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INVISIBLE ARCHITECTURE: THE EXHIBITION

Rita Elvira Adamo

This exhibition project evolved from a comparative study developed in 2014 by Rita Elvira Adamo, a young architecture scholar at the London Metropolitan University, comparing Italian Radical Architects' works of the 1960s–1970s, like Archizoom (Andrea Branzi, Gilberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello, Massimo Morozzi, Dario and Lucia Bartolini), Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Roberto Magris, Alessandro Magris, Gianpiero Frassinelli and Alessandro Poli) and UFO (Lapo Binazzi, Carlo Bachi, Patrizia Cammeo, Riccardo Foresi, Titti Maschietto, Sandro Gioli), with selected projects realised by contemporary Japanese architects.

The exhibition *Invisible Architecture: Italian and Japanese architectural movements in the 1960s and 1970s and contemporary debate* is a large-scale didactic path, a two-phase research, each phase complementary to the other. The first one shows, within an appropriate historiographical framework, the cultural proximity between the conceptual proposals of the Italian Radicals, with their shift from traditional city models, the insertion of mega-structures, the introduction of a proto-environmentalist conception of nature as a design and socio-cultural element, and the previous though nearly coeval theoretical experience of the Japanese Metabolist Group.

The second and more comparative phase of analysis intends to display how the ideas, generated in the brief and fertile era of research by the Metabolists and the Radicals, were faced and sometimes adopted by younger generations of Japanese and Italian architects of the 21st century. These new generations seems to be not easily framed within a defined theoretical group, but share a great sensitivity in responding to the signals from both the past experiences, which were maybe too innovative and utopian at their time, with and the contemporary debate, according to a more solid, efficient and pragmatic perspective, losing the ideological aura of their predecessors.

The contemporary architecture firms selected for this second phase are Sou Fujimoto, Kentaro Yamazaki, Onishimaki + Hyakudayuki Architects, Yuko Nagayama, Alphaville for Japan and 2A+P/A, DAP Studio, IaN+, OFL Architecture, Orizzontale, studio wok, Tipi Studio for Italy.

The Italian Radicals and, to a lesser extent, the Japanese Metabolists, never had a chance to realise their greatest and most utopian projects. The strength of their ideas still spread from their projects and writings and, after the 1970s, these ideas gradually increased their impact upon society and culture, influencing design as well as our concepts of plan and living the urban space. Radicals and Metabolists failed at their attempt to change their

respective societies in the short term, but managed to vehicle some of their most contemporary messages as an idealistic heritage for the following generations, who showed a more practical approach to the urban problems of the 21st century.

Since the exhibition aims at showing affinities and differences between the two groups, the selection of Japanese and Italian architects carried out is placing emphasis on their historical and social context. For this reason the exhibition is divided in three main themes, *Environment*, *Technology* and *Inhabiting*. These topics have been and continue to be fundamental aspects of the design process and with the projects selected for this exhibition we will discover their universal and atemporal soul as well as their being creations of the societies, the cultures and the time in which they have been conceived.

The comparative study shows how Japanese and Italian architects have perceived the need to include the social instances within architecture and design, although with different approaches, and how they have been influenced by the cultural aspects of civilization and by the historical contexts. Both groups share a great attention for their respective national societies, leading to a peculiar and original development of ideas and styles. Among the similarities, we can include the strong attempt at changing the society and the unconventional approach to city and architecture, radical and provocative whereas, among the present-day architecture firms an unexpected affinity in reading the historical and natural context, as well as a renovated sensitivity in tune with centuries-old cultures, emerges. As for the differences, it is important to underline the real diverse impact that the researches carried out by both the avant-gardes and the present-day architects contemporaries have had on the constructed environment. While the Japanese architects still maintain a protagonist role in the society in which they operate, the Italian ones had and still have little possibility to influence the economic and realization processes of making architecture and their impact in the society is hence marginal.

Invisible Architecture, therefore, has a twofold objective: on one side, through the selection process of the exhibition an effort was made to illustrate a journey through the evolution of the “words” of the Metabolists and the Radicals in the 1960s to the present-day “projects”, in which the actual realization of many innovative ideas can be easily traced to these two avant-garde groups of the 1960s; on the other side, it was pointed out that the creations of the present-day firms don't seem to have enough strength to trigger a real massive change in the social dimension of architecture, even if a more definite pragmatism of younger generations stands out especially if compared to their predecessors. In that sense, the exhibition does not only aim at comparing the two groups

of architects and the context in which they have operated, but it also strives to create a framework of reference for the latest generations of designers recruits who find themselves immersed in today's global village and are engaged in opening up a dialogue on the increasingly pressing social and environmental questions.

Following a first historical-cultural section introducing the avant-garde protagonists and their context, the exhibition proceed through the ideal division in the three main sections *Environment*, *Technology* and *Inhabiting*, key words which have been selected through a careful analysis of the architects' works and philosophies.

Both the avant-gardes and the contemporary groups will be divided into these three sections leading the visitors into a journey that alternates "the theory and the word" of the groups of the 1960s to the "projects and the signs" of the contemporary firms, depicting not only the innovative similarities which connect the two historical avant-gardes, but also the conceptual milestones which have led the most recent studies to a new interpretation of the past experiences through their experimentations.

As for the works realised by the contemporaries, the setup takes advantage of photos, renders and scale models for didactic purposes while illustrations, magazines, videos and collages will instead illustrate the works of the avant-gardes. The above-mentioned sections will be divided between avant-gardes and contemporaries and organised as follows.

In the avant-gardes *Environment* sections, the projects will be selected according to the groups' theories for the relationship between man, architecture and nature. Both for the Metabolists and the Radicals, nature found a place in the projects as a distinct entity yet coexisting with architecture, acting as a neutral spectator of human labour rather than being a reality changed by the-turn-of-the-century rationalist positivism.

Likewise, both the new Italian and Japanese generations look at nature as something to be respected, a source of inspiration and reflection, in accordance with the new sustainability principles, hence not something that needs deep changing.

In the *Technology* sections, the projects will be selected according to their socio-technological characteristics. Since the early 20th century, architecture has seen technology as the key to improve society and even alter the natural environment. Such progress further evolved in the avant-gardes of the 1960s, coming to realise that the use of the most advanced technologies could work as a model for the creation of a new human society of the future.

The use of mega-structures was the most flagrant example of this proposed revolution and it is important to emphasize that,

whilst the mega-structure projects have long sunk into oblivion, the use of technology foreseen by the Radicals has instead found among the new generations of architects its greatest implementation. Concepts like modularity, immateriality, hyperlink as well as the relationship between technology and nature in order to improve and preserve the environment, are all themes established a direct connection between the avant-gardes and the contemporaries.

The last sections on *Inhabiting* are probably the ones that make the comparison between the avant-gardes and the contemporaries a striking confrontation. The first ones managed to bring into focus a series of extremely advanced intuitions on how to experience a metropolis in a dynamic way and with no fixed points, anticipating *de facto* the life of modern man as designed in today's cities. On the other hand contemporaries are trying to bring back to a more human scale the approach to the housing design through the use of advanced tools in the sustainable approach to the city. There are still some relevant specificities between Japanese and Italian architects, which nevertheless found some points of contact over the years.

Being the themes still undoubtedly complex and relevant, the scientific equipment will take advantage of a series of historical-critical texts written by notable scholars from different countries that have deepened in many years the interest in these two groups and two eras.

Two worlds in mutual silent dialogue

In Japan and Italy in the early 1960s, you can find a series of extraordinary parallels and coincidences in many social, cultural, historical issues. They are even more remarkable if you think of comparing two ancient cultures so distant both geographically and for history and traditions. You may be tempted to speak about the differences between the two countries rather than the common aspects.

However, we can start from two very strong images and full of meaning: the scene of devastation of Hiroshima canceled by the atomic bomb in 1945 and Florence submerged by the flood in 1966. Two very different scenarios having yet in common the ability to unleash unexpressed energies.

In 1962, the architect Arata Isozaki recalls the image of the ruin as a liberating generator of the possibility of re-imagining the city of the future. Other Metabolists had already expressed the post-bomb wasteland as a unique opportunity to rebuild a new society.

A few years later, in 1967, the members of UFO radical groups in Florence, Archizoom and Superstudio lived directly that dramatic moment when it seemed as Florence was to disappear under rivers of mud in the night of November 3. Not even a month later, the exhibition *Superarchitettura* defined the design standards of the groups involved, releasing all the ironic and creative force and beginning the brief but intense season of the Italian Radicalism in architecture.

Japan and Italy entered the 1950s of the 20th century still full of wounds but in rapid healing. Defeated by history and by bombs only a few years before, without raw materials but rich in labour force and desire of redemption, they succeeded in a few years (along with Germany) to create an “economic miracle” almost unique in modern history. The policy of the two nations, ruled by liberal and conservative forces at the same time, helped to bury the latent social unrest channeling those energies in a frenetic productivity that led to a rapid but unbalanced industrialization both socially and regionally.

The social unrest started emerging when the young people of earlier generations who had suffered only marginally the war, the same generation to which belonged the baby-boomers in the United States, found themselves to develop a gradual rejection of that status of forced welfare, façade and created at the expense of strong differences between social classes. The protest that followed with occupations of factories, universities and schools was the failed attempt to create the utopia of a planned society, as stated by the architect Andrea Branzi.

The whole of Europe lived those early 1960s feverishly, turning

gradually all that enthusiasm into more violent and anti-creative methods.

In Japan occurred a similar social phenomenon that culminated in the assault at the Tokyo University Rectory in January 1969. The previous years, however, were full of feverish ideas in which both artistic and architecture avant-gardes created an unprecedented debate in the country. The group of Metabolists focused clearly on the Japan social change. A country where the megalopolis were the near future and where a growing corporate and dynamic society had to find new work and life spaces. The Metabolists outlined in an unconventional and unscrupulous way what was the social present of the Japanese people and they imagined a future not so different from what it was then realised.

Italians Radicals and Japanese Metabolists were the exact product of their age and of their respective countries. Two young and growing nations which began to ask questions about their own welfare and the future of their societies.

Questions asked in a more realistic way for the Japanese who had before them the chance to realise the utopia, thanks also to the support of their government, and in a more theoretical, imaginary and ironic way, but no less effective, for the Italians.

The architecture of the last avant-gardes

The search for the authenticity in the individual vision of the world and in the architectural production can be considered one of the founding issues of the architectural avant-gardes. The experimentation and the radical thought had the function to move the limit of the possibilities across the threshold of an achievable result, in order to accelerate the search and chart new courses. In the first half of the 20th century, the proliferation of movements and avant-gardes led to the definition of the modern architectural standards in the Western world.

After the Second World War, Modernism saw a quick spread around the world, supported by a rapid industrialization and by the spread of Western progressive ideologies in the two main variants, the socialist and capitalist ones. The birth of Metabolism in Japan can be framed in this context.

In the 1950s and 1960s Japan, thanks to the aids by the United States, became from a war-torn country one of the main capitalist powers. In the late 1950s, the need for reconstruction and for a unified view in rebuilding the country led to the birth of Metabolist movement.

The movement is framed within the groups that from 1953 onwards came into conflict with the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), from the historical breakup by the Team 10. Among the reasons that led to this breakup, we can include the correct reproducibility of the architectural prototype worldwide and the claim for an original modernism model able to adapt itself to the local cultures and architectures.

Metabolism, in fact, proposed, from some significant references to Modernism, a new form of traditionalism providing the assimilation of themes and forms of Japanese tradition linked in their turn to the archetypal aspects of living, the relationship to nature and the high technical quality of the artifacts. These themes were rethought in accordance to modernist ideas and approach, in a future vision of Japan as a recombination of its past fragments, creating remarkable historical and political value architectures.

These issues concerned, of course, not only Japan but all the world that claimed geographically and culturally its own autonomy with regard to the European-centric culture which from colonialism to the “new order” after the Second World War seemed to propose a monolithic idea of modernism in architecture. Metabolism came therefore to question even the mechanistic principles related to Modernism, proposing a “bio-dynamic” variation linked to a growth by elements and a new vision of urban design on a large scale.

The idea of the structures growth as well as the temporary nature of the measures, starting from the tradition of the Temple of Ise, whose ritual includes its reconstruction every 20 years, permeated the whole work of Metabolists and led to the idea of an urban development for parts, modular and organic.

In this sense, the work of Metabolists played a central role in the history of world architecture, representing the passage that filled the theoretical gap between the radical and heroic views of the French architect Yona Friedman in the 1950s, and his mega modular structure proposal suspended above the city and the territory, and the Plug-in City of the British Archigram, that at the end of the 1960s proposed a modular city which refused every heroic and moral value, appearing as a pure consumer item in a hedonistic world.

The anti-heroic vision of architecture found fertile ground in the late 1960s in a Europe which began to be shaken by social and political unrest, and that questioned the modernist certainties. New groups appropriated these issues, rejecting the Team 10 breakup with the CIAM, also perceived as a too sophisticated and calm renewal method while the architect Cedric Price spoke openly of a society that could certainly be better without the “form-makers” obsessions.

The Archigram group was among the first to give life to an urban vision no longer thinking to traditional buildings but structures designed as a mobile support for elements and modules whose functions did not generate anymore shapes and space, but mechanical and electronic services. These radical visions of anti-architecture aimed to overcome the limits imposed by society, by the current culture and history, and proposed minimal theoretical and architectural scaffolds to be filled later with contents. This approach found fertile ground in Italy in the late 1960s.

Unlike Japan, where the manifesto of Metabolism joined in a series of purposes the most important designers of the time,

although they were independent between them for the design, in Italy after the Second World War, also in full “economic miracle”, there was a rather irregular and diversified situation in the field of architectural thought. In a context of neo-rationalist and neo-realist views, organic, merger with classicism and strong focus on types and framework, the anti-architectural idea appeared in the late 1960s in the heterogeneous group of the so-called Radicals. The Radicals were very young and characterized by the refusal of academic modernism, mechanistic and formalistic but moreover for proposing an idea of architecture strongly inspired by the Pop culture issues, made of surreal images which found their most effective expression in the use of photographic collage.

Despite the electronic-technological issues were one of the starting points of their work, just like the British Archigram, and reiterating a refusal to the formal research, the Radicals expressed their opposition to the system showing their proposals with languages linked to the advertising world, so free from moralism and search for deeper values: typical issues of modernist poetry.

Their visions proposed again new ways of inhabiting the earth through a kind of primitive and futuristic nomadic lifestyle, renewing the relationship to nature and earth, mediated by advanced technological knowledge. From this perspective you can put the greatest Radicals invention, that is the idea that architecture had no longer to build but only provide a neutral schedule, no longer made up of places, buildings, streets and squares, but only a simple horizontal surface. Above this new zero plane all the activities will take place into a new absolute order dismissing the whole previous architecture made of shapes with the sole purpose of covering power and social oppression systems.

The surface of the Radicals, continuous monument or no-stop city, as well as the mega-structures of Metabolists can be placed in the larger context of the crisis of the idea of city and planning. The mega-structure is designed as a last chance to bring the natural environment and construction within a unifying element, containable and manageable.

Whilst Metabolism, having yet a propelling force for the realization of the architectural work, presents itself as the last of the modernist avant-gardes, at least at chronological and conceptual level, the Radicals with their scalar excesses and their critical and nihilistic expression can be seen as the transition between an architectural concept still at odds with Modernism and the 1970s, when the West economic crisis brought to the fore new issues and figures, closing the experimental period of both groups.

From global megalopolis utopia to today's reality

Fifty years after the beginning of these avant-garde revolutions, the two countries are two aged realities with ten-year of economic and identity crisis both social and architectural. In this static and renunciatory context the new generations of Italian and

Japanese designers move and they have thus to intervene on a post-modern and anti-utopian reality.

The demographic decline that has affected both countries, however, has given rise to two different urban impulses: a continuous influx of the population towards the big urban centers in Japan opposed to a contraction of the biggest cities in Italy, where small towns are experiencing a new period of recovering, thanks to an easiness of living increasingly unusual in the major cities, although with rare but excellent exceptions.

In this historical context we can see how Japanese architects are rediscovering keywords such as urban regeneration, recovery and sustainability, concepts considered, until a few years ago, unnecessary frills of a country where economic growth seemed endless, and they began to apply these concepts in the context of linear metropolis systems, and in particular along the Tokaido megalopolis route composed of Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe.

These concepts were instead historical heritage of the modern Italian architecture but they found new application not only in the bigger and more consolidated cities but also in smaller and

livable urban centres that, thanks to an improvement, although still too slow, of the high-speed rail connective infrastructures, of the technological and computer ones, allow a lower centralization and aim to a return to a kind of the municipalities new epic. Italy and Japan have however in common, especially in contrast with their richer past, the increasing use of new design and construction technologies offered to 21st century architect.

These technologies are now no longer placed at the service of a great urban utopia or typical social engineering of the 20th century avant-gardes, but rather of an ever more rarefied and minimal context such as the specific and continuous regeneration, the improvement of the individuals living conditions, of technological experimentation in small contexts such as productive and exhibition stands, schools, diffused offices and smaller homes and nevertheless used in a more and more dynamic way.

A no less important change than that one developed during the 20th century but certainly less resounding and away from the spotlight. A little but great revolution which shows how Italy and Japan still have much to offer the contemporary architecture research world.

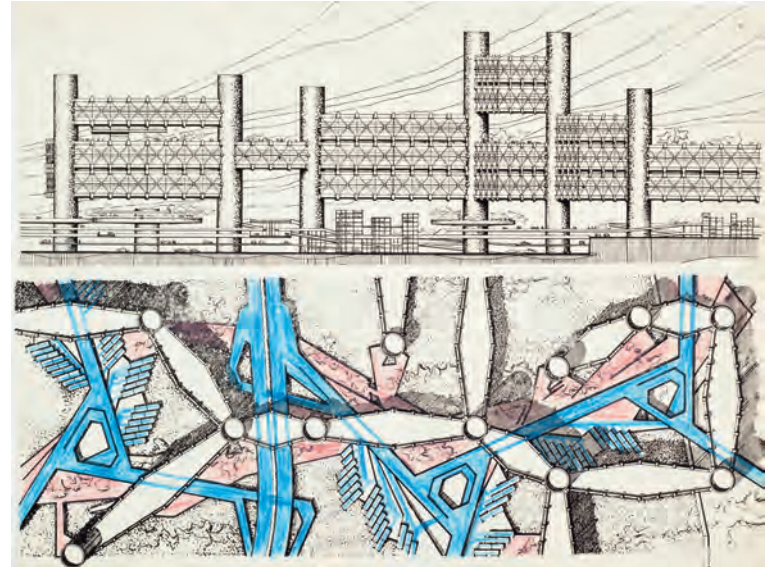
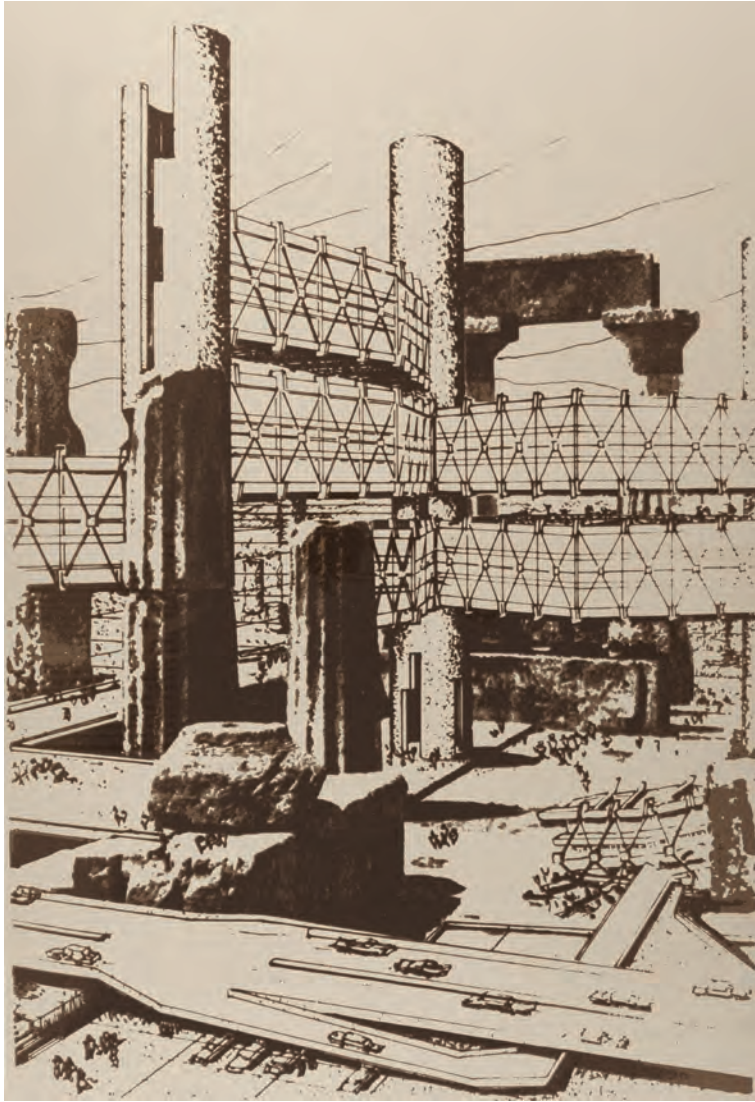
ENVIRONMENT

The understanding behind environmental issues

The ideas of ecology, environmental protection and peaceful coexistence between man and nature, in the mid-1960s, were still at a development stage. Frequently, the passion hidden behind the first organized movements, responded to the total disregard for environmental sustainability, typical attitude of the period of strong development in the aftermath of Second World War, with a radical and extreme environmentalism, in line with the strong ideological thrust of the political movements at the time. In this context, the first immature awareness about the importance of the "ecosystemic variable" began to make their way among the architects ideas of that period, mainly related to the opportunity to modify the environment through territorial dimensional scale projects.

In Japan, Metabolists had at their disposal, compared to Radicals, a wider range of concrete design opportunities to compete on territorial and landscape scale. In large infrastructural projects, Metabolists succeeded in influencing although partially, in a country that between the 1960s and early 1990s of the 20th century saw audacious achievements such as the Shinkansen, the Akashi bridge and the undersea Seikan Tunnel, both records in their respective categories or even the huge urban elevated infrastructures along the linear megalopolis of Tokaido, developed along the Tokyo-Nagoya-Kyoto-Osaka mobility corridor. Contemporary Italy saw important engineering achievements such as the A3 Highway or the several dams in the North of the country but, at the same time, lines of thinking and associations emerged seeking to protect the territory and its specificities as the first ecologists groups and antinuclear movements conceived in the 1970s. Unlike in Japan, Italian architects, almost all of them, had not the chance to confront with these issues through real design opportunities,

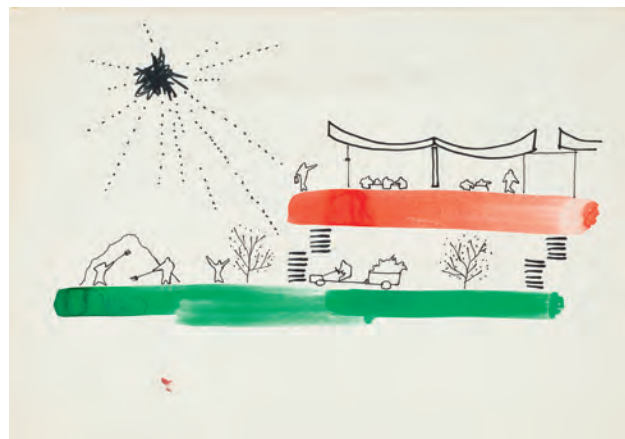
deciding to pour on theoretical works their design thinking in the field of the environment. In the projects here presented, Metabolists show to choose a pragmatic approach towards the environment, tending to the use of territory as a resource for a better social and economic development, and more rarely considering the demands of future environmental movements. The counterparty of Italian Radicals uses the environment as an abstract element, as a background where formulating their revolutionary ideas of innovation and interpretation of the new human condition in the second half of the 20th century. A clarifying example is the UFO's project "Monster of the Id" which describes a hypothetical dialogue between the territory and its inhabitants through the human unconscious materialization on the territory itself. Ultimately, Radicals approach to the environment is more respectful when compared to Japanese architects but the kind of analysis on it is still limited from being a pure compositional invariant.



Arata Isozaki, *Shinjuku Project: City in the Air*,
collage of incubation process,
collage/photograph, ink, tracing paper, 1963, un-built.
Collection of Arata Isozaki, courtesy
of Mori Art Museum

Arata Isozaki, *Shinjuku Project: City in the Air*,
elevation and floor plan, photograph, ink,
color pencil paper, 1963, un-built.
Collection of Arata Isozaki, courtesy
of Mori Art Museum

Fresh from his experience with Tange for the *Tokyo Plan*, Arata Isozaki offers here the evolution of those earlier studies. *Shinjuku Project: City in the Air* describes an expandable urban system based on two main elements: towers of 12 metres in diameter incorporating the vertical movement and a reticular connected system including residences and horizontal circulation. Beneath this free composition pedestrian and vehicle platforms find their place. In the following years Isozaki decided to apply among the towers some out of scale scale photographs of the columns of the temple of Hera in Agrigento, creating the paradigmatic image of the *city of the future lying within the ruin*, authentic architect's obsession.



Kisho Kurokawa, *Agricultural City*, sketch, ink on paper, 1960. Collection of Kisho Kurokawa Architect and Associates, courtesy of Mori Art Museum.

Kisho Kurokawa, *Agricultural City*, sketch, section of Habitat Unit, ink, watercolour on paper, 1960. Collection of Kisho Kurokawa Architect and Associates, courtesy of Mori Art Museum.

Kisho Kurokawa, *Agricultural City*, sketch, section of Mushroom Shape House, ink, watercolour on paper, 1960. Collection of Kisho Kurokawa Architect and Associates, courtesy of Mori Art Museum.

This project was conceived as a reaction to the devastation suffered from a typhoon in 1959 by Kanie, Kurokawa hometown birthplace. The architect here proposed to overcome the traditional agricultural production model while recalling the form of free expansion. The city is on two levels, the lower one where production and vehicular movement are concentrated, and the upper, 4 meters above the ground, consisting of a horizontal grid with square modules that contains the pedestrian paths in addition to housing and services. Each grid unit consists of 500 square meters including a village of about 2,000 inhabitants. Further units can be joined to the previous expanding system in a theoretically infinite way.



**Superstudio. *Architettura
réfléchie, un Miroir de
l'agriculture et Grand pèlerinage.***

© RMN - Grand Palais, Georges
Meguerditchian, Paris, Centre
Pompidou - Musée national d'art
moderne - Centre de création
industrielle / Jean-Claude Planchet

**Superstudio. *Architettura
réfléchie, les chutes du Niagara
(de la seconde série
de la Nature), 1970.***

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