

"The Search for urbanity in the frame of our traditional precedents"

by Mohamad Foyez Ullah

BAKLADESH has seen phenomenal urban growth — although unchecked, unplanned, and incoherent in terms of socio-cultural, political and economical aspects. This growth which has taken place over the last two decades (since Independence) — is often mislabeled as "developing urbanization". But it is not the intention of the author to take a polemical stance to generate any particular debate or to make any definition as an attempt to direct or formulate the pattern of urban growth.

The concept of urbanity in Bangladesh is an unexplored area of research. This, I think, is mainly due to the nation's new history of independence. It is perhaps, for this reason that we find it more convenient to search our urbanity in the broader frame of the Indian subcontinent. But with time it would be more defined to explore the history of urbanism of this particular territory within the frame of its politics, culture and society as well as within its geographical reality.

Although Bangladesh is a part of the Indian subcontinent, it does not clearly represent the Hindu-Islamic traditions of urbanism which has been manifested for a substantial era of time.

Within this boundary of land, no attempts were made to create cities of high urban and architectural value, such as the walled cities of Ahmedabad, Sahjanabad, Lahore, Bhopal or Hyderabad. But whatever be the history of architecture and urbanism of a particular area it is not only a material phenomenon of contained objects, but a socio-political and cultural phenomenon as well.

This is why in our context too, urbanism should be perceived as combining various diversities with overall designation to its physical forms (can be interpreted as urban forms or morphologies). Urbanism, in our context, thus is more an implicit element of social science rather than an explicit object of physical morphology. Urbanity, to be understood in our context, must be from a point of more sociological terms than going to the architectural objectives directly.

Now, to put in a clear perspective, we must identify some basic characteristic features of our urban environment. At the same time, I must say that this attempt will add impetus to the search for a valid architectural expression of our own, as well as to evoke our intuitive senses. Distinguishable features that I categorized below are some of many 'traditional precedents' which have given a characteristic style of expression

themselves with matters concerning the community's welfare and supervision, and had a direct relation with the organism called 'mahalla' or 'para'. History says that different types of Panchayets, namely 'Baras' 'Baish' depending on their social backgrounds controlled the different community set-ups and had many generic and sociologi-

Layering of spaces here can be understood through meticulous observations of different organisational units of a community as a whole, such as ranging from individual dwellings to public realms. I think this can well be manifested through the following statements: — Within individual dwelling units, the spatial character was demonstrated through

the raised plinth veranda and the upper level veranda looking onto the street. Although the upper level veranda had some defensive implications yet it was also suggestive in enhancing mental participation with the community realm as well.

— The public realm in what we read on exemplary cases like the 'maidan' (in Indian context) or the 'square' (of European entity) or classi-



Raised plinth and upper level veranda enhance mental participation with the community.

cal implications which can also be incorporated with architectural and planning aspects on the whole. In the older part of Dhaka, there still remains some 'Sardars' on their own, having lost their great pride, social esteem and formal recognition. Inner community narrow streets, cul-de-sacs within a community neighbourhood from the main streets are the manifestations of introverted attitudes. The mahalla gateways or the presence of clear demarcations of mahalla boundaries distinguished their extroverted nature. The presence of greater community spaces within a mahalla often associated with water tanks (Dighis) designated to some particular event or object, wells (Indras) within the compound trees (Am-tala, Bat-tala, Tai-tala etc.) expressed their extroverted character.

The layering of spaces in our traditional urban context is of no exception to that of the overall Indian context.

conceptualizing different domains in response to one's social and individual values. This phenomenon actually, is a transformed situation of our village domestic layering of domains.

— The spatial domain of the individual domestic unit and the next public realm was demonstrated through



People and buildings with a unique human scale gesture.

cal civic spaces is not distinct in our urban ethos. This is perhaps owing to the presence of our dominant social fabric of the city (such as 'Baras', 'Baish') creating a genre of community realm rather than that of a realm of public. These community spaces, unlike the public squares of large scale, are usually commu-

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nity hazards or dighis or wells, or even trees with their extended canopy where people met for social interaction. The progression of urban fabric shows a process of gradual and spontaneous accretion which is comparable to the traditional village settlement which grows without any formal planning.

Methods of reading a city and urban design approaches are often varied and viewed from multiple angles of perception. Currently in the western world, attempts are being made to review those various approaches of urban design methods that exist and thus categorized under particular headings. They are, such as — urban design as the guardianship of urban standards, revitalisation, iconography, spatial matrix, as definition of the public realm and so on.

Now, whatever be the classification of urban design types there always remains room for searching the roots of urbanity of a particular context with its particular cultural and Historical values. Urban design theorist and critic Michael Wilford says that a clear physical expression of the community's hopes and intentions through the medium of urban design is essential for the communication of a consensus image of the city of the future. I think that these community hopes and aspirations are obviously to some extent rooted in their collective urban memory printed from generation to generation.

Architecture has place, time and significance which cannot 'happen' without context. The understanding of architecture comes from comprehending the greater circumstances from which they have emerged, and appropriate architecture is 'created' by comprehending one's personal and cultural place within the larger cultural network.

Therefore, with the studies of our urban transformations and reading correctly our urban history, we can well be able to formulate and direct the valid architectural interventions to our urban milieu to ensure continuity in the process of achieving what Wilford says the consensus images of the city of the future.

Ethics of Designer Children

by Moyra Ashford

MORE than ten years ago, people around the globe were alternately fascinated and repelled by the advent of test tube babies, or children who were conceived in a laboratory instead of a bedroom.

But a battery of new phrases — all relating to a highly emotional debate on the ethics of using artificial methods of procreation — have since been added to the English language, especially in the past few months.

The new phrases, some scientific, some not, include 'granny mothers', 'designer babies', 'pick-and-mix-kids', 'colour-controlled children' and the so-called 'yuk factor' — a phrase describing the revulsion many feel about the whole matter.

Behind each phrase lies a scientific advance and an ethical dilemma. If 1993 was the year that science fired a volley of new quandaries, 1994 promises to be the year that they are thrashed out in public.

The debate is already raging. Says Dr Stuart Horner, chairman of the British Medical Association's (BMA) 18-strong Ethics Committee: "A Pandora's box has been opened."

"Every day we find something that raises an ethical problem to which we don't know the answer," says Professor Daniel Cohen, director of the Centre d'Etude du Polymorphisme Humain (CEPH) in Paris. "I feel that society should decide."

First there was the case of the twins born last Christmas to a wealthy, healthy 59-year-old British businesswoman. They had been conceived in an Italian laboratory, run by controversial gynaecologist Severino Antinori, from a donor's eggs fertilised by the sperm of the businesswoman's 45-year-old husband.

medical care, refuses gender selection under the guidelines of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), an organisation set up three years ago to supervise Britain's 110 fertility centres.

Recently, the Sunday Times newspaper revealed that scientists at Edinburgh University have developed a technique whereby the eggs from an aborted female foetus can be grafted to the ovary of sterile adult females, enabling them to give birth.

The team have already performed the operation successfully on mice. They think it could be done with humans within five more years.

To get an ethical go-ahead, the team has taken the unprecedented step of throwing the debate open to the public.

So far, reaction has tended to follow the 'yuk factor'. "It is a sinister Orwellian development," said Dame Jill Knight, head of the ruling Conservative party's backbench health committee.

On a BBC radio phone-in programme that devoted some time to the issue, callers' opinions ranged from the childless couple who welcomed the idea to the adopted woman who asked what parents would tell a child who was the result of a mother who had never been born.

The question of consent was raised: what if the aborted pregnancy was the result of rape? A woman who had suffered a hysterectomy suggested a national ovary bank and 'donor cards' similar to those held by people willing to become kidney donors.

Some callers could see no reason why a fertile career woman should not store her own eggs in a laboratory and then given birth after the menopause. The same technique can be used for women about to undergo cancer therapy that could render them infertile.

The BMA ethics committee and the HFEA, are both due to present reports soon. Specifically, the BMA committee is currently debating the question of foetal ovaries.

"Women do not have the right to have a child," she said in January. "But the child has a right to a suitable home."

Star Special

Computer

WordPerfect Office 4.0

BY integrating e-mail messaging, calendaring, and personal and group scheduling, WordPerfect Office, Version 4.0 is giving e-mail and whole new meaning.

This is no patchwork quilt of features and functionality. Under both Windows and DOS, the main window paradigm is the same: All the features are right there, and there's no shelling out to other add-on packages (unless you want to).

WordPerfect Corp has also made this a truly cross-platform product, with clients for DOS, Macintosh OS/2, and Windows all shipping simultaneously, and all able to use the same post office and the same database off one server or off a series of servers (WordPerfect calls them 'domains').

A minor misstep up front: Although the DOS client shares all the functions of its GUI counterparts, it does suffer from the limitations of its environment. The interface is boxy, and though it's somewhat customizable, you can't change it to the degree that's possible under Windows.

A NEW WINDOW

The new Windows client is a different story. The main window takes up approximately one-third of the screen and includes icons for appointments, calendaring, mail, notes, phone messages, and tasks. A major portion of the screen is occupied by an open area called the "shelf". Here, you can place icons for custom views and often-launched applications. The product also makes good use of the right mouse button to customize and/or change selections.

The upper-left-hand portion of the main screen contains icons for the in-box, out-box,

and trash can. The in-and-out-boxes actually serve as repositories for all types of appointments, interactions, messages, notes, and tasks. The out-box, for instance, is a great way to track the progress of messages. Doubleclicking on an outgoing message reveals if and when it's been received and opened.

The mail engine has also been enhanced with a spell checker and thesaurus, as well as basic rules and routing capabilities. Rules can act as the secretary to a few of us have. Whether you're away from your desk or simply don't want to handle every piece of e-mail that comes your way, rules can do the work for you — reading, moving, and even acting on e-mail as it arrives in your in-box.

These same rules can forward mail, send boilerplate responses, and save messages to specified folders (WordPerfect Office lets you create any number of user-defined folders). And although rules can be designed to act upon WordPerfect Office start-up, they can't be set to launch an application upon the receipt of a message.

Added to all that is the ability to create simple routing slips that can, say, send mail from user one to user two, and then on to user three — instead of broadcasting the message to all recipients at once. When the mail recipient opens the mail, WordPerfect Office prompts the reader with a message explaining that this message has a routing slip, and when they check "completed", the mail will automatically be sent to the next person on the list.

But network administrators should note that the routing feature requires its own dedicated server (called the Message Server). Analogous to Net

Ware's MHS (Message Handling Service), this is a logged-in node that handles routed and excess message traffic. Unfortunately, configuring the Message Server is not automatic in the administrator setup.

OFFICE MEETINGS

Group scheduling ties in nicely with these features. Provided you have access to other users' schedules, you can search across free and busy times for a whole group. You can also include resources in these searches.

Few features in WordPerfect Office's arsenal will prove as useful as its confusingly named Proxy ability. In a group situation, the opportunity to look at and act on another user's views (calendar, mail, and tasks) can be invaluable. Provided you have been given read privileges and/or write privileges, you can call up any number of other users' views and dynamically access them through a small icon that appears in the lower-left-hand corner of every view screen. One click, and a drop-down list of alternative user views appears.

Administrators should appreciate a rather trouble-free installation procedure and multiple gateways to MHS, SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol), and X.400. A DOS-based remote package also ships with the DOS client.

In the end, it doesn't really matter if WordPerfect Office has actually turned the definition of e-mail on its electronic head. For Windows users, at least, it manages to offer what Microsoft Mail and Schedule: integrated e-mail, calendaring, and scheduling.

courtesy: PC Magazine

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING PRICE TAG

Prices for packages such as word processors and data-base programs have fallen tremendously. Here's the tale of Quattro Pro.



DATA COMPANY REPORTS

A major advantage of using an operating system like Windows NT is the reliability of the environment. As users bring ill-behaved DOS and Windows applications to NT, this reliability will be put to the test.

With NT, as with OS/2 and some versions of Unix, each application runs in a separate space, called a virtual machine (VM). A VM is a computer that does not physically exist but is simulated by the operating system. One benefit of running an application under a VM is reliability. If the application crashes, the crash, in theory, is confined to the VM and does not affect other applications that are running.

To ascertain NT's reliability the PC Magazine lab put it through a series of torture tests, just to see if it could be locked up, rebooted, or terminated. Their experiments could rightly be called nasty and destructive. They included working with Windows, Windows NT, and DOS applications. They tested memory-access violation routines, floating-point and integer divide-by-zero attempts, illegal and privileged instructions, improper BIOS calls, I/O port access violations, and paging infringements. They also ran several DOS and Windows applications that were purposely buggy. All tests were performed on a 486/DX2-66 with 16MB of RAM.

CRASH PROTECTION: THEORY

Most of you are probably pretty good at getting Windows to crash or lock up. The developers amongst you know that one false move into the wrong area of memory, or one integer overflow violation — and it's all over. Windows 3.1 is better than earlier Windows, but it is crash-proof? Nah.

Why does Windows crash? Because Windows 3.1 executes

Is NT Crash-Proof?

all applications in the same VM. They are not protected from each other. If one Windows application crashes, others that are running will likely follow.

If Windows applications are executing under NT and crash occurs, NT terminates the VM in which the application is running before it can affect other NT processes or the operating system kernel itself. Because the virtual memory

manager provides a private address space for each process and, more importantly, protects the processes from each other, in theory NT keeps running even when applications crash.

CRASH PROTECTION: THE REALITY

Rude Windows applications won't be protected one from another however. Since all 16-bit Windows applications are run

under NT in a single virtual machine, Windows run under NT is bullet-proof compatible. This means that, just like Windows 3.1, even if just one Windows application causes a severe problem, the entire NT Windows 3.1 subsystem will crash.

The tests were able to demonstrate Windows subsystem crashes. Still, while the Windows 3.1 subsystem crashed, the NT kernel never skipped a beat. They could not get it to lock, to reboot, or to terminate.

DOS applications fare better still. They maintain their own virtual space in the operating system. If they cause a severe problem they are simply terminated by NT. Their tests included several intentionally disruptive DOS applications that we invoked from the NT "DOS-like" prompt. They all caused General Protection Faults. One even gave NT a 10-second spasm, but none adversely affected the operating system or other active DOS, NT, or Windows applications.

What they really tested is what is referred to as the structured exception-handling of

Windows NT. Exception handling is like a premarital agreement: It provides the details of how a system should respond if things don't go as planned. An exception handler, built into the operating system, waits for something unexpected to happen, then, based on what did happen, takes over and issues a series of instructions to the system that allow it to recover gracefully.

If an application uses an illegal memory reference, for example, the exception handler might stop the application and reply to the application in detail about the error in its ways. They noticed that NT can take its time when checking out an application before it coughs up an exception error. For example, they timed one application, which tried to overwrite memory that didn't belong to it, at 10 seconds from execution to exception.

It's possible that developers will, in their own creative ways, find one that will get under the skin of NT, but for now, it's nice to find an operating system with a heart of steel.

courtesy: BYTE

Affordable Compaq ProSignia 5/60 Harnesses Pentium's Power

COMPAQ's ProSignia 5/60 combines the forward-thinking design of Compaq's new uniprocessor TriFlex architecture with a 60-MHz Intel Pentium processor in a reasonably priced package: less than \$6,700 for a fully configured system.

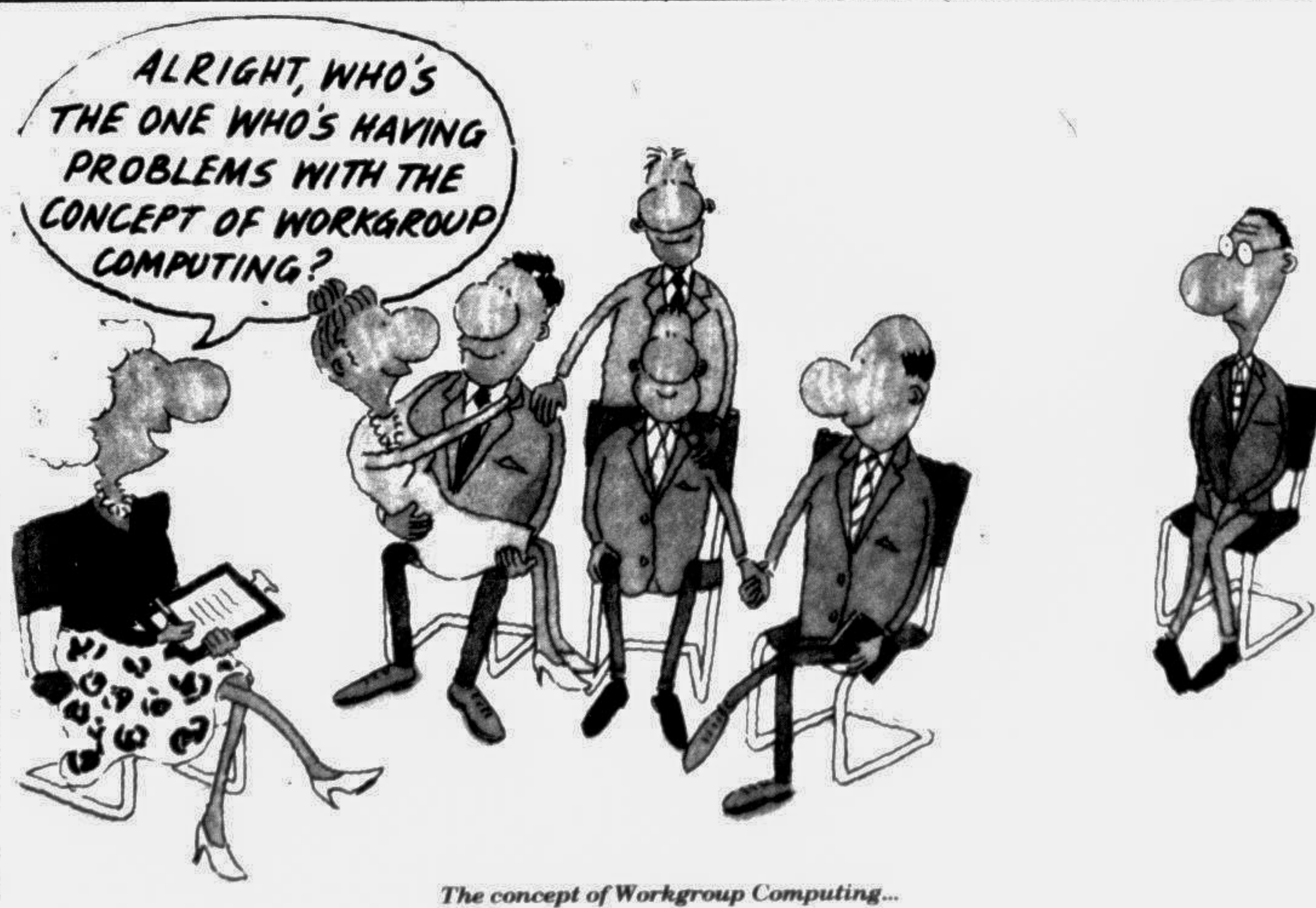
The ProSignia is the low end of Compaq's server line. It's TriFlex/PC Architecture is a uniprocessor version of the UniPro's TriFlex/Systems

Architecture. This architecture features a 128-bit memory bus, a 64-bit processor bus, and a 32-bit EISA I/O bus.

One result of such optimization is excellent throughput. In tests performed by ZD Labs using NetBench 2.06 that compared Pentium-based servers from IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and NEC with the ProSignia, the ProSignia had the best or second-best data throughput when 32 or fewer

clients were loaded on a network. Throughput for all four systems dropped sharply when handling 36 or more clients.

A base configuration, with 16MB of RAM and a 550MB hard disk, Fast-SCSI-2 controller, and a monitor sells for about \$6,689, and Compaq offers a wide range of hard disks and controllers for custom configurations. Given its price, the ProSignia's performance is impressive.



The concept of Workgroup Computing...