Arata Isozaki on the balcony of the Faculty of Engineering, University of Tokyo, *c* 1970
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery

Arata Isozaki *in conversation with* Thomas Daniell

If there is a Renaissance Man among contemporary Japanese architects it is surely Arata Isozaki, whose manifest brilliance as a writer, designer and artist is tempered with the appropriate degree of *sprezzatura*. But if the Renaissance Man is expected to exercise his gifts with studied nonchalance, it was during the Renaissance that the cliché of the tortured artist first arose. Flights of creative inspiration were romantically regarded as symptomatic of some primal psychic wound. In Isozaki's case, the traumatic event is well known from his own writings: the firebombing of his hometown one night in 1945. Even his most precisely composed work is tinged by an intimation of ruin and darkness that derives from the scenes he witnessed the morning after. He has understood from the beginning of his career that recovery from destruction, the reversal of entropy, can only be achieved by allowing infusions of energy from outside. Isozaki's generosity toward his peers and promising figures in the younger generation reflects a commitment to the advancement of the wider discipline of architecture that in turn nourishes and sustains his own progress. Fundamentally optimistic, Isozaki does not conceive of ruins as moribund, but rather as a necessary precursor to the creation of new life.

I spoke with Isozaki over two afternoons in early 2014 at his home in Azabu, Tokyo's most expensive and exclusive residential neighbourhood. The Chinese embassy is close by, and our conversation was occasionally interrupted by amplified slogans from passing trucks driven by ultranationalists protesting China's controversial claims to territory in the South China Sea. This seemed only fitting. As became increasingly clear during our conversation, Isozaki has been witness to, and participant in, many of the key moments of political and cultural conflict during the late twentieth century, as well as being a tireless activist for intercultural dialogue and collaboration.

Decorated with a mixture of western and eastern art, Isozaki's living room also contains examples of his own design work, notably the famous 'Monroe' chairs and dining table. Plans and large aerial photos were spread on the floor nearby, partly covered with sheets of tracing paper and hand-drawn sketches for an urban planning project in China on which Isozaki was still working. He no longer has a conventional office. The building that his practice occupied for the last few decades was recently sold, and his current projects are being undertaken with the help of a loose network of occasional collaborators distributed throughout Tokyo and the wider world.

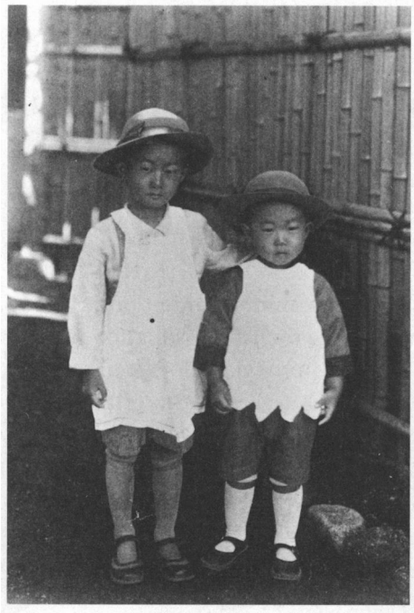
Dressed in a traditional *yukata* made of indigo-dyed cotton, Isozaki was dignified, genial and welcoming throughout. Speaking mostly in Japanese, he laughed frequently while recalling anecdotes from the past. As he eloquently elaborated on events about which he has previously written, it was plain that he had reached a point in his life and career where he feels little need to be diplomatic or discreet. There is already a vast body of writing dedicated to his architecture, much of it by Isozaki himself, so the purpose of this conversation was to learn more about the person: the formative experiences, underlying motivations and influential relationships that have brought him to this point. To do so, it was necessary to begin at the beginning.—*Thomas Daniell*

TD *Were you an exceptional child?*

AI No, I was ordinary. But there were two strong influences on my development. One was my family in my hometown of Oita, on Kyushu Island; the other was the outbreak of war. I was born in 1931, so Japan was at war when I was a child. Politically and socially it was also a time when there was an increasing interest in Japanese principles, Japanese objects, Japanese ideas. I absorbed all these influences, but as a person I was ordinary.

TD *The reason I ask is that the gallery permanently devoted to you at Oita Art Plaza has in its collection an essay you wrote as a high-school student, which contains some extremely sophisticated language.*

AI Ah, you saw that essay? I wrote it when I was 15 or 16, when Japan was under occupation by the Americans. During that period I began wanting to learn about different cultures, but there was no information available. Our house had been burned to the ground, and my father's book collection was gone. Only a few books remained in the school library. So I set up a study group for literature and theatre together with a few of my classmates, including the writer Shun Akasegawa, older brother of the artist Genpei Akasegawa. Some of my family members also had cultural interests. Before the war my father had gained a degree of fame as a haiku poet. He didn't use the traditional formal style, but wrote contemporary haiku. My mother's father was a professor of Chinese poetry. He was also a copyeditor for amateur Chinese poems at the same newspaper where my father was a judge of haiku poems, which is probably how my parents met. After my father had finished high school he'd gone to Shanghai to study at Tōa Dōbunshoin University, which was established at the turn of the century to educate people in Sino-Japanese relations, focusing on the commonalities of Asian languages and culture, with the long-term goal of Asian unity. My father had a sincere belief in these principles, so he became increasingly upset about the way they were being twisted to justify Japanese aggression in the Pacific, even taking the risk of writing essays critical of Japanese government policies. He stayed on in China after graduating, but then his older brother died so he had to return to Japan to take over the family business. Of course, his outspokenness meant he was very closely watched by the Japanese secret police. He entered Keio University in Tokyo, but was only there for a few months before the Great Kantō earthquake hit, in 1923. After that he returned to Oita to join my grandfather in the family rice trade. My father hated it, but had no other choice. Soon after inheriting the business he converted it into a trucking company, transporting goods around the country. He just wanted to follow his own interests, to write haiku and study the problems of Asia. He also became a bit of a playboy and was hardly ever at home.



Arata Isozaki with his younger brother, *c* 1936 (*top*), and on the top left of the photo with his brother and friends, *c* 1941 (*bottom*)
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery

TD *Do you have any siblings?*

AI Yes, two younger brothers. One is retired and the other passed away about ten years ago.

TD *You have often implied that your worldview, political tendencies and aesthetic sensibilities were formed by the trauma of the night in 1945 when Oita was firebombed. What happened to your home and family?*

AI Well, we all knew the air raids were coming. I remember our back garden would completely fill up with pink peony flowers every year, but in the spring of 1945 my father cut every single one of them down. He said that he didn't want the Americans to use them as a bomb target. A few weeks later, in April, we loaded all our household belongings into a company truck and headed for the countryside to stay with relatives. But there was an accident. The truck collided with a train and my mother was killed. Our possessions were scattered everywhere. On the night that Oita was bombed, in the middle of July – just one month before the end of the war – I was back at home with my father. I remember seeing the incendiary bombs bursting in midair and igniting fires all around. There were several direct strikes on our house. I escaped to a nearby field, from where I watched the house go up in flames. My father and I became separated. He was hiding beneath a concrete bridge when a bomb landed on it, injuring him.

TD *But he survived?*

AI Yes, he was okay.

TD *Where did you live after that?*

AI My brothers and I were evacuated to the countryside, along with all the other local children. I lived there for three months, then we returned to Oita and my father found us a place to live in the centre of the city. We still had the trucking business, so even though our situation wasn't good, we were better off than many of the other families around us.

TD *When did you move to Tokyo?*

AI I started studying at Tokyo University in 1950.

TD *And when did you graduate?*

AI I finished the doctoral course in 1961, but I never submitted a thesis. I wanted to stay at university as long as possible.

TD *How did you support yourself financially?*

AI For the first year I lived in a dormitory some distance from the main campus. At the end of that year my father died of a stroke and so I no longer had any financial support. Some of my father's friends quickly arranged for me to become a *shōsei*, that is, a student living with another family, doing small chores in return for food and lodging. I moved into the house of Kazuo Watanabe, an esteemed professor of French literature. He had translated Rabelais's *La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* (The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel) into wonderful Japanese prose. I home-tutored his children in high-school

mathematics and science. From the time I entered Kenzō Tange's lab right up to the end of my doctoral studies my only income was a very small scholarship, supplemented by a small salary for the last five years or so, when I was working almost full-time on Tange's projects. This was before he formed URTEC, so the money came out of Tange's own pocket.

TD *You were orphaned and made homeless while still a teenager. Would it be fair to say that the tragedy of your early life has had a profound effect on your conception of architecture?*

AI I'm unable to say anything about my feelings on that topic. In my first book of essays, *Kūkan e* (Toward Space), I tried to address this in a short text at the end called 'Nendaikiteki nōto' (Chronological Notes). The main point is that I didn't have any early memories of architecture. Or rather, I couldn't recall ever seeing anything architectural. Absolutely zero. What I do remember is living in a proper Japanese-style home, but then it was obliterated. Standing motionless in the remains of the fire... that's the moment at which my memories of the city begin.

TD *When did you first become interested in architecture?*

AI At that time Tokyo University allowed you to spend your first year of study without deciding on a major. I was thinking about doing something related to engineering. Then I saw the work of Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer published somewhere. I also became aware of Kenzō Tange's Hiroshima project through a magazine. So I decided to study architecture and join Tange's lab.

TD *As well as working on Tange's projects while you were a student, you joined a design collective called Gokikai (Fifth Generation Group). What was your role?*

AI I was the youngest member, so they made me the secretary. I don't think Gokikai was particularly important in the development of Japanese architecture. The name was chosen because we were all students of the fourth generation of architecture professors in Japan, from Kingo Tatsuno to Kenzō Tange. The two central people in Gokikai were Sachio Ōtani, who later succeeded Tange as a professor at the University of Tokyo, and Masato Ōtaka, one of the senior staff at Kunio Maekawa's office. They brought together about 40 others: architects and critics and editors and left-wing activists. In fact the group was created solely in order to criticise Tange's generation.

Arata Isozaki at the University of Tokyo (*top*)
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery
With Jiro Inazuka, left, and Kisho Kurokawa, right, in Tange's lab, *c* 1960 (*bottom*)
Courtesy Kisho Kurokawa Architect & Associates

TD *You then became part of a small group of students who wrote anonymous architectural criticism for the magazine* Kenchiku Bunka *(Architecture Culture) under the penname 'Hattariya'. I think the best English translation would be 'The Bluffers'. I know that you chose the name, so it seems you were humorously warning readers not to take your opinions too seriously. Nonetheless, Hiroshi Hara, for example, has said that Hattariya produced the sharpest architectural criticism of that period.*

AI Did he? Well, I'm not so sure. During the 1950s there were many debates in the Japanese architectural world, but clearly there were two main schools of thought. One was a left-wing, pro-Marxist approach that predated the war, exemplified by Kyoto University professor Uzo Nishiyama. I'd have to say it was based on the same ideology as the people who conceived the cultural policies of the Japanese Communist Party. They wanted architecture to be used to promote social justice. The other comprised mainly professors and alumni of the University of Tokyo, for whom architecture was a kind of formalism. They wanted to reinterpret Japanese traditional forms and connect them to international trends, to become part of the lineage of modernism. These two positions were still being debated by the fourth generation throughout the 1950s. The fifth generation, the Gokikai, wanted to develop an entirely different approach, but in my view they were trying to change the conception of architecture merely by changing its forms. I began to think that this wasn't a real generational shift. So I started to write criticism. Hattariya comprised three people: me, my classmate Hidemitsu Kawakami, who was studying urban engineering, and Teiji Itoh, an architectural historian. Itoh was ten years older than me, having graduated just before the war, but he contracted tuberculosis and was hospitalised for ten years. At the same moment that Itoh returned to the outside world, Kawakami and I graduated from university, and then we all entered the postgraduate programme.

TD *What brought you together?*

AI The three of us had a good rapport and a similar sensibility. By that I mean that we all had similar doubts about the entire ideology of modernism, in the widest sense of the word – prewar and postwar, left and right. But in order to be taken seriously one still had to have graduated from university and written papers for academic societies, so anonymity was a safe way to join the debates in the media without our credentials being questioned. Teiji Itoh had an unorthodox, humorous writing style, using vernacular expressions in very intellectual texts. It was a style very similar to the *rakugo* (comic theatre) of the late Edo period, or to the Japanese translation of *Gargantua* that I mentioned before. He was very skilful at writing highbrow texts in that style. Hidemitsu

Kawakami was collecting all kinds of data from his empirical studies of the city, which included material that couldn't be used in an academic setting. And, like that high-school essay you saw at Oita Art Plaza, rather than having a modernist style, I was very interested in the younger generation of writers. I was also looking at all kinds of foreign architectural publications. We superimposed these three approaches in our critical essays, combining a very playful attitude with a very academic attitude. Looking at them now, I realise that Kawakami contributed the parts about urban conditions and I contributed the parts about mass media and approaches to the task of architectural design, while Itoh collated and composed all of it for publication in his own expressive way. Probably our most controversial essay was called 'Shōjūtaku banzai' (Small House Banzai), which was in the April 1958 issue of *Kenchiku Bunka*. We declared that real architects should reject commissions for small houses. People still argue about it today. All the Hattariya essays were anthologised in a book called *Gendai Kenchiku Gusakuron* (Theory of Modern Architecture Junk), published in 1961. Noboru Kazawoe wrote the introduction, in which he described us as troublemakers by night and diligent students by day, though he didn't give away our names.

TD *But even while part of Hattariya you were also publishing more conventional criticism on similar topics without the protection of anonymity. For example, the January 1958 issue of* Kenchiku Bunka *contains the essay 'Shōjūtaku sekkei no mondai' (The Question of Small Houses), and the September 1960 issue contains 'Gendai toshi ni okeru kenchiku no gainen' (The Concept of Architecture in the Contemporary City), both authored by one Arata Isozaki. But you completely departed from conventional criticism with your most famous essay from that period: 'Toshi Haikaigyō KK' (City Demolition Industry, Inc), which appeared in* Shinkenchiku *('New Architecture') magazine in 1962. It was also published under your own name, but it's a kind of short story in which you split the creative and destructive sides of your personality into the two characters Arata and Shin.*

AI Yes, and the editor was so dubious about it that he hid it among the ads at the back of the magazine! But when I published *Kūkan e* in 1971 I made it the opening piece.

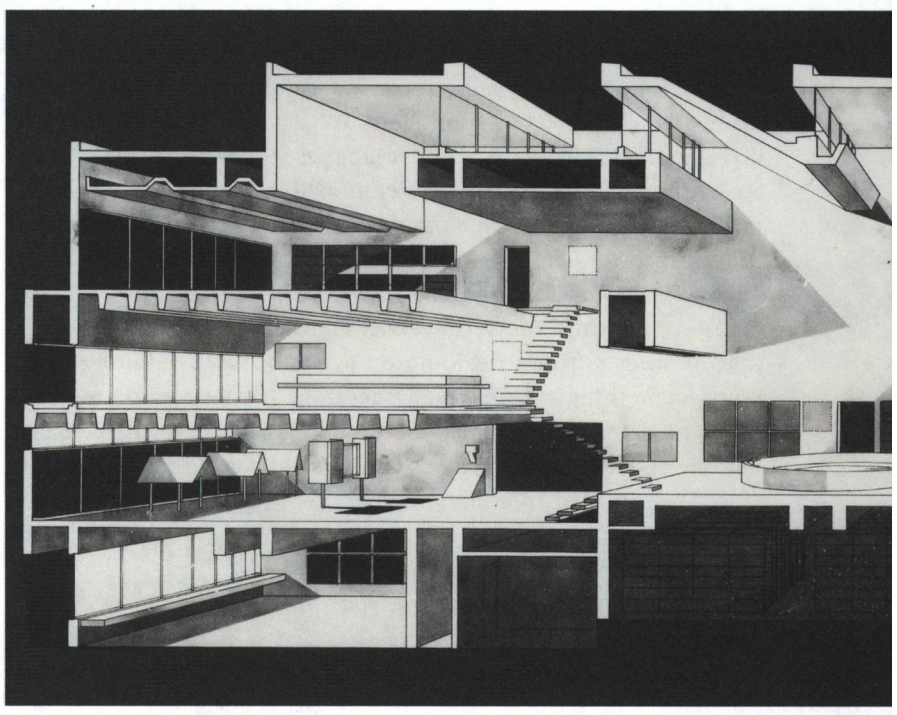
TD *Japan in the 1950s also saw an increasingly close relationship between radical art and radical politics, culminating in 1960 with the huge public protests against Anpo, the Japan-US Mutual Security Treaty. I know you were very involved with these events. Much of the student activism took place in the Shinjuku neighbourhood of Tokyo and was focused on a group called the Neo-Dadaism Organisers, founded in 1960 by the artists Masunobu Yoshimura, Genpei Akasegawa, Shusaku Arakawa and Ushio Shinohara, among others. You participated in their activities, but you also designed the building at the centre of the action: Yoshimura's home and studio, known as the Shinjuku White House. Every book about you gives the 1960 Oita Medical Centre as your first realised work of architecture, but in fact it was the White House, which was completed in the late 1950s.*

AI That's right, though I had completely forgotten about it until I read Genpei Akasegawa's memoir, in which he refers to it as my first building. Masunobu Yoshimura had been a year behind me at high school in Oita, in the same class as Akasegawa, but we were very close friends because we were all members of a drawing club called Shinseikigun (New Century Group). Later we all ended up at universities in Tokyo. Probably Yoshimura and Akasegawa remember what happened better than I do. I was a friend of them both, or more like an assistant. I remember giving Yoshimura a sketch for the house, but it wasn't built the way I drew it. Of course, I often visited the site, but there were many problems. I had wanted a pure, abstract cubic box, about 5m each side. I designed half of the interior space as a mezzanine. It was all to be made of wooden boards, painted white.

TD *With a flat roof?*

AI Yes, I remember drawing a flat roof. You could call it a modernist design. But I was still a student without an architectural licence, so the planning application was done by a professional office. They redrew the house for submission to the city council, changing all the aspects of my design that didn't meet the building code. It had to be coated with cement mortar. Flat roofs were absolutely prohibited, so it was capped with a gable. It reminded me of what happened to Le Corbusier's housing estate at Pessac, where all those novel cubic dwellings ended up having ordinary pitched roofs and so on. From outside the White House looked like an ordinary house.

TD *Was the exterior actually white?*



AI It was coated with mortar, then painted white. I remember deciding this in discussions with Yoshimura. The Neo-Dadaism Organisers painted it themselves and then named it the White House when they started gathering there. It was a wild place, full of avant-garde painting and sculpture and photography and music and dance. I was there almost every evening until Yoshimura sold it. I'd sit on the floor drinking his cheap whisky and imagining how architecture might become equally radical.

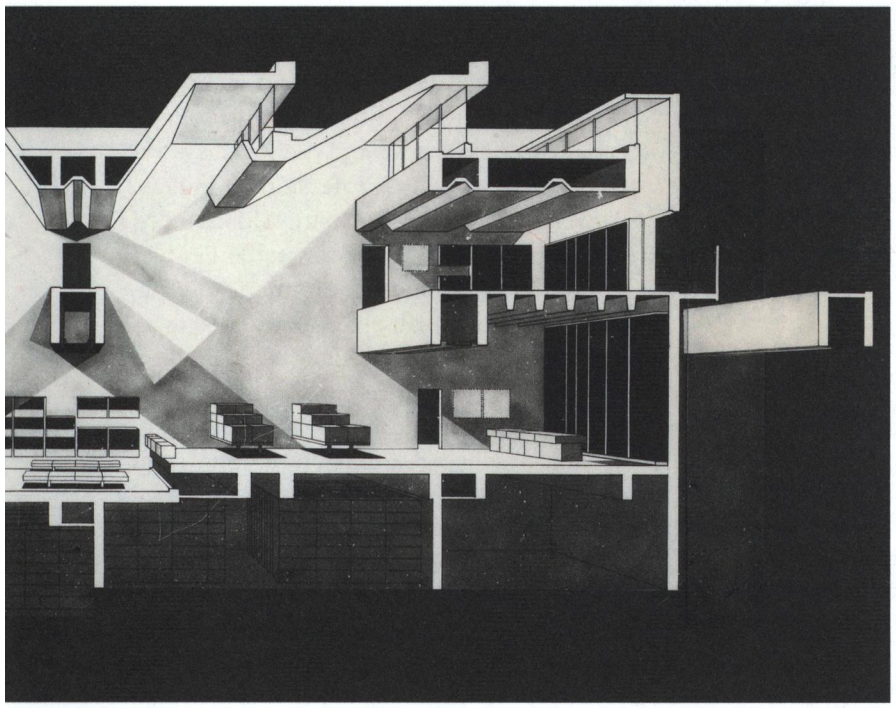
TD *How did you manage to study while spending so much of your time hanging out with artists at the White House?*

AI I divided my day into three parts. From late morning to afternoon I worked on Tange's projects in his lab at Tokyo University. Then I'd join the anti-Anpo demonstrations around the government buildings from late afternoon to early evening, and after that I'd move on to the White House, where I'd stay till midnight or early morning. I remember it all reached a peak of intensity in spring 1960 – the World Design Conference was held in Tokyo in May, and the anti-Anpo demonstrations got going a month later. Around the same time the Neo-Dadaism Organisers held a number of exhibitions and

performances. By the end of summer the treaty had been ratified, so the demonstrations lost their sense of purpose. Things calmed down a bit. It was then that I started work on Tange's 'A Plan for Tokyo, 1960'. We continued throughout the autumn, and made that huge model toward the end of the year. Then, at the very beginning of 1961, the scheme was featured in a NHK television programme. Tange got in front of the camera to explain his future image of Tokyo. So anyway, I was doing all these different things, and in that same period I designed a small building, now demolished, for the Oita Medical Association, which was across the street from where the Oita Art Plaza is now. So I barely had time to sleep. I started to have a problem with my ears that caused me to lose my sense of balance. I became exhausted, and eventually I collapsed and was hospitalised. The doctors carried out a series of tests. They first thought it might be a brain tumour, but it was probably Ménière's disease.

TD *They weren't sure?*

AI They thought it was the likely cause. In any case, I gradually returned to normal just by resting. I was hospitalised in spring 1961,



but still wasn't fully recovered by autumn. I was in that condition for about one year. Anyway, after the Anpo protests failed I lost interest in the whole scene.

TD *What happened to the White House?*

AI I'd always assumed it had been demolished long ago, as the neighbourhood was redeveloped, but in 2011, just before the tsunami, Terunobu Fujimori and Genpei Akasegawa went looking for it and found it quite well preserved. Yoshimura was living elsewhere, and too unwell even to leave his home, but he made a special effort so that the four of us could visit the White House together and reminisce. When we were there I realised that the interior was exactly as I remembered sketching it. The exterior and the roof had been altered, but not the stair and the mezzanine. Yoshimura died not long after that visit, and the White House was converted into a cafe last year. The new owners have painted the interior walls white, making it an entirely white cube. Of course, since the 1990s the phrase 'white cube' has been a synonym for a contemporary art gallery. My Gunma Museum of Modern Art, completed in 1974, is composed entirely from cubes, but as far as I know, nobody in the world was using the term 'white cube' back then. I first used white-cube-type gallery spaces in the Los Angeles MOCA, which opened in 1986, though I started work on the design around 1980. The architectural concept arose from long discussions with Pontus Hultén, who had been the founding director of the Pompidou Centre before becoming founding director of MOCA. Pontus's experience with the factory-like spaces of the Pompidou Centre had led him to imagine pure white exhibition rooms. Perhaps all the buildings I have subsequently designed based on the prototype of the cube are unconsciously related to the design of the Shinjuku White House.

TD *The White House was altered during its construction process and by the activities of the artists occupying it. Do you think this experience also gave you an awareness of the inevitability of the transformation of a building over time, which you then theorised in your 1970 essay 'Process Planning'?*

AI In the case of the White House the planning prototype, or rather the spatial prototype, was basically one room, so I thought it would be fine for it to manifest as just an interior space. But I began writing the 'Process Planning' essay in an attempt to understand how changes to a building's plan would influence its exterior form. Personally speaking, I wasn't aware of any direct relationship to the White House. Rather, it was an outcome of thinking about how to connect architecture and city. I wanted to find an alternative to the 'closed' planning of conventional buildings and the modular planning of the Metabolists. To my mind, it was 'process' that became crucial. I was made aware of this by looking at the history of the modern movement, in particular the emergence of Team X from within CIAM. For me the most important member was Aldo van Eyck, but Team X also included my teacher Kenzō Tange, and Alison and Peter Smithson. It was the Smithsons who insisted that modern architecture should deal with change and growth. But I thought, well, what exactly should change? What should grow? And to my mind they weren't able to offer any convincing solutions. At that time I had become very interested in two books, neither of them about architecture. One was D'Arcy Thompson's *On Growth and Form*, a study of the relationships between living organisms using topological diagrams, in terms of growth and change. The other was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Le Phénomène Humain* (*The Phenomenon of Man*), written by a Jesuit priest who was also an archaeologist – he had spent a long time in China researching the Peking Man. The book spans from prehistoric times to the distant future, like an eschatological diagram of the evolution of living things toward a shared cosmic consciousness. These were my favourite books for a long time. Both of them are somehow about growth, and therefore related to the ambitions of Team X, but I thought they suggested a viable alternative to the Team X approach. In the mid-1960s I was given an opportunity to test my theory when I was asked to design the Oita Prefectural Library.

TD *This was your second public building in Oita?*

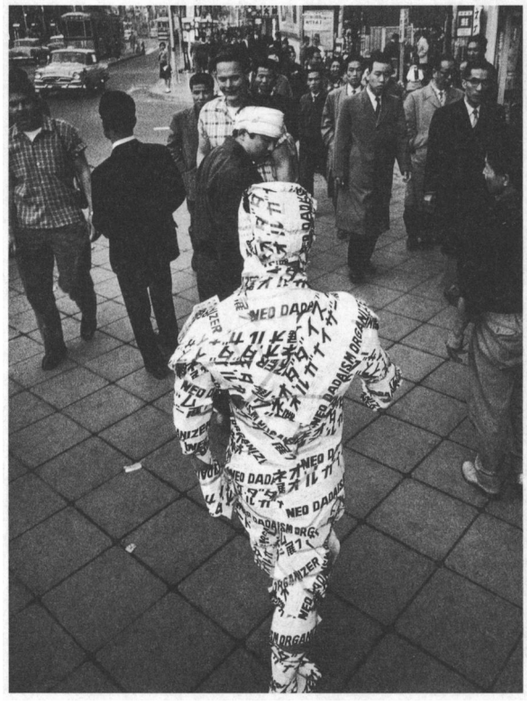
AI Yes. I'd previously done the Oita Medical Centre while I was still working for Tange. One of my high-school teachers, Tadashi Iwata, had been something of a surrogate father to me, and he later became part of the local government. Iwata introduced me to Hirō Nakayama, who was head of the Oita Medical Association. Nakayama commissioned me, an unknown graduate student, to design the medical centre, and later asked me to design a house for

Arata Isozaki, sectional perspective, Oita Prefectural Library, 1966

him. But the library was my first project as a licensed architect. That was the commission that allowed me to found my own office, Arata Isozaki Atelier.

TD *How did you get the commission?*

AI To explain that, I have to go back to my father. He had a couple of close childhood friends who later got involved with the far right. One was Toshio Gotō, who became a famous novelist under the penname Fusao Hayashi. In his youth he was an outspoken Marxist, but somehow he transformed into an ultra-nationalist and went to China during the war to write propaganda for the Japanese army. The other was Giichi Miura, who wrote really wonderful *waka* poems. Before the war he had been involved in right-wing activities in Japan as well as in occupied Manchuria and mainland China. After the war he was indicted as a war criminal and imprisoned for a while, then released. This barred him from working independently, but he was nonetheless able to join forces with former colleagues who happened to avoid being labelled war criminals. They rose to become successful businessmen and politicians, while he was a powerful 'fixer' behind the scenes. He wanted to be remembered as a true patriot, but his name was tarnished and couldn't be used on any monuments. Oita was his mother's hometown, so he decided to donate some kind of cultural facility to the city by offering money under her name. The prefectural governor at that time was a socialist, but he happily took the money. It wasn't much – certainly not enough for a public library – but it was at least enough to get the political process under way. Anyway, Miura knew my father, so he knew that I was essentially an orphan and he wanted to help my career. He contacted me after I entered the graduate course at Tokyo University. Up to that point I had been heavily influenced by Marxism, but I was becoming increasingly disillusioned. This was a period when the Japanese Communist Party was losing its way. Having said that, it would have been unthinkable for me to become associated with the right wing. So I told myself that I was accepting the commission mainly because of its connection with my birthplace, as a chance to do something for my hometown. They hoped for a large prefectural library, but the budget was tight. What to do? The contours of the project – size, programme, budget – were completely unclear. I realised that whatever architecture I made, it would probably have to be altered and extended in the future. So I wanted to design something that could expand, with each part changing in turn and growing in different ways. I thought it would be good to manifest those differences, and the process of transformation itself. So I classified the building into several large groupings, each with a distinct form that could expand independently, without modular repetition. By interlocking the elements, the whole thing would become a process. I wanted to find a way of describing these elements, and so I started to use the term 'emergent'.



Above: Shomei Tomatsu, *Neo-Dada Performance, Yoshimura and Arakawa*, Ginza, Tokyo, 1960
© Shomei Tomatsu
Opposite: Arata Isozaki, right, with Masunobu Yoshimura at the Shinjuku White House, Tokyo, 1960
© Takeo Ishimatsu

TD *In English?*

AI No, in Japanese: *hasseiteki yōin* (generative factors) and *sōhatsu keishitsu* (emergent form). Bringing ideas from biology into architecture was a strong interest of mine during the 1960s. Of course, with today's computer systems many people are investigating the possibilities of emergent forms.

TD *Yet despite these interests in growth and change, and your adoption of biological terminology, you never joined the Metabolists.*

AI Well, the organiser of the Metabolist group was Noboru Kawazoe, but the original idea came from Tange's assistant, Takashi Asada. I remember learning a great deal from both of them. Though Tange may have been a better designer, my impression has always been that Takashi Asada had a better knowledge of architecture and theory. They were very different personalities. Tange was relatively quiet and docile, while Asada was very outspoken and able to produce a wide range of things. For me, his most important project was Syowa Station, the facilities for Japan's first Antarctic research expedition. I worked on the design under Asada's direction. We thought about how the expedition team might assemble their own spaces to live and work year round. The temperatures could reach 40 degrees below zero, and the people working there were not professional builders. Everyone was an amateur. This needed serious research. Buckminster Fuller had developed a dome for an American expedition to the North Pole, but we used insulated wooden panels that were tilted up and jointed using screws. So from Tange I learned about design, or rather a way of conceptualising architecture, but from Asada I learned about building components, large-scale technology, industrial production. Anyway, based on Asada's proposal, Kawazoe went looking for some architects to draft into the group that would become known as the Metabolists. Initially, he wanted to include me. My so-called 'joint-core system' had been published in a magazine prior to the World Design Conference, but I think the main reason he asked me was that I had been working with Tange.

Looking at the activities of the Metabolists, to my way of thinking they somehow made architecture and the city incoherent and disconnected. All my City in the Air projects were partly intended as critical demonstrations of the main problem, which was the lack of relationships between the existing city and the new architecture above it. Nonetheless, while working for Tange on real projects I felt that it was important to create those relationships. Back when I was involved with the Hattariya group, the relation between architecture and city was my main concern. How could they be connected? The essence of modernism was discontinuity. For example, Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin erased part of the existing city and replaced it with something entirely new, making a clear demarcation between the two conditions. And if you look closely at Metabolism you'll understand

that they proposed building discrete cities, whether out across the sea, in the suburbs or the countryside. These were elaborated not in relation to the existing city but as autonomous, growing, tree-like systems, from trunk to branch to leaf. They made no distinction between architecture and city, treating them as the same thing. But any proposal for a future city is worthless if it ignores the form of the existing city and doesn't attempt to make relationships between that and the new city. After the Hattariya dissolved, Teiji Itoh and I formed a group called Toshi Dezain Kenyūtai (City Design Research Unit). We edited a special issue of *Kenchiku Bunka* in 1963 on the theme 'Nihon no Toshi Kūkan' (Japanese Urban Spaces), which we later expanded into a book with the same title. It was a study of historical Japanese cities with reference to the theories of Kevin Lynch and Philip Thiel. I have always argued that we need to study the relationships between the existing city and the new city. Then, within the new city, we need to again look at how aspects of 'process planning' might be applied. In my City in the Air projects, the present-day city and the city above it coexist spatially, and they are connected by public zones in the form of infrastructure. This was an early experiment with ideas about growth. A single tower can't be a called a city, but the vertical towers, conceived as infrastructure, combined with horizontal bridges might be able to unify urban activities in the air and on the ground.

TD *You made an extremely beautiful model for the second iteration of the City in the Air, also known as Clusters in the Air. Was it a competition entry?*

AI No, it was a completely private, conceptual project, so there was almost no money available. I paid some of the Neo-Dadaism Organisers – Tatsumi Yoshino and a few others – to help me make the model at my house.

TD *What was the purpose of your famous 'Incubation Process' collage showing the City in the Air set among classical ruins?*

AI I produced the 'Incubation Process' image and text in 1962 for a special issue of *Bijutsu Techō* (Fine Art Notebook) magazine edited by the poet Shūzō Takiguchi, who invited various artists and gave them each several pages to address the theme 'Gendai no Imēji' (Images of the Contemporary) however they liked. There was also a related exhibition in Shinjuku, I think. My work had appeared in magazines before, but I was always credited as an assistant to Tange, so I thought of this as my publication debut. But it was for the art world, not architecture. Around the same time I wrote the essay 'City Demolition Industry Inc'.

TD *It's ironic that some of the most canonical Metabolist projects were done by a non-Metabolist. What was your relationship with the members of the group?*

AI Ah, that's a funny story. For the 1962 Metabolist exhibition 'Anata no Toshi wa kō naru' (This Will Be Your City) held at the Seibu department store gallery, Kiyonori Kikutake was the organiser, but Noboru Kawazoe was the main curator. He was trying to expand the activities of the Metabolists into a larger movement. For the exhibition he included the main members – Kikutake, Kurokawa, Otaka, Maki – and invited me to join as an outsider, along with Kenzō Tange, Sachio Ōtani and Eika Takayama. When I brought my drawings to the gallery, Kawazoe said that they were all acceptable except for the final one, the collage showing my joint-core system amid ruins. He insisted that I leave it out, but for me that was the most important image. I was so furious that I gathered everything up and stormed out. Kawazoe was the leader of the Metabolists, but he was a journalist. Kikutake and Kurokawa were architects, and they spoke up for me. They convinced Kawazoe that the drawing should be shown, so I was once again asked to participate. Actually, Kikutake had already allocated one corner of the gallery for me, so I thought, fine, I'll do it, but at the same time I wanted to make it into a participatory, interactive installation. This wasn't officially approved, but anyway, the night before the opening I brought my drawings back and hung them in my corner, together with a table covered with an aerial photo of Tokyo, and some hammers, nails and coils of coloured wire for visitors to use as they liked. It was a very short exhibition, only a week or so. I came back halfway through and found that people had hammered nails not only into the table, but also into the walls and ceiling. The wires strung between them had turned my corner into a kind of messy spider's web. I cut it all down and left, but it soon started to grow again. On the final day, I brought a bucket of plaster and poured it all over everything. I told three friends what I was planning to do, but I never asked the other exhibitors. I just did it.

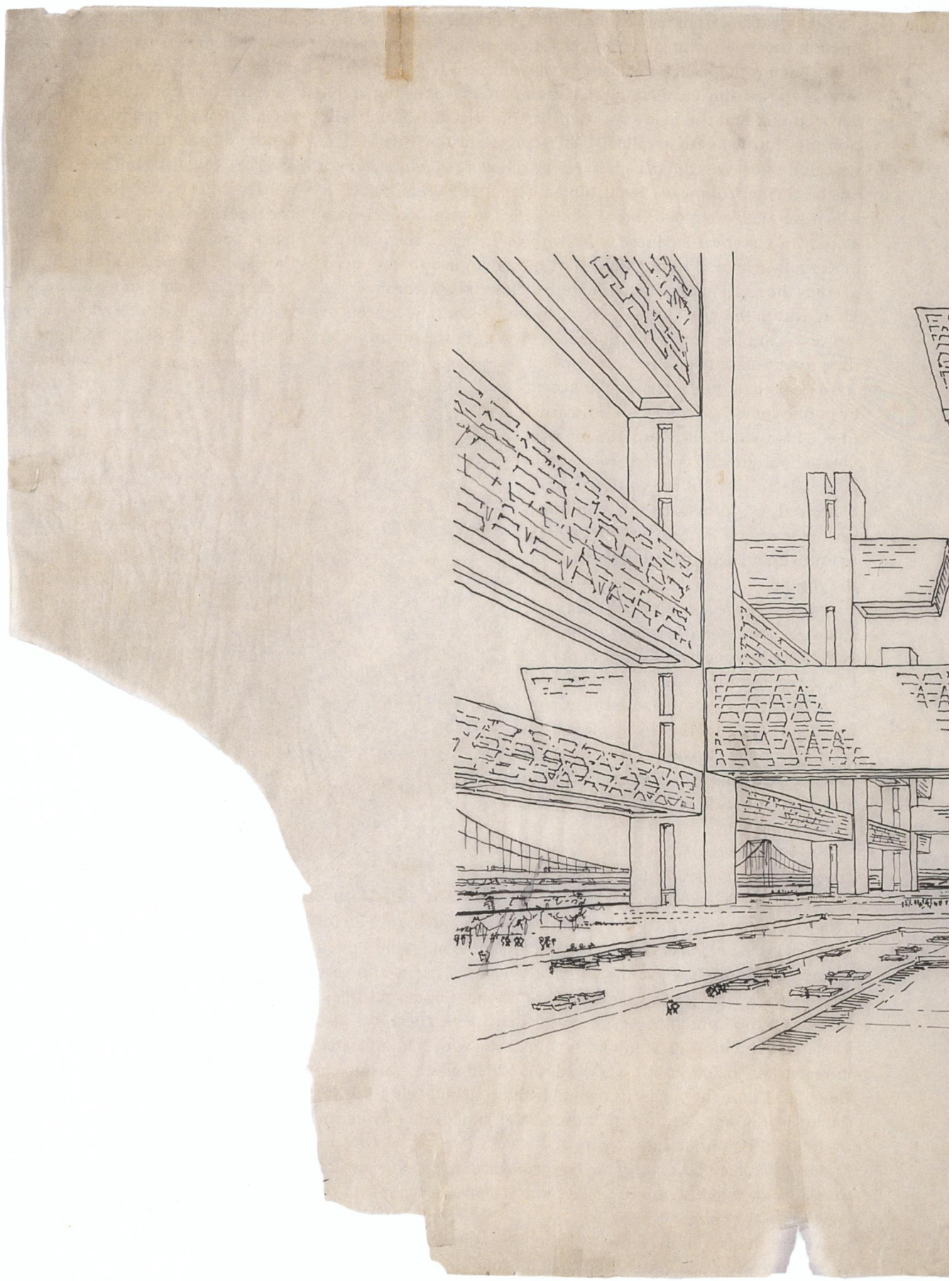
TD *Was the idea of a participatory exhibition influenced by the Neo-Dadaism Organisers?*

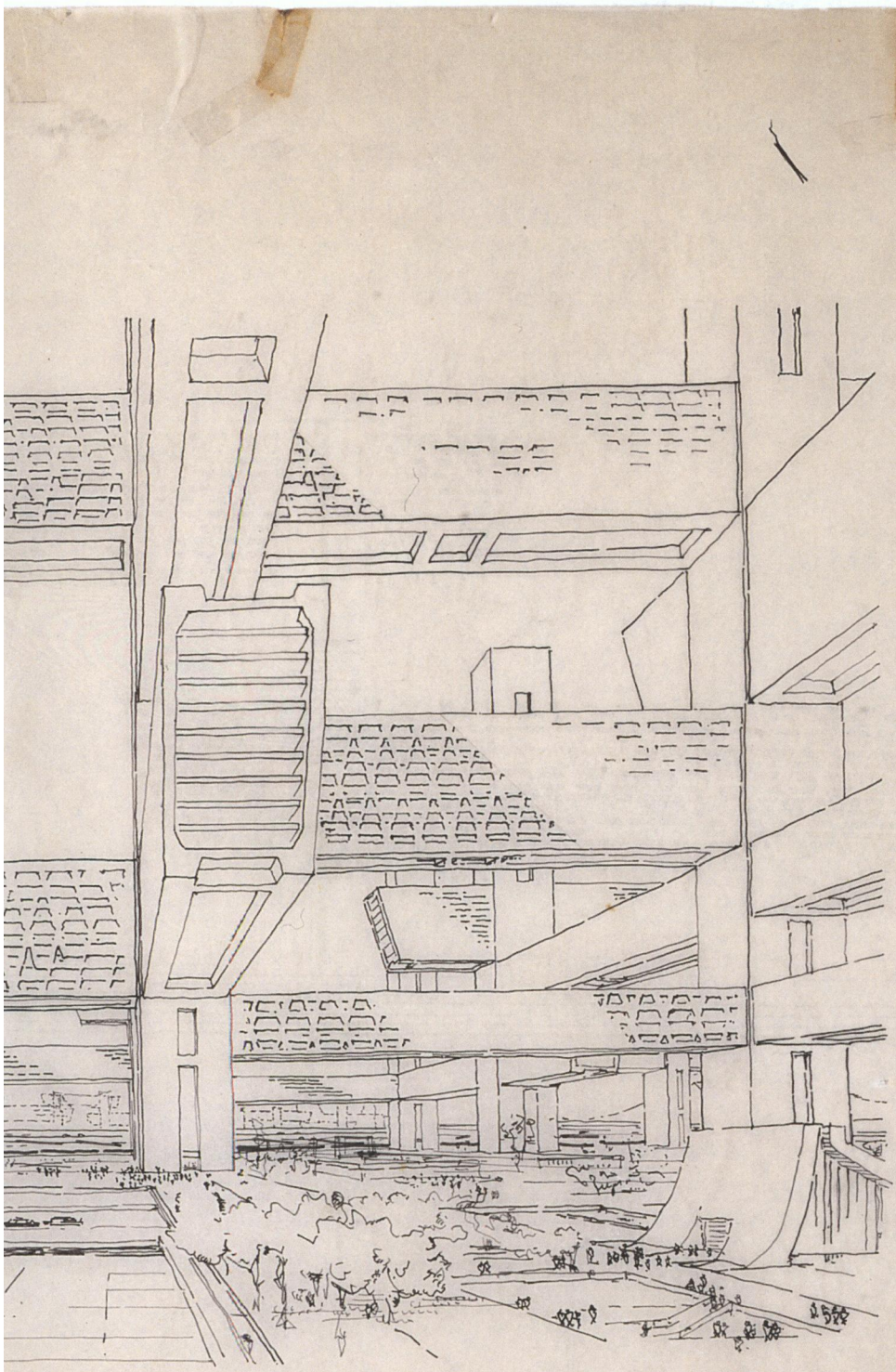
AI Yes, probably. I have a parallel career with them. I attended almost all of their performances and happenings. But the plaster was influenced by Jackson Pollock's drip paintings.

TD *Having created an artistic 'happening' in an architecture exhibition, later that year you held a party at your home, for which you sent out an invitation on behalf of 'Neo-Dada plus Tange's Team' with the title 'Something Happens'. What happened?*

AI Yoshimura had sold his White House a few months previously to get some money to move to New York. I decided to hold a farewell party for him, but also for myself. Tange was worried about me. He wanted me to get out of Japan for a while, so he had nominated me for a Ford Foundation Fellowship in New York. The results hadn't been announced, but I was already making plans to leave. In the end only Yoshimura went to New York, while I stayed in Tokyo. I called the party a 'happening' probably because I'd read the term in some articles about art events in Manhattan. Or maybe I'd heard it earlier that year during John Cage's visit to Japan, when I first encountered his theories – 'chance operations' and indeterminacy, things like that. Anyway, I wanted to try to stage

Overleaf: Arata Isozaki, perspective and elevation of office towers from Kenzō Tange, Plan for Tokyo, 1960





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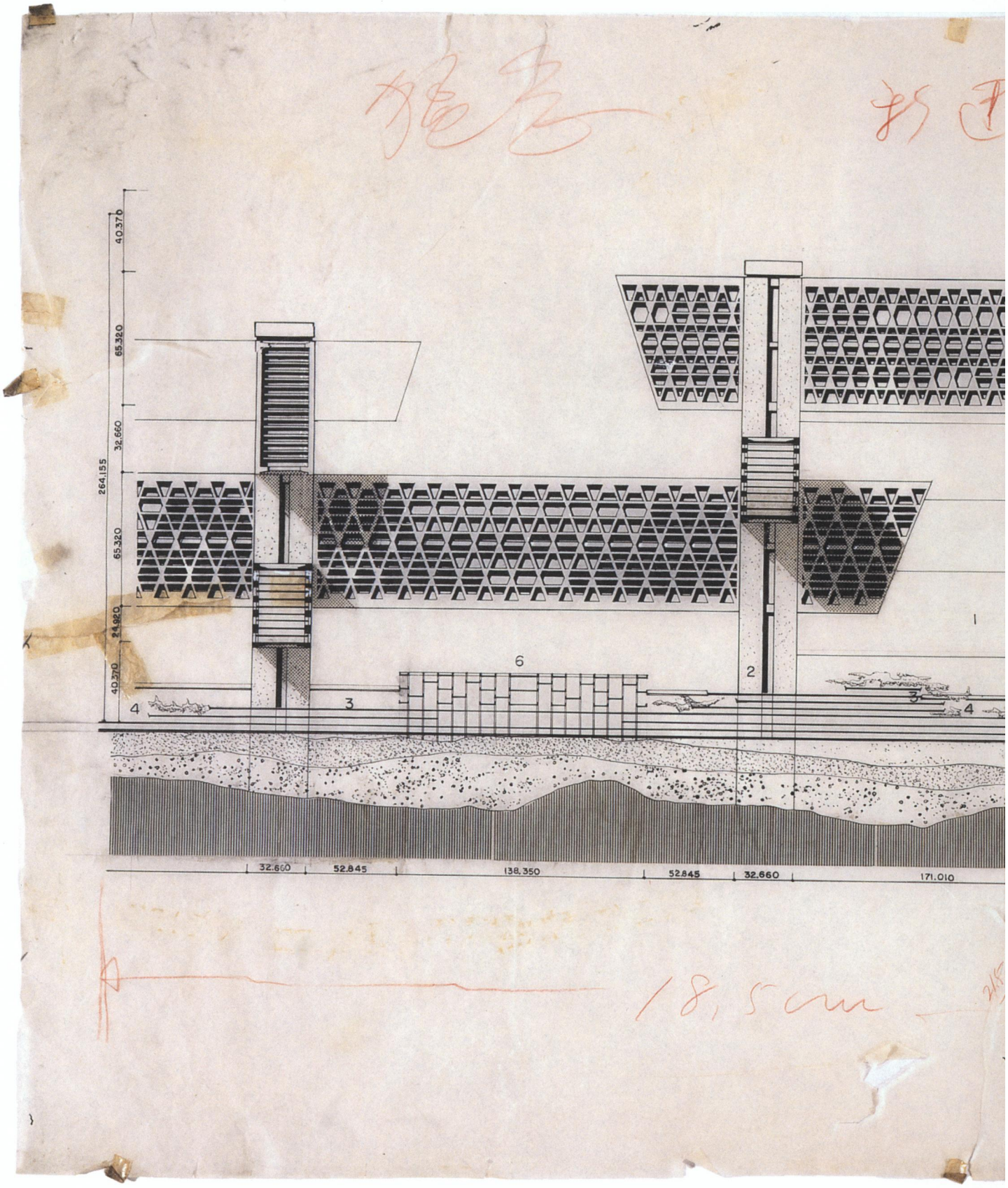

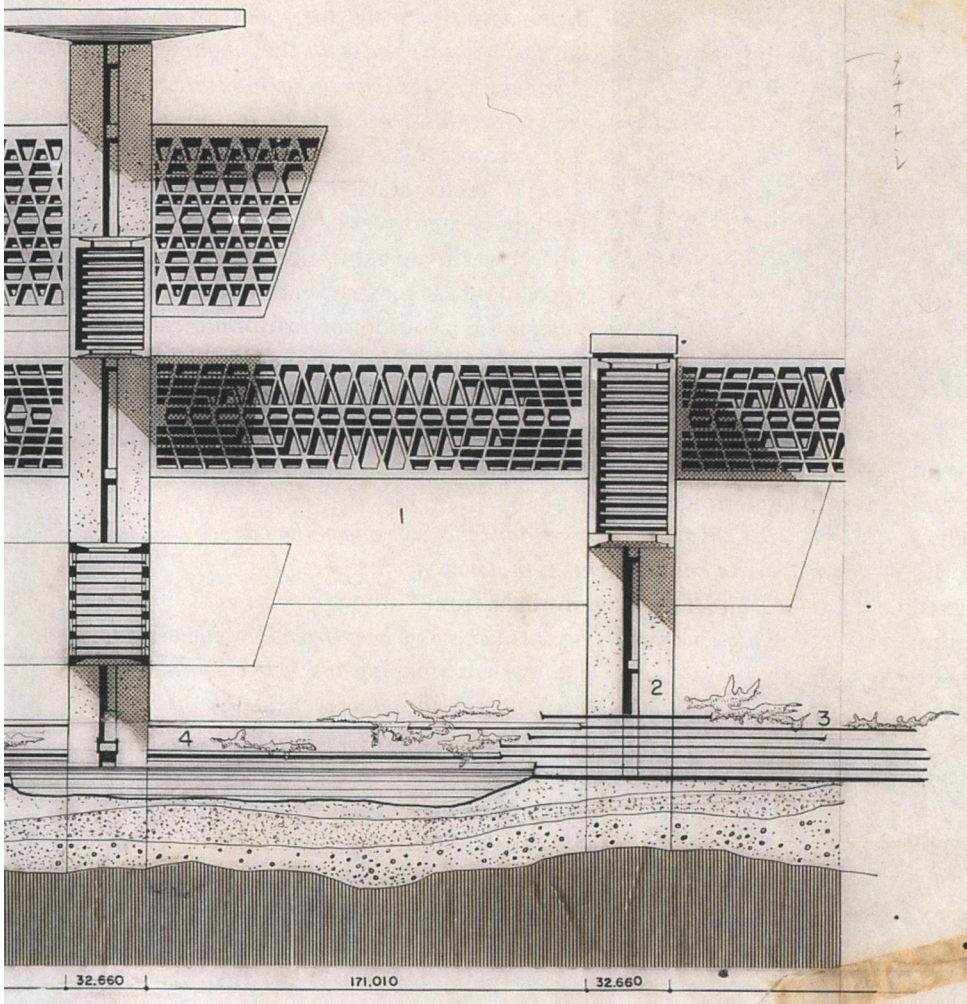

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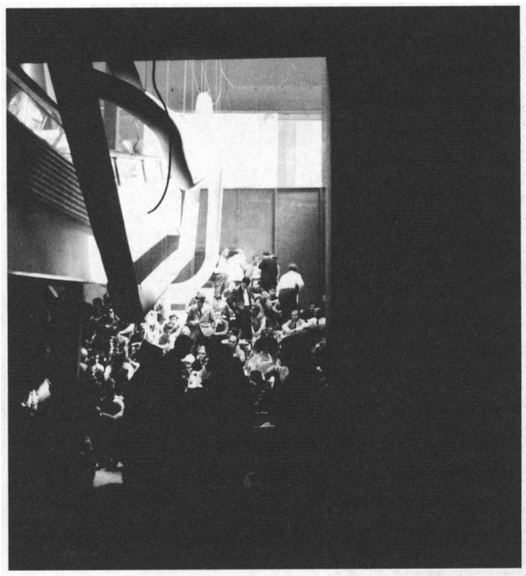
a happening, but my English was really poor then – it's still poor now – so I gave it the title 'Something Happens' on the party invitation cards. I remember it was a very hot summer evening. I was living in a small house with a garden all around. There was a small kitchen and bedroom, but the living room could open to the garden on all sides, so the guests stood outside. Every performer or dancer based in Shinjuku was there, along with many artist groups, not only the Neo-Dadaism Organisers, and quite a few other important figures: Kenzō Tange, Shūzō Takiguchi, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Tarō Okamoto. They were still young then, but looking for something new and different. Tatsumi Hijikata was there, the inventor of Ankoku Butoh dance. Actually, one of Donald Richie's first films was a documentary about Hijikata's troupe. You should also look at Yves Klein's book of photographs of interesting young artists in Japan, and you'll see some of my party guests. Anyway, all of a sudden, Masunobu Yoshimura did a strange kind of performance, prompting Shō Kazakura to do an even more extreme one in which he took off his shirt and burnt his chest with a hot iron. All kinds of bizarre performances have been done in Japan since then – people hanging from ceilings on fishhooks and so on – but Kazakura's act that night was unprecedented. Gyū-chan (Ushio Shinohara), who was famous for his mohican hairstyle, did some of his 'boxing painting'. Then Hijikata got completely naked and climbed up onto the roof. Shinohara climbed up after him, and the two of them started dancing up there. We had a kind of spotlight shining on them, and big speakers playing Miles Davis at full volume. By now all the neighbours were looking out their windows, and they'd started calling the police. Pretty soon a patrol car arrived. Tarō Okamato and Kenzō Tange were already very well known, and I didn't want them to get mixed up in all this, so I told them to leave through the back entrance and pretend that they just happened to be passing by. It was my house so I had to talk to the police. They said we could continue the party, but we had to shut off the spotlight, turn down the music, put on some clothes and keep off the roof. Then they left.



TD *No one was arrested?*

AI Not at that point. There were no trains running after midnight, so about 20 people spent the night sleeping on my living-room floor. At about eight o'clock the next morning the same patrol car came back. They told me that when they had reported to their chief in the morning he had got very angry: 'Why didn't you arrest them?!' So I was arrested, taken to the police station and asked to write a letter of explanation and apology: 'Sorry for these terribly shameful events, it won't happen again' and so forth. I signed it, but the police chief insisted that everybody else had to sign. So we went back to my house, but the police couldn't tell who was involved with the party and who wasn't, except for Ushio Shinohara, of course, because they recognised his mohican. But anyway, in the end, the police said, 'This is just a piece of paper. We don't really need it. We don't know how many people were involved, so just put some signatures on it.'

Top: The 14th Milan Triennale occupied by protestors, 1968
Photo Arata Isozaki
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery
Bottom: Arata Isozaki with Jasper Johns
© Shigeo Anzai

TD *You were clearly a committed supporter of the arts. But as well as allowing you to become more familiar with local law enforcement protocols, it seems to have inspired you to spend the 1960s becoming increasingly involved with the Japanese art community rather than the architecture community. In this sense, I think it's revealing that you chose to call your office an 'atelier'.*

AI I really started to contribute to the Japanese art scene from around 1966, when I was in an exhibition called 'Space and Colour'. Later that year I was asked to design the layout for an exhibition called 'From Space to Environment', held at the gallery in the Matsuya department store, for which I invited about 30 young artists. The only other architect was Hiroshi Hara. Many of the people I met then became collaborators in later projects.

TD *Aiko Miyawaki, your second wife, was one of the participants in 'From Space to Environment'. Is that how you first met?*

AI Yes. She had just come back from Europe.

TD *While she was living there she had been friendly with people such as Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. Did she introduce you to the international art world?*

AI Yes, it was through her that I became familiar with international artists from that generation. But my contact with the younger generation and with the Manhattan scene began slightly earlier, around the time that Jasper Johns made his first visit to Tokyo. He had a small exhibition at the Minami Gallery in 1965. I was closely connected to the Tokyo gallery community, so I organised a party at my studio, which I had just opened. It was tiny – one bedroom, a kitchen, a small living room. Jasper Johns stayed all night, drinking and talking until the next morning.

TD *Is this also when you first met Yoko Ono?*

AI Yes, I knew Yoko from about the same period. She had been living in New York in the 1950s, active with the Fluxus group and very influenced by John Cage. She divorced the composer Toshi Ichiyanagi in 1962 and came back to Japan, then she married Tony Cox. I remember Tony was one of the guests at my 'Something Happens' party. He was in Tokyo to meet Yoko, but she came back from New York the very next day. They had a child then moved to London, where she met John Lennon.

TD *There's an apocryphal story that you once designed a tea house for her and Lennon.*

AI It's true. While Yoko was in England she was being attacked from all sides for supposedly destroying The Beatles, and it was making her terribly neurotic. She and John had bought a big mansion in Ascot, outside London. At the time John was very worried about Yoko. He thought that maybe she was homesick for Japan, because they often went to Japanese restaurants in London, where Yoko would seem slightly more stable and calm. So John proposed renovating one of the rooms in their Ascot mansion in traditional Japanese style. Yoko agreed, and she called this Japanese friend in Tokyo who often helped her. He was an editor at *Asahi Journal*, and I knew him too. I'd met him when Karlheinz Stockhausen visited Japan in 1966, and *Asahi Journal* asked me to do an interview – the first one I'd ever done with a foreigner. This same editor asked me to help Yoko and John create a tea house, even though I had no interest in designing in a traditional Japanese style. I don't remember the exact details, but I was in Europe, and so on a particular day I was able to arrange to be in London to meet them. I was travelling with Aiko Miyawaki, but we weren't yet married.

TD *Were you divorced from your first wife?*

AI Yes, that's right. But I wasn't yet divorced from my second wife.

TD *Wait, how many times have you been married?*

AI Two times... No, actually three times. Aiko Miyawaki was the third. I remember I would often tease Tange – I have one more wife than you! Anyway, we visited Yoko and John at Ascot, then I came back to Japan and tried to organise the construction of a tea house. The most important thing is to find the right carpenter. Around that time I happened to stay at the famous Tawaraya Inn in Kyoto, a 300-year-old building that Junzō Yoshimura had renovated and extended after the war. I met the owners, Toshi Satow and her husband Ernest Satow – a half-American photographer whom I had met before he married into the Tawaraya family – and told them I was looking for a traditional carpenter. They recommended Sotoji Nakamura, who did all their construction and repairs. When Junzō Yoshimura designed the Japanese house that was exhibited in the courtyard of MOMA in 1954, he employed a master carpenter from Nagoya called Heizaemon Itō, but when he designed the house for the Rockefeller estate, he chose to have it built by Sotoji Nakamura. I thought Nakamura might be a good carpenter for a project outside Japan. Indeed, he turned out to be a very flexible and very intellectual person, despite being self-taught. We continued to collaborate and always stayed in close contact, though he passed away in the late 1990s and has been succeeded by his son Yoshiaki. I remember when Philip Johnson made his last trip to Japan I arranged for him to visit Nakamura at his own home. I wish I could have been there as those two masters, both around 90 years old, shook hands and spoke with each other. Anyway, around the same time as I was looking for a carpenter for John and Yoko, I also wanted to build a tea house as part of my Gunma museum project. I contacted Nakamura and asked him to do both. The one at Gunma was built, but the one at Ascot was not. As you know, Japanese tea houses are precut and prefabricated at the carpenter's workshop, disassembled and brought to the site, then reassembled. The timber for the Ascot project had already been cut when I suddenly got a phone call from Yoko, telling me they were about to leave for the United States, and asking me to hurry. So rather than shipping the parts, I sent them by air cargo to London. It arrived at the exact moment that Yoko and John left for New York, and they never came back. I don't know precisely what happened, but somewhere in London there must be a storage container with all the tea house timber. Maybe Yoko knows. About ten years later, after John's death, Yoko asked me whether I could finally use the timber to build a Japanese-style room in her apartment in the Dakota in Manhattan, but there weren't any rooms as big as the ones at Ascot, so I said no, impossible.

Top: Arata Isozaki with Gustav Peichl, left, and Hans Hollein, right, Vienna, 1968
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery
Bottom: Arata Isozaki with, from left, Lee Nordness, Hans Hollein, Karl Schlamminger and Ettore Sottsass, Paris, 1975
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery

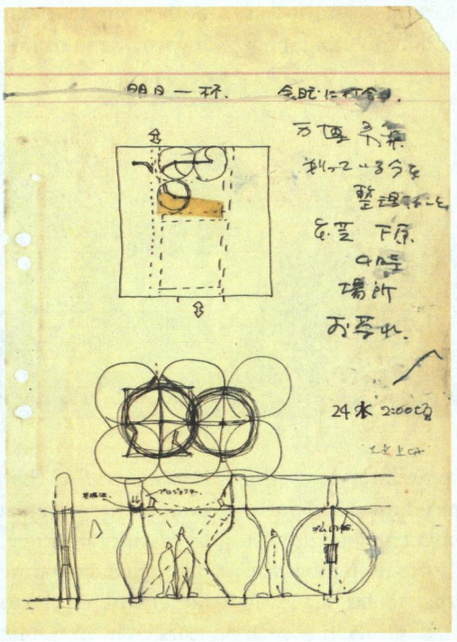
TD *Having become increasingly acquainted with key figures in the international art scene during the mid-1960s, you became an internationally recognised artist in your own right with your participation in the 1968 Milan Triennale. Unfortunately, not many people actually saw your installation, called 'Electric Labyrinth', because the venue was occupied by left-wing protestors. Given your political views and affiliations, where did your sympathies lie?*

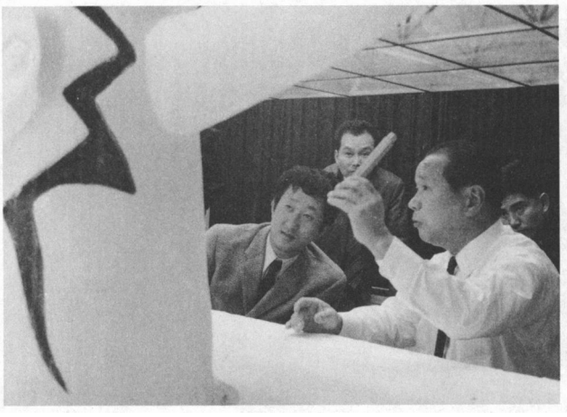
AI Ultimately, I guess I was closer in spirit to the protestors, but I also had a professional obligation as an invited exhibitor. I experienced a similar dilemma in Japan while I was working on the public commission for the Osaka Expo project. As a member of the younger generation I had a natural tendency to resist the existing social order. Just like the students, I sympathised with their rejection of the establishment, but I was simultaneously working on a public project that was intended to glorify the Japanese nation. I was heavily criticised in both cases. It was a very complex situation. In Milan my installation was an array of mirrored aluminium panels covered with a mixture of photos of corpses from the aftermath of the atomic bombings and Edo-period prints of Japanese ghosts or demons. All the panels were supposed to start rotating when visitors triggered infrared sensors. We were still checking the system right up to the last moment. I remember it was only about 90 per cent complete when the doors opened for the

press conference, but the venue was suddenly stormed by a group of left-wing students and artists and academics. They filled the space, so no one could see the installation anyway.

TD *What did they want?*

AI This was May 1968, and they were inspired by the events going on in Paris. The exhibition was suspended and we had to leave. Most of the exhibitors – members of Team X and Archigram, Alison and Peter Smithson, Aldo van Eyck, Hans Hollein, Peter Cook and so on – were staying at the same hotel. We met and discussed the situation, and the next day we tried to go back to the venue, but it was still completely full of protestors: 'The triennale is occupied', said a sign on the door. As one of the participating artists I was allowed in and I took some photos. At the gallery exit, visitors were asked to sign a document indicating whether they supported or opposed the protesters, and I signed in support. Giancarlo De Carlo, an architect from Urbino who was also a member of Team X, was probably in the worst predicament. He was one of the organisers of the triennale itself, and he proposed the theme of 'The Greater Number', but he was also extremely left wing in his thinking. So he and I were supporting the protesters when we should have been on the side of the organisers. But I realised that he was actually a major target of the protesters' anger. Regardless of our support, they saw us as members of the establishment. A day or two later I was summoned to the triennale organisers' office. All the documents regarding my travel expenses and honorarium had been prepared, but because I had shown support for the protestors they wouldn't reimburse my receipts. From their point of view we artists had been employed using public funds, but when this social uprising occurred, we acted as if we were independent and joined the protestors. They even suspected this had been our plan all along. In the end, I think I only received the price of my return ticket. I remember on the way back to Japan I visited Vienna, and Hans Hollein took me to see the Wittgenstein House. About three or four months later, around October, I heard they had reopened the triennale. But there was no way I could go back, because I was working so hard on the expo project.





TD *Did you stay in contact with the other participants in the triennale?*

AI Yes, we became friends. Most of the people I met in Milan were producing visionary ideas for exhibitions and publications. They weren't doing realistic architectural designs. I wrote about each of them in a series of articles for *Bijutsu Techō*, which I later collected into a book with the title *Kenchiku no Kaitai* (The Demolition of Architecture). I'd become good friends with Peter Cook. Soon after the Milan Triennale he was invited to teach in UCLA's new urban design department, with some other Archigram members. Warren Chalk and Ron Herron were already in Los Angeles, and Peter asked me to join them. I had already agreed to do some teaching at Musashino Art School in Tokyo, but student protests and riots were beginning to erupt there, so this gave me a good reason to quit and leave Japan for a while. There was trouble on university campuses all over the country, inspired by the radical left-wing movement known as Zengakuren (All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Government Associations), but the worst riots were at Tokyo University. From 1963 to 1969 my office was in the Ochanomizu neighbourhood of Tokyo, right where Norman Foster's Century Tower is now. It was only a ten-minute walk from the Tokyo University main campus, so in late 1968 and early 1969 I was going to watch the protests almost every day. Nihon University was a short walk in the opposite direction. Tokyo University is public, the top national university, whereas Nihon University is private. But there were riots and protests at both of them. It was very interesting. Students from Nihon University would go over to help their peers at Tokyo University, and vice versa. It was a kind of student exchange, and my studio was right in the middle, among the barricades.

TD *And so you escaped the 1968 student riots in Europe only to be caught up in them back in Japan.*

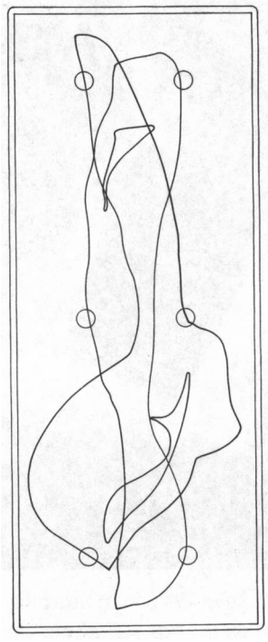
AI Yes, though I missed the worst of it because I went to Los Angeles. In January 1969 the Yasuda Auditorium at Tokyo University was occupied by student protestors. They had blocked the doors and were throwing things off the roof. The government sent in thousands of riot police. It was like a war zone. Protestors were sprayed with fire hoses, and tear gas was dropped from helicopters. In the build-up to all this I was working on projects for the Osaka Expo and the Milan Triennale.

TD *It seems you're always in the thick of things. I noticed that one of your early sketches for the Milan Triennale has some notes about the Osaka Expo scribbled in the corner.*

AI Exactly! That was a memo about the expo budget. I don't remember the exact sequence of events, but I was working on both of them at the same time. Just as I began working on the triennale, the government plans for the Osaka Expo began to move forward, and I was asked to make a proposal for the Festival Plaza. I think I did an overall masterplan for the expo too – all this was funded by public money, and I was involved in negotiations over the budget. I was also contacted by someone at Toshiba, who wanted me to design their company pavilion. Or maybe it was Mitsui... that's right, it was Mitsui. The Toshiba

Top: Arata Isozaki, sketch for Electric Labyrinth, 1968 © Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery
Bottom: Arata Isozkai with Taro Okamoto, 1967 Courtesy Taro Okamoto Memorial Museum

Pavilion was done by Kishō Kurokawa. But it was all too much for me to handle, so I decided to only work on the public project – the overall expo planning – as a member of Tange's team. I asked Katsuhiro Yamaguchi to take charge of the private project, that is, the Mitsui Group Pavilion. He worked on it together with Takamitsu Azuma, who was primarily known as a designer of houses. Yamaguchi is an artist, slightly older than me, who was the first person in Japan to think about technological art. Since the 'From Space to Environment' exhibition we have often collaborated on projects. I wrote that note about the expo budget on the 'Electric Labyrinth' sketch at the beginning of all this. It was probably the very first memo for the project. I don't remember exactly.



TD *You created the robots and other technological systems for the Festival Plaza at the expo, but eventually you collapsed from exhaustion and had to be carried out. Was this connected to your illness in 1961?*

AI No, it was a different situation. The opening ceremony for Osaka Expo was on 14 March 1970, but there was an unseasonal cold snap the night before and it snowed. I was responsible for the main plaza, including all the technical aspects, and I was ordered to make sure that the guests of honour would be warm enough. So I ran around all night trying to find a solution. I'd designed some lighting fixtures that I called 'tenagazaru roboto' (gibbon robots), and I moved them above the seats for the imperial family in the hope that they would give off enough heat. I was there until dawn, then I returned to my hotel, where I collapsed with a sudden, intense pain in my lower back. I was completely unable to move. I couldn't walk or even crawl. I watched the opening ceremony on a little television set in my hotel room. Everything went off perfectly. Then I was taken by car to the airport, and a forklift was used to put me on an airplane bound for Fukuoka. It turned out to be a slipped disc, but I was in bed for months after that, depressed. It was a psychological crisis even worse than my collapse in 1961.

TD *Did the Ménière's disease ever return?*

AI I had a similar experience many years later. I don't remember the exact dates, but sometime in 2001 I was in Florence for the Uffizi Gallery loggia project. My design had been provisionally approved, but it was still controversial. The Italian Undersecretary of Cultural Heritage, Vittorio Sgarbi, never missed a chance to vilify the project, calling me a 'kamikaze architect'. Anyway, there was a media conference at the Palazzo Vecchio museum, which also contains the Florence City Hall. We were in the biggest room, the Salone dei Cinquecento, which had been remodelled by Vasari. He had raised the ceiling and painted murals on it. I also heard that there had once been frescoes by, I think, Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci, though apparently Da Vinci had used wax-based paint, and when he tried to speed up the drying process with fire, the colours all melted. These days the space is covered with frescoes and full of sculptures. I was sitting on a stage alongside the mayor and the superintendent and all the local officials and visiting officials. When it came to my turn to give an explanation of the project, I suddenly became dizzy and fainted. I was taken by ambulance to an emergency hospital in Florence. Various doctors came to examine me. After about three or four days I recovered and the doctors told me I could go home. I asked if this episode was related to my earlier experience, but I was told that in Florence these symptoms are considered to be Stendhal syndrome, named after the writer. I had no idea what that was, so I looked it up once I was back in Japan. Of course, I knew that Stendhal was a famous novelist. He was French, even though his penname sounds German. As a young man, before he became a writer, he was a military officer posted in Italy. One day, while touring the artworks of Florence – it was at the Basilica of Santa Croce, I think, looking at Giotto's frescoes and the graves of Machiavelli and Michelangelo – he became dizzy and collapsed. After his collapse he recuperated at the house of his mistress, who owned various guidebooks on the art of Florence. Stendhal started reading one of them, and thought to himself, 'I could write better than this'. And that led to his debut as an author: his own guidebook to Italian art, which became a bestseller. People come from all over the world to visit Florence, and even now some of them will collapse when confronted with the abundance of artistic treasures in places such as the Brancacci Chapel or the Uffizi Gallery. An Italian psychiatrist wrote a thesis in which she described this as a special characteristic of Florence, and gave it the name Stendhal syndrome. And that's what the Italian doctors told me I undoubtedly had.

TD *Even your ailments are artistic references.*

AI It's interesting you say that, because I found a Japanese book that describes Stendhal syndrome in which the author asserts that Japanese people should be immune. He argued that the aesthetic sensibility of a person raised in Europe is formed through constant exposure to European history and art, and so being suddenly surrounded with things that reflect one's innermost being may cause an overwhelming psychological shock. But an Asian person undergoes their process of self-formation through exposure to Asian art and Asian culture. We may learn about western culture later in life, but it shouldn't have such a deep resonance for us.

TD *Perhaps you have a western soul, or at least a western psyche?*

AI Well ... I kept wondering why it happened to me. As an architect, perhaps it was when I first saw Europe that my aesthetic sense took root. So personally I would say that, more than Asia, more than Japan, I matured under the influence of Europe. Anyway, that's my way of explaining it. But I don't really know. The next time I went to Florence I was asked to give a lecture at the

Arata Isozaki, drawing and plastic curve template, *Marilyn on the Line*, 1965
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery

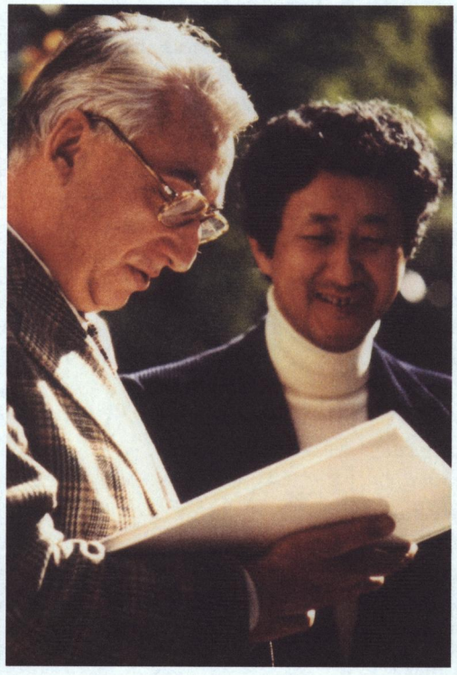
university, so I made the theme of my talk Stendhal syndrome. It was therapeutic for me, using this ailment to sum up my understanding of architecture and art. I remember there was a review of my lecture in a local newspaper, which said that as a Japanese I was talking about something that I shouldn't be able to understand!

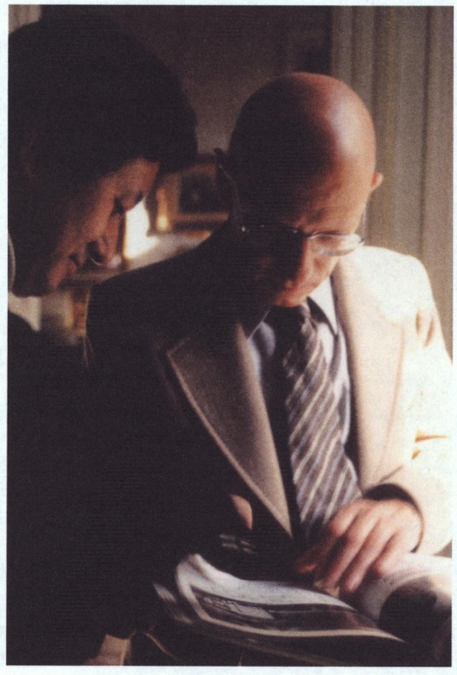
TD *Even though your theoretical writings have been explicitly directed toward the notion of 'Japan-ness in Architecture', the title of an anthology of essays you published a few years ago, I think it's true that many of your architectural designs are suffused with a European sensibility. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Japanese architectural avant-garde was dominated by you and Kazuo Shinohara, but he explicitly and uncompromisingly rejected western influences, railing against Japanese architects influenced by the west – he certainly would not have collapsed in front of Giotto's frescoes. Both you and Shinohara have been hugely influential on the development of Japanese architecture, through your writings as well as your buildings, but you are in many ways polar opposites. How was your professional and personal relationship?*

AI Shinohara was a few years older than me. He was the progenitor of a generation of Japanese architects focused on the design of private houses, which before then had been conceived solely in response to conventional, everyday functions. Various people started to describe Shinohara's designs as having a somewhat traditional Japanese style, but they were completely wrong. He wasn't applying a style to architecture, nor did he take a functionalist, technological approach. Rather, the key to his work was in the way he created architectural spaces. I don't think he was particularly interested in designing houses, either. He often said that a house should be a work of art, but for example, the building he did at the Tokyo Institute of Technology is predicated on the same way of thinking – he was making all architecture as art. That was the basis of his idiosyncratic theories.

TD *But wasn't your own architectural work also being conceived in artistic terms?*

AI At the same time as Shinohara was developing these theories I was planning the 'From Space to Environment' exhibition, so in that sense, yes, my activities were connected with the art world, and I thought that I could work as an architect and also as an artist. But for Shinohara, architecture did not need a connection with art: it *was* art. This became his manifesto. Our directions were different – his focus was houses, whereas mine was urban projects – but at the meta-level there were considerable similarities between us, in that we both began by looking for something other than the traditional architectural images created by our predecessors. I wanted to make buildings into architecture, and he wanted to make architecture into art. In the 1960s and 1970s many younger people were attracted to Shinohara's theories. Some of them are now well known: Toyo Ito, Itsuko Hasegawa, Issei (Kazunari) Sakamoto. Those people had no interest in my urban-oriented work. His followers are his legacy, and they carried his way of thinking into the succeeding generations. Unfortunately, even though we had many friends and colleagues in common, Shinohara and I tended to dismiss each other as being too obstinate to deal with. I remember once having a furious, drunken argument with him about houses – I was still denying that houses should be considered architecture, and back then all he had done were houses. We probably reached a mutual understanding in about 1970 or maybe even a little before that, but each of us continued to work in isolation. There was a final rupture in our relationship after the Yokohama International Port Terminal competition in 1995. I was on the jury, and he was a finalist. In the jury report I had written some negative remarks about the nationalistic symbolism of his design to explain why it shouldn't win. It was an anonymous competition, and I honestly didn't know whose entry it was until later, but he took it very personally. Japanese architectural critics and historians have never really taken up this topic. It was an outsider, David Stewart – who studied under Pevsner, so he's a proper historian – who best understood the situation. His book *The Making of a Modern Japanese Architecture* is the only comprehensive history available in English, I think. It ends in the 1970s, as do many studies of Japanese architecture, but the final chapter is about the work of Shinohara and myself.





Arata Isozaki with Roland Barthes (*top*) and Michel Foucault (*bottom*), Paris, 1978
© Kishin Shinoyama

TD *In 1978 you were involved in two important exhibitions: the celebrated 'MA: Espace-temps du Japon' at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, which you curated, and the 'New Wave of Japanese Architecture' group show at Peter Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York. Is that how your relationship with Eisenman began?*

AI No, it was a little earlier. The *Five Architects* catalogue appeared in 1972, but I had already discovered an early essay by Peter in which he was trying to apply Noam Chomsky's linguistic theories to architecture. I was amazed, and I translated it in order to introduce him to Japanese readers. So my friendship with Peter began through linguistic architectural theory. I then started learning about his activities at IAUS. I finally met him in maybe 1975 or 1976 when I went to New York to participate in a group exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum curated by Hans Hollein. Hans had

been a close friend from even before the 1968 Milan Triennale. At the very outset he asked me, and Ettore Sottsass in Milan, to help him organise the exhibition. We looked at various ideas before settling on the title 'MAN transFORMS'. The three of us were going to do the whole exhibition, but more and more people started to get involved: Buckminster Fuller, Richard Meier and so on. Finally it became an exhibition of about ten people. That was my first invitation to work in New York. And while I was there Peter invited me to visit the IAUS. At that time... who was in charge? An American called Andrew MacNair was thinking about creating a programme of international exchanges, and wanted to begin with a small exhibition and lecture series by young Japanese designers. So he consulted me and we put together a list of seven or eight people, which became the 'New Wave of Japanese Architecture' exhibition in 1978. Before the exhibition opening he wanted us to give lectures around the US, so this small group of Japanese architects visited a series of universities, like a travelling circus.

TD *Who was in the group?*

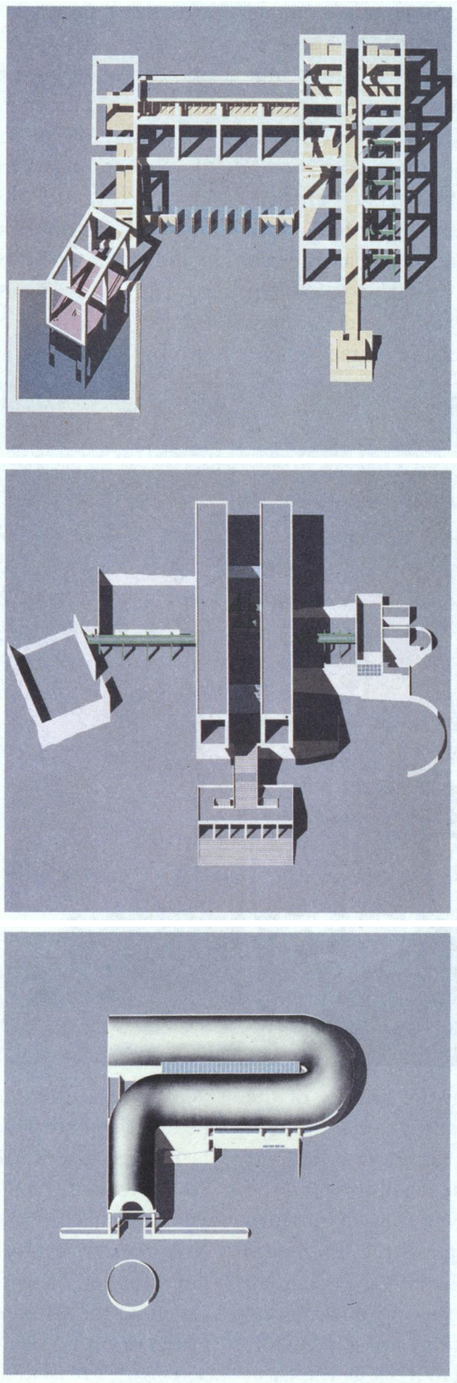
AI You'll have to look that up. I know Hiroshi Hara was with us, but I don't remember Shinohara being there. Of course I wanted to include him but he said he didn't want to be part of a group.

TD *It seems that Shinohara didn't interact much with other Japanese architects of his generation. Would it be fair to say that he preferred isolation while you were interested in making connections?*

AI Yes, maybe. He had quite a peculiar character. If he liked someone, he really liked them, and if he didn't, he just ignored them.

TD *The 1978 exhibitions highlighted a shift in your work, from the use of simple geometry in the 1970s to historical pastiche in the 1980s. What was the trigger?*

AI Well, it began much earlier. I visited Paris in the mid-1960s and up in the attic storeroom of a second-hand bookstore near the École des Beaux-Arts I found a single copy of a big, old book on Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Of course it was a reprint, not a first edition, but I had been obsessed with Ledoux since my student days, so I used all the money I had on me to buy it. I took the book back to Japan, but it was after my physical and psychological collapse at the Osaka Expo in 1970 that I started studying it every day. I had the urge to reduce architecture to the simplest possible elements, to neutral, minimal geometrical shapes. Around that period I had also found a small reproduction of Piranesi's Campo Marzio. During the 1960s I had been more interested in studying Japanese urban spaces, but having visited Europe I became increasingly obsessed by these historical European precedents, and especially by the platonic cubes, pyramids and spheres used by eighteenth-century neo-classical architects such as Ledoux and Boullée. Their massive, monumental forms suggested a way to resist the fragility and ephemerality of Japanese traditional architecture, not to mention the instability of the Metabolists. I understood that Ledoux intended his forms to be literal metaphors for the functions of the buildings – to directly communicate their meaning as *architecture parlante*. He stripped away all decoration to emphasise the three-dimensional solids and allow the metaphors to emerge. But during the 1970s I thought that these elements should be used as empty forms – that is, I wanted to eliminate the metaphors. Or at least, that's how I was trying to use the pure cubes at the Gunma museum, or the square pipes at Kitakyushu library or the vaults at the Fujimi country club. But somehow, having tried to remove the metaphor it would unavoidably reappear. These may be pure geometrical forms in the drawings and models, but when they are realised in physical buildings they become part of an architectural vocabulary and a social vocabulary. No matter how abstract the shape, the metaphor always returns. More broadly, a narrative will always emerge from the accumulation of metaphors.



Arata Isozaki, silkscreens of the Museum of Modern Art, Gunma (*top*), Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art (*middle*) and Fujimi Country Clubhouse (*bottom*), 1983
© Arata Isozaki, courtesy Misa Shin Gallery

TD *You were shifting to a vocabulary of pure forms during a period in which semiotic theory was prevalent in architectural discourse.*

AI Semiology was starting to become fashionable all over the world in the 1970s. This was a way of analysing language in terms of symbols and signs. Of course, it originated in the 1920s, so all kinds of research had already been done. At the very least, in the architectural world, these shapes were linked to linguistic shapes. I was interested in that at the level of formalism. But when it came to the Tsukuba Centre Building, which is full of historical quotations, I was aiming to create an ambiguity that would cause all the references to cancel each other out. It was a national project, so I wanted to avoid any sense of a clear institutional identity. I was thinking about architecture in terms of narrative and metaphor, assembled by gathering together all manner of quotations from all over the world. On the other hand, my ambition was to omit Japan as much as possible from these quotations. Throughout the 1970s, this was also my greatest source of anxiety. When I went to Paris to set up the 'MA' exhibition I also presented a number of my own current projects, and I was viciously attacked by the architects in the audience. I explained that my key reference

was Ledoux, and that I was adding historical quotations and metaphors to the pure spheres and cubes, but they insisted that a Japanese architect couldn't possibly claim to understand any of that. I was utterly denounced. It wasn't a debate, it was a full-on assault. At the same time I was also thinking about how to present specifically Japanese concepts for the 'MA' exhibition. All Japanese people intuitively understand the concept of *ma* – an interval in space or time – so it's unnecessary to hold such an exhibition in Japan. But people who are not immersed in Japanese culture have no comprehension of *ma*. None of my foreign architect friends could understand the concept even when it was explained to them. As Tenshin (Kakuzō) Okakura wrote in *The Book of Tea*, the idea of *ma* is unclear. It cannot be directly conveyed. And so I wondered what to do. The exhibition was divided into several subthemes: *ma*, *utsuroi*, *yami* and so on. They cannot be directly translated, so I tried to explain each of them as best I could in English, French and German phrases. Having attempted that, I could better understand why I was attacked for using Ledoux as a reference in my built projects. At that time my friend Peter Cook happened to be over from London, and he came to hear my lecture. At one point he suddenly stood up and defended me against the Parisian mob by saying, 'Japan is on the periphery of China, and Isozaki is a person who comes from a place on the periphery of Japan'. The British have an analogous relationship to us, being outside continental Europe, which has France as its centre. English people are different. Listening to a British eccentric, or reading Shakespeare, I have no idea what they are talking about, but when I heard Peter's explanation, I finally got it. The English tend toward eccentricity on their island, while the core of European rationality is located in the middle of the continent. Similarly, Japan is oriented toward the rational thought system of China, but the Japanese manner is based on a different logic. There is an analogy between the English sensibility and the Japanese sensibility. Going outside Japan and being drawn into furious debates about my works, discovering fundamental differences in contexts and logical structures, I wondered what gave rise to all these variations. The English poet Rudyard Kipling once wrote, 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet'. I started to think, well, maybe that's all there is to it. However, I still found myself debating the effects of globalisation while receiving commissions from outside Japan and travelling to work abroad. I have friends in other countries with whom I can easily talk about these issues, but recently I somehow feel that that kind of person is becoming increasingly rare. Regarding my use of quotation and metaphor, Peter Eisenman used semiotic analyses to deal with the problem of symbols at the level of syntax, in his analyses of Terragni for example, whereas he saw me as dealing with symbols at the level of semantics. Nonetheless, we have always been able to find common ground for our debates.

Above and opposite: Arata Isozaki, Tsukuba Centre Building as ruin, 1985

TD *When did Eisenman first visit you in Japan?*

AI I think it was in the late 1970s or early 1980s. He came to Japan after the 'New Wave' exhibition. If I remember correctly, the American Cultural Centre arranged for him to give a series of lectures, and I accompanied him the whole time he was in Japan. His itinerary included a lecture at the Hiroshima Cultural Centre, so that day I took him to visit Tange's Hiroshima Peace Centre and the Itsukushima Shrine. We met the mayor of Hiroshima in the afternoon, but when we arrived for the evening lecture there was almost no one in the auditorium. In Tokyo he had spoken to full houses. We couldn't understand what was going on, until we heard that the Hiroshima Carp baseball team had a championship match that evening. The mayor had promised to be at the lecture, but he didn't turn up either. We asked where he was, and it turned out he had gone to the game like everyone else. So we cancelled the event and Peter and I went to watch the game too. I remember we had the best seats in the stadium, but the Carp played badly and lost. The next day they went to Osaka and won the championship. Though there was no lecture in Hiroshima, the local guide told Peter and me some interesting old tales. The Hiroshima baseball stadium was directly on axis with the Hiroshima Peace Centre and the Genbaku Dome, which was at ground zero of the atomic bombing. So he told us about a Hiroshima legend that when the baseball game ends and the lights are extinguished and everything becomes dark, the ghosts of the people who died in the blast appear in the stadium. Peter and I were deeply moved. When he went back to New York he told these stories to his friends and acquaintances, and said that he wanted to write about this experience. But it wasn't an appropriate topic for the mass media. Even now, no one in America really talks about Hiroshima. So Peter wrote an Op-Ed column for *The New York Times* about his childhood memories of baseball, but he called it 'Stadium Ghosts'. At the very end he mentioned watching the Hiroshima Carp and included a line about the ghosts of the atom bomb. When I heard what he had done, I thought it was really great. Of course, when I created the 'Electric Labyrinth' at the Milan Triennale I also included a large collage called 'Futatabi Haikyo ni natta Hiroshima' (Re-ruined Hiroshima), a photo of the aftermath of the bomb combined with drawings of derelict megastructures. I always return to images of Hiroshima's devastation. Peter Eisenman and the ghosts of Hiroshima, Stendhal syndrome... I have never really talked about these things before, but they're all coming back to me now.

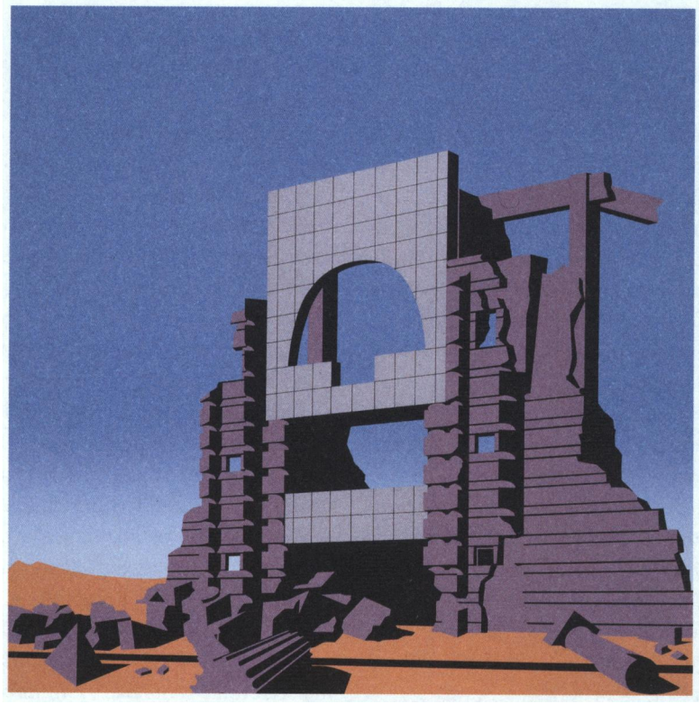
TD *You worked closely with Eisenman and his wife Cynthia Davidson during the 1990s on the* ANY *conference series. How did that come about?*

AI At the end of the 1980s I met with Peter during another visit to Japan and we decided to set up a number of international symposiums on architecture. These became the ANY series, which was held from 1991 to 2001, in a different country every year. When we began, Japan happened to be at the height of an economic bubble and was very wealthy. I had a friend in the construction industry who had a great deal of work in foreign countries and he was able to give us sponsorship for the full ten years. Of course, it was just the minimum necessary to keep going, so for each conference we had to do additional local fundraising. ANY was assembled in that format, but the impetus was the 'East is East' notion I mentioned previously. Could we achieve reciprocal cultural understanding? The aim was to find a shared foundation for theories of contemporary architecture and urbanism, and for theories of design.

TD *I saw you speak at 'Anywise' in Seoul in 1994, and I attended 'Anyhow' in Rotterdam in 1997, but you weren't there.*

AI My wife was ill so I couldn't go to Rotterdam, but that was the only time I was absent. Akira Asada gave a presentation about Metabolism on my behalf.

TD *Asada's lecture was on your Mirage City project, an artificial island located just off the south coast of Hengqin Island, which is part of China's Zhuhai Special Economic Zone. You also exhibited this in 1997 at the* ICC *gallery in Tokyo, revisiting the idea of a participatory installation, but this time incorporating submissions via the internet as well as from visitors in the gallery. The results were fascinating, but what did the clients ask for and how did they react to your design?*



AI Sometime around 1993 or 1994 I was asked by the person in charge of urban development for Zhuhai to make a proposal for a tourist development on the Chinese beachfront, just west of Macau. He came to visit my office, and I thought that he had some interesting ideas. We talked about various possibilities while he was in Tokyo, then he went back to China and introduced my work to the higher authorities. When I took my project over to make the first presentation it didn't include an island or anything like that. It was just for the beachfront. But as we continued to work on it I gradually began to think it would be more interesting to make an island. So once again I explained my ideas to him. And he said that, if this proposal was truly feasible, then there was no good reason for him to oppose it. So some of his staff devoted considerable time to calculating how much it would cost. They finally announced that they could build the infrastructure for the entire island if they had access to the same amount of money as had just been spent on building just the towers of Tange's New Tokyo City Hall. The Zhuhai officials said to me, 'Well, if that's the case, and we can find developers, maybe we could do it. So please go and look for developers.' They wanted me to take them along while I went looking for investors on their behalf! I wasn't willing to do that, so unfortunately it remained an imaginary project.

TD *Since then, there have been reclamation projects in Macau and south China that are even bigger than Mirage City would have been.*

AI Yes, but back in 1994, 20 years ago, I was completely without connections in that part of the world. I could probably do it now.

TD *Since at least the beginning of the 1990s you have worked closely with Akira Asada on many of your theoretical projects. He's an economist and philosopher with a strong interest in art and architecture, but he's also a nephew of Kenzō Tange's assistant Takashi Asada. Is that just a coincidence?*

AI Yes, basically it was a coincidence. I first encountered him in the early 1980s, while he was doing his master's thesis at Kyoto University, but I didn't know he was Takashi Asada's nephew. I read some of the essays he was writing around that time, which were appearing in Japanese magazines, and I thought he was demonstrating a new viewpoint as a writer. He suddenly became famous in the mainstream media around 1983. That was the year I completed the Tsukuba Centre Building. We started a dialogue about that project in relation to postmodernism, then we collaborated on presentations for the ANY conferences.

TD *In terms of your ambition to foster intercultural dialogue and mutual comprehension, how do you view the* ANY *conferences in retrospect?*

AI I don't think they were a success.

TD *Why not?*

AI Well, my biggest regret was that we didn't manage to hold one of the conferences in China. I tried, but there were too many obstacles. I understand that the series provided a forum for many valuable debates. Overall, in purely philosophical terms, the first half was influenced by Jacques Derrida, and the second half by Gilles Deleuze. That is to say, the first half was about old-fashioned design, and the second half was digitised, with all kinds of computer-oriented animations beginning to appear. The turning point was around 1995. In a sense, this can be understood as a worldwide generational change that happens to include architects and theorists, but we were left with what I consider to be excellent debates over this problem. The last ANY symposium was in New York, at the Guggenheim Museum, where Greg Lynn showed more of his completely computer-generated projects. For his younger colleagues that approach had become increasingly normal, but he was the pioneer. On the other hand, you had Peter Eisenman, Rafael Moneo and myself. Well, I was right in the middle, but we were of a generation that preferred analogue architecture. Our group had a comparatively shared conception of architectural design, in which architecture itself was used to self-referentially

critique the discipline of architecture. The members of the younger generation were not doing such self-referential work, which they already considered to be an old way of thinking. Instead, taking their cue from the ways that globalisation was reshaping urban growth and the flows of capital and flows of information, they developed concepts for making fully digital projects. It has now become commonplace to use computers, or IT generally, to design shapes, but in the mid-1990s no one knew where it was leading. That was a moment in which architectural debates and urban debates did not happen without the application of some kind of filter over economic or political issues. This was a generational change. Peter Eisenman vehemently criticised Greg Lynn. Then Rem Koolhaas said something to him like 'You're also on that side!' Then everyone just started calling Peter and Moneo old, and it turned into a big quarrel. Even if you read the book of the proceedings of that tenth ANY conference I doubt it's very easy to understand. But many of the participants subsequently wrote letters, and these are appended to the main content of the book. I remember in particular that Fredric Jameson's letter summed it all up very skilfully. At the same time as this generation gap appeared, the thinking of people worldwide was changing due to new technologies. Or perhaps the changes were due to new economic flows. Wondering what to do, we entered the 2000s. Of course, those letters were written in 2001. And while we were continuing to think about this conference uptown, what happened downtown was 9/11. To my mind, 9/11 invalidated in a flash all the debates we'd been having in the ANY conferences. A totally new discursive constellation appeared. In that sense, I don't think ANY was very successful, but it was a problem of the era, not of the conferences. That is to say, whether or not ANY was a success, the era was severed, and then the next one began. Everything changed in 2001.

TD *It was in 2001 that you created the exhibition and publication 'Unbuilt', which was a review of the unrealised projects of your career. But it seems that several of your earliest unbuilt designs have now been revived: for example, the Doha Library in Qatar has a profile that is strikingly similar to the Clusters in the Air project from the 1960s.*

AI Yes, the Emir looked at a book of my work, and asked me to build that project. But it's still unbuilt. It stopped while under construction. There's still a fence around the site, and the concrete structure has been built for the first three storeys.

TD *Is it cancelled or just delayed?*

AI I don't know. Probably cancelled, but that's due to political problems, not technical ones.

TD *The catalogue for 'Unbuilt' also includes an essay called 'Ryūgen Toshi' (Rumour City), which is a sequel to the 'City Demolition Industry, Inc' essay from 40 years previously. What happened to Shin and Arata?*

AI Well, I know what happened to Arata Isozaki, but not to them! 'City Demolition Industry, Inc' was about a conflict between Shin the Trotskyite and Arata the Stalinist, but the point was that both characters were latent within me. I wrote the essay in 1962, then for about 30 years it was completely ignored. In the late 1990s there was an exhibition called 'Cities on the Move', curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru for the Vienna Secession. They took the Mirage City model around various venues, but it got broken. Then in about 2000 some of those people who had dominated the second half of ANY – Rem Koolhaas and a few younger collaborators – did an exhibition in Bordeaux called 'Mutations', about new urban conditions, which they later brought to Tokyo. Obrist asked me to contribute something to the catalogue for a section about 'rumours', so I gave him the original 'City Demolition Industry, Inc' essay. During the exhibition, if I remember correctly, there was an image in circulation on the internet, a photo taken from the rooftop of the World Trade Center that someone had collaged with a photo of a plane to show the moment before the impact. In other words, the urban event of 9/11 had great significance for the way we think about the city and about buildings. For me, what was attacked was not the World Trade Center, but an urban icon. Taking up this topic, I think that the exhibition attempted to engage and construct the city in terms of rumours. So in this sense, 'Rumour City' was a continuation of what had come before.

TD *You are now publishing your collected writings in a series of hardcover volumes. I think there are seven books so far, containing essays grouped by theme rather than chronologically.*

AI All together there will be eight volumes, but the eighth one is actually just a collection of project descriptions, so I think of the first seven volumes as a complete set.

TD *That's interesting. Most architects write nothing but project descriptions, with perhaps a couple of token essays. You reverse the balance. As a historian and a theorist you have written some iconoclastic texts – I think the most important collection in English is* Japan-ness in Architecture *– but do you consider your main legacy to be your buildings or your writings?*

AI Almost all the essays from *Japan-ness in Architecture* are spread through those seven volumes. But writing is a part of every project. The French word for writing is *écriture*, which has a much wider meaning than the English equivalent. I don't remember who, but some French thinker – perhaps Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida – said that *écriture* is not only writing books, it is also designing things. I think that every creative act should be called *écriture*. Books, projects, performances: all are *écriture*. So I see my architectural and urban designs, whether built or unbuilt, as being on the same level as my writings.

TD *Indeed, that's clear. Your projects have always oscillated between the disciplined neo-platonic purity of your own hand and an unpredictable complexity engendered by the participation of other people. Is there an 'Isozaki-ness in architecture'?*

AI Well ... I'm not the right person to ask. But there is one thing I'd like to add. When I started as an architect in the 1960s, working in Tange's office, I could have stayed in the university faculty, with a teaching position and eventually a professorship. But I chose not to. When I graduated at age 30, I decided never to hold any academic positions, and that I would never join any professional associations. I don't teach, and I'm not a member of the Japan Institute of Architects. At the age of 60, I decided to refuse any more prizes, awards and honorary titles. I just wanted to be independent, able to do whatever I liked or enjoyed – to be, as they say in Chinese, a *bunjin*, an intellectual without any bureaucratic obligations, free to spend my time reading and writing. Almost all classical writings on art, philosophy, calligraphy and so on were done by such people. I still aspire to be a *bunjin*, but I haven't achieved it yet.

Translated from Japanese
by Thomas Daniell