

Laudatio Kenneth Frampton

Meine sehr geehrten Damen und Herren,

erlauben Sie mir nun die Sprache zu wechseln, da ich meine Laudatio auf den diesjaehrigen Schelling Architekturtheoriepreistraeger auf Englisch halten moechte.

Dear Kenneth,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regardless of the increasing importance of the Internet, of blogs and countless web-sites, and despite the much discussed declining role of the book, when one visits architectural libraries and architectural bookshops, we see hundreds of new titles. Especially in the libraries we have the chance to compare books of a similar nature: monographs on the leading architects or those who think they are, compendia on how to design in the spirit of sustainability and indeed treatises on architectural history and criticism.

What we can see in architectural bookstores and architectural libraries is that there are many architectural historians and there are many writers on architecture, who call themselves "critics".

However, there are only a few architectural critics, who have both a profound knowledge of architectural history as well as the experience of architectural practice. Kenneth Frampton is one of these rare individuals who combines all of these experiences and fields of knowledge.

This range of experience and knowledge has enabled him to understand the obstacles that architects often have to overcome in developing appropriate concepts and turning them into physical realizations.

It is this familiarity with the subject, from the inside out and from top to bottom, from the ever changing practical to the equally fluent theoretical conditions, that has provided Kenneth Frampton the impulses for his influential writings.

Not being content with the orthodox accounts of modern architectural history, seeing large gaps in Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* of 1941 and in Reyner

Banham's *Theory and Design of the First Machine Age* of 1960, Frampton cast a wider and deeper light on all those other modern architects who had been sidelined out of the stricter canonic accounts in his *Modern Architecture: A critical History* of 1980.

Into the wider view came amongst others the Russian Constructivists, Alvar Aalto, the Brutalists, the Rationalist and of course the first Postmodernists, to which Frampton provided his answer in a subsequent edition of the book: *Critical Regionalism*.

It was a term that Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis had coined in 1981 while writing on two Greek architects: Dimitris and Suzanna Antonakakis, and which was substantiated two years later in Frampton's "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance". The principal force behind this notion was Frampton's rejection of unrestricted, autonomous and therefore amoral technoscience, a subject on which Frampton wrote the comprehensive essay "Technoscience and Environmental Culture" in 2001, which grounded the argument on critical regionalism with its implicit rejection of unfettered technoscience with the broader debate on sustainable principles of building.

Prior to this, however, Frampton's detailed review of the constructional basis of architecture found its culmination in his *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction* of 1993. Here the different approaches to the assembly of materials to embody an architect's idea was laid open to avid readers. Besides the 19th century German and French architects such as Karl Friedrich Schinkel and Henri Labrouste, Frampton focuses on Frank Lloyd Wright, Auguste Perret, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Konrad Wachsmann, Louis Kahn, Jørn Utzon and Carlo Scarpa.

Anyone who had read this book at that time, could not have remained a Postmodernist but had to reflect on the import of these studies. It was Frampton's attack on Postmodernism's superficiality, its facadism, its insubstantive, non-constructional game with images. It was an attack that began by looking at the early classical moderns, as it were, Schinkel and Labrouste, the mid-classic moderns such as Perret and the late classic moderns such as Mies van der Rohe and Kahn.

Having said this, it is self-evident as to what Kenneth Frampton thinks of contemporary architectural design in which design software has added yet another layer in the division of labour, has provided yet another realm of expression, and has loosened further any sense of the ethical dimension of the architect's task.

Frampton's book *Labour, Work and Architecture* of 2002 brings together essays that have their ethical roots in the thinking of Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Frampton shows the pitfalls of advanced division of labour with the resultant loss of the architect's responsibility and control over the process of a building's realization, but also a variety of positive cases, in which that steady loss could be seen to have turned to the better.

It comes as no surprise then that the course laid out by the work of Frank O. Gehry has, in Frampton's eyes, been the demise of substantive architecture as many of us know and love it. Perhaps many of us just have a helplessly romantic desire for the notion of believing what we see. Or as Kahn put it: asking what a brick wants to be. Frampton's ethical concern has been to retrieve the bases of how architects can conceive and construct what we ultimately see in a building.

In this sense, in the idea of substance, essence, or, to use the German word "Wesen", we can see Frampton's familiarity with Martin Heidegger's work on the "Wesen" of things. Frampton's book with the title *Labour, Work and Architecture* is by no coincidence an alliteration on "Building Dwelling Thinking" ("Bauen Wohnen Denken"), Heidegger's famous 1951 Darmstadt lecture.

Dear Kenneth, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have deliberately stayed away from providing you all with the biographical details, all of which you can readily read in the Internet. Inspired by Kenneth Frampton's concern with the substance of architecture and what moves us architects to realize a better world by better architecture, and by appropriate architecture, I have outlined what I believe to be Frampton's main lines of thought and work.

In conclusion, let me summarize why I believe that Kenneth Frampton is one of the most influential and widely read architectural theoreticians and critics today.

- 1 Frampton describes and criticizes reality, and in particular built reality from a historical materialist point of view as well as from an ontological, phenomenological point of view.
- 2 This theoretical basis has allowed Frampton to practice a meta-criticism of the disciplines of architectural theory and criticism itself, pointing to their deficits, as well as to architectural practice.
- 3 Frampton has been committed to the project of the Enlightenment, of the Modern Movement, while acknowledging its historical errors.

- 4 Writing in English and working at the centers of the English language cultures, that is London and New York, Frampton's critical mind has had the advantage of scrutinizing hundreds of projects, buildings and architects.
- 5 Kenneth Frampton has inspired generations of architects and scholars with the combination of intellectual curiosity and rigor in research. In his critical incisiveness, Frampton has often been characterized as having a Germanic mind, something that can be sensed in his writings, his sentence structures but also in his ethical hesitations; his "Bedenken". All the same, Kenneth Frampton has always exhibited his English sense of humor, a charming form of self-effacing self-irony, which has served him so well in maintaining his sanity despite the grave misgivings about much of contemporary architecture.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us all together hope that Kenneth Frampton's self-irony and good health will be with him for a long time come.

And let us all congratulate you, dear Kenneth, on your well-deserved Schelling Architecture Theory Award 2012.

WW/Berlin 12 Nov 12