



# Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture

By Kenneth Frampton

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## Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture By Kenneth Frampton

Kenneth Frampton's long-awaited follow-up to his classic *A Critical History of Modern Architecture* is certain to influence any future debate on the evolution of modern architecture. *Studies in Tectonic Culture* is nothing less than a rethinking of the entire modern architectural tradition. The notion of tectonics as employed by Frampton -- the focus on architecture as a constructional craft -- constitutes a direct challenge to current mainstream thinking on the artistic limits of postmodernism, and suggests a convincing alternative. Indeed, Frampton argues, modern architecture is invariably as much about structure and construction as it is about space and abstract form.

Composed of ten essays and an epilogue that trace the history of contemporary form as an evolving poetic of structure and construction, the book's analytical framework rests on Frampton's close readings of key French and German, and English sources from the eighteenth century to the present. He clarifies the various turns that structural engineering and tectonic imagination have taken in the work of such architects as Perret, Wright, Kahn, Scarpa, and Mies, and shows how both constructional form and material character were integral to an evolving architectural expression of their work. Frampton also demonstrates that the way in which these elements are articulated from one work to the next provides a basis upon which to evaluate the works as a whole. This is especially evident in his consideration of the work of Perret, Mies, and Kahn and the continuities in their thought and attitudes that linked them to the past.

Frampton considers the conscious cultivation of the tectonic tradition in architecture as an essential element in the future development of architectural form, casting a critical new light on the entire issue of modernity and on the place of much work that has passed as "avant-garde."

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

In a word, Frampton's book is a wonderfully rich and resourceful companion to guide us along the shifting paths travelled by architectural ideas in the course of the last two centuries. Frampton is more conversant with historical thought and more compelling in his interpretation of architecture than most historians. I can think of no book, in any western language, that tackles this subject better.

(Kurt W. Forster, Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur, Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich)

Kenneth Frampton's *Studies* are a welcome contribution to the historiography of Twentieth Century architecture. In an editorial production saturated with empirical monographs and sometimes empty theorization, he cuts with passion and precision through a century of designs revealing the guiding path provided by the artistic interpretation of construction.

(Jean-Louis Cohen, Architect and Professor, L'École d'architecture, Paris-Villemin)

Kenneth Frampton has not spared himself in exploring the hidden causes which underlie the always complicated history by which the discoveries of material technology are brought into the cultural realm. A great deal of original research has been necessary, and this has resulted not only in fresh and interesting textual matter, but in an array of illustrations which, in combination with the verbal analysis, amounts to an entirely new representation of the evolution of modern architecture. Because of the care with which this hidden history has been brought to light, this book will be of equal interest to engineers, the student of architecture, and the student of cultural studies.

(Robert Maxwell, Emeritus Professor of Architecture, Princeton University)

There is in architecture an anxiety to master the trade, to do it properly: it is for this reason that good architecture reveals the trace of the hand, the trace of the properly done...It is nice that a critic like Kenneth Frampton, great navigator of the history of contemporary architecture, explores this subject subtly and with an open mind: this is what will bring us closer to the truth.

(Renzo Piano)

Kenneth Frampton's book approaches a very important issue for understanding the way in which architects proceed: the continuity between form and construction. But to establish this continuity doesn't simply mean to accept pure constructive determinism, and Frampton's book helps us to comprehend that beside whatever technical discovery there is always the architect's effort to produce form. Using the work of outstanding contemporary architects such as Utzon and Scarpa, Frampton is able to show how architectural talent is manifested in continuous form invention.

(Rafael Moneo, Professor of Architecture, Harvard University)

The material, detail and structure of a building is an absolute condition. Architecture's potential is to deliver authentic meanings in what we see, touch and smell; the tectonic is ultimately central to what we feel...Kenneth Frampton's new book is important for architects, students and anyone interested in the secrets of architecture.

(Steven Holl, architect)

**About the Author**

Kenneth Frampton is Ware Professor of Architecture at Columbia University.

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**Colby McCray:**

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**Juan Hinkson:**

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