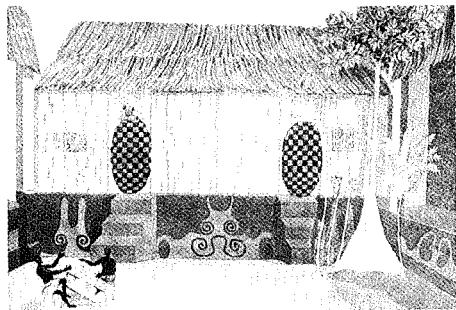


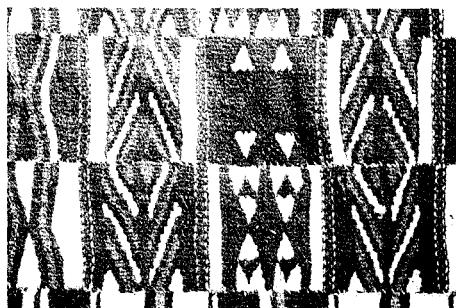
Concluding Remarks

Labelle Prussin



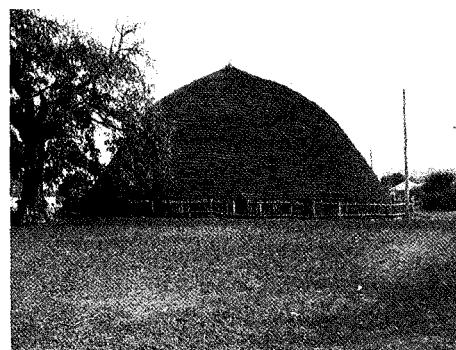
The interior courtyard of the Asantehene, chief of the Asante Confederacy at Kumasi, Ghana. (T Edward Bowdich, Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee, London 1819)

Photo L Prussin



Detail of a woven tapestry from Goundham, Mali

Photo L Prussin



The Friday Mosque at Dingueraye, Guinea, with its expansive mango tree in the foreground

Photo L Prussin

The aim of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture is to achieve a heightened awareness of architectural excellence in the world of Islam and to encourage the potential for creativity. These seminars provide a means for exploring and stimulating both. As Charles Correa has suggested, these two concerns, the past and future, are mutually related. I believe the success of this particular seminar lies precisely in the way in which past accomplishments, i.e. the historical record, and concerns for the future, i.e. the collective African aspirations, have been brought together. Indeed, the success itself reflects what lies at the heart of African philosophy: the continuity of existence.

Bringing these two concerns, past history and aspirations for the future, together calls to mind an African weaver who employs in his warp and weft variations of material, cotton, wool, camel or goats' hair, of tone and color to create a fabric. There is perhaps a parallel to be drawn with the West African architect who, in the manner of the weaver, relies upon conti-

nuity with the past as his warp and introduces variants in materials, forms, handling as his weft to create richness and diversity in a 'constructed' cultural fabric.

In introducing the subject of this seminar, Pr. Arkoun spoke of semiology. The questions which were raised again and again were: "What does the language of the city convey to us? What is the structure and content of that language, what are its phonemes?" I should like to ask, what are its graphemes? Is there a visual parallel to the Pikine football team to which Pr. Sow-Diagne referred in describing the sense of identity and cohesion which obtains there? Sociologists, anthropologists, architects, planners of various kinds, archeologists and historians, each of us from the perspective of our own discipline and concerns have addressed the subject of the seminar. The presentations and the dialogue have been rich, albeit heated. The task of summing up, of eliciting key points, of synthesizing, is a Herculean one. To accomplish the assigned task one must begin, like Antaeus did in Greek mytho-



The mosque at Banda Nkwanta, Ghana and its mango tree across the way

Photo L Prussin

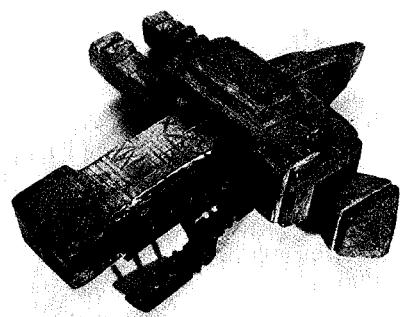
logy (and parenthetically, Antaeus came from Africa), by seeking strength and sustenance from the earth itself. The forms of certain mounds are also symbolic, one finds them as feminine grave markers and shrines, but also, if you looked carefully, as skylights on the roofscape of the mosque at Jenné, which Mr. Guibbert showed us yesterday.

In the African context, a work is sometimes worth a thousand images; in the Western context from which I come, a visual image, it is said, is worth a thousand words. And so, I would like to use a set of images to make some summary points. But, like the African languages themselves, each image is itself multi-vocal and multi-valent. Each, I hope, will evoke for you a host of the concerns voiced in the course of our deliberations.

In learning how to read the African city, it seems to me that what we must really ask ourselves first is: "What is the essence of African space?" I would like to suggest that its essence consists of the following:

1) Traditional African space is anthropomorphic and anthropocentric. The natural environment provides the visual referents, the focal points in the landscape, and the focal points for behavior and orientation in space. The towering baobab tree (or *fromager*) at the center of the village is what Paques calls a cosmic tree, present in every center, whether it be village, compound courtyard, or eventually the village or Friday mosque. At Soumania in Guinea, in the courtyard of the King of the Asantee recorded in 1817, at the village of Tene Toubab and in front of every mosque, wherever one looks in the West African savannah-sahel. In the most minute detail of the architectural repertoire, such as a lock, and in the ancestral shrines and pillars which mark the entrance or the center of every Voltaic Basin compound these qualities are to be found.

2) The ancestral pillars lead me to a second facet of the African essence which was also alluded to in the course of our discussions:



A wooden, Bambaro door lock from Koa, Mali
Photo L. Prussin

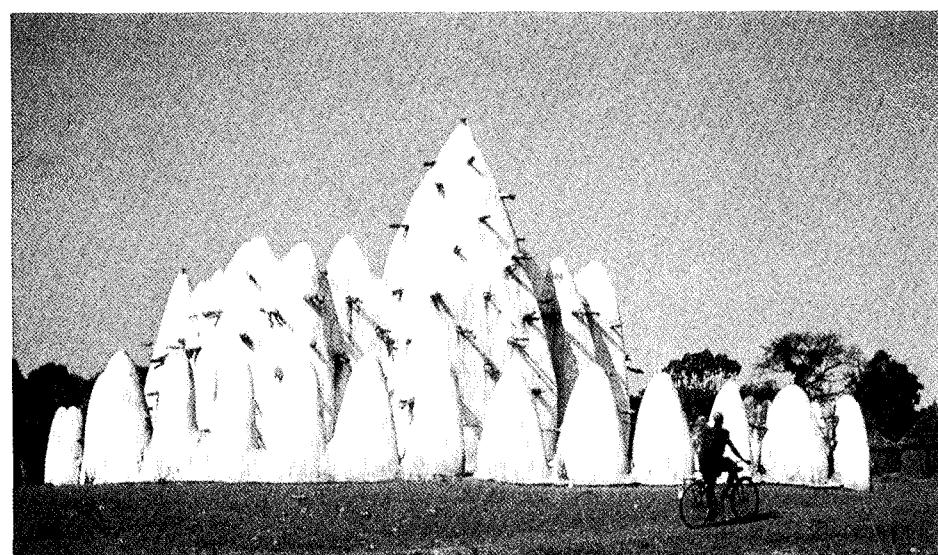


Ancestral pillars and shrines at the entrance to a Tallensi compound, at Tonga, northern Ghana

Photo L. Prussin



Burufu, northern Ghana, cluster of ancestral pillars which communicate the chief's genealogy
Photo L. Prussin



Kawara, Ivory Coast, in the 17th century mosque, ancestral pillars communicate new criteria for wisdom, piety and leadership

Photo L. Prussin



Circular dance during a funeral for a Limba woman in northern Sierra Leone.

Photo L. Prussin



Upper Volta, aerial view of a Mossi village

Photo L. Prussin.



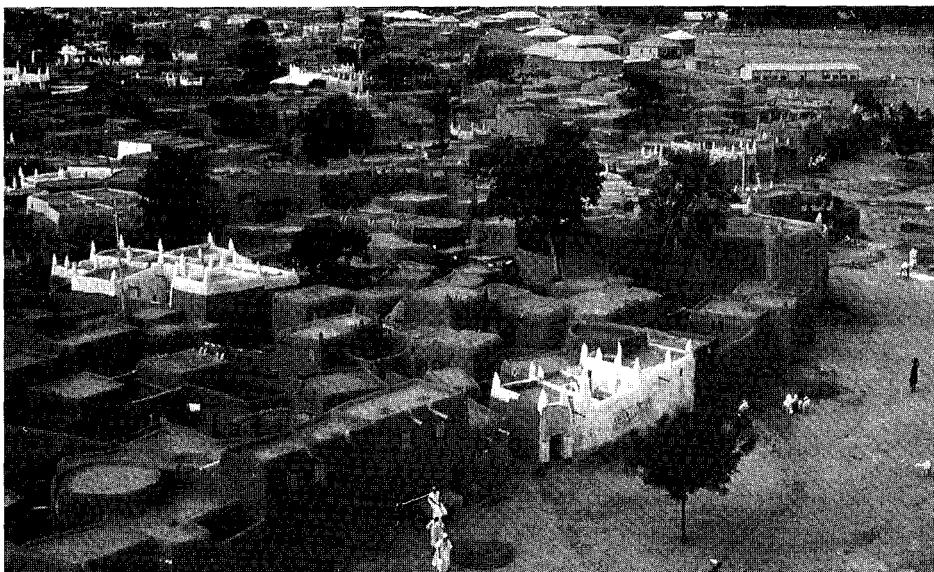
Prayers observed during the Tabaski fete, Jenné, Mali. People are oriented towards Mecca

Photo Marli Shamir



Northern Ghana; curvilinear walls of Tallensi compounds

Photo L. Prussin



Northern Nigeria, aerial view of Kano, looking down from the mosque

Photo L. Prussin

the presence of both the living and the dead in the rural habitat. The presence of both carries with it the continuity of existence. Its absence in the urban milieu raises an interesting but very relevant concern: is it an alienation from the earth as a source of strength, a severance of rural ties to the earth? Or does it represent the breakdown in kinship networks, which are so characteristic of and so essential to the rural hinterland?

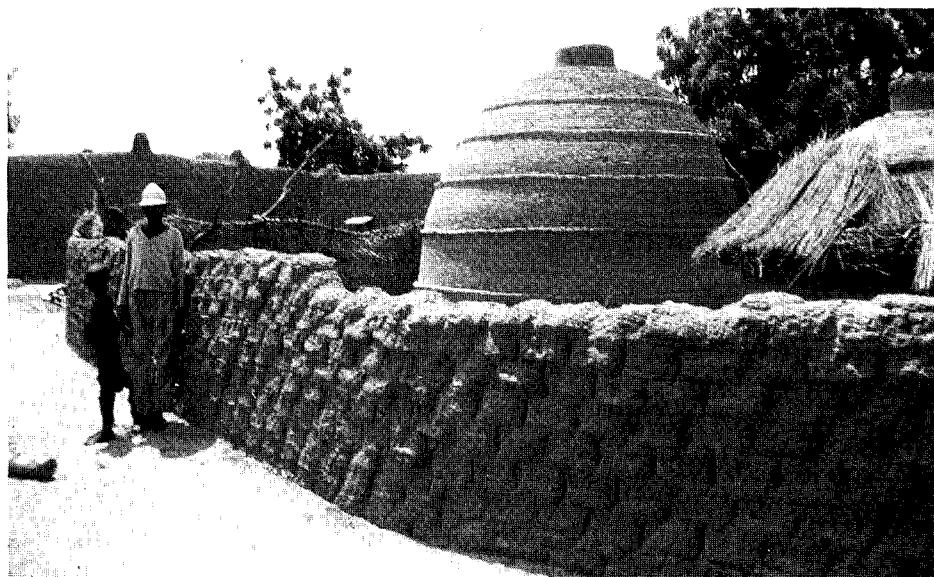
3) A third facet of the African essence of space: behavior in space and shifts in spatial orientation and organization are themselves form-giving factors. It is people who define space in West Africa. And ritual behaviour often crystallizes this definition, whether it be the circular movement of a funeral among the Limba of northern Sierra Leone, or the linear pattern of Friday midday prayers at Jenné. Behaviour in space cannot be separated from the spaces formed by the network of kin relations. By a process of mimesis perhaps, movement finds physical form, is reflected in the built environment at Tongo

in northern Ghana, and a once-Islamized village of Sekai in northern Ghana. By extension, these are related to urban forms. To a Mossi village, not unlike the one shown to us by Pr. Devisse, and not unlike the street network at Tegdaoust. By this time, in the ethnographic present, it can be seen at Kano in northern Nigeria. I also believe we should not forget about the relationship between behavior, social organization and technology. In addition to the pertinent points made about differentiation, specialization of skills and increasing procedural complexity, the form of the building unit itself is an element related to both form and behavior.

The form of these two building units reflects, and at the same time confronts us with questions concerning procedural complexity much as do the suggested innovations of ADAUA. I am reminded of an experience in the course of my own research: the archives suggested that numerous kilns were built by the French administration in Africa.

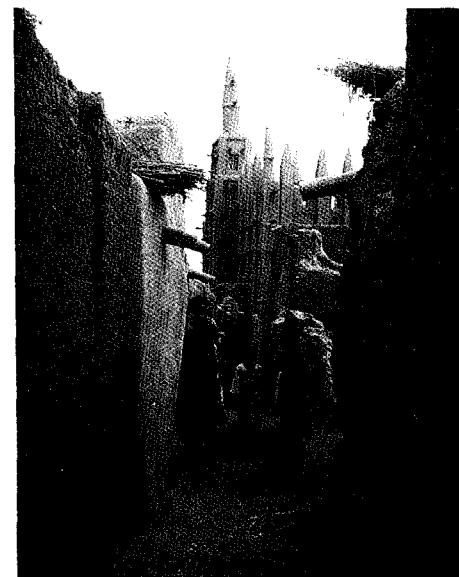
Why was fired brick ever adopted? Firewood, women potters, kinetic quality... Furthermore, and perhaps in contrast, why has that ubiquitous corrugated or aluminium roofing taken such hold, not only in Africa, but throughout the developing world? It served the multiple purposes of changing African society. No basic changes in structure were needed in the rainforests. At the same time, a cash economy and the incremental acquisition of single elements (not unlike the way in which one purchases, stacks and stores concrete blocks today), provided for house-building that never ceased.

Both technology and behavior in space involve horizontal and vertical dimensions. Horizontal space is often layered. Roofs are equally important in accommodating daily life and defining social relationships. At the same time, horizontal and vertical dimensions, interior and exterior, these also become symbolic elements in the fabric of urban space as can be seen at Bauchi and Gomitogo. The continuity of existence is matched by con-



A granary in the courtyard of a compound at Tera, Niger

Photo L Prussin



Mosque at Gomitogo, Mali

Photo L Prussin



Liberation ceremony at the founding of a new village near Akosombo, Ghana.

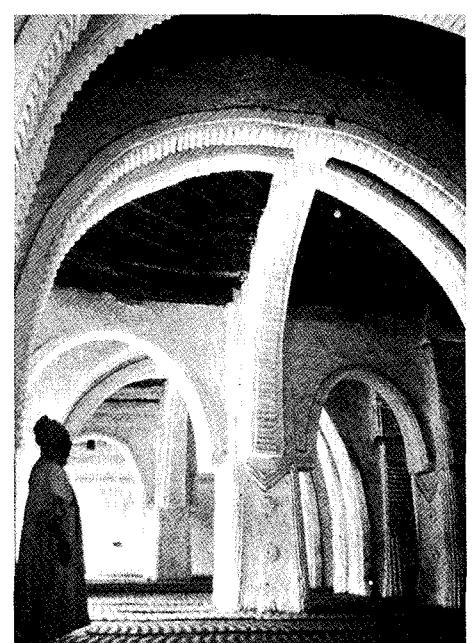
Photo L Prussin.

tinuity in the environment. Again, let me recall for you the way in which J.P. Lebeuf has described the African habitat:... "In order to understand the essence of African space and to read the African city, it is also necessary to attend to the fact that the African heritage brings with it oral modes of communication. When the griot sings the praises of Sundiata, the epic King who founded the 14th century empire of Mali, he begins: 'Listen to my words. You who want to know, it is by my mouth that you will learn the history of Mali'. And we all delighted in the griot who entertained us with his *kora* each evening at dinner. In like manner, the most important symbol of traditional leadership in West Africa has been the linguistic staff." In the oral mode of communication, memory is the mode for achieving personal immortality. To lack someone who is close and who can perpetuate the existence of the departed is the worst misfortune a person could suffer.



A Fulbe musician or griot in Guinea

Photo L Prussin



Northern Nigeria interior of the Friday mosque at Zaria

Photo L Prussin

The built environment also conveys personal immortality through its forms, through monumentality. Thus, when one seeks meaning in the environment, e.g. in the Jenné façade, one finds the presence of the ancestors writ large through the architectural symbolism, or, in the entrance to the Jenné Mosque, where anthropomorphic representation, as an extension of the egocentric space, is reflected in the masque-like quality of the engaged pilasters and the upper-level openings. Like a Dogon masque. On a façade at Zaria, where written words and graphic images convey the presence of a Muslim *savant*, the same phenomenon is apparent.

We have listened at some length to questions of land tenure in the processes of construction and urbanization. It is my understanding that traditionally land is vested in the community and administered by the kin head, the chief or council of



Façade at Zaria, northern Nigeria, the Arabic calligraphy of bismallah has been abstracted into the cursive design of the bas-relief

Photo: L. Prussin



Jenné, Mali; each year the exterior of the Great Mosque is resurfaced, in a ceremony which involves the entire community

Photo: L. Prussin



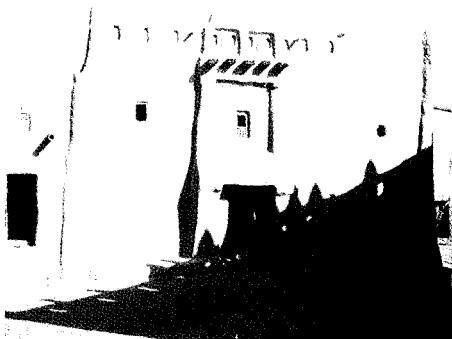
Mali, entrance to the Great Mosque at Jenné Mali

Photo: Marli Shamir



Symbols of Islam, e.g. the Koranic board, the ablutions kettle and the scimitar are realistically rendered on the entrance façade

Photo: L. Prussin



Mali; traditional stylized facades at Jenne.

Photo L Prussin.



Walata, Mauritania A host of meanings related to a wife's jurisdiction

Photograph courtesy Musée de l'Homme, Paris

elders. The land is one's own only as long as one uses it. With the system of rotational farming, land lies fallow for periods of time. When the land is left fallow, it reverts back to the community. This concept is related and relevant to the use of space, and to the maintenance of the built form. When a housing unit is no longer inhabited, it was traditional that it be left to deteriorate. It was maintained only as long as it was occupied.

This kinetic dimension is in turn related to the concept of time and to the patterns of maintenance. When we visited the Centre

de formation agricole at Nianing, to see the Award-winning buildings there, it was suggested that the buildings looked better before the newly-acquired coat of stucco had been applied. However, I think that the rendering was not only a way of dressing up the building for our visit, it was also a continuation of the tradition of annual resurfacing which is part of the maintenance process throughout the savannah-sahel. I also believe that this rendering has more than a physical, technological function. It reflects an involvement with the built environment, a sense of place achieved over time.

There is a kinetic quality to African architecture, and I for one found Pr. Osmont's discussion particularly relevant to this point.

The Castors project did not look very lovely to us, and certain failures were implied. Yet it seems to me that the changes wrought over several decades were a reflection of this kinetic quality

A question was raised by Pr. Kiray: Why have we not analysed the form and use of the courtyards? Courtyards are an integral part of living in these climates. There is no need to re-emphasize their presence. They are as important for our understanding of African space as the more public domains of street networks, etc. And they too enrich the vocabulary of graphemes which permit us to read the African city. Whether or not the courtyard provides shelter for a granary, symbol of the fertility which guarantees the continuity of existence through the ability to survive from one year to the next, it is the heart of the family existence. The courtyard is traditionally the wife's domain, and the attention she lavishes on her own, sometimes secluded, space is also a way of taking over and identifying with a space. We need to provide a canvas through which she too can communicate. What role can she play in imbuing the spaces wherein she acts out her social role with meaning?

Finally, I would like to summarize these headings or chapters (by subsuming them) under the continuity of the symbolic qua-

lity of the environment. The illustrations presented here are only one thread among many in the environmental fabric of West Africa. I offer them not as romanticized forms but as models of change, models which themselves emerged out of conflicts and aspirations and which reflect the ebb and flow of at least some of the interwoven variables within any cultural milieu at any point in time.

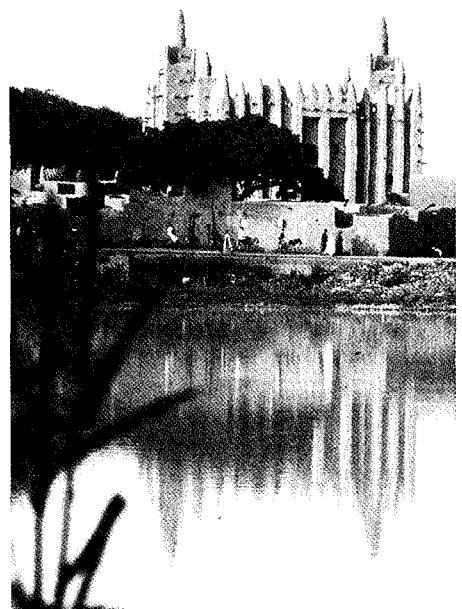
The illustrations which I have used (designed for a quite different presentation) and of course the summary comments reflect my own concerns and foci. I ask forgiveness for the human frailty which filters out on occasion, or fails to emphasize. Yet, I would like to suggest, in ending, that in our attempts to deal with the future of Dakar, of Moiti, of Kano, of Nouakchott, the problems we face as architects are not very different than those faced by el-Saheli, the Islamic poet-architect who travelled back to Timbuktu with Mansa Musa in the 14 century. He came with an intellectual commitment, with a model in his head, reinforced by the written word and design methodology of Islam. But the socio-political, the economic context in which he found himself lacked the resources, both human and technological, to translate a new ideal into reality. Yet, out of the interface between the ideal and the real, there indeed emerges the potential for a new kind of built environment. To understand the process, it is important to recognize that the "African habitat is more than a geographic, environmental fact; more than a mere social fact; rather it is a remarkable religious manifestation. The material, familial, social and spiritual life of individuals and groups unfolds within the framework of a symbolism present at all moments of existence, through all parts of one's environment from the most intimate realm of detail to the infinite."

Likewise, the African aesthetic is manifest not only in the self-conscious products of the indigenous artist, but in the mundane creativity of everyday life, from the micro-environment of body decoration to the far-distant boundaries of the known world.



Kolenze, Mali, in the sahos (age-set houses of the young, unmarried men), the traditional symbols of ancestry are integrated with a new technology, but the kinetic and ephemeral quality of African space prevails

Photo L Prussin



Mopti, Mali, in the Great Mosque, traditional African, Islamic and European (French) architectural styles and ideologies have been integrated to create a new African architecture

Photo L Prussin

Concluding Remarks

Mohammed Arkoun

We began with a historical presentation that drew attention to the origins of city planning in West Africa. I am not sure that all of the architects and city planners appreciate this type of investigation of the past. The fact is that many of them prefer mastering the practical difficulties of the present. We see here a conflict that has never been resolved between practitioners, engineers, architects in the field and those who are compelled by the need for an explanation of the urban phenomenon as an over-all socio-historical reality.

Two presentations showed the drama, the dramas, taking place in our societies — and in the absence of a thorough analysis and of theoretical knowledge of the mechanisms producing these misfortunes, we remain unable to prevent them, and we simply try to attenuate them when they are present. In this sense the practitioners must not lose interest in all of the cultural, psychological and social implications of any act of organization of inhabited space, the lack of time that is often invoked is an alibi, not a reason.

After Professor Devisse's intervention, we moved on to more descriptive presentations, and here we fell into the reverse type of excess, consisting in simply noting whatever comes to our attention. Time prevented us from going from the description to the explanation; but perhaps we must add that certain people prefer to avoid the painful path of explaining urban phenomena, especially when they have not yet been well analyzed, as is the case in Africa. We gave marked emphasis to Dakar, which is quite normal. But it is regrettable that we could not fully avoid one of the pitfalls that I had singled out: the pitfall of the anti-colonialist speech, the discourse of resentment. I do not want to minimize such a feeling, which I know well, but I say that it is time for the former colonized peoples to speak out as responsible people, since many things have happened in the past twenty years that are due to our participation as actors in our own history. I should like for us to look in two directions that are quite essential:



Pr Arkoun and Minister of Urbanism, Mr Oumar Wellé

Photo C Little/Aga Khan Awards

- 1) The historical direction opened up by Devisse.
- 2) The management of the national space, a new concept since independence, by the National State. How is this space managed? That is where the real responsibility lies

The problem is not describing the space of Dakar, but rather seeing that this space is linked with Senegal's social space as an entity for which a central political power is responsible. The phenomenon of interior emigration, which inflates and complicates the problems of this Dakar space for the reasons that Mr. Theunynck has just mentioned, and which are valid for other urban spaces, must be viewed in its social and economic dimensions, but perhaps above all in its political dimensions. The reason is that the central power structure can control the emigration flows depending on whether or not it has a rural and an urban policy at the same time. There is some depth to be given to the analysis by considering what happens in

the national space and by showing how it is managed from the capital.

We contented ourselves with the observation of a certain number of mechanisms and structural forces that one can find in all of the cities of the Third World. We were unable to single out the particular factors that act in the particular case of Dakar and of Senegal. What we heard could equally well apply to Bombay, Algiers or Casablanca. One should get a better perception of the factors that create special situations.

Must one call on several disciplines to analyze these phenomena? Yes, certainly, for — and I repeat — architecture and city planning are total socio-cultural phenomena: they refer to all manifestations of human existence. It is in this sense that the architect and the city planner must be technicians and humanists at the same time. How can we mobilize these disciplines, and according to what hierarchy?

Who produces urban space? Society does

And society lives with ideologies, representations, that we must first get to know. The ideologies that influence the social groups competing in the social space, and that lead them to play roles and to occupy situations of domination with respect to each other, strongly condition the production of urban space. That is why I would say that one must first read the city on the basis of the power that assigns the roles, checks on the activities, decides on the development of the territory, the movement of goods, etc. One must then read it on the basis of demography, family systems, traditional social structures, systems of beliefs and of non-beliefs of the population groups, symbols, signs and signals by which the different social groups express themselves. Each of these readings requires a recourse to a precise discipline.

I cannot fail to mention the absence of religion from the presentations that we have heard. Yet we are in a country in which religion is of decisive importance. In this domain, as well, there is competition among different symbols and different expressions of the sacred, with stakes that are either religious, or political, or esthetic, or economic. There is competition among the traditional religion, the Moslem religion, and the Christian religion, which is also present.

Describing the metamorphosis of the symbols, signs and signals that nourish the ideologies by which the social groups produce their inhabited space is a new task, one that is ambitious and has far-reaching effects on the future of architecture, city planning and any cultural production. From placing our analyses in a type of political-social-economic thought of Western origin, we forget that it is possible to consider the production of our urban or village spaces with greater freedom on the basis of the demands proper to each people in line with its historical experience. In Mauritania, for instance, people think that the nomads must be settled. They see this as an absolutely necessary bit of progress. This is an absolute cultural and intellectual error, because

the desert civilization is an independent civilization that has been perfectly described, for example, by Ibn Khaldoun; and Abd el Kader in 19th-century Algeria, in the face of the sedentary type of organization brought in by the French, gave a famous panegyric of Bedouin life.

The desire to settle the nomads is a typical example of normative reason of Western origin, or of peasant, city-dweller, centralizing, etc. origin, against the forms of civilization whose disappearance we accept because we do not know them.

Similarly, monotheism marginalizes the expressions of the sacred that one finds in the African religions, without posing the problem of a free, tolerant way of giving the social actors the possibility of producing their existence freely in conjunction with their positive tradition — and this to be done without romanticism, day-dreaming or primitivist illusion.

I hope that we will have the opportunity of coming back to all of these questions of great topical interest. In so far as they are clarified and are understood by the great majority, behavior patterns will change with respect to ourselves and to our environment.

Concluding Remarks

His Highness the Aga Khan

I should very much like to express, on behalf of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, as well as all of the participants in this seminar and myself personally, our warmest thanks to the President of the Republic of Senegal, Mr Abdou Diouf, who opened our debates and to Mr. Oumar Wellé, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, who encouraged and aided us in organizing the seminar. I would like to take this opportunity to pay homage to the country, to the government and to the Senegalese participants who have all contributed to our having an extremely open, creative and fruitful debate. The discussions have been held in a truly exceptional atmosphere of investigation that I wish to emphasize here. Moreover, I am grateful to Mr Goudiaby Atepa, Mr. Ssentogo and Professor Arkoun, who have guided us along and constantly maintained a high level of interest in the debates.

This forum has been an open one where differing points of view have been expressed, where certain paths for the future have been sought. The aim of our seminar was to come to Africa in order to inform ourselves about the problems of development in African cities. We have analyzed a great many situations, and heard numerous points of view. We have spoken of the city and its newly urbanised populations, as well as concentrations of villages in rural zones. The problems have been examined from a sociological, administrative and architectural point of view; I believe that all of these analyses together undoubtedly contribute to a better, more comprehensive understanding of these problems, for all of us including myself.

I should like to underline one particular point at this juncture which deserves greater study: I am referring to the difficulty in improving the quality of life of rural populations in the Third World; whether they be nomads or sedentarized peoples, traditional urban solutions are difficult to apply, be they in the built environment or in the realms of medicine or education. It has been rather clearly

demonstrated, I think, during this seminar that the Third World must find innovative, new solutions in order to resolve the problem of the quality of life which rural populations confront. We have explained in the past the reasons why the Aga Khan Award for Architecture is concerned with the question of Islam. Historically, we are all aware that Islam as a religion has expressed itself through the physical environment in different ways in different periods. The real question for Muslim countries is to discover how Islam is going to find expression on the environmental level in the Muslim world of the future. I do not personally believe that we should look for a universal reply, each part of the world must seek its own solutions. This problem, therefore, was imminently worth considering.

Another issue was raised in the course of this seminar which requires deeper reflections, that of architectural education. This involves the contribution of architectural schools in the Third World with regard to the techniques and the essential elements which those who are responsible for the built environment must consider when conceiving their future. I suggest that this is a fundamental issue that deserves deeper analysis.

Our Senegalese friends are going to ask themselves the same questions as did the participants in previous seminars, namely having participated in a seminar, do we simply stop at that? I wish to reiterate that this is not at all the goal of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture; indeed, quite the contrary. It was a privilege for us to come to Senegal, to have listened to you. And it is up to us to maintain the contact we have established. We shall ask you to stay in touch with us in order to share all that we can learn elsewhere, or even here once again, with regard to the problems of mutual concern.

I would like to close this seminar today by thanking all of the participants for their extremely interesting contributions and to reassure them that we shall communicate to them as rapidly as possible the final

publication of this seminar's Proceedings. Above all, I wish to insist on my request to you to remain in contact with us, to take part in future seminars and to let us benefit from your knowledge and experience. Thank you.