
Panel Discussion 1

William Lim

I would like to focus on six points:

The first point which has been mentioned by Charles Correa as well as Mona Serageldin is on urbanisation. Besides understanding statistics what may be useful for us to know is the rate of growth of the population in the urban areas and the economic changes arising therein, and what they mean. Obviously what happens in Bombay a city of five or six million people, with half of that in the informal sector will be very different from perhaps Penang, which is a smaller place. This interrelationship should be looked at a bit more carefully in order to be able to relate to what we are going to discuss.

The second point which has been talked about here, is the informal sector. It is important, and arising from this, the percentage of people who are affected by the informal sector, particularly in housing — but also most other urban activities. Although the figure of 50% has been mentioned, in the more affluent countries, like Malaysia and Singapore, the vast majority of the urban population in fact still cannot afford housing delivered by the private sector. You may really be talking about much higher numbers who are at the moment cramming in on the existing stocks of housing. As the urban explosion continues this impact will be felt even more seriously. Therefore the emphasis is really on the informal sector or the sectors that have been subsidised, or in one way or the other delivered with subsidised housing or shelter, or a self-help house.

This brings us to a very important point raised at the core of Mona's paper, namely the people's image in relation to housing, and their wants. We should discuss the importance of the examples indicated, whether built by architects or not and what is the impact on these people in the informal sector. The impact on the mass of people and how they are going to react must have a very important bearing on our own perception.

The third point is the value changes that are continuously taking place. Mona Serageldin has mentioned the perception people have of being urban, functional and modern and you can see the type of conflict that emerges here; on the other hand there is Charles Correa's thesis on the *open-to-sky* theory — for whatever reasons, people are moving away from that. Not totally, but they have a different interpretation of his open-to-sky concept. All this to some of us may be a step backward, or is it? There are other examples, like the three generations family. Is this the type of life style that people want?

The fourth point here is, that what people want is to express their own identity and then to actually be able to have some say on the limits of contact with their neighbours — this is very significant in this exercise of the search for identity. In the built environment, often designed by architects, how are we able to provide this opportunity for people to express their identity on this scale such that they can be involved internally and externally through their immediate territory. How are people able to have their say on the desired arrangements of buildings where the different levels of contact can perhaps be made as desirable for the people as it can be? How are we going to do this as designers?

The fifth point is that the search for identity is there not only in buildings by Graves in Portland and some of the other buildings of the so called post modern movement. That search is done within a box which as Charles Correa says we must discard in our search for identity as we are operating in the tropics and our conditions are different. Therefore our interpretations of the search it follows will be different. When one looks at Charles' beautiful hotel in Goa I would consider that to be his post-modern. So perhaps we should be a bit more careful in using terminology.

Lastly, Charles Correa has quite correctly talked about the energy crisis and the need to look at buildings, in a certain way, keeping in mind climate, limit

of technology and so on. But the question is: when development takes place, when society gets more affluent, especially in many of the capital cities which have borrowed images of international styles because their economy is hooked up with international trades and commerce — how do we deal with this demand for air-conditioned buildings by a lot of people? Once we decide that air-conditioning is acceptable, that is a different ball game. Are we then, talking about going back to a box? If not can we get away from it? Do we need it? That ties in with a related question to tall buildings and density especially in the central area and the urban area. If we have both high intensity and tall buildings can you really design buildings which are not air-conditioned? What are the alternatives? Where do we start discussing these problems?

Eric Lye

Perhaps to begin the discussion I could briefly suggest the fact that Charles Correa is looking to the sky and Mona Serageldin is deeply rooted on the ground

Tay Kheng Soon

Mona Serageldin's paper has given us a very sobering view. However I don't quite agree that collective neurosis is authenticity. When people choose to express what they are not, that is neurosis. When people want to have something that does not belong to them, that is neurosis. For example, many people in the middle class of the industrialised countries look towards the South Pacific, Asia, Thailand, Indonesia, as exotic places, and they try to get art and crafts from these areas to decorate their homes, in the same way people in South East Asia have pictures of the Swiss Alps hanging on their walls. People want to be something they are not and it is a natural thing, but it is also a neurotic thing.

During different phases of social development, especially during the rapid growth stage when people are moving away from traditional forms of existence to the new, especially through different forms of occupation through the urbanisation of their work then there is a transformation and uprooting of their cultural values and this is expressed most visably in their aesthetic choices — and so there is a rapid, a neurotic phase. I'm not so sure that it is necessarily a good thing. It is a phase which we have to pass through, but as designers the big issue is how do we respond to this? Do we say this is authentic, therefore good, or do we say that right this is a phenomenon, this happens. How do we deal with it? The question of how to deal with it is the beginning of the interaction between the phenomenon and the design process.

Mona Serageldin

I agree very much with what you said, by saying it is authentic does not mean it is good. It is authentic in as much as these people, each and every individual, believes in this type of housing to be what he or she wants.

Now it does have if you take it and analyse it, elements of both the modern and the traditional. It's the blend that they have developed for themselves. How you deal with it as an architect is another issue, because you see, architects have not dealt with it. Planners have dealt with the planning problem, the lack of infrastructure, the roads and so on but they have not dealt with the houses, or the architecture and the architect has not dealt with it at all. So that is an entirely new field now, if the architect wants to deal with it. I have heard many architects comment that this is very bad taste and vulgar. It is possible to say that too, you see that is an aesthetic comment. But the other comment that you make, that it is not aesthetically pleasing, does not mean it is not authentic. Aesthetically pleasing in your or some other architect's viewpoint does not necessarily mean it is not authentic for the person who has built it.

Hijas Kasturi

The question of the kind of identity that we want is whether it is going to be nationalism or something else. To me there are three groups. One is to be functional, that is Functionalism and that is with a capital 'F' which embodies many things. Rational thinking, good planning and a host of other problems, and the grammar of architecture that we learnt during our five years in school. That is part of it.

The second part is economic. Economics of construction, of technology, of availability of materials and of maintainability of the building.

It is the third one that really concerns us and that is aesthetic. It is here we must find the root towards identity in architecture. However, we are not being positive about it. We live in this world of closed communication, of the influence and onslaught of westernisation. It is at our door steps. How do we respond to this? With our multi-racial society and the host of problems that we have, ultimately how do we deal with it in a positive manner.

Haji Rahim

At the moment it seems to me that we are talking a lot about what and how. But so far in our deliberations nothing has been said about the philosophy of archi-

ecture. Secondly, I have a question for Mona Would you be able to clarify the influence of each age group in terms of development of styles or taste?

Mona Serageldin

Essentially, I was speaking about people who went to work as expatriate workers and who came back with a lot of money So by and large the people who are buying are in their prime of working life The workman will be a very young man, but the contractors not necessarily so at all. But you see the whole purpose of my presentation was simply to show a definition of identity as it is expressed in building by a very big component of the population that is not the architect or even defined by people related to the design profession, and to simply point out how they see and define their own identity We cannot define for them

Charles Correa

Talking about neurosis and what people want — the fact that people yearn, they strive and have aspirations is beautiful. It would be a deadly place if they didn't and there are societies where people don't have that kind of energy However if these aspirations are ugly, it is because the people at the top lead ugly lives since all new lifestyles come in either from leaders or from designers and architects That is our real responsibility. There is no way that people can see alternatives if they are not made palpable for them by example So, I don't see the aspirations of these people as a neurosis. It is not neurosis at all. I thought neurosis was thinking someone else is something he isn't

Eric Lye

Western culture and Christianity have always stressed individuality I believe Islam and even Buddhism stress a kind of harmonious compatibility with much less stress on individualism. In fact they frown on individualism. And yet we are always questioned on why we don't have individualism. Is it that bad not having individualism?

Wan Baharuddin

In Malaysia we can see in the terraced houses or in the other public houses that have been built, that when the houses are complete, after a couple of months or so, the modifications begin to appear, arches, inverted arches, etc. where people wish to express their individuality in that situation Therefore

it reveals the fact that architects are not fulfilling the needs of the users or the users have themselves to identify with their own spaces. So as such there are no possibilities for architects to impose their views of the world on to people I think that has to be accepted. But the question is, where does one draw the line between where architects should intervene and where they should impose their values on the users? I think that is where the search for identity comes in. I think the best contribution that an architect can make is to do what people cannot do. For instance people have been copying the modern movement simply because it is economically feasible (although not climatically so), and it is simple And since people have copied that, what do architects have for people to copy next? That is what the role of architects today should be as innovators.

Tao Ho

There could be another way of solving the problem of the search of identity maybe we should not be looking for solutions. Maybe there isn't any solution. Maybe we should pose more questions and questions may help to find answers that will be closer to the real solution, instead of the solution you may derive by defining the answer Our present approach to problem solving is to search for the tangible, whereas it may be that through a study of the intangible we can get closer, or have a different view point of the problem For example, in the search for identity in architecture, there are two approaches to the problem One is the local approach, and the other one is the bigger, universal approach, the big and the small picture I think we spend too much time in looking at the small pictures, forgetting that there is a bigger picture somewhere. Architecture is but one of the manifestations of an artistic or cultural heritage. But it is destructable in time, that is, it is transitory. What is not transitory is the human spirit that keeps us going When asked about Chinese culture, my mind immediately strings its 6000 years into one second. What is it? The Sung, Tung, or the Ching Dynasty? Is my identity what I am now, or what I was, or what I shall be? That is what we have to think about Today there is a great problem in the search for identity because we are in a society that is so highly consumer oriented Now, are we going to define identity in terms of the expression of the social economic phenomena which one finds in New York city, or even down town Kuala Lumpur, or do we look for identity in the invisible human spirit?

Kenneth Yeang

Actually we are talking about 'the search for identity in architecture', but so far the discussion seems to be 'the search for identity in the user of the architecture' and also 'the search for identity in architecture by the architects themselves'. So maybe we should concentrate on the title of the seminar rather than the user identification with his building, which is what I think Mona is talking about.

Mona Serageldin

Yes, you are right. But at the same time it is not user identification with the building, rather with the type of building that the user wants to fulfil his own aspirations.

Kenneth Yeang

Yes, that's exactly what I was talking about. In other words, to what extent does the architect control and shape the spaces for the users. Is there a system whereby the user can participate, although within limits? There is for example the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank which is a totally flexible system which the user can decorate and convert to whatever he likes. This question of flexibility has not been truly resolved. What exactly is the role of the architect? To what extent does he control the spaces for the people? And should he define, design and determine such spaces? We probably will have to meet somewhere in between, and the level of control of design structure can change when our society becomes more sophisticated and experienced, than at present, in the use of space. The word 'identity' has socio psychological implications, and implies a sense of being and personality. I don't think we can apply this to architecture. May be we should be talking about a critical vernacular, not in the sense of traditional architecture, but architecture that is particular to a region — in the same way that each country has its own language with different dialects for different regions. It is this sort of architecture that we are talking about where each region may be developing its own, and mixed style, and how to derive our own, rather than the social psychological aspects of architecture.

Eric Lye

Well we are talking about architecture, we are talking about especially countries that are not Western, that have gone through a degree of colonisation or late development. We are here

because there is a crisis, otherwise there is no need for us to talk. In the West they meet not because they talk of crises, they only talk of improving the techniques, whether metamorphical, semantic or whatever. But here we are talking of a real social crisis of identity which is software not hardware.

Panel Discussion 2

Eric Lye

I don't know how others feel but I am suffering terribly from information overload.

Perhaps then if there are any questions you may wish to direct them to Lim Chong Keat

Tay Kheng Soon

The less developed or indigenous areas you showed us, looking at these settlements, the pattern and house styles and ways in which houses are grouped together, do you find any trace of underlying themes that may be relevant to say housing areas today or city core areas or areas where community life can exist. Would you like to comment?

Lim Chong Keat

Identity is a psychological problem which faces different people in different ways. For example, tribal groups like the Balinese have identity. It's interesting to note that they have developed a very harmonious way of life and have become very confident people with certainly no identity crisis. They would know how to find their way into the modern era given their own terms. Now I mean by that, their own pace. It is a very important aspect which we should realise because right now, even in the cities of South East Asia specially the sea-open cities, we are being invaded by the whole multi-national money making business, the whole question of the importation of international architecture with all the problems that it brings, so that you are really not given a chance to progress at your own pace. In fact some of us are really trying to jump over and meet them on their own terms. Well, that is one kind of solution, but there should be a much more sensible slowing down, really the search for a different kind of optimum. At the moment, with the invasion of foreign initiatives and everything else,

Singaporeans are supposed to learn overnight how to be better than the Americans. It may not work out

William Lim

It seems we are going right back to Western concepts of individualism and collectivism. Why should we need to say how much flexibility we must give to people? Maybe in some instances they need more and in some less. We don't need to draw a line because there is a whole range of solutions. It is very dangerous if we start drawing lines even if we called it a compromise. Is it a compromise? Is it necessary to compromise? This comes back to a question raised earlier about philosophy. Perhaps we can come to some agreement that we belong to different regions and races and are non-Western and we do not have this approach, that we must find answers or solutions. If we accept this as a common philosophical approach, perhaps answers will slowly emerge which can over time become solutions or possible problem solving devices. We can then analyse them to derive a particular solution.

Sumet Jumsai

I begin to think that when we start to talk about the quest for identity, perhaps we might very well be suppressing the existing identity itself. I suppose that we must nevertheless live with tags on our backs with identity so that we can all be identified with something else and I suppose that identity becomes a desperate issue when you don't have it. And at this point in time I think the architect is the most desperate. He is so desperate that he is trying to short circuit the process of culture, something Charles Correa has done beautifully. In this respect I think he is a great architect because he can short circuit a process of culture most beautifully.

Charles Correa

Thank you for the compliment!

It seems to me that there are three main streams which go to recreate our environment and therefore define this identity research. One is the traditional way of building which exists in all the societies. Second is what you might call the popular way. From what Mona says there are two things about the popular way which are significant. One is that it seems to reject tradition increasingly, for example the courtyard. Secondly it is very much influenced by example from the top, that means the lower income groups imitate the middle income groups, all the way up. This leaves us the third main stream which is what I call intervention. Now this intervention can be done by architects who show alternate models or by politicians. Politicians are tremendous planners and designers. Seriously, they probably are more effective than most planners. Mao restructured China just before breakfast. There was Nyerere in Tanzania and Ataturk in Turkey. These are people who saw an alternative and started from zero. And this is what an architect can also do. But starting from zero does not mean that you don't understand the past, your environment, your materials, it is a synthesis which gives an alternative. I can see that the first two streams are very relevant to our identity. Obviously tradition is central, obviously popular architecture is too. You can't will it away, that is 80% of the people. But does the third stream have any contribution to make to the search? That should be the issue we could discuss.

Romi Khosla

Speaking as a practising architect, I don't think that all the issues that are affecting the whole world are necessarily affecting me, or that if a large volume of bad building is going up in an area in my country that necessarily bothers me: because in one's working life, one is trying to synthesise some values in one's work. And during that lifetime one has got time for very few of those values, and you do those in your work and you hope that you, as an architect, will make a building. You might do five buildings, in four of those you have not been able to express your turmoil, but it is in your mind. But the fifth building, which you regard as a good building of yours, is important because that building has summarised all the turmoil in your mind. The fact that a large volume of work is going on, which is expressing a certain value in society, doesn't mean that I as an architect am concerned with it. In my country there is a tremendous amount of corruption. Call it a neurosis, but then I can synthesise nothing out of it. I could not. But then, you see, as an

architect one is on a different search altogether. One is not trying to say that "I have to change the destiny of my country or the destiny of the architecture of my country". One does not have the time for that or the infra-structure. One is not Gandhi.

An architect never shows all his buildings. He always chooses to show maybe two or even one building, and that is important. He is saying that "I have summarised all the problems that I feel of this age up there in that building". Similarly I think that our search for identity in architecture should be really a quest for the few buildings which we feel have really hit the nail on the head because the architect has anticipated and summarised a lot of problems in that building and has given it direction

Kenneth Yeang

The way a person presents himself in every day life is a reflection of his identity. Someone said that he can describe a person's architecture by looking at his face. He said now if you look at someone like Philip Johnson, very smooth face — a lot of glass in his buildings. And if you look at Buckminster Fuller, he is bald and his head dome shaped. There is Hijjas in his seersucker suit and Charles Correa with his expensive Indian outfit. The identity of a person really comes in what he thinks, talks and dresses. So it is a wholistic concept of identity. Using this analogy maybe we can look at the way we do our buildings — our designed methodology. Some architects design in a very intuitive way. Others have a systematic approach. So I don't think all of us can even agree on how we are going to go about doing our design. So we are talking about a quality of architecture and how that quality is interpreted into the architecture itself. That is the angle we should conduct our search from.

Ruslan Khalid

Charles Correa hit the nail on the head when he said the people's aspirations really come from the top. So why can't we have a seminar where we can have politicians and rich people and so on, where we can discuss decisions. Where we can tell them what vulgar taste they have. But in Malaysia in particular, we now have different directives from different Ministries about how we should design our buildings. So perhaps legislation is the place to begin. Maybe we should become politicians. The second point as made by Baharuddin is that people are busy copying easy examples of the international style and that architects should be looking at what other contributions they could make in the society for them to copy.

Eric Lye

No concrete directions have been given to the discussion so far, and I don't think that should be. Please allow me at this time to quote Goethe, he said that "That which is practical the common man can make and the artist can learn; that which is art the artist must create and the common man can learn".

Perhaps the identity we are talking about is how to resolve the contradiction between our history and our culture. Maybe our identity is such that we need to live with this contradiction rather than to resolve it into a narrow definition although that would be very convenient for designers. This kind of identity is very narrow minded especially in the case of South East Asia, and Malaysia and Singapore in particular. Whether we like it or not it is a multi-racial society, in a way a multi-lingual society and multi-religious society. It is a problem and a contradiction but we must live with it and try to resolve this thing. This is where our real identity lies. We must think of this identity as a dynamic thing. Sometimes it is to do with politics, sometimes with social conditions and sometimes with beliefs. For example one of the things that interested me as an observer in Bali were the gates they have there, which you see all over the place. The house may be very tattered but the gates are phenomenal, so spiritual. I didn't know their meaning until I was told that they are actually temples split apart and the gates guard people who pass through. Now these are beliefs. Folklore, if you wish, but they are certainly important to them and meant something spiritual to me although I knew nothing about the background.

The Chinese have their kinds of beliefs. There is a thing called Geomancy. The Chinese used Geomancy, and developed in the Western eye, ridiculous corners and mirrors. Yet they are very Chinese, although they look funny if you are Western educated. But the bankers and shopkeepers believe in them and they give that unique character to the otherwise standard looks of the highrise. So this is just a little touch even in a crude way. I cannot say much about Malaysia, except that I am aware that the Sufi tradition has a lot of mysticism, yet you keep your mysticism in the kampong, it does not come out in the urban areas, perhaps it should. Even in a very naive way, try it, because I think the majority of the villagers believe in it. Islam aside, these are things that perhaps are not unimportant. We try to hide them away from our Western counterparts for fear that they may say that they are not terribly rational, but you know, neither are they themselves. It is inviting unnecessary criticism because we want our work measured by the Westerners. So what do you expect? Sure, you are measured according to their terms. I think it's about time we measure them by our terms, no matter how naive these may be. As a famous

Danish philosopher said: "naive you are, if you think those who succeed are not naive".

Now to get back to some of the important points made by Charles Correa. I think it was important when he said that a cultural process which gives identity in the end cannot be fabricated. This period of cultural gestation varies from nation to nation and society to society, it just takes time. Even in a country such as the U.S., it took them over two hundred years to get what we call 'identity'. And their identity came actually from a very republican way of life, the vast country, the resources and everything that Europe was not. So the problem that confronts us is whether we wish to conceive of identity in a self-conscious way, as seminars of this type must do, or in an unself-conscious way, as a way of life.

The other question from Charles Correa's talk is, which comes first: does environment influence man, or man influence environment?

I would imagine in the rural setting environment would influence man. In the urban setting perhaps it is man that influences environment.

Then there are problems of identity which are abstract and those which are real. Can we identify those in our own context within our own culture?

The "under the tree" concept which Charles Correa mentioned is important because it is a simple way of reminding us of our physical environment. The tree is a beautiful thing because it filters light through its leaves and allows air to flow through it like a stream. The trunk is a situational point that people gather under. So the tree is very appropriate to our climate, even to the way we perceive personal and interpersonal space relationship. The concept of the square table is western, because if you look at tribal relationships they sit around in a circle not a square. I do believe that in Asia our relationships are round not square, and yet we are getting squarer and squarer.

The other thing is the concept of a kind of nomadic space that you move from place to place according to climatic conditions, time of day and level of noise. The mosquito net is a wonderful definer of space which we have lost, which defines our sleeping space, not necessarily a bed. Then there was mentioned the machine for living. The phrase 'machine for living' must be taken more openly, in terms of the functional technological implications; but perhaps what is important regarding identity is, as far as architecture is concerned, that which is merely functional and that which is socially functional. For example in the West, they use instruments like knives and forks, and on the other hand the Chinese, use chopsticks. These things are not reasoned, they have cultural reasons. So when we are talking about identity, dynamic identity, we are talking about our cultural boundaries and perhaps

our new economic constraints, which go hand in hand. And this ought to remind us about the hippie and the Indian's Mercedes.

In our society with its colonial influences and religious influences from Buddhism to Islam to Christianity our identity is pluralistic. One or two elements may dominate but it is essentially pluralistic, and we are the losers if we categorise everything into a single identity.

We have to learn to accept and deal with contradictions. This is not unique to us. We must remember that our identity cannot be pure anymore because of global communications, that things come to us very quickly and are lost very quickly too. The days of a pure identity that we are talking about can no longer be.

In Mona Serageldin's paper, she talks about the user-client versus the builder-client, and how they identify their aspirations and what is the position of the architects in their dealings with the user-client and the builder-client. She seems to say that the kitchen is perhaps one unit of the habitat, which has positioned itself in such an important way because the chore of managing ones household has now become more efficient in terms of cooking, washing, drying and so on. I think this sort of thing itself does not have to do with identity, it is to do with just mere functions which are made more efficient. But the environment in which these functions situate themselves could have an identity. Perhaps I can pose a sort of Taoist question: do I sit near the pond and decide before I throw the stone how many ripples the stone will make, or do I throw the stone and then find out how many ripples it does make? Do we see ourselves as architects as geometric animators or as social animators? Perhaps we are geometric animators and no more.

Through our education, particularly our Western education and architectural education we are steeped in design using history and even social conditions, but we seem to shy away from designing using economics and politics. This is part of our handicap. We have something against economics as dirty and yet in actual practice we soon realise that we are absolutely naive about this. Perhaps I can end the summary by saying that I believe, that architecture is really about the art of building and building is merely the practice of architecture.

Ruslan Khalid

Identity in a country which has a monolithic culture is much easier to define than in a country like Malaysia which has a multi-racial society. A lot of architects in this country react very strongly against any discussion of national identity in architecture because it means a certain bias towards a particular

racial group. So this topic has been suppressed from any sort of public discussion. Perhaps somebody could take that up.

Sumet Jumsai

You have an important point. We have been talking most of the time about identity on a very abstract level. But the reason why we are here I'm sure is because in Malaysia (and Singapore) there is a feeling of crisis of identity, if you like national identity, let's face it. This feeling interests me because I think (and I hope to point out later) that the crisis in the national identity as you feel it here, as the government feel it here, could be something terrible artificial. The so-called Malay identity could be defined, and I want to prove it, is regional, almost ASEAN, but much greater than that, a West Pacific identity. I can see it and I shall try to show in my paper that there is a common origin in this part of the world and at the end of that paper nobody will feel there is a crisis.

Tay Kheng Soon

It is a fact that the centre of economic gravity has shifted eastwards and we may very well be in the centre of it. Because of this, and as a result of the colonial experience and the protracted nature of the integration of the various cultures in Malaysia and Singapore (being multi-racial and multi-cultural societies) and feeling the impact of Western pop culture and seeing some of the deliterous effect of the erosion of ethics and moral values in the more developed countries, we are suddenly faced with this prospect. I think that is really the dimension of the identity. (I don't think I would use the word crisis). We need to define identity in very practical terms. We are pulled from pillar to post by the different kinds of fashionable ideas being portrayed in all the media which we are so completely exposed to. How do we therefore focus our energies? We have a general concept, but as the Minister said in his opening speech, now you tell us, in specific terms what it's all about, because if you don't tell us, we're going to tell you. This is what it boils down to. Some bureaucrats at some level is going to define it for us. So if this seminar is going to be useful we should come to some very clear, albeit tentative conclusions, so that they may be refined further and demonstrated in actual projects.

William Lim

Maybe we should first discuss whether we need and

want to define identity so specifically. The danger of not defining it is to let it so loose that you let it drift, and in some instances as Tay Kheng Soon indicates, it may also have other implications. But if you define it, you are really restricting by definition the continuous evolutionary changes, growth and search. This sort of thing is evolutionary and takes time whether we like it or not, and if we don't allow that to happen we may be forcing the issue too fast which may have worse results

Eric Lye

I think at this point it is apt reminding ourselves that the case study method has been proven to be a very poor substitute for natural development, because it encourages short term gains that look phenomenal. But in reality it destroys the social fabric. In fact it almost destroyed the American social fabric. And now the Americans are going to Japan because the Japanese management method, or the Samurai approach is to take a more social, collective, cooperative approach not just in money terms for short term national gain. So applying this to the question of identity, there are ways in which to achieve it very quickly; but are we prepared to pay the long term price, or do we do it more slowly?

Charles Correa

Identity is pluralistic even if you are going to try and define it. That's the first message to get across to your tormentors, whoever they are, that there is no way you can define it as a simple static thing. First of all people change. That was the hopeful thing about Mona's presentation, that I saw people trying to respond to images, and to the stimuli they see. This area has changed. You weren't always Muslims, you must know that. In India there was a pre-Hindu, a pre-Dravidian past. There have been so many changes, specially in this part of the world, because they were intelligent, lively people, with an open sea. Ideas, people and religion went across. You are trying to suddenly define identity and say "that's it". That's not it and regardless of how you define it, it is pluralistic and it is going to change.

I like Lim Chong Keat's sentence when he say that "We are sent abroad by our parents to pick up the best, which we do". We do that and then we bring them back the slides. Then we put up buildings derived from those images and that's what is ruining the neighbourhood. So some interventions are bad. Even if you bring excellence and even if it is relevant on the face of it, it could be totally irrelevant. For example, the Indian railways Crazy idea. Today we'd

never do it. We'd say we cannot afford it. Anyone who has been on an Indian railway would agree.

Japan took technology like cameras, transistors, now I suppose computers, but they are doing such an excellent job, beating everyone at it backwards. Would you say it's relevant to them? They've made it their own. So if we don't have an identity it's not a problem to worry about when we get up in the morning. There are fifty other real problems on our plates. But if we are going to discuss it, make sure that the powers be understood that it's pluralistic, and in a state of change. And the real criteria to judge new ideas when they are introduced is, are they done with the highest standard of excellence or are they actually degrading the society

Ruslan Khalid

I think I was being a bit of a devil's advocate when I mentioned the architect's reaction to discussing identity because I thought it would stir people up. Nevertheless there is a problem that exists, if I bring the subject nearer home. Locally, when architects are told to do certain things by bureaucratic policies, they react to being told to do certain things in their design and work. This reaction is quite natural since it affects one's creative freedom. And yet we have not found any answer, argument or ammunition to counter these policies that have been forced upon us.

Eric Lye

Reality is man made. Either you make your own reality, or others make it for you. The Greeks, for example, managed to structure their mythology into architecture, which is a fantastic thing. It's quite a feat that one could make an architecture out of stories. Well, we have our stories too. Why not an architecture out of it, whatever our stories may be?

Hasan-Uddin Khan

May I ask you who creates those stories? It's not the architects. Someone said, where the power lies, where the economic decisions are made, where the political decisions are made, is where our architecture in fact in the end is created.

Eric Lye

The stories were certainly not created by the architects, but the architects were responsible for synthesising the stories into architecture among the Greeks. I

think the stories were dealing with moral issues, sort of pre-religious; it's important since man had to behave in society in a manner that was cohesive.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

Yes, but then that means the architects must, if they are part of that state, toe the party line; which comes back to when the politician defines what is the Malay or Singapore identity. Within the situation, one does toe the line.

Eric Lye

I think this is always true, we just choose not to believe it. I mean if you take, for example, the Greek, Roman and French empires, architects always toed the line, and some of them rose to great heights of achievement.

Ruslan Khalid

Maybe it's to do with our education, through which we've been brought up to believe that modern architecture is about individual freedom to create things, that any kind of superimposed discipline is anathema to the creative act itself.

Charles Correa

It's not just that we aren't building on the local myths and stories, as Eric Lye said, but we are also responsible for importing outside myths, which we personify in our buildings, images, etc., and what is resented is when they are inappropriate. Ideas come from all over, but the main thing is, do they take root? A lot of Gandhi's ideas were from Emerson, Mao's ideas were from the German Karl Marx. But the genius of these people made them take root in their country, because they understood their own society. They weren't accused of bringing in outside ideas, of bringing in outside myths. Whereas we can justly be accused, as architects, all of us, myself certainly, of importing inappropriate myths, and that is what is resented.

I think with time identity grows — it happens. I don't think it's something you consciously search out, you just try and see the real problems and solve them. The Japanese architects seemed to many people to be creating a Japanese architecture, but they weren't, of course. They were building Corbusier in Japan, and that is all, but with time that slowly became Japanese.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

Are you suggesting that the search for an identity within a region or a country is a legitimate search for contemporary architecture, or is it in fact a wrong question that we are asking?

Charles Correa

Sullivan said that whenever you build something, you are talking about yourself. One day he was walking along in Chicago with a student, there were some terrible buildings or at least he thought they were terrible. The student said "The architect ran away in Europe", and Sullivan said "No! He is right there, he can never escape". He is trapped, in effect. In that sense, if I think of all the terrible things in a city like Bombay, a hundred years from now historians will say "that is exactly what Bombay society was about" In that sense, believe me we are creating an identity, whether an ugly one or a good one, you don't know. But to make it better is the question. Or to make all these identities better, that requires a better effort from the architects.

Tao Ho

We cannot define our own identity at present, except maybe by post mortem say 200 years from now. Then we will see that although we are talking today about *having no cultural identity, or no identity in architecture*, the identity is being formed in the long run, but we could not see it ourselves in our time. I think we should forget about searching for identity in architecture, and should change the search for identity in humanity.

Charles Correa was talking about the sun and the earth and the wind in a particular location that shaped the *original cultural identity of the place*. If we take those natural forces which are the basic constant things on this planet, we will find that those will always be the influencing factor of the people in a given area, and their life patterns would be shaped by it. We should then not worry what kind of architecture style develops, whether a Pagoda roof, or some other funny shape.

Tay Kheng Soon

Whenever we try to define problems in a very specific way, we always run the risk of appearing to push for a monolithic point of view. That is a very unfortunate way in which our liberal education has caused our minds to be structured. The search for identity is really

a calling for professionals like ourselves to help in the process of creating national pride, national joy and self respect. So what is the stance of the designer? What position does he take in regard to his own people? Does he deny that he is a part of his own people? There was a time in the 50's and 60's when it was very fashionable for newly returned graduates especially from UK to the former colonies of India, Malaysia and Singapore to adopt an internationalist position, because they did not want to get involved in the politics of their own country. And I think there is a carry over of some of these kinds of ideas among some of the intellectuals today.

Now Singapore's population is about 2.4 million, and Malaysia's about 12 million. The leadership and the professional leadership groups are very small. Therefore the amount of interaction and the amount of exchange of information and contact between and within these groups is very great. This means that there is no necessity to be isolated from the decision making process. So what do we do? Since we have this opportunity do we just sit back and say "you make the decisions" or do we go in and establish a dynamic relationship? I don't accept that because those who are in power define problems in a certain manner, therefore we, as executors of the ideas, just carry them out. We have a conscience and an intellect, and we can relate to them. And I think they expect a relationship of that sort from us. If they can just tell us what to do, then we are not worth our salt.

Romi Khosla

The way this seminar is emerging, I see three very clear aspects of the search for identity. First and uppermost is non Westernisation, or non modernisation. I would not define it as a rejection of Westernisation or a rejection of modernisation. It's just that we have digested those, and they have not left a very nice flavour, and that has caused us to do what I consider to be the second thing, which is to take a major look at one's own history.

All of us in Asia have learnt a lot of our history from other people who were non-Asians, who wrote it for us. And I think the time has come when we are looking at our history anew, and are discovering in our history pockets of culture within our own countries, which we didn't even know existed. And this is coming about because we have got over modernisation, we have got over the charm of the square table.

The third thing is that we are moving away from a material search, we are trying to rediscover something spiritual. In terms of architecture I would say it's the desire to look into aspects of architecture which are not purely functional. The West and modernisation

were so heavy on functionalism that we ourselves began to think that good architecture was functional architecture. But I think, today if we look at the questions Asean architecture is asking, then we are saying let us look at architecture which is not purely functional. We are looking for elements of magic in our buildings because we have looked back in history, and we have seen that there were such elements. I don't think it means we are trying to copy the past at all, it's just that the search has taken on a new dimension. Our own cultures and our own thinking are getting much bigger, and modernisation can't accommodate them any more. It is very exciting, and I don't agree that we should not look at these things consciously. I think we should be looking at them very self consciously, because you know, it is only if we search that we really make some kind of progress. I don't think progress descends on us from beyond. It is a very man-made thing.

William Lim

What we are actually talking about at this seminar is, if we are called upon as architects to advise the State, or the patrons or the people on this question of identity, what are we going to tell them? Are we going to have a single identity, or a plural identity? Or do we advise them to just sit back, because history indicates, as Charles Correa said, eventually we are all creating our identity, whether self-consciously or unself-consciously, and history will look back and say "here is what was being expressed in that year". This may not be good enough, because we may now want there to be a positive intervention, and how do we do it? I think this is the question.

Parid Wardi Sudin

Looking at identity within the Malaysian context, I find that there are three points I'd like to introduce. First of all, identity as a national aspiration. Normally this is politically realised and politically aspired, and we as a society within a political structure indirectly or directly subscribe to that, otherwise you become an outcast in that society. Architects are ordinary human beings. We are voters, and some of us are also party members. Besides, we are also members of a family. In other words we should not forget the fact that we play a multi-faceted role. So in discussing identity, maybe we should begin to look at ourselves. Are we talking about ourselves as the architect, that is the person who makes decisions with respect to design and therefore is responsible for the form that design is going to take and hence directly influences the character and possibly the iden-

tity of that building? Or are we talking about educators, who do not design but influence the thinking of people with respect to identity?

The second point is implementation. There are Malaysian families with children in the universities. At the moment that particular child graduates, the circumstances of that family change as dramatically as of the family with an earning member in the Gulf States. The graduate is now an officer with an income that is very high compared to his compatriots. That change in income means he aspires to the same things that Mona Serageldin was talking about, you know, the kitchen with its gas stove, use of tables and chairs etc. So these things begin to make their appearance. Now when you talk about that, nobody plans it and nobody can plan it, but it's going to happen, at different paces, different times, modulated by different things. Where we come in as architects, is, when we make a design decision for a house, how do we modulate that decision in order to arrive at an appropriate design for these people.

The third thing is that Malaysia has a layered historical background, with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam all layering themselves on the same area and people, creating an extremely multi-faceted society. Then of course there was the colonial period. So this is the scenario within which we have to operate. Therefore, if we are going to talk about identity from the point of view of man in the street, then I think we have to have a different mix of people.

Panel Discussion 3

William Lim

I would like to refer to Tay Kheng Soon's statement earlier on in his paper, about the dichotomy between economic development and modernisation on the one hand, and culture and history on the other. I think if you look at it as hardware and software, then yes, this is dichotic. But if you think in terms of culture and lifestyle, I don't think there is necessarily a dichotomy, because culture is not stagnant and your lifestyle is not stagnant. In other words, it's not really possible for any society to reach a certain level of economic and technical development without changing its lifestyle. It's not a stagnant situation. So it's not backwards and forwards, but the parallel position of interaction, and I think that point may be important.

Eric Lye

Naive we may be, as architects are supposed to be, but at least we are talking about this issue and worrying about it. Planners never talk at this level about identity. They just get some formula, some space, and that's it. And then we are supposed to add the architecture and supply the character. So perhaps one of our roles is to ensure that they do talk about identity, because we will be unable to do the kind of things we want if they remain so insensitive about the environment.

Tay Kheng Soon

There are certain skills and certain meditative moods we have to discover for ourselves. I think the Western logic, the Western rational system of defining problems and testing hypothesis and so on is okay. But when it comes to dealing with software, that's where the system goes to pieces because it cannot handle it. And that is why we have no answers to our problems. The only way we can have answers is to use our own

sense, intuition and emotional responses, with the rational process on top of that to make sense out of that.

We need to go very deep into the principles of what a concept involves. Although we can't become geomancers or economists, we must understand enough about economics, politics, etc. to be able to relate to politicians, and to define problems in a language which they can understand. What we need is confidence, to know that we know enough, so that we can interact with others.

Eric Lye

Rather than expanding our energies on what is good or bad by Western norms, we should concern ourselves always with the whats, whys and hows of our own environments. The danger is that some times we are not discussing things on our own terms, and this is a fundamental issue with the question of identity.

As architects, we have to deal with the speculative aspect as well as the performance aspect. It is not simply an either or question. If we think it is, we will be at the mercy of other disciplines. The ambiguous and unattractive facts that confront architects must be dealt with honestly, because this is what gives coherence and integrity to our designs. We are also confronted, especially the practitioners, with the frustration of abstract pre-conceived ideas. I think we are all guilty of those, partly because of our education. We should begin to take a fresh look at architecture, and delight in a new reality. Let us open our eyes to our environment with the help of this reality. This will be our reality, rather than the reality of magazines. It is the reality that is all around us, yet we ignore it, because it is so easy for architects to abstract pre-conceived ideas. We are doers. We must test our thoughts, even if we fail. If we are wrong, we must do better. We must not wait for legislation or technology. If we wait for others, we will never achieve anything ourselves.

It is also fundamental in the creation of identity that we architects have a role to play, to prepare the eyes of the public, officials and consumers to see the things that we truly believe are important about our environment.

The other aspect of identity which could have backlash is the imposition of one culture or value or foreign value on another, which could create strain, especially when big doses come in a short time. How do you graft progress or new identity into any society which when threatened rejects the new and reverts to the old? That, I suppose, is the danger with many of the societies we come from. History has shown that when modern ideas go too far there's a complete reversion. So, the question of identity has to be looked at delicately, for although we are all trained in making choices very rapidly, and are progressive, there are many people in our society who will find choices very frightening. The timing is important. We should be self-conscious in creation and in criticism. Architecture is not an unself-conscious act. It is design, and design is a self-conscious act. We must not be guided by habit alone.

Perhaps what is even more important is that architecture alone, as an object has no identity. Its identity comes out of the timeless qualities of a society, whether they be religious, economic, ethnic or something else. Architecture per se has no identity. So in the creation of identity we must bring in those timeless qualities from culture and the other things that give identity to architecture.

There are inherent limitations in the practice of architecture. We all know that. But we must still deal with the different particulars in order to gain credibility in the eyes of our society. Among ourselves we may generalise. In front of the public we must deal in particular details. Or difficult particulars. Abstractions do not bring us credibility, and after all we are talking about making the public aware of our problems.

Lastly, my observation is that architecture as a performing art belongs to the practical, not the speculative. This is not to say that we should not speculate to develop our ideals. But as a performing art it is a practical art and there is no surrogate for being on the job. As an architect you have to build, because fundamentally the public judges us by our performance.

Hasan-Uddin Khan

A number of quite important things have been discussed in this seminar, and a number of points and themes are arising which we seem to be beginning to agree upon. Although we have approached the subject of identity from a great many view points, we have

as yet not quite defined whether we should look at identity or not, which would probably be a good thing to do. But we have come up with a consensus on one specific point, that culture cannot be fabricated, that there is a plurality, a multiplicity of directions that identity can take. I get the feeling that people here do feel that an identity cannot be frozen in time, and if we feel that an identity cannot be frozen in time, it must be a dynamic evolving process.

One of the interesting things that came up was Robi Sularto Sastrowardoyo's paper, where he talks of Bali, where there was a prescribed set of rules which governs people's lives and their architecture. Now that is a static situation, where a culture is static. He seems to indicate that when everyone knows what their micro and macro relationship with the cosmos is, you can almost begin to know how to design, where to place your things, which way to face. In contemporary Islam, it appears to me, that within a very dynamic situation, where there is this plurality of directions, even if you think of just South East Asia, we are in fact trying to create a Utopian vision, rather like Bali, which is a Utopian vision, if I may read it that way. We are trying to freeze this process of change, by trying to provide, again, an architectural direction.

Another thing, which really struck me is, that when we talk about identity in architecture, or cultural identity or identification, or pride in one's identity, or pride in one's own manifestation of culture, we are able, in South East Asia to do that, because there is a degree of sufficiency. There is a degree of almost having achieved all the basics. We are no longer struggling for survival totally. So, it is a luxury when you begin to think about these things. In some countries like Bali, and Pakistan, and maybe Egypt, you get the feeling that we almost cannot afford the time to worry about a thing like identity, because we are too busy building, or too busy creating. There's a whole process of urbanisation going on. In this rapid transformation, the feeling is that, as Eric Lye said, if a building in architecture does not have an identity, or meaning, it gets charged with meaning by the culture that it comes into contact with. We're actually playing around with the physical form, and the physical fabrics, but I think the meaning and the identity comes with its relationship with that particular physical fabric.

Charles Correa and Mona Serageldin and various other people have given the view that our culture, architecture and identity come from an urban architecture. However, it was interesting to see that when Fawizah Kamal and others presented their papers, they always talked of traditional models which were rural, and our cities are seen as a sort of an aberration, or transformation of that rural model into an urban

model, and unsuccessfully so. I think that will always be, that the moment we start applying a traditional urban situation into a new, urban, rapidly changing situation, we are inevitably going to get either horrible slums, or this fantastic transformation of the rural to become meaningless. It hasn't learnt how to react with what urban life's about. I would bear in mind the importance of creating urban models, identities which are really very different, and cannot be based totally on this import of the rural, of a nice Minangkabau house, or a traditional Balinese house

The last point that I would like to talk about is the importance of politics and economics. We should accept the importance of the decision making process in our societies, and architects should not cop out in this political process. The effect of the media, and especially the effect of the global media, the media that is not controlled by ourselves within our own countries has been devastating in our efforts to express our own identity

Finally, one last little footnote, we have come here together as practitioners and thinkers about architecture and about our environment. It is the first time that I have attended a meeting which is almost purely made up of Asians from within their own region, and within their own cultures or people working, or committed to this region. And one of the exciting things about this seminar is the beginning of a network, and the first bits of contact that we are coming into without having ourselves defined by people from the outside. And I think that this is an important thing — defining ourselves.

Panel Discussion 4

Haji Rahim

Among the Malays open planning as we understand it especially in terms of open platforms is more to do with the inviting look. There is a saying among us that the worst thing that could ever happen to the Malay is to be declared a social outcast. Because of this, normally the houses are open in front so as to give the impression that visitors are always welcome; and there is always a plate of rice in the kitchen. I think this kind of philosophy and concept needs looking into when we talk about identity in architecture.

Sumet Jumsai

This outlook is actually just not restricted to the Malays, but is found in the whole of the West Pacific region. It indicates a nautical background and has to do with when you are in the same raft or ship and you drift or travel from one place to another. To be a social outcast is to be cast into the sea, when you are really finished. So that is the nautical instinct.

Hijas Kasturi

The basis for identity is not derived from just superficial things. It can come in from philosophies, culture and so on. For example the Malay *adat*. Whether we use it or not I don't know yet, but it exists, it has relevance and it can be used wherever it is required. According to the Malay *adat* an entrance is never at the back, the bottom, or the side, which contemporary architecture permits, or your house below a building, or below the ground — never, never for a Malay house. These are the fundamental things. There are many other things, as well, for example the gable is a reflection of your status in the community. It can go on and on. This to me is very important. We can use it when it is adaptable.

Lim Chong Keat

The basis of design is not just knowing what to put in, but really what to leave out. If you try to throw everything into your building, hopefully you get a big stomach ache and we are living in a huge stomach ache of our urban civilisations today. Next, referring to Hijas Kasturi's contribution, I congratulate him for being a brave man to show us the realism where he is at. We are all on the fringe of, and some of us are in the milieu of urban commercialism. And we know that it is very difficult for an architect to resist a huge commission. However, I would like to comment not on what he is doing by way of buildings, but to the advertising gloss that goes around it. The kind of words that are being used by his agents to justify what he is doing — really, it is a very dangerous thing.

(Note. I felt justified in not including this 'gloss' in the edited version of the conference papers — Editor)

Tay Kheng Soon

I don't quite take Lim Chong Keat's view. I think the fact of living in today's world is that we have to be able to switch mode from low cost primitive housing to high cost five star hotels in terms of physical dimensions. We also have to switch gears and switch positions from points of philosophical, historical and archaeological interest to tackling the planners at the planning level. And similarly we have to switch between our real hardcore professional concerns and commercial concerns.

Secondly, I very much appreciate Sumet Jumsai's outlining of the scholarly background behind the common denominators in our South East Asian identity. As we are more and more exposed to this kind of research we begin to understand that we are not national entities as such, but are a common people in South East Asia; we have a certain distinct tradition with a distinct underlined area of sub-conscious. And we talk to each other through con-

ferences like these we begin to sense this, and I think this has a profound effect on our thinking.

Lastly, let me just add that the quest for identity is not a luxury. The quest for identity is a necessity. It is so because it is part of the social and cultural technology that we should harness because it is through the process of harnessing such a difficult technology, such a cultural technology that we can take the next step.

Charles Correa

I quite agree with Mona Serageldin that in a country like Egypt perhaps the other problems are so large that the search for identity is not one of the key problems. Or maybe they are more confident, they don't even question the identity they have, it's so much part of them. But to repeat what I'd said earlier you get your identity by going about everyday life in your own way.

Another thing which disturbed me is that it seems we look at a building as a box, a coded box. And it is crazy to think we'll find our identity by changing the code, the tattooing. It's the open spaces (I'm sorry to keep returning to it) and it's not just open-to-sky, there are so many different transitions. In this part of the world more than in India, I would think that it's those areas where life really occurs.

Eric Lye

To me what Sumet Jumsai presented is really what I will regard as our conscious and what Hijias Kasturi presented as our reality. I think we need both. Hijias Kasturi has also taken away the concept of the tradition role of the individual single architect because in some way perhaps he is not even an architect now, he is a director, the producer is someone else, providing the money and the means, he has a script writer, technician and actors. He is not the first to do it although the first one in this part of the world. His films (that perhaps upset some people) are part of this impressario film making which we have to face. It's a starting point.

Ruslan Khalid

I think what Sumet Jumsai has done is to really open my eyes to the problem of identity. Previously one laboured under the impression that when we talked about identity in architecture, particularly in Malaysia, we were talking about our own localised problems. He has opened up the whole global issue about

how the indigenous architecture of this part of the world is linked and related on a very pragmatic basis. I think it's a very important contribution. Perhaps now we can view our problem of identity in a much more outward looking way. The cross fertilisation of culture that must have existed must have had a tremendous influence on everybody. It's amazing to realise how isolated Malaysia was during the last maybe hundred years from Thailand for instance, because of the colonial government. How Indonesia was in fact isolated from Malaysian culture and so on. I hope that now with the *lingua franca* we can begin to communicate with each other again towards a fruitful development.

Next I want to talk about David Wee. He represents the kind of phenomenon we all have to face in this part of the world. When you come up with the client who has a definite idea about what he wants, invariably the architect designing for them will have to find some kind of rationale for what he does. In David Wee's case he finds rationale for establishing some kind of identity in his work in this instance the Islamic dogma. This is a very convenient kind of rationale to use, because it cannot be challenged by anybody. If you say your building faces Ka'aba and it's holy, you can't challenge that notion whether it's a house or a mosque. Then he uses the symbolism which to me has a certain sense of spiritual reality but which has no validity in terms of the functions of the Palace. That palace doesn't have many religious functions or ceremonies. Whatever ceremony goes on is more of the traditional or ritual kind than of the religious. Therefore to base all the architectural rationale on the religious kind of reason or symbolism is to me quite missing the point. But he cannot be challenged by his own clients because he is so emotional, so loaded that people would just have to accept his presentation, and this is the dilemma.

Tao Ho

The interesting thing about this meeting is that I see a lot of disagreement, and at the same time I agree with a lot of people on certain points. I think we have to recognise this contradiction, because we are dealing with different aspects of the same problem, on different scales: national scale, regional scale, socio-economic scale or even philosophical scale. Amongst architects, even if we come from the same culture, live in the same town and have a similar educational background, given the same problem, we can scratch each others eyes out disagreeing on the same basic principles. I think we have to realise that

Similarly, this problem of identity has a hierarchy of meanings and hierarchy of realities that we have to

deal with. A test of being an architect is whether we are able to solve this problem and face up to it honestly. So that when we are asked to design for a difficult client, we can honestly do our best, even if we are to design a slum.

Eugene J. Seow

It occurs to me that there is no mention of religion here, although it is a very powerful motive in all architecture. It forms a very important part of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist design. I feel that's a very strong motive force in the identity we are talking about.

Lim Chong Keat

When you use the phrase 'search for identity' it is of course a good platform, but there is an over emphasis on the word 'search', because it seems to imply that you are on some kind of road or you are not on it at all, and eventually you are going to shout "eureka!". Now we are already concerned about processes and the history of mankind is not going to stop anywhere until maybe at another big bang.

Sumet Jumsai

This question of architectural commercialism really reminds me of a very bad television programme I saw recently. It was about a couple of singers, they go up to an agent who is trying to sell them and they are straightaway offered a contract to sign. The boy refuses to sign but as the girl starts to sign, the agent presses a button which opens up half the wall revealing on the other side, the press. They start to interview the girl straightaway and she says, "I have not done anything yet, how can I give a press conference?" And they reply "never mind, give a press conference and then tomorrow is a tour of Atlanta, then a concert somewhere and the next day we are going to sell your records." And she says "But I have not made any records yet" "Never mind, we'll sell you first and make the record afterwards." And I think we're really moving into that. I'm not referring to anyone in particular but let us face the truth, that is what a lot of us are doing already. Why we are getting into that I don't know. Perhaps it is our fault or perhaps society's. Maybe we ought to blame society.

Norman Edwards

In South East Asia the architects are not involved in the kind of cultural and social mobility that Mona Serageldin was referring to. This is as opposed to the West where they are coming close to the grass roots, coming closer to a more actively involved relationship with the user. In some way architects are not down there where they should be and this is where as you say, the high percentage of the urbanites exist in society. It seems to me the quest for identity has a lot to do with the conscience that underlines the whole concern with this thing. There is a need to move into those areas.

Sumet Jumsai

The question is can architects play their role with the urban poor? The answer is yes and no. Yes, if you are in an academic like Eric Lye you can write books, or if you are part of the government services you may feel that you are paid to do it. But if you are in the private sector like myself and you go down to the slums, you are an outcast. Firstly you won't get all the fat commissions and so forth. Secondly you become a trouble maker. I'm speaking from experience, since I'm dealing at present with the biggest slum in Bangkok. I have been fighting against the evictions, but there is no role for me there as an architect. I would just like to mention this experience in terms of identity, because the solution I put forward for the national housing authority is not to use all this technology that is imported into the country via ADB and World Bank. But really to go back to the house on stilts. That is how those people live and that is their way of life and they can do it themselves. Now the terrain is almost completely flooded, and so I put forward this idea that where the terrain is flooded very deep they should not even bother to build stilts. Just have floating rafts. We have a lot of floating villages still left in the countryside and these are country people who have moved in from that kind of habitat into the city. But no, the government wouldn't have anything like that and because of the ADB and World Bank loans we have to start filling in the terrain at great cost. This is the sort of thing that we are doing. First of all bulldozing down identity and then getting into the economics of upgrading those particular slums.

Eric Lye

This question of the urban poor is a real dilemma. The bureaucrats and the planners feel that if the architect intervenes, then it is his doom. And the architect is of the view that he has no credibility if he goes in there

The French, however, have been doing some work on this and they don't call themselves architects, just animators. In that role, perhaps that is what architects are — animators.

Charles Correa

I think the intervention we can make, and it is very important that we make it, is in the new structuring of the city. That is one. Each of us can do it in his own area, his own city. Then we can perhaps use these advertising techniques to project it. In short everything you can do to put your point across to the planners for example.

When you see the really poor people you realise that they have wonderful solutions of how to build. That exists but what doesn't exist is the land where these solutions are viable and that is what we should try to provide for them. If there is a famine in India can you imagine us running around asking housewives to write recipe books so people can cook? It would be really insulting. We want to believe people don't have houses because they don't know how to build and we are going to teach them. We don't want to accept why they really don't have the houses, why they don't have the food.

Tao Ho

I belong to a voluntary organisation called 'Helping Hand'. We deal with the urban poor, people sixty years old, eighty years old who have been thrown out on the streets. People with absolutely no identity, whether architectural, spatial, or human. So what do I do? As an architect, I don't make buildings with stilts or talk about whether they should be Islamic or Chinese. What we have done is that there is a huge block of housing supported by stilts and those spaces are empty and not much used. So we talked to the housing people and said "Nobody is going to rent a shop down there. Nobody will use it. Can we have it?". We managed to have a few bays, between the columns, and we turned that into housing units packing in more people than the maximum allowed for the people living above. But we also leave out some space to give a little bit of social gathering area for the old people. There are four people living in a small room. But they live in a place where they find a little bit of identity because they have a little bed space and also they have a space to get together in a night time, but as far as architectural design is concerned, nothing. You will never be able to tell that it is done by an architect. Identity, it has none, but it serves a purpose. As architects I think we should look into this problem as well.

Tay Kheng Soon

I think architects need not feel guilty about this problem. There is a destitute problem and of course it has to be handled, through some sort of welfare organisation. Housing for the urban poor, at least those who can afford to build a shack or a shelter is not an architectural problem. It is primarily an economic, a job problem. In this the Housing Development Board in Singapore has proven very successful in what they did: it was a very basic political decision that the lowest twenty-five percent of the income group should continue to live in their present cubicles and slums; the main effort of the government and the economy drive is to create jobs so that these people, through the job creation process, can earn money to upgrade themselves. If you try to provide housing to these without upgrading their jobs, it's a bottomless pit. I think where the architectural problem begins is once people have earned enough money to pay for a house. Then their question is what kind of a house, then it becomes an architectural problem. At that point of time, in that time scale the question of density, house types, linkage to the ground, mixture and form comes in. I think a lot of work can be done and should be done by architects in that.

William Lim

I think we must call this to a close. We are drifting into another conference on the urban poor and not identity. It's a very important subject but I don't think we should be dealing with it at this seminar.

Norman Edwards

I didn't mean to suggest that in the argument for the architect moving back to a more participatory scale, that we were merely moving into the area of helping the urban poor, but rather perhaps to a position that the architects and some designers in the West have moved to, in the context of the economic downturn. In the context of the social and cultural revolution of the sixties they have moved towards the position of looking inwards, consolidating cultural and economic resources, questioning, looking back at history and so on. Most of the architects in the urban centres are inevitably at one level where all the money is and where the economic action is. At the other end of the scale there is the political reality of the opportunities that exist for the architect, where most of the needs of Asia exist, in the urban fringes and the urban areas. And that end of the scale, may represent more the setting for the real quest for identity with which we are concerned.

Mona Serageldin

I see identity as a dynamic motion evolving in time and place in response to outside forces, which we all seem to recognise, as well as to changes from within, which are more difficult to discern, maybe because we are constantly living with and looking at them. As Romi Khosla has said I also see identity as having two dimensions. The first, (unlike him I don't think of them as vertical and horizontal) I think of as inbred, derived from our ethnic, religious, cultural background and it is the one that gives the underlying layer of stability to the experience of change.

The second I see as acquired, shaped by challenges flexible? Islamic? symbolic? Do we adapt the past or and technological innovations. And this gives the flexibility necessary to a society to adapt and develop. If we are at a loss right now, it's because the rate of change we are experiencing has created a sense of disequilibrium between these two dimensions. However, to my mind, the imbalance is more superficial than it seems. We can all deplore consumerism, but we cannot deny the legitimacy or the quest for a better standard of living. We can deplore the negative feeling about our architectural heritage, but we should not interpret it to imply "that people are turning their backs on the past". Deep rooted popular attachment to religion and socio-cultural traditions negates this interpretation. Selective adaptation of traditional elements and their reinterpretation in terms of modern needs, whether real or perceived, is a sound and positive attitude. It is misleading to label any manifestations that we find difficult to accept as intellectuals, professionals or artists as a loss of identity. This would imply that there is a fundamental incompatibility between retaining identity and socio-cultural change that is necessary for all societies in the Third World, and elsewhere, to continuously develop. Cast in those terms, safeguarding our identity would become at best a half-hearted battle, and a losing one; at worst it would call for consistent looking backwards. This is a negative and self defeating exercise. The two tendencies are prevalent today not only here, but in the Middle East and other parts of the world, and they generate similar frustrations.

I find it more constructive to concentrate on defining the direction in which the whole society and its identity is evolving at this particular time and place, and to react to the parts of this movement.

Lastly, I do not see why the privilege of the reformulation of traditional settlement patterns in modern terms should be the unique reserve of the design professionals, particularly when such few architects and planners take the time to seriously study their history and cultural heritage. I question this attitude without denying the validity of any individual interpretation.

William Lim

It is clearly understood that any intervention, especially on a major scale, whether local or foreign, will have an impact on the public. However, there is a distinct difference between foreign and local intervention, whether or not they are of a good quality. The reason is this: if it is local intervention, there is already a filtering process by the person who is carrying out the intervention, whether we agree with the intervention or not. But the foreign intervention will quite often, even if it is in good faith, bring in with itself foreign values, life styles and an implied system of how things should work, which is an even more messy business. We have to be very careful and determine what level of foreign intervention we can absorb. If the quantum exceeds certain norms, a disequilibrium can take place. You effect the value system of the built environment as perceived by the public. Singapore has taken so much foreign intervention, all at one go, that it will be very interesting to see what is its impact when all the buildings are completed.

The second point I'd like to make is on the question of integrity, the architect's integrity. Is there a critical point where we feel "this is my limit, I am not prepared to go across this line" As responsible professionals we have to draw a line. Unfortunately this line cannot be drawn by someone else. It has to be drawn by ourselves. It is terribly important to be clear at what point of time to say no, because what we are going to produce will have identity, and it will have an impact, of whatever sort.

Lim Chong Keat

Looking at the Indian case, (although it was somewhat different, because it was a colonial situation) it must be asked that when Corbusier and Kahn were brought in, surely there were already capable Indian architects who were not even given the opportunity, I think Charles Correa was already born then.

Charles Correa

Let us not belittle people like Corbusier and Kahn. I always think that we were lucky to get Corbusier because he asked real questions. When I look at the British influence on India, I find there are lots of Indians who speak with a very nice English accent, and this and that, but there are also lots of Indians who have learnt about English law or about medicine. The transfer is a reflection on both sides, what people have to offer, and what people can absorb. In that sense I think India was lucky to get Corbusier, and vice versa, because they believed in architecture.

Lim Chong Keat

When I gave the Indian example, it was a value free comment. What I was trying to indicate was that the bureaucracy was tuned to that intervention whilst being deaf to the local factor. I am not afraid of any foreign intervention. We have a right to learn of the world, the world participates, and the ability to know what is relevant and what is not is of course the point. However, neither should we underestimate the problem of carpetbagging, because this is a real problem and it has an effect on the bureaucracy.

Ruslan Khalid

When Corbusier and Kahn went to India, they were doing public buildings. They did, as Charles Correa indicates some very valid research, and made some contribution to the development of modern architecture in India. Whereas in this part of the world there is a distinct difference — most of the intervention by foreign architects is in commercial areas. They have done no public building. Most of the foreign intervention here is concerned with commercial development like hotels and offices. So this distinction must be made and I want to repeat that we are not worried about the invasion in itself. We are worried about the kind of unthinking values that they bring, transferring complete Houston Technology or Houston lifestyle into Malaysia.

Hisham Al-Bakri

When I came to this seminar, I came with confidence, I thought I knew my identity. I thought I knew where I was going. But I think after three days of it, I am losing my identity. I don't know who I am, where I am going to be, what I'm going to do. Earlier on somebody asked, should architects be commercial minded, bureaucratic or urban poor architects. And then, should they be Islamic, national or regional. This is very interesting, but I am lost for direction. And then to make matters worse, we get foreign intervention.

When you lose your direction, you start to ask why? where? what? Why are we searching for identity? Have we lost it? Have we got one? I can't understand why we are searching for an identity when the developed countries are not. My own analysis is that we have been under the influence of colonisation and foreign culture. We now want to get out of that entanglement, so we are looking for identity, and we look to the past. In the past probably we had identity. We analyse the Bali temple, and everything that we can think of in the past. Why is it that they had identity and we don't?

We analyse it, and that's good. We can learn a lot from what has been studied and what is being presented today. But still, are we going to have a direction so that we can work as practising architects, not just talk about it?

We know that we have to have clients. Even the architects and builders in the past had clients. But our clients are changing. A few years ago our clients were different from the clients now. And the projects are different too. But two things don't change. One is our climate and the other is the size of the country. The other thing that doesn't change is the past. We can learn a lot from the past, but what direction are we going to take in the future? Other things change: Technology, and functional requirements, laws, regulations, construction techniques, materials, and with all these changes, our identity will go on changing. If we are going to get identity, it's not the elements of architecture that are concerned. We should narrow it down to the process. Should we build open-to-the-sky? Be flexible? Islamic? symbolic? Do we adapt the past or do we start another movement of style? Or do we go our own individual way? These are the options that are open to us.

Kenneth Yeang

I would just like to contribute some posers. The first one is, what is the definition of 'identity in architecture'? We should define what we mean by identity and by identity in architecture, and by architecture. And also what we understand by the role of the architect. Some definition or some collective definition is very important. Identity can be at the conceptual level or at the interpretive level. To what extent are we talking about identity? Identity to the architect, to the user, building owner or the nation?

The second poser is that the delineation of your sphere of influence is very important. In the search for identity in architecture, what is the boundary that we are studying? Are we studying at the regional level, or are we talking about identity in South East Asia? National level? Sub-regional level? Our own religious grounds, of Islamic architecture? We might be talking at cross purposes now. Sumet Jumsai might be talking about identity in South East Asia, while Hijias Kasturi about identity in Ampang.

The third poser is that we all have very different approaches to architecture. Architects won't agree on the same solution or the same methodology. There is nothing wrong with that. We work in different ways, but it is important that we are talking about architecture which implies design, and some time should be spent on how architects design, as that affects the way we bring our own influences to bear on identity.

In the subject matter there are two polarities. One is from the general to the particular, and the other is from the particular to the general. If two approaches correlate, you have a wholistic theory to what you are trying to do. When you look at things from the general level, you are talking about culture, the socio-economic influences, the arts and crafts and your region. From these you can pick up things which could be useful to you when you design, that give something unique or endemic to your architecture. From the particular level, you may find out what are the existing things in our architecture that you could use. For instance, in the Malaysian environment, the verandah ways of the shophouses are terrific spaces. We could articulate them. The 'surambi' of the Malay house, the pillotii, the porches of the colonial house, the pitched roofs. These are the particular elements. But we must be very permissive about this. If somebody wants to design a building for its symbolism, there's nothing wrong with that. Provided our experiments don't hurt too many people, it's O.K. We can try again. But what is important is that we are running out of time. The economic run that we have in Malaysia now may not last that long. Within that period we must make sure that we act fast. We must think, and more important, architects must interact, so that whatever we learn we share with each other, and cover as much ground as possible, in as short a time as we can.

Eric Lye

I think that some of us are getting frightened that we are not going to come to any conclusion, and that is a problem for architects, they are expected to always produce something.

Well, we seem to agree more or less on what identity is about, although we can't get too particular, because in a gathering of this kind we should deal with the forest rather than the trees. The trees ought to be dealt with from within, not without, and we are really a without group because we consist of so many cultures while within the same region.

On the point of the urban poor, helping the urban poor, I think I'd use the word 'help' rather than 'intervention'. I don't think the poor want you to intervene, they want you to help, and the sooner we get rid of the word 'intervene' the better.

About colonisation, it is one of those things we have nothing to apologise about. At the time we were just about growing up as a modern state, we had colonisation. It affected us not only materially, it also affected our way of thinking. There are good attributes to that as well as negative attributes. It taught us a few things that have been very useful in communicating with the

rest of the world. It is something we accept that while we were growing up, we were disrupted, and therefore now we are looking for our identity.

Perhaps to summarise the question of identity, I'd like to relate a little anecdote I lived in Canada for nine years, and my children were born there. But the reason I came back to Hong Kong was that one day the two boys come crying, saying that they say that we are not Canadians. That gave me the idea of coming back, and after we came back, I took them to the local films; here was their culture, their identity. But my little boy was very bored. I said, "What is the matter with you? Look at these Cantonese films. These are your roots." And he replied "Dad, these local films are so boring. The western films are such fun." So perhaps the little boy had observed something; why are we so sad all the time?

Mubin Sheppard

I wonder whether it is possible for architects to give a little attention to the question of conservation? In this country, and perhaps in other countries of Asia, the conservation of buildings of traditional style of architecture is something which is very important, and within a relatively short time, if something isn't positively done about them, many of these will have disappeared.

Lim Chong Keat

Maybe E J. Seow would like to comment on this, as a member of the National Monuments board of Singapore

Eugene J. Seow

You are out of time I am no more. I am part of the conservation. But, in reply to your question about conservation, I think even conservation is part of our identity. We are here because of the past. And I think Encik Mubin and most of us here are very much aware that there is so much wealth in this particular area of our past. I heartily support conservation. It is up to the young people here to think about this very important aspect that will perhaps give us all identity.

Parid Wardi Sudin

Major projects, major temples, mosques and commercial centres serve a fundamental purpose towards the education of the public. Architects, big or small, in what they do, have a fundamental purpose for

doing it, and I think what they do is incredibly important. In Malaysia, after the National Mosque was built, there followed a whole decade of mosques with folded roof forms. I believe that David Wee's National Palace is going to have tremendous repercussions on the local architecture for the next two decades. So, the 'big boys' have a very important role to play in the search for identity

Tao Ho

To go back to the beginning, I always feel that cultural identity started in isolation, and that is why there is something very distinct in different parts of the world, in Bali, in China, or in India. Then the interaction started, and now we are going to be part of a globalised world in one way or another. It is a matter of time. We have been talking about to what degree we should allow intervention, to what degree to allow things to disappear without losing our identity. I think this is not a quantitative problem. It is more a qualitative problem. To look at it quantitatively is like to define which is the last straw that causes the collapse of the camel. I don't think that will happen; the camel will still walk, and keep on walking. You may keep on adding straws to it, but he may become something else.

The whole world is losing identity in two ways. One is that we are being recolonised by a super culture that has a complete lack of identity. The other is that we are being colonised by what I call the 'siliconised people'. The people who want to systemise the whole world, to make glass boxes and have the multinational approach. That is a dehumanisation of our culture, and so what we have to search for is a new identity of humanity.

Lim Chong Keat

Tao Ho comes from Hong Kong which is a kind of camel, and I am not sure whether the next straw is going to be put on by Beijing or by the next developer.

Parid Wardi Sudin

In general there is a very real lack of information about the various buildings or history of architecture of this region as a whole. For instance if I go down to a good bookshop in Kuala Lumpur, it is most unlikely that I will find books on the traditional architecture of Thailand, Indonesia or the Philippines. That is because not many are written, and those that are written, for example by Sumet Jumsai, is written in Thai which I can't read. In Malaysia itself Nakula, a non-architect, tried to write a book. It is the first ever

written about Malaysian architecture. We have three schools of architecture, sharing one little book, written by a non-architect, and we want to talk about identity?

Student

When I first came to this seminar, I expected some answers to the problem of identity. But now I know that there is no hard and fast rule as to what identity should be like, and so I can rest assured that when my lecturers question me about identity, I can always ask them "do you really know yourselves?"

Another point I would like to make is that it is actually due to patrons or clients that our architecture or designs stand as they do. So perhaps these seminars should also be open to other learned people, people who are interested in architecture and could be our clients. The Sultans, for instance are the ones who say what identity should be. For example, you see the so called archway to Kuala Lumpur, it has been called a white elephant but like it or not, it is there, and who decided that it should be there?

Ezrin Arbi

I came here with high hopes that I would learn something concrete from you giant practitioners. But after three days here, I doubt if that hope will be fulfilled. You must have something about the "Search for Identity in Architecture" at the back of your minds. Maybe the objective is to identify the factors that would contribute towards the making of that identity, but of all the papers, I think Robi Sularto's paper was the only one which tried to define the word 'identity', and then Mona Serageldin made a few suggestions regarding it, and later on Kenneth Yeang. Maybe it is not too late for me to quote the definition of the word identity from two dictionaries.

"The quality or condition of being the same; absolute or essential sameness or oneness; individuality or personality; the condition of being identified in feeling, interest, etc."

That is what the Oxford dictionary says. And Webster says that identity is:

"The condition or fact of being the same in all qualities under consideration, sameness, oneness. The condition or fact of being some specific person or thing, individuality; the condition or fact of being the same as something or someone assumed, described or claimed."

I hope that we all, to a certain extent, subscribe to this definition. Otherwise we will be talking about an iden-

tity which is defined differently according to the number of persons who are present in this seminar.

The second key word is architecture. As students of architecture we may not have to define that, but if we agree that architecture is but one manifestation of culture, we should be talking about the relationship between identity and culture. Maybe one of the reasons there was such a negative reaction to the title of this seminar on the first day was that people were afraid that we would come up with something absolute. Well maybe we should not try to define what identity in architecture is, but we should at least try to find factors that will contribute towards identity in architecture. I think Japanese architecture has its own identity. Can you help us identify the things that give Japanese architecture that identity? In our own context, maybe because we have been developing so fast, and most of our architects are educated abroad, what they reproduce here is what they see in London or Melbourne, and soon our cities will be full of this undesirable architecture. However talking about bad architecture, please do not confine it to foreign produce or foreign designed architecture. There are many, maybe more pieces of bad architecture produced by local architects.

Abdullah Mohammad (Nakula)

I find the best approach to the search for identity in South East Asia is to seek the common thoughts or common faith in the religions of the South East Asian people as their philosophical motif. Based on one common faith and one common design we can build a modern identity for South East Asian architecture, conforming to modern economic and social needs.

Tao Ho

There is a danger in defining something, because once you give something a definition, it always disappears, and becomes something else. Lao Tse said that the name that can be named is not the true name. So I think the search for identity is a continuous process.

If I may give my own tangible approach to the problem, as I go about the search for identity in Chinese architecture. In this search, I separate the timeless elements from the transitory elements of architecture. Timeless elements are those coming from nature, from the people, and the things that do not change and become a symbol of their culture. The transitory elements are the use of materials, and the particular forms of buildings. It is the direct expression of the time in which the building was built.

So let us forget about the transitory element, because

that is the kind of material we are dealing with today — concrete, glass, steel, aluminium, etc. In the search for identity, can we reintroduce some of the timeless elements of our own heritage? For example, in Chinese architecture, there are several timeless elements that make it so distinctive. One is the roof. As a unifying factor or as a symbolic form of the building it is a very strong element in Chinese architecture. The second thing is the duality of meanings in the building architectural elements. In Chinese architecture, every single element, whether a column or a beam, carries a symbolic and a functional meaning. And out of the interaction of the symbolic and functional meanings it also becomes a part of the decoration. All the brackets on Chinese roofs and all the columns and beams, they are in fact part of the interior design of the buildings as well. Apart from that they give a sense of scale to the building and I find this to be a very important timeless element in Chinese architecture. The third timeless element is the hierarchy and the sequence of space. You go through one type of space into another and experience a variety and hierarchy of spaces, both interior and exterior. The fourth element is the interplay of formality and informality. Sometimes open spaces become very informal whereas the architecture itself remains formal in the extreme. This has a lot to do with two basic Chinese philosophies: the Confucian formality and the informality of Taoism. The interplay of these two becomes a very strong shaping force in our cultural and architectural heritage. Another element is the harmony with nature. Harmony doesn't mean that you design a building and it harmonises with nature because of its similarity to it. It can be part of this harmony even in contrast. Contrast means the appropriate relationship with nature whether you go against it or with it, but always taking the surrounding nature and environment into the design. Lastly, there is the importance of recognition of an architecture built out of a modular system. The detail is very flamboyant in its motif but the underlying factor is that it is all modular. In Chinese architecture that is even taken down into the scale of designing a whole city on a modular system.

Fawizah Kamal

If we are expecting to come up with a specific form as the answer to identity we are making a mistake, because forms change and their meanings change with time. Say a hundred years ago it was an accepted thing to have long hair. Now we have short hair and it is only hippies who wear their hair long. So meanings change with time and maybe the answers might come in other ways. Obviously there is such a thing as identity, or we could not be identified. But what is it? Perhaps it is the structure of the form i.e. the princi-

ples of it. Like for instance harmony, equilibrium, and things like that. Perhaps it is the deeper essence of these words which you will find common in all religions. We are simply talking about refinement of form. Why don't we talk about the deeper manifestations for which we will have to go much deeper into the issue than we have done up to now

Sumet Jumsai

I have already proven that there is an existing identity, a set of common denominators in the region. So if we are here to talk about regional identity, South East Asian identity in particular there is no need to go on about national identity in architecture. As a matter of fact, I would like to give an example of just such a mistake that we made in Thailand Thirty years ago, our government gave out a set of formulae for a national identity. There was a series of stylistic formulae in architecture, that showed the traditional Thai roofs, etc As a result of this, traditional Thai architecture was killed and it is only now that we are beginning to go back to the essence of traditional architecture. Once you start talking about national identity you bring in forces of divisiveness, and this creates other kinds of cultural and political back-eddies, which are inherent even in religions. Once you start talking about Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist points of view of architecture, you are bringing in layers and layers of back-eddies. And these back-eddies tend to blur the original instinct of people; if you like, the common denominator of humans.

Romi Khosla

As I see it there are two aspects to architecture: the technical aspect and the ideological aspect. The technical architect is a specialist worker Anybody who considers himself to be a purely technical worker and refuses to accept any responsibility for the fundamental choices, which he says he leaves to the developer is certainly betraying his social position. If he simply accepts fundamental decisions, then he may be a technical architect, but he is not a whole person. The real struggle is to search for alternatives. There is no rule which says that an architect should stay with buildings only and he has a right and the intelligence to question the fundamental issues of society, town planning and the way cities are brought about. In a talk about identity it is necessary to take a very large overview of social values. You cannot advocate a certain kind of building because it is in a context it also belongs to a certain ideology A building in Houston comes out of a certain ideology. You cannot transplant it into a different social context without agreeing that ideology

from where it comes is good. So it is extremely important to seek out those architects who have an ideological position or who are searching for one viz-a-viz their role in society as a whole, apart from their professional roles. It is in the works of those architects that we will find identity. Our societies in Asia are going through tremendous turmoil in which people are beginning to take sides; and I think it is very important for the architect to decide on which side he is because it is going to influence his work. And if he doesn't think about it I don't think his work is important.

Eric Lye

It is not true to say that westerners never talk about identity. I remember Tay Kheng Soon and I were at the Architectural Association twenty years ago when the GLC was talking about aesthetics, regulations, imageability, and how to beautify London. So they were talking of a kind of British identity if you like; they relate to St Paul's and to the spire on the south of Thames. Yes, they were worried too, because the high-rise is not something characteristic of the British tradition.