

Reconstructing the Idea of Islamic Architecture from the Sunnah and Ideas of Early Modernists

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Issue

- * Islamic Architecture Design and Discourse is imprisoned in a Typological Mind Set related to Architect's Ignorance of Islamic Political Discourse, Traditional Political Mind Set and Restricted Cultural and Intellectual Framework of Islam
- * Islamic Architecture Theory did not undergo an Evolutionary Process of Modernist's Clash of Values in the Social, Political, Religious and Environmental construct

Message

- * The way forward is to Reconstruct the Idea of Islamic Architecture using the Sunnah as a Value system but interpreted within the cultural and political framework of a locality and the constrains of Sustainable Technology
- * The Realm of Early Modernist Ideas in Europe and America possess much of the required template for restating the Islamic Agenda in Architecture Design Morality

Content

- * Understanding the Problems of Interpretation in Popular Islamic Architecture Design Discourse
- * Revisiting the Early Modernist Design Morality Discourse
- * A Critique of Populist Islamic Architecture from the Modernist Design Morality Discourse
- * Reconstructing the Idea of Islamic Architecture

Morality and Islamic Architecture

- * And is He Who spread out the Earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm, and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two: He draweth the night as a veil o'er Day. Behold, verily in these things there are Signs for those who consider!
- * And in the earth are tracts (diverse though) neighbouring, and gardens of vines and fields sown with corn, and palm trees-grown out of single roots o otherwise: watered with same water, yet some of them We make more excellent others to eat. Behold, verily in these things. (Ar-Rad Verses 3-4)

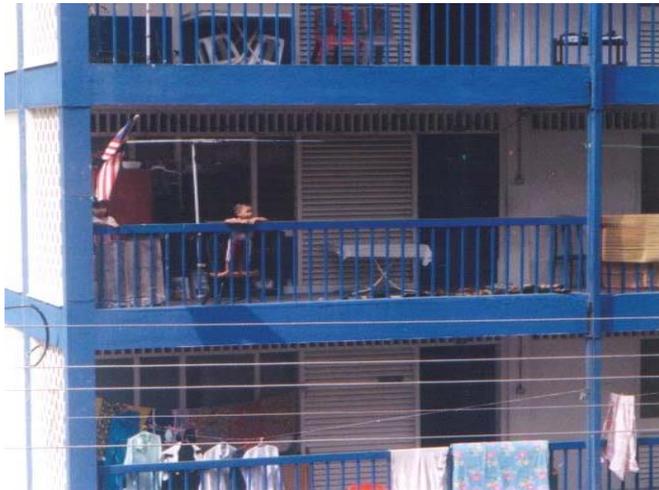


Which of these two architecture reminds of God? A building that dominates Nature or sits humbly between the landscape?

Morality and Islamic Architecture

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace and blessing be upon him) saying: A person while walking along the path saw the branches of the tree lying there. He said: By Allah, I shall remove these from this so that these may not do harm to the Muslims, and he was admitted to Paradise. **(Sahih Muslim, Vol. IV, p.1380)**

- * Abu Barza reported: I said: Allah's Messenger, teach me something so that I may derive benefits from it. He said: Remove something troubling from the path of the Muslims. (Sahih Muslim, Val. IV, p.1380)



Understanding the Problems of Interpretation in Popular Islamic Architecture Design Discourse

- * The Restrictive Idea of a 'Religious Architecture'
- * Framework of Historiography
- * The 'House of God' Predicament
- * Simplistic Borrowed Discourse of Architecture
- * Interpretation of Textual Sources
- * Political Patronage
- * Discourse on Islamic Politics
- * Populist Traditional Cultural mind set

The Restrictive Idea of a 'Religious Architecture'

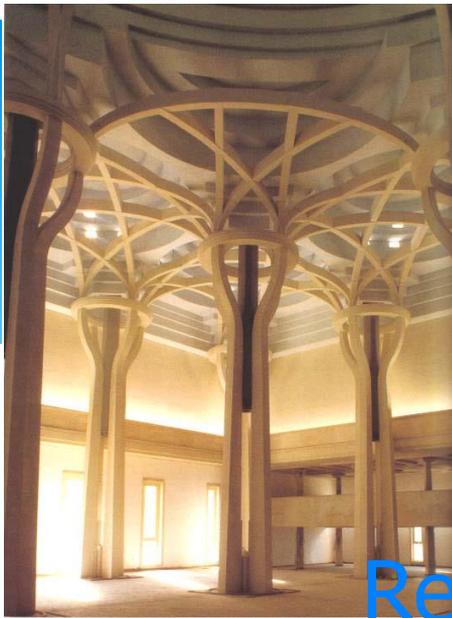
The history of religions has known two influences that sought to reduce its jurisdiction by limiting the data that constitute its subject matter: one was to attempt to redefine the religious datum in a restricted and narrow manner, and the other was an isolationist policy observed vis-a-vis Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The attempt to limit the jurisdiction of phenomena of religions by giving the religious datum a narrow definition led to theories that have tried to isolate the religious element and to identify it in terms of "the religious", "the holy", "the sacred". The problem these theories faced was primarily the reductionist's analysis of the religious phenomenon into something else that would lend itself more readily to his kind of investigation .

Ismail Raj al-Faruqi

Consider what a mosque, temple or church is. It is a place where we try to elevate spiritually to meet with God. It is the place where He dwells, a place where we go to seek solace and to communicate with Him, it is a place where we feel most at ease and where His presence, peace and comfort are most felt. It is indeed our refuge.

(Jimmy Lim, “Editorial comments”, *Majalah Akitek*, Vol. 2 no. 6, Nov.Dec.1990)



Structuralism



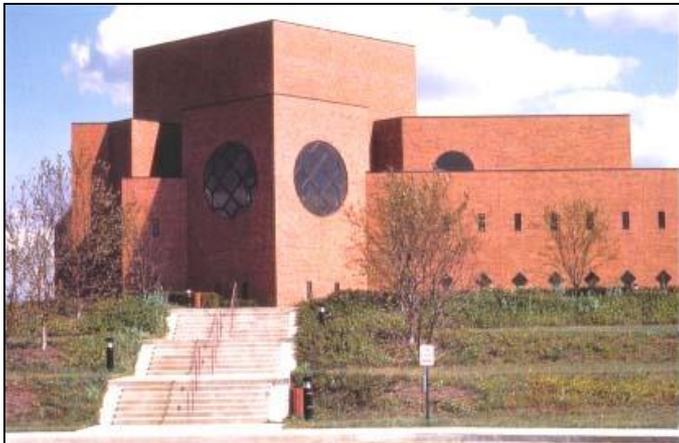
Revivalism

Metaphor



Restricted Borrowed Discourse and Design Approaches

Regionalism



Geometricism



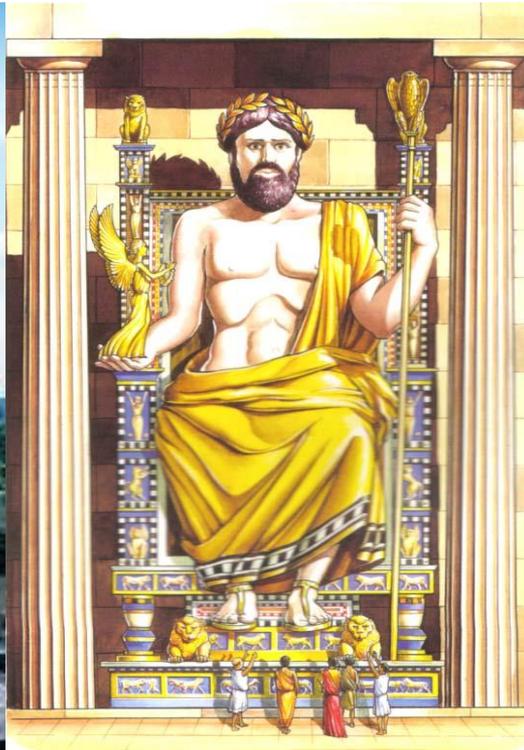
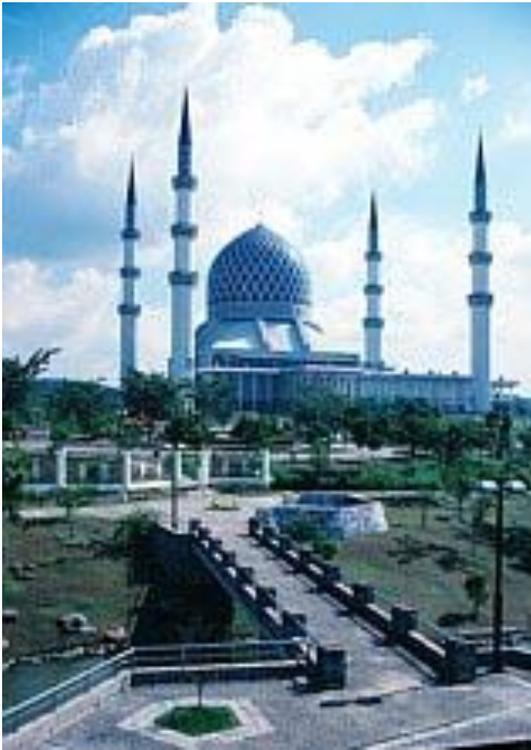
Framework of Historiography

“No further change had taken place in Muhammad's house at the time of his death on 8 June 632. He was buried in the room which he had occupied in his lifetime. **His house has not yet become a mosque** and its transformation to such was by no means a rapid process. It apparently remained a house long after his death, for Abu Bakr, on being elected Khalif or Successor, made use of it in the same way as Muhammad himself. It was still a house in A.D. 655, when the Khalif Uthman was murdered there in the room next to that in which the Prophet lay buried. Caetani considers that the fundamental change took place when Ali transferred the seat of government to Kufa in 657 and Medina sank back to the status of a provincial town. It was then that the memories of the Prophet, with which it was so intimately associated, raised it to the grade of sanctuary, as the place where more than half of the Qur'an was revealed, the place which had been his home for ten years, and finally his grave.”(TYPOLOGICAL STEREOTYPING)

* (Creswell 1958, pp. 5 – 6)

House of God Typology

- * Religious structures like mosques are considered as house of God from the idea of a Temple that houses a great statue of God



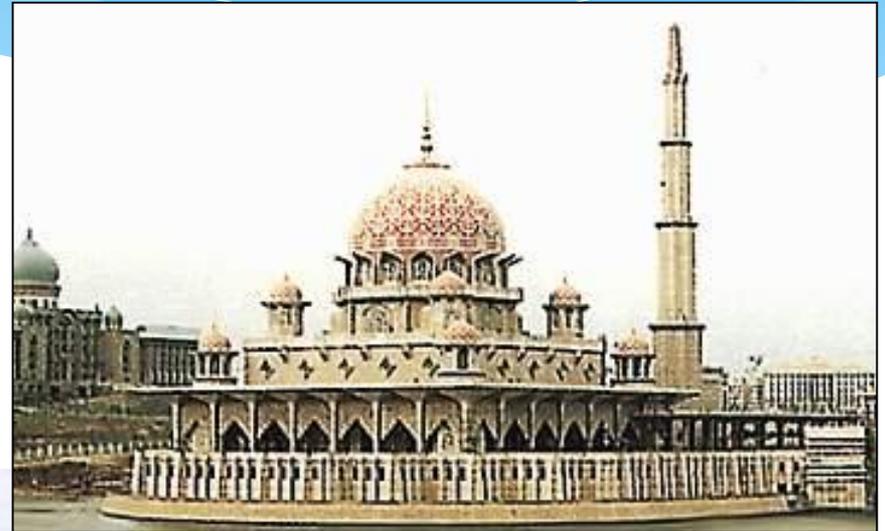
House of God?

Political Patronage and agenda

“Ziyad, who was well acquainted with the turbulent spirit of the cities of Iraq, thoroughly realized **the political importance of the mosque**, that dominating position in which was concentrated at that time the political and social life of the Arab Empire. At the same time he felt that the *masjids* of the tribes were a danger to him, hence **his anxiety to embellish and enlarge the Great Mosque**, so that by its splendor and proportions it would eclipse the tribal *masjids* and attract all to it.”

(Creswell 1958, p12-13)

Mahathir's Islamic Political Agenda to rival other Islam-based political parties



Populist Issues on Mosque Architecture

- * The Azan Issue
- * The non-Muslim in the Mosque Issue
- * The Loudspeaker-Khutbah or Ceramah Issue
- * Sleeping or Staying in the Mosque Issue
- * The children Issue
- * The Conservation-Adaptation-Wakaf Issue
- * The Business in the Mosque Issue
- * The Landed Mosque Issue
- * The Surau-Masjid Dichotomy Issue

Revisiting the Early Modernist Design Morality Discourse

- * Religious Values
- * Political Values
- * Environmental-Spiritual Values
- * Technological-Economic Values

Clash of Values

TECHNOLOGICAL VALUES :

Structuralism; the idea of structural honesty in expressing the joints, construction details, the building frame and services. 'The aeroplane is beautiful' (Le Corbusier), the Machine Aesthetic.

SCIENTIFIC-EMPIRICAL VALUES:

Human beings are biological entity responding to the Physical Environment. Traditional rules and rituals with faith as guidance is irrelevant. Behavioral and Climatic response of buildings are essential. Life is reduced to Basic Principles. Architectural Abstractionism.

ECONOMIC VALUES:

Efficiency and economic returns are the New Gods. Expensive structures for symbolism and Ornamentation for beauty adds unnecessary cost. 'Ornament is Crime' (Adolf Loos) 'Building as Pure Universal Shelter' (Mies van der Rohe)

The CLASH of VALUES in MODERN ARCHITECTURE (Late 19th Century): The NEW MORALITY

ECOLOGICAL VALUES:

The Earth is Our Spaceship. This is all we have. NATURE is the New God. Sustainability is the New Religion. The Architectural Mantra is to design with the site and natural materials.

DEMOCRATIC-PROTESTANT VALUES:

One Rule for All. Success is measured through the strife of the individual. The Individual is Important and Accountable before God. The President or Prime Minister is Accountable to the People. Architecture is Organic and must respond to individual sites, culture, technology and the vernacular (Frank Lloyd Wright)

SOCIALIST VALUES:

Ordinary Workers and People matter. Aristocracy is Sinfully Elite. Worker housing. Mass Housing. The City is for the many, not for the few. Great Architectural Masterpieces are those that solve the problem of the masses, not the elite.

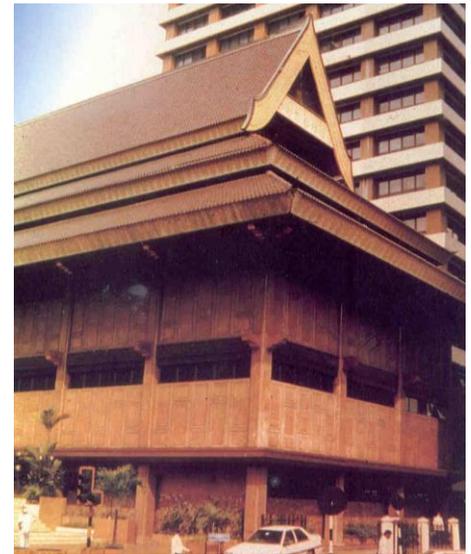
Pugin-Religious/Economic

- * *Two great rules for design are these: 1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, of propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building*



4 necessary minarets?
A dome when a simple
Portal prism is cheaper?

Why make concrete look
Like timber? Why a tall
Gable roof when a flat one
Can do the job less
expensively?



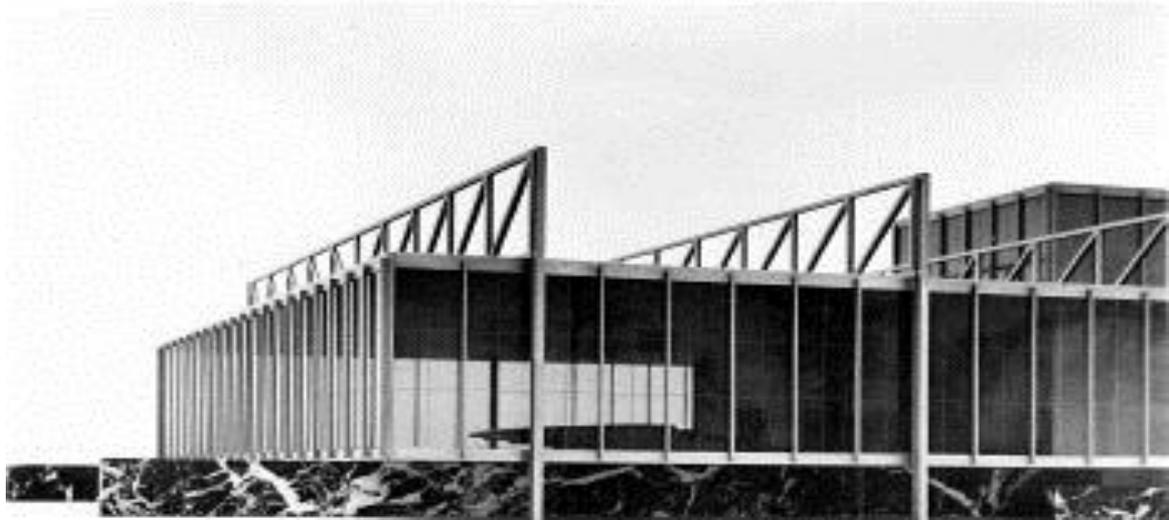
interpretation

- * Religious values of non-wastefulness and moderation... man should not waste... therefore architecture must not have 'wasteful' features unconnected with structure, construction or utilitarian purposes
- * Religious values of honesty... man must always tell the truth... therefore buildings must display clarity of construction, structure and function.

Pugin - Religious

- * *Pointed Architecture does not conceal her construction, but beautifies it: classic architecture seeks to conceal instead of decorating it, ..Indeed, if we view pointed architecture in its true light as Christian art, as the faith itself is perfect, so are the principles on which it is founded.*

Manheim Theater Project,
Mies van der Rohe,
Early 20th century



interpretation

- * Man's honesty and truth of what he says and feels is usually reflected outwardly in his good deeds, beautiful manners and modesty of clothing... therefore architectural features must display the result of construction... later on this was called 'form follows function' by engineer Le Corbusier which was then popularized by the visionary architect Louis H. Sullivan

Pugin – Religious/Environmental

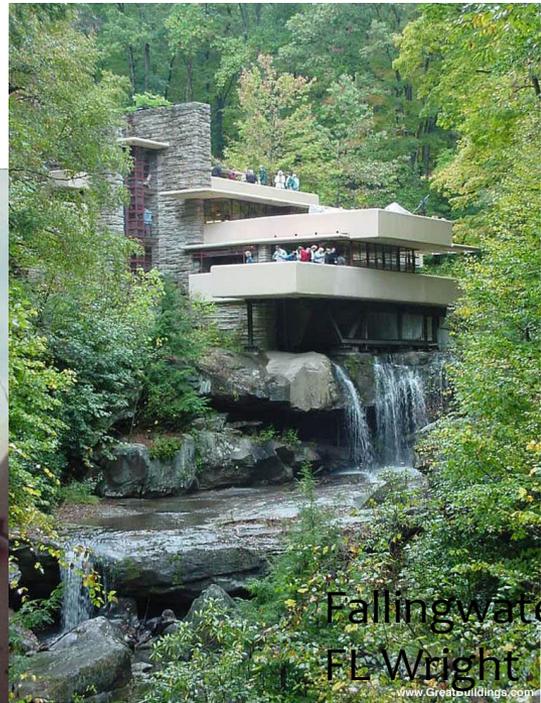
- For although the great principles of Christian architecture were every where the same, each country had some peculiar manner of developing them, and we should continue working in the same parallel lines, all contributing to the grand whole of Catholic art, but the very variety increasing its beauties and its interest.



Salinger House
Malaysia, jimmy Lim



New Gurna Housing,
Egypt, Hassan Fathy



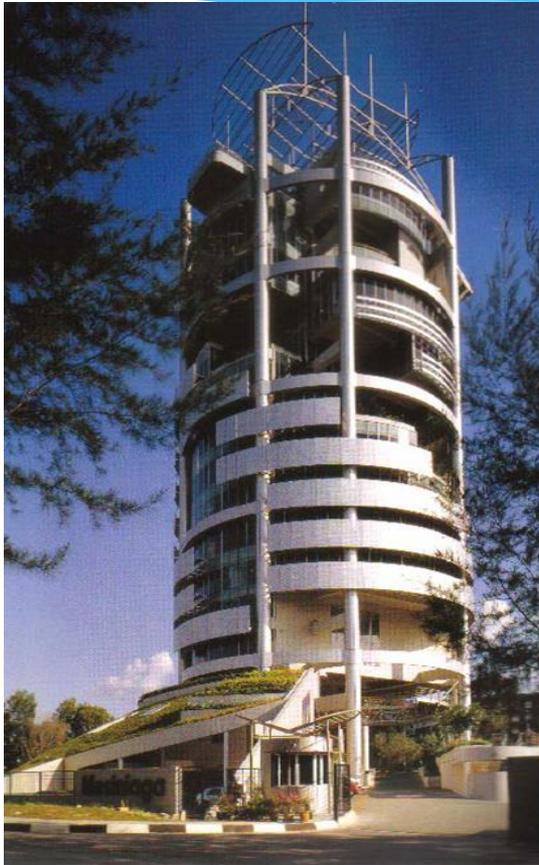
Fallingwater, USA,
FL Wright

INTERPRETATION

- * Good manners demand that we respect other cultures... therefore architecture should respect the climatic demands, material availability and technological know-how of a particular place
... REGIONALISM

Violet-le-Duc - Technological

- * Suppose that an architect of the twelfth or thirteenth century were to return among us and that he were to be initiated into our modern ideas; if one put at his disposal the perfections of modern industry, he would not build an edifice of the time of Philip Augustus or St. Louis, because this would be to falsify the first law of art, which is to conform to the needs and customs of the times.*



Mesiniaga, Ken Yeang



Gothic Architecture using Iron
Sketch by Viollet-le-Duc

interpretation

- * Scientific or academic values of integrity and state of the art knowledge... therefore architects should familiarize with contemporary technology and not get stuck sentimentally with the technology of the past people. Using old technology for the sake of blind adherence is like practicing norms and rituals of the past without understanding any of their rationale or meanings or relevance but simply copying for the sake of copying.

Violet-le-duc - Political

- *In the study of the arts of the past, therefore, we should observe a clear distinction between a form which is only the reflection of a tradition, a form adopted without consideration,- and a form which is **the immediate expression of a requirement**, of a certain social condition; and it is only the study of the latter that issues in practical advantage, -an advantage not consisting in the imitation of this form, but in the example it affords of the application of a principle.*

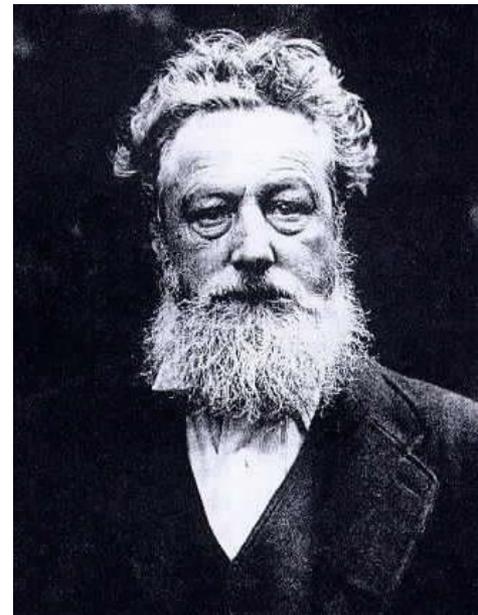


interpretation

- * Form should follow Function according to the dictates of 'spirit of place (geography, climate, building material and customs) as well as spirit of the times (technology and science)

Morris - Political

- * I don't want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few.*
- * What business have we with art at all unless all can share it?*

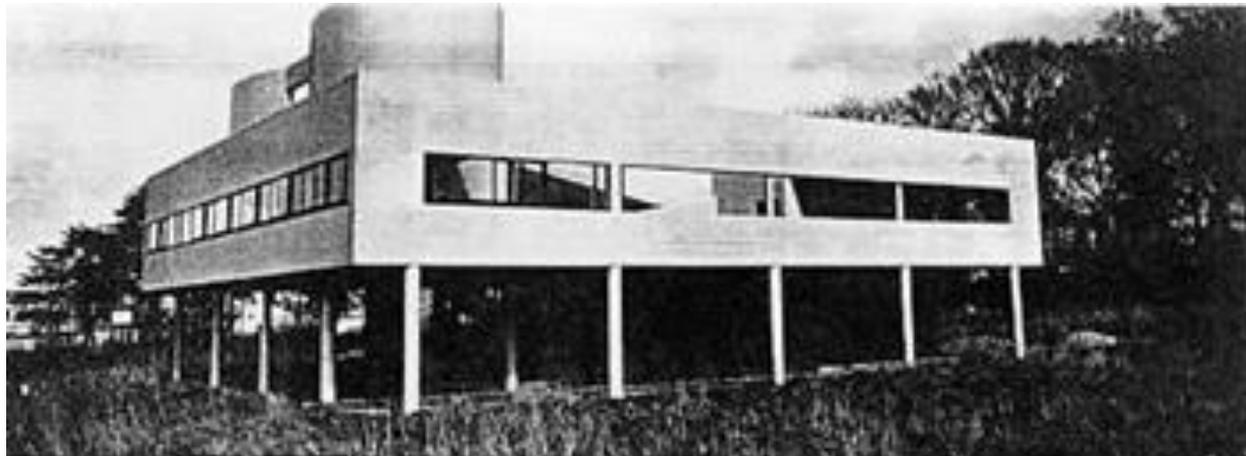


interpretation

- * Democratic values of justice. Education is the right for all. Shelter is the right for all. Food is the right for all. Not for a few... therefore why must art be understood only by the few? Why must architecture cater to the few? Democratic architecture must reflect the needs and rituals of the many. Not MUCH money spent on FEW buildings. But MUCH money should be spent on MANY public and community architecture with forms and plans catering to 'ordinary' people's needs. Architecture is not the plaything of the rich and few but the art and technology to solve the needs of the MANY. Only then... the form of architecture is reflected truthfully!

* **Le Corbusier - Economic**

- * *The Plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of an interior.*
- * *The Plan is the generator. Without a plan, you have lack of order, and willfulness. The plan holds in itself the essence of sensation. The great problems of to-morrow, dictated by collective necessities, put the question of “plan” in a new form. Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan both for the house and for the city.*



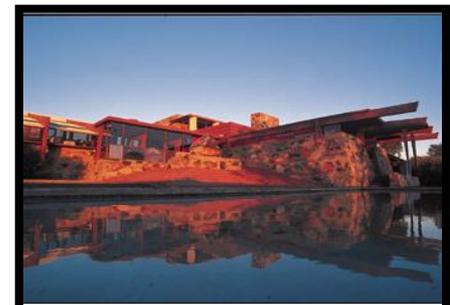
“To enlighten the young education must at least teach philosophy. Without a true philosophy there is no understanding of anything.

Without your own philosophic resolution and analysis of pretended knowledge, as applied to life, what and where are you?

Philosophy is the only realm wherein you can find understanding. Religion and the arts are all part of philosophy. **There has never been a creative artist or poet, for instance, who wasn't deeply religious...**

My work is great in so far as its philosophy is sound, and if my philosophy is unsound my work will not endure. The fact that it has endured, and now has a chance to continue beyond any lifetime, is simply due to the fact that the philosophy behind it all was a sound one. If that philosophy didn't inspire my work, it wouldn't exist very long ”

Wright, Frank Lloyd, **“Truth Against the World”**



Wright - Environmental

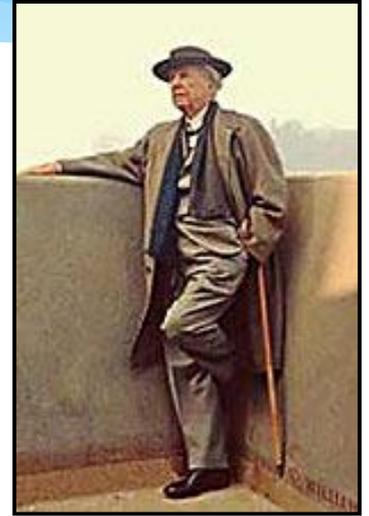
- * Nature is all the body of god we're ever going to see. It is practically the body of God for all of us. By studying that Nature we learn who we are, what we are and how we are to be."**

“If our education-called conservative- is ever going to do anything for us it has to provide enlightenment by means of art, religion and science. But until art, religion and science stop disregarding each other, until they realize their interest is one and the source of their inspiration is one, and realize that they can’t live apart, that union will not be possible. We teachers must teach men to seek enlightenment by means of the poetic principles of art, religion and science. We must manifest these to them as spiritual guideposts as true measures of understanding.”

Wright, Frank Lloyd, **“Truth Against the World”**



A democratic building is at ease: it stands relaxed. A democratic building, again is for and belongs to the people. It is of human scale for men and women to live in and feel at home.



Frank Lloyd Wright, In the Cause of Architecture, 1908

Political Values

Criticism of the Object-Centred Approaches

- * Revivalism
- * Geometricism
- * Metaphorism
- * Structuralism
- * Regionalism

Revivalism

Definition

- ✓ The direct interpretation of a previous architectural language using the same materials and construction process
- ✓ The direct application of forms and architectural elements from a previous known architecture using other than the original materials and construction process.



Advantages

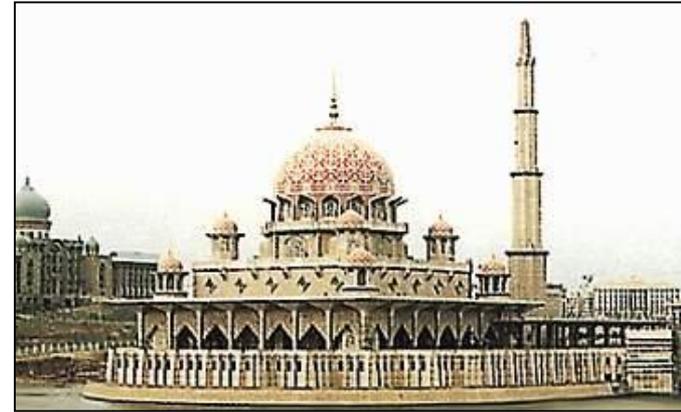
1. The language is easily recognizable by the public.
2. It makes design an effortless thing if mere imitation is the game
3. It affords a direct link to the past and ensures static continuity.
4. As in the work of Hassan Fathi, there is both an economic growth due to the application of local craft and materials with low scale development that suits a pre industrial culture.



Disadvantages

1. Local revivalism does not relate to the idea of a spirit of time; a building that ignores the scientific and intellectual development of the present era. Progressive idealism gives in to romantic or expedient solutions that suggest a society that is not brave enough or sure enough to get out of its own cocoon of certainty.
2. Foreign revivalism brings in problems with climatic context as well as the expensive efforts of bringing in foreign materials and labour.
3. It presents a society such as the Malays and a religion such as Islam in the light of strict dogma and as a static entity.
4. There is a problem of architectural interpretation of past precedent buildings such as the monumental mosques and palaces which becomes models for the present building and thus invites an embarrassing or erroneous interpretation of the religion or culture.
5. Revivalism forces an ethnocentric solution that might backfire to a concept that affords universal values.

8 July 2003



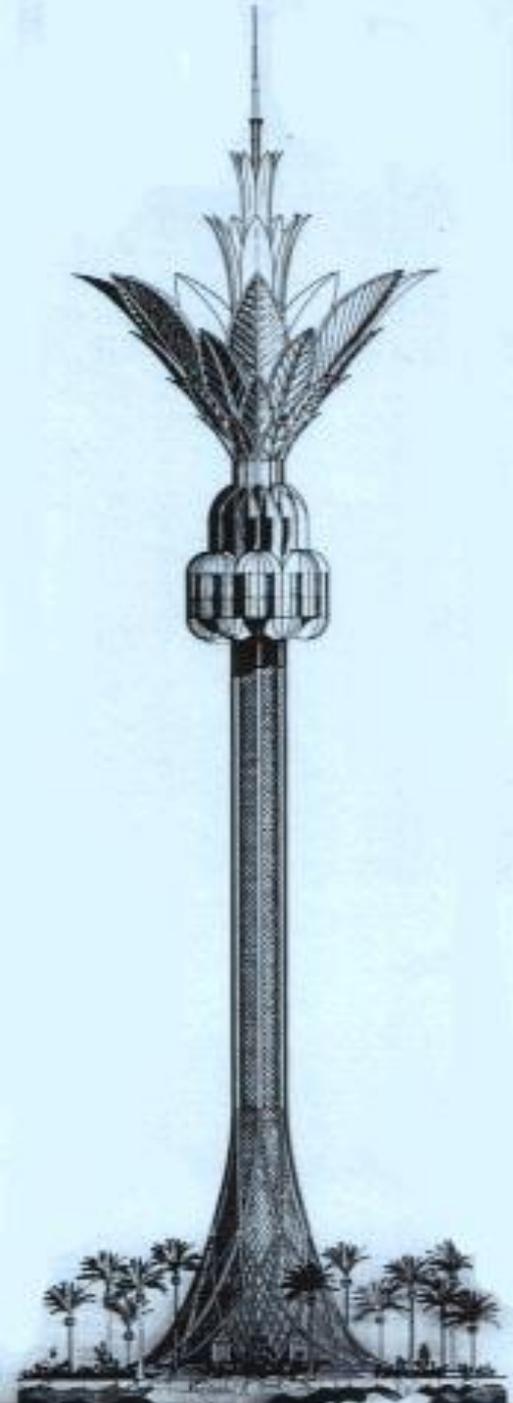
Metaphor

Definition

A building designed to communicate a meaning through the use of an abstraction of an object.

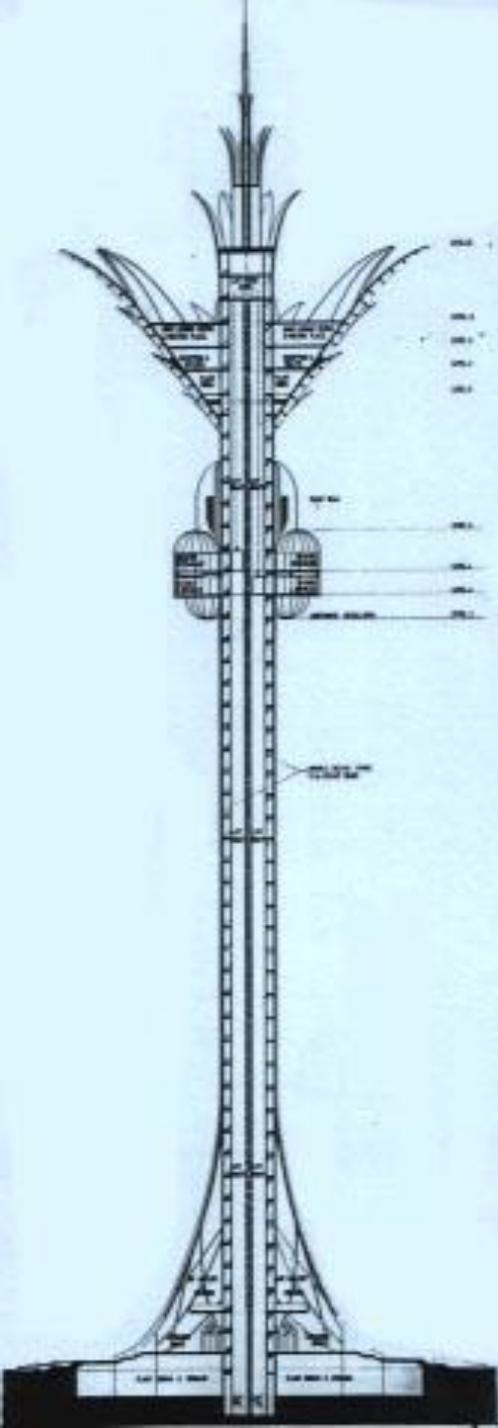
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Advantages

1. Depending on the choice of object referred to and the user's ability to interpret, it is a powerful tool of communication.
2. It affords an easy road to an interesting and unique form that is hardly present in the past.



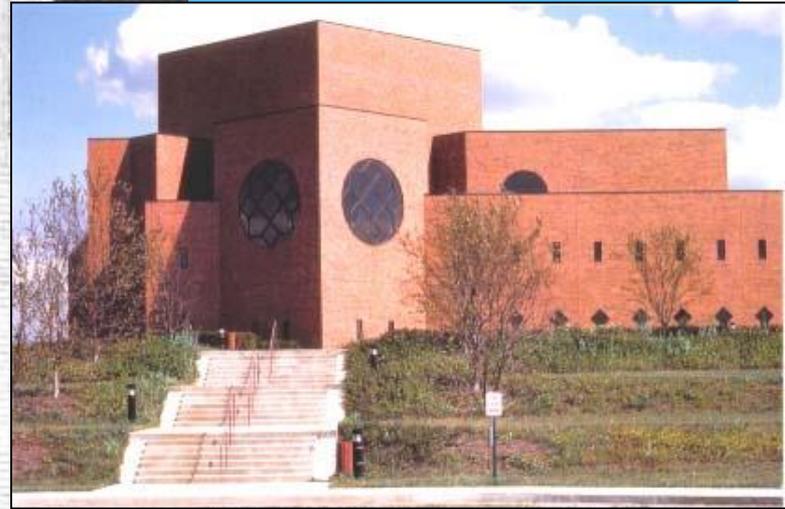
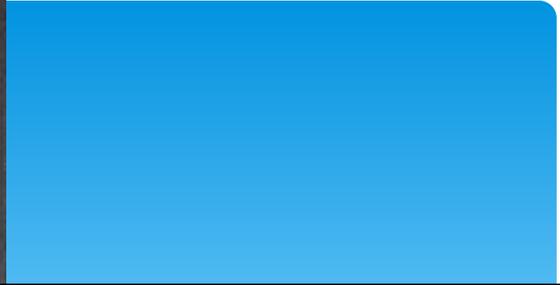
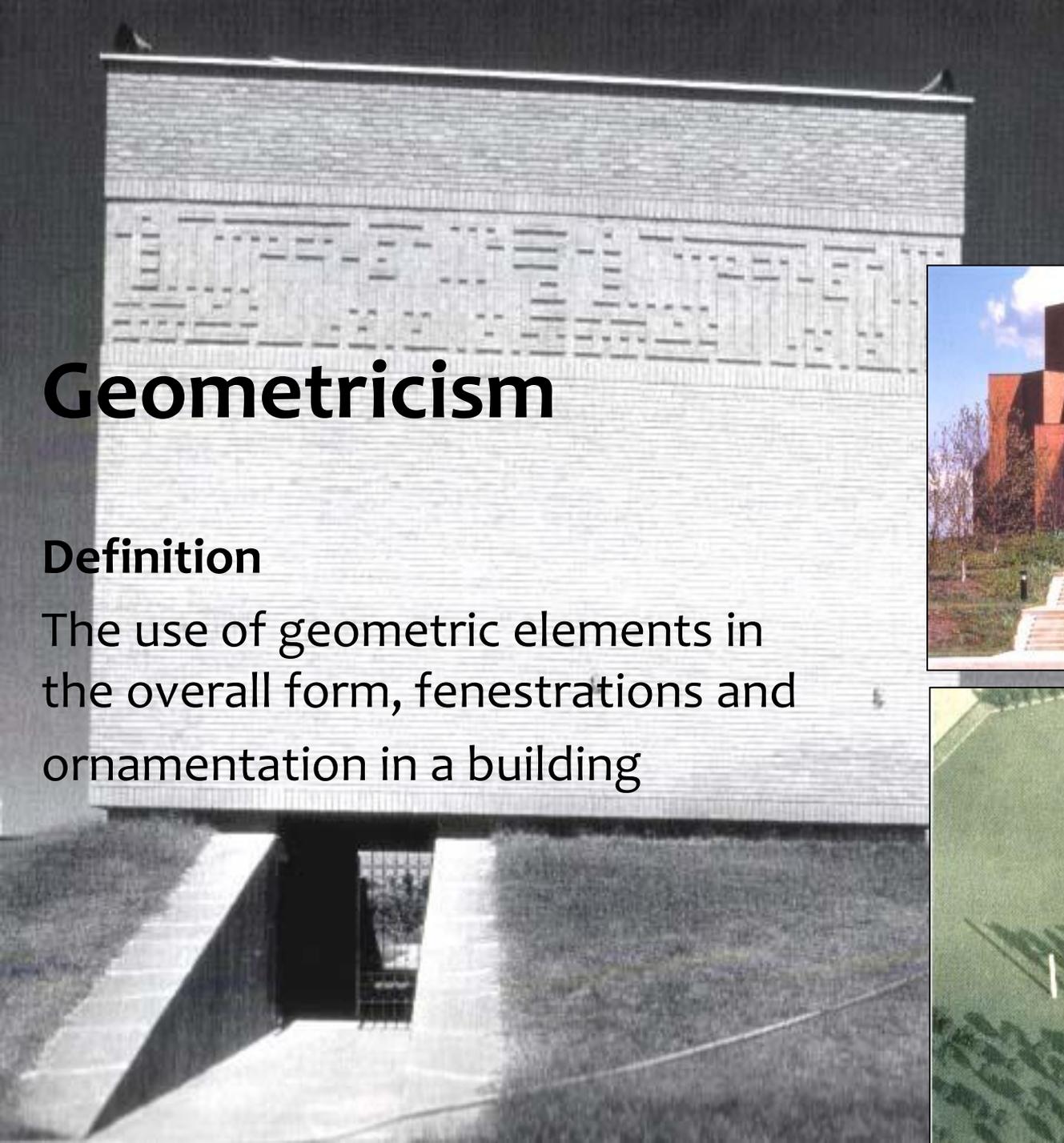
Disadvantages

1. Wrongfully executed, the metaphor is guessed and the message becomes static.
2. Wrongfully chosen, the object referred to has nothing in common with the present user and becomes an elitist tool of interpretation.
3. The preconceived form of a metaphor forces much structural and wastage of space to accommodate the shape chosen.
4. Too obvious a form, and the message becomes totally insulting to one's intelligence
5. Too complex, and the message dies with the architect!

Geometricism

Definition

The use of geometric elements in the overall form, fenestrations and ornamentation in a building



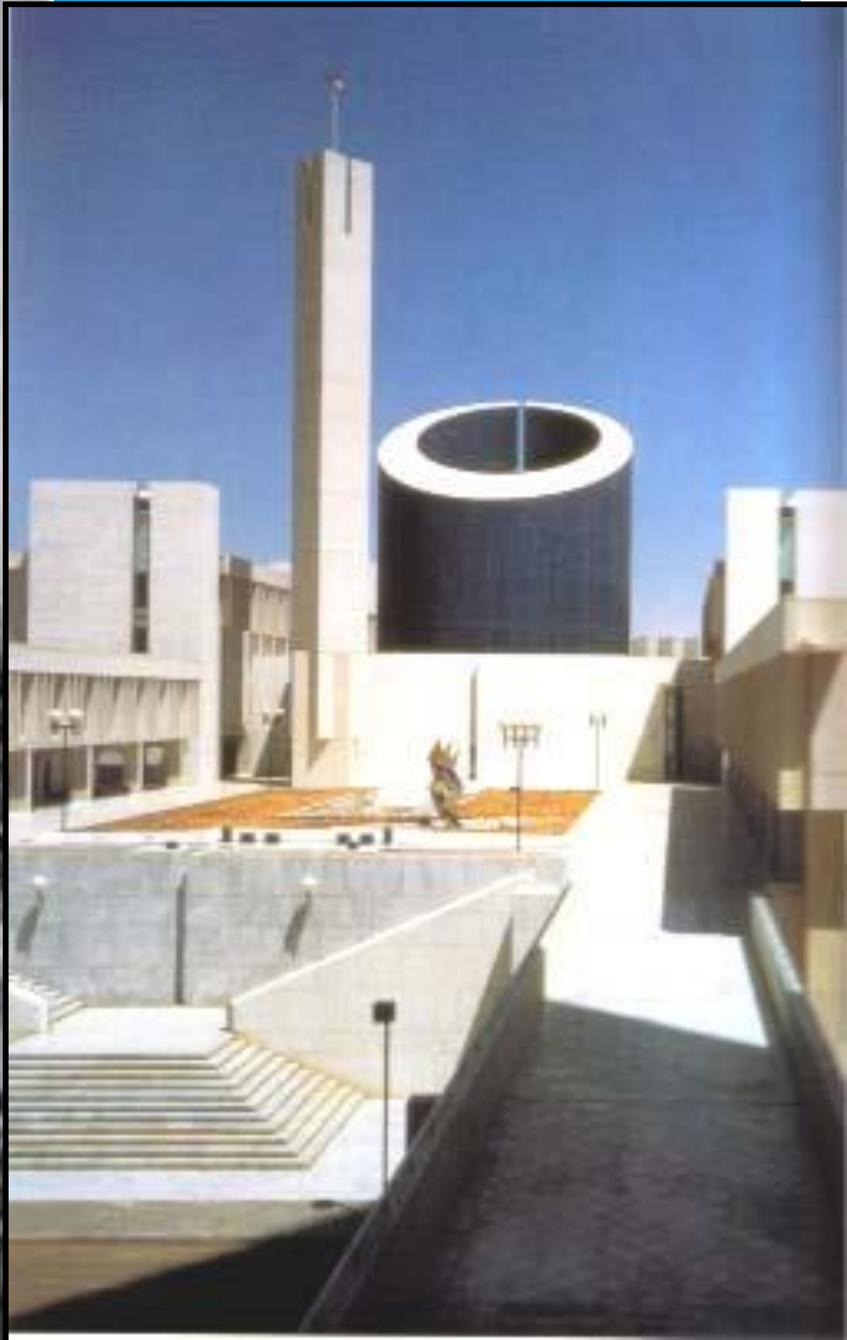
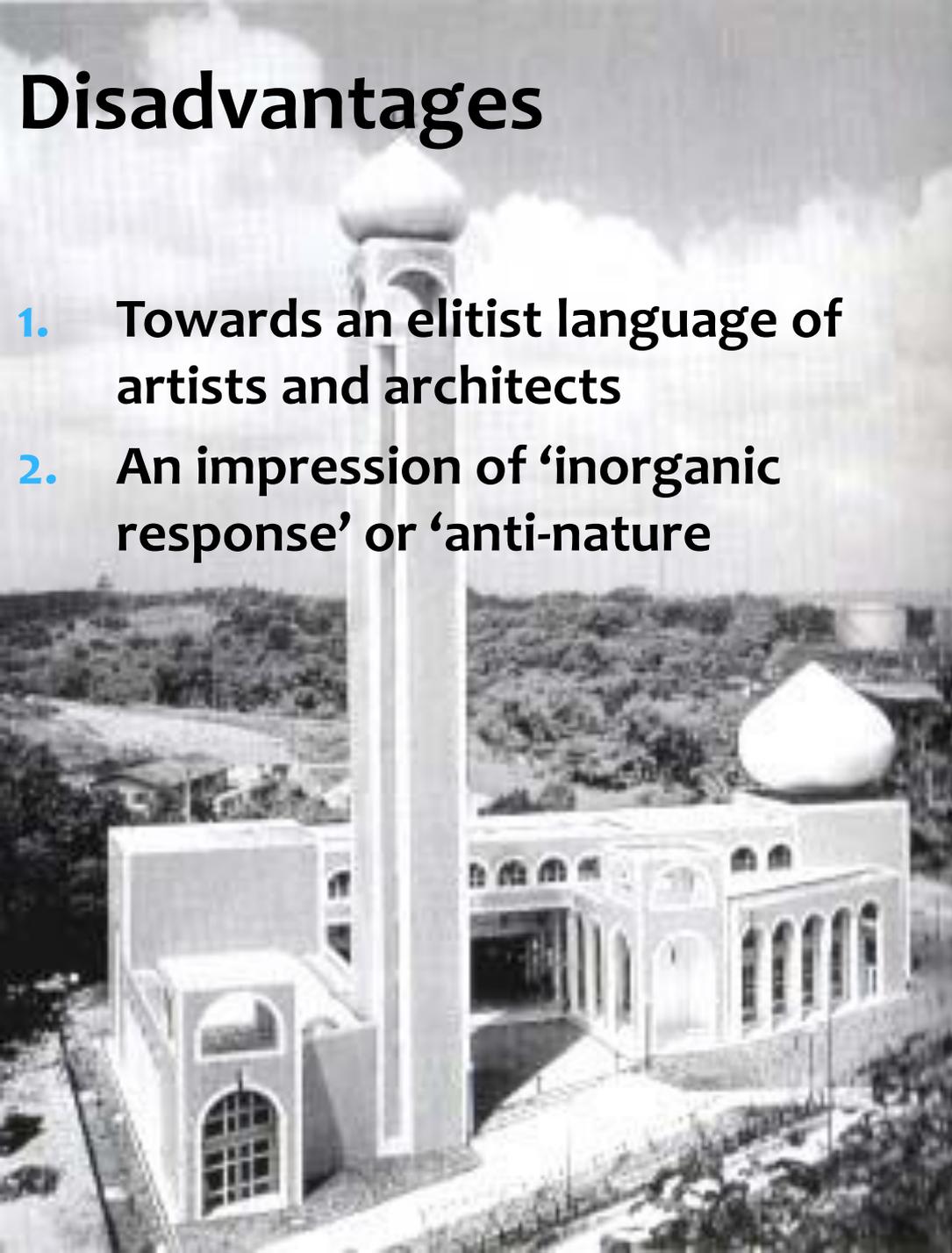
Advantages

1. The message of 'back to principles' in the form of basic recognizable forms.
2. There is a message of universality and the idea of 'progress'
3. A convenient element of mystical intellectuality.
4. A clear sense of order



Disadvantages

1. Towards an elitist language of artists and architects
2. An impression of 'inorganic response' or 'anti-nature'

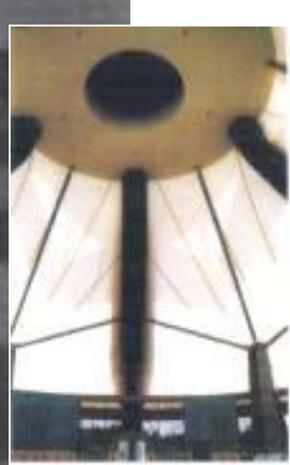
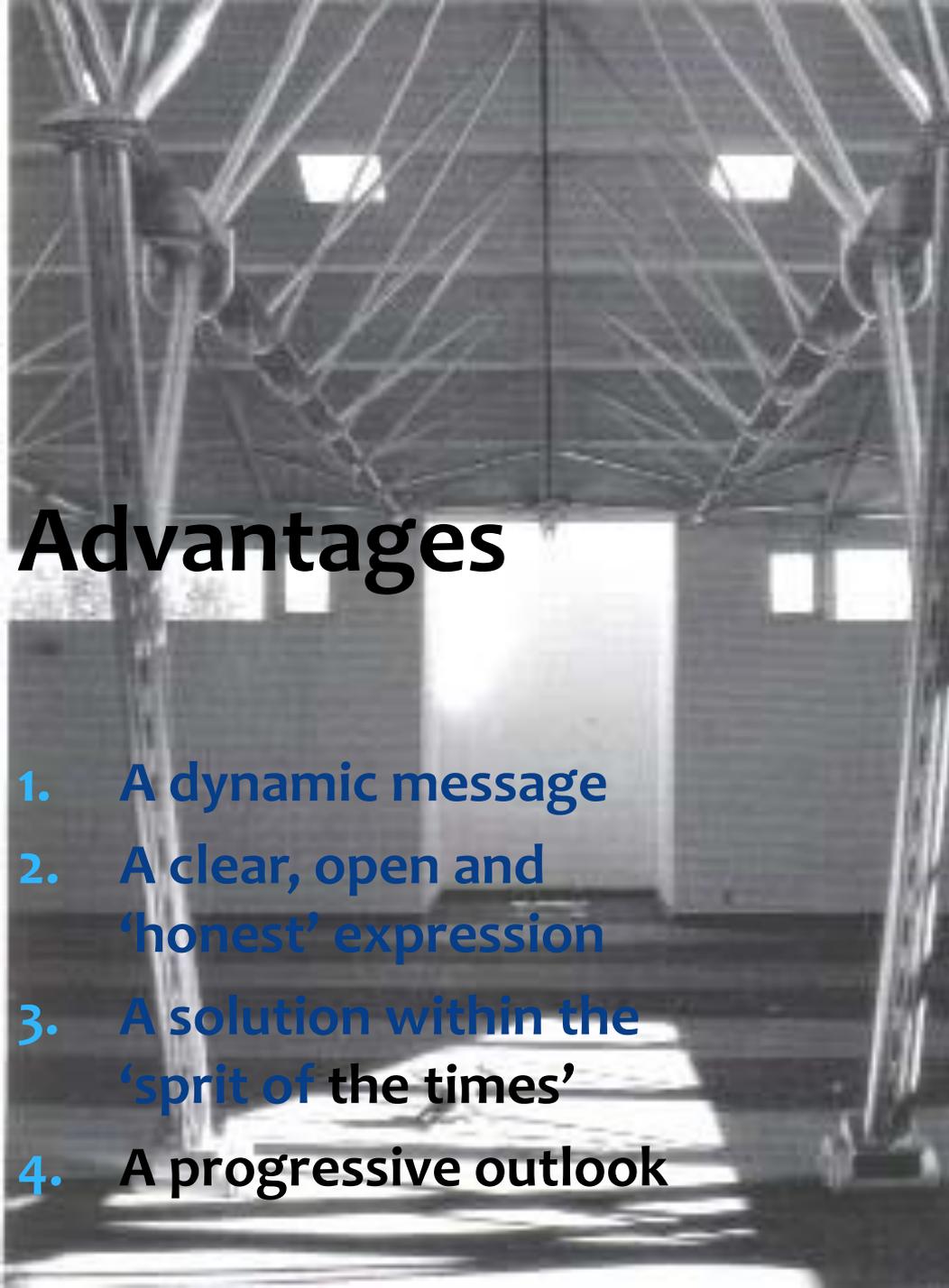




Structuralism

Definition

The skeletal expression of a building which reveals the structural and services system and also the use of 'state of the art' technology to stretch the limits of the material

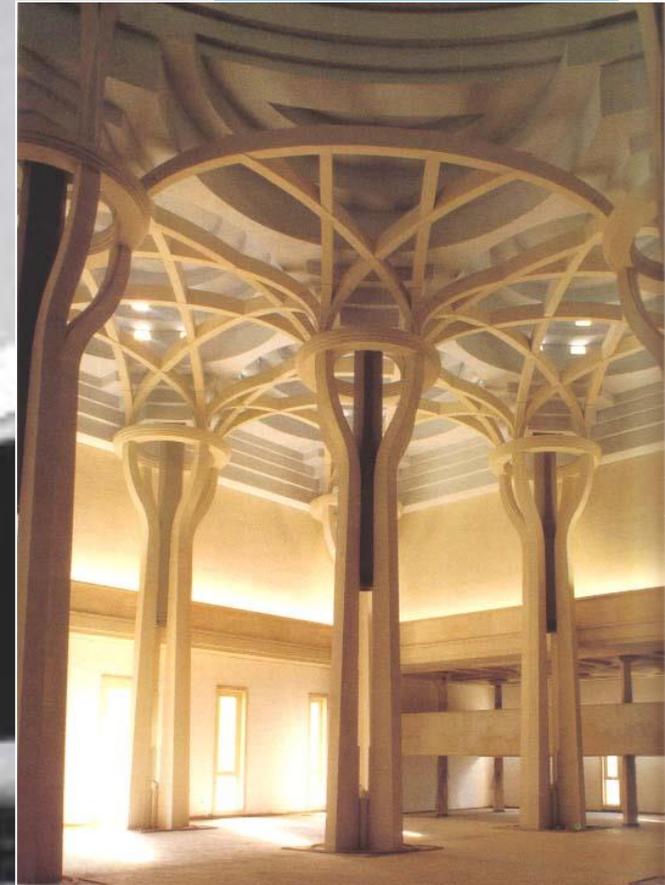


Advantages

1. A dynamic message
2. A clear, open and 'honest' expression
3. A solution within the 'sprit of the times'
4. A progressive outlook

Disadvantages

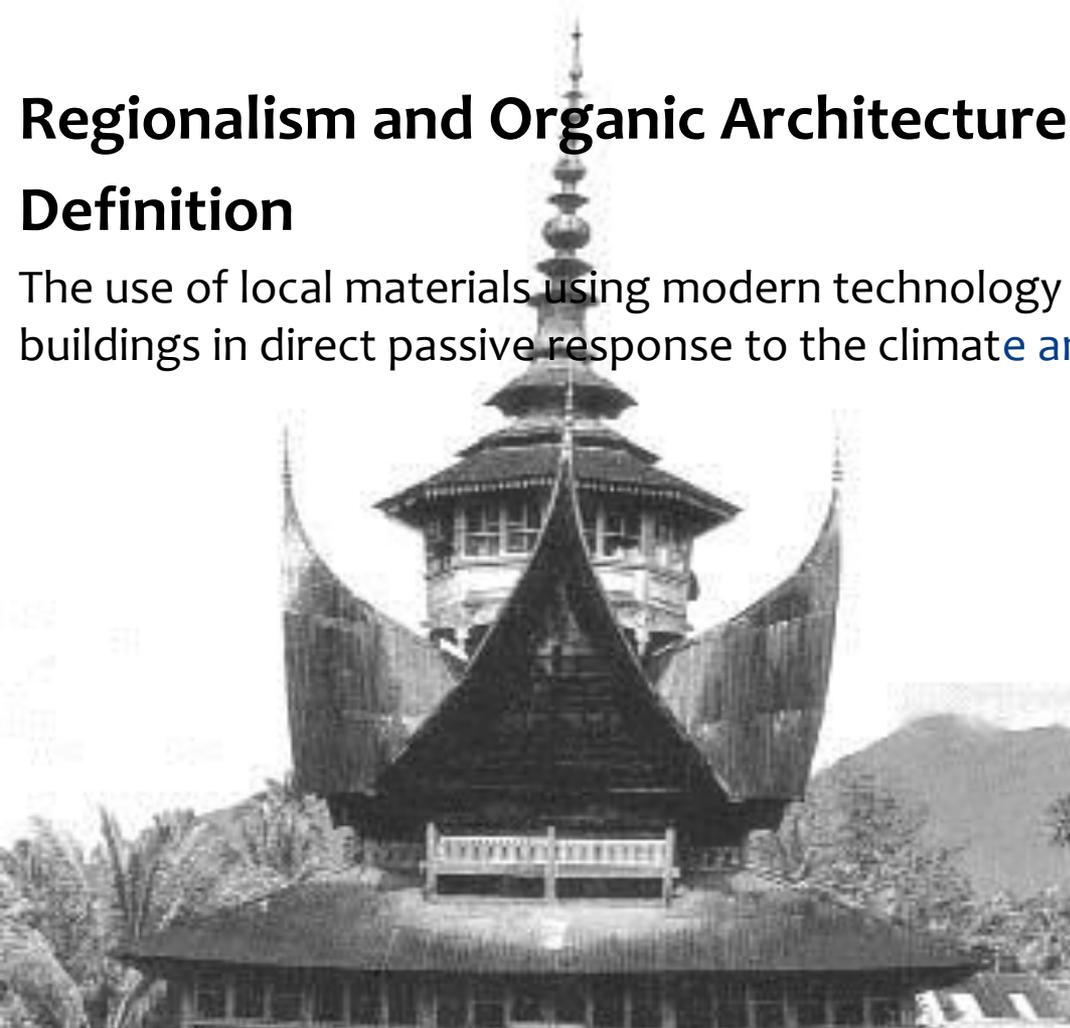
1. Expensive initial cost of labour and technology
2. Difficulty of expansion and growth
3. Expensive energy cost
4. A monstrous scale giving man an insignificant impression
5. The impression of an expensive shelter and of a machine architecture
6. High energy materials



Regionalism and Organic Architecture

Definition

The use of local materials using modern technology and understanding and the design of buildings in direct passive response to the climate and local cultural context.





Advantages

1. An architecture befitting a sense of Spirit of the place
2. The use of natural materials affords a Sustainable development relating to the idea of man as the Khalifa
3. Response to the climate and the use of materials relate to the message of 'strong, tested and eternal values'
4. A message of cultural tolerance since each geographic area implies a variety of **architectural response**
5. **A low scale development affords the idea of social and economic sustainability**
6. **a dynamic and an interpretation within the Spirit of the times**

Limitations of a Borrowed Discourse

- * Restricted Formalism
- * Uneconomic and Misrepresentative as Wasteful
- * Dogmatic Expression
- * Exclusive and not Inclusive
- * Non-Contextual