Disciplinary challenges

Critical perspectives

Practical wisdom and disciplinary knowledge

At the Research Seminar held at the RIBA on 9 September (see Report, pp13–15), Alan Penn presented the next RAE exercise as a creative vehicle by which the diversity of research and architecture could be acknowledged and consolidated as a basis for self-understanding. In principle, this is a good idea. However, it implies something of a common disciplinary understanding, as against the previous regime, where schools pursued different approaches within the loose framework of the RIBA assessment of design quality. I am among those who think that this previous regime was healthy for architecture. It seems that the new determination of quality according to 'knowledge', and particularly research-knowledge, is something to which we must adapt rather than something we would willingly invent for ourselves.

In particular, the effort to describe architecture as 'interdisciplinary' is more indicative of the divisions between disciplines than it is of architecture itself. The term 'interdisciplinary' comes from trying to find respect in research-driven universities – and from trying to make architecture safe for university research. On the one hand, we might be comforted by the description of architecture as composite knowledge voiced by Vitruvius (Book I.1-18). On the other hand, the current protocols for the production, teaching, dissemination and assessment of knowledge are far more sophisticated, rigorous in their self-definition and resistant to common understanding than in the time of Vitruvius. I do not believe that the integrity or coherence of architecture or urban topography corresponds to the 'inter' of 'interdisciplinary'.

I believe that architecture has its own integrity, one of whose virtues is the capacity to find continuities between social or political praxis and the highly sophisticated and precise knowledge of specialist disciplines. This capacity is unusual and deserves to be taken seriously. It arises less from architecture's conceptual knowledge, which is more or less a battleground, than from its practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is, in my view, wrongfully regarded as inferior to purely intellectual knowledge (a research-driven university apparently could not hire figures of the calibre of Piano, Libeskind or Koolhaas because of their lack of RAE status).

Institutionally, architecture is subject to two familiar divisions: between practice and academia, and, within the latter, between the sciences and the humanities (a division left over from the medieval quadrivium and trivium, where, however, their difference was less important than their contribution to a common understanding). I stress the institutional nature of these divisions because knowledge exists in those who hold it, which also means their interests, their positions in various contexts (usually several, including history), and so forth. It is not obvious that the still-evolving RAE is a worse or better institution than previous regimes of patronage (from Lorenzo di Medici to Mussolini) or the structures of democratic capitalism for discovering the good in architecture or for making architecture accountable to the people; but it is a question worth asking.

Discussion at this seminar raised the concern that, in re-thinking architecture in terms of research-knowledge, we are dispersing its integrity to an aggregate of specialist expertise or to an entirely separate knowledge industry whose sheer extent impedes useful communication. For example, discussion of architecture was dominated by technical or quantifiable analysis. People (also called users or occupants) were represented in terms of their behaviour, implying an emphasis on predictability and therefore upon control. We were warned not to harbour a too-parochial or too-romantic view of architecture's worth, since 'the industry' had already moved on to considering architecture a product like any other. Post-occupancy evaluation as a growth area in research was discussed as if it were unproblematic. Is one to imagine cumulative scores for technical efficiency and beauty? Does one assess a school by developing a relation between quantifiable factors and the number of politicians or professional athletes

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it graduates (minus the criminals)? The nature of 'good' in such evaluations is obscure; and if this good is obscure in the assessment of buildings, what are the implications for research-evaluation? Medieval Siena, as well as early twentieth-century Paris and New York, involved considerable suffering, yet they left a profound and rich cultural legacy (therefore 'good'). Harry Lime's evidently perverse justification of criminality (Italy under the Borgias versus Switzerland) has the merit of pointing to a cultural metabolism deeper than the blue-skies-everything-working (beauty plus efficiency) milieu of architects' renderings. Post-occupancy involves not simply efficiency, comfort or aesthetics, it ultimately involves civic culture in history.

'The present criteria of Originality, Impact and Rigour avoid the inevitable conflicts of content. It is perfectly possible to be original, rigorous and wrong…'

In other words, pursuing the concept of post-occupancy evaluation to its proper conclusion begins to indicate where the commonality of architecture actually resides. It suggests that the diversity of architectural approaches appear to be manifestations of a deeper order which is only partly architectural. Post-occupancy evaluation might nominally have the same criteria as the RAE, since both are looking for good architecture or the good within architecture. Both these forms of evaluation profess to make architecture accountable to 'the people'. While it is to be assumed that the detailed criteria for each panel have something like 'civic culture in history' as an overall desideratum, the published RAE documents emphasise assessment procedures and therefore support the impression of sheer diversity of specialist discourses and architectural approaches. The present criteria of Originality, Impact and Rigour avoid the inevitable conflicts of content. It is perfectly possible to be original, rigorous and wrong, with a vast but deeply unfortunate impact (eg, CIAM planning assessed by Jane Jacobs). By being more explicit with what is common, we might also have a basis for collaboration from outside the discipline, and from outside disciplinary understanding altogether – from practical life. It would certainly be regrettable if the assessment of quality were so forced to accommodate itself to the production of 'knowledge' that the real purposes and possibilities of architecture were suppressed.

One can see what this would imply from design itself. Some of the discussion at this seminar strove for a(nother) design methodology which might rationally progress from the relatively unknown (precedents) to the known. The concept suggested Architectural Office software opening with a production-schedule for each project linked to the CAD-files and to templates for contracts and letters to subcontractors, and so on. This sort of thing becomes credible only when one imagines oneself to be processing knowledge or information or data. While it often feels as if the endless paperwork (in both universities and offices) could be turned over to information-processing robots, in practice each situation requires attention. This is characteristic of praxis. Praxis is neither logical derivation of solutions nor pure production, but rather the exercise of judgements to find a best possible outcome in ambiguous circumstances. Praxis is furthermore collective or social (where disagreements are important to a good outcome). Finally, praxis involves not just knowledge but several strata of discourse, some more primitive than others.

We might look briefly at a design situation to understand this more concretely. To begin, we may imagine all the best computational, material, environmental, structural or formal expertise (or talent) assembled around a table. Nothing can happen, this is merely an open field of possibilities, until it is decided that there will be, for example, an auditorium. At this point, the cultural norms of an auditorium – which account for decorum, the characteristics of listening and speaking, the nature of assembling and leaving and so on – provide a common topic, a basis for conflict, negotiation, accommodation, collaboration. This creation of a situation for analysis and interpretation leading to judgements is the first crucial characteristic of praxis (of any kind). Furthermore, this situation does not transpire according to the flat logic of a report or even the lyric discourse of a novel; it involves false starts, re-starts, deviations, inspired discoveries, adaptations, compromises and so forth. Moreover, architecture stalks or discovers its outcomes through several strata of discourse or representation – models, drawings, precedents, simulations, analytic diagrams, calculations, plots and graphs, reports, essays, publicity, references derived from the personal or collective culture of the participants, fights, consultations, jokes, deceptions, sympathy, partial understandings, misunderstandings, cold coffee and the infernal Microsoft operating system. Some aspects are quite primitive and metaphoric – for example, the material imagination that specifies book-matched walnut panelling and red leather against grey painted plaster (the RIBA council-chamber).

Other aspects are extremely sophisticated and precise – such as the structural or environmental calculations. The more primitive dimensions provide orientation for the more sophisticated – one cannot derive the auditorium 'down' from the technical knowledge, rather one must build the conditions for properly communicating with such knowledge. While any praxis will involve levels of decorum, architecture is distinguished by its primary concern for the conditions of decorum. These conditions lie beneath or behind or before any actual praxis (or, usually, several possible praxes) in a building. This phenomenon of depth is the second crucial characteristic of practical knowledge. Third, this depth of knowledge is disclosed, or becomes a recognisable narrative, in a dialogue between its own immediate concerns and the more enduring, primordial temporality of cultural norms (which of course themselves can be the subject of critique). Out of this dialogue comes the experience which is the principal character of practical knowledge.

This experience, in turn, harbours the Wisdom which Aristotle, to whom we owe the first description of praxis (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI), placed in the highest position, as the culmination of practical and scientific (epistemic) knowledge. It is both highest and lowest – highest in the sense that 'civic culture in history' can be expressed as an ideal (and made subject to critique or

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valorisation); lowest in the sense that civic culture resides in the collective memory, common-to-all, and both precedes and sets the standard for all innovation or qualification (in a particular project or practical situation). This has two implications. First, it suggests that, despite all the attention paid to epistemological precision (methodology), all knowledge, not only knowledge in architecture, seeks to contribute to wisdom and will at some point have the character of a practical situation rooted in interpretation and judgement, such as was sketched above (even the most obdurate positivist must also be a detective). Second, the phenomenon of depth, of strata of discourse or representation, in which the more primitive lays claim to the more sophisticated and precise, pertains to the role of architecture in the culture. It is itself among these more primitive representations, setting the horizons for praxis.

By looking again at the problem of building-evaluation, we may see the interaction of the movement from knowledge to wisdom, and of this claim of architecture upon disciplinary knowledge. For the most part, evaluation of a high-rise office-block can be accomplished through quantitative means. The production of such an edifice is, by now, a highly refined procedure both technically and commercially, virtually the same the world over. It is possible to place all the relevant documentation on a server, for the effective collaboration of experts and professionals, who may themselves be located anywhere. This very autonomy, however, solicits attention with respect to understanding the ubiquity of these institutions for information-management in cities, along with the kinds of life they support (and suppress), the interaction between corporate and civic identity, the hidden dimensions of this autonomy in demands upon resources or traffic, and so forth. Again, however, all this cannot be brought to a single level of interpretation or discourse. 'Construction', for example, invokes a more primitive, synthetic, interpretative domain than does 'technology'.

By contrast, evaluation of developmental urbanism is more like interpretation of a historical event. My example comes from Capetown with which I have become familiar through the PhD research of Matthew Barac. The objectives are understood at the symbolic level – Mandela's 'rainbow nation' – the practical implications of which are an ongoing process of invention or improvisation, as well as of extensive testing in various forums. If, furthermore, 'developmental' means empowerment of previously disadvantaged peoples, the customary techniques of amelioration – exploitation of the global market economy to support the infrastructure and iconography of middle-class well-being – are compromised, since these all effectively suppress the identities of those who most need incorporation in the new social and political order (critique of cultural norms). The procedural consequence of this situation is that design is part of an elaborate political process of interpretation or discovery, in which even the protocols of attending meetings and knowing what to get out of them are unfamiliar to many of the important stakeholders. The context in which this takes place includes not only those immediately involved with a project – planning bodies, architects, neighbourhood associations, and so on – but also an intensely active international coalition of discourses which includes scholarly conferences and publications, NGOs and their priorities, as well as the style-magazines.

In many respects, all urban design looks roughly like this. However, the symbol of 'rainbow nation', by which the ethical common-to-all is established in the South African context, is, outside that context, generally replaced by approximations such as 'sustainability', to which the first reaction is to strip it of any symbolic import and turn it into technically definable and achievable objectives. In doing so, we invert the claim of cultural objectivity (ethical norms) upon epistemological objectivity (certainty), and enter into a confusion of expectations, of evaluations, even topics. 'Sustainability' sounds like a capacity; but it has become a word like 'health' in which the fundamental human issues (finitude, ethics) are often obscured by the pervasive technology (which mostly seeks to overcome our finitude). Under these conditions it is easy to find ourselves devoting our effort and imagination to administering the material conditions of survival (well-being) instead of using the available resources to create a rich culture (ethical orientation in history).

This last insight – from Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, a reformulation of the Harry Lime hypothesis, above – is meant to suggest how, by failing to keep the fundamental issues before us, all the goodwill and hard work may find itself constructing an 'inverted' reality. Lying at the bottom of the depth of representations are architecture and urban topography. With respect to their concreteness, all other representations are more or less conceptual approximations – visualisations, models, drawings, maps, network analyses, any notion of 'space' or of 'form', essays, calculations, the rest of it. Their limitations are the basis of their analytic or interpretative power: the clarity is always gained at the expense of the capacity for participation in the full conditions of reality. It is very easy to become lost in the representations and to appropriate inordinate power over these conditions – leading to utopian fantasies of cities without crime, disease, conflict, discomfort.

For this reason, I have been stressing the 'downward' claim of architecture in both practice and evaluation. Architecture is literally the background to all praxes, the horizon of our possible sophistication, not to say our sanity. We are very adaptable, but we do not live as a crowd in 'space'. We expend inordinate effort distinguishing and distributing places propitious for deciding, eating, making, and so on, and these harbour the cultural memory (and are therefore the framework for change in history). One needs a room to design another room or to properly support any situation. Given the scale and intensity of resources and effort, as well as the longevity, of architectural or urban configurations, it is obvious that – culturally – architecture represents an investment in our long-term values and concerns. In other words, architecture and urban topography embody interpretations of our cultural norms (ethics), qualifying our freedom.

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About eighty years lie between Voltaire's sceptical treatment of the Enlightenment's 'best of all possible worlds' and Marx's 'all that is solid melts into air'. Another hundred years lie between that and the concern of Habermas and Arendt that political life has descended to the administration of material necessities for mass-society. This history of regret implies some sort of (collective) choice regarding cultural orientation(s), which, even if forced upon us by ecological conflict, can make sense only to our ethical imagination. Since architecture and, particularly, urban topography, embody – or ought to embody – our ethical orientation, the capacity for its practical wisdom to find continuities across the full spectrum of understanding suggests that architecture might serve as a general example for the movement between knowledge and wisdom. Since its incorporation in universities, architecture has looked to every other discipline, but few have come to architecture. Architecture's challenge to purely disciplinary knowledge is presumably the reason for this; but it is hopefully evident that acknowledging this challenge is not merely the parochial concern of an isolated discipline, according to which we should surrender the integrity of architecture to disciplinary divisions. Properly acknowledging this challenge is part of our capacity for wisdom, which – equally hopefully – would be represented in our capacity to make 'good' cities.

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The scope of Critical Architecture

The Critical Architecture conference held at the Bartlett School of Architecture has generated an interesting succession of reviews and responses. The fact that there have been negative reactions is not a surprise considering that the term critical – in architecture but also in other disciplines – appears to have become merely a catchword vaguely associated with the challenging of paradigms or hardly discernible political agendas. That is why, in his review of the conference (**arq** 8/2, pp105-108), Brian Hatton needs to make use of lubricious definitions of the term, equating criticism to theory which is, then, described as the critique of criteria. Despite his efforts to disclose the hidden meaning of the term critical – covering a vast territory from Kant to Kristeva via many other *de rigueur* theorists such as Derrida and Foucault – Hatton is unable to provide a more appropriate definition, one that resolves the shortcomings of its current usage.

In his letter (**arq** 8/3+4, pp199-202), David Leatherbarrow adopts a more suitable position. He argues cogently that Hatton (as well as Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian in their responses to Hatton) struggles to advance innovative definitions of the term critical because it is too ample to be defined in one single stroke. Leatherbarrow demonstrates that criticism, in various forms and not only in one, is an intrinsic part of all architectural practices. He is less concerned with the definition of the term critical than with its practical applicability, its potential, the fact that critical thought and practice help to expose, denounce and challenge particular socio-political situations – or other kinds – advance or perfect solutions, and, eventually, change the world, although the latter may be a little too optimistic.

It is important to note, however, that the debate in **arq** around the term critical and its relation to architectural practices springs from a conference organised by the Bartlett School of Architecture and AHRA, all of whose participants operate within the UK-US scholarly axis. Questions outside the Euro-American context are mentioned only tangentially by Fraser, Leatherbarrow and, also, Rendell. It is clear that most of the correspondents to the debate are interested in discussing a particular mode of critical thinking, which they directly associate with the Frankfurt School. It is worth noting this point precisely because this mode of critical thinking has opened the door to escape the unidirectionality of the debate. In other words, the critical theoretical reflection that takes place at universities, and at conferences like Critical Architecture, allows the emergence of a multitude of contesting positions which reinvigorate architectural theories and practices. I refer here to Murray Fraser's comments about 'vernacular and generic buildings, such as the Kasbah of Algiers or the Victorian terraces of North London' (**arq** 8/2, p103). These buildings may not comply with pedagogically created architectural narratives, yet they reveal the ambivalence, as well as the performative, nature of architectural practices (I am borrowing Homi K. Bhabha's terminology in the same context as Rendell). This is the case of informal architectures in Latin America, for example, which constitute more than 70% of the fabric of the continent's cities but which have been radically dismissed by architectural scholars for not complying with hegemonic architectural narratives and, consequently, for disrupting the homogeneous growth of cities as imagined by architects, planners and politicians. Although informal architectures are, like most architectures, the products of social, political and economic processes, they reveal alternative forms of practice that do not reproduce prevailing values, which are rendered inadequate. For this reason, contrary to Hatton's opinion, such practices are of great architectural value and, contrary to Fraser's opinion, contain many critical bones in their bodies. So the focus of the conference complied with and endorsed prevailing scholarly hierarchies; a particularly disappointing aspect considering that one of the aims of the conference was to place architecture in an interdisciplinary context, thereby broadening the boundaries of architectural criticism.

'Although informal architectures are, like most architectures, the products of social, political and economic processes, they reveal alternative forms of practice that do not reproduce prevailing values…'

In the recent **arq** debate, each correspondent approaches the question of research from a different angle and all except one maintain that architectural practice can be led by research. I would like to stress that, in fact, it always is. Yet the very question of research in architecture is contentious, particularly so in the UK in light of the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise which poses considerable pressure on educational institutions (as

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discussed by Jane Rendell, **arq** 8/2, pp141-147). Architectural research has to comply with a pre-existing set of parameters that allow its results to be quantified. Any form of architectural research that does not correspond with the given categories, and whose outcome cannot be measured according to the given criteria, is consequently rendered unsuitable. Without invoking the old cliché – that architecture is a special case that needs be treated differently to all other disciplines or subjects – Rendell and Leatherbarrow demonstrate that interdisciplinarity is intrinsic to architecture in all its forms of practice. Rendell pronounces herself a passionate advocate for interdisciplinary research and opposes the suggestion that 'academic research should strengthen its ties with professional practice and act as an incubator for innovations in architectural design that will improve the quality of the built environment'. Such a declaration would probably be endorsed by a large number of people involved in architectural academia whose work does not match existing assessment criteria but which allows 'for the production of complex forms of research that are at once self-reflective and propositional'.

'Such an attitude evades institutional classification of research; as such, it becomes a risk that many schools cannot afford.'

The question arises as to whether the kind of interdisciplinary research that Rendell proposes is possible in all schools of architecture, or whether it is the reserve of the wealthier schools in larger urban centres. Interdisciplinarity, as Rendell suggests, requires the participation of individuals willing to stand on the edge and blur the boundaries of their own disciplines. Such an attitude evades institutional classification of research; as such, it becomes a risk that many schools cannot afford. Schools of architecture at universities without an established name, or the endowments of larger urban schools, tend to feel more pressure to comply with HEFCE and RAE procedures of assessment in order to obtain funding and to build a reputation as new emergent liberal institutions – so complying, paradoxically, with conservative educational and administrative strategies. Consequently, researchers at these schools of architecture find it difficult to pursue the kind of interdisciplinary research that Rendell passionately advocates. Admittedly, her questioning of existing structures of research assessment along with her call for interdisciplinarity may lead to possibilities of overcoming this situation. However, I feel less optimistic in this respect.

It is not the intention of this letter to contradict previous correspondents' views or to criticise negatively the Critical Architecture conference, rather to reflect on two aspects that were not fully addressed either at the conference or by past correspondents, namely: the lack of engagement with questions outside the Euro-American context; and the fact that the pressures of current research assessment procedures are felt with more rigour at some universities than others. The first aspect is important because the kind of critical thought that links the participants of this debate has allowed a multitude of contesting architectural practices to become visible and to be politicised. Yet, the debate, both at the conference and through the pages of **arq**, has failed to engage fully with such practices; a fact that has limited its critical repercussion. The second aspect is also crucial because it shows how existing procedures of research assessment, despite attempting to be impartial, put greater pressure on some universities which, consequently, precludes the possibility of pursuing interdisciplinary research in the way previous correspondents advocate. This is by no means to say that discussions about research and interdisciplinarity are fruitless. On the contrary, I am suggesting that further discussion is both urgent and necessary. Such debates, which are taking place mainly at schools of architecture, also demonstrate that the university is, as Alberto Moreiras sustains, one of the last remaining sites where critical practice is both theoretically possible and also existing in practice.

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Critical practice

Brian Hatton's review of the Critical Architecture conference (**arq** 8/2, pp105-108) demonstrates the value of debating the scope of criticism and critical thinking in contemporary architectural design, history and theory, insofar as it is provocative. However, his opening reference to Kant's formal definition of the concept of 'critique' means that his potentially fascinating argument quickly retreats to a rather limited and unproductive position.

There are a number of points I would like to address, which might reinvigorate Brian's argument and enable him to see the potential for the debate, rather than viewing it (especially when it is in opposition or contrary to his views) as irrelevant or inadequate.

First, Kant has at least three concepts of critique – not least indicated in the titles of his three texts of that name. But, as those readers who feel that Kant has something to contribute to architectural practice and theory will be aware, this first conception of critical thinking in the *Critique of Reason* is limited because it prioritises a disembodied form of reason or knowledge of the world. In contrast, in the third and final Critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant provides a quite different notion of critique, which is generated through *embodied* reason. Reason, whether it is derived from technical, perceptual or sense-based modes of knowledge, is produced by the activities of the aesthetic subject. As a result, concepts, such as space, become dramatically reconfigured as aspects of a subjective, *yet critical*, form of agency which constitutes the individual (be they an architect or philosopher, or both).

So, by ignoring this more radical concept of reason in the act of producing critical practices or modes of thinking in architectural design, Brian's appeal to the rigour of a philosophical concept of criticism falls somewhat short.

This brings me to my second concern; the priority which Brian appears to give to pure forms of philosophical concepts or cognitions, over and above the scope for architectural thinking to produce modes of critical thought, which may *also* reflect the material construction of ideas and the built environment. While I might personally share Brian's enjoyment and fascination with the power of philosophical thinking in relation to the production of critical architecture, Brian should be aware

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that his review sets off alarm bells for those critics, architects, historians and theorists in the profession who are troubled by the implication that only 'pure' forms of philosophical thinking can produce the superior or 'proper' concepts of critique or modes of critical thinking. Unfortunately, Brian's article might be read in just these very terms.

Furthermore, in so doing, Brian continues to uphold long-standing divisions between the two disciplines on two counts; first, by implying that if architects are not informed in a particular kind of philosophical 'reasoning' they are therefore non-critical; and second, in continuing to ignore the fact that critical architects may choose *not* to be critical philosophers. (And, of course, philosophers may not always be able to successfully realise their concepts in an architectural form.)

Finally, Brian confirms the suspicion of many in the architectural profession that to engage with a discipline which often appears to begin from the position that architects, especially practitioners, will tend to settle for inadequate modes of thinking, means that philosophy offers little scope for those who wish to generate real change in the profession, or promote its value for both philosophical, and critical but non-philosophical, practitioners, historians and theorists.

Below are some suggestions about 'ways out' from some of these issues, which might also be more productive:

1. A diverse range of debates about the scope of architectural criticism is to be welcomed, and the desire to retreat to comfortable, institutionally determined positions or oppositions should be avoided.
2. Architects and theorists will only (reasonably enough) want to learn about the potential that philosophy has to offer if those who practise philosophy recognise that it is a discipline which has its own limits and that critical sense-based thinking also exists, legitimately, in other disciplines. So, in this context, critical dialogue might appear on the horizon, rather than labels of inadequacy being thrown over the fence. (Personally, I felt that Sarah Wigglesworth's contribution to the conference provided a fascinating example of this in relation to client negotiations, so that critique is constituted by the reflexive production of architectural forms, economics and relationships, which are not determined by limited *forms* of architectural language, power or site.)
3. Critical thinking can and does happen in architectural practice and theory, enabling architects to interrupt the return to defensive or exclusive oppositions in practice-based or theory-based camps. Instead, if criticism is discussed in the context of its 'historicity' a useful set of practices might be generated through which to produce critical, productive and aesthetic architectural sites and thinking.

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Critical dilemmas

The last issue of **arq** deserves special mention for the diversity and richness of the papers. The Günter Behnisch interview was succinct and beautiful. Jane Rendell's well argued position is the best I have read on the subject of architecture versus criticism. However, a trend seems to be developing – that architectural criticism is an end in itself, arguably as a reaction to RAE values rather than to the realities of architecture. Over the last two years as President of RIAS, along with our Chief Executive Sebastian Tombs and Education Board chairman Gordon Smith, I spent a day with staff and students at each of the six Schools of Architecture in Scotland. In addition, I was chairman of judges of last year's 'Six', the Student Award scheme set up between RIAS and APU and run by the Lighthouse in Glasgow.

This could be seen as a snapshot survey of what is going on generally in Schools of Architecture, albeit there is a commonality of purpose in the six Schools due to ASSA, the Association of Scottish Schools of Architecture. Under the singular direction of six Heads of School, there are unique elements in each. In addition, each School has focused on specialisations that single them out. The Six Awards Exhibition serves to reinforce the richness of architectural education in Scotland. Embarking on this tour and conscious of much of the debate that has been under way on the pages of **arq** in the last five years, I expected a similar diversity in the attitudes and preoccupations of students.

While school-selection by students is a complex issue, influenced not least by the quality of the bars in respective cities, I was reassured by the Schools' views of diversity preparing students intellectually rather than solely vocationally; enriching the human rather than creating the architect. Accepting it as an ideal, but having to deal with the prescriptions enforced by funding limits, ARB and RIBA validations and the University's own expanding QA regime. However, I was equally surprised by the consistency of the views of students that overwhelmingly suggested that practice in designing buildings was why they had persevered through the trials of both academe and practice, which many found traumatic and not a little humiliating in its use of fresh student minds.

But where was all the diversity and richness which would take them into specialist fields, into research, into becoming enlightened clients and commissioners of buildings? Architects, even aspirant ones, still want to build, to craft, to create, to nurture humanity.

Again in my RIAS role, I attended the UIA Congress in Istanbul in July 2005. One of the highlights was a lecture by Joseph Rykwert, self-edited by his dawning realisation that he was the warm-up act for the 4000 or so delegates streaming in for the Zaha Hadid presentation. In his talk, Rykwert showed no slides, focusing instead on the importance of thinking and making, and their interrelationship. Quoting Vitruvius, he observed that there is no theory without practice, and no practice without theory. Making is the continual improvement of a theoretical position. Theory is based on experience and history but requires an essential ingredient of external criticism, which in turn connects it back to making/practice. Despite his assertion that 'translating theories

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in architecture only produces distortion', Behnisch (in the interview with Hanno Rauterberg, **arq** 8/2, pp 109–113) nevertheless affirms that his buildings are meant to allow for disagreement and debate. He takes a clear theoretical position which informs his architecture in turn. Notwithstanding Rykwert's position as a philosopher/poet rather than a practitioner, his work also demonstrates the practical application of theory, often tested to destruction. Built work is therefore not only critical to development of theory, it is also the basis on which criticism can progress with meaning. Again at the UIA Congress, Charles Correa referred to the explorations carried on through his built work and used these to develop a rich discourse on the nature of cities – the Western preoccupation with the city beautiful, and the wider recognition of cities as economic imperatives.

Each of the six Schools of Architecture demonstrated extremely wide variations and preoccupations in the field of research in architecture, necessitating the study by Jenkins, Forsyth and Smith (see pp33–43). The RIAS has supported this work to better understand its nature and any apparent cross-over with research being carried out in practice. A parallel study into this aspect of research has also been carried out by Scot MARK – Scottish Matrix for Architectural Research and Knowledge (Dr P. Jenkins, Dr H. Smith and S. Garcia-Ferrari) into the nature of research in practice (jointly funded by RIAS and APU). This found strong positive support for research as an integral aspect of the development of Scottish architecture and often the research was seen as an integral part of practice.

A broadly desired sound architectural knowledge base for the profession in Scotland needs to recognise that a significant amount of research is being carried out in both practice and research institutions. This requires a wider conception of architectural research which aims to break down the concept of research as a predominantly specialised approach to knowledge. It could be argued that placing architecture within engineering faculties at universities offers wider opportunities, yet the RAE Units of Assessment distort this, necessitating in turn a reappraisal of how the school's researchers and teachers approach the game of valid research balanced with teaching.

Making or practice appears in very few areas of the architectural research arena, despite the fact that evidence suggests that it is the specific area of interest of students and fundamental to the evolution of the most cogent theoretical positions. Nevertheless, rather than universities/schools encouraging an even greater involvement of practitioners in undergraduate courses to achieve some of those opportunities/objectives set-out above, and in turn pressuring RAE to recognise the validity of this – a validity supported by RIAS /RIBA and ARB – there is a notable shift in defining what might constitute architectural design or critical architecture or critical design in order to facilitate categorisation by RAE, whether appropriately correct or in the long-term interest of the subject field notwithstanding the interests of the profession which students wish to embrace and which in turn informs much of the work in universities. The current issue of the *Journal of Architecture* focuses on papers of the Critical Architecture conference held at the Bartlett in November 2004 and commented on by Brian Hatton (**arq** 8/2, pp105-108). His point, 'It is one thing to say that architectural work may effect a critique, it is another to present a work of criticism as itself architectural work', for me gets right to the heart of the issue.

In Jonathan Hill's paper at the conference – 'Criticism by Design – Drawing, Wearing, Weathering' – the concept of architecture as built form makes no appearance, marking a further shift away from reality. He suggests that 'in the disclosure of architects, the older meaning of design as drawing ideas and the newer meaning of design as drawing appliances are both in evidence. A critical design better fits the first concept of design than the second.' As Behnisch attests, and as most architects know, design only reaches true realisation and fulfilment in construction. No doubt this is architecture as appliance. The abnegation is completed in the following: 'The architectural profession is a significant hindrance to critical architecture … Professionals are neither expected nor paid to generate ideas – critical or not'.

Murray Fraser in his letter (**arq** (8/2, p103) seeks to counter Brian Hatton's wider criticisms of such views by focusing on his omission of any reference to those practitioners involved. However, the omission is in proportion to the myriad papers appearing in critical architectural journals and elsewhere, supporting the views of Jonathan Hill and others on the apparent irrelevance of the relationship between thinking and making, and its necessity for developing both our architecture and our society.

> *'…design only reaches true realisation and fulfilment in construction.'*

My six visits highlighted the tensions and ambiguities and often contradictions involved in each school – balancing issues of research, teaching and practice and the often disproportionate impact of statutory validation on decision-making. It is essential for their survival that schools of architects are rooted in the notion of making buildings and improving the built environment. Why else do they exist? What distinguishes them culturally from an Arts' or Humanities' perspective?

Two factors make architecture a unique art – utility and time. Architecture has never been built solely on the motivation of the architect, although it is made manifest by this. Rather it comes about through desire, however pragmatic. Desire for a nurturing of spirit, for warmth, for education. Painters and musicians express their own experience and persona through the form of their art. Architects imbue the desires of others with a personal interpretation born of experience of these requirements, synthesised with the nature of the place chosen. It requires the personal interpretation of the observer and can, through allegory or critical appraisal, transform our understanding. It also has utility and in this, more than any other art form, it can bring ebullience to our existence. Through place-making it can also touch and improve the lives of the greatest quantity of people. Its nature changes through time – in its development, construction, weathering and critical reception by society in degrees and influence unknown to other art forms. Stockhausen cannot claim to have impacted on our cultures in the way Mies or even SOM have done in

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architecture, and the theoretical debates on Ground Zero only serve to underline this.

Just as the architectural profession is at a crossroads, facing a multiplicity of competing suppliers and seeking to identify that which makes it unique in order to continue to fulfil its role in developing our society, so Schools of Architecture must focus on what they alone contribute to the intellectual base within that society. It appears to me that the RAE, by its very choice of definitions, is continuing to insist that in most cases other disciplines are doing just this … and better.

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