

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AS [APPLIED] SCIENCE

ARCHITECTUURGESCHIEDENIS ALS [TOEGEPASTE] WETENSCHAP

LEUVEN

Provinciehuis Vlaams-Brabant

9-10 November 2011

After graduating as an architect-engineer at the KULeuven in 1969 and the completion of a PhD on architectural education in Belgium in 1984 at the same university, Luc Verpoest took up a professorship in architectural history, 19th-20th centuries and history and theory of conservation. In different constellations, within the KULeuven Departments of Architecture and of Art History and within the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation, he taught several generations of students and developed research with a focus on the history of architectural education, architectural historiography and the history and practice of conservation in Belgium. Together with KADOC, the Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society of the KULeuven, he established groundbreaking research into the Belgian Catholic Gothic Revival. Furthermore, he is chairman of Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen, co-founder of DOCOMOMO Belgium and member of various organisations which focus on the history of architecture and conservation practice. His alumni, colleagues and friends, therefore, took the initiative to organise a symposium following Luc Verpoest's retirement on 1 October 2010.

In recent decades architectural history strongly evolved. Initially, the dominant international perspectives in architectural history focused - within various geographical and chronological frames - on the definition of the architectural vocabulary, stylistic evolutions, and theoretical discourses; or together with among others historians of construction, architectural historians mapped the evolution and impact of new construction techniques and building materials, stressing in particular the material-technical aspects of architecture. Although architectural historians still recognize these as essential elements of academic investigation, architectural history - as a scientific discipline - has come to reflect upon architecture and its historical evolution from more diverse and broader perspectives. This broader interest includes all aspects of the built environment and all facets of the production process within the entire range of architectural productions - 'from bicycle sheds to cathedrals' - looking consequently even more deeply into social, economic, cultural, ideological and religious dimensions. As 'such architectural history has been swept by the same intellectual winds that have shifted the larger landscapes of the humanities and social sciences (...) the focus has come to be on the contingent, the temporary, and the dynamic, on process rather than structures, on hybridity rather than consistency, on the quotidian as well as the extraordinary, on the periphery as well as the centre, on reception as well as production' (STIEBER, 2003).

In some way, these developments provoke various intellectual challenges to the discipline itself: 'architectural history (...) often wanders much further from the artefact and indeed sometimes seems more interested in the idea of architecture than in the study of what actually got built' (POWELL and THORNE, 2005). Hence, its role is even increasingly questioned by many of exactly those who are very much involved in the production of the actual built environment, the architects first. What useful purpose could architectural history serve? Is it all about "more than collecting knowledge out of a humanistic crave to know more" or can architectural history still "serve a better understanding and a critical consciousness as to what architecture should be today and tomorrow", as Geert Bekaert taught his students in the early 1970's (BEKAERT, 1974)? Do we still have to write, read and teach architectural history in this generic world of global architectural production today? Could one still expect from architectural history a better understanding of the built artefacts of the past to critically inform our present day and future views and beliefs? The diversification of architectural history - both as to its subject of research

as to its approach and methodology - is not only the outcome of architectural historians discovering for themselves the evident complexities and contradictions of the architectural discipline. It is probably linked to that belief that not only architects as stylists or as constructive designers and conservationists of architectural heritage could profit from a broader architectural history. Could not all those involved in the complex process of architectural production, including civil engineers, architectural critics, civil servants and decision makers in the field, patrons and contractors ... profit from a well developed culture of historical knowledge, awareness and understanding? Architectural history as critical reflection and as an applied science? The final question architectural historians have to address again and again, therefore should be: *which history for whom?*

Throughout his career at the KULeuven, Luc Verpoest continuously addressed these questions in his teaching of architectural history and architectural conservation to many generations of students and in the multidisciplinary research programmes on the history of architecture and conservation in the 19th and 20th centuries. Wishing to continue this investigation, his alumni and colleagues organise the present symposium, for which we are inviting contributions questioning the actual and historical evolution of architectural history and its application and relation to conservation and other architectural disciplines and practices. To this end, Luc Verpoest's article on the Belgian research tradition in architectural history (1986), forms an interesting point of departure (see: *Archis* 6, 29/3 (1986) 31-33) for further reflection. We welcome contributions which deal with a variety of aspects, ranging from (1) methodological discussions and evolutions, to (2) thematic approaches, such as architectural history and its relation to other disciplines going from cultural, social, economical, political, ideological history, over urban history and the history of science to the history of pedagogy and religion, (3) the professionalization and institutionalization of the discipline as such and of (4) teaching architectural history, within the Belgian and the international context.

Proposals for papers (max. 500 words) together with a curriculum vitae and a list of publications should be addressed by e-mail to ellen.vanimpe@vai.be by 15 February 2011 .

Replies will follow no later than 15 April 2011.

The papers of the workshop (or a selection) will, subject to peer review, be published by Leuven University Press in the KADOC-Artes series.

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