

critics at the congress. Iranian architect Houshang Seyhoun (a proponent of the new vernacularism in Iran and a distinguished architect of the shah's court) believed that the debate over the adaptation of modern technology to traditional forms should be replaced by a discussion of "modern tradition."<sup>15</sup> Seyhoun saw modern tradition as a form of ecological and geographical awareness concerned primarily with aesthetics and comfort.<sup>16</sup> His alternative reading of tradition as vernacular (exclusive of pre-Islamic architecture) was characterized by the biological and environmental and opposed to historical pastiche.

Seyhoun's call for a radical diversion from the main thesis of the congress was echoed by other participants. Georges Candilis was among the first to challenge the queen's disposition toward modernity rendered as a petrified monument. Recounting his conversation with the queen about the construction of a modern hotel in Isfahan, Candilis suggested overturning the traditional problems of architecture so that quality could be identified with the creative power of architecture in response to contingent, social, and historical realities rather than style, material, or technology.<sup>17</sup> In the same vein, Italian town planner and scholar Ludovico Quaroni criticized any metaphysical and formal interpretation of tradition as an absolute object divorced from social realities. While it was contentious, the congress became a venue for cross-cultural exchange and the clash of ideas among local and international architects.

This period of Iranian architecture was characterized by competing styles and formal allegiances to French, Anglo-American, German, and Italian postwar modernism.<sup>18</sup> Yet assimilations from historical or vernacular references, infused with the residue of modernist discourse, often remained merely formal exercises insofar as they failed to take a critical approach in addressing Iranian political and social conflicts. To ameliorate the shock and anguish brought by modernism, Iranian architects took up a type of internalized Orientalism by returning to history.<sup>19</sup>

Among the congress participants' responses to the queen's culturalist position on modernity, Kahn's intervention offered a departure from the "traditional." In a Heideggerian manner, Kahn differentiated between "tradition" and the "traditional." He argued that the term *traditional* belonged to circumstantial events of space-time and frozen, limited moments in the history of ideas, whereas *tradition* extended to "a longer period of time" (if tradition could be understood as a crystallization of humankind's existence and one's inner truth). However, in this sense tradition did not belong to the past or to the present. As Kahn remarked: "What man is composed of is that which is not yet made, not what is made. What is made has to do with needs, what is yet not made is the very essence of existence, so therefore nothing but art can bring it up."<sup>20</sup> For Kahn tradition hinted at the potential of

a temporal extension only if it could be seen as a state of futurity, in which only the work of art could release the incomplete and the unmade.

Thus, humankind's "powers of anticipation" resided in the *beginning* of the work of art.<sup>21</sup> This is why Kahn consistently praised the architecture of beginning, not in terms of spatial archetypes but as "that which confirms its continuation."<sup>22</sup> In his lecture at the Isfahan congress, Kahn stated:

[Tradition] is not so much what you see, but what you feel. If you feel the reflection of something, it is beautifully stated. It reflects something which you would like to extend the expression of, although you may not know its background. It transcends the knowledge about it.<sup>23</sup>

Kahn's faith in a romantic idea of origin and self-knowledge that could offer primacy to architectural work was sublimated in his well-known idiom of the "golden dust." As Kahn expressed it:

Tradition is a kind of golden dust that falls; if you put your fingers through it, there is a crystallization out of all circumstances which brought it about and made it be. If you put your fingers through it, I think you can sense the powers of anticipation, because in what has been accepted before by man as a place to live, a place to be, a place to talk, to learn, there must be considered a miracle, and nothing short of it.<sup>24</sup>

For Kahn, the golden dust was a "treasury" full of forms and an indication of the existence of amorphous ideas that belonged to a multiplicity of coalescing times and spaces.<sup>25</sup> During a dialogue with Luis Barragán, Kahn identified the fleeting character of tradition by offering two examples: a play by Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre and the old Etruscan mirror.<sup>26</sup> We cannot relive these two artistic products as spectacle, Kahn reminded us, no matter how much we dig into the past or manipulate their acts or images. Each rendered a static, vulnerable moment that broke down during the act of reconstruction. The golden dust, as a matter that was luminous but ruinous in character, would direct us toward new beginnings.

An advocate of architectural historicity (and not historicism) as revolutionary, fragmentary, and a basis for the "coming about of new institutions," Kahn often denied using historical precedents and their forms in his projects.<sup>27</sup> While Kahn wrote of the joy of beginnings, he warned against making the *error of beginning*: "If you get too close to beginning, it goes farther and farther away from you. Stop in midstream and allow that which will be forever unattainable."<sup>28</sup> From this perspective, Kahn can be seen as a figure of resistance within the context of the Iranian revivalist movement and its restrictive notion of history. Kahn's idea of the architecture of beginning, free from the constraints of chronological time