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## Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines

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## Introduction

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# Introduction

Belgin Turan Ozkaya et Elvan Altan Ergut

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In line with critical scholarship in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades, architectural history has been transformed as a field of academic inquiry with the expansion of frameworks, subject matters, themes, and methods of the discipline. Most often productive interaction with different disciplines and theories has provided new perspectives and conceptual grounding, and examples of architectural historiography along these new lines have proliferated. In order to contribute to the on-going transformation of architectural historiography, the papers in this session intend to further open up the spatial boundaries of architecture. While acknowledging the changes in the geographical frames of reference for the discipline, which have defined new objects of study and scopes of inquiry, they seek to go beyond the trope of East vs. West that not only dominated the earlier colonizing projects but also casts its shadow on some recent discourses that aim to dismantle the legacies of colonialism.

Our interest is in fracturing the “consolidated vision” that privileged and is still privileging the “West” through essentializing and dualistic perspectives, and perpetuates the misrecognition regarding the totality and unity of cultures. Vis-à-vis the historical processes of Orientalism, colonialism, Westernization, and nation-building that provided settings for inter-, and trans-cultural encounters, our aim is to problematize geographical difference—a complex category which may work in unexpected and ambivalent ways. And our contention is that nuanced readings that are based on complicated understandings of both architecture and culture, and that historically situate their objects of study, may point the way toward new perspectives and are capable of disrupting persistent master narratives.

While writing the proposal we had in our minds as possible examples the recent attempts to attribute active agency to the “Westernizing” Ottoman subject that the established historiographical narratives indefatigably portray as the passive receptor of the developments in that heuristic monolith called the West, the various moments of the intermingling of the colonizer’s and the colonized’s forms and images in the face of the colonial desire for purity and segregation, and of different “Orientalisms,” and nation-buildings those hallmark modern institutions as well as the hybrid, trans-

national and migrant subjectivities increasingly unveiled by the processes of globalization, which are all moments that deviate from simplistic positions on difference. Our objective is not merely to “pass” from one geography to another, the borders and the presumed homogenous territories of which are highly suspect, or to celebrate their mere alignment, but to actively open up the boundaries between putative totalities of culture in order to write different histories, particularly the intertwined histories of seemingly distant geographies.

The papers in this session give us ample opportunity to discuss the hitherto overlooked idiosyncratic German Orientalism, manifested together with a coveted imperialistic agenda the relation of which, nevertheless, may not be reduced to that of simple causality, to question the consolidated narratives about the impotence and passivity of the “Westernizing” Ottoman subject, and those of the consumer anywhere as a matter of fact, as well as the seemingly neat packaging of the new versus the traditional, the foreign versus the native, the international versus the national, and the civilized versus the cultural, which were already destabilized in their own moments of generation within the context of the early Republican history of Turkey, together with the synchronously de-colonizing and fixating, Janus-faced impact of French human geography on architecture and architectural history both in colonial and post-colonial contexts and the contested identities of “the East” and “the West,” modern versus traditional, aesthetic/sacred versus political within the thorny context of post-1967 Jerusalem.

In addition to raising fundamental questions about the nature of trans-cultural movement, geographical difference, and identity the papers also shed light on diverse issues related to architectural historiography, popular perceptions of the architectural past and the politics of preservation and urban design in different contexts.

Can Bilsel’s essay intriguingly explores the historical entanglement of the modern discourse of archaeological authenticity with German imperial archaeology and its reconstruction of antiquity in the early twentieth century. He contends that the German Imperial Museum invented and sacralized a new category: that of “ancient art” which is through the process of modern museological display and framing acquired its, still valid, status of uniqueness and iconicity. Regarding the Pergamon Museum in Berlin he argues that a “museum of architecture,” in contradistinction to the universal/colonial fair for instance, “empties out the monuments from all ethnographic interest; leaving a void in front of the monuments to be filled by the modern viewers.” The absence of the ethnological other, for Bilsel, however does not render the appropriation of the fragments of the other as the cultural heritage of a transcendental subject less hegemonic. He also hints at the possible difference of the German position in the Pergamon Museum from a rationalizing civilizing gesture like that of the French which, ultimately, intended to create a total environment for re-enacting the original experience of antiquity presumably part of the cultural heritage of the modern German viewer rather than intending a distancing, rational taxonomy.

Sevil Enginsoy Ekinci’s paper, on the other hand, discloses a “journey” in the opposite direction which might be portrayed as the transport of an industrial product and western technology to the technologically backward Ottoman Empire as established historiographical narratives would have it. Enginsoy Ekinci’s paper, however, challenges such views that attribute active agency only to the West and contends that the Ottomans might have been more than just passive consumers.

Elvan Altan Ergut's paper assesses the book that introduced "modern architecture" to a generation of Turkish architects in the modernizing context of the 1930s Turkey at the edge of Europe. *The New Architecture* written by the Turkish art historian Celal Esad and published in 1931 was actually a free adoption of a relatively less-known book of modern historiography, Andre Lurçat's *Architecture* published two years before Celal Esad's. The context within which Lurçat's book together with the ideas, forms, and images that it propagated was re-produced, disseminated, appropriated, and resisted by different and sometimes overlapping groups presents a fascinating opportunity to study cross-cultural encounter as well as cultural politics. The paper shows us that such mobilization may invoke essentializing reflexes of fixation and surprising alignments as exemplified by Turkish architects' claim that a foreign architect could never design a proper Turkish house and Celal Esad's endeavor, like that of many others in the 1930s, to re-write traditional Turkish architecture as a sort of modernism.

Cultural politics is at the core of the last two papers, too. While acknowledging human geography's contribution to the development of post-colonial cultures and spatiality, Patricia Morton also powerfully demonstrates its complicity in perpetuating ultimately racist evolutionary hierarchies through its insistence on the immutability of cultural difference and the specificity of the local. The consequence of this for architecture is the conflation of architecture with the character of people and their milieu as exemplified in the French colonial administration's equating of exposition pavilions with "racial 'types' produced by human geography." Morton, thus, questions the validity of the assumptions about the stability and immutability of the local and the hegemonic underpinnings of geography and looks for alternative conceptualizations.

The last paper of the session, Alona Nitzan-Shiftan's essay dwells on a case where cultural difference, modern planning, urban design, and historic preservation are entangled with politics. She compellingly demonstrates that all the above may become devoid of their usual attributes and come together in unexpected alignments as a result of strategic positioning for political and professional ends in the context of post-1967 Jerusalem.

As a whole the essays revolve around the issues of ambivalent identities, movement, and difference. Each essay is engaged at varying degrees in a different type of movement from the literal transport of the fragments of the Great Altar of Pergamon from the nineteenth-century Ottoman context to that of *Kaiserreich* together with subsequent changes in the fabricated and paradoxical meanings of it in different cultural and historical contexts to the apparently eastward journey of "an iron house for a corn mill" produced for assembling, de-assembling, and re-assembling, the ultimate condition of non-site-specificity, together with accompanying attempts to stabilize it in seemingly opposite geographies and historiographical constructs, from the circulating concepts, notions, and texts of architecture and culture to the voluntary or forced travels of architects. The last two essays, on the other hand, remind us the powerful reverse reflex to fixate culture and difference in the face of trans-cultural movement. Although there are inequalities in the power with which these encounters imbue encountering sides, after all "movement" subsumes under its rubric the quite disparate conditions of exile, leisurely travel, migration, colonization, and homelessness among others, spatial transport is among the reasons that render geographical identity and difference deeply ambivalent. The question, then, is: Should we dispense with the idea of locating cultural difference? Are all attempts to define

culture and cultural difference necessarily fixating? Can we only talk about flows and multiple identities instead of singular ones?

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## RÉSUMÉS

In line with critical scholarship in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades, architectural history has been transformed as a field of academic inquiry with the expansion of frameworks, subject matters, themes, and methods of the discipline. Most often productive interaction with different disciplines and theories has provided new perspectives and conceptual grounding, and examples of architectural historiography along these new lines have proliferated. In order to contribute to the ongoing transformation of architectural historiography, this session intends to further open up the spatial boundaries of architecture. While acknowledging the changes in the geographical frames of reference for the discipline, which have defined new objects of study and scopes of inquiry, it seeks to go beyond the trope of East vs. West that had not only dominated the earlier colonizing projects but also casts its shadow on some recent discourses that aim to dismantle the legacies of colonialism.

Our interest is in fracturing the “consolidated vision” that privileges the “West” through essentializing and dualistic perspectives, and perpetuates the misrecognition regarding the totality and unity of cultures. Vis-à-vis the historical processes of Orientalism, colonialism, Westernization and nation-building that provided settings for inter-, and trans-cultural encounters, our aim is to problematize geographical difference—a complex category which may work in unexpected and ambivalent ways. Nuanced readings that are based on complicated understandings of both architecture and culture, and that historically situate their objects of study, may point the way toward new perspectives and disrupt persistent master narratives.

As we will be discussing in the session, the attribution of active agency to the “Westernizing” Ottoman subject, and the disclosure of the intermingling of the colonizer’s and the colonized’s forms and images in the face of the colonial desire for purity and segregation, and of different “Orientalisms,” and nation-buildings, are all such moments that deviate from simplistic positions on difference. The objective is not merely to “pass” from one geography to another, or celebrate their mere alignment, but to actively open up the boundaries between putative totalities of culture in order to write different histories, particularly the intertwined histories of seemingly distant geographies.

## INDEX

**Index géographique :** Allemagne, France, Jérusalem, Turquie

**Mots-clés :** historiographie, colonialisme, orientalisme, occidentalisation, Empire Ottoman

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### ELVAN ALTAN ERGUT

Elvan Altan Ergut is Assistant Professor of Architectural History and Vice-Chair at the Department of Architecture, Middle East Technical University, Turkey. She received her BArch and MA in History of Architecture from Middle East Technical University, and PhD in Art History from State University of New York at Binghamton for a research on the relationship between architecture and nationalism in early Republican Turkey. Her research areas include architecture in late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, twentieth-century architecture and architectural theory, and architectural historiography. She is the co-editor (with Dana Arnold and Belgin Turan Ozkaya) of *Rethinking Architectural Historiography* (Routledge, 2006), and editor of *Cumhuriyet'in Mekanlari/Zamanlari/Insanlari* (*Spaces/Times/People of the Turkish Republic*, METU Faculty of Architecture Press, 2006) and *Türkiye Kentlerinde Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Mimari Mirası* (*Architectural Heritage of the Early Republican Period in Turkey*, Turkish Chamber of Architects, 2006).