ChatGPT Identifies Inhuman Architecture — But Can We Please Stop Building It?

by [Nikos Salingaros](#), with *ChatGPT* (May 2023)

A Series of Houses, Matias del Campo/Midjourney AI via Archipaper

Pitting Google and Microsoft against the architectural narrative.

People who promote adaptive architecture are fighting against [an entrenched system](#) backed by overwhelming media influence that generates its opposite. Finally, they have reasons for optimism. After one century, another competing power system has arisen spontaneously. Artificial Intelligence (AI) programs make an architectural revolution possible. The best commercial interest of the Tech Giants lies in adaptive design

that resonates with human biology.

I do not include Meta (AKA Facebook) in the above heading, because Meta made a mistake in [embracing architectural cult players](#) for designing virtual reality environments of the Metaverse. Ignoring what the imaginative gaming world learned about engaging design, those spaces are viscerally unattractive. An immersive virtual experience is pleasurable only if the body receives unconscious signals set by evolution. Overlooking this necessary condition probably contributed to Meta's losing several billions of dollars.

Because of their training, architects are clueless about what happened. Most of them are ideologically committed to supporting [stale design ideologies dating from the 1920s](#). Can we please fix this—for the good of humanity? Restructuring [architectural education](#) to teach discovered truths instead of design dogma is long past due, but [reforming](#) sclerotic academia poses a monumental task.

The key to doing this is to acknowledge that [AI vastly improves](#) the human connection between students and a topic. Ironically, "Artificial" Intelligence reveals architectural reality that a portion of the human population denies. There is a difference between how humans and machines think; but in the case of architecture, the surprise is that the humans behave unintelligently. AI reveals a deep disconnect between human senses and the design of our environment that many people fail to grasp. Those individuals override their own senses to believe what the design profession and vested interests tell them.

This essay suggests that both the common person and the aspiring young architect can use AI in re-discovering adaptive environments. Responses from *ChatGPT* incorporate what researchers already know based on [medical and neuroscience data](#). But mainstream architects confined in an intellectually barren world willfully ignore these findings on what

everybody—including themselves—feels.

How do you identify inhuman architecture?

I solicited *[ChatGPT](#)* to describe inhuman architecture. I asked for the characteristics of buildings that embody negative-valence properties such as anxiety, fear, nihilism, and threat; that deny life; that reject the sacred; that make us feel sick and wish to leave. These strong words are never mentioned in architectural education. Here is what *ChatGPT* described. I collected and arranged individual sentences from the answers given but have not edited them in any way.

ChatGPT: "For instance, some design elements that can generate feelings of anxiety or fear include:

1. *Sharp edges and angles: Buildings with sharp edges and angles can create a sense of unease and discomfort in people, as they evoke a feeling of danger or threat. Sharp edges can also create a sense of aggression or violence.*
2. *Dehumanizing: The architecture may prioritize function and efficiency over the needs and comfort of the human occupants. Spaces may be designed with little consideration for the human scale, leading to uncomfortable or even dehumanizing environments.*
3. *Detached from nature: In short, an architecture that denies life is one that is characterized by a lack of connection to the natural world, a focus on efficiency and function over the needs and comfort of the human occupants, and a cold, sterile aesthetic that feels dehumanizing and oppressive. Buildings designed with these characteristics may be the product of architects*

who are nihilistic, worship power over others, or simply lack a connection to the living world.

4. *Dark and cramped spaces: Dark spaces can create a feeling of fear or anxiety, as they obscure the surroundings and create a sense of the unknown. They may be designed to block out views of the natural world and to create an artificial, controlled environment that is devoid of any connection to the outdoors. Buildings that have dark and cramped spaces, such as narrow hallways or small rooms with low ceilings, can make people feel claustrophobic and uncomfortable.*

5. *Monolithic structures: Large, monolithic structures can make people feel small and insignificant, creating a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. Architectural details that represent nihilism may include the use of cold, industrial materials such as concrete and steel, as well as a minimalist aesthetic with sparse decoration or ornamentation.*

6. *Unnatural forms: Buildings with unnatural forms, such as twisted or contorted shapes, can create a sense of unease and discomfort in people, as they defy our expectations of how a building should look. These elements can give a sense of danger or unease.*

7. *Unusual or asymmetrical shapes: Buildings that have unusual or asymmetrical shapes can be disorienting and confusing to people. Overall, these architectural features may create a sense of anxiety or unease, as they may be seen as rejecting traditional values and promoting a sense of hopelessness or meaninglessness.*

8. *Overbearing or oppressive design: Buildings that have an overbearing or oppressive design, such as those with heavy, solid walls or dark colors, can make people feel uncomfortable and trapped. The*

architecture may be designed to create a sense of power and dominance, with little regard for the impact on the natural world or the people who inhabit the space.

9. *Redundant repetition: Repetitive patterns or motifs can create a sense of monotony or dullness, which can be very unsettling for people. Repetition can also create a sense of imprisonment or confinement, as it suggests a lack of variety or diversity. The overall effect may be a sterile and unwelcoming environment that feels more like a machine than a living space.*

10. *Excessive heights: Buildings that are excessively tall, particularly those with glass facades, can create a feeling of vertigo or unease. This can be particularly true for people who are afraid of heights."*

ChatGPT's guileless honesty.

The above characteristics define predominant architectural form languages applied around the world as a matter of course. I asked the program to summarize inhuman architecture, and it listed prevailing building styles! *ChatGPT* acts like an honest, naïve human in telling the simple truth. By drawing upon collective wisdom instead of being sidetracked by narrow opinion, *ChatGPT* is more grounded in evidence and logic than a person who is prejudiced by some agenda or ideology.

The descriptions come from billions of pieces of data. *ChatGPT* is trained to examine larger sets of information and reconcile them logically. Its answers were prompted by my questions, but that does not alter the game-changing nature of this exercise. Getting intelligent answers from a computer program is contingent upon asking it intelligent questions. I was careful not to use words that would recapitulate the standard

architectural narrative, which forms a relatively small part of the data base.

Giving obvious and ordinary responses, *ChatGPT* is unconcerned with the controversy those responses might generate. (*ChatGPT* is triggered by certain keywords to avoid or fudge an answer.) Machine intelligence has not yet been trained to be shrewd enough to recognize when it is stepping on the toes of a power system. It is humans who intentionally falsify answers so that those conform to a preconceived narrative set by "initiated" individuals.

In both its verbal and visual applications, AI has decisively shattered the hegemony of thought imposed on us by questionable [architectural dogma](#) during so many decades. If society decides to act, AI could help to revise a global system of construction, design, and education based upon ideology and stylistic conformity. The science-fiction prediction of AI superating human intelligence—keeping some people awake at night [worrying](#)—has come true, but its achievement in this particular instance is to liberate human society rather than enslave it.

When *ChatGPT* proves to be more intelligent than humans.

AI programs tap into vast data sets that are now accessible on a previously unattainable scale. Most AI responses are generated by algorithms trained to simply average surveys drawn from that pool of data. In some applications, AI identifies new patterns and learns both from stored data and from trial-and-error, which makes it approach real intelligence rather than simplistic regurgitation.

The [astounding win](#) of the *AlphaGo* program over Go champion Lee Sedol on March 2016 alerted those who were paying attention to the possibilities of AI to equal and even exceed human

intelligence. AI researchers have since developed increasingly powerful and sophisticated software. As the scale of the database and connectivity increase, emergent phenomena transition AI from highly restricted settings towards a more holistic framework. It was only a matter of time before we would think of asking an AI program for a wise answer to a pressing question.

Architects co-opt AI, while panicking about being replaced by it. They welcome AI, and indeed all technology, solely as props in producing architectural images that conform to the dominant narrative. It never occurs to either educators or practitioners to use AI to drastically improve the experience of the user. Architects do not, as a rule, strive to discover more adaptive design techniques, because their standardized product cannot relate to the concept of adaptation.

There is more than architecture at stake here. The mode of thinking that makes the architectural narrative possible is exclusionary and intolerant. It does not accept or even acknowledge adaptive and holistic methods of design. By contrast, the adaptive approach allows for balancing between humanistic and technocratic methods.

For mainstream architects, the uncountable examples of adaptive design spanning the globe do not exist. Those buildings, dating from all ages of humankind, are not even acknowledged as a valid category of architecture relevant for today. Adaptive design is the result of intelligence applied to interpret biological responses. Substituting ideology for reality, people rely upon canonical icons instead of engaging human intelligence in [architectural analysis](). This facile process of groupthink engages and interprets the physical world in an unintelligent manner. Architecture journals reinforce this illusion through continuous visual zapping via unnatural images published daily.

The intellectual split is one century old. Absoluteness and

exceptionalism are embedded within the architectural narrative—it supposedly contains the ultimate truth; hence new knowledge is superfluous. Dissident facts threaten the system's existence. The system judges adaptive design as unassimilable because it cannot be incorporated into its hegemonic image-based culture.

How architectural education perpetuates inhuman design.

I conclude by describing the dire situation in which architectural education, literature, and practice find themselves. In doing so, I am outlining points for a research project that can employ AI to finally resolve long-standing controversies.

Ever since the Bauhaus, [students began to be taught](#) to serve an industrial vision by eliminating life from their buildings and designs. Our schools do not teach adaptive design. A stylistic proscription imposes a narrow set of generic images on approved projects, which conflict with human biology. Students imbue those qualities through [incessant visual exposure](#) coupled with praise by their instructors. The standard system of instruction therefore amounts to an accomplished and sophisticated program of [psychological conditioning](#).

The current teaching model compels future architects to override their own neural system's evolved [processing mode](#). Insisting upon unnatural design numbs the body's reactions and this soon becomes internalized. An insular architectural narrative relies upon nonsensical attempts at [explanation](#). Misleadingly collected as "architectural theory", these propaganda slogans are tirelessly repeated as a mantra even though (or possibly because) [they contradict perception](#).

Society should be alarmed at this institutional choice, where

preferred design typologies are those identified by *ChatGPT* as inhuman architecture. The [rampant uglification](#) of our world could be affecting human health and well-being. Architectural style could be in part responsible for the observed [epidemic of anxiety](#) and depression.

As documented elsewhere, [architectural fashion](#) is not widely shared by the world's populations. Thus far, the narrative distracts a gullible public so that it is not interested in the [potentially negative effects of the profession's customary products](#). All the while, architects continue to ignore what the human body unconsciously [responds to](#) in a building. It is disconcerting that, whenever [reality contradicts](#) the architectural narrative, reality is dismissed.

Dystopian science fiction predicted what has happened with architecture. Ray Bradbury's 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451* described the nihilistic switch involving firefighters and literature, when the professionals charged with putting out fires eventually turned to burning books. Critics of architecture will recognize an alarming similarity, where the profession turned to eliminating specific geometrical qualities conferring life in buildings and urban places.

[Practitioners shun](#) traditional architecture as [cities destroy](#) their most precious heritage to make way for lifeless monsters. Solving this massive societal problem necessitates a radical [restructuring](#) of the current system of architectural education. Let us now use AI as a tool for improving human health through architecture.

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