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Interferences: Migrating Practices in Europe

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Perhaps it is precisely at a moment when the European peace order is facing pressure that the value of mobility between places, cities or countries is explicitly being thrust into awareness. Several decades of alignment and (eventually) unification, initially driven by politics, but always also by economic considerations, have profoundly changed the conditions of everyday life in Europe. Residing, temporarily, in different countries for education or work has become unexceptional for many Europeans, and travelling habitual for even larger numbers. It appears that a collective experience of a European space has gradually become established. For the many residents who have migrated to Europe from other parts of the world, the boundaries within it have perhaps even less significance, as extended family members find themselves in dispersed diasporas across the continent. At the Turkish greengrocer, the North African butcher or the Indian corner shop the product labels usually show this very clearly: they describe the borderless, pragmatic, but essentially European reality of migration societies from Catalonia to northern Sweden.

When perceiving Europe as a constellation of geographic spaces and networks we see a built Europe as the result of the (historical) migration of building types, cultural and urban models, and architectural languages along networks of exchange. European integration, and its liberties of movement of goods, services and people, have encouraged various forms of cultural mobility. Architects move between countries, as do engineers. Although linguistic and legal boundaries often still form obstacles to an even freer exchange, professionals have often found ways of working around them. The most fruitful precedents are probably those that have involved some form of collaboration. The partnerships of practices (from London, Brussels, Antwerp, Zurich and Milan) at work in the Antwerp docklands or on the Brussels Canal both mirror and feed an architecture culture that spans Europe from the north-west to the south. Reversely, the involvement of the Brussels office 51N4E in the replanning of the Albanian capital Tirana is a prime example of a cultural dialogue between Western Europe and the East, demonstrating a willingness on the part of the architects to engage with the history of the specific urban fabric. That this fabric itself was the product of Ottoman forms of urbanity and the fragmentary implementation of Italian ones during the Fascist occupation of Albania probably added to the rich mix of cultural associations and motifs. The architects took the long process of planning and realisation as an opportunity for stimulating a conversation with local actors, writers and artists about the capacity of this particular urban development to establish new forms of civil society attuned to the context of a post-communist society.

In a more distant, but not remote, past, the involvement of Southern European architects in the International Building Exhibition (IBA) in Berlin opened the door for the transfer of theoretical positions and their effectuation in the, then still divided, city. Alvaro Siza's project for a street corner in Kreuzberg is exemplary for the capacity of cross-cultural exchange: it probably needed an architect literate in the discourse on the European city both to activate the imagery of German Expressionism and find a language for a building that resonates with its context and the complicated history of Berlin (as well as providing fairly decent social housing). Siza's Schilderswijk projects in The Hague display a similar ability to detect cultural patterns and architectural forms, and to process them in designs that capture both specific architectural traditions and the necessities of a culturally diverse society. These examples demonstrate that being sensitive to cultural difference is not obstructed by the distinct artistic position of the designers – instead, such a position is an essential condition for genuinely engaging with a variety of cultural contexts.

The spatial identity of Europe is the outcome of the long-time exchange and migration of cultural models, including architectural types and languages, merging with vernacular characteristics. A relevant question may concern the coherence of a European identity. We could state that symbols of cultural affiliations and of political hegemonies operate alongside each other, question each other, or ignore each other.¹ In 1935, against the background of totalitarian regimes dominating European politics leading to the civilisational catastrophe that post-war European politicians wished to end perpetually, German philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote: 'Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are thereby not yet living at the same time with the others.'² Following from Bloch, we still live in a Europe that is permeated by realities that represent very different collective states of mind, and fundamentally different circumstances. 'Our time' is deeply influenced by the inherited realities of the *longue durée* of history and specific histories, but also by manifestations of cross-cultural interferences. It is in the moulded, humanised European landscape that the contemporary is situated in a variety of inherited, imagined and constructed concepts of order, organisations of society and constructions of individuality. Although operating in the same space in a fragment of time, these conditions continue to affect everyday reality, regardless of the differences between people in cultural background, class consciousness, socioeconomic situation, etcetera.

With this issue of *OASE* we propose an examination of the poetics of design and how they are brought about by the cultural exchanges that have characterised Europe for centuries and that have intensified over the past decades. Our perspective is both historical and contemporary, revealing the agency and role of architecture in shaping and reflecting the narrative of Europe as a fabric of cultural and artistic influences. As territories have shifted, so have competing visions of modernity or tradition, of progress or authenticity. Ideas developed in one region or nation have migrated and produced fruits somewhere else. European architecture cultures are, singularly and collectively, the product of infinite interferences, of overlaps and layers of cultural models and their material manifestations. Yet this issue also wishes to address contemporary transnational design processes, practices and projects that examine or illustrate how the various ambiguous and multi-layered historical narratives of specific European sites are interpreted and reworked. How does a specific project, a building design or a cultural product become the result of exchange? How does it affect the process of making or communicating decisions? Does a diversity of experiences and cultural backgrounds have an impact on how symbolic or representational languages are developed within practises and does it surface in specific aesthetic choices? Regarding the auto-construction of the architect, as a professional, an artist, an engineer or a servant to society: How do the different disciplinary formations and educational traditions in various parts of Europe affect and stimulate collaborations in everyday practice and in the processes of designing and realising buildings? And how is this translated into the organisation of labour within ateliers, studios, offices or planning firms – as the architecture offices are referred to in different national contexts, reflecting the variety of responsibilities, legal situations and the organisation of the building industries?

We are searching for contributions that are reflective and illustrate the effect of interferences between differences in architecture culture and educational background within design practices and the subsequent conceptualisations of architecture. We are interested in examining how this unfolds in design processes at the level of making design decisions, the use and development of design methods and methodologies, the visual representation of designs and the language and terminologies employed in design thinking. The contributions should argue in real terms this effect and ideally illustrate this in drawn or modelled evidence by addressing concrete (built or unbuilt) design projects dating from after 1989 along two lines:

¹ Alexander Demandt, *Metaphern für Geschichte. Sprachbilder und Gleichnisse im historisch-politischen Denken*, München: Beck, 1978, p. 293

² At the centre of the Bloch's book we find the concept of "non-simultaneity", which Bloch applied to the history of the yearnings of the people at the end of the Weimar Republic, taking up Marx, and with which he also criticised the biased analytical bleakness of the dominant forces within organised Communism and the Comintern.

Erbschaft dieser Zeit is probably one of the most important explanations of how the 'Schrecken-Deutschland', i.e. Nazi-Germany, came about. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of our Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 (original publication: *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Zurich, 1935), p. 97

Practical interferences and collaboration

What is the role of the architecture office as a place or incubator for cross-fertilisation among architects, methods and theories? What is the effect of procedural conditions on European practices for transnational collaborations or to operate in various European contexts?

Migrating positions and methods

How are theoretical positions or design practices that emerge in one place introduced and adjusted in another part of Europe through the migration of architects and the ideas, methods and (material) knowledge that they bring with them, ranging from representational techniques to practical knowledge on materials and their specific geographical application? How have European institutional spaces and systems shaped and cultivated these interferences among architects?

Abstracts with a maximum of **400 words** should be submitted (in English or in Dutch) via info@oasejournal.nl before midnight **June 19, 2022** along with your name and e-mail address, your professional affiliation and a short bio (no more than 150 words). This should be bundled in one **PDF** file.