

TWO-METER BALCONY
 SHOP FRONT POSSIBILITY
 RENTAL
 CONTINUOUS FLOATING FLAB
 MORTARLESS BLOCK WALL
 COMPOSITE BAMBOO FOAM BEAM
 COMPOSITE BAMBOO FOAM PLANK
 SULPHUR REINFORCING
 PLUMBING ACCUMULATOR
 CONTINUOUS ELECTRIC OUTLET

What is the status of this list of centers? To some degree these centers are based on observation; they reflect Peruvian life as it was in 1969. Some are idealized, they contain our ideas of what might be a better way to arrange pedestrians and cars, or parking lots. Some are almost no more than ideas about how something might be done: the use of sulphur as structural reinforcement, for example. Still others are highly general — so much so that they were later generalized and included in *A PATTERN LANGUAGE* and remain, to this day, as observations of what makes people comfortable, almost all over the world. These, then, are rooted in psychology. Some are specific to climate and place, not exactly to culture.

So, this list of centers describes what we took, at that time, to be the core of the cultural background in Lima, into which houses had to fit, and from which houses might be generated. We tried — in our inexperienced fashion — to identify the centers which really existed in everyday life (*SHOPS ON CORNERS*), and those which

we believed existed in people's consciousness (*THE SALA*), and those which existed, latent, in dreams and traditions but were actually disappearing from modern Peruvian society. Others reflected modern aspects of Peruvian city life. *FOOTBALL IN THE STREET* described the peculiarly Peruvian form of street football, *CAR-PEDESTRIAN SYMBIOSIS* described the way that cars were, then, a focus of activity.

All in all, this list of centers is a partial picture of the wholeness which existed in Peru at the time. Yet, because these centers exist in culture, they have a carrying force, a generative power. They may be used to create copies of themselves, or many specific individual centers, in Peruvian communities and houses, which reflect and embody these generic culture-defined patterns. So a certain person may now build a sala in his house, and this sala then exists in his new house as a new center which has unfolded from the wholeness of the culture, and has, in its specific details, also unfolded from the particular geometry of the house and its setting in the street. Thus the fact that *THE SALA* is on the list of centers, gives birth to real centers in the world, *generates* them.

The culture-borne centers play a genetic role, not unlike the role played by genes in an organism. They describe what *is* — in a deep, inner sense. And they also describe how the world can be generated, to become congruent with people's inner feelings, aspirations, habits, and society.



8 / THE TYPE OF OBSERVATION WHICH LEADS TO
 DISCOVERY OF LIVING CENTERS:
 SEEKING TRADITION AND SEEKING THE NEW

What exactly is the relation between fact and fiction, cold observation and inspired vision, in these patterns? And to what extent is the traditional nature of some of these patterns necessary, or typical? To what extent is the appearance of a

hypermodern pattern like *CAR-PEDESTRIAN SYMBIOSIS* also typical of what must happen when true unfolding takes place? Let us concentrate on the extent to which the process of finding, discovering, these generic centers, is a true

unfolding which can carry a culture from its past state, into the future.

Certainly the majority of these patterns from Lima were rooted in observation. We did not invent them. We *saw* them. We extracted them, as we thought, from the situations we saw around us, and in the people we were with.

Yet we were looking at people with charmed eyes. We asked ourselves, like psychiatrists, what was best in them, what were the things about the people we were with that were most deeply rooted, in which these people felt anchored. What conditions — we asked ourselves — did create for the people of Lima a condition in which they felt most whole, at peace with themselves? Of course, the answer to that question is bound to be both traditional and modern.

A person feels at peace in the special small living room near the front (the *sala*) because it reflects ancient Peruvian ways, the degree a stranger can come into the house, a comfortable, formal place, to “show.” So of course people feel comfortable, deep in themselves, continuing something like this.

Yet at the same time, boys and girls and teenagers also feel comfortable leaning against the battered old cars, talking in the dust and mud of the

unpaved street and glaring sun. And of course, they also feel at ease in a small narrow dark patios, where the glare of the incessant equatorial fog of Lima is cooled by the dark shade. And of course the family in the *comedor*, now gathered around the TV set, is something entirely new, yet also makes people deeply comfortable, because it is so real, so exciting, so everyday.

Which of these patterns, then, does the most to nourish the inner person? It is just those things, those generic centers, which fall out of the ground of their cultural existence, and yet maintain a thread with the past, stand on the past, because it is the most ancient and fundamental relationships and spaces, in which — in the end — people are most anchored — touched, brushed, transformed, by the hypermodern conditions of our age.

What we are looking for, in our attempt to find patterns NOW, for our lives, for our age, for new kinds of centers which will come about by unfolding from the wholeness of the present situation, are these deep patterns, half-existing, and yet carrying forward from the present, the truth about the present wholeness, preserving its structure, yet making themselves consistent with the new age.



9 / THE PROCESS OF FINDING A GOOD CENTER

To show in rather more detail the degree to which the list of centers that are unfolded from what lies deep in people’s hearts — hence in their “culture” — is crucial in the life of a building, I will describe the evolution of a single center for a single project. This example happened in 1982, during the early stages of making a single private house in Berkeley, California, for André and Anna. At the moment when this event took place, we had already determined the size of the house (about 1150 square feet) and its overall volume. It was to be a three-story tower, 20 feet by 20 feet in plan on each floor. This was the only

arrangement that would allow us to get the price down to within their budget, since it reduced both roof and foundation price.

We began to face the question of the spatial organization of the inside of the building. To do this, we had to find the most important major centers in the house. I asked Anna and André, What is the house made of? What are its principal rooms?

In the conventional wisdom of the mid-twentieth century (still active then, in 1982), it used to be normal to assume that every house had a kitchen, a living room, and a dining room,