

Gokiburi

蜚蠊 (ゴキブリ)
go-ki-bu-ri

Gokiburi is Cockroach in Japanese

It was the first day of my internship in Japan. I left the work early to clean my accommodation. Unlike the crowded streets of Tokyo, the streets of Atami were quiet, friendly and remained old fashioned. I even saw an old lady instructing the children to cross the street in front of the school. My accommodation was in an old building, located somewhat in the city center. The ground floor was taken by a yakitori restaurant, which was so tiny that only a narrow bar and six seats could fit in, without leaving any more space to move around. Next to it was a fisherman's shop, owned by a relatively young man who sold different types of fish that were freshly caught every morning. The second floor was divided into several rooms within sliding doors. I slid mine and saw the sunlight occupying entire space. Everything seemed surreal. It was like a Japanese movie set staged in front of my eyes. The tatami (rice straw mat), some small traditional furniture pieces, a rice cooker and a futon (duvet) simply fascinated me. So, I started cleaning. I vacuumed the floor and wiped the furniture with a wet cloth. When I was nearly done, it was already dark outside and I realized that there was no light in the room. As I started sweeping the oshiire (open closet space), the broom bounced something towards my face. I did not take too long to realize that it was a dead cockroach. The beautiful movie scene, my little utopia cracked into pieces. A spotlight was on the dead cockroach and everything else disappeared into the shadows. I stood motionless as if I was choked by its overwhelming presence. I was absolutely helpless.

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Katsaridaphobia

The cockroach, needless to say, has a tenacious hold on life and has survived for 350 million years with its brilliant intelligence that reaches IQ 340. We are all aware of this tiny creature's presence. It is fast, violent, fearless, prolific, dirty and ugly. It indeed qualifies to every condition to disgust us. Katsaridaphobia or cockroach phobia is the morbid fear of cockroaches. Although most people dislike cockroaches, those who suffer from katsaridaphobia are more extreme, their heartbeats can rise simply by seeing the picture or hearing the word "cockroach". It is usually caused by a traumatic experience they had with cockroaches in the past. Children with such an experience have a greater chance to have the phobia. One may become paralyzed, cry, scream, feel dizzy and weak in the knees or even faint, have an elevated heart rate, breath rapidly, experience chest pains or have a full-blown panic attack. Fortunately, the phobia can be cured. Gradual desensitization and exposure are the most common methods to cure katsaridaphobia. Looking at pictures of cockroaches, touching dead cockroaches and progressing to being in the same room with cockroaches are the examples.

So, do I have katsaridaphobia? Now that I look back into the situations, I might. I experienced almost every symptom listed above. However, I did not diagnose myself as suffering from phobia. I did not agree with my reactions to the cockroach. I was frustrated with my vulnerability, how I let go of my control so helplessly. I have been quite sure of myself, certainly of my consciousness, but an encounter with a dead cockroach had it shattered within

a second. It was not a mere horror of a cockroach. My consciousness was firmly barricaded is that then because of the unconsciousness, the fear from within? I examined the uncanny in my experiences in order to understand its fragments: their duplicities, placements and structures and origin memories and emotions. I took a knife, dissected the stomach of my fear to see what was going wrong, so that I could figure out what to do with its gut.

Uncanny and Heimlich

“There is no doubt that this (uncanny) belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread. It is equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general. Yet one may presume that there exists a specific affective nucleus, which justifies the use of a special conceptual term. One would like to know the nature of this common nucleus, which allows us to distinguish the ‘uncanny’ within the field of the frightening.” Uncanny, Sigmund Freud.

The dictionary definitions for uncanny is firstly, ‘having or seeming to have a supernatural or inexplicable basis; beyond the ordinary or normal; extraordinary’ and secondly, ‘mysterious; arousing superstitious fear or dread; uncomfortably strange.’ Ernst Jentsch, in his essay, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, defines uncanny as ‘fear of unfamiliar’ and ‘intellectual uncertainty.’ Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, goes further with an aesthetic investigation and describes uncanny as “nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to

the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed”. Unheimlich, uncanny in German, is like an offspring of its antonym heimlich, because it is inherited with heimlich’s gene. Heimlich means friendly, intimate, secure, secret, deceitful, something belongs to the house. Unheimlich is the opposite meaning un-homey, unfamiliar, un-tame, uncomfortable, eerie, unconcealed, something frightening and dreadful. Heimlich bears unheimlich. The horror is the invisible connection between the two leading us back to what is known and familiar. It results in unwanted self-exposure and inadvertently revealed secret. A forgotten memory, whether intentionally or unintentionally, exposes itself again as an object, as a person or as a space. Depending on how aware one is, it can pass without crossing the conscious mind or like a cockroach, it can cast a light on what has been forgotten.

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“I am not afraid of danger. If a man came in I would kill him without a shudder. I am not afraid of ghosts: I don’t believe in the supernatural. I am not afraid of the dead; I believe in the definitive destruction of all beings that die. Well?... Well then?... Right! I am afraid of myself! I am afraid of fear; fear of the pangs of the mind that loses its way, fear of that horrendous feeling that is incomprehensible terror. I am afraid of walls, furniture, and familiar objects that come alive with a kind of animal life. Most of all I am afraid of the horrible agitation of my thoughts, of my reason fleeing into chaos, dispersed by a mysterious invisible anguish.” The Terror, Guy

de Maupassant.

A beautiful man prays to preserve his charm and youth eternally. The stunning beauty is portrayed as a painting. He betrays, lies, tricks and kills. Good and evil, morality and sensation, beautiful and ugly. They mirror back to each other. However, what he wants is the false reality, neither the mirror nor the reflection, but what is floating in-between in the air. Oscar Wilde's novel *Picture of Dorian Gray* represents the relationship between heimlich and unheimlich. The reflection of the mirror is part of the mirror just like how the portrait and Dorian are part of each other. However, when the opposites attempt to merge into one, it becomes an uncertain reality and it arouses an uncanny feeling. The painting, the inanimate, embodies Dorian's sin and guilt and becomes animate. It is as if the painting, not Dorian, rots. However, in reality what is rotting is actually the fear for himself projected on the canvas. He sees the self not as it is, but as he wishes or fears it to be. He attempts to hide his deeds, but they have been animated. In the end, he finally decides to destroy the canvas. He swings the knife towards his portrayal, the illusion of Dorian Gray. He is found dead with a 'withered, wrinkled and loathsome visage' under his painting of the exquisite youth and beauty.

The image of the cockroach was still vivid in my head, it kept me from entering the door. Even after getting in, I had to stare at the spot where the cockroach was found until I eventually fell asleep. After quite a few days of thinking obsessively about the cockroach, I came across an old

memory of my own. I was still very young and I insisted on raising two birds at home. It certainly did not please my mom, especially because the smell of the feces. We soon found out that its sour smell rather attracted cockroaches. When my mom found one of them, it was smashed to death instantly. She hated it so much, because it reminded her of an old memory when she lived in an awfully poor house in the States, where the bigger cockroaches were eligible to crawl, fly and even attack. One day when I encountered a cockroach near the birdcage, I screamed for my mom to come over. She yelled at me that it was not necessary and that I should never do that again. I nodded. Some days later, I saw another cockroach crawling towards the washing machine. Once again, I called for my mom, but quietly, not to annoy her. Yet, she was angry again, this time saying that I was too quite. I did not understand the contradiction between this to the prior situation, so I did not know what to say. I tried to figure out how I should react if I encountered another cockroach, but I eventually had to give up, because there was no answer. I just hoped to not have one ever again. It actually worked until the day I was faced with the dead cockroach at my accommodation.

Screen Memory

'Such a memory, whose value consists in the fact that it represents thoughts and impressions from a later period and that its content is connected with these by links of a symbolic or similar nature, is what I would call a screen memory.' Uncanny, Sigmund Freud.

Screen memory is a recollection of falsely corrected infantile experiences, a fabricated memory constructed under a compromise between complete repression and full awareness of an unacceptable wish. The psychical force of wanting it remembered and its resistance of two competing forces, negotiate to displace the event with something else instead of canceling each other out or the one overpowering the other. The genuine incident hides behind the changed scenario by magnifying a different memory or emotion to conceal what has actually occurred, such as a true event or true emotion. The forgotten memories contain everything that should be remembered, but they are omitted to suppress what is significant. Therefore, it is usually filtered into something positive and less painful. Not only that, it confuses the time on when the event might have happened earlier or later than one thinks it did, because it is just a camouflage of what is hidden. It can either be a recollection of childhood that is clarified by later experiences or experiences from later in life that has significance to a connection with experiences of early youth that has remained suppressed. It is then questionable whether any memory of childhood is reliable. Maybe we believe it to be true. We believe what appeared to be.

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I had a photo that I carried along with me when moving to Holland. A family portrait that was taken when I was about five years old. I was wearing my favorite overalls, which had the shoulder traps that matched the color of my red hairband. During

the photo-shoot, everyone was smiling in the poses corrected by the photographer. The bodies were facing slightly different angles with stacked hands on the knees and the faces looked towards the camera, these were his requirements. Once again, I wore the overalls for my work. I used to like the sound of my overall clips clicking together. I also liked to hide something precious in the chest pocket and I was often scolded when I forgot to take it out before the laundry. I wore my overalls on the special occasions like the day when my mother took me shopping at the mall, where stores sold foreign products. It aroused the anger and frustration I had when my family lied that the photo-shoot would be ending soon because I thought I could spend some time at the shop like the last visit. In the same posture, with the same facial expression, from the stage with the most 'pleasing' scene that could possibly be done, things were just not the same.

Infantile Wish

Jentsch claims that when generating feelings of the uncanny, particularly favorable conditions that are applied, if intellectual uncertainty is aroused when the lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living. For instance, with dolls, children set no distinction between the animate and the inanimate. They play with dolls as if the dolls are alive. This is not just a way of an entertainment, but they do believe they are real. Unlike other conditions for intellectual uncertainty, it is derived from an infantile wish, not from an infantile fear. They are not afraid of the dolls becoming real, because they wish

them to be so. My overalls were as important and precious to me as a doll that I used to play with. However, I was never obsessed with dolls as much as my overalls. I wanted to visualize my obsession, so I went to a second hand shop near my place with the goal of purchasing overalls that looked similar to the ones that I wore for the family portrait. On my left hand I was holding the picture and on my right hand was going through the overalls that were hanging on the rack. I tried quite a few of them and picked one that was short with a big logo on the chest with the silver clips on the straps. When I posed in front of a camera with the overalls on, it came to me as an unfamiliar experience, feeling distanced from the time I tried them on at the shop. The setting, the overalls and myself as a grown up in a different time period created a completely different reality, despite being a mimic of what had happened in the past. The photo depicted discomfort and fear rather than of what used to be comfortable.

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The film, *The Shining*, directed by Stanley Kubrick and based on the novel of an American author, Stephen King, illustrates a story of a family spending five months of solitude at Overlook hotel. The hotel has a huge maze outside, made up of neatly ordered trees. It is duplicated as a small maquet in the lounge, where the view is dedicated to the maze. Subsequent to the scene where it shows Jack overlooking the model, his wife, Shelley and their kid, Danny, run into the maze. Overlook hotel is a beautifully designed building, equipped

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with everything that is needed. Its spacious and complicated space reminds of the maze. The twins, appear once in the beginning of the film, which causes Danny's blackout and later, the girls reappear and suggest Danny to play with them, but as they approach him, the image of them laying on the floor with blood all over with an axe overlap together. The film shows images that do not necessarily correspond to each other, which result in an intellectual uncertainty. The secrets and trickeries are stacking behind the viewer's consciousness. When the consciousness and the unconsciousness contradict and the logic no longer works, it creates such a mood like portrayed in *The Shining*.

The maze

The twin girls

The Red elevator with a flood of blood

The Shinning, Danny and Hallorann's abilities to communicate without opening their mouths

The maze, the maquet, Overlook hotel, Danny cycling along the hallways

The sound of Jack playing with a tennis ball, Jack stabbing with an axe as he chases after Shelley

The mirror reflecting Jack, The former caretaker who killed the wife and the twins, Jack's photo

Double

The paranormal phenomenon that is also available in reality like déjà vu or doppelgänger can be considered as what Freud calls the 'double'. The self, object and space can be duplicated, divided and interchanged. The evidence is gone to the unconsciousness and the trace is inaccessible with

logic. It is veiled and suppressed. However, once one becomes aware of its presence, the imageries distract the reality, which results the fear. The 'double' is closely related with repetition as it evokes the sense of helplessness under particular conditions and in combination with particular circumstances. When harmless and undoubted things are repeated in different occasions, the one recognizes them as inescapable, because the unconscious mind perceives the dominance of a 'compulsion to repeat, which proceeds from instinctual impulses'. In *The Shining*, Jack admits how comfortable and familiar the hotel feels even from his first visit by saying it feels like home. He says it is stronger than déjà vu given that he feels as though he has been there before, knowing every corner of it. The last scene shows an old photo of 1921, where Jack is standing between people as if he is a manager of Overlook hotel. Does it explain his feeling of déjà vu?

"The double was originally an insurance against the extinction of the self or, as Rank puts it, 'an energetic denial of the power of death' and it seems likely that the 'immortal' soul was the first double of the body." Uncanny, Sigmund Freud.

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The space under the bed was neglected or it was suppose to be neglected. It could have been used as a useful storage space, but it was rather hard to reach unlike a shelf, container or closet. After a visit to home in South Korea, I brought a suitcase along with things I received from friends and family. When I was back in Amsterdam, I tried

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to place them on the shelf, container or closet. However, I found them distracting and realized that they had too much of a presence. So instead, I hid them under the bed inside the suitcase, wishing that I would forget about them at some point. The dust tangled with hairs and spider webs covered the suitcase, but the interior never had a chance to get dirty, since I dragged it back and forth almost everyday. The deeper I hid it, the stronger the temptation got. I did not touch them though. I just watched them. I created a work, *Space Under the Bed*, which literally resembled the scene under the bed. When the memories are visualized as an object, they are repressed as much as possible. Only the materials and how they are formulated imply the story. The work consists of transparent strings crossing together from the wooden walls. The strings hold crystals of sugar hardened with sweetener syrup. When it reflects light, the particles shine along. Although they are hardened, the stickiness is still there, so it easily grasps on dusts.

I did not realize myself that I was talking too much about cockroaches until it was obvious that people were losing their interest. They stopped offering insecticides or sharing related experiences. So I decided to deal with it on my own. I predicted every possible case of what I could do, but killing was not one of them. I rather waited for it to leave my sight than having the dead body in the same room again. I studied about cockroaches every night. One day I figured out that they hated cinnamon so I put a scoop of cinnamon powder in every corner of my room. Another day I tried to get used to their image so I watched a 90 min-

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utes documentary about their body structures. As the weather became warmer, the cockroaches grew more active. One day, I went to onsen (hot spring) after work. A parked car with its lights on suddenly roared off and a flood of cockroaches escaped from the plugholes, drains and under the trashcans. I do not remember how many, but a dark mass covered the whole asphalt and scattered as if the waves were breaking, with the noise of their body parts scratching together. When they passed my bare feet wearing flip flops, I saw their heads, bodies, arms and legs moving in slow motion as if my brain had a difficulty to process the image. My fear reached its peak.

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In 1993, Mike Kelley presented an exhibition, *Uncanny* in Holland. The collection consisted of objects in the state where the lifeless bore an excessive likeness to the living. As he put it, it was a physical sensation associated with art experiences, tied to the act of remembering, or 'disturbing un-recallable memory'. It was a reflection of oneself, which resulted in confusion between the self and it. He compared it with an out-of-body experience, where one became so bodily aware that one had the sensation of watching oneself outside of the body as if watching the scene as a third person. He also emphasized the scale of the object, because in order to maintain the power it had, it was necessary to keep its physicality. The relationship between the viewer and the object intensified when they were similar in size.

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"It is important to me, first of all, that the objects displayed maintain their physical presence, that they hold their own power in relation to the viewer. I decided, therefore, to exclude miniatures—smaller than life-size statues, dolls, toys, figurines, and the like—from the exhibition. Generally, I believe that small figurative objects invite the viewer to project onto them. By this, I mean that the viewer gets lost in these objects, and that in the process of projecting mental scenarios onto them they lose sense of themselves physically. The experience of playing with dolls is a case in point. The doll becomes simply an object to provoke daydreams, and its objecthood fades into the background. Once the fantasy is operating, it could be replaced by any other object. On the other hand, I am interested in objects with which the viewer empathizes in a human way—though only as long as the viewer, and the object viewed, maintain their sense of being there physically." Playing With Dead Things: On the Uncanny, Mike Kelley.

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The work I created as a heating system represents a mother's womb. In that space, a person is a fetus. Inside of the wooden structure, the wool felt bed holds a person's body in a fetal position, known as the most comfortable position. The face, arms and legs fall into the holes on the bed. When the body swings back and forth, the cover, which is the same material with the bed, blocks the body's heat from escaping. Its appearance hardly suggests the imagery of a womb though, because of its size. The structure, 80x140x140cm, which is made to fit my height, 164cm, is too equivalent to human scale

that it does not look like it belongs to us. When a full grown adult poses him or herself as a fetus, the chance are very low that it looks like a fetus. In reality, the posture is quite insecure, especially when it happens inside the wheel. It requires full trust on the object as it forces the person to let go of the fear. Upon letting go of one's fear, the controlled posture on the bed gives a person the feeling of safety and your mind becomes fully awake. The space turns into the most private place like how heimlich without unheimlich is just a sense of familiar and comfortable.

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750,000 spectators visited the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York to sit in front of a person. From the 14th of May to the 31st of May in 2010, eight hours every day for almost three weeks, Marina Abramović exposed herself to the public. Why is her presence so strong? What makes people wait for hours outside of the museum to have a few minutes of the eye contact? These days, people barely have a chance to have a silent 'facing each other'. Is that why they are so emotionally moved when finally having so? Her gaze is both steady and powerful. Although she is fully clothed unlike her former performances, she has never been this naked. Her action, which involves no apparent action, but staying still and gazing into other's eyes, reveals her vulnerability so sincerely, yet it is fully equipped with her control. She provides a private space for a person to project oneself on her within the public. She becomes invisible, as she states, "there is nowhere to go except in yourself".

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Her presence is the sense of safety, 'feeling homely' and it empowers the other one's suppressed self to become present. However, her guard breaks down when facing Ulay, whom she shares her life in the past. In 1988, when they end their relationship, they walk from the different ends of the Great Wall of China and meet in the middle. As her control is released, her emotions are spilled out as well. She weeps and holds his hands. For once, the heimlich is fallen and so does her presence as a mirror. The experience of the uncanny in public is very uncanny. It is rare to happen in reality, because it 'can only arise only if there is a conflict of judgment as to whether what has been surmounted'. However, Marina's presence at MoMA seems already unrealistic, not only including her ability to stay in control physically and mentally for such a long time and the privacy occurring in the public, but also her not going to the toilet. The chair had a chamber pot beneath it, so she can stay fixed on the chair for the whole day. Beside that, her main material, her own body, seem to be changed or has not changed enough. She is 69 years old yet her youth has not gone away. Despite people's suspicion on whether she has received plastic surgery, she supports herself stating that Montenegro people live long and never age. Nothing seems unrealistic though. She is so subtle with her trickery that it only gives a hint of uncertainty. People are deluded by its almost believable fairytale, the setting of the white cube.

"The writer can intensify and multiply this effect far beyond what is feasible in normal experience; in his stories he can make things happen that one

would never, or only rarely, experience in real life. In a sense, then, he betrays us to a superstition we thought we had 'surmounted'; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it. We react to his fictions as if they had been our own experiences. By the time we became aware of the trickery, it is too late: the writer has already done what he set out to do." Uncanny, Sigmund Freud.

Every night I had dinner with my internship family: Yoko and Koji, their young daughters and two of my colleagues. After many hours of working, having a dinner in chaos of three children spraying water on my face and stealing my food while sitting on my lap meant a lot. I was exhausted. I took care of the cleaning and went to the entrance to change my shoes. Then I saw a cockroach, alive and huge. I felt weak at the knees like an experience of disembodiment. The kids were already falling asleep, but I had to let someone know. I wanted to do something rather than avoiding, at least for the sake of the children. I tiptoed to one of my colleagues, Tomoko, she knew the house more thoroughly as Yoko and Koji. She got a spray that could make a cockroach frozen for a couple of minutes and approached to it gradually. She shrieked shortly and told me she had missed it. She grabbed a stick near the toilet to flip the baskets and check under the rug, but it was no use. Next day, Koji decided to get a stronger insecticide that they had never used before. I tried not to be bothered, but I was afraid of going near the toilet, so I climbed two floors to use another toilet. When we were having a dinner together as usual, the kids were asking for desserts

after their meal. Koji grinned, took the girls near the fridge and told them that the oni (goblin) lives near the fridge to hunt down the kids who misbehave when eating and he especially likes those who eat the popsicles. The oni was the gokiburi (cockroach) that was caught in the cockroach trap placed in between the small gap next to the fridge. I shrieked and the kids started to cry. The gokiburi was Koji's entertainment and the kids' goblin and my projection of the past. In the same moment, three different experiences occurred.

The cockroaches accompanied me with fear all the time. It was a forgotten memory that was resurfaced without having my conscious realize it for a while. After I grew aware of the fear in my experiences, I perceived each encounter as an indication of the broken piece of the recollection embodied in my unconsciousness. The piece was completely distinct from the others and different so much as from the roots, since it was born from my personal emotions, memories and heimlich. Yet, I did not put together the pieces. Instead, I gathered them, gave a new form and handed it out to someone else. The response is theirs. It is no longer mine, but it was once mine. Perhaps it resulted in a new experience like Karl Gutzkow once stated, "we call it unheimlich; you call it heimlich". However, in one way or another, it was once again, a dead cockroach.

Work

Images of the art works mentioned in the text are available at www.obsessivepoetry.com

Book

How to Build a Japanese House by Cathelijne Nuijsink
Louise Bourgeois, Blue Days and Pink Days by Jerry Gorovoy
Man and His Symbols by Carl Jung
Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
On Ugliness by Umberto Eco
Pet Architecture Guide Book by Atelier Bow-Wow
Species of Spaces and Other Pieces by Georges Perec
The Architectural Uncanny by Anthony Vidler
The Philosophy of Andy Warhol by Andy Warhol
The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde
The Uncanny by Sigmund Freud
The Uncanny, Playing with Dead Things by Mike Kelley
Tokyo: A Certain Style by Kyoichi Tsuzuk

Film

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) by Stanley Kubrick
Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry (2012) by Alison Klayman
Air Doll (2009) by Hirokazu Koreeda
The Picture of Dorian Gray (1945) by Albert Lewin
The Shining (1980) by Stanley Kubrick
Room 237 (2012) by Rodney Ascher

Article/Exhibition

Cockroach: The Insect that We're Programmed to Fear (2014)
by Rachel Nuwer
<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140918-the-reality-about-roaches>
Transformers (2016) at MAXXI
<http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/en/editoria/transformers-catalogo-della-mostra/>
Who am We? (2002) at Serpentine Galleries <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/do-ho-suh>
Do-Ho Suh's Transformative Architecture
<http://www.janerendell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/whoamwe.pdf>

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