

Summary of the Contributions

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Charles Correa set the stage for this conference with a lecture in Nairobi by reminding us all of the values of vernacular housing, its adaptation to climate, open-to-sky space, local materials and communal lifestyles. Of course, he damned mass housing. I offer only one counterpoint — what about the evidence referred to by Saad Eddin Ibrahim that the poor will kill to live in these places? What about land costs and the densities engendered by land costs? How will everyone who wants to live and work in urban areas have a little house? I ask this question of Charles Correa?

Ismail Serageldin's paper and address expertly sorted out the issues of the seminar and made a clear distinction between the technical domain of mass housing, land services, credit, finance and urban planning, a domain which as a member of the World Bank, he understands very well. The domain of cultural authenticity, he refers to is usually left to historians and the domain of architecture. Specifically he touched on the architect's contributions to the domain of housing and how they should be critically assessed. Later he noted how architects dream. How wonderful from the down-to-earth chap at the World Bank to talk about architects' dreams. We heard Ismail Serageldin's flip side and it was worth it. But of equal value to the Award, I think would be a study of all the ways architects presently work in the field of housing in the developing Muslim world.

We know and admire the works of such gifted architects as Geoffrey Bawa. But what is life like for the so-called barefoot architect? Who hires him and how is he paid? What is life like for the lower-echelon architect or bureaucrat in the housing authority? Who listens to him? What does he do? By what standards should the work of these and others be critically assessed? How much of it really is of a standard to merit critical effort? This question should be looked into further.

Mona Serageldin's papers are invaluable documents because she does her homework. Every paper she has ever given and every paper I have ever read has been absolutely superbly documented and detailed. Her paper and slide presentation convinced me that informal housing is here to stay. Like Oleg

Grabar I am moved by the sheer quantity of human physical energy, invested in the forms and agglomerations and the great struggle to survive that they express.

Three sentences of Mona Serageldin's lead to an urgent question however, and I will quote her. She said "On the one hand the illegalities and violations, that characterise informal development cannot be condoned. On the other hand its contribution to the solution of the housing shortage cannot be ignored. In most labour exporting countries, informal housing today accounts for over 60 per cent of the housing stock". But since the area of land within daily commuting distance of urban centres keeps increasing, will the day eventually come when the show will be over for the informal home owners? The land illegally held and subdivided — will it somehow be made legal by skillful manipulators and by well-financed developers who are served by the best lawyers? I have this suspicion, perhaps because I come from New York city. But I do raise this as a possibility. Is there not a great danger that these informal home owners will become squatters again?

There is another question raised by Mona Serageldin's paper. She notes that practising architects fail to share academics enthusiasm for informal housing. It must be pointed out however in fairness to architects, that academicians are paid to study informal housing. Informal housing builders on the other hand cannot be expected to understand that they should hire barefoot architects and pay them at least to buy shoes!

Suha Ozkan's paper told us what mass housing has accomplished in all three of its categories, public housing, private sector housing and cooperative housing. His slides consisted mostly of what he and the Award considered to be good work. Most projects were visually attractive. The time constraints however did not allow him to give us sufficient information on how they work, whether the populations that they were designed for actually live there, whether densities are within the described norms and where the dwellers come from, what their jobs are and what percentage of their incomes they pay in rent? Such questions are essential to any critical analysis of the architecture of housing.

Hasan-Uddin Khan in collaboration with Charles Moore gave us a splendid slide lecture of house after house, being among the most beautiful I have ever seen. Are there any links between the houses of the rich and the houses of the poor? Can these wonderful houses have anything to do with informal housing, squatter settlements, contractor-built mass housing? I would like to think so. But when we consider as Saad Eddin Ibrahim reminded us, that the political, administrative, financial and architectural planning problem is the accommodation of several billion people who inhabit urban settlements, I do not have the answer to that question. I would just like to rephrase it — Can transformations of the architectural qualities found in these beautiful houses be applied to mass housing? And then another question — Can we truly not be bogged down by the mundane?

With time to ponder, I would like to say more about Hasan-Uddin Khan's venture into semiotics and I agree with Oleg Grabar that it is very important to transfer the ideas in that paper to a wider community.

Now to move on to the last of the major papers — The Role of the Architect by John de Monchaux. He pointed out that the architect, despite all the skills that he must bring to his task, including knowledge of finance, marketing and urban planning should not forget that his principal task, with his unique ability, is that of form giving. I agree with this but how is the architect to work with the poor? As he points out the process and institutional mechanisms by which the architect interacts with the poor, need new designs. He then said another important thing; that the poor client, the user of the housing should have the same relationship to the architect as any better endowed client. That is true. But I must ask how in political terms can this be arranged? How could the poor acquire the services of an architect for themselves? Unless the architect functions as an unpaid or marginally paid volunteer.

What kinds of institutions are required and how can they help architects directly serve the poor? What kinds of help do such institutions need? How could these organisations be created? Now to refer directly to the past history of the Award

— in the first Award cycle — an award was given to a school and dwelling complex in Senegal designed by an architect who came from Belgium who developed an appropriate technology with local craftsmen. The award was shared by a European Catholic religious group named Karitas who sponsored the project. Here we have one of the types of institutions that fund advocacy architects.

To my knowledge the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, is the first architectural programme that ever singled out and honoured such an institution and parenthetically, in making its choices to honour all the forces that taken together contribute to the making of architecture the Award is unique. I have been an architectural journalist for many years and I admit that one of the things we do is write up architectural awards. So you must believe me when I say that except for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, honours always go to individual architects and to what juries consider to be almost perfect works of architectural art or in the cases of say the annual Pritzker Award to leading architects with a lifetime of such creations. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture has honoured clients, preservation organisations and preservationists and such craftsmen as masons.

The Award seeks not to honour perfected work of architectural form but to discover and support promising initiatives, directions and searches in architecture. Notably the Award has accomplished this recognition while keeping the role of the architect in sharp focus. And the Award in this seminar and others have served as a bridge between the architecture of form and the architecture of social and economic objectives. It is now time for the Award to follow the lead proposed by His Highness the Aga Khan in a comment he made earlier in this seminar.

His Highness urged the Award to pay even more attention than it has in the past to the institutions and processes that govern the architect's role in relation to the poor. Now the architect whose greatest skill, we have been told by John de Monchaux and others is form giving must begin to find his way into the world of mass housing but he must do it within

an institutional framework. The poor urban migrants who must house themselves need him, picturesque slides notwithstanding, there is no way the urban poor can get it right without a good and dedicated architect to help them at whatever level Ismail Serageldin so ably described. I will take as an example the level of working immediately with an urban migrant community. This is a man or woman who must leave their arrogance back at the AA or MIT for he or she will not make money and will not live in much comfort especially if they are spending long months close to the site and the people.

I am now describing what I have always considered to be a heroic role. No one is saying every architect should practise his or her profession in this modest and humane realm. But the poor can be greatly served by those who do.