

MODERNIZATION AND LOCAL CULTURE

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THE EIGHTH CYCLE OF THE AGA KHAN AWARD
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009

Introduction

Furthermore, outsiders cannot 'assume away' the local cultural milieu. It exists. Any outside assessment of a notable building will be 'read' by the milieu and the assessment itself will become a vector for change, in one way or another, that acts upon the milieu. This is particularly true of the attitudes of Western observers, who represent the dominant culture of the world today, vis-à-vis Muslim intellectual elites who seek to redefine their identity in non-Western terms in the face of a historical break in Muslim cultural continuity...

The manifestations of the cultural situation also include another significant front: the advancing insertion of a modern, rapidly changing technology into everyday lives traditionally governed by other concerns. The suitability of the technology, its adaptation to the needs of the population and the societal context, is only one part of the issue. This is the part that has usually concerned architectural critics when looking at buildings. For both building as a process and building as a product, the technology issue has invariably been addressed in terms of suitability and adaptation. In more sophisticated analyses, the intrusion of technology into aesthetic precepts and norms has also been addressed. But the present discussion would add that technology, with its various facets and dimensions, involves a rationalist ordered universe, whose frame of reference is governed by a reductionist logic. That in turn confronts a manifest reality of semantic disorder due to the disintegration of semiotic frameworks referred to above. This confrontation is resolved when the rationalistic logic is used to provide new conditions that elicit a new set of cultural symbols, much as the Modern Movement in international (Western and Japanese) architecture came into being, thus liberating and broadening the horizons of an authentic yet contemporary cultural response within the Muslim world.

Ismail Serageldin

'The Search for Excellence in Muslim Societies', 1986.¹

Ever since John Turner's pioneering work with squatter settlements in Latin America, documented in his 'Dwelling Resources in South America' of 1963,² and since Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor*, first published in English in 1973,³ we have been only too aware of the overwhelming scale of global poverty, and the limits of architecture as a bourgeois practice when confronted with the degree zero of human habitation. Whether we like it or not, we are returned to these grass-

roots circumstances by the Master Jury of the eighth cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. For four of the nine works premiated in this cycle focus once again, as in the past, on the all but unbridgeable gulf that separates the deprived millions of the late-modern world – those whom Frantz Fanon once called the 'wretched of the earth'⁴ – from those of us who, by talent or by chance, find ourselves momentarily carried on the wave of global prosperity.

As Serageldin remarks elsewhere, much of the built environment in the Muslim world is in fact dependent on non-architects. For this reason alone the Aga Khan Trust for Culture finds itself simultaneously patronizing the art of architecture with a capital A, while still acknowledging the harsh realities of a world that desperately needs its assistance at many levels, not least of which is the triennial disbursement of the Award. Fifteen of the seventy-eight projects selected by Award Master Juries between 1980 and 1998 were, in fact, largely devoted to housing schemes for those living at the low end of the economic spectrum in the Islamic World.

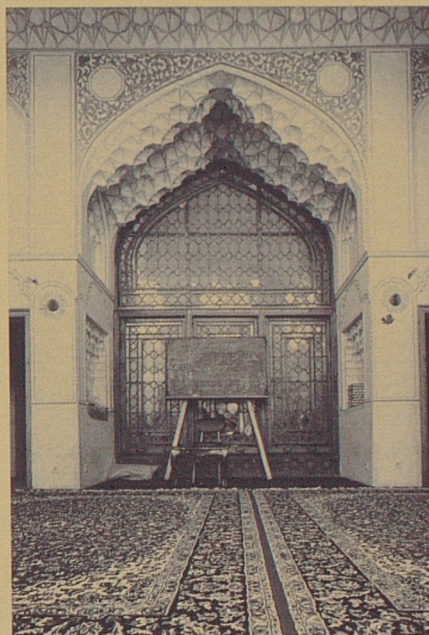
The Award's distribution for other categories over the same period may be gleaned from the following record: some 53 per cent were given to architecture and urban design, 22 per cent to conservation, 5 per cent to landscape and 20 per cent to housing. A comparable breakdown for this year's cycle works out somewhat differently, with three awards going to architecture, one each to the categories of conservation and landscape, and the four remaining awards being dedicated, if not to housing exactly, then certainly to the amelioration of the environment for the benefit of the rural poor.

The marked absence of conservation works in the current cycle of the Award is in strong contrast to the pattern of premiated projects in all previous cycles. Is this shortfall due to an absolute decline in the number of recent conservation projects in Islamic countries, or is it that our standards with regard to conservation have become so strict as to preclude works that would have passed muster some years ago? The New Life for Old Structures programme, representing this category in the current cycle, deserves to be warmly endorsed not only for its preservation of old houses and bath-houses in Isfahan, Yazd, Zanjan, Tabriz and Boushehr, as well as thirty ongoing programmes in twenty-one other cities, but also for the social outreach of the new uses

accommodated in this stock. Irrespective of how this programme may eventually be evaluated in terms of restorative technique versus social relevance, the restoration of the historical fabric of Iran's cities is not an inconsequential achievement, even if it seems to pale before some of the astonishing realizations premiated in the past, such as the rehabilitation of Old Sana'a in Yemen and the restoration of the centre of Bukhara in Uzbekistan, both being recipients in 1995; the reuse of the Rüstem Pasa Caravanserai in Edirne, Turkey, a recipient in 1980; and the controversial but exquisite refurbishing of the Azem Palace in Damascus, premiated in 1983.

Would we be justified in seeing the apparent decline in the scope and scale of conservation as indicative of a fundamental shift in our mode of evaluation? Have our standards become so exacting that they inhibit a more liberal approach to the reconstitution and appropriation of antique form? These are questions that patently go beyond the boundaries of the Award, for the world as a whole seems to be increasingly caught in the progressive bureaucratization of conservation. We are ever more frequently presented with a zero-sum game, with archaeological purity on one side of the argument and crass reconstructivism operating with impunity on the other, the latter leading to a kind of Disney World that nobody needs or desires. Between these two poles there surely exists an intelligent, sensitively calibrated middle ground, as the British architect David Chipperfield and his restoration consultant Julian Harrap are demonstrating in their proposals for restoring the Neues Museum in Berlin.⁵

Symptomatic of emerging bureaucratic rigidity is the fact that most of the architecture of Carlo Scarpa would be unrealizable today if it were subject to the strictures imposed by the average Italian *soprintendenza*.⁶ While for Scarpa restoration always involved an act of reconstitution, he nonetheless invariably displayed a certain discretion towards the antique fabric in which most of his works were situated. However, the liberties that he occasionally took in reifying one particular historical moment rather than another would no doubt be regarded as anathema today by the puritans of conservation. Does a similar restraint account for the fact that among the seven restoration works shortlisted for this cycle, only the restoration of a number of Safavid and Qajar structures could be regarded as being sufficiently faithful to the original? Or is it that



the secondary cultural status of a house or a bathhouse is such that they may be more freely modified to suit a new use, whereas a historical monument of higher stature must be preserved as is, in all its ruined Ruskinian purity? We know that Camillo Boito, the Italian nineteenth-century theorist of preservation, advocated a more moderate attitude towards restoration. So when it comes to the current debate over the limits of culturally responsible conservation, we should perhaps return to the pragmatic humanism that underlay many of his arguments.⁷

While such questions are perhaps unanswerable with any specificity, they are certainly worth asking in the context of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which has long since taken the lead in helping to preserve the cultural traces of the Muslim world in physical form. First, via the Award programme itself, through recognizing the urgency of conserving Islamic heritage irrespective of whether it is a singular monument or an extensive piece of urban fabric. Second, through the Historic Cities Support Programme dedicated to reconstituting remote cultural markers or revitalizing decaying urban fabric as the embodiment of a unique way of life. In the first instance I have in mind the 1996 restoration of the Baltit Fort in the Karakoram Mountains in Northern

Pakistan, while a telling example of the second surely resides in its recent efforts to conserve and revitalize the historical Stone Town of Zanzibar. The measured restoration and adaptation of historical buildings in Iran has, needless to say, its own intrinsic merit, particularly when, as is the case here, the reutilization of such structures yields public facilities of various kinds, capable of enriching the cultural and economic life of their immediate context.

Among the numerous settlements nominated for this cycle, none perhaps is more directly representative of the interaction between modernization and local culture than the rehabilitation of the village of Ait Iktel in Morocco. The overall income of this remote community is complemented by migrant workers sending back a portion of their wages, and it was just this Berber diaspora that was galvanized into action by a local anthropologist, Dr Ali Amahan, with the founding of the Association Ait Iktel de Développement. Two external factors stemming directly from the modernization process had a decisive impact on the formation of this organization: first, the closing of certain factories in France in the 1980s, where a number of Berber immigrant workers had been formerly employed; and second, the continuous drought induced in the High Atlas Mountains by changes in the global climate, which compelled village women to walk further and further to obtain water. Lest we conceive modernization solely as a recent side effect of globalized First-World consumerism, we might note that the local climate had already been rendered more arid by the wholesale deforestation of the mountains throughout the nineteenth century. The insatiable demand of the poor for firewood and construction lumber led to the ravaging of the local forests, at a rate of



New Life for Old Structures, Iran.

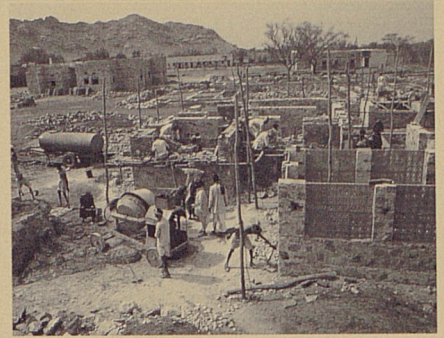
Ait Iktel, Abadou, Morocco.

depletion that, happily, has seen a significant reduction over the last decade.

Apart from affording access to basic education and providing itself with street lighting for the first time in its existence, Ait Iktel seems to have attained a significant improvement in its native culture, even if its basic housing stock remains essentially unaltered. Electrification and the provision of a reliable water supply has virtually eliminated the burden traditionally placed upon women, and Ait Iktel has reduced its illiteracy rate to 75 per cent as opposed to the national average of 81 per cent. All of this is even more impressive when one realizes that the average village income per capita is US\$ 90 per annum, as opposed to the national minimum wage of US\$ 140 per month.

Clearly there is little here that may be subsumed under architecture in the professional sense, and indeed this degree-zero building culture seems to be as removed from the more sophisticated cultures documented in Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects* of 1969⁸ as it is from the contemporary constructional norms of the developed world. This is perhaps what may be intended by the term local culture as opposed to the vernacular in a stylistic sense of the term. For here the vernacular, such as it is, can be seen as undergoing an all but invisible transformation as migrant building workers return home to build their own houses. Needless to say, they bring with them, however simple it may be, an alien building technology. However, even though the standard concrete frame is gradually being more generally adopted, along with the use of rendered block-work, traditional stone walls still hold their own against the seemingly infinite mountain range from which they have been quarried since time immemorial.

Equally removed from anything that we could possibly classify as traditional architectural practice is the work of the so-called Barefoot Architects, local people with no formal education who work at the Barefoot College in India. The college was established in 1972 by the sociologist Bunker Roy as a way of departing from the academic orientation of the Indian social-work tradition by engaging and training ordinary people, so as to cultivate a kind of Deweyesque, self-reliant community. Once again, the process of modernization was the prime mover at more than one level: first, perhaps because the natural aridity of the climate has recently become exacerbated by global warming; and



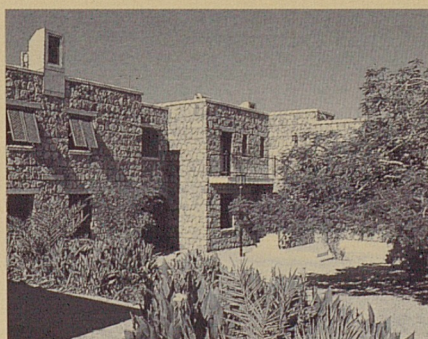
second, because the first five years of the institution would once again be largely spent in searching for a more reliable source of water and in electrifying some 110 villages in the district of Silora. This technological infrastructure was complemented over the next decade by improving the community's native skills for agricultural and craft production, enabling, in turn, the construction of installations dedicated to the harvesting of rain and the harnessing of solar power. In addition, the Barefoot Architects built a campus for the college. Based on a design that seems to have been arrived at on a collective basis, the architectural result is at once both surprisingly formal and informal. The basic building syntax itself could hardly be more strict and severe, even though the technology employed is quite hybrid, so that it is not something one could possibly recognize as vernacular in the traditional sense.

In the last analysis, the Barefoot College displays all the traits of a Utopian community abstracted from another moment in history. One is irresistibly reminded to an equal degree of both Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan College and of Charles Fourier's paradigm of the *phalanstère*, even if there is no parade ground on which any kind of *phalanx* could possibly assemble. In its stead there is a central theatrical space and open-air stage flanked on its wings by the cultural and collective core of the college, made up of the main dining room, the puppet theatre and administrative offices. A great deal of attention is clearly given to the enrichment of the cultural life of the institution, as is suggested by the presence of smaller stage platforms in the courtyards of the residential blocks. It is difficult to ignore the implicit symbolism of this neo-Kahnian layout, with its main axis of diagonal symmetry bisecting both the rainwater-storage tank and the principal

The Barefoot College campus, Tilonia, India.

open-air stage. Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes have been widely employed throughout, not only for the larger volumes but also for emergency shelter, invariably made out of scrap metal by the master craftsman Rafeek Mohammed. These temporary thatched shelters, often sided in mud-brick, recall the intermediate technology of the 1960s, along with the anarchic ethos of Drop City in Arizona and the *ad hoc* 'know-how' that was once commonly available in the pages of *The Whole Earth Catalog*.⁹

Designed by Jafar Tukan and Partners in collaboration with Ralph Montgomery, the SOS Children's Village in Jordan is also a somewhat Utopian development, even if its physical form derives from the standard typology of a decentralized family-based orphanage, as this has evolved under the auspices of SOS Villages International. Here the interface between modernization and the vernacular stems from Jafar Tukan's reinterpretation of the local stone building tradition, achieved through the application of traditional masonry to an *in situ* concrete frame filled with cement-block backing. Once local craftsmen had been trained in this mode of construction, they were able to disseminate the technique fairly widely, although local architects have so far remained relatively indifferent to the regionally expressive dimension of this approach. In addition to the rubble stonework, one should note the sensitive inflections achieved by the placement of concrete lintels and sills over and under the window openings, while the windows themselves are delicately screened, as in the past, by louvered timber shutters. With its solar roof panels and its ultra-modern concrete wind towers, the syntax of this settlement, despite its adaptation of the vernacular, largely eschews any overt reference to the Islamic tradition.

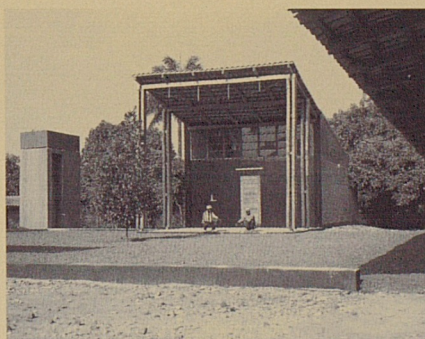


SOS Children's Village, Aqaba, Jordan.

Irrespective of the official auspices under which they were realized, the works discussed so far have depended for their success on one or two visionary figures without whom they would never have been realized. The Kahere Eila Poultry Farming School in Koliagbe, Guinea is no exception to this rubric. It is the outcome of an unlikely collaboration between a local veterinarian, Bachir Diallo, and a wealthy Finnish woman, Eila Kivekäs, the school being created as a way of addressing the appalling lack of protein in the average Guinean diet. It was the first of many local initiatives supported by Kivekäs and her development association, Indigo, which eventually led her to settle in Mali town in 1993.

As a result, she commissioned a house for her own occupation, to be designed by the Finnish architects Heikkinen-Komonen. This simple but somewhat mannered house, known as the Villa Eila, was supposed to have been a demonstration of the latent cultural potential of arts and crafts in Guinea. A number of its features, above all the roof and the bamboo sunscreening, do succeed in reflecting some aspects of local building technique, while suggesting the possibility of combining these tropes with modern spatial concepts and conveniences. The overall result, however, has apparently not withstood the ravages of the climate, together with a general lack of maintenance, particularly after Kivekäs' demise in 1999.

The modestly monumental Kahere Eila Poultry Farming School, by the same architects, seems to have fared much better, and in this regard, we might note that its design was based on a more rational plan. The confrontation here between modernization and vernacular culture is oddly provoked by the use of Nordic timber techniques ingeniously employed by the Finnish architects in the



Kahere Eila Poultry Farming School, Koliagbe, Guinea.

construction of the mono-pitched roofs. In addition, cable-tied timber joists are used for the wider spans covering the central classroom and its monumentally symbolic portico, opening towards the centre of the court. Otherwise, the complex uses local materials. The main body of assembly is built out of 15-by-15-by-30-centimetre hand-pressed blocks made of stabilized earth mixed with a small quantity of cement, while the roof tiles were also made on site along with traditional mats of woven wooden lathes that form the ceilings of the accommodation. All ventilation is natural and passes through the roof and, although the farm is well supplied with water, electricity and sewerage, there is no telephone connection. This affords a dramatic idea of how remote and primitive this institution really is – it stands there implanted like the emblem of a future hybrid civilization in the middle of the bush.

It is hard to imagine a more dramatic icon of global warming than a tropical rainforest, for today we are all hyper-aware of the way in which the lush vegetal cover of the earth's surface is being rapidly depleted. This imparts to the Datai Hotel in Malaysia an ambiguous yet critical character. Ambiguous because its erection has, of necessity, entailed the destruction of a certain amount of forest, including a 30-kilometre autoroute without which the northern part of the island would have remained inaccessible; critical because of the extreme sensitivity with which the construction of the hotel was approached by the architect, Kerry Hill.

While the complex adheres to the local Malay tradition of building on stilts, one can hardly speak of a vernacular here since the structure is extremely mixed. Concrete foundations and a certain number of steel spans are combined with brick walls rendered in plaster, while a considerable amount of timber cut directly from the forest is used for, amongst other things, the voluminous roofs with their large overhanging eaves protecting the verandas of the hotel from the monsoon. Further evidence of the perennial interplay between modernization and local culture is the fact that, although air-conditioning is available, it is treated as an option rather than a necessity.

Despite the fact that this is a hedonistic complex catering to the high end of the elite global market, its built-in environmentalism plays itself out at both an autodidactic and didactic level. It is autodidactic in the sense that, subject to the advice of the engineer,



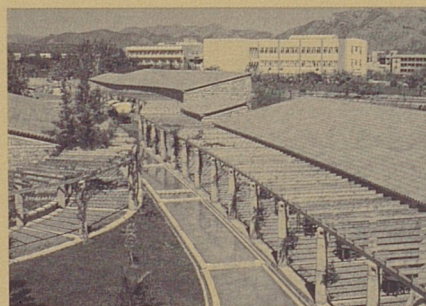
Rahulan Zain, and Dr Appanah of the Malaysian Forest Research Institute, both client and architect had to learn how a structure of this dimension could be responsibly inserted into such a delicate environment. It is didactic in the sense that, simply by staying in a rain-forest guests receive spontaneous instruction as to the nature of the fauna and flora surrounding them, while the hotel has sponsored a separate field experiment into the relative productivity of agricultural versus forest land.

In his warm appraisal of the building, the eco-tech Malaysian architect Kenneth Yeang writes: 'Who says that a critically regionalist architecture cannot be luxurious, commercial and pleasurable? This incredible hotel on the island of Langkawi, off Penang in Malaysia, is a clever reinterpretation of native architecture as a contemporary resort hotel. It demonstrates simply an approach to hotel architecture that is not Modernist, not pastiche, but innovates in all aspects of rethinking traditional Malay architecture. The architectural excellence of this genre has not been equalled elsewhere.'¹⁰

Our progressive reaction to the modernization process seems to assume a critically topographic, place-oriented character the closer one moves to the centre of 'universal civilization', to coin Paul Ricoeur's felicitous term.¹¹ This is surely evident in the compensatory form of the Olbia Social Centre at the Akdeniz Universitesi on the outskirts of Antalya. Typologically speaking, the introverted spine of the centre suggests a nineteenth-century galleria. This has both positive and negative connotations. Positive to the extent that the double-sided covered walkway connects to transport facilities, student accommodation and faculty buildings. Negative to the degree that an introspective 'galleria', when not inserted into existing urban fabric, always produces on its outer

perimeter an alien 'backstage' space, to which one cannot relate in a meaningful way (see the residential student union designed by Diamond and Myers and built in the campus of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada in 1969). However, Cergiz Bektaş provides a countervailing component to this 'backstage' effect, in an open-air amphitheatre with its *scena* facing into the campus.

The inner spine (galleria) is lined from end to end with cafeterias, restaurants, student clubs, multi-purpose auditoria, galleries and an array of shops. It is just this commercial continuum that enabled the university, with its limited funds, to take advantage of the BOT method (Build, Operate and Transfer), by which private investors glean the profit from the complex for nine years before transferring the ownership back to the university. Does not this ambiguous status – part shopping centre, part student forum – account for the mixed iconography of the syntax employed? Thus, on the one hand, stone-faced, anti-seismic, concrete-framed construction with mono-pitched, red-tiled roofs, having agrarian connotations, while on the other a wide ornamental watercourse, lined on both sides by an all but neoclassical timber pergola carried on pre-cast concrete columns. This combination suggests a



Datai Hotel, Pulau Langkawi, Malaysia.

Top: Olbia Social Centre, Antalya, Turkey.
Bottom: Bagh-e-Ferdowsi, Tehran, Iran.

promenade through a discrete mall, rather than the traditional dense urban fabric that was the original inspiration. Be that as it may, there seems to be little doubt as to the popular reception of this work or as to its role in compensating for the absent 'space of public appearance' in a late-modern campus.

Landscape features in the awards of the ninth cycle in two coincidentally topographic but otherwise unrelated works. The first, Bagh-e-Ferdowsi in Iran, is an enormous perambulating park that transforms beyond recognition the originally delimited Islamic concept of the garden as an earthly embodiment of paradise. The second, the Nubian Museum in Egypt, was apparently first conceived as issuing from the ground on which it stood, like the ancient, mythic culture it was intended to embody and represent.

The more extensively *paysagiste* of the two is evidently Bagh-e-Ferdowsi in Tehran. Conceived as a complement to the 12-hectare Baghe Sangi Jamshidieh, realized in the 1970s by essentially the same design team, Bagh-e-Ferdowsi is an even more stony, rambling park covering the lower foothills of the Alborz Mountains so as to create a green buffer zone between the burgeoning modernized megalopolis of Tehran and the relatively unmediated wilderness of the mountains. Apart from their differing size and shape, the primary distinction between these two complementary parks is that, where the first park is well served with an ample supply of water, the second is seemingly somewhat dry, even though commendable efforts have been made to provide fountains and water channels running alongside the stone pathways.

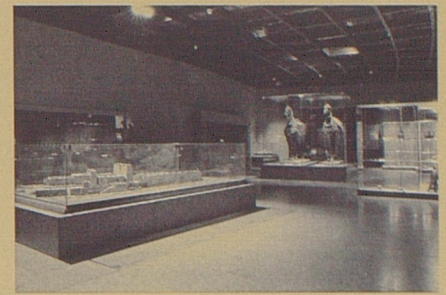
There are other differences between the two parks that are possibly indicative of the distinct historical circumstances under which they were created. For whereas the earlier park largely eschewed the importation of exotic, non-native shrubs, the later park seems to have been accorded a more popular, even populist tone through the introduction of large flowering borders or banks. Moreover, where the restaurants and other auxiliary service buildings of Baghe Sangi Jamshidieh were integrated into the landscape in such a way as to be virtually invisible, those of Bagh-e-Ferdowsi, representing the ethnic groups that make up the population of the country, have been treated as iconographic way stations. Hence the Azeri, Kurdish, Turkmen and Zagros houses, originally conceived as cultural institutions, which now function as teahouses mostly under private ownership.

Despite the use of imported stone from the respective regions of Iran, these various attempts to represent local culture in architectural terms would seem to be largely scenographic. In fact, the way in which masonry has been generally deployed in these two parks could hardly be more different. For where, in the first, case stones are placed so as to suggest some form of natural geological stratification and displacement, in the second, the stones are bonded together in such a homogeneous manner as to arrive at a continuously swirling plasticity, reminiscent of the zoomorphic forms of Antonio Gaudi's Park Güell in Barcelona. Bagh-e-Ferdowsi is most impressive at a broader, panoramic scale, where the paved mountain roads undulate through the landscape as though they were fragments of a regionally scaled, fortified wall.

Finally realized in 1997, the Nubian Museum at Aswan, Egypt, exists as a consequence of modernization in the most direct sense imaginable. Had not a vast section of the Nile Valley been totally inundated in 1971 to provide hydro-power for the new High Dam at Aswan, thereby creating Lake Nasser, there would have been no need to house the priceless remains of the twenty-two Egyptian monuments covered by the man-made flood.

Dr Mahmoud El-Hakim originally conceived the building as an internal topography, served by pedestrian ramps, surrounding a large statue of Rameses II in the centre, lit from above. The statue still occupies this position, although the elimination of the ramps and the skylight from the scheme means that it is now neither readily visible nor naturally illuminated. El-Hakim had intended that the flow of objects and visitors would culminate at the lowest level of the museum, at its eastern portico, where it would divulge into an external exhibition court. According to the landscape architects, Werkmeister and Heimer, this sequence was then to have been amplified by a stepped rock formation conducting visitors back onto the roof of the building, from which a stream of water would have descended as a metaphor for the Nile. Subsequent modification of El-Hakim's design weakened the didactic and cultural intentions of the initial concept, despite successful remedial efforts on the part of Dr Leila Masri to rescue something of Werkmeister's original landscape.

From the point of view of the never-ending conflict between modernization and cultural form, the initial brief seems to have been compromised by the modern cura-



torial tendency to maximize air-conditioning and artificial illumination, often at the expense of the relationship between users and exhibits. However, the building is well detailed and well constructed, its architecture seems successfully to represent the rich legacy of Nubian culture, and it asserts itself on the site in such an authoritative manner as to counter the popular prejudice that Nubia is a backward part of the country.

I have elected to view the works premiated for the eighth cycle of the Award as responses, at distinctly different cultural levels, to the impact of modernization. This seems to be the one factor linking architecture with a capital A as we find, say, in the Nubian Museum, to what we might more generally characterize as local environmental culture, as this appears in the Ait Iktel development, the work of the Barefoot Architects, the SOS Children's Village and the Kahere Eila Poultry Farming School. In each of these instances, the common denominator seems to have been a concerted effort to improve local living standards in the face of largely indifferent forms of modernization, operating at a globalized distance at ever-increasing speeds. What would appear to be intrinsically Islamic about all these works is the assumption of responsibility for the basic well-being of the society on the part of a relatively small number of enlightened individuals.

However, with the exception of the Jordanian orphanage, we can hardly speak of architecture in professional terms in these four projects, particularly with regard to sites as remote as the plains of Rajasthan, the High Atlas Mountains and the interior of Guinea, where the societies in question have been confronted with the challenge of improving the conditions of everyday survival and the maintenance of health. This goal has been achieved in part by revitalizing traditional forms of habitation and construction

Nubian Museum, Aswan, Egypt.



pertinent to the region and its climate, and in part by providing new water, power and sewerage infrastructures through sustainable forms of eco-technology. This, in turn, has led to additional benefits at the socio-cultural level, particularly with regard to the emancipation and education of women and, in the case of the Barefoot Architects, with respect to the categorical repudiation of the persistent legacy of the Indian caste system.

These four realizations, all of which display an ecological dimension in one way or another, serve to remind us of the way in which building culture, broadly understood, is ultimately inseparable from culture as such, in both a political and an artistic sense. It is a sign of the times that, as with the Olbia Social Centre, all four works were achieved without any significant input on the part of the state – at either a local or a national level – as opposed to those premiated works realized in Iran, Egypt and Malaysia. In these other, possibly more professional, undertakings either the local government or the nation state played a key role in initiating the project. Under this sponsorship, architecture tends to assume a more broadly instrumental character, subtly linked, even in the case of Iran, to pressures deriving from modernization and to the processes of cultural disruption and displacement: for example, the obsolescence, from a universal middle-class standpoint, of the traditional Iranian courtyard house, not to mention the brutal routinized incisions cut into the traditional labyrinthine urban fabric as long ago as the early 1930s. No doubt, the impact of modernization in the case of the Datai Hotel takes a somewhat different form, although even here, the indisputable quality of its eco-sensitive, quasi-vernacular architecture has ultimately been achieved in the name of exotic tourism, devised, all but exclusively, for the entertain-

ment and enjoyment of a global, jet-setting elite. In sum we are still some way from the authentic contemporary cultural response to which Serageldin aspires.

By way of an exemplary response in this regard we may invoke the Chairman's Award of the eighth cycle, given in honour of the distinguished Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa. Bawa's work has always reflected in the most subtle way this tension between modernization and local culture, never more categorically, perhaps, than in his civic buildings, culminating in the new Sri Lankan Parliament building opened on an artificial lake in Kotte near Colombo in 1982. It is hard to think of any contemporary legislative building that so seamlessly integrates a rational approach to both plan and structure with traditional tropes, as expressed in the hierarchical gradation of the trabeated frame from concrete to timber to fine-grained wooden grillwork. This gradation, combined with delicately profiled copper roofs rising over a concatenation of pavilions, ends in a work of breathtaking nobility, from which there emanates a sense of expansive benevolence. At the risk of exaggerating, one may perhaps claim that, whereas Bawa's plans were invariably orthogonal and hence both modern and efficient, particularly when combined with precisely trabeated structures, his details and, above all, his low-pitched tiled roofs, embodied much of the Sri Lankan building tradition, almost as an untouched continuum, as valid now as in the past.

Except perhaps for his persistently rational planning, this double condition tends to become totally fused in his domestic work. This is at once evident in the Ena de Silva House, built early in his career in 1960, and in his own house, realized in its entirety some eight years later. Both of these houses are in fact interstitial courtyard complexes, as are most of Bawa's subsequent houses in one way or another. As such, they are an integral part of his prowess as a designer of gardens, a practice that, for him, is inseparable from that of architecture. This proto-ecological green dimension surely attains its apotheosis in the 25-acre Lunuganga garden that Bawa has worked on continuously for the past half century, as a demonstration of that which he once ironically called 'action gardening'. In this singular, infinite work, one senses, once again, that feeling for tranquillity and labyrinthine beauty that somehow lies momentarily suspended beyond such abstract categories as modernization and its other.

Notes

- 1 Ismail Serageldin, 'The Search for Excellence in Muslim Societies', in *Space For Freedom* (Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986) p 62.
- 2 John Turner, 'Dwelling Resources in South America' in *Architectural Design*, August 1963, pp 360–93. See also by the same author *Freedom to Build* (New York, Macmillan, 1972).
- 3 Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor: an experiment in rural Egypt* (Chicago University Press, 1973).
- 4 Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris, F Maspero, 1961).
- 5 Accepting that there is no absolute answer to the dilemma posed by restoration, this team has assumed a synthetic approach to restoring, stabilizing and simulating the original form of the Neues Museum. To this end Chipperfield and Harrap have developed a computerized representation of a series of alternate levels to which the ruined interior might be restored.
- 6 See Ellen Soroka, 'Restauro in Venezia' in *Journal of Architectural Education*, May 1994, pp 224–41. Soroka quotes Scarpa to the effect that: 'By restauro (restoration) is not meant only to repair old buildings; our duty is rather to give them a new lease of life so that we may be able to live today and tomorrow... In architecture all the existing buildings form a part of the *matière*.'
- 7 Camillo Boito, *Questioni pratiche di belle arti* (Milano, 1893). In a similar vein, Viollet-le-Duc argued in his *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française* (1854–68) that, while empathizing with the architect of the original buildings, the restorer must remain open to different methods of restoration.
- 8 Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects, a short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1969).
- 9 *The Whole Earth Catalog* (Menlo Park, California, Portola Institute Inc, 1969). Influenced by Buckminster Fuller's techno-anarchic views as to the need to develop proto-ecological, synergetic systems on a world scale, this catalogue contains self-help survival information in almost every conceivable field, from simple shelter construction to hydroponics and the exploitation of solar energy.
- 10 Kenneth Yeang, quoted in the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2001 Technical Review Reports.
- 11 Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures', 1961 in *History and Truth* (Evanston, North West University Press, 1965).

Geoffrey Bawa: Ena de Silva House, Colombo, 1960.