

Robin Boyd

EXPO and exhibitionism

This is the most exhibitionist exposition ever, perhaps because it comes so soon after Montreal and Expo 67's complex image was still so fresh in all designers' minds: Fuller's sphere sitting like a clean scoop of ice-cream on an over-flavoured fruit-salad of shapes. Many of the architects who were invited once more on an ego trip have taken it too far this time—beyond the last charted point of structure in search of some new shape to excite attention. The worst offenders, with a few international exceptions, are the Japanese industrialists.

The atmosphere of Japan encourages exhibitionism. No country has a greater divergence between the taste of its sophisticated architects and that of the unsophisticated mass led by American-orientated ad-men. Science-fiction design spills out of the Japanese movie and television screens to shape much of the pop scene with spheres, stripes, and chrome-plated craziness. Whatever the cause, most of the conspicuous exhibition buildings at Expo 70 fall into two quite distinct categories, sophisticated and naive, but each in its way looks as if it has been calculated to please the mad scientist. The exceptions—which may, with difficulty, be ignored—are the symbolic or historical clowns, and the few serious buildings which often seem *too* serious for the unreal, fun world of an Expo.

The pattern created by the schizophrenic professor is set right at the beginning in the centre of the giant Festival Plaza. Kenzo Tange's stupendous space-frame, with its pneumatic plastic roof and random plug-ins, makes one statement. Then the huge hollow display sculpture, which is called the Tower of the Sun and rears one of its two heads through a hole in Tange's roof, contradicts it. The plot of Expo 70 immediately becomes apparent. It is a conflict between the order of monolithic sculptural concepts and the calculated confusion of semi-psuedo scientific systems—a visual conflict, in short, between the mad scientist's

monstrous end-product and the incomprehensible laboratory equipment with which he has made it.

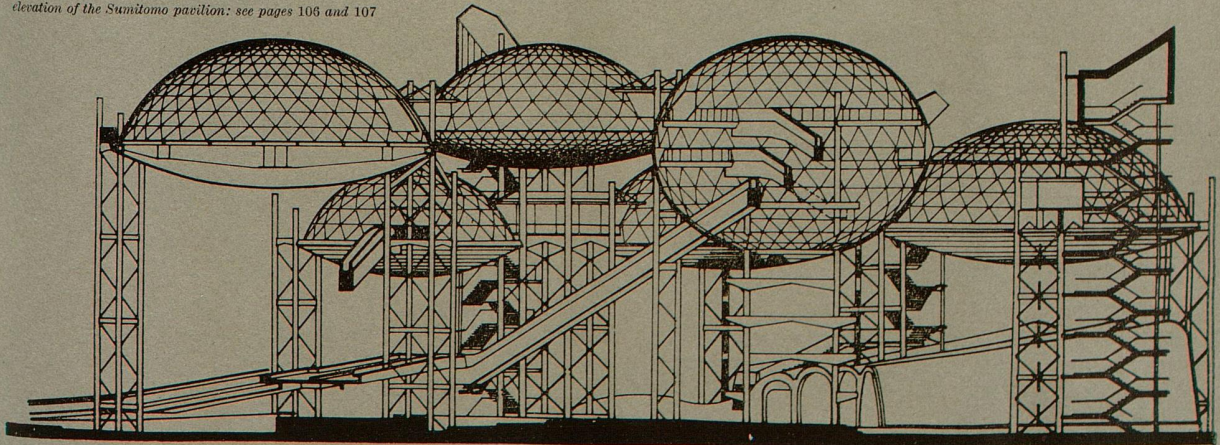
The conflict flares up all over the Expo site. Among the most notable closed visual concepts are the Japanese Government pavilion (the biggest of all), the Rainbow Tower, and the pavilions of the gas, chemical, and automobile industries. In the opposite class, that of laboratory equipment, are the Expo Tower and the pavilions of Sumitomo, Mitsui and Takara. The last is by the brilliant young architect Kisho Kurokawa. Another pavilion by him, the Toshiba Ihi, is itself a Jekyll and Hyde; it is a smooth sculpture supported by a jagged space-frame system of aggressive open-endedness.

Viewed from the outside only, as many visitors do view most pavilions, the closed end-product concepts are popular successes and critical failures, while the lab-bench solutions are often critical successes and nearly always popular failures. For instance, Expo publicity montage pictures feature the sculptured forms (and the historical clowns) almost exclusively. However, since the proportion of the pavilions in either category whose external images bear any relation whatsoever to their exhibition contents is just about equally low, it is difficult to say which category is, overall, less exhibitionist and more sensible as exhibition architecture.

An architect expects the highly sculptured end-product designs like the gas pavilion to be phony, and he is not surprised to find that confirmed on entering its irrelevant interiors. The disappointments are in the laboratory equipment category, and three samples may be selected to give an idea of the whole range. The Mitsui pavilion, by Takamitsu Azuma, provides the biggest letdown of all. Externally it looks like the mad professor's lab after a long night of unsuccessful experiments. It is wrapped loosely in fat, twisted tubes painted harsh red, yellow or blue. Some of these are pneumatic. It is surmounted by a giant tapered blue and yellow cone, red tipped, which regularly withdraws and then re-erects itself in a most questionable way—symbolising, one likes to think, nothing more than the arrival of the pneumatic age. Yet when one enters this incredible technological tangle, half the tubes turn out to be empty decoration and, at the heart of it all, its reason for being, there is just one more huge, bland hall presenting a moderately exciting light and sound show that could have been held in a plain dome-topped cylinder.

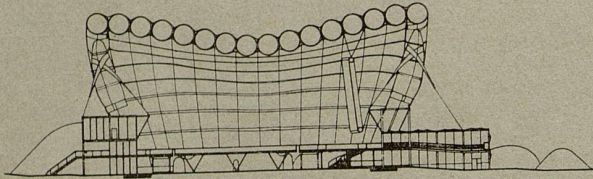
The Sumitomo pavilion, by the eminent young architect who designed the Kyoto conference hall, Sachio Otani, falls in the middle of the range. It is less grotesque; its exterior of flying saucers caught between tall vertical masts is strong and promising, and could easily fool an architect into believing there was a reason behind it. Yet its interior

erection of the Sumitomo pavilion: see pages 106 and 107



provides the second most incongruous contrast of Expo 70 (the first is the 'Computopia' housed in the Furukawa Group's pagoda). Sumitomo's silver saucers are found to contain totally unrelated, cosy fairytale models for children.

The Takara pavilion is by far the most imaginative, with Kurokawa's clever space-frame system as evident inside as it is outside. In spite of the most inscrutable flow pattern in all Expo—with visitors tangling as some enter and others leave the same doorways—its exhibitionism is related to exhibiting and to a feasible future for construction. It makes the others look almost as cheaply exhibitionist as one of Colonel Sanders's Kentucky Fried Chicken stands—which, if you can believe it, is present on the site.

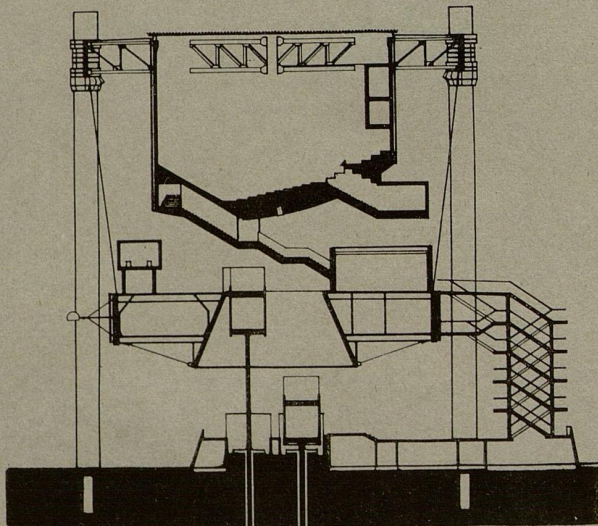


elevation of the pneumatic Fuji Group pavilion: see page 105

World exhibitions are expected to present some sort of view of the future, and an exhibition in Japan might have been expected to present the well-publicized view that the younger Japanese Metabolists have been sketching and modeling throughout the late 1960s. Instead, in all the buildings referred to above, the exhibitionism is more of the Archigram kind, which is, of course, closely related, but untidier in every sense. However, when one climbs actually into Archigram territory—into some red and yellow capsules hanging on to Tange's giant space-frame over the Festival Plaza in which the Archigram presents an exhibition of tomorrow's living—one discovers an unexpected tranquility. Here is little more than some sensible, quite square, wordy, unread admonitions warning of recognized evils of modern urban life, plus one or two nostalgic reproductions of early Archigram images—the images which are being parodied, with or without understanding, by many of the pavilions on the ground.

Towards the end of the enormous exhibition in the Japanese Government pavilion there is another overt exhibit of architectural ideas, as distinct from the many covert

continued on page 109



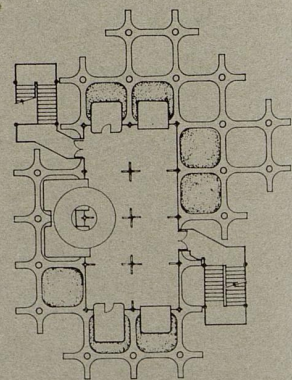
section through the Electric Power pavilion: see page 107

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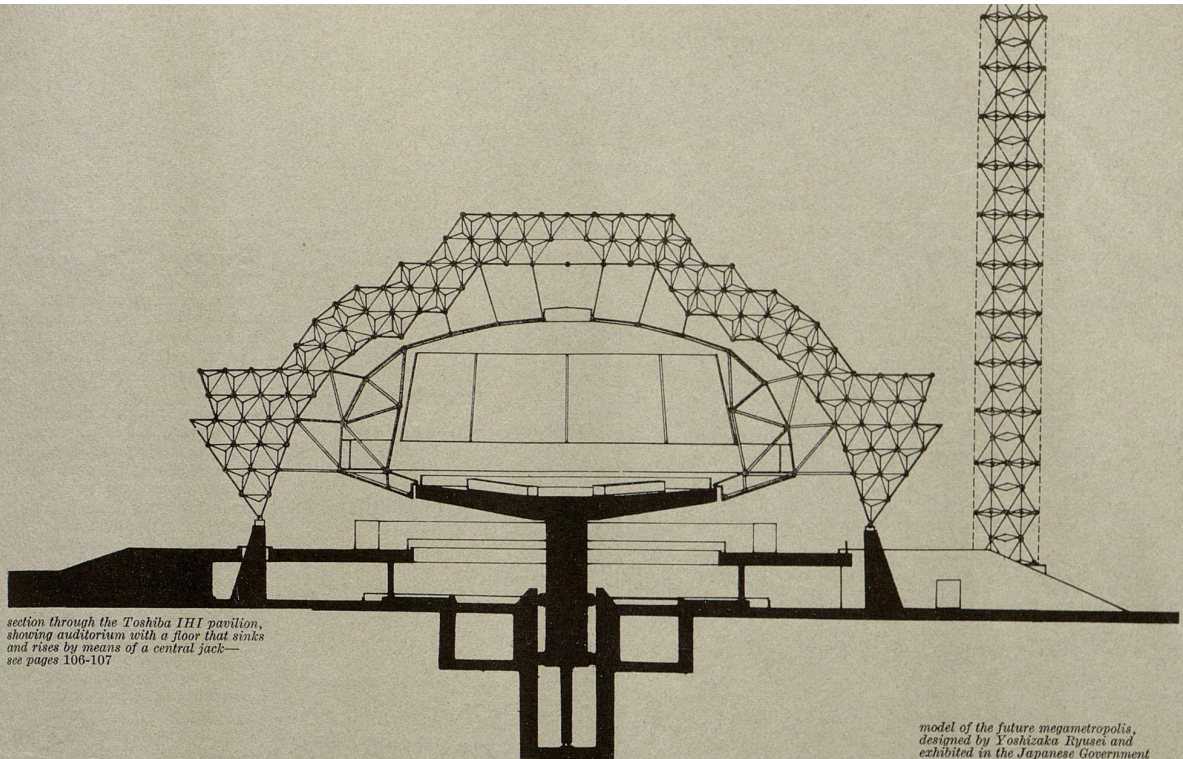
The commercial and industrial pavilions at Expo 70 are those that have indulged most uninhibitedly in the architecture of exhibitionism discussed by Robin Boyd in the preceding article. They provide an external display largely unrelated to their purpose and contents. The most interesting and spectacular of these are shown on the following pages, together with Kunio Maekawa's Iron and Steel Federation building, the only serious work of architecture in this category, which limits dramatic spectacle to its central auditorium.

Takara

On the facing page, 1, is one of the most successful of the architectural fantasies at Expo: the Takara pavilion, consisting of a steel-pipe framework in which are inserted cubic capsules covered in stainless steel. These capsules, which are attached to the framework by connectors, house the exhibits—the Takara group of companies manufactures beauty-products. The prefabricated system (devised by Shigeru Aoki) is capable, it is claimed, of unusually rapid erection, transport and dismantling for re-erection elsewhere. This example was put together in a week. Plan of the pavilion below. Architect, Kisho Kurokawa.



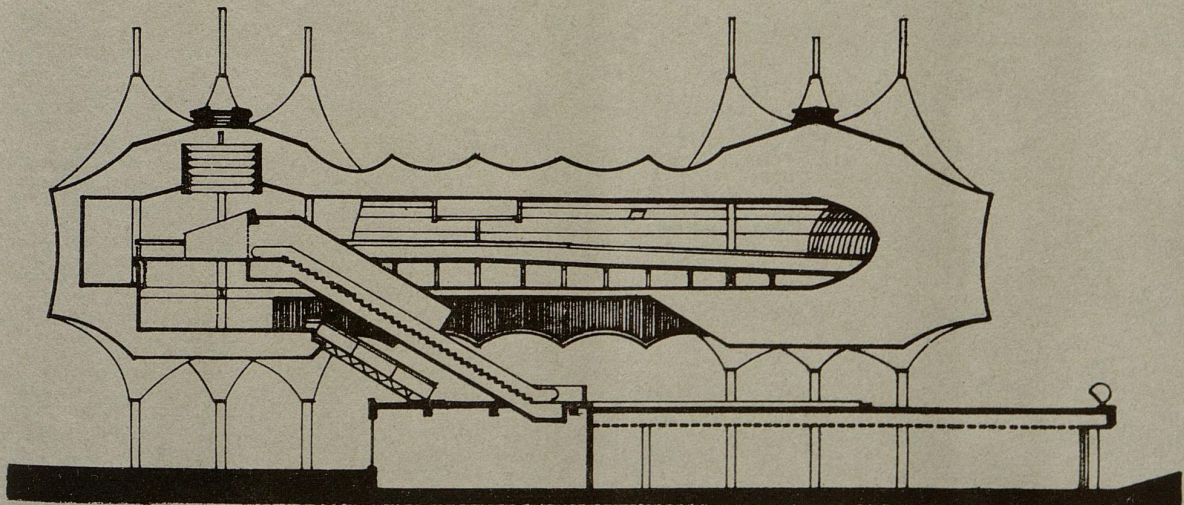
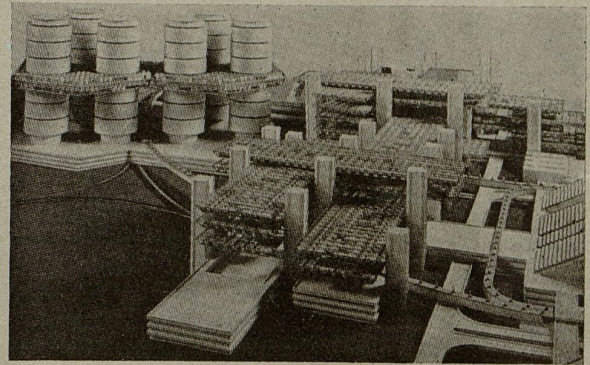
plan of Takara pavilion



section through the Toshiba IHI pavilion, showing auditorium with a floor that sinks and rises by means of a central jack— see pages 106-107

model of the future megametropolis, designed by Yoshizaka Ryusei and exhibited in the Japanese Government pavilion

exhibitions of architects' ideas. It gives a view of tomorrow, featuring an intricate model of an Archigram/Metabolist style 'megametropolis' presented by Yoshizaka Ryusei of Waseda University. Those two displays—Archigram's and Ryusei's—have enough in common to indicate a consensus of world architecture's vision for today (or 'tomorrow' in Expo language). It is not exhibitionist like the mass of Expo buildings outside, and it is not popular. Yoshizaka Ryusei's model offers an orderly but free grouping of vertical service towers and horizontal working or living planes, reminiscent of numerous schemes by leaders of the new Japanese Style; Tange, Kikutake, Shibuya and others. The Japanese girl attendant, whose job and inclination were not to denigrate the displays, commented on behalf of her pavilion's staff: 'We do not think it would be nice place to live. We call it the City of Sorrow.'



section through the Telecommunications pavilion: see pages 102-103