

## Foreword

## Architecture &

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Architectural research in the UK is set within an educational and professional context, which prioritises the design of so-called 'buildable' buildings. Unlike history, which tends to be understood as a discipline whose role is to provide a contextual and non-threatening backdrop to design, theory is often understood in opposition to design, either as an abstract and therefore irrelevant activity or as a political and ideological set of operations which skew the natural progression of pragmatic design methodologies. However, it is also possible for theory to be productive and to generate imaginative designs that work as critiques of the economic, social and cultural systems within which architecture is enmeshed as well as the normative design procedures cherished by the profession.

At the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, as Director of Architectural Research since 2004, I have encouraged the development of research that works between history, theory, criticism and design, such as Jonathan Hill's PhD by Architectural Design,<sup>1</sup> as well as Neil Spiller's AVATAR initiative which is closely engaged with

the Masters in Architectural Design,<sup>2</sup> as well as progressing projects of my own, such as *Critical Architecture* (2004) in collaboration with Hill, as well as Murray Fraser from the University of Westminster and Mark Dorrian from the University of Edinburgh,<sup>3</sup> and *Spatial Imagination* (2005) with Peg Rawes and Penelope Haralambidou also from the Bartlett School of Architecture.<sup>4</sup> A more traditional model of research for history and theory expects certain questions to be identified at the outset and then explored over the research period and structured into a linear account in which an argument is laid out progressively. However, practitioners do not necessarily work this way, instead intuition guides action, and an engagement with material processes of production produces a knowledge that is at once spatial and patterned.

In 2004, we launched a new series of interdisciplinary seminars, *Architecture &*, each hosted by a Bartlett School of Architecture researcher, taking a theme associated with their personal research as a starting point to invite those from architecture and other disciplines to generate new patterns of knowledge across, around and on disciplinary boundaries.<sup>5</sup> 'Interdisciplinarity' has recently become a catch phrase used by organisations and institutions who support, but also to some extent control, research. It is important to reflect upon this current situation,

one where the banner of inter-disciplinarity once waved to marginalize certain work by locating it on the outside of the academy, is now being used to refer to a valued brand of research placed firmly at the centre. Has the time now come when interdisciplinary practitioners and theorists will obtain recognition and support for our research? Or does the term inter-disciplinarity now have a new referent? It is not yet apparent. But it is clear that we need to remind ourselves and re-recognize those qualities that distinguish what critical researchers have, in the not-too-distant past, associated with the term inter-disciplinarity.

In my view an inter-disciplinary approach can be distinguished from a multidisciplinary one by its critical intention. Inter-disciplinary research critically engages with the ideological apparatus that structures the terms and methods of a specific disciplinary practice. The aim is to resist and question existing and dominant processes in order to produce new forms and modes of knowledge and understanding. I wish to refute the Peter Carl's assertion that: 'The term 'inter-disciplinary' comes from trying to find respect in research-driven universities' and respond to Felipe Hernández's provocation that 'interdisciplinary research [ ... ] is the reserve of wealthier schools of architecture in larger urban centres'.<sup>6</sup> Inter-disciplinarity is a term that has been used in

critical theory long before its adoption and incorporation into research assessment and funding council terminology in the UK.<sup>7</sup> Since in much of the literature concerning research in academe and higher education the term interdisciplinarity has been appropriated and is now used in place of multi-disciplinarity, it seems to me that the need for interdisciplinary research, as I have defined it here, becomes even more vital. It does not reflect a desire to work to funding council 'norms' as Carl posits, rather it is the very kind of activity that intellectual and creative life requires to critique and question such 'norms'. Far from being a material luxury, the prerogative of wealthier institutions, as Hernández suggests, the practice of inter-disciplinary activity is a political necessity. It is not because it is wealthy, nor because it seeks to work to funding council norms that the Bartlett School of Architecture is involved in interdisciplinary research but because it desires to produce research that is critically engaged.

*Architecture &* has taken the definition of interdisciplinarity set out here as a starting point for hosting events that bring architecture into relation with disciplines, including so far, art, archaeology and fashion. In 2004 for *Text-Space-Writing*<sup>8</sup> artists, architects and writers explored the creative potential of writing as a form of 'critical spatial practice', a term I coined in my book *Art and*

*Architecture*,<sup>9</sup> bringing processes from fine art practice and architectural design to inform theoretical production through a mode of an operation, which I have, in my own research, called 'site-writing' (see my own paper in this issue of *Haecceity*). This research has informed a postgraduate programme of study for diploma, masters and doctoral students at the Bartlett School of Architecture where students are asked to choose a site of investigation and to produce a piece of writing that researches, critiques and responds physically to this site, through the material qualities of a textual work that may intervene into the site itself. Such an approach brings the writing subject into direct relation with their subject matter, allowing personal reflections and private imaginings to intervene or draw out issues of cultural and social significance that pertain to a certain space, place or site, and which then operate on a more public scale in anticipation of an audience, an 'other'. (For work that has been informed by this approach see the papers in this issue of *Haecceity* by Lilian Chee, in her exploration of an architectural history patterned through two voices; Sophie Handler, in her focus on the patterns created by the actions of doing, un-doing, over-doing and re-doing; and also in the textile-influenced work of Lucy Leonard.)

*Pattern* took place as part of *Architecture &* in October 2006, initiated and organized by Ana

Araujo, the lead guest editor of this issue of *Haeceity Papers*. Araujo teaches at the Bartlett School of Architecture and is currently completing her doctorate on pattern, hysteria and architecture as part of the PhD by Architectural Design. Araujo's introduction, which follows this foreword, sets out a conceptual framing for understanding the interdisciplinary nature of pattern, drawing connections and making distinctions between the eight essays included here.<sup>10</sup> In each one pattern is positioned not simply as an object nor as a surface but as an interdisciplinary way of working, including activities like looking, painting, lace-making, sewing, tidying, curating, designing, as well as the writing of architectural history, theory and criticism. Processes of pattern-making are explored as subject matters and as ways in which the subject (artist, architect, critic, curator, historian, needlewoman, theorist) situates his/herself in relation to his/her subject matter. The methodologies adopted vary, theoretical debates in feminism, philosophy and psychoanalysis inform a number of papers, as do more historically located concepts of subjectivity, but this issue is characterized by the distinct set of rhythms each paper generates across figure and ground. These oscillations disturb an understanding of architecture as a distinct, self-determined entity, and instead fabricate architectures which are continually constructed and reconstructed

between subject and object, foreground and background, figure and ground.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For further information see

[http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/programmes/mphil\\_phd\\_d/mphil\\_phd\\_d.htm](http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/programmes/mphil_phd_d/mphil_phd_d.htm);  
(accessed 10 May 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For further information see

<http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/programmes/march/march.htm> (accessed 10 May 2007).

<sup>3</sup> For further information see

<http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/events/conferences/critical.htm> (accessed 10 May 2007) and Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (eds) *Critical Architecture*, London, Routledge, forthcoming 2007.

<sup>4</sup> For further information see <http://www.spatialimagination.org.uk/> htm (accessed 10 May 2007). See also Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell (eds) *Spatial Imagination*, (London: The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/events/seminars/seminars.htm> (accessed 10 May 2007).

<sup>6</sup> For an elaboration of these points see Jane Rendell, 'Architectural Research and Disciplinarity', *Architecture Research Quarterly (ARQ)* v. 8, n. 4, 2004, pp. 141-7. See the responses in *ARQ* by Peter Carl, Felipe Hernandez, David Leatherbarrow to this article and to the *Critical Architecture* conference held at the Bartlett School of Architecture in November 2004.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Julia Kristeva, 'Institutional Interdisciplinarity in Theory and Practice: an Interview', Alex Coles and Alexia Defert (eds) *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity, De-, Dis-, Ex-*, v. 2, London, Black Dog Publishing, 1997, pp. 3-21 and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/architecture/events/conferences/textspacewriting.htm> (accessed 10 May 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*, London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Garcia of the Royal College of Art and Caroline Evans of Central Saint Martins presented at the event, the former on textiles and architecture, the later on the pattern in fashion history, but sadly both were unable to contribute to this issue of *Haecceity Papers*.

