

Organic Architecture: Sustainability and Geomancy As One

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The Organic movement in Architecture is experiencing renewed interest and a sense of timely arrival here in America and abroad. This is an architecture that is concerned with deep human values; concerns of inner peace and outer healing. Building professionals and their clients are reawakening to the fundamental principles of creating 'Sacred Space' for people to live, work and play in. This is taking place as we recognize the degree to which we have mismanaged our built environment and encouraged the breakdown of the integrated ecosystems of the earth.

It is a spirit of clean housekeeping and right livelihood that initiates and ultimately accompanies the physical re-balancing of the ecological systems we have damaged. So as we develop new strategies in economics, policy, design and innovation with regard to our buildings (which consume 40% of national energy bill and where we in the "developed" world spend 90% of our time), we can begin to understand and remember how our structures must evoke the pure wonder of spirit and life itself.

A building's design must respond to issues of the heart and spirit as much as issues of the mind and body. By responding to these four qualities or states of being, Organic Architecture at once embraces and fuses together two fundamental schools of study, re-emerging in our society at this time, Sustainability and the Western Art/Science of Geomancy.

Sustainability can be defined as preserving the support of our planet's environment for future generations while providing for the needs of our present society. It is concerned with what we commonly refer to as the outward expressions and manifestations of our consciousness. Placemaking or Geomancy, the combined Art and Science of divining a sense of place, has been developed throughout the history of cultures worldwide. It is a means of getting in touch with the spirit of the earth, learning how to find where one belongs and consequently understanding how one behaves in relation to her and the rest of nature.

There has been an organic movement in the US since shortly after the civil war with the architecture of H. H. Richardson, followed by the work of Louis Sullivan, F. L. Wright, Bruce Goff and Paolo Soleri. In 1982 a number of Goff's past students established an association, 'Friends of Kebyar' which includes among its members recent recipient of the AIA Gold Metal, architect Fay Jones. Now based in Portland Oregon, the group holds conferences biannually and publishes a newsletter and quarterly journal. Another more recent development is the opening of a new architecture school in California, The San Francisco Institute of Architecture, under the leadership of Fred Stitt and other organic architects.

A yearning among students in building technology and architecture programs to work with more natural and malleable materials and geometries is also being perceived in schools in the Northeast. The rediscovery of Native American and European techniques in sod, cob, clay, earth and straw bale are being explored for their economic, ecological and freedom giving qualities with respect to the spaces and forms being produced. Even the use of wood and stone is being approached from the perspective of finding how the material wants to express itself.

The following four aspects or objectives of the Organic movement are offered here as general observations of a movement which by its own nature strives to avoid definition.

* That the **inner thought or big idea** of programmatic activities or functions of a building is somehow **reflected in the outer materials, colors and forms utilized**. Fundamental tools of geometry and symbolism (developed from the arts and sciences cross-culturally throughout history) are engaged in specific fashions to support the concept and connect with each other the physical and archetypal morphologies of both inner and outer space.

* That the work **exhibits some basic reflection of a physical, living sentient organism** or consciousness. This notion leads onto the integration of more appropriate technologies and issues of sustainability; i. e. buildings that 'breathe' in their environment materially, and within a larger matrix of energy fields of the planet now being identified by dowsers and others researching the true nature of the planetary grid system and such phenomena as crop circles.

*That the **end product of the design process recreates the inner emotional experience of the designer/client at the moment of creativity**, and that this goal is honored, engaged in, and taken to its next level of creativity by craftsmen/women with love and focus throughout the building process. In this way process and product are merged and the divisiveness that often accompanies interchanges between designer and builder is transmuted into energies of creative integration.

* This leads to a final **personal retrieval system** whereby a building acts as a living medium **to help -one with pure intention to come into contact with his or her essence or spiritual connection with the divine.** From idea, to action, to response then on to experience, a lemniscate system or flow is initiated. This is organic/transformational architecture -a building process oriented towards self discovery that puts one in touch with the essence of life and creation.

With these key aspects in mind, it becomes clear how the style and various components of an Organic Architecture will vary from country to country based on a host of regional, historical, cultural and societal conditions. And yet these principles are now being rediscovered and carried across international borders with the winds of change to establish a long needed alternative to the spiritually isolated, insensitive and wasteful remnants of the international glass box architecture that thrived in the cold war era.

A dictionary definition of organic tells us that it is capable of metabolism, shows symptoms of life and is characteristic of a living being. The Hungarian architect Imre Makovecz, (practicing since the early 1960's) has recently been able to represent this new movement due to the political transitions in his country. The following excerpts from one of his presentations underscore his philosophy:

And we who lived in periphery charged with little inconsiderable works have suddenly been able to represent Hungary and announce through this demonstration: we live, and this architectural tendency that sprung into existence owing partly to the intellectual inspiration of Frank Lloyd Wright, and partly the life work of Rudolf Steiner...lives also.

It is a mistake to think that this mission is only a stylistic inquiry. I do not believe in that concept and function of style by such a sense that it is used by architecture and other realms nowadays. I believe in dramatic collaboration of architects, customers (builders) and users much rather. We trust we have homogeneous responsibility for Nature, the ancestry, the several thousand year old signs, animals, plants, and our own human character. We trust architecture is able to salvage us from such a time abyss, such an age of the artificial created amnesia, that tried to make people forget their ancient mysteries. (•)

The extended idea from the movement is that the buildings are living beings themselves. responsibly exchanging not only gases, liquids and solids with the greater landscape, but also interacting with a subtle grid of electromagnetic patterns and vortices, terrestrial and cosmic energies, where the building serves as a node or satellite like receptor, to focus and enhance these energies. These traditions have their roots in the hermetic philosophies of Ancient Egypt and Greece and continue through the

information passed on through the Knights Templar and their construction of Abbeys and Cathedrals of the middle ages.

Roughly one hundred years ago H. H. Richardson extended that tradition by reinterpreting the Romanesque/Gothic into the New England Landscape, initiating an American Organic vernacular. Pieced together from his training in the Beaux Arts, his study of Romanesque Architecture, his interest in Early Christian Art of Syria the 16th century styles of Northern Europe and the Colonial American vernacular, Richardson fused his natural affinity for blending his buildings into the landscape with his magical use of geometry and symbolism and choice of natural rich color and material. His effect is clear today after having his Trinity Church selected as the most outstanding masterpiece by one hundred American Architects, one hundred years after its construction.

One of the strongest aspects of Richardson's work is the magical quality of proportion and geometric harmony so pronounced in all of his designs (see attached analysis of the Malden Public Library, designed in 1885. (•) Anne Tyng, Professor and close associate of the late Louis Kahn, postulates that structures which have made use of these specific geometries and proportional systems (including the circle, roots 2 and 3, the golden section and the 3-4-5 Pythagorean triangle as essential design layout), actually induce interactions at the cellular level in one's consciousness. The archetypal meanings of these numbers and forms are well documented by a host of contemporary writers studying sacred and symbolic geometry including Anne Tyng, Keith Critchlow and John Michell, Nader Ardalan and many others.

These same geometries have reappeared in numerous culturally and geographically distant and isolated locations throughout the history of temple building on the planet. The notion here is that the form (morphology) affects frequency (energy), or to add to the well known quote that, form follows function follows frequency, which ultimately follows intent. The study of platonic solids and the nesting of the five platonic polyhedra which give rise to these geometries, outlined by Plato in his Timaeus, were used as principal design parameters in Richardson's buildings, in plan section and elevation. (A study of fifteen of his buildings located in the Boston Area was exhibited by Timeless Architecture at the Harvard Law School in June of 1992 in honor of the AIA National Convention in Boston.)

In his book, The Earth, The Temple and The Gods, renowned historian Vincent Scully discovered that many features of Greek and Roman architecture were based upon the position of the temple to the surrounding landscape and the specific characteristics of the particular deity present, such that the spirit of the place was heightened by the specific placement of the structure. In each of these libraries designed by Richardson, a winged serpent can be found near or at the entry to the building, placed there to harmonize these energies of earth and sky, and to ward off any disrupting spirits or energy. By designing Libraries as Temples in the heart of these four towns (surrounding Boston), utilizing pure

geometry and symbolism to entice the energy and hold it there, Richardson was doing his part in re-mythologizing the landscape of America, linking us to thousands of years of traditional temple building, in response to the landscape and the greater cosmos to which we all belong.

It is clear that we are living in a much different period than our friend Richardson and that we are dealing with a much more complicated series of issues. Identifying the environmental critical indicators from a regional perspective and a series of solution technologies (many of which have been around for decades) are the first steps that must be taken to educate ourselves as to the most appropriate action we can take. Every serious school of planning and architecture needs to start pulling this material together, teaching a new generation of architects who have inherited city infrastructures (in the Northeast) averaging 80 years old, originally planned to last 100 years. A holistic attitude is essential in this work, as we can no longer design systems that fail to incorporate wise energy or land-use concerns. We need to find a way of convincing government officials at all levels that public policy and demonstration of a sustainable process must work hand in hand. Regional Centers that teach, demonstrate and sell Green products and processes have to be developed with City Councilors and Mayors taking primary positions of responsibility.

The accompanying figure 8 or lemniscatory chart (•) is helpful in weaving these two studies together, and can be seen as flip sides to the same structure. The model provides a flow diagram which covers seven primary concerns of Sustainability: energy, air quality, transportation/communication, food production, recycling, water management, and issues of establishing the home, hearth (where one guards the fire and spirit) or on a larger scale, the community. With this cycle complete, new energy emerges from the hearth and a new cycle, octave or spiral begins. We each go about another day consuming on the average of 33 pounds of air, 5.5 pounds of food, 1.5 pounds of water, and an immeasurable amount of the spirit light/fire we can radiate.

This same structure can also be seen (•) to weave together the four aspects of politics (defined by Webster as practical wisdom) to economics/ education, o the environment/ ecological integrity and finally to the social issues and what insures quality of life concerns. As mental, physical, emotional and spiritual beings we are constantly weaving a dance, balancing the essential ingredients of energy, communication and regeneration on each level.

The classical elements of air, earth, water and fire are essential in our initial orientation in the landscape. The layout of the temple begins in the western tradition with establishing the cross and is situated with respect to the four directions, the seasons and the rising and setting of celestial bodies. In the Malden library, aside from orienting the building askew to the street and perfectly magnetic North, the two towers in the building were placed such that a straight line drawn from each to opposite

corners of the buildings establish the winter and summer solstice sunrises (see figure #6).

We are in the process of rediscovering Organic Architecture now because we are ready as an urban/rural industrialized society to begin transforming and healing ourselves and our connection with the planet. Part of this healing is waking up to the divine qualities we possess on these four different levels of our individual human lives.

The universe has been described as the god watching himself. To find the god within we as individuals simply watch the patterns of the cosmos and get in rhythm with them. Building and architecture are the single largest outlay of our physical reality and thus we as builders and architects have enormous responsibility and opportunity to bring harmony to our world.

The soul of the house is the soul of the man. The layout of the hermit's retreat to the grandest temple must reflect these rules of harmony. We are told by our ancient guides, that. "as above, so below". Heaven and earth are working with the same ultimate rules. The role of the temple in the landscape and all organic architecture is to unite these forces.

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