Arata Isozaki

FOUR DECADES OF ARCHITECTURE

THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES

UNIVERSE
First published in the United States of America in 1998
by UNIVERSE PUBLISHING
A Division of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010

Revised edition of Arata Isozaki: Architecture 1960-1990,
first published in the United States of America in 1991
by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

Copyright © 1998 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 250 Grand Avenue,
Los Angeles, CA 90012, and Arata Isozaki

"Irony and Its Fulfillment" copyright © 1998 by David B. Stewart

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Isozaki, Arata.
Arata Isozaki: four decades of architecture / preface by Richard Koshukei ; essay by David B. Stewart.—Rev. ed.
p. cm.
1. Isozaki, Arata—Exhibitions. 2. Stewart, David B., II. Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, Calif.). III. Title.
NA555.79634 1998
720'.94—dc21
98-34095

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior consent of the publishers.

98 99 10 11 12 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Design by Charles Routhier and Sarah Cephart

Project descriptions on pages 26, 38, 44, 50, 53, 57, 58, 61, 62, 64, 67, 68, 74, 86, 98, 104, 110, 116, 124, 130, 133, 140, 146, 153, and 156 translated by John Lamb

Printed in Italy

Contents
Preface by Richard Koshukei 7
"Irony and Its Fulfillment" by David B. Stewart 12

City in the Air 26

 toolbox 30

Festival Plaza, Expo 70, Osaka 84

Melbourne 90 90

The Museum of Modern Art, Guimia 74

Osaka Municipal Museum of Art and Annex 86

Edison Country Clubhouse 92

Osaka City Central Library 98

Osaka Town Hall 104

Electric Labyrinth (Ruins Drawing) 110

Photography Credits 218
The sky over the archipelago was a cloudless blue on August 15, 1945, the day Japan surrendered. At that time I was a boy in my midteens and although I sensed that an era was ending, I had no idea what was beginning. All I knew was that the roaring had stopped and, for an instant, there was unmitigated calm.

Now, as I look at a photograph of a Vietnamese Buddhist priest committing self-immolation, I recall the flames of the countless foreign-made automobiles that had been overturned and set alight in front of Tokyo's Imperial Palace in 1932 on what is now called Bloody May Day. Similar flames had set ablaze the skies over Japanese cities after 829s had scattered their incendiary bombs—known as Molotov bread baskets. These had little restraining influence on me, as, in spite of the war, I continued to play in childish innocence.

Throughout my youth, until I began to study architecture, I was constantly confronted with the destruction and elimination of the physical objects that surrounded me. Japanese cities went up in flames. Forms that had been there an instant earlier vanished in the next.

The ruins that formed my childhood environment were produced by acts of sudden destruction, unlike those of Greece and Egypt, which had long been in a ruinous state. Wandering among them instilled in me an awareness of the phenomenon of obliteration, rather than a sense of the transience of things.

On the day in 1960 when the Japanese-American Security Treaty was ratified, I was a member of a protest demonstration in front of the Prime Minister's official residence. An abandoned armored car had been parked sideways across a narrow sloping street beside the residence, and a group that seemed to be right-wing had occupied it. They probably thought this side street, which was blocked, would be an excellent place to trap and thrash any of the protesting students and citizens milling around the Diet building. I was part of a barricade intended to isolate the armored car. As it grew late and we all began to feel tired, both groups mangled and joked with each other until it was impossible to tell friend from foe.
For about a week I had patrolled the Diet building and by the time the ratification took place, late at night, I was very weary. In previous demonstrations, I had been obsessed with the fantasy of seeing the Diet building, which looks like a preposterously large gravestone, set alight like the buildings that I had seen during the war. Although a female student who tried to crash into the Diet was killed, there was no fire. The tension in our group began to crumble that night. I happened to catch a glimpse of the eyes of a man, who all night, virtually without moving, had stood in a position of leadership on top of the armored car, waiting for a signal. He and his group must have experienced a despair more dreadful than ours.

After the struggle over the treaty was finished, the two things that remained in my memory in connection with it were the Diet building, which did not go up in flames after all, and the eyes of the man who, then, at any rate, was my enemy.

At about this time a group of my artist friends began behaving in eccentric ways on busy street corners. Calling themselves the Neo-Dadaist Organizers, they rashly opposed everything connected with existing institutions, organizations, and systems. I sympathized with their belief that only destructive behavior can be called art and sometimes participated in their activities. At one point, Shusaku Arakawa, a member of the group, and I proposed planning a house that would be impossible to live in—of course the plan was never realized.

In 1960, the Metabolist Group was formed and began designing cities of the future. The members of the group were friends, all about my age. Whereas they were all independent architects attempting to establish their own methodologies, I was still employed in the offices of Kenzo Tange and URTEC, where I was in charge of the "Tokyo Plan," a scheme for a futuristic city stretching its backbone over the waters of Tokyo Bay. The spare time I had after work was spent in political demonstrations and the antiproductive debauchery of artists' groups, leaving me very little freedom for planning on my own.

The thinking behind Japanese architecture in the 1950s had been to attempt to unify traditional Japanese wooden structures with Modernist architectural space, in which interior and exterior could interpenetrate. It could be termed a Japanese version of the New Empiricism and New Brutalism popular in Europe at the time. The Metabolists proposed bold technical innovations and, by means of their proposals for cities of the future, attempted to break the current architectural thinking. In the 1950s Japan experienced miraculous economic growth, consequently cities were rebuilt and expanded. Metabolism's ideas and methods accurately reflected prevailing circumstances, making it the leading architectural ideology of the time.

Metabolist architecture celebrated an industrial society. These architects believed that architecture was a durable consumer item. Consequently, their use of exterior capsules, units, and panels was not necessarily a solution founded in theory but lauded the industrial society by displaying mass-produced elements and indicating the ways in which they could be replaced and altered.

I was dissatisfied with politics, art, and my own field of architecture in 1960, but unable to break through with a methodology of my own, I became frustrated and day after day spent my energy on physical participation in radical activities.

At about that time, I was given a chance to publish a project entitled "Incubation Process" in an art magazine. In this context I abandoned all the technical considerations with which, as an architect and planner, I had been compelled to deal, and concentrated solely on the materialization of a concept that was then in the process of genesis.

The result was a simple photomontage that was extremely illogical and therefore neither architecture, poetry, urban planning, philosophy, a picture, a comic, nor a diagram. This photomontage liberated me from psychological suppression. By cutting ties with the architect's methods, the rational support of which is technology, I felt that I was once again able to strive to be an architect. Forced into a corner and almost desperate, I had discovered a breakthrough.

Later, this photograph was frequently cited as a representative Metabolist work. But while I was certainly thinking in Metabolist terms in this montage, as I dealt with the flux of generation and the destruction of the city, I was never a member of the Metabolist group. Indeed, I always tried to make a clear distinction between myself and their technological orientation, their somewhat naive pragmatism which allowed them to believe that a social revolution could be achieved by means of new technology.

My next task was to define the image of the kind of architect I wanted to be. The following passage, from some of my notes written in about 1960, has a bearing on this image:

In my opinion, the minimum requirement of an architect is a concept that germinates within himself. Though it may correspond organically to reason, design, and all the phenomena of actuality and nonactuality, this concept must exist without connection with any of these things. The existence of the concept can be proven only when the concept itself can be conveyed to others. It probably becomes certain and unshakable in accordance with the nature of the medium through which it is conveyed. I want to discover the medium that will make possible its most accurate transmission. . . . In the search, architectural design is my professional means.

To discover the concept, I sought ideas for the interpretation of space, time, and matter (architecture and cities), all three solely as metaphors. My equations for them are
For about a week I had patrolled the Diet building and by the time the ratification took place, late at night, I was very weary. In previous demonstrations, I had been obsessed with the fantasy of seeing the Diet building, which looks like a preposterously large gravestone, set alight like the buildings that I had seen during the war. Although a female student who tried to crash into the Diet was killed, there was no fire. The tension in our group began to crumble that night. I happened to catch a glimpse of the eyes of a man, who all night, virtually without moving, had stood in a position of leadership on top of the armored car, waiting for a signal. He and his group must have experienced a despair more dreadful than ours.

After the struggle over the treaty was finished, the two things that remained in my memory in connection with it were the Diet building, which did not go up in flames after all, and the eyes of the man who, then, at any rate, was my enemy.

At about this time a group of my artiest friends began behaving in eccentric ways on busy street corners. Calling themselves the Neo-Dadaist Organizers, they rashly opposed everything connected with existing institutions, organizations, and systems. I sympathized with their belief that only destructive behavior can be called art and sometimes participated in their activities. At one point, Shusaku Arakawa, a member of the group, and I proposed planning a house that would be impossible to live in—of course the plan was never realized.

In 1960, the Metabolist Group was formed and began designing cities of the future. The members of the group were friends, all about my age. Whereas they were all independent architects attempting to establish their own methodologies, I was still employed in the offices of Kenzo Tange and URTEC, where I was in charge of the "Tokyo Plan," a scheme for a futuristic city stretching its backbone over the waters of Tokyo Bay. The spare time I had after work was spent engaged in political demonstrations and the antiproduction debauchery of artists' groups, leaving me very little freedom for planning on my own.

The thinking behind Japanese architecture in the 1950s had been to attempt to unify traditional Japanese wooden structures with Modernist architectural space, in which interior and exterior could interpenetrate. It could be termed a Japanese version of the New Empiricism and New Brutalism popular in Europe at the time. The Metabolists proposed bold technical innovations and, by means of their proposals for cities of the future, attempted to break the current architectural thinking. In the 1960s Japan experienced miraculous economic growth, consequently cities were rebuilt and expanded. Metabolism's ideas and methods accurately reflected prevailing circumstances, making it the leading architectural ideology of the time.

Metabolist architecture celebrated an industrial society. These architects believed that architecture was a durable consumer item. Consequently, their use of exterior capsules, units, and panels was not necessarily a solution founded in theory but lauded the industrial society by displaying mass-produced elements and indicating the ways in which they could be replaced and altered.

I was dissatisfied with politics, art, and my own field of architecture in 1960, but unable to break through with a methodology of my own, I became frustrated and day after day spent my energy on physical participation in radical activities.

At about that time, I was given a chance to publish a project entitled "Incubation Process" in an art magazine. In this context I abandoned all the technical considerations with which, as an architect and planner, I had been compelled to deal, and concentrated solely on the materialization of a concept that was then in the process of genesis.

The result was a simple photomontage that was extremely illogical and therefore neither architecture, poetry, urban planning, philosophy, a picture, a comic, nor a diagram. This photomontage liberated me from psychological suppression. By cutting ties with the architect's methods, the rational support of which is technology, I felt that I was once again able to strive to be an architect. Forced into a corner and almost desperate, I had discovered a breakthrough.

Later, this photograph was frequently cited as a representative Metabolist work. But while I was certainly thinking in Metabolist terms in this montage, as I dealt with the flux of generation and the destruction of the city, I was never a member of the Metabolist group. Indeed, I always tried to make a clear distinction between myself and their technological orientation, their somewhat naive pragmatism which allowed them to believe that a social revolution could be achieved by means of new technology.

My next task was to define the image of the kind of architect I wanted to be. The following passage, from some of my notes written in about 1960, has a bearing on this image:

In my opinion, the minimum requirement of an architect is a concept that germinates within himself. Though it may correspond organically to reason, design, and all the phenomena of actuality and nonactuality, this concept must exist without connection with any of these things. The existence of the concept can be proven only when the concept itself can be conveyed to others. It probably becomes certain and unshakable in accordance with the nature of the medium through which it is conveyed; I want to discover the medium that will make possible its most accurate transmission... In the search, architectural design is my professional means.

To discover the concept, I sought ideas for the interpretation of space, time, and matter (architecture and cities), all three solely as metaphors. My equations for them are
space = darkness; time = termination (eschatology); and matter, or architecture and cities = ruin and ashes. I have written essays on all three topics: "Space of Darkness," "Process Planning," and "Invisible City." Darkness, termination, and ruin are incapable of being given form; they are diametrically opposed to such socially recognized concepts as transparency, progress, and construction, and have an aura of the unfortunate about them. Although I considered a paradoxical stance using these concepts as an effective means of countering architecture as it existed at the time, when technology reigned supreme, no one in the Japanese architectural world took me seriously.

Oddly enough, these metaphorical images relate to my memory of that instance of total tranquility, when everything seemed to have stopped, that I experienced on the day of the Japanese surrender. The houses and buildings that we had considered mainstays of our way of life, the established belief of the national state with the Emperor at its head, and the social system that controlled even the smallest daily activities, had been destroyed and had vanished, leaving behind only the void of the blue sky overhead.

Infinite darkness lies behind the blue sky. The stopping of time is a termination like the eschatological interpretation of the end of the world. The burned-out cities that I saw before me were ruins. Perhaps subconsciously I am attempting to return to that remembered instant that changed history and to conceptualize that moment in the form of architecture.

1965 MEDIA, ILLUSION, VOID: INVISIBLE CITY

It is perfectly acceptable to consider cities as a flux of generation and destruction but, in doing so, the nature of time must be examined. Having learned the ideas of mobility and change from Team X, the Metabolist architects attempted to think of architecture and cities in terms of the Buddhist idea of transmigration. They made no general observations, instead they proposed the concrete mechanism of architectural composition: a more or less permanent framework with changeable elements plugged into it and a smooth order governing the relations between the two. As the name of the movement reveals, they took the metabolism of organic creatures as the model of the kind of change they posited. Without delving into the philosophy of time, they were more concerned with the foreseen harmony of alteration systematically taking place within the flow of the time in which transmigration takes place.

I was in agreement with most of what they said but could not see eye to eye on one cardinal point: drawing a direct analogy between organic metabolism and architectural composition. For rather than being systematic, change is dramatic and destructive, lying outside the bonds of human control. It is the result of complicated accumulations of overlapping, unforeseeable coincidences. Method and logic originate on the basis of alteration of the natural course of change.

Since change is half-destructive and half-constructive, it should be permissible architecture to create the exact appearance of ruins.

When Tokyo was rebuilt after World War II, it accommodated examples of the generation of accumulated coincidences. The cheap room I rented as a college stu was located in one of these disorderly places. The wooden building, a capricious conglomeration of repeated additions located on a gently sloping bank, was devoid of the systematic placement, lucidity, and order that are generally recognized as the characterstis traditional Japanese residential architecture. To reach my room, which was in the most part of the building, one walked up two or three steps and down a diagonal corridor, then up a flight of stairs that turned twice along the way, then down a corridor lea to the left and up still another flight of steps. The side of the bank was covered with irregular mass consisting of a small part of the original building plus a number of tions necessitated over the years by dismantling and alterations of function and rep

In later years I tried referring to it as a topological labyrinth, but actually the neeborhood was a slum. Before the war it was a rundown region for poor laborers, n was a sunless ravine and bank on which my boardinghouse was located. Small ho crowned in on each other, and no doubt the cats that wandered from roof to roof b better idea of the overall space than the human inhabitants.

My boardinghouse was not level and plumb: the books that I arranged along wall were so heavy that my room gradually tilted in that direction. From time to time landlord would prop it up. My first priority was to move, but before I did I became i ested in the entire region and its complicated spaces: the disjointed spatial connect the spontaneous happenings; the capricious appearance and disappearance of sp the conjunctions of multifarious and diverse functions; the many layered spaces; the riders that twisted like a Möbius strip; doors that produced both awful noises and tiful voices; and people living together with rats, ticks, goldfish, and grasshoppers.

Ruins clearly reveal themselves in the process of construction and alteration. It war many Japanese cities lost all their old forms, but they were rapidly filled with gn of buildings that, from the very outset, looked like ruins with no visual order. Steel concrete mixed with advertisements; neon lights and telegraph poles came into passed out of existence easily. Cities lost their monumentality behind an aggregat flickering, lightweight, and superficial elements. They began to convey their meaning us through semiotic codes rather than actual solid forms. The development of var kinds of new media intensified this trend.
The city is undeniably in a state of flux. Invisible, it is virtually simulated by the codes that fill it. In my "Invisible City," which alludes to ruins, I foresaw a city filled with unreal codes where the interpretation of the classical structure of cognition is meaningless. I now believe that design and city planning will become impossible using methods that involve only the manipulation of physical actualities. Since coming to this conclusion, although I regard cities as fit objects for consideration, I have ceased to think that they can be designed and hence no longer undertake work of that kind.

In thinking about architecture, more than the city, time reveals itself in naked form. Designing a building, of course, means making visible something that has never before existed. The time involved in composing a piece of architecture is absolute and essentially different from time as expressed in the change and metamorphosis of the Metabolist architects. In "Process Planning," I interpret time in architecture from a completely different viewpoint. The idea of "growing architecture," which was popular when I wrote the article, is the reverse of the process that produces ruins.

In the normal process of creating architecture, at the final minute it is necessary to freeze all alteration. In the search for that moment of freedom, I made use of the ancient Judaic eschatological principle that the world must someday come to an end. Imagining the ultimate end as a dynamic viewpoint, clarifying the direction in which present conditions flow. On the drawing board, the piece of architecture is allowed to grow and change until it reaches its ultimate point in time, its termination, then it is cut off at the juncture called the present. It is then fixed and leaves the architect's hands. It may change thereafter, but it is meaningless to try, as the Metabolists did, to foresee its future alterations. It is not for the architect to speak of its future.

In this connection, the time that exists in the architect's concept emerges. This is different from absolute time, which flows unbroken from the past to the future.

In explaining the moment of enlightenment, the great Buddhist priest Dōgen (1200–1253), the first person to give Zen teachings a firm systematic foundation in Japan, wrote of flying toward a given instant. However, the same notion of time has existed in the Orient since the distant past. For instance, in the Abhidharma-kosa-shastra, the fifteenth-century Buddhist priest and scholar Vasubandhu clearly defines time as a single moment. Everything before the emergence of a dharma (entity) is the past and everything after its disappearance is the future. The moment before the eyes is the present. In this version, time is included within the entity.

In my architectural method I combine the dynamism of the Judaic idea of termination and the Buddhist concept of time as reduced to the instant. The final section of "Process Planning" sets forth the way in which architecture that has grown in reverse from the terminal minute is frozen in an instant. In other words, the building progress toward growth and instead begins moving in the direction of ruin. For us, my doctrine lacks the optimism derived from the future of eschatologica and is closer to the Buddhist doctrine of the impermanence of all things.

Many of the ideas that went into the formulation of this viewpoint were during work on a joint research project that resulted in a volume called Nihon kikan (Japanese Urban Space). This study revealed that many of the characters Japanese cities cannot be adequately explained on the basis of Western urban Our study was a method of analyzing those elements.

The traditional Japanese city consisted of buildings made largely of wood and straw, which could easily be turned to ashes, and did not readily reveal its eye. It was governed by a vague awareness of the mood of a busy neighborhood. I have come to think that the old-fashioned neighborhood feeling is becoming teristic of the modern Japanese city too.

Work on this project resulted in "Invisible City" and led to the development of the idea of "Darkness" as an architectural prototype.

Counterpoising invisibility and darkness with highly visible and substantial architecture made my methodology more conceptual and metaphorical. Art design is the process of giving concrete form to intangible concepts. In this is first necessary to pick out all the things that denote architectural elements: necessary to create a mechanism that will give new meaning to these now in elements. This is the starting point of my architecture.

ARATA ISOZAKI