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TOKYO STORY

We are not fighting against... We are fighting for...

Yes Dame Zaha's stadium for the Olympics is too big. But is scale and size the only problem?

Fumihiko Maki says:

“There aren't that many places you can find in Tokyo with such greenery and suddenly building this great building might be questionable”. The stadium is planned to be built in the historic Jingu Gaien area designated by the city of Tokyo for landscape preservation, and will sit near the Shinjuku Gyoen and Yoyogi parks.

After having read more than 50 blog entries and all the web architecture magazine articles (all copies of the same interviews and very little analysis of the real problem), we see clearly that the problem of the new Olympic stadium is not the size. According to Tadao Ando, who chaired the competition, the competition brief jury asked for an emblematic building to witness the technological power of Japan and its capacity to be a symbol.

“But we need a symbol— a symbol the entire nation can take pride in, and enthusiastically support”. “A symbol to Japan's capacity to change and make it new again, allowing the nation to live everyday holding its head up”... from the competition brief.

So can we blame Zaha Hadid to have responded to the first and foremost obvious question in a blunt and literal way? Her architecture is very good at making iconic piercing objects.

The first question then would be, is an iconic object a symbol to Japan's capacity to *change*?

I would like to suggest that there are a few urgent questions to be debated and discussed:

- What type of innovation is necessary today?

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- What is the role of the monument?
- Architecture and its political significance,
- The responsibility of the architect

Let us start with

The Architect

Kenzo Tange gained fame as an architect who tried, and often succeeded, in the bridging of an experienced past with an unknown yet optimistic future, thus constructing strong architectural statements that have become markers both in time and in space. It is by this understanding that the construction of a present age is not only possible but it is also communicable.

Political significance

Olympic Games and their facilities are events of great political significance. Many Olympic games 1968 in Mexico, 1972 in Munich, 1992 in Barcelona carried that significance. The 1972 games specifically portrayed the spirit of where an entire society wanted to be and this was very beautifully condensed into architecture. Behnisch and Otto's Olympic stadium with its spectacular roof and its elegant setting became a monument. It is therefore inconceivable to demolish this stadium; it has become part of German identity and history.

The National Stadium of Tokyo most certainly has played an important role in Japan's post war efforts of economic recovery and political reintegration. The sports facilities became symbols of this optimistic path. They supported the quest for an identity shattered by the course of history.

How can we simply eradicate this past? And all that is related to it and around it. How can we ignore the scale and the urban grain of the surroundings and the whole district of the gardens?

The Role of the Monument

Assuming that we still need icons that have the capacity of being monuments, we should clarify what should be the attitude towards the character and the communicative capacities of contemporary monuments.

a monument that is inclusive rather than exclusive,
a monument that is resourceful rather than wasteful,
a monument that listens rather than exclaims,
a monument that builds on rather than eradicates.

The 2020 Olympic Games provide the opportunity to redefine the role of a monument and become a meaningful marker of our time.

Messrs. Clients, Messrs. organisers of the Olympic games of 2020 Tokyo, wouldn't it have been a better decision to renovate, enlarge and extend the buildings which contributed to the history of modern Japan by marking the 1964 Olympic games to live a new ecology?

Why is it that Japan is obsessed with erasing its own fantastic history? Is demolition the only answer to renewal? Conservation and preservation is not only about safeguarding shrines and old buildings.

We should fight for Japan to show the world, through intelligence, that it would be truly revolutionary to build an ecological, resilient, loose and agile stadium. Rather than building something that mimics bio-ecology with means of super technology, it is possible to build a stadium that changes for the better, through landscape and infrastructure, the way that we live the city and the neighbourhood, especially in these difficult times of global economical deficit as well as natural catastrophes.

Why don't you choose to ask ZHA to renovate and extend the existing national stadium and all the surrounding buildings and facilities, renewing the park and allowing the 2020 games to become the symbol of this forward-looking sustainability? This Project should demonstrate how a nation could radically change the predicament of sustainability and think of architecture not only as an icon but also as a monument to useful landscape and infrastructure.

We are fighting for Japan to do much better and contribute to another beautiful Tokyo Story.

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to be 'N. Seraji', written in a cursive, stylized font.

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