EDITORIAL
Constructed Identities

Rosa te Velde

This issue of *Kunstlicht* takes you on a trip through Europe and a little beyond. Not only will we travel in space, this issue is also a journey back and forth in time. Architectural space acts as the interface through which we first encounter local histories and identities. With this issue, we take the opportunity to explore a selection of case studies that allow us to engage with specific spaces in different parts of the continent and beyond.

According to heritage studies scholar Linde Egberts, "interest in history has moved to centre stage in Western culture".[1] The need to "engage with the past" and to "bring a part of our past *back to life*", which is the case in many European regions, is what she refers to as 'heritage revivals'. Despite increased globalization, the need for (regional) identity is far from. Egberts shows that there are different ways of rendering an identity with the past. A variety of historical themes and temporal scales are prevalent throughout Europe. Early medieval heritage is dominant in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine to construct an identity of European unification, while the Viking Age, the Second World War, or industrialization heritage are prevalent in other regions. Heritage and its selective use of history is thus instrumental in constructing the story of the creation of a nation, a Golden Age or a shared trauma.[2]

The cover of this issue is a drawing by Georgian artist Lado Darakhvelidze. This drawing is part of a project exploring what children are taught in Georgia and its neighbouring countries Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan about their joint Caucasian history and the way it is represented through text books. His contribution to *Constructed Identities* is a chalk drawing depicting the history books of the countries referenced in this issue of *Kunstlicht*. It shows how heritage in its selective constitution is used to create and legitimize national identities by implementing them into our minds through education at an early age. In *The Heritage Crusade Historian and the Spoils of History*, historian David Lowenthal indeed explains how heritage is *flexibly* dependent on history, and how emotional or spiritual sentiments often turn out to be more persuasive than historical facts. He explains that "heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error".[3]

Heritage revivals are inherently related to the creation of 'competitive' and distinctive identities for cities, regions, and nations, which is also argued by

[1] Linde Egberts, 'Conceptual Fuel for Reviving the Past' in: Linde Egberts and Koos Bosma (eds.) *Companion to European Heritage Revivals*, Springer Open, 2014, p. 273.

[2] Linde Egberts, *Chosen Legacies: Heritage in the Construction of Regional Identity*, PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2015. In 2017, this research will be published by Routledge as *Chosen Legacies: Heritage in Regional Identity*.

[3] *History* (1998), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 121.

Egberts. Indeed cities and regions are now branded as 'unique' in order to mark them economically attractive for tourists, investors, and companies. 'History' has become an asset that needs to be capitalized on. Branding, however, always implies a simplification of complex and fluid identities for the sake of recognizability.

At the same time, in the face of polarizing discourses on citizenship, the need to define and defend identities and the need to 'protect our culture' is increasingly felt by political actors. According to sociologists Jan Willem Duyvendak and Evelien Tonkens, "this protectionism is based on a static and essentialized understanding of culture as well as on an idea of citizenship that has culture at its core".[4] Protectionism is inherently related to nationalism and on fixed ideas of culture that constantly draw and solidify exclusivist circles of citizenship.

It is the field of architectural heritage that answers, perhaps more than any other field, the felt need for protecting and defending identity, whether urged by neoliberalism or by nationalism, or even both. Architecture literally preserves narratives by reifying and solidifying histories. Ultimately, heritage is a question of representation. The decision to keep, restore, or demolish a previously conceived structure is a deliberate choice, and consequently, inscribes or redirects a particular identity. What does it mean to keep something? Whose memories are selected to be materialized and told? Admittedly (predominantly) Eurocentric in scope, this issue analyses current and historical attempts of pinning down and liberating identities through architectural heritage. Yet, it is precisely the notion Eurocentrism which is in dire need of analysis. 'Fortress Europe', for example, signals the relentlessly growing need to divide *us* from *them*. Walls, over which we do not dare to look, are literally raised to mark 'what is ours' and let us remain isolated within a safe and comfortable bubble. "We are here, because you were there" is the famous slogan under which many activists have continued to remind us, for decades, of the interdependencies and on-going inequalities as a result of European colonialism.[5] It is in this context that *Constructed Identities* aims to problematize architecture and its heritage and to seek ways in which to destabilize its fixedness and coherence.

In the first article, Lila Athanasiadou defines architecture as a practice and a medium that "has a delimiting potential that crystallizes identities into places [...]". However, according to her, identity is neither fixed by architecture nor is it solely a social construction. Rather, we need to consider 'spatial identity' in relation to its affordances to perform and to exercise power—the possibilities or the actions that the built structure facilitates. It is *within* the interactions between the human and non-human entities that the subjectivities of a place are created. By exploring various models within the conceptual tool of the 'territorial body' as coined by Félix Guattari, she analyses the case of Omonoia square in Athens. Examining the different political, economical, and social conditions of the square allows for understanding how Omonoia square reflects and epitomizes Athens' recent histories and its current state of neglect.

From Athens, we move to another square, one that also reflects a city's historical transformation: Potsdamer Platz in

4
Jan Willem Duyvendak and Evelien Tonkens, in: 'Introduction: The Culturalization of Citizenship' in: *The Culturalization of Citizenship: Belonging and Polarization in a Globalizing World*, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Peter Geschiere, Eveline Tonkens (eds.), Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2016, p. 2.

5
This brings to mind the We Are Here collective of refugees (who have been refused asylum) that claim their space within the urban fabric of Amsterdam through the means of architecture. By squatting iconic buildings such as a church, a flat, a school, and a prison, they demand visibility and acceptance of their presence in the Netherlands. See: www.wijzijnhier.org/.

Berlin. Once a bustling city square in the 1920s, it was divided by the Berlin Wall and as a consequence became a peripheral area on the outskirts of East and West Berlin. Isa Fahrenholz and Svenja Binz trace the history of this square to the 'tabula rasa' it was considered to be right after the fall of the wall, when suddenly Potsdamer Platz was geographically once again at the very heart of the city. This article examines the feverish rush in the 1990s to construct the site and the opposing desires in defining an identity for the square, with the conclusion that its current architecture has failed to re-establish a collectively shared myth of cosmopolitanism. Due to the dominance of international investors deciding upon the design of the square, it has become a meticulously branded space that dictates a very specific usage and therefore deters a heterogeneous public. In reference to anthropologist Marc Augé, Fahrenholz and Binz conclude that the space as it is today can even be considered a 'non-place': it does not allow for social interaction.

Squares, we could argue, often form the centres of a cityscape, literally, as well as in the minds of people, and can therefore be approached as critical culmination points in the context of this issue. However, both Omonoia square and Potsdamer Platz, in different ways, can be considered as examples of identity constructions that fail to be *public*. A city that is often praised for being tolerant and therefore inclusive is Amsterdam. Jennifer Tosch, the founder of Black Heritage Tours, challenges the dominant narrative of Amsterdam as a 'liberal' city and the capital of a proud and wealthy maritime nation. In an interview with *Kunstlicht*, she uncovers the symbols that are hidden in plain sight by rereading public space. Architectural heritage found in Amsterdam reveals how public space as constructed within this city is deeply related to hierarchies of race and white supremacy. Colonial histories, the Dutch involvement in the slave trade, or black presence in Amsterdam have been deliberately silenced and concealed from the dominant identity narratives of Amsterdam, and it is mainly through education that we can now learn to approach the material evidence that is largely blocked out from the 'cultural archive' in the Netherlands.

Another example of European imperialism orchestrating current identity constructions is demonstrated by the case of Luxor, Egypt. The contribution to this issue by Abla elBahrawy shows how the European scientific tradition of archaeology has torn apart generations of Egyptians and continues to hold in custody the creation of a distinct Egyptian identity. According to elBahrawy, the only way to escape the western tradition of pinning Egyptianness to its archaeological treasures is to objectify the European imperial past in Egypt. She, therefore, urges for the preservation of the European-built residences, exemplifying orientalist interpretations of Egyptian architecture, and the dig houses that have housed the many missions of western archaeologists. This approach to architectural heritage, according to her, would contribute to a layered history while distancing itself from a persistent way of constructing Egyptian identity, and, by doing so, would offer opportunities to move forward.

The monumentalization of history through architecture is a practice of persuasion. Guy Königstein's contribution to this issue responds to the importance of advertising within the field of heritage and its fabrication of identities. By blurring boundaries of what we consider to be true and

fictional, he explores a possible 'elastic' strategy of implementing alternative fantasies into our collective reality.

A very different approach, which at the same works with a similar aim as the other texts: to broaden our scope and alter existing frameworks, is discussed by Arna Mačkić through a comparison between architect Bogdan Bogdanović and jazz artist Sun Ra. Both simultaneously drew inspiration from archaic and futuristic references. Bogdanović searched for a visual language freed from religious or national references, in order to create uniting monuments in the newly established Yugoslavia of the 1950s and 1960s. Sun Ra, in his turn, searched for historical and futuristic narratives that would serve to elevate the self-image of Afro-Americans and their recent histories, by deliberately relating their ancestry to ancient Egyptian histories, as well as infusing fictional and cosmological dimensions into their identity narratives. He did so through his musical performances and films, in which his costumes and set design contributed to his newly envisioned hierarchies of history.

What we see emerging in this issue is how the fixation of identity through materiality is confronted by the flexibility and openness of sound and music. Artist Katinka de Jonge examines the rigid modernist design of the village of Nagele built from scratch in the Dutch *polderland* in the 1950s. To this day, little freedom is given to the inhabitants in terms of engaging with the village in their own way. A 'sense of place' is more than the built environment, and the only way to be freed from the modernist totalitarian design is by means of sound. Her work is a composition based on a recording of sounds encountered in Nagele. Her composition was performed in three versions by different ensembles, creating a 'feedback loop' and allowing the inhabitants of Nagele to echo and amplify their own presence.

In the final contribution to this issue, architectural historian Roel Griffioen in conversation with artist Wendelien van Oldenborgh discuss the importance of the musical metaphor of 'polyphony'. Van Oldenborgh's films are always shot at carefully chosen sites of architectural significance that allow her to question how a structure affords a plurality of voices. Many of her films take iconic modernist buildings as a backdrop to question if, instead of settling for a compromise, we can find ways of creating polyphony, in which different voices or interpretations can resonate *with* each other, "[...] and have their own vigour without having to compromise". Her work can therefore arguably be considered as taking a stance against assimilation, as with many of the articles in this issue of *Kunstlicht:* turning their backs on adhering to one dominant identity narrative and instead, giving room to silenced voices, fluid fantasies, and polyphonic compositions.

I would like to thank all authors and artists for their wonderful contributions to *Constructed Identities.* I am also very grateful to the entire editorial team of *Kunstlicht* for their conscientious editing and hard work. With this issue we proudly welcome Rosa de Graaf as a new native English proofreader and editor.

On behalf of the editorial board,
Rosa te Velde

THE CAUCASIAN HISTORY BOOK

Lado Darakhvelidze

Living in Arnhem in the Netherlands for the past eight years, I have become familiar with the annual activities in connection to the remembrance of the Second World War. Epic battles between the Nazis and Allied forces took place around the corner from where I live. From my window I can see the bridge that was bombed in 1945, which is well-documented in the movie *A Bridge Too Far* (1974). For me these events were unknown. The same applies to all the battles that have taken place in this part of the world: we were taught a *different* history. It goes without saying that people around me here in the Netherlands are not familiar with, for instance, the Crimean Offensive.

What do children in the Caucasus region learn in history classes concerning their joint past? What is being taught in Georgian schools and in those of Georgia's neighbouring countries? Are these differences as big as the difference between the Western and Eastern perspective?

After reading Georgian history books, I turned my attention to the complex school education in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey. and Russia, and their shifting contours in the present. 'History' in the region is being changed according to the political and ideological views of the establishment. The long-term effect that these differences within the history lessons cause should be a matter of concern. What fixed ideas of national identity do we teach our children? These very subjective and nationalistic perspectives will never contribute to resolving any political, geographic, or economic conflicts.

The cover of this issue of *Kunstlicht* is part of the on-going work *The Caucasian History Book*, a series that I started in the summer of 2016. This drawing is reflective of the school textbooks from the different countries discussed in *Constructed Identities*, including Germany, Egypt, Greece and the Netherlands. By bringing together these covers I want to question the role of education and the way architectural heritage serves as propaganda in establishing fixed ideas of nationalism.

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