ARCHITECTS IN EXILE

Abdula Akhmedov et al., Borisovsky Ponds Complex Project, 1996

STORIES OF NEW SPATIAL EXPERIENCES

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
May 29-30, 2023

OPEN CALL

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E STUDI URBANI

Exile Studies is a relatively new field in the humanities, seeking to analyze the global phenomenon of migration that emerged in the XX and XXI centuries. Although this field is essentially related to anthropology and sociology, a number of scholars also focus on the specific artistic experiences of the exiled, produced outside the cultural and social context, in which they grew up and spent a significant part of their lives.

Not surprisingly, there are far fewer studies of exiled architects than of other artists: writers, poets, musicians, etc. Architecture is the least literary and narrative art, even in comparison with music. Moreover, architecture has always been closely connected with power, and this factor often prevents architects-in-exile both from getting work, and from introducing specific exiled motifs and subjects into their work. This is precisely why the activities of architects in foreign cultural contexts have long been viewed through the prism of transculturalism, and more recently, through the concept of "cultural transfers". There have, however, been exceptions.

The exodus of Bauhaus leaders from the Old World after the Nazis came to power seems to be an iconic story of architectural exile. However, many aspects of their activities in the USA show differences between their exile in America and that experienced by Thomas Mann or Bertolt Brecht. The latter were motivated by the idea of opposing Hitlerism with a kind of "other Germany", and returned home after the end of the war. In contrast, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and others were the bearers of a universal project, ready to implement it anywhere in the world. Thus, while they were refugees in the political sense, they were not exiles as far as their work on a new architectural language was concerned. The same effort of universalizing modernization characterized practices of Western modernist architects in the colonial world. Contemporary scholars sometimes try to present the fate of Michel Écochard or Fernand Pouillon in the Maghreb as exile, which seems true as a fact of biography. But architects in exile do not always create "exile architecture".

Limbo, slits and circles of Hell, gates and ledges of Purgatory, spheres of Paradise – this mental construct, comparable in popularity and number of subjects with the Gospels and ancient myths, emerged in the fantasy of a 14th century exile, forced to leave his hometown. His emblematic experience demonstrated that the exile is associated with a particular mobilization of imagination, revealing one's ability to reincarnate, to see another world beyond reality. The abandoned country does not dissolve in the memory. It breaks away from the territory, transported across borders, beyond linear time, and is filled with tales and symbolic images. The migrant's dreams and his work are a field of hybrid otherness. The artist-exile's Paris resembles Vitebsk, Buenos Aires resembles the Old World. Joseph Brodsky compared the vantage point of exile to being on a pass from which one can view two slopes simultaneously; Edward Said reminded us that the exile is familiar with at least two cultures. According to him, the view of "the whole world as if it were a foreign land" was a guarantee of originality, which, in fact, made the work of exiles, migrants, and refugees become the modern culture.

Is it possible to find, in the works of architects in exile, expressions of their spiritual quest, new life experiences, nostalgic feelings and aesthetic shocks? If so, is it possible to outline within the creative evolution of the architects in exile, certain typical stages that writers, artists, or filmmakers go through, such as pre-exile, exile as such, post-exile, and nomadism?* When does modernism cease to be a universal language of domination, and become an existential language of the exile – and can both coexist?

In posing these questions, we want to continue the reflection, begun four years ago by researchers who devoted a collection of articles to the exile of architects.** Their innovative research focused on the social fate of architects in exile, and on the possibilities for cultural transfers, and the circulation of ideas that this opened up. Our questioning is more concerned with those cases, where the aesthetics of exile directly affected architectural forms.

We would like to address these questions during the conference we are going to organize in *Polimi* from May 29-30, 2023. We invite everyone to send us a synopsis of paper (maximum 300 words) as well as your short biography (maximum 150 words) by February 19, 2023 via the email **exile@polimi.it**. Authors of selected papers will be notified by March 15, 2023.

Unfortunately, POLIMI cannot cover the costs of travel and stay, but will be willing to offer selected participants lodging at partner hotels with preferential rates.

* These categories were studied in the collective work of the research group **Poexil**, which worked in the University of Montreal during 10 years, from 2002 until 2012 under direction of Alexis Nouss.

** Marie Gaimard et Caroline Maniaque (dir.), **Exils et migrations des architectes, des urbanistes, des paysagistes à l'ère contemporaine** // Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale urbaine et paysagère, nº 2, 2018