

# NEW MODES OF CRITICISM

At a certain point in the production of each issue of the magazine, there's a flurry of activity on Twitter signalling the arrival of the previous issue on desks near and far. You tell us what you like. You tell us what you don't like. You tell us what could make the magazine better / smarter / funnier / more correct / more interesting / more rigorous.

The feedback is so quick, so honest – there is a sense of authenticity in its immediacy and in its unmediated, un-spell-checked rawness. It's not always complimentary – but we love it all the same. When readers feel compelled to comment – whether praising or criticizing – it enlivens the idea of “readership” from a banal statistic to a very real community of individual voices who are all reading about, thinking about and speaking about architecture.

Though it's not necessarily a new idea, this chorus of voices is the essential character of online publishing – it pivots traditional media models away from singular authoritative sources to a wild cacophony of opinion, comment, critique, debate and analysis. And this ready access to an engaged audience enables – forces, even – a new democracy in publishing.

A case in point is the recent national conference *Natural Artifice* (page 61). Twitter was alive with conversation during the three days of the conference – and not just discrete comments but fascinating dialogue, as delegates dissected the ideas, themes and possibilities presented. Whether you were in attendance or not, the critique was enthralling. In this spirit, we were keen to capture a range of voices in our coverage of the conference: alongside our longer reviews, we've published a (very small) handful of tweets. These voices are distinctive, sincere, thoughtful and provocative.

As our conference reviewers note, the very notion of criticism appeared in numerous different ways during the conference sessions – whether attendees critiquing the sessions they attended, or presenters critiquing the quality of questions delivered by the audience. In the case of the Young Architects Forum, it was the appropriateness of criticism that was called into question in an uncertain format.

Saying that, all this conversation about new modes of criticism – whether of architecture or culture more generally – offered by the web infers that the old modes are ready for retirement. This is too simplistic a conclusion. Architecture critic and historian Ada Louise Huxtable gave a very lucid précis of the role of the architectural critic in an essay for the *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*: “The critic of architecture must ... be a decoder, demystifier and debunker; a guide to values and meanings as well as to technology and aesthetics, a link between past and present” (“Architecture Criticism,” Vol 134 No 4, 1990).

This multifaceted role is the one Andrew Metcalf tackles in his position as critic in residence at BVN Architecture. Simon Sellars's exploration of this pioneering model (page 27) suggests that the old models of criticism, rather than being laid to rest, might be reborn as something new.

It's an interesting program with a twofold objective – first, to build studio culture; and second, to keep the team thinking about architecture while they're busy making it. Intrinsic to this program is an appreciation of the value of criticism and its ability to challenge and inspire, to push an idea beyond its initial boundaries.

The program is still in its infancy. We watch with interest to see how it evolves.

*Peter Davies, Managing Editor*

Follow *Architecture Australia* at [twitter.com/ArchAusMag](https://twitter.com/ArchAusMag)

Selected articles in *Architecture Australia* may be eligible for Institute CPD points.

See [www.continuum.com.au](http://www.continuum.com.au).

## ARCHITECTURE AUSTRALIA

Editorial director  
Cameron Bruhn

Commissioning editor  
Justine Clark

Managing editor  
Peter Davies

Subeditor  
Susannah Buckley

Art direction  
Andrew Nimmo

Production  
Simone Wall

## Institute advisory committee

Richard Crawford  
Geoffrey London  
Carey Lyon  
Shane Murray  
Sean McEntee  
Anthony Balsamo

## Contributing editors

Shaneen Fantin  
Philip Goldswain  
Laura Harding  
John Macarthur  
Andrew Nimmo  
Ceridwen Owen  
Naomi Stead  
Kerstin Thompson  
Paul Walker

## Contributing photographers

Peter Bennetts  
Matt Browne  
Robert Frith  
Ben Hosking  
Felix Lacoste  
Trevor Mein  
Alexander Suen

## Managing director

Ian Close

Publisher  
Sue Harris

Associate publisher, audience acquisition and events  
Jacinta Reedy

Associate publisher, magazines  
Jan Henderson

## Advertising enquiries

Vic, SA & Tas  
Samantha Edel  
Gillian Lazaro  
T +61 (0)3 8699 1000  
F +61 (0)3 9696 2617  
NSW, Qld, ACT & NT  
Victoria Hawthorne  
Lana Golubinsky  
T +61 (0)2 9380 7000  
F +61 (0)2 9380 7600

WA

O'Keefe Media:  
Licia Salomone  
T +61 (0)8 9381 7590  
F +61 (0)8 9382 4850

Architecture Media Pty Ltd  
ACN 008 626 686

Level 6,  
163 Eastern Road  
South Melbourne  
Victoria 3205  
T +61 (0)3 8699 1000  
F +61 (0)3 9696 2617  
aa@archmedia.com.au  
www.archmedia.com.au

Level 2,  
3 Manning Street  
Potts Point NSW 2011  
T +61 (0)2 9380 7000  
F +61 (0)2 9380 7600

## Production

Printing:  
GEON, Queensland

Prepress: Optimo

## Subscriptions

Annual subscriptions (six issues):  
\$A74 Australia/NZ  
\$A124 Asia/Pacific air  
\$A129 rest of the world air (Australian currency)

From:  
Level 6,  
163 Eastern Road  
South Melbourne  
Victoria 3205 or  
[www.architecturemedia.com/secure](http://www.architecturemedia.com/secure)

## Distribution

Australia, newsagents:  
Gordon & Gotch

Australia, bookshops:  
Eight Point  
Distribution

International:  
Eight Point  
Distribution

Member Circulations  
Audit Board  
Audited circulation  
15,388 copies

ISSN 0003-8725

© 2011, Architecture Media Pty Ltd

*Architecture Australia* is the official magazine of the Australian Institute of Architects. The Institute is not responsible for statements or opinions expressed in *Architecture Australia*, nor do such statements necessarily express the views of the Institute or its committees, except where content is explicitly identified as Australian Institute of Architects matter.

Architecture Media Pty Ltd is an associate company of the Australian Institute of Architects  
7 National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600