Option 3

Kieran Long

ARCHITECTURE AND CRITICISM

"It may be argued that Ariadne achieved the first work of architecture, since it was she who gave Theseus the ball of thread by means of which he found his way out of the labyrinth after having killed the minotaur. Thus while Ariadne did not build the labyrinth, she was the one who interpreted it; and this is architecture in the modern sense of the term."


This course examines the relationship between architecture and its representations in the media, particularly architectural criticism as it appears outside of the academic architectural discourse. The objective is to make connections between the discourse of architecture and that of a more general media environment, showing how each affects the other, while demonstrating that a vigorous critical discourse is a reciprocal part of architectural culture. The course will also look at architects (in particular the Spanish practitioners Ignasi de Sola Morales and Rafael Moneo) who have written on their own and others' work in a critical idiom. This is also in an attempt to prove that Susan Sontag's assertion that 'to write is to practice, with particular intensity and attentiveness, the art of reading' can also be applied to the practice of architecture.

The practice of architecture has always been accompanied by a vital and defining critical discourse that exists beyond the academy, particularly in the hundreds of journals, magazines and newspapers that comment upon global architectural production. More than any other artform, architects depend on the media to achieve an influential position in the history of their discipline, even since the rise of global air travel and digital communications. The critic plays a vital part in this.

The heyday of 20th century architectural criticism coincided with the height of the modern movement, with editors of magazines influencing architectural production to a huge extent. Italy has perhaps the greatest tradition; Alessandro Mendini, Giancarlo De Carlo, Gio Ponti and Aldo Rossi were just some of the figures responsible for editing architecture magazines in the 40s, 50s and 60s. In the UK, this was mirrored by the rise in importance of editors, particularly those of the Architectural Review. Here they tended to be critics rather than architects. What Nikolaus Pevsner was to high modernism in the 40s, Reyner Banham became to Team X and James Stirling in the 60s, 70s and 80s. Writers like these also established the AR as a major campaigning magazine of national political importance, exemplified by publications such as the Outrage issue, a savage attack on the degradation of Britain's urban environments.

The hegemony of these few editors could not last, and critique now exists mainly outside of the mainstream architectural press. While the consolidation of magazine ownership has tamed the critical atmosphere in the journals, this critique has been continued elsewhere. The last 20 years of post-structuralist theory has encouraged artists and writers to undertake critiques of a broader scope than is typical in architectural publications. Whether this be the architectural "criticism" that we read into the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, or the performance critique of Andrea Fraser to the unconventional writing of historian Alan Balfour and the photography of the Bechers.

The aspiration is also to consider the writers as writers first and architectural commentators second, considering style as concurrent with content, to reveal the agendas at work in architectural publishing. But the intention is also for the course to concentrate on very contemporary sources, and encourage the students not just to reflect on this critical context, but to participate in it. Playwright Henrik Ibsen wrote that "to write is to sit in judgement on yourself". In this way, learning to read critically must be concurrent with learning to design.

Key books:
  K. Rattenbury, This is Not Architecture, London: Routledge, 2002
Key Journals:
- Domus
- Volume
- Icon
- Architectural Review
- Building Design
- El Croquis
- http://gutter.curbed.com/

Lecture programme

1. The publication of buildings in the 20th century

Architectural journals were vitally important to the advancement of architecture during the modern period, often edited by, or in collaboration with, some of the foremost practitioners of the day. This lecture will look at certain parts of the histories of the most significant 20th century journals: Domus, Architectural Review, Casabella, including short pieces by their most significant contributors such as Giancarlo De Carlo, Alessandro Mendini, Nikolaus Pevsner, Reyner Banham and others. It will also consider the attempts made by these magazines to change the way that architecture is represented and consumed. The AR's Outrage and Manplan issues will be considered, along with more recent examples in Archis and Volume magazine. These latter were inspired by the work of Dutch theoreticians and architects, who are probably the most innovative in contemporary architecture publishing. This lecture will also sketch out how magazines work in practical terms (with all the financial and political compromises) and how that affects output.

2. The Architecture Scene

Architecture has always had its stars and starmakers, and it is here that any critical discourse around the profession reveals itself as less than objective. One of the foremost self-mythologising architects of our time, Peter Eisenman, has written that 'Good architects will be remembered for their buildings, great ones for their books.' This lecture will sketch the history of the relationship between publications and fame, and show how certain practitioners dominate architectural discourse as a result of their associations and publications. The lecture will also consider the history of two of the most important crucibles and institutions that maintain these reputations - the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Venice Biennale of Architecture.

Bouman and R. van Toorn, A Conversation with Giancarlo De Carlo, in Volume #2,
Catalogues of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2004 and 2006
FAT, 'How to become a famous architect', www.fat.co.uk
K. Long, 'Venice Architecture Biennale', in Icon 017, November 2004

3. The work of architecture in the age of mechanical reproduction

Architect and critic Ignasi de Sola-Morales (1934-2001) occupies a paradoxical position in the world of 20th century architecture. He was the author of many essays setting out an innovative critical agenda, attempting to unite his admiration for Gilles Deleuze with the phenomenological tradition more typically admired in his native Spanish architectural culture. He was also the architect responsible for guiding the reconstruction of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona pavilion in Barcelona in 1986. This is one of the most resonant projects of recent architectural history for students of architecture and its relationship to the media. The reconstruction gave one of the most published (and least seen) buildings of all time a second, facsimile life.

Sola-Morales understands himself as caught between two disciplines - architecture and criticism. This is not always a comfortable for him.

This lecture will look at two Sola-Morales essays which consider subjectivity and authenticity in relation to architectural criticism. The first is his short response to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, and the second an impassioned consideration of the role of writing in architectural practice in relation to what he calls 'the insecurities of those working on the practical side.'


4. Journalistic method

This lecture will consider what happens when a strictly journalistic world view is brought to bear on architectural subject-matter. The tools of a journalist are research, observation, recording, and will often use anecdote, quotation or reference in an explicitly
This lecture will look at two recent texts by journalists that use these strategies in an effective way, and will question the role of personal testimony and opinion in architectural criticism. The first is an essay about Prince Charles’ attack on the architectural profession in 1984, and how both sides of this argument subsequently manipulated the media. The second is the final chapter from The Destruction of Memory, a recent journalistic work about the role of architecture in war. These highly-emotive essays pose the question: what is admissible in a work of architectural criticism?

5. The Ego of the Critic

Reyner Banham was probably the greatest British critic of architecture in the 20th century. A compelling character as well as a lavishly talented writer, Banham formed a key plank of the British and global architectural scene in the 60s and 70s. This lecture will look at his shorter essays (many of which appeared in architectural journals such as the Architectural Review and Architects Journal, and others in national magazines like the New Statesman and the Times Literary Supplement) and chart his development from art historian and specialist, to becoming the eyes and ears of the British architecture scene abroad, and key confidant of the likes of James Stirling and Cedric Price. Banham had the ability to provoke in both general magazines, and in those intended for a much less specialist audience. But his deceptively accessible style often concealed the entrenchment of his critical position.

6. Architectural photography

The manipulation of a reader’s perception is not the concern of authors and editors alone. Photography plays the most vital part in forming our view of the world, and no matter how architectural photographers (or indeed their clients the architects) have attempted to retain the conventions of blue skied, geometrically corrected imagery, the photography of buildings exists within a huge expanded visual culture of photography and film. There is an ongoing tension between objectivity and representation in architectural photography of the kind investigated in the work of German artists Bernd and Hilla Becher.

This lecture will present a short history of architectural photography, and then look briefly at the implications for architecture of film, mainly through looking at the writing of Kath Shonfield. Shonfield’s work applies a film-maker’s logic to architectural criticism, and in doing so shows the popular representations of the city in movies to be more revealing than those of architecture journals.

7. Andrea Fraser and the direct action Institutional Critique

The tendency of modern critique is to move away from considering artworks as objects that can be considered in some isolated, aesthetic field. Indeed, institutional critique can be observed in the most banal pieces of writing about architecture in newspapers, such as in the recent controversy over Jean Nouvel’s Musee du Quai Branly in Paris. But what happens when that pan-linguistic impulse is taken to an extreme?

The work and writings of the American performance artist Andrea Fraser push these questions to their limits. Her career as an artist began by her giving tours of institutions posing as a museum docent, describing (to bemused visitors) water coolers and escape signs in terms usually reserved for art works. In her later work, her institutional critique is trained on globalised art institutions and the environments that house them. This lecture examines her powerful essay ‘Isn’t this a Wonderful Place’, and looks at the way she deconstructs the power relationships of the institutions of the Guggenheim, the transparent strategies of ‘cultural regeneration’ and their effects, all through the lens of an intimate and ultimately unsettling encounter with Frank Gehry’s building.

A Fraser, ‘Isn’t this a Wonderful Place? (a tour of a tour of the Guggenheim Bilbao), in Museum Highlights, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005
Fraser, ‘Welcome to the Wadsworth’, in Museum Highlights, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005
8. Where's the original? Architectural criticism as fragment and record

What happens when the original no longer exists? Writing can provide the elegy for a lost work of art, or course, but in architectural culture a publication is often the only trace of a lost or never-existing building, a replacement for its material existence. This lecture will consider some examples of publications, exhibitions or palimpsests that stand in for a lost reality. One of these buildings is Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona pavilion, which stood for only 11 months between March 1929 and February 1930, was one of the most influential projects of the modern movement, was widely published at the time and then rebuilt in post-Franco Barcelona in 1986.

Perhaps the city in the world that suffers the most significant architectural gaps is Berlin, a city reshaped and rebuilt by war, dictatorship and division. This lecture will also consider the role of Alan Balfour's book about this city that provides a narrative of a place constantly in the process of reimagination. His book attempts to deal wholesale with the reordering of a place after the traumatic high of the demolition of the Berlin Wall. In a way, his book is a proposition of an historical order that might be Berlin's only chance for spiritual and architectural reunification.

K. Rattenbury, 'Iconic Pictures', in This is Not Architecture, London: Routledge, 2002

**TIMETABLE ITTA 200607**  Kieran Long

Thu 19 Oct 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture introduction  Teresa Stoppani

Thu 02 Nov - Sat 04 Nov 2006
H&T visit to the Architecture Biennale, Venice

Thu 09 Nov 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 1  Doreen Bernath

Thu 16 Nov 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 2  Andrew Leach

Thu 23 Nov 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 3  Lorens Holm

Thu 30 Nov 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 4  Oren Safdie

Thu 07 Dec 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 5  Grafton Architects

Wed 13 Dec 2006  18.30-20.00  M140
ITTA course introduction and lecture series presentations

Thu 14 Dec 2006  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 6  Johan Lagae

Thu 11 Jan 2007  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lectures Introduction  Kieran Long

Wed 17 Jan 2007  17.00-18.30  T401
ITTA Lecture 1. The publication of buildings in the 20th century

Thu 18 Jan 2007  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 1

Wed 24 Jan 2007  17.00-18.30  T401
ITTA Lecture 2. The Architecture Scene

Thu 25 Jan 2007  17.00-20.00  M055
Open Lecture 2

Wed 31 Jan 2007  17.00-18.30  T401
ITTA Lecture 3. The work of architecture in the age of mechanical reproduction
Thu 01 Feb 2007 17.00-20.00 M055
Open Lecture 3

Wed 07 Feb 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
ITTA Lecture 4. Journalistic method

Thu 08 Feb 2007 17.00-20.00 M055
Open Lecture 4

Wed 14 Feb 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
ITTA Lecture 5. The Ego of the Critic

Wed 21 Feb 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
ITTA Lecture 6. Architectural photography

Thu 22 Feb 2007 17.00-20.00 M055
Open Lecture 5

Wed 28 Feb 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
ITTA Lecture 7. Andrea Fraser and the direct action Institutional Critique

Thu 01 Mar 2007 17.00-20.00 M055
Open Lecture 6

Wed 07 Mar 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
Lecture 8. Where's the original? Architectural criticism as fragment and record

Wed 21 Mar 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
Tutorials

Wed 18 Apr 2007 17.00-18.30 T401
Tutorials

Wed 25 Apr 2007 SO
ITTA Final Submission

Wed 23 May 2007 10.00-11.30 M140
ITTA Feedback