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membaca tradisi ?
READING TRADITION

JEAN-PAUL BOURDIER

We are living in a period variously called the decline of the new, the age of mass media; an age of postindividual, postindustrial, poststructuralist and postmodern society. These labels can be quite deceptive, for the absolute new has never really existed, "mass" no longer equates with "people," and "post" in contemporary theory does not merely mean "after," but also implies "with" and "before."

The growing interest in traditional architecture among architects may be viewed as a desire to seek better ways for understanding their heritage, hence for transmitting and re-creating without having to accept a simplistic return to earlier architectural traditions or abide by a mere rejection of cultural pasts. Generally speaking, in the United States and in Europe there is a need to subject modernization and its exclusive emphasis on optimized technology to critical scrutiny, while in Third World countries there is an imperative to solve the paradox of how to benefit from modernization while returning to the wisdom of non market-dependent values. These are processes that are different because they are context-specific, but they are also tightly related to each other.

AN INTERDISCIPLINE

In recent years the study of traditional and vernacular dwellings and settlements has expanded beyond the limits of antiquarian and nostalgic interest into a discipline of its own (albeit a discipline always-in-the-making) and a critical practice concerned among other things with reaffirming regional/cultural identities and breaking the monotony, if not the oppression, of standardization. Its nature has also allowed it to extend beyond the limits of any single field to become a focus for research that cuts across the boundaries of a great number of disciplines, involving scholars in the arts, the humanities and the social sciences. A feature of postmodernism itself, this cutting across established boundaries remains plural; it manifests itself differently through a number of key notions today, including those of interarts, interculturalism, and interdisciplinism. The erosion of the old divide between high culture and popular culture has made it increasingly difficult to draw any clear-cut line of separation. It is therefore also of importance that in studying traditional dwellings, emphasis be given precisely to the interpenetration of classic and folk traditions, the interdependency of towns and the countryside in the morphology of settlements, and the continuity from rural to urban areas in house-types and groupings. These three approaches are found in this book in the chapters by Jo Tonna, Spiro Kostof and Sophie Clement-Charpentier, respectively.

On interdisciplinary work, Roland Barthes made an observation that may well apply to the study of traditional dwelling. He wrote: "Interdisciplinary studies, of which we hear so much, do not merely confront already constituted disciplines (none of which, as a matter of fact, consents to leave off). In order to do interdisciplinary work, it is not enough to take a 'subject' (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists in creating a new object which belongs to no one."¹ Research on dwelling traditions belongs, therefore, no more to architecture than to anthropology, archeology, geography or art and architecture history -- to name just a few. To avoid reiterating the values that legitimize each of the disciplines involved, perpetuating thereby the conventions

→ bentuk
suatu yg
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bukan
kumpulan bbrp.

dwelling
tradition
sah b'day
baru

challenge →

carried within their established boundaries, the work would have to go beyond the mere assembling of these different fields. This is where the challenge is issued. By asking potentially far-reaching questions about professional divisions and about the security and hierarchy they imply, attempts at understanding the traditional vernacular reality and eventually at revitalizing the roots of contemporary design practice will necessarily re-examine some basics that may now be taken for granted. I propose to contribute here to two questions that always need to be raised, the questions of tradition and representation.

→

TRADITION AND POSTMODERNITY

Much has been and continues to be said on the question of tradition, as many of the contributions to this volume evidence. Some of these contributions tackle the problem of defining the idea, exploring at length its denotations as well as positive and negative connotations, while others investigate its meanings in relation to specific built environments. But the issue, as some of us see it, is not so much to accumulate attributes of traditionality to come up with a better definition, or even to circumscribe the field. Nor is it to simply invalidate the notion because of the many specific negative connotations often implied in its use. The issue is more to question certain fundamental assumptions so as to open up the concept of tradition from a number of points of departure. Definitions are made in order to be remade and to invite further modifications of their limits.

idea
meanin

Tradition is a term that has often been used in opposition to modernity. As such, it has been situated within a system of binary oppositions (nature/culture; beliefs/science; mythic/historic; low style/high style; change/stagnancy) whose use even as an analytic tool is often reductive. In this period of the decline of the new it is certainly not new to say that modernization can no longer prove to be liberative *in se*. Much has been written on the failure of the modern architectural project and its participation in the principle of unlimited self-realization; much also on its participation in the idea of progress achieved with universal rationality and of eman-

icipation at the scale of humanity, of which the colonial enterprise was a comprehensive manifestation. Never has the rejection of the belief in the need to break with tradition in order to install an entirely new way of living and thinking been so widely and diversely voiced. As the philosopher Jurgen Habermas puts it, "modernism is dominant but dead."² What can be read in such a statement is that modernism is still considered to be expanding, but it is no longer creative. We can't negate modernism, for it infects our environment. Yet we can't simply work against it either, because the modernist project has made us aware of the limits of merely "working against."

still
expanding
but
no longer
creative

To reflect on the postmodern condition is to rethink the relation between the traditional and the modern. Our conception of modernity creates its own self-enclosed canons of traditionality. Tradition identified as the past is a modernist idea. The same holds true for the concept of vernacular when it is equated with low technology. In a context where the relation between traditional and modern has lost a fixed temporal reference, tradition perceived as a settled body of knowledge that can be objectively transferred, uncovered, mastered and laid claim to is at best reactive and at worst mortuary. Dead and circular answers feed endlessly on dead and circular interrogations. To say this, however, is not to say that one can simply deny or surpass the modernist values that condition existence today. One often partakes in perpetuating them even while dismantling them, for the question, "where does modernity begin and where does it end?" necessarily remains unanswerable. And it is this very unanswerable quality that constitutes the condition of postmodernity.

pila menempat
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pandangan
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modernist
concept of
tradition

If the modernist concept of tradition remains problematic to all studies of traditional dwelling, it is all the more so to those carried out by Westerners like myself whose research focuses on non-Western architectural traditions (although I am no less fond of those existing in the West). "Nostalgic," "antiquarian," and "romantic" are adjectives that may rightfully be applied to the many works we produce, anthropological or architectural, that offer in their interpretations not a mode of transmitting a

knowledge but, supposedly, the knowledge itself. Instead of trying to bypass, deny or censor the problems raised, we would have to work with them - critically. The question, as I started out saying with regard to the prefix "post" that accompanies the word modern, is not that of excluding or legitimizing what comes "before," but that of working with difficulties and uncertainties within a continuum of past, present and future.

In discussing tradition and postmodernity, I am not referring to the "pure technique, pure scenography" postmodernism promoted by Charles Jencks, as Frampton has put it;³ nor to the one termed "neoconservative" by Hal Foster, which resorts to pastiche in the name of style and history -- in other words which is marked by an eclectic historicism that reduces historical periods to ruling-class styles and relates to history mainly as "a store of styles and symbols to plunder."⁴ Rather, I find more creative the postmodern condition as analyzed by Jean-Francois Lyotard, who wrote: "A work can only become modern when it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its ending, but at its nascent stage, and this stage is constant."⁵ It is interesting to relate this statement to one by Yi-Fu Tuan, who writes in this book: "Everything that we see in the present landscape has had a past, however brief, and is in that literal sense traditional." Although very different, these two statements do meet on a certain level, since they both defy the modern tendency to view relations in time and space in term of simple successions or linear chronology. Postmodernism as bearer of old truths that have emerged in the last two decades in particular is a way of seeing into the already-existing cracks in the modern project. It is, again, a way of rethinking the relation between the traditional and the modern.



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modern

TRADITIONAL AND VERNACULAR: DWELLING AS BEING ON EARTH

If the study of traditional dwelling is an important one, it is not only because the world's population by and large is accommodated in traditional dwellings, but also because it is necessary to rethink

the dwelling-as-living reality in housing contexts where the problem of alienation still prevails. The juxtaposition of the terms traditional and dwelling can be criticized for carrying a normative attitude specifying what architecture is and what it is not. However, one can also argue that if architecture mostly stands for eminent edifices and monuments that are urban and aesthetically imposing, it also qualifies the practice of a profession and the product of a professional -- the architect. "Architecture without architects," "indigenous architecture" or "vernacular architecture" are possibilities, but they are in no way free of specific connotations. Furthermore, not every building is a dwelling place. Dwelling radically means "being on the earth." This is the well-known definition Heidegger brought back to us from Old English and High German: "The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is *Buan*, dwelling Building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth, . . . remains for man's everyday's experience that which is from the outset 'habitual.'"⁶ Dwelling therefore needs not be reduced to an activity that one performs alongside others, or to "having a roof over our head and a certain number of square meters at our disposal," as Norberg-Schulz has written.⁷ The terms traditional and vernacular meet where vernacular goes back to its Latin meaning as "things that are homemade, homespun, home-grown, not destined for the marketplace, but are for home use only."⁸ "The relationship of traditional man with the world," wrote a traditionalist in African matters, "was a living relationship of *participation*, not of pure utilization."⁹ John Turner made the now classic distinction between housing as the provision of a commodity and housing as an activity,¹⁰ while Ivan Illich went on to rename this activity *dwelling*, tracing it back to such notions as "be," "exist" and "live" -- that is "to be alive." In the vernacular context dwelling coincides with living. "To dwell means to live in the traces that past living has left."¹¹

vernacular
dwelling

TRANSMISSION: THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

The African scholar Cheikh A. Hampate Ba defines oral tradition as "the bond between man and the spoken word." He calls it "the

living tradition."¹² If one takes this definition as a further point of departure for rethinking the relation between the traditional and the modern, then tradition, generally speaking, would be the bond between men, women and the material they choose to work with in transmitting a knowledge or world view -- be this material speech, earth, writing, photography or drawing. ← tradition

In the definition advanced above, several questions are implied. ① One relates directly to the context from which it is excerpted and in which Hampate Ba carries on the now familiar argument: "Nothing proves *a priori* that writing gives a more faithful account of a reality than oral evidence handed down from generation to generation What is involved . . . is the actual value of the man who is giving the evidence, the value of the (chain) of transmission he is part of, the (trustworthiness) of the individual and collective memory." The cultural bias that values the written word over the spoken word speaks for a specific ideology of control, one in which "the signature becomes the sole recognized commitment, while the deep sacred bond that used to unite man and word disappears, to be replaced by conventional university degrees."¹³ This bias has many faces. On the one hand the written word takes on the weight of fact, accounting for the convenient classification of societies into those with history and those without; on the other hand there is a marked general tendency among scholars to neglect or to underrate all other representational structures. The written word is unproblematically valued as the most reliable source of information as well as the most capable of describing and analyzing accumulated data. The question of whether one should place more trust in one representational structure than in another is obviously not where the problem lies. Each structure generates its own sets of problems that need to be dealt with; moreover, as Hampate Ba points out, "written or oral evidence is in the end only human evidence and it is worth what the man is worth."¹⁴

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What is emphasized in this living tradition is the mode of handing down or passing on what we value. As Bruno Queysanne has relevantly pointed out, handing down is also handing over, and tradition is thus less an act of conservation than of transmission.¹⁵ In the worthiness of the person who is carrying on the task of

bagai mana
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on what we
value

transmitting, Hampate Ba also sees "the value of the chain of transmission" that this person is part of. This "bond between man and the spoken word" thus implies more than one link: it implies the bonds that tie one person to another, one generation to another and one people to another; the bond that ties the subject to his or her making; and the bond that ties one making or one mode of transmission to another.

It is in the context of handing over, or of the value of the chain of transmission a person is part of (whether this person is a member of the society in question or an outsider), that representation occupies a central role. There has been, with the works of poststructuralist critics, an important process for exposing the limits of representation, which render more and more untenable claims of objectivity of observation, transparency of description or immediacy of experience. To say that the simplest cultural accounts are intentional fabrications, and that interpreters constantly construct themselves and their products through the subjects they study, is to repeat what may already sound evident. But to incorporate and materialize this in the creative process of understanding and interpreting -- the living tradition -- is to open a ground that offers no ready-made solutions or methodologies.

THE GRAPHIC IMAGE

Three means of representation prevail for the time being in the study of traditional dwellings. These are verbal language, the photographic image and the graphic image. A number of critical examinations have been and will continue to be made of the uses of the first two in the areas of writing, cinema and photography. But the last is perhaps the least debated yet the most relevant to my own work and to architectural depiction in general. What I constantly have to face and explore is precisely the language of drawing, or drawing as a tool for thinking and representing. One could mention here, for example, the tendency in many cultural research works to resort to drawing as a mere instrument of communication, and an inadequate one at that. This often results in schematic drawings that are neither fully conceptual nor

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instrument of
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generation

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verbal language
photo image
graphic image

language
of drawing
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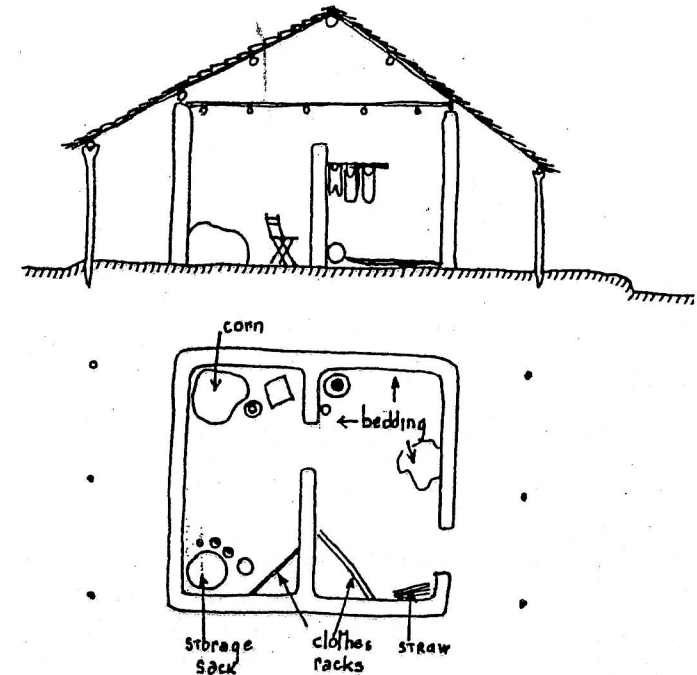


FIGURE 1. Neither conceptual nor representational, drawing as mere instrument of information.

representational (FIG. 1). Endless efforts are often spent in bringing out the subtleties of verbal language, but little attention is given to the way a line, the tone of a line, a surface rendering, the choice of a view angle, or the choice of type and mode of drawing can structure our experience (FIGS. 2, 3). Shape, volume, light, texture, shade, depth, movement (FIGS. 4, 5), kinaesthetic experience of space: a drawing is not simply visual or mental. If a schematic drawing appears merely instrumental, and neither conceptual nor representational, it is in most cases because it has reduced the dwelling experience to a simplistic sketch or outline. In other words, it has represented the experience poorly without fully realizing the function of the conceptual drawing. This function is not the neutral printing out of a previous concept, but an

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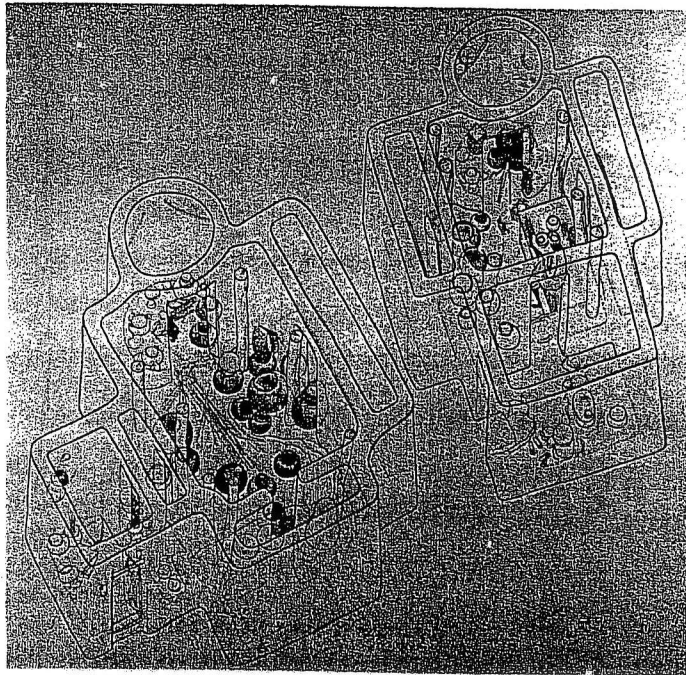
interactive process that involves eye, mind, heart and hand. A drawing that takes a reality as a given and is effected for information's sake is bound to remain fixed instead of constituting a site for reading. It does not allow itself to grow on the reader, nor does it allow him or her to follow and retrace its itineraries. Conceptual and representational drawings -- diagrams and elaborate line and surface drawings -- may both be used in a single case to interpret the dwelling reality. They expand one another but their functions are not interchangeable.

To think with drawings is not a question of drawing well, or an aesthetic-formalistic concern, although such a skill is certainly helpful to produce sensitive drawings. It is rather to explore the

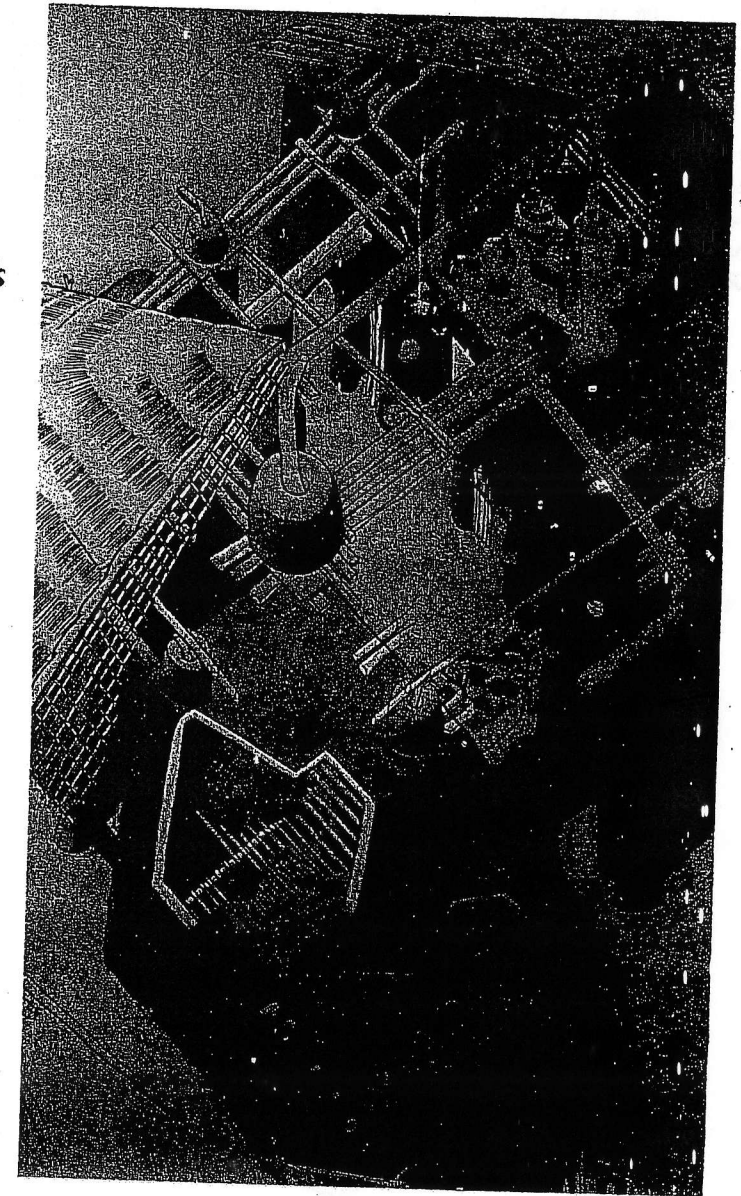
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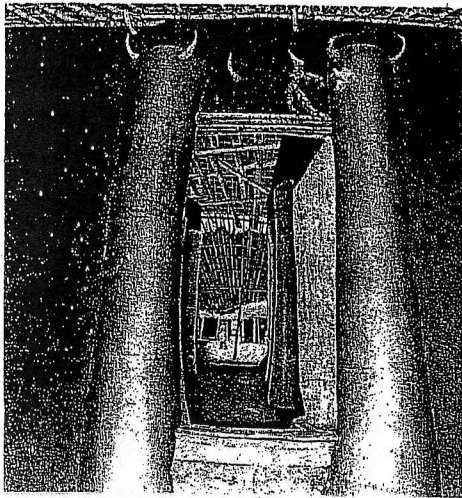
FIGURES 2, 3. Dogon dwelling, Mali (left); Joola dwelling, Senegal (right). Lines do speak a language. Different modes of drawing structure the viewer's experience differently.



limits and potentials of drawing as a structure in itself. The representation of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional drawing is commonly done with plans, elevations, sections, perspectives and axonometrics. There is therefore already a primary range of possibilities within representational drawing. Here I would like to give just a few examples of what is involved in the choice of making a perspective as compared to drawing an axonometric.

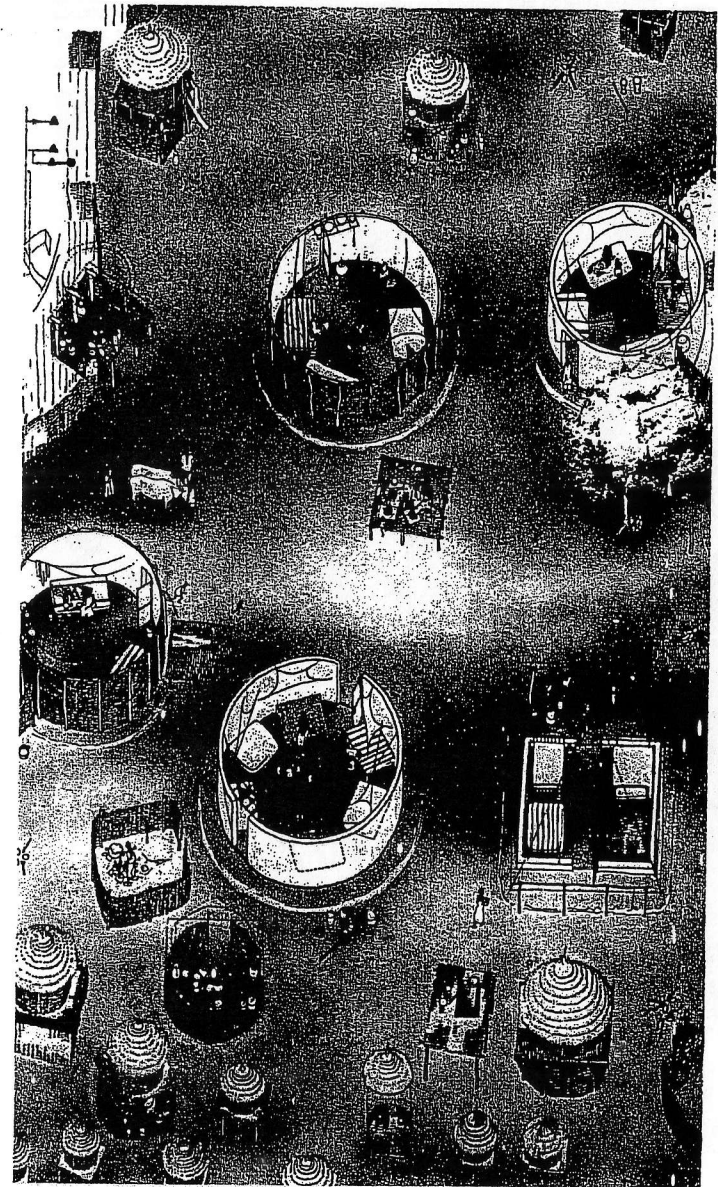
- ① The position of the drawer is one of centrality in the perspective, for it can easily be located through the eye level and vanishing points (FIG. 6). What a perspective presents is a temporary and fragmented spatial experience from a static point of view. In other words, what the drawer offers is what the reader gets. It is a one-way reading in which only one or a maximum of two spaces can be viewed; showing more spaces behind through the device of transparent walls will certainly clutter the drawing. Furthermore, the perspective organizes knowledge in function of what is immediately visible. The involvement it requires from the reader is passive, since it presents reality in a form he or she is already accustomed to.

static point
static
↓
one way
reading



FIGURES 4, 5.
Joola dwelling (left)
and Mandinka dwelling,
Senegal (right).

Representational drawings can go beyond realistic and aesthetic concerns. They can constitute a complex layered site for reading, and their function is not interchangeable with that of the conceptual diagram.



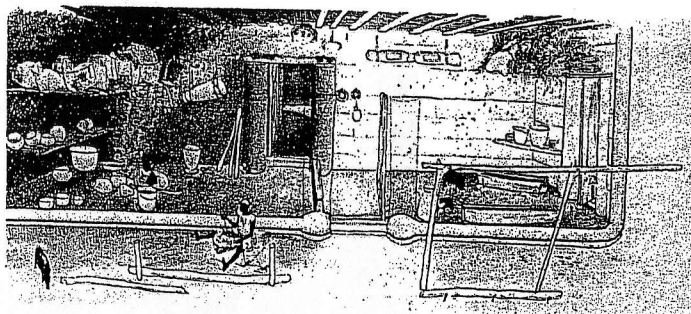


FIGURE 6. Joola dwelling, Senegal. The cutaway perspective drawing usually offers spatial experience from a static point of view.

② The axonometric (or bird's-eye view), more specifically the cutaway axonometric (FIG. 7), requires much more initiative on the part of the drawer as well as the reader. It gives an overall aerial perspective of the dwelling while playing with the norms of realist representation. To open a parenthesis here, what immediately comes to mind regarding the bird's-eye overview is the familiar military spirit, with its aerial photography and its precise mapping of habitats and surrounding terrain. The desire to perceive a phenomenon in its entirety is certainly not unrelated to the tendency to equate vision with control, knowledge and power. Apprehending a non-professionally built environment with the eye of a professional architect or anthropologist -- as plan, section, elevation and perspective, or as decipherment, dissection, classification and kinship-mapping -- is to partake in such a desire. Surely enough, I find myself pleading guilty at almost every step on the path, because I have a particular affection for maps -- although only the very old ones that bear the traces of previous voyages or the very elaborate ones that inscribe the physical quality of the terrain. To say this, however, is not to say that all birds' eye-view representation bears the same degree of totalizing control and omniscience. There are ways of resisting the all-governing and maximal overseeing military spirit as well as the modern consumer's desire for fast appropriation and immediate gratification. And there are differences to make between aerial

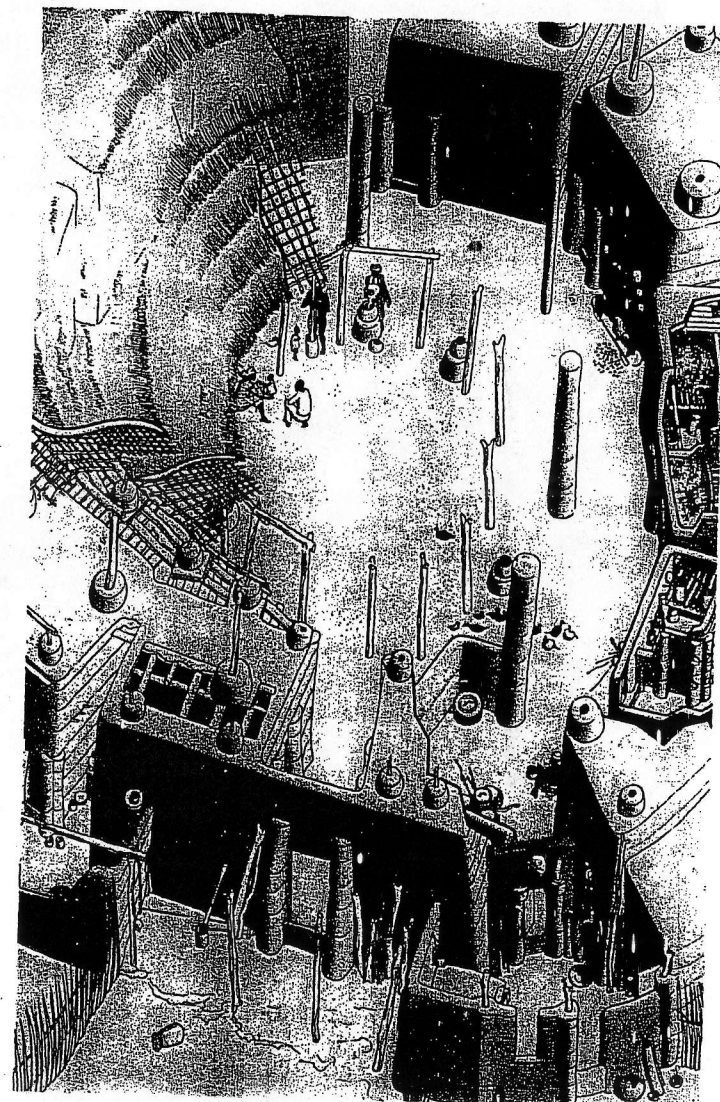


FIGURE 7. Joola dwelling, Senegal. The cutaway axonometric solicits the drawer's creative ability. It invites the viewers to read the reality of a house by reconstituting a personal visual path through the spaces and objects drawn.

graphic document. These differences lie precisely in the how and why of the chain of transmission, in the readings that result from the production and circulation of the photographed or drawn materials. Here I come back to the use of perspective and axonometric views.

The cutaway axonometric has the potential to acknowledge its status as representation and to play with the norms of realist representation in several ways. The position of the drawer is imaginary and constructed. His or her intervention is constantly acknowledged. This occurs first through the fact that the axonometric does not built itself on the realistic standard of the perspective with its vanishing points, and hence all objects are reproduced at the same scale and may be said to be slightly distorted -- although this may not be immediately evident to the untrained eye. Second, the cutting away of a space is a deliberate decision of the drawer and hence the process of assembling a cutaway axonometric is creatively demanding. In addition to demanding drafting and recording skills such as time-consuming measurements for precise scale, it actively solicits the initiative of the drawer. Where should one cut into a space and why would one open up the wall(s) or roof(s) of a house? Furthermore, although the cutaway axonometric offers an above-ground view, it allows the reader to reconstitute an on-the-ground experience by putting to use such devices as simultaneous views of spaces through transparent walls. The drawing thereby suggests an understanding of how the spaces interact, while inviting the reader to imagine the experience of walking through several spaces with their offered and hidden views. The active involvement of the reader is provoked not only by the unusual angle of view but also by the range of reading possibilities and itineraries suggested. The reader is not presented with one point of departure, and must choose and make up a personal reading path. Needless to say, although I often find the cutaway axonometric more creative and challenging than the perspective, there is no tool of representation that cannot be used differently, and one can easily imagine the potential of a series of perspectives that reconstitute an array of fragments of reality, while leaving the work of assemblage to the reader (FIG. 8).

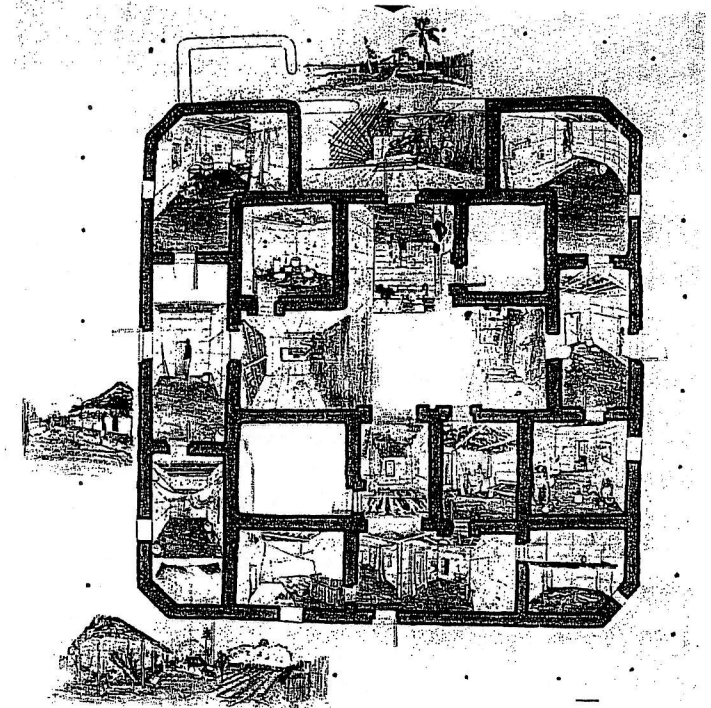


FIGURE 8. Joola dwelling, Senegal. Plan-perspective. An example of the many possible alternatives that also involve the creative participation of the viewer.

For tradition to remain a creative concept it is important, as quoted earlier from Hampate Ba, that "the deep sacred bond that used to unite man and word" does not disappear. In the context of the language of drawing, this statement could mean that whenever a drawer sets out to draw a dwelling, especially when the dwelling is from a different culture, the drawer should not only keep alive those things that informed the drawing (what he or she sees -- including local constraints, cultural specificities and professional obligations), but also what has inspired the drawing (how he or she sees and reconstructs the experience, and materializes its *punctum* -- the mutual designation between drawer and dwelling in this intersubjective and intercultural encounter). Drawing not as mere

expression but as production enables the functions of preservation and change, qualities inherent to all work of transmission. "The time has come to gather the old into the new," remarked Aldo van Eyck sometime ago. "We can meet 'ourselves' everywhere -- in all places and ages -- doing the same things in different ways, feeling the same differently, reacting differently to the same."¹⁵

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HANDED DOWN ARCHITECTURE: TRADITION AND TRANSMISSION

PAUL OLIVER

Over the past century there has been a growth of interest in the buildings of "non-literate," "pre-literate" and "unsophisticated" societies. But with an increase in academic studies such terms have come to seem pejorative in the face of the variety and complexity of the cultures and communities considered, and phrases such as "architecture without architects" have become wholly inadequate to define the nature, or quality, of their buildings. While "traditional architecture" has been frequently employed as a substitute term, its suitability, or the implications of accepting it, has not been subjected to much scrutiny.

In this chapter I discuss how the term "tradition" has been interpreted by anthropologists, and how the implied meanings in its use have a bearing upon our comprehension of building concepts and processes. Principal among these is the recognition that the establishment and maintenance of a tradition requires the passing of its essential elements from the members of a group to their successors. This may often be conducted verbally, and there are a number of vehicles of oral tradition, often formulaic in nature, some examples of which I cite. Other, non-verbal means are of no less importance. It is my contention that in the study of tradition in architecture it is the transmission of traditions that is least researched and yet most essential to its understanding.