Toward a Geography of Architectural Criticism (Paris/Rennes, 3-4 Apr 17)

Paris, INHA / Université Rennes 2, Apr 3–04, 2017
Deadline: Jan 8, 2017

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MAPPING.CRIT.ARCH Third International Symposium
Paris, INHA / Université Rennes 2

Toward a Geography of Architectural Criticism: Disciplinary Boundaries and Shared Territories

Mapping.Crit.Arch: Architectural criticism 20th and 21st centuries, a cartography/ La Critique architecturale, XXe et XXIe siècles: une cartographie
(Agence Nationale de la Recherche / ANR Project ANR-14-CE31-0019-01)

The research project Mapping.Crit.Arch: Architectural criticism 20th and 21st centuries, a cartography, (http://mac.hypotheses.org) funded by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche, aims to develop a field of research on the history of architectural criticism, from the last decades of the 19th century to the present day. It is based on an international network of scholars, whose interests cover the history of architectural criticism at various levels and through different approaches (including architectural theory, history of preservation, historiography of architecture, history of architectural periodicals and of criticism, history of photography). 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 (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University), Laurent Stalder (ETH Zurich), Suzanne Stephens (Barnard College, Columbia University), Alice Thomine-Berrada (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) are the members of this network, which is administrated by the Université Rennes 2 and coordinated by Hélène Jannière (Université Rennes 2).

This call for papers is for the third of three international events planned by the Mapping.Crit.Arch Project to foster scholarship on the history of architectural criticism and facilitate exchanges between scholars active in this field of research.

Third International Symposium: Call for Papers

After the first workshop (Université Rennes 2 and Archives de la critique d'art, Rennes, January 2016), centered on the relationship of criticism to "public opinion" and on criticism as an autonomous discipline, the second workshop (Università di Bologna, October 2016) focused on the actors and "vehicles" of architectural criticism.
This third international symposium, to be held in Paris (Institut national d'histoire de l'art) and Rennes on April 3rd and 4th, 2017, intends to debate two key questions related to the geographies

of criticism: what are criticism's disciplinary boundaries and which territories has criticism shared from the last decades of the 19th to the end of the 20th century with other disciplines.
In the first place, the symposium interrogates the overlapping of architectural criticism with different kinds of architectural writing, in particular those pertaining to architectural history and theory, but also those stemming from disciplines as diverse as sociology, anthropology, and philosophy.
The symposium is equally aimed at highlighting the relationships, the common terrains, and the conceptual tools that architectural criticism has in common with other genres of criticism, such as art criticism, music or film criticism, and literary criticism.
The term "territory" is used here to refer primarily to the various disciplinary fields on which criticism relies and from which it borrows its concepts and patterns of interpretation, as well as its intellectual tools. The term "boundary", for its part, is used to denote the zones of exchange and confrontation between criticism, history, theory and other types of writing on architecture, as well as between architectural criticism and other forms of criticism. The main aim of the symposium is to map these territories and delineate these boundaries.

1. Intellectual territories of architectural criticism: mapping disciplines, concepts, and "critical tools"

Defining the nature of criticism -- that is, outlining its boundaries, designating its tasks, and determining its object (the techniques, programs, forms, constructive solutions, or social uses of architecture) -- has been variously attempted, in past and recent times.
Many of those who have tried to give a clearer definition of criticism seem to have often failed to get past the preliminary question concerning its disciplinary frontiers as well as its perimeter, thus illustrating the semantic uncertainty that surrounds the term. This uncertainty does not simply concern the question of where criticism ends and parallel disciplines begin: the definition of "architectural criticism", in fact, indicates alternately a profession (if one refers to the critics and their activity), a set of social practices, or a discourse on architecture within academic institutions -- with a wide range of disciplinary orientations (history, aesthetics, sociology, anthropology, to name only a few). Moreover, architectural criticism encompasses multiple registers of discourse, from manifestoes to aesthetic analysis, architectural description, and technical specifications. Architects and architectural critics, for example, put forward the specific nature of architecture -- a multifaceted endeavor involved in economic, technological, social and urban practices -- to explain the difficulty of setting the boundaries of architectural criticism and itemizing its modes of writing. Defining the frontiers and delineating what criticism encompasses largely depends on the disciplinary standpoints adopted. Moreover, the frontiers and the perimeter of criticism vary from one cultural context to another.
In order to foster a debate about the disciplinary territories of architectural criticism, the symposium intends to "map" these orientations, registers of discourse, and set of activities.

The symposium's primary goal is to scrutinize the overlapping and blurred boundaries of criticism with other kinds of writings on architecture. Among the questions the event intends to pose are: does criticism borrow parts of its concepts and patterns of interpretation, modes of description, and schemes of narration from other better-defined or more "canonical" types of architectural writing like architectural history and theory? Or, does it connect to domains of knowledge like sociology or anthropology?
Paper proposals are expected to investigate the "migration" of concepts from one field to another,

together with their subsequent transformation, and to scrutinize criticism's borrowing of conceptual tools from history, theory, anthropology, etc.

Proposals are also expected to put into question the "typologies" of criticism -- in particular, the categories that recurrently describe the so-called "typologies of criticism", such as "learned" vs. "popular", professional vs. layman, formalist vs. technical, etc. -- and the criteria on which these typologies are based.

2. Architectural criticism and "other" forms of criticism

The above-mentioned term "territory" equally relates to the boundaries and frontiers that criticism shares with other fields of knowledge and artistic expression. By exploring this aspect, the symposium aims to question the opposition between two distinct conceptions of architectural criticism, one as "a type of criticism" and the other as an autonomous or disciplinary discourse. Peter Collins emphasized this opposition between these two conceptions by stating that architectural criticism "… is an activity which must be considered sui generis" and exclusively linked to architecture rather than "a species or aspect of a general activity called 'criticism'".

Architectural critics have underlined the possible links between architectural criticism and literary criticism ("the source and mold of all other forms of criticism," in the words of Yorgos Simeoforidis). Historians and critics of architecture are generally less inclined to establish parallels with art criticism, often rejecting it as a possible "source and mold" for architectural criticism. The rejection of any possible analogy with art criticism is based on a truism: architecture cannot be reduced to a form of visual art, given the multiple frameworks (aesthetic, technical, social, economic) it encompasses.
On the opposite, architects and architectural critics often put the accent on the similarities between the fields of architecture and music, or architecture and cinema. Starting from this assumption, they more willingly put forward the comparison between architectural criticism and music or film criticism. Is such parallel grounded on shared notions, rhetorics or theoretical tools, which are common to both fields? This part of the symposium is open to proposals that analyze these similarities and overlaps between different fields. It is equally open to specialists of art criticism as well as criticism of music, film, and literature, in order to animate a debate on the possible relationships between various forms of criticism and their shared territories.

By addressing all those questions, the symposium intends primarily to interrogate the multiple definitions of architectural criticism, without giving any prescriptive or normative definition of what "good" or "real" criticism might or should be.
These issues can be approached from different cultural and geographical standpoints, in an attempt to help sketch a vast set of definitions of criticism, closely related to various cultural and intellectual traditions.

Scientific Committee

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Abstracts in English of maximum 300 words, accompanied by a short CV including name, affiliation and a list of selected publications (all in one file in word or rtf format), must be sent by January, 8th to:
mappingcritarch@gmail.com
Notification of acceptance will be sent to authors by January 22nd.

Website: http://mac.hypotheses.org/

For questions regarding the organization of the workshop, please contact:
mappingcritarch@gmail.com or helene.janniere@univ-rennes2.fr
There is no registration fee; unfortunately, our organization cannot cover travel expenses.

Reference:

CFP: Toward a Geography of Architectural Criticism (Paris/Rennes, 3-4 Apr 17). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 22, 2016 (accessed Nov 26, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/14243>.