

INTERVIEW WITH KISHO KUROKAWA

Interviewed by Betty J. Blum

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Chicago Architects Oral History Project
The Ernest R. Graham Study Center for Architectural Drawings
Department of Architecture
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	iv
Outline of Topics	vi
Oral History	1
Selected References	54
Appendix: Curriculum Vitae	56
Index of Names and Buildings	59

PREFACE

As a youngster, Kisho Kurokawa's defining moment was viewing the ruins of his birth city, Nagoya, Japan, during World War II. He is convinced that on that fateful day long ago, while looking at the total devastation caused by bombs, he first understood the powerful potential of an architect—to rebuild a city. Today, with outstanding credentials, he is one of the leading architects in Japan. Kurokawa has had a multi-faceted career as an innovative award-winning designer and builder, respected philosopher, prolific author and translator, talented printmaker, lecturer, and educator. Although most of his work can be found in Asia, he has left his mark on another city rebuilt from ashes—Chicago. His especially close relationship to the Department of Architecture at The Art Institute of Chicago is evidenced in the naming of the Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture here. This interview will join the collection of the Chicago Architects Oral History Project, which seeks to document the lives and projects of architects who have built and rebuilt this city.

In a three-hour interview, recorded at Kurokawa's studio in Tokyo on May 28, 2001, he describes the path he has taken from his boyhood in Nagoya to his international prominence in the field of architecture and design, with a special focus on his work in Chicago, the Sporting Center at Illinois Center. Kurokawa's story was recorded on two ninety-minute cassettes that have been transcribed, and the transcription has been minimally edited to maintain the spirit, tone and flow of the original interview. Finally, the text has been reviewed for accuracy and clarity by both Kurokawa and me. Because Kurokawa has an astonishing amount of accomplishments to his credit and has written and has been the subject of so many books in many languages, it was difficult to select a representative sampling to include in the selected references and in the biographical sketch appended to this document. The bibliographic references I selected are those that were helpful in my preparation of this interview. Those listed in the biographical profile were chosen to provide an overview of Kurokawa's remarkable career. Kurokawa's interview is available for study in the

Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at The Art Institute of Chicago as well as in downloadable full-text version on The Art Institute of Chicago's web page, http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/dept_architecture/oralhistory.html

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Betty J. Blum
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OUTLINE OF TOPICS

Family background	1
Father's Work	5
School and Learning	10
Importance of Publications	18
From Kyoto University to Tokyo University to Study with Tange	20
Kurokawa's Philosophy	24
Metabolism in Architecture	26
Writings	30
Kurokawa's Office	35
Sporting Clubs at Illinois Center and Elsewhere	37
Woodcut Prints	44
Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture at The Art Institute of Chicago	45
Comparing the Construction Process	46
Japan Emulates the United States	49
Awards and Honors	51
Vision for the Future	52

Kisho Noriaki Kurokawa

Blum: Today is May 28th, 2001, and I'm with Dr. Kisho Kurokawa in his design studio in Tokyo. Dr. Kurokawa's work is well known and respected throughout the world. His talent has been recognized and rewarded with numerous prestigious awards and honors. Although most of his work is in Japan, we in Chicago are fortunate to have a gem of his built design in our city. We are further reminded of his achievements in architecture and design by the dedication of the Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture at The Art Institute of Chicago. Dr. Kurokawa, you have been called a Renaissance man, a legend in your own lifetime, an architect in the top rank of global superstars. With accomplishments that astonish your colleagues and admirers and inspire envy from your detractors, you've built a multi-faceted career: that of a designer, builder, printmaker, author, philosopher and theorist. Your writings have been influential, your art prints have been collected, your architectural drawings have been exhibited, your buildings have been award-winners, and you are the darling of the mass media. Why and how you have maintained such a high-level of creativity and efficiency in so many fields is what we are here to explore and document today in an effort to better understand your work in Chicago: the Sporting Club at Illinois Center. May we begin at the beginning? You were born in 1934 in Nagoya.

Kurokawa: Yes, the eighth of April, the same day of the path of the Buddha. It is the Buddha's birthday.

Blum: What a happy coincidence. Considering your achievements, maybe you are an incarnation?

Kurokawa: Well, I don't know that.

Blum: I read about your father, Miki, who was an architect.

Kurokawa: Yes, he was.

Blum: And you have a brother who is also an architect.

Kurokawa: I have two other brothers, Masayuki and Kiyohiko.

Blum: Both architects?

Kurokawa: Architects, yes.

Blum: It's easy to understand the influence of your home environment—your father and brothers, all architects—but were there any other defining moments that brought you to decide to become an architect? Or were you just swept along with your family's expectations?

Kurokawa: Both, both, yes. I think that my father expected me to be an architect. But I also admired my father because of his very talented gestures, even just writing one line on the paper, without scales. He can make a really straight line on the paper, it's a kind of magic.

Blum: Is that something he was trained to do?

Kurokawa: I think my father was just working for the improvement of the facility of the burned buildings. You know, we had, of course, a very hard time during my childhood because of the war.

Blum: Oh, this was during the war?

Kurokawa: During the war, yes. My father was just working but only for repairing the damages, not designing new architecture. So after he came back to his home he sometimes made me sketches of some dreams for making new architecture.

Blum: He was thinking about after the war?

Kurokawa: Yes, after the war. My father was quite a proficient artist and painter. He belonged to one of the very strong groups of artists.

Blum: What was the name of his group?

Kurokawa: Yes, Haku suikai. I've forgotten their real name, but "haku" means "white water" or "group of white water." So we saw many of his paintings that he started painting—I think it was after high school.

Blum: After your father's high school years?

Kurokawa: Yes, his high school. So sometimes he made sort of croquis—sketches—of the idea of the paintings and sometimes... I don't know what type of architecture he was imagining but he was

usually making sketches on the paper. But this made me quite an admirer.

Blum: These are memories from when you were about ten years old?

Kurokawa: I was in primary school, so I was seven or eight.

Blum: Are you the oldest of your brothers?

Kurokawa: Yes, I am the eldest brother. Then after the war was finished, my father took himself and my brothers to Nagoya City. That's the city where I was born. I saw nothing left—it was almost completely burned down and I could see just the mountains. It was nearly one million and a half population of Nagoya City at that time. But I really was impressed by my father when he said, "From now on, I must work for the new city of Nagoya. We architects have a duty to make a new city again." I was very surprised because, you know, it was completely burned down and no architecture was left. But an architect is in such a profession to make a city!

Blum: How did this early memory impact you?

Kurokawa: This was, I think, a strong impression of what the architect can do. So I think that day I really decided myself to be an architect.

Blum: You were quite young.

Kurokawa: Yes, I was only ten or eleven years, I don't know.

Blum: Were you good at sketching?

Kurokawa: Yes, in the primary and middle school, usually we have a classroom for art and painting and sculpture, these kinds of general training of the artists. I liked painting. I liked the homework of making models of airplanes or models of houses. This kind of training was part of the curriculum in the primary school and middle school. Many times my works were selected for prizes.

Blum: Well, you started early to collect awards! For those who are not here with us today, the walls of this entire room are lined with diplomas and honorary citations. They completely surround us.

Kurokawa: Just getting old, this is easy.

Blum: Getting good, not old!

Kurokawa: So, maybe I have been strongly influenced by my father.

Blum: And his work, the actual buildings that he built, other than repair work during the war, what were those designs like?

Kurokawa: Before the war, my father was one of the staff of the architecture department of the local government, Aichi, the prefectural government. And he was the architect in-house of this local prefecture, at the headquarters of the Aichi government. And there were others.

Blum: In what vocabulary were his government buildings designed?

Kurokawa: Yes, it's very monumental, classic. Quite recently in Nagoya City there was quite an interesting exhibition of local architects who did the

important architecture in that region. My father's work was included in seven or eight projects. Of course, at that time, everything was sort of a copy, or an eclectic copy, of western architecture. This is a picture of my father. Here's some of his work, his army work, before the war.

Blum: Is this a residence?

Kurokawa: This is residential. It's a culture center, still remaining in the city. And here's some of his competition work.

Blum: This looks like it could have been inspired by Chicago's Auditorium by Sullivan or something by Richardson.

Kurokawa: I was surprised that such a drawing is still collected.

Blum: Well, it's very interesting. Did you ever go with him to see what he was building or to visit his office?

Kurokawa: No, no. Of course, after he established himself as a free architect, he opened the Miki Kurokawa office in Nagoya City. I think this was just after the war, just after.

Blum: And then he was independent?

Kurokawa: Yes, independent. On the army base, everyone was still just sitting on the stones without thinking anything. But he suddenly established his own company and started to make designs. He was active after the war. He made so many contemporary projects after the war. I think he designed more than one hundred buildings in that region.

Blum: In a contemporary style?

Kurokawa: Contemporary style, yes.

Blum: Why do you think he shifted to work in a contemporary style after the war when he had worked in a traditional style before the war?

Kurokawa: You know, especially during the war, it was controlled by the army. The architect was controlled by their policy to introduce, for example, the Japanese traditional roof on the concrete box. So there is that kind of strong effort to bring the powerful nationalistic cultural style into the contemporary architecture. So no one could make real contemporary architecture because of the pressure from the army. Even Tange, during the war, he did a competition of the cultural center in Bangkok and his architecture is very nationalistic, in a traditional style. So almost all of the old architects before the war were influenced by European architecture, especially the great classic styles, and then during the war, they strongly controlled the style as a nationalistic, powerful style. So I think when my father started his own architecture office then actually he started to do his own contemporary architecture by his own ideas.

Blum: I'm a little surprised that a man with your father's training and age would accept modern architecture easily. I can understand why *you* would. But for an older architect, that's quite remarkable.

Kurokawa: I think so, yes. So that's why in the Aichi prefecture area—it's in the middle part of Japan—they spoke about the quite new movement of contemporary architecture created by several architects. My father was one of these architects.

Blum: I have read that you were greatly devoted to and influenced by your father's library.

Kurokawa: Yes. But during primary school and middle school there were no bookshops. We just tried to live as best we could. We needed food. So sometimes the book was the material for fuel. We used the book as energy, to boil the water. None of us had any way to live with contemporary technology. We did not even have food, any food. So we would go around the countryside to pick-up leaves. We had a special book about which leaves you can eat and which you cannot. So as small children, every day in the morning we would go to the mountain or to the forest to pick up the leaves for the day's food. So no bookshop, of course. We could not eat, so...

Blum: You make me feel like crying.

Kurokawa: It was a really hard environment that we spent during the war and after the war. So that makes quite a jump from such a situation to the architecture, you know? An unbelievable jump. But in my father's studio, I found some of the architectural books. This was the only book I think I could read.

Blum: Which books? Corbusier?

Kurokawa: No Corbusier book. There were no bookshops.

Blum: Were these books your father had collected and used for his own work?

Kurokawa: Um-hum. So maybe some of the books he bought when he was school age. So many of the books were written in English. So his room was full of books and it was a different environment.

Blum: You said he did classical-type architecture, was it in Greek and Roman styles?

Kurokawa: Eclectic, eclectic. As you know, we Japanese had the Meiji Restoration. Meiji Restoration is kind of a revolution. We changed completely from a Japanese style to the European style. We had sort of a regulation at the beginning of the Meiji period. If an architect would make public facilities, it should be based on the European style: Baroque or Renaissance or any combination of classical architecture. So you can see the Tokyo Central Station or the Japanese Central Bank, these buildings are the first European-type buildings based on this instruction by the government. So from the Meiji period everyone that was an architect should follow this guideline of the government. So the only way to make architecture is to copy the renaissance architecture or medieval architecture or baroque architecture, or a combination. It's a pity because at that time the government's policy was to catch up to Europe. There was the tendency all over the world, in India, China, and Japan and many other Asian countries, they tried to catch up to European culture to become contemporary societies. So we lost completely our tradition from that moment. This still continues in our consciousness in Japan, still. We Japanese are still keeping the ideas of the Meiji Restoration and that means that the culture of Europe is what we emulate. So for Japan, the progress means to catch up to Europe. This was the idea at that time. So we had really many European architects at that time coming to Japan as professors at the university. We had several very famous European architects. They made quite an

interesting real European-style classic architecture here in Japan. They sometimes lived nearly all their lifetime in Japan.

Blum: Did you have Frank Lloyd Wright in mind when you said that?

Kurokawa: Frank Lloyd Wright just visited Japan and made his design, but we had many architects from England, from France, from Germany.

Blum: More admiring than Frank Lloyd Wright?

Kurokawa: Frank Lloyd Wright was just a visitor. We had many visitors, including Josiah Conder and Bruno Taut. They wrote many books about Japan. They were famous Europeans. But anyhow, this was the situation after the Edo period. It was very natural that if we say contemporary architecture, at that time it was in the European style. During the war, contemporary architecture means a nationalistic style with a Chinese or Japanese roof. And then after the war, contemporary style was really contemporary again.

Blum: And your father participated in all of these changes?

Kurokawa: Yes, yes.

Blum: Where do you fit in this progression of styles?

Kurokawa: You know, I spent four years at Kyoto University. I found that Japanese tradition is very interesting, especially the reconstruction of the seventh-century, eight-century... It's really a masterpiece of that age—Todai-ji Temple is one example of the Nara period in the eighth century. So why Japanese disregarded our own tradition and changed

our minds just to copy European architecture, this was my first question during these student days. So I tried to understand our own tradition, not just to apply the form of the roof or those typical things. I tried to study more spiritual elements of Japanese culture. Then I could make architecture—contemporary architecture—based on Japanese spiritual tradition. Spiritual tradition is invisible, so you can transfer or introduce these traditional spiritual elements into contemporary architecture by using contemporary materials, contemporary technology. This is the start of my philosophy of Symbiosis.

Blum: Did this idea begin seriously when you were in school?

Kurokawa: Yes. Actually, this started from the middle school.

Blum: That's pretty sophisticated for a middle school student.

Kurokawa: Yes. When I tried to have the entrance examination of the public school, the best school in that region. Usually each region has a public school that is really hard to enter because so many good students try to enter that public school. But suddenly when I tried to enter this school, the whole educational system had changed. So I consulted with my father and finally I decided to enter into the same school from which he graduated.

Blum: Which was?

Kurokawa: Tokai Middle School. But then Tokai Middle School is another concentration of talented people—they rush to this school. So really my classmates were many, many geniuses. I was really so happy because I spent time with these people. This school has a very long

history of tradition. It was established one hundred ten years ago, so it's older than Kyoto University and it was established as a training school for the Buddhist children. It was a special school when it was started.

Blum: Was it only for religious instruction or did it also include academic training?

Kurokawa: Of course it had the usual academic training. But you know, usually, the children of Buddhist priests were going to go to the special university, a Buddhist university, so they must have prayer education. After they graduate the Buddhist university they must have many years of training at the temple. Then they become priests. So it's a long way to be a Buddhist priest. But, of course, that was a hundred years ago. Now the number of the students who want to be priests has decreased. Even the teachers, the professors, of this middle school should be priests. So we have the curriculum of mathematics, of English, of Chinese, literature, physics. But the teacher is a priest, so it's a very, very special school. Then the director or chairman of the middle school is Shiio, very much a philosopher, Benkyo Shiio. He was the head priest of Zojo-ji Temple in Tokyo—it's a big temple, the Jojo School of Buddhism. He started the new movement of Buddhism, so-called "co-living Buddhism" in Japanese, *tomoiki* Buddhism. So once a week, the whole student body would gather together in the auditorium and we would have a lecture by Shiio on this co-living Buddhism for six years—three years of middle school and three years of high school.

Blum: While you were being trained in Buddhism did you see a connection to becoming an architect?

Kurokawa: Yes, of course. So this is really good for my philosophy of Symbiosis, because co-living and symbiosis were really quite similar. But his idea of the co-living Buddhism is Buddhism doctrine. So this Buddhism doctrine cannot apply to the Christian world or the Islamic world, because this is religious doctrine. So I tried to create the philosophy—of course this came from Buddhism—but I must complete it apart from Buddhism to realize this philosophy as a more worldwide thinking. In any religion—Christianity or Islam—the idea of the symbiosis can be there.

Blum: You picked up this particular idea when you attended the Buddhist middle school?

Kurokawa: From my memory, the middle school and high school was such busy days with the homework and preparing for the next step of the entrance examination of the university. Tokyo University and Kyoto University are the most difficult to get into, they are very hard. So usually the people take two years, three years, sometimes four years, before they're admitted because the competition is so strong. Fortunately, I entered in Kyoto University.

Blum: I'm not surprised.

Kurokawa: Then I started thinking of this philosophy of Symbiosis. One of the reasons is in Kyoto I once again understand Japanese culture is very international. I mean that even for Todai-ji Temple of the eighth century, the government invited Indian engineers and Chinese designers and Korean experts to Japan to make such a huge structure. So from the beginning of Japanese history, we Japanese have been very

international. That's what is very impressive to understand about Japanese culture—it's not just local culture. Because our country is very small, the only way to survive in the world we must introduce many different cultures or know-how or technology into our country. To develop ourselves, that is the only way to survive.

Blum: But as you said before, the danger in that was losing your own indigenous culture.

Kurokawa: Yes, and vice-versa. But luckily, Japan is located on the Pacific Ocean as an island, so we have buffer zones. Of course, it is very hard to introduce the culture of other countries because we didn't have at that time any airplanes and the only way was to go by wooden ships. At that time, in the eighth century, we had an educational system of studying abroad. So if there was a talented student, the government sent this student to China or another country to be trained. But among hundreds of students who left Japan, those who made it safely alive to China were only two or three among hundreds, because it was very hard to travel. But these two or three people stayed in China or India three months or a longer time, like five or ten years, and they came back to Japan. If they made it safely, they would be the great teachers of the next generation. So in that way, it was not easy to go out and come back. Anyhow, the people really tried to communicate to another world. But these spirits are underlined. We kept the spirit of introducing other cultures into Japan. This is a quality still remaining in contemporary society.

Blum: Well, that was a perilous way to become a teacher or an architect.

Kurokawa: Yes. So, in that sense, my idea of the symbiosis of different cultures is really from that root. If you're analyzing what is Japan, then Japan is a symbiosis of different cultures. Then I understand that usually it is very difficult for other countries to realize such a cultural mixture. It's not so easy—the Greek, the Roman Empire, you know, they never introduced heterogeneous culture into their country.

Blum: Do you think that worldwide cultural exchange is inevitable today with instant communication?

Kurokawa: Yes, yes. But I'm saying that for the Roman or Greek, purity was the only way to survive and to keep their own traditions. It was purity, purity, purity. Then purity weakens the country and then they're finished. So this is the difference between Greeks or Romans and Japan.

Blum: So coming from the background that you had—Buddhist training along with an awareness of Japanese tradition.

Kurokawa: And my studying in Kyoto. Kyoto is the only town... Nara and Kyoto are the only towns where we didn't have any bombs and they were completely kept intact.

Blum: Like Paris, during the war.

Kurokawa: During the war, you know the famous story—one of the famous professors—I forget his name—suggests to the United States Army and Air Force that they don't bomb two cities: Nara and Kyoto.

[Tape 1: Side 2]

Kurokawa: It was unbelievable for us. Yes, it is really thanks to this professor who suggested to the United States Air Force not to bomb these two cities. That's why we still have these two cities that are completely traditional. That's a very important story.

Blum: How did the city inspire you—studying at the Kyoto University and living in this traditional environment?

Kurokawa: Yes, of course. I really was at the start of my philosophy of Symbiosis. Actually, one of the books that was quite important for me is the doctrine of *Consciousness Only* of Indian Buddhism, fourth century. It's a very profound idea of the new order. They are saying that we don't have any yes or no, we don't have any matter and spirit. They have consciousness in between. So actually, the two extreme existences are the same.

Blum: So they blend in the middle sphere in consciousness?

Kurokawa: Consciousness, yes. It's a very striking idea, you know, because the contemporary idea is dualism from Aristotle to Descartes and Kant to Christianity. The whole idea of this culture developed especially in Europe is dualism. This idea of consciousness-only doctrine is very different from the dualism. So that is a start.

Blum: When did you begin to absorb and make these ideas your own?

Kurokawa: Past the year of university in Kyoto. So, for me, it took about fifty years.

Blum: You were one of the first generations that were educated in architecture after the war.

Kurokawa: After the war? I think so, yes, yes.

Blum: In your school, was the Beaux-Arts system taught or a more contemporary system?

Kurokawa: After the war, already the professor is teaching the contemporary architecture.

Blum: Like the International Style? The Bauhaus?

Kurokawa: Yes. Because, you know, before the war, some of the leading Japanese architects were trained under the famous names like Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Sert. Do you know Mr. Maekawa, the famous Japanese architect who worked with Le Corbusier for more than two years?

Blum: Do you mean that he studied with him in his atelier and worked with him in Paris?

Kurokawa: Yes. And Sakakura also worked with Le Corbusier. Kenzo Tange was once a student of Maekawa. So, of course, Tange adapts Le Corbusier's architecture. So after the war, one of the gods for Japanese architects is Le Corbusier. And, of course, we always were watching the activities of Gropius and others in Europe.

Blum: What was it about Corbusier's work that appealed to Maekawa and then to Tange as a second-generation architect?

Kurokawa: I think that Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright were different from other big names because they were not just designing architecture in the cities but they wrote many books. So they were thinkers. And they have a philosophy and they have the concept. You know, we were stimulated not just by Le Corbusier's works but by his writings because he has a strong message.

Blum: I think that one of the books that is the best known, one of his earliest and most revolutionary, was *Towards a New Architecture*.

Kurokawa: I think so, yes.

Blum: It was published in 1927 but not translated into Japanese until 1967. Were you able to read the French version?

Kurokawa: Ah, I didn't know that. Every book written by Le Corbusier was eventually translated in Japanese.

Blum: But that's quite late. You were finished with school by 1967.

Kurokawa: Some others, yes, were translated.

Blum: And Giedion, too, who wrote *Space, Time and Architecture*. He first published in 1940 but that wasn't translated into Japanese until 1955.

Kurokawa: Yeah, I know, I know.

Blum: So many of these books were not available in translation when you needed them or you wanted them.

Kurokawa: Of course, not all were translated, but Sakakura in his studio had access to the whole of his writings. Le Corbusier's books were there. And because he was with Tange, he can speak French fluently. So our teachers, professors, and great architects at that time, can speak sometimes German, sometimes French, sometimes Italian. Of course, we didn't have all Japanese translations but we had the lectures by those people who can speak French. So we knew each detail of the concept of what Le Corbusier was doing. In Japan, not only Le Corbusier, but in the 1950s, I translated through the book about futurism in Italy in the early twentieth century and Russian avant-garde constructivism. So, especially for me, the movement of the early twentieth century is not just about Le Corbusier, but also Italian futurism—you know, Sant'Elia, Balla, Carra, Leonidov—and many other Russian constructivist architects, who were doing or writing the new concepts simultaneously. Of course, Le Corbusier introduced futurism and Russian avant-garde in the magazine he was editing, *L'Esprit Nouveau*. In this magazine, he was talking much about the Russian avant-garde. At that time in Russia, *SA*—that was the name of a magazine in Russia, *Soviet Architecture*—they were introducing many of Le Corbusier's works and his concepts and writings.

Blum: He also competed for the Palace of the Soviets commission.

Kurokawa: He did city planning, yes—the *Cité Radiuese*, “The Shining City”. That idea was originally presented to the future of Moscow and then he published it at a CIAM meeting.

Blum: Now, did you come in contact with all these ideas and various groups through publications or through word-of-mouth from people you knew?

Kurokawa: Publications, yes. We had so many of the books that were published in the United States or England or Europe, written in English. So we usually had the book in English.

Blum: So the ideas were generally around?

Kurokawa: So, so. I think that Japanese architectural society at that moment was one of the most information-centered of the contemporary architects, because, you know, we are very keen to know what was going on in every different culture. So, in the architectural magazines, we knew in some small city in Finland what type of architecture was being constructed there, or in a local town in India that this type of architecture was being constructed by Correa or...

Blum: Now, this was during your school years?

Kurokawa: Yes, university.

Blum: After you graduated the University of Kyoto, you went to the University of Tokyo.

Kurokawa: For graduate school.

Blum: Why did you switch schools?

Kurokawa: Four years studying in Kyoto was enough for me. I concentrated on understanding the history of Japanese traditions in such an historical environment. Mostly the professors at Kyoto University at that time were famous historians and architecture critics; there were not really any architects in our school. But, for example, at that time, Tokyo University had Kenzo Tange as a professor. And at Waseda they had Yoshizaka—he was also one of the students of Le Corbusier. And Kiyoshi Seike in Tokyo Institute of Technology and Taniguchi was also a professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. At each university, they had a top name of architecture teaching.

Blum: So the University of Tokyo was your choice.

Kurokawa: Tokyo is really the city to meet such top people and get top information about contemporary architecture. For the four years I had been thinking very basic conceptual studies in Kyoto and then I moved to Tokyo to prepare my training as an architect. That was my idea in moving from Kyoto to Tokyo.

Blum: While you were at Tokyo University...

Kurokawa: Because Tange was one of the very famous professors of Tokyo University, I think that he had just started as an impressive—he had just started on the way to be a renowned architect. At that time his Peace Center in Hiroshima was published and completed and then he got the first prize of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Offices competition and he wrote many impressive articles in architecture magazines. So for the students, he really was a genius. So I tried to go to Tokyo University to meet him and to work with him as a student, a graduate student. That was my aim.

Blum: Did you ever think that maybe you would like to study with Corbusier in his atelier in Paris?

Kurokawa: No. The only time I tried to go out from Japan was to visit Louis Kahn and ask him to be a member of his atelier. He said, "I'm very sorry, but the whole table is full." So I could not. But this was the only time.

Blum: Why did you select Louis Kahn?

Kurokawa: Because for me, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright and then Louis Kahn, these three people were philosophers and architects.

Blum: Did Mies enter your thinking?

Kurokawa: No. He's a great architect, but really the deep-thinking philosopher-architect, were only those three. So when I graduated from the master's school, the graduate course, I tried to be one of the staff of Louis Kahn. In 1960 I met once Louis Kahn in Japan because he had come to participate in the international design conference in Tokyo. As a member of the Metabolist group, we had eight hours of discussion with him.

Blum: Eight hours?

Kurokawa: Yes, from the evening to the next morning he was talking, talking. It is a very fond memory.

Blum: Did you find his ideas interesting for eight hours?

- Kurokawa: Yeah, yeah. We were just watching, really just watching him talk.
- Blum: When you were studying and working with Kenzo Tange, were you working on specific projects as if you were in his atelier?
- Kurokawa: You know, we had two different types of students at the graduate school. I and Isozaki were the master course students.
- Blum: Just the two of you?
- Kurokawa: Yes, of course there were some others. But in graduate school we had very few people who can get into Tokyo University—it's a very difficult entrance. Actually, in my year, I think that seven students were permitted to be in the master course. Each one could select the professor. Me and another one—I've forgotten the name—two students were permitted to be in Tange's laboratory. Isozaki was three years older than me and he was already a master course student. We had a choice to be a member of Tange's office and then we would be paid and we must work with him for drawings. But Isozaki and I had a different idea. We didn't want to be paid so then we were free, we were not doing his work. Isozaki and I wanted a more independent stance from his atelier, but sometimes we worked with him when he requested me to do a job or competition or something.
- Blum: Was this while you were getting your master's or afterwards, when you were a free agent?
- Kurokawa: Yes. After two years of the master course then I proceeded to three years of the doctor course. But still it was the same situation—I have my own desk and am studying my own thesis. Sometimes I was

working with Tange, especially for competitions or some sort of the study part of a project—the Tokyo Bay Plan project, for example. We worked on the design collaboration with Isamu Noguchi for the UNESCO Japanese garden project or the furniture project in collaboration with the artist Taro Okamoto. He died but he was a very avant-garde type of painter.

Blum: Who else worked with you and Tange on the plan for Tokyo?

Kurokawa: On that project, Isozaki and I were involved.

Blum: So this really exposed you to city planning, urban planning, in a broader sense?

Kurokawa: But before that, we already started the Metabolism group in 1960. This idea was already started in 1959. I, myself, was proposing many future city projects in 1959, 1960, 1961.

Blum: What inspired this group of people to get together and come up with this new way of looking at things?

Kurokawa: You know, in 1958, I learned that CIAM collapsed. 1958, I think, was the first year of my doctorate or the last year of the master course. Anyhow, 1958 was just the starting point of my career. So it was a great shock—I was very shocked—to know this news that CIAM has collapsed. It meant that Le Corbusier's theories had collapsed. Corbusier sent this message, "The new age is started as the old age is finished and it's your turn." It's very impressive.

Blum: That inspired you? You're showing me a sketch that Corbu did with one figure standing on the shoulders of another. Was this part of the letter?

Kurokawa: Yes. I don't know to whom Le Corbusier sent this short message, maybe Peter Smithson or Aldo Van Eyck or Candilis. But someone received this letter from Le Corbusier and then he sent it on to many people. One of them came to me, I don't know why. But anyhow, I got this letter and it was very short. Because, you know, we learned much about the theories of CIAM. Before, all contemporary architecture concepts we learned from Le Corbusier and Gropius and Sert, this generation. Le Corbusier said, "We're finished and the new age is coming, so it's your turn." What type of age was coming now?

Blum: And what new ideas did you bring to the new age?

Kurokawa: So I started thinking that we were the next generation. Then I wrote a short article that is *From the Age of Machine to the Age of Life*. That is the title of my short essay I wrote in 1958. From that time on for the next forty years, I am working in the context of *From the Age of the Machine to the Age of Life*. Metabolism is an important life principle. Symbiosis is an important idea of life principle. Information is an important concept of life principle. Recycling is an important concept of life principle. Ecology is an important concept of life principle. So the whole concept I trace from 1958 up to now.

Blum: Have your ideas about which you write evolved over time?

Kurokawa: No, in parallel, in great parallel. Because Symbiosis started fifty years ago at Kyoto University. Then in 1959, the Metabolism was coming.

Blum: I have read that the Metabolism group—you and the others who were involved—was a group that came together on the occasion of the World Design Conference in Tokyo in 1960.

Kurokawa: Yes, yes, we invited Louis Kahn.

Blum: And it was there that your group first presented its ideas.

Kurokawa: Yes, that is true.

Blum: To show that there really was something new coming out of the young Japanese...

Kurokawa: Yes, we discussed what is new. Then every night we gathered and discussed. I agreed to select the concept “Metabolism,” which was a very strange term.

Blum: It sounds very clinical or medicinal.

Kurokawa: Biological, yes. I completely agreed to select this name because it was one of the important concepts of life principles. So everyone agreed. Before I was involved in the Metabolism group, I had already started thinking of Symbiosis as early as middle school and then university. For me, Symbiosis and Metabolism are the same concept. Each of my works is always indebted to Metabolism and Symbiosis. Sometimes, for example, on the KLIA, which is the Kuala Lumpur International Airport project, they have a cellular unit, a metabolic system. Also, the important idea of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport is Symbiosis, between forest and architecture, the symbiosis of high-tech

architecture and local culture. The symbiotic relation is realized at the same time as the metabolic systems. So, it's really parallel.

Blum: In 1960 or in the few years before and after, did the group that presented themselves and their ideas as metabolists do any work that was designed with Metabolism as an underlying principle?

Kurokawa: Yes, almost the whole realized work was to some extent dedicated to these ideas.

Blum: What was the first expression of this principle in your work?

Kurokawa: The first expression maybe was 1970 Expo. Before that, Nitto Food Company canning factory for peaches. That was the same system of Metabolism. It is similar to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Then, Nakagin Capsule Tower and also Sony Tower and Capsule House K, and National Ethnological Museum in Osaka. All this architecture is related to the theory of structure.

Blum: Do you think that these projects are like landmarks representing these ideas and concepts?

Kurokawa: The Metabolism idea is not just a technical application of growing and extending systems but also I myself wrote many of the articles of Metabolism in which I explain that the most important idea of Metabolism is the cycles. The metabolic cycle is the same idea of recycling architecture. You know, in the Nakagin Capsule Tower the whole piping system is exposed from the core so the piping and the mechanical space will be changed in the short cycle as I recycle systems, so then the whole structure can live longer.

Blum: If you can replace parts of the system?

Kurokawa: Yes. So the idea of Metabolism is present already in expansion of systems but also in recycling systems and ecology to keep the architecture more longer-lived. So also, the idea of the expansion means the idea of asymmetry. If we make the unit in an asymmetrical way, then we have choice of the extension. If we make symmetrical architecture, there's no way to extend to the next stage. So this asymmetry is also the other tradition of traditional architecture. For example, the Katsura Detached Palace. So we always made our lectures about Metabolism starting from Katsura Detached Palace. The idea of Metabolism is a Japanese traditional idea. So Metabolism is not just a technological expression, not just high-tech architecture, but it is living. For me, it is traditional Japanese architecture but using contemporary materials.

Blum: I get the sense from the way you talk about these ideas and the work that expresses some of these ideas that these ideas were around all the time but you put them together in a very special way.

Kurokawa: You know, we published the first book of Metabolism in 1960 and already we put the Katsura Detached Palace in there as an example, from the sixteenth century of Japanese history. For us, Metabolism is—especially for me, I don't know if Maki or Kikutake think the same way—but for me, the most important thing is to change society from the age of machine to the age of life. Age of machine means the most important concept is universality or the global world standards or mass-production, or equality, economy oriented and technology oriented. For the age of life, my idea is to change from the age of

machine to the age of life. This is a revolution. The age of life means metabolic architecture and the philosophy of Symbiosis, a variety of values, a symbiosis of many cultures, different cultures; it is anti-hegemony—to put the importance into the history. Le Corbusier is fighting against the academy and decoration and this means that he was trying to change from the classic decoration to the very abstract architecture without decoration. You know, the idea of the age of life principle is that, again, we need symbolism. The symbiosis of universality is the machine principle but we need symbiosis between universality and local identity. What local identity means is that we need symbolism again. That is history and culture. We must express some identity of culture. We can make the same architecture in many places. To hold these important and difficult tasks as we have in the age of life. Information is another important factor of life principles. Everything is the same for me: Metabolism, Symbiosis, recycling, ecology, information. These are the same important concepts. This is completely different from the idea of the machine: universality, economy-oriented, technology-oriented, hegemony-oriented.

Blum: Was this a struggle getting the ideas you talk about—new, young, avant-garde ideas—into the mainstream?

Kurokawa: It's still not mainstream.

Blum: There was a struggle that erupted in the 1960s—I don't know if it was going on in Japan too—of the young against the old, the new against the established, the traditional against the avant-garde. It seems that the rupture appeared almost all over the world at that time.

Kurokawa: It is the history. You know, when art nouveau was avant-garde, then the industry tried to take this avant-garde thing as a universal industry. Then the avant-garde is no longer avant-garde because it is commercialized. Le Corbusier and CIAM...

[Tape 2: Side 1]

Kurokawa: So I think that Gropius, the Bauhaus, and Le Corbusier's concepts and avant-garde architecture is gradually absorbed into the industrial sector. Then the International Style is actually commercialized by industry. Anyone can make contemporary architecture by using steel, glass, and concrete. Without Le Corbusier, anyone can design contemporary architecture in a cheap way. So then Le Corbusier is no longer avant-garde, he becomes the creator of the style.

Blum: But as you described, apparently he understood that.

Kurokawa: Yes, he understood that.

Blum: He wanted you—the younger, up-coming people—to stand on his shoulders.

Kurokawa: I think that we've already spent forty years and still my position is in the minority. Maybe it means that I'm still avant-garde.

Blum: Well, that's a good measure. You've spoken a great deal about your writings. You write and you build and you write and you design. What role does your writing hold in your architectural career?

Kurokawa: I learned a lot from history. You know, once again, I know what the Italian futurists, did—Marinetti, Sant’Elia. They died at the age of 28 or something, in the First World War. The Russian avant-garde started from 1917 when the Russian Revolution started. Then it finished at the age of 1935 when Stalin established his own idea of social realism. So then any architect who was sort of a strong member of the movement was either killed or he must leave the country or, like Melnikov, he must stay in his house thirty years. I met Melnikov’s son just one month ago and he is still crying for his father because he stayed thirty years after Stalin pushed him into his house and he could not go out.

Blum: That’s shocking.

Kurokawa: But still, everyone in the world respects their sketches, ideas, books. Almost all their ideas were not realized. The sketches of the architecture, for example the sketches of the architect Sant’Elia for the Futurist city in his *Manifesto of Futurist Architecture* were not realized, but we are still taking those concepts as a very important historical message. So from that part, I understand the architecture, the realization is, of course, based on his concepts or his philosophy. But architecture is the material, it’s a visual substance, so we cannot keep the visible material existence forever. It may last one hundred years or five hundred years, but it eventually disappears. The cities of Greece have disappeared; Rome has disappeared. Nothing is forever.

Blum: But do you think the writings are more durable?

Kurokawa: Writing is forever. The philosophy is forever and philosophy is really changing through another generation, from generation to generation. These ideas can change and develop as they are of human importance.

To realize or not realize is not a big problem for me. To establish the philosophy is the most important.

Blum: So do you think that's where your immortality—if there is such is thing—lies?

Kurokawa: I learned from Frank Lloyd Wright, I learned from Le Corbusier, that their writings, their philosophies are still very active and may last forever.

Blum: So you think it is more important than their buildings.

Kurokawa: Yes, yes. More important. So this is my basic starting point. Fortunately, I have a chance to realize some of these concepts. It's very happy compared to the Futurists or Constructivists who could not build anything. I am always trying to share the time to write the books and to make a sketch of future cities. The future cities I cannot realize, I'm sure, but it's okay. But from these sketches and writings and concepts and philosophies many people will take the seed from these sketches and philosophies to make their own projects. It's a kind of genome, a gene. We have a gene and our gene is going to our children and going to the next generation. But the philosophy is something like a gene. That's why in my early stages—from twenty-four up to the thirties—I wrote already five or six books. My name is getting very well known because of the books. One of the books is *Urban Design*, a best-seller, and *Action Architecture*, and that book is also a best-seller. So my philosophy is coming out. But if the people who are talking are saying, "He is an architect without realizations," I'm okay with writing.

Blum: You've done both, build and write.

Kurokawa: Yes.

Blum: Am I correct to understand that you translated Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of the Great American City*? Did you translate that officially or just for yourself?

Kurokawa: You know, my secretary at that time helped me.

Blum: Was it available to other people or was it just for your private use?

Kurokawa: No, no, it was a kind of a best-seller translation, published from Kajima Publishing Company. It's still in the bookshop.

Blum: There was another book that you translated by Jencks?

Kurokawa: Yes, I translated two books of Charles Jencks's. One was the *History of Modern Architecture* and then last year I translated *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe*.

Blum: Well, that's very impressive.

Kurokawa: One of the reasons I translated Jane Jacobs was that I wrote the book, *Urban Design*, in 1964. She and I wrote about nearly the same concept, but her book was published later than mine. Unfortunately, my book was in Japanese. Really, the concept is quite similar, so I am very impressed. When I spoke with her she said, "Your idea is quite similar." Then I published that.

Blum: Well, her ideas were a first in the English-language literature. I have a confusion—when I started looking for your writings in our library and other places, I noticed that there was a writer by the name of Noriaki Kurokawa and then there was a Kisho Kurokawa. Then I realized that up until 1970 you published under the name of Noriaki. After that it was Kisho. Why did you change your name?

Kurokawa: It was not by me. It was society. Usually, for example, when someone is getting famous, the people are giving the name more in an easy way. For example, Isozaki Arata or Arata Isozaki. This is his real name but this can be the Arata or Shin. Because this is a Chinese letter, it can be two ways: Shin or Arata. But Shin is more easy to pronounce, so when Isozaki was becoming famous, everyone was reading his name as Shin Isozaki. The same is with my name: Noriaki Kurokawa or Kisho is an easier thing to pronounce. This is for everyone—politicians, authors, architects, musicians, actors—that when he is famous, suddenly, not himself or myself, but everyone else in the papers or television or critics are using the different pronunciation. The Japanese usually just register the name to the government when we are born, this is a duty. But my name is registered in Chinese letters, so Chinese letters can be read in any way. This is very confusing for foreign countries. Once I was invited to the United Arab Emirates and already my name was very famous because of the many books I had published. So I was invited and the sheik of the Arab Emirates was standing on the airplane steps and I was so young—they knew my name but they didn't know my age—so when I was stepping down onto the red carpet I said to someone who was standing there that my name was Kisho Kurokawa. He said, "Where is Noriaki Kurokawa? Where is your father?" and he was looking in the doorway. But I said, "I am also the father." It was really confusing. Then, after 1968 or something, I

put my name as Kisho Noriaki Kurokawa. Up to 1968 my name is Noriaki Kurokawa. Then after 1972 it was Kisho Kurokawa. You have a Christian name in between and we have a Buddhist name in between, so this is mine.

Blum: Do you read the journals that publish your work?

Kurokawa: Yes, usually, yes.

Blum: Do you pay much attention to what they say?

Kurokawa: Not so much. But I'm always sending things to magazines in many countries, like Spain, Brazil, Columbia, China, Korea. But I don't always have such a good memory about when we send the materials to which magazine.

Blum: Is that how your work gets published? Do they ask for it or you send it on your own initiative?

Kurokawa: No, no. Usually we have a letter from them requesting... I think that nearly every week we get a letter from somewhere.

Blum: Well, I know that you have a large staff. One thing that we sort of skipped over that occurred in 1962, was that you founded your own office. Did you have any idea then, any master plan, about how your office would develop? Such as it is today, it's a large office and you work all over the world on huge projects.

Kurokawa: I don't know. There was no plan, no plan.

Blum: Well, surely you were ambitious.

Kurokawa: No such ambitions. But I have the tactic, or maybe strategy, because, you know, in the Japanese government system, in the first selection for big projects, they only check the number of people working in the office, not the talent. There is no information at all about awards or talents, this kind of thing. Mechanically, they cut the candidates by the number of people in their office.

Blum: You mean that if you have a large staff, you're high on the list?

Kurokawa: Yes, otherwise, they cannot be on the final list. If I have only four people working with me, I cannot be on the final list for the government projects. The second thing is the size of the office. The third one is the economical situation—if the company is good in money—at the end of the fiscal year. So these three things are very important to be listed as a candidate for government projects.

Blum: Talent doesn't count?

Kurokawa: No.

Blum: Is that a hollow victory?

Kurokawa: Sure, it's very hard for the younger generation who are going to be architects for government projects. Government projects are very important and very important for the architect to do. So as a strategy I tried to make my office at the minimum size for their request. This is my strategy, but this is the only reason. I have no vision for the future.

If the government said that having only two people was okay for making projects, then I would go down to that. This is better!

Blum: Among all of the jobs that you have done all over the world, there is one that we in Chicago are especially interested in. It is the Sporting Club at Illinois Center that you designed in 1990. Considering its setting it has been called a “very small little project among giants.” It’s a small building among these large Illinois Center buildings. But the writer also said of your building that “what it lacks in volume, it makes up for in vitality.” How were you selected for that job?

Kurokawa: At that time, I had a private client by the name of Naiman Company and he’s doing the chain of many sporting clubs—the Sporting Clubs of the United States was the name of the chain. He visited Japan to discuss this with some Japanese financiers and he was jogging—he was staying at the Imperial Palace and jogging in this area—and he found one of my realized projects, the Wacoal Kojimanchi building. Then he suddenly visited my office, “I saw your Wacoal building and it’s very impressive. I have a project in the United States, the Sporting Club. Could you design it?” I said okay. This is a very simple story. He’s an owner of a private company and he saw one of my projects during his jogging in the morning. But another one I really finished the working drawings for and we got permission for the construction from the city of Los Angeles, California. It was Gateway Center the high-rise office tower, but unfortunately, the finance people changed their minds, so it was not...

Blum: It was not built?

Kurokawa: It was not realized. But this project was accepted very strongly in the California area. And this was not realized but there is another sporting club in San Diego.

Blum: I spoke with Mr. Dinnerman. He was in Santa Monica. He told me that you designed several sporting club projects, not just for Chicago.

Kurokawa: Yes, this was a very interesting project. Yes, San Diego, Miami...

Blum: He said in Boca Raton, Florida, and Newport Beach. I didn't find much that was published, but I did see this photo, which I would like you to look at. Is this the Newport Beach Sporting Club?

Kurokawa: This is, yes. This one is Newport Beach, yes, yes. I remember this.

Blum: Had you done any sporting clubs before?

Kurokawa: No, this was my first time to do the sporting club.

Blum: Was Chicago the first one or was the California club the first?

Kurokawa: The project itself—this was an earlier stage when I did this design. I think the first idea was for Newport Beach because it had a location near where we have a good harbor, so I did the suspension roof that looks like the mast of the yacht. If this would have been realized, it would have been more interesting, but I think that the second scheme was realized. John Naiman, is he still alive?

Blum: I don't know. I couldn't find him, but I spoke with Mr. Dinnerman. Here is a letter from him that was in our files at the Art Institute.

Kurokawa: 1987! I think that he has completely retired and that he lives in New York with his daughter. I think he went bankrupt from his business, so another man is doing the Sporting Club in Chicago. But it's a pity because, you know, one of the movable tower sculptures had problems. It fell and it was only because this was a maintenance problem. The bolts should have been kept in a better way but the new manager took the whole beautiful sculpture away. That was a very important design image of the four towers.

Blum: Well, it was perfect: a wind sculpture for the Windy City.

Kurokawa: Yes, yes, it was a perfect idea. This building, the high-rise next to my building, is the B.P. Amoco building, the oil company, so the image of this is the oil machine.

Blum: Who created the wind sculpture and how did you select the artist?

Kurokawa: Shingu is number one among sculptors of moving sculpture. That's why—I need that moving sculpture because Chicago is a city of wind.

Blum: Yes. Did you select Shingu?

Kurokawa: Yes, I selected him.

Blum: Well, it's a pity that it's not still on the building because it was very interesting and appropriately placed.

Kurokawa: Yes, very interesting, because this was one of his masterpieces. But I'm sure that the manager of the club did not understand the value of this sculpture.

Blum: I have read that about the configuration of the Sporting Club it has been said to have been inspired by one of the small late banks that Louis Sullivan designed. Is that true?

Kurokawa: Yes, because, you know, in Chicago, for me it is Louis Sullivan and then Mies on Lake Shore Drive. They are the two people and this is very natural. Chicago is Sullivan and Mies. This is sort of an homage to them. The basic idea is Japanese architecture in the United States. The idea for this environment, for me is the garden, the Japanese garden, with many stones, the huge stones, there.

Blum: Are you saying that you see the surrounding buildings as stones?

Kurokawa: Yes. For me, these are the stones. These are stone gardens.

Blum: Mies would be surprised to hear it described that way, I think. But I understand your frame of reference.

Kurokawa: So I said, okay, I'll make invisible architecture. Invisibility is the thing for this.

Blum: In your building?

Kurokawa: Yes. The whole building should not appear strongly; it should be weak: transparent and invisible. Small and transparent, and slender structure, so it feels weakness. Weakness is the Japanese vitality, of

Japanese culture. The United States and Russia like the image of power, but Japanese culture is delicate. Yes, weakness.

Blum: Well, I went to visit the Sporting Club and I must say that the way it's designed with the center atrium...

Kurokawa: And then the grabbing stones.

Blum: Oh, yes. That's really wonderful. There are little kids on that wall climbing like little spiders. It's really amazing to watch.

Kurokawa: At the time when it was installed, it was the largest climbing wall in the world.

Blum: Now there are several.

Kurokawa: They had many world championships there. I made the name of the climbing wall "Mount Chicago." Well, in Chicago you don't have any mountains, so now in my small building you have one.

Blum: Imagine, a mountain to climb in Chicago! I have heard, but I've read it in only one article, that there are three levels above ground and four levels below ground.

Kurokawa: Or three levels below ground. We have a mezzanine floor, so you can say that there are four floors or three floors.

Blum: Well, I understood from what I read that the depth of the underground level was taken from the depth of the original ground level of Chicago. But over the years that has been built up with landfill.

Kurokawa: Yes.

Blum: what inspired you to do that?

Kurokawa: Well, it's already part of the infrastructure. You know, the concourse level and mechanical level of Chicago Illinois Center—it's already done at this level.

Blum: That was the original level of the city when it was originally founded, in 1830?

Kurokawa: Yes. You have a whole city history in the vertical way.

Blum: Ah. Well, that was, I think, a very interesting feature. Was there anything that you did at the sporting center that was new and innovative at the time that worked well?

Kurokawa: Yes, I think that one of the ideas of this architecture was to see how we could realize the maximum transparency of architecture. To realize the invisibility, which means that you can see the activity inside of the Sporting Club at night with the lighting inside and then you can see how the people are enjoying the jogging and so on.

Blum: Oh, it bursts with energy when you walk in. It's quite amazing.

Kurokawa: Yes, because you know, there are rocks, many rocks there, where we cannot see what is going on in the inside. If you can't see anything, that means that it's rock. The architecture should have a relation to the city, that means that from the inside we can see the city on a more

intimate level. If we can recognize who someone is we can still communicate.

Blum: Do you think that by way of contrast that the Sporting Club, a small building of white metal and glass, communicates with its tall, bronze glass and Cor-Ten steel neighbors? You are calling them stones—but I'm thinking of the real materials—do you think that by contrast the Sporting Club relates to its neighbors?

Kurokawa: No, no. I know it is a small project, so we cannot play big architecture. But with small architecture, the best way is to express smallness. You know, this is the Japanese sense for judo. Small man is sometimes more powerful than a big one. And small is the same. Even a small champion fighting with a big one can fight in the same field. But in this case, the small man is never pushing the big man, he is using their power and throwing him away.

Blum: Well, it's a handsome and interesting small building.

Kurokawa: Thank you.

Blum: It's handsome in its setting, especially because there is such a contrast with the "stones" and this lovely little building.

Kurokawa: I'm doing this way in many other projects. For example, I have a national treasure next to my project in Nara City—it's the Museum of Photography. I have a program from the city and so the floor area of my museum project, is three times bigger than the floor plan of the national treasure. I cannot make such a big project next to this, so I put everything underground. There is only a small entranceway, with a

roof, that remains above grade. So it's a small roof next to the national treasure and it's very successful. But 100 percent of the building is underground. It's similar to this. Another one is the new wing of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, where it is the same, 75 percent of the building is underground. So the small part is sticking out above the grade. Again, I respect Rietveld—he is a great architect, so I respect him and his is the main building, so I make my building look small.

Blum: Well, I've only seen photographs, but your addition looks striking.

Kurokawa: This is the response to the environment, not just competing in bigness. Sometimes I need to disappear myself into this.

Blum: Well, the Sporting Club does have at least half its structure below grade. May I show you photocopies of some woodblock prints that we have in a portfolio at the Art Institute?

Kurokawa: Woodcut prints, yes. This was in the collection of the museum.

Blum: There are twenty in the set.

Kurokawa: Twenty-one. Twenty are in the set and the one is a very special large size.

Blum: These were done in 1981.

Kurokawa: Yes, actually, it took twenty years to complete.

Blum: They are titled "Architecture in the World of Image." What does that mean for this set?

Kurokawa: Well, I made many sketches during the designing of these projects. Twenty-four hours, anytime I had small sketches in the making of sketches. I used these sketches as material for the woodcut prints. So this is a collage of my sketches, and sometimes photographs of my realized architecture, with the very preliminary sketches. So it's a collage of the preliminary image with final completion. It's a collage of my sketches of projects.

Blum: Well, you certainly are talented in many, many fields—the art prints as well. The Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture at the Art Institute is a constant reminder of you for us.

Kurokawa: Yes, that's a great honor. Sometimes the people are thinking that this is my permanent exhibition space. But it is not.

Blum: What does this recognition mean to you?

Kurokawa: I think that one of the connections I have to Chicago is through my project of the Sporting Club. From that time I have many friends in Chicago and I visit many times. I know the director of the Art Institute and Mr. Zukowsky is a good friend now. Through these contacts now I try to contribute in many ways. Once the Art Institute tried to make an independent museum of architecture near the Illinois Center and so I designed the project and we did a model.

[Tape 2: Side 2]

Kurokawa: Then once you had the school entrance...

Blum: The School of the Art Institute?

Kurokawa: Yes, that is another entranceway into the Art Institute and they had the plan to make the museum of architecture by using one of the parts of the school.

Blum: When was this?

Kurokawa: It's already more than ten years ago—or more than ten or twelve years, I forgot. I intensively visited the museum to develop the plan and so I was involved many times to develop the Art Institute activities. So through these contacts with the museum, I was kind of a fellow of the Art Institute.

Blum: Do you mean a benefactor?

Kurokawa: I forgot the title. But I still tried to keep the support for especially the architectural department activities.

Blum: Well, the gallery with your name over the entrance is our main gallery for architecture. One last question?

Kurokawa: Okay.

Blum: May we go back to the Sporting Club? When you were building the Sporting Club, considering the difference in your approach, cultural differences, differences in workmanship, in ideas, uses, what did you find was the greatest difference and the most difficult to overcome?

Kurokawa: Many differences, many differences. For example, the deviation between the architect and the construction company is very different. In Japan, the construction company respects the architect.

Blum: And in the United States?

Kurokawa: No.

Blum: They do not?

Kurokawa: No. They are just doing business. So, for example, in Japan, if I found a better selection of material or a change of the detail is more suitable to this location, in Japan we can discuss this with the construction company. If my change during the construction does not affect their cost, they accept my proposal of change. Of course, this must be through the permission of the client. But in the United States or Europe, it cannot happen. Once we sign the contract, no change. If there are changes, they will request us to make a huge amount of compensation.

Blum: Did you know that when you began building the Sporting Club?

Kurokawa: Yes, of course I knew that. Then, secondly, the client has a separate contract with each engineering company, for electricity, for air conditioning, for finishing, and for the foundation and structure. They are doing their job separately, but who is coordinating this? In Japan, the construction company is the coordinator of the different jobs. This is the most important thing for the construction company. They must coordinate these, that is their responsibility. In the United States, the client has separated them and so the architect is the only one to

coordinate this, but this is sometimes very difficult. For example, each different profession has a different union here. In Japan, the whole construction labor has one union, so there is no problem. But there if a union is striking, it will stop the job tomorrow, but other people are coming tomorrow, so they need the connection. If the man who must do the ceiling is off the job, we waste two or three days because of the one union on strike.

Blum: Did you spend a lot of time in Chicago while the Sporting Club was being constructed?

Kurokawa: Of course we had the associate architects, Fujikawa Johnson. They know everything and I have a chief architect, Kitagawa, at that moment who stayed at the site during important periods. I could not stay the whole construction time, but I visited several times.

Blum: Were you satisfied with the workmanship?

Kurokawa: If you compare it with the Japanese, no.

Blum: Well, would it have been different had it been built in Tokyo?

Kurokawa: The quality of the detail is different. You know, if, for example, I say we need two millimeters round on the corner of the table, no one can do that in Chicago.

Blum: Why? Don't American workmen know how?

Kurokawa: No. United States, it's more industrialized in the economy. So if we select the standard material, it's perfect, because it's completely

produced in the factory and it's based on the strict standards, so the quality is perfect and everything is perfect. But if I tried to put my personality to this material, then suddenly the cost is jumping up to five times, six times, or ten times... So, in the United States, everything is on the social stream, then it's easy, we can do it the easy way. But if we try to establish the personality in this stream, we need a strong power to resist this strong stream, otherwise we flow...

Blum: So are you saying that the materials and their production methods often shape the design of a building?

Kurokawa: Yes. For example, this is a wall, here is a ceiling—usually I need very a tiny strip on the corner, but it's not easy in the United States. This is the wall and the panel is just put against the wall. It's very costly. My architecture is very special because I put my weight not only into the totality of architecture but the detail. Detail and totality are the same for me. That is my philosophy of Symbiosis. But the detail realization is very hard.

Blum: So do you think that there is a big difference between building in Japan and building in Chicago?

Kurokawa: Yes.

Blum: Well, in Chicago we're glad that you built here in spite of the problems you had.

Kurokawa: Of course, Japan was similar to the United States after the war, but the United States is an economy-oriented country. So people's first interest

is the economy, money, money. But Japan is the same now, a money-oriented country.

Blum: Do you regret that change in Japan?

Kurokawa: Yes, very much. You know, anyone can create money by robbery or speculation or any profession can make money. Money has no color, money is the same. But the culture means the way of spending money. So people who are spending money in different ways are different. People who are making money, it's the same money. So the change or difference is in how people are spending money and to what purpose. To create culture is the most important aim for spending money. In history, history says nothing about who is the richest man or the richest country. You know, once Egypt was the richest country, but history never says that once Egypt is the richest country. The only thing that says that are the pyramids—this is spending money for the culture. In the Victorian age, England was the richest country, but because they spent money to build Victorian cities all over the world, history remembers the Victorian age. It's not because of the money, but how they used the money for culture, the city, for architecture. Still, the United States has not so much recognized architecture or cities as a cultural asset.

Blum: Well, I think in Chicago we are becoming more aware of our architectural heritage.

Kurokawa: Japan is gradually coming to be the same country of speculation, so... I think that the capitalist system is very good, but we are already surpassing the capitalists.

Blum: What do you think comes next?

Kurokawa: Speculation, a speculative economy. Speculation is not the economy of demand and supply. Speculation is completely different: they are playing with money to get other money. So this huge amount of money is going everywhere without demand or supply. They just are going to get another. Money makes money. Money, money, money, money, but no culture.

Blum: That sounds like you think it will be a bleak future.

Kurokawa: This is very, very, very bad.

Blum: As I look around this room—I've mentioned before that it's lined with diplomas and citations and awards—which one is most important to you?

Kurokawa: I am always very pleased if I have a citation or diploma or award because this is a message from the people who see my architecture, that they see my architecture or they enjoy my architecture or they appreciate my architecture. This is a kind of communication coming back to me. In that sense, any kind of communication—even critical, if I'm on the critics' bad list very strongly—it's okay with me because it's communication. But nothing is very, very bad. No critics and no awards is not good. No awards, many critics, that's okay—this is just another method of communication.

Blum: Would you point to any of these awards as the most important to you?

Kurokawa: One way in which I may be very different from other architects is that for Japanese architects especially, foreign work means Europe and the United States.

Blum: Do other Asian countries matter?

Kurokawa: Not for Japanese architects. For them the world means the United States and Europe. I have different activities, as you know. I'm doing a project in China. Just five days ago, I was the first Japanese to become an academican of the Russian Academy. The Academy was established by Catherine the First in the eighteenth century.

Blum: What a nice honor for you, congratulations.

Kurokawa: So, my image of the philosophy of Symbiosis is a new world, including America, the United States, and Europe, Russia, Asia, and Eurussia. Really I found that during the past forty years, the cultures in Eurussia or Russia or China are very different. It's different. Of course, in terms of the economy, the United States, Europe, and Japan have made quite a lot of progress. For China, Asia and Russia, things have been very hard. It's very hard. I found in Russia, especially the elderly people are living in very hard conditions. It's very hard because of the pension fund—it is not working after the corruption. But they have a very strong different culture in Russia. In China they have a very great culture of thousands and thousands of years. So my image for the future is that these different cultures are becoming clearer and if human beings understand each other more profoundly, I think we can live together more cleverly. Unfortunately, the evaluation of culture is based on the evaluations of the economy. If the economy is going up, the culture of this country is expanding with money. But we have so

many different cultures still alive in the huge area of the planet that I'm quite pleased that my philosophy of Symbiosis and my architecture is accepted by the Eurussian countries—in China and Russia. That is for me the possibility of the future in another two hundred years you will still have these differences.

Blum: You have a very broad vision. And, if it materializes as you envision it, you will leave a proud legacy for your children.

Kurokawa: Yes, I hope so, yes. This is what I'm feeling from my activities.

Blum: Well, we may not be around to know, but I hope you're right. Dr. Kurokawa, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure.

Kurokawa: Thank you very much.

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University of Tokyo, under Kenzo Tange, M.Architecture, 1959
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Homo Movens (1969)
Thesis on Architecture I (1982)
Philosophy of Symbiosis (1987, revision 1991). Awarded the Japan Grand Prize for Literature (1993), English edition cited for Excellence from the American Institute of Architects (1992).
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Kisho Kurokawa Note (1994)
Millennium Kisho Kurokawa (2000)

- Honors:** Academician, Japan Art Academy, Japan, 1998
 Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France, 1989
 Commandeur de l'Ordre du Lion, Finland, 1988
 Gold Medal, Academy of Architecture, France, 1986
 Honorary Doctorate, Albert Einstein International Academy Foundation, 1989
 Honorary Fellow, American Institute of Architects, USA, 1982
 Honorary Fellow, Royal Institute of British Architects, 1986
 Honorary Member, Union of Architects of Republic of Kazakhstan 2000
 Honorary Member, Union of Architects, Bulgaria, 1982
 Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1994
 Life Fellow, Royal Society of Arts, London, 1976
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 Advisor, Municipal Government of Guangzhou, China, 2000
 Advisor, Municipal Government of Shenzhen, China, 1999
 Advisor, Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2000
 Analyst, Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 1974-91
 Chairman, Board of Trustees, Advanced Research Center, Columbia University, New York City, USA, 1986
 Consultant, Japanese National Railway, 1970-80
 Co-president, International Congress of Architecture, Aspen, Colorado, 1979
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 President, Urban Design Consultants, Tokyo, since 1969
 President, The Japan Society of Landscape Design, 2000
 Principal, Institute for Social Engineering, Tokyo, since 1969
- Major Projects:** Chinese-Japanese Youth Center, Beijing, China, 1986
 Ehime Prefectural Museum of General Science, Japan, 1994
 Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan, 1988
 KL International Airport, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1994-97
 Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama, Wakayama Prefectural, Japan, 1994
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 Nara City Museum of Photography, Nara, Japan, 1991
 National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka, Japan, 1983
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INDEX OF NAMES AND BUILDINGS

- B.P. Amoco Building, Chicago, Illinois 39
Balla, Giacomo 19
Benkyo, Shiio 12
- Candilis, Georges 25
Capsule House K, Karuizawa, Japan 27
Carra, Carlo 19
Central Station, Tokyo, Japan 9
Conder, Josiah J. 10
Correa, Charles 20
- Dinnerman, Robert 38
- Fujikawa Johnson 48
- Gateway Center (project) 37
Giedion, Sigfried 18
Gropius, Walter 17, 25, 30
- Illinois Center, Chicago, Illinois 42, 45
International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) 19, 24-25, 30
Isozaki, Arata 23-24, 34
- Jacobs, Jane 33
Japanese Central Bank, Tokyo, Japan 9
Jencks, Charles 33
- Kahn, Louis 22, 26
Katsura Detached Palace, Kyoto, Japan 28
Kikutake, Kiyonori 28
Kisho Kurokawa Gallery of Architecture, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 1, 45, 46
Kitagawa, Youshi 48
Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 26, 27
- Kurokawa, Miki (father of Kisho) 2-10
Kurokawa, Masayuki (brother of Kisho) 2
Kurokawa, Kiyohiko (brother of Kisho) 2
- Le Corbusier, Charles Edouard Jeanneret 8, 17-18, 21-22, 24-25, 29, 30, 32
Leonidov, Ivan Ilich 19
- Maekawa, Kunio 17
Maki, Fumihiko 28
Marinetti, Filippo Tomaso 31
Metropolitan Government Office Building, Tokyo, Japan 21
Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig 40
Museum of Photography, Nara, Japan 43
- Nakagin Capsule Tower, Tokyo, Japan 27
National Ethnology Museum, Osaka, Japan 27
Newport Beach Sporting Club, Newport Beach, California 38
Nitto Food Company, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan 27
Noguchi, Isamu 24
- Okamoto, Taro 24
- Peace Center, Hiroshima, Japan 21
- Radiant City (project) 19
Richardson, Henry Hobson 6
Rietveld, Gerrit Thomas 44
- Sakakura, Junzo 17, 19
Sant'Elia, Antonio 31
Seike, Kiyoshi 21

Sert, José Lluís 17, 25
Shingu, Susumu 39
Smithson, Peter 25
Sony Tower, Osaka, Japan 27
Sporting Club at Illinois Center,
Chicago, Illinois 1, 37, 39, 40-43, 45,
46, 47-48
Sullivan, Louis 6, 40

Tange, Kenzo 7, 17, 19, 21, 23-24
Taniguchi, Yoshio 21
Taut, Bruno 10

Todai-ji Temple, Nara, Japan 10, 13
Tokyo Bay Plan, Tokyo, Japan 24

Van Eyck, Aldo 25
Van Gogh Museum (addition),
Amsterdam, Netherlands 43

Wacoal Kojimachi Building, Tokyo,
Japan 37
Wright, Frank Lloyd 10, 18, 22, 32

Yoshizaka, Takamasa 21

Zojo-ji Temple, Tokyo, Japan 12
Zukowsky, John 45