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Jennie Watts

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# DISCOURSES OF PLACE AND PROFESSION

## A Thematic Analysis of Support for *Architecture NZ* Magazine in a Crisis

JENNIE WATTS, AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

### Introduction

Industry-specific magazines are a genre imbued with identity-forming symbolism and rhetoric. Magazines belonging to professions serve a purpose different from popular publications, which is to reflect the profession back at itself. The organizing principle of *Architecture NZ* magazine's content is that it is of Aotearoa New Zealand, whether that be discussion of design for this landscape or acknowledgement of a professional heralding from this country.<sup>1</sup> To that end, *Architecture NZ* represents issues of place-based concern to readers in Aotearoa New Zealand, and elsewhere. It is a lens through which to understand and to critique and shape the profession's impact, and it serves as one of the few central points around which the architecture profession in Aotearoa New Zealand, is oriented, and therefore expresses much about the identity of the profession. This study is an examination of the role of a print publication in a community of place and a community of practice at once. The study thematically analyzes the written statements of support by architects from around Aotearoa New Zealand, about why it is crucial, in their view, that *Architecture NZ* magazine should continue to be published given the crisis presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. These statements of support were sought by the publisher and editors of *Architecture NZ* in what they term a "reader rally,"<sup>2</sup> along with the request for individual subscriptions to the magazine. The written support from a cohort of passionate architects served to further encourage subscription, which provided the necessary financial resource to get through the period of uncertainty in magazine publishing that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic.

This article begins with an overview of relevant literature that puts the magazine and the moment of crisis into context. The changing media land-

scape and the advent of digital-media publishing have put pressure on print to no small extent, and this is discussed in the context of architecture publishing in particular. The literature also examines the long tradition of architectural magazine publishing as a place of discourse and critique, and this provides context for the findings later in the article, where it is shown that discourse—discussion, debate, and critical opinion—on the architectural profession is one of the most valued aspects of *Architecture NZ*. This is interpretive research, which focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals within their social and cultural contexts. Methodologically, a discourse-analysis approach in tandem with thematic analysis provides the framework for examining how these meanings and values are constructed and negotiated by the respondents to the publisher's call for support.

### ***Architecture NZ: Magazine Overview***

*Architecture NZ* has been published in this name since 1988, and as the title *New Zealand Architect* for the ten years before that. In its current form it is owned by BCI Central and published by AGM (a division of BCI), who, until the beginning of 2020, published other built-environment titles *Houses*, *Interior*, and *Urbis*, all of which ended due to economic impact from the pandemic. Contemporarily, *Architecture NZ* comprises a consistent and predictable contents divided into content “type,” and each type is found together, in predictable order, in each issue. The content types are projects, people, practice, and review, with the occasional promotional article and, on a regular basis, the announcement of awards.

The New Zealand Institute of Architecture (NZIA) website describes the role of the architect as “driven by four fundamental elements: technical skill, practical understanding, analytical ability and creativity.”<sup>3</sup> It goes on to say “architects are concerned with the ways buildings integrate with the environment within which they sit” and “Architects, catalyzed by new technologies and innovations, and with social awareness and a strong sense of conviction, are ideally placed to improve the way we live in the future.” These descriptions suggest that to support their not-insignificant outputs, architects must require a steady stream of input to maintain their social awareness, feed their creativity, and enable them to keep up with innovation and advances in technology that may impact the built environment. Architecture media is one such form of input.

Media plays a crucial role in representing fashionable discourses and spreading and assimilating discourse within professions. Mazza and Alvarez write about popular press and note that the diffusion of management discourses is intrinsically tied to media.<sup>4</sup> They refer to Berger and Luckmann's foundational writing on the construction of social reality through discursive practice, whereby shared definitions of reality are formed through discourse.<sup>5</sup> Discourse is understood to be a necessity in the field of architecture, and architectural discourses address a range of concerns regarding social impact, environmental impact, and aesthetic notions. In their study of architectural discourse and narrative, Jones writes that architects' discourse "frequently reveal[s] many tensions between culture, politics, power, and identity."<sup>6</sup> The complex layering of all these topics occurs in architecture, in part, because of the relative permanence of architectural structures and the physical impact they have on the way people move in space. Architecture is, in a way, ideology made concrete, and so the decisions made by architects reflect socially and culturally impactful decision-making. Discourse is also present in the shaping of the identity of architects. Scholar-practitioner Diana Cuff described, from a sociological perspective, the way architectural discourse functions within the professional practice of architecture, especially in shaping identities and organizational behavior.<sup>7</sup> Grubbauer and Steets explore the way architects become architects and that they describe themselves to themselves and the public through rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Cohen et al. write that discourses "reflect architects' orientations to the diverse challenges facing their profession particularly concerning the role of creativity in the practice of architecture."<sup>9</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the field of architecture, as it did almost everything else. There was an economic downturn affecting the construction industry, problems with the availability of building materials from abroad, as well as the more fundamental philosophical re-set that it caused around future planning and responsible care of the planet. Al-raouf wrote "the pandemic is evolving into an urban crisis, forcing us to reconsider our deeply held beliefs about good city form and the purpose of planning. Architectural theory and practice is responsible for looking ahead, formulating visions and offering alternatives."<sup>10</sup>

Opportunities for discussion and critique are traditionally a part of architectural practice when design problems or responses to a design brief require provocation to refine the solution in the form of "crits"—critique of work by colleagues. In addition to this interpersonal communication, the

media functions to position the macro-concerns alongside micro-solutions in architectural periodicals. The architect's media menu is rich and varied, with architecture magazines being a staple of the profession for decades. Architecture media appears to contribute more to the profession than just functioning as a record. As Rattenbury has asserted, media does not merely convey architecture: it defines architecture through the various forms of representation, and architectural theory is thus a mediated construction.<sup>11</sup>

## Magazines and Community

Magazines walk a line between documentation of what is and catalyst of what might be. They are a socio-culturally significant artefacts that convey the “stories we tell about ourselves.”<sup>12</sup> Through telling stories, magazines bring together and reflect a defined community.<sup>13</sup> One of the features of a magazine is that they are—apart from news and current affairs magazines—targeted to a specific audience: They cater to a clearly defined readership interested in the content that the magazine publishes and can be described as a community of interest. It has been argued that magazines crystalize imagined communities,<sup>14</sup> and serve communities of interest (and/or practice), *and* virtual communities.<sup>15</sup> These many ways of defining community intersect. Virtual communities are, as Reader and Moist argue, a collective phenomenon, in contrast to an imagined community which is an individual's perception of community.<sup>16</sup> A virtual community, then, is one that coheres via participation, mediation, and through discourse. The term “virtual” in this sense is not a reference to groups communicating online using, for example, social media platforms, but rather is being used to mean communities that are *virtually* the same (share characteristics of) geographically located ones, except they are centered on a topic of common interest rather than geography.

Kitch wrote that magazines help to define imagined communities, which is an individual experience of perceiving other readers of the publication as being of like mind as in a community.<sup>17</sup> Abrahamson proposed that the shift in the postwar period from general-interest to special-interest publications supported “individual fulfilment and fragmented communities of interest” that went along with an increase in leisure time and a boost in disposable income, and that these new publications helped bring together a new form of community.<sup>18</sup> He wrote, “It is even possible that the activities themselves serve as substitutes for a more conventional sense of commu-

nity. . . . an essential element in the coherence and an important validator of these communities' very existence.<sup>19</sup>

A further type of community served by magazines is the community of place. Research has identified that magazines covering specific geographic areas such as cities or regions function to establish local identity, establish a sense of coherence among residents, and complete the socio-cultural "picture" of the attributes of that place.<sup>20</sup> Webb has examined the sense of belonging forged by the publishers of Reiman magazines and the way that reader-contributors created the experience of interwoven lives of the reader as an imagined community.<sup>21</sup> Webb makes the connection between this reader engagement with sense of place, and what Calavante et al. describe as a social process of "performing and audiencing, of self-presentation and spectatorship of everyday life."<sup>22</sup> As in Webb's study, the architects in this case center themselves in the place-based cultural foment through the *Architecture NZ* publication. The respondents who engage with the call for statements of support are shaping their sense of self in relation to the community of readers. It is a situated discourse focused in part on what is shared as much as is distinct. I argue that Aotearoa New Zealand is ideally suited to representation as a site-specific creative community as indeed architects have argued that the style or vernacular of architecture in this country is distinctively its own, though influenced by styles both endemic and from abroad.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the research into magazine communities applies textual analysis to the artefacts themselves or tells the story of the historical development of the publications in the context of a dynamic cultural and economic environment. This study contributes to the field of reader response by examining the statements of architects who expressed their support for the continuing publication of *Architecture NZ* at a time of upheaval.

## Magazine Publishing Challenges in the Digital Age

Many contemporary magazines have digital elements, such as websites, that host a selection of articles or an Instagram profile that assists in marketing but also serves the magazine's readership in the digital realm. However, there is a small but growing movement away from the pervasiveness of the online presence by both publishers and readers. Waldman notes that there is increasing concern about the quality of concentration and engagement that is engendered by reading online, and an equivalent nos-

talgia for reading in print format.<sup>24</sup> And Ferriera and Ganito describe the offline presences of two thriving magazines, and the “unplugging practices” that their readers seek.<sup>25</sup> However, in general terms, being digital and connected across platforms is the norm.

Cardoso describes the problem of magazines and print publications more generally being under pressure in the digital environment and proposes that news magazines such as *Time* are beginning to lose their identity as they change their publishing model to a hybrid one and alter the predictably periodic nature of publishing in print to something more ad hoc.<sup>26</sup> Cardoso writes that in the uncertain digital publishing environment, two things are certain: “there is no sensorial experience of holding a pleasurable and immutable magazine in our hands, and it is impossible to display magazines . . .”<sup>27</sup> A further criticism of digital magazines is the volatile technological environment “distorts, even violates, the implicit magazine-reader social contract”<sup>28</sup> in the sense that each new technology and therefore new iteration of what it means to be a “magazine” undermines the dialectical relationship between expected editorial structure and novel, unexpected content.

The volatile technological environment became most visible for *Architecture NZ* at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when, like many print publications, advertising revenue was suddenly limited. At this juncture *Architecture NZ* printed a separate single-page cover letter that was included in the package with the May issue, making an appeal for support in the form of subscription. The letter appeals to the readership for subscriptions, and in doing so, interrupts the usual relational dynamic between publisher and reader. Another study that highlights the leveraging of a partnership between editors and readers is the analysis of Reiman magazines undertaken by Webb.<sup>29</sup> The Reiman magazines are largely comprised of reader-generated content, recipes, and stories of Christian women’s homemaking. In that research, as in this study, the power relationship is upturned from the privilege of the autonomous publisher and editorial decision maker to the more vulnerable position of collaborator, reliant upon the readership.<sup>30</sup> By being open about the pandemic-related uncertainty in the publishing environment, the publishers and editors of *Architecture NZ* have sought to strengthen the relationship with the profession. They did this by requesting not only financial support in the form of subscription but also discursive statements of support. The action unites the readership as a community tied together by the publication, in a kind of virtual community, reminiscent of Granovetter’s “weak ties.”<sup>31</sup>

*Architecture NZ's* appeal to readers for financial support is uncommon but not unique. Dozo and Krywicki<sup>32</sup> wrote of a parallel situation in France where a gaming magazine found itself in severe financial trouble after the distributor, Presstalis, withheld funds from all the titles it worked with, endangering the viability of many smaller titles including *Canard PC*. As with *Architecture NZ*, the editor(s) made the situation public and alerted the readership to the impending risk of closure. Dozo and Krywicki found that the survival and restoration of the magazine was made possible by two factors; the first, the communication of the magazine's production challenges that included the loss of funds, but in addition were contextualized by the editors as a part of an increasingly digital-publishing landscape. And second, the coherent readership "community" formed around the editorial identity of the publication. The scholars note "Meta-communication concerning the production of the magazine appears to be essential in making readers aware of the value of what they are paying for in an environment that has been shaken by the digitalization of information."<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the cover letter, as in *Canard PC*, the editorial in *Architecture NZ* that month operated as this "meta-communication," describing and providing context for the suddenness of the challenges the publisher was experiencing. The "call to action" by the editorial team speaks directly to loyal readership, members of the profession who depend upon the publication for a sense of belonging and for whom *Architecture NZ* is a totem or cornerstone of their professional experience. The appeal further closes the distance between publisher and reader and enhances the sense of being part of a group that relies upon a professional network to succeed.

## Architecture Periodicals

Scholarship in the field of architectural periodical publishing reflects a thriving field of magazine scholarship from about the 1980s. Architectural magazines are a focus of scholarly research for a range of reasons and approaches. Some studies frame magazines as a record or document of a time and space in the field. These studies may take the form of historical review, capturing the achievements of the magazine or the tone and direction of architectural theory of the period.<sup>34</sup> Some are focused on a single publication, others are a synthesis of the publications by country during a specific period—postwar or art movement such as modernism, for example—and record of intellectual and material history.<sup>35</sup> Žunić & Vukić

write about major architectural periodicals in the postwar period in Croatia and describe the way these publications were the site of philosophical wrestle between socialist ideology and design principles.<sup>36</sup> Further, some studies critically frame architectural periodicals as mediators of a community of practice, or culture. These studies acknowledge not only what is included in the magazine but also what is excluded, that which may be outside of the mainstream, revolutionary, edgy, or antiestablishment and emerges sporadically via exhibition or published in “little” magazines (“zines,” self-published pamphlets or short-run, backroom publications).<sup>37</sup>

Architectural periodicals have wide-ranging purpose and intention. They are a site of information exchange where design ideas are transferred and translated and describe a form that embodies a common language, or purpose through images and text about solutions to design problems.<sup>38</sup> They serve as documentary record too. As Sawyer writes, architectural magazines “provide a manifest log of developing architectural cultures in different geographic locales.”<sup>39</sup> In the past, the varying purpose of architecture periodicals has been dictated to some extent by the dichotomy of “academic” and “trade” publications, as Schwarzer wrote in his examination of two major titles *Oppositions* and *Assemblage*. Schwarzer argues that the philosophical distance between academic and trade publications may have increased during the 1970s–90s, as it became increasingly difficult to reconcile any one direction or theory—a clear impact of postmodernism. Schwarzer also notes that academic journals may have moved toward a more esoteric and speculative theoretical position in response to the “decline of analytical substance”<sup>40</sup> in trade or professional titles. This study is not an analysis of content, although the sections that are valued by readers are often mentioned in the statements. Instead, the study examines the way the readers describe their fondness for, and commitment to, reading the publication. It is an analysis of the perspective of the loyal and supportive audience.

Schwarzer goes on to describe what he proposes as the “mission” of the architecture periodical, which is “one of recognizing, contrasting, and synthesizing the complex historical conditions of architectural culture and production.”<sup>41</sup> Further, and particularly relevant in terms of this study, is his recognition of the mediating process that occurs in architectural periodicals, between “sensuous, technical and ideological elements.”<sup>42</sup> This interrelationship is clearest in academic periodicals and less so in commercial

or trade magazines. Schwarzer suggests that trade magazines are subject to the pressures of commercial publishing with the increased volume of advertising, and inclusion of practical and product information, in contrast to academic publications, which are by their nature more capable of remaining in the theoretical and speculative realms. Willis, too, lamented the increased commercialization of architectural press and the widening divide between academics and practitioners, and the decrease in number and diversity of periodicals.<sup>43</sup> Willis also identifies the push-pull tensions between the regulations about which building systems or technologies are used, regulations put in place to protect clients or governments, or the environment. He wrote that editorial control is being lost and suggests that adherence to at least journalistic standards of inquiry and critique would ensure the loss of credibility and therefore usefulness of the publication to the professional readership.

In this context then, there is no shortage of criticism of popular architecture publications, and scholars have identified the risks associated with the profession being reliant upon the commercially driven periodicals, including the skewing of content toward advertisers and their products, and away from the intellectual criticism and discourse necessary to inspiring architects to reach for innovative solutions to problems of social, environmental, and ideological origin. A further variable that contemporary publishers must navigate is the digitization of magazine content either in open-access or subscription form. Digital magazines that are read in blog or website form provide more opportunity for advertisers. Those that publish in page-turning form, as if reading the print version are somewhat more limited in that sense if advertising revenue is prioritized over editorial content. Architecture periodicals are almost without exception, though, commercially funded. *Architecture NZ* walks a fine line being a commercial publication that remains inclusive of the public but also speaks to and of the profession. The title is undoubtedly of the establishment in large part due to its historical ties with NZIA and its place as longest-running architectural publication of this country. Indeed, no other architectural publication in Aotearoa has endured the volatile economic environment or the evolution of digital publishing. “Established” is an appropriate term, then, to describe the magazine, in both the sense of its links to the preminent professional body and universities, and in the sense of being deep rooted, enduring economic and cultural vicissitudes.

## Methodology

The methodological approach for this study is an inductive, interpretive one. A discourse analysis lens combined with a thematic analysis method is an effective approach to uncovering how architects construct their identities, beliefs, and attitudes through their statements. Discourse analysis allows for a deep exploration of the ways language is used to create social realities, particularly focusing on how architects articulate their professional identities and express their views within specific social and cultural contexts.<sup>44</sup> Discourses in the field of architecture has been examined by other scholars who find language to be deeply embedded in architectural design processes<sup>45</sup> and a richly insightful entry point into the sociohistorical significance of architecture.<sup>46</sup> Discourse analysis is a way of explicating not just what is said but what is meant. By analyzing the architects' statements, I identify the discursive strategies architects employ to position themselves within their professional community, convey their values, and respond to prevailing pressures in the field. Thematic analysis complements this approach by systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within the texts, providing a structured way to understand the recurrent themes and conceptualizing of architects' self-representation.<sup>47</sup> Together, these methods reveal both explicit and implicit meanings embedded in their written communication. This is a pragmatic approach to analysis of data where the corpus is found in the public domain and the purpose of the research is to explore the candid meaning-making process. This research explores the underlying meaning of the architects' messages of support to discover which notions are common among them.

The statements and subscriptions were elicited by the publisher and editors in what they term a "reader rally"<sup>48</sup> during March 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic began and business was rocked by insecurity due to lockdowns and global fear. The publisher, AGM, published selected quotes from these statements in the editorial of the May edition of *Architecture NZ* magazine along with the inclusion of a letter that made a plea for subscription to keep the magazine going. The statements were also published in the web-based newsletter *Architecture Now*, accompanied by an identifying image of the submitter, and number seventy-two in total including the letter by the student association, Students of Urban Planning and Architecture. These statements are the data corpus of this study, which are

analyzed thematically to explore the reasons for the profession's dedication to the periodical and offer the opportunity to take a focused look at the profession's passion for a publication that both represents and serves as a source of inspiration at a time when the print publishing environment was under acute pandemic-related pressure.

To begin, it is necessary to define the form that the architects' statements take. Rather than letters to the editor which are invited but not sought, and the topic of which is not specified, these statements elicited by the publisher take the form of testimony. The purpose of testimony in marketing is to give weight to the advertisement's entreaty to purchase or engage. Testimony can demonstrate perceived value or importance, for example, and the entreaty to spend or employ is less overt. This is so in the case of the testimonies of architects about *Architecture NZ* magazine. These testimonies are purposeful communication, designed to demonstrate support for the continued publication of the magazine, and perhaps to attract further subscriptions. Those who composed a statement of support described the crucial nature of the magazine to the profession in New Zealand, or, more personally, the necessity to themselves of having this publication to draw upon and be inspired by.

Analysis of these testimonies is a straightforward process of applying Braun and Clarke's six-step process to identify the themes discussed in this paper. I began by reading and rereading the messages, becoming familiar with the voices and the composition of each, and as an entire body of text. Next, I began again reading and identifying phrases and ideas that the writers had emphasised, and those that were repeated, keeping a record and a tally of these. I finished this stage of the analysis process with a spreadsheet with a list of codes, some sense of how the codes fell together into themes, and relevant quotes direct from the statements. The next stage was to group the concepts and develop the thematic convergences, reviewing and regrouping the codes through an iterative process of checking and defining the themes.

There are two main themes that are explored in this article: the tangible and the communicative. The tangible theme—*A magazine to have and to hold*—describes the profession's espoused attachment to a physical printed object. The printed publication is significant to the respondents for a range of reasons, and demonstrative of their preference for something they can hold, engage with physically, and collect, along with an ambivalence toward the digital resources that are now ubiquitous. The communicative theme

comprises two parts. *Our place* describes the sense of meaning and community that is oriented around the publication. The respondents express a need and gratitude for the way the publication articulates the current issues of the profession, the way it coheres a stylistically disparate group of practitioners into a community, that it records the movement and growth of the profession over time. In this way the publication becomes a valuable archive and documentary. *Discourse and community* is about the publication as a site of negotiation, through language, of the most significant and urgent principles of the profession. The issues that are given priority, and the strategic laying out of these in the wider context serve to bind the profession in shared problem-solving and celebration of their work.

### *A Magazine to Have and to Hold*

The complexity of this theme is that the testimonials were produced in response to the news that the magazine was at risk due to financial constraints. The testimonials are, then, predominantly about how valued the publication is, as this is what was asked of respondents. However, there are recurring ideas within the responses about the importance of the hard copy publication that are revealing of the way architects engage with and store the publication, alongside how they feel about the tangibility and longevity of the glossy, high-quality, illustrated periodical.

There is a temporal aspect to physical publication, which is that it exists in space and can be experienced in that context by more than one person. One respondent referred to the pile of magazines in a waiting room, that they can continue to enlighten and arouse curiosity in people beyond the currency of the latest issue. Furthermore, some respondents are emotionally attached to the regular arrival of their printed magazine. One describes an “emotional lift every time it arrives” and another that the physicality of it “distinguishes the reading experience” and brings contentment.

Just as the longevity of each printed copy appears important, so does the experience of time spent reading the magazine. Architects enjoy the considered pace of the reading experience which makes consumption of the magazine’s an event. One describes enjoying the magazine while relaxing in the bath, and another keeps them stacked on the coffee table—“treasured.” As one respondent says, “Architecture is not realized at pace, but with care and attention to detail” in reference to the slow luxurious perusal of the

magazine. This too reflects the consideration and depth with which architects engage with a design problem. One respondent said reading the magazine was about “purposefully slowing down.” Another reoccurring idea was that the magazines continued to be read, not just stored but serving as a perennial resource and source of inspiration.

About a third of the respondents had something to say about the publishing landscape at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak and resultant economic effects. That they would respond to the event that has led the publisher to ask for these testimonials is not unexpected, and their comments demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the economic effects that have led to the sudden loss of advertising revenue. There was also a link made by some respondents to the contemporary challenges around production of hard copy publications and the prevalence, immediacy, and relatively inexpensive nature of publishing digitally. Some expressed sadness and regret that the print industry is experiencing difficulties. One respondent writes “changes in the publishing landscape have me in disbelief. It is inconceivable that we might not have a design magazine.” There is a feeling of general weariness around the digital materials that are readily available to designers on social media, design pages and image collection sites like Pinterest. The respondents describe these as fleeting, shallow and superficial, which contrasts with the *Architecture NZ* magazine’s tangibility and durability. And so, I surmise that the tangible nature of the magazine is seen as valuable to architects because of the nature of their work, creating tangible three-dimensional objects in space, and the reality that, for this profession, digital artefacts have less meaning or desirability.

Regarding the decrease of print publishing amongst the surge in digital publishing, there is some commentary about the digital page overtaking the printed page in desirability and cost-effectiveness. One respondent said that print is thought to be expiring because of “young people” but that architecture students would tell you otherwise, that they consume the magazine as a welcome antidote from screens. The hard copy magazine is a refreshing change from the screen, which is “full of archi-porn and self-promotion” and “fodder for shallow flashy images.” The publication is enduring, lasting longer than a “one shot wonder” on Instagram and the fleeting images of social media. One respondent saw the magazine as a place of thoughtful critique “in a sea of other commercial media selling product and fashion.”

## *Our Place*

This theme describes the way meaning is expressed and fostered by *Architecture NZ* and the way it speaks to and of the profession about itself. There was acknowledgement that this publication has longevity and is a generally respected title, and that New Zealand had been relatively well served by architectural and design press. The publication was described in glowing terms by some, as the premier architectural publication in New Zealand, that there is nothing else like it in New Zealand. A prominent idea that reoccurs in the testimonials is that *Architecture NZ* is documentary of the architectural philosophy and built environment specific to Aotearoa New Zealand. It records the evolution of the profession within the construction sector in this country, and the record informs the direction of the future. The magazine serves as a record, a library archive of the canon of architecture in New Zealand. Respondents become quite fervent in their testimonials on this point. They write about how formative the publication is as a way for students to get their heads around the New Zealand aesthetic. One respondent notes that there are “few remaining forums outside of lecture theatres where discourse is recognized and protected.” So the publication filled a gap for students when New Zealand architecture was limited to a small handful of lectures at university. It was described as “an essential institution” and “a source of insight that is accessible and digestible.” Another respondent writes that the publication is necessary for “the exchange of architectural knowledge and process development in NZ.”

As an archive or historical record, the publication is said to be very desirable. According to the respondents, *Architecture NZ* “is the foundation on which we evolve the NZ design environment” and “a historical document for what was important and endures and what has fallen by the wayside.” Many respondents referred to their collection of issues spanning years that they treasure as a reference document. One wrote that this archive is a record of “collective memory and vision,” while another writes of it “charting the built progress of this land.” This emphasis on recordkeeping seems particularly important, suggesting that the publication serves to represent and make real the work that they do. As one respondent writes, “to lose such an important guardian of NZ architectural history is unthinkable.”

The longevity of the publication’s existence engenders nostalgia in many architects for whom the magazine has been a part of the architectural scene

throughout their careers. Architects expressed nostalgia in describing both their involvement with and reliance upon the publication. Some had played an active role in the magazine's past—either as editors or contributors or photographers: “I count previous editors as friends.” Many had had projects published in the magazine held up as being exemplars of good design. One respondent wrote, “As a new graduate . . . I did some freelance writing for *Architecture NZ*, which in those times helped me pay the rent,” and continued, “*Architecture NZ* isn't just a magazine; it's a collegial institution.” For some, there is an element of having been through tumultuous times together before: A defamation claim back in the 1980s caused many in the profession to band together and contribute financial and moral support to save the magazine. Another respondent was reminded of her time working for the publisher ACP in the early 2000s and the financial difficulties publishing went through then. She wrote, “I experienced firsthand the passion and the struggles, and this is bringing it all back.” For one respondent, the possibility of losing the publication was a source of grief and he wrote that he would greatly miss the connection to the wider profession.

Concurrently, the magazine is expressive of the state of contemporary architecture here. It represents both a cultural heritage and a current vernacular. The publication doesn't just record the evolution and development of architecture in New Zealand, it has another function too, according to the testimonials, which is to express the New Zealand architectural vernacular. Several of the statements referred to the unique architectural story of this land, and this place as special, an island nation with its own DNA. One even quotes Kipling's description of Auckland in reference to Aotearoa: “Last, loneliest, loveliest.”<sup>49</sup> There is a deep attachment to the land expressed by respondents.

### *Discourse and Community*

Regarding the quality and tone of discourse, there was some reference to the importance of having a magazine that is provocative and encourages free discussion of the matters that are important to the profession. About a third of the respondents referred to discourse in some way, they used words like “communication,” “critique,” “discussion,” “analysis,” “commentary,” and “debate” to describe an element of the magazine that they felt was valuable. One described the magazine as providing an “immeasurable contribution to dialogue.” Another wrote that it reflects who we are in a

critical light. They describe the magazine as a venue for debates and discussions, and another wrote that the magazine brings together “images of the past, words for the future, a horizon that extends far beyond the anxieties of our present situation.” These architects make a clear case for valuing the critical and informed discussion that occurs within the pages of the magazine.

The publication functions as a signifier of the profession. Respondents’ testimonials suggest that the magazine helps to define the profession, and that the publication is essential to the discipline of architecture. They describe the magazine as bridging the gap between academia and practice, and that it “unites the pulse of our *mahi* and *korero* into a tangible medium.” It functions as a vehicle for people and places and opinions. One testimonial declares plainly, “we can’t not have a mag!” Respondents tied the magazine to the role of the architect in society, saying that the publication illustrates the way humans and buildings come together in a holistic purpose, and the magazine is demonstrative of “the difference we can make” across social, environmental, and cultural contexts. There was a sense of collective responsibility, as one respondent wrote it is valuable to “read the rich variety of work and the effort needed to produce it . . . helps to strengthen the sense of having a common purpose of service to our clients.” As well as this service, the testimonials refer to a strong sense of community and a collective, collegial culture, and that browsing through the magazine helps to center and inform the reader in terms of the culture of the profession. Furthermore, respondents refer to the enrichment of the practice of architecture through strong editorial leadership and the challenging articles written by industry players and academics. Not all respondents wanted the magazine to continue to do things the same way, however. A couple of respondents noted the current difficulties are an opportunity to revise or refresh the magazine by adopting the content of some of the publications that had been closed, and thus become more accessible and inclusive. Another respondent suggested it would be good to see some smaller projects make their way into the pages, instead of the usual grand and costly builds. Nevertheless, several respondents felt that it was humbling to be published in the magazine, interpreting that as peer recognition of good work. A couple mentioned the celebration of friends’ and colleagues’ accomplishments when they are profiled in the publication. Finally, there was a feeling that the publication encourages creativity in the industry and inspires those who aspire to join the profession.

In summary, the testimonials articulate the centrality of the publication to a cohesive and collegial industry where talent is celebrated, and creativity is fostered. The frequent use of the collective “we” in the testimonials suggests a certain security and clarity of belonging to the profession. There is a strong sense that architects have a responsible role in society, and they feel that weight on their shoulders and that *Architecture NZ* is a focal point that keeps them from swerving too far from fundamentals, like function and client brief, alongside the emphasis on finding creative solutions.

## Discussion

The thematic analysis of architects’ statements of support for the ongoing publication of *Architecture NZ* has identified two main themes: The first is a fondness for the tangible nature of the printed publication; the second is the centrality of the magazine to the shared history and contemporary development of the architectural profession in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is interesting to observe the emotion expressed in the testimonials, indicating a real fondness and, in some cases, nostalgia for the publication. There is comfort in the regular appearance of the magazine and the time spent reading it.

In a time when the risk of *Architecture NZ* closing was real, the readers made an overt statement of allegiance that forms a coherent expression of loyalty and perhaps bolstered the publisher’s resolve to keep the magazine going. Publications rely upon a guaranteed readership to attract advertiser spend, which funds the ongoing viability of the publication. But when the surety of advertiser funds was compromised due to global events it was strategic, from a business continuity perspective, to consolidate and maintain the readership that would attract advertisers back again by requesting subscriptions. Asking architects to articulate their support for the publication with a brief statement was a communicative strategy that functioned to galvanize at least a section of the community of practice. The statements of support, or testimonials, reveal three themes that demonstrate the ongoing utility and necessity, to them, of this publication. It is interesting that New Zealand architects remain attached to the printed copy in a time where hard copy publishing is less in demand and generally declining. It is reflective of their familiarity with the three-dimensional nature of things, that they find “real” things stimulating and worthy of exploration. For some architects, perhaps, the physicality of the publication is

an extension of the physicality and tangibility of the buildings they design in three dimensions. By and large, architects deal in worldly things. There are of course avenues of architectural practice where conceptual provocations are conceived, not intended to be realized in the sense of bricks and mortar but as a kind of conceptual play. Architects argue that this kind of philosophical experimentation is a crucial element of their responsibility for pushing the boundaries of what is considered form and function, place, and “construct.” However, much of the work that an architect engages in is *toward* the real: actual physical, material alternations in three-dimensional space. As Unwin writes, “The processes of architecture are applied in (or on) a real world with real characteristics: gravity, the ground and the sky, solid and space, climates, the progress of time, and so on. Works of architecture are constructed with real materials with their own innate characteristics and capacities.”<sup>50</sup>

There is, too, a long tradition of the architectural periodical, going back more than a century, and several decades in the case of *Architecture NZ* in its current and previous forms. The institution of architectural publishing is embedded in the profession, and while there is plenty of material available for download, architects within and hailing from New Zealand are fond of both the physical format and the thought leadership provided by this magazine. Not insignificant, is the crossover into the popular. *Architecture NZ* appears on bookshop and library shelves, accessible to the public who may, too, consume the publication for inspiration purposes. Architecture lends itself, by its visual nature at least, to accessibility in a way that the other professions do not. In this way architecture achieves exposure to, and engagement with, audiences outside of the profession.

Respondents indicate that the opportunity for discourse provided by the *Architecture NZ* is central to the profession. The magazine is a site of negotiation of the challenges in the industry and in the environment, in addition to the sharing of innovation and examples of new work. *Architecture NZ* is a source of critical discussion of the changing nature of architectural practice. It is also a source of inspiration and aspiration, as well as serving as a record of the evolving nature of the profession. This reflects the findings of Kong<sup>51</sup> and Irimeia<sup>52</sup> that professional discourse contributes to the identity creation of professionals and the “community of practice.”<sup>53</sup>

The passion expressed in response to the magazine being at risk indicates a fear of loss and an earnest response to the call to action to save it. It seems the discourse made possible by the publication is particularly

valued by the profession. An interesting omission from the testimonials is the reliance upon the publication as a marketing tool, a way of attracting new clients. It could be that this is an assumed function, but the architects describe the publication as being for their use and gratification rather than for that of the general public. This supports my assertion that the publication is central to the profession's expression of identity. The subtext in this analysis is the professional identity of architects. The testimonials indicate a process of negotiation, challenge, and review of professional identity occurring through the editorial decision-making, and content of the publication is it addresses problems of design, environment, and regulation.

For further examination and research is the architect's relationship with the land evident in the statements that goes beyond geography. Architects express a deep connection to the land in which they work, and although it is not the purpose of this research to determine the extent to which they are successful, they appear to want to do justice to the land in their designs. It is an aspect of the profession that is more artistic in nature, and where the very practical, functional aspects of the work nudge against something more emotional. Architects take seriously the responsibility for designing buildings that have longevity, and therefore should be fit for purpose to the extent that the purpose can be envisioned in a world where ways of life are changing at an accelerated pace. Accordingly, *Architecture NZ* expresses something that is inherently and endemically of Aotearoa New Zealand, expressed through coverage of socioculturally relevant decisions for this place. The magazine weaves together the threads of form and function and concept and budget in locus with what has gone before, with difficult histories and colonization, with ever-changing and a renegotiated sense of what it means to reside here, and with the identity of the architectural profession. Aotearoa New Zealand, is relatively small, and while there are distinctive differences in culture between islands and between regions, the periodical comfortably encompasses the architectural trajectory of the country, indicating a community of place alongside the community of practice.

## Conclusion

The messages of support provided by readers of *Architecture NZ* function as a record and demonstration of coalescence of a community that was at risk of becoming fragmented by the pandemic. They align with the things that the magazine achieves: the representation of a community, shared

understanding of the profession, a sense of belonging, and participation in the commons. The minor criticism expressed in the testimonials is about the scope or breadth of the projects featured, and by extension, the designers whose work receives the greatest attention. The magazine could take the opportunity presented by the crisis in publishing to review the content and perhaps make the magazine more inclusive by covering smaller-scale projects. Nevertheless, it raises the question whether *Architecture NZ* can be representative of the range of work across the country or whether it has been pigeonholed by tradition and its reputation as the major architectural periodical of New Zealand, and therefore tends to promote the “hero” projects over the everyday. A limitation of the research is the issue of whether the publication is representative of the whole profession or if some are better served than others. It is unlikely that those architects who do not see themselves represented will have offered their statement, and so apart from the few critical comments that indicate a preference for a wider range of content, the critical voice is likely absent from the data corpus. However, the intention of the study is not to assess the successes or failures of the publication but to examine the significance of the magazine to the members of the profession who were moved to provide a testimonial at a moment of vulnerability in the print-publishing sector.

Rather than sequestering the work of the profession away from the public eye, periodicals such as *Architecture NZ* help to expose the inner workings of the community of practice. It is, in effect, a democratization of the art and science of architecture. The magazine is an invitation to engage with the practice of architecture more thoughtfully than simply moving through—or driving past—the resulting built environment. In addition, the printed publication has more currency than an online one because it can be happened-upon serendipitously, whereas the online magazines must be sought out. A recent print publication that has arrived on the architectural scene is *Here*,<sup>54</sup> a hybrid online- and print-subscription model publication that was begun during pandemic lockdown and produces six issues per year. These two print publications now share the magazine racks, and both appear to thrive. This may be something of a turnaround given the precarious position that *Architecture NZ* was in at the beginning of the pandemic. It is also somewhat surprising that there has not been a flurry of online magazines attempting to fill the predicted gap in architectural publishing. Perhaps a finding of this analysis, that architects are compelled by three-dimensional artefacts over two-dimensional digital screens, may be at play.

There is utility in extrapolating these findings beyond the architecture profession and examining how they might apply in other fields, especially those that comprise a highly visual field of work, such as landscape design, civil engineering, product design, fashion, theater, and the performing arts. I propose that the themes identified in this research could be present in these other professions based on the mix of creativity, real-world physicality of the final product, and necessity of critique and sociocultural context embedded in the discourse. This is a promising direction for future research into professional communities and their relationship with magazine media.

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JENNIE WATTS (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Communication at Auckland University of Technology. She is a member of the Communication for Social Change Research Center, and she teaches and researches in the Critical Media Studies Department. Watts is committed to fostering critical literacy and inclusive pedagogies in education. Her diverse research interests currently include media literacy education, the mobilization of communities to protest, and climate change discourses in journalism and popular culture.

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