

Hello Christopher; Why don't we start with the interview. I am interested in your answers to the following questions. Best wishes, Nikos -----

Questions for Christopher (700 words). **You offer a revolutionary four-volume book to the world. I am worried that people are unprepared for it, simply because it represents such a radical break with what everyone is used to. For example, this book is supposed to be about "The New Architecture", yet many of your architectural examples are not architectural at all. You hit your readers in the stomach by contradicting all they have ever been taught about architecture. Specifically, they expect to see photos of buildings without people, because that's the current conception of architecture -- built structure that is validated by formal or ideological arguments. Nothing to do with human beings, since a building's raison d'etre is supposed to be purely formal or ideological. Yet your examples of architecture just show people having a good time or coping with life in environments of negligible "architectural" qualities. Your point is that architecture is not about building style, but is really a state of mind, and that good architecture is any structure, however modest, that generates an identifiable positive state of mind that allows you to be alive to the fullest extent possible. This idea is profound as well as revolutionary, since it stands architecture on its head. You validate our most basic feelings as human beings and insist that the built environment must nurture our inner joy, sadness, vulnerability, unselfconsciousness, etc. All the formal architectural concerns -- and names like Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Frank Gehry, and Daniel Libeskind -- are thus thrown out of the window.**

Alexander: Of course, I have never had a rule in my mind telling me that I must participate in the psychotic process which we call architecture today. My allegiance is not to the profession as it is constituted today, but to the Earth, to buildings, and to people. Seeing the fact that most of our contemporary ways of dealing with architecture have been insane, I turned my back on them, and started from scratch. I began that work about forty years ago, and have been gradually approaching an architecture of a true humanity, year by year, ever since then. It has grown, and now may be called a coherent view of what architecture ought to mean.

Many of the people who pay attention to what I say, are not architects. They are ordinary family people, engineers, scientists in biology, computer scientists, politicians and political scientists. All these people know that something is wrong, and they know deeply what is wrong, but they have not had a leader who shows them that it is OK to say these things.

Why are you not afraid of being ignored, or even killed, or of having hatred pushed in your face, by other contemporary architects who see that you are undoing what they stand for?

Alexander: The truth is a powerful thing. It gives people courage. And as the person who is saying these things, I need courage, too. But the fact that what I have to say is true gives me great courage, and the will to go forward, because I know, and other people know it is the truth. And, surprisingly, it gives many young architects courage,

because they recognize it as the truth. Many architects today are walking about, knowing deep down, that they are doing something bad, or artificial, or meaningless, but not knowing exactly how to cut this mental cancer out of their systems. When they hear and see what I have done and built, and written, they begin to relax. Why do they relax. Because they hear someone speaking the truth, and many of them decide to follow that truth, because it makes them feel whole within themselves, even just to admit to these problems.

When it turns out that in addition, I have real practical solutions as well, and that what I have to say is not only true, but also morally right, and also practical, then they get excited and there is no reason for them to give up. They feel refreshed and renewed.

After having dismantled architecture, you come back with overwhelming scientific arguments and show how to put it back together again in a coherent manner. You demonstrate to anyone who has even an amateur's knowledge of popular science that most twentieth-century buildings are lifeless and incoherent, and that their place in books of great buildings is simply a mistake. The problem is that many people do not have this minimal scientific background to appreciate your claims, and will be offended by it without being able to verify it for themselves. You are contradicting something that was accepted by our civilization, regardless of whether ordinary people ever felt comfortable with it or not; a credo that became part of our culture and educational system. Most people are terrified by revolutions and changes of paradigm, and this is certainly one. People might agree with you on a deep level in their heart and gut, but be too scared to let go of what they have been taught. They will support the established view out of fear. Truth doesn't matter in such occasions -- the instinct for survival fights against drastic change because, who knows, maybe your ideas will not stop at architecture, but will turn society itself upside down. Should we fear the collapse of social and economic order as we know it -- how can you convince the world that your ideas are not dangerous?

Alexander: My ideas are dangerous. They are dangerous to the established order, which has, unintentionally, created an inhuman world during the last fifty years. The pressure of living in this inhuman world, together with the horrible consequences - drugs, war, mindless jobs, mindless television, broken homes, teenage violence and so on -- have brought people to a breaking point. At this point, more and more people have become determined to change the world. One reliable estimate is that 60 million people, in America alone, are determined to stop playing along with the artificial and deadening world we have created, and are determined to find new ways of doing things, new ways of thinking, new ways of acting, new ways of buildings- so that we become reconnected to ourselves. That is an enormous thing. To all these people all over the Earth - and on Earth there are perhaps as many as one billion such people, all over the earth - to these one billion people these ideas are not dangerous at all. Instead they have a life-saving, healing quality which can help to place all of us in a new relationship with our planet, with one another, and with our lives and values.

Finally, there is the "architect problem": what to do with existing architects. According to your own estimates, there are about one-half million architects around the world. The vast majority was

taught in schools that turned modernist after the second world war, and is therefore trained in sterile and formalist methods totally disconnected from life. Younger architects are even worse, because they are trained to deconstruct forms -- what's left has no coherence whatsoever. One could say that many of those architects are trained to destroy and prevent rather than to generate living structure, although it never occurs to them that that's what they are doing. What's to become of them? Fine; the star architects have had their moment of glory, and can retire wealthy, but what about the unknown practitioners who worshipped the star architects? It would be easier to retrain them into another profession rather than to make them change their working habits, since their methods have been part of their beliefs and worldview for much of their lives. And then, who is going to build the world from now on? If our architects have been trained to be anti-architects, then you obviously need to train fresh people to do the job right. But where are they now? And since universities have the tenure system, how do you get rid of die-hard modernist and deconstructivist professors who run those programs now? Where are young architects going to learn an architecture that promotes life since they cannot do it in a university?

Alexander: Even half a million architects can easily become obsolete, if they keep on doing things which are superceded by other better methods and by the efforts and work of others. When the automobile was invented, the horse and buggy lasted a few years, and finally dropped to one side as a minor entertainment, but was simply no longer the main way in which people moved around.

The new form of architecture that I am speaking about is beginning to be understood by engineers, by ecologists, by computer scientists, by builders, by artists, by biologists, by economists. Many of these people recognize that architects are simply not dealing with the problem of the environment in a realistic or useful fashion, and that the task of building now falls on their own shoulders. Under the impact of that kind of thinking, people are now developing new ways of banking, new ways of development, new forms of social reconstruction, and new forms of housing, new forms of sustainable settlements.

In many countries the primary way of conceiving and making buildings and settlements is already people-oriented. It is not recognizable within the existing paradigm, as architecture, and architects despise it because it looks low budget, low tech, and is oriented to people's desperate needs - yet all this is, within the perspective of our new architecture, a major contribution to the new, life-based paradigm. All this is only in its beginning. These new kinds of professionals, new social forms, are beginning to develop and propagate new ways of doing things instead. And what architects claim is simply being laid aside as the nonsense it really is.

Some young architects will join this new process with enthusiasm, as is already happening. Will the others choose to come along? I believe the remainder of the architects who continue trying to teach nonsensical deconstructivist ideas will, within a few years, simply be forgotten. The new architecture I propose will ultimately supercede the present views, because it is true, because it is based on common

sense and makes sense for ordinary people everywhere, and because it is based on good science.

You can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.