

NOW LIVE ON KONRAD TV – ON THE COMPULSION TO OVERCOME THE FINISHED OBJECT

Jeanne Hu and Mark Wigley on Konrad Wachsmann

It's time for the Venice Biennale. And it's architecture's turn. Unlike its small sister, the Art Biennale, Architecture tried to come up with answers: about our built and unbuilt environment, how we live together and how we organize coexistence. One of the highlights of this year's edition was the Platinum Lion for Konrad Wachsmann, laudated by Mark Wigley. Author of many books and films on Wachsmann and responsible for our recent Wachsmann adoration. Mr. Wigley used the occasion to emphasize, once again, the importance of Konrad Wachsmann as an architect of joints. An architect of the brain. And a TV Star. 100 years ago, Konrad Wachsmann was arrested as a dissident German living in Italy. Escaping to France, he was arrested again. For being a German. In the internment camp he sketched a design for a hangar. As a refugee in the United States he developed it into what he called a space frame—an ephemeral cloud-like mesh, able to take any size or form to host any activity. Here began what came after architecture.

“Konrad Wachsmann was the key to understanding that architecture was the problem, not the solution,” Wigley opens. Architecture as a human order, created by our built environment; a meaning, given to humanity, other than non-human. Wachsmann vehemently opposed the disciplinary notion of architecture. His aim was the dissolution of professional boundaries by means of a single (architectural) element, the joint. “Imagine: a joint, so complex, combining 21 tubes, allowing you and me to construct any geometry and space, rendering the architect, as the one to join and master, obsolete.” The joint, as an architectural metaphor for the dissolution of architecture, an exit strategy for the profession into the blur of reality.

The joints, as connecting parts, make the architect the designer of connections and not of fixed solutions. A network system that is radically democratic and in favor of the collective, rather than the individual; solidarity instead of competition. Wachsmann (just like Richard Buckminster Fuller) fed this radically modern notion back into architectural designs: interconnected, light as an airplane, equipped with technology, expanding the (built) borders that architects had established for centuries. “They were truly modern” Wigley states. What made their architecture so modern and real was their desire and compulsion to overcome the finished object as the main focus.

Yet Wachsmann was, in Wigley's eyes, more than an architect, “his anti-architecture is nothing but an idea about democracy. Infinite connectivity is a spirit that's democratic in the sense that every point has equal value to every other point. Depowering the old idea that the strength is not in the individual point [but in the] network and its connections. In a certain sense, there is nothing but net, no discrete subject or place, just a vast interconnected organism.” Wachsmann thus delivered a blueprint for today's understanding of architecture as a collective action beyond individual and private interests. Wigley refers to Wachsmann not necessarily as an architect but rather as the TV producer of his own reality show. With this analogy Wigley builds on Wachsmann's criticism of the architect. For centuries, architects have worked in denial, excluding reality from their projects. Here, Wigley concludes: “It's not just that Wachsmann thought that

architecture was being replaced by television and actually devoted the last years of his life being a TV maker. Wachsmann was a broadcast, a TV program himself. TV meaning reality, being anywhere, although people thought it was gone. TV as an intrusion of the private sphere and the edited space. Hidden reality. If architecture was about control, TV was its biggest nightmare. Vietnam in your bedroom? Who would possibly want that? And not just Vietnam.

Editing the outside world through architectural means was suddenly impossible. TV is a codeword for the unexpected possibilities of future realities."

Wigley's speech was more than a homage to a historic figure. Konrad Wachsmann was neither a hero, nor the über-architect his colleagues wanted to see in him. For Wigley, Wachsmann is a way of thinking, or, as he puts it, "a broadcast" that aired with the "Fuller Show" or before the "The Price...". A TV channel about the future.

The future of architecture. Today we call it reality, one that "cannot be the future, because the future is by definition what exceeds our ideas. Still, you should always speculate about the future, because the ways in which you get it wrong and it surprises you, will affect what you think the future is."

From Venice, more on this channel. Soon.