Interview Essay
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On Conversations about Architecture and Philosophy, with Kenneth Frampton

I met Kenneth Frampton on April 30, 2023, during his last week in the United States before moving back to London. He'd come from his home in Hudson down to New York City for two days of last-minute engagements, among which our dinner in Midtown Manhattan. The reason for our meeting was one that he felt important enough to carve out some time in his schedule: a conversation about philosophy.

In the months that followed, we exchanged several e-mails and letters. We started by reviewing an edited transcript of our discussion, to which I added new questions. He responded with edits and new comments, before deciding to completely rewrite his replies in a more rigorous manner. In turn, I redid my remarks, to which he then reacted, and so on throughout a year-long back-and-forth. The result was a simple rendition of an otherwise layered compilation, of his responses to my remarks to his recollections prompted by my questions. Together, they offer a record of the impact that several philosophical ideas exerted in Kenneth Frampton's work throughout the years, as well as of how he dealt with them, what he thinks of their importance for architectural discourse, and what new sources he's looking into as he continues to think about architecture.

Philosophy, a Scandal

Among the many sources Frampton's writings draw on to talk about architecture, philosophy has been distinctive, constant, and influential. His early text in Charles Jencks and George Baird's *Meaning in Architecture* bears the title "Labour, Work and Architecture" (1969), as does his collection of essays published under the same name in 2002, explicitly

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alluding to the triad of "labor," "work," and "action" as described by his first and greatest philosophical interest, Hannah Arendt. His début editorial for *Oppositions*, suggestively called "On Reading Heidegger" (1974), opens with a quote from the then recent English translation of "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951), while Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935/36) plays a part in "Rappel à l'ordre: The Case for the Tectonic" (1990). The introduction to the first edition of his major book *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (1980) begins with Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, from *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940), while the latest edition of 2020 replaced it with a passage from Guy Debord's *Comments on the Society of Spectacle* (1989), which had come out in the meantime, on modernity and thinking, before echoing Jürgen Habermas' claims about the unfinished project of modernity. His landmark essay "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" (1983)—a chapter following directly after Habermas' own appearance in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* edited by Hal Foster—cites a cornucopia of philosophical concepts, including Heidegger's notion of "place," Ricoeur's "universal civilization," Marcuse's "one-dimensional thinking," Benjamin's "aura," and Arendt's "space of appearance."

In our conversation, Frampton described his use of philosophy humbly as something of a "scandal," because of how "casual" and "intuitive" it was. My assessment is far more laudatory than his modesty would permit—albeit appreciating humility as an important feature of his approach. Frampton integrates a wide range of philosophical notions and insights into his thinking: neither as superfluous embellishments that appear after the fact, nor merely as examples or illustrations of his point, but as structural components of his discourse. Philosophical references inform specific steps in the reasoning process, so decisively that they ultimately become inseparable from it. In the process, Frampton avoids many common pitfalls in such exchanges. Philosophers do not overpower his work and turn him into one of their disciples, nor does he fall into the temptation of pertaining to be a philosopher himself. The purpose of these contributions is linked and subservient to his larger architectural positions. Furthermore, he steers clear of the trend of reducing philosophical sources to placeholders for one's own pre-established points, reducing them to quotes and citations that are meant to give a deceptive sense of intellectual authority to one's speech. To the contrary, Frampton carefully reads and seeks to understand philosophical ideas. He learns

from them, builds from them, and questions them, modestly, curiously, and genuinely open to their enriching transformative potential.

Theory at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies

Frampton's interest in philosophical ideas is an exemplary instance of a larger phenomenon that defined architectural culture in the second half of the twentieth century, and has remained part of it ever since. It emerged from a mix of necessity and opportunity. On the one hand, philosophical post-war reflections on the crisis of modernity helped architects in their critical reevaluations of the modernist tradition and on how react to its apparent demise. Philosophers at the time also provided architects with the means of speaking to the condition of social unrest in Europe and the United States in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, with questions of sociopolitical nature that took nothing for granted. On the other hand, as the economic crisis of the 1970s left architects out of work, many were prompted to explore theoretical questions instead. They found a global haven for these projects in New York, at an extraordinarily productive international place of encounter and activity that could only have existed there and then, says Frampton, he who took active part in it too.

> "Between the mid-'60s to the mid-'80s the intensity of the critical discourse within the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (the IAUS, established by Peter Eisenman and Arthur Drexler as an adjunct to the Museum of Modern Art) made it into a center of an evolving transatlantic debate, which may explain why three of the contributors to Hal Foster's postmodern anthology *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture* were involved in one way or another with the IAUS [Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, and Frampton himself, while although Fredric Jameson too became involved as a guest speaker]. This also accounts for why my second essay, to be influenced by *The Human Condition*, entitled 'Industrialization and the Crisis of Architecture', appeared in the first issue of the IAUS magazine, *Oppositions*."

Many of the discussions at the Institute and in *Oppositions* relied heavily on philosophical sources—incidentally establishing influential and long-lasting models how architectural-philosophical exchange can

occur. But within the IAUS' penthouse in New York flowed an extraordinary variety of intellectual currents.

> "The conversation within the IAUS was multifaceted in terms of the various discourses with which its members were affiliated. The ideological affinities of the so-called IAUS 'fellows' covered a wide range, beginning with Eisenman, who was preoccupied at the time with Noam Chomsky's deep structural analysis of language. At the same time, there was the Marxism of Anthony Vidler, closely aligned with the so-called 'negative thought' of the Tafuri/Cacciari line of the history and theory of architecture then being elaborated within the IUAV, Venice. Mario Gandelsonas and Diana Agrest were influenced by the literary structuralism emanating from such figures as Roland Barthes. Both Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi who were also briefly associated with the IAUS were linked to other distinguished French intellectuals such as Hubert Damisch and Jacques Derrida. This rich mix was very much amplified by the presence of visiting architectural intellectuals from Spain and Italy who were part of the internal debate within the IAUS, such figures as Massimo Scolari and Giorgio Ciucci from Italy, and Rafael Moneo and Ignasi de Solà-Morales from Spain."

More names still could be added to this long list. Alan Plattus was one of the first and few architects to write about Ludwig Wittgenstein in a review for *Oppositions* no. 3 (1974) of Bernard Leitner's *The Architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Documentation* (1973). It remains one of the sharpest critical analyses of the so-called Wittgenstein House. Others, like Joan Ockman and Mary McLeod, organized seminars on architectural criticism that brough in speakers like Tomás Llorens and Fredric Jameson, and led to the publication of *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology* (1985). As for Frampton, he developed a singular approach that combined two sets of references: phenomenology, and Marxism as read by the Frankfurt School.

Hannah Arendt: Labor and Work (and Action)

It all began when in 1964 Eisenman invited Frampton to the Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment (CASE) at Princeton University. He would return to teach in 1965, once more owing to Eisenman's initiative. Frampton's first experiences in the United States of America revealed an explicit, aggressive form of capitalism that he'd

never seen before. "In England the claws are hidden, but in the US they are visible," he often says, repeating what Michael Glickman once told him. This shock left a deep and lasting impression on him. As he also frequently points out, "[i]n a way the United States politicizes me."

Around the same time, Frampton found an intellectual framework with which to both make sense of his political awakening and address his concern for the built environment beyond the design of the architect. From a fortuitous recommendation came his first real contact with philosophy, and its impact cannot be overstated.

> "I first read Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) on the recommendation of Sam Stevens who, having studied in the Courtauld, taught history and theory at both the Liverpool School of Architecture and at the AA School of Architecture in the '60s. Similarly trained as an architect at the AA in the '50s, I was acutely aware of the fact that a large part of the built environment was invariably realized without the intervention of an architect. At the same time, it was evident that the megalopolitan suburbia was totally removed from any kind of vernacular culture, and it was just this schism that made me acutely susceptible to Arendt's distinction between 'labor' and 'work' which was such a key aspect of the *The Human Condition*. One can hardly equal the precision of her differentiation between the two: 'Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself. [Whereas of work she wrote:] work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.'[1]"

Frampton was quick to adopt this central conceptual distinction, and to transform it for the purposes of his reflections on the production of the built environment. Arendt became a major reference in Frampton's

[1] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 7.

work thereafter. After "Labor, Work and Architecture" (1969) came his first contribution for *Oppositions*, "Industrialization and the Crisis of Architecture" (1973) and, quite explicitly referring to his inspiration in the title, "The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects: A Reading of the *Human Condition*" (1979).

> "Arendt's *The Human Condition* was of fundamental significance for me because of the parallel that she drew between 'labor' and 'work', defining the first as a condition in which that which is produced is destined for immediate consumption and the second as a condition in which that which is produced is intended to endure. [...] Unlike George Baird, I initially neglected her third term 'action' in order to focus on the uncanny parallel that obtained between Arendt's respective definitions of labor and work and the double definition of architecture in the Oxford English Dictionary, namely, in relation to labor, the first definition speaks of 'the action and process of building', whereas, in relation to work, the second definition alludes 'to the erection of edifices for human use'. And we might note here that ambiguity introduced by the reference to utility."

He might not have expected to find himself one day explaining his use of Arendt's ideas to the philosopher herself. In 1972, at a symposium on Arendt's work organized by the University of York, in Canada, both he and George Baird presented their papers based on her writings. Frampton's contribution was based on what would become "Industrialization and the Crisis of Architecture," an extensive critical history of the techniques of architectural production throughout modernity, from the 1750's across multiple instances of paradigm shifts, or "crises." The essay refers to Descartes, Habermas, and Benjamin, but it's Arendt's quotes that appear consistently throughout the text. They introduce key ideas with which to interpret the historical descriptions that Frampton so carefully laid out. The distinction between "labor" and "work" reappears as a fundamental framework. In the end, in response to Arendt's warnings against the increasing blurring boundaries between the two, Frampton find the way out in "action"—which Arendt defines as "[...] the human condition of plurality [...] [which is] specifically *the* condition—not only *condition sine qua non*, but the *condition per quam*—of all political life."[2]

[2] *Ibid*.

In a conclusion that still feels all too relevant fifty years later, Frampton says: "[...] the only way in which our self-consuming ideology of waste will be overcome and architecture redeemed is through the participatory democratic determination of the nature of our environment. The alternative is to remain subject to that which Arendt has described as the most tyrannical government of all, namely, the government of nobody—the totalitarianism of technique."[3]

Frampton's respondent, as he remembers it, was Robert Major, a former pupil of Arendt's who had registered as a student at Columbia University on her recommendation. But the philosopher herself seems to have reacted too:

> "I recall that she found my adaptation of her discourse to architecture relatively convincing."

Martin Heidegger: Building and Cultivating

Reading Arendt would lead Frampton to discover the work of her teacher, Martin Heidegger. Frampton was one of the first architects to discover and write about the now famous essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951), right after the publication of its first, 1971 English translation by Albert Hofstadter, in "Poetry, Language, Thought."

> "Later, I realized that Arendt's unusual etymological distinctions between labor and work were linked to the phenomenological-existential tradition going back to the foundation of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl and his slogan, 'back to the things themselves', thereby establishing via his assistant Martin Heidegger a line linking Husserl to Arendt who would become in her turn a pupil of Heidegger."

At the Institute, working as an editor of the journal *Oppositions*, he wrote the editorial for the fourth issue and named it "On Reading Heidegger" (1974). The philosopher would thenceforth recur in Frampton's works. In fact, decades later, in a course given at Columbia University shortly before his retirement in 2020, "Critical Theory and Environmental Design: Philosophy and the Predicament of Architecture in the Age of Consumption," references to Heidegger in the syllabus are second only to Arendt.

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[3] K. Frampton, "Industrialization and the Crises in Architecture," *Oppositions*, 1, 1973, pp. 61–62.

Frampton was influenced by the later or post-*kehre* Heidegger though, author of "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935/6), rather than the early Heidegger of "Being and Time" (1927). This might baffle many philosophers, for whom the late Heidegger's lyrical style renders his thought more obscure and even somewhat mystical compared to the terminologically strict, albeit somewhat jargoned explanations of the early Heidegger. For architects, however, there is an instinctive appeal to those hazy images and poetic allusions, all the more as two of its central terms—"building" and "dwelling"—seem to fluctuate between a literal architectural meaning and a metaphorical philosophical one that renders the latter accessible through the former. For example, we easily visualize the idea of "dwelling" as a mode of living in a house—e.g., inhabiting a house to find shelter from predators or the elements—but through that image we can also better understand the broader notion of "dwelling" as inhabiting a world of meanings, in what is commonly called (although not by Heidegger) an "existential sense."

Heidegger's etymological analyses also became keystones of Frampton's reasoning, particularly those around the term *Bauen*. In fact, the recourse to etymology seems to happen in his writings as a methodological strategy even outside of any reference to the German philosopher. His balance between learning from his sources and thinking beyond them is also explicit in moments such as this one, where he embraces Heidegger's linguistic analysis but then contrasts it with a different language.

> "Heidegger's emphasis on 'building' in his 1951 essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking', translated into English in 1971, was equally existential since it served to connect building with the cultivation of the earth, thereby etymologically establishing a link between *Bauen* (building) and *Bauer* (farmer) and hence via the German term for 'neighbor' (*Nachgebauer*), the meaning of one who cultivates and dwells nearby, and, in this regard, one may speculate the German word *Siedlung* (settlement) is a concept that is totally antithetical to the English term 'housing estate'."

An Architectural Phenomenology

Heidegger was a central figure of phenomenology, a concept that has tended to translate into architectural discourse in the most peculiar way. In philosophy, and particularly in the Heideggerian sense,

phenomenology may be broadly and simplistically described as a methodological approach that understands things as they appear to us in our everyday engagement with them, or in our *intentionality* towards them, how they're meaningful to us. It precedes interpretative framework like those of the sciences or metaphysics, which pertain to define the essence of things, and instead reveals the more primordial structures of meaning that constitute our existence in the world. In architecture, the term "phenomenology" metamorphizes from an approach into the consequences of the approach's literal application in the architectural profession. It represents a reaction against both functionally-oriented modern architecture (particularly in Europe) and its reduction to a corporate style of design (especially in the United States).

> "After World War II, architecture was increasingly subject to the impact of techno-science upon what were then still largely craft processes in the generation of built form. As Alan Colquhoun suggests in his 1967 essay 'Typology and Design Method', architectural culture cannot be significantly cultivated unless it is predicated on past prototypical paradigms."

Phenomenology in architecture thus seeks the reinstitution of meaningfulness in design, by retrieving history from the modernist *tabula rasa*, learning from the neglected teachings of tradition, and refocusing design strategies from global homogeneity to regional circumstances. In its built expression, it has come to stand for a subject-centered sensuous experience of space, from the atmosphere it generates to its detailed physical properties, like materiality and texture.

There have been some adaptations of a Heideggerian-based phenomenology in architecture, and Frampton was in contact with a few. He joined two notable thinkers at the First International Cubit Symposium on Architecture and Culture, in 1989, at a roundtable later published as "The Voice of Architecture." One was the philosopher Karsten Harries, well-known both for his inquiries into architecture's task within the *ethos* of a time and place—and that's the sense in which we ought to understand the title of his popular book *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997)—and for teaching the unique course "Philosophy of Architecture" to generations of students at Yale University. Another was the architectural theorist and historian Christian Norberg-Schulz, architect and historian who gave form to many of the aforementioned

stereotypical phenomenological architectural notions in architecture in his book *Genuis Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (1979). Frampton prefers to highlight *Intentions in Architecture* (1962), a book that relies on Gestalt psychology instead, prior to the author's contact with phenomenology but in a way anticipating its necessity. As Frampton pointed out during our conversation, the title itself alludes to *intentions*.

Frampton too made use of phenomenology in his teaching *and* saw it as responding to a previous latent inclination of his, as he points out when revisiting an early pedagogical exercise he used to perform.

> "The didactic method entitled 'Comparative Critical Analysis of Built Form', initiated by me at the beginning of my teaching at Princeton in 1967, took the form of applying Arendt's concept of 'the space of human appearance', along with her parallel distinctions between 'public' and 'private' space. This exercise involved the retrospective analysis of two buildings of the same programmatic type! In this didactic exercise, the students were asked to compare houses to houses, town halls to town halls, and so on, in terms of the way in which the two buildings in question distributed public, semi-public, private and service space. In retrospect, it is possible to see this exercise as having had a phenomenological character, which was before I was cognizant of this branch of philosophy. Equally phenomenological was the way the analysis focused on the movement of the subject through the space, as this was revealed by tracing the flow of Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale* in each instance. Published by Lars Muller in 2013 as *A Genealogy of Modern Architecture*, this exercise had a phenomenological character by virtue of tracing movement through the spatial arrangement in each instance, along with noting the way in which these spaces are finished and detailed, discriminating say between the warmth of wood versus the coldness of the stone; a differentiation that is quintessentially phenomenological in as much as it is as tactile as it is visual."

One accusation frequently leveled against phenomenology, however, is a perceived sense of nostalgia. The idea derives from a misinterpretation of "Building Dwelling Thinking," which reads Heidegger's example of the Black Forest Farmhouse as an urge for a return to an unrecoverable past. That Heidegger himself wrote his concerns about modernity from his small cabin in the Black Forest only reinforces this impression.

However, Heidegger is the very first to warn that such a return is inconceivable. The Farmhouse, he explicitly says, is no longer what can be built as such, confirming what "The Origin of the Work of Art" had already asserted about the irreversibility of a time gone by.[4] However, the meaningfully enrooted spirit in which the Farmhouse was built can find a modern expression—as, for example, in the case of Aalto's architecture. At their best, the arguments against nostalgia raise questions about the particular architectural forms that these principles have taken, or target the very principle in itself as ill-fitting for its time.

Frampton fended off these accusations as misunderstandings, and pointed at one of the most pressing concerns of the present era: climate change. Frampton's critique of uncontrolled capitalism and the ill-conceived notion of limitless growth is also one of a doomed fight against nature and the human being's basic condition within it. In this regard, it appears he considers phenomenology both a means to reveal these malaises and as an alternative way of acting on them: on the one hand, authors like Heidegger and Karsten Harries show how much of our relation with things has shifted in a time when the productive mode of being of the machine has pervaded our own; on the other hand, the rediscovery of historical and local modes of construction provide alternative responses to building that ease our current impossible demands on the planet.

A Decisive Breakpoint Called "Critical Regionalism"

This sense of phenomenology is also at the root of one of Frampton's most significant and long-lasting contributions to architectural discourse: critical regionalism. It emerged in the wake a polemic: three months before the opening of the 1st Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980, he sent a letter to Paolo Portoghesi, the organizer, announcing his resignation from the curatorial team. Faced with the plan for the *Strada Novissima*, a long row of empty façades by various architects that would become the most memorable feature of the Biennale, Frampton protested against the postmodern superficial and populist historicization of architecture, and the embrace of its commodification as a product of capitalism.

[4] M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," and "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, Harper & Row, New York, 2009, pp. 40, 158.

His retort later appeared in the form of essay "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an architecture of resistance" (1983). "Critical regionalism" mediates the homogenizing global effect of the modern world (Ricoeur's "universal civilization") with the recovery of local specificities, ranging from cultural, historical, and tectonic to topographical and climatic—hence the term "regionalism." It is also a mode of revealing and resisting this dominant condition, not just as it's expressed *in* the built environment, but by combating it *through* architectural and urban practice—hence "critical." In architectural terms, it reevaluated modernism as the built expression of this flattened global world on the one hand, while using its technical possibilities to create built expressions of site-specificity on the other, rather than replacing it with the mere superficial allusions to historical and traditional meanings as postmodernism did. It echoes Heidegger's look at the past that nevertheless does not seek to return to it, which Frampton transforms into a kind of *arrière-garde* position, with the political dimension of Arendt's writings, missing in Heidegger. The text is full of particular examples of what this may actually look like, such as Jørn Utzon's Bagsvaerd Church (1976) and Alvar Aalto's Säynatsalo Town Hall (1949).

> "1980 was a decisive breakpoint for me because this year saw both the publication of my *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* and Paolo Portoghesi's scenographically postmodern exhibition in the Venice Biennale. It is significant that Hal Foster's *Anti-Aesthetic* anthology of 1983 would open with two contributions which were immediate responses to this cultural event: Jurgen Habermas's essay, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project' and my essay 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance'."

Managing Many Sources

"Towards a Critical Regionalism" is just one instance of Frampton's masterful ability to draw from multiple philosophical sources to formulate his arguments. It's also a testament to the intellectual environment of interdisciplinary exchange at that time. He recalls that Tomás Maldonado introduced the Frankfurt School to him and to Alan Colquhoun, and the latter was who first gave him a copy of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955)—another philosopher he had the chance to see lecture in Princeton. Then there is the story of Dalibor Vesely.

> "It is around this time that the émigré Czech architectural theorist Dalibor Vesely became an influence on my thought! Vesely had studied with Jan Patočka, a Czech philosopher who, in his turn, had studied with Husserl. 1980 also saw a special issue of the British magazine *Architectural Design* devoted to a reception and critique of my *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. This number, entitled *Modern Architecture and the Critical Present*, apart from excerpting parts from the book, was made up of critical reviews, written by various colleagues! I invited Vesely to contribute something which he promptly refused to do! Instead he told me that what I had attempted to sum up at the end of my history had been formulated more rigorously by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in his book *History and Truth* (1955), wherein he had elaborated on the fundamental difference between 'culture' and 'civilization', and it is exactly this differentiation which I used to open my 1983 essay 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance'."

Ricoeur's challenge—"There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization"[5]—launched the reflection on critical regionalism, while contributions from Arendt and Heidegger helped give the concept shape. Many other philosophers played a role too though.

> "Among the multiplicity of figures by which I was affected at this moment, mention has to be made of Walter Benjamin's 'Four Theses on the Philosophy of History' of 1944 which I employed as a gloss to the first edition of my critical history, featuring Benjamin's allusion to the image of Paul Klee's *Angel of History* with its impulse to restore all the things of the past that had been destroyed by time. At the same moment, Benjamin's essay 'Paris Capital of the Nineteenth Century', translated into English by Ben Brewster for the New Left Review, would exercise an influence on all of us when it was published in 1979 in the Yale School of Architecture magazine, *Perspecta* 12."

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[5] Quoted by K. Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in H. Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, 1st ed., Bay Press, Port Townsend, Wash., 1983, p. 16, from P. Ricoeur, *Universal Civilization and the National Cultures* (1961), trans. C. Kelbley, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1965, p. 277.

Frampton's recourse to philosophical insights continued in the following years. This was the case when speaking of the "tectonic," for example, which he deemed another one of his most important contributions. Briefly put, the "tectonic" refers to the architectural work's ability to express its mode of construction as a visible and experienced property, one that embodies the specificity of its historical and cultural context. The idea draws once again on Frampton's criticism of the deceptive scenography of postmodernism, for the faithful correspondence between construction technology and the spaces it creates, as in the authenticity of materiality, for example. In "Rappel à l'ordre: The Case of the Tectonic" (1990), and then Arendt and Heidegger reappear in the book *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (1995). However, Frampton also sought to address new topics with new ideas, that often arose from the orbit of familiar ones.

> "Perhaps mention should be made in passing of my citation from Gianni Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* (1985), translated into English in 1988, as this appears in my subsequent book, *Studies in Tectonic Culture* of 1992, wherein he states 'if therefore, in architecture, as also in philosophy, as in existence in general, we renounce any metaphysical, superior, transcendent legitimation (of the kind reaching ultimate truths, redemption of humanity, etc), all that is left is to understand legitimations as a form of creating horizons of validity through dialogue, a dialogue with the traditions to which we belong and with others.' This observation was part of the same phenomenological tradition in that Vattimo had already studied with of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who in his turn had been a pupil of Heidegger. My gravitation to this discourse was reinforced by Vesely, who gave me his own copy of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960)."

It should nevertheless be noted that philosophy was only one of the many different kinds of sources that Frampton learned from and interweaved in his writings. These include texts, designs, quotes, and insights, produced or spoken of by architectural practitioners, historians, critics, but also from authors in other fields. If on the one hand philosophy helped read those contributions in ways they may otherwise remain hidden, on the other hand they also rendered many conceptual abstractions tangible and, at times, operative.

> "There were other influences on my ideological position, including figures as diverse as Eric Schumacher, with his *Small is Beautiful: Economics as Though People Mattered* of 1973, and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* of 1967 and also his later essay 'Comments on the Society of Spectacle' of 1980, a gloss from which will be used together with Benjamin's 'angel of history' in the reprint of the 5th edition of my critical history."

What Is Kenneth Frampton Reading Now?

Frampton's interests in philosophy continue, which is to say that he continues to read philosophy, but a particular kind. At our meeting in New York, Frampton mentions he had a copy of *Being and Time* in his hotel room. He was finally trying to read it! He also spoke about his rediscovery of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who, unlike Heidegger, introduced the body into the phenomenological approach.

The importance of Merleau-Ponty for Frampton is twofold, and mirrors his own dual philosophical orientation. As he noted, the philosopher combines phenomenology with Marxism and these are, as it were, two sides of Frampton too. Merleau-Ponty seems to promise Frampton more than accrued knowledge or a few new conceptual parts for his toolbox, but also path to self-reflection on the very fundaments of their kindred mode of thinking.

He had quoted Merleau-Ponty in *A Genealogy of Modern Architecture*, although, in hindsight, not to his satisfaction. He felt that at the time he hadn't quite grasped the importance of the notion of "intentionality." So, he said, once he settled down in London in the Barbican, his goal would be to work on Merleau-Ponty.

> "If I think to myself 'what do I do with the rest of my life?', one of the things I would like to work on is on Merleau-Ponty."

Architecture and Philosophy

The way Frampton brings together such a variety of insights is one of the distinctive traits of his writing. The manner in which he does so is not simple to pin down though. In this regard his similarities to Arendt run deep once again. She is a famously difficult author to categorize: was she a political philosopher, a political theorist, a phenomenologist, a journalist, or a story-teller? Frampton too seems not to quite fit the categories he's

put in. In *Labour, Work and Architecture* he says "In addition to teaching, I am more strictly speaking a writer on architecture rather than an architect or even an architectural historian or, for that matter, a theorist or a critic [...]."[6] The role of the "architect" may be one he no longer plays as a practicing designer, but it persistently motivates and guides his scholarly inquiries in history, theory, and criticism. This perhaps is one of the most important characteristics of his writing: it's produced with the tools of the scholar but from the standpoint of the practitioner; or, as he told me, "it's been written with the mind of an architect."

[6] K. Frampton, *Labour, Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design*, Phaidon Press, London/New York, 2002, p. 6.