



# Forty Ways To Think About Architecture

Architectural history  
and theory today

Edited by Iain Borden,  
Murray Fraser and  
Barbara Penner

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**WILEY**

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To Adrian

A brilliant and generous teacher, writer, colleague and friend.

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# Acknowledgements

When, in June 2013, we first began this volume to celebrate Adrian's career, we set ourselves two very ambitious goals: first, to produce the volume *before* Adrian's official retirement (in September 2014); and second – and even more optimistic – to keep the volume a secret from Adrian until publication. We gave our project the code name 'Quaranta', and swore everyone – all 40 contributors and the many others who were involved in editing and production – to secrecy.

Miraculously, to our knowledge, nobody slipped up. We are most grateful for the amazing efficiency, enthusiasm and, above all, discretion displayed on the part of everyone who made this volume possible. It is hard to believe that a collection of essays like this one can be produced in such a short space of time – surely there is no better testimony to the regard and affection in which Adrian is held than this.

In particular, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the help and support of Briony Fer. From digging out images from Adrian's slide and photo collections to giving us by-proxy permission to reprint 'Future Imperfect', this would have been a much poorer collection without Briony as our co-conspirator.

This project has benefited greatly from excellent administrative and editorial support. Danielle Willkens did a truly exceptional job at keeping on top of contributions and coordinating the submissions – she acted with real skill, patience and tact. Helen Castle and the editorial team at Wiley (especially Calver Lezama and Miriam Murphy) provided outstandingly efficient support in terms of editing and production. We thank them most sincerely for their efforts.

While not being a 'Bartlett' book per se, it never could have happened without the generous financial support from the Bartlett School of Architecture and its then Director, Marcos Cruz, who wished to recognise Adrian's outstanding contribution to the school over forty years in a suitably substantial and lasting way.

Thanks also, of course, to all of the many contributors, who responded so magnificently to our request for ideas, texts and images in a ridiculously short time frame. Without you, it never would have happened.

FORTY WAYS TO THINK ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

# Introduction

IAIN BORDEN, MURRAY FRASER, BARBARA PENNER

Adrian Forty started teaching at the Bartlett School of Architecture in autumn 1973. At the same time he was taken on as a doctoral student by Reyner Banham, and soon became regarded as a protégé of that renowned British architectural historian and critic. Banham left The Bartlett for the State University of New York at Buffalo in summer 1976, at which juncture Mark Swenarton, another of Banham's doctoral students, joined The Bartlett's history and theory staff. Together, Forty and Swenarton founded a new master's programme which ran for the very first time in the 1981–2 academic year. At that point the course was called the MSc History of Modern Architecture; later on it would become the MA Architectural History. Adrian continued to teach the first-year undergraduate programme in architectural history and theory while co-running the MSc course, first with Murray Fraser, then with Iain Borden, and then with a group of colleagues that included Ben Campkin, Barbara Penner, Peg Rawes and Jane Rendell. Adrian has also been a revered doctoral supervisor, world-famous scholar and a much-valued mentor and colleague. Finally, he retired from the Bartlett in summer 2014, fittingly 40 academic years since he first began there.

This book is not intended as a simple festschrift to celebrate Adrian's retirement. Rather, we see it as an opportunity for a wide spectrum of scholars and architects – again, 40 in total – to use the opportunity to write about what has happened to architectural history and theory in the four decades that Adrian was at The Bartlett. Some of the contributors refer to Adrian's ideas and writings, while others choose to write on themes which might be inspired from having read his books and essays, or which they simply feel he might enjoy. The essays look at the many scales of architecture from its



urban manifestations to how buildings are conceived, built and occupied, then down to a closer look at construction materials and details. We have invited art historians and design historians as well as those who are more directly engaged in designing or teaching architecture. The net result is a rich mix of contemporary thinking about architecture, summed up in readable and lively essays rather than scholarly prose.

## 'FUTURE IMPERFECT'

The essays in this book bear testament to the richness, diversity and influence of Adrian's thinking, teaching and writing about architecture. Indeed, we are delighted to be able to include here, in the opening essay, the text of Adrian's inaugural professorial lecture at UCL, which he delivered in December 2000 (see Chapter One). Entitled 'Future Imperfect', this lecture provides a valuable insight into some of the main ingredients of Adrian's approach to architecture, including his reflections on how these relate to Reyner Banham's own inaugural professorial lecture at UCL which had been delivered exactly – to the day – 30 years previously. 'Future Imperfect' thus takes us through a remarkable range of considerations, including the value of studying actual works of architecture as well as their representations, the significance of everyday buildings as well as the canonical works of famous architects, and the dialogue which the historian can construct between 'theory' and architectural objects.



Adrian photographing the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, closely watched by his younger daughter, Olivia.



But this lecture was also far more than a reflective consideration on methods and principles. Typically, and essentially for Adrian, it is also a reflection on both an unusual theme – imperfection – and a series of actual objects. So in his talk Adrian takes us on at once a conceptual journey, guiding us through notions of perfection and imperfection from Aristotle and Alberti to Ruskin and Godard, and also a tour of architecture as buildings and objects, from the medieval Abbeville Cathedral to 20th-century works by Perret, Le Corbusier, Price, Gehry and Koolhaas, as well as to much less well-known buildings such as a social housing estate on the edge of Paris.

Equally typical of Adrian is the fact that none of this is ‘difficult’ to follow: although he studiously takes apart the abstract term of imperfection, he does so in a manner which is always clearly comprehensible and accessible to all. He also does so with a wit and occasional idiosyncratic flourish (the ending line is pure delight) which maintains a sense of his own personal charm and eloquence – we are always aware that this is Adrian, a real person, who is speaking, and that we are not just hearing an enunciated text.

There is one further aspect of this lecture which gives another insight into Adrian’s working and intentions, as signified by the first word of its title: ‘future’. Despite having written one of the seminal books on design history (*Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750*, 1986), and having recently completed another equally influential book on architectural theory (*Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, 2000), Adrian leaves these largely in the background of his talk. This is not a grandiose display of previous successes and achievements. Instead, the lecture is about the future – a future that is of Adrian’s own work – and in particular on his then-just-beginning research into the culture of concrete in relation to architecture. And this, perhaps, signifies above all else a quality which is always evident in Adrian’s work, namely a restlessness to move on, in this case from design to words to materials, and so always to consider new aspects of architecture and the world in which it operates. The ‘Future Imperfect’ lecture is therefore not just a reflection on the past, or a consideration of where we are, but of where we might be heading in the years to come.

## EXPANDING THE FIELD

Before turning to ‘Future Imperfect’, however, as well as to all the other essays

in this collection, we would like to outline briefly how Adrian has contributed in significant ways not only to architectural history and theory teaching at The Bartlett, but also to its development as a discipline in the UK and internationally. As Adrian himself has noted, architectural history in the UK has only relatively recently come to occupy a more secure and settled place within academe – a situation that Adrian's own efforts at The Bartlett have helped to bring about.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 1960s, many of the most noteworthy scholarship and architectural history initiatives were produced independently of universities and architectural schools. To cite just two examples: the *Survey of London* series, begun in 1894, has been, until very recently, an independent initiative (and in 2013 left the auspices of English Heritage to join The Bartlett); and the RIBA Drawings Collection was assembled by John Harris, who had no affiliation with any institution of higher education. Architectural history was pursued largely by scholars who were based at museums (for instance, Sir John Summerson at Sir John Soane's Museum) or were of independent means. Voluntary associations from the Georgian Group to the Victorian Society and learned societies such as the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain played crucial roles in supporting the discipline through conferences and publications. Certain journals, such as the *Architectural Review*, also emerged as important platforms for the dissemination of architectural history.

Of course, there were a few important exceptions to this rule. By the time Adrian entered the scene, architectural history in the UK was already in the midst of change. Some opportunities for doctoral training did exist by the 1950s and 1960s, thanks largely to the influx of European émigrés fleeing from Nazism in the 1930s. Located just down the road from The Bartlett, the Warburg Institute had been transplanted to London from Hamburg in 1933 and Rudolf Wittkower was employed there between 1934 and 1956. Wittkower's educational impact was notable, as he trained Colin Rowe among others. Equally – if not more – critical was the arrival in London in 1935 of Nikolaus Pevsner, who then in 1941 began to work at Birkbeck College (also very near to The Bartlett), and whose *An Outline of European Architecture* (1942), *Buildings of England* publications (begun in 1951), and co-editorship of the *Architectural Review* were all so crucial to establishing a popular understanding of what architectural history should be – that is, the story of the aesthetic and spatial intentions of architects. Pevsner also began to take

on doctoral students at Birkbeck and also at the University of Cambridge (where he was Slade Professor of Art), including Reyner Banham and Robin Middleton.

The general expansion of higher education in Britain in the 1960s was significant for the fortunes of architectural history. This period, for instance, saw the establishment of the University of Essex's Master's course in Architectural History and Theory, under the leadership of Joseph Rykwert, which, from 1968, trained a large number of well-known historians and theorists, from Robin Evans to Mohsen Mostafavi. (Rykwert, with Dalibor Vesely, then went on to establish the research programme at the School of Architecture at the University of Cambridge in 1980.) Overall, however, it is notable that architectural history training in the 1960s was still largely taking place within art or art history departments rather than in schools of architecture; following an undergraduate degree in History at Brasenose College, Oxford, Adrian's own master's was in Art History at the Courtauld Institute and his first teaching position was at Bristol School of Art (1971–3). This situation slowly began to change in the wake of the 1958 'Oxford Conference', which decreed that schools of architecture should not only train architects but also conduct architectural research – a decision which was to have far-reaching consequences for architectural education. At The Bartlett, it led to the appointment of Richard Llewelyn Davies in 1960 who renamed the School of Architecture the School of Environmental Studies – a tale expertly summarised in Peter Hall's contribution to this volume (see Chapter 32) – and committed it to an ambitious multidisciplinary programme of research that saw architects working alongside psychologists, economists, planners and physicists. Llewelyn Davies also decided that an architectural historian should have a place at the table.

Enter Reyner Banham, who was appointed to a senior lectureship at the Bartlett School of Environmental Studies in 1964, and who produced some of his best-known studies during his 12-year tenure at the university.<sup>2</sup> Banham also took on doctoral students including Charles Jencks, Mark Swenarton and Adrian himself. While Banham rebelled against many of the aesthetic tenets of Pevsnerian architectural history (a questioning that is more quietly continued by Adrian too), he never wavered from Pevsner's belief that architectural history should not be the preserve of an elite, but that it should be something very