

## REFLECTING ON INTERDISCIPLINARITY(IES)

*This article serves as the introduction to a volume dedicated to the question of interdisciplinarity in architectural history. In view of the field's growing diversity and complexity – as well as the risk of its potential fragmentation – the authors emphasize the importance of engaging with interdisciplinarity in a critical and deliberate manner. The first section traces the history of the concept and considers how architectural history as a discipline has positioned itself in relation to it. The second section outlines the range of methodological approaches and theoretical reflections proposed by the volume's contributors across its various chapters. While not aiming to capture the full spectrum of contemporary interdisciplinary practices, these contributions offer a representative overview of the trajectories along which the field is currently developing. These include postcolonial frameworks; intersections with environmental history; the impact of digital technologies; the articulation of both material and immaterial histories of architecture; critical engagement with architectural representation and its relationship to visual studies; the transformation of the traditional monographic model; and the role of collaborative research as a driving force of interdisciplinarity, among others.*

The discipline of architectural history has become increasingly difficult to define in simple terms. Once a relatively stable humanistic field rooted in the historiographies of style, form, function, and patronage, it has grown highly pluralistic and fragmented, shaped by diverse academic traditions and often propelled by research questions and methodologies native to other disciplines. Today, architectural history seamlessly integrates methods from the other humanities and the social sciences while also readily embracing the more scientific – e.g., technological and environmental – perspectives. Indeed, the rise of digital technologies and the incorporation of material, mechanical, and ecological aspects, among others, have significantly reshaped its disciplinary boundaries. This evolution has led to extraordinary heterogeneity in architectural history writing, raising questions about the field's identity. What – if anything – still unifies the discipline amid its ever-growing methodological diversity? How have theoretical and practical perspectives from other realms of knowledge production and new digital tools used for research and data visualization transformed its narrative frameworks? Have interdisciplinary approaches opened productive and meaningful avenues of study, or have they further fragmented an already diffuse discipline, contributing to confusion or even an identity crisis?

Just a few decades ago, interdisciplinarity was considered an innovative scholarly approach; today, it is virtually a given<sup>1</sup>. Yet, the widespread

acceptance of this academic direction is rarely questioned – one wonders whether interdisciplinarity itself has become an unexamined assumption. The exponential growth of studies that engage with the issue in architectural history reflects both the inevitability of disciplinary intersections and the need for continuing critical examination of their practical, theoretical, and methodological implications. In their exploration of topics at the crossroads of architecture, fine art, design, construction technologies, architectural theory, and literature, recent volumes of the journal *Opus Incertum* concretely illustrate this dynamic. These include studies on exhibition design and museums (2024 and 2023); early modern “speaking facades” (2022); Dante and architecture (2021); construction techniques in early modern architectural treatises (2020); Renaissance villas and grottos (2019 and 2018); and early modern wooden ceilings (2017), among others. Drawing on these highly interdisciplinary investigations, the present volume directs its focus at the historiography and methodologies of interdisciplinary practice in architectural history today. By bringing together a curated selection of current perspectives from scholars across generations, geographical contexts, and academic backgrounds<sup>2</sup>, it builds on previous publications around this theme that have thoughtfully confronted methodological developments in architectural history in an effort to invite a productive reflection on the ongoing evolution of the discipline<sup>3</sup>.

### Defining interdisciplinarity

Before introducing the articles included in this volume, it may be beneficial to offer some preliminary considerations of interdisciplinarity and its place in contemporary architectural history. The term ‘interdisciplinarity’ derives from the prefix *inter-* (‘between’ or ‘among’) and the noun *discipline*, which originally referred to the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student<sup>4</sup>. Over time, the concept of ‘discipline’ expanded to encompass “the act of learning, the subject of instruction, and the philosophical system being transmitted”<sup>5</sup>. With the establishment of monastic orders in the Middle Ages, the term also took on connotations associated with penance, even denoting the whip used by monks for self-flagellation<sup>6</sup>. Michel Foucault reminds us that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ‘disciplines’ also functioned as instruments of power, regulating bodily operations through institutions such as schools, the military, and the state, which imposed various constraints, prohibitions, and obligations. The control and segmentation of time and the hierarchical organization of individuals within society were all mechanisms designed to enhance productivity and efficiency<sup>7</sup>. The subdivision and specialization of knowledge, formalized in the nineteenth century under the influence of Auguste Comte's positivist philosophy, further reinforced this societal structuring through institutions<sup>8</sup>.

This narrow and confining vision of ‘discipline’ that centered on limits and boundaries persisted



*Dessiné par C. N. Cochin fils, Chevalier de l'Ordre du Roi, de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts, 1764.*

*Gravé par B. L. Vieyra, Graveur de l'Académie, à Paris, 1772.*

# FRONTISPICE DE L'ENCYCLOPEDIE.



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**Fig. 1** B.L. Prévost (after a drawing by C.N. Cochlin fils), Frontispiece of D. Diderot's *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, 1772 (© The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on interdisciplinarity is vast. For English-language sources, see J. THOMPSON KLEIN, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice*, Detroit 1990; A. KARLQVIST, *Going Beyond Disciplines: The Meanings of Interdisciplinarity*, "Policy Sciences", 32, 1999, 4, pp. 379-383; J. MORAN, *Interdisciplinarity*, Hoboken 2010; *Interdisciplinarity: Its Role in a Discipline-based Academy*, edited by J.H. Aldrich, New York 2014; H.J. GRAFF, *The 'Problem' of Interdisciplinarity in Theory, Practice, and History*, "Social Science History", 40, 2016, 4, pp. 775-803.

<sup>2</sup> Contributors to this volume range from early-career scholars, whose papers derive from their dissertation research, to more senior scholars, whose studies reflect a longer career of exploring these and other topics. They come from various countries around the world, including Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, China, France, Italy, and the United States.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Méthodes en histoire de l'architecture*, "Cahiers de la Recherche Architecturale et Urbaine", 9-10, 2002; and *Learning from Interdisciplinarity*, "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians", 64, 2005, 4.

<sup>4</sup> For the etymology of the prefix 'inter-', see É. MÉCHOU-LAN, *Intermédialités: le temps des illusions perdues*, "Intermédialités. Histoire et Théorie des Arts, des Lettres et des Techniques", 1, 2003, pp. 9-27, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1005442ar> (last accessed 27 March 2025). On the history of the formation of the disciplines, see *Qu'est-ce qu'une discipline?*, sous la direction de J. Boutier, J.C. Passeron, J. Revel, Paris 2006, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editionsehess.20041> (last accessed 25 March 2025).

<sup>5</sup> "L'action d'apprendre, la matière d'enseignement ainsi que le système philosophique transmis". M. LECLERC, *La notion de discipline scientifique et ses enjeux sociaux*, "Politique", 15, 1989, pp. 23-51: 24, <https://doi.org/10.7202/040618ar> (last accessed 27 March 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Les corps dociles*, in *Surveiller et punir*, Paris 1993, pp. 159-199 (first ed. Paris 1975), <https://shs.cairn.info/surveiller-et-punir-naissance-de-la-prison-9782070729685-page-159?lang=fr> (last accessed 30 March 2025).

<sup>8</sup> LECLERC, *La notion de discipline...* cit., pp. 27-34.

<sup>9</sup> "La discipline est une catégorie organisationnelle au sein de la connaissance scientifique ; elle y institue la division et la spécialisation du travail et elle répond à la diversité des domaines que recouvrent les sciences. Bien qu'englobée dans un ensemble scientifique plus vaste, une discipline tend naturellement à l'autonomie, par la délimitation de ses frontières, le langage qu'elle se constitue, les techniques qu'elle est amenée à élaborer ou à utiliser, et éventuellement par les théories qui lui sont propres". E. MORIN, *Sur l'interdisciplinarité*, in *Carrefour des sciences*, actes du colloque (Paris, Palais de l'UNESCO, 12-13 février 1990), Paris 1990, <https://cicret-transdisciplinarity.org/bulletin/b2c2.php> (last accessed 27 March 2025).

<sup>10</sup> "Corps de connaissances inscrit dans des textes, des exemples paradigmatiques et des formes d'instrumentation, qui fait l'objet d'une transmission pédagogique. [...] Ce qui nécessite une mise en forme, ou conformation du savoir à

until the late twentieth century. Edgar Morin's 1990 definition reflects this when he describes 'discipline' as "an organizational category within scientific knowledge" that

institutes the division and specialization of labor and corresponds to the diversity of domains covered by the sciences. Although part of a broader scientific framework, a discipline naturally tends toward autonomy by defining its own boundaries, developing its own language, creating or adopting specialized techniques, and, in some cases, establishing its own theories<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, in 2006, Jean-Louis Fabiani characterized 'discipline' as

a body of knowledge embedded in texts, paradigmatic examples, and forms of instrumentation, transmitted pedagogically, necessitating a structured organization of knowledge for instructional purposes, a progressive gradation of teaching methods from simple to complex, and an academic program that forms [...] a 'programmatic space'<sup>10</sup>.

In response to this paradigm, interdisciplinarity has emerged largely *against* the disciplines perceived to be overly rigid. It has sought to critique and challenge the dominant structures and values of knowledge transmitted through traditional disciplinary configurations<sup>11</sup>. Its goal has been to transform, transgress, and deconstruct disciplinary forms of knowledge and the boundaries that define them, in order to generate, as Roland Barthes observed in 1971, new ways of understanding and new epistemological inquiries into the very nature of disciplinary expertise:

Indeed, it seems that *interdisciplinarity*, today considered a key value in research, cannot be achieved by the mere juxtaposition of specialized bodies of knowledge; interdisciplinarity is not an easy task: it begins *effectively* (and not merely as an expression of wishful thinking) when the solidarity of the traditional disciplines breaks down – perhaps even violently, through the tremors of fashion – in favor of a new object, a new language, which belongs neither to one nor to the other of the sciences that were

supposed to be peacefully brought into dialogue. It is precisely this discomfort with classification that allows us to diagnose a certain mutation<sup>12</sup>.

Even after half a century, the widespread embrace of interdisciplinarity remains evident, particularly among funding bodies, where 'being interdisciplinary' continues to be regarded as inherently valuable<sup>13</sup>. However, interdisciplinarity also raises significant concerns, and the concept itself risks becoming increasingly diluted. Art historian Rosalind Krauss offers a critical perspective on what she terms the "post-disciplinary" era, identifying two major issues: first, the potential erosion of specialized technical skills within traditional disciplines – an "atrophy of expertise"; and second, the instrumentalization of interdisciplinary practices by institutions that consolidate faculties and departments into broad, more generalized study programs. For instance, art history has frequently been subsumed under the broader category of 'visual studies'. Under the pretext of dismantling outdated, rigid, and self-referential disciplines, universities, according to Krauss, often view such consolidations as a convenient solution to budgetary shortfalls<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, while funding agencies continue to favor interdisciplinarity, it does not necessarily facilitate academic hiring, as university positions remain largely tied to discipline-based departments<sup>15</sup>. Navigating between being "well-disciplined" and being "un-disciplined" is thus a precarious balance, especially for early-career researchers<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, for interdisciplinarity to be truly productive, it requires a deep understanding of the discrete disciplines it seeks to bring together, thus often making collaboration essential. Simply applying conceptual frameworks from other fields to a research subject is insufficient; as Jérôme Bourdon points out, this would be more accurately described as "inter-methodology"<sup>17</sup> or, in Harvey Graff's terms, "interdisciplinarity

within a discipline”<sup>18</sup>. Given that the definition of disciplines themselves is fluid, some scholars have advocated not only for “un-disciplinarity” but also for “anti-disciplinarity”<sup>19</sup>. This perspective seeks to clarify the conceptual confusion surrounding the term and its many variations (e.g., multi-disciplinarity, trans-disciplinarity, etc.) while recognizing that interdisciplinarity has always been an intrinsic part of the intellectual enterprise, as exemplified by institutions as venerable as the academies of ancient Greece and by projects as revolutionary as Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. Indeed, the frontispiece of the second folio edition of Diderot’s *L’Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers* presents a floating pantheon of the principal disciplines (as they were understood in the late eighteenth century), with a veiled figure of naked *Truth* presiding over a gathering of female personifications symbolizing the various *Sciences, Arts, and Crafts* (fig. 1)<sup>20</sup>. Among them is the figure of *Architecture*, its instruments prominently displayed near the center of the composition. In this allegorical assembly, the different disciplines – though clearly distinct – are shown clustering together, touching, and embracing one another, as if to call attention to the interconnected nature of the realms of knowledge they represent.

### Interdisciplinarity in architectural history

Architectural history has been actively engaged with many of the debates outlined above. Academic journals, which play a key role in shaping the field, began addressing the issue of interdisciplinarity over twenty years ago. They noted that architectural history had gradually expanded its focus beyond formal and stylistic issues to include the technical, social, political, and environmental dimensions of the built fabric. The parameters that define architectural history’s narratives and establish the legitimacy of its

sources ultimately determine the extent to which it draws upon other disciplines<sup>21</sup>. In this regard, the range of disciplines that architectural historians might engage with appears almost limitless, as Mario Carpo has noted<sup>22</sup>. Consequently, the debate revolves around how to define the field’s boundaries – which ultimately becomes a political question<sup>23</sup>. The core issue is no longer what other disciplines can contribute to architectural history but rather what architectural history can offer to other fields<sup>24</sup>.

When considering how interdisciplinarity may become part of a scholar’s operational toolkit, it is important to recognize that most methodological and writing decisions are not entirely premeditated but are molded by individual academic trajectories, the unpredictable contingencies of research, and the specific requirements of the subjects being studied. In fact, scholars across the field of architectural history often have little in common with each other in terms of training and methodology<sup>25</sup>. National academic cultures and the structure of available educational programs also significantly influence career paths<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the meaning of interdisciplinarity in architectural history varies depending on whether one has studied in an art history department or an architecture school – two academic cultures that are often contrasted. Likewise, each chronological, typological, and geographical specialization (e.g., ancient, modern, contemporary, digital, vernacular, African, Asian, or European architecture) has its own historiographical tradition that sets it apart from the others, sometimes quite sharply.

Today, the anxieties of the late twentieth century regarding the field’s “epistemological heterogeneity”<sup>27</sup> have largely subsided. The inherently interdisciplinary nature of architectural history is now seen less as a challenge and more as a catalyst for innovative and stimulating approaches to both studying architecture and understanding its

des fins d’inculcation, une gradation des traductions pédagogiques du corpus qui va du simple au complexe, et un programme d’enseignement qui forme [...] un ‘espace du programme’”. J.L. FABIANI, *À quoi sert la notion de discipline?*, in *Qu’est-ce qu’une discipline...* cit., pp. 11-34; par. 1 and 11.

<sup>11</sup> J. THOMPSON KLEIN, *A Taxonomy of Interdisciplinarity*, in *A History of Knowledge: Past, Present and Future*, edited by C.L. Van Doren, New York 1991, pp. 15-30.

<sup>12</sup> “On dirait en effet que l’interdisciplinaire dont on fait aujourd’hui une valeur forte de la recherche, ne peut s’accomplir par la simple confrontation de savoirs spéciaux; l’interdisciplinaire n’est pas de tout repos: il commence effectivement (et non par la simple émission d’un vœu pieux) lorsque la solidarité des anciennes disciplines se défait, peut-être même violemment à travers les secousses de la mode, au profit d’un objet nouveau, d’un langage nouveau, qui ne sont ni l’un ni l’autre dans le champ des sciences que l’on visait paisiblement à confronter; c’est précisément ce malaise de classification qui permet de diagnostiquer une certaine mutation”. R. BARTHES, *De l’œuvre au texte* [1971], in *Le Bruissement de la langue. Essais critique*, IV, Paris 2011, pp. 71-80: 71.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, W.J.T. MITCHELL, *Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture*, “Art Bulletin”, 77, 1995, 4, pp. 540-544: 540 (this is a special issue on interdisciplinarity); and GRAFF, *The ‘Problem’ of Interdisciplinarity...* cit.

<sup>14</sup> R. KRAUSS, *La mort des compétences*, in *Où va l’histoire de l’art contemporain*, actes du congrès (Paris, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 16-18 février 1995), sous la direction de L.B. Dorléac, Paris 1997, pp. 241-247: 243.

<sup>15</sup> R. FINI et al., *A New Take on the Categorical Imperative: Gatekeeping, Boundary Maintenance, and Evaluation Penalties in Science*, “Organization Science”, 34, 2022, 3, pp. 1090-1110, <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2022.1610> (last accessed 25 March 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Y. GINGRAS, *Formation fondamentale et multidisciplinarité à l’Université: rhétorique et réalité*, in *Entre culture, compétence et contenu. La formation fondamentale, un espace à redéfinir*, sous la direction de C. Gohier, S. Laurin, Montréal 2001, pp. 343-354: 348-349.

<sup>17</sup> J. BOURDON, *L’interdisciplinarité n’existe pas*, “Questions de Communication”, 19, 2011, pp. 155-170, <https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.2652> (last accessed 25 March 2025).

<sup>18</sup> GRAFF, *The ‘Problem’ of Interdisciplinarity...* cit., p. 800. See also H.J. GRAFF, *Undisciplining Knowledge: Interdisciplinarity in the Twentieth Century*, Baltimore 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Among the many studies that invoke the notion of “un-discipline”, see especially J.M. BESNIER, J. PERRIAULT, *Interdisciplinarité: entre disciplines et indisciplines*, “Hermès. La Revue”, 67, 2013, 3, <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-hermes-la-revue-2013-3?lang=fr> (last accessed 25 March 2025); L. LOTY, *Pour l’indisciplinarité*, in *The Interdisciplinary Century: Tensions and Convergences in 18th-century Art, History and Literature*, edited by J. Douthwaite, M. Vidal, Oxford 2005, pp. 245-259. For the idea of anti-disciplinarity, see in particular J. MOWITT, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, Durham 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Diderot’s explanation of the frontispiece reads: “Sous un Temple d’Architecture Ionique, Sanctuaire de la Vérité, on voit la Vérité enveloppée d’un voile, & rayonnante d’une lumière qui écarte les nuages & les disperse. / A droite de la Vérité, la Raison & la Philosophie s’occupent l’une à lever, l’autre à arracher le voile de la Vérité. / A ses pieds, la Théologie agenouillée reçoit sa lumière d’en-haut. / En suivant la chaîne des figures, on trouve du même côté la Mémoire, l’Histoire Ancienne & Moderne; l’Histoire écrit les fastes, & le Temps lui sert d’appui. / Au-dessous sont groupées la Géométrie, l’Astronomie & la Physique. / Les figures au-dessous de ce groupe, montrent l’Optique, la Botanique, la Chymie & l’Agriculture. / En bas sont plusieurs Arts & Professions qui

émanant des Sciences. / A gauche de la Vérité, on voit l'Imagination, qui se dispose à embellir & couronner la Vérité. / Au-dessous de l'Imagination, le Dessinateur a placé les différents genres de Poésie, Épique, Dramatique, Satyrique, Pastorale. / Ensuite viennent les autres Arts d'Imitation, la Musique, la Peinture, la Sculpture & l'Architecture". D. DIDEROT, J.B. LE ROND D'ALEMBERT, *L'Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers*, Geneva 1777-1779 (2<sup>nd</sup> in-folio ed.), frontispiece explanation.

<sup>21</sup> D.M. ABRAMSON, Z.C. ALEXANDER, M. OSMAN, *Introduction: Evidence, Narrative, and Writing Architectural History*, in *Writing Architectural History: Evidence and Narrative in the Twenty-First Century*, Pittsburgh 2021, pp. 3-16.

<sup>22</sup> M. CARPO, *Architecture: Theory, Interdisciplinarity, and Methodological Eclecticism*, "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians", 64, 2005, 4, pp. 425-427.

<sup>23</sup> A. PICON, *Repenser les limites de l'architecture : un acte politique*, in *Repenser les limites : l'architecture à travers l'espace, le temps et les disciplines*, édité par A. Thomine-Berrada, B. Bergdol, Paris 2005, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.inha.2034> (last accessed 27 March 2025); D. HARRIS, *That's Not Architectural History! Or What's a Discipline For?*, "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians", 70, 2011, 2, pp. 149-152.

<sup>24</sup> N. STIEBER, *Architecture between Disciplines*, "Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians", 62, 2003, 2, pp. 176-177. See also *À quoi sert l'histoire de l'architecture aujourd'hui?*, sous la direction de R. Klein, Paris 2018.

<sup>25</sup> *Être historien de l'architecture dans la France des XXe et XXIe siècles. Des Ego-histoires et des Vies*, sous la direction de A. Timbert, Turnhout 2023.

<sup>26</sup> *Report on the international Symposium of the Technische Universität Dresden at the Accademia Nazionale di San Luca in Rome, in cooperation with the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris Sciences & Lettres University: 'The history of architectural history. The genesis and development of a scientific discipline between national perspectives and European models'* (Rome, 8 and 9 November 2022), "Journal of Art Historiography", 27, 2022, pp. 1-31. <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/karge-frommel-walter-report.pdf> (last accessed 26 March 2025).

<sup>27</sup> F. HAMON, W. SZAMBIEN, *Qui a peur de l'histoire de l'architecture?*, "Histoire de l'Art", 31, 1995, pp. 3-13, <https://doi.org/10.3406/hista.1995.2669> (last accessed 25 March 2025); P. BOURDON, *Pourquoi l'histoire de l'architecture ferait-elle peur?*, "Histoire de l'Art", 33-34, 1996, pp. 91-92.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*, edited by D. Arnold, E.A. Ergut, B.T. Özkaya, New York 2006; A. LEACH, *What is Architectural History?*, Cambridge 2010.

<sup>29</sup> HAMON, SZAMBIEN, *Qui a peur...* cit., p. 12. The material, spatial, and conceptual aspects of architecture can themselves play a role in stimulating interdisciplinarity in academic contexts, as argued in F. LI VIGNI, *Architecture et interdisciplinarité. Le cas d'étude des instituts de la complexité*, "Natures Sciences Sociétés", 28, 2020, 3-4, pp. 306-313, <https://doi.org/10.1051/nss/2021005> (last accessed 25 March 2025).

history<sup>28</sup>. Rather than deepening the divide between 'practitioners' and 'historians', interdisciplinarity can serve as a unifying force. It has the potential to create a more inclusive, collaborative, and experimental "science of architecture"<sup>29</sup>, one that embraces a broader range of perspectives, methodologies, and participants, thus ensuring the field's continual renewal<sup>30</sup>.

This volume aims to contribute to these ongoing discussions by offering a broad – and by no means exhaustive – 'snapshot' of interdisciplinarity in architectural history today. Rather than advocating for or against it, the volume demonstrates how intersections with select other fields – from environmental studies, to digital humanities – have expanded architectural history's methodological scope and reshaped its research priorities. To avoid superficiality and steer clear of the rhetorical pitfalls often associated with the concept, the editors have sought to address both the historiographical and applied dimensions of interdisciplinarity while also engaging in a critical reflection on their own research practices.

### Navigating the field

The collection of essays included in this issue of *Opus Incertum* took shape through a rigorous selection process and extensive discussions – not only about the subjects explored by the authors but, more importantly, about the approaches they adopted and the ways in which they interpreted our call for papers. The volume reflects a wide-ranging and diverse spectrum of engagements with the notion of interdisciplinarity, which vary according to the chronological and geographical contexts examined. In the course of putting this issue together, the peer-review phase proved especially critical, serving as a catalyst for dialogue and debate that allowed the authors' ideas to evolve and deepen throughout the revision process. The final product reinforces the opening statement of our call for papers, which recognized the variety of potential inter-

pretations of the very concept we wished to interrogate<sup>31</sup>. Some of the questions we initially posed resonated strongly with the scholars who responded to the call, while others – such as the role of critical theory, feminist perspectives, the history of construction, and considerations of different national traditions – remained more marginal. Nevertheless, the fourteen selected essays engage with many of the central themes we had hoped to highlight: post-colonial approaches; the dialogue with environmental history; the impact of digital technologies; the definition of both material and immaterial histories of architecture; the problematization of architectural representation and its relationship with visual studies; the evolution of the traditional model of the monograph; and the role of collaborative research as a driving force of interdisciplinarity. Some authors explicitly linked their papers to specific themes raised in the call from the very opening of their essays. For instance, Joseph Siry directly addressed one of the central questions posed: "Is the growing interest in hyper-contemporaneity a problem or an opportunity for the architectural historian? Are there chronological limits that should not be crossed to preserve the necessary critical distance or is the study of hyper-contemporaneity a stimulating challenge that could lead to methodological innovations and open new interdisciplinary horizons in the field?". The reference here to the importance we placed on collaborative and interconnected research was explored by Siry through a historiographical consideration of contemporary design practices, in this case those associated with the concept of 'integrated design' in the realm of sustainable architecture, where architects, engineers, contractors, and clients, work together "to combine both passive material and active mechanical systems in larger buildings that aspire to be green or energy-conserving".

The volume as a whole presents a polyphonic picture of how architectural history today inter-

sects with other disciplinary fields and grapples with the question of interdisciplinarity. This is evident not only in the essays dealing with historiography, but also in those developed around objects (i.e., drawings, prints, buildings) and working methods that draw on diverse areas of expertise both outside and within the field of architecture, which is itself inherently trans-disciplinary. In this regard, the essay by Giusi Ciotoli and Marco Falsetti merits particular attention. Through a comparative analysis of the Western notion of architecture and the Japanese concept of *kenchiku*, the authors underscore the relevance of a non-Eurocentric historiographical approach to the study of interdisciplinarity in architecture. Their inquiry extends into the postwar Japanese context, with particular emphasis on the theoretical production of architects trained within the school of Kenzo Tange, such as Arata Isozaki.

In this issue of *Opus Incertum*, moreover, the pairing of interdisciplinarity and architectural history unfolds with varying degrees of complexity in response to the “challenges of interdisciplinarity” that extend beyond the *hortus conclusus* of architectural culture. These degrees of complexity readily dissolve the binary division of the volume’s table of contents into two broad categories, Forms of Narration and Historiography, instead inviting a fluid reconfiguration of the order in which the papers were presented in favor of other, equally valid ways of organizing the interdisciplinary dialogues they explore. Such alternative structures, one of which is delineated in the paragraphs that follow, can be easily imagined because of the heterogeneous nature of the methods and study materials examined in this collection. Indeed, those methods and materials serve as fertile experimental ground that offers multiple pathways through the concept of interdisciplinarity depending on the different scales of observation employed by the contributors<sup>32</sup>.

To begin, a dialogue with adjacent disciplinary fields emerges from within the discipline of architectural history itself. Sim Hinman Wan’s essay situates interdisciplinarity in architectural historiography in a broader historiographical framework, addressing global history from perspectives that range from postcolonial critique to ecocritical approaches, while acknowledging the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the former. His analysis moves from a historical reading of the Anthropocene to a decolonialized history of ecology to suggest that a truly ‘planetary’ history of architecture would benefit from engaging more deeply with some of the questions central to those fields. Reflecting on the evolution of chronological architectural surveys, Wan argues that such a ‘planetary’ approach must consider “the built environments in their ecological contexts”, recognizing them as both “historically specific” and closely interconnected with “other architectural variables”.

Other authors focus specifically on the relationship between architectural history and distinct yet interconnected disciplinary areas. Carlo Tosco, for example, explores the interaction between architectural and landscape histories through the concept of “comparative historiographies”, focusing on a case study of the Clitunno Springs in Umbria. Landscape history, a relatively young discipline that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, finds a key figure in postwar Italy in Emilio Sereni, the originator of the concept of the historical ‘agricultural landscape’. Tosco differentiates landscape history from environmental history, framing the former as a form of cultural history that analyzes territorial transformations using parameters that intersect with those applied to the study of architectural changes. In his reading, landscape history is a history “that stands out for its reading of the relationships established over time between settled populations and their environments”. Similarly, Joseph Siry structures his historiographical contribution around an encounter between

<sup>30</sup> For some of these ideas, see I. DOUCET, N. JANSSENS, *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism: Towards Hybrid Modes of Inquiry*, Dordrecht 2021; *Interdisciplinary Design Thinking in Architecture Education*, edited by J.J.Y. Kim, Abingdon 2024, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003296355> (last accessed 25 March 2025).

<sup>31</sup> “It is nearly impossible to define the discipline of architectural history in simple terms today. The field has become pluralistic and fragmented, marked by multi-, trans-, inter-, and even anti-disciplinarity”. <https://journals.fupress.net/call-for-paper/architectural-history-and-the-challenges-of-interdisciplinarity> (last accessed 15 January 2025).

<sup>32</sup> On this question, see *Jeux d’échelles. La micro-analyse à l’expérience*, sous la direction de J. Revel, Paris 1996.



two clearly defined disciplinary fields: architectural history – specifically the history of modern architecture – and the history of energy use and environmental controls, building on the early investigations by pioneering scholars such as Reyner Banham. A comparable approach also characterizes Marie-Madeleine Ozdoba’s exploration of the relationship between architectural history and visual studies. Drawing on methodological models that range from Ernst Gombrich’s theories to more recent perspectives, such as those of Gottfried Böhm, Ozdoba cautions against reducing architecture to a mere visual medium and instead mobilizes concepts from visual studies such as “écologie des images” (image ecology), “pouvoir de la représentation” (power of representation), and “performance des images” (performativity of images).

A substantial portion of the contributions in this volume explore interdisciplinarity through an engagement with specific research ‘objects’ and case studies, which provide concrete opportunities to identify and test potential interdisciplinary pathways<sup>33</sup>. Here, the question of the research object and its multiple scales – from the micro, to the macro – emerges as a central driver of interdisciplinary inquiry<sup>34</sup>. Two particularly compelling examples at the smaller scale focus on the analysis of drawings and prints. Maria Cristina Loi, building on her ongoing investigation of early modern and contemporary architectural drawings, examines four very different case studies. These range from a well-known study drawing by Francesco Borromini for the plan of the chapel of the Magi in the palazzo di Propaganda Fide in Rome to a less familiar sketch by the Spanish architect Rafael Moneo for his Kursaal project in San Sebastián. Through these examples, Loi reflects on architectural drawing as both an expression of multiple competencies and a tool serving diverse purposes, describing it as an “interdisciplinary laboratory of architectural history”. In contrast, Carolyn Yerkes discusses monumental

prints depicting the final military campaigns of Charles V in the mid-sixteenth century, which led to the creation of some of the largest encampments ever built. These little-known images provide a compelling lens for assessing the impact of siege warfare on all aspects of early modern daily life. Focusing on what she terms “the architecture of attrition”, Yerkes brings architectural history in dialogue with a constellation of related disciplines, including military history, urban history, the history of technology, and cartography. A double shift in scale – expanding to the level of urban and rural territories – emerges from the interdisciplinary research of Charlotte Duvette and Alessandra Panico, which spans, respectively, from a Parisian district to the rural landscape of the Val di Susa in Piedmont. Duvette, as part of a recent research project at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (INHA) in Paris, presents a multifaceted cultural history of architecture through her analysis of a Parisian neighborhood between the palais Royal and the place de la Bourse, focusing on its transformation from the mid-eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Duvette’s approach relies on a variety of visual, cartographic, and textual sources and is structured around two key historiographical models. The first, the ‘spatial turn’, leads to an understanding of the neighborhood as an intersection of places, socio-economic processes, and professional and personal networks. The second, the integration of digital technologies like GIS, allows for a more nuanced analysis of the spatial and cultural dynamics of the district. Duvette’s work exemplifies the fruitful dialogue between architectural history and disciplines such as urban history, art history, geography, and digital humanities. Panico’s study, on the other hand, examines the relationship between humans and their environment, leading to a multidisciplinary investigation that incorporates ecology, environmental history, and climate science. Her study of landscapes and their transformations over time necessitates a plurality of approaches, which inevitably coa-

<sup>33</sup> On the use of case studies as a methodological tool, see in particular *Penser par cas*, sous la direction de J.C. Passeron, J. Revel, Paris 2005 (esp. pp. 9-44), <https://books.openedition.org/editionshess/19901?lang=en> (last accessed 31 March 2025).

<sup>34</sup> Issues of scale in architecture and architectural history are the subject of a recent conference at Harvard’s GSD, <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/event/cambridge-talks-acts-of-scaling/> (last accessed 8 April 2025), as well as the volume *Collaborations, collaborazioni*, “Studi e Ricerche di Storia dell’Architettura”, IX, 17, 2025, 1, <https://www.aistarch.org/studi-e-ricerche-di-storia-dellarchitettura-numero-17-2025/> (last accessed 8 August 2025).

lesce into an interdisciplinary framework. One key method in landscape studies – and particularly in analyzing architectural structures – is regressive analysis. Building on Carlo Tosco's work, Panicco applies this approach to a broader territorial scale. She reconstructs the multi-dimensional evolution of the Susa Valley in Piedmont, moving from the most recent phases to the earliest. Similar to Tosco's analysis of the temple and springs at Clitunno, her study of the church of Madonna del Ponte in Susa – now home to the Museo Diocesano di Arte Sacra – provides an opportunity to trace the building's transformations in relation to climate events documented in archival sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. This category of contributions – those that begin with a specific object or theme before expanding into interdisciplinary dialogue – also includes the essays by Aliaksandr Shuba and Marie-Luce Pujalte-Fraysse. Both authors emphasize the socio-cultural dimensions of architectural networks, albeit in two vastly different historical contexts. Shuba's research spotlights the international working group 'History of Urbanism and Construction in Historic Cities', which played a pivotal role in shaping architectural and urban planning history in state socialist countries during the immediate post-WWII period. The group articulated new methodologies and priorities for these fields, as well as for addressing restoration and monument preservation practices. At the same time, it initiated international discussions and debates aimed at bridging the growing divide between architectural theory and practice – an issue that remains highly relevant for contemporary architectural historians and their interdisciplinary pursuits. Pujalte-Fraysse's paper takes us back two centuries to the case study of the French architect Jean-Arnaud Raymond, questioning the ongoing relevance of the traditional monographic approach centered on a single architect. Rather than privileging the individual, Pujalte-Fraysse redirects attention to the pro-

fessional and intellectual community to which Raymond belonged – a *koine* of architects who shared formative experiences and professional practices within a common cultural, socio-economic, and political context. With this slight adjustment in focus, the architectural monograph itself reemerges as a potential conduit for interdisciplinarity.

Beyond the different interpretations of interdisciplinarity arising from the various research subjects, it is also crucial to consider an architectural historian's working method as a fundamental tool for developing an interdisciplinary perspective through a critical reassessment of the disciplinary boundaries within which the field operates. Three contributions – by Emmanuel Château-Dutier, Gianmario Guidarelli, and Nele De Raedt *et alii* – offer a compelling cross-section of methodological considerations that open innovative paths to interdisciplinary inquiry. Château-Dutier's paper explores the methodological impact of applying discourse analysis to architectural texts. He provides a historiographical overview of the relationship between language and architecture, while also examining the use of digital tools for processing manuscript texts on architecture. Tracing the development of automated text processing, Château-Dutier highlights how Automatic Text Recognition (ATR) enables the structuring of digital texts from manuscript images. This technology allows researchers to process large collections of handwritten architectural documents – such as critical essays, correspondence, and administrative records – thereby enhancing both accessibility to these materials and their subsequent analysis. His paper explains that architectural history has become a key component of digital humanities through the use of software interfaces that collect vast amounts of annotated data and generate highly effective handwriting recognition models.

Guidarelli offers a different yet complementa-



ry perspective, exploring how digital technologies themselves can promote interdisciplinarity. As discussed in his essay, these technologies provide collaborative platforms where researchers from various fields – including architectural history, art history, archaeology, and conservation – can investigate common research questions, even when approaching them from very different disciplinary positions. A significant development today is that digital tools are no longer used primarily for visualizing research results; they function on a more structural level, as operational frameworks for interdisciplinary exploration. In this regard, they have become indispensable not only for data processing but also for methodological experimentation. Digital technologies, in fact, provide a basis for testing new research protocols capable of simultaneously transforming both the epistemological approach and the narrative methods in architectural history. To demonstrate the practical application of these ideas, Guidarelli presents the “CoenoB(i)UM” project, an ongoing research initiative in which the innovative use of Building Information Modeling (BIM) generates digital architectural models integral to the research process. Bibliographic data and archival sources related to a network of Cassinese Benedictine monasteries are systematically compared with other forms of documentation (visual, material, etc.), allowing for the seamless integration of multidisciplinary expertise from the different members of the research group.

The practical application of this type of collaboration also comes to the forefront in the essay co-authored by Nele De Raedt, Anne-Françoise Morel, Ralph Dekoninck, Renaud Pleitinx, Cécile Chanvillard, and Agnès Guiderdoni, which opens this volume. Their paper is the product of genuine teamwork, centered on a single research subject: the Désert de Marlagne, a site near Namur, Belgium, distinguished by its

complex topographical, hydrographic, and landscape diversity. The project brings together researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, further demonstrating that collaboration and methodological experimentation are both intrinsic to interdisciplinary inquiry. However, they also represent some of the defining challenges of interdisciplinarity – challenges that present both opportunities and limitations. De Raedt and colleagues offer an epistemological and methodological reflection on the conditions necessary for developing a successful collaborative research project, with the aim of defining the architectural historian’s role alongside specialists from other fields. Two observations from their paper stand out as particularly illuminating: “Interdisciplinarity”, the authors write, “can challenge the identity of the disciplines involved and thus pose a critical challenge to them. However, an interdisciplinary collaboration that respects autonomy and values the expertise of each discipline can also provide an opportunity to clarify their objectives and examine the porous boundaries of their knowledge”. They further emphasize: “It is, in a sense, about investing in these border zones, as they allow for the exploration of all spaces of passage, transfer, transition, and movement”. The team goes to the heart of the matter when they assert that “the added value of interdisciplinarity does not correspond to an increase in certainty but rather consists of an experience of uncertainty – temporarily disorienting, yet methodologically necessary to achieve what one might call an augmented historical reality”. If this issue of *Opus Incertum* has succeeded in capturing some of the paths and modalities for constructing this “augmented historical reality” in architectural history, then we, as editors, have fully achieved the objective we set for this publication.

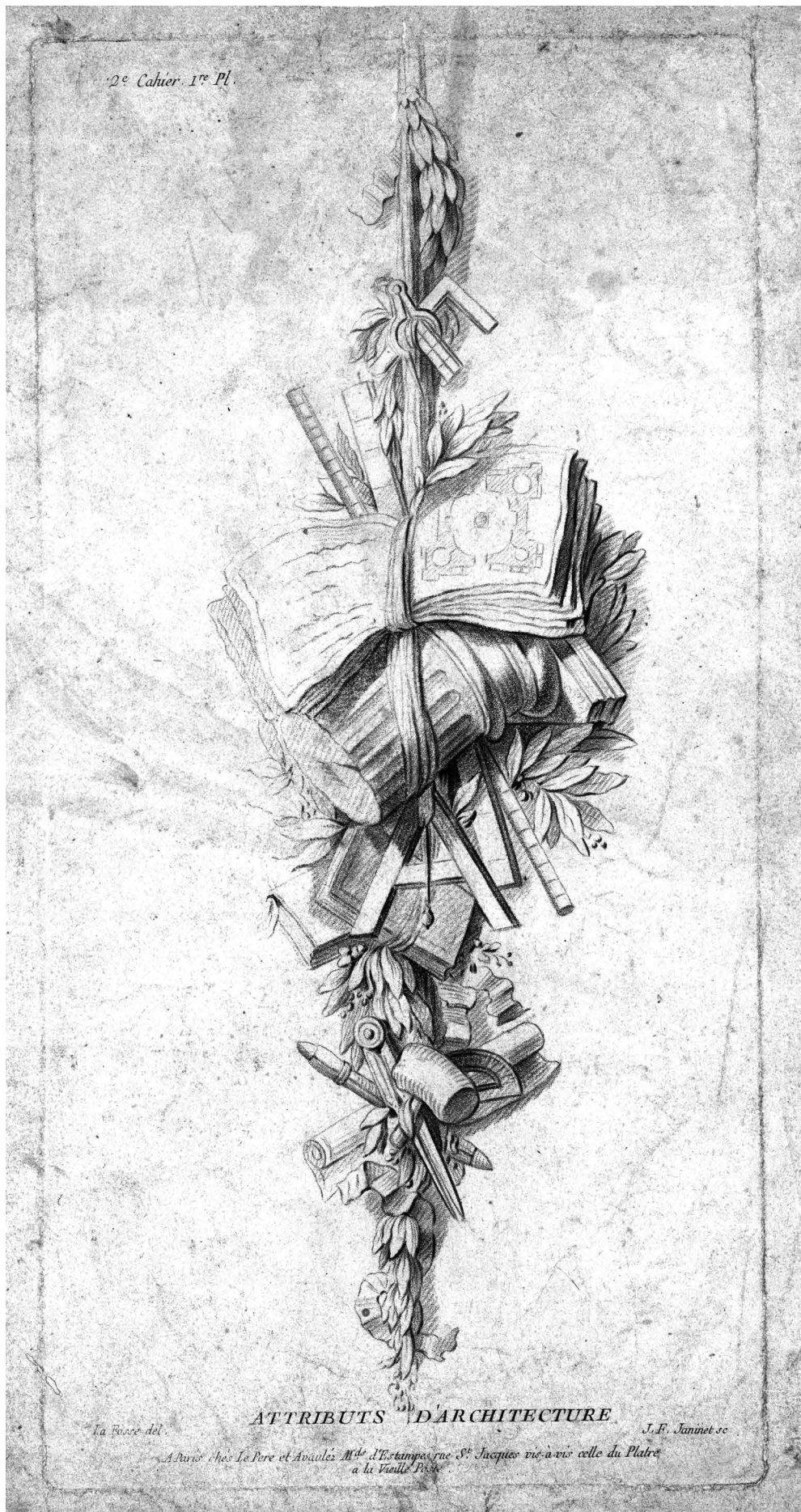


Fig. 2 J.-F. Janinet (after J.-C. Delafosse), *Attributs d'architecture*, 1772-1779 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1964-4255; public domain).