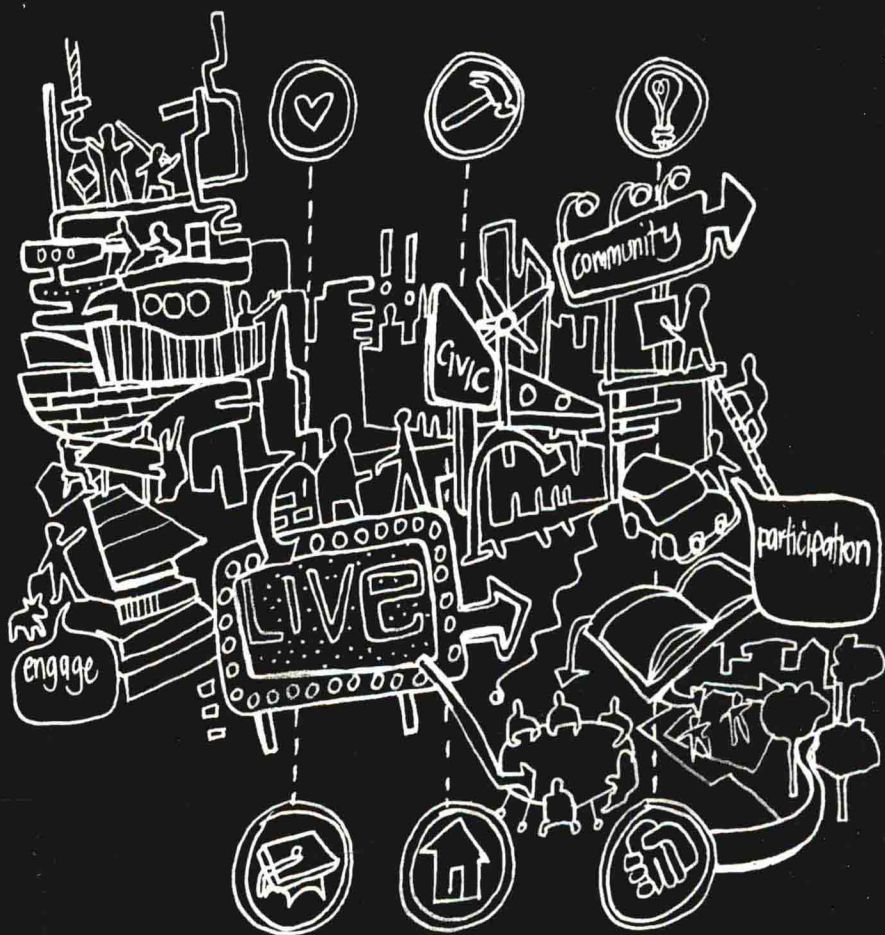# architecture **LIVE** projects

pedagogy into practice

edited by harriet harriss and lynnette widder

ARCHITECTURE LIVE PROJECTS

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Architecture Live Projects provides a persuasive, evidence-based advocacy for moving a particular kind of architectural learning, known as Live Projects, towards a holistic integration into current and future architectural curricula.

Live Projects are work completed in the borderlands between architectural education and built environment practice; they include design/build work, community-based design, urban advocacy consulting and a host of other forms and models described by the book's international group of authors. Because of their position, Live Projects as a vehicle for simultaneously providing teaching and service has the potential to recalibrate the contesting claims that both academia and profession make on architecture.

This collection of essays and case studies consolidates current discussions on theory and learning ambitions, academic best practices, negotiation with licensure and accreditation, and considerations of architectural integrity. It is an invaluable resource for current and future Live Projects advocates – whether they aim to move from pedagogy into practice or practice into pedagogy.

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Dedicated to Huxley, Curvier, Rudyard, Carlos, Freya, Yewbert, Atticus, Thilo, Skoukje and Unicorn

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FOREWORD

Live Project love: building a framework for Live Projects

Ruth Morrow

Introduction

Live Projects exist between the two tectonic plates of learning in academia and in practice. This chapter aims to frame Live Projects more clearly in order to encapsulate, critique, progress, and elevate the work. Ultimately it aims to share the Live Project love. It draws on a range of current publications on Live Projects, in particular papers presented at the International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, in May 2012[1] and the author's own teaching experience.[2] But, while the breadth of Live Projects is wide, we still seem unable to locate Live Projects within a pedagogical context, tending instead to limit descriptions and hence analysis to the architectural process and outcome.

There is a need to create an operational and theoretical framework for this mode of pedagogy. It is important to recognize that architectural pedagogy, even in the form of Live Projects, is not architectural practice, though it frequently overlaps. Even though Live Projects may come very close to architectural practice, particularly at postgraduate level, they still remain a pedagogical tool. And while they may be 'live', unpredictable, contingent, and even 'student-led', they are still a pedagogical construct of higher education.

We need an overarching framework that goes beyond collating descriptions of project A, B, or C and, instead, suggests coherent and crafted pedagogies. To build that pedagogical framework around Live Projects we need the component parts of a conceptual framework: a working definition, categorized exemplars, and analysis of content and method, that are specific, though not necessarily exclusive, to the concept.

Working definition and back catalogue

A cursory glance at a selection of definitions for Live Projects shows that this first level of building a framework is relatively evolved. Below are two such definitions: an early and a more recent attempt to encapsulate Live Projects:[3]

The live project is defined here as a type of design project that is distinct from a typical studio project in its engagement of real clients or users, in real-time settings. Students are taken out of the studio setting, and repositioned in the 'real–world'.

(Sara 2004)

A live project comprises the negotiation of a brief, timescale, budget and product between a client and an educational institution.

(Anderson and Priest 2012)

Between these two definitions one sees a development from describing the activity to including the context. Anderson and Priest's definition places the 'educational institution' for the first time into the definition, providing us with the means to sift and sort case studies, beginning a process of classification through which a community and lineage can emerge.

Combining the recent body of work that has emerged from sustained Live Project programmes at UK universities[4] with the vibrant design/build culture that occurs in the US and other countries,[5] we are starting to build a comprehensive catalogue where work can be cross-referenced and patterns identified. The 'Live Projects Network'[6] and, indeed, this publication provide further vehicles to extend the catalogue, reveal characteristics and traits, and allow those involved in architectural education to critically contextualize and develop their own Live Project pedagogies.

Considering content

Most constructed forms of teaching/learning start with the question: What do we want (students) to learn? Live Projects expand that to ask: What more do we want architecture students to learn? Tutors create Live Projects, sometimes instinctively, in response to perceived gaps in education or areas of practice that normative design studios fail to address. Several such areas emerge:

People. Live Projects are used to expose students to a wide variety of people implicated in architectural processes – that is, other professions, contractors, client bodies, and user groups, particularly those outside the architect's normal sphere.[7]

Processes. Live Projects offer students opportunities to participate in stages beyond the design phase: defining briefs, fundraising, costing projects, and developing marketing strategies.

Materials/construction. Design/build Live Projects allow students to directly interact with materials and the process of assembly. They gain not only knowledge but also knowhow[8] that later informs their development and practice as architects.

Other skills. Long lists of skills are identified as emerging from Live Projects. As Live Projects' range has increased, so too has the list of skills that emerge from them. Typically skills noted are group work, audience-responsive communication skills, reporting, and negotiation, but increasingly other skills such as marketing,

dealing with contingency, social media promotion, etc. have become part of Live Projects.

Value systems. Live Projects release students from the less-than-transparent values that exist in the design studio.[9] The question of who has the authority to judge architecture, where and when, frequently emerges, though it is rarely resolved.[10] Knowing that there are conflicting and contentious views of architecture is valuable for students as they begin to triangulate their own positions. The value and nature of architectural practice itself also comes under scrutiny in Live Projects. They provide a place from which students can explore 'new ways of practicing architecture and ... rethink the traditional role of the architect as a service provider ...' (Denicke-Polcher and Khonsari 2012: 3).

Considering method

Whilst the pedagogical content of Live Projects is becoming clearer, the methods used have to be 'extracted' from writings on the subject. At the symposium cited, people talked extensively about why and what, but few outlined how. Fewer still adopted the language of learning intentions, outcomes, assessment means, and criteria. And, while the use of such terminology does not directly imply meaningful learning, we do need to capture and understand its pedagogical methodologies and structures in order to refine them. Three areas emerge initially from the writing on Live Projects:

Support. Those involved in delivering Live Projects naturally evolve systems and processes that support the process over time. They do so not just in regard to students but, significantly, also in support of clients. Support comes in various forms. In some cases, tutors select projects, prepare the ground, and manage the process to varying degrees in order to ensure positive outcomes.[11] In other cases, students select or bring projects themselves, increasing their understanding, ownership, and commitment from the beginning.[12] Handbooks and 'resource and survival packs' are generated (Chiles and Till 2009) and 'Live Project offices' have been established to support Live Projects before, during, and after the process.[13]

Timing. Probably the greatest area of discussion for Live Project practitioners is timing and location in the curriculum. Many argue that design/build projects do not fit easily into semester structures unless heavily choreographed.[14] Some design tutors overcome this disjuncture by straddling semesters.[15] The expectation is that, later in the curriculum, Live Projects become longer, like 'lite' versions of practice. In fact, some argue that Live Projects have no place at undergraduate level. However, if we return to the evolving definition of Live Projects, particularly Anderson and Priest's definition, we see that the institution and, by association, its operational context is part of the Live Project framework. In other words, both higher education and practice make up the context for Live Projects. Creative practitioners of Live Project pedagogy must surely be sufficiently skilled to work within both arenas.

Critique. Given that the 'crit' plays such a central role in the culture of architectural education it is odd that discussion about assessment and critique is noticeably scarce in the writings around Live Projects. Where assessment is discussed, it is in the context of keeping it to a minimum (MacLaren 2012: 7) or looking for opportunities to evaluate outcomes in other areas of the course.[16] In general, assessment and critique feel uncertain and as yet unresolved. Chiles and Till's description of a final Live Projects presentation echoes this uncertainty. These, they say, 'are not critiques but formal presentations run by the student body'. They admit that students still feel that tutors sometimes 'bring more traditional power relationships back into the review' (Chiles and Till 2009: 5). Like at Sheffield and other places, our experience with the one-week 'Street Society' Live Project at Queen's Belfast has led us to assess Live Projects elsewhere in the curriculum. It is purposefully concluded *not* by a crit, but rather by a public celebration.

Perhaps we require a clearer theoretical and practical understanding of the differences between *assessment*, *valorization* and *critique*, and, more particularly, their role, timing, and significance in developing and sustaining students' creative practice.[17]

Conclusions

Live Projects are increasing in number and sophistication and, with that, the formation of a defining and supporting framework is almost inevitable. There are certainly areas within their content, method, and critique that require further examination, including the nature of the relationship between Design Studio projects and Live Projects. Design Studio provides the perfect risk-free environment to strip away context, conditions, and uncontrollable complexities and allow an abstracted space in which to examine concepts in detail and isolation.

If Live Projects are to take up a different role from that of Design Studio projects, it is because they exist in complex, unpredictable spaces where skills of negotiation, fleetness of foot, resourcefulness, time management, and ability to deliver within (changing) constraints to a range of audiences are at stake and of value. In that case, Live Projects must be assessed in a different way to Design Studio projects. This might naturally lead to the evaluation of different types of learners in different ways at different times in the curriculum and ultimately result in a mark sheet whose profile is in flux! Perhaps one measure of the success of a curriculum that integrates both Live and Design Studio projects is that more people are able to find a valued position in the broad church of architectural education.

There are clear tensions between the tectonic plates straddled by Live Projects, creating attempts at repositioning and occasional ruptures, but there is also a heightened potential for new energies and rich deposits. Nonetheless, we still need to frame, test, and question them in order to share the Live Project love...

Notes

1 The International Symposium *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy* was held in May 2012 at Oxford Brookes University, UK.

2 Morrow contributed a key-note lecture at the 2012 International Symposium *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, drawing on pedagogy outlined in the following publications: Morrow (2007a; 2007b); Morrow and Brown (2011); Morrow and Brown (2012).

3 Other definitions: Watt and Cottrell (2006) and Chiles and Holder (2008).

4 Under the leadership of Bob Fowles (University of Cardiff) and Bill Pirnie (University of Dundee).

5 Countries represented at the International Symposium at Oxford Brookes included the United States, Indonesia, Canada, Qatar, and India.

6 Live Projects Network, an online resource launched by Oxford Brookes University, UK to connect academics, students, and clients involved in Live Projects. Available online at: www.liveprojectsnetwork.org Accessed January 2014.

7 For example, see Andri Yatmo and Atmodiwirjo (2012).

8 For Judy Wajcman (1991) 'knowhow' is a form of knowledge that is 'visual, even tactile, rather than simply verbal or mathematical'.

9 This issue is well discussed in feminist critiques of architectural education, particularly Dutton (1991).

10 Carless (2012) describes a project where children and primary school teachers, acting as guest critics, assess architecture student design work.

11 Michael Hughes' honest critique (2012) outlines the lengths faculty go to 'artificially curtail' and manage a design/build project into a form of choreographed reality in order to 'increase the likelihood of an on-time project completion'.

12 In 'Street Society', an annual constellation of Live Projects run at Queen's University Belfast, a call for project proposals is announced and then shortlisted by postgraduate students who act as project managers. See Morrow and Brown (2011: 11).

13 For example: the Bureau of Design Research (BDR) in the School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield; ASD Project Office at London Metropolitan University; the Project Office at Portsmouth School of Architecture; and more generally initiatives such as the Science Shop (part of an EU-wide network) at Queen's University Belfast.

14 This point was made in Chandler (2012) and Hughes (2012).

15 Denicke-Polcher and Khonsari (2012) advocate Live Projects that start within the semester structure of a taught course but span into vacation and/or the year out (that is, the year required to satisfy Professional Examination (RIBA/ARB Part 3)).

16 For example: Shechter (2012) describes how a learning log is used to capture and assess students' experiences, particularly in respect to evidence of collaborative skills.

17 Critical feedback tends towards the negative. The term 'valorization' reminds us that one of the most supportive strategies in the development of a clear and distinctive form of creative practice is to remind students (and ourselves) when things are going well.

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PREFACE

The rub

Mimi Zeiger

Let's start with Daisy Froud and Alfred Zollinger's 'Pedagogy into Practice or Practice into Pedagogy?' dialogue in this volume. Beginning not at the beginning but *in media res* may seem rather awkward when applied to a preface, the very role of which is to anticipate the content to come without revealing too much – to frame, but not flesh out. With Live Projects, however, we need to start in the middle of things. As their name suggests, Live Projects are oft defined within the architectural discipline by their activity, with their conceptual, theoretical, and pedagogical implications only just spelled out in this volume.

Froud, a member of the London-based firm Agents of Change, where she leads participation and community engagement, describes the friction between theory and practice as an active space of experimentation. She calls this area of productivity a "rub", writing, "[i]t is a means to test theories of democracy, of engagement, of the politics of form, and to think about what theories and propositions start to emerge through the experiences and accumulated evidence."

To describe this confluence of agents and constituents, designers and communities, with the word "rub" – a word that is simultaneously soothing and abrading – is to recognize the challenges of Live Projects. The idiom "therein lies the rub" indicates the difficulty of working in-between – not simply between theory and practice, but also between public and private sectors, and between mainstream and disciplinary cultures. The rub comes from marginalization stemming from opposing arenas. On one side is the alignment of Live Projects to Do-It-Yourself home improvement and the efficiencies of design/build, which undermines their pedagogical power. Architecture culture tends to shy away from DIY didactics and "bottom–up" techniques, since these practices often elude formalist critique with their scale, scope, and off-the-shelf material palette. On the other side is the decidedly aformal "social practice." Stemming from the art world, social practice shares similar techniques and goals with Live Projects, including direct community

engagement, a drive toward social good, and the emphasis on the activity (and activism) itself – a transformative experience. Social practice, like Live Projects, is just beginning to be institutionalized, raising difficult questions about acceptance and meaning within culture.

In a *New York Times* article entitled "Outside the Citadel, Social Practice Art is Intended to Nurture," author Randy Kennedy summed up the wellspring of participatory practice that had developed since the Occupy Movement while identifying its deep roots in grassroots organizing and post-studio practice dating back to the 1960s, writing:

> Known primarily as social practice, its practitioners freely blur the lines among object making, performance, political activism, community organizing, environmentalism and investigative journalism, creating a deeply participatory art that often flourishes outside the gallery and museum system. And in so doing, they push an old question – "Why is it art?" – as close to the breaking point as contemporary art ever has.
>
> *(Kennedy 2013)*

Which raises an equally old question of Live Projects: "Why is it architecture?" Or perhaps, more specifically in the case of this book: "Why is it architectural education?"

Editors Harriet Harriss and Lynnette Widder position Live Projects at the juncture of academia and the profession, making a case for a hybrid of the pedagogical and the practical. As such, the appropriate arenas for architectural education are questioned in relationship to the expanded role of architect, an economically precarious profession, and a thoroughly global practice. Here, we need to rethink this increased complexity and understand it not as a formal pursuit but rather as a density of relationships and connections that increase not only discourse but dialogue.

Hybridity is hardly a neutral stance. For instance, Charles Jencks, in his new introduction to *Adhocism*, reissued by MIT Press, describes the book's title as a "mongrel term" and of the subject writes, "it prospers like most hybrids on the edge of respectability" (Jencks and Silver 2013: vii). With the power of "both/and" – that is, Live Projects embrace the best of design speculation, sociological strategies, and construction technique – comes the specter of "neither/nor" – that these projects are compromised by their lack of trajectory within an avant-gardist pursuit.

Later, in the second half of *Adhocism* (part of the original 1971 edition), coauthor Nathan Silver uncovers why hybridity jangles nerves and finds its potential for systemic transformation in his "An appreciation of hybrid forms." He writes: "[p]ractical adhocism inevitably has to do with impure, bastard systems, because one order linked to another order disturbs the serene autonomy of reach .... What first seemed grotesque eventually becomes normal. Thus successive barriers of formal inhibitions collapse" (Jencks and Silver 2013: 140).

So, ultimately, hybridity not only identifies the parts within established systems that leave not only openings (wittingly or unwittingly) for appropriation – an