Architectural Culture in the Fifties: Louis Kahn and the National Assembly Complex in Dhaka

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This article explores the architectural culture of the fifties and analyzes Louis Kahn's responses, as reflected in his project for the National Assembly complex, now called Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka, Bangladesh. After World War II, architects and social critics became increasingly distressed by the apparent erosion of community and rise of mass culture. Major architectural trends such as the new monumentality, humanism, and regionalism, were attempts to arrest this erosion and to facilitate the reconstruction of communal life. Analysis of Kahn's intellectual development from the mid-fifties to the early sixties demonstrates that he was influenced by these movements and shared these concerns. This is reflected in his design for the National Assembly complex, which became a forum in which Kahn addressed these particularly western dilemmas.

THE AMERICAN ARCHITECTURAL COMMUNITY of the fifties endured a confusing assortment of disparate moods.[1] Movements such as the new monumentality, the new humanism, and the new regionalism seemed to clatter against each other with no single pattern dominant. Surrendering in defeat, critics concluded that "chaoticism" was the only common thread. But such trends did share one theme, an anxiety about the perceived erosion of community life since the end of World War II.[2]

This concern underlies Louis Kahn's description in 1964 of how he designed the National Assembly building in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Figs. 1, 2). In typically mystical incantations, Kahn said, "On the night of the third day, I fell out of bed with the idea which is still the prevailing idea of the plan. This came simply from the realization that assembly is of a transcendent nature. Men came to assemble to touch the spirit of commonness, and I thought this must be expressible. Observing the way of religion in the living of the Pakistani, I thought that a mosque woven into the space fabric of the assembly would [express this] . . . transcendent nature."[3] This conviction, that assembly is a transcendent social good, Kahn shared with his more pragmatically-minded colleagues, including his peers at Yale (where he taught from 1947), and especially at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught from 1955 until his death in 1974.

This article is about two sides of a conversation. The first side is the architectural discourse of the late fifties and how several of its dominant themes reveal an underlying concern with the restitution of community in general, and more particularly, of democratic public life. The second side is Kahn's reaction to these concerns. Creation is dialogical: to analyze the work of one architect without comprehending the discourse to which he responds is like straining to grasp an exchange between two speakers when only one voice can be heard. How can examining the architectural culture of the fifties illuminate Kahn's work of

1. An earlier version of this paper was prepared for a conference held in October 1991 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, entitled "Sher-e-Bangla Nagar: Louis Kahn at Dhaka." The conference was sponsored by the Aga Khan Foundation. The author would like to express her gratitude to Mary McLeod, Robin Middleton, Gwendolyn Wright, and Francesco Passanti, all of whom made very helpful suggestions for earlier versions of this essay. For comments on later versions, thanks to Alice Gray Read and Joan Ockman. Julia Moore Converse, curator of the Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and Gail Pietrzyk, of the University of Pennsylvania Archives, have also been extremely helpful. This article is drawn from research for my doctoral dissertation, "Changing Symbols of Public Life: Louis Kahn's Religious and Civic Projects (1951–1965) and the Architecture of the Fifties." Research was partially funded by a Rudolf Wittkower Fellowship for Dissertation Research, and by travel grants from Columbia University.

2. On chaoticism, see "The Sixties: A P/A Symposium on the State of Architecture," *Progressive Architecture* (March 1961) 42: 122–33. On the extraordinary sense of community that developed in the United States during the Depression and especially during World War II, see Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940's and 1950's* (New York, 1985), 6–12, 50, hereafter cited as *The Liberal Mind;* and Francis Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front* (New York, 1948), 230–34. An excellent introduction to immediate postwar architectural theory is *Architecture Culture 1943–1968,* ed. Joan Ockman (New York, 1993).

3. Louis Kahn, interview with Paul Heyer, in *Architects on Architecture: New Directions in America* (New York, 1966), 397, hereafter cited as *Architects on Architecture.* Although Heyer did not publish the text until 1966, he conducted the interview with Kahn in early 1964. The transcript of the interview, with Kahn's annotations, is in the archive of Richard Saul Wurman, New York City. In 1972, East Pakistan declared independence from West Pakistan and changed its name to Bangladesh.

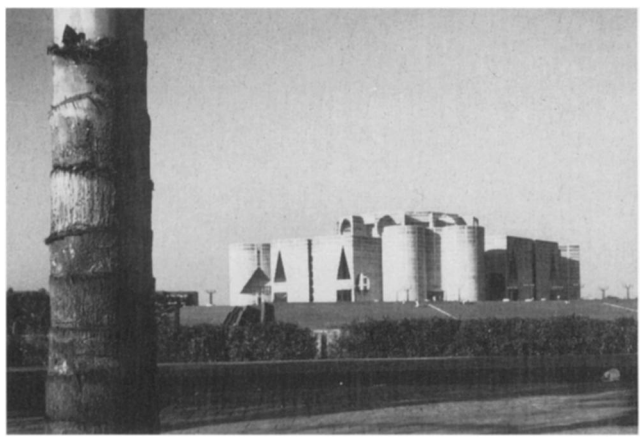

Fig. 1. Louis Kahn, National Assembly building, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Designed 1963–66, constructed 1966–83. South elevation, with the brick-paved south plaza in front. The prayer hall is in the center, flanked by office blocks. The circular cutouts on top mark the assembly chamber. (All photos taken by Sarah or Wlodek Ksiazek unless otherwise noted)

the period, using one of his major efforts, his design for the National Assembly building in Dhaka, as an example?

The new monumentality

Of the dominant themes of the era, that with the longest history was the new [modernist, nonacademic] monumentality. A problem as vexing as it was vague, architects discussed monumentality in the architectural press and the conferences of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) of the forties and the early fifties (Fig. 3).[4] Immediately after the war, discussions of monumentality and public space often focused on the forums of popular culture such as shopping malls and urban squares, and architects sought what they called a "synthesis of the arts," in which collaboration with painters and sculptors would create a new public idiom. But by the early fifties, this idea would be largely supplanted by a Buckminster Fuller-inspired technological idealism, in which architects endeavored to reinvigorate modernism through wartime discoveries in structure and technique.

By the late fifties, the discourse on monumentality took a new turn again, partly under the influence of prominent intellectuals, who had become specifically concerned by the erosion of a hierarchy of public and private life, and by the concomitant rise of what was, by then, pejoratively termed "mass culture." Mass culture was defined as a homogenized, consumerist culture, in which individuals no longer identified themselves with any social body larger than their immediate family, and consequently felt no greater social commitments than the fulfillment of personal desires. This problem, discussed by philosophers (Hannah Arendt), politicians (Adlai Stevenson), and social critics (David Riesman, William H. Whyte, C. Wright Mills) was an integral part of the intellectual life of these years.[5]

Architects, probably in response, shifted away from discussing the urban center as a locus for both social and civic life, focusing instead on how an architectural monument can express the aspirations of civic living.[6] In 1957, Vincent Scully wrote an

4. For a general discussion on monumentality in modernism, see Christiane C. and George R. Collins, "Monumentality: A Critical Matter in Modern Architecture," *Harvard Architecture Review* special issue, *Monumentality and the City* 4 (Spring 1984): 15–35. The best-known statements on monumentality are Sigfried Giedion, Jose Luis Sert, and Fernand Léger, "Nine Points on Monumentality—1943," in *Architecture You and Me: The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 48–51, later reprinted in the *Harvard Architecture Review,* 62–63. Sigfried Giedion, "The Need for a New Monumentality;" and Louis Kahn, "Monumentality," in *New Architecture and City Planning,* ed. Paul Zucker (New York, 1944), 549–68 and 577–88 respectively; Elizabeth Mock in *Built in the U.S.A. 1932–1944,* ed. Elizabeth Mock (New York, 1945), 17–25, *passim.* "In Search of a New Monumentality: A Symposium," *Architectural Review* 104 (September 1948): 117–29, has contributions on the topic by Gregor Paulsson, H.-R. Hitchcock, William Holford, Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, Lucio Costa, and Alfred Roth. Lewis Mumford published a response to this symposium entitled "Monumentalism, Symbolism and Style," in the *Architectural Review* 105 (April, 1949): 173–80. The subject of the 1947 CIAM conference in Bridgewater, England, was "the synthesis of the arts," recalling Giedion's proposal for a new monumentality. The 1951 CIAM conference, held in Hoddesdon, England, was entitled "The Core of the City"—once again, the topic was monumentality, and public space. The proceedings of the Hoddesdon conference were published by The International Congress of Modern Architects, J. Tyrwhitt, J. L. Sert, et. al., eds., *The Heart of the City: Toward the Humanization of Urban Life* (New York, 1952). There are many other, less-known statements on the topic. Among them are George Howe, "Monuments, Memorials, and Modern Design—An Exchange of Letters," *Magazine of Art* 37 (October 1944): 202–7; and Jean Labatut, "Monuments and Memorials," in Talbot Hamlin, *Forms and Functions of Twentieth-Century Architecture* (New York, 1952), 3:523–33.

5. The first contribution to this discussion was from David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study in the Changing American Character* (1950; repr., New Haven, 1969). C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York, 1956), esp. 303–4, contained a stunning condemnation of mass culture; see also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), hereafter cited as *The Human Condition.* Hannah Arendt and Louis Kahn were inducted into the National Institute of Arts and Letters at the same ceremony in 1963; see "National Institute of Arts and Letters," Box 57, Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as the Kahn Collection.) Adlai Stevenson's comments at a Smith College address from April 1956, reprinted in *Saturday Review,* were typical of the themes he sounded in these years: "Since western rationalism and eastern spiritualism met in Athens . . . collectivism in various forms has collided with individualism time and time again." See Paul Carter, *Another Side of The Fifties* (New York, 1983), 90–91, hereafter cited as *Another Side.* William H. Whyte, "Urban Sprawl," *Fortune* (January 1958): 103–11, 194, 198, hereafter cited as "Urban Sprawl." An offprint of Whyte's article is in Kahn's papers, "Misc. F," Box 68, Kahn Collection. Especially good discussions of mass culture in the fifties may be found in Warren Susman, "Did Success Spoil The United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America," hereafter cited as "Success;" and Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," hereafter cited as "Matter of Taste;" in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War,* ed. Larry May (Chicago, 1989), 19–37 and 38–60 respectively.

6. For a discussion of the distinction between the communal space of popular and civic cultures, see Mark Lilla, "The Great Museum Muddle," *The New Republic* (8 April 1985): 25–30, cited in Denise Scott Brown,

Fig. 2. North façade, showing the Presidential Plaza at left, with its outdoor foyer immediately to the right.

Fig. 3. Inside jacket cover illustration for published proceedings of CIAM 1951 conference in Hoddesdon, "The Core of the City." (International Congress of Modern Architects, *The Heart of the City: Toward the Humanization of Urban Life,* ed. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, J. L. Sert, and others [New York, 1952])

article on monumentality in the Capitol Complex at Chandigarh, in which he enthused that the "problem of a new monumentality" was solved.[7] But others were not so convinced. By the early sixties we hear frequent echoes of Paul Rudolph's complaint that "civic architecture is the glaring lack of the twentieth century." The sentiment was expressed by Kahn's old friend, J. L. Sert, and by Ulrich Franzen at a conference in which Kahn participated in 1960.[8]

Several factors contributed to this reawakened interest in the monumental. First, there was cause to contemplate public landmarks, since postwar prosperity brought more commissions for institutional buildings of communal symbolism than ever before.[9] Another reason was that the increased sensitivity to historical precedent, advocated by many of the field's leading practitioners since the early fifties, inspired architects to consider the semantic implications of their work. Furthermore, Kevin Lynch's ideas on perceptual images of the city, in particular his emphasis on the importance of landmarks, were widely influential (Fig. 4). For example, Lynch sent Kahn a draft of his manuscript in 1955, which Kahn read carefully. Kahn began musing on symbolic monuments shortly thereafter, asking "Is not the civic center the Cathedral of the city?"[10] In the late fifties,

"Public Realm, The Public Sector and the Public Interest in Urban Design," *Architectural Design* 60 (1990): 22.

7. Vincent Scully, "Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style," *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 10, hereafter cited as "Modern Architecture."

8. "The New Art of Urban Design—Are We Equipped?" Transcript of a conference held at the Architectural League in New York with Kahn, Sert, Franzen, Rudolph, Scully, and others, in 1960. In "Louis I. Kahn-Architectural League," Box 61, Kahn Collection. This was later published in *Architectural Forum* 114 (June 1961): 88–89.

9. See the statistics on building activity published monthly in *Architectural Forum* from the years 1955 through 1962, which report a dramatic rise in institutional construction of all kinds, especially religious and educational structures. See also "Commodity, Firmness, and Delight," editorial, *Architectural Forum* 106 (February 1957): 97, gleefully predicting that "the investment of America over the next ten years will add up to $500 billion—half a trillion—in construction of all kinds."

10. In August 1955, Kevin Lynch and Gyorgy Kepes asked Kahn for comments on their manuscript, a study which would eventually be published as Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass, 1960); unmarked file, Box 66, and "Massachusetts Institute of Technology," Box 62, Kahn Collection. Kahn read and edited the manuscript very carefully. Evidence of Lynch's impact on Kahn is demonstrated by two versions of a letter he wrote to Pietro Belluschi, the Dean of the School of Architecture at MIT, outlining teaching plans for his Bemis professorship at MIT the following year. The first draft of Kahn's letter, in his sketchbook, is virtually a repetition of Kahn's text, "Expressways are like RIVERS, . . ." from "Toward a Plan for Midtown Philadelphia," *Perspecta* 2 (1953), 10–27. But the text which Kahn sent Belluschi, dated 16 August, after he had received Lynch's manuscript, has passages added on the importance of landmarks. In his notations on Lynch's manuscript, Kahn applauded Lynch's emphasis on monuments, writing "VG [very good] AND NECESSARY" next to that section. Kahn's revised letter to Belluschi includes the following section on cathedrals: "CIVIC CENTER-CORE/ What does it want to be? Is it the creative center of communication? . . . The question of the civic center is the most provocative in the architecture

FIG. 33. *The Duomo, Florence*

Fig. 4. The Duomo, Florence, as it appeared in Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City.* The photograph emphasizes the building's massive scale. Lynch uses it as an example of a landmark which organizes one's perceptions of the urban environment. (Copyright Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960. Used by permission of MIT Press)

Lynch was a frequent visitor to the School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania, where Kahn taught, and his work turns up often in course syllabi and master's theses of the era, some of which Kahn kept.[11]

That the new urban monument should encourage a participatory public—as opposed to a mass public—came to be repeated again and again. The problem seems to have been addressed in Europe first. British architects Alison and Peter Smithson, with whom Kahn became quite close after 1957, wrote in their article of 1955, "Urban Re-Identification," that "the task of our generation is place—we must re-identify man with his house/his community/his city" (Fig. 5).[12] While the Smithsons became convinced that mass culture could generate participation, most architects were less favorably inclined. In the 1959 issue of *Perspecta,* American-born French expatriate, Paul Nelson, warned of "the extreme danger in a mass production society of absorbing the individual into a collective pattern of passive conformity. . . . Means . . . must be found in the new architecture to permit the individual to intervene, to participate, to express himself."[13]

These themes were echoed in the Otterlo conference of the same year, particularly in the presentations of the Smithsons and of Aldo van Eyck—the only architect whom Kahn publicly commended at the conference.[14]

By 1960–61, the problem of the relationship of the individual to the collective was being deliberated among Kahn's colleagues in the United States. In November 1960, Karl Linn, a landscape architect on the Penn faculty whom Kahn had supported strongly, argued that Madison Avenue was creating a wellspring of consumers in place of a public of citizens. If this continued, Linn warned, we would "betray America."[15] The following year G. Holmes Perkins, the Dean of the School of Fine Arts at Penn, declared that a sense of community should be encouraged at all levels of social organization "from the family to the city," recalling the hierarchy of "Urban Re-Identification" that the Smithsons had made their ideal.[16] At the 1960 conference which Kahn attended mass culture was a principal topic of discussion, with Scully complaining that American mass culture was "discouraging respect for action or accomplishment."[17] Once again, the demon was social apathy generated by a breakdown of traditional patterns of association.

The issue, then, was that architects should encourage people to identify with their community by providing places with symbolic focus. But what form should these new public monuments take? Orthodox modernism no longer served, becoming increasingly associated with the corporate culture that architects deplored. Colin Rowe, an architectural critic based at Yale in the early fifties, argued that the construction of Lever House in the United States and the Festival of Britain in London, were turning points which signaled to progressive architects that the previously revolutionary idiom of modernism was no longer an agent of social critique.[18] Though the change may have occurred later, the rise in

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of the city." Unmarked file, Box 122, and "Massachusetts Institute of Technology," Box 62, Kahn Collection.

11. Holmes Perkins, Dean of the School of Fine Arts at Penn, was in frequent contact with Lynch during these years and a fulsome supporter of his ideas. See correspondence between Lynch and Perkins "A.S.C.A. Convention, Program Committee," UPB 8.4, Box 90, University of Pennsylvania Archives. Lynch's influence is clear in, for example, the Princeton MFA thesis of Jeremiah Ford III, Kahn's student, when he was a visiting critic at Princeton in 1959. Ford's thesis is in Kahn's papers: "Princeton-1958–59," Box 62, Kahn Collection.

12. Alison and Peter Smithson, interview with author April 1992, and "Urban Re-Identification," first published in *Architectural Design* (February 1955); published in expanded form in *Ordinariness and Light: Urban Theories 1952–1960 and Their Application in a Building Project 1963–1970* (London, 1970), 18–103.

13. Paul Nelson, "Design for Tomorrow," *Perspecta* 5 (1956): 59, hereafter cited as "Design."

14. Aldo van Eyck, in Oscar Newman, ed., *New Frontiers in Architecture: CIAM '59 in Otterlo* (Stuttgart, 1961), 27–28, hereafter cited as *New Frontiers.* In the early 1970s, Kahn referred to Aldo Van Eyck as a very important architect who should have had more opportunity to build. Kahn, interview with Richard Saul Wurman, original tape in the archive of Richard Saul Wurman, New York City.

15. Karl Linn, memorandum to the University of Pennsylvania, 1 November 1960, no title, unpaginated. A copy is in Kahn's files, "Misc. 1961," Box 64, Kahn Collection. In January 1963, Kahn wrote a long memo to the Dean of Penn's School of Fine Arts, Holmes Perkins, encouraging Perkins to support Linn for projects in the Department of Landscape Architecture, where Linn had been a professor since 1959. The letter is in "Karl Linn," Box 56, Kahn Collection.

16. November 1961, G. Holmes Perkins, "Urban Form," for the Symposium on Metropolitan Planning. Published in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106 (June 1962): 190.

17. Vincent Scully at the Architectural League symposium, *Architectural Forum* 114 (June 1961): 87.

18. Colin Rowe, introduction to *James Stirling, Buildings and Projects, 1950–1980,* ed. Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford (New York, 1985), 17. Other critics expressed similar sentiments. In 1953, Joseph Hudnut acknowledged that modernism needed to be reinvigorated, bemoaning

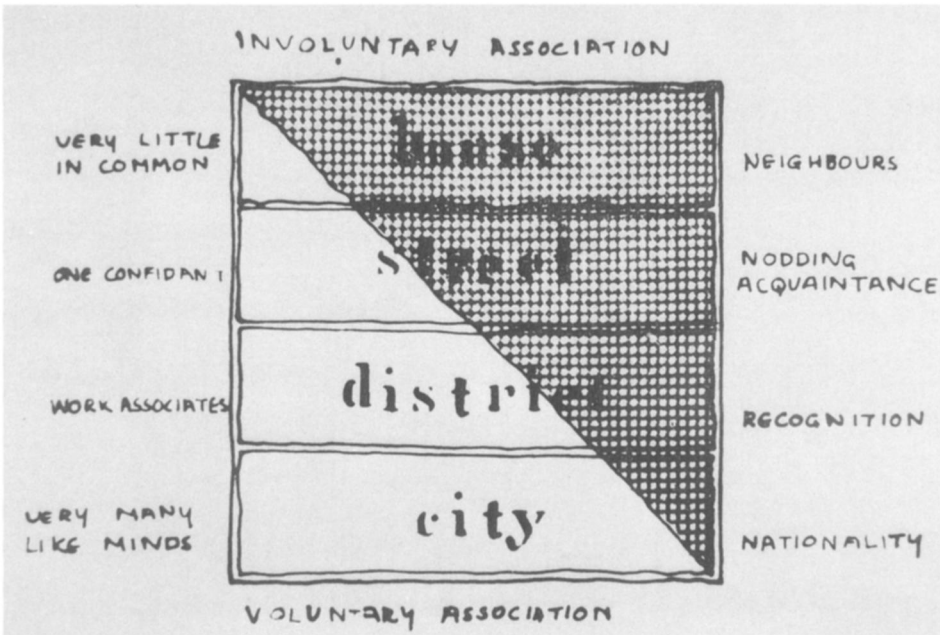

Fig. 5. Alison and Peter Smithson, grid showing levels of community and forms of association in a city. Published in the expanded version of the article of 1955, "Urban Re-Identification." (*Ordinariness and Light,* London [1970]. Used by permission of the authors)

the U.S. in the mid-fifties of a facile neoclassicism—Minoru Yamasaki's buildings for Wayne State University, for example, and Philip Johnson's schemes for Lincoln Center—hastened the urgency of the dilemma.[19]

The new humanism and regionalism

Simultaneous with this growing interest in public monuments, two aesthetic ideals emerged during the mid- to late-fifties. One was termed the new humanism, the other, less dominant, the new regionalism. The new humanism posited certain primary geometric motifs derived from the Italian Renaissance as bearers of universal significance. Regionalism, by contrast, demanded that the architect consider local climate, topography, social patterns, and built heritage.

The phrase "new humanism" had a curious life in the fifties, having one meaning in the United States at the beginning of the decade and a nearly opposite one by the end. After the war, it referred to a movement imported from England which had been inspired nostalgically and advocated by left-leaning, if not explicitly Marxist, architects. Humanism meant an individualistic, romantic design approach associated with the architecture of Alvar Aalto, and sometimes more distantly with William Morris.[20]

But by the end of the decade, humanism had come to be associated with the forms and ideals of the Italian Renaissance, especially the work of Palladio. This change in meaning was largely due to the growing influence of Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism,* published in book form in 1949, and widely available in its second edition of 1952. The impact of Wittkower's book occurred earlier in England than in the United States, and there the movement it inspired was usually referred to as neo-Palladianism. By 1953, *Architectural Principles* was popular at Yale's school of architecture; the results of its influence were generally visible by 1955. The critical change in the meaning of the word humanism in the United States seems to have been initiated by Vincent Scully in an article of 1957 in which he described recent work by Philip Johnson, and Eero Saarinen's chapel at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as the "architecture of democracy," marking a "new humanism." This phrase became a battle cry in the article of 1959 on Paul Nelson discussed above, and William Jordy used humanism in the Wittkowerian sense the following year.[21]

"the aridity of our new architecture." See "The Three Lamps of Modern Architecture, I: The Lamp of Progress," *Architectural Record* 113 (March 1953): 138. Alison and Peter Smithson reported on Rowe's studies at Yale; this has been confirmed by Dan Naegele, in an unpublished master's thesis on Colin Rowe for the Architectural Association, 1989. Alison and Peter Smithson, interview with the author, April 1992.

19. Both Yamasaki's work at Wayne State University in Detroit and the various schemes for Lincoln Center were published regularly in the late fifties and early sixties.

20. See Reyner Banham's discussion of the new humanism in "The New Brutalism," *The Architectural Review* 118 (December 1955): 355–62; see also Nigel Whiteley, "Banham and *Otherness:* Reyner Banham and His Quest for an *Architecture Autre,*" *Architectural History: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain* 33 (1990): 188–221. When the phrase came to the United States it did not always carry as much political baggage; for example, G. E. Kidder Smith, in *The New Architecture of Europe* (Cleveland, 1961), 259, describes Alvar Aalto's Sanyatsalo as "the apotheosis of the new humanism." In "The Next Fifty Years," *Architectural Forum* (June 1951): 168, Eliot Noyes complained that "This word 'humanism' is often used to justify a kind of corny lushness of materials, colors, etc. which amounts really to a lack of architectural discipline." The new humanism and the new empiricism were in many instances interchangeable names for the same movement.

21. For an excellent discussion on the impact of Wittkower on immediate postwar architecture, see Henry Millon, "Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism:* Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture," *JSAH* 31 (1972): 83–91. Colin Rowe uses the term "neo-Palladian" in his

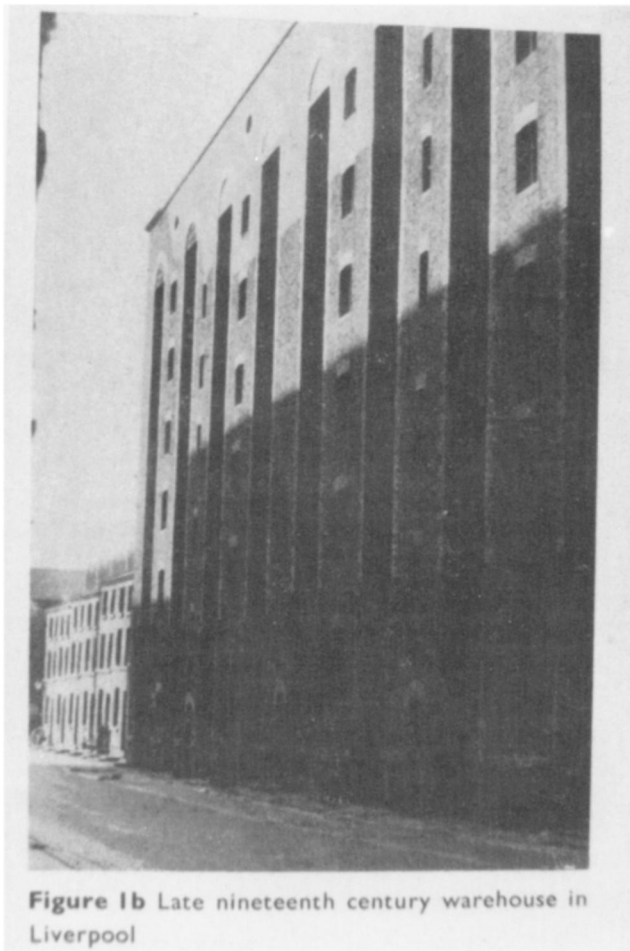

Fig. 6. "Late-nineteenth-century warehouse in Liverpool," from James Stirling's "Regionalism in Architecture." (*Architect's Year Book* 7 [1957]).

Palladian humanism had several manifestations, but two tenets appeared consistently. One was a belief in the power of primary geometric forms, sometimes for symbolic, but also often for perceptual reasons. The second was a concern for the proportions of a building in relation to the human figure. Scully defined humanist works as focused on making "clear, man-centered forms," which asserted a sculptural, symbolic, monumental presence. Such work proved that "our present fate remains more wholly human than we had been led to believe." Stressing the urgency that fired this new ideal, Scully ended by proclaiming

Fig. 7. Louis Kahn personal slide, inscribed "19th cent. Warehouses, Liverpool Docks." (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

that "in the face of total challenge"—challenge presumably from mass culture, or communism, or both—"the values of humanist civilization, as yet not dead, call to us, and we take our stand."[22]

The alternative to humanism was regionalism. Like humanism, regionalism's definition in this period was evolving. During the interwar years, it had been a significant movement on the west coast, giving modernism a local inflection by advocating sensitivity to indigenous climate and native materials. In the work of architects such as Pietro Belluschi, this version of regionalism lived on after the war. But at the same time, regionalism's definition was expanding, coming to imply that practitioners should also analyze a culture's built heritage, which sometimes meant its vernacular structures and sometimes meant its high art. This change was largely inspired by architects' increased exposure to nonwestern cultures, where travel as well as commissions were now common. Architects as diverse as Edward Durrell Stone, Paul Rudolph, and James Stirling advocated this brand of regionalism, claiming respect for national and local identities. In its expanded manifestation, regionalism became a simultaneous critique of twenties internationalism and of Palladian humanism.[23]

discussions of the impact of Palladio on contemporary American architects in "Neo-'Classicism' and Modern Architecture I," hereafter cited as "Neo-'Classicism' . . . I," and "Neo-'Classicism' and Modern Architecture II," both of which are reprinted in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 119–38, 139–58. For a discussion of the impact of *Architectural Principles* at Yale, see Robert A.M. Stern, "Yale 1950–1965," *Oppositions* 4 (October 1974), 42–44; and William Huff, "Louis Kahn: Sorted Recollections and Lapses in Familiarities," *Little Journal: Society of Architectural Historians Western New York Chaper* 5 (September 1981), 3. For references to the term humanism in its neo-Palladian sense, see Scully, "Modern Architecture," 5; William Jordy, "The Formal Image," *The Architectural Review* 127 (March 1960): 157–65.

22. Scully, "Modern Architecture," 10.

23. On the involvement of U.S. architects and city planners in the development of the Third World after World War II, see "U.S. Building Abroad," *Architectural Forum* 102 (January 1955): 98–119. For the regionalist response, see Sigfried Giedion, "Forget the International Style: The State of Contemporary Architecture, I. The Regional Approach," *Architectural Record* 115 (January 1954): 132–37, hereafter cited as "Regional Approach." Belluschi's interest in regional identity is demonstrated by projects such as his Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon of 1951; see also Jane Loeffler, "The Architecture of Diplomacy: Heyday of the United States Embassy-Building Program, 1954–1960," *JSAH* 49 (September 1990): 251–78, in which Loeffler illustrates that Belluschi's American embassy building program was partly shaped by an interest in regional identity. Pietro Belluschi and Kahn knew each other professionally, and Belluschi had hired Kahn for a visiting professorship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956. On James Stirling, see his "Regionalism in Modern Architecture," *Architect's Year Book* 7 (1957): 62–68, hereafter cited as "Regionalism." Kahn's admiration for Stirling's

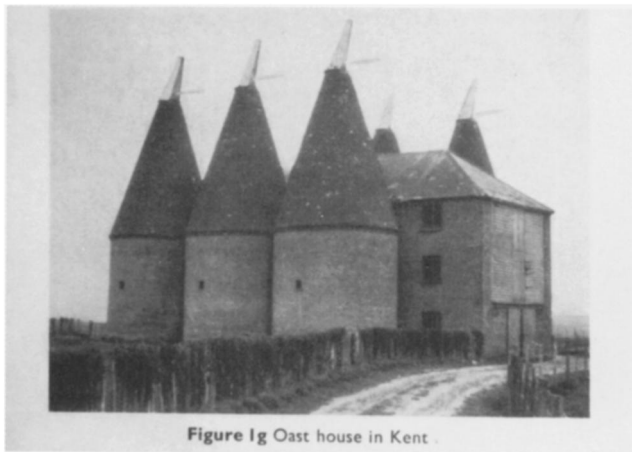

Fig. 8. "Oast House in Kent," from Stirling, "Regionalism in Modern Architecture." (*Architect's Year Book* 7 [1957])

Fig. 9. Louis Kahn personal slide, inscribed "Oast Houses, Kent." (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

Wherever regionalism was discussed, it was directly proposed as an antidote to mass culture. In 1954, Sigfried Giedion acknowledged the harm western civilization had perpetrated upon nonwestern societies in the name of progress and rationalism, and predicted that "a new hybrid development—a cross between western and eastern," was imminent. James Stirling declared in 1957 that the lessons of vernacular architecture could now be "appreciated and possibly utilized" as an alternative to a "supposedly undesirable ad[vertisement]-mass society." That same year, Paul Rudolph asserted that regionalism promised "one way toward that richness in architecture . . . so lacking today," while warning that the forces of mass culture (national distribution systems, ease of travel, mass communications) were obstacles to regionalist practice.[24]

Often integral to the postwar regionalist ideal was a particular interest in so-called anonymous architecture, and in the accompanying formal qualities of stasis and volumetric expression. Stirling published a series of images of traditionally-constructed masonry structures and striking volumetric forms, arguing that they were more autochthonous than modernist works. These ideas clearly intrigued Kahn, who gathered slides of virtually the same sequence of buildings, perhaps collected on an outing the two took together during one of Kahn's many visits to England in the early sixties (Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11).[25] Stirling, in turn, was increasingly inspired by the publications of Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, a friend of Kahn's, who was publishing articles on anonymous architecture regularly in these years.[26]

In spite of ideological differences, Palladian humanism and postwar regionalism fused in one important way. Ideologies born not only of a reaction to modernism, but of the cold war, both insisted on the value of individual identity within the collective sphere.[27] For the antithesis of man-centered humanism was collectivism—or communism, in so many words. The antithesis of regional identity was mass culture. Fears of communism were connected to the threat of mass culture in that a people apathetic about their civic duties were easily manipulated by a power greater than they. Willingly, they forfeited control.[28] It was

work in the sixties is described by Anant Raje, who worked in Kahn's office in the early sixties; Raje, interview with the author, March 1991. Stirling first met Kahn in 1959, when the former came to Philadelphia to see the Richards Medical Center. Stirling, note of thanks to Kahn, unmarked file, Box 66, Kahn Collection. Kahn and Stirling were in touch regularly in the early sixties; see for example, "Misc. Material from Trip to England (1962) Found in File 1983," Box 56, Kahn Collection. Stirling described his friendship with Kahn in an interview with the author, September 1990.

24. Giedion, "Regional Approach," 135; Stirling, "Regionalism," 68. (Stirling reiterates and expands upon these ideas in "The Functional Tradition and Expression," *Perspecta* 6 [1960]: 88–97.) Paul Rudolph, "Regionalism in Architecture," *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 13. This issue of *Perspecta* was edited by Kahn's former student and later employee, Marshall Meyers. Rudolph's name appears in the *University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, School of Fine Arts* 54 (21 December 1953), 9. Another article which discusses regionalism in relation to mass culture is Mary Mix Foley, "The Debacle of Popular Taste," *Architectural Forum* 106 (February 1957): 141–45, 240–48.

25. According to Stirling, they did travel together looking at buildings. Stirling, interview with author, September 1990.

26. Kahn knew Moholy-Nagy's work in these years. Edmund Bacon writes Kahn in February 1954: "Thank you for your good words on my comment re: Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's 'Mexican Critique.' " Unmarked file, Box 66, Kahn Collection. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy published an article on primitive architecture in *Perspecta,* a journal Kahn had contributed to and knew well; "Environment and Anonymous Architecture," *Perspecta* 3 (1955): 3–8. Correspondence between Kahn and Moholy-Nagy in the Kahn Collection indicates that they were warm acquaintances, if not friends. See Moholy-Nagy, *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture* (New York, 1957). Bernard Rudofsky's better-known *Architecture Without Architects* was published in 1964, after an exhibition curated by Rudofsky on the same topic at the Museum of Modern Art.

27. On the impact of the cold war on culture, see Pells, *The Liberal Mind;* Carter, *Another Side;* Susman, "Success;" and Lears, "Matter of Taste;" see also Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time* (New York, 1976), 11–90, *passim*; and Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1983).

28. This argument is most clearly articulated by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951), part 3, 303–470; and in *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), part 2, 22–78.

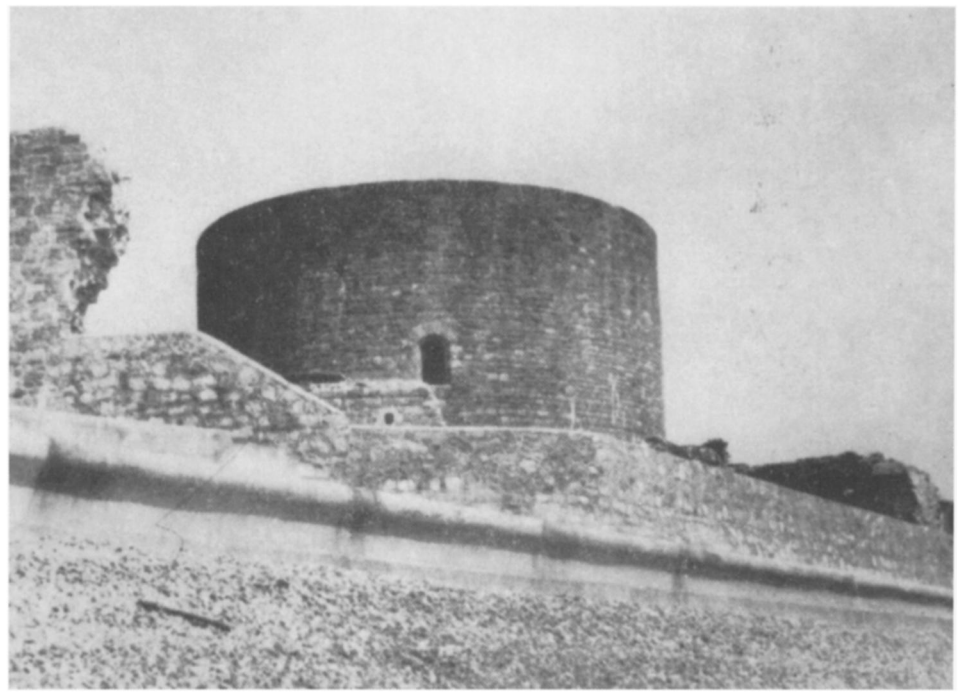

Fig. 10. "Martello Tower on the South Coast" from Stirling, "Regionalism in Modern Architecture." (*Architect's Year Book* 7 [1957])

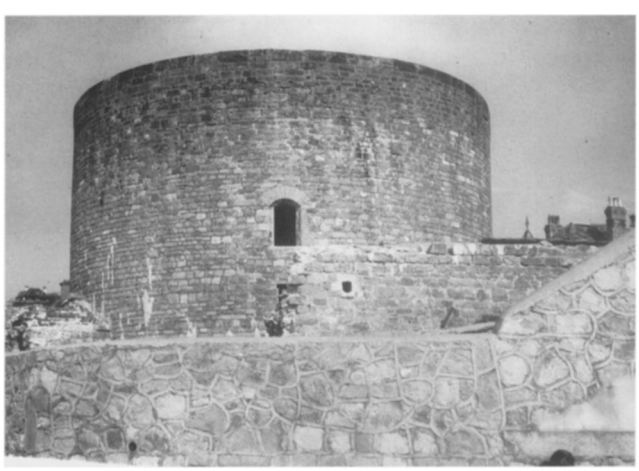

Fig. 11. Louis Kahn personal slide, inscribed "Martelo [*sic*] Tower, Coastal Lookout, Kent Fortification." (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

these dangers which both regionalism, and Scully's "architecture of democracy," meant to set themselves against.

Proponents of both movements (especially humanism) were unabashedly patriotic, as Scully's article intimates.[29] By 1960, Kahn's colleagues were actively championing the superiority of democratic, humanist values over those of communism. Karl Linn writes that "it is this very democracy and greater freedom that we yet enjoy [in contrast to Russia] which entitle and obligate the United States to world leadership."[30] Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote Kahn in 1960 that one of the aims of the Voice of America series in which Kahn would participate was "to stimulate among the intellegensia behind the Iron Curtain an awareness of . . . patterns of thought . . . differing substantially from those to which they are currently restricted."[31]

Kahn's response

Kahn's ideology of design changed quite substantially from the mid-fifties to the early sixties. These changes were largely generated by a need to solve certain formal issues in his developing vocabulary, such as an increasing sophistication in the use of natural light, and how to adapt the served/servant pavilion motif of projects such as the Trenton Jewish Community Center to a scale appropriate for large public commissions. Nevertheless, the paths Kahn took to address such formal issues demonstrates a response to the contemporary architectural discourse outlined above.

Like many of his colleagues in the late fifties, Kahn began to connect suburbanization with the loss of a public sphere, as is evident by his response to William H. Whyte's article of 1957, "Urban Sprawl," which argued that decentralization was threatening the life of the urban center. "I am inspired by your article," Kahn wrote Whyte. "It arouses a spirit of home beyond one's own. It arouses a spirit of patriotism and civic responsibility."[32] Kahn could be witheringly critical of architects who submitted to interests of financial self-gain, and this disdain continued while

29. Colin Rowe also makes the connection between humanism and democracy in the conclusion of "Neo-'Classicism,' . . . I," 134. James Stirling refers to regionalism as a nationalistic alternative to mass culture, "Regionalism," 68.

30. Linn, memo to University of Pennsylvania, n.p., cited in note 15.

31. Henry-Russell Hitchcock to Kahn in April 1960, "Voice of America-Louis I. Kahn Recorded November 19, 1960," Box 55, Kahn Collection.

32. William H. Whyte, "Urban Sprawl," cited in note 5. Kahn to Whyte, December 1957, "F. Misc.," Box 68, Kahn Collection.

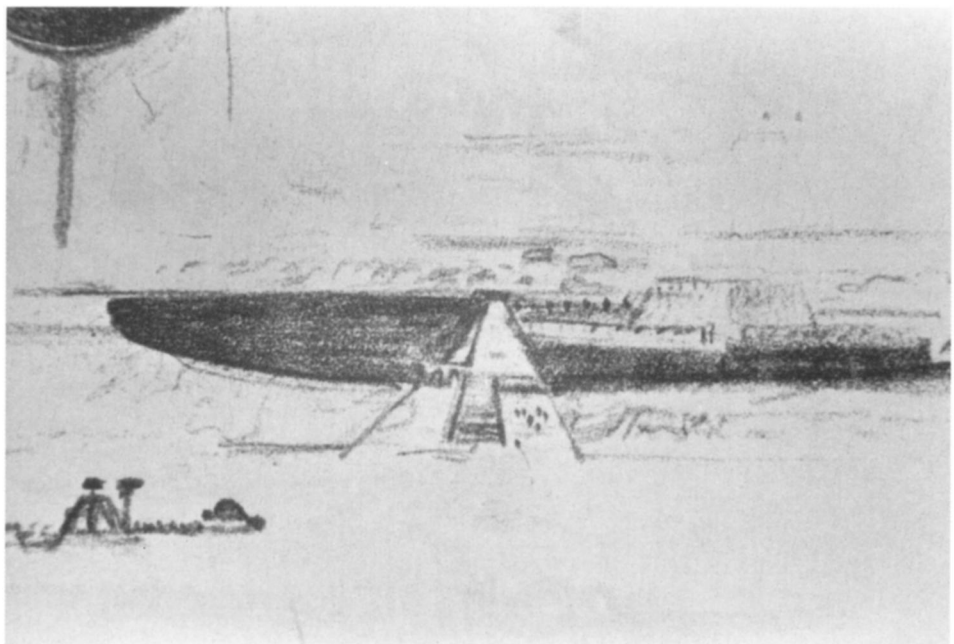

Fig. 12. Louis Kahn, early sketch for the National Assembly, 1963, showing the projected National Assembly surrounded by water.

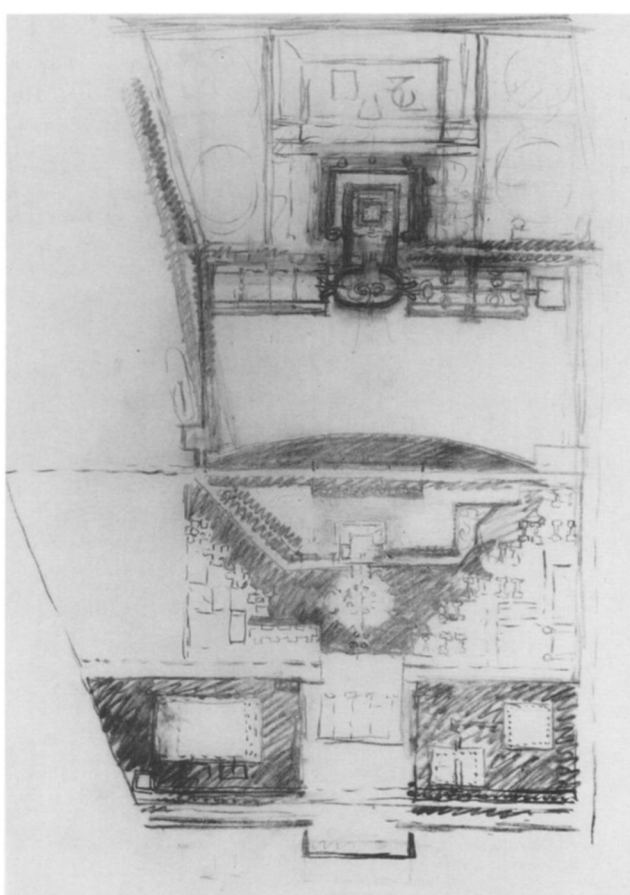

Fig. 13. Louis Kahn, sketch, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, with Citadel of Institutions on the top, and Citadel of Assembly below (1965–66). (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

he was designing Dhaka. In the early sixties, Robert Venturi sent Kahn a quotation from a book by Albert J. Nock: "Burke touches this matter of patriotism with a searching phrase. 'For us to love our country,' [Burke] said, 'our country must be lovely' ... Economism can build a society which is rich, prosperous, powerful, even one which has a reasonably wide diffusion of material well being. It cannot build one which is lovely. . . ."[33]

It was the democracy of participation, without the perversions of mass culture, which Kahn began to propound in the years 1958–59. At the CIAM conference in Otterlo, Kahn declared: "Suppose you wanted to meet here, upholding certain cultural, social, or other interests of our democracy, you now have no place to meet. The city hall, which was the place to meet, is now something else. . . . You go by it but it is really a place you don't participate in anymore. There is no assembly held there ... participation does not exist anymore."[34] Kahn explicitly connected successful public spaces and monuments with the building of democratic ideals. He called landmarks "loyalties," and commented in 1958 that New York City's best recent public spaces, because they make people feel connected to a larger social body, "build patriotism."[35]

33. Albert J. Nock, *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* (New York, 1943), ch. 8. Quotation from undated letter, Robert Venturi to Kahn, "Venturi, Bob," Box 59, Kahn Collection.

34. Kahn, speech at CIAM conference, given September 1959, Otterlo. Reprinted in Newman, *New Frontiers,* 208.

35. Kahn called landmarks "loyalties" in "Design with the Automobile: The Animal World," *Canadian Art* 19 (January-February 1962): 50. The discussion of New York is in the minutes of a meeting of board members on a committee for one- and one-half percent for art, "One and one-half percent committee (Peacock) Changed to Ordinance Committee." Box 62, Kahn Collection. It is important to note that Kahn

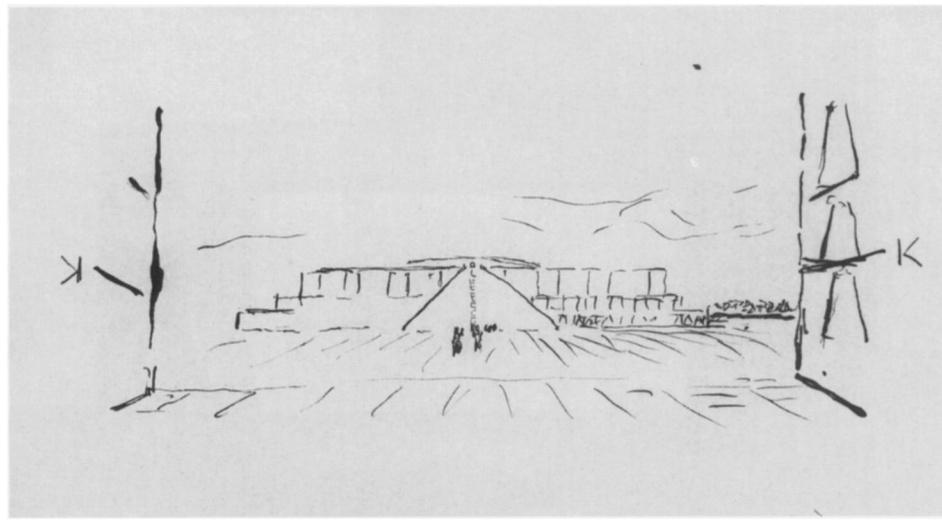

Fig. 14. Louis Kahn, sketch showing early scheme for South Plaza and a pyramid-shaped mosque appended to the National Assembly (1963–64). (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

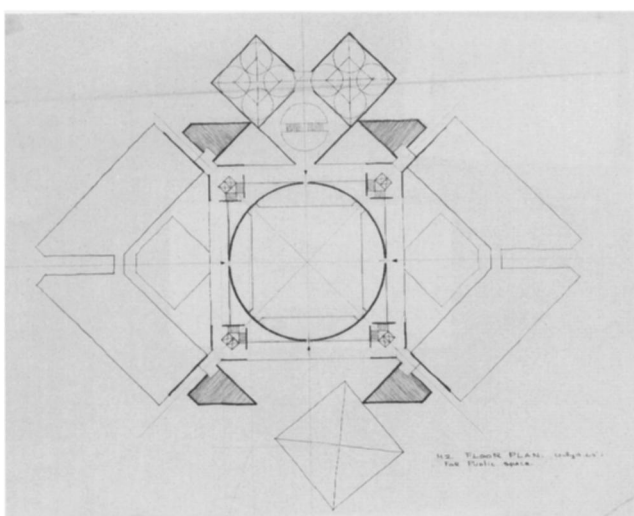

Fig. 15. Louis Kahn, floor plan for early version (4 July 1963) of the National Assembly showing off-axis mosque, later called the prayer hall. (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

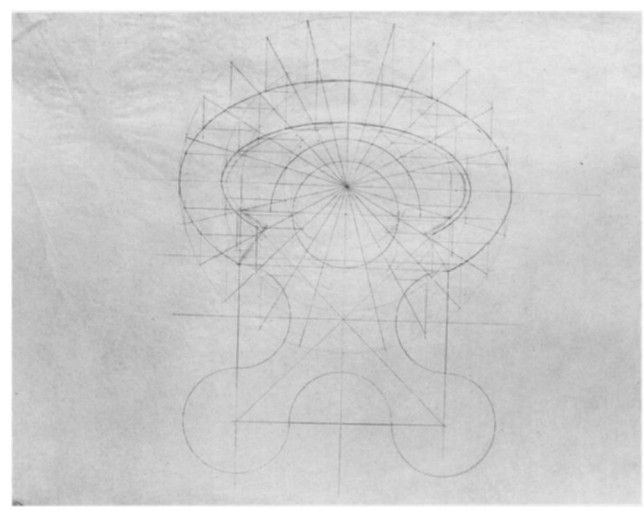

Fig. 16. Louis Kahn, scheme for prayer hall (approximately December 1964–June 1965) illustrating the geometry of the staircase in the ambulatory which leads one inside. (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

About the same time, in response to renewed debates on the issue of public symbolism in modern architecture, Kahn's thoughts turned once again to monumentality, a subject that he had not explicitly addressed since 1944. Kahn joked in 1958 to his old friend Isadore Buten, "Needless to say I have much to talk about even excluding Monumentality," and wrote him in 1961 that he planned to deliver a new lecture on the topic—different from his 1944 lecture, "Monumentality"—at their club.[36]

Kahn's work similarly reflects this developing interest in the monumentalization of urban civic space. Early evidence is in his plans for downtown Philadelphia of 1957, with those grand fortresses of carparks protecting the city from the intrusion of that

used the word patriotism in the late forties as well. However, in such references he often referred to patriotism as more local than supralocal, and more in reference to city planning than to architecture. For example, Kahn wrote to Howard Myers, the editor of *Architectural Forum* in May 1947, that "to the people the street is their city. They live and work in it . . . Street patriotism can make or break planning." Unmarked file, Box 61, Kahn Collection.

36. Kahn to Isadore (Mish) Buten, August 1958, "Oct. 16, 1957–Sept. 7, 1958 ltrs from 8/22–9–7," Box 9, Kahn Collection. See also letter from Kahn to Isadore Buten, August 1961, "Misc. corresp. Ap-July 1960," Box 64, Kahn Collection. Kahn writes "I have decided because of my mental development in these twelve years to speak on an entirely new subject 'Monumentality.' Undoubtably you are surprised . . . but I have the favor of the Fates and the good fortune to have been directed much to my expectations and find myself in a developed state of mind ready to change from 'monumentality' to 'monumentality.' " Kahn gave the lecture on 27 October, 1961, according to correspondence to Buten, "Misc. corresp. Ap–July 1960," Box 64, Kahn Collection.

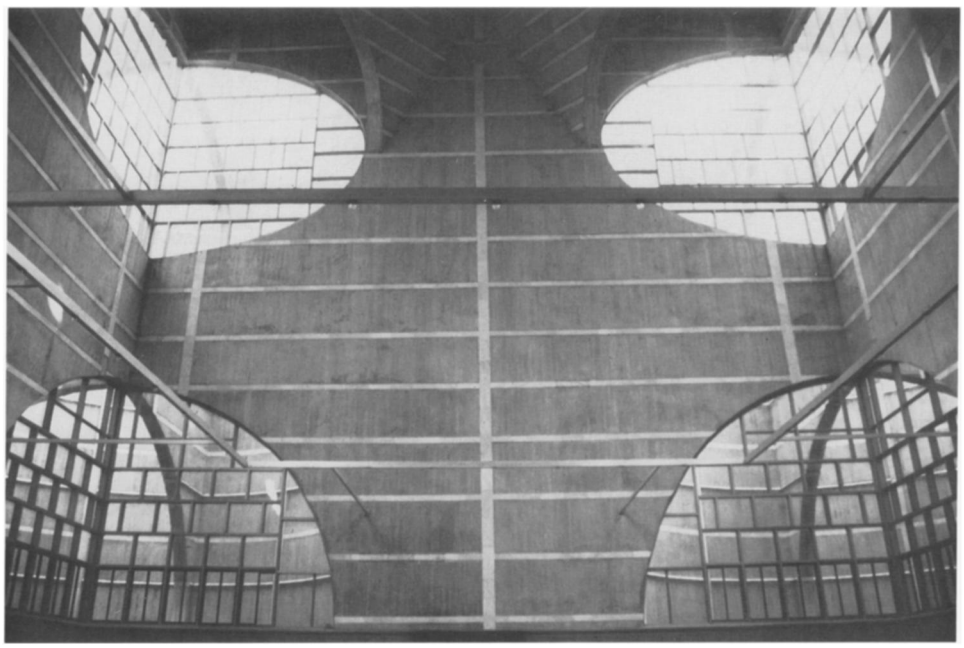

Fig. 17. Prayer hall, interior.

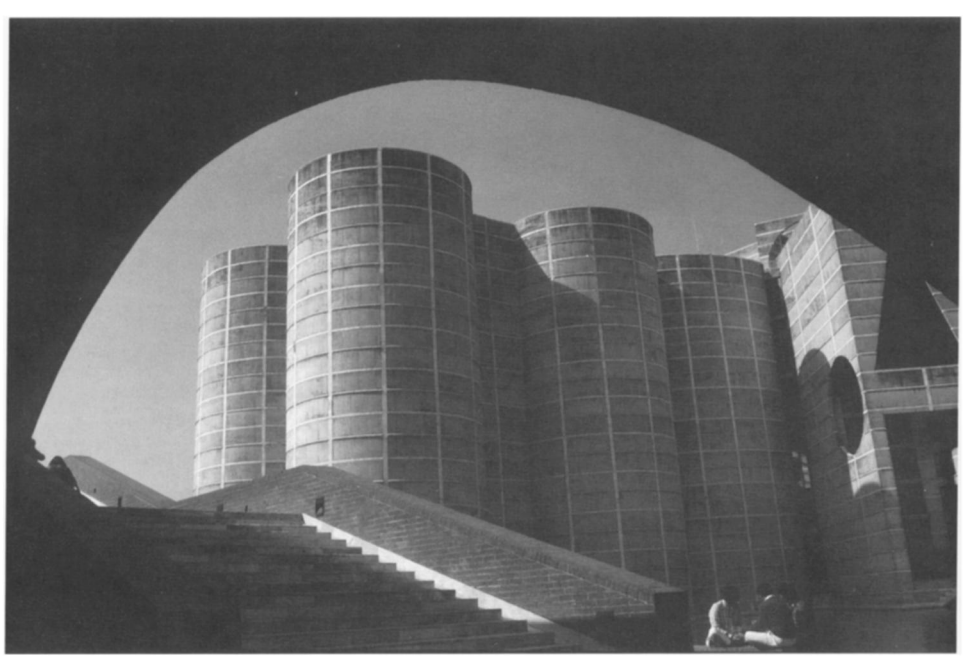

Fig. 18. Prayer hall, exterior. Here, as elsewhere, note the extensive marble strips.

"brute," the automobile.[37] But in the mid-fifties Kahn was still torn between his organically-derived vocabulary of the early fifties and the abstract, historically-derived language of his mature idiom. This is apparent in his many schemes for the Trenton Jewish Community Center, in which Kahn was still mainly interested in structural expression, in the potential of the cellular plan, and in his ideas of served and servant spaces.

From 1957 through 1959, Kahn began to develop the idea that architecture should express the essence of an institution. His first use of the word "institution" is—not surprisingly—in a letter to Alison and Peter Smithson, in March 1959, in which he wrote: "have some ideas about the 'existence will' re: our institutions with direct bearing on architecture that will interest you."[38] The idea was stimulated from several sources. Studio projects given by

37. Kahn in lecture at Princeton University, November 1961, from notes by Tim Vreeland, unmarked file, Box 122, Kahn Collection.

38. In February 1959, Kahn writes to an editor at *Perspecta* that he is "anxious to write and illustrate my most recent thoughts on architecture. Lately, thoughts occur to me about the 'existence will' which opens unexplored aspects of architecture." "September 8, 1958–March 31, 1959," Box 9, Kahn Collection. The letter to the Smithsons is the first identifiable example in which Kahn actually uses the word "institution" in the sense which he develops in the next several years. However, some

colleagues close to Kahn—Tim Vreeland, Romaldo Giurgola, Robert Venturi, and more distantly, Holmes Perkins and Robert Geddes—illustrate a near-obsession at the School of Fine Arts at Penn with the notion that architecture can simultaneously symbolize and reinforce the democratic community though expression of its institutions. A more direct stimulus may have been provided by a 1957 conference in Georgia at which Kahn spoke, entitled, "What Is Institution?" Finally, in 1958, Kahn met with an old friend, the architect Percival Goodman, who had argued since the publication of *Communitas* in 1947 that the duty of architects was "a philosophical one: to ask what is socially implied in any . . . scheme as a way of life."[39] By July of 1959, Kahn wrote to an acquaintance in Boston, "I have come to realizations about architecture which now form the entire basis of my work . . . I want to make buildings that will evoke a way of life. . . . It is a result of interplay of desire and needs in relation to our Institution[s]."[40]

Intimately connected with Kahn's idea that buildings should evoke a way of life was the growing conviction that the design should proceed typologically, not functionally. The program a client provided was often better ignored. From 1959: "the Architect should . . . train his mind . . . [to] lead him to realizations of new spaces, good for these institutions. He should fight the stock programs of spaces now destroying the entire sense

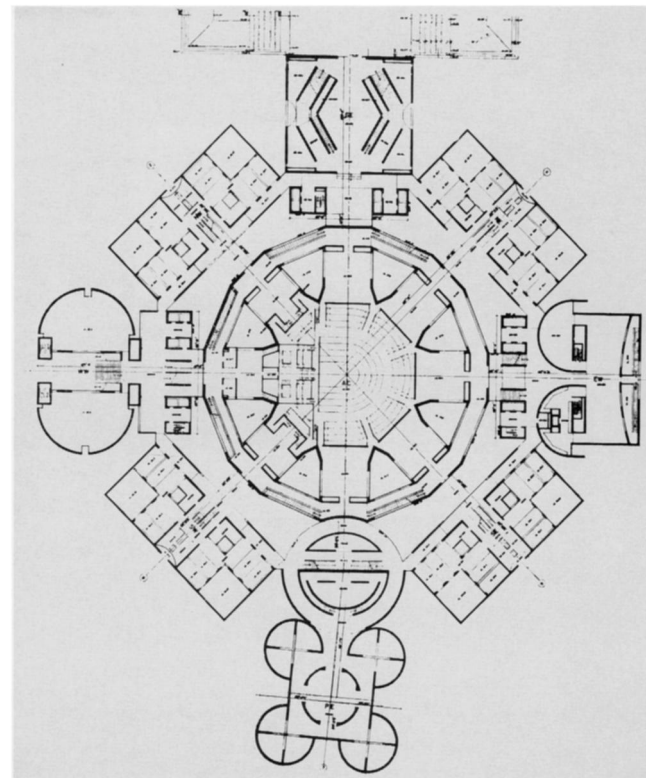

Fig. 19. Final plan of the National Assembly. (Louis I. Kahn Collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission)

from which institutions . . . took hold as a way of life. Through great new spaces created by the Architect a more meaningful sense of living could become."[41] The architect should be an activist, giving society the spaces it *should* want, since the spaces institutional clients actually request might very well foster social apathy. These spaces should "evoke a . . . greater sense of loyalty to the . . . institutions which are really there [to establish] an inevitable responsibility toward civic living."[42] Responding to the call of the critics and architects who surrounded him, Kahn wanted to design a monumental urban architecture that would foster democratic participation, and celebrate the individual's contribution to civic culture.

The National Assembly in Dhaka

Kahn's scheme for the Capitol Complex in Dhaka represents the culmination of the development of a design ideology with which he had been struggling since the early fifties. From the mid-fifties on, one can see an interplay of these contemporary themes in Kahn's work—humanism most prominently in his early schemes for the Unitarian Church at Rochester (design 1959–61); and an incipient regionalism in his designs for the

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of his studio projects and lectures of the years 1957–58 already indicate a shift toward thinking in these terms.

Several people who knew Kahn in this period have insisted that he was using the word institution in these terms long before 1958. It is true that the idea did not appear suddenly, but the use of the word in its mature definition did. The word simply does not appear in Kahn's numerous statements about his projects before 1958, and it appears constantly thereafter.

39. On studio projects at Penn, see the Master Redevelopment Plan project given by Robert Geddes and Tim Vreeland (who was one of the senior designers in Kahn's office) in the fall of 1956, which begins, "Let us assume that a sense of community is a desirable goal . . . [and] that the design of the physical environment has an effect in creating a sense of community." "Architectural Problems Fall 1956–57," UPB 8.4, Box 96, University of Pennsylvania Archives. On 11 April 1957, Kahn participated in a conference sponsored by the Georgia chapter of the American Institute of Architects entitled "What is Institution?" "Boca Raton," Box 65, Kahn Collection. Kahn came to speak in Percival Goodman's class at Columbia University in December 1958, after which Kahn and Goodman had dinner. "Louis I. Kahn, Lectures, 1958 Only," Box 64, Kahn Collection. Paul and Percival Goodman, *Communitas* (New York, 1947), 20. *Communitas* was regularly assigned to architecture students at Penn; see "Architectural Problems Fall 1956–57," UPB 8.4, Box 96, University of Pennsylvania Archives. Holmes Perkins cites passages from the book in a lecture of 1958; see Holmes Perkins, "Physical Planning, Civic Design and Architecture," in "Dean Perkins' Speeches & Articles 1958–59," UPB 8.41, Box 9, University of Pennsylvania Archives. Paul Goodman spoke at the School of Fine Arts at Penn in 1956, and the lecture was extremely well received by the students. See May 1956 memo in "Committee: Program School of Fine Arts," UPB 8.4, Box 94, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

40. Kahn to Allan Rae, 16 July 1959, unmarked file, Box 66, Kahn Collection.

41. Kahn to Allan Rae, unmarked file, Box 66, Kahn Collection, n.p.

42. Kahn, speech at Cranbrook, June 1961; "Cranbrook Speech—1961—to be edited," Box 54, Kahn Collection.

Fig. 20. National Assembly building, porches.

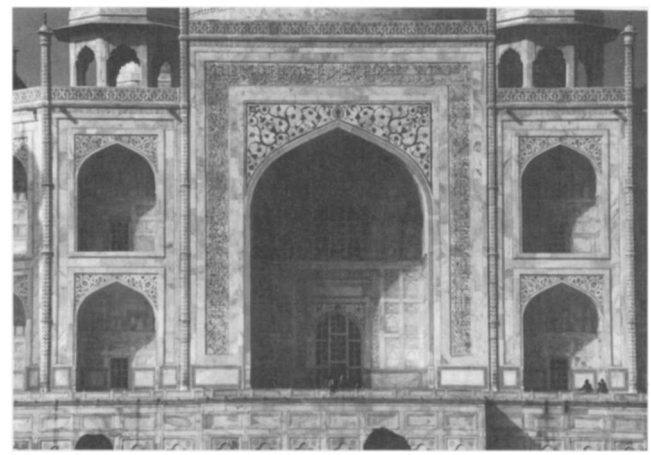

Fig. 21. Taj Mahal, Agra, porches.

unbuilt U.S. consulate in Luanda, Angola (1959–62).[43] But nowhere are they as completely expressed as in the complex at Dhaka (design 1963–66). For Kahn, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar was "a place of transcendence," but it was also a medium through which he could explore a social philosophy formulated in opposition to mass culture, a philosophy of liberal humanism and democratic idealism.

The ideals of democracy, the championing of individual participation in a public sphere, were exactly what Pakistan wished to present to the western world when it asked Kahn in November 1962 to design its second legislative capital in Dhaka. All the information Kahn received on contemporary Pakistan stressed this point.[44] Although President Ayub Khan engineered a military coup overthrowing the parliamentary government in 1958, he was elected president the following year and advocated a representative system he called "strong democracy." Whatever his true intentions, Ayub Khan's message to the West was unequivocal. He told the U.S. Congress in 1961, "our aim always was and always has been and always shall be to have representative institutions." The U.S.–Pakistan relationship in these years was one of mutual interdependence. America funded Pakistan heavily; in return, Pakistan promised to be a foothold for the United States in the region, while India, of course, received aid from Moscow. Ayub Khan told Congress that Pakistan "must" receive American aid because "if there is real trouble there is no other country in Asia on whom you will be able to count. The only people who will stand by you are the people of Pakistan."[45]

Analysis of Kahn's statements during the time he was designing Dhaka indicates that he conceived the National Assembly building as monument to the democratic ideals on which he was currently focusing. Monumentality was intended by both client and architect from the start. Ayub Khan commissioned the complex to deflect criticism that his government was favoring West Pakistan over East—he could not, in such circumstances, afford to appear miserly. And Louis Kahn orchestrated the site plan to make the National Assembly the Parthenon of the East. The only information his early sketches provide is to indicate his intentions to use the great monumental techniques of the past: two grand axes sweep toward the climactic capitol, which is separated from the city and reflected in water surrounding it (Fig. 12). Kahn joked about the monumentality of his intentions: "In the beginning, it was as big as the Hagia Sophia—and that was a little bit too much, I think, so we brought it down to something more reasonable."[46]

That the National Assembly building was intended to embody democratic ideals is everywhere apparent in Kahn's statements about the project. A letter of 1963 from Kahn's office refers to "the representation of American ideals . . . to other countries in the architectural work in Pakistan."[47] That same year, Kahn wrote

43. Other scholars have considered the influence of Rudolf Wittkower's book on the early schemes for Rochester; see Robin Williams, "An Architectural Myth: The Design Evolution of Louis Kahn's First Unitarian Church," M. A. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1990; and David Brownlee and David DeLong, *Louis I. Kahn: In the Realm of Architecture* (New York, 1992), 66, hereafter cited as *Louis I. Kahn.* Other interpretations of the Capitol Complex at Dhaka include William Curtis, "Authenticity, Abstraction, and the Ancient Sense: Le Corbusier's and Louis Kahn's Ideas of Parliament," *Perspecta* 20 (1983): 181–94; Florindo Fusaro, *Il Parlamento e la nuova capital a Dacca di Louis I. Kahn, 1962/1974* (Rome, 1985); and Brownlee and DeLong, *Louis I. Kahn,* 78–85.

44. "Pakistan Literature," Box 119, Kahn Collection.

45. Ayub Khan, speech delivered to U.S. Congress, reprint kept in "AC—Post Report—Karachi, W. D.," Box 119, Kahn Collection.

46. Kahn, lecture at the School of Architecture, University of California, Berkeley, 1966. This lecture will be published in full in *Perspecta* 28 (Spring 1994). The tape is in Special Collections, The Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities.

In a memo to himself of 18 November 1963, which was later used as part of negotiations with the Pakistani government, Kahn wrote that "to the highest degree it [the complex] must strive to establish a climate that brings forth a total concept recognized by the world as a great value given to it for the ages by Pakistan. We must aspire to nothing less." Box 116, unmarked file, Kahn Collection.

47. Letter to U.S. Immigration Service to secure an extension for the visa of Carles Vallonrat. "C.E.V.," Box 58, Kahn Collection.

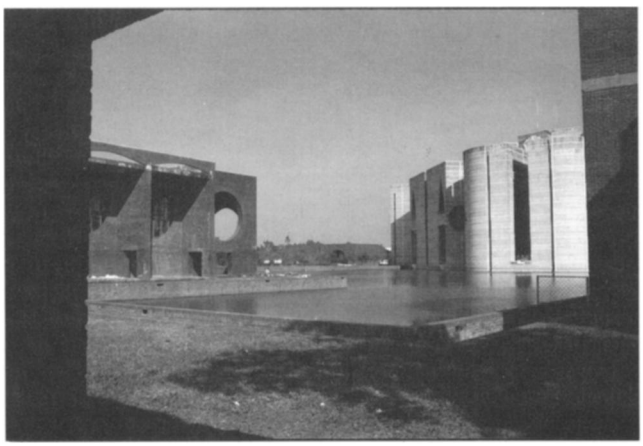

Fig. 22. National Assembly building, showing relationship of concrete assembly to brick hostels.

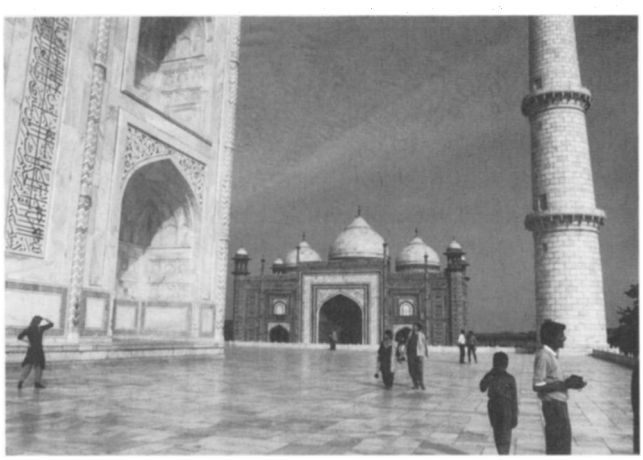

Fig. 23. Taj Mahal, showing relationship of white marble mausoleum to red sandstone cloister-arcades.

a letter to Washington University's Director of Special Events—a man whom he did not know—stating, with some bitterness, "I reflect on the fact that I have as yet not received a direct commission from the city of Philadelphia, but have been asked to design the Second Capital of Pakistan. Someday I hope to build a building for Philadelphia and one for the U.S. Government."[48] That Kahn, however unconsciously, equated a commission from the American government with a commission from a Third World Muslim country signals the ideals he was bringing to the Dhaka commission.

Most suggestive in this regard is the first draft of Kahn's statement for one of the early publications of Dhaka, by North Carolina State College School of Design, in 1964. It shows an aspect of Kahn which I can only call an attempt to depoliticize

48. Kahn to Irving Litvag, Director of Special Events, Washington University, April 1964. "Louis I. Kahn, Lectures, 1959," Box 59, Kahn Collection. Kahn had, of course, been hired in 1959 to design a consulate for the U.S. State Department in Luanda, Angola, but this project was cancelled in 1962.

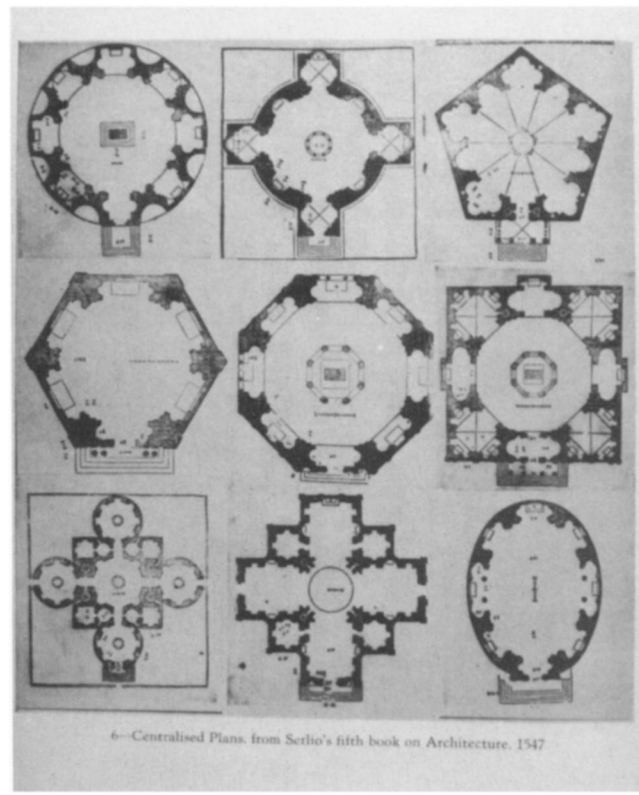

Fig. 24. Plate 6, Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism,* centralized plans, from Serlio's fifth book on architecture.

himself. While the published version of the North Carolina statement read "men came to assemble to touch the spirit of commonness;" originally Kahn wrote "men came to assemble *not for personal gain* [italics mine] but to touch the spirit of commonness." The first draft reveals clearly that the ideal relationship between the individual and the collective is the topic at hand. The famously cryptic sentence, "the relationship of the assembly, mosque and supreme court and hostels, in their interplay psychologically, is what expresses *a nature* [italics mine]," reads quite straightforwardly in the first draft: "The relationship of the assembly, mosque and supreme court and hostels, in their interplay psychologically, is what expresses *the nature of a government institution* [italics mine]."[49]

Kahn sought to express in Dhaka what he called (in an another excised phrase) "the Majesty of a government of the people working for the common good;"[50] in doing so, he incorporated various strains of contemporary architectural discourse. He

49. First and final drafts of Kahn's statements for the publication of his drawings for the Capital Complex in Dhaka are in "North Carolina," Box 56, Kahn Collection. The publication is "The Development by Louis I. Kahn of the Design for the Second Capital of Pakistan at Dacca," *Student Publication of the School of Design, North Carolina State College, Raleigh* 14 (May 1964): 3.

50. Kahn, draft of text for a booklet describing progress on the Second Capital in Pakistan, June 1965; "PAC Progress Booklet," Box 122, Kahn Collection.

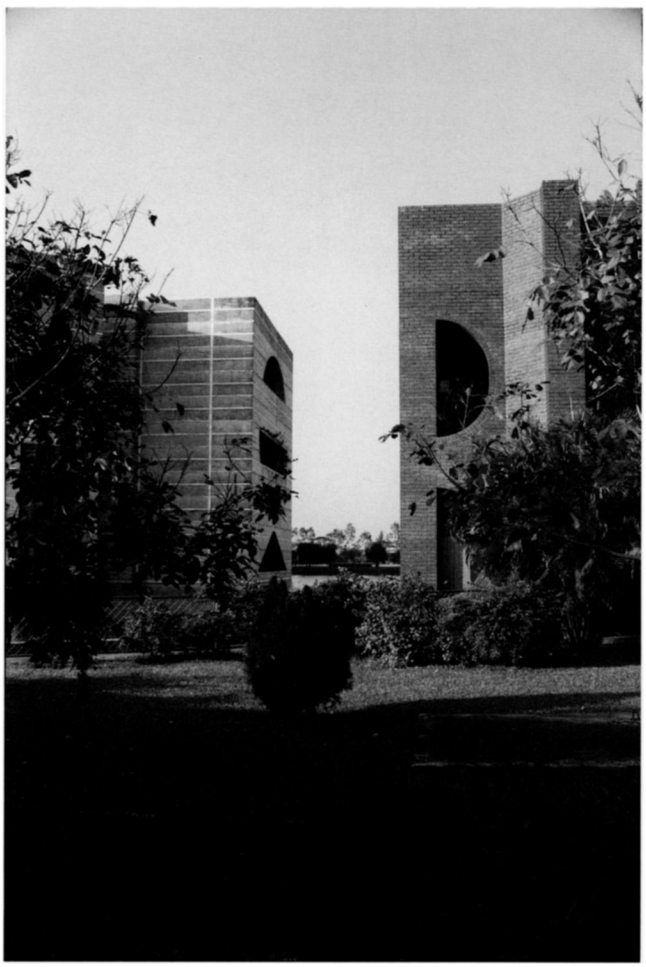

Fig. 25. National Assembly, from vantage point of hostels, showing scale distortion due to the distance between the buildings.

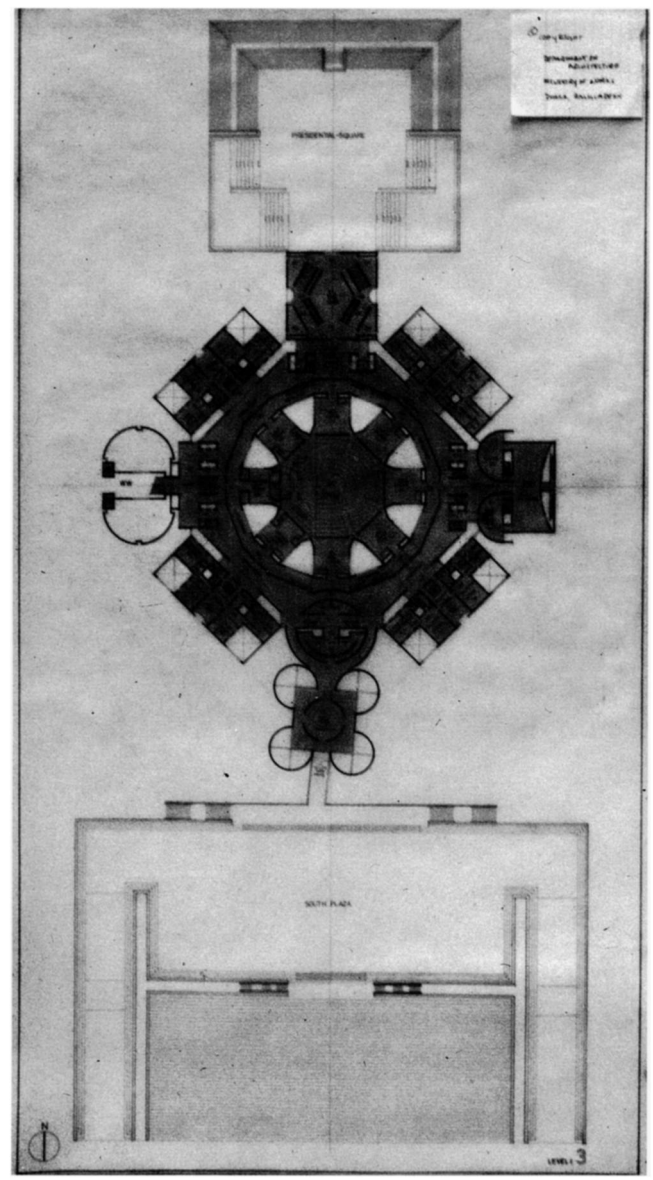

Fig. 26. Plan, illustrates the scale of the floor area of outdoor public plazas in relation to the floor area of the National Assembly. The South Plaza is on the bottom; the Presidential Plaza is above. (Department of Architecture, Ministry of Works, Bangladesh)

developed a monumental space intended to articulate the nature and importance of civic responsibility. He drew from the opposing ideologies of regionalism and humanism to create a complex respectful of Bengali climate and tradition, but oriented west. And he used the common ground within these ideologically conflicting movements to create a design which privileges individual participation within the collective sphere.

Kahn's first move in developing the site plan was to separate the complex into the citadel of institutions on the one hand, and the citadel of assembly on the other (Fig. 13). He repeatedly emphasized that the citadel of assembly, which included the parliament, supreme court, mosque, and hostels, must "take its distance" from the citadel of institutions, which contained a sports arena, two schools, and a marketplace.[51] This separation of the site into two forums reflects American concerns about the erosion of civic responsibility in the face of mass culture. Kahn insisted upon articulating a difference between that collective forum in which private needs are served—the citadel of institutions—and that collective forum which demands and defines civic duty.

In his articulation of the prayer hall within the National Assembly complex, Kahn refined this exploration of the nature of the civic sphere. In spite of Kahn's claims that he wove a mosque into the capitol to express the transcendent nature of assembly, in his handling of the program Kahn effected a symbolic separation of church and state. Originally, the program called for a prayer hall inside the capitol and for a separate mosque. Kahn initially designed a large separate mosque on axis with the National Assembly. When the client objected, Kahn incorporated the mosque into the body of the capitol; he simultaneously changed

51. In Heyer, *Architects on Architecture,* 398–99.

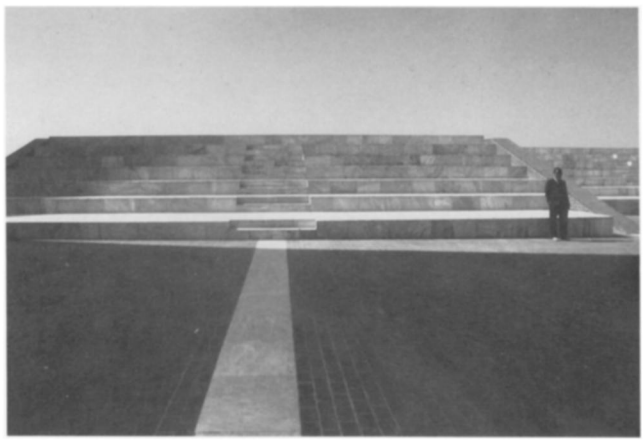

Fig. 27. Presidential Square, showing marble seating for public gatherings.

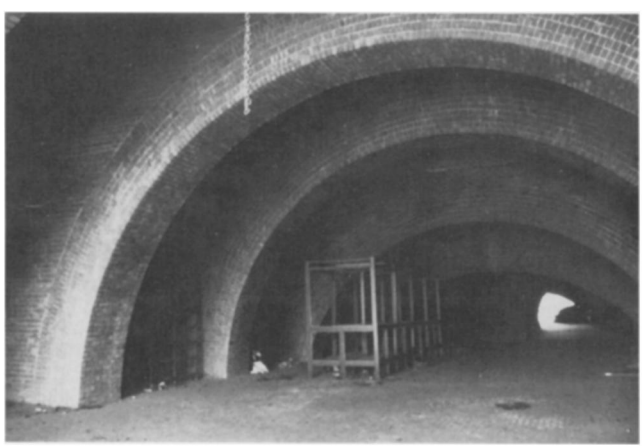

Fig. 28. Presidential Square, below, showing area proposed as public museum.

its shape to a pyramid to differentiate it from the Assembly to which it was appended (Fig. 14). One drawing indicates that he immediately considered cranking it off axis as well. His many subsequent schemes for the mosque indicate that Kahn always sought to articulate its dissimilarity from the rest of the building, using at times almost a baroque geometry entirely uncharacteristic of his idiom (Figs. 15, 16). Pakistan was a Muslim nation, but Kahn would not allow the National Assembly silently to absorb a mosque (Figs. 17, 18).[52] Although typological separation was part of the period's aesthetic, Kahn did not have to make the division so dramatic. In a 1966 lecture, Kahn explained: "See, the mosque

52. Kahn's initial schemes for the National Assembly were done from January to May 1963. By May 1963, Kahn had integrated the mosque into the body of the National Assembly Building, and Office Drawing, Scheme 2, May 1963, indicates an off-axis mosque. Kahn to Kafiluddin Ahmed, May 1963, "Pakistan Correspondence-Miscellaneous," Box 120, Kahn Collection. For an overall discussion of the design development and construction of the complex at Dhaka, see Peter Reed, "Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Capital of Bangladesh," in Brownlee and DeLong, *Louis I. Kahn,* 374–83.

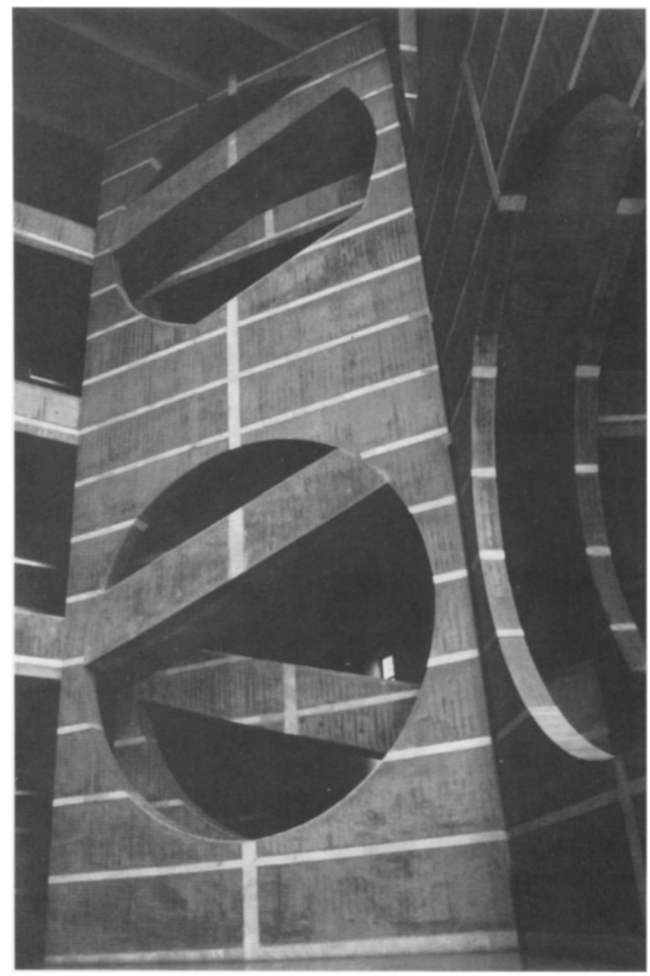

Fig. 29. Foyer, Presidential Square.

turns slightly toward the west. I purposely did that, I *purposely* made this building sit there like that, so I could turn the mosque the other way (Fig. 19)."[53]

Kahn's regard for both the climate and tradition of the subcontinent reflects his response to the regionalist doctrine evolving in the West in reaction to mass culture. Kahn was not entirely attentive to the region's unforgiving sunlight and six-month monsoons, using, for example, wooden window mullions which have long since rotted away. Nevertheless, the evolution of the design shows a developing environmental awareness in the increased protection from rain and sun on the façades. Kahn was amending his design in response to his visits there and to information gathered by his staff.[54]

53. Kahn, Lecture at Berkeley, 1966 (see note 46).

54. Climatological information was sent to Kahn in November 1963, "PAC-Cablegrams to/from Addl Chief/2 years 1966–1967," Box 117, and October 1964, telegram from Roy Vollmer to Kahn, "PAKCAP-Correspondence to/from ROYGUS October 8, 1964 thru June 30, 1965," Box 117, Kahn Collection. The office drawings in the Kahn Collection include detailed climatological information, which was analyzed especially for the design of the hostels. Faruqul Islam and Amir Hossein of the Department of Architecture, Ministry of Works, Dhaka,

Fig. 30. Detail, office block, National Assembly, showing marble banding at five-foot intervals. Illustrates relation of banding to windows indoors, and the alternation of flat bands with projecting drip courses.

If Kahn did not always comprehend the climate of the subcontinent, he consciously adopted its architectural tradition. "I've chosen to distinguish [the National Assembly] from its surroundings by the introduction of a lake. Because it's a delta country, and all important buildings are on mounds. That's the way to protect yourself from flood."[55] The choice of marble for the floors and the facings was a conscious allusion to Moghul tradition.[56] There are similarities between the capitol and Moghul mausoleum-gardens known to Kahn. In the Taj Mahal in Agra, and Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, are devices similar to those used in Dhaka: the use of reflecting pools, setting a building upon a

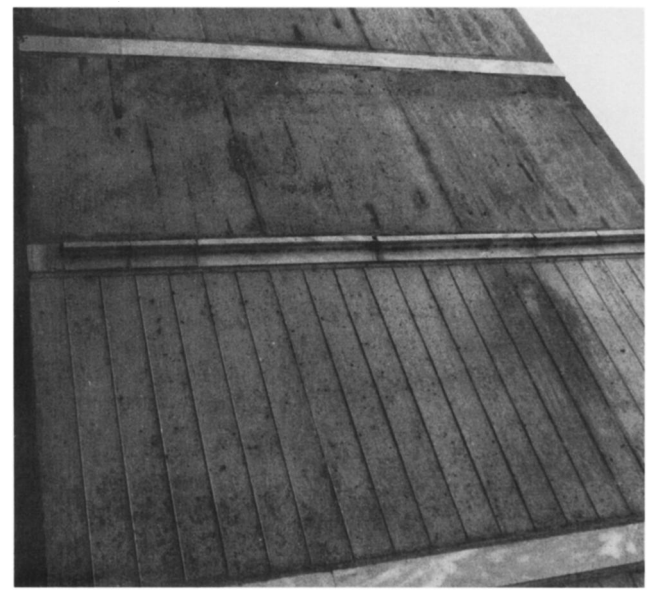

Fig. 31. Detail, façade, National Assembly, transition from third to fourth levels. The elevations of the first several stories have v-shaped grooves that Kahn originally wanted to use on the entire façade. But the detail had to be dropped, as Kahn was dissatisfied with its execution.

plinth, an octagonal plan, a two-tier articulation with deep sculpting in shadowed porches (Figs. 20, 21), a tall, light, central building with low red arcades surrounding (Figs. 22, 23), and an extensive use of marble inlay.[57]

Kahn filtered these elements of the subcontinent's regional tradition into a western vocabulary that (ironically) included both vernacular and high precedents. From the paired cylinders abutting rectilinear forms of Stirling's oast houses, Kahn drew the final composition for the mosque. From Wittkower's publication of domed, central-plan, Renaissance churches, he drew the configuration of the Assembly building, with offices replacing subsidiary chapels. The result of this complex layering of sources is a series of sharp, abstract geometric forms in plan and elevation, generating multiple symmetries (Fig. 24, compare with Fig. 19). Yet within this monumental abstraction, Kahn privileges individual identity within the collective sphere, mining the ideological commonality in humanism and regionalism. Imposing as the building is, it shows an attention to the human scale and path which inspires the user to feel not only awed by the grandeur of the place, but also empowered.

If one views the National Assembly from the vantage point of the hostels, the ten-story capitol seems commensurate with the two-story residences (Fig. 25). This apparent congruity of scale is furthered by the two-part articulation of the façades of both the hostels and the Assembly, thereby suggesting an intimate relation-

described how all the wooden mullions in the National Assembly were subsequently replaced with metal ones, interview with the author, January 1991.

55. Kahn, speech at Yale in October 1963, later published in *Perspecta* 9/10 (1965). Page 9 of transcript in "Yale Speech for *Perspecta* 9 LIK," Box 54, Kahn Collection.

56. See telegram to Kahn from Roy Vollmer, 14 October 1964, on the floors: "*marble* excellent concept for the higher category buildings. Traditionally used in great palaces and gardens of the Moghuls." "PACCAP Vollmer Reports," Box 122, Kahn Collection.

57. Carles Vallonrat and Kahn visited the Taj Mahal in Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, and the Moghul monuments in Delhi on one of their earliest trips to India (Vallonrat, interview with the author, September 1991.) According to Kahn's calendars, this would have been either in November 1962 or July 1963, when Kahn was in India in conjunction with his project in Ahmedabad. "LIK Calendars," Box 121, Kahn Collection.

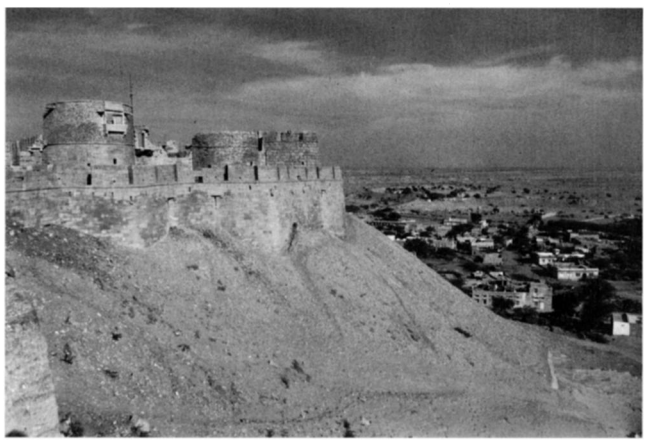

Fig. 32. Fort, Jaiselmer, Rajhastan, India. Although it is unlikely that Kahn travelled to Jaiselmer, he would have seen a similar fort outside of Jaipur, as well as in other Indian locations.

Fig. 33. Foyer, National Assembly, entrance on third level, underneath the sanctuary of the prayer hall.

ship between the spaces of domesticity, in the foreground, and the space of civic culture beyond. Furthermore, the Assembly building façade, bastion though it is, is legible. Different articulations without indicate different functions within: the Assembly Chamber identified by the projecting light shafts above (see Fig. 1), the cafeteria block by the twice-inscribed circle, the repetitive office blocks by the triangle-above-rectangle-next-to-circle motif.

To the program for the restricted-access National Assembly building, Kahn added over 800,000 square feet of built public space, in the South Plaza and the Presidential Square (Fig. 26).

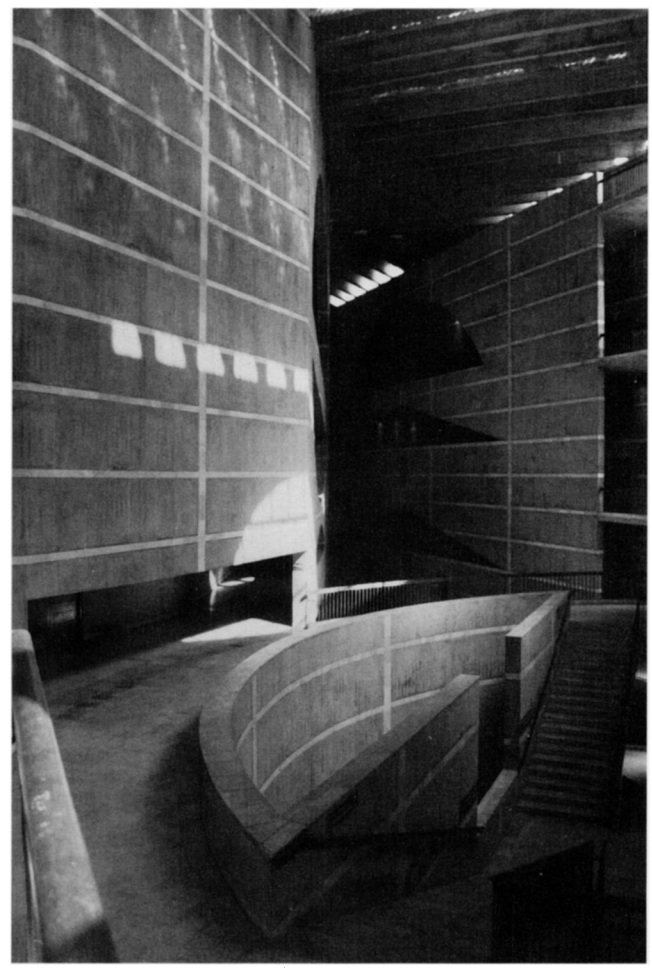

Fig. 34. Ambulatory, National Assembly.

According to some Bangladeshis, it is the gardens and outdoor public areas that are a real gift to the city, offering respite from the crowding of downtown Dhaka.[58] The Presidential Square was intended as an arena for special occasions held outdoors (Fig. 27), underneath was a space proposed as a public state museum (Fig. 28).[59] Certainly the staircases breaking the geometries of the monumental foyer and ambulatory are potent symbols of the path of man through space; by extension, they suggest the contribution of the individual to the government housed within (Fig. 29).

There is a careful management of scale on the elevation of the National Assembly which pulls the viewer into a bodily relationship with the building, softening the massiveness of the overall image. For example, the marble bands which mark the end of a day's construction pour appear every five feet, in comfortable reference to the human body (Fig. 30). Furthermore, Kahn

58. The author extends her thanks to the many Bengali architects in the United States and Bangladesh who assisted her in her study of the building. Among them are: Jalal Ahmed, Raizul Ahsan, Kazi Khaled Ashraf, Hasina Chowdhury, Lailun Ekhram, Saif-ul Haq, Amir Hossein, Abu Immamuddin, Mazharul Islam, Faruqul Islam, and Uttam Saha.

59. Description of the Presidential Gardens and Presidential Square in "PAKCAP-Correspondence to/from ROYGUS/October 8, 1964–June 30, 1965," Box 117, Kahn Collection.

Fig. 35. The National Assembly on the back of an autorickshaw, Dhaka.

wanted to create rich shadows on the façade. In addition to the drip courses projecting every ten feet, Kahn wanted to leave the v-shaped grooves from the formwork on the building—a major design difference which would have made the façades highly textured when viewed from nearby. (This detail was dropped after the construction of the third level due to problems of craftsmanship [Fig. 31]).[60]

Did the monumentality at the National Assembly come at the expense of humanistic ideals? The building does look like a fortress, as indeed it was intended to. This derives partly from Kahn's response to the publications by Stirling, Moholy-Nagy, and others on anonymous architecture which he saw in the years immediately preceding his design for Dhaka; perhaps it also refers to the Indian fort-building tradition (Fig. 32).[61] But the great, hulking wall creates symbolic associations that Kahn clearly intended. The National Assembly building is, after all, a restricted-access building: not all who vote are welcome inside. Hence the psychological distancing created by the associations of a citadel is not inappropriate. Furthermore, during the years he was designing the capitol, Kahn insisted that a building should be a "world within a world," it should create an atmosphere which will inspire men to rise to the solemnity of their task.[62] For such a purpose, the National Assembly elevation articulates a strong boundary, indicating that in crossing it, one enters a special place.

The entry sequences stress the spaces in which the user is reminded of his or her status as the member of a public. The main entrance foyers, traditionally places of grandeur, are underplayed, perhaps because a foyer is a space where one is unlikely to encounter others in sustained contact (Fig. 33). Instead, the monumentality occurs in the ambulatory, where one is constantly

60. Abdul Wazid, former Additional Chief Engineer for the Bangladesh Public Works Department, interview with the author, January 1991.

61. Kahn probably saw some of the forts in the Indian state of Rajasthan on one of his earliest trips to India, as he sent a postcard of the fort-palace at Jaipur to the employees in his office in November 1962. "Correspondence—Miscellaneous," Box 55, Kahn Collection.

62. In 1962, Kahn lectured in Aspen, Colorado, and spoke of the Pantheon: "One of the most wonderful buildings in the world which conveys its ideas is the Pantheon. The Pantheon is really a world within a world." 27 June 1962, "Aspen Conference—June 1962," Box 59, Kahn Collection. In May 1963, in a lecture to the Association of Interior Designers, Kahn presented his schemes for Dhaka and declared that "truly a building is a world within a world. When you're in this building, you must feel really no association with the outside. I am not one who believes in the picture window where the outside is inside and the inside is outside, and I don't believe in drops in living rooms either;" unpublished lecture, p. 24, "AID Speech-Liturgical Conference," Box 68, Kahn Collection.

aware of one's relationship to the other users of the building, and of one's connection to the Assembly as a whole (Fig. 34).

Conclusion

In plan, elevation, scale, detailing, and sequence, Kahn drew from the ideologies of both the new humanism and regionalism to make the National Assembly a monument to the values of American democratic idealism in the fifties: the force of the individual voice, the gravity of civic responsibility, the separation of church and state, the defense against homogenizing mass culture. Such values are variously expressed in all of Kahn's civic and religious work in this period, including the Unitarian Church in Rochester, and the design for the American consulate in Luanda.

Clearly, in the case of the complex at Dhaka, this dynamic indicates a colonial mentality, in which the ideals of a greater power are transposed onto one unlikely to resist. Does this make Sher-e-Bangla Nagar an example of American postwar cultural imperialism?[63] In a way, it does, but the conceptual flexibility and abstraction of Kahn's forms are such that it has not retained this meaning for long (Fig. 35). Successive generations of Bengalis have reinterpreted the National Assembly building to embody new aspirations for their country and themselves—a process which began before the building was even near completion.

It is a testimony to Kahn's success that this evolution of interpretations continues. Festivities celebrating the inauguration of Begum Khaleda Zia, the democratically-elected, fundamentalist-Islamic Nationalist Prime Minister took place in March 1991 in the Presidential Square. Perhaps ironically, it was the first time the plaza had ever been used in the way that Kahn intended.

63. Such an interpretation is suggested in Ignacio de Sola-Morales i Rubio, "A Lecture in San Sebastian" (1982), reprinted in *Louis I. Kahn: L'uomo, il maestro,* ed. Alessandra Latour (Rome, 1986), 205–24.