Using comics to promote green and inclusive architecture

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Outside of comics available to the general public, a small number of architects are using sequential art to explain their designs to clients and stakeholders. These include proposals concerned with the integration of recycling, increased use of green spaces in urban designs and encouraging community involvement in their work. This paper will look at three of these initiatives.

Erect Architects’ BinToGather project was proposed for a University campus in East London, and includes comic strips to explain the design and implementation of a recycling initiative. C.J. Lim and Ed Liu’s book smartcities, resilient landscapes + eco-warriors includes a number of comics looking at the possibilities of eco-friendly architecture which could be built variously in such locations as North Dakota and Jiangu Province, as well imagining a utopian future based on greater integration of green spaces in cities. Sabba Khan’s involvement with the ‘Shape Newham’ project brings her parallel careers as an architect and graphic novelist into the revitalisation of public spaces in this deprived London Borough, including reproduction of text and images from locals into a shared street space.
Bradford Wright has investigated how superhero comics promote (and resist) societal change, while Hammond and Danaher note the medium of comics as a useful pedagogical medium for interactions with teenagers. Recent research by Paul Fisher Davies has explored the effectiveness of comics as a communication device, while Dominic Davies has investigated the use of comics that unpack urban decay and neglect. Based on these insights into comics as an educational and inspirational tool, and talks given by Susanne Tutsch (Erect), Lim, and Khan, this paper will look at how architects use comics in their work and why each of these creators sees the form as an important way of sharing and integrating their ideas in the public realm.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Alex Fitch is the presenter of Panel Borders, the UK’s only monthly broadcast radio show about comics on Resonance FM, the Arts Council station in London. Intellect, Strange Attractor, University Press of Mississippi and McFarland have published Alex in anthologies on the subjects of comics and film. Over the last two years, he has co-edited an issue of the University of Michigan’s Film Criticism journal, acted as a guest article editor of Literary Geographies, and been invited to write an article on Early Transmedia Practices in Nineteenth Century Comics, for a forthcoming anthology from Routledge.

Alex teaches Masters Students at the University of Brighton on the subject of Critical Approaches to Architecture, and has previously taught Comics, Media Studies and Film Studies at the same institution. He is pursuing a PhD on the Interrelation between Comics and Architecture at the university, to answer the question: “What can sequential art tell us about architectural interactions that other media do not?”