

**Architecture Beyond Cultural Politics:**  
Western Practice in the Arabian Peninsula

by  
**Tarek Beshir**  
Bachelor of Architecture  
Cairo University  
Cairo, Egypt  
June 1981

Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science in Architecture Studies at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
June, 1993

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Signature of Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Tarek Beshir  
Department of Architecture  
May 7, 1993

Certified by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sibel Bozdogan  
Assistant Professor of Architecture  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Julian Beinart  
Chairman  
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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MAY 02 1993



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## **ABSTRACT**

Much of the recent architectural discourse in the Gulf States is permeated by a passionate preoccupation with narratives of identity and self-definition. During the last two decades, these states invited an overwhelming number of western architects to participate in development projects. The work of these architects appears to involve a multitude of interpretations. At one end is the architect's own theoretical position and autonomous architectural discourse, while at the other end is the cultural and ideological circumstances by which the architect's work and ideas are received and understood.

This study is focused on two institutional buildings designed by two western architects: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh by Henning Larsen, and the National Assembly in Kuwait by Jorn Utzon. A critical reading of texts and representations of these buildings provides a vehicle to expose the explicit and implicit theoretical positions of the two architects and to offer a critique of the cultural politics of identity by which the architect's work and ideas are received.

This study argues that the "discursive practice" and the cultural politics underlying the work of architecture serve to place identity as the centerpiece of discussion which in turn reduces architecture to a set of prevalent characterizations and obscures any meaningful analysis of work and ideas.

**Thesis Supervisor: Sibel Bozdogan.**  
**Title: Assistant Professor of Architecture.**



## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I wish to thank the Aga Khan Program for making this endeavor possible and providing me with this invaluable opportunity to study at M.I.T.

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my thesis advisor, Sibel Bozdogan for her invaluable guidance and constructive criticism which helped a great deal in focusing and clarifying the structure of my arguments. Her courses and intellectual rigor has been the source of inspiration.

I am grateful to Ronald Lewcock for his sustained encouragement and insightful comments. I also wish to thank Masood Khan for his continuous support and for sharing his insights and time with me. To Akos Moravinski, I am also indebted for his helpful criticism and guidance.

My special thanks and great debt to Khaled Asfour for his continuous concern, invaluable help and encouragement over long distance calls. I would like to extend my appreciation to the staff of MIT libraries specially to Omar Khalidi for his assistance in obtaining the necessary material.

To May and Yasser who made my stay at MIT and Boston, rather pleasant and to whom I owe much more than I can express. My two years would never have been the same without Wael Al-Masri.

Last but not least, no words can express my gratitude towards my wife and companion Nadia, for her unflagging support in all my endeavors and who has bared my continuous inconveniences without complain. To her continuous sacrifices along with her refreshing optimism, I am indebted. To my daughter Yasmeen who brought happiness, liveliness and blessings with her coming to our lives.



## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	3
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	5
<b>Table of Contents</b>	7
<b>I. Introduction</b>	9
<b>II. The National Assembly Building in Kuwait by Jorn Utzon</b>	23
Utzon's work in the context of Western theory	
The Political and Cultural Context of the Kuwait National Assembly building	
Building program	
The monumental canopy	
Folded roofs versus 'billowing tents'	
The traditional bazaar	
<b>III. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh by Henning Larsen</b>	49
Larsen's work in the context of Western theory	
The Political and Cultural Context of the Minis- try building	
Competition statements and building program	
'Lessons from the Orient'	
Anonymous facades	
A bureucratic corridor versus a merchant's bazaar	
Courtyards and the 'Islamic dream of paradise'	
The urban complex	
The modern mushrabiyya	
Discursive interpretations	
The building and the text: a world apart	
<b>IV- Reflections</b>	79
<b>Appendix</b>	89
<b>Sources of Illustrations</b>	93
<b>Bibliography</b>	99





# I

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## Introduction



## **Introduction:**

During the last two decades, particularly after the oil boom, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Kuwait invited a sizable number of western architects to design many of their major institutional buildings. This study attempts to understand the complexities involved in the work and practice of western architects in the Gulf region. Two major institutional buildings are selected as case studies. Both buildings were designed by two prominent western architects: the Kuwait National Assembly in Kuwait by Jorn Utzon and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh by Henning Larsen.

Institutional buildings in the Gulf region are usually a form of cultural representation reflecting the client's projected identity or some version of the architect's own judgements. These buildings, designed by western architects, often provoke a set of questions that impinge on the architectural production itself: what are the implicit and explicit theoretical positions of the architect and is there a discrepancy between them? What is the architect's understanding and knowledge of the other culture? How far does the architect respond to the client's expectations? What are the cultural and ideological circumstances in which his work and ideas are received?

The thesis attempts to investigate these questions from within the epistemological framework that the architectural artifact possibly involves the simultaneous understanding of two levels of thinking. First, the architect's private level of thinking, that is, his theoretical positions and relative program of action which are consistently present in his body of work and frequently assert his axioms. Second, the public level of thinking that encom-

passes the culture at large with which the architect interacts. The artifact produced by the architect, in the first case, is based on an autonomous body of architectural knowledge which avoids its cultural situatedness. In the second case, however, the artifact is the product of cultural predicaments based on ideological, political and socio-economic factors.<sup>1</sup> Between the two levels of thinking there is an interaction that can be described as reciprocal and can influence the relation between architecture and culture in general.

This epistemological framework acquires a special position in the practice of western architects in the Gulf region. The relation between the two levels of thinking, although initially reciprocal and intertwined in nature, eventually becomes convoluted where the second level of thinking dominates. A reciprocal relationship takes place when the architect shapes his building according to his own sphere of architectural knowledge and theoretical positions taking into consideration the cultural milieu, the environment and the client's interests and expectations. A convoluted relationship then comes into play when the architect's work and ideas are introduced to his client's culture to acquire a new body of meanings, a new set of rational arguments that might be independent from his initial sphere of knowledge.

In this vein, the architect may begin to respond by holding two different positions at the same time: one implicit and the other explicit. His espoused theory of action (his explicit position) which he adopts as the basis of his communication with others, may or may not be compatible with the theory-in-use which actually governs his actions (implicit position).<sup>2</sup>

In their theoretical statements and architectural positions, architects, as well as critics, may then come to stress

or rather inflate the second level of thinking at the expense of the first, especially if their text and theoretical arguments is read by the audience of the client's culture. Michel Foucault dismisses the credibility of such type of text which frequently results in a "reductionist" approach. He stresses the importance of recognizing the discontinuities, inconsistencies or contradictions that run throughout cultural history. Foucault calls for building up a new approach to which he gives the name *Archaeology*.<sup>3</sup> He describes 'Archeology' as an anti-reductionist approach which rejects flattening out or suppressing evidence in order to create a story which may be simpler or more cogent. Archaeology, according to Foucault, is the activity of putting together fragments which appear to be disconnected and disparate, while knowing that it will never be possible to assemble all the parts or create a whole picture.

The act of re-introducing the artifact through a new set of rationales different from the initial set which were established to satisfy a particular agenda, that is specifying 'a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge' and 'fixing the norm for the elaboration of concepts and theories,' is coined by Foucault as "discursive practice." According to him, "discursive practice" is the interaction between theories and production. He argues that prescriptive theories, which come out of a "discourse" do not necessarily coincide with all individual works, even if these theories are manifested through individual works or announce their presence for the first time through one of them.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault's ideas of 'discourse' and 'discursive practice,' are inspirational for this study and offer insights the implications of which are relevant to a critical evaluation of the work of western architects in the Arabian Peninsula.

To be able to pursue "discursive practice," there must be a discourse that is initiated by certain actors. One set of actors are renowned architects, journalists, critics, historians, theoreticians and other intellectuals; all in great capacity, contribute to making and shaping the discourse of architecture that acts within a particular culture. Hence these actors play a crucial cultural role in influencing the way buildings are interpreted and evaluated.

In the Gulf region, there is another influential set of actors, namely, government agencies and cultural intellectuals. They tend to shape the official taste for architecture in accordance with changing political agendas and even regroup periodically the public opinion around this particular taste. These two set of actors meet each other through various discursive fields, one of which is competitions. The second set of actors invites the first to participate in design competitions either as evaluators or producers of ideas. Maximum agreement between the two parties evolves when "discursive practice" is brought into forceful play between them.

Design competitions sponsored by government agencies in the Gulf become a major architectural event when the subject of the competition is a prestigious enterprise. Competitions, in this case, bring several issues to discussion. First and foremost, the selection of internationally renowned architects for the competition by the promise of a sizable financial reward, ensures, to a great extent, a higher quality of return for investment on the sponsor's part. Second, the client's choice of jury members (predominantly a team of foreign consultants) and the announced design criteria express certain architectural preoccupations of the culture. Third, announcing the competition internationally brings prestige and publicity to the sponsors and promotes national pride through world recognition.

"Discursive practice" enters the process of design competitions the moment the statements of objectives are spelled out. Usually these statements are loaded with phrases that emphasize polarities and oppositions such as modernity and tradition, past and future, vernacular and monumental; to name but few of the most popular terms.

Many of the self-conscious historical references taken by western architects from the so-called generic tradition of "Islamic Architecture" are implied in the competition brief. For example, the brief written for the competition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh states that the main criterion is "to create a contemporary symbol of Islamic ideals which acknowledges the architectural traditions of Riyadh." In the case of Baghdad State Mosque competition, the brief stressed that "the monument should synthesize the history and heritage of Islam with the contemporary quality of life," and that "the design should follow Arab-Islamic style."

With these kinds of briefs, architects should then try to mediate between those binary opposites such as "history and heritage of Islam" versus "contemporary quality of life." They should resolve the riddle of "contemporary symbol of Islamic Ideals." Perry Neubauer, the chief architect of The Architects Collaborative (TAC) who was responsible for the design of several projects in the Gulf States, once reflected on this ambiguous situation by stating that, "None of our Arab clients have been able to explain in words how to express the Islamic style — or even what it is, for that matter. Rather they suggest that we visit important buildings and open spaces to interpret what we see in a modern concept."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Neubauer's statement is harsh on the client, yet apparently it helps to divert the blame away from western architects who pursue "discursive practice." For if they cannot meet the vague expectations of the brief through their design

solution, then at least through textual description of their projects. The thesis focuses on the discrepancy between the two.

Vagueness in competition descriptions may not be promoted by the inability of the client to explain precisely his objectives, as Neubauer suggested, but perhaps by the desire to demonstrate the ability of the developing countries to equate with the West on its own terms. Clifford Geertz depicts this situation:

The peoples of the new states are simultaneously animated by two independent, yet distinct and often opposed aspirations —the desire to be recognized, the assertion of the self and a demand that their identity is publicly acknowledged 'as being somebody in the world'; and the desire for progress and for 'playing a part in the larger arena of world politics,' and exercising influence among nations.<sup>6</sup>

The situation of Arab cultures caught between "opposed aspirations" started in the 50s and 60s when many of the old cities witnessed wholesale demolition of the traditional fabric to make way for wide streets and modern building blocks. Large avenues and roundabouts represented the triumph of the automobile in the metropolis. Many of the traditional buildings were perceived by city planners and government officials as obstructions to the modern interventions. The move towards 'modernism' in architecture was quite radical. It was espoused on the highest levels of the administration with unanimity and was implemented at all governmental levels with persistence. The tacit agenda of most of the governments in the Gulf region was to catch up with the material culture and technological advancement of the West. A direct appropriation of the "International Style" in the form of corporate towers and mass building blocks was adopted in the



region similar to that developed in the Western world during the 50's.

The decades of the 70's and 80's, however, witnessed a conspicuous shift on the architectural scene in many of the Gulf cities. The period was marked by a renewed interest in issues of cultural identity and Islamic tradition. Notion of 'Islamic architecture' came to the fore. With a new found respect for the great achievements of the past, the architectural culture in many of the Gulf states were searching for ways to reproduce in their contemporary architecture some of the vocabularies and forms of the traditional architecture particularly those which were identified as 'Islamic.' Alarmed by the disassociation of their cultural roots and the eradication of their traditional fabric, the architectural society in many of the Gulf countries became increasingly interested in issues of identity and self-definition. Consequently, terms such as authenticity, cultural continuity and local heritage came into vogue and progressively gained adherence.

This shift in attitudes towards history and traditional architecture in the 70's and 80's was coupled by an attack on modern architecture. The complexities of the 'Modern Movement' had no place in the minds of many Arab architects and architectural intellectuals. Terms like 'Modern,' 'Modernism,' and 'International Style' were lumped together and referred to as the source of the plight and facelessness of contemporary architecture in the Arab world. Return to the past was proposed as a solution to rectify the evils of 'Modern' architecture.

Sayyed Hussien Nasr, for example, advocates an anti-modernist stance and stresses the essentiality of tradition in increasing the authentic environment. He argues that modernity and modernization caused contemporary

designers to lose their inner sense of beauty, dignity, harmony and nobility which characterized the authentic manifestation of the Islamic spirit.<sup>7</sup> Secularization that spread in cities killed the imagination of the traditional Muslim artist who was nourished by symbols drawn from the Quran.<sup>8</sup>

According to Nasr, the solution to the crises within the Islamic architecture and the modern cities lies in a return to, what he calls, "traditional Islamic architecture" which he believes to be still alive in villages and small towns. Similar authors proposed architecture of resistance (synonymous for traditionalism and revivalism) as an alternative to re-establish continuity with the past and eradicate the impact of modernism.<sup>9</sup>

The preoccupation with issues of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in the Arab world, had its roots in the Western architectural discourse. The unified 'Modern Movement' of the 30's, depicted in the writing of influential historians such as Giedion, Pevsner and Hitchcock, was heavily scrutinized as the concern for historicism gathered momentum by the 70's. Since then, western architects, critics and historians advocated the coexistence of tradition and modernity. For example, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter invented the term "collage" and "bricolage" as devices of assembling elements and forms together from modern and traditional histories.<sup>10</sup>

This new approach, among others, called for "pluralistic" and "inclusive" attitudes to architecture rather than "exclusionist" and "reductionist" approaches that had come to dominate the architecture scene in the mid-twentieth century. There was the emphasis on establishing visual links with the past through the use of both historical forms and applied decoration. Robert Venturi, for example, argued for establishing the symbolic and sceno-

graphic dimensions of architecture as opposed to abstract, compositional concerns. "As an architect," he says, "I try to be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past, by precedent, thoughtfully considered.....I am for richness of meaning rather than clarity in meaning, for the implicit function as well as the explicit function."<sup>11</sup>

This pluralistic approach took many directions, however, some of which espoused polemical attacks on 'Modernism' such as that of Charles Jencks, who introduced the term "post-modernism" as a reaction against all forms of modernist expression in architecture. These polemical attacks and theoretical statements moved to the Arab world to become the dominant discourse on the architectural scene. The irony is that although recent critical theory in the West has already rectified the distorted image of the modern movement<sup>12</sup> and showed how it was invented as a unified doctrine,<sup>13</sup> there is still too much anti-modern rhetoric — comparable to that in the West — taken on board by many local architects and critics in the Arab world.

More relevant to my thesis, the attack on modernism forces many of the foreign architects involved in projects in the Gulf region, to pursue a "discursive practice" and become totally determined in their explicit positions to have their work accepted by their Gulf client. Pleasing the Gulf client is not the only incentive to pursue a "discursive practice" by Western architects. They are also motivated by the possible gain of an *Aga Khan Award for Excellence in Architecture* which was established in the late 70's. Not only is the Award one of the best paying cash prizes in the architecture field, but is always surrounded by sizable media coverage. To win the award means instant fame and more commissions in the Muslim world. For architects to win the Award, they should work hard

to localize their designs, even if this means starting with some "remote" theoretical premise and wrapping the architectural product with terms that are "close" to the local context.

It is in this kind of environment that the two western architects, Henning Larsen and Jorn Utzon, worked out their buildings: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Kuwait National Assembly. Famous as they are, for producing quality design backed by theoretical positions in their own cultures, these architects come to produce buildings in the Gulf where they engage themselves in cultural rhetoric. Vague descriptions of briefs may not be the only reason. Edward Said may tell us about another. It is the discourse of Orientalism in which the architects may engage themselves. Said writes:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.<sup>14</sup>

There are two branches of the Orientalist discourse. The first pertains to a group of artists and scholars, mainly from Western Europe, who travelled to the Orient from the seventeenth century onwards and gradually established the latter as the subject matter of representation through illustrated travel accounts, paintings and sketches. The Orient, as Said has shown us, was systematically objectified by these travelers into a form of discourse as well as into a stereotypical image for consumption and a stylistic category in architecture. More relevant to the thesis is the second branch of Orientalists which is linked with the contemporary scholars who are

still hitherto, interested in the study and interpretations of the Orient, particularly Islamic cultures.

Contemporary scholars specialized in the art and architecture of the Muslim world produce texts that constitute a primary source for western architects. Some of these texts are fraught with distortions that range from sweeping generalizations and unification of periods and styles to assumptions based on the negation of the West. Ernst Grube, for example, characterizes the architecture of the Islamic world as 'hidden architecture.'<sup>15</sup> He emphasizes the 'interiority' of all Islamic architecture and argues that it is rare that an 'Islamic building' can be understood, or even its principle feature identified, by its exterior. Moreover, he perceives Islamic architecture as antithetical to that of the West. He writes, "Islamic architecture at its best, and at its most 'Islamic,' is truly a negation of architecture as conceived in Europe."<sup>16</sup> In this respect, Grube authoritative remarks on the architecture of the Islamic world reflects an Orientalist discourse which is determined to prove the authority of the West over the East through a "reductivist" scholarship.

The problem lies in the fact that many western architects working in the Gulf, rely on such texts that had already undergone a "discursive practice." How then can they escape the same practice? The thesis focuses on this line of thinking since the work of Utzon and Larsen in the Arabian Peninsula is no exception.

In the light of this, the work of both architects in the Gulf region will be critically examined in the context of two settings: the first is the architect's own theoretical position in relation to the major preoccupation of the architectural culture at large. The second setting is the ways in which his work and ideas were received and presented in the Arabian Peninsula.

## Notes:

- 1 Michael Hays, "Critical Architecture : Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta* 21, (1984), pp. 15-29.
- 2 Royston Landau, "Notes on the concept of an architectural position," *AA Files* 1, (81-82), pp. 111-114. See also, Argyris, Chris and Schon, Donald, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, Jossey-Bass, 1974.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
- 4 Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, Cornell, 1977, p. 199.
- 5 Glenn Lawry, *American Architects in the Arab World*, American Arab Affairs Council, 1983, p. 3.
- 6 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 258.
- 7 Sayyed Hussein Nasr, "The Contemporary Muslim and Architectural Transformation of the Islamic Urban Environment," *Towards an Architecture in the Spirit of Islam*, (The Aga Khan Awards for Architecture) Philadelphia, (1980), p.2
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Examples of other writers that advocate a similar approach, but less philosophical, are Tareq Abdel Fattah "Modern Architecture in Kuwait" in *Al-Benaa* (April/May 1989); pp. 38-42; and Udo Kultuman in *Mimar* who maintained this line of thought throughout all his articles, see "Contemporary Arab Architecture: The Architecture of the Gulf States" in *Mimar*, (Dec. 1984), pp. 50-57.
- 10 Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978.
- 11 Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977, p. 16.
- 12 See Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," *Assemblage* 2 (February 1987), pp. 19-32.
- 13 See Giorgio Cuicci, "The Invention of the Modern Movement," *Oppositions* 24 (Spring 1981), pp. 69-91.
- 14 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1987, p.3.
- 15 Ernst Grube, "What is Islamic Architecture," *Architecture of the Islamic World: It History and Social Meaning* (George Michell ed.), London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, pp. 10,11.
- 16 Ibid.

# II

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## The Kuwait National Assembly

Kuwait

*by Jorn Utzon*





### **Utzon's work in the context of Western theory:**

Utzon's early academic experience at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen was under the direction of the historian and town planner Steen Eiler Rasmussen. His first key inspiration was Alvar Aalto and Gunner Asplund whom he worked with in 1945. The brief apprenticeship with Aalto left a strong influence on him and nourished his sense for the physical and natural context. Working with the French sculptor Henri Laurens, Utzon was profoundly influenced by the former's perception of suspended sculptural forms.<sup>1</sup>

In 1947, Utzon set up his first partnership with the architecture historian, Tobias Faber. Following the theories advanced by D'Arcy Thompson in his book 'On Growth and Form,' Utzon and Faber issued a joint manifesto, entitled, 'Trends in Contemporary Architecture' wherein they attempted to derive their architecture from natural forms of accretion and growth.

Utzon's affinity with landscape shaped by topography, material, craft and architecture engendered by natural forces is a fundamental tenet in his architecture. The architectural critic Peterson testifies to Utzon's affinity with nature. He writes, "To this artist, there is no essential difference between a city organism and a plant organism. He deducts living truths from the construction of nature and reshapes them quickly into rough drafts of houses for human beings..... His houses grow, like organisms, they reflect the form of nature's growth, they are not theoretical frameworks for human life but live their own life because they are structured according to the same physical laws that govern their inhabitants."<sup>2</sup>

The period between 1945 and 1957 of Utzon's life was one of assimilating a great variety of places and cultures and

integrating his experiences into a comprehensive and coherent design philosophy. His extensive travels to the Far East were already a manifestation of his tendency to seek inspiration outside the Scandinavian tradition.

A visit to Morocco in 1948 supplied Utzon with a model for his notion of 'additive architecture' which he adopted in several of his housing schemes. In 1949, a scholarship took him to Taliesen West and Taliesen East where he spent a short time with Frank Lloyd Wright by whom he was profoundly influenced. The first example of this influence was Utzon's own house in Hellebaek built in 1952 which was an independent interpretation of Wright's Usonian houses.

Utzon's encounter with different cultures and places led remote themes to converge into ideas dormant in his own creativity. In many cultures which he visited including that of Mexico, China, Nepal, India and Japan; he noticed an almost generic opposition between a heavy-weight podium and a light-weight roof that floats above it.<sup>3</sup> In his seminal article "Platforms and Plateaus: The Ideas of a Danish Architect," published in 1963, Utzon posits the roof/platform paradigm as a mean of architectonic expression and structural composition. The physical tension induced by the opposition of hovering roofs and strong earth hugging platforms defines his architectural space and unfolds in his work one after the other, where it is invariably rendered as a shell roof or a folded slab structure suspended over a terraced earthwork. According to Utzon, "(T)here is a magic in the play between roof and platform."<sup>4</sup> The origin of the roof/platform is clearly manifested in his early generic sketches.

When he wishes to show the nature of the Japanese house, Utzon sketches the roof hovering above the floor, without including the transparent walls (Fig. 1). He



Fig. 1 Japanese house, conceptual sketch.



Fig. 2 Clouds over the sea, conceptual sketch.

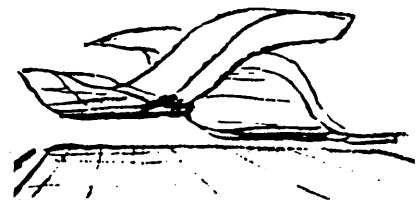


Fig. 3 Sydney OperaHouse, preliminary sketch.



Fig. 4 Sydney OperaHouse, conceptual sketch.

Fig. 5 Sydney Opera House, final sketch.



describes the floor in a traditional Japanese house as "a delicate, bridge-like platform. This Japanese platform is like a table, and you do not walk on a table top. It is a piece of furniture."<sup>5</sup>

The 'clouds over sea' sketch depicts the sea as a horizontal line with mounting clouds above it (Fig. 2). This sketch is a prefiguration of the shell roof of the Sydney Opera House where Utzon perceives the roof as hovering over the horizontal podium and touching it at certain points (Fig. 3, 4, 5). Utzon's ideas and intentions behind this project are clearly stated in his own words:

The Sydney Opera House is one of those buildings where the roof is of major importance. It a house which one will see from above, will sail around, because it sits on a point sticking out into a harbor..... This means that one could not design a building for such an exposed position without paying attention to the roof. One could not have a flat roof filled with ventilation pipes, in fact, one must have a fifth facade which is just as important as the other facades.<sup>6</sup>

Utzon's preliminary sketches for the Bagsvaerd Church confirm his penchant for the roof/platform idea. First, he sketches a group of people standing on a ground which extends towards a distant horizon with clouds offering spatial definition to the scene (Fig. 6). In his second sketch, however, the same elements are present, but the ground is treated as a built floor and the clouds are depicted as a series of hovering vaults. Between floor and

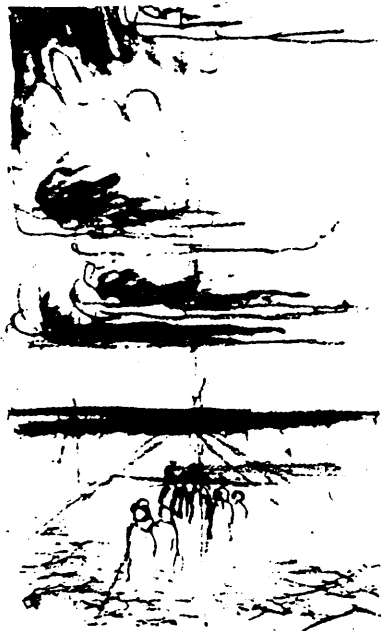


Fig. 6 Bagsvaerd Church, preliminary sketch.

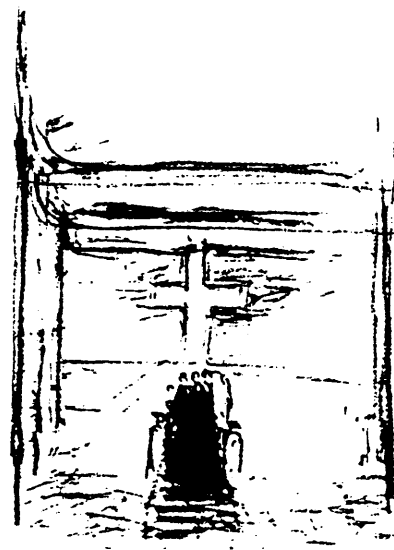


Fig. 7 Bagsvaerd Church, final sketch.

ceiling, the group of human beings are directed towards a large cross (Fig. 7).

Although Utzon's preoccupation with the notion of 'roof and platform' is not articulated as an explicit theoretical statement, yet it may be read as a departure from a search for initial principles and primary axioms in architecture, comparable to the 'primitive hut' posited by Laugier in his *Essai sur L'architecture* of 1753 and Semper's formula of the opposition between the *tectonics* of the roofwork and the *stereotomics* of the earthwork.<sup>7</sup>

Utzon's countervailing but complementary opposition of roofs and platforms generally appears in three type-forms, each being largely determined by a variation in the roof. The first of these types, the courtyard and the monopitched roof, appears in two related housing schemes realized in the early sixties: the Kingo and Fredensborg residential settlements. The houses are composed of L-shaped courtyard units covered by light-weight monopitched roofs and arranged in contiguous clusters with the potential to accommodate themselves to any topography (Fig. 8, 9).

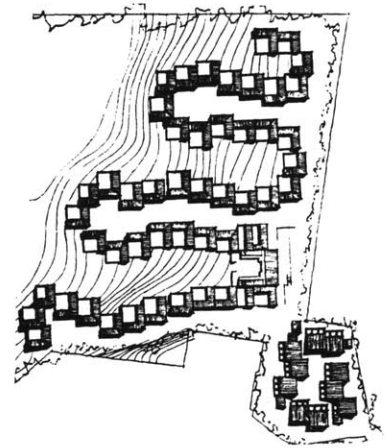


Fig. 8 Terrace Houses at Fredensborg, North Zealand, 1962-63, general site plan and ground floor plan of a typical unit with garden.

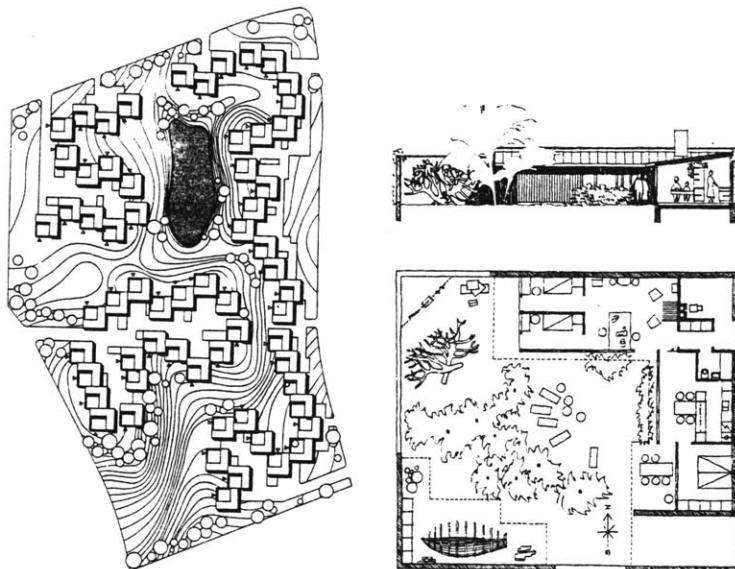
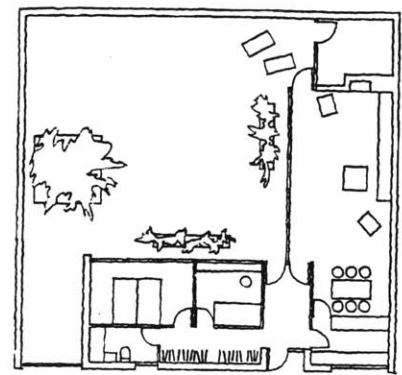
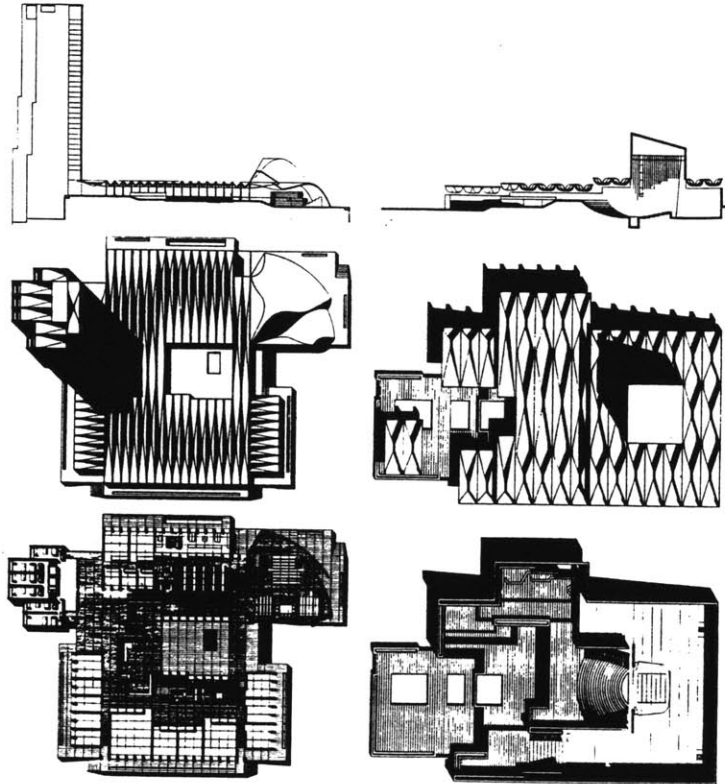
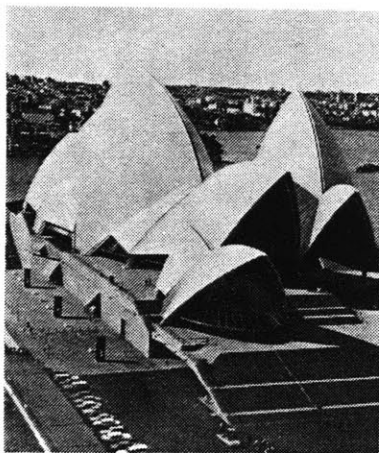


Fig. 9 Kingo Houses, near Elsinore, Zealand, 1950-60, general site plan, cross section and ground floor plan of a typical house unit with garden court.

*Fig. 10 Competition scheme for the high school at Elsinore, Zealand 1958, longitudinal section, roof plan and ground floor plan. (left)*



*Fig. 11 Competition scheme for World Exhibition, Copenhagen 1959, longitudinal section, roof plan and ground floor plan. (right)*



*Fig. 14 Sydney Opera House, general view.*

In the second type, the roof-work consists of a folded slab suspended above a raised earthwork. The folded-roof type manifests itself in Utzon's proposals in the late fifties for the High School at Elsinore in Denmark (Fig. 10). Also, this type appears in Utzon's competition schemes for the Zurich Opera house, the World Exhibition in Copenhagen and the Art Gallery project in Silkeborg (Fig. 11, 12, 13). The third type, the shell-roof usually surmounts assembly halls and appears repeatedly in the above mentioned projects attaining its fullest expression in the Sydney Opera House (Fig. 14).

Utzon's penchant for shell-forms and folded roofs plays an important role in his architecture. Concrete shells cover the public assembly halls, while the folded roofs cover the podium which accommodates generic institutional spaces. In most of his projects, shell roofs appear as public, symbolic elements that are readily distinguishable from the surrounding folded-plate roof. Thus, the

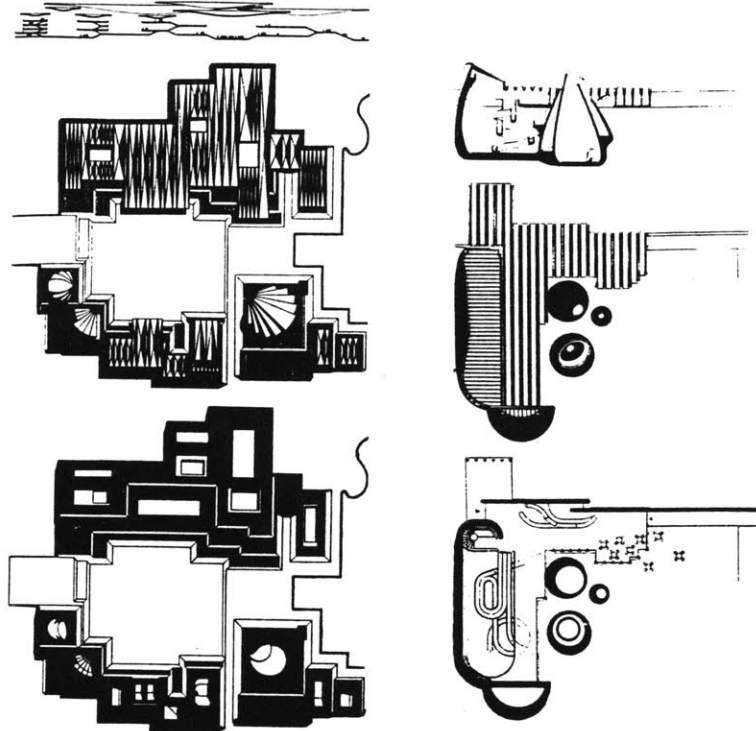


Fig. 12 Competition scheme for the Zurich Theater 1964, longitudinal section, roof plan and ground floor plan. (left)

Fig. 13 Art Gallery and Museum in Silkeborg 1963, section, roof plan and ground floor plan. (right)

visibility of Utzon's assembly halls, acts as 'spaces of public appearance' equivalent to Alvar Aalto's notion of 'city crown.'

Of equal importance, is Utzon's preoccupation with the idea of 'additive architecture' where the repetition of a single spatial unit responds to the requirements for extensions and modifications. The application of this additive principle is evident in several projects that were designed by Utzon in the sixties particularly that of the Farum Town Centre (Fig. 15) and the Herning School (Fig. 16). These projects demonstrate the degree of flexibility and freedom that can be achieved by using units and components to be developed in stages or continuously growing organically. Also, in the Jeddah Stadium proposal of 1969 (Fig. 17), Utzon combines, in different permutations, five generic structural units, each one being conceived in terms of its constitutive and connective role.<sup>8</sup> Utzon's notion of 'additive architecture' finds par-

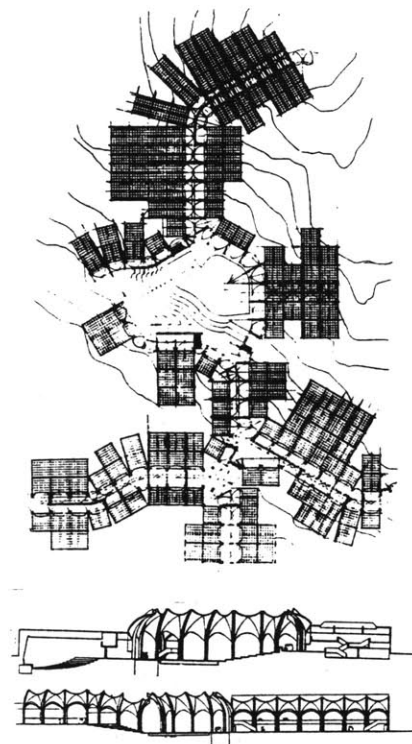


Fig. 15 Farum Town Center, general layout and sections.

Fig. 16 *Herning School Center, general layout.*

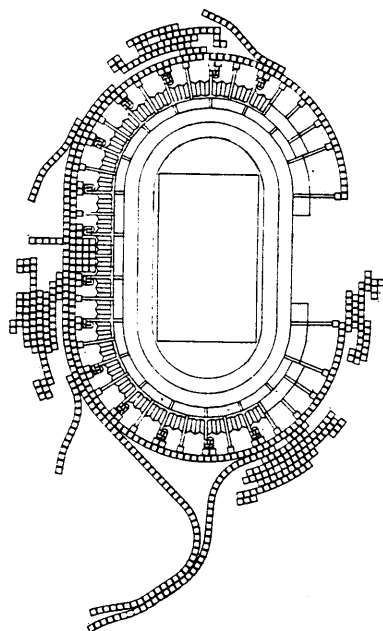
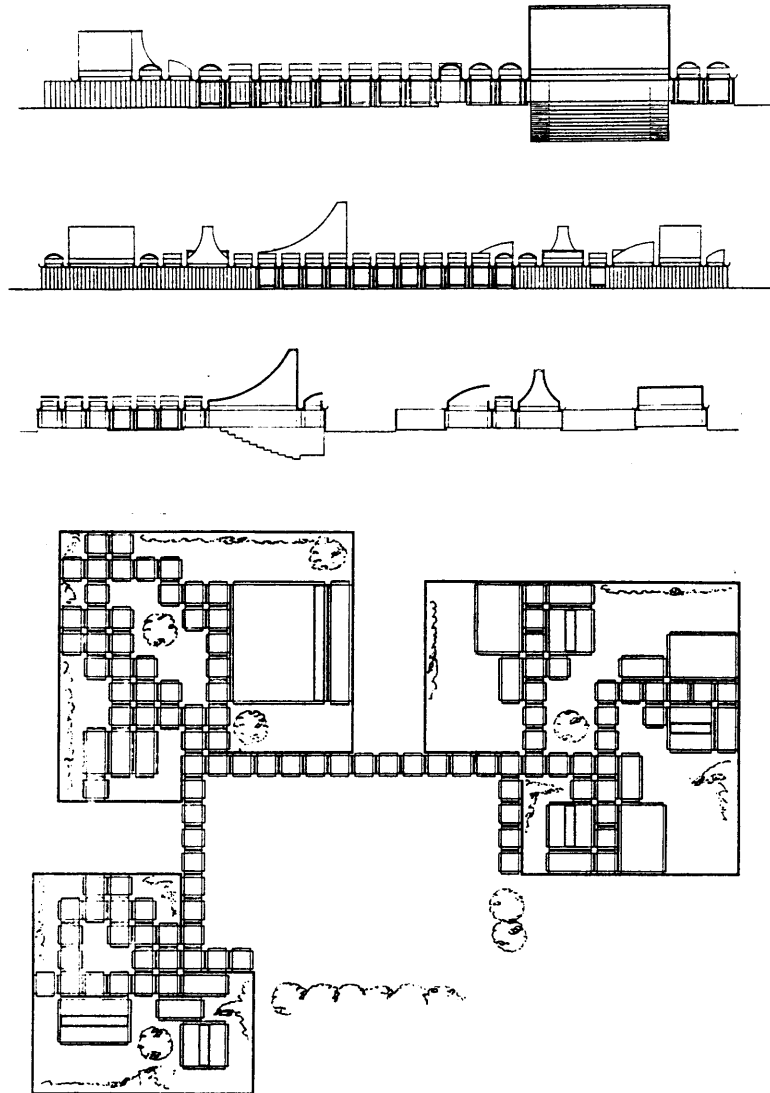


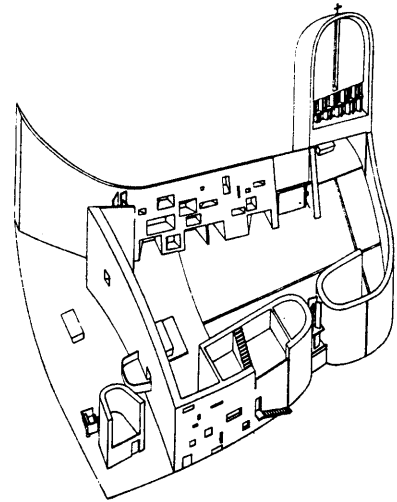
Fig. 17 *Jeddah stadium proposal 1969, mass plan.*

allel to the anthropological references underlying the work of Aldo Van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger; and Christopher Alexander's concepts of 'environmental structures.'<sup>9</sup>

Many historians, such as Philip Drew and Sigfried Giedion, portrayed the work of Utzon's generation as antithetical to that of the early generation. Drew states that "The inapplicability of the first generation's rigid rationalistic and extrinsic formulae as templates for structuring the environment has forced architects among Utzon's generation to investigate relatively freer, intrin-

sic system of order. The (latter) acquired an organic outlook which involved taking instructions from the environment instead of enforcing preconceived rationalistic structures upon it."<sup>10</sup> Thus, like Postmodernism which is typically defined as the antithesis of Modernism, the work of Utzon's generation was presented as an attempt to rectify the 'rational bias' and 'explicit functionalism' of the early generation. With the work of the latter depicted as passing through a phase of 'Confusion and Boredom' during the sixties, the work of Utzon's generation offered a new direction giving architecture a "poetic" and structural expression.<sup>11</sup>

One facet of rectifying the thought of the early generation was structural expressionism which spread in 1950s and marked the beginning of a wide range of experimentation with free roof structures. Prominent architects, such as Le Corbusier, who designed the Ronchamp Church (Fig. 18), and Eero Saarinen, who designed the TWA terminal, experimented with structural expressionism as an escape from the 'tyranny of the box.' The combination of allegorical forms and structural efficiency offered an opportunity for reconciling "expressionism" with "rationalism." Structural expressionism was of particular concern to Utzon where he professed in such an approach giving his buildings a rich formal language. With his Sydney Opera House (contemporary to Eero Saarinen's TWA), Utzon resolved the opposing tenets inherent in the work of the early generation: namely their claim to be scientific and rational and their tendency for an artistic and creative impulse.<sup>12</sup> This impulse and the suppressed expressionistic aspects of the modern movement arguably, were traced as far back as the 1920s when Eric Mendelson built his Einstein Tower at Potsdam.<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 19)



*Fig. 18 Ronchamp Church, Le Corbusier, 1952.*



*Fig. 19 Einstein Tower, Eric Mendelson, 1920.*



### **The Political and Cultural Context of the Kuwait National Assembly Building:**

Historically speaking, Kuwait is comprised of three main groups: the ruling family who were originally desert nomads, an oligarchy of merchants and a working class — mostly fishermen, pearl-divers and shipbuilders. Of these groups, the second has been by far the most powerful and dynamic social force. It was the merchants who provided the ruling family with their income in the shape of customs and duties and provided employment for the rest of the community.<sup>14</sup>

The choice of a ruler, in conformity with the tribal tradition, was usually regarded as a family affair; and while clearly it was no democracy, this primitive political system allowed the Kuwaitis wide freedom of action and expression. Public opinion was an important political force, hence, it was general practice for the ruler to consult the elders of the community on matters involving serious decisions. Law and order were maintained in a simple and unpretentious way in accordance with Islamic law as modified by tribal usage and local custom.<sup>15</sup> However, this triple social structure has been altered with the recent changes in the socio-political life.

Oil production which started in 1946 after the Second World War was the turning point in Kuwait's history. It transformed Kuwait from a small state into one of the wealthiest oil-producing countries. The new wealth created a demand for services to implement the ambitious programs planned by the government. Inevitably, an attractive market for labor was created and an overwhelming number of foreign expatriates flocked from other countries to Kuwait.

With the modernization programs and the reliance on

foreign expatriates in various development projects, it was natural that the growing size of the foreign community, not only challenged the traditional social and political structure of Kuwait, but also served to complicate the Kuwaiti sense of identity. The ethnic composition of the immigrants was heterogeneous and their social habits, cultures, creeds, and above all, political tendencies were numerous and widely divergent. So pervasive has been their influence that there is hardly an aspect of national life which does not bear their mark.

Alarmed by the potential for disruptive demographic imbalance (with the Kuwaitis numbering less than half of the total population),<sup>16</sup> the Kuwaiti government was prompted to take defensive measures which led to depriving the majority of the expatriates living in Kuwait from any permanent ties with the host country. They were denied citizenship and their naturalization into the host country were extremely strict. With little or no hope of being permanently integrated into the community, foreign expatriates were left without any sense of allegiance to Kuwait.<sup>17</sup> As a result, a growing dissent among them increased the potential for internal problems.<sup>18</sup> These problems were further compounded in the wake of the Iranian revolution by the religious tensions between the Kuwaiti Sunnis and the Shiite immigrants (from Iran and Iraq) who felt discriminated against by the Kuwaiti government.<sup>19</sup> As a result, a number of terrorists attacks were directed at institutional buildings and public facilities in an attempt to destabilize the country's national security.

The socio-political instability coupled by the religious tensions prompted the government, as a defensive way of asserting national identity, to request that the new National Assembly building express a local character. By emphasizing this concern for local character, the building



Fig. 20 'International Style' buildings after the oil boom.

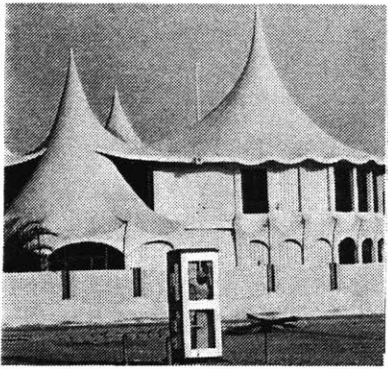


Fig. 21 Superficial clichés.

was to be perceived by the natives as a symbol of the government's commitment to perpetuating the special privileges of Kuwaiti citizens within the heterogeneous society in which they remained a minority.

In addition, this keen interest in asserting national identity—as a political expression—by dressing the building with local character was coupled by the contemporary architectural trend that called for buildings to be sympathetic to the architectural heritage of the society. The focus on architectural identity coincided with the widespread discontent with many of the 'international style' buildings constructed in the seventies (Fig. 20). As a result, the Municipality of Kuwait, supported by the Amir and the government, initiated a strong preservation campaign geared towards reviving the architectural heritage of the country. The *diwaniyyas* of the merchant families in the old city were renovated as a sign of salvaging what remained of the traditional buildings. A three-quarter scale Kuwaiti village was built in the city near the sea shore to remind the young generation of their history and architectural heritage. Old marketplaces were restored in order to "preserve the place of the souk in Kuwait's society, its connection with the country's tradition and its compatibility with modern requirements."<sup>20</sup> The period of the 70's marked an increasing tendency in using superficial clichés and forms such as tents and arches and the so called 'Islamic/Arabic' style was predominant. (Fig. 21)

### Building Program:

In 1973, the Kuwaiti government decided to build a new National Assembly to replace the old 'international' style Assembly Complex which was built during the 60's (Fig. 22). The decision to commission a prominent building to house the National Assembly and the particular forms with which the building was to be carried out were manifestations of the search for identity.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the old 1960's complex which was remote from the seat of amirial power, a far more prominent site along the Arabian Gulf was chosen to house the new National Assembly. The choice of the location was part of a larger plan intended to establish a host of prestigious buildings along the coastline. The new Assembly building was to join the Seif Palace (the administrative headquarters of the Amir), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Museum (Fig. 23). The site is a large plot of almost 120,000 sq. m. bounded by roads on three sides, one of them being the Arabian Gulf Street which runs along the sea shore (Fig. 24).

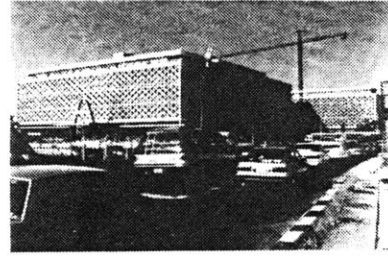


Fig. 22 Old National Assembly.

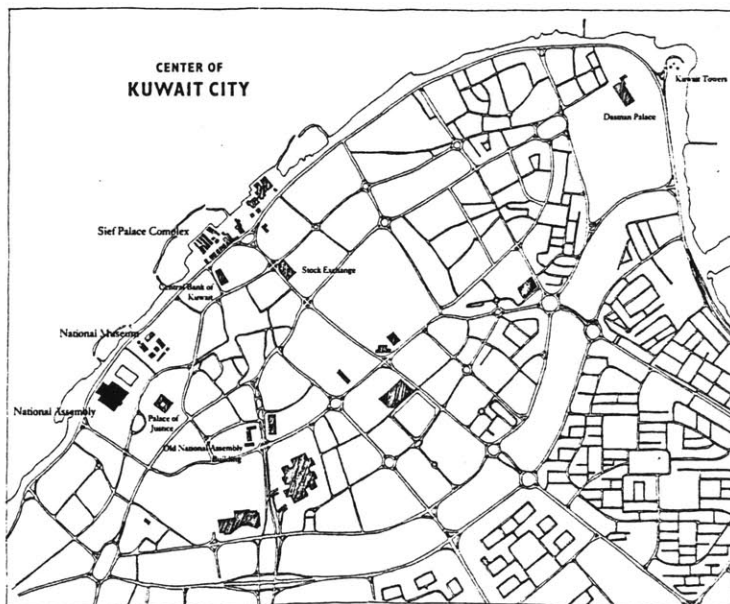
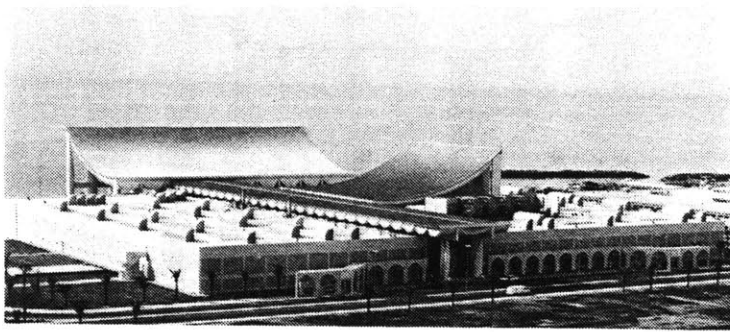


Fig. 23 Map of Kuwait city showing the location of the old and new National Assembly building.

Fig. 24 *New National Assembly.*



A limited design competition among six invited architects, was arranged for this purpose and juried by an international team chaired by a British architect.<sup>22</sup> According to the program, the design was to include the National Assembly Hall; a reception hall; lounges for the Amir of Kuwait; the Prime Minister, the President of the Assembly and other officials. Also to be included in the project were individual offices for Assembly members; administration offices; a library; a restaurant and a prayer hall.

Utzon received the first prize and later he was charged with the detailed design of the complex. The plan of the entire complex is a square, based on a module of five by five meters. Departmental offices and reception halls are all organized along a main central corridor. These offices are all arranged around small courtyards, connected to the central street via side corridors (Fig. 25). The flat roof is dotted with skylights in the form of half-barrel vaults providing natural light to the corridors.

In proposing his building to Aga Khan Award, Utzon states that it stands as "an excellent synthesis of traditional Arabic architectural principles and contemporary design expression."<sup>23</sup> Utzon's statements are clearly marked by the politics of identity and a strive to please his client by using terms of the much favored synthesis of 'tradition' and 'modernity.'

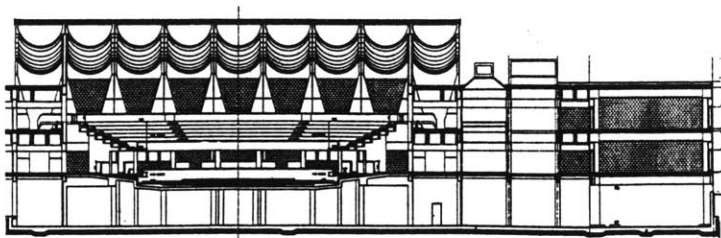
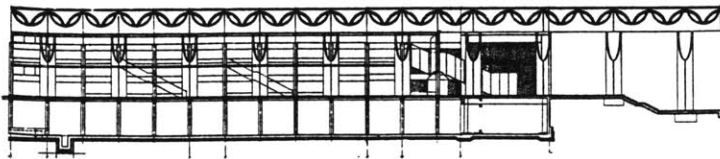
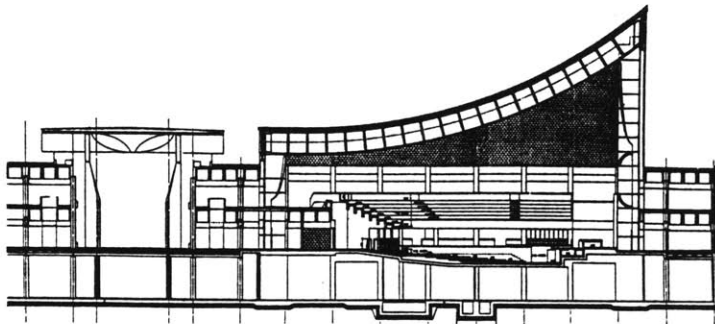
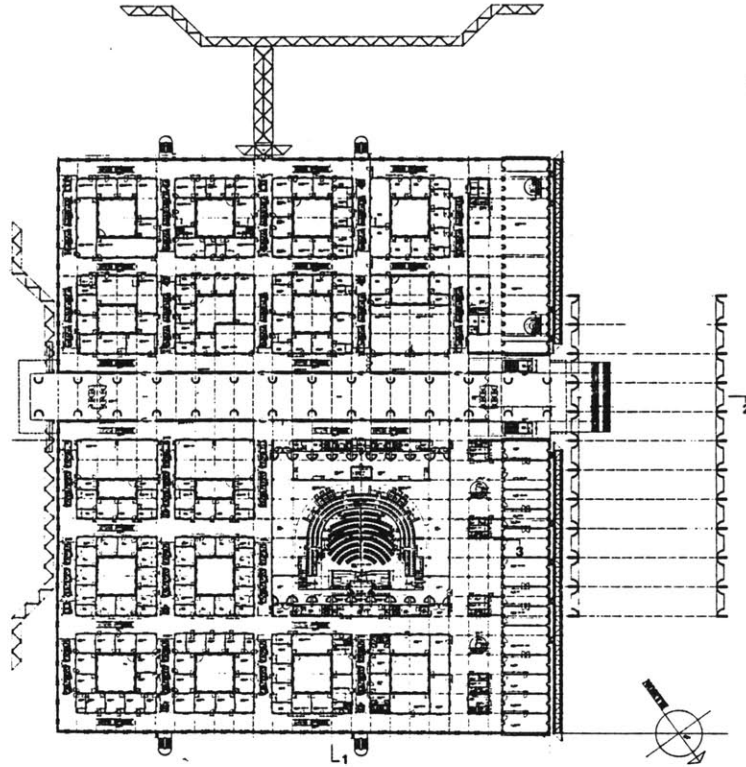


Fig. 25 National Assembly Building, ground floor plan, longitudinal section in main corridor and cross sections in Assembly Hall.

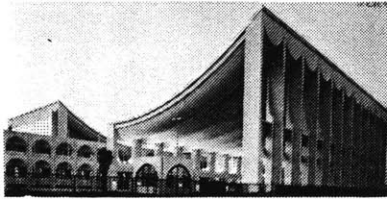


Fig. 26 Square canopy.

### The monumental canopy:

The central corridor, Utzon argues, "leads towards the ocean into a monumental canopy which gives shade to a large open space where the Kuwaiti people can meet the Amir."<sup>24</sup> The monumental canopy (Fig. 26), according to Utzon, functions as the old "diwaniyya"<sup>25</sup> that houses an Arab tradition of having a direct contact between the ruler and his people. Utzon even draws similarities between the canopy protecting the people from the severe sun, and the protection which the Amir extends to his subjects.

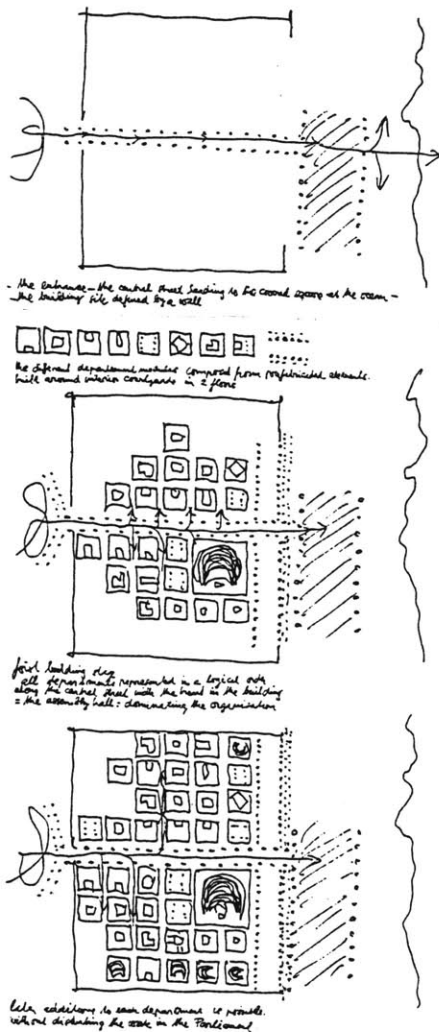


Fig. 27 Preliminary sketches showing Utzon's processional approach.

In Arab countries, Utzon states, "there is a tradition for very direct and close contact between the ruler and his people. The dangerously strong sunshine in Kuwait makes it necessary to protect oneself by seeking refuge in the shade. The shade is vital for existence, and this hall, the Covered Square, which provides shade for public gatherings, could perhaps be considered symbolic of the protection extended by a leader to his people."<sup>26</sup>

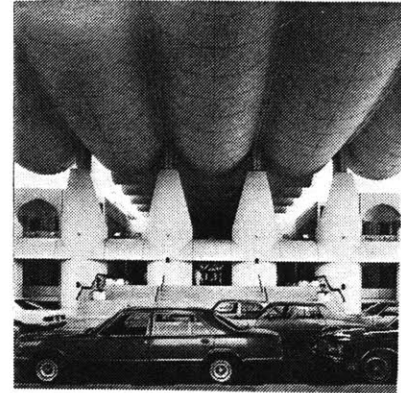
Although Utzon's attempt to revive the old Kuwaiti custom of informal gathering between the ruler and his people is to be commended, his intentions is at odds with the current political situation. Given the government's ceaseless quest for security and stability, especially after the tension raised between Kuwaiti Sunnis and Shiite immigrants who felt discrimination by the government,<sup>27</sup> one wonders if the client ever intended such public free access to the complex.

Utzon's initial sketches clearly show his intention to create a processional street leading through various departments and culminating with the monumental canopy overlooking the ocean (Fig. 27). Yet when reviewed by the client, the scheme was altered. Instead of using the

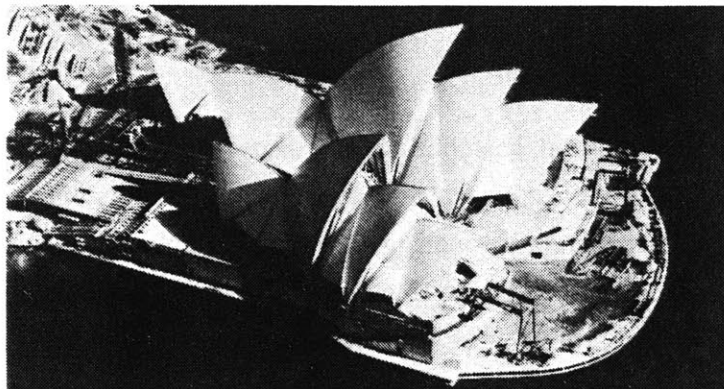
canopy as a meeting place for the Amir and his people - as initially intended by Utzon - eventually its function has been altered and it is currently used as a drop-off area where the leaders meet their cars (Fig. 28). Presumably, due to concerns for the personal security of the Amir and the National Assembly leaders, the public canopy lost its intended function and bears no relation to the existing political conditions.

Utzon, in this case, was trapped in his 'discursive practice.' He sold the idea of a canopy through statements that dwelled on a traditional custom (subjects meeting Amir), which have lost its strength in recent times. The act of justifying a historic form through with its historic customs that are no longer valid is clearly marked in Utzon's explicit statements. The Kuwaiti government may even prefer this analogy with a traditional custom, however, they couldn't have ignored the consequence of this particular case of the canopy for it promises insecurity to the Amir. In this regard, Utzon did not tailor his statements well enough to suit his client's needs. He was even completely out of touch with the reality of the cultural political situation.

If we exclude Utzon's political and historical justification of the canopy, we begin to understand its location overlooking the sea. It can be seen as a design approach which he already adopted in his previous work. In the Sydney



*Fig. 28 Square canopy used as a drop-off area.*



*Fig. 29 Sydney Opera House.*



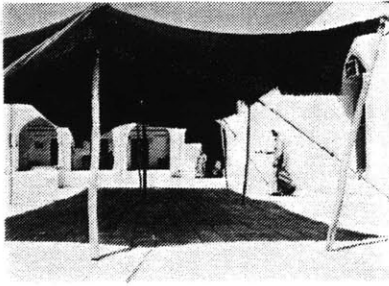


Fig. 30 Traditional tent.

Opera House, for example, Utzon designed a similar processional route that leads the audience from the main entrance through the concert halls to a monumental canopy overlooking the ocean. (Fig. 29)

#### Folded roofs versus 'billowing tents':

According to Utzon and his team, "The shape of the roof of the Assembly Hall and the covered Public Square in front of the main entrance conveys the lightness of a billowing Arabian tent."<sup>28</sup> In his attempt to dress the building with local identity, Utzon chose to evoke the symbolism of the bedouin tent (Fig. 30). However, in the way he has abstracted it, he delivered little of its imagery and even less of its principles. Arguably, his statement reinforces the stereotypical image that Arabs are synonymous with tents.<sup>29</sup>

Arab nomads were so accustomed to the feel of a flexible cloth roof over their heads that a solid roof constituted a threat. There are many stories of how these nomads were not used to sleep in a solid house for fear that the roof will fall and crush them. For the nomad, psychological protection — the feeling of security — is not tied to any absolute protection from the physical elements.<sup>30</sup> One wonders why Utzon begged the trouble to evoke cloth and make heavy sections of concrete "breathe, or perhaps sigh."<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, a tensile roof structure would have been much more appropriate to evoke cloth. To claim that the shape of roof of the Assembly Hall and the covered Public square convey the lightness of a billowing tent, in fact, belittle the *tour de force* of Utzon's expressionistic forms and sculptural tendencies.

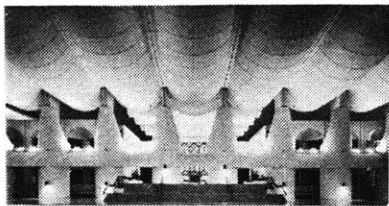


Fig. 31 Square Canopy, folded roof or billowing tent?

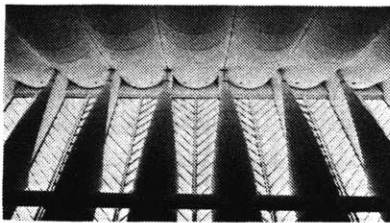


Fig. 32 Assembly Hall, folded roof or billowing tent?

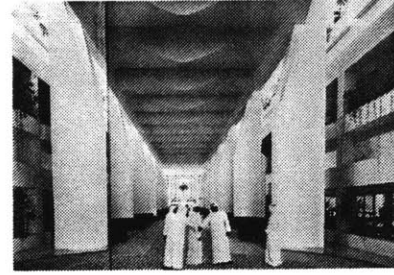
The form of the folded roof that covers the central corridor, the Assembly Hall and the monumental canopy (Fig. 31, 32, 33) are similar to many of those used by Utzon in

his early schemes, particularly that of the Elsinore School and the Zurich Opera House (Fig. 34). The similarity of the folded roofs in the foregoing buildings, is far more convincing than that of the 'billowing tents.' Apparently, Utzon chose to down play his preoccupation with folded roofs and preferred to repackage them as 'billowing tents' to suit his client's aspirations and his much cherished search for identity.

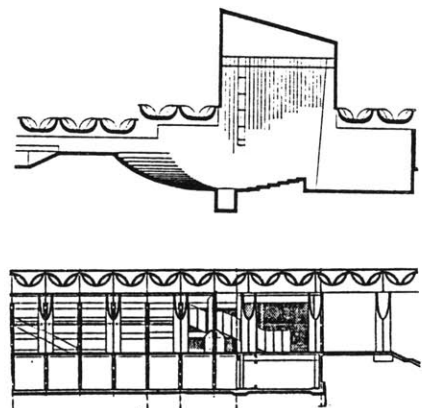
It is relevant at this point to expose how the folded roofs which Utzon adopts in many of his buildings is interpreted differently by architectural critics, each according to his/ her own discourse. In his six points for 'architecture of resistance,' Kenneth Frampton argues that, "the fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place."<sup>32</sup> To illustrate his notion of 'Critical Regionalism,' Frampton points out to Utzon's Bagsvaerd Church (Fig. 35) as a successful synthesis between universal civilization and local culture where he refers to the folded roof of the main hall as a Chinese pagoda. (Fig. 36)

William Curtis, on the other hand, offers another reading for the folded roofs that Utzon uses in his buildings. Citing the National Assembly as a successful example of 'Authentic Regionalism,' Curtis refers to the roofs of the main Assembly hall and entrance canopy as a contemporary version of a billowing tent. He writes, "The entire complex was covered by a spreading roof and in the case of the main chamber and hall there was an uncanny echo of the billowing forms of a tent..... The conception of the sheltering roof invokes tribal memories to do with the princely tent of the elders."<sup>33</sup>

The description of Utzon's folded roofs as a 'Chinese padoga' or a 'bedioun tent' clearly shows the transfer of



*Fig. 33 Central corridor, concrete folded roof.*



*Fig. 34 Zurich Opera and National Assembly, Longitudinal sections showing the similarities in Utzon's treatment of the roof.*

Fig. 35 Bagsvaerd Church, elevations, sections and plans.

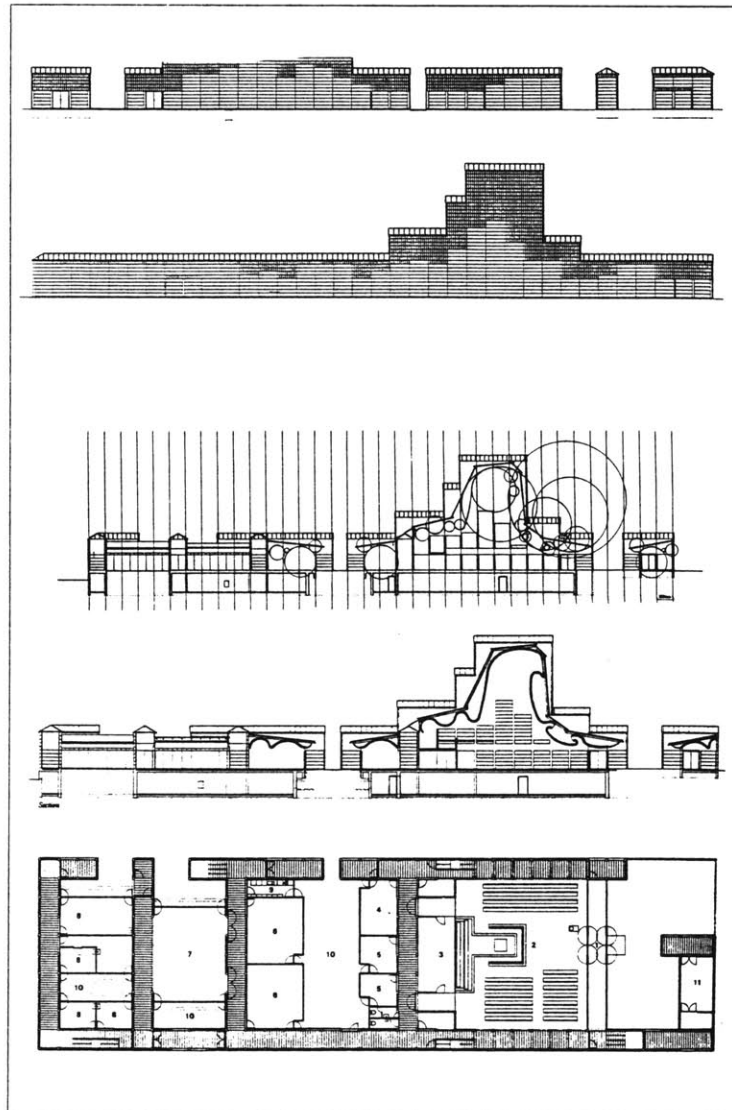
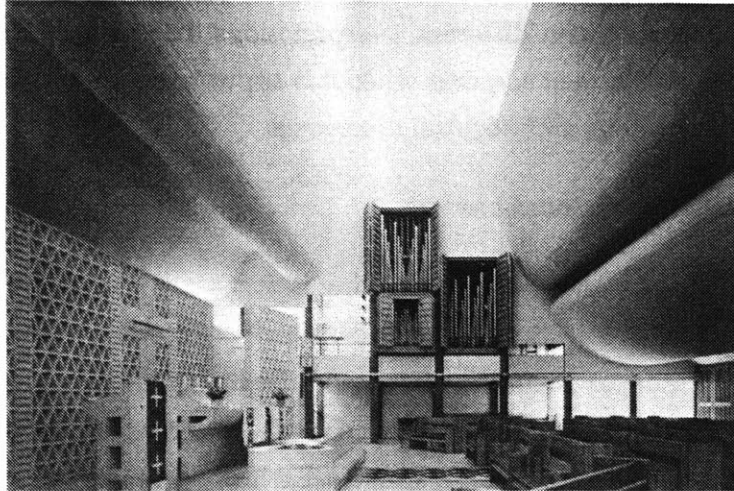


Fig. 36 Bagsvaerd Church, folded roof in main hall.

meaning and different interpretations that an architectural element acquires when it is appropriated and used in various architectural discourses.

### **The traditional bazaar:**

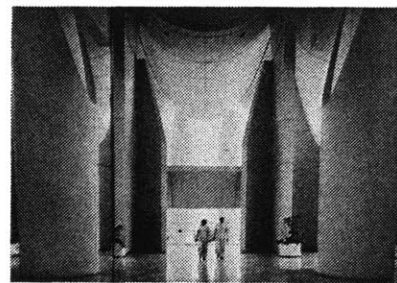
Utzon claims that his building is organized in a fashion close to traditional Islamic bazaars.<sup>34</sup> According to him, "the departments consist of modules of various sizes built around small patios or courtyards — connected to the central street by side streets. Each department can be extended at any time by adding modules. The building can grow sideways, away from the central street, and its outer boundaries will change as time goes by. These free-flexing outer boundaries of the system are very much related to traditional Islamic bazaar architecture."<sup>35</sup>

Utzon's idea for the office modular arrangement is to provide a basic framework which facilitates future expansion on three-sides of the building. However, the similarity that he would like to claim between the 'Islamic traditional bazaar' and his generic modules is unconvincing and farfetched. Whereas a traditional bazaar, could break free from a fixed boundary to accommodate itself to the peculiarities of its surrounding fabric, as in the case of Isfahan (Fig. 37), Utzon's corridor is boxed in an orthogonal grid and terminates on both ends by the canopy hall and the bus entrance. (Fig. 38)

He could just as plausibly have claimed that his inspiration of the repetitive office modules is derived from his personal interest in 'additive architecture' which he adopted in many of his schemes of the late 60s particularly that of the Farum Town Center project and the Herning Technical School (Fig. 15, 16). The strength of Utzon's concept of the 'additive principle' is apparent in many of his projects and is set forth in his own words:



*Fig. 37 Traditional bazaar, Isfahan.*



*Fig. 38 Central corridor of National Assembly Building.*

A consistent utilization of industrially produced building components can only be achieved if these components can be added to the buildings without having to be cut to measure or to be adapted in any way. Such a purely additive principle results in a new architectural form with the same expression..... When working with the additive principle, one is able — without difficulty— to respect and honor all the demands on design and layout, as well as all the requirements for extensions and modifications. This is just because the architecture or perhaps rather the character of the building is that of the sum total of the components and not the composition or that dictated by the facades.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas Utzon's notion of 'additive architecture' is clearly manifested in many of his buildings and writings, in order to be more convincing and appealing to the Aga Khan Award, Utzon sought to downplay his 'additive principle' by claiming to utilize the organizational principle of the traditional bazaar.

The contradictory interplay between the interior and the exterior which characterizes many of Utzon's work, particularly that of the Bagsvaerd Church, recurs in the National Assembly building. The various departmental offices, the Assembly Hall and other functions are all surrounded by a perimeter blank exterior wall. However, in an attempt to 'Arabize' his building, Utzon espouses postmodernist concepts by dressing the exterior facade by an arch-shaped walkway which he claims to be "inspired by Arabic architecture."<sup>37</sup>(Fig. 39)

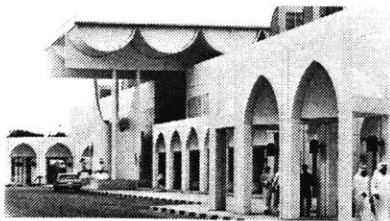


Fig. 39 Arcade on exterior facade.

In his verbal and iconographic reliance on traditional vocabularies to describe his forms, Utzon engaged himself in cultural rhetoric to bring a justified purposefulness to his work and to establish a link with a client who seems

more interested in overt representational and traditional images. A 'nomadic tent,' an 'Islamic bazaar' and an 'Arabic arch,' are all but traditional metaphors packaged by the architect in a successful and marketable formula in congruence with the client's expectations.

In an attempt to please his client, Utzon lumps the tent symbolism with his own architecture pursuit of sculptural and technological expressionism. His elegant forms are as superficial in their evocation of the nomad's tent and the merchant's bazaar as they are irrelevant in their social accommodations. With the so-called 'Islamic' and/or 'Arabic' references treated as purely formal devices, Utzon seeks only to confirm and extend a stereotype. The consequence of such approach is the ridiculed complexity of thoughts relevant to his theoretical framework for the sake of selling his design to the client.

## Notes:

- 1 Philip Drew, *The Third Generation, The Changing Meaning in Architecture*, New York: Praeger, 1972, p. 44.
- 2 Keld Helm-Petersen, "Jorn Utzon: A New Personality," *Zodiac* 5 (1959), p. 70.
- 3 Jorn Utzon, "Platforms and Plateaus: The Ideas of a Danish Architect," *Zodiac* 10 (1959), p. 114.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Jorn Utzon, "The Sydney Opera House," *Zodiac* 14 (1965), p. 49.
- 7 In his 'Four Elements of Architecture' published in 1852, Semper divide his primordial dwelling into four basic elements: 1) earthwork, 2) the hearth, 3) the framework/roof, and 4) the lightweight enclosing membrane. According to this taxonomy Semper classify building crafts into two main principles: the *tectonics* of the roof in which light weight elements are assembled together and the *stereotomics* of the earthwork, wherein mass and volume are conjointly formed by piling of heavy weight element. For details, see Harry Mallgrave and Wolfgang Hermann, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings by Gottfried Semper*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- 8 Jorn Utzon, "Additive Architecture," *Arkitektur* 1 (1970), p. 27.
- 9 Philip Drew, *Opt. Cit.*, 1972, p. 45.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 11 Sigfried Giedion, "Confusion and Boredom," in *Space Time and Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, introduction to 1961 ed., p. IVI.
- 12 Mary McLeod, "Architecture," *The Post-Modern Moment*. S. Trachtenberg (ed.), Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 27.
- 13 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, Architectural Press, 1960.
- 14 Fakhri Shehab, "Kuwait: A Super-Affluent Society," in *Modernization in the Arab World*, (J. Thompson and R. Reischauer ed.), New Jersey: Van Nostrand Company, 1966, p. 127.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 16 John Whelan, *Kuwait: A MEED Practical Guide*, London: Middle East Economic Digest, 1985, p. 1.
- 17 Fakhri Shehab, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 136.

- 18 Middle East Research Institute, *Kuwait: MERI Report*, University of Pennsylvania, London: Croom Helm, 1985, p. 15.
- 19 Ibid., p. 23.
- 20 "Souk Al-Amir Inauguration," *Al-Qabas International* 5 (February 1990).
- 21 Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 218.
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- 27 Middle East Research Institute, *Opt. Cit.*, p.36.
- 28 Jorn Utzon, "Aga Khan Application," p. 6.
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# III

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## The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

*by Henning Larsen*



### **The work of Larsen in the context of Western theory:**

Born in Denmark in 1925, Henning Larsen received his architectural education at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He studied at the Architectural Association in London and finally at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, U.S.A. He worked with his Danish mentors Arne Jacobsen and Jorn Utzon. He considers himself belonging to a Norse tradition. He writes, "My predecessors are people like Asplund and Aalto."<sup>1</sup> His affiliation with these mentors influenced his interest in the play of light and the tactile perception of space and geometric forms.<sup>2</sup> Experimentation with light, space and form constitutes a central theme throughout Larsen's architectural oeuvre.

His buildings are characterized by an interior spatial complexity and pure geometrical forms. He describes his approach to architecture as essentially "sensorial and perceptive"<sup>3</sup> He writes, "Architecture, though composed of abstract elements, is concrete. It is purely physical, and can be perceived both with our senses of touch and sight."<sup>4</sup> He draws an analogy between architecture and music by stating that "Architecture consists of the same elements as music, namely, a form, a pause, a rhythm: the way in which form and space are linked together."<sup>5</sup> His buildings can be seen within the context of the Danish architecture in which the contradictory interplay between the exterior and interior is manifested. The Danes live in a harsh climate, with little in the landscape to stand between them and stormy weather coming down from the North Sea.<sup>6</sup> As a result, many Danish buildings are turned inward on covered atria with few openings on the exterior facades.

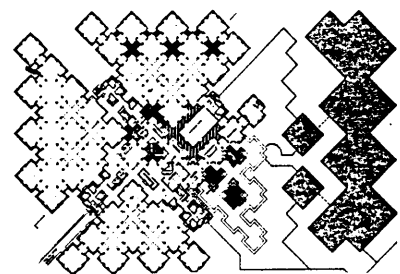
Larsen's buildings are remarkably urbane in character, i.e.: high-density urban clusters with typical grid layout

of internal covered 'streets' and open ended circulation patterns. He adopts a building configuration in which public spaces are moved indoors and yet retains a sense of outdoors.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of a building as a 'city in miniature' based on a system of covered streets and urban squares was introduced to the Scandinavian scene in the early sixties through the work of Aldo Van Eyck and the Dutch 'Structuralist' movement which emerged as a reaction to the modern avant-garde. Van Eyck had already demonstrated his anthropological concept of the 'city in miniature', which later found its most literal interpretation in the work of his followers particularly in Herman Hertzberger's *Centraal Beheer* Insurance Company building (Fig. 1).

Influenced by these architectural movements, Larsen played an important role in translating the 'structuralist' theories to his home country. Concomitant with the structuralist theories, several concepts for organizing universities were prevalent on the architectural scene in Scandinavia. Features they had in common were the possibility of expanding a campus in stages and allowing faculties or colleges to grow individually in order to achieve a high degree of flexibility in building facilities and encourage more interaction between faculties.<sup>8</sup>

In his designs for the University of Trondheim in Norway, Larsen adopts the structuralist theories where the internal organisation of the building is a system of interior streets and public spaces to which all important functions are tied. In order to cope with the complex program and requirements imposed by the university building, Larsen used a modular grid that allowed the flexibility of relocating partitions and technical facilities.<sup>9</sup> The building consists of a three-storey block, surround-



*Fig. 1 Centraal Beheer, by Herman Hertzberger, plan.*

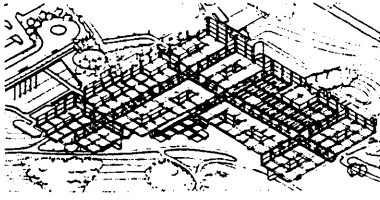
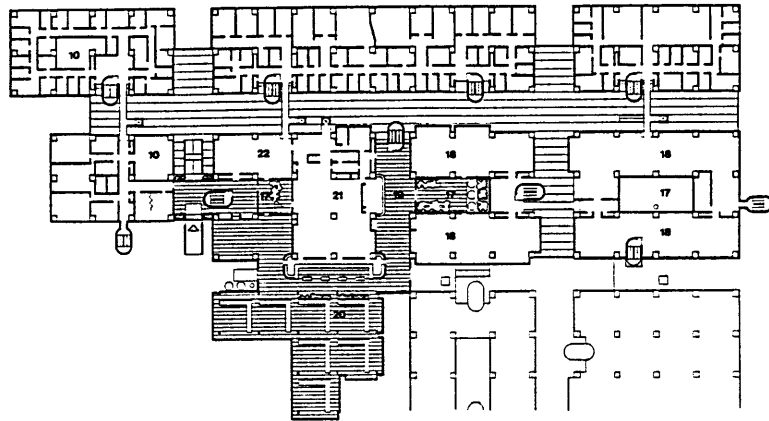


Fig.2 Trondheim University, Norway, Isometric, ground floor plan.



ing relatively small courtyards with internal covered "streets" and public spaces, thus transforming the building into a 'city in miniature' where the harsh cold climate clearly necessitated an introverted solution<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 2).

By the end of the sixties and early seventies, there was a wide criticism for the 'structuralist' approach on the grounds that it resulted in excluding any consideration of frontality and representation.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Larsen's buildings of the late 70s and early 80s signaled a conspicuous shift from the early 'structuralist' principles. This shift is clearly evident in the Hoje Taastrup County Grammer School in Copenhagen, Denmark. In his design, Larsen split the school into four classroom blocks grouped around a central court which is the main point of entry and assembly. Each block is arranged around a small internal space of double volume.<sup>12</sup> By focusing his plan in this fashion, Larsen created a building type composed of repetitive spaces, where a concentration of open floors and overlooking galleries connected by stairways creates the desired formal and spatial effects (Fig. 3).

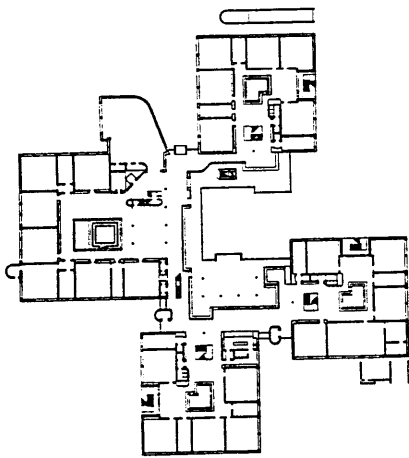
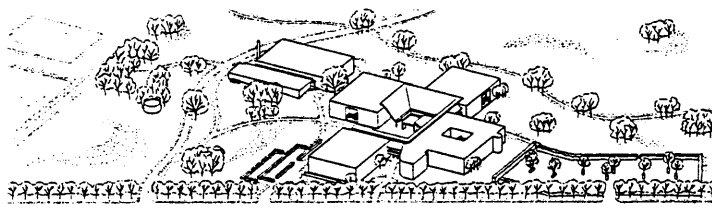
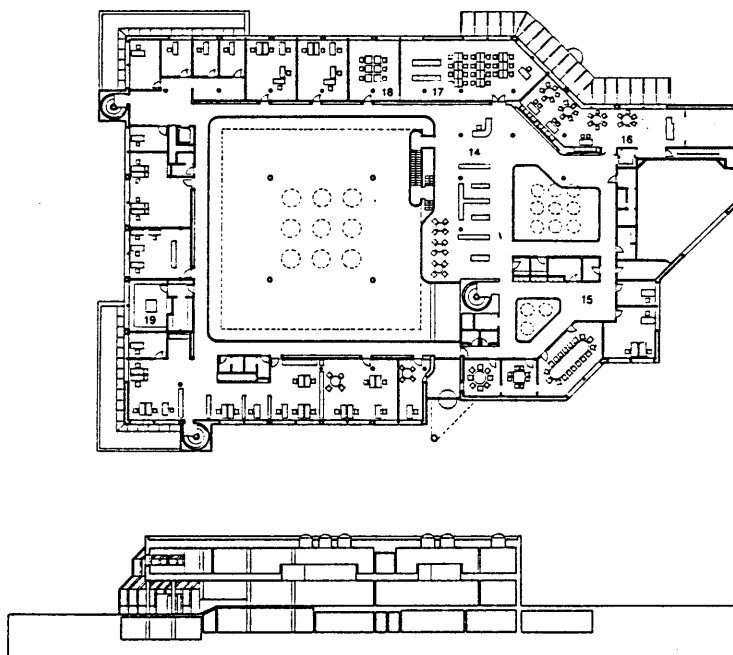


Fig.3 Hoje Taastrup County Grammer School, Denmark, general view and ground floor plan.



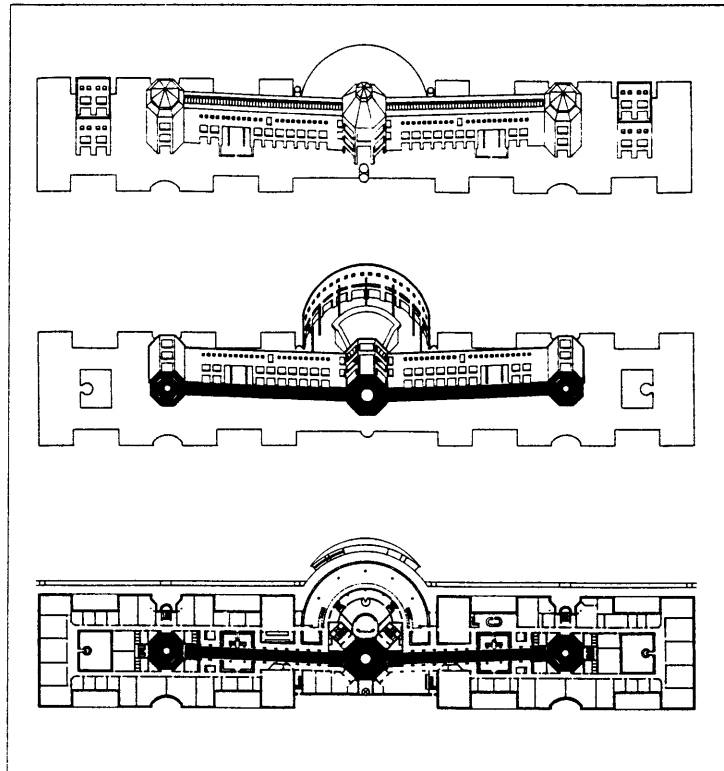
The scheme for the main Library in Gentofte, Copenhagen, belongs to the same design methodology which Larsen employed in the Hoje Taastrup School (Fig. 4). Similarly, the exterior facade of the library conceals a two-storey interior space lit by a cluster of circular skylights and a continuous slot which runs around the edge of the two-storey central space. Ancillary spaces are accessed on the upper floor from a continuous gallery. The clusters of circular roof lights and slots running around the central space recalls Alvar Alto's libraries and anticipates increasingly experiments with top lighting in Larsen's later work.

Larsen's work during the seventies and eighties find parallel to the work of the 'neo Rationalists' with their emphasis on the urban block and the street, particularly as manifested in the theoretical writings and works of Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Grassi and the Krier brothers.<sup>13</sup> Larsen's recent projects in Europe, particularly that of the College of Business Administration in Denmark (Fig. 5) and the Churchill College in England, (Fig. 6) clearly

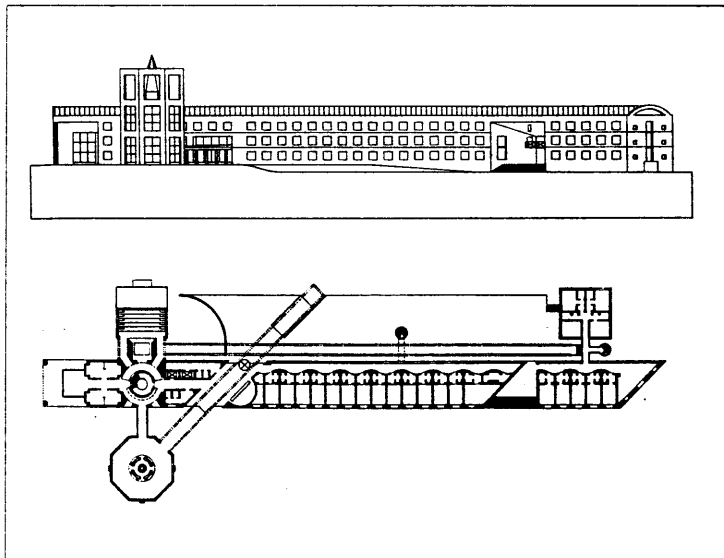


*Fig.4 Gentofte Public Library, Denmark, ground floor plan and elevation.*

shows his tendency to create tension in his architecture by the juxtaposition of pure geometrical forms such as cubes, octagons, cylinders etc. The extreme contrast between the exterior and the interior and the main circulation of inner streets that typify many of Larsen's early buildings are also adopted in these colleges.



*Fig.5 Copenhagen College of Business Administration, Denmark, isometric and plans.*



*Fig.6 Churchill College, England, elevation, elevation and plan..*

### **The Political and Cultural Context of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building:**

The political importance of the city of Riyadh was established in 1824 during the second Saudi State when the Imam Turk Ibn 'Abd Allah Al Saud chose the city as his new capital, thus replacing the old Dar'iyah, the capital of the first Saudi state. Since then, the city remained the capital of the Nejd area. Its importance increased significantly during the rule of 'Abd al 'Aziz Al Sa'ud who extended his control over much of the Arabian Peninsula and established the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Since then, the city of Riyadh became the political center of the newly founded Saudi State.

During the post-World War two period, the discovery of oil enabled Saudi Arabia to be transformed from a traditional state into a rapidly developing modern state. This rapid change increased the importance of Riyadh not only as the historic center from which the modern rule originated but also as the center for development. Consequently, the Saudi government decided to relocate their major institutions from the old capital of Jeddah to the blooming Riyadh. Among these institutions were the core of the diplomatic community, as well as, many of Saudi Arabia's prestigious ministries.

The process of modernization that ravaged the capital attempted to satisfy simultaneously the needs of both the religious and the secular elements within the Saudi Kingdom. This process of modernization and the desire to initiate and control change had profound effects on the role and position of religion in society. Consistent with their patrimonial character, the Saudi government had to balance the interests and activities of the religious and the secular elements, without affecting noticeable change in the political sphere. This policy adopted by the



ruling family was one of asserting Islam as a state ideology while promoting notions of progress, modernity and material development through alliances and help from western countries.

As a traditional monarchy deriving part of its legitimacy by adherence to Islamic tenets, Saudi Arabia during much of its brief history as an independent state lived in comparative isolation from the rest of the world. While most Arab states were being swept by various ideological currents -- nationalism, socialism, and communism -- Saudi Arabia remained identified with Islam. In addition to the presence of Mecca and Medina, the center of Muslim prayers and pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia has long provided the example of a modern self-proclaimed Islamic state.

Nowadays, the ruling family's emphasis on its position as guardian of Islam's holy cities and overseer of the pilgrimage provides a basis for prestige and leadership in the Islamic world.<sup>14</sup> Islam is seen as an effective instrument of diplomacy and political influence alongside and in conjunction with petrodollars. In their attempt to accommodate the twin forces of adherence to Islam and alliance with the west, the Saudi government advocates a strategy of reconciliation. The architecture adopted by the Saudi government came to express these twin forces by using modern technology enveloped in a tradition-like facade. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a good example for such an expression.

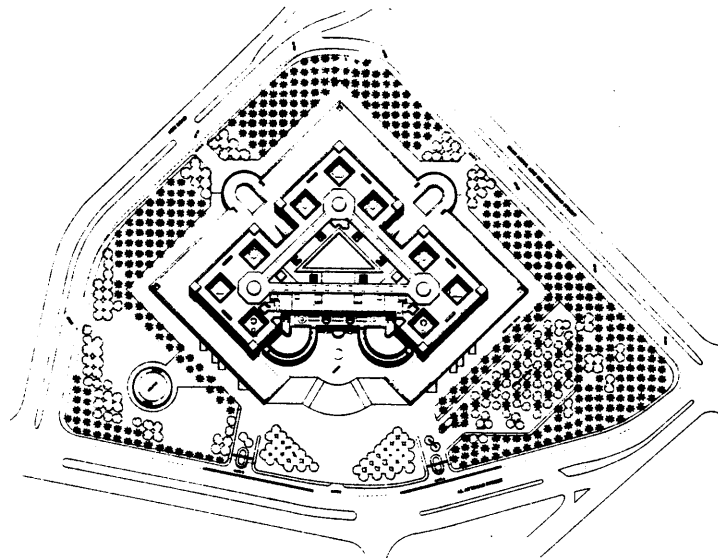
### **Competition Statements and Building Program:**

In response to the desire to relocate their headquarters from the old capital of Jeddah to the new capital of Riyadh, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sought the assistance of a western consultant (International Union of Architects) to organize and manage an international design competition for the design and construction of their new headquarters building. The competition was held in June 1979. The jury, while including local governmental administrators and western consultants, was chaired by the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy.<sup>15</sup> The building program was conceived to house the three main functions of the ministry: a section for Political Affairs, another for Economic and Cultural Affairs, and the third for Administrative Affairs. Also, the program was to include a banqueting hall, a mosque, a library, a conference center, an exhibition space, and a teaching area for the Diplomatic Corps.

Beyond pragmatic requirements, the competition brief requested a building which would "develop a physical image for the new headquarters that will reinforce the ministry's mandates and aspirations" and "create a contemporary symbol of Islamic ideals which acknowledges the architectural tradition of Riyadh."<sup>16</sup> More importantly, the building should function as a "front door to the kingdom," imparting to the visitor a positive impression of Saudi Arabia, and should act as a link between the Kingdom and its delegations and embassies abroad.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to be more clear about their objectives, the jury put forward to the competitors a set of criteria which were to form the basis of their assessment.<sup>18</sup> The underlying agenda was to assert the political leadership of the Kingdom among the Islamic world and a showcase of power to the western countries.

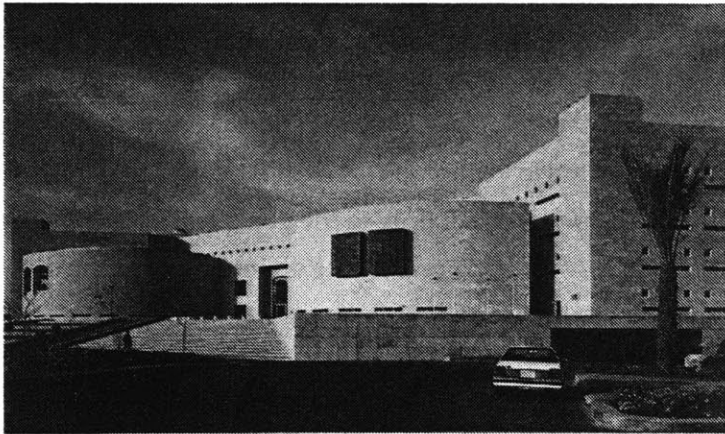
Eleven architectural firms of international reputation representing various nations were invited to participate in this competition.<sup>19</sup> Although Larsen's scheme was not a clear contender to win the competition in the first round (due to its seeming inconsistency of information as well as its extensive coverage of the site),<sup>20</sup> in the second round however, Larsen responded to the jury's remarks and carried out the necessary modifications. Consequently, the first prize and the commission for the building were awarded to him. The process of the competition as described reflects the authority of the client and the jury in encouraging the architect's 'discursive practice.' To win the competition, the architect had to justify carefully his design with respect to the client's culture. Consequently, Larsen's scheme was hailed by the jury for being totally responsive not only to the goals and aspirations of the ministry but also presenting an image sensitive to the religion, culture and architecture traditions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>21</sup>

Located in the new district of Naseriyyah, the site is about two km northwest of the center of what remains of old Riyadh adjacent to the Naseriyyah gate.<sup>22</sup> The building is a free standing object isolated from its surroundings

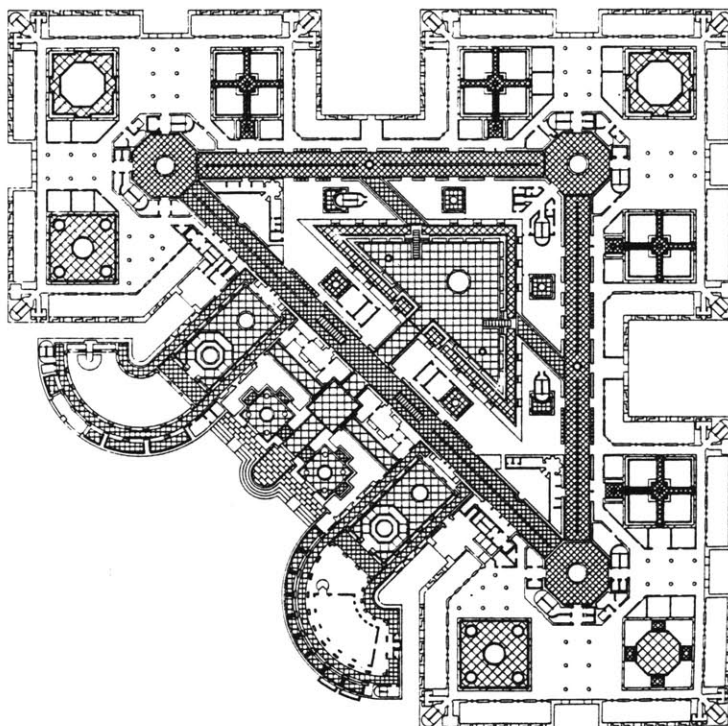


*Fig.7 General site plan.*

and set over a podium housing a parking garage in the basement (Fig. 7, 8). The building is a four-storey triangular massive block highly compartmentalized and hierarchical in its arrangement, providing office spaces for a thousand employees and many visitors, as well as all the ancillary facilities (Fig. 9, 10). The plan is built over a square which is divided into four quadrants. One of these quadrants is removed to bring the plan in conformity with the form of the site and to create space for the main entrance. The three remaining quadrants house the main



*Fig.8 Main elevation, exterior view.*



*Fig.9 Ground floor plan.*

Fig.10 Isometrics showing the buildings organizational principles.

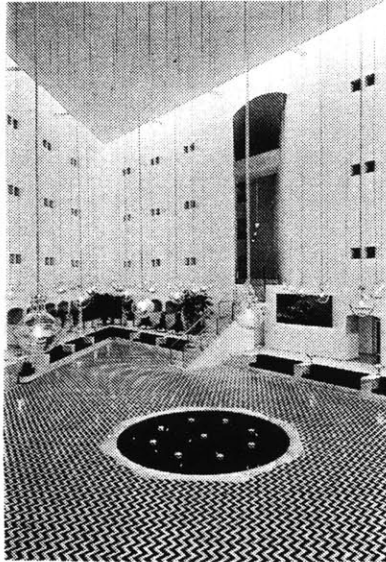


Fig.11 Central Atrium.

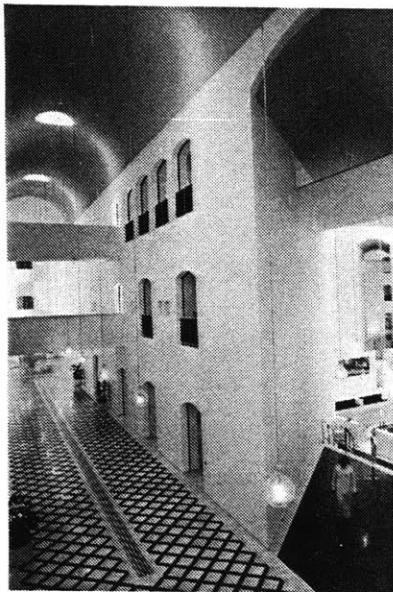
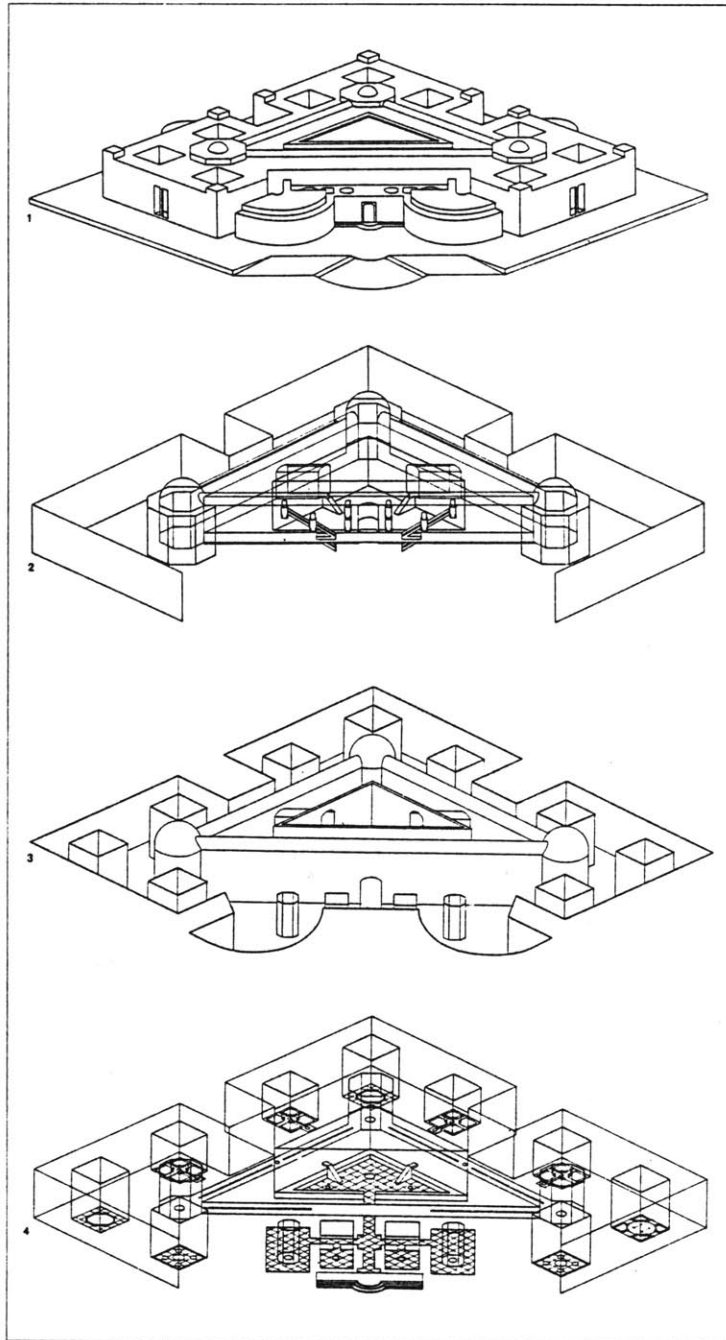


Fig.12 Internal streets with upper level bridges.



office areas which are arranged around octagonal shafts covered with semi-circular domes. Each office area is, in turn, punctuated by three square courtyards. The main entrance is flanked by two semi-circular structures which house the banqueting hall and the library; and leads to a four-storey triangular atrium covered by a suspended roof and lined by a system of barrel-vaulted corridors (Fig. 11, 12).

### **"Lessons from the Orient":**

The project presented Larsen with a set of new and challenging issues. It is by far the largest of his designs and his first commission in the Middle East. He faced a totally different cultural environment than the one he had functioned so far. In his overarching desire to meet his client's mandate and aspirations, Larsen claims that the goal he set for himself was to 'reinterpret' the traditional architecture of Islamic culture and adapt it to the needs of a large modern bureaucracy. His statement to the jury is quite explicit that it is worth quoting in full:

A building for a ministry of Foreign Affairs has a dual purpose: First, it contains all functions necessary for the daily life of a modern ministry, with its particular spatial and technical implications. Secondly, the building expresses its formal function to its own society and a global society. The design of the building reflects this need and expresses it in a locally inspired architectural language to reflect the dignity and formality of its purpose. We felt that a building representing Saudi Arabia to the outside world should have elements of an Arabian or Islamic tradition in its appearance.<sup>23</sup>

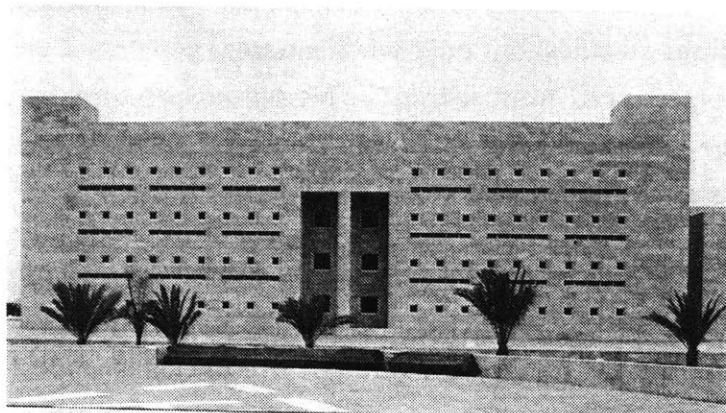
Proceeding from a similar premise in a provocative article entitled: "Lessons from the Orient," Larsen addresses his western audience by asking the following question: "Is it possible to interpret and transform the physical manifestations of oriental architectural elements into a contemporary idiom?"<sup>24</sup> In his attempt to provide an answer, Larsen introduces his readers to the characteristics of 'Islamic architecture' and sets out an overview of the precedents which he claims to have digested and assimilated. He specifies those precedents as courtyards, bazaars, anonymous facades, etc. More explicit is his

reminder: "the objective of this building is to carry on the historical continuity and to create complexity and variation through the deliberate architectural elaboration of traditional Islamic elements."<sup>25</sup>

It seems to be less Larsen's work than his words that cannot escape being polemical. He claims inspiration from a wide range of building types and architectural forms of "Islamic architecture." This suggests something like a dictionary or inventory of precedents ready for recycling.

#### **Anonymous Facades:**

The recurring theme in Larsen's observations about 'Islamic architecture' is that the facades appear anonymous. He argues that "the anonymity of the facade is another requirement of Islam ideology, a warning against manifestations of power and wealth through gaudy buildings."<sup>26</sup> It is true that Larsen may have excluded the use of any kind of ostentatious decoration on the external facade, however, the fact that the building is recognized by its sheer scale, its setting on top of a podium and its fortress-like character, all serve to increase its monumentality (Fig. 13). In this respect, Larsen fails to explain how notions of monumentality may be reconciled with his claim that the building follows 'Islam ideology' by avoiding manifestations of power.



*Fig.13 Anonymous facades.*

Larsen argues that the Islamic tradition of 'hidden architecture' with stern exteriors and richly detailed interiors has been a direct inspiration for his project.<sup>27</sup> By portraying 'Islamic architecture' as 'hidden with stern exteriors,' Larsen's statement not only is fraught with sweeping generalization, but also disregards the exteriority of many of the traditional buildings in the Islamic world. Mughal tombs, for example, usually set as an object in the landscape, have their four facades decorated with intricate designs as in the case of the Taj Mahal in Agra (Fig. 14). Even in the case of institutional buildings situated in the most dense fabrics, such as religious buildings of medieval Cairo, the emphasis on the aspect of exteriority of the facade is quite evident. Mamluk foundations, at the time, used the facades as an effective means of communication with the immediate socio-political circumstances.<sup>28</sup> The Sultan Qalawun complex, for example, bears testimony of the conspicuous display of exterior facades (Fig. 15).

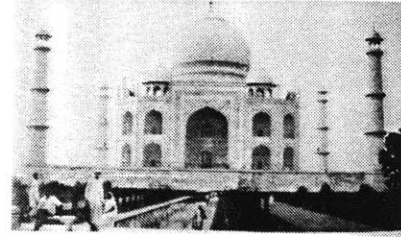


Fig.14 Taj Mahal in Agra.

It is likely that Larsen borrowed the rather provocative term "hidden architecture" from the authoritative book *Architecture of the Islamic world* edited by George Michell. In the introductory essay of the book, Ernst Grube describes some of the architectural elements that he perceives as typical of 'Islamic architecture.' He writes, "At all times and in all regions of the Muslim world we find hidden architecture that is, architecture that truly exists, not when seen as monument or symbol visible to all and from all sides, but only when entered, penetrated and experienced from within.....'hidden architecture' may be considered the main and dominant form of truly Islamic architecture."<sup>29</sup>

Grube's authoritative remarks on Islamic architecture reflect an Orientalist discourse of perceiving the West as antithetical to the East through irreconcilable oppositions. Whereas Western architecture displays pompous



facades, that of Islamic culture is humble. Whereas the former is directional with specific functional spaces, the latter is a negation of the former.<sup>30</sup> Orientalist discourse, in this respect, is a form of "discursive practice" where the Western scholar is determined to prove the authority and superiority of the West over the East through "reductivist" scholarship.

When a western architect like Larsen comes to understand the client's culture through this kind of authoritative text, inevitably he commits the same distortions as that of Grube, ranging from sweeping generalizations to assumptions based on the negation of the West. Following Grube's argument, Larsen states that the exterior of his building "is not pompous as in the Western architectural tradition, rather it is anonymous in the tradition of the old palaces and official buildings of Riyadh which were constructed in mud bricks."<sup>31</sup> The notion of anonymous Islamic facades versus distinguished western ones was not the only criterion that justified Larsen's explicit statement about his building's facades. The architectural critic, Chris Abel explains that the austerity of the facades of the ministry building is a result of Larsen's understanding of the inward orientation of the Nejd architecture.<sup>32</sup>



Fig.15 Qalawun Complex.

It is true that many of the traditional buildings in the Nejd area confronts the observer with a blank facade, pierced only by small openings, however, rarely does any building of this type stands on its own. Rather, they are usually arranged in clusters of dense masses each sheltering the other. Even if one is to subscribe to Abel's argument, this implies that Larsen ignored the organic structure of the Nejd traditional buildings by simply taking the building out of its protective and intricate urban context, blowing its scale many times and ending up with a massive structure set as an object in the landscape.

### A bureaucratic corridor versus a merchant's bazaar:

Larsen claims that the organizational structure of the internal corridors that run parallel to the central atrium (Fig. 16) are similar to that of the traditional bazaar.<sup>33</sup> "Like the bazaar streets," he argues, "the location of the internal streets in the building structure is the main factor in the hierarchic structure of the building, its identity and readability from an aesthetical point of view."<sup>34</sup> The resemblance that Larsen would like to draw here between the traditional bazaar and that of the inner corridors of the ministry building is only at the level of imagery. He claims to use the organizational principle of the traditional bazaar, but he does it in such a reductive manner. A close look at the plan of a traditional bazaar, such as that of Isfahan in Iran, reveals stark differences, contrary to Larsen's claim of resemblances (Fig. 17).

Whereas the bazaar in Isfahan is organic and dynamic in the sense that it responds to the peculiarities of the surrounding urban fabric, Larsen's 'bazaar' is rigid, orthogonal and static. Even if he managed to evoke some of the architectural vocabularies of the traditional bazaar—in the imagery of circular sky-light — his bureaucratic corridor cannot help but alter the meaning of the traditional *souk* which is distinctive by its social and commercial activities.

It is likely to describe Larsen's building as an office building designed for a number of bureaucrats rather than a bazaar planned to accommodate an ever-changing variety of commercial and social activities. In treating the bazaar as merely an organizational diagram, Larsen's 'inner streets' are detached from the traditional *souk* he attempts to associate with. The full identification of the 'inner streets' of the ministry building as an inspiration of that of Islamic bazaars<sup>35</sup> belies the fact that Larsen already

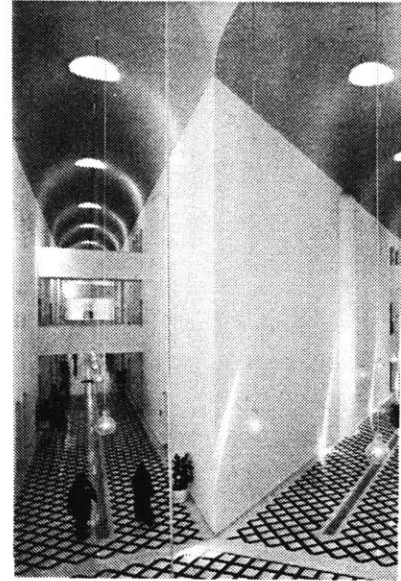


Fig.16 View of one of the internal corridor in the Ministry building.

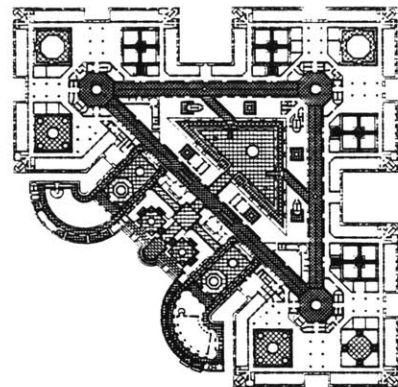


Fig.17 Figure ground: the Ministry building (above) and main bazaar in Isfahan (below).



*Fig. 18 Trondheim University, Norway, inner street.*

used them in many of his Scandinavian projects. One can argue that the 'inner streets' Larsen used in his buildings in Scandinavia are far more close, in their organizational structure, to that of the ministry building than it is to the traditional bazaar. In his designs for the University of Trondheim and the College of Business Administration, Larsen adopts a concept similar to that of the ministry building where he organizes the different functions of the campus along a circulation system of 'inner streets'<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 18, 19).

The question that poses itself at this juncture is why should the term bazaar be introduced in an office building? Why should an organizational element such as a corridor or an 'inner street' which is more internal and transcultural to the discipline of architecture be reduced and categorically defined as Islamic bazaar ?

#### **Courtyards and the "Islamic dream of paradise":**

Similar to his attempt to refer to the 'inner streets' as a direct inspiration of Islamic bazaars, Larsen claims that the nine courtyards of the ministry building reflect the rich traditions of Islamic gardens (Fig. 20, 21). He writes, "The square plazas are designed with the traditional chahar bagh cross pattern with fountains in the intersections and raised passways leading out to the galleries along the walls."<sup>37</sup> According to Larsen, "The courtyard defined by walls, arcades and vaults form the frame of the building's social life — the private sphere in contrast to the throbbing, public life of the city ..... the courtyard becomes a garden, reflecting the Islamic dream of paradise."<sup>38</sup>



*Fig.19 College of Business Administration, Denmark, view of internal corridor.*

The analogy which Larsen attempts to draw here between the courtyards of the ministry building and that of Islamic gardens is highly questionable. Historically,

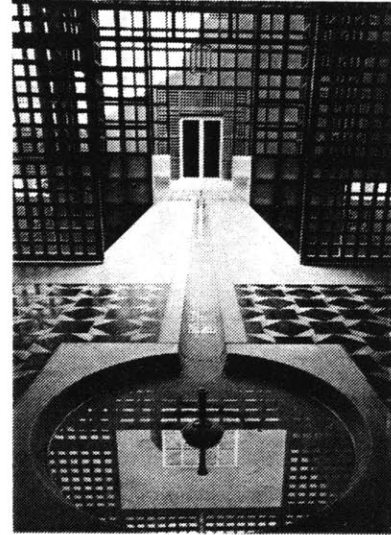
many of these gardens were used as gathering places for socializing and princely pleasures as in the case of the Mughal gardens in India and Alhambra palace in Granada. On the contrary, Larsen's courtyards serve none of the functions of the traditional gardens.

One can argue that since the entire building is air-conditioned, access to these courts is minimal, hence they play no significant social role as Larsen would like to claim. They act as formal gestures that lost their social role. Beyond the claims that they are inspired by Islamic gardens, the most convincing aspect of their use is that they act as a successful environmental device to protect the internal office spaces from direct glare and provide cool air which in turn reduces the full reliance on mechanical devices.

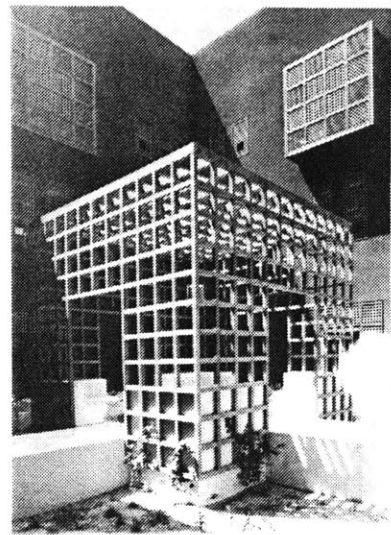
#### **The urban complex:**

According to Larsen, "the Islamic town is a 'flexible structure' and a 'living organism' that is able to adapt itself to the functional needs and cultural pattern throughout generations and subject to changes and innovations. The architectural design concept for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, took the Islamic tradition of urban architecture as its starting point. The building reflects those traditions, at the same time referring to an international idiom."<sup>39</sup>

As an object in the landscape (Fig. 22), the building is utterly detached from its urban surroundings and provide an unjustified pretense of being part of a larger urban setting similar to that of Islamic cities that Larsen claims to have been inspired by (Fig. 23). It is rather in relation to the concept of a 'flexible structure' or 'living organism' that his university designs in Scandinavia and that of many traditional cities in the Islamic world draw



*Fig. 20 Courtyard.*



*Fig. 21 Courtyard.*

parallel. In his University design, Larsen adopts a 'structuralist' concept<sup>40</sup> which enabled him to achieve a high degree of flexibility and expansion in the building facilities and encourage more interaction between faculties.<sup>41</sup> However, rather than describing his ministry building within the framework of his early preoccupations, Larsen preferred to reintroduce his ideas to the client as being inspired by 'Islamic traditions of urban architecture.'

His deterministic interpretation of the ministry building exclusively in terms of 'Islamic precedent,' fall short of revealing the architectural possibilities contained in working with ideas and concepts that are transcultural and internal to the discipline of architecture.

Larsen argues that the integration of important urban functions such as mosques, madrassas and bazaars in Islamic cities and their incorporation into complex structures justifies the low priority given to the exterior of those buildings. He writes, "The impression of the limit, size and functions of the individual building is thus blurred, and the possibility of recognition of the extent of public functions is eliminated..... It is not experienced from outside, but will reveal itself only when one venture inside."<sup>42</sup>

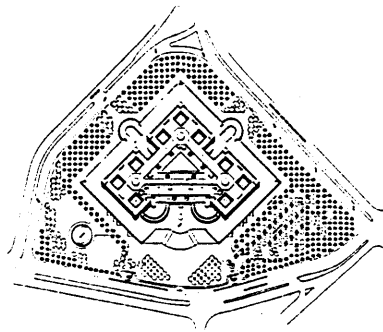


Fig. 22 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, object in the landscape.



Fig. 23 Kirman, Isfahan, intricate urban fabric.

Larsen seems to have had contradictory ideas about the degree to which he wants his building to reflect 'the principles of traditional urban architecture.' Whereas, on the one hand, he argues that the limit, size and function of public buildings in the Islamic cities is hardly recognizable, on the other hand he states that his building expresses its formal function and that "the three corner blocks each reflect their internal function: the section for the foreign minister, the section for politics and economics and the section for administration. The circular forms contain the more public functions of the ministry."<sup>43</sup>

### The modern mushrabiyya:

In order to add to his building a local and vernacular character, Larsen espouses a post modernist approach by using mushrabiyyas on the entrance facade (Fig. 24). However, the question to be raised here: Is the use of a traditional passive device justifiable in a totally air conditioned modern building? Traditional mushrabiyyas were mainly used in domestic buildings as a device for multiple function. Not only they reduce solar glare and permit air movement, but also provide a window with an outward view while simultaneously maintaining privacy (Fig. 25). However, the wooden mushrabiyyas which Larsen uses on the entrance facade of the ministry building, serves none of the functions of the traditional ones. In fact, they act as formal gestures that lost their functional and cultural relevance. This is one of the few instances in which Larsen gives his explicit statements a physical representation.

### Discursive Interpretations:

Not only did Larsen consistently engage himself in rhetoric statements and arguments to convolute his design with words that invoke historical continuity, there are also several critics who pushed the argument further. Chris Abel, for example, claims that Larsen has been inspired chiefly by the great heritage of Mogul architecture in India particularly that of Taj Mahal at Agra where the square plan form is centered on a major domed space and divided into four equal quadrants. Abel sets out to describe the architectural oeuvre from which Larsen draws his inspiration and then explains the similarities between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building and that of Taj Mahal (Fig. 26). To paraphrase Abel's argument:

Each quadrant of the Taj is pierced by an octagonal

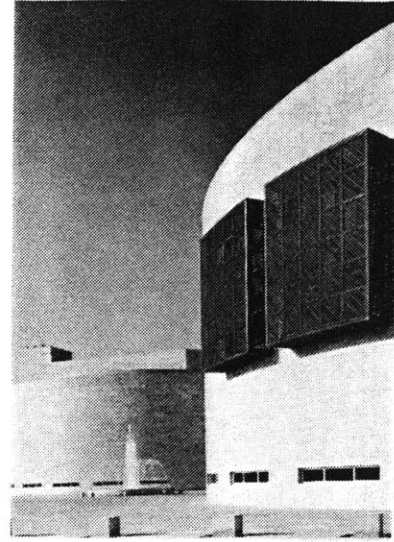


Fig.24 Modern mushrabiyyah.

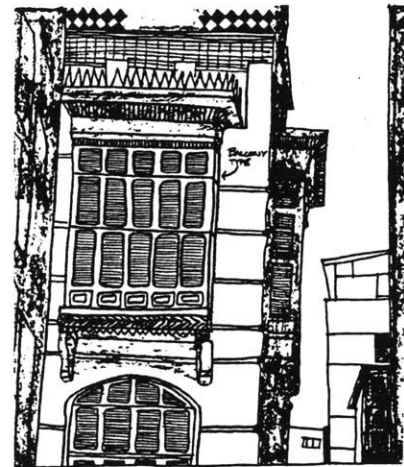


Fig.25 Traditional mushrabiyyah.

light shaft topped by a decorative pavilion, or chatri: Larsen's domed 'light towers.' Each shaft is also joined to every other shaft by passages - Larsen's 'streets' - which run parallel to the outside walls but also connect diagonally across the central space containing the tomb, thus triangulating the plan. In brilliant adaptation of the plan to his triangular site, Larsen discarded one of the quadrants, moved the central space inside the remaining triangle of 'streets,' and in the process changed its octagonal shape to suit the new location.<sup>44</sup>

By attempting to draw similarities between the plan of the ministry building and that of the Taj Mahal, Abel is hard-pressed to localize Larsen's building by sifting through its forms and attributing it to 'Islamic' precedents. A close look at the figure ground of both plans, clearly shows a marked distinction between the two. Whereas the circulation corridors and spaces of the Taj Mahal are all focused on the main space of the tomb and are tightly integrated visually and formally, Larsen's circulation corridors and octagonal spaces operate, to a large extent, independently of the main space.

Similar to Abel's attempt to wrap the ministry building with 'Islamic' metaphors, William Curtis follows along the same line of thought by stating that Larsen succeeded in reconciling "the modernizing aspirations of the Saudi elite with deep echoes from the regional past."<sup>45</sup> Curtis pushes his arguments to the extreme by drawing a far-fetched analogy between the Saudi emblem of crossed swords and the triangular atrium of the ministry building<sup>46</sup> (Fig. 27). In addition to the statements given by the above mentioned Western critics, Christian Norberg Shultz, in an article entitled 'The Architecture of Unity,' presents the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as "an inspiring contribution to the development of a new Islamic archi-

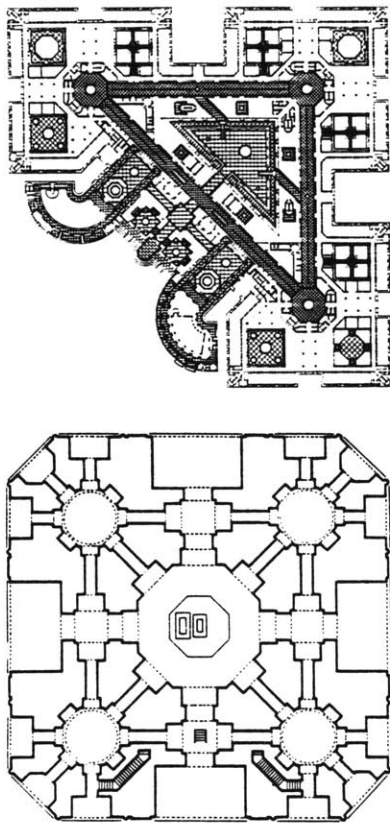


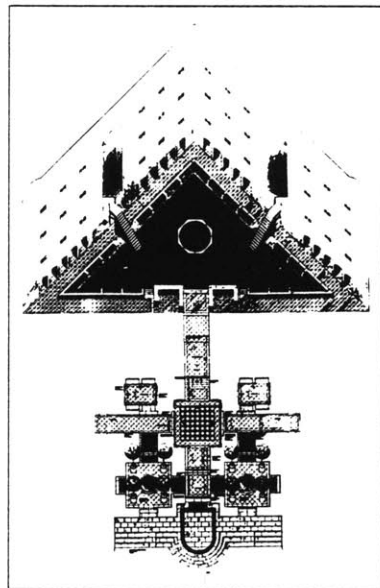
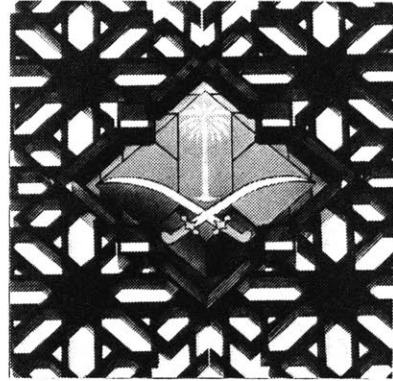
Fig. 26 Plan comparison: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (above) and the Taj Mahal (below).

ecture."<sup>47</sup> Having prescribed the characteristics of 'Islamic Architecture' (blank walls, arches, domes, muqarnas, minarets, and courtyards), he states that the Ministry building is thoroughly 'Islamic.' Norberg Shultz statements can be seen as another version of an Orientalist discourse. He simply reduces the architecture of the Muslim world to something like an encyclopedia of Islamic forms and a limited number of components that can be recycled and replicated in different contexts.

Describing the character of Larsen's building as "thoroughly Islamic" was also confirmed by the French architect Serge Santelli who was a former recipient of an Aga Khan Award and the technical reviewer for the ministry building which also received an award in the 1989 cycle. This confirmation is based on Santelli's idea that the only way to do good architecture is through what he calls the 'Architect's Reservoir.' This reservoir, he states, "contains all the buildings which are part of the history of architecture. It connects past and present thus building architectural memory."<sup>48</sup>

Santelli's depiction suggests the decomposition of past and present architecture into a group of forms that can be recycled into new designs. If one follows Santelli's understanding of good architecture, which is strictly formalistic, this implies that a culture that has no present architecture of its own to fill the architect's reservoir, can derive good architecture only from past architecture. Thus, architectural character, in the Arab world, would be synonymous to the physical form of past architecture. Who would help the architect to fill his reservoir of Islamic architecture? Orientalists like Grube who reduces traditional architecture in the Islamic world into an inventory of forms and basic types?

According to Santelli, "a building that does not have a



*Fig. 27 Far fetched analogy.*



courtyard is not really a Muslim building."<sup>49</sup> What about courtyard houses in the Western world? Does living in a courtyard house makes one a true Muslim? Isn't this equivalent to a man who does not grow a beard is not a Muslim, or a woman who does not wear a veil is not a true believer? One wonders how many "beards" and "veils" in Larsen's building that convinced Santelli and accordingly the jury, that the building reflects an "intelligent use and interpretation of traditional architecture."<sup>50</sup>

No doubt that Larsen's extensive use of courtyards appealed to Santelli's thoughts on good 'Islamic architecture.' The statement of the award, as well as those of supporting critics, not only obscure the criteria of judging the building on architectural merits, but also serve to reaffirm the identity politics that permeates the architectural culture in the Muslim world.

#### **The building and the text: a world apart.**

Larsen's apparent determinism in proclaiming the architecture of the Islamic world as a monolithic set of forms not only obscures the complexities of Muslim cultures and contexts, but also that of the building itself. What appears at first sight to have nothing to do with Larsen's work in Scandinavia has in fact a great deal to do with it.

It would be interesting to speculate, with how much relative ease some of Larsen's buildings in Europe can be shipped to sites in the Arabian Peninsula and whether they would be praised for displaying the principles of 'Islamic' precedents. It is not surprising to find the close similarity in the form and vocabulary of both the Ministry building and that of the College of Business Administration in Copenhagen — a project which Larsen was commissioned to design while working on that of the Ministry in Riyadh. More striking is the similarity of the

organizational elements Larsen used in both projects. Both appear sober in their exterior and are internally organized, in plan, on 'inner streets'<sup>51</sup> (Fig. 28). The extreme contrast between exterior and interior which is apparent in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also characterize that of the Business College (Fig. 29).

For an architect who claims that his direct inspiration for the Riyadh building is the 'Arabian/Islamic' traditional vocabulary, the designs of the two different contexts seem curiously similar. In this respect, although both projects are in different cultural and physical contexts, the close similarity in their architectural syntax seems capable of challenging the identification of the ministry's building as 'an intelligent and modern interpretation of Islamic precedents.'

Larsen's building is discursively represented and celebrated in architectural circles and the media as a modern reinterpretation of traditional precedents where the architectural critics passionately sift for adequate justifications for the building's forms to the extent that discarding a quadrant of the plan to fit the site, has been interpreted as the "missing part" which symbolizes the Saudi embassies abroad.<sup>52</sup>

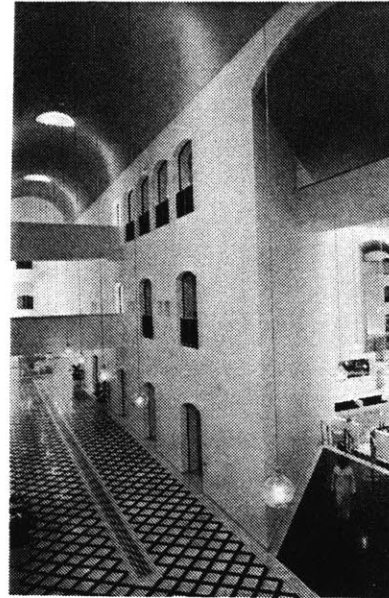


Fig 28 Ministry building and Copenhagen School, Interior streets.

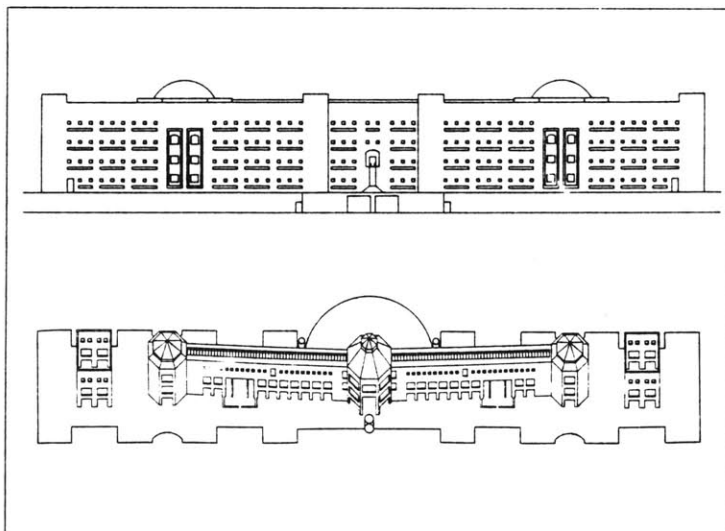


Fig.29 Ministry building and Copenhagen School, exterior elevation.

Not surprisingly, textual reading constitute the overriding theme in Larsen's observations of other culture. In relying totally on texts about 'Islamic architecture,' Larsen's "Lessons from the Orient" is thereby systematically transformed into an object of representation and a stereotypical image for consumption where forms from a variety of styles and cultures are arbitrarily and indiscriminately mixed.

His presentation of the ministry building essentially stands out as a textual reading of his client's culture rather than his rationale which is derived from the immediate context. He takes a detached view towards the past, a view in which the past is neutralized and utilized as a supplier of abstracted images. He set up a generalized frame of reference and introduces a taxonomy of rules about 'Islamic architecture' which allows his building to be analyzed accordingly. Traditional forms are dealt with as an inventory abstracted and taken straight out of their historical context to produce a comprehensive justification for his design approach. The question then to be raised not only to Larsen but to Grube, Abel, Curtis, Shultz and Santelli: Is it appropriate to borrow an architectural form that once had symbolic or socio-cultural associations in the past and claim the validity of its historic *raison d'être*.

Larsen's use of 'Islamic' precedents not only serves as a textual reference for his building's vocabulary, but also is devised to establish a communicative link with his client. In this vein, one can argue that Larsen's 'Lessons from the Orient' reaffirm the cultural politics of identity which explain less about his architecture than about the ideological and political climate in which he is operating.

Although his building manages to avoid the kind of self-conscious historical 'quotations' much fancied by post-modernists, his words and statements espouses the post-

modernists rhetoric. In such a conception of the Islamic past, a few and simple elements, derived from architectural books, are sufficient to represent the other culture. The complex history of the architecture of the Islamic world extending across more than fourteen centuries and three continents, has been stripped down and repackaged. In this invented version, Larsen's building is represented by precedents such as the *mushrabiyya*, the *souk*, the courtyard house, etc. It is through this interpretation, which is based more on historical stereotyping that his building is most readily recognized and awarded.

Alternatively, one can argue that it is in relation to Larsen's own architectural syntax and implicit design methodology that his building can be fully comprehended beyond the various explicit statements which are no more than adjectives added to his building and used as a vehicle to suit his client's aspiration and search for identity.

## Notes:

- 1 Maria Celani, "Space and Light: Interview with Henning Larsen," *Spazio e Societa* 9 (June 86), p. 8.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Henning Larsen, "On Architecture," *Living Architecture* 4 (1984), p. 100.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Tobias Faber, *New Danish Architecture*, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1968, p. 8.
- 7 Nils-Ole Lund, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs," *Arkitektur* (October 1985), p. 286.
- 8 Erik Skriver, "Campus Organized Around a Series of Tall, Glazed Interior Streets," *Architecture* (August 83), p. 174.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Erik Skriver, "School Arranged Around a Cheerfully Canopied Central Court," *Architecture* (August 1983), p. 114.
- 11 Alan Colquhoun, "Centraal Beheer," *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981, p. 105.
- 12 Erik Skriver, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 114.
- 13 Nils-Ole Lund, "Danish Postwar Architecture — An analysis," *Arkitektur* (October 1985), p. 68.
- 14 Philip Khoury, "Islamic Revivalism and the crises of the Secular State in the Arab World," I. Ibrahim (ed.), *Arab Resources*, 1983, p. 214.
- 15 The choice of Fathy is of importance because by that time Fathy played a significant role in the architecture of the Arab world. Fathy introduced the vernacular model to Arab architecture.
- 16 International Union of Architects (ed.), *11 Entries for the Headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia*, Paris: Editions L'Equerre, 1981, p.10.
- 17 William Curtis, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia," *The Aga Khan Award for Architecture 1986, Technical Review Summary*, p. 5.
- 18 see Appendix for competition's statements.
- 19 William Curtis, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 5.
- 20 International Union of Architects, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 20.
- 21 Ibid., p. 21.
- 22 William Curtis, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 2.
- 23 International Union of Architects, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 112.
- 24 Henning Larsen, "Lessons from the orient," *Daidalos* 10 (Dec. 1983), p. 95.
- 25 Ibid., p. 102.
- 26 Ibid., p. 95.

- 27 International Union of Architects (ed.), *Opt. Cit.*, p. 112.
- 28 Ira Lapidus, "Mamluk Patronage and the Arts," *Muqarnas* 2 Yale University Press, 1984, p. 178.
- 29 Ernst Grube, "What is Islamic Architecture," *Architecture of the Islamic world: Its History and Social Meaning* (ed. by George Michell), London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, p. 11.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 31 International Union of Architects (ed.), *Opt. Cit.*, p. 112.
- 32 Chris Abel, "Larsen's Hybrid Masterpiece," *Architectural Review* (July 1985), p. 30.
- 33 Henning Larsen, "Lessons from the orient," in *Daidalos* 10 (Dec. 1983), p. 101.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Chris Abel, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 38.
- 36 Erik Skriver, "Campus Organized Around a Series of Tall, Glazed Interior 'Streets'," *Architecture* (August 83), p. 174.
- 37 International Union of Architects (ed.), *Opt. Cit.*, p. 113.
- 38 Henning Larsen, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 95.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 40 Chris Abel, "Modernism in the Danish Manner," *Architectural Record* (June 1990), p. 78.
- 41 Erik Skriver, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 174.
- 42 Henning Larsen, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 100.
- 43 International Union of Architects, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 113.
- 44 Chris Abel, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 30.
- 45 William Curtis, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 1.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 47 Christian Norberg-Shulz. "The Architecture of Unity," *Architecture Education in the Islamic World*, (Ahmed Evin.ed.), The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, Singapore: Concept Media, 1986, p. 14.
- 48 Serge Santelli, "On creativity, Imagination and the Design Process," *Space for Freedom: The Search for Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies*, (ed. Ismail Serageldin ), The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, London: Butterworth, 1989, p. 230.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 50 Master Jury, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia" *The AKKA 1989 Winners*, p. 16.
- 51 Chris Abel, "Modernism in the Danish Manner," *Architectural Record* (June 1990), p. 78.
- 52 William Curtis, *Opt. Cit.*, p. 6.

# IV

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## Reflections





## Reflections:

"It has been said that [the Kuwait water towers] blend Islamic tradition with modern technology. It brings to my mind the image of Muslim minarets as well as modern missiles. ... I had no such idea ... the image did not at all persist in my mind... It was not my intentions to make the towers look like minarets, but obviously they have something in common."<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of a Danish architect commenting on the tower structures he designed in the Arabian Gulf. This is one of the few instances that a western architect admits that his initial design intentions never included its final interpretation. However it reflects a widely acknowledged practice by western architects in the Gulf region, namely, the disconnection between two layers of thinking. One layer has do with the architects sphere of architectural knowledge which contains theories, educational background and theoretical positions. The other layer is related to cultural predicaments related to issues of modernity and tradition, political agendas, as well as the propaganda of the media.

A reciprocal relationship comes into play when the architect manipulates his expertise and theoretical framework to the benefit of the building program, as well as the expectations of his Arab client. A convoluted relationship takes place when the architect's work is interpreted and discussed from within the cultural politics of identity. There, the first layer of thinking, apparently disappears, for it is covered up by the second layer. Unfortunately, most of the clients, local architects, critics and members of the local intelligentsia are unable to see the inner layer which reveals the quality of the building.

The question to be raised at this juncture is: why can't the architect express his building from within his implicit position and in terms of his theoretical premise instead of engaging himself in rhetoric and empty words about cultural sensitivity? The latter, alone, does not tell much about the building. What is wrong if Larsen speaks about his building in terms of his experimentation with form, light and space; with his 'structuralist' concern in perceiving the building as a "city in miniature" with covered streets and urban squares; with his interest in exploring tension generated by juxtaposing pure geometric forms?

For Utzon the same questions are relevant. Why can't he explain his building in relation to his notion of "additive architecture," or his affinity with nature as depicted in the act of sailing in the sea? Why can't he explain his structural expressionist idea of the National Assembly building as a generic opposition between a heavy weight podium and a light weight roof that floats above it?

If these two architects, or critics in general, introduced these buildings with respect to the first layer of thinking (along with cultural rhetoric if deemed necessary), perhaps the quality of the built environment in the Gulf region would have been better.

There are many actors in the business of "discursive practice" in the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf region, with quite complicated and intertwined relationships. There is the relation between the architect and the client, the critic and the culture, the client and his society, the juror and the architect. Due to the complexities and ambiguities involved within the discourse itself, the amount of literature produced by these actors, depicting the practice, is overwhelming that it has a language of its own. Terms such as authenticity, cultural continuity, architectural heritage, Islamic, traditional, modern, re-

gional, high-tech, minaret, courtyard, bazaar, tent, are only but few of the most popular syntax of this language.

For the architect, knowing the language means a rewarding commission from a wealthy state client. For the state client, the appropriate language is a way to communicate persuasively to the society. For the critic, the language is an assurance to the culture that it has accommodated a prestigious and contextual building. For the juror, the language is a tool to orientalize the architect.

Successful as they are in the language they use to legitimize their statements some actors are bound to be the losers, they are the young generation of local architects. They are the losers because the politics of identity, exercised by the different actors and parties, has a detrimental effect on the qualitative development of architecture in their countries. It does not allow the building to be criticized in relation to the architects' work and ideas beyond the cultural politics that frequently wraps it.

As young architects, they miss the demagogic chance to learn from distinguished western architects building in the Gulf. When their job is finished, western architects leave a group of "skeletons" devoid of any theoretical content, and this should inspire the young generation of local architects in their future work. The question to be raised here is: how are the young local architects able to differentiate between good and bad architecture? Both, are equally wrapped in the cultural politics of identity.

What I am stressing here in my argument is the role of *ideas* in architecture. I believe that any vital and relevant architecture relies on the prior development of theory. Once formulated, these ideas should not be suppressed or covered up. Rather, they must be subjected to continuous criticism if they are to sustain an ever-increasing

work of high quality. When a western architect comes to the Arab world and leaves behind an exclusive building alongside his baggage of ideas, the young generation of local architects can debate the ideas, remodel them, retune and develop them in response to their cultural predicaments. This should be their role when it comes to responding to foreign ideas already planted in their cultural landscape in the form of buildings.

A foreign architect, on the other hand, should not feel "guilt consciousness" for not understanding the Arab culture—a guilt that forces him to submerge his building in a sea of meaningless references to local character. He should see his position as advantageous over the local architects — a position of "critical distance," to use Edward Said's term, which can allow him to view the Arab societies in a less passionate way, with the spiritual detachment and generosity necessary for a balanced vision.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, both parties, local and foreign architects, know their role and position in relation to one another. A spirit of self-confidence and mutual trust rules their relationship — a spirit that can invoke new ideas, new forms and new architecture beyond the politics of representation.

In this atmosphere, Larsen can argue that because the environment in Scandinavia and the Gulf are similar in terms of their harsh climate and sober landscape (the former in a freezing zone, the latter in an arid zone), design solutions in both contexts merge. Thus, if buildings are turned inward in Scandinavia with covered atria and few external openings, the same arrangement could occur in Riyadh. There is no need to advocate statements about "anonymous facades of Islamic architecture" which instantly expose the architect's ignorance about the archi-

texture of the Islamic world. Also, Utzon may draw a similar analogy between his Opera Sydney House and the National Assembly. He can argue that because the site of the Assembly building is similar to that of the Opera Sydney, concerning its prestigious proximity to the sea, the idea of introducing to the Assembly a "fifth facade," manifested in a folded-roof type, is also plausible without resorting to the politics of identity by reversing the term "folded roof" to "billowing Arabian tents."

It is necessary here to mention that the object of my critique is not much the architects' buildings (which exhibit undeniable beauty and quality) but rather their polemical statements and theoretical texts that accompany their buildings. By engaging themselves in the cultural politics of identity, wittingly or not, they dress their work with Islamic precedents and vocabularies, which in turn obscures the opportunities for the public to understand their ideas and implicit theoretical statements.

Moreover, it should not be understood from my argument that I am against a local preoccupation with identity and self-representation, nor do I advocate quality assurance through the sole autonomy of theories related to the discipline of architecture. What I am hoping for the architecture of the Arab world is an interaction between the two lines of concern, a reciprocal mode of interaction. One cannot repress the concern for identity if that is the aspirations of the whole society, but what one can argue for is to direct such concern to a more mature level of representation by benefiting from the "critical distance" acquired by an outsider who offers his expertise to the society.

With this reciprocity between the theories of the architect and the expectations of the culture, the artifact "is not

merely a means of expression, but a *winning of reality*. This winning of reality affirms that we are concerned with the process, something that unfolds in time, a situation where the maker's own thought is changed, perhaps even radically, by the reality he has won. The original maker/interpreter is no longer the same after the first encounter with the artifact.....and the artifact is something more than what was intended." <sup>3</sup>

This changing positions and perceptions suggest that identity and self-representation do not constitute a singular monolith, but rather *multiple, shifting* and sometimes *self-contradictory*.<sup>4</sup> The assumption that identity can only be found in local and traditional architecture reduces the genuine desire to connect with the "larger reservoir of human culture as a whole" or what Edward Said called the "worldliness" of the artifact. "Worldliness is therefore the restoration of such works and interpretations of their place in the global setting, a restoration that can only be accomplished by an appreciation not of some tiny, defensively constituted corner of the world but of the large, many windowed house of human culture as a whole."<sup>5</sup>

Yet "worldliness," I would argue, does not mean the negation of the self, rather its assertion beyond the obsession with the past. There should be a concern to make the best out of two simultaneous positions. The continuous flow of foreign ideas to the Gulf region should not be conceived of as a threat to the politics of representation, and hence to be wrapped up textually, verbally and even physically by local vocabulary; but a chance to situate the artifact in the global setting, a chance to liberate architecture of the Arab world from the mere nostalgia for the past. More important, it is a chance to open up a *space of freedom* <sup>6</sup> in which innovation replaces mere recycling of forms. Also, the continuous concern for local identity should only serve as a reservoir for self-confidence in

one's abilities, as a base to deal with foreign ideas and as an anchor with which one can stand against discursive practices, be they local or foreign. Whether architecture in the Arab world can make the best of the two positions remains to be seen.

## Notes:

- 1 Renata Holod, et al., (ed.) *Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today* (The Aga Khan Award for Architecture), Geneva: Aperture, 1983, p. 252.
- 2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* New York: Vintage Books, 1978, p. 259.
- 3 Stanford Anderson, "The Presentness of Interpretation and of Artifacts: Towards a Theory of Duration and change of Artifacts," *Akshara* (1982), p. 59.
- 4 M. Tucker, Foreword to Ferguson, et al., eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, p.20.
- 5 Edward Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," *Raritan* (Summer 1991), p. 28.
- 6 A term coined by Mohammed Arkoun, and later used by Ismail Serageldin in *Space for Freedom: The Search For Architectural Excellence in Muslim Societies*, (The Aga Khan Award for Architecture) London: Butterworth Architecture, 1989.



## **APPENDIX:**

### **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Statement of Objectives:**

#### **I. Design Objectives:**

- To develop a physical image for the new headquarters that will reinforce the ministry's mandates and aspirations.
- To develop an environment which will inspire personal commitment to the ministry.
- To establish and maintain security of information, people and facilities within the ministry.
- To promote and allow internal communication.
- To allow for organizational change.
- To accommodate the increasing use of technology for information processing and communications.
- To accommodate the potential employment of women.
- To develop a facility which assures continuity of day-to-day operations.
- To employ building systems that will allow concurrent with the new facilities for the diplomatic community.
- To establish an appropriate project budget that reflects the projected life span of the building.

#### **II. Concepts**

While specific concepts regarding ministry operations emerged during the development of the management plan, specific concepts regarding the physical qualities of the building emerged during the development of the program.

- The ministry as the front door of the Kingdom.
- The site and building as a highly visible and complete

entity.

- Minimum points of entry.
- Security zones with maximum ability for internal movement.
- Common-use meeting rooms and salons.
- Departments as organizing elements.
- Supervision
- Department typing and clerical pools.
- Informal staff contact and relief.
- Integration of related units.
- Future change through convertibility.
- Centralized 24-hour operations
- Centralized delivery.

### III. Assessment Criteria:

The jury decided after some discussion that the list of ministry's goals outlined in the Functional Program given to the competitors should form the basis of assessment. These were simplified into the following nine criteria stated in order of priority as follows:

**Image:** Each entry assessed first for the appropriateness of its external image as a symbol of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh. The qualities sought by jury members were those of dignity, integrity and restraint as against being overpowering, forbidding or theatrical in appearance or such other aspects considered unsuitable to the ministry's image. In the jury's opinion, no project answered this completely satisfactorily in the first stage.

**Cultural and environmental relevance:** The ministry's stated wish is that this project act as a symbol of Islamic ideals in the cultural and environmental context of Riyadh and should also demonstrate its very contemporary purpose.

Dr. Fathy described the characteristics of Islamic architecture deriving from the severity of the climate as an "Architecture of Walls" emphasizing "interiority". In the opinion of the jury, this difficult aspect of the project was not satisfactorily answered in most entries.

The extensive use of glass in strip windows, galleries, etc., which are more characteristic of temperate climate architecture were considered inappropriate to Riyadh. Response to the criteria was found completely satisfactory in the case of three entries.

**Interior environment:** Because of the need of the ministry to have a working environment which would "inspire personal commitment" this was given high priority in assessment. This was answered by most competitors by means of interior galleries, courts and gardens and generally the provision of adequate working spaces.

**Circulation:** The need for separate and suitable entrances for dignitaries, general visitors and staff because of differing security requirements, times of use and importance of functions, as well as differing vehicular ways and parking provisions for each of the above was not fully appreciated by many of the competitors, but in most cases could be solved by some adjustments. Many entries, due to exterior horizontal layouts or lack of appreciation of necessary proximity, had complex or unnecessarily lengthy circulation paths.

**Suitable spaces:** Because of internal focus there needed to be a variety of spaces to adequately accommodate the various ministry functions. This was appreciated in some projects, but in many there was an attempt to free spaces into rather formalistic patterns that were not suited to the functions.

**Space relationships and location:** The relationships between the departments and various functions of the ministry seem to have been on the most part workable except for aspects of separate circulation and security. Most areas were appropriately located in the overall complex.

**Adaptability:** Since expansion was required only in the Diplomatic Institute, there needed to be within the overall space allocation for departments, a certain flexibility to allow for the change in the size of the different departments. The solutions either stressed flexibility to the sacrifice of department identity or were so formalistic in their placement that adaptability was seriously threatened.

**Security:** It was not expected that contestants could consider detailed security precautions, but that they would understand the need for controls at the entrances to the ministry site and of protected circulation routes within the ministry. Although site controls were usually adequate in the solutions, security of internal circulation had not been satisfactorily worked out.

## Sources of Illustrations:

### II. Kuwait National Assembly

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Fig. 2 Jorn Utzon. "The Importance of Architects." *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, 1984.

Fig. 3 Jorn Utzon. "The Importance of Architects." *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, 1984.

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Fig. 8 Philip Drew. "Jorn Utzon" *Third Generation: The Changing Meaning of Architecture*, 1972.

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Fig. 14 Ismail Serageldin. "Architecture and Society" *Architecture Education in Islamic World*, 1986.

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- Fig. 21 Stephen Gardiner, *Kuwait the Making of a City*, England, 1983.
- Fig. 22 Lawrence Vale. *Architecture, Power and National Identity*, 1992.
- Fig. 23 Lawrence Vale. *Architecture, Power and National Identity*, 1992.
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- Fig. 26 Poul Erik Skriver. "Kuwait National Assembly Complex." *Living Architecture 5*, 1986.
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- Fig. 31 Poul Erik Skriver. "Kuwait National Assembly Complex." *Living Architecture 5*, 1986.
- Fig. 32 Poul Erik Skriver. "Kuwait National Assembly Complex." *Living Architecture 5*, 1986.
- Fig. 33 Poul Erik Skriver. "Kuwait National Assembly Complex." *Living Architecture 5*, 1986.
- Fig. 34 (above) Philip Drew. "Jorn Utzon" *Third Generation: The Changing Meaning of Architecture*, 1972.
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Fig. 35 Jorn Utzon. "The Importance of Architects." *Architecture in the Age of Scepticism*, 1984.

Fig. 36 Christian Norberg-Schulz. *Scandinavia: Architettura. Gli Ultimi Vent'anni*, 1990.

Fig. 37 Chris Abel. "Larsen's Hybrid Masterpiece." *Arkitektur Dk 7*, Dec. 1985.

Fig. 38 Poul Erik Skriver. "Kuwait National Assembly Complex." *Living Architecture 5*, 1986.

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Fig. 1 Nils-Ole Lund. "Danish Postwar Architecture - An Analysis." *Arkitektur Dk 1-2*, 1985.

Fig. 2 (plan) Nils-Ole Lund. "Danish Postwar Architecture - An Analysis." *Arkitektur Dk 1-2*, 1985.

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**Fig. 18** Chris Abel. "Larsen's Hybrid Masterpiece." *Arkitektur Dk* 7, Dec. 1985.

**Fig. 19** Christian Norberg-Schulz. *Scandinavia: Architettura. Gli Ultimi Vent'anni*, 1990.

**Fig. 20** Steen Estvad Petersen. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Saudi Arabia." *Living Architecture* 5, 1984.

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