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Vernacular Architecture

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Although vernacular architecture has emerged as a popular and significant field of research during the twentieth century, the concept itself is rather intangible and difficult to delineate. To many people, vernacular architecture refers to indigenous, 'primitive', folk or popular building traditions that are rooted in place, culture and history and that have come about without the involvement of professional architects. Southeast Asian longhouses, West African family compounds, Chinese courtyard houses or American log cabins epitomize vernacular architecture as culturally distinctive, traditional, common and everyday forms of building made by ordinary people in response to local needs and environments (Fig. 1). To others, however, the term vernacular architecture is more extensive and also includes very different forms of architecture; architecture that is not necessarily rooted in place and tradition, but that is nonetheless commonly made by anonymous builders and that forms a significant part of contemporary everyday built environments around the world. To those people, the term vernacular architecture may refer to road-side diners in the USA, suburban developments in Australia, retail shopping malls in Europe or high-rise housing estates in Singapore, in addition to the more traditional building forms noted above (Fig. 2). But it may sometimes also include the contemporary informal squatter settlements that can be found in so many of the fast-growing megacities around the world, or the alternative forms of architecture using traditional materials like bamboo or earth that have emerged during the last decades in response to growing social and environmental concerns.

Over the years, those differences in interpretation of the term vernacular architecture have led to academic debates about what the concept actually means, how it should be defined and what forms of architecture should be included in it. In recent years, these debates have intensified. Calls for the abandonment of the term have been issued, while arguments for its continued validity and usefulness have also been put forward (Vellinga 2011; Hourigan 2015). Regardless of these academic debates and of what interpretation is favored, it is clear that vernacular architecture makes up a significant part of the world's built environment. Fifteen years ago, the President of the International Union of Architects estimated that only about two per cent of buildings in the world had been made with the involvement of architects (Rapoport 2006: 181). With increased urbanisation and the rapid growth of informal settlements this has entailed in many parts of the world, this number is unlikely to have increased. At the same it is also clear that the concept, however defined, can potentially comprise an enormous variety of building traditions, ranging from ordinary everyday structures like houses and diners, to ceremonial ancestral homes and religious buildings, to commercial shopping venues and agricultural complexes. In some cases, such traditions have played a central role in processes of cultural, national and political identification. At the same time, they have sometimes served as an inspiration for contemporary architectural design, while at times they have found themselves subject to processes of appropriation, folklorisation and commercialisation.

The fact that vernacular architecture makes up a significant part of the world's built environment constitutes a powerful argument as to why its study should be a fundamental part of architectural history curricula. At a time when the historical and contemporary boundaries of architectural history have been renegotiated and opened up (Arnold *et al* 2006), an inclusive architectural historiographical discourse must acknowledge the existence and importance of such large parts of the world's architectural heritage as represented by vernacular architecture, even if the authorship, date and provenance of the buildings concerned may be difficult or sometimes impossible to establish. If architectural history did not acknowledge the vernacular architecture of the world, its validity would be significantly reduced. As Bernard Rudofsky, one of the pioneers of the study of vernacular architecture wrote in his characteristic rhetorical style: 'Would we call botany a science if it dealt exclusively with lilies and roses?' (1977: 13). To remain credible, architectural history must acknowledge the ordinary, everyday buildings made without architects. The fact that vernacular architecture is often intricately linked to the architectural forms that have traditionally formed the subject matter for architectural history (with the one not infrequently inspiring the other), only strengthens the argument that vernacular traditions should be taken serious as a study subject.

However, the fact that vernacular architecture may comprise an enormous diversity of building traditions simultaneously exemplifies the difficulties inherent in the use of the concept. It has been argued that the term vernacular is a residual category that includes all those building traditions that do not form part of the conventional architectural canon (Upton 1990). If a building is not iconic or monumental and if it has not been designed by an architect, it is very likely to end up being classified as vernacular architecture rather than as architecture *per se*; especially when it is found in countries outside of the developed world. In assuming this residual position, the concept of vernacular architecture has been able to validate building traditions like Indonesian longhouses, roadside diners and informal settlements as forms of architecture (albeit vernacular ones), rather than as simply buildings. Without the concept, such building traditions would most likely have been continuously ignored by architectural historians (like they were in the not too distant past). In the words of Henry Glassie, another pioneer in the field: 'When we isolate from the world a neglected architectural variety and name it vernacular, we have prepared it for analysis' (2000: 20). However, in the process of categorising architectural traditions that do not fit in the architectural canon as vernacular architecture, what are in effect very distinct and disparate building traditions from all around the world have become generalized and essentialized into one distinct type. And in defining the category of vernacular architecture as being essentially different from architecture more generally because of its everyday, common, traditional and anonymous (in terms of authorship) characteristics, it exposes some problematic assumptions about the cultural distinctions ('us' and 'them', modern and traditional, authored and anonymous, complex and simple) that underlie it (Upton 1993; Vellinga 2006).

Although the concept of vernacular is by now well-established in architectural circles, it thus remains rather ambiguous, contentious and challenged. This chapter will explore the history and development of the architectural discourse on vernacular architecture, taking this ambiguous, contentious and challenged status of the concept as a starting-point. The chapter will indicate some of the ways in which the vernacular has been defined, studied and used, and will outline how the discourse on vernacular architecture has evolved in response to wider social, economic and environmental developments. It will also show how it continues to evolve by drawing attention to some current and newly emerging areas of research in relation to vernacular architecture. A central

assertion of the chapter is that vernacular architecture is a concept that serves to define a category of architecture in opposition to 'capital A' architecture, in order to help define, validate and aggrandize the latter. In this respect, it is not unlike other academic categories like 'primitive art' or 'traditional society' (Price 1986; Kuper 2005). The concept remains useful in drawing attention to a large variety of building traditions that would not have received serious attention without the label 'vernacular'. However, it is important to recognize that its continued use in architectural discourse raises important questions about the way in which the latter values and represents the architectural traditions of other peoples and cultures in a time of increased globalisation and multiculturalism.

Definitions

In architectural discourse, the term vernacular has been borrowed from the field of linguistics, where the term has long been used to identify the native dialects of a specific country, region or group of people. A dialect or vernacular is a form of language that is spoken by a specific social class, ethnic group or local community in a particular region, and that is derived from (and sometimes defined in opposition to) a standard language (Oxford Dictionary of English 2003). A well-known example of such a vernacular language would be cockney, which is spoken by members of the working-class population in the East End of London and may be said to form an English vernacular. In many cases, though not all, the distinction between a standard language and its various vernaculars may have status implications, with the vernacular identified as a 'low' or 'subordinate' variant of the standard language. The fact that written records have often been drawn up in standard languages like Latin or Sanskrit reflects and strengthens those implicit status distinctions; as does the etymological origin of the adjective vernacular in the Latin *verna*, which means 'home born slave' (Oxford Dictionary of English 2003). As a dialect, a vernacular language is the common language shared and used by ordinary people in a specific region of the world. It is often not written down or formally taught and although it may be the everyday language for most people, it is normally not used in written records or during official or ceremonial occasions. In popular perception, vernacular dialects are sometimes associated with rural rather than urban areas, even though (as the cockney example shows) they do exist in the latter as well.

It is those associations with notions of the common, the everyday, the regional, the shared, the informal and the rural that made the adjective vernacular an attractive one to apply to the forms of architecture commonly associated with it. AlSayyad and Arboleda (2011: 135) trace the use of the adjective vernacular in relation to dwelling and settlements back to Thomas Blount's *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* (1707), in which he refers to vernacular as 'Proper and peculiar to the House or Country one lives in'. Green (2007: 4) refers to a more recent first known use in England, quoting an anonymous contributor to *The British Critic* who in 1839 wrote that '(…) the present age has no vernacular style of architecture'. Although the term was regularly used since the nineteenth century, its use became firmly established from the late 1960s onwards, when various authors argued for its appropriateness in comparison to other frequently used terms like 'traditional', 'primitive', 'folk' or 'anonymous' (Rudofsky 1964; Oliver 1969; Rapoport 1969). Nowadays, the term is frequently used in academic and professional discourses, although 'traditional' is equally common (AlSayyad 2014) and the popularity of the term differs per discipline (in anthropology, for instance, it is much less common than in architecture or architectural history). Nor, indeed, is it in use in all languages.

Although a direct translation exists in French, there are none in Spanish, Chinese, German or Arab, for instance. In those languages, other terms like 'popular' may be used instead.

As noted above, despite its common use in English language academic and professional discourses, there are various interpretations of what the term means. Each of those has different emphases, entails different levels of architectural inclusivity and raises important questions of definition. One common interpretation, the one that is probably best known and most used in architectural circles, is that of the vernacular as 'architecture without architects'. Popularized most famously and effectively by Rudofsky (1964), this notion conceptualizes any building that has not been designed by architects (or that, in the case of Rudofsky's writings, has no known architect) as vernacular architecture. It takes its cue from the notion that vernacular dialects are informal and not explicitly taught or written down; but it does of course raise the question of what an architect actually is and when a builder may be said to have become one? Another common conceptualisation is that of the vernacular as architecture that is regional or local, and distinctive or indigenous (native) to a place (for example, Brunskill 1987; Carter and Cromley 2005). This interpretation places the emphasis on the regionality of dialects rather than their informality, but in turn it raises questions about what a locality or region is, how its boundaries may be defined and how different regions interrelate to one another? A third common interpretation of vernacular architecture is that of the architecture of the people (Oliver 1997: Oliver 2006). This notion emphasizes the common and everyday nature of the vernacular, as well as the status distinctions that are implied in the concept, and of course raises important questions about who 'the people' actually are, and what the relationship is between the people and the everyday and their implied antonyms like elite, extraordinary or exceptional? In practice, many publications simultaneously use a combination of all those interpretations to define vernacular architecture, along the lines of 'self-made buildings constructed by ordinary people using local materials'.

A common thread in all interpretations, conceptualisations and definitions of vernacular architecture is its assumed normative opposition to other forms of architecture. When vernacular architecture is defined as informal, regional or popular, it is invariably done in opposition to a mainstream architecture that is seen to be formal, international (and thus non-distinctive) or elitist. Vernacular architecture is often seen to represent values that are opposite to those manifested by the architectural canon: it is traditional rather than innovative, communal rather than individual, authentic rather than artificial, humane rather than imposing, natural rather than cultural. In some instances, it is also seen to be more culturally and regionally appropriate than other forms of architecture; a tendency that has not infrequently lead to the appropriation of vernacular forms of architecture for ideological, political or ethnic purposes (see below). Another common thread in those interpretations, conceptualisations and definitions is the emphasis on what may be called the production of buildings. It is the role and position of the builder, as well as the design, materiality, technology and form of the buildings that tends to define vernacular architecture. In line with more common tendencies to associate the meaning of objects with their makers, it is the authorship of a building (or rather, the presumed lack of it) that determines whether it is vernacular or not (Upton 1993). What happens after a building has been made, when it is inhabited or otherwise used and given meaning by people is often not taken into account. Perhaps it is this perceived lack of authorship that has meant vernacular buildings have often been ignored in architectural historiography and that has allowed them to be placed in an anonymous and undifferentiated residual category.

Histories

The history of the study of vernacular architecture remains to be written. As noted, the use of the term in (English language based) architectural discourse dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. Both in the UK and the USA, the interest in vernacular architecture to an extent emerged in response to the prevalence of neo-classicism as an architectural movement, which was seen to erode the authenticity of British and American architecture because of its international style and thus ignited interest in regional forms of building. Perhaps more importantly, the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in both countries also played a major part, as both developments resulted in large-scale social, economic and political changes that together seemed to erode long-established and familiar local and regional identities. The farmhouses, cottages and barns of common people in rural areas like the Cotswolds or New England came to be seen as places where architectural authenticity and craft could still be found, as opposed to the overcrowded cities that housed people from all across the country, and thus they became a subject of architectural interest (Upton 1990; Green 2007). This interest in regional forms of architecture built on earlier nineteenth century interests in folk traditions that emphasized the ways in which the traditions of the common people represented the true and authentic culture and spirit of countries and regions (Burke 1978). From the earliest beginnings, then, the study of vernacular was thus used to criticize (and in some cases reject) contemporary architectural practice. The vernacular was traditional, authentic, natural and the result of craftsmanship and skill, whereas the contemporary architecture found in the fast-growing cities was seen to be international, industrial, inauthentic and ugly.

The study of vernacular architecture received an impetus at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the emerging Modernist movement in Europe turned its attention to it. Building on the nineteenth century ideas about its supposed authenticity and craftsmanship, vernacular architecture was seen to represent many of the qualities that were central to the new Modernist notions of design; functionalism, for example, and a truthful use of materials. But rather than continuing to just use vernacular architecture to criticize contemporary design, the architects of the Modernist movement now turned to vernacular architecture as a source of inspiration and wisdom. Across Europe, Modernist architects drew on examples of vernacular architecture to help formulate their visions for a new and contemporary form of architecture. Le Corbusier's (1987) interest in the vernacular traditions of the Balkans has of course been well-documented; but he was not the only Modernist architect to focus his attention to vernacular architecture. In Germany, for example, architects like Schultze-Naumburg investigated German vernacular traditions to help develop a new way of building (Gutschow 2010). Others, like Bruno Taut, looked further away and studied non-European forms of vernacular architecture, most especially in Japan (Akcan 2010). A similar interest in vernacular architecture was shown during this period in other parts of Europe. In many respects, Rudofsky's seminal *Architecture Without Architects* exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1964), although often hailed as the first work to draw attention to vernacular traditions, was thus part of an established Modernist tradition of using vernacular architecture to critically comment on and inform contemporary architectural practice. Nonetheless, Rudofsky's work was probably the most effective in drawing the attention of both architects and the general public to the existence of the vernacular; most work before then had been scattered and rather hidden in academic and professional publications.

No doubt influenced by the work of Rudofsky, the study of vernacular architecture really took off in the late 1960s, becoming at the same time more international, inclusive and accepted into the architectural discourse. The end of the 1960s and early 1970s in particular saw the publication of a number of seminal works, like Oliver (1969), Rapoport (1969) and, a few years later, Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour (1972) and Glassie (1975). In contrast to earlier works like Moholy-Nagy (1957) and Rudofsky (1964), these publications were less romantic and more analytical in focus, and tried to understand vernacular forms of architecture within their social, cultural and environmental contexts. Many of these publications dealt with western as well as non-western traditions, such as Norwegian farm buildings (Lloyd 1969) or Native American pueblos (Rapoport 1969); some of them, like Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour, who studied the Las Vegas strip, also expanded the term beyond the traditional and rural buildings that up till then dominated the discourse. The increased interest in vernacular architecture worldwide during this period appears to relate to the processes of nationalisation, industrialisation and urbanisation that took place in many parts of the non-western world at the time and that led to the same concerns about the loss of cultural identities and traditions as were found in Europe and the USA during the nineteenth century. But the social, political and intellectual climate in the West during the 1960s, with its increasing demands for a more inclusive and democratic historiography, and the associated rise of popular culture, will no doubt have been of influence as well (Carter and Cromley 2005). As such, the period saw a combination of studies that tried to salvage and document traditions that were seen to be destined to disappear, and those that tried to draw attention to emerging and contemporary popular building forms that deserved more recognition from the architectural establishment.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the concept of vernacular architecture had become well-established and had come to comprise all those buildings that were not part of the increasingly global, modern, international and elitist canon of architecture. It now included traditional (and often rural) forms of architecture form around the world, as well as contemporary popular, commercial, informal and alternative forms of building. It had become more recognized in academic circles and had begun to be included in architectural encyclopedias and dictionaries. It had also become more formalized, with the establishment of a number of academic forums and associations like the Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF), the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environment (IASTE) and the ICOMOS International Committee on Vernacular Architecture (CIAV). The 1980s and 1990s in particular saw a lot of studies and publications about vernacular architecture, no doubt influenced by the increased manifestation of the processes of modernisation, globalisation and urbanisation, and the cultural, economic and architectural changes and interconnections they entailed (e.g. Knapp 1986; Waterson 1990). The scope of the field of vernacular architecture expanded during this period to look more critically at the notions of tradition, locality and authenticity that underpin the concept and to investigate the ways in which vernacular architecture may sometimes be manufactured, consumed and appropriated, or serve as an inspiration for contemporary design (AlSayyad 2001). The publication of Oliver's monumental *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (1997) a few years before the end of the twentieth century marked a milestone in the study of vernacular architecture and helped to validate it as a serious field of academic study.

Approaches

Today, the academic and professional interest in vernacular architecture remains strong, but this does not mean that one can speak of a unified field of vernacular architecture studies, as sometimes seems to be suggested (Carter and Cromley 2005). It is more accurate to say that a number of different discourses exist, each of which has a somewhat different interpretation of what vernacular architecture is and a different approach to its study. To an extent, historical, national and disciplinary backgrounds have an influence on those interpretations and approaches. The USA, for instance, has a more expansive and inclusive notion of vernacular architecture than the UK, while anthropologists, say, tend to approach vernacular architecture in a different way than architectural historians do. But on the whole the different discourses are more aligned with the various academic forums and associations that have been established to study vernacular architecture, rather than with national or disciplinary affiliations. Organisations like the ICOMOS International Committee on Vernacular Architecture (CIAV) and the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE), for example, both comprise members of different disciplinary and national backgrounds, but there are distinct differences between the approaches they use. ICOMOS-CIAV focuses mainly on issues of documentation and conservation, whereas IASTE is more concerned with the academic analysis of the role of tradition in architecture and the ways in which this role evolves as a result of processes of globalisation. Although individual scholars may contribute to the conferences and publications of more than one association, in general there is little communication and exchange between the various forums.

Although vernacular architecture has sometimes been described as constituting in its entirety a distinct approach to the study of architecture (in the sense that it is possible to ask 'vernacular' questions about popular use and meanings in relation to any kind of building)(Carter and Cromley 2005: 7), the approaches used to study vernacular architecture have in fact always been varied and dynamic. During the nineteenth century, the study of vernacular architecture was in the main the focus of folklorists, antiquarians and architectural historians. Broadly speaking, their interest was the collection and documentation of European or American pre-industrial building types like cottages, farmhouses and barns, often in the context of nationalist movements and influenced by the notion that such buildings represented the 'authentic' pre-industrial traditions of specific places and people, and thus warranted recording. During the twentieth century architects began to turn their attention towards vernacular architecture, with a view to learn from vernacular design and apply its lessons to contemporary forms of architecture. This implied a somewhat different approach, one that was less concerned with recording building forms and was more focused on understanding how they functioned. The second half of the twentieth century saw an increased interest among anthropologists, geographers, environmental psychologists and social historians, who turned their attention away from buildings as objects and looked more at the ways in which vernacular architecture was used and embodied cultural values, social relationships, economic structures and religious meanings; not just in Europe and America, but all around the world. In recent years, in response to the challenges posed by climate change, a new discourse has emerged that looks at the environmental performance of vernacular architecture and that is mainly the terrain of architects and building engineers.

Although it is possible, broadly speaking, to identify such historical phases and developments in the study of vernacular architecture, it is important to realize that all the above-mentioned approaches

are still used today and that within those broad categorisations, there is considerable variety in the way the subject is actually studied by individual scholars. Back in the early 1980s, the architectural historian Upton (1983) identified four distinct approaches that were prevalent in the field until then: object oriented studies, socially oriented studies, culturally oriented studies and symbolically oriented studies. Around the same time, the anthropologist Lawrence (1983) classified the various approaches into aesthetic formalist studies, typological studies, evolutionary studies, diffusionist studies, social-cultural studies and physical studies. Although these approaches do sometimes overlap, and evolutionary and diffusionist studies are a lot less common nowadays, both categorisations are on the whole still valid today. But they should now perhaps be supplemented with what AlSayyad (2006) has called an 'activist oriented' approach that looks at how vernacular knowledge may contribute to the solving of problems.

Regardless of what approach is followed, the methods that are employed by students of vernacular architecture tend to be various and drawn from established disciplines. In most cases, architectural surveys in the form of measured plans and, drawings and maps are part of the methodology used. Often those are supplemented by photography and sometimes film to document building practices and forms. Historical plans, drawings and photographs, as well as archival material, may often be studies to provide a historical perspective (Carter and Cromley 2005). Interviews with builders and users are commonly employed to record values, meanings and oral histories of the buildings and their uses. As in most fields of study, writing is one of the main methods by which information tends to be disseminated and discussed. Maps are sometimes used to collect, analyze and disseminate data, but the potential of cartography as a research method remains to be exploited (Vellinga 2003). More recently, the detailed monitoring and measurement of the environmental qualities and performance of vernacular architecture has become more prominent, using various in-situ monitoring techniques that measure, for example, variations in temperature, wind velocity or direction, humidity, solar radiation or illumination (see Vellinga 2013 for examples). This work sometimes includes computer simulations and modelling programmes. The use of digital modeling and 3D representations has also begun to emerge in relation to contemporary attempts to conserve and represent vernacular architecture (Treadwell 2015), indicating that the methodology used to study vernacular continues to evolve.

Appropriations

From early on, vernacular architecture has been of interest to the professional architectural community not so much because of its heritage value, but because it was seen to potentially offer lessons to contemporary design. Because the vernacular has commonly been seen to possess certain qualities that were missing from contemporary, formal forms of architecture (locality, for example, or communality, honesty, durability, simplicity and self-sufficiency), architects have often turned to it for inspiration and wisdom. Already in the nineteenth century, Arts and Crafts architects like Philip Webb, Richard Lethaby and Charles Robert Ashbee promoted the use of vernacular building crafts, forms and local materials to create an alternative to the industrialized and mass-produced forms of architecture created by contemporary practice (Cumming and Kaplan 1991). As noted before, the Modernist movement similarly drew on vernacular architecture and the qualities it was believed to possess. Its emphasis was more on the perceived functionality and simplicity of vernacular

architecture, however, rather than its specific materiality or form (Lejeune and Sabatino 2010). The postmodern period at the end of the twentieth century saw more formal and symbolical appropriations of vernacular forms in contemporary design, for example in the case of the Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre by Renzo Piano (Fig. 3). Vernacular architecture became of importance not for its materiality or functionality, but because of the cultural meaning that it was seen to possess. This period also saw the emergence and popularity of so-called historicist or retro-design in relation to domestic forms of architecture (Harris and Dostrovsky 2008)(Fig. 4), as well as the appropriation of vernacular materials and technologies in the search for more ecologically sustainable forms of contemporary architecture (Vellinga 2013). In all these cases, the vernacular has been appealing because it represented something that contemporary architecture lacked, be it local character, cultural distinctiveness, natural ambience, functionality or sustainability.

Alongside such professional appropriations, vernacular architecture has also been used for ideological, political or commercial purposes. Because of their cultural distinctiveness and rootedness in place, vernacular buildings have frequently been employed to create, strengthen and represent local, regional or national identities. For example, during the mid-twentieth century, vernacular architecture often featured on the currency notes and stamps of newly independent nations in the developing world like Indonesia and Mali (Standish 2000), or acted as a source of inspiration for the design of new parliament or government buildings (as in Sri Lanka or the Philippines). In some instances, such as in Indonesia under President Suharto's New Order government in the 1980s and 1990s, the appropriation of vernacular forms of architecture was part of a deliberate attempt to redefine ethnic relationships and to maintain an existing balance of power and domination (e.g. Schefold 1998). Similar uses of vernacular architecture have been noted in the case of other authoritarian regimes, such as the Argentinian and Portuguese dictatorships during the mid-twentieth century. In other cases, vernacular architecture has played an important role in attempts by ethnic or local communities (like the Sámi people in Scandinavia) to establish, maintain or revive their independence or cultural identity in relation to neighboring groups or encompassing social entities like nation-states (e.g. Bjørklund 2013). Not infrequently, those processes involved the careful selection of specific building traditions or elements of them (a roof form, a particular material, or a specific type of decoration) to represent the group, as well as the conscious manipulation and exaggeration of those traditions or elements to augment their symbolic power. In all such cases, vernacular architecture has been actively 'consumed', or even wilfully 'manufactured' and 'invented', to achieve the ideological or political goal in question (AlSayyad 2001).

Such a consumption of vernacular traditions does not only take place for ideological or political reasons. Because of its distinctive character, vernacular architecture has also frequently been used for commercial purposes, for example to boost tourism or to help increase the sales of particular (often locally distinctive) products. Thus, in many parts of the world, including in Turkey and Thailand, vernacular traditions have been promoted as a tourist destination (either in situ or in open-air museums), or have inspired the design of hotels and other tourist facilities. Once more, such cases have not just involved real buildings, but also contemporary interpretations of them (some of which have been quite liberal), using carefully selected traditions, buildings or building elements (De Jong 1997). In some cases, dedicated theme parks or entire villages have been (re-)created with reconstructions or replicas (e.g. Hitchcock 1998). Perhaps not surprisingly, in the vast majority of cases such appropriations have involved the traditional, indigenous or folk buildings from around the world that to so many people comprise the category of vernacular architecture (the

Indonesian longhouses, the Native American tipis, the Chinese courtyard houses), rather than the everyday buildings that make up so many contemporary built environments (the retail parks, the motels, the suburban housing estates) or the informal settlements that are also sometimes included in the category (although examples of the latter do exist, for example in South Africa). This commercial appropriation may also take place through the use of imagery, rather than actual architecture. Thus representations of vernacular architecture have often been used to create tourist souvenirs (for example key-rings, fridge magnets, postcards, calendars); in some cases they have also been part of the visual branding of regional or local products. In such cases the vernacular is quite literally manufactured to be consumed.

Realities

Early studies of vernacular architecture often emphasized the traditional, homogenous and static nature of the building forms concerned. Frequently focused on rural and pre-industrial building traditions, many nineteenth and twentieth century studies tended to classify vernacular forms of architecture into distinctly bounded geographical, typological and chronological categories: *the* Maasai house, *the* black tent, *the* colonial bungalow. In many instances, such vernaculars were seen to be traditional and unchanging, and part of (or survivals of) a bygone pre-modern era where cultural traditions were pure and authentic, and rooted in place and history. Contemporary changes were commonly described or lamented in terms of the 'loss' and 'decline' of cultural distinctiveness and purity, and seen to be caused by outside forces (modernisation, westernisation, globalisation) rather than by the builders, inhabitants and users of the traditions themselves (Upton 1993; Vellinga 2006). Only in more recent decades has there been a recognition that cultural traditions are dynamic, active and creative, and that many forms of vernacular architecture are the result of architectural and cultural borrowings, amalgamations and changes that have taken place over (sometimes very long periods of) time, owing to the active agency of those who build and use them (Upton 2001; Asquith and Vellinga 2006). As is the case with all forms of material culture, the form, function, use and meaning of vernacular architecture is continuously changing, in tandem with the wider environmental, economic and social developments that inevitably take place. It is now more commonly recognized that such changes do not have to be described in terms of cultural damage, contamination or inauthenticity, but that they represent new phases in continuously evolving living traditions. As such, the vernacular should no longer be seen as a survival of pre-modern times, but as an active and dynamic part of the contemporary modern world.

Such a new perspective on the nature of vernacular architecture is all the more important given the many challenges faced by vernacular architecture today. In various parts of the world, rapid environmental, social, economic, political and cultural changes and developments have had a major impact on vernacular traditions. Climate change, conflict, demographic change, technology transfer and migration are only some of the processes that continue to influence vernacular forms of architecture and that increasingly challenge the ways they were seen to rather unproblematically relate to history, locality, culture and identity by earlier generations of scholars (Fig. 5). Of course those processes and their impacts manifest themselves in different ways in different parts of the world. In developed countries like the USA, Europe and Australia, a combination of demographic changes (most especially an ageing population), technological developments, policy regulations

(health and safety, insurance, mortgage) and social dynamics (changing family and household relationships, de-ruralisation and counter-urbanisation) have resulted in a variety of ways in which vernacular architecture is perceived and treated, ranging from neglect and abandonment (e.g. in parts of rural France) to appreciation and gentrification (e.g. in parts of rural England). In those countries, vernacular forms of architecture (in the sense of traditional buildings rooted in place, culture and history) may be in high demand as (often, second) homes and act as inspirations for contemporary architectural design; or they may be perceived as historic remnants worthy of conservation. In all instances, they will be subjected to significant change and development.

In large parts of the developing world, the realities and challenges faced by vernacular architecture are of equal importance, but they are usually of a different nature. An appreciation of vernacular architecture as cultural heritage or high-value housing, for example, is less common in most parts Southeast Asia, Africa or Latin America; as is (so far at least) the impact of government or industrial regulations. Instead, the traditional, indigenous forms of architecture that can still be found here and that may have such appeal to tourists are more often seen as obstacles on the road to progress and modernity by their builders, owners and occupiers, and thus they are frequently under threat of abandonment and demolition. In some parts of the developing world (for example Thailand or Brazil), international tourism may lead to the commodification and preservation of vernacular traditions, but in other parts (such as South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa) natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes or floods, and man-made conflicts have calamitous impacts on vernacular buildings and, indirectly, the skills and knowledge they embody. Unprecedented population growth and urbanisation have led to the abandonment of much traditional rural vernacular architecture (for example in China), while at the same time they continue to feed the rapid expansion of the informal settlements that are sometimes defined as contemporary forms of vernacular architecture. Further changes are caused by the introduction of new technologies and the new labor relationships that are formed as part of the expansion of cash economies and the global market. Those often give rise to new everyday built environments (suburbs, high-rise housing estates, shopping malls) that may be very different from traditional forms of vernacular architecture and that may be more akin to what can be found in many other parts of the world.

Perhaps because of the enduring and profound tendency among scholars of vernacular architecture to focus on pre-industrial, pristine and rural traditions, a lot of those contemporary realities and challenges, and the manifold ways in which they impact on vernacular architecture, have not been subject to much study yet and are only now beginning to emerge as areas for research. To study them is indeed of great interest and significance, as they show very clearly that vernacular building traditions are never static or homogenous, but are always developing as a result of their intricate relationship to dynamic environmental, social and economic contexts. The contemporary realities and challenges remind us that the great variety of building traditions that come under the analytical umbrella of vernacular architecture are today still fundamentally linked to cultural contexts, but in different and much more dynamic and creative ways than used to be thought and imagined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Paying more attention to the contemporary manifestations of vernacular architecture (be they traditional, popular, everyday or informal) will teach us much about their position and value in the twenty-first century, but perhaps more importantly will also provide us with better insights into the nature of architectural traditions more generally and how they actively, by means of human agency, relate and respond to challenges, opportunities and new realities. It will expand an already varied and exciting field of research into one that looks at

enduring and new building traditions and at the ways in which they continue to come together in creative and new ways.

Futures

Paradoxically, although the concept of vernacular architecture emerged from a desire to establish a more inclusive architectural history, in emphasising the pre-modern and 'Other' nature of the vernacular in relation to contemporary 'capital A' architecture, the concept has become rather exclusive in that certain forms of architecture are accepted as truly vernacular, while others are not recognized or only by some because of their supposed 'contamination' by modernity. The cultural distinctions that underlie the decision to accept a building as vernacular or not ('us' and 'them', modern and traditional, authored and anonymous, complex and simple) are problematic and indeed sometimes uncomfortable. The reality today is that buildings that are truly local, traditional or rooted in place are difficult and increasingly impossible to find. Similarly, it will be hard to find buildings that are truly modern or contemporary and that are not in one way or another influenced by tradition and the past. All forms of architecture are distinctive cultural expressions of people who attempt to create a sense of place in a particular locality and present. All are the result of unique amalgamations of ideas, beliefs, technologies, materials and values. All will be unique responses to their particular natural and human environments and adapt over time. In this respect, to separate one category of architecture (vernacular, in this case) from another ('capital A', 'modern' or 'contemporary') makes no sense. It is the tendency on the part of a small group of academics and professionals to distinguish a small and select group of buildings from all others on the basis of one criterion (authorship) that gave rise to the concept of vernacular architecture. As long as this tendency persists in architectural and architectural history discourse, the vernacular concept remains a necessary and important, if ambiguous, contentious and challenged, tool to draw attention to all those other forms of architecture that make up the world's built heritage, but that are no deemed worthy of attention by a privileged few. It is only when the vernacular is no longer needed, that architectural history will be truly inclusive.

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Figures

Fig 1: Riparian settlement, Kampuchea, Cambodia. ©Paul Oliver, 2007.

Fig. 2: Suburban house, Toowoomba, Australia. © Marcel Vellinga, 2009.

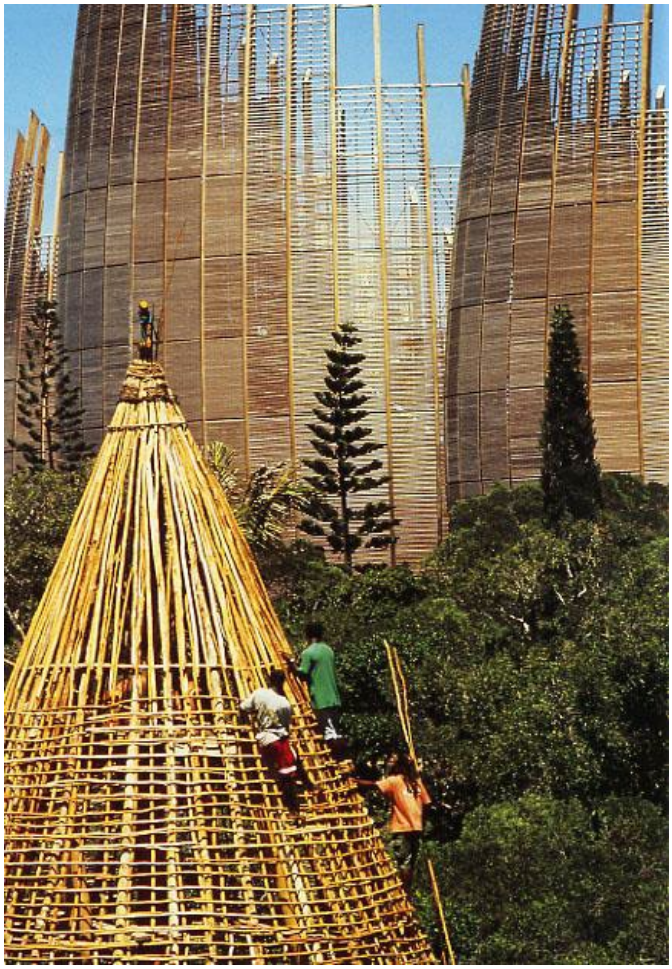

Fig. 3: Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre, by Renzo Piano, Nouméa, New Caledonia. © Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 1998.

Fig. 4: Historicist design, Stroud, Cotswolds, UK. © Marcel Vellinga, 2014.

Fig. 5: Abandoned and ruined vernacular architecture, Akcicek, northern Cyprus. © Marcel Vellinga, 2008.