Introduction to *CENTER 15: Divinity, Creativity, Complexity* (Center for American Architecture and Design, 2010)

by

Michael Benedikt

With rare exceptions, architecture schools belong to universities within which religious education is offered only in Religious Studies programs. In both—architecture schools and religious studies programs—the gods are always *their* gods, and religious rituals are seen as "serving social purposes."[1]

In architecture schools specifically, where studios will sometimes take on the design of a church, a mosque, a synagogue, or a Buddhist retreat, it is the putative *client's* faith that is the subject of the program, not the student's (or the teacher's). The latter are off-limits to discuss except over pizza some blocks away. True, temples and cathedrals comprise a substantial part of architectural history courses, but as the slides roll by they soon become seen as demonstrations of the lengths to which master builders once went to please princes, popes, and power generally, rather than as "engines of divinity" or "receptions of the spirit." As in Religious Studies, keeping distance is essential, even if it undermines understanding.

For its part, today's architectural design discourse, call it theory, provides few ideas that would guide designers anywhere near the gates of Mystery in contemporary terms, this even though the field, especially of late, has become rife with mystifications of how form is generated by "systems" and "processes," systems and processes whose explanations are as dependent upon authority and intuition, upon getting the language right and the software to cooperate, as religious explanations ever were. In result, to reflect seriously, gropingly, upon God or the cosmos today in the halls of an architecture school, or to say out loud that one is searching for something deeply true, or ethical, or aesthetic in the free act (or result) of design, would be to betray a serious absence of "cool."

Now, secular universities should not offer training in any faith, granted. Nor should they offer in(tro)ductions to the mystical experience.[2] But one wonders whether the idea of God—or at any rate, of "the divine"—in all its historical richness and contemporary problematics could ever again inspire creative work in architecture, as it did for centuries in painting, music, and, yes, science as well. After all, our understanding of what "God" means has not been, and need not be, frozen in ancient doctrine. The idea of divinity varies from religion to religion, and it has already changed over historical time even within the Western tradition.[3]

For example, post-Enlightenment figures like Jefferson, Franklin, Newton, Kant, Emerson, Thoreau, James (William), and Einstein, to name a prominent few,

proposed that God can be a/the stupendously intelligent and powerful creator of the universe that tradition tells us God is, but without day-to-day involvement in human history. This is *deism*. Here, God is not a person in any sense; nor is God addressible or caring, as "he" is in *theism*. For deists, it suffices that the universe be of God's design and marvelous beyond compare.[4] Deists can even accept evolution: it's the way God works. Evolution or no, it follows that the natural world is God's Book as much as the Bible is, and that we are free to read both "texts" using our full rational and interpretive powers. But (says deism), because we are a part of nature too and not our own creators, we may act upon nature only in reverence and with an understanding of God's purpose, which is to "hear" and "see" His name glorified in and by works of beauty, goodness, and harmony with all creation…whatever—or whoever—God *really* is.

Nowhere was deism more literally adopted than in Freemasonry, that secretive religious movement that, by its own account, originated in the stone-cutting guilds of medieval Europe and ancient Egypt. (It was officially founded in the early 1700s.) In Freemasonry, one image dominates: God as the *Architect* of the Universe, God as geometer-supreme. Polymath and architect Sir Christopher Wren was a Freemason, as were the architects Benjamin Latrobe, Pierre Charles L'Enfante, and possibly Le Corbusier.[5] So too was the poet and artist William Blake, and a number of American presidents.

Among the great modern architects, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Louis Kahn were arguably deists (but not, we think, Freemasons). And so too, perhaps, was Mies van der Rohe when he famously pronounced that "God is in the details."[6] Scientists and philosophers today who call themselves "spiritual but not religious" are frequently deists too, as are many artists, nature-lovers, and ordinary people who are tired of conventional religious dogma. And as we shall see, deism (together with pantheism, the idea that God and Nature are one) lends passion to many a contemporary environmentalist.

But deism is not the only alternative to atheism (i.e., the belief that there is no God in any sense) or to (mono)theism, i.e., the belief that there is one creator God—omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent—who is involved in human history and answers prayer. Nor is deism necessarily the best alternative for our time, even though it appeals nicely to the scientific temperament. One could equally well pay attention to what John Calvin called *sensus divinitatis*—our innate sense of the divine—and then explore that intuition's involvement not with Calvinism per se, nor with awe at God's once-and-for-all design (which yields up deism once more), but with a deeper than usual appreciation of the *process of human ethical creativity*—a process that is itself, as some of the papers in this book will argue, "divine enough," even when seen in a naturalistic, evolutionary context.

This interpretation of *sensus divinitatis*, anyway, yields up a different conception of God to the Biblical/Qur'anic one as well as to the deist one. And it brings us to a new understanding of the nature and meaning of human creative acts.

This fifteenth volume of *CENTER: A Journal for Architecture in America* was long—too long—in the making. Its origin lay in the conference held at the University of Texas at Austin in November of 2004, called "Divinity, Creativity, Complexity," which attempted to fuse these ideas to the phenomenon of architecture.

Four papers were presented then, and they appear here in edited form: "Strange, Hidden, Holy: Religious Experience in Recent Secular Architecture," by William Saunders, editor of *Harvard Design Magazine*, "Science and the Quest for Cosmic Purpose," by John Haught, Senior Fellow in Science and Religion at the Woodstock Theological Center of Georgetown University, "God the Architect of the Universe, Universe the Architect of God" by Charles Jencks, independent author, historian, designer, and theorist extraordinaire, and "The Argument from Design(ers)" by yours truly of the University of Texas at Austin. Thereafter, several papers were invited specifically for this volume. Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufman's "In the Beginning…Creativity," is a by-permission re-print of a chapter in a book of the same name. Florida State University philosopher of biology Michael Ruse's "Design vs. Creation in the Arts," Tom Fisher, Dean of the College of Design at the University of Minnesota's "Perennial Way of Design," and Chicago architect Stanley Tigerman's "Creativity, Melancholy and the Divine" are original papers, and were invited. The remainder of the articles in this volume were the result of an open Call For Papers published in the *ACSA Newsletter* and in other venues. Submissions from some thirty respondents were reviewed and six selected for publication by our Editorial Board.

I want to thank all of these authors, invited and selected, for the immense patience they have shown as this volume of *CENTER* was oh-so-slowly pulled together, edited, and financed. If it's any consolation, dear authors, remember that our subject is timeless and that your contribution is unique: there's no book quite like this in the annals of architectural publishing.

———

I shall try now to provide a coherent overview of our fourteen authors' disparate "takes" on the divine aspects of architecture (or is it the architectural aspects of the divine?). As intended, evolution is a recurrent theme: how it works, how it generates complexity, how creativity is evolutionary and evolution creative; and how human creativity, if not exactly proof that we are made "in the image of God," is nonetheless radically dependent on grace of a sort, on a Way found, on serendipity seized and put to ethical, life-promoting advantage.

The latter idea is largely the subject of the article by Gordon Kaufman, for whom God and creativity are all but identical. "The metaphor of creativity," he writes, "is

appropriate for naming God because (1) it preserves and indeed emphasizes the ultimacy of the *mystery* that God is, even while (2) it connects God directly with the coming into being—in time—of the new and the novel." In Kaufman's view, human creativity is but a subspecies—a late manifestation—of eternal cosmic creativity, and *that* creativity, built upon and out of chaos, is Godly, or, cutting to the chase, God. Kaufman is not writing about architecture. He is a theologian. But his views lend permission, it seems to me, to welcoming aleatory and serendipitous design processes into architecture, both formally and socially. They suggest a limit to rationality. They put a circle around CAD (computer-aided-drafting) and BIM (Building Information Management) systems, around all performance checklists, and around all bloodless, volume-clumping, color coding "programming stages," which masquerade as design. No: *air* must be let in: *neshama*, spirit, serendipity, excess, love. And all these represent an embrace of complexity.

If Kaufman is indebted to the "process" view of divinity that goes back to Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, William Saunders seems more under the influence of Paul Tillich, for whom God was the Invisible Ground of Being and thus to be found everywhere "embodied" in/as a vast and charged stillness, or potential, which, like the Tao, underlies reality. Like balancing rocks seen against star-filling skies, "there are buildings and places," Saunders writes, "that put us in mind of the divine, and many (if not most) of them are not religious buildings." These are buildings and places that help you feel how large the world is—how infinite, unknowable, and little interested in you personally—and that, at the same time, deliver you to joy, to gratitude, that you can hear, see, and have this very thought. Such buildings and places make you feel fortunate to be at least *capable* of the same rationality and ingenuity that made them possible and yet feel humbled at the greater "work" that is the cosmos—"strange, hidden, and holy." Using a wide range of examples, Saunders lauds the elusive combination he sees in the best of contemporary architecture: human labor taken to perfection on the one hand, devotion to the unseen—both intimate and grand—on the other. Common to the best in architecture, he argues, is the suppression of the individual ego (architect's or observer's), a disinterest in comfort, and a willingness to take on the difficult whole and fail. Refreshing, too, is Saunders' critical take on the feeling of "spirituality" that is all but automatically produced by Minimalist architecture that plays coy with light. Ando pretentious? It's a thought.

Prominent as an explicator of science to religious thinkers and of religion to scientists, theologian John Haught offers a view of how evolution itself can be seen as "strange, hidden, holy," to use Saunders' words. The God known to the Western tradition is nothing if not purposeful; while biological evolution is nothing if not purpose*less*. Both would explain Everything. How can they be reconciled? First, Haught indicates, we can and should be skeptical of scientific reductionism: the world is not "nothing but" atoms or quanta and thus "flat;" rather, it is intrinsically and "informationally" hierarchical. Evolution generates complexity, and complexity creates levels upon levels of phenomena with sharp ontological discontinuities. Second, we have to marvel at how the universe seems custom-made to have humans

eventually poking about in it. Given how many constants in physics *had* to be exactly what we find them to be, more than luck is involved. It would seem that "(M)ind has been woven into the fabric of the universe from its earliest beginnings." Third, following Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Haught sees not only *directionality* in cosmic evolution (to which any cosmologist might agree, given that the universe seems to be expanding and, on the whole, increasing in entropy), but *purpose*, which is directionality toward something of undeniable value. And what is that something of undeniable value? It is *consciousness*, human to be sure, but perhaps also, some day, supra-human consciousness. Fourthly, and finally, Haught deploys a version of the "argument from design" for the existence of God. Citing process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (who appears more than once in this book), Haught casts evolution itself as a possibly divine process whose aim is "*more intense configurations of beauty*." (Here the architect-reader will surely rush to read Whitehead.) "The long view," Haught concludes, "…would consider all the puzzling features of the cosmos revealed by modern science to be consistent with the notion that the cosmos is grounded in and sustained by an *ultimate reality* [his emphasis] whose creative will is that of maximizing cosmic beauty."

This reader finds this last view somewhat terrifying, in as much as exploding stars, not to mention fireballs filmed from helicopters, are beautiful too. From this possibility, Haught covers himself, as it were, by offering as "possibly correct" a Christian article of faith: that the ultimate reality is *infinite love*. Some readers might sigh, "if only." But no matter. Haught here (and more so in his major writings, of course) comes close to making the science-religion divide leapable.

In "God, the Architect of the Universe—Universe, the Architect of God," Charles Jencks makes that leap on every page, back and forth, buoyed not only by the updraught of poetic insight (or is it license?), but also by contemporary cosmogony and complexity science. Appreciation of the architects' religious impulse, he says, begins in appreciation of architecture's claims to show/manifest "purposeful design" and "beautiful organization." Shades of Freemasonry: Who else but God/Architect can say "Let there be light"? Who else but God/Architect would judge that what He/he had made was *good* at the end of every day of a six-day "construction" sequence, and then walk away forever…except for rare-but-important visits? Look at nature's beauty and (fine) architecture's. Are they not of the same H/hand? Jencks does not *subscribe* to these views as much as delight in them. His own are more modern, and derived from the science of complexity and the process of evolution, which process Jencks—like Haught, Whitehead, and Darwin himself—finds mysterious and impressive enough. Complexity generates value, not from without, but from within as it were: a sort of welling up, a boiling, a burgeoning, into higher and higher levels of organization: matter into life, energy into intelligence. And "this is precisely what architects do. They take nature's basic language and idealize it, dramatize, or at least, edit it. They turn nature into the idea of Nature with a capital N, a kind of Godly act." Which is to say: Humans are involved in the evolutionary drama, moving it forward by their very agency (which could not have been said, say, fifty thousand years ago). Complexity is maximized when it is

neither under- nor over-organized, the first (under-) yielding chaos, the second (over-) yielding rigidity. In making a building or work of art, this complexity "comes into being as the result of imaginative power" steering the middle course…this "imaginative power" being nothing other than *cosmogenesis* re-manifest in the human mind. Illustrations abound in Jencks's article as he explicates these ideas, but he concludes with annotations of his own design work—a remarkable landscape in Scotland in honor of his late wife, Maggie Keswick, called *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation*—and the suggestion that God "himself," "herself," or "itself" may be the superorganismic *product* rather than generator of nature, evolution, and ourselves: Universe, the Architect of God indeed.

Philosopher Michael Ruse takes a more measured approach. Expert in the rise of Darwinism and the debates that swirl around its finer points, Ruse looks more carefully at the process of natural selection than does Jencks or Haught (or anyone else in this volume for that matter). To this day, Ruse reports, it is not settled which is more important: the logic of *form*, or the logic of *function*. Both have a channeling effect on the course of a species' evolution: there are constraints and opportunities that derive from the patterns of self-assembly to which the species has already committed; there are constraints and opportunities that derive from the changes in the environment that affect every organism's chances for reproduction in/of its current form. If the argument between biologists consists in disagreeing as to which is the more powerful effect (Ruse confesses himself a functionalist), architectural readers will find the controversy familiar, even as the Modernist credo "form follows function" (usually ascribed to Louis Sullivan) holds sway and is challenged by the postmodern, computer-driven reversal, "function follows form." As Ruse observes however, the true divide between biological evolution and architectural (or cultural) evolution is *intentionality*. One cannot and should not ascribe intentionality to the bulk of living organisms he notes, much less long-term intentionality of the sort that could guide evolution to fixed ends across several generations. But this is precisely what human designers (and breeders) succeed in doing. Nor do buildings reproduce themselves by themselves. One realizes that to apply evolutionary narratives to architecture's technological or stylistic history (or to music's, or art's, or even science's) requires much squinting of the eyes. But not all rigor is lost: together with landscapes and urban conditions, buildings differentially support human life by their form and material, and so participate in human biological evolution quite literally: which families and traits will multiply and which will not (or not so fast).

Ruse opens a world of subtle considerations to the average reader, considerations that go not only into recent biological research but to the roots of philosophy, where, needless to say, there are further tendrils to follow and further assumptions to question. Every nodal word in the modern lexicon of evolution—"adaptation," "constraint," "function," "fitness"— is fraught with ambiguity or energized by buried teleology (as with "compensating," and "favoring," which are rarely prefaced with "as though…"). Indeed, one begins to wonder whether evolution could be described

at all were its language stripped of living metaphors—were it left with only force, mass, time, and distance.

Then again, what *can* be spoken about without metaphors? Not much. Our most meaningful words are but metaphors compressed by time and usage into apparent solidity, into apparent objectivity. Life-soaked judgments of strength, weakness, resistance, progress, success, justice, and beauty suffuse almost all thought, even thoughts about numbers, inanimate objects, and "processes."

Ah, but in matters religious as well as scientific we seek the truth that lies beyond petty desire—beyond, even, relevance to life. We are looking for Truth eternal, which might not be expressible in words. How shall we experience it? And what should we learn from trying to? Getting the whole enterprise off to a bad start, Tom Fisher suggests, is positing that humans, nature, and God occupy separate and incommensurable realms. As he points out, it is abundantly clear now that humans and nature (to take two of the three) form one tightly bound system. And when it comes to design, or to explaining *why* things are the way they are, it is clear that whether or not to "bring God in" depends as much on what we mean by "design" as what we mean by "God." For, "as every working designer knows," Fisher observes, "'transcendent form giving' is not how design actually occurs. Most designers spend their time in unpredictable, trial-and-error processes, engaged in a project at all levels of detail." Sounds like evolution. Implication: if this is not how God works, then God is not a designer; if it *is* how God works, then God is a designer who works through—or perhaps simply is—evolution, especially if it's the case (as I suggest in my own contribution to this volume) that "design" *is* evolution and "evolution" design, distinguished from each other only by speed (fast vs. slow) and point of view (outside vs. inside). Fisher finds what he is looking for in Aldous Huxley's 1944 book *The Perennial Philosophy*. "(D)esign and evolution are not contradictory, but part of the same 'Divine Ground,'" writes Fisher, citing Huxley, and then turns our attention to the implications of all this for contemporary architectural design. "The doctrine that God is in the world, has an important practical corollary—the sacredness of Nature, and the sinfulness and folly of man's overweening efforts to be her master rather than her intelligently docile collaborator." That was Huxley. Follows Fisher: "A perennial architecture would be one that demands less space, requires fewer resources, and exhibits less hubris." It would be practiced by architects who "perceive everyone and everything as sacred…cherish all, …waste nothing, …and live simply." From the unity of God, humans, and nature, Fisher draws radical conclusions. Sustainability (or environmentalism), which for most architects passes as a simple responsibility, for Fisher reaches the level of moral imperative, a spiritual necessity, a total orientation, a path to planetary salvation. One could not ask for a more direct route from religious thinking to professional practice.

Fisher would not be the first person to see the road to God passing through Nature, or indeed, to see divinity in/as *natura naturans*, nature naturing. At the dawn of the modern era, Spinoza's heresy was to speak of "*Deus sive Natura*," God-or-Nature, as a single entity. Now it is a fairly common view, akin to deism, or a sort of pantheism.

In his piece *"Feminist Architecture: Meet Feminist Ethics,"* architect Tom Spector marks out another approach, another whole theology, although he does not say so. This approach comes out of Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and G.W.V. Hegel. In it, the connection between divinity and humanity is forged in the phenomenon of ethical development (largely between humans, but also other forms of life); and it privileges real-time encounters between sentient beings over hierarchical rule-making or rule-play. Care, love, genuineness, community, benevolence, and justice, are expressions of God in—and perhaps of God *as*—modes of human, moral, living-in-relationship. Politics matter, and actual life matters, "religiously." Spector's essay starts by exploring the gender differences delineated by Ancient Greek city life: life in the *agora* (public square, men) and in the *oikos* (home or hearth, women). Sustained by architecture, he remarks, "the walls of domesticity (that) mark an abrupt boundary between public and private, the moral and beyond-moral, (may be) nothing more than a convenient fiction for those who want to exclude women and the lessons of domestic life from their theorizing." Spector's main sources are not the three philosophers I mentioned, but contemporary feminist moral philosophers like Carol Gilligan, Margaret Urban Walker, Beatriz Colomina, Joan Tronto, and Brenda Vale. Were feminist ethics allowed into the *agora*, workplaces would be more nurturing in design and operation. They would evenly offer personalized interiors, zones of intimacy, access to outdoors, child care facilities, paternal and maternal leave, conflict resolution that was negotiated and interpersonal rather than authoritarian or contract-waving. Gone would be glass houses and office buildings (both male ideas). Welcome would be repair over new construction. And so on.

If this threatens to devolve into a parlor game, Spector stays well away, and goes deeper: The general perception, he observes, that "the best designers are concerned with such presumably masculine things as formal perfection and aesthetic ingenuity, and that there is (for them) something second best, or merely compensatory about connecting people in caring ways with their environment" (i.e. femininely), "finds its…opponent in traditional moral philosophy, in which artistic matters are considered to be of lesser consequence than moral concerns." Feminists, he suggests, ride upon this traditional prejudice, but do so at some risk. "Catering to needs" should be neither a weakness nor a strength when it comes to the "serious pursuit of form." Architecture is equally a collaborative ("feminine") and heroic ("masculine") discipline. Spector takes the next logical step: perhaps "gender itself is constructed, and heretofore fashioned primarily to serve the interests of…men." "If this is true," he goes on, "then the unquestioned embrace of a care-ethic may be a refusal to explore creatively the more interesting boundaries of what it means 'to be a woman'." Or a homosexual. Is there really "queer space" for example? Looking at the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender Community Center in San Francisco, Spector says no, not in form or aesthetic, and he doubts that either "gender construction" theory or "the woman's voice" will make a difference to that aspect of architecture. Where would it, then? Drawing on his own locale, Spector suggests we look to process/practice, specifically to the caring practice of such pioneers as Martha Berry

(1866–1942), architectural patron in Georgia responsible for Berry College's campus being among the most beautiful in the country, and Anna Colquitt Hunter (1892–1985), Savannah preservationist extraordinaire. The Historic Savannah Foundation that Hunter founded, and which is mostly run by women, has now directly saved over 350 historic buildings and sparked the rehabilitation of 1000 more. "(W)illing to take substantial personal risk to protect the objects of their affection," these women acted out the ethics of care in a way that one could call "religious" (see Note 2). No traditional theology is committed to here except perhaps the conviction that God is good, or that *our* doing good—caring for others, preserving them, honoring them, without thought for reward—is God's will obeyed. Some non-traditional theologies however, *are* implied if not committed to; again, coming out of Hegel, Buber, and Levina: the idea that divinity is seen through, embodied in, and perhaps even generated by, personal virtue in the encounter with other living beings.[7]

William Richards looks at the late 20th-century architect who most clearly personified the ethical attitude to architecture, Louis I. Kahn. Of course, Kahn is well known for his mystical metaphysical pronouncements like "I asked brick what it wanted to be, and it said, 'an arch,'" and "All material in nature, the mountains and the streams and the air and we, are made of Light which has been spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a shadow, and the shadow belongs to Light.") He spoke of the Treasury of Light, of the Immeasurable from which Form comes and returns, of the Desire to Express and to Be, and so on. Less emphasized, however, is Kahn's commitment to human community and to human institutions, and his firm belief that buildings—architecture—should *dignify* individuals from the scale of the city to the scale of rooms. ("A plan is a society of rooms" he would say, with all that implies for the inherent "rights" of every room to have its own front and back, source of daylight, and structure.) These are ethical concerns, and they explain his buildings as much as, if not more than, his metaphysics do. If Kahn's metaphysics were not any recognizable religion but rather a Romantic NeoPlatonism, Kahn's *practice* might be called religious humanism. Indeed, as Richards writes, "Kahn's shift from *Modern* architect to *modern* architect…is about his changed conception of community." Rather than the Modernist notion of "the collective containing the individual," Kahn posits instead "that the collective is an extension of the individual." The hinge point of his *oevre* in this regard lies between his unbuilt Adath Jeshurun Synagogue and his First Unitarian Church, the first being interested in technological prowess and universalizing symbolic form, the second in the actual working of an actual community. Kahn's work before and after these projects was not the same. "For Kahn," Richards concludes, "a combination of Renaissance principles and Bueax-Arts organization filled the chasm between the relentlessly systematizing heroics of Modernism and the archaic timelessness of 'community'—community not as a simple coming together physically (which makes only crowds), but as an existential concept applicable to individuals and working as a concrete genesis of programmatic, functional form…"

Though much has been written about Louis Kahn, a definitive account of his "religion" has yet to be written. The same could be said of the faith-life of most architects about whom essays are worthy of being written. Strongly influenced by Kahn, and almost as well known for his philosophical if briefer, more Zen-like pronouncements, is the Japanese architect Tadao Ando. (Ando—an ex-boxer—underwent Zen-influenced martial arts training.) Our author, Jin Baek, focuses his attention on one of Ando's best-known and, as it happens, explicitly religious buildings: his Christian "Church of Light" in Osaka, of 1989.[8] Baek traces Christianity's interest in "emptiness"—otherwise a distinctly Buddhist or Taoist ideal—to Protestantism's rejection of the Catholic Church's fondness for religious representations, that rejection based in turn not only on the Church's corruption at the time, but on the Biblical proscription of idolatry and on the monastic ideal of simplicity. The theme of emptiness, Baek tells us, was further reinforced by theologian Paul Tillich's belief that after the horrors of the 20th century, the only authentic representation of (Christian) faith was "sacred emptiness," which (in Tillich's words) is possible in architecture "only if the architecture shapes the empty space in such a way that the numinous character of the building is manifest." *Numen*, from the Latin, means "divine power," and that, for architects, is suggested by structural magic, plain surfaces, and *pure light*—light unexpected, mysterious, and content-free. Room must be left for the Word, which is borne by sound and voice, not vision. The cross is simply a cross, unoccupied (Christ risen?) not a crucifix (Christ crucified); and the cross that appears and at the same time disappears at the Church of Light (is it structural, just window, or a geometrical/formal consequence of squareness?) raises its abstraction to new heights. Baek looks back to the history of Christianity in Japan to explain how it is that the cross became seen as "the symbol of cruelty or of inhumanity" not of transcendence or pathos. "The Buddhist idea of death is rest and peace, not agony" he reports, while the Buddha's sitting or horizontal posture is "a great contrast to Christ on the cross." (Baek is here quoting scholars Daisetz Suzuki and Shinichi Hisamatsu.) One can see why Ando would try to draw the central sign of Christianity away from Western and towards Eastern sensibility. Otherwise bathed in darkness, Ando's signature, polished concrete gleams like lacquer-ware from the light of the cross, like gold on the skin of the Buddha...

Readers of Baek's analysis will find themselves either exhausted or elated, either confounded or enlightened, by its poststructuralist thoroughness. Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez provides a counterpoint: a no less thorough, but surprisingly straightforward, discussion of a single moment in the work of Mexican (and Catholic) architect Luis Barragan, a contemporary and friend of Louis Kahn's, also prone to making materially simple, empty, and powerful spaces (if with much more color). While de Vazquez intrigues us with her description of the debates in art-history that would conflate (and then deconflate) the movements known as "magical realism" on the one hand, and "surrealism" on the other, her focus soon descends upon a single moment in Barragan's oeuvre: a small interior pool of water at the back of La Casa Gilardi in Mexico City that, by virtue of its color and lighting, both hints at and transcends baptism, both hints at and transcends the lucky occurrence

of water in a rocky cleft of wilderness, that is wade-able but isn't—that is useless really, but pregnant with significance. One looks at the composition with the expectation…of what? One is not sure: perhaps the appearance in some accidental reflection of Our Lady of Guadalupe. De Vazquez's excerpts of Gabriel Garcia de Marquez's *Strange Pilgims* help us accept Barragan's religio-magical ambition. De Marquez and Barragan were friends. But one is reminded too of the work of minimalist Donald Judd, hinting at—or is it hunting for?—fullness in emptiness, the divine in the ordinary, the rich in the simple, heightened perception and speeded thought, including the thought that God cannot be seen except in passing, or, having always already passed by, in a momentary breeze.

Not for Richard Becherer such light and magical moments. Not for him the "miracle" of sun-slice upon water, but long and complicated human memory, the ghosts of the past haunting the banal post-industrial landscapes of old downtowns. Becherer's lengthy meditation-cum-history of an abandoned section of downtown Sioux City, Iowa, is a rare find in the literature of architecture's "spiritual dimension." Becherer and his students researched it in libraries and map rooms, to be sure, but more importantly, they recovered its complex and layered human history of service and struggle as the meat-packing district of a once thriving town, and turned it into an exhibit emplaced in the same space. Why call this exercise—surely a humanistic one—"spiritual"? One need not, except that Becherer's voice raises images of transience and loss, inevitability and freedom that go beyond the recitation of circumstances. He tells, for example, of how "the *uncanny* shows its face in the insurance map" of Sioux City; how the random variation of the built-out grid "owes its visibility to unseen and unforeseeable forces," which is to say, to the 'acts of God' that work differently upon wooden and brick structures. His narrative wanders like the Missouri River ("Old Misery") through Sioux City's history, revealing complexity upon complexity: nature and humankind struggling over livelihood as though one wanted to take it away from the other; of fortunes won and lost. He tells of the people, mainly black, who lived and worked and died in the South Bottoms and Stockyards, as the rest of the city spread itself over river and hills energized primarily by real-estate boosterism. It could be the story of many a mid-American city. Becherer conjures the soul of Sioux City out of its brothels and feedlots. In his hands, the city gains a sort of consciousness of its own, a will, a fate. If Italo Calvino enchanted us with tales of imaginary cities, Becherer does it with a real one.

Interlude.

Becherer's essay and Baek's lead me to wonder about *words*, about how they seem both necessary and superfluous to conjuring up the gods of Architecture (to speak loosely). The stones of Architecture's are silent, yes. To stand in their presence with only the sun and the wind and a few small birds flitting through the columns…is to experience eternity; or if not eternity, time becalmed; or if eternity again, not the eternity that the "never-ending waves" or "wheeling stars" remind us of, but the

kind that has human beings *in* it, able, somehow, to participate in Olympian foreverness because they had achieved perfection in design and construction and had thus earned a place in the Universe.

But here again, see, I have applied words. It seems that one steps willingly into Silence only when prepared to do so…by words. Do Zen masters not put us in the palms of their hands with images of unblemished mirrors, departing geese, single hands clapping, and then laugh at how, with the intention of ridding ourselves of thought, these images make us think? I inhale the vaults of the Kimbell Art Museum and wonder if it is the building or my vocabulary that seduces me into lauding this building's supreme indifference *and* supreme compassion, a combination that is surely a version of divine love.

Of course, divinity—or God—as described in the Bible will have none of this. There God is nothing if not "proactive," confronting the ready-to-meet-Him and the unready-to-meet-Him with the same disregard for their plans. Abraham's God is not the Tao experienced in meditative bliss. He is not in the tinkling of bells or in the space between words (or columns). Abraham's God is speaks in the imperative. He churns with us and wars with us, bargains with us and makes covenants with us, even sacrifices what is dearest to Him and shares our tears. Throughout the Bible, our Father (who art you-know-where) *wants* things from us.

What are people of rational mind today to make of all this personification? For that is what the Bible's theology uses: personification, not as a mere literary trope, but to speak of something unspeakable. The Bible is a collection of human dramas based on historical events and written in the language of *relationship*: of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, kings and subjects, masters and servants. It is a morality play, a book of allegories held to be true, in which much of the wisdom *found* reflects the wisdom *brought* to it: the word of God, yes, but heard and spoken by humans retelling, rewriting, and reinterpreting its stories for three thousand years or more, tracking an evolving intuition of what is truly Good. Why can the "Word of God' not be a *process* too?

Where a modern religious sensibility sees "God" as giving voice to our conscience and an address for our gratitude, a committed atheist must find, within the narrative sweep and undoubted truth of evolution, alone sufficient reason to pick up where our mostly-believing ancestors left off, and do good. For surely *good* is in our hands to do, which makes it a matter of will and imagination, not just true knowledge of nature. Indeed, as Steven Pinker, Robert Wright, Daniel Dennett, and many other evolutionists have pointed out since, and including, Darwin: what is good and right in our eyes often runs *counter* to what we know is true of nature, counter to what evolutionary dynamics (not to say instinct) would advise us to do in order to survive and reproduce. Care for the ill, the aged, or the handicapped? Please. Love your enemies? Pshhh. Refrain from killing? Get real. These things will only slow you and/or your tribe down in the struggle to out-survive and out-reproduce your neighbors.

Interlude over.

While reading Alvaro Malo's often-technical descriptions of the Sonoran desert landscape, I found myself wondering again about the need for poetry to prepare us to see that place in the right way. "(A)s I dig in the foothills of the Catalinas," Malo begins, "…I forget the canons of beauty...and go along instead with the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's suggestion that one may formulate an aesthetic based not on the notion of beauty, but on that of force—force not understood as violence, but as the transitive event between my body and the material I move…the line of inflection…actualized in the mind but realized in matter." Throughout, Malo intersperses his disquisition on the geology and hydrology of Arizona with reveries that could have been cited by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*:

> How silently, even swiftly, the days glide by out in the desert…How 'the morning and the evening make up the first day' and the purple shadow slips in between with a midnight all stars!" And: "With the dawn we face the sunrise./We face it with all our humility./We are mere beings./All we can do is extend our hands toward the first light… We take it and cleanse ourselves./We touch our eyes with it…"[9]

Malo's is a plea for architects to find the spiritual dimension of their art in the land to which their buildings belong, in landscape not as the object of view but as the play and result of forces: here, the forces of heat, wind, water, and time upon rock. No paper and scissors in this picture, but plenty of poetic sensibility: "Geography is not the surrounding of the building, but rather the impossibility of its closure… Geography is not the field next door, nor even the neighboring district, but a line that passes through our objects, from the city to the teaspoon, along which there is an absolute outside."[10] Malo: "Geography is not just a territory that awaits mapping and subdivision... It is also a field of forces whose vectors await experiencing—a *source* of sensibility." That's where beauty comes from. That's where truth comes from, aided not by philosophy so much as "ecosophy." Malo makes no theological claims except the implicit deistic and perhaps pantheistic ones: that the true and eternal come from appreciating our temporality in the face of geographic time and our weakness in the face of geological forces, forces whose ability to punish and sustain and produce complex beauty is inexhaustible. These words point to the near-religion that environmentalism has become in this day. And yet it would be wrong not to remark upon how the desert Southwest recalls the landscape of the Hebrew Bible: impassive, magnificent, harsh in the day but forgiving at dusk, parched for miles but watered in grateful clefts by passing thunder. Forty days and nights alone in this land would surely purge the soul. Malo would have us bypass talk of meeting God or the devil, however, and bypass even First Nations narratives that saw spirit-entities everywhere in this gorgeous and terrible landscape. It would

be enough, Malo suggests, to become One with the desert by having the map of our very bodies coincide metaphorically with the Earth's. With "[l]ongitude [as] the set of mechanical relations of extension and orientation in space," he writes, "and latitude [as] the set of motive, or emotive, forces and intensive states in time…we may construct the map of a body and [with it] 'form…a natural geometry that allows us to comprehend the unity of composition of all of Nature and the modes of variation of that unity.'" Ecstatic union with divinity is the model. It is a model that goes back to medieval Sufi, Jewish, and Christian mysticism.

Architect, educator, and writer Stanley Tigerman takes us to the theme he first explored in *The Architecture of Exile*: that architecture begins in human beings finding themselves where they do not belong, where they did not grow up as a species, which is Eden (or East Africa a hundred or more thousand years ago). Architecture is thus suffused with our longing to return to seventy-five-degree temperatures, fruited plains, and animals to name; which is why we roof, and blow air, and garden. Tigerman begins this article, however, with a discussion of the melancholy of architects today who, afraid of "playing God" also cut themselves off from cultivating any poetic-ethical sensitivity, a sensitivity which, Tigerman argues, is itself "informed by a sense of the divine." Like the wandering Israelites of Exodus, many in architecture are caught between hope and nostalgia, carrying around with them a spark, a lamp, against the darkness of developer culture and philistinism. "Once it is posited," he goes on, "that creativity has greater authority when it relates to a sense of the divine, the question as to *which* kind of divinity this applies to, or derives from, becomes worth scrutinizing." He sees two kinds: those that derive from and idealize constant reinterpretation and updating of what "God" and "good" mean, and those that "emanate from an unwavering faith in fixed ideals." The second is where architecture has for too long placed it bets, as it were, which is to say, in the Hellenic, Roman, and (Roman) Christian ideal of eternal truth wedded to power, which is the reward for "being right with" God almighty. Tigerman makes a case for the first, however, and its post-exilic, Hebraic (and he does not mention, but might have, early Christian) roots. It is time that architecture turned its attention to the powerless and homeless, the disabled and the disenfranchised, the lost and lonely; not to posit new structures "out of the blue," but to interpret old ones: those from history as well as those aging buildings right nearby, and then accept the "impure" and complex results. Like Spector, Becherer, and Richards in this volume, Tigerman taps into the ethical roots of religious sensibility, rather than the aesthetic ones, to find architecture's path.

My own contribution to this volume is one about which I can be brief. Like Tigerman, I start with a discussion of how and why architects are sometimes accused of "playing God." Noting that film directors, surgeons, and playwrights often face the same accusation, I try to show how it does not hold up and is not fair, if only because the God they sometimes think they "are" is not the God of the Bible, but something/someone/some-process more gentle by far. I then look into the so-called "argument from design" for the existence of God, which goes back to the 19th century, and note Darwin's view of it. I consider what *evolution* consists in by

contrast to *design*, only to find structural parallels—parallels so deep that it can fairly be asserted that evolution and design *are one and the same process*. All that is different is the spatial scale, the temporal speed, and point of view of the namer of the process. "Designing is evolution speeded up and seen from outside the system; evolving is design slowed down and seen from inside the system." More often than not, too, evolution increases life's complexity, and it is from that complexity reaching higher and higher levels over millions of years that life-forms such as ourselves come eventually to have the power to sway large parts of the process of evolution. The very notion of *ethicality* emerges at this point too, and with it, a profusion of allegories, stories, rules, and theories that "explain" its arrival on the scene, allegories and rules that, being held to be true, work to have ethicality survive and reproduce as a way of life. Designing, which we recognize as *designing*, reflects the taking-over of biological evolution by ethical intention and its speeding up in neuronal processes. Where is the divinity in all this? In the very process of ethical creativity and/or in its result: the good. What has this to do with architecture? A great deal, just as it does with all the activities of daily life that allow creativity to take place. My paper concludes with short studies of Michelangelo, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Louis Kahn, all of whom, I try to show, had distinctly theological understandings of the source and purpose of their creativity, and all of whom (excepting Michelangelo, although he had a distinctly cosmic/developmental cast to this thinking) understood and accepted evolution as the way of nature.

—

To my knowledge, the argument from design never had actual designers address it directly. Symmetrically, it would seem that no theologian has visited a designer's office or themselves picked up a pencil to sketch something not in front of them, but in their heads, that might just work… But many fine architects and designers over the centuries (and too few of them having been mentioned in this book) have had profound things to say about the nature of their calling and the stars that they follow, and thus about the argument from design by implication. No one has mentioned Philippe Starck, for example, who is eloquent on the subject of design's cosmic and ethical purpose. Christopher Alexander has spent a lifetime reconciling "the quality that has no name" to the evolution, order, and complexity of the universe, and he too remains under-cited in this book, including by yours truly. Actual designers have long felt the triple process of reproduction, variation, and selection move through them as they labored.

But times have changed. Religion counts again, even as the voices of atheism grew more strident in the early 2000s and the faith vs. science debate heated up again. Computers have opened up our appreciation of the power of micro complexity to generate macro order. Evolution has received a boost in the public mind, with books about it proliferating everywhere and explaining everything. In result, where faith is in resurgence, it is at a higher, more self-aware and scientifically informed faith. In result too, we can expect more books about the spiritual aspects of architecture to

appear, fusing poetic and practical sensibilities. Yale University hosted two conferences on the topic in 2007. Attendance was excellent (I am told, I was not there), and a book of collected papers called *Constructing the Ineffable* is forthcoming from Yale University Press, edited by Karla Britton, The Architecture Culture and Spirituality Forum held its first symposium in Oregon in March of 2009. Membership is growing (visit http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/acs/). Renata Hejduk and Jim Williamson of Arizona State University have a volume in press with Routledge, titled *Saved! The Religious Imagination in Modern and Contemporary Architecture*. And then there are the several symposia and publishing efforts of the Center for American Architecture and Design at the University of Texas at Austin over the last ten years or so, focusing on architecture's values at a fundamental level, from psychology to economics.

In all, these are good times for architects to re-evaluate what they know about their art. "Sustainability" does not begin to exhaust the ways in which architecture is able to contribute to the quality of life today. Nor does the computer by itself open doors to anything but antic technophilia in certain architects' hands, and ruthless efficiency in others', without a guiding notion of what makes places great and abiding. In presenting this fifteenth volume of *CENTER: A Journal for Architecture in America*, my hope is that talk of God and goodness, of design and evolution, of complexity and its causes, of truth and beauty and "spirituality" and all the things that matters to us beyond cleverness and money, will enter the mainstream of architectural conversation refreshed.•

NOTES

[1] Consider this statement: "From the viewpoint of religious stud(ies), a religious ritual is a ritual precisely because it is human behavior that accomplishes nothing except the construction of concepts about its own legitimacy." Or this: "In sum, the religion researcher is related to the theologian as the biologist is related to the frog in her lab." From K. L. Knoll "The Ethics of Being a Theologian," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 7, 2009.

[2] Some say that architecture is rather too much like a religion already (at least in the academy), with design studio being precisely the place of in(tro)duction to the mystical experience, at around 2 am. On John Dewey's definition of "the religious," they have a point. To wit: "Any activity pursued in behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and in spite of threats of personal loss because of conviction of its general and enduring value is religious in quality." *A Common Faith* (1934) p. 31.

[3] See Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (London: Random House, 1997), or Frederick W. Schmidt, ed., *The Changing Face of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Press, 2000).

[4] One can trace deism itself to Spinoza, Descartes, and before that Aristotle and his idea of the Prime Mover.

[5] See J.K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

[6] Mies's pronouncement actually comes from Gustave Flaubert, who got it from Thomas Aquinas. Michelangelo is quoted as saying something very similar: "Trifles make perfection, but there is nothing trivial about perfection." "Whoever is striving for perfection is striving for something divine." And "Beauty is the purgation of superfluity." I imagine Mies van der Rohe having these sayings in a bedside reader.

[7] My own efforts to describe this last option can be found in *God Is the Good We Do: Theology of Theopraxy* (New York, Bottino Books, 2007).

[8] I say "as it happens" because many of Ando's secular buildings have the same serenity, physicality, and capacity to throw one into contemplation of beyondness (for lack of a better word).

[9] The first sequence is by John Van Dyke, the second by Ofelia Zepeda; see Malo's article in this volume.
[10] The words are Bernard Cache's.