My Theory of Architecture

By Hasegawa Itsuko

WHEN I took a trip to Europe right after finishing university, I began to strongly question the modern architectural style, which has developed based on the idea that "less is more." In 1968, the year I started graduate studies at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, an article in the Austrian magazine, *Bau*, about Hans Hollein's revolutionary new thesis that "Alles ist Architektur" (Everything is Architecture) had a huge impact on me. His words could be taken as a denial of Modernism, and I soon felt that architecture included non-material things like air and states of being. In contrast to Japanese modern architecture, which had developed problems with the ideal that architecture itself should always be autonomous, the new ideas that kept flowing into Japan between 1960 and 1970 accelerated changes in the way architecture should be.

If we take a broad view, the social trend is for houses to be products in a consumer society, and large-scale system production of buildings has taken a major role in industrialized society. In this kind of society, I was impatient that the direction of my concept of architecture did not fit in, and I became excited by the possibilities offered by the new ideas from abroad.
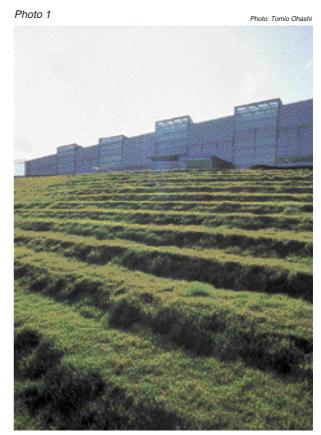
The speed at which new styles of architecture came and went, including Postmodern, Deconstructionism and Hyper-Modern, was dizzying. At this time, during the decade of the 1970s, I was thinking intensely about architecture after Modernism while assisting in the research lab of Professor Shinohara Kazuo at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Meanwhile, I slowly began to design small houses for my friends.

The sayings that "architecture is a system" or "architecture is art" are the theories of the people making the architecture, and they imply that the architect creates the architecture independently as his or her own work. In order to build architecture to encompass the issues of both the designer and the user without any conflict between the two, I started house design by addressing on my own the issue that the creative process needs to be revised. In other words, I wanted to take into consideration many different things for a method of developing architecture that included not only the theory of designers, but the theory of users as well.
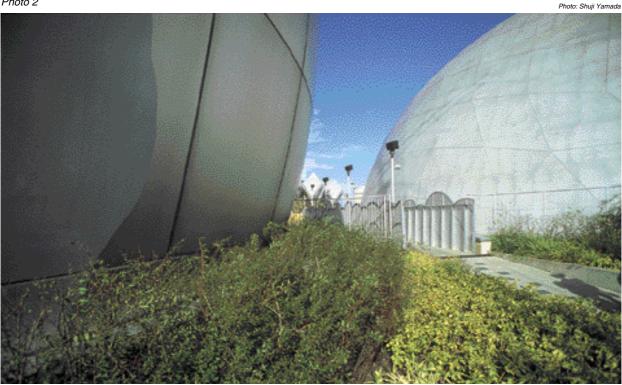
While working on the design, I first tried to talk specifically with the homeowner about his or her lifestyle, placing importance on the exchange of opinions. In doing this, I gained an awareness of making architecture as a joint effort with the homeowner, in the case of a small house. Through this kind of communication with the homeowner, the architecture can be found in the development process itself. When putting this into practice, the more detailed the communication becomes between the homeowner and me, the more diverse the styles that need to be employed.

In the 1970s and 1980s, both the economy and politics changed a great deal in Japan, and a lot of new ideas were introduced into the lifestyles of ordinary Japanese relating to clothing, food and housing. The lifestyle of homeowners was steadily changing. Finally we arrived at the idea of using an empty space as a positive void. I designed a house that could be called incomplete and "unaffected art" with a format where the empty space can be sometimes partitioned according to the composition of the family, or could be reconfigured for an event. In the end, I wanted to develop the empty space into a living area where people could conduct themselves freely.

When I call space a "room," I am not imagining the building itself in a fixed format. I am imagining a situa-

Photo 1

Photo: Tomio Ohashi

The Oshima Museum of Picture Books

Photo 2

Roof garden of the Shonandai Cultural Center site in Fujisawa, Kanagawa Prefecture

tion that connects to the future, while leaving room for many different possibilities. I am using the word "room" with the meaning of a space or environment that is flexible enough to handle any changes. Architecture does not just deal with hard objects; rather it functions as space that is developed through the relationship to people. I came to realize that developing home architecture through communication opens up room where people and things have a relationship, and creates room for people to continue to live. I decided I wanted to share the joy with the homeowners, and take architecture in the direction of creating homes that incorporate the feelings of their owners.

After I became involved with several public architecture projects, I noticed that it took managers at the center of the architecture to make it work. I came to feel that I wanted to get closer to the complicated structure of life, or a non-linear structure, and open up architecture from classical geometry, and promote designs that show the connections with the people doing the management planning. I continued to think about this, always using my own specific reasoning, and I realized that I only wanted to make things that were necessary for people, and that above all, what I wanted is to create spaces where people feel physically comfortable.

Since a lot of public architectural designs are chosen through competitions, they are on wide public display, and citizen hearings are also often held. In these hearings there is the confirmation process of getting approval from users for the competition entries. As the competition proposals need to be considered in a short period of time, I wanted to make designs that are closer to the users' behavior and consider more deeply the incomplete ones in this hearing process.

A design work with a special mission like the Oshima Museum of Picture Books, which I was asked to start from a "soft" design, is completely different from design work that opinion exchange and workshops were held following the competition, and I can confirm the details with the users over and over again. The values of the designers and users naturally collided and fused in the exchange of opinion over public architecture. However, rather than just trying to win the other side over, I learned to intentionally confront the users in order to develop a deep relationship. In other words, this is a process where the people of contemporary society confirm the project together, including its way of thinking and sensitivity to lifestyles, and it is a process that is aware of this as a concept.

Since users are groups of people with different perspectives, this has become a process that tries to introduce a concept that approaches multiculturalism. Although this is public participation in a nutshell, the large abstract concept of "the public" has already lost meaning. We then saw that there were small sports and hobby groups, or just individuals. These individuals included those who had traditional lifestyles, people who had lived in several different countries and urban individuals. They have a

Photo 3

"Plaza" of the Shonandai Cultural Center site in Fujisawa, Kanagawa Prefecture

mature sense and are very interesting and accomplished people. We continued to hold discussion meetings on how we could create an open public or urban space for these people.

As an "outsider," I might be pressing for a cultural conversion of the field from the outside, or am probably working for a complete change. For me, just saying that the change is simply new is weak, but I want more diverse value and historical weight. The theme of collaboration is an integral and steadfast part of my design process. This is because it is also necessary to highlight things that people are not aware of, while shortening the distance between people and clarifying the differences with the user that arise from the designer's standpoint.

In my architecture, there is a certain extreme realism, which probably has a different dimension from the conceptual architecture of other architects.

Although it is difficult to explain in words, most architects have a strong notion that the architect is independently creating something new. However, in my case, as I deal with complex realities using several concepts and then express this through my work, since architecture is more like a living process, it cannot be developed without dialogue.

Architecture bears the long process where changes continue to be incorporated until the building is completed and is being used. It can be said that the time of completion is not the building's peak, rather it should be 30 to 50 years in the future, in the incomplete process of architecture. Since social conditions and people's ways of thinking change over time, architecture must also be revised like the story of our daily lives. I am looking to connect architecture to users and towns, which are experiencing this continual change.

For example, in the case of the Shonandai Cultural Center site in Fujisawa (Kanagawa Prefecture), since it

Photo 4

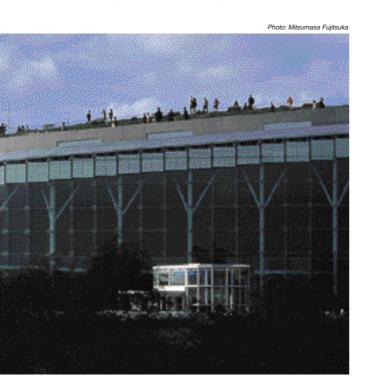*Niigata City Performing Arts Center*

Photo 5

Photo: Ekio Kamiyama

The landscape design of Niigata City Performing Arts Center employs a system of floating islands arrayed like an archipelago

Photo: Mitsumasa Fujitsuka

had been an empty lot for a long time, it had been used as a field for many different purposes. I thought that I wanted to allow for this legacy in the new exterior space. For the Niigata City Performing Arts Center, I tried to create a "story," where a field-like outdoor theater was incorporated into the landscape, and I reconstructed an aerial garden as a space for showcasing the traditional arts of Niigata, using the landscape of a group of floating islands in the Shinano River, which was the scenery in prosperous times. During the construction, workshops were held, and additions were made to the "story" while learning about ways to use new architecture and planning management. Then after it was completed, the story continued to be developed as the people of Niigata took the next steps.

The style of public architecture is determined by the gathering of many different opinions and standpoints from groups including the government, residents, experts and architects. Buildings that architects have built in the past may remain as symbols of society during their respective eras, but they were not necessarily designed to be convenient for users. Since the advent of the Modernism style of architecture, architects have developed theories with a certain conviction. However, even though some are linked with government authority, they have not brought joy to individual citizens. I would like to move away from this, and create enjoyable architecture in Japan that brings together the people who design and use the buildings, by making architecture that fully incorporates the users' point of view. **J S**

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