

Negative Opinions: African leadership is continuing to fail the African people

"I don't think it will go beyond giving Africa's leaders the opportunity to hold lavish and expensive conferences and shower luxurious vehicles upon themselves. The African Union will not make an iota of difference to the poor African ravaged by poverty, war and disease."
Jupiter Punungwe, Zimbabwe

"To meet and talk about African unity at this stage, to me, they are just enjoying a jolly ride to the host country of conferences, wasting the already fragile resources Africa has."
Nomsa, South Africa

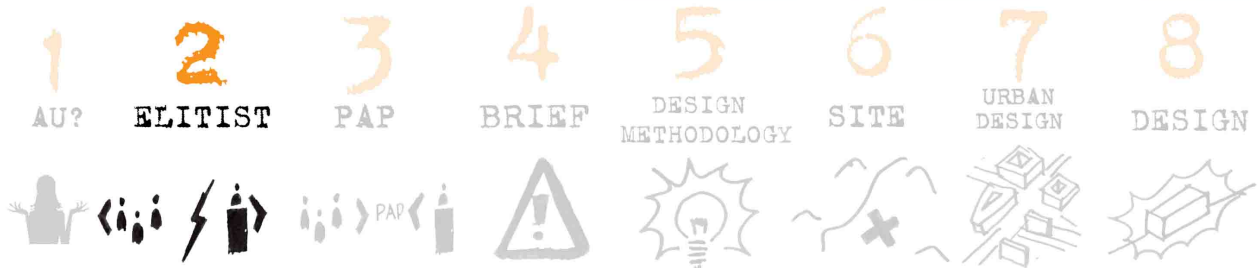
"I wish Africa would integrate as the EU has done. However, I abhor to say this, I don't think so, because the most African leaders shouldn't qualify to lead their country. Their qualification is promoting animosity and anguish to their own people."
Taha Roba, Canada

Conclusion: How do ordinary people view the AU?

In considering the two sources, we see that:

At a grassroots level, majority of ordinary citizens are unaware of the AU or do not have enough knowledge to form an opinion on the organization. The elite have a strong awareness and an above average knowledge regarding the AU. From the opinion poll we see that 85% of the comments posted had a negative opinion on the ability of the AU to make a contribution to the continent. In most opinions the AU is regarded as nothing more than a renamed OAU, and even when opinions were optimistic they were not out rightly so, stating that the AU should be afforded an opportunity to prove itself.

As such, we conclude that from the perspective of civil society the AU is predominantly viewed as a top-down institution.



The Architecture: Top down or Bottom up?

This section will explore the architecture of the OAU and AU in relation to the 3-point perspective explored previously. These perspectives are:

- The AU / OAU's opinion of itself
- The Media's critique and perspective of the AU/OAU
- The perspective of the everyday person of the AU/OAU.

These three views correlate strongly with Vale's identification of political buildings serving several symbolic purposes. (1992:07)

- It reflects the politicians and architect's opinions
- It chooses to either reinforce or counter existing social readings of architecture
- It is an embodiment of the search for clarity, order and predictability in a threatening world.

As such, we see a one to one relationship between the origin of these opinions and the category of symbolism. In the analysis we will be looking at the following buildings:

- OAU Conference Centre, Abuja Nigeria
- A comparison between the old OAU headquarters, Africa Hall to the new AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



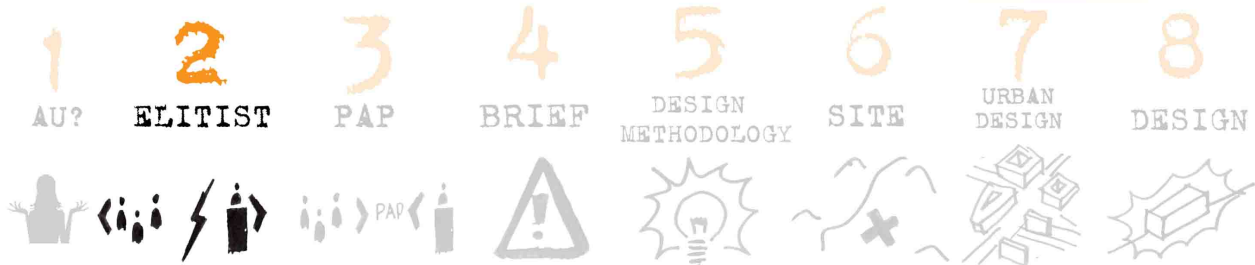
OAU Conference Centre (A+U architecture and urbanism 1994.pg 57)



Africa Hall (www.collections.lib.uwm.edu , cited 28 March 2007)



AU Headquarters (www.africa-union.org , cited 03 May 2007)



The analysis will be approached in the following manner:

- Firstly the buildings will be analyzed from a city scale highlighting the spatial strategies employed in regard to buildings of power in relation to the urban fabric.
- Secondly, an analysis of the building highlighting the form function relationship and developing an understanding of the portrayal of power as seen through the architecture.
- Thirdly from the perspectives of the following 3 view points as previously identified:
 - a) The patron of the architecture.
 - b) The visitor orientating himself within and in relation to the building.
 - c) An onlooker passing the building from the street.

The intention of this analysis is to assess whether the architecture corresponds to the elitist notion of the AU and OAU as derived from the previous discussions.

OAU Conference Centre, Abuja Nigeria by Albert Speer Architects

This building is located in Abuja the capital city of Nigeria. In 1976 the capital of this West African nation was moved from the coastal city of Lagos to the newly planned Abuja which is located in the center of the country. This “planned” city is located in the Nigeria’s Federal Capital Territory, which attempted to reduce any real or perceived regional bias in a country which was formed by amalgamation of various tribal territories and emirates, under colonial influence. (www.wikedepia.org , cited 30 June 2007)

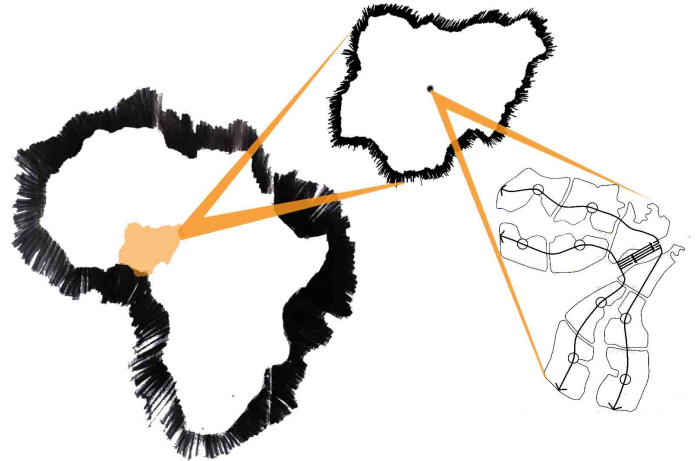
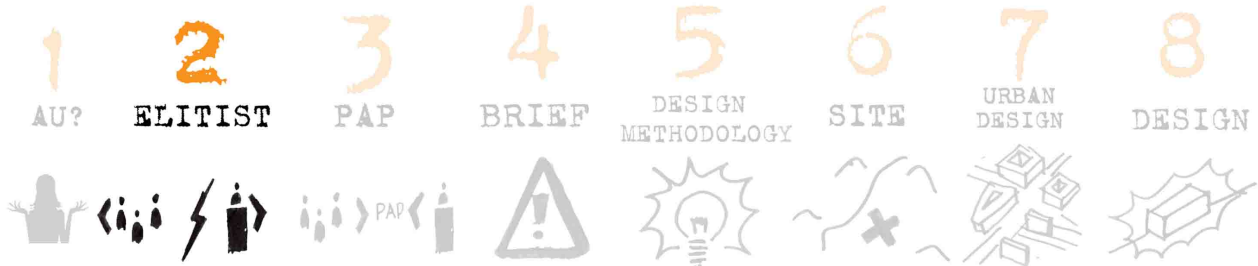


Diagram illustrating location of Abuja and Nigeria in Africa
Abuja plan (Vale 1992:147)



City scale analysis

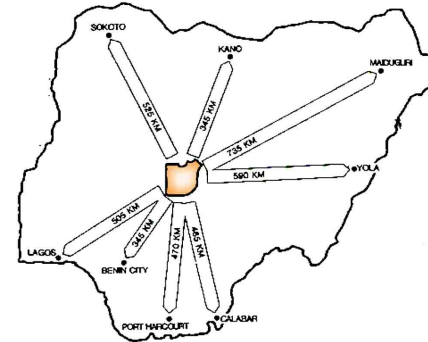
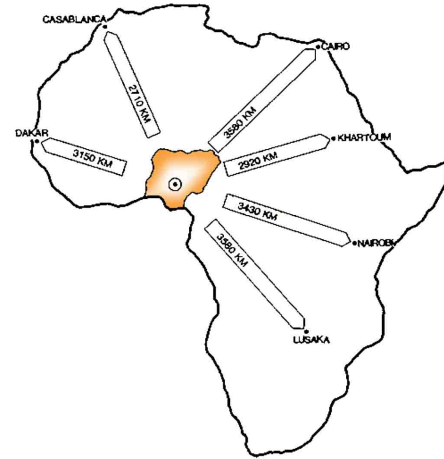
In *World Architecture*, a critical mosaic, we learn that the creation of Nigeria's new capital was as a result of the 1975 commission into the role of Lagos as capital city for the Federal government of Nigeria as well as the state of Lagos. (Kultermann ed. 2000:153)

The commission's findings cited "constant traffic jams, intolerable congestion, the chaotic sanity situation, as well as the lack of available land for expansion" as reasons why it deemed the city unfit as the seat of national government (Vale 1992:134)

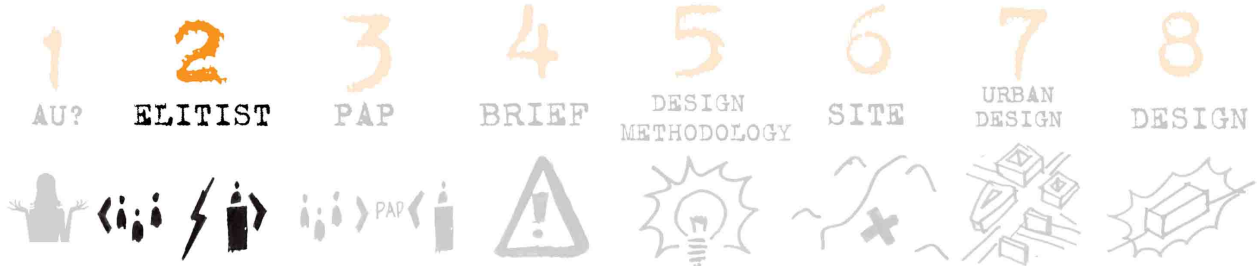
A new capital city situated in the country's interior was proposed. Vale considers this as an example of "the postcolonial desire to leave the colonial port city in favor of a centrally located plateau."

The Nigerian government invited several international design firms to develop new plans for Abuja. From these three were selected to participate in a design competition, resulting in the winning plan by Kenzo Tange & URTEC of Tokyo (Kultermann ed. 2000:153) Elleh describes the urban form as "in the form of a drawn bow with the outer ring the expressway, the inner ring the distributor string, and the total city center an arrow aimed at Aso hill." (1997:318-328)

As such we see Abuja as a newly planned modernist city to be built on virgin land, in the postcolonial tradition of capitals such as Chandigarh and Brasilia

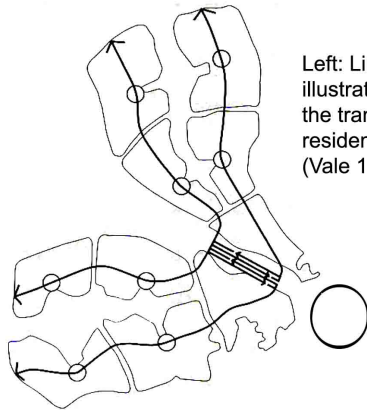


Idealized centrality of Abuja (Vale 1992:36)

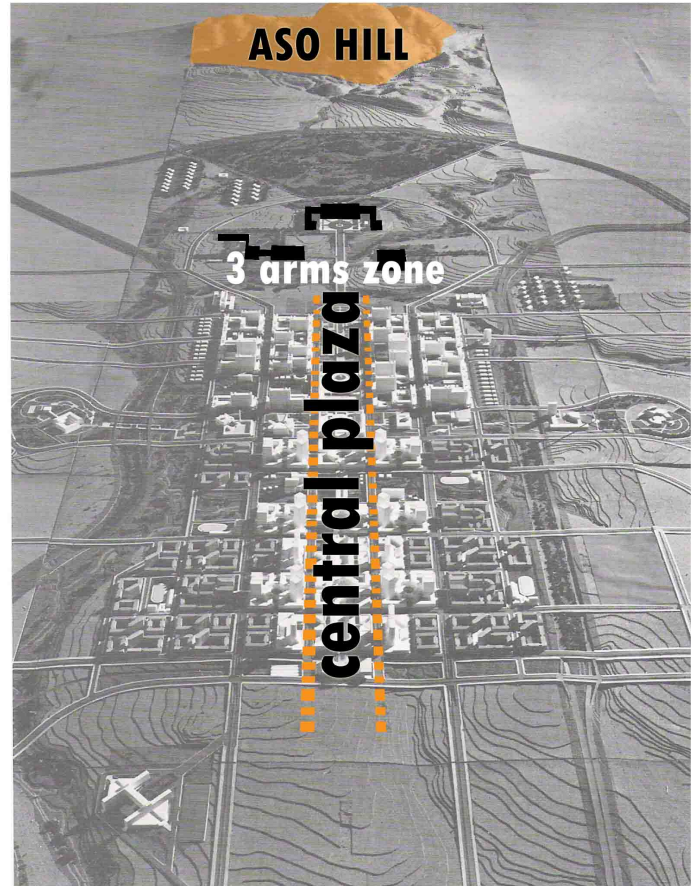


In the Tange plan, Aso hill, a prominent landmark is used as the focus of the city plan. At the foot of this natural feature lies the 'three arms zone' housing the legislature the judiciary and the executive functions of Nigeria's national government.

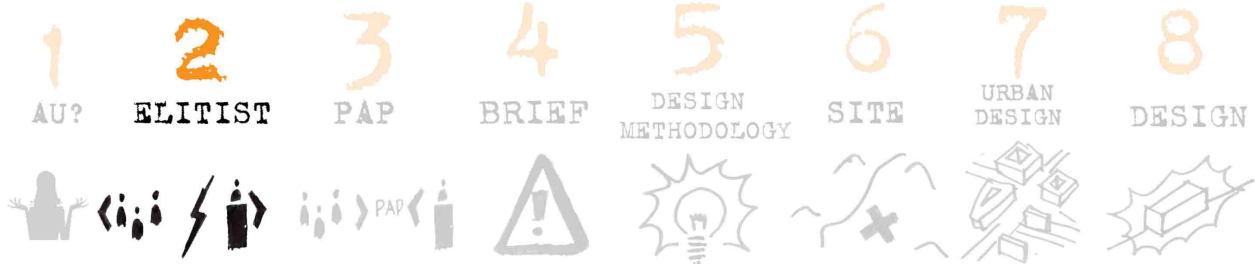
The center of the city is an elongated plaza with public functions and tall administrative buildings flanking it. The central plaza is separated from the three arms zone by the use of distance and terrain. This central plaza opens up on the one end to the three arms zone and Aso hill on the one end and to the national stadium at the other. Transit corridors at the base and head of this central plaza links to the residential crescent outside of the city center. Each residential district has a central point that connects the transit system. business and public transport amalgamate around this center. (after Vale, Elleh & Kulterman)



Left: Line diagram of city illustrating the central plaza, the transit corridors and the residential crescent (Vale 1992:147)



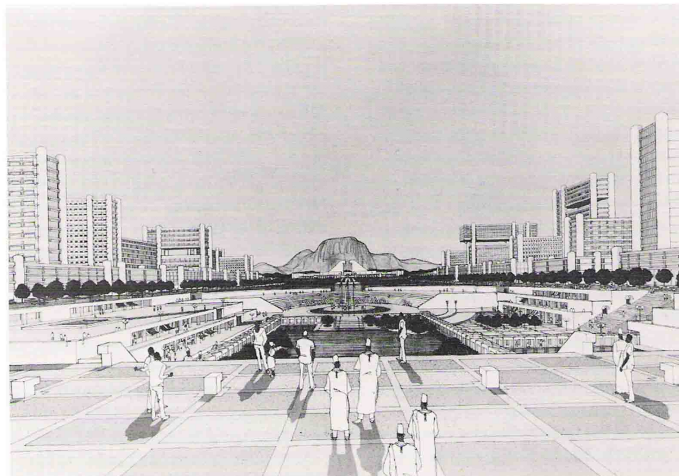
Top: Model of Abuja (Vale 1992:143)



In this we see a clear hierarchy of space. Firstly, we see administrative and government functions being given a predominant role in the city. However, the three arms zone is clearly separated from the central plaza. The three arms zone takes the privileged position at the base of Aso hill. Vale notes that this separation is a clear indication of public accessibility gradients. The 3 arms zone is not intended to be publicly accessible however the visual link to central plaza suggests an accessibility. The placement of the 3 arms zone against the backdrop of Aso Hill gives the three houses of government “strength by association.”

Vale further questions the guise of the city’s morphology as ‘a city for all’. Writing about the residential crescent and linkages to the central city plaza he notes that while the transit system, comprising of four parallel corridors may appear to give equal desirability to each of these corridors, this is in fact a misrepresentation. The two outer transportation corridors are designed to go first to the ministries, then to the commercial facilities before ending at the transport center at the base of the central plaza.

By contrast the two inner transportation belts go directly to the transport center along areas intended for industrial zoning along the crescent. As such “the master plan enhances residential splits between white collar/blue collar and civil service/non civil services.”



Top: Sketch view of Abuja’s central plaza (Vale 1992:140)



Such we see that at a city scale there is a clear hierarchy in relation to institutes of power and residential/commercial aspects of the city:

- The cities plan emphasizes the central plaza and three arms zone, which comprises of administrative and governmental buildings respectively
- The three arms zone housing the 3 arms of government is privileged by locating itself at the foot of Aso hill. This site creates an impression of power and authenticity/legitimacy by associating itself with a strong element of the natural landscape.
- The axial arrangement of the 3 arms zone to the central plaza emphasizes governmental hierarchy over the city, while simultaneously giving the impression of public accessibility to government structures. However this is merely a visual link as the 3 arms zone is not intended for public accessibility.
- The city plan also gives an impression of equality amongst its citizens however this is not entirely true, citing Vales analysis of transit corridors which reinforce class segregation along white collar/blue collar and civil service/non civil service lines.

- As such there is a clear hierarchy between power and the everyday, publicly accessible to visually accessible and segregation along class lines.

Analysis at the scale of the building



The OAU Conference Centre , Abuja
(www.unaids.org , cited 04 July 2007)

The OAU Conference Centre is located on “a prominent site in the international zone of the city overlooking the savannah hills. The assembly hall is orientated in a northern direction to highlight the overview towards the central area and golden mosque.”
(Nakamura, ed. 1994:52)

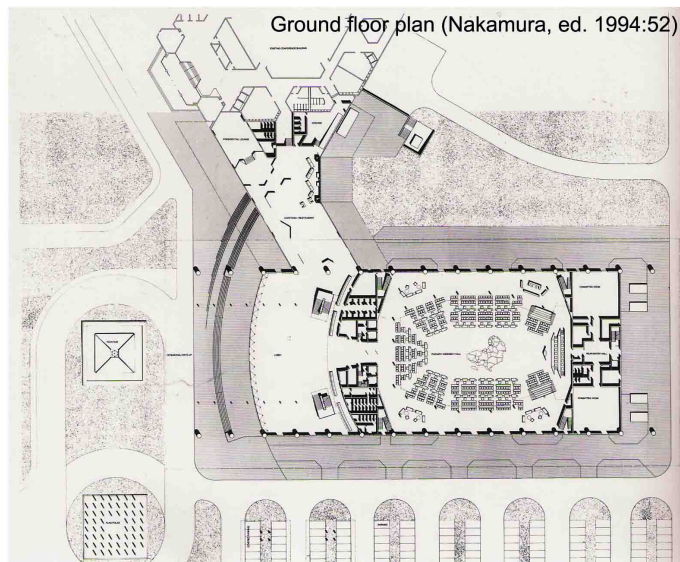


From this and our discussion of Abuja at a city scale we see that the building is located in close proximity to Abuja's central plaza. The buildings function, being a continental and international conference centre is telling of its place in the hierarchy of Abuja's master plan.

The Nigerian government decided that in hosting the 1990 OAU conference it would host it in its new capital Abuja. Due to the need of the number of delegates as well as cementing Nigeria's role in both the continent and OAU it was decided to construct a larger conference venue attached to the existing Abuja International Conference Center. The brief required the building to cater for 1800 delegates and integrate up to date audiovisual equipment as necessary for international conferences. All dining, meeting and auxiliary services were to be integrated into the existing neighboring conferencing building. (Nakamura, ed. 1994:52)

The conference Hall is orientated to take advantage of views across the savannah hills and Aso hill along its length. The front of the building overlooks Abuja's central plaza and Mosque. The building is entered either via the existing conference venue or by vehicle along the elongated processional vehicular entranceway

This roadway creates a central island which is occupied by a prominent water fountain and 53 flagpoles arranged in a square formation for each of the 53 member states of the OAU.



In analyzing the buildings floor plans we firstly note the separation between the conferencing Hall and auxiliary spaces. The building is rectangular in plan, with a assembly hall being large in volume and fronted by a generous entrance foyer and entrance porch.



The back of the assembly hall houses a private entrance for the OAU presidents and other prominent OAU figures, as well as two separate committee rooms. Public and press galleries are found on the first floor and are accessed via the front entrance foyer. This entrance foyer is joined to the existing conference facility via a wide connection passage that serves as a temporary exhibition space.

The conference Hall is symmetrical and the axis of symmetry runs thru the centre line of the building and through the entrance fountain, located in front of the building.

The main elements of the front facade are the full height convex mirrored glass wall, the vaulted roof and large red prominent concrete columns. The vaulted roof is emphasized, by the corrugated sheeting enveloping the entire truss system, giving the appearance of a heavy monolithic roof. The monolithic vaulted roof extends beyond the convex curved glass facade, supported on either ends by the red concrete columns creating a high, deep 'entrance porch'. The building is raised on a slight plinth and the curved stairs echo the convex glass facade in plan.

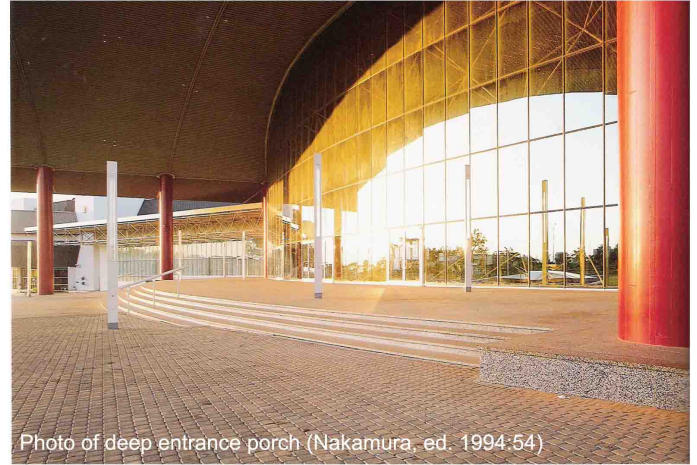


Photo of deep entrance porch (Nakamura, ed. 1994:54)

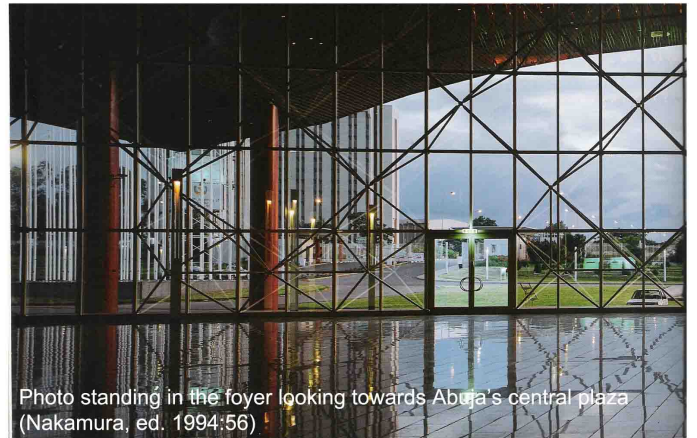
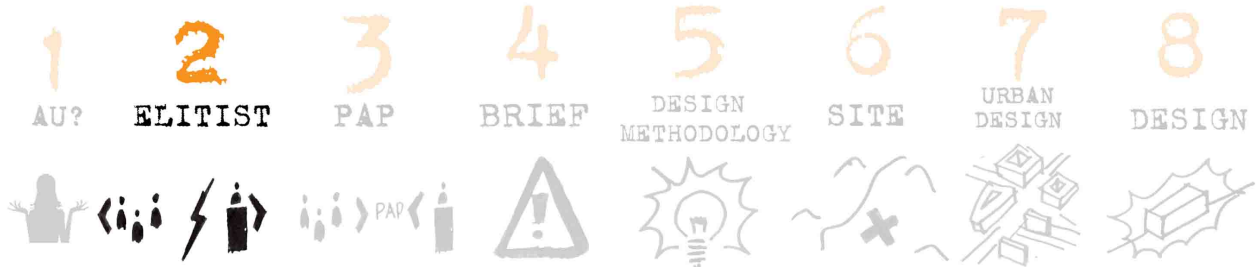


Photo standing in the foyer looking towards Abuja's central plaza (Nakamura, ed. 1994:56)



Form, function and power

The building uses a variety of architectural devices to portray power. These are summarized below:

- The building is orientated to frame of views towards the natural landscape from inside the assembly hall, which ties the work of the delegates attending conferences to the natural, gaining legitimacy through association. The building foyer is orientated towards Abuja's central plaza. This positions the building amongst important government related functions, which flank Abuja's central plaza
- The vehicular entrance is elongated becoming a processional path for arriving dignitaries. This gives the building a sense of power from both the point of view of the delegate in the luxury car that sees the building as his destination, as well as the spectator that witnesses the arrival of dignitaries.
- The building is symmetrical about its centerline and this symmetry is reflected in both plan and elevation, giving the overall building a harmonious sense of composition. This also creates a strong layering of foreground, middle ground and background.

