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On reaching eighteen

Entering its eighteenth year and with effect from this volume – number 18 – **arq** has a revised editorial team and moves its editorial headquarters in the UK from Cardiff University to Newcastle University (see '**arq** news', 17.3–4, p. 197, and the inside front cover of this issue). The age of eighteen customarily marks a new phase of life in many Western countries and a consolidation of one's identity. And it may also be that this journal, like British architectural research culture itself, is becoming more assured in its character.

arq emerged in 1996, partly in response to a rather insular British concern: a new insistence on formal research assessment in UK universities, the culture of which produced anxieties that can be readily detected in the pages of the first few issues. It was a time when most British architecture schools had few research active staff and just one or two professors, many of whom had arrived in academe in their 50s with a wealth of practice experience but little equipment for methodical research inquiry. Research assessment thus served to both hasten and consolidate a move towards established university-based architectural research which had begun at the RIBA's Oxford Conference in 1958 (another theme of early issues of **arq**). While the metrics of research assessment remain blunt instruments, and while they still exercise negative as well as positive influence over the content of architectural research itself, their impact on research culture in British architecture schools in the intervening years has been immense. For all the anxiety, UK schools are now much more serious about research and the overall quality of the work is much higher than it was a generation ago.

Another preoccupation of early volumes of **arq** concerned design as research: first, worrying about whether design could be research at all and, second, establishing when the practice of design might become research inquiry, and when the 'finding out' that architects do as part of any design project might become original knowledge. As the pages of this journal have subsequently demonstrated, and as a wealth of papers and books elsewhere have indicated, these questions have passed: the credibility of design research now seems beyond question and its contours are increasingly well outlined (see, for instance, *Mapping Design Research* published by Birkhäuser in 2012, the *AADR* series and Ashgate's *Studies in Design Research* series).

The consolidation of **arq**'s identity is also illustrated by its now-established global reach. Papers addressing British and North American concerns have increasingly been supplemented by those addressing issues and contexts ranging from Europe East and West, China, Australia, the Middle East, Asia and South America. In an international architecture

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research culture where various journals do not extend an open call for papers, we are proud to extend an open invitation and to publish contributions from leading researchers worldwide, tested by rigorous double-blind peer review.

arq's remit of bridging practice and academe remains a core concern, reflected by its readership in both spheres. Indeed, the journal acknowledges an increasing tendency to blur distinctions between practice and academe, where practices are keen to conduct research and universities are embracing practice-led and practice-based research, where more architects are spending their careers moving between spheres. While it is perhaps inevitable that we receive most of our submissions from academics – who usually have more 'laboratory time' to research and write – we aim to publish work relevant to both constituencies and we actively seek contributions from practitioners. We remain deeply interested in the concerns of practice, and remain enthusiastic about research that brings methodical inquiry to bear on problems arising through practice. Past theme issues on questions of quality in architecture (**arq** 11.3–4), for example, or the cultures of technical literatures (**arq** 16.3), will shortly be supplemented with issues on Olympic legacy, a new generation of emerging design research practices and the new materials of synthetic biology – all matters of shared concern across our broad readership.

As the contents of this issue illustrate, we remain committed to reflecting the breadth of our interdisciplinary discipline – including design and practice, environmental design and digital design, history and theory, materials and landscape, research and education. Indeed, we want to develop those areas which have, in the past, been under-represented in the pages of **arq**.

As **arq** approaches its 20s and 30s – a time, perhaps, of youthful vigour – we seek to embrace and anticipate international research topics of major concern to practitioners and academics. We want to lead by curating issues on important themes. We also want to respond to the research community in both practice and academe by remaining open to the latest research, from whomever and wherever, on the simple test of its originality, significance and rigour – a triad which, incidentally, constituted the basic metrics of the UK research measurement that prompted **arq**'s founding eighteen years ago.

THE EDITORS

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