

## The Third Way: Between Fundamentalism and Westernisation

*Charles Alexander Jencks  
19, Lansdowne Walk  
London W11 3AH  
United Kingdom*

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture is unique among architectural awards for the seriousness and depth with which it examines architecture and for having built up an extensive archive of contemporary architecture in the Muslim world. But in one quite unexpected way it can be seen as part of a much wider, shared pursuit: the search for a new path between fundamentalism and westernisation (or tradition and modernisation), the construction of an alternative tradition, the 'space for freedom', or the growth of a new kind of Islamic plant. The following comments refer particularly to the 1995 awards.

The West hears most often about Muslim societies in terms of the Arab-Israeli dispute; it fears terrorism (and, to note an architectural context, associates it with such things as the bombing of New York's World Trade Center); today the West often demonises Islamic culture as 'Islamism' and acts without principle in Bosnia. For their part, Muslim cultures have suffered economic exploitation by the West, or the more subliminal Coca-Cola culture: that is, all the types of modernisation that can be summarised as 'westernisation'. But they have also benefited from western medicine, technology and Enlightenment ideas.

So much is known and probably granted by all sides of the cultural divides, north/south and east/west. Sociologists are now beginning to understand the paradoxical way seeming opposites can actually create each other. For instance, a modernising process which is too fast and unbalanced can actually lead to its supposed antagonist, fundamentalism. Successful modernisation - at least in its own terms - occurs in a few traditional cultures which are not completely colonised or uprooted by foreigners: Japan and Singapore are examples, with Hong Kong as an unusual middle case of permissive neo-colonialism (which allowed the traditional Chinese culture some autonomy and power). Where traditional values and customs are not lost faster than economic and cultural opportunities open up, as Ismail Serageldin has pointed out, modernisation does not lead to reaction. But where there are great inequities and no Faustian trade-off is possible, fundamentalism finds a fertile territory. Masses of the poor will find solace in absolutist restatements of traditional myths and religions. They can be retribalised, as we have seen with so many recent neo-

nationalisms. In fact, pseudo-religion and nationalism were typical by-products of modernisation and cultural Modernism in the 1930s (remember the use of Nietzsche and Darwin), and sociologists now refer to National Socialism as a form of 'Reactionary Modernism'. (Harvey, 1989, 33, 209; Herf, 1984). Such a conjunction was impossible to think about twenty years ago when Modernism was thought antithetical to fascism.

### **Inadequate Words**

Such interesting conceptual dilemmas constitute the background as I, a westerner, think about the architecture of Muslim societies; but, in an important sense, they are severely limited by the words in which they are expressed. Consider the title, 'The Third Way': are there only two other ways? Absurd; there are probably twenty or, some would say, as many ways as there are cultures. Furthermore, the overtones of my title are equally negative and positive: 'The Third Way' was used occasionally in the 1930s to refer to the fascist alternative to liberalism and socialism, and 'The Way' refers to 'the true path of life' that many indigenous cultures follow (including the Tao). In any case, is it a 'way' or 'path' between the Scylla of fundamentalism and the Charybdis of westernisation? Would not the image of a 'bridge' be better, because - clearly - what is needed is some kind of conjunction, tension, opposition or, should we say, learning, between these alternative poles.

Metaphors and words matter, just as much as architectural expression; if they are tired and imprecise, or distorting and reductive, better ones need to be found. So, should my title be 'Walking the Tightrope Between X and Y'? This has several advantages over the other metaphors, because it suggests that the path is precipitous. It must include Islam and the West - even fundamentalism and commerce. There is no going back from development, just as there is no future without ethnicity and religion. Therefore there is nothing but danger, and a tightrope stretched between antagonistic but sometimes positive forces.

Yet neither path nor tightrope brings out a most important point, that it is a process, search, debate or new construction that is wanted - indeed something that is a growing tradition. What metaphor or word will encompass all these necessary points? None. Language fails to provide the compound entity, nor is there an institution in the political lexicon which will do the job. Single words and traditional concepts are simply inadequate to describe what is needed - which is not to say the reality is not emerging.

### **Challenge and Confusion**

It is apparent in my analysis of twelve different approaches to architecture (Table 1) that there are many valid paths on the Third Way - a veritable multi-laned highway. There are also many international civil institutions which, similar to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, are opening up the Third Way. Characteristically, these support trans-national values while, at the same time, upholding regional, local and

traditional values. Oxfam, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Amnesty International or, on a more activist level, Greenpeace, are engaged in this double activity - or the double-coding I find essential to the post-modern agenda.

	POSITIVE VERSION	NEGATIVE VERSION	
1.	Invisible Mend ( <i>Ultra-modest conservation</i> )	'Counterlet-Trad'	15
2.	Neo-Traditional ( <i>Reformist, in-keeping</i> )	'Club-Med'	15
3.	Post-Modern ( <i>Double-coded, symbolic</i> )	'PO-MO'	17
4.	Modern ( <i>Minimalist, Kahnian, High-Tech</i> )	'Dumb'	13
5.	Neo-Modern ( <i>Sophisticated revival</i> )	'Decon'	4,5
6.	Emergent ( <i>Cosmogenic creative</i> )	'Cosmic'	2,5
7.	Socio-Political ( <i>Activist, feminist, squatters</i> )	'Politically correct'	3
8.	Socially Worthy ( <i>Reformist</i> )	'Opportunist'	5
9.	Urban-Worthy ( <i>Contextual, reconstructivist</i> )	'Boy Scout'	4,5
10.	Eco-Worthy ( <i>Sustainable, re-lorestin</i> )	'Girl Scout'	4
11.	Pop Commercial ( <i>Surreal imagistic, humorous vulgar</i> )	'Kitsch'	5
12.	Craft Worthy ( <i>Educative, architectural training</i> )	'Amateur'	2
		TOTAL	86

Table 1 : 86 submissions to the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 1995 classified by the author according to twelve distinct approaches and styles.

On the one hand, there is respect for the Enlightenment project, universal history, liberation, technological and social development and, on the other, defence of local culture, traditional patterns of society, and ecology. These opposites constitute the post-modern double vision and lead to its dual coding, hybrid style and ironic politics (that accommodates and subverts at the same time). The new institutions, which have emerged since 1945, the non-governmental organisations and post-modern movements, are giving birth to a new world culture and to a new type of person who owes allegiance to global and local issues equally. Thirty years ago the 'world citizen' was a pious hope or a joke; today he is produced inevitably by world trade and new transnational civil bodies.

There is also a parallel growth within the Islamic world, challenging stereotypes and extending traditions. Abdol Karim Soroush, the Iranian scholar, is called 'the Martin Luther of Islam' because he shows that the faith must be based on two pillars: freedom to believe what one is persuaded is the truth, and the idea that the interpretation of religious texts is always in flux, never fixed (Wright, 1995).

Freedom and reinterpretation are here to be understood as essential to Islamic faith. The great critical legacy of the first half of this century, the legacy of Muhammad Abdu, Iqbal, and Taha Hussain does not constitute a strict school, but it has kept alive the debate with the past and the right to *ijtihad*, to reinterpret the text and tradition in the light of present needs. Many scholars and thinkers in different countries

keep this tradition of free exploration alive, among them Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri in Morocco, Syed Hossein Nasr from Iran, Mohamed Salim Al-'Awa in Egypt, Nurcho-lis Majid in Indonesia, Azim Nanji from Kenya, Hisham Gait in Tunis, Fatima Mer-nissi in Morocco and Leila Ahmed in the United States. The new growth in Islamic thinking spreads across all national boundaries and specialisations.

The Los Angeles Times article 'Islamist's Theory of Relativity' argues for an emer-gent tradition which is both 'authentically Islamic without being fundamentalist and authentically modern'. Again, of course, the words are inadequate since the terms authentic and modern hide so much and contain too much, but an Islamic reformation may be underway, carried forward by those whom the article cites - Tunisia's Rashid Ghannouchi, Egypt's Hassad Hanafi and Algeria's Mohammed Arkoun. Democracy, freedom, equality and the empowerment of ordinary believers, 'a seed to grow' are the phrases used. The space of freedom, of choice, of error has to be opened and protected as a precondition for religious belief. On this point so many in the Third Way agree even when they have different specific beliefs. Shifting back to architec-ture, the Award has developed a growing tradition by stressing different examples, giving different precedents, writing different rules for action and building laws. Pluralism of example is the rule.

The confusion that results from using labels, rather than examples, as standards can be shown in many ways. All the 'isms' show this problem, from Modernism to Post-Modernism, just as do all the 'ologies', from ideology to theology. Many people, particularly intellectuals, sometimes believe they have reached the bottom of a pro-blem when they have formulated some connection between labels, and this leads to the kinds of oversimplifications which become habitual and then are turned into government policy. We find this in the West today in the tendency to conflate fun-damentalism with the followers of Islamic religion. Journalists, government advisers and The New York Times sometimes use the two interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. Thus, recent formulations of United States' policy have had recourse to the concept of 'Islamism'. As Michael Field, the respected author of *Inside the Arab World* and consultant on Middle East Affairs wrote in the *International Herald Tri-bune*:

The West, some tell us, should resign itself to living with a region that is increasingly Islamist and unfriendly, and even learn to do business with it. The term 'Islamism' is gaining currency because, more than 'fundamentalism', it conveys the meaning of Islam as a political movement.(Field, 1995, 8)

Field (a typical expert?) is guilty of a double reduction here which is not unique: first, he reduces Islamic societies to Arab ones (when there are more than forty-four Muslim countries, and the largest is non-Arab) and he tacitly accepts the theologi-cally questionable view that God belongs to a political party.

Such is the power of words and linguistic associations and the inadequacy of labels. If, as Field and other experts are now suggesting, we are stuck with calling political,

revolutionary and populist movements in Muslim societies 'Islamism', then we might as well stop thinking. I am not, to underline the point, attacking Field's ideas and values, many of which are worthy, but again showing the common linguistic confusion within which we frame the debate on culture, and therefore on architecture. To return to my title, we have to fashion a third way between labels, between Islam and the West, while at the same time using them, accepting them, changing them. This is what is at stake in the metaphor of process and growth which constantly recurs in the debate - the growth of a third path.

Put another way it is to look at the positive, creative sides of the 'fundamentalism and westernisation' of my title, to take the energy invested here and deflect it to another purpose, a third alternative, an enigmatic 'other'. This is best illustrated with one of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture-winners, the Kaedi Hospital extension in Mauritania (Fig. 1a, b). Here is the architectural equivalent of fundamentalism - a brick dome construction reminiscent of several traditional techniques, some of which are common in Muslim cultures - and modern hospital technology, western planning and Expressionist aesthetics; but all of these antithetical traditions are extended, distorted and combined in a unique post-modern hybrid. The innovative language of architecture includes hemispherical domes, parabolic domes, doughnut-plan domes, oves or tear-shaped spaces, pod-spaces, and an overall petal morphology organised roughly on a curved, branching plan.

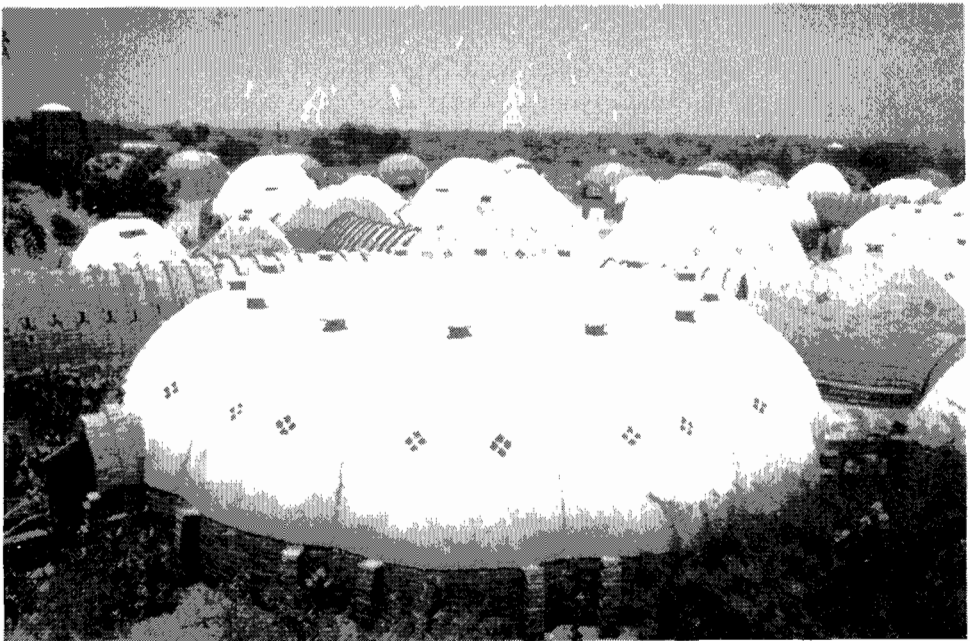


Fig. 1a Kaedi Regional Hospital, Mauritania. Construction is made up of ogives (simple domes), oves (complex domes), and lentilles (pod shaped spaces). (Photo: Kamran Adle/AKAA)



Fig. 1b Kaedi Regional Hospital, Mauritania (Photo: Kamran Adle/AKAA)

One could commend this as a fractal architecture, a self-similar building which avoids the banality of a self-same Modernism; one could see in this both an ecologically sensitive response to the climate and local materials and a new version of the cooling, 'stack effect'; one can admire the village planning which does not slip into neo-trad, the style of Club-Med primitivism so dangerous in this sort of scheme. That the surgeons who operate here like it as much as the patients reflects the multiple-coding of the form language. Because of its innovative use of appropriate technologies in an 'other' aesthetic, one can say it fulfils the primary role of a spiritual architecture, that is, creativity, freshness, freedom from cliché. A hospital certainly is not a mosque and has no explicit religious purpose (although birth and death occur here) but the quality of this building has implications for a renewed Islamic tradition of spirituality - a point to which I shall return.

### **Desiring Heterogeneity**

If the Kaedi Hospital is a good example of 'inbetween architecture' - both Islamic and modern and neither explicitly - then it constitutes one type, one example and style from which to learn. A basic heuristic of the Award is to create a set of different exemplars and over the years it has done so, setting standards through the casebook method, showing principles through specific buildings. The decision to award not one but several buildings and directions, a goal from the start in 1977, affirmed pluralism, but did so in a way that was less apparent than real. The image of the Award, as purveyed in books and magazines, has gravitated toward seamless conservation, or what I would call 'Invisible Mend', because new and old are blended and mended in a way which minimises difference. Other awarded approaches that have

dominated the image of the Award (if not the reality) are neo-traditional, modern abstract and socially worthy self-building, or architecture for the poor.

Throughout I will refer to all of these identifiable 'schools' at first in positive terms because I presume a benign intentionality and quality; but there is also a corresponding negative usage associated with each of them, since they can be debased for commodification and entropy. So, again, it is necessary to steer a course between what can only be relative markers, plural guides on the road, not end points.

It is essential for Muslim architectures to broaden the heterogeneity of value systems as they increase the range of building types. The development of Muslim cultures in a global framework will inevitably lead to a plethora of styles, functional types and urban morphologies, whatever anyone might say about it. The question is: can one develop a radical pluralism or differential scale of judgement or discontinuous valuation without slipping into absolute relativism?

The Award has been notable for developing different criteria for judging conservation and rehabilitation projects, and is exceptional in promoting standards of housing for the poor; but it has not been very lucky at supporting the third of its three stated goals - the discovery of new architectural vocabularies - because not enough such work has been submitted (or perhaps exists?). With Kenneth Yeang's work (Fig. 2a, b), and others shown in the 1995 awards, that lacunae may be somewhat filled; but it strikes me that the whole question of the three privileged categories - a kind of Trinitarian unity - might be expanded to a more radical heterogeneity.

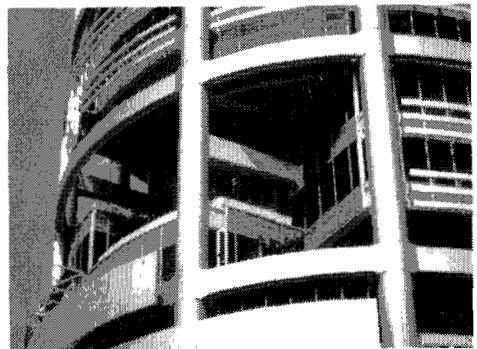


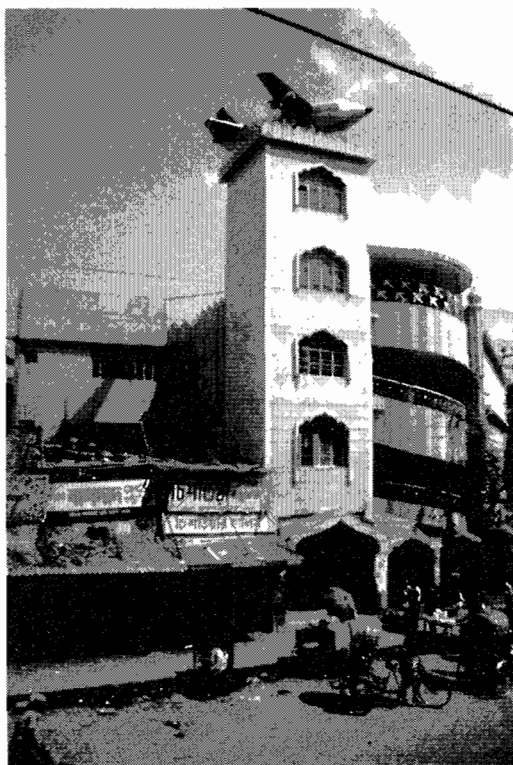
Fig. 2a, b Menara Mesiniaga, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Photo: K.L. Ng). The bioclimatic skyscraper.

At the second meeting of the Master Jury the initial 433 submissions had been cut to eighty-six and, to gauge the existing plurality of these, I made a quick classification of each scheme in terms of its major themata. My analysis resulted in twelve distinct approaches and styles, a good measure of the existing heterogeneity in the architecture of Muslim societies, even if one disputes the rather superficial categorisation and the limited sample. The main types, listed in positive and negative versions to show that each tradition may degenerate into a caricature of itself, show that each approach demands the *sine qua non* of quality. I do not expect everyone to agree with the twelve, or fully understand them. The list is made to suggest existing variety and the categories that may still be missing, or under-represented (see Table 1, p. 291).

As one might expect, these eighty-six projects show a majority of traditional, Modern and Post-Modern approaches, the kind of spread one might find in any large civilisation today. So far so plural. But under-represented by my standards are schemes which are ecological (category 10), feminist (7), cosmogenic (6), pop-commercial (11), industrial High Tech (4) and pluralist/heterogeneous (category 3, but not made explicit in my characterisation). Why do I say these are under-represented?

Take the pop-commercial category, with only half or part of a building. In Muslim societies, facing rampant commercialisation by both multinationals and small traders, it is absolutely necessary that architects forge a set of aesthetic and constructional rules which deal with this emergent reality and not simply give up and shout 'kitsch', as do so many critics in the West. Commodification may be ugly and venal, but there are still unique standards and opportunities for expression, ways of turning commercial forces in an inventive direction, as the work of SITE and, occasionally, Robert Venturi and Archigram have shown in the West. The closest the Award could come to a submitted example in this genre was the Aeroplane Mosque - a first essay in 'IslamPop' (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 Mukeet, Aeroplane Mosque, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1990. Surreal juxtaposition or advertisement, ironic comment or whimsical bricolage - the framing of the incongruity is uncertain and therefore not a true example of pop-commercial; but the standards for judging such work is completely different from evaluating customary buildings. (Photo: L. N. Ekram)





Many will find this building and my label questionable, and it raises all sorts of issues from secularisation to a fundamentalism that is ironic, but it also clarifies the issue of discontinuous valuation very clearly. One values pop-commercial for its surreal inappropriateness, vitality, incongruity, amplification and distortion of scales, juxtaposition, clash of references - all values which are counter to cultural integration, traditional harmony and mainstream aesthetics. There is no possible yardstick by which one can judge the Aeroplane Mosque along with Incremental Housing and, for instance, the Women's Library and Information Centre in Istanbul, a feminist project whose architectural values are mostly involved with rehabilitation, but whose invisible values are clearly involved with activism, empowerment, a historical movement. One way forward for the Award and the architecture of Muslim societies is frankly to admit this radical heterogeneity and discontinuous valuation - to desire and reward difference.

### **Spirituality and Cosmogenesis**

Such values of pluralism have been supported in the West, particularly since the 1960s and the rise of Post-Modernism, but they are clearly not enough to sustain either an urbanism or a coherent culture. While I would support the slow movement toward greater heterogeneity which is underway in Islamic societies, I also think that the basic traditions of equality before divinity and fraternity (or communal spirit) which are so palpable within these societies have much to contribute to the Third Way. It is true, and a cause for pro-test, that women are excluded from the public realm in most Muslim societies, but it is also true that Islamic communities are a lot less atomised than corresponding ones in the West.

There is an older tradition of Islamic culture which was universalist in the direct sense that it was oriented to the universe, the cosmos, the scientific and mathematical laws as revealed by researchers (and even architects). That tradition may be as attenuated in Muslim cultures as it is in western ones today, but it is nonetheless a possible source and inspiration for a public architecture. I have set out such arguments in *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* subtitled 'How Complexity Science is Changing Architecture and Culture', and I will not rehearse them here (Jencks, 1995). Suffice it to say that contemporary cosmology and complexity science are giving us a new view of the universe as a single, creative unfolding event with the primary message that the universe is a lot more creative - jumping to new levels of organisation - than anyone suspected even twenty years ago.

Self-organising systems are found everywhere, even in non-living matter such as clouds or the Red Spot of Jupiter, and they are forever reorganising on higher (and lower) levels through phase transitions, leaps, catastrophic falls, smooth slides and jumps. The story of the universe, from its beginning some ten to fifteen billion years ago, constitutes a new meta-narrative which can unite all cultures, all religions, if it is recounted as a single creative, still unfolding event. The implications are clearly spiritual, even for atheists, because they show we are fundamentally built into the

laws of nature. The universe must - given enough time - produce sentient beings. It must produce culture, aesthetic feeling, ethical beings, discrimination, ever more sensitive levels of feeling, and a host of other values.

In the Award debates, Mohammed Arkoun raised the question of spirituality and architecture, and pointed out two necessary conditions for an authentic spiritual building; it must embody aesthetic feelings, perhaps of harmony and transcendence, and it must be creative. The fact that so much Islamic religious building fails on both these scores - as does Christian - has to be admitted from the start. The historic religions today are more concerned with the numbers game, doctrinal conformity and stereotype than they are with spirituality, so one has to look outside these traditional institutions to find it. ('The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life', as Corinthians 2 insists.) One recurrent, if intermittent, source is the avant-garde, especially that which has developed from Vassily Kandinsky and his writings, such as *The Spiritual in Art*. Another is the scientific community, or at least a small part of it, particularly those concerned with path-breaking discoveries in genetics, astrophysics, and chaos and complexity theories.

I would argue that to Arkoun's two criteria of spirituality in architecture - aesthetics and creativity - a third should be added: the presentation and representation of contemporary scientific laws as they unfold. As we discover the new laws, the new form languages, and ways of conceiving the universe, we discover basic, transcendent truths that are provocative, stimulating, creative and aesthetic; we discover more of our basic connection to the single, creative unfolding event. In short we discover the unity of the universe, a counterpart to the necessary heterogeneity of societies.

By this measure the most spiritual architecture the Award recognises in 1995 is, again, the Kaedi Hospital: harmonious without being *clichéd*, new without fetishising originality, scientific in being based on new techniques, and aesthetic in being consistently self-similar - petal-like. There is something transcendent in the handling of internal space and light - perhaps it is the use of simple means in an entirely fresh way. The strange ovoid/petal forms of the nurses' house and courtyard also have this quality: their enigmatic and suggestive forms provoke an empathetic response because they are both primary and new. Their organic qualities suggest growth, and this metaphor is a natural analogue of the creative growth of the scheme as a whole, not to mention the jumping universe.

My inadequate metaphor of the Third Way is, as I have said, also meant to suggest growth, creativity, the construction of a new tradition across barriers and between cultures. The difficulty, and it has been a theme of Post-Modernism now for twenty years, is to keep the autonomy of the parts while the links are being constructed. I can imagine that as Islamic thinkers and architects come to terms with the new sciences and cosmogenesis, something quite new and beautiful will emerge.

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