

## Where did that come from?

In the instant of inspiration, few architects can determine precisely where an idea came from. Neuroscientists may be unable to account for the synaptic connections which spark those rushes of insight, but all architects are familiar with what they are like. Such ideas have value in many ways, not the least of which is economic. The UK government, for one, has recently championed the value of creative industries to the economy.

In our last editorial, we discussed the same government's consultation on a new framework to measure the quality of research in universities. Another consultative document has been produced since we wrote which does not shy away from the most controversial proposal: the attempt to measure the impact of research on business, the economy, social policy and society, rather than solely on academic and professional communities. **arq** has been delighted to receive both letters on this theme (pp. 5–10) and a perspective piece by Sebastian Macmillan (pp. 11–16). The latter examines architects' criticisms of recent research assessment exercises, arguing that a tendency to special pleading about architecture's distinctiveness serves to weaken the discipline. As the most recent UK research audit showed – and as debates in **arq** about the nature and conduct of architectural research have illustrated – we can be assured of the significance and rigour of our work. Indeed, Murray Fraser argues in his letter that architectural research has come of age. So the issue at stake is not one concerning the quality of architectural research, but instead the efficacy (and desirability) of its measurement.

Herman Hertzberger has written about the library of ideas which architects carry with them in order to design: the buildings, technical principles, experiences, art works, theories, films, music, whose rich mix lies behind and between those flashes of inspiration. As designers, we gather ideas where we can find them. We tap a huge diversity of sources, some more oblique than others. Many ideas of great value seem to come from somewhere else. The papers in this issue of **arq** derive from a conference called 'Architecture in the Space of Flows' held at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. They explore architecture as a phenomenon of time as well as space, examining how it is embedded in the various flows – social, cultural, infrastructural – of daily life. The parameters are outlined by the conference organisers, Chris L. Smith and Andrew Ballantyne, in their contribution (pp. 21–27). These papers comprise an exploration of ideas whose direct impact on design – or indeed the economy or society – would, we suspect, be very hard to measure. Their contribution is not immediately straightforward; it lies in their potential to add to the library of ideas which helps us to imagine.

We concluded the last editorial by arguing that creativity has long eluded quantitative measurement and that the ideas which sustain architecture and architects remain multiple, shifting, contradictory and contingent. We may not be able to account precisely for where all our ideas come from as architects, but few would deny the value of sustaining creative imagination, and its transformative potential. It is difficult to reconcile these necessary creative contingencies on the one hand with society's increasing impulse to assure accountability and measure reliability on the other. However these priorities are not necessarily incompatible. A key challenge for architects as leaders in the creative industries, and for architectural research, is to find ways to champion the merits of speculative creative work, and explicate its value, in an age which seeks legitimisation in quantitative metrics.

THE EDITORS

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