In a time when the season of the great visionary urban utopias appears irrevocably lost, buried in the ruins of its own illusions, an exhibition like Struggling Cities seems to awaken an interest, perhaps never completely soothed, towards the issues of the large-scale urban design and, through an unexpected and deliberately permeable character, leads us to reflect upon the fate of urban (and human) planning and the implications that derive from the opportunity to prefigure a future yet to come.

The initial digression on some of the most famous ideal cities, representative of different eras and geographical contexts like Dadu, Palmanova, Brasilia and Chandighar allows Nahohiko Hino, curator of the exhibition, to define the specificity inherent the idea of the planned city as well as the eschatological and morphological implications related to the planned city. We are introduced then in the debate about the reconstruction, that took place in Japan after the war: overcome the hardships of the post-war decade, during which the architects face a deficit of about 4 million homes, the 60s mark for the Japanese designers the halfway point of a changed view toward the role of architecture, thanks also to the happy solution of a weak point in the normative legal status of the architect.

However, the weight of the architectural and typological tradition, unsuitable to resolve the problems of the mass housing through modern tools, relegated the scope of new buildings to the prewar categories in which, nevertheless, architects like Kenji Hirose, Kiyoshi Seike and Gonkuro Kume (continuators of Horiguchi and Yoshida) continued the experiments on the development in series.

From the fertile cultural magma, which describes the 60s in Japan, Metabolism arises and, starting from the World Design Conference in Tokyo, enacts its own challenge against the crisis of the traditional city, as well as the wild “Westernization” of Japan, raging throughout the decade with visionary projects that, often, imply the rediscovery of the traditional Japanese arts and the conflictuality between preservation and innovation. This dichotomy relates to the eternal coexistence of antithetical pairs, different souls and yet simultaneously present in the Japanese nature as can be considered both the cultural and figurative aspects represented by the Jomon and the Yayoi period, or the rational and systematic nature of Tange opposed to the one expressed by Metabolism, which uses more or less rational fears related to the crisis to propose progressive images of future cities.

The apogee of Osaka closes the heroic season of radical projects made by Metabolism - that perhaps first glimpsed the crisis of architecture, caused by the inability to give shape and value and innovation. This dichotomy relates to the "Westernization" of Japan, raging throughout the 60s in Japan, Metabolism arises and, through an unexpected and deliberately permeable character, leads us to reflect upon the fate of urban (and human) planning and the implications that derive from the opportunity to prefigure a future yet to come.

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to a space that changes at a rate different from the one that can be reached through the planning-and delivers the heroes of that epic to the folk collective imaginary: it is not a case that this occurs on the occasion of its international celebration. Something similar will happen in 1980 in the Biennale of Venice, which will mark the end of postmodernism.

The great works of demolition and reconstruction that took place in Tokyo throughout the 80s then produce a radicalization of the memory, through which the nostalgic element indiscriminately encircles with beauty the different lost shreds of the city. The same dynamic that presides over Junichiro Tanizaki’s “In Praise of Shadows”, where the aesthetics of the “loss” hangs on the architectural element, considered as the last bastion of a way of life doomed to extinction. In this sense appear more than ever eloquent the videos featured in the exhibition, taken from anime (animated productions) like Inspector Matsui’s Inquiry, Patlabor: The movie, Ghost in the Shell and Innocence, in which the appearance of an imaginary dimension pushes towards the drifts of an illusion.

However, the disturbing walking cities named “leviathans that wander in a world destroyed in the aftermath of a nuclear war” by Giedion and Doxiadis include an ironic and provocative component that cannot be found, for example, in the poetry of Metabolists, that debate the
modo una versione lessicalmente aggiornata delle performances degli anni ‘60, quando architetti come Tange e Kurokawa erano star televisive di una stagione ancora lontana dalla spettacolarizzazione voyeuristica del progetto contemporaneo, e che anzi, al contrario, utilizzava il mezzo televisivo in senso civico, per presentare proprie proposte per la città del futuro.

L’incapacità (o l’impossibilità) riscontrata nelle città pianificate a mantenere la coerenza formale espressa nelle intenzioni dei progettisti fa sì che molte di esse presentino parti progettate circondate da insediamenti caotici, costituendo un problema comune a tutte le megalopoli moderne. Non a caso Isozaki annota che “le città persero la loro massiccia sostanzialità dietro aggregazioni di elementi oscillanti, leggeri, superficiali. Cominciarono a trasmettere i loro significati più per codici semiotici che con forme solide vere e proprie. La città è in una condizione di fluidità. Invisibile, è virtualmente simulata dai codici che la riempiono”. Eppur tuttavia mai come nel caso di Tokyo le componenti autonomiche non pianificate assumono una consistenza propositiva, rivendicando un carattere di organicità nonostante la grande varietà di tessuti, morfologie e tipologie. In tal senso la contemporanea dicotomia tra frammenti di città apparentemente inconciliabili si risolve nel trasferimento della problematica ad una categoria mentale caratterizzata dalla divergenza/compresenza di diversi livelli di realtà, tutti ugualmente concreti e plausibili, quanti sono gli immensi settori di Tokyo. La sfida, come anche lo stesso Hino sottolinea, è individuare se si tratti di un unicum. Non a caso nell’introduzione al libro di Livio Sacchi Tokyo-to, Franco Purini annota: “la questione centrale (...) è accertare se la metropoli nipponica coincida con l’ultima fase di un processo degenerativo della città contemporanea o sia invece il primo esemplare di un nuovo genere di insediamenti umani, ovvero...
di post-città iperboliche e simultanee, ormai divenuti altrettanti fenomeni geografici. Agglomerati smisurati la cui sostanza fisica sarà sempre meno determinante pervenendo a una sorta di relativa invisibilità, mentre si faranno progressivamente più importanti i processi comunicativi e i meccanismi autorappresentativi”.

Ed è sempre Isozaki ad annotare che “la città moderna respinge la pianificazione” intendentendo come pianificazione un mero “disegno” dove l’unica organicità perseguita è quella formale, tralasciando ogni implicazione morfologica. La visione “organica” che suggerisce Hino è racchiusa in questo senso: allontanare la città globalista, costruita all’insegna di una spettacolarizzazione dell’architettura, distante dall’idea di spazio urbano, liberando al contempo le città da un falso universalismo lontano dalle contingenze. Per Hino, l’esperienza “spontanea” di Tokyo dimostra che l’idea tradizionale di città pianificata, subordinata a mere logiche razionali, adottata fino ad oggi potrebbe semplicemente non essere più l’unico parametro e termine di paragone per qualunque “giudizio di valore”, come d’altronde constatava a suo tempo anche il noto semiologo francese Roland Barthes: “Tokyo ci ripete ... che il sistema razionale non è che un sistema tra gli altri”.

plausible, as the huge areas of Tokyo are. The challenge, as well as Hino stresses, is to identify whether it is a unique. It is not a coincidence that, in the introduction to the book “Tokyo-to” by Livio Sacchi, Franco Purini notes: “the central issue (...) is to ascertain if the Japanese metropolis coincides with the last stage of a degenerative process of the contemporary city or it is the first example of a new kind of human settlements, or rather post-town hyperbolic and simultaneous, already become geographical phenomena. And it’s one more time Isozaki to note that “the modern city rejects planning,” meaning planning as a mere “design” where the only organicity pursued is the formal one, ignoring any morphological implication. The “organic” vision suggested by Hino is enclosed in this sense: to distance the globalist city, built in the name of a spectacular architecture, faraway from the idea of urban space while, at the same time, saving the city from a false universalism distant from the contingencies. For Hino, the “spontaneous” experience of Tokyo shows that the traditional idea of the planned city, subject to a merely rational logic, adopted till the present days may simply not be the unique parameter as well as the yardstick for any “value judgment” as noted at the time also the well-known French semiocian Roland Barthes: “... Tokyo tells us that the rational system it is only a system among others”.

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