

# TRANSCENDING ARCHITECTURE . Contemporary Views on Sacred Space

(Washington DC: The CUA Press, 2015)

[http://www.sacred-space.net/transcending\\_architecture/](http://www.sacred-space.net/transcending_architecture/)

## Introduction (Chapter 1)

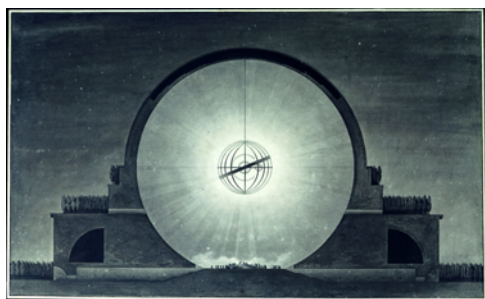
Julio Bermudez



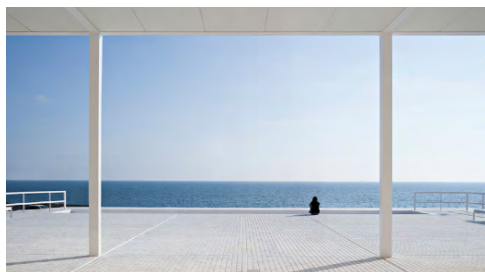
(1) *Transcending through the building*



(2) *Transcending through service*



(3) *Transcending conventions ...*



(4) *Transcending psychological state*

In the introduction to this book, I consider the promises and perils of buildings seeking transcendence. The ambiguity of the title *'transcending architecture'* certainly lends itself rather easily for a nuanced and provocative discussion. For who or what is doing the transcending? And exactly what is that being transcended? Its semantic vagueness forbids closure, secures humility, and encourages new interpretations, even of the ones already concocted. In this sense, at least five general and different but potentially interrelated meanings are implicit.

*Transcending architecture* may refer to a building type whose purpose is to (1) deliver users to a transcendental state (e.g., sacred architecture) or (2) support services, activities and realizations that advance a transcending cause (e.g., human dignity). *Transcending architecture* may also imply architectural practices and/or results that go well beyond cultural, social, or professional conventions. In this third case, it is architects who are using the making of architecture to enact the transcendence. Fourth, it could also describe a psychological state reached with (or without) architectural assistance but which no longer pays attention nor depends on architecture. Such state may (or may not) be ineffable. Lastly, the term may be pointing at the act of moving past architecture (either as discipline or actual built structure) due to its inability, irrelevance, or being unnecessary to address transcendence — or any other purpose, for that matter.

Having framed the discussion and acknowledged the indeterminate and disputed nature of *'transcending architecture,'* I go into recognizing the bias underscoring the writing of this book: *a belief in the reality and need for an architecture that advances the cause of transcendence.* We only have to look at our world obsessed with speed, consumerism, technology, entertainment, and economic growth along its mounting pile of overwhelming negative effects to realize the value and timing of an architecture that transcends. By providing us with a respite, environments intentionally designed to 'reach beyond' afford us the rare opportunity to re-discover our bearings and, in so doing, frame our existential condition within the larger matters of life and the divine. In other words, architects may create the conditions that induce people to, paraphrasing Thoreau, awaken to the divinity of the present moment and, through it, to the deepest and widest meaning of the good, the true and the beautiful. It is this conviction that motivated me to request the help of 17 scholars and professionals with established expertise in the relationship between architecture, culture, and spirituality to collaborate with me in considering the matter of *'transcending architecture.'*