Architecture in a Simulated City

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Images of Tokyo photographed aerially like a map are projected onto the floor. One is a flat and homogeneous scene taken from three hundred meters above and graphically processed by a computer. Another shows the back of young boys standing in a row and playing with game machines. The screen then abruptly changes to a scene of an expressway. The scene disappears into the depth of the screen like the speed of Akira on his motorcycle. By graphic processing, the screen is made completely flat without depth and the images become those of dramatic cartoons.

A floating floor ten meters wide and twenty-eight meters long is paved with opaque acrylic panels. A translucent acrylic screen five meters high undulates in the longitudinal direction. A liquid crystal screen is incorporated along the way which can be electronically controlled in its transparency and translucency. A side wall is finished with aluminum panels while a translucent cloth hangs from the ceiling. These screens receive images from forty-four projectors: eighteen suspended from the ceiling cast images on the acrylic floor while the remaining twenty-six project overlapped representations on the screen from behind acrylic or cloth shields.

Numerous images edited and accumulated on twelve laser discs show everyday scenes of Tokyo: flocks of people crossing zebra-zones, businessmen talking on the platform while waiting for a train, a young man speaking over a public tele-phone, and so on. These video images are incessantly shuffled and collaged on the forty-four screens. Only occasionally are images repeated. Environmental music processed by a synthesizer fills the space from sixteen-channel speakers to add another dimension to the scene.

This is the space entitled "Dreams," the third room of the "Visions of Japan" exhibition held in London. Visitors are showered by floating video images and soaked with the sounds. Their bodies float on the river of the acrylic floor and sway as if they were seasick. The Crown Prince of Japan, who opened the show, said he wished to have had a cup or two of sake before he came so that he could feel the space more vividly. Prince Charles, on the other hand, asked what could follow from these images. When I answered there might be nothing, he asked if I was an optimist. I said of course I was.

Although it was entitled "Dreams" by Arata Isozaki, the organizer of the show, the space was originally to be called "Simulation." This name was intended to evoke modern Tokyo, the simulated city (the title was revised to respond to the opinion of the London side who believed the name "Simulation" was too difficult for the general public who would visit the show). The experience was to be like walking through Kabukicho Street at night—exposed to tremendous video images and showered with sounds. By looking into the screen of the video game, one was already with-
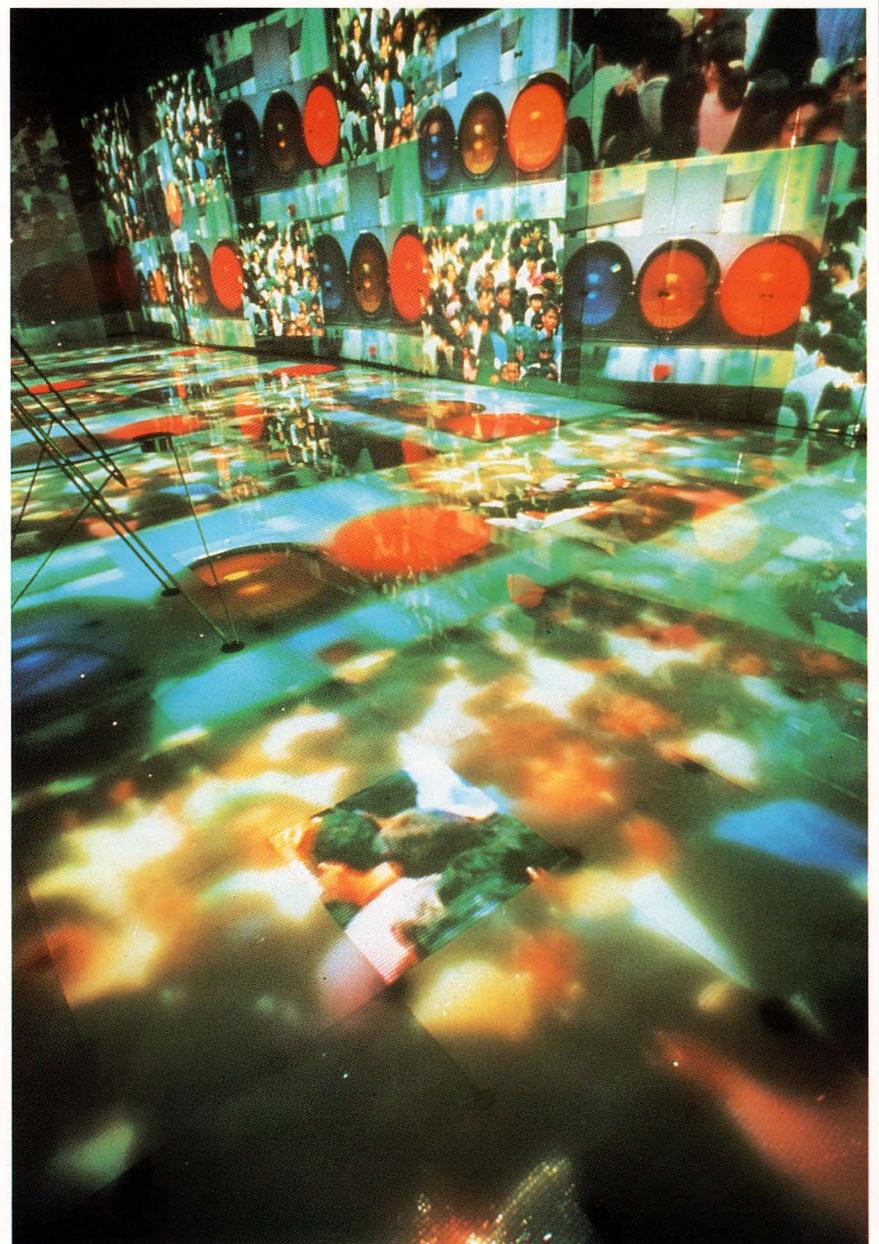
"Simulation" Space from Visions of Japan. *(Photo by Naoya Hatakeyama)*

in the screen—intoxicated with the illusion of light and sound in the space as suggested by the Japanese Crown Prince, and suspended in a futureless space as implied by Prince Charles. Perhaps we have no future to reach.

There exists, however, a distinct difference between the simulation in the room and the reality in Shinjuku. While the real city is endlessly filled with noise and chaos, the collaged city displayed on the screen is soon to be filled with white noise or phased out into a computer-graphic stream. In short, the urbane "scene" is destined to lose its clear configuration and fade into morning mist. All the realistic images melted into a state of calm enlightenment may be seen as a "nirvana." If we are to imagine the future, what conditions other than the extreme state of technological control can we expect?

In the space, five objects are placed in the shower of the video images. These objects, created by a young English designer, Anthony Dunne, look like television sets fresh out of their packages or comical androids breathing the air of information. They convert images in response to noises filling in the space or they generate strange sounds. While commercial television sets are packaged in ready-made clothes, (like businessmen in business suits conveying mainstream information unilaterally) these objects are highly personal and poetic, allowing us to recognize anew that we are surrounded with noises. We may have already grown an additional organ within the body which inhales noises like objects. Even though these things are not seen with our eyes, our bodies, constantly exposed to the air of technology, respond to them, and synchronize our biological rhythm with them. Unconsciously, we may already have a robotized body like an android.

The Town Gate for Okawabata River City 21, which we call the Egg of Winds, is based on a concept similar to the one above. An egg sixteen meters long and eight meters in diameter is wrapped with aluminum panels and floats in front of two high-rise apartment buildings. While the Egg is merely an object which reflects the sunlight in daytime, it displays video images (including both recorded and live broadcasts) at night. The images appear on internal screens and the partly punched, aluminum-paneled surface when a set of five liquid crystal projectors are switched on. The Egg is turned into a vague 3-D existence without a sense of reality, as if holographic. Passers-by look up at the egg, stop for a moment to wonder what it is, and then walk away. The object differs in character from television sets installed on street posts or a large Jumbo-tron color display which decorates the wall of a downtown building. It is an object of video images which can be seen through the information-filled air of the surroundings. This image-object comes with the wind and is gone with the wind.

Coincidental to the time of the creation of the Egg of Winds, a model of similar shape was displayed at an exhibition in Brussels. This model for the River City Town Gate 21 was shaped like a ship or a polyhedron with triangular planes. The Brussels Egg was made with transparent acrylic material on the floor and covered by translucent cloth and punched aluminum panels. Visitors could not enter it, but could see chairs and tables installed inside through translucent coves with the natural light coming from above. They saw a city life packaged within the Egg like an illusion: transient objects, like a mirage without a sense of texture or existence. They are spontaneous phenomena: ephemeral objects more like a rainbow than structures.

If we think of the two Eggs of Winds together, we may, perhaps, refer to them as the "Design of Winds." When we use a filter of some kind to screen the information-filled, not-yet-visualized air, the object becomes visual. Acts of architec-

Egg of Winds, Town Gate for Okawabata River City 21. (Photo by Tomio Ohashi)

Tower of Winds, Japan. (Photo by Tomio Ohashi)

ture today should attempt to discover such a filter for visualization.

The Tower of Winds which I built a few years ago in front of Yokohama Station, Japan, embodied most efficiently this Design of Winds. The tower is characterized by being installed in the neon-lit downtown rather than beside a museum and the tower's lights wink like advertising neon. It is said to give an impression that the air around it is filtered and purified. This may be so because I intended not to cause a substance to emit light into the air, but to make the air itself converted into the light.

The Egg of Winds in the River City Town Gate 21 was originally intended as a image-model for a future house, but, as it took too much money to create the shell, it evolved into the Egg. What was originally intended to be seen through the filtered air was a new style of life in a simulated city.

The Egg of Winds in Brussels was the image-model of a city house for myself. It represented an urban life which day by day loses reality in proportion to the rate of visualization of city life. What is common in the two Eggs is that they are containers implying a new life. I wanted to show that the loss of reality in city life is another side of the coin to image-like architecture.

In any age, a dream for a new life leads into a new kind of space. For instance, people in the years around 1975 dreamed of "modern living" in a space with electric apparatuses. This lifestyle was epitomized by a flat-roofed house with large openings or a brightly-lit house covered by a low-gradient roof, a kitchen with a built-in refrigerator and gas oven, dining chairs with chrome-plated pipe frames and thin bentwood backs, and so on. A nuclear family was supported in such a modernized life with bright images. A father in a white shirt worked in a modern office constructed with steel and glass materials and came home to such a kitchen and dining room where his smiling wife and children waited for him. If a Volkswagen or a Citroën 2CV was parked outside, the image of a new life would be perfect.

While the ideal life in the electric age was embodied in essence in this space of "modern living," we have not yet found a space suitable for the ideal life in the computer age. This is more effectively reflected in the difference between Volkswagen and Citroën of old days and Toyota and Nissan of today than in houses. More precisely, Volkswagen and Citroën were designed using forms that imply a variety of mechanical functions, while Japanese cars of today, mounted with various electronic intelligence, are covered with superficial package designs without a hint of the diverse technology inside. Current cars are designed almost as an image which is irrelevant to the mechanism. Household electric appliances are based on a similar concept.

While the car and industrial design pursue the modern style to answer the fashionable needs of consumers, design in housing is oriented entirely toward conservatism (even though it is also superficial). In the world of architecture (where functions and forms were not closely related to each other from the beginning), style becomes more and more nostalgic in expression as Japan's GNP increases.

What, then, is the new life of today? We are too busy to give serious thought to it as a plethora of posh, small items and spaces catches our eyes. Foods, clothes, and daily necessities on the shelves of department stores and convenience stores shine brightly, as if to help us realize our dreams. But when we have eaten, worn, or installed them in our houses, they lose their brightness and look faded. From that very moment, we are doomed to look further for new items.

Homogenization is constantly progressing behind these products (ranging from a grocery to a house) which superficially look quite individualistic. In other words, as observed in car design of today, homogenized contents permit trivial differences in superficial character. Not only houses are destined to go in the same direction, but also architecture. For example, air conditioning technology severs a building from the local climate and allows houses of the same style to be built anywhere in the world; it can be used in all styles of architecture. Works which are apparently unique, are as homogenous in content as they are decorated superficially with different forms. They are not unlike a perishable fillet of fish wrapped in a sheer of Saran Wrap, frozen under homogenous conditions, and stocked on the shelf of a convenience store.

Since the birth of steel and glass, we have long sought after a universal space. However, this universal space, related to the coordinates of Euclidean geometry, did not achieve its theoretical goal of homogeneity. The trend toward purely homogenous neutrality was checked by orientation toward locality or desire for monumentality in architecture. The thorough homogenization of architecture has been prevented by an almost unconscious worship of "architecture" by architects themselves.

Therefore, the phenomenon of homogenization in today's architecture is expressed quite differently from the aesthetic pursuit of universal space. What is homogenized today is society itself, and architects are vainly fighting against it. The more an architect relies on characteristic or rather personal expressions, the more homogenous become his works, as if points on the coordinates of Euclidean geometry are similarly connected. Now is the time when all of society is being covered in a gigantic Saran Wrap film.

Once, architects longed for homogenous grids because society was opaque and turbid. They tried to incorporate transparent and neutral grids into a society which was as obscure and heterogeneous as lava. Therefore, even if architects successfully attained homogenization in a universal office space, it was limited within an enclosed territory. When they took one step out of the office, there extended real and muddy spaces.

Today, our environment is filled with vacant brightness. Just like commodities filling up the shelves of a convenience store, our cities have dried up and become bleak. For the last ten years, cities have been removed of humidity as if they were thrown into a gigantic dryer. Although we are surrounded with a variety of goods, we are living in a thoroughly homogenous atmosphere. Our affluence is supported only with a piece of Saran Wrap film.

Simulated life is allowed by the Saran Wrap film which covers society. For instance, men and women stop at places after work to eat, sing, dance, talk, watch movies, go to theaters, play games, or go shopping. The time and space positioned somewhere between office and home (for example, exercise at a sports club) is fully fictional. Men and women eat whatever is served there, as if the dishes were cooked by their mothers, sing and dance as if they were movie stars, and discuss topics with whoever happens to be there as if they were intimate friends. They go shopping to have dreams of wealth, and exercise in an artificial space as if they were running in a field or swimming in the sea. These are all simulations from the space and actions toward whatever is gained there. Moreover, these simulated spaces and lives have invaded offices and houses instead of modestly staying in the neutral zone such as downtown. Our families and jobs are all simulated; we now cannot distinguish reality from unreality.

We have lost not only the visual sense, but also taste, hearing, feeling and smell in regard to reality. We are not sure anymore what is really tasty, what we hear, what we feel. Our body has changed even

though we are not aware of it. This is because the communication systems among us (or between ourselves and goods) have undergone radical changes. We have transformed our body so that we can reverse the relationship between reality and unreality by a simple movement of an image.

The progress in media has isolated words from goods and diluted the reality of those goods. We are able to develop images even if they are not accompanied with an entity. Thus, the simulated life has self-proliferated into other areas. As a result, communication without entity (communication through media) has become a necessity in our daily life. The communication which was once deeply rooted in an area or in a local community has lost its significance. What is thriving in our cities is based on a network of instantaneous, ephemeral, and unspecific but numerous media which deny a physical distance.

We are challenged to solve two difficult problems when we build architecture in a simulated city. One is how we can create a work of architecture-as-entity while goods-as-entities are losing their significance. Another is how we can build architecture which endures time while local communities are nullified, and the network of communications-via-media appears and disappears incessantly.

Both problems are as difficult to solve as they are contradictory. One challenges us to make something real while goods hardly have reality. The other asks us to create a permanent space in a constantly changing city. What kind of architecture can be possible under such contradictory conditions?

There seems to be no definite answer to solve these questions. What is certain to me, however, is that it is meaningless for us to stand outside of these conditions or take a position where we do not recognize the two problems as contradictions. What, then, can we still do to narrow the gap? For the first problem, we are required to solve the question of how to make fictional or video-image-like architecture. For the second problem, we need to learn how to make ephemeral or temporary architecture. I do not mean that architecture should be replaced with video images or that temporary buildings should be used. We should, rather, build fictional and ephemeral architecture as a permanent entity.

We should utilize the power we obtained from these cities in order to create a space. We should fully use the effect of fictional architecture. Cities offer generous advice in this regard. I suggested fictional and ephemeral images by utilizing the light and video for the Tower of Winds and the Egg of Winds. I attempted to evoke fictional, ephemeral screen images like natural phenomena in the proposal for the Japanese Maison de la Culture in Paris, as wells as in the Nakameguro T Building and F Building in Minami Aoyama, by using glass screens holding liquid crystal film between them. (For the latter two projects, mere stripes were created by pasted-on silkscreen films.) In addition, I tried to create images which were more natural than nature itself by building an artificial landscape on the originally flat site in projects such as the Guest House for Sapporo Breweries and Gallery 8 in Yatsushiro.

These manipulations are all simulations. Ideally, there would not be any architecture which is not simulated in simulated cities. For instance, the earth fill in the approach to the Gallery 8 in Yatsushiro is a quite fictional, man-made hill. Once completed it seems to have been sitting there for hundreds of years. Reality today seems to be created beyond such fictionalism. We are now living in the border-less world of reality/unreality, and the same is applicable to materials in architecture. Today, when our entire society is wrapped in an enormous sheet of film, what we can still do is to beautifully visualize the content of the wrapping rather than to make the content look real. The fate of architecture will now depend on how we find the structure of the fiction.

T-building, Nakameguro. (Photo by Tomio Ohashi)   *Yatsushiro Municipal Museum.*