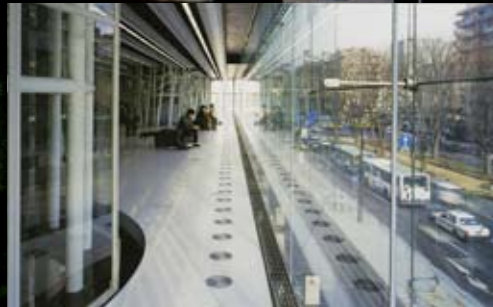




Toyo Ito's Sendai Mediatheque is an example of a building that embraces the "multidimensionality, diversity, and uncertainty of living in a computerized world" (Witte, 2002) by acting as a nodal link that enables an oscillating relationship between people and information. Ito describes his idea of architecture as a type of fluidity, an expression of the general instability of the universe and of the transient nature of beings and things (Witte, 2002). This perception of the universe as transitory, is one of the cultural factors of Japan's affinity for the virtual world with its floating and ephemeral entities (Witte, 2002). It is in the Sendai Mediatheque, where Ito concentrates on three specific elements of plates (floors), tubes (columns), and skin (facade and exterior) to bring forth his cultural and architectural ideals.

Toyo Ito | Sendai Mediatheque

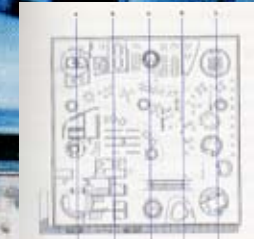


It is important to state Ito's criticism towards the assumption of architecture as the formation of boundaries from the outside and inside world. As noted in Reyner Banham's "Space and Power" (1975), architecture has evolved to blend interior and exterior spaces as a joint relationship rather than separating the two. In conjunction with Banham, is Theo van Doesburg's "Towards a plastic architecture" (1970), where he stresses the necessity of architecture to be open with the elimination of interior and exterior boundaries. The Sendai Mediatheque reflects this blurring by recognizing that the "phenomenon of architecture must be conditioned by the unstable, fluctuating society of the information age" (Witte, 2002). In physicality, the facade is comprised of a double-paneled glass screen with horizontal stripes, which create a subtle visual effect between the exterior and interior spaces (Sakamoto et al., 2003). The roof and west wall are covered in metal-louvered screens, while the north and east walls are covered with varying transparent materials of glass and metal on each floor (Sakamoto et al., 2003). This allows for an exposure of the inside to the outside and visibility from the outside to the inside. Since the building faces Jozenji-dori avenue, the transparency of the facade allows for viewers to recall the tubes within the building as a homage to the Zelkova trees, which line the avenue (Sakamoto et al. 2003).

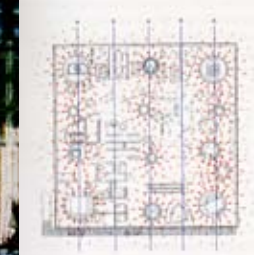
Space | Sendai Mediatheque

The oscillating effect of visuals, people, and information is exactly what Ito desires for this building to do: To dismantle the organization principles of traditional facilities that usually constitute for conclusive functions (Sakamoto et al., 2003). For example, the act of reading books would simulate a library, and the act of appreciating art would simulate a museum (Sakamoto et al., 2003). The Sendai Mediatheque has four distinct working zones, the public gallery, library, film and media center, and an information center. Ito eliminates the barriers which culturally and physically encase these four activities by firstly acknowledging that information is, and cannot be contained, therefore it is impossible to place it within a spatial barriers. Thus, Ito developed an ABABA rhythm within each floor, using the circular nature of the tubes, A, as forces of energy that repel and the suspended zones of space between the tubes, B, as pressure spaces to move towards other tubes that are further away (Witte, 2002). Thus, the relationships between the role of the structure, materials, surfaces, programs, and spaces allow for an interchangeability and migration of people (Witte 2002). There is no prescribed path or series of experiences. Rather, each person's path of experiences is strictly dependent on their desire or need.

Each person's desire shapes their relationship with the Sendai Mediatheque, therefore the building itself has no particular role other than being the space where the sharing, learning, and transferring of information takes place. "In this nodal facility, 'collection' becomes 'connection'." (Sakamoto et al, 2003). This connection can be connected to four readings. The first being Martin Hiedegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1992) and Christian Norberg-Schulz's "The Phenomenon of Place" (1996). In these two readings, both authors stress the relation between man's need for dwelling in a space, locale, and place. Since the Sendai Mediatheque was erected for the soul purpose to connect people to information, space, locale and place become set parameters for this connection to take place or to dwell within. Thus, the genius loci, or the spirit of the place, is dependent upon the dwelling of the people to connect to information. Secondly, similar to the ideas presented in Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" (1968), and Tom McDonough's "Situationist Space" (2004), the idea of navigation by memory or feeling and the integration of workplaces and dwelling, is the haecceity of the Sendai Mediatheque. Without any particular walls to delineate particular activities within the space, each person is compelled to venture where they desire to go, destroying the traditional Cartesian grid for spaces and sequencing of events and experiences. Like the Naked City map, each person's trajectory and their desire to discover in this particular space is completely variable and dependent on each user, resulting in a very particular and unique experience. "The spatial experience is not unlike walking through the woods. The presence of trees creates different spaces among which people can choose where to do whatever, in much the same way as humans since ancient times have made places to live within the flux of nature." (Sakamoto et al., 2003).



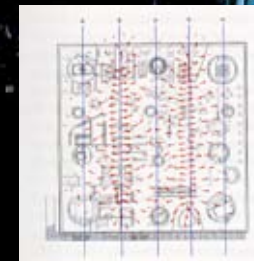
ABABA



A gravities



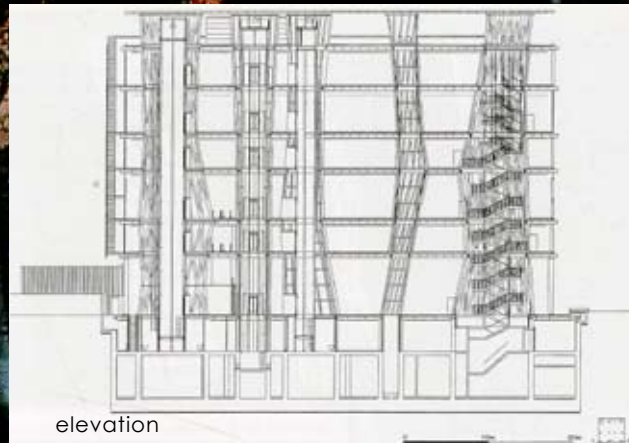
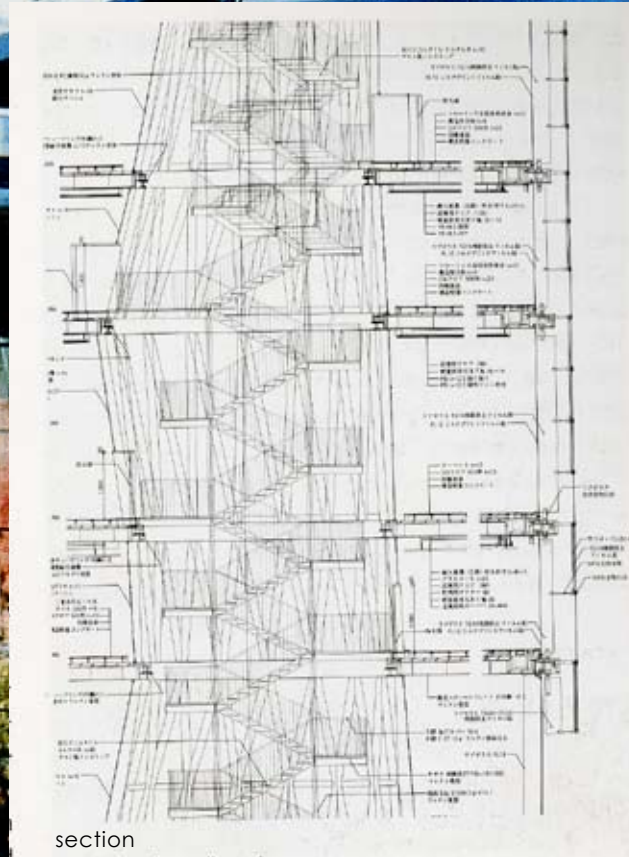
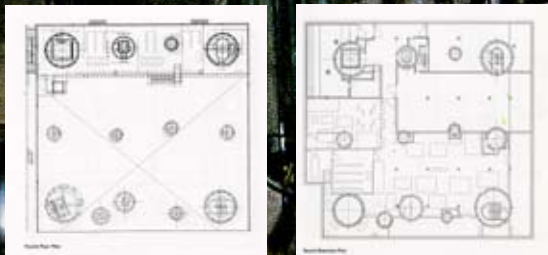
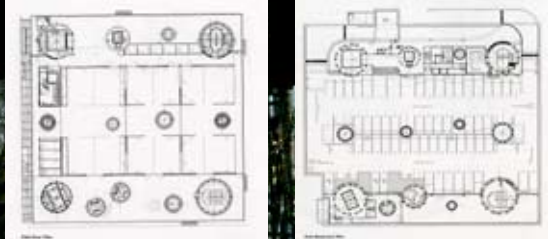
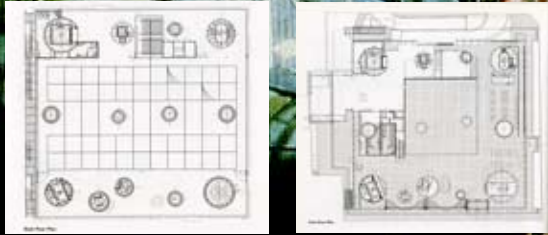
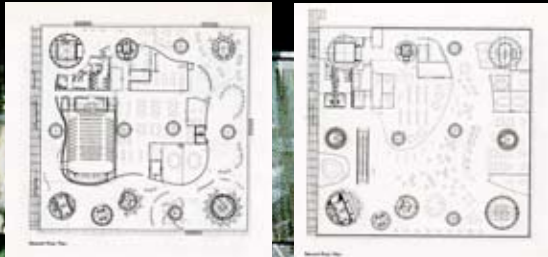
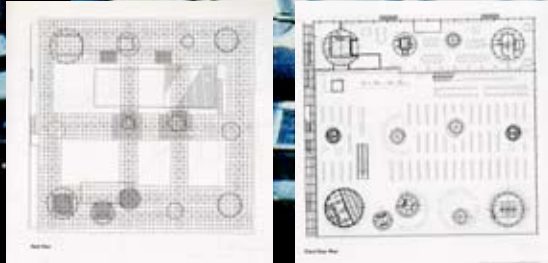
B gravities



A and B gravities

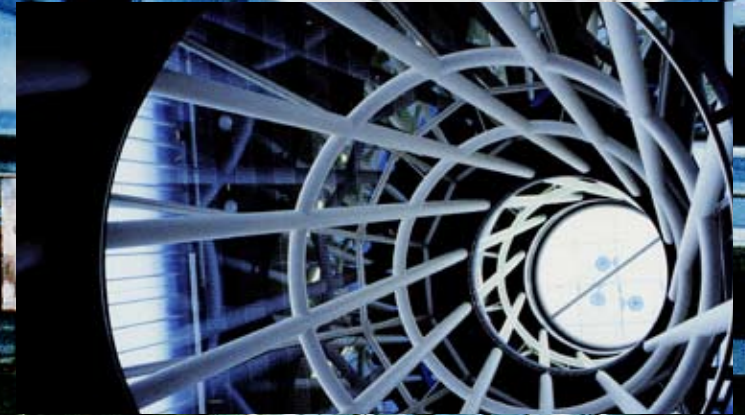


Space | Sendai Mediatheque



To further the discussion of space, the idea of smooth and striated space brought forth by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their "1400: The Smooth and the Striated" discussion, is an interesting concept to use for a comparison to the Sendai Mediatheque. In order to successfully discuss the Sendai Mediatheque, two explanations must be made. Firstly, the building is 50m x 50m x 30m, a large cube where each floor is held up by differing sized tubes. Their placement and size is dependent on the need to transfer loads into irregularly placed columns (Sakamoto et al, 2003). In a sectional view, the volume of the building is exposed with its tubes and seven floors. Secondly, the notion of smooth and striated space is based upon the notion of duality, where smooth and striated spaces are not in opposition, but rather in a mixture or blending, where one space can revert, create, or render the other space. To understand this concept in motion in the Sendai Mediatheque, the starting point would be the initial conception of the building. As noted before, information is not contained, therefore, it is impossible to place it within spaces of specific activities. Thus, this notion of information is a smooth space idea, where it advances in concordance to the nature of research and scientific discovery. Rather than to compartmentalize information, the Sendai Mediatheque acts as a node or conduit of information. This act of electing to be the node within information begins to construct a particular location and specified physical space for this trafficking of information to take place, thus it acts as a striated space. Also, the four programs designated to this building become a type of boundary or set condition for the building. However, as mentioned above, the four programs become an integrated experience when people are introduced into the building. The desire to learn and share information governs the internal workings of a people driven body in the building. Thus, the continuous duality of striated and smooth space can be understood by the idea, structure, and people.

Space | Sendai Mediatheque



Finally, the physical openness of the Sendai Mediatheque brings up a conversation about the militarization of space. From Michel Foucault's "Means of Correct Training + Panopticism" (1975), Paul Virilio's "Total Accident" (2002), and "Endocolonization and the State-as-Destiny" (1997), the problems of surveillance, discipline, and control were in any part, related to the original intention of the Sendai Mediatheque. However, it is quite clear that the ability to see exterior to interior, interior to exterior, and interior to interior, the fashion of surveillance is quite apparent. Ito's intention to make the building spacious and enable users to move through the space as they wish, becomes surveillance from person to person, and person to information. From this action, information can be learned from the people who enter the Sendai Mediatheque for information.



However, the Sendai Mediatheque is a building that offers a space that encourages the exchange of information. It may be a site that can be easily pinned as a space for surveillance and security, but its original intention cannot be overlooked. Toyo Ito's desire for a fluidity between human interaction and architecture becomes a blur when it is manifested in the Sendai Mediatheque.

Space | Sendai Mediatheque

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Space | Sendai Mediatheque