

# Preface

Kenneth Frampton & CARTHA

With a career that spans through the last 5 decades, Kenneth Frampton has been a fundamental figure in architecture critique. Through teaching, writing, editing, and curating, his work has become key in the understanding of modern and contemporary architecture. “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” (Among many of his writings) remains a pivotal and highly influential essay, which had already in 1982 advocated for an alternative to modernism, suitable for a postmodern society that would go beyond an aesthetic discourse.

In the current context of global neoliberalism, architecture is increasingly instrumentalized as a political tool, an apparatus that constructs and produces identity. CARTHA asks how architects today can question anew the tenants of Modernism through a series of identity-building process—Assimilation, Appropriation, Rejection and Conciliation—in order to reimagine how architecture can achieve a new agency within contemporary social, economic, and political structures.

Addressing this topic, CARTHA posited a series of interrogations through the 2018 Building Identity cycle

that Professor Frampton has reformulated into a single essential question and response:

“What can be the role of architecture in an age totally overrun by neoliberal, globalized capitalism?”

*One could say that the historical failure of social democracy has left the society bereft of any agency for its self-realization that is not compromised by the market and rampant consumerism. Generally speaking, right wing political parties in the Anglo American world have no vision whatsoever for the future of the society other than enabling the super-rich to escape reasonable taxation, make even more money and worsen the already unacceptable maldistribution of wealth.*

*Where functioning welfare states still prevail, as in Scandinavia, the possibilities for maintaining social security, national health, free education and public transit which are paid for by taxation, the architectural profession still has a basis on which it can contribute to the identity of the society. It may also be argued that where the city-state still survives in Italy or Spain, the profession may contribute both to the social well being and the identity of the local community. Given the Dark*

*Neoliberal Age in which we live the role of architecture in the formation of social identity is extremely curtailed. Your questions seem to anticipate nothing about the future of climate change and the latent capacity of maximizing techno-science to pollute an entire planet. One notes that Europe has played a resistant role in this regard.*

*I cited Alvar Aalto as an exemplary figure because while he remained committed to the modern project he did so in a way that was always attentive to climate and topography. Moreover, he employed a language which was accessible as opposed to current spectacular displays of instrumental form, totally indifferent to the psychological well being of the user."*

In response, CARTHA maintains that building identity is intrinsically linked to place: the climates, ecologies, topographies, and socio-political structures that contextualize architecture are fundamental to its formulation and understanding. Critiquing Modernism's desire to reject architecture's histories and restructure the city through the appropriation of new ideological frameworks, this cycle is a response to that legacy of detachment. It postulates the impossibility of the tabula rasa, placing social, cultural, and geographical contexts at the center of any design process.

By reframing architecture through the processes of building identity, the essays and design speculations contained in CARTHA's current cycle offer a point of resistance to the universalizing tendencies of globalization.

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