

MAPPING.CRIT.ARCH First International Workshop

Université Rennes 2, January 18, 2016

Agence Nationale de la Recherche / The French National Research Agency (ANR)

Architectural Criticism: Part of Public Debate or Autonomous “Discipline”?

About the project: *Mapping.Crit.Arch: Architectural criticism XXth and XXIst centuries, a cartography/ La Critique architecturale, XXe et XXIe siècles: une cartographie*
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The research project Mapping.Crit.Arch: *Architectural criticism XXth and XXIst centuries, a cartography*, funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche, aims at developing a field of research on architectural criticism and its history, from the very last decades of the 19th century to the present day. It is based on an international network of scholars, whose research involves history of architectural criticism on various levels and with different approaches (including architectural theory, history of preservation, historiography of architecture, history of architectural periodicals and of criticism). Nathalie Boulouch (Université Rennes 2 and Archives de la critique d’art), Anne Hultzsch (Bartlett School London and OCCAS, Oslo University), Giovanni Leoni (Università di Bologna) Paolo Scrivano (Boston University), Laurent Stalder (ETH Zurich), Suzanne Stephens (Barnard College, Columbia University), Alice Thomine-Berrada (Musée d’Orsay, Paris) are the main members of this network, which is hosted at Rennes 2 University and coordinated by Héléne Janniére (Université Rennes 2).

First International Workshop, January 18, 2016. Architectural criticism: a part of public debate or an autonomous “discipline”?

This call concerns the first of a series of three international workshops, which will take place in January 2016 (Rennes 2 University), Spring 2016 (University of Bologna) and Fall 2016 (Paris and Rennes). The aim of these three workshops is to foster scholarship on history of architectural criticism and to facilitate exchanges between scholars involved in this field of research.

This **first workshop** is to be held at Rennes 2 University on **Monday, January 18, 2016**. It will deal with the relationship of criticism with “public opinion” and on the opposite side, its relation to architecture as an autonomous discipline.

To what extent does architectural criticism share common questions, protagonists and medias with the public sphere, with the “public debate”? Or conversely, has it an exclusive relation to the professional or the academic sphere? In this case, does architectural criticism tend to become an autonomous discourse, if autonomous exclusively refers to architectural theories/ histories? Does it refer to extra-disciplinary concepts? The various nature and degree of such an autonomy could be examined in different historical, institutional and cultural contexts: to what extent is architectural criticism autonomous from social uses, from the architectural design, and its economic production? Those are a few of the main questions that we would like to be addressed during this first workshop.

More precisely, the issues of the relation between architectural criticism and public opinion or public debate, of the reception of contemporary architecture in the public sphere, may be discussed in different ways, as suggested below: for instance, its connection to preservation of heritage, its relation to the judgment/evaluation of architecture and the evaluation criteria, and its relation to the so-called “crisis” of criticism.

In Europe as well as in Northern America, preservation of historic buildings and ancient city centers are a focus

of interest for an increasingly large audience. By contrast, unless in certain public controversies and polemics (regarding for instance, issues of preservation in the context of urban renewal, from the XIXth century to the present), the relationship of contemporary architectural design to a “large” audience does not seem so easy nor so immediate in the eyes of architects, critics and commissioners. In different cultural traditions, this interest – as revealed by public media – and the roles of architectural criticism differ. To what extent may criticism be considered as an agent of mediation of architecture towards a “large audience”? What are the specific vectors of architectural mediation towards the public?

Presentations might stress the issue of architectural criticism in relation to polemics on preservation, from the nineteenth century to the present day.

Evaluation and criteria

Secondly, the issue of “public debate” has also to do with the evaluation of architecture. “*What is good architecture?*” was the title of a recent special issue of the TU Delft periodical *Oase*. This interrogation is (at least) twofold: on the one hand, it may refer to the evaluation of architecture and of its social uses (see Saunders, *Judging architectural value*, 2007). On the other hand, it refers to the set of criteria and values defined in relation to a corpus of architectural theories.

Presentations might also stress the issue of judgment and different criteria in architectural criticism.

Crisis

Last, the issue of the architectural mediation towards the public may have to do with the so-called “crisis” of architectural criticism, whether or not this crisis is real or fictitious. Many authors (critics, historians or architects) have stressed the origin of this “crisis” in three phenomena of the 1980s and 1990s: first, the collusion of criticism with the professional self-promotion of architects, with “urban marketing” and the political and institutional communication policy of cities, regions and states; secondly, the disappearance of the “heroic” critic or *critique engagé*; thirdly, the absence or the rarity of clear-cut theoretical positions in the contemporary architectural debate.

This “crisis”, as well as the uncertain boundaries or on the contrary the growing gap between a “*critique savante*” and a criticism intended for the public sphere, are to be explored, in the present day and in history. By questioning the crisis of the criticism, one may also analyze the intersecting relations between media and the public and the various kinds and types of criticism: the aim is not to produce typologies, but to shed light on those interrelations.

These issues can be addressed from different perspectives, either by documenting case studies or by presenting international comparisons, which could highlight different roles of architectural criticism toward the public.

The workshop will host papers authored by architectural and urban historians as well as scholars in different fields (i.e. sociology – philosophy – scholars in information and communication science).

Abstracts (English) of **300 words maximum**, as well as a short CV including name and affiliation and a list of publications, are to be sent by **October 25th, 2015** to:

helene.janniere@univ-rennes2.fr

and

mappingcritarch.emuhidine@gmail.com

Notification of acceptance will be sent by **November 11th, 2015**.

The workshop will be held at Rennes 2 University, Département d’Histoire de l’art, on **Monday, January 18th**.

For questions regarding organization of the workshop as well as the content, please contact helene.janniere@univ-rennes2.fr or mappingcritarch.emuhidine@gmail.com

