9 / FEELING AS THE ORIGIN OF THE ARTISTIC WHOLE

I assert again the very close connection between feeling and wholeness. When I say that we should aim towards the feeling created by a building, I might equally say, we should always try to shape each part so that it works to create the whole. These two rules are essentially one and the same. If I work towards making a thing which has true feeling, I am necessarily aiming at, conceiving, imagining, and thinking, about the quality of the whole. And it is true, then, that I will, because of my mental concentration, work in such a way that each part supports the whole, and is shaped by its presence in the whole and by its contribution to the whole. Easily said. But not trivial. It does mean that what is made, to create a whole, must originate from the effort to create feeling in the whole, not from intellect. Intellect is too crude a net to catch the whole.

In the following examples, I try to go a little further to show how these two concepts — created feeling in the whole, and the whole itself — are linked in practice.

CATCHING THE FEELING OF THE WHOLE THROUGH COLOR AND MATERIALS

It is important to understand what it means to pay attention to the *whole*, and how the feeling induced by that whole can then come into play in different ways. For example, in the choice of materials, what is "the whole"? When I begin a project, I often make a palette in which different materials are looked at in their proportion, so that one can discover, and then establish, the balance of materials that will make the project good. That statistic is one of the most global

First test

Second test

things about a project. Here in an early stage of the Eishin project in Japan, we see four different mockups, each containing different relative proportions of concrete, concrete block, white plaster, black plaster, green plaster, wood, stone. After studying these, a particular one (the fourth) was chosen, and provided the project with its wholeness of feeling.

Such a statistical distribution for overall material percentages is no less important than the expression of the overall type of plan, or the broad brush configuration of the plan. In each case one makes that choice which has the most profound feeling, and which fits — emanates most successfully from — that particular site.

When I visited the site in Japan, and spent a few days there in 1983 at the beginning of the project, I began to experience the wholeness of the site as a kind of light. I can still see it, and feel it, in my mind's eye, as I sit writing these words today, seventeen years later. It was both bright, and soft, yet brilliant and harsh in its softness. I was able to carry in me the feeling of the buildings — even their forms and colors — that would be congruent with that light, sustaining it and sustained by it. The wall mockups I made, a few weeks later, shortly after returning from Japan, and illustrated here, were made as an answer to the feeling of the light which I experienced in Japan, in Iruma-shi, on that site, in 1983. The fourth mockup came closest to realizing the light in its harmony.

A TINY LIBRARY MOLDING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WHOLE

Let us use a microscope to look at such a process more carefully.

A few years ago, I built a library in my house. It has floor-to-ceiling bookshelves all around. The bookshelves have a small step at waist height and may be seen as they are in the room in the photograph on the next page. Because of the step at the waist-high shelf, there

Third test

Fourth test

The finished library. ''... I look around after an hour of labor, and realize that this may be the best reading space I've ever been in... The room doesn't shout... it has light that is good, and from two directions, that is constantly changing. The relationship of the chair to the table is just right for a long read. The details all come together in a way that makes me feel peaceful and watchful and attentive and comfortable reading a complicated book for a long period of time.'' Joel Garreau.

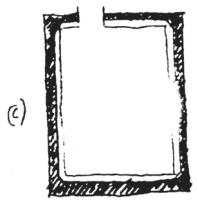
was a slight problem in the corner. There is a gap between the two verticals at the shelf (see diagram). How should the gap be closed? While I was building it I began a discussion with the cabinetmaker, how to close this gap.

There were three main possibilities. The thing could be made with two boards that form a right angle going into the corner. The thing could be made with two boards that form a right angle coming out into the room. Or the gap could be closed with a 45-degree board chamfered to fill the gap.

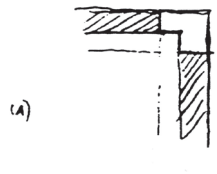
To decide the issue, I made a very simple experiment. When the gap was there, between the boards, I made a mockup with my hands — putting my two hands to go into the corner, putting my two hands to come out into the room, and putting one hand to make a 45-degree "board." Looking at my hands, in these three arrangements, it was possible to see which one had the best effect on the room as a whole. I chose the third of them, with the chamfered corner. My carpenter was surprised, and resisted this one slightly. I did it, though, because from the experiments, I knew that it would make a better corner for the room as a whole. And, in the finished room, these corners do indeed make a beautiful whole. They have an effect which makes the entire room feel more finished, and more complete.

Here we have a case where a decision that is at the scale of three or four inches affects the life of a large center that exists at a scale of about 15 feet.

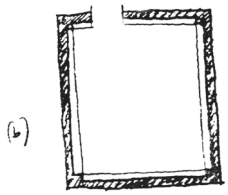
Consider another similar example from the same room. I had to place a small crown molding to close the gap between shelves and ceiling. I chose a crown molding, and had the idea of painting it. I thought if we use the same redwood, it will make a harsh connection with the white of the ceiling.



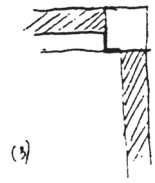
Plan view of the whole



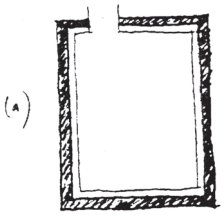
Configuration corner empty



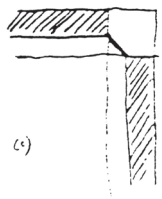
Plan view of the whole



Configuration projecting into room



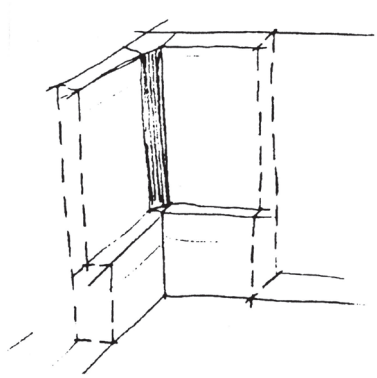
Plan view of the whole



Configuration chamfered corner

First I thought about colors — and mentally went through the possible colors. It seemed likely that red would be the most harmonious. Then I got a small piece of the molding, and tried a few reds on it. I had expected that the red would need to be pale, halfway between the color of the redwood and the white of the ceiling, to tie the two together more effectively.

However, as it turned out, the thing which was most quiet, and which tied the room together most effectively, was a dark red, a scarlet with black mixed into it. Here again is a case where a very small center, at the scale of two inches, when carefully colored and intensified in just the right way, has the effect of calming and



Perspective view of the chamfered corner

The part of the campus where the library was to be built.

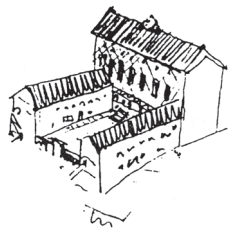
binding together the whole room — again a center at the scale of 15 feet.

In both cases (chamfer and color), a small center, only a few inches across, helps the life of a center which is many times larger. The large center of the library as a whole, gets its life and depth of feeling from the careful way these small centers are chosen to help it.

Now, when people visit that room, they often comment on an enormous silence which appears to emanate from the room. A stillness one can hear in the room, even before entering.[8]

It is easy enough to understand the idea that an existing wholeness is helped by a small center, if it is done right. However, what I have found, is that people have difficulty *seeing* the wholeness accurately, so that they know what to do there.

Diagram of the ridge, judo hall at the left-hand end, library at the right-hand end



Sketch of the library, as it was to be built

THE SHAPE AND POSITION OF THE LIBRARY ON THE EISHIN CAMPUS

In the diagram, you see the plan of the university portion of the Eishin campus near Tokyo, as it was at an early stage while my colleagues and I were working out the plan. It is a long ridge, a natural feature of the land, which later was lined by long narrow buildings along either side. At the left hand end (east) is the Judo Hall. That forms, as one can see, a kind of stopping point, a focus, towards which the whole is oriented. And at the west end, is the Library building. That library building is shown in my sketch. The whole building is conceived, shaped, given its cup-shaped plan, its height, its organization — by the task of becoming a focus which energizes the whole top of that ridge *as a whole*. The cup shape enhances the larger whole of the ridge. This is geometrically true. When we paid attention to the feeling that emanated from the land, and did our best to create the deepest feeling, it was natural (and appeared inevitable) to place the library in that position on the ridge, and to give it the half-cup form, which completed the natural form of the ridge itself.

That is a simple example of what it means, on a larger scale, to get feeling in a building by making it contribute to the life of a larger whole.