Like many of you, I did not get to all the readings that I had planned for last summer. Before the fall quarter began, however, I made the time to electronically leaf through old issues of the *JSAH*. I was touched by the scale of change the journal has undergone in the seventy years since its inception, but also by its original grounding in contemporary concerns. Between the Arab Spring and the fall of American discontent, change was on my mind.

As for the journal, change in length and format over the years is striking. The inaugural issue of January 1941 was a modest twenty-six-page mimeographed volume, at that time called the *American Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. It consisted of one article, a “current bibliography,” and a few brief reports. Within a year, under Turpin Banister’s editorship, the journal doubled in length, and the cover of the journal was redesigned to incorporate a new logo. Begun with a subscription list of 30 in 1941, there were over 250 subscribers by the mid-1940s. The design would continue to be adjusted during the first decade to attain a format by 1950 that would remain fairly stable until the 1990s, when under Nicholas Adams’s stewardship it would be redesigned to take its current visually attractive print form. The journal doubled in size between the 1950s and 1960s.

With the launching of *JSAH* Online from volume 70 in 2010, we are observing the beginnings of a profound change in the way we view and read the journal. It is not the print form, but the digital version, that is the journal of record now. Would the waning of print in the future enable us to rethink the content of architectural history, its methodological and theoretical premise, and how we communicate our disciplinary concerns to the larger world? The question is not just how the digital media would transform content. The bigger questions, it seems to me, are: How might we utilize the new possibilities of contact and readership to launch new modes of engagement with architectural history? How might these new engagements realize the original desire to address critical concerns of the contemporary world?

I cannot do justice to either the range of subject matter handled in the past or to the difficulties of organizing content and the unstinting labor of past editors that has bequeathed us the flourishing journal in the present. I will confine myself to a few brief remarks on past coverage and focus.

The very first volume of the *JSAH*, published during World War II, registered its concern about the effects of bombing on the buildings in Europe. The journal’s issues during the war years were marked by the recognition that methods of architectural history needed to be rethought and...
that a new analytic must place “contemporary problems into sharper focus.” This was both a response to the attitude toward history in much modernist architecture practice that had threatened to marginalize the instruction of history in architecture programs, and a belief that the architectural historian must meet “today’s critical problems” to address the “tottering equilibrium of our world.”

The first volumes of the JSAH were animated by the consciousness of a global conflict that made it necessary to promote a “broader view of architectural history” encompassing monuments as well as ordinary buildings, and what Talbot Hamlin nicely described as the “necessary but unwritten architectural histories.” The journal covered remarkable geographic territory during the first few years. Ironically, it was only after the journal had found its feet, and its name had been changed to invoke its international status in 1947, that it seemed to have slowly become more provincial in its focus. Despite periodic reevaluation and renewal of the pledge to publish nontraditional material, it would be decades before the journal again actualized this old ambition.

The editors and editorial teams in the last two decades have done much to expand geographic coverage and to seek conceptual and methodological tools to expand the framework of architectural histories in the pages of the journal. Expansion of reviews from books to exhibitions and multimedia, and the move to JSAH Online are some instances of recent change that now impact how we read and think about architectural content. The desire for geographic spread has been modulated by the recognition that we can only publish what is submitted to us, and that quality and depth are not to be sacrificed in the desire for breadth. Implicit in this task of expanding global coverage has been the view that the JSAH is an American journal of global scope—the journal, after all, has always been published in the U.S. and sustained by the efforts of editors from North American academia. From this perspective, the journal faces two other problems. The contours of history in the pages of the journal are shaped after the models of architectural history pursued in American academia; the changes we see in terms of content and scope in the JSAH mirrors changes in that system. These models of architectural history also govern the view of how we, as a disciplinary journal, connect to the larger world conceptually, methodologically, and substantively. Citing the practical difficulties of publishing articles written by authors from outside North American academia, Nicholas Adams expressed the hope that we would have important English-language documents translated into foreign languages, so that prospective contributors may be prepared to participate in the conversation of the JSAH. An excellent idea, but we can longer rest assured that such forms of knowledge transfer can occur unidirectionally. How prepared are we to take on problems of architectural and urban history in other parts of the world?

We live in a historical moment that offers challenges to older disciplinary connections. We are witnessing a geopolitical shift, and the humanities in North America are besieged by economic demands arising out of this shift. The future of a disciplinary journal will depend on our capacity to envision change and re-view connections.

Expansion of subject matter demands methodological and theoretical augmentation. Few fields have a broader compass than architecture—primarily because it is essential to human existence and because in its historical development it has touched endeavors in every field: art, politics, society, science, technology. We do ourselves disservice when we limit our intellectual compass. Take the example of contemporary inquiries into spatial culture. While spatial studies have now become the prerogative of many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, the pages of the JSAH have been relatively untroubled by the methodological and theoretical approaches that consider production of space, even though no other discipline is better prepared to tackle it than ours. It is time to reclaim that ground.

Our most important contribution as scholars does not reside merely in our expertise in a given field or subfield, but in the kinds of connections we are able to forge with those in other subfields within architectural, urban, and landscape history, with other regional specializations and those disciplines outside our specialization. This requires stepping out of the comfort zone of our own field of expertise, and acquiring a habit of reading across cultures and modes of communica-tion. Who will do it? You will do it; we will do it.

As the new editor, I am dedicated to preserving the distinguished profile of the JSAH by promoting its critical engagement with the world. To this end I plan to organize some thematic issues on critical directions in architectural history. Most importantly, I hope JSAH readers will read across the articles to decipher connections and themati cs, even in those issues that will not be thematically directed.

The four articles in the present issue deal with modernism and the social, formal, and technical concerns that reflected the modernist imaginary in Central Europe, South Africa, Mexico, and the United States. The specific concerns in the essays—the problem of abstraction that forms the core of Leslie Topp’s article, the hidden agency of “nature” that facilitates accumulation in a racialized landscape discussed by Jeremy Foster, the nationalist-universalist dialectic of Mexican modernism examined by Kathryn O’Rourke, and the aesthetics of new technology explored by Joseph Siry—are
all enduring themes in the historical debate on modernism. Together, however, they foreground not only the intellectual and practical genealogies of modernism that were shared across much of the world, but their discrepant applications for which we must recognize the sinews of power that connected these locations in the first place.

In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my predecessor, David Brownlee. He ensured a smooth transition by his readiness to answer my innumerable queries. More than that, with the launch of *JSAH Online*, the *JSAH* is no longer one journal, but two. This places unprecedented demand on the editor’s time. The *JSAH* is fortunate that this transition occurred while David was editor. The time and care David devoted to the journal’s operation and production and to addressing the many problems of the infant online version, went far beyond the prescriptions of duty. It will be a tough example to follow.

My thanks to the review editors, my editorial assistant Katie Papineau, and managing editor Mary Christian, whose individual efforts contribute to the superior quality of the journal. Specifically, my thanks to outgoing post-1750 book review editor John Macuika for his service to the *JSAH* and for helping the transition to Patricia Morton, who will replace John from the next issue.

Swati Chattopadhyay
Editor, *JSAH*

Notes