

*network*

*model*

• *fluids*

*model* •

*mobility*

• *alterity*

# The Global Bottega.

## From Networks to Fluids, between Practice and Academia

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### *Abstract*

Global architecture practices have developed since the 1950s, ever since air travel made it possible for practitioners to coordinate projects in different locations simultaneously. In turn, prominent schools of architecture have developed global programs allowing for a continuous geographical exchange of students, teachers, knowledge. Stemming from the premise that contemporary globalized practice must move across practice, education and management, between academia and profession (Jenson, 2014) in order to be effective on a wider scale, this article explores the possibility of shifting from a representation of globalized practices of architecture that focuses on geographical nodes (network model) to a representation that focuses on mobility (fluids model).

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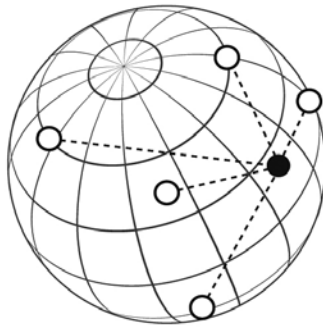
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The model based on fluids, on the other hand, eliminates nodes in favor of a continuous mobility of people, objects, technologies.

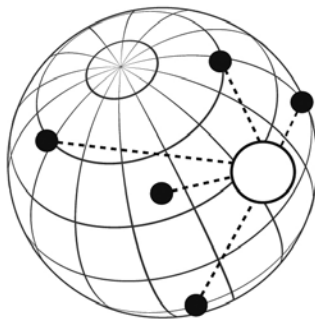
The model of a global architecture practice has developed since the 1950s, ever since air travel made it possible for practitioners to coordinate projects in different locations simultaneously. Beatriz Colomina (2009) speaks of Le Corbusier as a “post-human” architect, the first to understand the extent to which the airplane represented an extension of one’s own body in allowing to achieve previously unimaginable professional deeds. Corbu traced his travels around the world on a map, representing the “hyper-mobile architect” (1960) as a linear vector centering on Paris (node) and covering all continents (network). Still today, the models of global practice, as well as the pedagogical programs of globalized schools of architecture, typically employ the network as a way to represent their world.

Figs. 1, 2, 3 - Globalized practices and academic programs self-representing themselves through a network model.



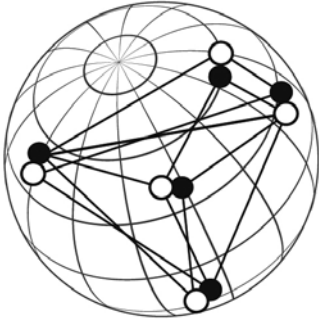
- 1 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
- 1 POINT OF DEPARTURE
- MANY DESTINATIONS
- TWO-WAY CONNECTIONS

The Corbu traced by Colomina is a professional of promethean proportions, exploiting to the fullest the possibilities offered by a changing world. “Publication generates travel that generates publication, and in the middle of this cyclical engine projects are produced” (Colomina, 2009).



- 1 DESTINATION
- MANY STUDENTS
- MANY POINTS OF DEPARTURE
- TWO-WAY CONNECTIONS

The AA is the “first truly global school of architecture” (Colomina, 2009). The poster of the first Summer Sessions workshop featured the front of the new Boeing 747. The success of the Summer Sessions was “cheered on particularly by the ‘global village’ servicing chats and by the example of the ‘linking-up’ forays performed by the optimists on the London scene.” (Boyarsky, quoted in idem).



- MANY STUDENTS
- MANY POINTS OF DEPARTURE
- MANY DESTINATIONS
- ONE-WAY CONNECTIONS

The aim of programs such as Urban X is that of preparing “individuals to join the design professions in an integrated, urban, and globalizing world” (Jenson, 2014, p. 147) . The role of academia and academic programs is projective, and its agency is intended as potential.

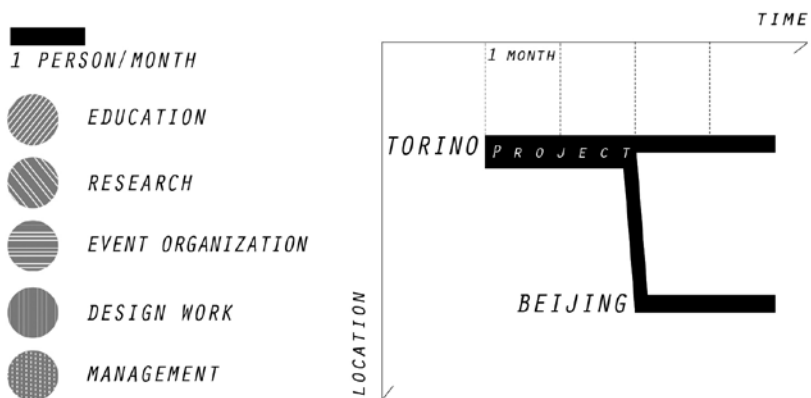
However, according to Urry (2010), in the analysis of social globalized relations such model of “networks” contrast with an alternative model of “fluids”. The model based on networks, working through geographically connected nodes, allows to focus on points of departure and points of arrival. Companies that employ this model are, for instance, McDonald’s, as well as architectural practices such as Foster and Partners (McNeill, 2005), and work by replicating a successful instance across the globe. Each office or branch becomes a node, and the interconnectivity of such nodes is finalized at the development of the nodes themselves. The model based on fluids, on the other hand, eliminates nodes in favor of a continuous mobility of people, objects, technologies. The resulting global model is “rhizomatic rather than arboreal” (Urry, 2010, p. 356) and allows for a focus on connectivity as purpose rather than as mean.

To the extent to which the production of effects matches a widening of the collective and an increase in mobility, then it can be argued that the measure of the success of the laboratory lies in its ability to widen and be mobile.

The diagram here displayed explores the potentiality of such a model, in moving from a nodal-geographical representation to a continuous flux, foregrounding the mobility of resources and relating them to actual effects. By choosing to employ a model based on fluids we propose to find in the diachronic dimension of connectivity, rather than in the synchronic dimension of geography, the development of a web of relations, occasions, agreements, and projects.

This diagram is proposed as a tentative representation technology overlapping Urry's model and so-called Sankey diagrams; as in Charles Minard's well-known Sankey map of Napoleon's Russian campaign of 1812 (Tufte, 1983), the diagram overlays a flow diagram onto a geographical as well as temporal chart. The diagram reconstructs the work of a team dedicated to research activities with China at Politecnico di Torino, focusing on architecture and urban design. The period of observation goes from the beginning of 2013, when this activity started to take shape, until the middle of 2017, when this survey was launched. Thirty-one completed or initiated projects were considered, as related to education, scientific research, design activity, event organization, academic management. A questionnaire was submitted to the 24 professors, researchers and PhD candidates gradually involved (among them the authors of this essay), to quantitatively reconstruct the nature and mobility of their work. The diagram carefully intersects these data, while the lower part of it is qualitative, and represents the main 'Chinese' institutional actions promoted by Politecnico di Torino, in the same period.

Fig. 4 - Legend and navigator of the diagram.



From a first observation of this result, two reflections emerge.

The widening of the collective is offered as the primary tool through which the laboratory (research team in this case, but similar would be for architecture firms) builds itself and simultaneously produces effects: projects, publications, events (Armando, Durbiano, 2017). The aim of the fluid model is to concentrate on mobility and activate the “scape that would otherwise remain functionless” (Urry, 2010, 356). To the extent to which the production of effects matches a widening of the collective and an increase in mobility, then it can be argued that the measure of the success of the laboratory lies in its ability to widen and be mobile.

Interactions shown in the diagram exemplify how the architect, professional or academic, is turning into a more flexible and fluid figure adapting to the challenges of the new international market: the “global architect of alterity”, as Michael Jenson calls it (2014), moves across practice, education and management, between academia and profession.

### References

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(Next pages)  
Fig. 5 - Diagram,  
spread 1.  
Fig. 6 - Diagram,  
spread 2.

JANUARY  
2013

APRIL  
2013

JULY  
2013

OCTOBER  
2013

J  
2

TORINO

JOINT STUDIO TSINGHUA FABACCHI PLAN SHENZHEN BIENNALE - WATERSHEDS EXHIBITION  
"WORLD ARCHITECTURE TORINO SPECIAL ISSUE" B E I J I  
Joi

RESEARCH  
TEAM

BEIJING

GUANGZHOU

SHENZHEN

INSTITUTION  
(POLITO)

EPFL delegation visits Polito on China issues  
Launch of the Call "Internationalisation of research", Po  
PRIN "Recycle" (N



APRIL  
2015

JULY  
2015

OCTOBER  
2015

JANUARY  
2016

APRIL  
2016

B  
AMSTERDAM

PARIS

LAUSANNE

SHANGHAI

SUZHOU

CHENGDU

Event Torino 2006-Beijing 2022 Winter

Appointment of a **Rector's Delegate** for relations with China

Opening of the **South China - Torino Collaboration Lab**, Guangzhou

"**ents' Research**" call, Polito + CRT Bank Foundation: Polito-Tsinghua-EPFL team awarded

University of Technology

JULY  
2016

OCTOBER  
2016

JANUARY  
2017

APRIL  
2017

JULY  
2017

BOSTON

DRESDEN

D E R C A O T M H L O A N A G C H M I E N A  
 N E W T U A W N S R E S E A N C H  
 R O L Y M P I C S 2 0 2 0 Y A N Z H O U I S L A N D M A S T E R P L A N P I A N O F A C T O R Y C O M P E T I T I O N  
 B E I J I N G D E S I G N W E E K H K T F O R U M  
 T U R I N G - C H E N G D U W I T  
 S M A R T M E T E R R E S E A R C H  
 P H D C O U R S E " D O M E S T I C A T I N G T H E M E G A C I T Y " B E I J I N G D E S I G N W E E K  
 - H U I T O N G P L A Y G R O U N D  
 J O I N T S T U D I O C H I N E S E  
 U N I V E R S I T Y O F H O N G K O N G

HARBIN  
CHONGQING

Approval of China Strategic Plan 2016-2020, appointing young professors to work with/in China

Olympics

Affiliation with Sino-Italian Innovation Base Camp  
First proposal for a China Centre at Polito

Establishment of the Belt and Road initiative in Beijing  
Attending the "Joint Projects with Top Universities" call  
Polito-Tsinghua team awarded

Establishment of the Interdisciplinary China Center in Chongqing

Establishment of the Interdisciplinary China Center in Chongqing