

THE SEA WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

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私たちが見たい海

東京で電車に乗ったり街を歩いたりしていると、東京が海辺にあることを忘れてしまうのはたやすい。東京とは、常に大海原と関わりをもってきた島国文化を持つ国の首都であることを。魚を食べたり、災害を恐れるときに、思い出すことはあるかもしれない。また、東京の住民たちは、伝統文化を守るための砦を築くかのように、新しい人口島を建設している。しかし、メタボリストなど、中には、完全なる浮遊都市を構想した人たちがいる。この推論は、日本の過去と未来における想像の領域としての海を考察する。

Manar Moursi は建築、都市計画、アート、デザインを研究している。ユートピア的な現実逃避を思わせる東京のカラフルなプラスティックボックスや、カイロのストリートファニチャーなど、日常的なものに関心をもっている。2012年11月に東京に滞在した。



*The rough sea
Stretching out towards Sado
The Milky Way*

Matsuo Basho, 1689

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Renders by Rowan Kandil



If the center of a city is connected to its past and sheds light on its history, a city's edge is equally revealing; it defines the outline of the city's present, its growth and its relationship to its hinterlands. Tokyo's map presents an intimidating and thick web of metro lines. This, combined with the seemingly endless multitude at its heart, provoked a strong urge in me to etch myself into one of those bold-colored lines in an attempt to reach the edge of this town.

How does this endless city end? How soft or hard are its edges?

Taking the Odayku line westward, all the way to its last stop, Tokyo fades from dense metropolis to American dream. From glitzy scrapers to pitched-roof single family dwellings in suburbs with strip malls and amusement parks. Like pendular movement, this exploration of the inland edges prompted me to think of Tokyo's other boundaries: the sea and the bay on which it sits. Formerly known as Edo, which means bay entrance or estuary, Tokyo's industry and harbor areas mostly block its seashore. Wandering the streets of the city today, one hardly sees its watery edge. Even facades of buildings on the waterfront turn their back to the sea. And yet, this edge has so powerfully defined the city and the country as a whole.

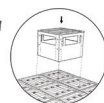
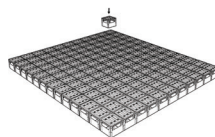
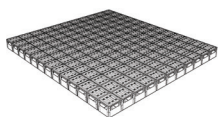
Surrounded by the ocean, Japan as an island has always honored the blessing of the sea. The ocean is the bearer of bounties. But the sea is also the generator of catastrophes. In recent years, with rising sea levels, the ocean has betrayed the Japanese with tsunamis that have swallowed entire towns. Though the ocean has often played a catastrophic role, looking back one finds an almost continuous thread of artificial island projects. From Edo times to today. Each telling a different story of the city's relationship with the sea.

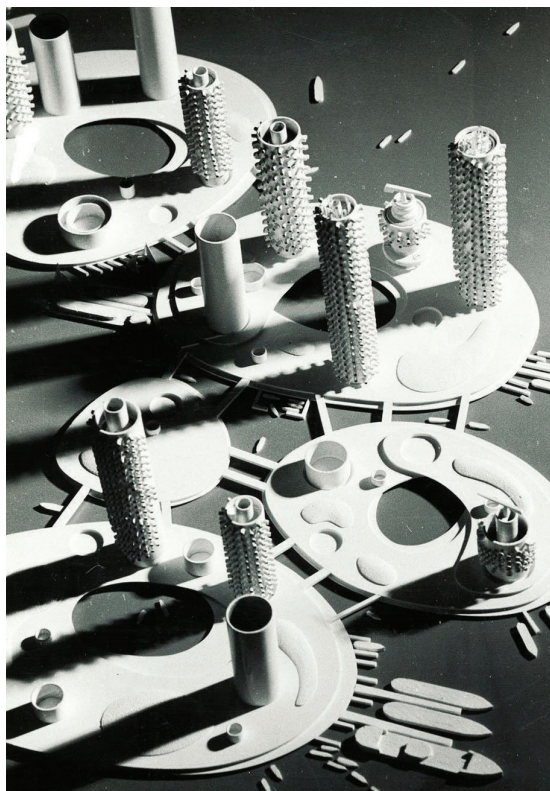
The earliest of these projects were the artificial islands that were built with the intention of defending a vulnerable Japan against Western intrusions. A series of five island fortresses, called Odaiba, was constructed in 1853 by Egawa Hidetatsu for the Tokugawa shogunate, to protect Tokyo from attack by sea. Of the five fortresses, only two survived to today.

What we today know as Odaiba began as landfill no. 13: a vast new piece of land in the middle of the bay. In the early 1990s, Tokyo governor Shunichi Suzuki made plans to redevelop this land into what he called "Tokyo Teleport Town." It was to be a showcase for futuristic living, for a population of over 100,000. When the housing bubble burst, the plan was put on hold. But in the late 90s Odaiba saw a comeback as a tourist and leisure zone, complete with several large hotels, shopping malls and a giant Ferris wheel.

Artificial islands were not only constructed for protection and pleasure. In April 1958 an extreme solution to the Tokyo Metropolis' land shortage was proposed by the Japan Housing Corporation (JHC). The JHC's plan, laid out in the Kuro Kano proposal, was to fill and polder the entire east side of Tokyo Bay, from the Tsukiji District to the Boso peninsula. The proposal was conceived as the ultimate solution for the exceptional urban growth Tokyo was experiencing. It was met with severe criticism, due to the damage it was projected to cause to the ecology.

Two months after the Kano plan was announced, architects Masato Otaka and Kiyonori





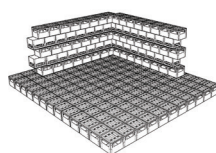
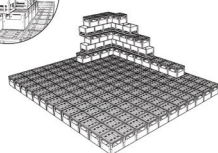
Marine City, 1958. Designed by
Kiyonori Kikutake.

菊竹清訓「海上都市」プロジェクト (1958年)

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Kikutake of the Metabolist Movement made their respective counter-proposals, “Neo-Tokyo Plan: City on the Sea” and “Marine City”, which were schemes for new marine urban habitats on floating offshore islands. Their proposals were largely accepted by the government, which was seeking solutions to the dramatic growth that Japanese cities were experiencing. Creating new “land” in the sea was less costly than redeveloping the inner cities.

For the Metabolists, though, building floating cities in the ocean was about more than just a search for additional land. Architectural historian Kenneth Frampton explains: “[When] the Metabolists looked to the sea as the locus of a new civilization, they looked to the one element which had always been deeply linked to the spiritual and material survival of Japan.”⁵⁸ They felt their projects were models for the future that could be universally adopted. They were



convinced that a brand new civilization would emerge once people were brave enough to reject the chaos, danger and misery of “continent civilization” and turn to the sea. Kikutake declared that “The civilization of continents was an accumulation of bloody struggles of human relations established in limited land, so it was a history of endless wars”. The Marine City, he claimed, “will be a unit of human community, not the individual life.”

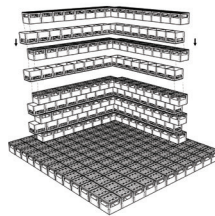
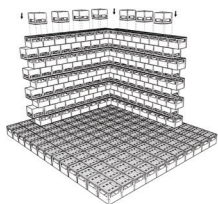
While the fortress islands built during the Edo era were created to protect and stabilize an older order, the Metabolists thought of their proposed islands as vessels heading towards a new world. Kikutake’s vision was futuristic, technocratic and romantic. In his floating city designs, the city was radically nomadic, modular and metabolic—not anchored at any fixed point. All or part of it was able to cruise to new moorings if necessary or desired. And at the end of its useful life, the floating city was to be sunk to the ocean floor where it would be re-territorialized as a reef for marine life. With science and technology as their tools, the Metabolists tried to define new relationships between nature and human beings. Land did not belong to any individual. The foremost objective was to eventually liberate the land through people choosing to live on artificial islands. Land could then become public property and restore itself to its natural state.

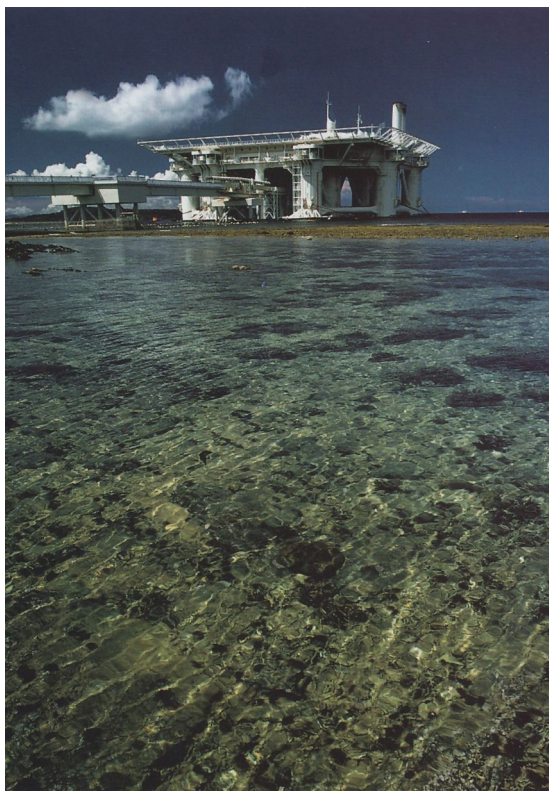
Kikutake elaborated his vision of nomadic, organically adaptable human habitats in the sea by building a dramatic Aquapolis as a prototype, for the government’s Expo ’75 in Okinawa. It had a futuristic marine theme: The Sea We Would Like to See. For Kikutake, the Expo was a platform to build and showcase his ideas. A 100-by-100-meter floating city block containing accommodation, a banquet hall and offices was built in Hiroshima and then towed to Okinawa.

But the mood changed shortly afterward. Expo ’70 was critiqued as a dystopia far removed from reality, and the 1973 energy crisis exposed Japan’s reliance on imported oil. Thus, the floating-cities projects were shelved and the utopian spirit lost its momentum.

In the context of a post-war Japan, the Metabolists’ floating-city solution can be read as a way of questioning Japan’s cultural identity. The Metabolists linked the ultra-modern concepts of nuclear physics and biological growth with traditional Buddhist thought on regeneration. A marriage of two visions of the world—scientific and spiritual—gave birth to a utopia whose core concepts are still applicable today. With rising sea levels and a desire to create flexible, modular and responsive housing solutions, the Metabolists’ floating-city ideas seem to be in tune with the needs of our times.

To me floating cities imply a resilience and a conviction on the part of humanity to survive even the deepest disasters and create novel solutions. Liberated from the restrictions of the land and the soil (and nationalism) that we are born into, new self-built islands endow their builders with a Godly control, beyond the power that architecture alone can provide. From above, I see new lines drawn in the vast ocean that can overlap, interlace or be erased completely, generation after generation—defining somehow a new humanity that is resilient, but that at the same time embraces more willingly the transience of things and believes always in the possibility of newness and renewal.





Aquapolis, 1975.
Designed by Kiyonori Kikutake.

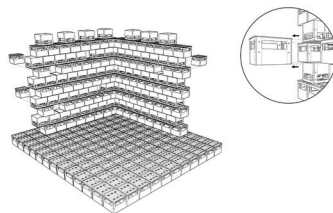
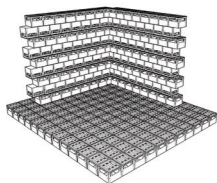
菊竹清訓が設計した「アクアポリス」
(1972年)

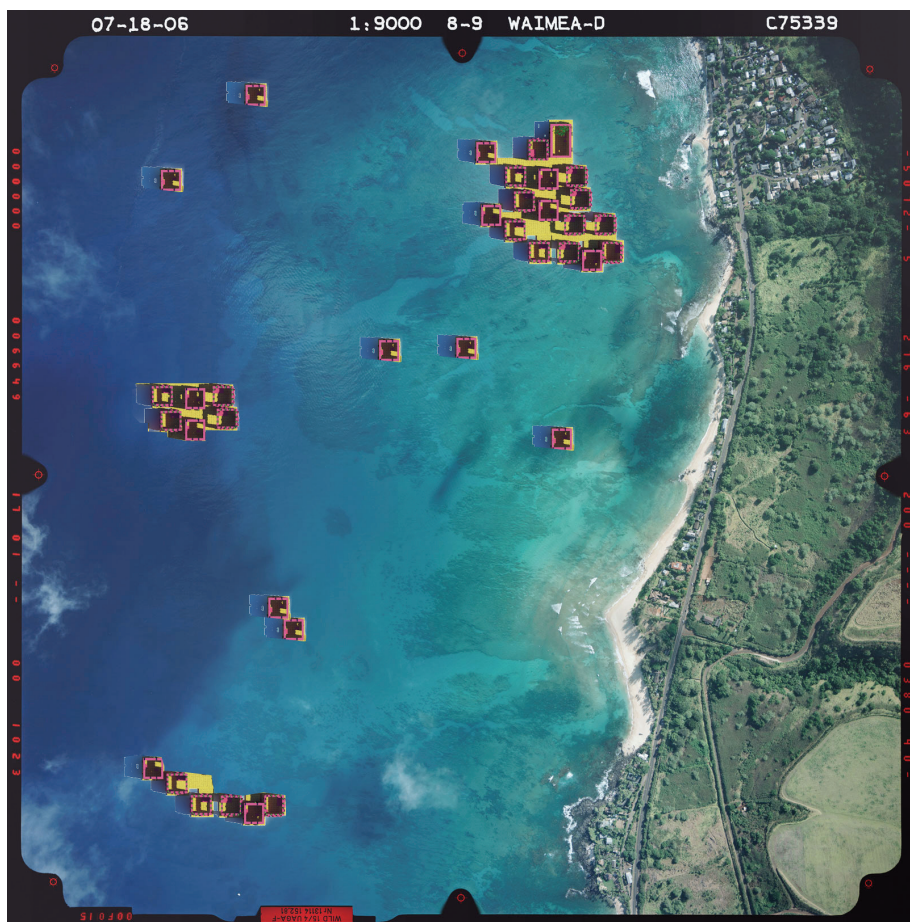
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*The island is like a tiny star
that Space doesn't see and mutely crushes
as it grinds on fearfully ignorant...*

*it tries to go on blindly, on its own
self-invented course, outside the scheme
of the planets, suns and systems.*

Rainer Maria Rilke





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D.I.Y. METABOLISM — A UTOPIAN SURVIVAL GUIDE

“The sea is awaiting a new discovery which will promise true happiness for human beings. It is just a matter of time that the civilization of continents hands over its part to the prospective civilization of the sea...Just as life originally came from the ocean, so will the metabolism of the city be given the opportunity to develop in a smoother manner by floating on the ocean.”

Kiyonori Kikutake, 1964⁵⁹

In a future of climate change and with the threat of rising sea levels, the words of Japanese Metabolist Kiyonori Kikutake seem prophetic. The context of this quote is a post-war Japan that had failed to expand its territory through the conquests of war, and was now searching for new sites to accommodate future growth.

Today, we have indeed colonized the ocean. Possibly the only human relic in a world with risen sea levels will be non-biodegradable artificial plastic.

Will we be there? Living on plastic islands in the sea? On utopian floating cities?

The ubiquitous plastic crates of Tokyo may offer a hint to what life in the future might look like. These readily available modular units can easily be configured to create inexpensive floating habitats and reefs, providing the building blocks for a second chance for humanity. Flexible ad-hoc networks of mini-islands, structured and governed by the laws of the sea, and the standardized dimensions of crates.

