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In the beginning of the 60s, Japanese architecture reached its first peak. In 1961, Kunio Maekawa's «Tokyo Culture Hall» was completed and in 1964, the «Olympic Gymnasium» was built for the Tokyo Olympics (1964).

When I studied at the University of Tokyo (1961-64) Kenzo Tange was a teacher, and Sachio Otani, Arata Isozaki and Kisho Kurokawa, who were to lead the Japanese architectural world in the time to come, belonged to his office.

In those days Tange's office published «The plan of Tokyo 1960», and was participating in urban design competitions one after another with their exciting proposals and the office was indescribably active. For students like us they were our idols and when their projects were published in architecture magazines we devoured their articles and out of them we tried desperately to establish our own architectural theories. Not only Tange but also when Isozaki and Kurokawa, who were yet students on a doctoral course, walked past the studio, excitement was in the air.

When the objects of study were halls or museums we used to visit the Tokyo Culture Hall and the National Museum of Western Art (1959) by Le Corbusier, which were approx. 15 minutes' walk from the university. In the weekends we went as far as to the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art by Junzo Sakakura, 1951, in the outskirts of Tokyo. Even though it has been built at a low budget in the era of the after-war economic poverty, the delicate beauty of the Kamakura Museum...
of Modern Art, which seems to have inherited the Japanese tradition of wooden buildings, is ever present in my mind. Also, when I visited the Tokyo Olympic Gymnasium, which was about to be completed, I was struck with admiration by the marvellous urban-scale space treatment created by the space between the two gymnasiums. I was also deeply impressed by the unimaginable fluid space inside the gymnasium.

It was in 1960, a group called »Metabolism« was formed, whose three leaders were two architects around 30, Kiyonori Kikutake and Kisho Kurokawa, and a critic, Noboru Kawazoe. In the same year, inviting Louis Kahn, the World Design Conference was held in Tokyo, and the group had been established on this occasion in order to make various futuristic proposals to the cities. Every project was filled with dreams for the Japanese cities, which enjoyed rapid growth due to the swift progress in the economy. As architects, apart from the two mentioned above, Fumihiko Maki and Masato Otaka participated.

It was Kiyonori Kikutake who was the most active person in putting forward proposals in the group »Metabolism«. He was thrown into the limelight by his own residence »Sky House« (1958). This house consists of a single dwelling space that is lifted high up in the air by four wall columns. Even though the roof, which is composed of 4 pieces of HP-shells, is unique it reminds us of the traditional Japanese house at the same time. In particular the detachable children's room unit, which is hanged from the main volume and the »Movement«(kitchen/bath unit), which is extending over the surrounding terrace, are expressing in the purest and clearest way the idea of metabolism, a building which is subject to regeneration.

In the 60s, Kikutake presented Izumo-Taisha-Chonoya (1963), Kyoto International Conference Hall competition project (1963), and Hotel Toko-en (1964) in rapid succession and marked a new phase in the Japanese architectural world.
I joined these projects while I was a student and after graduation I became a member of the atelier and practiced for several years as an architect. There has not been a time as hard and as stimulating as when I worked at Kikutake's atelier in 1965-69. Perhaps without this milieu it would not have been possible for me to sustain the present design activities.

I have only told about a part of the Japanese architectural world in the 60s out of my personal history but no matter who does, it will be impossible to talk about the present status of modern Japanese architecture without relating to what happened in the 60s. And the four architects, Junzo Sakakura, Kunio Maekawa, Kenzo Tange and Kiyonori Kikutake have each played a quite important part in this era.

What is characteristic to these four architects is the fact that they are strongly influenced by Le Corbusier's ideas and works. It is natural in the case of Sakakura and Maekawa as they have experienced working at Le Corbusier's atelier but the influence in the case of Tange and Kikutake is in no way less. Even in our generation Le Corbusier was so deified that when we started to study architecture it was a matter of course to keep Le Corbusier's collective works at hand. When I worked at Kikutake's atelier I occasionally saw Kikutake unconsciously draw Corbusier's curved lines in his sketches. Corbusier's space is very much incorporated in Kikutake's architecture, I suppose.

In any case when the Japanese architecture imports, studies and digests the western Modernism and then attempts a gradual process of discovering its own originality, I believe, these four architects' ideas and works can show important suggestions.

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Kamakura Museum of Modern Art
J. Sakakura

Left, main building 1951
Right, annex 1966

Photo by Y. Futagawa
Kamakura Museum of Modern Art

View of the two exhibition areas at night

Photo by Y. Futagawa
Kamakura Museum of Modern Art

Interior of an exhibition area

Photo by Y. Futagawa
KAMAKURA MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Details of the construction on the eastern elevation of the museum

Photo by Y. Futagawa

Plan
1. Exhibition area
2. Exhibition area
3. Secondary annex
Sky house
Elevation

Sky house
Detail of entrance area