* (Japan as seen through European eyes, 1934), recommended by Japan's Ministry of Education and translated repeatedly; *Nihon bunka shikan* (A personal view of Japanese culture, 1936), a great commercial success ; and a posthumous collection of previously published essays, *Nihin bi no sai hakken* (A rediscovery of Japanese aesthetics, 1939), which not only joined *Nippon: Yoroppajin no me de mita* on the Ministry of Education's recommended readings list but also earned a place in the commercially profitable Iwanami Shinso "red series". James Dorsey, *Culture, Nationalism, and Sakaguchi Ango* in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 27, No 2. (summer, 2001), p. 351 also see Jonathan M. Reynolds "Ise Shrine and a Modernist Construction of Japanese Tradition" *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, no.2. (jun., 2001), p. 322
- ³⁷ Kawazoe Noboru, *Watakushi no Tauto kan*" Quoted in James Dorsey, *Culture, Nationalism, and Sakaguchi Ango* in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 27, No 2. (summer, 2001), p. 351
- ³⁸ Dorsey J, *Culture, Nationalism, and Sakaguchi Ango* in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 27, No 2. (summer, 2001), p. 355

³⁹ Nishikawa Nagao, Two Interpretations of Japanese Culture, Transl. by Mikiko Murata and Gavan McCormack, in *Multicultural Japan: Paleolithic to Postmodern*, ed. Donald Denoon, Mark Hudson, Gavan McCormack and Tessa Morris-Suzuki (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 253, 254

⁴⁰ Dorsey, Culture, Nationalism, and Sakaguchi Ango in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 27, No 2. (summer, 2001), p. 356.

⁴¹, Dorsey, Culture, Nationalism, and Sakaguchi Ango p.367

⁴² Kurt Junghans, "Bruno Taut und sein Buch", in Taut, , *Das japanische Haus und sein Leben*, p. 317