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Researchers practicing design

Practitioners researching design

Emerging practices in design research

James A. Craig and Matthew Ozga-Lawn (STASUS)

This issue of **arq** explores how academic researchers are practicing design, and how architectural practitioners are researching design. Pedagogy has emerged as a theme bridging these two distinct subfields. Likewise, they are connected through explorations of the nature of architectural representation and process, examining how ideas, strategies, and spaces are communicated across academia and practice. The ever-changing field of architectural representation, and how we engage with it, often escapes close reading. By drawing particular attention to it, the issue aims to highlight the state of design research in the discipline today.

As STASUS, a research-practice, our work focuses on exploring and understanding the potentials of architectural representation. This seemingly well-understood, but often critically neglected field is often the focus of design research; research which often pays special attention to the methods of working employed by the designer. In our projects, we question the agencies found within architectural projects, and challenge familiar terms like site, context, and studio.

This issue opens with a 'perspective' from Kate Davies, Head of Media Studies at the Architectural Association in London, on the nature of site in relation to a 'nomadic design studio' called *Unknown Fields*, which she co-leads with Liam Young. *Unknown Fields* travels the world – to locations as far-flung as Chernobyl, Bolivia, and the South China Seas – in order to explore understandings of an ever-more globalised economy and its ramifications for the contemporary city. In such an examination, 'site' is necessarily reframed as locality and materiality seems archaic when judged against the speed and mobility of global pressures.

Our own exploration of the nature of the studio space and the framing of architectural representation is titled 'Looking; looking back'. We introduce a concept of the studio as a critical territory in architectural representation that has escaped close scrutiny in recent years, and draw upon theories and frameworks of space in an attempt to explore it more thoroughly. The idea of the reconfiguration of a seemingly familiar concept connects numerous articles in the issue. Continuing an exploration of site, Matthew Butcher describes his design research project 'Silt House' and its complex relationship to the terrain it is situated on in his text 'A Lyrical Architecture of the Flood'. In the text, Butcher presents his project as an antagonist to future occupation models of urban development in the Thames Estuary. Butcher makes reference to Raimund Abraham's work as inspiration for the design of 'Silt House'; where the architecture is symbiotically linked to the body of the inhabitant and the wider landscape. 'Silt House' is an architecture that avoids technocratic flood defence solutions, but instead presents an alternative to living with the flood, where the architecture is in continual dialogue with the inhabitant and the ever-changing landscape.

'[…] exploring the nature of architectural representation and process, and how ideas, strategies and spaces are communicated across academia and practice'.

Following this, Penelope Haralambidou discusses her recent work and pedagogy at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, in 'The architectural essay film' where the framework of the essay film is critically explored through Haralambidou's own work and that of her design studio.

In his text 'Architects of fact and fiction', Jonathan Hill reminds us that, despite design research appearing and often being discussed as being new to architecture, it has been a part of the architect's work for over 500 years. Hill illustrates this understanding of design research as integral to the architectural discipline through a series of student projects from Unit 12 at the Bartlett, which he co-leads with Matthew Butcher and Elizabeth Dow.

Taking us through another recent history, Bruno Gil outlines the emergence of digital practice in pedagogical concerns at the Architectural Association in his text 'Digital redux', from initial critical interests in 'the fold' in the 1980s to more recent formal obsessions around parametricism. In doing so, Gil asks 'what next?' and points to the recently founded Strelka Institute as a possible example of how criticality and the digital may soon reconvene.

Luke Pearson, Teaching Fellow at the Bartlett, develops this concern with the digital to explore how

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contemporary videogames affect our conception and delineation of space, and what strategies videogames offer for bridging between the representational and computational in architectural design. Through a number of case studies, the article explores the idea of the 'half-real' space that exists between the fictional simulations of space within videogames, and the 'real' rules that we follow which exist both within, and outside of the 'gamespace'.

We then move into two texts from young practices and their relationship to design research. Ordinary Ltd. detail in-depth research into new uses of timber in 'Conflict and compromise in multi-storey timber architecture', illustrating how their practice engages directly in material science research. Jan Kattein outlines a 'Manifesto for the architect-arbitrator' in his essay, calling for more teaching programmes to concentrate on collaboration and teamwork in order to contribute to a more pluralistic discipline.

The issue closes with a letter from with Liam Young, as counterpoint to Davies' opening text on *Unknown Fields*, of which Young is the second half. Young's experience as an itinerant educator, moving between London (AA) and the US (Princeton/Sci-Arc) is extraordinary. In this interview we ask him what drives him to undertake this, and what it tells us about the relationship between researchers and educators within and around academia.

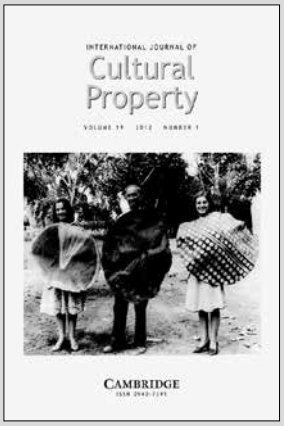
James A. Craig and Matthew Ozga-Lawn run the design research platform STASUS and are Lecturers in Architecture at Newcastle University, UK.

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