

Environments of Exchange:

The New Building for the Josai School of Management

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Abstract

The design for the new Josai University School of Management reflects the innovative pedagogical goals of the university. Through a series of informal and formal spaces, the architectural design of the building creates various environments of exchange where encounters can lead to collaboration and innovation. The design recognizes that in our increasingly interconnected world, business happens in a variety of spaces. This building attempts to provide spaces that extend learning beyond the classroom.

Key Words: University Architecture, Design and Pedagogy, Informal Space, Spatial Networks, Learning Environments

Introduction

When one hears the phrase, “a good business environment,” the quality of architecture is usually not what is being referenced. Economic factors, organizational structures, efficiency models, connectivity, and ease of communication usually take precedence in constructing the conditions of profitable exchange. Likewise, the phrase “a good learning environment,” is dependent on access to academic resources, professorial, institutional, research materials, technological facilities, etc. While the role of architecture shapes our experience of the physical world, it also has a profound effect on human exchange. As exchange is a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental quality of all business and pedagogical activity, it is only natural that architecture does not just comprise the background for these endeavors. Rather, architecture actively participates in constructing the terms of human exchange, whether in business or at university.

Free exchange is the central goal behind the design of The Josai School of Management (Figure 1). And because the school and the building have been able to simultaneously define their joint pedagogical mission, “learning environment,” “business environment,” and “architectural environment” are inextricably linked. The goal of both the school and the building was articulated in 2004 by Josai’s chancellor, Noriko Mizuta, and the school’s administration. The new School of Management should promote a more open and fluid relationship between students, faculty, and the business community than is typically found in Japanese institutes of higher learning. The academic openness, flexibility, and fluidity pursued by the school was underscored in the building design through a series of spatial principles. Each of these principles can be simultaneously understood as a business model, a learning model, and a spatial model.



Figure 1 Josai School of Management overall view

Networking versus Organizational Clarity

Sequential movement through traditional institutional buildings is often scripted and linear. There is often a singular entry leading to enclosed spaces of prescribed uses. Institutional buildings, whether academic or commercial in nature, mirror the organizational clarity of the entities they house. Departments are defined, interaction and exchange abides by embedded rituals, rules, and hierarchies. With organizational clarity, there is the assumption of efficiency. However, under this guise, a certain calcification can result.

Rather than emphasizing structural and organizational clarity, the Josai School of Management is a building that promotes networking. The strong entrepreneurial element to the curriculum of the School is supported by encouraging taking advantage of opportunities that circumvent the barriers of traditional organizational structures. The increasing fluidity, multivalence, and accessibility of networks, that are free of the traditional rituals of exchange, encourage entrepreneurialism outside traditional corporate structures. Innovation is increasingly possible without access to great resources.

The Josai School of Management subverts the traditional classroom bar by twisting it in on itself (Figure 2). This allows the building to interact with different parts of itself while creating spaces that are defined by open. These spaces, courtyards, cafe, media room, are easily accessible, often without building entry (Figure 3). They are part of the learning environment, but are spaces that can foster meetings and interactions that can be the beginning of more involved exchanges. More and more, meetings occur in accidental spaces, in hotel lobbies, on airplanes, etc. By creating spaces that are both open but connected to the school, the Josai School of Management encourages the opportunistic networking that is necessary to support entrepreneurial endeavors in both the business and academic realms.



Figure 2 Josai School of Management aerial view



Figure 3 View of media lab from stairs to courtyard

The Utility of the Public Realm

Spaces of learning and business have often measured their success through their efficiency. Square boxes that promote focus and prescribed activities have been the spatial model of organizational efficiency. On the other hand, the public realm, the world outside with its programmatic fluidity, has traditionally been understood as a place of leisure or the realm of moving from one space of production to the next.



Figure 4 View of public courtyard

However, with wireless communication on the one hand, and an emphasis on human networking on the other, the public realm has become an area of creative productivity. The Josai School of Management realizes the potential of the public realm, and makes it an integral part of the design. In other words, the public is not just the space leftover once private spaces are designed. It is understood as the glue that draws people to the school, whether they are from different departments or outside the university. The diversity of population that one finds in public spaces is a resource of diverse ideas that can enrich any endeavor.

While the twisting of the building allows the Josai School of Management to reference itself, the path that moves under the building, up to the café courtyard, and to the hillside, allow the public realm to be incorporated into the school while remaining quintessentially “public.” (Figure 4) This path encourages public lingering and a sense of engagement with the school.

The Informal and the Formal

The entrepreneurial and the corporate, that describe both the innovation of individual endeavors and the stability and communality of organizational endeavors, comprise two indispensable and symbiotic forces that comprise the forces that propel the market economy. As discussed, each has a different relationship to prescribed rituals of exchange and hierarchy. This is also apparent in environments of learning. Classrooms, which spatially encourage singular focus on an instructor, and formalized modes of student/teacher behavior, have traditionally comprised the basis of the learning environment.

The Josai School of Management supplements these formal spaces with those that encourage creative collaboration and innovation. Spaces of smaller scales of gathering, outside the realm of the classroom, that do not have the focus on a single lecturer, allow learning to happen in small groups in a non-hierarchical manner. Often this takes place at the realm of furniture in spaces that cannot be understood as ‘rooms.’ The shape of the oversized furniture in the media lab (Figure 5), that make small circular rooms, or the small lounge spaces that



Figure 5 View of media lab

occur in voids between the blocks of classrooms, provide outlets for these entrepreneurial meetings.

Where is the Front Door?

Historically, the most obvious sign of hierarchy in architecture is the front door. It controls access, determines in what sequence the building is used, and often helps determine the volume of the building that frames it. One clear way to undermine traditional organizational structure and propose multiple paths of use is to decentralize entry. Consequently, the principal device organizing the building circulation is the path that moves under the building to Josai Hill. This walkway connects two building entries on the ground, the stair that leads to the internal courtyard, and two additional entries on the courtyard level. Furthermore, each entry is bracketed by an entry up to the classrooms as well as a public space. Therefore, one's entry experience may be defined by the media lab, the presentation room, the café, or the auditorium. In this respect, the building has its own heterogeneous urban quality (Figure 6). The absence of a single front door, makes the building permeable and de-emphasizes its singularity.

The Power of the Accidental Encounter

In business and learning, and the architecture associated with these endeavors, we have invariably felt the need for control. Where money or young minds are at stake, it is natural that we design environments that enforce time-tested rituals of exchange. However, as these exchanges became more porous, through the predominance of communication networks, the redefinition of the public realm, the decreasing formality of human relations, and the general challenges to traditional hierarchies, mechanisms of control may have counterproductive results. Consequently, it is necessary to acknowledge and embrace the terrain of the "acci-



Figure 6 View of public path to Josai hill



Figure 7 View of courtyard skylights

dental encounter.” The “accidental encounter” that occurs outside predictable and organizational structures, are more and more pervasive in important opportunities in both business and understanding. The building design for the Josai School of Management embraces the possibilities of unanticipated meetings to take innovation to unimagined places (Figure 7).