

History of Architecture and Culture – 6

Lecture 3

Works of Robert Venturi

Now let's see what famous people wrote about modernism that may people think away from modernism. Today we have two important writers and two important architects and writers. These both these gentle men are more famous for the literary and critic work rather than their buildings. While Robert Venturi was also good with his practice. He has also received the Pritzker prize which is the highest prize in architecture it's like the Oscar of architecture. So now let's get in to what Robert Venturi is talking about.

Robert Charles Venturi, junior is an American architect, he was the founding principle of the firm Venturi Scott Brown and Associates, and he was one of the major influential figures in the Twentieth century.

He was awarded the Pritzker prize like I mentioned earlier. But in 1991 it was awarded to him alone. In spite of his request to include his equal partner Dennis Scott Brown also his wife. But the committee rejected the request and they granted the Pritzker prize just to Robert Venturi.

Venturi was a controversial critic of the blithely functionalist architecture and symbolist Vacuum which he called the modernist architecture during 1940's and 50's. He has been considered as a counter revolutionary. He published the 'Gentle Manifesto' 'complexity and contradiction' in architecture and lot of other works in his lifetime. In 1966 Robert Venturi published a book in the introduction of the book Vincent Scully writes this book is probably the most important writing on architecture making. Ever since Le Corbusier wrote Vers Une architecture in 1923. Le Corbusier work was suppose to be considered by the modernist as the Bible of modern architecture and Vincent Scully describes this book contemporary complexity and contradiction in architecture as the most important writing on the making of architecture. Since that book by Le Corbusier. So that much importance being acculated an attributed to this particular book.

Postmodern architecture first emerged as a reaction like I mentioned earlier in the previous episodes and also in the previous history of architecture V. Every style is a reaction against the doctrines and the principles of a previous style. So right now we have something called post modernism learning and in

postmodernism were actually a reaction to modernism to modern architecture to international architecture as expressed as by Le Corbusier, Mies Van der Rohe and lot of modernist people. So the generation was came after that started rejecting those ideas and started going against those ideas and started reacting to those ideas and that is when post modernism were born. And this book was written in that particular time in 1966 when post modernism was happening. In place of the modernist doctrines of simplicity as prescribed by Mies Van der Rohe which he says “less is more”; and the functionality which is being expressed by “form follows function” and Le Corbusier doctrine which says “a house is a machine to live in”, in the words of Robert Venturi he calls architecture much more than that and he calls it complexity and contradiction.

Postmodern buildings would have curved forms would have decorative elements, would have bright colored elements, asymmetry, and features often borrowed from historic periods of architecture. Colours and textures which are unrelated to the structure of function of the building. Totally in a vimsical in a price element nature and those are the element which makes postmodern architecture. And Venturi considers this kind of element a surprise element as inspiring and inviting into the fabric of architecture in this particular point of time.

He rejects Puritanism of modernism on monahan; he called for a return of ornament, and accumulation of citations and collages borrowed from previous historic styles of architecture.

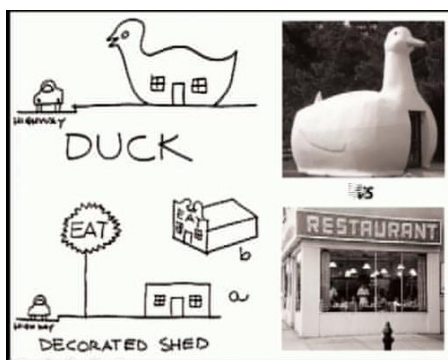
Postmodernism heavily borrowed from classical architecture form rococo from neoclassicism, Viennese secession, the British arts and crafts movement, the German Jugendstil and lot of other movements.

Postmodernist buildings often combined the new forms which have been evolved in the 1960's and 70's and it mixed with seemingly contradictory nature of the classicist elements. If you see some of the projects designed by James Stirling his Stuttgart project. He described the style as representation in abstraction, monumental and informal, traditional and high-tech at the same time.



In this book complexity and contradiction in architecture he demonstrates through countless examples, an approach to understanding the architectural composition and complexity, and the resulting richness and contrast and interest that the building creates on to architecture itself. He compares with huge signage's on top of buildings that calls for attention and he compares that to buildings that form in form itself to create monumentality effect.

He draws inspirations from both vernacular and high style sources. He introduced new lessons for buildings of architects which are both familiar for example Michelangelo, Alvar Aalto these are examples that are familiar and they borrowed examples from these people also. and he also borrowed from the buildings of the then forgotten architects like Frank Furness, Edwin Lutyens and also those architects whom they had forgotten comfortable at that particular point of time. He made an example that says the difficult whole rather than the diagrammatic forms of that were popular at that particular point of time. He compares a building which calls itself a restaurant with the board and then he compares it with another building which is shaped in the form of a duck.



In this picture you can see that there are two cases, in one case there is a building that was shaped like a duck and in another case there is a building with glass facade and it says restaurant on top. On the high way, this is the high way this is the side of the high way you can see this building which is shaped like a

duck it has doors and windows everything. But it is in the shape of duck and on the other side this looks like there is a huge signage that says it's an eatery or a restaurant. And the actual building is just a shed it is a decorated shed. The building looks somewhat like either this or there is a huge sign post and there is a simple looking shed on the side. So he compares these two examples a duck and a decorated shed and then he calls for duck buildings which are a little more acceptable than decorated sheds.

Venturi includes examples which are both built, un-built, un-realised of his own work to demonstrate the possible application of all the techniques that he has discussed. This book which he had written has been translated and published in 18 different languages.

Immediately hailed as a theorist and designer with radical ideas, he went on to teach a series of studios at the Yale school of architecture in the 1960's and early 70's. During these lessons, during these theories the most famous of these was happening in Las Vegas. Where he along with Venturi sorry he along with Scott Brown and with Steven Izenour, led a team of students they went on to document and study and analyze the Las Vegas strip of all the interesting buildings on that particular street. That particular point of time it was probably the least likely subject for a serious research because Las Vegas was suppose to be like the fun capital of the United States and people don't go there for a serious research people only go there when they are taking serious fun not for serious research. So he took up such a controversial place and the controversial in the general sense but it actually proved a lot of architectural value from his research. After the research was done they published a book called learning from Las Vegas and all the findings of that particular teams work they are all published in that book.

The book was published in 1972, four years after their strip to Las Vegas. And this book was revised five years later in 1977. He says learning from Las Vegas; the forgotten symbolism of architectural from using the student work as a foil for new theory. In this book he coined the terms Duck Integrated shed the descriptions was so for two most predominant ways of embodying the iconography in buildings.

In this book he adopted the later strategy producing formally simple decorated sheds with rich complex and often shockingly ornamental flourishes. The work of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown adopted the later strategy they produced

simple decorated sheds with often shocking and interesting ornamental flourishes.

Works of Christopher Alexander

Next we will move on to another famous architect and writer Christopher Alexander.

Christopher Wolfgang Alexander is a widely influential architect and design theorist, and currently emeritus professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

His theories about the nature of human centered design have affected varieties of fields of designing including architecture, urban design, software development, sociology and lots more. He has designed in personally built over hundred buildings both as an architect and as a general contractor

He has also recently been invited to a program in Naples a one year course at a university where a students are suppose to explore innovations in ecological urbanism by buildings, using the methods he had developed. So he had gone there and he has recently given approval for that building.

In software, Christopher Alexander is regarded as the father of pattern language movement. Will tell you what pattern language movement is in short.

He wrote the book called A Pattern Language and the first wiki the technology behind Wikipedia led directly from Alexander's work, according to the Wikipedia's creator Ward Cunningham.

Alexander's work has influenced the development of agile software program development and Scrum. The Wikipedia the entire Wikipedia was based on a technology which was based on the pattern which was made possible by Christopher Alexander.

In architecture, Alexander's work is used by a number of different contemporary architectural communities including the New Urbanist movement, to help people to reclaim control over their own built environment.

However, his work is often harshly critical of much of contemporary architectural theory and practice because he always keeps criticising people of his own contemporary nature. When there is other contemporary architect building something and he is more of an architectural critic than an

Alexander is known for his many books on the design and building process, including

- Notes on the Synthesis of form
- A city is not a tree
- The timeless way of building
- A new theory of urban design, and
- The Oregon experiment

His more recently he published the four-volume *The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the universe* is published much later and is much recently published. In this new book, he talks about the newer theories of the morphogenetic process of architecture; he talks about the battle of life and beauty of the earth, the implementation of his theories in a large building project in Japan is still underway.

Alexander is probably best known for his book *A pattern Language*, where it's a perennial best seller and it is still prescribed book in many architectural schools around the world. And the reasoning that it uses a simple, and needs which a person requires as a designer and the needs are then combined to form the language which is required for the architect build. So a pattern language is used to empower anyone who wants to design and to build and to work in any skill starting from the microwist scale to the mega scale projects that are available.

Christopher Alexander says there is one timeless way of building. It is a thousand years old, and the same today as it has ever been. The great tradition buildings of the past, the villagers 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 where you feel yourself, places where you feel alive, expect 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 our faces are.

Christopher Alexander talks about a way to build a process of building itself and he says that the process is steam less because this is the process of the universe. It is the process in which man himself starts evolving creating structures and great places of architecture. It is a place in which we feel happy and we feel excited and we feel accelerated and those are not the spaces which

people design consciously. Those are people designing places in a way which Christopher Alexander coins as the timeless way. He says that all these particular places have a quality and that the quality he tries to define that quality in many words. He experiments with a lot of words. He uses words from the language from the English language and he tries to see if that is the quality which he is talking about. Unfortunately for him none of the words available in the English language actually matches with the feeling that he is talking about the timeless way or the quality. So therefore he calls that quality as a quality without a name that is how he defines it he calls that quality that makes the buildings so lively and so lifelike and so interesting is a quality without a name.

He discusses all these points in his book *A Timeless Way of Building*. In his other book *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. It describes a very very practical architectural in a form a mathematics formulae or table or a computer scientist might call it as generative grammar. This occurs because they were built to local regulation that required specific features but freed the architects to adopt themselves to particular situations. They did not give any generalized theme or generalized format. This book provides the rules and pictures and leaves the decisions to be taken from precise environment of the project.

It describes exact methods for construction of practical, safe and attractive designs at every scale from a regional level through cities, through neighborhoods, through gardens, through buildings, through rooms, through furniture and even fixtures down to the level of doorknobs. The interesting part about this work is the fact that the architectural system consists only of classic patterns tested in the real world but it is reviewed by multiple architects for beauty and practicality. This book includes all needed surveying and structural calculations, a novel simplified building system that copes up all the shortages of materials, and easily stored by inexpensive materials producing long-lasting classical buildings with small amounts of materials, design and labor in a cheap manner.

He says that all is possible but if you follow simple rules of this generative grammar. All Christopher Alexander talks about in his book are syntax, grammar, sentence, words and phrases. We can use these words, phrases, punctuations and these in a manner that fit best the architect and for the purpose to create poetry.

It first has users prototype a structure on-site in temporary materials. Once accepted, these are finished by filling them with very-low-density concrete. This method was adopted by the University of Oregon and it was described as the Oregon experiment which was published in 1975 and it remains the official planning instrument of Oregon it also been adopted in part by some other cities as a building code. The idea of pattern language appears to apply to any complex engineering task not just to designing buildings and it has been influential in designing software where different patterns are been used to document the knowledge that have been collected in the field. So it has been used to variety of fields not just in design.

Alexander's built work is characterized by a special quality which he used to call a quality without a name but he actually names it has wholeness in his book nature of the order this is the last book he has written and he relates to human beings and introduces or let's say induces feelings of belonging to the place and structure.

He claims that the quality is found in the most loved tradition and historic buildings and urban spaces, and that is precisely what Alexander has tried to capture with his sophisticated mathematical design theories. Paradoxically, achieving this connective human quality has also moved his building away from the abstract imageability valued in contemporary architecture. It is always being related to the medieval architecture or the taught process which was in the past also the imageability which is usually associated with contemporary architecture is a kind of lost in his buildings. There is one of the reasons why his buildings are under-appreciated at present.

A pattern is a careful description of a perennial solution to a recurring problem within a building context, describing one of the configurations that brings life to a building.

Each pattern describes a problem that occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core solution that problem, in such a way that you can use the solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice.

In the pattern language book there are over 250 patterns that we discussed by Christopher Alexander. A pattern starting from the usually the patterns are named in such a way that stairway that can be used as a seating, green open space, a park for 500 people, things like this we can easily relate to. A waiting

place, a waiting place could be anywhere from a hospital's waiting place or a waiting place in front of an office reception or it could be anywhere but he calls it a waiting room, a space for waiting and then he describes the quality that is required for the space for waiting and then he describes the amount of things that we need to do in a space for waiting and then if you could include all those qualities we will always get a quality which is decided for in a building.

In the timeless way of building in that book Christopher Alexander was talking about how buildings can be designed to become timeless. He was talking about a quality without a name and then he asks us to find out what a quality without a name is and this quality without a name is being defined as wholeness. In his later book he compares always his ideas with earlier examples where people feel happy in a particular place.

In the medieval palace or a city or a church there is a kind of ambience which makes the feeling of a person grow up, why are we not able to produce that particular quality in modern buildings so that search made him write that book timeless way of building whereas in the pattern language book he describes about 250 patterns and he carefully names each of these patterns in a way which can be understood and applied by everybody and outdoor seating something which people can understand, a city for 50,000 towns for 50,000 something which people can understand, a balcony. These are some of the patterns that are there in Christopher Alexander's book. Also there are about 250 patterns which Alexander has talked about, but we can use that book as a reference material and we can start creating our own patterns.

For example, if we can make our own patterns let's say a place for watching cricket could be a pattern or if for example if you want it to be a little more personal you can say a place for oneself or a place for yoga. You can create your own patterns and then you for example if you say you're gonna design a place for yoga and you keep on listing all the parameters that you need for a space for yoga that will become another pattern to the existing two hundred and fifty patterns which Christopher Alexander has designed and you had added one more pattern to it. When you are designing a space and you can take randomly from five or six patterns and then if you mix up all the characters you will get that particular place. Let's say you are designing a garden, you want an exterior garden you want a sitting place and you want a fountain, you want peace and calm and you want a gazebo and you can combine all these five or six patterns and you can take pieces of information and pieces of missing pieces

from all these to form jumbled and then that is when you can create that particular space with ease. So that was what pattern language purpose about.