

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE MELILLA CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

I was extremely happy when I first heard about this conference and was excitedly looking forward to the discussions. Unfortunately, circumstances have prevented me from attending the conference. I am especially sorry, too, that I shall miss the rich union of many cultures, a subject in itself dear to my heart for decades.

I thought that I could at least present a summary of the remarks I would have made, in the hope that through this method I can engage some sort of dialogue with the conference attendees.

For nearly 30 years I have been working on a series of books entitled *The Nature of Order* [1], an attempt to bring a fusion of the scientific world view with an adequate view of art and architecture. It has been my desire not merely to present a theoretical view, or the kind of thing an analytical or critical thinker might produce, but rather to produce a work that could directly affect the life and day-to-day work of a working artist while simultaneously clearly expressing concepts in terms that physicists and biologists can appreciate and benefit from, so that in some way our picture of the universe can be altered by this new picture.

Above all, none of this can work unless it is seen in a context that admits God—unrestricted wholeness—as the underpinning of all that is seen and experienced. I certainly do not mean, by this, adherence to any particular religion or religious tradition. Rather, I mean that the life of objects and buildings and places and our inner experience of self, all of which we experience in art, can be understood both in terms congruent with science as we presently know it and also in personal terms that touch us in our hearts, activate our hearts.

The view of science that provides the underpinnings to all four books in *The Nature of Order* series relies on a relatively small number of observations and a small number, also, of new concepts that define living structure and the processes that generate living structure in objective terms. These include:

- *an attempt to identify wholeness as an objective structure existing in some degree in all material systems*

- *a method of observation that allows impartial observers to measure the degree of life in different structures according to their own inner state when in the presence of these structures*
- *an attempt to see all evolution and development in physical systems, in living systems and in the creation of works of art as defined by a sequence of wholeness-preserving or “structure-preserving” transformations.*

This way of thinking thus provides a vision of reality in which all events come about as transformations of the existing whole. Above all, it redefines the nature of our efforts as artists.

What is most important is that all this is not merely a theoretical scheme, but rather a way of thinking and a set of tools that first teach the artist to make things, and show the way to making things—paintings, works of sculpture, buildings, and the many manifold possible structures that must appear in buildings at a huge range of scales. The buildings and public spaces that can be reached by these methods are entirely different from those typically created in the 20th century; they point the way to a humane world in the future and a cogent, sharable way for people to reach this humane world together.

I have attempted a fusion of science and art in a hard-nosed fashion compatible with scientific thinking yet inspired and nourished by concern for the well-springs of human experience and the origin of the human self. I could never have managed even this first step without the range of cultures and civilizations that I have paid attention to, visited and been part of during my life.

The material in these books is largely culture-independent. By that I do not mean that different cultures should be somehow absorbed in some general mass culture of the future. Quite the opposite. It turns out that the criteria of life in artifacts has the same deep substrate in all cultures and civilizations, and the work in these four books draws on these hugely different cultures and shows what is common to them, doing it in a way that

honors and respects the art and building traditions of this worldwide range of civilizations.

In particular, I have benefited from my lifelong association with Islamic culture and my love of ancient Turkish and Persian carpets as well as my long association and friendship with Japan and the Japanese people. India, Latin America, Russia, the Pacific, many European nations, Moorish Spain, North Africa and China all have played a significant role in helping me to understand the phenomena with which I have been concerned. The unification of cultures, and the exchange of profound respect from culture to culture, is vital to the proper understanding of artistic phenomena and to the practice of individual art and individual building in various local cultures today.

During the last two centuries, art and science were strongly separated. The thought that made sense in science made little sense in art, and vice versa. This has been most uncomfortable. It made both—art and science in their separate ways—seem less valid, since it was obvious that neither one of them had much claim to an authentic view of reality, able to encompass the strength of human intellect and the stretch of human passion. I have attempted to paint a world picture that suggests that there is a single view of matter, the universe and mind that stretches wide enough to encompass both art and science. If that is true, we shall all be very much the richer for it in the future.

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Reference

1. Chris Alexander, *The Nature of Order: Book 1: The Phenomenon of Life; Book 2: The Process of Creating a Life; Book 3: A Vision of a Living World; Book 4: The Luminous Ground* (Berkeley, CA: Center for Environmental Structure, 2002–2004). See also <www.natureoforder.com>.