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THE GRAIL SERVES THE GRAIL KING: THE CRUX OF THE NATURE OF ORDER

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Abstract. *The Nature of Order* documents what and why we build and have built through the ages. It recounts the intellectual and psychological developments that taught us to deviate from timeless attitudes toward building and life itself. And given the extent and depth of Alexander's research, it's hard to imagine that we wouldn't agree with him. But most architects and architecture professors don't. Why? My experience leads me to believe that belief stands in their way: specifically, belief in a world view that's untenable. It's exactly this world view that Alexander undermines. And so, if we're convinced of the validity of Alexander's work, how can we help other people discover it? Not only by reading and talking and thinking, but by studying representative buildings and towns in an intimate way, I suggest. That means getting to know them as though they were living beings. It means climbing into the skin of their architects so that we discover the goal the architects had in building them. It means bringing us in contact with a wisdom we already possess. That wisdom reminds us that our designs serve the Grail King: the image of God.

Keywords: *architectural design, architectural education, Christopher Alexander, life belief, experience, human soul, analogy.*

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1. Acknowledging the resistance to Alexander's discoveries

Christopher Alexander has built a great deal. He has written a great deal. Through his words and his studies of building plans, construction, and decoration, and through his built works, Alexander has unearthed the goal he senses in the builders of living architecture through the ages.

Alexander describes that goal penetratingly in *The Linz Café* (Alexander, 1981, p. 69):

> the works of art which touch us, which evoke great feeling, are works
> which have consciously and deliberately been created as offerings to God,
> as pictures of the universe, or of something that lies behind the universe,
> as pictures of the human soul.

How do Alexander's words strike students and professors of architecture? Where do the words come from? How, if we've been trained to value only conclusions that appear to be narrowly scientific, can we trust Alexander's impression?

Alexander devotes articles, chapters, and books to his critique of the goal most architects in our age have. I find Alexander eminently convincing, but most of my students and colleagues don't. Is the idea of dedicating your design to a life beyond

your ego, beyond current style, beyond use or sustainability, so alien to our current experience? How might we make the goal more immediately tactile? How might we experience that goal as alive?

If words, even well-written words, can't break through the current ideology of what and why we build, what else could?

Alexander's joyful drawings, such as the Fifteen Fundamental Properties that he recognizes in architecture we experience as alive (Alexander, 2002, pp. 143–296), reach us as they would reach every child:

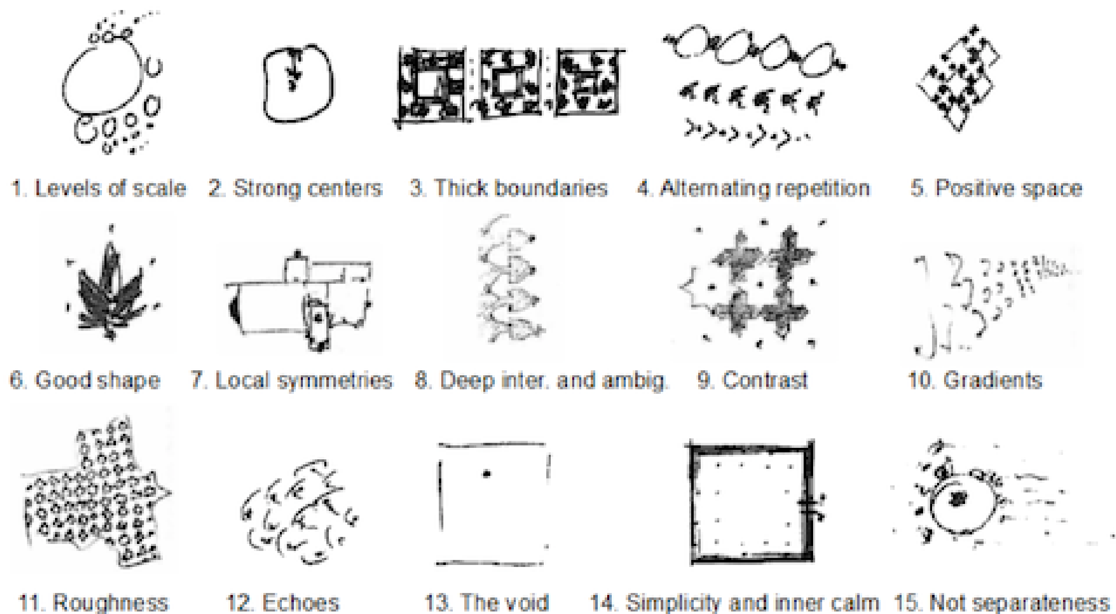

Figure 1. Alexander's Fifteen Fundamental Properties (Jiang, 2019, p. 15)

The Fifteen Properties are patterns or organizing and decorating spaces, buildings, façades, even the order of towns. After having written a whole book on patterns in the built world (Alexander, 1977), why does Alexander limit himself to fifteen properties? One reason may be that Alexander is looking for a way to reach people's experience directly; and fifteen properties are surely easier to remember and to detect than the 253 patterns in *A Pattern Language*. Another reason, which strikes me as deeper and more compelling, is that the fifteen vignette drawings bring us back to our own childhood: they remind us of the apparently simple drawings we made. More significantly, they bring us back to the psychological attitude we had as children: we drew because it gave us joy, not because we needed to prove ourselves. And when we drew, we were living psychologically in a world full of analogy. If we drew a house, for example, it was not merely a structure that answered to functional or stylistic requirements: it was, as we know from depth-psychological research (Dawson, 2004 and Dawson, 2007), a picture of our own soul as well.

Alexander isn't the only architect who reaches us through drawings that may well be stronger than words. Léon Krier's drawings and cartoons and buildings all have the capacity to reach us immediately too (Krier, 1998). And if you read Krier's summaries

of what's missing in the established architecture world, and you look at his designs, you can't help noticing Alexander's Fifteen Fundamental Properties. The buildings, their elevations, the towns, the neighborhoods: they're all organized around centers. You don't have to read whole books to discover why Krier's architecture lives.

But both Alexander and Krier are voices we have difficulty hearing if we've been indoctrinated in the fundamentalism of an architecture whose chief goal is to glorify the purported spirit of our age. In the majority of contemporary schools of architecture, students are trained consciously to design buildings and spaces that fulfill a design program based on activities called functions. Students are also trained to be innovative, to produce something no one has seen before: the design must prove the creativity of the emerging architect. This attitude, born of the ideology of Gropius, Mies, and Le Corbusier, has carried over into our current period of so-called iconic architecture. Such an attitude is entirely irrational. How might we make that fact apparent? How might we begin to experience the goal Alexander finds in the builders of living architecture? By putting ourselves in the skin, the minds, the souls of builders throughout history. By discovering what their goals were when they drew, designed, and built.

2. Experiencing the Goal of Architecture through the Ages

Imagine studying architecture objectively. I mean looking objectively at the chief goal we have when we build. I mean extracting and interpreting that goal in all the periods of our history. I don't mean the goal of shelter. I don't mean the limits of particular construction materials. I don't mean use or function. I mean a deeper goal: Whom or what do our buildings serve?

Imagine a curriculum of, say, twelve buildings, not terribly large or complex, but fully representative of the time and world view they were built in. The twelve that come to mind are obviously personal choices because I know them. They all have clear spatial structures and constructions. They represent other buildings of similar types as well. Half are sacred; half are secular. Their builders did not share the same goals. The goal of getting to know these buildings – or any other buildings you might choose – is the goal of getting to know any building or plan or design: to climb into the skin of their designers and builders: only then can we be led to ask, and to experience, what or whom the designs serve.

--a Dogon hut and village
--an atrium house in Herculaneum
--the Erechtheion
--San Miniato al Monte, Florence
--San Martín de Frómista
--Fontenay Abbey
--Santo Spirito, Florence
--Villa Poiana
--the town of Comayagua
--Maison La Roche
--Lever House, New York
--Sint-Benedictusberg, Vaals

Figure 2. Dogon hut and village (Wikimedia Commons)

Studying the Dogon hut and village leads us to parallels with the nests apes make, with early Greek temples, and with the thatched huts our European ancestors lived in.

Figure 3. An atrium house in Herculanum (Wikimedia Commons)

The atrium house crops up throughout history, even at the scale of town planning.

Figure 4. The Erechtheion (Wikimedia Commons)

The Erechtheion is small but complex: the nature of holy spaces and how we made and make them throughout the world is the obvious theme.

Figure 5. San Miniato al Monte (Wikimedia Commons)

San Miniato unleashes a study in tectonics, in inherited and new decoration, in building and design traditions that link the Ancient World with the Romanesque world.

Figure 6. San Martín, Frómista (Wikimedia Commons)

San Martín introduces the barrel vault to the study, lending it for comparison with more complex churches, world views, and techniques of the Romanesque and Gothic periods as well as with Roman and Byzantine precedents.

Figure 7. Fontenay Abbey (Wikipedia Commons)

Fontenay illustrates the emerging Gothic tradition, brought to life more by itinerant builders than by architects as we now know them.

Figure 8. Santo Spirito (Wikipedia Commons)

Figure 9. Villa Poiana (Wikimedia Commons)

Santo Spirito and Villa Poiana open the world of proportion and polite details borrowed from a living vernacular tradition – not just in the Renaissance but in contemporary times as well.

Figure 10. Comayagua (Wikimedia Commons)

The Honduran town of Comayagua encourages a study of virtually all planned towns, with or without Roman roots and encompassing even streetcar suburbs and Garden Cities.

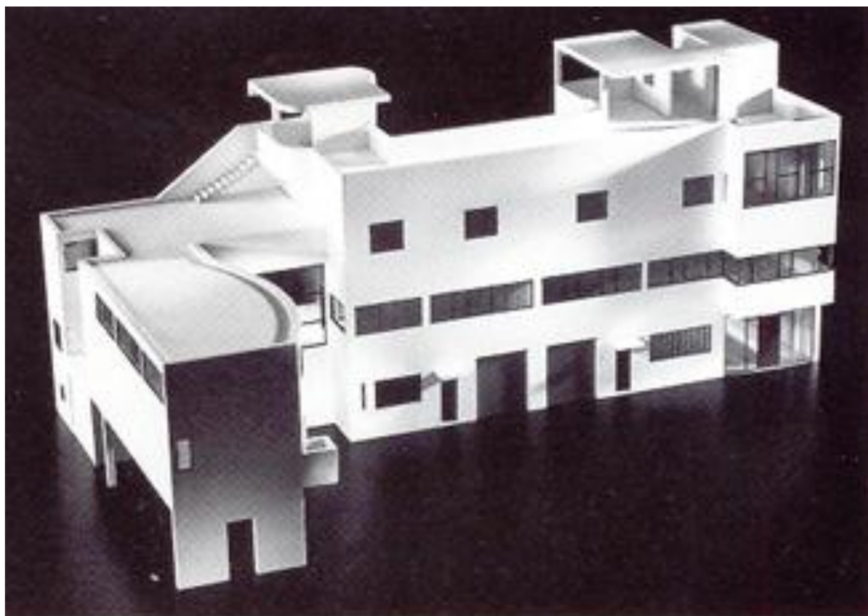

Figure 11. Maison La Roche (Wikimedia Commons)

Maison La Roche serves as an example of the Modern Movement, with its distrust of history and its love of abstract geometry: it leads us to study the roots and

consequences of the Bauhaus vision, of Le Corbusier's town-planning dreams, of the myth of the Spirit of the Age.

Figure 12. Lever House (Wikimedia Commons)

Lever House addresses the issues of urban space, how building materials age, meaningful façade patterns or their lack, and the architectural, technical, and social questions involved in building skyscrapers.

Sint-Benedictusberg returns the focus to proportion, to spatial definition and decoration, not just in the work and theories of Dom Hans Van der Laan 19] but in the work of virtually every other architect who has ever searched for objectivity in human perception.

Meeting these buildings, and really getting to know them in our time, would mean making models of them, perhaps even full-scale models of parts of them. Students could feel the spaces and their boundaries. They could discover the strengths and limits of construction materials. Without reading books they could experience the orientation of the spaces. And most of all, they could feel, without being told, what or whom the builders were serving. Were they serving the divine, the life beneath and beyond our ego?

Figure 13. Sint-Benedictusberg (Author's photo)

If we have a lived experience of buildings that serve the divine, we can't help constrasting those buildings with structures that merely proclaim the apparent creativity of their designers. In our own emerging designs we'll realize our goal as architect is not simply to display our creativity or our capacity for innovation.

3. Discovering the goal of what we build now

My question is how to make Alexander's breakthrough literally break through the institutionalized resistance of people in virtually all contemporary schools of architecture. And my answer is to ask the question Alexander in effect is asking: Whom does the Grail serve? The answer: The Grail serves the Grail King.

The medieval tale of the search for the Grail is a timeless myth that continues to speak to us now (Johnson, 1977). A king has become lame, and his kingdom suffers. Only a knight who asks the right question can heal the king, and as a result the kingdom as well. Parsifal spends nearly his whole life going down the wrong paths, barking up the wrong trees, forgetting the one question he needs to ask. But finally, just at the right moment, ask it he does. Whom does the Grail serve? The Grail serves the Grail King.

The Jungian analyst and author Robert Johnson (Johnson, 1977) explains the essence of the Grail myth. The Grail is the chalice of the Last Supper. But the Grail doesn't ultimately serve us: it serves the Grail King, the image of God. In other words, the outpouring of the Grail, which enables our creativity, gives us the power to serve God in how we live, in what we do, in what we make. The Grail lifts the burden of our ego – our wish to succeed or prove ourselves or design something perfect – from our shoulders. If the Grail serves the Grail King, then everything we do or make is, in fact, an offer of thanks to the Grail King. Our architecture too serves the Grail King.

Whom does our architecture serve today? And why? Why did we, through the ages, build with an answer to that question? Why did we stop building with a spiritual goal? And can we return to building with that goal?

The question is of course far deeper than how and why we build. It's a question about how we experience and perceive life itself. The answer to that question, I believe, is already present within us, in our unconscious, if not conscious, attitudes toward building and living. But what's within us can get suppressed and repressed when ideology stands in the way. This is the tale Alexander tells so clearly and so thoroughly.

It's also the tale my own life has told. I discovered and rediscovered Alexander through the years because my experiences and my questions were also his. Alexander developed himself further by building. I developed my understanding of architecture further by studying other things between my two architecture studies. And those other things helped me understand the joy I had felt in building and designing as a child. They also helped me understand how I came, temporarily, not to trust that joy.

4. Discovering an architecture that lives

When I was three I escaped from the family and walked down the street to a house under construction. I was fascinated by the structure, by the concrete block walls of its perimeter and the wooden frames for the interior walls. At my age, and at my size, I had trouble distinguishing between the openings that would become doorways and the 16-inch spaces between the studs. The superintendent came to my rescue and lent me his folding rule, which I promptly broke. I returned to the house every day (and continued to break more folding rules), and eventually I brought the superintendent home for dinner. I knew I wanted to be an architect.

I drew houses. I built houses out of cardboard and out of my wooden blocks. Then I let an imaginary hurricane destroy them so that I could build them all over again. Did I know then that I was building not only physical houses but also containers for my own soul? Did I know that I was teaching myself to survive the winds not only of strong storms but also of inevitable growing pains? Did I know that I was living in a world of analogy?

What I did know, was that the houses I had discovered and the houses I had made were alive, alive for me. They quickened me. They made me feel more alive. What I knew as well, and what fascinated me, was that houses had various compositions and were built in various ways. Our house in Coral Gables, Florida, was built of stuccoed concrete, inside and out, to weather the strongest hurricanes. Our summer cottage in Macatawa, Michigan, was built of wood, with studs like those of the inner walls of the house being built near ours in Florida. There were no hurricanes in Michigan; but a summer thunderstorm would make the house shake, threatening to blow it off the brick piers above the sanddunes it rested on.

Two different methods of construction, then, and two different climates and possible threats. But that was not all. There were also two different ways of designing, of composing, of determining and arranging the rooms. When I was three I didn't have a language for such organizational concepts, but I certainly noticed them. And it didn't take me terribly long to start asking the questions all architects should ask: What led to the composition, both in terms of the spaces and the construction? How did I feel in the composition? How did my body fit in the various rooms? Could I experience parts of the house as living bodies like my own? Were there centers in the arrangement of the

rooms? Was there a difference between moving through the house and coming home in a particular room?

5. Discovering urban structure that lives

As I got older, I became aware of architecture at the larger scale of the town. Not only a house but a town as well could be alive, could encourage life both psychologically and physically. In Coral Gables I could climb huge tropical trees, play with friends in the yards between houses, walk through the neighborhood to a park with swings and chickees, rollerskate on the newly laid walks around the church. But I wasn't allowed to walk or cycle to shops or school or to friends' houses outside the neighborhood because the family thought them too far away. For any really interesting destination we had to take the car.

In Macatawa I was liberated from the dependence on the car. Tiny roads meandered through hills in a forest. We could walk to all the cottages, to the village shops, to Lake Michigan or Lake Macatawa. It felt like a paradise. Why was Coral Gables so different?

It was designed for the car, not for people walking. It was designed in order to give people the illusion that they all could live in their own individual castles. It was designed according to the ideology of zoning, which separated dwelling from working and playing and shopping.

My first experience of a town with a spatial structure I felt at home in was the Cornell University campus. Buildings surrounded a tree-filled quadrangle as though they were living spectators who had come to view community happenings. But a college campus, while significant in terms of pattern, is not yet a real town.

The towns I discovered in the Netherlands were the ones that taught me how important street patterns, walking distances, and spatial centers are. The towns themselves have major centers, and their neighborhoods do too. The town structure is not only beautiful: it's also extremely handy, since you can reach everything by foot. You live, you work, you play, you worship, all within the same spatial structure. You meet people in the street. It's not only your own house or apartment that you call home: it's the whole town.

The spatial patterns in canal towns like Naarden and Delft grew out of the need to make swampy land habitable and defensible. The plan of attack was both straightforward and ingenious. With their hands people dug a canal that surrounded the land they hoped to claim from the swamp. They used windmills to pump the water out of the emerging land and into the ring canal. But since the new land remained swampy, people dug drainage ditches that further led the water into the ring canal. These ditches later became alleys or secondary streets. And since reclaiming land was both expensive and labor-intensive, lots for houses had to be deep and narrow, making as much use as possible of the costly infrastructure.

It's clear that necessity led to the beauty of such town patterns. It's the necessity of struggling with the land and with the elements, using only the energy from people, animals, and the wind. There is a parallel between the limits of the energy needed for creating a town and the patterns Alexander collects in his Fifteen Properties. Centers can't be centers without clear boundaries. Meaningful patterns are far more than disembodied concepts. And they don't require machines fed by fossil fuels.

Figure 14. Naarden (Commons. Wikimedia.org)

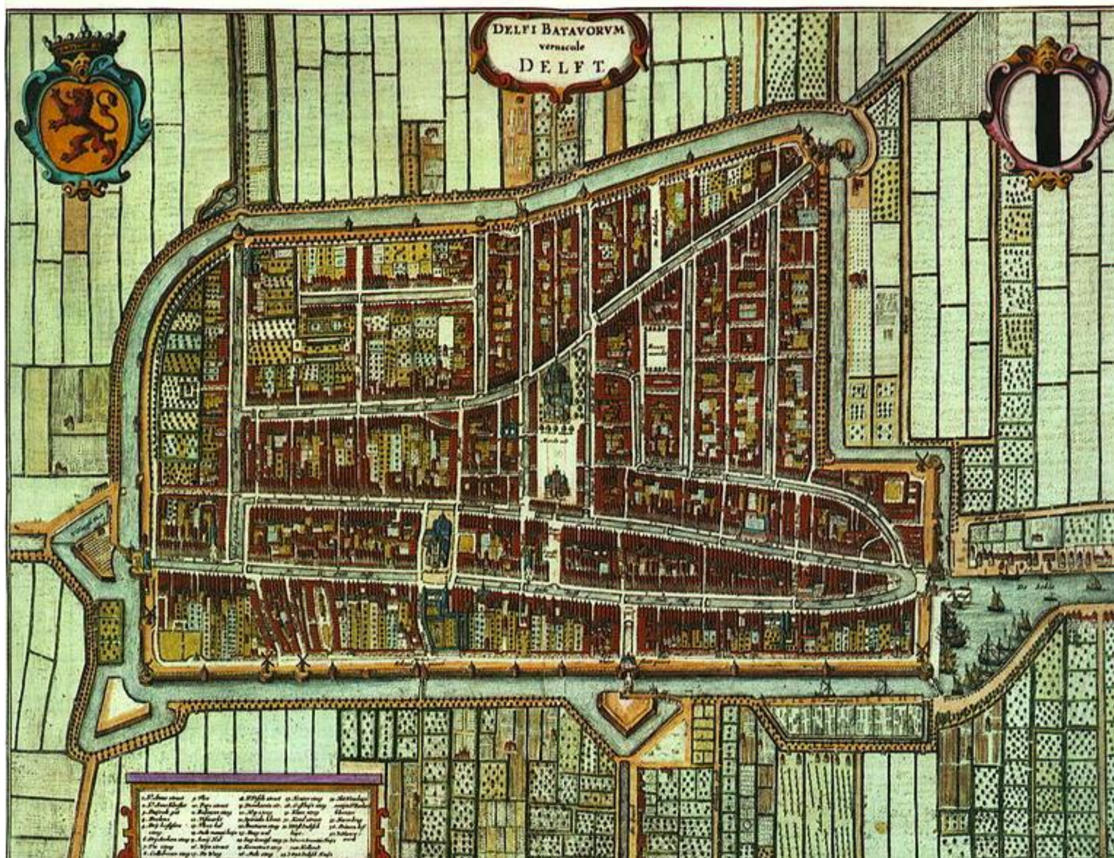

Figure 15. Delft (Wikimedia Commons)

6. Meeting the ideology that killed living architecture

When the time came for me to go to university, I knew I wanted to study architecture immediately rather than postpone it till graduate school. Cornell let me do that. But I knew nothing about the curriculum – or the fundamentalism – of the architecture department there. I only knew I was entering a new paradise of woods and hills and walkable paths, far above Lake Cayuga and far away from tropical heat.

It didn't take long, however, to get kicked out of Paradise. We studied the facts of architectural history thoroughly and deeply. We drew buildings. But when we designed them, we were told we could only design according to the rules of the Modern Movement.

I was naive. Though I had seen and reflected on the different ways of designing and building houses and towns, I didn't ask myself what I was doing when I was designing. I just wanted to pass the design class. No one mentioned that a room, a building, a town might be more than a functional response to a design brief. When I asked a professor what a composition was, he made me the laughing stock of the class. He thought I was joking. Where was the joy I had felt as a child, designing and building in an enchanted world?

Thankfully I was a friend of the library. I looked for answers and direction in books, in the experience of people beyond the fundamentalist church of our architecture school. One of the books that has stayed in my memory was *Community and Privacy*, which Alexander wrote together with Serge Chermayeff in 1963 (Chermayeff & Alexander, 1963). I was particularly impressed with the plans of various houses: many were abstract, with more or less undefined spaces rather than rooms, while others were decidely more livable, with functional locks between private and public areas. I was also struck by the phenomenon of the long, thin house. It resonated with my experience of houses. I knew it was wise. I knew it was true.

But the breath of fresh air I experienced in *Community and Privacy* was not sufficient support for me to continue to struggle with the architecture school. I didn't know it consciously then, but in retrospect I know I felt it: I didn't know what the goal was for my designing. No one told us, and we weren't old enough or wise enough to seek an answer for ourselves. We simply had to prove we were creative. But 'creative' meant that we had copied a design one of the Modern Masters had made earlier.

7. Learning about architecture by not studying it

It was too much for me. After three semesters, I transferred out of the architecture school to the College of Arts and Sciences. Exactly half of our entering class in the architecture school transferred out with me. I felt devastated. I didn't have much energy to study anything else than architecture, but neither did I have any wish to stop studying and fight in Vietnam. I ended up studying English and Spanish literature.

My literature study gave me the space I hadn't found in the architecture school. I missed my passion for designing spaces that could be built, but I discovered I could design with words. And perhaps the most important discovery in that study was that compositions in words had a goal. The goal was a picture of life, of our struggles, of the way we're constituted.

Couldn't architectural compositions have a similar goal? That was a question I felt but didn't yet consciously ask. I had to wait quite a long time before I could ask it. And when I did, it was Alexander who helped me.

Two experiences helped me get through my undergraduate study. The first was the summer I spent in 1969 in an impoverished village in Honduras. Seven Cornell students deemed themselves the saviors of the wretched of the earth. We helped the people in the village organize a potable water project. I helped teach children to read. But more important than the work we ostensibly did for the people in the village was what our work did for ourselves. We lived as close to nature as we could. We had no choice. We worked. We cooked. We played. And we did so in cornfields, in hills, in and between adobe houses with clay floors and little else inside than people and rats.

My experience in the summers in Macatawa taught me that the world was different from my conventional life in Coral Gables. My experience in Ithaca taught me that the world was far more ideological than I had perceived earlier. My experience in Honduras taught me that life grew from the ground – the literal ground and the ground of human being.

The second experience began in my last year of college and continued into the year beyond it. In keeping with the times, I wanted to change the world. I joined a group of Cornell students who set up an experimental junior high school, geared to children who didn't receive enough attention in the conventional public school. Fr. Daniel Berrigan, Cornell's chaplain, and Ivan Illich supported us and convinced the school board that we should have a chance.

8. Discovering the objective source of our experience

After a year of teaching in the experimental school, I realized I didn't know enough about education, about the human soul, about development. A year later I enrolled in a PhD program at Columbia in philosophy and education. The philosophy I was fed didn't help me at all: it was all analytical; it taught me nothing of meaning, of how the human soul is constituted. A wise advisor suggested I take courses at Union Theological Seminary, which was connected with Columbia. And there is where I really learned something, something that later helped me ground Alexander's work.

When we read substantially in the pioneers of depth psychology – the branch of psychology that includes the unconscious – I felt I already knew C. G. Jung (Jung, 1977). It was as though he gave me the language to describe experiences I'd already had. Here was the meaning, even the metaphysics, that analytical philosophy lacked for me. We are no *tabula rasa*: our dreams and wishes and even our creativity are objectively present within us. I ended up writing my dissertation on Paulo Freire and Jung. Freire was a Brazilian educator who taught people to read and write by encouraging them to tell their life stories. Freire wanted to change the world by helping people to become conscious of repressive social structures. Jung wanted to change the world by helping people to reconnect with the images from their inner depths. Could education embrace both? Not, I concluded, so long as we continued to believe in the Enlightenment world view of objectivity based on conscious reason alone.

My study of education and meaning was of course an encounter with my own life, my own soul. And that encounter brought me back to my original wish to become an architect. But how? And where? Would I have to struggle with the same ideology I had met at Cornell? And where, really, did I want to live?

9. Studying and teaching architecture through new eyes

Increasingly I felt alienated in America. I was grateful for the quality of my education. I was thankful for my friends. But I hated the dependence on the car; I found most cities ugly; and I wondered where I might feel most at home: the South, the Midwest, the East. Thanks to my father's job with an airline, I had visited Europe several times. Like many Americans, I wanted to learn more about my forebears: English on my father's side and Dutch on my mother's. I knew and revered English literature and manners, but I felt more at home in Dutch towns. The scale, the walkability, the modest beauty seemed to me to have arisen from a ground of being, an attitude born of an objective wisdom that took individual houses and people and let them relate to each other as a whole.

I couldn't resist the impulse to jump, to fly across the ocean. Rarely in my life before or since have I felt the certainty and the energy to make such a move. But I did. I stayed with friends. I hitchhiked across the country. I bought architecture magazines and books I could only read if I picked up the language quickly. And I did. For the second time I started to study architecture, this time in Dutch and, in 1980, in a relatively small department of the Technische Universiteit Delft.

I loved drawing and designing again, but I still didn't know what the goal of my designs was. Like Cornell in 1966, Delft in 1980 was card-carrying Modernist, but not so evangelical as Cornell had been. I discovered I could design houses with pitched roofs without being kicked out of camp. But I was still naive. I assumed that Europeans were better educated than I was in history and meaning. They weren't.

Toward the end of my first year the professors in my design project listed *Houses Generated by Patterns* (Alexander, 1970) as a source of inspiration. I recognized Alexander as the author. I recognized the virtues of the long, thin house from *Community and Privacy*. I was intrigued by the joyful drawings. But my professors were primarily concerned with the functional arrangements of space rather than the deeper goal of a design.

At the beginning of my third study year I hosted a seminar of students and our two professors. On a visit to the Design Centre in London I had bought *The Linz Café* (Alexander, 1981, p. 69) because it captivated me. I let the group read the passage I quoted earlier on:

> the works of art which touch us, which evoke great feeling, are works
> which have consciously and deliberately been created as offerings to God,
> as pictures of the universe, or of something that lies behind the universe,
> as pictures of the human soul.

The room fell still. Had no one else any experience that resembled Alexander's? Later on, when I had become a teaching assistant, I wrote chapters in a student design manual. I cited Jung. My professor told me I shouldn't use the word *soul* in the Netherlands. Apparently it conjured up church doctrines people no longer understood.

How, I wondered, could you learn to design meaningful architecture if you didn't consider the human soul, the psyche, the lifeblood of our experience? Jung had shown that the images and patterns that the psyche gives us are objective. It seemed to me that Alexander was searching for the objective source of the design patterns he would later call living structure (Jiang, 2019b).

I had hoped to feel at home in the Netherlands, but again I was apparently the odd man out. I searched for friends, this time in books. I read *A City Is Not a Tree*

(Alexander et al, 2005), which struck me as eminently true: I had experienced the freedom of various routes from A to B and back. I read *The Timeless Way of Building* (Alexander, 1979). I read *A Pattern Language* (Alexander, 1977). I read Stephen Grabow's *Christopher Alexander: The Search for a New Paradigm in Architecture* (Grabow, 1983). And as teaching assistant with my own courses, and later as lecturer and professor, I always included Alexander.

The students' response? Almost like their earlier response to *The Linz Café*: silence; alienation. And when I included Salingaros and Mehaffy's 'Geometrical Fundamentalism' (Salingaros and Mehaffy, 2006) among the readings, the chief response was that the authors were unkind to Le Corbusier, the students' hero. The ideology of Modernism had become the established church for people who were supposed to be intelligent and rational. Sadly the eminently clear Preface to *The Phenomenon of Life* (Alexander, 2002, pp. 5-24) wasn't able to penetrate most students' resistance either.

I wrote articles in Dutch and English about the life of the soul in what architects design. I added Geoffrey Scott's *The Architecture of Humanism* (Scott, 1924) to Christopher Alexander: a building we relate to meaningfully shows us elements that remind us of the human body. I added Dom Hans van der Laan's *De architectonische ruimte* (van der Laan, 1983): Van der Laan's discoveries of measures, of how we perceive the relation between wall thickness and room width, are all about experiencing centers. All of the Fifteen Fundamental Properties in *The Nature of Order* (Alexander, 2002, p. 143-296) are ways of making centers in spaces, in walls, in the human soul.

Léon Krier (Krier, 1998) impressed me both in his designs and in person. Virtually everything he designs falls within the parameters of Alexander's works: centers, scale, analogy with the human body, and a spiritual goal in what we build, what we move through, what we dwell in.

10. Acknowledging the spiritual goal in architecture

It's the spiritual goal in what we build that pierced me when I was a boy. It's the spiritual goal that continues to pierce me as a man. And it's clearly the spiritual goal that pierced Alexander in his searches and researches, in his building, and in his reflecting. Living from and with a spiritual goal is a built-in attitude. Jung (Jung, 1977) and Huxley (Huxley, 1962) and a host of other sages remind us of that truth. Why, then, is it so difficult to remind people of our own built-in nature?

God got in the way. Not the living God of inner encounters, but the institutionalized God whom Blake characterized as 'binding in briars my joys and desires' (Blake, 1794). Gods come to us in inner encounters. They quicken us. But when we institutionalize them, they easily become other people's gods. And when we interpret them and systematize them and make rules about how we should approach them, we build straitjackets. We may break through our straitjackets, but then we're left without gods to quicken us, to delight us, to lead us. We let ideological gods take the place of the original gods. In our time the ideological god is the Spirit of the Age.

We human beings have never been able to live without gods, without sources of power stronger than our ego. The Spirit of the Age functions as a god for people who worship it. Only when we can meet another god can we become liberated from the power of an ideology. Alexander reminds us of the gods already within us, the gods that are responsible for works we experience as truly alive. Our task is to make the images in

Alexander's work so seductive, so delightful, that they'll reconnect us with the wisdom we already possess.

That wisdom is the value of making and experiencing analogies in what we build and what we do. An analogy compares two things, two patterns, two lives. It lives. In fact, it's the crux of Alexander's reflections and discoveries. Spaces and boundaries and towns meet us as alive when they mirror the order within us, when they help us see and experience more than their physical selves or patterns alone.

11. Recognizing and teaching the importance of analogy

In 30 years of teaching (or trying to teach) architectural design in Delft, I repeatedly met with incredulity when I spoke the language of analogy, when I compared an architectural element with a living being, when I tried to take the meaning of a design out of the prison of the purported Spirit of the Age. It seemed to me that I was making a simple and obvious comparison, one that any child would make. But then I learned that Dutch high schools did their best to banish thinking in analogies from their curriculum. See here the new Scholasticism, but this time one that worships no other god than the Spirit of the Age.

How, then, might we break through the ideology that has alienated us not only from beauty in what we build, but also from an experience that's deeper than that of a literal, physical thing? That is the question that remains with me when I consider Alexander and everyone else whose work or ideas fit the patterns Alexander describes.

Alexander has extensively documented the patterns he calls living structure (Jiang, 2019b). The next challenge is to discover what we as architects and designers need to do to create living structure. The myth of the Grail points us in the right direction. It reminds us that our designing has a goal that's not only deeper than the goal of function or style: the goal is also objectively present in our psyches. We knew it when we were children. We felt its absence later on when we didn't feel at home in particular buildings, neighborhoods, or towns. What do we need now in order to reconnect with the living structure within ourselves?

It would help immensely if high school students learned about the human psyche, if they were encouraged to reconnect with their own unconscious sides, if they discovered that our rational choices are rarely rational. A new curriculum in high schools, and then at the beginning of a university course, would create welcome space for creativity and for liberation from reigning ideologies.

Then, in a curriculum for architecture students, the most effective approach would not be with words or theories, but with encounters with actual buildings throughout human history. We would meet them as we would other human beings. We would get to know them intimately. We would draw them and build models of them. And because we had got to know them intimately, we would discover whom they served, whom their builders served. As designers we too would become conscious of the goal of what we designed.

Designers of the world, architects of the world, unite! Professors in architecture schools, rebel! Feel the life in creations that go beyond your own ego. Feel the challenge to play, to create a world as offerings to God. Make space for delight! After all, it's in our genes. The Grail serves the Grail King.

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