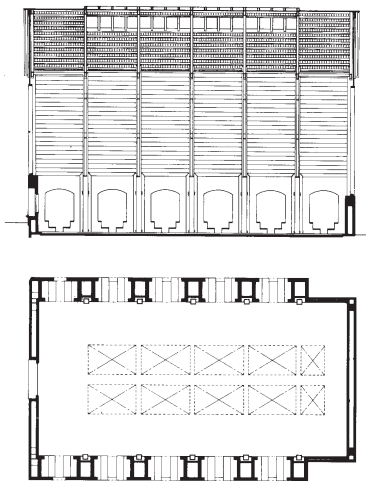




Niche in the Central building, Eishin campus



Plan and section of the Central building

Thus, the elaboration of form which occurs, is a raw harmony made of the simplest elements, in a telling and geometrical order, which is balanced and gauged to convey raw feeling. It repeats. It is often brutally simple in its regularities. But each mass is calculated to oppose, or complement, or complete, the harmony of the other elements.

This process, which circles around a bit, is the process of trial and error in which the solid geometry receives calculable, massive weight. When you are done, if you have reached what you aim for, you feel the impact of its "presence." *This* is how architecture comes about.



Interior of the Central building



11 / WHAT SEEMS LIKE AN IMPOSITION OF GEOMETRY
IS NECESSARY AS A PART OF EVERY LIVING PROCESS

What I have said applies to buildings. It is the process through which the great volumes and spaces, in their proper hierarchy, are fitted together with small elements, even with the masses of which the walls and stones are made, to arrive at one solid packing that endows its surroundings and its occupants with the presence of a living center.

I believe—but am not in a position to affirm with certainty—that a similar “brutal” and purely geometric process always occurs

somewhere in other kinds of unfolding that generate living order. I have had conversations with colleagues who are trying to extend what I have presented in this book. They tell me that at least something similar is going on in poetry, in dance, in the formation of social structure, in planning, even in the creation of healthy family relationships.⁶

Does this formal creation of geometry really apply to other living processes? Does it apply to the formation of a community? Does

it apply to the creation of a human group; does it apply to the brushwork of a delicate painting? Or to the construction of a song played by a flute? To all these questions, it is probable, I think, that the answer is "yes." I believe the language of this chapter, pretty much as I have written it, applies not only to

the construction of small buildings, and great buildings, but also to the emergence of any coherent whole, in almost any medium.

Thinking about creation in this way, brutal and too-decisive though it may seem, is the process by which the guts of a thing, its valuable force, is made.

NOTES

1. The whole chapter owes a great debt to Ingrid King. The difficulty of writing it and this difficult topic had been plaguing me for years, but I felt unable to write it down successfully. The way of treating it which I have chosen finally became clear in the course of several intensive discussions with Ingrid, in which we reviewed, together, many buildings which we have built, and which other people have built. During these discussions the logic of this chapter became clear.

2. See discussion of the Sapporo building in Ingrid Fiksdahl King, CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE (Tokyo: A+U, ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM, Special one-volume issue, August 1993, 151 pages).

3. For more detail of this process see Book 3, chapter 6.

4. For more detail of this process see Book 3, chapters 7 and 12.

5. Ingrid King, "Notes for a lecture on 'middle range order,'" lecture given in the Department of Architecture lecture series, Kroeber Hall, University of California, 1981.

6. The expansion of the nature of order theory into these various subjects has been proposed to me and written about by various authors, including Richard Gabriel (poetry), Jenny Quillien (anthropology, human behavior, and organization theory), Peter Block (society and institutions) and many others. Of special interest is Richard Gabriel's extremely detailed application of the theory to the writing of poetry and to the criticism of poems. In his short book he constructs a parallel theory to the effort undertaken in this book, with extraordinary success. See THE NATURE OF POETIC ORDER: AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE PROBLEM OF LOCATING FAILURE IN POEMS, Department of English, Stanford University, 1999.