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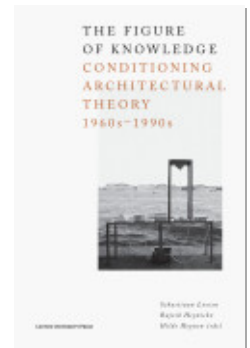
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A Discipline in the Making

Hilde Heynen

We started this book by wondering about the historiography of recent architectural theory, questioning the process of canonization, and suggesting that the act of history writing itself tends to obscure some of the factors that play a role in the actual unfolding of this field. Architectural theory, like other scholarly and scientific disciplines, is not a totally autonomous intellectual endeavor. It is conditioned by academic institutions, funding opportunities, publication channels, relations with the profession, and geopolitical constraints – to name just the most obvious elements. Historiography all too easily overlooks such factors, giving priority to narratives that focus on the most famous names and the most obvious movements and tendencies, making these ever more famous and obvious while unintentionally oppressing the many other strands and authors that might also merit attention. The factors guiding this narrowing-down process are rarely scrutinized, because they seem to be accidental rather than constitutive for the field. Post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms have nevertheless pointed out that these seemingly unimportant conditioning patterns contribute to the reproduction of a very specific figure of knowledge – a figure that is intimately entangled with a hegemonic, white, patriarchal, and commodified culture. Architectural theory, as represented in historiography, thus often falls short of what we might hope and expect it to be.

We are indeed witnessing a situation in which architectural theory, which supposedly thrived on post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial critiques, did not fully process these inputs in a thorough self-reflection. Late twentieth-century architectural theory, as it was canonized in the 1990s,¹ was thus mostly described as a field dominated by American EastCoast intellectuals, whose concerns rarely had to do with actual problems faced by architects in real-world situations. Mary McLeod pointed out this situation in her seminal 1996 paper on “‘Other’ Spaces and ‘Others’”:

What is disturbing is the link between theory and the architectural culture surrounding this theory. In the United States the focus on transgression in contemporary architecture circles seems to have contributed to a whole atmosphere of machismo and exclusion. One is reminded of how often avant-gardism is

a more polite label for the concerns of angry young men, sometimes graying young men. (...) These blatant social exclusions, under the mantle of a discourse that celebrates the “other” and “difference”, raise the issue of whether contemporary theorists and deconstructivist architects have focused too exclusively on formal subversion and negation as a mode of practice.²

The setup of the 2017 conference that generated many of the essays for this book explicitly addressed these issues. It asked contributors to “screen the unspoken rules of engagement” and focus on “singular and ‘minor’ expressions of theory” that might harbor in “local discourses.”³ Many contributors took up the challenge. Hence a reflection on the chapters that made it into this volume allows to identify some of the conditioning patterns that shaped the figure of late twentieth-century architectural theory (although I certainly cannot claim to be exhaustive in this analysis).

The modifying factors that stand out most clearly can be ordered under three headings. The first pattern has to do with the question of *what kind of knowledge* architectural theory strives towards, or, put differently: what other discipline(s) are considered to offer guidance and a model to aspire to? The second pattern relates to the question of *what is at stake* in architectural theory: how do architectural theorists see the added value of their work? What battles are they fighting and why? These questions are entangled with the third set of considerations, which focus on *positionality*. Here the questions are about geographical, institutional, and temporal factors that favor some voices, in some languages, while disadvantaging others.

What kind of knowledge?

In the time period after 1968, architectural theory changed gears, so it seems. There is a telling difference between Joan Ockman’s *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* and Michael Hays’s *Architectural Theory since 1968* – two volumes that were meant to work as a tandem.⁴ Ockman’s title did not highlight “theory” as a key word, which suggests that it was not yet configured as a separate discipline. Moreover, her set of authors comprised many more practicing architects than Hays’s did, and the texts she anthologized were much shorter. She thus selected from other *kinds* of text than Hays did. Generally, the texts that she chose were primarily oriented towards either a general public or practicing architects. Hays, on the other hand, selected more sophisticated, philosophically complex, and intellectually challenging texts for a readership composed of other theorists or mature students.

The authors in *The Figure of Knowledge* identify different frames of reference, according to which architectural theory is modeled on the basis of different scholarly

disciplines. In many chapters the pilot discipline is philosophy – as it was for Michael Hays. This is related to the urge of several architectural theorists to upgrade their discipline into a recognizable scholarly field that is part of the humanities. In contrast to this ambition, other authors continue to situate architectural discourse as more closely aligned with architectural and art criticism. Lastly there is a chapter that discusses architectural theories as implicit rather than explicit bodies of thought, underlying a series of practices that rarely are perceived as “architectural theory.”

1. Pilot discipline: philosophy

In both the opening and concluding chapters of this book, the main frame of reference is philosophy. André Loeckx’s chapter, which I coauthored [CHAPTER 1], deals with the vicissitudes of semiotics in architecture. Semiotics is the study of signs, originating from linguistics, but gaining increasing importance in the 1960s and 1970s as an instigator of seminal changes in philosophy. The French version of semiotics – semiology, based on the works of Ferdinand de Saussure – was implicated in the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism in that period. The Anglo-Saxon version – building upon the works of Charles Sanders Peirce and Charles W. Morris – became a reference point for aesthetics. The exciting insights into processes of signification and coding emerging from both these strands, generated an increasing interest in the philosophy of culture. Semiotics also inspired many developments in related fields such as literary theory, art theory, and cultural studies. No wonder that architectural critics and historians, interested in finding a solid basis for their understanding of architecture, turned to semiotics as a promising field that could foster a theory of architecture worthy of the name. Conversely, some semioticians – most notably Umberto Eco – turned to architecture as a complex field allowing them to test the productivity of their concepts. Loeckx and Heynen discuss the work of a plethora of architectural writers – including Geoffrey Broadbent, Charles Jencks, Philippe Panerai, Aldo Rossi, and Peter Eisenman – tracing how the philosophical changes induced by semiotics and semiology registered in architectural discourse. They critically engage with the difficult issue of how post-structuralist architectural discourse relates to everyday social reality, questioning the role of the architectural theorist as somebody potentially far removed from the concerns of practicing architects and the challenges implied by transforming cities. Their conclusion reconfirms, however, the necessity for architectural theory to fundamentally engage with philosophical discourses, in order to deepen its own knowledge basis and to strengthen its argumentative power.

Joan Ockman, in the final chapter of this volume [CHAPTER 14], likewise focuses on an important philosophical movement, namely Pragmatism. Pragmatism is a

specifically *American* intellectual tradition, going back to the work of William James and John Dewey. In her semi-autobiographical reflection, Ockman ponders on the project she devised, together with philosopher John Rajchman and historian Casey Blake, to launch Pragmatism as an American answer to the disturbing effects of the reliance upon “French Theory” (read: semiotics and post-structuralism) that was prevalent in architectural theory up till the 1990s. Regretfully admitting that her Pragmatist project was not a success, she also ends her essay, like Loeckx and Heynen, by pointing to the inevitable entanglements between architecture and its sociopolitical condition – entanglements that can only be unraveled by further theoretical reflections that build upon these philosophical traditions.

Like Ockman, Paul Holmquist [CHAPTER 9] turns to an American imprint of philosophy in the meanderings of architectural theory in the late twentieth century, the central figure in his essay being Hannah Arendt. Positioning Arendt’s philosophy as a “phenomenological account of human politics intrinsically related to a fabricated common world,” Holmquist discusses how both Kenneth Frampton and George Baird took up elements from her thinking to construct their own theoretical approach – Frampton by elaborating on the “resistive political capacity of architectural construction,” Baird by envisioning “how architecture can accommodate (...) a passionate, symbolic public realm.” Both architectural theorists thus take their clues from philosophical discourse in order to formulate their thoughts on architecture.

Lastly, Karen Burns [CHAPTER 13] also departs from philosophical musings by putting the post-structuralist topic of gender and subjectivity center stage. For her, the experimental writing initiated by French philosophers such as H  l  ne Cixous or Luce Irigaray was highly significant for the production of architectural theory in the 1980s and 1990s. Authors such as Daniel Libeskind, Robert Segrest, Jennifer Bloomer, and Ann Bergren published writings that explored the borderland between fiction, rational analysis, and designerly ways of thinking, emulating the experimental prose of the so-called *  criture f  minine*. According to Burns, later historiography cleansed architectural theory from this once important genre, revealing the backlash of neo-conservative and anti-feminist forces.

2. Architectural theory as part of the humanities

Closely related to the positioning of philosophical traditions as pilot disciplines was the desire to construct architectural theory as a fully academic scholarly field that could hold its own among other humanities. This part of the story has to do with the status of architectural history. Whereas architectural history was generally seen, up till the 1960s, as part of the more general field of art history, this began to change in the later years of the decade. It was no longer obvious that

architectural history would be taught by art historians, since architects themselves began to claim expertise and to develop relevant scholarship.⁵ Among the emerging new generation of architectural historians there were a lot of architects: Manfredo Tafuri, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Kenneth Frampton, Charles Jencks, and Alan Colquhoun; all had degrees in architecture before they turned to architectural history. Late twentieth-century architectural theory, one could claim, is to a certain extent the offspring of this academic battle for hegemony in the teaching of architectural history, since it was through elaborating theoretical discourses that these newly minted scholars began to differentiate themselves from their old-fashioned rivals, who were art historians without the benefit of an architectural education.⁶

This new situation also relates to the establishment of doctoral programs in architectural schools in North America as well as in Europe, as Ole W. Fischer argues in the present volume [CHAPTER 6]. Fischer narrates how prestigious architectural schools such as MIT in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and ETH in Zürich (Switzerland) responded to the crisis of modernism by institutionalizing programs in history and theory of architecture that educated students towards a PhD. What was at stake in these programs, according to Fischer, was no less than “a revision of modernity as a scientific project.” By awarding doctoral degrees in “History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture” (MIT) or “Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur” (ETH), these schools ostensibly displaced the discourse about architecture from the field of art towards the broader humanities, claiming for architectural history and theory a position as a scholarly discipline. Through the very existence of these doctoral programs, architectural theory moreover became more academic and sophisticated in its exchange with other fields of knowledge.

A similar background story can be traced in the contribution by André Loeckx and myself on semiotics in architecture [CHAPTER 1]. The semiotic turn we discuss was motivated by a desire to find a well-structured and scientifically valid discourse that might be transposed to architecture. Architectural theory in a sense relied upon semiotics to reinvent itself as a scholarly valid discourse. This endeavor also contributed to the academization of architectural discourse, because it generated an exchange with a long-established field in the humanities such as linguistics.

Sebastian Loosen [CHAPTER 5] likewise points to epistemological questions as important drivers of the interest in architectural theory. According to him, the 1970s in Belgium was a time where architects were at a loss to answer basic questions about what values they should adhere to and why. He argues that “the intellectual malaise was so profound” that different voices “might even be found to differ on the fundamental level as to *what* knowledge about architecture actually *is or should be*” (p. 127). Within this diverging field, some protagonists indeed turned to science and the humanities to find foundations on which to build architectural knowledge.

These three chapters thus highlight how architectural theory in the late 20th century not only based itself upon philosophy as the discipline to be emulated but also claimed for itself a place among other humanities. By establishing doctoral programs, fostering scholarly publications such as *Assemblage* (US) or *Archis* (the Netherlands), and seeking to publish with university presses, architectural theory aimed for a position within the university. By becoming more academically savvy, it also drifted away from its previous, free floating status as an activity indulged in by architects who were first of all practitioners and only afterwards teachers and writers, to now become a full-time occupation for academics.

3. Art criticism

Architectural theory nevertheless did not fully divorce itself from art and architectural criticism as practiced in the broader field of culture. As the name of the doctoral program in MIT – HTC (History, Theory, Criticism) – already indicated, architectural theory’s alliance with history *and* with criticism remained operational. Some of the chapters in this book thus point towards figures and situations where architectural theory manifested itself in and through art (or architectural) criticism.

We see this phenomenon most clearly at work in the figure of Lara-Vinca Masini, discussed by Peter Lang [CHAPTER 3]. Masini was a critic, curator, editor, publisher, and writer who, according to Lang, “played a pivotal role from the outset in the emergence of the *Superarchitecture* movement that would spawn radical groups like Superstudio, Archizoom, and successively, UFO, 9999, Zziggurat and others” (p. 81). Her appearance in a book on architectural theory might be surprising because she is not internationally well known and there is not one key text that would summarize her ideas and that could act as vehicle to spread her fame. Indeed, the relevance of her work in architectural theory does not solely reside in her writings. What Lang makes clear is that it is in the *practice of curating* that she acts out her ideas on art, architecture, history, and the city. Through her installations and exhibitions, through her selection of specific works of specific artists for specific places in the city, she shaped new relations between private and public, between architecture and art, between history and the present, and between the city’s morphology and its historical legacy. Her exhibitions questioned the received image of Florence as the Renaissance capital, veering away from the ever-repeated celebration of its fifteenth-century heritage and opening it up for more disturbing questions about its recent past and its position in the present. Masini’s work, one can claim, *enacts* a theoretical position and is thus valid as another possible “figure of knowledge” for architectural theory – alongside its well-rehearsed manifestation in seminal texts and academic disputes.

Robin Boyd, as presented by Philip Goad [CHAPTER 2], can be compared to Lara-Vinca Masini in certain respects. As an Australian architect and critic with a wide international network, he played some role in international exchanges, but his main impact – like that of Masini – was local and strongly connected to his own personality. Whereas he wrote many articles and books that were well received at the time, his lack of a clear theoretical or aesthetic allegiance, according to Goad, played a role in the withering away of his visibility after his early death. Boyd always wrote from the point of view of the practicing architect that he also was. Hence his work aimed more for the astute formulation of specific criticism, rather than for the abstract formulations of a more generally valid theory. In the few cases that his work came close to a theoretical position – like in his 1965 *Puzzle of Architecture* – his relaxed journalistic writing style, which avoided reaching firm conclusions, made it eminently readable but less apt as a theoretical manifesto with retaining value as an anchoring point for future discussions.

Sebastiaan Loosen's chapter [CHAPTER 5] also points towards art and architectural criticism as an important face of architectural theory. Whereas some of his protagonists turned to science and the humanities to find a stable footing for architectural discourse, there were others (such as Mil De Kooning, Geert Bekaert, and bOb Van Reeth) who advocated an architectural intellectuality that was permanently engaged with the real. This “realist” position was in a certain sense mistrusting words and discourse, since the ideal situation would be that “the real” would speak for itself. Hence these critics saw their own writings as a labor that came close to a notion of *poiesis*, the Greek word for “making”: in their eyes, the work of the critic resembles that of the poet more closely than that of the philosopher. Their theoretical utterances were thus deeply entrenched with a literary and poetical vocabulary and writing style that steered away from generalizations and often emulated the practice of criticism in its focus on specific works and phenomena.

4. “Theory” versus “theories”

A last frame of reference is the one invoked by Matthew Allen in his discussion of programming in the 1960s [CHAPTER 4]. His starting point is the “premise that it is worth questioning the distinction whereby *Theory* upholds standards of critique while (minor, ad hoc) *theories* are tied down to contingencies of practice” (p. 102). He thus suggests that the genre of Theory canonized in the well-known anthologies superseded another competing genre – that of “theories” embedded in practices and techniques. His argument is made clear by delving into the recent history of “programming” in architecture. In the 1960s “programming” was gaining momentum as a more advanced formulation of the main idea of functionalism (“form

follows function” became “form follows program”). In the ideological battle of the early 1980s, the centrality of the idea of “programming” was repudiated – to be replaced by the “negation of functionalism” as formulated by Peter Eisenman and others. Programming however did not disappear from architecture, but went as it were underground: it continued to be the driving force behind the elaboration of computer programs for architecture – very clumsy and laborious ones at first, more smooth and effective ones later. Allen thus argues that the victory of “Theory” writ large is somewhat of a mirage: underneath this seemingly dominant “Theory” there are many other “theories,” based on a very different set of assumptions and methods, that continue to be operational and influential without being recognized or articulated on the explicit level of “Theory.” He illustrates this view through an analysis of printouts from early computer programs, which he sees in terms of aesthetic schemata illustrating different “figures of knowledge” at work in architectural computation.

This chapter is a particularly salient one in this volume, because it shows that architectural theory as a body of ideas is not confined to the ones that are made explicit in philosophical or critical texts. Indeed, architectural theory might be *embodied* in architectural practices such as computational design, as argued by Allen, or *enacted* rather than articulated, as in the work of Lara-Vinca Masini. We can go even further and argue that implicit theories of architecture could be recognized, e.g., in the study curriculum of architects, in the way architectural offices are organized, or in the way competition briefs are formulated. All these instances have, as a backdrop, ideas and convictions on what architecture is or should be – that are made operational in the practice of teaching, managing an office, or organizing a competition. These ideas are not always explicitly elaborated in long texts, but careful analysis – like the one proposed here by Allen – allows to recognize, discuss, and criticize them – which is the work of (the history of) theory.

What is at stake?

Another way of looking at these essays has to do with the question of how they identify what is at stake in architectural theory. Here I recognize two lines of engagement. The first one deals with the issue of autonomy: is architecture (or architectural theory) an autonomous field developing according to its own logic or is architecture a field that is in constant interaction with other domains that influence its configurations? The second line of engagement maps the ideological battles between different approaches that strive for dominance or criticize existing hegemonic patterns.

1. Autonomy versus heteronomy

Louis Martin [CHAPTER 7] refers to Stanford Anderson's distinction between an *internal* and *external* history of architecture. An internal history focuses on what is unique to architecture, while an external one highlights the social conditions that constrain and enable the developments in architecture. Martin uses this distinction to claim that in the case of Melvin Charney, the Montreal architect and artist, architectural theory is enriched and enabled by concepts drawn from external disciplines (notably semiotics), while its internal structure nevertheless remains remarkably stable. This stable structure has to do with a way of thinking that relies upon dualities ("architecture and engineering" [Le Corbusier], "feeling and thinking" [Giedion], "twin-phenomena" [Van Eyck]). In the case of Charney, such dualities were framed as oppositions: "design versus architecture," "image versus Process," and so on. Charney thus exemplifies – at least in the eyes of Martin – how the paradigmatic shift in architectural theory from a biological to a linguistic analogy did not structurally change the dualistic way of thinking inherited from the Modern Movement. Inserting external references (theories of the sign a.o.) in this case only reinforced the internal logic of the field. It is Martin's contention that this process illustrates what he calls, following Anderson, the "semi-autonomy" of architecture and architectural knowledge.

Martin concludes his chapter with a series of exploratory considerations that challenge the starting points of this book and of this coda. For him, the theoretical frameworks that waxed and waned in architectural theory – critical theory, postmodernism, critical regionalism, deconstructivism, or pragmatism – are more than surface phenomena and cannot be explained away as the result of external influences. In his view, the paramount objective of historiography is therefore to "uncover the latent logic of the field in mapping the relationship between these concepts and explaining their role in the development of architectural "knowledge" (p. 175). He likewise underscores that the configuration of architectural knowledge remains relatively stable in the long run, although its thematic contents change. With these statements Martin clearly endorses a viewpoint that favors an internal rather than an external history of architecture and its theory, because he sees external factors as influencing but not determining.

In contrast with Martin, Andrew Toland [CHAPTER 8] sees "an evolution of architecture's intellectual culture away from internal disciplinary questions" (p. 182) since the 1990s. He interprets the "dirty realism" that is the topic of his chapter as the harbinger of this very evolution. Mapping the discourse of dirty realism as proposed by Liane Lefavre in her interpretation of the work of a group of architects figure headed by Rem Koolhaas, Toland compares this new discourse with earlier versions of realism and with the attempts of historians like Manfredo Tafuri

or Fredric Jameson to interconnect architectural developments with processes of globalization. The main question addressed by this discourse is that of the agency of architecture and urbanism: is it possible for architects and urban designers to not only take into account the “real” environment of a globalizing world but to design, in the words of Lefaivre, “lyrical objects that provoke reflection and action in connection with a world that reflects the social and ecological realities of our cities – realities that are becoming ever ‘dirtier’” (p. 186)? This rapprochement between internal and external factors led, according to Toland, to an ambivalent aesthetic mode of response, in which intellectual and affective dimensions were interwoven – an aesthetic mode that recognized the totality of the globalized world as a construct, in the face of which however the design disciplines were all but powerless.

Sebastiaan Loosen [CHAPTER 5] likewise recognizes a moment of impotency in the confrontation between an architectural culture that was used to looking inwards and one that needed to look outwards to address a societal condition. In the moment of crisis provoked by the demise of modernism, architectural culture in Belgium apparently was at a loss, unable to determine what exactly the criteria should be with which to assess architectural projects. The internal logic provided by modernist discourse apparently no longer sufficed, but neither was there a common understanding of what other logic could replace the modernist one. Loosen interprets this situation as a genuine confusion as to the epistemological status of architectural knowledge: the protagonists in the debates that he maps had very different ideas about how architecture related to (or should relate to) social reality. It is apparently in such moments of crisis that an internal history of architecture, which would stress its autonomy, no longer suffices, since the historical actors themselves struggle with how to understand architecture’s relation to external realities.

2. Ideological battles

As stated above, architectural theory did not always put into practice a self-reflection, applying the critical insights it imported from other disciplines on its own configuration. Hence the sometimes angry and disappointed tone of later reflections looking back at key moments that seemed promising from a feminist or postcolonial perspective but that were not carried through.

One can recognize this disappointment in Karen Burns’s contribution to this volume [CHAPTER 13]. She traces how a particular strand of architectural theory that experimented with modes of writing and that was seen as a central concern of theory in the first half of the 1990s was sidelined in the anthologies that were produced in the second half of that decade. Her interpretation is that this strand fell victim to the “Culture Wars” that were waged against critical theory generally

and its feminist overtones specifically. These “Culture Wars” were part of a largely successful neo-conservative project that managed to discredit architectural theory as a feminized and futile practice of endless arguments that led nowhere. And the architectural theory that was passed on to the next generation was one that did not recognize its own feminist genealogy. Whereas one could have expected that the feminist experimental *écriture* would have been honored in subsequent historiography, this did not happen, due to gendered editorial practices. The end result is a marginalization of *l'écriture* and its many women exponents, who disappeared from view in the folds of the dominant narrative.

One aspect of Burns’s diagnosis is further analyzed by Sandra Kaji-O’Grady in her chapter on the feminization of architectural theory [CHAPTER 12]. She zooms in on the metaphors that were used in the early 2000s when architectural theory was repudiated for its supposed ineffectiveness and when the “critical project” came to be seen as “exhausted.” She writes:

The figure that was conjured [in this battle] was a male architect-writer whose impotency was exposed by the action-oriented pragmatism of the architect-builder. These attacks used the very same gendered dichotomies that feminist theorists had sought to expose at the heart of the architectural discourse (p. 243).

For Kaji-O’Grady this attack on theory had severe consequences, since careers were forged or faltered and many theorists shifted their work more towards history or towards the newly minted “architectural humanities.” She observes that the year 1996, which could be framed as a moment of “triumph of feminist theory in architecture” given the many topical publications that came out that year, also might be seen as the beginning of the end. The outsider status, which had briefly allowed women in architecture to engage in a critical dialogue fueled by their marginality, did not protect them against the backlash unleashed by anti-theory and anti-feminist forces. Historiography moreover added insult to injury by minimalizing the import of this whole episode.

Both Burns and Kaji-O’Grady write from a position of close alignment with the feminist and women authors of the 1990s – Burns as part of that cohort, Kaji-O’Grady as a slightly younger sympathizer. They are both also rather explicit about this alliance and about the perspective from which they write. This is not always the case. Many historiographic endeavors tend to present themselves as “neutral” and “objective,” not by stating this explicitly but rather by keeping silent about their perspective. According to Ricardo Ruivo [CHAPTER 11], this attitude has generated a questionable historiography of the Soviet avant-garde, which, to his mind, was an “invention” of Western scholars rather than an adequate narration of what actually

unfolded in the early years of the USSR. He claims that “this historiography of Soviet architecture became a tool for the consolidation of a specific, today dominant architectural ideology, which is linked to the ascension of a liberal alternative to the left” (p. 227). Referring to Tafuri and Anatole Kopp, Ruivo insists that the continental narratives describing constructivism from the viewpoint of “operative criticism” were more true to the original discourse and intentions of their protagonists, since they explicitly recognized the political motivation of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s. Anglo-American historiography, which later came to dominate, was, on the other hand, inclined to overlook this political dimension, focusing on aesthetic categories instead. It is this historiography that is now mainstream and that, unwittingly perhaps, reproduces a neo-liberal ideology by looking away from the intense political battles about the right way for communism that were so important to the Russian architects and artists from the 1920s. This type of historiography flattens out what was an intensive intellectual and cultural struggle and thus silently reinforces Western, mainstream ideological concepts that are not spelled out but assumed.

Carmen Popescu [CHAPTER 10] revisits the discourse of “critical regionalism,” which was meant to offer a valid alternative to modernism without succumbing to the seduction of historicism and formalism, as practiced by the postmodernists of the Strada Novissima in Venice’s first architectural biennale of 1980. She also frames the intellectual pursuit of a solid theoretical foundation for critical regionalism – the motivation behind the work on critical regionalism of Tzonis and Lefaivre on the one hand and Frampton on the other – by pointing towards the battle lines between those who wanted to continue in the line of modernism and those who embraced historical formal languages. To her mind, the battle was inconclusive – or at least the intellectual superiority of the “critical regionalism” project could not be established since the movement suffered a “loss of criticality” – because it didn’t recognize that it was on the one hand constructing a historiography while simultaneously being considered to be helpful as a guideline for the contemporary production of architecture. Popescu doesn’t use the term here, but her contention seems to be that critical regionalism didn’t really work out because operative criticism doesn’t remain credible in the long run. If my interpretation is correct, this would mean that Popescu takes a different position from Ruivo. Whereas Ruivo seems to advocate that operative criticism is the best approach, since it at least allows readers to understand where the historian is coming from, Popescu rather points to the incommensurability between history and criticism. Her concluding remarks moreover suggest that critical regionalism entailed a veiled attempt to prolong the hegemony of a specifically *Western* discourse, and that its loss of criticality had to do with its insufficient processing of postcolonial and subaltern critiques.

Positionality

Since the 1980s, post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms have made us aware of the importance of situated and embodied knowledge.⁷ The identity of the researcher or scholar in terms of class, age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc. is not merely external to the construction of knowledge but impacts and conditions research questions, methodologies, funding opportunities and so on. Hence it is not superfluous to question the position from which architectural theorists in the recent past were writing, nor is it futile to ask the same question regarding the contributors to this volume.

In pondering these questions, it becomes very clear that the Anglo-Saxon discourse has been the central point of reference for architectural theory since roughly 1968. Although there existed and exist lively and interesting platforms of exchange in French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, and other languages, their impact was and remains limited by their language. Whereas the avant-garde in the 1920s relied upon German, French, and Russian (see, e.g., the journals *Vetsj*, *Gegenstand*, *Objet*), the postwar world indeed witnessed a growing dominance of English. In this “American century”, English became virtually hegemonic. This can be deduced from the fact that ambitious editors of periodicals in other languages thought that they should at least provide abstracts in English; or from the circumstance that the import of many theorists based outside of the English-speaking world is often assessed in terms of whether or not translations of their work are available in English. Since English became our lingua franca, it is by being translated in English that writers have access to a globalized audience.

The editors of *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory* (2012) indeed stated that “the best known centres of architectural theory are located within the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere – London, the American East and West Coasts, one or two centres in Australia. Paris, Venice and Berlin, like Barcelona and Rotterdam, are on the map, but they do not have the same force of gravity. Other parts of the world – the whole of Asia, Africa and Latin America – do not really play along.”⁸ This academic hegemony is not just a product of American soft power or of economic dominance. It also directly relates to funding opportunities, for it is only in these places of centrality that one finds professors of architectural history and theory who are expected to do research and to publish internationally.

This situation gives rise to a complex dynamic of center and periphery. In North America – and especially at the East Coast – ‘French theory’ was of utmost importance in the last decades of the 20th century.⁹ This discourse also had a large impact on architectural theory, as can be seen from the contributions of Ockman [CHAPTER 14], Fischer [CHAPTER 6], Martin [CHAPTER 7], Kaji-O’Grady [CHAPTER 12] and Burns [CHAPTER 13]. Arguably, the ‘French theory’ version of the

ideas and works of continental philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Henri Lefebvre, or Jacques Derrida differed from the original version – if only because the work often was only partially translated. The intellectual context and the rich interaction with other thinkers was also obscured from view, resulting in a “French theory” that current French intellectuals barely recognize as such (a recent PhD dissertation thematizes, e.g., how in the 1990s Jacques Derrida was a big shot in Anglo-Saxon architectural theory whereas he barely registered on the French architectural scene).¹⁰

Philip Goad [CHAPTER 2] analyses an interesting example of this center-periphery dynamic by discussing the work of Robin Boyd. As an Australian and a regular visitor to North America and the UK, Boyd had easy access to publication channels such as periodicals. When it came to books, however, his publishing house was an Australian one, which meant that his books were not readily available on the American market. Hence the impact of his work is less than it could have been. Peter Lang points to the fact that his protagonist – Lara-Vinca Masini – published only in Italian and that her work was never translated into English. This, he thinks, was one of the reasons why she never became internationally significant, although she was quite well known in Italy.

The figure of knowledge for architectural theory is thus partially shaped by these geographical and institutional factors. They also contribute to what one could call a different sensibility on both sides of the Atlantic. It seems to me that architects and teachers in Europe have more of a direct line with planning administrations and government bodies. There is also a stronger tradition of architectural competitions and there are thus more entanglements between public bodies and architectural intellectuality. Hence in Europe the impact of architectural theorists, however indirect, on what actually gets built, seems to be more important than in the United States. This might be one of the reasons why the criticality debate, which was so pertinent in North America, seemed to be far less relevant from a European point of view.¹¹ This different sensibility might also be the reason for which the dividing lines between history, theory, criticism, and practice might be more permeable on this side of the ocean, as one might deduce from, e.g., the contributions by Loosen [CHAPTER 5], Lang [CHAPTER 3] and Toland [CHAPTER 8] – although Martin’s chapter about the Canadian architect Charney [CHAPTER 7] presents us with a counterexample (but then again, Canada is in many respects more European than American).

This volume of course does not escape the logic of academic hegemony either, certainly not when one looks at the geographic location of the authors of the different chapters. The book simply confirms that architectural theory and its historiography is firmly based in North America (six authors) and Europe (seven authors), with quite some inputs from Australia (four authors). Masculine dominance likewise

is confirmed (twelve male versus five female authors). Thematically only Ricardo Ruivo [CHAPTER 11] and Carmen Popescu [CHAPTER 13] deal with topics that escape this geographic confinement – the Russian avant-garde on the one hand, critical regionalism on the other. (It should be mentioned though that this outcome is partially an artefact: some of the most engaging contributions to the 2017 conference dealt with architectural theories that were developed in the communist world. For editorial reasons, however, these papers were developed into a theme issue of the periodical *Architectural Histories*.)¹²

All in all the contributions in this book clearly show that many different factors and circumstances play a role in the evolution of a discipline of architectural theory in the late twentieth century. Without being exhaustive in its analysis, this volume nevertheless makes clear that the discourse of the period was much richer, much more complicated, and much more entangled than we are led to believe through the process of canonization. If we want to foster an architectural culture that embraces this critical legacy, it is important that we continue to have an open mind for trajectories and ideas that do not belong to the mainstream but that are inspirational and instructive, maybe not in spite of, but rather because of their marginality.

Notes

1. Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997); K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).
2. Mary McLeod, "'Other' Spaces and 'Others,'" in *The Sex of Architecture*, ed. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 21-22.
3. The Call for Papers for "Theory's History, 196X-199X. Challenges in the Historiography of Architectural Knowledge" can be consulted at <https://architectuur.kuleuven.be/theoryshistory/>.
4. Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Columbia University GSAPP/Rizzoli, 1993); Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968*.
5. Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Post-modern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
6. Stanford Anderson, "Architectural History in Schools of Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (1999): 282-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/991520>.

7. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>; Hilde Heynen and Gwendolyn Wright, "Introduction: Shifting Paradigms and Concerns," in *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*, ed. C. Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen (London: SAGE, 2012), 41-55.
8. C. Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory* (London: SAGE, 2012), 7.
9. Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, eds., *French Theory in America* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
10. Céline Bodart, "Architecture et déconstruction, remises en jeu d'une rencontre: Raconter, traduire, hériter" (PhD diss., Université Paris 8/Université de Liège, 2018).
11. Jane Rendell, *Critical Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Ole W. Fischer, "Architecture, Capitalism and Criticality," in Crysler, Cairns, and Heynen, *The SAGE Handbook*, 56-70.
12. Hilde Heynen and Sebastiaan Loosen, eds., "Marxism and Architectural Theory across the East-West Divide," Special Collection of *Architectural Histories* 6-7 (2018-2019). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/ah.401>.