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Thresholds

A field guide
to the future
of architecture

Edited by &beyond

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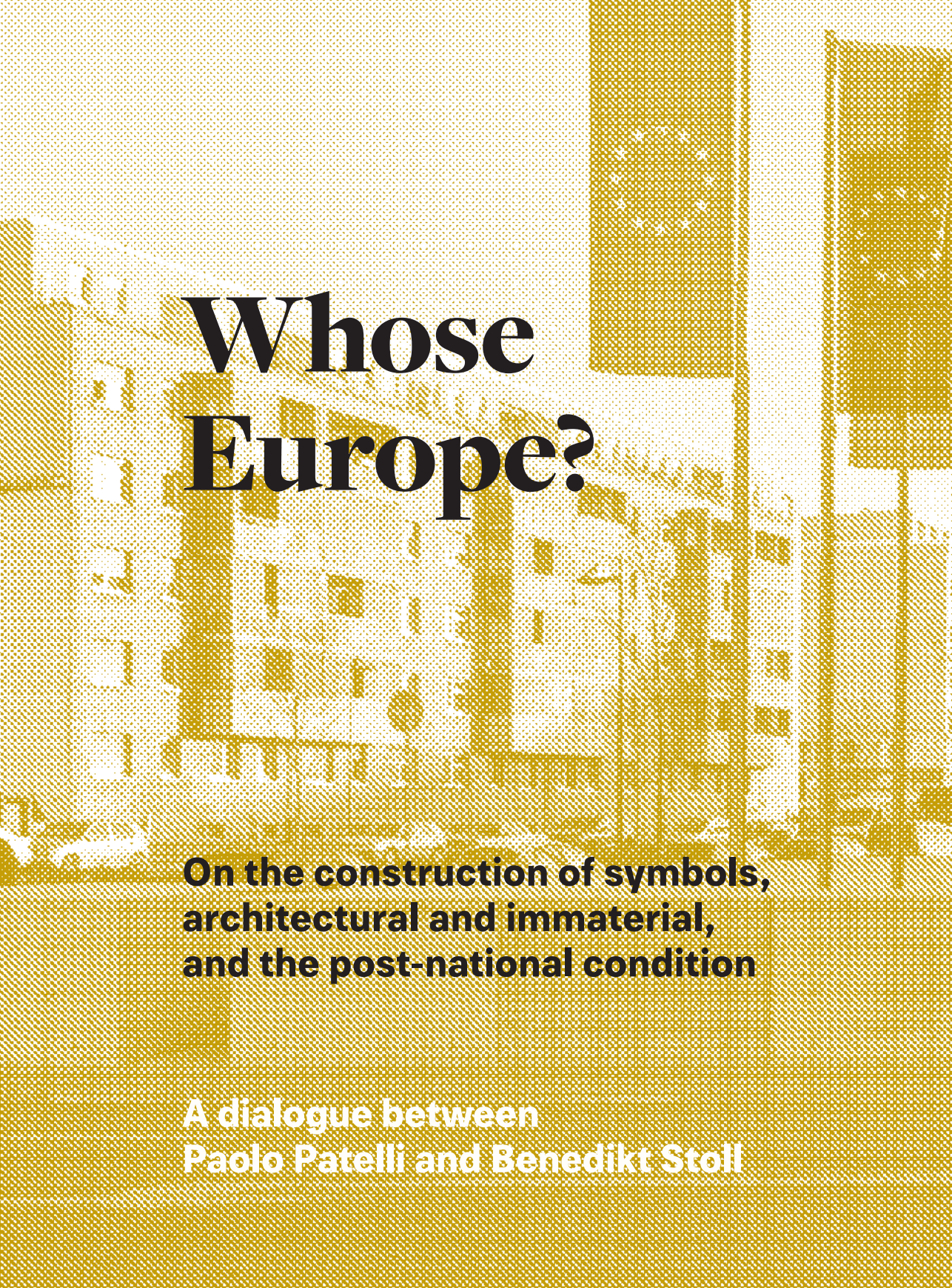

Whose Europe?

On the construction of symbols, architectural and immaterial, and the post-national condition

A dialogue between
Paolo Patelli and Benedikt Stoll

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"By giving newcomers, travellers, refugees, nomads or migrants agency to blur the lines between existing spatial dualisms and cultural boundaries, the city could become more open."

The term "postnationalism" describes a world in which nation states – and their associated national identities – have ceased to be the primary framework from which governance and citizenship is derived. With nationalism on the rise and the principle of unity seemingly in retreat in Europe and beyond, such a condition currently seems very far away for the countries of the European Union. But six-decades' worth of constructions pertaining to it remain: from banknotes to buildings, logos to plazas – all attempt to foster a pan-European identity of sorts, whilst asserting the Union's position on the global stage.

Architect and researcher Paolo Patelli's project The Architecture (an Archaeology) of a Post-Nation considers what architecture might materialise the post-national political contract, whilst Guerilla Architects' newspaper project entitled The European Dream explores how communication and representation shape and inform the interpretation of identity and warchitecture. In the following dialogue, Patelli and Benedikt Stoll from Guerilla Architects discuss how something so transient and shape-shifting is reflected in the output of architecture, a discipline traditionally concerned with the actual and concrete.

Paolo Patelli Both of us seem to evidence in our work the feeling that Europe as a "thing" is difficult to grasp. We both seem unsure that it even exists, as it is not visible from within. A European identity is perhaps more detectable in its citizens' interactions with the symbols associated with it; it is visible in mundane manifestations, flags and similar banal paraphernalia, and in performances of the everyday, from cash transactions to choosing the

Paolo Patelli

Paolo Patelli is an architect and a researcher, currently based in the Netherlands. Through his practice and collaborative works, he engages critically and by design with space, things and society. He is Associate Reader at the Design Academy Eindhoven and a 2017/18 resident at the Van Eyck studio programme in Maastricht. He also teaches at The New School's Parsons Paris and collaborates with the Programme d'Expérimentation en Arts et Politique (SPEAP) at Sciences Po in Paris.

Previous spread:
European Central Bank headquarters, Frankfurt. Photo: Paolo Patelli

Benedikt Stoll

Benedikt Stoll trained in architecture and urban planning at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and University of Arts Berlin. He was awarded a DAAD annual scholarship for his diploma project, The European Dream, to develop his ideas at the Bartlett School of Planning in London as part of their inter-disciplinary urban design postgraduate programme. In 2012 he co-founded the international collective Guerilla Architects in London/Berlin and initiated and co-founded the interdisciplinary cultural association die Anstoß e.V. in Karlsruhe in 2013.

correct queue at passport control. Architecture doesn't seem to play a significant role; it is perhaps now even "excused" from having to comply with the demands of a ruling power. On the one hand the institution of Brussels as the capital of the Union has resulted in defaced architectural forms, struggling to find a new space between the totalising space of globalisation and the old patterns of nation-states. On the other, European prizes and competitions like Europan and the European Prize for Architecture never seem to find a concerned public beyond the professional bubble of designers. But is this all?

Bendikt Stoll I'm not sure whether the majority of European citizens do in fact interact with the EU's "banal paraphernalia". The 40th anniversary edition of the Eurobarometer[1] survey showed that as many people still identify solely with their nationality as those who additionally feel "European in some way". The latter likely do so because they experience the benefits of being in the EU. Whereas it seems that those who do not consider themselves European – as recently shown by the Brexit vote – are the ones that make use of and very publicly express their national identity. Citizens who potentially embody a European identity, such as those involved in the newly arisen Pulse of Europe[2] movement are rather a minority. That's why I would question whether the institutional manifestations of the EU, such as the euro, and its everyday performances are actually the right – or "realist", to borrow the word you use in your work – way to look for an European identity. Do we need a completely different kind of European imaginarium?

PP In my research and use of the term "realism", I focus not only on "official" representations and monumental spaces, but also on more mundane places and artefacts,

1 Eurobarometer is a series of public opinion surveys that have been conducted throughout EU member states regularly on behalf of the European Commission since 1973.

2 pulseofeurope.eu/

March for Europe. Citizens celebrating the 60th EU anniversary and protesting against Brexit, London 25 March 2015.
© Mark Lyndon Pautz

which, in spite of their ordinary character, embody the Union for many of its citizens – including those deprived of citizenship. In 2016, for example, whilst taking part in the cultural programme when the Netherlands held the presidency of the EU Council, I built a small canopy just outside the site where the official meetings were taking place in Amsterdam. It was constructed using salvaged materials from the then recently demolished migrant camp in Calais, in France – the "Jungle", as it was known. Inside I displayed materials contributed from the invited

attendees alongside activists' stickers and leaflets in multiple languages that addressed a post-national public.

NEE Campaign poster produced and distributed by the SP, the Dutch Socialist Party on the occasion of the the Dutch Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement referendum, April 6, 2016. Photo: Paolo Patelli

The project was an unsolicited set of "footnotes" to the institutional storyline being constructed in a new museum in Brussels, the House of European History. I didn't choose a narrative or take on the role of "collector-in-chief", but rather hoarded found objects. Realism is a representation of things as they actually are. For me, that means the sincere, un-idealised rendition of contemporary life in the EU. In my work, the word "realism" also makes reference to the fact that the orthodox way of being European is rarely challenged, the motto instead being: "let's be *realistic*; there is no alternative". We have heard it many times and the attitude was exemplified by the reaction of the institutional powers of the EU when that position *was* challenged by the result of the Greek bailout referendum of 2015. There is apparently only one acceptable way of being European, economically but also politically and culturally.

We normally look at architecture, or more broadly, at the built environment, as the interface through which

we can encounter shared meanings and identities. I am interested in the architectural representations of these modes of realism. Your *European Dream* project compiles texts and images about identities and borders as economic, political cultural or sociological processes. How do they relate to and challenge the perceived "fixedness" of the institution of the EU and its architectures, both actual and governmental?

Fortress Europe, from The European Dream project. Image: Benedikt Stoll

BS I wonder if we – as "Europeans" – are limited to the tactics of subverting, hacking or reconstructing representations and artefacts of the EU because they are so ubiquitous and familiar, so fixed, that we can no longer imagine anything. However, I see a discrepancy between the embodiment of the Union and the existing means of representation, especially from the "outside" perspective of a newcomer. Talking to migrants or refugees often reveals that they harbour visions and expectations of Europe that can be extreme: unrealistic nightmares or utopian fantasies. These dreams often stem from and reflect the vast disparity between their lived social, political and economic realities. However, these irrational

narratives are often more powerful than their European counterparts. In *The European Dream* project I attempted to imagine Europe from the point of view of the "other" – both anthropogenic and migratory – to challenge the preconceived "fixedness" of the sometime humanist and now rather neo-liberal internalised notion of identities and borders within the EU.

Euro-Sculpture, Willy-Brandt-Platz, Frankfurt. Photo: Eric Chan CC BY 2.0

PP Recently I turned my attention to Ottmar Hörl's *Euro-Sculpture* that stands outside the European Central

Bank in Frankfurt. It is a representation that is as abstract as money while at the same time as tangible as hard cash: a neon-lit acrylic rendition of the sign of our common currency, the €, with twelve stars clumsily attached to it and bumper stickers all round. Language and matter are both flattened to become currency, the resulting shorthand being Europe is euro, euro is freedom etc. What kind of approach do you think could effectively challenge the weak, prevailing visual regimes?

BS It might be as simple as denial, to start with. Every attempt to deconstruct the meaning of an established mode of representation always ends up becoming a part of its reconstruction. This dilemma is consequently restrictive if one aspires to the creation of truly different kind of "European" narrative. Not being able – or allowed – to enjoy the advantages of the EU perhaps prompts newcomers from outside to assume that it always successfully embodies its supposed fundamental values of "respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law". Sabotaging the conveyed identity of the *Euro Sculpture* is certainly an effective way of critiquing contemporary notions of Europe held by EU intellectuals, but it is also abstract given the fact that newcomers would arguably suggest a different (visual) language and representation of what they consider Europe to be. Are we, in our position, able to re-think Europe or do we need an "outside" perspective in order break free from our biases?

PP First of all, what do we mean by "we"? The *Euro-Sculpture* is an interesting example but is just the gift of a private association to a European institution. If you want to consider what the words "European identity" mean to "European citizens", things get very

"Diversity and the condition of being an outsider are already there at the heart of Europe, they always have been."

tricky. Diversity and the condition of being an outsider are already there at the heart of Europe, they always have been. A European identity cannot be hung solely on a linear idea of European history, a grand narrative stretching from ancient Greek democracy and Roman civilisation through the Enlightenment and on to Modernity. Nor, alternatively, can it rest on a supposedly common cultural milieu when, in reality, it's surprisingly difficult to find intellectuals equally praised by, for example, the Poles, the Portuguese, the Swedes and the Greeks; Galileo Galilei was almost burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church, there is prejudice against Michelangelo's probable homosexuality, Augustine of Hippo was born in North Africa, and so on. So the predominantly white, Christian clichés are useless when it comes to imagining what "European" is. The task is overwhelming and, yes, we need help from the outside, but if you look closely, outsiderness has been there all along.

This aside, even the political shape of Europe is unstable, shrinking and expanding as we consider the extensions of the Eurozone (a monetary union of 19 of the 28 EU member states), or those of the Schengen area (26 European states that have officially abolished passport and border controls at their mutual borders). A legal definition of European citizenship is derived directly from those of its member states. Creating a new, different space for it, beyond the borders of nation states, poses interesting questions and demands imaginative effort, as the scenario finds some of us within and some without. How can we negotiate and/or navigate these kinds of thresholds? How do they manifest (or not) in architecture?

BS In order to actually convey these ideas of shifting

borders and identities into space, one has to reconsider the holistic act of attempting to create "meaningful" architecture. That entails acknowledging Dutch structuralist concepts of the 1960s and 70s and the misleading dualisms between public and private or outside and inside, as well as the idealistic notion of spatial archetypes that could encourage creative appropriations for different situations as thresholds of an open society. In my recent work, a cognitive mapping workshop entitled *Re-tracing Home*, I have been pursuing a phenomenological approach that challenges deterministic or generalised notions of cultural and architectural identities. Instead, it emphasises the particularity of human encounters and gives voice to recent newcomers who have not been heard in the process of their cultural and architectural home-making. I propose that we as architects should provide open and undifferentiated structures that can be filled with meaning by their future inhabitants *before* aiming to foster possibilities of encounter: we should only build meaningless structures embedded in an already meaningful environment. The ability to create a domestic space through individual appropriation from scratch enables inhabitants to determine the threshold between private/public themselves and thereby be part of the cultural and architectural process of renegotiating meaning in space.

"We should only build meaningless structures embedded in an already meaningful environment."

By giving newcomers, travellers, refugees, nomads or migrants agency to blur the lines between existing spatial dualisms and cultural boundaries, the city could become more open. This might also challenge new forms of colonialisation, which simply incorporate "other" practices into predominantly "European" standards or archetypes and fuel a pre-designed exoticism. Even with the best intentions, attempts to design for newcomers from non-

European backgrounds can easily become laden with racist clichés, diminishing real complexities. To mediate the future city as a fluid space of shifting borders, one has to co-produce its preconditions as well as its results. I understand you went to the "Jungle" in Calais and I am curious as to how your visits and exchanges with the people there have influenced or shaped your awareness of postnationalism. Would you regard the site as an example of postnational architecture/urbanism?

PP Calais, a port city in northern France, overlooks the Strait of Dover at the narrowest point of the English Channel, making it the closest French city to England. Between 1999 and October 26, 2016, the town's outskirts hosted a series of makeshift camps, bustling villages packed with a mix of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants, hoping to reach the UK. I visited the camp in early 2016 to talk with some of the settlers. They had set up a functional local economy, with restaurants and shops, and even created "embassies": shacks with Kurdish, Afghan, Syrian, Iraqi, Eritrean flags. I was struck by how "urban" the feeling inside the "Jungle" was, whether in the rough streets or inside the tea houses and makeshift ballrooms lit with festive lights.

The residents were grateful to the volunteers for the help and support granted them through campaigns all over Europe, but they knew that what they were seeking was something the volunteers could not offer; a passport and a ride to the UK, where working long hours, so that they could help their families back home, would be much easier. The moment they achieved this, they would not need the camp anymore. Whilst the "Jungle" was a place many were bound to, it was also the direct result of the hypermobility of other geopolitical entities. In its

A Pan-African flag, in the "Jungle", Calais. Photo: Paolo Patelli

temporary frame, giving form to both mobility and fixity, the Jungle represented a postnational pocket of space, a glitch of urbanity, stuck between France and the UK, between Europe and the Global South. Whilst I was there, within a portion of the camp that had just been set alight by the residents before it could be torn down and cleared by the police, a Pan-African flag was still flying high from a tree. I found myself imagining what it would have meant to add an EU flag next to it. ■

Archifutures

Archifutures brings together projects and initiatives, both real and imaginary, that are shaping the architecture, cities and societies of tomorrow.

Vol. 4: Thresholds
A field guide to navigating the future of architecture

How can you navigate towards something when there are no fixed points, when you cannot determine your position? How do you know where to go, or even know when you have got there? This fourth volume in the *Archifutures* series investigates how architecture, traditionally considered to be a future-oriented activity, can best respond as we find ourselves on the threshold of a "post-futurist" condition where the future is not necessarily ahead of us, but everywhere and – perhaps most especially – "now".

Edited by Sophie Lovell and Fiona Shipwright, &beyond

Contributors include: Nora Akawi, Florian Bengert, Filipe Estrela, Mariabruna Fabrizi, Nikita Gyawali, Ana Jeinić, Holly Lewis, Fosco Lucarelli, Brett Moore, Sara Neves, Paolo Patelli, Pedro Pitarch, Blanca Pujals, Benedikt Stoll, James Taylor-Foster, John Thackara and Andreas Töpfer.

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