

**Thursday, 14 June**  
**14.30-17.15**

Track: Mediations  
Room: *National Library, Main Conference Hall*

**MEDIATING ARCHITECTURE AND ITS AUDIENCES: THE ARCHITECTURAL CRITIC**

**Session chairs:** Maristella Casciato, Getty Research Institute  
Gary Fox, University of California, Los Angeles

The session interrogates the emergence of architectural criticism as a key site for the production, circulation, and transformation of architectural ideas and practices in the twentieth century.

Responsible for bringing architecture into public discourse, architectural critics like Montgomery Schuyler, Lewis Mumford, Nikolaus Pevsner, John Summerson, Catherine Bauer, Jane Jacobs, Bruno Zevi, Ada-Louise Huxtable, and François Chaslin—to mention a few names of global significance—had transformative effects on the field. Each engaged in a remarkable diversity of professional activity including historical scholarship and preservation advocacy, becoming leaders in cultivating public opinion and in fostering a resemantization of the relationship between the built and the textual. In many ways their practices were divergent, yet together they articulate the often overlooked gaps between the built, the projective, and the public.

The investigation examines these transformative, yet little-studied figures, querying their historical role in the development of new audiences for architecture, their impact on the development of architectural journalism as a field distinct from the academy, and their influence on contemporaneous architectural practice.

The chairs encourage non-biographical and non-descriptive approaches to the topic, instead inviting scholars, architects, and critics to respond to historically specific questions such as:

1. How did the role of the architectural critic emerge, transform, and come to be highly specialized over the course of the twentieth century?
2. How has criticism adapted to its many media forms or engaged media systems beyond the textual?
3. What types of audiences does criticism engage or produce?
4. What historical relationships have criticism and journalism had with building practices and with scholarly production?
5. How does architectural journalism relate to political structures and institutions? What role has censorship played? How might we account for histories of repression of the architectural press?
6. How have the dictates of journalism run counter to those of criticism? Where has the friction between criticism as an ethic or as an aesthetic become apparent?
7. What becomes of the critic as the object of critique?
8. How has architectural criticism been treated historiographically, and what kinds of historiography might emerge from scholarly attention to architectural criticism?
9. What does it mean to make historical evidence of criticism?

**PAPERS**

**Critique vs Criticism: Giulio Carlo Argan and the Manifold Practices of *Critica***  
Cesare Birignani, The City College of New York

Unlike English, Romance and Germanic languages do not distinguish between *critique* and *criticism*. In French, Italian, Spanish, German, Swedish, one and the same word (*critique*, *critica*, *Kritik*, *critiek*) is used to refer to two ostensibly distinct activities and to encompass a wide and somewhat unwieldy range of critical practices (commentary, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, judgment, etc.). This lexicological detail is not trivial. It

might, in fact, reveal a fundamental feature of architectural writing as it was practiced in Europe and offer clues for the study of the emergence and transformation of the figure of the architectural critic. In this paper I propose to explore the dialectic of critique and criticism—and sketch the outlines of what we may call a study in historical semantics—by looking at modern Italy and, in particular, at the work of the art and architectural historian and critic Giulio Carlo Argan (1909-1992).

A prodigious, Promethean scholar, Argan was a key voice in architectural debates from the 1930s onward and contributed to major re-orientations of the discipline, for example (re)introducing architects to the paramount issue of typology or raising, in a seminal 1957 essay, the problem of the relation between architecture and ideology. Moreover, through his relentless activity as a publicist, Argan became one of Italy's most important public intellectuals, reaching new audiences outside the profession with newspaper columns, magazine articles, radio and TV programmes, and, significantly, an art history textbook that was used for decades in high-school curricula. Argan's long and preternaturally productive career—and his manifold practices of *critica*—offer an ideal ground to probe the vicissitudes of architectural criticism in the twentieth century and trace the history of the mediations between architecture and its audiences.

### **Architects vs. the Public in Architectural Criticism: From the Press to Radio and Television** Jessica Kelly, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

In 1972 the BBC broadcast a television programme called 'Life is Right, The Architect is Wrong'. The sentiment of the programme was evident from its title – it interrogated the work of architects in relation to the opinions and lived experiences of the public. This was one of the first times on British TV that architects, critics, and the general public appeared together on a panel to discuss architecture. Nearly forty years earlier, in 1935, *The Architectural Review* had published its first criticism column. Its purpose was 'not so much to elevate the understanding of the architect as to fan the ardor of the layman, who is to-day increasingly tempted to follow the current trends of architectural thought'. These two examples of architectural criticism's negotiation of the relationship between the expertise of architects and the opinions, knowledge, and experience of the public, are my starting point.

Between the AR's first criticism column and the BBC's 'Architect is Wrong' programme, architectural criticism shifted from seeking to consolidate the authority of architects by guiding and educating the audience, through attempts at compromise, balancing public opinion with architectural expertise. This shift from consolidation to compromise and critique was mirrored by architectural criticism's move into radio and TV. This paper will discuss the relationship between the changing media of architectural criticism and the changing attitude toward the public.

Looking at specific articles in the AR and BBC radio and TV broadcasts, this paper shows how the dynamic of expert versus public shaped the content, tone, and mode of address in architectural criticism. In turn, it will trace architectural criticism's role in the changing relationship between architecture, architects, and the public in Britain.

### **Designs on TV: Aline Bernstein Saarinen and Public Reception of Architecture in the Postwar US**

Emily Pugh, Getty Research Institute

My paper examines how architectural criticism on American television news and documentary programmes in the 1950s and 1960s played a key role in elevating the public's regard for architecture and design in these decades. In particular, I will analyze programming produced, written, and often featuring architecture critic and journalist Aline Bernstein Saarinen, whose reporting on design and the arts helped to move architecture to the center of national debates on culture and politics.

Saarinen worked as a critic and editor for print publications, including *Art News* and the *New York Times*, before beginning a career as TV journalist in 1962. Throughout the 1960s, she reported on architecture and arts for programmes such as NBC's *Sunday and Today*, as well as documentary specials like *Opening Night at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts* (1962). Using information culled from the programmes themselves as well as relevant archival materials, my paper will discuss how Saarinen's reporting echoed themes presented in other, similar programmes that aired around the same time, such as the 1958 episode of NBC's *Look Here* featuring Raymond Loewy or the 1961 episode of CBS's *Accent*, featuring Philip Johnson and Louis I. Kahn. I will explore how the message conveyed by Saarinen and other architectural critics of this era informed, and was informed by, the evolution of television documentary as genre, which according to media historians was experiencing a golden age in the early 1960s. As I will argue, Saarinen's career demonstrates how architectural criticism and more precisely *journalism* on US TV news shaped public attitudes towards architecture and design in the postwar decades, establishing in the minds of Americans deep connections among building design, national prestige, economic affluence, and political supremacy.

### **Data Dread and Architectural Criticism**

Matthew Allen, Harvard University

I argue that an important aspect of modern architectural criticism is its fraught relationship with data. I focus on the case of John Summerson. In a seminal 1957 paper, Summerson proposed that – in the words of Colin Rowe – ‘an allegedly neutral compilation of data’ is the ‘motivating force of modern architecture.’ Like other critics (e.g., Hitchcock's 1947 ‘genius and bureaucracy’ and Colquhoun's 1967 ‘typology and design method’) Summerson was attempting to adapt prewar thinking about modern architecture to the postwar situation. In 1960s Britain, the general infatuation with science and the spread of computational thinking mixed in architecture with a burgeoning bureaucratic terrain, from corporate practices to salaried government architects. In place of the relatively straightforward relationship between genius designers and iconic buildings, the postwar architecture critic grappled with new production methods, new building types, and increasing political complications. Of all the problems posed by the new bureaucratic mode, its relationship to data caused the most anxiety. In part through Summerson's example, the contradiction involved in the very notion of criticizing data became a central tension of criticism. Historically, ‘data’ refers to ‘assumptions.’ Once data is criticized, it is no longer properly data. Taking this contradiction into account, a quasi-philosophical questioning of the place of data, determinism, and functionalism in architecture became a hallmark of postwar architectural criticism. Attempts to negotiate this central tension imparted the distinctly intellectual and internalist/disciplinary character that separates postwar criticism from adjacent modes of writing such as popular reviews of buildings and more philosophical theory. It also helped define a new audience distinct from the layperson and the architect-as-designer: the intelligent and creative worker in the bureaucracy of architecture. Criticism of the type Summerson wrote thus helped to define what it meant to be an architect in the last half-century.

### **The ‘Critical’ in the Architectural Criticism of Kenneth Frampton**

Mary McLeod, Columbia University

For nearly fifty years, British-American architect Kenneth Frampton has been one of the most important critics and historians of architecture, read by architects and students worldwide. He introduced the word ‘critical’ in English-language architectural criticism: first, in the title of his 1974 essay ‘Apropos Ulm: Curriculum and Critical Theory,’ and later, in his book *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (1980) and his highly influential essay ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance’ (1983). His writings during this period were part of a larger shift that occurred in architecture criticism from the 1970s onward, one that sought to understand not just architecture's formal properties but also its broader political, social, and cultural implications. Frampton sought to forge a link between architecture criticism and Marxist

cultural theory, specifically the Frankfurt School. Here, he shows some affinities with his friend and colleague Alan Colquhoun. Together, they helped initiate what is sometimes called the theoretical turn in English-language architecture writing.

Frampton's interest in a Marxist cultural criticism was especially indebted to Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse (his copy of *Eros and Civilization* was, not coincidentally, a gift from Colquhoun), and two architects whom he encountered in the 1960s: Claude Schnaidt and Tomás Maldonado. Frampton, however, departing from these Marxist predecessors (as well as Manfredo Tafuri), and influenced by Dalibor Vesely, has attempted to combine his Marxist critique with a more phenomenological examination of architecture's experiential qualities in an effort to counter—or at least to provide an alternative to—an overly commodified world.

After examining the evolution of Frampton's theoretical perspective and some of the tensions in his critical stance, I conclude with a brief discussion of the impact his work has had on subsequent architectural criticism.