

*Arata Isozaki*  
*Translated from the Japanese*  
*by Thomas Daniell*

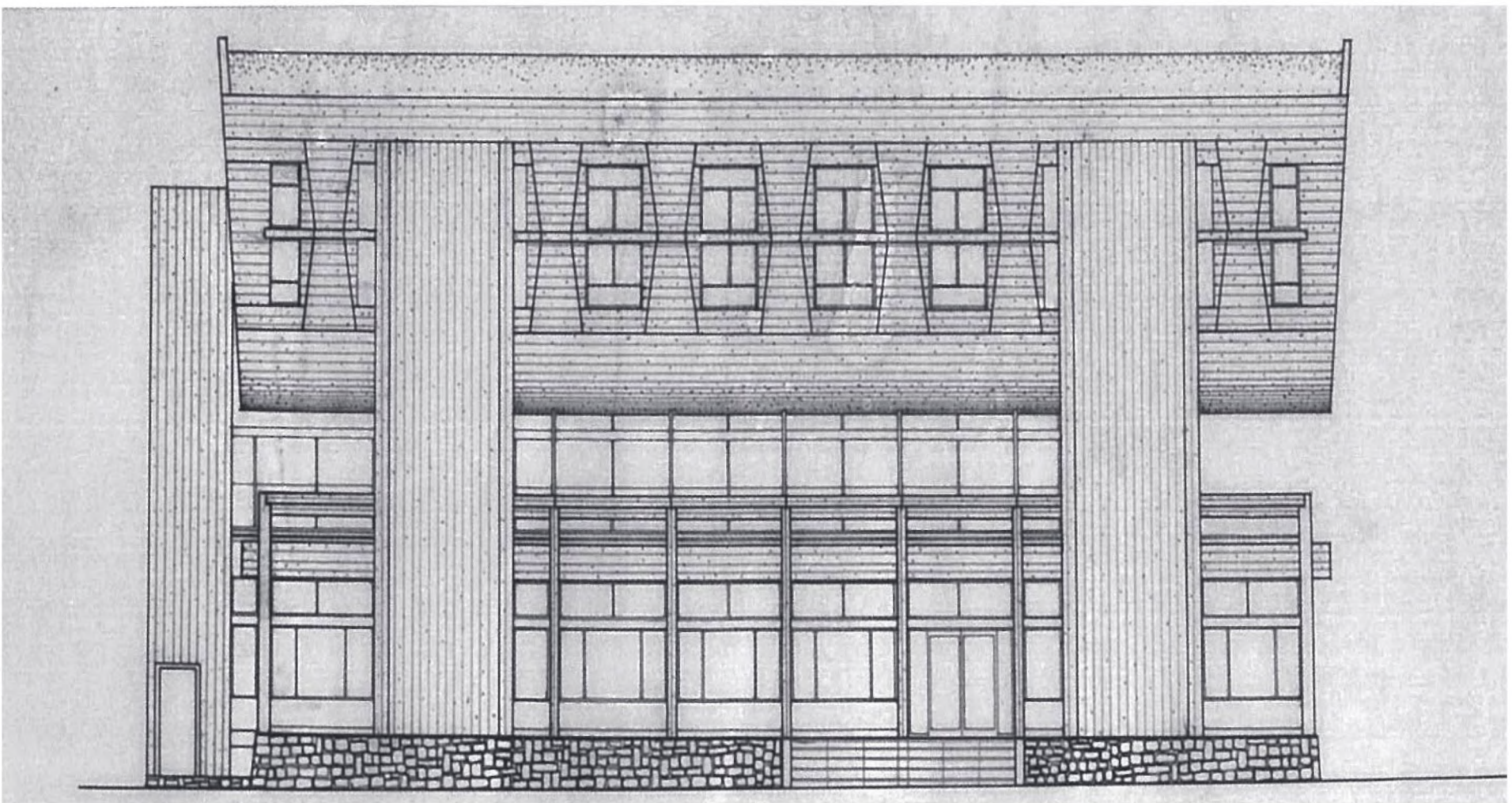
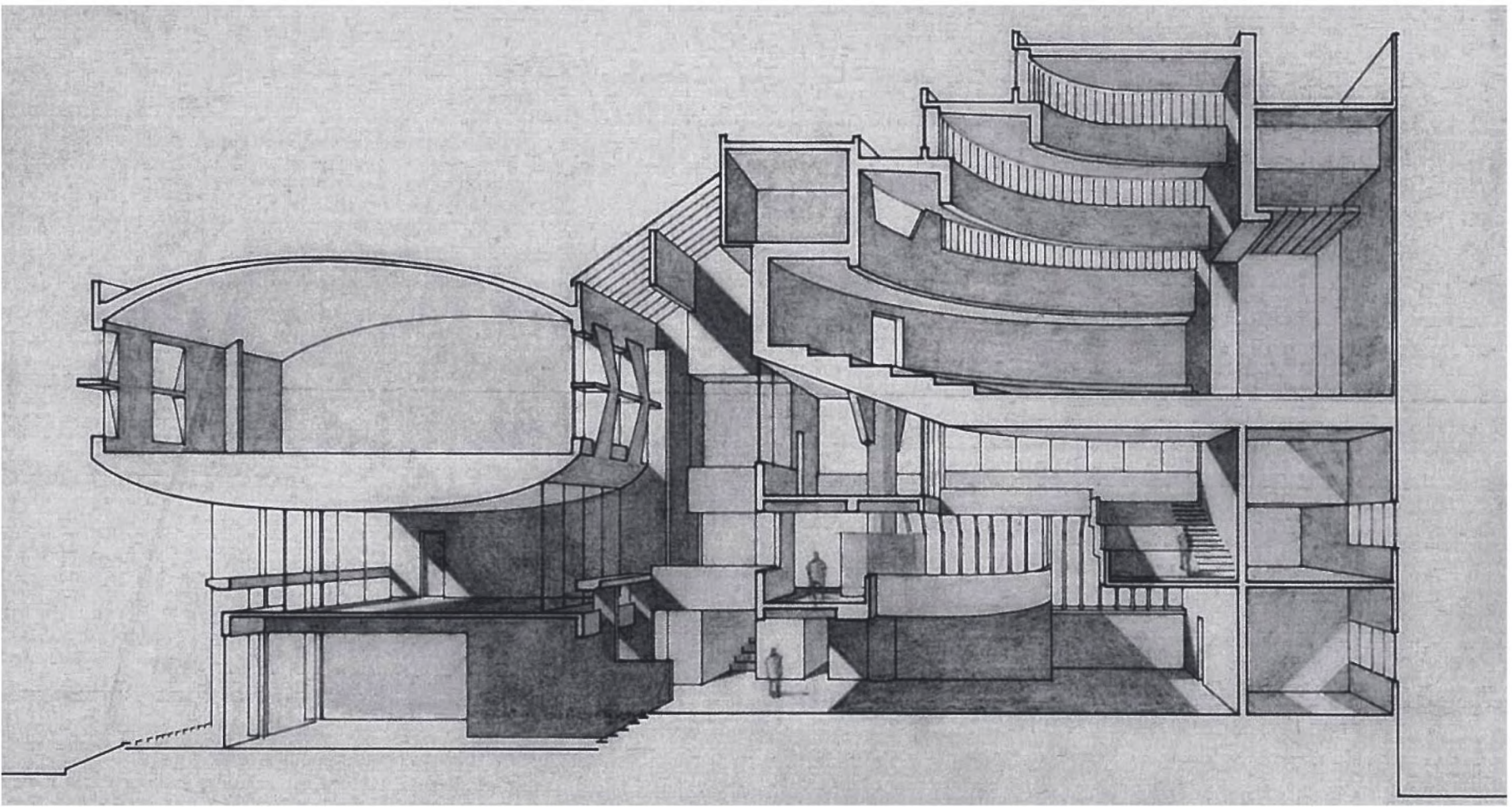
## I Am Often Asked about My Relation to The Metabolism Group, So I Have Tried To Recall That Period: Personal Note on The Japanese Architectural Avant-Garde<sup>1</sup>

Though I am of the 1960s generation in terms of age, I have often said that my way of thinking as an architect belongs to 1968. I have also called the 20 years between 1968 and 1989 – that is to say, between the Cultural Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall – a suspension of history. Under the nuclear sublime, the world remained in a state of bipolar conflict, within which only global financial capital could expand in a bizarre manner, transforming the world from production to consumption, from substance to symbol, from real to imaginary – in short, from modern to postmodern. This appeared to be a linear transition, but in the 1990s it suddenly and strikingly began to warp into a vortex of nonlinearity, diversity, and complexity. Put in grandiose terms, history had returned. The next thing I knew, nearly 10 years had passed. What kind of period was the 1990s? There have been attempts to explain it in terms of the “actual/virtual” characteristics of media space, but in fact, all those symptoms were already present in the 1960s. They were just left hanging for 20 years because the real situation was unable to catch up with them.

Last year (1997) was nothing but retro nostalgia for the 1960s, so much so that I feel like giving an ex post facto explanation. I kept being asked about my departure point as an architect, that is to say, what was my beginning? I am not trying to pass off the 1990s as a repetition of the 1960s. I used to think that my personal experiences belonged to me alone, and that I could make use of them or forget about them however I pleased, but after 30 years, that is no longer true. What occurred at that time and what I was obsessed with at that time have all been recorded and disseminated outside of me. Private ownership of my memories has disappeared. There is nothing I can do about that. Furthermore, everything has been restated inaccurately, and mostly misunderstood. So, I thought it would be a good idea for me to get involved with this retro nostalgia and take it as an opportunity to set the record straight.

I recently became involved in the planning of two exhibitions. The first was “Japanese Summer 1960–64” (at Art Tower Mito, August 2 – September 28, 1997) and the

1. Arata Isozaki, “Metabolism to no Kankei wo Kikareru node, sono Koro wo Omoidashitemita: Nihon no Kenchiku Avant-garde Shichū / I Am Often Asked About My Relation to the Metabolism Group, So I Have Tried to Recall That Period: Personal Note on the Japanese Architectural Avant-Garde,” *10+1*, no. 13 (May 1998): 25–32. In the original publication, the text is Japanese, but the title is bilingual.



Arata Isozaki, Oita Medical Hall and extension, 1972. Elevation. Top: Section perspective. © Estate of Arata Isozaki.

second was “Neo-Dada Japan 1958–1998: Arata Isozaki and the Artists of ‘White House’” (at Art Plaza Oita, February 1 – March 22, 1998). The former was an overview of new art movements in Japan during the five years after 1960, for which I reenacted my 1962 *Incubation Process / Joint Core System*. The latter was at the Oita Prefectural Library, a building that I designed and built between 1962 and 1966, which has been preserved and converted into a new gallery. At the opening of the exhibition, I reread a set of my architectural theses in relation to the continued existence of that building, beginning with “Process Planning Theory” (1963). All these tendencies began in the year 1960, so this was an

2. Hajime Yatsuka and Hideki Yoshimatsu, *Metabolizumu: Senkyūhyaku Rokujūnendai – Nihon no kenchiku avangyarudo* [Metabolism: The 1960s – Japan's Architectural Avant-Garde] (Tokyo: INAX Publications, 1997).

3. Modernism Japan Kenkyūkai, ed., *Saidoku: Nihon no Modern Architecture / Review: Modern Architecture in Japan* (Tokyo: Shokokusha, 1997).

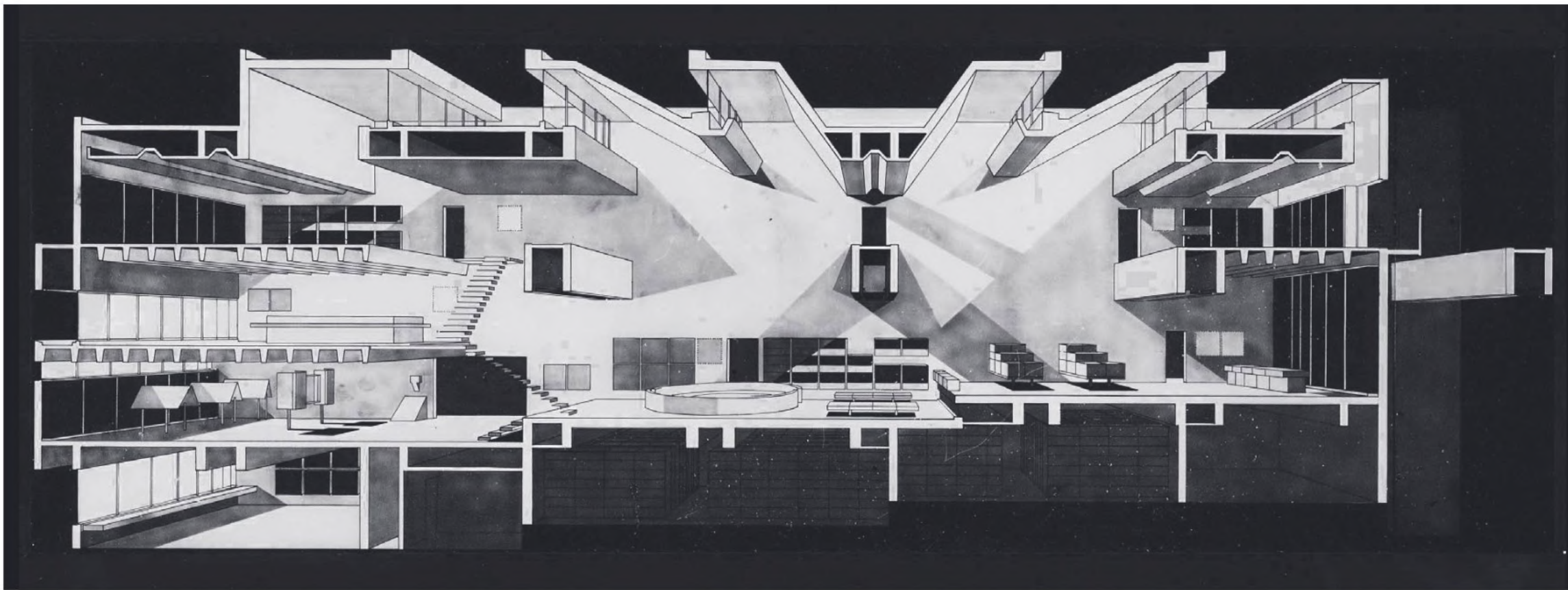
opportunity to reevaluate those projects that were my departure point in thinking about the city and its architecture. On top of all that, the book *Metabolism*,<sup>2</sup> which was published in 1997, treats the 1960s as a historical subject.

Metabolism was launched in 1960. The book is subtitled *The 1960s – Japan's Architectural Avant-Garde*, but while summarizing the late-1950s formation of the group, it also describes in detail the 1960s work of the group's effective leader, writer Noboru Kawazoe, and four of its members, architects Kiyonori Kikutake, Kishō Kurokawa, Masato Ōtaka, and Fumihiko Maki. It also makes partial references to four architects on the periphery of the movement: Kenzō Tange, Takashi Asada, Sachio Ōtani, and myself. All those architects collaborated with Tange's university laboratory in the 1950s. Then, sometime around 1960, they dispersed and began to work separately. Kurokawa and Maki had both been enrolled in Tange's university laboratory, so it could be said that this was a period in which his laboratory temporarily disintegrated, with one part forming the Metabolism group and the rest starting their own activities. Except for Tange, who was in his mid-40s, none of them were well established. For example, the book *Review: Modern Architecture in Japan*<sup>3</sup> contains a selection of 24 Japanese architectural structures from the 1950s and 1960s, with commentary appended to each one, in an attempt to elucidate Japanese architectural modernism during those 20 years. However, work by the Metabolists and related architects are not mentioned. This may be because they were not acknowledged as being part of the establishment, or perhaps due to a discrepancy in viewpoint between the architectural avant-garde and architectural modernism. The former leans toward a discourse of the unbuilt, while the latter chooses to focus on realized buildings. In any case, their respective viewpoints do not overlap at all, but the editorial intent of both books is to cover the same period of Japanese history, the 1950s and 1960s, and it is an undeniable fact that Metabolism was launched exactly in the middle of that period. Until now, the discourse of contemporary architecture in Japan has generally focused on built structures. In other words, there are discussions of architectural modernism, but the unbuilt architectural avant-garde is overlooked. Another possible reason is that there has so far been no comprehensive research on Metabolism. To the extent that it compensates for this lack, the publication of *Metabolism: The 1960s – Japan's Architectural Avant-Garde* is greatly appreciated.

In documenting modern and contemporary architecture in Japan, I believe that attention should be paid to discourse as well as to buildings, and that only by looking at both can we obtain a full picture of what has occurred. We have begun to see quite detailed documentation of both the discourse and built architecture starting with the introduction of modernism, in the 1930s and 1940s, and the subsequent process of Japanization. Before WWII, modernism itself was the avant-garde, but postwar modernism underwent a process of Japanization, so “Modern Architecture in Japan” was perhaps no longer seen as avant-garde. Then, a Japanese architectural avant-garde appeared: the radically new discourse of Metabolism. That is the outline of the situation, though perhaps it was actually more contorted. If one were to ask the Metabolists Ōtaka and Maki whether or not they were trying to be avant-garde, and whether or not their work should be considered avant-garde, they would probably answer no. And if you asked them whether they were modernists, they would probably be at a loss for an answer. In Japan, the avant-garde and modernism became established as separate categories.

An avant-garde begins by making a manifesto. The Bunriha architectural movement (Japanese Secession, active 1920–28) began with a manifesto. The architectural movements that followed all first proclaimed a manifesto. A movement is a group activity, and comprises like-minded people with similar aspirations. A manifesto is an affirmation of those aspirations. Without one, a movement will not be able to advance. At the same time, the movement itself must provide both an ideology and a method. The ideology must be clarified, and a broader discourse, even if it is not a political discourse, must be constructed. Metabolism also had a manifesto. In this respect, it followed the tradition of the avant-garde. Since Metabolism, there have been no manifestos in Japanese architecture. In other words, Metabolism was the last avant-garde movement.

Modern architecture, in the broadest sense, is considered to have begun in Europe in the middle of the 18th century, when the successive iterations of classicism ceased. In order to reactivate the development of architecture in the 19th century, new projects were composed by reusing historical styles. This was predicated on a historical view of stylistic change. Something was needed to lead these changes, and artists saw themselves as taking on that role. The same was true in politics, and so an avant-garde emerged simultaneously in politics and art. The architectural movements of the 20th century



Section perspective of Oita Prefectural Library, 1966. © Estate of Arata Isozaki.

inherited this modernist structure. The modern architectural movement was led by the avant-garde. The development of modern architecture in Japan during the quarter century following the Bunriha can be explained by this schema. Positioned at the end of that lineage, Metabolism was avant-garde in its form as a movement, but why did it not continue? Why did it stop after a single manifesto?

Though their words and deeds were not always in agreement, looking at how the members established themselves by developing discourses and styles that seem to be an about-face – with the exception of Kikutake, who said, “I will continue to bear the cross of Metabolism upon my back” – one wonders what the Metabolist manifesto was all about. If, after all, it has shifted into a position that is not at all incongruous with Japanese architectural modernism, at what point in the 1960s did a tectonic shift occur that caused the avant-garde to become so debilitated? To ask such questions is the same as asking for a historical viewpoint that encompasses the entirety of 1960s Japan, but in the book *Metabolism*, most of the energy has gone into exhuming documents, which do not answer my questions.

I would like to elucidate, incidentally, my own interpretation of modernism. So-called International Style architecture is a tendency that is considered to have been established in the mid-20th century, with the Museum of Modern Art in New York as its starting point. In “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,” held in 1932, European architectural avant-garde movements and their diverse manifestos were squeezed into the framework of a 19th-century understanding of styles, and the ideologies of their manifestos were diluted, laundered, and reduced to a single style directly linked to industrialization. This style began to be

called modernism, but it was a formalism that could have any kind of ideological underpinning. Its origins lay in the avant-garde, but in removing the sting of ideology, it could permeate the entire world, transcending differences in political systems, climates, and traditions. Moreover, under the name of regionalism, it could syncretically adopt the peculiarities of each place. In Japan, it was easily adapted to traditional styles. It is not strange to call this “Japanese architectural modernism.” This worldwide propagation of modernism displays the same characteristics as Hellenism in late antiquity. Hellenism, which spread throughout the entire Mediterranean and then further east, has influenced Mediterranean civilization up to the present day, but the basic form of its architecture is classical. Through meticulous manipulation and refinement, it also achieved a syncretism with Asian artifacts, and manifested at various levels of civilization as merely an amusement. Modernism, too, was spread throughout the world with vague definitions and arbitrary appropriateness. This explosive expansion was not unrelated to the political and economic domination of the world by the United States since the mid-20th century. The modern architectural movement was first promoted, both ideologically and methodologically, by prewar CIAM, a Europe-centered movement active from the 1930s to the 1940s. In the 1950s, CIAM was revolutionized and, in the 1960s, ultimately ended by Team X, a sect that emerged from within it. If we go so far as to say that modern architecture, through the organization of a collective movement called CIAM, maintained its outward appearance as an avant-garde, when Team X emerged within CIAM, rebellion and criticism recommenced as an inherent characteristic of the avant-garde. Team X aimed its attacks at the architectural modernism that was already spreading around the world. When the core members of CIAM began to reach retirement age, it self-destructed. Team X had been expected to nurture the next generation, but as the targets of its criticism disappeared, it lost its reason for being. I should make it clear that Team X had become international by the time of the launch of Metabolism at the World Design Conference, held in Tokyo in 1960, which was attended by many Team X members. The Metabolism manifesto was addressed implicitly to them. The Metabolists were seeking recognition as the Tokyo branch of Team X.

The motivation for launching Metabolism as an architectural movement was to participate in an international trend, which adumbrated the limits of that movement. Team X soon ceased to exist. Its standard bearers would go on to become

established as modernist architects in countries around the world. They devoted themselves to practical, built architecture. The Metabolist architects belonged to a younger generation, but they were able to catch the wave of Japan's economic growth, and so encountered a miraculous era of national projects, such as the Olympics in 1964 and the Expo in 1970, and were able to establish themselves even more speedily than most members of Team X. There was an instantaneous transition from unbuilt to built. So, while actually constructing projects that had been conceived as "unbuilt," they had no spare time in which to recalibrate their methods. The book *Metabolism* diligently traces the work of the four architects in the group – Kikutake, Kurokawa, Ōtaka, and Maki – and their astonishingly prolific buildings in the 1960s, all done while they were in their 30s. Consequently, their work flowed into Expo '70. If, rather than the name of a group, we consider Metabolism to be a general term for modernist/avant-garde work in 1960s Japan, it is possible to say that Expo '70 was its culmination. To a greater or lesser extent, Metabolism, as launched in 1960, continued to maintain the original utopian ambitions of modern architecture as well as the avant-garde intention to lead the way forward. Accordingly, their proposals were not limited to the realm of fantasy but were always intended to be realized. In summary, it could be said that those 10 years were a period during which the 1960 manifesto was validated through concrete works. By reconfiguring the manifesto into a methodology directly linked to technology and technocrats, they were able to produce the spectacular venue of Expo '70. Really, there was no distinction between built and unbuilt. Proposals that could not be materialized were sterile, so it was important that these methods could be effectively applied to producing novel designs that could be realized. Above all else, the methodology of Metabolism was made implementable. The culmination of this process was visible at Expo '70.

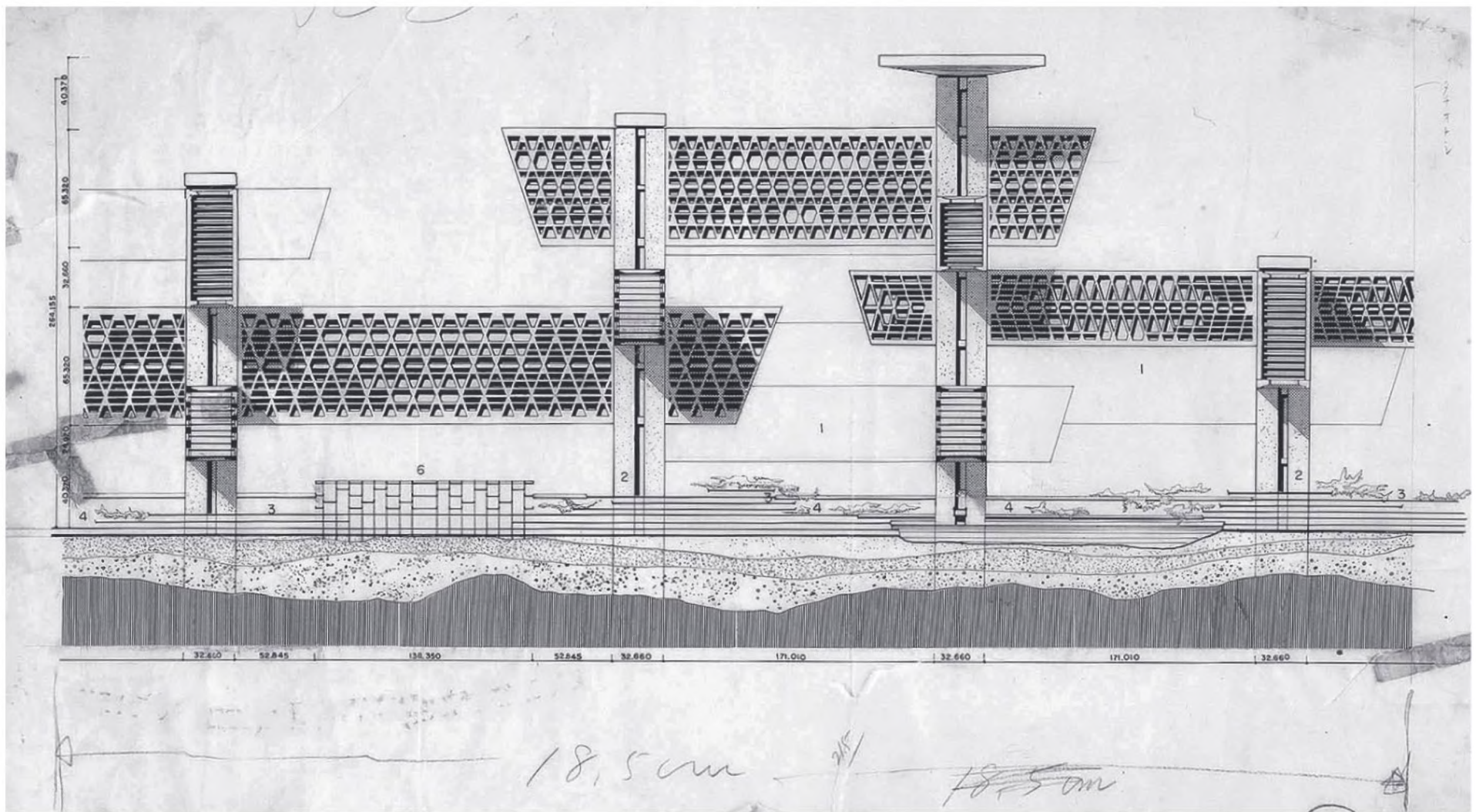
Architects once drew visionary projects, now described as "unbuilt," as intentionally impossible to realize. No matter how ripe and ready they may have been, they were fated never to appear concretely in the world. That is precisely why they are so important and admired. In the case of the Metabolism group, it is safe to say that there were no such intentionally impossible concepts, or what I would call imaginary models. During the preparatory stages of the exhibition "Urban Planning and Urban Life: This Will Be Your City" (1962), to which I was invited to contribute from the periphery, I brought along a montage called *Incubation*

4. Shuzō Takiguchi, ed., "Gendai no Image" [Contemporary Images], *Bijutsu Techō*, extra edition, vol. 14, no. 203 (April 1962).
5. Arata Isozaki, *Kenchiku no Kaitai* [The Demolition of Architecture] (Tokyo: Bijutsu Press, 1975).

*Process*, which depicted the mingling of an imaginary future city with real ancient ruins. I had first created it for Shuzō Takiguchi, guest editor of a feature called "Contemporary Images" in the art magazine *Bijutsu Techō*,<sup>4</sup> but Noboru Kawazoe, who was acting as the exhibition director, refused to allow it to be shown. His reasoning was that the exhibition would be misinterpreted as frivolous if it included a horrifying vision of the future. I was told to go away and erase the ruins and redraw it. Since depicting the ruins was my primary concept, I could not redraw it. I just said, "Thank you for your kind offer, but I will let you off the hook," and gathered up my remaining drawings and left. Thanks to the intervention of Kikutake, the problem was resolved and I was given a small space in the gallery. Last year, after an interval of 35 years, I was invited to restage the audience-participation performance of *Incubation Process / Joint Core System* at Art Tower Mito.

This is a small episode that no one remembers now, but it also revealed the organizational policies of Metabolism as a group. First, by depicting a rose-tinted future city (or society), there was an internal compulsion to take a collective step toward the utopian vision adhered to by modernism. Anyone who violated this would be expelled. There were conflicts and mutual expulsions within the Surrealist group over politicization, and the same kinds of regulations were imposed by the organization of the Communist Party, with the Comintern at its head, a structure that seems unavoidable when a group is founded. I am not especially criticizing the image of such organizations. These were common around 1960. I am simply pointing out that the Metabolism group was a faithful imitation of the structure of modern avant-garde movements. Perhaps this is the reason that, by the mid-1960s, maintaining the group became meaningless, and it became engulfed by the vaster wave of the 1968 Cultural Revolution. Thereupon, the sequence of escape, reversal, and establishment naturally followed.

What I have described as a conflict between the basic stances of the unbuilt and the built is not unlike today's discrepancies in views on the virtual and the actual. Anyway, the discourses of modernism were all assembled with a view toward the real. In this case, real is synonymous with actual, but it also implies realization as substance. Naturally, within Metabolism, things that could be implemented and things applicable to reality were valued, while things that remained merely in the realm of fantasy and that appeared unrealistic were excluded. It would have been natural for them to reject



Arata Isozaki, Drawing for Kenzo Tange's A Plan for Tokyo, 1960.  
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my work, which mixed ruins with the future. This can be explained from an unexpectedly straightforward standpoint. That is to say, architectural or urban proposals are technological systems, and proposals are technological novelties that can be demonstrated and evaluated only when they are concretely implemented. So, to write that “the city of the future is a ruin” was only permissible in the context of art. I knew full well that it would be ignored and rejected in the context of the Japanese architectural discourse of that time. I did not become a member of the Metabolist group because I was thinking about architecture and the city in the context of art. Not only did I see no need or necessity to become a member, I also expected that, even if I did, I would probably end up being expelled from the group. Having said that, I never had any intention of forming an opposing group or movement. I thought that we might at least be able to conduct joint research. This would not be the work of an architect, so it was not uncomfortable for me. I decided to procrastinate and just be left out. And while being utterly compliant with the situation, I thought that I would break through the bottom. I would look for another path starting from wherever I happened to fall. That would be my starting point. In this manner, I analyzed the aims of the Metabolist group and tried to enter realms of thought that they were unable to encompass. At the end of the 1960s, I began writing *Kenchiku no Kaitai* (The Demolition of Architecture),<sup>5</sup> a survey of the work begun simultaneously by my generation of architects, and five years later, it finally

took the form of a book. I consider my work and thinking to have been constructed and framed through these affiliations. If we were to compare the characteristics of the Metabolists and the architects in *The Demolition of Architecture*, Metabolism is a continuation and development of the architectural avant-garde that produced modern architecture, while the group introduced in my book have in common their attempts to reject and obstruct the ongoing development of the architectural avant-garde. What can be seen here is not the dialectical thinking that had been reiterated up until the 1950s, but radicalism. It was a plunge toward the destruction of fundamentals. That is why, in 1968, a phenomenon of demolition at all levels was visible. I myself was “demolished” at that point in time. After being swept up in the wave of the international Cultural Revolution of 1968, I was forced into a double bind that left me immobile, and I reached a point of physical and mental collapse. Such a course had already been chosen when I broke through the bottom of the methods and discourses constructed by the Metabolists. I once wrote that this was because I found it dubious that the technological theories of Metabolism were all constructed according to a preestablished harmony. To state that in another way, the concepts proposed by the Metabolist group were highly coherent, but I believe that indeterminacy and undecidability should be at the root of discourse. Metabolism was too well-coordinated. Even the future, which is necessarily unknown, was spoken of with seeming clairvoyance. The city in which I lived, Tokyo, seemed to have nothing to do with such an aesthetic sensibility. If a proposal were to be made for its reconfiguring, it seemed only natural that this would result in a logic for coordinating the uncoordinated, for ordering the disordered. However, the movements of the real city are discontinuous, chaotic, contingent, subject to the intervention of unknown people, and impossible to predict. The real city has a coarse texture, and this is what must be logically formulated and incorporated into design proposals. While following and analyzing the discourse of Metabolism, I began to think that we should not regenerate a preestablished harmony, but should unflinchingly face the irreversible process of change itself. So I came up with the idea of “process planning.” From 1961 to 1962, I tailored this concept into my projects, both urban and architectural.

Why the belated start? I was simply an audience member for the entirety of 1960. I completely bypassed the World Design Conference in Tokyo, being occupied with

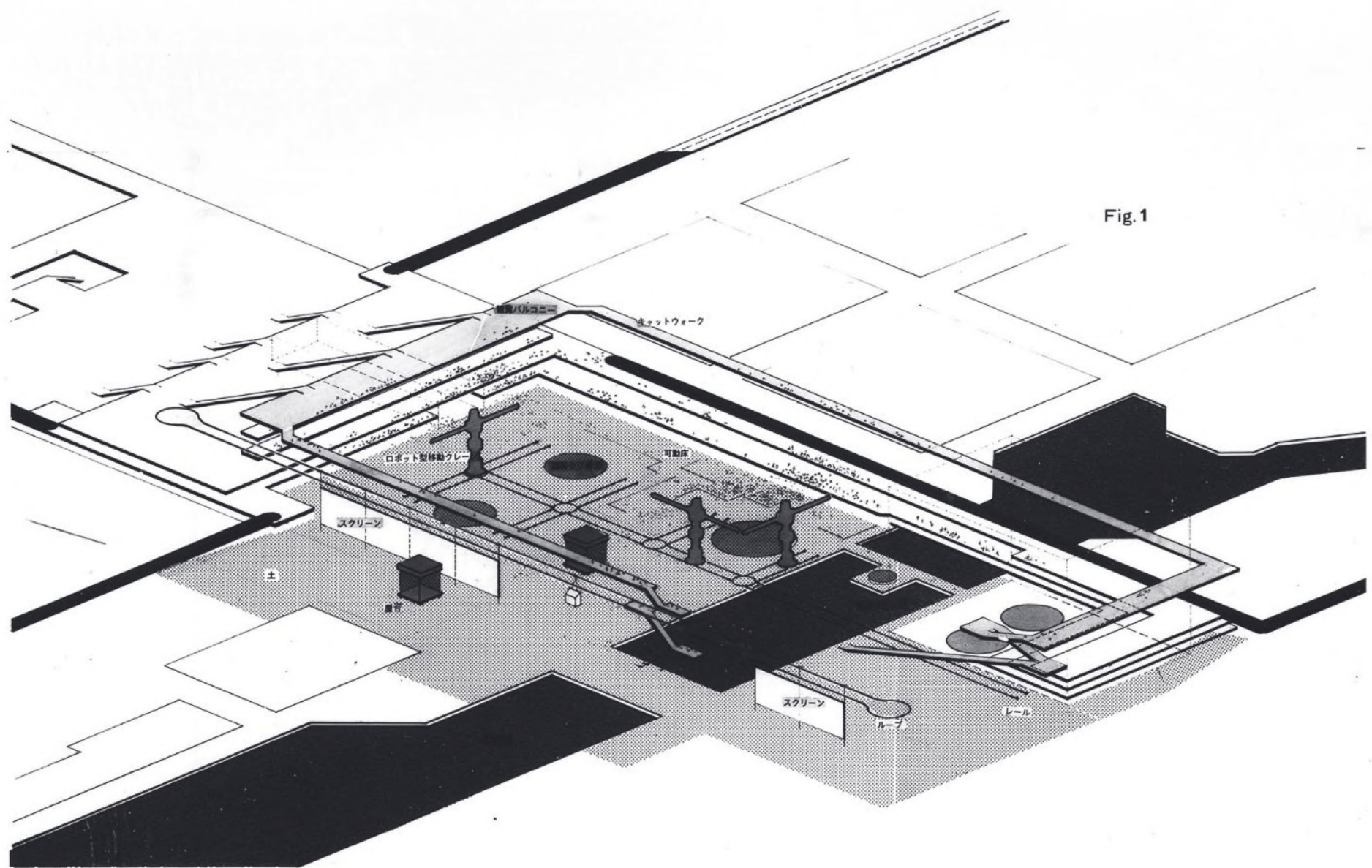


Fig.1

Early isometric drawing for Festival Plaza at Expo '70, Osaka, 1967. Courtesy Arata Isozaki & Associates.

demonstrations against the Japan-US Security Treaty and late-night parties with the Neo-Dadaism organizers, while preparing materials for the media presentation of "A Plan for Tokyo, 1960," as well as supervising construction of the Oita Medical Hall (1960), so I had no leeway to collect and collate all of my personal projects. As a result of this overloaded schedule, I was hospitalized with what was suspected to be Ménière's disease and spent the autumn of 1961 recovering. It was only then that I came up with the idea of process planning. With regard to cities and architecture, *Incubation Process / Joint Core System* and the first scheme for the Oita Prefectural Library were both produced in 1962. They were, of course, intended as criticisms of Metabolism. The reason they were criticisms is that Metabolism was a presence looming in front of me with the level of intensity that even now constitutes the mainstream of the Japanese architectural world. It might be said that my thinking about process would not have been possible without Metabolism.

At the time, I was confronted with two problems to solve: uncertainty and undecidability. Both of them have the prefix *un-*, which could be said to be their common denominator, but they are elusive terms that have a kind of instability that cannot be dealt with by the dominant approaches of material dialecticism and scientific syllogism. Their concrete images are exemplified by Jackson Pollock's action paintings and John Cage's music of chance. From the mid-1950s until the early 1960s, the Japanese artistic and musical worlds were impacted

by the shockwaves of *Art Informel* and “Chance Operations.” Artists of my generation were hit hard by these shockwaves, which primed them to launch their own trajectories. At the end of the day, Metabolism was the architectural version, and Japanese Nouvelle Vague was the cinematic version, but while architecture and cinema succeeded in changing their subject matter, as far as I could see, their methods still retained the debris of the preceding period. By comparison, action painting and chance operations, as can be inferred from their names, dictated the methods themselves. Their sole objective was to change the way pictures are painted, the way music is composed, and so on. Originally, the avant-garde of art was the revolutionizing of its methods. The elimination of the subject led to formalism, which was the enemy of Socialist Realism in postrevolutionary Russia, but the rise of American art to world prominence from the 1960s onward was not unrelated to formalism becoming the standard for aesthetic judgment.

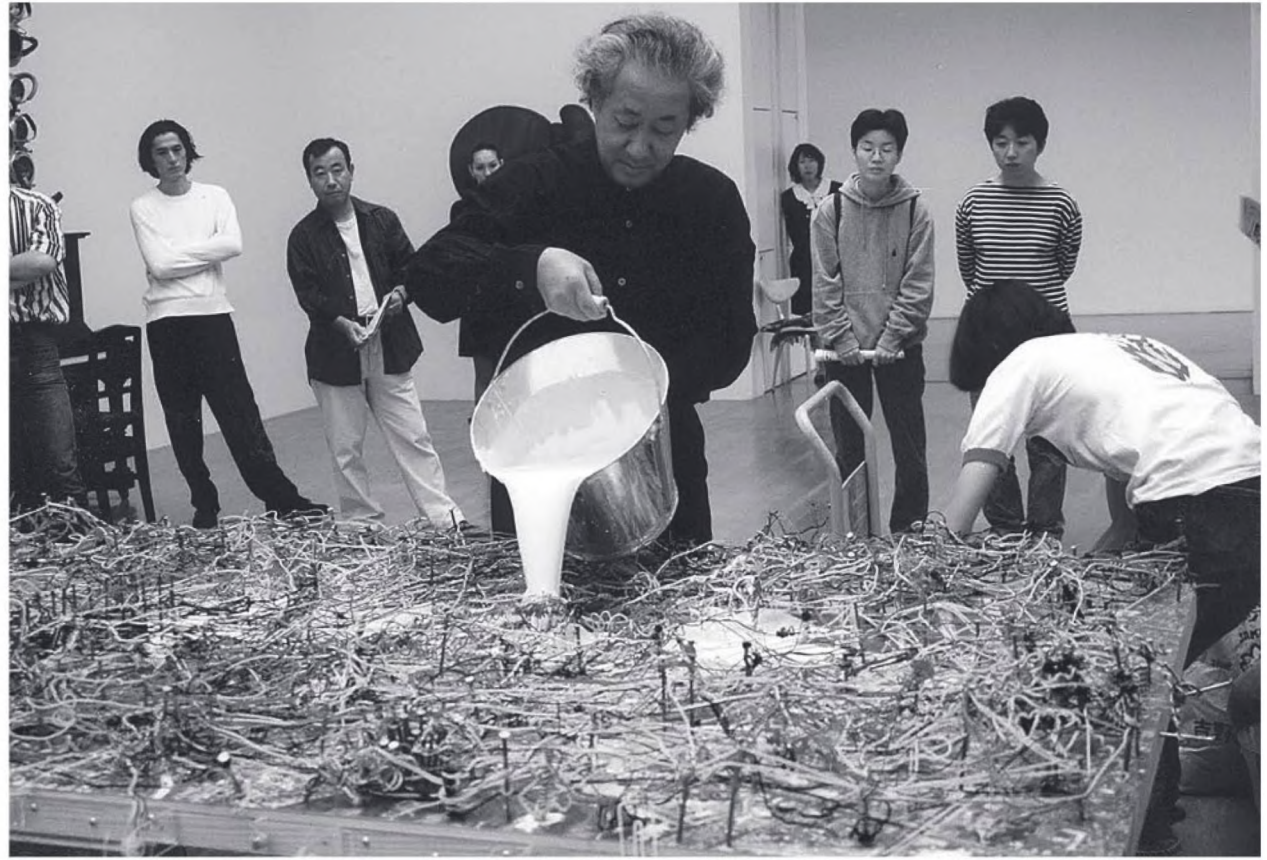
My attempts to place indeterminacy and undecidability at the core of my projects were single-mindedly based on images of the work of Pollock and Cage, and could be said to be an expression of a kind of mood of chaos that I was absorbing from my urban reality, especially Tokyo, which was at the beginning of an uncanny upheaval. For the exhibition “Urban Planning and Urban Life: This Will Be Your City,”<sup>6</sup> my *Incubation Process / Joint Core System* artwork took the city as a canvas, on top of which, through the intervention of an indeterminate number of other people, action painting was used to simulate the generation of an emergent city. Whereas Pollock relied on the activity of his own unconscious, here I planned for the spontaneous participation of spectators.

*Incubation Process* was also a type of performance that, during that period, was called a “happening.” At its conclusion, I dripped liquid plaster so as to cover the entire surface of the canvas. Unsurprisingly, the final result was not unlike a Pollock-style action painting. In my first essay on urban architecture, “The Rebirth of Symbols”<sup>7</sup> (1961), which I wrote at the time of the completion and publication of the Oita Medical Hall (1960), I invoked Pollock in order to reject Mondrian, but the artwork I produced was far too Pollock-like. Accordingly, I discarded it as a failure, retaining only a few photographs as a record. That was also because I did not have the space to store it. No, as I had no intention of becoming an artist, the result was just too artistic. There was no reason to preserve it. However, in the 1990s, the 1960s have become retro nostalgia, and people are asking me for those photographs.

6. “Toshi Keikaku to Toshi Seikatsu: Anata no Toshi wa kō Naru” [Urban Planning and Urban Life: This Will Be Your City], Seibu Department Store, Tokyo (October 12–17, 1962).

7. Arata Isozaki, “Symbol no Saisei: Ōitaken Ishi Kaikan no Sekkei ni atatte” [The Rebirth of Symbols: On the Design of Oita Medical Hall], *Kindai Kenchiku* [Modern Architecture], vol. 15, no. 2 (February 1961).

Arata Isozaki, *Incubation Process / Joint Core System*, Art Tower Mito, 1997. Courtesy Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito. Photo: Tsuyoshi Saito.



Because “Metabolism” has become a subject for historical documentation, but I did not join the Metabolist group and instead created a project that was somehow an act of withdrawal, this could only lead to my reexamination of the vanished work that was my departure point.

Last spring, I organized a kind of workshop at the ICC Gallery to launch a website for my “Mirage City” project (1994–). During the preparatory stages, I again recalled *Incubation Process / Joint Core System*, about which there was very little documentation. The whole story is included in the catalog for the 1997 exhibition “Mirage City: Another Utopia.”<sup>8</sup> After 35 years, the *Incubation Process* performance was reenacted at Art Tower Mito. During the intervening period, this performance of an urban model had become somewhat explicable. The original performance was merely a manifestation of the contingency of urban scenery, achieved through audience participation, but, as stated in the exhibition catalog, it also “suggested the limitations of Metabolism, which ultimately could only accommodate architecture and the city under an organic model with a single creative agent. Architectural unity and the plans of an individual break down spontaneously as innumerable ‘others’ come and go.”<sup>9</sup> Christopher Alexander’s “The City is Not a Tree” (1965) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s “Rhizome” (1976) enabled an explanation of the principles of forms produced by contingent and irreversible processes. Questions regarding the creative protagonist and other people implicitly arise in such a format. This is reinforced by the various complex geometries that have attracted widespread interest in the 1990s. In this sense, *Incubation Process / Joint Core System* may be recalled as a seminal project.

8. Arata Isozaki, *Mirage City: Another Utopia* (Tokyo: NTT Publishing, 1997).

9. Noi Sawaragi, “The Heat of Passion and Thermal Dynamics,” *Japanese Summer 1960–64*, exhibition catalogue (Ibaraki: Art Tower Mito, 1997). The original publication is bilingual.

10. Literally “word spirit,” a notion from Japanese mythology that ascribes magical powers to words, which can thereby affect objects.

In the 1950s, Mitsuo Takeya’s three-stage theory of natural perception attracted much attention. Simultaneously a theory of technology and a theory of natural dialectical epistemology, it explains how perception deepens dialectically from the phenomenological stage to the substantive stage to the essential stage, as well as from surface to depth, and how this could also be applied to the development of technology. As an epistemology of design, Kikutake’s three-stage theory of “ka, kata, katachi” corresponds to Takeya’s theory, which could also be applied to technological theories of architecture, the methodology of Metabolism being one example. I remember being almost overwhelmed when I first encountered Takeya’s theory. I found his three-step theory compelling, but I was somewhat uncomfortable with the final point. He instantaneously transformed this three-stage theory into an archaic Japanese word – *kotodama* – to which he assigned an epistemological concept.<sup>10</sup> The word *kotodama* has far more communicative power than Western philosophical concepts. It has the power of flight. If we convert this three-stage theory to image/type/shape, it may also be possible to include Louis Kahn’s theory of form/shape. Kahn’s premises never transcend the framework of Neoplatonist idealism. In comparison, Takeya’s theory of technology is pure dialectical materialism. Kikutake’s three-stage design theory, with the addition of *kotodama*, is a linguistic syllogism. He thereby created an exquisite composition .

My discomfort with the final point of Takeya’s three-stage epistemology was probably because I felt that it was close to Stalinist thinking, which further formalized Engels’s *Dialectics of Nature*. At that time, rather than the theories of those self-proclaimed Marxists, I was more sympathetic to the thought of Mao Zedong, who similarly discussed Marx but developed those ideas in a more disjointed way. While speaking dialectically, Mao was a believer in perpetual revolution, creating endless contradictions. His dialectic was full of holes and never completed, yet it was implemented violently. I felt that this was more realistic, and that the irreversibility and contingency of uncertainty could only be grasped in that way. When you get right down to it, in fact, I think that my discomfort was with dialectical thinking itself. At least, I myself do not engage in dialectical thinking. Just as Mao created enormous flows and vortices, we too should believe only in flows and vortices – that is, in processes.

John Cage draws chance operations from the *I Ching*. He left no room for the inclusion of formalized dialectics.

So Takeya's three-stage theory is not a dialectical epistemology, but a simple step-by-step methodology. My "Four-stage Theory of Urban Design" (1963) was assembled in this manner, at the level of single-mindedly trying to escaping dialectics.

*Incubation Process / Joint Core System* visualized that escape through the intervention of other people. In this manner of thinking, there can be no overall preestablished harmony. Cage said, "Keep on with exactly what you are doing." This means giving up on imagining the impending future. So, "The city of the future is a ruin." That's all there is.

The idea of process planning was not conceived during the design process of the Oita Prefectural Library. It had already arisen during the process of conceiving my earlier urban designs. I became clearly aware of it while analyzing the architectural typology of the library, and decided to apply it to architectural design. I resolved this in the spring of 1963, when the first proposal for the Oita Prefectural Library, which had been put together in the autumn of the previous year, was published in a magazine. When the detailed design had been completed and construction was about to begin, I wrote an essay titled "Discovering the Medium" (1965). At that time, while adapting my essay "Process Planning Theory" (1963) into a methodology, I appended the act of "cutting." After completing the detailed design, I became convinced that "cutting" was the decisive act and the sole method for undertaking the design in my own way.

A "cut" design exposes the severed end, and thus evokes an accidental suspension or destruction, so later I could explain that this is why it looked like a ruin. It gave me a renewed awareness of the ways I had depicted such cut surfaces as destroyed surfaces when first creating the montage that combined a future city with ruins. The "cutting" is a suspension. It is the freezing of an image that is fluctuating in one's imagination. It may be thought of in relation to death. It is also a violent intervention. As much as possible, it should look like a sudden accident. It is undoubtedly an ominous image.

My "Process Planning Theory" had an almost painful birth, originating in one very mundane opportunity among all those I was encountering. The design had to proceed with the programmatic requirements not yet determined, while the regulations were being hypothetically classified and their spatial characteristics analyzed, all of this while I was waiting for decisions about the still unknown budget and scale of the project. In my imagination, the building was expanding and contracting like a living organism. At certain moments, it had

to be vigorously cut. I thought of these cuts as design decisions. Accordingly, the entire process of expansion and contraction is exposed on the cut surfaces. Now, more than 35 years later, I think it is possible to incorporate this condition into the problem of undecidability. In Jacques Derrida's 1960s writings, which I finally encountered in the late 1970s, this undecidability is placed at the center. At the time, I had no conception of whether or not this "cutting" technique could be incorporated into such a framework. I was doing nothing more than single-mindedly looking for a design method. My awareness of problems inherent to that period, at the end of the 1980s, came through Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman, the distant catalysts for linking Derrida's thinking to "architecture." This undecidability is also related to the larger framework at the time the ANY conferences were started.

The first proposal for the Oita Prefectural Library, created in 1962, used precast concrete for a structure of room units that incorporated mechanical services. Given that it can be used to aggregate rather than unify architecture, precast concrete precisely fit the concepts of Metabolism, which anticipated systematic replacement, and was in due course developed into capsules as entire dwelling units. This is seen as the most characteristic achievement of 1960s Metabolism. It is a field of design in which Kurokawa was almost unrivalled during his Metabolist period. The capsule can be called an icon of the 1960s. The design solution in my first proposal for the Oita Prefectural Library merely followed the ideas of Metabolism. After a short hiatus, I redesigned it. This was partly due to my experiences in the interior spaces of Western classical architecture, but also because I understood that a precast concrete system was inappropriate to the actual situation and would only increase the cost. At the same time, I had a hunch that a new proposal with a construction method using long-span, site-cast concrete might give rise to spaces with controlled shafts of light, something that had rarely been attempted in Japan before. To put it grandiosely, by abandoning the precast concrete construction method, rather than making a direct link to industrialization, which is at the heart of Metabolist design methods, I would be able to bring "architecture" closer to attaining characteristics of Western classical architecture that I had experienced spatially. One might say that I chose to express space rather than to express technology. I thought I should retreat from technology. I would part company with the so-called avant-garde, which was merely pursuing novel proposals based on industrial

principles. I decided that I must instead turn to “space,” which is the essence of “architecture.” And this conversion was predicated on the concept of “cutting.” That was the act of design.

If I try to arrange my thoughts about 1962 in this manner, I clearly had an encounter with Metabolism. But I should assert that it was precisely this contact that caused my conversion. I can classify my projects for both architecture and the city as attempts to construct something spatial by assembling highly conceptual problems of contingency and indeterminacy, as opposed to the preestablished harmony and technological doctrines of Metabolism. My concern over the most negligible sense of discomfort pushed me in a different direction. It was just a momentary choice. But in retrospect, it seems like fate.

The interval of 30 years turns all this into retro nostalgia. Now I can see my choice clearly, but in the middle of it, I couldn't even see the immediate future. The publication of *Metabolism* has enabled me to write down these impressions. If it is seen as a book that grapples with history, I feel as if my view of the boundary between history and retro nostalgia is becoming blurred.