

## Theme Issue Introduction

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*Leon Battista Alberti in De re aedificatoria stated, "the city is like some large house and the house is in turn like some small city."<sup>1</sup> Five centuries later Alberti's analogy was poetically expanded by Aldo van Eyke as "start with this: make a welcome of each door and a countenance of each window. Make of each a place; a bunch a places of each house and each city, for a house is a tiny city, and a city a huge house."<sup>2</sup>*

*What do they mean by these assertions? In Book 1 of Alberti's treatise he states that architecture requires "compartition." Its success depends on the harmonious relationships between its parts in service of a Vitruvian inspired goal of a "single, harmonious work that respects utility, dignity and delight."<sup>3</sup> In Book 5 he goes on to describe the goals of the city and the house as the same. "It should be extremely healthy, it should offer every facility and every convenience to contribute to a peaceful, tranquil, and refined life." In Place and Occasion (1962) Aldo van Eyke wrote, "Start with this: make a welcome of each door and a countenance of each window. Make of each a place; a bunch a places of each house and each city, for a house is a tiny city, and a city a huge house."<sup>4</sup> Van Eyke's statement is very similar to Alberti's, but when one examines his further commentary it is clear he meant something very different.<sup>5</sup> Van Eyck was suspicious of any "system" that suggests a structured or formal autonomy divorced from how humans interact with the each other and the built environment, and from the human conditions itself.<sup>6</sup> A talk by van Eyck in 1963 is perhaps clearest in articulating his humanist position when he states, "The job of the planner is to provide built homecoming for all, to sustain a feeling of belonging. I would go so far to say that architecture is built homecoming."<sup>7</sup>*

*Alberti's and Van Eyke's domestic urban constructs,*

*though similar, actually present complementary aspects of the city – one instrumental, organizational, and rational; the other poetic, experiential, and humanistic. As such, they may provide productive means to re-conceptualize the contemporary city where often culturally prejudiced, disciplinary truncated, and overly instrumental solutions neglect, misunderstand, or minimize issues of spiritual, physical, and emotional health. Furthermore, the house-city metaphor suggests the fundamental human need for establishing an ontological foothold in the world, where cities not only reconcile the social, environmental, and political imperatives of our time, but also materialize the world and our place within in. That is, cities that effect our spiritual homecoming.*

*By 2030 there will be almost five billion people living in cities, with much of the growth occurring in developing countries. This accelerating global urbanization prompts reconsiderations of the city. It also suggests reconsiderations of how cities are assessed, conceived, and built. Given the sobering pressures of growing populations, climate change, resource depletion, and fiscal insolvency of global cities, new perspectives and multidisciplinary approaches are required. It demands of society to awaken to the fact that for a species to remain viable, it must establish a niche for itself that is holistically beneficial both for itself and for the well being of its surrounding context. This "beneficial niche" needs an attitudinal change, a transformation to what some have termed an emerging Ecological Age that may succeed the Technological age and foster a deep awareness of the sacred presence within each aspect of the universe and man's integral part in this web of existence.*

*The Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF) was created in 2007 with the expressed intention of*

addressing the interrelationship of culture, spirituality, and the built environment. Its members believed then, and continue to profess now, that contemporary global culture requires insightful studies, reflective making, critical assessment, and open dissemination regarding the transcendent in the built environment. By 'transcendent' they mean considerations associated not only with the sacred or metaphysical, but also ones that also facilitate human health and well being, care for the environment and other beings, and nurture interpersonal connections and community. Its members believe that the design and experience of the built environment can assist the spiritual development of humanity in service of addressing the world's most pressing issues.

In 2013 the Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum, in partnership with faculty at Harvard University, convened on campus and at Glastonbury Abbey the Urbanism, Spirituality & Well being Symposium with the goal of expanding the contexts, sources, and dialog regarding contemporary urbanism. The symposium convened participants from the fields of design (architecture, landscape design, urban planning), religious studies, public health and other related disciplines to address the ways in which the social, cultural, and built environments of cities can support collective and individual wellbeing. It focused on the potential of the city to contextualize our shared "human condition" as well as provide connections to the transcendent dimension of existence through architecture and urbanism. Periodically, over a span of several months from April to June, a three part series of public lectures, luncheon workshops and group discussions took place. They were structured as follows: research and investigations into how such potentials had been successfully realized in the Past; case studies of how they are being realized in the Present; and a review of trends of how they may be accomplished in the Future.

This organization is reflected in the following papers that comprise this special volume dedicated to urbanism, spirituality, and wellbeing. There were over forty papers presented at the symposium and public lectures, all the result of a strict peer review process. Of these, eight were chosen for

this publication, and are as follows:

Harvey Cox, the Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School, provided the opening keynote of the symposium. In **The Monastery, the City, and the Human Future**, he outlines the historical and contemporary phenomena of pilgrimage. Important contemporary sites such as the Camino to Santiago de Compostella, Glastonbury, and Lourdes are examined in the context of our secular age and the secular city. Cox contextualizes contemporary pilgrimage as congruent with an emerging spirituality, which he incisively outlines. All to argue that the future city, which will become increasingly important, should support not impede this resurgent and ultimately hopeful, spirituality.

Two essays discuss cities of the past and how perennial traditions have, and continue to, influence them, as explored through selected cities of the Middle East and Asia. In the article **Urbanism of Detachment**, Rahul Mehrotra and Felipe Vera describe how in recent years, there has been an extraordinary intensification of pilgrimage practices, which has translated into the need of larger and more frequently constructed urban structures for hosting massive gatherings. The case of the Kumbh Mela, a legendary Hindu festival in India, sets the standards for understanding alternative ways of building cities that are transitory and with a temporality aligned with the ephemeral nature of massive human flows. The Kumbh Mela, which occurs every twelve years, creates the biggest ephemeral megacity in the world accommodating 3 million pilgrims. The scope of this extreme case prompts us to think about future cities more broadly.

Nader Ardalan in **The Transcendent Dimension of Cities**, focuses on two pivotal questions regarding urban environments: "What are the transcendent foundations that have given birth and historically sustained great cities of the Middle East over the last ten millennia, and what can we learn from them that may inform and influence the holistic transformation and life patterns of our cities today and their future?" Through case studies ranging from one of the earliest human settlements, Gobekli Tepe of the tenth-century BCE,

*to Mecca, Jerusalem, Fez, and Isfahan of the seventeenth-century CE, he traces the key, perennial cultural and urban design principles that have characterized these traditionally transcendent cities.*

*Next are essays that present aspects and attributes of contemporary urbanism. Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago may date from the nineteenth-century, but its ideas are firmly positioned in the contemporary, as demonstrated by Kristen Schaffer in **Heaven on Earth: Swedenborgian Correspondences in the Plan of Chicago**. She presents how Burnham's lifelong and devoted Swedenborgian faith informed his plan of Chicago – a largely unknown, but important history. Swedenborg was an eighteenth-century mystic whose prolific visionary writings, though not universally known, proved influential. Two Swedenborgian concepts were particularly important to Burnham: correspondence and uses, or divine models and public benefits and how they might be realized in the contemporary city. Schaffer demonstrates how both were reflected in the Chicago plan and the public works it included, and suggests their contemporary relevance.*

*In his essay, **In Search of Spirituality in the Places of Urban Decay: Case Studies in Detroit** Joongsuk Kim examines the phenomenon of urban decay in Detroit to offer a surprising aspect of spirituality and urbanism. Even though Detroit's recent history of population loss, disinvestment, and urban decline are not minimized or romanticized, Kim demonstrates how, paradoxically, the urban environment provides for a certain kind of spirituality, and he outlines its particular aspects, such as memory, community rituals, and the desire to do good works. In spite of, or even because of, Detroit's often-bleak cityscapes, these spiritual aspects provide unique perspectives regarding how the contemporary city might be reconsidered.*

*In **Transitioning Natures: Robert Schuller's Garden Grove Experiment**, Antonio Petrov presents Robert Schuller's innovative Garden Grove Church in Riverside, California to describe a particular, and pervasive, twentieth- and twenty-first century spirituality. Of these, placeless and diffuse contemporary spirituality results in a repositioning of*

*traditional roles of sacred architecture. Through the lens of Richard Neutra's innovative design of Garden Grove, Petrov demonstrates how the architecture responded to, expressed, and facilitated very large participants in religious practices with implications regarding their relevance to sacred places in the contemporary city.*

*Two final essays address the future city. Maged Senbel in **Utopian thinking and the intercultural co-creation of urban futures**, argues for a renewal of utopian thought and aspiration, in the context of the urban challenges we face and which will become increasingly challenging. Senbel outlines specific examples of applied utopian thinking – from the bio-physical to the eco-social – and community-building as effective means to formulate them. All to suggest how the future city might be productively reimagined and transformed.*

*Similar to Senbel, **Arguments for a Spiritual Urbanism** by Julio Bermudez, outlines the compelling challenges humans face in the near future – and how they might be addressed through spiritual urbanism. He outlines the ways in which spirituality has grown and broadened to demonstrate its potential to transform how we conceptualize and build our cities. But perhaps most importantly, Bermudez presents how the future city may assist in individual and communal spiritual development. This leads to specific recommendations and a hopeful vision of how we might build the future city to support the advancement of human consciousness.*

*As Harvey Cox insists in the introductory essay, the numerous challenges of a rapidly urbanizing world demand that "we must do better" in creating our cities than we have in the past. Julio Bermudez points out all of the benefits of our globalized, modern culture, while recognizing the immense challenges this has produced. Global climate change, economic disparity, resource depletion, and a certain kind of materialistic ennui are unfortunate, but inevitable, outcomes of the success humans have enjoyed in shaping and transforming their environments to fit their needs. The rapidly urbanizing world, however, illustrates that the old ways no longer work*

*and our current habitations on the planet are unsustainable. That much is clear. How to proceed is more difficult.*

*Marshall Berman suggested that modernism was the "struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world." Perhaps the most fruitful way to begin is to cultivate a growing awareness of the sanctity of our home planet, and the necessity of subtle, or not so subtle, shifts of consciousness this recognition demands. So-called nature writers have traditionally articulated the sanctity and fragility of the natural world. But what about our urban environments – cannot they also be similarly conceptualized? It is through the agency of projecting human consciousness onto the natural world that it is ordered and rendered comprehensible. Conversely, our built environment materializes that same consciousness. Both are sacred – both may assist in the development of human consciousness. In this manner, cities can serve to sustain us and support our spiritual lives, while also expressing the spiritual ascendancy we have realized. That is the promise of new, integrative, and ultimately hopeful visions of the city included in the essays of this volume.*

*Endnotes:*

1. Alberti, Leon Battista, (trans. Rykwert, Joseph, Leach, Neal, and Tavernor, Robert, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988, *Book 1*, p. 23. See also Tavernor, Robert, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.
2. Van Eyck, Aldo, (Ed. Ligtelijin, Vincent, and Strauven, Francis, *Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and Other Writings, 1947-1998*, Amsterdam: Sun Publishers, 2008, from "Place and Occasion," 1962, p.471.
3. Alberti, Leon Battista, (trans. Rykwert, Joseph, Leach, Neal, and Tavernor, Robert, *Book 1*, p. 23.
4. Van Eyck, Aldo, (Ed. Ligtelijin, Vincent, and Strauven, Francis, *Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and Other Writings, 1947-1998*, Amsterdam: Sun Publishers, 2008, from "Place and Occasion," 1962, p.471.
5. For example, van Eyck's rebuttal to Christopher Alexander's 1966 article "A City is Not a Tree" challenged the part to whole hierarchy of Alexander's "Semi-lattice" theory as overly systemic, "oversimplified," and ultimately "unpoetic." van Eyke, p.447.
6. van Eyke, op cit., from *Team 10 Primer*, 1968, p. 447.
7. "Leaving 'home' and going 'home' are difficult matters both ways. Both house and city, therefore, should impart a feeling of going (coming) home whichever way you go. To go in or out, to enter, leave or stay are often harassing alternatives. Though architecture cannot do away with this truth, it can still counteract it by appeasing instead of aggravating its effects. It is human to tarry. Architecture should, I think, take more account of this. The job of the planner is to provide built homecoming for all, to sustain a feeling of belonging. I would go so far to say that architecture is built homecoming." Van Eyke, op cit., from "How to Humanize Vast Plurality?" p. 442.