

KENZO TANGE, 1946-1969, Architecture and Urban Design; edited by Udo Kultermann, Praeger Publishers, 304 pp., \$29.50.

Kenzo Tange is a wonderful, thriving, 3-D denial of the prophecies of architectural doom. Not for him the tortured introspection of the guilt-ridden escapees from the ivory tower, gnawing at their now soggy ideological bones. Never for him a moment of doubt about where he stands when established architectural values confront the supposed visual tastes of the silent majority. Never for him more than a sideways glance of contempt at the various attempts to seduce the functionalist tradition during the last two decades: mod-classic, mod-gothic, mod-mediterranean, mod-barnyard.

For twenty years he has just kept on building in the great tradition of the Modern Movement, the capital Ms magnificently intact, as if nothing had ever happened to it. He uses the old ingredients — concept, structure, space (plus a soupcon of tradition) — and makes them look as new now as they were in 1950, or 1920, or ever.

He is proud to admit that he follows Le Corbusier, but he does this in his own way, which is unique. He continues to develop and mould the tradition into his own style of creative realism: a painfully personal style that is giantistic, sensitive, superfunctionalist.

His works are as monumental as buildings can be: grandly architectural, artistic, contributive, high culture. So that should put them beyond the pale in the socially responsible eyes of 1971, shouldn't it? But the Japanese people love it! He is a national celebrity and something of a national hero. The outcome of his elitism is popular. He proves that architecture doesn't have to make all the concessions and compromises in order to achieve the necessary rapport. Or, in Japan it doesn't, anyway.

Tange is of course as world-famous as any architect now living, holding international awards galore including the gold medals of the RIBA (1965) and the AIA (1966). Yet this is the first full-scale non-Japanese collection in book form of his buildings, and of some of his philosophical writings about them, and such a book is overdue.

This volume also has a slightly frozen look — as if nothing had happened to architectural book publishing in the last twenty years. It is literally square (11 x 11 inches), richly illustrated, very handsome in a conventional way, with a slip cover and all that. And it is printed in Switzerland in the Corbu tri-lingual technique with three parallel columns per page — English, German, French. As an alternative to three separate books this device may have benefits for an international publisher, but it has none for a reader outside a language school or a gymnasium.

It is presented as the first volume in a series: Tange's "Oeuvres Completes". It is compiled from two earlier, smaller collections published only in Japanese, and has some inscrutable qualities which make the precise intent obscure. The title gives the time range covered as 1946 to 1969 but Udo Kultermann in his brief introduction says the range is from 1950 to 1970. He also mentions that a number of buildings of the last few years "have been intentionally omitted since they are so extensive in plan that they fit better in a projected second volume." Yet what could be more extensive than the Expo plan and its central structures, or the plan for Skoplje, Yugoslavia — both of which are included? On the other hand there are some frustrating gaps in the early years: four completed buildings of Tange's transitional period, including the Rikkyo Library and the Dentsu Building in Tokyo, are missing. The overall result is a gallery of beautiful, familiar photographs. Only three or four of the 35 buildings or projects illustrated will not be immediately recognized by Japanophiles.

Udo Kultermann's text is largely explanatory and makes little attempt to appraise or distinguish between the merits of Tange's buildings — as between, for instance, the all-glass oven of the children's library at Hiroshima, the antic single-shaft office building of the Shizuoka newspaper corporation in the Ginza (FORUM), and one of the greatest achievements of this century: the Olympic arenas in Tokyo.

When one has to cope with three languages at a time it is no doubt difficult to keep each one completely under control. Thus we learn that the plan of the massive, blind concrete cultural centre at Nichinan is "meaningfully reflected in the transparently plastic, stereometric external structure."

All the above criticism of this worthy book may seem petty, yet a definitive and truly complete collection was required and this is not quite it. Also, the translator's turgidity is not inevitable. It is not present, for instance, in Kenzo Tange's own words in the few essays of his which are given in the book. These are as simple and crystal clear as his building concepts. Here is in 1966 speaking on function, structure and symbol:

"The problem may be generalized like this. Can modern technology restore humanity? Can modern civilization find the channel linking itself and a human being? Can modern architecture and urban space be again the place for building up human character? . . . we can say 'yes' only when modern technology has succeeded in creating in a space a symbol of the spirit of the times."

Standing in some of Tange's spaces it is not at all difficult to say 'yes'. He is a great and lucky man who has been blessed with the vision, competence, and opportunities to create what he wanted: spaces symbolic of these times — these times in Japan.