

Architecture and National Identity

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Le palais de Tuileries: hier et aujourd'hui

En 2004, l'Académie du Second Empire a créé un Comité national pour la reconstruction du Palais des Tuileries, brûlé pendant les derniers jours de la Commune de Paris en mai 1871. Ce projet de reconstruction d'un palais disparu du paysage parisien depuis plus de 135 ans soulève une certaine polémique. Selon Alain Boumier, le président du comité, cette initiative est « un élan au-delà des générations, des tendances politiques, des cultures et des frontières ». Boumier affirme qu'il n'y a « qu'une France malgré les changements de régime, et aucun régime n'est propriétaire de la France ni de son patrimoine » (<http://www.tuileries.org>). Son projet, cependant, si jamais il se réalise, aurait pour effet de nier l'importance historique de la Commune, comme l'a souligné Jean-Jacques Aillagon, ancien ministre de la Culture et de la Communication : « la question de la reconstruction du palais des Tuileries n'est pas sans poser des problèmes déontologiques de première importance. Convient-il, en rétablissant le palais dans ses dispositions d'origine, de « gommer » la trace de ces événements tragiques, qui comptent parmi les plus importants de notre histoire nationale? » (*Journal Officiel* du 24 mars, 2003).

La décision de raser les ruines des Tuileries suscita une polémique très vive pendant les premières années de la Troisième République. Dans cette communication, j'explorerai les implications du nouveau projet à la lumière des débats des années 1880 afin d'analyser l'importance de la Commune et de la destruction du Palais des Tuileries dans l'histoire et l'identité nationales de la France.

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The Proposal to Reconstruct the Palais des Tuileries: Symbol of Empire and National Identity

The Palais des Tuileries, symbol of French *gloire* during the nineteenth century, may rise again to grace the *axe royal* from the Louvre, Place de la Concorde, Champs Elysées, to the Arc de Triomphe. My paper examines the current project of the Comité national pour la reconstruction des Tuileries, of which I am a member. I will present results of my interviews with French architects, functionaries and intellectuals on the project, while connecting the present proposal with French identity now and in the nineteenth century. Despite the Tuileries' troubled past, during identity crises France has often returned to the reconstruction project.

I will briefly discuss the destruction of the Tuileries and proposals for reconstruction from the 1870s through the 1950s. The current plan to rebuild the palace *ex nihilo* is widely supported, as demonstrated in three recent colloquia on the topic, each attended by 300 or more supporters, where I presented my support at the Luxembourg Palace, the Université de Paris and the Foundation Del Duca of the Institut de France. If rebuilt, the Tuileries will be a copy of its last state before the fire of 1871. Under the July Monarchy and Second Empire the palace took its best known architectural form and came to symbolize French identity and *gloire*, for good or for bad.

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Exposition Universelle de 1889: Colonialism, Medievalism, and Republican Ideals

The *exposition* of 1889 is famous for the Eiffel Tower—monumental steel symbol of technological innovation. A large number of the architectural constructions for the exposition, however, drew on history and tradition. This paper investigates how architecture engaged Republican ideals, providing physical spaces for didacticism to meet seduction. Organizers envisioned scenes of renewed national unity emerging from visitors' collective experiences of awe and wonder. To this end, the exposition combined historical and geographical exoticism, fostering both medievalism and colonialism as popular expressions of republican values and French modernity.

Medievalism and colonialism function as mutually reinforcing sites of national identity in a number of different venues. Along the Esplanade des Invalides, the Palais des Colonies (and its surrounding villages) faced the medieval façade of the Ministère de la Guerre. Avenue Suffren (alongside the central axis of the Champs-de-Mars) offered a similar experience of temporal and geographic vertigo, with several medieval reconstructions on one side and streets from Cairo on the other. Finally, at the foot of the Eiffel Tower itself, Charles Garnier (architect of the Opéra) presented his *Histoire de l'Habitation Humaine*—a series of forty-four houses “typical” of the world's major civilizations and races (including medieval France and contemporary Africa).

Through reconstructions of medieval and colonial architecture, exposition organizers encouraged millions of visitors to draw parallels between distant times and distant places. They grounded national identity in the prestige of both medievalism and colonialism, enlisting both in the service of a triumphant national modernity.