This paper addresses the problem of interpreting the concepts of tradition and traditionalism with specific reference to the tradition of the Anatolian house and the recent erosion of place quality in Turkish towns. The Anatolian house provides a remarkable example of cultural diffusion and transformation. During the reign of the late Ottoman, a variety of cultures impinged on one another, giving rise to autochthonous traditions that were shared by different religious and ethnic groups. But during the Republican Period the process of Westernization interrupted the continuity of historic traditions, resulting in the emergence of a peculiar contemporary tradition. The majority of Turkish housing today displays characteristics of a "vernacular modernism" conditioned by the moral and technical orders of a market economy. The worldwide spread of such cultural mediocrity has often been attributed to the corrosive influence of a single world civilization. A number of recent attempts have been made to search for a national idiom in Turkey. But these attempts, often promoting a "vernacular historicism," have yet to account for any distinct revision of urban house-form.

Argument today revolves around an old rhetorical opposition between universal civilization and national culture. Should a post-traditional society sustain its cultural tradition to attain universal values, or vice-versa? The conservative in this debate is more involved in the revival than in the preservation of tradition. The progressive, though an ardent defender of preservation, resists revivalism because of its chauvinistic connotations and pastiche effects. This paper attempts to resolve this argument by suggesting a simultaneous unfolding of the historical problems of the Anatolian house tradition and the theoretical problems of presumed dichotomies such as "traditional vs. modern." Finally, the paper advocates the development of research strategies to facilitate correct readings of cultural tradition and design strategies to improve the quality of residential environments.

In Turkey, as elsewhere, local housing traditions have been undercut during the twentieth century by the rise of a single world civilization. This civilization has brought a mediocrity to architecture that has contributed to the loss of place quality of Turkish towns. In Turkey, as in other nations,
awareness is growing as to the erosive impact of this international culture, and steps have been taken to reassure the value of local traditions. But because these steps have resulted in little more than a dressing up of underlying structures, they have yet to bring any significant changes in house-form.

In intellectual circles, awareness of the problem of lost cultural identity and aesthetic decay has spawned two opposing schools of thought. But because both conservatives and progressives are locked in a historicist debate, they have failed to see the true nature of the problem. This is that the current predicament is the result of a fundamental disruption of cultural continuity.

This paper advocates a new approach, one characterized by an analysis of fundamental structures. On the one hand, these structures are the intellectual dichotomies that frame current cultural criticism. On the other, they are the actual building traditions that have been developed in the region. The paper advocates a questioning and redefinition of urban morphology. And it advocates a new, more radical, role for the architect — that of attempting to dissolve the boundaries between city planning and architecture.

THE PROBLEM OF "TRADITIONALITY"

At first glance, the topic of traditional dwellings and settlements suggests an interest only in strikingly quaint and exotic traditions that have somehow managed to survive the grind of modern times. Such suspicion is in keeping with mainstream cultural criticism which is permeated by a tendency to dichotomize cultural practices into opposing poles of "traditional" and "modern." "Tradition," in such a formulation, is equated with that which is ages-old and part of a static past. Traditions are objects of nostalgia and romantic preservation for their ability to remind us of what has been left behind in the march of progress. In this mode of thought the idea of tradition is characterized by an apparent historicity, one that, however, fails to include everything belonging to history. In architectural culture, for example, critics often focus only on the historic vernacular as the archetype of tradition, while the cultivated masterworks escape the domain of tradition entirely. Another popular dichotomy is, therefore, that between "vernacular" and "high-style," opposing works termed "popular," "folk," "anonymous," or "indigenous" to those regarded as "cultivated," "classic," or "institutionalized." Where the former dichotomy divides cultural history into pre-industrial and modern times, the latter is atemporal, including any historic or contemporary practice. One pertinent problem with the latter distinction, however, stems from the inherent difficulty of working with ideal types. Rapoport has pointed this out in reference to modern popular design, which does not fit the classificatory system comfortably. Modern popular design is sometimes regarded as a tradition in its own right and at other times as a vitiated product of consumer culture. The latter classification allows popular design to escape the domain of tradition, since traditionality is assumed to belong only to pre-modern times. The argument is often resolved by consulting the dictionary, where "tradition," in its most generic sense, is found to imply a handing down of beliefs and customs. It follows that only two generations of time are sufficient to earn a practice the most fundamental traits of a cultural tradition: that of being learned and that of being loaded with cultural meaning.

Such an inclusive scope to the notion of tradition embraces any practice that holds a precedent and that communicates underlying "moral and technical orders," as Redfield has named them. In this respect, the term "tradition" attains a relatively neutral sense, virtually encompassing "modern" as one of the adjectives it can attract. A tradition can be modern for its time, meaning that it can be distinguishable from what preceded it — though in the course of time it may lose its "modernness," as in the case of Neo-Classical terrace houses in Akaretler, Istanbul (FIG. 1). Conversely, a modern (meaning "contemporary") practice may turn into a recognizable tradition, as can effectively be seen in the case of commonplace apartment buildings that make up the majority of housing in present-day Turkish towns (FIG. 2).

These apartment buildings provide an interesting case. Despite their "non-traditional" looks, they constitute a distinct tradition for several reasons. First, they proliferate the variants of the same cliche types, and so hold a precedent. Second, they are expressive of speculative market imperatives that are geared toward profit-making and the mediocre level of skills and tastes of popular culture, and so communicate underlying moral and technical orders. On closer inspection, the buildings show some stylistic variations. While the urban elite follow the current fads and fashions of "high-style modernism" (FIG. 3), the anonymous builder has invented a "vernacular modernism" which has become almost indigenous to the conditions from which it...
springs (FIG. 4). The paradox is that this vernacular modernism is also a totally ubiquitous phenomenon, a product of what Ricoeur has termed the "single world civilization." Characterized by total indifference to regional characteristics, the products of a mediocre culture have spread all over the world, resulting in an irreparable loss in the identity of places. Increasingly, societies are becoming aware of the erosive influences of this international culture. In Islamic countries, the Aga Khan Award in Architecture has started a cultural program that has caused a rigorous search for cultural identity. But along with the remarkable endeavors under this lead has come a blind fascination with traditional forms, a trend that has grown in conformity with market imperatives. In Turkey it has become very fashionable to dress up buildings in traditional style. The high-style traditionalism of the urban elite can be recognized by quotations from the classical Ottoman idiom, or occasionally the classical Western idiom (FIG. 5). Meanwhile, the anonymous builder has created a vernacular tradition that indulges in an uncritical eclecticism (FIG. 6). The original intention, if there was one, may have been to revive national or regional traditions so as to rid architecture of the ubiquity of the international idiom. But the result has been a universal kitsch.

THE HISTORICIST DEBATE

Before proceeding with a critique of the apartment tradition, it is important to point out another crucial dichotomy of thought. Interwoven with the distinction between modernity and tradition has been an equally powerful distinction between the "universal" and the "national" (or the "international" and the "regional," as the case may be).

When Ricoeur spoke of the pressing necessity of taking part in universal civilization and cherishing national cultures, his use of the terms "universal" and "national" was virtually framed by the ideas of "modernity" and "traditionality." Ricoeur penetrated into one of the absolute dilemmas of modern societies, the crucial choice between free access to progress (often at the expense of cultural resources) and retreat to cultural sources (frequently at the risk of hindering progress). To avoid the unfavorable impacts of either extreme, many developing societies have had to address the following questions: "How do we become modern and return to sources; and how do we revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization?"

The questions above were raised during the first decades of the twentieth century, at a time when the Ottoman Empire was collapsing, by Ziya Gökalp, a Turkish nationalist.
FIG. 3. (top left) Apartment building in Ankara: "High-style Modernism."
FIG. 4. (middle left) Apartment building in Ankara: "Vernacular Modernism."
FIG. 5. (below) Apartment building in Istanbul: "High-style Traditionalism." Photo: Türkan Turuhan.
FIG. 6. (bottom left) Apartment building in Istanbul. Photo: Murat Balamir.
Dwelling on the distinction between universal civilization and national cultures, Gokalp formulated a temperate strategy for the newly emerging Turkish nation: to adopt the scientific and technical civilization of the West while reviving the dormant culture of folk tradition to replace the heterogeneous culture of the Ottomans.

Gokalp’s views have been a source of dispute, and have been greatly abused in both conservatives and progressive circles. Trapped within a problematique of tradition vs. modernity and national vs. universal, the unresolved dispute has reached into the present. For the conservative, universalism means the destruction of national and spiritual values. For the progressive, it is precisely the emphasis on national and spiritual values which carries reactionary, if not chauvinistic and fundamentalistic, overtones. The conservative holds that commitment to tradition is essential for the survival of a nation. To get on the road to universal civilization, a society should not merely imitate the West, but should also depend on its own culture. To support this view, the conservative dwells on the examples of Ottoman and Japanese society, both of which are assumed to have cherished cultural traditions out of which universal values grew. On the other hand, the progressive holds that an obsession with the cultural past brings about a reluctance to undergo the radical changes that the idea of progress may require. He maintains that the job of catching up with Western civilization is a prerequisite to survival.

Both arguments emphasize political agendas that eventually reflect on cultural policies which affect the built environment. Today’s dominant conservative rule in Turkey seems to promote a revivalist program, illustrated in a 1984 seminar entitled “Turkish National Style in Architecture.” The seminar witnessed the confrontation of the conservative and progressive camps. Despite common discontent with the predicament of lost cultural identity and the aesthetic decay of the townscape, the solutions for recovery were, at any rate, incongruent.

Defenders of revivalism see style as a powerful tool to restore lost cultural identity and maintain national unity. Viewing cultural pollution as an aftereffect of pluralism, Cansever emphasized the “false freedom” and “delusive universality” of Modern Architecture. Central to this argument is the elevation of traditional Turkish architecture to universal status, attributing to it a timeless quality — especially when compared to the International Style, which is regarded as entirely temporary or transient. The opposing view maintains a commitment to modernist ideals, rejecting any form of revivalism. Regarding the idea of style as only marginal to the concerns of architecture, Kuban expressed his anxiety over the inhibiting and regressive nature of imposing any style. He defended pluralist democracy, which requires tolerance for cultural variety, even its own polluted products. Central to this argument is the critical question of whether one can identify a typical “Turkish house” given the complexity and variety of house traditions throughout Anatolia.

What the seminar clearly revealed was the discursive nature of most of the debate. Terms like “national-universal” and “regional-international” were in turn loaded with and emptied of value. On the one hand, there is a need to distinguish between what is international and that which is universal; advocates of modernity and progress have often failed to address those values which endure through time and space. On the other, the national legitimation of a traditional housing type representing the Turkish nation is equally confusing. To resolve the argument, one needs to unfold the history of house traditions under the Ottoman reign.

THE ANATOLIAN HOUSE TRADITION

The Ottoman Empire was not a nation in the modern sense of the word. It was not characterized by a unified culture, but rather contained within it a mosaic of cultures with different religious and ethnic origins. There is a strong bias to separate out at least two families of houses, those belonging to Anatolian Turks and Greeks, which received their distinct physiognomies from timber and stone construction, respectively (FIGS. 7,8). However, this classification is not consistent throughout the region. Where two different groups had ample contact, house traditions of one culture often served as the model for the other. Thus we come across similar house-forms shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jewish groups, where the distinguishing nuances are often in details and ornaments (FIGS. 9-11). Conversely, changes in house-form can be observed in some cases within only several miles within a single religious or ethnic group.

In short, the adoption of house-form has often occurred based on appropriateness to circumstances rather than aspiration for religious or ethnic identity. Clearly, all this
variety, be it collected under the title “Anatolian” or “Ottoman,” does not allow for an ethnicity-based justification for a Turkish house. And yet a timeless quality does underlie it all, one that exceeds religious, ethnic or regional peculiarities. If there is a lesson to be derived from Anatolian traditions, it is that identity arises from circumstance, out of physical and cultural situation.

Quite to the contrary, the search for identity today takes place elsewhere. While the conservative locates cultural identity in an uncontaminated past, i.e., in an architecture that descends from an origin for the Turkish house, the progressive locates cultural identity in an emancipatory future, i.e., in an architecture that reflects progress and instrumental rationality. Unable to cope with the present predicament, many intellectuals remain within an historicist vision, whereby history proceeds on a continuum extending from an origin to a telos. But at the core of the present predicament rests an irretrievable disruption of cultural continuity.

While the apartment tradition is replacing historic regional traditions at an incredible speed, such irreversible disruption eludes most current debate which remains trapped within a problematique of tradition vs. modernity. Whether an apartment building has a distinctly modern look or whether it contains traditional allusions ultimately does not matter much. Both are only representations, of modernity on one hand and traditionality on the other. The superficiality of both attitudes is manifest in their typological poverty. Being variations on a few, poorly designed plan-types, none can account for any distinct revisions of urban- or house-form.

Insensitivity in the design of buildings and apartments is to a great extent induced by building codes and regulations that leave very little room for initiative by the talented designer. The current laws regulating apartment ownership have played a decisive role in disrupting cultural continuity. Not only is the coherence of the house as the locus of extended family life fragmented into separate ownerships, but the coherence of the urban morphology is also broken. Unlike the historic examples where the ordered sequence of public and private outdoor spaces resulted in an urban ensemble, these apartment buildings are isolated objects on individual lots. Under current ownership and property
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Among recent approaches that have promoted contextual sensibilities, the strategy of “critical regionalism” has received much credit. In an often quoted passage, Kenneth Frampton has defined “an architecture which distances itself quite equally from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to the architectonic forms of the pre-industrial past.”13 Resisting both an obsession with optimized technology and a nostalgic historicism, this design strategy includes a paraphrasing of traditions, with particular emphasis on the characteristics of places. We prefer to use the term “paraphrase,” because it suggests a free rendering and amplification of architectural motifs such that the essence of an original source is maintained while the vocabulary and expression are new. Among remarkable examples of this type of design one can note housing experiments in Paris, where the basic morphology of the urban block has been rendered in a new sensibility. Despite their innovative techniques and post-modern looks, the quality of place in the Parisian apartment tradition has not been destroyed. A similar attitude can be observed in the apartment houses designed by Paul Bonatz in Ankara during the early Republican Period (FIG. 72). The district created by these houses carries influences from Anatolian house traditions.

If a paraphrase of Anatolian house traditions is to be accepted as a strategy, one needs to discover what gives Anatolian towns their quality of place. This quality resides primarily in the contained outdoor spaces that are defined, ordered and scaled by houses. From the street, the Anatolian tradition allows for the impression of a row-house order, when, in fact, the houses are detached, linked to one another only by garden walls. At ground level, one feels the palpable presence of an urban wall which defines the street and conforms to its irregularities. The upper floors, however, attain planimetric regularity with the help of projections. Here the continuity of the wall is broken, and the buildings turn instead into a rhythmic flow of projections that give scale and character to the street and provide maximum light and view for indoor spaces. The continuous wall serves as an interface between the public street and the private courtyard into which open semi-enclosed verandas. Abstractly speaking, the wall acts as an interface between urban form and house-form. Its physiognomy and

FIG. 7. Traditional timber house in Mudanya, Bursa. Photo: Nimet Özgünül.
FIG. 9. Traditional (Turkish) house in Göynük, Bolu.
FIG. 10. Traditional (Greek) house in Sirince, İzmir. Photo: Gül Asatekin.
FIG. 11. Traditional (Jewish) house in Ankara.
Tectonic features vary with changing regional conditions, but its role remains fairly constant (FIGS. 13-15).

The potential of this traditional order has not been fully explored in contemporary housing layouts. Instead of focusing on the revival of various styles of picturesque traditional detail, current design efforts should try to question and redefine urban morphology. The more radical role of the architect should be to attempt to dissolve the boundaries between city planning and architecture. Where debate has shifted to the content of architecture, architecture cannot expect to be more than a play between “Turkish” and “Western” looks. The search must be for good architecture, and (as has long been the case with Anatolian tradition) good qualities can come from near or far.

We would like to conclude with a saying from Bruno Taut. “All national architecture is not good, but all good architecture is national.” Would it be unfair also to say that “all universal architecture is not necessarily good, but all good architecture is timeless and placeless.”
REFERENCE NOTES

We would like to thank Sibel Sozdogan for her contribution to an earlier draft. In addition to offering her comments on the content of the paper, she has helped us with the phrasing of many ideas.


6. In *Keywords*, Williams gives an historical account of the controversy. To summarize briefly: “civilization,” having been behind the general spirit of the Enlightenment, has the associated sense of an achieved condition of refinement and order. “Culture,” on the other hand, has behind it the Romantic reaction against the inhumane and mechanical character of the new civilization then emerging. While civilization has come to emphasize a universal state, culture confined itself to characteristics of folk cultures. The distinction assumes a sharp contrast between the symbolic production of mankind and material production, which is primarily identified by technical achievement. Modern anthropology sees neither contradiction nor qualitative difference between culture and civilization; see R.L. Beals and H. Hoijer, *An Introduction to Anthropology* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1973).

7. Ricoeur, “Universal Civilization,” p.227. 8. Here the labels “conservative” and “progressive” are used at the expense of being categoric. They are used at the expense of being categoric. The politically conservative groups are not entirely opposed to progress, and, quite ironically, are less concerned with the preservation of traditions than are the progressives. It is often the progressives who take the lead in movements to preserve cultural heritage. Since both groups are essentially involved in historical thinking about relationships between the past and the future, both may be defined as “histori-...” and “radical historicist” are widely used labels today. See S.J. Maldenbaum, “Historians and Planners: The Construction of Pasts and Futures,” *APA Journal* Spring 1985, pp. 185-188.


12. For further information on the process of ownership fragmentation in Turkish urbanization, see M. Balamir, “Kat Müllkiyeti ve Kentleşmeniz,” *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* Vol. 1 no. 2 (1975), pp. 295-317.


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