An open living archive for ACADIA
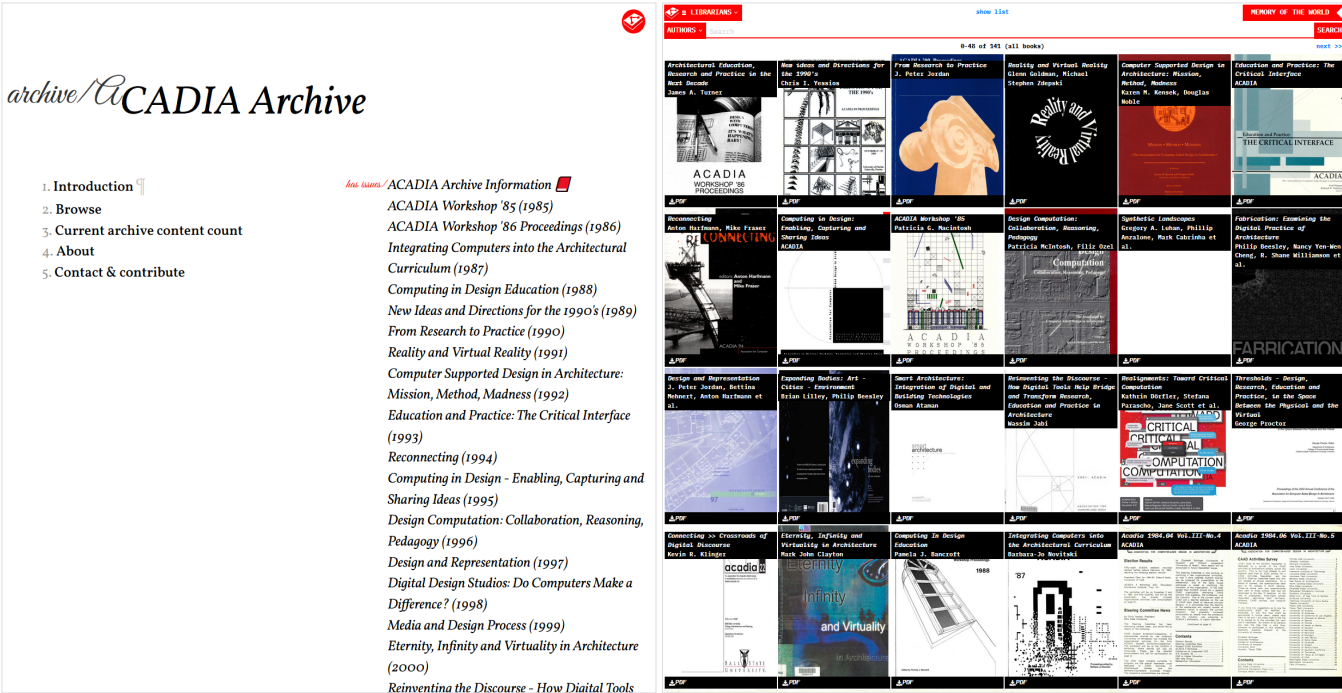
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1   Screenshots of the archive landing page (left), and of the archive library (right).

2   Screenshots of (left to right) the archive sitemap listing all content; the entry for the 1985 Acadia Workshop listing contributions, key information and a library link to the proceedings volume; and an article from the 1995 conference listing co-authors, key metadata, and library link to its proceedings volume.
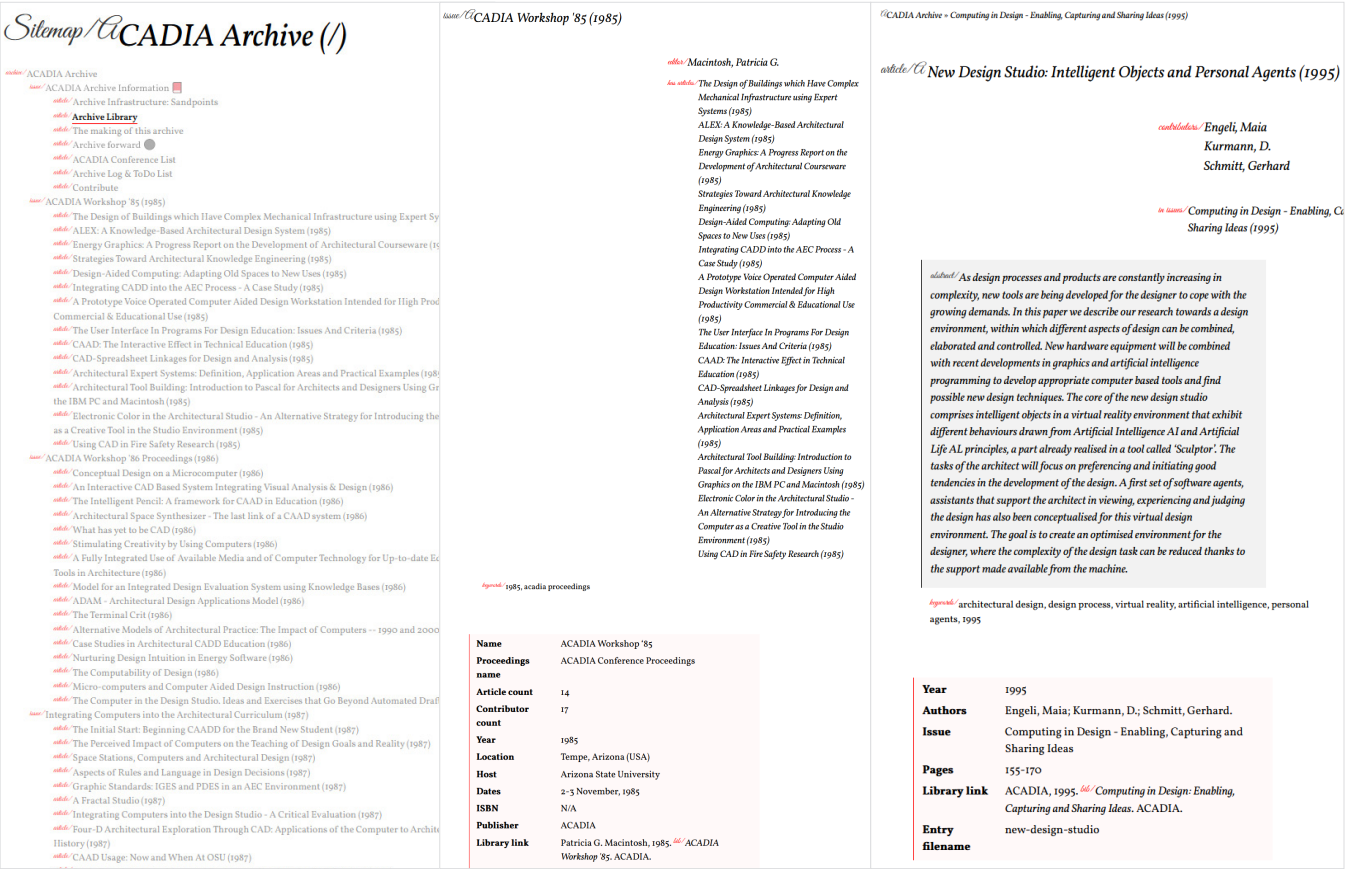
What is computation today? And why archive?

ACADIA was founded in the early 1980s with a mission, like similar initiatives (e.g. eCAADe, CAAD Futures, etc.), to disseminate knowledge on computation in architectural design, planning, and education, as well as to contribute, through computation, in shaping "humane physical environments."

Four decades later, the question 'What is computation?' is so ubiquitous and pervasive that it becomes elusive. Those of us old enough to remember would recall generations of pioneers eager to introduce new tools, methods, etc. to the community, as well as the resistance against 'the digital' in architecture. Nevertheless, from our present viewpoint computation seems to have won. Computing is everywhere, not just within academic research or the profession's 'avant-garde,' but in virtually all architectural practices. If there is even an outside to computation in architecture today, it would be difficult to pinpoint.

However, what we architects tend to remiss –both in discourses and classrooms– is that computation has a history, and is not just a set of practices and discourses locked in the present. All too often we observe the discourses pertaining to architectural computation shifting to the 'new' and being taken up by their times' current technologies, tools, affordances, and the hypes and speculations that these drive. Inevitably, the cycle repeats when, again, newer innovations take up the spotlight, followed by new paradigms that disrupt and supersede the previous ones. While some of these paradigms live on by feeding into their successors, others are abandoned and largely forgotten like dead ends in the branching evolution of architecture computation –for historians, perhaps, to discover at a later time.

Eventually, the cost of these cycles of disruption in architectural computing practices and discourses is our own history. Here, we shall not conflate history with a line tracing a causal genealogy of victors that justify the present, but rather a larger body of knowledge: a space of contributions that influence one another, that reflect visions from different points in time and speculations on potentialities, even technologies, perhaps not available to us today. Moreover, this is a history of people striving to contribute to a scientific community.

Indeed, computation comes with a history, and by now this history is quite considerable. More importantly for us, as our generations' 'computationally-minded' researchers and practitioners, this history is our community's heritage. Creating an open living archive is a step closer to acknowledging this heritage.

An open-source and open-access archive for ACADIA

My proposal for the ACADIA Cultural History project was to create an open archive, using for input a list of conference contributions between 1985 and 2020, and a collection of digital proceedings publications. The archive was built using open infrastructure and open workflows implementing *Sandpoints*, an experimental publishing infrastructure developed by Marcell Mars as a theme for the static website builder *Hugo*. All entries were populated computationally via a Python program that generated entries for all 1488 articles, 2057 contributors, and 40 conference proceedings between 1985 and 2020. Each conference entry lists its editors, articles, and key metadata. Each article entry lists its contributors, abstract, and keywords (if available), and each contributor page lists their contributions and co-authors. Moreover, all entries are interconnected so one can also browse via keywords, co-authors, and backlinks. In addition, the archive's library catalog currently provides access to 22 optimized digital proceedings volumes and 119 other historical documents.

While such an archive can certainly allow for better access and traversal across the body of knowledge that constitutes ACADIA, what it can facilitate and also publish in hypertext form, are equivalents of archive-playthroughs: analyses, elaborations, mappings, and syllabuses to apprehend and disseminate reflections of this rich and openly available heritage. All are welcome!

All archive contents are open. All data, software, and infrastructure used to create it are open source. These are all provided and documented at the archive site, along with instructions for its extension and maintenance. The archive is currently hosted at: https://pages.sandpoints.org/sandpoints/acadiaarchive-46619c43/archive/acadia/ and is planned to migrate to archive.acadia.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Constantinos Miltiadis, doctoral researcher at Aalto University, is a transdisciplinary architect and design researcher; also a programmer, media artist, curator, teacher, and librarian. He has studied architecture at NTU-Athens, and at the Chair for CAAD ETH Zurich, and pursued studies in computer music at KU Graz. He has taught creative computation and experimental VR game design for large academic courses and brief workshops, and has published contributions in fields including architecture, artistic research, and game studies. He is currently finalizing his doctoral dissertation which investigates virtual navigable environments inconstructible in the physical world, experienceable only through digital media.