

# "There is no limit, I'm very happy with hybrid bastards."<sup>1</sup>

## Anne-Julchen Bernhardt in Conversation with Hana Cisar

**Hana Cisar:** Today's migration seems to burst all political and economical limits. Does your typological and phenomenological survey of migrants as builders in Germany, TRANSFER, as published in ARCH+ in 2013<sup>2</sup>, relate to this situation, when thousands of refugees are attempting to reach Europe in search of safety and a better life?

**Anne-Julchen Bernhardt:** The TRANSFER project uses tools of the Enlightenment. It looks at migrant buildings objectively. TRANSFER changes the passive attitude of welfare to active participation in society. It demonstrates the building activities of people from abroad in Germany. Migrants produce space to last; they contribute significantly to the material culture of Germany. Also, migrants generate architecture that wasn't here before. The architecture differs in program, use, actors, form, detail, economy, location, construction, building process, and production conditions. By studying these new hybrids accurately, the transformation of migratory elements under the local conditions in Germany can be observed. These transformed typologies nurture design processes in architectural design with the elements involved. A qualitative type of research does not intend to propose fast solutions for the actual situation. It is a contribution to the discourse of intercultural experiences and practices in Europe.

**HC:** You write about the "travel of the architect" and about bodily experience as the most important source of the building idea. After Le Corbusier's famous "Travel to the Orient", many theories and speculations were formulated, about how he translated his visual impressions into new models for architecture in France and in Switzerland. How different is the translation in the TRANSFER project?

**AJB:** The journeys are not that different from the famous journey of Le Corbusier. But the important difference is that the journey is not initiated by a

white, male, dictatorial, heterosexual, European architect looking at a so-called primitive culture. It's organized by ordinary people trying to find the essence in their culture and by less famous architects invited by migrants to look at their culture. The transformation is more pure and often with less awareness. The process of transformation is often determined by simplification and misunderstanding. But especially the simplification gives an indication whether an architectural element is important or not. For instance, the garage for the temple carriage for the Sri Kamadchi Ampal Tempel in Hamm-Uentrop is a simple corrugated steel structure—similar to industrial constructions—that was built by a local company. The design and the material of the garage adapt to the surrounding context, while the carriage has still its distinct shapes and materials. The garage seems less important than the temple carriage. The garage is totally secular, while the carriage is sacred. The garage is a typological adaptation to the German climate (rain) and a constructive adaptation to the German construction methods—a hybrid prototype is created. Various 'mistranslations' show the effect of the local context, rather than of the original one.

**HC:** You describe how the traditional Oriental typologies of public and semi-public buildings transform themselves and the (German) cityscapes. Does something like integration through architecture exist in the Turkish area or in a shisha-bar in Cologne? Who is building and who is coming there?

**AJB:** Urban space in German cities changed tremendously in use and appearance with migration. *Keupstraße* in Cologne, for instance, has been in the process of transformation from a typical 19th-century working-class street into an Oriental Bazaar for the last thirty years. It is now intensively filled with Turkish craftsmen shops and restaurants, at the moment still without a roof, but the shop owners are already thinking about it. It is a contemporary tourist

attraction. Now, there is a smell of strawberry in the city streets, Shisha bars pop up on every corner. It is a new nightlife location, visited by young men and women; different from the Shisha bars in the Arab world, which are visited only by men and different from all the existing German nightlife locations like breweries, bars, bistros, cafés, and restaurants. The Shisha bars share a specific layout of seating (on the perimeter of the room) which enables the visitors to communicate with the entire venue, although you share a table with a smaller group of people.

**HC:** Your research starts with the assumption that architecture emerges out of migration. In other words: architecture develops where the original parameters—climate, place, material—change. A particular case is the reconstruction of existing buildings. What influence does this have, beside other parameters, on such a strong typology as that of a Hamam?

**AJB:** One can often find transformations in migrant architecture. Due to economic constraints, used buildings are preferred over new ones. Generic boxes located in the urban sprawl are particularly attractive to low-budget investments. Religious programs move into former industrial buildings along with their architectural elements. The boxes are transformed, and in the process of adaptation you find the most important elements that have to be transformed. The more complicated the process of adaptation, the more significant the selection of the elements to be transformed. And the result shows the initial position of the existing building and the initial position of the typology. In the example of a Hamam in the city centre of Düsseldorf, the traditional mirror symmetry is not structurally transformed but done programmatically. Women can use the Hamam on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, men on Wednesdays and Saturdays. So this element of the typology seems to be not obligatorily connected to form. Other elements, like rooms with good proportions and an elaborated connection between the rooms, seem to be fundamental. In the transformation of an existing 19th-century building you can find each traditional room placed and arranged meticulously in the existing structure, quite similar in size and proportion to the original, connected by new stairs and openings.

**HC:** You say that the buildings of the migrants in Germany change especially the agglomeration. How does this happen?

**AJB:** The conditions of production of migrant buildings are different from the ones of buildings by people without a migration background. Their social position differs from the German majority. Their needs are not fully satisfied by the existing German social system and building program. Thus they constitute groups, find spaces to meet, and perform their social activities. Less solvent, their financial resources are limited. They rent or buy used buildings or cheap plots that are not located in the city centre. In the sprawl you can find intensively used programs like mosques, temples, community centres, wedding halls, schools, sports clubs. Migrants contribute to the urbanization of urban sprawl, they hybridize, compress, and socialize places far from the urban centre. Transit spaces become habitable spaces: at the exit road in front of the wedding hall you can see women in evening dresses chatting, the Goddess Kamakshi is passed in their temple car along warehouses of Westfleisch, the nearby canal serves for the ritual bath of several hundred believers. These spaces are globally connected; the temple celebrations in Hamm welcome Hindus from Denmark, France, and the Benelux countries. Migrants are actively engaged in urban development; they are the protagonists of a new agglomeration that forms not only a logistical and infrastructural system but also a hybrid cultural space. The agglomeration becomes a culturally charged space.

**HC:** Until now, the migrant building activities acted under the radar of the building authorities. How does the planning department and the building authority react to them?

**AJB:** German bureaucracy is quite slow in reaction to these changes. It took twenty years to accept the vanishing difference between housing and office. It is still not accepted that a new small hybrid—the kiosk—is changing from a shop for cigarettes and newspaper to something between retail, café, and service point. The regulatory agency has bigger problems by authorizing the hybrid program. Both are examples of programs that do not fit into the traditional classification of approved uses. The new architectural programs accompanying people from abroad are looked at with suspicion. Often they do not match the existing categories and laws. They are perceived as a problem, their indeterminacy is a threat.

**HC:** Is there something like a limit: only so far and not more? Or can we expect, in the image of the

future society, a total hybridization of the urban space?

**AJB:** There is no limit, I'm very happy with hybrid bastards. Architecturally, Germany represents an agreement on proper soberness. The new hybrids are the antipode, they are raw, complex, and of a particular unfinished beauty. The new hybrids challenge the ordinary notion of architecture, their ambiguity fosters a more reflective understanding of typologies and of architectural space.

**HC:** Last year you did a project seminar at the RWTH in Aachen with students on the theme of a migrant centre. What can architecture students do at this level to make a difference for migrants? What has happened lately that this is considered a new theme? Is this change relevant for your research?

**AJB:** We started the studio with a collection of spatial elements from all over the world. A spatial program names and assigns rooms by seemingly universal terms. But a building program is not universal; the name of a room implicates a defined use. We wanted to broaden the cultural understanding and use of spaces, to find more specific or more universal spatial manifestations. The collection helped us to be aware of differences between different cultures, and to praise them somehow. The projects for the migrant centre reflected the two opposite possibilities—to be heterogeneous and special, or to be universal and simple. We looked for ambiguous architecture, which could be understood by many. The studio Kosmopolis took place in spring 2015, before 800,000 refugees came to Germany. Kosmopolis dealt with migrants in a German city, not with refugees. Refugees need help and shelter, which is a different task. Refugees have to become migrants as soon as possible and dissolve into the body of the city. Architecture of welfare is not my field of interest; I am more interested in architecture that activates urban citizens.

**HC:** How can urban citizens be activated by architecture, and in which parts of the city can it best happen?

**AJB:** As I said before, there are two opposite possibilities and probably many in between. One is described by the famous quotation by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to Hugo Häring, that he has only to make the shack big enough to let different things happen. The strategy of a spatial generosity combined with beauty is not only true for mixed-use but

also for cultural hybridity. The other possibility is an architecture that synthesizes different specific spatial elements in an eclectic, precisely ambiguous whole. In eclecticism you have to choose: it is not almost everything but a precise selection of many elements. Its multi-attributive elements can act as an evidence for appropriation. The city is a multidimensional, non-hierarchical, pulsatile structure. So the architecture should be everywhere, in your neighbourhood, in the city centre, in the periphery, in the agglomeration.

### Captions

**1** Garage for the temple carriage, Hamm-Uentrop: The garage is a typological adaptation to the German climate and an adaptation to German construction methods. Photograph: © Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, Cologne.

**2** Shisha shop, Cologne: The ubiquitous youth culture of shisha-smoking is celebrated with products and shop design. Photograph by: Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, Cologne.

**3** Wedding hall, Cologne: The wedding hall in the industrial zone changes the interpretation of zoning laws in Germany. Photograph by: Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, Cologne.

**4** Keupstraße, Cologne: The shop owner's association of Keupstraße is thinking about placing a canopy over the street and turning it into a real bazaar. Photograph by: Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, Cologne.

### Notes

**1** Anne-Julchen Bernhardt on the influence of building activities by migrants in urban spaces in Germany.

**2** Anne-Julchen Bernhardt, Anna Weber, "Transfer. Migration erzeugt Architektur", *ARCH+* 213/2013, p. 72–73.

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Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics



**Anne-Julchen Bernhardt** (b. 1971/DE) studied architecture at the RWTH Aachen and the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, worked as an architect in Berlin and Cologne, and as an assistant professor at the RWTH Aachen. Since 2008, she is a tenured professor at the RWTH University for building typologies. In the year 2000, she established BeL Sozietät für Architektur together with Jörg Leiser. BeL has received numerous awards, among them the Kunstpreis Baukunst of the Berlin Academy of the Arts. The office has worked on 122 projects; 20 have been completed.

**Hana Cisar** studied architecture at the ETH Zurich and the EPF Lausanne. She has worked as an architect in Zurich, Lugano, and Paris. She has taught architecture at the EPFL, the University of Liechtenstein, and the University of Applied Sciences in Chur. At Eindhoven University of Technology she was Chair of Architectural Design and Urban Cultures. She works independently as a designer and author, and is currently a student of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating ZHdK, as preparation for establishing a platform on curatorial practice (curating architecture).