

ART AND GLOBALIZATION

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ART HISTORY AND ARCHITECTURE'S APORIA

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I would like to pick up on the theme of nationalism, since it featured so prominently in the discussion, but draw my thoughts around something that was not addressed, namely the problem (if I can use that word for a moment) of architecture as it relates to the disciplinary formation of art history. I feel somewhat conflicted in raising this issue, since, as an architectural historian, I am already working within the grain of certain presuppositions and historical constructions. But I am speaking here not as an architectural historian, but as a historian of the discipline of art history, and it is from that point of view that I would like to insist that a discussion about art history and "the global" is changed considerably when seen from the perspective of architecture.

Let me start with a point made by James Elkins. Art history, he claimed, "grew up along with the rise of the modern nation-state," and because of this its current practices may "still be in thrall to the nationalist impulses that seem in retrospect to have driven so much earlier scholarship." There are several ways in which one can agree and disagree with this claim, but my intention is to expand on it laterally not by looking more closely at the phenomenon of the modern nation-state, but by comparing the modern (and here I have to add what was missing in the phrase, namely the word "European") nation-state of the nineteenth century with the modern, non-European nation-state of the twentieth century. If European nations were created with attachments to a history that could be scripted to reach back to ancient times, the situation in India, Brazil, Africa, and elsewhere was very different. There, nation-building was allied with modernization and not preeminently with a demand for art-historical continuities. The new nations of the twentieth century created any number of universities, technical institutions, and even some museums, but did not create major institutions for the study of art or architectural history. The twentieth-century modern nation-state was anticolonial and, to state it perhaps too bluntly, anti-art history.

In the Seminar, much was made about the absence of art history programs in non-European countries. But it can be debated whether this is really an issue at all, or whether what Anglo-European art historians see as a crisis of discontinuity, others could see as something quite different, especially if one takes into consideration that the relationship to architecture was a powerful one and in a sense ushered in the first phase of global modernism. Think of capital cities, and all that they entailed, like Ankara (late 1920s), Chandigarh (1950s), Brasilia (late 1950s), Tel Aviv (1950s), Islamabad (1960s), Dacca (late 1970s), and Abu-

ja (1970s). These cities can be compared with an earlier global national style, namely the beaux-arts, examples of which can be found in South American, Egypt, and Japan. Beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century, that mistake, so to speak, was not to be made again.

I am not here to defend modernism, but to suggest that non-European modernism was not only a fundamental challenge to the European nation-state model, but an event in history that could not be registered—overtly at least—in the disciplinary structure of art history. Stated in simpler terms, at the very moment in time when architecture was engaging the global (for better or worse), art history was becoming ever more a fixed as a nonglobal discipline (for better or worse). Georg Friedrich Hegel promised that art was a much stronger carrier of the history of civilization than architecture, tied down as architecture was to the presumably deadening realities of economic need. But for a period of time, and one that is today hugely relevant to the question of how we frame the global, it was architecture, not art history, that dominated the national narratives in the non-European world. As a result, art history lost contact with and control over its privileged, philosophically mandated connection to the history of nation-states. It became self-foreclosing at the very moment it was set apart from history. It has never acknowledged this most fundamental of realities.

Compare the Greek architect Constantinos Doxiadis with his contemporary, Erwin Panofsky. Doxiadis, who designed Islamabad, had a global practice—perhaps even the first such practice—and was a leading architectural theorist of the age, promoting what he called *ekistics*, a theory about landscape, resources, and design. Panofsky was equally prolific and created a theory that was to become the mainstay of art history, namely iconology, a theory that was obviously Eurocentric. Still today, a book like *Methods and Theories of Art History* can claim without any ambiguity that Panofsky developed “modern iconographic theory.”¹ But “modern,” in this case, refers to the institutional structure of art history, which could only be pursued in the art history departments of Europe and the United States. It was very different from the “modern” as understood by Doxiadis, which was also based on expertise, but was not dependent on the conventions of historical production.

One of the innovations of the Bauhaus, one must recall, was that it had no library, and still today in the non-European world, architecture is to a large extent taught without what we might consider adequate library facilities. This is not necessarily a question of resources. Certainly the school of architecture at Hong Kong, which I recently visited, could afford a library. Most of these schools were born in the modern nation-building era and still carry the imprint of their modernity. Today we see this as a deficiency, but that could be debated, and I am certainly not claiming allegiance to the implicit anti-intellectualism that attached itself to the tropes of architectural practice. The point is to see in

1. Anne d'Alleva, *Methods and Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King, 2005).
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what way this absence (the absence of history in the modernist project) not only ran counter to the shaping of modern art history in the Anglo-European world but was not necessarily a negative.

The problem is therefore not architecture, but an art history that—despite its attempt to now think globally—still cannot see the consequences of its anti-global, antimodern, “modern” retrenchment, even though this retrenchment is encoded, and even preserved, in its disciplinary structure. Art history’s absence in the nation-building formations of the twentieth century is registered as an absence of history itself! Just look at how many books there are on Islamic art architecture that end in the eighteenth century, supporting the image of non-European modernism as not having a history worthy of the past. The otherwise magisterial book *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* ends in 1839.² Furthermore, the last chapter is called the “The Final Phase of Mamluk Architecture,” as if this final phase was a historical predictor of the arrival of the new colonial masters who ended the flow of Islamic architectural history in India. Though this may to some degree be true, the presumption is that history ends because art history ends and that a new era begins that is basically history-less. Art history disguises its exclusion from the global other in the form of silence, but basically admits that it doesn’t know what to say. The solution is to interpret the “end” of art history as a transition to a completely different disciplinary framework, known as contemporary art and art criticism. The phrase “contemporary art” is, from this perspective, the semantic indicator of art history’s alienation from the global modernist history and its belated attempt to reconstitute its legitimacy in that arena, by making everything into an endless modernity.

Art history has yet to deal with the two very different meanings of the word “modern” when discussing the “modern nation-state”: one from the nineteenth century and the other from the twentieth, one operating with art history and the other opened up—and in opposition to—the former through the medium of global modernist architecture. It is fine to critique the former, but the real work is to recognize the latter and to see the all important difference between modern architecture, which began in Europe but which received no nation-state mandate, and the global modernist architecture, which did. Historians in both art and architecture have tended to validate the former, whereas I am trying to validate the latter—not the politics, of course, but its historical reality in disciplinary historiography.

Seeing this distinction will not be easy, since art history, symptomatically, lashes out at architecture without realizing why. Hal Foster, for example, who obviously speaks from a certain position as art critic, accused Frank Gehry of making bad sculpture—“regressive” is the word he uses—and of caving in to the global spectacular.³ But it is quite possible to see not architecture but art history from the 1950s onward as “regressive” (making “bad” global history).

2. Bianca Maria Alfieri, *Islamic Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Laurence King, 2000).

3. Foster, “Why All the Hoopla?” *London Review of Books*, August 23, 2001, 24–26.

The antagonism is particularly noticeable when Foster protests against the false "license" that Gehry ostensibly had in making his designs, by which Foster means that Gehry operates outside the bounds of art history and its presumptive avant-gardist (that is, European) iconographies. Foster also sees as postmodern what is actually architecture's modernism. Postmodernism, a largely architectural innovation, was actually only a second global wounding of art history. The real wound happened earlier, for it was not postmodernism that freed architecture from history's disciplinary constraints, but modernism—and not European modernism, which is still the favorite subject of art history, but non-European modernism.

After a passage of time, many non-European countries, as we all know, moved into a post-nation-state phase, which championed the call for local and regional identity, a phase that is still strong today. This in turn created a need for a history that not only supported the legitimacy, retroactively, of the nation state, but that came also be seen—officially or not—as a form of resistance to both the earlier ideas of national modernism and the growing specter of globalization. Nothing has been better for the global expansion of art history than the globalized claim for a local resistance to globalization.

Art history, born in the service of the European nation-states, now rises up in the service—implicitly, of course—of a latently antimodern view of the non-European world. Today's nation-state must—so the sentiment makes clear—have a civilizational history that reinforces its political legitimacy as a world nation. Global art history thus risks becoming a code word, on the flip side of the chart, for a highly questionable globalization of identity in alliance with a rapidly expanding museological culture. Just think of the huge expansion of curatorial space from 1810 to 2010, and of the expansion in the last ten years alone! What major city around the world today does not have at least one museum designed by a so-called avant-garde architect? These buildings and institutions are, however, only a very small fraction of the exponential growth of museological space. Large swaths of landscapes, replete with buildings and even towns, are being set aside by the UN as cultural preserves. In the late 1970s there were only a few so-called heritage sites as sanctioned by the United Nations, which, after the destructions of World War II, was eager to preserve culture in the name of "civilization." Today there are over seven hundred heritage sites of different types all around the world, with countries everywhere eager to have as many as possible so as to rake in tourist revenue.

And where there is no nation, one can be easily simulated. The Dogon in Africa are, for example, now a protected culture, which means that a whole array of modern bureaucratic structures will be created on their behalf and imposed upon them. Their land has become a vast anthropological zone, as if the disaster of the Indian reservations in the United States has been forgotten. Ironically, it is the landscape they inhabited that is being "protected," their architecture being seen as little more than an extension of the natural world. The Romantic

age lives on, but now as a major global and financial institution. According to the official text: "The Bandiagara site is an outstanding landscape of cliffs and sandy plateaux with some beautiful architecture (houses, granaries, altars, sanctuaries and Togu Na, or communal meeting-places). Several age-old social traditions live on in the region (masks, feasts, rituals, and ceremonies involving ancestor worship)." The UNESCO efforts, though meant to forestall the modernist eradication of history, bring into play an industrialization of cultural history that returns to the conventions of the static, "modern" nation-state. Art history has long adjudicated contemporary Dogon art as a contemporary variation of tradition, some of it high-priced, some of it kitsch. But don't tell that to the UNESCO officials, who view the Dogon as still real and very much in need of our protection. Twenty-first-century Dogon society is, in fact, so valuable that we have to make it into a quasi-nation-state frozen against time to become a culture, landscape, and museum all in one. (Dogon coffee cups are sure to come.)

I raise this because the operations of UNESCO were not mentioned in the seminar, and yet it is this institution that is the globalized front of art history today, normalizing the image of static nationhood. It is important to challenge this form of globalization, but it is equally important to realize that it shares its Eurocentric origins with art history's beginnings.

One cannot but help notice, therefore, that art history—even as it tries to go global—repeatedly falls victim to the crisis of a double negative in which its Eurocentrism was inscribed, first as a nineteenth-century discipline and then again as a twentieth-century discipline, and perhaps now for the third time as a global discipline where it hopes to finish its original mandate, history and contemporary art being the two mutually orthogonal vectors by which it operates. The literalness of this was recently laid bare in the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, which opened a few years ago. It has one building for Korean traditional art and another one some ten feet away for contemporary art. The sober art historian is paired with the tortured, postcolonial contemporary artist, a person who is fated to have no history in the presumptive historylessness of global capital unless assisted by the techniques of art curatorship. The timelessness of tradition meets the timelessness of the contemporary compared to the timefullness of the modern art history project.

The difference between tradition and the contemporary, and between a global history that ends before modernism and begins again with art's encounter with modernity, is clearly a false dichotomy, and one of the reasons why a putatively global art history has so many strikes against it. The pattern is already visible in the first generation of textbooks that follow what I call the "Euro+ model" of history writing. This approach reaffirms the familiar linear narrative for Europe and then adds—or rather includes—free-standing chapters on China, India, and Africa, as if these places have an unbroken history largely separate from global realities until their fateful encounters with modernism, which is where their history and their art history ends and magically switches to contem-

porary history. In one textbook, Africa is divided into two time periods, "ancient," which goes from 2500 B.C.E. to 1700 C.E., and "modern," which goes from 1900 to today. One should not stumble over the word "modern," since the antimodernity of the split is what is to be noticed. The consequences are bizarre. Why would the highly sophisticated architecture and engineering accomplishments of the fifteenth-century Mamluks, not to mention the twelfth-century churches of Lalibela with their complex hydroengineering, belong to ancient history? Can one really go from Saharan rock art to a thirteenth-century statue from Zimbabwe in the span of a few pages without falling prey to the ever-present suggestion that Africa is defined by the continuity of its presumptive primitiveness? The book also "disappears" the history of the colonial occupation of Africa in the late nineteenth century. This is not to say that the authors are unaware of this but to point to the fact that once again art history presumes that its history is History itself.

In the Euro+ model, the burden of European (perhaps I should say non-Afro-Asian) history is its modernity (and the legitimization of history and its nation-state constructions), whereas the burden of the history of the non-European world is, apart from its ostensible separation from Europe, its saturation with tradition. This two-part model remains resolutely Eurocentric while fulfilling the liberal promise for an alternative to the history of the West, the main purpose of which is to allay Western anxieties about its modernity while reserving the sanctity of the modern idea of the political border as protected by the international laws that were set in play following the Congress of Vienna in 1815. It is thus the timelessness of modernity that makes the illusion of timefullness possible.

The basic rule is that nations are entitled—if not actually urged—to be not-global in their historical outlooks while being globalized in their economic outlook. The progenitor of this duality was, of course, the Romantic age, which has now, one can almost say, become both international and global. The non-European world has to a large extent accepted this neo-European modern nation-state view. This was brought home to me when an Indian publishing company asked us to change the name of our textbook, *A Global History of Architecture*, to *A History of Indian Architecture*. We were also expected to thin it to emphasize the importance of India. The editors of the press saw Indian history—and perhaps the real market here was Hindu history—as a site of resistance, even though their model for history writing most obviously derived from colonial-age history. This view cannot be stopped, wrapped up as it is in the advancements of museology and the globalized bureaucratization of space, not to mention the heritage-ization, touristification, and global UN-ification of culture.

Art history is now in a position that it can begin to explain—even, finally, to itself—its own aporias. Clearly, it has the obligation to reassess its disciplinary status and its attachments to Eurocentrism, but it also needs to reassess the fateful negative consequences of some of its more cherished philosophical impera-

tives, which are twice over Eurocentric. Ultimately the problem is, of course, not about architecture, but rather about what architecture brings out of disguise in this respect. Never allowed into the inner sanctum of history, architects already in the nineteenth century were well aware that their field's attachment to history was constructed, that history could be manipulated and its meanings made reducible to a range of simulacra. It was this that made architecture so successful in the nation-building phase of the twentieth century once its historicist skin was finally rejected. It was this aesthetics-with-no-history that finally burst through outside of Europe in the early twentieth century as an early formation of a global other to art history's Eurocentrism—a no-history that was, however, a historical and epistemological project unto itself. In the face of this crisis, art historians may have wanted to affirm a European civilizational model of history and continuity, but they are now, perhaps, slowly waking up to the realization that even their field's history—like that of architecture—has long been disconnected from a presumptive civilizational mandate.