

I imagine being inside one of these houses, a Japanese replica in the Utah desert in 1943.¹ The dimensions, the scale, the joints, things yet to be discarded; the full scale of military contingency lay dormant, speculated but yet to be seared into flesh.

The windows one could penetrate by wetting your fingers with saliva, making a rubbing motion on the surface to create a tear; to eavesdrop and spy on the enclosed. A simple fiction shored up from Hong Kong period dramas.

I imagine it always quiet; a deathly silence; not because of the fatalism entombed in these homes, or the lack of actual inhabitants – but because this is my defining impression of a Japanese home. The doors slide, the furniture low, the steps careful: movement restrained and contained.

Test against memory. I last lived in a Japanese home when visiting my sister just outside Nagoya in 2009. My nephew, Ollie was then two or almost two, I'm not great at keeping track. I remembered we made a racket in the tatami room – a contract to explode into a frenzied dance each time his tropical mobile issued a dancing song. When you exhibit such extreme, exciting behavior to a two-year-old, you are expected to commit. Exhaustion, expiration be damned, Dance! Dance! Dance! You are 99% absence with moments of reprieve you

have to make matter. Ollie was so small. Min and I leapt up and down on the tatami together; encouraging our mutual stamina. The tatami was firm and spongy; a taut trampoline with little give. Ollie so small didn't recover his calm and it was a restless night for my sister. We dispense the fun without the consequences, the crazy aunts.

On the testing grounds, every care was taken to ensure the authenticity of the structure, "making all details of these dwellings correspond with authentic Japanese practice." The exacting accuracy would establish the weak points of shelter and uncover the vulnerable zones – knowing the enemy served as a weapon of efficacy. "While the Achilles' heel of German architecture was the attic, in Japanese structures it was the floor... the tatami floor mats are the most important item of Japanese furnishing since they greatly influence bomb penetration as well as the inflammability of the test structure. The tatami used at Dugway are either originals made in Japan from the hard-packed rice straw or imitation mats manufactured from thistle which have been shown by test to approach the original mats in both bomb penetration and inflammability."²

Set ablaze, the flames engulfed your feet. By the time we woke, we were sun-burnt floating adrift. You looked over and smiled.

I can stave off cancer with this tea. I am grateful for every note.

I wanted to erect a structure that could withstand external forces.

The circular demonstrated greater blast-resistance, predictably reinforced concrete would feature and no glass, no windows would shatter, no fallout danger. Our psychic comfort must rest in the cream-coloured shaggy carpet.³ No one sinks into the shallow trenches. We dug our forks into cans of syrugged pineapple; our eternity lay on the horizon. We fell asleep to thundering applause; I stalled your resentment. Consistency is key to immunity.

Security architecture is an anachronism; it now only exists virtually.⁴

Kah Bee Chow

1

The Dugway Proving Ground in Utah "served as an environmental test bed for some of the most elaborate and toxic chemical and biological warfare experiments." In March 1943, with bombing attacks on cities being intensified by all sides, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction at Dugway on a series of "enemy villages," detailed reproductions of the typical housing found in the industrial districts of cities in Germany and Japan. The purpose of these "test villages" was to determine the effectiveness of a variety of incendiary bombs then under development by National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). Vanderbilt, Tom (2002) *Survival City: Adventures Among The Ruins of Atomic America* Chicago: Princeton Architectural Press, p.69.

2

Ibid. p.72.

3

As the bomb-proof materials for fallout architecture excluded glass and windows by extension, Vanderbilt observed that even "Astronauts demanded the psychic comfort of windows; could terrestrial architecture do without them?" Ibid. 86.

4

In contemporary usage, security architecture commonly refers to the design artifacts which describe the security controls relating to information technology architecture. So wikipedia tells me.