**Practice, discourse, experience: The relationship between design history and architectural history**

This Special Issue explores the relationship between architectural history and design history. It considers the intersections and divergences between these two disciplines which, despite their close subject areas and methodological links, have developed distinct institutional and academic identities that often separate them, particularly in the British context. The idea for this Special Issue was drawn from our experiences as researchers working in the space between these two disciplines.[[1]](#footnote-1) The commonality in our work could be described as architectural history without architecture. We have both used archives and oral histories to examine exhibitions, drawings, and the magazines, words and unbuilt works of architecture. As two architectural historians concerned with an expanded definition of architecture in the 20th century, and with methods and objects often drawn from design history, our research has not always fit into the conventional categories of architectural history – and we are not alone. Some subjects and methodologies are still dismissed as not ‘counting’ as architectural history or as too ‘architectural’ for design history, despite the work of scholars continuing to blur these divisions.[[2]](#footnote-2) We have found ourselves at the same conferences and events, and publishing in similar places across the disciplines, but noticing that these different forums rarely spoke to or referenced each other, despite their close subject matter. As scholars working on the edge of both disciplines, we feel that the entanglement between them is sometimes lost in their current institutional framing. This Special Issue will consider what is gained from exploring the relationship between architectural and design history. We argue that the relationship between the two disciplines is currently undergoing a period of reassessment and change, which we seek to capture and reflect on.

The four papers in this issue explore subjects, sources and methods that blur the division between architectural and design history. Our contributors are all women and all, with one exception, are affiliated with architectural institutions, departments or organisations in the UK and Australia. While we have not asked the authors to reflect on their own disciplinary biographies, it is interesting to consider who writes histories that explore or stretch the boundaries of these disciplines. Often, those working across the fringes of design and architectural history do not follow a linear disciplinary trajectory and thus often bring with them an interdisciplinary ethos. Indeed, as editors of this Special Issue, we come to the crossroads of these two disciplines from very different paths – one as a historian who has specialised in the field of design, and then focused on mediation and discourse in architecture; and the other, trained as an architect, moving into academia as an architectural historian concerned with architectural production before and beyond the built work. This introduction frames the articles – which in different ways demonstrate the compelling nature of research that straddles these disciplines – through an examination of the roots that such research approaches have, specifically in Britain and America, in the recent past of each field.

Design and architecture are themselves entangled disciplines, with a long history of interdependence, collaboration and overlap. From the German Werkbund’s aim to improve manufacturing ‘vom Sofakissen zum Städtebau’ (from sofa cushion to city planning) and Gottfried Semper’s exploration of the relationship between architecture, urban planning and the arts, to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement in the UK – architecture and design have been inextricably linked. As a consequence, architectural history and design history are also close relations, both having roots in Art History. Nikolaus Pevsner’s writing in the 1930s on art and industry as well as the origins of the modern movement, are cited as foundational texts in both architectural and design history. Furthermore, Design historians and architectural historians increasingly study the same things – such as interior spaces, furniture and media. Yet, in Britain particularly, architectural history and design history have established distinct disciplinary identities, priorities and practices, which over the past 60 years have diverged and converged at different moments. We will trace some of these disciplinary paths in this introduction

This Special Issue is in part a response to Jilly Traganou’s 2009 article in this journal, which called for a ‘reorganization of the field of spatio-architectural studies and the creation of a new scholarly public realm that bridges between existing disciplines and fields’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Traganou characterises a ‘broader realm of material – spatial – culture’ that encompasses not only a consideration of architecture as built form, but of inhabitation, reuse and ‘after-life’, mediation and appropriation, cultural, political and symbolic values, process and production, authorship, from the scale of the interior to the urban. She highlights that architecture has been subject to scholarship from across disciplines including geography, anthropology, sociology, politics, cultural and gender studies, media and philosophy in the last twenty-five years. This issue builds on Traganou’s observations by scrutinising the relationship between architectural history and the field of design history specifically. We seek to extend our understanding of what sort of histories are produced by scholars at the intersection of these two fields, what methods they employ and how the blurring of disciplinary boundaries can make space for a diversity of historical narratives.

Through a re-reading of key moments within the historiography of each discipline in Britain and America, since the Second World War, it is possible to understand how architectural and design history have evolved in relation to each other, and how the expansion of each into the territory of the other has emerged. While both design history and architectural history are global disciplines, this introduction is concerned specifically with their development in the UK and USA. This is tailored to the context of the *Journal of Design History*, wanting to explore the disciplinary, intellectual and institutional context of this specific publication; but it is also owing to the experiences of the editors who work in UK universities. Much could also be learnt from a broader, global perspective on the relationship between the disciplines, but it is not within the scope of this issue. Such an exploration, form a more global point of view, would be equally valuable. We are telling only a part of a much larger and more complex story in this introduction. In her 1988 essay on ‘Situated Knowledges’, Donna Harraway argued for ‘critical positioning’, which is the act of naming ‘where we are and are not’ and from these ‘partial perspectives’, ‘limited locations and situated knowledge’ it is possible to cultivate webbed accounts.[[4]](#footnote-4) Harraway states that the ‘only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular’.[[5]](#footnote-5) This introduction goes some way to situating the vision and knowledge of the issue. We present a situated and contextually specific narrative of the intertwined institutional and intellectual histories of the disciplines and the debates that have shaped them, in an effort to contextualise the current relationship between architectural and design history as represented by the papers in this issue.

**From the *Parallel of Life* and Art to *Learning from Las Vegas*: disrupting and de-materialising disciplines (1953-1975)**

An important part of the background against which design history emerged as a discipline is the orientation of radical architects and theorists in the mid-20th century towards cultural forms outside the field or architecture. The work of the Independent Group (and Reyner Banham in particular) in Britain was part of this process of challenging the logic of disciplines and the categorisation of particular objects and practices. The group was preoccupied with technology and consumer culture as the ‘live’ culture of contemporary society.[[6]](#footnote-6) Its members viewed architecture, art and design as equal facets of a culture unified by consumerism and technology.[[7]](#footnote-7) In 1953, members of the Independent Group mounted The Parallel of Life and Art exhibition. The exhibition focused on the aesthetic links between conventionally unrelated objects, including skyscrapers and vegetable cellular tissue, Macchu Picchu and a Dublin bus garage.[[8]](#footnote-8) As Reyner Banham described it in his review of the exhibition in the *The Architectural Review* in October 1953, the images in the show revealed ‘similarities and parallels’ between the things they documented, even where none exist between the objects and events recorded.[[9]](#footnote-9) By experimenting with established categories and classifications the exhibition emphasised the ‘contingent relationship’ between the image, the system of ordering within the exhibition and viewer. Parallel of Life and Art thus expressed the group’s interest in challenging existing categories, boundaries and disciplines.

The influence of the Independent Group has been well documented, but one important strand can be distilled in the context of this journal as the preoccupation of a generation of architects with consumer culture, the everyday, the media, and crucially, with the world of design outside architecture. Certainly this was not the first time that architects had looked beyond buildings, as Le Corbusier’s learning from grain silos, ocean liners, airplanes and automobiles, and the influence of industrial forms of design on a generation of modernists can attest. But where the modernists looked for formal and conceptual design principles, the generation following the Independent Group did not directly translate the forms and images they saw into built form, but reappropriated cultural modes of expression, media, images and tropes typically alien to architecture.

Indeed, as the title of Simon Sadler’s 2005 volume on London-based architecture group Archigram states, it was *Architecture without Architecture*. Encouraged by Independent Group interlocutor Reyner Banham, Archigam (1961-74) represented a moment of radicalism which pushed architectural culture away from the orthodoxy of European Modernism, towards a breadth of references taken from primarily American mass culture: *Whole Earth Catalog*, the space race, microwave meals, and Woodstock. This approach became a particular concern of Banham, (historiographically, perhaps the archetype of the architecture-design historian), who in his work as an architectural critic throughout the 1950s and 1960s propounded mass produced industrial and consumer goods as the future of architectural design and practice. Writing in *The Architectural Review* in 1960 Banham argued that ‘building design just does not match the design of expendabilia in functional and aesthetic performance’.[[10]](#footnote-10) He encouraged architects to explore the relationship between buildings and ‘the corn-flake packet or other industrial products like motorcars’ because, he asserted, buildings were ‘simply long-term expendables’.[[11]](#footnote-11) This conflation of architecture and mass produced consumer products marked a key turning point in the relationship between architectural and design history. If buildings could be thought of in the same way as cornflake packets and architects in the same way as commercial design teams, then the lines between studying the history of architecture and the history of design could be redrawn.

Archigram, driven by a dissatisfaction with continental High Modernism, and fostered by Banham, was indicative of a wave of neo-avant-garde activity that saw young radical architects eschew the very object of their profession – the building. This concern with producing architectural concepts without the means of a building was described variously as a ‘dematerialisation’ of architecture and as ‘conceptual architecture’ by critics and theorists.[[12]](#footnote-12) Other radical groups in Europe including Archizoom (1966-74), Superstudio (1966-78), Gruppo Strum (1966-75), Haus-Rucker-Co (1967-92), Utopie (1967-78), as well as Ant Farm in the US (1968-78), all put forward architectural and spatial ideas through drawing, exhibitions, little magazines, objects, installations and events. This dematerialisation of architecture in the 1960s embraced flexibility, mutability, disposability and ephemerality; establishing new criteria and principles in the definition of architecture which mirrored the world of mass design. Reprising the language of the avant-garde before them, this generation of architects (the neo-avant-garde) employed a much broader spectrum of media than architects conventionally used. These groups and their work established a mode of production that subsequent radical architectural thinkers would go on to adopt throughout the 1970s and 80s, with figures such as Rem Koolhaas, Bernard Tschumi, Nigel Coates and Zaha Hadid promulgating progressive architectural ideas without built works.

This dematerialisation in architectural practice was also felt in the shifting focus of architectural history. It marked a gradual shift away from buildings and architects towards a broad field of enquiry that included builders, users, photographers, critics and patrons. In his historiography of architectural history David Watkin named Banham as a key figure in architectural history’s ‘reaction against the preoccupation with isolated “prestige” buildings in favour of study and understanding of the whole complex anonymous web of the urban environment’.[[13]](#footnote-13) This is Banham’s most significant influence on the relationship between architectural and design history – the broadening of the definition of architecture away from the individual building, aligning it instead with appliance culture more broadly. In doing so, approaches to writing about these subjects and their histories also required a shift. As has been noted by Iain Borden et al, until the 1960s architectural history in the UK was chiefly the domain of independent scholars and writers working on projects such as the Survey of London series or John Summerson’s work at the Sir John Soane’s Museum.[[14]](#footnote-14) Banham, via his studentship under Pevsner, began an opening-up of architectural history, ensuring it was no longer solely an elitist concern focused on canonical buildings and Architecture with a capital A, but could explore the fugitive matters of inhabitation, use and reuse, the political, cultural and social.

1960s popular culture also played a major role in reshaping architectural discourse in America, and reorienting it towards design – most obviously through the writings of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. Penny Sparke points to Venturi’s 1966 text *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* as a pivotal moment where the definition of ‘subject areas’ between design and architectural history slipped. Sparke noted that design and architecture had to be redefined as the values of modernism were eroded ‘by the reality of design as it functioned in the marketplace’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Banham, as well as other members of the Independent Group and Archigram, were fascinated by America and the advanced consumer culture they witnessed there. As mass consumerism developed in Europe after the Second World War, the realities of consumer culture demonstrated the everyday relationship between design and architecture that historians and histories were now challenged to acknowledge and accommodate. In 1972 Venturi and Scott Brown published *Learning from Las Vegas* which argued for an expanded definition of architecture that went beyond the work of trained architects and included the ordinary and the everyday built environment.

Indicative of this new branch of architectural history promulgated by Banham is the disciplinary categorisation of British scholars during this period. The long-established intertwining of architectural history as a part of art history can be attributed in part to the fact that works of fine art, such as paintings and sculpture, were often integrated into prominent architectural projects, particularly in sixteenth-century Italy. Celebrated artists, such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Giorgio Vasari, who helped to found the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Florence in 1563, painted frescos and mural cycles in villas, palaces, and church buildings throughout Italy, establishing a hierarchical equivalence between painting, sculpture, and architecture in art academies, and subsequently within the disciplines of art and architectural history throughout Europe.[[16]](#footnote-16) It has thus followed that historians have traditionally discussed both art and architecture. However, as a recent volume by Mark Crinson and Richard J. Williams (2018) points out, this close relationship broke down in the post war period, and by the second half of the twentieth century art historians and architectural historians were most often differentiated with very little dialogue between them.[[17]](#footnote-17) This change in orientation away from art history naturally entailed reflection and divisions within both disciplines, with new approaches and preoccupations. A detailed discussion of the historiographic relationship between art and architectural history is beyond the reach of this introduction, however, its relevance here is in Banham’s breaking away from the art historical mode. Indeed, Banham was the first Professor of Architectural History in the UK (at the Bartlett, UCL), while his PhD supervisor Nikolaus Pevsner was Professor of Art History (at Birkbeck). To Watkin and other historians like him, Banham’s work was a match for the ‘barbarous Utopian dreams’ of architects working in the 1970s, meanwhile traditional architectural historians in the UK moved closer to conservation, feeding ‘vulture-like, on the decaying remains of the civilisation which the planners, the politicians and the architects have helped to destroy.’[[18]](#footnote-18)

The crisis that marked the fall of Modernism thus created a fork in the road whereby architecture and architectural historians were divided between those who looked back and those who sought a new mode that reflected the changing cultural moment. Furthermore, the renewed attention given to historical styles of architecture within practice also gave architectural history a new place within the school of architecture – albeit in a mode that left pre-modern architectural histories to the art historians.[[19]](#footnote-19) Alina A. Payne has discussed the legacy of this split from the 1970s onwards, which saw influential architectural journals, presses and museums, focus almost exclusively on modern and contemporary subjects.[[20]](#footnote-20) This was also the period during which the Society of Architectural Historians became independent from the College Art Association, marking a definite disciplinary break.[[21]](#footnote-21) Of course, architectural history and historians came in many forms during this time, creating a spectrum of approaches that ranged from the art historical at one end, to those who moved much closer to what would become design history at the other. There was some frustration with architectural history’s slow response to this changing culture in architecture. This frustration was articulated most explicitly in a 1969 article by John Maas titled ‘Where Architectural Historians Fear to Tread’ in the American *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.[[22]](#footnote-22) Maas listed the articles published in the journal since its founding and lamented the narrowness of the scope and the conformity of the methodologies. His calls for change are still referred to in discussions of disciplinarity in the journal. This was where design history began to emerge in Britain and America, overlapping with the concerns of ‘new’ architectural writers, magazines and scholarship, making a space for a consideration of architecture situated within a much broader context, away from the ‘Isolated Art’ characterised by Maass.

The art history departments at Northumbria and Middlesex Polytechnics both held conferences on design history in the mid-1970s and were among the first to develop BA and MA courses specifically in Design History.[[23]](#footnote-23) The 1977 conference of the Association of Art Historians was important for the formation of the Design History Society in the UK.[[24]](#footnote-24) The Society was formed during the Design History conference at Brighton Polytechnic in September 1977. There are several detailed surveys of the development of design history as a discipline in Britain, a recanting of which is beyond the scope of this introduction. However, it is pertinent to explore the broader academic contexts of the burgeoning discipline and also to emphasise shared motivations of design historians and those pursuing new avenues in architectural history in the late 1970s. An important milestone in this context was the Open University’s A305 History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939 unit, launched in 1975. The course was written collaboratively by scholars including Tim Benton, Charlotte Benton, Stephen Bayley, Geofrey Baker and Sandra Millikin, with contributions by Reyner Banham, Adrian Forty and Bridget Wilkins among many others. The course explored the genealogy of the Modern Movement in Europe and as the title indicates it explored architecture and design simultaneously, as interrelated and contingent subjects – an approach doubtless motivated by the early modernists preoccupation with the Gesamtkunstwerk. This fluidity in approach to architectural history and its relationship to the broader subject of design was perhaps also facilitated by the institution of The Open University itself, which was concerned with democratising access to higher education and experimenting with broadcasting as a means of widening participation.

The shifts towards the study of design history (as distinct from art history) and the focus on the everyday, the quotidian and the experiential in studies of architecture were contemporaneous with the rise of social history, feminist history and ‘history from below’ in the UK. In the late 1960s the History Workshop began at Ruskin College Oxford with the express aim of re-focussing the narratives and methods of history towards the everyday lives and experiences of working-class people and other groups marginalised in conventional histories, particularly women. The influence of the women’s movement and historians such as Sheila Rowbotham were pivotal in this shift. This workshop aimed to ‘recover the texture of daily life’ and to bring ‘the boundaries of history closer to those of people’s lives’.[[25]](#footnote-25) The parameters of historical practice were expanding, driven by the principles of democratising not just the sources and narratives of history but the practices of history and the production of historical knowledge. In 1969 Stuart Hall took over the leadership of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University and heralded the beginning of an era focussed on mass popular culture, subculture and issues of race, gender and class through the work of scholars such as Dick Hebdidge and Anglea McRobbie. This was the context for the development of design history, which Kjetil Fallan describes as a discipline that recognises the ‘extraordinary significance of the ordinary’.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In common with the ‘history from below’ movement, design history owed much to Marxist approaches to history that sought to explore the social, cultural and political contexts of artefacts and labour. In 1979 *Block* magazine was launched at Middlesex Polytechnic, which ‘sought to understand the social and existential meaning of things’.[[27]](#footnote-27) This was echoed in the work of Adrian Forty during the same period, who described his work as ‘applying Marxist thinking to architectural history’ to move away from focussing on ‘what architects did’ to explore architecture as something which is ‘produced socially’.[[28]](#footnote-28)At a keynote speech for a 2019 conference on the relationship between Design History and Architectural History, Adrian Forty described the intellectual and cultural context in Britain in the 1970s, which formed the background to the development of design history. Forty explained how publications such as *New Society*, which encompassed a range of disciplines and explored ‘the environment’ in its broadest possible sense, created a space for expanded fields of architectural and design history. Forty also emphasised the influence of french semiotics on British academia in the 1970s – Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* was first published in English in 1972. As Forty described it, Barthes explored how things mean, not just what they mean, and this perspective was transformative to the study of mass culture and the environment. In this context, the strand of architectural history that Reyner Banham had pioneered, which both responded and contributed to the dematerialisation of architecture after the Second World War, was closely aligned with the new discipline of design history.

In this issue, Erin McKellar and AnnMarie Brennan’s articles both explore architecture beyond buildings. Mckellar’s study of Erno Goldfinger’s designs for children explores the expanded field of architectural activity and considers how the architect’s work encompassed interior, urban, graphic and industrial design. AnnMarie Brennan in turn explores the inextricable practices of industrial design and architecture. Brennan explores the role of technology in the definition of architectural practice. This links to current research in architectural history which approaches architecture as a medium and infrastructure (rather than singular practice). If we think of architecture as a medium, as a ‘channel of transmission’ Mary Louise Lobsinger has argued, it can ‘make visible an intermedial dynamic of material, technical and social consequence’.[[29]](#footnote-29) This methodology builds on architectural history’s focus on mediation, which will be discussed further on. The papers in this issue demonstrate the legacy of some of the intellectual and institutional changes we are describing in this introduction. Both Brennan and McKellar’s papers also raise the issue of the relationship between history and practice in both design and architecture. From the early 1980s onwards, in Britain and America, debates over the parameters of the disciplines of architectural and design history continued and revealed similar concerns in both camps, specifically over the status of history as an autonomous subject or as a subject to contexualise practice.

**The Autonomy of History and its Relation to Practice (1981-1996)**

In 1981 two postgraduate courses were established in London that signalled the separate institutional identities of design history and the strand of architectural history pursued by Reyner Banham and Adrian Forty: The MA in Design History at the V&A Museum and the Royal College of Art, and the MSc in Architectural History at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London. These courses came to define the methodologies and pedagogies of their respective disciplines in the UK. Design history, located within the museum, was concerned with objects, their contexts and their producers and consumers. Architectural history, conversely, located in the architecture school, was focused on the outputs, processes and representations of architectural production. Yet, these definitions and separations were not fixed, and they have been periodically debated over the last thirty years.

When the *Journal of Design History* began publication in 1988 it became a site for debates over the definition of the discipline. In the first issue of the Journal, Victor Margolin’s article on ‘A Decade of Design History in the United States, 1977-1987’, criticised the ‘fragmentation’ of design in some studies.[[30]](#footnote-30) Margolin commented that

Not only does such segmentation perpetuate partial views of design in society, but it discourages the establishment of an arena in which design can be seen in its totality, as a distinct social phenomenon like science or technology.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Although he does not mention architecture specifically, Margolin’s call for unity in the subject matter of Design History, was met by the following issues of the journal which featured articles on various topics relating to architecture. From Nicholas Bullock’s article ‘First the Kitchen- then the façade’ on 1920s domestic architecture in Germany, Pauline Madge’s ‘An Enquiry into Pevsner’s “Enquiry”’ (which actually focused on the link between Pevsner and business management), and Sean Cubbit’s semiotic reading of pubs ‘Anxiety in Public Houses: Speculations on the Semiotics of Design Consciousness’, are just a few examples. The first issue of the Journal in 1989 contained Adrian Forty’s talk for the first Banham Memorial Lecture in which he explored the use of design metaphors in architectural thought. Forty asserted the relationship between design and architectural history by focusing on Banham’s belief that ‘the design of non-architectural artefacts as setting a standard against which architecture could be judged’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Forty’s lecture considered how design metaphors were tools for architects to think and write about their practice and profession.

The issue of how history related to practice, was contentious in both architectural and design history during this period of disciplinary reconfiguration and the issue is still debated today. Developments in art and design education throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the UK, particularly in the wake of the Coldstream Reports, were key to the emergence of design history and a broader approach to architectural history.[[33]](#footnote-33) Given this legacy, both disciplines continually negotiate their status as an academic, humanities discipline in their own right and their role as a means of contextualizing practice. They have the dual purposes of both relating to practice and striving for historical understanding for its own sake. This debate was happening in the British journal *Architectural History* in the late 1980s. In 1987 Mark Swenarton, who together with Adrian Forty had taught history at the Bartlett School of Architecture since the late 1970s, wrote an article about the role of history in architectural education in the UK. He gave a brief survey of three different approaches to history in British architectural education; Realist (characterised by Lethaby and the Central School of Art), Classicist (Blomfield and the Liverpool School) and Modernist (Bauhaus and later Richard Llewelyn Davies and Reyner Banham at the Bartlett) – arguing that each approach to history in education was indicative of a different approach to architecture.[[34]](#footnote-34) By Swenarton’s assessment, all of these approaches were ‘instrumentalist’, which meant they used history ‘to demonstrate or substantiate a proposition about how to design’.[[35]](#footnote-35) The effect of this was to reduce architectural history to a form of ‘propaganda’ for particular approaches to or styles of architecture and historians (in the model of Pevsner) ‘intellectual adjuncts of current movements in architecture’ (Robert Stern and postmodern architecture are cited as an example).[[36]](#footnote-36) This echoed David Watkin’s assessment, in 1980, that architectural history was often written in ‘furtherance of a particular type of present-day architecture’.[[37]](#footnote-37) In response to this situation, Swenarton argues, many architectural historians had withdrawn from discussing current architecture and retreated to ‘antiquarianism’.[[38]](#footnote-38) This was demonstrated by the contents of *Architectural History* itself, which in its nearly thirtieth year had ‘not carried a single article on architecture since 1914’.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Swenarton argued that architectural history as a discipline needed to assert its validity in its own right, rather than as an instrument to support and substantiate practice. He argued for history to be taught in architectural schools for its own sake because ‘historical understanding is a necessary preliminary to informed action… in any field of human endeavour’.[[40]](#footnote-40) This approach would broaden the definition of architectural history, as the eras or examples chosen for study would no longer have to serve the purposes of a particular approach to practice. Instead architectural history could be defined in much broader terms, bringing it closer again to design history. However, nearly ten years later in 1996, Elizabeth McKellar (who is now Professor of Architectural and Design History at the Open University) wrote in the British *Journal of Architecture* that architectural history faced becoming an ‘invisible subject’ in Britain; marginalized in architectural schools and disappearing in universities (unlike design history which McKellar noted was going from strength to strength) and left to conservation studies which neglected contemporary architecture.[[41]](#footnote-41) McKellar insisted that architectural history needed redefinition, in order to preserve its unique disciplinary identity. This redefinition should broaden the types of research methods and subject matters included under the banner of architectural history.

Similarly, in design history, Victor Margolin, this time writing in *Design Issues* in 1995, argued for a broadening of the subject matter of design history, writing that ‘designing is an activity that is constantly changing’ and thus design history should expand into the study of all things produced in the domain of the ‘artificial’.[[42]](#footnote-42) Victor Margolin’s essay was arguing for design history to become a field within the broader subject of Design Studies. Together with Richard Buchanan, Margolin was involved with the development of Design Studies in America; design studies, rather than design history allowed for a ‘dialogue with other specialists as well as historians’ and opened up the study of design to diverse kinds of inquiries related to history as well as to the contemporary situation’.[[43]](#footnote-43) This is echoed to some extent in Jilly Traganou’s call for architectural history to develop into architectural and spatial studies, discussed above. In this Special Issue we maintain a focus on history as a methodology but seek to explore what it can contribute to knowledge within these broader disciplinary boundaries.

At the same time that McKellar and Margolin were arguing for architectural and design history to expand their parameters, historians working mostly in Schools of Architecture (as opposed to art or architectural history departments of universities) were developing the category of ‘architectural humanities’. This put architectural history in a category together with architectural theory and studies of culture, design and urbanism with architectural practice and research. In 2003, a group of historians including Andrew Ballantyne, Sarah Chaplin, Jonathan Hale, Iain Borden, Adrian Forty, Murray Fraser, Andrew Higgott, Adam Sharr, Richard Patterson and Jeremy Till, founded the Architectural Humanities Research Association to capture, support and promote humanities research in architecture in the UK. The AHRA annual conference and the journal *Architecture and Culture* continue to promote this cross and interdisciplinary approach, which situates architectural history within the broad spectrum of humanities research relating to architecture. The debate over the autonomous or instrumentalist character of design and architectural history in relation to practice and the periodic convergence and divergence of the disciplines has not been resolved but it is periodically re-imagined.

Another key node of convergence in what we might consider now as a design history and architectural history network, is that of mediation. In the 1990s both subjects experienced a disciplinary shift toward mediation, which marked an important point of confluence between the two disciplines.[[44]](#footnote-44) In her reflection on architectural history’s attention to the channels of mediation, Anne Hultzsch argues that architectural historians must remember that their work rests on bringing together text and image in the interpretation of architecture; Hultzsch reminds us that web of anonymous and unacknowledged ‘co-authors’ of architecture (graphic designers, publishers, production editors etc) must be acknowledged and explored.[[45]](#footnote-45) This echoes Lees-Maffei’s assessment of design history’s attention to mediation: ‘the mediation focus enables recognition of the fact that design is much more than the object, it is a complex web of surrounding practices and discourses’.[[46]](#footnote-46) Thus, the recognition of mediation as a ‘useful tool’ has broadened the horizons of both design and architectural history and in this sense, the expanded fields of both disciplines are the site of their commonality.

In the Clark and Brody 2009 Special Issue of the *Journal of Design History* (discussed more in the next section), Lees-Maffei’s article ‘The production-consumption-mediation paradigm’, mapped the shift towards mediation in design history over the last thirty years.[[47]](#footnote-47) This shift was also occurring in architectural history and the focus on mediation in both disciplines was informed by a move towards cultural studies.[[48]](#footnote-48) In architectural history this was signalled by the work of scholars such as Lynn Walker, Jane Rendell, Daphne Spain, Iain Borden and Joe Kerr, who explore architectural spaces and practices as mediators of ideas and concepts ranging from gender and social class to politics, disruption and subversion. Building on this ‘cultural turn’ in architectural history but also informed by postmodern shifts towards the study of discourses and discursive formations, Adrian Forty, Andrew Higgott and Elizabeth Darling incorporated the architectural press, journalism and media into the study of Modernism, on an equal footing with more conventional sources for architectural history such as buildings, drawings and the writings of architects.[[49]](#footnote-49) This exploration of the mediation of architecture also includes architectural historians such as Simon Sadler and Robert Harbison, broadening their perspective on what architects did to include exhibitions, interventions, speculative projects and collaborations.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Beatriz Colomina’s book *Privacy and Publicity: modern architecture as media* approached media sources as equivalent to buildings in the understanding of architecture.[[51]](#footnote-51) This perspective that viewed media as instrumental rather than auxiliary to architecture, was related to shifts in design history, which had begun to look at, rather than through, magazines. This approach was also spearheaded by Kester Rattenbury, Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Stephen Parnell and more recently Anne Hultzsch’s work on the history and status of the architectural magazine and its relationship to buildings has contributed further to this body of scholarship.[[52]](#footnote-52) The work of the editors of this issue forms part of the same trajectory. Jamieson’s writing on the unbuilt paper works of architecture by British radical group NATØ centres on their self-published magazine, interrogating it as an object which produced spatial concepts through graphic design, and as a site for the production of architecture through writing and drawing. Kelly’s research into the career of editor and critic J.M. Richards looks at the place of journalism, which includes the informal and ephemeral work of editing as well as the published magazines, newspapers, books, broadcasts and exhibitions, in architectural culture.

All of the articles in this Special Issue demonstrate the current complexity of architectural and design history in the UK, America and Australia specifically. Lisa Hirst’s and Ruth Slatter’s articles ask what is learnt from applying the lenses of different disciplines to topics and objects from architectural history. For instance, Lisa Hirst looks at the The Queen’s Hotel building from the perspectives of transport and business history to complicate the story of a single building. Hirst’s work treats architecture as something that can make visible complex dynamics of production, mediation and consumption in architecture. She moves beyond the narrative of a single architect and considers the multiple authors and users involved in giving meaning to the building. Ruth Slatter’s paper also traces the experiences of users, specifically spiritual communities in chapel buildings. Slatter’s work considers how buildings interact with broader material culture and social, cultural and political contexts. Each contributor to this Special Issue has explored complexity through themes such as authorship, technology and the biographies of buildings and spaces. While the building and the architect remain present in most of the papers, the perspectives and methodologies brought to bear on these ‘conventionally’ architectural topics expand the narratives and understandings of both disciplines.

**2009-2019 Diversifying Histories**

The most immediate context and inspiration for this Special Issue comes from the debates in the last ten years about the sources and methodologies of design and architectural history. Both disciplines are going through a period of reassessment, and while we do not claim to arrive at any definitive answers in this issue, we hope to contribute to the current thinking about the character and relationship between the two disciplines. The Design History Society Annual conferences in recent years have reflected on the current status of the discipline in relation to contemporaneous conceptual and cultural shifts – in 2016 Design and Time, in 2017 on Making and Unmaking the Environment, and in 2018 on Design and Displacement. These broad, conceptual conference themes accommodate diversity in the definition of design and design histories. Architectural history is going through a similar moment of reflection. In 2017 the annual symposium of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain was titled Beyond ‘by’: ​Towards an inclusive architectural history?, which rejected traditional architectural histories of authored buildings in favour of breaking down divisions that divide ‘the architect-designed sheep from the vernacular goats’.[[53]](#footnote-53) It signals that the discipline is seeking to broaden beyond the single-author building to acknowledge the expanded field of architectural production.

This Special Issue follows a series of Specials over the last fifteen years that have considered the methodological, historiographical and disciplinary status and characteristics of Design History. In 2004 Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino explored the relationship between design, craft and art, highlighting research that complicated the conventionally discrete definitions of these categories.[[54]](#footnote-54) This current issue builds on Lees Maffei and Sandino’s assertion that the ‘interplay’ between categories is a ‘compelling and revealing focal point for analysis’.[[55]](#footnote-55) By looking at the interplay between design history and architectural history, this issue presents both disciplines as expanded fields of enquiry and points to the potential for research that crosses the conventional disciplinary categories. The 2009 issue on the Current State of Design History, edited by Hazel Clark and David Brody, explored the impact of debates about globalisation and sustainability on the discipline, as well as questioning the existing paradigms and canons that dictate what is included and excluded from histories.[[56]](#footnote-56) All the contributions to Clark and Brody’s issue, to a greater or lesser degree, explored the role that the historian and the choices they make have in constructing the parameters and character of the discipline. The priorities and principles of the people who write and teach design history were interrogated for clues about the future of the discipline. Our Special Issue also raises questions about the future of both architectural and design history and the relationship between them. The contributions all explore complexity and plurality and our contributors are all women, most of whom work within architectural schools or architectural history organisations. The scope of this issue is limited in terms of race and geographical context but as we work towards a greater diversity of historians we create space for a diversity of histories.

This theme of the motivation behind or purpose of history was picked up in the 2018 Virtual Special Issue edited by D.J. Huppatz on theme of Methodology in Design History.[[57]](#footnote-57) In his introduction Huppatz surveyed various historiographical moments that related to the progression and development of design history as a discipline; in particular, the reassessment of historical sources and methods in the 1960s. The articles he selected from the *Journal of Design History* archive demonstrated the range and variety of methodologies present within design history. This lack of a singular or unified methodological identity could be seen as a weakness for an academic discipline, however, as Huppatz asserts, design history is defined by the diversity of approaches, practices and subjects encompassed within it. Huppatz insists that design historians must critically engage with and reflect on their methodology in order to ‘clarify and enhance the discipline, both for themselves and for a broader audience’.[[58]](#footnote-58) Huppatz invoked Clive Dilnot’s call for ‘critical self reflection’ to ask historians to consider why they do what they do and for whom.[[59]](#footnote-59) This process of critical self reflection, or acts of what Harrawy termed ‘critical positioning’, are present in current efforts towards decolonising both design and architectural history.[[60]](#footnote-60) This involves not simply the insertion of ignored or silenced narratives, but a more robust rethinking of methods, sources and outcomes of historical research.

This brings us back to the debate over the purpose of history. In answer to the question: what is the purpose of architectural history, Swenarton wrote that ‘historical understanding is a necessary preliminary to informed action… in any field of human endeavour’.[[61]](#footnote-61) He was advocating history for history’s sake as a counter to the ‘instrumentalist’ or connoisseurial approaches to architectural history that pervaded that period. The current situation could be charactised by reworking David Watkin’s description of Reyner Banham’s turning of architectural history’s attention to the ‘complex and anonymous web of the urban environment’ and extend this to describe the ‘complex and anonymous web’ of architectural and design production, mediation and consumption in 21st century culture.[[62]](#footnote-62) The separate categories of objects and buildings, architects and designers, fine art and mass production no longer capture the range of work being done by scholars in both disciplines. Webs and networks offer much more useful models for thinking about architecture and design and they allow historians to explore interrelation and interdependence. In the current context of the diversity of histories, of different methods, subjects and narratives, this Special Issue responds with the suggestion that the purpose of history is to tell a diversity of stories, to highlight a range of voices and explore complexity rather than seek uniformity.

1. We are grateful to Grace Lees Maffei for introducing us. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the convergence of these two disciplines are a range of scholars whose work has and continues to shape the space between, including writers and theorists such as Reyner Banham, Charles Jencks, Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall, Robert Hewison, John Thackara and Helene Lipstadt, and contemporary interdisciplinary historians including Adrian Forty, Penny Sparke, Gillian Naylor, John Styles, Beatriz Colomina, Elizabeth Darling, Simon Sadler, Barry Curtis, Elizabeth McKellar, Anne Massey and Deborah Sugg Ryan. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Traganou, Jilly. "Architectural and Spatial Design Studies: Inscribing Architecture in Design Studies." *Journal of Design History* 22.2 (2009): 173-181. (p.173) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Donna Harraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Priviledge of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, (Autumn 1988), p.588 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Donna Harraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Priviledge of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, (Autumn 1988), p. 590. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Reyner Banham ‘The Atavism of a Short Distance Mini Cyclist’, in *Living Arts*, 3, 1964, in, Penny Sparke, *Design by Choice*, (Academy Editions, 1981), pp. 84-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Independent Group were latterly named the ‘fathers of pop art’. Anne Massey has written extensively about the problems with this historiographical on the group’s relationship to Pop Art. Not only does this label write out the women involved in the group, but also expunges the groups preoccupation in design, architecture and consumer culture. See, Anne Massey, The Independent Group: [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Catalogue for Parallel of Life and Art, 1953, in, Parallel of Art and Life: Exhibition, curator, Anne Massey, ICA, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Reyner Banham, ‘Review of Parallel of Life and Art’, in *The Architectural Review*, October, 1953, pp. 259-261, reproduced in Ockober, 136, Spring, 2001, pp. 8-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Reyner Banham, ‘Stocktaking 5’, *The Architectural Review*, June 1960 p. 385 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Reyner Banham, ‘Stocktaking 5’, *The Architectural Review*, June 1960 p. 385. The first four articles of ‘Stocktaking’ had addressed the conflict of technology and tradition, the impact of scientific advancement, the role of the architect as ‘universal man’ and the role of architectural history in practice. The fifth and final article brought together the editorial board of the AR – J.M. Richards, Nikolaus Pevsner, Hugh Casson and Hubert de Cronin Hastings, with Reyner Banham – to discuss the content and outcomes of the series. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ross Elfline, in his article "The Dematerialization of Architecture: Toward a Taxonomy of Conceptual Practice." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 75.2 (2016): 201-223, defines demateralisation in architecture as ‘a fundamental shift in praxis from objects to actions, or from things to strategies’. As such, dematerialisation was part of a broader shift toward conceptualism in architecture, which Elfine describes as a process that ‘fundamentally questions the interior logic of a discipline through the development of strategic, self-critical actions, actions that may or may not entail the creation of material objects’. Bernard Tschumi also wrote about the dematerialisation of architecture, citing theorist of performance art RoseLee Goldberg and focussing specifically on the role of writing in producing architectural concepts, claiming that the 'distinction between the talk about space and the creation of space vanishes' and 'ultimately, the words of architecture become the work of architecture'. See. Bernard Tschumi, 'A Space is Worth a Thousand Words', in Bernard Tschumi, RoseLee Goldberg and Royal College of Art (Great Britain), *A Space, a Thousand Words* (Dieci Libri,

    1975), p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. David Watkin. *The rise of architectural history*. London: Architectural Press, 1980. p.185 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Iain Borden, Murray Fraser, and Barbara Penner. *Forty Ways to Think about Architecture: Architectural History and Theory Today*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, New York, 2015. p.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Penny Sparke, *An introduction to design and culture: 1900 to the present*. Routledge, 2013. p.172 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Payne, Alina A. “Architectural History and the History of Art: A Suspended Dialogue.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1999, pp. 292–299.(p.293) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Mark Crinson, Richard J. Williams. *The Architecture of Art History: A Historiography*. Bloomsbury, London, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. David Watkin. p.190 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Payne, Alina A. “Architectural History and the History of Art: A Suspended Dialogue.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 58, no. 3, 1999, pp. 292–299. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid. Payne lists *Oppositions, Assemblage, ANY*, MIT Press, Princeton Architectural Press, the Canadian Centre for Architecture and Deutsches Architekturemuseum. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., p.296. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. John Maas. "Where architectural historians fear to tread." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 28.1 (1969): 3-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. J.V. Gooding, *Design History in Britain from the 1970s to 2012: Context, Formation and Development*. PhD Thesis, University of Northumbria. January: 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Grace Lees-Maffei, “Design History: The State of the Art”. *College Art Association*. November 16. 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Raphael Samuel, “On the Methods of the History Workshop: A Reply.” *History Workshop Journal* 9. 1 (1980): 164 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Kjetil Fallan. *Design history: understanding theory and method*. Berg, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Jonathan Woodham, “Block”. *A Dictionary of Modern Design*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press. 2006

    [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Adrian Forty, “The Clear Sight of an Architectural Historian”. *Lobby*. 2. (Spring). 2015: pp.117-119 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Mary Louise Lobsinger, ‘Architectural History: The Turn from Culture to Media’ Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 75: 2, (June, 2016), pp. 135-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Victor Margolin, ‘A Decade of Design history in the United States, 1977-1987’, *Journal of Design History*, 1:1, 1988, pp. 51-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., p.51 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Adrian Forty, ‘Of Cars, Clothes and Carpets: Design Metaphors in Architectural Thought’, *Journal of Design History*, 2:1, 1989, pp. 1-14. (p.1) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Victor Margolin, ‘Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods’, *Design Issues*, 11:1 (Spring 1995), p. 4. The Coldstream Reports of 1960/1962 had created a new qualification in British art education - the Diploma in Art and Design. The Dip AD was intended to provide a ‘liberal arts education’ and introduced art history as a compulsory component of arts education. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Mark Swenarton, The Role of History in Architectural Education, *Architectural History*, 30, 1987, pp. 201-215 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., p.209. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., p.212. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. David Watkin, p.ix [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Swenarton, p.212. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., p.212. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., p.210. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Elizabeth McKellar (1996) Architectural history: the invisible subject, *The Journal of Architecture*, 1:2, 159-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Victor Margolin, Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods, *Design Issues*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), p.10 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Victor Margolin, Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods, *Design Issues*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring, 1995), p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The shift in design history is detailed in Lees-Maffei, Grace. "The Production–consumption–mediation paradigm." *Journal of Design History* 22.4 (2009): 351-376. The change is architectural history is perhaps best seen in Beatriz Colomina, Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier. *Privacy and publicity: modern architecture as mass media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Anne Hultzsch. “Pevsner vs. Colomina: Word and Image on the Page”, in *Forty Ways To Think About Architecture: Architectural history and theory today*. Wiley. 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lees-Maffei, Grace. "The Production–consumption–mediation paradigm." , p.372. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Lees-Maffei, Grace. "The Production–consumption–mediation paradigm." *Journal of Design History* 22.4 (2009): 351-376. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., p.367 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. For details see: Adrian Forty. *Words and Buildings: a vocabulary of modern architecture*, Thames and Hudsom, 2000; Andrew Higgott. *Mediating Modernisms: Architectural Cultures in Britain*, Routledge, 2007; Elizabeth Darling. *Reforming Britain: narratives of modernity before reconstruction*, Routledge, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Key works include: Robin Evans. *The projective cast: architecture and its three geometries*. MIT press, 2000; Robin Evans, Richard Difford, and Robin Middleton. *Translations from drawing to building and other essays*. London: Architectural Association, 1997. Simon Sadler. *Archigram: architecture without architecture*, MIT, 2005; Robert Harbison. *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable: in pursuit of architectural meaning*, MIT, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Beatriz Colomina, Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier. *Privacy and publicity: modern architecture as mass media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Kester Rattenbury. ed. *The is Not Architecture: media Constructions*, Routledge. 2002; Sarah Williams Goldhagen. ‘Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style’, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians.* 64: 2, June, (2005): pp. 144-167; Steve Parnell. "AR's and AD's post-war editorial policies: the making of modern architecture in Britain." *The Journal of Architecture* 17.5 (2012): 763-775; Steve Parnell. "The Collision of Scarcity and Expendability in Architectural Culture of the 1960s and 1970s." *Architectural Design* 82.4 (2012): 130-135; Stephen Parnell. "Architecture's expanding field: AD magazine and the Post-Modernisation of architecture." *ARQ: Architectural Research Quarterly* 22.1 (2018): 55-68. Hvattum, Mari, and Anne Hultzsch, eds. *The Printed and the Built: Architecture, Print Culture and Public Debate in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain conference archive, *‘Beyond ‘By’: Towards an inclusive architectural history’*, [https://www.sahgb.org.uk/symposium-archive.html#](https://www.sahgb.org.uk/symposium-archive.html). [accessed 29.07.19] [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Grace Lees-Maffei and Linda Sandino. "Dangerous liaisons: Relationships between design, craft and art." *Journal of Design History* 17.3 (2004): 207-219. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid., p.207. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Clark, Hazel, and David Brody. "The current state of design history." *Journal of Design History* 22.4 (2009): 303-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. D J Huppatz, Introduction to Methodology: Virtual Special Issue for the Journal of Design History 2018, *Journal of Design History*, epy021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epy021> [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Clive Dilnot, ‘The State of Design History, Part I: Mapping the Field’, Design Issues, 1:1 (Spring, 1984), p. 12, quoted in Huppatz, 2018, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Donna Harraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism and the Priviledge of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, 14:3, (Autumn 1988), p.588 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Swenarton, p.210. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Watkin. 1980. p.183 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)