

EDITORIAL

## On the Meaning of 'Europe' for Architectural History

Alona Nitzan-Shiftan\* and Nancy Stieber†

This introduction to the special collection 'The Meaning of "Europe" for Architectural History' raises issues about the relationship between knowledge and geopolitics, in particular the significance of 'Europe' for the production of architectural knowledge.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the European Architectural History Network, we invited scholars to join us in rethinking one of our founding questions, namely, how to interpret the inextricable ties between knowledge and geopolitics, an issue that arose from the naming of our network. How can we unpack the significance of 'Europe' for our scholarly domain today? What is the role that the idea, legacy, and institutions of Europe play within the new distributions of global power, and how does it currently affect the production of architectural knowledge? We dedicate this special issue of the EAHN's peer-reviewed, public access journal *Architectural Histories* to these questions.

Our questions pertain to the development of our disciplinary culture in and beyond *the Age of the Three Worlds*, to borrow Michael Denning's definition of 'that short half century between 1945 and 1989 when it was imagined that the world was divided into three—the capitalist first world, the communist second world, and the decolonizing third world' (Denning 2004: 2). The idea that 'Europe' as a geographical construct was split during this period between two 'worlds', and gradually retreated from controlling the 'third', testifies to the ambivalence and contingency of what we consider Europe. On the one hand, for the proliferating studies on 'other modernisms'<sup>1</sup> that go 'beyond Europe',<sup>2</sup> Europe continues to be the powerful foil against which knowledge is produced. On the other hand, the rise of our own network responded to the hegemony of the American Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), indicating the shifting powers within the First World and across the Atlantic Ocean.

Indeed, from the EAHN's first meeting in 2006, we debated whether the 'European' in our name refers to cultural identity, to a geopolitical construct, or simply to its bureaucratic registration in Europe. From the start we acknowledged the significance of Europe's fragile and dynamic boundaries for our discipline. Papers in this collection continue to raise similar questions: Do these boundaries include the colonial expansion to Asia

and Africa (Tostões, Castela), or alternatively, the internal colonization by the ultimate Oriental other, the Ottoman Empire (Kılinc)? Our symposia and conferences have taken place in sites ranging from São Paulo to Ankara, a geographical spread that complicates the 'Europe' in our name. How do we reconcile the methodological move away from Eurocentrism with our own stake in a European disciplinary network?

In this context we wish to foreground several interrelated historiographical issues. First, we want to draw attention to the relationship between the geopolitics of disciplinary organizations and the creation and dissemination of knowledge in our field. The SAH considers itself representative of the profession worldwide, a position it bolstered in the postwar era. But the recent rise of other organizations that deal with architectural history calls for a new understanding of the discipline's changing range and scope. While organizations such as the International Committee for the Buildings, Sites, and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement (DOCOMOMO) and the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE) responded to scholarly developments in our field—a reaction to postmodernism and a response to postcolonialism respectively—organizations such as the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain (SAHGB) and the Society of Architectural Historians—Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ) are geographically dispersed. More recently EAHN and the modern Asian Architecture Network (mAAN)—networks of scholars located in Europe and Asia—call into question the difference between a *society* and a *network* in a global world. More pointedly, we ask how this recent geopolitical spread is affecting the ways we assess the legitimation of knowledge in our field and the power of its related institutions.

Second, we want to locate 'Europe' within the shifting geographies of architectural narratives. Banister Fletcher's classic *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (1896), its audience the subjects of the British Empire, taught that the universal narrative of architecture has a European trajectory. Despite the rise of post-World War II nationalisms, survey classes throughout the developed and postcolonial world continued to follow this Eurocentric tale. The recent globalization of academia, during which 'the lineaments of the global cultures that emerged as three

\* Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, IL

† University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, US

Corresponding author: Nancy Stieber ([nancy.stieber@umb.edu](mailto:nancy.stieber@umb.edu))

worlds gave way to one' (Denning 2004: 282), has challenged this narrative. It has put into question the impact of different world orders—colonial empires, nation-states, or global unions—on the production of architectural knowledge. How is Europe seen from the current de-centered positions of new global histories? If modernism is compatible with global trajectories, as Rem Koolhaas demonstrated in his call for the 2014 Venice Biennale, what about earlier architectures? Does the current global spread of knowledge relegate the architectural history of pre-1800 Europe to regional scholarly enclaves, putting into practice Chakrabarty's influential proposition to provincialize Europe (Chakrabarty 2000; Volait 2017)?

Third, we wish to question the position of 'Europe' in the geopolitics of academia. In recent decades the study and research of architectural history has been gradually moving to architectural schools and specialized institutions, while also expanding to theory and criticism. This shift happened most visibly in North American universities, where it was also articulated self-consciously through the establishment of prestigious doctoral programs. What does this mean for the field in its entirety? Is North America, because of its resources, its power, and its language, at the center of architectural history? Similarly, if North America 'invented' 'history, theory and criticism' as a sub-discipline by appropriating key European thinkers and importing leading scholars, can Europe be more than its 'prehistory'? Where can the varied national, regional, and local research traditions in Europe position themselves within this field of expertise? And a corollary question is inevitable: can the growing accessibility of information and online learning throughout the world and in particular the Global South challenge the Eurocentric bent of our field?

In this collection we present the discussion of the issues identified above in a roundtable held on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the EAHN, published here as 'Field Notes' (see Freigang et al. 2018). Three members of the EAHN discuss the historiography of European architectural history in the aftermath of the former Three Worlds: Christian Freigang from a German viewpoint, Andres Kurg from an Eastern European one, and Ana Tostões from a Portuguese and postcolonial one. Carmen Popescu, Rob Dettingmeijer, and Nancy Stieber then present an institutional perspective on the 'European' designation of the EAHN based on their experiences during the network's formation. This section closes with Christine Mengin and Rob Dettingmeijer, founding president and vice-president of the EAHN respectively, who provide an anecdotal introduction to the 'improbable' origins of the network.

The roundtable is also the springboard for the four position papers. Our invited speaker, Daniel Monk, questions the epistemological position of the roundtable's initial mandate, asking us to consider an alternative historiography to the assumptions underlying our question about the meaning of Europe. The debate is followed by three articles, by Vladimir Kulic, Kivanç Kılınç, and Tiago Castela, that consider specific historical case studies in the Eastern Bloc, Turkey, and South Africa in the light of European identity. Each of these papers challenges the assumption of a diminishing European power by invoking

the ways in which the idea of Europe continues to live in people's imagination. They point to the complicated venues through which these imaginaries are developed into and substantiate social realities of racial discrimination, modernization, and collective memories. They ask us to continue considering the power of this cultural and geopolitical construct as an open and lively question.

This special collection of *Architectural Histories* is dedicated to the memory of Rob Dettingmeijer (1945–2016), founding member and founding vice-president of the EAHN, who passed away in June 2016 shortly after the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the EAHN. His calm but earnest contributions to our discussions were of inestimable value to the formation and development of the network.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> DOCOMOMO 2006 in Ankara, for example, was dedicated to this theme; see, in particular, Bozdogan (2006).
- <sup>2</sup> Architecture Beyond Europe is a research group with an open access journal. In particular see the round table ABE organized at the EAHN Biannual International Conference in Dublin, 2–4 June 2016. Five papers presented at the roundtable were published in the 'Debate' section of the November 2017 issue of *ABE Journal*, introduced by Mark Crinson's 'What is Europe?' (see Crinson 2017).

### Acknowledgements

We thank Christine Mengin for graciously hosting the celebration of the network's tenth anniversary in Paris. As then-president of the EAHN, Alona Nitzan-Shiftan is grateful to her fellow officers, Hilde Heynen, Merlijn Hurx, and Ruth Hanisch, for delightful and in-depth Skype sessions brainstorming the ideas in this collection.

### Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** Nitzan-Shiftan, A and Stieber, N. 2018. On the Meaning of 'Europe' for Architectural History. *Architectural Histories*, 6(1): 10, pp. 1–3, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.326>

**Published:** 13 June 2018

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