



TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS AND SETTLEMENTS REVIEW

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THREE CULTURAL TENDENCIES

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MEMORY WITHOUT MONUMENTS

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EAST BLOC, WEST VIEW

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Memory without Monuments: Vernacular Architecture

STANFORD ANDERSON

This article concerns the role of memory in vernacular architecture. It first points to a distinction between social memory and disciplinary memory in architecture. It then calls attention to the difference between the forms of memory embodied in the vernacular architecture of preliterate and literate societies. In preliterate societies, the cohesion of social and disciplinary memory in vernacular buildings allows the buildings to provide information about the past, but that past is not as much separate from, as subsumed in, the present. By contrast, literate societies develop records of their past — a past set apart, and so inducing inquiry and scepticism. A continuity is actually present in these distinctions between the types of memory embodied in the vernacular architecture of different societies, moving from the forms associated with preliterate societies, through the variations within literate, relatively ahistorical societies, and ending with the highly stylized “vernacular usage” in intensively historical ones. While the growth of disciplinary memory has facilitated the establishment of an architectural profession, a complete separation of social and disciplinary memory would ultimately prove destructive to the linkage between a society and its forms of architectural expression.

In 1995, in an essay in the journal *Daidalos*, I distinguished between “memory through architecture” and “memory in architecture,” in which the former involved “societal memory carried in architecture” and the latter concerned “the operation of memory within the discipline of architecture itself.” Among the examples I used to illustrate the former — what I refer to as “social memory” — were medieval European copies of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (FIG.1). Since the many “copies” of this holy site were quite different from one another, it was clear that its religiously generated recall did not entail strict architectural norms. And yet it is also clear that such social memory dominated architectural form and precedent at the time.

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FIGURE 1. Fulda, Germany. *St. Michael*, 820-22. An example of a copy of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem. (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.)

On the other hand, I illustrated the other type of memory — what I call “disciplinary memory” — with projects such as those of the so-called “Revolutionary architects” of eighteenth-century France — specifically Etienne Boullée. In projects such as the Pyramid for Turenne, this work involved the recollection of significant precedents in a way that was both more formally faithful and yet radically innovative in scale, organization and meaning (FIG.2). One sees here architecture approaching an autonomous state.

Dennis Domer recently introduced me to a vernacular work that serves well to demonstrate my distinction between societal and disciplinary memory: the Barber School in Kansas, an unusual stone building isolated on the prairie, dating from the early stages of settlement. Thomas Barber, mourned in a poem of John Greenleaf Whittier, was the only casualty in the so-called Wakarusa War of 1855, part of the political and armed conflict known as Bleeding Kansas that presaged the Civil War. The one-room school named in his honor, having fallen into disrepair, became in recent years a preservation project of faculty and students of the University of Kansas. As the accompanying photo indicates, the preservation was carried out not as a restoration, as more conservative preservationists urged, but as

a stabilizing of the ruin, now sheltered under a metal roof (FIG.3). The architects also avoided the inclusion of interpretive panels. Disciplinary memory is at work here in two ways: it is the incomplete fabric of the building and its physical setting that are restored, while the positive and negative decisions of the new work (what was and deliberately was not done) reinforced the knowledge of what the artifact had been. In its new state, one can recognize the unusual commitment involved in a masonry building in isolation on the prairie at a moment of few resources; one sees its relation to the open plains; and one sees both of these all the more emphatically through the techniques employed. One also comprehends a more extended history, the period of neglect and decay and, for that matter, even a theory of preservation. But societal memory of the role of this place in Bleeding Kansas is something the viewer must bring to it — or await the installation of historical texts. The disciplinary memory embedded in Barber School is not to be seen as the architects’ resistance of history; their solution intensifies those aspects of societal memory that can be carried by the physical site itself. But for those who want the detail of social events, other resources would need be employed which, in turn, would be more compelling for having this physical setting.³

To step back slightly, it is perhaps possible to say that neither social memory nor disciplinary memory is ever wholly absent in any work. Variations between the numerous reconstructions of the Holy Sepulchre reveal different approaches to architecture, and thus also reveal disciplinary memory, in the service of something other than solely recalling the esteemed precedent in the Holy Land. On the other hand, the projects of the “Revolutionary architects,” while marked by the invention of a particularly unique disciplinary memory, and often addressed to unprecedented programs, do not wholly escape social memory. Indeed, the impact of these works often relies on their implicit comparison with familiar forms used for other purposes, with differences of scale or detail.

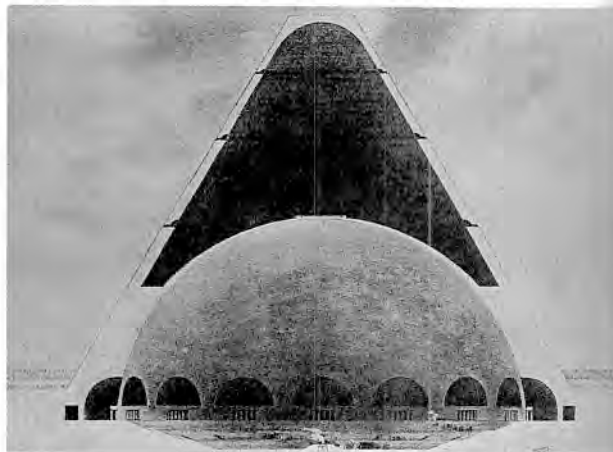


FIGURE 2. Etienne-Louis Boullée. Project for a pyramidal cenotaph for Turenne, uncertain date, 1782?. (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale.)



FIGURE 3. Douglas County, Kansas. The Barber School, 1871. Restored 1993-1998 by faculty and students of the School of Architecture and Urban Design, University of Kansas. (Photo courtesy of Dennis Domer.)

All forms of memory, then, may move toward one another. Nonetheless, even as the above briefly noted examples may suggest, there is a history to the distinction of social and disciplinary memory that merits attention. Furthermore I suggest there has come to be more division of labor in modern times between the uses of these memory systems than there once was.

It was precisely this question of how the relation of disciplinary memory to societal memory changed over time that I explored in the *Daidalos* essay. But in that essay I concentrated on architecture by recognized architects (whether known by name or not) to show how the increased distinction between the two forms of memory over time allowed the discipline of architecture to become a more rigorous and challenging activity. But I also recognized the hazard for both architecture and society if these two forms of memory arrived at a point of utter separation.

The above arguments invited prior questions, which I want to explore here. The questions include the following: Was (or is?) there a condition under which social and disciplinary memory were not separated? If so, under what conditions would social (or collective) memory and disciplinary memory diverge? My telegraphic answers are these: first, what is commonly referred to as vernacular architecture represents at least a close cohesion of social and disciplinary memory; and second, it is the advent of writing and history that has invited the increasing distinction between these memory systems. In proffering the above hypotheses, I use the term "vernacular architecture" to refer to works by builders who, whether their names are known or not, are not recognized as architects. In doing so, I accept the ambiguity inherent in this definition and the fact that it connotes a wide range of buildings in quite different societies.

In addition to this issue of the close relation of social and disciplinary memory in vernacular architecture, I want to explore several related issues here. One will be to relate the diversity of vernacular architecture with the varying degrees of relation between social and disciplinary memory — from a virtual

fusion, to a looser but still identifiable relation. Another will be to explore how these shifting degrees of relation — and ultimately what may be termed a weak relation — accord with the passage from pre-literate to literate societies. Finally, I will explore how this passage may also be a passage from societies dependent on memory alone to those with historical constructions. In other words, I will explore how differences in the operation of memory in various societies may accord with distinctions among vernacular architectures, and between vernacular architecture and architecture that is more self-consciously conceived.

My aim in this discussion is to consider examples representing a spectrum of societies, and of architectures. First are preliterate societies, devoid of historical reconstruction, whose vernacular architecture holds social and disciplinary memory in close relation. Second are literate societies which nevertheless give little emphasis to historical reconstruction, and in which a relatively close relation may be maintained between social and disciplinary memory. Finally, I will look to literate, highly historicized societies with little that passes for vernacular architecture. Yet, even in such societies, I want to note that what may be called "vernacular usage" still exists in varying degrees.

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE: COHESION OF SOCIAL AND DISCIPLINARY MEMORY

I begin with a preliterate society, devoid of historical reconstruction, whose vernacular architecture holds social and disciplinary memory in close relation. Taking one example from innumerable instances around the world, one can look to the deserts of Gujarat, where there exist still today settlements of the Banni people where a distinctive building form is closely correlated with local social life (FIG.4). Among the various aspects of this social life is the art of building itself, serving to maintain existing physical structures, but also to build new units or compounds. Despite its presence from time immemorial, this art of building, like other customs in the social life of the Banni, is very much a matter of the present. Until recently (and, then, only as it was compiled by visitors from outside the community), there was no other record of this building technology or its use other than in the actual buildings and the craft knowledge of the builders, passed from generation to generation. One must conceive that there have been changes in both the social life and the building technology of the Banni; yet such processes are necessarily lost in time. Likewise, innovation may continue to occur, but it, too, is experienced in response to current conditions, and then is lost in the continuing presence of the artifact.

I suggest that the widely admired vernacular architecture of many parts of the world — in Greece, for example — would, until overridden by the radical changes of the twentieth century, accede to similar analyses that show a close relation of social and building programs.

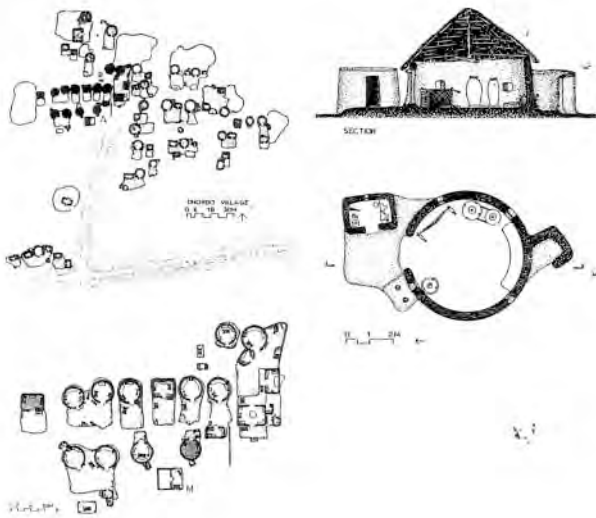


FIGURE 4. Dhordo, India. Banni village. (Courtesy of Kūlbushan Jain.)

RELATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY TO HISTORY: PRE-LITERATE TO LITERATE SOCIETY

What, theoretically, can be made of this? Considering the operation of memory in a society and its extension in time, is it essential to make a distinction between those societies that possess only memory and those that confront memory with history? In an oral society, even if there is a dynamic that leads to a collective understanding of the past, memory resides in individuals. The absence of records contributes to the modification of social memory and tradition from generation to generation. The past is not as much separate from, as subsumed in, the present.

Studying preliterate societies, several authors have noted the insistent attention of these societies to the *present* moment and the distancing of the society from its past. In preliterate societies, cultural tradition is maintained in face-to-face communication and in the context of present issues. In such an oral society, *forgetting* — and even forgetting that one forgets — is as important as memory. Jack Goody and Ian Watt observed that “the social function of memory — and of forgetting — can thus be seen as the final stage of what may be called the *homeostatic organization* of the cultural tradition in a non-literate society.”³ Transformations of social practices or forms may or may not be noted at the time of the event, but are unlikely to remain in memory in face of the perceived reinstatement of balance. Similarly, Jacques Le Goff observed that collective memory functions in oral societies according to a “generative reconstruction” that eliminates or transforms those parts of the tradition that are no longer operative.⁴

Under these conditions, what an outsider might call social and disciplinary memories participates in this homeostatic process, which constantly re-establishes balance and allows present differences with the past to be forgotten. The

relation of these memories to one another may appear seamless. The making of the physical environment is at one with the social construction of the society; perhaps the builder receives honor for demonstrable skills, but so too do others who are part of this attainment of balance through both maintenance and change. The generative reconstruction, aimed at maintaining a stable present, subsumes distinctions which only the external observer would make.

Again, according to Goody and Watt:

*Literate societies, on the other hand, cannot discard, absorb, or transmute the past in the same way. Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages scepticism; and scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole. From here the next step is to see how to build up and to test alternative explanations; and out of this there arose the kind of logical, specialized, and cumulative intellectual tradition of sixth-century Ionia.*⁵

One might, of course, note that this description aptly summarizes the intellectual traditions of our own day, both in the West and in other parts of the world. These are the preconditions for self-conscious forms of memory and for divergences of memory systems within a single culture. These are also the preconditions for memorialization — that is, assigning to built form the explicit role of maintaining memory.

VARIATION OF MEMORY IN LITERATE SOCIETIES

I would like to turn now to variations and changes of memory in literate societies — still with attention to the production or reception of vernacular architecture.

On my first visit to Saudi Arabia in 1980, to the highly developed oil region of the Gulf, several students of architecture kindly offered to take me to see what they termed “a very old building.” I expected to see some well-preserved example of indigenous mud-brick building — the former vernacular architecture of this region and culture (FIG. 5). The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia is not the best place to see such building, but many examples that would have satisfied my neophyte’s eye sped past the windows of the car. Eventually, however, we arrived at a town on the coast where a small commercial building of mixed construction techniques and some modest Art Deco detailing, probably circa 1940, proved to be the destination of our quest. At the time of its construction, this building might have served as an example of the incorporation of innovations into the established vernacular tradition. But viewed in 1980, in the presence of local university students, and in the more general context of a highly modernized society, my attention went



FIGURE 5. *Unaizeh, Saudi Arabia. Indigenous mud brick building. (Photo by author.)*

more to the apparent difference in the historicity of my mind and that of my student hosts. It was remarkable that this stylistically mixed, relatively recent building was to fulfill the promise of “a very old building.” The experience spoke definitively of the disparities of historical orientation — and systems of memory — between representatives of two highly literate, but different, societies.

Writing makes possible inscriptions on memorial constructions, texts on supports conceived intentionally for the maintenance of records, and, most important of all, changes in mental attitude at both individual and social levels. Nonetheless, there are variations among these changes from one society to another. Rote learning or memorization, within a culture that is both oral and literate, is argued to have long been characteristic of Islamic societies.⁶ The relative weight of memory and inquiry differs from one society to another. What is remembered, and how, also differs. Memorization of prescribed texts is quite different from a system that establishes the conditions for, and encourages, newly invented and

critical memories. Compared to the West, the maintenance of archives and records, crucial to the critical use of memory, has been limited in Islamic societies — and where they exist, they have mainly been concerned with established religious and legal concerns. Records pertaining to change in cultural production in and for itself have had little place.

In Saudi Arabia, as in many countries, there has, of course, been rapid change in these matters. Fifteen years after my visit, there had come to be a greater appreciation for, and preservation of, the indigenous architecture of Arabia, as well as interest in adapting its forms and principles to current development, as shown here in the Saudi Embassy in Yemen (FIG. 6).⁷ What I mean to point out is that local systems of memory and historical consciousness, once quite distinctive, have become more self-conscious, and have changed in concert with other aspects of Saudi development.

For their part, Goody and Watt were explicit that the nature of new historical societies varies with the form of language. Significant variations extend to our own day, perhaps in the relation of language and history, and certainly in the societal apparatus constructed to facilitate or inhibit the writing of history and its concomitant critical role. Today, even among highly literate societies, there are still those that are relatively ahistorical. The concept of an archive, let alone the presence of archives and museums, is unevenly distributed throughout the world. In preliterate societies, then — but also in literate societies that have not given a prominent place to historical studies — knowledge of the past and the relation of that knowledge to the present is quite different from the highly historicized societies of the West (and perhaps elsewhere).⁸



FIGURE 6. *Beha Group (Riyadh). Sana'a, Yemen. Saudi Embassy, 1988. (Photo by author.)*



FIGURE 7.
*Woudrichem,
The Netherlands.
Houses in the
market street.
(Photo by
author.)*

One might remark that this differentiation is not only to be recognized by country or language area, but also by discipline. Architecture has not been the most laggard of disciplines in the studied examination of its past, yet the marketing of architectural drawings and the burgeoning of architectural archives and museums in the last two decades speaks to a significant change in the relation of history and artifacts also in the West.⁹

So-called “vernacular architecture” may, then, be interestingly correlated with distinctions of societies as preliterate or literate but also with varying linguistic and memory systems — historic societies, that is, with varying levels or types of historic consciousness.

SUSTAINED VERNACULAR TRADITIONS WITHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Continuing with my spectrum of examples, I now turn to sustained vernacular traditions within historical societies. Most visitors to the Netherlands are struck by the distinctiveness of the typical houses, and thus the urban fabric of the old centers of Dutch towns (FIG.7). Characteristically, the houses are of brick, in rows with the gable ends to the street. They are also relatively small but have large windows directly at street level, and with little if any separation from it. Collectively, these houses yield a cityscape of remarkable intimacy and openness. Houses of this type were built without architects for centuries, most particularly from the Renaissance until the twentieth century, establishing a widely dispersed Dutch housing vernacular.

In the early twentieth century, as Dutch architects pioneered the field of social housing, the received type influenced their work significantly.¹⁰ This tradition continued, with increased architectural and urban sophistication in the work of M.J. Granpré Molière, as in his famous Vreewijk community in Rotterdam (FIG.8). Even architects of a distinctly modernist inclination established housing types that relied significantly on this tradition, as in the Laan van Meerdervoort in The Hague (FIG.9). Still more remarkable, much of the housing in the interwar years by Dutch architects of impeccable modernist credentials retained distinctive characteristics of the strong Dutch vernacular tradition, as in the work of J.J.P. Oud (FIG.10). Even in the famous Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart in 1927, Oud and his fellow Dutch architect Mart Stam, working under an experimental program in another country, still built row houses (FIG.11). Of all the modern architects of the era, only the Dutch architects maintained these characteristic traditional approaches.

But in this series of buildings, while there is a recognizable tie, there is also a progressive loosening of ties to the vernacular — and a loosening of the relation of social and disciplinary memory. In any such progression a point will ultimately be reached where one can no longer speak of vernacular architecture. This is where I believe one must shift to talking about an underlying “vernacular usage.” Even though it goes beyond the scope of this article, it is possible to show how even in Dutch society, with its often strong sense for tradition, the ties of new construction to vernacular housing, or the relation of social and disciplinary memory, can still be burst asunder — as in massive housing estates of high-rise buildings in the postwar years.

Taking another step in our spectrum of examples, I offer a brief observation of the persistence of a vernacular usage in high modern architecture. The work of the Mexican architect Luis Barragan is usually, and rightly, appreciated for the abstraction of its forms, and particularly for its powerful use of color. However, one need only walk the streets of a Mexican village to find sources not only for such colors but also for the play of apertures, space, light and color. And it can happen that this phenomenon of vernacular architecture is even more striking where the exteriors of houses are simply white, but where, when they are opened for the evening air, an effusive world of color is lit, framed and revealed.

Degrees of “vernacular usage” within highly literate and historical societies can range, then, from the relatively unself-conscious maintenance of housing and urban forms, through deliberate adaptations of received vernacular types, to the adaptation of elements across time and space in explorations made possible by what I will call the quasi-autonomy of architectural form. Thus, even in highly literate and historical societies such as the Netherlands or Mexico, one may find traditions of dwelling type, of urban fabric, and even of architectural abstraction that represent interesting, often contributive, persistences of earlier socio-cultural organization. By “tradition,” here within



FIGURE 8. (LEFT) M.J. Granpré-Molière. Rotterdam. Vreewijk housing estate, 1916-19. (Photo by author.)



FIGURE 9. (RIGHT) J.W. van der Weele. The Hague. Houses in the Laan van Meerdervoort 741-827, 1927. (Photo by author.)

historic societies, I imply tradition that continues to serve in the maintenance of a dynamic social equilibrium. Increasingly, this will be “invented tradition.”¹¹ Yet I am also thinking of those conventions or traditions that form the substrate of any society — so pervasive that they are rarely brought to cognizance.

It is for the understanding of phenomena such as these that the historical concept of “mentalities” is particularly apt. As Jacques Le Goff has written: “The history of mentalities . . . is also a meeting point for opposing forces which are being brought into contact by the dynamics of contemporary historical research: the individual and the collective, the long-term and the everyday, the unconscious and the intentional, the structural and the conjectural, the marginal and the general.”¹² This is an excellent catalog of the concerns that must be represented in a study of traditional building practices (or what may be called “the vernacular”) within historical societies.

MEMORY WITHOUT MONUMENTS

In the cases of the vernacular in architecture given above, as different as they may be, it appears that social memory and disciplinary memory retain significant associations. One might even speak of how they allow “memory without monuments” — or, as did Hermann Muthesius, of how memory may be an attribute of the very art of building.¹³

I hypothesize that vernacular architecture, whether of preliterate or literate societies — and even what we know as the “dwelling types” or “urban fabric” of modern settlements — raise intrinsically interesting issues of architecture closely linked to memory. I have presented these issues thus far in the context of arguments that conceive of oral societies (and even certain aspects of literate/historical societies) as deeply engaged in the present — in the maintaining of a homeostatic organization that

FIGURE 10. (LEFT) J.J.P. Oud. Rotterdam. Kiefhoek housing estate, 1925-29. (Photo by author.)

FIGURE 11. (RIGHT) Oud. Stuttgart, Germany. Weissenhof housing estate, 1927. (Photo courtesy of Rotch Visual Collections, MIT.)



is as dependent on forgetting the past as it is on recalling it. However, the very fact that buildings themselves are usually of long duration should raise another round of questions.

I would like to twist the argument slightly, and look again at preliterate forms of vernacular architecture, as in my example of the Banni in Gujarat. Do the commentators on oral societies, concerned with the absence of texts (whether on memorial buildings or on other textual supports), fail to recognize how building itself, with its long duration, is a cultural form that opens the possibility of historical reflection? Vernacular architecture may preserve or recall cultural forms and social or disciplinary practices that would otherwise be lost in the flux of the present. To accept a concept of “vernacular architecture as document,” or even “building process as document,” would thus change the account of past and present, of memory and historical sense, in preliterate societies. I should note that current scholars obviously use vernacular architecture in this way. But my question is whether, and if so when, the indigenous cultures themselves made that step.

To twist the question further, I propose two caveats to the exploration of vernacular architecture as document. Differentiations from one society or period to another might be necessary for two reasons. First, the capacity of a vernacular building to serve as a document does not guarantee that it will be taken as such, any more than a written text that fell by chance into the hands of a preliterate society would be. It is necessary to arrive at a certain turn of mind to see a building as a document, as representing something other than its performance in the present. One would therefore need evidence of this nascent historical sense before asserting that buildings served as documents at some earlier moment.

The second caveat, as central to architecture as to historiography, is that building practice, or, more generally, what I have called disciplinary memory, has at least a degree of autonomy. Certain fundamental tectonic forms — e.g., the post and lintel, the timber frame, the plaited wall infill, the arch, and so on — developed independently in different cultures (FIG. 12). In different cultures, and over time even in the same culture, the same tectonic forms and physical organizations may serve different purposes and meanings. Both these facts — independent invention and alternative uses — point to the quasi-autonomy of these, and other, artisanal endeavors. It is in this quasi-autonomy that architecture discovers its own discipline, the development of forms and organizations that are not derived deterministically from social forces. At this point I want to emphasize, however, that I am speaking only of “quasi-autonomy.” I do not think it desirable that architecture should aspire to a similar level of autonomy as that of the so-called fine arts. Under the concept of quasi-autonomy, more than one form can serve the same purpose, and the same form can serve different purposes. Consequently, there is room for invention that is fundamentally architectural without sacrificing responsibility to social need. There is likewise the opportunity for successful reuse and reinterpretation of the existing social investment in physical environments.

I would reinforce the matter of quasi-autonomy by stating it differently. Within the same society, aspects of a discipline may persist or be revived without engaging the same associations those aspects had at an earlier period. Thus, artistic and even artisanal activities cannot be reduced to being either determined by, or the determinants of, social conditions. The flip side of this argument is, of course, that an artifact like vernacular architecture presents an ambiguous document for the reconstruction of beginnings and past uses.



FIGURE 12. Village north of Jogjakarta, Indonesia. Traditionally crafted house. (Photo by author.)

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion and that of my earlier paper in *Daidalos* I re-emphasize the proposed distinction between social and disciplinary memory. Without the exploration and development of disciplinary memory, there is no independence for the discipline of architecture. This does not preclude responsible service to society as one also extends the quasi-autonomous content of architecture. Indeed, I would deliberately want to suggest its inclusion.

I have argued that vernacular architecture in its purest sense, in the hands of unself-conscious builders in indigenous cultures, may represent the fullest identification of social and disciplinary memory. I have been moved in observing such special environments in India, North Africa, Bali, and elsewhere. Yet I do not put this identification forward as an ideal (this is just as well, for in modern, literate, historical societies, such a condition is not available). Today it is unavoidable that one see these phenomena historically and critically. On the other hand, I have pointed to the maintenance of memory in a range of "vernacular usages" that I find exemplary — even into highly abstract modernism.

In scholarship, or in practice, I assert the importance of attending to systems of memory. But I do this as much to fend off abuses as to recognize responsibilities and opportunities. The uses of memory in the former Yugoslavia, or Northern Ireland, or central Africa today are awful. So, too, was the use of memory in Nazi Germany, where one could also point to distinct architectural correlates.

On the positive side, my predilections go to the more radical forms of "vernacular usage" I recognize in Oud and Stam in Stuttgart, or in the work of Barragan. However, if one turns to more conservative examples, problems abound. Claims for authenticity and fulfillment of identity through the invocation of memory are normally the rhetoric of dogmatists who would lead us, individually and collectively, into desperation. Less frightening concepts such as "inventing tradition," or even "manufacturing heritage," sound immediately problematic. Indeed, they are so, but they also cannot be immediately dismissed. It is clear that historical reconstruction of most that society values will reveal just such "invention" and "manufacturing." In retrospect such invention will often be admired, but at the same time it is important to be sceptical of such endeavors. Thus, when Granpré-Molière "manufactured" Vreewijk, a sizable, traditionally-based housing complex in the radically modernizing port city of Rotterdam, he was understandably criticized by the modernists around him. But, in response, I suggest that the modernists themselves, at their best, have employed "vernacular usage." And one can also point to how today, seventy years later, Vreewijk is still a desirable living environment, compelling sympathetic examination. Close attention will then be required to discriminate when the Seaside and Celebrations of the world are as worthy as Vreewijk, when they are as nostalgic and vacuous as the Main Street of Disneyworld,

or when they are as corrupting as reactionary appeals to racial, class, or national identity. And, then again, why not just aspire to more, including a higher and more critical use of memory?

The argument I have made is complex. Today it would be difficult to find a truly preliterate society engaged in unmediated indigenous building. For that matter, the other instances of vernacular architecture and tradition I have mentioned — survivals of earlier practices and memory systems within various literate societies, or the persistence of vernacular traditions and related "mentalities" in highly literate and historical societies, are also increasingly rare, especially if they are to be free of additional layers of memory and interpretation. The nonhistorical or marginally historical practices that are of concern today must be approached historically, with all the difficulties and ambiguities that suggests. Thus, the work of IASTE will no doubt quite rightly be more concerned with the complexities of how "the vernacular" has been interpreted than with the complexities (or admirable simplicities) of the vernacular artifacts themselves. The diversity of the subjects studied and the complexity of the ways they can be known implies the importance of specific and nuanced inquiry rather than the power of generalities.

Nonetheless, I suggest that such inquiries would profitably begin by attempting to situate vernacular practices within the systems of memory operative in a given time and place. This done, there must be further refinements based on questions I have raised here: Does this instance of vernacular architecture itself provide a historical document for its contemporaries? And does the work in question reveal important continuities first for a system of memory, and then for a history of the discipline of building — and thus for a degree of autonomy of the discipline, even if this phenomenon will appear more decisively only later?