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Kanan Makiya

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# PAPERS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

**Paper No. 57**

**“Putting Cruelty First”**

**Kanan Makiya**

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

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## Putting Cruelty First

Lecture given by Kanan Makiya at the University of Western Ontario, October 27, 1994 (not for quotation)

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Cruelty, understood as the willful infliction of physical pain on a weaker or actively subjugated living being, is a difficult thing to write or talk about. It was not among the seven sins considered deadly by St Thomas Aquinas and the Christian tradition. Nor does it feature in either the Qura'n or the Old Testament as an evil that has to be shunned independently of all other criteria. Philosophers have tended to avoid the subject. To the best of my knowledge, there is no Platonic dialogue on cruelty. Is this because cruelty is so commonplace, or because it is so obviously wrong, morally speaking, as to be hardly worth talking about? Unlike virtue, one should immediately add, which is not so commonplace, and which has claimed a lot of attention over the centuries.

Yet cruelty's persistence across cultures and through the ages challenges a deeply felt human need to believe in the essential goodness of human beings and promises of eventual salvation. Cruelty puts us face to face with the dark and subterranean corners of our own natures. Maybe this is why artists and dramatists--by contrast with the philosophers and the theologians--have not neglected it.

Paradoxically, it also has to be admitted that precisely because cruelty forces us to look into ourselves--as opposed to, say, pointing the finger at others--there may very well be a certain wisdom in avoiding becoming too obsessed with it. By steeping ourselves in the terrible things that people do to one another, it is all too easy to end up withdrawing from the world, even hating it. As Judith Shklar, put it in her book *Ordinary Vices* : "We become misanthropic if we contemplate dishonesty, infidelity, and cruelty ... for too long.... Who, after all, can bear the nag and the scold? More seriously, it is undeniable that misanthropy has the most destructive political possibilities. To hate men as they are is enough to do

anything for the sake of a new and improved humanity; to clean up the human race until only the strong and handsome are left--these are projects about which we know all that we need to know by now."<sup>1</sup>

In a wonderful little essay, the title for which I have borrowed for tonight's lecture, Shklar argues the case for "putting cruelty first" as a way of warding off that kind of misanthropy, of controlling it so that it does not turn into rage. Putting cruelty first turns on its head the traditional system for ordering the vices which is present in roughly the same form in all the great religions of the world. In any ranking of the vices, "to put cruelty first," she concludes "is to disregard the idea of sin as it is understood by revealed religion. ... When [cruelty] is marked as the supreme evil it is judged so in and of itself, and not because it signifies a denial of God or any other higher norm. It is a judgement made from within the world in which cruelty occurs as part of our normal private life and our daily public practices.... To hate cruelty with utmost intensity is perfectly compatible with ... religiosity, but to place it *first* does place one ... outside the sphere of revealed religion. For it is a purely human verdict upon human conduct."<sup>2</sup>

I had my work criticized once by a very good Iraqi friend. He wanted to know why it dwelt all the time on darkness. "Is it because you think there is no way out?" Was I not encouraging apathy, political paralysis, destructive cynicism, and, worst of all, helping to extinguish hope in the possibility of a different kind of future for the people of Iraq. The friend who made these points knows what things are like inside Iraq. He is not a person to want to hide the cruel facts on the ground. He is not like all those Arab intellectuals in the West and false friends of the Arabs who think that friendship translates into hiding all ones dirty laundry from the 'other', in particular, from Western, eyes. Still he had sensed a morbid strain in my books, one which could be misconstrued to suggest that maybe we people of Iraq have become, in spite of ourselves, hostages to a painful and oftentimes cruel past. That is not what I actually argue in my books, I should like to emphasize. But,

is it somehow implied, regardless of what I might say or write, in any kind of extended preoccupation with cruelty?

I don't think so, and I want to make the effort tonight to try and demonstrate that, not by theorizing, but by taking you on a journey with me through various efforts of the human imagination, efforts that I have found to be not only not morbid, but soul-transforming, uplifting even, and they were all of this precisely because they put cruelty first.

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I shall begin with a musical performance in Sarajevo of Albinoni's Adagio in G minor. On June 7, 1992, as artillery shells were raining down on the crumbling city of Sarajevo, a disheveled, stubble-bearded man in formal evening attire was seen unfolding a plastic chair in the middle of Vase Miskina Street. He lifted his cello from its case and began to play Albinoni's Adagio in G minor, a slow, haunting, melancholic piece of music, which you may be familiar with. The musician was Vedran Smailovich, a Bosnian Muslim. On the same day of every week, at exactly the same time, 4 P.M., for months on end, irrespective of the conditions, Mr. Smailovich would go to the same spot on a pedestrian mall of his wasteland of a city in order to play Albinoni's Adagio. That day, a journalist happened to be there. "There were only two people to hear him," he wrote, "and both fled, dodging from doorway to doorway [to escape the shells falling all around], before the performance ended."<sup>3</sup>

The spot Mr Smailovich chose, was outside a bakery where several high-explosive rounds had struck a bread line 12 days before, killing 22 people and wounding more than 100. The city all around "is a skeleton of the thriving, accomplished city it was," wrote the reporter, "It is a wasteland of blasted mosques, churches and museums; of fire-gutted office towers, hotels and sports stadiums, and of hospitals, music schools and libraries punctured by rockets, mortars and artillery shells."

Sitting in that wasteland, with artillery shells flying all around him, playing Albinoni's Adagio, was Mr. Smailovich's way of honoring Sarajevo's dead. Smailovic used to play the cello for the Sarajevo Opera. "My mother is a Muslim and my father is a Muslim," he told the reporter, "but I .... am a Sarajevan ... I am nothing special, I am a musician, I am part of the town. Like everyone else, I do what I can."

A hint of the lost world which Smailovich was trying to recapture, is crystallized in an image which a journalist stumbled upon when he visited Sarajevo in the summer of 1992. "Entering the handsome old Austro-Hungarian edifice that houses the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that absorbed several [artillery] hits that day," he wrote, "I saw in the vestibule a striking poster. Executed in yellow and black, it was a combined logo capturing the Star of David, the Islamic star and crescent, the Roman Catholic cross and the more elaborate cruciform of the Orthodox Church." The superscription on the poster read 'We Are One People.' "Here, " the writer concludes "was the defiant remnant of the 'Yugoslav idea.' "4

The Italian novelist, Italo Calvino, described his writing as a "search for lightness" in "reaction to the weight of living."<sup>5</sup> This is what Smailovich did. However lonely and ultimately futile his gesture may have been, like a work of art that is meant to be seen or read by others it was made for a public. Mr. Smailovich is anything but a politician. Those who put cruelty first hardly ever are. Nonetheless to redefine and to reclaim one's public space as he did is a political statement. However hopeless and wildly irrational Smailovich's statement might look from a safer vantage point than the one he chose--on a pavement with shells flying all around him--and however wary we all should be of overly romanticised images of Sarajevan history, both Smailovich's response to the new realities and his desire to reconnect with what life used to be like, are life-affirming, reactions to cruelty.

Smailovich's gesture is about many things. But the act of re-imagining Sarajevo is what I want to draw your attention to because it provides us with a new point of view upon a city being torn apart by war, one in which the competing and non-negotiable truth claims of the warring parties could be seen with a certain degree of indifference. From within this neutral public space that Smailovich and the handful of people who attended his performances, have carved out for themselves--and the emphasis here is on the word public--the raging war no longer appears as some kind of "war over truth"--who is right and who is wrong, whose religion is 'best' and so on-- it appears instead as a kind of malignancy that has been visited upon his city.

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Cruelty of this sort has been growing in many parts of the world in recent years. I will not even attempt to draw up a list of the countries affected. My area of interest is the Middle East. Algeria and the Sudan are in the news these days as of course is Iraq where a whole civilization and way of life going back to Sumerian times, that of the Marsh Arabs, has been wiped out in the last two years. And where barbarous forms of punishment involving branding the foreheads of common thieves and army deserters, were being carried out a few weeks before Saddam's latest showdown with President Clinton.

Such cruelty, motivated as it is by a myriad of different reasons, is being resisted and reacted to. More often than not it is resisted in ways that eventually lead to a ratcheting up of the levels of violence. I am not interested in those forms of resistance in this lecture, but rather in reactions and responses to cruelty that are in the spirit of what the Bosnian Muslim, Smailovich, did in Sarajevo. These are not as often in the news.

A case that we do know about, however, involves a recent architectural exhibition in which a number of young Lebanese architects presented schemes for the reconstruction of war-torn and divided Beirut.<sup>6</sup> Like Smailovich, albeit in far more favorable circumstances and



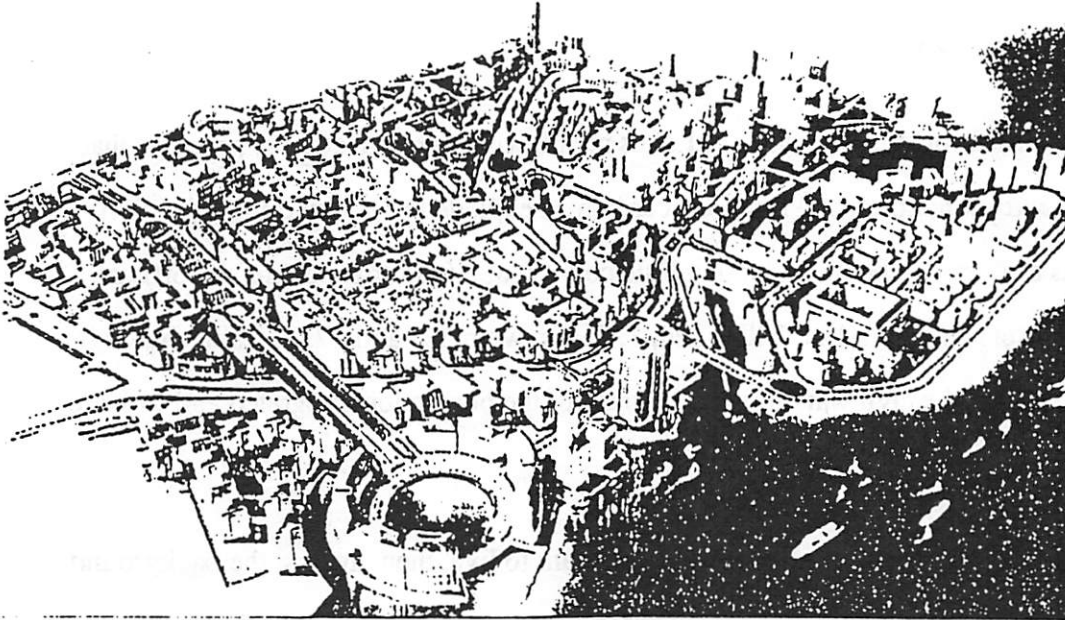
with a more suitable professional background, they were engaged in an exercise of re-imagining their city, re-imagining a post-civil war Beirut. But they go beyond Smailovich in one sense, in that they chose to do this by making of their city's cruelty a point of departure for reconstruction.

War is like a bulldozer: fifteen years of it had released a great deal of prime urban space in the center of Beirut. To these young architects, it seemed that the fate of all that space was at the heart of the most important questions the Lebanese need to be asking themselves today about their future.

The proposals of these young architects need to be understood in context, however. The most important thing about that context is that they all stand in sharp contrast with another scheme, one which is underway even as I speak. In 1991, a plan had been put forward in great secrecy for the reconstruction of one square kilometre in the Beirut Central District. The plan was the brainchild of the Lebanese billionaire and current Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri. The project is completely unique in its scale and in the annals of Middle Eastern urban planning. I want to focus on the image of the city which it is trying to construct and contrast that image with the counterproposals of the young Lebanese architects.

*Slide 1: Beirut Central Business District 1991 Master Plan*

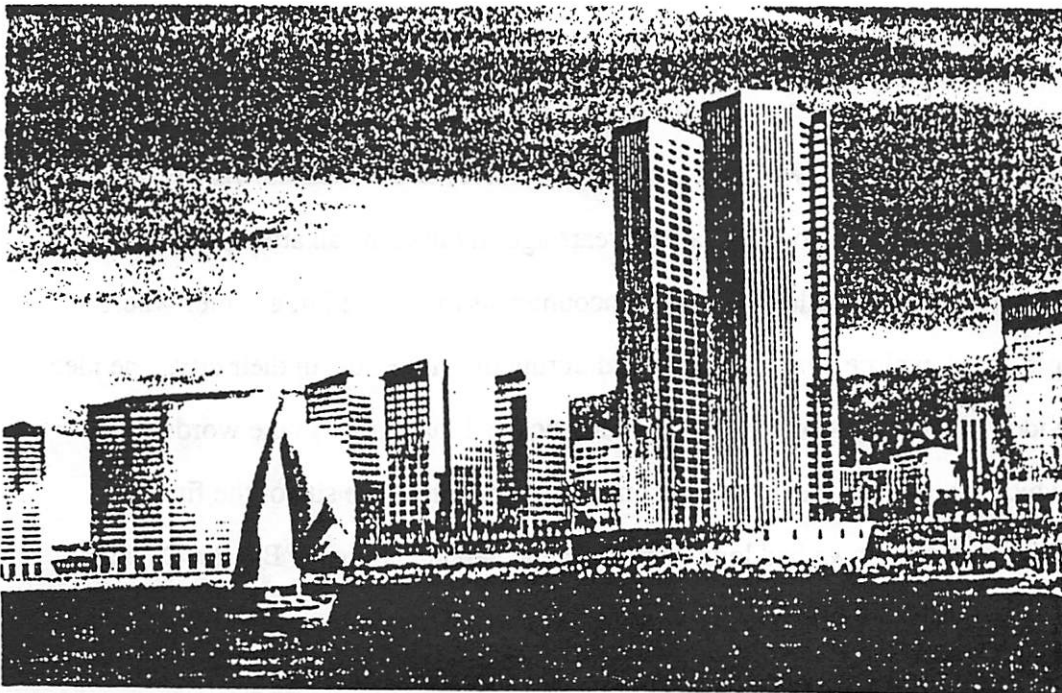
To build this plan much, if not all, of the existing architectural and historical heritage of Beirut's city center as we have known it would have to be destroyed. To say nothing of all the residents and local businesses which would have to go. Three architectural features of the Master Plan sum it up. They are: **first**, the master plan's prominent new axis, which is billed as being 10 metres wider than the Champs-Elysee, and which replaces *sahat al-burj*, an old Ottoman square which was a pulsating nerve center of the old city. **Second**, a pair of tower buildings named after, and conceived in the spirit of, the two World Trade Center towers in New York. **Third**, a new island built upon land reclaimed from the municipality



The 1991 Beirut Central District Master Plan

Above: overall view

Below: A view from 'petit Manhattan' towards the 'World Trade Centre' twin towers



of Beirut's garbage dumping ground. The island, in the early versions of the scheme, was named "petit Manhattan."

*Slide 2: Perspective View of Towers*

What does this vision of Beirut tell us? Let us recall, while looking at these pictures, that three thousand six hundred and forty one car bombs exploded in Beirut during the civil war. Let us also remember that in a tiny little country of 3.0 million people, the official casualty toll for the war is 144, 240 killed, 197, 506 wounded and 17, 415 still missing. Moreover, during the civil war, around one-third of the population emigrated and came to live here in the West.

If we think of space as a metaphor for how we want to live, then, against the background of all that violence what does the imagery before you mean? To my mind it looks like it springs from what I only know how to describe as a state of collective amnesia, a kind of "psychic numbness," which, it has to be admitted, probably corresponds to how a large number of Lebanese truly feel.<sup>7</sup> Most people just want to forget or block out all the pain and suffering and guilt; they want to remember Beirut, that jewel of the Mediterranean, 'as it used to be.'

This desire to forget is by no means unique to the Lebanese. Something similar happened to Germans after World War Two. I am reminded of a story about Dachau which was published in *The New Yorker* one and a half years ago. It concerns an attempt by a handful of city residents to build a 'house of encounter' as they called it, a center where young people could explore what had happened during the Holocaust in their city. The idea was to provide "a framework of conscience, tolerance and dialogue," in the words of the initiators, which would help the town overcome its reputation as the site of the first Nazi concentration camp. The town had long been concerned about its image. But the Dachau town council would have nothing to do with this idea. They fought the project tooth and

nail for twelve years with arguments like Dachau was not in a position to take upon its shoulders a responsibility that belonged to the entire German nation. One council member warned that "the mark of Cain" would be impressed upon the brows of every resident of Dachau for all time. "We will defend ourselves [against this] with all our might, to the very last drop of blood," he said in a rather unfortunate turn of phrase given that Goebbels, Hitler's minister of Propaganda, had used the same formulation.<sup>8</sup> The town council then embarked on a monomaniacal effort to promote "the other Dachau." Colourful posters promoting "the scenic old town," and "the interesting old palace," and the cheapest beer in Germany, were actually displayed inside the museum of the concentration camp.

Fantasy--such as we see in Hariri's plan for Beirut--is fuelled by nostalgia. The combination aims to console, to simplify, to reduce. In the background, always, is the desire to forget, to pretend it all never happened. There are psychological gains to be sure from indulging in such a deliberate excision of the force of memory. Hope after all, and the will to action, spring in part at least from the capacity of the human mind to forget, to be oblivious and willfully censorious of the past. These should not be underestimated or played down. One must get on with life, and sometimes it is necessary to forget in order to be able to do this. But there can also be in this very desire or need to forget, an unwillingness or inability to grapple with real problems that might lie in store in the future. This kind of escapism is at the heart of the Hariri plan, just as it was the driving force behind the strong reaction of the members of Dachau's town council to the idea of a "House of Encounter" as a way of dealing with the legacy of the Nazi period.

Let us consider instead the results of a different kind of Lebanese imagination as applied to the problem of rebuilding Beirut.

*Slide 3: The Lines of Fire Project'--Plan View*

Rima Namek and Carole Chediak approached the reconstruction of Beirut very differently from the 1991 Hariri Master Plan. Working on the scale of the whole city, they set about defining what should become its principal axes of development, not by thinking of the Champs-Elysees, but by using the lines of fire most favored by snipers and gunners during the civil war to, in their words, "graft" or "stitch" together the divided city of Beirut.

[*Show on slide*]

*Slide 4: 'The Lines of Fire Project'--Graft View*

Each "graft" marks a zone proposed for detailed study, as we see in the next slide. The "trajectory of the bullet line" the architects assert, has given rise to a variety of models of destruction. These are worthy of elaborate study and description. Describing the physicality of the war landscape--through photographs, drawings and in model form--brings with it the realization that they create new patterns and relationships from which urban planners can learn and which have relevance for the future. A powerful new *real* axis of development is in this way generated. That axis was the outcome of underlying forces which were obviously at work in the city. But its description and elaboration will in turn redefine those relationships. That is the contention of the scheme. The lines "of fire" created by the fighting, have density as well as direction which establish how people's experience of their own city was transformed during the fighting. The habits of a lifetime changed, and with those changes the patterns of circulation of the city changed. The city changed. The people changed. We cannot afford to ignore those changes, Namek and Chediak are telling us in this scheme. They are real, more real than the Champs-Elysees, the World Trade Center towers, and petit Manhattan.

Namek and Chediak have not produced a blueprint like the 1991 Master Plan; they have suggested another method by which to proceed. The novelty of that method, in my opinion, lies in its recognition that human folly is, or maybe ought to become, a central fact in renewal.

*Slide 5: Holiday Inn Hotel Scheme-Isometric*

Another entrant in the exhibition, Joumana Ghandour, chose to both "represent" and "transcend" her city's reality, as she put it in the writeup for her submission. She has designed something concrete in the very traditional language of architecture, a real physical intervention into the fabric of her city. Her elaborate drawings work out all the little details and problems involved in transforming the gutted shambles of Beirut's once famous Holiday Inn Hotel, the symbol of Beirut's fabled cosmopolitanism, into a vertical cemetery for victims of the war. The building which sits in a strategic position in the heart of Beirut overlooking the city, was at the centre of what became known as "the war of the hotels," when Muslim and Christian gunmen fought it out between and inside the hotels, room to room, exchanging artillery barrages rooftop to rooftop.<sup>9</sup> The Holiday Inn, which still stands in the center of what used to be known as Beirut's "gold coast", had to acquire the status of a monument, Ghandour felt, because it has become at one and the same time "the reason for civic pride and [civic] shame."

The building is accessible by means of a precarious metal bridge. Below is a crematorium and parking for visitors. The bodies are going to be incinerated and put in little glass urns on shelves in what used to be the hotel rooms. To get to those urns, visitors have the choice of three enormous vertical circulation cores which occur where the old lift banks of the hotel used to be (six lifts per core). A huge hydraulically operated wooden platform takes visitors up and down the different 'landings' of the building (these used to be floors).

*Slide 5: Holiday Inn Hotel Scheme-Plan*

The walls and partitions on each floor were gutted during the war and Ghandour's proposal entails finishing off the job. Even the floors she wants stripped out to be replaced with a series of metal cat walks. "The cognitive ground ... is now destroyed," she writes in the notes accompanying the scheme. "'Terra Firma' is lost." All that is left of the old concrete

floors is a central narrow corridor which links the three hollow towers. The catwalks would be accessible from this central corridor (not shown on drawing). They rest on a cantilevered structure. You always have to walk carefully in this building.

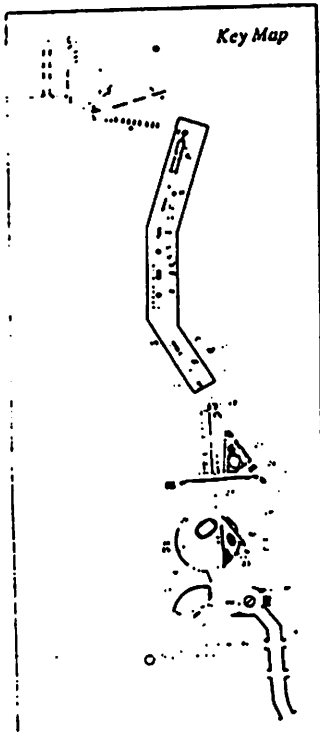
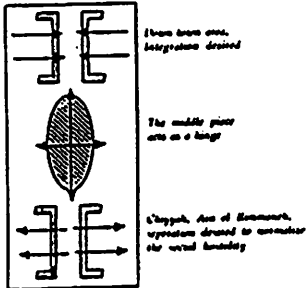
Imagine the elevated building as having been turned into a completely hollow open structure. It is made up of three towers--the vertical circulation cores--and two concrete facades. These are all that is left of the original 'International Style' designed hotel. The experience is that of walking inside a polished skeleton. The two outer walls have been reduced to their bare concrete structure. They carry shelves set within their openings spanning across what used to be the hotel rooms' box balconies. Poured glass urns containing the ashes of the victims rest on them. Each shelf is backed by a translucent sheet of glass set right below the old "ceiling" of the room. The glass is sandblasted on the inside and highly polished on the outside. In this way, viewed from outside, the monument reflects back the city that contains it. But the city is always everywhere in the transparency and hollowness of the structure. The glass is cut at a height of 3 feet above the ground of the concrete frame, allowing an uninterrupted view down toward the city. One is therefore looking at each individual urn against the spectacular backdrop of the whole city of Beirut. The artist writes "The necropolis and the city are one and the same. Memory is provoked into taking possession of a whole from a fragment."

*Slide 7: The Development of a "Neutral" Fragment of the City: The 'Green Line' in Beirut*

Oussama Kabbani's scheme is less a statement and more of a real architectural solution than either of the two I have mentioned. It takes the demarcation line, otherwise known as the "Green Line," of Beirut as the backbone of the whole city's renewal. This is the series of destroyed buildings which effectively formed a no-man's zone during the civil war dividing it into an eastern and a western sector. The name is derived from the weeds and grass that grew unchecked out of the cracks of the unused asphalt of the central dividing highway. Kabbani's idea is that of all the spaces of the city, this zone has, through

# LEGEND

- 1 Floating Performance Stage
- 2 Docks for Tour Boats
- 3 Fishing Pier, Waterfront Esplanade
- 4 Informal Sector Kiosks, Waterfront Park
- 5 Aquarium-Amusement Center
- 6 Waterfront Hotel Pier
- 7 Waterfront Condominium Pier, Landscape Maze
- 8 Office Buildings
- 9 Water Clock Tower (Clypeodra)
- 10 Commercial Strip (Souk)
- 11 Cultural Heritage Museum (The Old Police Building)
- 12 Restaurants Building
- 13 Colonnades
- 14 Pedestrian Bridges
- 15 Art School
- 16 Public Garden
- 17 Under Ground Parking
- 18 Beirut Opera House
- 19 Children Cultural Center
- 20 Beirut Public Library
- 21 Monument
- 22 United Nation Tower
- 23 Government Center (Federal Triangle)
- 24 Parliament (Existing)
- 25 Linear Extension of Existing National Museum
- 26 Hippodrome (Existing)
- 27 Under Ground Vehicular Tunnel
- 28 "Sit-In" Movie
- 29 Sports Arena (Soccer Field)
- 30 Shooting Range
- 31 Gymnasium (New Sports City)
- 32 Tennis Courts
- 33 Hotel
- 34 Restaurant Crescent
- 35 Boulevard (viewing Platform)
- 36 Artificial Lake
- 37 Zoo
- 38 Shoppers World
- 40 National Monument
- 41 Residential Buildings to Define the Highway Edge
- 42 Regularization of Informal Developments



Proposal



violence, acquired the essential attributes of "neutrality." No one lives there any longer. Everything is destroyed and uninhabitable. So why not repossess it in such a way as to make of it the central *raison d'etre* of Beirut's renewal? This is a scheme that goes beyond mere acknowledgement of the randomness and savagery of the violence, of its constantly shifting boundaries and the endless partition of urban space. In fact Kabbani has laboriously worked out a complicated arrangement of spaces, spaces which bring people together and spaces which keep people apart, culturally neutral spaces and culturally stratifying ones and so on. The whole range of conditions in between the extremes of separation and integration, all of which were intensely experienced by Beirut's citizens during the civil war, are worked out architecturally to form what might be called a giant highway of redevelopment.

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The irony is that irrespective of how creative in engaging with space and memory these three alternatives to the Beirut 1991 Master Plan may be, none of them had a chance of being realized. On the other hand fantasies like that of Mr. Hariri do get taken seriously and are being realized today. Namek and Chediak's elaborate rejection of all traditional descriptions of a city, Ghandour's monument to shame, Kabbani's nuanced and elegant architectural 'solution' which attempts to go beyond the trauma of Beirut by accepting that trauma as its starting point, and even Smailovich's musical gesture, all these look like ultimately futile reactions to the frenzy of violence which held Beirut and Sarajevo in its thrall. Mr. Smailovich's music was drowned out by all the bombs. After a while of playing Albinoni's Adagio in the same spot at the same time every week, he disappeared. No one seems to know what happened to him.

Yet there is not a trace of illusion about any of these reactions to cruelty. They are so to speak steeped in an awareness of the very thing they reject. If they are at odds with circumstance, then maybe it is because of the intention of the artist and the work. We are asked to not only repudiate the apparently unstoppable violence swilling all around, but to look for its sources inside ourselves. This is quite a turnaround from earlier so-called progressive paradigms which 'denaturalize' violence, banishing it as though it can only be an aberration or an outside imposition upon the human spirit.<sup>10</sup> Seen from the perspective of the artists and architects of Sarajevo and Beirut, and that of the larger span of human history, grand hopes of human perfectibility themselves look aberrant. Hence the place of memory and reminders of how cruel we can be. But this does not mean violence has been 'naturalized,' in other words represented as though it were somehow inbuilt in our genes. If civil wars like those of Lebanon and former Yugoslavia have finally rid us of our innocence and naivete, they still have not turned these artists into cynics.

"In a dark time, the eye begins to see," begins a poem by Theodore Roethke.<sup>11</sup> Artists and poets, like many of the ancient myths and legends from which they derive their inspiration, have long exploited this presence of darkness in order to open human hearts on to the world. Needless pain, or cruelty, the most "extreme of all vices" to quote Montaigne, is debilitating, but it can also be emotionally transforming.<sup>12</sup> In Haiti, to denounce the abuses of government soldiers under the old regime, or to discuss politics freely, or simply to move around at night, was to experience what people call *coeur saute*, [curr saute] or a heart that skips a beat in sheer terror of what might be about to come.<sup>13</sup> Imagine those skipping heart beats sustained over a long period of time and in a changed context like Sarajevo in June 1992, or Lebanon through its civil war, both contexts which when lived through give the appearance of complete irrationality. It is hardly possible for individuals or whole peoples and cultures to sustain such suffering without becoming more and more aware of the radical contrast between what is and what ought to be. Such needless

suffering can--I don't say will, or must--bring about an interruption in our customary methods of interrogating the world around us.

The experience of cruelty, of seeing into the bottom of the abyss, can turn those who are subjected to it in on themselves, or it can help them reach outwards in the urge to extend civility into the very same world of cruel facts that act constantly only to dismantle it. In itself, of course, cruelty does not offer guarantees for anything. But the possibility exists of allowing it to open a window otherwise closed to us, a window through which to consider changing the rules by which we organize our lives.

A useful analogy to consider in this regard is the experience of death and bereavement. In the deepest way imaginable, one is compelled to face up to the finiteness of life by the death of a loved one. Like nothing else, the death of a parent or a child can bring home the immediacy of the experience of being alive. But of course it doesn't have to. An opposite outcome is just as likely. Extreme negative experiences, however, do seem to have a greater proclivity to changing the way we do things than positive--hence self-reinforcing--experiences.

As though to drive home this point the English artist, William Hogarth, did a series of engravings called *The Four Stages of Cruelty*. The engravings depict instances of physical violation and maiming, and the effects of these on the faces of people and animals in extraordinarily graphic and vivid detail. The artist's intention was to bring about an emotional revulsion against cruelty in the viewer. Hogarth hoped, in his own words to transform, "the most stony heart."

By the standards of Beirut and Sarajevo, there is naivete in such hopes. Artists do not change the world; at best their work can begin the business of acknowledging the way things are. Then at least an artist or an intellectual can be said to have been responsible towards what and who he or she is. Smailovich's music, and the architecture of the young

Lebanese architects I have considered, these are instances of a different kind of 'culture of resistance' than the one we associate with gun-toting liberation fighters or idealistic revolutionaries setting out to build a brave new utopia. The difference is summed up in the preoccupation with cruelty.

This same preoccupation, it should be noted, was the driving force of such great advocates of toleration as Voltaire and Montaigne. Voltaire's *Traite sur la tolerance* was written in the middle of the 18th century (published in 1763). Consider why it was written. Jean Calas, a Protestant in the fiercely Catholic city of Toulouse, had been sentenced to be broken on the wheel for the murder of his son. Following this ordeal he was given two hours to repent and confess to a murder which any sober assessment of the facts would clearly show he could not have committed. Calas would not confess to something he did not do, and so his broken body was officially strangled until pronounced dead. Calas's corpse was cremated and his properties forfeited by the authorities. When Voltaire found out about the case, he was incensed. So incensed in fact that this by then grand old man of French letters campaigned on the issue for three years until he won a royal annulment of the Toulouse Court's judgment.

Voltaire's treatise on toleration was written while he was campaigning feverishly against this miscarriage of justice. It begins with a full account of every lurid detail of the case and proceeds in fulminating language for something like eighty pages laying out the whole array of horrors which religious fanaticism in France gave rise to across the centuries. "From every disputed verse of scripture," Voltaire blasts away, "there issued a fury, armed with a sophism and a sword, [a fury] that goaded men to madness and cruelty."<sup>14</sup>

Far from sowing the seeds of political apathy and misanthropy, Voltaire's outrage was turned into a justification for the modern idea of toleration. He wrote an essay, Smailovich played Albinoni's Adagio, and the three young Lebanese architects I mentioned drew drawings. But these differences of time, circumstance, and medium are not as important as

the experiential-emotional impulse that gives all of these artefacts a unity. Might one dare to suggest that the secret of building a better, more tolerant world, is to be found in that unifying impulse.

"We are all products of frailty: fallible and prone to error. So let us mutually pardon each other's follies. This is the first principle of all human rights."

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Two hundred years before Voltaire, Montaigne was moved by the same horror of cruelty which he called the most "extreme of all vices."<sup>15</sup> "I cruelly hate cruelty," he wrote, "to such a point of softness that I do not see a chicken's neck wrung without distress, and I cannot bear to hear the scream of a hare in the teeth of my dogs, although the chase is a violent pleasure."<sup>16</sup> Note that they are his dogs and that the chase gives him a violent pleasure. That is quite an admission to make. But it is characteristic of the relentless honesty with which Montaigne faced up to the phenomenon of cruelty in human affairs. He combined a less fiery temperament than the crusading Voltaire, with a more introspective style of reflection. In fact he begins his Essay on cruelty with a discussion of virtue, virtue understood as the quest to be perfect, to emulate God. Cruelty is inherent in the vanity of such a quest.

Man is the "most vulnerable and frail of all creatures," Montaigne wrote. At the same time he is the most arrogant. "He feels and sees himself lodged here, amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven." But "in his imagination [man] goes planting himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing down the sky beneath his feet."<sup>17</sup>

By insisting upon human frailty, Montaigne was trying to draw attention to the intolerance raging all around him.<sup>18</sup> "I live in a time when we abound in incredible examples of

[cruelty], through the license of our civil wars; and we see in the ancient histories nothing more extreme than what we experience of this every day."<sup>19</sup> Four thousand Huguenots had been massacred in Toulouse when Montaigne was thirty years old, and an annual festival to commemorate the event instituted. It so happens that the celebrations to mark the two-hundred-year anniversary of the massacre were at hand when Jean Calas was judicially murdered, with the complicity of Toulouse's suspicious and superstitious citizenry.

In a remarkable passage that many an ideological or religious empire-builder would do well to reflect upon, he wrote:

Of what is the subtlest madness made, but the subtlest wisdom? As great enmities are born of great friendships, and mortal maladies of vigorous health, so are the greatest and wildest manias born of the rare and lively stirrings of our soul; it is only a half turn of the peg to pass from the one to the other.... Plato says that melancholy minds are the most teachable and excellent: likewise there are none with so much propensity to madness....

Do you want a man to be healthy ... and securely poised? Wrap him in darkness.... We must become like animals in order to become wise, and be blinded in order to be guided.<sup>20</sup>

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Montaigne and Voltaire wrote in reaction to the horrors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Europe was being ripped apart by wars of religion. Ever since the Reformation, religion had become a great political force ushering in the most fanatical period in European history. The description of those wars that one comes across in a novel like *Simplicius Simplicissimus* by Grimmelshausen written in 1669 remind me of many parts of the Middle East today. I couldn't help as I was reading it but imagine scenes which my Lebanese friends had experienced or told me about. Germany was devastated

during the Thirty Years War, as devastated as Lebanon during its terrible fifteen year civil war. Whole tracts of land with their villages had been laid to waste just as they have been in southern and northern Iraq in recent times.

Did all this fanaticism and destruction usher in a new European age, "teaching mankind by the rudest possible process the hard lesson of toleration," as one writer has argued?<sup>21</sup> Hardly, since national wars very quickly replaced religious ones and ideological wars soon found their way back into European affairs. The technical means of destruction grew in leaps and bounds, and the most generous thing one can say about the willingness to use those means is that they stayed the same. The wars, civil wars, revolutions and holocausts of this century have brought more suffering than anything experienced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All we can say with some assurance is that the forms of intolerance tended to change in Europe. Cruelty, methods of punishment, and religious fanaticism, for instance, became issues.<sup>22</sup> And somewhere along the line a new idea was born, or at least formulated in a fresh way. In the minds of at least some of the principal actors of the time a connection existed between that new idea, toleration, and cruelty. Michel de L'Hopital (1503-1573), who became Chancellor of France in the middle of the 17th century, eloquently summed up the new sensibility in a famous address given at Orleans: "The cause of God does not need to be defended with arms.... The knife is of no use against the spirit, if not to destroy the soul together with the body ... Mildness is more beneficial than rigour. Let us get rid of these diabolical words, the names of parties, factions, rebellions: Lutherans, Huguenots, Papists; let us leave unchanged the name of Christain."<sup>23</sup>

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Human beings have a tendency, Montaigne notes in one of his essays, to be "tormented by the opinions they have of things, not by the things themselves."<sup>24</sup> With this 16th century thought in mind, I want to conclude on the resistance to yet another 20th century site of escalating cruelty: the demolition of a mosque by militant Hindus in Ayodhya, India, on

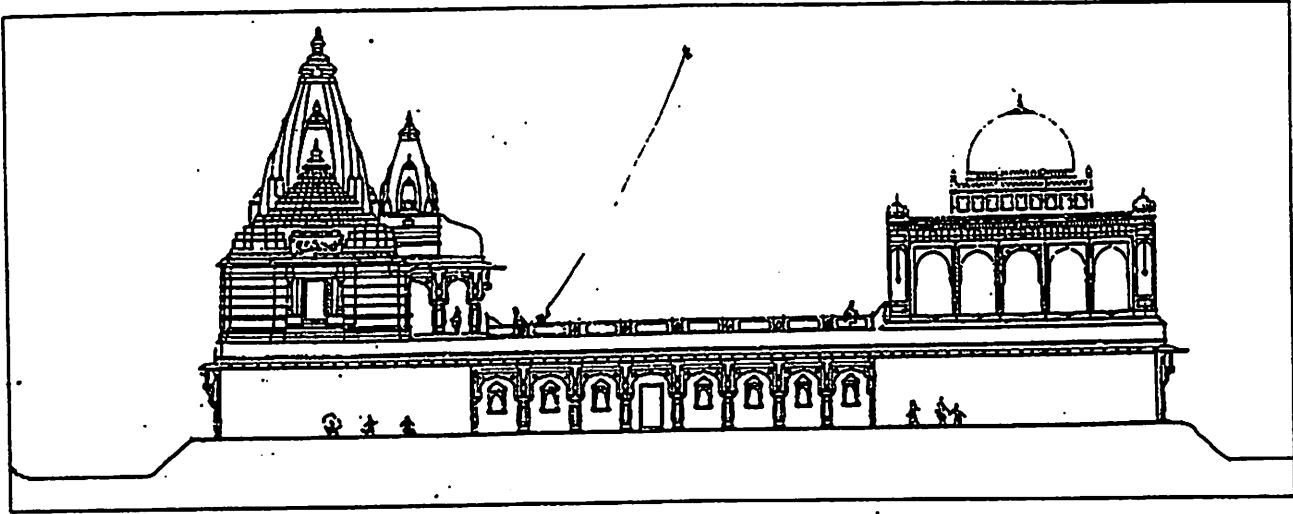
December 6, 1992. The mosque, built in 1528 by Emperor Babar who led the Mughul conquest of India, has been the focus of tensions between Muslims and Hindus since the morning of December 23, 1949, when Hindu militants claim, an image of the God Ram miraculously appeared in the shape of a dark, luminous, and very beautiful child playing inside it.<sup>25</sup> In recent years, Hindu revivalist leaders have been calling upon their followers to descend on Ayodhya to begin the construction of a temple to Ram who was born, they claim, on the very spot where Babar built his mosque. Using sledgehammers, and with thousands of onlookers egging them on, groups of young *kar sevaks*, which means voluntary builders, turned the five-century-old structure into a pile of rubble in a matter of hours. The incident led to a wave of riots through several Indian cities and the deaths of several thousand Indians, overwhelmingly Muslims. It also led to newborn Muslim children made orphans by the riots being renamed Saddam according to one report.<sup>26</sup>

The story of the disputed mosque in Ayodhya looks like a clear case of human beings tormenting themselves over "the opinions they have of things," to paraphrase Montaigne. But when the Indian weekly, *India Today*, sponsored a nationwide contest for creative solutions to the problem of how to deal with the demolished site, the results were staggering. By April 21, 1993, 1,618 proposals from artists, architects, artisans, children and rickshaw-wallas (drivers) had come pouring in.<sup>27</sup> They came in six languages: 550 were in Hindi; 542 in English; the remaining 526 submissions came in Tamil, Telugu, Malayan and Gujarati.

I would like to end on some of these projects which speak for themselves and I will be limiting myself to describing what they are in the words of the individual makers themselves wherever possible. Unfortunately the magazine did not always publish names with the schemes, so I will avoid them altogether.

*Slide 8: Anathalaya: Home for Children Orphaned by Religion*





*Anathalaya: Home for Children Orphaned by Religion*

The idea is for a temple and a mosque built on a common raised plinth which is the ceiling for an orphanage for children who lost their parents during the riots.

*Slide 9: The Site as Symbol*

The idea is to separate the debris of the destroyed mosque from the outside world by a rectangular body of water. The comment on the scheme reads: "Debris is a symbol of human disgrace. Debris originates from solid structures--similarly a stable society could crumble.... A monument on the same site would be criminal--it could be pulled down after another 400 years. Water shall be a barrier between a civilized society all around and rugged chaos inside."

*Slide 10: The Site as Archaeology*

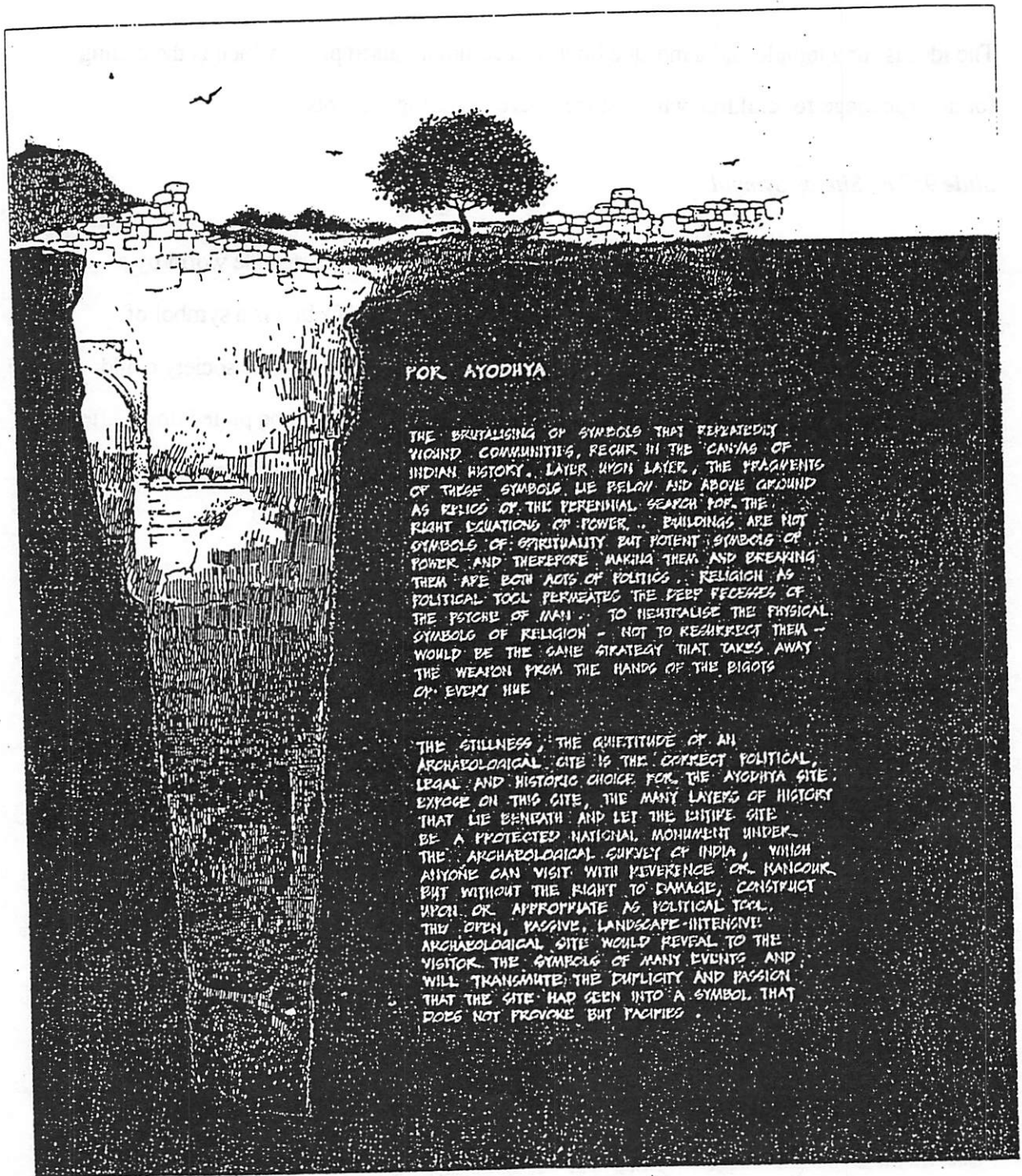
The idea here is to, in the words of the artist, "expose on this site the many layers of history that lie beneath and let the entire site be a protected national monument... which anyone can visit with reverence or rancour. But without the right to damage, construct upon or appropriate as a political tool. The open, passive, landscape-intensive archaeological site ... will transmute the duplicity and passion that the site had seen into a symbol that does not provoke but pacifies."

*Slide 11: The Site As Monument*

This individual proposes a monument. Six pillars, representing the six religions of India, all to be made from the rubble of the destroyed Babri masjid and to be erected on its site. A marble canopy would connect the six pillars at about 8.5 feet off the ground.

*Slide 12: The Spiral Ascent of Consciousness*

Several schemes dwelt on the idea of a journey to be represented as some kind of spiralling structure, which represents an ascent towards higher degrees of enlightenment. I chose this

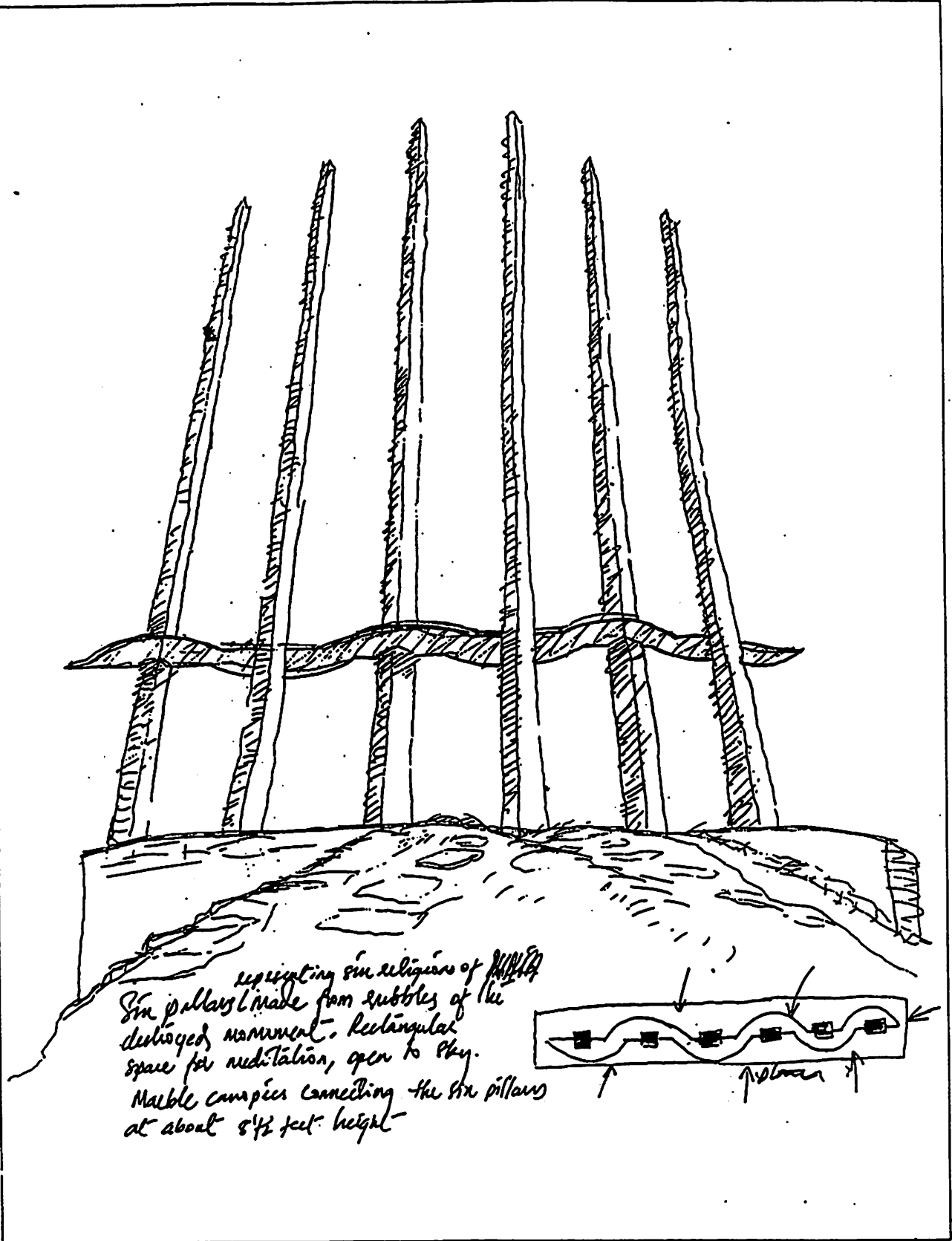


### FOR AYODHYA

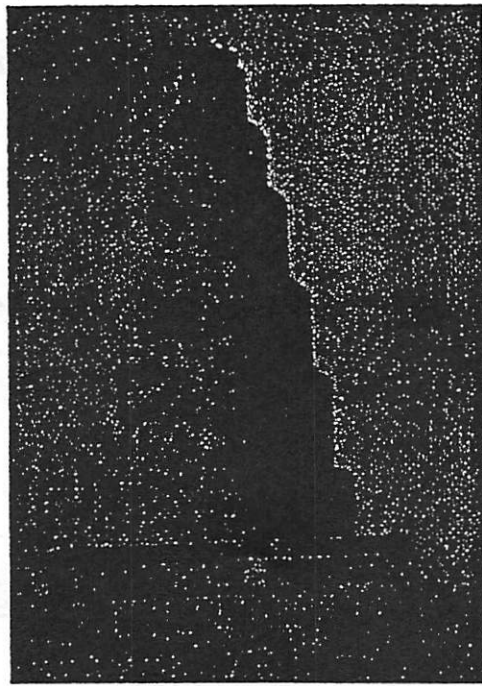
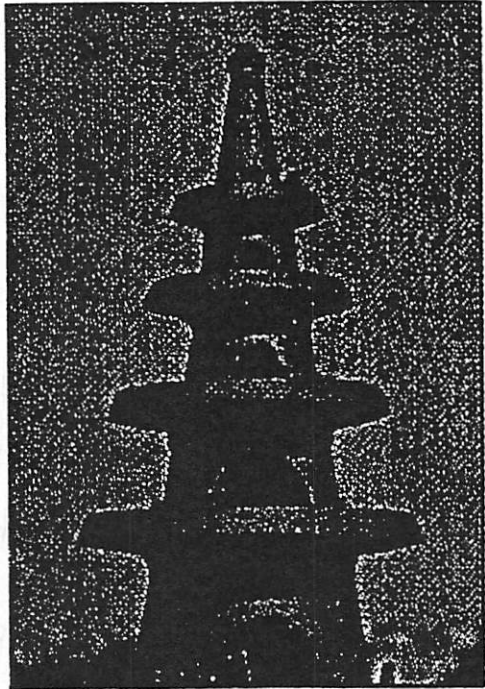
THE BRUTALISING OF SYMBOLS THAT REPEATEDLY WOUND COMMUNITIES, RECUR IN THE CANVAS OF INDIAN HISTORY. LAYER UPON LAYER, THE FRAGMENTS OF THESE SYMBOLS LIE BELOW AND ABOVE GROUND AS REMICS OF THE PERENNIAL SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT EQUATIONS OF POWER. BUILDINGS ARE NOT SYMBOLS OF SPIRITUALITY BUT POTENT SYMBOLS OF POWER AND THEREFORE MAKING THEM AND BREAKING THEM ARE BOTH ACTS OF POLITICS. RELIGION AS POLITICAL TOOL PERMEATES THE DEEP RECESSES OF THE PSYCHE OF MAN. TO NEUTRALISE THE PHYSICAL SYMBOLS OF RELIGION - NOT TO RESURRECT THEM - WOULD BE THE SAME STRATEGY THAT TAKES AWAY THE WEAPON FROM THE HANDS OF THE BIGOTS OF EVERY HUE

THE STILLNESS, THE QUIETITUDE OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE IS THE CORRECT POLITICAL, LEGAL AND HISTORIC CHOICE FOR THE AYODHYA SITE. EXPOSE ON THIS SITE, THE MANY LAYERS OF HISTORY THAT LIE BENEATH AND LET THE ENTIRE SITE BE A PROTECTED NATIONAL MONUMENT UNDER THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA, WHICH ANYONE CAN VISIT WITH REVERENCE OR RANCOUR BUT WITHOUT THE RIGHT TO DAMAGE, CONSTRUCT UPON OR APPROPRIATE AS POLITICAL TOOL. THE OPEN, PASSIVE, LANDSCAPE-INTENSIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE WOULD REVEAL TO THE VISITOR THE SYMBOLS OF MANY EVENTS AND WILL TRANSMUTE THE DUPLICITY AND PASSION THAT THE SITE HAD SEEN INTO A SYMBOL THAT DOES NOT PROVOKE BUT PACIFIES.

The Site as Archaeology



The Site As Monument



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*The Spiral Ascent of Consciousness*

particular variation because I liked the fact that the potters who conceived it, from Delhi and Udaipur, were consciously inspired by the 9th century great minaret of Samarra, in Iraq.

*Slide 13: Milan Tila: A Shrine to Inter-Religious Communion*

This submission is by a miniature painter who still works in a traditional Rajasthani style of painting that dates back to the Moghul period. The painter is from Bhilwara, in Rajasthan. He has translated the concept of Milan Tila, or meeting place, into Hindu-Muslim symbols. In the foreground of the picture we see all the fathers of Indian secularism, headed by Ghandi and seated next to him a Muslim colleague (probably Maulana Azad?). In the background is the tree of life with a new mosque and mandir on the site of the demolished Babri masjid.

*Slide 14: Temple in Lego*

A ten year old girl from Calcutta sent in this photograph of a lego made structure with the comment that "Nobody will be allowed to use this space as a platform."

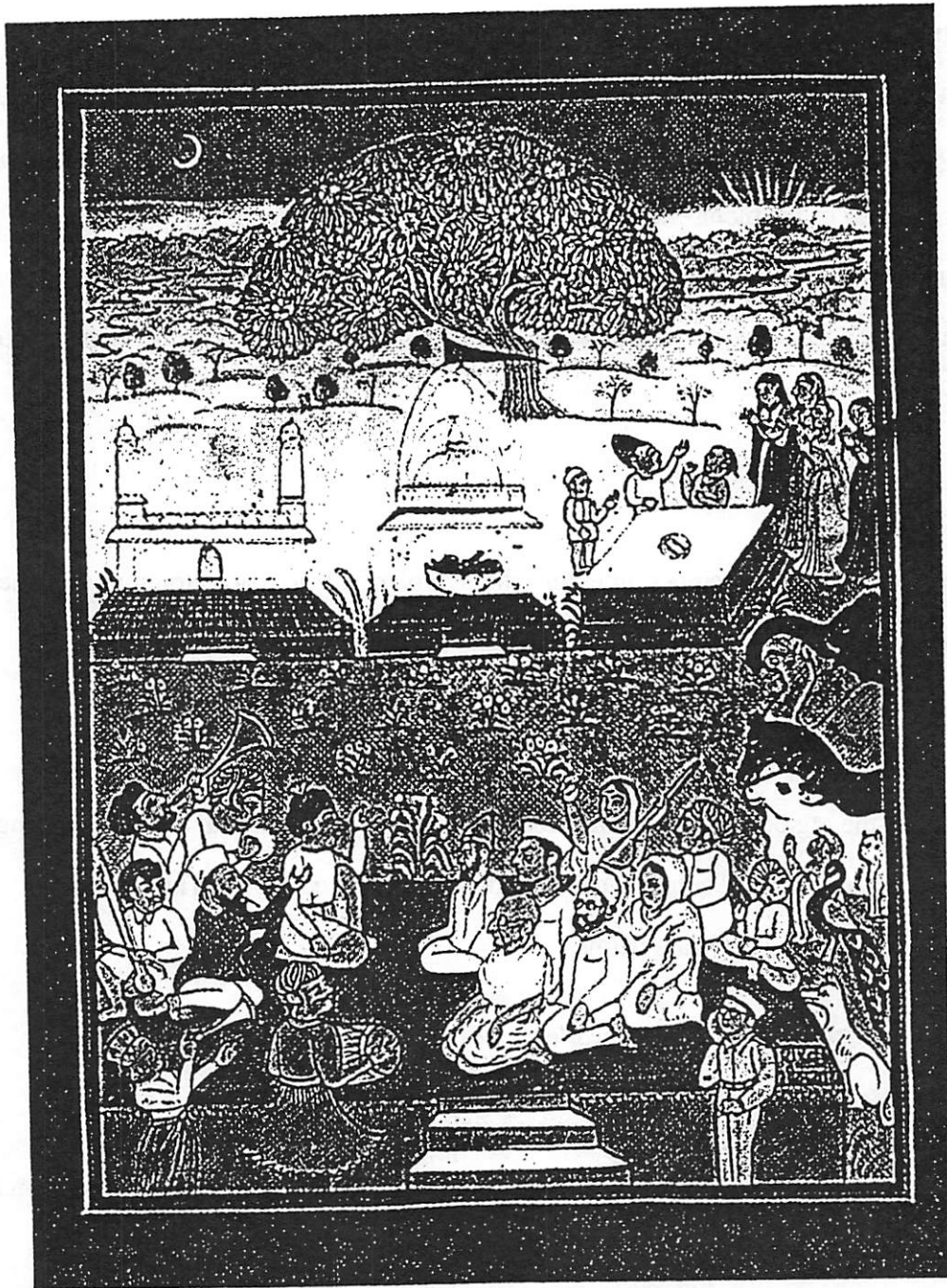
*Slide 15: Painting of Temple and Mosque*

An artist from the region of Bihar visualizes the building of a temple and a mosque facing each other on the site. The Temple is enveloped in a field of marigolds. The Mosque is surrounded by an orchard of date palms.

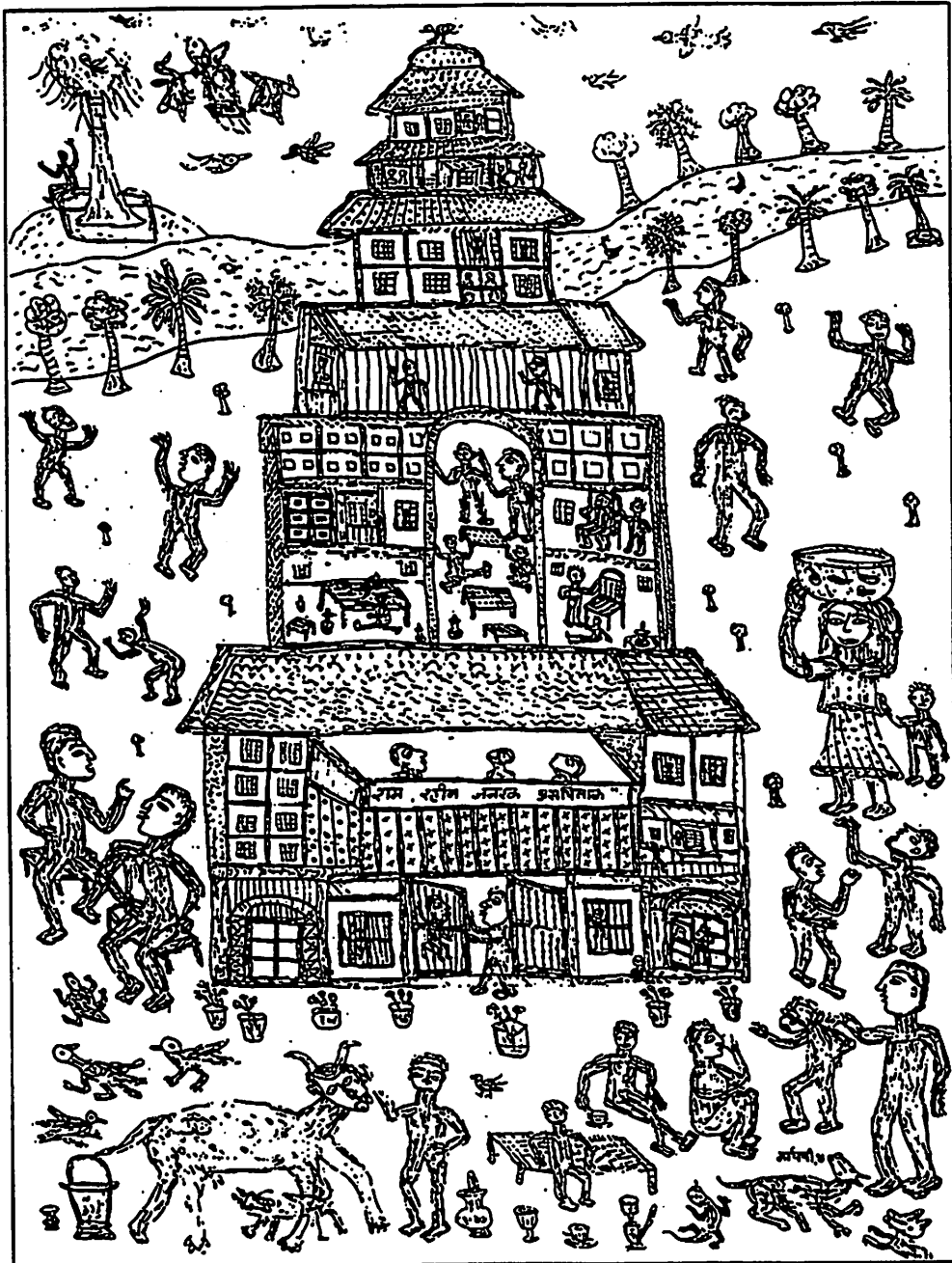
*Slide 16: Impression of a Rickshaw-wallah's Hospital*

This is my favorite idea. It was conceived by a rickshaw-wallah who understands that toleration can never be an absolute value. He wrote a note that read: "Make a hospital on the site, I say ... And if anyone tries to break it we should break their hands and legs... Of course, the hospital should treat them later!"

END



*Milan Tila: A Shrine to Inter-Religious Communion*



*Impression of a Rickshaw-wallah's Hospital*



## NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup>Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 1984), p.3.
- <sup>2</sup>ibid, p.8-9.
- <sup>3</sup>This story was first reported by John F. Burns, in an unforgettable deeply moving report from Sarajevo entitled, 'The Death of a City: Elegy for Sarajevo', published in *The New York Times*, June 8, 1992, Section A; Page 1.
- <sup>4</sup>Christopher Hitchens, 'Appointment in Sarajevo,' *The Nation*, September 14, 1992, p.236.
- <sup>5</sup>Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1988), p.26.
- <sup>6</sup>Entitled, 'Demarcating Lines: Urban Projects for Beirut by Young Architects,' the exhibition was shown at the MIT Museum between June 1 and July 19, 1991.
- <sup>7</sup>The phrase was used by Robert Jay Lifton in his preface to the book by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Inability to Mourn* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p.ix.
- <sup>8</sup>See the article in *The New Yorker*,
- <sup>9</sup>See Ihsan Hijazi and Sam Mohdad, 'Beirut: A War's Aftermath,' in *The New York Times Magazine*, 27 January, 1991.
- <sup>10</sup>See Bernd Huppauf, 'The Violence Among Us,' *The New York Times*, November 21, 1993.
- <sup>11</sup>Theodore Roethke, *Selected Poems* (London; Faber and Faber, 1969), p.65.
- <sup>12</sup>Quoted in David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990), p.187. Taken from (II, xi, 408 [313]). See also p.230.
- <sup>13</sup>Cited in the report by Howard W. French, 'Haitian Townspeople Tell of New Fear of Violence,' *The New York Times*, March 1, 1993.
- <sup>14</sup>Available in English as Voltaire, *Toleration and Other Essays*, translated by Joseph McCabe (New York; G.P.Putnam's Sons, 1912), p.83. For an invaluable summary of this essay in context, see A. J. Ayer, *Voltaire* (London; Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), chapter 6, "Ecrasez l'infame."
- <sup>15</sup>Quoted in David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990), p.187. Taken from (II, xi, 408 [313]). See also p.230.
- <sup>16</sup>All quotes in the last three paragraphs are from Montaigne's essay, 'Of Cruelty,' *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, Donald M. Frame, translator (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1965), pp.306-318.
- <sup>17</sup>From 'Apology for Raymond Sebond,' *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, Donald M. Frame, translator (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1965), p.330-331. See also David Lewis Schaefer's discussion of this passage in, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990), p.59-60
- <sup>18</sup> See the discussion on this point by David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990), p.68.
- <sup>19</sup>'Of Cruelty,' *The Complete Essays ...*, p.315.
- <sup>20</sup>*The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, p.363.
- <sup>21</sup>The ardently Protestant author C.R. Fletcher[Ref?]
- <sup>22</sup> See David Lewis Schaefer, *The Political Philosophy of Montaigne* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990), p.230.
- <sup>23</sup>Quoted in Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (McGraw Hill; New York, 1967), p.134.

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**24[Ref]**

<sup>25</sup>Details of the controversy are provided in Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Enquiry* (New Delhi; Vistaar Publications, 1991), p.15.

<sup>26</sup>See 'Orphans of Ayodhya,' *India Today* (New Delhi), April 30, 1993, p.50.

<sup>27</sup>For statistics, see *India Today* (New Delhi), May 15, 1993, issue, p.47. Some of the schemes were first presented to the public in *India Today's*, February 15, 1993, issue. In that issue, the editor, Aroon Purie, wrote: "As a magazine we are privileged to present creative solutions to the Ayodhya problem. These are selected from a special publication which *India Today* is bringing out at the same time as this issue, with contributions from eminent artists, poets, writers, architects, artisans, thinkers, and other concerned citizens. This spontaneous outpouring was channelised by a voluntary body called Sarthi, which serves as an organization that helps artists in need. Their idea was to tap the creative well-springs of this country to contribute to a solution of the immediate Ayodhya problem. Also, through that, deal with the larger issue confronting the country: what sort of nation do we want to be?" *India Today* (New Delhi), February 15, 1993, p.1. The schemes are presented on pages 32-54.