

01: Introductory Remarks

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This is the continuing story of practice, design and research and it has been given a very insightful twist by Leon van Schaik and his excellent book, *Mastering Architecture*, which forms, so to speak, the intellectual backbone of the Research Symposium.

Let us think for a moment about what is the biggest animator of research. Let us also think a little bit about the tension between applied research on the one hand and on the other, research that is not directed at a specific application or is even non-goal-oriented. I suggest that the biggest animator of research is not money. It is not government. It is not even the need to make the world a better place. I think it is curiosity. That has certainly been true whenever I have been involved in research. I became involved because there was something mysterious to unearth, to find out about. In my case I was once on a train in North India and, looking out of the window, I realised that a form of settlement that had been continuously developed for 5000 years, based on courtyard houses, had suddenly, within 50 years, been completely abandoned as a model. That was a mystery to solve and, though I thought it relevant to current practice, that was not the main purpose of the research. People kept saying, "Do you want to bring back these courtyard houses, is that how we should be living?" I said, "I don't know, but I first want to know why they are no longer the pattern." I had a great time and met some wonderful people with illuminating stories to tell.

So the purpose of the research was why this climatically well adapted form of dwelling was no longer used as the favoured model. In one of our interviews an owner/occupiers of a traditional house was talking enthusiastically about how comfortable it was even in the heat and said fervently: "After all, necessity is the invention of mother." I have never forgotten that: necessity is indeed the invention of mother.

I mentioned earlier the tension between applied research and what many academics want to do. At the beginning of the RIBA's gearing-up of its research effort, a meeting was held, arranged jointly by RIBA R&D and CABA. The room was filled with about twenty academics and twenty practitioners. The practitioners said "We want applied research, research is fantastic". But the academics said almost the opposite, that yes you may well find applications for research findings but first of all you have to actually pursue knowledge for its own sake. I would fiercely defend the latter on the grounds of curiosity because that is actually what animates people's work. But the big challenge is how you bring the two together again, because otherwise the academic effort would not find its real potential.

What is the RIBA doing? I am happy to say that architecture and design are for the first time properly counting as research subjects in the RAE, in no small measure thanks to the efforts of the RIBA. Later on we will be hearing about the President's Awards for Research and of course we have no less than two research groups in the RIBA. One is led by Keith Snook, who is responsible for helping to organise today's event. The other is Building Futures, a group convened by Dickon Robinson which has a fifteen to twenty year frame of view. Building Futures had a long and creative partnership with CABA for many years and it may do so again one day – I would like that to happen, for obvious reasons.



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It seems to me that the big challenge is communicating what is being done in academia and closing a gap that seems to exist in architecture and urbanism: a gap between what happens in the academy and what happens on the ground. What is happening in the academy, the discourse, the research and the critiques, seem to me to be so rich and full of possibilities; while what happens on the ground generally fails to match that in quality. But what happens on the ground is what we as citizens actually experience. And it would be tragic for it not to benefit far more from research and real communication with the academy.