

# The Phenomenon Of Life Christopher W Alexander

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this book brings together key works of the noted architect and architectural theorist christopher alexander many of which have not been published before the book contains twenty five essays and other works many chosen from the newly organized christopher alexander archive providing a window into the ideas and thought process of one of the most innovative architectural thinkers of the twentieth century the items span alexander s fifty year career beginning with an early version of his phd dissertation based on fieldwork in india continuing to fifteen years in the development of a pattern language one of the best selling books in the history of architecture and proceeding to the writing of the nature of order alexander s four volume masterwork and beyond the writings combine theory and descriptions of practice and together support a blueprint for the development of a new humane way of building while also providing a window into the mind of an extraordinary thinker teacher and professional

focusing on a plan for an extension to the university of oregon this book shows how any community the size of a university or small town might go about designing its own future environment with all members of the community participating personally or by representation it is a brilliant companion volume to a pattern language

volume 1 the timeless way of building lays the foundation of the series it presents a new theory of architecture building and planning which forms the basis for a new traditional post industrial architecture created by the people read it for inspiration as a practicing planner an educator or a student you cannot help but be challenged and stimulated by this book dennis michael ryan journal of the american planning association volume 2 a pattern language is a working document for such an architecture it is an archetypal language which allows lay persons to design for themselves i believe this to be perhaps the most important book on architectural design published this century every library every school every environmental action group every architect and every first year student should have a copy tony ward architectural design volume 3 the oregon experiment shows how this theory may be implemented describing a new planning process f

this introductory volume to alexander s other works a pattern of language and the oregon experiment explains concepts fundamental to his original approaches to the theory and application of architecture

christopher alexander s series of ground breaking books including a pattern language and the timeless way of building have pointed to fundamental

truths of the way we build revealing what gives life and beauty and true functionality to our buildings and towns now in the nature of order alexander explores the properties of life itself highlighting a set of well defined structures present in all order and in all life from micro organisms and mountain ranges to good houses and vibrant communities the foundations of modern scientific thought are firmly rooted in a conception that the universe is a machinelike entity a play of baubles machines trinkets to this day our real daily experience of ourselves has no clear place in science it is little wonder that a machine like worldview has supported the deadly architecture of the last century this mechanistic thinking and the consequent investment oriented tracts of houses condominiums and offices have dehumanized our cities and our lives how are spirit soul emotion feeling to be introduced into a building or a street or a development project in modern times the luminous ground the fourth book of the nature of order contains what is perhaps the deepest revelation in the four volume work here is a geometrical view of space and matter seamlessly connected to our own private personal experience as sentient and knowing creatures this is not merely an emotional appendix to the scientific theory of the other books it is at the core of the entire work and is rooted in the fact that our two sides our analytical thinking selves and our vulnerable emotional personalities as human beings are coterminous they must be harnessed at one and the same time if we are ever to really make sense of what is around us and be able to create a living world alexander breaks away completely from the one sided mechanical model of buildings or neighbourhoods as mere assemblages of technically generated interchangeable parts he shows us conclusively that a spiritual emotional and personal basis must underlie every act of building his buildings and works of art demonstrate in detail what he means and then in the middle of the book comes the linchpin of the work a one hundred page chapter on colour which lavishly illustrates and dramatically conveys the way that consciousness and spirit can make their appearance in the world altogether present throughout this fourth and final book is a new cosmology uniting matter and consciousness consciousness inextricably joined to the substrate of matter present in all matter and providing all wholeness with its material cognitive and spiritual underpinnings this view though radical conforms to our most ordinary daily intuitions it may provide a path for those contemporary scientists who are beginning to see consciousness as the underpinning of all matter and thus as a proper object of scientific study taken as a whole the four books create a sweeping new conception of the nature of things which is both objective and structural hence part of science and also personal in that it shows how and why things have the power to touch the human heart a step has been taken through which these two domains the domain of geometrical structure and the feeling it creates kept separate during four centuries of scientific thought from 1600 to 2000 have finally been united the nature of order constitutes the backbone of building beauty ecologic design construction process an initiative aimed at radically reforming architecture education with the emphasis of making as a way to access a transformative

vision of the world the 15 fundamental properties of life guide our work and have given us much more than a set of solutions the nature of order has given us the framework in which we can search and build up our own solutions in order to be authentically sustainable buildings and places have to be cared for and loved over generations beautiful buildings and places are more likely to be loved and they become more beautiful and loved through the attention given to them over time beauty is therefore not a luxury or an option it includes and transcends technological innovation and is a necessary requirement for a truly sustainable culture

christopher alexander s series of ground breaking books including a pattern language and the timeless way of building have pointed to fundamental truths of the way we build revealing what gives life and beauty and true functionality to our buildings and towns now in the nature of order alexander explores the properties of life itself highlighting a set of well defined structures present in all order and in all life from micro organisms and mountain ranges to good houses and vibrant communities from a practical point of view a vision of a living world is the most compelling of the four books hundreds of photographs and plans of new buildings that have living structure and the processes which gave them life demonstrate for the first time what the concept of living structure can mean in buildings of our time and of the future the really good building the really good space places that reach an archetypal level of human experience reaching across centuries across continents across cultures across technology across building materials and climates they connect us to ourselves they connect us to our feelings what is more as we study them we realize that they all share a similar geometry how are they made the practical task of making beauty is the principal subject of this volume hundreds of examples of buildings and places are shown new forms for large buildings public spaces communities neighborhoods lead to discussions about equally important small scale of detail and ornament and colour many of the examples are built by alexander and his colleagues other buildings explored take us around the world and through time with these examples lay people architects builders artists and students are able to make this new framework real for themselves understand how it works and understand its significance the book is a feast for the eyes and mind and heart places created by living process book 2 have living structure book 1 and they connect us to our essence as people book 4 the seven hundred pictures of alexander s buildings and works of art shown in this book demonstrate in detail what he means taken as a whole the four books create a sweeping new conception of the nature of things which is both objective and structural hence part of science and also personal in that it shows how and why things have the power to touch the human heart a step has been taken through which these two domains the domain of geometrical structure and the feeling it creates kept separate during four centuries of scientific thought from

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christopher alexander s series of groundbreaking books including the timeless way of building and a pattern language have illuminated the fundamental truths of traditional ways of building revealing what gives life and beauty and true functionality to buildings and towns now in the nature of order alexander delves into the essential properties of life itself highlighting a common set of well defined structures that he believes are present in all order and in all life from micro organisms and mountain ranges to the creation of good houses and vibrant communities in the phenomenon of life the first volume in this masterwork alexander ponders the nature of order as an intellectual basis for a new architecture proposing a well defined scientific view of the world in which all space matter has perceptible degrees of life with this view as foundation we can ask precise questions about what must be done to create life in the world whether in a single room a doorknob a neighborhood even in a vast region he presents the basic tenets of the concept expanding on his theories of centers and of wholeness as a structure and describes the fifteen properties from which he feels wholeness may be built he also argues that living structure is at once both personal and structural related not only to the geometry of space and how things work but to human beings whose lives are ultimately based on feeling thus order as the foundation of all things and as the foundation of all architecture is both rooted in substance and rooted in feeling here then is the culmination of decades of intense thinking by one of the most innovative architects alive

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as an innovative thinker about building and planning christopher alexander has attracted a devoted following his seminal books the timeless way of building a pattern language and the oregon experiment defined a radical and fundamentally new process of environmental design alexander now gives us the latest book in his series a book that puts his theories to the test and shows what sort of production system can create the kind of environment he has envisioned the production of houses centers around a group of buildings which alexander and his associates built in 1976 in northern mexico each house is different and the book explains how each family helped to lay out and construct its own home according to the family s own needs and in the framework of the pattern language numerous diagrams and tables as well as a variety of anecdotes make the day today process clear the mexican project however is only the starting point for a comprehensive theory of housing production the production of houses describes seven principles which apply to any system of production in any part of the world for housing of any cost in any climate or culture or at any density in the last part of the book the shift of paradigm alexander describes in detail the devastating nature of the revolution in world view which is contained in his proposal for housing construction and its overall implications for deep seated cultural change

scientifically this is perhaps the most exciting of the four books how do beautiful creations come into being nature can make an infinite number of human faces each one unique each one beautiful the same is true for daffodils streams and stars but man made creations especially the towns and buildings of the 20th century have only occasionally been really good more often mediocre and in the last 50 years have most often been deadly what is the reason for the difference it hinges on the deep nature of the processes we use merely understanding the geometry of beautiful and living form the topic of book 1 is not enough to help us create such a living geometry in the 20th century our society was locked into deadly processes which created our current built environment process that most people were not really aware of and did not question despite their best efforts and intentions architects and planners working within these processes could not achieve a living built environment life and beauty in the built world arise only from processes which allow living structure to unfold the secret lies in knowing as nature does what must happen in what order what sequence of events allows a living form to unfold successfully here in book 2 alexander puts forward a fully developed theory of living process he defines conditions for a process to be living that is capable of generating living structure he shows how such processes work and how they may be created at the core of the new theory is the theory of structure preserving transformations this concept new in scientific thinking is based on the concept of wholeness defined in book 1 a structure

preserving transformation is one which preserves extends and enhances the wholeness of a system structure preserving transformations provide the means for any step by step process social biological architectural or technical to reach configurations which are most profound most capable of supporting life the process of creation whether in the formation of a single object or in the piecemeal aggregation of a town requires this sort of generative process a careful and deliberate sequence of steps in which each step creates the context for the next one and each next wholeness is derived from the previous wholeness our billions of beautiful and unique human faces come from one class of sequences driven by these sequences an initial cell differentiates again and again until beautiful and complex human beings emerge infinitely various always harmonious making changes in society so that streets buildings rooms gardens and towns may be generated by hundreds of such sequences requires massive transformations this book is the first blueprint of those transformations

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these notes are about the process of design the process of inventing things which display new physical order organization form in response to function this book opening with these words presents an entirely new theory on the process of design

the venerable cities of the past such as venice or amsterdam convey a feeling of wholeness an organic unity that surfaces in every detail large and small in restaurants shops public gardens even in balconies and ornaments but this sense of wholeness is lacking in modern urban design with architects absorbed in problems of individual structures and city planners preoccupied with local ordinances it is almost impossible to achieve in this groundbreaking volume the newest in a highly acclaimed series by the center for environmental structure architect and planner christopher alexander presents a new theory of urban design which attempts to recapture the process by which cities develop organically to discover the kinds of laws needed to create a growing whole in a city alexander proposes here a preliminary set of seven rules which embody the process at a practical level and which are consistent with the day to day demands of urban development he then puts these rules to the test setting out with a number of his graduate students to simulate the urban redesign of a high density part of san francisco initiating a project that encompassed some ninety different design problems including warehouses hotels fishing piers a music hall and a public square this extensive experiment is documented project by project with detailed discussion of how each project satisfied the seven rules accompanied by floorplans elevations street grids axonometric diagrams and photographs of the scaled down model which clearly illustrate the discussion a new theory of urban design provides an entirely new theoretical framework for the discussion of urban problems one that goes far to remedy the defects which cities have today

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