



10 / WILL DEEP FEELING REALLY BE POSSIBLE?  
IN 21ST-CENTURY SOCIETY

It must be admitted that our society, modern industrial society, does not usually work in such a way that the whole *can* be given profound feeling. The fragmentation of process has made it difficult, if not impossible, to pay attention to the whole in almost all building processes.

One might say, then, that feeling is an unattainable ideal for us. We might reflect sadly on the passing of traditional society, where feeling was present in almost every building, and say, with a shake of the head, that for us in post-industrial society it is no longer possible. I shall return to this massive theme in Book 3. But I do not believe that a negative judgment about the matter would be

helpful or accurate. I am certain that a society of human processes, based in the fashion I have been describing on the emergence of feeling, is an attainable ideal. Early modern buildings — the works created in the first half of the 20th century — were (oddly) more often engaged by feeling than postmodern buildings — those from the second half of the 20th century. Social and industrial processes can, with the right intent, be refashioned to allow feeling to guide and dominate the whole, no matter how impossible that may sound to our cynical contemporary ears.

It is worth reflecting on this as a realistic possibility.



11 / CLASSROOMS IN THE RAIN

If I repeat the process of relying on feeling again and again, gradually I do get something which has life. The proof of the pudding is that the life generates deep feeling within *me* — a profound kind of ease.

What is responsible for this kind of ease?

The subtle details of human experience must be accommodated. Yet though they are subtle, they are extremely specific. We feel them strongly. And they do actually exist in the reality of the events which will happen there, practical physical events, and emotional events.

A small story about a discussion I had with one of my apprentices, Friso Broeksma. He had been working on the Berryessa house for Mr. and Mrs. Lighty for three or four months, and I asked him what he thought of the feeling in the building. I asked him, if he felt that he now understood the principle that every step taken in the Lighty house was based, always, on trying to

deepen the feeling. He said: “Yes, in *theory* I do. But in practice it seems different. I am worried, for instance, about the fact that the house has so many stairs — this will make it very hard for the Lightys when they get old. And the fact that the bedroom is separate from the main house — it means you have to go through the rain when you go to bed.”

I told him that these were just the kinds of problem I was concerned about: That he was exaggerating certain practical matters, and therefore losing his own connection with the deeper feeling. To begin with, the Lightys and I together had laid the buildings out, among the oak trees, in this rambling way, with the necessity of moving from building to building, just to get from room to room. It came from them, because they loved the slope and the oak trees so much. Why should someone *else* come along and say that it is not functional? I told Friso that thou-



*Rain on the Eishin campus. students hurrying from class to class*

sands of traditional buildings he himself admired, in Holland, Africa, Russia, China, have all kinds of anomalies. These so-called anomalies come about for practical reasons that allow them to be true to the unity of their situation. They are a little strange, occasionally. But the strangeness bothers almost no one, because, what is more important, we sense and feel and experience their commitment to *life*.

So I told Friso that the issue of stairs for old people, or the issue of not getting wet, are not as all-important as he was claiming. The main lesson is to gain a greater sense of perspective, in which feeling has its place, and practical issues about getting wet and keeping dry also have their place. It is *feeling*, above all, which has the greatest chance of dealing with the whole in a balanced way, because it is precisely the nature of feeling that it does embrace the whole — while intellectual ideas more often concentrate on parts and end up getting them out of proportion.

What is most important is the feeling, the life one experiences there. You consider them

charming and never dwell on or exaggerate possible functional problems. But, for people educated in the functional architecture of the 20th century, it is the tyranny of functional problems, created by a rigid frame of mind, which exaggerates some things, and then makes it impossible to get the feeling or the wholeness right.

In the Eishin project, we had many fights with the teachers about the idea that the classrooms were separated from one another. They said: “How can you make a school where you can’t go from one classroom to another without getting wet?” I told them, “Rain is part of life. It is not only necessary to avoid the tyranny of simple-minded functional thinking so as to relax the plan and allow the wholeness to develop. Also, getting wet is good for you — it increases your own sense of life. Think about Zen, and recognize the importance of the rain. It will be impossible to build a beautiful campus, if you insist on rain-proof connections between all buildings.”

We argued and argued. Finally I reminded them that it had been their own choice to make

classrooms separate (because the home-like atmosphere was better for the students and for the teachers), but that this separation and homelike atmosphere brought with it a second reality — namely, that the classroom buildings really *would* be separate, *would* have their own gardens — and that one would then have to go out into the rain when walking from one classroom to another.

So finally we did decide to allow the buildings to be separate. A year after the buildings were finished, I asked them if they minded getting wet between classes. They laughed. “We

like it,” they said. “We have umbrellas. Or we run. We feel more alive.” The deep feeling which I am talking about concerns the whole. It includes feelings of life, the sense of living. Within the terms that I am talking, the feeling of the Berryessa house is profound because it allows parts of the house to sit on the slope — looking at the purple mountains which the Lightys loved — without disturbing any oak trees. The tyranny of “old people mustn’t have stairs” or “you must have a covered indoor path to the bedroom” would disturb the whole, and disturb the feeling far too much.



## 12 / A NEW WHOLE EMERGES: LIFE V. MECHANISM THE ESSENCE OF UNFOLDING WHOLENESS

The obligation of the building is to help the street; the obligation of the fireplace is to help the room; the obligation of the wall is to help the roof; the obligation of the building is to help the garden; and of the garden to help the street.

It is this endless, upward-streaming hierarchy which produces life.

Everything in living process is meant only to underline this idea, and to show what it means to make this practical in buildings. I am proposing that in the course of planning, conceiving, designing, and making something, throughout that process we have a *single* step-wise process which may have 10 steps or 500 steps or 100,000 steps — but the essential nature of each step is exactly the same. It has only one purpose: to allow the wholeness to unfold correctly, *through feeling and by creating feeling*.

The process of putting feeling into the thing can be understood soberly. Consider an imaginary building task. It starts on the day you first hear about the job. It continues when you visit the place, meet the people; goes on while you get an idea about the building; get a rough idea about the plan of the building, the treatment of the site; continues while you work out the build-

ing volumes; goes on when you see the first visions of color and materials; when you have to pay attention to the codes; keeps going as you start working out movement, structure, and the placing of individual rooms. It goes on while you prepare drawings, and submit them to the building department; it goes on while you make mockups of the various kinds of construction which will be used in the building; working out what kind of building details you will use.

In every case, we do everything we can to intensify the feeling. It goes on when we start forming foundations; continues as we pour foundations; continues in the cutting and planing of every piece of wood; goes on while we decide details during construction: move walls, place windows, decide details of a seat here, an ornament there. It continues while we paint, place colors, on the building — and it continues in all the years after that while you, or others, add to the building, change it, improve it, and take care of it.

During this process, we make hundreds of thousands of individual decisions. Some of them take no more than a second: It may be an instinctive placing of a line — here instead of here.