

POSITION PAPER

Open Brief*

Andrew Leach*, Antony Moulis†, Christine McCarthy‡, Ari Seligmann§, Marco Biraghi||, Julie Willis¶, Lee Stickells**, Julia Gatley††, Nigel Westbrook‡‡, Martino Stierli§§ and Amy Clarke†

To commence the thirtieth annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ), held on Australia's Gold Coast in July 2013, ten delegates were invited, with very little warning, to take five minutes and one image and offer a provocation on the open matters of architectural history in the present moment. The term 'open' was taken as the conference theme—a device used by SAHANZ meetings not so much to define the scope of papers presented as to declare the conference flavour year by year. It was not, therefore, an open conference (anything goes) so much as a conference on open issues (where, indeed, to go). The ten interlocutors were invited after the conference to document their interventions. They are presented here as a record of the preoccupations of a specific moment and a specific institutional geography, with all the idiosyncrasies and commonalities it might reveal to a broader audience.

Open Brief

Andrew Leach

To commence the thirtieth annual conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ), held on Australia's Gold Coast in July 2013, ten delegates were invited, with very little warning, to take five minutes and one image and offer a provocation on the open matters of architectural history in the present moment. The term 'open' was taken as the conference theme—a device used by SAHANZ meetings not so much to define the scope of papers presented as to declare the conference flavour year by year. It was not, therefore, an open conference (anything goes) so much as a conference on open issues (where, indeed, to go).

While the three days of conference business allowed delegates to work these issues through by taking recourse to the research-driven myopia to which no one is immune, beginning the entire discussion with a series of positions on the current state of architectural history, its present challenges and its open matters, served to keep the bigger disciplinary picture and its institutional challenges in mind even when individual papers were attending to the sometimes minute details of their research. Perhaps it was the short lead-time, or the pre-session drinks, or the invitation to speak with complete freedom, but in any case the session served to energise and anchor the subsequent three days.

It also likely helped that the room in which this session was held—at the Gold Coast's Arts Centre—contained the exhibition *Las Vegas Studio*, curated by Hilar Stadler and Martino Stierli, which offered a visually rich reminder of the profits of conducting an audit on our habits so far as the production of architectural criticism, history and theory are concerned. The ten interlocutors were invited after the conference to document their interventions. They are presented here as a record of the preoccupations of a specific moment and an institutional geography with all the idiosyncrasies and commonalities it might reveal to a broader audience.

For a body of scholars—emerging and established—for whom travel to Europe requires more than twenty-four hours' air travel, and to North America demands crossing the breadth of the Pacific Ocean, distance, access and communication are perhaps naturally at the forefront of the issues that emerge from this exercise. And these preoccupations offer useful points of contrast with those brought to our beaches by European colleagues. The issues that emerge from the following interventions are at once local and general, occasionally concerning sites and problems

* Griffith University, Australia
a.leach@griffith.edu.au

† University of Queensland, Australia
a.moulis@uq.edu.au, amy.clarke@uq.edu.au

‡ Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
christine.mccarthy@vuw.ac.nz

§ Monash University, Australia
ari.seligmann@monash.edu

|| Politecnico di Milano, Italy
marco.biraghi@polimi.it

¶ University of Melbourne, Australia
j.willis@unimelb.edu.au

**University of Sydney, Australia
lee.stickells@sydney.edu.au

††University of Auckland, New Zealand
julia.gatley@auckland.ac.nz

‡‡University of Western Australia, Australia
nigel.westbrook@uwa.edu.au

§§University of Zurich, Switzerland
martino.stierli@uzh.ch

that demonstrate an engagement in debates at some remove from, in this case, Queensland and the Gold Coast. They may well therefore resonate with colleagues from those cities that have traditionally served as the organising nodes of architectural history scholarship.

But these brief position pieces also say much about the terms in which scholars from Australia and New Zealand, and those who find the region's institutional geography a stimulating terrain, all engage with the wider world of architectural history and historiography.

1. Say When

Antony Moulis

In 2012 at the Archive Room of the Frances Loeb Library in Harvard's Gund Hall I had a total of six hours' access to archival materials related to a study in which I am involved into the eminent Australian architect John Andrews, designer of the famous tiered and glazed studios of the Graduate School of Design that sat above me. As useful as this access was for the research project I was undertaking with colleagues in Melbourne, Adelaide, Toronto and Boston, it struck me that the laptop sitting on the table gave me far greater access to a range of information and resources than the archive itself could provide. The advent of the electronic database has made information retrieval more direct than before, allowing for the contemporary reality of the architectural historian as a figure able to sit at home or at their office desk, accessing materials remotely rather than necessarily 'on site'.

This new world of open access is, of course, not total. At the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, for example, the entire contents of Le Corbusier's archive are scanned and searchable on site, yet that vast bank of resources is only selectively available online. But what would total online access to an archive like that of Le Corbusier mean for our work? In this case open access might do no more than mildly support an already ravenous program of research on the architect, which shows no sign of slowing. It is also unclear whether open access to Le Corbusier's archive would produce or encourage 'other voices' to write on the architect's work, or if it would broaden debate beyond its



Fig. 1: Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University, September 2012. Photo by Antony Moulis.

already stretched boundaries. More significant than the matter of obtaining 'universal' access to information are the potential impediments it would introduce—issues of cultural and institutional support and authority that lend prestige to voices already well known for their historical work on the architect or for the issues they address. So what does more extensive access to architectural archives in the online world mean to the direction or potential of architectural history research?

I believe this question draws attention to a more demanding issue, namely: what questions should we pose to the historical material we can now face and access when there is so much material (read 'information') to consider? Here is a greater problem, the making or framing of a question that is already too real for architectural historians. It is exposed in the various 'calls for papers' issued for conferences and symposia that arrive with ever more frequency in our clogged inboxes, demonstrating the exponential growth in the number of questions posed of architecture by historians—as if in anxious response to the excess of information to which these questions are aimed. Should questions of architectural history attempt to keep up with today's excess of information? Is it wise to do so, or necessary?

The liberty to ask questions turns into a tyranny of choice. It is the need to pose a question and to consider its relevance to an account of history that is a real dilemma for architectural historians now, not least for the issues it raises of hierarchy and authority politely thought of as having been left behind. Having a question reveal itself as timely or meaningful (rather than having to insist on its relevance) is the key, but who, again, might be the judge of that? Perhaps what remains open is access to the skill that all architectural historians might love to have: the ability to recognise when a question has indeed been properly and clearly asked.

2. Consumption by the History Monster

Christine McCarthy

After lectures I often find leftover handouts and other bits of paper, which, like most teachers, I collect up for the recycling bin to ensure the room is tidy for the next class. This year, after my first history session, among the detritus was a gem: a careful biro drawing of the word 'history'



Fig. 2: Student drawing (owner unknown), found in the venue of INTA251 History of Interior Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, 5 March 2013.

being consumed by flames, and the jaws of a one-eyed monster—complete with twinkle in eye—whose skinny arms were in the process of breaking off the ascender and arm of the letters ‘h’ and ‘r’.

The drawing in some ways encapsulated my recent thinking about the vulnerability of architectural history in the professional architecture curriculum. As all practitioners of history know, all things—good and bad—come to an end, and I’ve been wondering about how and when architectural history in particular, especially in the university architecture curriculum, will itself come to finish.

At least two reasons suggest this thinking is relevant. The first one is the perennial issue of a crowded professional curriculum. There is near insufficient room to teach core content, and there are few elective options for students to specialise in history, or to expand their disciplinary thinking. New space is needed for curriculum change and progressive thinking for architecture both as a discipline and a practice, and history is frequently munched at from various directions in the attempt to squeeze more into a seemingly ever-reducing space. The second, and perhaps more pressing, reason derives from why history became included in the architectural curriculum in the first place, and is interwoven with nineteenth-century aspirations by architects to achieve professional status.

Professionalisation required a mechanism to distinguish architects from others in the building trades (Upton 2012: 61; Wright 1990: 18; Crinson and Lubbock 1994: 40, 41; Cuff 1991: 28–31). This demarcation of ‘the role of architect within the specialised ranks of the building industry ... [aimed to protect] it from competition and encroachment’ (Crinson and Lubbock 1994: 40; also Larson 1977: 219; Freidson 1986: 33). The teaching of architectural history, derived from the tradition of the liberal arts, was key to implementing this distinction. It increased the gap between architecture and manual labour while simultaneously erasing or obscuring ‘the distinction between architects and their clients’ (Upton 2012: 61–63). The teaching of architectural history thus forms part of the agenda of patch-protection that underpinned the establishment of architecture as a profession. Its inclusion was about using the accoutrements of class distinction to disable working class competitiveness for architectural work. Its strategic relevance is increasingly questionable in a world of growing democratisation of education that challenges ideas of price fixing and preaches competitive free trade, while eroding the trade protection that professions and their institutes perpetrated in the past under the guise of professional standards.

I am not so naive as to suggest that the current capitalist priorities of the world are a panacea to historic social ills, but equally the validation of architectural history as a discipline is most commonly a variation of the niceties of liberal arts and professionalism, cloaking the inequalities of class hierarchies. It is time that we explicitly engage with the ideology founding the discipline and recognise that its very foundations are sutured to prob-

lematic notions of elitism. Given that this dubious beginning is integral to the discipline, a truly ethical history of architecture may not be possible. Is it now time—or past the time—for us to anticipate, and perhaps celebrate, the inevitable conclusion to our discipline, and consider what might replace it?

3. Too Much Is Never Enough

Ari Seligmann

Within the contexts of rapidly proliferating informational resources, curriculum constraints, codified competency considerations, and the plurality of methods and approaches, how do we make architectural history relevant?

We operate in challenging informational contexts. We have easy access to vast amounts of global information of variable quality, from Wikipedia to WikiArchitectura to various rich digital archives, from RIBA to the Le Corbusier Foundation to SAHARA. There are speedy research assistants with search engines from Google to Siri, but they provide limited assistance with editing or sorting. We are also both blessed and plagued by access to a diversity of architectural media: buildings, texts, blogs, tweets, Grand Designs on television, galinsky guides, 3D models and reconstructions, YouTube animations and walkthroughs, and actual or virtual (e.g., Google street view) experiences, to name a few. In addition, if someone wants to know something about architectural history, especially our students, they do not typically seek books or scholarly journals but rely on the internet, which many of us now carry in our pockets. History books, textbooks and academic articles are a very small part of a broad array of information resources shaping understanding of the evolving built environment.

Within curricula and classrooms the curation of content is increasingly challenging. The volume of information is continually expanding but the number of classes and actual available class time are contracting. We still acknowledge canonical projects as well as a broader range of the built environment. We seek grounded familiarity with local developments as well as understanding of varied global phenomena. How can we expect to comprehensively cover the evolution of architecture and cities from caves to contemporary times in a substantial way? Is our only recourse to return to a few core principles and use thematic organisations to locate them synchronically and diachronically?

Across the world we operate within evolving educational policy contexts. In Australia, the roles and relevance of architectural history are shaped by the Australian Institute of Architects’ *Standards for Programs in Architecture* with sections for the awareness, knowledge, application and synthesis of ‘History and Theory Studies’ (AIA 2009). The discipline is also shaped by the *National Competency Standards in Architecture*, which currently glosses over history with but one mention, in Section 1.1.1: ‘Generate a design concept that can be realised as a building, includes as performance criteria: 06: The design concept demonstrates an understanding of architectural history and building traditions [and] 07: demonstrates an under-

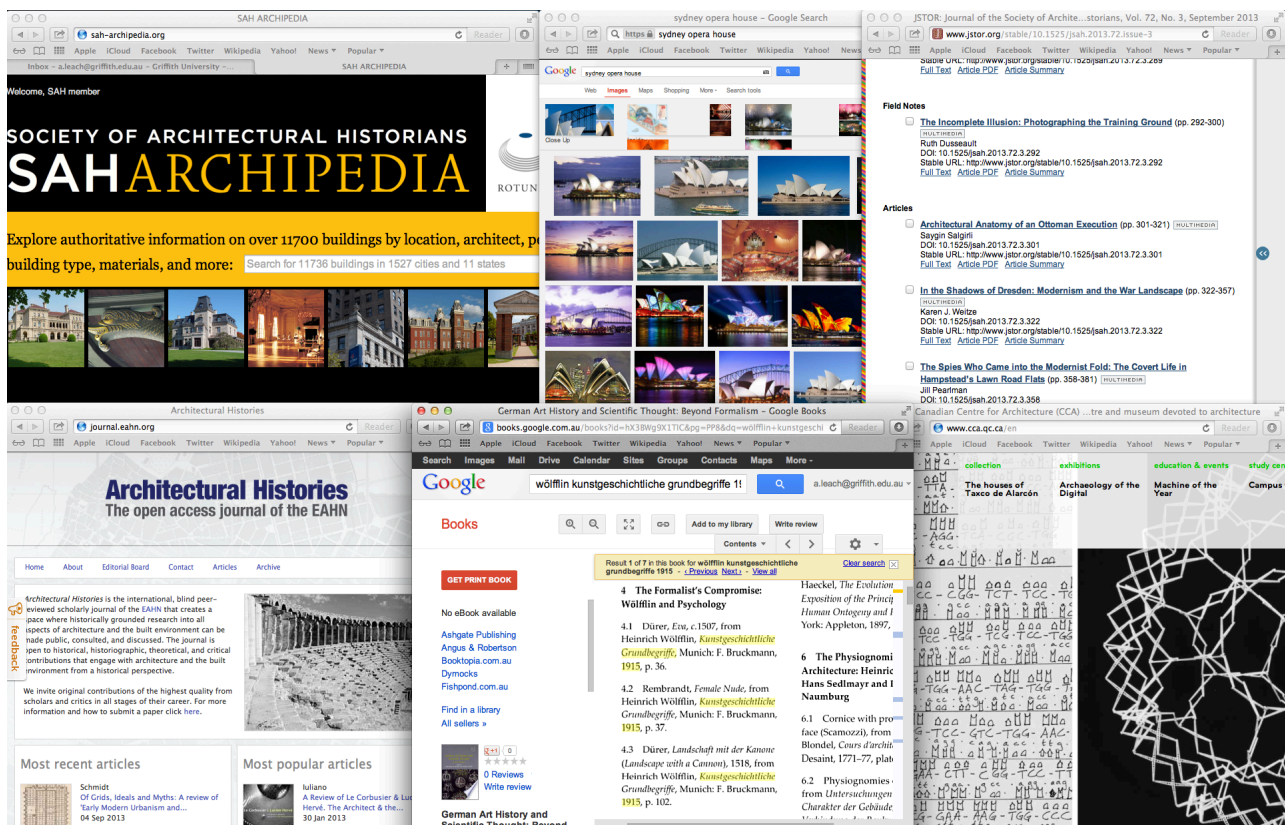


Fig. 3: Screen shot of Andrew Leach’s computer, 30 September 2013.

standing of relevant social, cultural and environmental issues’ (AACA 2009: 6). We also follow the *ALTC Architecture Standards*, which established this threshold learning outcome, in Section 1.1: ‘Identifying, explaining and working with appropriate knowledge of architecture, its history and precedents and with knowledge of people, environments, culture, technology, history and ideas pertinent to architectural propositions’ (ALTC 2011: 9). These institutionalized frameworks suggest quite particular roles for architectural history.

Studying history is no longer simply a basis for cultured erudition. We seek to learn lessons from the past, set contexts for the present and identify precedents as cautions or inspirations for the future. Moreover, whether critical, post-critical, documentary or operative, history plays important roles in facilitating engagement with developments and discourses of the discipline.

Today we are working in a diffuse field. How can we identify and articulate the relevance of architectural history across academic, professional and popular audiences?

4. Fewer Shapes, More Process

Marco Biraghi

The history of architecture should seek to research and understand the rules on which architecture is based today. Architects such as Palladio and Mies van der Rohe—while expressing differences between one another in their work—operated on the basis of clear and shared rules. Today we live in a time in which, apparently, architecture operates outside of such rules. This is the exact opposite of Mies van der Rohe’s view: ‘You can not invent a new



Fig. 4: Seattle Central Library, Rem Koolhaas and Joshua Prince-Ramus of OMA/LMN, architects, 2004. Photo courtesy of Steven Pavlov [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

architecture every Monday morning.’ Apparently, nowadays architecture happens this way: exuberant, imaginative and creative shapes seem to reinvent architecture every Monday morning.

However, in contemporary architecture the rules are in many ways even more coercive than those of the past. These are not stylistic rules (those dictated by the orders), but technical rules, rules of construction, rules dictated by building regulations, safety regulations and fire and earthquake standards. There are also rules imposed by the industrial production of components (what could be

called 'catalogue architecture') and the provision of facilities. Today the architect (does such a person now exist in the old idealistic sense of the term?) has the job of selecting, assembling and bringing elements together. The problem is therefore to be aware of these rules, to dominate them and not be dominated by them.

Often the exuberance of shapes seems to hide the incapacity to be truly aware of these rules. Palladio and Mies were conscious of their own rules to the point of being able to act upon them, changing, modifying the relationships between them and their value. Palladio made columns with bricks, used gables and domes for homes—in short, he conceived something new from the old pieces of the architect's tradition. He reassembles the ordinary, what had become conventional and thus is slightly estranged, to the point of producing something new. Mies does the same thing with a system of elements that belonged to the industrial world. The same could be said of Le Corbusier, who invented the plan of a city from a viaduct, which uses the estrangement of an ordinary system to create something new. A viaduct is always a viaduct, columns are always columns, and a T-beam a T-beam, but when they are interpreted in a different way, the result can be a big leap for all.

Today, no contemporary architect has yet managed to alienate the system of rules within which current architecture is made and to thus bring them to a level of universality—a new availability. Perhaps only Rem Koolhaas has tried to do this over a long period, yet without reaching results that are truly persuasive.

It is not the task of the history of architecture to find these solutions.

Its task rather should be to pull into focus the set of rules that unifies today's architecture, beyond its forms, often different but basically inessential and confounding. And in this way, at least, to try to bring those rules to a state of consciousness within the field of architecture. Closely linked to the need to go beyond the apparent forms of architecture, another task of the history of architecture should be to investigate how current architecture is produced, to investigate the design studios of architectural practice—their organization, their skills, and even the physical spaces in which architecture is today produced.

So, trying to synthesize the aim of doing research in the history of architecture today, you might say: less shapes, more process.

5. Past Tense?

Julie Willis

We celebrate at this conference the thirtieth anniversary of the formation of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, SAHANZ. The Society's age suggests that we should have reached some sort of maturity in the research we undertake and the knowledge we present. But I worry for the state of architectural history in Australia and New Zealand. For there is still much which has been left un-researched or under-researched and there are large gaps in our understanding of the development and evolution in architecture in both countries.

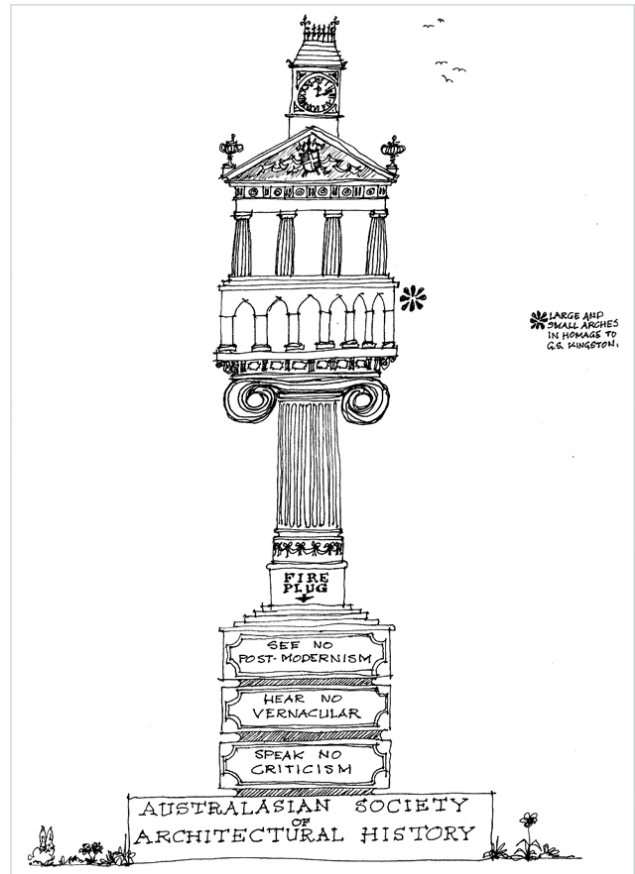


Fig. 5: *Australasian Society of Architectural Historians*. Drawing by Miles Lewis, 1984. Courtesy Miles Lewis.

What we know, we know well, with some topics seemingly endlessly researched and revisited to find yet new insights. Yet others are completely ignored, seemingly judged to be unworthy or uninteresting. We see new modes of thinking, new methods and new theories introduced, but few path-leading forays into research territories that are completely new and that fundamentally change the way we think. We've had limited success in attracting a new generation of researchers to local and regional topics, and the few there are usually prefer the bright lights of more international themes. Are we thus witnessing the end of the proud tradition of examining Australian and New Zealand architecture that extends back more than eighty years? For some of us, researching the utterly unfashionable means there is an endless supply of projects to keep us engaged for decades to come, as the shifting trends swirl on around us. But to what will all this lead? If we only research the fashionable, the recognized, the famous, the highlights, when do we change or expand the boundaries of what we know? Aren't we in danger of becoming moribund and self-referential? And if our next generation of scholars from the region prefer or are encouraged to take on more internationally-focused topics, does this speak to the end of strong scholarship on local and regional architectural history?

The completion of the large task that was the *Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2012, was an eye-opening exercise

into the patchy state of architectural history research in Australia. Most apparent was the silo-like approach that individual researchers had, usually inadvertently, come to adopt. Most often, this was because of the boundaries encouraged by state-held records. Only in recent years, with increasing access to such digitized material as historical newspapers, are we easily able to verify the whereabouts of an architect who goes ‘missing’ from the local records. The work completed for the *Encyclopedia* demonstrated the significant and two-way traffic not only across the Australian continent, but across the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the architectural histories of both nations, while intimately connected, remain almost entirely separate in historiographical terms. This points to just one aspect of the incomplete project that is the study of Australian (and New Zealand) architecture. To study the development of colonial Australian and New Zealand architecture in isolation from fellow British colonies in Asia and elsewhere is similarly limiting to a full understanding of their respective architectural evolutions.

There is so much research yet to do, yet we track a waning interest in that which is not already well-known or of-the-moment (the seventies, anyone?). Increasingly, we present ever-thinner slices of research, for it is now rare to see SAHANZ papers that tackle broad issues or significant volumes of material. Rather than registering an ever-expanding and integrated body of knowledge grown over recent years, which we might expect a maturing disciplinary discussion to evidence, we instead witness increasingly disconnected and narrowed views of architectural history. For the architectural history of Australia and New Zealand, and indeed SAHANZ itself, have we passed the zenith without taking note?

6. Beards

Lee Stickells

This image is a still from the 1976 Australian documentary film *Living Way Out*. It shows a low angle close-up of Terry Brealey, ‘Government Scientist,’ driving a car, an unremarkable brick building just visible through the driver’s side window. *Living Way Out* explores life in Shay Gap—one of a number of remote company mining towns constructed during Australia’s iron ore boom of the 1960s and ’70s. In the scene from which this image is taken, Brealey discusses planning and design as a means to address climatic, social and psychological adaptation in those towns—as young families struggled to give themselves a future and live a ‘normal’ life thousands of miles from suburbia. His appearance—a middle-aged man with glasses and beard—fits nicely with the stereotypical image of the scientist identified in Mead and Métraux’s well-known study of 1957. However, the onscreen caption isn’t quite accurate. Brealey’s official title was Senior Research Architect, a role he undertook within the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO, Australia’s national science agency) as part of the organisation’s then recently established Remote Communities Environment Unit (RCEU). The RCEU, part of the CSIRO’s Division of Building Research, was created in 1971 with the inten-



Fig. 6: Clip from *Habitat: Living Way Out*, 1976. Film Australia Collection. Still supplied by the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia’s Film Australia Collection Library, Sydney © NFSA.

tion of undertaking research to improve living conditions and encourage people to stay in the new mining towns. Brealey, along with a team of environmental psychologists and social scientists, evaluated and informed the design of remote mining settlements in Australia. This experimental unit, adopting what it called ‘The Systems Approach,’ also pointed to the contours and conditions of emergent architectural knowledge—particularly new forms of architectural research, practice and education connected to the concept of ‘environmental design’.

As part of a broad rethinking of research and pedagogical models in architecture during the 1960s and ’70s, the term ‘environmental design’ emerged to describe the vision of an expanded, interdisciplinary, quasi-scientific practice engaged with the totality of ‘man’s environment’. Particularly in Anglo-American and Australasian schools, fields such as environmental psychology and environment-behaviour studies grew in influence, curricula were rethought as interdisciplinary, research-based programmes, and collaborative research projects were undertaken by architects working with behavioural and social scientists. The RCEU indexed such shifts. It specifically indicated the way that, in Australia, architectural approaches to climate-responsive design, temporary and prefabricated structures, along with the formation of ‘community’, were being rethought through an interdisciplinary approach that drew significantly on modern psychological and sociological traditions. New models of research for architecture, and new professional roles for architects, emerged as part of such collaborations.

The brief sketch I’ve provided above links, with very broad strokes, the operations of a tentative Australian architectural research initiative and the re-conceptualisation of the architecture discipline through its re-envisioning as environmental design. I suggest that it also points to open territory for Australian architectural history. While the RCEU was an obscure enterprise (it is not even listed in the CSIRO’s online institutional history, *CSIROPedia*), it nevertheless exemplifies significant disciplinary transformations that were taking place across

the second half of the twentieth century. Architectural education became increasingly embedded in the Australian university system; its teaching and research programs became increasingly subject to the priorities of the modern research-intensive university and their intertwining with national government research agendas. Australian architectural history has not yet fully engaged with the way that the connections between architectural practice, the profession, architectural education and research activity around architecture were rethought and shifted during the twentieth century's later decades (through, for example, the experiments in formulating a discipline of 'environmental design'). If these experiments and transformations are to be accounted for, such an endeavour would not just be about filling in or supplementing existing accounts. It would not simply be a matter of offering up a marginal history of non-architects. It would, rather, investigate the work of architects that crossed not only lines of different scales but also lines of discipline and knowledge fields. In this way, I suggest that Australian architectural history has yet to produce an expanded disciplinary history connecting architecture's professional and cultural practices, its technological applications and its sites of knowledge (re)production.

7. Books or Journals?

Julia Gatley

Academics are by now accustomed to the ranking of our research both within and beyond our own universities. In these ranking systems, the science model is increasingly the model against which most other disciplines—including that of architectural history—are assessed. This model emphasises the importance of refereed journal articles at the expense of other types of publications. To suggest that this is in some way problematic is not to deny the worth of refereed journal articles, but rather to recognise the values that can be eclipsed by them. In particular, many journal articles find a comparatively small academic readership, amplified for us as architectural historians by the fact that journalists do not find breaking news stories in articles from the *Journal of Architecture* or *Architectural Histories* like they do with those from *Nature* or *Science*.

Yet our discipline is one that is of interest to a general readership, a general audience. Our research and writing have the potential to affect heritage identification and assessment; the retention (or not) of individual buildings and building complexes; and the design of areas in which significant sites and buildings are located. Our research and writing have the potential to increase public awareness about the importance of good design in the built environment and the value that is attached to it. To reach this general audience, we need to write books, curate exhibitions and have an ongoing presence in newspapers as well as in professional and commercial magazines.

But to what extent do the bodies that assess us recognise these outputs and their values? The body that assesses me and other New Zealand-based architecture academics every six years—the Engineering, Technology and Architecture Panel within the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF)—is a panel that regards refereed



Fig. 7: The exhibition *Athfield Architects: People and Place*, curated by Julia Gatley and held at the City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand, 22 June to 7 October 2012. Photograph by Kate Whitley; courtesy of City Gallery Wellington.

journal articles as the normal vehicle for academic publishing. Books and exhibitions are comparatively atypical outputs and their value is downplayed. I sense an attitude that anyone can write a book, yet not anyone can write an academic journal article, so journal articles must necessarily be better.

All architecture academics will have their own view on whether they should try to satisfy the university assessment system by writing journal articles, or choose to pursue a range of publications with a view to reaching a range of audiences. There are numerous factors to be considered, from research funding and promotion track to public interest and heritage conservation. For the time being, at least, I am opting for a general readership, because I believe in the recognition of values that are additional to those that make sense to scientists.

8. Keep on Digging

Nigel Westbrook

In early 2013, a Greek-Australian student constructs a fictional excavation of a site in post-Global Financial Crisis Athens. An urban nomad enters the imagined site from a door in a decrepit street. He descends into a forest that has grown up behind the hoardings that we take for granted as an instrument of the process of urban transformation. But the space beyond the hoarding exists within brackets, as an outside, a utopia. Unlike Dante, the nomad enters without a guide. A ruined building, formerly a technical school, built to supply tradesmen for the post-war state, serves as the portal into an excavation of ground that is apparently composed of the traces of every pathetic habitation of the site, from the ancient potteries to the detritus of present-day drug addicts, prostitutes and economic migrants stranded by the economic collapse, the survivors of the old market economy, and a few urban pioneers infiltrating the chaos. Like Dante, the nomad finds a path and descends into circles of imagined existence, approaching a fictional source, here the ancient river, long dried-up. Finally, the nomad re-ascends to an ironic paradise—a field of golden wheat, rippling within a space enclosed by the



Fig. 8: *A Monument to Gerani*, by John Tanner, February 2013.

same hoardings that he entered, before stumbling back into the crumbling streets from which he descended.

This project emerged from a direct response to Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and an immersion in the images of Lebbeus Woods. The ruin in both instances was proffered as the site for visions. The project metaphorically excavates its site—downtown Athens after the financial melt-down—to search for the root of things. Along the way, it (unintentionally) revisits Terragni's architectural woods of the Danteum, an unrealized project for a symbolic reconstruction of the Divine Comedy, a dark forest that leads to a descent into hell, then purgatory, before an ascent to a paradise symbolized by a grid of glass columns. In creating a story of fictional origin, the project synthesizes figures of both avant-garde art and *novecento* nationalist romanticism. But the 'story' of Terragni lies outside the creator's perception. It is part of a conceptual development sublimated beneath the apparently benign 'project' constructing a narrative structured around the theme of architectural ruination.

The fragment, and the figure of ruination, lies at the core of a generation of architectural thought that could be loosely defined as post-modernist. This term, which has become so loose as to render it almost useless, can nonetheless be associated, in the field of architectural history and theory, with an unresolved debate over issues of origin, language, normativity and projection into the future. Two images emerge: one, the Loosian fragment that reminds us of what we have lost; the other, the Venturian sign that reminds us that all meaning and history have become smeared on the windscreen of the present—an impossible duality, which surreptitiously merges into a common position of exile.

In the wake of the descent of the Benjamin-inspired 'school' of deconstruction into ever-more banal form-fetishes as allegory (the Holocaust co-opted as a camouflage for surface-effect), the architectural critic is faced by an ever-more dispiriting flatness, a flatness excused by local and international historians and critics as demonstrative of 'multiplicity' and by implication, criticality (liberation). The obvious, and pathological, connection to the closed circuit of a marketplace of consumable images remains largely unexamined.

Returning to the consideration of my student's project, foremost for me in the practice of both architecture and its historiography is a kind of speculative archaeology. However real their materials, archaeologists are limited by a kind of restraint that has come to privilege the reconstruction of knowledge of how a society functioned rather than the meaning of the forms that it created. And perhaps architectural history has also moved down this path. Within a postmodern paradigm, representation is suspect. An architectural archaeology offers the promise to engage imaginatively with the past as a layer of the present. In the few architectural texts which I have found transporting—Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia*, Rossi's *Architecture of the City*, Moneo's *The Blue of the Sky* and Grassi's *Architecture, Dead Language*—the intended and unintended meaning and affectivity of forms seems to have always been near the forefront. All these texts have now become historicized in the writing of Aureli and others, but the central concern seems as relevant to me today—the continuous engagement with the traces of the past, and the projection of the future, as part of a culture of preserving, but not artificially reconstructing, the fragments of the past—as this (innocent) project dug for a possible utopia beneath a modern-day Athenian ruin.

9. Mies at the Fair

Martino Stierli

This photograph was taken in June 1920 at the First International Dada Fair in the gallery of Dr. Otto Burchard in Berlin. It shows Ludwig Mies (the later Mies van der Rohe) among the participating artists of this seminal exhibition, which also included Johannes Baader, John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Höch.

We see a rather well-behaved group of young men in spotless suits; the clothing of the woman in the center of the picture (Heartfield's wife) is the only explicit statement about 'reform', while Hausmann's checked cap (third from the left) speaks of a certain Bohemian attitude. Despite the apparent informality, what we are looking at is not a random sample of the *jeunesse dorée* of the Berlin bourgeoisie, but some of the most outspoken and ferocious critics of Wilhelmine society. This image, one could argue, is of almost diagrammatic significance for the architectural culture of the Weimar Republic. Of all



Fig. 9: Opening of the First Dada Fair, Berlin. Depicting (L–R): Hannah Höch, Otto Schmalhausen, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield (holding his son Tom), Dr. Otto Burchard, Margarete Herzfelde, George Grosz (pictured on wall), Wieland Herzfelde, Rudolf Schlichter, Mies van der Rohe, unknown, Johannes Baader. Hannah Höch Collection, Berlinische Galerie.

the artistic movements active in the Republic's early days, Dada was undoubtedly the most radical. Read against the political programme of its protagonists, the conforming attitude of the crowd seems rather astonishing. Is this a group of political and artistic radicals indulging in the comforts of the bourgeois salon? Or is perhaps the whole Dada attitude merely a performance, a sort of petty and well-contained rebellion sprung from the nurseries of the very same Wilhelmine society they were attacking? In any case, the bourgeois and the bohemian universes do not seem to be as totally at odds with each other as the accounts of the Dada protagonists suggest. Rather, they form the dialectical but necessarily interdependent opposites of Janus-faced modernity. Mies seems to be perfectly at ease with this.

The photograph shows the German architect—then little known and inconspicuous—in a moment of professional and private crisis. Mies hadn't built a house in years, and his submission to the 1919 'Exhibition for Unknown Architects' in the Netherlands—the neo-classical 1912 project for the Kröller-Müller house in Wassenaar—had been rejected by Gropius. Shortly thereafter, Mies conceived of his famous 'Five Projects' of the early 1920s, seemingly almost out of nothing. They not only brought him lasting fame, but also fundamentally changed the course of modern architecture. It is striking how Mies developed such a sudden interest in avant-garde art practices.

After 1920, Mies often made use of photomontage to elaborate and represent his architectural ideas and spatial conception, a technique that had been propagated by the Berlin Dadaists. For the Dadaists, photomontage was not merely a means to represent the industrialised metropolis and its fragmented perception but also a heuristic model for the production of visual meaning. The First International Dada Fair was the first time these new possibilities could be presented to a larger audience. The profound transformation in Mies's architectural language that took place at precisely this moment is clearly a result of his con-

frontation with Dadaist pictorial grammar. Only through Dada did he learn to understand photomontage as an epistemological tool—an understanding that had direct consequences for his architectural thinking.

On a more abstract level, the photograph illustrates that architecture, beyond all considerations of the autonomy of the discipline, is deeply ingrained in historical processes and epochal rifts. This is the lesson of this image for the current state of architectural history as well: architecture is involuntarily part of a larger social and artistic context. Our task as historians is to render transparent the complex interactions between these fields, and to bear in mind their consequences for the practice of design.

10. Architectural History and Cultural History

Amy Clarke

The Scottish devolution referendum of 1997 returned to Scotland the first parliament (albeit with limited powers) since the Union of 1707, when the government shifted to London as the capital of the United Kingdom. For the first time in 300 years, Scotland was in need of a parliament building. The previous parliament building (James Murray, 1639) had long been turned over to other uses, and a viable alternative—the Old Royal High School (Thomas Hamilton, 1826–29)—was quickly disregarded. A new and ambitious building befitting of the next chapter in Scotland's history was called for. The end result was a complex designed by Enric Miralles that ran several hundred million pounds over budget and took three years longer to complete than originally forecast. Writing in 2006, Andrew Ballantyne suggested that regardless of its perceived flaws, Miralles' work was 'a bold choice, and an experimental design, which was calculated to position Scotland as a forward-looking country with a place in international culture' (Ballantyne 2006: 37).

This understanding of the use of architectural symbolism to communicate the identity and ambitions of an entire nation can be extended further when the Scottish Parliament building is viewed in the context of contemporary Scottish cultural, economic and political landscapes. Debates over the Parliament's location,



Fig. 10: The Scottish Parliament illuminated at night, Adam Elder, 2005. Image © Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body—2012. Licensed under the Open Scottish Parliament Licence v1.0.

size, appearance, construction materials and expense are indicative of broader questions about Scotland's present and future. Is Scotland a nation afflicted by a lingering cultural cringe, or can it weave its past and future identities together in a confident and internationally marketable hybrid? What exactly is 'Scotland' now, where does it sit within its extended British and European networks, and will this change again in 2014 with the referendum for independence?

These questions about identity, and the communication of that identity, have no definitive answer, but will be in the minds of many Scots as they go to the polls next year. They are also questions that I am considering within my own PhD research, and which have, in a more abstract sense, defined my understanding of where architectural history sits as a discipline. The 2013 conference of SAHANZ encouraged delegates to consider the questions within architectural history that remain 'open,' unanswered, or perhaps even unasked. As a scholar who sees architecture as a cultural 'gesture,' to borrow from Ballantyne (2006: 36), and who sees the Scottish Parliament Building as a metaphor for the uncertainties of my own position within architectural history, I suggested that one of these open questions was that of scholarly identity in a world concerned with disciplinary boundaries.

I firmly believe that while the individual details within a particular building can tell a story, when that building is viewed within a broader cultural context the story takes on a breadth and richness that would otherwise be missed. But is this architectural history, or is this cultural history? How can we determine where cultural history ends and architectural history begins, particularly when both disciplines draw on one another to inform their scholarship? More importantly, is this divide something that we should try to determine at all? These are issues that are pertinent particularly as the legitimization of one's work (and indeed the appropriate location of that work) within disciplinary-driven institutions dictate the drawing of boundaries. They are also issues that will likely remain 'open' and undecided, much like the continually fluctuating perception of Scottish national identity and the Parliament building that has come to symbolise this debate.

Note

* *Open: The Thirtieth Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, was convened by Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia, July 2–5,

2013. Papers presented at this event are available for individual download from the conference website (<http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/sahanz-2013>) and the full record available as *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand 30, Open*, edited by Alexandra Brown and Andrew Leach (Gold Coast, Qld.: SAHANZ, 2013), 2 vols.

References

Architects Accreditation Council of Australia

2009 National Competency Standards in Architecture. Available at www.aaca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/2009_NCSA.pdf [Last accessed 29 June 2013].

Australian Institute of Architects 2009 Policy on Tertiary Education of Architects—Standards for Programs in Architecture. Available at <http://www.architecture.com.au/cpd-education/national/schools-education#tertiaryeducationofarchitectspolicy> [Last accessed 29 June 2013].

Australian Learning and Teaching Council 2011 Architecture Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement. Available at <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-architecture-learning-and-teaching-academic-standards-statement-2011> [Last accessed 29 June 2013].

Ballantyne, A 2006 Architecture as Evidence. In: Arnold, A et al (eds.), *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*. London: Routledge, pp. 36–49.

Crinson, M and Lubbock, J 1994 *Architecture: Art or Profession? Three Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Britain*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Cuff, D 1991 *Architecture: The Story of Practice*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Freidson, E 1986 *Professional Powers: A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Larson, M S 1977 *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Upton, D 2012 Defining the Profession. In: Ockman, J (ed.) *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, pp. 36–65.

Wright, G 1990 History for Architects. In: Wright, G and Parks, J (eds.) *The History of History in American Schools of Architecture, 1865–1975*. New York: The Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture; Princeton Architectural Press, pp. 13–52.

How to cite this article: Leach, A et al 2013 Open Brief. *Architectural Histories*, 1(1): 27, pp. 1–10, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ah.ba>

Published: 26 November 2013

Copyright: © 2013 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.



Architectural Histories is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.

OPEN ACCESS