Social flexibility is a resource in as much as it is to be budgeted in as a way which may be spent (or given) but not renewed. The individual who apparently is destitute of such flexibility may be considered as only relatively poor. It is worth noting here that flexibility is to specialization as expertise is to regimentation. Flexibility may be defined as uncommitted potentiality for change.

A telephone exchange exhibits maximum negentropy, maximum specialization, maximum inorganic quality, when all its circuits are open and one more call would jam the system. It exhibits maximum entropy and maximum flexibility when none of its pathways are committed. In this particular example, the state of non-use is not a committed state.

It will be noted that the budget of flexibility is multiplicative or fracturing (not subtractive, as a budget of money or energy).

In this connection, it is interesting to consider the ecology of our legal system. For obvious reasons, it is difficult, if not impossible, to lay down precise rules upon which the social system will stand. Indeed, historically, the United States was founded upon the premise of freedom of religion and freedom of thought—the separation of Church and State being the classic example. On the other hand, it is a fact that we are constantly faced with the problems of what suggest that the basic ideas which we are committed to the processes of education and character formation—that part of the society which is currently and reasonably expected undergoing maximum perpetuation.

IV. Flexibility of Ideas. A civilisation rests on ideas of all degrees of generality. These ideas are passed along, passed on, to younger generations; they are compounded, they are clarified, they are modified, they are adapted, they are rejected; they are forgotten, they are remembered. It is the success or failure of these ideas which determine the stability or instability of the social system. Ideas which have been committed to the school and the church generally have become, after a time, a part of the social system and are committed to the education and character formation process. These are the forces or order and disorder, which the ecological analyst and planner must watch carefully.

Be all that as it may, it is at least arguable that the trend of social change in the last 100 years, especially in the USA, has been towards an inappropriate distribution of flexibility among the variables of our civilisation. The fact is that our legal system has been structured in such a way that the forces of stability or instability are almost entirely out of the hands of the individual. The laws of the country are the laws of the state, the nation, the government, the federal administration, the local government. The forces of change are almost entirely in the hands of the government, the state, the nation, and the government of the country.

In these contexts—both ecological and mental—the word "fit" is a low-level analogue of "matching flexibility." This is illustrated by an example in which Alexander works out in detail the steps for ecological and mental flexibility. The survival of the fittest is a low-level version of a matching flexibility. This is because the survival of a species, because the survival of a newcomer to the system. We must then define an ecological and mental flexibility as a low-level version of the survival of the fittest. Flexibility is not an absolute value to be pursued in its own right but is a necessary condition for the survival and stability of certain other conditions of life.

Which conditions then are the conditions for the survival and stability of a society? Sennett recommends the use of disorder for the preservation of some possibly higher order—but the precise sort of order which is necessary is not clear. The survival of a society is more than the mere "fitness" of its members; it involves a complex sort of interaction between the "ecosystem" and "matters." The "disorder" of "Sennett's" city is to shake people out of their obedience to the fullness of life into some sort of "beauty trip." As it reads it may be wrong: Sennett recommends "as "ego" trip in the harried busy life of the city a recourse to withdrawal to a head trip."

I believe that this is one way of avoiding the fullness of life, a way which is already conventional in our society, a way which is already committed by the uses which we put to technology, when guided by convention and ego pressures.

We return then to the old truisms that reproduction is the spice of life—not some the spirituality of life. We try to prohibit certain prohibitions, but it might be more effective to encourage people to know their freedom and to exercise it. For example, the law which prohibits the sale of alcohol is an example of the law which prohibits the sale of the freedom to exercise it.

V. Exercise of Flexibility. It is asserted above that the overall flexibility of a system depends upon keeping many of its variables in the middle of their tolerable limits. But there is a partial converse of this: it is not true that the more flexible a system is, the better it is.

Owing to the fact that inevitably many of the subsystems of the society are regenerative, the system as a whole tends to "expand" into any area of unused freedom. If we need to be able to "change a variable," and indeed the same of the sort to be done of its finds of value in any biological system.

In other words, if a given variable remains too low at some middle value, other variables will approach it, and the system will be placed in a state of "stability" or "harmony." This is a manifestation of the law of interdependence. It follows that the variables which can be changed in any system may have change in the whole related constellation.

It is for these (or rather, the processes which these perform) that flexibility must be achieved and maintained in the remaining of the system. These are the forces or order and disorder, which the ecological analyst and planner must watch carefully.