

Chapter 1

From chamber to transformer: epistemological challenges and tendencies in the intersection of architectural histories and critical theories

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*In the summer of 1985, I lay on a beach on Crete, struggling to read a text whose pages and words seemed to me to be wholly resistant to offering up their meaning. The book, Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature*,¹ had been "suggested reading" for a course in architectural history that I was about to start in London the following September. And I struggled with it for a number of reasons. First, and perhaps understandably, it was my first real introduction to marxist thought, and for anyone's initial forays into that conceptual schema, any book, no matter how well written (and Williams' script is a model of reasoned clarity), was always going to be hard work. Second, and though I barely knew it, this was also my first real introduction to the realm of critical theory in general. Up to that juncture, my education had been in history of various kinds – architecture, art, ancient world – but none of it held much truck with ideas beyond the world of its own objects of study, still less with general cultural abstractions of this ilk. Third, therefore, was a growing unease not just with the difficulty of the text, but also with its very relevance to the course on which I was about to embark. "Base and Superstructure," "Hegemony," "Typification and Homology," "Ideology," "From Reflection to Mediation" – of what possible relevance were these chapters for the historical study of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Ebenezer Howard? Why the hell, my sun-soaked brain demanded, was I reading this?*

In the autumn of 1985, a first year student of architectural design, I entered a world of seductive forms (glass boxes, white villas) and earnest politics (ugly housing). Although drawn to the latter, the social issues seemingly only got in the aesthetic way. The two bore a strange and uneasy relation. Later and deeper into the world of architectural education, this relationship was torn entirely asunder. I was told that because I liked thinking about theory I would never have any architectural idea. For, as the Master carefully explained to me, those who were interested in thinking theoretically could never be architects. Then came my entry into history, into historiography, into, therefore, a place where one could think – that is think "architecturally" as something at once ideational and material. Here arose the central

question: through exploring the workings of architectural history in terms of both epistemology and methodology, how would it be possible for my politics to inform theoretically creative practices?

In any historical or critical field – whether concerning the interpretation of architecture, planning history, social events, art, medicine and so forth – there is a danger that the methodology of the investigating author will conflate or conspire with the ostensible objects of study. Rather than taking an independent critical line, the interpretation consequently takes the form of an excavation that can repeat only what it unearths, say only what it is allowed to say.

Nowhere, perhaps, has this process been more readily apparent in the field of historical and critical studies of the built environment – architecture, urbanism, landscape, planning² – where the perpetual trend among historians has been to conduct their lines of enquiry less upon their own theoretical or political agendas and more on the internal concerns of the spatial professions and the intricacies of their procedural practices. The discourse around architecture is particularly redolent of this kind of approach, where very often architecture is understood simply to be “what the architect does.”

This much is, perhaps, not in itself a bad thing, for the recording and explanation of the practices of urban professionals according to their own concerns is certainly of some historical worth: what architects think, what they have done (or what they think they have done), and what they themselves have considered to be the most important ideas and influences on their operations are all things which deserve to be recorded, assessed and communicated. And, of course, many architectural historians have concentrated on exactly this kind of study, typified by the work of those such as Kenneth Frampton, who, for example, notes in his *Modern Architecture: a Critical History*, that in this text, and despite a professed “affinity for the critical theory of the Frankfurt School,” he has tried “whenever possible to let the protagonists speak for themselves.”³

One other point worth making here is that many of these architectural historians have also either trained as, and/or continue to work as, architects in their own right. Their concerns are, therefore, necessarily and perhaps rightly directed at the operative functions of the architectural practitioner. Nonetheless, as all of the chapters in this book in some way demonstrate – including many by those who are both historians and design practitioners – it is not only the internal matters of architecture with which the architect/historian need be concerned.

The machinations of the drawing board are not the only things that ought to be addressed. There is life outside of the studio, the building site and the private library, and, of course, architects and everyone involved in architecture (which is, in fact,

simply everyone) is absolutely implicated in this wider world of architecture – inescapably, everyday, we all live in and through architecture.

The problem, however, is that resisting the gravitational pull of the object is particularly difficult in the case of histories concerned with the built environment. First, there is the perplexing nature of the object of the material character of the city and its multifarious buildings. A more complex, dynamic and opaque entity than the (post)modern metropolis would be hard to imagine. Second, there is the problem of the inextricably implicated relation that architecture (as with planning) holds with this city-entity, being both challenged and constrained by a set of institutional practices that draw their power from as diverse a range of sources as capital and economies, national and municipal governments, dominant classes, smaller yet mobilised interest groups, territorialised zones and cultural conventions.

Architecture's problem – that of the physical and social complexity of its arena of action, compounded by the multifaceted negotiations it has to undertake in order to act at all – is then replicated in the representations made of it in history. Unable to see the wood for the trees, historians are constantly tempted to focus on the minutiae of architecture, on individual agents, individual projects, individual codes as the constituting elements of their histories. Too often, they closely follow architects such as Richard Meier who earnestly believe that “[a]rchitecture is the subject of my architecture,”⁴ and that, consequently there is no need to look beyond the internalised concerns of the discipline in order to understand it historically. Hence certain monographs on the single architect or architectural practice, special publications on the single building, or focused studies of a particular aspect of architectural practice. All these provide glimpses or partial views of architecture, but ultimately do little more than record the general character of architecture, yielding a textual snapshot of particular objects and surfaces. Not so much hidden away as lost altogether are the forgotten peoples, the alternative practices, the imagined representations that fall outside of the hegemonic realm. Similarly struck off from the political agenda are the wider concerns, the mobilising forces that provide both the occasion and much of the substance for city development and architectural activity. What these studies lack is an explicit framework in which to situate their objects of study. As a result, the apparent implication is too often that the given subject is, at best, an isolated arena of activity, and, at worst, the only one really worth studying.

Alternatively, unable to see the trees for the wood, historians are tempted to throw what they intend to be a catch-net over their objects, seeking to cover all peoples, all things, all activities under one banner. Here, encyclopaedic historical volumes attempt to survey such things as the whole of twentieth century architecture,⁵ the whole of Indian architecture,⁶ or, in the case of the magisterial Banister Fletcher, the whole of everything.⁷

If architecture is the conception, design and construction of the spaces of the city, then it is important to realise that this creative system occurs neither solely in the ways in which the great projects purport to operate (that is, architectural activities have discursive content and meaning far beyond their avowed intentions and surface appearance), nor indeed only through these great projects. There are not only hidden meanings, but also hidden practices to architecture.

How then is the historian to cut through this dense swathe of money, power and ideology? How to make sense of its concomitant spatial existence, the city, and of the creative practice of architecture? The aim must be, first of all, to recognise the grounds on which the historical interpretation is being made, by which is meant not so much the meanings that can be located *within* the historical object as the *questions that may be asked of it* according to an explicit historian-centred agenda. It is to this problematic which we now turn.

NINE CHALLENGES

Although antiquarian historians such as Deborah Howard may believe that "good history does not need methodology,"⁸ the notion that history can or should be written "without methodology" or "without theory" is an absurdity; it is impossible to approach history using the old ideas and minds of those who have gone before. "Theory is indispensable. It is how we make sense of the world."⁹ How else are we to construct history except through our own contemporary concerns? And how are we to translate those concerns into interpretative questions to be asked of the past? Conversely, how are we to use the past as the grounds upon which to conduct our own interpretative enquiries? Any consideration of the past must then use some kind of mediating concept to negotiate between its specific substance and the present condition of the historian – "all history is theoretical."¹⁰ Furthermore, that mediating concept can no longer be simply the language-manipulation of literary technique or writerly prowess; discussions about architectural historical methodology cannot remain simply within the remit of narrative style or communicability.¹¹ This "crisis in narrative or storytelling history,"¹² is, as Hayden White succinctly states, true of *all* kinds of history whether theorised (what he calls "philosophy of history") or empirical ("history" or "history proper"):

Those historians who draw a firm line between history and philosophy of history fail to recognize that every historical discourse contains within it a full-blown, if only implicit, philosophy of history . . . the principal difference between history and philosophy of history is that the latter brings the conceptual apparatus by which the facts are ordered in the discourse to the surface of the text, while history proper (as it is called) buries it in the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device.¹³

As Keith Jenkins concludes, the choice is not whether history should be theoretical or not, but rather between "a history that is aware of what it is doing and a history that is not."¹⁴ Theory then is, on one level, the making explicit of the historian's negotiation, of setting out the interpretative agenda not as an implicit, invisible subterfuge, but as a necessarily implicated set of thought processes.

The question of whether to use theory or not is an irrelevance. Rather the questions must be, first, which theory to use, and second, how to relate it to the ostensible objects of study?

To consider the first of these questions, if architecture is, as already stated, inextricably implicated in the material and ideological practices that conduct and control city affairs, then it makes sense that for any architectural history to provide a critical interpretation of architecture, its theoretical grounding *must* come not just from within the architectural discourse. "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."¹⁵ Instead, it is necessary to look at other arenas, other theoretical territories. Furthermore, just as historians should not be slaves to the internal concerns of architecture, nor should they be driven solely by the classifications and limited scopes of particular kinds of theories. To do so would be to be sealed within the chamber of philosophy. Therefore, in *InterSections* we take "critical theory" not only to mean the work of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Benjamin, Habermas, Horkheimer, Marcuse *et al.*), but also to encompass any self-reflexive emancipatory theory (various feminisms, marxisms, psychoanalysis etc.) together with any theoretically informed academic discipline (such as historical and cultural studies, anthropology, geography, sociology etc.). Critical theory is any mental schema which abstracts a model, explanation, speculation, hypothesis or method of action for any aspect of social life. It is our contention, therefore, that some of the best works in architectural history – best that is both for architectural historians to consider in relation to their own research, and for those who wish to understand and confront the received history in which we live each day – do not in fact necessarily have the label "architectural history" on their back cover. They are, however, of direct relevance to architectural and city history, such that it is possible to speak of the "difference that theory makes."¹⁶

This, in turn, raises the secondary question of how theory relates to the historical and critical study of architecture. What difference does theory indeed make? It occurs in nine ways.

Theory as objects of study

First, theory can be the object of study for histories of architecture. This can occur as an historical discourse about particular theories, describing their content and development and intimating at their relevance to architecture. Here, critics and historians change their primary focus from architecture to theory, often using the former as a way in to the latter. Alternatively, historians may study the ways in which architects

have deployed theory in order to inform their design practices. Here, instead of "architectural theory" being viewed as the autonomous realm in which architects discuss their design methodologies, such theory can also be seen to encompass abstract ideas from outside of architecture. Finally, historians may, while accepting the centrality of the figure of the architect, interpret the architect's design process through the lens of critical theory.

New architectures

Second, critical theory in itself has the potential to tell us something different about the way people go about their lives other than through the conventional architectural history discourse. Simply put, the range of ideas in critical theory offers the chance to see architecture as something other than buildings, compositional techniques or architect-based practices. This theory is a space of imaginative abstraction outside of the immediate remits and dictates of *architectural practice*, and it is therefore here that the conventional objects of study may be displaced out of their normative arena, such that they are challenged, made wider, more varied, less predictable. Theorised history thus, to transpose Fredric Jameson's account of materialist history, "does its work ultimately by undermining the very foundations, framework, constitutive presuppositions, of the specialized disciplines themselves" not in order to erase such disciplines but to disclose "an *Other* of the discipline, an outside, a limit, the revelation of the *extrinsic*, which it is felt to be scandalous and unscholarly to introduce into a carefully regulated traditional debate."¹⁷ Architecture is not, then, lost or reduced in the process of theorised interpretations but, conversely, is found once again and made richer, more significant to the world in general.

Framing questions

While finding new objects to study is an important part of theorised history, as Griselda Pollock¹⁸ and, more recently, Leonie Sandercock point out, "simply adding new stories is not enough. There is a difference between rewriting history by adding the forgotten or repressed contributions of (for example) women and retheorizing history by using gender or race as categories of analysis."¹⁹ Third, therefore, critical theory can provide a theoretical outside from which to challenge conventional representations. Seemingly conventional subjects, such as a particular building, can be given a new meaning and a new lease of life by posing different questions. Here, the questions asked of architecture are challenged. This theory is a space of imaginative abstraction outside of the immediate remits and dictates of the *historical discourse*, and it is therefore here that the questions most commonly asked of architecture may be revised, such that they too, like the objects of study in architectural history, are also made wider, more varied, less predictable.

Critical history

However, in any intersection of architectural history and critical theory the latter cannot say anything it likes of the former. Rather, there is an interplay between critical theory and the architectural history which, epistemologically, is not a freely associative criticism, one which simply uses architecture from which to spring in to open speculation that, in Barthes' terms, "has in its favour the right of the signifier to spread out where it will,"²⁰ but which instead calls upon history in order to limit the terms of engagement while at the same time posing questions of it.

To criticize . . . is to put into crisis, something which is not possible without evaluating the conditions of the crisis (its limits), without considering its historical moment.²¹

Critical theorised history is then a form of "criticism" which is determined by methodology rather than by a temporal distance from its objects of study. Architectural histories of this kind can be histories of the present as well as of the past.

Interdisciplinary debates

Fifth, the audience or readership of architectural history can also be developed. Too often architectural history is directed either at an audience seen to be comprised solely of architects and/or of architectural "tourists" concerned more with simply seeing constructions than understanding architecture according to the full range of its interpretative potentialities. The task here, then, is to put across the meaning, the relevance of architecture to those who are either too immersed or, alternatively, not immersed enough in its culture. And the way to do this is not to present architecture as an autonomous activity, which can be appreciated only by being fully engaged in its ways or by watching respectively from afar, but as something capable of being inserted and understood in wider comprehensions of cultural production.

Such a task, can, of course, be achieved by showing the economic, social and political contexts of architecture, and a large number of architectural histories do exactly this. However, as Manfredo Tafuri has argued, such contexts are not unitary formations:

to displace the investigation from a text . . . to a context is not sufficient. The context binds together . . . [b]ut it is constantly broken up by "technical accidents": . . . tactical manoeuvres that obscurely intersect larger strategies . . . subterranean ideologies that nevertheless act on an intersubjective level . . . diverse techniques of domination, each of which possess its own untranslatable language.²²

If architectural histories are to consider context as part of their subject matter, they must also confront and develop the various theorisations and interpretative methods that others have already used to analyse them. The fifth challenge, therefore, is not only that architecture must be placed as an historical subject within various historical contexts, but also that architectural history should engage in the interdisciplinary debates centred on different theorisations of the cultural. Here, the "audience" is seen to include academic and intellectual debates, themselves wrestling with the turbulent nexus of society, space and time in the context of critical theories of all kinds.

Disclosing methodology

Sixth, by engaging with critical theory historians can make explicit their own methodologies to the readers, allowing the latter to more fully comprehend (and hence question) what they are reading. To use a theatrical analogy here, this means disclosing not just the stage scene itself, but also all of the various pulleys, ropes, screens and trapdoors, as well as performative staging effects such as music, lighting and narrative, that help make up the staging and theatrical process. This, then, and to continue the theatrical analogy, is a Brechtian approach, one which deliberately deploys distancing effects (or Brecht's *V-Effekte*) in order to disclose the constructed nature of history.

It is important to realise that this is more than just a technical operation, but an attack on the epistemology (from the Greek *episteme* = knowledge) of history as the narration of past events. Such a history is one where the historical object is explicitly seen to be as much produced by historical writing as being the starting point from which historical writing springs.

The problem arises of knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed.²³

In other words, architecture is seen to be produced by architectural history as much as architectural history is founded on architecture. Epistemologically, therefore, the reader is encouraged to consider the very grounds on which historical representations are formed, as well as to consider the events of history, and hence is encouraged to think about the constructed nature of all events, from history to the present day.

Self-reflexivity

Seventh, critical theory makes historians themselves conscious of what they are doing, and so able to consider not only the ostensible object of study, but also the development of the critical field that focuses on and helps to create that object. As

Henri Lefebvre and Roland Barthes both point out, this is essential, for all intellectual enterprises must be self-critical in order to properly exist.

There can be no philosophy without a critique of philosophy and a refusal to "philosophize." Equally, there can be no science without a critique of the scientific canon and science in general, no psychology without a critique of psychologism, no history without a critique of historicism. And so on and so forth.²⁴

All criticism must include in its discourse an implicit reflection on itself; every criticism is a criticism of the work and a criticism of itself. In other words, criticism is not at all a table of results or a body of judgements, it is essentially an activity.²⁵

Just as the reader is encouraged to consider the constructed nature of history, so too must the historian also consider the procedures and assumptions by which they operate. For architectural history, this means that the discipline is forever, in Tafuri's terms, in crisis:

History is . . . an analytical construction that is never definite and always provisional; an instrument of deconstruction of ascertainable realities . . . With the fading away of the dream of knowledge as a means to power, the constant struggle between the analysis and its objects – their irreducible tension – remains. Precisely this tension is "productive:" the historical "project" is always the "project of a crisis."²⁶

Once again, this historical endeavour is always and already an epistemological one, seeking to continually revise the grounds of knowledge as well as what historical knowledge might say of particular architectural events, actions and spaces.

Re-engagement with theory

Eighth, and as the last quotation implies, it is not just architectural history that is to be rethought through an encounter with critical theory. Critical theory is not just another arena in which to think architecture – simply writing or reading such texts at this level of abstraction is not enough. One common approach within theorised architectural history is to follow Gilles Deleuze in treating theory as "exactly like a box of tools."²⁷ Well, this is both true and not true. On the one hand, considering critical theories in relation to architecture provides many advantages, as argued above, enabling those within architecture to extend and validate their choice of subject matter, to engage with other disciplines, and to import in new interpretations and speculations. Texts and ideas from the realm of critical theory allow the possibility for this to happen – they are that "box of tools."

On the other hand, there is, of course, far more to rethinking architecture than reading and contemplating; it cannot be the simple setting of critical theory alongside architecture, or of just using critical theory as an operative procedure that is itself left unmodified. Such technicity runs the risk of producing an architectural history that although pretending to be polemical, argumentative, political and transgressive is, in reality, a toothless and endless reiteration of other people's ideas – and here one might recall F.H. Bradley's denigration of Hegel's idealist logic as "a ghostly ballet of bloodless categories."²⁸ Instead, then, of treating the "tool" of critical theory against architecture in the manner of a simple application of a device against a remote object (comparable to Martin Heidegger's *Vorhandenheit*, or "presentness-at-hand" of the object "out there"), the architectural historian should consider the tool-object in relation to themselves and their object of study (cf. Heidegger's *Zuhandenheit*, or "readiness-to-hand").²⁹

Hence, for example, the concern of the editors of *Architecture and Feminism* to avoid the more contingent relation of "architecture *if* feminism" or the more additive relation of "architecture *plus* feminism" in favour of the more "strategic and speculative" conjuncture of "architecture *and* feminism," a relation that not only exchanges concepts but also seeks to open up a new ground for both conceptual schema.³⁰ Those concerned with the engagement with critical theory must, therefore, also *return* architecture to critical theories, not only showing architecture's value to external theories that seek to understand the cultural world, but also altering and modifying (in effect, producing) those theories accordingly. To quote marxist historian E.P. Thompson, arguing against what he viewed as the overly theorised formulations of structuralist marxists such as Louis Althusser,

Historical practice is above all engaged in this kind of dialogue; with an argument between received, inadequate, or ideologically-informed concepts of hypotheses on the one hand, and fresh or inconvenient evidence on the other; with the elaboration of hypotheses; with the testing of these hypotheses against the evidence, which may involve interrogating existing evidence in new ways, or renewed research to confirm or disprove the new notions; with discarding those hypotheses which fail these tests, and refining or revising those which do, in the light of this engagement.³¹

The rethinking of theory and history must be a two-way process – not an application of one to the other, but a true intersection, an inter-production of both at once.

There is also another dimension to this intersection. If explicitly theorised history is concerned with the return to theory, and is also concerned with interdisciplinarity, then, *a fortiori*, it must also provide a challenge not only to itself and to theory but also to those other disciplines. To quote Tafuri once again, history "calls into question the

problem of 'limit:' it confronts the division of labor in general; it tends to go outside of its own boundaries; *it projects the crisis of techniques already given.*"³² History does not simply contextualise or link together different disciplines, but situates itself in the discontinuities between them in order to further complexify that interrelation.

Praxis

History has always been implicated in the development of the city and its architecture, a relationship that has become increasingly complicated and fractured from the nineteenth century onward.³³ So in this sense we know that whatever architectural historians write will, in some way, make a difference to architecture. This means that historians should take an interest in and responsibility for the potential ramifications of their thoughts and actions; historians should consider not only *what* they might want the world to be but also *on what grounds* their work might relate to that possible world.

In constructing a critical and theorised history, this engagement, these grounds, necessarily take on a particular form. Any critical theory aims not only at the understanding of the world but also at a simultaneous transformation of both itself and that world "beyond" theory.³⁴ Critical theory is in this sense always aimed at liberation and emancipation – not just social and political liberation of the kind associated with class revolution and new economic systems, but with the creation of a total revolution that encompasses the full scope of productive creativity, in the fullest sense of that term, including not only architecture and art, forms of making and writing, but also emotions and desires, loves and actions of all kinds.

To undertake this process in architecture does not, therefore, mean finding one overarching metatheory that is capable of explaining everything at one fell swoop – as Sandercock recognises:

The search for such a totalizing theory seems a misguided one, pushing us toward some kind of universal generalizing in our work, predetermining what we are going to find in our researches, ignoring the Foucauldian insight that power begins in little places and in terms of little things, and closing off the possibilities of human agency.³⁵

Nor does it mean what Tafuri calls "operative criticism," that kind of architectural history (from James Fergusson to Nikolaus Pevsner, Morton Shand and Bruno Zevi) which seeks to explicitly support and promote a particular kind of architectural design practice, i.e. that kind of history which "has as its objective the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalised."³⁶ And nor does it mean constructing scientific relations between cause and effect, between the knowable past, plannable

present and predictable future³⁷ – architectural history is not about certainty. Above all, it does not mean saying what is good or bad (a Kantian project of justifying historical discourse in terms of what ought to be),³⁸ correct or erroneous – architectural ideology is not an error or a slippage between illusion and reality,³⁹ but is always a negotiation of different external contexts, internal procedures, possible meanings and potential occurrences. Architectural history is as much in the realm of the perhaps and the maybe as in the therefore and the consequently.

Rather, the kind of theoretically informed praxis we seek here is one that is far more open, more fractured, more provisional in its tasks – a praxis which is about possibility as much as about prescription. We need, therefore, theorised histories of all kinds, those that deal with issues of gender and race, those that deal with mind and body, those that deal with materiality and idealism, those that bewitch and those that puzzle. We need theorised histories that will inform the ever-changing range of practices that intersect with cities and their spaces, with architecture. We need theorised histories that help us to think and act critically, now and in the future. As Jonathan Charley has argued,

If critical theory is to become truly critical and not simply a means of giving academic weight to traditional debates over aesthetic hierarchies, it must at some point return to the critique of revolution, to the rethinking of how the built environment is produced, to the continuation of the assault on capital, and to the maintenance of a belief in social progress and human emancipation that is not defined by the reproduction of bourgeois utopias.⁴⁰

Such a critical, theorised architectural history will share the intensity of intellectual energy and the concern for the provisional nature of historical knowledge that Jameson finds in “dialectical history” (and of which he cites Tafuri’s *Architecture and Utopia* as an exceedingly rare example),⁴¹ but will be distinguished from dialectical history in not sharing its sense of inevitable failure and unresolvable contradictions, offering instead a utopian impulse that is forever awash with the incessant waves of human creativity. Such theorised history is a transformer, a constant movement toward achieving new forms and contents of thought and action, an activity that perpetually speculates on the varied differences both of architecture as it now is and of architecture as it is yet to become. Then, and only then, is architecture rethought.⁴²

It is this nine-fold challenge – to theory as the object of study, to new architectures, to the framing of interpretative questions, to the critical nature of history, to interdisciplinary debates, to the opening of methodological procedures, to self-critical development of the discipline, to re-engagement with critical theory, to praxis – that

constitutes critical theory’s most important potential contributions to architectural history.

Some voice *a priori* objections to such intentions. The architectural historian Gavin Stamp, for example, has described one of these kinds of theorisations, poststructuralism, as “an irrelevant masturbation.”⁴³ But if there is going to be any onanism in architectural history, then it is going to be done by those who get on with it only by themselves. If architectural history ignores the kinds of theoretical explorations undertaken by other disciplines, it runs the risk of doing something that, while perhaps perfectly enjoyable, will be meaningful only as a self-referential exercise and thus irrelevant to anyone else. Architecture, the social art, should surely be rendered relevant and enjoyable to everyone, and not just to architects and architectural historians. The history of architecture is something to share.

Of course, discussing theoretical concepts like deconstruction and post-modernism may not be the best things with which, for example, to commence an introductory study of architecture – they certainly need to be introduced carefully and intelligently into the discourse – but neither are they quite the “virus” or “disease” that those like Stamp would have us believe. Such things enable historians, practitioners, students and non-academics alike to address other disciplines and current conditions and preoccupations, and thus to diversify the significance of architecture. This kind of intellectual contemplation enriches both historical and other ways of conceiving of architecture. Dealing with matters of race, sexuality, class, psychoanalysis, social space, of how meanings are created and transferred, with experience, political action, gender and so on, dealing with these kinds of things in both architectural production specifically and cultural production in general maximises the opportunity to learn all that architecture is and might be capable of. It maximises the opportunity to learn from the past, and so to relate history to the present. To speak about architectural history without reference to these things, without reference to other disciplines, without reference to theory, is not only to dismiss architecture’s relevance to the world in general, but also to trivialise current conditions and preoccupations. And, to quote Sandercock once again, “to understand these systematic exclusions, we need theory.”⁴⁴ Only then will we realise that architecture is present everywhere, that our lives are necessarily architectural in ways that we are only just beginning to comprehend, and that consequently, if I might reverse one of the most Lefebvrian of sentiments from the events of 1968, beneath the beach, lies the pavement.⁴⁵

THREE TENDENCIES

When we first began this project, it was our intention to structure the text according to the kinds of theories that different authors deployed in their intersection with

architecture. There were to be sections on theories of language, theories of social categories, theories of action, theories of knowledge, and so forth. This, however, proved impossible for a number of reasons, not least the resistance (rightly so) of many contributors to being pigeon-holed in such a manner. And just as importantly, their work indeed supports this resistance through its determinedly interdisciplinary and intertheoretical nature: most if not all of the chapters draw on not one but several kinds of critical theory, using it not as a singular reference point but as a varied terrain in which to reconfigure architecture and its theorised interpretations.

Nor can this text be a comprehensive review of all kinds of critical theories which might relate to architecture. The continuous invention of new social concerns, new arenas of architectural action and the extraordinary acceleration of all manner of critical theory means that such an encyclopaedic approach not only would run contrary to the very nature of critical theory (which is itself an historical production, forever changing in relation to contemporary conditions) but also would in any case be impossible in any practical manner.

The structuring of this book does not, therefore, follow the *kinds* of theories with which contributors engage, but rather the strategies and tactics they have used in this engagement. This, therefore, is a book structured around neither architectural subject nor interpretative theory, but around epistemology – around the different grounds by which contributors seek to know the subject of which they speak and by which they construct their histories. If, as is argued above, the relation of critical theory to architectural theory is one which poses epistemological challenges, then it is indeed appropriate to respond along similar epistemological grounds.

We should point out straight away that this, too, is a kind of pigeon-holing, in that many contributors may easily fall in to more than one of the three strategies that we identify here. Therefore we prefer to identify not strategies *per se* but *tendencies* of methodology, where contributors tend to move towards a particular mode of intersecting history and theory rather than adopting it solely as a prescriptive operational system.

Tendency 1 Theory as objects of study

Perhaps the most obvious intersection of critical theory and architectural history is to treat the former as an object of study in its own right, as an entity to be described and interpreted autonomously as well as in relation to architecture. Neil Leach, in Chapter 2, undertakes such a task in using Walter Benjamin's thoughts on photography as a starting point from which to spring off into a more lengthy exegesis of, successively, Benjamin's theory of mimesis, James George Frazer's anthropological consideration of sympathetic magic, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical concerns and Theodor Adorno's marxism. Leach then returns briefly to photography, reinterpreting

photographs less as representations of particular figures or buildings and more as means by which one might identify creatively and imaginatively with the world. In a close interweaving of theory and architecture, Darell W. Fields, in Chapter 3, seeks to deliberately "mis-read" the philosophy of history and ideas on aesthetics in the work of the nineteenth century philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. Through a highly intense and logical methodological procedure, Fields shows how the concept of race and blackness is embedded both in Hegel's texts and within the notion of architecture that such texts set up. Partly transgressive, partly hermeneutical, Fields uses theory on theory to reconsider a foundational concept of architecture.

Another approach to the treatment of theory as an object of study in its own right is to consider the way in which critical theories of various kinds might be used directly or indirectly by architects themselves in their designs for architecture. In Chapter 4, Beatriz Colomina considers the work of the architect Frederick Kiesler and, in particular, his project for the "Space House." In Colomina's careful interpretation of architectural design, theory and published reactions, Kiesler's notions of eroticism, seduction and psychosexuality are brought to the fore. Such concepts are shown to exist as ideational architectural entities, in relation to particular architectural elements such as walls and doors, and through architectural materials like rubber, sponge, straw, rayon and oiled silk. An even more explicit exemplar of critical theory used in design is provided by Chapter 5. Here, Clive R. Knights takes on one of the most notorious intersections of theory and architecture, that of deconstruction in the work of Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida. Knights shows that both architect (Eisenman) and philosopher (Derrida) fail to account for the human subject, and, in terms of architecture, how Eisenman fails to realise that his work is a representation of a representation. Significantly, Knights works here both *within* the logic of deconstruction and *outside* of that logic, deploying Ricoeurian hermeneutics to sustain his own argument.

Tendency 2 Theorised interpretation

As the above intimate, it is not just inside or outside of architecture that critical theory may be seen to exist. It is in the interplay between the two that historians can focus their interpretative efforts, using theory to reinterpret architecture and architecture to reinterpret theory. It is the epistemological category, therefore, of "interpretation" that is important here, that intellectual and active space in-between the historian and their subject, that space which is neither purely subjective nor objective, that space which distinguishes history from the disciplines of science, social science and the arts.⁴⁶

One of the most fruitful arenas for this kind of intellectual labour has come in the rethinking of the modernist condition, and, in Chapter 6, Sarah Wigglesworth

confronts one of the seminal buildings of architectural modernism, that of the *Maison de Verre* designed by Pierre Chareau and Bernard Bijvoet. Focusing in particular on ideas of medicine, surgery and fetishism, Wigglesworth draws on alternatively feminism, marxism, psychoanalysis and film theory in order to wrench the building out of a conventional architectural historical discourse on form and technology into another about disavowal and patriarchy within architectural practice. A somewhat different revision of a canonic modernist architect is provided by Helen Thomas in Chapter 7, where Thomas considers the *Los Jardines del Pedregal de San Ángel* by Mexican architect Luis Barragán. Part architecture and part property development, the *Jardines del Pedregal* is considered by Thomas under different conceptions of time, drawn from the poet T.S. Eliot, the eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant and the historian Fernand Braudel. If Thomas' interpretation is partly driven by postcolonial techniques of breaking down universalist narratives, then Chapter 8, by Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, is even more explicitly postcolonialist in its identification of themes of hybridity and otherness in (post)modern architecture. Although informed by theories of cultural theorists Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco and historian Edward Said, Fraser and Kerr consider two building projects, the Getty Center in Los Angeles by architect Richard Meier and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by architect Frank Gehry, to show how a specifically architectural contribution might be made to the postcolonial debate. Here, architecture is seen to be not a resultant effect of difference but a mechanism for its creation.

Two other chapters in this part likewise consider modernity, but move away from the deliberate architectural modernism as artefacts consciously designed by architects. In Chapter 9, Henry Urbach turns his attention not only to the *Maison de la Publicité* by Oscar Nitzsche but also to the quotidian streets and electric lighting of Paris. Using concepts of gender and the psychoanalytic concerns of Julia Kristeva and Freud as his guides, Urbach shows how neon and electric light was seen as feminised and hence at once seductive yet threatening. Historians of architectural modernism, such as Henry Russell Hitchcock, Pevsner and Zevi, consequently demonstrated their own photophobia by excluding such discussions from their histories. Zeynep Çelik, in Chapter 10, confronts a rather different kind of non-architect modernism in the form of the French colonialist interventions in the city of al-Jaza'ir (Algiers) during the nineteenth century. Comparing these events with Orientalist scene paintings by Osman Handi, and drawing on the ideas of Said and postcolonialist theoretician Gayatri Spivak, Çelik shows how not only new objects but also new interpretations must be made if architectural history as the history of both the Western canon and of previously repressed peoples is to be rewritten.

It is not, of course, only modernity that can be reconsidered in this way. In the final chapter of this part, Chapter 11, Diane Ghirardo considers the history of women

and space in the Italian Renaissance city of Ferrara. Using detailed empirical and archival work alongside more theoretical ideas drawn from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and (implicitly) historian Michel Foucault, Ghirardo discloses how concerns of eroticism, the spatial control of bodies, and power pervaded women's relation to the streets, laundries, property, convents and other architectures of the city. In doing so, Ghirardo shows how archival sources, architectural historians and architecture in general are all implicated in a patriarchal exclusion of women.

Tendency 3 Theorising historical methodology

As the chapters by Çelik and Ghirardo in particular make clear, it is not just the interpreting categories of architectural history that become modified in the intersection with architectural history – the epistemological foundations, procedures and political objectives of architectural history become challenged, twisted and reworked. Here, architectural history stops being just the history of architecture, but becomes a different kind of history and maybe even not a “history” at all – it becomes that procedure, partly theoretical, partly historical and partly speculative, which refers to things architectural in order to construct its arguments and speculations.

A stimulating exemplar of this kind of procedure is provided by Chapter 12, in which Sarah Chaplin directs her attention toward Las Vegas. Referring to Foucault, Baudrillard, the Situationist provocateur Guy Debord and to cultural theorists Gianni Vattimo and Arthur Kroker, it is the concept of heterotopia in particular that Chaplin uses not just to drive her interpretation of Las Vegas but also to construct her chapter. Categories of naming, taming, saming and gaming lead to a consideration not just of past events but also of the “irruption of possibilities,” and hence of the future as much as of the present. In Chapter 13, Iain Borden provides a similarly close intersection of critical theory and object, this time looking at three different kinds of boundary (exclusionary, identity-challenging, commodified) in contemporary London. Referring to sociologist Georg Simmel, anthropologist Marc Augé, philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Lefebvre and Heidegger, Borden reconceptualises architecture not as a thing but as a production formed out of physicality, politics and social experience.

The next pair of chapters, as with many of the other contributions to this volume, both confront the category of gender, although to rather different effect. Jane Rendell, in Chapter 14, looks at “rambling texts” and prostitution in nineteenth century London. Rendell uses the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Jacques Lacan and, in particular, Luce Irigaray in order to consider issues of sexuality, movement, masculinity, class, exchange, consumption and mimicry. This is not so much a history of Regency London as, in Rendell's own terms, a “starting point for considering the gendering of public space through the pursuit of pleasure” and, in particular, a problematisation of the conventional trope of the “separate spheres” of public and private. Barbara Penner

in Chapter 15 similarly looks at a text, this time *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf. Penner's concern here, however, is with the processes of identity formation, arguing alternatively with and against the ideas of historians Joan Scott and Elizabeth Wilson and literary critic Toril Moi. Rather than treating Woolf's writings as historical evidence or proof of women's experiences in the city, Penner shows how they represent the production and reproduction of such different gendered urban experiences. Architectural history here is concerned not with evidential facts, buildings or events, but with processes, social constructions and formations.

It is perhaps significant that the last pair of chapters in this book (as with many of the others in this book) are both written by those who are active architectural educationalists and designers. If we are indeed "in an era where discourse is as important as design,"⁴⁷ then it is important to realise how each may be implicated in the other, not just as mutual referents but as a simultaneous project. In Chapter 16, Jeremy Till provides an intersection between the architectural projects and writings of Le Corbusier, Eisenman, Giedion and high-tech architects, and the philosophy of Kant and Lefebvre. The literature of James Joyce, particularly *Ulysses*, provides an additional triangulation point. Focusing on the nature of (spatialised) time, Till's concern here is not with causal links between philosophy and architecture, but the very distinction between them. His aim, in doing so, is to help "administer the practice of architecture" – a way of thinking which is simultaneously historical, theoretical and practical. Katherine Shonfield, in the concluding Chapter 17, also has similar epistemological complexifications in mind. Moving successively from the marxism of urban geographer David Harvey to the anthropology of Mary Douglas to the role of the fiction, Shonfield seeks to posit interpretation as a kind of architectural theory in its own right, and hence to blur the boundaries between criticism, history and design. As Shonfield concludes, this is of particular relevance to urban development, transgressing the categories of specialisation, expertise, professional and other practices which restrict the potential culture of architecture and the city.

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