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Beyond Precedent

Global in a Not-so-Global World

The desire to teach in a way that acknowledges our position in the world as global citizens faces several challenges, many of which are global in nature. We identify three of these. First, there is the split between “modern” and “traditional” that can be found in a wide range of institutional and historical practices the world over. Second, there is the problem of language which has embedded within it certain historical presumptions. Third, there is the hesitancy in studio teaching to address issues that allow students to see themselves as actors in global history. What we advocate is a global critique of anti-global practices.

Now there is one outstanding important fact regarding spaceship earth, and that is that no instruction book came with it.

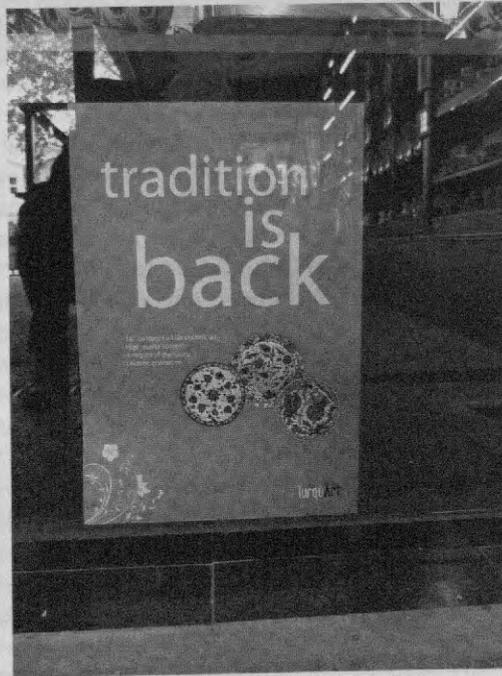
—Buckminster Fuller

The Modern and the Traditional: A Global Dualism

It may be true, as Buckminster Fuller so aptly noted, that no instruction booklet came with spaceship earth, but that does not mean that such “booklets” are in any way lacking. The problem is that most of them are astonishingly outdated, such as for example, the one that claims to spell out the difference between tradition and modernity.¹ Used all over the world, it could be called Instruction Booklet Number One. The Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, for example, in Seoul, Korea opened its doors in 2004 with one of its new buildings serving as the home of “Korean Traditional Art” and another, just a few meters away, serving for the exhibition of modern art that is tailored around what its curators call “the flow of contemporary art.”² The split between “the traditional” and “the contemporary”—between the fixed and the transient, and between “history” and “modernism”—is so pervasive and now so fundamental to the perspective of current self-understanding that it makes all attempts to define “the global” in more complex terms practically

impossible, especially because the discourses associated with “tradition” are integral not only to international curatorial practices, but also to the national-identity projects—practically the world over—of the last twenty years (Figure 1).

1. “Tradition is Back,” A shop sign in Istanbul, 2010 (Photo courtesy of Mark Jarzombek).



The dissemination of this Instruction Booklet has been relatively rapid. In the mid-twentieth century, national identity was usually associated with modernization and engineering. Recent national-identity movements, however, have increasingly been associated with history, religion, and “culture,” the latter often sanitized for internal popular consumption, touristic commercialization, and political empowerment. Furthermore, since 1975, about forty-eight new countries have joined the United Nations, eager to define their unique identities. The result has been the internationalized spread of cultural nationalism and the ideology of tradition. Architectural restoration projects the world over have often played an important role in this. Kwanghwamun, a tower gate in Seoul, Korea, for example, was rebuilt in 2010 to invigorate national spirit (Figure 2). The Korean president, dressed in traditional costume, delivered the opening speech under a white banner suspended from balloons stating that the gate was restored to its “genuine form.” Such projects, along with hundreds of UNESCO World Heritage Sites aim to cement the relationship, reinforced by tourism, between history and national identity (Figure 3). Another indicator is the rise in the number of national museums in the last decades.³

Art history has played a role in the distribution of the Instruction Booklet since such categories as Korean Art, Chinese Art, Cambodian Art, and Indian



2. Official opening of the Kwanghwamun (tower gate) in Seoul, Korea, on August 15, 2010 (Photo courtesy of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Republic of Korea).

Art seem to always “end” with the arrival of modernism in a way that reinforces museological practices.⁴ The title of William Watson’s magisterial book, *Arts of China to AD 1900*, says it all, as does Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom’s book, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*.⁵ Bianca Maria Alfieri’s *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, ends in 1839.⁶ The last chapter of Alfieri’s book is called the “The Final Phase of Mamluk Architecture,” as if this “final phase” were a historical predictor of the arrival of colonial masters who ended the development of Islamic architectural history in India. These books epitomize the art historical crisis of how to address the advent of modernity in the non-West, promoting the premise that modernity represents an era that is essentially (art) history-less. It is this historiographic closure against modernity—where it is treated as a

separate academic discipline—that forces modernity to be seen first as a “rupture” and then as an endless “flow” of contemporary, tradition-less realities.

Global Instruction Booklet Number One has also been institutionalized in architectural pedagogy especially in Asia, where there are not only usually two primary history offerings, “traditional architecture” and “modern architecture,” but also where the first is commonly taught before the second, effectively alienating one time period from the other.⁷ The split—constituting a self-traditionalization of the non-West—poses fundamental problems to the advancement of global history, which has no home in such a system. In Japan, for example, it might seem reasonable that most architecture students are asked to take a course on Traditional Japanese Architecture. It

makes them into good and knowledgeable citizens. But global citizenship is sacrificed. And the problem is not just in Japan, but now, practically global.

The pervasive dualism of history and modernity might have some credibility in the field of art curatorship—reinforced as it is by the globalized rise of cultural nationalism—but the history of architecture should most certainly not be written or taught in this way. Nor is it accurate. There is much more flow to history than there is to modernity. One only needs to think of the seemingly endless rise and fall of empires and kingdoms compared to the significantly more stable political situation of today. The Leeum Samsung Museum should improve the curatorial language of its exhibitions. One museum should be dedicated to the Flow of Traditions and the other to The Modern Art in the Era of Permanent Nations.



3. Billboard announcing the beginning of construction in 2007 by the Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage in collaboration with UNESCO at Lalibela, Ethiopia (Photo courtesy of Mark Jarzombek).

Argument one: Consideration of the “the global”—learning the history of others and challenging ourselves to resist the convenient and reductive taxonomies of nations—should be adopted globally, but it is not. It is undercut by a global culture of localism augmented by cultural nationalism and reinforced by art history, art curatorship, and the international heritage industry.

The NAAB and the Paradox of Language

The National Architectural Accrediting Board has recently decided that it is important to educate students about what it calls “Historical Traditions and Global Culture.” According to the guidelines about how to accomplish this, schools of architecture are mandated to provide students “with an understanding of parallel and divergent canons and traditions of architecture, landscape and urban design including examples of indigenous, vernacular, local, regional, national settings from the Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern hemispheres in terms of their climatic, ecological, technosocioeconomic, public health, and cultural factors.”⁸

Unlike Instruction Booklet Number One, which is brought out of hiding only as a global cumulative

practice spanning the realms of art, architecture, and politics, this “booklet” is spelled out in real words. But what then does Historical Traditions and Global Culture, for example, mean? A good number of traditions are actually impositions of the ruling elites that have been naturalized over time. The Japanese tea ceremony, as it is usually performed today as a demonstration of simplicity and austerity, may now be seen as traditional, but it was created in the fifteenth century as a protest by the aristocracy against the courtly excesses of the shogunate. In cases like this, the adjective “historical” is useful since it keeps the study of tradition anchored in historical and not in ontological vagaries. The problem, however, is that many things that we call “traditions” are not historical, but modern inventions often frozen in time for political expediency. By only teaching “historical traditions,” we are not bringing into the open the circumstance that traditions are also shifting signifiers. The linkage of “global” and culture, in the context of “indigenous,” is also hardly neutral. It is a reiteration of a decades-old position that holds that global is to be taught and researched as a recuperation of an architecture-from-below, a premise which today is seen as

patronizing. Taken together, the words Historical Traditions and Global Culture should have been arranged differently to read “Global History and Cultural Traditions.” History is always global, and traditions are always cultural products.

Let us now study the next part of the N.A.A.B. “instruction booklet” and the catenation of words beginning with indigenous and ending with “national.” There is no doubt that indigenous architecture is important to study, but one should not forget that in India, for example, the government has categorized many of its numerous indigenous tribes as members of the “Backward Classes.”⁹ This is not just a legacy of colonialism, but a conceit of civilization that can be traced back thousands of years, and not just in South Asia, but practically everywhere. In the context of our modern times, the suppression of indigenous people has increasingly important economic implications, since many of these tribes live in forested and mountainous areas rich in lumber and mineral deposits. Linking indigenous to “nation” creates the illusion that nations arise from their indigenous populations naturally over time, when in actuality the modern nation-state, as history shows again and again, has more often than not sought to suppress the rights of the indigenous.

The !Kung (also known as the San) in Botswana are a case in point. With the creation in 1961 of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, three quarters of their population were relocated to resettlement camps outside the Reserve. The !Kung, who had lived on this site for seventy thousand years or more, were seen as an embarrassment. Conflicts arose. Scores were murdered. In 1999, some land was returned to the !Kung, but in 2005 the government began again to remove them, leaving only about 250 permanent residents in the Reserve. In 2006, a Botswana court proclaimed the eviction illegal, allowing some of the !Kung to return to the game reserve, but many still live in resettlement camps. The difficulties the !Kung experienced did not end there. In the 1990s,

the pharmaceutical giant, Pfizer, became aware of the tribe's use of a local plant, the hoodia cactus, to suppress hunger while hunting, and in 1998 the company began producing a hunger-suppressant using an extract derived from the plant. None of Pfizer's profits were earmarked for the !Kung. In 2002, a memorandum of understanding was drafted, but its implementation is doubtful.¹⁰ To add insult to injury, the recent construction of a fence along the Botswana-Namibia border separates the !Kung from their millennia-old hunting ranges.¹¹

The story is repeated in many places, but with different emphases. When Indonesia gained independence in 1950, an aggressive government campaign was launched to modernize the Mentawaians, who lived on the island of Siberut. Traditional cultural practices, such as tattooing, tooth filing, and the wearing of loincloths, were forbidden. Individuals were forced to join either the Christian or Muslim faith. In the 1990s, cultural oppression of the Mentawai took on a more brutal form—forced relocation to resettlement sites in government-created villages. Mentawai shamanism was outlawed, and police stripped shamans of their sacred objects. International organizations like UNESCO, the World Wildlife Fund, and Friends of the Earth have done little to help. They were often more concerned about saving the island's primates than its indigenous people.

The United States was, of course, the first modern state to enforce a top-down suppression of its indigenous populations, as opposed to having them as colonial subjects. National parks were about landscapes and animals and not about native populations. The approach has now more or less become state policy the world over. It has, one can say, "gone global." In other words if we want to study the premise of "global culture" as NAAB expects us to do, we should not begin with the indigenous and work our way up the historical ladder. Instead we need to start with the status of the indigenous in global history.

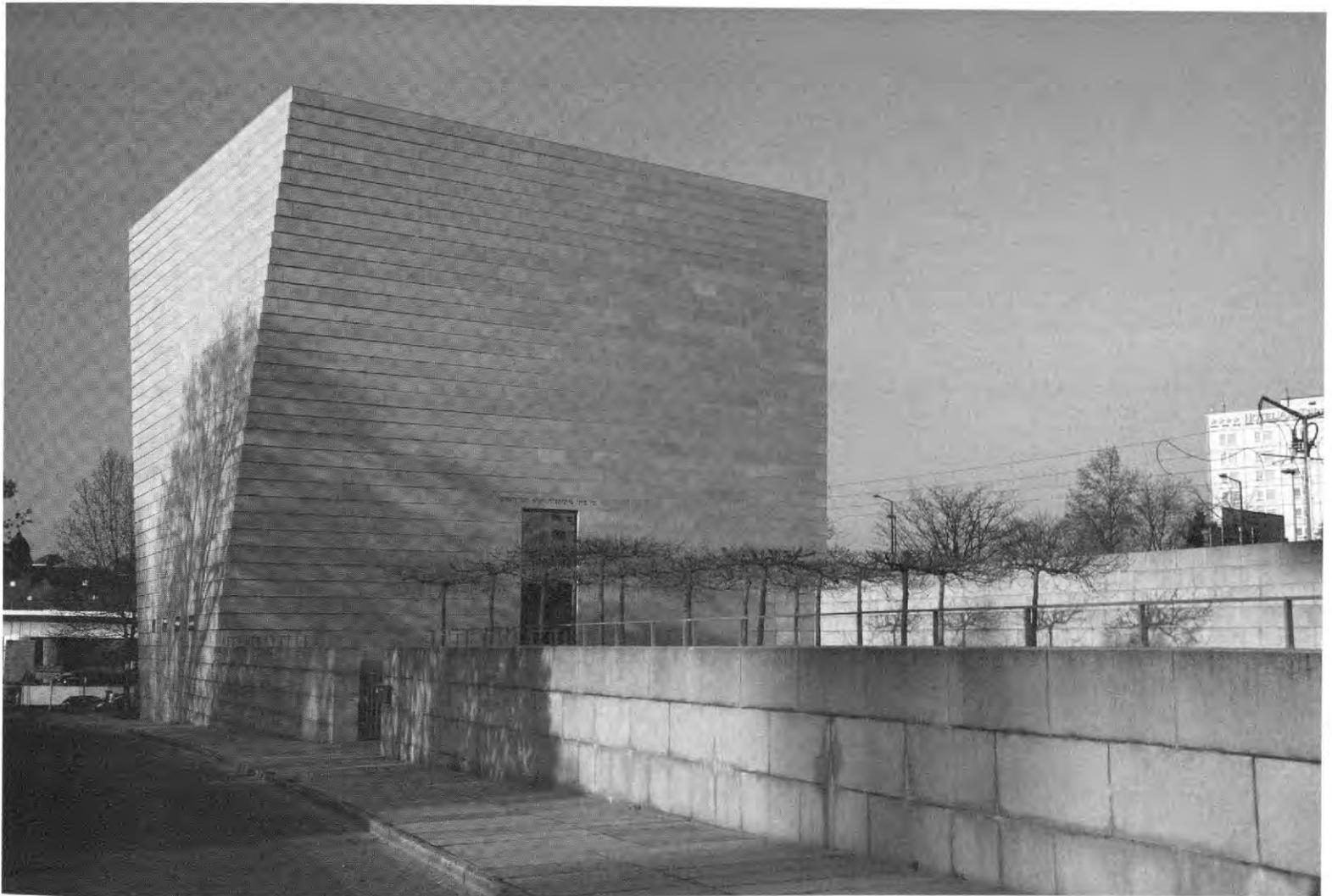
The word "vernacular," the next word in the catenation, is equally problematic. The term derives from the Latin word *vernaculum*, which referred to a shack where slaves lived at the back of a Roman villa's garden. In the eighteenth century, the word slowly came back into currency but without its architectural meaning. Instead it was used by linguists to describe European languages, particularly local dialects. This remained the case until the 1970s when vernacular came into architectural parlance in England and Wales in the context of research into barns and farm sheds.¹² By the 1990s it had become widely naturalized in architectural jargon. Although its etymology alone should lead to a rejection of the term's usage, it is now so well established in architectural circles that it even has come to refer to monumental buildings in the non-West. For example, on its much-used web site, the Smithsonian Institution labels the Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, as vernacular.¹³ We do not know who the designer of the Great Mosque was, but, by that logic, many European cathedrals could also be called vernacular. This tendency to sometimes characterize non-Western architecture—especially if it is made out of mud or timber—as vernacular is not only patronizing, but it is also inconsistent with the term's application in Western contexts. The NAAB guidelines, however, practically endorse this usage, by seeing vernacular as a step up, so to speak, from indigenous.

The word "national" is obviously the most complex term in the catenation. Before the nineteenth century, India, for example, was home to numerous kingdoms, empires, and states. Hundreds of different languages are still spoken there. Given the existence of the modern country of India, which was ultimately a colonial construct, it is, of course, convenient to think along the lines of an "Indian architecture." The problems are obvious. How, for example, does one deal with the pre-modern history of Pakistan or Afghanistan? Likewise, although Southeast Asia was significantly influenced by India through the spread of Buddhism and Hinduism,

Angkor Wat is discussed today as an example of "Cambodian Architecture," even though it cannot be understood without considering the contemporary Chola Empire in India, the Srivijayan Empire to the south and the Kingdom of Dali (in modern-day China) to the north. Pre-nation-state history is significantly skewed when viewed through the lens of modern national realities. The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco has separate sections for China, India, Korea, and Japan. While this might seem reasonable enough, such a structure makes it impossible to learn about the complex, intra-continental connections between these places. The museum, despite its name, makes it impossible to learn about Asia. The name of the museum should be "The Art of (Some of) the Countries of Asia as Seen Through a Non-Global World-View."

All in all, the catenation from indigenous to national not only suggests a progress toward more organized and more legitimate political structures, but also reinforces the stability of the concept "national" which makes us return to Instruction Booklet Number One. The catenation tries to avoid a Eurocentric perspective by being inclusive of the architecture "from below," but it is most definitely still a nineteenth century proposition. The catenation fails to account for histories—even ancient histories—that are transnational, trans-geographical, trans-continental and, maybe lastly, and importantly, global; all the more reason to shift the discussion from Global Cultures to Global History. Admittedly, "nations" are more stable and thus more convenient for the historian than what existed before, but if the goal of education is to move in the direction of global then we must critique the hegemony of "the nation" as a stable epistemological and disciplinary construct.

Argument Two: By global we do not mean the culmination of history beginning with the indigenous and ending with the modern nation state. Nor do we mean the reclamation of an architecture-from-below, but a project that can—and must—frame the contestations and



4. Rena Wandel-Hoefer and Wolfgang Lorch, The Dresden Synagogue, 2001 (Photo courtesy of Maros Mraz).

ideologies embedded in architecture's historical formations.

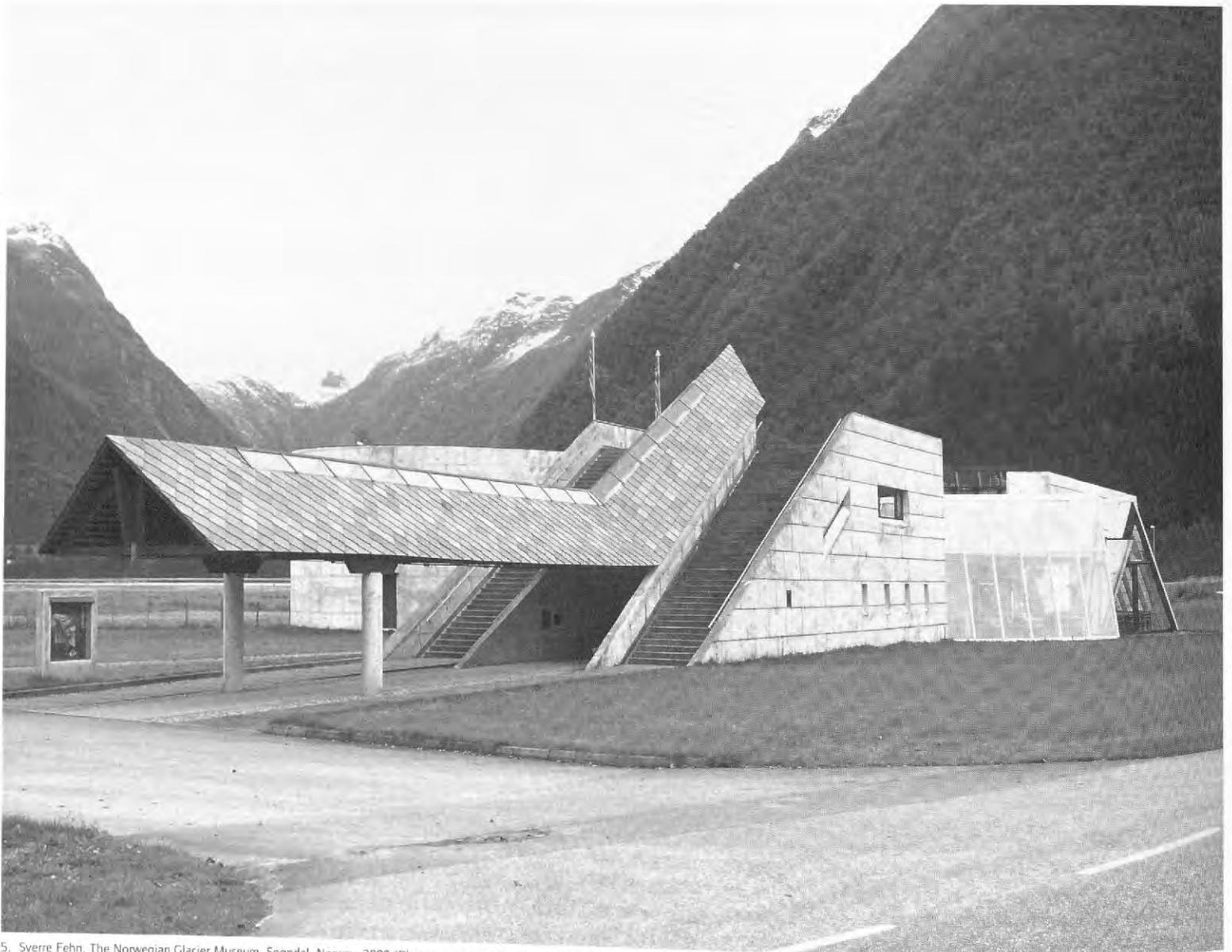
Putting the "Global Footprint" into the Architectural Studio

The challenge of engaging the question of the global must occur not only in seminar rooms, but also in the architecture studio. Unfortunately, global is almost always made equal to "globalization." This has become an Instruction Booklet unto itself. Studios using this instruction booklet are often designed around pressing problems, like the growth of slums, the rapid urbanization of the countryside, and the crisis of ecology. While these issues are important, their range is much too limited, especially if the emphasis is on problem-solving. Instead, one could ask students, for example, to

design a store that makes manifest its globalized contents, and by this we do not mean a store that—like Rem Koolhaas's Prada store in New York—celebrates its contents. After all, buildings of even humble proportions are today a composite of materials from probably a dozen or more different countries. In that sense, buildings are far more foundational as a map of global realities—in the positive and negative sense—than even a shoe. And it is not just materials along with their chemistries and industries that make a building global but so too the economies of production and exchange, all of which can be incorporated into a building's message. Having students first research the global nature of materials and their production streams, and then having them experiment with ways to represent that in a design would be a first

step to raising global consciousness. Unfortunately, we tend to focus more on the carbon footprint than on the global footprint. The point is not that the global footprint needs to be reduced. Instead it needs first to be made manifest. Then it could perhaps even be celebrated.

Religion is another common but prickly subject that is rarely discussed. Consider the following studio proposition: Design a synagogue in Dresden where there are no Jews. This might sound like an implausibly strange studio project, but it is not a hypothetical question. Such a building was designed by Rena Wandel-Hoefer and Wolfgang Lorch, and built in 2001 (Figure 4).¹⁴ There were almost no Jews in Dresden when the synagogue was built, since they were exterminated during WWII; furthermore, the few Jews living there had come



5. Sverre Fehn, The Norwegian Glacier Museum, Sogndal, Norway, 2000 (Photo courtesy of Frode Inge Helland).

only recently from Russia and were relatively secular in their world-view. But the site of Gottfried Semper's synagogue, which was demolished under Hitler, was still owned by the de facto Jewish community. The government decided that a synagogue should be built on the site, even without a client. Regardless of one's opinion of the building, it was an important and praiseworthy—and not uncontroversial—structure that opened a conversation about global realities.

This example inspires ideas for other projects: a neo-pagan temple in England for the so-called Druids who are clamoring for legitimacy; a mosque

without a minaret, as is now legislated in Switzerland; a human rights museum in Beijing; or a mosque near the Ground Zero site. The fact that this last project is now at the center of a national debate should lead studio professors to ask why this project has not already been assigned.

Political issues present countless opportunities for studio projects. In Bahrain or Hong Kong, a teacher might propose that students design a museum devoted to the lives of Philippine workers; or in Seoul, a museum to Vietnamese wives. We can imagine a museum of journalism in Moscow; an Armenian History Museum in Istanbul; a memorial

in Tiananmen Square to the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989; or a new government complex in Afghanistan. A teacher might propose the design of a bank that anticipates a civilizational collapse and the return of a barter economy; the design of a school for our failed education system; a house where a family member suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). After all, 1.6 percent of Americans and millions of people worldwide suffer from PTSD.

How do we get students to see themselves as architectural actors in our complex, but shared, global reality?

A student who designs a Buddhist sanctuary in Maine might be interested to learn how Buddhism left India in the third century CE and how its architectural forms were transformed as it travelled across China to Korea and Japan. Students asked to design a warehouse in Ethiopia, which is experiencing a huge influx of Chinese goods, could examine the architectural, political and urban connection between India and East Africa beginning in the twelfth century. Students designing a mosque in Ireland could consider how Christian architects in thirteenth-century Cordoba transformed the city's seventh-century mosque into a cathedral. Students designing projects sited within the chaos of a contemporary megalopolis should study the largest multicultural city in the pre-modern world, Chang'an (contemporary Xi'an).

Global realities are more compelling as platforms of discussion than what one finds in most studios today even when they focus on globalization. No wonder architectural education seems increasingly irrelevant. Not only should students be brought into the heart of controversies, but they should also be familiarized with examples that are already engaged in the great, historical questions of our time and should focus on these rather than on the latest buildings by star architects. Examples abound: a Glacier Museum in Norway (Figure 5); a memorial to President Reagan in California; a shrine to Jesse Helms in North Carolina; a Pol Pot Torture Museum in Cambodia. The list goes on! All of these buildings exist, but are almost never discussed as ways to get access to our contemporary position in global history.

Argument Three: Most studios, even those that claim to address globalization, have inoculated themselves against cultural relevance. This is a serious mistake. We must re-establish the global relevance of architecture through informed, critical

position-taking. Furthermore, all buildings should have a Global Footprint.

Conclusion

In the above comments we have tried to paint a picture of difficulty. The "global project" as it might be called—a project in which different people see themselves as part of a complex global history and its disciplinary and political formations—requires global participation. That is for sure. But this is unlikely given the current state of affairs where many of the current "instruction booklets" for spaceship earth are designed to work against a global-oriented epistemology. The more global—or seemingly global—we have become in the last decade the more we realize how un-global the dominant narratives are about what global means. This suggests that we should not be too optimistic about a global epistemology in the near future. In the short term, however, both history-writing and the architectural studio must play a part in the critique; their future cultural relevancy depends on it.

Notes

1. See Mark Jarzombek, "Art History and Architecture's Aporia," in James Elkins, Alice S. Kim, and Shivka Valiavicharska, eds., *Globalization and Art* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp. 188–94.
2. <http://leem.samsungfoundation.org/eng/main.asp> (accessed July 5, 2010).
3. Some of these are: National Art Gallery, Singapore, 2013; National Art Gallery Pakistan, 2007; National Museum of Kenya, 2006; National Museum of China, 2003; National Museum of Saudi Arabia, 2000; Uzbekistan State Museum of Applied Art, 1997; National Museum of Turkmenistan, 1998; National Museum of Bashkortostan Republic, 1992; Kuwait National Museum, 1983.
4. For the critique of heritage industry see, for example: Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987); Richard Sharpley, *Tourism, Tourists and Society* (Huntingdon, UK: Elm Publications, 1994); and John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).
5. William Watson, *The Arts of China to AD 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art*

and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

6. Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Laurence King, 2000).
7. In the US and Europe, the classic distinction is between Modern and the Renaissance, with far different consequences.
8. This requirement is known to school administrators as Realm A: A.9. "National Architecture Accreditation Board (NAAB) Student Performance Criteria (Approved July 10, 2009)," p. 22. http://depts.washington.edu/archdept/Forms/2009_Conditions%20_FINAL%20EDITION.pdf (accessed July 5, 2010).
9. For a brief history of the term, see Marc Galanter, "Who Are the Other Backward Classes?" An Introduction to a Constitutional Puzzle," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13, 43/44 (October 28, 1978), pp. 1812–1828. The government of India classifies some of its citizens based on their social and economic condition, using terms such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Other Backward Class (OBC). These people are to be distinguished by the "untouchables," The "Scheduled Tribes," who constitute about 7 percent of the population, do not accept the caste system and prefer to reside deep in the jungles, forests, and mountains of India, away from the main population. The government claims that it ensures the social and educational development of OBCs, but in practice this is a complicated matter. Before 1985, the affairs of Backward Classes were looked after by the Backward Classes Cell (BCC) in the Ministry of Home Affairs. With the creation of a separate Ministry of Welfare in 1985 (renamed as Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in 1998) the matters relating to OBCs were transferred to the new Ministry.
10. Rebirth Africa, "San Tribe and Biopiracy," *Rebirth Africa*. http://www.rebirth.co.za/hoodia/san_tribe_and_biopiracy.htm (2000, accessed May 1, 2010).
11. Native Solutions to Conservation Refugees, "Seven Tribes Threatened by Ethiopian National Park," *Native Solutions to Conservation Refugees* <http://www.conservationrefugees.org/threatened.html> (accessed May 1, 2010).
12. In the late nineteenth century, historians would have talked about Folk Architecture or Primitive Architecture. In the 1970s the focus was on "shelter." See for example, Paul Oliver, *Shelter and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1969) and R.W. Brunskill, *A Systematic Procedure for Recording Vernacular Architecture* (London: Ancient Monument Society, 1966–1976). One of the earliest uses is found in M. Bevan-Evans, *Farmhouses and Cottages: An Introduction to Vernacular Architecture in Flintshire* (Hawarden, UK: Flintshire Record Office, 1964). Bevan-Evans was an archaeologist and the county archivist of Flintshire, Wales. The journal, *Vernacular Architecture*, published out of York, began in 1970. R.W. Brunskill's book *Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties: A Field Handbook* (London: Faber) was published in 1974.
13. http://sirismm.si.edu/siris/top_images/eepa_top08_2007.htm (accessed July 5, 2010).
14. Mark Jarzombek, "Disguised Visibilities: Dresden/'Dresden'." in Eleni Bastea, ed., *Memory and Architecture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, November 2004), pp. 49–78.