

TWO BRANDS OF HUMANISM

Howard Davis interviews Christopher Alexander

Introduction

I have known Christopher Alexander for about seven years, first as student, then as colleague, always learning. We have done a wide variety of things together, ranging from building concrete vaults to developing new techniques of participation for urban communities; writing and designing and teaching. Something that has always been the case with Chris is that things are usually not as simple as they seem at first sight: there is always a deeper insight, the crux of the matter, the real question. It is this that has made the work exciting: the idea that if you scratch them just a little bit, your superficial assumptions crumble, and underneath lies the need for new assumptions, new questions, raw and shing... and these new questions lead to new insights, more work, and progress.

So it was with this interview. I was asked by the editor to do this interview, about people, and what to tell architecture students about people. I expected to have a discussion about all this: about the failure of the modern environment to accomodate people humanly; about Chris's efforts, in the pattern language, to specify exactly what the environment needs to make it human; about attempts to put this theory into practice; about what students expect and how to transmit these ideas to students.

However, I had also known for a long time that although much of Chris's work is based profoundly on, and indeed has helped to ~~shape~~ define, explanation of the way that people use and shape the physical environment, Chris does not see such understanding as the solitary

aim of his work, and indeed regards many present-day efforts in user-needs studies and participatory design processes and "human design" as extremely limited in their ultimate effect on the quality of the built environment. As always, there was a "deeper insight" that is the core of the matter, that redefines the problem.

So the discussion turned away from what I expected, and what the editor expected. In the end, the interview is about the distinction between the well meaning humanistic efforts in architecture of the last fifteen or twenty years, and a humanism that has as its only goal the ability to awaken the human spirit, to touch the heart, to allow people to make something that they truly like. The interview explores the difference between these two brands of humanism, and goes on to describe Chris's approach to teaching the second version. As we will see, the difference is an enormous one, and goes to the basis of modern thought.

- Howard Davis

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Howard: The environment is really in trouble, in the way it responds to people, and the way people fit into it. What are you doing about that, in your role as teacher and as an architect?

Chris: I believe that even if one accepts the fact that the environment is inhuman and has failed miserably, as you say, we actually have to ask the question "Why?" to make any headway in changing it. I don't think that humanism, alone, solves the problem. What I mean by humanism is the intelligent, liberal well-meaning attitude toward human affairs which is more or less well known according to who you talk to and who you read. But that's tough. For example, there are some people on our faculty who have very intelligent well-meaning attitudes, and would probably call themselves humanists. But the problem is that they are trying to marry humanistic ideals with some intellectual mental baggage about architecture and the nature of the universe that will not mesh. So if you try to be humanistic, but you believe things about architecture that are ultimately impossible to believe, you end up making up a completely mechanistic pastiche, and I think that most practice and most teaching that is going on has that kind of difficulty.

Howard: Are you saying that those humanistic ideals are wrong, or just that they are not well-understood?

Chris: Let me give you an example. I was having lunch today at the Fourth Street Grill, which was built in the "California tradition" of the 60's and 70's in the sense that it is so clearly intended to be

more human. It is certainly pleasant in some ways. And it was designed by people, who certainly do understand the human problem in the formulation of the 60's. They understand that things are very mechanized; they understand that large corporations are brutal and are causing inhuman situations; they understand that large building construction tends to produce very sterile atmospheres. So here you have all this recycled redwood, and the same classic laidback California scene that you can get all up and down the coast from Los Angeles to Big Sur to Eureka. It is relatively pleasant. I certainly think it is more pleasant than going into the Bank of America building. But only slightly. Because it seems to me to be imprisoned in its own very image-ridden self-conscious baby-faced humanism, and it ~~doesn't~~ doesn't have the humanity of Chartres Cathedral and it doesn't have the humanity of a Long Island diner. It's not operating at a level that I consider pleasant.

Howard: It's got better food than Chartres Cathedral. Can you be more specific about what you think is wrong?

Chris: It is done with good intent...but the reason I gave those two examples -- Chartres and the Long Island diner -- is that, in contrast, the Fourth Street Grill is not based on even 5 percent ~~of the~~ depth of the spiritual experience of those places. Of course it is not trying to be, so I'm not saying it necessarily should be. But it also, is not based on real human experience either. In that sense, it is just as image-ridden as the Bank of America building, except that it happens to be using sand-blasted redwood instead of smoked plate glass.

Howard: But I still don't know what exactly is wrong with the restaurant-- in human terms.

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Chris: I don't think it's any accident that a whole series of classic human situations and emotions could not be filmed, for example, in a place like the Fourth Street Grill. The only thing you could film there would be the groovy dilemmas of the 70's.

Howard: You're saying that there are certain emotions that couldn't be expressed in that place?

Chris: ~~I~~ I think so. Let's just take a really basic human situation, --- like being an orphan -- just something fundamental. Now you can imagine that you're making a movie about being an orphan, and you want to imagine the child's experience. What's going on at that moment? You just try to imagine what is happening. You could imagine filming it in the streets of San Francisco, the streets of any big city, you could imagine filming it in the diner I was talking about; you could imagine it on the beach, for that matter. I think it would be peculiar to film it in the Fourth Street Grill.

Howard: Well, there are never any kids in there.

Chris: That's absolutely true. And what's that all about?

Howard: Well, there are also no kids in some old San Francisco restaurant that you might say has a nicer feeling to it.

Chris: Actually, I don't think that's true. I think it is very easy, indeed, to imagine a film about an orphan, peering around the door, and looking into such a restaurant. You know, it immediately conjures up images that make sense. I can't make sense of those images in

that place, on 4th Street. I don't think I'm being fanciful. I believe it's true. And I happen to have picked a rather sad and unfortunate human emotion but the same goes for the positive emotions, the happy or lucky ones.

Howard: I also think it's true. I just don't understand the connection between the inability to have these emotions and rough-sawn redwood.

Chris: But you're not denying what I'm saying.

Howard: I'm not denying what you're saying. I hate those places. I don't like being there and I don't like the scene there. And it seems as if every time something is designed it has that character -- and something else disappears from the world. Nothing important comes into the world. But we haven't gotten to the connection, yet.

Chris: You know, even with good intentions and lots of sincere idealism, the fact of the matter is that that particular restaurant is a speculative development. It was basically built to promote a situation that is capable of money, and it is not done in a way that actually permits a direct relationship between someone's own inner life and the situation there. This is also true of the Bank of America building, and is not ~~true~~ true of Chartres Cathedral and the Long Island diner. The diner is produced by somebody who's actually just trying to make a living. That's not the case with this thing we're talking about. And as a result none of the features that would naturally congregate around that inner life if it dared to be exposed, are going to take place there. In other times this displaying of the inner life has

an incredible number of dimensions. It isn't either especially sweet, or sour. It takes the most zany and incredible series of situations which ~~might~~ certainly might include the gutter and the circus and vaudeville, and 5,000 other things, certainly including the family dining table and ordinary fireplace, too. But, the 4th Street Grill is not one of them. I know that those feelings had nothing to do with its making. And I'm saying, that if you are occupied with those feelings, you will, in fact, not do that particular thing with that redwood, nor will you do the kind of thing that's the Bank of America building in the way that it is made out of its particular pieces of concrete and steel.

Howard: It seems easy to say that the problem is speculation and the desire for money.

Chris: It's not only speculation. I'm saying none of the circumstances that exist in architecture or town planning or any sort of making today, are ones which open the door to these kind of feelings and realities. And this is absolutely throughout society. And, I think the feeling that, somehow, the liberation of the 60's and 70's has got rid of the problem is completely illusory. I do not think that happened. I think all that's happened is that one type of mechanism has been cashed in for another.

Howard: The life and spirit that you seem to be talking about, are certainly the kinds of things that people in the last 15 years have tried to address themselves to: the evils of speculation, the

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alienation of production from peoples' spirit ... aren't all the things that concerned people have been doing, been a step at addressing these things?

Chris: Suppose that I think of the various people in our school who have, over the last 10 or 15 years, tried to introduce human considerations into the environment, all of them making very, very intelligent and I believe accurate assessments of social or human considerations that apparently affect buildings, and yet, all that operates is basically designed to plug into the same machine that is churning the wheels right now. And, it is very, very deceptive. First of all, in the late 60's there was a version where a lot of those people felt they could actually cooperate with what you might call big time architecture, and actually make a difference, and prove things. And I think some of them still do. That was, in a way, a more obvious mistake, because if you try to, say, do a human factors analysis which is going to be churned up into the computer of some corporate architectural firm, you know, really, that nothing is ~~xx~~ changing. But I think that was a bit transparent, and after a while people understood that that wasn't actually doing a whole lot. But then there is a second version, that is much more deceptive, and I don't think that people have ~~xxxx~~ yet even understood what is faulty. And that is what you might call the "Small is Beautiful," laidback California scene.

Howard: I see that as a close cousin of the same thing.

Chris: It is, but it needs to be made clear why. It is like solar energy. For a very short period, if you put solar collectors on your

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buildings, you had a little halo around your head. And, I suppose in the space of five years it's become obvious that if you put solar collectors on a building you can be just as silly a technocrat as someone who is building an eighty storey building in a place where it has not business to be. And so this kind of "hippy technocrat" mixture has become a little bit obvious now, but what you might call the "hippy humanist" hasn't become quite so blatant, yet. And so I think there are still a lot of people who think that if you do use rough-sawn redwood and sandpaper it rounds instead of sharp at the corners, and use stained glass and leaded windows, and all that stuff, that somehow the thing has become human ... when actually it can be just as deeply alien as anything else. And it is pointless. I think actually pointless is more what you feel when you're in the presence of that stuff. And that ... we're really talking about lost souls, here.

Howard: But what is it about speculation, exactly, that causes bad buildings to be made?

Chris: The essential thing that makes the difference between something which has spirit and something which doesn't has to do with your motive in making it and with your inner connection with it while you're making it. And if your motive in making it is relatively pure, that is, you are making it so to speak, ~~for yourself~~ for yourself -- that sounds egocentric, but it's not -- it's possible for the thing to achieve real depth, because you put your own true feeling into it. If you're doing something for motives that lie on the level of making money, there are different ways that that motive

can color this activity. If the need is absolute and direct, like the guy in the Long Island diner who's simply trying to make his own living, it's not destructive, it's not disturbing, as a matter of fact it's fairly ordinary and organic, more or less like sweeping the kitchen. But if it is an arm's length deal, where the people who are involved in the building and the people who are involved in running the restaurant are all of them completely at arm's length from the ownership -- in other ~~words~~ words, where there's a series of abstract relationships between the people who are owning it, the people who control the money, the people who cook the food, the people who serve the food, the people who eat the food, the people who build the building -- if those ~~are~~ are all economic relationships of a purely economic sort, then what happens is that the kinds of feeling that can generate spirit ~~are~~ simply do not survive, they cannot survive in that ambience. But I'm not talking just about a delicate little plant that's got to be nurtured under a sun ray lamp. It's a fact, actually just quite straightforward, that this feeling will not happen then. Large scale speculation which introduces these arms lengths deals -- which waht most of modern construction is like -- simply does not allow the kind of direct relationship that happens for example, when a person carves a heart into the back of a wooden bench -- which is a very direct relationship, and where you can put this kind of feeling in.

I just want to go back to the point, where I said that this feeling will only happen when you're doing it for yourself...because there's another kind of thing that has been going on, in the last few

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years in the world, which is in fact a very inflated sort of egotism, egocentrism, really, where you say, "My feelings are all that matters" and this is another artistic attempt to get away from all this very abstract, very brutal stuff. So people are saying, my feelings as artist are paramount, I'm going to do whatever I like, I'm going to produce the feelings in my paintings, sculptures, handmade houses, or whatever. The trouble is that this doesn't produce the goods either. This feeling only arises when you thoroughly and deeply recognize the structure of the situation that exists and you do the exact right thing at the right moment, to respond to that situation. When that is going on, then it becomes invested with deep feeling. What's happening in the speculative situation is that you see a certain situation and you are not free to respond to it correctly.

I'll give you an example which doesn't have to do with speculation. We've been building a house up at Lake Berryessa, and last time I was up there we were building ^{the} foundation. We had to place the carport, which is actually going to be used as a shed to store lumber, and so forth. It's the approach building -- a long shed on the upper part of the slope where you come off the road, and then the house, as you know, tumbles down the hill, with very small buildings.

Now, there's a couple of oak trees up there, and it also happens that there is, in front, a 25 foot setback. When you place the carport correctly, it encroaches 3 feet into the setback. What I mean by correctly is that you come in in the right way, and the space between the carport and the first oak tree and the second oak tree is

of just such a nature that a beautiful and organized and harmonious place is formed between the carport and the trees which leads then to the gateway that leads down to the house. Now it might sound amazing, just on tape here, but if you move the end of the long carport which is crossing the setback line 3 feet in from the street, so that it's no longer in violation of the law, it comes close enough to the first oak tree so that there is no longer a ~~park~~ space formed between them and then the whole situation up on the top of the slope is ruptured. I cannot explain that in detail without taking you there. Try to ~~xx~~ just take it as a fact for a moment. So what we have here is a situation where the correct reaction to the real situation produces a violation of a certain rather unimportant law, namely the setback line. Correct adherence to this law violates completely the correct action at the top of this piece of land. Of course, as a law-abiding citizen, one would want to say, "Well, the law is also very important because the law was created in order to guarantee the well-being of the street." Namely, the setbacks are intended to make sure that there's a harmonious situation along the street. The thing is though, that the law is actually an extremely crude instrument which does not express in the deepest way how to arrive at that harmony.

Howard: Formal harmony?

Chris: No, I'm not just speaking about formal harmony. I'm talking about the well being of the street, in other words people would like that the street have a fairly rural character; they would like it to be nice and relaxed; they don't want buildings encroaching too closely on the street, possibly for reasons that have to do with the rural

feeling, possibly for reasons that have to do with the safety of children, with horses, I don't know, various things. It's functional and formal. I'm not at the moment questioning their judgement, the judgement of that community, in saying that they would like houses to be a little away from that street. I'm saying that a rule which says that one wants to have houses a little bit away from the street or set back from the street is flexible enough to permit the right thing to be done in any given case. A rule which says it has got to be a minimum of 25 feet exactly and which happens therefore to put somebody who put it 22 feet in a particular case in violation of the law, even though that is the right thing to do, this is causing an incredible bind, unintended of course. Of course there are no evil ~~magi~~ magicians sitting in the Zoning Department, chuckling. The ordinance, as it exists, the 25' rule, is a sincere attempt on the part of the zoning people to create a sensible and useful rule. But the rule happens to be very inflexible. Therefore it becomes technically impossible to do the right thing.

In this particular case we are ready, if necessary, to fight it to the hilt. And I think it'll be O.K. because the community is rather relaxed, and I think they'll understand the issue and so therefore we'll be able to take people there and say, "Look, this really is not sensible because if you move this thing 3 feet you get a wonderful situation, and if you ~~insist~~ insist on putting it behind the zoning line you get a terrible situation which isn't good for anybody." I believe people will understand that and will agree with it. But suppose for a moment that they didn't. You can

easily imagine a situation going all the way to the Supreme Court, where the issue is, are you allowed to build in accordance with the rightness of the situation, or are you forced to follow some trammels that are ~~capable~~ capable of disrupting the rightness of the immediate situation.

Now, when I talk about speculation... the problem with speculation is exactly similar. It's not that there's something evil about making money: it's not a moral problem at all. It's a practical problem. If you're involved in speculation, you will then be guided by a series of principles which will tend to violate the correctness of the immediate thing that would be correct and appropriate to do in any one of a dozen or a hundred cases, and therefore it is impossible to make a right building under those circumstances very often, not inevitably and not always, but very very often, because the rules you have to follow in order to speculate will violate your reaction to the given situation that would make it correct. And that is the essence of the problem.

Howard: It's also the case, if you look at the carport, that you wouldn't want to fight it without this direct relationship...in other words, because you have this direct relationship to the thing, you are more able to fight it, to actually take it to the hilt.

Chris: Yes, that's a good point. And also, if you were involved in speculation, since time is then considered as money, you could not afford the least little wrinkle of trouble, and therefore you would have to follow the rule to the letter, because you've got to get the damn thing through the ~~the~~ Building department in 5 weeks.

Howard: It seems to me that "liberal humanism" -- the efforts of the last 15 or 20 years -- and the rules that come out of that have a similar effect ~~x~~ as the rules that come out of speculation, and you wind up being a slave to this thing we call "humanism," which also results in a certain set of do's and don't's.

Chris: Yes I agree. Well, let's take a very simple example. Let's take simply the way in which one piece of wood is finished. I mentioned before when we were talking about the 4th Street Grill, that there's a fair bit of sandblasted wood there and a lot of wood that has been sanded so heavily that the corner has been rounded off. Strongly rounded off. Now that is happening under the impact of a rule which is quite similar ^{to} the zoning ordinance. It happens to be a culturally defined rule which says, if you want to groove, California 1980's style, it's quite a good idea to get out your high speed sander and sand off the corners. And following the same argument, you could say to me, "Well, O.K., in what sense does that rule violate some kind of rightness which would be possible if that rule were not being followed?"

Now the answer to that is quite complicated and I'll have to treat it like this. Let's take a particular table, that's made of some planks, and we'll just talk about the table top and we'll discuss the difference between a table where the edge has been very strongly rounded with a sander and a table where that edge was made with a plane and possibly a very very tiny rounding with extremely fine sandpaper just to take the cutting edge off the corner -- but basically the corner is ~~harper~~ sharp after it was made with a plane.

Now, suppose that we were to take two tables like this, for comparison: one of them severely rounded with sandpaper, and one of them made with a plane and where the edge is sharp. And then suppose I say to you, "Which one of these feels better?" The hasty reaction to that -- especially if we live in California in 1981 -- is "The one which is more rounded feels better." And this reaction comes about because we've been living in this sharp Cartesian world of rectangular grid coordinates for so long that a lot of people have an automatically negative reaction to anything like that and therefore think that anything which is rounded must be better.

Howard: It's an intellectual reaction.

Chris: It's an intellectual reaction, right. But if I say to you, "Let's consider these two tables, and I want to ask you, to tell me, ~~for~~ which one of them you're more willing to take as a picture of your own self." You will find this a peculiar request, of course. There's a long story behind here which I can't go into in this interview. But if I ask you in a very serious way to tell me which of the two you would consider a better candidate to be a picture of your own soul, in other words of everything about you, your past, your future, your aspirations, your abysmal parts, your most wonderful parts, everything, all of this stuff, and I want one of these two tables to be a picture of that. I want you to pick the one where it is more true that it is that kind of picture. It is -- again difficult to do this experiment on tape, without having two real objects in front of us -- but anyway, I will make the prediction that it is highly probable -- I'd say ~~it's~~ it's virtually certain -- that if you do

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that experiment honestly, without the overlay of being hung up with various rules, fashions, and so on and so forth, that you will pick the table that's got the cleaner edge to it.

You're nodding your head. I'm recording this for the tape.

Howard: Well, we don't have the tables in front of us.

Chris: Right, we don't have the tables in front of us, and it's completely a thought experiment. I believe I am right.

Howard: I know you're right. But I don't know why.

Chris: The "why" of this, certainly we cannot get into in this interview. That is a very large task -- as you know, I'm writing an immense work on this at the moment, that's got more than 1000 pages of manuscript now. It's a very difficult question but it's a real one -- and the crux of this whole issue is, is what is that all about. But the point is, without even digressing off into it, just accepting this simple empirical fact, that if we want to make a table with real feeling, in other words one where a person feels truly at home, it's evident then that he'll tend to feel more at home where the edge of that table is made in the second way rather than in the first way. Truly, deeply at home -- not at home in the sense of being part of the groove, part of the scene, but in the sense that they feel themselves truly related in their ~~souls~~ soul to the table at which they are eating. I constructed this example to be able to

say simply why is this example similar to the example of the zoning setback. The point is that the simple minded rule which says "If you want to groove in California, get out your sander," this rule again is violating any instinct that one has about how to make that table correctly, in the deepest sense. And this kind of thing is going on, all the way up and down the line.

Howard: To say that the maker of the table should make it so that the person eating there feels connected to the ~~the~~ table, deep down in his own soul... that implies a motive that is far away from what the current "scene" happens to be.

Chris: I think it does have to do, ~~essentially~~ essentially, with motive, yes. I'm using that in a very deep sense. But, if I try to put it for myself, what is it, in the end, that what does one actually need to be trying to do, in order to make a real difference, then the motive has to be different. And, I can state quite boldly what I think that motive has to be.

Howard: I think you should.

Chris: It's a ... union.

Howard: Union?

Chris: Right.

Howard: What's that?

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Chris: I'm talking about union of yourself with what the world is made of, or union of yourself with other people, or union of yourself and things. Most fundamentally, I'm talking about the motive being union with the basic stuff the universe is made of, or the basic stuff the world is made of,. I'm using rather funny words which could get a little too carried away here, but I said I was going to say it bluntly, because actually there is no other way to say it. Either you do it, or you don't. This is what was going on in Medieval Europe, for example; it was going on in, as far as we know, ~~Braxxx~~ Bronze-age China; it was going on in the great Buddhist periods in Japan, and ~~pnobably~~ going on in quite a few primitive tribes up and down the Americas and Africa and Afghankstan, steppes of Central Asia, and for that matter, the aborigines in Australia. In all of those times and peoples, this was ~~quaxix~~ quite clearly understood, and this was the basis for what they did, what we now consider to be great art, and try to buy in fashionable boutiques, and see in museums, and art dealers. The only residue of what those people believed, are these few artifacts which remain. But that is what ~~why~~ they believed, and because they believed that, and because they were trying to find that union, they did what they did. We don't believe this. We have an essentially mechanistic view of what's going on. And no matter what kind of a humanistic clothing this mechaaistic view has, it will still produce garbage so long as it is not oriented in that direction. It will produce things that are fundamentally unfrieddly, dangerous, unpleasant, deceptive, slippery and not helpful to us. And this is very tough stuff, I realize. It's unfortunate. I sound like a little preacher, here. I don't want to. But you're asking ~~my~~ my real opinion of these things, and that's my real opinion.

Howard: You don't think at all that this "liberal humanism" was a very weak and feeble way of expressing a desire for this.

Chris: Take Bertrand Russell, who was a good example, I think, of a thorough-going humanist. He believed deeply in what I consider to be a mechanistic view of science and philosophy, but he was a very, very reasonable person. I think he had a genuine, quite heart-felt desire for things to become better in society.

Howard: Well, that's who I'm talking about, for example.

Chris: O.K. But I think that the people of that tradition -- which is still going on -- were scared witless by the possibility of what I've just been talking about. Absolutely scared out of their skins by it, and who were doing everything they could to couch what seemed reasonable and hopeful in terms, any terms, that could avoid saying what I've just said. And, so I don't think they had a glimmer of it, I think they were ~~xxxx~~ conscious and deliberately trying to avoid it, because, for whatever reasons, it scared the pants off them. And I think that's still going today, and we've got ~~plenty of~~ plenty of people in our department who are in the same position, I believe.

Howard: Caught in a bind between the humanism and what they see as the objective nature of science...

Chris: Well, I think that the fear goes goes much deeper than just being caught in a bind, actually. Because I do believe it's fear. I don;t think it's just ~~intel~~ intellectual doubt which has to do with

the problem of reconciling the great and wonderful discoveries of science with this sort of matter. Because that kind of doubt doesn't produce fear. What I witness is fear, and I know that when these topics are mentioned, people get very very uptight, they get quiet sometime, unless they happen to have moved in that direction for their own reasons, quickly become hostile, and exhibit a whole series of emotions none of which have to do with what we might call reasonable skeptical doubt. :They go much further than that. They want to exorcise the kind of thinking that I was just expressing.

Howard: Well, why are they afraid? What are they afraid of?

Chris: It's hard to expect anything else. We're sitting at the end of a 300 year period of history, and it is not very surprising if a person who has inherited the products of that ~~30~~ 300 years, and especially the products of the last 50 years. There are deep traps of thought that have engulfed people's minds, words, thoughts, and habits. And it just takes an extraordinary phenomenon to shake the ~~g~~ ground under somebody's feet ~~in~~ in just that way, so that they will suddenly start to realize just what this is all about.

Howard: Could you say something more about union? It's clear in the case of the ~~restaurant~~ restaurant that money and speculation are putting the people who have that restaurant between themselves and those emotions you were talking about before. And in the case of some building like Wurster Hall there is something else, the image of some kind of technological fantasy, which is coming in between the designers of the building, and the kinds of emotions which out to happen in architecture schools. But you're talking about a union between the

maker, and the thing that's being made, and the stuff that's going to happen in the thing that's being made.

Chris: Right. But I think the word union is a bit forbidding. As a practical concept it is not the most immediate, or the most helpful. But I think what you're asking is, this is all find, but what does it actually mean in practice.

Howard: That's what I'm asking.

Chris: Well, that actually is not too difficult to answer, because one of the very simple ways to answer it is to say, that one of the fundamental things that I try to teach people is to learn how to do something that they really and truly like, in a deeply felt way, so that they like it in every possible way, with all of their own dimensions, not that they like it as architecture students, or they like it ~~like~~ because they think it makes them like Charles Moore, or Yamasaki, if it was 15 years ago, or whatever. But, what I mean, is to actually, truly like it. And that sounds so fantastically simple, but it's extremely hard. And it's clearly not happening in Wurster Hall, and it's clearly not ~~is~~ happening in the 4th Street Grill. And of course, you work very, very long and hard, to get them to do it. In my experience it takes actually about the better part of a year to get a student ~~xxxxxx~~ even to do this very simple thing, to make something that he truly likes. Because actually the situation is so screwed up, now, that rather than do that the student will keep coming back with one hundred million different things, all of which are replacements for this actual reality. He will come with things he thinks I will like, or

he will come with things that he thinks he ought to like, or he will come things that he thinks look like traditional forms, or he will come with, x, y, and z, just one thing after another. And, to actually break through all of that and come to terms with what you truly like... it sounds so childishly obvious, but it's very, very hard to do. It's particularly hard to do, because, the things that you truly like happen to be frowned on by contemporary values, in architecture. So, if you produce something that ~~xx~~ you really like, there's a good chance that quite a few of the people that you run into, as fellow students, or faculty members, will snigger, and will sort of say, "Ha. Why are you doing that?" or "I mean, what is that all about? What are you trying to prove?" or whatever. So, it's formidable, formidable barriers that have to be overcome, to actually allow a person to do what they truly like.

Howard: But, it's not just that there are ideo-social barriers to doing this.

Chris: No... Internal freedoms, also. But there are the social pressures that have got to be overcome. There's internal fears that have got to be overcome, that have got nothing to do with social pressure. But, ~~which~~ what you're saying is that there are other things to be overcome, which are the simple tools of the trade.

Howard: Suppose some student comes to you, because he wants to learn this. What has he got to do?

Chris: Make things.

Howard: Anything else?

Chris: Make things and keep confronting the fact that the thing he has made is not actually this. And after a while it gets boring. It's like sitting with a psychiatrist for seventeen sessions in total silence, and finally it just gets to be too much, and so he says something. And it's a little like that. Somebody keeps coming back with one thing after another, after the other, after the other, and finally, if they stay with it, things just can't go on, and on and on and on without doing this, especially if, as a teacher, one has the intention to recognize, very, very carefully and acutely, when glimmers of this thing actually are making ~~thi~~ their appearance, and to make quite sure those things are strongly encouraged. And so, the student ~~learns~~ to recognize them. And, the other stuff is actually rejected for whatever it is. And, that is actually the main ~~function~~ I fulfill as a teacher.

Howard: Just to help students recognize this.

Chris: Yes, to help students recognize it, gradually, and to recognize the value of it, and recognize the emotion that pours into it, and the feeling of joy that they have when they succeed in doing it, and recognize, of course, many of the particular things that you need to do, also, to help yourself achieve this, and so forth. I do the same things with clients, by the ~~way~~ way. It's no different, actually. It's easier, because they haven't got a whole bunch of things in their head about what ought to be happening..

Howard: Could you talk about the relationship between this feeling people have when they do it, and the thing itself?

Chris: If I tell you what I see when I see it ... it's not printable. I don't mean to say that it's swear words. I mean that I would have to say ... the light of the universe shining there. What are you going to do with that?

Howard: I'm not going to print it.

Chris: Everything that I try to do, whether it's at the level of an individual joint of a column and a beam, or a fleur de lis painted on a wall, or a large scale financial or administrative mechanism that is involved in the production of some part of the environment, neighborhood, houses, or whatever, always has to do with ... finding ways of permitting this thing to come through.