

“Biophilia and the Quality of Life in Our Cities: Inspired by Classical Greek Ideas”, Commencement Address, Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queen’s College, City University of New York.

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The quality of human life

Human life is connected to the earth’s ecosystem, beyond mechanistic notions.

Greek concept: geometry underlies life.

Fractal scaling, symmetries, complex coherence, structural patterns.

Natural and living structures provide a fundamental healing connection between the body and its environment.

The “biophilic effect”

Natural environments nourish us.

What about artificial environments: the environments we build?

Environments are emotionally and physiologically healing if they embody traditional design techniques that imitate nature.

The machine aesthetic

Ideology of the machine society.

Crude mechanistic worldview is not healing but does the opposite.

It negates the complex mathematical properties of nature.

Reduces nature and detaches human beings from the biosphere.

Re-orienting our worldview

Rediscover the biological interaction between people and sensory space.

Intimate informational connection between human beings and nature.

Enhancing quality of life through the geometry of the built environment.

The nurturing environment

Distinguish nourishing from anxiety-inducing environmental information.

Not nightmarish “sustainable” cities and urban projects proposed and built by fashionable architects.

Those re-package their extraordinarily expensive and fundamentally unsustainable products.

Five points for regeneration

1. Access to clean air, water, shelter, and living space.
2. Access to biophilic information in plants and animals.
3. Access to biophilic information in texture, color, ornament, and art.
4. Access to an anxiety-free environment: public urban space, open-access residential and commercial spaces.
5. Protection from anxiety-inducing objects.

Connecting to place

Connection is achieved through dance, music, art, and architecture.

Common properties include patterns, regularity, repetition, nesting, hierarchy, scaling, and fractal structure.

Demonstrable geometrical patterns, not mystical properties.

A living city encourages movements

The entire range of scales corresponding to the human body (1mm to 2m).

Extending into the range of scales of pedestrian movement (2m to 1km).

Priority placed upon the smaller scales corresponding to the human body.

Coherent system of movements and actions on many different time scales.

The “dance of life”

Urban movement has its continuity, rhythm, and complex fractal structure.

Very much like classical dance forms from all cultures.

Connected pedestrian geometry allows rhythms that are unfeasible in a car.

Our organism accumulates positive and negative effects of daily rhythm.

The “Knowledge Society”

Wellbeing demands an environment that permits spatio-temporal rhythms.

Quality of life is measured in part by the five criteria I have outlined above.

Quality of life is not enhanced by an alien urban morphology that follows a modernist design ideology.

Conclusion

Quality of life depends in part upon nourishment from the environment.

It does not totally depend upon energy consumption.

The global consumerist society has done a very thorough job convincing people of an imaginary link between quality of life and energy wastage.