



Kioi Seidō – The Architecture of Education: A Building that Teaches Without Teaching

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DOI: 10.63467/all16.art15

Abstract

Education has never belonged solely to classrooms. Architecture, as one of society’s most pervasive yet overlooked teachers, silently shapes behavior, values, and perception through space, light, and material. This paper examines Hiroshi Naitō’s *Kioi Seidō* (2022, Tokyo) as an architectural pedagogy -- a building designed “without purpose” that resists the dominance of utility, productivity, and profit. Through its spatial sequence—from dark, compressed entry to luminous atrium—*Kioi Seidō* dramatizes education as transformation: a journey from disorientation to insight.

Drawing connections to Dewey, Freire, and Montessori, the project exemplifies how architecture can embody problem-posing pedagogy, cultivate reflection, and position environments as active teachers. It also resonates with Japan’s cultural lineage of Shinto shrines, Zen gardens, and tea houses, which educate through atmosphere and ritual rather than instruction. At the same time, its refusal of fixed function raises ethical debates about privilege, responsibility, and sustainability in a city of scarcity.

By situating *Kioi Seidō* alongside global precedents such as Ronchamp, the Salk Institute, and the Vittra Telefonplan School, this paper argues that the building is neither sanctuary, nor school, nor monument, but a deliberate anomaly - an architecture of ambiguity. In doing so, it reminds us that built environments are never neutral: they teach discipline, consumption, control, or, in this rare case, openness, humility, and interpretive freedom. *Kioi Seidō* demonstrates that

Romanian International Conference for Education and Research 16th edition, 12th-13th November 2025 at Iași, Romania.



architecture itself can be a form of pedagogy, expanding education beyond curricula into the spaces of everyday life.

1. Introduction

Right in the middle of Tokyo's dense and tightly organized urban landscape—where space is scarce, real estate is expensive, and nearly every square meter is optimized for efficiency—stands an architectural anomaly: Kioi Seidō (completed in 2022, designed by Hiroshi Naitō). Commissioned by the RINRI Institute of Ethics with the unusual request to create a building *without a predefined function*, Kioi Seidō challenges deeply held assumptions about architectural purpose, economic value, and the cultural expectations placed on built environments. In a city defined by speed, productivity, and spatial compression (Sorensen, 2018), the notion of constructing a “form without function” appears almost contradictory. Yet this deliberate absence of program becomes the very source of the building's intellectual and educational power.

Architecture is traditionally understood as purposeful: it shelters, supports work, facilitates commerce, or expresses civic identity (Ching, 2020). To ask an architect to design without a clear function is to disrupt the discipline's foundational logic. However, Naitō's project demonstrates that architecture can transcend utility and work instead as a spatial, ethical, and phenomenological inquiry. The building's refusal of predetermined use invites occupants to confront their own expectations of purpose and meaning within the built environment. It provokes questions rather than offering instructions—a trait that aligns it with philosophical and educational traditions that value ambiguity as a catalyst for reflection (Eisenkot & Auster, 2022). The initial experience of Kioi Seidō makes this pedagogical quality immediately perceptible. Visitors enter through a dark, compressed ground-floor space whose rough concrete walls still bear the cedar-grain impressions of their formwork. The atmosphere is cave-like, heavy, and introspective. As one ascends the building, however, light enters more generously through nine apertures above, ceilings rise, and the space gradually expands. By the time visitors reach the top, the atrium has transformed into a bright, airy void—a transition that enacts an architectural



narrative of movement from darkness to light, enclosure to openness, and introspection to calm transcendence. This upward journey becomes a lesson in spatial perception and sensory awareness, a kind of experiential pedagogy reminiscent of phenomenological architectural theory (Pallasmaa, 2012; Zumthor, 2006).

Already, this movement through Kioi Seidō reveals how the building functions as a silent teacher. Unlike conventional buildings—where spatial cues guide behavior, purpose dictates circulation, and signs instruct occupants—Kioi Seidō refuses to signal how it should be used. There are no desks, no designated zones for productivity, and no functional anchors. Instead, visitors must interpret the space for themselves. In doing so, the building cultivates habits of perception, patience, and reflection. This aligns with broader theories of environmental learning suggesting that space shapes cognition and behavior as much as formal instruction does (Lippman, 2010).

The RINRI Institute's intention amplifies this educational dimension. As an organization devoted to moral reflection and ethical cultivation, commissioning a building without function was not an act of architectural whimsy but a deliberate ethical experiment. They sought a structure that could provoke introspection rather than activity, contemplation rather than productivity. In this sense, the building embodies a pedagogy of ethics: one learns not through direct instruction but by dwelling in uncertainty, interpreting space, and confronting assumptions about value. The building becomes a philosophical classroom, though one without lectures or syllabi.

This architectural experiment also resonates with Japanese traditions where learning is embedded in spatial experience. Jōmon dwellings emphasized harmony with ritual life more than efficient use; Shinto shrines built by miyadaiku carpenters transmitted knowledge through embodied apprenticeship rather than written plans. These traditions demonstrate that space itself can teach, shaping cultural values and ethical sensibilities through atmosphere and material, not merely function (Brown, 2021; Schnell, 1999). By echoing these lineages, Kioi Seidō situates itself within a long history of Japanese architecture that prioritizes experiential learning over utilitarian efficiency.



The contrast with contemporary educational architecture further highlights Kioi Seidō's significance. Modern classrooms, universities, and learning environments often prioritize visibility, control, and spatial efficiency—qualities aligned with institutional productivity but less supportive of contemplative learning (Nair & Fielding, 2014). By resisting these norms, Kioi Seidō demonstrates a different educational paradigm, one based on openness, ambiguity, and inquiry rather than outcome-driven instruction.

This study examines Kioi Seidō as a case that sits at the intersection of architecture, culture, ethics, and education. Its central thesis is that although the building lacks an explicit functional program, it nonetheless performs a profound educational role. Through its deliberate ambiguity, material expression, and phenomenological progression, Kioi Seidō teaches its occupants to see, think, and question differently. The building offers lessons not through content but through experience, and thus reframes the relationship between architecture and learning.

In an era dominated by metrics, efficiency, and economic optimization, Kioi Seidō stands as a compelling reminder that not all value is measurable. Its refusal of functional clarity becomes an opportunity to reconsider how architecture participates in cultural education. Just as learning extends beyond the classroom, architecture can teach beyond its program. Kioi Seidō thus becomes not merely a building but an educator—one that teaches through ambiguity, material presence, and experiential transformation (Pallasmaa, 2012; Tanizaki, 1977).

2. Literature Review

The conceptual foundations of Kioi Seidō draw from several overlapping domains of scholarship: architectural theory, phenomenology of space, Japanese cultural and material traditions, environmental psychology, progressive educational philosophy, and comparative studies of contemplative architecture. This literature review situates the building within these broader discourses, demonstrating that its ambiguity, materiality, and experiential form reflect long-standing traditions of learning through space, while also challenging modern assumptions about utility, efficiency, and architectural program.



2.1 Architectural Theory and the Question of Function

Modern architectural discourse has been shaped by the notion that “form follows function,” a principle popularized by Louis Sullivan in the late 19th century and later cemented by modernist architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius (Curtis, 2011). Buildings were expected to express their function clearly, minimize ornament, and operate as rational machines for living or working. Yet scholars of postmodern and experimental architecture have noted that deviation from function can itself become a critical statement (Venturi et al., 1977). Kioi Seidō intervenes in this lineage by deliberately rejecting functional clarity; instead, it aligns with architectural experiments that foreground ambiguity as a tool of critique (Leatherbarrow, 2009).

Naitō’s decision to prioritize form, atmosphere, and material presence over programmatic determinacy resonates with phenomenological architects such as Peter Zumthor (2006) and Juhani Pallasmaa (2012), who argue that architecture teaches through sensory engagement rather than through functional prescription. The literature suggests that buildings can produce meaning not through what they instruct occupants to do, but through how they shape perception, movement, and reflection. This theoretical foundation supports interpreting Kioi Seidō as a building that “teaches without teaching.”

2.2 Phenomenology, Atmosphere, and Sensory Learning

Phenomenology in architecture emphasizes embodied experience—light, shadow, sound, material texture, and movement through space—as a source of meaning (Pallasmaa, 2012; Pérez-Gómez, 2016). Kioi Seidō’s progression from darkness to light, its rough cedar-imprinted concrete, and its cavernous top-lit atrium align closely with this phenomenological scholarship. Zumthor (2006) argues that sensory atmospheres create emotional resonance and invite contemplation; similarly, Böhme (2014) conceptualizes “atmosphere” as a spatial condition that generates states of mind.

Such frameworks support the claim that Kioi Seidō functions pedagogically. Phenomenologists contend that sensory experience fosters reflection and awareness, cultivating forms of knowledge that precede or exceed verbal instruction. Environmental psychology also reinforces this notion:



spatial qualities—light levels, material warmth, openness—directly influence cognition, mood, and attentional patterns (Evans & McCoy, 1998). Spaces that slow perception, reduce functional cues, and heighten sensory awareness are shown to promote deeper reflection and cognitive openness. The literature therefore recognizes architecture as an active medium of cognitive and emotional learning.

2.3 Japanese Architectural Traditions as Embodied Pedagogy

Kioi Seidō also emerges from Japanese architectural and cultural histories where buildings transmit knowledge through ritual, atmosphere, and materiality rather than through explicit program. Scholarship on the Jōmon period (Imamura, 1996) reveals that prehistoric dwellings were not merely shelters but encoded spiritual and communal values through layout, circular settlement patterns, and their integration with nature. These structures cultivated a relational worldview, teaching occupants through spatial organization and ritual practice.

Shinto shrine architecture furthers this relationship between space and moral education. Historians of Japanese architecture emphasize that shrines were traditionally constructed by miyadaiku master carpenters, relying not on drawings but on oral knowledge, embodied apprenticeship, and ritualized building practices (Young & Young, 2007). This aligns with Deweyan educational philosophy, which views learning as experiential, embodied, and emergent (Dewey, 1938). Shrine architecture, with its purification rituals and disciplined craftsmanship, teaches humility, respect for materials, and reverence for natural cycles.

Scholars such as Brown (2021) and Schnell (1999) argue that shrine spaces cultivate moral sensibilities through atmosphere, not instruction. The quiet thresholds, dim interiors, and symbolic material choices foster a reflective mental state, shaping visitors' ethical awareness. Kioi Seidō's own emphasis on ritual-like ascent, sensory contrast, and open-ended interpretation mirrors this lineage of architecture as moral pedagogy.

2.4 Progressive Education and Ambiguity as Learning

The literature on educational theory provides a second key foundation for interpreting Kioi Seidō. Constructivist theorists, including Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), maintain that



learning occurs when individuals actively construct meaning rather than passively receive information. Montessori (1967) emphasizes the importance of open-ended materials that invite exploration rather than dictate outcomes. These principles correspond directly to Kioi Seidō's refusal of functional cues: the building invites interpretation, curiosity, and exploratory behavior. Paulo Freire's (2000) critique of "banking education" - where knowledge is deposited into passive learners—also resonates with Kioi Seidō's pedagogical form. Freire advocates spaces that promote questioning, dialogue, and consciousness-raising. Architecturally, a building without fixed purpose becomes a site where visitors must actively decode spatial meaning, embodying Freire's concept of critical pedagogy.

Educational psychologists further argue that environments rich in ambiguity foster creativity, critical thinking, and flexible cognition (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Literature on problem-based learning reveals that uncertain or open-ended environments develop cognitive resilience and tolerance for ambiguity (Tawfik et al., 2021). Kioi Seidō's architecture aligns with these findings by intentionally withholding functional direction, thereby cultivating interpretive skills and reflective habits.

2.5 Architecture as Cultural Memory and Social Education

Beyond individual experience, architecture participates in shaping collective memory and societal values. Scholars such as Huyssen (2003) and Assmann (2011) argue that built environments encode cultural narratives, functioning as pedagogical sites that teach societies how to remember, mourn, or imagine. Memorial architecture—such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the Berlin Holocaust Memorial studied by Young (1993)—demonstrates how spatial form influences collective emotional and moral engagement.

Sociologists describe public spaces as arenas of civic learning, where individuals encounter difference, negotiate shared resources, and internalize social norms (Low, 2017). Architecture thus becomes a teacher of citizenship. Kioi Seidō's open, non-commercial space exemplifies this role by resisting the profit-driven urbanism of Tokyo and providing a contemplative public environment that teaches reflection over consumption.



2.6 Comparative Cases: Global Architectural Pedagogies

Comparative architectural scholarship provides additional insight into how buildings teach through atmosphere, material, and light. Studies of Louis Kahn's Salk Institute highlight how monumental concrete voids, framed by sea and sky, produce meditative settings that inspire scientific and philosophical inquiry (Tyng, 2013). Similarly, Le Corbusier's Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut is often analyzed for its ability to evoke spiritual reflection through asymmetry, curving surfaces, and shifting light (Curtis, 2006). These works parallel Kioi Seidō's pedagogical use of ambiguity and sensory experience.

In the context of public knowledge institutions, the Seattle Public Library by OMA demonstrates how transparency, spatial irregularity, and circulation complexity support exploratory learning (Burdett et al., 2011). Contemporary educational architecture, such as Rosan Bosch's Vittra Telefonplan School, shows how flexible, open-ended spaces can foster creativity, collaboration, and learner autonomy (Bosch, 2015). These comparative cases reinforce the broader trend toward architecture that functions as an educational agent.

2.7 Environmental Psychology and Spatial Cognition

Environmental psychology provides empirical grounding for understanding how architecture shapes learning. Studies consistently show that lighting conditions, spatial openness, material warmth, and sensory contrasts significantly influence cognitive performance, attention, and emotional states (Evans, 2003). Spaces that reduce noise, provide visual calm, or introduce natural materials enhance reflective thinking and well-being (Kaplan, 1995). Kioi Seidō's spatial sequencing - from dark enclosure to luminous openness—maps directly onto findings that gradual sensory transitions support cognitive resetting and attentional renewal.

Moreover, research on spatial ambiguity indicates that environments lacking explicit functional cues increase exploratory movement and interpretive engagement (Stamps, 2010). This aligns with Naitō's deliberate refusal to assign purpose, creating a spatial environment that stimulates cognitive openness and self-directed meaning-making.



2.8 Summary

The literature across architectural theory, phenomenology, Japanese cultural history, educational philosophy, environmental psychology, and comparative architectural studies converges on a shared insight: space is a powerful teacher. Architecture can cultivate reflection, moral sensibility, sensory awareness, and cognitive openness not through explicit instruction but through embodied experience. Kioi Seidō participates deeply in this lineage, situating itself as a modern site of spatial pedagogy. Its ambiguity, sensory contrast, and cultural resonance are supported not only by historical precedent but also by contemporary research in learning and cognition.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and multi-scalar methodological framework suited to analyzing Kioi Seidō as both an architectural artifact and an educational environment. Because the building is intentionally non-functional and relies on experiential interpretation, a conventional performance-based or quantitative approach would be inadequate. Instead, the methodology integrates phenomenological analysis, cultural-historical contextualization, comparative case study methods, environmental psychology, and educational theory.

3.1 Interpretive Architectural Analysis

The first methodological component is an interpretive examination of the building's architectural elements. This includes close analysis of:

- material expression, particularly the cedar-imprinted concrete;
- spatial sequencing and vertical transitions;
- the manipulation of light and darkness;
- the absence of conventional programmatic cues;
- atmospheric conditions such as silence, enclosure, and openness.

These elements are studied as communicative devices through which the building produces meaning. This approach draws from established methods in architectural phenomenology and



critical spatial studies, which treat architectural form and atmosphere as interpretive data rather than strictly functional determinants.

3.2 Phenomenological Reading of Spatial Experience

A phenomenological methodology is employed to analyze how Kioi Seidō influences perception, emotion, and embodied understanding. This involves reconstructing the sensory experience of moving through the building—from the dark, compressed ground floor to the luminous atrium above—and interpreting how such sequences cultivate reflection. Phenomenology enables the study to treat movement, sensory contrast, and atmosphere as central to understanding the building’s pedagogical capacity.

3.3 Cultural-Historical Contextualization

To situate Kioi Seidō within a broader Japanese architectural lineage, the study applies cultural-historical analysis to compare the building with:

- Jōmon-period dwellings and prehistoric spatial practices
- Shinto shrine construction and *miyadaiku* apprenticeship traditions
- architectural forms associated with ritual, purification, and moral cultivation
- contemporary patterns of urban development in Tokyo

This contextual method highlights how cultural traditions of spatial pedagogy—learning through atmosphere, material, and ritual—inform the building’s design and its non-utilitarian orientation.

3.4 Comparative Architectural Case Study Method

Comparative analysis is used to position Kioi Seidō within an international discourse on contemplative and pedagogical architecture. Relevant precedents include:

- Louis Kahn’s Salk Institute
- Le Corbusier’s Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut
- Rem Koolhaas’s Seattle Public Library
- Rosan Bosch’s Vittra Telefonplan School

Examining these cases allows the study to identify shared strategies—such as spatial ambiguity, sensory modulation, and open-ended circulation—that support reflective or inquiry-based



engagement. Comparative analysis clarifies how Kioi Seidō participates in broader architectural efforts to cultivate learning through space.

3.5 Educational-Theoretical Framework

The study integrates theoretical perspectives from educational philosophy and psychology, especially:

- constructivism (Piaget; Vygotsky)
- Montessori's principles of open-ended learning environments
- Deweyan experiential learning
- Freirean critical pedagogy
- the concept of the "hidden curriculum"

These frameworks provide a conceptual basis for understanding how architectural ambiguity, sensory immersion, and spatial openness operate as pedagogical tools. The theories help explain how a building with no prescribed function can nonetheless shape interpretive behavior, critical awareness, and reflective learning.

3.6 Ethical and Societal Evaluation

Given that Kioi Seidō was commissioned by an ethics-focused institution, the methodology includes an interpretive ethical analysis. This component examines:

- debates around architectural utility and public value
- tensions between idealism and pragmatism in dense urban environments
- issues of accessibility, inclusivity, and elitism
- questions of cultural memory and societal education

Rather than treating such critiques as external objections, the analysis incorporates them as part of the building's pedagogical effect. Ethical tensions are understood as instructive, revealing how architecture can provoke societal reflection.

3.7 Synthesis of Methods

Together, these methods create an interdisciplinary framework that interprets Kioi Seidō as a pedagogical environment shaped by cultural history, phenomenological experience, architectural



form, and educational theory. This integrated methodology supports a comprehensive understanding of how the building teaches through ambiguity, atmosphere, and sensory progression.

4. Results

The analysis of Kioi Seidō through architectural, cultural, phenomenological, and educational frameworks reveals the building's multifaceted role as a pedagogical environment. Rather than functioning as a conventional structure with a defined program, Kioi Seidō operates as an experiential teacher that cultivates reflection, sensory awareness, ethical questioning, and interpretive agency. The results of this qualitative inquiry are organized into thematic categories that illuminate how the building teaches through ambiguity, material expression, spatial progression, cultural lineage, ethical tension, and global architectural parallels.

4.1 Ambiguity as Pedagogy

One of the most significant findings is that Kioi Seidō's intentional ambiguity functions as a pedagogical mechanism. The building refuses conventional functional cues—there are no directional signs, no designated seating, and no clear spatial purpose. Visitors must interpret the environment for themselves, making decisions about movement, posture, and meaning without guidance.

This ambiguity parallels principles of inquiry-based and constructivist learning, in which learners construct knowledge through exploration rather than passive reception. In this context, the absence of program becomes the content: the building teaches critical thinking, perceptual attentiveness, and comfort with uncertainty. This result aligns with educational theories that identify ambiguity as a catalyst for creativity and reflective cognition.

The contrast between Kioi Seidō and its hyper-functional urban surroundings intensifies this pedagogical effect. In central Tokyo—an environment optimized for speed, efficiency, and commercial productivity—the building's refusal of utility disrupts normative expectations. It



asks visitors to reconsider the values embedded in urban form and to imagine alternative relationships between space, meaning, and purpose.

4.2 Spatial Sequencing and Sensory Transformation

A second major finding concerns the building's spatial progression from darkness to light, enclosure to openness. The ground level's compressed, cave-like atmosphere—with thick concrete walls marked by cedar formwork—creates a primordial, introspective state. As visitors ascend, light gradually increases through nine apertures, culminating in a bright, expansive top floor.

This sensory transformation aligns with phenomenological theories that emphasize how architecture shapes perception and emotional experience. The vertical sequence serves as an embodied narrative: darkness to illumination, heaviness to lightness, ambiguity to clarity. This progression is pedagogical in its own right, teaching through movement and sensory contrast rather than didactic content.

The ascending spatial experience mirrors historical ritual structures in Japan, where movement through architectural thresholds symbolized purification, preparation, or transformation. In this sense, Kioi Seidō's spatial sequence becomes a contemporary ritual of reflection.

4.3 Material Expression and Ethical Atmosphere

Analysis of material expression shows that Kioi Seidō's rough, cedar-imprinted concrete plays a significant educational role. Unlike smooth, polished finishes associated with corporate modernism, the textured concrete connects the building to natural material traditions and emphasizes imperfection, tactility, and the traces of construction.

This material honesty reinforces ethical and cultural values associated with Japanese architecture: humility, simplicity, memory, and an appreciation of natural processes. The concrete's imprint of cedar planks evokes ancient wooden construction methods, subtly linking the building to the Jōmon period's earthen structures and the austere spirituality of Shinto shrines. This resonance teaches occupants to recognize material as a bearer of cultural meaning.



The material atmosphere also contributes to what can be described as ethical quietness. Rather than stimulating activity, the building slows perception and creates conditions for contemplation, which aligns with both phenomenological understandings of atmosphere and Japanese aesthetic traditions of subtlety and stillness.

4.4 Cultural Lineage as an Educational Framework

Situating Kioi Seidō within Japanese cultural history reveals how the building participates in a longstanding tradition of spatial pedagogy.

Jōmon Resonances

The rough textures and ambiguity of the interior recall the Jōmon era's dwellings, which were constructed for ritual and communal gathering as much as shelter. These prehistoric structures taught social and cosmological orientations through embodied experience.

Shinto Shrine Practices

The connection to Shinto shrine architecture is equally significant. Shrines were historically built through oral transmission and apprenticeship, embedding learning in the act of construction itself. Visitors learned through purification rituals, silence, and atmospheric cues rather than explicit instruction. Kioi Seidō echoes these pedagogical forms through its ritual-like ascent and open-ended spaces.

Miyadaiku Tradition

The *miyadaiku* carpenters' approach—learning through repetition, embodied skill, and reverence for materials—offers a template for interpreting the building's educational significance. Kioi Seidō similarly teaches through encounter, sensory engagement, and respect for the qualities of material.

Collectively, these cultural findings demonstrate that Kioi Seidō is not an isolated experiment but part of a Japanese lineage in which architecture itself is an educator.

4.5 Ethical Implications and Pedagogy of Value



The building embodies an ethical stance that challenges dominant economic logics. In a city where land value is exceptionally high and architectural purpose is often tied to commercial productivity, Kioi Seidō's lack of programmatic utility is a radical gesture.

Rejection of Profit-Based Value

By refusing to generate economic return, the building critiques the assumption that architectural worth must be measurable. This ethical reframing aligns with broader Japanese philosophical traditions that value contemplation, ritual, and intangible cultural heritage.

Architecture as Moral Inquiry

The commissioning body—the RINRI Institute of Ethics—intended the building to provoke reflection on moral life. The architecture itself becomes a medium for ethical inquiry, teaching that ambiguity, slowness, and contemplation are not wasteful but necessary for ethical and intellectual development.

Hidden Curriculum

The building functions as a “hidden curriculum,” teaching without explicit instruction by shaping behavior, silence, and interpretive habits.

4.6 Comparative Global Parallels

Comparative analysis positions Kioi Seidō within a global network of architecture that teaches through space.

Salk Institute (Louis Kahn)

The monumental concrete spaces and ocean-facing plaza teach a meditative attitude toward work and discovery. Like Kioi Seidō, it uses light and void as pedagogical devices.

Notre Dame du Haut (Le Corbusier)

This chapel demonstrates how asymmetry, indirect light, and sculptural form elicit reflection. Its ambiguity parallels Kioi Seidō's experiential strategy.

Seattle Public Library (OMA)

Transparent facades and unconventional circulation paths turn library use into an exploratory act, demonstrating that public buildings can encourage interpretive learning.



Vittra Telefonplan School (Rosan Bosch)

Flexible, non-hierarchical learning spaces foster creativity and autonomy, aligning with Kioi Seidō's refusal of fixed purpose.

These comparisons show that Kioi Seidō participates in a broader architectural movement in which buildings shape learning not through classrooms or curricula but through spatial openness and sensory engagement.

4.7 Societal Learning and Collective Memory

The analysis reveals that Kioi Seidō teaches not only individuals but also society. Drawing from sociological theories of public space, the building serves as:

- a counterbalance to commercialized urbanism
- a contemplative public resource
- an embodiment of alternative urban values
- a teacher of collective reflection

By resisting privatization and monetization, it reopens the public imagination, teaching that cities can make room for thought, ethical inquiry, and shared cultural memory.

4.8 Critical Tensions as Educational Devices

The study identifies several critiques—elitism, accessibility, practicality, sustainability—that are often raised in response to non-functional architecture. Importantly, these tensions are themselves pedagogical.

Elitism

Critics argue that dedicating prime real estate to contemplation may privilege certain populations, raising questions about who has access to reflective space.

Accessibility and Interpretation

The ambiguous spatial design may confuse or exclude visitors who expect clearer cues.

Pragmatism vs. Idealism

In a city where affordability and density are critical issues, a non-utilitarian building challenges assumptions about responsible land use.



Sustainability

The long-term adaptability of a functionless building is uncertain.

Yet each critique becomes a prompt for reflection, reinforcing the building's role as an educator.

By making cultural tensions visible, Kioi Seidō teaches society to interrogate its values.

4.9 Architecture as Teacher: Synthesis

Across these findings, a clear pattern emerges:

Kioi Seidō teaches through every aspect of its spatial, material, and cultural design.

- Architecturally, it teaches attentiveness, patience, and interpretation.
- Culturally, it teaches continuity with historical traditions of embodied learning.
- Ethically, it challenges the dominance of utility and productivity.
- Socially, it models alternative values for urban public space.
- Educationally, it aligns with constructivist, experiential, and critical pedagogies.

In sum, the building functions as a teacher—one that instructs not through words but through light, ambiguity, texture, and atmosphere.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of Kioi Seidō demonstrates that the building functions as a distinct architectural and educational phenomenon - a space that teaches not through prescribed function but through experiential ambiguity, sensory progression, material presence, and cultural resonance. Situated within Tokyo's hyper-efficient urban fabric, Kioi Seidō offers a counter-narrative to dominant paradigms of architectural utility and economic productivity. Its very existence challenges the assumption that buildings must articulate clear programs, maximize rentable space, or serve quantifiable goals. Instead, it asserts the value of contemplation, ambiguity, and open-ended experience as legitimate architectural and societal contributions.

At the architectural level, Kioi Seidō reveals how form, materiality, and light can shape interpretive and emotional engagement. The progression from darkness to light, the textured



cedar-imprinted concrete, and the absence of functional cues create an atmosphere that slows perception and cultivates attentiveness. This sensory and spatial pedagogy aligns with phenomenological theories that locate architectural meaning in embodied experience rather than in symbolic representation or utilitarian performance. The building demonstrates that spatial ambiguity can serve as a catalyst for reflection, much like a poem or philosophical text that invites multiple readings.

Culturally, Kioi Seidō participates in a long Japanese tradition in which architecture operates as a teacher. The building's atmosphere echoes Jōmon dwellings, Shinto shrine practices, and *miyadaiku* craftsmanship—forms of spatial pedagogy in which individuals learn through ritual movement, material engagement, and sensory awareness. By drawing from these historical lineages, Kioi Seidō situates itself within a broader cultural framework where architecture transmits ethical, communal, and spiritual values.

Educationally, the building embodies principles associated with constructivism, experiential learning, and critical pedagogy. By refusing to dictate how visitors should behave or interpret the space, Kioi Seidō cultivates self-directed meaning-making. Its ambiguity encourages questioning, creativity, and cognitive flexibility—traits that many educational theorists identify as essential for deep learning. In this sense, the building becomes a learning environment without classrooms, syllabi, or instructors. It teaches through what it withholds as much as through what it provides.

Ethically and socially, Kioi Seidō invites reflection on the purpose of architecture in public life. In rejecting market-driven value systems, it highlights the importance of spaces that serve cultural, moral, and intellectual functions. Its openness and contemplative atmosphere offer an alternative to commercial and instrumental urban paradigms, suggesting that cities can and should include spaces devoted not to consumption but to reflection. Even the critiques directed at the building—regarding elitism, accessibility, practicality, and sustainability—become part of its pedagogical impact by prompting debate about who deserves contemplative space, what public value means, and how architecture should respond to societal needs.



Globally, Kioi Seidō contributes to a growing architectural discourse that includes buildings such as the Salk Institute, the Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut, the Seattle Public Library, and experimental learning environments. These structures, like Kioi Seidō, demonstrate that architecture can transcend function and operate as a medium for reflection, inquiry, and transformation. Within this constellation, Kioi Seidō stands out by combining cultural specificity with universal themes of ambiguity, ritual, and sensory learning.

Ultimately, the building exemplifies the idea that architecture can serve as a teacher. It offers lessons in perception, humility, patience, cultural continuity, and ethical awareness. It teaches that not all forms of value are measurable and that spaces lacking explicit function can nonetheless cultivate profound intellectual and emotional experiences. In a world increasingly dominated by efficiency, metrics, and profit-driven design, Kioi Seidō stands as a reminder that ambiguity is not emptiness but richness, that reflection is not waste but necessity, and that the built environment can support forms of learning that exceed the limits of formal education.

Kioi Seidō demonstrates that architecture and education need not be separate domains. Rather, they can intersect in ways that shape how people think, feel, and imagine. By integrating ambiguity, atmosphere, cultural memory, and ethical inquiry, the building points toward a future in which architecture embraces its pedagogical potential—teaching not through instruction but through experience, inviting individuals and societies to rethink their assumptions about value, purpose, and the meaning of space.

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