Observations on New Models

Jacques Berque

Dear colleagues, it is difficult to square the circle. I realize that all of us, whether Orientals or Orientalists, are also alchemists more or less. But, in this case, alchemy would be very difficult because we are confronting conceptions which are apparently antithetical to the future. We are forced to make a great methodological effort in order to create synthesis out of this antithesis. I have no illusions about the impact which discussions of intellectuals or artists could have But, in the end, I suppose that we must be responsible. We have no choice but to take our own opinions seriously and to act as Kant, for instance, asking ourselves at every juncture whether our opinions should still be applied.

When Picasso draws an eye in the middle of a cheek, that has a stimulating effect that develops our concept of design. But suppose the architect places an eye in the middle of a design, the consequences would be a little more serious. Usually the artist, sculptor, musician, painter organizes a dialogue between his own inspiration and the material with which he is dealing and, certainly, the result produces an impact on the people who perceive the work of art. With the architect or the urbanist, the consequences are much more serious. What is the material of urbanism and what is the impact of the urbanist? Is his material steel, cement, glass or a certain technology? Is that his material? Or is his material simply the whole human group which is to live in these forms and volumes. In other words, what is material for others becomes to him his being and his end (*Ma huwa ta'thir bi–l–nisba lil–fananin al–'akharin fa–sār bi–al–nisba 'ileyh ghāytahu wa shartahu*) The interest of the architect is to invent his past better than his future We have the paradoxical result that the architect who is making use of these forms and volumes for the human group finds himself obliged to serve that human group This is a part of the paradox of which the antithesis forms only a part.

We have to compose forms and volumes of Islam in modernity. So we have to ask ourselves at once what is modernity and what is Islam? On the first question, I agree on many points with Professor Nasr. Many of his objections to the limitation and the servility with which models from industrial society are copied are fully justified for the simple reason, that there does not yet exist an industrialized civilization What we call industrialized civilization is nothing but a projection of regional cultures of certain countries, cultures which had a role in the history of the expansion of the industrial era. For example, the Islamic World is divided between three so–called industrial civilizations: French, British, American. But we have absolutely no right to claim that these regional influences are part of a world industrial civilization. We, therefore, can easily claim here that this industrialized civilization is still to be invented.

Secondly, the Islamic peoples will have to have their share in this development. And this takes us very far from projects of conservation, restoration or even revival. It is for Islam to reinvent the world and to propose to the world a new Islamic system. When I say a new Islamic system, it is understood that it will be a system which has its roots in the eternal Islamic identity. So then, the question arises what identity have we to project into modernity?

Here we have to give the floor to scholarly efforts because it is only investigation through separate studies that will allow us to comprehend all the experiences lived through Islam and to extract an Islamic model as an abstraction. To my knowledge, this has not yet been attempted. Indeed, do we have any body of works which would allow us to determine what is really Islamic in an Indian, Andalusian or Malaysian mosque? What in them pertains to Islam and what pertains to regional building traditions or borrowings? Furthermore, are we capable of distinguishing between that which pertains to a permanent Islamic identity and which is characteristic of one or another period of history? Until we are able to do so, then we cannot speak about that identity which we want to project into the future

Nevertheless, like most of you, I am more experienced in certain regions or periods of the Islamic world. I should like to draw on one of these experiences to begin that which could become an attempt to define Islamic identity.

I spent several years in my youth in the old Moroccan city of Fez, not just as an academic researcher but as a functionary in municipal affairs. Therefore, my point of view is not simply an abstract one, but one that is also based on practical living. The Islamic model which I abstracted in my first studies, a quarter century ago, is a radiating model. This model could be characterized by several traits which I shall try to enumerate One, the primary focus of the ritual religious centre is a Great or *khutbah* mosque. The madina is distinguished from the village because it possesses a *khutbah* mosque. This mosque is by far the most important centre from all points of view: spiritual, urbanistic and even political. From there many streets spread out to all quarters. Another characteristic of this structure is the relative autonomy of the various districts All these districts take the form of labyrinths, an aspect which has so much struck foreign observers Each quarter enjoys a certain autonomy and possesses a small, secondary mosque as well Not only autonomy, but from the functional point of view, a different character. There are quarters occupied by a single trade or craft, by a single ethnic orgin The ensemble makes up a model characterized more by involution than evolution. This is a totality which functions without any imposed rules. One could even say that its regulation emanates from its very existence. And, as compared to a similar European city, the role of form and image is predominant here. What is in our cities aesthetics, in the Islamic cities is really regulation, innate regulation. It is quite different from the European model.

That is the first model which I had observed and which I presented in an article. Very often this radial model is taken to be a typical one for Islam and even of the Orient, to such an extent that, when Crusaders came back to Europe, they also founded radial cities, called *villes neuves,* imitating what they thought to be the

Fez, Morocco· one of the many entrances to the Qayrawiyyin Mosque from the surrounding alleyways

Photo: S Bianca

eastern city. And, of course, this model can be reinterpreted in theological terms by saying that it is God who fixes the order to the city, the unity and multiplicity, the unity or *tawḥīd*. But, alas, if we confront this model with other hypotheses, we have to change it. And myself, I have to criticize my first study because I left out many features which more or less contradict my first opinion. In Fez, we have not just one great mosque, but two. There is the Mosque of the Andalusians which was more important in time past than the Mosque of the Qayrawiyyin. There were two towns, not just one, the town of the Qayrawiyyin and the town of the Andalusians separated by an open space. However, the first town eventually invaded the second, so that in this radial model there was not one centre, but two or three. Surely, there is a religious centre but we have also an economic centre, the *qayṣariya* (or the Market of Caesar) specializing in import trade. We have

another centre, the centre of power; it is quite important. But the centre of power is situated in yet another town, Fez Jdid. And perhaps we have a kind of decentralization in other aspects of urban life. For instance, the world of the crafts is quite decentralized.

More than that, we had forgotten one of the main aspects of urban life: man. The crowd flows through this model; and it is the crowd which fills the streets on Fridays. And it is the crowd which makes the city live, because it brings in raw materials from the country and buys from the tradesmen in town. Now, can we make an abstraction in our model of an element which gives it life?

If we consider the crowd, we become aware of many other things, too. This model of the city represents the standard, the order while the crowd represents disorder. Really, the city adjusts itself by the confrontation of the order and the dis-

order. The crowd represents the essential element because it is the crowd that seizes power from time to time.

And now let us consider another well known antithesis. We are accustomed to assume an essential difference between town and country. One even considers this opposition as a basic characteristic of Islamic civilization.

Let us suppose that the town has a three dimensional form: prayer, commerce and manufacture. Indeed, if we analyze the urban bourgeoisie, we find that it has arrayed itself among those three elements. This can be an additional proof of my first hypothesis of radial order. But this hypothesis is incorrect. How can we ignore the dimension of power which is, in a way,· the military aspect? In most Islamic cities we see the mosque, the adjacent market, but we also notice, off to the side, the *qal'a* or the citadel. Can we, therefore, say that the city presented a fourth dimension?

Now to proceed to the country. We will also find that the country possesses three dimensions. It is the country which the Arabs call *bedw* or the nomad. What are the dimensions of nomadic life? First, there is an agricultural and pastoral dimension based on the fertility of the soil and the herds. And there is the religious dimension, which unfortunately is subjected to all sorts of deviations in the customs of the Bedouin. These last are objects of constant attempts of orthodoxy to rectify their beliefs. And lastly we have the military dimension. Indeed, this last dimension affects the synthesis between town and country, because we often find that it is the base on which the authority establishes itself, consisting of either nomads or foreigners. This indicates to what extent the life of the Umayyads was a life that reflected integrating the values of this society, for their own life alternated between town and country. And even today we notice that whenever there is a unified positive effort of this group against occupation or reconquest, it is when the country is allied with the city in resisting all efforts at division. I can give you many examples drawn from recent history. Those people

gained independence through new alliances between the town and the country. Colonial powers tried very hard to disrupt this alliance. But if my theory of dimension is correct, we will find that town and the country were parts of a synthesis and that these are the poles of dissimilarity. I have found the correct translation of that term in the Koran, *khilfah*.

If my model is correct, we find that the ideas that we had about the structure of the city have to be revised altogether in terms of specific cases. And this proves to us also that evolution is possible within the Islamic model since we have examples of many of the traits of evolution during the most expansive periods of Islam. This raises two interesting problems, I think, which we ourselves should consider because they have direct bearing on our present concerns. The walls that encircle the Islamic city and which are considered by the Western as well as by native researchers to be very characteristic of these cities, are those walls an element of separation or an element of conjunction? I think they are an element of juncture as has been made apparent by the monumentality of the city gates. This is a very important point, because you probably know that aesthetic theory according to which Islam rejects closed forms. If so, how are we to explain the existence of the walls? Only if we would regard the walls and gates as a typological break but not as a sociological one.

Secondly, many of those who study the Islamic model make a fetish of a certain number of forms, like arcades or arabesques or minarets. But do these forms, in reality, have any bearing on the true structure of the model or are they simply embellishments? The arcades are, of course, Oriental but they are also characteristic of Napoleon III. There are many arcades in the Islamic lands but also in the rue de Rivoli. Even the minaret which we see is absent from some Islamic cities. And the call to prayer often emanates from the roof and not from a minaret.

This, I think, leads us to a theoretical stance which I hope will help us to answer our second question. If we seek an identity characteristic of the Islamic model, this identity will not be found in one or another concrete manifestation. If we examine such models through monographic studies, we will find that one or another of their elements could be absent or could change or even develop. Identity does not consist of things, it consists of their system of arrangement. As proof, I who am addressing you, renew all my cells once every seven years. So, does my identity then reside in these cells or in the system which they form? If our identity resides in this systematic structure and not in its separate components, then these can change as long as their relationship to one another remains identical. That is what Islamic thought expresses in Arabic as *thawābit wa mutahawilat* when differentiating between invariabilities and variables. As long as invariables are maintained with the original system, the identity exists.

Also, the proportion of Arabic words in Persian reaches sometimes up to seventy percent of the vocabulary. But vocabulary is not the language. The language is a system and provided the system remains Persian, it can absorb all the words it wishes and still remain Persian. Some people say that in English a third of the words are of Latin origin. Can we then say that English has only two–thirds of an identity? What counts in languages is the system and not the elements that entered that system. If that is true, you have a key for explaining all periods of history and all the projections into the future. In my opinion, it is the only possible explanation through which we individually or collectively can maintain our own identity in the face of all the changes. So that is true, we have to seek the invariances in the Islamic urban system in order to project that very system into modern terms. And perhaps


Fez, Morocco: a bazaar in the madina

Photo: H-U Khan

then we should allow the arcades to disappear. Possibly the rotating square about which I myself have written, which is both in the Friday mosque of Isfahan and in the Qayrawiyyin, is characteristic of Islamic ornamentation. Perhaps in the city of tomorrow, we shall find this form just on an ashtray.

To conclude, I shall try to extract several characteristics from the model I have built. If you are interested in the subject, you will find in my paper an attempt at constructing a Utopia of the city. I have tried to derive from this model the component elements of a system and project them into a future vision of the town. There are four elements. First, not mono-centrism but multi-centrism. Second, segmentation into the distinct units, in the shape of the quarters. Third, an alternation between various orders of things: order and movement or order and disorder, solids and voids, light and dark, norm and game. Fourth, an alternation between what is morphological and what is rhetorical, what is rhetorical in the sense of Aristotelian rhetoric or the way of the truth to be applied in terms of human behaviour Many of us have made mistakes by taking the rhetorics of the Islamic city as morphology or vice versa. We have to deal with both of them but knowing that they belong either to rhetoric or to morphology without mistaking between them Thus, I have conceived a new city of Fez which would be a utopian projection, signifying the expansion of an Islamic system into the world and not an inversion of that system onto its past. I was inspired by the magnificent twenty-fourth Sura of the Koran, the Sura of Light where we can find many elements on which I have relied Lastly, I should say that if I deal with this question with so much passion, it is because it is not only of concern to Islam but to all the old civilizations and mine to begin with I want to project my own civilization into the terms of the future. But I don't think that would materialize by imitating the Place des Vosges or Notre Dame, nor in setting out a structure similar to that of Centre Pompidou, because the Centre Pompidou is the future without authenticity

while Viollet–le–Duc is authentic without a present or a future. As an extreme example, I refer to the fort of Carcassone rebuilt (re–made) by Viollet–le–Duc in "medieval" terms. I avoid this forced antithesis by the conviction that our future is the projection of our identity, participating in the expansion of the universe and not a retreat into our past.
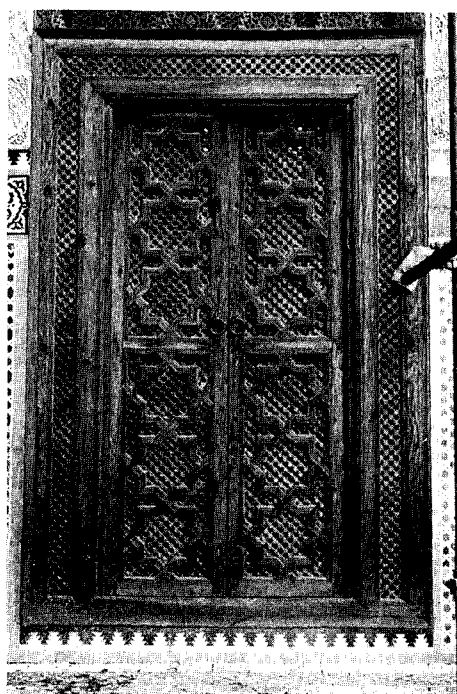
Meknès, Morocco palace doorway

Photo H–U Khan/Aga Khan Awards

Discussion

Grabar

It is rather difficult to comment on fireworks. Professor Berque has suggested to us an extraordinarily original manner of seeing, what I would like to call semiotics of the Muslim city. What he has proposed are the functional operative terms by which the city lives. Some of those terms are common to all cities, others are unique.

Two ideas strike me as being particularly important. One is that it is people who make the signs work. Berque suggests that an originality of the Muslim city consists in the fact that forms are charged by people, that forms (pursuing the electricity comparison with alternating currents) are somewhat neutral in themselves, but it is human activity that charges them. It is people who give them a certain sense, certain meaning, certain uses.

Secondly, he mentioned the importance of the nature of noise within the city. He points out that in the traditional city the extent of the voice of the muezzin creates the unit. In dealing with the future, it seems to me this is precisely one of those cases which is no longer applicable. With automobiles we cannot hear the muezzin's natural voice Also, loudspeakers have extended his range. But I wonder whether those who deal with contemporary sociology may not identify the limits of certain sources of noise within the city that create meaningful entities In older cities the water carrier, the vegetable vendor and so forth, created certain units through their voices. What is the equivalent today?

The signifying power within the city is created so much by human activities This one broad issue seemed to be somewhat troublingly transformed toward the end of Berque's talk when he himself seems, with his two rotating squares, to start worrying whether there are intrinsic meanings in certain forms. I feel very strongly that a characteristic of a great deal of the physical environment of the traditional Muslim World, traditional works of art and of

architecture does indeed lie in the rapport between forms and in an abstract definition of forms, rather than in any one form itself. I am basing this mostly on things that I know better, i.e., the early period.

I want to stress another point Berque made. It is not only regions that are important but also times. What is true of the Muslim world of the eighth century is not necessarily true of the tenth nor the twelfth nor the fourteenth nor seventeenth. One of the great tragedies of the field is the freezing of certain periods and considering them characteristic of all times. While I like the notion that it is the syntax between parts that is permanent or significant, I wonder whether Berque himself is not tempted to find concrete meanings in specific forms. If we accept this, we might have to accept the arcades as well. I am a little worried on this particular issue, but I think it is clearly a subject for further discussion.

In the semiotics of the city, people, rather than forms, make it operative. Systems are permanent. Forms change and are modified, but the systems remain.

Fathy

Today's discussion was very interesting because we came down to architecture proper and are trying to define something which is very subtle: that is the spirit of Islam. We have in architecture the incentive for man to build, to do something His psychological and cultural background makes him shape his architecture. If we want to understand the subtlety of the problem, what is not only functional but also what is spiritual, let us give an example. If we take a plate and put sand into it and vibrate it, the particles would take certain patterns. These patterns are guided by the mechanical movement of the plate because every grain of sand has no will. In town planning when we vibrate the geographical area, men do not necessarily vibrate in unison with the forces; they have the will to divert.

Architecture is the most important element in culture because a building to my mind is like the shell of a snail. The soft, living part secretes calcium carbonate and by mechanical forces it takes the shape of a spiral, but once the shell is formed it turns on the living soft part and gives it shape. So it is that the house shapes the individual, the city shapes the community. When we were vibrating in unison with the forces that were acting on our society, we created the Islamic cities. In the exposition of Professor Khan, we have seen the most beautiful examples of Islamic architecture from Spain to India that the Muslim has produced when he was vibrating in unison with his environment. Our architecture was not formed from the individual work of one man, nor in a single lifespan, because it had to have a tradition. There are cycles that need more than one lifespan to crystallize. Now, when we are cut off from our tradition, we are forced to deal individually with problems that need more than one lifespan to solve. It is beyond our means. We oversimplify any problem to tackle it.

We are here to define the problem of culture change and its effect on architecture. It is not only the Islamic spirit that we have to preserve but the quality of architecture. New materials that we have, new possibilities, new techniques in structure make us more concerned with plastic materials like concrete. A plastic material has no character. It is your own will that shapes it.

When I first saw Ronchamp, I was shocked. Here the architecture negates classic symbols of Christian architecture. It looks like the aerodynamic lines of an airplane. Do not bring sacred art down to this level.

We have to recognize that we have the implicit and the arbitrary in all our architecture. What is the implicit? It is, in a certain sense, what we described when we vibrated a metal plate. The mechanical forces arrange the particles into a certain pattern. Some grains of sand are large; some are small. They set a certain pattern among themselves, not affecting the general pattern.

In planning and architecture my will may incite me to diverge from the pattern. This can occur for two reasons. Either I do not know the forces and do not take reality and truth in architecture into consideration, or I am doing so with intent. In either case I am not allowed this in religious architecture, if we consider architecture a communal art, not an individual's will, because the building must be placed in the city.

Architectural forms are like a language; I have to understand the language if I am to talk to you. If nobody understands what I am saying, it is impossible. We have to define meanings of the many words we are repeating without understanding. What are the essential aesthetics in architecture? What do we call contemporary? Is it because this is taking place now? What is progress and what is the progression? If we analyze scientifically most of what we call modern, we will find it retrogressive and anachronistic because contemporary means living, existing, occurring at the same time and so it has a parallel between two things. What is it I am comparing my contemporary with? Is it just because I have put in a glass wall? In the past, the ancients had some point of reference as to contemporaneity. They took, for instance, the temple as a microcosm because they were most conscious, because they were not cut off from the cosmos. They made the temple to coincide with some pattern in the sky. So, nowadays, when we are not building temples, what would be the point of reference, what would be the point from which to judge our contemporaneity? It is applying modern science to all that we built.

We know that a plane of glass, the glass wall, is the last word in modern architecture. Once exposed to the sun, a three metre square of glass generates two thousand calories per hour. Would it be modern to make my building a solar furnace with a huge refrigerating apparatus?

What has changed in the Islamic spirituality to change our architecture? We can have examples from the past, which are wrong architecturally and spiritually and "Islamically" and we can have the ultra–
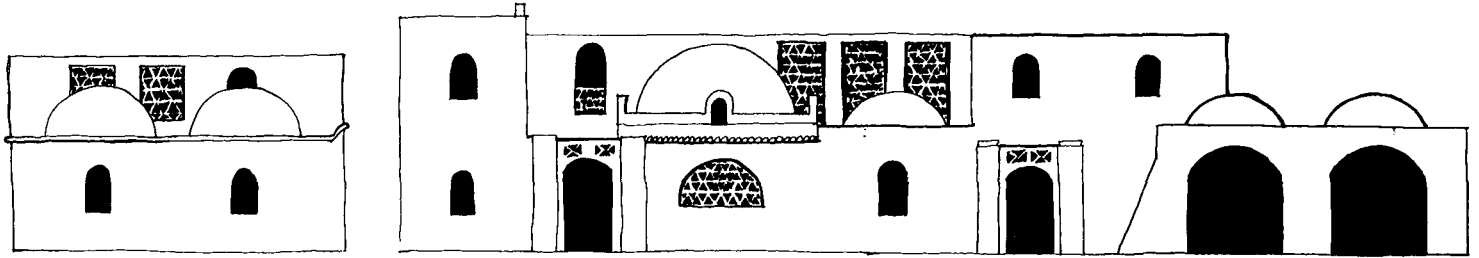
New Gourna, Egypt, designed by Hassan Fathy

Drawing: Aga Khan Awards

modern which would be Islamic in spirit, but we have to define what it would be. To define it is a very subtle problem.

I had the same when I was designing the village of Gourna where we had two hundred Christians, and I had to build a small church for these people. I could have designed just a church; I refused. I said there would be something missing. I had to have a Christian friend of mine come and design it because every line expresses a feeling from within which I cannot give technically. A religion is not given to the technician, it is given to the spirit. What makes an Islamic architecture is subtle; the identity we are talking about is that which comes from within the place and the culture. The best definition of culture is the outcome of the interaction between man and his environment in satisfying his needs both spiritual and physical. The physical, very simple. When we come to the spiritual, this is where the sensitivity of man should recognize that something is beyond him. But we architects don't say so. We put into the ground whatever we want. An architect does not put his building into the interstellar space. He puts it in two environments, the God–made environment and the man–made built environment. If he doesn't respect the first, it would be a sin. When we come to the man–made environment, including our Islamic or Christian or whichever architecture, we have to respect its past, because

if we do not respect this architecture, it would be considered as lack of civility towards those who preceded us. If I have no information or knowledge of why they built this form, I should not abolish it because I do not understand it. If we have a certain architectural feature repeated in Islamic architecture, whether in a mosque or a *khān* or whatever, when it occurs three or four times in the city or in different cities according to the laws of probability, it is impossible that it could have occurred by hazard only. There is a will behind it. By analyzing it scientifically, as I have said, we might find a guide to indicate to us true principles.

To my mind, in architecture the most important elements are truth and fidelity to both the environments, to the expression of man, not deviating like the grain of sand that jumps outside of the vibrating plate or having my own will and ruin the whole picture for all mankind.

Ardalan

I wish to look at four of the creative men who spoke today. I look at Fazlur Khan, a man of the East living in the West, who has begun recently to study the East. I find in his presentation a very academic base which says that we are to approach the problem rationally. Therefore, he

seeks that which is written; he looks at the Koran and he looks at the *Sharī'a*. His presentation raises many issues as well as questions of direction. The key subtle element to which he alluded was the state of tranquility and that the state of tranquility might have aspects of both humility and individuality. But could not a good Zen Buddhist garden also be described in the same way? And, therefore, the problem is that the creative imagination within an Islamic vision must have some differences, and this is the point to which Hassan Fathy was alluding.

In Mr. Robertson, basically a man of the West but one who has lived somewhat in the East, has travelled internationally and worked in the last two or three years in the East and particularly in Iran, I find an extremely important man. He is a man who seeks the middle way in the Confucian sense, a sense of reality that is not too much to the right nor not too much to the left, yet not a compromise; a man who generally feels that he should be in the middle of the action, politics, economics and developers. He is also a person who speaks about an attitude and he calls himself a mercenary. I think he's a very truthful man and in this mercenary attitude, he must make quick decisions. Essentially, he deals with a cookbook sort of necessity to put something together and then, as the man of the western cowboy imagery, he rides off into the sunset. In

dealing with such subtleties and such areas in which research have not been developed extensively, you really cannot do that. Robertson is an example of the man of the West who means so very well, but does not have enough sustained research of the two domains that Mr. Fathy alludes to, to be able to do the job adequately.

One of the important aspects of what has been shown is the idea of a master plan. The idea of a master plan is a conception originally found in geometric layout of cities in many places, in China, in Iran. These cities were geometric statements of cosmic consciousness, of a state of order, where the centre was a place of power. Around it was the settlement of the ministers and then, on the periphery, the body proper of the cells, of the labourer, the slave or whoever held this body entity together. That was a certain master plan. In time, the master plan became much more dynamic than that. Yet today, we re–introduce the aspect of the old master plan to countries who already have become much more diversified than that. The idea of a master plan today is almost antithetical to the dynamic growth of countries such as ours. You will never have enough data, you will never have enough of a model to be able to create a geometric pattern for the dynamism which it is to capture. The idea is to develop a suit though projections of data for what this man will be at the age of twenty–five. However, the man is stunted in his growth, his left arm is cut, something happens but the suit remains the same. So the man feels inferior for being either too small or too large, too warped or too powerful, too thin or too fat. I believe that there is another attitude which allows one to plan for uncertainty. Perhaps it is with a very simple modality very much like the music of the East, a very simple score which, however, you spontaneously interpret as you play your tune and learn from the note that you have performed what your next note should be. And if the drum goes out of tune, you then relate to another instrument to pick up your melody. That orchestration of a basic simple score has much more to offer to us than the conception of

the master plan of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and now twentieth century.

Going next to the work of Mr. Khwaja, I find so much agreement with a man of the East who is working in the East. I find in his presentations, however, a sense of bewilderment in the answers that are emerging. It is a very significant piece of work about direction that one ought to take.

This is also some of Professor Khan's concern. I do not find his great engineering imagination dealing with the idea of the new aesthetic of spacemaking. He is at his point of transformation, trying to learn about Saudi Arabia. In his paper he described mosques essentially from a certain world. There are other mosque worlds. There is the mosque world of Iran which is very different from the linear, columned mosque. There are the mosque forms of the hot, wet climates which were not alluded to in this paper. In a learning process, this is all positive. I think this is exactly where we ought to be. What really is needed in the Islamic countries is enough sustained research into the quantitative adaptive architecture to which Fathy alluded when he began his presentation and observations a few days ago. But he is talking about scientific information, about adaptive architecture at all levels.

However, I found that there was another point raised rather obliquely in various other comments. Namely, if we cannot measure something, it does not exist. Consequently, because we could not measure Islamic spirit, we say it does not exist. This is extremely problematic because one can rationalize and quantify the rational. One cannot rationalize the intuitive, the non–rational, a dimension which is the foundation of Islamic vision. If one does not combine the rational and the intuitive, two complementary aspects of our vision of existence, one has lost the whole purpose of this exercise. Of course you cannot document spirit, it is transcendant, it is a way of life, it is a vision. This is a very important aspect of the problem that we have been discussing.

Hassan Fathy, a creative man of faith of the East, asks our point of reference. He alludes to cosmic orientation. He deals with a primary cause. If we neglect this aspect, then we should only call ourselves existentialists. Can you be an existentialist Muslim? Such a category may exist, but I cannot comprehend it. Therefore, if you believe in primary cause, you must have that sense of reality. This sense of reality has a universal dimension and a very personal dimension. The personal sense of reality works in concert with the universal (within the framework of an Islamic universe). This pleases our aesthetic sense of existence. As artists we experienced this pleasurable sense of the beauty of existence and we then recall at will.

The dialogue of the individual with the communal has yet another scale. If the individual exists, then society exists. If this society exists and it views things in a certain way, a nation exists. And, therefore, I believe very much in the fact that national or regional cultural identity exists and it converses with another thing called *dār al–Islam*, the world of Islam, this wonderful multifaceted world that goes from Indonesia to North Africa and beyond. The world of Islam converses with the world in a universal way. The individual parts of the body are talking with the body and living in concert with it. The conversation of these complementarities are the dimensions which have to be addressed. If we negate these dimensions, we are also negating the formula which is very fundamental and essential to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

Fathy

We are all trying to uncover the identity of Islamic architecture. Our architecture had a psychological background which we can analyze. Also, it has genes and chromosomes which give it the figure, the same shape of the family; cultural change is an interruption cutting us off from our genes and chromosomes. And we architects are wiping out all of what we have had pretend-

West coast of Malaysia: a traditional house

Photo: H-U Khan/Aga Khan Awards
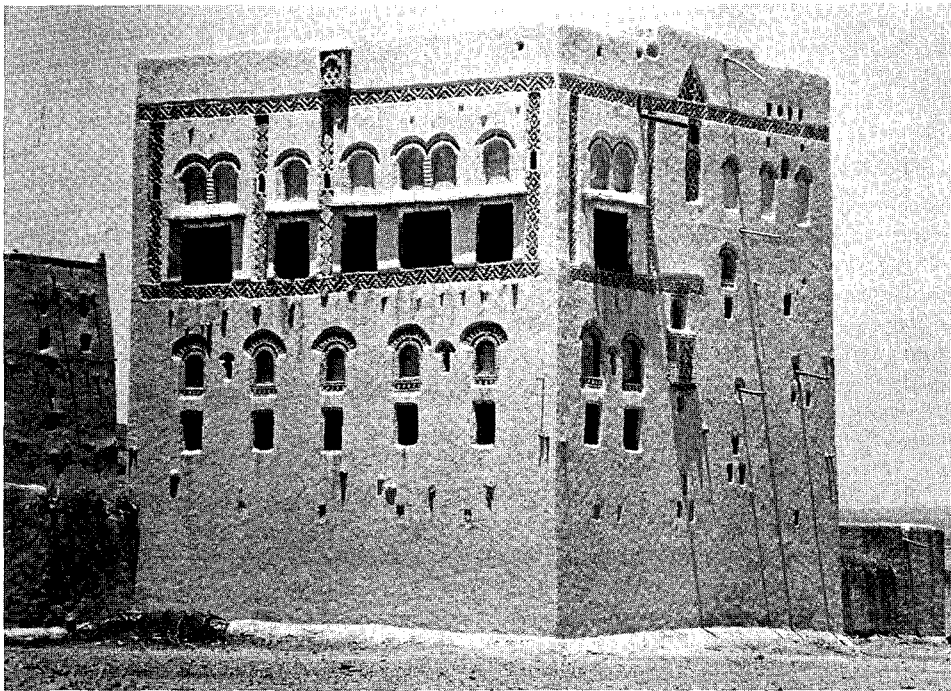
Melah, Yemen: traditional mud building with brick decoration

Photo: A. Bertaud

ing that this is not modern. Never in the history of mankind were drafting instruments a determining factor in design. Nowadays, the T–square has become a determinant. I call this T–square architecture, far from man when he was dealing with stone.

I am reminded of the story of a man passing three men dressing stone, conversing with the stone. He asked the first man, "What are you doing?" He answered, "I am earning my living." "And you, the second?" "I am dressing the stone." "And the third?" "I am building a cathedral." So there is a great difference among the three.

We are earning our living as architects; we are not dressing stone, because we don't have the stone; we have concrete, which we pour. These are the major factors that have affected our culture, all our culture. East and West are the same. Facility that is offered man has cut him off from not only the cosmos but from nature. First of all, we are cut off from God–made environment in our modern cities. We are surrounded only with the man–made environment; we are surrounded with concrete, asphalt, street lamps, trams, cars. Town planning has become the domain of road engineers. Where are the architects? Where are the sociologists? The architect who feels with his fellow citizens and tries to put beauty into his building so that it bows to the passerby, that architect is civilized, is civil. Every ugly building is an insult to the gentleman passing in front of it. It is saying, "This is your worth, Mister!" We lose the aesthetic factor, we lose the human scale, if we say town planning is for politics, economics, whatever, and not for men. Town planning cannot be reserved for engineering.

Man is created by God to be surrounded by a certain environment composed of the landscape, the rock, the tree, the animals, the sky, even cosmic rays. The teachings of Islam, the teaching of all the religions, are after the same thing: to find God by your senses, by analyzing, by observing nature. The means might be different because my environment is different. In the Koran it says that Abraham had his people

live in a barren desert to pray. This "pray" is to observe, to think, etc. That is why we have the abstraction in the Islamic architecture. We have sciences that grew in Islam: geometry, algebra and astronomy, because sky surrounds man. When I have nature which is very rich, it is different. I could not have had Impressionist paintings in the desert. I could not have a palm tree and a camel beside a Swiss chalet; this is what we are doing nowadays. We are having Swiss chalets with camels; this is what we are doing with architecture. We have to have truth. Truth to what? To God and to his creation, magnificence in everything, from the smallest to the largest. If I have a full glass of water with 50cc. capacity, it cannot hold 51cc. It would spill over. But if you insist, I will freeze the water and put in 1000cc. of frozen water When we put men on top of one another, we are freezing something in these men. The spiritual needs of man are most subtle and difficult to recognize, but nonetheless present. How can I admire the work of God in buses, automobiles, asphalt, concrete or glass walls?

We have to recognize what is interchangeable between cultures and what is non–interchangeable. Some elements of a culture I can take, others I will never assimilate Interchangeables are those elements of a culture suited to your nature and your physiological make–up, things usable to you.

I have been trying recently to use a little musicality in teaching the problems of town planning in schools to produce the harmonics and counterpart of volume and scale. This is the way to be modern but not to have glass walls In the deep ocean you have flat amorphous organisms Why? Because there is no change in temperature. There is no change in pressure. There is no light. It is all dark So when I make my environment uniform with constancy of temperature ensured by air conditioning, I am returning man to that amorphous creature regardless of whether he has already been articulated.

We must find these subtleties and put the emphasis on the spirit of Islam that has been lost unnecessarily. As proof for the necessity of such investigation, we have seen images that have replaced the traditional, most of which cannot even be called architecture. We have to think twice about what we call "modern architecture" and "Islamic architecture."