

Space, Art and
Architecture Between
East and West:

The Revolutionary Spirit

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Edited by

Argyro Loukaki

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*This book aims to be a pebble of the new theoretical paradigm
aiming for the building of bridges between East and West.*

It is lovingly dedicated to Panagiota.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND PREFACE

In the few years since the outbreak of a global pandemic, we have been witnessing the overwhelming transformations that are taking place on the world map, which are dictating new theorizations, transcending the outlines of political economic analysis, as well as postcolonial-, and individual-centered discourses. Capitalism appears in Eastern countries like China just a means to a collective, far-sighted end. This is so especially in regard to ancient nations like, for instance, China or India, which now loom as the next globally powerful players. This volume intends to respond to such an emerging need for new theorizations based on multi-scalar artistic, spatial and cultural awareness, going far beyond the exclusionary outlook of individual rights and tastes in relevant areas. Instead, it explores the magma of culture, ancient and modern, as cosmogonic matter giving birth to new worlds and dynamics.

This book is about the revolutionary spirit in geographical, architectural and artistic transformations. Such transformations, including reshuffles, re-orientation, power relations and antagonisms, past and present, over resources, predominance, religious as well as symbolic terrains and cultural territories, but also vicissitudes in the identities and fortunes of individual players, are often the result of struggles, revolutions and contestations. The main motive here is to explore such momentous processes of transformations and rearrangements in our world, particularly regarding the East-West polarity and its shifts.

The East has long been a research interest of mine since I was a young student at the School of Architectural Engineering of the National Technical University of Athens. At the time, mainly due to the charms of Japanese gardens. It has remained a steady source of fascination, primarily in terms of aesthetics and art, which has led to several publications. On the other hand, the celebration in 2021 of the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman rule and the subsequent establishment of the Greek State in 1830 was the critical spark behind this volume. Time and the *Zeitgeist* were relevant, since the pandemic contingent illustrated how linked global geographies, Eastern and Western, really are. For this reason, the widest possible conception of space globally is pursued here.

This book originated from selected papers presented at the conference *Space, Art and Architecture Between East and West. The Revolutionary*

Spirit, which took place in 2021, and was organized by an Academic and an Organizing Committee chaired by me, in the context of the School of Humanities and with the multilayered support of the Hellenic Open University.¹ The book also contains especially written chapters. I thank the authors for their trust.

This collection draws from a tradition of research and publications on arts and space, regional, urban, and now global that we have established, striving for an all-inclusive scholarly approach that transcends the boundaries of traditionally separate disciplines such as cultural geography, art and architecture history as well as archaeology. Space, be it architectural, urban, regional, national or global, Eastern and Western, and the art that is encased or hosted in it, are approached from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, art is fused with a correspondingly multi-layered geography of culture.

Dionysis Mourelatos has been supportive during the editing of this book. Jenny Albani invited me to write an article to present our work in the 2021 review of ICOM, the International Council of Museums, Greek Section.

Adam Rummens of Cambridge Scholars Publishing has been very encouraging, lenient with the inevitable delays, and supportive—so much appreciated. Collaboration with Sophie Edminson regarding the book cover which I designed was straightforward. Amanda Millar has been very cooperative and courteous.

Experience has shown me that each book follows its own course towards completion, easy or difficult. Editing this volume has been extremely demanding, not only because it has involved an extended list of tasks regarding both its textual and visual aspects, which included page design, typesetting, proofreading, care for the quality of figures and design of the book cover. Besides, there have been various tough hurdles along the way. George and Lydia Georgia, my mother Panagiota, a lover of life and a brave survivor who escaped death closely and miraculously during the proofreading, my brothers George and Angelos and their families, as well as friends have been compassionate, devoted and supportive in equal measure, helping me to overcome them. My affection is theirs now and always.

The book is lovingly dedicated to Panagiota.

Argyro Loukaki, February 2026

¹ Details in chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.eap.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Revolutionary_Spirit_book_of_abstracts.pdf.

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INTRODUCTION

EAST, WEST, AND ART: REVISITING THE CONCEPTS

ARGYRO LOUKAKI

We are currently living at a time of unprecedented universality. More than ever before, space of various scales and orientations, from that of isolated architectural works to the planetary, moving between East and West, emerges as a category indispensable for analysis and intercultural comparison. “The East is a career,” as Benjamin Disraeli said in *Tancred*. The East, origin of some very ancient civilizations, has long furnished the West with a rich twosome. On the one hand, geographical imaginaries of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and remarkable experiences; on the other, a vast reserve ready to transfuse into the West easy access to cheap labor, raw materials like oil, archaeological or other valuable artifacts and treasures, as well as consumer markets.

The effort to establish the supremacy of Western civilization has been constant after its extraordinary ascendancy from the Renaissance up to the present. Simultaneously, inter-Western antagonisms over cultural predominance, active at least since the 18th- and 19th-century establishment of major European museums, led to concomitant treasure hunts in the East, around the Mediterranean and elsewhere. Right now, though, a radical reversal is taking place, as not only is interest in Asian art growing with the advent of globalization (Turner 2014); also soaring is the admiring fascination with the structural, scalar and technological aspects of architecture and engineering in a country like China, where Western architects are frequently invited for their designs, as they were in the imperial past. And yet, there are still ongoing canyonlike Eastern and Western divisions of the globe. Quite in this sense, art, architecture, as well as urban spaces and cultural landscapes from what are currently considered Western and Eastern territories appear at once more interconnected through rich exchanges but also more at odds due to sharp contrasts.

Such precedents and the wildly competitive spirit of our time, economic, military, geopolitical but also cultural, underpin the conceptual intention of this volume to address the widest possible comprehension of space globally. The current cultural dynamics fashion contemporary cultural landscapes and aesthetic responses in both Eastern and Western geographies, already shaped and re-shaped by resistance or revolt. Heed the spatial and technological impact of the 18th and 19th century Industrial Revolutions. Also, the impact of “rebel cities” (in Harvey 2012). In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt argued that war and revolution still constitute the central political issues of our world and are carried out in the name of freedom from tyranny. Freedom as a political phenomenon was coeval with the rise of the Greek city-states; however, the revolutionary spirit of the last centuries is unprecedented and unequalled in all prior history. It should be noted, in passing, that, despite Arendt’s argument that there is not war theory in Ancient Greece, we see in Hesiod’s *Theogony* that Zeus establishes his divine order following a long and violent conflict, the Titanomachy. Heraclitus famously stated that “war is the father of all and the king of all.” Besides, Thucydides wrote the *Peloponnesian War*, and classical tragedy introduced theatrical exploration of the theme of clash but also the punishment of hubris.

The revolutionary spirit is evoked here in dual manner: first, to signal distinct historic-geographical moments, where creative or winning powers transform extant artistic and architectural accomplishments through dialogue, adaptation or confrontation and creative destruction, to reshape canonic art and architecture, or even the cultural landscapes of entire regions. Second, as a historical moment of insurrection, to which the arts and the urban space must correspond creatively.

A quasi-revolutionary spirit emerges here in the drive to question perceived boundaries and to encourage mutual communication and analysis in the East and West, as indicated in this book’s title. Specifically, following on the footpaths of *The Monumental* (Routledge 2025), the volume at hand looks beyond binary frameworks of West versus East, seeking instead rich interdisciplinary understandings of art and architecture by the contributing specialists. The revolutionary spirit is understood here as the motive for political, artistic and spatial transformations. It is integral to shifts in creative paradigms, including the legacies of classical antiquity as well as of modernity. It is evoked to signal transformative moments across time and space, whereby creative powers break down and supersede assumed boundaries and conceptual limits to rebuild, reform and reshape.

Building on the above, this book explores themes of art, space and identity as they are transformed by revolutionary change coming from shifts

in historical conditions or in taste and technologies. What is pursued, more precisely, is a nuanced contribution to the theoretical discourse that builds on geographical fragmentations and aesthetic contradictions to create opportunities for reevaluation and transcendence of ongoing and yet unnecessary disruptions or misunderstandings. This book argues, in fact, that only an acculturating perspective that is simultaneously globally inclusive and locally respectful can now make local specificities visible in the field of art and architecture as well as propel deeper mutual understanding. Such a theoretical attitude should be upheld by a dual awareness of global tensions and revolutionary innovations internationally. Therefore, an outlook that is characterized by intentions of universality, but remains sensitive to local differentiations, values and aesthetics is adopted here.

The main themes addressed in this volume include how the geographical distinctions between “East” and “West” are approached today at the level of art, architecture and space as constant interaction and interweaving. Also, what are the potential causes but also implications of revolutionary undercurrents, expressions and processes in these creative domains, as spatial, artistic and architectural dialogues evolve through, but may also contribute towards the shifting East–West divide. The manner we define essential geographical concepts such as “East” and “West” is subject to shifting geopolitical situations and rearrangements. A Mediterranean country like Greece is a rather typical example of such shifts, because it has been variously portrayed as an Oriental or as an Occidental territory. Greece became an Ottoman province for four centuries after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 CE. All the while, mainly due to its classical past, it continued to hover in the European geographical imagination as the cultural cradle of Western civilization, mythical as well as civilizational, material as well as immaterial.

Art historians such as David Summers (2004) speak of spatial instead of visual arts, and as Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann (2004) speak of the geography of art. This book keeps on the footpath of previous interdisciplinary exploration of the relationships between geography, aesthetics, art, architecture and urban space leading to volumes edited by me: *Urban Art and the City. Creating, Destroying, and Reclaiming the Sublime* (Routledge, 2021); *The Monumental* (Routledge, 2025). Also, a volume in Greek: *Τέχνη, Χώρος, Όψεις Ανάπτυξης στην Ελλάδα της Κρίσης* (Space, Art, Aspects of Development in Crisis-Hit Greece, Λεμιών/Limon, 2018). Research in the chapters here deepens these accounts by approaching multi-scalar space and the art incorporated in it from multiple perspectives and at, equally, multiple scales: from that of the individual work of art, to

architecture, designed urban landscapes and urban planning. Furthermore, art is fused with a correspondingly multi-layered geography of culture.

For just an example relevant to the themes of this volume, take an international literary figure, very appreciated in the East, like Nikos Kazantzakis (Chapter 8). Kazantzakis was desperately searching for authenticity, human dignity and sacredness. He did encounter them in East Asia, especially in pre-WWII Japan, as a collective sublime, at once artistic, aesthetic and natural, but also as readiness for departure from the mortal sphere following such a supreme experience. Mysterious traditions of this kind are unconsciously captured by the constantly active Western yearning, which is material but also psychic, ready to reach the thresholds of utopianism. Because, beyond the unquenchable thirst for power, resources and experiences, lurks also the need for new kinds of beauty and marvellousness, as Umberto Eco (2004) argues. But this particular, aching desire should be channelled way beyond the past and arts strictly delimited according to geographical divisions, “Oriental” and “Occidental.” It should be accomplished based on the certainty that there will be a human future and consequently its archaeologies.¹ This, not as sci-fi, but as a real, urgent global prospect, can only be possible under certain rather obvious conditions, insinuated here.

Relevant concepts

To provide the necessary wide-ranging context in this book, I briefly discuss in the following eight relevant concepts (A-H). Some of them are present in a number of chapters, and some, while more tangential to them, are relevant to this project as a whole. These concepts are the following: A. East and West, Greek classicism, and changing global geographies. B. Colonialism and global power structures. C. Western (post-) colonialism and the East today. D. Art and architecture fusions despite the East-West divide. E. Byzantium and the Greek tradition. F. Visual regimes and spatial interpretations. G. The 19th-century outlook and the classical legacy. H. Western art history today.

Specifically, I expand on the shifting ideas relating to what are the East and the West; global power structures; colonialism and postcolonialism. These themes are widely looming but more specifically discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 here. Thereafter follow some remarks on the globalizing aspects of art and architecture theory, more broadly relevant. The Mediterranean East-West polarity, in which major players were the

¹ As Fredric Jameson (2007) would have it.