Exploring Architecture in Islamic Cultures 3

Criticism in Architecture

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The meetings were held under the auspices of the International Committee of Architectural Critics whose past president, Dennis Sharp, acted as consultant to the Award to foster the seminar topic. In Malta, the seminar was co-sponsored by the University of Malta's Foundation for International Studies. Richard England was the seminar coordinator locally. From the Geneva Award Office staff, Jack Kennedy, Executive Officer, was responsible for the seminar organisation and Farrokh Derakhshani, Award Procedures Coordinator, oversaw implementation in Malta.

Robert Powell of the National University of Singapore is editor of the Proceedings.
Contents

Foreword 7

Criticism in Architecture 8
Dennis Sharp

Modern Approaches to Regionalism

Session I 16
Selma al-Radi

Architecture as an Intellectual Statement —
Modernism in the Muslim World 16
Ismail Serageldin

Counterpoint — The National Commercial
Bank, Jeddah 31
Romi Khosla

Panel Discussion 34
Peter Davey
Ihsan Fethi
Abdelbaki Ibrahim
Peter Serracino Inglott

Open Discussion 39

Traditional Approaches to Contemporary
Architecture

Session II 53
Charles Moore

Meaning in Tradition: Today An Approach to
Architectural Criticism 53
Hasan-Uddin Khan

Counterpoint 65
Michael Sorkin
Panel Discussion
Richard England
Abu H. Imamuddin
Syed Zaigham Jaffery
Brian Brace Taylor

Open Discussion

Architectural Criticism

Session III
Mohamed Arkoun

Panel Discussion
Chris Abel
Stanford Anderson
Osamah El-Gohary
Andras Ferkai
Haluk Pamir
Pierre Vago

Open Discussion

The Criticism of Architecture in the Media

Session IV
Dennis Sharp

Panel Discussion
Charles Knevitt
Ruslan Khalid
Satish Grover
Victor Torpiano

Open Discussion

Rapporteur
Mildred Schmertz
Distributed Paper
Notes for an Essay on Architectural Criticism
Haluk Pamir

Background and Bibliographical References
Dennis Sharp

Appendix
Opening Ceremony
Closing Session

Seminar Participants
This book records the proceedings of the third in a series of regional seminars within the general title “Exploring Architecture in the Islamic World”. I am again privileged to be asked to edit the papers and discussion. On this occasion, unlike the first two, I attended the seminar held on the island of Malta. This has both advantages and disadvantages, for in editing the previous publications “Architecture and Identity” and “Regionalism in Architecture”, I was able to exercise a certain amount of dispassionate detachment.

With the transcripts before me the passions and interests of the participants are still very real and it has been a more difficult task to make the necessary literary incisions. Some participants had come prepared to discuss a global view of architectural criticism, drawing largely on a western tradition, others had a more singular task which was to define the critical criteria for selecting the best in the architecture of the Islamic world, to receive the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. The discussion flared to life in illuminating exchanges.

There were many remarkable insights and ideas and one can distill from them directions for the Aga Khan Awards’ committee. A relevant framework for architectural criticism in Muslim parts of the developing world, as well as non-Muslim countries did emerge, even if it was not precisely articulated at the end of our three days of deliberation.

The task of this book is to ensure that those ideas are assembled concisely, for such critical direction is lacking in the developing countries of the world.

This book may be a momentous step forward, for the participants in the seminar could hardly have been more distinguished. In the western critical mode we had the first Editor of L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, the Editor-in-Chief of Architectural Record, the Editor of Architectural Review and the Architectural correspondents of the Times (London) and the Economist (UK). From the developing world, including countries with a substantial proportion of their population of the Islamic faith, we had editors of Architecture + Design (India), Habitat Pakistan (Pakistan), Espace Africain (Ivory Coast), Majallah Akitek (Malaysia), S’alam Al-Benaa (Egypt), Atrium (Malta), and MIMAR: Architecture in Development, together with contributors to Al Ownrane (Morocco), Hungarian Architecture (Hungary) and Al-Benaa (Saudi Arabia).

Architectural criticism ultimately can only flourish in a climate of intellectual freedom, a situation which sadly does not exist everywhere in the developed or the developing world. There was evidence of a serious lack of critical discourse in many societies. Paradoxically this also gave sustenance to those who may have felt that they were alone in facing this dilemma. This shared experience was for some the most valuable outcome of the seminar.

May I record my appreciation of the patience and cooperation of Catherine Ng who transcribed the recordings of the seminar; also Patricia Theseira and Lynda Lim who have in their usual calm and efficient manner steered the book through the production process on behalf of the publishers.

Robert Powell
Editor
Criticism in Architecture

Dennis Sharp

The topic of this seminar, “Architectural Criticism” is, I believe, a highly relevant, important and apposite one. It is concerned with opinions, values and value judgements; with the qualitative aspects of individual buildings, groups of buildings and the built environment as well as with design, taste, cultural values, with communities and, of course, most importantly, with the communication of ideas. Here we immediately enter the company of great writers. Oscar Wilde, writing of critics said: “Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope”.

Architectural criticism is a much wider subject than one might expect. Like other areas of criticism it is tied in with philosophy, history, theory and practice. It is not an easy subject with which to deal, as any practising writer, editor or critic will soon tell you. It is by no means easy to define or to pin down. In a sense everyone is a critic. Everybody has opinions about buildings, however innocent and inept. Who has not heard an instant opinion given about a piece of architecture: “Gosh, I hate the look of that building. Doesn’t that look dreadful?” or a more general criticism, like Prince Charles’s which condemned “London office buildings so mediocre the only way you ever remember them is by the frustration they induce!”.

Criticism is, after all, about seeing. Criticism is always about opinions; holding, sharing and even imposing them. This Seminar is concerned with the professional aspects of criticism; widely used, formative criticism. I want to isolate some of these factors.

We should commence, however, with some general observations: It was the well known Swiss writer Friedrich Durrenmatt who expressed serious reservations about critics in his little essay Chat about criticism in front of the press. He was on a “war footing” he said, with theatre critics and preferred to get out of their way if possible. “No writer is insensitive to criticism” he said, “no writer is ever quite sure that he can master his own job...”. As a writer and architect myself I know exactly how he felt. His words should find a sympathetic ear amongst architects and writers alike.

In his essay he went on to define four classes of critics. He described them thus: “The first can neither write nor criticise. The second can write but cannot criticise. The third cannot write but can criticise, the fourth can write and criticise!” “Most critics”, Durrenmatt said, “are to be found in the first class, the most famous are in the second, and in the fourth are those who know something about the subject being criticised. Nobody is to be found in the third category — those who cannot write but can criticise — it is purely hypothetical!”.

Durrenmatt’s point about his second category — that appreciation and criticism (of the theatre) is not the same thing — is useful. Merely to praise or to condemn does not amount to criticism. Criticism ought to be supported by reasons. We have to work out just what these reasons are. Are they altruistic, practical or propagandist? Are they international, nationalistic or regionalistic?

First we have to start with criticism itself. Looking back over twenty years of involvement as an editor of magazines concerned with architectural history, theory and criticism I am amazed by two aspects of this current new mood of seriousness about architectural criticism. It is a relatively new attitude.

From the mid-1960s onwards hardly anyone seemed interested in architecture, let alone to read about it. Everyone it seemed at the time was into ecosystems, futurology and man-environment studies. Into “hippy” dreams of self-reliance, self-build, life support systems, mud huts and shelter, doomsday prophecies, cultural anarchy and student revolution. Alongside this there were some devastating views about life itself, and about morality and religion.

Yet with it emerged the well expressed views on environmental matters of Paul Goodman, Jane Jacob’s rediscovery of city life, Illich’s de-schooling and medical nemesis, Schumacher’s small and beautiful movement, Bernard Rudofsky’s non-
pedigreed architecture, Dick Sennett’s uses of disorder, Buckminster Fuller’s domes, Paolo Soleri’s colossal archaeological Utopias, as well as Lord Clarke’s *Civilisation* series on TV, Disneyland and the Beatles. It was all part of a great cultural ‘counter-revolution’. Its success was based very largely on a critical discussion of new dialectics and a broad dissemination of views that transcended national and cultural boundaries.

The so-called Modern Movement era was condemned at the moment its chief protagonists died. It was a period of turmoil, of great unrest and change. It was the time of the pursuit of many ends as ends in themselves, an “anything goes” period. It was the time of the pluralist, the universalist and the generalist. It was one of those periods in time – if I may paraphrase Sir Isaiah Berlin – of the foxes rather than the hedgehogs: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing”, he wrote in his famous essay on Tolstoy.

I believe we have again entered into a period of the hedgehog. Today, the monists are inspired by the challenges of unity, of inter-cultural problems, relationships and definitions. Contrary to the feeling in the 1960s and early 1970s when we spoke of whole “environments” (whatever that may have meant) and about “urban planning strategies” we now talk of *Architecture*. We are re-united under the banner of architecture. We speak of cities and towns again, rather than urban phenomena. We are into the One Big Thing, *Architecture*, which is all to the good. We can now concentrate on Architecture and Civic values, on historical traditions in a seemingly endless endeavour to explain and understand the nature, processes and the results of man’s most imaginative and rewarding faculty, to **BUILD**

This change has taken some time so I’m not too dismayed at the thought that the spread of an articulate architectural criticism will also need time to gain a hold, particularly in those areas in which a strong critical tradition has been lacking. First you design, then you build, then you criticise. It is an on-going if somewhat repetitive process and we should try to broaden it. Criticism is usually carried out retrospectively. It is a posterior subject. To **ELEVATE** it to a full frontal position as part of the design process has been suggested by a number of critics, including Bruno Zevi, the CICA President. Until that happens it will remain a retrospective activity. It is concerned with recall and indeed much of what one discusses is spoken of from memory. We talk about buildings that we have visited and experienced, written on, read about and probably photographed. We are not able to go up to the critical object. We can only say: “Look, its like this or that”. We are not able to point to it and say this characteristic or that feature belong to a certain tradition or a particular family of forms, except through the photographs or verbal descriptions we employ. We should be able to grasp the point that criticism occurs outside and beyond the object. Criticism thus exists in its own right. But, as Durrenmatt hinted, it must never become an art form for its own sake. It has a servicing function. In our discussions, we shall talk about styles and no doubt this provides us with a short cut into a critical assessment. Critics are supposed to know about these things. We are not able to say to a building’s creators “why did you make this or that decision?” Indeed, it is up to us to articulate our ideas in such a way as to communicate not only our comments or views on a particular building but to provide information on its background, its construction, materials and design formulation and to distill the very essence of the object we are discussing. All of this I believe is what we call *Architectural Criticism*. By such means we should be able to conjure up in the minds of an audience an image of the object itself and a clear idea of its chief characteristics, its setting and its cultural connections.

I have little doubt that discussions of buildings and the built environment will have a high priority in this seminar, but we are also here to discuss architectural criticism, its techniques, its processes and principles. We shall also be focussing on what educationalists would call the acquisition of knowledge based skills. Some critics in this distinguished company will certainly appear more skillful. Others may well feel the need to re-acquire knowledge once painfully learnt but now neglected.

The organisers of the seminar had it in mind that such skills should be passed on to others, that this learned and acquired knowledge, and the abilities that go with it, should be shared. Those surrounded by a high degree of know-how, of contacts and references, should be persuaded to explain and analyse their position, and to pass on their skills.

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**Some definitions**

Criticism is easy to define in general terms. A succinct definition states that it is “the art of judging the qualities and values of an aesthetic object”. The perceptive 19th century British writer Matthew Arnold defined it as, “A disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world”. The critic, he said, should be flexible, tactful and free of prejudice. Whilst such general definitions may be relatively easy to quote the application of critical principles is much more difficult. There is little consensus here. One set is to be found in the area of aesthetics. These principles
relate to definitions of concepts such as truth, order, proportion and the beauty of forms. They really are the province of the philosopher rather than the critic. The critic is involved in the use of such concepts as guiding principles as well as being caught up in their fluctuating values relating to changes in taste and fashion. Aesthetic interpretations are the basis of architectural criticism as long as architecture remains an art. The role of the critic is to encourage, and stimulate creative enthusiasm and discussion.

Criticism I would argue should not make it appear, as it often does, that a particular building is the result of some miraculous or “secret” design process. Architecture is a constructive art. It possesses special aesthetic aspects but for all that it is the fruit of voluntary and explicit choices on the part of the designer, usually on behalf of a patron or sponsoring client. Therefore, in the process of criticising a building it is always important to associate it with the designer, the firm or team associated with its creation. An explanation of the purpose, programme and requirements of the sponsor, patron or client is extremely important. Furthermore, an architectural critic can offer a real service and often act as an important intermediary between the architect and the consumer and the public. Thus he helps to break down isolationist attitudes so detrimental to the furtherance of architectural ideas and qualities. In a real sense then the critic can actively participate in architectural and environmental matters. The critic can get close to the design and perhaps become an important influence on the designer as well. A critic, however, should never try to act like a judge whose decisions are eagerly awaited by the architect or conversely, become someone whose strictures are greeted fearfully or with disdain. That, I believe, weakens the whole critical position. So does the paid promotion of so-called “independent” critical reviews of buildings and environmental projects which is unfortunately becoming more prevalent in the western press today.

Inter-cultural references

Architectural criticism does not appear to have developed in the Islamic world at the same pace as architectural history writing. There is not a body of distinguished critics, neither is there a literature that reinforces a current critical viewpoint. However, there is no lack of theory. There is also a substantial body of architectural scholarship. It is obviously felt that the lack of architectural criticism has probably restricted, if not deterred, architectural development. This, as the organisers of this seminar have suggested, represents a serious void. The acquisition of skills and knowledge on criticism have to be encouraged. They are required to fill out the expression of critical thought and writing on architecture and the built environments of Islam. A broad basis for this approach will be stressed in Ismail Serageldin’s paper. It stresses the need for a critical appraisal of building trends in the Muslim world against the background of multi-cultural references. It also discusses the highly sophisticated state of the craft of criticism in the west. It argues that criticism in the west is closely associated with the dissemination of information on the built environment and on the design of buildings. It stresses that it does this in an objective, if not entirely unbiased, way. I agree; but what do we mean by architectural criticism?

What is architectural criticism?

At the outset I suggested we should differentiate between three related subjects: between architectural theory, architectural history and architectural criticism, at least insofar as this seminar is concerned. Although these subjects are often seen as inextricably mixed they clearly are separate disciplines. Increasingly people trained in architectural and art history, and architects with an interest in theory and involved in education are taking upon themselves the mantle of architectural critic. On the whole critics are not trained but emerge from various backgrounds although courses on criticism within schools of architecture have been developed recently. The architectural critic mainly comes from the profession or directly from journalism.

It would be incorrect to argue that architectural criticism is a precise science or discipline. Although there is now an International Committee of Architectural Critics (CICA) and almost every member is from the kind of background I have just mentioned, each one remains an independent and free agent. Members are not expected to subscribe to any collective view about architecture, or about criticism, nor necessarily to share the same ideas, although some clearly do. CICA is a pluralistic organisation and provides a platform for the involvement of architectural “critics” in international architectural events including, most importantly, architectural competitions. It seeks to identify the separateness of the critic’s role from that of the designer but demands close collaboration. Bruno Zevi has argued that critics should be installed in architectural offices: this would give architects an opportunity to test their ideas on an objective and neutral person at the outset of a project. Many CICA members are, of course, architects themselves who have also chosen to be involved with criticism. In that way they continue a wholly respectable line of individualistic professional architectural criticism. Some of them have
developed specialist interests in aesthetics, in urban planning, in architecture and theory, in history and in wide multi-cultural aspects of the disciplines and ideas that form part of the environmental arts and sciences. CICA has few members from the Muslim world although its membership includes some critics and editors from developing countries.

The nature of criticism

Most criticism is personal and written by an individual for popular or specialist consumption, whether eastern or western. Thus the importance of objectivity in criticism has to be stressed. A lot is demanded of the critic in the judicious administration of this goal. It has to be allied to good sense and clear judgement, to sagacity and it must be in the hands of someone who can hold their own against the spread of mediocre mass cultural values. It is important to be controversial but not offensive as this represents a total negation of the critic's role. Stressing the intellectual nature of a building is of some importance but to do it at the expense of communication is of course ridiculous. Good critics never alienate their readers. However, all criticism should be carefully regulated to suit the needs of the medium. An overly intellectual approach to criticism may well find a place in a professional or student publication or another medium like video suited to deep and lengthy analysis but it must be stressed that criticism on the whole is as important in tabloid and popular newspapers and journals as it is in the specialist press. For many years the London Daily Mirror employed the services of an environmental correspondent whose role was to produce snappy, up to date colloquial stories on new buildings and new environmental developments for that widely circulating paper. Popular daily newspapers cannot afford to ignore the changes that are going on and every effort should be made to try and influence editors, owners and readers to ensure that environmental criticism is part of their normal fare. Fortunately CICA over the past few years has seen many new opportunities open up for critics.

The role of the critic

The role of the architectural critic has expanded rapidly. There are many recognised critics who themselves represent particular views, attitudes, positions and cultural backgrounds. For years they have shared the international platform. Considerable attention has been given over the years to that long line of distinguished Italian architectural critics that spans from Argan, Dorfles and Bruno Zevi through to Gregotti and to the school of critics which includes Giancarlo de Carlo, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co. In the United States it is Louise Ada Huxtable and Vincent Scully as well as Reyner Banham, J M. Fitch, Peter Blake and others who have raised criticism to a high level. S E Rasmussen and C. Norberg-Schulz working in Scandinavia have also reinforced the international credibility of architectural criticism in a similar way to the British architectural critical fraternity which has included John Summerson, John Betjeman and J M. Richards who in a succession of widely read publications and through the pages of the distinguished British journal The Architectural Review established an international reputation for good critical writing. Richards was for many years The Times' architectural correspondent. However, this particular line owes much to 19th century precedent and to the master writers of that articulate period. There were many critics of architecture. Chief among these stands the eminent critic John Ruskin (1819-1901). His artistic doctrines and economic theories were responsible for creating the opinion of generations of artists and architects. He looked at nature and especially at the sublime aspects of nature as a main feature in his world of ideas. He has been credited with creating the modern welfare state whilst J. Rosenberg has written that: "It would require a revolution to undo the revolution which Ruskin brought about". He viewed architecture in a very special way but tended to underestimate somewhat the value of his major critical and theoretical work The Seven Lamps of Architecture.

Ruskin's ideas are so well known it is perhaps only necessary for me to say that he set up a pattern of categories for a kind of architectural criticism that is still relevant. Given that mass, space, line and colour are the main elements of architecture each generation decides what, if anything, is common in their use in an analysis of buildings or indeed the 'great' styles. However, it must be recalled in Ruskin's case that he was completely committed to the Gothic style and therefore his important views about Unity and Coherence – as fundamental notions of composition – have to be viewed in that light. Few critics manage the monumental achievements of someone like Ruskin although his contemporary William Morris must also be viewed in context as someone of great significance in the furthering of ideas on critical values in art and architecture. He influenced many others at the turn of the century including the architect and teacher W.R. Lethaby, founder of the Central School of Arts and Crafts, whose weekly columns in The Builder magazine were the source of inspiration to a whole generation of architects committed to change including the Scottish pioneer Charles Rennie Mackintosh.
Lethaby and the German Muthesius made a profound impact on the society they wrote for and they traversed national and cultural barriers with ease. Both were critical of the buildings of their own age, held opinions about them and sought to use some of them as 'exemplars' for a better architecture. They were both brilliantly perceptive critical theorists and were both practising architects. Undoubtedly their work indicates a level of competence that we still would be expected to emulate. As individualists they were keen to pursue particular views about architecture. Lethaby, for example, was absorbed with the human motives that conditioned and shaped the appearance of buildings. His still valid thesis was that building practice mirrored the general development of world ideas. He believed in the efficacy of the creative process and was concerned with what he called "the inner heart of ancient buildings where wonder, worship, ... and symbolism" would provide the main motives for an enquiry into the nature of architecture. As the historian Statham said: "All architecture — that is all that is worth the name — is one vast symbolism; symbolism controlled by and expressive of structure might be the definition of architecture in the higher sense". Lethaby fully supported this view not simply because of the material attributes of building and the convenience of structures but as a means of providing man with the "opportunity of developing his mind and releasing his spirit" "Man," he wrote, "is primarily a maker, a builder". Lethaby's thoughts although somewhat esoteric at times (see books such as Architecture, Nature and Magic) have acted as direct inspiration for generations of architectural critics. They offer an impetus to deal with subjects above the mundane and the mediocre and provide a sounding board on the deeper fundamentals of architecture and design. They also stress the importance of nature and the organic as well as democracy and the freedom of speech.

Another critic whose importance should not be underestimated is the American urban historian Lewis Mumford. Known internationally, he has over many years, set out a consistent attitude to architectural theory, design and criticism. He provided one of the major source textbooks The Roots of Contemporary American Architecture, 1952, which indicates the importance of the link between history and theory and stresses its critical overlap. Amongst others Mumford was also instrumental in drawing attention to the critical skills of the early Chicago architectural writer Montgomery Schuyler whose well informed comments on the architecture of the late 19th century place him among the finest architectural critics of his age.

New opportunities

Nowadays TV and video have become effective means for specialist information and for the dissemination of ideas and criticism. Here there is an enormous opportunity for architectural criticism to become one of the major areas within the cultural sphere. It plays already a part in the media through news channels (short reports as well as researched features), in educational broadcasts and probably most memorably in programmes like 'The Shock of the New' by the Art Critic of Time magazine and Peter Adam's 'Architecture at the Crossroads' from the British Broadcasting Corporation. Both series attracted audiences of millions of viewers in Europe and the USA. Viewing figures aside, the value of criticism that marries words to images is one of the most important, effective and fascinating developments in art and architecture in our age. We should strive to develop a criticism which is 'visualisable' as well as literary.

The message of architecture

Architecture of course should be able to convey its own message, to relate its own story without a word ever being written. Many contemporary architects would like that! For all its shortcomings criticism is largely in the written form. The French author Antoine de Saint Exupery put his pen to it in his famous philosophical work The Little Prince, 1943, when he wrote: "Words have the power to make the invisible visible". Much earlier the Abbe Laugier had written: "If the problem be well stated, the solution will be shown ...". We all recognise the importance of the phrases, "Architecture speaks", or architecture parle and the hippy-type exhortation "architecture communicates". So too, does writing and it is at this point criticism can enter: modestly perhaps but effectively if the criticism itself is to communicate.

What is it that the critic wishes to communicate? I would suggest first of all that the critic is concerned with the nature of criticism itself: with its aesthetic basis, its descriptive range and its general appeal. Criticism is primarily connected to culture and cultural values. In its architectural relations it has a specialised meaning but in its widest sense 'culture' is, as T S Eliot suggested in his Notes towards the definition of Culture, 1948, "Not something for the few but the way of life of a whole people". Further: "Culture includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people."

We could all make our own list of what such a broad definition should cover but if we narrow it down to
an area like architecture or environmental design we can see immediately certain common cross-cultural factors. These are the beacons of communication and the staple of good architectural criticism. I shall try to list some of them but first of all we must ask ourselves another question: In order to criticise it, do we have a clear idea of what architecture is? Le Corbusier wrote: "It only exists where there is a poetic emotion". "Architecture is a plastic thing", he said. "which is seen and measured by the eyes. Obviously if the roof were to fall in, if the central heating did not work, if the walls cracked, the joys of architecture would be greatly diminished; the same might be said of a man who listened to a symphony sitting on a pin cushion or in a bad draught." Great teachers and communicators like Le Corbusier have always said this dimension of empathic involvement in architecture. It is a part of the aesthetic and cultural dimensions we referred to earlier. It is something that no critic can ignore.

**Literary criticism**

We find the most comprehensive form of criticism is in the field of literature. Literary criticism has reached a very high level of sophistication. Any academic library will have an enormous selection of reference books, theses and pamphlets on the sources, the relationships and the relativities of contemporary literature. Literary criticism is an area of study that has had a profound effect on the "mechanics" of architectural criticism. Critics and theorists alike have transferred its structuralist and linguistic techniques, its bases in semantic theory and the study of meanings in order to underpin architectural ideas and to provide a critical apparatus for a subject which has very largely been examined from a chronological, historical or a comparative point of view. Thus architectural criticism, particularly in terms of its responsive relationship to literature, has reached a sophisticated level. It has also cross-fertilised the criticism of the other arts.

Cinema, theatre and music criticism, as well as that of the fine arts, is no longer merely an area for connoisseurs; there is a great deal of originality in the approach of critics to these cultural areas. The critic is seen not necessarily as an information gatherer nor as an event promoter although this too is a function, particularly in theatre and cinema criticism, but rather as a commentator. The power of the critic has become great in some spheres. The *New York Times* theatre critic for example can assume the ultimate position of the legendary and frighteningly powerful critic and express opinions that can make a success of a show or immediately close it. Thankfully the same thing cannot yet be said of the architecture critic!

**The architect as critic**

The advantages of the architect as critic are I believe obvious. The critic who comes to architecture trained in another discipline is disadvantaged. The weaknesses of the "journalist-critic" have been exposed many times in the past through lack of awareness of architectural history or context and iniquity. The academic historian passing off as an architecture critic too is often suspect, susceptible to pedantic pressures that can obscure the creative issues. There have, of course, been a number of notable exceptions that prove that this rule is not hard and fast. In order to understand architecture however the critic must know how it is made. The centrality of the design process must be acknowledged. The critic must have a notion about how it works and how a design is conceived and made. I do not mean to imply that the architect-critic is himself, through the nature of his conceptual/process knowledge, necessarily any better at successfully solving what Le Corbusier called his "pure creation of the mind". No, only that he is probably in a better position to be able to articulate and explain the nature and problems of a building design. The 'pure creation' we speak of is, after all, derived from the designer's own skills, emotions and spirit. It expresses itself through the employment of shapes and forms and the arrangement of spaces achieved in the pursuit of the beautiful and the aesthetic. With this in mind the critic who is both competent and confident can then produce information that will have grown up from a keenly felt and well understood process. The criticism should then be acceptable to the triumvirate of originating designer(s), readers and critic.

**Critical criteria**

Acknowledging an apparent lack of structure in architectural criticism, some years ago I introduced a number of critical categories in the "Architectural Journalism and Criticism Workshop" that was formed at the Architectural Association in London. These categories related to an ungraded list of criteria. They were neither just a simple series of categories nor a foolproof check list but rather an attempt to create a working tool whereby the students' thoughts and words could be focussed on the main areas that criticism might be expected to cover. My list was divided into: environmental, economic, functional, constructional, political, cultural, and of
course aesthetic categories. Some of these areas overlapped whilst others were added later in an effort to create a more fluid critical process. They helped greatly in providing clarification of the aims and content of the critical writing undertaken by the students. They formed the basis for sharpening arguments and for opening up widely differing areas of knowledge. In the most simple form they could become paragraph headings. We also used them in discussions and in the course publications produced by the students themselves.

The students were then invited to carry out architectural criticism of two major buildings: one new, the other, the Smithson’s Economist Building in London, somewhat older and already widely featured in journals and books.

Looking back at this work it is interesting to note that the students adopted an amalgam of the categories I had introduced into the course ranging through the ‘aesthetic economic’, ‘the aesthetic functional’, ‘the aesthetic environmental’ and ‘construction and materials’ for their critical formats. These young amateur critics recognised immediately that the so-called critical and investigative structure of such journalism needed to be related to the aesthetic touchstone which we have defined as the basic ingredient of criticism itself. They no longer needed me to labour the point! They had recognised that it is from the realm of the aesthetic that the most productive criticism emanates. It is not without its dangers though. Quite often aesthetic values can be used as a safe harbour. They become a shelter for the critic’s own prejudices and the pursuance of idiosyncratic opinions, witness the diatribes engaged in by many of the writers in those flashy and overdesigned student or institutional journals that have exceedingly narrow circulation paths.

Aesthetic questions

Central to our whole discussion is the question of the aesthetics of architecture. It is a subject that has been widely discussed and on which there is an expanding literature. The subject is very much alive but it is rather elusive. Apart from its essential use in criticism it is perhaps of passing interest to note its wider significance and usage. Some years ago the British Government issued a circular on the subject of ‘architectural aesthetics’ for the use of planning and conservation officers who were expected to administer the planning regulations affecting historical and listed buildings and conservation areas. The circular provides guidelines on general aesthetic matters and also deals with materials, finishes, as well as appearances and appeal procedures. In the design studios of architectural schools aesthetics have, of course, always played a part. Students attempt to achieve aesthetic results in their work and a discussion of aesthetics is usually the mechanism employed by the jury or examination committee. It is largely the value judgement process by which student designs are assessed. I think we can say – at least those of us who trained as architects – that we have all experienced these processes. On the whole we are probably still confused by them!

I don’t want to be drawn into a lengthy argument on aesthetics now but it would be useful in relation to this discussion of architectural criticism to pose two or three questions that arise in connection with it. Our starting point must be that we believe that architecture is an art form. Therefore, the drawing of analogies from other artistic fields is entirely right and proper. This, of course assumes that architecture’s social, anthropological, utilitarian, technical and constructive roles are also taken into account and treated seriously. All of these, one must assume, respond in one way or another to the aesthetic elements contained by architecture.

My first question is therefore: What are the aesthetic elements that are contained by architecture? Certainly the definitive one which has been referred to (from Baumgarten onwards) is the aesthetic ‘philosophy of beauty’. The traditional view held of this kind of beauty emphasises its idyllic and pleasant qualities. Such an attitude could not be held up in the modern world. Look for example at Goya’s “Horrors of War”, Picasso’s “Guernica”, at Dalí’s and Max Ernst’s surrealist images or even Herb Greene’s “Buffalo” prairie house (a thing that could be called beautiful but which evokes an eerie isolated sense in the viewer and raises architecture again to the symbolic level) to see its modern definitions. We might say then that beauty lies as a principle within aesthetics although a study of aesthetics does not furnish a definite principle of beauty. Rather, as Professor Albert Bush-Brown has implied: “Each principle has a valid contrary ... discord and harmony; each has its proper role. That is very different from saying there are no principles at all.”

The second question I wish to pose is one that relates to criteria and has been partly ventilated earlier in this paper. It can be framed as follows: How can buildings be discussed using aesthetic criteria? Here again I think we can summarise the position by saying that we should take into account some major points: Firstly, a building is a physical object and that secondly the critic looks at that object and reflects on its cultural background and its influences. Finally, the perceptions that come from the object through to the critic are those that represent its position within the aesthetic framework. For
a wider discussion of the cognitive and perceptual skills required of a critic we should look at the writings of Rudolph Arnheim. His work reminds us that not all aspects of perception in a building are visual; some are tactile, others acoustic, olfactory and thermal. Also the perception of a building during the day is considerably different from the way it would be recognised under night time conditions.

Another question is the one that brings us right into the arena of qualitative judgements: Can architectural critics decide on criteria for aesthetic excellence? Such a question would not imply across-the-board agreement. It might be very difficult to persuade a critic committed to the "Functionalist" cause to accept the aesthetic position of a critic who extols the virtues of Post-Modernism. However, one would expect an objective critic to stress the unique quality of the work that he was viewing. Indeed, it is worth bearing in mind what Wayne Attoe said in his book Architecture and Critical Imagination, 1978 when he stressed the unique quality of architectural criticism in the arts field: "What is special about architecture (or environmental) criticism is that it can have an impact not only on the individual career but our collective future as well. Decisions about the environment are much more in and about the public realm than are decisions in the various art worlds and we have learnt that the public realm can be sensitive to influence. To capitalise on this unique feature of architectural criticism the critic should emphasis that it relates to the future and not be satisfied with making categorical judgements or isolated interpretations of the past". Most importantly he goes on, "The contents of the critique should focus on how things in the past and present can teach us how better to handle the future". This is worth reiterating time and again. Whilst Attoe is pressing the flesh at the right point he probably does not give enough credibility to the view that many other critics work within the public realm. I think that this can be found to be useful in providing the architectural critic with a cultural yardstick.

Most importantly, however, Attoe stresses the special role that the architectural critic has in provoking and stimulating opinion about work that will affect the character of the existing environment. Undoubtedly critics do have power and responsibility in this area and although few critics have prevented changes actually taking place in the public realm many have influenced judgements about the way new public works have been accepted. It should be remembered that Ruskin deplored Paxton's "Crystal Palace" ("a cucumber frame with two chimneys") and it was not really accepted as a piece of architecture until well into the 20th century. It's final acceptance was because of the criticisms of Victorian eclecticism!

Conclusion

I began my address with a reference to values and value judgements. I mentioned these subjects at the outset because they pervade all aspects of professional criticism. As we look at the basis of architectural criticism, at the critic's roles, at the nature and mechanics of such criticism and the increasing opportunities for criticism in the media we shall be dogged by questions of values and judgements. The whole essence of a profession is that it involves expert judgement and not rules of thumb. Architecture is like law and medicine in this respect. Professor Peter Collins reminds us in his book on Architectural Judgement, 1971, that, "... only a trained architect is really sensitive to the essential elegance of a well constructed and properly functioning building. Laymen inevitably judge professional expertise superficially, and become impatient with technicalities ...". It is at this interface of professional expertise and lay opinion that the critic can most advantageously operate.

Footnotes

1 This is a composite of the Keynote Address given by Dennis Sharp and his Position Paper which was distributed to seminar participants A selected bibliography prepared by Dennis Sharp can be found on pages 142-143

2 The future British monarch commented thus in a speech in London, U K, December 2, 1987
Session I
Modern Approaches to Regionalism

Selma al-Radi: Chairperson

Architecture as an Intellectual Statement
Modernism in the Muslim World

Ismail Serageldin

Introduction

This paper is based upon a specific view of architecture and of architectural criticism. Fundamentally, it focuses on a multi-dimensional criticism — physical, contextual, and cultural — which recognises the intellectual statement of architectural works as resonating on local, regional and international levels.

The paper is in three parts:
Firstly, the notion of cultural authenticity and its manifestation in the contemporary architecture of Muslim societies. This includes a critical review of the Bhong Mosque in Pakistan, a project which won an AKAA in 1986, contrasting it with that vernacular masterpiece, the Great Mosque of Niono in Mali, another AKAA award winning project in 1983, thereby demonstrating the differences between the “populist” on the one hand and the “popular” on the other.

Secondly, the use of a sophisticated architecture based on a vernacular language as demonstrated by the masterful work of Ramses Wissa Wassef at the Arts centre at Harranya at Cairo in Egypt, a 1983 AKAA winner.

Thirdly, the modern urban aesthetic, with special focus on three buildings; the Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies (CPAS) in Cairo, Egypt, the Saudi Development Fund Building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and a somewhat more extended review of the National Commercial Bank Building in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

These three buildings provide an interesting and vitally important dimension to our reviews of Architecture in the Muslim world. They, especially the National Commercial Bank in Jeddah, address the problems of today and tomorrow, at the scale of the late twentieth century. This is something, that the former structures, such as the Wissa Wassef Centre, are fundamentally incapable of doing.

The Bhong Mosque — an AKAA winner in 1986. Exterior views
The Bhong Mosque

An Aga Khan Architectural Award winner in 1986, this building complex has stirred considerable controversy. Some have been enchanted by the exuberance and baroque character of the decoration. They have found the vivacious decoration and uninhibited interplay of elements and materials indicative of self-assurance and lack of affectation. The amount of the decoration which some would consider excessive, was a statement of appreciation of the central building in the community, whose greater glory and grandeur somehow reflects favourably on the whole community. The richness of the decoration is so striking as to call to mind its vernacular echoes; the decorated Jeepneys and trucks, so characteristic of this part of the world are the gaudy manifestations of love of objects that local taste identifies with.

Yet there is no such excessive or rich decoration in the vernacular architecture of the surrounding villages. There, the mudbrick architecture echoes the simple architectural language of bygone days, and even the modern (and thoroughly mediocre) structures of the local marketplace are equally devoid of decoration.

The issue at hand however transcends the use of decoration, which can be easily defended as playful and enriching. Rather it is the misuse and the abuse of decorative and architectonic details.

Some of us are deeply disturbed by the disassociation of the decorative elements from their frame of reference; for example, the use of imported bathroom tiles in some places, and the use of overt signs such as the Arabic inscription “Muhammad” in marquee advertising graphics grafted on top of such key architectural elements as the gateway. Such features indicate that the architects have not mastered part of their function, which is to design a project which adds to the prevailing, socially accepted view of the desirable, and to elevate the aesthetic standards of the community beyond just responding to what “pleases the people”.

On the whole, however, the Bhong Mosque complex sends a troubling message to thinking architects everywhere. Its very vitality and self-assured use and misuse of the architectural idioms, its total disregard for the stylistic and thematic discipline central to contemporary architectural theory and practice, its pursuit of excessive decoration (as if more were always better); all these aspects must be seen as a simple, even naive, statement that is clearly understood and appreciated by the population of users and observers. Herein lies the troubling aspects to thinking architects. The message of the Bhong Mosque is one of a populist approach to architectural expression. It transcends the popular towards a disorderly...
The simple mud brick architecture of the surrounding villages.

Bathroom tiles used as decorative elements in the Bhong Mosque.

The modern structures of the local market place are devoid of decoration.

Detail of the Bhong Mosque.

The Arabic inscription “Muhammad” above the gateway to the Bhong Mosque.
amalgam of elements devoid of syntax, it reflects the semantic disorder from which many contemporary Muslim societies suffer. Its very success must therefore give pause to thinking architects who have been following a different approach, where they conceived their role to be one of defining the future from a reinterpreted past. To them, the success of Rais Ghazi's enterprises must give pause.

**Niono Mosque**

Let us now turn to another mosque in another poor Muslim country, the Great Mosque at Niono, in Mali, West Africa. This elegant, simple but grandiose structure has a unique dignity and serenity about it.

The Plan is simple, almost classical in its rectilinear clarity. It is the work of a mason commissioned by the community which is obviously proud of its mosque.

The decorative elements of the mosque facades are the same as those found elsewhere in the region. They represent an architectural language easily read and understood by the population. They have a tremendous sense of balance and harmony, and the monochromatic treatment of the walls and their texture are elegant and beautiful. The details, though simple, are still quirky enough to provide that occasional touch that sets off the bulk of the overall structure.

In the interior the mosque spaces are restful and pleasing and in spite of its almost arid simplicity, the Mihrab works very well indeed. It is the kind of space where one can meet and pray with calm and serenity, communing with both God and fellow man with ease.

The Niono Mosque is a functional building, well used by the community in a myriad of ways. School, mosque and meeting area it is very much the central element of the community’s life.

More importantly, the Niono Mosque fits extraordinarily well with the rest of its surroundings. It reflects the architectural language of the vernacular tradition of the area, elevating it to a higher level, but remaining very much part of an integrated, coherent whole.
The Niono Mosque is well used by the community in a myriad of ways.
On the Populist and the Popular

It is now pertinent to link the critique of the Bhong and the Niono Mosques at the level of the intellectual context in which such projects must be evaluated. At this time, Muslim societies are deeply troubled by the historic rupture they have suffered.

The coherence of their cultural milieu and its orderly evolution has been shattered. A major task lies ahead of all Muslim intellectuals to take on the challenge of rebuilding their societies in terms of an integrated and integrating culture. Integrated insofar as its constituent elements are synchronically and diachronically coherent. Integrating insofar as its capacity to accept the new and evolve in a manner that does not fall prey to the semantic disorder that accompanies the discontinuities of an arrested development.

In this context, elites be they political, socio-economic or intellectual, have two alternatives. They can either opt for the arduous task of rebuilding their socio-cultural system on a sound basis of self-knowing reordering of the milieu; or they can take the easier ideologically charged approach of a populist appeal to the prevailing majority, with all its negative intellectual connotations.

Here it is important to distinguish between popular and populist. The former is an expression of a deep collective consciousness that responds to a well-established and well-understood set of symbols, and whose discourse is governed by agreed conventions. Thus the Niono Mosque in Mali is a prime example of a vernacular architecture that is an expression of a coherent popular culture.

On the other hand, the culture of populism is ideologically charged. It seeks to deify the popular culture, to set it up as a legitimising force for attitudes that restrict the social discourse. When elites exercise their authority (indirect or derivative as it may be) they have a responsibility in the manner in which they address the broad population at a time of cultural crisis. Architects, and in this instance Rais Ghazi must be considered as an architect as well as a member of the elite, can base their concepts and designs on a set of popularly accepted codes; but the manner in which they interpret these codes is what will make the difference.

The Ramses Wissa Wasef Centre in Egypt

To underline the point made in the preceding discussion, it is useful to review the work of a truly talented architect who chose, like his friend and colleague Hassan Fathy, to work with the constructs of a vernacular architecture, deeply rooted in the rural tradition of Egypt. From the very first look, one is struck by the harmonious “fit” that this 1983 AKAA winner has with the surroundings which derives from the use of traditional materials, and the architectonic language of the local vernacular. Nevertheless, an adapted vernacular since domes are more characteristic of southern Egypt than of the delta.

Essentially, however, the architects hand is visible in the elegant volumetric treatment of the buildings. The skilful spacing and articulation of voids and solids and the geometry of forms speaks of a true mastery of the idiom and of the building techniques.

The articulation of interior spaces and architectural elements such as the staircase is no less skilful and appealing.

The architect was also able to use this same architectural language to produce more imposing buildings suitable for wealthy individuals of his family and friends. What is striking here is that in spite of the shift in scale and the more complex volumetric manipulations the buildings remain firmly integrated as part of the same whole. Interiors are well
Plan of the Habib Gorgy Sculpture Museum – Ramses Wissa Wassef Centre

appointed, and allow for considerable convenience and expressions of tasteful, though not ostentations, decoration.

To truly appreciate the role of the architect as a creative force we must turn to one particular building of this vast complex: the sculpture museum.

The learned casualness of the plan deserves attention. The shift of the axis of the internal elements has a three-fold function: firstly, it creates a series of completely different spaces for the visitor to walk through, thus creating much more interesting experiential phenomena for the visitor than would a more uniform volumetric treatment; secondly, the spaces thus defined allow different pieces of sculpture to be shown to best advantage; and thirdly, the shift allows the pierced wall to be better oriented to catch the best natural lighting.

Indeed the light and shadow are extraordinarily well-used in this exceptional building. That these effects could be produced by natural light shows the hands of a master designer at work. Most striking, however, is the internal lighting scheme. The stunning display is totally the result of natural lighting.
No spotlights were used in the sculpture museum (unlike the textile exhibition room in the adjoining building). To truly appreciate how this was done, the section allows us to better understand the devices utilised. The vaulted central gallery is kept darkened except for small holes spaced out at the top. The niches on both sides are also kept dark except for a small strategically located opening which floods the statues with a powerful dramatic light.

This is an example of using the vernacular language but raising it above the mediocre manifestations of the ordinary. It enriches local culture, without degrading symbols to signs and signals.

When one also remembers that the centre is a living, thriving community that has allowed local artisans to blossom to international renown, one must admit that artists and architects working within the context of the popular can avoid the pitfalls of the populist, even when using local naive decorative elements which would be the Egyptian equivalent of the Jeepney decorations. Their impact is enhanced by the architect’s skillful manipulation.
The Urban Scene

In today’s rapidly urbanising world, cities are growing at an incredible pace. The needs of these densely settled populations are quite different than those responded to by the previous three buildings. Office buildings, factories, garages, railway stations and airports are all among the requirements of a contemporary society. The high cost of land in the centres of the great cities have all but mandated a high-rise formula.

I have argued elsewhere that high-rise is not intrinsically unislamic, witness the structures of Sana’a and Shibam in Yeman. What concerns us here is whether these new buildings will be derivative or original, whether they will be authentic or kitsch.

To respond to these challenges the architectural vocabulary of Rifat Chadirji is more directly relevant than that of Hassan Fathy. I will not review the work of that great architect, rather I propose to present three office buildings, each outstanding in its own right, and each of which deserves considerable recognition, even though none has yet won an Aga Khan Architecture Award.

The Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies (CPAS) in Cairo, Egypt

Professor Abdelbaki Ibrahim’s Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies is a combination of residence, offices, research centre, training facility and centre of production of a magazine called Alam Al-Benaad. It is a very personal enterprise and represents one of the very few structures to have escaped the mediocre boxy outline so characteristic of much of modern Cairo.

Using the same volumes which are largely dictated by the building regulations, the Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies stands out as an original structure, built upon an understanding of the traditional scale and spatial organisation of medieval Islamic buildings in Cairo. Distributed about a courtyard, open to the sky, the building playfully articulates volumes and uses to good effect the conventional, inexpensive materials of most surrounding middle-class buildings.

The architect has succeeded in achieving the programme he set out for himself, and in spite of some problems in the detailing, its individuality clearly represents a most interesting building, quite a rarity in a sea of all too many mediocre buildings.

It is unfortunate that the Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies has not been taken as an exemplar by others, since further development of this approach would have been beneficial for Cairo.
Could this approach which works for a small structure be carried into a much bigger structure of the type that a modern metropolis invariably requires?

The Saudi Development Fund (SDF) Building in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

One of the most interesting attempts at modernism in the Saudi context is the Saudi Development Fund Building in Riyadh. It is an imposing structure with a very distinctive appearance. It is built to the lavish standards that befit its function. This excellently finished building can today be considered as something of a “type”: a six-to-seven storey office building with limited external openings and an interior atrium. The designers use the atrium to create an interesting interior space. The key problem with such interior atria is that although they provide light and a dramatic interior space, they are enclosed and have to be air-conditioned. Furthermore, the drama of the space is insufficiently appreciated from the actual workspace in the offices, most of which face the exterior through very narrow slits of window space; a necessity to cope with the harsh glare and for echoes of the traditional architectural idiom of the area. Thus the corridors tend to benefit most from the atrium.

Could the Saudi Development Fund Building approach be used for a larger “tower” structure? Is there an alternative “type”? The final and most important example shows such an alternative.

The National Commercial Bank (NCB) Building in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Jeddah’s growth is remarkable in the history of cities: over the past ten years, it has catapulted from a city of 300,000 to a metropolis with over a million inhabitants and a rapidly changing social, demographic and economic structure. The growth has been accompanied by a dazzling change of appearance, as the most modern western innovations were introduced at a dizzy pace. The Jeddah skyline, once dominated by the lone tower of the “Queen’s Building”, is now reminiscent of Manhattan.

The city’s character has been rapidly changing, and a major conservation effort has been undertaken to protect the old city’s many fine buildings. The present-day character of the city is a cosmopolitan blend that retains its Muslim flavour but is a somewhat uncomfortable mix between the Arab and the Western cultural domains. This is particularly true of that quintessential 20th Century phenomenon:
The Tall Building. Skyscrapers as cultural manifestations remain insufficiently studied in the West, and totally unstudied as they relate to the value structure and self-image of contemporary Muslim societies.

In many ways, this unease is well expressed in the Bugshan Tower which is a tall, curtain-walled structure. After completion with a conventional facade, it was then “Islamicised” by covering each element of the flat facade with a small “paste-on” arched window frame.

The National Commercial Bank is dramatically different. One’s first impression is of a tall, crisp, 27-storey office tower that is striking because of the absence of scale elements on the facade; indeed, one is immediately overwhelmed by the sense of a solid masonry triangular slab with three huge “holes”. These are truly colossal: two of them in the southeast facade, one at the top and one at the bottom, each seven storeys high and virtually square, and one in the middle of the northeast facade, nine storeys high. An attached elevator shaft and services core abuts the third (northwest) side and completes the tower. Behind that is an ancillary round structure: a six-storey garage. In plan, the building is reminiscent of a squat arrowhead pointing to the east, away from the sea.

The key to the building is the remarkable organisation of space. The equilateral triangle of the tower extends throughout its height, but is divided vertically into increments of seven, nine, and seven floors. Each segment has office space along two sides of the triangle. However, in a brilliant stroke, the glass walls face the interior of the structure, that is to open-air loggias or atria seven to nine storeys high. The bottom and the top increments both face southeast, while the middle section is rotated to face north.

Indeed, the brilliance of Bunschraft’s creation is the vertical stacking of open atria of such huge dimensions. The 7-9-7 storey high atria allow for the traditional functions of the courtyard, whose advantages have been widely praised by many authors, to be translated into the scale and dimension of the 20th century skyscraper. The elegance of the solution is further reinforced by the functionalism of its use. For the atria to function properly, air circulation is required. This is provided through a common triangular shaft that connects all three areas and runs through the building to the roof. This allows air movement to exist and avoids trapping it within any of the atria, generating a chimney effect that keeps the air in the shaded area cool. The elegant geometry of the spaces generated by the design are particu-
The setting for the National Commercial Bank in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The Bugshan Tower in Jeddah a tall curtain-walled structure. A mediocre tower in sharp contrast to the NCB project.

A solid masonry triangular slab with three huge holes — two of them in the southeast facade, each seven storeys high, and one in the middle of the northeast facade nine storeys high.
larly interesting. Furthermore, the windows of the offices that overlook the atria are in deep shade, but still afford magnificent views of the city, by night as well as by day.

This basic design is reinforced by basement vaults and safe-deposit facilities and a banking hall at ground level, and is capped by executive offices at the top of the triangle. Both banking hall and executive offices occupy the entire triangular space. The banking area can be entered from the street as well as through the main entrance, and is a double-height room with a mezzanine floor floating free of the walls, with the central triangular opening mentioned above allowing light to enter from the loggia above. The penthouse level has glass walls on all sides, but is set back behind a covered arcade.

Although the building is made of structural steel with clear spans of fifty feet, the main external walls are precast concrete, insulated, and then finished in travertine veneer. Marble is also used on the ground floor and polished black granite is used on the 23rd.

The building fully meets its stated objectives of being the headquarters of the bank as well as prestigious local branch bank.

In essence, the real ingenuity of the design lies in the fact that the building is a conventional glass-box skyscraper brilliantly turned “outside-in” with stunning visual drama and effective functional results.

This is not to say that the building does not have its weaknesses. It does. Among the key weaknesses in the design are the main entrance, which appears squashed. It is almost as though the fear of impairing the clean geometry of the tower dictated an uncharacteristically understated entrance. Another flaw is the disposition of the circular garage building and its link to the main building, which appears awkward in comparison with the masterful, confident treatment of the main block. In the interior, the organisation of space and the decoration are most pedestrian (except on the executive floor) — something of a let-down in such a dramatic building. These considerations are, however, swept aside by the dramatic and startling views of the city afforded from almost every place in the building.

Furthermore, the drama of the form is matched by the functionalism of the design. This is best exemplified by the central shaft left open through the overlapping of the triangular atria. It is this core of light that allows functional ventilation of the atria to take place. It creates a chimney-like effect that enables the trapped air heating up in the atria to be sucked upwards and outwards from the building and thereby breathing in new air into the atria themselves. When the vegetation of the atria is more complete, the airflow is bound to strengthen the cooling qualities of the micro-climate generated therein.

*The main entrance of the National Commercial Bank appears rather squashed*
In discussions with the various users — from guards to office boys to clerks to managers — there was an overwhelming sense of satisfaction with the building as a working environment, and a sense of pride in the structure.

In terms of contextualism, narrowly defined, the building does not attempt to relate in any significant way to its surrounding urban fabric. The old city of Jeddah, a stone's throw away from the site, is not integrated into the design, either by resonance or extension. Many have viewed this as a major flaw in the design. This reviewer obviously does not consider this shortcoming as anything but a secondary issue.

In the broader context of the Jeddah skyline, with a number of existing towers ranging in mediocrity from the Queen's Building to the Bughshan center, the National Commercial Bank tower provides not "one additional tower" but a true "landmark". Furthermore, its location on the lagoon would not be problematic if other, lesser high-rise buildings could have been kept to more modest proportions. Then, the National Commercial Bank Building would have performed the dual function of citywide landmark and of focal element in the urban design composition of the lagoon subsection.

The National Commercial Bank is much more than a clever solution to a nagging problem. It is the epitome of what great architecture is all about. It is a bold and imaginative application of creative talent to the solution of an intractable problem: the tall building in the harsh climate of Jeddah, where in addition to heat and sun, there is the issue of glare; where in addition to modernism, there is an echo of lessons learnt from both courtyard and malqaf — lessons not transferred to the modern building but truly internalised and reinterpreted at the scale of the machine-technology of today. The originality of the idea, the boldness of the conception and the high quality of the execution all mark it as a great building. The controversy it has generated testifies to its ability to engage thinking architects intellectually as well as visually. That, in the final analysis, is the highest compliment that can be paid to a creative work of art.
Conclusions:  
On Modernism in Islamic Architecture

There are those who advocate an almost romantic attachment to the built forms of the past, not as exemplars of a particular historic period, but as the only real, authentic manifestation of a culture. These advocates are usually the same individuals who consider that particular elements of an established architectural vocabulary (such as arches, domes or gateways) are essential to ensure authenticity. There is no doubt that elements of the established architectural vocabulary, skillfully used and consistently reinterpreted, are an important dimension of producing culturally authentic architectural creations. Here we must caution against the pitfalls of populism (The Bhang Mosque) or worse, the cheap attempts at “Islamising” Western architecture (e.g. The Bugshan Tower) by relying on such features as superficial substitutes for a true effort at interaction with the milieu, its historical legacy, its cultural heritage and its contemporary problems, using the full potential of contemporary materials and technology.

Great regional architects such as Rifat Chadirji have understood this point extremely well. His emphasis on abstraction of traditional form and reinterpretation in a modern context is, to this writer, the essential element for a positive growth of the contemporary culture of Muslim societies. This is a particularly important issue to highlight in view of the strong xenophobic currents that seek authenticity in romanticising the past and fleeing from the future. Such movements refuse to recognise the great burden incumbent upon contemporary architects in the Muslim world generally and in the Arab world specifically, where, driven by oil revenues, the pace of modernisation has been unprecedented in the annals of human history.

This extremely rapid modernisation has led to a critical loss of identity among many of the ruling socio-economic elites, whose influence in turn has led either to total adoption of Western models, or to kitsch, or to a resurgence of the popularised vernacular. Worse, in many cases, the confrontation of elite perceptions of aesthetics and mass manifestations of popular taste have become ideologically charged. Elitism is confronted by populism. The latter, however, is a degraded form of the popular—a set of ideological concepts that are increasingly politicised in terms that reflect the cultural disintegration and uprooting found in contemporary Muslim societies. It is this phenomenon that intellectuals such as Arkoun have so cogently identified: an accelerated disintegration of the traditional semiotic frameworks in Third World countries generally, and the Muslim world specifically.
The critical question before us can be put very simply: should we look at this building as Architectural Form or should we see in it the dimension of an Architectural Symbol? It is critical because we may all agree, one way or another, in praising it as form, but if we start discussing it as a symbol, the doors open to a wholly different dimension.

As architectural form

We know that as form, as an enclosure, the building is extremely successful. Its solution to climate and function, its geometrical clarity of form, its use of open versus closed, void versus solid and wall versus glass, is right up there, in a world class. This is a view whose parameters are quite well known and definite as long as it doesn't get entangled in the irrelevancies of post-modernism and late-modernism. The parameters that I am talking about are:

First of all, that the horizons and perspectives of such a view must be deep and singular and not broad and general. This is a view of reality where the search is a deep one based on a less ambitious, narrow, psychological and physical portrait of the building. No panoramas can be attempted in this view. It is the view that searches for the texture of reality in a short story, an intense film, not in a saga or a chronicle or epic.

Secondly, such a view must be based on the rationality of thought processes set in motion much earlier in the west by great thinkers who included Descartes and Francis Bacon. The essence of this view is first of all to define a problem, proceed by objectives, pose a solution and then test the solution against the problem to determine the strength of its success. It is also essential within this viewpoint, to solve only those problems which can be measured and analysed.

Thirdly, such a view must also accept as its parameter that compartmentalised views rather than holistic views are required to unravel reality.

As architectural symbol

Now, if we were to look at this building as an architectural symbol, a totally different facet emerges. There is a great danger that the building might be seen as irrelevant to its context and irrelevant to the context of the recognisable society around it. It may even share its irrelevance with other great architectural feats such as Lutyens New Delhi, built to permanently house the British rulers who happened to leave just as the whole thing was completed; or Le Corbusier's Chandigarh built as a...
new capital to unite the Punjab which is already split into two states with terrorists striking at the door, or Louis Kahn's Dhaka complex built to house the representatives of the people who have still to be elected.

Once one leaves the warm comfort of architectural form, one is entering the quicksands of what is actually happening "out there". It is very difficult for me to skate in and out of all these issues as easily as Ismail Serageldin does.

The reason why architecture is being so closely examined in our four civilisations, Iran-Arabic, Indian, the Indonesian and the Chinese, is because important work is being done here. Groups and communities; entire societies are searching for identities. The greatest search is carried out by the intellectuals, the modernised intelligentsia, the recently enriched "bourgeoisie" that feels that architecture can produce and propagate cultural symbols which can be selected and controlled. The cultural aspirations of this "bourgeoisie" have to be conservative and must always refer to selected symbols that have a supposed sanctity of some golden age of the past — that is why religious dispensation is important. Architecture then is the most visible and convenient instrument. At the material level, as form, it will satisfy the aspirations to outdo the west.

As a cultural level, it can build convenient bridges with the past because we all know the past is obscure in its orality, in its oral traditions whose origins and distortions are beyond our imagination. Oral traditions are much more susceptible to change, much harder to control, and much more dynamic and it is the emergence of these traditions which produces buildings like the Bhong Mosque. Traditions and cultures that are written down, slow down change, they block change and they guide change. The architecture of such buildings, become convenient vessels for actually selecting cultural symbols, whether it be poetry, art or whether it be some bridge that can be established; the sort of architectural symbol that we dig out of the past.

The problem is that the sheer dynamism of the cultural transformations that are taking place in these four cultures is frightening. Look at the context; every community in our part of the world is full of linguistic and cultural richness, that we know goes back thousands of years. Superimposed on this are the social and economic disparities that are growing even as they become unacceptable. Then there is the need and effort for all these cultures to be self reliant in agriculture, science and technology. So the challenges are simultaneous, synchronous and immediate at local, national and global levels. Architecture

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*Le Corbusier's Chandigarh built as a new capital to unite the Punjab.*
is therefore necessary to find a way out because there is a process of alienation going on and a dichotomy is emerging, that is going to determine the social and political developments in these parts of the world. Even as the western-educated middle class expands and tries to harness the dynamism, a new rural elite is emerging, whose culture is strikingly different, who have never held power before and which will have no time for such architectural feats.

Ismail Serageldin’s paper has identified the inherent contradictions of our current architectural debate as those which have to do with the modern versus tradition, technology versus craft and international versus regional. Within these contradictions, solutions are easily possible and in his view, he has clearly held out that the Commercial Bank Building is a successful solution to these contradictions. If on the other hand, one puts across a point of view that the inherent contradictions of architecture in this part of the world are much more concerned with issues related to cultural context and social relevances, then one could see this building as part of the process of the shifting of wealth towards the emerging international financiers, who are laying golden eggs all over the place, including Jeddah, Bangkok and Hong Kong.

My point is that when we see these golden eggs, we should be very careful, not to fall into any traps that are laid to justify these acts. These acts are historically inevitable and don’t need a licence. They are imposed, they are not born out the natural struggle or a real search for identity. They are indeed mystical acts of power structures that are beginning to feel increasingly uncomfortable with the very forces that economic prosperity has unleashed amongst the people.

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Session I
Panel Discussion

Peter Davey

It seems to me that the central challenge is to give modernism a human face. This is particularly so because the attempts to make post modern classicism and rationalism into new international styles, has failed so disastrously. The thinness of their programmes is only too apparent. In an age of pluralism, we desperately need a theory of architecture that will allow the plural expression of different cultures and identities within each culture, and also the expression of the individual identity against the mass.

Modernism must not be forgotten, not just because it offers such potential for freedom, in terms of space and form, but also because it can offer freedom for the individual and for the small group.

While accepting much from the heroic age of modernism, we must rescue it from the alienating clutches of big bureaucracy whether private or public. Regionalism is one of the most hopeful ways of doing this though it is not the only one. Other fruitful ways forward include the organic strain in European architecture; the diverse and rich interpretation of functional relations between the individual and society by architects like Hertzberger, Kroll and Erskine; and even certain aspects of high-tech. These approaches are not mutually exclusive nor are they incompatible with regionalism.

First of all, we ought to try to find out what authentic regionalism is not, or distinguish authentic regionalism from false regionalism. Regionalism is not kitsch, the mindless agglomeration of past vernacular forms which can be seen in any western European or north American suburb and, with concrete ogre arches, in cress commercial buildings in any modern Muslim city. Nor is it the kind of kitsch that Prince Charles is trying to force on us in the speech where he suggested that the new surroundings of St. Paul's in London should be dressed up in a kind of red brick with "Wrenish" stone detailing. (Does he want us in fact to go around in knee breeches and full-bottom wigs?).

Nor is regionalism, parochialism: local culture trying to turn its back on the world culture. We have to accept the television, the telephone, the car, the aeroplane, and the microchip, or we die both economically and culturally. Any authentic regionalism must accept world culture and still be specific and particular. Nor is regionalism an attempt to turn the clock back to some perceived previous golden age, or ideal state of society: that way lies fascism.

Authentic regionalism draws on climate, topography and perhaps local building methods and materials. It certainly tries to reinterpret for today, traditional patterns of local culture. With these criteria in mind, it is possible to identify as regionalist buildings those as diverse as Foster's Hong Kong Bank, Glenn Murcutt's small houses in Australia, Henning Larsen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building in Riyadh, Hopkin's Lords Cricket Stand in London and Bawa's University of Ruhunu in Sri Lanka.

All these are regionalist buildings though not all look as if they are directly derived from contextual or vernacular sources. All add to and reinforce a sense of local culture without necessarily descending to the knee breeches syndrome or the populism of the Bhong Mosque.

One of the things that gives me hope for regionalism, is that it is not just another architectural movement, but part of a potential cultural re-generation that ranges from ecology to literature. Of course it has a political dimension.

We must remember that regionalism is not just a panacea, as we can see by looking at the National Commercial Bank in Jeddah. This is the first time I have seen a series of close-up slides of it and I find it absolutely terrifying. It is one of the most crushing buildings I have ever seen. It has a scale which reduces humanity to the level of ants. We should compare this building to Foster's bank in Hong Kong, where he generously opens a new public space of great nobility to the population at large. The Jeddah building is an expression of corporate power; direct
and raw. The Hongkong building is an expression of a more generous attitude to society and the city. Yet they can both be truly described, at least in some respect, as regionalist. So regionalism is not enough.

Ihsan Fethi

Let me say at the outset that I found both arguments very profound and interesting despite their apparently fundamental contradictions. While Ismail Serageldin seems to emphasise the architectonic and formalistic challenges of modern architecture in the Islamic world we find Romi Khosla in his counter-point argument turns to the more complex question of the symbol in a rapidly changing Muslim society. I believe that we cannot simplify this inherently complex issue into form versus symbol. Form and symbol are both inextricably related, especially in Islamic architecture, where sometimes form itself becomes the symbol. This is very clearly evident in the architecture of the Mosque itself.

However, where does the architectural critic stand here. As critics, do we praise these new pillars of capitalist or corporate establishments on purely aesthetic or architectonic grounds but devoid of their cultural context? Do we want these new imposing structures to represent the ideal examples for modern Islamic society? If in their own right, they represent very positive architectural re-interpretations of traditional forms and solutions, should we dismiss them outright as architecture devoid of its modern urban context. Should we at least encourage them for their bold and pioneering attempts to confront an essentially very difficult problem, that is how to create a truly contemporary architecture in the Islamic world, based on its own social context and its own regional cultural heritage?

Lastly, I would emphasise the necessity of diversity within unity. I find it extremely dangerous to impose set ideas and try to apply them universally on every region of the Islamic world. We should not discourage regional particularity within the overall embracing cultural plurality of Islam.

Abdelbaki Ibrahim

I give my comments on Ismail Serageldin’s paper as a Muslim architect. We have been working on this issue for the last twenty-five years in written articles, newspapers, books and magazines. In all the literature we have read and received from the West, the values and the rules of Islam have not been mentioned as basic criteria for architectural evaluation. When one mentions the design of a mosque, there are rules, values in the Islamic religion, which control the design of a mosque. In many cases, the examples one sees in Egypt, Asia, and elsewhere in the Islamic world, are not combined with the Islamic values of mosque design. The Nionno Mosque is one of those mosques which reflects the values of Islam in design.

In the Koran and in the Hadith there are many verses from which we can get these rules and values. They have never been applied in most of the mosques one sees evaluated and criticised. In my book Islamic Perspective of Architecture Theory I explained all these values and how they could be interpreted in the design of public buildings, housing and mosques. They are based on purely Islamic values so the values come first and the form afterwards. In Islam there is no such thing as regionalism. Islam is not confined to a certain place such as the Middle East, and not confined to a certain era of time. Islam is a religion for every place and for every time. So these rules and values are the constants which direct architecture in the Islamic world. With the inherited cultural and social and traditional values, (of course these are reflected on local architecture), these are the values in Islamic architecture.

Until now, critics from the West have looked at Islamic architecture from the point of view of aesthetics, of social values and have never mentioned the basic rules and values in Islam’s teachings. As Dennis Sharp mentioned in his paper, criticism does not appear to have developed in the Muslim world at the same pace as architectural history and theory. There is not a body of distinguished critics neither is there a literature that can reinforce the current critical view points. The lack of communications between East and West still exists.

We devoted one edition of our magazine Alam Al-Benna, to “Islam and Architecture”, a criticism of the Aga Khan Awards of 1983. We have also published books on architecture in the Arabic script but there is a lack of critical dialogue. Now there is a change; the wind blows from the West to the East and it blows everything in front of it. It changes everything; the habits, the social life; it changes even our dress. We are not ourselves; I feel it with my new tie around my neck. This is exactly as we see the influence on the East because there are not enough people in our area in the Muslim world who can resist this cultural invasion and re-vitalise the values of Islam whether it be by designing mosques, or housing. This is what we need in the Muslim world.

Selma al-Radi

I don’t know what you mean by Islamic values and forms. In fact you not only have the pre-Islamic in
Arabia but a lot of influences that came in from the Hellenistic world; so there is an incorporation. Islam has always adopted new forms into its own values. The fact that it has been such a successful religion is precisely because it has been able to adapt to the areas around it. It could take in, without destroying its own centre. I think that what part of this discussion has to be about is how much it can adapt from the modern world without actually destroying itself.

Peter Serracino Ingoll

I am not an architect. I am a philosopher, and the remarks I am going to make are very general, although I want to tie them in particularly to what we heard earlier. The title of Ismail Serageldin’s paper was “Architecture as an Intellectual Statement”. I myself think it is very profitable to consider architecture as a language. Part of the problem with the approaches which have been attempted using this method is that the nature of language itself is not something about which everybody agrees.

Basically it seems that at the moment there are two schools of thought about the nature of language which seem to be opposed to each other. There are those who continue the traditional way of discussing meaning and truth seeing them primarily as a matter of the relationship between signs and what the signs are signs of, that is things and facts in the world. The other approach which was greatly promoted by Kierkegaard and later Wittgenstein, insists that truth and meaning are not so much a matter of the relationship between signs and things or between propositions and facts but that they are rather a relationship between person and person; they insist, therefore, that meaning and truth are very largely a function of the social context in which they occur.

It seems to me that the two points of views on architecture which we have heard reflect more or less these two philosophies of language. My own view is that this is not a matter of “either/or”. It is a matter of “and/and”; hence any complete account of language, of meaning and truth has to consider both the semantic relationship between the signs and their objective correlates in the world and the inter-personal relationship. In other words truth and meaning only occur in a dialogical context and, therefore, we have to consider who is talking to whom, as well as what they are talking about.

When one adopts this latter point of view, and focuses on the sign-signified relationship in architecture, functionalism is what immediately results; but when one adopts the other point of view which I think is complementary, that is the “dialogic approach” one is all too often faced with a difficult situation; the dialogue seems to be between unequal partners. The architects and the other people responsible for the production of these signs, the buildings, are more intelligent and more powerful then the mass of the people towards whom the architecture is addressed. This in-equality is something which, inevitably makes true dialogue difficult. There is, unfortunately, a divergence in status between the speakers. This is in a sense the problem which has to be faced here.

I would like to begin facing it with the following remark; one of the characteristics of speaking is that you can’t do it with your mouth full, i.e., you can’t do it while eating. Speaking excludes eating. I am saying this because true dialogue and the true exercise of language is of its nature exclusive of consumerism, that is, of the kind of approach which considers dialogue or communication to have to be necessarily communion. People since Plato have often compared feeding minds with feeding bodies. They have almost thought that the idea of talking, of dialogue, like that of eating, implies complete assimilation and communion, rather than that communication implies distance. I hold that the opposite is true and consequently in architectural terms, for an architectural statement to be dialogic, it should not be assumed that there is going to be a complete coincidence of point of view and attitude between the emitter of the signs, the speaker, the architect, the producer of the building, on the one hand, and the people who receive it, on the other. On the contrary, a certain tension between them is probably proof that a truer dialogue, a more authentic dialogue is taking place than if there was total coincidence. The abolition of the gap between architect and public tends, in fact, to be an expression of a consumeristic society where you have the mass passively accepting what the dominant speaking group is offering.

In fact, correlative with the distinction I made between what one could call the ‘semantic’ approach, relating signs to signified, and the ‘pragmatic’ approach, emphasising person to person relationship, is the observation that the first approach tends to take the indicative mood of language, its declarative and informative function, as primary, while the other approach tends to take its performative or perhaps even its imperative function, the form of language which tends towards doing, as its typical or its essential mode.

If we take the first approach then, and think of the buildings which were described by Ismail Serageldin as informative statements obviously the impressiveness, the grandeur of a bank is telling us that capitalism, that money, is extremely important in our society and I don’t think anybody would dispute the truth of that. It goes, already some way towards explaining some reactions to the buildings. What emerged was
that a dislike of the buildings was closely associated with a dislike of what they were a sign of. Some of us began hating the buildings because we hate the capitalism of which they are an expression. On the contrary, one could feel a great deal of sympathy for the mosques in their less capitalised settings, precisely because they were expressing values with which one was more in sympathy. However the reason for the strength of the reaction only really emerges, if we consider the imperative dimension of these buildings. The National Development Bank in Jeddah is not just telling us that money and capital and financing transactions are extremely important, but it is doing it in an extremely authoritative way. It is not just telling us something but also coaxing us to believe it in a certain way just as the mosque, besides telling us something about people’s belief in God, is also inducing us to pray; it is so structured that we are led to do this. Similarly the bank is so structured that it is not merely telling us that money counts, but also inviting us to worship Mammon.

I think it is extremely significant that in the case of the National Development Bank, we are told that its chief aesthetic defect is the smallness of the door. I wonder if this is not seen as an aesthetic defect precisely because it is making very imperative the attitude, the humility, the almost bowing down which one is forced to do, in order to enter into this capitalist temple.

Our negative reaction therefore, is really a rejection of the authoritative manner, of the mood, with which the dialogue is being conducted. Something was described as an aesthetic defect precisely because it came into conflict with the values which the perceiver of the building had. Basically what I am trying to say is that, first, for an architectural language to be authentic, for it to be meaningful, for it to have truth, the sign must signify what it is the sign of, whether it is a mosque or a bank, and that this is a virtue. So banks should be seen as important in modern society, just as mosques should be seen to be important in a Muslim society or other symbols expressive of the values of the society. We must, however, also consider them as dialogic media between proponents and recipients of a message destined to influence our behaviour.

In many cases, what we get is a very authoritative exchange in which it is obvious that power is concentrated on one side and not on the other. We may very well object to this on political and social or religious or other value grounds, such as equality and solidarity. I think that it is impossible to divorce our reception of these value systems from our aesthetic perception. Therefore, finally, what I am trying to bring out is that in this dialogic relationship we must not assume that because there may be negative popular reactions to a building, this means necessarily that the building is not positively dialogic. It may very well be stimulating a critical reaction and this sort of critical response is precisely the way in which people creatively participate or respond to the creative act of a genuine dialogic artist.

Selma al-Radi

I think maybe the Bank building is a sort of “eye-of-the-needle” syndrome, only the rich can pass through it in this life and possibly in the next life as well!

Jo Tonna

The confrontation between the Bhong Mosque and the Jeddah National Commercial Bank, I think, aptly sums up the polarisation between the modern and traditional sectors of societies undergoing rapid material development according to foreign models. In a bid to preserve a cultural identity which they see as imperiled, threatened society looks for what Jacques Berque called “substituting intensities” in religion, ethics, and art. A traditional architecture can function as a counterpoint to what is being transformed, by stressing or even exaggerating whatever can be seen to set it apart from the architecture of other cultures. This attitude animates the work of Hassan Fathy and others, who define “Arab” architecture in terms of differences between it and the architecture of other cultures. These specificities can be found in ways of responding to the physical and social climate of a region, cosmological symbol systems, and so on; the object being to haul up signs of specificity and authenticity; “truth to the people and place”. The problem is that, since it is unrealistic to try to exclude all the visible signs of global culture, by over—cultivating local divergencies one runs the risk of promoting an absolute rupture between the traditional and modern sectors of the individual personality, society and the landscape. In arguing for a “critical regionalism”, Kenneth Frampton maintains that the technical benefits of modernisation should not be rejected; however, cultural hegemony can be resisted by cultivating a local architectural culture, definable by the location of a specific architectural system in relation to a set of critical points of reference: space and place; typology and topography; architectonic and scenographic; artifice and nature; visual and tactile. The possibility of a complete rupture in the cultural landscape can, I think, be avoided by a more pragmatic approach, that would involve an attempt to come to terms with global culture by intervening with one’s own experiences, perceptions, and sensibilities in the interval debates which inevitably go on within a volatile and pluralist global culture. This would afford the
opportunity to seek out convergencies as well as divergencies between regional and global cultures and so help to make the latter truly universal. Whether one is out to look for convergencies or divergencies, a knowledge of architectural history — one's own history, and other people's history can become a useful critical and operative tool if one knows how to use it. Hassan Fathy, as I mentioned earlier on, focussed on the divergencies. When it came to establishing what sort of relationship there should be between interior and exterior space in "Arab" architecture, for instance, he would have no truck with phenomenal transparency and the interpenetration of interior and exterior space, heralded by Giedeon as one of the "great" themes of modernist architecture. It simply made no sense, he argued, in the Arab social and physical environment, as can be seen from traditional Arab architecture, which habitually separates interiors from exteriors, excludes raw nature from inside the building, and substitutes it by an idealised artificial landscape. One could cite other instances in which traditional architecture is directed toward objectives diametrically opposed to those pursued by modernist architecture; but from our point of view, the areas of convergence between traditional or regional architecture and some current theories or movements within the ambit of universal architecture are even more illuminating.

For instance, Stefano Bianca analysed traditional Moroccan cities and used his findings as the basis for a critique of conventional zoning techniques in town planning, which he attacked as disruptive, dehumanising, and ultimately at odds with Islamic moral principles. At about the same time a similar attack on the modern industrial city was being waged by Leon Krier, who denounced all zoning except vertical zoning. In this case the argument was based on a study of the pre-industrial European city. Again basing his arguments on historic architecture, Robert Venturi challenged the modernist dogma which proscribed applied decoration and narrowed down the field of architectural representation to structure and function.

He argued for buildings which, having been efficiently designed as neutral containers of function, can then be made to carry whatever signs or messages they could be made to convey through applied decoration — what he calls "decorated sheds" — of which the Bhong Mosque can be seen to be a quintessential example, whereas the National Commercial Bank still subscribes to the modernist prejudice against applied ornament. Many western students of traditional Muslim architecture, conditioned by functionalist theory and Loosian tirades against applied ornament, professed perplexity of the readiness with which that architectural culture could accommodate the most diverse functions to preconceived forms and typologies,
Suha Ozkan

In the absence of Ismail Serageldin, I feel compelled to express a point of view, on my own behalf but as a person who discussed his paper as it evolved.

Ismail Serageldin wanted to make one point clear, that is to differentiate what is authentic from what is clip-on or pastiche or forced in the various kinds of architecture. He deals with two sectors, one the large scale building, the other the more authentic, small scale building, where the technology is more manageable.

The criticism which favoured the Bhofk Mosque as against the unfavourable view of the National Commercial Bank amazes me. One must be able to see the accumulation of capital and autocracy which enabled the former to be constructed. I only see them as being in different sectors, the one religious and the other financial. In the case of the Bhofk Mosque, a landlord has built over a period of two generations and has not made the best use of crafts. Ismail Serageldin judged this in comparison with the more authentic usage in the Niono Mosque and Ramses Wissa Wassef where the social and the technological forces are more genuine. This is an important aspect of the paper.

The other point relates to the National Commercial Bank which he judges against other similar buildings. He doesn’t question the existence of a corporate building, or an image, or a symbol of that scale. He judges the office building as a creative achievement and an architectural approach.

I am glad that Romi Khosla has mentioned among other alternatives, Sunet Jumsai’s Bank of Asia. It is very interesting because that bank has sources of inspiration in his child’s toy. He openly and proudly says that. Some critics followed it up and traced it all the way back to the Renaissance and human forms but that seems a far fetched source of inspiration. It has little authenticity in this respect.

Gordon Bunshaft responds to climatic forces and he ends up with a machine which functions. People are happy there, the image is appropriate and the working environment is extremely pleasant. The control of the macro environmental forces is very intricately done. The image is a corporate image as with the Bhofk Mosque. Of course Ismail Serageldin favours one and not the other. That is his choice and I am not going to judge on that.

The National Commercial Bank follows the architectural ideology of the modern movement and does it very carefully and convincingly. Therefore taking all Serageldin’s architectural judgments and projecting them to another socio-political context in which everyone else has other points of view on other aspects, is unfair. Serageldin’s judgment is limited to architectural issues and the abstraction of forces as they act on all architectural entities. He is not seeking to protect what the building represents or whatever social and economic forces shaped the building.

Chris Abel

I have seen Sunet Jumsai’s ‘Robot’ building in Bangkok and I was very much amused by it. Jumsai himself showed me round and explained what it was all about. He is an excellent architect as his new campus for Thammasat University shows, but I think he went off the deep end with this toy robot of his, which is what the building is based on.

According to Jumsai, he produced several schemes for his clients at the Bank of Asia, but they were bored with all of them. Finally, almost in despair, he saw his young son at home wheeling this toy robot and thought he would try something like that, and his clients really liked the idea; quite obviously because it presents a strong image and makes a fine advertisement. It is no more than that; a giant billboard for the Bank. It has nothing whatever to do with all these other references to ‘post-modern clas-
sicism' and 'hi-tech' that have been discussed. I think some journalists have made a big meal of it. Sunet Jumsai makes a big meal of it himself, sometimes with tongue-in-cheek, sometimes in deadly earnest.

What neither he nor any other architect can get away from is that no matter what he says his 'robot' building means, it is society, not he, that makes the final judgement. As Wittgenstein would say, the meaning is in the use, that is, in the social use. In this case the meaning of the building lies in its value to the Bank of Asia as an outsize gimmick with which to draw attention to the Bank, and judging from the public response, that is just the way it works. From that point of view it is very successful.

Jumsai was aware of these aspects from the beginning, but now he is trying to rationalise the whole thing, saying that his bank represents some kind of 'robot architecture' of the future; 'post-hi-tech' he calls it. He is in fact very jealous of Norman Foster's Hongkong Bank – this came out in conversation – which was built with parts made by real robots and works with the help of real computers. He is jealous because he knows that Thailand doesn't have that kind of building technology. He put forward an elaborate argument trying to suggest that here was the first 'robot building' of the twenty-first century, in keeping with the technology of the time, whereas of course there is no advanced technology involved in the building whatsoever. It is purely an image of a child's robot; an architectural gimmick. On the other hand, as an expression of huge Third World frustration at trying to keep up with technologically advanced nations it could be counted as a very meaningful cultural statement.

Selma al-Radi

Doesn't the same hold for the Jeddah Building. They don't have the technology in Jeddah and in Saudi Arabia. It is imported from outside. It is all brought in; the marble, the stone and a lot of other material including the technology that goes into that building?

Chris Abel

The banking institution (in Jeddah) itself is imported of course. With every imported institution, the architect's role is already circumvented, as Sunet Jumsai's was in designing the Bank of Asia. Architects do not invent building types. Building types are invented by society, in the same way that society as a whole is responsible for the kind of institutions it has. A building type is nothing other than the built expression of a social institution. We fool ourselves, as critics and as architects, if we think we can do very much about that, though I admit to some exceptions. On occasions there is some process of adaptation involved and this can be quite important. I like SOM's bank building in Jeddah because it is a sensible adaptation of an imported building type to the climate of the region.

I rather like it also, incidentally, because I suffer from vertigo, and if you are very high up in the building you find you are looking down at the internal courtyards, not into empty space, and that's comforting.

Nobody mentioned however the planning of the building. It's mostly an open-plan building and actually this is more important than the handling of the entrance, which has been criticised. Saudi Arabs hate open-plan offices. They like cellular office buildings for the privacy they afford and that is why Larsen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is very successful functionally as it is composed mostly of cellular offices. From the planning point of view, SOM's bank really is a foreign bank imposing a way of life – an alien institution – on Saudi Arabian values.

Here is an example of the limited range of possibilities an architect has to work with. The most important decisions are already made when the client decides to have a building type of that kind. The important choices are planning and developmental choices. They go back to socio-economic decisions: 'how shall our country be developed?' Once you make the decision, 'let's import this building type', meaning 'this institution' – which is the sort of decision made with the advice of Western 'fly-by-night' experts – you can't really do too much after that. I am sorry to be downgrading the role and influence of architects and critics, but that is the situation.

Selma al-Radi

I think you are not judging architects fairly. After all was it the architects' idea to have something so vast? I don't think anybody is denying that it is a superb building and that the finishes are fantastic. Everything is beautiful about it but the sheer size of it is like a log dropped from heaven! That is what I find so frightening about the building.

Chris Abel

In this case it was the bank owners themselves – who happen to be an important Saudi family – not
the architects, who made the basic decision to have a
tower of that kind. They made that decision to ex-
press their own strength and power, which to a
certain extent is entirely appropriate to Jeddah,
given its history as an ancient trading centre. Never-
thless, the comparison is a limited one, since the
pre-industrial commercial institutions of the past
took different forms to the commercial institutions
of today. There is no getting away from the fact that
the SOM building is a modern commercial office
building and as such is essentially an imported West-
ern institution.

Dennis Sharp

We have had a carrot dangled in front of us by one
or two speakers and Chris Abel has re-emphasised
it; the question of divisions in society.

It might be worth getting some input on the value or
otherwise of the high building. Let me take an ex-
ample. Peter Davey was suggesting that there is an
advantage to think along the organic, naturalistic
lines of architecture and to look at the buildings of
people like Kroll, Erskine and others. Well they
certainly operate within an area of architecture
which they deem to be appropriate. "Appropriate"
because it comes close to natural ideas and to the
organic tradition.

The problem with the organic tradition, if it is ap-
plied to the developing world, is that it is essentially
a low scaled tradition. It is not very often concerned
with high buildings. Indeed I have yet to see a high
building anywhere in the world which you could
describe as 'organic'.

I am talking about a movement within modern
architecture, (organic, romantic or natural) which is
concerned with devising a series of architectural
forms; devising a language that has meaning within
the parameters of modern design. I don't think that
does exist although I acknowledge the existence of
say high adobe buildings in the South Yemen.

Otherwise you are into the other side of things; the
high tech aspects of local high building and those
people who deal with the problems, as Ada Louis
Huxtable might say, in an 'artistic' manner. Some-
thing that would appear to have a special kind of
technological quality. The question of high buildings
is an important one.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

I would like to come back to something that Chris
Abel mentioned, which is the intention in building.
How does one talk about or criticise a building,
purely on what are supposedly its architectural or
even symbolic values or how it is manifested in the
environment?

I would throw open a question on the role of the
client in establishing a programme which gives a
number of conditions, and whether architectural cri-
ticism should be concerned with this question of
intention?

Chris Abel

I think then you are talking about broadening the
concept of design, into designing society, which is
presumably what some people are trying to do.
Whether or not one can actually succeed is another
matter, but obviously people try to do. The very fact
that one has a socio-economic development plan,
which gradually alters a previous pattern of develop-
ment, indicates a designing force of some kind.

I do think architecture is a peripheral activity as far
as the major social and economic decisions are con-
cerned. It is not a small activity but peripheral con-
cerning those decisions which affect the mainstream
of life of Saudi Arabians and anybody else in the
developing parts of the world. The Saudis for ex-
ample are going through trauma because they are all in
the state of a culture shock. Perhaps that is the
reason they drive in the terribly aggressive way they
do - trying to work off their frustrations. There are
other signs that things are out of control. They are
all living two lives; split personalities with one facing
the past and the other an unknown future and neith-
er quite matching up with the other. You are not
going to solve that kind of problem with any
architectural solution.

So the important decisions are made, as I already
suggested, when the development plan is drawn up,
usually by Westerners. I said at an Aga Khan sym-
posium at MIT recently that perhaps the best thing
all these Western experts could do is to just get up
and leave; let people in the developing world sort
things out themselves. But of course no Westerner
will do anything of the kind, which probably also
includes me.

Selma al-Radi

Their architects are trained in the West in any case.

Chris Abel

Exactly, and they are brain-washed in the process
too. So it's again largely a concept of social design
we are talking about, with education a key part of
the design.

Joseph M. Spiteri

Skyscrapers being a product of Western values, it is
apt to recall, what Buckminster Fuller once said:
“Now there are all these great skyscrapers ... and
why are they there? They are there because that is
the best way you make money with your land and
nothing to do with what is good for humanity”. Highly
developed countries, however, are not likely
to carry out any drastic changes.

Coming nearer to our main topic; firstly, I feel that
regionalism as an attitude to design will not serve as
a cure-all to even ‘localised’ problems. Regionalism
is not a new attitude, in fact, Gunnar Asplund as
early as 1916 said that it is more important to follow
the style of the place rather than that of the time.

Secondly, looking at local architectural develop-
ments in recent decades, quality depends on other
factors too. Local architecture can be described as
belonging to a place, because it remains essentially
traditional. There are ideas which have been bor-
rowed and are hence modern, but they are not
“modernist” ideas, which implies ideological con-
notations and ideas developing from industrial mod-
es of production.

Malta serves as a good example that clearly shows,
that traditional methods by themselves do not en-
sure quality. When one disregards the universal
principles of design the probability is that results
remain unsatisfactory.

Regionalism reduced to its lowest terms, really
means traditional methods, know-how, techniques
and materials. In Malta, all these survive. We con-
tinue to build in stone as we have always done.
Concrete has been introduced but it has not meant
that we have produced any new shapes, or new
interiors or spectacular relationship between in-
teriors and exteriors. One therefore can learn a
great deal by examining design trends in a non-
changing context such as ours.

One can see, that though buildings remain essen-
tially traditional in layout, scale and materials, all this
has not helped us to avoid the creation of unsightly
developments. It is important that architects respect
their indigenous cultures, study their particular
country and place so that continuity is ensured, and
hence their buildings speak the language people
know. These considerations on their own, however,
separated from attention to universal values of de-
sign will not ensure acceptable results in the end
product.

‘Critical regionalism’ as it is also referred to by some
writers depends as much on universal values as on
the correct attitude to tradition.

Ruslan Khalid

I agree with Chris Abel, particularly when he said
that many architectural decisions are not really
made by architects but by other people who are
more powerful and more influential. The Hongkong
and Shanghai Bank and the Asian Bank in Bangkok
were not possible without the collusion of the client.

It is the client who in fact finally decides how much
money they want to spend, what image they want to
project, what kind of buildings that they want to
build. If they are lucky they get the architect that can
express their own aspirations. Norman Foster has
done just that in Hong Kong.

The point that I want to return to, is the role of the
architectural critic. It seems that there is conflict or
confusion as to the role of an architectural critic. I
don’t know whether there is a clear-cut division
between somebody making an aesthetic judgement
on a work of art and a moral judgement about that
work of art’s validity in the context of the particular
community. Maybe this is where the role of
architectural criticism comes in, because very often,
in the recent past, the weightage seems to be more
on political and social values than the pure delight in
the aesthetic.

Music is another product that is for the use of the
common people, just as architecture in the end, is a
product for communicating something to the com-
mon people; but music critics seldom come out with
the kind of social weightage or moral weightage that
architectural critics tend to place on the building
product.

In terms of music, the whole thing can be enjoyed
without any inference of social or moralistic think-
ing. Perhaps in a similar way, architectural criticism
could be divided into what is its aesthetic worth and
what is its social worth.

Richard England

In fact all major decisions in the architectural pro-
cess are taken initially by politicians. Then follow
the planners, and then the people who determine
the service and sewerage pipes and eventually the
architect ends up with an area marked out by other
people where he is supposed to put up his building.
The initial decision making which is the most im-
portant, is unfortunately always outside the hands of the
architect.
Another point that I want to take up is that basically, architecture does not travel well. Every place has not only its own environment but it also has its own sense of time. Therefore, when we talk about time in New York, or when we talk about time in Jeddah, or in Malta, they are not exactly the same thing. There is a progressive growth and continuity which relates to time in a particular place.

It is extremely difficult therefore for visiting consultants to arrive jet-lagged, look at a place and instantly understand it. The only way you can understand a place is to know its memories. I think it was the American architect, Jacqueline T. Robertson who said that visiting consultants are a little bit like hired mercenaries ... without guns, but just as lethal.

Solutions must be found from within. The people who live in and understand the place, will know more about it and be more sensitive to it. They can listen to what that place is indicating and what it is asking for as a solution to its own particular problems taking into account its particular time scale.

**Peter Davey**

It is difficult to divorce architecture from moral and political issues. Architecture is political and making architecture is a political act. Every line we draw influences the way in which people move or work and hence the life of the polis. Although Chris Abel is quite right when he said that there are basic types given to us, surely buildings like Centraal Beheuws by Hertzberger or the Hong Kong Bank, both of which are wonderful places to work in, could not have been achieved without the architect having a very strong idea about the way in which he wanted the play of life to be acted within the building. The architect has a great deal to do with the play of life even if he only sets the scenes, and it is very easy to denigrate what the architect can do, partly because in the 1940's, 50's and 60's, architects made excessive claims about the way in which by altering the environment we could improve humanity. These were shown to be false, yet architects can still have a great influence, for good or ill, on the way in which people live and work.

**Haluk Pamir**

I would like to direct my points more towards the style of criticism in the presentation by Ismail Serageldin. It is not the only case in architectural criticism where the data used for criticism and the information provided to the reader or the audience, is not sufficient or does it examine the users relationship to the building.

The criticism excluded some environmental data for the building. We are told that people are very happy using it but I am not sure whether the users reaction data is available.

We have seen cross-sections which described the environmental control of the Jeddah bank building, but still we don't know how effective it is in comparison to other possible solutions for the same purpose. So we are again missing something in terms of data. We also do not know the intentions of the architect, both the Muslim architects and the non-Muslim architects, in terms of the types that they are handling.

The development of an office space requires some explanation and this building should be situated at some point in the debate on office development. Again we have not had enough debate on regionalism which Ismail Serageldin referred to implicitly in his paper. It's not only regionalism — regionalism is not enough; it goes on to a kind of implicit authenticity, which was discussed also by Peter Serracino Inglott. If we are going into critical judgement then authenticity should also be criticised. I don't think that authenticity can be easily defined like other Muslim values, affecting architecture.

Regionalism, can be discussed in terms of authenticity, but where is the criticism of authenticity? Criticism should not stop, before criticising its own outlook. This is lacking in Ismail Serageldin's paper.

**Dennis de Lucca**

If there is an architecture, historically, which has been concerned with reusing earlier forms, it has been Islamic architecture. The Christian Church of St. John in Damascus was converted into a mosque by changing its orientation and introducing a mihrab facing Mecca. Surely this is case of Muslim values coalescing with an alien form, in this case a byzantine form, to adapt it to a new culture; an Islamic culture.

In the field of town planning, when the new town of Baghdad was planned in 762 A.D. it has been said that the Caliph Al-Mansur consulted architects, engineers and land surveyors coming from practically every part of the Islamic empire; from Syria, Persia, and many others. Surely if there is an architecture which has always been concerned with adaptation of forms in the context of town planning, it too is Islamic architecture.

When we are talking about architectural criticism this unique historical phenomenon must be taken into account. Today one finds Muslim and non-Muslim architects putting up buildings in Islamic
countries so that one sees a coalescence of different forms and different traditions. Architectural criticism of contemporary Islamic buildings must take this very important fact into account.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

When Richard England spoke of solutions from within, it ties in with what has just been said. How far is “within”? Within countries like Pakistan or India, the regional differences get smaller and smaller. Does this mean that the best solutions must come from a very small group of people who “understand” their own cultures in their own societies? Or can we, as I believe, benefit from the input from people from outside a region which may help us to look at ourselves in different ways.

The danger of saying that all solutions must come from one’s own culture, is that we become terribly chauvinistic and defensive. I would not go in the other direction either and say let the “guns for hire” (to use that phrase again) come in and do what they will. The balance between what must come from within a culture and what someone else can bring to that culture, given our global situation today, must be maintained.

I believed that this also applies to architectural criticism or writing about buildings. The same mix between those who work within their own cultures and those who bring another viewpoint into it must in some way find a fusion and a mix.

Selma al-Radi

I don’t think a situation ever occurred where a building was made purely out of local culture. Architects, stone-masons and artists were always mobile. If you look at the palace at Persepolis it had Greek architects and architects from practically all over the world involved; stone-masons and craftsmen. If you look at any major historical building, there has always been foreign workmen involved.

The very fact that we are discussing seriously now that there should be a totally regional architecture, seems to me absolutely incredible, especially in the light of what historically has been the building tradition and the architectural tradition. It has never been isolated in that way and I don’t see why it should be isolated today. Under Islamic tenets or under Hindu or any other tenets, it cannot stand on its own. It has to link up with everything that is around it.

Yasmin Shariff

There has been cross cultural input in most of the grand projects throughout history, however, there has never been such an ability to bring materials (both old and new) from all over the world to erect buildings today. This puts a much greater responsibility on architects because as there is such a wide choice available the selection of forms and materials has to be made much more carefully.

Most buildings tend to be little more than “the decorated shed”. Few of the choices made on building form and decoration are more than skin deep. Symbols and decoration are clipped onto a facade like a stage set. The Bhong Mosque is an example of such a building. When viewed in detail the building loses its integrity. The ornate craftsmanship of the decoration is not enough to create a building of excellence. The Bhong Mosque does not stand up to the very high standard of Mughal architecture which it seeks to imitate. Mughal mosques were more restrained in their decoration and their choice of colours. They were better proportioned and their environmental engineering and landscaping was far superior in design to the Bhong Mosque.

The Bhong Mosque is a very good example to illustrate the problem facing modern designers. Most countries are facing a cultural identity crisis — trying to absorb modern technology within traditional values and symbols. A building of substance cannot be created by simply masking a modern “shed” with a traditional wrapping. It would seem that in order to cope with the rapid rate of change in the modern world — the Future Shock — people are clinging onto familiar symbols especially those of power and wealth. “To design in truth and build with beauty” should be the corner-stone to cling to in order to create buildings with integrity which are sensitive to the people and land that they are built to serve.

Buildings of integrity of beauty and truth are seldom the work of an architect in isolation. They are usually actively fought for by both the sponsors and the designers. Politicians and planners have a major responsibility in helping to encourage good design and the architectural critic can spearhead the process of identifying good designers and important sites and expose the vested interests and prejudices which jaundice architectural projects.

Ruslan Khalid

I don’t entirely agree with the statement by Selma al-Radi regarding regionalism. Coming from a country which is very conscious about trying to develop architecture with some kind of national identity or
local identity, I feel that whilst you might say that imported technology occurred even in primitive times, there are more subtle things in operational architecture in which the acknowledgment and understanding of local custom and tradition is of great importance.

Regional architecture exists in a real sense if it can be read in terms of the architect’s translation of the way of life of the people that he designs for.

Selma al-Radi

I did not say that regional architecture did not exist. I said that regional architecture always involved fresh inputs from outside. There are always people from outside a region coming in and adding to and influencing local styles. I am not saying that it is always a good thing either, but that it is an historical fact which one cannot deny.

In Malaysia, you have had in the past, any number of different people that have come in and have obviously affected your regional architecture. It is similar everywhere in the world and there is no place historically that has ever been free of it.

Suha Ozkan

On this subject, an expression or phrase which was used by Peter Davey would give some guidance and I like it very much. He conceived regionalism as cultural regeneration. I think it is a very important point, because if we conceive the subject in this way, architecture becomes a process or a tool to evolve a certain state of being. It does not become an end product as in many examples that we have seen. That would open the whole perspective on approaches to regionalism which I would like speakers to dwell on and to exchange ideas. That point I think is very valuable as a contribution.

Richard England

The point I made earlier referred to a regional architecture and not a national architecture. Architecture is born from physical data and a memory data. Physical data is about the topography of the region as well as its geography. It is also about climate and locally available materials.

Memory data is about the tradition, the history and also the background and legends of the region. The architect takes these two data banks and crystallises them in the moment of time that he is working on his project. That moment in time, focusses the region’s economic and political aspirations. The architect should use this data as a spring-board to arrive at a solution which is pertinent and which belongs to the spirit of that place and to the spirit of the time of that place.

Romi Khosla

It is not too important to know whether it’s the architect or the circumstances that determine the building type. What is more relevant is that critics have started increasingly to search in architecture for some kind of a temporary freezing of complex social values. Probably the architect is not concerned with these things. His own training, discipline and opportunities narrow down the reason why he makes a particular kind of building.

The critics who are now becoming increasingly institutionalised, have begun to look at architecture as probably the only creative art form which is reflecting the complexity of change. Literature and music and painting are not giving that dimension to us at all. We should separate out the two issues completely. We can discuss a building critically from the architect’s point of view. In the same breath, we cannot then drag it through the streets and start accusing the architect of having ignored a whole complexity of issues which have to do with the observation of social change.

In the Islamic world in the east particularly, the changes that are occurring are so rapid; the value systems that are being generated, absorbed and digested and spat out; the pace of it is so rapid that we all tend to start looking at architecture and buildings in which we can find lasting values. We then go a step further as critics, and start putting into them values which may not be there. The critic is also a social observer and he will like to project certain social values into the building, social values which he thinks should be permanent.

Architecture is thus landed with all kinds of complex purposes and historical links, which do not ostensibly exist at all. We have to remember that before we entered the industrial age, the dynamism of cultural change was tremendous. Just because it was an oral culture and we have no record of it, we make assumptions and choose certain golden ages and freeze certain values. If you see the kind of trade, war and cultural activity that were taking part in this part of the world, one is amazed at the lack of permanence, and yet the quality of the development that was taking place at the same time.
Haluk Panır

I would like to hear from participants who come from those areas where the buildings that we have been discussing are built, especially the architects of the buildings. How do they respond? Can they convey to us the impressions of the architects in these countries and their evaluation.

Raymond Vassallo

I would like to make a few comments about regionalism. First of all it makes sense, it is easier to opt for a regional architecture, a local culture and a smaller type of settlement, rather than an ad hoc settlement such as the large Metropolis. I would like to illustrate this comment by reference to two of the buildings, which we have discussed. They are assumed to be at the two extremes of the controversy about regionalism.

The first building is the Nino Mosque. This building exhibits regionalism to quite a large degree. The reason is that it seems to respect the topography, the climate and the local building materials which have been used in its construction. I wonder if the architect who built the Nino Mosque had any other options? One can say that it is a successful building from the regional architecture point of view but it is easy to find some defects in it. The three towers on its facade appeared to be clipped on. They are not very well related to the rectangular mosque. That is one example.

The second example at the other extreme, is the Bank designed by Gordon Bunshaft. In this case, the question of applying regionalism is easier said than done. First of all, it was not possible to use traditional local materials in such a megastructure. In fact Bunshaft used, what is now, the universal building material, concrete, the material which is the basis for the international style and for buildings which we find in most of the larger cities in the more developed countries.

I feel that the National Commercial Bank is quite authentic, in the sense that it accommodates the organism; the corporation, quite successfully. It symbolises it quite successfully too. It has been pointed out that there are defects such as the juxtaposition of the circular garage, next to the triangular point block. I think the architect tried to pack to much on the site which appeared to be rather restricted. The main problem is that of scale. An earlier speaker rightly commented that it makes the people look like ants. The simile is a rather unhappy one and there is a certain amount of truth in it, after all, the pedestrians down below, are like ants when compared to the size of the large social organism to which the bank corresponds. In fact the building is likened to an ant hill, with so many people working from morning to the evening.

The other point that I want to make is about applying the concept of regionalism to this building. Gordon Bunshaft managed to apply the skyscraper to the setting of Saudi Arabia successfully, in the sense that he did come to grips with the local problem of climate. It has been suggested that he picked up a motif from Islamic architecture, i.e. the courtyard and took inspiration from it, to solve the problem of air-change and shading within the building. This is the only way in which one can talk of regionalism as far as this building is concerned. Otherwise the courtyard analogue is far fetched.

On the other hand, I wonder, if one has to expect the building to relate to the particular culture; Islamic culture in this case, the culture which is found in the country where this building has been erected. I wonder if there is a different type of culture today, at a higher level of abstraction, perhaps a world culture, which would explain why we get all these high rise buildings in various countries. If one had to dwell in outer space and aimed one’s instruments at the world today, probably these manifestations of our world culture are the first evidence of human activity on earth which one would experience.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

I wish to refer to the Bhong Mosque in Pakistan. I am from Pakistan and I know the area reasonably well. I felt there was a slightly misleading comparison made in Ismail Serageldin’s paper between the villages which are undecorated and this amazing decoration of the mosque. There is a very strong tradition in Pakistan, especially in that area, where people do not like to be seen to be decorating the outside of their buildings, as it is seen in part as ostentation. There is a certain degree of modesty which is exhibited.

The mosque is seen as a house of God and a place which becomes a symbol for community. It becomes an important place which must be glorified, which must be, in a sense, decorated. It is a process of embellishment, which says that we really consider this as the most important part of our village. The point that it didn’t fit with what is around it is somewhat at odds with my perception.

Osamah El-Gohary

I have reservations on the idea of regionalism. So far
we have used so many terms that, to a Muslim, seem to be as foreign as much of the architecture we see now. Islam is not “regional”. If we look closely at many of the mosques that have been built through history, we see two directions. We see the regional influences and we can also see the Islamic influence. We can see the plan of the Prophet Mosque in Medina embedded within most of these designs, even though climatic conditions, materials, and so on, might have different influences in the building.

We see in the architecture of the mosque that the designers use courtyards, local building materials, local architectural vocabularies but the problem faced is not the use of the vocabulary as much as the way it is put together. Muslim architecture has borrowed a lot from other cultures but the thing which is more important is the syntax and the grammar of the language of Muslim architecture.

The dome that Sinan uses is the same as the Renaissance dome but the concept of space is totally different and since he had a different concept of space then he has got new technology to invent, to make this new space.

I also want to mention the National Bank. We should have a better description of this building before we criticise it. We should have a master plan of the entire area to get an idea of the location of this building and the circumstances of the site to know exactly why this building turns its back to the sea and to the shore and why it has these huge openings. We should ask the architect about the architectural precedent of this building in the region, and see whether or not he has an architectural vocabulary that he used which makes this building not necessarily Islamic but related to the local Jeddah architecture.

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**Said Zulficar**

The architect of the National Commercial Bank in Jeddah never went to Saudi Arabia. It was designed entirely in the USA.

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**Osamah El-Gohary**

I don’t think that an architect has to go to a country to design. He can obtain enough information to design a building. It’s not an excuse for the architect to say “I did not go there and therefore I cannot design”. The problem with architects is mostly they look only at buildings, they never read history, they never go beyond what they see, especially practising architects.

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**Syed Zaigham Jaffery**

Just to add a corollary to the architect for the National Commercial Bank Building not going to Jeddah. Similarly, I don’t think Ismail Serageldin went to experience the Bhong Mosque, but he has written a critical evaluation on it. Therefore, we come to a most important question that we should probably address here, and that is: Can critics criticise buildings which they have not experienced?

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**Selma al-Radi**

Critics should go to see a building they are criticising.

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**Dennis Sharp**

That is incredible. The whole idea of criticism is that you criticise something which you have seen, surely? This is getting into the realms of the absurd. It's rather like being a music critic but not actually hearing the music!

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**Syed Zaigham Jaffery**

To continue with this question of the architect having designed something which is supposed to be a symbol of regionalism yet not having visited Jeddah, there is also the question of the role of the architect. How much of the design that architects are doing today, is based on the whims of the client? What are the values that are imposed on the design? In most cases, isn’t the architect just a facilitator of a certain politician’s whim, or a certain banker’s whim, or the need of a bank for publicity? So that if it is a robot, it will be remembered and people will come and deposit money there. If it was a low key, lost in the slums type of bank, would it have the same impact as the robot building.

Therefore, the question is how much can an architect do without his design being superimposed by the values of the client? If you take it a little further, why did the builder of the pyramids build as high as he did? Who was dictating the height? Was it his design decision or in the modern context, why did Sumet Jumsai really go for the robot as a design for his bank in Bangkok?

In another situation, you could say that sensitive and good architecture, therefore, may only be possible when you train the decision maker about what the architect can do. Here is where the architectural critics can probably play a role in trying to train
those who decide what our design is going to be. Maybe those are the people who should be attending the workshops more than architects.

Alex Torpiano

As regards the architect not having visited Jeddah, it is certainly shocking when you realise that he has designed a building for a place he has not even visited. On the other hand, when you keep in mind that he is designing a bank which is a symbol of capitalism, is it so shocking that he is doing it from the centre of capitalism?

Going back to what Abdelbaki Ibrahim suggested concerning the rules that prescribe how a mosque ought to be designed in various regions, what is the architect to do when he tackles a building for which there is no model? Could it be justifiable to say that since the ultimate model for a big bank exists in America, the designer does not need to go to see the context in which he is building since what is desired by the client is a small "Washington" in the middle of Jeddah.

I am not saying that I agree with this line of thinking but there is justification for that approach since what you are really saying is that the Jeddah society that this building serves and represents is not really the Islamic world in its ideal, or perhaps its traditional role, but it embodies the importation of, not just the money, but a whole way of projecting itself.

Dennis Sharp

The question presumably is how do you prevent this sort of thing happening? Someone could be in a position to receive a commission quite outside the context in which the building is being built. It goes back to a point that I raised earlier; that a basic discussion has to take place about typologies, about use of certain forms of buildings.

This is where the architect and the critic can work together. Particularly over this current argument about high building. Do we want to see high buildings in the Islamic world in places which have a low scale and a low profile? Is a high building a good thing to have next door to the Mdina here in Malta? Do you bring Italian architects in to design enormous hotels next door to the Knights Chapel? I don’t think you do personally.

Architects and critics have got to make decisions about whether they want to influence clients, patrons, and the general public and about whether these attitudes are acceptable or not. That has got a lot more to do with regionalism than these vague quasi-social arguments we have been hearing. Aalto, who we know worked within a regional context and produced marvellous buildings, was an architect who worked with an operative function of regionalism.

Osamah El-Gohary

I want to return to this idea of height and whether Islam has something against or for the idea of height. The example is from Sinan’s architecture again and can be found in the building of the Selimiye in Edirne. He wanted to build a much higher dome than that in Constantinople (Istanbul) where people remarked upon the height of the dome of Hagri Sophia. Is that an Islamic thought? If we take it from the very basis of Islamic thought then spending the money of the people erecting high buildings may not be proper.

From another point of view, namely the idea of rivalry; that one building competes with another and that one dominates the other; the Islamic state wanted to make such a gesture in that particular region. The building represented the power of Muslims and Islam and consequently the gesture became something Islamic taken from the Islamic Law known as Sale al-Zara’i. Here we have the idea of height and doing something that overrides the other buildings that exist in the city or region.

Selma al-Radi

I think its politics more than Islam. It is actually a political statement in most cases.

Osamah El-Gohary

If we want to design something Islamic, there are some Islamic laws. Whether this is a political thing or not there are laws in Islam and whatever comes from these particular laws is Islamic.

Dennis Sharp

If you start on a point like that, you have got a basis on which you can discuss high buildings. Then you have got to add the corollary; the high building in the United States was an amalgam type building, it was not the single use building that we see imposed on so many environments today. The earliest examples of the Chicago high buildings were often multi-
use buildings. They contained within their own envelope, many different uses and they had many different volumes.

If you look at the Chicago Auditorium Building by Adler and Sullivan, that was not only a hotel, but also had an auditorium. It is a tiny building in modern Chicago terms now but at that moment in time, when these kinds of discussions were being held by the Chicago architects, they would have been discussing the imposition of that kind of object on their environment.

There are rules and lessons that one can learn from a discussion of such points as these. They are concerned with architectural objectives and values and these are the things which can establish a basis on which regionalism itself can be discussed.

Peter Serracino Inglott

Height in itself is not significant and one cannot attribute universal significance to something being taller. There are tall men who carry themselves proudly and there are tall men who carry themselves humbly. This is perfectly possible.

I think the difficulty about tall buildings is one which emerged when Dennis Sharp said “can the tall building be organic?” Organic implies articulated. The problems which were being raised about the Jeddah bank or banks, because it applies to both of them, is a matter of their articulation. You can have a tall building which is articulated in ways, for instance, which have a rhythm which is proportionate to human dimensions.

You can be at the foot of a tall building which is in scale to the human body and to human size and which therefore does not give you this feeling. There are other problems about inserting tall buildings, say, next door to Mdina. There, first you have a natural environment which is made up of low undulating hills and this is very different from an environment which could be a flat plain or where there are mountains. The building is going to have a dialogue with the natural environment and that has to be taken into account.

It may also be inserted in an urban texture with which it can come into conflict or with which it can harmonise. You cannot make a universally valid statements about tall buildings. It depends entirely on the context in which they are going to be used, on the ways in which they are going to be articulated, and the way in which people are going to react to them.

Abdelhaki Ibrahim

Let us come back to the Islamic values which we Muslims always refer to when we discuss any architectural work. Of course Islam strives for homogeneity between people and this is eventually reflected in the environment itself. If we have tall buildings and low buildings, this does not really reflect the social values of Islam which leads to homogeneity.

If we consider mosques then we have research on the rules and values which control the design of a mosque. Islamic values do not call for extravagant decoration; they call for modesty, they require open space for everybody to have a good view of the Imam who is leading the prayers. There are other factors affecting the shape and the plan of the mosque. The mosque is usually the symbol of the people and the centre of the urban structure.

Whereas, if you have tall buildings which dominate the mosque, that does not reflect Islamic values.

Selma al-Radi

I don’t know how you can say that they are not Islamic values. Presumably the clients in the case of the National Bank were Muslims and they requested, as I understand it, a tall building. In that case, do you then have to go back and say the government has to set guidelines, whereby no building should be taller than four storeys, because Islam says everything has to be homogeneous and everything has to be two storeys.

I don’t see how you can superimpose something like that on a Islamic society today.

Abdelhaki Ibrahim

It’s not a question of imposing rules. Architecture is always the reflection of the social and cultural structures. If you find these mishaps in Muslim cities like Jeddah, it means a man is not a good Muslim; he wants to show himself and in Islam we are told not to be extravagant.

Yasmin Shariff

Height restrictions are imposed on buildings for many reasons. One of the major constraints in London on height is the relative position of a building to St. Paul’s Cathedral. This planning policy affects sight lines as far as ten miles away from the Cathedral. Many of the planning policies such as this one
have evolved from local action groups who campaign on environmental issues.

Planning law in Britain, following legislation in the late 1960s and early 1970s requires the public to be informed and to have a voice in shaping their surroundings. Unfortunately this is not supported by an active or lively debate about architectural issues. I believe it is the critic's responsibility to stimulate such a debate so that the general public can make a more informed decision. The critic can make a valuable contribution as the intermediary between the professionals and the general public. As an impartial and knowledgeable person the critic can crystallise the pertinent issues and publicise schemes. Critics in the literary and theatrical fields promote their arts in a controversial and dynamic manner. There is no reason why an architectural critic cannot make a similar impact.

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**Syed Zaigham Jaffery**

In Indonesia, on the island of Bali, with which I'm sure many of you are familiar, in the early 70s tourism expanded and they built new tall hotel buildings which were totally alien to Bali's environment. The local people hated it. So now, there is a rule which restricts the height of all buildings and no building can be higher than the coconut trees. That is a building regulation, believe it or not!

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**Selma al-Radi**

The same thing happened in Sana'a when it first opened out to the western world. Sana'a invented the skyscraper though the highest buildings then were between eight to ten storeys high. Modern technology came in in the early 70s and the Yemenese decided that they must have it too. The Airline brought in an Italian architect and he produced this wondrous steel building that goes up eighteen storeys.

At the base of this building, lived the most important Sheikh of the area who said 'I can't stand this thing staring at me'. The local people, the local craftsmen took up the issue and professionals joined in. Eventually the criticism was so extreme that it was discussed in parliament and a law was passed whereby (in a country that invented the skyscraper) "no building may be higher than the tallest building in Sana'a".

I don't think you can just throw out local interest groups and the local inhabitants. After all, they have to live with these buildings.

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**Haluk Pamir**

It would appear that in Islamic thinking we have one approach to criticism, which puts modesty, as a value system, for criticising architecture. It can be used probably for producing architecture as well. There is a counterpart in the western conceptual framework; Smithson's notion of "ordinariness". It can be compared though I don't know how one can actually use modesty as a tool for generating criticism. It seems that there is also a universal intellectual quest to try to define architectural criticism.

Ismail Serageldin's position was that he was looking for an intellectual approach to criticism, however he didn't say which intellectual position he was trying to criticise! Abdelbaki Ibrahim is an intellectual as well and he has produced books on his position.

How can we compare the two positions? Critics should have a value system, and should actually develop and make this value system explicit to others. The Keynote Paper stated that criticism should be objective and, if I have not misunderstood the paper, that one should not really push a value system. It cannot go very far because we, as individuals, have value systems and also criticism is directing others towards a value system.

One cannot become a critic overnight. We can talk about architecture, we can raise the question of values, we can make human judgements, but it is difficult to become an architectural critic. One should be very careful in taking on the role of the critic. If we are going to start in the Muslim world or in the developing world, to take the critic's role, then we must prepare ourselves.

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**Peter Serracino Ingloft**

I would like to take this opportunity to return to the subject of critical discourse. I do not think, and here I am more on home ground than in my previous intervention, that you are at all correct in asking for definitions of such terms as "authenticity". We were not using it in any special sense. I don't think anybody who has an ordinary command of English does not know what "authentic" means. It is something which is not a fake, it is something which doesn't pretend to be other than itself. It would be wrong to insist on definitions. I think this was one of the worstheritages which Socrates left the western world because it gives the idea that there must be one single essence underlying a term; terms like beauty or art. In fact, there is no essence underlying beauty or art. These are terms which cover a multiplicity of convoluted realities between which there is a large number of likenesses, a network of connections and so on. I
think asking for definitions is something which is necessary in the natural sciences or mathematics but not in this kind of discourse. The real problem arises not about what "authenticity" means, but when we start saying this is authentically Muslim, for instance, then there is a problem. The problem there however is really defining "Muslim" and not defining "authentic."

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**Ruslan Khalid**

I want to add a comment on the subject of value judgements. We talk here as critics belonging to an international clique with international values. When we are judging the work done in a particular locality, some native situation, then maybe our critical evaluations will not be appropriate to their own concept of what is unique and what is ideal in their terms.

For instance, if we look at the Palace in which our seminar is taking place, maybe today we will value the kind of things that have been done to the very room in which we are sitting as perhaps immoral in our terms, because it uses too much human labour. If we are critics and we were to judge this building in those terms, this kind of work will never be done. The value judgement should be scaled down, or should be tuned to be appropriate to the kind of work or the kind of context that we are looking at.

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**Raymond Vassallo**

When one criticises a building, it is important to do it in the right context. Some comments have been made about height and in my opinion, some of the comments were made out of context.

The possibility was mentioned of building a high rise structure next to Mdina. This would be a case of a building being out of context, most certainly out of place. If the location is a down town area in a modern city, which is already compromised by a cluster of high rise buildings, then the situation is a completely different one. It is not surprising that an architect such as Gordon Bunshaft, when given the commission of building a bank in such a location, literally rose to the occasion by building highrise. The main problem is one of scale, in the sense that it is not important if the building is twice as big or half as big. It is very difficult for the human being to appreciate how large it is.

The problem of scale is a modern problem because in traditional architecture, the module of scale was the human figure. This module is hardly applicable to large buildings or high buildings and so far, architects have failed to invent a new module of scale which might be applicable in such large building.

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**Gorg Cilia**

The thing that has impressed me is that we seem to have taken up a lot of time discussing one dimension, ie, the vertical dimension and we do not look at architecture as buildings, modulating the terrain in a three dimensional way. It troubles me, that we are looking at architecture and regionalism in one dimension only and not in other dimensions.

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**Denis de Lucca**

As Gorg Cilia rightly implies, architecture has many dimensions, not just one, two or three. In fact, no photograph can present us with an accurate picture of a particular building. The best way of experiencing architecture is by walking through and around it and this experience is something which is difficult to explain in a photograph, especially if one has not had the opportunity of seeing the building in its context.

Additional dimensions do not come through on photographs, especially the dimension of time and the experience of space.

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**Jo Tonna**

I am pleased we are now been talking of "additional dimensions", because this takes me back to the point I made earlier about the convergencies that can be found between the traditional architecture of Muslim countries and some recent trends in contemporary western architecture. For instance, Charles Moore advocates a "haptic" approach to architecture, meaning one which is directed at all the senses and not merely the sense of vision, the ultimate objective being an architecture that is experienced by inhabitation and possession from within, rather than being perceived visually and from a distance. On this point there is much to learn from traditional Arab and Muslim architecture, which is mostly appreciated for the protection, serenity, and unexpected delights it affords. Where the celebration of movement and the organisation of visual axes takes pride of place in the West, whose architecture is interpreted by Norberg-Schultz as a choreographed succession of centres and paths, the architecture of Muslim lands is all centres, marking out inhabited places for relaxation and introspection, and leaning towards a poetic celebration of the
fragmentary, the episodic, and the unexpected. This is a trend which is partly shared with Arab poetry and music.

**Peter Serracino Inglott**

What has been said about architecture is of cause a reflection also of society. The west has the idea of a hierarchical class society where the middle class integrate and create a ladder of social mobility upwards and downwards while Muslim society, has the idea of a multi, overlapping group sector system, centered on the mosque in the town. There are certain values, but it doesn’t have this scale of social classes; it has overlapping ones which are not integrated but disseminated. So there you have a perfect reflection, in architecture, of the way in which society is structured.

**Selma al-Radi**

In that case, the bank building in Jeddah stands for all of that. It is superimposing itself in a non-Islamic manner because, presumably the only prominent building that should exist in an Islamic society is a mosque or a combination of a school and a mosque together, probably with a *souk* around it. This is the usual configuration at the centre of a town.

The bank building is then superimposing another imperialist or capitalist form. It is “banking imperialism” imposed in the middle of a society that is not supposed to have any other symbol except that of the mosque.

**Ruslan Khalid**

There is more to a Muslim society than people living in houses and going to prayers and to school. The markets, many of them remaining, are evidence of commercial life in the Muslim society. They do take some prominence in the make up of a Muslim city.

**Selma al-Radi**

That is part of the commercial life. People basically came in to trade in the city in the market areas. This bank though is an alien form; not that banking doesn’t exist for banking existed even in the old market place. Should it however, dominate the whole country side or should it just take it’s place in the society it’s supposed to serve?

**Malta architect**

Actually the bank building has impressed me quite a lot but there is a problem with its scale. In my experience when you move around in an Islamic town, there is a feeling that the buildings are conceived in isolation and they simply fit into place. They are very much like atoms moving around, fitting automatically into place, with the streets as communication networks; not pre-designed streets, but streets which come out of the buildings.

The problem is that when there is a building of the scale of the National Bank, automatically that building is going to condition the space around it. If there is an unplanned space around it, which is the traditional attitude towards town planning in many Islamic towns, automatically you are changing the entire concept of how to look at things and how to experience towns. That worries me considerably because buildings of that scale would seem to imply that one needs a much more global attitude to planning which tends to be a problem. Even looking at skylines of Islamic towns one sees buildings in a very natural way placed in different areas and problems happen when you have such a large building. That should be taken into consideration, particularly when introducing high buildings into Islamic towns, much more than in other towns.

**Selma al-Radi**

We have heard some very interesting points on architectural criticism relating to height, function, moral values, the clients’ role, education, architects education, value systems and a number of different attitudes that we should take into consideration.

I hope we will hone it down so that it becomes more manageable and understandable.
Session II
Traditional Approaches to Contemporary Architecture

Charles Moore: Chairman

Meaning in Tradition: Today
An Approach to Architectural Criticism

Hasan-Uddin Khan

In today's world there appear to be, if one may simplify and generalise, two major forces at work in the architecture of all cultures, those of universality and particularisation. We are confronted with this duality in our life and environment. "On the one hand there is something specific to and inseparable from a given cultural and geographical situation (which we would call regionalism) whilst on the other hand there are developments that are global for all areas and mankind".1

Universality can be said to be manifested in building through a form of internationalism or modernism and through building types such as airports and assembly-line factories, whereas regionalism is more easily illustrated through vernacular building, religious institutions, and through building types that have existed in a particular society for a period of time long enough to have established a tradition in terms of image, style, function, technology or in the way of construction. These polar forces exist in a dialectic within which architects have to operate. It now appears impossible not to be influenced by international developments and to base designed architecture strictly on a regional tradition — or to consider design criticism from this viewpoint.

On the other hand, it is also dangerous to “invent the future” (one of Buckminster Fuller's phrases) without reference to the traditions of the past. “One has to know where one is coming from to know where one is going”, to use one of Charles Correa’s favourite lines.

One approach to architectural criticism is to explore the internationalist, rationalist tendencies that today's designers and critics have to consider. I will concentrate on the opposite, the uses of tradition from a theoretical and critical point of view. The points of departure are different and it will be interesting to see whether we arrive in very different places as well.

I will concentrate on examples from Asia and Africa, parts of the world with significant Muslim populations, as I know them best. The examples are divided into four categories to illustrate different ways of looking at buildings; i) as regionalist expressions, ii) using the craft tradition and existing imagery to be populist (kitsch), iii) as vernacular images which raise questions of authenticity, and iv) attempting to create a synthesis of old and new. The examples are not intended to reflect the architecture of any one place, or indeed of any one designer, but illustrate the points that are made in this paper. The approach is a wide one, applicable to other societies and situations, one which is rooted in the society with which it deals.

Designers of the developing world are probably now aware that much of the knowledge informing their practice has been formulated outside their own regions, and more often than not during periods of colonisation. Writings on architecture exhibit “an Eurocentric orientation and mark a sharp break with pre-colonial intellectual traditions of the non-European world. The limitations of such scholarship and training are increasingly recognised and eschewed in other social science disciplines (M. Bernal, 1987). Rarely have such critiques systematically penetrated architectural scholarship .... The study of design in development has been impeded by theoretical structures which do not recognise that architecture in development has a different, though related, history to that of the architecture of the developed world.”2

If this is true, that our thinking has been so influenced by 20th century developments in the West, are there any phenomena and experiences which assist us in understanding (by way of parallels) what is occurring today in our cultures? In other words, can we learn from the mistakes of others? How can we consider built form in societies of the Islamic world, societies which by and large emerged from colonial domination only in the 1950’s and began a period of modernisation, nationalism and industrialisation at that time? This was often a reaction to the immediately preceeding period. Perhaps we can
Regionalism

- An example of regionalist expression, the Medical Clinic of Mopti, Mali, 1977, by architect Andre Ravereau uses traditional construction methods and forms. The clinic is designed to contain within it a pedestrian street, repeating not only construction and building design but also urban form. The building also consciously relates sensitively to the Great Mosque which is the settlements’ major architectural statement.
The Daara School in Malika near Dakar, Senegal, 1980, designed by Raoul Snelde uses a construction system developed by UNESCO’s Breda Office. The system was first used in 1977 in a CARITAS project for an Agricultural Training Centre in Nianing, Senegal. The system consists of load-bearing masonry block walls supporting thin (4 to 5 cm thick) ferro-cement vaults. Even though local builders were trained to use the system they expressed doubts as to its replicability as it required greater investment in items such as scaffolding. The designs themselves were much liked by the users in terms of space, light and ventilation.
be aware of two major trends, which have been called *avant-garde* and *kitsch*.

In the early 1940's Clement Greenberg in a series of essays explored these themes and said something which is important to our discussions, "A society, as it becomes less and less able, in the course of its development, to justify the inevitability of its particular forms, breaks up the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences. All the verities invoked by religion, authority, tradition and style are all thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works".

I believe that this is particularly relevant in developing countries today where the symbols, materials, designs and ways of construction; the traditions of the buildings, are being eroded and rendered meaningless.

This process in the west in the 1920's resulted in what might be called avant-garde culture "detaching" itself from the norms of society, breaking with the traditions inherent therein. Simultaneously, there also appeared what was called kitsch; the popular, commercial, adverts, Hollywood, comics and eventually architectures which strove to "break free" of their roots. This thirst for kitsch has transformed itself into a hunger which was post-modernism and today what is being referred to as the age of "Restoration Architecture".

The ideas of kitsch (a term which is perhaps not as popular today as it was a few years ago) has become the universal culture – the popular culture of easily assimilated and understood meanings and signs. On the other hand the avant-garde has gone towards particularisation of ideas, into a narrowing or a channeling of options in order to influence and change attitudes. This is prevalent in the works of Geoffrey Bawa of Sri Lanka, Abdel Wahed El-Wakil of Egypt and Charles Boccara of Morocco; albeit in different ways.

Perhaps the greatest factor in all this was the acceptance of science and technology. Martin Pawley recently wrote "The architects of the generation of 1914, the monocled mutineers who lives through the
invention of the automobile and aeroplane, were the first to embrace science and technology as a substitute for their accumulated legacy bringing these matters into the mainstream of architectural thought for the first time. They took this step as artists, licensed to find inspiration where they chose, but they soon found that immersion in science and technology threatened their old identity.\(^4\) If I can take this a step further, it also threatened the validity of their designs. The alienation from society continued. Why should this be so? After all, change is a continuing state of normalcy.

With the growth of industrialisation in general and construction in particular, building design and production became separate specialised activities.\(^5\) Aesthetic questions of judgement were separated from what had been up to now a total process of design. Consciousness of style, which now obsesses designers and critics alike, was perhaps born with the periodical *Journal of Design and Manufacturing*, founded in London by Henry Cole in 1849. Criticism focussed on stylistic questions apart from technology. The criteria of judgement remained largely on this level. To develop such criteria as appropriateness to culture, ecological soundness and economy, as well as the identification of other bases on which to judge building, is going to be a major task.

"The loose, indiscriminate character of design terminology has bequeathed to contemporary architectural discourse terms such as traditional and modern. They refer in the main to stylistic attributes of buildings."\(^6\) In developing countries indigenous building forms have in the past fifteen years or so been providing architects with a source of inspiration in countries disengaging themselves from their colonial past. Hassan Fathy, the champion of indigenous building, has brought with him a whole attitude towards contemporary building using traditional methods of construction and adapted traditional forms. This "earth is beautiful" movement found a wide following amongst young architects looking for an alternative to the high-tech solutions developed mainly in the west and found to be inapplicable in the poorer societies of the world.

Is contemporary work so-inspired "traditional"? Is it "modern" — it does not appear so. This raises the issue; are buildings to be understood as traditional or modern on account of how they appear or on account of how they are produced? Recent architectural examples illustrate that modern forms need not be accompanied by industrial methods of production and "traditional" forms are achieved with the latest scientific discoveries in the construction/materials sector.

To reduce architecture to its "essentials" or lowest common denominators; materials, technology, economics and function alone, can only impoverish and restrict the practice of architects and deprive them of individuality (equated to regionalism) and commonality (universalism). There is a need to develop greater sophistication in the handling of an architectural language. It is through an architectural language, and its communication through the media, that we stand a chance of modulating universal principles into regional ones.\(^7\) The idea of complexity as a design tool is gaining credence.

If we return to the ideas of the avant-garde and kitsch we may find some clues. If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art — the architect’s architect — kitsch imitated its effects. The neatness of this antithesis is more than continued — it corresponds to and defines the tremendous interval that separates from each other two simultaneous cultural phenomena such as the avant-garde and kitsch, such as modernism and tradition, and such as particularisation and universality.

These "intervals" (to use a musical term) are too great to be closed by all the infinite gradations of internationalism to regionalism and correspond in turn to what might be termed a social interval — "A social interval has always existed in formal culture ... whose two termini converge and diverge in fixed relation to the increasing or decreasing stability of a given society."\(^8\) In stable societies the distinctions between tradition and modernity are blurred — the axioms of the few are shared by the many — the masses believe superstitiously what the elite believe soberly. The two coexist more or less peacefully.

This they do when there is stability and the rate of change allows for a transfer of understanding of the aesthetics and meanings of traditions. Tradition indicates a degree of conditioning. Rapid change brings with it the danger of not being able to assimilate change on an emotional or intellectual level. It is little wonder that governments revert to past traditions as vehicles of stability.

An example of this is that of Pakistan where "Islamic Architecture" was decreed as desirable and interpreted as arches and domes belonging to a pre-colonial past. Another example is that of Morocco where the King proclaimed that a Moroccan Architecture should have green tiled roofs and use traditional crafts in a building. The forms and crafts are indeed beautiful and people respond as though instinctively to this; but does this use of tradition give contemporary structures meaning?

The almost literal use of design elements and technologies of building are one direction, an alternative seen as indigenous and charged with meaning either in nationalist or ideological terms. Both in terms of imagery, and actual levels of the construction indus-
try the traditional (defined as you will) plays a role in national development, identity-wise. It cannot be ignored. It cannot be discarded.

Hence critics looking at buildings which contain this charged and emotive response cannot remain neutral or aloof. I find the idea of an unbiased critic unrealistic. Architectural criticism cannot escape being tied to some kind of boundary, be it ethnic, political, national or cultural: it cannot be “value-free”. A recurring example of this is that of architectural competitions where critics, perhaps as judges, are faced with instructions to support indigenous traditions solutions and have to deal with this.

This, in a cyclical way, brings us back to the issue of the parameters of the discourse — the regional and the universal, and the assertion I made earlier that it is no longer possible to look at one or the other in isolation. I suggest here the layering of responses not only by the client and the architect but by the observer or critic.

Critics can either belong to the society in which they work or can bring with them a cultural baggage which they apply to other solutions. Most of the architectural writers in the Islamic world today, and they are not many, have either been trained abroad or at the very least been exposed to the architecture of people like Richard Meier and Charles Moore or ideas expressed by Kenneth Frampton, Charles Jencks and others; the theoreticians and imagemakers are alive and well in the West. Perhaps the only counterbalance for contemporary architecture exists in Japan. What is needed is for critics of architecture to emerge in developing countries bringing with them modifications and additions to the international discourse.

Are critics of the third world ready to indulge in self-criticism; are they politically able to so so; do they wish to do so? Dennis Sharp made the point in his keynote address about the critic acting as the bridge between architects’ intention and manifestation. Perhaps in simple terms the critic can act as enabler in disseminating and understanding the nature of the use of tradition; traditional values, traditional images, traditional forms of organisation and construction for contemporary societies today.

Footnotes

1 Hollein, Hans Preface to Sedad Eldem, Concept Media, Singapore, 1987

4 Pawley, Martin “Technology Transfer” in Architectural Review, September, 1987
5 Kostov, Spiro ed. The Architect, chapters on the History of the Profession, 1977
6 Also developed by S Jayewardene
7 Jayewardene, S. op cit
8 See also Khan, Hasan-Uddin, “Architectural Education — Learning from Developing Countries” in Journal of Architectural Education, September, 1986.
9 Greenburg, C. op cit.

Acknowledgement

I should like to thank my colleague Brian Taylor for his comments, discussions and assistance with this paper.

All photographs courtesy of Mimari Hasan-Uddin Khan with the exception of the following:
Page 54 and page 55 AKAA/C Little
Page 60 (Top) and page 61 B B Taylor
Page 62 (Top) Mimari/S Cohn
Page 63 C. Bonn
Drawings on pages 63 and 64 courtesy of Geoffrey Bawa
Traditionalism

The Mausoleum of Mohamed V in Rabat, Morocco, was built in 1973 on the archaeological site of the Hassan Mosque. It was designed by the Vietnamese architect, Vo Toan. It continues well established traditions of plaster, tile, metal and woodwork.

Brasswork at the top of the stairs to the Mausoleum

Mausoleum ceiling

In a similar vein to the Mausoleum, the Ben Jelloun House in Marrakesh brings together a number of crafts used in unconventional manners, to produce an instantly recognisable “Moroccan style”, even though individual elements are not traditional. The house, designed by William Willis with the owner, was built in 1986 and has had its impact on local building.

Exterior
In the Tichka Hotel, Marrakesh, 1986, the architect Charles Boccara uses elements of traditional design in a modern hotel to give a flavour of the country. In the interiors, by William Willis, this approach is taken much further to produce a kitsch Moroccan atmosphere which most tourists find very pleasing.

The issue of “how far” one goes in using tradition for contemporary buildings is one that needs to be tackled by architects and critics alike.

Exterior view

The dining-room with its “palm-trees” and murals
Vernacularism

What might be termed as the "earth is beautiful" movement uses the vernacular to create an "alternative" architecture to that of internationalism or modernism, and poses as being authentic and rooted in its culture. In the Foissac House of 1985, Elie Moutyal and young

Moroccan architect uses pressed-earth block vault construction bringing together ideas expounded by Hassan Fathy and his own appreciation of Hispano-Moresque Spanish and Moroccan architectures

Exterior view

Niche covered with a half-cupola for sitting off the patio
Synthesism

One major direction that has gained perhaps the greatest support recently in the Islamic World is that in which the architecture combines the best of the traditional with that of the modern to create a synthesis. The Tandjung Sari Hotel in Sanur, Bali, Indonesia, continues the approach set by Hassan Fathy and El-Wakil to produce buildings that are timeless.

The hotel complex, divided into bungalows, uses traditional Balinese imagery, construction and local materials blended with modern requirements (such as air-conditioning) to produce an elegant solution which at first glance seems “undesigned.”
Geoffrey Bawa, the Sri Lankan architect also uses the vernacular to produce an undesigned look which is deceptive as each and every element is carefully considered. In his Serendib Hotel, Bentota, 1971, the simple long line of tiled roofs disguise the sophisticated sections and courtyard which lead from one space to another.

Section

Courtyard near the entrance
A recent work, 1986, the Arts and Science Faculties at the University of Ruhunu, Matara, embodies Bawa’s ideas on materials and space. Technical aspects are carefully dealt with as is the building design and movement through space, where covered passages, pavilions and verandas are an intrinsic part of the design concept.

The architect’s use of traditional imagery brings together a local and personal eclectic taste producing a complex rich in references and meaning. In this approach Bawa points the way for a seminal architecture for Southeast Asia and the wet-humid regions.

Walkway under construction

Science Faculty building

Detail of layered roof construction.
I begin with a brief apology to you. I only received Hasan-Uddin Khan’s paper moments before the session commenced so I am unable to reply in these off-the-cuff comments, to its great nuance. I will however respond somewhat obliquely — but I hope germainly — to some of the points he makes, particularly points about the conflicts between the “universal” and the “particular” and other dilemmas of this question of regionalism. I also would like to pledge to you that in my remarks I will observe what has emerged as the first rule of critical practice in this discussion which is, “do not speak about that which you have not seen”.

This puts me at something of a disadvantage since my architectural knowledge springs largely from my experiences in the West. However, one of the reasons that this discussion on regionalism has become so fervently joined both where I come from and where many of you come from, is that certain meanings in architecture that all of us hold dear, have become in recent time radically destabilised and we are left in a kind of quandary of meaning. It is a mistake to think that this destabilisation is the product of what has been called modernism, rather the root of this difficulty lies in what used to be called modernisation by certain sociologists.

This threat is an extremely thorough going one. It isn’t simply a threat to the stability of images, it is a threat to an entire system of knowing things. It is in fact what philosophers would called an “epistemological” difficulty that we are confronted with. Modernisation has proposed a whole series of essentially new ways of knowing the world and architects are obliged to confront this situation.

I offer you an image of something which I have seen recently. On getting off the aircraft in Malta, we were whisked into town in a taxi. My initial thoughts were of course “Ah, we are not in New York anymore”, as I observed the sharply volumetric planar Mediterranean buildings that I saw en-route. However, I realised on further inspection that although we were not in New York anymore, there were certain incrustations on these buildings that had a familiar aspect; atop these bold Mediterranean forms, there was a forest of television antennas. This was something with which I was indeed familiar from my own experience. Indeed if one travels in rural America, one sees a kind of comparable phenomenon in the backyards of houses in every dell and hollow where have grown, as mushrooms after the rain, enormous satellite receiver dishes, which presumably are tuned into exactly the same electronic emanations that penetrate these Mediterranean houses in Malta. I would like to argue to you that one of the things that architects must confront is the presence of this incredibly powerful instrument for the transformation of consciousness, both of architects and global citizens.

There is an American novelist of whom I am quite fond, called Don DeLillo, who I recommend to you all. In his most recent novel, White Noise, the following sentence appears: “For most people there are only two places on earth, where they live and their television set. If something happens on television, people have the right to find it fascinating, whatever it is”. Let me, by way of making this point, use a little bit of a kind of television epistemology for you. You may be aware of the phrase “couch potato”, a current term in the United States. A “couch potato” is a chronic, indeed narcotically addicted viewer, of television. The location speaks for itself.

I offer you a brief discourse on the “couch potato’s way of knowledge”. The characteristic mode of consumption of television by the “couch potato” is recumbent in the couch, grasping the electronic “zapper box” which enables him or her to whizz through the frequencies at will. What is created by this set of transformations of the television, each time, is in fact a fresh artifact. Every “watching” of television yields its characteristic reading and every reading is different. Amazing and distressing effects develop from this mode of consuming knowledge.
Characteristically, even without "zapping", we in America are habituated to seeing incredible spectacles of juxtaposition on television. For example, the image on the evening News of poor babies in Ethiopia suffering from starvation, is immediately followed by an advertisement for the cat food promoted by Morris the finicky Gourmet Cat. Equally, the spectacle of bodies on the battle fields outside Basra is followed immediately by an advertisement for the latest in feminine deodorants. We all snigger at this and at some level we know that these juxtapositions are ludicrous in their quality. However in the context of the culture that produces them, we are so habituated to this style of juxtaposing that the ludicrousness is erased. The basis for the "couch potato's" way of knowledge is precisely in this system which is dedicated to a constant broadening of the range of images which can be juxtaposed and still comfortably be held within culture.

Inversely, one might argue, that the product of this system is precisely the idea that any combination is not only as meaningful as any other, but any combination is as meaningless as any other. The forms that grow from this "couch potato's" way of knowledge is the product of a culture that spawns form, after recombinant form, each of which is totally new, on the other hand, each of which is totally familiar.

By extension, I choose this word "recombinant" with some malice aforeshadowed because we also live in an age of gene splicing and DNA research in which scientists are able, on a daily basis, to create in their laboratories, new recombinant organisms, unseen previously on the planet. The critical question which remains, in confronting these newly spawned organisms, is whether or not these orchestrated genetic accidents constitute species or freaks. I would argue to you that we live at a time in which scientific advances and advances in the dissemination of knowledge have totally dislocated our way of apprehending the content of our architecture.

If I could switch at this point from epistemological to ontological terrain, what we are confronting here, is a culture in which the simulation, to use the fashionable term, is privileged. The way in which Baudrillard defines simulation is quite simple. Simulation amounts to the notion that signs for the real are in every instance substituted for the real itself.

This is the main point that I would bring to you; in this culture of simulation, the simulacra, the products of this process of invention, are essentially indistinguishable from what we are habituated to consider to be, in the words of the Coca Cola Company "the real thing". The instances of this simulacrum are numerous and I will only list a few. Certainly, we know, for example, that as American consumers, we are confronted in the supermarket everyday with so called natural foods which are in fact compounds of petrochemicals.

Equally, to give a more serious example, I must admit to a certain failing, which is a fondness for aviation. I receive an aviation magazine and I am always amazed to discover in this magazine, the latest details of the simulators that the aircraft companies are able to build, in which the experience of space for the trainee pilot is nominally as palpable, as tactile, as real, as the experience of real space itself. Of course, one gets ultimately to the inevitable architectural or architectural beaute-noire of this train of thinking, which is to say "Disneyland".

Disneyland, which is an easy mark at some levels, is a more difficult mark at others. We all know that Disneyland is no more, in a certain way, than a hideous tissue of lies. On the other hand, citizens of the United States know fully well that Disneyland is in many respects, a far more satisfactory version of a certain reality than reality itself. It is not messy; people of one's own class are present behaving themselves; the architecture is carefully orchestrated and indeed there is a kind of artificial sense of commonality that exists in the streets of Disneyland, that probably doesn't exist in the crime and crisis racked streets of our "normal" cities.

Let me back track a little bit because one of the obvious key problematics that has come out of this conference so far, is the question of authenticity. Authenticity is obviously an extremely difficult and problem fraught concept. Professor Inglott offered a kind of simple and basic definition of authenticity that I would like to refer to. What he suggested is that, in essence, any citizen knows what authenticity is, because authenticity does no more than represent itself for what it is. It seems simple enough I would like to argue that in the context of simulation, though, the kind of judgement implicit in the ability to make this statement is totally eviscerated. If we can no longer tell the difference, even this simple idea of authenticity is radically destabilised.

At some level we know that we are forced to confront a series of inauthentic objects and yet we know, on the other hand, that they are not only indistinguishable from the authentic object but in many ways superior. There is another theme park in the United States which is interestingly enough directly across the road from old colonial Williamsburg, a place called Busch Gardens and the advertising for this theme park goes "its just like Europe, only closer". Terms have shifted.

Let me now introduce another term here, to bring this back to the architectural ground, because I think this turn of phrase somehow encapsulates some of the dilemma that I think we are trying to speak
about here, and that is the concept of "creative geography". This is a location that was coined by the great Soviet film director Lev Kuleshov in the early 1920s. Kuleshov's problems - which led to this coinage - was as follows: He was sitting one day in Leningrad hoping to make a film. One of the settings that he needed to include in this film, was Washington D.C. He was, for a variety of reasons, unable to go to Washington D.C to film, therefore, he adopted the following strategy. By assembling through montage a series of shots drawn from places in and around Leningrad, he was able to create cinematically the simulacrum of Washington D.C. He was able to have Washington D.C., as good as Washington D.C., without actually being in Washington D.C.

I think this condition of creative geography has become the given environment of architectural space making. Precisely the problematic that is raised by the question of simulation. So the question for critics and those who would judge architecture is precisely this: how do we judge a satisfying mendacity? How do we judge a lie that gives us pleasure?

I know that Socrates was taking it a bit on the nose earlier in this session. This is essentially the problem that Socrates confronted; if literature, which is what he was interested in, was essentially a construct of lies, how did one confront this double problem of being confronted on the one hand by its pleasures, its seductive aspect and on the other hand by our immediate knowledge that what was being presented to us, was inauthentic, that in fact it was a lie? Socrates as, twenty-five hundred years of philosophy now atest, veered off in the wrong direction and founded a school of idealism which we all now repudiate whenever we have a chance. However the problems that Socrates confronted, is exactly the same problem that creative geography creates for all of us. That is to say, in a global culture in which there is no region, what is the authenticity of regionalism?

Certainly this is one of the problems that modernism sought to confront in its early days. Modernism might be said to be the legatee, the heir of the Socratic tradition, in that its interest was in proposing an essentialism in architecture; an architecture paired to its minimum conditions, a kind of degree zero of architecture; an architecture that could be considered to be the "universal solution".

I noted with interest that Hasan-Uddin Khan's description of a school in Malika - accompanying his slide presentation - was a kind of litany of the most fundamental modernist tenets. It was "replacable, economic, light and airy". I think the phrases might well have been spoken by any of the great godfathers of modernism. That is one possibility.

The second possibility is the value, that is promoted most seminally in the United States, which is the so-called value of pluralism; which is to say the value of no value at all.

Let me tell you a little architectural anecdote by way of invoking my response to pluralism. This is drawn from my experiences as a Professor of design at Yale University, which was formerly graced by the deanship of Charles Moore. I used to commute up to Yale University from New York city a couple of times a week and I would be obliged to go to the studio where I was offering instruction by passing through the studios of the other professors. I always found this trip to be a highly troubling experience. I would pass by projects that were being made for sub-urban office buildings in some kind of devoluted modernist costume. There was another professor who was doing a gentlemen's club on a constrained urban site. Just next door to my own studio there was a whole class that was turning out riding academies after the manner of Michael Graves and finally I would get to my own studio where, at least the work was a little more inexplicable, in terms of those categories.

What was problematic about this, is exactly what is difficult about television, which is to say, not that there is anything intrinsically insidious about a classical order. It is just that my own work became devalued by its comparability. Much as any two images on television are interchangeable, and are pared of their values by precisely this interchangeability; the work that I was doing, which I believed in, which I thought was invested with a whole panoply of responsible, social, political and aesthetic values, was debased by definition.

To move to another point raised by Hasan-Uddin Khan. Kitsch is the anti-modern face of modernism itself. It stands in a dialectic relationship to modernism. It owes its existence to modernism and its discontents. We are besotted in the western architectural press with a whole series of architectures that pre-suppose the invention of some sort of origin tale about architecture. The number of articles published about Adam's House in Paradise and the idea of the primitive hut is absolutely staggering nowadays. Indeed this kind of romance of the primitive has been with us for a very long time and it is an understandable response in a destabilised era where there is a great searching for some touchstone of both ethical and cultural authenticity.

The by-product of this kind of investigation is of course the privileging of the idea of a whole set of architectural golden ages, whether it be the age of Sinan, or Brunelleschi. I would say that the television system that informs this whole operation is equally invested in the idea of this golden age; the
time when things were somewhat more seemless, the time of Vignola and "I Love Lucy", Herb Schiller, who is an interesting writer on the imperialist dimensions of the American media, notes with some perspicacity the way in which the product of the so-called American television golden age, has been dumped by way of colonial inducement, all over the third world.

One is reminded equally of visits to Mexico city; its streets lined with much venerated 57 Chevrolets and other detritus of our consumerist golden age. I feel this kind of approach to history as a terrain for pillage is exactly comparable. Indeed this is the Prince Charles syndrome in excelsis which we have also witnessed in a return of fundamentalist politics in the United States. If you followed the hearings of the late lamented Judge Bork, who was rejected for the Supreme Court, the issue there turned on Judge Bork's interpretation of the key document of the American golden age, which is to say, the Constitution. The question addressed to him was whether or not he was authentically interested in strict construction. We are confronted with a whole series of architectural Judge Bork's nowadays, who attempt under the banner of a dubious authenticity to force this idea of their own problematic strict constructions on the rest of us.

The main manifestation in American architecture culture is the idea of contextualism. We discuss this endlessly in the United States and indeed within our architectural discourse, the act of recall has been elevated to the most consequent architectural activity. I would say to you that when recall finds itself in such a position of power, the death of art is not very far behind. Indeed, this is further problematised by the obvious attempt to invent the context in what has been referred to as the context of no context.

Finally, I would say that another symptomatic reaction, which is a little more mixed and a little more difficult, is the worldwide movement for preservation. I am as friendly to preservation as the next person, certainly as a lover of architecture, one cannot but be friendly, to the preservation of its great monuments. It is clear that the movement for preservation is a by-product of this great destabilisation of values with which we are confronted. However the difficulty with the movement for preservation is precisely that it privileges the physical aspects of architecture over its other qualities. We are put in a situation where there is a certain inducement to re-acquire architectural forms in the context of our own culture, to re-acquire forms which have been wrested, sometimes with great violence, from any notion of their original context of meaning, the context of meaning that animated and invented them in the first place.

I certainly do believe, along with the modernists, that form follows function. I think that is something to be held in mind and I think what we are beginning to discover in this conference is that, this is a location, a formulation that only works if we understand function in a fairly catholic way. We must understand function as not simply being, in terms of the almost parodic style of the modernist manner, a question of sound plumbing and operating windows, but we must understand that the ideological function of architecture is one of its most consequential dimensions.

If we adopt this kind of spirit of expanded functionism, I think that we will be induced to resist architecture that offers instead of substance, the art of camouflage. We, as critics and architects, should be interested in an architecture that is simultaneously beautiful and critical.

If I could address something briefly to comrade Dennis Sharp on this CICA. I am completely and adamantly opposed to his notion that a critic should be installed in the office of every architect, by way of being a kind of ideological Commissar to vet the designs for some standard of a correctness. Given the essentially double character of architecture which I have just proposed to you; simultaneously an artistic enterprise and an inevitable, inescapable map of social relations, then if the critic is to sit in anybody's office, it should be in David Rockafeller's or Ronald Reagan's. He or she should stay as far as possible from the offices of the architect, both by way of preserving the critic's independence of operation and the free thinking of the architect. I am reminded by analogy of a current development in the United States; the installation of what are called in an appalling Orwellian locution "ethicists" in our great hospitals. They sit by the beds of patients who are sustained by life support systems and deliberate with themselves and the doctors as to whether the moment has come to turn off the switch and terminate the poor patient's life.

I don't think this is a fit role for critics of architecture but I hope that we can find some more fitting ones in the course of these discussions.
Richard England

The title of this session “Traditional Approaches to Contemporary Architecture” prompts me to introduce to you some of my own work in Malta because I believe my whole approach is compatible with the title. I believe an architect should show what he has done with his own buildings, not in order to suggest that he has found the right solution, but at least to show that in manifest built form, he has attempted to find a solution. In all my buildings there is an attempt to relate to the “spirit of place” of my native island. The parameters of my design process fall very much within a traditional approach towards the establishment of an expression of contemporary regional architecture.

If we are to talk of an architecture which relates to a particular place it seems necessary to briefly examine the place itself. Malta is an island which today is still fortunate to have retained its building tradition, both in terms of materials, i.e. stone, and also the craftsman’s skill. This means that when one is using traditional materials today, one is not indulging in nostalgic revivals of a dead past or veneer facades to obtain stage-set effects, but one is making use of a living contemporary local technology.

In my approach towards regionalism, there is a continuous use in whole or in part of the local limestone material, not only because one is seeking to create a sense of continuity with the past, but because it is still the most easily worked, readily available, and economically priced building material on the island.

I have always believed in an expression of an architecture of regionalism relating specifically to a process of evolution as opposed to revolution. The particular qualities and properties of Malta indicate that the following of, or the extension of, living traditions is the sole correct and logical solution available. What is required is to look forward but also to reach backward in producing an expression of architecture of continuity within change. I strongly believe that without a past no expression of architecture can have a future. In all my work, there is an attempt to create an architecture based on the philosophy of a new leaf not a new tree! The intention is to graft buildings to essential basic regional roots whilst utilising as much as possible ethnic materials. This manifests my belief that architects must relate to and evolve their work from the particular “spirit of place”; be truly regional, adhere to scale and yet produce an expression that is essentially of today. In projects such as the Salina Bay Hotel

Limestone units grouped in quarry before transportation to building sites.

Typical Maltese Cluster of cube houses around church as the focal point traditional townscape.
and the Ta’ Monita Tourist Village. I have tried to obtain an expression which in Rifat Chadirji’s words is “technically progressive” (in relation to the island) “yet culturally conservative”, in the sense that to conserve means to keep alive.

Wherever an architect works, he needs hands that see and eyes that feel, together with an essential dose of good manners, in trying to produce an integrated tapestry of time and place woven into a contemporary fabric of identity. I once again would like to stress what I said at the opening of the seminar. “It is imperative that in the exiguous proportions of an environment as small and fragile as Malta (or for that matter anywhere) an architect must perform in the dual role of designer of the future and defender of the past.”

The Marina San Gorg Tourist Apartments at St. Georges Bay demonstrates an attempt to create an expression of continuity, based on the common historical and traditional roots which connect the new buildings to their neighbouring surroundings and the environment in general. The new attempts to establish a relationship with both the physical and cultural background of the old of this particular site. The treatment of the existing military barracks, an imported cultural baggage which has now become part of the overall local identity, is echoed in the new building. It is an exercise, carved in the traditional ochre coloured stone of Malta, relating today’s expression to the legacy of tradition. Here is a wedding of old and new in both composition and materials; an attempt to create a total contextual fabric of identity. This is an architecture of “dialogue” between the site as it was and as it is now, with the insertion of the new building. By mixing the tenses of the site, the project illustrates that architecture is a journey which involves the past, present and the future. It also demonstrates that in architecture, whilst there is a time to be bold, there is more often a time to be humble and furthermore that the most
basic and essential quality in any architectural gesture is that of respect towards the site and its existing surroundings. With this approach of contextualism the prime objective of the architect becomes one of defending and preserving the past. It was T S Eliot who said, "the past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past".

The Festaval Tourist Village on the north coast of the island, is conceived as a discreet architectural insertion into the surrounding flowing landscape, under the solid walls of a centuries old defensive tower. I have always felt that the basic failure of the International Style stemmed from the fact that modern architects spent too much time analysing joints in buildings forgetting, most of the time, the most important joint of all, that of the building to the site. seven floors are terraced into the sloping terrain between the dividing stone spine-walls, so that at no point does the building protrude more than one floor above the contours of the existing site. This is an attempt at a total integration of a building into its site; a manifestation of architecture laid out in a minimal system of balanced asymmetrical construction, which at the same time is an echo of the existing surrounding topography both in form and materials. This project reflects a determined effort to develop a commercially viable tourist architecture, which while climatically responsive, enhances as well as exploits the character of the site and region. The aim is to complement and extend the existing environmental values. In this light, I have always attempted to treat any new building operation as an exercise in conservation, which contributes to the essential character of the particular site, with a specific view towards not only the preservation of these values, but even more so their enhancement.

Crowning the hill which rises steeply from the fertile valley below the village of Manikata, on the northern side of the island, high above the solid, cubic houses, stands the Church of St. Joseph, a simple punctuation mark in the flowing landscape. The tra-
ditional relationship of curved building to cube, between the church and the surrounding urban dwelling forms in traditional complexes, is repeated in this design.

Manikata's origins lie rooted in the built form of the pre-historic temples of Malta. It also draws its form from the equally feminine florid shapes of the island's opulent baroque church domes, which dominate the cubic skyline of the characteristic Maltese townscape, and also from the primitive masonry order of rural toolsheds which dot the local countryside. All these images are combined together and injected into a design suitable, for a 20th century church, so that it can act as a bridge between the Malta of the past and that of the future — suspended in time and place, yet simultaneously very much of both.

This is a building which attempts a relevant borrowing from the ethnic-rooted culture belonging specifically to a place as opposed to Post-Modernism's indiscriminate hijacking of random elements from the pages of architectural history books.

Before "regionalism" became the fashionable concept that it is today, these works and similarly the buildings of Rifat Chadirji in Iraq, Aris Konstantinides in Greece, Geoffrey Bawa in Sri Lanka, Farruai and DeMazieres in Morocco, and a handful of others, attempted to create an expression of contemporary architecture, based on historical and traditional roots, which crystallised the potential of the region and connected buildings to both their physical and cultural backgrounds. These expressions are in no way to be understood as a desire to halt progress or the way to the future. As man becomes more mobile in an ever-shrinking global-village civilisation, he is developing an increasing awareness of the value of roots; which are recognised not only as a vital psychological need, but even more, in order to successfully relate our species to a basic sociocultural existence and location in both time and space. Identity can only be found through a process of analysis of the region in its place and in its time.

It was Paul Ricoeur who said, "the problem is not simply to repeat the past but rather to take root in it, in order to ceaselessly invent the future". Drawing both from the physical and memory data banks an expression of architecture should vary according to place, just as fruit varies according to the soil in which its seed is planted.

In concluding I would stress that it is not necessary to label an expression of architecture as "traditional", "regional", "modern" or "post-modern". The prime and essential requisite is that a work of architecture belongs to its particular place in time and is created in such a way that it may be termed above all "appropriate" and "relevant" to first of all its surroundings and then to its users.

Photographs courtesy of Richard England

Abu H. Imamuddin

Listening throughout the deliberations, I have been wondering what should be the criteria for criticism of architecture in the Third World context where there is a growing dominance of imported symbols over the local ones. If 'symbol making' is one of the main objectives of architecture, then the pertinent question is who makes what kind of symbol, for whom and for what purpose.

In the recent past, we have been overwhelmed by the ideas and ideals of western art and architecture. Quality of architecture (at least officially) is measured by the extent, use and application of western elements or concepts in shaping, organising and delineating the built environment. Appreciation for those buildings or structures remains limited to
architects who were mostly responsible for such developments and to those educated middle and upper class people who are their main consumers and who have an affinity for western culture as opposed to their own (through the influence of their education, training and the media). They are in the majority in government and decision making bodies and it is only natural that a building, quite out of context, may be readily accepted. One such example is the Capital Complex at Sher-e-Bangla, Dhaka designed by Louis Kahn. It has been referred to by Romi Khosla in his presentation as a strong symbol making building of our region.

Now let us see, in what context the building is placed. Dhaka is an old city. Traditionally religious buildings in this region played a dominant role in symbol making. Mosque structures were the landmark in Mughal and pre-Mughal periods and these were often placed within spacious gardens standing free in relation to nature. Now, looking at urban vernacular architecture in this region we see examples of people-built mosques, with the use of a variety of colours, texture and form which expresses the local people’s choice.

In the old part of the city one sees the vernacular domestic architecture of Dhaka. At different times, different elements have been used to delineate the building facades. The buildings are generally built
very compactly in a harmonious order. Often there are interventions of modern buildings in the traditional fabric, trying to establish a new balance.

The Central Mosque of Dhaka (the Baitul Mukarram Mosque) is a modern building and a landmark in the city. Though built by professionals, the building has a limited architectural significance, yet it is a very popular building and highly appreciated by the ordinary people. In relation to this our Capitol Complex stands at the opposite pole.

The National Assembly Complex was originally commissioned by a dictator to proclaim his brand of guided democracy. The commission was given to an architect well versed in Roman architecture, but he may have had very little opportunity to know about Bengali architecture.

It seems that the reference he has taken to develop the design is from Roman architecture. The spaces created are more in conformity with Roman traditional scale which expressed the power and dignity of the Roman Empire. One wonders whether Bangladesh, a poverty stricken Third World country needs a powerful image to symbolise its parliament.

Moreover, the form is self reliant, imposing and out of human scale in complete contradiction to the prevailing architecture of the city. It was designed like a castle, massive, inaccessible and segregated by
The Capital Complex is self-imposing and out of human scale — designed like a castle — massive, inaccessible and segregated by water bodies.

water bodies. It represents more a seat of despotic alien power than democracy, having little coherence with the culture and people of the country. This heroic architecture, made out of shapes of geometry, transmits very little to the ordinary people. To them, it is very ambiguous in nature and is only impressive to the extent of its official dignity as an Assembly building and massiveness of its structure. The building form is as meaningless to the people as are the intricacies of democracy.

The irony is that the building, on the contrary, has a profound influence on architects and students, as well as the elites. It is the monumentality that inspires them; in fact it is the monumentality that has become a powerful symbol of architecture, if not of its people and culture. The effect on local architecture is a growing tendency towards monumentality among architects (everybody is building monuments to themselves) rather than developing a harmonious architecture based on the study of indigenous design. Such a powerful symbol restraints the development of a humble local architecture.

Symbolism with official patronage and claiming authenticity for the same in many ways suppresses the natural organic growth of local architectural tradition. In our regional context, blind appreciation of imported models has become a general mode of architectural criticism.

Photographs courtesy of Abu H Imamuddin

Syed Zaigham Jaffery

Just to add to what Abu H. Imamuddin has been saying and to take the thrust of the discussions towards the topic of the seminar, I would like to point out a few things, about dealing with or indulging in architectural criticism in our societies. When I say our societies, I mean those in the Third World, and most Islamic countries are in the Third World.

Healthy and thriving architectural criticism implies that there is architecture in the environment which raises the need for evaluation and criticism to improve further: that there is an audience and that there is an awareness within this audience. Of course, none of this can be without a value base or an ideology. If you look closely or examine the
factors in most of our countries, you will find that most of these elements are missing.

Architects form a minority, serving, if they are active, an elite or only a small percentage of the population. Most of the architecture in our countries is not by architects. The audience, to which you could address your criticism, is limited. There are literacy rates of two to twenty percent, in very good cases, in populations of fifty to a hundred million. Within that two to twenty percent, not many are aware of the issues or values of architecture as critics would like or based on which we could probably criticise.

In fact, the opposite may be true: where the literate populations are westernised by education, their culturally invaded values try to dictate the outcome of the work that an architect produces. It has been said, that behind each bureaucrat, who wields the power to decide on our plans, is a Shah Jahan trying to create monuments to his own whims or his own interpretation of modernity or tradition. Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj Mahal, for those of you who might not know, was one of the greatest builders of the Mughal dynasty which ruled the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent for several hundred years.

How much, then, can the architect resist? Or should he refuse to work rather than tarnish his work by the elements demanded by the untutored and then subsequently perhaps go hungry? Should he bow to the pressures and apply the elements demanded by his clients and concretise their imaginative whims? Surely, one might say that the ideal would be the middle course, but that implies that the architect educates the client. How many of us have the time or the inclination to do that?

These are everyday issues for us. The contradictions are inherent. The form of criticism adopted in the west can therefore not be applicable in many of our countries. There are those in our countries who are powerful enough to deny work to the architect and they can also stifle criticism. In our context, the values differ: the framework is different and therefore, criticism’s hue must perforce be different in our cultures.

Thus, you cannot appreciate the Bhong Mosque in the air-conditioned cloisters of the World Bank. You have to experience the dirt, the flies and the dusty streets of Rahimyar Khan in order to appreciate the peace, the quiet and the visual feast of the Bhong Mosque’s interior and the exterior courtyards. The steps that rise from the dusty streets are steps that help you to transcend from the temporal to the permanent. Such an experience is actually a change in the state and the frame of mind, from materialism to spiritualism.

In his paper, Ismail Serageldin appeared angry at the efforts of the common man that achieved an AKAA Award. The Bhong Mosque represents a storehouse of symbols and forms for the masses who search for familiarity and moorings in a fast changing world over which they have no control. They search for their identity. They visit and internalise these visual symbols to rise above the mundaneness of everyday existence. It is after all, the House of God. For the gods then, everything, for He is Eternal. The plain, simpleness of the surrounding houses, is only for humans, the temporal and prone to disappearance tomorrow. Bhong Mosque represents not an abuse of decorative elements but a library of symbols from which one can draw inspiration. It is a repository of over thirty years of a labour of love, of spiritually satisfying work of local craftsman. It is obviously different in the texture of its skin from the surrounding houses. Similarly, Niono Mosque is different, in that it emphasises verticality; it is higher than the surrounding houses of men; for again, it is the House of God.

Bhong Mosque, and structures like it have therefore to be judged in their own political, socio-cultural, economic and aesthetic context. In other words, you cannot use a common framework for criticism. You cannot take the framework for the Niono Mosque and use it for the Saudi Development Fund Building in Jeddah, whatever the commonalities that you can ascertain, contrived or otherwise. If this is not done, criticism may not serve the purpose it is meant to. It will serve only to further confuse.

Another aspect which needs consideration is the context in which criticism can become valid or useful. Criticism or free evaluation implies not only an awareness, but also a certain type of freedom within a society. Where our most worthy clients are government or the economic barons, who wield equal power, and where criticism is equated with praise only, can we be critical safely? Can we criticise Louis Khan’s Assembly building, in Dhaka, in the way we can do it in Malta or in Greenwich village? If we can’t do that, then how do you raise the level of awareness in the place, in the context, where it will be useful?

Another peculiarity of the current literature in the field of architectural criticism is that it is not only within a framework, foreign to the context, it is also mostly about architectural work by western architects in eastern settings. Perhaps the current bevy of critics find it easier to pass judgements on these works because the framework is familiar.

All this points to the need to develop the subject of architectural criticism or evaluative methods within
architectural schools in our countries, or maybe by initiating workshops on a regional or national basis, where we can discuss the various contexts and arrive at our own framework for critical evaluation. An outcome of this seminar can be the development of such workshops in Islamic countries. Another could be the yearly publication of the best critical evaluation of Third World architectural works by Third World architects themselves, and the text of these evaluations could then be used for teaching evaluative criticism in our schools and by architects as well.

Brian Brace Taylor

I was impressed and encouraged by the enthusiasm with which most participants took up issues in the first seminar session, indeed freely indulging in criticism. I shared, unfortunately, our Maltese colleague’s frustration that so much time was spent on what he called two-dimensional criticism — the tall building; relatively less time was spent on developing a discussion around the role of the critic. We were all over the field, in my estimation, with “analogies” and “dichotomies” and the various “ISMS” in vogue. Can we not try to focus now on the useful ends, perhaps served by the critical endeavour?

I am an historian by training, but before I came to architecture I read literature and especially literary criticism; it was pointed out to me by Haluk Pamir, that literary criticism is different from architectural criticism. True enough; but we still pass (for the most part) by the written and the spoken word to express individual perceptions and values. Americans (children at least) are naive, but the first exercises in criticism we were given as students of literature were aimed at destroying — it was a strategy — a certain number of unthinkingly-accepted conventions and values (motherhood, the flag, etc.) acquired over 18 years of parental upbringing. After “demolition” came the conscious construction of frames of reference, the announced parameters of any analysis and evaluation undertaken. One was forced to try to be as clear as possible in separating out pure description (“objectiveness”, historical presentation of the “facts”) from the judgemental.

A crucial obstacle to be overcome in any attempt to be constructively critical is to bring the words as close as possible to the object or phenomena, being presented; a poem, a building, physical gesture in dance, an emotionally charged space. As an historian I have tried, through various indepth case-studies, over the years, to reconstruct the processes by which exemplary buildings got built; as a critic, I have tried to draw meaningful lessons for the present (and future perhaps) from these. In both inst-

ances, once one has put ink to paper, one has defined a position at a particular moment in time. “Frozen it” as Romi Khosla put it. It represents a step, positive one hopes, in a continuing process of dialogue with present circumstances and existing precedents. It is this critical endeavour that contributes to what Peter Davey called, and Suha Ozkan rightly re-emphasised, a regenerative exercise.

The critic has a role to play as interpreter (outside the principal actors) with the necessity of making people aware of the complex factors involved, the values at play, and posing the questions that may assist in formulating relevant meanings, in pointing out systems of thinking, or the acquired preferences we call tastes.

There is a need to establish a critical “distance”, not first-person recounting; architects testimony (especially if living) is one source, but it needs filtering. “Abstracting” is a technique employed.

I am hopeful that in the discussions that we can focus more and more on the tools of the critic, which are the words he uses and the question of communication. It is not just a problem of different language – Arabic or French or English, but also the languages we want to use, the building blocks, for finding relevant meanings.

Let me close with one or two remarks about regionalism. I am in a minority for being sceptical of the term “regionalism”. I find it an extremely vague term to use in a critical sense. I was impressed by an essay by Kenneth Frampton in which he talked of critical regionalism which he readily admitted was not a happy term and one he wished to find alternatives for. The phenomena he described are still relevant. The term regionalism is vague except in certain circumstances — such as Malta which is an island culture.

Most of the world does not have these geographical constraints. The tendency encouraged by the architect Chadirji is to justify one’s source of inspiration. This is best left to the historians or critics. The term regionalism does not advance theoretical discussions very far, except in justifying certain particularisms. What useful purpose is served by showing one’s credentials?
Charles Moore

Almost everybody seems to be talking as though architects and critics form some beautiful seamless whole; some wonderful package coming together. I function as an architect much of the time, as a critic less of the time, and I don't detect quite such a happy union between the groups.

I went to architecture school and I know the images that we were given there; people we wanted to follow. I did not attend an architectural critic's school, but I presume that the image that the architectural critic must be given in whatever school he goes to, is of Procrates, the Roman inn keeper, who invited in guests and then chopped off their upper or lower extremity's to fit the bed, rather than fitting the bed to them.

To seems to me that the favourite critical pastime is to invent some format, whether it is critical regionalism or decorative late post-modernism or something equally loathsome and discover that the architect in question that is, oneself, fits that perfectly and that oneself is therefore loathsome. Or to take an alternative format, regionalism (not critical) and discover that one does not fit that and therefore has to have his hands and feet cut off to make him fit. I would like to suggest that this is not satisfactory to the one who is having his hands and feet cut off.

I would like to discuss now how we are going to bring the bone of architectural criticism to Islam and how to do this without dismembering all the architects in Islam in the process. I hope that we can work out in what framework we are operating; both architects and society at large. I hope there is still some residue of bitterness and pain left from Michael Sorkin's remarks so that we can have some questions and responses.

Haluk Pamir

Regarding Michael Sorkin's ideas, I can say that it was an effective type of criticism, which we are not very familiar with; that fast talking, pouring out of ideas; different and conflicting ideas. That is very creative and it helps other people's thinking. It works for some people, including myself.

However the cultural critique he made isn't really fitting for my background. We only have one 12-hour channel and that is highly controlled. The way information is processed both in daily life and on television, which in Turkey is a representation of life and not its critique, is very different from that of Michael Sorkin's context.

I think the cultural difference is one side. His other argument was that pluralism should be dead by now and that we should have functionalism; that we should revert to form follows function again. Since we have critics amongst us who criticised that issue long ago, ie., form follows function, I believe that they should use this chance of replying, so that some unhappy recurrences won't take place.

Form follows function has many connotations, including those that lead to the previous International Modern Movement. Is that what we are seeking at the moment? One should very clearly define the terms of architecture that one is using.

In terms of regionalism, I would like to question what definition of regionalism are we talking about? Turkey for example is an Islamic culture, ninety-nine percent of the population are Muslims (at least it is written on people's Identity Cards). We are a Mediterranean culture and we are a democratic culture as well. We are also trying to become an open society. That is a culture which can be regionally interpreted as it is different from other democratic cultures. There is a different heritage; an Anatolian heritage which is a different Mediterranean outlook. So it is difficult to talk about regionalism in a narrow sense.
In Turkey we had a period not of direct colonialism but there were western influences on Turkish architecture. It is hard to say that that is to be forgotten. It is as valid as other architectural propositions. It could be true for other cultures' as well. This is a critique of narrow regionalist attitudes.

Mohammed Arkoun

I should perhaps keep silent since I have just arrived and I apologise for being a little impatient to intervene in these discussions. I am a member of the Steering Committee and I have had the privilege to work in these Awards for eight years. What I have heard reminds me of many things which have already been said, in preceding seminars.

I take the liberty to speak now, although I missed, unfortunately, the first seminar session. I came from another meeting in Paris on a subject which is linked to our subject here. It was a meeting on the Mediterranean as a specific region of study. It is a very interesting initiative taken by the former Minister of Agriculture in France, who is now the councillor for President Mitterand. It shows that this interest in regionalism is not something particular to our endeavour in the Aga Khan Award, but is something more important, about which politicians at the highest level, are taking an interest.

We are working in the Aga Khan Award for Islamic Architecture, to try to understand what is going on in the Islamic world where there are many societies which need to be understood and studied with new approaches and with another vocabulary. We have been looking at this in the Aga Khan Award, for at least ten years.

What I have heard does not answer precisely this aim which is absolutely central to our endeavours in the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. This meeting on criticism in architecture could be taking place, in view of what we have heard, in Baltimore, in Bloomington, or in Los Angeles and we are using a vocabulary in the criticism of architecture, just as it is used in a general context among architects. I am used to being a disturbing voice in meetings like this because I am not an architect. I am a historian of Islamic thought and I look at this problem from a different viewpoint to the architects.

When we speak about traditional approaches to contemporary architecture and we are looking at tradition in the Islamic world, we really have to use another vocabulary, another methodology, because it is different. The historical evolution of the two worlds, of the western world and the Islamic world are totally different. We have said this several times in previous seminars.

When we present for example, the Mausoleum of Mohamad V in Rabat, as it has been presented by Hasan-Uddin Khan, we should immediately explain the place and the scale in which this Mausoleum is existing in an Islamic society today; very much influenced by western models of life, culture, ideology, institutions and aesthetic criteria. We should immediately say that this Mausoleum is not perceived as a monument by Moroccans because the generation of Moroccans who look to this Mausoleum today, are in fact cut off from traditional values and representations; in Morocco as well as in other Muslim societies sixty percent of the population are less than twenty years old.

The demographic pattern is significant and affects all levels of social, cultural and political life.

This is a fact that we should know and understand. Tradition, for this very young generation, has not at all the meaning that we give to tradition when we speculate as intellectuals from outside, I mean from the more or less romantic view of Westerners on the Islamic world as far as arts, architecture and religious life are concerned. I do not mean by this that we should follow the fundamentalist positions on this matter but rather that we have to show how traditional values are used as ideological, abstract claims and slogans more than as living, substantial activities in an integrated society. I am pointing to a new psycho-social analysis of the aesthetic values in a Muslim environment. This is not done by scholars specialising in Islamic studies; it is done even less by architects who are foreigners to Muslim societies and social sciences.

I heard the word authenticity and we have heard this word so many times in previous seminars. I would like to kill this word. I apologise for speaking like this. I express with this brutal language a very hard struggle inside Muslim societies within the last twenty years. It is not at all relevant, not sociologically, culturally and intellectually relevant. Why is it used so often and so easily? Why do Westerners use it in the same uncritical way as Muslims do for apologetic constraints and aims? This is the first question to be asked before using the vocabulary of Muslims without a critical inquiry on how a social language is produced by groups to hide real issues. This is extremely important. It is not sufficient to show any so called traditional monument anywhere and to say that there is something authentic.

I was here in Malta, in 1979, as an organiser of a seminar, convened by the Sorbonne to study the Mediterranean societies. You can read the proceedings of what we said, as historians, ethnographers, anthropologist and linguists, gathered to study an example of a Mediterranean society.
The problem of Mediterranean identity is one of the relevant problems that we discussed. When we look at architecture here, or in Algeria, in South Italy or in Sicily, we are concerned with the Mediterranean quality of all the culture and not only architecture. This is very relevant and we are trying now to understand the Mediterranean identity in a multidisciplined approach, not a singular approach.

Oleg Grabar, although absent, is with us in spirit. He has been a member of the Steering Committee and he used to say that architects cannot speak for more then five minutes without slides. This is important because when we speak on criticism, we have to analyse and work out concepts. We have to deepen the concepts that we are using and for this we need the mind more than slides. What I mean by this is that the methodology of criticism in architecture is not so different from literary criticism, or criticism in history, in music or in philosophy. Are architects entitled to work outside this intellectual concern? It is a question, not a polemic statement.

What are we doing, as historians, when we read an historic or a literary text? We don’t look at the words in a limited concrete space as we do with slides, seeing just the form totally isolated from the cultural, social, historical and philosophical environment. Working out a concept embraces all these disciplines. The architectural act is a culturally total act, involving all aspects of the life in a given society. You can’t avoid these aspects when you criticise some building taking place in a space, in a city, or in an historical development. You can’t avoid all the sociological, historical, literary, religious, ideological, economic and demographic aspects in Muslim society today. These are the methodological requirements of any criticism; and criticism in architecture cannot be limited to the consideration of forms, volumes, material elements and physical space.

We have to elaborate a vocabulary because in the Aga Khan Award, we have repeated several times for the past ten years, that we are looking for a relevant vocabulary that can be used to find procedures and explanations. Why are we organising these seminars? We do so to take advantage of the experience of the participants to elaborate a kind of dictionary that the Steering Committee and the Master Jury will use when they award prizes to the projects nominated for each cycle of the AKAA. It is a practical aim and not just an exercise for one seminar. I remind you of this because it is the responsibility of the Award to initiate a search for a modern, human environment in the Muslim world, instead of the anarchic activity of building that we observe in many societies in the last thirty years.

I would like to come back to the problem of tradition in Muslim society. Try to imagine that we have among us here some Muslims (those Muslims who represent the majority of Muslim society today) who are described in all the newspapers and on television in western societies, as “fundamentalist Muslims”. They represent the large majority of the population aiming, as you know, to stop the politics of westernisation in all fields of life. What would their reaction be to the very sophisticated western criticism, in the humanistic American language used by Michael Sorkin for example? I understand and like his humour but it could lead to dangerous misunderstandings and reactions because it has no relevant link with the real issues of Muslim tradition. I am not taking the position of the “fundamentalists”, but I am explaining that we need in the AKAA a language adapted to our subject and our concerns.

I know that some of you will be hurt by what I am trying to insert in our discussions; I am even raising misunderstandings because I refer to Muslim tradition without explaining what this means and refers to. I wrote a long article on this topic for the AKAA Granada seminar in 1986 and unfortunately I cannot repeat it all here.

Something of the Arab tradition survives here in Malta; but we did not come to Malta for that reason. We came here to look at something which is Mediterranean at least. Mediterranean character concerns many Arab Muslim societies as well as Christian, Jewish and Western societies. This is a useful approach for one should not forget that many characteristics of architecture are related to a culture known, developed and used much before Islam appeared in the area. This is not well recognised by Muslims themselves. Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Greece, Southern Italy, Southern France are as relevant as North Africa, Palestine, Syria and Egypt.

Then we have to raise the problem, not of tradition, but of the rupture with the tradition, of the disappearance of tradition and we have something very delicate to analyse, which is extremely important and relevant to our search. All Muslim people today, and there are millions, are living in a kind of psychological drama because in all the current Islamic discourses on any subject - architecture, politics, economics or culture - they have this position between the claim for a tradition which they feel has been a very rich one of Muslim civilisation in the classical age, but at the same time when they claim this, they know that this tradition is destroyed. They have no access to it. This tradition exists in an ideological discourse. It exists in the collective imaginaire, as we say in French, and it has a psychosocial collective function.

The over-valuation of tradition is a compensation to the "cultural aggression", al-ghazwalfikn, as we say in Arabic, coming from the civilisation of the west,
from the impact of the models set and imposed by the West through colonial domination in architecture, literature, political institutions and economics; at all levels of life. The Mediterranean world represents not only Muslims on the south coast of Mediterranean, but also the European societies I mentioned. They are complaining and using the same language as Muslims because the technology imposed by the North ignores the specificity of Mediterranean Civilisation.

The Mediterranean world is satellite by the West led by America; I cannot develop this point and you will accuse me of using political language but I am speaking of traditional cultures facing technological forces of production which are ruining societies. Architecture is under the control of technology – you know the consequences for the Muslim world.

Architects are taking part in this game of forces and we can't neglect this. That is why we have to include these facts in criticism of architecture in the Muslim society today. Any architectural act produced in a Muslim societal space should take into account all these aspects. I know that architects refuse to enter into these more or less political considerations; they prefer to keep away from them but they know how they contribute to strengthen the ideological forces acting in all societies.

I would urge that you move in this direction, that you help the AKAA Steering Committee and the Master Jury, now in its fourth cycle to make awards to architectural projects which have been built in the last ten or twenty years in the Islamic world which respond to the perspectives of criticism I have suggested and not only to the form of a nice house built somewhere for a rich man for example. That is not the main aim.

I apologise again for speaking like this. I do it as an historian of Islamic thought and more than that as a member of Muslim society, eager to contribute to a better life in our societies. I share very much the ideals and concerns of His Highness who gives us this opportunity to exchange views with such freedom. I am sure all of you share with me in applauding the generosity of His Highness who had this rich idea to serve the Muslim world today through architecture – an exalting activity.

Michael Sorkin

My goodness! That is a hard act to follow as we say in our poor bankrupt, colonising culture. I certainly am delighted to find Professor Mohammed Arkoun in essential agreement with the three main points that I attempted to make though I must defer to the volume of his eloquence which I could never hope to equal. However I reiterate the three points; first, I agree with him about the exhaustion of the idea of authenticity and I support the notion that we purge it forthwith from our vocabularies.

I equally support the necessity for seeing the architectural act as a totalising one embracing the whole panoply of cultural understanding and finally I couldn't concur more with the destructiveness of the colonial experience and indeed my talk was in some measure an attempt to deconstruct certain aspect of this colonisation.

To the other two speakers who also responded to what I have said; first to my friend Haluk Pamir; he underestimates the coloniser if he thinks that Turkey has but one channel. I recall my last visit there and that there was not merely one channel on television, there was copious Coca Cola, innumerable buildings in Ankara which seem to have been designed by Louis Khan and a University that was described as being the MIT of the Middle East. As to this notion of a kind of comprehensive functionalism that I was limning, if vaguely; I am attempting to describe something that embraces several aspects of the idea of regionalism that are being talked about here. Certainly, there can be no disputing that one of the reasons for the rise of the discourse on regionalism in recent years is exactly as a point of resistance to the culture of the coloniser. This is relevant to us precisely because it attempts to inform ideological considerations in the discussion of architecture.

Finally to Brian Taylor who commented about my use of analogy as a mode of argument. I am surprised at this. His remarks depend on two of the most prominent and historic myths that architecture has cherished. One of them is the myth of architecture's autonomy within culture. It is precisely to address this fatigued notion that the kind of self primitivation that I spoke of is involved; the ideal that somehow the incrustation of culture that has accumulated around architecture can be stripped away and architecture revealed in its pristine naked autonomous elegance. I reject this reading.

Secondly his comments participated somewhat – which is surprising for an historian – in the myth of objectivity. One thing that recent developments at the Sorbonne, among other places, in the study of history, reveal to us, is that history is written by its proprietors. There is no unitary reading of the historic. It is an invention of those that control it.

Pierre Vago

I have a feeling that I am the only member of this distinguished assembly who is not English speaking
or English educated. I am from France and I feel that I should say some words at this stage of the discussion.

Some of us came here for a meeting on architectural criticism. I would like to ask you all to adhere to the subject in dispute. Architectural criticism is a very difficult problem and we have a lot to say about it. I hope that we will avoid, creating artificial conflicts between west and east, cultural and non-cultural participants.

It happens that I am from the Mediterranean. I am an architect and I was an architectural critic. In this position, I think that one thing is really necessary and that is to try to avoid misunderstandings by very different interpretation of the same words.

One of those is tradition and the other is regionalism. What is regional? What is Islamic? Is Islam as it appears from some interventions, a region, or is it a religion? It is very difficult to say that a big modern bank should be Islamic architecture. It is nonsense! In fact we must try to find definitions, through words and not through images. This is a very wise thing, precisely in order to avoid misunderstandings; if the same expression covers completely different notions then we may never come a step nearer to the solution for our problems. It would be nice to come to some understanding and I hope in a friendly way. Yes, in a friendly way!

Haluk Pamir

I am participating in this seminar to discuss how architectural criticism can be handled by new architectural movements that are developing in Islamic countries. Of course that goes with establishing a critical mentality in such countries. Mohammed Arkoun’s contribution explained the need for such a critical mentality, however, his examples might not go well with the architectural issues. It doesn’t really give strength or meaning to the architectural issues.

The criticism by Michael Sorkin needs to be responded to. He was very critical about recent movements with origins in America and that was a valid contribution.

Mohammed Arkoun also said that the architect cannot talk for more than five minutes without slides, yet he seems to be expecting architects to develop an ideological approach against the currents that seem to be engulfing developments in Islamic thought. I think there is a conflict. We expect Mohammed Arkoun and others to develop such ideas and to communicate them to us in forms that are usable. In the past he has served this purpose well.

I recall from the last seminar in Granada that the information we produced wasn’t operationalised. I think one should do that after each meeting. This was done after the regional seminar which took place in Dhaka and led to the formation of a Society of Architects (see Regionalism in Architecture, proceedings of the Dhaka seminar — Editor).

A similar thing can happen here, however one should not expect too much. I can understand Mohammed Arkoun’s views but I think all of us might differ in vision as well as in operational facility.

Raymond Vassallo

I would like to say a few words about traditional approaches to contemporary architecture which is the title of this session. I would like to discuss this subject with particular reference to Malta. Here, in common with most Islamic countries, we have very strong traditions and one can draw on these traditions and take inspirations from them to construct buildings which are more acceptable and more valid in their own right.

I would like to shift the scene from here to a bay, in the northern part of the Island, a bay known as Mellieha Bay. In this Bay, there are three examples of contemporary architecture and it is interesting to observe the manner in which the architects involved tried to apply traditionalism in each of the projects to a greater or lesser extent and to see how successful they have been in producing a building which is suited to the particular site and environment in which it exists.

All three projects have a common characteristic. They try to cope with a new phenomenon which is characteristic of the last quarter of century, that is more tourism, so they are resort hotels or tourist complexes.

Incidently this building type, the tourist complex, has generated a new problem here in Malta as far as the problem of scale is concerned. In each of these examples, the architects were very much aware of this problem of scale and each of them tried to solve it in his own way.

The first project is the Mellieha Bay Hotel. It is a project which was designed by Raglan Squires and Partners about fifteen years ago. In this project, the architect broke down the project into four blocks to reduce the scale and he has given a horizontal treatment which I feel is sympathetic with the geological stratigraphy of the area.

An attempt has been made by the architect to create a visual focus in the centre block, housing the public areas. The project as a whole, has made quite an
impact on the environment Mellieha Bay. It is a subjective question as to whether this impact is positive or negative. However I do believe that it is a valid project in its own right.

The second project, by Richard England is known as Festaval; again it is a tourist hotel project situated on a steep slope, not far from the Mellieha Bay Hotel. The use of the sloping site here has few if any precedents in local experience. On this score, the building is of interesting appearance.

It appears that the sloping profile or form given to the building is intended to echo the topography surrounding the project. Viewed from the side, the building appears to be one storey high. Viewed from the front however, one does see all of the seven stories and for this reason the building makes quite a strong impact on the general environment in the area. The building does not rise above the natural skyline of the ridge behind it and I think this is a good point.

The third project I have in mind is conspicuous by its almost total invisibility. If one were to point from a distant to this project, one might have difficulty making out the new forms.

This project is an attempt to create an architecture which merges and almost loses itself in the environment that surrounds it. It is an unobtrusive, unself-conscious type of architecture which tries to cause the least possible disturbance to the landscape which preceded it.

I am referring here to the tourist village locally known as the Danish village. Very little has been said or written about this project. I have not seen it reviewed in any journal and its architect is anonymous in the sense that few local architects if any, know his name. I for one do not.

However, I would like to say a word on his behalf and embrace this work. Here refined modernism and regionalism combine in a most satisfactory manner. The project comprises amorphous clusters of cubic forms connected or overlain by an irregular network of access voids. This situation echoes quite clearly, in many ways and in many dimensions, the experience of the Maltese village. There is something Islamic, perhaps I should use the adjective Mediterranean, about the external aspects of these clusters, such as one finds in the Maltese village.

The architect picked out motifs from the local vernacular traditions, such as the courtyard and used it because the building's function required it. The aesthetic validity follow as a corollary.

The traditional use of Maltese stone has been adopted generally even in small details, such as light fittings. The central building housing the public

areas is in sudden contrast to the residential clusters. Strategically placed to exploit the view of Mellieha Bay, the central building group has a restaurant, a bar and an assembly building and a swimming pool. Wide use has been made of lush and exotic vegetation in order to create a veritable oasis in the best Islamic sense of the world. This project makes no impact at all on the Mellieha Bay environment. The architectural experience one senses while walking through this project is superb.

Abdelbaki Ibrahim

I would like to express my deep appreciation of what Professor Arkoun said; that a new approach to Islamic architecture, the evaluation of Islamic architecture, its values, rules and so on, should be looked at in a way where social, economic and cultural aspects are integrated.

As a Muslim architect, I felt lost in the many diverse architectural theories expounded in the last decade. I found it very important to go back and re-read our history with the idea of Islamic architecture in my mind. How does one see it through history as a result of political, social and economic interactions. I had to go through all the western ideas and theories and search for a new approach to contemporary architectural theory which is relevant to Islamic rules and values. I have already published two books on this subject. The first is a Historical Perspective of Architecture of the Arab East and the second an Islamic Perspective of Architecture Theory.

I feel that to answer the questions posed by Professor Arkoun, we should have a panel of sociologists, Muslim scholars, historians, architects and economists and they should come together and discuss these matters. This problem might be thus tackled in an absolutely different way, relevant to the needs and requirements of the Islamic world at the present time.
Session III
Architectural Criticism

Mohammed Arkoun: Chairman

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is a space for freedom. Nobody is excluded from expressing freely their opinions and we wish to benefit from the experience and knowledge of everyone here. It is our intention and our ambition to know what is going on in architecture today, specifically architecture applied to societies which are Muslim; societies which have special problems.

This is the point I wanted to make in my earlier intervention and I hope it is not misunderstood. I would like everybody to contribute their knowledge and to assist us in this long term search in which we have been engaged for almost ten years.
Chris Abel

I came here prepared to talk about ‘architectural criticism and the problem of cultural exchange’, but I would like to begin by trying to respond in some way to the presentation that was given to us in Session II by Professor Mohammed Arkoun. I think the substance of what he said was on the ball, if not the style. Unfortunately, Westerners often respond more to style than to substance, which may account for the adverse reaction from part of the audience, but I do believe that the effect of the presentation was to open up the scope for this seminar and to remind us what the main purpose is.

In 1982 there was a conference on Design Policy in London at the Royal College of Art (RCA) organised by the RCA and the Design Research Society. I proposed the idea that part of the conference should be given over to design policy in the developing world. I helped to organise that session and wrote a paper specially for it. I want to read just the first two paragraphs to you because I think they are germaine to what Professor Arkoun was trying to get at in the preceding session.

“If I interpret the spirit of the Design Policy Conference correctly, its aim is to encourage us to do some more basic thinking about the nature and direction of our activities as designers, researches or educators; what those activities presently contribute to society and what, in the future, they might contribute.

If I am correct in my interpretation, then we cannot assume, even in the U.K., that we understand what kind of society we are designing for. We are obliged, if our interests are not to be seen to be mostly trivial ones, to confront the larger question. I am suggesting here that the complex interrelations between human artifacts and human institutions are such that if we are seriously concerned with the design of artifacts, then we must also be concerned with the design of those institutions which lend to artifacts their purpose and meaning. If it would be negligent to assume that we know what kind of society we are talking about in the so-called developed world, we would be extremely foolish indeed to assume anything of the kind when it comes to dealing with the so-called under-developed nations. And if the professional climate in the developed nations actively encourages the narrower focus on artifacts, which it does, conditions in the under-developed world demand that we adopt the more inclusive view and take the design of cultures as the main problem.”

So we are not going to solve the main problem at this seminar or in the next few months or in the next few years. The problem goes too deep for any quick resolution. What I suggest though as a start is that if Professor Arkoun is serious about taking architectural criticism on board as a major concern for the Aga Khan Award we indulge in a little institution designing, or rather institution extending because what the Aga Khan Award already does for architecture is, I believe, magnificent, but needs extension. If we are really serious about raising the standard and level of criticism in the Muslim world and in the developing world at large, then we also need an institution parallel to the architecture Award which will do just that. So why don’t we have an Award for critics on the same regular basis. I would also like to add that somehow or other — I leave the answer to this tricky political question to the Steering Committee — the Award for critics should exclude Westerners. We need to encourage the level of criticism within Muslim societies by Muslims. If we don’t what will happen of course is that, initially at least, we will have more Western experts on Muslim societies winning the critics’ Award than Muslims, simply because their cultural traditions give them a head start. That is hardly what is needed.

Mohammed Arkoun asked too much of us in Session II. He asked the right questions but he asked for too
much of us in too short a time. Institutions solve the kinds of problems he referred to, not conferences, not even well recorded conferences. So let us see something come out of this seminar which is more than just proceedings, but a new institution. That is my proposal and now I would like to move on to my own presentation.

I will talk mostly indirectly about the problems of architectural criticism, since I should like to focus on some of those problems which affect the nature and extent of any critical discourse. The problems I have in mind arise from the interactions between different culture forms, such as those between Western and Muslim cultures. It seems to me that we cannot sensibly discuss what is 'good' or 'bad' architecture in the contemporary Muslim world without first asking what is the necessary basis for a positive and creative interaction between the very different cultural influences which go to make up that world.

As I understood Mohammed Arkoun's remarks he was pointing out to us that we no longer live in a world of pure cultures, not even in muslim societies, and that is the kind of world we have to deal with. I agree with him wholeheartedly. In fact I often begin my classes by telling students that my approach to teaching architecture is founded on three basic facts of life: there is no pure race; there is no pure culture, and there is no pure architecture. So let us begin there, with the real world, instead of chasing after idle dreams of pure architecture and pure culture. There is no such thing, and if we try to measure architecture in the contemporary Muslim world according to such criteria we are not going to get anywhere.

For all the ambiguous political connotations, colonial architecture offers some good examples of what can be done in adapting imported building types and models of architecture to regional cultures. It also offers good examples of the problems involved in cultural exchanges between East and West. What did the British do when they set up home in the colonies? They brought their architectural baggage with them of course. In Malaysia, for example, in the hill stations in the Cameron Highlands — a place where empire builders could retreat from the hot and humid climate of the flatlands — it is possible to find buildings which are as close to an explicit reproduction of the typical country cottage, rose bushes and all, as can be achieved in a far off land; all meant to make a colonist feel as much at home as he could on the other side of the world.

That might seem to prove a point about the negative side of colonialism; just bringing one's own cultural baggage along and superimposing it on the new place. But what about the colonial villas? The Palladian model is still recognisable, but I call them the Palladian villas of Malaysia because that is just what they are; both of Europe and of Malaysia. An import, certainly, but a well adapted import, especially to the climate of the region. To paraphrase the introduction to a recent paper of mine; what is important in regional architecture is not the source of the original model or type but the nature of the transformation involved in adapting the original to the new context. 2

Tudor-style inn in the Cameron Highlands, close to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was built as part of the Colonial hill station.
So what is the realm of architectural discourse here? On what grounds do we base our critical analyses if we allow for such a liberal definition of regionalism. We can say there is some kind of transformation involved, some kind of adaptation of the architectural form to the local climate, but that does not necessarily mean there has been any change to the nature of the original institution. What was the original architectural model again? Palladio’s own villas near Vicenza in northern Italy. What was the other ingredient? The traditional Malay houses-on-stilts, which were built to make maximum use of natural ventilation. The happy result of this hybrid mix; a whole new series of buildings which are now recognised as part of the cultural heritage of the region.

Cultural exchange was undoubtedly helped along in this case by the fact that both the main sources were detached, single family dwellings, give or take the odd live-in relative. So the two original models already had something in common. But now consider the surroundings. The Malay house is part of a kampung, or village community, with no territorial boundaries between any of the dwellings. But the colonial villas are each surrounded by private grounds, purposefully designed to keep out trespassers, which in the former colony meant mostly the ‘native population’. In effect, the whole area in which these villas were situated constituted a separate and restricted enclave in which only the colonists could live, and is quite distinct both in architecture and spatial pattern from the ‘native areas’ where both the indigenous Malays and non-white immigrants lived.
So really the villas and the kampong houses are similar only at an architectural level in their response to the local climate. At the social and institutional level of building types and settlement patterns they are very different. The Palladian villas of Malaysia are private family houses built in residential enclaves for the exclusive use of colonists, who have settled there for the express purpose of exploitation of the regional economy for the benefit of the ‘homeland’. The Malay houses form part of a shared village community which in colonial times was a relatively self-contained social and economic unit. The lack of boundaries between the Malay houses therefore had explicit social and cultural meanings, just as the boundaries between the colonial villas also had theirs.

So why should we look to these villas now for lessons in how to adapt imported models, if the adaptations were so limited? Well, for one thing, adaptation to local climate is one of the fundamental characteristics of any regional architecture, and is as important in the energy-conscious world of today as it has been in the past. So that aspect is not to be underestimated.

But it must also be conceded that Malaysian society and culture is rapidly changing, and if the suburban villa with its private gardens was once an alien import it is no longer regarded as such by large numbers of Malaysians, especially the well-to-do and growing middle class, who now aspire to live in just such a house even if they do not already do so. If you compare the quality of the architecture of the modern villas with the quality of the colonial villas you may also draw the same conclusion as an increasing number of Malaysians: that the practical builders and engineers who were mostly responsible for those colonial buildings knew a thing or two. You may even agree with the recently established conservation movement in Malaysia, that these buildings are not only worth preserving but also worth emulating.

What we can see in these examples is a two-way process of cultural exchange in operation. Some imported culture forms — ways of building — are adapted to the local situation, and the local culture and way of life also changes in response to the influence of the imported culture.

The wonderful thing about this series of villas is that it is a series, not just a one off, though all vary considerably. A group of builders — not professional architects, it may be noted — struck gold. People repeated this kind of building; it became an accepted pattern. Therefore there must have been some good sociological and cultural reason for the new plant to have taken such firm root.

Let us consider some details. Where does the shape of a typical villa’s roof come from? It looks almost Post-Modern. Michael Graves could have done it. In fact it follows the same humped line of the so-called Palladian window, which has two straight lintels either side of an arched centre.

Consider also a typical Chinese style shop house. The building type was imported by Chinese immigrants to the region, but the details were Western. The Palladian window appears again. The form was invented by Bramante but was used by Palladio so often it became identified with his name. A durable architectural motif, one might say; bouncing down through the centuries; bouncing across cultural and geographical borders. Recently revived again and much used and abused by Post-Modern architects such as Philip Johnson — repeated endlessly on one of his awful office tower buildings.

Chinese “shop-house” in Georgetown, Penang Island, Malaysia, with “Palladian Windows” in first floor

It is this sort of thing which gives rise to the currently popular notion that architecture has some kind of a life of its own, which is true up to a point, but only up to a point. Wittgenstein would back that up; so would Ernst Cassirer: both philosophers who had a lot to say about the way different culture-forms shape different ways of life. Culture-forms do have a language and a life of their own to a certain extent, otherwise we would not talk of the religious life or the academic life or the political life the way we do. The important thing is that different culture-forms interact with one another. They do not exist in isolation from other culture-forms. That is where we have to focus the critical discourse in architecture — on the nature of that interaction — if we want to understand architecture in its broader cultural context. Let us recognise architecture perhaps as a semi-autonomous culture-form with some built-in rules of practise and some built-in institutions which help to sustain the form. But let us also recognise that architecture cannot exist in isolation. It is only given
full meaning by the interaction it has with other social and cultural institutions.

Commercial institutions, for instance. SOM's National Commercial Bank in Jeddah brings us up to the present day, but in a way the basic processes and problems of cultural exchange are similar to those which gave rise to the buildings we have just seen. SOM's bank is a brilliant adaptation of a Western commercial building type – the office tower – to the hot-humid climate of Jeddah, as I mentioned in the first session.

As before, the adaptation is mostly limited to the architectural form, not the social institution itself. Jeddah is no stranger to commerce, it should be added, but as I also suggested earlier the nature of the smaller scale Saudi Arabian commercial institutions of the pre-industrial past would have differed quite a bit from the NCB, with its modern corporate structure and branches all over the Middle East. It is a brilliant building in many ways, certainly to be much preferred to the international style glass skyscrapers which have just been dumped all over the world. But it should also be asked what else does the building do apart from responding to the climate? We know the tower was put up partly for prestige, but what about the economic imperatives which help push up a tower like this? What about the inflation of the land values and so on? These are questions which have very much to do with the social and cultural suitability of the building type itself. This is precisely where architecture and society interact most clearly: at the level of the building type.

We move next to the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi by Payette Associates. Is a hospital a Western institution by nature? Of course not! In fact the hospital as a social institution was invented by Muslims. So it could properly be called a Muslim institution. It is more difficult to identify it with a specific building form, however, since the sort of arcaded, courtyard buildings in which hospitals were first housed were also common to mosque and
palace architecture of the same period. Sometimes a palace was actually converted for the purpose. That points to a very interesting characteristic about Islamic architecture; that it produces flexible forms which can be adapted to different purposes. It suggests that somehow or other it ought to be possible to adapt it to the requirements of modern institutions.

But if the hospital was originally a Muslim institution, is the Aga Khan University Hospital — which boasts some of the most advanced medical equipment to be found anywhere — the same kind of hospital as existed in Cairo in the tenth century AD? Has the technology of medical care, let alone the building technology, changed so much that the institution can no longer be regarded as the same? This is quite possible.

The architecture is also somewhat ambiguous in character. The planning concept, with its asymmetrically linked courtyard buildings, is in keeping with Islamic traditions, and offers functional outdoor spaces to take care of the large numbers of relatives who usually accompany patients who are undergoing treatment. The architectural forms are more Western in character, however. From the outside the whole complex has a distinctly industrial look about it, more in line with Modernist ideology than any Islamic models, and there is a strong hint of Le Corbusier in some parts, such as in the ‘brise soleil’. There is also a marked restlessness about the sharply angled forms which are quite alien to an Islamic work of architecture.

On balance, though, the planning concept is more significant in establishing the sympathetic character of the whole than the specific forms of the buildings. At the other end of the scale, the careful handling of the details reinforce the impression of a genuine reinterpretation of regional architecture. A waiting room for relatives of people undergoing major surgery illustrates this, though a photograph could not do the scene full justice.

Reflections on the ceiling come off the pool below the open screen and when you are inside this building these dappled lights have the most marvellous shimmering effect, inducing a special atmosphere in the room. These little details are probably the best part about the architecture. The idea of focusing attention on the details, getting it all working at that level, is also true to Islamic traditions.

To my mind, Henning Larsen’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh, is the best work of architecture to come out of the Islamic world in the last few decades and will probably hold its own through to the end of this century. What a mixture of sources! Desert fortress, courtyard dwelling and mausoleum, all put together in the service of housing a modern bureaucracy. The planning concept is actually based on the square plan form, divided into four quadrants, typical of the mausoleums built by the Mogul emperors, of which the Taj Mahal is the most conspicuous model. If you place a piece of transparent paper over the plan of the Taj Mahal you can very easily draw in the plan of the MOFA, making a few modifications as necessary — losing one quadrant for
example, to make the new building fit into the triangular site in Riyadh.

Here is an example of architecture as a semi-autonomous culture form if ever there was one. The plan form of the Taj Mahal survives through the transformation and is still recognisable. Was the architect aware, though, of the possible meanings implied in the use of such a model: actually building a bureaucracy on the plan of a tomb? One might well take this as some kind of sophisticated comment on the nature of bureaucracy! I don’t think that Larsen intended any such comment, though. He would have been treading on dangerous ground in Saudi Arabia if he had. More likely he saw the plan of the Taj as a useful way of breaking up a large scale building into smaller segments, while still retaining the monumental grandeur of the whole. The result is based on the Taj plan but is also very different from that building. It takes a special kind of talent to put together ideas from different sources and to come up with something like this, which not only summons up images of the past but also works well as a modern office building. The Saudis especially appreciate the domestic ambience of the cellular offices, in contrast to the impersonal layout of the SOM building. Here is a rare case where an imported building type has been well adapted to the region at all levels of space and function.

Many external features are explained once the sources of inspiration are understood, which it is the job of the critic to ferret out. Right in the middle of each side we find a recess, which is a modern interpretation of the iwan, a common feature of Islamic architecture which marks an entrance or an important feature on the inside of the building, such as, in this case, the junction between two internal ‘streets’, which are themselves modelled on Arabian souks.

The projections on each corner of the building look like fortifications and reinforce the desert fortress image, but were actually intended as lift housing. Then there is the incredible space of the central triangular atrium, with its floating roof suggestive of the floating roof of the Chapel at Ronchamp. The small square windows facing onto the atrium are deliberately undersized, so as to inflate the scale of the space. Altogether a very subtle exercise, but the total effect is quite stunning.

I spent weeks in this building, getting to know it, observing the changes in the quality of the light at different times of the day. I fell totally in love with the place. It was an experience I will find hard to recapture, and was in fact my launching pad as a critic. Here I was, faced with the problem of having
to write about a building which I knew hardly anyone would ever get to see. What a marvellous incentive for a critic! Having to make the thing come alive: to walk people through the place; to recreate the experience I had.

All this is by a Danish architect who had ‘discovered’ Islamic architecture for himself. But let us also not forget that the client was Saudi. Great buildings usually take great clients as well as great architects to produce. It is very important that during the last few years, we have clients of this calibre beginning to emerge in the Muslim world.

Now we turn to the more orthodox traditionalism of Abdel Wahed El-Wakil. Wakil is often criticised for sticking too close to the traditions of the past. But it would be a mistake to push the contrast between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ interpretations of regional architecture too far. I prefer to regard the two approaches as defining the two extreme ends of the same spectrum, with any number of variations in between. In truth, there is no modern building that does not relate somehow or other to some precedent, no matter what the architect may say about it. And there is no traditional building that does not relate somehow to the present, if only in the manner of its contemporary use.
What can we make then, of one of El-Wakil's mosques on the Jeddah Corniche? Just a recreation of traditional forms, domes, arches, and so on and so forth. Is that all there is to it? No! Wakil is holding up a model of traditional architecture and saying to Saudi Arabian and Muslim architects everywhere: “Look, we had something good here, something we can still use and learn from”. What he is doing is endowing contemporary relevance on Islamic history and culture and encouraging Muslim architects to undertake an exercise in relearning their heritage. How, it may be asked, is it going to be possible to produce the sorts of creative fusions in the Muslim world between the present and the past, such as we have seen in Payette's and Larsen's work – ironically, both Western architects – if there is no knowledge or appreciation of the traditional base, if there is no respect for the past as well as for the present? Arthur Koestler called it the 'act of creation': a fusion between two previously unconnected culture forms. That fusion cannot happen without mutual respect and deep understanding of the two culture-forms involved; both modern and traditional.

I would rather see something like this, than some tiresome repeat of the International Style. But really there is more to it than just strict tradition. Wakil's original commission from the mayor of Jeddah was for a series of sculptures along the Corniche. But he said “No, I don't want to do any sculptures, I want to do a mosque”. What he actually did was a sculptural mosque. By doing that, he has extended and reinterpreted tradition because Islamic architecture is not normally so sculptural; it is mostly inward-looking. But this is both an outward-looking as well as inward-looking building, and relates perfectly to its ‘island' setting. There is a transformation involved here then, from Islamic traditions to something more Mediterranean in spirit.

So there is more to Wakil's architecture than has usually been made out. This also goes for the way his buildings are made. As Ronald Lewcock recently pointed out, Wakil is not just talking about reviving traditional forms. Like Hassan Fathy, he is talking about the craft of building and the way buildings are put together. Surely if there is any kind of meaning to the word authenticity in architecture, it has to do with this. If there is any such thing as an authentic architect, it is an architect who is fully involved emotionally as well as intellectually with the act of building, with the means of production, something most architects have become totally divorced from. Not to mention critics, especially those of an art-historical bent who haven't even the time or patience to talk about the way a building is made. So Wakil gets cursed or praised on the basis of form alone, when his work should be discussed in terms of the way buildings are made.

Wakil, Larsen and Payette are all exceptionally talented architects, however, and there are just not enough architects of this sort of calibre to go around, or to solve the kinds of problems we see in the modern suburbs of Riyadh. It is all very well for us as critics to talk and write about the best buildings that get put up by the talented few, but what can we say about the remainder? The problem here is not just the awful quality of the individual buildings, but the whole pattern and quality of urban development. Somehow we have to deal with this wider situation.

The pattern is familiar enough; the decentralisation; the suburban infrastructure and building types, the Western style shopping centres. But is it any more really alien in Saudi Arabia? Is it perhaps what the Saudis really want now? It is a good question. Having lived there for three years, I would say that they do, but they cannot reconcile wanting this with still wanting to retain much of their older life-style.

How can architects talk about rebuilding the 'Islamic city' and recreating medieval city patterns when they have to deal with modern systems of communication and settlement patterns? What can we make of the contemporary villas, for example? Every Saudi family seems to want a Western style villa now, with at least one garage, just as the Malaysians now do. They want a villa because they think a villa is the most modern, best and civilised thing to have.

But it doesn't really work out, because as I said, Saudis also want to retain their old life-style at the same time. An important aspect of the traditional Saudi life-style is the value placed on privacy, especially where the family dwelling is concerned. So you wind up with inherent contradictions between the need for maximum privacy and what the outward-looking villa as against the inward-looking courtyard house can offer. All the windows in such villas have frosted glass in them as well as drawn curtains. Wives and young children now live in totally air-conditioned, artificially lit environment, twenty-four
hours of the day, rather than let anyone get so much as a peek at them from outside. They even put up little screens in between the villas if they are built too close — which they usually are — to prevent any possibility of being overlooked by their neighbours. Being a detached building, the maximum wall surface is also exposed to the sun, with equally negative consequences for climate control. All in all, importing this building type into Saudi Arabia has worked far less well than it did when the villa was imported into Malaysia.

We cannot rely on the architectural elite to solve problems on this scale, though we need their work in order to provide others with models of excellence they can emulate. That, after all, is what the Aga Khan Award is largely about. We also have to try to raise the level of the norm; to raise the quality of the average building, which means also to raise the quality of the average architecture and builder.

For this reason I cannot separate architectural criticism from the broader problems of architectural education. I think they are in fact inseparable. As teachers of architecture, we spend most of our time in the studios acting as critics. But I believe that it is also only by raising standards at the very beginning of an architect’s career that we can hope to tackle the basic problems Professor Arkoun wants us to solve, and which I have elaborated on.

I should like to conclude, therefore, with a discussion of some projects I devised for students at King Saud University; very much with these more general problems of cultural exchange and environmental quality in mind.

This is where the problem usually starts, as far as the education of architects in Saudi Arabia is concerned: Here we see first year students being trained by a well-meaning, young Saudi architect, who had completed his education in the West, and who wanted to provide his students in Saudi Arabia with what was thought to be the most modern and advanced method of teaching basic design; which is in fact some awful derivative of the Bauhaus preliminary or foundation course.

In my view, this kind of foundation course never even worked well in the West. It is all based on exercises in abstract form and is totally anti-historical. Students are deliberately encouraged to set aside their own cultural background and to start from scratch. Start with an empty mind! What’s this if it’s not brain-washing? What has it got to do with Saudi Arabia or the Muslim world? Not too much.

Half of the first year class was taught this way and the other half worked with exercises in Islamic design under the direction of a Western teacher, which was me. The irony hardly needs underlining. I suggested we try a regional approach and was supported by a number of Saudi faculty, including the then current Chairman of Department, Dr. Saleh Al-Hathloul, who incidentally was one of the finest and most enlightened chairmen I have ever worked with. So the two alternative classes ran in parallel.

All my exercises were based on Islamic cultural sources but they are not restricted to just Saudi Arabia. Islamic culture is both regional and international in character and in scope, just as Western culture is, so why not make the most of it? This way it was possible to teach students something about their own cultural heritage but also about the historical processes of cultural exchange which were involved in the development of Islamic culture. So we were able to avoid the danger of being parochial.

The Bauhaus foundation course was supposed to be concerned with the teaching of design through exercises in abstract form. You can do that too if you want, by teaching students Islamic ornamental design, which is very much concerned with abstract form. Yet these exercises were also very different from what came out of the Bauhaus or my colleague’s studio.
Starting with exercises which teach students the basic geometric principles of Islamic ornamental design we progressed to exercises involving ever more complex geometrical patterns. But the same principles of design underly them all. They are all based on the circle and the idea of manipulating figures within the circle and then repeating the same unit to form a virtually endless pattern. The idea of repetition in these patterns has to do with the Islamic idea of unity—the circle also being the symbol of unity—the idea of unity of all things under God. Patterns like this are repeated across a wall or floor surface so as to emphasise the continuity of the surfaces and the spaces they define. So students are taught from the beginning to think of these patterns not as something to be framed and hung on a wall, which is the way we think about Western abstract art, but as an integral part of the environment.

All the geometric patterns came out of a book on ornamental design (El-Said and Parmat 1976), but the individual colour interpretations did not. This is where students were able to manipulate patterns and to learn just how far they can change the visual effect while sticking to the same geometrical design. A remarkable thing happened in this exercise. I gave the same pattern to four different students. I wanted each student to give me his own interpretation of the pattern and what came out were four designs all based on the same geometry but all looking very different. We all suddenly realised when we put these things on the walls—there were many similar exercises too—so that is how it is done! My Saudi colleagues were astonished. They had never before understood what I and my students had found out—that by changing the tonal values you can manipulate the pattern as you want. If one looked closely, the design appeared to switch between one pattern and another. It’s the same trick as that old Gestalt demonstration: the silhouette of a face becomes a vase and the vase becomes a face. But it was there in Islamic ornamental design for centuries. And how much better for Muslim students to discover something like this through their own cultural heritage than through some hand-me-down version of the Bauhaus. They discovered this visual phenomenon for themselves and are learning how to make use of it as designers from these exercises.

Notice the patterns begin to shimmer and it is this effect—which these students are controlling—which helps to produce the impression of transparency which scholars talk about when they refer to the dematerialisation of the wall surface in Islamic architecture. A wall covered with designs such as these is not a material wall any longer, but a wall with spiritual meaning.

In these beginning exercises we were mostly interested in learning the basic rules of the language of Islamic ornamental design. I told my students, “If you want to become a poet, you don’t have to invent the whole language. What poets do is first learn their native language and then they go on to use it in an imaginative way”.

So when the students had learnt the basics of this language, I told them, “go ahead, now design the surface ornament for a courtyard floor”. Put together all that you have learnt and create a design of your own”. I gave them a suitable plan for a courtyard house and the designs that followed were similar in so far as they follow the traditional three part arrangement of one pattern at the base of the central fountain, a second pattern surrounding this base, and a third major pattern for the rest of the courtyard. This much was specified in the exercise, but the rest was up to each student.

Now it is conceivable that with computer-aided design and graphics techniques it might be possible to go on from these exercises in known patterns and
get students to create new variations on the geometric patterns themselves, and maybe even produce entirely new patterns. That's something for the future, perhaps. What we actually did was to go on to an entirely different kind of exercise.

The old town of Dariyah, which was the home of the Saud family lies just outside Riyadh. The town is built entirely of mud-brick with some local rubble stone for foundations. Now the reactions of Saudi Arabians to the very idea of building in mud is that mud is strictly for hippopotami! No self-respecting Saudi wants to build in mud anymore. They associate it entirely with a poverty-sticken past they would rather forget. But I told my students that the courtyard house type itself has much to recommend it, so let's look at Dariyah from first principles and learn what we can from its buildings.

We began the sequence of projects with each student making a little study of Dariyah, describing the history, location and settlement pattern of the town in words and pictures, all on the same sheet. I had a capable Egyptian assistant working with me so I told the students that they should make the most of the fine graphic qualities of their own language and note the drawings in Arabic. My assistant then checked their drawings with me, translating as we went along. Not the easiest way to do things, but worth the trouble.

They did a similar study of one of the courtyard houses, making measured drawings and explaining the way it was put together and the way it was used, the importance of the open but private central space, and how the form and materials responded to the desert climate.

Sometimes people asked me "what did you teach them in Saudi Arabia?". I tell them "I did not teach them a thing — I let the buildings teach".

Then I said, "right, having learnt the design principles involved in houses of this type, let us now design a modern courtyard house, based on the same basic principles but reinterpreted for the decentralised, modern urban environment such as we now have to deal with in Riyadh". I also told them to design their buildings with modern but simple technology in mind, such as concrete blockwork which would have the required thermal properties but would help convince students that the virtues of the courtyard building type were not necessarily restricted to 'old fashioned' mud houses.

It would have been too much to ask these first year students to design a suitable layout for such houses, so for our starting point we took a scheme from a senior student who had created a kind of 'urban oasis' of high density, low rise courtyard housing — clustered tightly together but also tied into a modern urban infrastructure of high speed motorways. We created a couple of 'holes' in his site plan and told our students to fill them in with either a two storey courtyard house or a single storey courtyard house, according to what they had learnt from the two previous study projects.

The end result demonstrated what first year students can do with their own regional culture if they are just given the chance; modern courtyard houses complete with modern amenities and communications, but also still affording the climate control and priva-
cy which are the virtues of the traditional architecture of the region.

I think the lesson should be clear enough by now. Instead of just trying to adapt imported building types and institutions to regional cultures and conditions, maybe Saudi Arabian architects and architects in other parts of the Islamic world should also be making greater efforts to make the most of their own cultural resources by updating their institutions and building types to meet contemporary needs. But don’t expect architects in the Islamic world or any part of the developing world to produce miracles of reinterpretation if they aren’t even taught to value their own heritage.

Photographs courtesy of Chris Abel

References

1 Abel, C. “Living in a hybrid world, I: the evolution of cultural identities in developing countries”, Design Studies, July 1982


Mohammed Arkoun

Chris Abel’s presentation is extremely interesting and I thank him for having provided an illustration of what I wanted to say earlier. It is exactly this kind of criticism, considered and practised, as a thinking process, to make explicit, implicit issues in what an architect, writer, philosopher or painter is doing. This is the function of criticism.

Chris Abel has done it with examples taken in a Muslim society and he has linked it to the general issues of contemporary criticism in the world. I never meant to separate issues in Muslim societies from general architectural issues in western societies. He has given a good illustration and I thank him for this.

Each slide that Chris Abel has shown, (I am not
against slides, but the misuse of them) was used to explain working concepts as we say in literary criticism. I hear often that there is no criticism in the Muslim world and in Muslim societies. This is not correct. There is not much criticism in the architectural field, but I can assure you that there is a large amount produced by Muslim scholars and intellectuals, in the literary, philosophical, theological, and political fields. I confess that it is not all relevant and updated; it is not emancipated from ideological biases; but it exists.

This criticism has something to do with architectural criticism. In literature the situation is different; there is an important and ancient tradition of criticism. Let us be fair about what is existing, what is done on the Muslim side and let us reveal it when we deal with architecture. There are many journals and reviews dealing with literary criticism.

Stanford Anderson

The preceding session introduced a range of buildings for consideration in our critical debate. Chris Abel’s familiarity with these buildings has permitted him to give another dimension to that discussion. I am particularly grateful to him for that concrete contribution, since I have not have the opportunity to visit any of these works. Consequently I cannot speak about specific issues concerning these buildings but must rather turn to a few thoughts about the criticism of architecture generally, hopefully with reference to the concerns of this meeting.

Several speakers pointed out that the architecture of Islam, from its beginning, adopted pre-existing or foreign, or innovative forms – turning these forms to its own purposes. Why would one make such an unsurprising claim? Presumably it is felt to be necessary to make such an unexceptionable claim because there are still those who would see as necessary, a deterministic relation between forms and their use or meaning. If one were to accept such a principle, then a form which has already been used for one purpose could not serve correctly in a new context.

However, it is such a claim for the immutability of meaning of forms that runs against all history and experience. The history of architecture is rife with examples of radical re-use of forms and the migration of their meanings. This absence of a strict relationship between form and meaning is one indication of a degree of autonomy in architectural forms.

I rush to stress “a degree of autonomy” (elsewhere I have written of the “quasi-autonomy” of architectural form). Quasi-autonomy is an ambiguous word, as it must be. It points to autonomy for the reasons already cited, the absence of necessity in the form/use/meaning relationship. There is also autonomy for the reason that form cannot be reduced to any other set of descriptions or conditions. Nevertheless, this is a qualified autonomy because, I would assert, the range of use and meaning which may attach to any form is not limitless. A given form may positively facilitate a certain range of use and meaning; it may accommodate a wider range but there will still be a limit.

The successive thresholds where a form shifts from support to accommodation and thence to inadequacy are the constraints that make wise architectural decisions necessary, while it is the relative autonomy that allows us to re-use old forms or adapt new ones without absolute constraint.

If we can accept this notion of quasi-autonomy, one result is the breaking of any claim for necessity or truth in the relations between forms and their uses and meanings. Yet the significance of architectural decisions remains.

Breaking truth claims about architecture is, I believe, a necessary and liberating step. I would attempt to advance this claim by reference to another set of arguments heard in the earlier sessions – arguments which, like the resistance to new forms, are tinged with disabling truth claims.

In the earlier sessions, we were frequently offered comments or analysis based on polar oppositions: modernity and tradition, past and future, private and public, vernacular and monument, art and craft. In some instances these oppositions were put forward with the explicit or implicit requirement that we must choose between these poles. Similarly, we were offered the choice between form and symbol. Of course if we must choose, there is an imperative to make the correct choice.

These are demands that can be placed upon the architect; so too they can be laid upon the architectural critic. Only if the critic has made the right choice among such alternatives, will he or she examine the correct buildings and assess them rightly. From such claims, it is only another small step to arrive at the demand that we be in possession of some truth that will give us a firm foundation for our choices amongst these polar opposites.

I am not troubled with the introduction of the terms that I listed – public and private; monument and vernacular, and the like. I am troubled that our thought is pushed to the poles while judgements of over-arching correctness or error are laid upon these polar choices.

I would like to illustrate this matter with my interpretation of the thought and work of the noted
Viennese architect of the early twentieth century, Adolf Loos. Loos respected tradition — whatever was vital and supportable in the past of his culture. He was mistrustful of predicting the future, but he was keen in his attention to modern innovations. Loos was moved by the monumental when it took an appropriate place, and perhaps still more appreciative of the vernacular works of the townscape and the countryside. Loos sought to distinguish and honour both art and craft. Art was a high calling that transcended material matters; but for this very reason, the artist should not dictate forms to the craftsman. Shoes, a saddle, or a piano, found their own proper evolution in the hands of the craftsman who used and made them.

Loos recognised all the terms which we have heard in polarities: tradition and modernity, past and future, vernacular and monument, private and public, country and city. But for Loos, I suggest, these strands are woven into one another, forming a fabric, or what we might call a field. Within this cultural field, he did not seek to find one correct place for man to inhabit, not even one place for a modern Viennese, nor even one place for himself, a secular architect of 1910 Vienna. Rather, he thought that every task demanded a considered choice of where one must locate that work.

The cultural critic and friend of Loos, Karl Kraus, sought to explain that to which both men had contributed: "Adolf Loos and I ... have done nothing more than to show that there is a difference between an (funearary) urn and a chamber pot. It is in this difference that culture is given a space to play itself out. The others, those with (claims to) positive knowledge, however, divide themselves between those who would use the urn as a chamber pot and those who use the chamber pot as an urn" (K. Kraus in Adolf Loos. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag, Vienna, 1930.)

Thus, within the Loosian cultural field that I evoked, the urn is closer to the monument, art and tradition. The pot is closer to the vernacular, privacy and craft. It was correct to give both their places in the cultural field and thus also to locate their design and fabrication.

For Loos, architecture as a discipline, was closer to craft than to art; yet architecture covers some range of the cultural field. A funerary monument approaches art; a country house approaches the vernacular. In 1910, Loos designed, in Vienna, a domestic interior notable for its private and often traditional particularities. The exterior of that house (the Steiner house) was comparatively modern, and decorous as it cloaked its privacies from the city.

In the same year, in the same city, Loos designed a modern and formally inventive shop interior while the exterior of that building (Haus am Michaelplatz) echoed traditional, monumental buildings in the surrounding old city of Vienna. Thus Loos not only differentiated the house from the shop, or the suburban house from the central city building, but even the interior of each from its exterior.

I have tried to suggest two related things. Firstly, there is no essence or truth or true origin that stands at the base or core of architecture. Nonetheless the quasi-autonomy of architecture and the many positions it may be assigned in the cultural field, provide both the options and the constraints, which preserve a significant discipline called architecture.

One last point about this view of architecture. Loos was also critical and open to new forms. He adopted the Anglo-American ideas of domesticity both as a criticism of the bourgeois norms of Vienna and as a model. He criticised the ambitious extensions of art into the vernacular and the crafts, as was practised by his compatriots, the Seccessionist, and by his contemporaries, the leaders of the Deutscher Werkbund. Loos commended the new, simpler and more repetitive fenestration of apartment buildings served by elevators. That is to say, neither his vision of the cultural field nor of architecture was static. Criticism and innovation accompanied what he knew.

If we were to adopt such a critical structure, we could, without appeals to truth, be articulate and discerning about the buildings we criticise, and, possibly, also able to appreciate why the Aga Khan Award can and should be diverse without loss of principle.

Mohammed Arkoun

I would like to call your attention to the last problem Professor Anderson mentioned, which is the theoretical problem which divides critics of architecture as well as those of literature. He spoke about the quasi-autonomy of architecture. To what extent can one consider that there is a quasi-autonomy or even an autonomy of architecture as an activity, as well as literature, or painting, music, etc ... Is it an autonomous activity which does not look to other fields of activity in society? This is a theoretical problem and a methodological issue which is often discussed among specialists of criticism in various fields. It would be difficult to widen this discussion, precisely because architects do not have time to look to other artistic domains and compare the tools used for criticism. Not having time does not mean that the work can be avoided.

You know that there are socio-critics, psycho-critics,
historico-critics, and philosophical-critics. I don’t see why architecture should escape all these kinds of criticism.

Osamah El-Gohary

I would like to mention firstly a few points about the National Bank and the Bhong Mosque. I have seen both and approached one of them, at least as far as the entrance canopy.

I see no difference between them. If one takes them in abstract terms, neither has really expressed the nature of materials. We can see in both examples the idea of hiding the structural framework of the building, especially in the National Bank, where the steel frame has been covered with other materials, which brings us back to 19th century architectural where the idea of eclectic style was very much present. The steel or cast iron frames were built and then covered with renaissance graphic style. This is one way of seeing architecture in the nineteenth century.

If we give an award to the Bhong Mosque where concrete slabs were used, topped by domes, we can also give a prize or at least think about the National Bank in these terms.

The other point I would like to touch upon here, is the values that one adopts when criticising a building. As Mohammed Arkoun mentioned, in Muslim society there is criticism; in religious criticism, concepts or new facts have to be analysed. The whole idea of rejecting something or coming up with an answer has to be compared with the basic materials in the Koran and the Hadith.

We do need people like Professor Arkoun to give us clues about the values in Muslim society and the thinking process of Muslim societies, so that architects can take these ideas and employ them in their own works. Without such people, we cannot go on to produce architecture which relates to the values of the Muslim community.

If we take the “Seven Lamps” of Ruskin; beauty, truth and so on, I am not really sure whether I could adopt this in criticising a building in the Muslim world. If I take the concepts of Giedeon, of space-time architecture, I see the transparency that dominates modern architecture and its negative influences on the Muslim community, as Chris Abel has illustrated; windows have to be covered. When glass is much used it causes the invasion of privacy. All these problems actually stem from an incorrect conception of space in Muslim architecture.

The third point I would like to bring up is the regionalism versus nationalism debate. I have doubts about the idea of regionalism because I do not feel that in Islam there is such a thing as regionalism, as barriers and as boundaries. It is illustrated in Mosque architecture where we have a model that is borrowed from the Arabs which has travelled all over the Muslim world. There is something Islamic in it and it is topped off with local regional variations.

I have written a piece which I would like to read, which reflects some of my thinking on architecture in the west as well as in the Muslim world. I wrote this as an opinion on the architecture of Abdel Wahed El-Wakil

“Modern architecture is based on 19th century and early 20th century architectural morality, which stresses the ‘abandonment of historical style.’ The aesthetic is devoid of ornaments and traditional architectural vocabularies.

However, Wakil proves to us today that our contemporariness should be the opposite of the 19th century’s. The morality of today requires going back to historical styles and drawing lessons from these for our contemporary architecture.

Wakil conceives architecture as a biological, organic and to some extent evolutionary process. Nothing can be born without inheriting the genes of its parents — the generic forms in architectural terms. In another sense, architecture is a language that has words, syntax and messages.

When one conceives architecture in these terms we are able to design in any part on the globe, with architecture that speaks the language of that region. For this reason Wakil has been able to design buildings in Greece, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, that speak the regional language of architecture.

In each of his magnificent buildings in the Muslim world Wakil speaks the language of architecture that an average Muslim walking in the street would understand. Wakil realised that if a building is to communicate any message, certain words of the traditional language of architecture should be used in a traditional syntax. It may sound Classical or Renaissance; if so we might be getting the Renaissance of modern architecture in the Muslim world.

By doing so, Wakil proved to us not only the existence of what one may call a language for Islamic Architecture, but also its validity for contemporary architecture.

Wakil used the traditional vocabularies of architecture in a fashion unlike the 18th and 19th century revivalists. He asks what a thing wants to be. An arch is born if one opens up a brick wall.

His *muqarnae*, squinches, and pendentives not only serve aesthetic functions but also express the na-
ture of his building materials.

Wakil’s works not only remind one of the Wrightian ideas of organic architecture (since every line in his buildings expresses the nature of the materials) but also of the great Ottoman, Mimar Sinan of the 15th century. Sinan was born into a rich architectural tradition of Muslim and Byzantine origins. Sinan designed mosques that spoke the language of Pan-Islamic architecture with an Anatolian accent.

Wakil, unlike Sinan, was born at a time when the traditional architectural language was forgotten. His genius lies in the manner in which he revives the forgotten language and transmits messages that people comprehend.

As for Wakil’s mosque architecture, I find his work illuminating for the following reasons.

In my extensive research on mosque architecture, I realised that mosques, in addition to providing a shelter from sun and rain, heighten the psychological experience of prayer. In traditional architecture up to the 16th century mosque design stressed this experience. However in our modern era, with its emphasis on materialism and its neglect of the psychology of the individual, this tradition came to an end.

With the introduction of psychology to the realm of architecture the new humanistic architecture was born. This was the case for architecture in general. Mosques did not reflect this attitude until Wakil introduced his new mosques, in which he incorporated the interior design, form, and layout in order to induce psychological experiences that were lost during the past four centuries.

The nostalgic dimension of the past, which gives continuity and reduces controversy, is well illustrated in most of his designs. His preparation for the inner space takes into account epigraphy as well as pictorial representations that are essential to the psychology of the worshippers.

His gardens around or inside the mosques isolate the worshippers from the outside world and intensify their concentration.”

When I wrote my thesis I thought that it was only a theoretical one, however, Wakil proved it to be a valid argument for practicing architects. His mosques are not only shelters from rain and the solar

*Student work at the King Saud University in Riyadh – experimentation in mud architecture after the manner of buildings in the Najid region  (Riyadh, March 1988)*
heat but a shelter for the soul where one can find all that is needed for strength — a process called “psychosynthesis” and “psychoanalysis”. His mosques are rooms in the city for the spiritual well being of the city's dwellers.

For the past four years I have been experimenting, along with my students at King Saud University in Riyadh, with the process of learning from our traditional environment. The students measure drawings of old buildings and ruins in Najad region in the kingdom — a process very much similar to what Renaissance architects did with Roman ruins.

Last semester students concentrated on mud architecture in the Najad region for our participation in the international exhibition “Architectures De Terre” (Riyadh, March 1988 — Editor).

The students not only did measure drawings but also models so that they will get a feeling for the mass and the proportions of the structures.

Photographs courtesy of Osamah El-Gohary

Andras Ferkai

I am an architect from Hungary and the editor of the Hungarian Architecture magazine. First of all, why am I here and what has Hungary got to do with the Muslim world?

In 1526 the Turkish Empire reached and occupied the central part of Hungary and they stayed there for more than one hundred and fifty years. This was a peaceful co-existence between Hungarians and Turkish because Hungarians gave tax and in return they could retain their culture. From this period a lot of Turkish buildings remain in Hungary, such as mosques, and public baths.

Contrary to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, we have practically no Muslim people living in the country, so we have no living Muslim architecture now. Muslim architecture in Hungary is a question of protection and restoration of its monuments. We have some good examples of this.

I would like to say a few words about the situation of architectural criticism in my country. Our problems are more or less identical with those of the whole eastern block, so in a way, you will have an overall view of Communist countries.

Some years ago, we edited a special issue of our magazine dealing with architectural criticism. We asked many architects about this topic and the answers were very surprising. Most of them asserted that there was no criticism in architecture at all, and that it was not needed. Others explained that traditional criticism was dangerous under the circumstances when architecture is so strongly determined by social conditions in the eastern European countries.

An older architect wrote, “Architecture is a social affair today, more than it used to be. It is a mistake to think that architecture depends only on the architect’s talent. It does, but even more it reflects on the will, the economic situation, the state of development, the level of organisation and every deformation of the society. If we criticise architecture and say that it is in crisis and that it is confused, then by inference society and the establishment is judged”.

Let me enlighten you with two examples of the different role and emphasise architectural criticism has in the countries of eastern Europe.

The first story happened in the early 1950s. At that time, the establishment had been transformed, following faithfully the Stalinist way; the industries, the financial institutions and the firms, were nationalised. The private practice of architecture ceased and architects gathered in huge offices established by the state, did not want to accept the Stalinist style in architecture.

The political leadership decided to organise a so called “discission”, where they could force architects to be obedient. It was very strange that a Marxist professor of architecture a follower of functionalism, was accused of being the follower of a past style which would not fit with the new social ideas. After this “discussion”, architects were forced to accept the new style.

The second story concerns the same professor. In the middle of the 1970s, he wrote, severely criticising the organic experiments of the Pecs group; it was a little group of young architects in the southern part of Hungary. They tried to find a new path in architecture; a little bit organic starting from folk or vernacular traditions.

This professor, with his criticism, managed to stop the experiment. From this, there developed a heated debate in the pages of different magazines. Eventually one passed sentence on the experiment and the group was dissolved in an administrative way.

This is why architects still have a fear of criticism. A new approach to architectural criticism is needed in our country and in eastern Europe, which separates firmly the responsibility of the architect from that of other decision makers; clients, investors and construction firms. The critic cannot analyse a recent building only as a work of art. He must discover the social background, the factors influencing the crea-
tive process and he can then focus on questions of form, function, meaning and style.

Mohammed Arkoun

The fact that Andras Ferkai from Hungary is with us, shows that the Award does not have a narrow approach on Islamic character. We would like to explore every historical space where an Islamic experience, about architecture, took place. This is one of our ambitions; a cultural and knowledge seeking ambition and through this, an ambition for an understanding of civilisation.

Haluk Pamir

I have prepared some notes on architectural criticism, which have been distributed, in which I argue that there is a difference between critical and non-critical mentalities towards life. (Notes for an Essay on Architectural Criticism by Haluk Pamir are to be found on page 135 – 141 Editor). The notes establish the context for critical activity and criticism in the field of architecture. In them I discuss the situation in Turkey and the place of architectural criticism there. It is slowly developing but we do not yet have a theory of criticism.

One school, the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, has had courses on theory, history and criticism of architecture since the mid-1960’s. It was run by Ahmet Gulgonen assisted by Suha Ozkan. After Gulgonen left, Suha Ozkan carried on for six or seven years, and some publications resulted. This was a course taken as an elective but students who took the course were also good in design and nearly all of them abandoned criticism totally after their graduation.

It is not easy to establish a critical centre in one institution in the hope that it will affect others in the profession and in society. Such an institution should establish a good relationship with society to become effective.

We did some survey work with our students at METU during the late 1970s (Imamoglu and Imamoglu, Pamir), on the values they placed on our traditional architecture or Turkish architecture in general. The students were very critical about our architecture and they very much praised western architecture. Imamoglu showed slides of modern buildings and old building, asking them to compare which was better. He tried many experimental situations, not just asking which building was better, but which architect they thought was a better architecture, without giving names of the architects.

In both cases the conclusion was that the western type was seen as a better type of architecture even in historical examples. We have now introduced criticism in the architecture doctoral degree course. We are trying to first criticise the myths established in the west, so we are trying to establish the deconstructing process first. This involves not only mythical personalities of architecture but also mythical theories of architecture; both the processes of doing architecture and also the men behind such activity. That is one step.

The second step we are trying to do is to understand the quality of architecture in Turkey, that is the position of kitsch – bad taste – which is nicknamed “Arabesque” in Turkey. It is a term used for a type of music. It is the music of hopelessness of the people living in shanty towns; some sixty-six percent of our population. It talks about misery, and limited futures to the strains of Arabic music. It is critical in a negative way. This “Arabesque” approach cannot be heard on the radio; the state does not approve of it, but it is still there. It is used by people generally and it is used in architecture. No one can forbid that.

We have Arabic arches, windows and entrances, all over the place; not only that, but other kinds of kitsch imported from the west as well, the plastic version of many things. We have concentrated on criticising that as well.

In order to do this, one should take a stand, one should have a theoretical approach to criticism. We are trying to establish, first of all, a notion that there is no absolute human judgement; that it is not possible. There are examples from psycho-physical research which actually aimed at establishing such absolutes and failed — even in areas of human sense research.

We are saying that this is something normative in a sense or it depends on human construal, even construal of the norms in such areas. It means that first of all we have to establish normative areas, that we want to operate in, in architectural criticism. It is this definition of areas that is important.

Secondly, we try to deconstruct the contribution of building appraisals because that is one area which even the western critics, who have been operating for a very long time, are avoiding. Building appraisal, generally means understanding how the building functionally operates. All the servicing is appraised in a building’s appraisal. That was done in 1970’s and it is still being done in some magazines, but not really enough information is provided. Instead of building appraisals, we should try more environmental evaluation studies.

Most research in the west shows that there are great cross-cultural differences, in establishing standards.
for architectural servicing. It varies from one culture to another, so it is difficult to criticise a building using the standards that are established in another country. It depends on life style, on fashion, on what people see in fashion magazines, how the places are connotated through influential media.

That means that since there is no absolute judgement, you have to construe it, but you have to have enough information to understand the building. That information can be gathered by good environmental evaluation. Architectural criticism organises and directs human beings to organise such information, deciding what kind of information is needed or what kind of approach is needed to understand architecture?

Criticism in most of the Islamic world is very restricted for many reasons. I know however that the tradition of our sponsor is a very critical stream of thought.

We can use two kinds of criticism. One is the deconstructive type of criticism which tries to scratch the surface, to pull down the facade of what is going on and tries to understand the inner conflicts that make that outward facade exist. The other is of course reconstructive criticism which is, in most cases, what we read in architectural journals. This tries to figure out the typological semiotic implications of plan types, facades, etc. Its authors mostly try to reconstruct an understanding of all those stimuli that they want to convey to other people reading the magazine or the book.

However, architectural criticism is not enough. It should be environmental criticism that should not just try to say how the building fits into its environment but it should treat each and every building as a cultural phenomena. It can only be explained by man-environment relationship theories. Man-environment relationship theories can also direct the environmental evaluation and human construal processes that go with such criticism.

Said Zulficar, in an introduction to a previous regional seminar, made me feel that the Award acts as a very general pressure group. It is not just in building criticism that the Award is interested but it has a general attitude and mentality directed towards the environment and it is trying to criticise and establish counter proposals by showing the results of the Award processes.

We should be aware of the building terminologies that we are using in our parts of the world. That is very important. The building terminology the builders are using and the building terminology the users are using are quite different, even in Turkey, from one region to another.

There is a reductionism, I must say, in describing the building activity in the regions that we come from. There is great pressure from the west who define that reductionism because the building processes are changing; that is one kind of pressure; the crafts of building do not exist any more. The theories of architecture are bringing in new words and we try to see the building activity only through such verbal concepts as transparency, functionalism, etc. Such concepts have nothing to do with how the building is crafted.

We must encourage the establishment of architectural and environmental movements in our countries. The west has its own architectural movements, its own organised way of thinking and people provoke ideas. I do not know if the AKAA can be accepted as a kind of movement. There should be a lot of different environmental movements that might compete with the AKAA movement or probably with AKAA as an umbrella organisation. There are already existing compatible movements. They will produce alternative man-environment relationship theories which it should be possible for the critic to use, to judge and criticise buildings. We should also create myths.

There was an argument in MIMAR sometime ago on this subject. We should have mythical architectural critics in our parts of the world and we should have myths of buildings as well, but they should be established very carefully so that they will not turn into paper tigers of some sort. In our reliance on the tradition of criticism in the west, in the field of architecture, we must be aware of the fallacies that take place in western architectural criticism.

To illustrate this I have distributed a cutting from a British daily newspaper which briefly says that Lloyds, the world's biggest insurance market, has decided to redesign its London headquarters after a flood of complaints about working conditions in the building. It took ten years and 195 million pounds Sterling to build this award winning structure, designed by Richard Rogers in the heart of the City, London's financial district.

The decision to redesign followed a poll commissioned by Lloyds, that found three quarters of the employees at the new headquarters thought its working environment was worse than in their old building. Peter Miller, Lloyds chairman, said 77 per cent of dealers and 65 per cent of its underwriters thought the building could be fixed to suit their business needs, but he could not say how much the modifications would cost.

Miller defended Rogers, who also co-designed the Pompidou Centre in Paris, as a genius. Rogers was unavailable for comment about the decision to rede-
sign the building, which won a City Trust Award and The Financial Times Architecture at Work Award to 1987

So I have some questions for the critics we have at this seminar arising out of this situation. Could anyone explain how the situation might have arisen? Secondly, what is the status of the City Trust Award and The Financial Times Architecture at Work Award and finally what conclusions can one draw from such happenings?

Mohammed Arkoun

This is an exercise which we should really do. Haluk Pamir has pointed out some issues which I consider very relevant to our work and he has mentioned what he calls mythical theories. This is a very questionable point because I know, through my contacts with architects and anthropologists, that architects use this very delicate concept in a totally different way and content to the current use by anthropologists.

We should discuss this point of myths in our critical discourse. There is no way to have any criticism on any theory without elaborating a working concept of myths and the working concept of another word, which doesn’t exist in English and German, but is very commonly used in French: it is the *imaginaire*. This is also a question for critical discourse; why a concept exists in some language and doesn’t exist in another language? It is a very important issue, especially when we come to use Muslim languages like Arabic, Persian and Turkish.

We cannot work out any theoretical and practical approach to criticism without elaborating the concept of *imaginaire* and also the concept of *myth*. Haluk Pamir has also pointed out another question which deserves our attention; the position of the Muslim world in relation to the west. He mentioned that there is a trend towards accepting the western model in architecture; not only in architecture; but also in literature, politics, institutions, and in the courts of the law.

But the Muslim world had shifted from the admiration, that Haluk Pamir has mentioned, to a total rejection. We are in the period of the refusal. We are in the period of the reaction against the naive acceptance without criticism of the so-called model of the west. This historical fact is now a very big political issue between the west and Islam. It has cultural and intellectual implications not yet considered by scholars as it deserves. If we ignore them we will simply ‘gossip’. This gossip dominates many books and reviews on Muslim societies and culture; I would wish that architecture be protected from such ignorance and gossip.

Pierre Vago

I will try to stick to the subject of “architectural criticism”. The problem is not new. I found in my files, a special issue of *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, twenty-five years ago exactly, dealing with *La Critique Architecturale*. I refer to the long paper I wrote at that time.

Architectural criticism is a very important and complex problem. The first question you must consider is: who is an architectural critic? Who are the actors in this game? To be a doctor you need some qualifications and also to be an architect, but anybody can call himself an architectural critic. If he can find an editor in a magazine or a producer on television, he can then poison public opinion with his sometimes not very well prepared ideas.

One of the questions to be discussed by this group of architectural critics, should be a definition of who is and what are the requirements to be an authorised, accepted and competent architectural critic because the influence of the architectural critic is very great. His influence is not just on the architect. The architect generally does not like to be criticised. He likes it when people say that his he marvellous, or even a genius! But that is not very important.

More important is the impact of the opinion expressed in newspapers or on the television which is more and more the means of communication and the influence on public opinion by people speaking on architectural matters. The impact of what is written in architectural magazines is very great on students and young people. The influence of some magazines is certainly greater than the influence of their professors and teachers.

It is very important that architectural criticism should be serious but it is seldom that architectural criticism is serious. It is generally applied to buildings or operations such as planning, reconstruction or preservation. We all feel that we need some definitions. In the past the criteria was established, at least, in some specific cultural areas.

Now there is nothing. We have no solid references. One of the most important task should be to try to come to some solid references. There is a need, as a first step, to come to an agreement on these definitions. We use words without knowing the precise meaning of the words. In this room, probably if we asked ten participants to say what they mean by tradition or local forms, the definitions would be quite different.
The architectural critic generally comes from two fields; the field of architects themselves, and from journalism; these are then, the professional critics. The two groups, or catagories, can give very good results; but very often, in recent years at least, we can see that the professional critics coming from journalism do not have the necessary knowledge of the problems of the architect. They imagine that the architect is a kind of God, having all the powers, and that if he designs a building, it is really totally his responsibility.

Unfortunately, an architect is very often a slave, the slave of his client, of bureaucracy, of money, of a budget, the slave in some parts of the world, of politicians, parties, dictators who impose their will and it is very difficult to resist. On the other hand, an architect as a critic is sometimes too strongly influenced by aesthetics

In the 1987 UIA meeting in Brighton, England, for example we discussed a building praised by many participants; but almost nobody had seen the building. It was considered as a marvellous building. Maybe it is; but here the question of the photographer arises. I have sometimes had terrific surprises when I have purposely visited a building because I had seen such beautiful pictures, and the plans were good. I did not recognise it because the photographer was too good. He took the right views, used the correct lighting and focussed precisely on the building. I always thought that one of the reasons for the success of the Le Corbusier was his photographer, Lucien Herve — not the only reason of course.

It is often very difficult to gain entry into a building. I am convinced that in architecture the space is at least as important as the volume, and the inside is as important as the exterior skin of the building. The building when you enter creates many feelings, impressions and sensations. Now, walking inside is an experience which is quite impossible to reproduce by photographs taken of the exterior.

Architecture is not sculpture; in spite of the, in my opinion, completely false definition by Le Corbusier, "Le jeu savant correct et magnifique des volumes assemblee sous la lumiere".

Maybe that is sculpture, but it is not architecture. Architecture has first of all to fulfi a function; if it does not work, it is a great mistake to accept it as a wonderful thing only because the exterior form is pleasant.

Problems like those arising now in London, referred to by Haluk Pamir, are maybe a result of that. A well known skyscraper got all kinds of awards because it is considered as beautiful by some people. Unfortunately it does not work. When I visited Bra-

zilia, the two cupolas of Niemeyer, the Parliament and the Senate are very impressive and aesthetically it is a shock. But then you go inside. The two main rooms are interesting; one is an amphitheatre, with a flat roof covering and the other is covered with a kind of cupola. In these two rooms, the deputies and senators meet twice or three times a year for a few days, but there is a staff of hundreds of people, working the whole year with electricity. This is Brazilia, where the sun is shining so marvellously!

In France we have now a terrific architect, an export product of Catalonia! He is covering France and Europe with his works; I hope he will never cover the Islamic world with his neo-Fascistic, neo-Stalinistic, "architecture". You know them of course. Behind his concrete columns, there are sometimes bathrooms, of course without windows. In his marvellous palaces; the joy of the photographers of fashion, there are small social houses, two room apartments. It is completely foolish; but some of the architectural critics are enthusiastic; they say "Here is the new Michaelangelo of our century!"

I think the internal function, the cost and the durability are elements that you cannot forget in the appreciation of a building. There is another aspect too; a building may be beautiful in itself but can completely destroy an existing environment, natural or built. It can be an offence to an environment. It is not enough to limit the role of an architectural critic, even of a good critic, to an aesthetic appreciation of a building or a group of buildings.

I am sure that we need, and the decision makers need, architectural criticism. The decision maker is not a competent architect nor a competent architectural critic. He is looking for advice and if he looks in magazines, where he find critical appraisal. He says, "Probably these names are the best". This is one of the main responsibility's of the critics.

What can we do to clarify things? As I have said, at least we could try to clarify some definitions. I am really afraid when we use the words "authenticity", or "tradition". What is tradition? What is local architecture? What is imported architecture? All architecture is imported, more or less.

This is my first visit to this beautiful island of Malta. If you take out the imported architecture, what remains; some stones? All the palaces, all the churches, all that we see is imported architecture!

Similarly with Spain. The Alhambra is imported architecture, nothing to do with Spanish architecture. Everywhere, there is imported architecture. This year I visited Anatolia; all that my Turkish guide showed me, even the most remarkable monuments, are imported architecture, coming
from Greece. You can say the same thing with the new forms. Please, let us go back some centuries; think what architectural critics said when Brunelleschi covered Santa Maria del Fiore with a cupola! A strange, never seen, brutal modern form of building. The cupola coming from Firenze went everywhere; the English are very proud to have it in London in St. Paul's; the Romans in S. Pietro, and we French, on the Invalides in Paris.

We must accept some architectural forms as the result of a technical invention, or the genius of men who will go out of their original country and will be an enrichment for all of us; it must be accepted as an enrichment.

I am not a specialist of Islamic architecture but I have spent a lot of time in the Maghreb. If you took away from Algeria all the architecture imported by the Romans, you would destroy Timгад which is a gem but has nothing to do with the local architecture. The same with EI-Djem, in Tunisia, or Volubilis in Morocco; export of civilisation or of a technique, is an enrichment and must be accepted, never rejected. As a principle, I am really very troubled when I hear people saying that you must adapt to the local. At what time does it commence; how do we define what is “local”?

The history of a town is a constant evolution; it is a constant introduction of new elements brought by historic evolution; technical, social, economic influences, multi-cultural influences. These enrich human societies. Turning to the preservation of heritage; at what time and stage, can you accept imported forms and expressions of architecture as being part of the heritage and why stop it at a certain point? Yesterday is part of the heritage of today; maybe new elements will be part of the heritage of tomorrow: why not?

You cannot sterilise a civilisation, you cannot sterilise a town or a city. You cannot preserve it at a certain stage, or it dies.

We, as critics and servants of the architect and society, must make it really very clear that life is stronger than some concepts, if these concepts are interpreted in a restrictive and static sense. History is going on.

It is really very interesting to see pictures of some of the cities of this part of the world which I don't know very well. I do know some cities, like Cairo. Of old Arab Cairo very little remains. Is it possible to stop its demise? It seems very difficult.

You have heard in this seminar many speak about Islamic architecture and the Islamic forms of architecture. I have the feeling that here again, there are so many expressions of architecture in the very large Islamic world. It cannot be the same in Saudi Arabia and in Ivory Coast. It cannot be the same in Algeria or in Indonesia. There are local geographic, human, cultural, traditional and economic conditions which give different forms to the same idea or the same spiritual content. These are quite different expressions; and this is marvellous! You cannot reduce it to a certain form.

In time and in space there are certain differences and it is clear that the mosque one sees in Pakistan and the mosque one sees in Jeddah or in the M'Zab are jewels, the latter without decoration at all.

That is why I think the greatest, the largest, liberty of expression must be given, if you try to define Islamic architecture. We need to come to some agreement on some principles, some philosophical ideas. The most important is the spiritual content. The form can be very beautiful or not so beautiful; but the spiritual function is the most important in our materialistic world, and that we must try to save.
Session III
Open Discussion

Paul Gauci

Some very interesting issues have been brought up that are closely related to the question of dualism and the dynamic relationship existing between "extreme" poles. Some speakers also referred to the quasi-autonomy between various cultural forms and the possibility of establishing the degree of autonomy. The implication of this is that architectural criticism can only be an inter-disciplinary exercise.

When discussing "regionalism" we should, however, be very careful of being too multi-disciplinary. I will elaborate on this further.

It is also important, for the critic to take into account not only the relationship between various cultural forms, but also that between culture and politics and economics. After all regionalism is essentially an ideological and political issue using architecture as one of its tools.

It would be unwise for critics to disregard such political and economic factors. At the risk of sounding doctrinaire I would point out that international finance which in many ways was responsible for the dissemination of the so-called international style in architecture, has the very nice habit of borrowing from the ideological discourse of its "opponents" and making use of it for its own ends. The result, as I will demonstrate, could easily make architecture, an important cultural form, completely autonomous, that is cut off, not only from other cultural forms but also from society as a whole. To give one example, I refer you to our local situation where a good number of the recognised experiments in regional architecture, have taken place within the tourism sector. These are very interesting experiments, and some of them happen to please me, but they are anything but Maltese. Local people simply do not relate to the abstract interpretations of motifs and other forms borrowed from what the architects concerned imagine the Maltese past to be. As a matter of fact, the designs of these buildings and complexes are more a product of an enlightened marketing strategy of the investors than part of a "political movement", which tries to convince the Maltese that they have a cultural identity which they should develop in order to counteract the wholesale importation of foreign cultures.

Going back to the question of being too multi-disciplinary. It is my opinion that sometimes architecture, or rather, discussions on architecture, tend to be overly political. Many people have from time to time, had the illusion that they could achieve much through architecture. We have the example of the Constructivists in post-revolutionary Russia who dreamt of the socialist city as the social condenser. I believe that the advocates of regionalism are living the same illusion.

My final comment is that the architectural critic should make a clear distinction between the criticism of a building per se or the building as a social or cultural phenomenon. An architectural critic discusses the building in itself. When someone analyses a building in a social or cultural context, one is not an architectural critic but a social critic using architecture as a tool.

I am not interested in looking for a demarcation line between the architectural critic and the social critic but this distinction is a very important one to make because an architectural critic who attempts to be a social critic without the right academic and professional backgrounds, is treading on very treacherous ground.

Renato LaFerva

How can you have architectural or any other form of criticism without having freedom to be able to do it? Without a free press, I cannot see any architectural criticism at all; any form of criticism is simply an exercise in futility.

For example when you came to Malta, you might have thought that we live in a happy little democracy.
We do but it is not all that democratic.
Just before this seminar opened, the local Chamber of Architects, of which I am a member, had something to say about the proposal to bring a foreign architect to advise on certain aspects of the restructuring of this capital city of Valetta.

There are several papers published in this country but no paper accepted to publish the statement made by the Chamber of Architects, except for the paper of the party in government which published an abridged version together with its own comments on what they thought about it.

It is no use our living in a world of dreams, we must appreciate what is happening around us when we talk about architectural criticism.

When we talk about regionalism, I fail to understand how Islam can possibly be thought of as a region. It stretches from Morocco to Indonesia covering three quarters of the world!

Raymond Vasallo

Architecture has the greatest and most drastic and far reaching impact on man, his environment, the quality of his life and on his biological and psychic well being. So it is a blessing that we have the architectural critic to give subjective judgements on the recently erected mosque, or palace or the National Bank building.

Let us not forget, however, the kindergarten down the road, or the terrace house round the corner. The larger part of our settlements and our urban environment consist of this type of building. I wonder if the architectural critics have time for this category.

For practical reasons, I cannot see the critics sharing the same office with the architect as Bruno Levi has suggested though I would certainly like to see an architectural critic in the department which is responsible for what is built in this country. I mean the department which is responsible for the issue of building permits.

I would like also, to appeal to every practicing architect to act as a critic in regard to his own works before these works leave the drawing board and not after. There is always room for the old maxim that when you find a good solution, look for a better one.

Peter Davey

I want to add a word about the craft of criticism. When I was starting in this trade about twenty years ago, we used to talk about the difference between prescriptive criticism and descriptive criticism. I think it is sometimes still quite useful to distinguish between the two which are always interlocked.

Without descriptive criticism, you cannot prescribe. Descriptive criticism is the craft that every critic must learn before applying his value system. The trouble is very many people posing as critics have not been instructed in the craft; and as a craft it is the most difficult I know next to designing buildings. You have to translate the three dimensional reality of a building, an enormously complex object in real time and space, into the two dimensions of photographs and drawings and the one dimension of linear prose. It is very hard indeed — but, like any craft it can be taught and learned and it is our duty to foster and pass on the skills that have been taught us.

It is all in an effort to make the building live in the reader’s mind — an absolutely vital enterprise, because one of the reasons why architectural criticism is different from literary criticism is that with literary criticism the text is accessible, you can suppose that the reader will have read it already or can get it, or you can quote from it. You cannot expect people to buy tickets for Bhong when you are writing about the Bhong Mosque.

Of course descriptive criticism can never be valueless. Historian’s objective criticism and autonomous criticism that some people have been talking about, is in my view totally impossible. We have to decide what to select because we are limited in the amount of space that we can devote in describing buildings. If we were not, we might just as well publish a Bill of Quantities and have done with it.

So in selection, we are making moral and political choices about the nature of the buildings we are trying to describe and about our approach to them — and to architecture as a whole. We, as editors and critics, are making prescriptive judgements all the time, even when they are not overt. Without these judgements there can be no architectural criticism. But without the essential craft of writing about buildings, architectural criticism becomes mere empty vapouring.

Abdelbaki Ibrahim

I refer to the words of Pierre Vago who suggested that critics of Islamic architecture should be qualified in Islamic history, sociology and teachings. This is very difficult for many people to comprehend.

I remember five years ago when I was on a committee putting together the curriculum for the Department of Islamic Architecture in Mecca and there were about twelve people around the table. Everybody was explaining what Islamic architecture is, in a different
way. I said “how come we differ here on the definition of Islamic architecture. We are going to teach people and we already have different views”. The main question now is do we associate architecture with Islam as a religion, with its rules and regulations or is Islamic a description of types of architecture and buildings built at certain times and in certain places?

The example which Chris Abel described of the course he gave in Jeddah University, reminded me of the time about fifteen years ago when I was giving a similar course but with an additional dimension on the social behaviour of the Islamic community, in space. How is the meaning of Islam distilled and reflected in the building form? When Chris Abel mentioned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he referred to the Taj Mahal. To me as a Muslim, the Taj Mahal is a very beautiful piece of architecture, but I do not consider this as Islamic because in Islam we are told not to have or to build Mausoleums.

So the question remains of the definition of Islamic architecture, in order that architectural critics should be aware of what Islamic architecture is. Is it ornaments, as somebody emphasised? Is it transplantation of types of architecture from one place to another? Is it a sort of imitation of the past? As a Muslim, I see it as an advancement because Islam calls for advancement and innovations as one theme of Islamic education.

Suha Ozkan

I want to say certain fairly general things about my own geographical region. Even though I have a wider scope in the Award, the place which I know best is my own country. Oddly enough it has only five percent of the world’s Muslim population but it has forty-five percent of the Muslim architects. In other words, there are sixteen thousand architects in Turkey and the critical discourse in architecture, as Haluk Pamir lucidly displayed, is almost nil.

In the twenty years of my professional life, together with a group of people in Turkey, many of whom are involved in the Award in its various stages, we have tried to encourage critical thinking; not critical thinking among architects but critical thinking among people. When there is an exhibition of paintings or the launching of a book on literature, there is much debate in the media and press but when a major planning scheme is unveiled or when a major building is opened or when a major commission is given, there is no discussion in architectural terms in the media. We tried very hard for some time but with no success unfortunately. We tried harder in certain realms of architecture in which things can be discussed and elaborated and where there has to be discussion; that is the architectural competitions.

When an architectural competition takes place, there is a jury which does the critical assessment and the architects in any Turkish competition, who submit their drawings require a convincing response from the jury. We were very successful in the liberated atmosphere of 1968 onwards, to impose critical thinking where the jury response to the professional was concerned. In other words, they had to explain why they selected the winning building in a competition.

This was a big achievement for my generation of architects and we were applauded for that. These colloquies are still being held and one of the quotations which Haluk Pamir has included in his ‘Notes’ is from these colloquies. At least one hundred of them have been held so far and following the jury’s explanation, the architects criticised the brief, though never the judgement. Unfortunately when the discussion takes place, and I happened to take part in one of these as an expert, it often revolves around details such as the water table level or the roofing material or the garage level, which of course is totally meaningless in the context of architecture. So we ended up in a completely distorted architectural discourse via criticism.

I have agonised over this situation when there is not a sincere discussion or discourse between architects and the public at large.

After joining the Award, I experienced something completely different, where the selection process is fairly open even though the meetings are not open to the public. As Mohamed Arkoun explained the whole of the transactions of the Award had the banner, which was coined by himself as “a space for freedom” or un espace de liberte where all ideas were integrated. This is one of the reasons why we wanted to bring criticism into the foreground because there is a critical process existing in the Award, which is very open and very rich. There are seminars going on in parallel with the nominations, the short-listing and final awards and it involves all the architects from the Muslim and western world who contribute to the Award.

In many Muslim countries, there is absolutely no critical discourse. The reason is that there is a lot of money involved. Let us be very open about this; if I criticise someone’s building, he will telephone me and say “look why are you playing with my livelihood. I have got this competition or commission and I have to finish it”. You can only pamper each other and in that way we will arrive nowhere.

This brings me to the second point which is very important; the launching of a movement. In other words an open discussion to encourage critical thinking; negative and positive; to point out directions and
lines of thinking without resentment and without being personal and without affecting anyone’s livelihood.

This was actually one of the aims of this seminar which we discussed at the outset and it is why we invited the leading architectural journals of the world. I believe that they are the ones who can nurture this idea and who can enhance the level of thinking of this movement.

I don’t want to refer to authenticity or regionalism or to restrict the discourse in this matter but the movement has to be started. I cannot say what the response to the movement will be by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. We, at the outset, and by our constitution don’t want to be a school of thought. We want to offer an arena for discussion, a free forum and the movement or schools of thoughts are going to emerge in other places. I would beg all editors to help in elevating this movement in critical thinking.

Mohammed Arkoun

I am now speaking not as chairman of this session, but like Suha Ozkan, as one of the members of the Steering Committee, to inform you how the Award conceives its function. The question of Islamic architecture has been raised several times. The prospect has been mentioned of Islamic works of the same appearance stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. How do you deal with this?

We have a very open approach to what qualifies as Muslim architecture. We do not want to impose on architecture conventional definitions of what is Muslim. When we consider a country such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Senegal, Jordan or any other country where there is an Islamic presence, we regard Islam as a factor among other factors, which plays a role to produce architecture in that society. There are three levels that we have to consider all the time and in all the places. These levels are viewed from an archaeological, anthropological and historical point of view. The first level, is the deepest one: the level of local tradition before Islam came. We find this in all societies. This level is not dead, it is still existing. We want to know to what extent it exists and what kind of existence it should retain. It is an enormous problem because Islam has already covered or eliminated traditions that have preceded it (I refer to what the Koran called Jahiliyya).

All societies where Islam arrived had before, in their history, a more or less rich culture. We do not neglect or cover this culture with a dogmatic definition of Islam. This would be a missionary activity, not an activity embracing scientific knowledge carried on in a space of intellectual freedom and criticism.

The second level which we consider all the time, is precisely the level of Islamic inspiration. Islam came as a religious horizon. It is a religious teaching. It opens ontological, metaphysical and spiritual horizons. These horizons are to be found in the book of Islam, in the Koran. It is a great tradition enriched by the creative work of artists, thinkers and religious personalities. We should not consider it through the political movements today, which are more political than religious or cultural. We should consider the roots, not only of Islam, but the roots of the whole culture produced in what I have described as the Societies of the Book. (Lectures du Coran, 2 ed. Paris, 1988.)

When we say the Societies of the Book, we include the Christian and Jewish societies. It is all the same search for something which concerns the spiritual ontological religious horizons. Everybody is thus concerned, not only Muslims. This is the second level because this level came in various societies. At this level we have to work out a new cultural environment which we can describe as Muslim. Islam is differently present, according to the manner in which the existing culture resisted the impact of Islam. There is a dialectic between these two levels that we have to understand, as historians, anthropologists, theologians and philosophers. That is why I say again that architecture cannot be just about forms. That is why I raised the problem of autonomy of architecture; of the act of building.

The third level that we have to consider is the impact of modernity on these two levels including the current expression in traditional societies. Chronologically it comes the third. It comes structurally and chronologically after the others and it destroys and eliminates the others in many societies where big cities grew in short periods and attracted peasants and nomads who had strong links with traditional cultures. The recent growth of big cities shows clearly all the problems generated by modernity but not solved yet. It is precisely our task to point out the issues and difficulties and to find relevant solutions in architecture and the urban fabric; but this search will not be successful without a serious knowledge of the present situation of the Muslim world in general. I hope you see how the word Islam encompasses many levels of reality.

Ihsan Fethi

I would like to stress two important issues which have troubled my mind as an architectural critic from the Muslim world. The first point is that I feel there is a
real danger of cultural stagnation in Islamic architecture today. This danger emanates from the cultural bankruptcy of the reuse of tradition forms and symbolic details, as they are without any significant innovation or an intellectual reinterpretation.

In other words, there is a real danger today, a real threat of the proliferation of reactionary or at least stationary architectural design.

From this standpoint, I believe that the works of Arab architects such as Hassan Fathy and Wakil, although they are well executed, well designed and aesthetically pleasing, are no more than a literal interpretation or literal continuation of past concepts by using traditional technologies and materials.

Western critics, significantly, have romanticised a lot about their works and said very little indeed about the other innovative architects such as the late Iraqi Qahtan Avni and Rifat Chadirji, who both elaborated a new and contemporary language for architecture in Iraq by using modern technology, imaginatively and intellectually, reinterpreting Islamic architecture, concepts and forms into the modern reality of today.

I strongly recommend that we, as critics, should examine architectural works in the Islamic world in this light. Innovation and cultural contemporarity in Islamic architecture are the two most needed approaches today.

The second point which we have not really addressed ourselves to sufficiently, is the question of architectural education and institutions. As critics, we should examine architectural education and institutions, for they constitute an important link and an important part of the whole architectural process.

As a general comment, I would say that in architectural schools there is obviously a strong western cultural influence and very little evidence of concern for local problems and issues or even understanding the indigenous culture or history. These academic factories, as I call them, are producing hundreds and hundreds of architects who are largely architecturally unaware of their own culture and consequently cannot be expected to create intellectually conscious architecture in their own countries. A major re-examination and critique is therefore needed in these academic institutions.

Dennis Sharp

In my Keynote paper I was trying to direct attention to a number of areas in architectural criticism. I think we have got to the position in this seminar of directing attention to the more detailed aspects of criticism. Professor Arkoun was speaking earlier about the possible link or the analogy with literary criticism. He was also expressing a doubt about whether there is a body of architectural criticism of any real substance. I think it would be wrong to leave that impression. There is a substantial body of architectural criticism. That body of criticism should be recognised and acknowledged, even rather briefly, because it represents part of the tradition of critical thinking; of the apparatus, if you like, of architectural criticism.

In my paper I suggested it really began in the middle of the nineteenth century when it was linked to the very strong German philosophic aesthetic tradition. It produced, over many years, many categories of architectural criticism; as many perhaps as exists, in the area of literary criticism.

It is worth turning our minds briefly to the descriptive tradition in architectural criticism mentioned by Peter Davey. It is a strong one. It is very largely in the English language and it has some very good models for the future and possibly for alternative modes of criticism. There is also of course, something we have not touched on, which is that kind of criticism which promotes the building you are actually working on. The sort of thing that Frank Lloyd Wright did so well and Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer too. This is where you look as if you are actually criticising the building when you are really forcing it on the public and telling them it is a good thing to have. There is a very strong tradition here of prescriptive criticism, covering all cultures.

The kinds of critical categories I have been thinking about are those that take up particular positions. We have not discussed for example, the whole tradition that rests on the historicist's position. Stanford Anderson mentioned it when referring to the father of the modern aspect of that tradition, Adolf Loos. Of course the strength of that tradition comes through from Burchardt, Wolflin, Gombrich, Wittkower and more recently people like Norberg-Schultz, Mark Giraud and others. There is a very strong element there which deals with description and criticism and uses an apparatus of critical values.

There is the modern movement criticism, which stems from Giedeon, Pevsner, Richards and Banham, up to the present day; there is practical criticism from people like Alan Colquhoun, Peter Smithson, John Summerson, Vincent Scully, Charles Moore, Robert Venturi and that positively links with a whole body of knowledge about architectural theory. The man-environmental studies, pioneered by Amos Rapoport represent a body of knowledge that could be tapped and used effectively. There is a linguistic tradition which involves the borrowing of ideas from the French structuralists reflected in the work of Charles Jencks, George Baird, Geoffrey Broadbent and Chris Abel.

The psychological — Gestalt theories of Rudolf Arnheim and others have had an important influence.
as has of course the more recently invented propagandist style which we are still suffering from, the Charles Jencks school of Post-Modernist criticism!

We are dealing with a very dense tradition. It is by no means one man thick. It is an incredibly wide subject and it would be useful if we can broaden the basis of what we are speaking about in critical terms as well as in cultural ones.

Robert Powell

Haluk Pamir’s notes on architectural criticism excellently summarise the critical and non-critical mentalities and the status of architectural criticism in different societies. In Singapore architectural criticism hardly exists, apart from the regional-versus-foreign identity debate.

There is a reluctance perhaps for cultural reasons to criticise. Perhaps it stems from the notion of filial piety, or of respect for one’s elders and one’s mentors. In such societies one can understand the lack of a critical attitude.

Haluk Pamir correctly identifies other aspects of criticism in some Asean societies. Criticism as he says, is restricted to external influences with criticism of the system, for example criticism of Singapore’s public housing, institutionalised into “feedback” from Residents Committees and grass-roots political organisations.

How can criticism be introduced in a situation of such non-critical mentality? Is it desirable? Many would agree with Mohammed Arkoun that if it means the style of criticism that Michael Sorkin brilliantly displayed that it is debatable if it would be acceptable in some societies. We are witnessing just such a gulf in views in Singapore at the moment when the Government has limited the circulation of several overseas journals because of differences of opinion on the responsibilities and interpretation of journalistic freedom.

Edwin Mintoff

Mohammed Arkoun argued in Session II for a contemporary architecture which should reflect better the deep traditions and cultures of Muslim society. I believe that this is amply justified although I do not think that it is possible to find a solution to this during this one seminar or even in a number of seminars.

I feel that Chris Abel’s contribution has come closest to meeting this requirement and I found it very impressive, particularly because he touched on the educational process. I do believe that this gives the roots or basis for providing a successful architect.

Chris Abel showed how he used design skills and not words, so that Muslim students themselves appreciate and learn their own traditions and cultures. He has also gone one step further in helping Muslim students to reinterpret these previously learned design skills to produce an architecture which reflects the changing needs and consequences of contemporary society. He is using a reinterpretation rather than a reuse and therefore an organic method of developing an organic architecture.

It has also been stated that successful architecture normally comes about when great clients and great architects come together. I share this view although I do not agree that a new generation of clients of a certain calibre are starting to emerge. This brings me to the point where I wonder if architectural critics could play a far more important role in trying to reach the public, using their criticism as an educational process. I have the impression that architectural critics tend to embrace the architectural profession but rarely go beyond the confines of the profession. The National Bank Building in Jeddah may be a consequence of this.

Pierre Vago made the point that critics often present their own pictures to describe projects. In the case of the National Bank in Jeddah, a picture was presented although it was not presented as it should have been
because what was perhaps the most important thing, the synthesis of the building with the surrounding urban fabric, was not illustrated. The greatest criticism should have in fact refocused on this aspect rather than on the performance of the building itself.

A closer look at how the building stands in its environment reveals that a number of short-comings are evident and the serial vision and many other urban experiences are totally destroyed by the massing and the actual size of this building. This was attributed to the fact that the clients themselves wanted a tall object, and used their influence, to have the building constructed as they required it.

So if architectural critics could actually stimulate an education process where the public is being educated and not only the architects themselves, this would be a very valid contribution indeed.

**Syed Zaigham Jaffery**

Mohammed Arkoun mentioned that we are going through a period of refusal, where the naive acceptance of non-local models is being rejected. If we can understand who brought this period of refusal about, maybe then we can understand the role of the architectural critic and the architect himself. It would also help us, if we are refusing a certain model, to decide which level to return to! Obviously it has to be either level one or level two, as defined by Mohammed Arkoun because level three, namely the impact of non local models, we have already rejected.

Regarding this period of refusal; did architects bring it about? Was it the decision makers who brought it about? Was it the people, the vast majority of whom are affected by the work of the architect, but are not served by him in our cultures? Also, if this period of refusal is already here, we have to then go into something else. There cannot be a void for long. The question is where should we return to? Should this return be controlled and who should control it?

**Mohammed Arkoun**

The question of refusal is extremely important. It needs analysis because it deals precisely with the role of any architect today in a Muslim society. Why do Muslims refuse the west ideologically at the same time that they claim its material benefits, its tools for greater comfort and its technology? It is one of the most striking contradictions today in collective attitudes presented as "Muslim" attitudes; how do we explain it? There have been attempts to explain this; how far are architects prepared to go in such an inquiry to enlighten their work and their design decisions? Here we need historians, psychosociologists, anthropologists: all disciplines which are absent in the training of architects.

It appears that every time we touch upon an issue, we stop and go no further, because we discover our ignorance, the inadequacy of the existing literature, the impossibility for us to initiate a work requiring time and teams of good scholars. This is typical of our Muslim existence today. Muslim societies do not produce enough scholars to study their evolution and bring answers; they rely on Western experts who remain in the technical practice of their expertise.
Session IV
Panel Discussion
The Criticism of Architecture in the Media

Dennis Sharp: Chairman

Dennis Sharp

In this concluding session we are to talk about architectural criticism in relation to the media. Presumably this is where the professionals come in.

We have an interesting platform of speakers that includes a London journalist, an architect who left the west to move into his own native region in order to try to come to terms with the local architecture there, a colleague from Malta and Satish Grover from India who has recently pioneered the new magazine Architecture + Design, in Delhi.

As the media person will be taking over for the first part of this session we have to make a quick definition of what we mean by ‘media’. Clearly we mean national papers, periodials, professional journals and those inter-professional communications that are usually described in the west as newsletters or house journals which tell you about what is going on in a more local way.

Once we have discussed journals, we should direct our attention to the new media. There has been little reference so far to the way we look at architecture although we have seen demonstrations through slides and descriptions. Obviously the most sophisticated and the more modern means is to look at architecture as if it moves and lives, through visual means: film, television, video and so on.

There are people in the seminar who have had considerable experience in this area and it is hopeful that they will share some of it with us. It is perhaps worth emphasising that many years ago, when television was beginning to become a major popular means of communication, many producers and directors thought of architecture as being a static art form. It was felt it wasn’t really the kind of thing you could photograph and use in educational, critical or propagandist programmes. That situation has changed considerably and television is becoming the main means by which we know more about the architecture that is being erected throughout the world rather than through the old method of magazine circulation.

I want to pose just two questions to begin with: Is the printed means, the written word – the method which Victor Hugo in his Notre Dame de Paris condemned as the enemy of architecture – now itself becoming obsolete? Are we moving into a new means of architectonic communication through the moving image, cinema, television and video?

Charles Kevitt

Louis Kahn said that a school was two men talking under a tree. If he had been here for this seminar, he might have described some of the discussions as being amongst a cacophony of critics, with thirty atonal contributors working to as many scores and with perhaps half a dozen competing conductors.

The seminar has been a revelation to me in two respects; some negative, which I will get out of the way quickly, and some more positive. The downside which made me despair at times included references to Prince Charles wanting us all to wear knee-breaches; the various platitudes about the limited extent of the architects’ influences; and various irrelevant discussions about skyscrapers.

We have heard that architects do not need to visit the countries where they work, let alone the site. We have heard about the use of architecture for nationalistic ends, rather as the Nazis used it. We have heard about television aerials; the Basra dead, and female deodorants.

We heard that “form follows function” yet again, and we thought perhaps that had been dead long since, but nothing specifically about Charles Correa’s “form follows climate”. We heard about theological commissars; critics in every office, which smacks just a little bit of “jobs for the boys”. We heard about the award for the Bhong Mosque, an award for architecture, whereas perhaps there
should be a separate award for community enterprise. Until the third session, we heard little about either regionalism or criticism. In fact criticism was the least thing we have heard about.

Now the good points and what I think we should have been discussing in more depth and what we might be able to cover to some extent in the final session. There has been a welcome call for diversity and plurality, the breaking down of geographic and cultural boundaries. We have heard that architecture tends not to travel well, though that should not be thought of exclusively. We have heard that regionalism is cultural regeneration. The fact we need now more than ever to re-join, what Richard England would describe as “head” and “heart”, in a joyous response to life. Duality has been raised, the dialectic between universality and particularisation. The need for relevance. The need for good manners and the identification of the elitist and populist approaches.

In a way, the most important contribution we have heard so far has not been from an architect, or a critic, not even an architectural critic, but from a philosopher Peter Serracino Inglott who talked about the functionalist versus the pragmatic, science and technology versus interpersonal relationships.

He referred to aesthetic perception and values going hand in hand and the need for a dialogue between proponents and recipients of messages. That is what I will be talking about, with a final comment on education and the role of the media.

So in this final session, it is being suggested we need a little less fundamentalism and a few more fundamentals. As the media put it to hopeful presidential candidates in America: “Where’s the beef?”

There has been a lot of talk about humility but very little evidence of it. To be a little provocative let me give you my favourite definition of a critic, this was coined by Brendan Behan. He said “A critic is rather like a eunuch in a harem. He knows how it is done. He has seen it done every day but he cannot do it himself”

That may sound a little bit harsh but some of the issues I would like to raise are these. Who exactly do the critics address? Clients, politicians, the public, practising architects or other critics? It is imperative to target your audience.

Criticism is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It must have a purpose. The best way to have that sense of purpose, to exercise it, is to do three things; inform, explain and entertain, whatever the medium.

Dennis Sharp referred in the Keynote paper to Matthew Arnold, who said that a critic should be free of prejudice. I simply do not believe that a critic can be entirely free of prejudice. How can he be? He has many influences working on him and he can’t simply discard those. There is also a role for critics to campaign about what they believe in. Their passion and conviction can be directed to achieving certain desirable goals.

Beware of status, associations and clubs which may perhaps seek to serve the interests of their members before those of their audience. Doing it is more important than talking about it. Beware of pomposity and self importance. Do not underestimate the intelligence of the reader. If the public, as we have been told, hold largely superficial views, surely it is the role of the critic to educate their discretion, not to take their discretion from them.

We have also heard that there is no scientific method of criticism but critics do not work in a vacuum. They may be largely untutored and self appointed. Even more than in other cases, self criticism or self analysis is just as important a role of the critic as criticising the works of the others.

If they are to be heard and have influence, and how else does one do that, than through the media of whatever sort, then they have to work to basic parameters which can be defined by the audience, the amount of space they get and how often, editors and publishers, laws of libel occasionally, and not least, economics. There are very few media which will pay for journalists to go and see buildings that they are writing about unfortunately. The critics’ position requires responsibility to be exercised and the judicious exercise of power.

The power of the critic in my view is very often overestimated, not least by critics themselves, and sometimes by the subjects of their criticism. In a recent television programme in England, Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and James Stirling were interviewed. The interviewer asked “What is the basic problem with modern architecture in the United Kingdom?”, and they replied, “The critics!”. Beware of paranoia.

It is my experience that very few architects read and even less, perhaps, think about their approach to a particular project within the context of what critics are discussing all the time.

In Britain we have a particularly difficult problem in that there is a strong literary tradition, but a very weak visual tradition. As Sir Hugh Casson once put it, “Art is a wet exercise done by wet people on wet afternoons”. That is in England! Today there are scores of critics and by critics I am taking them to include reporters like myself, reporters who are occasions critics, contributing to the trade press,
radio and television and the national daily and Sunday newspapers.

In talking about the national press and the national media, it is important to point out what the editors of these media are looking for. What they prefer, in my experience, are "issues", preferably controversial issues. There has been no shortage of these of late. I see the trade press, whether it is a building trade journal which goes to builders, or The Architectural Review, as part of the construction industry and construction process — the national media are not.

The national media critic has the advantage of having one foot in the expert's camp, but he straddles that great divide between the experts and the public. He should therefore perhaps be more objective and that means reporting the bad news as well as the good. It means more than discussing simply aesthetic issues.

Just to take three very brief examples; it is relevant in the national press to point out that the Lloyd's building is the most expensive building in Britain; that it cost Stg. £3,000 per m². It is important to point out that the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, which has received more accolades perhaps than criticism than any other building recently, is the most expensive new building in the world, at Stg. £5,000 per m². It is important to point out that the Pompidou Centre does have a maintenance problem, with more than Stg. £10 million a year being spent on it.

Firmness, Commodity and Delight are good criteria for assessment, plus the building's ability to raise the spirits. Perhaps overall there has been too much emphasis on "Delight" at the expense of Firmness and Commodity.

Process is also important, as well as the end product. I was particularly impressed by a recent visit to Aga Khan projects in Pakistan and the similarity of approach to building by the rural poor in the foothills of the Himalayas and the squatters in Karachi, to the urban poor in Britain's inner cities — not that the depths of poverty are comparable.

The role of a critic in the national media includes explaining to readers who don't know very much about architects or architecture, that architecture involves more than simply designing facades.

In 1984, Berthold Lubetkin, one of the pioneers of the modern movement in England, made a very profound statement, one which I would agree with wholeheartedly and it has become quite an issue in the national media recently in Britain. It is this: "Architecture is too important to be left to architects alone. Like crime, it is a problem for society as a whole". Perhaps there is almost too much critical discourse in the British media and quantity should never be mistaken for quality just as in architecture.

Criticism has become so competitive that half the effort goes into knocking out your opponents, a wholly gratuitous exercise which shows contempt for the reader and is one aspect of criticism which I hope will not be exported to other countries. There are dangers in using the national media, because of the audience the media have. The dangers lie in simply re-enforcing people's prejudices; in being too concerned with novelty and not genuine innovation; being seduced by good photography — visual titillation bordering on architectural pornography; and being controversial for its own sake. It is a very easy thing to be controversial but in the end it is largely unproductive.

We should always be concerned to "educate" the reader, but not in any patronising sort of way; the "I know best" approach. At the same time you have to be quite clever in persuading your editors and publishers to actually cover architecture at all. The guideline that I have always used is that there are always two good reasons for doing a story; the second one is architecture. You always carry architecture on the back of something else. The aim should always be to assist understanding and to break down the barriers between specialists and non-specialists.

Every quality publication in Britain, national press and specialist interest press, has architectural critics these days. This is a fairly recent phenomena over the last seven years. The coverage tends to be on the arts pages except in The Times, which is rather interesting. The only place architecture cannot be covered in The Times is on the arts pages because the arts editor believes that architecture is "commerce"! There is one advantage to this; architecture usually goes on news and features pages and is treated like every other aspect of everyday life.

Dennis Sharp has asked if the printed word will ever be obsolete. In my view no. It was always said that radio would replace the printed word and then television would replace radio. That has not being proved to be the case.

We have also been quite lucky in recent years with television coverage of architecture, even though it is notoriously difficult to cover well. There have been two major series in the U.K.; "Space on Earth" and "Architecture at the Crossroads" and occasionally documentary programmes in the arts fields such as "Arena" and "Omnibus".

We have regular coverage on programmes which have a very high number of viewers, such as Thames News, which goes out at six o'clock in the evening every day of the week to greater London. Here we
have, for example, run a poll amongst the public on the best and worst in modern architecture in London since the war, in which five thousand people took part. Most public opinion polls, which one sees in the press, might take between seven hundred and fifteen hundred points of views. When you can reach millions of viewers on television and get five thousand responses it is obvious that this medium is a much under-utilised one as yet.

There has been no shortage of issues such as the Lloyd’s building, the National Gallery extension, Mansion House Square proposals or the recent statements on architecture by the Prince of Wales. Whatever one might think about the views the latter has been expressing, the one thing that it has done is to raise public awareness of the issues and of course provided lots of work for architectural critics!

The great advantage of television as a medium is two-fold; one is the visual impact, and the audience that one can reach. In Britain you can reach up to twenty million people at one time with a message. The problems are also there, not least the medium dictating largely what that message is. Visual images come first, rather than content perhaps. There is a natural tendency to be superficial and the technology is much less accessible than the printed word. Take, for example, a newspaper cutting which can be easily copied at little cost and distributed, rather than everybody having their own video tape recorder. The television presentation is shorthand and it relies heavily on other parties; director, cameraman and editor.

Architecture always was the social art. Analogies with music, frozen music or otherwise, can only go so far. The experience, the intuition, and not least the eye of the critic, should help us to discriminate between the bad, which is always alas in the majority, and the good.

I will touch very briefly on the subject of Regionalism and other aspects of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. I think it is important to realise that in recent years, a certain amount has been taken for granted by younger architects and perhaps younger critics. Critics should assume certain things when they are writing for current audiences.

It is almost conventional wisdom now that there is a need for identity. There is overall recognition of the contribution that non-specialists can make to the debate and to the process of commissioning, designing, and managing buildings. There has also been concern over post-modern AIDS; that is Architectural Integrity Deficiency Syndrome.

“Complexity and Contradiction” was published twenty-one years ago and it seems extraordinary that it has taken twenty-one years to come of age.

Yet many of the examples that have been inspired by that book, have resulted — certainly in terms of modern architecture in London — in the most ham-fisted travesties of architecture that I have ever seen; what one might call “Madison Avenue packaging of raw square-footage”.

Questions we might address ourselves to are — How do we, as critics, speed up the pace of change, of education and of informed debate? How do we bring about a marriage of the various strands of contemporary thought on architecture to influence practice? How do we ensure that any such marriage is a happy and permanent one and one that does not end in divorce?

Informed architectural criticism has an important role but only in so far as it influences the “Master Builders” — those who actually build — and to the extent that it makes the built environment more responsive to people’s needs and aspirations.

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Ruslan Khalid

In this august company I feel like a fraud because I really came into architectural criticism very recently, by accident. Dennis Sharp mentioned the fact that I went back to Malaysia in 1980 and my experience then prompted me to do something to intervene with what is happening professionally in Malaysia. To intervene on a large scale in what is happening in a country is a very ambitious thing and is quite impossible to do.

The only other alternative left to me was to become a member of the Council of the Institute of Architects and start the ‘flight’ from the inside; to see whether I could influence my colleagues and fellow professionals to look at things in a slightly more responsible way. That involvement landed me with the job of editor of the house magazine.

The magazine is Majallah Akitek. I edit it part-time and I do not get paid for it. In my spare time I paste the thing, I cut the thing, I do everything and therefore its deficiencies or its good points are all mine.

I would also like to inform you of some terms of reference that I gave myself when I took up the position as editor. I knew I had a role to play and my role was a pedagogic one. It was not to be a magazine which indulges in intellectual discourse or architectural criticism per se, but it was meant to be a magazine that could be read by the less intellectual or the more ordinary kind of architects and even the public at large, so that they could understand the issues that I am trying to foster. That is the role I cut out for myself.

In developing that role I also made an analysis of
how such a magazine could be modelled. I knew that I had to deal with actual buildings and projects. I had to make sensible connections. Before I embarked on it, I thought I should really define for myself how this could be done in a coherent way.

My problem at first was to do with the reader. The magazine is not for sale; it is consumed mostly by the members of the institute, who are by nature very lazy about reading things. In Malaysia we do not have a very literary background. This is a dilemma; to address people who don’t read and to say things that are meaningful to them. It is very difficult.

My self imposed terms of reference were to try to make what I say more meaningful to the reader. We have heard how in Turkey for instant, architects are very sensitive to criticism. They will take offence if one talks unfavourably about their buildings.

I had to face this problem. In facing this problem, I looked at the plus and minus aspects. I did not want to produce negative criticism in the sense that I didn’t want to play to a particular gallery although the magazine is addressed to particular people and is not being addressed to the world at large.

The second thing I was trying to do was to avoid the creation of myth or to try and champion a cause. There has been in the history of architectural criticism situations where critics try to create myths and champion causes. There have been causes which have been championed by critics and after a few years that cause died out and so did the critic!

There cannot be criticism in very loose terms about the good and bad points of a building without real clarification of the term of reference; that adds some confusion in the mind of the reader. I determined to avoid this.

I also try to avoid personality cults. There is a kind of person who becomes such a star that whatever he writes or doesn’t write becomes an issue that people talk about. The critic should not use his personality to intervene in the way people perceive a building.

The other thing I wanted to do was to make my criticism really contextual to the culture, heritage and environment in which a building is located. There is a specific framework in which criticism can be made. These then are the things that I term negative criticism.

The positive criticism I define as in depth analysis; scholarship, perceptive views on the long and short term values of a proposition, platonic but judicious discourse on a subject. It has to be contextual and yet non self-indulgent in pursuing issues. That is basically the terms of reference I gave myself. I also gave the people who contribute articles to me the same terms of reference.

We are addressing an audience who are not really interested in reading, and we are also operating in a system where there is an autocratic kind of government, albeit a democratic system, who do not really give too much heed to public opinion. So when you write an editorial, I don’t think it really matters whether the issues you are raising are very important because the decision makers will disregard what you have to say anyway.

One also comes across the problem of publicity seekers. There are architects who do mediocre jobs and yet want to have them published. These are the people I have to keep away from my door. Fortunately in Malaysia, the reverse is the case. Architects in Malaysia are very reluctant to have their work published or discussed.

In fact before I came to this Seminar, we staged an exhibition on Thirty Years of Architecture in Malaysia, that is, architecture since independance, and we spent one whole year dragging out drawings from reluctant offices. They were so reluctant that we had to redraw their plans for presentation and take photographs and so on. We virtually had to pay them to get the material. It is a peculiar problem because in the west, or in Japan for instance, architects would kill themselves to get that level of the limelight.

The pitfalls of publicity are many. In Malaysia, we are not so affected by publicity, except that our views on architecture have been affected by what is written in the media of other countries. In fact it is the media of other countries that makes discoveries about Asian architecture and architects. I think Charles Correa, Geoffrey Bawa or even Sumet Jumsai, were to some extent inventions of western mythologists rather than figureheads within their own countries. Of course that is not to demean their work. Bawa is a much envied personality in Sri Lanka and many architects in Sri Lanka do not speak to him or he to them. That kind of situation exists.

There has been exposure or highlighting of their architectural achievements, without balancing the situation to show that there are other people who are not lucky enough to receive the spotlight and to get publicity.

I would challenge many people here whether they have heard of Bobby Manosa of the Philippines; or Robbie Sularto of Indonesia or Nayyar Ali Dada in Pakistan, who are doing quite extensive work. These people are equally important exponents of traditional architecture in their countries but because they have been publicity shy and have not been discovered by the western media, they are unknown except to people in a certain circle.
We have been talking about critics and criticism but we have not really made any positive proposition on how we can help the development of Islam in architecture or architecture in any country in a positive way. We have also heard that critics cannot make valid criticism on the design of a building without visiting the building. I would contradict that.

When we talk about architectural criticism, we talk about criticism of the building that has been completed, about un fait accompli. We rejoice or we regret and we make frustrated noises about them. The architectural press can play another role, a more positive role in trying to intervene in what happens in a particular situation or country.

If you analyse the design process of a building, there are several things that take place. First of all, there is a dialogue between the client and the architect. Then the architect develops the client's requirements, processing them through his own architectural theories and responses to culture and tradition. After this, he makes his design proposal and goes for client's approval and statutory's approval.

This is the stage where my proposition starts. This is where architectural critics could play a role. Instead of a critic being planted in an architect's office, as Dennis Sharp has proposed, I suggest we plant an architectural critic in the planning office, where planning approval is given.

This may create a very difficult situation but I think in Britain this situation exists without it being institutionalised. You have a situation where a building, when it is proposed, is given wide publicity in the press, and the public's reaction or even Prince Charles' reaction will cause it to be built or not to be built, or to be amended.

This situation does not happen very often in my part of the world or perhaps in Malta and I know it does not happen in the Middle East. Maybe one could convince the local government and the government of other countries to change this view and make it compulsory for a building planning application to be debated publicly before it is allowed to be built.

A lot of decisions are presently being made by untrained professionals, the so called planning authority or planning bureau who are mostly bureaucrats, who are not really trained as architects or indeed as planners. As a consequence, some outlandish buildings have been put up.

Even in my country, the system is so autocratic that you don't even know that the site next door is being earmarked for a very important project until the contractor moves into the site and starts constructing a building. It is too late to intervene at this time. The critic's role probably would be more positive if they would intervene in a development, at the stage where it is being conceived.

Dennis Sharp

I have some responsibility here and I must deal with it before a myth grows into a legend! I refer to this idea of a critic being "planted" in an architect's office. That was a remark I attributed to CICA President, Bruno Zevi; it is not my idea of the way architectural critics should continue.

The issues that Ruslan Khalid was addressing were those of a small professional magazine, concerned with the communication of professional to professional and the recognition of excellence within the profession. It pinpoints a problem. Looking around, I wonder if there is anyone here from the Muslim world representing a national paper? It would appear there are none. I suspect that reflects the larger situation. That was the case too, as Charles Knevitt mentioned, some years ago in the west.

There were very few architectural correspondents. Don't run away with the idea because we are now complaining of a surfeit of these people in the United Kingdom and in the U.S.A. that there were, in fact, a large number of architectural critics twenty or twenty five years ago. That would be a very wrong impression. There were only, if I remember correctly, two major architectural critics in the immediate post-war period. One was J.W. Richards, probably the most distinguished of those critics, who worked as editor of The Architectural Review and the architectural correspondent of The Times newspaper.

We must bring into focus at this stage that we are talking about the evolution of a means of communication. Criticism is -- as I tried to emphasise in my Keynote Address -- a relatively new area for us to get involved in and whatever background we come into it from is incidental.

It is striking, as Ruslan Khalid made very clear, that one often starts from very small beginnings. Most of us, I suppose, who are involved in architectural criticism, were brought up on the student magazine or on the local architectural society journal. We would take the make-up home in the evenings, get out the paste and the scissors, lay it out and send the copy back to the printers. We hoped that they would get it right the third time round, that we had chosen the right pictures with not too many grainy marks on them. All of those problems we are well acquainted with. But it appears that others are still groping with such fundamental problems.

It was very encouraging therefore, when a number
of members of CICA were at the Sofia Biennale ’87, in Bulgaria to observe that there is a mechanism, whereby such small magazines can become recognised on a wider platform. Indeed it was the way I came across the magazine called Architecture + Design, an admirable magazine from India. Satish Grover is its Managing Editor. It is a representative magazine of Indian architecture; a very good magazine of its kind and one which received a Gold Medal award at the Sofia Biennale ’87

Satish Grover

Having heard such erudite and professional opinion on architectural criticism in this Seminar, and after re-reading the notes and thoughts that I put together in Delhi, I feel that I needed a defence, even to be heard in this kind of a gathering. The only defence that I can suggest for myself is that I am an amateur. I am an amateur among a gathering of professionals. I am an amateur practicing architect, an amateur teacher, an amateur architectural historian, an amateur painter and an editor of sorts of an architecture magazine. I am not an architectural critic at all, so I am not speaking from that platform in any way.

The only other reason that I continue to be brave enough to say a few words is that what I am going to say is not based on any international understanding whatsoever and only on the basis of what I know of in India and that is the only region that I know anything about

In my country, architectural criticism (and I mean even a paragraph of architectural criticism in an essay of appreciation) is fraught with grave danger for the critic, particularly if the architect under criticism happens to be a stalwart of the profession. These dangers stretch from the critic being architecturally ostracised by a powerful camp, to being harassed by inconvenient phone calls from the author of the building under criticism, questioning first the capability and integrity of the critic, even to the extent of asking how much was he paid to do this and what is his price for undoing the damage.

In this sort of situation, the critic is forced to say “To hell with all this. Let me just carry on with my practice, or teaching, or whatever”. That brings one to the crux of the matter.

As you will have realised, I am talking of a trained architect as an architectural critic. In my country to date, in my opinion at least, the only worthwhile architectural criticism has been written by architects. Nevertheless, it is considered, almost unethical for an architect to write critically about another architect’s work. The dictum is “Mind your own business and I will mind my own, otherwise ...”.

Apart from underlining the fact that free lance or independent architectural criticism is not yet a viable profession in India, the vital question that comes up in my mind is: Is architectural criticism the domain of a trained architect, a professional journalist, a historian, an art critic, or merely a conscientious citizen?

I will restrict myself to personal experience to answer the questions raised. At the level of an ordinary citizen, no one is going to listen to me unless the problem is grave enough for me to organise a mass protest march. I myself dismissed a letter written in the popular press, by what one may call an “ordinary citizen” calling one of my buildings “an ugly duckling” by saying “What does this fellow know about architecture?” That takes care of the ordinary citizen as far as his influence on a practicing architect is concerned.

As for the professional journalist, being an architectural critic; let me cite an incident. A student of mine was doing a dissertation on “Architecture and the Media”. She asked the editor of a prominent daily newspaper why they did not write criticism of architecture as they did of dance, painting and music. The Editor replied, saying “What do you mean we don’t write criticism of architecture? We write extensively about every building that collapses in the city!”

This extreme example apart, even at his best, the professional journalist does not or cannot criticise architecture as an individual. He can only put forward the views of the people concerned; the politicians and professionals on the matter and then claim his job is done.

Again this sort of criticism does not carry much weight as far as influencing the architect is concerned. It can be ignored by him as being either politically, or professionally manoeuvred or as downright inept. I have noticed the quality of architectural criticism in the most popular of international journals. They all smack of a journalistic job well done, but with little content or guidance for the professional architect.

We then come to the historian in my listing of possible architectural critics. I may be labelled one, on the basis of having written a couple of books on the History of Indian Architecture. This is a very safe field in which to act as critic, for the authors of the buildings you are writing about are safely in their graves and cannot defend or retaliate.

However, the argument of the practicing architect against a pure historian, acting as architectural critic
is "This fuddy-duddy historian has no idea of the complex contemporary problems I am faced with. He just wants to compare my buildings with the Taj Mahal or the Parthenon. Let him get me the right society and the right client and I will build buildings or monuments as beautiful as he refers to".

Lastly I come to the prospect of an art critic doubling as architectural critic. The professional architectural and institutionalised critic may not like this idea at all, but the idea of an art critic doubling as an architectural critic seems to me a very viable answer maybe because I have dabbled and even exhibited experimentally some paintings and received criticism for the same. I will not go into great depth for the reasons for my inclination but just sketch them out.

A mature art critic is a sort of jumble of all the different specialists that I have mentioned. He is an ordinary citizen. He has to be a bit of a historian. He is a journalist who knows what media is all about. He has ideas of form, colour and structure. What is more, he has no vested interest in the profession of architecture (unlike an architect/critic) and can happily ignore any telephone calls and harangues from the designer of the building.

The art critics I have met in India, I have found enthusiastic, to write architectural criticism only if their editors would allow them to do so. This is as far as my personal experience is concerned.

I would like to say a few words in support of my proposal on the theoretical aspects of criticism, which is partly based on my experience in the running of an architectural magazine and the reading one has to do to deliver lectures to students on the History of Architecture. The question that arises is, is there any universal formulated basis for architectural criticism? This is something which has been discussed at many levels in this Seminar some of which I have understood and some of which quite honestly have been unnecessarily complex.

On this subject, I quote from a publication of the year 1914 called "The Architecture of Humanism" by Geoffrey Scott. I do so for after hearing such rich and eloquent arguments at this seminar, I feel we have got into such complexities in analysing architecture that we seem to have forgotten the elementary tenets on which criticism could be based.

Hereafter I may be very kindergartenish in what I am going to say but I think that is all I can do. I am going to depend very largely on what Geoffrey Scott has written.

Simplifying the matter, Scott says "Architecture, the most complex of arts, offers to its critics many paths of approach and as many opportunities for avoiding their goal". Where could these paths lead? Scott answers this very simply. The first criteria of judgement on architecture is obviously its "firmness" as he calls it, what today we would call its structural aspect. He continues "By this necessity architecture stands related to science and to standards of science and thus the recognition that mechanical bondage of construction closely circumscribes the growth of a building".

At the same time he argues architecture requires, what he calls "commodity", what we may, in contemporary terminology interpret as function or comfort. According to him, it is not enough that the building should possess its own abstract knowledge of construction only. Architecture is also subservient to the general uses of mankind. So immediately, politics and society, religion and liturgy, ethnic groups and occupations, become factors in the formation of architecture.

From the above two criteria, Scott first concludes that "The history of civilisation thus leaves in architecture its truest, because it is its most unconscious, record".

If architects and architectural critics already feel the burden of their profession, Scott also recognises that architecture requires "delight" — a purely aesthetic impulse; an impulse distinct from the above two, which good architecture must simultaneously satisfy. An impulse by virtue of which architecture becomes art. How it becomes art is a question which obviously has no definite answer and tomes could be written on it. The three fundamental basis of analysis defined by Scott are as valid today as when stated by him some seventy-five years ago.

Of the three fundamentals of criticism to my mind, the first two are not terribly complicated and can be assessed on a fairly firm footing universally. In the sense that the success or failure of a building on structural grounds, can even be reduced to a mathematical formula and a logical judgement made either way.

The "commodity" could also be judged by a conscientious critic by recording the user's point of view, be it through interviews or polls or presented by computerised means. The "delight" part of architecture is the most ambiguous, and yet as important as the other two.

To my mind, it is the "delight" that is essentially a regional phenomena, that is, if we are talking of the delight of the people seeing and using the building and not the delight of the ego of the architect. Here I come back to my contention that the mature art critic, with due references to the structural engineer, and the users can pass valid judgements on the "delight" aspect with his presumed knowledge of
the artistic traditions of his people, region, country, whatever it be. Maybe it sounds like a proposal for a "troika" of architectural criticism with the professional art critic as its co-ordinator and spokesman.

I know the dangers inherent in this too for I have read architectural criticisms even by mature art critics where you feel that they have gone it alone and committed some major goofs on the structural and functional aspects of the building. But then this can be remedied by the art critic being paid a little bit more to do his homework and co-ordinate more assiduously.

In support of my proposal, in spite of some failings of some of the art critics in India, I still know that the works of Percy Brown, Burgess and Havell, who were all basically art historians, are still major works, not only of reference, but even of elementary understanding of Indian architecture.

If I were to give my second preference in the matter of the background of the architectural critic, it would be the architect critic. But there are major pitfalls in this in India. I will remind you again that I am always speaking in the context of India because that is all really I know about.

The first pitfall is that of being victimised by the all powerful people and bodies, which I have already mentioned. The only way to avoid that happening, is for the trained architect to abandon for ever the idea of practice, devote a lot of time to reading history and try to make a living out of architectural criticism and general writing. This is absolutely impossible in India today, unless you are willing to be a kind of architectural critic and saint as well and live on nothing.

This point I shall again substantiate from my personal experience. After having written two books on the History of Indian Architecture, which brought it up to about A.D. 1751, I was well into seven or eight years of private practice. Earlier, as a fool probably, I had nurtured the ambition of bringing my history volume up to the contemporary period. However, at that time I realised the perils of doing so.

My criticism, if honest, would arouse the wrath of powers that would try to destroy my practice, because I would be getting into the contemporary situation. Quite honestly, I must admit I have no desire to look after myself and my family on the pittance that could be earned by an architectural writer in India. Maybe I am stressing the economic aspect too far, but I could not face the prospects of being a saintly architectural crusader. So the third book has not been written and probably will be written only after I don't need my practice to live on.

In my list of possible art critics, the last one is that of the pure historian turned architectural critic. Quite honestly he is not on my list at all. The architectural historians tends to treat buildings as mere appendages to his own predetermined theories on history and at best draws on archaeological aspects, or in deference to architects condescends to describe buildings in dimensional and statistical terms.

I would like to reinforce this by a last personal example. One of my two books on the History of Indian Architecture was handed over by the editor of a magazine to a pure historian for a review. He wrote a long review; the first three quarters of it, expounded his own theories on the writing of history. He then corrected some of the conjectural dates given by me by plus or minus a dozen years or so; the spellings of proper names; pointed out proofing errors; made a few remarks on the quality of printing of the book and dismissed the book without a word about architecture.

I am sorry I have relied more on my personal experience than theory in making proposals, but not being a professional critic but rather its victim, I have no choice. Let us say that mine is a view from this side of the fence, but by one who has had some glimpses of the other side too.

Dennis Sharp

If that wasn't criticism of the most fundamental kind then I don't know what criticism is. It was a marvellous demonstration by Satish Grover of the very art that we are discussing. It is very appropriate that it should come from him.

The last platform speaker is Victor Torpiano, a home grown critic. He is the editor of the magazine for the Chamber of Architects of Malta.

It was in the early 1970s that Malta came to terms with the problem of architectural education. Previous to the 1970s, architectural education on the island was mainly concerned with producing engineer - architects or architect - engineers. With the input of the distinguished historian, critic and lecturer from Liverpool University, Dr. Quentin Hughes, who eventually became principal of the school here on the island; the educational system for architects was given a new direction.

I hope that Victor Torpiano will not mind if I say that he is one of the early products of that new direction of architectural education, who graduated from the Royal University of Malta in 1975. He worked in a design office in the Middle East during the period 1976-1984 and he is now working in private practice.
Victor Torpiano

The criticism of architecture in the media must always have as its ultimate constraint, the differentiation which Haluk Pamir has mentioned, between a critical and a non-critical mentality. I say this because I think it is implicit that criticism in the media cannot be limited to learned journals or professional magazine. Therefore, there is besides the problem of informing the experts, the architects and the educated people who are generally interested in culture and in architecture in particular, another greater purpose of providing meaningful information for mass consumption.

Most people in the developing countries, those of Islam and those of the Mediterranean, have a love-hate relationship with American culture. No matter what ugly things we perceive in the wholesale adaptation of this culture, it is practically an inevitable trend given that the spread of information technology and telecommunications continues to advance at such a rapid pace. This direction will ultimately lead us all to the situation which Michael Sorkin has so vividly described.

Therefore architectural criticism has to devise popular means of divulging architectural thought through newspapers and through television. This has to be done through a language which must be accessible to as wide a public as possible. This has to be done also, and this is even more difficult, not by imposing the critic’s narrow viewpoint or bias, but by presenting the pros and cons of a building, perhaps in the format we have used in this seminar of “point and counterpoint”. That means that the achievements and the inherent problems of a building must be given equal importance and conclusions drawn.

Therefore, Ismail Serageldin’s excellent critique of the National Commercial Bank Building in Jeddah should have gone on to comment on the building’s relationship to the context of the city. His conclusion that this was besides his point was a bit weak. Otherwise it was a very excellence analysis of an important building.

Once we use the media to popularise awareness of a critical approach to architecture, we must also keep in mind that the strict analysis of a single building is not enough, but rather the particular building should be used as an exemplar of the basic principles of scale, form, function and context. In this way, the public starts to be exposed to what influences a critic’s opinion or a prize-awarding jury’s decision.

This approach is fraught with the danger of being pedantic and demagogic, but at the worst, if the public is not influenced, the clients are at least influenced as to the possibilities and the pitfalls. As we have observed, great clients are essential together with great architects to produce great buildings.

This exposure, of course, cannot and should not be limited to new buildings but must also include old buildings, with the same analysis of form, function and scale. In this way, the native or local cultural forms can begin to be grasped, and hopefully assimilated consciously as opposed to the subconscious knowledge of one’s own culture.

I say this because, very often, the developing countries are xenophile, they admire, or are subtly influenced to accept foreign models which is not necessarily wrong, were it not for the neglect which becomes the fate of local culture. In this context, architectural criticism is also a comment on any particular society. It is a political comment and a sociological comment.

I was interested to note Suha Ozkan’s comment that in Turkey, an architect can resent criticism of his own work by another architect. This is similar to the situation in Malta, where the smallness of our community and the tininess of the architectural community, make it difficult and delicate, to come out in the open with comments about contemporary architects.

I do not know how other people have solved this problem in their countries. From what we have heard from Ruslan Khalid and especially from Satish Grover, it is very much the case too in Malaysia and India. How can we resolve it; by ignoring it? The same fate that Satish Grover has described, awaits the architectural critic who ignores it.

Another point that Ruslan Khalid made about reluctant architects with regard to the publication of their projects, is also very valid in Malta This is again understandable, given our small size and the scarcity of large projects.

Ruslan Khalid’s proposition about public debate on projected buildings, before rather than after a building has been constructed is interesting. The local Chamber of Architects in Malta proposed last year, in a draft memorandum, a policy to be adopted, that in an effort to enhance and improve the quality of buildings being produced, building projects should be debated and exposed to the public, before they leave the drawing board and go to the site. The initial response was positive and what remains now is to discuss how this can be implemented.

Dennis Sharp

I think that opens up a whole area of possible discussion. The mood seems to be a helpful one; a mood
for the exchanging of ideas. This was the intention for the last session of the seminar: that there should be some sort of pedagogic aspect to it. We have now refined some of the points that were raised earlier.

We are speaking of communicating issues and their evaluation on a totally different scale from the way we were discussing things in the previous session. The link was provided by Charles Knevitt, when he was talking of television audiences in vast numbers, something like twenty million people viewing one programme. Can you imagine that? The scale is phenomenal. But Ruslan Khalid was also talking about a magazine with a circulation of five hundred.

I think we are getting things into perceptive. The monumental presence of the west, its gigantic presses, and its great opinion making communicating skills is something which the mind boggles at, to use a current cliche. Shall we take the smaller issue? Shall we go down to the scale of the difficulty of the small circulation issue? World numbers, regional numbers (or readers) are not changing. We are still dealing with mass population but we are still dealing too with limited means of communication, limited mechanisms, and limited aparatus. I think that would make a very good point for discussion. So let us thrash this out and offer some suggestions to the Award on how criticism, if it is seen to be a good thing can be utilised. Let us offer some way forward in this difficult area of communication.
Abdelbaki Ibrahim

What are the objectives of criticism? Is it educational, for information, or what?

I have written in daily papers for the last thirty-five years on architecture and planning. I have always felt that in the Arab world in the Middle East, there should be architectural magazines. During the time I worked in Saudi Arabia with the United Nations, I helped my friend Ibrahim Aba El-Khail to issue his quarterly magazine Al-Benaa.

When I went back to Egypt, we felt that we should issue another form of that magazine and we decided to call it Salam Al-Benaa. The main objective was to address not only architects but also the public because we felt it very important to inform people.

We started in 1980 and we had some financial difficulties. I went to the Ministry of Culture for financial assistance similar to that given to assist other cultural activities such as the cinema, dance, theatre and literature. As a member of the Architectural Committee in the Ministry of Culture, I suggested they help us in overcoming this financial crisis but their response was negative.

Anyhow, we managed to overcome our financial problem. Our main objectives was to concentrate on the revival of Islamic values in architecture. How effective was that? Very minimal although we influenced the educational system perhaps. The magazine is inexpensive and can be bought at any kiosk in the city for about US $0.50 cents.

It had a very narrow scope, so we thought of having television programmes in the same field. I wrote scenarios for fourteen architectural programmes. This was two years ago but the progress has been very slow due to the lack of finance or perhaps the lack of interest from the people responsible within the local TV organisation.

Now we are preparing to produce video films on architecture. We helped in the production of the first film on 'Carnival of Architecture' in Cairo, as a starting point. We feel that we have to educate ordinary people more than to educate architects. In the meantime, we hold monthly architectural meetings in the Centre for Planning and Architectural Studies (CPAS) whereby we ask architects to expose their works and to receive criticism from the audience.

We are also preparing an encyclopaedia on Islamic Architecture in Cairo, not only as a historical book but including critical points of views.

We have to educate the people, the decision makers, and the "customers", in parallel with architects.

Joseph M. Spiteri

There is no question that the critic's job is very important. It is indispensable from many aspects but like everything in this world criticism is not without its drawbacks. The greatest danger, lies in the fact that the critic needs at times, to command attention and hence he may be looking for the unconventional to report on, when the conventional and the ordinary may be just as valid and as beautiful.

A perfect summing up of this situation, I remember occurred when I once brought up this difficulty with Professor Herbert Kramel, when he said "Don't you know that dog bites man is not news, but man bites dog is always news!"

My second point is that critics must have an 'educated' eye. It is worth perhaps recalling an anecdote which was told some years ago, which was about a Renaissance painter who invited his shoemaker neighbour to tell him if details of the shoes on the subject he was painting were correct. As they were not, the painter quite humbly accepted his criticism and proceeded to correct the painting. However, the shoemaker did not stop there but thought he was qualified to criticise other parts of the painting. Of course the painter simply ignored him. This brings
out the moral that painting must be left to painters, and shoes to shoemakers.

Thirdly, there is another matter about which we must be very careful. I refer to critics’ jargon, the complicated language which they use. This is often too obsfuscated, too clouded to be correctly understood by the public at large. Moreover there is no necessity for abstruse language when one is talking about universal qualities like beauty. “My beauty, though but mean, needs not the painted flourish of your praise. Beauty is bought by judgement of the eye.” These words are Shakespeare’s, and I quote them not to sound dogmatic, but because if one is a dwarf than it is only by climbing on the shoulders of a giant that one can see further to the horizon.

Since we have gathered here to discuss the qualities of buildings it is not out of place that we the architects help the professional critic by indicating the pitfalls he may encounter in his hard task.

Finally in a lighter vein, one may do well to reflect on what Sibelius, the famous Finnish composer, once said, “No monument was ever erected in memory of a critic”.

Yasmin Shariff

I see the role of the critic, primarily as an intermediary between the general public and the technical and intellectual professionals. In times of cultural crisis, the critic’s role is of great importance.

The crisis we face is one of identity and values. Universalities are being confused with pluralisms. Plastic urns are being used as chamber pots. Plastic candy-cake kitsch, arabesque or otherwise, invades the Islamic culture like a cancer, growing to unhealthy proportions. Reality and fantasy are interchangeable with the flick of the remote control button of the television channel. “Dallas” is created in the house and downtown where glass towers soar.

These are the manifestations of the current aspirations of most clients. Western seduction has succeeded. Disneyland conquers historicism. Restoration projects are for tourists, buildings tarted up for tourist’s consumption. The historic building suffers from what I call the “Wham, bang, thank you mam” syndrome. The entrance ticket obtained, the quick trip, the guide paid, the coach moves on and the stage set is rearranged for the next bus load.

History is written by the victors. As Disneyland very ably proves the western world too suffers from its own cultural identity crisis. The Greek and Roman base from which western architecture evolved, shares the same platform that the Islamic architectural world also evolved from. However the Islamic world has an additional problem: its loss of dignity and cohesiveness. It views its own civilisation through the eyes of its aggressors, imperialists and colonists, whose biased view of history, claims the Greek and Roman traditions as their own.

Through the popular media, primarily television but supported by daily journals, magazines and learned publications, the problems of cultural identity and dignity can be addressed. An architectural media revolution is required to bring matters of the quality of the built environment to the attention of the general public. It has to be done through the channels of television and film.

Critical thought cannot only be aimed at professionals. The general public has been alienated and a concerted effort has to be made to address problems of communicating with them. The critic has to spearhead this media and cultural revolution, cutting through the layer of junk and debris which has accumulated and address the pertinent issues.

It is high time the critics turn on the fountainhead and shower the populace of the Islamic world with stimulating controversial ideas on Islamic architecture and environment and discuss the issues of symbol, form, identity, myth and mysticism. Until this happens, the Islamic world will lie very comfortably on its padded “potato couch” and watch its synthesised “Texan Dallas” desert.

Dennis Sharp

An interesting development in communication occurred in England in the late 1960s. It was the media innovation that eventually became the ‘Open University’. It was a tremendous idea. We have perhaps rather overlooked this pioneering effort at mass education.

The means were taken to convey to a large television audience a series of programmes on subject areas such as art, architecture, economics, mathematics and so on. I was fortunate to be one of the original advisers for the architecture series and one of the programme makers.

Some of the television programmes that were made in the early 1970s were shown for nine or ten years and they built up a kind of fan club of people who wanted to learn about architecture, through this means of education by television.

The key to it was to have first of all, a sympathetic director, a good script writer and a professional body of architects and critics. Perhaps one of the reasons we are now overblown with critics in the U.K., is because those programmes are still continuously in use within schools of architecture and
art history departments. They were a stimulation to the growth of criticism.

So television, film — and more importantly video — are now the main means of mass information communication. Personally I shall never want to stop reading books, my eyes would be useless vehicles without books to gaze at. The younger generation however would I think be just as happy to see the communication of architectural criticism by the means of mass methods of communication in addition to books and journals

Hasan-Uddin Khan

With reference to architects from the Third World, being publicity shy: I don’t actually, from my experience, believe that to be at all true. Architects love publicity, including the ones that Ruslan Khalid named, who I know very well, and who we will be covering in MIMAR in the near future, amongst others.

There has never been any problem about getting a response from architects. The problem is getting materials that are publishable and communicatable, either in terms of photographs or drawings, because of the tools that are available to people in the Third World, for decent reproduction of photographs, and drawings. That is where the problem lies — in communicating an architect’s work, not in the architects themselves. They really are as publicity mad as anyone else in other parts of the world!

Romi Khosla

I view this whole thing slightly differently. First of all, in our part of the world, we find it difficult to relate to this word “objectivity”; it just doesn’t exist. We look at people, and their life styles and we are aware that there is a polarisation in our part of the world. Our cultures are split into two. The traditional cultures have been moving slowly whilst the westernised cultures have been moving fast, abandoning their values and acquiring more values.

When a person in our part of the world says that he is being objective, as Ruslan Khalid and Satish Grover have mentioned, everybody asks “Which side is he on?”. The first question he is asked is, “What are you representing?”. We all know about this polarisation I would support Professor Arkoun’s views. The two rhythms are very different. We are all aware of the two rhythms. You cannot act as a fountainhead for the people because actually the people are extremely intelligent. The culture of centuries is flowing through them. You cannot “edu-
cate” them. They know what is right and wrong. It is no use for you to interprete reality for them. They are the force and the culture that is changing. We cannot take from the past or take some abstract views and tell them “Now, please view this building like this”. They are simply not going to do it.

History will leave behind what is important. The useless debris will just fall apart in our part of the world. Values are growing and falling apart so quickly that personally I have no difficulty in telling what is relevant or not relevant. You just need to look back for five years and you will know which is a relevant building and which is not a relevant one.

The role of the critic in our part of the world is as a translator. He is like a very creative intelligent translator who is familiar with the context and he is transposing a work, a novel or a saga, from one language to another language. Beyond that, he cannot go. We do not want him to interpret because ordinary people are already interpreting and they are doing it in a much better way than you will ever be able to do it because you either belong to one side of this cultural divide or the other.

Hsain Fethi

Regarding the importance of the role of the media, especially television. We, in Iraq, have several associations for critics; in the arts, music, poetry and literature. These associations are officially supported by the Ministry of Culture.

The Association for the Arts Critics for example, includes about fifteen members with two architects and some archaeologists as well. The Association holds monthly lectures and seminars and these are usually televised and then broadcast with minimal editing on the second channel. This format is very popular and reasonably easy to do and these lectures and seminars have become a regular fixture in the programmes.

Renato LaFerla

Between 1955 and 1960, we had a school building boom in this country and I was one of the architects responsible for designing a number of these schools. It so happened that a very influential person was the sole producer of a certain type of concrete roof in this country. We were hard pressed to use this material in our roofs but we resisted this because we knew this was not economical.

Between 1974 and 1984 I contributed articles to a number of local newspapers on building and when a
British publication released details of a similar concrete roof which had collapsed, I thought it was incumbent upon me to write an article in the newspaper complimenting the local architects who had resisted the use of that concrete roof in Malta some years earlier. Of course, I was sued for libel by the producer of the concrete roofs in this country.

This is related to the way we should put forward architectural criticism. Architectural criticism can land you in court quite easily.

Abdelbaki Ibrahim

What do we want from the Aga Khan Award in the context of architectural criticism? For myself, I want the Aga Khan Award to help in producing architectural films or programmes similar to “Architecture at the Crossroads” which was shown on the BBC two years ago.

Dennis Sharp

The point that was made, was what should the Aga Khan Award be thinking about as a communication means in the future. The suggestion is that it should be filmed along the lines of some of the more successful television programmes put out in the UK and the U.S.

There is not an interchange between these two countries on these architectural series as yet but it will come in the future, I think. There have been experiments on both sides. It will be worth investigating to see how it could be used as an effective means of disseminating information on the Aga Khan Awards.

Selma al-Radi

I want to answer Dr Ibrahim’s question. There are a number of film projects, in fact in front of the Steering Committee of the Aga Khan Award that we have to discuss in our future meetings. There are four or five films that we have to discuss precisely about this, both about urbanisation and about historical cities.

Jo Tonna

I am still a little perplexed about the objectives of architectural criticism that we are discussing in this conference. Looking at history, the largest, the most beautiful and the most important buildings in any culture, including the Islamic world which this seminar is about, have been built without architectural critics; without any formal criticism but with very good architects, naturally.

One perhaps should distinguish between criticising an “architectural project” and a “building”. Anyone can criticise a building actually because we all use a building. The user can criticise it. If you are aware about the context of that particular building, you can talk about certain qualities it has, and its relation with the environment. You can create a whole list of things criticising a particular building.

With an architectural project it is rather different because one is talking about space and other aspects. Surely the architect who has designed the building is the best person to offer self-criticism on what he has done. It is central to the design process in architectural education that a student is trained to be critical of his own work. It is essential in creative work.

Paul Gauci

I would like to relate my experience after living for one year in Libya. The official Libyan television station tried to promote Islamic culture. Unfortunately the attempts to present Islamic architecture and other aspects of Islamic culture, were very boring. I had the impression that only a small number of people watched these programmes. The large number of rotating TV antennas on the skyline of Tripoli reinforced this impression.

Such programmes are immediately followed by “Dallas”, which is a very refined way of selling American culture. We have similar experiences in Malta. Television programmes such as “Dallas”, “Dynasty” and “Miami Vice”, besides being visually exciting and very well produced, are also selling specific types of architecture and interiors. Architects, friends of mine, have been asked to design houses like Southfork, for example!

Perhaps something similar might happen if the Aga Khan Award were to produce programmes on architecture and architectural criticism. I am very doubtful about how successful these would be. Regionalism in architecture and the attempts at developing an Islamic architecture are highly political issues. However it is through commercial productions in popular media programmes that culture and cultural forms can be sold. Perhaps regionalist variants of Dallas type productions could be considered. These would definitely have more appeal than documentaries carrying high flown, yet meaningless descriptions of specific buildings.
Therefore, one of the best ways that the Aga Khan Foundation can help improve the standards in the Islamic world is simply to help in the education of architects in Islamic countries. It is the best and most positive way. This could be one of the most important contributions.

Suha Ozkan

I shall briefly respond on the expectations that people have of the Award. It is of course very flattering; so much is expected from the Award. One should not forget that this is an exercise, financed and nurtured by His Highness, the Aga Khan and his committee, with input from many other places.

The objective of the Award is really to influence all kinds of people who are affected by and concerned with the environment; the clients, the politicians, the architects themselves and the users. In other words, we cannot in the Award, take all the responsibility to do everything. We prepare the message and put it in the proper channels. So far, we have organised thirteen seminars; many books, meetings, think-tanks, transactions and twenty-six prizes, and three ceremonies. The question is how do the decision makers and the local authorities receive the information which has been cultivated so far in the Award and put it to work and give us feedback.

Many people at this seminar including Abdelbaki Ibrahim, Peter Davey and many others, have assisted by giving pages in their journals and helping us disseminate this information. We are very grateful that they have helped the Award with the means at their disposal.

When it comes to employing other means and media, it may be that we will be diverging from the things which we know and do best and it may also imply a lot of additional finance. These proposals are frequently discussed in the Steering Committee which makes the Award’s policy’s. Sometimes they are taken up and sometimes they are rejected. Our discussions and deliberations here in Malta, will be taken back to various countries, and hopefully cultivated jointly with other information forces. Not everything should be expected to come from the Award because the Award has limited resources. What has been achieved has been with the help of people here and elsewhere.

Concerning the other aspect of the Award’s work which Jo Tonna has mentioned; education is important of course and dissemination of information is important. These were discussed at the very outset of the Award when it was first launched. That is why Concept Media was founded to publish books and MIMAR was founded to publish periodicals and that is why the Aga Khan Program was initiated at Harvard and MIT.

There are other subsidiary institutions which deal with certain other aspects of architecture, which are of course very important. We are not underestimating them by concentrating on criticism here. We are emphasising the role of criticism because the Awards themselves, embody a critical judgement every three years; a meticulous process of assessing buildings and giving the Awards. It signifies a message from the Award; it is the core of the Award and carries the banner for three years at least and it also adds to the cumulative memory of the Award.

That is one of the reasons why we brought criticism to the centre of this discussion here in Malta and we wanted to have this particular session on “the media” to see how this message can be disseminated as well as how decision makers and architects, could be sensitised to the issues.

Syed Zaigham Jaffery

I would like to just add a few things to what Paul Gauci said and also perhaps respond to an earlier question asking if there was anybody from our part of the world who writes for the national papers.

I would like to mention my experience. I returned to Pakistan in 1980. Soon after, I joined the Karachi Development Authority. Fired as I was with ideas which I had picked up in western architectural schools, including that of free speech, freely delivered and very freely published, I wrote on architecture and planning issues. I remember the last time that I wrote for a national daily I lamented how playgrounds and parks were being converted to multi-storey high rise apartments. Soon after, the Governor’s Office received a letter from one of the influential vested interests demanding that I be ‘fired’ because I was a budding communist. My explanation was called for. Luckily for me the critical piece in question voiced similar opinion to those the President of Pakistan had used in an inaugural speech at a seminar. I pointed to this similarity of view in my explanation. The matter rested there for sometime. My job was also important to me, so I could not really be that free and simply give it up and make my living from writing alone because you do not get paid much, if at all, for writing on architecture. For several years after that experience I wrote very little and everything that I wrote, had to be cleared by my boss before I could take it to the press. Soon I gave up writing.

The urge to write however did not die, it was just dormant and continued to itch. I wanted to bring out
a magazine, a journal on architecture (there was no precedent for it in Pakistan). The declaration or permission of the government was achieved in my sister's name and my mother made the founder of the magazine. To be Honorary Editor however I had once again, to ask permission.

These are not the only problems that one has to face when one publishes. In a recent issue we covered a grand old building, the Victoria Museum in Karachi. We have been covering old buildings and pointing out their good points rather than criticising new architecture because people are very sensitive to that. We have received telephone calls in Karachi just as Satish Grover receives them in Delhi.

One of the things that we pointed out in covering the old museum building was that, within the courtyard of the old building which is being used as a government office, they had constructed a mosque. Basically, I am religious and I am not against mosques, but the construction of this particular mosque destroyed the entire facade of this old building which is part of Karachi's architectural heritage. We mentioned that this mosque should not have been built in this particular spot. The subscription from that office was not renewed and negotiations for getting advertisements from them broke down completely.

These are the hazards that we have to face. We have found that in order to raise the level of awareness, it is safer to discuss old buildings whose architects are dead. One can point out the good points and hopefully when people read this, they will transfer those things into what they are experiencing in modern architecture.

Another method that we, at the magazine have been involved in, is in the documentation of old buildings which are then shown on national television programmes broadcast by the Karachi television station. They have been very helpful and I am pleased that this point has been made about using television for the dissemination of awareness about architecture.

Dennis Sharp

Indeed that brings us right back to where we began and its an appropriate place to stop. The other underlying message that has come through to me is that to the descriptive, prescriptive role of criticism, we should add another very important aspect; the 'predictive' one. What will a building look like and do to the environment when it is built? Let those who can 'read', speak!

It only needs me now to underline the idea of an award for criticism. I would like to convey this to His Highness the Aga Khan together with the need for a publication that effectively covers architectural criticism; it could be for criticism of the Awards made, or of one of the Award buildings. It could also be a publication for consumption within the Islamic community which carries features on the Awards.

Edwin Mintoff

I am glad to learn that there seems to be an overall consensus that the role of the architectural critic should go beyond the confines of the architectural profession and reach the public at large as an educational process.

However in so doing it is very important that architectural critics speak in a language which is readily understood by the public. Reading a number of reviews and influential daily newspapers, one frequently gets the impression that these are only understood by architects who have a comprehensive architectural training but not by the general public.
As Peter Davey said, critical journalism is about selection and inclusion. Those of you who have laboured over your papers and have made careful remarks during the sessions, enriching the commentary in this seminar, will find that almost all of what you said or wrote has not found its way into my summary.

The segments of the discussion that have found their way into my brief discourse are those which I consider the most controversial, the most significant, the most well stated, or all three.

First I want to restate the basic structure of this seminar as it was put together by Suha Ozkan, Dennis Sharp and Ismail Serageldin. It was very carefully organised and it produced a very interesting outcome. It began with Dennis Sharp’s Keynote address on the nature, methodologies and responsibilities of architectural criticism and was followed by the presentation of two major critical papers, each responded to, in counterpoint, by shorter critical papers and then after there was a kind of ad hoc, free style, random criticism from the audiences. In the papers and in the commentary, we thus saw criticism in action.

Later the seminar moved away from the discussion of critical models to the critical process itself and finally we discussed the art and craft of criticism. This discussion was done mainly by those who labour in the media.

So what have we learned? As Dennis Sharp reminded us, architectural critics play many roles and could play more, but not all critics aspire or should aspire to completely fit Sharp’s model.

May I begin by flinging down the gauntlet and stating that an architectural critic is anyone with access to a printing press who wants to talk about architecture. He must sit down at his word processor and get on with it, learning by doing. Let us take for example Prince Charles. Should he not continue to be allowed to criticise carbuncles as he sees them, without certification from CICA?

To disagree further with Sharp’s definitions, criticism need not focus solely on aesthetic values, it is never a disinterested endeavour, it is always ideological. The critic does not always work retrospectively, but often plays a watchdog role joining members of the concerned public in helping prevent the construction of buildings considered, inimical to the public interest.

I disagree with Dennis Sharp’s suggestion that the critic help out the designer in the process of design. Could you imagine a more scandalous conflict of interest than for an architectural critic to serve as a co-designer of a building he will eventually review in the media?

Here is a plot for you inspired by Charles Moore. He mentioned the critics’ Procrastes earlier in this seminar. Imagine an eminent architect who finds himself about to be cut and fitted once again into the critic Procrastes bed. As he cries to the critic for mercy, the critic answers, sharpening his knife, “Need a little help with your next design?”

I find fault with Dennis Sharp for calling to mind such ghastly scenarios, while overstating the qualifications and credentials needed to effectively perform the critical task. Apart from these caveats, Sharp’s introductory lecture successfully served the essential function of defining comprehensively the value system within which all responsible architectural critics must work. So his paper, with the exceptions that I have mentioned, was a fundamental base for our meeting.

A second contribution also reflected the value system that was set up for this conference. Ismail Serageldin’s papers is an excellent paradigm of architectural critical methodology. I won’t attempt to assess or recall in detail the paper. I would rather very briefly mention how he appears to have thought it through and constructed it, in other words, how he performed the critical act.

He chose to describe two manifestations of the contemporary architecture of Muslim societies, the ver-
nacular and the modern urban aesthetic. He picked examples from each segment and this was set within a framework leading to his subject: Gordon Bunshaft's National Commercial Bank Building in Jeddah.

As a critical work, I would say that the paper had a thin veneer of objectivity, disinterest and detachment befitting its title "Architecture as Intellectual Statement". But nobody was fooled. Serageldin loves Bunshaft's building and he wanted us to love it too. So his article is polemical and slanted and leaves some things out and of course fails to convince everybody as Romi Khosla and his fellow discussants pointed out.

Khosla for example praises the building as form, but attacks it as symbol. Pamir thought that Serageldin did not adequately research certain questions such as user's satisfaction, among others. But the article itself, because of its strong position, its energy and its corroborative detail gave the discussants plenty to discuss, confirm or disagree with, as the best criticism always does.

A second major paper by Hasan-Uddin Khan helped develop a critical value system apart from the subject discussed in the paper. Khan spoke about critical concepts and the value systems they represent. He was dealing with the dual themes of universality and particularisation in the developing world. He said more about the themes than the buildings he chose as examples. It was primarily a discussion of contemporary critical ideas rather than of their objects. This was an appropriately conceived paper for a conference of this kind.

Challenged, I imagine, by Hasan-Uddin Khan's definitions of contemporaneous kitsch, Michael Sorkin followed with a counterpoint. Sorkin was inspired to bring us right up to date on the subject of popular culture. Not everybody was pleased to hear what he had to say. Somebody said to me, "What's Greenwich Village got to do with us" We heard about couch potatoes and ethicists and the rest.

Like Michael Sorkin, I am from New York city and it's the centre of our universe and I can say that he is telling it like it is. To try and make you feel a little better let me say that he exaggerates, but not much! His paper was brilliant, witty. He applied the most contemporary critical concepts and language. My only regret is that some of the words are so new; couch potatoes and some others that I think if we had a glossary the entire paper would have been more appreciated.

Later speaker after speaker strove to define critical values Chris Abel described imaginative teaching methods by which he brought to his Saudi architectural students a methodology which enabled them to examine and transform a segment of their own vernacular.

Stanford Anderson made a very interesting point on the difficulties of critical analysis based on polar opposites, form versus symbol, tradition versus modernity, and so on. Again in the search for values, he said if we must choose between opposites we must be in possession of some truth. He cited Adolf Loos' attitude towards his work; Loos was able to span these polarisations by being open to new forms, to criticism and to innovations.

Pierre Vago reminded us with wisdom and eloquence that the architecture of no country would be worth a visit without its imported architectural treasures. To quote him, "Importation must be accepted, never rejected". Just as profoundly he added, "I worry when people say we must adapt to the local. What period is local?" These are profound questions.

Suha Ozkan gave us a devastating statistic. His native country Turkey has five percent of the population of Islam but 45 percent of the architects and yet in this country, with all these architects, critical discourse does not exist. He said, "That is because there is bread involved" and we all know what that means. He pointed out that it is important that the Aga Khan Award offer a setting for a rich critical process, an arena of discourse. This is a great resource not only for Turkey but for the rest of the Islamic world. Suha Ozkan hopes that we architectural critics will launch a movement.

Turning now to the media, I would just remind you that "the media" sometimes is made to sound like a great monster, a monolith, an undifferentiated instrument. This isn't so, the media takes many forms and there are a great many different kinds of people who write about subjects that are related to architecture in very significant ways. Those who are specifically involved in architectural criticism are often performing under considerable difficulties. They are performing a function that few people want. It is also necessary to say that journalists and critics are not as powerful as they may appear. As Charles Kneivitt reminded us, many architectural writers have to fold their criticism into articles that have other ostensible tasks. Most of them spend a lot of time begging their chief editor, the night copy editor or the publisher, to give them space to address an architectural question when other issues appear more urgent.

Architectural critics are even subject to readership surveys. If the publisher of a daily paper decides to see what readership an architectural column has and it turns out to be low, that architectural column can turn into a home furnishing and housewares column.
in the next morning editions. These are the realities of the work of some of us that should be mentioned.

There seems to be a widespread assumption that architects can do no wrong and that architectural critics have to be trained so that they will support architects and the world will be a better place. I would like to question that assumption.

The assumption is that the critic should always be on the side of the architect, helping him in his battle against the ignorant client, the incompetent government and the indifferent public. The architect’s foes are not necessarily all that bad and the responsible critic must often oppose the architect and oppose him in the public interest.

The most distinguished critics have the broadest vision of the public interest and fight the hardest on the public’s behalf. The best critics give their critical support to outstanding architects who are concerned about the larger questions and who work in the public interest.

Having tried to set that right, I would like to thank the Award for giving architectural critics the chance to come together and learn from each other and talk about what we do. I hope we in turn helped the Award to formulate a critical process of judgement.
Notes for an Essay on Architectural Criticism

Haluk Pamir

“Architectural history cannot be evaluated through criticism; one can only look at the causes and results.”
— Behect Unsal (M. Arch., later Professor of Architectural History). Mimari Tarihine Dair, Mimarlik, 1948(4).

“When I returned from Germany in 1945 — after finishing my education there — I decided to write architectural criticisms in Mimarlik. However the editors rejected my first and only article on the subject by saying that: ‘criticism would alienate the few practising architects’. Thereafter I never tried my hand at writing critical articles again. Later I heard that others willing to do so were also discouraged during the following decade. It is a pity, because we could have established a tradition of criticism.”
— Orhan Alsac (architect, Head of the Turkish Building Research Institute). During a discussion on the results of ‘Ankara City Hall Competition’, June 1986.

During the last competition hearings (colloquium) the chairman of the jury was nearly begging for questions. Similarly during the colloquium of the rentable housing competition the number of jury members exceeded that of the audience.”
— Hasan Ozbay (M. Arch., Deputy Secretary General, Chamber of Turkish Architects). Mimarlik, 1983(7).

“... I cannot understand what your (critical) approach is. We expect judgements at the end of such a (critical) study. This is also what the society expects...”
— Gungor Kaftanci (An old guard and a prolific architect). During a discussion of Atilla Yucel’s paper on ‘the critical dimension in architecture’. Mimarlik, 85(5-6).

“We didn’t have enough time to prepare our criticism of (response to) the jury’s critical reports on our entries.”
— Tamer Basbug (A young and well established architect). During a discussion on the results of ‘Ankara Inter-City Bus Terminal Competition, June 1985.

“Today one has to produce a piece (of architecture) that one believes is better than the one that is going to be criticised. If you don’t like my building, build a better one.”

Problem in general

As the above quotations show, Turkish architects and academicians have come a long way in dealing with criticism in their field; from negating its use to a situation where there is a positive need to define conflicting attitudes to criticism and evaluation, and where even criticism of the critic is required. Tension between the ‘architect’ and the critic normally arises due to preoccupational differences.

However there is as yet no theoretically comprehensive study or position declaration by professionals on such issues of criticism. The critically minded but infrequent contributions to architectural journals are mainly on criticism of the social context or the client (architecture not possible without a good social system), and criticism of the building’s relation to its historical or vernacular context (not appropriate for its context). Books by people like Ozer (1964) and Kortan (1971, 1974) mainly deal with issues related to the present architectural scene and criticise model infiltrations or acculturation of our architecture by the external influences (critique of authenticity/plagrism).

Books on Turkish architects and magazine articles presenting case studies take the utmost care to avoid criticisms or evaluation. A reader of such publications is left in a position where it is impossible to make basic human judgements on the presented material.

Since they are not recorded; lively critical jury discussions during both teaching and post-competition exchanges do not formally contribute to architectural

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1 This paper was distributed to participants prior to Dr. Pamir’s contribution in Session III.
However this intellectual discourse did not have a rewarding response. Apart from Engin Yenal’s and Gulgonen’s warnings requiring scholarly building appraisals (no: 5), Khosla’s requests for more theoretical articles (no: 6) and letters (no: 12) on Bernard Huet’s criticism of the Baghdad Mosque competition (no: 11) (positive response to the criticism) there were no attempts at critical assessment of positions, buildings or profiled architects. The readership survey results of 1985 (no: 20) did not include responses requesting either a more critical approach in general or more specifically critical articles in the journal.

Since most non-critical cultures do not have architectural journals or in some cases effective architectural societies it obviously becomes difficult to make a research based analyses of the problem. In any case the problem does not lie just with rapid modernisation and cultural discontinuities but also with conflicts embedded in tradition.

Critical versus non-critical mentalities

The following are a few assumptions on the differences between the critical and non-critical mentalities and their contextual properties. The assumptions try to establish norm dimensions and then offer contents of criticism for both cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Mentality</th>
<th>Non-critical Mentality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construal of Basic Orders</strong></td>
<td>Man is at the centre of conceptualisation activities. Meta-authority and ‘Nature’ are in dialectical relations with man, forming a context for human spiritual and technological activities. Environmental control comes from within (man).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construal of the other Culture</strong></td>
<td>Non-critical cultures can be controlled and criticised. Uses of criticism on non-critical mentality is reflective of self-esteem which helps the formation of an ideology of: “We are the core culture, they as periphery should change their construal due to our criticisms and control patterns.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relations to Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Meta-authority is at the centre of conceptualisation activities. ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ are subordinate to this higher level which from time to time leads to fatalism. Environmental control comes from external sources to man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construal of critical cultures by non-critical mentality is mediated by the construal of their self identity by the orders of critical cultures. Critical cultures can be criticised for their intervention in non-critical contexts. However such ideological core effects on the peripheral cultures cannot be controlled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge does not lead to or represent power for man in direct everyday transactions with the environment. It helps in man’s interpretation of spiritual orders and their relations with everyday contexts. Interpretation of the core knowledge for new situations is seen as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Mentality</td>
<td>Non-critical Mentality</td>
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<tr>
<td>experimentation. This supports the tendency of doing research for knowledge. Alternative research orientations are supported for alternatives of knowledge.</td>
<td>the main formal knowing activity. Alternative research orientations are not supported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth and Control on Knowledge</td>
<td>Growth of knowledge is checked by its relationship (even when it is opposing it) with the central authority. Authoritarian and authority supporting knowledge has primacy. New requirements on conceptualisation of modernity and change is answered via transfer of knowledge from critical cultures which opens the possibility of a great influx of conflicting knowledge. This happens with a reduced control of validity and reliability of such knowledge and without any theoretical studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of Criticism</td>
<td>Criticism is socially accepted and organised for different types of human endeavour. For some activity even an epistemology of critical thinking is valid. Reflexive and constructive criticism flourish. Creates an open system where crisis situation occurs due to unresolved conflicts based on such criticism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High status of obedient behaviour reduces the status of criticism. Criticism is restricted to external influences to the system and to the system's behaviour under such influences. Not reflexive or constructive for future development. May keep away unwanted intrusions from the environment. Crisis situation is due to conflict between authoritarian system and effective external influences. Criticism may be taken as an activity external to the system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural Criticism</td>
<td>Already exists both within a traditional context of criticism and as an entity by itself. A dialectical development of architectural criticism takes place due to the interaction of such work by practitioners and theoreticians. Architectural movements and groups are a normal originator of such criticism as are professional critics and academic evaluators. Public response is imminent. Critics have power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural criticism as a tradition does not exist. Architects are not willing for such a development to take place. Practitioners want to dominate the theoretical conceptual approach and argue that they can only believe in a critic who can build better than themselves. Apart from a regional-foreign identity debate there is no conceptual architectural frame for criticism that accommodates critics or academics' response. There are no critics.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shortcomings of the Present Situation in Architectural Criticism</td>
<td>Lack of coherent inter-relation between human judgement, building appraisal and architectural criticism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of coherent inter-relation between human judgement, building appraisal and architectural criticism.</td>
<td>It's whole non-development attitude and its situation at the moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the lack of input from building appraisals, criticism conceptualisation tends to change not because of scientific findings (and through understanding of buildings) but trendy external shifts in philosophy and human sciences.</td>
<td>Doesn’t use its potential critical mentality to offer alternative frameworks of architectural criticism for a holistic outlook. (Isn’t using understanding and interpretation of traditional constructs to place reason and communication in their right place for evaluative and critical research.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Though critics sometime influence the judgement of the lay public this results in a misinformed attitude that creates a back-lash for architecture.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Critical Mentality

- Sometimes critics misinform other architects.
- Critics’ attitudes have changed from ‘a bicycle shed is a building but not architecture’ to ‘architecture as a decorated shed’ within only a decade without finding a good context for dialectical argumentation.
- Critical attitude at the moment is highly pre-occupied, with western modern architecture, its problems and counter proposals.
- There is no critical framework for evaluating architectural critics or criticism.

This comparison of two cultural contexts shows us that although the critical culture is encouraging architectural criticism the shortcomings of the already developed approaches are not multi-dimensional, and do not depend on facts for some of their arguments. They are not covering universal issues for most of the time and do not encourage the multi-model response of the interested groups. This highlights a need for a search for a more universal, more factually responsive and multi-modal/multi-dimensional critical mentality, in architectural criticism.

Understanding a reflexive, multi-model construal of architectural criticism

The first step is to define what we mean by architectural criticism above and beyond previous understandings of it as;
- feedback for architectural practice;
- deriving theoretical continuities from architectural history (including informed judgements appropriate to the study of historic texts);
- conceptualising architectural frameworks from case studies;
- diachronic and synchronic studies of architectural types;
- existential responses (probably partially reflexive) to particular humanised places;
- searching for good architecture that can become a precedent for future use.

What should be the parameters of a critical approach?

Firstly it is a reflexive construal of the system of constraints produced by the man-environment relationship under study-revealed by the design product and its implications. Secondly it is a reflexive construal of the system of constraints produced by the architect’s position in the man-environment relationship under study — revealed by the design act and its implications.

Thirdly it is a reflexive construal of the system of constraints produced by the construals of both the man-environment relations and the architect’s position in the man-environment relation revealed by the criticising act.

The first two are about the content of criticism the last is about the style of criticism.

Content of criticism is construed as ‘reconstructions’. It should be based on objective date, it must explain the type of knowledge that is considered correct in architectural activity and must refer to particular cases. The style of criticism can be construed as ‘deconstructions’. It should be based on experimental data — oriented towards removing the distortions of experience — it must deal with unveiling the ideology(ies) of conditions and must refer to a more general system of rules.

‘Reconstructive criticism’ could change architects’ behaviour by establishing rules implicit in the related man-environment systems. The architect may or may not follow such an increase of content in the ‘rules’.

‘Deconstructive criticism’ on the other hand is a form of oppositional thinking which reveals false relationships, identities or ideologies in man-environment interactions. This definitely asks for a change in practice and is based on the discourse of its relations with ‘reconstructive criticism’.

Change in practice can only occur if there are competing theories and if the output of reconstructive criticism requires a choice between competing theories. That means deconstructive criticism is a case of a valid alternative construal which helps to increase our construal complexity.
Through criticism one systematically searches for one's own or another's misjudgements of architecture, mistakes in building appraisals and false premises within architectural criticism itself. Misjudgements of architecture by the lay public and mistakes in building appraisals do not give rise to large research programmes or their revision. However recognition of false premises of architectural criticism would require such changes. The issues raised in the last paragraph should be further analysed for a clear understanding of their interrelationships.

Deconstructions of human judgement, building appraisal and architectural criticism

Human Judgement: Researchers trying to establish a continuum of judgement by using the 'absolute judgement' method in psycho-physical studies during the period between the late twenties and the mid-fifties could not establish valid norms for such research. Moreover it was difficult to label it as 'absolute' because they varied due to contexts of stimuli presentation, the antecedent properties of the judges and the interaction situation of the judges with the stimuli. Such findings first brought in the realisation of the strength of perceptual shifts in judging and with it discussion of perceptual discontinuities. Then it was realised that there was a semantic shift as well which arises due to the verbal response techniques. Inclusion of non-verbal, non-intrusive techniques helped to reveal the comparative judgemental similarities and related differences across 'physical', 'personal' and 'activity' contexts. This final step showed that the process of judging is normative and neither the search for 'the best' nor for the 'better than' stimuli can explain the complexity of the situation. A judge acts according to his or her style of construing a situation and the style is consistent for all sorts of construal contexts. People try to structure their experiences (including that of architectural environments) to make it predictable, meaningful and explicable. This structuring is done by means of construal. However there are some generalists who construe architecture, its social context and its social activity context using similar unfolding of style, and there are others who are specialists construing different contexts in different levels of complexity. That means construal properties of categorisation and conceptualisation are used differently across contexts. This brings in the validity of argument about personal differences in judging and relating it to a naturalist normative stand. Argument is about schemata that man construes due to its relationships with the environment. A person's schemata of his own 'construal processes' creates a more con-

scious judgemental response which can become reflexive and critical.

Judges of architecture therefore must be able to have schemata of their own construal process. This should be communicable and should be used for purposes of education and for a more learned lay response.

Judges who have a differentiation style would be able to categorise individual items of architecture in a highly differentiated system, whereas those with an integration style would be able to integrate such categories at higher levels of conceptualisation. Some would do both or on the contrary would have low differentiation and high integration that is more theoretical than critical.

In general we can say that at the level of human judgement of architectural presentations (both for the lay public and the critic) personal construal constraints (style) are operative, and reflect the face validity of the problem at hand. Interpersonal construal through the checks of commonality and sociality of construal gives us an idea of the reliability of such judgement. Architectural critics must be aware of such a human response to architecture.

Building appraisal

Another level at which one assumes a critical outlook to buildings is that of doing building appraisals. This approach easily established itself with the support of empiricist and positivistic ideologies of science when a more 'scientific' approach was looked for in understanding building performances. Performance was measured in relation to the physical, organisational and cost aspects of the building as defined by building standards. Later, human response to buildings was found to be varying against the fixed building standards. First a behavioural assessment of standards in line with the scientific approach required, was established producing some new insights to organising data at hand as well as an increase in data in general. This approach was also giving an example of theory-practice unity where application examples were provided by the design method studies.

However the validity of such work was questioned by a shift in scientific attitudes. The non-behaviourist cognitive approaches showed that behavioural assessment by itself never provided the meaning for standards applied. Still, this semantic shift later became a model for criticism (semiotic, cultural and phenomenological attacks on appraisal).

On the other hand the realisation of cultural differences on subjects such as lighting level standards and noise level standards, marred the reliability of the approach.
The careful and detailed case studies done of schools, offices and housing environments provided data that could have been used by the critics but it wasn't. This is due to the critics' interest in higher level conceptualisations. Nevertheless two points were clear: architects have a hard time satisfying the users of their buildings, and the buildings' textual readings by users did not match the architects' intentions. Methodologists were also dissatisfied with their approaches. Some of them emphasized the creative quality of the design process falling however into the trap of discussing such concepts through positivistic models. Others argued for approaches that go far beyond the case at hand in its present time frame. In fact such timeless qualities are not very meaningful without cross-cultural checks. A spin-off from this is the facility programming approach to architecture.

In any case building appraisal should be replaced by environmental evaluation which means not just promoting studies into building contexts but also adopting an environment attitude; more specifically a man-environment interaction theory which will make such evaluations understandable for the specialist and usable for the generalist.

Reliability of the findings of environment evaluations can only be established by interdisciplinary control. Of course they still have to have validity (meaning) for the user as well as experimental validity for the disciplines involved. Here the increased awareness of a need to set norms for environmental standards (for separate cultures and each cognitive style) and an awareness of environment standards as social constructs (including verbal and non-verbal) and building norms encourages hope for the future.

Architectural criticism

As argued above both the reconstructive and deconstructive approaches to criticism interact with the properties of human construal styles and social evaluation of environments. However this interaction cannot fulfill itself if left within the boundaries of building construction, construction of 'self or the social group' in relation to architecture or the social construction of architectural culture. This is due to processes of architectural history.

The construal approach should base itself on an environmentalist position where all the concepts should be presented within a theory of man-environment interaction. Environmental and personal construal is part of such a theory.

This will save architectural criticism becoming an activity abstracted from its natural context or an impotent protest. The critic must, by deconstructive criticism, show us the inherent contradictions of his subject, yet by reconstructive criticism must help others to construe the interpretation of his proposed man-environment theory and the resultant environment that they should expect.

The test for the reconstructive criticism is either by shared reasonings and myths or by shared experiences and uses of environments. The first one will be helped by enriched (with increased complexity and higher level of integration) human construal, the latter by the alternative responses of a greater number of users (alternative construal increased and higher level of differentiation as against previous environments).

Of course another test for the reliability of such an approach would be to see its validity among a group of critics. What sort of disagreements and uncertainties it creates when it tries to deconstruct previous conservative and radical attitudes in architecture and architectural criticism?

It might create an identity crisis for some due to the conflict between the possible environment construal styles an architect can use and his style developed during his own self construal. Therefore this would require a conscious attempt to formulate differentiation and integration styles for new categorisation and conceptualisations of architecture in its relation to 'self and others' and 'social activities in dialectical harmony with nature'.

Architecture which shares the tradition of aesthetic imagination as a utopian and liberating faculty would not only liberate itself but also liberate the environmentalist discourse by the uses of such imagination. It will be a re-ordering contribution to man-environment relations which until now have been dominated by discourses of ecologists, cultural anthropologists, environmental social scientists.

Architects and architectural critics must explicitly understand what this group of people are arguing for. The new understanding will develop the sense for environmental criticism (including; establishment of criteria for knowing the environmental impact of a project synchronically and diachronically).

A critical summary

The position in this paper criticises architectural criticism in both the eastern and the western cultures for their categorisation and conceptualisation styles.

The proposed integrative type of criticism is 'environmental' with strong ties to the other two levels of criticism that of human construal and environmental evaluation. Environmental criticism should facilitate research into human construal and environmental evaluation (deconstructive criticism) while integrating
results of such studies by attributing meaning to them via environmental theories of man-environment interactions (reconstructive criticism). This approach should be able to cover relevant work both in the eastern and developing countries with that of the western and developed countries. However in order to increase environmental criticism contributors from both cultures must speed up the task of defining and externalising their separate environmental values. In this interaction, tolerance must be shown for dissenting-conflicting views. Non fatalist-open society is the only context for the provision of tolerance. In such a society critical education would lead the way for: deconstructing false premises of human judgement and building appraisal, and reconstructing an overall critical mentality to man’s relation with his environment in general and to architecture in particular. Architectural education in terms of theory-history-criticism relations should follow the same pattern. Similarly architectural competition juries should emphasise ‘typological’ and ‘semiotic’ problematics inherent in the proposals only as much as they reflect upon continuities and conflicts between facility programming, environmental programming and architectural programming of such proposals.

Another form of criticism embedded in professional practice is by providing counter projects as a deconstruction of related facility programmes of specific environments. Also by producing conceptual architecture for life-style alternatives, without specified date or place. This kind of criticism increases the complexity of our construal for the domain of architectural criticism

New and alternative dimensions of conceptualisations are thus developed and new categories of critical approaches are established.

Non-critical cultures and their critics should start their new effort in environmental criticism in all types of media, trying to show:

- The possibilities of internal dynamics for the architectural-environment systems development,
- The possibilities of the architectural-environmental systems change due to external dynamics, and
- The possibility of doing the first two without letting the context or the system becoming non-critical

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Background and Bibliographical References

Dennis Sharp

Since the formation of the International Committee of Architectural Critics (CICA) in Barcelona in 1979 a representative organisation for those engaged in architectural criticism exists. Over the past few years members of CICA have presented papers at a number of conferences and seminars including those of the International Union of Architects held in Warsaw, Cairo and Brighton. CICA is an affiliated body of UNESCO (COG) and the UIA. These papers and contributions have been, very largely, devoted to the subject of architectural criticism and the role and responsibility of the critic, particularly in relation to the architectural profession and the consumer.

For the purposes of the seminar I have drawn on some of this material to present a viewpoint which, to use a phrase of W.R. Lethaby's, is 'more than one man deep'. Whilst I took care to acknowledge sources where appropriate in the Keynote paper I had no wish to obscure the general thrust of my arguments with too many qualifying notes and references. However, I keenly express my debt of gratitude to the members and invited speakers at the CICA seminars whose contributions have proved useful in this survey as well as to many published sources.

Because of the youthfulness of the discipline of architectural criticism it would be useful to append a short, selected list of principal bibliographical sources on the subject. This list could form a basis for individual reading or aid in the compilation of a course or for curricular outlines for teaching purposes.

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143
Opening Ceremony

Said Zulficar
Secretary General – The Aga Khan Award for Architecture

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all, on behalf of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, to this seminar on “Criticism in Architecture” which we have looked forward to with great hope and with high expectations. I would also like to convey to you His Highness the Aga Khan’s personal greetings and sincere wishes for a fruitful and successful meeting.

We deeply appreciate the Government’s offer to host this seminar in Malta, a country that is both geographically and culturally at the crossroads of the North and the South, of the East and the West and whose magnificent architectural heritage as well as its sympathetic contemporary buildings are like a solitary blossoming flower in the chaotic deserts that characterise most of the expanding urban settlements of the world. We are especially honoured that His Excellency, the Acting President of Malta, Mr. Paul Xuereb and The Honorable Mr. Michael Falzon, the Minister for Development of Infrastructure, have spared the time to inaugurate this seminar.

This meeting is co-sponsored by the Foundation for International Studies and I would like to thank Professor Salvino Busutil, the Director General of the Foundation for his valuable assistance in preparing and organising this seminar. We have also received the continual support of the International Committee of Architectural Critics (CICA), two of whose co-directors, Pierre Vago and Dennis Sharp are participating in this seminar.

The local organiser and coordinator of the meetings has been Richard England and it has been our special privilege to be associated with such a distinguished, helpful and efficient colleague.

The topic of “Criticism in Architecture”, although expressed in terms much different and through activities and publications of a wide diversity, is indeed, at the very core of the concerns of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. We have been guided by the inspiration and generosity of His Highness the Aga Khan, who in 1977, took the extraordinary initiative to give expression to an idea which now, ten years later, is the reflection of our hope and of our mutual concern to encourage excellence in the built environments of developing countries.

I emphasise the word hope and the word concern for we have begun only now, following a decade of earnest efforts, to realise the proportions as well as the difficulties of our task and the complex nature of its fulfillment.

We have come to call this quest our “search” and we have all come to realise the illusive nature of such a concept as excellence in architecture. We at the Award recognise with a certain amount of perplexity the difficulties of proscribing the limits and of determining the criteria of this concept which we have termed “architectural excellence”.

The physical testimony to our frustration is all too evident everywhere around us; burgeoning cities, anarchic urbanisation, mediocre architecture, urban decay of historic city centres, disfigured landscapes and environmental deterioration; all of which have seemingly overwhelmed the diverse urban fabrics of the cities of the Third World.

Yet, notwithstanding this bleak and gloomy picture we must persevere to identify and propose viable options. Glimmers of hope and inspiration, however rare, have consoled our increasing despair and frustration. That each of you here has devoted your time and your interest to our mutual search is evidence enough that still there is hope and that God willing we may succeed in the end.

My colleagues from the Aga Khan Award Steering Committee will give better expression to these thoughts which have been nurturing in the Award for over a decade. They, as must all of us, sense that time is not on our side and that we must double our efforts if our aspirations are to reach fruition. The lesson we have learned over these many years is that
architecture is merely the echo of a culture and that “excellence”, however much it may touch on aesthetics, is but the expression of a culture in harmony.

During this seminar we look forward to learning a great deal from you. Most of us at the Award are not trained in architectural criticism but the processes and the procedures we undertake to identify, evaluate and recompense exceptional architectural achievements in the Islamic world do involve the systematic and meticulous critical analysis of each project nominated for a possible Award and to date, around eight hundred completed projects have undergone this form of architectural critical analysis which is a unique model of evaluation and the only first-hand source of building information available in the Islamic world.

I urge you in the deliberations of this seminar to help us situate architecture and the criticism of architecture in the dialogue of culture and to conceive of “excellence” not only as a question of beauty, of lines, of forms and proportions, but as the harmonious expression of the places of home and of utility, of work and of industry, of prayer and of repose; in short, of all the physical manifestations of mankind’s building achievements. We do consider architectural criticism as a subject of great importance as it is a vital factor in arousing public awareness of the issues and problems related to the steadily deteriorating built environment.

It is not inappropriate to remind you that 1987 has been the International Year of Shelter and in this respect I cannot close these introductory remarks without the reminder that “excellence” in architecture is the domain not only of beauty and of great splendour but also of the modest fulfillment of the lives of countless millions of unprivileged poor people in the underdeveloped countries who are barely surviving in a world of societal turmoil and urban disorder.

I thank each of you for the honour you have done us by your presence.

Salvino Busutil
Director General – The Foundation for International Studies

It is with pleasure that the Foundation for International Studies at the University of Malta, accepted the invitation of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, to organise with it, this seminar, on “Criticism in Architecture”. Since its creation, the Foundation has co-operated closely with architects and has held a summer and a winter School on architecture, both of which have attracted a large number of young and not so young architects from all over the world. It also held the first meeting of The Mediterranean Schools of Architecture, as well as a Workshop on the Environmental Training of Architects. This is as it should be, since one of the primary aims of the Foundation is to offer, at the international level, training in matters affecting man’s habitat through its international environment institute.

We are therefore happy to be associated with the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in hosting this seminar. For me, it is especially gratifying, since it was at the division of UNESCO for which I was then responsible, namely that of Human Settlements and Socio-Cultural Environment, that some ten years ago, the representatives of His Highness the Aga Khan, first discussed the setting up of what has become known as the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

I am therefore really delighted to see here, among others, Dr Said Zulfiqar my erstwhile colleague of a decade ago who is now the Award’s Secretary General. I also wish to welcome another old friend Pierre Vago, the man who was the life and soul of the International Union of Architects, with whom we worked closely through my Division for many years. To old friends and new ones, warm greetings.

You will be debating architecture at some length and hence I do not think I, a non-architect, should add much comment thereon. I may, however recall, within the context of this seminar, that will debate traditional and modernistic trends in Islamic Architecture, with its heritage of earth architecture, the discussions we had in Paris six years ago, when we at UNESCO assisted in presenting the exhibition on “Des Architectures de Terre” at the Centre Pompidou.

To scepticism from some quarters concerning the validity of earth architecture, the Pompidou Centre’s Director for Industrial Creations, in his response to what he called the new logic of the earth, referred particularly to ancient Muslim architecture and perennial values when he said, “The Palaces and Mosques of earth architecture, symbols of political and religious power, could not have been built and maintained across the centuries unless through the work of subjects or of the people”. Hence one should bear in mind also the humble homes erected through autoconstruction or through village solidarity unfortunately declining today. Developing countries do not accept that such architecture today contributes to the esprit de marque to which they aspire.

It is I think vital that the popular traditions on which so much of Islamic architecture rests should be revitalised and revalued. They may not provide miraculous solutions to every architectural problem today, but, and this is the strange paradox of our history, in this our new industrial age, we can find technological inspiration in methods invented ten thousand years ago to build mankind’s first cities and which, rekindled in the Islamic era, have come down to us today as sources for the design of the future. That I feel is one
of the lasting contributions which the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, can make to, as Longfellow put it, "the noblest art of all the arts; paintings and sculpture are but images, are merely shadows cast by outward things on sterile canvas having in themselves no separate existence. Architecture existing in itself and not in seeming to be something it is not, surpasses them as substance".

The Honorable Michael Falzon
Minister for the Development of Infrastructure

As Minister responsible for architectural works in Malta, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you at the opening of the Third Regional Seminar of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. That the Aga Khan Foundation has chosen Malta and the Foundation for International Studies as the venue for this exercise, is a matter of pride for us.

We are deeply grateful to His Highness the Aga Khan and to those collaborators from the organisation of the Award for Architecture for the privilege they have accorded us through the presence of so many distinguished architects and architectural critics. Malta's rich architectural heritage from the first manifestations of neolithic man to contemporary expressions, reflecting Malta's varied and variegated cultural traditions, provides a natural and unique backdrop to your deliberations.

You have around you in Malta, at every step, at every corner, the architectural offerings of millenia of history. You are surrounded here by a microcosm of architectural history, unparalleled in the world. As every great civilisation has left its mark on this island, it has done so primarily through the hands of the architect, from the untutored and the untrained to the highly informed and learned. Thus across the span of centuries monuments sit side by side in harmony and equilibrium amongst themselves and with nature.

In this age, when environmental concerns have rightly come to the fore, Malta should strive to provide an example of a balanced physical environment at peace with its citizens. We are not perfect and we have committed mistakes but I would like to think that we are still in time and that we have the potential to give Malta an architectural presence and an architectural future which will do justice to its erstwhile grandeur. That is why we are starting with a major project for the rehabilitation of Valetta to restore this great capital city to the glory it should, by dint of traditional history rightfully enjoy. We plan too, to ensure that the urban and rural fabric is fully integrated and properly woven. Mdina, which is perhaps the most Islamic of our cities, with its walls dating from the Arab presence in Malta, will be retained in its splendour and care will be taken not to tarnish the delicate texture of its age old charm. Similarly, we will strive to give back to the Gozo Citadel that architectural magic which over the centuries it has enshrined within its walls. Go to any village in Malta, however modest, and you will find an architectural treasure trove in each one of them. Enjoy them, our architectural wealth, which we offer to you, our distinguished visitors, as a pledge in support of the ideals of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

His Excellency, the Acting President of the Republic of Malta, Paul Xuereb

It is always a pleasure to welcome to Malta, representatives of the cultures of the world, particularly when the expression of that culture is through the noble form of architecture, for architecture, to quote our own Richard England, "is the manifestation of the dreams we desire". It was an inspiring thought on the part of His Highness, the Aga Khan, to establish his Award for Architecture and to so structure that award as to include in it, seminars and workshops designed to heighten the awareness of the architectural heritage, diversity and potentials. Such an endeavour is one more confirmation of His Highness's dedicated and profound interest in cultural issues worldwide. While regretting that due to his other commitments, it was not possible for His Highness to be with us, I have asked his representatives, who have privileged us with their presence, to convey to him, our sincere appreciation of all the work that he has been doing and continues to do, for the benefit of mankind.

We hope that in the not too distant future, His Highness will visit our island.

In holding your seminar in Malta, in conjunction with our Foundation for International Studies, and the International Committee of Architectural Critics, you have chosen as your theme "Criticism in Architecture". You have very wisely, in my view, brought to address issues inherent in the topic of your seminar, not only distinguished architectural critics but some of the world's most celebrated architects themselves. Furthermore you have enriched your gathering by participants not only from the Muslim world, but from every region.

The example given by His Highness in embarking on such an initiative, is one worthy of admiration in that it underlines the integrity of the human person and its wonder in both body and spirit. Thus the Imam's faith is expressed in his environmental concerns. Whereas he seeks for his followers, not only their spiritual well being, but also the improvement of the quality of their lives. Hence the Imam's dedication to architectural excellence is not simply a pursuit of aesthetic excell-
ence, however laudable that is in itself, but also, and perhaps more basically, a commitment to a proper environment worthy of human beings.

In this context, your seminar should be a celebration of the art of architectural criticism because it should be a celebration of higher standards for architecture itself. If, as Frank Lloyd Wright said, “architecture is the frame of human existence”, then you are met here for a manifestation of human existence through architecture.

In assessing the pragmatic needs of man, you will not forget his passions and his imagination. Conversely you will not forget that architecture may look to the angels for inspiration but it is meant for the abode of man. In this spirit of harmonious endeavour I wish every success of your seminar.

**Introduction to Malta Richard England**

As coordinator of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture Seminar in Malta, I am enthusiastically delighted to welcome the overseas visitors here on my own native island. It is nearly three years ago that I first put out feelers to try and attract the Aga Khan Award for Architecture to organise one of their events in Malta. The reasons were obviously many, but basically two-fold. First because I was, and now am still more, firmly convinced that the Aga Khan Award for Architecture established through the enthusiasm, sensitivity and above all the wisdom of His Highness the Aga Khan, has in today’s world, no equal as a body or institution in environmental terms.

The Award not only guards, protects and gives life to areas of rich architectural heritage, but also opens up and encourages progressive paths for the establishment of ideas and philosophies focussed on new valid contemporary architectural expressions.

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture through its Steering Committee and its organisation of awards, seminars and educational programmes, is involved in “a search for excellence in architecture” in the Muslim world. It has now become necessary that this unique example be extended to and followed in, other societies. I augur that this will be done soon for it is obvious that most of the modern world of today is characterised only by its confusion and lack of order. This state of affairs should not however deter us from attempting to create a new world. Let us not forget that the first one was also created out of chaos!

My second reason for wishing to have the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in Malta, was definitely a more selfish one. As an ardent and passionate lover of my country and its architectural splendour, I wanted to share with all the wonderful people associated with the Award, this unique legacy of an island heritage, and even more selfishly, to ensure that we Maltese could partake of some of the wisdom for the benefit of preserving the past and enhancing the future of our land.

Now that the dream is realised and the distinguished personalities are assembled, it falls upon me to introduce this unique island of Malta, carved, etched and built out of the one stone material, drawn from the core that constitutes the very land itself. Through the unity of this ethnic limestone a strong sense of continuity and homogeneity is evident in the vast overlays of man’s activities over many centuries and his struggle to wrest a living in an environment which provides only limited and restricted natural resources.

Because of the island’s strategic position at the crossroads between the great traditions of Europe and the Islamic World, the built expression of the Maltese Islands is an architectural reflection of the meeting place of these cultural overlays which have dominated them through history. Here is a stone-fusion of not only East and West, but also North and South. The traditional close-knit urban clusters, echoes of the island’s occupation by the Arabs, are crowned by the rounded baroque curves of church-domes imported through the Italian and Spanish influences of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. The synthesis of these two great cultures provides the basis of identity which crystallises into the “spirit of place” of this land. A similar cross-cultural parallel exists also in linguistic terms. Malta’s language is the only language of Semitic origin written in the Roman alphabet.

This is the architectural context; a tapestry spanning over six thousand years, manifested always in a maximum utilisation of the minimum resources available. The fields are built, the soil accumulated between the rubble walls and much that appears natural, is in fact man-made. In Thackery’s words, “Malta is a place where the fields are rock and the hedges are stone”. This is a land of predominant man-made solids; a campanology of cube-form music further emphasised by powerful sun and shade patterns surrounded by an ever-present blue cerulean sea. Malta over many centuries has been utilised as a sanctuary, a naval base, a trading post, a harbour, a feudal state, a fortress and today, not only as a tourist resort, but also as a platform for intellectual and cultural discourse. Unknown people from prehistory, then the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, Normans, Angevins and Aragonese, together with the multi-national order of St. John of Jerusalem and finally the British, have all contributed their own interest in the survival of Malta and its people. These contributions by foreign rulers have constantly utilised Malta’s own natural building material. Now we ourselves are continuing this tradition. The story of this island is written in its stone.
Today our island faces a multitude of architectural problems. Too many errors have been committed in the name of “progress”. In the last thirty years we have covered over three times more land with new building than we had covered since the beginning of time. For an island just over one hundred square miles in area, it is a frightening thought! The importance of architecture, not only on our island but anywhere, cannot be overstressed. The words of His Highness, the Aga Khan, emphasise this in a clarity that is worth quoting. “I can think of no human art-form which exercises such a permanent influence over our lives. We must demand from our respective national decision makers, our architects, our planners, and our landscape architects, an environment in which we can live and work harmoniously and to the fullest”.

I am sure that the authorities in Malta, our decision makers and we, the professional practitioners, will listen carefully to your deliberations for there will be many lessons to be learnt. The fulfillment of our role as architects, I think, lies in our performing not only as designers of the future but also as defenders of the past. The announcement of an international competition for a building on the Opera House site in Valetta is an issue of great magnitude and importance. I augur that both the architects and critics involved in this project will be of the stature of those who are with us here as guests, in order to ensure that our capital city of Valetta will eventually obtain a new building of the quality it deserves.

In concluding I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to His Highness, the Aga Khan, and to his collaborators, for having accepted to come to Malta for this Seminar and for giving us the opportunity and privilege to host this memorable event. Thanks are also due to the Secretary General, Dr. Said Zulfiqar and the Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Suha Ozkan, to Professor Salvino Busutil and the Foundation for International Studies, to Father Marius Zerafa, Director of Museums and to Professor Peter Serracino Ingollt, Rector of the University of Malta. My thanks also go to my close collaborators in the organisation of this event, especially Keith Cole and Konrad Buhagiar, also Victor and Alex Torpiano and Anton Valentino. Most of all I would like to thank the members of the Steering Committee and the distinguished overseas guests for being here with us.

I augur that this may be a successful seminar and look forward to what no doubt will a series of most interesting discussions and fruitful deliberations.
Closing Remarks

Richard England

As local coordinator of this extraordinary event which we have been privileged to host, permit me in conclusion to express a few brief thoughts. We have heard deliberations about architecture from both critics and architects, about the relationship of the critic to the architect and the architect to the critic. As a practicing architect I am not convinced that the two are perfectly compatible. It seems to me that every architect is on every critic’s menu. On the other hand, both architects and critics have a valid role to play and certainly during this seminar there have been most valuable discussions from both parties.

On the occasion of this closing ceremony, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all for your most illuminating contributions. There is always some positive aspect to be gained from criticism even if the criticism involved is fairly strong.

After having listened to both sides of the arguments; the brilliance with which the points and counterpoints were put forward and the high quality of the weaving of the arguments themselves, permit me to express my appreciation of what we have heard.

I would like to stress how much I have personally enjoyed the whole event. May I also express a heartfelt thank you to you all for providing such fascinating intellectual stimulation. I speak on behalf of all my Maltese colleagues when I say that we are extremely privileged and honoured to have hosted you on our island. A special thank you to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, for coming here, and also for your words of wisdom which I am sure will be of benefit to Malta. Most of all thank you for your friendship. You have been wonderful guests.

Said Zulficar
Secretary General
Aga Khan Award for Architecture

In my opening statement, I voiced the wish that we at the Aga Khan Award for Architecture hoped to learn a great deal from this seminar on “Criticism in Architecture”, a subject which is a vital factor in making people aware of the steady deterioration of the built environment in the countries of the third world. On the whole I feel that our hopes have been fulfilled and that our deliberations now enable us to understand better the methods and mechanics of architectural criticism.

However, I will not hide from you that the task before us will be arduous and fraught with difficulties. As several speakers have underlined, criticism or the capacity to criticise in any field; literary, religious, political, artistic or architectural, can only be exercised if there is a climate of intellectual freedom in a country. Unfortunately, this climate does not exist in the great majority of countries in the Third World, and in the Muslim countries in particular. As one of the speakers said so pertinently, without a free press architectural criticism is but an exercise in futility. So you can imagine the complexity of the task confronting the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. Our Foundation is probably the only international non-governmental organisation or lobby group in the Islamic world, the only space of intellectual freedom which genuinely both practices total liberty of expression in its gatherings and seminars. It is also a meeting point for Intellectuals – albeit related to the architectural profession – from both the industrialised and from developing countries, from the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. This also explains our presence in Malta, this space of freedom so close to us geographically and culturally and situated at the crossroads of the North and the South, of the West and the East.
I am reflecting the feeling of all the international participants when I express, on their behalf, my deep appreciation and very warm thanks to our Maltese hosts for the hospitality and kind attention we have received throughout our all-too-short stay in this engaging country.

To all the international participants who spared their time to come here, thank you for your contributions.

Salvino Busutil
Director General
The Foundation for International Studies

One should, on behalf of the Foundation for International Studies, say a very special word of thanks to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, for choosing Malta as the venue for the seminar and also a great deal of gratitude is due to Professor Richard England.

I have much pleasure in inviting the Honorable Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of Malta to give the concluding address.

The Honorable Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami
Prime Minister of the Republic Malta

I assume that when you choose Malta as the venue for your third regional seminar, one reason was that our island was deemed an appropriate and stimulating setting for the discussion of its major theme “Criticism in Architecture”, with particular reference to the Islamic world. I make this assumption with confidence because nobody more than a select company of some of the world’s leading architectural critics, can be expected to be sensitive to the relationship between a physical setting and the dialogue which arises within and about it.

More particularly I have noted the stress laid by the principle speakers of the seminar, in the papers that were distributed beforehand, on the need for the critical appraisal of building trends in the Islamic world to be undertaken against the background of multi-cultural references.

Our island clearly provides just such a background. The fact that by virtue of geography and history, multi-cultural references are crowded in our small space, hardly needs pointing out. I would rather take up two other observations made in the Keynote paper of the seminar which acquire a particularly striking echo against the background of our island.

The first observation is that the Muslim world has a rich architectural heritage but so far, a relatively poor architectural criticism. This observation is no doubt applicable to Malta and it fully deserves the pondering, which it was given in your seminar. Just as the significance of a book does not depend solely on its contents, but also on the response of its readers, so too the significance of a building is not constituted solely by itself but also by the behaviour towards it, of the people in whose midst it exists. The significance of a town or a village is constituted not only by the buildings of which it is made up, but above all, by the behaviour of the people who exist in its midst.

Indeed from the point of view of a political leader, the critical response to the architectural environment is of central importance. If criticism is the creative response to creative activity, than its absence means that there may be a creative few in that society but the society as a whole is not. For this reason, the development and currency of critical language is one criteria of the general level of creativity reached by a society.

A second observation, quoted from the architect and historian, W.R. Lethaby, which has received deserved attention at your seminar, is that the development of building practice mirrors the general development of world ideas. The validity of this critical observation has been reflected in your seminar, notably in the primary place which you have given to the discussion of regionalism in architecture.

Regionalism is today one of the most important of developing world ideas. My government has been seeking to promote its development, with the limited but privileged means which smallness gives, in international forums and though concrete initiatives. In particular we have been stressing the need to recognise and strengthen those regions which have a real environmental unity, combined with the troubling but enriching complexity of the plurality and diversity of cultures, such as the Mediterranean.

Moreover the strengthening of these regional realities cannot be in the sense of the homogenisation or imposed uniformity, but in the setting up of institutions which promote dialogue, exchanges and communication. In this light, the observation that the Mediterranean people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have achieved a remarkable realisation in their architectural achievement of cross-culture dialogue, but still have to develop critical awareness of its significance and the critical language with which it expresses itself, acquires a programmatic and a political value.

A sound architectural criticism is a vitally needed contribution to the awareness of local and regional identity. A strong awareness of identity is a most useful quality to have in the political situation of the world today. It allows a country to remain open to foreign influence without much danger that its native traditions will be submerged. It allows a society to assimilate modern technology without the sub-
mersion of its ethos and values. It allows a culture to grow and develop by responding to the stimuli and challenges coming from outside without losing its soul in the process.

Unfortunately, hardly any part of the world and certainly not our own has escaped from chaotic urban sprawl and to a greater or lesser extent, from the degrading of the environment under the impact of industrialism, individualism and other factors that have pock-marked the modern age. There is perhaps no more effective means to stem this tide of disorder than the enhanced sense of identity which architectural criticism can help to promote. There can hardly be a more eloquent summary of the history and sense of a place than its architecture but it will not effectively result in the collective self-consciousness, unless it is reflected in the looking glass of critical language.

For all these reasons, I thank the Aga Khan Award architecture for its decision to hold its Third Regional Seminar in this island, where the ideas discussed by you all will find a receptive sounding board. I am also grateful for their contribution to your local hosts, notably the Minister for the Development of Infrastructure, the Foundation for International Studies, and Professor Richard England.

I hope that fruitful contact between Malta and the Aga Khan Award for Architecture will continue because I am sure we share the desire to seek the Mediterranean and Muslim tradition of an architecture which speaks of the mercy of God and the community of mankind, in order that these will recover their pristine glory in contemporary terms. There is no surer way to this renaissance than the strengthening of communication and dialogue between men and woman, whose views may differ on many points, but who share the basic conviction that all problems are to be faced on the basis of rational analysis, respect for the dignity of all and the commitment that the beauty of the best of human achievement, not least in the architectural field, becomes the common heritage of the whole world.
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