

Showing at the Japanese Pavilion: City of Girls, Alien Metropolis

Arata Isozaki

Translated by Sabu Kohso

The Japanese pavilion showcases a phenomenon that has transformed the evermetamorphosing, ever avant garde city of Tokyo to its very core – welcome to Adolescent City of Girls. This may look like an alien city: it is a place where all the moralities of the former community have been discarded, replaced by no morality: acts released from any bind, free of inhibition, can be witnessed anywhere and anytime. Now, this freedom is beginning to create a new ethics.

This metamorphosis of the urban space is evident on two levels. That is to say that since the division between interior and exterior and between the private and public domains has become blurred and dissolved, the image of the ideal family, the nuclear family – parents and child – that lives in that realm is no longer sus-

tainable. It follows that the type of urban residence designed to accommodate that image – living, kitchen, dining and x bedrooms – has become obsolete. The collapse on two levels – the threshold of architecture and the ideal family image that resides therein – signifies that the contemporary urban space that has been formed throughout the ages of modernization and de-modernization has now lost its basis.

The symptoms were experienced five years ago (1995) as shattering events: the Great Hanshin Earthquake revealed just how ephemeral were the gorgeously superficial signs of the city: they disappeared in all of a moment, leaving the real substance of objecthood – rubble. And the infamous sarin gas attack by Aum Shinrikyo showed how relatively simple it was to paralyze a metropolitan network that hosts 12 million people.

It has taken time, but Japanese society seems to have regained a semblance of normalcy and recovered from the two incidents, though they left deep scars in the minds of everyone, including artists and architects. But these events have deeply

influenced the substratum of Japanese urban space, and it has begun a radical metamorphosis to its core.

As the title "City of Girls" suggests, the Japanese pavilion presents an installation of the metamorphosis of the city: here, the protagonists have just entered their teens – no longer pre – teens under parents' and society's watchful eyes, not yet responsible adults. Thirteen year-old girls are teetering on the edge between child and adult; and barely reaching puberty, they are just beginning to encounter society's gender distinctions. They can be both children and adults, both men and women in terms of gender coding. Their being in the midpoint is instantaneous, yet it sparks so brightly.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the Japanese city in the year 2000 is powered by the electricity they generate. The center of Tokyo, for instance, is full of their fashion, the accouterments of their life style, the goods created as an extension of their sensitivity. Although their trans-territorial and anti-institutional sensibilities

may appear odd to conventional eyes, what seems clear is that they are on the verge of blowing away the form and institution of the city as we have made it.

These radical events are attacking the boundaries that articulate urban space. The contour lines of architecture are being erased, and distinctions between interior and exterior are disappearing; what is left is just a sense of division, such as that in the work of Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa. The distinction between clothing and housing is being muted; heavy-duty clothing is assuming both roles: this is the formless and homeless design of the "Mother" series of Kosuke Tsumura. The division between real and virtual is nullified by Yayoi Deki's fingerprints, which are indefinitely reproduced and fill up the interstice. Finally, you the viewers encounter a mass of little girls photographed by the alien gazes of their other, Hellen van Meene.

Hello Kitty!