

ARCHITECTURE AS DIALOGUE

by *Masahiro Harada*



SAKARA - PHOTO BY RYOTA ATARASHI

We do not subscribe to the assertion that "the city is a problem and architecture is the answer." That point of view is a pure product of modern architectural theory, which as such weighs very heavily on today's architectural education programmes: What are the problems running through the city? What answers can architecture offer them? School trains us in the acquisition of this method of questioning. Student evaluation is based on this conceptual and rational system of question and answer. And it is doubtlessly relevant, if limited to academic training; architecture on paper, devoid of substance, remains at a level of abstract purity that allows it to theoretically resolve the problem posed by the city. But with real architecture it is quite another matter. Indeed, even when it is designed as a pure answer, architecture realised, from the moment it imposes "mass" and becomes a built object, never manages to get beyond the "city=problem" equation. Because many architects have not grasped the obviousness of this, an incalculable number of buildings have sprouted in the urban landscape through the conscious application of the lesson learned: "problem-solution." Unfortunately, the legitimate and equitable "answer" expected often winds up being nothing more than deplorable "urban filler". For in using this approach, the concrete situation of the city is rendered abstract, theorised and formalised as a logical architectural answer. It is useless and unsightly to reintroduce these relationships defined through the filter of conceptual labels into the material world in the form of buildings. The resulting built architecture is merely a superfluous residue. We are doubtless the first generation to become aware of the reality of modernism's limits. We sincerely and conscientiously avoid dealing with architecture through concepts as much as possible. For us, the city is from the outset imbued with "substance", and the architectural process is the creation of "substance". Therefore, we seek to manipulate these concrete relationships, as they are, in all their concreteness. The relationship between pre-existing city and future architecture is never envisaged in a unilateral way, as one would do when bringing an answer to a question, but rather as a continuous and balanced "dialogue" between the old and the new "substance." This is what makes our point of view so childlike. To act upon things simply, so they will actually become what one would wish for.

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