

## Notes from the field

Most British local authorities require, as a part of a planning application, a plan at 1:1250 that shows the site outlined in red. Yet all parties concerned – architects, planners and clients – recognise that this represents a superficial idea of site. They know that there are broader relations which require thinking about the context of a project beyond the red line, considering prospect, aspect, building-lines and local building uses, as well as the social, economic and historical contexts involved. As Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn write in *Site Matters*, the idea of site ‘simultaneously refers to seemingly opposite ideas: a physically specific place and a spatially and temporally specific ground’.<sup>1</sup> They note the variety of words used to describe site – including place, context, property, ground, situation and setting – that are not precisely equivalent but tend to be used interchangeably. At a conference held in Edinburgh in 2009, it was proposed that another word – ‘field’ – should be added to this list. Organised by the University of Edinburgh and the Architectural Humanities Research Association, the conference explored the multiple meanings of the idea of ‘field’ in relation to architecture.

Suzanne Ewing, the Conference Chair, reflects on these multiple meanings in her review of the event (pp. 309–11). ‘Field’ can describe a plot of land outlined in red on a plan. But it can also refer to a less physically delimited and more culturally- and historically-determined idea of site, to the fieldwork practices of anthropologists, geographers and archaeologists, and to the assertion of professional and disciplinary fields (for example, the fields of architecture and planning). The papers from the event collected in this issue of *arq* carry out different kinds of ‘fieldwork’, reflecting this multiple interpretation of ‘field’. Beginning with two articles not presented in Edinburgh, Helen Mallinson reports from Peter Zumthor’s Serpentine Pavilion in London (pp. 304–8), and three academic practitioners – Christopher Platt, Alan Pert and Gordon Murray – recount how their house designs have emerged from particular interpretations of coastal conditions (pp. 312–26). Stephen Walker reads the practices of the *Anarchitecture* group, bridging the fields of art and architecture, in relation to Rosalind Krauss’s notion of ‘expanded field’ (pp. 347–57). Peter Kellett reflects on twenty-five years of anthropological and architectural fieldwork at an informal settlement, Santa Marta, in Colombia (pp. 341–6). Florian Kossak explores how an architect’s way of life – his or her *Tagwerk* – might inspire their practice, with reference to the farm work and design work of German architect and teacher Otto Steidle (pp. 327–40). And in a study of Clifton Cathedral, Robert Proctor examines fieldwork in the design process by linking liturgy in the church to ‘anthropologies of ritual’ (pp. 359–72).

Professional and academic fields are expanding and shifting, with a proliferation of specialist consultants and new disciplines involved in making buildings and doing academic research. Much of the most creative work, however, happens in the gaps and overlaps between these specialist fields. Professionals and academics usually work remotely from their sites and it is important to remember how their fieldwork practices influence the work they produce. The papers collected here offer an important reminder to participants in the architectural field to engage with ‘the field’ in intensive and creative ways, using their design intelligence, critical faculties and life experience to make the most of the rich and diverse contexts in which they work.

THE EDITORS

1. Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn, *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories, and Strategies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. xiii.