

INTRODUCTION

In many works, searching from this viewpoint for this or that trace, for something that can give you information about an author, you practice an essentially biographical investigation of the author himself, you don't analyse the meaning and significance of the work as such.

—Jacques Lacan¹

This book is neither a biographical investigation of Kenneth Frampton, a renowned historian, architect and architecture critic, nor a study of his oeuvre in its entirety, a huge task that would take into consideration many volumes, including the five editions of his *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, in addition to the numerous published books, essays and forewords that he has written for scholarly books to date. Instead, it is a modest-yet-timely project: focusing on the first edition of *A Critical History* (as it will be referred to throughout this volume), published in 1980, it is a search for clues and positions that will provide the reader with a partial view of the significance of Frampton's historiography of modern architecture—"partial" because, in this volume, each chapter of the first edition of his book has not been examined. Although particular attention has been accorded to Frampton's work, the scope of this book is comprehensively narrow. Rather than reading the first edition of *A Critical History* through the lens of contemporary fashionable ideas and transient themes, the approach here is somewhat archeological: zooming into his book and simultaneously building out, an attempt has been made to historicize Frampton's positions, with a critical eye on the contemporary state of architectural praxis. The following reading of Frampton also offers a "prism" for comprehending architecture in global capitalism. Critically significant to this retrospective reading of Frampton's book is the fact that in the course of its subsequent editions, the first two parts of the first edition have remained almost unchanged, and also that its content comprises the core of the Modern Architecture movement, which still influences the course of future actions. For instance, among the many themes discussed in the second part of Frampton's book, his interpretation of events from 1930 to 1945—a watershed in the developmental process of modern movement architecture—is highlighted.

On the other hand, the thematic continuity and crisis of postwar architecture is demonstrated by a focus on selected themes from the other two main parts of *A Critical History*. This book explores the historical constellation in which Frampton held onto his anteroom view of history, even amid the flow of *time* and the flood of temporality. In this mediated interest in historiography, our contemporary involvement in the subject foreshadows the appeal to retrieve the historian's intentions.

Following on from continued scholarly interest in teaching and writing on modern and contemporary historiographies of architecture was this author's *The Mental Life of the Architectural Historian* (2013), a volume that examines tropes central to the work of selected architectural historians, including Frampton. In particular is the question of how each historian approached the historicity of modern architecture. The present book is different: it neither looks exhaustively at every subject and building densely elucidated in the first edition of Frampton's book nor pursues what might be considered a textual reading of his book. The reader will note the diachronic temporalities that weave my reading of Frampton's project with the historicity of his *écriture*. Obviously, "Kenneth Frampton" means many things, not only to this author but also to the many architects, critics, historians and academics who have been reading, reviewing and critiquing his work since he attained *visibility* in the architectural circles of London after graduating from the Architecture Association in 1956, and more so after he decided to settle in New York City and teach at Princeton University in 1972. In addition to his affiliation with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and with Martin Heidegger's writings on subjects such as "the work of art," technology and "dwelling," what is intriguing about Frampton is his analytical approach to, and criticism of, the architecture of the past and the present—an approach that, even during the high days of post-structuralism, was neither formalistic nor textual. Although exposed to the significant theoretical discourses disseminated during the late 1970s, this author's central intellectual inclination was coloured by Marxian readings and criticisms of art and architecture in general and Manfredo Tafuri's in particular. On the other hand, Frampton's take on critical theory and his engaged criticism of architects' work were appealing to an architect and educator who was a latecomer to the primal scene of the postwar crisis of architecture—America!

As for the book itself, *A Critical History*, each chapter begins with an appropriate quotation from the text of another architect and/or thinker. This became a motivation to write an essay on "quotation" that was presented at the annual conference of the SAHANZ (2017)²—a revised and extended version is compiled in this volume (see Chapter 1). Equally important was the fact that, in the first edition of Frampton's book, an image preceded the text

of each of the three main parts. These three cover-page images are considered here as "postcards," pregnant with clues to the problematic suggested by the title of each part, which Frampton critically unpacks in the relevant compiled chapters. Each of these postcards is also read as a visual emblem communicating between the author's text and the reader, who would be expected to encounter the book in different geographic temporalities, especially as the book has been translated into several languages. Here, the reader is reminded of two things: first, that these postcards and the idea of starting each chapter with a quotation are considered as an attribute of artifact, an analogue to Frampton's book; and, second, that the image preceding the introduction to the first edition of the book was removed in the second (1984) and subsequent editions.³ Though Frampton never stated as much, this excision was perhaps part of the "minor corrections, to enlarge the existing final chapter substantially, and add a completely new chapter at the end," he outlines in the preface to the second edition. Toward the end of the same preface, we realize that this "new chapter" will introduce the concept of Critical Regionalism, Frampton's major contribution to the criticism of contemporary architecture, which he revised and expanded upon on several subsequent occasions. This is one reason why the last chapter of this volume is dedicated to Critical Regionalism. And yet, the omission of the cover image from the book's introduction says something about Frampton's skilled sensitivity concerning the images he selected to accompany his text, a vital hallmark of his career since he took on the job of technical editor of *Architectural Design (AD)* in 1962, a position he held for three years. Frampton's reserved admiration for photographic techniques is evident in most of his published manuscripts to date. This is an extremely important attitude in the context of the current commercialized nature of everyday life when the photographic reproduction of a building is often abused, its potentialities narrowed to *image-making*, a snapshot substitute for the experience of architecture as such. This development confirms today the distinction Walter Benjamin made between watching architecture with a pair of touristic glasses and experiencing a building in a moment of distraction.⁴ This is a critical-materialist understanding of "experience," the anthropological dimension of which Frampton shares, though in his work this is toned down by a phenomenological concern for "essences," rather than for the Benjaminian notion of "bodily sphere" associated with the developments taking place in *technique*.⁵ In the same text, Benjamin wrote in parentheses that "Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through 'historicity.'" Frampton would agree with Benjamin's disappointment at witnessing the demise of traditional experience (past historical life) due to the distance technology inserts between the past and the present and the subject and the object.⁶ In the following chapters, the reader will also notice Marxian traces in both

Heidegger and Hannah Arendt.⁷ Even though Arendt is not mentioned in the first edition of Frampton's book, these two thinkers' discourse problematized his affiliation with Benjamin to the point where Benjamin would remain in their shadow. Frampton's post-1980 writings demonstrate that he did not keep Benjamin and Heidegger at an equal distance, even though, as we will see in the following chapter, a Benjaminian vision of history casts a long shadow on Frampton's historiography of modern architecture.

The third significance of Frampton's book relates to the following statement extracted from the introduction to the first edition, which, interestingly enough, remains the historico-theoretical regime of *A Critical History* today:

Of the courses of action which are still open to contemporary architecture—courses which in one way or another have already been entered upon—only two seem to offer the possibility of a significant outcome.

This statement discloses the dialectical coexistence of the "operative" and the critical in Frampton's historiography. What seemingly interested Frampton were the moments in the formation of modern architecture when a work either tried to exacerbate "meaning" to the point of inexpressibility or recoded the culture of building toward a poetics of placemaking. Thus, Mies van der Rohe's "ideal" of *beinahe nichts* (almost nothing) is tacitly introduced as a source of future action. According to Frampton, Mies's lack of interest in engaging with the urban enclave is "patently visible and often takes the form of masonry enclosure," without associating the implied *character* of architecture with any particular architect. In retrospect, the reader of Frampton's oeuvre will not fail to associate this suggested "visibility" with a specific group of modernist architects, among whom Alvar Aalto stands tall. Pursuing Adolf Loos's strategic approach to modernity, Aalto attempted to emulate the "cracks" existing between the past historical life and technologically motivated experience, aiming to create an architecture that would avoid the avant-garde's transgressive agendas.⁸ Yet, call it *misreading*! In the present volume, Frampton's two suggested opposing sources of future action have been read allegorically. It is hoped that the reader will extrapolate its potentialities from "Mies Contra Aalto: A Conundrum," discussed in Chapter 6 of this book. Still, having come across Fredric Jameson's reading of the Heideggerian rift between "world" and "earth,"⁹ this alleged misreading sheds critical light on Frampton's reserved position on Mies, whose work complements Aalto's while keeping the Finnish architect's "biomorphism" at arm's length. This implied ontological separateness can be read in analogy to the "bridge" Heidegger discusses in his famous 1954 essay on "dwelling." Reflecting on Frampton's reading of

Heidegger's essay, as suggested elsewhere, amalgamating material with technique, the Heideggerian bridge can evoke a sense of nearness by keeping the banks of the river apart.¹⁰ As such, dialectics structures the proposed "Mies contra Aalto" paradigm.

A fourth interest in Frampton's vision of history concerns themes that led him to choose *A Critical History* for the book's subtitle. These themes are differentiated from those in another prominent historian who also took a Marxian approach to architectural history, Manfredo Tafuri. While this has been extensively discussed elsewhere,¹¹ the difference between the two historians can be briefly articulated thus: both remain critical of the avant-garde aspiration to reconcile formal autonomy with the prevailing zeitgeist; and each approaches architectural praxis differently. Drawing from the historicity of the nihilism of the project of Modernity, Tafuri's critical discourse remains focused on how *architecture* at its best anticipated an eventual failure, despite or because of its attempt at decoding the capitalist production system. Frampton, by contrast, tends to highlight the marginal victories of singular works that have been able to preserve aspects of "placemaking," as instrumental reason tightens its grip on architecture. While both historians share the idea that architecture should address a historiographical problem, Frampton's commitment to a semiautonomous architecture has uniquely positioned him to interpret the architect's continuous encounter with the contemporaneity integral to a broader crisis of architecture. Whereas Frampton plots the ongoing development of the concept of crisis throughout the short history of modernity, Tafuri traces the genealogies of the crisis back to the springboard of Western Humanism. The important dimensions of Frampton's critical regime are discussed throughout this book, particularly in Chapter 7, and in connection with the author's Critical Regionalism.

Having plotted these four cardinal points, we need to remember two additional considerations: given the three postcards mentioned above, the scope of this book remains "confined" to discussing themes coterminous with the historicity implied in the division of *A Critical History* into three main parts, as listed in the contents of the first edition. Following Walter Benjamin's distrust of historicism, the narrative form that ends with the totalization of history in one way or another has been avoided. This is important given not only my sympathy with the German thinker's messianic Marxism¹² but also the fact that Frampton's "Introduction" to *A Critical History* begins with a famous quotation from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940). Apropos, the present book should be considered a collage of separate plots,¹³ short sketches on topics relevant to Frampton's discourse on the historiography of modern architecture that have been sewn together in seven chapters

with an absent central theme: to reflect and expand on the theme of the *critical* that peppers the first edition of *A Critical History*.

The present book thus approximates Benjamin's concept of "constellation." He wrote, "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been coming together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."¹⁴ As such, the past/present dialectic sets the agenda for this interpretative reading of Frampton's text, which means that, although I had read *A Critical History* several times before, whenever teaching courses on the history of modern architecture, reading Frampton's book anew, and writing this volume, involved more than "understanding" the author's intentions. Instead, I read the first edition of Frampton's book in the image of the constellation wherein the past, the temporality of Frampton's writing of *A Critical History*, and that of my writing of the following pages, could not but lead me to choose an interventionist strategy, which is evident in between the lines of my discussion of Frampton's positions on the themes elaborated in each chapter of this volume. Accordingly, this project neither attempts to "discover" what Frampton thought when he wrote *A Critical History*, especially during the ten long years that ended with the publication of the book's first edition, nor intends to contextualize his book historically, though "contextualization" remains integral to the critical rewriting of history. Moreover, the formation of Frampton's book has not been "reported" in a chronicle-like fashion, as is the case with semi-documentary work. However, this is a fashion in recent writing on past events, a follow-up to the mass media production of documentaries on diverse subjects! And yet, particles of these methodologies might have unconsciously slipped into the chapters, and the reader is sure to detect them here and there.

To reiterate, *A Critical History* has been approached as an artifact stripped of temporality. The book's major tropes have been unlocked toward two ends: first, to elucidate how Frampton's critical presentation of the history of modern architecture, and the book's classificatory mode (periodization?), have contributed to our understanding of the contemporaneity of architecture. Second and related to the first, it concerns the particular theoretical strategy for mapping Frampton's historiography over time, from the modernism of the 1920s to the crisis of the project of Modernity (starting roughly from the mid-1930s) to the postmodern condition. The themes Frampton attended to, the formation of which has shaped his singular approach to the problems of modernism in architecture, which is integral to the historical progression in this book, have been emphasized. Frampton had the privilege of seeing the 1930s retrospectively, from the viewpoint of the Cold War era, when capitalism in America had shifted gears to not only consolidate its presence in known industries, including the building industry, but also, more importantly, and for the

first time, expedite the formation of the “culture industry,” as formulated by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1947. While these developments’ socioeconomic and cultural impacts in so-called Third-World countries have not been explored,¹⁵ Frampton’s recently published work is proof that he sees architectural history from an Archimedean point on the fringes of the western hemisphere.¹⁶

Along with these developments, ample attention has also been focused to Frampton’s exposure to several critical texts and concepts, including Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* (1958), Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling” and Walter Benjamin’s “Philosophy of History,” mentioned earlier. The impact of these texts on Frampton’s oeuvre—the shift from his earlier reviews of buildings, which could be labeled journalistic, to his later, more distinctively critical work—is studied here. Imbued with a phenomenological reading of Marxian concepts such as labor, materiality and technology, Frampton’s later work tries to move away from his earlier style of criticism, which was primarily focused on “design” and the architect’s *intention* in handling issues internal to architectural design—even though the various dimensions of design should be the concern of every historian even today. Since the first formulation of “Critical Regionalism,” however, Frampton has consistently contributed to identifying the scope of the ongoing architectural crisis in late capitalism, while at the same time highlighting strategies of resistance intended to postpone the total takeover of architecture by the regime of technological instrumentalization. This historical phenomenon has attained global visibility through the expansive strategies of late capitalism. Not only Frampton’s various reworkings of the text of “Critical Regionalism” but all the revisions of his book should be considered a strategy to resist the reduction of the *project* to an object, the repetition of which undermines its capacity to face the present, the now-time. The many editions of the book do not speak to any strong desire to keep himself on the stage of contemporary architectural debates on Frampton’s part. Rather, they speak to a desire to see the continuation of modernity, though with advanced awareness of its problematics, while at the same time searching for effective critical channels to postpone the moment when architecture disappears within the multitudes of effects emanating from the floating images that structure the future propagated by the global networks of capitalism. This dimension of his work places him squarely in opposition to Tafuri. Whereas Tafuri consolidated himself as a *classical* historian working within historical totalization, Frampton’s insistence on revising and expanding the book during the past four decades demonstrates the possibility of a critical assessment of the ongoing conflict between architecture and capitalism, even as the latter’s master-code constantly reimagines modernity anew. This is the

negative dialectics that has unconsciously sneaked into Frampton's project, and it is a positive change.

As mentioned earlier, the text of Chapter 1 emerged from the idea of the role quotation plays in historiographies in general and in Frampton's narrative in particular. Each chapter of *A Critical History* begins with a carefully chosen quotation. However, the choice turns out to be particularly significant when Frampton opens his short introductory remarks with a famous quotation from Walter Benjamin's essay "Philosophy of History." In this chapter, extensive attention is given to Benjamin's "Angel of History," mapping its critical importance for Frampton's historiography of modern architecture. Chapter 2, "A Trilogy," focuses on three dates, 1939, 1967 and 1978, claiming that each of these years saw particular historical events destined to limit the scope of architecture's drive for autonomy. These dates also designate the periodization that underpins the three-part organization of Frampton's book. The three cardinal transformations that thematically structure Frampton's position on the history of modern architecture have been highlighted: these are the cultural, the technical and the territorial, which are discussed in the first three chapters of part I of *A Critical History* and encapsulated in part I's cover image, an interior view of Germain Soufflot, Ste-Genevieve, Paris, 1750–1939. Inspired by the cover-page image of part II of the book, a photomontage of Giuseppe Terragni's Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932–36, Chapter 3 in this volume argues for the criticality of the events of the 1930s, particularly the rise of Fascism in Europe, a pivotal moment in Frampton's retrospective account of the period spanning 1836–1967. Comprised of twenty-seven chapters, part II of *A Critical History* comprehensively covers Frampton's story of modern architecture. The study of the major players of this rather long period was guided by the insight that, between 1914 and 1918, Benjamin had already sensed the crisis haunting Europe. While Frampton might not share Benjamin's position that technique is more than a tool—that, rather, "it is a condition of the invention of the human itself"¹⁷—he would be unlikely to disagree that the decade of the 1930s transformed the "structure of experience," which in its many manifestations, including architecture, was until then directly or indirectly influenced by the metaphysics of Humanism.¹⁸ No wonder then that in Chapter 3, and throughout this volume, Frampton's obsessive focus on Hannah Arendt's call for "the space of public appearance" and the Heideggerian notion of "placemaking" is important. These two concepts have been taken up in Chapter 6 to demonstrate their centrality to Frampton's appraisals of Aalto's architecture on several occasions since the first edition of the book. What makes the uncharacteristic juxtaposition

of Aalto and Mies significant is the type/tectonics manifested in these two architects' best work. Another difference relates to the geographic temporalities that each of these two architects had to work through as part of the project of Modernity. Herein lies the essentiality of regional difference—Finland for Aalto, Berlin and Chicago for Mies—even within Europe and from the bedrock of the formation and transformation of modernity. The significance of *distance* is discussed in Chapter 7, which primarily focuses on Frampton's Critical Regionalism. The historico-theoretical trajectory of his discourse on the "critical" since the book's first edition in 1980 is also demonstrated. Chapter 5, by contrast, presents an in-depth reading of four analytical essays on selected works of postwar British architecture that were written before Frampton's total appropriation of Arendt and Heidegger. Despite this, his later writings show the persistence of particular concerns about the culture of building that were formative for his earlier work. In this regard, the culture of building is for Frampton the site where the *image* of the past turns out to be the nucleus of resistance; he has launched against the colonization of architecture by commodity form.

This book deliberates on matters related to the history of modern architecture and contemporary historiographies of architecture. Besides this, it stresses on the relevance of modernity and modern architecture for contemporary architectural criticism and praxis. In the present state of digital reproducibility and global capitalism, it is convincing that, at best, both architecture academics and students have lost sight of architectural history. At worst, they presumptuously proclaim the irrelevance of history for contemporary architectural praxis. Perhaps a different architecture could emerge from the prevailing depthless intertextuality, when all that is solid, including the subjectivities nurturing class conflicts, melts away! It is not the task of architecture to expedite this process in any form; it should, however, be theorized to offer a clear demonstration of ideologies of architecture across history. The following pages aim to establish Frampton's historiography and his ongoing endeavor to promote a critical understanding of the historicity of architectural crisis.

Notes

- 1 The final draft of this manuscript was prepared by mid-2020; thus, the fifth edition of Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (September 2020), and K. C. Britton and R. McCarter, *Modern Architecture and the LifeWord* (January 2021) were not consulted.

Jacques Lacan explaining his methodology, quoted in Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (London: Verso, 2019), 97. For Lacan, the problem was the articulation of "desire." The ambition in the present volume is rather modest!

- 2 Gevork Hartoonian, "The Violence of Quotation," in *Quotation: The 34th Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians*, ed. Gevork Hartoonian and John Tying, Australia/New Zealand (SAHANZ), 2017, Canberra, Australia.
- 3 Another curiosity is the photo of Alberto Santori's project for Notre-Dame du Phare (1931), used for the book's cover since its first publication. Neither the project nor its architect is mentioned or discussed in any of the chapters of the book's first edition!
- 4 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217–52.
- 5 In "Convolute N" of his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin distinguishes his concept of historical materialism from a phenomenological emphasis on "essences." See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 462. For Benjamin's affiliation with "anthropological materialism," see John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 172. The chapter "Benjamin and the Weimar" is recommended.
- 6 Recalling the mutilated bodies returning from the scene of World War I, Walter Benjamin writes, "With this tremendous development of technology, completely new poverty descended on mankind." He continues, "Indeed (let's admit it), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on the personal level, but the poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism." See Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol 2, 1927–34* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 731–40. The essay was originally published in 1933.
- 7 In his autobiography, Robert Maxwell recalls that Thomas Stevenson, known as "Sam" in the architectural circles of the University of Liverpool, United Kingdom, recommended Hanna Arendt to Kenneth Frampton. Robert Maxwell, *The Time of My Life in Architecture* (London: Artifice, 2016), 27.
- 8 The idea of "crack" has been borrowed from Hal Foster. See <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/hal-foster-1251083> (accessed August 13, 2019).
- 9 Fredric Jameson, *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality* (London: Verso, 2016), 76–81.
- 10 Gevork Hartoonian, *The Mental Life of the Architectural Historian* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 169.
- 11 Ibid., "Coda," in Hartoonian, *The Mental Life*, 160–77.
- 12 For work on Walter Benjamin, see Gevork Hartoonian (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2010); and Gevork Hartoonian, "What Is the Matter with Architectural History?" in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 171–81.
- 13 A shorter version of the first chapter of this volume was presented at the Society of Architectural Historians Australia/New Zealand, 2017. On two separate occasions, the concept of Critical Regionalism discussed in Chapter 7 in this volume has been addressed.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, "Awakening," in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462.
- 15 Lukasz Stanek's book sheds fresh light on the center-periphery debates. See Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).
- 16 The speculation here was recently confirmed in Kenneth Frampton's email to the author dated Monday, January 11, 2021. He wrote, "I assume that you have obtained a copy of the 5th edition of my so-called Critical History! You seem to be referring to it in your current critical take on operative occidental histories?" The author had

not yet received the fifth edition of the book when adding this footnote (Saturday, January 24, 2021)!

- 17 David Cunningham and Jon Goodbun, "Marx, Architecture and Modernity," *Journal of Architecture* (April 2006): 173.
- 18 See John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).