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THE UNDERLYING “*WHY*”: Art, nature and our architectural project inspired by Kiesler

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Abstract

In this brief essay, we ruminate and reflect on the “why” of our project – what motivates the design of this architectural form, inspired by Kiesler and how might this manifest visually. The latter is but hinted at having discerned four principles inherent in Kiesler’s architectural vision. This is also based on a “feel” for nature and the mechanism of adaptive evolution, processes that in fact factor into design

principles, pattern making and architecture itself. In order to actualize this both scientific rigor and artistic inspiration are utilized and harmonized, such that their apparent distinction is but trivial – in fact we describe a shared interdisciplinary sphere, a common language at root or core. This will go some way to developing this project as theory assumes materiality and the invisible becomes visible.

Keywords: Architecture, Art, Evolution, Science, “Language Games”, Kiesler

1. Introduction

When contemplating what motivates the desire for creative play and for producing creative work such as an architectural project, one is really inquiring as to the depths of human creativity and what motivates the creator of such forms in the first place. This is an important question, for if the architectural structure is to breathe and flourish and indeed be an instance of creative ingenuity, it ought to be created with the consciousness of the underlying motives, intentions and ideals that somehow inform the very work of art itself. In other words, clarity as to the philosophical depths of one’s creation is like the thought that may be contained within words – clear, logical and emotionally rich if the sentence is to contain meaning, and then communicated and expressed to another, in the same way that even a building may be said to “speak”.

In this essay I derive a few tentative solutions to such questions. First is the awe and wonder in the presence of nature, and in particular describing the work of nature as akin to artistic production. More particularly, it is nature and its methods, namely evolution and evolutionary design that informs our project, which we then hope to mimic and model, in the attempt to write nature or invite nature into the solution space of this architectural form.

Secondly, is our desire to invoke a cross, inter and trans disciplinary nexus of forces in the development of our design, and thus here I show that the “language games” that apply to either art or science, although apparently distinct and unrelated, are indeed overlapping, reflective and actually describe the same processes and events.

Thirdly, I have derived four perhaps overarching principles that one might glean from Kiesler’s architectural oeuvre as most evident in his “Endless House” designs. These principles allow one to better answer the “Why” of motivation and causality and set the project within creative limits that are both attentive to nature and allow for cultural dynamism and human interaction.

Finally, at the heart of all these considerations, one might posit a metaphysical duality (for example, between self and world...) at the source of nature and indeed the human psyche – a duality that seeks unity, reconciliation, oneness – and that is remedied or satiated through the “world of ideas” (colonizing the mind so to speak); sexual reproduction (colonizing the body, so to speak) and movement, a basic property or sign of life. In all these instances, the origins of duality is an attempt at reconciliation, health and survival and one might thus surmise the architectural structure in all its complexity, functionality, scientific rigor and aesthetic delight “expresses” or simply shows or invites the inhabitants to sense the flow of life, to sense its unity, openness and love, for one might posit that underlying the desire to propagate ideas, to mate with another and to move is to reach out and bond with the other – to find oneness - and harmony and beauty, the quiescence of life itself.

Thus in attempting to answer the *why* of our project, one delves deep within the mind and heart, and it is such concerns that are

embodied within our architectural form, where both its aesthetic appeal (attraction) and extra -aesthetic depth (what does it mean?) fuse, where artistic and scientific technologies embolden such a physical structure, born of nature and transmuted into culture. The building then is an exemplary of evolution itself, one end of the string embedded in nature and the other in culture, the individual and social networks.

2. Nature as an artist: Evolutionary sculpting

A primary mechanism within cells and DNA is the function of a feedback system consisting of an activator and inhibitor, resulting in a dynamic harmony and dynamic tension that manifests in the formation of patterns and functions within nature. The success of any one trait/pattern/function/property may result in its survival, and it is this adaptive edge that maintains evolutionary growth.

Central to these processes is not simply a pragmatic solution to overcoming internal and external environmental pressures, but that such design optimization or creativity is inherently aesthetic. While art is precisely human creation which nature is not, nature is considered an aesthetic object, art been an example par excellence, and thus nature and art are at least correlated aesthetically. Thus, when aestheticisms speak of the harmony of an artwork, its proportional beauty; its ability to attract and sensitivity of line, color, composition and so on, the same such analysis can be applied when observing nature. Thus, it is no wonder that so much art has indeed been inspired directly from nature, all the while the artist is subjected to the same laws of nature.

Nature thus can be metaphorically compared to the work of an artist consisting of a certain telos – the fabrication of an environment that yields both proliferation based on systems of organization that scientific methods might unearth, as well as an uncanny ability to produce great variety, inescapable power and beauty, endless patterns and sublime form. While the work of an artist can be considered to include both conscious intent and subconscious forces, nature appears to follow both intelligent design and endless, creative play with no apparent order or purpose: form begets form. Moreover, whereas one could derive a formal, stylistic analysis of the arts, so one could apply a similar “design function” imputed to nature, and while the latter is not said to correspond to a meaning as such, while art is open to interpretation based on human volition, nevertheless, it is a facile distinction arguing that nature and culture form a boundary condition. We ourselves are predisposed as we are as humans – biologically, psychologically, socially – a construction of nature itself, so that nature and culture form somewhat of a continuum. The evolutionary processes that brought about art are part of the same process that led to humans standing erect, a disposable thumb and an increased size and complexity of the cortex.

Hence, it is no surprise that the well-known Abstract Expressionist, Jackson Pollock asserted that he is nature, that is to say, rather than simply a mimetic copy of nature, the very act of painting itself is an expression of and through nature, and the resultant work, in my estimation is an image of the subatomic realm derived intuitively, with reference to his “drip paintings”. Joseph Buoys went further and claimed that we are all artists, by which I think he meant that the very human desire for meaning, for aesthetic sensitivity and for ingenious solutions is the mechanism that drives

evolution and the basis of civilization indicative of art-like capacities. Barnett Newman, another Abstract Expressionist wrote an essay defining the first person as an artist, implying that the quantum leap in human control of nature came through the corresponding sense of seeing its beauty and making things not simply for tools, but as highly personal symbols and aesthetic markers of time, place and even selfhood. The initial terror prehistoric humans may have felt in the presence of a bison led to marks on a cave, possibly counting, methods to hunt successfully and abstract thinking, thus manipulating nature, taming the initial awe, wonder and the presence of a threat.

3. “Language games”: The interdisciplinary

While art making predates the modern scientific method by many thousands of years, at their core they are both disciplines or expressions that are concerned with coming to know reality, albeit in distinct ways and resulting in different “products”. However, we would like to suggest that indeed they overlap and that the different “language games” (in Wittgenstein’s sense) are in fact more similar than at first may be apparent.

While our architectural project attempts to embrace “both cultures” and create “a third culture”, it is useful to briefly mention these overlaps for it sets the tone for a structure at once imbued by aesthetic considerations and methodologies of the sciences where analysis, knowledge of materials and mathematics are at its core. In this way, the resulting “performance” – the building structure – includes an expanded definition of an architect – an artist and a scientist in some measure – reflected in a building with an empathetic human-centered stylistic code as well as fulfilling certain scientific criteria of comfort, light and space.

A brief example of how these “language games” converge follows:

Whereas in scientific jargon one might speak of “initial conditions”, that is to say the parameters set within the “possibility space” of computer-aided design based on principles of growth and evolution inherent in organic systems, one could just as easily within the sphere or domain of arts, speak of “inspiration”, the initial catalyst for human-generated design. While scientists may speak abstractly of structure, weight distribution and the like, one might equally speak of form (this implies a human-centered approach), proportion and balance. A good eye thus applies equally well to developed analysis and calculation, as well as an intuitive grasp of order, harmony and just “looking right”. Even if the computational model allows us to speak of “form finding”, one in fact also invokes “technique”, “style” or “type” where such language may apply equally well to the arts and sciences alike. In fact, one might speak of evolutionary processes themselves as been an “expression”, how one set of variables leads to another or expresses a new state/form/property and so on. In this sense and following from the previous section on evolution as art, so one might see nature itself as an expressive act, a common turn of phrase that applies to artistic invention. Finally, “selecting possibility space” may be another form of verbiage that can be rendered to read as “creative act or performance”. Thus, the interdisciplinary is interesting not only because it allows one to combine methods from differing disciplines, but because in their combination and merging, a certain undefinable process is at work, and we

envisage, a provocative architectural building can come into being – the invisible made visible – just as nature’s “will” for beauty and survival is expressed in the great abundance of say plant life.

4. Kiesler’s principles and fundamentals

Kiesler was an artist and architect as well as producing creative theatre designs. He was immensely influenced by Surrealism and biomorphic forms. One can perhaps discern four motivating principles in his oeuvre, evident as well in his “Shrine of the Book” design in Jerusalem, and perhaps most fully expressed in the never-to-be-built “Endless House”:

1. An Architecture that is *organic* (i.e. not linear or pure geometry), so that as hitherto argued there is a richness of ideas, a fecundity or reproductive aliveness as well as the inert that invites attraction and (imagined) movement. An organic architecture mimics in form, space and structure sentient life: copulation, eating and consuming, excretion, movement, bonding, repulsion and negation. Such an architecture would oppose hierarchical thinking; Classical verticality/horizontality – an assumption of power dynamics that dwarf the viewer/inhabitant, and instead seek to embrace, invite, grasp subtlety and deal with nuanced light and space that is neither overbearing, constricting, nor yet all powerful and dogmatic.
2. Architecture that is *living* in which creative dynamic spaces teem with life owing to the unusual aesthetic, the Surreal incantations. Following from the first principle, such spaces appear to “grow” and interconnect, rather than being hieratic, where a central overpowering space dominates in tyrannical steadfastness, an inhuman sense of stasis, in its assertion of say its Institutional power-mongering. A new architecture, inspired by Kiesler’s living sculptures, as it were, reflects the softness, uncertainties and psychological depth of a human being, while yet maintaining a strong spine as such, yet without a dominant assertion where all else would be considered “the enemy”.
3. Architecture that is *challenging* as he reimagines the traditional modalities of floor/wall/ceiling/interior design and almost Dada-like aesthetic. Creative solutions are precisely creative insofar as they “break the mold”; paradigm shifting innovation relevant to quantum leaps in evolution in multiple domains. Hence the best art (and science) challenges the status quo and reimagines or envisions the new, initially often perceived as rebellious, an aberration or mutation. In this regard, we regard Kiesler as a pioneer.
4. An aesthetic attentive to all 5 senses - as a sculptural object and tactile/textural experience for those inhabiting the architecturally constructed space. This attunement to the senses is a practical way of realizing the above principles, for a lived-in space that the inhabitant can interact with is precisely the anecdote to art/architecture/knowledge as power paradigms, a rather dangerous phenomenon where either state or church produces architecture that instantiates and declares such ideologies. Instead, a humane approach to architecture reimagines what being human is and provides a healthier, skeptical, critical and playful attitude in the pursuit of knowledge and public service.

5. Conclusion

So, we are now in a position to answer the mercurial “why” – what motivates this architectural product, what underlies and forms a basis for this project? First it is a love of nature and the mechanism of evolution that creates and “sculpts” the manifold forms. Based on wondrous nature and inspired by the work of Kiesler, we derived some basic principles that determine a new architecture, one that counters linearity, determinism, dictatorships and a degradation of the individual as but a cog in the wheel of other extra-aesthetic ideological motivations. In this sense, science itself becomes humanized and thus in order to realize our project the scientific spirit, imbued as it is with calculation, analysis and reductivism is tempered with the humanities and arts – to this end we explained how their apparent divergent “language games” are more closely aligned than is usually thought. Hence, the eventual architectural structure that will be generated or expressed will in the end speak of this more unified and holistic vision.