

# The Timeless Way of Building



Christopher Alexander

# THE TIMELESS WAY OF BUILDING

*Christopher Alexander*

*with love and thanks  
to Ingrid, Sara, and Peter*

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### THE TIMELESS WAY

A building or a town will only be alive to the extent that it is governed by the timeless way.

*1. It is a process which brings order out of nothing but ourselves; it cannot be attained, but it will happen of its own accord, if we will only let it.*

### THE QUALITY

To seek the timeless way we must first know the quality without a name.

*2. There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a man, a town, a building, or a wilderness. This quality is objective and precise, but it cannot be named.*

*3. The search which we make for this quality, in our*

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*own lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person's story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive.*

4. *In order to define this quality in buildings and in towns, we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there.*

5. *These patterns of events are always interlocked with certain geometric patterns in the space. Indeed, as we shall see, each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space, and out of nothing else: they are the atoms and the molecules from which a building or a town is made.*

6. *The specific patterns out of which a building or a town is made may be alive or dead. To the extent they are alive, they let our inner forces loose, and set us free; but when they are dead, they keep us locked in inner conflict.*

7. *The more living patterns there are in a place—a room, a building, or a town—the more it comes to life as an entirety, the more it glows, the more it has that self-maintaining fire which is the quality without a name.*

8. *And when a building has this fire, then it becomes a part of nature. Like ocean waves, or blades of grass, its parts are governed by the endless play of repetition*

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*and variety created in the presence of the fact that all things pass. This is the quality itself.*

### THE GATE

To reach the quality without a name we must then build a living pattern language as a gate.

9. *This quality in buildings and in towns cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly, by the ordinary actions of the people, just as a flower cannot be made, but only generated from the seed.*

10. *The people can shape buildings for themselves, and have done it for centuries, by using languages which I call pattern languages. A pattern language gives each person who uses it the power to create an infinite variety of new and unique buildings, just as his ordinary language gives him the power to create an infinite variety of sentences.*

11. *These pattern languages are not confined to villages and farm society. All acts of building are governed by a pattern language of some sort, and the patterns in the world are there, entirely because they are created by the pattern languages which people use.*

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12. And, beyond that, it is not just the shape of towns and buildings which comes from pattern languages—it is their quality as well. Even the life and beauty of the most awe-inspiring great religious buildings came from the languages their builders used.
13. But in our time the languages have broken down. Since they are no longer shared, the processes which keep them deep have broken down; and it is therefore virtually impossible for anybody, in our time, to make a building live.
14. To work our way towards a shared and living language once again, we must first learn how to discover patterns which are deep, and capable of generating life.
15. We may then gradually improve these patterns which we share, by testing them against experience: we can determine, very simply, whether these patterns make our surroundings live, or not, by recognizing how they make us feel.
16. Once we have understood how to discover individual patterns which are alive, we may then make a language for ourselves for any building task we face. The structure of the language is created by the network of connections among individual patterns: and the language lives, or not, as a totality, to the degree these patterns form a whole.

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17. *Then finally, from separate languages for different building tasks, we can create a larger structure still, a structure of structures, evolving constantly, which is the common language for a town. This is the gate.*

## THE WAY

Once we have built the gate, we can pass through it to the practice of the timeless way.

18. *Now we shall begin to see in detail how the rich and complex order of a town can grow from thousands of creative acts. For once we have a common pattern language in our town, we shall all have the power to make our streets and buildings live, through our most ordinary acts. The language, like a seed, is the genetic system which gives our millions of small acts the power to form a whole.*

19. *Within this process, every individual act of building is a process in which space gets differentiated. It is not a process of addition, in which preformed parts are combined to create a whole, but a process of unfolding, like the evolution of an embryo, in which the whole precedes the parts, and actually gives birth to them, by splitting.*

20. *The process of unfolding goes step by step, one pattern at a time. Each step brings just one pattern to*

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*life; and the intensity of the result depends on the intensity of each one of these individual steps.*

21. *From a sequence of these individual patterns, whole buildings with the character of nature will form themselves within your thoughts, as easily as sentences.*

22. *In the same way, groups of people can conceive their larger public buildings, on the ground, by following a common pattern language, almost as if they had a single mind.*

23. *Once the buildings are conceived like this, they can be built, directly, from a few simple marks made in the ground—again within a common language, but directly, and without the use of drawings.*

24. *Next, several acts of building, each one done to repair and magnify the product of the previous acts, will slowly generate a larger and more complex whole than any single act can generate.*

25. *Finally, within the framework of a common language, millions of individual acts of building will together generate a town which is alive, and whole, and unpredictable, without control. This is the slow emergence of the quality without a name, as if from nothing.*

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26. *And as the whole emerges, we shall see it take that ageless character which gives the timeless way its name. This character is a specific, morphological character, sharp and precise, which must come into being any time a building or a town becomes alive: it is the physical embodiment, in buildings, of the quality without a name.*

### THE KERNEL OF THE WAY

And yet the timeless way is not complete, and will not fully generate the quality without a name, until we leave the gate behind.

27. *Indeed this ageless character has nothing, in the end, to do with languages. The language, and the processes which stem from it, merely release the fundamental order which is native to us. They do not teach us, they only remind us of what we know already, and of what we shall discover time and time again, when we give up our ideas and opinions, and do exactly what emerges from ourselves.*

# THE TIMELESS WAY

A building or a town will only be alive to the extent that it is governed by the timeless way.

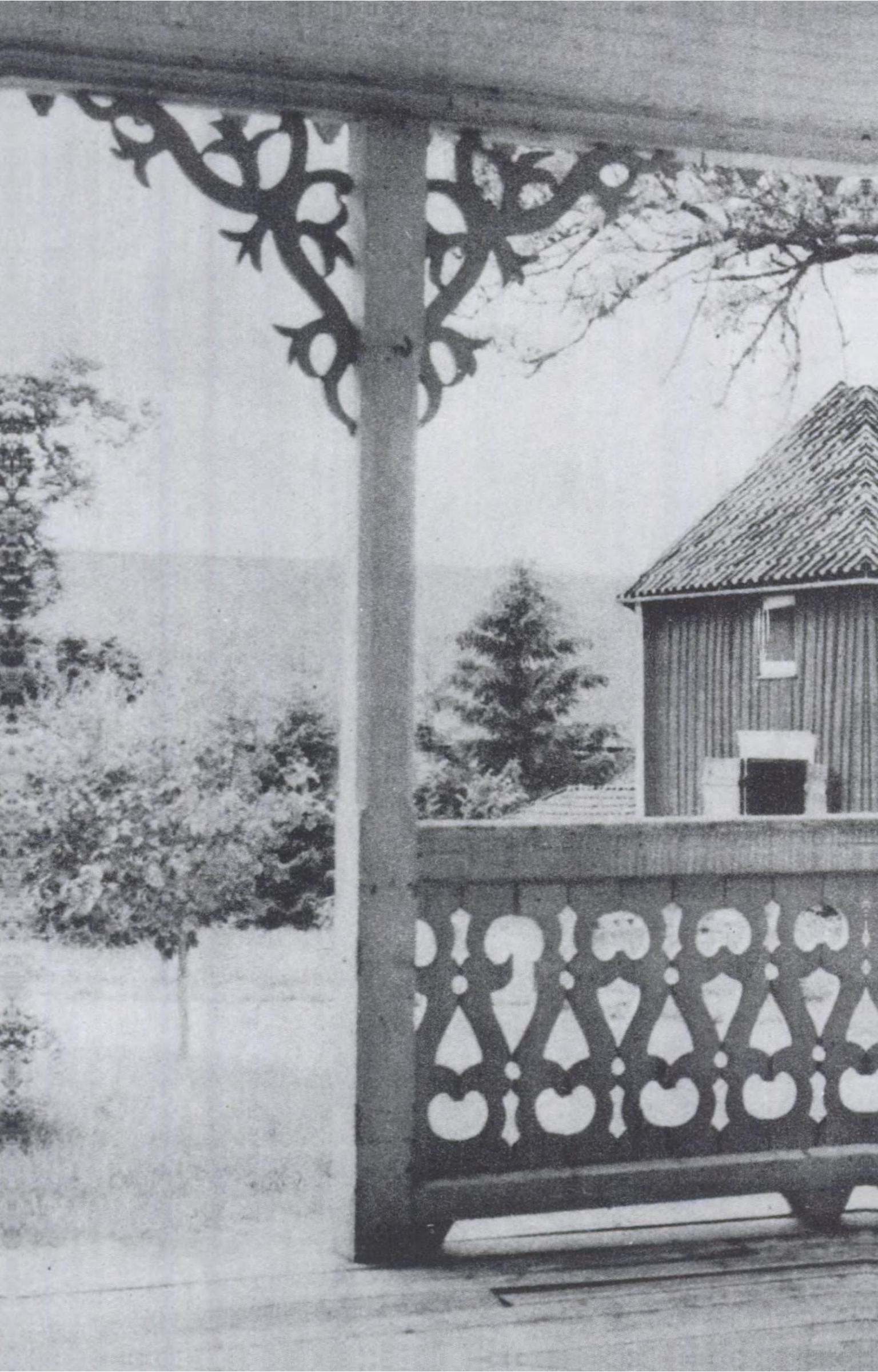
## CHAPTER I

### THE TIMELESS WAY

*It is a process which brings order out of nothing but ourselves; it cannot be attained, but it will happen of its own accord, if we will only let it.*







*There is one timeless way of building.*

*It is thousands of years old, and the same today as it has always been.*

*The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. It is not possible to make great buildings, or great towns, beautiful places, places where you feel yourself, places where you feel alive, except by following this way. And, as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form, as the trees and hills, and as our faces are.*

*It is a process through which the order of a building or a town grows out directly from the inner nature of the people, and the animals, and plants, and matter which are in it.*

*It is a process which allows the life inside a person, or a family, or a town, to flourish, openly, in freedom, so vividly that it gives birth, of its own accord, to the natural order which is needed to sustain this life.*

*It is so powerful and fundamental that with its help you can make any building in the world as beautiful as any place that you have ever seen.*

*Once you understand this way, you will be able to make your room alive; you will be able to design a house together with your family; a garden for your children;*

## THE TIMELESS WAY

places where you can work; beautiful terraces where you can sit and dream.

*It is so powerful, that with its help hundreds of people together can create a town, which is alive and vibrant, peaceful and relaxed, a town as beautiful as any town in history.*

Without the help of architects or planners, if you are working in the timeless way, a town will grow under your hands, as steady as the flowers in your garden.

*And there is no other way in which a building or a town which lives can possibly be made.*

This does not mean that all ways of making buildings are identical. It means that at the core of all successful acts of building and at the core of all successful processes of growth, even though there are a million different versions of these acts and processes, there is one fundamental invariant feature, which is responsible for their success. Although this way has taken on a thousand different forms at different times, in different places, still, there is an unavoidable, invariant core to all of them.

*Look at the buildings in the photographs which start this chapter.*

They are alive. They have that sleepy, awkward grace which comes from perfect ease.

And the Alhambra, some tiny gothic church, an old

## THE TIMELESS WAY

New England house, an Alpine hill village, an ancient Zen temple, a seat by a mountain stream, a courtyard filled with blue and yellow tiles among the earth. What is it they have in common? They are beautiful, ordered, harmonious—yes, all these things. But especially, and what strikes to the heart, they live.

*Each one of us wants to be able to bring a building or part of a town to life like this.*

It is a fundamental human instinct, as much a part of our desire as the desire for children. It is, quite simply, the desire to make a part of nature, to complete a world which is already made of mountains, streams, snowdrops, and stones, with something made by us, as much a part of nature, and a part of our immediate surroundings.

*Each one of us has, somewhere in his heart, the dream to make a living world, a universe.*

Those of us who have been trained as architects have this desire perhaps at the very center of our lives: that one day, somewhere, somehow, we shall build one building which is wonderful, beautiful, breathtaking, a place where people can walk and dream for centuries.

In some form, every person has some version of this dream: whoever you are, you may have the dream of one day building a most beautiful house for your family, a garden, a fountain, a fishpond, a big room with soft light, flowers outside and the smell of new grass.

In some less clear fashion, anyone who is concerned

## THE TIMELESS WAY

with towns has this same dream, perhaps, for an entire town.

*And there is a way that a building or a town can actually be brought to life like this.*

There is a definable sequence of activities which are at the heart of all acts of building, and it is possible to specify, precisely, under what conditions these activities will generate a building which is alive. All this can be made so explicit that anyone can do it.

And just so, the process by which a group of independent people make part of a town alive can equally be made precise. Again, there is a definable sequence of activities, more complex in this case, which are at the heart of all collective building processes, and it is possible to specify exactly when these processes will bring things to life. And, once again, these processes can be made so explicit, and so clear, that any group of people can make use of them.

*This one way of building has always existed.*

It is behind the building of traditional villages in Africa, and India, and Japan. It was behind the building of the great religious buildings: the mosques of Islam, the monasteries of the middle ages, and the temples of Japan. It was behind the building of the simple benches, and cloisters and arcades of English country towns; of the mountain huts of Norway and Austria; the roof tiles on the

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walls of castles and palaces; the bridges of the Italian middle ages; the cathedral of Pisa.

In an unconscious form, this way has been behind almost all ways of building for thousands of years.

*But it has become possible to identify it, only now, by going to a level of analysis which is deep enough to show what is invariant in all the different versions of this way.*

This hinges on a form of representation which reveals all possible construction processes, as versions of one deeper process.

First, we have a way of looking at the ultimate constituents of the environment: the ultimate “things” which a building or a town is made of. As we shall see, in chapters 4 and 5, every building, every town, is made of certain entities which I call patterns: and once we understand buildings in terms of their patterns, we have a way of looking at them, which makes all buildings, all parts of a town similar, all members of the same class of physical structures.

Second, we have a way of understanding the generative processes which give rise to these patterns: in short, the source from which the ultimate constituents of building come. As we shall see in chapters 10, 11, and 12, these patterns always come from certain combinatory processes, which are different in the specific patterns which they generate, but always similar in their overall structure, and in the way they work. They are essentially

## THE TIMELESS WAY

like languages. And again, in terms of these pattern languages, all the different ways of building, although different in detail, become similar in general outline.

*At this level of analysis, we can compare many different building processes.*

Then, once we see their differences clearly, it becomes possible to define the difference between those processes which make buildings live, and those which make them dead.

*And it turns out that, invariant, behind all processes which allow us to make buildings live, there is a single common process.*

This single process is operational and precise. It is not merely a vague idea, or a class of processes which we can understand: it is concrete enough and specific enough, so that it functions practically. It gives us the power to make towns and buildings live, as concretely as a match gives us the power to make a flame. It is a method or a discipline, which teaches us precisely what we have to do to make our buildings live.

*But though this method is precise, it cannot be used mechanically.*

The fact is, that even when we have seen deep into the processes by which it is possible to make a building or a

## THE TIMELESS WAY

town alive, in the end, it turns out that this knowledge only brings us back to that part of ourselves which is forgotten.

Although the process is precise, and can be defined in exact scientific terms, finally it becomes valuable, not so much because it shows us things which we don't know, but instead, because it shows us what we know already, only daren't admit because it seems so childish, and so primitive.

*Indeed it turns out, in the end, that what this method does is simply free us from all method.*

The more we learn to use this method, the more we find that what it does is not so much to teach us processes we did not know before, but rather opens up a process in us, which was part of us already.

We find out that we already know how to make buildings live, but that the power has been frozen in us: that we have it, but are afraid to use it: that we are crippled by our fears; and crippled by the methods and the images which we use to overcome these fears.

And what happens finally, is that we learn to overcome our fears, and reach that portion of our selves which knows exactly how to make a building live, instinctively. But we learn too, that this capacity in us is not accessible, until we first go through the discipline which teaches us to let go of our fears.

*And that is why the timeless way is, in the end, a timeless one.*

## THE TIMELESS WAY

It is not an external method, which can be imposed on things. It is instead a process which lies deep in us: and only needs to be released.

*The power to make buildings beautiful lies in each of us already.*

It is a core so simple, and so deep, that we are born with it. This is no metaphor. I mean it literally. Imagine the greatest possible beauty and harmony in the world—the most beautiful place that you have ever seen or dreamt of. You have the power to create it, at this very moment, just as you are.

And this power we have is so firmly rooted and coherent in every one of us that once it is liberated, it will allow us, by our individual, unconnected acts, to make a town, without the slightest need for plans, because, like every living process, it is a process which builds order out of nothing.

*But as things are, we have so far beset ourselves with rules, and concepts, and ideas of what must be done to make a building or a town alive, that we have become afraid of what will happen naturally, and convinced that we must work within a “system” and with “methods” since without them our surroundings will come tumbling down in chaos.*

We are afraid, perhaps, that without images and methods, chaos will break loose; worse still, that unless we use im-

## THE TIMELESS WAY

ages of some kind, ourselves, our own creation will itself be chaos. And why are we afraid of that? Is it because people will laugh at us, if we make chaos? Or is it, perhaps, that we are most afraid of all that if we do make chaos, when we hope to create art, we will ourselves be chaos, hollow, nothing?

This is why it is so easy for others to play on our fears. They can persuade us that we must have more method, and more system, because we are afraid of our own chaos. Without method and more method, we are afraid the chaos which is in us will reveal itself. And yet these methods only make things worse.

*The thoughts and fears which feed these methods are illusions.*

It is the fears which these illusions have created in us, that make places which are dead and lifeless and artificial. And—greatest irony of all—it is the very methods we invent to free us from our fears which are themselves the chains whose grip on us creates our difficulties.

For the fact is, that this seeming chaos which is in us is a rich, rolling, swelling, dying, lilting, singing, laughing, shouting, crying, sleeping *order*. If we will only let this order guide our acts of building, the buildings that we make, the towns we help to make, will be the forests and the meadows of the human heart.

*To purge ourselves of these illusions, to become free of all the artificial images of order which distort the*

## THE TIMELESS WAY

*nature that is in us, we must first learn a discipline which teaches us the true relationship between ourselves and our surroundings.*

*Then, once this discipline has done its work, and pricked the bubbles of illusion which we cling to now, we will be ready to give up the discipline, and act as nature does.*

*This is the timeless way of building: learning the discipline—and shedding it.*

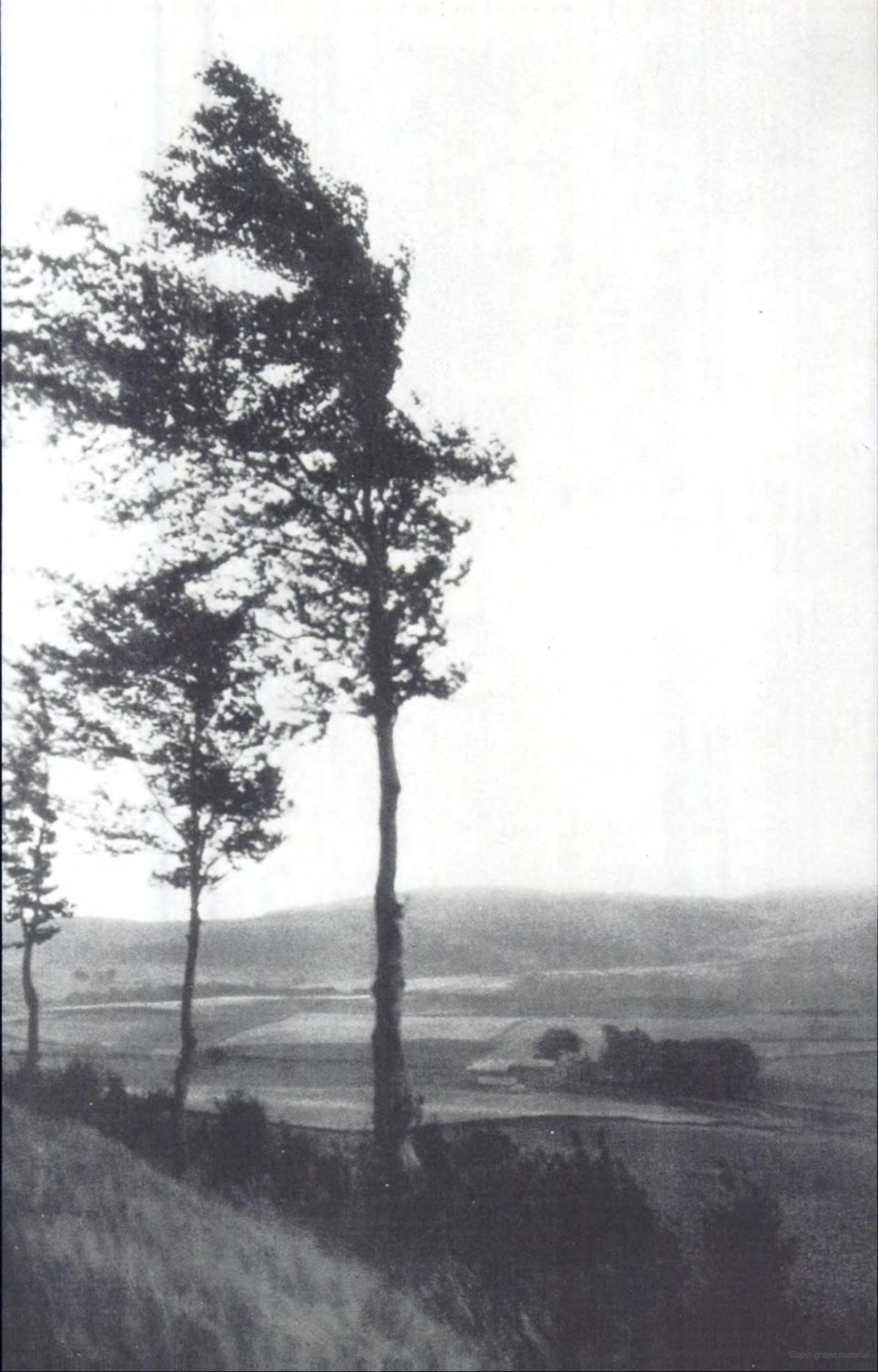
# THE QUALITY

To seek the timeless way we must  
first know the quality without a  
name.

## CHAPTER 2

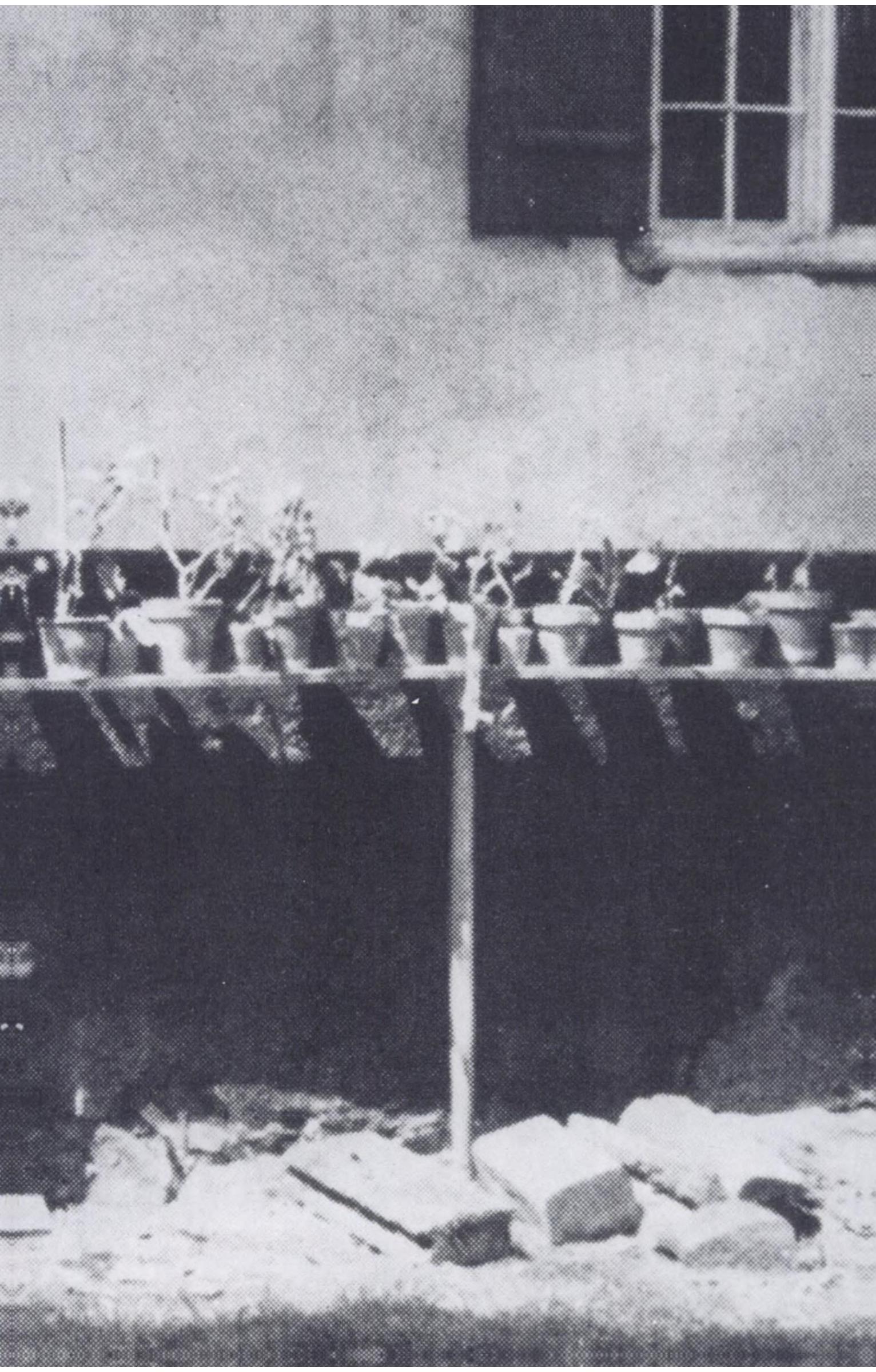
### THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

*There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a man, a town, a building, or a wilderness. This quality is objective and precise, but it cannot be named.*











*We have been taught that there is no objective difference between good buildings and bad, good towns and bad.*

*The fact is that the difference between a good building and a bad building, between a good town and a bad town, is an objective matter. It is the difference between health and sickness, wholeness and dividedness, self-maintenance and self-destruction. In a world which is healthy, whole, alive, and self-maintaining, people themselves can be alive and self-creating. In a world which is unwhole and self-destroying, people cannot be alive: they will inevitably themselves be self-destroying, and miserable.*

*But it is easy to understand why people believe so firmly that there is no single, solid basis for the difference between good building and bad.*

*It happens because the single central quality which makes the difference cannot be named.*

The first place I think of, when I try to tell someone about this quality, is a corner of an English country garden, where a peach tree grows against a wall.

The wall runs east to west; the peach tree grows flat against its southern side. The sun shines on the tree and as it warms the bricks behind the tree, the warm bricks themselves warm the peaches on the tree. It has a slightly dozy quality. The tree, carefully tied to grow flat against the wall; warming the bricks; the peaches growing in the sun; the wild grass growing around the roots of the tree, in the angle where the earth and roots and wall all meet.

## THE QUALITY

This quality is the most fundamental quality there is in anything.

*It is never twice the same, because it always takes its shape from the particular place in which it occurs.*

In one place it is calm, in another it is stormy; in one person it is tidy; in another it is careless; in one house it is light; in another it is dark; in one room it is soft and quiet; in another it is yellow. In one family it is a love of picnics; in another dancing; in another playing poker; in another group of people it is not family life at all.

*It is a subtle kind of freedom from inner contradictions.*

A system has this quality when it is at one with itself; it lacks it when it is divided.

It has it when it is true to its own inner forces; lacks it when it is untrue to its own inner forces.

It has it when it is at peace with itself; and lacks it when it is at war with itself.

You already know this quality. The feeling for it is the most primitive feeling which an animal or a man can have. The feeling for it is as primitive as the feeling for our own well-being, for our own health, as primitive as the intuition which tells us when something is false or true.

But to grasp it fully you must overcome the prejudice

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

of physics which tells us that all things are equally alive and real.

*In physics and chemistry there is no sense in which one system can be more at one with itself than another.*

And no sense at all in which what a system "ought to be" grows naturally from "what it is." Take, for example, the atoms which a physicist deals with. An atom is so simple that there is never any question whether it is true to its own nature. Atoms are all true to their own natures; they are all equally real; they simply exist. An atom cannot be more true to itself, or less true to itself. And because physics has concentrated on very simple systems, like atoms, we have been led to believe that what something "is," is an entirely separate question from what it "ought to be"; and that science and ethics can't be mixed.

*But the view of the world which physics teaches, powerful and wonderful as it is, is limited by this very blindness.*

In the world of complex systems it is not so. Most men are not fully true to their own inner natures or fully "real." In fact, for many people, the effort to become true to themselves is the central problem of life. When you meet a person who is true to himself, you feel at once that he is "more real" than other people are. At the hu-

## THE QUALITY

man level of complexity, then, there is a distinction between systems which are true to their “inner nature,” and those which aren’t. Not all of us are equally true to our inner nature, or equally real, or equally whole.

And exactly the same is true in those larger systems, outside us, which we call our world. Not all parts of the world are equally true to themselves, equally real, equally whole. In the world of physics, any system which is self-destroying simply ceases to exist. But in the world of complex systems this is not so.

*Indeed, this subtle and complex freedom from inner contradictions is just the very quality which makes things live.*

In the world of living things, every system can be more real or less real, more true to itself or less true to itself. It cannot become more true to itself by copying any externally imposed criterion of what it ought to be. But it is possible to define a process which will tell you how the system can become more true to itself, in short what it “ought to be,” only according to what it is.

This oneness, or the lack of it, is the fundamental quality for any thing. Whether it is in a poem, or a man, or in a building full of people, or in a forest, or a city, everything that matters stems from it. It embodies everything.

*Yet still this quality cannot be named.*

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

The fact that this quality cannot be named does not mean that it is vague or imprecise. It is impossible to name because it is unerringly precise. Words fail to capture it because it is much more precise than any word. The quality itself is sharp, exact, with no looseness in it whatsoever. But each word you choose to capture it has fuzzy edges and extensions which blur the central meaning of the quality.

I shall try to show you now, why words can never capture it, by circling round it, through the medium of half a dozen words.

*The word which we most often use to talk about the quality without a name is the word "alive."*

There is a sense in which the distinction between something alive and something lifeless is much more general, and far more profound, than the distinction between living things and nonliving things, or between life and death. Things which are living may be lifeless; nonliving things may be alive. A man who is walking and talking can be alive; or he can be lifeless. Beethoven's last quartets are alive; so are the waves at the ocean shore; so is a candle flame; a tiger may be more alive, because more in tune with its own inner forces, than a man.

A well-made fire is alive. There is a world of difference between a fire which is a pile of burning logs, and a fire which is made by someone who really understands a fire. He places each log exactly to make the air between

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the logs just right. He doesn't stir the logs with a poker, but while they are burning, grasps each one, and places it again, perhaps only an inch from where it was before. The logs are so exactly placed that they form channels for the draft. Waves of liquid yellow flame run up the logs when the draft blows. Each log glows with full intensity. The fire, watched, burns so intensely and so steadily, that when it dies, finally, it burns to nothing; when the last glow dies, there is nothing but a little dust left in the fireplace.

*But the very beauty of the word "alive" is just its weakness.*

The overwhelming thing that stays with you is that the fire lives. And yet this is a metaphor. Literally, we know that plants and animals are alive, and fire and music are not alive. If we are pressed to explain why we call one fire alive and another dead, then we are at a loss. The metaphor makes us believe that we have found a word to grasp the quality without a name. But we can only use the word to name the quality, when we already understand the quality.

*Another word we often use to talk about the quality without a name is "whole."*

A thing is whole according to how free it is of inner contradictions. When it is at war with itself, and gives rise to forces which act to tear it down, it is unwhole. The more

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

free it is of its own inner contradictions, the more whole and healthy and wholehearted it becomes.

Compare the trees along a wild and windblown lake, with an eroded gully. These trees and branches are so made that when the wind blows they all bend, and all the forces in the system, even the violent forces of the wind, are still in balance when the trees are bent; and because they are in balance, they do no harm, they do no violence. The configuration of the bending trees makes them self-maintaining.

But think about a piece of land that is very steep, and where erosion is taking place. There aren't enough tree roots to hold the earth together, let's say; the rain falls, in torrents, and carries the earth down streams which form gullies; again, the earth is still not bound together because there aren't enough plants there; the wind blows; the erosion goes further; next time the water comes, it runs in the very same gullies, and deepens them; and widens them. The configuration of this system is such that the forces which it gives birth to, which arise in it, in the long run act to destroy the system. The system is self-destroying; it does not have the capacity to contain the forces which arise within it.

The system of the trees and wind is whole; the system of the gully and the rain is unwhole.

*But the word "whole" is too enclosed.*

It suggests closure, containment, finiteness. When you call a thing whole, it makes you think that it is whole

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unto itself, and isolated from the world around it. But a lung is whole, only so long as it is breathing oxygen from the air outside the organism; a person is whole only so long as he is a member of some human group; a town is whole only so long as it is in balance with the surrounding countryside.

The word carries a subtle hint of self-containment. And self-containment always undermines the quality which has no name. For this reason, the word "whole" can never perfectly describe this quality.

*Another facet of the quality which has no name is caught by the word "comfortable."*

The word "comfortable" is more profound than people usually realize. The mystery of genuine comfort goes far beyond the simple idea that the word first seems to mean. Places which are comfortable are comfortable because they have no inner contradictions, because there is no little restlessness disturbing them.

Imagine yourself on a winter afternoon with a pot of tea, a book, a reading light, and two or three huge pillows to lean back against. Now make yourself comfortable. Not in some way which you can show to other people, and say how much you like it. I mean so that you *really* like it, for *yourself*.

You put the tea where you can reach it: but in a place where you can't possibly knock it over. You pull the light down, to shine on the book, but not too brightly, and so that you can't see the naked bulb. You put the cushions

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

behind you, and place them, carefully, one by one, just where you want them, to support your back, your neck, your arm: so that you are supported just comfortably, just as you want to sip your tea, and read, and dream.

When you take the trouble to do all that, and you do it carefully, with much attention, then it may begin to have the quality which has no name.

*Yet the word “comfortable” is easy to misuse, and has too many other meanings.*

There are kinds of comfort which stultify and deaden too. It is too easy to use the word for situations which have no life in them because they are too sheltered.

A family with too much money, a bed which is too soft, a room which always has an even temperature, a covered path on which you never have to walk out in the rain, these are all “comfortable” in a more stupid sense, and so distort the central meaning of the word.

*A word which overcomes the lack of openness in the words “whole” and “comfortable,” is the word “free.”*

The quality without a name is never calculated, never perfect; that subtle balance of forces only happens when the ideas and images are left behind; and created with abandon.

Think of a truck, filled with bags of cement. If the bags are stacked perfectly, in lines, it may be careful, and intelligent, and quite precise. But it will not begin to

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have the quality without a name, until there is a certain freedom there: the men who piled the bags, running, and throwing them, forgetting themselves, throwing themselves into it, lost, wild. . . .

And a steel mill too can have this quality because its freedom and its wildness show there, blazing in the night.

*And yet, of course, this freedom can be too theatrical: a pose, a form, a manner.*

A building which has a “free” form—a shape without roots in the forces or materials it is made of—is like a man whose gestures have no roots in his own nature. Its shape is borrowed, artificial, forced, contrived, made to copy outside images, not generated by the forces inside.

That kind of so-called freedom is opposite to the quality which has no name.

*A word which helps restore the balance is the word “exact.”*

The word “exact” helps to counterbalance the impression of other words like “comfortable” and “free.” These words suggest that the quality without a name is somehow inexact. And it is true that it is loose and fluid and relaxed. But it is never inexact. The forces in a situation are real forces. There is no getting round them. If the adaptation to the forces is not perfectly exact, there can be no comfort, and no freedom, because the small forces which have been left out will always work to make the system fail.

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Suppose that I am trying to make a table for the blackbirds in my garden. In winter, when the snow is on the ground, and the blackbirds are short of food, I will put food out for them on the table. So I build the table; and dream about the clusters of blackbirds which will come flocking to the table in the snow.

But it is not so easy to build a table that will really work. The birds follow their own laws; and if I don't understand them, they just won't come. If I put the table too low, the birds won't fly down to it, because they don't like to swoop too close to the ground. If it is too high in the air, or too exposed, the wind won't let them settle on it. If it is near a laundry line, blowing in the wind, they will be frightened by the moving line. Most of the places where I put the table actually don't work.

I slowly learn that blackbirds have a million subtle forces guiding them in their behavior. If I don't understand these forces, there is simply nothing I can do to make the table come to life. So long as the placing of the table is inexact, my image of the blackbirds flocked around the table eating, is just wishful thinking. To make the table live, I must take these forces seriously, and place the table in a position which is perfectly exact.

*And, yet, of course, the word "exact" does not describe it properly.*

It has no sense of freedom in it; and it is too reminiscent of those other things which are exact in an entirely different sense.

Usually, when we say something is exact, we mean

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that it fits some abstract image perfectly. If I cut a square of cardboard, and make it perfectly exact, it means that I have made the cardboard perfectly square: its sides are exactly equal: and its angles are exactly ninety degrees. I have matched an image perfectly.

The meaning of the word "exact" which I use here is almost opposite. A thing which has the quality without a name never fits any image exactly. What is exact is its adaptation to the forces which are in it. But this exactness requires that it be loose and fluid in its form.

*A word which goes much deeper than the word "exact" is "egoless."*

When a place is lifeless or unreal, there is almost always a mastermind behind it. It is so filled with the will of its maker that there is no room for its own nature.

Think, by contrast, of the decoration on an old bench —small hearts carved in it; simple holes, cut out while it was being put together—these can be egoless.

They are not carved according to some plan. They are carefree, carved into it, wherever there seems to be a gap. It is not in the least contrived; there is no effort in the decoration; it does not seek to express the personality of the man who carved it. It is so natural, that it almost seems as though the bench itself cried out for it: and the carver simply did what was required.

*And yet, although the old bench and its carving may be egoless, this word is also not quite right.*

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

It does not mean, for instance, that the man who made it left his own person out of it. It was part of his person that he liked the bench, and wanted to carve hearts in it. Perhaps he made it for his favorite girl.

It is perfectly possible to make a thing which has the quality which has no name, and still let it reflect your personality. Your person, and the likes and dislikes which are part of you, are themselves forces in your garden, and your garden must reflect those forces just as it reflects the other forces which make leaves grow and birds sing.

But if you use the word "ego" to mean the center of a person's character, then the idea of making something egoless can sound as though you want the person to efface himself completely. That is not what the word means at all; and yet because of it, the word is not quite right.

*A last word which can help to catch the quality without a name is the word "eternal."*

All things and people and places which have the quality without a name, reach into the realm of the eternal.

Some are eternal in almost a literal sense: they are so strong, so balanced, so strongly self-maintaining, that they are not easily disturbed, almost imperishable. Others reach the quality for no more than an instant, and then fall back into the lesser state, where inner contradictions rule.

The word "eternal" describes them both. For the instant that they have this quality, they reach into the realm of eternal truth. At that moment when they are free

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from inner contradictions, they take their place among the order of things which stand outside of time.

*I once saw a simple fish pond in a Japanese village which was perhaps eternal.*

A farmer made it for his farm. The pond was a simple rectangle, about 6 feet wide, and 8 feet long; opening off a little irrigation stream. At one end, a bush of flowers hung over the water. At the other end, under the water, was a circle of wood, its top perhaps 12 inches below the surface of the water. In the pond there were eight great ancient carp, each maybe 18 inches long, orange, gold, purple, and black: the oldest one had been there eighty years. The eight fish swam, slowly, slowly, in circles—often within the wooden circle. The whole world was in that pond. Every day the farmer sat by it for a few minutes. I was there only one day and I sat by it all afternoon. Even now, I cannot think of it without tears. Those ancient fish had been swimming, slowly, in that pond for eighty years. It was so true to the nature of the fish, and flowers, and the water, and the farmers, that it had sustained itself for all that time, endlessly repeating, always different. There is no degree of wholeness or reality which can be reached beyond that simple pond.

*And yet, like all the other words, this word confuses more than it explains.*

## THE QUALITY WITHOUT A NAME

It hints at a religious quality. The hint is accurate. And yet it makes it seem as though the quality which that pond has is a mysterious one. It is not mysterious. It is above all ordinary. What makes it eternal is its ordinariness. The word "eternal" cannot capture that.

*And so you see, in spite of every effort to give this quality a name, there is no single name which captures it.*

Imagine the quality without a name as a point, and each of the words which we have tried as an ellipse. Each ellipse includes this point. But each ellipse also covers many other meanings, which are distant from this point.

Since every word is always an ellipse like this—then every word will always be too broad, too vague, too large in scope to refer only and exactly to the quality which is the point. No word can ever catch the quality without a name because the quality is too particular, and words too broad. And yet it is the most important quality there is, in anyone, or anything.

*It is not only simple beauty of form and color. Man can make that without making nature. It is not only fitness to purpose. Man can make that too, without making nature. And it is not only the spiritual quality of beautiful music or of a quiet mosque, that comes from faith. Man can make that too, without making nature.*

## THE QUALITY

*The quality which has no name includes these simpler sweeter qualities. But it is so ordinary as well, that it somehow reminds us of the passing of our life.*

*It is a slightly bitter quality.*

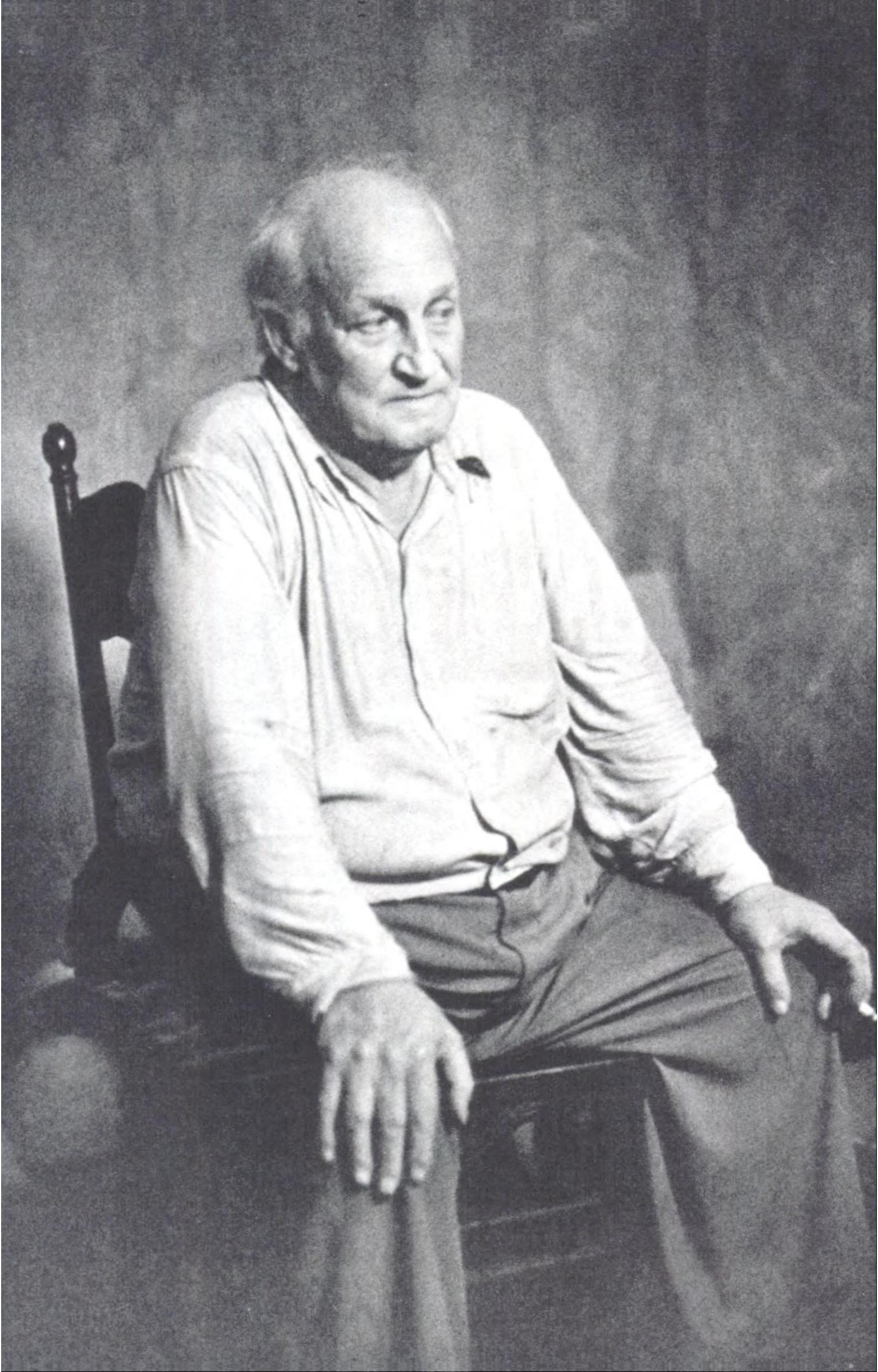
## CHAPTER 3

### BEING ALIVE

*The search which we make for this quality, in our own lives, is the central search of any person, and the crux of any individual person's story. It is the search for those moments and situations when we are most alive.*











*We know, now, what the quality without a name is like, in feeling and in character. But so far, concretely, we have not seen this quality in any system larger than a tree, a pond, a bench. Yet it can be in anything—in buildings, animals, plants, cities, streets, the wilderness—and in ourselves. We shall begin to understand it concretely, in all these larger pieces of the world, only when we first understand it in ourselves.*

*It is, for instance, the wild smile of the gypsies dancing in the road.*

The broad brim of the big hat, like arms spread wide, open to the world, confident, huge, . . . The embrace of the child's arms about the grass. . . . It is the solid and entrenched repose of the old man lighting a cigarette: hands on his knees, solid, resting, waiting, listening.

In our lives, this quality without a name is the most precious thing we ever have.

*And I am free to the extent I have this quality in me.*

One man is free at that one instant when you see in him a certain smile and you know he is himself, and perfectly at home within himself. Imagine him especially, perhaps, wearing a great wide hat, his arm flung out in an expansive gesture, singing perhaps and for one instant utterly oblivious to everything but what is in him and around him at that second.

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*This wild freedom, this passion, comes into our lives in the instant we let go.*

It is when all our forces can move freely in us. In nature, this quality is almost automatic, because there are no images to interfere with natural processes of making things. But in all of our creations, the possibility occurs that images can interfere with the natural, necessary order of a thing. And, most of all, this way that images distort the things we make, is familiar in ourselves. For we ourselves are, like our works, the products of our own creation. And we are only free, and have the quality without a name in us, when we give up the images which guide our lives.

Yet each of us faces the fear of letting go. The fear of being just exactly what one is, of letting the forces flow freely; of letting the configuration of one's person adjust truly to these forces.

Our letting go is stifled, all the time, so long as we have ideas and opinions about ourselves, which make us hug too tightly to our images of how to live, and bottle up these forces.

So long as we are still bottled up, like this, there is a tightness about the mouth, a nervous tension in the eyes, a stiffness and a brittleness in the way we walk, the way we move.

And yet, until one does let go, it is impossible to be alive. The stereotypes are restricted; there are very different configurations. The infinite variety of actual

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people, with their vastly and utterly different forces, require a huge creation, to find the resolution of the person: and in finding this resolution truly, one must above all be free of the stereotypes.

*The great film, Ikiru—to live—describes it in the life of an old man.*

He has sat for thirty years behind a counter, preventing things from happening. And then he finds out that he is to die of cancer of the stomach, in six months. He tries to live; he seeks enjoyment; it doesn't amount to much. And finally, against all obstacles, he helps to make a park in a dirty slum of Tokyo. He has lost his fear, because he knows that he is going to die; he works and works and works, there is no stopping him, because he is no longer afraid of anyone, or anything. He has no longer anything to lose, and so in this short time gains everything; and then dies, in the snow, swinging on a child's swing in the park which he has made, and singing.

*Each of us lives most fully “on the wire,” in the face of death, daring to do the very thing which fear prevents us from.*

A few years ago a family of high wire artists had a terrible fall from the high wire, in the middle of their performance. All of them were killed or maimed, except the father, who escaped with broken legs. But even

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after losing his children in the fall, a few months later he was back to work, in the circus, on the wire again.

Someone asked him in an interview, how he could bring himself to do it, after such a terrible accident. He answered: "On the wire, that's living . . . all the rest is waiting."

*Of course for most of us it is not quite so literal.*

The fear which prevents us from being ourselves, from being that one person unique in all the world, from coming to life—that may mean nothing greater than the fear of giving up the image of a certain job, an image of a certain kind of family life.

One man can be as free in lighting up a cigarette, as that old man dancing on the wire. Another traveling with the gypsies. A handkerchief around your head; a horse-drawn yellow caravan, pulled up in a field; a rabbit stew, simmering and bubbling on the fire outside the caravan; licking and sucking your fingers as you eat spoonfuls of the stew.

*It has above all to do with the elements.*

The wind, the soft rain; sitting on the back of an old truck moving clothes and baskets of possessions while the gentle rain is falling, laughing, crouching under a shawl to keep from getting wet, but getting wet. Eating a loaf of bread, torn in pieces, hunks of cheese cut crudely with a hatchet which is lying in the corner; red flowers

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glistening in the rain along the roadside; banging on the window of the truck to shout some joke.

Nothing to keep, nothing to lose. No possessions, no security, no concern about possessions, and no concern about security: in this mood it is possible to do exactly what makes sense, and nothing else: there are no hidden fears, no morals, no rules, no undercurrent of constraint, no subtle sense of concern for the form of what the people round about you are doing, and above all no concern for what you are yourself, no subtle fear of other people's ridicule, no subtle train of fears which can connect the smallest triviality with bankruptcy and loss of love and loss of friends and death, no ties, no suits, no outward elements of majesty at all. Only the laughter and the rain.

*And it happens when our inner forces are resolved.*

And when a person's forces are resolved, it makes us feel at home, because we know, by some sixth sense, that there are no other unexpected forces lurking underground. He acts according to the nature of the situations he is in, without distorting them. There are no guiding images in his behavior, no hidden forces; he is simply free. And so, we feel relaxed and peaceful in his company.

*Of course, in practice we often don't know just what our inner forces are.*

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We live, for months, for years, acting in a certain way, not knowing whether we are free or not, doubting, not even sure when we are successfully resolved, and when we aren't.

*Yet still there are those special secret moments in our lives, when we smile unexpectedly—when all our forces are resolved.*

A woman can often see these moments in us, better than a man, better than we ourselves even. When we know those moments, when we smile, when we let go, when we are not on guard at all—these are the moments when our most important forces show themselves; whatever you are doing at such a moment, hold on to it, repeat it—for that certain smile is the best knowledge that we ever have of what our hidden forces are, and where they lie, and how they can be loosed.

*We cannot be aware of these most precious moments when they are actually happening.*

In fact, the conscious effort to attain this quality, or to be free, or to be anything, the glance which this creates, will always spoil it.

It is, instead, when we forget ourselves completely: playing the fool perhaps among a group of friends, or swimming out to sea, or walking simply, or trying to finish something late at night over a table with a group of friends, cigarette stuck to lower lip, eyes tired, earnest concentration.

## BEING ALIVE

All these moments in my own life—I only know them now, in retrospect.

*Yet each of us knows from experience the feeling which this quality creates in us.*

It is the time when we are most right, most just, most sad, and most hilarious.

*And for this reason, each one of us can also recognize this quality when it occurs in buildings.*

We can identify the towns and buildings, streets and gardens, flower beds, chairs, tables, tablecloths, wine bottles, garden seats, and kitchen sinks which have this quality—simply by asking whether they are like us when we are free.

We need only ask ourselves which places—which towns, which buildings, which rooms, have made us feel like this—which of them have that breath of sudden passion in them, which whispers to us, and lets us recall those moments when we were ourselves.

And the connection between the two—between this quality in our own lives, and the same quality in our surroundings—is not just an analogy, or similarity. The fact is that each one creates the other.

*Places which have this quality, invite this quality to come to life in us. And when we have this quality in us, we tend to make it come to life in towns and buildings which we help to build. It is a self-*

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*supporting, self-maintaining, generating quality. It is the quality of life. And we must seek it, for our own sakes, in our surroundings, simply in order that we can ourselves become alive.*

*That is the central scientific fact in all that follows.*

## CHAPTER 4

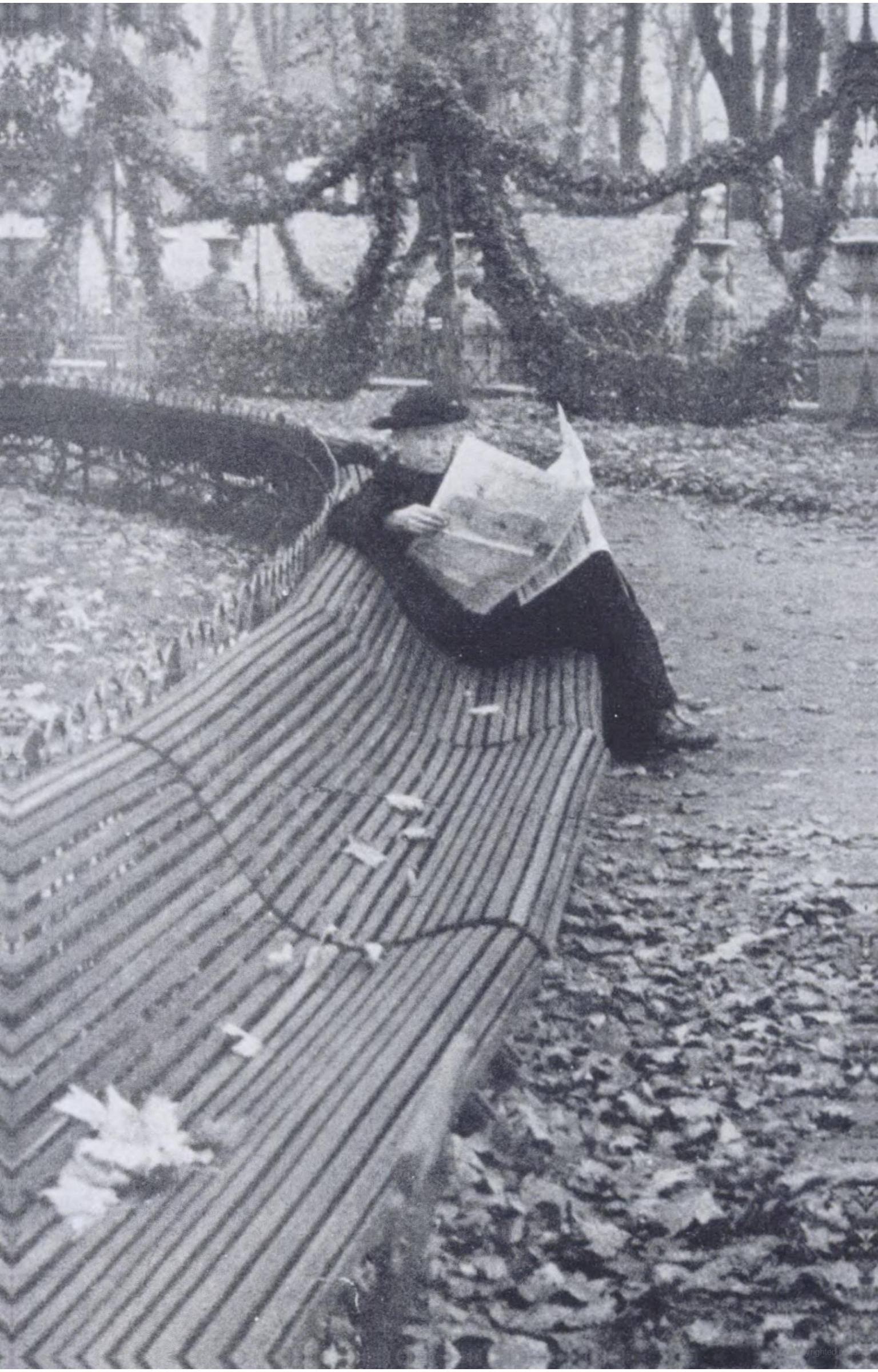
### PATTERNS OF EVENTS

*In order to define this quality in buildings and in towns, we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there.*













*We know what the quality without a name is like in our own lives.*

*As we shall see in the next few chapters, this quality can only come to life in us when it exists within the world that we are part of. We can come alive only to the extent the buildings and towns we live in are alive. The quality without a name is circular: it exists in us, when it exists in our buildings; and it only exists in our buildings, when we have it in ourselves.*

*To understand this clearly, we must first recognize that what a town or building is, is governed, above all, by what is happening there.*

I mean this in the most general sense.

Activities; events; forces; situations; lightning strikes; fish die; water flows; lovers quarrel; a cake burns; cats chase each other; a hummingbird sits outside my window; friends come by; my car breaks down; lovers' reunion; children born; grandparents go broke. . . .

My life is made of episodes like this.

The life of every person, animal, plant, creature, is made of similar episodes.

The character of a place, then, is given to it by the episodes which happen there.

*Those of us who are concerned with buildings tend to forget too easily that all the life and soul of a place, all of our experiences there, depend not simply on the physical environment, but on the patterns of events which we experience there.*

## PATTERNS OF EVENTS

What is Lima—what is most memorable there—eating anticuchos in the street; small pieces of beef heart, on sticks, cooked over open coals, with hot sauce on them; the dark, badly lit night streets of Lima, small carts with the flickering fire of the hot coals, the faces of the sellers, shadowy figures gathered round, to eat the beef hearts.

Or in Geneva—chestnuts, hot, in small paper bags, eaten in the autumn mist, warming the fingers.

And, what is it about the California coast—the shock of the waves, the hiss of the surf, standing on a rock while the white water hisses in, runs out, a dash across the wet sand to the rock, before the sea comes in again.

And it is just the same indoors. Think of a big room, vast, huge windows, big empty fireplace, completely empty, no furniture at all, except an easel and a chair—Picasso's studio. Is this not made entirely of the situations, the forces let loose by the configuration of events?

And what of a party around a kitchen table, people drinking together, cooking together, drinking wine, eating grapes, together preparing a stew of beef and wine and garlic and tomatoes which takes four hours to cook—and while it cooks, we drink, and then, at last we eat it.

What of the kind of moment we remember most of all: the flickering candles on the Christmas tree, the small bell ringing, the children waiting, hour by hour, outside the door, peeping through the crack, and finally rushing in, when they hear the tinkling of that small bell, and see the tree there, lit, with fifty white and red candles, burning, and the smell of singed pine needles where a twig caught fire while the candles were being lit.

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What of the process of scrubbing the floor, working the stiff bristles of the brush, and the pail of water, over the soft boards, with fibers breaking loose, and the smell of the soap that stays in the wood.

Or saying goodbye, at a train, leaning through the window of the train, waving, kissing, as the train pulls out, running along the platform. . . .

Or, taking the Sunday walk, a family, abreast, in twos and threes, walking along the road, pushing the smallest child perhaps, the others lagging behind to look at frogs, and an old shoe.

*These patterns of events which create the character of a place are not necessarily human events.*

The sunshine shining on the windowsill, the wind blowing in the grass are events too—they affect us just as much as social events.

Any combination of events, which has a bearing on our lives—an actual physical effect on us—affects our lives.

If, for example, there is a stream bed gouged in the rock outside my house, which fills each time it rains, this is a situation which has a powerful effect on the character of the environment, yet is not a human situation at all.

*Compare the power and importance of these events with the other purely geometrical aspects of the environment, which architects concern themselves with.*

## PATTERNS OF EVENTS

Compare, for instance, two ways of including water in a building.

Suppose, on the one hand, that there is a concrete reflecting pool outside your room—with no purpose except to reflect the sky.

And suppose, on the other hand, that there is a stream outside your room, with a small rowing boat on it, where you can go, to row, lie on the water, struggle against the stream, tip over . . . .

*Which of these two makes the most difference to the building? The rowing boat, of course, because it alters the entire experience of the building.*

It is the action of these moments, the people involved in them, and the peculiar situations, which make the impression on our lives.

The life of a house, or of a town, is not given to it, directly, by the shape of its buildings, or by the ornament and plan—it is given to them by the quality of the events and situations we encounter there. Always it is our situations which allow us to be what we are.

It is the people around us, and the most common ways we have of meeting them, of being with them, it is, in short, the ways of being which exist in our world, that make it possible for us to be alive.

*We know, then, that what matters in a building or a town is not its outward shape, its physical geometry alone, but the events that happen there.*

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It is all the events which happen there—the human events given by the situations which are repeated, the mechanical events, the rush of trains, the fall of water, the slow cracking of structures, the growing of the grass, the melting of the snow, the rusting of iron, the flowering of roses, the heat of a summer's day, the cooking, loving, playing, dying, and not only of ourselves, but of the animals, and plants, and even of the inorganic processes which make the whole.

Of course, some events happen once in a lifetime; others happen more often; and some happen very often indeed. But although it is true that a unique event can sometimes change our lives completely, or leave its mark on us, it is not too much to say that, by and large, the overall character of our lives is given by those events which keep on recurring over and over again.

And, by the same token, it is roughly true that any system, any aspect of the life of a part of the world, is essentially governed by those situations, human or non-human—which keep on repeating there.

*A building or a town is given its character, essentially, by those events which keep on happening there most often.*

A field of grass is given its character, essentially, by those events which happen over and over again—millions upon millions of times. The germination of the grass seed, the blowing wind, the flowering of the grass, the

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movement of the worms, the hatching of the insects . . . .

A car is given its character by the events which keep on happening there—the rolling of the wheels, the movement of the pistons in the cylinders, the limited to and fro of the steering wheel and axle, as the car changes direction.

A family is given its character by the particular events which keep on happening there—the small affections, kisses, breakfast, the particular kinds of arguments which keep on happening, the way these arguments resolve themselves, the idiosyncrasies of people, both together and alone, which make us love them . . . .

*And just the same is true in any person's individual life.*

If I consider my life honestly, I see that it is governed by a certain very small number of patterns of events which I take part in over and over again.

Being in bed, having a shower, having breakfast in the kitchen, sitting in my study writing, walking in the garden, cooking and eating our common lunch at my office with my friends, going to the movies, taking my family to eat at a restaurant, having a drink at a friend's house, driving on the freeway, going to bed again. There are a few more.

There are surprisingly few of these patterns of events in any one person's way of life, perhaps no more than a

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dozen. Look at your own life and you will find the same. It is shocking at first, to see that there are so few patterns of events open to me.

Not that I want more of them. But when I see how very few of them there are, I begin to understand what huge effect these few patterns have on my life, on my capacity to live. If these few patterns are good for me, I can live well. If they are bad for me, I can't.

*Of course, the standard patterns of events vary very much from person to person, and from culture to culture.*

For a teenage boy, at high school in Los Angeles, his situations include hanging out in the corridor with other boys; watching television; sitting in a car with his girl-friend at a drive-in restaurant eating coke and hamburgers. For an old woman, in a European mountain village, her situations include scrubbing her front doorstep, lighting a candle in the local church, stopping at the market to buy fresh vegetables, walking five miles across the mountains to visit her grandson.

*But each town, each neighborhood, each building, has a particular set of these patterns of events according to its prevailing culture.*

A person can modify his immediate situations. He can move, change his life, and so on. In exceptional cases he can even change them almost wholly. But it is not possible

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to go beyond the bounds of the collection of events and pattern of events which our culture makes available to us.

*We have a glimpse, then, of the fact that our world has a structure, in the simple fact that certain patterns of events—both human and nonhuman—keep repeating, and account, essentially, for much the greater part of the events which happen there.*

Our individual lives are made from them . . . so are our lives together . . . they are the rules, through which our culture maintains itself, keeps itself alive, and it is by building our lives, out of these patterns of events, that we are people of our culture . . . .

There is no aspect of our lives which is not governed by these patterns of events. And if the quality without a name can come into our lives at all, it is clear that it depends entirely on the specific nature of these patterns of events from which our world is made.

*And indeed, the world does have a structure, just because these patterns of events which repeat themselves are always anchored in the space.*

I cannot imagine any pattern of events without imagining a place where it is happening. I cannot think of sleeping, without imagining myself sleeping *somewhere*. Of course, I can imagine myself sleeping in many different kinds of places—but these places all have at least certain physical geometrical characteristics in common. And I can-

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not think about the place without also knowing, or imagining, what happens there. I cannot think of a bedroom, without imagining the bed, lovemaking, sleeping, dressing perhaps, waking up . . . breakfast in bed . . . .

*Consider, for example, the pattern of events which we might call "watching the world go by."*

We sit, perhaps slightly raised, on the front porch, or on some steps in a park, or on a café terrace, with a more or less protected, sheltered, partly private place behind us, looking out into a more public place, slightly raised above it, watching the world go by.

*I cannot separate it from the porch where it occurs.*

The action and the space are indivisible. The action is supported by this kind of space. The space supports this kind of action. The two form a unit, a pattern of events in space.

The same in a barbershop. Inside, barbers, customers sitting in a row along one side, chairs for haircuts in another row, widely spaced, facing the mirrors, the barber idly talking while he cuts your hair, bottles of pomade around, hair dryer lying on the table, a basin in front for rinsing, a strop hanging on the wall, for stropping the razors . . . Again, the activity and its physical space are one. There is no separating them.

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*Indeed, a culture always defines its pattern of events by referring to the names of the physical elements of space which are "standard" in that culture.*

If you look back at the patterns of events that I have mentioned, each one is almost completely defined by the spatial character of the place where it occurs.

The barbershop, the porch, the shower, the study with its writing desk, the garden with its path, the bed, the communal lunch table, the cinema, the freeway, the high school corridor, the television set, the drive-in restaurant, the front doorstep, the candlestand at the back of the church, the market with its vegetable stalls, the mountain path. Each of these elements defines a pattern of events.

*And the mere list of elements which are typical in a given town tells us the way of life of people there.*

When you think of Los Angeles, you think of freeways, drive-ins, suburbs, airports, gas stations, shopping centers, swimming pools, hamburger joints, parking lots, beaches, billboards, supermarkets, free-standing one-family houses, front yards, traffic lights . . . .

When you think of a medieval European town, you think of the church, the marketplace, the town square, the wall around the town, the town gates, narrow winding streets and lanes, rows of attached houses, each one containing an extended family, rooftops, alleys, blacksmiths, alehouses . . . .

In each case the simple list of elements is intensely evoc-

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ative. The elements are not just dead pieces of architecture and building—each one has an entire life associated with it. The names of the elements make us imagine and remember what people are doing in those elements, and what life is like in an environment which has those elements.

*This does not mean that space creates events, or that it causes them.*

For example, in a modern town, the concrete spatial pattern of a sidewalk does not “cause” the kinds of human behavior which happens there.

What happens is much more complex. The people on the sidewalk, being culture-bound, know that the space which they are part of is a sidewalk, and, as part of their culture, they have the pattern of a sidewalk in their minds. It is this pattern in their minds which causes them to behave the way that people do behave on sidewalks, not the purely spatial aspect of the concrete and the walls and curbs.

And this means, of course, that in two cultures, people may see sidewalks differently, that is, they may have different patterns in their minds—and, that they will, as a result, act differently on the sidewalks. For example, in New York, a sidewalk is mainly a place for walking, jostling, moving fast. And by comparison, in Jamaica, or India, a sidewalk is a place to sit, to talk, perhaps to play music, even to sleep.

It is not correct to interpret this by saying that the two sidewalks are the same.

## PATTERNS OF EVENTS

*It simply means that a pattern of events cannot be separated from the space where it occurs.*

Each sidewalk is a unitary system, which includes both the field of geometrical relationships which define its concrete geometry, and the field of human actions and events, which are associated with it.

So when we see that a sidewalk in Bombay is used by people sleeping, or for parking cars . . . and that in New York it is used only for walking—we cannot interpret this correctly as a single sidewalk pattern, with two different uses. The Bombay sidewalk (space + events) is one pattern; the New York sidewalk (space + events) is another pattern. They are two entirely different patterns.

*This close connection between patterns of events and space is commonplace in nature.*

The word “stream” describes a pattern of physical space and a pattern of events, at the same time.

We do not separate the stream bed from the stream. There is no distinction in our minds between the bed of the stream, its banks, its winding configuration in the land, and the rushing of the water, the growth of plants, the swimming of the fish.

*And, in the same way, the patterns of events which govern life in buildings and in towns cannot be separated from the space where they occur.*

Each one is a living thing, a pattern of events in space,

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just like a stream, a waterfall, a fire, a storm—a thing which happens, over and again, and is exactly one of the elements from which the world is made.

And it is therefore clear that we can only understand these patterns of events by seeing them as living elements of space themselves.

It is the space itself which lives and breathes; it is the space which is the walking, jostling sidewalk in New York; it is the space we call the porch, which is the pattern of events we also call watching the world go by.

*The life which happens in a building or a town is not merely anchored in the space but made up from the space itself.*

For since space is made up of these living elements, these labeled patterns of events in space, we see that what seems at first sight like the dead geometry we call a building or a town is indeed a quick thing, a living system, a collection of interacting, and adjacent, patterns of events in space, each one repeating certain events over and over again, yet always anchored by its place in space. And, if we hope to understand the life which happens in a building or a town, we must therefore try to understand the structure of the space itself.

*We shall now try to find some way of understanding space which yields its patterns of events in a completely natural way, so that we can succeed in seeing patterns of events, and space, as one.*

## CHAPTER 5

### PATTERNS OF SPACE

*These patterns of events are always interlocked with certain geometric patterns in the space. Indeed, as we shall see, each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space, and out of nothing else: they are the atoms and the molecules from which a building or a town is made.*











*We are now ready to come to grips with the most basic problem of a building or a town: What is it made of? What is its structure? What is its physical essence? What are the building blocks of which its space is made?*

*We know, from chapter 4, that any town and any building gets its character from those events and patterns of events which keep on happening there the most; and that the patterns of events are linked, somehow, to space.*

*So far, though, we do not know just what aspect of the space it is that correlates with the events. We do not have a picture of a building or a town which shows us how its obvious outward structure—the way it looks, its physical geometry—is interlocked with these events.*

Suppose I want to understand the “structure” of something. Just what exactly does this mean?

It means, of course, that I want to make a simple picture of it, which lets me grasp it as a whole.

And it means, too, that as far as possible, I want to paint this simple picture out of as few elements as possible. The fewer elements there are, the richer the relationships between them, and the more of the picture lies in the “structure” of these relationships.

And finally, of course, I want to paint a picture which allows me to understand the patterns of events which keep on happening in the thing whose structure I seek. In other words, I hope to find a picture, or a structure,

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which will, in some rather obvious and simple sense, account for the outward properties, for the pattern of events of the thing which I am studying.

What then, is the fundamental “structure” of a building or a town?

*In the crudest sense, we know from the last chapter roughly what the structure of a town or building is.*

It is made up of certain concrete elements, with every element associated with a certain pattern of events.

*On the geometric level, we see certain physical elements repeating endlessly, combined in an almost endless variety of combinations.*

A town is made of houses, gardens, streets, sidewalks, shopping centers, shops, workplaces, factories, perhaps a river, sportgrounds, parking . . .

A building is made up of walls, windows, doors, rooms, ceilings, nooks, stairs, staircase treads, doorhandles, terraces, counter tops, flowerpots . . . repeated over and again.

A gothic cathedral is made of a nave, aisles, west door, transept, choir, apse, ambulatory, columns, windows, buttresses, vaults, ribs, window tracery.

A modern metropolitan region in the United States is made of industrial areas, freeways, central business districts, supermarkets, parks, single-family houses, gardens, high-rise housing, streets, arteries, traffic lights, sidewalks.

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*And each of these elements has a specific pattern of events associated with it.*

Families living in the houses, cars and buses driving in the streets, flowers growing in the flower pots, people walking through the doors, opening and closing them, traffic lights changing, people gathering for mass on Sundays in the nave of the cathedral, forces acting on the vaults, when the wind sways the building, light coming through the windows, people sitting at the windows in their living rooms and looking at the view . . . .

*But this picture of space does not explain how—or why—these elements associate themselves with definite and quite specific patterns of events.*

What is the relation between a church, say, taken as an element—and the pattern of events which happens in the church? It is all very well to say that they are connected. But unless we can see some kind of common sense in the connection, it explains nothing.

It is certainly not enough merely to say glibly that every pattern of events resides in space. That is obvious, and not very interesting. What we want to know is just how the structure of the space supports the patterns of events it does, in such a way that if we change the structure of the space, we shall be able to predict what kinds of changes in the patterns of events this change will generate.

In short, we want a theory which presents the interaction

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of the space and the events, in a clear and unambiguous way.

*Further, it is very puzzling to realize that the “elements,” which seem like elementary building blocks, keep varying, and are different every time that they occur.*

For among the endless repetition of elements we also see an almost endless variation. Each church has a slightly different nave, the aisles are different, the west door is different . . . and in the nave, the various bays are usually different, the individual columns are different; each vault has slightly different ribs; each window has a slightly different tracery and different glass.

And just so in an urban region. Each industrial area is different; each freeway is different; each park is different; each supermarket is different—even the smaller individual elements like traffic lights and stop signs, although very similar, are never quite the same—and there is always a variety of types.

*If the elements are different every time that they occur, evidently then, it cannot be the elements themselves which are repeating in a building or a town: these so-called elements cannot be the ultimate “atomic” constituents of space.*

Since every church is different, the so-called element we call “church” is not constant at all. Giving it a name

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only deepens the puzzle. If every church is different, what is it that remains the same, from church to church, that we call "church"?

When we say that matter is made of electrons, protons, and so forth, this is a satisfying way of understanding things, because these electrons seem, indeed, to be the same each time that they occur, and it therefore makes sense to show how matter can be built up from combinations of these "elements," because the elements are truly elementary.

But if the so-called elements of which a building or a town is made—the houses, streets, windows, doors—are merely names, and the underlying things which they refer to keep on changing, then we have no solidity at all in our picture, and we need to find some other elements which truly are invariant throughout the variation, in a way that we can understand a building or a town as a structure made up by combination of these elements.

*Let us therefore look more carefully at the structure of the space from which a building or a town is made, to find out what it really is that is repeating there.*

We may notice first that over and above the elements, there are relationships between the elements which keep repeating too, just as the elements themselves repeat. . . .

*Beyond its elements each building is defined by certain patterns of relationships among the elements.*

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In a gothic cathedral, the nave is *flanked by* aisles which run parallel to it. The transept is at *right angles* to the nave and aisles; the ambulatory is *wrapped around* the outside of the apse; the columns are *vertical, on the line separating* nave from aisle, *spaced at equal intervals*. Each vault connects *four* columns, and has a characteristic shape, *cross-like* in plan, *concave* in space. The buttresses are run down the outside of the aisles, on the same lines as the columns, supporting the load from the vaults. The nave is always a *long thin rectangle*—its *ratio may vary between 1:3 and 1:6, but is never 1:2 or 1:20*. The aisles are always *narrower* than the nave.

*And each urban region, too, is defined by certain patterns of relationships among its elements.*

Consider a typical mid-twentieth-century American metropolitan region. Somewhere *towards the center* of the region, there is a central business district, which contains a *very high density* office block; near these there are *high density* apartments. The overall density of the region *slopes off with distance from the center, according to an exponential law*; *periodically there are again peaks* of higher density, but smaller than the central ones; and *subsidiary* to these *smaller* peaks, there are still smaller peaks. Each of these peaks of density *contains* stores and offices *surrounded by* higher density housing. *Towards the outer fringe* of the metropolis there are *large* areas of *freestanding* one-family houses; *the farther out from the center they are, the larger* their gardens. The region is

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served by a *network* of freeways. These freeways are *closer together* at the center. Independent of the freeways, there is a *roughly regular two-dimensional network* of streets. *Every five or ten* streets, there is a larger one, which functions as an artery. A few of the arteries are even bigger than the others: these tend to be arranged *radially, branching out* from the center in a *star-shaped fashion*. Where an artery meets a freeway, there is a characteristic *cloverleaf arrangement of connecting lanes*. Where two arteries *intersect*, there is a traffic light; where a local street *meets* an artery, there is a stop sign. The major commercial areas, which *coincide with* the high density peaks in the density distribution, all fall on the major arteries. Industrial areas all fall *within half a mile* of a freeway; and the older ones are also *close to* at least one major artery.

*Evidently, then, a large part of the "structure" of a building or a town consists of patterns of relationships.*

For both the city of Los Angeles and the medieval church get their respective characters as much from these repeating patterns of relationships, as they do from the elements themselves

*At first sight, it seems as though these patterns of relationships are separate from the elements.*

Think of the aisle of the cathedral. It is parallel to the nave, and next to it, it shares columns with the nave, it

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runs east-west, like the church itself, it contains columns, on its inner wall, and windows on its outer wall. At first sight, it seems that these relationships are "extra," over and above the fact of its being an aisle.

*When we look closer, we realize that these relationships are not extra, but necessary to the elements, indeed a part of them.*

We realize, for instance, that if an aisle were not parallel to the nave, were not next to it, were not narrower than the nave, did not share columns with the nave, did not run east to west, . . . that it would not be an "aisle" at all. It would be merely a rectangle of space, in gothic construction, floating free . . . and what makes it an aisle, specifically, is just the pattern of relationships which it has to the nave, and other elements around it.

*When we look closer still, we realize that even this view is still not very accurate. For it is not merely true that the relationships are attached to the elements: the fact is that the elements themselves are patterns of relationships.*

For, once we recognize that much of what we think of as an "element" in fact lies in the pattern of relationships between this thing and the things in the world around it, we then come to the second even greater realization, that the so-called element is itself nothing but a myth, and that indeed, the element itself is not just embedded in a

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pattern of relationships, but is *itself* entirely a pattern of relationships, and nothing else.

In short, the aisle, which needs the pattern of relationships to the nave and the east window to define it, is *itself* also a pattern of relationships between its length, its width, the columns which lie on the boundary with the nave, the windows which lie on the outer boundary . . .

*And finally, the things which seem like elements dissolve, and leave a fabric of relationships behind, which is the stuff that actually repeats itself, and gives the structure to a building or a town.*

In short, we may forget about the idea that the building is made up of elements entirely, and recognize instead, the deeper fact that all these so-called elements are only labels for the patterns of relationships which really do repeat.

The freeway, as a whole, does not repeat. But the fact that there are cloverleafs which connect the freeway to roads at certain intervals—that *does* repeat. There is a certain relationship between the freeway and its crossing arteries and cloverleafs, which does repeat.

But once again, the cloverleaf *itself* does not repeat. Each cloverleaf is different. What does repeat is that each lane forms a continuously curving off ramp to the right—there is a relationship between its radius, its tangency, the fact that it is banked, which does repeat.

Yet once again the “lane” which figures in this pattern of relationships does not repeat. What we call a lane is itself

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a relationship among still smaller so-called elements—the edges of the road, the surface, the lines which form the edge . . . and these again, although they function temporarily as elements, in order to make these relations clear, themselves evaporate when we look closely at them.

*Each one of these patterns is a morphological law, which establishes a set of relationships in space.*

This morphological law can always be expressed in the same general form:

$X \rightarrow r (A, B, \dots)$ , which means:

Within a context of type  $X$ , the parts  $A, B, \dots$  are related by the relationship  $r$ .

Thus, for example:

Within a gothic cathedral  $\rightarrow$  the nave is flanked on both sides by parallel aisles.

or:

Where a freeway meets an artery  $\rightarrow$  the access ramps of the interchange take the rough form of a cloverleaf.

*And each law or pattern is itself a pattern of relationships among still other laws, which are themselves just patterns of relationships again.*

For though each pattern is itself apparently composed of smaller things which look like parts, of course, when we look closely at them, we see that these apparent “parts” are patterns too.

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Consider, for example, the pattern we call a door. This pattern is a relationship among the frame, the hinges, and the door itself: and these parts in turn are made of smaller parts: the frame is made of uprights, a crosspiece, and cover mouldings over joints; the door is made of uprights, crosspieces and panels; the hinge is made of leaves and a pin. Yet any one of these things we call its "parts" are themselves in fact also patterns, each one of which may take an almost infinite variety of shapes, and color and exact size—without once losing the essential field of relationships which make it what it is.

The patterns are not just patterns of relationships, but patterns of relationships among other smaller patterns, which themselves have still other patterns hooking them together—and we see finally, that the world is entirely made of all these interhooking, interlocking nonmaterial patterns.

*Further, each pattern in the space has a pattern of events associated with it.*

For instance, the pattern of the freeway contains a certain fabric of events, defined by rules: drivers drive at certain speeds; there are rules governing the way that people may change lanes; the cars all face the same way; there are certain kinds of overtaking; people drive a little slower on the entrances and exits . . . .

And the pattern of a kitchen, in any given culture, also contains a very definite pattern of events: the way that people use the kitchen, the way that food is prepared, the

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fact that people eat there, or don't eat there, the fact that they wash the dishes standing at the sink . . . and on and on . . .

*Of course, the pattern of space, does not "cause" the pattern of events.*

Neither does the pattern of events "cause" the pattern in the space. The total pattern, space and events together, is an element of people's culture. It is invented by culture, transmitted by culture, and merely anchored in space.

*But there is a fundamental inner connection between each pattern of events, and the pattern of space in which it happens.*

For the pattern in the space is, precisely, the precondition, the requirement, which allows the pattern of events to happen. In this sense, it plays a fundamental role in making sure that just this pattern of events keeps on repeating over and over again, throughout the space, and that it is, therefore, one of the things which gives a certain building, or a certain town, its character.

*Go back, for example, to the porch of chapter 4, and the pattern of events we may call "sitting on the porch, watching the world go by."*

What aspect of the space is it which is connected to this pattern of events? Certainly it is not the whole porch,

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in its entirety: it is instead, just certain specific relationships.

For instance, in order for the pattern of events "watching the world go by" to happen, it is essential that the porch should be a little raised above the level of the street; it is essential that the porch be deep enough, to let a group of people sit there comfortably; and it is essential, of course, that the front of the porch be open, pierced with openings, and that the roof is therefore supported on columns.

*It is this bundle of relationships which is essential, because these are the ones which are directly congruent with the pattern of events.*

By contrast, the length of the porch, its height, its color, the materials of which it is made, the height of the side walls, the way the porch connects up with the inside of the house, are less essential—so they can vary, without altering the fundamental and essential nature of the porch.

*And in this same sense, each pattern of relationships in space is congruent with some specific pattern of events.*

The pattern of relationships we call a "freeway" is just that pattern of relationships required by the process of driving fast with limited access to and from side roads: in short the pattern of events.

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The pattern of relationships we call a Chinese "kitchen" is just that pattern of relationships required for cooking Chinese food: again the underlying pattern of events.

And insofar as there are different "kinds" of kitchens, there are different patterns of relationships, responsible for slightly different patterns of events, in different cultures, which have different patterns of cooking.

In every case the pattern of relationships in space is that invariant which must repeat itself with some pattern of events, because it is exactly these relationships which are required to sustain that pattern of events.

*We realize then that it is just the patterns of events in space which are repeating in the building or the town: and nothing else.*

Nothing of any importance happens in a building or a town except what is defined within the patterns which repeat themselves.

For what the patterns do is at the same time seize the outward physical geometry, and also seize what happens there.

They account entirely for its geometrical structure: they are the visible, coherent stuff that is repeating, and coherent there: they are the background of the variation, which makes each concrete element a little different.

And, at the same time, they are also responsible for those events which keep repeating there, and therefore do the most to give the building or a town its character . . .

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*Each building gets its character from just the patterns which keep on repeating there.*

This is not only true of general patterns; it is true of the entire building: all its details; the shape of rooms, the character of ornament, the kind of windowpanes it has, the boards of which the floor is made, the handles on the doors, the light, the height, the way the ceilings vary, the relationship of windows to the ceiling, the connection of the building to the garden and the street, and to the spaces and the paths and to the detailed seats, and walls which are around it. . . .

*Each neighborhood is defined, too, in everything that matters, by the patterns which keep on repeating there.*

Again, it is just those details which give the neighborhood a "character" which are defined by patterns: the kind of streets which it has, the kind of lots the houses are; the typical size of houses, the way that the houses are connected or distinct. . . .

Isn't it true that the features which you remember in a place are not so much peculiarities, but rather the typical, the recurrent, the characteristic features: the canals of Venice, the flat roofs of a Moroccan town, the even spacing of the fruit trees in an orchard, the slope of a beach towards the sea, the umbrellas of an Italian beach, the wide sidewalks, sidewalk cafés, cylindrical poster board-

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ings and pissoirs of Paris, the porch which goes all the way around a plantation house in Louisiana. . . .

The qualities which make Paris a special place, which make Broadway and Times Square exciting, the qualities which make Venice special, the qualities which make an eighteenth-century London square so peaceful and refreshing—indeed, the qualities in any environment which give it the character you like it for—are its patterns.

*A barn gets its structure from its patterns.*

It has a certain overall shape, roughly a long rectangle; there is a central portion where the hay is stored, with aisles along the sides where the cows stand; there is a row of columns between the center and the aisle; along these columns are the feeding troughs where the cows feed; there are great doors or double doors at one end; perhaps smaller doors at the other end, in the aisle, for cattle to pass in and out. . . .

*And an expensive restaurant gets its structure and character from its peculiar patterns too.*

Small tables, each one with a few chairs; small individual lights at the tables; the head waiter's desk at the entrance, with a light and a place for his reception book. Dark perhaps inside, reds, deep colors, often no windows. A swinging door leading to the kitchen . . .

*Venice gets its life and structure from its patterns.*

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A large number of islands, typically about 1000 feet across, packed together houses, 3-5 stories, built right up to the canals; each island with a small square in the middle of it, the square usually with a church; narrow, irregular paths cutting across the islands; hump-backed bridges where these paths cross canals; houses opening onto the canals and onto the streets; steps at the canal entrance (to take care of variations in water level) . . .

Venice is the special place it is, only because it has those patterns of events in it, which happen to be congruent with all these patterns in the space.

*London gets its life and structure from its patterns too.*

First at the regional scale: the characteristic conglomeration of boroughs, the characteristic location of major railway stations on an inner ring, with the railways radiating outwards, the characteristic location of industry at the periphery. Then at the next smaller scale there are the characteristic rows of semi-detached "villas," the characteristic inside details of the railway stations, the characteristic squares, with oval or rectangular green parks in the center, the use of roundabouts, traffic moving on the left. Then to more detail: the interior layout of a typical row house, the particular English character of "filling" stations, the London club, Lyons and Marks and Spencers, the shape and height and placing of advertisement boardings on bridges and outside railway stations, and their particular characteristic shape and height. Then to more detail: the special kind of staircase baluster, the

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use of two-inch bricks in Georgian houses, the ratio of bathroom area to house area, compared with that typical of an American house, the use of flagstones on the sidewalks. Then down to the tiniest details of all—the special shape of English faucets, the kinds of handles on an English metal window, the shape of the insulators on a telegraph pole.

Again, in each case the patterns define all the typical events which happen there. So “London,” as a way of life, lies there completely in these patterns which the Londoners create, and fill with the events that are exactly congruent with them.

*And, what is most remarkable of all, the number of the patterns out of which a building or a town is made is rather small.*

One might imagine that a building has a thousand different patterns in it; or that a town has tens of thousands. . . .

But the fact is that a building is defined, in its essentials, by a few dozen patterns. And, a vast town like London, or Paris, is defined, in its essence, by a few hundred patterns at the most.

In short, the patterns have enormous power and depth; they have the power to create an almost endless variety, they are so deep, so general, that they can combine in millions upon millions of different ways, to such an extent, that when we walk through Paris we are mainly overwhelmed by the variety; and the fact that there are these deep invariants, lying behind the vast variety, and

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generating it, is really an amazing shock. . . .

In this sense, the patterns are perhaps still deeper and more powerful than the discussion has made clear so far. From a handful of patterns, a vast, almost incalculable variety can be made: and a building, with all of its complexity and variety, is generated, actually, by a small number of them.

*They are the atoms of our man-made universe.*

In chemistry we learn that the world, in all of its complexity, is made up from combinations of some 92 elements, or atoms. This is an extraordinary fact, amazing to a person who learns chemistry for the first time. It is true that our conception of these atoms has changed repeatedly—far from being the little billiard balls we once thought, we know that they are shifting patterns of particles and waves—and that even the most “elementary” particle—the electron—is itself a ripple in the stuff of the universe, not a “thing.” However, all these changing views do not alter the fact that at the level of scale where atoms occur, they do occur, as identifiable recurrent entities. And even if vast changes occur in physics, and we one day recognize that these so-called atoms are also merely ripples in a deeper field, the fact that there are entities of some kind which correspond to the things we once called atoms will remain.

Just so, we realize now, that at the larger scale of towns and buildings, the world is also made of certain fundamental “atoms”—that each place is made from a

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few hundred patterns—and that all of its incredible complexity comes, in the end, simply from the combinations of these few patterns.

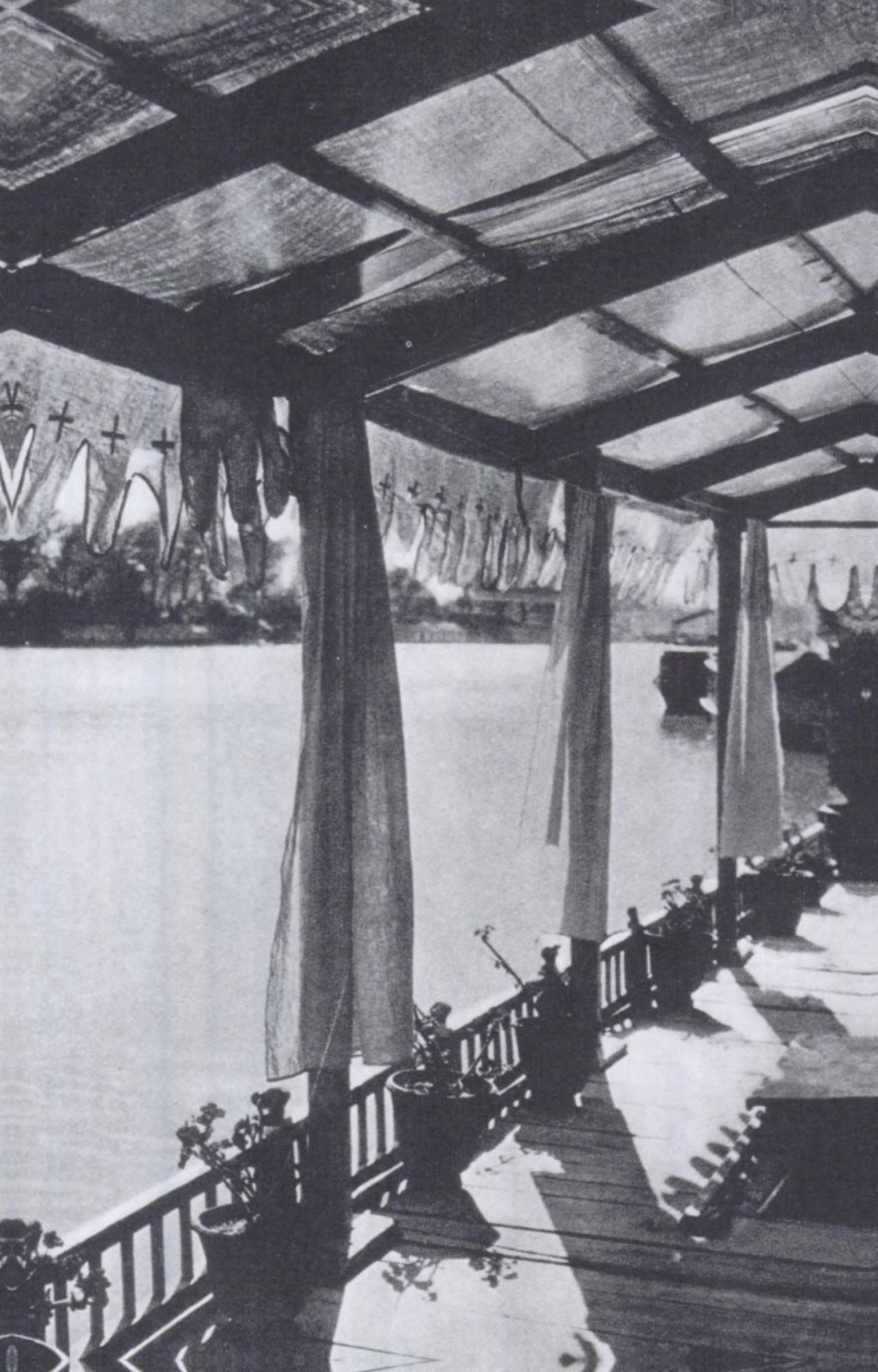
*Of course the patterns vary from place to place, from culture to culture, from age to age; they are all man-made, they all depend on culture. But still, in every age and every place the structure of our world is given to it, essentially, by some collection of patterns which keeps on repeating over and over and over again.*

*These patterns are not concrete elements, like bricks and doors—they are much deeper and more fluid—and yet they are the solid substance, underneath the surface, out of which a building or a town is always made.*

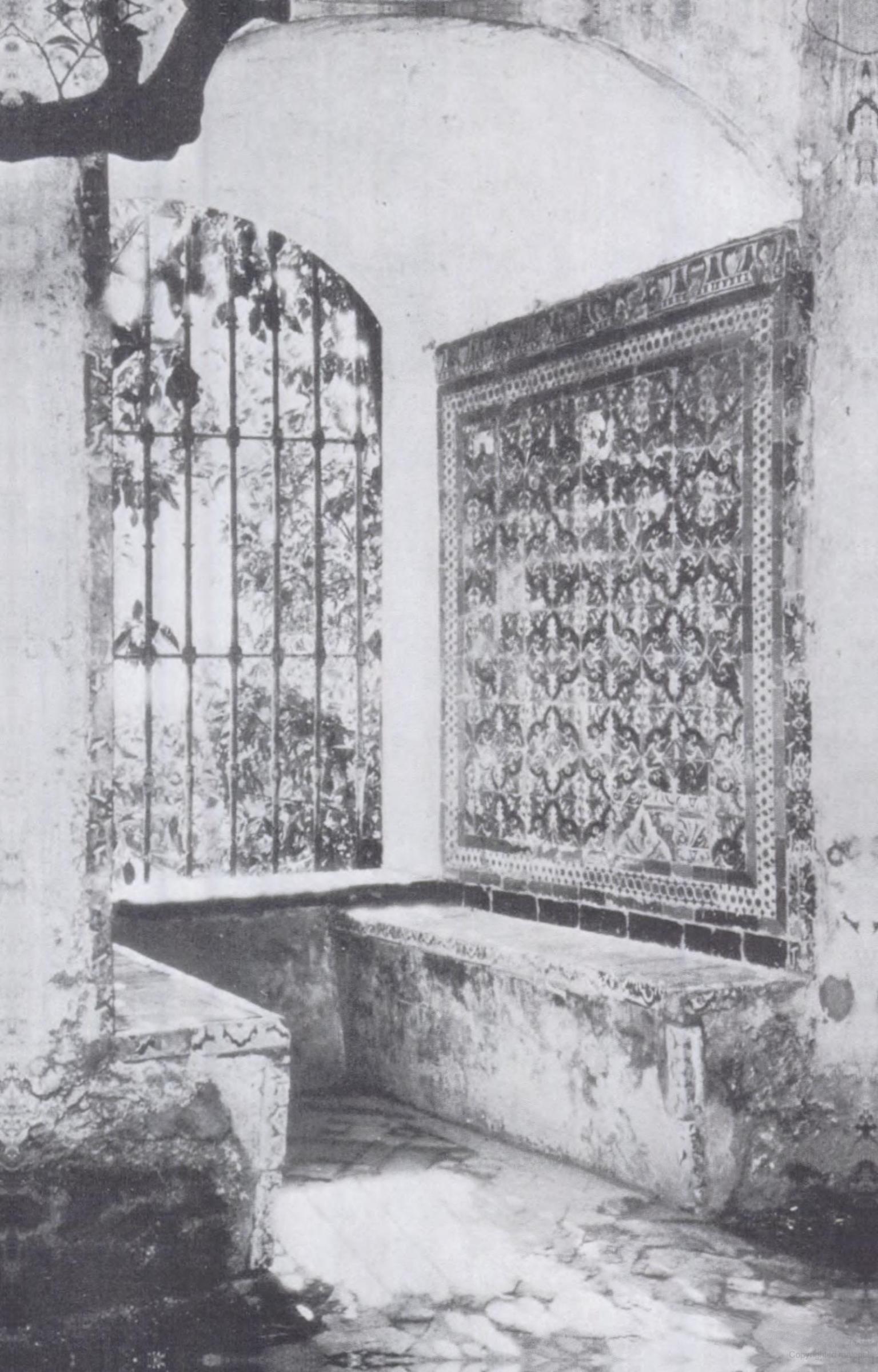
## CHAPTER 6

### PATTERNS WHICH ARE ALIVE

*The specific patterns out of which a building or a town is made may be alive or dead. To the extent they are alive, they let our inner forces loose, and set us free; but when they are dead they keep us locked in inner conflict.*







*We know now, that every building and every town is made of patterns which repeat themselves throughout its fabric, and that it gets its character from just those patterns of which it is made.*

*Yet it is obvious, intuitively, that some towns and buildings are more full of life: and others less. If they all get their character from the patterns they are made of, then somehow the greater sense of life which fills one place, and which is missing from another, must be created by these patterns too.*

*In this chapter, and the next, we shall see just how certain patterns do create this special sense of life.*

They create it in the first place, by liberating man. They create life, by allowing people to release their energy, by allowing people, themselves, to become alive. Or, in other places, they prevent it, they destroy the sense of life, they destroy the very possibility of life, by creating conditions under which people cannot possibly be free.

Let us now try to understand the mechanism by which this works.

*A man is alive when he is wholehearted, true to himself, true to his own inner forces, and able to act freely according to the nature of the situations he is in.*

This is the central kernel of truth already expressed in chapter 3.

To be happy, and to be alive, in this sense, are almost the same. Of course, a man who is alive, is not always happy in the sense of feeling pleasant; experiences of joy

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are balanced by experiences of sorrow. But the experiences are all deeply felt; and above all, the man is whole; and conscious of being real.

To be alive, in this sense, is not a matter of suppressing some forces or tendencies, at the expense of others; it is a state of being in which all forces which arise in a man can find expression; he lives in balance among the forces which arise in him; he is unique as the pattern of forces which arises is unique; he is at peace, since there are no disturbances created by underground forces which have no outlet, at one with himself and his surroundings.

*This state cannot be reached merely by inner work.*

There is a myth, sometimes widespread, that a person need do only inner work, in order to be alive like this; that a man is entirely responsible for his own problems; and that to cure himself, he need only change himself. This teaching has some value, since it is so easy for a man to imagine that his problems are caused by "others." But it is a one-sided and mistaken view which also maintains the arrogance of the belief that the individual is self-sufficient, and not dependent in any essential way on his surroundings.

*The fact is, a person is so far formed by his surroundings, that his state of harmony depends entirely on his harmony with his surroundings.*

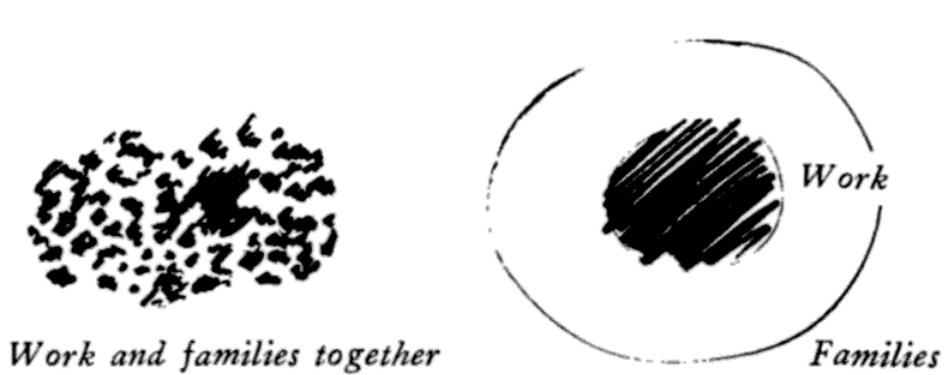
Some kinds of physical and social circumstances help a person come to life. Others make it very difficult.

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*For instance, in some towns, the pattern of relationships between workplaces and families helps us to come to life.*

Workshops mix with houses, children run around the places where the work is going on, the members of the family help in the work, the family may possibly eat lunch together, or eat lunch together with the people who are working there.

The fact that family and play are part of one continuous stream, helps nourish everyone. Children see how work happens, they learn what it is that makes the adult world function, they get an overall coherent view of things; men are able to connect the possibility of play and laughter, and attention to children, without having to separate them sharply in their minds, from work. Men and women are able to work, and to pay attention to their families more or less equally, as they wish to; love and work are connected, able to be one, understood and felt as coherent by the people who are living there.



*In other towns where work and family life are physi-*

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*cally separate, people are harassed by inner conflicts which they can't escape.*

A man wants to live in his work and he wants to be close to his family; but in a town where work and family are physically separate, he is forced to make impossible choices among these desires. He is exposed to the greatest emotional pressure from his family, at that moment when he is most tired—when he just comes home from work. He is confused by a subtle identification of his wife and children with “leisure,” “weekends,” and hence not the daily stuff of life.

A woman wants to be a loving woman, sustaining to her children; and also to take part in the outer business of the world; to have relationships with “what is going on.” But, in a town where work and family are completely separate, she is forced to make another impossible choice. She either has to become a stereotyped “housewife,” or a stereotyped masculine “working woman.” The possibility of both realizing her feminine nature, and also having a place in the world beyond her family, is all but lost to her.

A young boy wants to be close to his family, and to understand the workings of the world and to explore them. But, in a town where work and family are separated, he, too, is forced to make impossible choices. He has to choose to be either loving to his family, or to be a truant who can experience the world. There is no way he can reconcile his two opposing needs; and he is likely to end up either as a juvenile delinquent, who has torn himself entirely from his family's love, or as a child who clings too tightly to his mother's skirts.

## PATTERNS WHICH ARE ALIVE

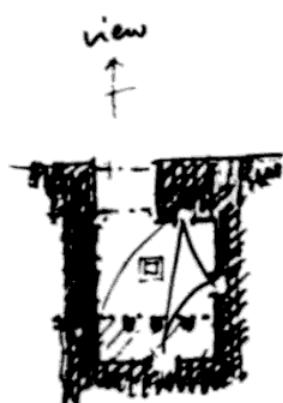
*In the same way, a courtyard which is properly formed, helps people come to life in it.*

Consider the forces at work in a courtyard. Most fundamental of all, people seek some kind of private outdoor space, where they can sit under the sky, see the stars, enjoy the sun, perhaps plant flowers. This is obvious. But there are more subtle forces too. For instance, when a courtyard is too tightly enclosed, has no view out, people feel uncomfortable, and tend to stay away . . . they need to see out into some larger and more distant space. Or again, people are creatures of habit. If they pass in and out of the courtyard, every day, in the course of their normal lives, the courtyard becomes familiar, a natural place to go . . . and it is used. But a courtyard with only one way in, a place you only go when you "want" to go there, is an unfamiliar place, tends to stay unused . . . people go more often to places which are familiar. Or again, there is a certain abruptness about suddenly stepping out, from the inside, directly to the outside . . . it is subtle, but enough to inhibit you. If there is a transitional space, a porch or a veranda, under cover, but open to the air, this is psychologically half way between indoors and outdoors, and makes it much easier, more simple, to take each of the smaller steps that brings you out into the courtyard . . .

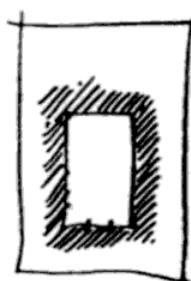
When a courtyard has a view out to a larger space, has crossing paths from different rooms, and has a veranda or a porch, these forces can resolve themselves. The view out makes it comfortable, the crossing paths help generate a sense of habit there, the porch makes it easier to go out more often . . . and gradually the courtyard becomes a pleasant customary place to be.

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*But in a courtyard where the pattern of the opening and veranda and crossing paths is missing, there are forces which conflict in such a way that no one can resolve them for himself.*



*A living courtyard*



*Dead courtyard*

Consider, for example, dead courtyard surrounded by walls on all sides, with no porch or halfway space between the indoors and the outdoors, and with no more than one path leading out to it.

In this place, the forces are in conflict. People want to go out, but their timidity, which makes them seek a place halfway to the outdoors, prevents them. They want to stay out, but the claustrophobic quality, and the enclosure, sends them back inside again. They hope to be there, but the lack of paths across the courtyard make it a dead and rarely visited place, which does not beckon them, and which instead tends to be filled with dead leaves, and forgotten plants. This does not help them come to life—instead it only causes tension, and frustrates them, and perpetuates their conflicts.

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*And the same can happen even in a window: A window with a "window place" helps a person come to life.*

Everyone knows how beautiful a room is when it has a bay window in it, or a window seat, or a special ledge next to the window, or a small alcove which is entirely glassed. The feeling that rooms with these kinds of places in them are especially beautiful is not merely whimsy. It has a fundamental organic reason behind it.

When you are in a living room for any length of time, two of the many forces acting on you are the following:

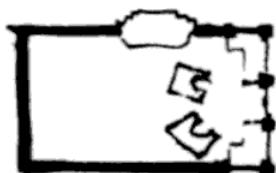
1. You have a tendency to go towards the light. People are phototropic, biologically, so that it is often comfortable to place yourself where the light is.
2. If you are in the room for any length of time, you probably want to sit down, and make yourself comfortable.

In a room which has at least one window that is a "place"—a window seat, a bay window, a window with a wide low windowsill that invites you to pull your favorite chair over to it because you can see out so easily, a special ledge next to the window, or a small alcove which is entirely glassed—in this room you can give in to both forces: you can resolve the conflict for yourself.

In short, you can be comfortable.

*But a room which has no window place, in which the windows are just "holes," sets up a hopeless inner conflict in me which I can't resolve.*

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*A window place*



*Holes in the wall*

If the windows are just holes in the wall, and there are no places where the windows are, one force pulls me towards the window; but another force pulls me toward the natural "places" in the room, where the comfortable chairs and tables are. So long as I am in this room, I am pushed and pulled by these two forces; there is nothing I can do to prevent the inner conflict they create in me.

The instinctive knowledge that a room is beautiful when it has a window place in it, is thus not an aesthetic whim. It is an instinctive expression of the fact that a room without a window place is filled with actual, palpable organic tension; and that a room which has one lacks this tension, and is, from a simple organic point of view, a better place to live.

*In each of these cases we have an example of a pattern which helps us resolve our conflicts, and an example of a pattern which prevents us.*

In each case, the first pattern allows us to resolve our forces for ourselves. It imposes nothing on us: but merely allows us to resolve our forces, as they are.

On the other hand, the second pattern prevents us from resolving our forces for ourselves. It makes it impossible for us to find an activity which will allow us to resolve our

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inner forces, and to make ourselves whole. We turn this way, then that way, rats in a trap, searching for some activity by which we can make ourselves whole. But there are none. We cannot find a way of work which keeps us at one with our family; we cannot enjoy our presence in the courtyard; and in the room without a window place, we cannot even wholeheartedly sit down. These surroundings will not let us take the steps we want to take, to be at peace with ourselves. We experience constant stress.

*Of course, stress and conflict are a normal and healthy part of human life.*

We constantly meet conflicts, or problems, during the course of the day: and each time, the body goes into a state of "stress" to mobilize itself, to deal with the conflict, to resolve the conflict.

This effect is physiological. We have, within our bodies, a specific physiological mechanism which produces stress. It produces, within us, a highly mobilized state of readiness, a state in which we have extra adrenalin, more alertness, faster heartbeat, higher muscle tone, more blood to the brain, more mental alertness . . . this highly alerted state, which is the state that we call "stress," arises whenever we encounter difficulty, or conflict . . . any situation in which we have to react, to solve a problem, meet a challenge . . .

Under normal conditions, when we solve the difficulty, cope with the threat, resolve the conflict, the stress then disappears, and all goes back to normal. In this normal

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sense, stress and conflict are an ordinary healthy part of everyday life. An organism could only exist without stress in an environment in which there were no conflicts or challenges at all—and under such circumstances the organism would atrophy and die.

*But a pattern which prevents us from resolving our conflicting forces, leaves us almost perpetually in a state of tension.*

For, if we live in a world where work is separated from family life, or where courtyards turn us away, or where windows are merely holes in the wall, we experience the stress of these inner and conflicting forces constantly. We can never come to rest. We are living then, in a world so made, so patterned, that we cannot, by any stratagem, defeat the tension, solve the problem, or resolve the conflict. In this kind of world the conflicts do not go away. They stay within us, nagging, tense . . . The build-up of stress, however minor, stays within us. We live in a state of heightened alertness, higher stress, more adrenalin, *all the time*.

This stress is then no longer functional at all. It becomes a huge drain on the system. Since the organism's capacity to enter the stressed state is already partly "used up" because it is perpetually in this state, our capacity to react to real new problems, dangers, and conflicts goes down, because the organism is constantly exhausted by the perpetual state of stress. .

And so the "bad" patterns—the window which doesn't work, the dead courtyard, the badly located workplace—

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these stress us, undermine us, affect us continuously. Indeed, in this fashion, each bad pattern in our environment constantly reduces us, cuts us down, reduces our ability to meet new challenges, reduces our capacity to live, and helps to make us dead . . .

While, on the other hand, the corresponding "good" patterns, when they are correctly made, help us to be alive, because they allow us to resolve our conflicts for ourselves. As we encounter them, we are always fresh, in the face of new encounters, new problems . . . and we are continuously renewed, and made alive . . .

*It is therefore clear that patterns play a concrete and objective role in determining the extent to which we come to life in any given place.*

Each pattern that creates conditions in which people can resolve the conflicts they experience, for themselves, reduces people's inner conflict, helps to put them in a state where they can meet more new challenges, and helps them to be more alive.

On the other hand, each pattern that creates conditions in which people experience conflicts which they cannot resolve for themselves, increases their inner stress, reduces their capacity to resolve other conflicts and meet other challenges, and therefore makes them less alive, more dead.

*But, beyond that, patterns are not merely instruments which help us live: they are themselves alive or dead.*

For, valuable as it is, the concept of patterns as life-giving

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or life-destroying does not go far enough. The arguments of the last few pages could make it seem as though a good pattern is merely one which is good for *us*. Yet this view, in its simple form, would lead to the same anthropocentric view of the world which has done so much damage in the past. And above all, it would lead, in the end, to the question—well, if it is to be good for us, then we must decide what we want—and all the arbitrariness which that entails.

It is time now, to recognize that this quality without a name in our surroundings which lets us become ourselves, is not, and cannot be created there, by any effort to make it “for” man.

*Good patterns are good because to some extent each one of them reaches the quality without a name itself.*

After all, the criterion of being good for *us* could never be a general criterion for patterns—because obviously, there are many patterns, essential to the harmonious ongoing life of the seas, the deserts, the forests—which are not directly good for us at all.

If the only criterion for a good pattern were its goodness for *us*, we should be forced to judge the ripples in a pond, or the crash of an ocean wave, according to whether we could get nice fish from it, or whether we liked the sound—and this would be ridiculous.

Certain patterns are simply resolved within themselves, within their proper contexts—in these contexts they are intrinsically alive—and it is this which makes them good.

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And this is as true for the pattern of an ocean wave as it is for the pattern of a courtyard in a house.

*Consider the ripples in a patch of wind-blown sand.*

When the wind blows, at any given speed, it picks up grains of sand, and carries them a few inches. It carries the smaller grains slightly farther, and the bigger grains not so far. Now, in any patch of sand, there are always a few irregularities—places where the sand is a little higher—and of course, as the wind sweeps over the sand, it is just the grains on these little ridges which get picked up and blown. Since, for any given wind speed the wind carries all the grains roughly the same distance, the blowing wind now gradually deposits a second ridge a certain fixed distance from the first, and parallel to it. This second ridge, as it builds up, is also especially vulnerable, so the grains from its top, once again, get blown on to form another ridge, the same distance again, and so on . . . .

*This pattern is a recognizable and constant pattern, because it is a truth about the laws which govern sand and wind.*

Within the proper context, this pattern creates and re-creates itself over and over again. It creates and re-creates itself whenever the wind blows on the sand.

Its goodness comes from the fact that it is true to its own inner forces, not from any special sense of purpose.

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*The same can happen in a garden, where the plants, and wind, and animals are perfectly in balance.*

Consider, for example, a corner of an orchard, where the sun warms the ground, the marrows grow, the bees pollinate the apple blossom, the worms bring air to the soil, the apple leaves fertilize the soil . . . . This pattern repeats itself, hundreds of times, in a thousand different gardens, and is always a source of life.

But the life of the pattern does not depend on the fact that it does something for "us"—but simply on the self-sustaining harmony, in which each process helps sustain the other processes, and in which the whole system of forces and processes keeps itself going, over and again, without creating extra forces that will tear it down.

*In short, saying these patterns are alive is more or less the same as saying they are stable.*

Compare the eroding gully, of chapter 2, with these patterns. The gully is unstable. It destroys itself. Its own action, gradually tears it down. These patterns on the other hand, have the quality, that their own action helps keep them alive.

You may wonder: what about cancer. Cancer is stable. It maintains itself. And "in the small" this is true. But it only maintains *itself*. Since, in order to maintain itself, it must in the end destroy what is around it—the very organism where it lives—it ultimately too destroys itself, by helping to destroy its surroundings.

And although it is true that nothing is perfectly stable,

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and true that everything changes in the end, there are still great differences of degree. The patterns which are alive maintain themselves in the long run, because they do nothing to destroy their own immediate surroundings, and they do nothing drastic, in the short run, to destroy themselves. As far as it is ever possible, they are alive, because they are so much in harmony, that they support themselves, and keep themselves alive, through their own inner structure.

*And just this also happens in patterns from the human realm. Their quality does not depend on purpose, but on their intrinsic stability.*

Consider two human patterns. On the one hand, consider the fact that certain Greek village streets have a band of whitewash, four or five feet wide, outside every house, so that people can pull their chairs out into the street, into a realm which is half theirs, half street, and so contribute to the life around them.

And on the other hand, consider the fact that cafés in Los Angeles are indoors, away from the sidewalk, in order to prevent the food from being contaminated.

Both these patterns have a purpose. One has the purpose of allowing people to contribute to the street life and to be part of it—to the extent they desire—by marking a domain which makes it possible. The other has the purpose of keeping people healthy, by making sure that they will not eat food that has dust particles on it. Yet one is alive; the other dead.

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*One, like the ripples in the sand, sustains itself and heals itself because it is in harmony with its own forces. The other one can only be maintained by force of law.*

The whitewashed band is so congruent with the forces in people's lives and with their feelings that it sustains itself—when the whitewash gets dirty or worn people take care of it themselves because the pattern is deeply connected to their own experience. From outside, it seems as though the whitewash maintains itself almost as if by magic.

The indoor café in Los Angeles is almost opposite: it has no such congruence with people's inner forces. It has to be maintained by force, by force of law—because, under the impact of its own forces, it would gradually deteriorate, and disappear. People want to be outdoors on a spring day, want to drink their beer or coffee in the open, to watch the world go by, but they are imprisoned in the café by the laws of public health. The situation is self-destroying, not only because it will change as soon as the law which upholds it disappears, but also in the more subtle sense that it is continuously creating just those inner conflicts, just those reservoirs of stress I spoke of earlier which will, unsatisfied, soon well up like a gigantic boil and leak out in some other form of destruction or refusal to cooperate with the situation.

*In short, a pattern lives when it allows its own internal forces to resolve themselves.*

And a pattern dies when it fails to provide a framework in

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which forces can resolve themselves, so that instead, the action of the forces, unresolved, works to destroy the pattern.

That is the distinction between the two patterns in the last example. The fact that both of them are based on human "purposes" is quite irrelevant.

And this explains the importance of the courtyard pattern which inspires use.

*It is the self-sustaining character the living courtyard has, which is the essence of its life.*

As time goes on, the courtyard which lives is also growing. More and more happens there. Because people enjoy being there, they plant flowers there, and look after them; they keep the garden furniture painted; and even if you go there when no one else is there, you can "feel" the presence of life there, because you can sense that people are taking care of it.

But the other lifeless courtyard, as time goes on, becomes more and more forgotten. No one enjoys going out there—so the paint is peeling; the gravel has weeds in it; even the sculpture standing there somehow looks abandoned. The courtyard which is whole, becomes richer and more whole; the courtyard which is unwhole slowly fades away and dies.

And so we see the wholeness of the living courtyard does not depend on any human values, external to the courtyard, invented by you, or by me, or by the people who live there. It is a fact intrinsic to its own organization.

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*And now we see just how the circle of the argument completes itself.*

In our own lives, we have the quality without a name when we are most intense, most happy, most wholehearted.

This comes about when we allow the forces we experience to run freely in us, to fly past each other, when we are able to allow our forces to escape the locked-in conflict which oppresses us.

But this freedom, this limpidity, occurs in us most easily when we are in a world whose patterns also let their forces loose . . . because, just as we are free when our own forces run most freely within us, so the places we are in are also free when their own forces (which include the forces that arise in us) themselves run free, and are themselves resolved . . .

*The quality without a name in us, our liveliness, our thirst for life, depends directly on the patterns in the world, and the extent to which they have this quality themselves.*

*Patterns which live, release this quality in us.*

*But they release this quality in us, essentially because they have it in themselves.*

## CHAPTER 7

### THE MULTIPLICITY OF LIVING PATTERNS

*The more living patterns there are in a thing—a room, a building, or a town—the more it comes to life as an entirety, the more it glows, the more it has this self-maintaining fire, which is the quality without a name.*





*When one pattern is alive, it resolves its own forces, it is self-sustaining, self-creating, and its internal forces continuously support themselves.*

*Now we shall see that this is just a special case of a more general effect by which the patterns in a town or building help to sustain each other, in which each pattern which is alive, itself spreads out its life.*

Consider the “architecture” of a system in which many patterns co-exist.

*Assume, for instance, that a certain building is made up from fifty patterns.*

These patterns define the building in its totality. They define its large scale organization, the layout of rooms, the way the ceilings work, the typical positions of the windows, the way the building stands up, its foundations, its roof, its windows, and its ornament.

To all intents and purposes, these fifty patterns define the physical structure of the building, and they are responsible for the events which happen in the building over and again—both the human events, and the non-human physical events.

*Each one of these fifty patterns can itself be alive, or dead.*

Or, to be more precise, each one of them is relatively more alive, or more dead—of course it is a matter of degree. But anyway, each of these fifty patterns, is

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relatively stable, and self-sustaining—or it is relatively unstable and self-destroying.

*Consider what happens when several of these fifty patterns are more “dead.”*

Each of these “dead” patterns is incapable of containing its own forces, and keeping them in balance. What happens then, is that these forces leak out, beyond the confines of the pattern where they occur, and start to infect the other patterns.

*Consider, for example, the pattern of a column and beam structure without a brace or capital where the column meets the beam.*

In every structure, for any given pattern of loading, there are varying stress concentrations throughout the structure. Certain points, because of their configuration, tend to have very high stress concentrations—right-angle connections between columns and beams are one example. In such a configuration, as the stress concentration goes beyond the bounds of the material, small cracks develop. The cracks ripple outward from this point and weaken the structure at other surrounding points. So far the self-destroying nature of the system is still entirely in terms of mechanical forces. But now a new kind of effect begins. The small cracks attract water by capillary action: the water enters into the material, and damages its load-bearing capacities still further. When the ice comes, the

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water freezes, expands, and does still further damage. Next time the loads create a concentration of stress in that damaged area, they do still further damage, and the structure ruptures further.

*Or consider the pattern of a courtyard which is too enclosed.*

In the living courtyard, we are nourished; we go out when we feel like going out, the courtyard gets looked after, we still feel like being there; we are relaxed and free whether we go out there or stay inside.

In the dead courtyard none of this is true. We try to go out, but are frustrated, because the courtyard itself pushes us away. We still need, somehow, to go out; the forces remain within us, but can find no resolution here. We have no way of resolving the situation for ourselves. The unresolved conflict remains underground; it contributes the stress which is building up. First, it reduces our capacity to resolve other conflicts for ourselves, and makes it even more likely that unresolved forces will spill over in another situation. Second, if the force does spill over, it may create even greater tension, in another situation, where there is no proper outlet for it.

Suppose, for example, the people who want to be outside go out instead and sit on the road, where trucks are going by. It is OK. But then perhaps a child gets hurt. Or, even if a child does not actually get hurt, the mother fears for it, and shouts, and conveys a continuous sense of

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unease to the child, so that his play is spoiled. . . . In one fashion or another, the effects always ripple out.

You may say—well, people can adapt. But in the process of adapting, they destroy some other part of themselves. We are very adaptive, it is true. But we can also adapt to such an extent that we do ourselves harm. The process of adaptation has its costs. It may be, for example, that the child adapts, by turning to books. The desire to play in the street conforms now to the dangers, and the mother's cries. But now the person has lost some of the exuberant desire to run about. He has adapted, but he has made his own life less rich, less whole, by being forced to do so.

*The “bad” patterns are unable to contain the forces which occur in them.*

As a result, these forces spill over into other nearby systems. The cracks in the column-beam connection, in time, cause water damage in the wall. And the courtyard which fails makes children want to play outside and causes stress and danger in the street.

But these forces make other nearby patterns fail as well. The pattern of the street may not be conceived as a place for children to play. So, suddenly, a pattern of the street, which might be in balance without this force, itself becomes unstable and inadequate.

And the pattern of the wall-to-beam connection—which was originally not conceived as having to cope with a

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leaking flow of water from above, within the beam—is suddenly unstable and inadequate also, because the context and the forces which it tries to put in balance, have changed.

*In the end, the whole system must collapse.*

The slight stress caused by the overflow of forces from these first unstable patterns spreads first to nearby patterns—and then spreads still further, since these nearby patterns become unstable and destructive too.

The delicate configuration which is self-creating, and in balance with its forces, is for some reason interrupted—prevented from occurring, placed in a position in which its configuration can no longer recreate itself.

What then happens to the forces in this system?

So long as the self-creating balanced configuration existed, the forces were in balance.

But once the configuration is put out of balance, these forces remain in the system, unresolved, wild, out of balance, until in the end, the whole system must collapse.

*By contrast, assume now that each one of the fifty patterns out of which the building is made is alive and self-resolving.*

In this case just the opposite occurs. Each pattern encompasses, and contains, the forces which it has to deal with; and there are no other forces in the system. Under

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these circumstances, each event which happens is resolved. The forces come into play, and resolve themselves, within the patterns as they are.

*Each pattern helps to sustain other patterns.*

The quality without a name occurs, not when an isolated pattern occurs, but when an entire system of patterns, interdependent, at many levels, is all stable and alive.

We may see the sand ripples anywhere where we choose to put loose sand under the wind.

But when the wind blows across the sea, over the inland marshes, and the sand ripples support the dunes between the two, and the sandpiper walks out, the sand fleas hop, the shifting of the dunes is held in check by grasses which maintain themselves and the sandpiper—then we have a portion of the world, alive at many levels at once, beginning to have the quality without a name.

*The individual configuration of any one pattern requires other patterns to keep itself alive.*

For instance, a **WINDOW PLACE** is stable, and alive, only if many other patterns which go with it, and are needed to support it, are alive themselves: for instance, **LOW WINDOWSILL**, to solve the problem of the view and the relation to the ground; **CASEMENT WINDOW** to solve the problem of the way the air comes in, to allow people to lean out and breathe the outside air; **SMALL PANES** to

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let the window generate a strong connection between the inside and the outside.

If these smaller patterns, which resolve smaller systems of forces in the window place, are missing from the window place itself, then the pattern doesn't work. Imagine for instance a so-called window place, with high windowsills, fixed windows, and huge sheets of plate glass. There are so many subsidiary forces, still in conflict, that the window place still cannot work, because it still fails to resolve the special system of forces it is supposed to solve. To be in balance, each pattern must be supported by a situation in which both the larger patterns it belongs to, and the smaller patterns it is made of, are themselves alive.

*In an entrance which is whole, many patterns must cooperate.*

Try to imagine an entrance which is whole. I have in mind an entry way, perhaps to a larger building: and for it to be whole, it must contain at least these elements: the arch, or beam, which brings the loads down from above; a certain heaviness perhaps, in the members which bring these forces down, and mark the edges of the entrance way; a certain depth, or penetration, which takes the entrance a distance in, deep enough, so that the light is changing on the way through the entry way; some ornament, around the archway, or the opening, which marks the entrance as distinct, and gives it lightness; and, in some form, things that I would somehow see as

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"feet"—things sticking out, at the bases of the sides—they might be seats, the feet of columns, something anyway which connects the sides to the ground, and makes them one. Now this entrance might be whole. I doubt though, if it could be whole with any less than that.

So, somehow, this system of patterns, which I have loosely sketched, forms the basis for what is needed in the entrance of a larger building: and these patterns are a system; they are interdependent. It is true that each one can be explained, in its own terms, as an isolated thing, which is needed to resolve certain forces. But, also, these few patterns form a whole, they work as a system. . . .

### *The same in a neighborhood.*

Again there are certain rough patterns, more rooted in human events, in this case, which must be there together, in order for us to experience the neighborhood as whole. . . .

A boundary, certainly, more or less clearly marked; and gateways, not emphatic, but gently present, where the paths that pass in and out cross the boundaries: inside, a piece of common land, with children playing, animals grazing maybe; seats where old people sit and watch what is happening; a focus to the whole; the families themselves, grouped in some kind of clusters, so that there are a visible number of them, not too many, for the neighborhood as a whole; water somewhere; workshops and work, perhaps towards the boundary; houses of course, too, but clustered; trees, somewhere—and sun-

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light somewhere too, intense in at least one place. Now, the neighborhood begins to form a whole.

*Now we begin to see what happens when the patterns in the world collaborate.*

Each living pattern resolves some system of forces, or allows them to resolve themselves. Each pattern creates an organization which maintains that portion of the world in balance.

And a building in which all the patterns are alive has no disturbing forces in it. The people are relaxed; the plants are comfortable; the animals pursue their natural paths; the forces of erosion are in balance with the natural process of repair which the configuration of the building encourages; the forces of gravity are in balance with the configuration of the beams and vaults, and columns, and the blowing of the wind; the rainwater flows naturally, in such a way that it helps just those plants to grow which, for other reasons, are themselves in balance with the cracks in the paving stones, the beauty of the entrance, the smell of roses in the evening outdoor room . . . .

*The more life-giving patterns there are in a building the more beautiful it seems.*

It shows, in a thousand small ways, that it is made, with care and with attention to the small things we might need.

## MULTIPLICITY OF LIVING PATTERNS

A seat, an armrest, a door handle which is comfortable to hold, a terrace shaded from the heat, a flower growing just along the entrance where I can bend down and smell it as I pass into the garden, light falling on the top of the stair, where it is dark, so that I can walk toward it, color on the door, ornament around the door, so that I know, with a small leap of the heart, that I am back again, a cellar half down into the ground, where milk and wine can be kept cool.

*Just so in a town.*

The town which is alive, and beautiful, for me, shows, in a thousand ways, how all its institutions work together to make people comfortable, and deep seated in respect for themselves.

Places outdoors where people eat, and dance; old people sitting in the street, watching the world go by; places where teenage boys and girls hang out, within the neighborhood, free enough of their parents that they feel themselves alive, and stay there; car places where cars are kept, shielded, if there are many of them, so that they don't oppress us by their presence; work going on among the families, children playing where work is going on, and learning from it.

*And finally the quality without a name appears, not when an isolated pattern lives, but when an entire system of patterns, interdependent at many levels, is all stable and alive.*

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A building or a town becomes alive when every pattern in it is alive: when it allows each person in it, and each plant and animal, and every stream, and bridge, and wall and roof, and every human group and every road, to become alive in its own terms.

And as that happens, the whole town reaches the state that individual people sometimes reach at their best and happiest moments, when they are most free.

*Remember the warm peach tree, flattened against the wall, and facing south.*

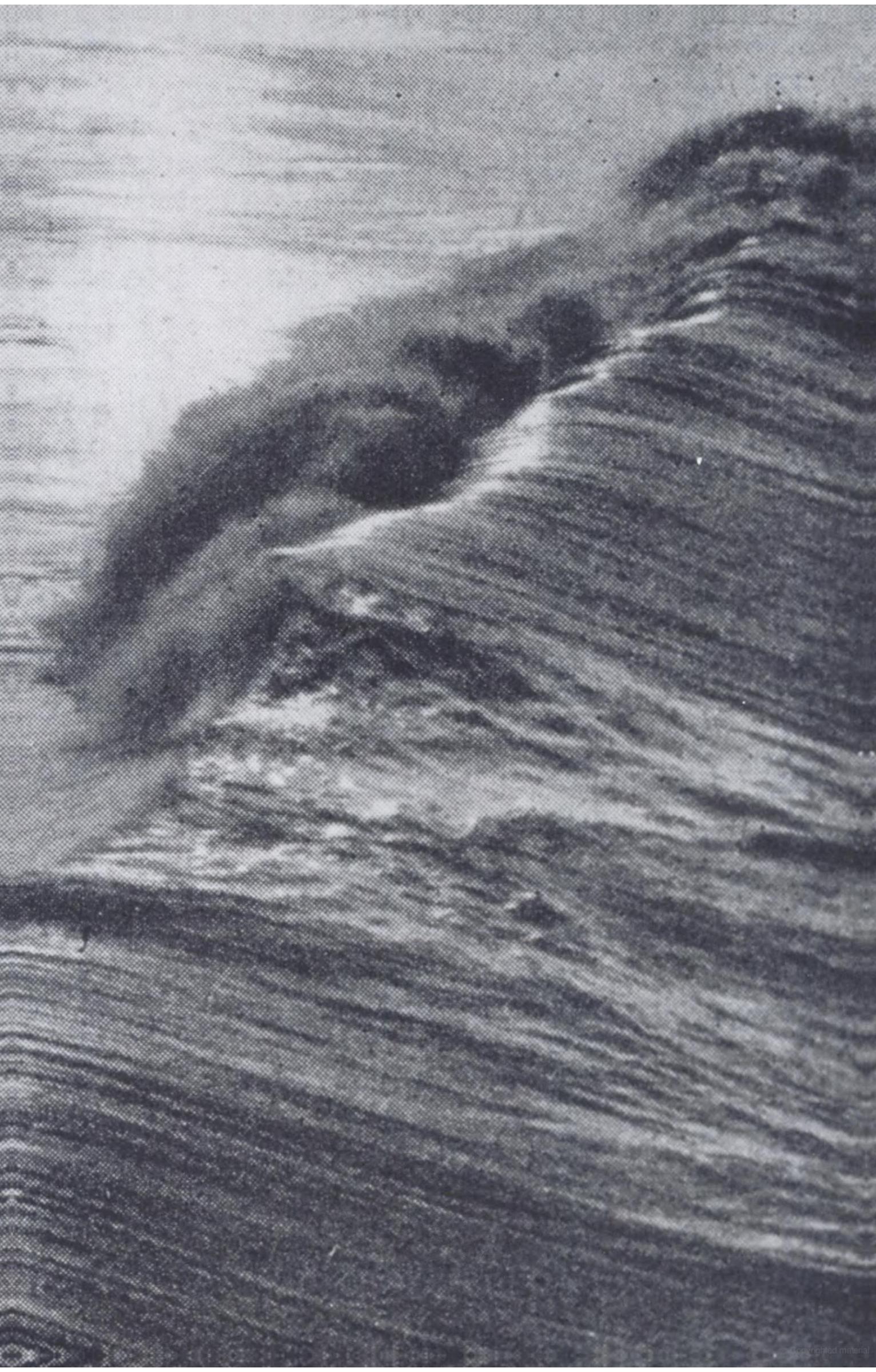
*At this stage, the whole town will have this quality, simmering and baking in the sun of its own processes.*

## CHAPTER 8

### THE QUALITY ITSELF

*And when a building has this fire, then it becomes a part of nature. Like ocean waves, or blades of grass, its parts are governed by the endless play of repetition and variety, created in the presence of the fact that all things pass. This is the quality itself.*











*Finally, in this last chapter of part I, we shall see what happens geometrically, when a building or a town is made entirely of patterns which are living.*

*For when a town or building lives, we can always recognize its life—not only in the obvious happiness which happens there, not only in its freedom and relaxedness—but in its purely physical appearance too.*

*It always has a certain geometric character.*

What happens in a world—a building or a town—in which the patterns have the quality without a name, and are alive?

The most important thing which happens is that every part of it, at every level, becomes unique. The patterns which control a portion of the world, are themselves fairly simple. But when they interact, they create slightly different overall configurations at every place. This happens because no two places on earth are perfectly alike in their conditions. And each small difference, itself contributes to the difference in conditions which the other patterns face.

*This is the character of nature.*

“The character of nature” is no mere poetic metaphor. It is a specific morphological character, a geometric character, which happens to be common to all those things in the world which are not man-made.

To make this character of nature clear, let me contrast it with the character of the buildings being built today. One of the most pervasive features of these buildings is the fact

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that they are "modular." They are full of identical concrete blocks, identical rooms, identical houses, identical apartments in identical apartment buildings. The idea that a building can—and ought—to be made of modular units is one of the most pervasive assumptions of twentieth-century architecture.

Nature is never modular. Nature is full of almost similar units (waves, raindrops, blades of grass)—but though the units of one kind are all alike in their broad structure, no two are ever alike in detail.

1. The same broad features keep recurring over and over again.
2. In their detailed appearance these broad features are never twice the same.

On the one hand all oak trees have the same overall shape, the same thickened twisted trunk, the same crinkled bark, the same shaped leaves, the same proportion of limbs to branches to twigs. On the other hand, no two trees are quite the same. The exact combination of height and width and curvature never repeats itself; we cannot even find two leaves which are the same.

*The ocean waves all have this character.*

The patterns out of which the wave is made are always the same: the curl of the wave; the drops of spray; the spacing of the waves; the fact that roughly every seventh wave is larger than the others . . . There are not many of these patterns.

Yet at the same time, the actual concrete waves themselves are always different. This happens because the

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patterns interact differently at every spot. They interact differently with one another. And they interact differently with the details of their surroundings. So every actual wave is different, at the same time that all its patterns are the same precisely as the patterns in the other waves.

*So do the drops within the waves.*

The distinction between the “global” patterns and the concrete details is not a matter of size. What is true for the waves is also true for the individual droplets. Each drop of a given size has more or less the same shape—yet, again, under a finer microscope, each one is slightly different from the next. At each scale there are global invariants, and detailed variations. In such a system, there is endless variety; and yet at the same time there is endless sameness. No wonder we can watch the waves for hours; no wonder that a blade of grass is still fascinating, even after we have seen a million of them. In all this sameness, we never feel oppressed by sameness. In all this variety, we never feel lost, as we do in the presence of variety we cannot understand.

*Even the atoms have this character.*

It may surprise you to realize that the same rule even holds for atoms. No two atoms are the same. Each atom is slightly different, according to its immediate environment.

It is particularly crucial to discuss this fact about atoms,

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because so many people take "modular" construction for granted. If you challenge the builder of a modular environment, and say that such an environment cannot be alive, he will very likely say that nature itself is built from modular components—namely atoms—and that what is good for nature is good enough for him. In this sense, atoms have become the archetypal images of modular construction.

But atoms are all unique, just like raindrops and blades of grass. Because we use the symbol C for every atom of carbon, and because we know that every atom of carbon has the same number of protons and electrons in it, we assume that all atoms of carbon are identical. We think of a crystal as an array of identical parts. Yet the fact is that the orbits of the electrons are influenced by the orbits of electrons in nearby atoms, and are therefore different in each atom, according to its position in the crystal. If we could examine every atom in very great detail indeed, we would find that no two atoms are exactly alike: each is subtly different, according to its position in the larger whole.

*There is always repetition of the patterns.*

The patterns repeat themselves because, under a given set of circumstances, there are always certain fields of relationships which are most nearly well adapted to the forces which exist.

The shape of the wave is generated by the dynamics of the water, and it repeats itself wherever these dynamics occur. The shape of the drops is generated by the balance

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between gravity and surface tension in the falling drop, and it repeats itself under all circumstances where these are the dominating forces. And the shape of the atoms is created by the inner forces among particles, which once again repeats itself, approximately, everywhere these particles and forces coincide.

*But there is always variation and uniqueness in the way the patterns manifest themselves.*

Each pattern is a generic solution to some system of forces in the world. But the forces are never quite the same. Since the exact configuration of the surroundings at any one place and time is always unique, the configuration of the forces which the system is subject to is also unique—no other system of forces is ever subject to exactly the same configuration of forces. If the system is responsible to the forces it is subject to, it follows that the system too, must be unique; it cannot be exactly like any other, even though it is roughly similar. This is not an accidental consequence of the uniqueness of each system: it is an essential aspect of the life and wholeness of each part.

*In short, there is a character in natural things which is created by the fact that they are reconciled, exactly, to their inner forces.*

For from the play of repetition and variety at every level, it follows that the overall geometry is always loose and fluid. There is an indefinable roughness, a looseness,

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a relaxedness, which nature always has: and this relaxed geometry comes directly from the balance of the repetition and variety.

In a forest which is alive, it would be impossible for all the trees to be identical; and it would be impossible for one tree itself to be alive, if its leaves were all the same. No system whose component parts are so unresponsive to the forces they are subject to, could maintain itself successfully; it could not be alive or whole. It is a crucial fact about the wholeness of the tree that every leaf be slightly different from the next. And of course, since the same argument applies at every level, it means that the component parts of nature are unique at every level.

*This character will happen anywhere, where a part of the world is so well reconciled to its own inner forces that it is true to its own nature.*

All those things which we loosely call *nature*—the grass, the trees, the winter wind, deep blue water, yellow crocuses, foxes, and the rain—in short the things which man has not made—are just those things which are *true* to their *own* nature. They are just those things which are perfectly reconciled with their own inner forces. And the things which are not “nature” are just those things which are at odds with their own inner forces.

And any system which is whole must have this character of nature. The morphology of nature, the softness of its lines, the almost infinite variety and the lack of gaps—all

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this follows directly from the fact that nature is whole. Mountains, rivers, forests, animals, rocks, flowers all have this character. But they do not have it simply by accident. They have it because they are whole, and because all their parts are whole. Any system which is whole must have this character.

*It follows that a building which is whole must always have the character of nature, too.*

This does not mean that a building or a town which is alive will look like a tree, or like a forest. But, it will have the same balance of repetition and variety that nature does.

*On the one hand, patterns will repeat themselves, just as they do in nature.*

If the patterns out of which a thing is made are alive, then we shall see them over and over again, just because they make sense. If the way a window looks onto a tree makes sense, then we shall see it over and again; if the relationship between the doors make sense, we shall see it for almost every door; if the way that the tiles are hung makes sense, we shall see almost all the tiles hung in this way; if the arrangement of the kitchen in the house makes sense, it will be repeated in the neighborhood.

In short, we shall find the same elements, repeating over and over again—and we shall see the rhythms of their repetition. The boards in the siding of the house, the

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balusters in the railing of a balustrade, the windows in the buildings, panes within the windows, the same approximate roof shape repeated over and again, the similar columns, similar rooms, similar ceilings, ornaments repeated, trees and the boles of trees repeated in their pattern, seats repeated, whitewash repeated, colors repeated, avenues, gardens, fountains, roadside places, trellises, arcades, paving stones, blue tiles . . . all repeated, whichever of them are appropriate in any given place.

*On the other hand, of course, we shall find the physical parts in which the patterns manifest themselves unique and slightly different each time that they occur.*

Because the patterns interact, and because the conditions are slightly different around each individual occurrence, the columns in an arcade will all be slightly different, the boards in the siding of the house will be slightly different, the windows will vary slightly, the house will vary, trees' positions will vary, seats will be different even at the same time that they recur . . .

*The repetition of patterns is quite a different thing from the repetition of parts.*

When two physical windows are identical the relationships which they have to their surroundings are different, because their surroundings are different.

But when the relationships to their surroundings—their

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patterns—are the same, the windows themselves will all be different, because the sameness of the patterns, interacting with the difference of the contexts, makes the windows different.

*Indeed, the different parts will be unique because the patterns are the same.*

Consider, for example, the pattern SUNNY PLACE, which creates a spot in the sun, along the south side of a building, just where the outdoor space gets used, and where the building opens out to it. This pattern may create a series of similar spots, along the southern edge of a long row of houses—but then, just where the houses turn a corner, it generates a special place, which sticks out half into the street, low walls to protect its sides, perhaps a canvas canopy—a place which everyone in the neighborhood remembers and looks for.

This unique place is not created by some arbitrary searching for uniqueness. It is created by the repetition of the pattern which calls for a spot in the sun, and by the interaction of this pattern with the world.

And we shall find the same at every scale. Where there are many houses, the houses will be similar in form, but each will be unique, according to the nature of the people who live in it, and because each has a slightly different combination of relationships to the land, the sun, the streets, the community.

The windows of a given house will all be broadly similar, according to their patterns, but again no two will

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be the same in detail—each will be different according to its exact position, the direction of the light, the size of room, the plants outside the room.

*And from the repetition of the patterns, and uniqueness of the parts, it follows, as it does in nature, that buildings which are alive are fluid and relaxed in their geometry.*

Again, this doesn't mean that buildings ought to look like animals, or plants. The vertical, the horizontal, and the right angle are too central to the nature of human space to make that possible. But in a place which is alive, these right angles are rarely exact; the spacing of parts is hardly ever perfectly even. One column is a little thicker than another, one angle is a little larger than a right angle, one doorway is just a little smaller than the next, each roof line departs just an inch or two from the horizontal.

A building in which angles are all perfectly right angles, in which all windows are exactly the same size, and in which all columns are perfectly vertical, and all floors perfectly horizontal, can only reach its false perfection by ignoring its surroundings utterly. The apparent imperfections of a place which is alive are not imperfections at all. They follow from the process which allows each part to be fitted carefully to its position.

*This is the character of nature. But its fluidity, its roughness, its irregularity, will not be true, unless it is made in the knowledge that it is going to die.*

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No matter how much the person who makes a building is able to understand the rhythm of regularity and irregularity, it will mean nothing so long as he creates it with the idea that it must be preserved because it is so precious.

If you want to preserve a building, you will try to make it in materials which last and last forever. You will try to make sure that this creation can be preserved intact, in just its present state, forever. Canvas must be ruled out because it has to be replaced; tiles must be so hard that they will not crack, and set in concrete, so that they cannot move, and so that weeds will not grow up to split the paving; chairs must be made perfect, of materials which never wear or fade; trees must be nice to look at, but may not bear fruit, because the dropped fruit might offend someone.

But to reach the quality without a name, a building must be made, at least in part, of those materials which age and crumble. Soft tile and brick, soft plaster, fading coats of paint, canvas which has been bleached a little and torn by the wind, . . . fruit, dropping on the paths, and being crushed by people walking over it, grass growing in the cracks between the stones, an old chair, patched, and painted, to increase its comfort . . .

None of this can happen in a world which lasts forever.

*The character of nature can't arise without the presence and the consciousness of death.*

So long as human images distort the character of nature, it is because there is no wholehearted acceptance of the

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nature of things. So long as there is not wholehearted acceptance of the nature of things, people will distort nature, by exaggerating differences, or by exaggerating similarities. They do this, ultimately, in order to stave off the thought and fact of death.

*So finally the fact is, that to come to this, to make a thing which has the character of nature, and to be true to all the forces in it, to remove yourself, to let it be, without interference from your image-making self—all this requires that we become aware that all of it is transitory; that all of it is going to pass.*

Of course nature itself is also always transitory. The trees, the river, the humming insects—they are all short-lived; they will all pass. Yet we never feel sad in the presence of these things. No matter how transitory they are, they make us feel happy, joyful.

But when we make our own attempt to create nature in the world around us, and succeed, we cannot escape the fact that we are going to die. This quality, when it is reached, in human things, is always sad; it makes us sad; and we can even say that any place where a man tries to make the quality, and be like nature, cannot be true, unless we can feel the slight presence of this haunting sadness there, because we know at the same time we enjoy it, that it is going to pass.