

THE LATENT PEDAGOGY OF THE ARCHIZINE

Architecture fanzines - known as 'archizines' – provide a vehicle through which students can critically reflect upon their learning experience and/or discuss emergent or even 'radical' issues that are often absent from the usual suite of academic and trade journals. For students in particular, the archizine often provides the only space in which their concerns are articulated. This paper will seek to define the latent pedagogy of the archizine – and consider the unrecognised value of this vital vehicle for achieving learning, empowerment, critical and inclusive discourse and interdisciplinary collaboration.

'Like architecture, DIY publishing comes burdened by physicality. In a strange twist of fate, however, it is the distribution network of little magazines that unburdens architecture.' Mimi Zeiger, *Loud Paper* 4(4) [1]

Architecture fanzines - known as 'archizines' – provide a vehicle through which students and professionals can critically reflect upon their learning experience and/or discuss emergent issues that are often absent from the usual suite of academic and trade publications & journals (Redstone, 2012) [2]. There are 78 post-millennial archizines in existence at the time of writing [3], which suggests that this is a genre and format that has enduring appeal. The long and diverse chronology of archizines has been effectively captured within two exhibitions: 'Clip/Stamp/Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines' (Columina 2010) [4], which focuses upon the archizines of the 1960's and: 'A Few Zines: Dispatches from the Edge of Architectural Production,' (Loudpaper, 2009) [5] which explores the interdisciplinary influences within architectural zines during the 1990's [6]. Whilst the millennial rise of online communications have lured some archizine producers away from the traditional (and often more costly) printed medium, printed literature has recently experienced a renaissance [7,8], renewing the appeal of the 'object-ness' of these hand-made, often photocopied and stapled artefacts. For students in particular, the archizine often provides the only space in which their concerns are articulated; concerns that both academia and practice-oriented publications often seem to entirely ignore (Berman, Z. 2013:2) [9]. As Nina Shen-Poblete, founder of 'event based live fanzine' Black Grout observed (2013) 'archizines are often a reaction to a lack of critical engagement in the profession, disjunctions between education and practice and an elitism in architectural discourse, (Shen-Poblete, 2013) [10]. Indeed, many archizines address these agendas through geographies, typologies, formats or themes (Berman, Z. 2013) [11] as a means to ensure that their content addresses a point of conflict. The chosen agenda for this paper

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concerns the way in which archizines address points of conflict in education – for example, where school value systems, what constitutes knowledge, design studio issues, or curricula content or delivery are being contested, and the pedagogic implications of such acts - a subject that has not been previously reflected upon within architectural literature. Subsequently, this paper seeks to address this gap in knowledge by providing an overview of the nature of archizine-specific, student-generated pedagogy and; examine the extent to which fanzines are tacitly aligned with established learning theories. Furthermore, this paper seeks to substantiate the claim that archizines play a vital pedagogic and practical role in offering more than a basic understanding of contemporary architectural theory and practice - and instead – offer more inclusive, empowering and societally responsive ideas and discourse than conventional academia and trade publications (Freire, 1968) [12].

Methodologically, five archizine case studies are scrutinised, focussing particularly upon student-initiated or engaged archizines: **NATO** (Narrative Architecture Today), (1983-86) **Fulcrum** (2011-14), **2ha** (2013 – on-going), **Archigrille** (1999-2000) and **Pollen** (2001 - 03). Each of these case studies is chosen on the basis that they exemplify the defining characteristics of the archizine genre. The latter two were produced by the author during her student years. The decision to include these somewhat subjective archizines was intended as a means to incorporate auto-ethnographic [13] research methods into this enquiry and provide an interesting counterpoint the traditional methodologies used to examine the independent archizines.

Fig. 1. Cover and front page of NATO.
Source: Image courtesy of Mark Prizeman (NATØ)



NATØ (Narrative Architecture Today)

NATØ emerged from the Architectural Association School Unit 10 in 1983 and was active until 1987. It's name was ironically appropriated from the original acronym for *Northern Atlantic Treaty Organisation* – UK Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's Cold War defence team, whose intention was, "to safeguard the freedom and security of its member states", (Castle, 2005) [14]. Arguably,

NATØ was similarly concerned with ‘freedoms’, but these were creative, and explored through mixed drawings, photographs, writings, collage and montages from others magazines and even performances and live events, drawing inspiration from ‘zines’ and other radical publishing practices in literature, music (Jameison, 2014)[15]. Indeed, in much the same way that interdisciplinary pedagogy has been described as a, ‘formation that confounds the disciplines and creates a vacuum of institutional context,’ (Penny, 2009)[16], so too did NATØ. Furthermore, NATØ was written within what Martin Kreiswirth called the ‘narrativist decade’, whereby, ‘narrative, like “grand” or “meta” concepts such as “language” or “reason,” has begun to leave the reflected light of specific disciplinary, institutional, or methodological arenas and become a source of illuminary convergence,’ (Kreiswirth, 1992, p.630) [17]. Similarly, the convergent nature of narrativism aligns with recent literature concerning the narrative nature of pedagogical content knowledge within interdisciplinary learning, and its ability to order to an otherwise chaotic curriculum (Gudmundsdottir,1991)[18]. In effect, NATØ were using narrative to make architectures ‘chaotic’ ‘disciplinary & institutional’ methods and processes make sense – drawing inspiration from art, fashion, pop music and nightclubs. As Castle highlighted, ‘NATØ’s urban design and consumer spaces have so seamlessly entered received knowledge, that its influence has been denied’, (Castle, 2005) [19]. Ultimately however, NATØ’s sense of zeitgeist – described by Villanueva-Brandt as a “largely responsive” (and by implication unstable) nature - may have propelled toward its downfall (Castle, 2005) [20]. Yet, it was NATØ’s ability to ‘make sense’ of the interdisciplinary practices underpinning the Post-Modern rhetoric of the time that positions it as one of the most salient commentaries of that period of architecture, and a lens through which to examine the ‘chaos’ of interdisciplinary pedagogy too.

Fulcrum

The next case study presented for consideration is Fulcrum, founded by architecture students Jack Self, Graham Baldwin and Aram Mooradian and published weekly from 2011 to 2014 at the Architectural Association School in London. Fulcrum’s design was ‘based on the idea of a pivot – a line drawn down the centre of the page, on either sides of which two articles sit and discuss a particular topic’ (Self, J. 2013) [21], with the reverse of the page featuring an indicative illustration or image. Its intention was to address, ‘the agency of the architect as a construct in the late neo-liberal economic model,’ (Self, J. 2013) [22], and to challenge to the lack of engagement between the AA students and the outside world (Dutton, R. 2014) [23]. Pedagogically, it provided a critique of the economic forces influencing practice and their influence on education and in effect shared the educators burden of responsibility in opposing neo-liberalism, by bringing democratic political culture back to life,’ (Giroux, 2011, p.73) [24]. Whilst churn within the editorial team combined with the size and frequency of the editions highlighted its instability, its lack of curricula or credit-driven preoccupation manifested as a thematic agility more able to respond to emergent concerns, such as the Occupy movement of 2012 (issues 32-37). It was also notable for creating an equal platform for discussion between students and staff, often using the vertical divide down the centre of the page as a means to pair an established academic or writer with a student - without giving either primacy. Aside from the democratising outcomes, this approach encapsulates the best of autodidactic or student-led pedagogy (Michael, 2008) [25]. It also enabled students to propose and direct - and not just absorb or react against – established thinking. The frequency of publication and coherency of the agenda led Fulcrum to be one of the most successful and influential archizines: at one point, it had over 7000 online readers [26]. Of all the recommended academic texts imposed upon students in their course reading lists, one wonders how many have achieved this level of popularity, or inspired as many imitators. The potential for archizine influence over curricula should not therefore be underestimated.

2ha

Irish archizine 2ha works with architects, academics and artists to create work that both examines and re-imagines suburbia,' [27]. For several decades, suburbia has been maligned or simply disregarded within architectural history. 2ha's analysis and reimagining of suburbia takes a different view, highlighting its inherent beauty and latent visual intrigue. It also offers a sublime critique of planning systems and categorisations. The title itself is a double-entendre – makes reference to land metrics (2ha meaning two hectares) but also the geographical context in which the magazine originates: the Irish word “tuatha” refers simultaneously meaning people and the land they inhabit. This reflects their belief that, ‘the modern Irish suburb, the land, and the way it is used, is still inextricably linked to the people that use it,’ [28]. For many years, architectural historians disregarded suburbia. However, rising house prices coupled with student debt has renewed their appeal, and architectural literature has more recently renewed its interest in this typology. Arguably, suburbia is more recently undergoing a renaissance, one which positions 2ha as something of a zeitgeist in being one of the first to highlight the suburbs previously neglected importance. Pedagogically, 2ha shares the critical and co-creational characteristics of Fulcrum. Furthermore, 2ha operate a model of ‘Situated Learning’ (Wenger & Lave, 1991) [29], whereby legitimate peripheral participation in community contexts such as the suburbs enables learning by doing. Similarly, Robert Brookes analysis of the American suburb identifies it as the site where students develop a more ‘robust citizenship’ and a ‘place-conscious’ education can take place, (Brooke, 2015) [30], which seems a fitting description of the pedagogic dimension within 2ha. Furthermore, by ‘engaging in regional and local issues and conditions,’ (Holland, 2004) [31] 2ha engenders a greater sense of citizenship (Carpini, 2000; Colby et al, 2003) [32]. Arguably, literature that serves to help increase architects commitment to public service not only benefits students and society but the profession as a whole.

Archigrrle

(1999-2000) was set up by paper author Harriss during year two of her undergraduate degree at Manchester School of Architecture. Archigrrle was inspired by a concern over the lack of female representation in architecture and specifically intended to give female architecture students a voice through the medium of comic strip and poetry. Most of the content was intentionally droll but there was often a tacit, more serious agenda at play. For example, Archigrrle tackled issues tackled as diverse and complex as maternal bereavement, the loss of workshop technicians in the school due to budget cuts and the sexual-political dynamics operating in the design studio. This aligns with the pedagogic principles of Freire (1968; 2000) [33] who argues that students should be considered less as mere consumers of established knowledge and instead critical commentators and co-creators of the forms of knowledge that prove to be both empowering to them and to society as a whole, (Freire, 1968). Whilst only two editions were ever published due to involvement in other projects, Archigrrle provides an interesting, historic snapshot of the changes taking place in architectural education - at a time when higher education still offered grants to students from low-income backgrounds. Furthermore, the auto-ethnographic subjectivity of the comic strips illustrated how architectural education was experienced – providing a critique of the student author, and not just the system. This critical-of-self approach traces its origins back to Descartes famous method of ‘rightly regulating reason’, which is in effect a form of autodidactic pedagogy, ‘a sceptical meditative process by which one expels faulty beliefs’ (Taylor, 1979) [34], replacing them with a clearer and better informed sense of certainty. In effect, Archigrrle captured the way in which education was interpreted and then applied to everyday experiences, exemplifying the ‘reflection upon and in action’ pedagogic model espoused by Schon (1983) [35]. In assuming a critical-of-self approach by allowing for knowledge and beliefs to be continually questioned, refined and edited a process of iteration occurs. In effect this involves keeping discourse in a state of responsive instability – is a key hallmark of the archizine genre.

Pollen (2002-2003)

like the other archizines -used a thematic strategy to set agendas about ideas or issues they considered important – but that were not being explored within their MA architecture & interiors program at the time. For example, Issue 01 'Property' addressed gentrification but also explored notions of 'ownership' in relation to the marriage contract. In contrast, Issue 03 'Fight,' was intended to challenge the government's decision to re-enter the gulf war in 2003. Pollen's content mean that it exemplified self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975)[36] and in some ways became a refuge from the design studio, even proving to be more intellectually consuming than the design briefs. As the name was intended to suggest, Pollen was specifically interested in the dissemination of ideas between disciplines, and how architecture related to and integrated the other forms of creative practice. Subsequently, each edition would sponsor art & design students to produce limited edition artefacts: interdisciplinary pieces for the limited edition print runs, as a means to foster interdisciplinary collaboration (Wagner, 2012)[37] between students from across the college. The pieces ranged from a fanzine sized body-bag with a pink silicon knuckle-duster (Fight issue), a sexually provocative, printed tea-towel that could be used many times and show signs of wear (Age issue) and a version of the archizine exploring animation that was printed on a dress pattern intended to exaggerate a woman's curves (Fat issue). In some ways, Pollen offered a critique of the college's lack of opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange, since these opportunities were few and far between at the time. Finally, whilst Archigrle took a clear position on feminism (as the name affirms), Pollen assumed a more tacit approach, using the bodies of the two female authors as harbingers of our feminist take on the theme: from computer-aged depictions for the Age issue to wearing wedding and spinster gowns in the Property issue. These tactics facilitated a feminist reading of the content by using the implied (rather than the actual) – a tactic which contemporary feminist theory has identified as, 'a new facet of agency that rhetorical theorists have heretofore neglected,' [38].

CONCLUSIONS

Archizines offer an important, if unconventional, medium through which pressing architectural concerns are imaginatively considered and critiqued and yet their pedagogic prowess had not previously been considered. Archizines handmade roughness & thematic immediacy capture a certain zeitgeist about the need for alternative ways of scrutinising architecture, and they prove to be a more accessible format than a conventional publication, academic article or trade journal through which students can participate in the co-creation of architectural knowledge. What this analysis of five case studies identifies is that archizines offer not only an important critique of architecture in practice, but of architectural education too. Indeed, by establishing some of the ways in which archizines are tacitly enriched by good pedagogies - such as inter-disciplinary collaboration, civic engagement, self-directed learning and autodidactic learning – demonstrating their educational functionality too. This is further supported by recent scientific evidence that the tactility of printed artefacts are more effective than their digital counterparts at achieving 'deep' reading and by implication, learning, (Keim, 2014) [39]. Subsequently, this paper contends that archizines should be considered a key part of architecture's literary and pedagogic canon; a methodological tool for data gathering on nascent concerns and for measuring pedagogic efficacy and impact; and as a means through which students' autodidactic capabilities can be developed and expressed.

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