

Editorial: the issue of the refereed studio

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AS THE ENVIRONMENT OF TERTIARY EDUCATION is increasingly shaped by efficiency measures and performance indicators, specifically publication, the question of research productivity has become paramount in landscape architecture. In 1997 *Landscape Review* made its first commitment to pursue the notion of the refereed studio as a valid and fruitful form of research for landscape academics. This brief paper (Bowring 1997) was followed by a call for papers to be published in a special issue of *Landscape Review*. This was advertised over the landscape architecture internet chat site, LARCH-L, with a link to the paper via the Lincoln University web site. Expressions of interest were encouraging and a number of papers were submitted for review. However, the breadth of responses to the manuscripts from referees illustrated the challenge of applying peer review to the creative processes of the studio setting. Despite the request for manuscripts to include a statement of objectives, critical review of substantive focus, presentation of process, and outcomes, many submissions were characterised by a lack of clarity. In some cases the 'design' of the submission obscured rather than articulated the nature of the research question. Several of the reviewers requested a restating of the objectives for the studio, and discussion of the significance of the outcomes. Nonetheless, several papers were identified for publication, and three refereed studios are presented in this issue, together with an invited refereed paper by Professor Helen Armstrong from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Armstrong's work in enhancing the recognition of creative scholarly practice as research has been an important contribution to the ongoing debates, and her co-authored studio with Debbie Robbins published in this issue illustrates the advances being made at QUT on the overall process of the refereed studio.

Although the publication of this issue represents a move forward in the area of the refereed studio, the debates over design and research continue. The titles of the papers published here immediately announce the plural connections between design and research: *Design Studios as Research*, *Research by Design*, and *Research on the Design Studio*. It is apparent that there is a range of ways in which the relationships between the design studio and research can be conceptualised. This range of interpretations has strong parallels with Nigel Cross's and Bruce Archer's proposals of 'research into, for and through design', discussed on the Design Research Society's internet chat site in December 1999 (DRS 1999). This demarcation is a useful means of teasing out the relationships between design and research, but the ensuing debate has also highlighted an emerging schism between practitioner researchers (ie 'for' and 'through'), and the 'into' researchers. The perception from some chat site contributors was that researchers *into* design find it easier to attract funding in the United Kingdom. This model follows a more traditional approach to research, where investigation is detached from design. Difficulties in gaining funding for research which is *for* or *through* design illustrate the lack of recognition of this approach as equally

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valid. The question of the connections between research and practice emerge, and for educators there is the additional link with teaching.

The relationship between education, research and practice could be conceptualised as a triangle, with design in the centre. While the triangle was relatively stable in the traditional model of design education, it is now being deformed under new pressures. The links are tested in an environment which demands explicit rather than inferred evidence of the associated activities. The link between research and education is apparent in the demand for educators to produce premium publications and engage in contests for research funding. The notions of pure research and the intrinsic value of knowledge are under threat in the current climate. Instead, the emphasis is on quantifiable research output; putting pressure on the linkages between research, practice, and education, as design educators struggle to conceptualise the nature of a 'countable' form of research related to the studio.

The connection between education and research is under increasing scrutiny. Rather than accepting this connection as inherent in education, the last decade has seen the call for an explicit demonstration of the association. In New Zealand, for example, the research teaching nexus is one of a range of auditable requirements in universities. The Education Amendment Act 1990 makes it a legal requirement that lecturers are also active researchers, and the Academic Audit Unit periodically scrutinises universities to ensure this is the case. For landscape architecture educators this presents particular challenges, as the connections between research and studio teaching do not fall within established academic practice.

The challenge of articulating the relationship between design education and research has parallels in the ongoing discussion of the connections between research and design practice. A forthcoming conference at the University of Hertfordshire intends to explore these links, and the call for papers observes that 'Models of research through practice may be found in the professional development of the subject through exhibited and award-winning artefacts, in accrued historical evidence in collections, in academic studies and their assessment in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) etc' (Research into Practice 1999). The conference poses questions such as 'How does practice generate research outcomes?' and 'Is all studio practice a form of research?' And as a means of emphasising the difficulties of equating traditional research performance indicators with creative practice, concludes by asking if 'Picasso deserves a PhD?'. This highlights the futility of trying to push the parallels between design and research too far. Adopting traditional research techniques as analogues for design research is potentially problematic. Even terms such as 'data' and 'triangulation' carry a lot of baggage, with connotations of positivism and a search for 'truth'. As Thwaites advises, trying to compare research processes and design processes is an intellectual 'red herring'. He believes that, 'It amounts to trying to make landscape design into some sort of pseudo-science in order to give it recognisable intellectual credibility'. (Thwaites 1996 p 31)

Landscape architecture educators are facing a particular set of challenges, in addition to the broader demands of the changing tertiary sector. The primary challenge is evidently the conceptualisation of the relationship between the design studio (whether as practice or education) and research. The refereed studio offers a means of addressing this challenge. As a performance indicator it has the

potential to be valid in traditional research terms because of the demands of peer review. It also makes the connections between research and teaching explicit, and therefore demonstrable. This idea has been explored within architectural education, for example by the Committee of the Heads of Australasian Schools of Architecture (see Armstrong in this issue). There has also been a recent call for submissions from the *Journal of Architectural Education* (JAE), seeking 'conceptually innovative design studio projects', which understand 'the design process as a mode of critical inquiry, not just a formal proposition'. (JAE Call for Design Submissions 1999) The submissions are to be reviewed by a jury of design educators and professionals: in essence a refereed studio.

The notion of the design studio as a piece of research is addressed in depth in Helen Armstrong's paper in this issue. This paper scopes the issues associated with promoting the design studio as peer-reviewed research, looking to other creative arts as benchmarks. Armstrong reminds us that we are not alone in defining creative process as research, and her examples from parallel design and fine arts disciplines are instructive. As an illustration of the manner in which the research design nexus might be actualised, Armstrong outlines a range of studios from QUT.

The first of the refereed studios presented in this issue is by Ann Forsyth, Henry Lu, and Patricia McGirr, and focuses on the very nature of studio teaching in a specific context. The research questions aim to contribute to our understanding of community service learning studios, seeking an exposition of the problems and benefits of this model. Forsyth, Lu and McGirr's research yields valuable outcomes not just from an educational perspective, but also from the community's point of view, highlighting for example the lack of vandalism as an indicator of ownership and respect.

In the second refereed studio, the focus shifts from a concern with testing studio teaching models to research into a particular design type. Sue-Anne Ware uses the studio as a vehicle for pursuing the challenge of designing anti-memorials. Here the design itself is the research question, and the focus is on the end products of design. Through engaging in a theoretically informed studio process, Ware's students are co-researchers, contributing to the emerging understanding of the relationships between culture and memorial design.

The final refereed studio is by Helen Armstrong and Debbie Robbins, and here both the discourse and the outcomes of the studio are the foundation of the research proposition. As Armstrong and Robbins explain, innovation in the manner of studio teaching was reflected in original and creative work which fulfils a criterion of the traditional research agenda: the production of new forms of knowledge.

In conclusion, the future of the refereed studio rests in the understanding of the role of peer review. While this poses some dilemmas, as outlined by Armstrong, it also provides a means of placing the material in context – both disciplinary and locational. The notion of the peer review also recognises the dynamic nature of a discipline, rather than imposing limiting criteria. As a discipline there is a need to have the confidence in ourselves to rely on peer review, and be able to defend this as a performance indicator. Peer review proposes a means of making an assessment, which is meaningful to the profession, and not viewed as an exception to 'normal' research.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

We are seeking further papers – either presenting refereed studios or discussions on the concept of the refereed studio. Due date: 29 September 2000.