

*Oleg Grabar*

I shall try to highlight a certain number of broader issues which have emerged and a certain number which were not discussed. One thing that struck me as we were talking about public buildings and spaces is that, as opposed to homes or many other kinds of buildings, there are always two contradictory activities taking place in public spaces. The restaurant appears quite differently from the point of view of the cook or from the point of view of the eater. The viewpoints of the school-teacher and student are not the same. The point of view of the bureaucrat or the signature-seeker is not the same in an office building. In other words, a peculiarity of public buildings of whatever variety is that at least two different positions, two different attitudes, two different uses and likes or dislikes of buildings always exist.

Another aspect of public buildings is that they remain longer than other edifices. They are more difficult to destroy, and are therefore much more likely to affect architectural style and self-identification. They affect the lives of almost all people in one way or another.

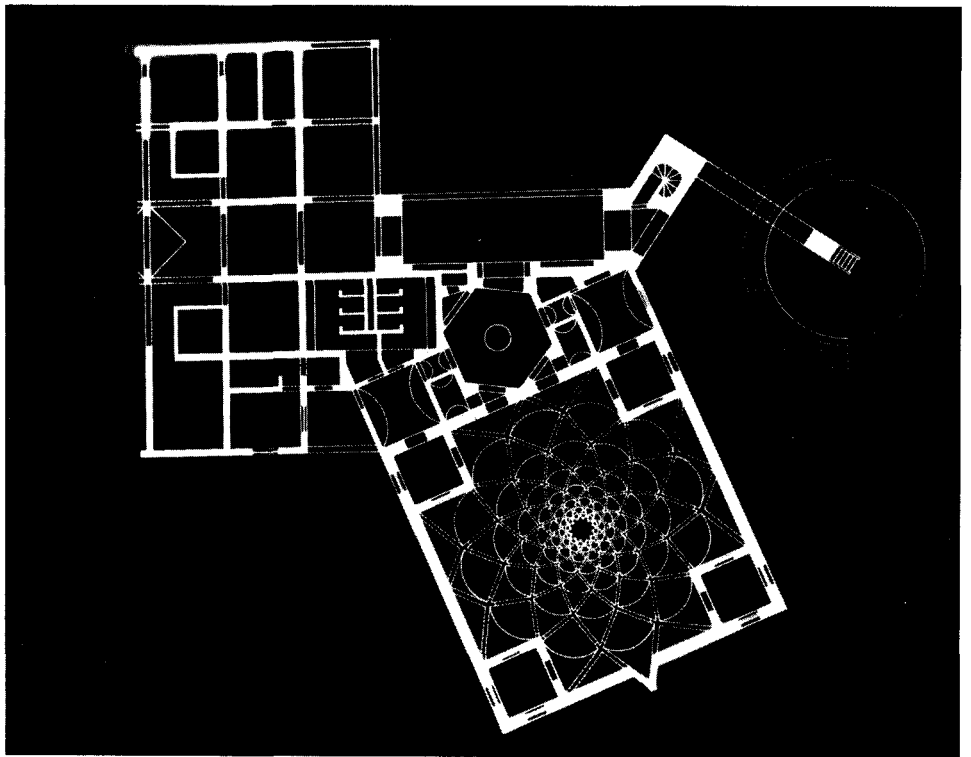
As usual in our seminars, we have not arrived at conclusions nor even at a consensus. Rather we derive a more or less formulated sense of key issues, key needs, key troubles, occasionally a few prescriptions. I will skip prescriptions like ecological balance, local materials and so forth, these being a kind of tag we can add to whatever we are talking about. What, then, are the key issues, needs and troubles that seem to have emerged?

One group is a series of omissions. There are a certain number of things we did not talk about, and yet those seem to be extremely important in thinking about public spaces and the search for form. We did not discuss spaces for movement and transportation, from airports to the way in which taxi organizations find a nook in a city, the place from which they will go from one city to another or one part of town to the other. I am not sure why we did not discuss them, but it is curious that this aspect did not come up.

Particularly in comparison to our previous

seminars, we talked little about Islam. We mentioned some obvious generalities here and there, and some very simple run-of-the-mill statements about modesty, privacy and what have you. But I wondered whether this is so because the types of monuments we are dealing with are much more contemporary, more a result of today's changing world than of the relatively stable world of the past. To equate a modern hotel with a caravanserai can be done, but it is not an entirely fair proposition because those were very different institutions. If Islam is to be relevant, it has to come in not through the citations from the Koran or from Sunna, but from a sort of intelligent use of the principles of analogy and innovation. I think we are dealing with a very new set of propositions.

There is one fascinating aspect of Islam which is public but about which we did not speak; it is in the area where the search for form is perhaps most fascinating, and that is the mosque. The mosque is a sacred building, a holy building, a building restricted to the Muslim community, but it is a public building and not a private one. One can argue perhaps that these holy spaces, mosques, shrines, etc. are the places least in search of forms. I wonder whether this is not instead a most significant area for the search for form, if architects do in fact seek what we have paid lip service to in other contexts: the problem of creating a contemporary form for something deeply embedded within the fabric of society. In many ways the tastes of the masses are affected more by mosques than by great public buildings;



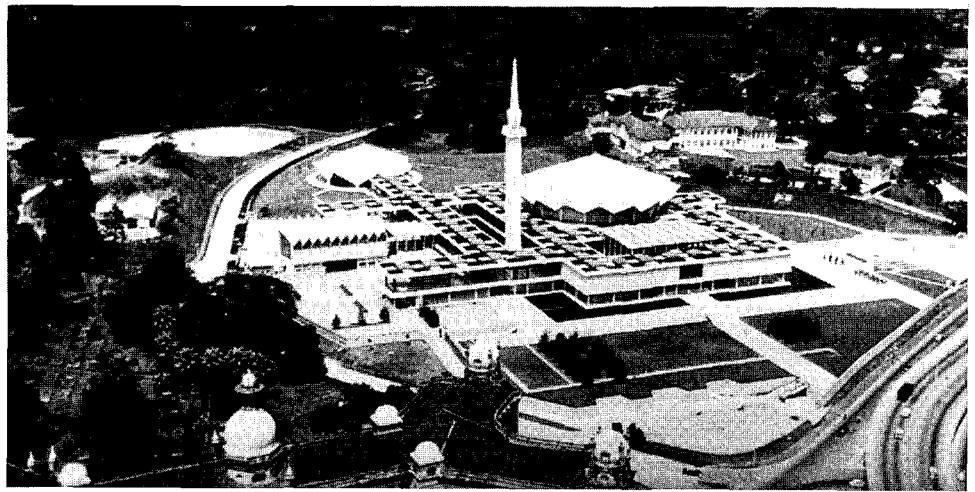
*Hamadan, Iran plan for Bu Ali Sina mosque of the University of Hamadan, designed by Nader Ardalan*

*Plan: N. Ardalan*

there is a different psychological attitude involved. It became clear to me during these past few days that a seminar on mosques and holy places is absolutely essential, even though it is likely to create more fireworks than a seminar on government buildings or universities.

Another issue which consistently came to the fore is the relationship of public buildings to people. I fear I will get into some difficulties in trying to go beyond the obvious statement that buildings have to be good for the people using them, convenient and attractive and pleasant and what have you. I would rather try to think of this issue of relationship to people in terms of how it can affect the creative processes of the architects and the decision makers today. I am very confused by the architects' notion of process. I think it refers archeologically to something one analyzes while it happens, but I am not entirely sure I understand what it means once a building is built, once it is in use. I do see in the large institutional complexes and public buildings a fulfilling of two functions. One is a synchronic function, creating a setting for daily life, for the number of activities which take place daily within society. The second, perhaps much more so than housing, is the sort of diachronic process of creating the future. In many ways the process of daily life will adapt itself to anything, because life has to go on. But there is also a way in which buildings and settings create the future, and our concern should be about the long-range effects on society of large government complexes, hotels for foreigners or campus-style universities.

We call constantly for flexibility. Is flexibility a form, and is form not frequently a straightjacket? Someone observed that function, in time, creates a style. In time the buildings we are talking about are going to create the style and the manner of behaviour of a whole culture. But given the restrictions of climate, locale, politics, etc., are we not saying that each region, perhaps in this case each national entity, will acquire its own style of creating architecture? Will not the very nature of public buildings compel oil-rich countries



*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: the National Mosque*

*Source: Postcard*

to have one set of answers, poor countries another?

I was fascinated by the following problem: within the obvious renaissance of Muslim architecture in our time, I wonder whether the architecture of social forms is going to follow one of three models. There is the Roman model, where in Amman or Jerash or Fez you will find the same theatre, nicely built, beautifully fit and so forth. It may be the Gothic model, where in a sort of ripple effect a series of changes occur, then spread out by whatever means to encompass a whole area. Should it be the Baroque model, where from the very beginning a clear individuality existed in areas from Spain to Russia within a common idiom of purposes and functions? We are at the moment faced with the possibility of any one of these models reappearing in the Muslim world in its own contemporary fashion. It is the major monuments, the public buildings which will determine this direction.

I would put one series of key issues which were raised constantly into the general category of "training." The main training required is clearly the training of the decision makers. I have not the foggiest notion of how one sends ministers back to

school, or who is going to train them anyway. But the need for training of the bureaucrats in this area is an issue on which we have all agreed. Another kind of training which surfaced during our discussions is the development of a partnership between the historian and the contemporary planner or designer. This would allow an individual commitment from each, while allowing for the development of a true sense of which forms are within the continuity of the Muslim world and which forms may as well be given up. We are still faced with the problem of how to define a relationship to the past. How do we decide on its mode, how do we decide on the ways in which we are going to try to understand it? The notion of a lobby of action and judgment, signals of which I picked up informally during the meetings, rather appeals to me. However, a lobby frequently sounds very much like an academy, and we know that we do not want to develop an academy. Yet the question of training, the question of explaining or discussing, of thinking about the past as one deals with the present, is something which is clearly needed in order to create a future.