humanized

A person doesn't *think* feelings — they *feel* them; it's this experience of emotion that gives living a sense of meaning and vitality. It isn't about intellectual insight, technological accomplishment or abstract theories, but rather about experience in the world.

One of the purposes of architecture used to be to elicit a reaction about feeling; to be intrigued, moved, and inspired. At its best, architecture used to be about the experience of what psychologists call the "vitality affects," the unique human emotion of awe.

Today's architects are more concerned with the conceptual and technological state of the field. Instead of designing structures with the intent of evoking emotions, many architects seem to use buildings to represent abstract principles or ideas devoid of context. As a result, architecture is too much about the expression of theoretical thought and technology, and not enough about the experience of emotion. Ultimately, too many structures are emotionally flat and monotonous, like the architectural equivalent of clinical depression; or technically overwhelming, contextually destructive and intimidatingly foreign, where the architects confuse awe with impact, and create the architectural equivalent of anxiety disorder.

Intentions and technology don't matter in the living of life, its experiences that matters. It's irrelevant to convey intent or a particularly clever conceptualization. The same could be said of any field of human endeavor: in the end, outcomes matter more than thoughts and objectives. What is essential in architecture is not so much the beauty of the ideas, but the beauty of the results, of what the naked eye can see from the detail to the whole, without preparation or explanation of any kind. Strangely, however, today's architecture seems to be primarily concerned with intent — with what the *architect* thinks and believes and what can be built with new technology, as opposed to with what the audience senses and discerns, or what's best for humanity. The problem is that ideologically impeccable structures can feel awkward and uncomfortable; conceptually novel buildings can accurately reflect a philosophical or intellectual or technological movement while simultaneously neglecting the lived experience of their inhabitants.

In any pole, citizens vote overwhelmingly for the buildings that inspired deep feeling. These choices seemed to confound architectural experts, who observed that the winning structures were certainly not "the design professional's view of the best buildings," but instead were the ones that most appealed to people's emotions. Significantly, the experts failed to explain why the "design professionals" imagined that architecture and emotion are antithetical to one another.

A paradigm shift that embraces human emotion in architecture and the built environment, to re-humanize it, is needed. After all, humans exist in physical spaces; by definition, then, human emotions unfold in and are influenced by those same spaces. It's healthy to feel, and acknowledge that impediments to feeling should be addressed and removed so that all live in a deeper, richer, more meaningful way. A renewed focus on human beings and human experience in architecture, which returns us to the core experience of human emotion is obligatory. By recognizing the centrality of human emotion in architecture, it not only becomes a philosophical issue of structures and materials, but also of deeply felt experience.

DAVID STRABEL R.A.

Wells, Maine 04090 &
Brockport, New York 14420
585-637-5346
dave@davidstrabel.com

architect