

Architecture and Biophilic Ethics

Human Nature, Culture, and Beauty

Abstract

During the past two decades we have witnessed a world-wide architectural euphoria brought about by unforeseen accumulations of wealth, new technologies, computerized design methods, desire for visibility, and an obsession with seductive visual imagery. Architecture seems to have lost its existential sincerity and meaning and turned into architectural entertainment. Yet, these unforeseen buildings often project an unexpected predictability, repetitiousness and boredom because of their forced but superficial newness. As Guy Debord has suggested, we have entered “The Society of the Spectacle”.

The call for an ecological ethics, life style and sustainable architectural thinking is surely the most important change in the art of building since the breakthrough of modernity. Today’s ecological imperative requires an architecture that provides a credibly identifiable ecological performance. Today, “ecological” features are merely a surface label that conceals crude business interests. Instead of creating a world of architectural fiction, our buildings need again an existential rooting in order to reinforce our sense of the real.

A true ecological ideology of construction suggests a non-autonomous architecture adapted to natural processes and cycles. However, true sustainability is not merely a technical attitude, as it has to be rooted in an ethical ground. Human thinking and actions are frequently based on metaphors. Instead of mechanical and aesthetic models we need to think through biophilic metaphors. The founder of Biophilic thinking, Edward O. Wilson, argues that “All man’s troubles arise from the fact that we do not know what we are and do not agree on what we want to become”. It is crucial that we learn to see ourselves as biological, evolutionary and historical beings, and base our thinking and actions on biological realism. We also need to re-discover the interaction between ethics and beauty, sensitise ourselves for a biophilic beauty, and understand the crucial role of tradition as the true ground of creativity and source of human meaning.

Keywords

Phenomenology, Ecological Ethics, Biophilic Ethics, Human Nature