

interview

CLIENT-ARCHITECT RELATIONSHIP with Christopher Alexander

We, of the Music School, were invited to form a group to meet with Chris and one of his colleagues, Murray Silverstein. When the magic week came, the group (a Doctorate student, Prof's Miller; McManus; Saltsman and myself) were supposed to cancel everything and to devote the entire week to the meeting.

What interested me was that after about two days, when Murray and Chris kept pushing us to making decisions, on Wednesday morning, everybody experienced a kind of overnight conversion. A kind of what's going on here. What is really happening. What have I doing that I must not be doing and vice-versa. And the same happened to everyone else in the group. So that Wednesday, there was an extraordinary difference in my experience, in what went on than what had happened on Mon. and Tues. From Wed. to Fri. afternoon, we really moved into high gear. I know my colleagues join me in looking on the week as having been an exciting and potentially useful experience.

And, for the most of us certainly, it was the first time that we had to deal in spacial terms, in spacial imagery. Also, in a way, rather rare, that we would be dealing with this kind of interpersonal relationships; where the experts were not really playing cat and mouse with you, but in effect saying, damn it, they didn't say, they kept making sure that we realise that it was not so much that they really knew how to do this, and just were not going to tell us. It was that the essence of what came out had to be from us.

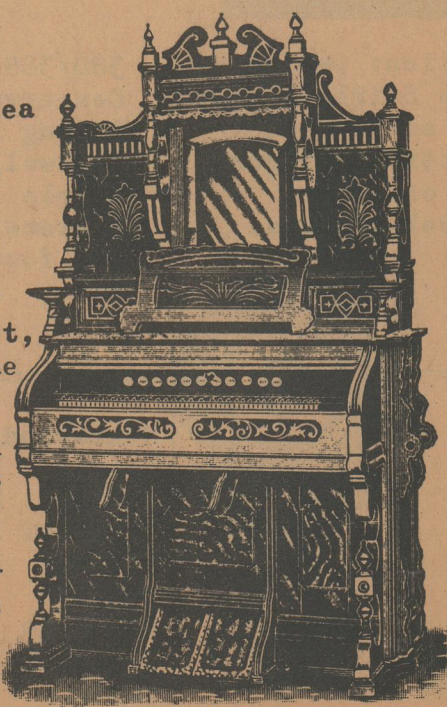
However, there were instances that Chris and Murray sort of, and I say with as much affection and respect, coyly try to make us head in the direction of certain particulars that we just said NO, it's irrelevant, indeed it's horrible. In Music, the relationship between a teacher and a student, especially in performance, is by definition, intimate - on a professional level. To think that a teacher is in a studio and on either side would be practice rooms for that teacher's students - would be insanity and would lead to murder and suicide and nothing flat. Because the teacher is trying to teach a third student, hearing what the ones, we're talking about some sound transmission inevitably, it would drive him crazy. Perhaps it would have been good for them to have a music lesson with a teacher, on one to one basis, in one of the studios with a really nice view outside.

Thus, in certain cases, the matter of the placement of studios, practice rooms, retreat areas, offices, classrooms, rehearsal spaces, storage spaces, all of these things tended to challenge some of his principles, but I think the principles held up.

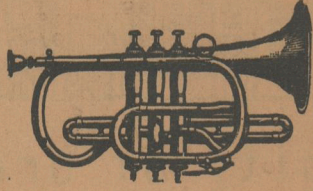
When we got to discussing the nature of the hearth, and the possibility of an eat-in place. Here too, in a way that sort of startled us. We suddenly turned cold and negative on it. The idea of having ten people at the Center of Environmental Research cook for each other and eat together is beautiful. But translate it into three hundred people is a no-no. The idea of having a place in the hearth where people can have intimacy to discuss something undisturbed is beautiful, and to be able to move into large groups, small groups and so on. But the cooking itself is out of the questions we saw it, communal eating - fine. I think he accepted our judgement.

I know Chris and Murray felt good about our involvement in it, that they learned a great deal. They developed a kind of analytical framework with which I think they would be able to evaluate details of the plans as they are revised until the magical, mystical day that they are actually here - which I'll believe when I see it.

music dean robert trotter



No, Bob Harris wasn't in on this. I saw him periodically in Deans Council's Meetings. In effect, I sort of ran to Uncle Bob and said "Hey, so and so is happening, is that good?". And he substantiated it and supported my reactions or helped me with refining them in various ways.



MUSIC COMPOSITION IS A KIND OF 'Spatial Imagery'

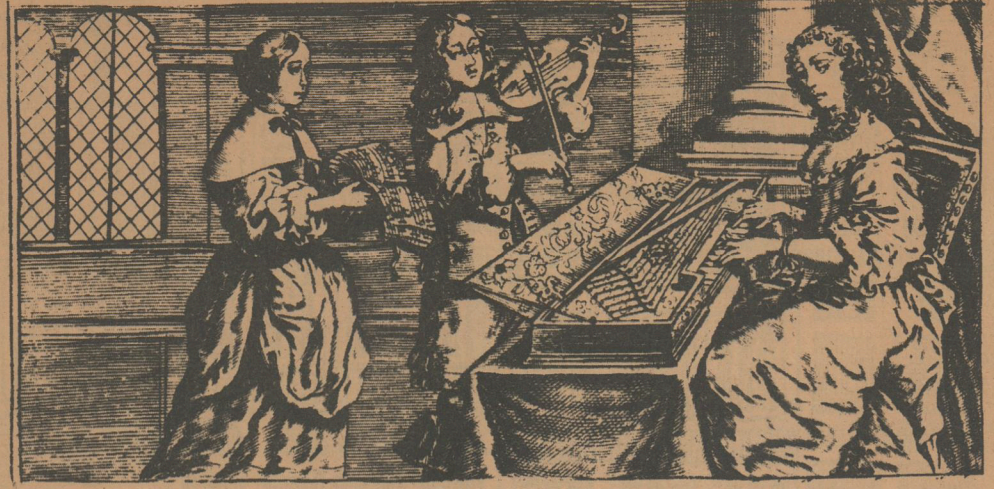
My reaction to your statement is that I can feel that metaphorically too, But it tends to be looked or to be experienced mostly as temporal. Though with contemporary styles, this spacial placement and this sense of palpable thickness, thinness, transparency, opacity, density if you will, are real phenomena. I think there's an element of sinesthesia where you translate something that comes to the ears into a visual, spacial image. And god knows we get into enough trouble because we use words borrowed from visual, spacial heritage to describe musical phenomena and just fall into semantic cul-de-sac all over the place.

ON DESIGNED SPACES

The image of the institutional freeway - in the case of that abomination Prince Lucain Campbell, vertical and horizontal freeway, where nothing stops the eye, and nothing stops the body. In general, at least in my experience of it, and certainly in our click, click, push-pull freeways with the little areas off and things, which is such an incredibly, one to onem and distressing metaphor for linear thinking, of the most conservative high bound variety. And I think one of the most fruitful images that I see coming from Christopher Alexander principles is the image of ambiguous territory. That there are places which don't belong to anybody, and therefore, belong to everybody. The way these can overlap, both visually and if you will, in security and access is very exciting.

The ambiguity of classroom spaces in themselves, so that they are square rather than axial, was something we were very much concerned about. Because an axial classroom tends to inevitably put the teacher into that traditional image of up front, where they are heretically the revealer, the center of reveal wisdom and the adversary. The students seldom look at each other, they all look forward. And all of those three counts, I see that kind of axial space as inappropriate. A square room can be made one against many oriented, but it can also be made circular and all of the other kind of setups. Some of my colleagues including myself are distinctly uncomfortable in the traditional format. Others are distinctly uncomfortable in anything but the traditional format, as you can guess. That's the way things are these days - but the students do go out of their way to shift into other formats.

All such things as the relationship of inside to outside; human scale to institutional scale, shape as it affects the rhythm of movement and standing still; the difference between a convex space and a concave space; direction; height; all of these things can for me, to be very personal and living things. Now, of course, instant expert that I am, can look at a building and say: "That's wrong, that's wrong.." I haven't done that before, to a certain extent. I have some names with which to express and to conceptualise experience. No, it's not jargon. I find that one person's jargon is another's useful words. And stirrup with which the words are used turns them into jargon even if they were monosyllables for somebody.



PRESENT CONDITION OF THE Music Building

You know the old saying that Chicago has only one slum, meaning from North to South, and the East to the West. Well, I think that we tend to, we have tended in the past to think that our building as having genuine slum areas in it. Some of the classrooms, there have been decent rehabilitation. We are grateful for the breach delivery of the remodeled Recital Hall, has us on tender hooks now. Because each new change brings crisis, difficulty and concern for whether there are finer solutions for it. The point is that when you put nine accoustical clouds or more, and discovered that they've covered up all the lights on the stage, then you have to make some rather drastic rethinking. And then there is an element ther of the old business that if you buy a pair of pants, then your shoes turned out to be shabby. And if you then buy a new pair of shoes, it turns out that you've got to buy a new mink coat to fit. Every small thing done to the building means something to the community here. The fact that we finally have fans in the Men's and Women's toilets is a cause for great rejoicing. The fact that somebody forgot to tell people people not to paint them 'landlord' green makes us a bit sad, but at this point, peace.



ON RELOCATION

We want to stay here. That is assuming that the field to the north of us will be likely, partly be used by our addition. That there will be other buildings coming that way. I hope, and I know my colleagues join me in hoping that the center of demographic gravity of the campus will tend to move southward a bit. Now we say in semi jest that we are beyond the grave. For the student who has 1:30 class in Friendly Hall til 2:20, then to take a class at 2:30 here, then go back to Condon for 3:30, takes a lot of commitment. And I think that geographic placement has tended to join with the changing repertory that interests young people to the point that there's a certain degree of isolation here. I'm distressed by provincialism on both sides, and I see students, people, who are only interested in Mozart, and people only interested in the 'Young Bloods'. And I see other people: "Hey, let me have sound. Sound that is potentially useful in my life, and whether it's Mozart, or Janis, or Afghanistan or Luciano Berio. I think Chris' image of not deserting a building is a valuable image. I like the idea of making home a more useful place.

EUGENE CULTURAL CENTER

The financial implications of upkeep after construction are very much on my mind, because I know that places with far bigger populations have difficulty in supporting.

We thank Dr. Trotter for taking time out for this interview.
p.c.
jih.

ON ARCHITECTS

I'm interested in the level of consciousness in people especially. Architects I've known in the last twenty years or so, in general have tended to be highly aware of the interplay between individual human beings and the rest of the world - the physical world, the visual world, the aural world, all of these aspects of the physical; and people relating to each other and the way in which spaces help to ease or clutter those relationships. The same kinds of cynicism that tempt anybody in the professional capacity tempt architects. And the kinds of hustles that they have to go through in their client-relationships and contractor-imperfections and all these things, can get at architects and can make them just as bitter as anybody else on an unclarified level. However, one can become professionally competent in dealing with space, without having to become aware of its implications for human nature, for the way people relate to themselves and to each other. The big corporation architects, the kind that turns out some of the buildings that I don't like. I only know what they are. I know that probably they are human beings, but bureaucratic context have damaged them very much.

AFTER YOU ALFONSE

Concerning the possibility of having a chamber music concert in Lawrence Hall - you know the story after you Alfonse. Story of the woman who never delivered twins. She died and they did an autopsy and discovered two little men. One was saying after you Alfonse, and the other was saying after you Josef. After I stopped laughing twenty years ago, I realized that it has influenced my thought. You would like us to do it but don't want to intrude. Students and faculty here might want to do it but don't want to be pushy. So what have you got. There are constant places where collaboration could take place that doesn't yet take place. That's why I find that the image of glacial rhythms of change offer some comfort to me, because I see some very nice things happening.

ON BEING INTERVIEWED

In an interview when I'm talking about something that I really care about, I would rather live dangerously and be affront about it and what, Jean-Jacques Rousseau called "Etalage de soi" rather than playing 'cagey' and no comment and all that crux. Sometimes I pay heavily for it. I consider the essential feature is for a person to have a vision that touches other people and then it moves or doesn't move, according to the rhythms that are beyond our language. Or you speak very definitely why something doesn't move.

P. CHEN

John Hurst
Brian Kade

