

# The commercial and the transient: The contradictions of the vernacular in a time of late modernity

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## Introduction: What makes the vernacular within architecture?

An architecture without architects: such assumption forms one of the most common definitions of vernacular buildings. It designates a range of non-monumental buildings not designed by trained architects. The expression is used at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) eponymous exhibition curated by Austrian-American historian Bernard Rudofsky in the autumn of 1964, encapsulating a broad collection of pictures of indigenous landscapes, buildings and social practices all over the world<sup>1</sup>. During the 1960s, a rise of interest toward the vernacular is mostly related to domestic architecture from the non-developed world, even though it is extended to some non-monumental western buildings as does architectural historian Paul Oliver<sup>2</sup>. The vernacular basically embraces domestic architecture and dwellings made by builders who have not had a fine arts education, following long-term evolution of local building crafts and techniques usually not related to any stylistic rupture introduced by monumental arts. Mainly, geographical conditions, both for local material resources (geological composition of grounds, climate) and cultural diffusions in restricted time and space prior to contemporary globalization make up the strong architectural coherence attributed to the vernacular, that historians tend to see retrospectively as the making of singular landscape identities. Vernacular buildings do not shape an *architectural order* as do monuments (top-down design) but cover a set of *non-pedigreed architectures* as Rudofsky puts it (bottom-up building)<sup>3</sup>.

As vernacular architecture is not designed by professional architects, it is actually made by *builders* whose definition can greatly differ both in terms of building typology (dwelling, fittings or infrastructures) and socio-historical evolutions, preparing the ground for various or even contradictory distinctions of the vernacular. A timber-framed house from Normandy (fig. 1) can fall into this category as well as postwar agricultural fittings related to land consolidation (fig. 2), as they are both built without architectural commission

1 Rudofsky 1964.

2 Oliver 1997.

3 Rudofsky 1964.



Fig. 1 Place Fournet, Lisieux (Normandy, France), Timber frame town house typical of Pays d'Auge.



**Fig. 2** Postwar agricultural fittings in Loix-en-Ré (Charente-Maritime, France) in local architecture (white walls and monk and nun roofing).

4 Vigato 1994.



**Fig. 3** Place Fournet, Lisieux (Normandy, France), Individual house in regionalist Normand style.

5 Ghirardo 1994.

6 Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972.

7 Jenkins 1975.

8 The Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'attractivité régionale (DATAR, 1963–2014) was a State administration dedicated to physical planning.

realized by academically trained architects, whether it be a local builder or a building company following an engineered model, respectively.

In the French context, the ethnological extent of Rudofsky's conception implies also to differentiate the vernacular from *regionalist architecture* that covers a range of buildings from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in which trained architects recreate features of historic buildings, from domestic architecture to monuments by using local materials and repertoires of local design patterns (gables, roofs, ornamentation, etc)<sup>4</sup>. The neo-Normand villas with timber frame facades are a good example of an inspiration taken from the vernacular by architects or specialized builders (fig. 3). Sociological status (professions, training) and local economy distinguish the vernacular from the non-vernacular. The MOMA exhibition came out at a moment when the first 20th century European regionalist architecture had disappeared in western countries because of the massive spread of functionalist planning and prefabricated methods of building during the post-war period. At the time, interwar regionalism represents the *architectural order* of a reinvented tradition that the modern movement has sought to break with. But far from renewing it, "*postmodern architectures*" went even further in breaking with early 20th century regionalism by dismissing notions of *order* or *model* in architecture<sup>5</sup>. Out of any order, an emerging definition of the vernacular is gradually based on the *ordinary* character of the visual living environment.

The 1970s visual cultures focus onto the ordinary landscapes by seeking what the monumental order of *established modernist architecture* would have disdained, left out or unwillingly planned<sup>6</sup>. In the United States, the New Topographics exhibition from 1975 to 1976 displays the banal aspects of the American contemporary landscape by shooting contemporary or agricultural fittings<sup>7</sup>. In the same vein, the French Minister of Territorial Development launches the DATAR<sup>8</sup> in 1984, aiming at reporting the conditions of the French contemporary landscape. Photographers shoot its various aspects and latest evolutions, both within and out of post-war planning's willingness to equip the national territory. Even though they don't explicitly refer to the notion of vernacular, those two photographic enquiries give to the ordinary and bottom-up visual realities a sense differing from local traditions, yet represented by Rudofsky's exhibition, and conversely feature the environment of the contemporary *everyday life*.

The assumption that *old rural dwellings* enter the usual definition of the vernacular stands progressively in contrast with its contemporary updating. From the late 1940s and the 1950s, developers within the house market in the United States (and later in the 1960s and 1970s in Western Europe) are making sure that modernist architects lose planning powers in favour of developers and builders, leading to the reintroduction of the vernacular within contemporary architecture. It comes here to define the daily environment of objects, mass consumption and ordinary dwellings. Should we consider, as the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour put it,

that Levittown or the aesthetic of Route 66 is the new 1960s American vernacular<sup>9</sup>? Even though some models may have been designed by trained architects, can we see the peri-urban real estate developments, characterizing most of the post-war suburbs in western countries, as the contemporary vernacular landscapes? It depends on the definition given to the vernacular, either rooted in historical crafts or as a dynamic and transient practice of building. Characterizing the vernacular in the second way takes us away from historians' definitions including Rudofsky's and Oliver's.

### The commercial vernacular

We could arbitrarily identify three steps in the recognition of the vernacular: whereas romanticism discovers the rural vernacular of farms and medieval city centers, the modern movement later identifies the *industrial vernacular* of infrastructural modernization under the rise of Fordism, and finally post-modernity draws attention to the effects of consumption and commodification on the making of landscapes. The latest turn implies a shift in capitalist stages, from Fordism to post-Fordism and flexible accumulation that growingly reduce the share of production in favour of consumption<sup>10</sup>. Such trends have been investigated by means of the notion of *late modern capitalism* according to which the latest economical evolutions affect whole aspects of planning, architecture, culture and arts<sup>11</sup>. *Late modernity* doesn't break with modernity but deepens its paradigm: goods (as the ones used in the building sector) become even more manufactured by free market and value chains internationalization that lets vanish local resources and crafts from the building economic circuit. The architectural production under the conditions of late modernity necessarily breaks with traditional crafts still present at the MOMA exhibition.

In their seminal essay *Learning from Las Vegas*, the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour conduct in the first part a visual investigation of the architecture of commercial signs and strips arising in 20th century Las Vegas. Signs make up immediate realities present in the visual and aesthetic environment of the American middle class whose everyday life is growingly based on mass consumption in strip malls. They coin the notion of *commercial vernacular* that designates the ordinary landscape of strips, shops, and roads<sup>12</sup> (fig. 4).

Such recognition updates the comprehension of the extents and failures of modern planning. For the authors, the modern movement initially takes inspiration from industrial vernacular architecture such as grain silos or factories, both related to the rise of agricultural and industrial revolutions. They even identify in Le Corbusier's purism an inspiration taken from the vernacular of Mediterranean settlements with cubes, white walls and flat roofs, whereas the latest period of his work is related to *brutalism* that turns modernism into emphatic monuments. They point out such reversal as an *irony* that the former historical vernacular is retrospectively valued but not the contemporary one of strips and roads that modern architects scorn<sup>13</sup>.

9 Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972.

10 Harvey 1991.

11 Jameson 1984.

12 Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972: 6.



Fig. 4 An example of peri-urban strip mall adapted to car, Skejby, Aarhus (Denmark).

13 Ibid.: 152.

By focusing on strips or suburban real estate, they consider landscapes where architects advocating full planning gradually lose power behind developers, even though some may participate in house sketching and modelling. But the *builders* behind individual houses and malls have nothing to do with the medieval *builders* or the local tradesmen that William Morris and Ebenezer Howard dreamed of for reforming the arts against industrial depreciations of building crafts. *Late modern builders* (an expression that we coin) refer to construction firms that the latest mutation of Fordism makes possible to produce in series even more rapidly to maximize standardization. Houses and strips have become highly manufactured products. A Marxist view would analyse the extension of capitalist accumulation within the building industry that shapes bigger companies by which former *builders* become *developers*. The features of contemporary capitalism (accumulation, large-scale companies) reveal the *ordinary* as a product of *late modernity*. David Harvey analyses the postmodern turn within capitalism as a space-time compression that enables the market to govern new economic sectors and accelerate the exchange of goods<sup>14</sup>. Such acceleration results in the outbreak of a flexible accumulation overcoming Fordism that materializes itself in the multiplication of roads as consumers' everyday life. Conditioning the perception of Las Vegas from the car, the *speed* and the *transitory* make up the experience of the commercial vernacular.

14 Harvey 1991.

### The antinomies of the architect: builder or designer?

The necessary consequence of analysing strips as a new architectural manifestation leads to the separation between the architect and the engineer. The three authors renew a debate that seeks to answer whether the architect is an engineer or a designer. In substance, architects are losing power as a consequence of complexifying planning processes and cultural upsurges against modernism, so they can just design the visual aspect of buildings as if they were construction decorators. Such reasoning is reflected in the notion of the *decorated shed*<sup>15</sup>, designating architecture as an aesthetic intervention on an engineered structure. On the contrary, the *duck* refers to the attempt of merging architecture with engineering and display structural performances similar as gothic builders did. Splitting the duck from the decorated shed implies the return of the ornament, separated, or added to the building as architectural strip design does. They stand in sharp contrast with the modern movement that conversely seeks to turn structures and functions into architectural principles of form (the duck). But the return of the ornament does not imply any decorative order as classicism did (even though some postmodern architects tried exactly that, e.g., Charles Moore), it rather associates architectural intervention to visibility. Therefore, the architect is not missing from the commercial vernacular, he is merely secondary by intervening solely on the design process but not the building process.

15 Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972: 88.

Because the commercial vernacular refers to the visual aspect of the landscape and not the building techniques that are left to engineers, the authors overhaul the iconological method elaborated by Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky who studied and classified art by the cultural and historical content of images<sup>16</sup>. Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour do not comprehend the strips and commercial signs in relation to their building processes (planning and construction work) but to their mere visibility and their quality of being *signs*. In other words, the authors highlight the visual dimension of architecture despite the material structure, underlying a consecration of the division between form and function. We find here the constant protest against their association by the modern movement that leads the opportunity to analyse the ornament almost independently from the structure, at the heart of the notion of *decorated shed*. A first contradiction appears because the late modern vernacular is characterized by prefabrication and no longer by traditional crafts (identified as vernacular by Paul Oliver). More recently, the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels has coined the term *Vernacular 2.0* to highlight architectural solutions pragmatically adapted to singular projects that no longer borrows from traditional methods. From the 1990s, the Danish “new wave”, of which Ingels is a protagonist, is criticized precisely for dismissing the national “functional tradition” of brick building methods and inaugurating a superficial, “communicative” practice of architecture<sup>17</sup>.

16 Panofsky 1939.

17 Vindum/Weiss 2012.

The articulation of postmodernity to the upsurge of signs and the communicative nature of images has been richly investigated. Photographer and philosopher Jean Baudrillard focuses on western societies’ growing consumerism by analysing the living environment of objects as a system of significations orientated toward the making of oneself as a person<sup>18</sup>. Producing signs implies a visual turn that favours the return of iconological studies instead of material analysis. Yet, the iconological method tends to ignore the construction work and planning in analysing architecture.

18 Baudrillard 1970.

The authors express a strong critique against the way the modern movement turns towards the production of monumental buildings. The modern movement achieves buildings as unpopular monuments, assuming a “*heroic and original*” attitude toward a quest for technology. At the time, such avant-gardist position does not obtain any broad approval within the population which has massively adopted individual housing since the post-war period. The suburban housing model spreads because it adopts features from the vernacular house considered as popular:

“Today even traditional American shed roof and boards-and-battens are accepted and replace the flat roof and imitation concrete that architects strove for and clients resisted in suburbia.”<sup>19</sup>

19 Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972: 152.

The flat roof and concrete structures become inadequate symbols of a pretentious or technocratic attitude toward popular aspirations for a comforting landscape of gable roofs and low walls. The upsurge against the “polite

20 'Polite architecture' designates non-vernacular buildings in Brunskill 1971.

21 Jameson 1984.

22 Brunskill 1971.

architecture”<sup>20</sup> of modernism gives to the suburb a way toward *popular* success. The architecture of new suburbs is criticized for its *postmodern populism*<sup>21</sup> that distances itself from the modern narrative of technological and social improvement and seeks to make understood that, because of those unpopular aspirations, modern architects forgot to grasp the making of suburbs in favour of builders and developers making the true vernacular landscape, in the same way as academics previously forgot old rural dwellings in favour of “polite classicist”<sup>22</sup> architecture.

### The vernacular landscape against modern planning

Twelve years after *Learning from Las Vegas*, the writer and landscape designer John Brinckerhoff Jackson publishes *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (1984). His insight into the vernacular differs in terms of arguments, scope, and scales. While the three architects examine the contemporary landscapes undergoing commodification and consumption, Jackson focuses on the overall process of space-making throughout the times. Nevertheless, they all intend to understand how the latest social evolutions disrupt modern planning, and challenge the usual association of vernacular architecture with the retrospective formation of a tradition.

For Jackson, the vernacular house cannot be defined by historical local crafts, which is a formal definition suitable for historians, archaeologists or geographers; it is rather characterized as a constant adaptation to functions, uses and services related to peculiar environmental conditions in time and space<sup>23</sup>. Such view involves two consequences: first, the vernacular holds a transient quality because evolving spatial conditions can disrupt the previous functions of dwellings (protection against new climatic hazard, urbanization that densifies parcels), secondly, the vernacular is fundamentally embedded in social uses and practices. It relies on a sociological investigation of spaces that contrasts with any formal conception. Jackson defines landscape not as an artistic representation (in this point he also diverges from the strip iconology), but as the social production of spaces throughout time. Far from being withdrawn into its natural conditions, the landscape is the result of the human and social making of spaces. The social extent of landscape is drawn from the French school of human geography and French historical anthropology. Marc Bloch focuses on late medieval agrarian structures and social life in their spatial extent to explain the formation of open-field systems with crop rotation in northern France, bocage in the west and two-field system in the south<sup>24</sup>. In *La verdeur du bocage*, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie formulates an overall description of a local society in western Normandy in which landscape appears to be the spatial manifestation of social structure<sup>25</sup>. Landscape is not analysed as immediate visual reality as in Las Vegas, but as a social product.

The vernacular landscape implies a critique of welfare planning as Jackson distinguishes it from a *political landscape*<sup>26</sup>. The vernacular landscape is produced at the bottom level of society (peasant land use in medieval times, or, as we may translate it, private garden decoration in contemporary times),

23 Jackson 1984: 3.

24 Marc Bloch 1931.

25 Le Roy Ladurie 1973.

26 Jackson 1984.

while the political landscape is planned at the top level (landlord controlling a territory from the castle, then State-led building of roads to control borders). This conceptual distinction takes Jackson away from Marc Bloch's view of rural history that does not distinguish a vernacular and a political level in the production of agrarian systems because the whole is interconnected: agricultural surplus creates cities and finances cathedrals, peasants exchange with lords. Jackson does not strictly oppose the vernacular to the political (they are overlaid in a medieval fief), but he considers that the later development of modern States widens and upscales political control over landscapes. In the 20th century, welfare planning materializes the spatial extension of modern States as it gives planning powers to public authorities: by planning neighbourhood units, public infrastructures, large-scale roads, the geography of welfare provisions developed in post-war USSR and western countries spreads a political landscape (New Deal resettlement policies, British New Towns), especially in countries marked by state planification as France (Reconstruction, *Grands ensembles* and *Villes Nouvelles*). Even though it originally pretended to break with classicist architecture, the modern movement draws out the same top-down political attitude by using the planning powers of administration. The modern state's legal basis, transforming *space* into *territory*, extends its control not only on building castles, major roads and fortresses, but aspires to cover all areas of planning like minor roads, cities and suburbs, street alignments. Such development reaches its peak in post-war western and communist countries at a moment when the 1960s antimodern critique claims modernism to be an authoritarian attitude, opening an era of criticism in which *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* takes place. In France, Henri Lefebvre's notion of right to the city, developed from 1968 in its seminal eponymous essay<sup>27</sup>, holds a similar view focusing on the bottom-up making of spaces at the scale of cities that functionalist planning would have cut back. The ideological context, marked by libertarian Marxism and self-management, favours anti-modernist critiques in the vein advocated by Lefebvre, even though Jackson actually seeks an accommodation of landscape design with people's needs rather than class opposition. Yet Jackson tries to see within contemporary landscape transformations a way toward more self-space-making.

27 Lefebvre 1968.

Jackson sets up three types of landscape. The Landscape One, that of the early medieval period and the American colonization, is characterized by provisional wood settlements of local communities and custody; the Landscape Two, that manifests a surge of political control over planning by the making of a stable territory (palaces and gardens, squares in cities, large-scale roads), is inherited from Rome and the Renaissance. Finally, the Landscape Three disrupts the political landscape by the acceleration of social and economic changes (large-scale urbanization, protests)<sup>28</sup>. Landscape Three can be somehow drawn closer to the commercial vernacular: the mass planning of suburbs with real estate schemes and spatial sprawl establishing commercial fittings by the roadside. We can relate the commercial vernacular to the post-political landscape that Jackson examines as breaking out in the late 20th century.

28 Jackson 1984.

The comparison between Landscape One and Landscape Three lies in the legal extent of space-making. Bottom-up planning makes *custody* the principle of land use allocation and building, in opposition to the modern state-led planning using *law* and *planning*. In medieval societies, common rights organize exchange while the political landscape progressively introduces public and private ownership, later developed by enclosures. Custodies are informal and evolve all the time, echoing the definition of the vernacular as the transient quality of adaptation to new environmental conditions. In Landscape One, the transitory relates to medieval wood clearing and frame building (wood symbolizes the provisional) and lodge cabins in the early colonization of Northern America. In Landscape Three, economic disruptions of industrial and post-industrial societies shape the contemporary vernacular: Jackson mentions Taylorism triggering the desertion of traditional dwellings in favour of equipped modern houses in North America during the first half of the 20th century<sup>29</sup>. In other words, the vernacular is located where economic conditions exceed political control (even though economists generally consider that State intervention can in fact support and regulate the market). Suburban individual home schemes, where inhabitants decorate in their own way gardens, walls, and fences, can be considered as the late modern vernacular because people produce themselves the suburban landscape as they shop goods in suburban malls and centres characterized by the aesthetics of commercial vernacular. Jackson polarizes the vernacular by political intervention over space, but he misses to integrate an analysis of late modern capitalism as it grasps the making of contemporary landscapes: in an era where people own private houses, they build or decorate them with manufactured goods from large-scale private companies.

29 Jackson 1984.

Neither Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour nor Jackson refuse altogether modern planning methods in the making of landscapes, but all four of them advocate planners and landscape designers to be less authoritarian and to accommodate a *laissez-faire* with the latest social changes taking place within the period of late capitalism (commodification and consumerism producing strips, democratization of individual homes by scheme developers, highly-manufactured goods that require commercial hubs, etc). Postmodern populism can be understood as the legitimization of consumers' and inhabitants' needs: such dimension is ignored by Jackson who does not clearly relate the Landscape Three to the rise of post-Fordist capitalism. He does not seek emancipation from capitalism (postmodern thinking has been regularly accused of accepting the market economy because of its post-political attitude). Jean-François Lyotard analyses postmodernity as the end of grand narratives, among them the rational development of modern States of which architectural functionalism represented the highest fulfilment<sup>30</sup>. Supporting the bottom-up making of cities and landscapes situates all planning projects at local levels instead of national or regional levels. Decentralization laws in Denmark (1973) and France (1982) mark such a step toward late modern planning.

30 Lyotard 1979.

## The political contradictions between the late modern vernacular and historical architectures: the transient against heritage?

The difference between the two conceptions of the vernacular firstly relates to the cultural background of Venturi and Jackson's investigations rooted in the singular context of American history. Jackson postulates that Western-European building archaeology and art history, by studying rural domestic architecture, focus on the long-term making of building techniques that we inherit today as a testimony of a historical tradition: rural European architecture did not evolve much since its formation during Late Middle-Age until the industrial revolution. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie coins the term *histoire immobile* (immobile history) to describe the long-term characters of rural societies between the 14th and the 18th centuries in which agrarian systems, inheritance rules and space-making did hardly evolve. As Jackson puts it, the shorter duration of American history, characterized by the combination of fast technological changes, vast land conquests, "*abundant wood*" and "*scarcity of workforce*" made the dwellings more likely to be provisional before their retrospective formation as a building tradition<sup>31</sup>. Defining the vernacular as the transitory suits American history well. We can similarly assume that the commercial vernacular expresses the making of the post-war American way of life based on mass consumption and the low density of suburb schemes where no domestic tradition is rooted in a long history, in spite of Frank Lloyd Wright's attempt to create Usonia. Jameson writes that post-modern culture is the first truly American culture, emancipated from European-born early modernism<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Jackson 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Jameson 1984.

Late modernity has been associated to an acceleration of financial and exchange fluxes through the notion of *liquid society* in which the transient becomes a pattern of cultural change<sup>33</sup>. The acceleration of economic and political disruptions during the late 20th century, first and foremost the latest stages of globalization, lets bottom-up social practices rapidly evolve in adaptation to changing environmental and historical conditions. The Social Darwinist view that underlies the transient quality of the Jacksonian vernacular is not precisely investigated nor related to globalization patterns. The short-term temporality of increasing mobilities stands in contrast with the static position implied by the formation of a tradition that requires long-term trends in building methods. Therefore, traditional architectures and landscapes related to a historical period, such as wood frame building prior to industrial revolution, are not considered anymore as vernacular regarding the recent disruptions brought about by industrial rise and fall. A *static* attitude against disruptions consists in implementing preservation policies to protect old architectures considered as *heritage*, rather than allowing a vernacular *laissez-faire* that could break it. In other terms, the Jacksonian vernacular does not shape a tradition as French regionalist architects or as William Morris did by employing local crafts threatened by industrial revolutions imposing faster and cheaper building techniques.

<sup>33</sup> Term coined by Anthony Giddens. See Giddens 1991.



**Fig. 5** Heritage landscape of individual houses (Lisieux, Normandy, France) altered or modified by post-war fibre-cement roof siding and fencing with evergreen plants.

34 Cupers 2014.

Consequently, the vernacular can be identified throughout architectures whose building methods do not employ traditional and local crafts anymore (whether it be for Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour or Jackson). If we look at French suburb planning in the late 20th century, the mass development of individual home estates has been criticized for damaging the traditional landscapes because of new modes of building (prefabrication), designing (render coating instead of stone, brick or wood) and domestic ways of living (garden fencing with evergreen plants, individual parcel allotment, privacy that obstructs the view, fig. 5). Preservationists use to blame an alteration of the traditional architectures that Paul Oliver identifies as vernacular (*historical non-pedigreed*), but the new way of inhabiting peri-urban spaces would qualify suburban architecture as vernacular in the eyes of Venturi or Jackson. New space-making practices can alter or even lead to the disappearance of previous ones that precisely become retrospectively seen as vernacular from a historiographic point of view. The new vernacular lets disappear the former one. To a similar extent, Henri Lefebvre's right to the city claims inhabitants to take active parts in defending the city against alienating functionalist planning. But during the late 20th century, traditional crafts, altered since the beginning of industrial revolution, have almost vanished to a point that only preservationist polices can bring the necessary knowledge to protect and use old local building techniques. Following Lefebvre's quest for bottom-up participation in ruling cities, some French architects and academics since the 1980s seek to make way to "co-conception" and socially embedded architectural practice with inhabitants within planning and building<sup>34</sup>, from Lucien Kroll to Patrick Bouchain: such co-conceived architecture marks the emergence of Landscape Three because it integrates contemporary bottom-up space-making. As the building culture of late modern western societies is not rooted anymore in the knowledge of traditional architecture, preservationists may consequently fear that co-conceived architecture would alter the heritage landscape because people's practices are embedded into mass consumption and globalized culture. In an era when private companies grasp whole economic sectors as in the building and decoration industry, preservationists may even wonder about the extent to which late capitalism could interfere with or influence people's space-making culture, turning down Lefebvre's emancipatory perspective to bring back to people their right to the city rooted in the quest for self-management against capitalism.

For preservationists, upcoming social and economic changes potentially threaten the legacy of historical rural and urban architectures. In order to prevent any damage that they could suffer from, they advocate for classifying sites and buildings. Where custody regulates the vernacular, law enforces preservation: architectural and cultural heritage are constituent to the formation of the modern State and the modern nation. The common etymology of *stasis* in Latin binds *static* with State, and heritage policies take root in the French Revolution as a reaction against vandalism. Preserving long-term traditions appeals to preservation and the legal system that prevents what customs dis-

rupt: the political attitude of preservationists opposes Jackson's post-political view. But he does not ask for any intentional abandonment of heritage preservation, his post-political view over vernacular landscapes merely leads to an indifferent attitude toward the protection of old architecture. On the contrary, heritage protection prolongates the State's planning rationality over space because only law guarantees heritage preservation against contemporary damages.

The notions of *common* and *common rights*, echoing the medieval customs, make way to vernacular practices in contemporary space-making. The French geographer Anne Sgard has recently highlighted such conflict between landscape as heritage preservation, aimed at fixing a given historical state of aesthetic patterns and natural conditions, and landscape as a *common good* designating the current social demands concerning the access to spaces (beaches, mountains, etc)<sup>35</sup>. As in Jackson's and Lefebvre's views, we find again a tension between the aesthetic perception of *paysage* and the social extent of *landscape*. Preserving the former requires to set a coordinated policy while the later depends on people's needs and practices. Such tension particularly refers to the French regulation of Sites and Monuments and the 1943 bill that assesses areas of protection in a perimeter of 500 meters around a listed building. Within those areas, the historical built environment of farms or worker houses, once produced by bottom-up local builders, becomes now protected by national policies as any building project has to pass the assessment of a State architect (*Architecte des Bâtiments de France*, ABF) who can prevent owners from adopting non-traditional roofing or cladding in accordance to contemporary needs for heating. Thermal renovation, whether it follows new regulations or new ways of life, can threaten historical landscapes.

The last paradoxical consequence is to bring preservation closer to modern planning methods insofar as they both represent a top-down attitude toward space-making. Modernist architecture has become a historical period and constitutes nowadays a historical legacy of buildings and landscapes. The establishment in 1988 of Docomomo<sup>36</sup>, a non-profit association aimed at protecting the legacy of modern architecture and landscapes, illustrates such paradox: Docomomo calls for legal protection and stands against the mass demolition of modernist buildings largely advocated by contemporary planners who echo the 1960s antimodern critique of Lefebvre's right to the city. Since few decades, preserving "older architectures" as heritage by far exceeds the realm of classical monuments and historical urban and rural built environment towards more recent periods. Such evolution is very sensitive in the French historiography, in which architectural historians don't use the notion of "vernacular" to designate local architectures in their evolution from preindustrial societies to postindustrial ones, like the English-speaking literature usually does. The *Inventaire du patrimoine*, a French service of the Culture Ministry aimed at inventorying buildings, landscapes and decorative arts all over the national territory since 1964, does not generally use the notion of vernacular and rather refers to it as the *historical built environment* (*bâti an-*

35 Sgard 2010.

36 International Committee for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement.

*cien*) whose material legacy forms the overall heritage of a historical period. It is the implicit acceptance of the arbitrariness to fix a clear delimitation of what is vernacular or not. By opening architectural history to the 20th century ordinary architectures and landscapes, French historian Jean-Baptiste Minnaert has recently implied to consider that ‘relevant’ architecture without architects does not only concern pre-industrial dwellings, but extends in time toward the spatial manifestations of later industrial and post-industrial mutations becoming liable to heritage preservation (suburban housing schemes, road infrastructures, commercial landscapes)<sup>37</sup>.

## Conclusion

The *commercial vernacular* (1972) and the *vernacular landscape* (1984) bring about the delimitation of vernacular architecture that historians initially reserved to the non-monumental rural and urban dwellings that originated prior to the industrialization of the building sector. Beyond different arguments and scopes, Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour and Jackson all update the common definition of the vernacular as an architecture of buildings without architects to the late 20th century socio-economic evolutions: the presumed failures or excesses of modern planning leading to protests, the growing influence of developers upon the production of suburban estates and commercial malls, the deepening globalization affecting the economic circuit of materials. By focusing on architectural strips on roadsides, the commercial vernacular comes to designate the visibility of the ordinary middle-class living environment while the vernacular landscape is transient and mobile because it characterizes bottom-up space-making adapting to environmental disruptions. The authors make way to a *late modern vernacular* leading to contradicting views: firstly, the commercial vernacular is no longer associated with building crafts nor tradition-making which English-speaking historians previously identified as vernacular, secondly the Jacksonian vernacular landscape does not call on preservation policies upon former vernacular-made buildings once disruptions have imposed new ways of space-making exceeding the political State control. Moreover, especially in France contemporary vernacular practices are now progressively opposed to State-led national patrimonialism.

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## Figures

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