

PhD RESEARCH PROJECTS 2013



TUESDAY 5 MARCH 2013

Conference: 9.30am–6.30pm
The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL
Wates House / 22 Gordon Street / London



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INTRODUCTION

Harmony and Discord

This year's *PhD Research Projects* conference and exhibition unites doctoral researchers in Architectural Design and Architectural History & Theory at the Bartlett with Anthropology at UCL and the Royal Academy of Music. As the fabric and setting of our everyday life, architecture is, by its very nature, an interdisciplinary practice. Vitruvius said as much over two thousand years ago, remarking that 'the architect should be equipped with knowledge of many branches of study and varied kinds of learning... knowledge [which] is the child of practice and of theory'. But some remain cautious of the widespread application of this term. Jane Rendell, an energetic advocate of interdisciplinarity, argues that real engagement in such work is emotionally, intellectually and politically demanding as it 'requires us to be critical of what we do and open to change!'

PhD Research Projects seeks to address the question of interdisciplinarity in form as well as content. We have invited contributions from doctoral researchers from within and outside the Bartlett engaging

in research that sprouts beyond Vitruvius's many branches of study. In *Ten Books on Architecture* he lists astronomy, drawing, geometry, history, medicine, philosophy and law, to which our contributors can add not only anthropology and music, but biology, economics, film, geology, painting, planning and robotics, research that cuts across disciplinary boundaries. Which brings us to the violent diagonal slash that slices across these pages.

Philosopher Julia Kristeva invokes this gesture to convey the dynamic interaction between theory and practice and between disciplines. She insists many academics are 'locked within the specificity of their field' working in isolation rather than in collaboration with colleagues, 'and therefore do not teach their students to construct a diagonal axis in their methodology'. *PhD Research Projects* aspires to construct this dynamic diagonal axis by curating sessions that pair researchers together around theoretical, practical and methodological interests, building a space for these many branches to not only meet but to spread between and across one another.

Throughout these papers, we can bear witness to a flourishing synthesis of research within shared overarching themes. One dominant discussion permeating many papers is the role of architecture in producing, or being produced by, systems of control. Such conversations range from the societal level, examining violent architectural interventions by the state, to microscopic manipulations of entomological behaviour and to seemingly abstract systems in financial and industrial sectors in which regulated processes become a kind of dynamic architecture. The ethics and aesthetics of these discussions are probed by a variety of methodological approaches, from archival research into architectural plans to scientific experimentation with animals.

In a similar way, the theme of perceived decline and renewal is expressed in multiple mutations ranging from the political to the parasitical: magnified investigations of biological decay and documentary evidence of geological erosion become inadvertent yet poignant metaphors for broader discussion of cyclical deterioration and 'regeneration' of social housing. The practices of drawing, filming, painting, performing and writing act as conceptual, collaborative and reflective tools to cast new light on these shared considerations.

This permutation from matter to metaphor is reflective of a broader antipathy to binary classification weaving throughout the research in relation to the question: what is architecture? In particular, the dichotomy of materiality and immateriality is explored and challenged through the medium of sound, musical composition and performance. Can

sound be material? Can notation be space? Is performance structural?

Our hope is that by bringing researchers together, in harmony and discord, the pairings open up processes and relationships of doctoral research to critical and creative evaluation, inspiring interdisciplinary exchange and arousing a curiosity in the audience to engage in the dialogue, asking questions of each other and of themselves.

Amy Thomas and David Roberts