

same fifteen transformations, much as I have illustrated them, that reader (man, woman, architect, artist) will feel more free to recognize the power of the language I have drawn, and be more likely to use it in his and her own built constructions.

Why do I say that this painting has been made within the form language of the fifteen transformations?

The heads float free — as in a dream, each one a grotesque CENTER in its horror. The emphasis on the heads is indeed as CENTERS, more than heads. Each mouth is drawn as a CENTER, blood red in its CONTRAST and defined in its GOOD SHAPE; the hair sits, shape like, on the head and around the head forming a BOUNDARY to the skull; the ring around the eyes is drawn as a BOUNDARY; the teeth, savage, are drawn more from ALTERNATING REPETITION than from realism or a dentist's chart; the skull floats on a stick, not on a neck, shaped by GOOD SHAPE, affected by deep interlock, given its wedge shape by a GRADIENT; the shirts are colored by ALTERNATING REPETITION; the central shirt is given

its order by screaming CONTRAST, from the surrounding shirts, and the mask from the lower face; the dimensions of eyes, teeth, lips, hairs, are not governed by realism, but by LEVELS OF SCALE. Even the hairline of one man is given its shape by waving ALTERNATING REPETITION, not by the nature of hair.

I believe Ensor, in his visions, used this language, the language not only of a true architecture, but also the language of our archetypal fantasy, to make a thing which is profound in its horror, profound in its magnetic drawing power, and that he composed this picture (as other similar ones), drawing from this language, to substantiate his dreams.

If the language can do this, I believe we have no reason to be afraid that it is too sweet, too traditional, too saccharine, or that it will paste an untruthful sentimentality onto our buildings. The language can, I am confident, serve any purpose, I believe, that is deeply related to human (not mechanical) experience.



*A pedestrian street on the Eishin campus, the comfortable space, gritty concrete, laundry lines, but elegant details — all, somehow, speaking in a way reminiscent of the Ensor painting.*



*Not an ancient style: but essentially a building without style, that follows directly from the structure-preserving transformations, according to the simplest moves. The Great Hall of the Eishin campus.*



11 / POSSIBILITY OF A FORM LANGUAGE FOR  
ALL FUTURE TIME

I show three photographs of completed buildings (pages 455–57). They embody, in actual built cases, the kind of results this form language of fifteen transformations, when used in building projects, is likely to create. First (page 455), a street in which buildings, and space achieve a comfortable, formal, but comfortable harmony. Second (above), the Great Hall of the Eishin campus, seen across the campus lake. Third (opposite), the high, enclosed living porch of the Heisey house in Austin, Texas. All three were built during the last twenty years. I suggest that in any building process governed by construction, it will be the fifteen structure-preserving transformations which may most easily become the formal tools

with which people can create well-adapted forms, allow coherent geometry to emerge, and manage, effectively, to assist in the creation of living form by adaptation and unfolding.

It is examples like these that encourage my belief that these fifteen transformations can provide us with a natural “alphabet” of living process. They are the most natural elementary transformations for a form-language that is able to generate living structure in the world.<sup>17</sup>It seems possible to me, that the conception of a universal form language, made from the fifteen transformations, applied, repeated, cycling and recycling in different concrete forms, recursively, so that every part and



*Once again, not ancient style: but again a building without style, that follows directly from the structure-preserving transformations. This is the unfolded geometry of an elaborate porch.  
Heisey house in Austin, Texas, Christopher Alexander with Randy Schmidt and Saul Pichardo.*

every part of every part, will ultimately be formed *in its geometry*— could take root in our time, and in the future. It would be simple and elegant. And it would preserve and generate the elements of style which are necessary to a living world.

The form language which appeared in the works of several modern painters, most notably Matisse, Vlaminck, Bonnard, Derain, Nolde, Ensor, also provide schemata with which one

can think, or decipher, or elaborate, a building in a natural way, something that goes the same way as the small sketches or the unfolded, built stair. These painters described and generated— above all— a new geometry of form and color which can be part of nature. It may also, with study, turn out to be a significant part of our growing effort to determine a generic form language for our time and for all future time.