

# Transcending Architecture : How to Design and Experience It

ARPL 618: Foundations of Sacred Space and Cultural Studies

Spring 2019

Instructor: Julio Bermudez

Wednesdays 9:40am-12:10pm

*“When one actually sees the solidity of a mountain or the vastness of the sea, when one comes upon it suddenly, there it is in its monolithic presence. Everything, including one’s own ego, has been pushed aside, except the majesty of that mountain or that sea. Such a sight absorbs you completely — it is beauty itself. If you are fortunate enough, think of a building that absorbs you with the same intensity — that building I call architecture: the others are nothing but edifices.”*

Claudio Silvestrin, 1999

## Inquiry

Is there a relationship between transcendence and architecture? Can the built environment help us access a spiritual state, perhaps God? And if so, how? These are questions as old as architecture and perhaps mankind itself. They are interrogations that deserves particular attention from those of us who profess architecture, since it is us who are in charge of, hopefully, make it happen.

This class will study the *transcending* nature of architecture using analytical and phenomenological methods. **First**, we will get acquainted with the state-of-the-art on the topic through a series of lectures/readings in combination with case studies of actual buildings reported to induce ‘ineffable,’ ‘spiritual,’ or sacred responses. These first 8 weeks of the semester will conclude with a document summarizing architectural properties, rules, and methods to assist designers in the pursuit of the highest purpose of architecture. The **second** half of the semester will turn this picture upside down by proposing that the reality of transcendence via architecture should not be analyzed or studied from without but actually lived. Students will be educated in the difficult, seldom recognized, and yet fundamental art of experiencing buildings and being present. We will carry on this contemplative practice in the perfect context of springtime and Washington DC powerful architecture. Students will be asked to visit, experience, and record their encounter with significant buildings (sacred and not). If properly engaged, these last 8 weeks of the term may prove to be transformative in a student’s career.

## Operation

The class will function as a seminar with regular faculty lectures, readings, student presentations, discussions, film viewing, field studies, and graphic/written assignments. The use of media (sketching, photography, and video) will be important in the second part of the semester during a series of ‘in-situ’ contemplative architectural practices. Nationally recognized experts on sacred space will participate in the discussions and/or reviews of the coursework.

## Bibliography

Diverse references and sources will be used during the semester, including films, music, and other media. However, central to this investigation will be:

J. Bermudez, *Transcending Architecture* (CUA Press 2015)

J. Bermudez, *Usus in Praesens* (2012) (2008)

J. Elkins, *Pictures and Tears* (Routledge 2001)

S. Unwin, *Analyzing Architecture* (Routledge 2009)

## Note

This class is not thought to serve just sacred/cultural grad students. Senior undergraduate students or graduate students in other concentration will find much to learn, enjoy and apply. If in doubt, contact Julio at [bermudez@cua.edu](mailto:bermudez@cua.edu)



*Between Cathedrals, Cadiz (Alberto Campo Baeza)*



*Sagrada Família, Barcelona (Antonio Gaudí)*



*Washington Monument from the Lincoln Memorial*



*Vietnam Memorial (Maya Lin)*

## **Bibliography of Reference**

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*Casa Malaparte, Italy (Adalberto Libera)*



*The Ancient Pyramids (Giza, Egypt)*

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