

The Missing Dimension in the Built Environment A Challenge for the 21st Century

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Abstract

This article addresses architects, planners, and developers but should also interest any other professionals involved in the creation of the built environment. It begins by stating that the built environment is principally made up of buildings and groupings of buildings. Therefore, architecture and urban design are the major focus of the article. Definitions of architecture are then presented from a variety of authors and architects. An argument is made that there actually is a missing dimension in the built environment illustrated by quotations from architects, architectural theorists, amid critics. It becomes evident that architecture is unable to satisfy the emotional and aesthetic needs of people and also that the profession itself, which admits that modern architecture has created bleak and insensitive environments, is in profound disagreement on how to rectify the situation. Under the heading "Architecture—The Object" arguments for and against different architectural movements or stylistic tendencies are highlighted by quotations from the proponents of tile various styles and theories. A similar approach is taken for cities under the heading "Urban Design—The Juxtaposition of Objects." The fact that something is missing from architectural and city design is concluded, and examples of a preoccupation for the spiritual aspect of architecture and urban design are used to illustrate this growing concern for a dimension that has been much neglected in tile previous several decades. The notion of "spiritual" is then defined, followed by a list of spiritual qualities. Two important principles, unity in diversity and consultation are discussed before presenting some concluding thoughts on how the designers of the built environment can begin finding ways of infusing their designs with a spiritual dimension.

Résumé

Cet article est destiné aux architectes, planificateurs et promoteurs mais devrait aussi présenter un intérêt pour tout autre professionnel impliqué dans la création de l'environnement bâti. La prémisse établie au départ est que l'environnement bâti est essentiellement constitué de bâtiments et de groupes de bâtiments. Il en découle que l'architecture et la planification urbaine sont l'objet principal de cet article. L'auteur présente ensuite les définitions de l'architecture selon divers auteurs et architectes. En citant des architectes, des théoriciens de l'architecture et des critiques, il propose l'argument selon lequel il manque en effet une dimension à l'environnement bâti. Il est évident que l'architecture est non seulement incapable de satisfaire aux besoins affectifs et esthétiques des gens mais que la profession elle-même, qui admet que l'architecture moderne a créé un environnement morne et insensible, est en désaccord profond sur la façon de rectifier la situation. Sous la rubrique «l'architecture—l'objet,» l'auteur présente les arguments pour et contre des différents mouvements architecturaux ou tendances stylistiques à l'aide de citations provenant des partisans de divers styles et théories. Il emploie une approche semblable pour les villes sous la rubrique «la Planification urbaine—la juxtaposition d'objets.» Il en conclut qu'il manque un élément à la planification urbaine; pour illustrer ce souci croissant de la dimension qui a été grandement négligée pendant des décennies, il utilise des exemples de l'intérêt porté à l'aspect spirituel de l'architecture et de la planification urbaine. L'auteur définit ensuite la notion de «spirituel» et il énumère une série de qualités spirituelles. Il examine deux principes importants, l'unité dans la diversité et la consultation, avant de présenter, en guise de conclusion, quelques idées qui permettraient aux planificateurs de l'environnement bâti de commencer à introduire, dans leurs projets, une dimension spirituelle.

Resumen

Este artículo se dirige a arquitectos, planificadores y urbanizadores pero también deberá interesar cualesquiera otros profesionales involucrados en la creación del ambiente construido. Comienza por declarar que el ambiente construido se compone principalmente de estructuras y grupos de estructuras. Por lo tanto, la arquitectura y el diseño urbano figuran como enfoque mayor del artículo. Se presentan definiciones de la arquitectura valiéndose de una variedad de autores y arquitectos, teóricos arquitectónicos, y críticos. Resalta, por ende, que la arquitectura no solo es incapaz de satisfacer los requerimientos emocionales y estéticos de las personas sino que la profesión misma, admitiendo que la arquitectura moderna ha creado ambientes desolados y desprovistos de finura, se encuentra en

profundo desacuerdo de como corregir la situación. Bajo el encabezamiento de “Arquitectura–El Objeto” los argumentos en pro y en contra de los distintos movimientos arquitectónicos o tendencias estilísticas figuran destacados por citas de quienes son proponentes de los variados estilos y teorías. Se aprovecha de un enfoque similar para las ciudades bajo el título de “Diseño Urbano–La Yuxtaposición de Objetos.” El hecho de que hay un faltante en el diseño municipal y arquitectónico queda establecido y se usan ejemplos de una inquietud por el aspecto espiritual de la arquitectura y el diseño urbano para demostrar la creciente preocupación por una dimensión muy desatendida en las décadas anteriores. Se define el concepto de “espiritual” seguido de una lista de cualidades espirituales. Se abarcan dos principios importantes, la unidad en diversidad y el proceso consultivo, antes de presentar unos pensamientos concluyentes con respecto a como los diseñadores del ambiente construido efectuarán el comienzo de hallar el modo de infundir a sus diseños una dimensión espiritual.

People often have personal definitions for concepts expressed by words; therefore, it would seem advisable to define a few important notions in this article so that we have the same meanings in mind. *Environment*, according to the Oxford dictionary, is defined as that which environs (or surrounds); especially the conditions or influences under which any person lives. The “built environment” therefore is composed of the structures that surround humans, creating conditions that influence their lives. Since architecture and the juxtaposition of structures are major factors in the creation of the built environment, I will concentrate on architecture, its juxtaposition in space, and the people involved in its production.

Architecture–A Definition

Architecture is defined as the art or science of constructing edifices for human use, specialized as civil, ecclesiastical, naval, and military. I will concentrate only on civil architecture. The Oxford definition also instructs us to see ARCHI-TECT--URE whose further definition is archi=CHIEF or MASTER -tect =BUILDER -ure RESULT. Architecture, therefore, is the result of an action carried out by a master or chief builder. All this may seem overly evident, but in architecture there is often a variety of definitions. The most common definition among architects is the “art of building” as Vitruvius proposed (*Ten Books* 1) and as expanded by the architectural historian Demetri Porphyrios who more recently writes, “Building refers to the craft of constructing shelter....Architecture on the other hand, ... refers to the art of building (*l’art de bâtir*)” (“Building and Architecture” 7). He reinforces the notion of “art of building” when he states that “architecture detaches itself from the contingencies of shelter and construction, [its aim being]... to afford an emotional delight that accompanies the pleasure of recognition of what is true for us” (“Imitation and Convention” 15, 19–20). Leon Krier, a leading proponent of historical contextualism in architecture and town planning, defines architecture as ARCHE-TEKTONIKE, meaning form of origin (“Building and Architecture” 118–19), to justify his use of classical principles in his architectural and urban design concepts. (Architects often define architecture to suit their personal ideology.) Krier elucidates further on his personal definition He suggests. “Architecture is the intellectual culture of building. It is concerned with the imitation of the elements of building into symbolic language, expressing in a fixed system of symbols the very origin of Architecture” (“Building and Architecture” 119). Le Corbusier gave many definitions, two of which are, “The business of Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials” and “Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light” (*Towards a New Architecture* 4, 29). Many other well-known architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Kahn have also given definitions, illustrating the diversity of interpretations on the theme that “architecture is the art of building.”

Architecture–The Object

Turning now to the idea that there is a missing dimension in architecture, I would like to present a few comments from a number of people, most of whom are quite well-known architects and architectural theorists, to illustrate that there is something missing. Among the most vocal groups concerning the failure of modern architecture are the advocates of the Post-Modernist movement. Charles Jencks, who was the Movement’s chief protagonist, wrote, “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3:32 p.m. when the famous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite” (*The Language of Post Modern Architecture* 9). This oft-cited architectural disaster, in spite of having won a design award from the American Institute of Architects, had become a sociological fiasco. Modern architecture’s “purist style, its clean, salubrious hospital metaphor, was meant to instill, by good example, corresponding virtues in the inhabitants. Good form was to lead to good content, or at least good conduct; the intelligent planning of abstract space was to promote healthy behaviour,” Jencks remarks (*Language* 9). Norberg-Schulz notes that “the Modern Movement never forgot...artistic obligations. Nevertheless, its rational-pragmatic methods, led to an environmental poverty which in the long run became unbearable” (“Two Faces” 13). Several generations of architects and planners have been trained

in this tradition based on the writings and projects of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, et al. Architectural schools have produced, and many still produce, an elitist professional who believes that he or she holds the truth with regard to what constitutes a beautiful environment, which in turn will result in a psychologically healthy and happy society. Krier feels that the “modern architect is not asked to think about the social programme only to give it form” (“School St-Quentin-en-Yvelines” 113). He continues, “We all know by now that modern architecture and town planning are incapable of creating localities of human dignity. The time has come to learn from the residents’ protests against such architecture” (“Berlin-Tegel” 87).

Jencks, writing about the Deconstruction Movement in architecture, says of Eisenman’s House 11a, “These devices, later called ‘scaling’ and ‘self-similarity’ by Eisenman, decrease the power of the user just as they increase that of the architect” (“Deconstruction” 27) suggesting an elitist approach in Eisenman’s architectural design. Jencks further notes that “here is the real contradiction in Deconstruction: in spite of the claims to pluralism, difference, a war on totality and defence of ‘otherness’, this hermetic work is often monist, elitist, intolerant and conveys a ‘sameness’” (“Deconstruction” 31).

Porphyrios in his criticism of Post-Modernism and Neo-Modernism and in defence of classicism makes this statement:

Measured against the aesthetics of the voyeurism of contemporary Post-Modern and Neo-Modern cultures, classicism appears the only critical and progressive stance to take. This is so since the indiscriminate historicism of Post-Modernism or the pseudo-scientism of Modernism have disembodied both the city and its architecture. The crudity of Modernism and Post-Modernism alike has been their inability to embrace those humanist values which make individuals into citizens. (“Critique” 65)

Jorgensen in support of classicism, states that

today, classical architecture is once again being re-evaluated: it is no longer seen as a symbol of oppression but as an uplifting promise of civic values. The perception of an architectural language will always be coloured by social conditions, personal experiences, political ideas or even an event that happens to be associated with a building. A positive or negative valuation of architecture is always emotionally conditioned. (“Copenhagen” 20)

Cesar Pelli criticizes classical and traditional revivalism nothing that “a direction that imitates forms of the past, as wonderful and exciting as that could be at any one moment, cannot have any future. The change has been too great for it to be so” (“Mega-Building” 51). Robert Adam elaborates saying, “When the 20th century is defined by its motor cars, and computers what possible relevance can columns or decorated gables have to an architecture which has a duty to reflect its age? To most of the design professions, this technological view of contemporary life removes any hope of giving any real credibility to Classicism or Post-Modernism or other historically biased movements” (“Tin-Gods-Technology” viii).

This lack of a common direction in architectural expression is universal and not confined to the West. Catherine Cook, discussing Soviet views on the role of conceptual competitions in current architecture, notes that the “architectural professions worldwide are the butt of sociological and technical criticism” and that “in the East as well as the West, there is widespread alienation, of urban populations in particular, from the environments which the profession has recently dealt them and substantially deriving from that, the alienation of many talented student architects from mainstream practice as they see it currently operating” (“Update” 60). Paul Goldberger writing in the *New York Times* (24) and Kurt Andersen in *Time* magazine relate how the city of San Francisco has adopted extremely restrictive urban-development rules that limit the construction of skyscrapers to prevent the “Manhattanization” of their downtown environment. The planning director has stated, “We think it is time for a departure from the International Style.” The rules he has instituted strongly encourage architects to design distinctive tops to their buildings by making this an obligation and by applauding parapets, domes, obelisks, pilasters, and cornices and by refusing glass boxes (*Time* 40). These are, however, superficial band-aid solutions for a problem that has the proportions of terminal cancer. The profession often turns to “style” as the solution to a problem that has a more important dimension.

Zenghelis has this to say about styles:

Claiming to be connoisseurs of an apocryphal humanism, we search for solutions in *styles* to problems that need *ideas*. The proposals we offer, whether in the guise of “Post-Modernism,” “New Classicism” or “New Modernism” are nothing but style revivals drawn from models that become simultaneously devalued and undecipherable. By ignoring the *reality* of the world out there (the real context), these proposals miss the point of

architecture altogether; they do nothing to promote the betterment of this reality. Instead of ideas that relate to its life, the public receives a lot of dogma for which it has little use, but do we offer these proposals to the public or to ourselves? The community of architects has become a self-congratulatory fan club, involved in ritual rallies, inventing its own imaginary antagonisms, prides, jealousies, and insecurities. (“Aesthetics” 66)

Porphyrios underlines this trend in the profession when he notes that “there is an aimlessness in architecture today. It is expressed in oppositions like Modernism vs. Post-Modernism, functionalism vs. historicism, rationalism vs. eclecticism, and so forth” (“Cities” 15). The profession is lost and grasping at any stylistic straw that seems to offer security rather than seek the root cause of the problem. Jencks, however, believes that “if sophisticated methods of measuring taste were used...they would show that all stylistic preferences for traditional, vernacular, Classical, Modern, Post-Modern, Deconstructivist, or ‘Other’—are minorities, even if some are much bigger than others. In short, existing taste is heterogeneous. In Britain, as elsewhere, there is a plurality of taste cultures none of which has an absolute majority” (“Ethics” 25–26).

Urban Design—The Juxtaposition of Objects

Turning to the problem of cities, Kaplan in a review of a book on cities says in regard to the changing attitude of planners who were once more in touch with the people, “In recent years... reflecting changing national priorities and prejudices, the profession has generally drifted into dabbling in rhetoric, sweeping theories and grand designs. While the nation’s cities and suburbs are being shaped and misshaped by developers, real estate lawyers, market researchers and obliging architects and politicians, many planners seem content to practice their profession as academics or bureaucrats” (*New York Times* 24).

In his description of the conditions that brought about the neo-rationalists, Ignaci Solá-Morales notes that in the fifties there was a “gradual decline of the principles of the Modern Movement as they were turned into instruments of property speculation and of the destruction of the city [and that] the sixties represented a definitive trivialisation of the functional, technical and social principles of the Modern Movement” (“Neo-Rationalism” 15). He states that this group of young Italian architects (the neo-rationalists) “rejected conventional professionalism because of the commercial vulgarity to which it had reduced Italian architecture and design and the immorality of its urban policies which were based on consumerism and destruction” (“Neo-Rationalism” 15). According to Porphyrios, Krier proposes that the usual approach to city design is based on “the idea that we can engineer cities by simply applying any technical know-how, [which] . . . has been the typical Modernist response to urbanism and has proven disastrous” (“Cities” 19). Richard Rogers counters Krier’s attack stating that “as long as we continue to treat the construction of buildings as solely an economic venture, our cities, towns and villages will become less and less attractive places to live in. Whether they are dressed in vernacular, classical or international style is quite beside the point...Our cities are in crisis. These once great centres of civic life have become urban jungles where the profiteers and the vehicle rule. Lack of foresight and private greed have eroded this once public realm” (“Pulling” 69).

Michael Wilford’s description of how the built-environment professionals are viewed is a most scathing commentary on the professions and their product. He writes:

...the participants are a complex group with rival professionals frequently camouflaging their differences and incompetence with statistics, lurid graphics and smooth patter. Public authorities are frequently perceived as being administered by uncreative and cautious bureaucrats fulfilling dogmatic political objectives. Developers are regarded as predators, without social responsibility and motivated only by financial gain. Planners are viewed as statisticians with their thick reports, written in abstract and opaque language (so often a substitute for ideas and actions) breeding suspicion and contempt, rather than confidence in the community. Architects have acquired the reputation of being the unprincipled hacks of developers or public authorities. The public often have strong and differing opinions which are not easily articulated and expressed. (“Off to the Races” 8)

This points out the need for professionals to develop techniques to help involve the public in the design of the built environment and in articulating and expressing their opinions in an organized and systematic manner. Wilford goes on to elaborate that “the failure of post-war planning, which has turned cities into experiential deserts, has eliminated contrasts and reduced sensation to a monotonous level and to the disintegration of the street and organized public space” (“Off to the Races” 8). This is due largely to the architect’s view of him or herself as a monument builder.

Jeanne Wolfe, in a review of Roger Kemble’s book *The Canadian City*, quotes Kemble, who says “buildings and the cities are weak symbols of overpowering, destructive, artless, international finance gone berserk. Current buildings respond with manic immediacy to ephemeral facts sticking to the city like lint on a worn-out suit”

(*Montreal Gazette*, sec. K, 12). Rhys Phillips notes that if we do not learn from the “cities in the suburbs” approach of Carver, Krier, Duany, Zyberk, Calthorpe and others, we will be, as Christopher Alexander writes “trading the humanity and richness of the living city for a conceptual simplicity which benefits only designers, planners, administrators and developers” (*Montreal Gazette*, sec. J, 12).

Jaquelin Robertson, in describing Leon Krier as a professional, presents an elitist image of architects, when he remarks that Krier is not the typical architect “who is expected only to be interested in his ‘objects’ and who will lie down and roll over given any chance to do his own thing...who creates antisocial, hero-buildings standing alone” (“*Empire*” 12). Prince Charles notes that “we in this country are painfully aware of the trauma caused by uprooting traditional communities at the behest of ‘benevolent’, know all planners” (“*Recent Speeches*” 33). The image of architects, planners, and developers, as you can see, is not very flattering. But Prince Charles gives a ray of hope when he says, “If we help recreate places where people can walk in comfort and security and can look about and be entertained by buildings that are tuned to the eye; if we encourage a renaissance of craftsmanship and the art of embellishing buildings for man’s pleasure and for the sheer joy in beauty itself, as opposed to mere functionalism; then we shall have made our cities centres of civilisation once again” (“*Remaking Cities*” iii). One may not agree that a return to the crafts of the past is economically possible today, nor that the traditional style of architecture in some form of classicism is appropriate, but one must admit that the qualities Prince Charles describes are what most people wish to have in their built environment.

The Missing Dimension—The Need for Spiritual Qualities

From this rather long tirade on the ills of architecture, city planning, and the negatively perceived attitudes of the professionals involved, it would seem clear that something is missing. I suggest that the missing element or dimension is that which affects human reactions—the spiritual dimension.

Architects, in spite of the negative picture that has just been painted, are not all completely oblivious to this deficiency in the built environment and in their profession. Jaquelin Robertson, for example, notes that “Krier’s frontal attack on the architecture of the post-industrial, consumer empire is both an intellectual and a spiritual housecleaning. A spiritual washing down, refitting and remaking.” Robertson also points out Krier holds that “architecture is about how buildings relate to one another in patterns that support communal life in a spiritual and ecologically healthy way” (“*Empire*” 12).

Frank Lloyd Wright was hopeful in 1957 that architecture would discover or recover its spiritual dimension. He wrote, “Victor Hugo, greatest modern of his time, went on to prophesy: the great mother-art, architecture, so long formalized, pictorialized by way of man’s intellect could and would come spiritually alive again. In the latter days of the nineteenth or early in the twentieth century man would see architecture revive. The soul of man would by then, due to changes wrought upon him, be awakened by his own critical necessity” (*A Testament* 17). Le Corbusier had this to say about the spiritual role of architecture and architects:

Architectural abstraction has this about it which is magnificently peculiar to itself, that while it is rooted in hard fact it *spiritualizes* it, because the naked fact is nothing more than the materialization of a possible idea. (26) (Italics added.)

The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit; by forms and shapes he affects our senses to an acute degree and provokes plastic emotions; by the relationships which he creates he wakes profound echoes in us, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and of our understanding; it is then that we experience the sense of beauty. (*Towards a New Architecture* 1)

Frank Lloyd Wright has repeated many times the importance of spirit in architecture and humankind. He states that

architecture is that great living creative spirit which from generation to generation, from age to age, proceeds, persists, creates, according to the nature of man, and his circumstances as they change....Any building is a by-product of eternal living force, a spiritual force taking form in time and place appropriate to man. ... We must believe architecture to be the living spirit that made buildings what they were. It is a spirit by and for man, a spirit of time and place... we must perceive architecture... to be a spirit of the spirit of man that will live as long as man lives....Use and comfort in order to become architecture must become spiritual satisfactions wherein the soul insures a more subtle use, achieves a more constant repose. So, architecture speaks as poetry to the soul. (*American Architecture* 18, 19, 38)

Catherine Cooke notes that the research undertaken by the Russian avant-garde (constructivists and suprematists)

is now proving its considerable power. Its constant hold on later generations of 20th-century designers is unquestionably attributable to the unique clarity and rigour with which it addressed the two polar alternatives of the spiritual and the material in the relationship between human beings, as agents of cognition, and the environment around them. (“Lessons” 15)

Antonio Sant’Elia in the 7th point of his 1914 manifesto wrote, “...by architecture, I mean the effort to freely and audaciously harmonise man with his environment, that is, to make the material world a direct projection of the spiritual world” (“Manifesto” 21).

Jencks, in a negative description of High-Tech Architecture and some of its protagonists, points out the lack of a spiritual dimension when he notes that its “poetics constitutes a ‘symbolism of the void’, a wilful ‘superficiality’ of paper-thin membranes, perforated metal screens, white surfaces, and plain geometries placed in delicate juxtaposition to create a harsh silence, a spiritual stoicism” (“Battle” 25). In a critique of Deconstructivism, Jencks uses Rosenberg’s “Empty man,” or “Orgman” in the sociology of alienation to describe the ideal man for Deconstructivists. What “Empty man” has discovered “is a religion without faith, a positive nihilism, or in Derrida’s terms, an affirmative deconstruction” (“Deconstruction” 25). Norberg-Schultz quotes Jencks who “citing... the art critic Peter Fuller,... calls for the equivalent of a new spirituality based on an imaginative yet secular, response to nature herself,” that is, “a shared symbolic order of the kind that a religion provides but without religion” (“Two Faces” 14).

Lucien Steil in defence of classicism states, “Traditional architecture is not a style: Traditional architecture is guided by the ideal of classicism and fostered by the patrimony of the vernacular. Besides the formal and constructive ethics, the moral and spiritual dimensions of building are its predominant concern” (“Tradition” 6). John Quinlan Terry also supports the notion of spiritual qualities in Classicism when he proposes that

the Classical orders of architecture were given at the dawn of history. To me they are divinely inspired...There is a spiritual dimension to art; architecture is the expression of belief. Alas, modern art and architecture [*sic*] is the perfect expression of a bankrupt faith, of a nation that knows not what to do or where to turn. There is an alternative, both spiritual and architectural, which worked in this country for centuries and was the secret of Britain’s greatness but is now rejected and we shall never be happy until we return to that rejected alternative [classicism]. (“Classicism” 9)

“Cities and landscapes are the tangible realisation of a civilization’s spiritual and material worth” says Krier, proclaiming once again that Modern architecture and urban planning have demonstrated only impoverishment with regard to spiritual worth (“Authority” 17). Thomas Beeby, writing about urban form, noted that the “Greek city which grew around its raised holy place where the gods of the natural world had been gathered from the sacred groves and mountains.... Myth and life were one in these cities constructed in a spiritually charged landscape ...” (“Cultural” 86). At the Architectural Institute of America’s Accent on Architecture awards gala where he received a gold medal, Fay Jones called on architects to bridge the gap between the past and future, to resist superficial trends and fashion design, and “to shape new forms in the landscape that will illuminate, nourish, and poetically express our human qualities at their spiritual best” (“Accent” 1).

Emilio Ambasz, describing his proposal for the Houston Center Plaza, states that “the solution developed from a view of the plaza as a physical, a metaphorical and spiritual image of Houston.” He reiterates this concern writing that the “most important of all is the spiritual quality of the space ... that the plaza was designed as a contemplative, spiritual environment” (“Houston” 46).

Fritz Griffin and Marietta Millet, writing in *The Journal of Architectural Education*, remark that “cultural and spiritual values tend to dictate the expression we choose to create—the ‘greater shelter’ of architecture,” and that these are, along with experimental and aesthetic qualities, the “driving forces of architecture” (“Shady” 43, 68).

It is also interesting to note that the theme quotation chosen for the 1985 Architectural Institute of America’s national convention in San Francisco, taken from Le Corbusier, was “Material needs and spiritual appetites can be satisfied by a concerned architecture.” (It is ironic that much of the criticism levelled at the modern movement was directed at a lack of spiritual values as perceived by the ordinary layperson.) But as Christopher Martin points out, “Most people would welcome the return of an architecture that has soul and is inspired by ethical considerations. For

that to happen the impulse is likely to come not from rhetoric but common sense instincts of the heart” (“Second” 15).

Prince Charles has become an important personage in the architectural debate, giving a very strong spiritual bent to his arguments. Geoffrey Broadbent remarks that Prince Charles has time and again “called for a return to the spiritual values of the Christian faith....Raphael Samuel, pleaded for the kind of ‘soul’ which I [Prince Charles] take to be a spiritual quality which we all find in the finest buildings” (“Report” 14). Prince Charles suggests that

the trick...is to find ways of enhancing the natural environment, of adding to the sum of human delight by appreciating that man is more, much more than a mere mechanical object whose sole aim is to produce money. Man is a far more complex creation. Above all he has a soul and the soul is irrational, unfathomable, mysterious. Ever since man began to build, he has acknowledged this vital aspect of himself, whether it be through some form of pagan worship which led him to want to decorate and embellish his buildings, or through a desire to glorify God and to build in sympathy with God’s creation on this earth....Our age is the first to have seen fit to abandon the past or actually to deny its relevance and the lessons learnt over thousands of years. It is the first to have despised the principles of mathematical harmony and proportion and to have embarked on a course which glorifies man’s domination over nature and the triumph of science. All this coincides with what can only be described as the denial of God’s place in the scheme of things and the substitution of man’s infallibility. The result, I would suggest, has been a profound disease amongst countless people who are forced to live in the surroundings sired by this unbalanced attitude. (“Ethics” 28)

[He suggests that we need] to build communities with a soul. (“Recent Speeches” 33)

Jencks accuses Prince Charles of advocating a Christian culture. He suggests that “we might characterise it [his ‘crusade’] as the four C’s: Conservation, Community Architecture, Classicism all under the umbrella of Christianity....It is... a kind of fundamentalism—explicitly at the architectural level and implicitly at the religious level” (“Ethics” 29).

This may well be true but it is difficult to argue with his appeal when in response to the *Pater noster* project at St. Paul’s cathedral he proposes, “Surely here if anywhere, was the time and place to sacrifice some profit. If need be, for generosity of vision, for elegance, for dignity; for buildings which raise our spirits and our faith in commercial enterprise, and prove that capitalism can have a human face” (Jencks, “Ethics” 27).

Spiritual—A Definition

From those examples, and one could find others, we can see that many architects are concerned about the spiritual aspect of architecture, although in some cases the word *spiritual* is used rather loosely and therefore needs defining. “Spiritual” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “of, pertaining to, affecting or concerning, the spirit or higher moral quality especially as regarded in a religious aspect.” It is obvious that the religious notion of spirit or higher moral quality is not always that used by the various professionals when they use the word *spiritual*. If we seek further precision by defining “spirit,” we find “the animating or vital principle in man; that which gives life to the physical organism in contrast to its purely material elements; the soul of a person as commended to God.” We can see that the concern is religious and tied to the Creator. If we now look up the meaning of “soul” we obtain “the principle of life in man or animals; the principle of thought and action in man, commonly regarded as an entity distinct from the body; the spiritual part of man in contrast to the purely physical,” we thus come full circle, spiritual–spirit–soul–spiritual, with all these notions being linked together and possessing a religious aspect involving moral qualities that affect the animating principle in human beings governing our thought and action—the spiritual part of humanity.

If we now look at the definitions given for spirit and soul by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we find, “The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names—the human spirit and the rational soul—designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings” (*Some Answered Questions* 208). He also says that the “spirit of man has two aspects: ... it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection. If it acquires virtues, it is the most noble of the existing beings; and if it acquires vices, it becomes the most degraded existence” (*Some Answered Questions* 144). It would seem, therefore, to understand what spiritual qualities are, so as to strive for their acquisition and thereby introduce them into the practice of one’s profession, one must know the nature of the virtues or perfections of which people are capable.

Spiritual Qualities—The Challenge

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in elaborating the character of the spiritually learned, gives us a description of the necessary spiritual perfections. He says, “The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind...” (*Secret of Divine Civilization* 35). There is a need to acquire the best education possible in one’s profession so that one becomes competent not only in the technical aspects but also the human aspects relating to spiritual needs. It should be an education stressing independent investigation, not the blind assimilation, acceptance, and imitation of the information passed on by our mentors.

“The second attribute of perfection is justice and impartiality. This means to have no regard for one’s own personal benefits and selfish advantages.... It means to see one’s self as only one of the servants of God,...and except for aspiring to spiritual distinction, never attempting to be singled out from the others” (*Secret* 39). This certainly goes against the grain of most architects who strive to have their “monuments” published in the popular architectural magazines.

“The third requirement of perfection is to arise with complete sincerity and purity of purpose to educate the masses: to exert the utmost effort to instruct them in the various branches of learning and useful sciences, to encourage the development of modern progress, to widen the scope of commerce, industry and the arts, to further such measures as will increase the people’s wealth” (*Secret* 39). Architects often believe they have a mission to educate the masses, but it is usually a one-way process. Architects have much to learn from the masses but need to shed their elitist attitudes to cure their professional deafness. They need to produce spiritually uplifting environments that will create a feeling of wellbeing and peace. Education of the masses, therefore, would involve demonstrating that spiritual and material well-being can be created through an environment developed in partnership with the masses.

“Other attributes of perfection are to fear God, to love God by loving His servants, to exercise mildness and forbearance and calm, to be sincere, amenable, clement and compassionate; to have resolution and courage, trustworthiness and energy, to strive and struggle, to be generous, loyal, without malice, to have zeal and a sense of honor, to be high-minded and magnanimous, and to have regard for the rights of others.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ends this list by saying, “Whoever is lacking in these excellent human qualities is defective” (*Secret* 40). So there we have it, the qualities needed to practice one’s profession so that these qualities will become part of what one builds or creates. Now this is what one can call a real challenge.

It seems obvious that if the professionals of the built environment displayed these qualities in their finished product and in their relations with the people involved in producing it, one could speculate on the positive change it would bring to the environment. To be able to do this, the architect or planner must dare to be different (because one would probably be taken for a naive utopian) and to be ready to pay what may at first seem like negative consequences, such as being on the outside of the superficial stylistic trends and to be perceived as a professional aberration.

For developers, builders, architects, and planners, the profit motive must become a secondary concern to that of the people’s well-being and happiness. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarks, “We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages” (*Secret* 3–4). He also states that “wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor” (24–25), “...if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this...” (*Secret* 24). The Bahá’í principle of the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth is very important and should have a profound effect on how one manages one’s professional practice. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human race” (*Secret* 4). This is what the built environment we create must promote; this is a part of the challenge.

One cannot say that in a literal sense the Bahá’í writings tell builders, architects, or planners precisely what to do or how to go about doing it; but these Writings have a transcendent quality that should enable us to apply the wisdom that lies within globally. Shoghi Effendi states that he wishes “to encourage those who are talented to give expression to the wonderful spirit that animates them” (*Unfolding Destiny* 429).

Unity in Diversity

I will give a few examples that attempt to apply the wisdom in the Bahá'í writings. The principle of unity in diversity in the Bahá'í Faith is important in terms of its architectural expression and the importance given to every cultural group. The widespread application of the International Style of architecture, which completely ignores cultural and contextual differences, means that one can wake up in a room in a large chain hotel and not know in which country one is. In the Bahá'í Faith minorities are encouraged and given a great deal of importance, and nowhere in the Writings does it encourage the stifling, monotonous uniformity created by an architectural style implanted everywhere on the planet irrespective of cultural and geographic differences. The same uniformity is a possibility once more given the ascendancy of the post-modernist movement and the new classicism. The recent Bahá'í temple in New Delhi, India, in the shape of a lotus demonstrates a respect for the culture and geography of the country where it was built to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine it anywhere other than in India.

Consultation

Another principle that should be included in the transfer of spiritual qualities to architecture requires that the elitist attitude in architects be changed to include the people in the design process where all the individuals are respected and designers give proposals in the spirit of detachment. (For additional references see John Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*.)

Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution. (*Consultation 6*)

The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. (*Consultation 5*)

...the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues. (*Consultation 6*)

The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people. (*Consultation 5*)

The philosopher Karl Popper remarked, "If the growth of reason is to continue, and human rationality to survive, then the diversity of individuals and their opinions, aims and purposes must never be interfered with" (*Poverty 15*). Architects and planners need the diversity of opinions that the public can give them. As Sanoff has proposed, "The expertise does not entirely reside in the designers but rather in all those whose interests are affected by a design problem" (*Methods 167*). This is especially true when dealing with other cultures, and it must be said that architects are an elitist subculture, quite different from the majority of their clients. Recall the example of Pruitt-Igoe, where a similar structure housing a middle-class population and not the urban poor, functioned without problems, indicating that when designing for the poor, the architect was actually designing for his own cultural group, the middle class. Eastman noted that in these cases, "The architect's own value system and intuition will lead him to false conclusions and result in the imposition of his values on the users" ("Adaptive-Conditional" 52). Kevin Lynch suggests that architects "should act as specialists in creating form possibilities, predicting their effects and explaining how they can be technically accomplished, but his basic role is to disengage himself by communicating the necessary techniques of design and analysis and thus allowing the client (or user) to invent and build his own world....Architects would work to reveal hidden needs and possibilities" (*Site Planning 259*). This requires an important transformation in the practice of architecture.

Cavdar notes "that the typical planning process by only informing the users of the outcome of the decisions taken by the planners and administrators, condemns them to be mere objects of the process; for the masses to become the subject of the process, an unobstructed and dialectical medium of communication must be attained" ("Design" 163). In the new development at Dorchester, Prince Charles is hoping to build a community that will demonstrate the kind of traditional architecture and town planning he supports. Using what he calls Community Architecture, "...the wider community would certainly be consulted, and the voice of the people so disastrously shut out from an actual say in the shaping of their own environment elsewhere, would certainly be heard in Dorchester" (Martin, "Second Chance" 9). 'Abdu'l-Bahá very beautifully puts this whole matter into perspective when he says, "A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as 'a confused medley of dreams' (*Qur'án 12:44; 21:5*), and

external lustre without inner perfection is 'like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water' [*Qur'án* 24:39]" (*Secret* 60–61).

The built-environment professionals, as you may see, have an immense challenge if we are to make a contribution to the establishment of a spiritual dimension in the environment. As the Finnish architect Ilmo Valjakka remarks, "Architecture, the art form most related to life, has the demanding task of combining the diversity of human soul and every day life in an artistic expression" ("Media House" 125). We must set about defining the actions to be taken. The perfection of spiritual qualities we must acquire is a first step, but simultaneously we must define the ways in which these qualities can be integrated into the product of our creative process. The process has yet to be discussed in detail, but the Bahá'í writings provide guidelines. I do not pretend to have found the way to integrate the spiritual dimension into the design of the built environment, but I am confident that through consultation we will find many ways. As shapers of the built environment, we must conscientiously make the effort.

In conclusion, these words from 'Abdu'l-Bahá seem appropriate: "This handful of days on earth will slip away like shadows and be over. Strive then that God may shed His grace upon you, that you may leave a favorable remembrance in the hearts and on the lips of those to come...Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all..." (*Secret* 116).

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