PANEL DISCUSSION
A Roundtable Discussion with the Authors of A *Pattern Language*

Moderated by Hajo Neis & Gabriel Brown

Question 1

If you were preparing to write an updated APL, A Pattern Language 2.0, what changes or additions, if any, would you suggest making to the original, particularly in regards to the format, layout, or methodology of the book?

SARA ISHIKAWA

I cannot for the life of me imagine myself writing an updated version of *APL*. We worked very hard and long on the initial book, and had endless discussions on everything about it. I think the format, layout and methodology of the book are not perfect but I can't think of how to change it, except maybe to be clearer on context but this was also thoroughly thought through and discussed. As to the content of the patterns, of course a lot of patterns can be improved, additional ones added, etc. Patterns are meant to be improved as technology and forces change and we accumulate more knowledge and experience. Improvements and adding patterns should be ongoing and made accessible somehow to anyone who could benefit from them. *APL* might at some point be updated but not as far as I am concerned, by the original authors. I think we did the best we could at the time we did it. If others should take on such a task, that version would be theirs and it would probably also need to be updated at some point. I think there is no such thing as a perfect or final *APL* - now or in the future and I think that's good, healthy and the reality just because things change.

MURRAY SILVERSTEIN

I say, let the book stand on its own, in its original form, with all its strengths and weaknesses, as a relic of its time. On the other hand, no reason not to "let a thousand languages bloom," offshoots of *APL*, siblings and cousins, children and grandchildren. History will sort them out. But in terms of its format and layout, its quirky beauty, *APL* is a classic. I still find the format fascinating, the mix of photos, diagrams,

hypotheses; the weird mix of certainty and open-endedness, of imperishable truths, hunches and stupidities; its foreshadowing of the hot-linked hyper-texts we find today on sites like Wikipedia. All in all, for its time, it's still lively and compelling.

I hope it will be used as a seed for ways to design, ways to write and think about the physical environment, for a long time.

It's the methodology, however, outlined at the beginning of the book, "using the language," where the real weakness lies. A rudimentary method is described, and then it says you have to read *The Timeless Way of Building*, to really understand pattern languages and how to use them. That's bunk. If we were re-issuing *A Pattern Language*, not as 2.0, but as a new edition with a new introduction, I would say that all this introductory and explanatory stuff should be ignored; that the ways of using it are multiple and depend on many factors, personal and cultural; that it can be used by individuals, by offices, by design teams or client groups--all of which could be given as examples.

The idea conveyed by the book that there is one single right way - creating a sub-language, a sequence, etc. - was a mistake. It was useful for some, but on the whole, too limiting. And more important, it just hasn't been true to my experience. I've found the book useful in a great variety of ways that we never could have envisioned when we wrote it.

MAX JACOBSON

I don't think there is a need for *APL Version 2.0*. It was so intensely concocted to comprise an integrated volume (material, tone, paper, size, image choice and quality), and it is so uniquely a product of its time and place, that it exists as a strangely whole and complete object. It contains many levels of precision and insight (from the truly brilliant, to the promisingly significant, even to the probably wrong), and levels of seriousness (from deadly to hardly). By being so thoroughly a product of its authors' knowledge and beliefs, embedded in the culture of the years of its creation, it remains a radiant

vision of an approach to design. It doesn't need fussing with.

On the other hand, I can envision *Another Pattern Language*, and *Yet Another Pattern Language*. These will retain the abstract structure of the original approach, but nothing more. They will also be the products of authors united by purpose to put forth the elements of their unique vision of architecture, or a sub-class of architecture. Actually, several such pattern languages have been put together, either focusing on an aspect of architecture, such as sustainability, or on a particular type of architecture, such as childcare centers.

Question 2

What work or research do you hope future generations might undertake to advance or bolster the Pattern Language theory and approach?

SI   The idea of the patterns is that they are hypotheses - our best solution to date. I think it would be great if people would demonstrate this idea, and take specific patterns in *APL* that they disagree or find fault with - like *Ring Roads* or *Parallel Roads* and see if they could improve them - where should highways be located and how should they connect to other roads - or what should the layout of streets be in a town. I would also be interested in how people might improve and update patterns such as *Good Materials*, and other construction patterns. I would also encourage people to develop new patterns as I think they are doing - in areas of ecology, for example, or environmental justice, keeping in mind good forces - basic human physical, psychological and positive social and cultural forces - as opposed to destructive, superficial or not so basic forces such as greed, excess, or some market forces - to better the environment as a whole for everyone and everything. It would help if they were in the form of patterns with full arguments presented so that they could more easily be understood, evaluated and improved.

MS   Since 1977, when the book appeared, our capacity as a society to create decent and humane buildings has probably improved slightly. Where we're losing ground, however, is in our cities, in the way buildings aggregate and make larger places: streets, parks, neighborhoods, commercial nodes, downtowns; in the way cities grow (or fail) within their regions, as parts of their bioregions, their watersheds. The patterns for this scale are now the most important: the patterns

that underlie healthy densities, lively live/work streets, the proximity of greens and local services, the webs of public transit systems, the interlacing pattern of city, suburb and countryside. These are the ones we need, as professionals, to understand, to clarify and to promote.

We need to make our urban regions more sustainable, and that means they have to be places that the great majority of their inhabitants care about; places the poor and the middle class want to invest in, to nurture and protect, as well as the rich. So it is a matter of social equity combined with sustainability.

MJ   I am particularly interested in promoting the PL theory and approach in the teaching of architecture. In addition to using *APL* in introductory classes of design, I would like to see the approach extended to the teaching of architectural history and criticism. For example, after an extended tour of Palladio's villas outside Venice, I summarized my understanding (and appreciation) of these buildings in the form of patterns, the sizeable group of patterns that Palladio used to create unique villas for each site and client. I think this approach could be extended to those historical architects whose work is covered in history classes. I also used this approach to introduce the monograph on Tom Bosworth's residential architecture in the Pacific Northwest.

Question 3

In your experience since writing the book, have you identified any patterns that you have found especially true or salient? Are there any that you find less true today?

SI   The patterns I think are important and true and are favorites of mine are: *Scattered Work, Network of Paths and Cars, Main Gateways, Quiet Backs, Small Public Squares, Entrance Transition, Arcades, Farmhouse Kitchen, Private Terrace on the Street* and *Light on Two Sides of Every Room*. There are many others.

The patterns I'm not sure about mainly in terms of whether they can realistically be implemented as stated, in this day and age, are *Industrial Ribbon, Raised Walk* and *Children in the City*. There are probably more of these.

Question 4

A young architecture student picks up a copy of APL for the first time. Is there any particular advise or guidance you might give to aid their understanding or application of patterns and pattern languages?

MS   At the residential scale, at least, Max and I (along with our partner at JSW/D Architects, Barbara Winslow) tried to answer this in our book, *Patterns of Home*.

But today, if I had to pick one single pattern from the original book for students to consider, to contend with, I'd say *Positive Outdoor Space*. It's a pattern that is at work (or ought to be) at all scales, from window places to buildings, from park benches to cities. As an architect, as my sense of the pattern has deepened, it has provided me with direction and inspiration many times over.

Plus, it's a pattern that provides critical insight into the dynamics of form in all arts, music and painting, sculpture, literature, and so on. *Positive Outdoor Space* is a crude but robust expression of the understanding that it's the negative space that gives the positive space its vitality; that the positive, shaped thing is given life and spark and truth by the way it is braided together with that which surrounds it, the silence, the empty space. Darkness, mystery--these are the sources of order, of rhythm, of meaning. Keats had a name for this pattern: he called it "negative capability."

My other favorites are those dealing with the sheltering nature of roofs, with natural light in buildings, and those that concern themselves with transitions. *Entrance Transition* is timeless: it's like a genome. You can't understand architecture without it.

The weakest patterns in the book were those concerned with construction. For the overall coherence of the book, we wanted to have something to say about construction, of course, but, for the most part, we didn't really know what we were talking about. There are some very useful principles in this section of the book—*Structure Follows Social Space* is key, but on the whole these patterns are pretty lame.

MJ   Murray Silverstein, Barbara Winslow, and I wrote Patterns of Home precisely to point out the roughly 10 patterns that have proven to be the most essential elements of our practice over the past 30 years. Actually, most of the 253 patterns in *APL* seem to me fundamentally sound and useful. The weakest are those defining the light-weight concrete building system, an interesting system to be sure, but not as sustainable as wood for those projects close to forests which offer certified lumber.

SI   Look at both the structure and the content of patterns. Appreciate the structure in terms of its problem solving capabilities - context, problem, solution. When developing a pattern, try to identify all the basic natural, human, social and cultural forces operating on the part of the environment being discussed, and try to be clear about the context under which these forces come into play and see how well these forces are resolved in the solution - abstractly and minimally (diagrammatically prescribing no more than the essential parts in essential relationships to each other) so they can be reused in the stated context and there is as much room as possible for individual expression when they are implemented in design. When applying patterns, try to efficiently combine or overlap them to arrive at a richer design such as with *Main Entrance, Entrance Transition, Private Terrace on the Street, Sunny Place, Front Door Bench, Sitting Bench* and *Raised Flowers*. See if the design enhances and feels as good or better than the patterns by themselves.

MS   Advice to a young student picking up *A Pattern language*: well, first of all, I'd say, Go ahead and pick it up! Take a look, flip around in it. But second of all, I'd say, ignore all the methodology about how to use the book, all the preaching.

Here's what I've found: people flipping around in the book, following their nose, begin to get it, to understand how to use it. Experience with the language itself teaches you how to use it.

And, more important, as you become familiar with particular threads of thought that run through the book, you begin to grasp, intuitively, what a pattern is. You begin to think about the environment in terms of patterns; to see that the physical world is not made up things, so much, as patterns.

In this sense, the book triggers thought and memory and feeling; and it gives form to memory and feeling, by helping you to think about and understand the physical places you've experienced. Common readers--that is, readers reading freely, out of interest (not in school)--often say, "Oh, yeah,"

and "Ah-ha!"

Here's an analogy: a young poet flips around through a book of poems, reading here and there, and begins to notice that the poems have a common lyric form, and so begins to understand the structural, linguistic pattern behind the poems; to understand the pattern of the sonnet, for example, or the pattern of the blues. And understanding such patterns not only helps you learn how to create such things yourself, it also helps you to "see" more; to see more deeply into the world, and your experience with it: Because the world itself is made in such a way as will reveal itself to the ways of feeling and thinking embodied by the lyric poem, by the chord structure of the blues.

It's very useful in this life, with all its ambiguities and contradictions, to see the deep patterns once in awhile, the fleeting ways it all coheres. And that, I think, is the most powerful thing about the book. So I would tell a student, open it anywhere: simply confront a single pattern, and follow your nose, see where it leads.

If I was teaching with *APL* today, I would devise exercises that essentially encourage this kind of behavior: a kind of meandering, unfocused confrontation with the book, and then ask people to report on their experiences, over the course of days, weeks, months.

I'll say again: there can be no single rule or method for using the book, any more than there can be a single method for using, speaking with, a natural language. You just pick it up and start doing it. It only takes a minute to start; but it's going to take you years, a lifetime, to finish, and still you won't be done.

One of the pleasures of having been one of the authors of *APL* has been the experience of hearing folks tell me, in various ways, essentially this: the book has encouraged a way of being in the physical world; a way of seeing: it's made of things, the physical world--grass and concrete and wood--but things are made of patterns, and the patterns together are like a language, a language you can intuitively understand and learn to speak.

MJ   For the architecture students encountering *APL* for the first time, some introductory words might be in order:

 a) The authors believe that the patterns are the most important elements of knowledge needed by an architect;

 b) The students need to confront each of them with an open mind, asking whether they agree with the pattern or not;

 c) They should be prepared to change their mind over time regarding the significance of each pattern:

 d) The patterns are, in most cases, necessary but not sufficient to create a good design;

 e) Hold the work of an architect that you admire in one hand, and *APL* in the other, asking to what extent the patterns help explain the buildings you admire.