

**Critique architecturale
et débat public**

sous la dir. de **Hélène Jannièrè & Paolo Scrivano**

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Abstract Architectural criticism is often seen in exclusive relation with the professional world of architecture and with academia, originating and descending in large part from theory or history of architecture. Challenging these assumptions, this introductory text considers architectural criticism – in its multiple forms – from a different perspective: it places it within the wider arena of public debate, exploring its disciplinary boundaries. Engaging in public debate, in fact, architectural criticism broaches themes and questions that go beyond professional and specialized interests: criticism can therefore be seen as acting as an “interface” between different stakeholders, with the critic assuming the role of mediator. This essay argues that it is possible to address the question of what is “public” in criticism by using examples drawn from recent history. The studies assembled in the present volume prompt a reflection on cases where architectural criticism has been able to appropriate themes of public debate, offering specific viewpoints on the relation of architectural criticism to public opinion and to the public sphere.

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Public Debate and Public Opinion: Notes for a Research on Architectural Criticism

Since the end of the nineteenth century, architectural criticism has from time to time been described as the “poor cousin” of criticism. An historically less established practice and less recognized activity whose disciplinary boundaries were less defined than those of art criticism, architectural criticism encountered a lesser public success than cinema, music or theatre criticism. A recent example may illustrate this deficit, in terms of both offer and public audience: *La Dispute*, a cultural radio program launched in France in 2011, broadcasts daily on criticism of the visual arts, theatre, cinema and literature, but seldom ventures into the fields of architecture and the built environment.¹ Apparently little read, seen or listened to by the general public, architectural criticism, when geared via the mainstream or cultural press toward a non-specialized audience, has also been often denigrated by practitioners or by architecture’s academic community – the former blaming it for its supposed distance from the reality of design and building industry, the latter accusing it of alleged theoretical shortcomings. All in all, these observations lead to question the composition of the public of architectural criticism and its limited diffusion outside specialized circles. Is criticism in exclusive or privileged relation

with the professional world of architecture, the academic milieu, the educational institutions of architecture? And, if not, under which conditions and in which measure does criticism participate in the public debate?

The public role of criticism

With these questions becoming all the more relevant at a time of unprecedented transformations affecting the press, it is possible to question the future of criticism in the realm of politics and society as well as in that of cultural and artistic productions. In a current situation unfavourable to the press,² do generalist media still reserve space for criticism? How do matters stand with criticism, particularly in architecture, in the public space intended as a space for public debate? The proliferation of electronic media and social networks, together with the new uses resulting from them, have had a deep impact on the political and cultural press and on the specialized one: these mutations have the capacity to subvert the roles between critic and public and the potential to transform the latter into an active agent of criticism, thanks to the use of social networks or the creation and frequentation of blogs. Even though this issue of *CLARA* does not deal directly with

1 On *France Culture* radio channel since September 2011. Producer: Arnaud Laporte. Retrieved from: <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-dispute> [available on October 15, 2019].

2 With budgets being drastically reduced in newspapers, journals, radio and television, the boundaries between journalism and communication are becoming increasingly less defined.

architectural criticism in electronic media or with new readership practices on the web, these recent transformations invite to put under question the public role of criticism. Thus, this volume proposes to shed indirect light on the current situation through case studies drawn from recent history: to do so, it considers several viewpoints on the relation of architectural criticism to the public debate and its different publics. It also proposes a reflection on cases where architectural criticism has been able to appropriate themes of public debate.

Beyond these reasons, which one can *a priori* judge somewhat distant from the major concerns of architecture's "disciplinary" and professional domains, to assemble a collection of writings under the title "Architectural Criticism and Public Debate" answers to an epistemological question about criticism: looking at its relationship to the public debate, in fact, can first of all help decoding architectural criticism's definitions and boundaries. Moreover, analysing this relationship makes possible to pose new questions, especially since this volume of *CLARA* responds to the growing interest that seems to surround the theme these days.³ Over the past ten years and a few decades after art criticism, architectural criticism has become a research subject in its own right. It has now attracted the attention of many scholars who have shown that the understanding of the "critical" object requires going beyond the study of its vectors – such as the professional journals, to which many studies have been devoted since the 1980s – and of its actors' intellectual trajectories – notably those of the architectural historians, the subject of numerous monographs in recent times. Examining architectural criticism from the perspective of the public debate leads thus to reconsider the

commonly accepted definitions of criticism, sometimes indicated as derived from the theory or history of architecture and sometimes as a mediation between them.

The British literary critic Terry Eagleton makes of the link to public space a condition of any critical discourse: "the concept of criticism cannot be separated from the institution of the public sphere. Every judgment has to be directed toward a public [...]. Through its relationship with the reading public, critical reflection loses its private character. Criticism opens itself to debate, it attempts to convince, it invites contradiction" (Eagleton, 2005: 10). Starting from the field of literature, Eagleton sees in the contemporary decline of criticism a consequence of its distance, since the eighteenth century, from the public space of debate to which it used to be intrinsically linked. This issue of *CLARA* assumes that it is the relationship of architectural criticism to the public space of discussion what distinguishes it from other types of texts in architecture – whether of theoretical, historical, technical, or doctrinal nature (Jannièrè, 2019). It also suggests that, by exploring this relationship, one can better understand the blurred boundaries that criticism shares with other types of writings on architecture and the built environment. All this brings back to the distinction made in 1968 by historian Peter Collins in his article "The Philosophy of Architectural Criticism" between an architectural critique that would be a "form of criticism in general", in the same way as art, music or literary criticism, and "an activity which must be considered *sui generis*", a "very special" one and "related only to architecture" (Collins, 1968: 46).⁴ In the eyes of Collins, this second orientation deserves alone the name of architectural criticism and remains an internal discourse to the field of architecture through its actors, theoretical references and media. Indeed, does not the interaction with the public sphere tend to disappear when criticism, understood as an

3 The research project *Mapping Architectural Criticism, 20th and 21st Centuries: A Cartography*, funded by the French National Research Agency between 2014 and 2017, has created an international network of scholars focusing on the history of architectural criticism according to different definitions of the subject and utilizing different methodological approaches: more information about the project can be found at <https://mac.hypotheses.org>

4 For further considerations on the dichotomy proposed by Collins and for its consequences for the historiography of criticism, see: Jannièrè (2009).

internal discourse of architecture, claims to be an autonomous practice?

Criticism and its multiple forms

Examining the relation of criticism to the public debate can then lead to reconsidering certain classifications of criticism: scholarly, popular and by experts or users. Establishing in 1930 one of the first typologies of literary criticism, Albert Thibaudet appropriately referred to the so-called secular criticism, that of non-specialists, as the “secrétariat du public” – the “secretariat of the public” –, which he also defined as “spontaneous criticism”: the very fact that his classification was based on the relationship with the public is, in itself, interesting (Thibaudet, 1939).⁵ Following Thibaudet, the attempts to classify literary and art criticism multiplied. Faced with a complex task, many theorists, critics and researchers have in turn tried to inventory several types of architectural criticism in order to bring to focus the status of this object so difficult to define. The already mentioned Peter Collins, one of the first authors to define a typology applicable to the field of architecture, distinguished three kinds of criticism according to their readerships or audiences: the one geared toward the “general public”, the “professional”, and the “profane” (Collins, *op.cit.*). Emerging from more sociological approaches, other lines of thought differentiate the types of criticism depending on the profile of the critics and their positions in the architectural discourse (Devillard 2000; Deboulet 2008; Lange 2012).⁶

However, if attempts to classify architecture criticism abound, the resulting proposals still raise numerous questions. For example, does the opposition between “scholarly”

or elitist criticism and “profane” or popular remain valid today? In 1998, the critic and journalist Suzanne Stephens pointed out the growing gap between a criticism destined for a well-defined readership, the one frequenting professional periodicals, and a theoretical criticism found in journals emanating from academia, in particular in North America (Stephens, 1998). Although very different, both types of criticism are addressed to the architectural milieu (whether its readership is formed by practitioners or academics) and their proposals remain internal to professional and technological circles, to theoretical manifestos, and to the narratives of the history of architecture. Banking on a North American tradition of which Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs and Ada Louise Huxtable have been eminent representatives, Stephens propounds a third way, that of “public” criticism, written by professional journalists, hosted in “generalist” newspapers, and intended for a large audience (Stephens, 2009).

To varying degrees, the essays collected in this volume raise too the question of what is “public” criticism. In the eyes of the editors, the definition of public criticism should not be limited to contributions published by specialized journalists in daily newspapers. The intent of this issue of *CLARA* is rather to understand in which measure architectural criticism takes part in the public debate by broaching themes that go beyond professional or specialized interests, regardless of the nature of the employed vectors and the intellectual position of the involved authors. In addition, the idea of “public” criticism interrogates the level of involvement of non-specialized media and intellectuals in the criticism of architecture and, conversely, that of the architectural critics in the intellectual field.

5 This is the text's second edition, the first having appeared in 1930: a new edition has been made available by Michel Jarrety (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013).

6 In light of the many initiatives – round tables, symposia, and articles – that have been devoted to the subject, it would impossible to provide a thorough overview of the multiplicity of forms that can be attributed to architectural criticism, a task that would be made even more difficult by the existence of diverse traditions of criticism in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Public debate, public sphere, public opinion

The title chosen for this volume deserves indeed clarification. In political science, public debate indicates the “principle of a direct confrontation of ideas between opponents, the recognition of the virtue of the democratic system in relying on the exchanges of opinions and in involving as much as necessary the citizens in the mechanisms of decision, through deliberative processes” (Mercier, 2015⁷). The concepts of “public debate”, “public sphere”, and “public opinion” are therefore closely intertwined. Public debate is a “related principle” to that concerning the public sphere (*ibid.*), which in turn is defined as a place where societal issues are discussed publicly, according to a notion derived by Hannah Arendt from the Greek *polis* and by Jürgen Habermas from the bourgeois public sphere that emerged in the eighteenth century.

As a consequence, public debate always takes place before an audience (Badouard *et al.*, 2016: 7): while not always implying the latter’s physical presence, it consists in a process of “debating contradictory arguments during which an individual or a group will be confronted with diverging opinions in order to evolve or, on the contrary, reinforce the initial positions” (*ibid.*⁸). The public character of the exchanges, which requires their content made accessible to a third public, is at the heart of the Habermasian theory of the public space. It thus covers a series of discussions, which “are not abstract exchanges that take place in a world of chimerical ideas: they are concrete social activities occurring in material spaces” (*ibid.*⁹). It is not the case to discuss here the various denotations of the concept of public debate, whose genesis, criticism, and multiple implications have been examined by many authors in several disciplines, from political philosophy to information-communication sciences: applied to other fields, the definitions of public debate are notably broader

than those originally used in political science when referring to democracy. It is nonetheless important to unravel the meanings of this notion often used by historians in their writings on the modes of publication in architecture.

Since the release in 2007 of Richard Wittman’s *Architecture, Print Culture and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century France*, it is not uncommon for authors of works on modes of publication in architecture to call for the notion of public sphere or public space. Most times architectural historians refer to the concept theorized in 1962 by Jürgen Habermas to designate both a “set of private persons who debate the common interest”, in the particular context of Europe at the origins of the Enlightenment, and the “bourgeois public sphere” that emerged as a counter-model to the absolutist state on account of the public discussion under the aegis of reason (Ballarini, 2018). The public space — synonym in French of public sphere, the two terms being used in an equivalent way in the texts discussing this concept¹⁰ — acquires with Habermas two successive and competing meanings. On the one hand, it designates the place, physical or not, where the ideas that in this space are brought to crystallize into a public opinion are rationally discussed; on the other, it covers a structuring principle of the social order, based on the relations between the private and the public sphere (*ibid.*). Delineated in the 1962 book, these two meanings have since been analysed as categories characterizing a particular historical context, that of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century in the first case, and as a normative model of public space in the second (*ibid.*). After having been over time amended by Habermas himself (Habermas, 1992), discussed extensively, and even contested (Fraser, 1992¹¹)

10 See Ballarini’s analysis of the translation in different languages of the titles of Habermas’s works: in Italian, for example, the definition of *opinione pubblica* (public opinion) does not make reference to the term “sphere” nor to the term “space”.

11 “[A] body of ‘private persons’ assembled to discuss matters of ‘public concern’ or ‘common interest’ ” (Fraser, 1992: 112).

7 Translation by the authors.

8 *Ibid.*, translation by the authors.

9 *Ibid.*, translation by the authors.

– in particular because of the uniqueness of the bourgeois public sphere postulated by Habermas, which does not consider the critical thinking within other social classes (Ballarini, 2016) –, the notions of public sphere and public space have been marked by multiple variations and have also benefited from the contributions coming from various disciplines.

Despite these developments, sometimes these two notions – which have enjoyed an “incredible fortune”, in the words of Thierry Paquot (2009) – are used intuitively when transferred to other disciplinary fields: “Frequently mentioned in articles or in book introductions, the public space is almost never put in place as part of a theoretical framework for the clarification of a series of problems. It is indeed so commonly used that it seems to work as an acquired thought, designating an invariant whose definition would be shared by all, without being in effect useful in the conduct of a research” (Ballarini, 2016¹²). In a recent wave of works on architectural publishing and architectural theory, the public sphere (openly referred to Habermas) appears often considered as an “acquired thought”, an abstract and normative element, and not derived from historical and social conditions, owing to the lack of consideration for the semantic depth of the term and its diachronic variations. Behind these references to the Habermasian public sphere, one can detect multiple – and perhaps not totally conscious – layers of sense, as Wittman (2007) at one point remarks in the introduction to his book.¹³ In addition to this, Wittman considers the public sphere not as a single place (pinpointing in passing the problem posed by the spatialization of

the concept in the English translation of “public sphere”), but as a network formed of a multiplicity of places, echoing in this respect the positions taken by a large part of contemporary scholarship.

One of the most recent works dedicated to architectural publishing, *The Printed and the Built* of 2018, takes up the idea of the construction of a public sphere that materializes “architecturally”. The central thesis of this book is in fact that the architectural materialization of the public sphere did not merely correspond to an act of building, but to a revolution of the illustrated press at the beginning of the nineteenth century that brought architecture into the public space and that, as a consequence, gave rise to a “public discourse”. As Anne Hultzsch, one of the editors of *The Printed and the Built*, writes in the book’s introduction, “[i]ntegrating words, images and buildings – real or imaginary – in entirely new ways, the illustrated press contributed to shape a new public discourse on architecture and to propel architecture into the public realm as part of a novel visual culture” (Hultzsch, 2018: 7). In explicit connection to Wittman’s position, Hultzsch remarks how “[...] the modern public sphere manifested itself architecturally not only in the form of buildings, but also as debates, programs, reactions and negotiations in and over public space. The spatial practices of the modern city were negotiated in print, making the new press key to understanding the city, its architecture and its public life” (*ibid.*).

The interest of Wittman’s book, however, does not only consist in arguing that architectural subjects penetrate the public space of debate and that, symmetrically, the public debate covers themes pertaining to architecture or urban transformation. Wittman makes clear that the discussions on architecture and the city became the melting pot of the political exchange, especially after 1740. If a campaign of reform of the taste of the educated elite had been launched by the French Royal Academy of Architecture since its foundation at the end of the seventeenth century (Wittman, 2009: *passim*, 11–12), it was in the mid-eighteenth century that the protagonists of the discussion over public architecture in Paris triggered a debate on

12 Translation by the authors.

13 In particular, Wittman reminds that, despite its vast influence, *Strukturwandel in der Öffentlichkeit* is the work of a philosopher and a sociologist and not of a historian: “[*Strukturwandel in der Öffentlichkeit*] was never intended as a social history properly speaking, but rather aimed to provide a basis for Habermas’ criticism of contemporary public life” (Wittman, 2007: 5). Wittman also states that, while grounding on Habermas’s work the structure of his own analysis, he nevertheless took into account more recent studies devoted to the question of public sphere.

buildings and sites, as “a way to raise controversial questions about the management of national life by the Crown that would have been dangerous to pose in a more direct way” (*ibid.*: 14¹⁴). Wittman thus shows how a discourse apparently limited to specialists manages to reach the general interest, evoking in this case the phenomenon of *montée en généralité*, of generalization, as defined by the sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991). It appears then evident that deploying notions of this kind in the architectural field has implications that go far beyond those implicit to the notion of “publication”, outlined already thirty years ago by Hélène Lipstadt (1989).

Criticism and the formation of public opinion

Finally, there is another reason to be interested in the “public debate”, as a principle connected to that of public sphere. If linking the notion of public sphere to that of criticism in general might appear particularly fruitful methodologically – as evidenced by Eagleton¹⁵ –, art historians have also looked with favour at the relation between public sphere and art criticism. This has allowed them to delve deeper into what public, audience, and public opinion might mean in their own disciplinary domain, three notions that have continued to remain somewhat controversial since the 1980s. For example, more than a decade before Wittman, Sylvia Lavin noted that art historians have highlighted the convergence in the mid-eighteenth century between the consolidation of art criticism as a practice and the emergence of a public

sphere (Lavin, 1994¹⁶). In her view, in their proliferation during the eighteenth century, the theories of architecture played a role similar to that of art criticism in codifying personal taste into a norm and in forming a coherent body of “public opinion”.¹⁷ Lavin also adds that the history of architecture has not drawn all the consequences from this observation and from a full understanding of the notions of public and public opinion.¹⁸ “Particularly controversial, and of a seemingly obvious and yet eminently complex sense”, the concept of opinion is of special interest here (d’Almeida, 2007: 18).

In their statements in favour or against criticism, architects and critics have repeatedly mobilized the notion of public opinion – albeit often failing to mobilize public opinion itself. In 1886, at a time when the journal *La Construction moderne* had been in existence for less than a year, its founder and editor-in-chief, the engineer Paul Planat, entitled his editorial “L’architecture et le public” (“The Architecture and the Public”).¹⁹ In the text, Planat warned in particular against the merits of “étaler dans le public” (“spreading out in the audience” in English) – that is, in the general press – polemics or controversies confined to the “men of art”. However, despite this modesty, or perhaps prudence,

16 The creation of an audience for the arts and its emergence within the so-called *Salons* have been challenged by some scholars: Thomas Crow in his *Painting and Public Life* (Crow, 1984) asserts that the emergence of an art audience around 1747 (date of the famous essay by Étienne de La Font de Saint Yenne, long considered, even before Denis Diderot, as the founder of art criticism) was a much longer and more intricate process than the myth of this “convergence” generally induces to think. Also, Crow’s conclusions have been disputed: according to some, an audience for the arts – both “popular and “educated” – existed well before the establishing of criticism in the mid-eighteenth century; see Uzel (2012).

17 “Indeed, given its critical and speculative character rather than its practical value, this literature emerges as the equivalent, in the domain of architecture, of the art criticism that developed during the same period and that also began to establish techniques and standards of judgment for the works of art” (Lavin, *op. cit.*: 185).

18 This is the position that the authors of this text endorse (Jannièrre 2019).

19 The editorial responded to a controversial article appeared in the daily *Le Temps* about the basilique du Sacré-Cœur in Paris (Planat, 1886).

14 Translation by the authors.

15 The beginning of this introduction recalled the interaction between criticism and public sphere as formulated in the field of literary criticism (Eagleton, *Op. cit.*).

probably meant to preserve the professional interests of architects, by launching a column called “Causeries” Planat wanted exactly to establish a form of dialogue with the public. In the first edition of 1885 of this section, he saw indeed in this new weekly publication a possible and worthwhile *trait d’union* between the architect and the public. On his part, the historian Nikolaus Pevsner invoked during the Second World War “the man in the street” in a column of *The Architectural Review* aimed at visually educate its readers to recognize historical values in London’s vernacular architecture threatened to be destroyed by German bombardments. And in the postwar period, the policy of mass housing, generally poorly received in France, gave rise to calls from architects to educate the public opinion, which should have been acquired to the cause of large urban interventions: in the eyes of the professionals who built the so-called *grands ensembles*, the critic should have played a leading role in such a task of forming opinion (Jannièrè, forthcoming). These examples seem to prove that the critic has often been seen as a potential mediator in the service of architecture and that the relation to public opinion has constituted a permanent concern for architects: but if summoning the public opinion is an aspiration that remains persistent in architectural culture, it is at the same time indefinite and somewhat incantatory, and as much evasive as the notion of “general public”.

Addressing the public: an array of case studies

The notion of “public opinion”, as elaborated by several disciplines, has therefore no univocal meaning.²⁰ Should thus public opinion be intended as expressed “in public”, as publicized, and as referring to the public sphere, or should it be seen as the opinion of a

“public” the contours of which still remain to be defined?²¹ How to transfer this very malleable notion into the domain of architectural criticism? And does the address to a “public” make criticism become “generalist”, geared toward a general public, as if opposed to a criticism made by experts for experts and specialists?

The essays contained in this volume advance partial answers to these questions. Some of them, for example, tackle the relation between criticism and public opinion under the perspective of a connection between a specialized discourse about architecture and the views expressed by a variety of actors and media that are indirectly linked to architecture as a profession but also as its “material” outcome in a society – as we have seen, a recurring theme in the last three centuries of the history of the discipline. In her essay on knowledge and opinion in Portugal’s early twentieth-century architectural criticism, Rute Figueiredo mentions British literary critic Frank Kermode and his position about criticism as a “conversation between knowledge and opinion”, something that draws an interesting parallel with Cedric Price’s “dialogical” approach to criticism, as explained in another article included in this collection, the one by Jim Njoo on the British architect’s activity as columnist. The latter’s case is particularly cogent to the questions addressed by this issue of *CLARA*, since Price propounded a variety of “declinations” according to which architectural criticism can be associated to the public

20 See, among many other studies on this question: Brugidou (2008: 13–32). For a history of the public opinion since the seventeenth century: Neumann (1984). An issue of the journal *Hermès* retraces the different studies dedicated to the notion of public opinion in the United States: “Théories de l’opinion publique: perspectives anglo-saxonnes” (Bondiaux *et al.*, 2001).

21 “The opinion’s public character reflects several traits. It first evokes the idea of publicizing opinions that no longer circulate clandestinely, in the secrecy of some *salons* or some exclusive circles but that, starting from the eighteenth century, are printed, made known, and circulated thanks to a press system whose growth is at this moment exponential. It then reflects an audience, a real or supposed community to which opinions are addressed and delivered. Public opinion is an opinion in a community, in the service of a community that receives it, discusses it, or disputes it. The public is both producer and receiver of opinions, author and recipient, subject and object of the action. The adjective public reflects here a horizon of exchange and debate, a power of debate and judgment that links and makes society” (d’Almeida, *op. cit.*: 19–20). Translation by the authors.

debate, in a way that reflects, as Njoo puts, “a ‘dialogical’ approach to criticism based on [...] creative experiments in mass media, journalism and writing”. In Price’s almost kaleidoscopic activities, architectural criticism emerged as both a sort of negotiation between architecture and public discourse, at once discursive practice situated “somewhere between architectural theory and architectural journalism”, and advocacy for the creation of a sense of “societal awareness”. The essays also unveil the role played by specific “tools”, such as specialized publication outlets, in defining the boundaries of criticism in relation to public opinion. This is made evident by the case of *A Construção Moderna* and *Arquitetura Portuguesa*, two journals analysed by Figueiredo that, while developing different publishing strategies – one geared more toward professional milieus, the other more toward the general public –, provided the figure of the architect in the context of early twentieth-century Portugal an opportunity for social distinction and cultural legitimation, crafting a sense of relevance within the public realm. Indeed, legitimation and distinction – almost in the terms defined by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979) – are possible elements through which to read the interaction between “specialization” and “non specialization” in any architectural discourse.

Several essays tackle questions regarding the complex relation between specialized and non-specialized criticism, on one side, and its audiences and readerships, on the other. These questions entail the presence of mediation or negotiation of some sort, which Price for example expressed in the idea of “self-reflection” or self-criticism (through his “Cedric Price Supplement” in the journal *Architectural Design*) as a component of a broader process of “dialogical criticism”. Njoo makes a point in distinguishing between “dialogics” from “dialectics”, in line with Richard Sennett’s concept of “dialogic cooperation” illustrated in his 2012 *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*: “dialogics” does not “[...] aim at finding a common ground or arriving at a synthesis”, writes Njoo, thus a “dialogic” conversation is part of a “process

of exchange” meant to facilitate awareness and mutual understanding. What seems to implicitly emerge from this apparently incessant quest for a dialogue is the recognition of the condition of “blurred boundaries” that characterizes criticism in architecture. Criticism therefore appears as a possible “interface” between varied and thus not always converging realms. This might be the case when at stake is the cultural transfer from and to the architectural discourse and “nearby” fields – such as philosophy, theory, and sociology –, a theme that Jasna Galjer discusses in her essay on the debate on criticism in former Yugoslavia. The activities and initiatives of the so-called “Praxis Group”, the group of un-orthodox Marxist philosophers and intellectuals around the journal *Praxis* (published for a decade starting from 1964) and the parallel Summer School of Philosophy in Korčula, in the Adriatic Sea, carried not only a political dimension in their attempts at bridging the gap that existed during the years of the Cold War between East and West Europe, but also contained an implicit intent at producing multidisciplinary exchanges. The various projects and proposals by architects and architectural theorists such as Vjenceslav Richter – whose *Sinturbanizam* (“Synthurbanism”) was published in 1964 –, Radovan Delalle, Andrija Mutnjaković, and Antoaneta Pasinović implied a synthesis of discourses, the crossing of the boundaries separating architecture from other disciplinary realms. The Yugoslav context also demonstrates the remarkable receptivity of some East European architectural milieus, as it seems to be proved by the circulation in Yugoslavia of Jürgen Habermas’s work well ahead of the English-speaking countries, something that made Yugoslav intellectuals (and architects) well aware of his theory of public sphere.

In many cases, the search for a common ground for exchange, involving the potential participation of disciplines other than architecture, might also have been a response to the “perceived distance” between the world of practitioners and professionals and that of users and viewers. This is what, for example, Michela Rosso discusses in her piece on the British and American architectural

criticism's scenes of the 1970s and 1980s. The argumentations used by journalist and writer Tom Wolfe, as well as by others, to denigrate modern architecture in the public discourse suggested a curious reversing of modernist aesthetics: the alleged questionable quality of modern architecture was attributed to its use of elementary forms recalling the simplicity (or the banality, in the critics' view) of box-like objects – the same simplicity that, before and after the Second World War, prominent modernist architects such as Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius had for example found and appreciated in Japanese architecture. Wolfe's attack on modernism was also based on a process of personalization of the critical discourse, one producing a close identification between author and object of debate. Highlighting this aspect, Rosso's piece leads to argue that this mode of approaching architectural criticism paralleled a way of depicting architecture – through the perspective of the architect's *persona* – that might have anticipated (and perhaps inspired) many contemporary narratives concerning the figure of the architect.²² Furthermore, the attacks on modernism of which Wolfe was one of the major exponents disclosed not only a curious paradox – the polemics of the 1970s and 1980s probably brought to public attention a phenomenon that had been partially neglected before –, but also a use of narration devices that had been effectively derived from other segments of public communication.

The oftentimes-unresolved question of the supposed dissociation between critical discourses about architecture and public opinion emerges also in other articles contained in this issue of *CLARA*. The public character of some of the foremost *opérations d'urbanisme* carried out in France around the 1990s is analysed by Valéry Didelon, in his essay dedicated to the case of Euralille, by using the interpretative binomial of *critique élitaire* versus *critique populaire*. In a detailed and convincing way, Didelon describes the distance that separated the protagonists of the so-called “high” debate – in the major

architectural publications – from those who participated in the discussions about the project in light of their particular interests – the residents directly affected by the works, the downtown merchants concerned by the transformations affecting the distribution of goods in Lille's metropolitan area, the city population as a whole, even the local professionals eager to be “[...] involved in the largest development operation that the city had known for a long time”. It is interesting, and perhaps not surprising, to read in Didelon's text of the accusations of elitism that targeted in the popular press both the project for Euralille and its design mastermind, Rem Koolhaas:²³ a situation that stresses the problematic position of the contemporary architect, anxious to be at the centre stage of the media discourses about architecture but somewhat cornered in the major decision-making processes concerning the city and the building sector and marginalized in the construction of architecture's public perception.²⁴ Albeit from a perspective to various extents different, the same subject is also addressed by Sebastiaan Loosen in his essay on the critical debate in 1970s and 1980s Flanders and the almost “symbiotic” association of architect Bob (or bOb) Van Reeth to critic Geert Bekaert, when discussing an overlapping between built and written work that reconfigures the relation between professionals, experts and the public. The case of Van Reeth and Bekaert reinstates criticism's crucial role of mediation, though this time between the intrinsic autonomy of the discipline of architecture and the unavoidable “public” character of the built environment.

The question that remains open is whether architectural criticism might be considered even beyond the realm of “professional” critics (or professional experts

23 Koolhaas, with the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), was the author of Euralille's master plan.

24 In this case it comes to mind Koolhaas's embarrassed interview that accompanies the video-documentary *Koolhaas Houselife* (2008), by Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine on villa Lemoine in Bordeaux, where he is asked to respond to the criticism coming from Guadalupe Acedo, the housekeeper protagonist of the film.

tout court), to encompass other voices from various streams of popular culture, including singers and songwriters. This is what is provocatively proposed by Erik Wegerhoff in his essay on Italian *pop star* Adriano Celentano and his 1960s hit *Il ragazzo della via Gluck*. While that of Celentano is more a critique of urbanization than real architectural criticism – as Wegerhoff makes clear in his text –, the song lyrics seem to place themselves in that intermediate space of negotiation between specialized and non-professional discourses. By looking at an example placed perhaps at the extreme limits of architectural criticism’s territory, Wegerhoff’s essay points again at the juxtaposition between “profane” and “educated” criticism discussed by others in this same issue of *CLARA*. It is the very same kind of mediation that marked the weekly column series that Cedric Price started in 1985 for *Building Design* under the title “Starting Price”, described by Jim Njoo’s article: responding to letters received from readers, Price forged “a sense of community and proximity with its readership”, but also helped determining a sort of crossing point for all the involved actors in the architectural discourse, both professionals and laypersons. In this case, the parallel with the columns often found in popular journals – such as those written by “experts” and advising on a multitude of questions²⁵ – is striking. Whether the letters to which he replied were authentic or written by Price himself, as someone seems to suggest, is of relative relevance: what matters is that the column “Starting Price” created a sort of ideal “interface” between different levels of understanding of architecture.

Conclusion

The studies assembled in this volume offer a spectrum of examples of possible engagements of architectural criticism with public debate. They confirm the multiplicity of forms that criticism has assumed in the past, pinpointing at the same time different modes of establishing a relation to public opinion and to the public sphere. They all highlight, though, criticism’s capacity to go beyond professional and specialized interests and to act as a mediating element between different stakeholders. Of course, they do not provide an overall portrait of criticism’s relation to the public: but they challenge well-established assumptions that place criticism in exclusive connection with the professional world of architecture and with academia, originating and descending in large part from theory or history of architecture. While much remains to be done, this volume aspires to offer a small contribution to an investigation that is still at its infancy.

25 See for example the case of columns on interior, furniture or kitchen design in 1960s Italian women magazines (Scrivano, 2017).

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