

Reform Architecture to Enhance Humanity

by [Nikos Salingaros](#) (April 2024)



St Paul's Cathedral, Canaletto, 1754

We are taught to prefer buildings that diminish life

Education conditions the public to prefer the crude industrial modernism of 1920's Germany embodied in today's built

environment. That set of universally accepted typologies—boxes, cantilevered overhangs, crude concrete, curtain-glass walls, faceless façades, jutting metal pieces, monotonously repeating elements, sheer walls, towers—fails to provide psycho-physiological comfort. The profession deliberately avoids elements of traditional architecture and the state of comfort and happiness those induce in the user.

The West erased its inherited architectural knowledge and practices, to replace them with depressing and strange products. So did the more religious and traditional East, eager to catch up with the West. Modernist architects used a sly power grab to promote their wares along with false promises of utopia. By marginalizing professionals skilled in creating an adaptive human environment, a new bunch of individuals was elevated to positions of authority. Those figures now occupy architecture's pantheon.

Visual elements essential for the human cognitive system include balanced curves, complex symmetries, gravitational stability, harmonious composition, ornament, rich and subtle colors, and textures that make the immediate environment emotionally nourishing and peaceful to be in. Yet architects implement building typologies that eliminate these vital components of design, disconnecting people from the visually nourishing world. Learning to get a kick from repellent forms becomes a mark of social prestige! Labeling dissenters as intellectually backward and primitive shames everybody into accepting alarming or minimalist building interiors and exteriors.

Science is abused to maintain a hold on power

A massive disinformation campaign further tricks the public into believing that official architecture is based on science—it is not. Science condemns industrial-modernist

typologies, but people are not sufficiently informed to see a junk food analogy for the built environment. Propagandists deftly divert the debate towards contentious political topics, phony ethical declarations, and away from science.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and medical data overturn the dominant architectural narrative by showing how industrial-modernist buildings generate anxiety in humans—even in the bodies of brainwashed individuals who insist that they enjoy the experience. Those “experts” are mentally conditioned to suppress their body’s alarm signals. Moreover, like missionaries, they are trained to “save” the ignorant public and insist upon imposing their prejudices on everybody else.

Artificial Intelligence also shows how a child’s developing brain requires the variety of organized visual complexity that was present throughout human evolution, which industrial modernism erased. Because of its harmful effects on children’s development, cutting off humans from engaging with their surroundings is a crime against our young. Parents accept this catastrophic situation and don’t see they are unwittingly sacrificing their own children to a cult of images.

Recent developments using Artificial Intelligence identify the types of architecture that are necessary to support human biology. After one century, AI reveals what humans have forgotten: the characteristics of emotionally nourishing environments. Portable, wearable sensors measure how the human body reacts to forms; determine where the eye looks to unconsciously; identify what triggers healing effects; emphasizing that much of what we build nowadays is either invisible (because the brain ignores it) or may be harming us through negative emotional signals.

Media power dissolves traditional values

How about traditional religious values protecting inherited

culture and the sanctity of procreation and raising children in a healthy environment—the sacred responsibilities of parenthood? Not to mention assuring that places of worship suggest a higher order opposed to human corruption, greed, and nihilism.

Forget that! Such notions appealed to our primitive ancestors, but we are now “modern” and can’t be bothered with old-fashioned ideas. The lure of glitzy fashion that the architecture-industrial complex offers the public trumps any religious notion of morality and responsibility to the meaning of human life. As legal profits can be made at the expense of public health, big commissions gained, and prestigious prizes won, an entrenched system continues to erode what is left of our diminished humanity.

People buy the dominant architectural narrative because the wiring of the human brain favors instinctive group cohesion (an evolutionary advantage a million years ago) that enables indoctrination in modern society. This acceptance mechanism coming from peer pressure also drives advertising and dangerous pseudo-religious cults. The media constantly feature flashy and weird buildings, supposedly representing the pinnacle of human intellectual development. While it takes advanced technology to make such a building work, there is no intelligent adaptation to the human body and senses.

Adopting mainstream architectural expressions has deeper underlying consequences. Inherited artistic and cultural traditions are erased; adaptive architectural solutions are forbidden and consequently forgotten; and the system severely punishes individual departures from orthodoxy. Overwhelming media power forbids evolved architecture that adapts to higher human sensibilities, while traditional architects around the world must grovel to the dictates of the flashy prizes.

Individual and institutional clients including churches, corporations, governments, hospitals, and universities cave

in. This is the biggest disappointment of all, as society naïvely expects our most learned and wisest individuals—academic researchers, intellectuals, medical professionals, philosophers, and religious authorities—to protect humanity from harmful trends. In betraying this trust, new school buildings the world over, and even entire new campuses, pay homage to anxiety-inducing design that is sold as “cutting-edge.” Approval and selection committees obviously do not bother to read the neurological research about the effects those disjointed forms have on the human brain.

The media praise dreary, incoherent, or menacing new school buildings as being fashionable and innovative. A wealthy individual sponsors an ugly building on campus, despite having personal misgivings, because spokespersons for the profession promote it. Speaking out to suggest a more traditional design for one’s money exposes the donor as ignorant and socially retrograde—even reactionary. That would undo the philanthropist’s original intent, which is to generate positive publicity from donating to the school.

Global building activity supports aggressive sensory goals

Building shapes, surfaces, and volumes influence our bodies and minds in a deep but unconscious manner. Yet dominant design relies exclusively upon established visual styles and narrow models of construction technology. Millions of new buildings look the same—with obligatory industrial-modernist characteristics recognizable from miles away. Close-up, those buildings do not accommodate the human senses. The emotional impression from pedestrian approach and entry ranges from banal/neutral to foreboding/hostile. This feedback denies the appeal of traditional architecture and urbanism from older cities, tourist spots, and self-built settlements that feel comfortable in scale even if they lack basic infrastructure and services.

Real-estate speculators love industrial modernism because it makes huge profits from a generic product that adapts to nothing. The opposite case to modernist concrete or glass cubes is also favored precisely because it is extravagant and incoherent. Curved swooping buildings—giant menacing sculptures that serve no purpose other than to satisfy ego and narcissism—are extremely expensive to construct. The architect and client waste resources to show off while ignoring the emotional needs of the users. Deconstructivism (a sensory assault) and Minimalism (classic sensory deprivation) are visually opposed but equally hostile to humans. This two-pronged practice makes a joke out of sustainability, since nobody ever wants to maintain a building that is not loved.

“Officially favored” architecture has gone through several variations since the 1920s without ever relinquishing sensory hostility towards users—to do that would be nostalgic, hence taboo. Favored styles move from being austere and faceless to broken and disjointed forms that provoke anxiety. A succession of alien images transform yet studiously avoid geometries that the human perceptual system evolved to thrive on. After so many decades, willfully suppressing life-enhancing geometries in our buildings has become a dangerous and senseless game.

Global construction exploits its public relations apparatus to maintain a clique of favored architects in the public eye. This corrupt power game relies on the Orwellian switch between beauty and ugliness. Big money allied to ruthless political interests use the media as willing propaganda tools. The collective mind is deceived when hand-picked juries habitually award prizes to the absurd fruits of some fellow narcissist’s imagination.

So, which interested party is going to insist on a new/old architecture that enhances our humanity? The knowledge to construct healing environments is presently known, but stubbornly kept outside the profession. Society has a responsibility to become better informed and to implement

change.

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