
Toward a Synthesis: Reactions and Directions

Discussion

Berque

Dear colleagues, I was very impressed during these three days by the value of the comments and the materials provided for us. I was also struck by their variety and by their contradiction. The purpose of the seminar was to search how Islamic architecture and design can manifest themselves in the modern world. Some of us recommended a return to the *Shari'a* or even to mysticism and theosophy. Now, certain of us wonder if it is possible or even convenient; why are the so-called Islamic societies so affected by universal change that their sense and denomination are altered? However, all the authors consider "Islamicity" a necessary characteristic of their own identities. How can one define this identity with temporal and regional variations? Would it be manifested in the relationships between forms and behaviours? Some of us spoke of partial revivals or of the maintenance of marks and orders.

Architecture is just a part of the whole and reflects collective necessities. Have we the right to speak of abstractions? Can one analyze concrete things without concepts? My puzzlement was complete when I was informed that in a period of transition, we cannot hope for anything but an unsatisfactory solution. Yes, but must we understand that we can do nothing in order to make such a solution a little less unsatisfactory? One can prolong those contradictory remarks and I understand perfectly that our colloquium has just to constitute a preliminary step, a step of confrontation rather than conclusion or recommendation.

But if we can expect a second step, perhaps it is convenient to foresee a second stage of problems and means to solve them. Hence, I should like to propose the following four points as preliminaries to future discussions: a systematic inquiry into the adaptation of Islamic design to the various periods and situations where it manifested itself; a systematic inquiry into its achievements in modern time and the flexibility it has displayed facing a variety of situations; an evaluation or rather an attempt of evaluation of its present successes and failures, an attempt of testing them according to social, psychological and aesthetic criteria; and, if it is true that manifested aspects of any category of social life insert themselves into a system, and if this system must be investigated from the surface into its deep structure (generative or not), numerous cases could be studied in several Islamic countries for appreciating the real sense of this hypothesis. I hope that the Steering Committee can take these suggestions into consideration.

Grabar

The initial purpose of this gathering had essentially two concrete objectives. The first was to identify issues sufficient in number for the Steering Committee to formulate while it proceeds with its work of organizing the Award criteria, categories to be awarded or approaches for judging the built environment.

The second objective was to identify topics of such burning interest or such controversial interest that further discussion

seems to be required in the four additional seminars that are being planned. This first meeting had the objective of being a free-ranging meeting where all kinds of thoughts, frustrations and feelings would be brought out. Now it is the task of this group, then of the Steering Committee and especially of the Convenor's Office, to try to impose some order on them in order to organize and think through the subjects and topics for the coming seminars. These were the initial objectives.

Twelve points seemed to me to be underlying almost all of our concerns, around which we can focus further discussions.

The first one would be a sense of a certain crisis within architecture, architects and culture, specifically within architecture itself. It could, perhaps, be phrased in the following form: that the immense building activity of many Muslim countries today runs the risk of leading not only to a bland neutral architecture, a sort of zero architecture, but may especially lead to a further diminution, eventually almost to a destruction of cultural identity.

The second theme, not in any order of importance, is that two opposite poles or two possible extremes exist in dealing with the importance of Islam within the problem of architecture and perhaps within the problem of cultures. At one end, there would be prescriptive Islam whether one sees it as a Sunni *Shari'a*-centred one, theosophic or whatever, but essentially a system that has prescriptive implications; some things are possible and good, some things are impossible and bad. At the other end, there would be the pole of indigenous, local, regional, even national traditions which are only Islamic to the extent to which the people of the region prefer Islam as their major way of life.

A third point is of a totally different order. I detect from this seminar a clear mandate for the encouragement and development of local techniques, not so much of a folk tradition but the development of local means of construction, decoration, building. This certainly could be one topic for a future seminar.

A fourth theme that occurred constantly is the extraordinary unclarity of the relationship to the old. The relationship to the old Muslim tradition appeared to me this morning in Professor Khan's paper as a very strange one, a strange relationship in which the old fascinates—and yet one does not want to do the old. Nostalgia or use, the active preservation, passive preservation, preservation of a single great monument, preservation of a social setting, the relationship to the old which gives the rules of the Islamic architectural game is still something which to my mind is not fully explored.

The fifth point that clearly came out, I felt, is the city and the country. More has been said, I think, about urban centres than about anything else from grandiose new plans to slum dwellings. However urban Islam was, the Muslim world today is not only an urban world, and there are all kinds of other aspects of that world that are pertinent to our attempt to evaluate its new architecture.

The sixth is a sense that many of the problems are universal, but that what we are seeking are specifically Islamic solutions.

The seventh point is perhaps slightly outside of the purview of our gathering here, but it underlies many of the problems, and this is education. It was clear that there are varieties of levels of ignorance that exist everywhere. Architects don't know history, historians do not know what goes on today, sociologists don't look at things, urban planners do not read and so forth. In other words, what we do feel is that there is an absence of an education in the problems with which we are concerned at other levels of the culture. Whether it is for those of us who teach abroad to instill some knowledge of Islam into our colleagues, and Islamic art into architectural students in the West, or whether it is for schools in Muslim countries to instill a sense of history and of their own past in their own students, these are educational tasks which exist even though we have not talked much about them.

The eighth problem is again slightly outside of the purview of the Award process, but is so clear that it has to be mentioned. The lack of knowledge is not that people do not read what other people write or do not look at what exists. It is that a certain number of things are simply not known. The number of instances when people mentioned the need for a study on one or another topic is so great that some system of research must be the base for dealing with the broader questions.

The ninth problem is one which was alluded to much more today than in the past days, but is clearly behind a great deal of our discussions. This is the nature of architectural patronage. In the contemporary world, the nature of the patronage, the public and private powers, the importance and impact of bureaucracies, is clearly something that worries and affects the practitioners enormously. Varied solutions seem to exist in dealing with it: revolt or adaptation or compromise.

The tenth problem is the significance of expertise from the outside, external to the cultural itself. It is very clear that, for a number of reasons, outside "experts" are brought in and play an extremely important part in the shaping of the new environment. This creates certain problems. It raises issues, not only practical issues of knowledge or no knowledge of local conditions but, I think, also psychological issues, emotional issues, such as why do we need outside experts, why should we follow what they say, and so forth. This is clearly an area about which we should think, an area which is important to develop.

The eleventh point is something hardly mentioned for two days yet repeatedly stated today: forms. It deals with the nature of the aesthetic that is involved. What is the nature of the social and especially the semiotic contract of any society? What is the nature of the relationship between people and what is built? Are domes necessary to make something Islamic? Is it that there should be no straight lines but there should also be a complex relationship between the sky and

the building? It can be as simple as concrete, formal elements. It can be as complicated and abstract as the wonderful image of light that enters a building. Whatever it is, whether it is light or whether it is a concrete form, we have only barely begun to explore the notion of whether there is a semiotic contract between Muslims and their surrounding architecture. We have not talked about the question of forms, yet we have raised formal complicated questions, complicated questions of visual symbols: whether they exist, what they are, whether they are consistent from one part of the Muslim world to the other.

The twelfth point is that we have all been influenced by generative grammar, the discernment of surface and inner structures. This is a topic that would be terribly difficult to deal with without masses of monographs. But, eventually, we must begin this process.

Rageh

In my limited knowledge I remember that the basic tools of Islam as a dynamic religion are *ijtihād* and *ijmā'*. *Ijihād* means individual creativity, an attempt by the individual to reach his own conclusions. Whatever his conclusions are, they are perfectly acceptable as long as there was an honest and truthful attempt behind them. This is very much of an Islamic value we should not lose.

Ijmā' could be translated in as superficial a way as the collective consciousness, the spirit of the community or the spirit of the group. So, whatever the group agrees to as a goal, and whatever conclusions it comes to, all are perfectly acceptable in Islam. And I do not know of any other doctrine that allows these two forces to be working in a very dynamic and lively way within the individual and within society. Dialogue between these forces has always been a very basic and fundamental tool throughout Islamic history. It is possible that this lies behind the continuity of Islam and provides the basis for renewal from one

epoch to another. So we have to use the same tools to revive Islamic architecture. *Ijihād* of the individual and *ijmā'* of the community and the group.

I was very much fascinated by my friend, Fazlur Khan when he spoke about simplicity. I disagree with him when he defines simplicity, symmetry and centrality. I think it was a little bit beyond that. Simplicity is very much an Islamic value. I will explain what I mean here by simplicity. The Sultan Hasan Mosque and many great mosques have been mentioned by several speakers as great examples of Islamic architecture which should be emulated, should be admired. We should be descendants of the builders of these great edifices. I shall refer to Egyptian mosques. I know little about them and practically nothing about other mosques. Well, Sultan Hasan Mosque, which is considered one of the greatest landmarks in the history of Islamic architecture, is a deviation from Islam, in my opinion. It was built when Islamic thought and civilization was at a nadir, when the Islamic religion was very static, when secret groups proliferated throughout Egypt and the Islamic world probably. It was not built at the time of Ma'mun when he was surrounded by learned people (*ulamā'*). It was not built at the time of al Mu'hyi li-dīn Allāh when his best time was spent talking with wise men. It was built to be a symbol for the power and authority of the sultan and his government. And we forgot at that time that Islam came for man. Where is the humility and humbleness (*khushu'*)?

Where is the truth of me? If I stand in Sultan Hasan's Mosque, where is my place? There is no place for me. I am not trying to say that this is a bad architecture; it is one of the finest pieces of architecture, but we are talking about architecture in the spirit of Islam. I think mosques like Ibn Tulun or like Al Azhar are closer to man. I feel that I have a place there. I feel that there is some basic Islamic value in it. The mosque or the building should and must be related to man as defined by the Koran and defined by and in the Islamic doctrine as humble, truthful architecture. Monumentality has never

been a part of Islam. I think architecture in the spirit of Islam might be something different.

Professor Nasr spoke about *tawhīd*. I think the unity of the universe would lead us also to an aesthetic concept of the universe. After all, unity in essence is an aesthetic concept. And we should be careful in the words we are using because Islam really is neither polarization nor compartmentalization. It is a very fluid, very active and a very dynamic doctrine. In Islam alone, the thesis is its own antithesis. The dialogue between the different diversities is the essence of the belief. And I think we should know and search and look for the Islamic concepts of reality, truth and beauty in architecture in the spirit of Islam. We should look at it not only by our intellect, not only by our instinct, but also by a thing that is more into the Islamic spirit: *wijdan*.

Finally, we spoke about architecture. We spoke about city planning. We were wrong, because Islam does not know either architecture or city planning. Islam knows *'umran*, meaning architecture, meaning planning, meaning sociology, meaning civilization. This is the way it is used by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*. The detachment of building from the city, from the people, from the whole life, is only for the compartmentalized mind. When you give the Award to *'umran*, you give it for all these things together.

Kuban

We are gathered here for the promotion of some architectural activity in the spirit of traditional culture. Architecture is the final, basic product of a historical situation in its totality. The face of our cities expresses this situation in which traditional remnants fight a losing battle. What are the resources for the re-establishment of a livable environment which would still preserve the Muslim heritage and would express it? I think nothing is stronger as a manifestation of the spirit of Islamic culture than the traditional architectures



Cairo, Egypt: Sultan Hasan mosque

Photo: J. Bloom/S. Blair

and traditional cityscapes. Therefore, the preservation of the historical environment seems a good starting point for action. Old forms are the most obvious points of reference for formal as well as spiritual continuity.

Certainly, it is not possible to preserve everything, to impede the change of our physical environment or to find solutions to the new functions within the traditional schemes. But the part that we will be able to preserve, that we still find beautiful, that is to be integrated with the new is still to be created. I would like to use a commonplace example: the family structure. Children are not like their parents. Family life could be harmonious if old and young respected one another. In the actual situation of the Islamic culture, respect and harmony are key concepts for regeneration and creativity in our environment in architecture, respect for traditional forms and harmony between old and new.

Respect, in this context, means respect for the traditional built environment, the untouched surrounding nature preserved for and social life it sustains and the expectations of the human being still living there. In addition, respect means understanding. An active respect means scientific evaluation. We all know that, although they may seem beautiful to some of us through abstraction, the inhabited traditional houses are not kept up well. They are abandoned as unhealthy. They are decaying. More importantly, they are not respected by the inhabitants. They are not adequate for the new exigencies of life, at least, in their present condition. Here we have the problem of preservation, restoration and regeneration of old quarters and old houses. This is respect at its finest, because Islamic spirit is expressed and symbolized in them. This is where we have to keep the old forms, not in their imitations, but in themselves, giving them the possibility of survival.

The concept of harmony substantiates our demands for the creation of an architecture in the spirit of our culture. In the training of architects, the concept of harmony is used partly as synonymous to

the concept of respect for the existing environment, but it is generally more than that; it stresses more the physical qualities of architecture. What we have to ask from our architects is to build in a spirit of continuity with the still existing traditional environment. For creative architects, this never means imitation.

The formal character of the new architecture will be the outcome of both the interpretation of this continuity, and the harmony which will be created between the one we cherish as the expression of our culture and the new. I think it is better not to insist too much on the formal aspects of the new architecture; instead, insist more on behaviour. I refer not only to the behaviour of architects, but to that of their clients: the decision makers, politicians, administrators, greedy businessmen, simple but money-thirsty contractors and all kinds of speculators. The well-intentioned architects cannot counteract the massive speculative, political interests of these groups. But, though inseparable, this is a problem of much greater scope with which we can deal only on a general level. To be more effective, we must limit ourselves to one group, that of the architects, and to their behaviour in actual circumstances. We propose to sponsor good will and good work among the ranks of architects. If they build respectfully and harmoniously, then the good qualities of the old will influence their sensibility and permeate their sense of form. They will find rational ways of creating in the spirit of their own culture, the Islamic culture as we define it today. What I say here is not simple hope. All over the world, capable architects have built beautiful, modern buildings in harmony with the pre-existing environment. Such architecture should be regarded as being in the spirit of one's own culture. The problem is to make the Muslim architect believe that the traditional has an intrinsic value for his cultural identity and, therefore, for his originality. One more point I feel compelled to make about the building activity itself: Mr Robertson presented to us the project of Shahestan in Tehran. I found it a reasonable, modern project. We know many

such grandiose, kingly projects. Can they define a new image of an Islamic architecture? I doubt it. Even if we were to do a hundred projects such as this, we would barely influence the physical environment of the eight hundred million Muslims, when hundreds of thousands of apartment and office buildings and other structures are being built each year. In the time it would take to complete one project like Shahestan, uncontrolled, speculative building activity would define a new shape for Muslim cities.

The direction we can take in dealing with this situation is quite clear. Our priority must be humble dwellings. A new spirit, one which the majority of people would understand, could evolve from simple experiences. Monumentality in today's world might still excite simple minds, but it cannot be respected.

The continuity with the past could best be preserved in the everyday life of people and in their home, not in tall office blocks, airports and palaces.

Islam as a living tradition is to be found more in today's daily life than in the frozen forms of the great architecture of the past

Turner

More thought should be given to the differences between materials, tools and jobs. Jobs, I would understand as work; tools, the means by which jobs are done; materials, those resources which the tools use in order to do those jobs. The issue then is whether it is appropriate to focus on tools or on jobs. It seems to be taken for granted that we are making awards to jobs. It is my feeling that the greatest influence which people like ourselves can have is as toolmakers, rather than as actual builders, although we may have to do actual buildings in order to develop the tools, for they are the central or most influential area of our creativity. For instance, the most interesting work that we have heard about is that of Hassan Fathy and Farokh Afshar. This does

emphasize the fact that I regard the significance of those particular works as the developers of tools. The word tool is used broadly to include simple hardware such as drills, pots, syringes, brooms, building elements or mentors, and not just large machines like cars or power stations. Included among the tools are productive institutions, the produced tangible commodities like cornflakes or electric current, and productive systems for tangible commodities such as those which produce education, health, knowledge or decisions. I use this term because it allows me to place into one category all rationally designed devices, be they artifacts or rules, codes or operators, and to distinguish all these planned and engineered instrumentalities from other things such as basic food or implements, which are not deemed to be subject to rationalization. School curricula or marriage laws are no less purposely shaped social devices than roads or networks. Tools are intrinsic to social relationships.

An individual relates himself in action to a society through the use of tools that he actively masters or by which he is passively acted upon. To the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self-image. Convivial tools are those that give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his vision. The industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them, and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others. Most tools today cannot be used in a convivial fashion. The convivial society, and I take it that the characteristics or the qualities of Islamic culture are profoundly convivial, should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others and least value-oriented. The growth of tools beyond a certain point increases regimentation, dependence, exploitation and impotence.

Kandiyoti

I did not plan to say anything today, but I was really provoked by Mr. Rageh's comments concerning values. I feel the need to make some kind of sociological statement of values as they relate to social structure. In order to keep Professor Grabar's guidelines, I will try to relate my comment to the unclarity of the relationship to the old or the transition between the old and the new.

So far, we have been talking about values in absolute terms as they are found in prescriptive codes of behaviours, such as the Koran or any other law. I am thinking now of the sorts of environments that ordinary people live in everyday; there, you have prescriptive rules and values which translate into cultural preferences. Then, at another level, these translate into behaviour having an effect on the environment people use. Because of these different deviations, I think that it would be wrong in planning terms to take values at the absolute unmediated level and to look at their reflections in space, especially, if the space is habitat. I think we can have a clearer idea if we complete the equation by having values embodied in prescriptive codes and systems as a shaping form on the one hand, and social structure with its own dynamics and its own pace of change, on the other. Look, then, at the resultant behaviour of the user as an intersection of the two, because I think that values are responsive to changes in social structure. The reason they are responsive to changes in social structure is that there are so many things changing the material culture; people cannot but respond to these changes. I want to illustrate this very briefly with some data from a study I did in a central Anatolian village in Turkey. I was really looking at something quite different. I was looking at the effect of mechanization and capital-intensive farming on changes in stratification and values.

Part of my interview had to do with religious sins. I took a series of what were considered to be religious sins. The list included having pictures around them,

drinking alcohol, borrowing or lending money with interest, reading the prayer in Turkish, as opposed to Arabic, etc. I want to give you some illustrative responses, to analyze why these responses were made and to try to see why it occurred that way. Was it because the *Shari'a* was not well enforced at the national level or was it because of something else?

For pictures, these are the replies elicited. A lot of peasants have many images in their houses. They also have Goodyear calendars with girls on them. So, when I asked them whether a picture is a sin, I got the following response. The picture of Atatürk is not a sin. The pictures on stamps are not sins. Family pictures are not sins. This is a sin (pointing to the girl in her mini-pants on the calendar). With regards to alcohol, they said wine is definitely a sin. Raki isn't. As far as the money with interest was concerned, there too I got an interesting answer. They said interest from banks is not a sin. However, there is one guy in the next town who is a usurer. That definitely is a sin. "He's going straight to hell."

Now, what am I trying to say by this? It is quite clear that whether or not the Turkish state had been guided by the rules of *Shari'a*, whether or not it had gone through the processes of republican transformation, these villagers now integrated into the national economy are very clearly swallowed up by market forces and confronted by the whole material culture of the West

Now, this is something we cannot negate. We cannot talk of values in the absence of material culture. I happen to believe that material cultures have a way of changing behaviour outside the will of the people. They have a force of their own. My analysis of these peasants' behaviour does have an implication for architecture as material culture. These people, subsistence agriculturalists not long ago, were confronted with the market economy and with a new material culture to which they had to adapt whether they liked it or not. Hence, they had to make modifications in their belief systems to accommodate the new features of their environment.

The same is true for the houses I surveyed in a working-class, blue-collar habitat. Because there was television, and new patterns of visiting, they relaxed segregation of the sexes considerably if not completely. They were now watching television in mixed company. The whole idea of male and female spheres within the household has been collapsing.

These things do have implications for planning. If we really do want to be efficacious about understanding values as they relate to behaviour in space, we have to focus more on the mediating mechanism. I think this is the key to the problem. We accept the forms *a priori*. To go to the level of the prescriptive roles directly from the *Shari'a* is not the answer either. On the contrary, I think we should look at changing structures as they slowly impinge on value systems through a dynamic process of change. It is only when we discover those buffer mechanisms, those intermediary mechanisms which make it possible for people to adjust to change without losing themselves, that we will be able to understand the way in which they shape both their identity and their environment.

Stambouli

During our discussions I think that the substance of our findings was often challenged by two main contradictions whose resolution is vital if we as intellectuals want to take seriously our responsibilities as interpreters of our time

The first contradiction is between what we call the Islamic idiom, with its characteristics of simplicity, discretion and sense of equity, and what I called yesterday the currently dominant technocratic rationality with its limited profit mechanism. As long as we intellectuals have not, through an effort of creativity and imagination, been able to conceptualize our present correctly in order to give credible alternatives to our societies for the future, we will continue to be confronted with failures in what we call modernization. It is necessary

to remind you that what we call Islamic renaissance (*nahḍa*) is still problematic and fragile. We intellectuals share the responsibility for the failure throughout our societies at any level: education, economics, urbanism, architecture and so on. Failures in modernization processes during the last two decades have led to what I call, involutive retraditionalization of great parts of our societies. So neither a passive conception of Islamic revival nor a technocratic conception of modernization, but an effort of investigation upon the present of our peoples will adapt Islam to the challenges of modern time.

The second contradiction is the one that exists between the massive, concrete, basic needs of our peoples, which have abruptly emerged through artificial hyper-urbanization during the colonial period and after, and the means at hand to solve such needs. Dependency and hegemony on the international scene and redundant, liberal political systems on the local one do not allow the development of suitable means. Unless such contradictions between needs and means are overcome, there is no way out of the deplorable situation in which many of our people are living. Such contradictions could be overcome, I believe, if adequate educational programmes were instituted.

To rebuild our identity in the true spirit of Islam, not only our architectural identity but our total identity, we must renew our historical personality and its various facets with a creative effort in order to live within our time and not within nostalgic, passive illusions of glorious pasts.

Faghih

I'm overwhelmed by what I've heard and what I learned, but also very much by what I felt. I had three very strong feelings. One which I think is crucial to the making of a meaningful Islamic architecture (or let's say the making of an architecture in the spirit of Islam and to the cultures which belong to it) is that involvement of the person with what he's

doing, involvement of the architect with what he's designing and also commitment to the people for whom this work is being done is very important. My second feeling is that architecture cannot be a neutral set of solutions or a simple matter of neutral methods applied to those specific situations. True, they are part of the masses of quantities which are being built in contemporary architecture, but they do not touch our senses and they do not make our history. My third feeling is that architecture has to belong to a major canon of architectural tradition in history in order to guarantee the semiotic contract. Personal involvement with the problem you are given to solve and your belonging to a cultural tradition, to a canon of architectural history, doesn't mean that you approach problems rationally. And at the end I would like to say what I feel about the Awards. I think they ought to be given to those who, despite the dominant or bureaucratic state of affairs in all of the countries we live in, have succeeded in solving creatively and rationally problems which are important to the continuity of the Islamic tradition in the contemporary environment.

Kowsar

Since we are rapidly nearing the conclusion of the seminar, I would like to make some remarks about design processes and those factors that, I am convinced, strongly influence them. 1) The "nature," meaning those objective physical qualities which can be modified only to a minor degree, e.g., vegetation, topography, water, the pre-existence of a built or unbuilt environment, etc.; 2) the "climate," or the sky, the sun, light, shadow, heat and cold; 3) the "culture," or the society in which the architect operates, including economic, historical, political, religious and social aspects of the lives of individuals, a group or society as a whole. Through the interpretation of these three main factors, the architect is able to express his personal concept of the world

and of architecture itself. Here I would like to quote Louis Kahn: "Expression is the centre of all the arts and art is the language of God."

Although in each region of the world the first and second factors, namely, nature and climate, can be assumed to be unchangeable; the third factor, culture, changes over time, as does the weight of its components. Viewing architecture in this perspective, the architect, through his personal feeling, will decide what significance each one of the variants shall get in shaping his work.

Keeping in mind the changeability of culture over time and from place to place, I would like to add the following observation: day by day, the world is moving closer toward overall unity, which is a positive event. No doubt that we citizens of the world greatly benefit from it. No doubt, regional and local cultures will be enriched by their mutual contacts. Only thirty years ago, many Western people seemed to think of the world as ending at the Aegean Sea. However, let us not consider political and economic reasons for that. It's an old story. Instead, let us look into the interest generated by improved mass media and improved communications and transportation facilities that the younger generation is developing in Islamic countries and cultures. It's not only for oil or petrodollars.

We may consider this world tendency to be a positive one, although we also have good reasons to be concerned about the loss of diversity. We should be aware of the problem, as diversity is the base of creativity, and creativity is the difference between man and animal. We therefore need our own identity, an important aspect of which is our religious heritage. During this seminar, many different cultures, from Malaysian to Egyptian, have been grouped together under the heading "Islamic culture." I personally believe that religion is only one of the components of a given culture. Hence, I fear it is possible that we are clouding understanding of that identity we seek.

Let me bring up a very easy example: the

term "Western society" often refers to many different countries. However, this does not mean that the Italian way of thinking, behaviour or artistic expression is applicable to all; nor is the German or that of any nationality. Are French expressions the same as American ones just because these two people share Christianity as a major cultural aspect? Indeed not. I would like to stress that there are many other factors which have contributed throughout the centuries to shaping societies and which have often created similarities.

Traditional Islamic and medieval European towns have many of these similarities in their environments. Their organism originated in human scale needs, by human or animal potential speed in movement, hence translated into human scale spaces. Today, not only is human dimension no longer the commanding one, but the very number of human beings is such that romance could be dangerous.

During the past few days most of us have successfully pointed to the magnificent cultural heritage of architecture in the various Islamic countries. However, we should not attempt to define a formal model for evaluating architectural environments or buildings.

Since freedom of thinking and expression are essential conditions for creativity, no set codes can bring about creativity, as evidenced by the European experience with neo-classicism. During the nineteenth century, inspirations based on the Parthenon, Gothic cathedrals, the Renaissance and the Baroque styles led architecture to eclecticism, the worst insult to the past. The results would be the same if this attitude were to be applied to Isfahan's Friday Mosque or Agra's Taj Mahal. It would be a sign of weakness and void. Therefore, I agree on the necessity to search for spirit and not for form in Islamic architecture and to consider carefully the changes and what still validly exists without anti-historical sentimentalism. Each architect will find his own answer to this search by filtering each problem through his own culture and

beliefs. Finally, I would like to quote Louis Kahn again:

Tradition is really a sense of validity. It is not what you see but what you feel. If you feel the reflection of something, if it is beautifully stated, if it reflects something which you would like to extend the expression of, although you may not know its background and it transcends the knowledge you have about it, you see it and you feel that you must see it. You must see it because it is the kind of thing which you would not see in nature without man. It spells an association of man to man. It spells civilization. It spells the tendency toward the meeting of people and finding out about yourself through someone else.

Hassan

We have had the opportunity to glimpse, however briefly, a few projects presented by participants that illustrate the principle that should guide our considerations for the Award. During the first seminar for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the contributions of the participants have alluded to the direction our thinking should take and the criteria to be adopted for the evaluation of the architectural projects.

- 1) The concept of identity: an architecture that should express our identity, reflect our past heritage and extant in our present realities and projected needs.
- 2) Integrity: an architecture in which the designs and building materials are true to the lifestyle and economies of the people who are the users. Part of our mission is to have the eyes to recognize those projects exemplifying these qualities and to have the courage to support them however simple and unostentatious.
- 3) Service: in keeping with the spirit of Islam, His Highness the Aga Khan reflected his concern for building hospitals and schools and public institutions for his people, and Janet Abu-Lughod bade us not forget the message in Islam of service

to the community. Expressed in architectural form the madrasa, the *maristan*, the mosque, the *sabil*, the *kuttab*, the *rab'* and the *wakāla* are all institutions of service to the community.

When we use in combination the concepts of Islamic identity, integrity and service, our search for valid contemporary architectural forms in keeping with the spirit of Islam becomes easier.

In some of the projects presented to us, we recognize the integrity, the search for identity and the service in architectural forms, materials used and their relevance to the social needs of the clients.

It was evident that these projects were worthy of our consideration for the Award, and each category should be considered separately for the Award. Projects fall into the following categories:

- 1) Award for the project created by and implemented by the individual architect or planner: for example, the work of Hassan Fathy who designed the whole village of Gournah for and with the people. He was inspired by Islamic and vernacular traditions and, in turn, has inspired architects all over the world.
- 2) Award for projects created and implemented by a creative research team. An example of this has been presented by Farokh Afshar and his team from the Centre for Indigenous Development Studies. In an action-research programme they built with the people a number of institutions including a public bath and a school.
- 3) Award for a good governmental project that is locally initiated, designed and implemented. An example of this may be the Ibn Khaldun City near Tunis presented briefly by Professor Stambouli.
- 4) Award for vernacular architecture. Villages and buildings which result from the efforts of an entire community and are the expression of a particular culture. This brings to mind the villages and cities of Yemen as shown to us by Alain Bertaud. When we give awards, thereby prestige, for such architecture, we reinforce popular

self-expression and encourage architects and government to look at their roots and local traditions for inspiration. Such awareness should be created if we are to stop the process of the cultural obliteration of our architectural traditions in rural development programs, such as happened in Nubia in the 1960s.

Robertson

I want to thank you for letting me sit in for the last three days. I can take back from this conference substantially more than I came with, and it is the first time I have been able to say this about a conference in a long time. I would like to read to you, if you will, a set of prescriptions that I gave to myself some years back and have given to my students, because I think they complement so many of the value issues that you are talking about today. I think they illustrate the commonality of ideas, the kinship of ideas between your world and mine.

In general, build within and not against the existing cultural and natural context unless there is a profoundly perceived reason for violating this setting. This means reinforcing the found orders and systems more often than not and observing the social contract that exists between most buildings in any architecturally satisfying community. Articulate and enhance social ceremony and local tradition. Abide by the manners of the place and time. Use the implied architectural conventions. Do not intend to invent new vocabularies for their own sake; languages take a long time to develop; you throw them away at great risk. Suspect variety for its own sake, value consistency and modify repetition.

Don't think that your primary concern is always to reform a client in some fundamental way or necessarily to extend his frame of reference or to show him a "new world." There are plenty of occasions when he really doesn't need any of this and the attempt to evangelize is only

narrow self-gratification, excess baggage for the flight at hand. Parenthetically, all efforts in life are not helpfully informed by the same sense of urgency and private passion. Indeed, the ability to overload relatively modest programmes is all too prevalent. There is a good bit to be said for the self-conscious, natural and repetitious response rather than the original and frazzled idiosyncratic one. It is neither possible nor desirable to have to think things through each time. No one has the time nor indeed the capacity nor resources to do so. Thinking, following Whitehead, is not unlike a cavalry charge in war, it requires fresh troops, great courage and strength, it must come at precisely the right moment and is always undertaken at great risks and cost. An analogue is that high civilizations are precisely those which maximize the number of tasks performed by rote, high design being no exception. Good architecture is generally that in which there are the fewest number of variables or elements which can be said to be original or new. It is a proper balancing or sorting and reusing of known elements and techniques which most often produces buildings of merit and long life. Mediate between appropriate monumentality and necessary human scales without taking polemical sides. Both have and will always be necessary.

Study history, love it critically, appreciate its contextual implications. You cannot escape the past and its dynamic anymore than you can tomorrow. On the other hand, you cannot steal from history, it is like stealing from yourself. Use historical models critically as building blocks if you will. You are part of a continuum and your major task as thinker/doer is to sort information about the past, distinguish patterns and unscramble those new orders which better describe the surrounding reality. Using Bateson's analogy, you must distinguish what information has to go on what maps. Recognize, understand, respect and use the real constraints of money, time, local building and development practice and prevailing habitant law. These are all positive values and should all be recognized as such. Try to wrest from

the possible and the limited some extra concessions of grace rather than always to win sweeping victories. Extract from the relentless pressure of diminishing resources and waning manners, some limited enhancement. This is basically what the artist/architect is hired to do, not to transform society. Transcending the realities of the constraints must always be considered as a benefit.

Well, let me conclude with two more statements. This particularly applies to the Award, because I, like John Turner, have spent much of my life working on tools and some of it working on products, and the two are very different. Remember that, although architectural and planning practice may well be processes which themselves often undermine and always alter their final product, they can never be a surrogate for that product as some would wish. And the ultimate client is quite ignorant of the designer's process or his intentions. The intended public lives with the results, the physical world in which it has neither a legitimate need nor interest in authorship and only a hope of appreciation in us and that exhilaration of perception sometimes called joy. Your client is not yourself nor is the final product. Unfortunately, the criteria for judging the one is not the same for judging the other. Do not be confused or misled by architectural awards. Building should not, indeed, cannot be evaluated nor given prizes in any real sense for at least five years. The opening is a promise, nothing more. Try to learn from what you do after you have done it, how the building is used and how it is valued by those who use it, not by whether it provided immediate fuel for your ego. Finally, try to acquire grace, a sense of intellectual balance and human perspective as a man who just happens to practice architecture. What you are as a person is important to what you do as an architect, even though in the strictest analytic sense you cannot prove this, nor will it make you a good designer. This was a basic premise by the humanist ideal and is, I suspect, still fundamental to a healthy architecture today. It is also, as I have learned over the last three years, and

especially again over the last three days, a central tenet of Islam.

Afshar

The seminar theme suggested a difficult task: defining the "Spirit of Islam" in a way relevant to architectural and planning activities. The task was somewhat simplified since Islam is not confined to esoteric matters, but presents itself as a practical way of life touching on all matters both spiritual and temporal. In this sense, the use of the term "Spirit of Islam" could be misleading; hence the choice of another title, "Toward Appropriate Architecture for Muslim Countries."

An underlying issue in the conference was a question concerning the extent to which the world is shaped by people's material conditions or their belief systems. Some emphasized the former, others the latter. The central attempt of these comments is to explore the resolution of the two by identifying some principles in Islam and relating them to a practical action for today.

We are faced today with an increasing amount of inappropriate, often imposed architecture that undermines indigenous building potentials, causing dependence on expensive imported methods; does not meet basic shelter needs of the majority; and is alien to the local environment and culture. It must be recognized that these problems are shared by Third World countries in general and are to some extent expressed globally.¹

Since these comments concern themselves with Muslim countries, we must ask what bearing Islamic culture has on defining and achieving appropriate types of architecture in these countries. In a preliminary exploration of this question, the paper raises three issues: What is Islamic architecture? What Islamic principles have architectural and planning implications? And third, what might be subject areas for further investigation?

Islamic architecture, as it is commonly

identified, developed for the most part from pre-Islamic traditions. Some of its best expressions are a result of a creative interaction between indigenous building traditions and the new methods that Islam brought with its spread. Thus, arches, vaults and domes, commonly associated with Islam, originated long before Islam and developed in a wide variety of ways in response to local conditions in different areas.²

The superficial imitation of such forms today is no answer. It does not face any of the problems mentioned. Too often it is a rather tastelessly executed surface-dressing, distorting the problem rather than broaching it. Thus a reinforced concrete arched façade on a housing scheme contributes mostly to making the houses more expensive, and therefore, less accessible to those who need them.

The idea that certain forms are Islamic and others less so is a moot point. Even so obviously Islamic a building as a mosque has very different expressions in Nigeria, Oman and Iran. The success of these buildings in terms of their spiritual or functional effectiveness is not necessarily dependent upon a common external form. Their success depends more on the allowing for the functions prescribed for them in Islam than on the principles and processes underlying their construction.

The functions vary for each type of building. Thus the mosque will usually have a courtyard pool or other place to perform ablutions, a large hall in which the congregation can stand undifferentiated and an articulated wall section (*mihrāb*) that indicates the direction of Mecca, which is the orientation of the mosque and of the congregation.

The following principles give us some suggestions on the type of processes and products that would be appropriate in architecture and planning in Muslim countries. These principles are neither exhaustive nor exclusive to Islam. Nor is the link between Islam and the activities mentioned below made to suggest that the initiation and validity of the latter depends on its connection with Islam. What is

interesting here is that policies and projects that independently make good practical sense are also supported in the principles of Islam.

1) The principle of equality is fundamental to Islam. It is expressed, for example, in the emphasis on all standing shoulder to shoulder in a mosque regardless of status. Thus, an architecture that mitigates against the polarization of rich and poor would be in spirit. A housing scheme which was an expensive development requiring heavy subsidy and built in limited quantities for a few low-income people would challenge the principle. The housing scheme would have to demonstrate a system of acquiring land and finances for construction that would make it a viable method for the majority.

2) "Next to prayer, learning was regarded as most sacred" in Islam.³ A project that is a learning experience during the process of its realization would reflect this very important principle in its use. Combining the principle with the concept of equality would suggest an educational policy aimed at alleviating the needs of the majorities through the participation of those identifying the major problems as well as those engaged in finding solutions to these problems and in making the results accessible to all.

3) The idea that every element is an autonomous part within a larger whole and is also a microcosm of it, is reflected in the belief in Islam that every person is his own priest, a household head is the caliph of the family and the family is a society within the society.⁴ This principle is expressed in many traditional Islamic cities in which neighbourhoods (*mahalla*) form autonomous communities containing a cohesive social structure as well as physical services pertaining to the neighbourhood without over-dependence on the city centre. The same principle can be developed on a national level, suggesting a decentralized policy of self-reliant, regional groupings united at the national centre without overburdening it. "The idea of ecological equilibrium is one of the cornerstones of the traditional sciences of

Nature, including Islam.”⁵ This ecological equilibrium is achieved by the realization of the potentials of local human and material resources in a way that is harmonious with man and nature. Many traditional buildings and settlements express this principle. Modern projects to be true to the same principle need to be developed from a thorough understanding of these indigenous buildings and settlements and fully use local resources.

4) “Islam as a religion is a way of unity and totality. Its fundamental dogma is called *al-tawhīd*, that is to say, unity or the action of uniting.”⁶ Although this concept implies a single source and a unifying principle outlining the whole, it is not necessarily restrictive. In art this is illustrated in tile work by the use of a basic matrix used to create an infinite variety of designs which are harmoniously composed. Similarly, in architecture, myriad building types have resulted from an equally varied vault and dome technology. All share a common structural principle and form. The concept of unity can serve to synthesize the points so far mentioned. In this context it can imply a resolution of the contradictions of past, present and future, rich and poor, rural and urban, professional craftsman-builder and user, process and product. Thus, for example, this concept would support a policy that would encourage a close, cooperative working relationship between professional architects and engineers, craftsmen and traditional builders and end users, arguing that this would produce far more creative and appropriate resolutions to architectural and planning needs than the present system of politicians and professionals prescribing for everyone else.

What, if any, constants can be identified as “Islamic” in the built environment, and what are the variables that result from local conditions in the different Muslim countries? This question suggests two major subjects requiring investigation:

1) A thorough study of Islamic texts to identify what attitudes and guiding principles these texts have for the built environment. In addition to possible constants

arising from such studies, local Islamic texts and local interpretations to Islamic law regarding building and planning in different countries should be studied. These should be assessed in view of the contemporary situation.

2) A thorough study of the indigenous built environment should be carried out in each of the Muslim countries. Indigenous building materials and skills should be assessed to determine their potential for meeting contemporary needs.

Altogether, these studies and any pilot projects they suggest would give us a better understanding of how to define and achieve appropriate types of architecture and planning in Muslim countries.

Reference Notes

¹ For a discussion of the problem regarding the Third World in general, see F Ashar, A Cain, M R Daraie, J Norton, “The potentials of indigenous building technologies,” *Communications and Development Review I* (4) (Winter 1977-78)

² Choga Zambil, vaulted 1200 B C

³ A U Pope *A Survey of Persian Architecture* (Oxford University Press, 1969), p 49

⁴ F Schuon *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, trans by Peter Townsend (Harper & Row, 1975), as quoted in N Ardalan and L Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity* (University of Chicago Press, 1973)

⁵ S H Nasr, *Islamic Science* (World of Islam, Festival Publishing Co, Ltd), p 227

⁶ S H Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Belknap, 1964)