As announced in Hilary Ballon’s editorial (“JSAH: The Electronic, Multimedia Edition,” JSAH 67, no. 4 [Dec. 2008], 481), we are now working with the University of California Press to launch the online edition of this journal with the March 2010 issue. Authors interested in making use of our new capabilities are warmly invited to contact me (dbrownle@sas.upenn.edu).

We face numerous technical challenges as we make this transition, and we are also mindful of the implications that it has for the philosophy, methodology, and pedagogy of our discipline. To help us think about these matters, I have invited the editors of several sister publications to share their views.

DAVID B. BROWNLEE
Editor, JSAH

Back to the Future: The JSAH and New Media

In its program of fostering research and teaching in the history of architecture, ASAH should investigate, develop, and apply new techniques and aids. For example, the effective presentation of three-dimensional architectural monuments in color would greatly increase the appreciation of fine architectural design. We hope to present before the summer meeting a demonstration of the new Polaroid, three-dimensional, color slide projection which promises to be a most important development in this direction.

—“Further Possibilities,”

As this citation from the founding issue of the JSAH (the forbear of the JSAH) demonstrates, the Society of Architectural Historians and its affiliated journal have always been involved in exploring how a wide variety of sensory and technological experiences might enrich our understanding of the field. In the first issue’s report on the ASAH meetings, held 20–27 July–1940, for example, the journal celebrates a series of “inspection trips to buildings of architectural and historic interest in and around Boston,” as well as a number of diversely illustrated talks that took place at the Harvard Faculty Club. John P. Coolidge exhibited “his unique collection of illustrative materials on early Lowell buildings”; Turpin C. Bannister’s lecture would be chiefly remembered for the “miraculous arrival of the slides by the B. & M. ‘Minute Man’”; and Dr. Herbert Bloch “passed around some fine examples of stamped brick” during his talk on “The Roman Brick Industry.” Although clearly engaging his audience in a rich sensory experience, Bloch nevertheless restricted his illustrations to the realms of sight, smell, and touch, reportedly declining “to demonstrate the famous tasting method for dating bricks which has been attributed to some modern archaeologists” (21).

The contemporary expansion of the JSAH into an online format extends the spirit of this early community of architectural historians in a number of ways. First, the new availability of audio, video, Adobe Flash VR, and 3-D models will allow a much wider community of scholars access to the kind of multisensory illustrations of architecture that were available to the elite group of men gathered together in Harvard’s Faculty Club in 1940, allowing the journal to function as a resource for researchers wishing to experience and not just read about a given structure’s acoustic, temporal, and tactile qualities. Furthermore, in widening the scope of scholarly architectural publishing beyond the linguistic and the visual, these new media also promise to engage what Howard Gardner describes as alternative forms of intelligence, such as “spatial” and “bodily-kineshetic” intelligences, making it likely that we will see the emergence of new uses of the linguistic component of, and the word-image relationship in, the scholarly essay. But what will tenure committees make of peer-reviewed hypertext- or audio-articles? Who will take the lead in preparing university administrations for the creative variations on the linear essay that are bound to emerge, and what criteria will editorial boards use to monitor the quality of these newly emerging forms?

Although the journal’s ambitious online format will undoubtedly cast a wider net than those early meetings at Harvard, this new mode of experiencing architectural space
will still be limited to those who have access to both technology and continuous technological support, and so this initiative provokes the question of how the SAH and the JSAH will reach out to those readers and potential contributors who exist in a different technological “class” from those who have universal access to the latest thing. Will the journal adopt two formats, one involving new media and the other involving the more traditional use of text, photographs, and line drawings, and if this is the case, how will the journal deal with the likely possibility that the texts that develop in response to new media illustrations may not be so simply transferable to the earlier print format?

If the earliest issues of the JSAH are anything to judge by, we will have time to ponder these important transitional questions. Though the first issue made it clear that “simple line illustrations can be included in the present format, and, if desired, special arrangements might be made for incorporating photographic reproductions” (“Articles for the Journal,” 25), most of the early issues featured articles without any images, making heavily illustrated pieces like Clarence Ward’s 1944 essay, “The Pier in Gothic Architecture Especially in the Île de France,” extremely rare. Rather than seeing this time lag between the availability and actual utilization of new media in a scholarly venue as a sign of failure, however, it might be more productive to use this probable period of delay to develop conversations with academic administrators, foundations, libraries, and educational technology centers about the kind of support structures that will be needed to sustain and expand the JSAH’s initiative in a democratic way. Simultaneously, the journal might foster interdisciplinary conversations with neighboring fields, perhaps most obviously with the fields like Sound Studies and Cinema and Media Studies, to encourage the development of a critical and self-reflexive language to address the use of new media by architectural historians. Scholars in the field of sound studies might help architectural historians to develop a critical lexicon to describe differentiated acoustical experiences; film theorists might offer a useful resource to architectural historians wanting to reflect on the illusory depth effects of moving images of perceived space; and architectural historians might in turn help cinema and media scholars refine their language for describing the experience of three-dimensional space in the age of virtual reality.

As we consider the future of the JSAH, we might recall that when the journal was first launched with the hope that “the time will soon be ripe for such a group to undertake a great cooperative encyclopaedia [sic] of architectural history” (25), this longing for encyclopedic knowledge emerged partly in response to the widespread destruction of World War II, also commemorated in this first issue, which noted with regret that “the cathedrals of Rouen, Evreux, Arras, and Cambrai are in ruins” (22). Though the digital archive seems to offer unrestricted possibilities for recording the diversity and complexity of architectural structures, we need to remember that video and digital images today constitute some of the fastest-growing ruins of modern visual culture. As the Library of Congress’s 1997 “Report on the Current State of American Television and Video Preservation” notes, “absent from the archival field is anything remotely approaching what might be called an ideal format or a preservation copy.” The report goes on to note that both videotape and digital data will likely need to undergo the time-consuming and costly processes of continuous remastering and reformattting to updated formats as a result of the ever-accelerating speed of digital obsolescence. Within the underfunded world of academic journal publication, who will be responsible for ensuring that these new forms of online imaging continue to be legible as the older machines and systems on which they were created become extinct? Are we in search of a permanent archive for these new media experiences, or do we expect that these experiences will be relegated, like the ASAH’s trip to the Peter Tufts House on 20 July 1940, to the memories of the few who were lucky enough to be there at the right time?

Karen Beckman  
Editor, Grey Room

Notes

2. Phenomenological film and media theory provides a rich discourse for exploring how moving images seem to be able to translate bodily experiences for viewers. See, for example, Hugo Münsterberg on Film, ed. Allan Langdale (Routledge: New York, 2002); Vivian Sobchack, Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); and Laura U. Marks, Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
4. A self-reflexive awareness about the photography of architecture is present in the very earliest issues of the JSAH, as we see, for example, in Paul Zucker’s review of Alexander Frankley’s Stones of Glory—Stones of France: A Pictorial Sequence of French Architectural Monuments (New York: International University Press, 1944), when Zucker notes how in the photographs “the Gothic cathedrals . . . are unduly romanticized by queer angles and photographic approach, thus actually perverting the structural idea.” “Medieval Architecture,” 54.
5. In 2008 the theme of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies’ annual
conference was Architectures of the Moving Image, in acknowledgment of
the need for this field to turn its attention to questions of design, structure,
and space.


Breaking the Ten-to-One Barrier

Compare the attendance roster of an annual SAH conference
to those of the same year’s meeting of the American
Historical Association, American Political Science
Association, the College of Art Association, or Modern
Language Association: historians of architecture, urban
design, and landscape architecture are few. The field is
sparsely populated with scholars who work on disparate top-
ics, attend or participate in occasional conferences, and con-
tribute to journals that are sustained by a small group of
devoted readers.

Many factors underlie and reinforce this, creating a
self-perpetuating circle of relative disciplinary isolation.
Among the most easily remedied factor, however, is a
single technical obstacle. Scholars are usually not able to
document adequately their published work because the
cost of doing so is prohibitive. The ratio of images that
I show in a lecture, compared to the images I publish in
an article on exactly the same material, is on the order of
10:1. I suspect most of my colleagues would say more or
less the same.

Analyzing architecture and urbanism necessitates
mastering a complex and wide-ranging set of skills,
including the ability to decipher the documents that are
the built environment’s stock in trade: architectural pho-
tographs, floor and site plans, sections, axonometrics,
sketches, design and technical drawings, topographic
maps. Most scholarly articles contain too few illustra-
tions for even specialists to critically assess an author’s
claims. Most lay readers and scholars from other disci-
plines, untrained in these specialized visual codes, cannot
be expected to and probably do not try to comprehend
the occasional technical illustration that is typically pub-
lished in a scholarly book or essay.

The scarcity of its practitioners and their discipli-
ary isolation together impoverish contemporary archi-
tectural history. New scholarship, even groundbreaking
works, rarely receive substantive, ongoing discussion and
debate. (Colleagues joke that few undertakings better
epitomize Adolf Loos’s “spoken into the void” than pub-
lishing one’s first scholarly book.) This vacuum of criti-
cal debate, among historians of the built environment
with each other, or with scholars from other disciplines,
hibits individual scholars’ intellectual growth and vital-
ity in the field as a whole.

*JSAH* online can be an enormous facilitator of such
productive discussions and debates. Circumventing the
high cost of printing, *JSAH* online will allow the pub-
clication of scholarly articles containing many more illus-
trations, and in different kinds of formats, than is the
norm. A greater density of visual documentation will
surely help to make scholars’ arguments more transpar-
ent and comprehensible both to specialists and to oth-
ers. And because the internet is (at least ideally) a
“worldwide web,” a wider range of interested parties—
including scholars from other disciplines—will be able
to access top-notch works of architectural history. *JSAH*
online promises to be one crucial step toward creating
the wider audience and more vibrant scholarly discus-
sion and community that contemporary architectural
history deserves.

SARAH WILLIAMS GOLDHAGEN
Co-editor
*Positions: On Modern Architecture and Urbanism/
Histories and Theories*

Ceci tuera cela: Digitalia and Its Unintended
Consequences

The intended consequences of the rapid rise of digitalia, in
all its polymorphous permutations, are abundantly clear to
anyone in reach of a $200 laptop and a solar-powered bat-
tery. Turn on your HDTV, listen to a downloaded song on
your laptop, watch an On Demand movie or DVD, or talk
to someone on a cell phone while viewing your favorite film
on an MP3 Player as you GPS your way to the iStore.
These are but a sample of the intended consequences of
media-driven digitalia that may one day supplant the analog
world in which we dwell. However, what of the unintended
consequences for those of us who practice the craft of archi-
tectural history, theory, and criticism? Moreover, if one
ascribes to Victor Hugo’s argument about the printing press
killing architecture, what does that say about the relation
of 0s and 1s to traditional print and paper publications, par-
ticularly architectural books and journals?

Analog media will not evaporate overnight anymore
than architecture did owing to Gutenberg and movable