architecture in a simulated city
TOYO ITO

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Images of Tokyo photographed aerially like a map are projected on the floor. One is a flat and homogeneous scene taken from 300 meters above and graphically processed by 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 on expressway as if taken from a video game. A scene disappears into the depth of the screen with the speed of Akira running 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 of 10-m width and 28 m length is paved with opaque acrylic panels. A translucent acrylic screen of 5-m height undulates in the longitudinal direction. A liquid crystal screen is incorporated at a point that can be electrically controlled in transparency/translucency. Another sidewall is finished with aluminium panels, and a translucent cloth hangs from the ceiling. They are all screens for images projected from 44 projectors. Eighteen projectors suspended from the ceiling project images on the acrylic floor while the remaining 26 units project overlapping images on the screen from behind acrylic or cloth shields.

Numerous images edited and accumulated in 12 laser discs predominantly show everyday scenes in Tokyo. Flocks of people crossing zebra-zones, businessmen talking on the platform while waiting for a train, a young man speaking over a public telephone, etc. These video images are collages and change incessantly on the 44 screens and the 44 screens display different images almost all the time but occasionally show the same images. Environmental music processed by a synthesizer fills the space from 16-channel speakers to add another dimension to the scene. This is the space entitled Dreams exhibited in the third room of "Visions of Japan Show" held in London. Visitors at the Show were showered by the floating video images and soaked with the sounds. Their bodies floated on the river of the acrylic floor and swayed 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 me what was expected ahead of these images. When I answered there might be nothing ahead of these, he asked if I was an optimist. I said that of course I was one. Although it is called "Dreams", according to Areta Isozaki, the producer of the Show, the space was originally titled "Simultation". The space actually simulated the present day Tokyo although the title was revised to respond to the opinion on the one side that the title "Simulation" was too difficult for the general public who would visit the show. In a sense, Tokyo is a simulated city. The experience of viewing the

images is almost like walking through Kabukicho Street at night. We are exposed to tremendous video images and showered with sounds in both spaces. By looking into the screen of the video game, we are already within the screen. We are intoxicated with the illusion of the light and sound in the space as suggested by the Japanese Crown Prince, and suspended in the 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 Kabukicho. While the real town is endlessly filled with noises and chaos, the collage of a city displayed on the screen will soon be filled with white noises or phased out into the computergraphic stream. In short, the urban scene will lose its clear configuration and fade into morning mist. All the realistic scenes melted into a state of calm enlightenment that may be called "nirvana". If we are to imagine the future, what other states than the extreme state of technological control can we expect?

Five objects were placed in the shower of the video images in the space. These objects designed by a young English designer, Anthony Dunne, looked like TV 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 generate strange sounds. While commercial TV sets are packaged in ready-made clothes as businessmen in business suits and are conveying information of the mainstream unilaterally, these objects are the highly personal and poetic ones that allow 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 the objects. Even though they are not seen with eyes, our bodies (which are 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 was based on a concept almost similar to the above. An egg of about 16-m length maximum and 8-m diameter maximum is wrapped with aluminium panels and is floating in front of two high-rise apartment buildings. While the egg is merely an object reflecting the sunlight in daytime, it displays video images including both the recorded ones and ones broadcast on TV at night-time on the internal screens and the partly punched aluminium panelled surface when five units of the liquid crystal projectors are switched on. The egg, which shines silvery in daytime, is turned at night into a vague 3-D existence without the sense of reality, as if in holography. 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 TV sets installed on the street posts or a large Jumbo-tron color display decorating the wall of a building downtown. It is the object of video images, which can be seen through the information filled air in the surroundings. It is the object of images which come with the wind and which are gone with the wind.

Coincidentally with the time of creation of the Egg of Winds, a model of almost similar shape was hung in an exhibition venue in Brussels. It was the initial model of the River City Town Gate 21, which was shaped like a ship or a polyhedron with triangular planes. The egg in Brussels was made with transparent acrylic material on the floor and covered by translucent cloth and punched aluminium panels. Visitors could not enter it but could see chairs and tables installed inside through translucent covers with the natural light coming from above. They see a city life packaged within the egg just like an illusion. They were all transient objects like a mirage without the feeling of texture or existence. They are ephemeral objects, which are more spontaneous phenomena like a rainbow than structures.

If we think of the two eggs of winds together, we may perhaps call them the design of winds. When we use a filter of some kind to screen the air that is filled with information and yet not visualized, the object then becomes visual. The acts of architecture today should be 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 the design of the winds. The tower is characterized in that it is installed amidst the neon lit downtown rather than in a museum. Although the tower, which winks lights similarly to other advertising neon lights, is less spectacular, it is said to give an impression that the air around the tower is filtered and purified. It may be so because what I intended was not to cause a substance to emit light in the air but to make the air itself convert into the light.

The Egg of Winds in the River City 21 was originally intended as the image model of a future house, but as it took too much money to create the shell, it ended up with just being the egg. What was originally intended to be seen through the air became a new style of life in a simulated city. The Egg of Winds in Brussels is named Pao, a dwelling for Tokyo Nomad Women, which was the image model of a city house for me. It depicted the image of an urban life which daily loses reality in proportion to the rate of visualization of the 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 the city life is another side of a coin to the image-like architecture.

In any age, a dream of a new life leads into a new space. For instance, people in the years around 1975 dreamed of a modern living in a space with electric appliances. It was symbolized by a flat-roofed house with large openings or a brightly lit house covered by a small gradient roof, a kitchen with a built-in refrigerator and a gas oven, dining chairs with chrome-plated pipe frames and thin vented wooden backs, etc. A nuclear family is supported by such modernized life with bright images. A father in a white shirt works in a modern office constructed with steel and glass materials and comes home to such a kitchen and dining room where his smiling wife and children wait for him. If a Volkswagen or a Citroen 2CV were parked outside, the image of a new life would be perfect.

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

While the car design and the industrial design pursue the modern style to answer the fashionable needs of consumers, the 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, the style was directed to the nostalgic expression as Japan's GNP increased.

Then, what 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 catch our eyes. Foods, clothes and daily necessities on the shelves of department stores and convenience stores shine brightly as if to realize our dreams.

But when we have eaten, worn or installed them in our houses, they lose the 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 looks quite individualistic. In other words, as observed in the car design of today, homogenized contents permit trivial differences in the superficial character. Not only houses, but also architecture is destined to go in the same direction. For example, the progress in air conditioning technology severs architecture from the local climate and proves that houses of the same style can be built anywhere in the world. It has proven all styles of architecture. Works of architecture which are apparently unique and different from each other are homogenous in content as they are decorated superficially with different forms. They are not unlike a fillet of fish, a perishable, wrapped in a sheet of Saran-wrap on a shelf of a convenience store. Only when wrapped in a sheet of film, and frozen under homogenous conditions, could they be placed on the shelves of a store.

Since the birth of steel and glass, we have long sought after the universal space. However, the universal space, which is almost the coordinates of Euclidean geometry, did not quite achieve homogeneity, even though purely homogenous neutrality was checked by orientation toward locality or desire for monumentality in the architecture. The thorough homogenization of architecture has been prevented by 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 the universal space. What is homogenized today is the society itself, and the 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 the society is being covered in a gigantic Saran-wrap film.

Once architects longed for homogeneous grids because the society then was opaque and turbid. They tried to incorporate transparent and neutral grids into the society, which was as opaque and heterogeneous as lava. Therefore, even if they had successfully attained homogenization in a universal office space that 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 drier. Although we are surrounded with a variety of goods, we are living in a thoroughly homogeneous atmosphere. Our affluence is supported only with a piece of Saran-wrap film.

Simulated life is formed based on the Saranwrap film that covers the society. For instance, men and women stop at places before going home after work in order to eat, sing, dance, talk, watch movies, go to theaters, play games or do shopping. The time and space positioned some where between office and home for doing, for example, an exercise at a sports club are fully fictional. They eat whatever is served there as if the dishes were cooked by their mother; sing and dance as if they were movie stars; discuss topics with whoever happens to be there as if they were ultimate friends; go shopping to have rich dreams and exercise in an artificial space as if they were running in a field or swimming in the sea. They are all simulations from the space and actions to whatever they gain there. Moreover, these simulated spaces and life have invaded offices and houses instead of modestly staying in the neutral zone such as downtown.

Our families and works are now all simulated. We cannot now distinguish reality from unreality.

We have lost not only the visual sense but also taste, hearing, feeling and other senses in regard to reality. We are not sure anymore what is really tasty, what we hear, what we really feel, etc. Our body has changed even though we are not aware of it. This is because the communication systems among us or between goods and us have undergone radical changes. We have transformed our body so that we could 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 the goods. We now are able to develop images only by words or video images even if they are not accompanied with entity. Thus the simulated life has self-proliferated into other areas. As a result, the communication through media, or in other words, communication without entity has become a necessity in our daily life to the extent that communication without the media network is impossible. Communication, which was once deeply rooted in an area or a local community, has lost its significance. What is thriving in our cities is based on such network of instantaneous, ephemeral, and unspecific but numerous media, which deny the 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 an entity while goods as entities are losing their significance, and 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 are quite difficult to solve, as they are contradictory. One is the contradiction in architecture, where we are challenged to make something real while goods hardly have reality. Another contradiction is to create a permanent space in the relative relation that is constantly changing. What kind of architecture is possible under such contradictory conditions?

There seems to be no definite answer to solve the 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 two problems as contradictions. Then, what we can still decide is how much we can 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. Rather, we should 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 the fiction. The cities offer much advice in this regard. I suggested fictional and ephemeral images by utilizing the light and video images for the Tower of Winds and the Egg of Winds. I attempted to evoke fictional and ephemeral screen images like natural phenomena for the Proposal for the Project for Japanese Maison de la Culture in Paris, Nakameguro T Building, and F Building in Minami Aoyama, by using glass screens holding the liquid crystal film between them. (For the latter two projects, pasted silkscreen films created more stripes.) I also tried to create images that were more natural than nature by building an artificial landscape on the originally flat site in the projects such as the Guest House for Sapporo Breweries, and the Gallery 8 in Yatsushiro.

These manipulations are all simulations. There would not be any architecture that is not simulated in simulated cities. For instance, the earth fill built in the approach in the Gallery 8 in Yatsushiro is a quite fictional man-made hill, but once completed, the hill appears to have been sitting there for over a 100 years. Reality today seems to be created beyond such fictionalism. We are now living in the borderless world of reality/unreality, and the same is applicable to materials in architecture. Today when the 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.

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