Conference Report:
IASTE 1996 and the State of the Field

The IASTE 1996 conference was predicated on the proposition that traditional dwellings are being irrevocably changed due to larger globalization processes that include the growth of expatriate migrant populations, the rise of ethnic nationalisms, and the internationalization of labor and capital. The conference included a number of keynote and plenary sessions which ranged from discussion of issues of identity, culture, globalization, and their reflection in the built environment to examinations of the general study of traditional environments and the problems and prospects of the field. As a form of epilogue to the conference, we invited some of the plenary discussants to reflect on these issues.

Economist Michael Cohen, reporting on the role of heritage in the current global system, draws attention to the urban convergence phenomenon and the emergence of a virtual city. In calling for his “city of virtue,” he reminds us of the terrestrial city: a city of inequalities rooted not only in socio-cultural constraints, but also in opportunities. Don Krueckebere, a planning expert, analyzes the themes of the conference in light of larger structures of global power. Using both the balancing corrective vectors and values proposed by Cohen and the local policy recommendations of Manuel Castells, he calls for a program that is part of a larger social objective. Sociologist and art historian Anthony King provides a critique of the politics — and the absence of it — in traditional environments research, and points to the possibility of an intellectual hegemony situated principally within a “neo-colonial,” “U.S.-based” discourse. Finally, anthropologist Nelson Graburn calls our attention to the role of intellectuals, the effect of global migration and “brain drain,” and the possibilities of local resistances to homogenizing trends. While he reminds us that the strength of IASTE may lie in its multiplicity of approaches and theoretical openness, he calls for a retrospective examination of the ideological and methodological framework for our studies.

These four commentators provide a clear reminder of the debates in IASTE’96 and set the stage for IASTE’98.

— Nezar AlSayyad
FROM THE VIRTUAL CITY TO THE CITY OF VIRTUE: FROM STOCK/FLOW TO HERITAGE AND VALUES

MICHAEL COHEN

One of the most challenging impacts of globalization on urban phenomena has been recently reflected in the growing popular interest on what has been termed "the virtual city". The combination of communications and information technology, the growth of financial markets and flows, their consequent impact on local patterns of production, employment, and investment, and the emergence of "spacelessness" have all led to the perception that there is a "virtual" city, in contrast to a "real" city.

The suggested features of this virtual city can be grouped according to their origins as well as their manifestations in social reality. The first has been captured by Manuel Castells in his reference to "the city of flows," where the movement of goods, services, capital, people, information and knowledge are seen as defining new patterns of urban behavior and spatial location. He forecast that new forms of human settlements would evolve in response to the incentives generated by these flows. A critical aspect of this city of flows would be the connectivity implied between the city and the global world outside.

Ten years after the publication of Castells' work, these flows are reflected in the proliferation and growing importance of information technology as an instrument to monitor and generate these flows. The advent of cellular phones and pagers, adding to the mobility of the lap-top computer, and their relatively inexpensive diffusion in cities throughout the world, regardless of income level, further enhances the impression that we are witnessing the globalization of culture and technology, a process characterized by speed of change and mobility. The primary stages for this drama are cities.

A second feature of the virtual city is the difficulty in identifying the roots by which the flows are anchored in specific places and locations. If my address is no longer rooted in a place, is it real or virtual? How is access defined? And, more importantly, are spatial relations still relevant to a world of flows? In effect, does place matter? At a time when at least a dozen recently published books have asserted the enduring importance of place, it is striking that a new urban discourse has arrived which implicitly asserts that place is no longer relevant.

These questions imply a third feature of the virtual city, as Saskia Sassen has suggested, a new geography of centers and peripheries which are less dependent on physical locations than on their "virtual importance" within the patterns of flows. Her use of the term "global cities" might seem somewhat exclusive in that she only applies it to a few centers such as New York, Tokyo and London, while placing such other major phenomena as Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Singapore and Hong Kong in a subordinate category. But she correctly focuses our attention on the question of importance or centrality in the world of flows.

Sassen takes this analysis much further, however, when she brilliantly describes how patterns of production, employment, and economic organization all adapt to new global circumstances. These processes transform local patterns, while adapting and adjusting themselves in order to bring local resources and capacities into global processes and markets. The consequent homogenization of consumption is reflected not only in McDonald's restaurants, but also in the hundreds of now-international brands that are replacing local products and industries. As I walk through a mall, am I in Barcelona, Boston, Bangkok or Buenos Aires? What is the importance of differentiating factors? And to whom do they matter?

In contrast to this brief description of the virtual city, delinked from place, culture, social structure, and natural environment, half the world's population faces another urban reality which reflects the growing concentration of the world's population in specific locations, in growing levels of interdependence, environmental deterioration, infrastructure decay, unemployment, and social and economic distress. This daily reality (with each week sees the addition of 1.5 million people - equivalent to a Hanoi or a Pittsburgh) is not at all virtual, but rather immediate - just outside our front door in cities in all regions of the world. Indeed, it even suggests what I have elsewhere referred to as "the hypothesis of urban convergence," arguing that cities in the north and south now share their most salient features, in contrast to the great differences of two decades ago.

FROM THE VIRTUAL TO THE TERRESTRIAL CITY

This reality is the new urban landscape, which William Morrish and Catherine Brown have called "the terrestrial city"; and it is very much rooted in specific places, communities, and socio-cultural constraints and opportunities. The homeless men waiting for soup and sandwiches on Pennsylvania Avenue in...
Washington, D.C., one block from the White House and across the street from the World Bank, have no illusions that their reality is anything but down-to-earth and immediate. It is not virtual; rather, their lining up for food is a matter of survival. It is also the reality of inhabitants of the neighborhoods of Abidjan or Nairobi, for whom the problem of mobility, of transport to work, occupies a critical place in the way they organize their lives. Similarly, it is the reality of women waiting their turn for water at standpipes in Calcutta or Karachi. If the most important asset of an individual is his or her time, these choices are in fact existential. It is no longer a matter of Cartesian luxuries such as “I think therefore I am,” but rather of “I make my way through the terrestrial world therefore I am,” and if I don’t, I cease to exist in an economic or social sense.

This terrestrial city is not, however, just the stage for the drama of daily lives, but also the location for the resolution of the moral dilemmas of political and social responsibility. As Richard Sennett has commented, the Greeks believed that human conscience resided in the eyes: it is only when we see reality that our conscience is provoked. Seeing the data on computer monitors will not stimulate either social conscience or social responsibility.

The question which arises from this tension between the virtual and terrestrial city is how to identify the moral bases of urban life. What is social responsibility? What constitutes good institutional as well as individual performance, whether in housing or environmental management? What are the moral guides by which we can find both the most efficient and socially just path to follow in specific circumstances? Where can we look for such guidance for responsible urban citizenship?

William Morrish poses this dilemma by arguing that the “virtuous city” has reconciled the virtual and the terrestrial city, finding a balance between the past and contemporary perspectives on the resolution of problems. This balance reflects the desire of members of the community to make the past also present in the current debates and decisions.

LOOKING TO THE PAST TO FIND A PATH TO THE FUTURE

I believe that one of the primary sources of guidance in determining a normative view of the city may be heritage, the origins and patrimony of human settlements. While frequently perceived as a specialist subject within the range of pressing immediate urban concerns — falling into categories of preservation, restoration and management — the subject of heritage in fact deserves a much more central place in urban policy frameworks. I would assert this importance is not just historical, but rather economic, social, cultural, and indeed political and ultimately moral in defining good practice. Heritage refers to a constant debate of who we are and what we have done. This does not imply that all inheritances are either just or liberating; indeed, they frequently reflect past histories of injustice and oppression. But, as some popular singers say of love, “it is all we got.”

Taking this view into the economic realm suggests some interesting insights. Early 1990s estimates of the value of the stock of shelter and infrastructure in developing-country cities are about US$3 trillion, with annual investment on the order of US$350 billion, of which the external share is US$7 billion. Even if these numbers are incorrect by an order of magnitude, they nevertheless suggest that the stock of assets is much more important than the investment flows involved in creating new assets. If societies are seeking to increase the productivity of land, labor and capital as the basis of economic growth, it is clear that a 5 percent increase in the benefits coming from this enormous stock is equivalent to the whole annual flow. This perspective suggests the great importance of managing existing stocks more efficiently, protecting them against deterioration, and, indeed, looking for new ways to leverage their enormous value to create new value.

It is possible to substitute the word heritage for stock in this argument and to apply it to infrastructural or environmental heritage as well. This would lead to the conclusion that improved maintenance of existing heritage (also the stock of past investments) requires renewed urgent attention in many cities. Maintenance and rehabilitation is needed to assure current levels of performance as well as the benefits it provides for future generations. If this perspective is applied to social and cultural heritage, it also suggests the imperative to value such assets as part of any strategy for the future.

The importance of heritage does not, however, reside totally in its preponderant weight on the landscape, but also in its value content. Heritage reflects past choices — some successful, others not — and represents the best evidence we have of which choices were able to achieve their intended objectives. As such, heritage provides an invaluable guide to the limits and potential of human action. As suggested earlier, virtuous
behavior involves this balancing between appreciating the lessons of history and acknowledging the new circumstances and demands of the present.

But to take advantage of this heritage first requires memory: memory of the choices taken, of their implementation, and their consequences. And accurate memory implies rigorous attention to uncovering history, both objective and subjective. It may ultimately not matter what happened, but rather how we remember it and feel about it. As some historians have suggested, learning to “read the past” is required to understand what is happening today. This process also offers the opportunity for understanding the difficult relationship between intention and consequence. If we appreciate the past, then we are more likely to be able to value the heritage surrounding us, understanding that it has profoundly conditioned our choices and preferences about the present and those to be made in the future.

This valuing process is in turn a prerequisite for being able to “take care” of that heritage which is so valuable in economic, social and cultural terms. If we are unable to take care of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Egyptian Museum, or the Zocalo in Mexico City, how are we to make important choices for the future: about transport strategy in New York City, cultural education and tourism in Egypt, or urban social and religious life in Mexico? Yet the disappearance of any of these three world-class monuments to the human experience would constitute irreparable damage to the world’s patrimony.

While the valuing of heritage is not the only ingredient supporting a city of virtue, it is one important component. Understanding our past choices and their consequences may be our best compass for future choices. This is essentially a model of reflection and learning, as suggested by Don Schon in his important book *The Reflective Practitioner,* which asks how professionals reflect on their work. Schon’s insistence on the importance of “setting the problem,” of having a “reflective conversation with the situation,” is essential advice for this process.

Insistence on moral self-examination does not have to be a new form of cultural imperialism applied to urban management. Rather, it simply poses the question elegantly suggested by Margarita Gutman in Buenos Aires: “If we knew more about the past, would we do anything different in the future?” This is a strategic and existential question which applies to more than just the management of cities.

Finally, making the journey from the virtual city to a search for the city of virtue is ultimately a quest for social and political responsibility. Its Aristotelian tone is appropriately serious because observers of urban realities at the end of the century rarely refer to such provocative terms such as social and political responsibility. Instead, they retreat to technocratic visions of "effective urban management" or "sustainable urban development," which mask the fundamental importance of sound moral and ethical bases for policy and action in the construction of urban society. This journey of inquiry is not necessarily linear; multiple round-trip tickets may be required. But it is certain to earn many frequent-flyer miles.

**REFERENCE NOTES**

I am indebted to William Morrish, Margarita Gutman, and Thomas Reese for their contributions to my thinking on the issues raised by this essay.


*Michael Cohen is Senior Advisor to the Vice President for Sustainable Development of the World Bank, Washington, D.C.*
When I think of my task today, I imagine 128 musicians, each playing his or her own instrument and composition, for twenty minutes or more, over the course of four days, often playing simultaneously, in one of three separate rooms. At the end of the four days the maestro, Nezar AlSayyad, and the concert master, Jean Paul Bourdier, introduce us—four musicologists—each of whom is asked: “What did you hear?” The answer we all want to give, I think, is that we heard a great symphony. I cannot honestly say that I heard a great symphony. But I do feel that we have heard, particularly in some of the plenary addresses and discussions, some structural themes that might serve to organize all the other tooting, screeching and drumming of the last four days. Let me try to sketch that now.

In her welcoming remarks Saturday morning, as part of a longer quotation from Donlyn Lyndon, Provost and Vice Chancellor Carol Christ gave us a wonderful image of place: “Places form an armature for the imagination.” It is clear from various commentaries and direct observation over the last four days that what we need is an armature, a structure onto which the plastic material of our studies and presentations can be attached to give an articulated form to this enterprise.

Toward this end I found Ali Mazrui’s typology of three cultures very stimulating and helpful. He constructed these cultures based on their valuation of time: there being cultures which are nostalgic, presentist and anticipatory. I have drawn a schematic diagram for each of these three ideas, which I think reveals some interesting relationships (FIG.1).

In the culture of nostalgia, the past, at the bottom of the pyramid figure, is valued much, portrayed by the wide base, and the value of place in time diminishes systematically and consistently through the present to the future. Presentism, Mazrui suggested, devalues both the past and the future—hence its shape is that of a diamond, its greatest width and value being in the middle present. Finally, anticipatory culture values time in the inverse of the nostalgic culture. It values the future most, the present less, and its shape is that of an inverted pyramid. Two things immediately jump out from this analysis: 1) nostalgic culture and presentist culture share a common devaluation of the future; and 2) presentism and anticipatory culture share a common depreciation of the past. These observations suggest that these three notions are not entirely oppositional ideas.

Mazrui went on to suggest that the model of presentism represented capitalism. But I would temper this account slightly, and point out that it represents only half the idea of capitalism. “Capitalism,” Mazrui said, “believes in progress but behaves in presentism.” In fact, capitalism believes and behaves in both. The reason is capital markets discount the future at a certain rate. For instance, when you put your savings in a bank, this discounting is reflected in the interest rate which determines that, at 5 percent, $100 deposited today is worth $105 one year from today. Or, to say the same thing in reverse, the future value of $105 is discounted to a present value of $100. Your bank is willing to give you the 5 percent interest because they believe they can turn around and lend your $100 at a higher rate of return and make a profit. Capitalism actually values the future in these ways, making money, for example, off the differences in the present value of capital to different people in different places.

If you find this kind of geometric analysis interesting, you have probably jumped ahead of me to see that there are other possible configurations of this evaluation. For example, the true opposite of presentism would combine nostalgic evaluation of the past with the anticipatory evaluation of the future. Thus, using a second pair of diagrams, it is possible to represent presentism and its new hybrid opposite, which for a lack of a better term I will call the devaluation of the present (FIG. 2). Below each of these diagrams I have written two possible, more familiar, alternative names: the all-important “imperialism” of the present; and the all-unimportant “dependency” of the present—dependent on the authority of the past and sacrificed to the valuable future.

I want to make two points about this latter pair of diagrams and the systems they represent. First, the two are interactive in real life. Society and the economy differentially and simultaneously are nostalgic about some places (some parks and forests, some shrines and monuments, some neighborhoods and property), and devalue some others (railroads, old central business districts, some public schools, some neighborhoods and property); and they similarly value some futures highly while devaluing others. Political, social and economic processes are a mix of nostalgic, presentist and anticipatory...
behaviors. Second, the resonance of imperialism and dependency suggests that this mix is not a homogenous blend, but that patterns are observable. This particular pair of linked patterns is exactly what Saskia Sassen was talking about when she titled her presentation “Whose City Is It?” This is a spatial contest.

Sassen captured these two valuation schemes in a horizontal differentiation between the spaces of the global city (marked as forward looking), and the spaces of the working class and immigrant communities (marked as backward looking). I have tried to combine Mazrui’s vertical concept of time with Sassen’s characterization of the horizontal differentiation of space/culture/valuation in a third diagram (FIG. 3). Sassen emphasized the interdependency of these two sectors in reality, but they are also dualistic in the sense that different valuations are put on them which overestimate their importance in the one case and underestimate it in the other. Hence you may recall how she characterized the linkage of these two groups in the policies of cost-cutting: deregulation as a kind of formal-economy cost-cutting on the one hand, resulting in the transfer of government functions from the public to the private sector; and
the cost savings of informal economies on the other hand, also resulting in the transfer of government functions from the public to the private informal sector.

It seems to me there are two ways to project the playing out of this contest. The first, also shown in Figure 3, involves the simple perpetuation of current inequalities and the dominant mythology that supports it. That mythology, in a nutshell, is that unfettered market capitalism is natural, efficient, and historically successful. Hence, this valued “past” is the source of future values in the global economy. The other crude and pernicious myth involved in this scenario is that the backward workers and the backward immigrants have always been with us, and it will always be that way.

The alternative is what we make it. The difference between the perpetuation of these myths and their false values and the values we espouse is us. I have tried to capture this alternative in the balancing corrective vectors of my last diagram (FIG. 4).

One of the balancing vectors is historical (about the past); the other is projective (about the future). Thus, on the right side I have listed the corrective values proposed by Michael Cohen: less inequality, social responsibility, access to education, friends, tolerance, struggle and negotiation, and environment and infrastructure. And I have listed the local policy recommendations of Manuel Castells: building technological infrastructure, economic development policy promoting global linkages, legitimizing local government through democracy and transparency, reconstructing the meaning of space and forms, and counter-cultural global network building.

I do not want to dwell on the difference between the analyses of Sassen and Castells. What is important to me is what they share: a view that national governments are the losers to global power, and that the origins of struggles between the global and those it devalues are rooted in local spaces and spaces.

I believe these ideas affirm Paul Oliver’s admonition that we should be part of a program, a social objective, a mission. That notion is absolutely integral to the theoretical constructs that Mazrui, Sassen, and Castells offer. But I must also agree with Tony King that Oliver is wrong when he says that it is the job of academics to “understand” and of politicians to “change things.” King is right when he reminds us that all knowledge, which is our product, is politically constructed. This is overwhelmingly so in the case of historical work, into which most of our efforts fall. The choice of problems, the choice of sites, and the choices of data at those sites are all political: that is, reflective of some purposive end that affects the future of resources and lives.

This is why I simply cannot believe my ears when I hear our distinguished mentor Amos Rapoport say that he “has no interest in changing the world,” and that “until we understand the world properly we cannot change it properly.” Rapoport says that our scholarship lacks theoretical unity, agreement on meanings, and cumulative knowledge. He is absolutely right. And he says that he read through the programs and proceedings of all previous conferences and cannot remember a thing about them. Yet, if we have learned anything from postmodernism, it is that the perception of important meanings has as much to do with the purposes of the reader as it does with the substance of the text. I say that given the consciousness of a political purpose in our work, there is theory here to which we can attach and to which we can contribute, and we must.

Rapoport says he is not interested in changing the world, but he is. He wants to improve our work, and that is about as political as one can get. That is personal; he wants to change us. He wants to hear some music. So do I.
THE POLITICS OF "TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS"

ANTHONY KING

As a theoretician, rather than an architectural practitioner or educator, I see my role here principally as a gadfly. I shall offer a critique of the general research direction of some of the papers, and ask the question: where are the politics in the study of "traditional environments?" I shall put this question in regard to two or three issues.

A Brazilian friend told me recently that the intellectual debate on globalization, ongoing for almost a decade among Anglo-Saxon sociologists, had not taken off in Brazil; not, that is, until April this year when the U.N. sponsored a conference on "Culture, Globalization, and Identity." In this way, the process of globalization constructs itself in its own image. A topic like ours — "Identity, Tradition, and Built Form" — is paradigmatically an outcome of globalization, insofar that the contemporary concern with civilizational and societal (as well as ethnic) uniqueness, expressed via such motifs as identity, tradition and indigenization, rests on globally produced ideas. To cite Roland Robertson: "In a world hyperconscious of societal and civilizational interdependence, there is an exacerbation of civilizational, societal and ethnic self-consciousness." The question is, however, whether this contemporary obsession with identity is really the most important issue with which we should be dealing. I shall return to this question.

It is clear from the subtitle of this conference — "The Role of Culture in Development and Planning" — that, while the participants may come from a variety of disciplines, the real target audience consists of the environmental professions, not the least that of architecture. And if the focus is to be on the role of culture, I would suggest that it is the increasingly individualistic, and imperialistic, role of architectural culture that should be the central object of discussion. For it is architecture as a universal identity, as well as tradition, which (together with other processes) is increasingly the most instrumental factor in shaping (especially urban) built forms around the world.

There can be few other professional cultures that, with its clone-like national and international journals, associations and conferences, as well as practices and commitments, project such as globally uniform identity as that of the architect. Of course, much of the uniformity of architecture's urban product is increasingly
pre-given. On the one hand, this is a consequence of increasingly similar technologies, materials, work methods, ideologies, and clients; on the other, it stems from the increasingly similar economic, social and political formations for which architects design. The monarchical court societies, fascist dictatorships, or socialist republics of the past have been replaced by the national and transnational imperatives of an increasingly universal, multinational consumer capitalism, more powerful than the nation state.

I am speaking here of the way in which specific design and stylistic paradigms — classicism, modernism, postmodernism, neo-vernacularism, Islamic revivalism — miraculously appear in the service of various regimes all around the world. What I refer to is the most basic and strikingly noticeable difference in the built environment: that between the self-consciously architecturally designed, and the unself-conscious construction of an "ordinary building." In this context, the notion of paying attention to "cultures" (i.e., somehow local, place-related essences) becomes both secondary and subordinated to the greater, and more powerful "Culture" associated with what, in fact, is a transnational architectural identity. From being a natural, unself-conscious attribute, a symbolic system of self-representation, "culture" is turned, in a Baudrillardian sense, into a consumer sign. If what I am saying is correct, we are all implicated.

The assumption that culture has to be related to place/space has become increasingly problematic. There are innumerable globalized, placeless cultures that are placed around the world, even though we would all acknowledge that the way these are received, consumed, indigenized, and invested with local meaning may be different in each individual instance. It is equally the case that cultures exist far from their points of origin. In this context, the notion of a region (understood as a spatial, or geographical, entity) having a particular culture (understood as a social phenomenon with particular physical, visual, material or other characteristics) is equally problematic. If 60 percent of the permanent inhabitants of the Spanish island of Majorca are now German, what is the nature of its culture?

I have similar misgivings about the ambiguous notion of "tradition." For most of this century, the traditional architectural culture of Manhattan, and the essence of its identity, has been represented by the skyscraper. Because of the decaying state of the older, more "traditional" of these buildings, a high-powered body has recently been established to examine their distinctive construction methods and materials to see how they can be preserved. Everyone has traditions, though as Paul Ricoeur once said, as soon as traditionalism becomes self-conscious, it is no longer truly traditionalism. With what criteria is "the traditional" identified? It still worries me, as it has since IASTE was founded, that "traditional dwellings and settlements" are still being interpreted by some as belonging to "the other," typically associated with the so-called non-Western world. (Of the some 145 papers to be presented at this conference, about half originating from the U.S.A. — though not necessarily all written by Americans — some 75 percent fall into this category; and even those that address populations and environments in "the West" largely focus on so-called "ethnic minorities.") The West, it seems, has no tradition, except that of attributing it to "the other." Are we allowed to address other traditions in other places, such as socialist planning in Cuba, public housing in Sweden, or the new skyscraper tradition currently being introduced in China?

Does this distinctive geographical distribution of the paper topics mean that this is simply a neo-colonial discourse, with the U.S.A. as a basis (and base) from which to continue, though in a different guise and through different agencies, cultural hegemony over the (literally) non-Western world (knowing, of course, that "capitalism works through difference")? Or is it, on the contrary, the work of a scholarly group of closet socialists determined (under an apparently neutral label) to stem the penetration of market forces to parts of the world they have not yet reached? Or alternatively, of a right-wing, reactionary movement intent on keeping "traditional environments," and their inhabitants, in place for the benefits of global tourism? Who is setting the agenda for the study of "traditional environments" and for what reasons?

What is being done to address the vastly increasing disparities of wealth, both between the different countries of the world, and within different nation states? Where are the politics in the study of traditional environments? I think it is time they were addressed.

Anthony King is a Professor of Art History at Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY.
This article includes some observations on papers delivered at the 1996 IASTE conference in Berkeley, focusing on the cultural construction of concepts such as “tradition,” with which we think about reality.

I am a socio-cultural anthropologist with a number of personal and professional connections to the study of vernacular architecture and traditional environments. Although I studied Western architectural history as a teenager in England, both for fun and in preparation for my entrance exams to Cambridge University, my interest in the wider field was particularly stimulated by the recent work of two fellow anthropologists. In addition, my professional interest has been engaged by my research in the anthropology of tourism over the past two decades, particularly concerning Japanese domestic tourism.

The activity of tourism bears a paradoxical relationship to architecture. Both architecture and tourism as we know them today are run by trained professionals — architects on the one hand and travel agents and tour guides on the other. However, the “pre-modern” forms of architecture — architecture without architects (important subject matter for IASTE) — can only be paralleled in part by pre-modern forms of travel such as pilgrimage and warfare, both of which were usually led by specialists from religious and military institutions. Without such leaders, pre-moderns rarely traveled outside their home areas, though they did, of course, practice vernacular architecture in constructing their dwellings and modifying their environments.

In today’s world, middle-class travelers gain prestige and serendipitous pleasures by being independent and not using professional travel agents and guides when they are tourists — though they often use guidebooks not only for practical matters but for understanding the natural, historical and cultural environments they visit. The more hedonist “mass” tourists, on the other hand, make maximum use of professionals for arrangements, transportation, and tour guides. The parallels with architecture are again anomalous. Few middle-class Westerners build their own houses (though it is perhaps prestigious to do so, with the aid of guidebooks, like middle-class tourists), but they gain prestige and pleasure from employing well-known architects, specialized contractors, and interior and landscape designers. Meanwhile, the less wealthy “working classes” rely mostly on mass-produced housing forms, much as they rely on mass tourism packages. Within this schema, an architect building his or her own house is a bit like a travel agent going on tour by him- or herself!

RETRIEVE COMMENTS

In a number of papers at the 1996 IASTE conference speakers were vague or imprecise in their usage of “we” and “they,” making assumptions about the identity of the analysts and the objects of their gaze, or losing information which might have added to their conclusions. For instance, both Castells and Sassen addressed the topic of global urbanization and discussed the global flows of migrants, characterizing such migrants generally as laborers from backward areas supplying fodder for post-modern economic growth. I think it is equally important to stress the migration of professionals, often known as the “brain drain,” in factoring the importance of such global flows and differential growths. (Such an insight may have been particularly obvious at a conference at which many of the participants exemplified the trend.) Furthermore, the movements of the “working class” immigrants, the “they” of one generation, may well raise a generation of intellectuals, the “we” in the next, exemplified possibly by other participants at the conference such as Rabinow or Sassen. And this migrant part of the “we” may form the backbone of the network of cosmopolitan critics of the global flows called for by both Rabinow and Castells.

Castells also talked positively of the possibility of local resistances to global uniformity emerging from particular geographical populations. I should point out the danger that it is precisely this mobile network of critics who may very well co-opt the specific forms of local resistance and exercise more global and intellectually oriented forms of resistance. A parallel suggests itself with the intellectuals of the nineteenth century who co-opted the spotty resistances of local craftsmen to industrial production, and produced a global form of resistance that spread around the world and is still with us today.

In many papers and commentaries the speakers used analytical categories as though they had fixed meanings throughout all times and in all places. Their arguments are weakened or called into question by their forgetting that such terms originally emerged to encode specific world views and make...
rhetorical assertions, or even to convey ambiguities or multivo­
cal meanings. My concern is, therefore, for the cultural con­
struction of the concepts with which we think.

For instance, Dell Upton pointed out that tradition has
been dying for two hundred years, and was surprised that it
wasn’t dead yet! This implies that the concept of tradition
embraces objects which were flourishing centuries ago and are
still around. This may be true in specific instances, but in gen­
eral we should not be surprised, because the concept of “tradi­
tion” emerged, along with “modernity,” during the
Enlightenment, specifically to denote objects, ideas, and ways
of life which were threatened by the change to modernity, and
that were seen to be dying. Ever since then, tradition has
come to mean anything that is threatened by change. Indeed,
it is modernity that “invented” tradition, just as it invented
disciplines such as Anthropology and Folklore to study tradi­
tions, and just as it continues to create traditions. People of
modern societies have always been ambivalent about tradition,
devaluing and destroying the pre-modern and at the same time
nostalgically trying to save and incorporate it, as Rosaldo wrote
in his article on “imperial nostalgia.” Indeed, Lanfant has
pointed out that it is exactly “that which is threatened” that we
find attractive and powerful in its liminality, and that we seek
out in our tourist forays.

I also think that both Halm and Rabinow were not cor­
correct in suggesting that, contrary to our contemporary values,
we cannot get rid of the modern, and that it is (only) the tradi­
tional, the nostalgically desired, that dies. Indeed, Fabre’s
superb paper on contemporary Seoul explained why the archi­
tecturally modern, pre-World War II, Japanese-built Korean
National Museum (formerly the South Korean congress build­
ing and originally the Japanese administrative headquarters)
and the post-Korean War, American-built block of flats at
Namsan were both destroyed in the 1990s. Korea was
attempting to erase these prime modern symbols of foreign
domination, thereby freeing the “traditional” nearby pre-colo­
nial palace to emerge as a central national symbol.

The contrary process whereby modern entities “become
traditional,” and thereby become candidates for preservation
and celebration, is part of the ongoing creation of the tradi­
tional within the heart of the modern. Anthony King correctly
pointed out that skyscrapers and early McDonald’s stands have
recently become threatened parts of our built culture, and have
thereby been redefined as traditions worth preserving. This is
part of a larger process summarized by the dictum “all obsolete
technology becomes art” by metamorphosis over time, about
which Marshall McLuhan wrote:

When Machine Production was new, it gradually cre­
ated an environment whose content was the old environ­
ment of agrarian life and the arts and crafts. This older
environment was elevated to an art form by the new
mechanical environment. The machine turned Nature
into an art form. For the first time man began to
regard Nature as a source of aesthetic and spiritual val­
es. They began to marvel that earlier ages had been so
unaware of the world of Nature as Art. Each new tech­
nology creates an environment that is itself regarded as
corrupt and degrading. Yet the new one turns its prede­
cessor into an art form.

The word “tradition,” of course, refers both to a process,
the handing down from generation to generation, and the
products, things or ideas that are handed down. The concept
of tradition shares its origin in early modernity with a number
of other latenly ideological concepts that relate to it and to
our study of traditional environments in the modern world.
These include the anthropological use of the terms “cultur­
e” (1871), “folklore” (1846), and “heritage” (before 1900). These
originated as concepts in the discourse of Western analysts,
expressing a particular historical world view that was used not
only for thinking about the Western world but also about the
newly discovered historical world and the newly colonized
non-Western world. Horner has pointed out that the concept
of tradition was originally negative in the European world,
referring to the irrational, pagan survivals, burdens of supersti­
tion, and so on. But as changes sped up after the industrial
revolution, tradition came to be seen in a different light, as a
reservoir, a source of continuity and identity. Indeed, by the
late nineteenth century, tradition was at the center of many
European nationalisms, and traditions became, selectively,
things to be saved, preserved, or even invented.

Terms such as folklore, culture, heritage and traditional
(but possibly not yet vernacular) have been taken up by post­
colonial, non-Western politicians and members of the intelli­
gentsia as part of their own ideological discourse about their own
built forms and cultural and natural environments. The 1996
TASTE conference was full of examples of the global spread of this
discourse and the use of these concepts by authorities in, for instance, China, Egypt, India, Japan, Korea, South America, and Turkey. In one case, we were told of the importance of the concept 

tradis for planning in today’s Indonesia. The concept of tradition (along with heritage and culture) has decidedly positive ideological connotations in this diaspora, resembling more the European nationalist uses, rather than the negative stereotypes first used by missionaries, educators and colonizers.

Let me suggest that we can think about architecture and the vernacular following what Jacques Maquet (following André Malraux) wrote about art and primitive art. Maquet suggested that art, most certainly the so-called primitive or traditional arts, does not exist outside of the galleries, museums and institutions of what we call the art world, especially in the societies of Africa, Oceania, and Native America from where it has been imported. Art only exists a) by destination, when it is made by self-designated artists who intend their production to circulate in the art world; or b) by metamorphosis, in cases where something produced for entirely different purposes “becomes art” by entering into the circuits of the art world by either crossing cultural boundaries or existing through historical time until it is incorporated into modernity as “art.” The parallels with “architecture” created by self-conscious architects vs. built forms later labeled “vernacular architecture” by cultural boundary-crossing authorities or by existence into the modern historical period (cf. McLuhan), are both obvious and useful in clarifying the historically contingent cultural construction of the concepts with which we think.

A PROPOSAL

In their contributions to the session “The Study of Traditional Environments: Problems and Prospects,” at the 1996 IASTE conference, both Amos Rapoport and Paul Oliver expressed some anxiety about the direction of our hybrid discipline. Rapoport noted that after a decade of meetings organized by IASTE and other organizations, participants have counterproductively piled study upon empirical study, so that there are too many to remember or synthesize. The failure to take time to examine what, why and how we study has not only precluded the emergence of his long-hoped-for multidisciplinary “Integrative and Comparative Environmental Studies,” but it has prevented challenges to romanticism and the necessity of actually learning something positive from the vernacular.

Similarly, Oliver noted that the strength of IASTE lies in its multiplicity of approaches, but that as there is no overt goal or program, we do not know if we are getting anywhere. He also suggested that this lack of specific direction may have alienated some anthropologists and geographers, who no longer attend our meetings. This I doubt, because one cannot tell by surface appearances whether participants are geographers, or particularly anthropologists, who are good at disguising themselves by “going native.” Oliver further observed that in the provision of housing for the masses of the Third World, modernity has failed, and that people have fallen back on their own and their communities’ vernacular efforts. He questioned whether IASTE is systematically mapping and learning from those processes.

I propose that at a future meeting of IASTE, perhaps in the year 2000, we stop and take stock of our direction and progress. This could consist of a retrospective examination of the progress of our empirical researches on specific types and areas of built form, as well as a probing consideration of the theoretical, methodological and ideological underpinnings of our studies. This conference would need more foresight and organization than our usual get-togethers, but I believe it would be worthwhile.

The reason I have brought up this suggestion is my similar experience with the multidisciplinary study of tourism in the past decade or two. I belong to two overlapping international organizations (both somewhat smaller than IASTE): the International Academy for the Study of Tourism (founded 1986) and the Research Committee on Tourism of the International Sociological Association (founded as a workshop in the 1980s and formalized in the 1990s). The study of tourism has blossomed exponentially in many disciplines and in most parts of the world — even faster than the global penetration of tourism itself. We also felt that we were drifting, and beset by too many competing publications and empirical case studies. So at the 1994 meeting of the Research Committee on Tourism of the ISA we proposed that our next meeting would be primarily devoted to a direct review of theories, concepts and methods.

This meeting took place in Jyväskyla, Finland, in 1996. Though the papers presented there could contain data, either comparative or from case studies, the presenters had to give clear priority to the paradigms they worked within and the assumptions behind them. Thus the papers were selected by the organizers as the best representatives of different approaches and areas of study. The point was not for each paradigmatic repre-
sentative to try to convert or condemn others, but to make clear how we work and hence why we have a certain direction. We started by breaking the papers into three master paradigms (neopositivism, critical theory, and interpretive/hermeneutic), and then subdivided them, with independent critical summarizers for each set. This method might work well for IASTE also, although one might not necessarily expect the same master paradigms to apply. Perhaps Amos Rapoport could organize a well-thought-out subgroup under the rubric "Integrated and Comparative Environmental Studies."

Such a work would provide us with a clear new platform for the twenty-first century. It would allow us to see our lacunae and the possibilities for new syntheses so we could modify and surpass our efforts to date. Also, by selecting and highlighting an array of "best-case" studies, it would serve as a useful guide to activism, a direction that many in IASTE seem to desire.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. These were Molly Lee, who (with Gregory Reinhardt) was the author of contributions to Paul Oliver's forthcoming Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture, and more recently of G. Reinhardt and M. Lee, Eskimo Architecture: House Forms and Culture in the Early Historic Period (Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press, in press); and Peter Nabokov, co-author of the well-known P. Nabokov and D. Easton, Native American Architecture (Oxford: University Press, 1986).

2. At the 1994 meeting of IASTE in Tunis I presented a paper which described and analyzed the iconic use of traditional Japanese architectural features for authenticating contemporary touristic buildings such as hotels, ryokan and restaurants. See: N. Graburn, "Neo-Traditionalism in Japanese Rural Tourist Architecture," paper presented in the session "Tourism and its Impact on the Commodification and Demise of Sustainable Traditional Settlements," at the conference "Value in Tradition: The Utility of Research on Identity and Sustainability in Dwellings and Settlements," IASTE, Tunis, December 1994. Other papers at that event also took up a similar theme. See, for example D. Buntrock and M. Locher, "The Use of Tradition in Contemporary Japanese Architecture," and N. Mitsuhashi and N. Fujimoto, "On Conversion of Traditional Houses into Community Space and Lodging Activities in Kuriyama, a Japanese Village."

3. Of course, hunters and gatherers and, especially, pastoralists traveled extensively as part of their annual rounds in order to both secure a livelihood and converse, trade, and perhaps intermarry with neighboring peoples. But it would be difficult to assert that such travels occurred outside their home territories. For the history of travel and tourism, see J. Towner and G. Wall, "History and Tourism," in N. Graburn and J. Jafari, eds., Tourism Social Science, special issue of Annals of Tourism Research 18 (1991), pp. 75-84; and D. Nash "Tourism as an Anthropological Subject," Current Anthropology 22 (1981), pp. 461-81.


5. M. Castells, plenary presentation, "Third Millennium Urbanization: Megacities and Microsocieties"; and S. Sassen, "Whose City is It?" in the session "Culture, Globalization, and Built Form."

6. For instance, Michael Watts and I came from England, AlSayyad from Egypt, Bourdier from France, Castells from Cataluna, Roy from India, and so on.

7. P. Rabinow, discussant in the plenary session "Culture, Globalization, and Built Form."


9. For the best discussion of the intellectual history and political application of the concept of tradition, see A.E. Horner, "The Assumption of Tradition: Creating, Collecting, and Conserving Cultural Artifacts in the Cameroon Grassfields (West Africa)," Ph.D. diss. in Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.


16. The concept of culture first appeared in the general, non-hierarchical sense in E.B. Tylor, Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Religion, Language Art and Custom (London: John Murray, 1871). The word "folklore" was first formulated by the English antiquarian William John Thoms in 1846. The concept of heritage had long standing in European law, referring to that part of a man's inheritance, or patrimony, that provided his (family's) living and was not alienable by will or executor, but this has in the late nineteenth and twentieth century been expanded to the rightful inheritances of a nation or all humanity. See, especially, C.-M. Bazin, "Industrial Heritage in the Tourism Process in France," in M.-F. Lanfant, J.B. Allcock, and E.M. Bruner, eds., International Tourism: Identity and Change (London: Sage, 1995), pp.113-26.


21. See also H. Becker, Art Worlds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

22. The proceedings of the meeting are already contracted by a publisher as K. Hollinshead and N. Graburn, eds., Paradigms in Tourism Research (Elmsford, NY: Tourism Dynamics, forthcoming); and as a special issue of Tourism Analysis.


24. Such a meeting demands that its organizers be proactive and firm in choosing the leading representatives and, with feedback recorded and sent back to the participants for revision, that its papers be subject to heavy editing. This thematic conference need not control all the sessions of an IASTE meeting but could, perhaps, consist of 15-20 papers of 30 minutes (less than ten hours) in plenary or majority sessions.

Nelson Graburn is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.