

# *Architectural Approach to the question of Europe*

Peter Fend interviewed by Jérôme Sans

*What is Europe ?*

No more nor less than a peninsula extending from the Urals to the Atlantic. Given this definition, we can think of a determinate land mass with two sides, sloping into two seas, one to the Atlantic, generally north; and the other to the Mediterranean, including the Black Sea and Caspian; generally south. The one edge less than precisely defined is in the southeastern corner, from the line of the Urals towards the Mediterranean coast; this includes, interestingly enough, much of Kurdistan.

*Is there not also a political definition, or condition, of Europe?*

I try to take a non-political approach. The physical conditions, of materials, of water, of pollution, these are what I work with. It is not my professional role, nor the role of any artist or architect, to get involved in saying who controls what. For me, who thinks architecturally, Europe is a certain body of land with a certain set of clients. The clients will of course quarrel with each other over who controls what part of the land, and therefore,--given Europe's technological might--who controls what part of the world economy. While I must be aware of what these clients are doing, and while of course what I do or say can affect their quarrels, my position is developed prior to any regard for their particular ambitions or partitions. My position is to look at Europe as a specific body of

land subject to specific planning constraints.

*Isn't this new?*

It's scientific, it's matter of fact. What else can an architect do when asked to discuss--as I am asked here--a specific body of property, or, to be more blunt, real estate?

But when people are asked to discuss "Europe", as some kind of historical and cultural given, that is what's in the newspapers or at political summits, and it's always political.

By being physical but thinking about the needs of clients, the people who live there, I realize the simple fact that a peninsula, like a small out-thrust on a lake where several vacationers live, will always be a conflict zone if a property holder is stuck in the middle. This is the problem of Mitteleuropa, or the "German Question"; as an architect thinking, by analogy, about satisfying various vacationers on a small peninsula, I would suggest that planning start with dividing lengthwise down the middle, so that everyone can get from one end to the other without feeling blocked. Much more of the fighting and territorial struggle have gone east-west than north-south. In art history, in cultural history, even history generally, we all can distinguish a Mediterranean or Black Sea culture from a northern one, Atlantic one.

Now, when I say that I am not professionally engaged in deciding who owns what in Europe, or what might be called the political frontiers, I am recognizing that almost never in the history of Europe have borders been stable. The durability of States, with certain borders, is even less stable than the existence of major business corporations. But nonetheless - as in science, as in medicine, as in architecture--there are certain structural facts, which have been stable throughout history, even throughout human existence, and these facts -- like the facts of the human physiology, which are true in every society, regardless of regime-- are what I would like to deal with. An architect designs apartment building or complex: who lives there, who owns it, what social class they have, even what nationality or jurisdiction they might have, is quite frankly a separate matter. I wish to maintain the same posture towards the complex that is Europe. The physical and ecological facts, like those of the body, can be respected regardless of who disputes ownership over what.

*But you are famous for your political opinions.*

I don't think my opinions are specially "political", in the sense of being aligned with one or another ideology, or even having anything to say about forms of governments. My political stance, which was learned in elementary school in America (and foolishly betrayed since then by the evident conduct of the US CIA), is that there should be freedom of religion, of expression, of press and -- as the objective for all this freedom-- of business enterprise. But this is little more than standard 18th century liberalism. And with that comes a genuine opposition to violations of human rights, like the stabbing of Monica Seles, as induced by a nationalist media. As a citizen, not as an artist, I am very concerned by such violations of human rights, and by attendant violations of liberal principles in business enterprise or the press. I am consequently very concerned about attempts by a certain country, namely Germany, to gain dominance in Europe -- with the same patterns of tyranny and monopoly as practiced before. Legalization of the Catholic cross in public schools, a massive exchange, tolerance of monopolistic expansion in retail merchandising, aerospace, and the auto industry, fabrication of false news events to modify public opinion, all these are signs of a society which, like its favorite new trading partners, would deny the centuries of effort leading to the Enlightenment and freedom of enterprise. But the reaction of mine comes not from anything that might be done in my art, in my professional practice of architecture, but from my you might call "naive" education in civil liberties and fair-market economics.

The current situation with Germany, which toys with the equal possibility of imposing its currency over Europe, and seeks as well to consolidate market power from throughout Europe upon itself, as if at the Center, has been attempted before, with catastrophic results. And this I respond to. The problem is not a question of guilt or national identity. It is not a question of ideology, even. It is probably chiefly a question of geographical expansion results from the centuries of strife and angst attendant to a certain geographical position. This position is in the middle of the peninsula, blocking passage across.

*But you are known as someone who gets involved somehow in wars, and who have even suggested, in a recent interview, that wars appear to be necessary.*

As someone said to me recently, as long as there are human beings there will be wars. There is a war going on now in Europe, in a point not even halfway across the continent from the Arc Atlantic to the Urals, in the Balkans. The task is to take that as a given and to prepare for the creative conditions that would normally follow. After all, we all know of postwar architecture. Little that is important is done in a prewar, or late decadence, condition.

But I believe that laws and procedures have been set up to allow "wars" to take place, that is, aggressive conflict and change to take place, without destroying human bodies: it's called free-market business competition. And in this context, I speak and operate as an artist preoccupied with architectural issues-- or as a frontier-breaking architect. I speak about borders, wars and Europe here in the context of an art show, which could be said to sanction an architectural exposition or statement, to which I am professionally confined to speaking as an architect, as a sort of artist, not as a political personality. If I were conducting commercial struggle, then change could be rapid and convulsive, and could even concern territory, without being violent. Radical changes in the production of energy, or the exploitation of coastal waters, could occur. But I am aware that it may be easier to introduce these changes in an area which has undergone a real, hot war, just as Rockefeller was able to introduce sweeping changes in the means of primary fuel supply, hence industrial systems, in the tabula rasa following the American civil war. A postwar condition, or at least a post-stable one. So, I am aware that what is strictly architecture, without political meaning per se, may be nonetheless in a long stable one. This is a marketing decision, not a political one. As I said regarding my work (as opposed to my public opinions about, say, tyranny, I am professionally confined obviously looking for climates where new ideas will be readily be recieved.

*Isn't this opportunistic? We all know that artists can no longer simply work in a studio, and that even an architect must work in a large political context, but your alleged separation of architecture from politics suggests that you would work for anybody providing that there is, as you say, a tabula rasa.*

Yes, but that does not mean that I change the art, or architecture, to suit political, or property-holding, changes. What I present as a means of territorial organization is practically universal. The principle of the ocean basin, derived for me from earth art, applies anywhere on the planet, and it is universally applicable in both developing a soil (including raw material) management program, and in controlling a Number 1 problem now, pollution.

I do think there is a certain progress in evolution, in history. We humans are much further evolved in the use of tools, in medicine, in science, in art and communication, than we were many centuries ago. We can cover everlarger expanses of territory in everless time, so that thinking and planning on a large scale, including the scale I propose of Oceans basins, is a logistic feasibility, a reasonable next step in physical organization. So I believe ther can and should be change i property-holding. Given present telecommunications, weaponry and transport, the integrity of a territory like that of France becomes increasingly impossible to maintain. There must be a penetratin throughout a larger space,

like that of whole Europe. So I have felt enabled to start presenting paradigms of territorial organization, of regional thinking, which are less local and more universal. More extended in area, more comprehensive of the entirety of soils and water. What I present as a means of territorial organization is saltwaters, practically universal

*People say that this sort of universality makes you some sort of missionary.*

First, the physical-geographical approach that I take, being broader than specifics of human history, is at least meant to be factual. People can do what they want with these facts. My experience with people in the Yugoslav war is that while they might intellectually appreciate and even practically or scientifically advocate the approach I have taken towards land and resources, even in Europe, this does not alter their questions about identity--whether Orthodox or Catholic, or Muslim--and I say, Okay. I'll just try to make sure that certain ecological or physiological conditions are assured. They can fight as they want, I have said, but I will try to make sure that at least the air and water are clean. That's not being a missionary, that's being a physical planner concerned, as everyone fashionable is these days, with ecology.

*But what do you mean by universality?*

I mean that, in a place like Europe, some things change very quickly, like political frontiers, and somethings change less drastically but nonetheless measurable, like coastlines, and somethings have not changed almost at all since humanity existed, like the mountrain ridges that separate ocean watersheds. Like the ridge that divides the European peninsula between an outer ocean and an inner, more closed ocean, between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. And these are facts which I have made an art-world profile of emphasizing since they are true, at least physically, and merit representation.

*But why are you so energetic?*

Partly because in my personal life I happen to have been caught up in the conflicts, and I want the historical record to be clear that another view is possible, and partly because I believe that architecture, as an assemblage of ideas from art, can lead to principles of regional planning and infrastructure development as stable, as "universal", as those of building modern structures. Also, and this is vital to understanding what motivates me, I came upon some ideas and then checked with various authorities in science, architecture, even international law, before deciding that it would be in the long-term public



interest to represent a certain position, as I professionally do.

Before and after all the political talk about the future of Europe, before and after all the contradictions and reversals of position by various officials in the nations' governments, there remains the physical, material fact of what is Europe. It is, as everyone agrees, a peninsula extending from the Asian land mass into the present or one time waters of the Atlantic Ocean. It is a peninsula extending west, flanked by ocean--by saltwaters--on its south and north flanks.

But even geologically, this peninsula has had many changes. Infrastructure, cities, harbors and landfills, even the loss of soil due to acid rain pollution, these could all be considered as vast changes in the physical facts of Europe.

One could say that the changes in infrastructure, an even in land use and environmental damage, are what people are disputing, and what I in my architectural mode am proposing to enter, but before all that I wish, as an architect confronting a given material, like a sculptor confronting a certain rock or clay or pile of steel, to know what that material is and what is unchanging about it.

The coastlines have changed with each century, the political boundaries and groupings have changed with each century, but the mountain ridges at least throughout human existence, have not.

If these are stable edges, these , mountain ridges separating water flows, and these I propose to define as the lines of separation, the stable borders or demarcations within the physical fact of the multi-client land that is Europe.

*People have usually said that you take a provocative, even a dangerous position*

That is because it is nowadays a fashion for artists, and I am regarded as an artist in the art world (even though I am really working in architecture and not in the usual visual arts), it is now a fashion for artists to be politically engaged. Or be "politically correct". To make political or social "commentary". Instead of making researches into painting, drawing or sculpture, or, as I do, into the planning and ordering of space, artists feel compelled, due to current market demands, to make art about political issues; In the case of the state of the art in painting or sculpture, as certainly was the case of Goya or David, there was art about political events with an obvious political point of view, but even they were not making "political art" as it is fashionable now to make such political art. Commentary by Christian Philipp Müller on the borders of Austria, or by

Ronald Jones about Pan Am 103, or by Mark Dion about genetic engineering, function not as art but as political editorials, as commentary. The work, then, is illustration, not art. One could not speak of advances or changes in the state of the art in painting or sculpture, as certainly was the case with David Goya or another portrayer of political events, Rodin. One could speak, rather, of theater, of set design. With the alleged artist functioning psychologically more like playwrights. I am not interested in such political art, such editorializing, such attempt to communicate a certain political message or political discussion through the medium of the art show or alleged art work. I am interested in separating art questions from political ones, such that one could speak of a painting, drawing or sculpture, or of an architectural project, in objective terms.

*But doesn't this have political implications?*

Yes. It's funny that you used that word. It's the word used by the Bundesministerium fur Forschung und Technik, Abteilung Kunst, to say that I am "out of bounds". They say that my work has serious "implications". I could be pleased to think that at least they do not say that the work is itself political, or ideological, or either left or right, but that only if it is practiced, even practiced without any regard for political questions or contexts, it would have implications, indirectly at least, on the course of political discussion.

*Can you give an example? Now, all the media and all the politicians are talking about the Union of Europe. There are talking about some sort of unification. What do you think about unification?*

There's a lot of politically motivated talk, a lot hysterical talk, which has almost nothing to do with reality. First, they should be distinguishing between Europe and Europeans. Maybe, someday, there could be a union of Europe, a bit like the union of the United States which was defended, for example, by Abraham Lincoln. But this is obviously not happening now, and even as it is happening it is not helping people to get jobs or money, so this moving towards union has been more or less a negative experience. Even the idea that a union could avoid war, which seems to have been the main rationale for it, seems very much contradicted by the facts. Less than a third of the European land mass is actually covered by the European Community, so we are talking here about only a tip of the peninsula being under one possibly unified client, or state. And even that is not clear, either internally or immediately externally, next door, in areas of all together far greater mass or people and territory, like Russia, the Ukraine, Yugoslavia or Turkey. Second, and

now we're talking about "implications", there should be a distinguishing between union or unification, a political act, and organization, an architectural and artistic one.

*What do you mean by organization ?*

An architect is not retained by a client, or in the case of Europe it's several clients, to unify the object at hand. He or she is retained to organize it. To articulate it. To give it structure and clarity, to identify natural and pleasing lines of separation and juncture, not to putting averthing together into one large mass.

The miracle is that while the architect does this ony physically, without regard for the different client's individual feelings, taking into consideration chiefly the physical conditions of the space, he or she ends up helping clients gain or reestablish a clear, distinctive identity. the United States is more or less a union, and the result is a generally over-homogenised culture with tendencies towards individual mass violence and the formation of a swelling underclass, with its own violent consequences. One might do well to articulate and organise the territory of North America, such as I propose to do for Europe, so that there can be comprehensible and pleasant spaces, each with its own client public, rather than a Union with an indistinguishable blur of "Americans" or "Europeans", among whom an ever larger and more dangerous underclass (like the present asylum seeking classes) forms. So, I am proposing an organisation of Europe, not a "Union".

*Isn't this a political statement ?*

No, because I would be organising Europe about the same way if it is populated by people from this century, or two centuries earlier, or 10,000 years ago. Europe is not people. It is a place. An architect builds a palace for a client, but who occupies that palace will change from century to century. Same palace, more or less, always with political implications, but not in itself a political message or statement or control.

*What is it that makes people think that you are making political statements ?*

Chiefly, I think, the work with satellites.

This has been pretty , such stopped by the various governments, at least as far



as looking at wars ones, or ecological crises, or other news worthy sites might be concerned. this was my practice for some time, and I beleive it should be the practice of artists at all times. Taking truthful images of what is happening in the world. Sometimes the truthful images are not flattering, but that is not the fault of the artist, that is the fault of the particular person or landowner whose property is being imaged. The point is, various western governments were very hostile to this practice, and what started out as various attempts to get me and my colleagues to not be so truthful in public and to maybe also help on some other matters, starting with the Falklands, but continuing wiht the Gulf, with Chernobyl, with other allegedly sensitive sites, led me into a condition where, particularly with a scandal at the United Nations, which included two press conferences we gave there sponsored by the UN Correspondents Association, me and my coleagues were knowing too much. We had become too much of a potential embarrassment. The result, as at the Documenta, has been to more prominently make public some of the ideas about ocean basins, or about truthfulness in satellite monitoring, or about what seems to be a manipulation of news photos in the media, so that while I won't try to make trouble with some things learned in diplomatic circles (as they say) I also will not let people forget that art and architecture have a contribution to make in this world, not just in some art context, and should win more respect and power.

*Why, just for power ?*

No, for the fulfillment of knowledge gained through art.

If one makes realistic landscape paintings--i.e., photos and videos-- with satellite data, and if one is being asked to not make such realistic paintings, and to not even "know" what is appearing with the data going into those paintings, then one knows that here are specific, concrete contributions to be made to the general body of world knowledge, and people in other professions, like law or administration, should make room to give this knowledge some room.

One example, very ancient and original, is cave art. If a cave artist making paintings could not inspire people to succeed in the hunt, without getting killed or injured, and each day was a life and death matter, then he or she was replaced. The imagery had to communicate effectively, and not just to some collectors. This I have tried to do, projecting work qnd imqges as much as possible towards the mass public.

*But about Europe. What do you propose to do, or say, about the life and death matters in former Yugoslavia ?*

As I said, quite by personal coincidence, in what could be called a matter of family, and also the frontier thought conditions of the cultures, I happen to have been involved in various parts of Yugoslavia. Nearly all the republics. The scientist who since 1982 has been interested in the basin idea, and who was setting up the UN Regional Seas Program, of the UN Environment Program, was from what is now Croatia. The first business contracts were with architects in Belgrade, for a client in Montenegro. There have been invitations to work on the offshore energy project in Slovenia... and so on. But I happen to know, partly from unwanted encounters with various Western government people, and partly through analyses of facts like how the former Yugoslavia had been trying in the late 1960s, right up to February 1991, to take a lead in negotiating a peace agreement in the Gulf, for which the West made sure that 700 Billion dollars was spent to instead maintain the status quo, I think that Yugoslavia is chiefly a victim of the Western imperative for near-monopoly control of by far the largest fossil hydrocarbon reserves in the world, the Gulf. Publishing some of these analyses is what I can do as an independent observer, an observer who has used satellite data to see what is really going on, so that in the long run (I hope) the truth will be publicly known. The problem in Europe, which appeared earliest in the First World War, is that the current holders of control in the Gulf, namely the US-UK with France and The Netherlands on side, don't want anyone in the middle or east of Europe to enjoy a favorable access to the Middle East and Gulf, along with some consolidation of power. This explains the Gallipoli campaign of 1915, the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, the quite un-American "Woodrow Wilson Doctrine" of "national self-determination", designed to break up larger blocs into nationalist, ethnic units, all of course quite weak. And it explains the current ongoing creation of a permanent indecision and vacuum in the "ex" Yugoslavia.

*What is the real meaning of European union at this time if all one can do with the former Yugoslavia is send food and clothes ?*

Sending food or clothes to the victims, like foreign aid to former, powerless colonies, is a somewhat cynical aftermeasure. The powers that now control global energy resources do not want a united or strong Europe that could take advantage of its proximity to the Gulf through the Balkans and Turkey. This situation will change most readily, I believe, with development of other sources of energy, upon which every economy is dependent.

*Austria, which is the bridge between western and eastern Europe, is trying to enter into the European union but has a problem, perhaps, in its neutral status. It is also, like Italy, one of the door of Yugoslavia. What role could it play ?*

To be realistic, I think it should not attempt to play a geopolitical role. This will only review all the horrific events of the two world wars. Rather, I think it should concentrate on an entirely new initiative, an ecological initiative. Despite the war conditions, it could actively promote the development of a Regional Seas Program for the Black Sea, in line with existing UN Environmental law, and allowing at least some point of common work among all the neighboring ethnic groups. It could also direct its technology towards developing the non-polluting fuel sources, like direct and indirect solar, that could help it save the now troubled forests, and help it assert a new concept of ecological caretaking. The technology is accessible, the public will is there, the scientific institutes are capable, and an architectural tradition is in place. I have proposed that Austria work together with fellow neutrality tending states, like Switzerland, Holland and the countries of Scandinavia, in developing economic practices and technologies that bypass both fossil and nuclear fuels. This conforms with the strong public will. An armature for economic development policy could be the Alcazar multi-nation airline deal, which at this time might or might not go through.

*Traditionally, Austria is really a European country*

It is very important, I think, to bear in mind the imperatives, the true necessities. Solving the environmental problems of Austria, and developing new technologies for fresh new economic development, whether of Austria as a sovereign state or as a "region", are imperatives today. It is foolish and suicidal to try going backwards. The physical facts of Europe, even of simple telecommunications and transport infrastructure, have totally changed what constitutes a so-called "country" in Europe. Regarding airlines, for example, it would be economically provincial and backwards to propose a nation-basing of Austria's aviation industry, with consolidation of the two Austrian airlines.

*Shared between a desire to accept the accession to Europe and its big market and the fear to lose its recent acquired identity, Austria must take more efforts to convince the Austrian to the benefit to be European. SA big movement from ecologist to the very right are "Euroseptical". An attitude of resistance which is visible in all Europe, provincialism and withdraw.*

Unfortunately, as I made clear at the outset, there has been this supposition that "Europe" is the European Community, so-called, which in fact is just the western tip of the peninsula. People think about whether they are well off, whether they are healthy and economically sound. It is not clear now that the European Community is helping either the environment, which assures health, or the economy, which assures economic well-being. Indeed, the entire continent is

heading downwards, largely due to the breakdown of the East-West division and some attempt to create a scheme towards a Western dominated whole. Nothing happening so far would make people confident.

*With this nationalisms growing everywhere, don't you think the risk will be to make a "folklorisation" or "museification" of local cultures? And is there really a risk of homogenisation? The European fragility seems to be at the same time its power, its diversity, its multiculturalism.*

I think it's most vital that the culture roughly accord with the technology. If there is space age technology there should be space age culture, with space age business structures and territorial planning. What is happening instead, I think unfortunately, is a sort of nostalgic, fearful reaction, so that people are being encouraged to revive old native costumes, native music and culture, sometimes as if the Industrial Revolution, let alone today's post-industrial information revolution, never happened. Various commotions are made to revive the Hapsburg territorial structure, to re-implant folk customs and traditional religion, even--as Bunte has euphorically suggested--to revive the good old days of "Deutsche konigen". One can see brochures from allegedly-independent Croatia of peasant celebrating with solid-wooden wheel carts. Of course behind this all lies a substrate of Siemens, Kraus-Maffei, Sony and other high technology, so what is enacted is a sort of eastern Europe version of Eurodisney. People would be induced to re-believing in the past, but the economic and industrial realities are entirely otherwise. Such tendencies, I believe, looking at experience, are very dangerous. It is vital to encourage more comprehensive understandings of territory, both in Europe and in the world.

*Austria seems to struggle to not be an appendix of Germany of unified Germany. Is there really a risk for Austria to be again colonised by Germany? Is this fear justified?*

There is evidently an ongoing attempt from Germany to re-establish an austrian German fusion. When this has been attempted before, in an attempt to create a solid bloc throughout the center of the peninsula that is Europe, the results have been catastrophic. People say that would not happen again, because the Germans, and so on, have learned. I don't think that people can "learn" in defiance of geographical conditions. This is not a question of guilt or not. It's a question of geographical situation. Creating a bloc in the center of a peninsula, with a consequent blockage of the natural tendency to move east and west, causes conflict. And that in turn causes alternative inward and outward vectors. It is vital that Austria not be fused with Germany. The way to do that--and here I speak as an architect--is to recognize that there is a German-speaking part of

Europe which drains towards the Black Sea, within the Mediterranean or Inner Ocean frame of Europe as peninsula, and there is a German speaking part which drains towards the North Sea and Baltic Sea. The two can be ecologically, materially and economically separate. This would accord with the general belief that Bavaria and Austria have more in common than, say, Bavaria and northern Germany. The Austrians I have met themselves tend to not want a fusion with Germany, and even now resent the attempts to impose the Mark. And when I have shown a physical context of the Black Sea basin, including the Danube of course, some young Austrians--knowing little more than just this image--have exclaimed, "If only Hitler had known". This is doubly interesting as an observation because examination of a military history chart from the Second World War shows that at that time, when the Germans and Austrians together were trying to create a new European organisation, the farthest east reaches of their aggressive procedure was roughly coincidental with the frontier of the Black Sea and Baltic Sea basins, respectively. What might have occurred if then there had been a realization of such territorial de facto organization, or holding, but within UN Regional Seas guidelines, and not with war?

*Are you for a quick release of the European Community to countries of central Europe and Oriental Europe?*

If the European Community is to expand, it should do so comprehensively, all at once, for all of Europe. After all, the entire peninsula needs a comprehensive planning and development, and especially ecological restoration, strategy. Working piecemeal, as the Germans now propose, just entails a slow expansion of the west towards the east, with inevitable consequences of resistance and repulsion. I am always astonished at how people do not learn from the experiences of Napoleon and Hitler. Don't push East, from a position inside Europe, but take a global view of the entire peninsula, see the entire peninsula in relation to the globe, as part of the spiral with a peninsular projection, and then plan accordingly. What ethnic groups will live where can, I believe, be considered somewhat subsequently. After all, the current geopolitically dictated dicing up of Yugoslavia, which is now going through some reverses due to, well, tendencies, shows that ethnic organization--like the Wilson Doctrine before--only leads to economic disarray and spatial confusion.