type. Yet, we have already passed the tipping point where more of us access books, newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals more often through electronic platforms than the printed page. Not that long ago, however, one conducted proper research in an archive, a library, or at a building site. Now that many once hard-to-locate archival documents are available remotely as high-definition digital images, and more print-based documents are being made available via the internet, the need or desire to visit physically one’s campus library, let alone a distant archive or site, are becoming increasingly uncommon. Yet, there remain those who still place great capital in the in situ experience of architecture, cities, and landscapes. In the midst of multiple-platform interfacing, many researchers prefer holding a drawing in one’s hands, studying its texture, the faint traces of an architect’s pentimento, taking note of the casual notation or sketch on the verso. Neither the most elegant digital reconstructions of existing places, nor the best 1200-dpi TIFF of a document can span, at least for now, the gap between the virtual and the haptic. However, for the generation of architectural historians who have yet to complete grammar school, let alone their doctoral studies, these distinctions will be moot. This last unintended consequence concerns me most as an editor, a researcher, and a teacher. As we develop digital journals to better create and disseminate knowledge, we owe it to ourselves, our students, and to the next generation of scholars to not lose sight of the difference between knowledge and information. Once technology begins to use us, rather than we use it, that is when the car drives us.

We will all profit from digital imaging and web-based platforms developed in service of extending the reach of our research, expanding the voices in our dialogues, and increasing the depth of our understanding. However, when the nature, focus, and goal of architectural research is reengineered so as to better exploit digital technologies—when this is prioritized above all else—it may be time to step back and ask what precisely is the purpose of our work.

GEORGE DODDS
Executive Editor
Journal of Architectural Education

A Transatlantic Perspective
The SAH’s principal motives behind moving into multimedia publishing, facilitated by—but equally dependent upon—a sophisticated electronic platform, are stated in terms of impact and access: strengthening scholarship in the discipline and expanding its international outreach. It is particularly commendable to see that from the outset the planning process included business planning so as to ensure that whichever scheme was adopted would be sustainable long-term. As an academic living far from an appropriate research library I rely heavily on online resources and am acutely aware that the electronic landscape is strewn with leftovers from once-funded projects, curtailed when the initial grant was not renewed: digitization projects that only ever produced a section of their promised virtual library, web resources left unmaintained when their creator moved on, websites that appear on indexes although now removed, and so on.

Nevertheless, the SAH’s worthy wish list seems to be predicated upon a model derived from focusing on the potential of new technology, rather than the actuality of relevant readerships (or “markets”). How far are these aims likely to achieve their desired effects, especially at this moment: in the decade of the first ever truly global recession?

A Different Readership?
I write from my personal observations over nearly a decade as Honorary Editor of Architectural History, a journal which during that period has changed substantially in content (broader), production (now largely electronic), and dissemination (moving onto JSTOR), despite hardly any visible change in appearance. The UK market is a much smaller one than the U.S. one, for all disciplines. In addition, architectural history is a much more minority discipline in the UK than in the U.S. In a country where higher degrees are still less common than across the Atlantic, architectural history is only available as an undergraduate degree at a single university. Most architectural historians here have therefore trained initially either as architects or as art historians (the latter a much more minority discipline in the UK than US), and only subsequently specialized in architectural history; some also come into the discipline from history or archaeology (but hardly ever, as in the U.S., from literature).

Within this context, making any journal in the field, or indeed any learned society, sustainable depends upon drawing on a wider audience than a purely academic one, embracing individuals working for state or private heritage bodies (such as English Heritage, Royal Commissions on Historic Monuments, or the Victorian Society); librarians, archivists and curators in specialist collections (such as the British Architectural Library at the RIBA, the RIBA Drawings Collection at the V&A, or the Soane Museum); consultants in conservation practices (architectural histori-
ans either employed within architectural, planning, or engineering practices, or independent consultants taking commissions from such); and also amateurs interested in fields covered by the discipline.

Broadly speaking, British journals have adopted one of two alternative strategies to deal with the problems (mainly financial) deriving from such a limited market. Some titles inherently address a broader readership, because of their particular specialism: for instance, Construction History embraces engineers and other professionals in the construction industry, while Twentieth Century Architecture deliberately exploits the current widespread interest in that period among a wider spectrum of specialists, and in terms of both academics and educated amateurs. Others increase the breadth of readership by including architectural history within a much wider subject area; an instance of this would be Architectural Research Quarterly, which covers subjects from architectural science and sociology alongside architectural history and theory. Architectural History is the only British journal dedicated exclusively to the discipline, but it also benefits from a long-standing international readership, traditionally focused on the Commonwealth (from where many students came to train in the UK, and to which a quantity of UK graduates used to emigrate as academics), but also with significant numbers of institutional subscribers in North America, due to the common language; moving into JSTOR has greatly enhanced the journal's international visibility, especially since JSTOR linked with Google, increasing interest in it both in terms of contributors and subscribers.

A Different Level of Technology?

Our readership is thus probably less homogeneous than that of our American sister publication. In turn this also means that our readers’ experience of and access to information systems is more diverse, a situation aggravated by the often lower standards of provision in British institutions: a large proportion of UK universities lag way behind their U.S. counterparts in the standard of IT provision, perhaps most significantly in the relatively narrow range of IT applications usually available, but also the range of electronic subscriptions (even as a member of a university in the Russell Group—the elite top twenty—I only have limited JSTOR access, excluding the section covering art and architectural history!); there are wide disparities across the university sector in terms of provision, and the move toward a digital economy is actually exacerbating these. Moreover, graduate students often have their access to IT facilities cut the moment that they submit their thesis and retirees (at a maximum of 67 here) on the last day of their last term; independent scholars—a sizable group within this discipline—cannot usually afford much access at all to such facilities. It is not uncommon for retired academics (sometimes among our most productive colleagues), let alone older amateurs, to lack any online access. Little effort was made to equip older faculty with cutting edge IT skills; as was well known, Sir Howard Colvin, the doyen of English architectural history who only died just over a year ago, never graduated from manual typewriter to its electric successor, let alone to PC, and he was not unique in this! Indeed, broadband is not yet available in all parts of the UK (although the British government has now committed itself to its extension nationwide), especially in some of the rural regions to which many choose to retire (downsizing to release equity, and thus supplement meager pensions). Suffice to say, a considerable number of SAHGB members (including some respected peer reviewers) are not even on email.

Consequently, putting material on any kind of high level electronic platform will not so much increase access, at least in terms of increasing the number of individuals able to access it (still a widely held desire in this welfare state, albeit diluted), as accentuate existing divisions within the community, according to the degree of access to electronic material: all, part or none of it. This is not merely a matter of justice or equality, but rather an issue of how best to facilitate mutual exchange across the discipline’s community, and how to make that community as inclusive as possible. Given my personal experience of the contrast between provision in the U.S. (where I recently held a year-long research professorship in a well-endowed private university) and the UK, and between my own experience in a Russell Group university with that of colleagues in less research-oriented British universities, I cannot help wonder how far colleagues in less well-funded colleges in the U.S. will be able to access a multimedia JSAH, and thus how far—or even whether—they will be included within the scholarly exchange opened up by it. Looking now from more than a narrowly British perspective, how far does the embracing of higher-end technologies reduce the diversity of voices able to contribute to the scholarly debates on which the intellectual “strengthening” of our discipline surely depends?

A Changing Readership: Our JSTOR Experience

In contrast to the SAH, the SAHGB has no paid staff and therefore relies entirely upon members’ unpaid service: for membership administration, production, and sales of publications (primarily journal and newsletter), event organization (study visits but also annual lecture, symposium and conference), administration of research funding (research and publication bursaries, and latterly studentships) and awards (for
publications and essays), and even website maintenance, let alone for sporadically responding to governmental requests to represent the discipline in enquiries, etc. Furthermore, given the smaller market in Britain, commercial publishers, including university presses, will not take on titles in disciplines seen to have a limited audience unless a considerable subsidy is paid by the journal’s host organization; for instance, Cambridge University Press levies such a charge for ARQ, even though most of the editorial (as opposed to layout, design, and distribution) work is done for it gratis by an editorial team of academics. The option of moving from publishing directly through a printer, as Architectural History does currently, to handing over much of the production process to a full-service publisher is therefore not a viable alternative for such a British-originated journal.

The SAHGB Executive Committee therefore accepted JSTOR’s invitation to include Architectural History, so as to extend the journal’s reach without increasing the demand upon the society’s own (volunteer) resources. The statistics collected by JSTOR and regularly made available to us have provided objective evidence, which, together with more direct feedback—from readers, authors and institutional subscribers—enables us to assess the impact of this move. First, the number of readers and contributors has increased enormously, especially from outside the UK; certain individual articles have registered around as many downloads (i.e., online readers) as the journal has (hard-copy) subscribers. As might have been predicted, in terms of sheer numbers these new readers have primarily been Anglophones, in Australasia and North America; nevertheless, the greatest proportional increase in contributors seems to have been in continental Europe, where we have relatively few (hard-copy) subscribers.

Second, the possibility of JSTOR access has not led any existing subscribers to suspend subscriptions (perhaps due to the three-year moving wall) but instead, through increasing visibility, has introduced new ones, notably institutions from outside our traditional geographical reach (such as from the Middle East).

Third, JSTOR’s link with Google has resulted in a dramatic and wholly unanticipated rise in requests for single articles (which, until replaced by an automatic ordering facility, has greatly increased the workload of those society officers contacted by these potential readers!). These enquiries demonstrate that the JSTOR–Google link has not only increased the number but also the range of such new readers, since many of them come from outside the discipline, their inclusion thus promoting architectural history’s integration into more interdisciplinary scholarship; indeed, since moving onto the JSTOR platform contributions have been submitted from scholars in a wider range of disciplines than before (such as literature or human geography).

Fourth, it is apparent that these new readers, and especially those from outside our own discipline, are attracted by specific subject matter (no doubt due to the word-searching facility), regardless of relative scholarly quality; it is somewhat embarrassing to note that some of our most-accessed articles are therefore ones that are intellectually weaker, or even straightforwardly outdated. JSTOR’s facilitation of access by unsupported independent scholars can thus mislead innocent researchers as well as inform them. Moreover, it is precisely these readers who are less likely to have access to other, hard-copy resources (such as research libraries containing monographs) to supplement material accessed online; the fact that JSTOR is opening up free access to institutions in certain parts of the developing world (notably Africa) will no doubt amplify this situation. Do we have a “duty of care” to attach a “health warning” to our product?

Changing Technologies and Their Actual Effects

Our experience of JSTOR has demonstrated that readers are taking advantage of the opportunities it offers and which hard copy does not, above all through the word-searching facility (and moreover doing so across disciplines and historic periods) and then downloading articles onto their own desktop: at work, home, or wherever. Evidently younger scholars, especially those whose entire education has been computer-assisted and whose leisure has likewise been supported by iPod and Nintendo, have raised expectations as to communications media and above all to the degree of interaction they can afford. This is particularly apparent to anyone who has served on juries in architectural school crits in recent years, as work is now habitually not merely presented with “zoomable images” and video or audio clips (et cetera!) tacked on but is rather elaborated through multilayered, computer-generated drawings and virtual 3-D models, and with fly-through animations used as much as an exploratory tool within the design process as a presentation medium at its conclusion. For that generation, hard-copy periodical and monograph publishing must seem to belong to a bygone era, even when the former are accessed via JSTOR or other electronic subscriptions.

In fact JSTOR, unfortunately, seems to have been conceived within the earlier mindset, simply transferring the products of a traditional publication process onto an electronic platform, thus preventing exploitation of that technology’s inherent potential (and it is here that JSAH’s electronic, multimedia edition represents a considerable
advantage on what is currently available). JSTOR’s reproduction of journals in their original format might be justified when initially digitizing back runs, for which electronic data had to be obtained by scanning hard copy, but I fail to understand why the same policy is followed for current issues, for which electronic files are invariably available. At the most basic level, I am personally aware that this policy is compromising image quality, even if this is not immediately perceptible to the naked eye. At another level, direct transfer of electronic files (preferably those immediately preceding hard copy layout stage) would enable JSTOR (or indeed any other electronic platform) to offer relatively easily additional facilities such as “perfectly synchronized” text and image, as it would enable one to click through to the relevant note or image (usually stored in separate but correlated electronic files until final conversion prior to hard copy layout) as and when referred to in the main text.1 My point here is that we seem to be missing out on the potential of exploiting some of the simplest electronic programs, one that would be widely accessible since they do not require users to possess as high a level of equipment or programs as will be required to access JSAH’s electronic, multimedia edition.

Before venturing further into the digital economy, I would like to see at least some attempt at resolving various mundane problems that have arisen already in our move in this direction. Ironically, the age of raised expectations is too often proving to be one of lowered standards in illustration. First, there is the financial implication that when electronic publication duplicates its hard copy equivalent, a supplementary reproduction fee is often levied by libraries and other collections supplying illustrations. Given the extraordinary rise in reproduction fees over the last couple of decades, this double whammy is sometimes leading to withdrawal of necessary illustrations, in the process depriving the collections of any fee income at all. I would like to see journals affected by this, including JSAH and Architectural History, making a joint approach to relevant collections so as to discuss how better to tackle this conundrum.

Second (and to some degree prompted by the previous concern), the wide availability and relatively inexpensive-ness of scanners and digital cameras, together with the recent decision of several leading libraries to allow readers to photograph material themselves rather than obliging them to pay for the services of in-house professional photographers, has led to authors increasingly supplying editors with illustrations that they have produced themselves. It would be polite to state that these amateur productions rarely reach the standard of illustration to which scholars as visually aware as architectural historians have become accustomed in traditional journals let alone in the latest designer magazines. Setting out minimum technical standards for authors (such as stipulating the minimum resolutions acceptable) and the introduction into graduate research training of courses on producing professional-quality illustrations are strategies that can mitigate, but not wholly resolve, this problem, which like the previous one deserves further consideration.

Third, computer-generated drawings—at least those of any complexity—rarely translate satisfactorily to the printed page. This medium’s original application—for producing large-scale printouts capable of accurately communicating detail and scale to fellow construction professionals—implies so much reduction in order to fit within the printed page that individual lines tend to break up or even disappear; although individual lines can be thickened up, this process incurs an inherent loss of scale. Moreover, the effect of thickening up many lines often results in more confusion than clarity. At the same time, the medium’s inherent technical potential—for incorporating multiple layers of detail—has resulted in those capable of producing such drawings adopting as default a higher level of complexity than can be reduced to fit the printed page. Authors working on a daily basis as architects or archaeologists, or acquiring their illustrations from such practitioners—that is, those used to producing working drawings—are usually happily oblivious to the consequences of their reduction, as they may either never have to translate this graphic form so as to fit the printed page or habitually delegate this operation to specialist staff within their office.

Of course, there is no denying the advantages brought by the electronic revolution, not least in journal production, particularly when this remains an in-house publication; but here too there are certain, often unforeseen, drawbacks, once more due to the limitations inherent in the non-commercial level capacity of authors’ and editorial IT resources. Electronic communications speed up the transfer of material between editors and authors, and simultaneously save on postage costs, especially when working between continents; but in reality the limited file space in many (most?) authors’ internet accounts effectively prevents the mutual transfer of high-resolution images, which therefore have to be mailed in hard copy. Likewise, electronic technology potentially brings several processes under the direct control of editors, but it is questionable how far it is desirable to increase this (unpaid) workload of already hard pressed academics; more brutally, if their workload is increased in this way, it will become more difficult to find volunteers willing and able to undertake it.
Strengthening Scholarship and Expanding Outreach: Which Technology for What and Whom?

Our move into JSTOR and then the latter’s link-up with Google has greatly enhanced exploitation of journals hitherto only accessible through hardcopy, and in the process has raised our journal’s international visibility, and thus outreach. Nevertheless we face raised expectations as to how research can be communicated and then used interactively, above all from the rising generations and from those working in more technically based disciplines. Our collaboration in interdisciplinary projects is an important way of developing our own discipline, as I am personally aware from working on a GIS-based urban history project, funded by a department of geography. But should technology play the leading role—as opposed to a more subsidiary, enabling one—in our policymaking when considering how to strengthen scholarship and expand international outreach in our particular discipline? Indeed, how far could technology be capable of achieving these—primarily humanistic—ends? Recent intellectual advances in the discipline have to a great extent been due to a preparedness to listen to voices—of women not just men, of draftsmen and building site workers as well as designer architects, of indigenous peoples as much as their colonists—previously unheard because ignored or even deliberately suppressed. I am concerned that dependence upon a high-level electronic platform, while opening up new avenues of interactivity will do so at the expense of restricting access. I don’t just want to hear the voices of the Harvard-educated Obamas but equally of the students in traditionally black colleges in the deep South, alongside Antipodean aboriginals, Chinese ethnic minorities, and students and faculty from less well-endowed colleges in the “First World,” where progressive adoption of electronic technology is increasingly dividing a single, discipline-defined audience into a series of separate audiences, differentiated according to access to technological resources. Simultaneous publication in electronic and hard copy will inevitably lead each author to prioritize one of those two (albeit overlapping) audiences, with more profound, intellectual implications than may have been anticipated.

Over a quarter of a century ago a British economist (in fact a German émigré) warned of letting the potential of new technology—which he defined as mere “know-how,” and which Dalibor Vesely has long equated with techne—dictate policy at the expense of more humanistic concepts of value (and, in Vesely’s case, of poiesis). He developed a concept of “intermediate technology,” a kind of lateral thinking that adapted lower levels of technology, those truly accessible to all and adapted to their real needs—in innovative, user-led ways, rather than more blindly adopting the latest technologies as and when they appeared. Like the SAH he believed that we should “turn the potentiality into a reality,” continuing “to the benefit of man.” It’s how far we manage to include that latter part, in its widest sense, that also concerns me here.

JUDI LOACH
Honorary Editor
Architectural History

Notes
1. Although JSTOR intended to move over from scanning hard copy to acceptance of electronic files directly from their periodicals’ editors or publishers, it seems that they intend to take the post-electronic files, which will therefore preclude their optimum exploitation by readers, as suggested above.

The Big Picture

Print versus pixel? For a long while the media debates have tended to detour into the details of personal comfort and cultural custom—whether you like to read on the screen, or enjoy the tactility of print, or whether the web as a platform feels too flimsy, too bloggy, to support the gravitas of discourse. It’s been easy to overlook the big picture. But the big picture is now plain: the future of journals is online. (Books are a different story, and another forum.)

The economic and environmental benefits of eliminating paper-and-ink production and petroleum-based distribution are undeniable. Still more compelling are the editorial opportunities. The ability to feature topical essays and timely reviews; to augment traditional visual formats with slideshows, webcasts, video, and film; to encourage interactive dialogue; to deepen texts and images with hyperlinks; and to enlarge readership and reach by expanding from limited subscription to open access format—all promise to make scholarly and trade journalism livelier and more responsive and influential.

But ultimately the big picture frames more than the future of academic and professional publishing. Digital communication is more than a new medium; it’s a new system—a system with its own networks, practices, expectations, opportunities. (For a terrific analysis of web-as-ecosystem, read Here Comes Everybody [New York: Penguin Press, 2008], by NYU instructor Clay Shirky.) The rise of this system is driving changes in architecture and design...