

OASE 75 commemorates the 25th anniversary of *OASE* as a journal for architecture. There is an element of celebration in this initiative. Since its emergence in the early 1980s *OASE* has had the sort of precarious existence that is common to most architecture publications, and most certainly to journals dedicated to critical reflection on the practice and theory of architecture, urban planning and landscape design. This issue is, however, more than a festschrift, a recollection among friends of the particular histories connected to *OASE*. The publication in English of a selection of articles, most of which have only been available in Dutch, also presents an opportunity to reflect on the past 25 years in order to ask some persistent questions about the relationship between design practice, criticism, history and theory, and about the position of architecture journals in general and *OASE* in particular.

OASE RETROSPECTIVE

About 70 issues of *OASE* have appeared since the journal was founded by a group of students at the Faculty of Architecture of Delft University of Technology in 1981. The origin of the journal as part of the fall-out of a period of intense, violent (and certainly in part destructive) debates on what was called the ‘democratisation’ of education in the 1970s is tangible in both the editorial stance and the organisation of *OASE*. Then, as now, the journal is made by volunteers and relies on the commitment of a large variety of authors, advisers and friends. The role of *OASE* has changed over time; from a *samizdat* publication by a group of Delft students to an autonomous periodical addressing a select yet international audience. *OASE* is a journal of architecture from the Low Countries, but it has followed the emergence of Dutch architecture in the 1990s and its international branding as ‘Superdutch’ from a fairly studied distance. In fact, the most ‘Dutch’ aspect of *OASE*, since 1990, has been the consistently outstanding and surprising graphic design by Karel Martens and the Werkplaats Typografie in Arnhem. And, of course, the decision to retain a local European language alongside the English texts.

The origins of *OASE* in the challenging didactic environment of a school of architecture suggest a comparison with publications such as *Perspecta*, *Scroope*, *AA Files*, *Faces*, *Trans* or the *Harvard Design Magazine*, and others with looser connections to academic institutions like *Oppositions* or *Arch+*. Unlike most of these, however, *OASE* was not an initiative of academics but a heroic project of self-education by a generation of students who found the teaching offered to them lack-

ing in rigour and breadth.¹ The first years of *OASE* can probably best be described as the endeavour of a generation to discover architects, architectures and ideas about architecture, which had had no place in the curriculum of the institution where the editors found themselves by default, given the dominant position of Delft among the Dutch schools of architecture at the time. Despite the development of the journal from student magazine to a now peer-reviewed publication for architectural design and reflections, this is still tangible in the thematic focus and the writing. The selection of themes and approaches is predominantly informed by individual interests or ‘fascinations’, developed by editors who may be practising architects or academics. In one of the first issues of *Perspecta* Henri-Russell Hitchcock wrote about the generic interest in architecture history among architects, adding that ‘the aspects, or periods, of history that seem at any given time to merit the closest attention certainly vary with changing sensibilities’.² *OASE* is a journal reflecting sensibilities rather than particular disciplines. There are examinations of architecture history or historiography, yet it is not a journal of architecture history. Issues relating to architecture theory may be addressed, but the impulse is not that of an academic discourse confined to theory. Articles that could be described as exercises in architecture criticism take a form, which would be impossible in most professional magazines dedicated to presenting projects to practising architects. And finally there are essays that defy any categorisation; highly personal cultural reflections, which lend the journal a sense of urgency beyond both the professional and academic preoccupations of the discipline of architecture.

A TYPOLOGY OF ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINES

Professional magazines, which in the 1950s and ’60s took the role of advocates of particular approaches (one can think of Pevsner’s and J.M. Richards’ role as advocates of an English picturesque in the *Architectural Review* of the period or the heralding of radically modernist architects in *l’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*), have increasingly become inventories, journalistically reporting anything happening within the field of architecture that the editors consider relevant. The intention to serve large audiences and to offer a broad perspective on architectural culture has frequently resulted in the recording of the status quo, preferably beautifully illustrated. Academic journals, often set up to emulate the patterns of publishing research long established in other disciplines, notably architecture history and planning, constitute the other end of this field, where there is no place for editorial bias or particular

¹ *Trans* (ETH Zürich), *Scroope* (Cambridge School of Architecture) and *Perspecta* (Yale University) are still edited by students of the respective schools.

² Henri-Russell Hitchcock, ‘Food for changing sensibility’, *Perspecta* 6, 1960, p. 2

interventionist directions. Where a relationship with the practice of architectural design exists in such editorial contexts, it is, at best, indirect. In between there is, or should we say there used to be, a zone where arguments or ideas were put forward in the form of a magazine, often with academic connections, as a recognisable position or tendency, ideologically firm and often supported by graphic experiments. The nature of *OASE* as a 'Magazine of Neither', that does not privilege an exclusive focus – be it architecture history, theory or design – but rather seeks to act as a forum where various disciplinary focuses can interact, means that each issue first of all reflects the interests of its particular editors. Beyond this there is, however, a common thread, which reveals itself when set against the types of available publications on architecture. Within the landscape of architecture magazines the position of *OASE* can only be described as ambiguous, a collective of stubborn and engaged editors pushing ahead, unfettered by the international fashions of academia but also deeply unimpressed by the bravura of celebrity architecture. One could criticise its editorial line as being inconsistent, or marginal, even irrelevant. One thing is for sure, it is precisely its fragile position in between firmly established positions and beyond established management models, this typical 'neither', that distinguishes *OASE*. This 'fragility' has consistently marked the position of the journal over time and its editors have been continuously engaged in protecting this characteristic against outside pressures, be it from publishers, academe, professionals, subsidizing bodies, and even readership.

ARCHITECTURE, CRITICISM AND REFLECTION

Is there still a need for a journal like *OASE*, or indeed architecture journals? Over the last two or so decades, the nature of architectural discourses has changed to such an extent that, by now, *OASE* finds itself in a 'splendid isolation' of sorts. The disappearance of journals such as *Oppositions*, *Assemblage* and *Daidalos*, among others – publications that had an enormous impact and influence on the discourse from the period of, approximately, 1967 to 1999 – cannot be explained by financial reasons only. Instead, much of the discourse has become obsessed with the practical and the pragmatic and developed a significant suspicion to any kind of theoretisation, reflection, even intellectual enquiry. Of course, the very nature of the debate has changed. The preoccupation with the 'critical', obsessively present in the 1980s and '90s, seems to have been replaced by an equally complete predominance of celebrating architects and a select number of buildings. At the same time architecture has entered a phase where spatial experience is only a side effect of its production and reception. In certain milieus – one can think of *Volume* in this respect – architects have been seeking to redefine their

role within a broader discursive environment, in an effort to make design operational as an approach and attitude in a wide variety of contexts that no longer necessarily have to lead to spatial or built form. Digital developments have furthermore drastically altered the way that architecture is designed and conceived. Likewise the daily discussion of architecture finds its place not only in conversations between experts, but has extended to easily accessible websites, blogs, inter-forums, and so on. The effacement of the barrier/border to architectural media has not only allowed a broad public to engage in discussions on architecture and the city, but has simultaneously drastically redefined the privileged, but essential role of the informed critic. Meanwhile, the production of texts related to architecture has paradoxically grown exponentially. But where does this leave a publication on architecture?

COMMEMORATING A COLLECTIVE ENTERPRISE

Browsing through 25 years of *OASE* – a task that is now facilitated by an online index made available on the journal's website on the occasion of the publication of this issue – one will be struck, perhaps even puzzled by the variety of themes and fascinations addressed. Issues have covered topics such as the architecture of schools and mass tourism, gentrification, suburban dwelling, the Generic City, 1970s architecture and urbanism, the relationship between architecture and literature, space in cyberfiction, and recent disciplinary positions in historiography, but also eighteenth-century 'architecture parlante', the work of De Stijl and Bauhaus, essays on Paul Valéry, and the *Autobahnen* of Nazi Germany. Even if one could set out on an endeavour to define categories of interests over the years, any attempt to circumscribe a clearly defined, long-term editorial agenda would prove unrewarding. In fact, specific editorial positions are mostly defined at the level of individual issues or a select set of issues, rather than as a consistent project spanning a long period of time. Crucial in that respect is that even while the composition of the editorial board has been continually evolving, the one aspect that has remained constant is the absence of an editor-in-chief. *OASE* has always been a collective project, in which practising architects with an interest in theory, history and criticism sat together with researchers and academics with a strong sensibility for design issues. Editorial boards then have functioned as spaces for internal disciplinary discussions. Of course, at certain moments in time, particular members of the editorial board have impacted more strongly on the position of the journal than others, but in essence every issue of *OASE* is the product of a group rather than an individual. Within such collectivity, internal discussion and conflict have proven as fundamental to the journal as shared interests and fascinations.

Following *OASE*'s slow detachment from a TU Delft student's publication to a peer-reviewed journal, the editorial board is now composed of members who are based in the Netherlands or Flanders but have, in fact, more diverse origins and backgrounds and operate in a variety of international networks. The current composition then, reflects a multifocality of possible positions within the disciplines of architecture and urbanism, which in turn is reflected in the broad variety of topics of the more recent years, even if from an outsiders view, *OASE*'s production might still appear as more consistent than for those who operate within the editorial space of the magazine.

What binds these 25 years of production together is less a shared 'agenda' or 'position' than an *engagement* with architecture as a cultural product and as a discipline with its proper autonomy, integrity and legitimacy – even in conditions that are strongly steered by forces and logics that reach beyond. Issues of *OASE* have often expressed the belief that architecture (from chair to city) is a rich and complex field of cultural production and knowledge that relentlessly redefines itself vis-à-vis spatial, societal and cultural challenges and simultaneously has the intrinsic power to challenge these. Critically reflecting and writing on this intriguing *character* of architecture can be regarded as the engaged project of *OASE* throughout the last 25 years. It is also reflected in the different themes that *OASE* engaged with. Apart from being instigated by the personal fantasies and preoccupations of the editors, these themes often address the perennial questions of architectural culture as they appear and re-appear in a context that is firmly related to the Low Countries but is viewed from a broader, European and even international perspective.

It is precisely this focus on the perennial themes of architecture, on the intrinsic power of architecture to relentlessly challenge its own premises as well as those of the broader social and cultural field that seems to have determined the appeal of *OASE* to a public of academics and students, as well as of practicing architects, landscape architects and urban planners. In an era in which a wide variety of logics influences the development of the built environment, this belief in the cultural strength of architecture seems to be more necessary than ever.

This special issue thus does not seek retroactively to distil a continuous position after 25 years in order to explain its continued existence, a mission impossible given the absence of one clear editorial missive. Instead, it serves as a testimony and a grateful contemplation of the hard unpaid labour of the many diverse editorial constellations and a colourful network of contributors of varying stature, while paying tribute to the generous support of individuals, practices and the foundations constituting the local panorama of subsidised culture. It offers the reader a broad selection of texts, some previously only available in

Dutch. Rather than being a 'best of' of 25 years of *OASE*, the selection, by illustrating the broad scope of themes, issues and fascinations that have occupied those who have made the journal over all these years, also offers insights in the changes within architectural culture in the Low Lands over the last 25 years.

Despite this itinerant nature of *OASE*, which to an extent is also its *raison d'être*, this anniversary issue reveals a periodisation of the review into four rather distinct phases, each with a different significance and audience. For each of these periods of time we have asked an author, each of them respected within the discipline of architecture, to reflect on that timeframe, the role of the architecture magazine in general and *OASE* more specifically. For each period, we have selected a restricted number of important texts that have remained somewhat under-recognised, which are briefly presented by some of the editors at the time. The dedication and commitment, already apparent when reviewing *OASE*'s history itself, has re-emerged through these contributions by former editors, contributions we consider vital to *OASE* 75 as they reflect an ongoing involvement with the discourse. The issue will furthermore present a factual history of *OASE*, a complete index and some aspects of the graphics of the magazine.

The periodisation demonstrates how small and sometimes seemingly insignificant changes can trigger a transformation in content and editorial direction. The periods are organised by specific breaks due to a name change, new graphics, and subsequently a new language. This reveals how practical and external factors can often underlie the traditional understanding of historical continuity. Putting things on the reading table like this, we hope that more reflection on the influences and relevance of *OASE* will follow as a reaction to its anniversary issue. Hopefully, the issue will provoke a discussion inside and outside the audience of *OASE* on what this magazine has been – and, perhaps more importantly, what it should become. More generally, we explicitly hope that it will contribute to a larger discussion on the role of journals of architecture in contemporary architectural culture.

The editorial board, April 2008

'O', as *OASE* was first called, referring to Ontwerp, Onderzoek, Onderwijs (Design, Research, Education), was born in an atmosphere of discontent, imbedded in the educational context of the Faculty of Architecture of Delft University of Technology (the then Afdeling Bouwkunde of the Technische Hogeschool Delft). A product of the 'the critical 1970s', it took as its point of departure the international debate on architecture and planning until then seemingly absent in the Netherlands. The founding editorial states that the intention is not to make an in-crowd school paper, but a publication that collaborates with Eindhoven University of Technology, the various architecture academies and the departments of art history in the Netherlands. It aspires to continue the engagement of the student movement that started in 1966, and to offer a platform with the ability to react to current subjects. Issues 1 to 10 collect different articles along a number of simultaneous editorial tracks that are replaced by new ones when exhausted. The virtual absence of a budget was the reason that every issue needed to be sold. After issue 9/10, the last three original editors left, completing the first full replacement of the editorial board. Another factor in ending this embryonic phase is the name change forced upon *O* by the 'Federatie O', the combined organ of the professional organisations of various fields of design in the Netherlands: architecture, interior design, urbanism, landscape architecture and engineering (BNA, BNI, BNS, BNT and ONRI). Regretfully, *O* is compelled to accept the claim to their name by an institution-of-institutions that nobody had ever heard of, appearing from then onwards as *OASE*.

Period I

FOUNDATIONS

A Student Publication and its Name Change

1981–1984

O 1
O 2
O 3
O 4 Jongerenhuisvesting (Youth housing)
O 5
O 6
O 7
O 8 10 jaar stadsvernieuwing Rotterdam (10 years of urban renewal in Rotterdam)
O 9/10