

## Is history useful?

As English universities face up to savagely disproportionate cuts in government funding for teaching in the arts, humanities and social sciences – as compared with those for the sciences – there is talk of a ‘dark new philistinism’. An extreme prognosis, perhaps, but whereas in the USA a liberal arts degree retains credence as a foundation for citizenship and further study in any field, decisions like this signal what society deems ‘useful’ or not and impact on the aspirations of young people. Times are indeed hard and the paper in this issue by Jonathan Charley offers a timely interpretation of architecture in the ‘shadows of economic history’, in times of ‘boom, slump and crisis’ (pp. 363–372).

Such disparities in funding hark back to that utilitarian ‘two-cultures’ division we are supposed to have moved beyond. In many fertile fields of research, collaboration between engineers and creative designers (‘science’, ‘arts’, and ‘humanities’) is commonplace – a leading mobile-phone company, for example, employs philosophy graduates to sharpen its thinking. Nowhere is this more the case than in architecture. **arq** aims to cover the spectrum of architectural research and practice, and some of the best design and thinking in our pages occur at the kinds of interface under discussion, as in Robert Kronenburg’s study here of ‘The Design of Portable Buildings for Live Music’ (pp. 304–316).

This issue includes several ‘history’ papers, prompting timely questions about the usefulness of history and the humanities generally. For some decision-makers, apparently, they are at best an ornament or pastime to be indulged in as respite from ‘useful’ work – in its most narrow conception – in the business park or dealing room. And even, perhaps, in a moment of generosity, to be supported from the fruits of this year’s Christmas bonus – the Dark Ages of Late Capitalism indeed.

One use of history is to define the tradition(s) or canon(s) within which research and practice are conducted. T. S. Eliot wrote of the presentness of the past, wherein a significant new work of art not only modifies what comes after, but also adjusts the whole relationship of old and new.

Le Corbusier has reverberated seismically on tradition both ways, without his own preeminence in the canon(s) seeming to slip by a notch, and his work remains a fertile source of inspiration and reinterpretation. Here, for example, Antony Moulis unpacks the continuities of Corb’s spiral plan research, its reworking of Beaux-Arts traditions, and impacts on Koolhaas and others (pp. 317–325).

Histories of art and architecture can, of course, be politically orchestrated (the CIA’s support of Abstract Expressionism as part of cold-war cultural policy is now a received part of art history), but generally the record is not the outcome of conspiracies. Rather, it often seems to be left to chance or accident – the enthusiasm of isolated researchers, the availability of an archive, the fluxes of fashion. James Stirling’s oeuvre might appear sufficiently multivalent and complex to reward extensive study and interpretation, yet this

early (1981) Pritzker Prize-winner has suffered disregard and neglect. Here Judith Wolin gives a Report on 'Notes from the Archive', reflecting on the Yale exhibition and catalogue sampled from the archive of some 40,000 drawings acquired by the Canadian Centre of Architecture in 2000 (pp. 303–303). Stirling's reputation can only grow as this resource is quarried; earlier numbers of this volume of **arq** have played their part, including both a paper (14.2, pp. 153–164), and a long letter (14.3, pp. 192–194), reflecting on aspects of the work and place of this intriguing architect.

However objective historians believe themselves to be, all history becomes historiography. We write naturally now of canons and traditions in the plural, and no longer can anyone sustain the notion of a pure stream of Modernism flowing outward from its European and North American centres (Berlin, Paris, New York ...) to fertilise an expectant world and to be, in turn, hybridised – even contaminated! The orientalisating or racialising agendas implicated in these older kinds of history are examined in the paper by Charles L. Davis II on Viollet-le Duc's rationalisations of race and style (pp. 341–348), while the contribution by Hyon-Sob Kim tells of the real complexities of the world architectures of Modernism (pp. 349–361).

With these kinds of thinking **arq** continues to promote the uses of history to deepen architectural culture and to oppose its abuse through neglect, ignorance or wilful misallocations of resources. Finally, we are delighted to extend our congratulations to a unique example of living history – Oscar Niemeyer, still designing as he celebrates his 103rd birthday.

THE EDITORS