

# PEDAGOGY AND/AS ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

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Sheffield University School of Architecture

A critical understanding and development of learning processes is an integral part of any architectural and urban practice that seeks to be both empowering and sustainable. We are interested in opening up the discussion to allow for desire, collectivity, dialogue and organisation.

How can these processes alter our ways of working with space?

Presentation by Ruth Morrow in discussion with Nishat Awan; Dan Jary; Rosie Parnell; Ruben Parnell; Steve Parnell; Doina Petrescu; Kim Trogal; Supreeya Wungpatcharapon, James Brown, Beatrice Munby, Steffi Rhodes, John Sampson

## Session Notes:

Ruth began by presenting her 'in progress' diagram, describing her approach to practice and situating the process of design in a relation between creative users, space, creativity and architects. She explained that her approach to practice has increasingly come to be informed by a pedagogical framework. She has "turned into a pedagogue" and suggests that there is a conceptual driver in pedagogy for a participative practice, one that is capable to identify, expose and swap hierarchies

In such processes, she suggests that people's motivations need to be exposed at a personal level; "why are you in the room?" Doina suggests that this is also important in terms of reciprocity. We need to understand our own motivations for undertaking a project and need to be clear with what we are giving and what we are receiving throughout the process.

Ruth suggests that in a reciprocal process, it is not the architect who is necessarily the pedagogue. She suggests that they can be, that part of the thinking behind inclusive pedagogies is that the hierarchy of teacher/ student is examined – in moment when the student becomes 'the teacher' they demonstrate deep learning – so it is with an open architectural process. She **here brings** the concepts of the 'critical users.' She explains that she began with participation in the movement for the disabled and continues to return to her interest in disability studies. She describes the concept of 'inclusive design' as something utopian, and suggests that this is important to keep as a goal, even though we recognise that we cannot always (sometimes it's possible to) achieve it.

Ruth highlights the difficulty or paradox in working with a paradigm of 'inclusive design' yet acknowledging conflicting demands. Doina suggests it is important to understand conflict/ confrontation as a creative part of democracy, following Chantal Mouffe. Nishat describes the concept of Agonism of Chantal Mouffe: where we shift from being enemies in conflict (antagonism) to adversaries (agonism). This shift involves a recognition of the others position and an understanding that our needs/ desires/ opinions may never be able to be reconciled. In accepting that we will never agree, we must accept the difference and work with this, without resorting to violence/ antagonism.

In this sense can Design / architecture be understood as a process of managing rather than resolving conflict; mirroring the language of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland?

By considering conflict management and/as design, to work with confrontation as creative force, Ruth asks how to bring users to become creative *and* critical users. Doina suggests that social practice is done not because others 'need my help,' but it can provide the critical conditions

where we learn quickly. She suggests it is important to understand the 'limit condition' in which we are working, because at this limit things are more visible. It is important to create critical conditions for pedagogy.

Ruth suggests that in architecture, we often do not analyse 'users' and suggests that it is perhaps the role of the architect in the process, to bring 'critical users' into becoming, into learning quickly? She suggests that architects also have huge amount to learn from critical users – due to their heightened social and spatial experiences; this provides acute insight

Rosie suggests whether creating critical conditions for pedagogy can be understood as one of the roles of the 'Live Project' within architectural education.

Ruth suggests that by bringing an academic curricula into a 'real' situation transforms that situation and the other people involved, each taking the roles of teacher and students at different times. Ruth suggests that although studying is a privilege this privilege can be extended to others. To 'go outside' with the university is a strong tool, for all to learn.

Doina recalled her experience with the Ecobox project in Paris, where the involvement of students in the process meant that the residents too became interested in learning. It engendered a 'learning environment'. Ruth and Doina discussed the role of universities in 'ripening the territory', before developers, and architects come. This relates to the idea (mostly maintained by certain architects) that 'good architecture requires 'good' clients. Ruth suggests that live projects can in one way produce good clients but hopefully more than that, ie. clients who demand much more. It's the belief in disability worlds that legislation can not bring about accessible environments so we have to educate more demanding user groups

Doina suggests that often in the live projects students over-enthusiasm can lead to the loss of criticality in the process. Ruth cites the project she initiated in Sheffield for first year students called '4 days on the outside' that was in fact a week long project. The last day is specifically set aside for reflection and analysis. Ruth suggests that 4 days on the outside actually became a cultural event, a practice emerging from pedagogy.

Ruth presents Space Shuttle and Street Archaeology, two projects she has initiated with PS<sup>2</sup> (Paragon Studios/ Project Space). Paragon Studios is a group of artists located on Donegall Street in Belfast, with a project space at ground floor with street-shop frontage. The project space is open to any who want to run a project from it- the conditions are that a project should not use it as a commercial gallery space or sell works from it.

The Street Archaeology project (which developed out of a 1<sup>st</sup> year architecture project: Room Archaeology- see <http://buildingclouds.blogspot.com/> p13), invited contributions from a variety of artists to make installations/ processes/ art works based on/in Donegall Street. The Space Shuttle project (which resembles the fourdays project), aimed to project the project space into the further reaches of Belfast via a mobile 'shuttle' which was to host a variety of events and projects. Ruth suggests that both these projects are both the site in which they operate but simultaneously alter the site. Ruth suggests that the process of organising the street archaeology project, going from door to door, inviting people, built a community.

Kim asks whether Ruth feels there is anything transferrable of her projects, whether she feels it can become a model for others.

Ruth is unsure as she feels it is very much rooted in the context of Belfast. She describes the impact of class upon the process of working with people on Donegall Pass. Ruth suggests that 'class' in the context of Belfast, brings certain additional problems to working 'publicly.' For example, she explains that if an individual is seen to express something aspirational or desires

something creative for themselves, it is negatively regarded as a criticism of the community and the place. Ruth also explains, that the governance of Belfast from London (particularly before the New Assembly) created a situation where people felt they have no voice. This combined with those who aspire to work creatively or differently, then already are 'set against' what exists. Ruth explains that within the Space Shuttle project, the group had difficulty in getting people together, and people had great difficulty or reluctance to tell/ share on a personal level.

Ruth describe one of the events, which was the 'big whinge box,' a box into which people could post problems. Then aimed to make a map to show how to solve the problems (like bureau d'études work on a local scale).

Other events, like 'shiny sparkly Sunday' were aimed at specific groups of people. This event, a temporary beauty centre for the women on the pass, was aimed towards the women in the area many of whom are very keen on beauty products/ treatments. They are body-conscious, perhaps it is the only thing they can control?

Ruth suggests that the identification of possible solidarities, identifying what can bring people together, is context specific but its identification may be the common 'approach'? In this case it is the use of beauty that gives the pretext to bring people together. Or the garden, in the work of aaa.

Ruth also suggests that the tools of transmission of the project, are context specific and therefore maybe not transferrable. She says, what worked were really big posters, crisps, and using the local press, as well as having old maps of the area.

Kim asks, whether Ruth feels that the Space Shuttle project has had any longer term impact on the area.

Ruth suggests the term impact is not one she would use, and that too often we are caught in attempting to 'measure the impact' of something whose value lies elsewhere. Ruth notes that the group of women who met at Shiny Sparkly Sunday, have formalised themselves as a group, the first women's group in the area? But that this effect is not a way to 'measure' the Space Shuttle project.

Doina suggests that a pedagogical approach could give longevity to a community project.

Ruth speaks of another project she is working on, which is called "Creative Transformations Projects," she says that the title is temporary and involves a series of case studies to tell stories about work.

In the Space Shuttle Project, the group had an 'index of ideas' on a table, people could contribute ideas for projects and if more than one person wanted to do it, it stayed on the agenda. She explained that one of the projects was called "Arch Future," concerning the contested memory of an arch in Donegall Pass. Deep down, no-one wanted to do it, so they hadn't really told anyone about it or enthused about it. When the day came, no-one turned up and they were relieved not to have to do it. It set the pedagogic limits- ie. you can only teach / be creative when you are interested in the subject matter. It seems obvious but too often people half do things because they are only half interested.

Doina, brings here the idea of "magic." She cites the movement in California and the modern 'witch' Starhawk, as discussed by Isabelle Stengers. It is a knowledge which is repressed in the West, in Africa for example it still has a strong tradition. It is a marginalised knowledge and we should make space for other ways of thinking.

Are we/ can we work with magic?