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KOEN STEEMERS

Koen Steemers is an architect with experience in practice, consultancy, research and teaching. He is Head of the Department and Professor of Sustainable Design at the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture, and was Director of the Martin Centre from 2003 to 2008. From 2005 to 2011 he was President of PLEA International, an association of 2,500 members worldwide with an interest in Passive and Low Energy Architecture.

One hundred years ago the inaugural lecture of the Slade Professor of Art and noted Arts and Crafts architect Edward Prior signalled the establishment of architectural studies in Cambridge. Since then the study of architecture at Cambridge has gone through diverse cycles of privileging history, practice, theory and research. The purpose of this introduction, and the symposium that this publication relates to, is to reflect on these cycles, to comment on where we currently stand and to speculate on where we are heading.

A detailed historical narrative of the department's development is not the purpose here: more erudite and detailed histories have been written by experts such as Andrew Saint and Peter Carolin. Saint provides an overview from the start of architectural studies in Cambridge in his article, "The Cambridge School of Architecture: A brief history" first published in 2006 and available on our website (www.arct.cam.ac.uk). Carolin supplements and expands on this with a particular emphasis on research and practice activities during the last half of the century in his article for this publication entitled "An Outsider's Reflections". Much of the remainder of this book provides insight into some more recent research and practice related to the department.

HISTORY

From the start, the study of architecture in Cambridge was modest in size and considered as a liberal arts education: the notion of vocational training was, in Saint's words, "suspect in Oxbridge degrees". This still rings true today in a department that has an intense intellectual and creative environment for design and research, and yet we also have full professional accreditation. At the start, teaching in the department consisted of a combination of architecture and history of art and, despite the fact that the two areas split into their separate courses in 1960, we remain a joint Faculty of Architecture and History of Art.

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In the post World War II era, the norm was that lecturers would combine teaching with practice, and it was practitioners who increasingly provided the core content of the curriculum. This continued to be the case up to the end of the century. A significant strengthening and addition to this practice-based expertise was introduced by Leslie Martin who arrived in 1956 to formally become the first Professor of Architecture.

Martin instigated a particularly strong research culture that Carolin expertly describes in his essay for this book. This ethos of advanced design thinking provided the environment that led to the introduction of a Diploma course in 1960, and more directly to the establishment of what we now call the Martin Centre – our research wing – in 1967. The focus of research could be summed up as the mathematical study of built form and the implications for design. By the time Colin St. John Wilson took over as head of department in 1975, the Martin Centre had grown and spun out to its own location, temporarily taking the Diploma students with it. Wilson appointed a number of architectural theorists, notably Dalibor Vesely and Peter Carl, and brought the Diploma back to Scroope Terrace, the Department's home since 1924. This invigorated not only studio culture, particularly at Diploma level, but also history and theory teaching at undergraduate and masters level.

TWO CULTURES

By way of shorthand, C.P. Snow's 'two cultures' – delivered as a talk in Cambridge in 1959 – could be said to represent the creative tensions in the department between those working on scientific approaches and those developing more philosophical perspectives related to architectural studies. This perceived division was exacerbated by the separate locations of the Martin Centre and its 'scientists' on the one hand, and the 'philosophers' and studio teaching on the other. Since the introduction of regular national research assessments in the 1980s, the division between the two cultures has become more emphasised. Carolin refers to Martin's axiom that 'everything is connected' and 'there are no separate subjects', which is a notion that lives on in the department. This connectedness has become increasingly explicit and important in the research, teaching and studio work of the department.

With respect to research the Department has, for example, developed environmental research agendas that have crossed over from the technical to embrace questions of perception and behaviour, exemplified by the environmental design research work of Dean Hawkes, Nick Baker and more recently Mary Ann Steane and Minna Sunikka-Blank. Social and economic factors are also central to the research of the urban planning team, led by Marcial Echenique and Ying Jin, which is converging with the richly funded projects on urban conflict and the socio-political work led by Wendy Pullan and Max Sternberg. This is complimented by the research of Francois Penz related to the use of the moving image to explore urban narratives (an essay is included in this book), Felipe Hernández's socio-cultural readings of cities in developing countries and James Campbell's global historical surveys of building types and materials. Appropriate technologies in poorer, more risk-prone and climatically diverse regions of the world are also the focus of Michael Ramage (on transitional housing and material), Emily So (on natural disasters and risk in the built environment) and Alan Short (on designing for climate/change), which brings us full circle back to environmental design.

PRACTICE AND DESIGN-RESEARCH

Under the leadership of Marcial Echenique, the greater focus of the full time academics on research, and the subsequent success of being at the top of the UK's research ranking, has meant that the department has been able to employ an equivalent number of practitioners. These Design Fellows and Visiting Professors have driven the studio culture forward, bringing with them not only practice-based expertise but also teaching excellence.

14 Echenique ensured that the Martin Centre was brought back home to Scroope Terrace and commissioned the new studio building. The benefits of critical mass, and the increased interaction between research-active staff, graduates and design fellows, has brought new focus and impetus. This collaborative spirit is particularly clearly manifested in the new version of the Diploma – the RIBA/ARB Part II MPhil degree – which has grown out of the MPhil founded by Hawkes and Baker and integrates the studio culture established by Vesely and Carl. Under the coordination of Ingrid Schröder and a widening range of colleagues, advanced research comes in to direct relationship with studio objectives.

The way forward is to build an increasingly seamless studio-based environment that integrates the 'two cultures' of research with practice-based expertise. I am optimistic.

