

The west shall shake the east awake.
Walk while ye have the night for morn.
— From "Finnegan's Wake" by James Joyce

In my mind, the last ten years of the 20th century passed by like a whirlwind. Up until three-quarters into the 20th century, society in general was still filled with dreams of "progress" and people had concrete goals. However, in the 1990s, the Japanese economy had made a rapid downturn and people inevitably began to wonder, "What was meant by prosperity?" The structural basis and discipline of the value system that had sustained society tumbled all too easily. And yet, most people have become so accustomed to the way of life brought about by the "economic prosperity" that they are unable to readdress their orientation both physically and mentally. They are left stranded, unable to rebuild on a new social structure, and simply continue to follow the traces of an ephemeral dream, getting nowhere. Vested interest groups, totally incapable of responding to the changes occurring in their surroundings, are bound by personal interests and do not possess any means other than personal favoritism.

There are those who are trying to breakout of the old evils as fast as possible and capture new business opportunities, or those who are struggling to promote a structural revolution. Then, there are those who are totally oblivious of the changing world and are absorbed in their narrow-minded daily lives, or those who try to bond only with those that share the same values. When the economy is deteriorating, society in general tends to look back upon past glories and turn to conservatism. Such human tendencies and developments are not merely unique to Japan, but can be observed in any country as well.

In the 20th century, we had charged headlong on the path of economic development bearing a common goal, which was "to make our lives more affluent". It can be said that we had interpreted "affluence" to mean to achieve materialistic satisfaction by supplying anything, anytime, anywhere, or establishing an efficient distribution network system, or implementing standardization, simplification, reduction, and acceleration in order to process everything fast and with ease. All this led to the appearance of a massive consumer society. In large cities, such as Tokyo and Osaka, the phenomenon was particularly striking. But nowadays, everywhere in Japan, every town has the same sort of stores filled with the same products that all provincial cities seem to look the same, lacking in local characteristics. In particular, the appearance of the 24-hour convenience stores and fast food restaurants spread quickly throughout the country. They offer the same sort of products and the same sort of services by store clerks, who use the same sort of language that seems to be entirely prescribed in a training manual. The phenomenon is not only in Japan. In many cities around the world, the same sort of brands and fast food restaurants line the streets that people feel a sense

of relief to see familiar scenes and products in a foreign country.

In addition, the sudden diffusion of computers and mobile telephones further spurred the speed-oriented society, and has created people who enjoy conversation through the interface circuits rather than actually meeting and speaking to people. As time can be saved by not having to go out for work, or for shopping, or to the bank, the convenience of being able to use all the time saved on other activities has generated a condition where by one is even busier in the speed-oriented age. On the other hand, time for hands-on experiences are being deleted and diminishing communication with each other. With the advances in information technology, we may be able to obtain information from any part of the world at an instance, but it is ironical that amid the abundance of information, humans are drowning in information and their comfort levels and values are being obscured.

Hence, people cling on to 'things'. People feel a sense of comfort and mental stability by having the same 'things' as others. When products are distributed in a global scale to all countries and races, an enormous market is acquired. "Economic globalization" incited reduction, a scale-down, homogenization and acceleration in the consumer society, and by instigating the people's religious penchant for materialistic products, it evolved in tune with the economic superpowers. However, economic globalization is not as versatile as to accommodate every person in every country, and it has evidently caused the widening of the financial gap among the people of the world.

As the 21st century began, there is a trend to appreciate things that are unique to a particular area, to accept diversity in values, to respect the existence of other people, etc. However, it is also apparent that times are tough for the course to accept diversity. Contrary to our ideals, I fear that the discrepancies among the people's perception of quality life and human dignity may become even wider.

There are of course people who are expressing doubts about the "linear expansionism" and encouraging people to stop and think, and are promoting a more diverse value system. However, such people still seem to be a minority. Amid the surge of economic prosperity referred to as "globalization", we must discriminate what we really need from what we do not by keeping a sharp eye open and exercising sensible imagination and judgement. "Globalization" should not be applied to the economy, but it should first and foremost be applied to human dignity. Ernst H. Gombich may have said the following words in the 1970s, but he articulates the role of art of today.

Human beings must point to their problems not just in science and technology, but also in art. It should be a source of comfort to believe that we are able to commit ourselves to solving such problems. It seems that the time has come for us to contem-

plate that it is we ourselves that must set the goals.

It is essential that we are able to say a firm “No”, when our values are confronted by a possibility of being manipulated and to prove that we are not puppets to the inevitable progress. There is a growing tendency to question the justification of the concept of progress every time it is brought up, and I feel that this awareness will have an effect on art as well. Today, in the education of art, more than any other field, there is an urgent need to examine objectively what it really is that we are looking for in art. Giving uncritical praise to any innovation is never going to serve as a substitute to the diverse values of humankind.⁽¹⁾

At the 49th Venice Biennale, it is expected that many of the pavilions will hold a one-person exhibition, but I have ventured to present a group exhibition. The theme will be based on cities at the beginning of the 21st century, and will attempt to reveal the aspects of the cities where antithetical concepts such as progress, regression, dissemination, stagnation, concern, neglect, symbiosis, independence, noise, silence, cooperation, loneliness are intricately woven, as well as the complexity within which we humans live.

The participating artists all work on different media. The three members are Yukio Fujimoto, Naoya Hatakeyama, and Masato Nakamura. Yukio Fujimoto, who studied musicology, uses sound as his medium and began to present sound objects and sound performances in the mid 1980s. He continues to work on sound and spatial perception. At the Ohtani Memorial Art Museum in Nishinomiya, there is an “Audio Picnic at the Museum” project that is held only one day a year. Fujimoto picks an area on the premises of the museum, inside or outside the gallery, and performs a sound installation. The project began in 1997 and will continue for 10 years until 2006. Fujimoto’s method of presenting the relationship between place and sound stirs the perception of the visitors, and helps us recall our sensitivities which have been numbed by all the noise and sounds that flood our environment.

Hatakeyama is a photographer who has been taking photographs of workings and factories, rivers in cities, and other such aspects of urban development. The set of photographs observing a changing city from a fixed location, “Untitled 1989-2001”, and ones portraying the transformation of a baseball stadium in Osaka, “Untitled/Osaka 1998-1999”, all reveal an almost anarchy-like expansion and transformation of a city in the era between the so-called Japanese Bubble and today. However, even though the Japanese economy has plunged in numbers, the trend of the consumer society in Japan, led by the younger generation, still seems to be prevalent. When we set foot into the underground sewerage of Shibuya, a youngsters’ town, there lies a world entirely different from the hustle and bustle of the streets. No sun-

light penetrates the canals that lie 5 meters below ground level, rats run around, and the sewage is covered with filth and mold. Hatakeyama’s photographs, “Underground”, which depict a different aspect of the city, make us aware of the relationship between humans and an area that is normally not seen.

Nakamura is an artist who is interested in and creates artwork out of signboards of a 24-hour convenience store and a logo of a fast food restaurant, which are symbols of consumer society. These signboards and logo, which attract the attention of people even from a distance or at night, are highly strategic. The hamburger chain, McDonald’s, is a huge fast-food burger chain that has stores in over 100 countries around the world. The yellow illuminated sign has become a common image that is imprinted in our subconscious, and as a universal language for travelers who do not speak the local language, it is equivalent to a place of safe-haven. With permission from McDonald’s, Nakamura created many different sizes of the logo, “M”, and presented them in an installation, placing them in accordance with the room. The title “QSC+mV” represents “Quality”, “Service”, and “Clean”, a policy of the McDonald’s company. The company policy to provide the same quality, service and cleanliness under whatever circumstances, whatever resistance, easily overcomes any conflicting political policies between nations and carries out globalization. The objective of Nakamura’s work is not to praise the globalization of the business, or to criticize it. Nakamura had endured tough negotiations with the company, and by elevating the context of real business to the realm of art, he is instrumental in provoking a recognition of a world where diverse interpretations, including the two polar interpretations, are possible.

The exhibition at the Japan Pavilion will attempt to create a magnetism with the works by the 3 artists, which are both independent and interfering, and in harmony at the same time. The layout of the exhibition will try to make the most of the architectural structure of the Japan Pavilion, which has a piloti structure. In the upper gallery, the employment of the 4 walls, which support the ceiling like pillars, was highly challenging. The idea was not merely to make conflicting factors, such as the noise and silence of a city more prominent, but by using the upper gallery and the lower gallery, temporarily constructed on the piloti, and by displaying the works so that there is a sense of connection between the upper and lower galleries, the complexities that are intricately woven in the cities, which are an outcome of consumer society, are revealed. I tried to make this aspect apparent both in concept and by display method.

(1) Japanese language edition “Geijutsu to Shinpo” Chuo-Koron Bijutsu Shuppan Co., Ltd., 1991, PP.145-146 translated by Koji Shimomura, Sinji Goto, and Masashi Uragami from Ernst H. Gombrich, *Kunst und Fortschritt; Wirkung und Wandlung einer Idee*, Keoln, 1978.