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Beyond Metaphor

Visualizing Consciousness

Hiroshi Hara

In order to present my perspective on the distinction between 'Contemporary Architecture' and 'Modern Architecture' I use the following diagram:

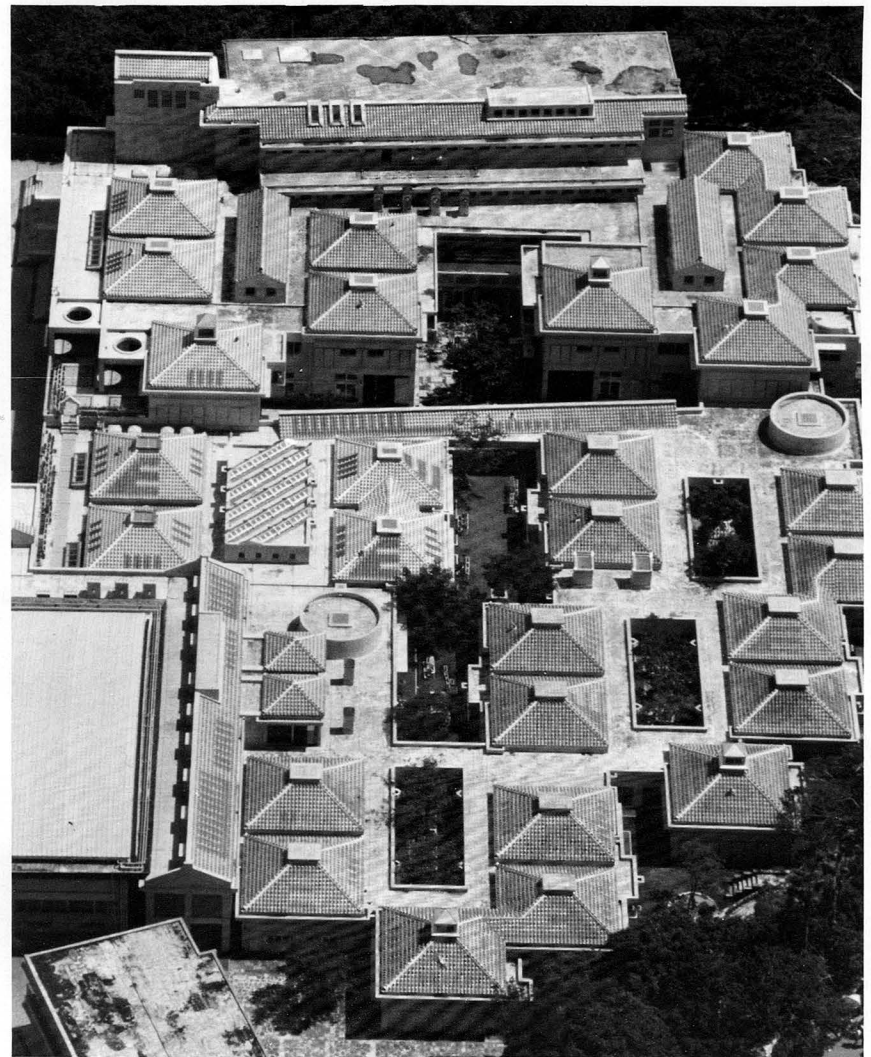
| Modern Architecture | Contemporary Architecture |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (physical) body | consciousness |
| machine | electronic device |
| function | modality |

Having drawn this diagram several times, however, I have come to expect that there must be many divergent views concerning this conception. In particular, I find it difficult to present a concrete explanation of the word modality, on my own. Modality is defined by phenomena such as spatial atmosphere or mood, but this definition has been argued intuitively, not logically. Naturally, there is a strict correlation between modality and consciousness. In this short explanation, the concept of modality itself will not be dealt with directly, but memory, an outstanding phenomenon of consciousness, will be discussed in conjunction with my recent works.

The relationship which contrasts 'body' with 'consciousness,' in the diagram above, does not mean to infer that modern architects paid no attention to psychological human activities. However, judging from their arguments, it appears that their rationalistic designs were mainly based on physical pleasantness. Without a doubt, they viewed the human body as a machine. Our current engineer-

ing environment is completely different than the one at the beginning of this century. We have transgressed from the age of the machine based on dynamics to the age of the electrical device based on electronics. The way in which electronic devices function is similar to the way in which our consciousness functions. In effect, these devices perform a role for our consciousness. One such example is artificial intelligence, the characteristics of a machine programmed to imitate human intelligence functions. Previously physical phenomena were grasped by observation of the machine. Presently, conscious phenomena are understood by observation of electronic devices.

Though no clear explanation about explicit conscious phenomenon has been presented to date, it is clear that memory and memory recall exist. Moreover it is also clear that new images can be conceptualized by memory modification and synthesis. Assuming that memory and conceptualization are two important phenomena of consciousness, when reviewing this century's aesthetics one is reminded of theories dealing with metaphor. 'Defamiliarization' of Russian Formalism and 'depayement' of Surrealism are two major concepts which made use of the aesthetics of metaphor. In effect, artistic works were formed by the stopping of conscious activities (for example, 'astonishment') and the awakening or creation of new images through a shift of context and juxtaposition of heterogeneities.



Josei Primary School: Verifying Old Memories

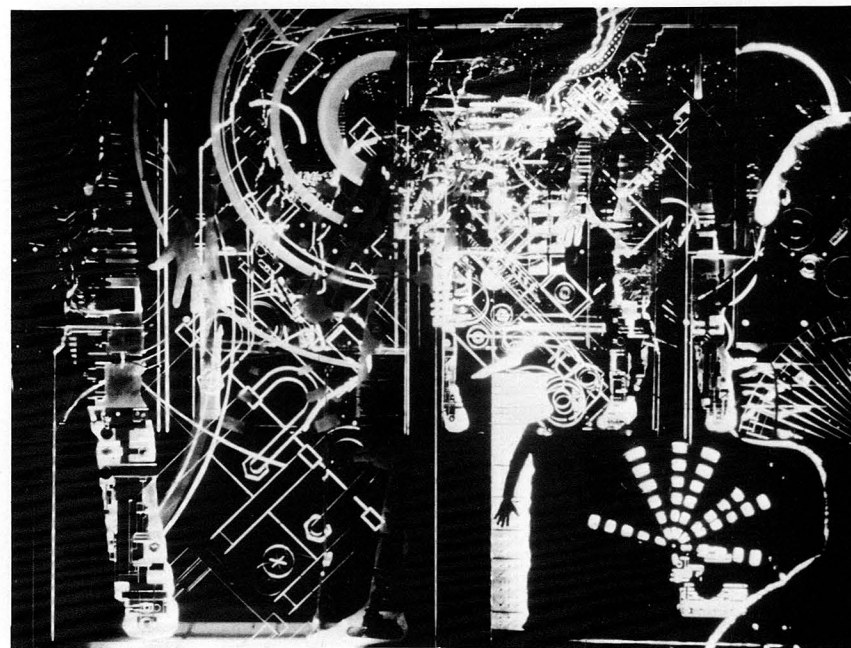
Metaphor, which often serves the function of introducing people to new images, is related to memory which every person possesses. The existence of memory is the basic condition required in order that conceptualization may occur. Although this relationship is not clearly defined, shifts of contest and juxtapositions are created due to the fact that all people share a memory of the 'commonplace.' By cutting relationships between shared memory, these shifts and juxtapositions appear.

Whereas modern architects focused on the stable relationship between body and machine based on 'function,' the intention of contemporary architects is to 'cut' this relationship. The design theme 'decomposition,' which is presently sweeping the world, is an excellent example of cutting relationships. However, if metaphor is the sole aesthetic applied today, it is unavoidable that the artistic precepts applied in Russian Formalism and Surrealism continue to prevail in contemporary architecture. In order not to waste the property left by the past we must search beyond metaphor.

As Marcel Duchamp so succinctly put it, peeping into consciousness is the direction we must take. In other words, architecture should be created as a device which examines how our consciousness works.

I shall explain this with my recent works. The first is a primary school in Okinawa, a Japanese island located in the South Pacific. The exterior face of the school was designed with traditional Okinawa village architecture in mind. The buildings are located on an ancient castle site, a major symbol of the island's culture. In effect, Okinawa villages 'reappear' in order to confirm memory. The interior design makes use of contemporary elements with an emphasis on the juxtaposition of outside and inside, old and new. These new elements are transformations of the vocabulary of modern architecture as well as aspects of other cultures. Noting that the word metaphor originally meant 'to carry,' these new elements are in effect transported objects. Thus, this school is a typical example of contemporary design.

In compliance with a request made by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, an object titled 'Robots of Silhouette' was created. It is also referred to as 'Modal Space of Consciousness.' It is designed as a device intended to make the viewer a participant, encouraging him/her to peep into his/her own consciousness, in particular to test one's memory on figure images. The object is made of transparent engraved acrylic plates with computer controlled lights which continuously generate a variety of images. The photograph of this object was taken through twenty layers of plates. It is an overlay of fragments consisting of design



"Modal Spaces of Consciousness": Overlay of Conscious Fragments

drawings of the robots, figures of men and women, and ornamented graphs (figures transformed from geometrical graph theory). One of the outstanding features of our image memory is that it exists as a fragment of the whole. As well, it is able to overlay. Using the method of collage these features of our memory can be expressed artistically. This object is characterized by the generation of almost infinite numbers of figures designed in a multi-layered system, not through the simple pasting method of ordinary collage.

Though it is difficult to directly translate 'Robots of Silhouette' into architecture, a similar effect can be obtained by using glass arranged in a horizontal zigzag form. This effect has been applied in Kenju Park Forest House, a residence built in a forest. The forest and architecture are overlaid, with an intentional fusion of nature and artificial form. The spatial effect created by the technique of overlay makes the boundary between inside and outside ambiguous. Any person occupying the house would never quite be sure if he/she were inside or outside. This ambiguity of boundary is also a feature of memory.

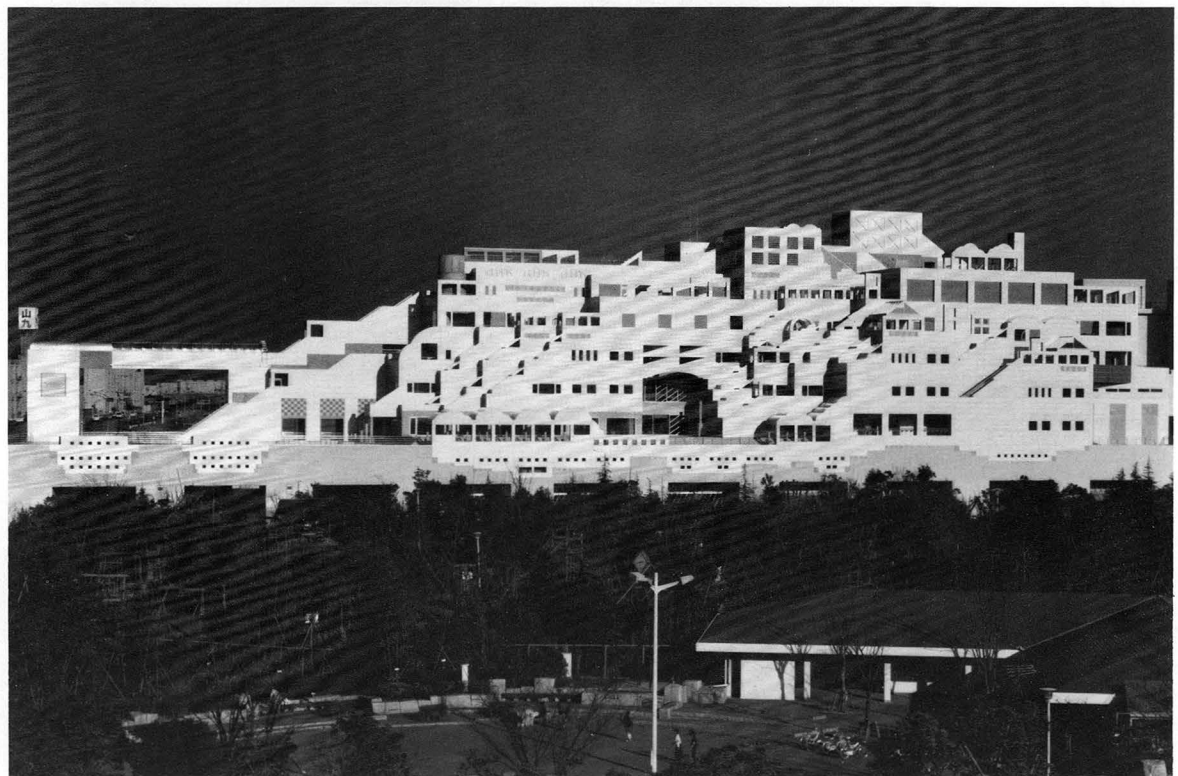
The zigzag glass effect is also applied in the case of the Tasaki Museum of Art. Here, the zigzag glass serves to overlay images at various angles. In effect buildings, forest and sky are transported and fused together creating new scenery. The scenery from the building is artificial. In the photo, each part of the building surrounding the inner court is fusing as a result of the night reflection of the zigzag glass. Cloud-shaped elements used for the roof are also arranged inside the building so that real and virtual images cannot be divided.

In effect, the zigzag glass makes memory's reproducibility visible. Scenery, which was viewed only a moment before, appears again as a virtual image on the glass surface. Until now, without using electronic devices such as video or tape recorders, we have been unable to visualize memory reproduction. It seems that this phenomenon is different from recalling old memories, not only in terms of the length of time but also in terms of quality. It is difficult to express, but it may be the difference between a shared memory and an unshared vanishing one. In architecture, memory of images which present a world view, which I refer to as 'world scenery,' is important. However, vanishing memory, that of trivial images, is also important.

Yamato International Building was designed based on the concept of 'village in architecture.' It is a solid which consists of twelve layers, each partly chipped off. The multi-layered system is designed so sensitively that it reflects even a momentary change in the natural light. Local reflections breaking out spontaneously on the facade create the effect of halation. This characteristic, which causes a transition of the state of being, is a modal feature of this work of architecture. Although the shape is fixed, halation effectively creates ambiguous boundaries. The facade consists of a combination of two different colored aluminum panels. Depending on the light, the horizontal stripes of the exterior face continue to appear and disappear. Throughout the day



The Tasaki Museum of Art: Transporting Night Scenery and Building Itself



Yamato International Building: For a Memory of Villages Not Yet Seen By Anyone — Dej'a Vu

the building's outline and stripes fade in and out, just like our memory does.

I have attempted to explain a few of my recent works from the viewpoint of peeping into consciousness. We have yet to achieve a clear definition of memory. In my opinion, people of the future, when looking back upon our contemporary architectural activities, will discover a series of research reports on human consciousness. By setting the goal through the observation of our own consciousness, we should create new architectural works which reflect our search for a definition of consciousness and memory.

Kenju Park "Forest House" Juxtaposition of Scenery in Memory and Real Architecture

PHOTOGRAPHS:
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