



**EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY NETWORK**

**DUBLIN 2016**



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## **Building the Nation before Nationalism: The Cosmopolitan Historicism of mid 19th-century Europe** Mari Hvattum, Oslo School of Architecture and Design

The Napoleonic wars may have been the beginning of the modern, European nation state, yet early to mid 19th century Europe was a cosmopolitan place. Professional groups such as craftsmen, academics, physicians, and not least architects, studied, worked, and married across national boundaries with astonishing ease, contributing to a mobile and cosmopolitan culture that was characterized by a rapid exchange of ideas and models.

Looking at examples of this mobility (for instance the German architect Heinrich Ernst Schirmer (1814-1888) who worked in Norway between 1838 and 1882, when a pronounced nationalist turn in Norway forced him to return to Germany), this round table paper explores the notion of a national architecture prior to national romanticism. I am particularly interested in the way the cosmopolitan historicism of the early to mid nineteenth century attempted to merge the universal and the national by means of architectural style. Schirmer and his generation were sensitive to local cultural conditions, but insisted nevertheless in translating the local into a universally legible idiom. They thus transcended the local and indigenous, seeing the nation state as part of a cultural commonwealth. In an increasingly multi-cultural world, it may be that the fluid notion of identity, encountered in early nineteenth-century Europe has something to teach us.

## **Straddling the National Divide: Appropriated Pasts, Inverted Archaeologies, and Byzantine Architecture in Europe, 1878-1939** Aleksandar Ignjatović, University of Belgrade

When in 1898 Emile Zola named the Basilica of Sacre Coeur in Paris a "citadel of the absurd", his designation did not refer only to the church's aura of religiosity and monarchism in the midst of the secular Third Republic. The chalky white edifice on the top of Montmartre also recalled the absurdity of the "French Byzantine architecture", which was methodically invented by nineteenth-century historians to distinguish the French from other European nations. Paradoxically, it was exactly the same nexus between the appropriation of the Byzantine Style and national exceptionalism that marked many other nations' architectural representation of identity at the time. From Russians and Christian nations of the Balkans, to Germans, Catalans and British Catholics, a number of European nations were simultaneously employing the tropes of Byzantine cultural succession as a symbol of national identity while erecting modern religious edifices and rewriting national architectural histories. While national architectural histories were being produced, creating a linkage between national styles and Byzantine architecture, new Neo-Byzantine edifices were springing up throughout modern European capitals to represent a kind of

“inverted archaeology”— from Christ the Savior in Moscow (1860-83) and Westminster Cathedral in London (1895-1903), to St.-Esprit in Paris (1928-35). Thus, a heritage that was, and still is, usually thought of as a symbol of the East-West divide, represented a common cultural treasury for creating architectural imageries of national identity and cultural exceptionalism. However, this simultaneity and interdependency of historical writing and the construction of modern national monuments is a telling example of a phenomenon that outstrips the question of the comparable (and competing) national appropriations of the “Byzantine Style”. Namely, the outrageous insularity of these Neo-Byzantine edifices, which were constructed as islands of apparent architectural archaism in their increasingly modernizing urban settings, testifies to the duality of national identity that Homi Bhabha has called the tension between the “pedagogical” and “performative”. It is this duality of nation as a historical object and subject of representation that can be traced in various architectural medievalisms—both built and written—across Europe in the critical moment of nation building between the Congress of Berlin and WWII.

## **Our Building Ourselves: How Architectural Photography Shapes National Identity** Shelley Hornstein, York University

While Europe braces for how to contend with the refugee crisis, its real challenge is not housing and jobs but the hierarchical and buried episteme of Eurocentrism and its modelling of the world that places European privilege as the central cartographic and regulatory agent. “The intellectually debilitating effects of the Eurocentric legacy,” as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam describe it, are “...indispensable for comprehending not only contemporary media representations but...subjectivities...”

How does architectural photography participate in shaping and driving the narratives of nationhood in a time of modern identity formation and shifting borders? Recent media images of demolished archeological sites in Syria (Palmyra) visually communicate the power of nationhood (ISIS) and its fragility (Byzantines, Rashiduns, Abbasids, Mamluks...). My contribution takes modernism’s innovative, experimental, yet racist and colonialist starting point to ponder the question of nationhood seen or constructed through the lens of architecture. I will discuss the Archives of the Planet by French Banker, Albert Kahn. This project aimed to photograph cultures and geographies -- now a collection of 72,000 colour autochromes -- before would they would “disappear”. Such systems for mapping and cataloguing the world crack open traditional readings of place shifting our eye to alternative forms of representation or non-linear practices of organizing culturally porous space and hence engagement across cultural, racial and geographic borders. Yet with the aftershocks from the Dreyfus Affair reverberating across France (and even