# Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarship 2013 Samuel Butler

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Access for All (Or Some)

A research trip to academic, industry, and community accessibility architecture in Amsterdam, Birmingham, London, Singapore and Sydney.





# **Itinerary**

**Sydney** 18th November

**Singapore** 19th November

Changi Airport (SOM with Moshe Safdi)

Amsterdam 20th - 26th November

Schiphol International Airport Nieuwmarkt district tour Royal Palace Rijksmuseum Silodam (MVRVD) Science Centre NEMO (Renzo Piano)

# Space and Flows Conference at the University of Amsterdam

The Architecture Centre Amsterdam
(ARCAM) (René van Zuuk)
Amsterdam Noord district tour
Pakhuis de Zwijger (Architectenbureau Jan
van Stigt)
Openbare Bibliotheek Amsterdam (Jo
Coenen)
EYE Dutch Film Institute (Delugan Meissl
Associated)
The Waag Gatehouse
CREA Institute (Joost Glissenaar)
National Maritime Museum

#### Haarlem

The Raakspoort Haarlem (Bolles+Wilson) Haarlem City Hall Windmill De Adriaan

# **Itinerary**

#### Birmingham 26th - 30th November

The Bullring (Future Systems)
The Library of Birmingham (Buro Happold)
Christmas Markets and city walk
Birmingham Town Hall

#### Access for All Seminar at M\*A\*D\*E

St. Martin's Church
St. Phillip's Cathedral
Council House + Gardens
Colmore Row walking tour
The Birmingham Hippodrome (Associated
Architects)
Newhall Square

**London** 1st - 9th December

Site Visit with dblo Associates, Chelsea

**Amsterdam** 10th December ~transit~

**Singapore** 12th December CBD walking tour

**Sydney** 13th December

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**Post Tour Visits + Events** 

**Universal Design Conference Sydney Town Hall** 20th - 21st August 2014

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## **Executive Summary:**

Following the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in 2013, Australia was poised to become a world leader in Integrated Universal Design. Faced with two important facts: Our urbanised spaces growing at an unprecedented rate, and disabled groups now given the freedom to allocated funds towards projects they deem suitable, the catalyst for an investigation into 'Integrated Access' and 'Universal Design' appeared as appropriate and necessary.

Utilising the Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarship I was awarded by the NSW Architect Registration Board, I developed an itinerary to explore pedestrian mobility through the designed urbanised cores of Singapore, Amsterdam, Birmingham, London, and Sydney, as a means to find suitable (and relevant) examples of inclusive architecture. Aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the limits and responsibilities architects and urban planners face in providing universally accessible design, I conducted interviews and analysed both publicly and privately designed architecture: enriching public spaces, and exclusive, barrier design.

The 'universality' of disability is well know, with approximately 20% of the global population having a recognised disability. Lonely Planet this year dedicated a new sector of their web presence to disabled travellers, which in addition shows the necessity for quality information and experience when discussing design and mobility. Inclusive design is not only for those with disabilities, but influences cultural, social, and opportunities for all members of the community to engage with. Mobility is a gradient along which members of society slide, and those whom require disabled access temporarily, may also not always require it.

Through a cataloguing and observation of public/ urban spaces in action, across the Netherlands, England, and briefly Singapore, the dependability on access for activation and usage became clear: public designs which are easily accessible, provide seating, varying levels of privacy, and an integrated flow of pedestrian activity, create more possibilities. One of the most recognisable observations made over each of the study areas, was the struggle of users performing day-to-day tasks, such as entering stepped cafés with strollers, which were not designed for them. Clearly, this is obviously highly problematic. In an uninterrupted natural setting, we understand our ability to move through space is limited by our surroundings and our adaptability, however this should not be the case in any constructed urban space, where humans have crafted levels, surface materials and heights to suit a particular user.

By traveling to Amsterdam to attend the Fourth Spaces and Flows Conference on Urban and Extra Urban Design, I participated in addressing high level academic and psychological effects of urbanity on community. Similarly when traveling around the Netherlands, the attitude towards accessibility often appeared simplistic, however it's integration into singular, integrated solutions is considerably more beneficial than current 'tick-box' global design trends. After Amsterdam, I travelled to Birmingham, to meet their own architectural advocacy centre M\*A\*D\*E. I attended the RIBA conference hosted by M\*A\*D\*E, Access For All: Designing Inclusive, Accessible Buildings and Spaces, which contrasted starkly with the CBD's pre-1950 buildings, who's architectural access policies largely appeared unconsidered.

I was lucky enough to spent one week in the office of dblo Associates in Fulham, London, assisting in the documentation and evaluation of several projects. dblo came highly recommended for their inclusive approach to design, deeply considered design for holistic client needs, and design to 'future-proof' each of their projects. Additionally while in London, I engaged with advocacy groups for both accessibility and disability, who petitioned both on statuary and grassroots community levels, for recognition and acceptance into the design process. I have remained in contact with Accessibility UK, and plan to continue an exchange of research. Traveling from Amsterdam's Dam Square (built late 1200's) to London's Piccadilly Circus (1896), and upon return to Sydney's own Martin Place (1982) there remains a defiance to accept and design with the sectors of society with limited mobility.

I would like to thank the NSW Architect Registration Board, as executors of the Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarship Trust. In addition, I would like to acknowledge and thank Paul Berkemeier and Dr. Catriona McLeod for their guidance in preparing for this Scholarship.



(A:) Travelator, Changi Airport, Singapore (B:) A retrofitted canal bridge integrates seamlessly with it's context, Amsterdam



### Introduction

Proceeded by the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme by the Australian Federal Government, my Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarship began when disabled Australians were given the freedom to individually choose where funding for community and private disability projects would be directed. The majority of these projects will directly involve architects and other creative, construction, and design industries, and Australia, as a responsibility to the global architectural community, should provide leadership in championing Universal Access. The term 'Universal Accessibility' does not refer to pathways or spaces designed only for disabled users. It refers to placemaking which are easily accessible by all people, regardless of their level of mobility. An inclusive approach renders the definition between 'disabled' or 'able bodied' users irrelevant, and provides an impartial equity in placemaking. I consider this to be the hallmark of successful public design.

"In 2013, more than 50% of the global population lived in urban areas. By 2030, it is predicted that 60% of all people will live in a city, and this percentage is predicted to increase into the future."

I traveled to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in search of the highest quality precedents for universally accessible design and space, to articulate the challenges Australia may face as the urbanised and dense city regions increase globally, and on home shores.

#### **AMSTERDAM**

Arriving to central Amsterdam amplified a most striking difference in public spatial design, having come from the design scales present in Sydney. In navigating the thoroughfare (bike lanes often having right of way over pedestrian footpaths), jumping the 40cm gap between platform to train, for those trains marked "Disabled friendly", and tackling stairs of a 1:1 rise/going ratio, I began to appreciate the inbuilt regulatory differences of Australia, perhaps for the first time! Whilst often approached with little to no enthusiasm, the seemingly conservative regulations of '2R + G' have a widely effecting influence on everything from plot size, spatial density, and quality of space.

1. Statistic from the Global Health Observatory (GHO) 2013 study, a suborganisation of The World Health Organisation (WHO)

Setting foot in Dam Square, home to the Royal Palace, various luxury hotels and shopping, I was provided with my first hybrid of Universal Access and public space. The National Monument remembers the victims of WWII, and is incidentally a fantastic example of universal access, providing barrier-free access to all levels of the monument in an integrated and simple way.

The tall, thin, 'Amsterdam Style' maisonettes ubiquitous in the central Nieuwmarkt district, seem to scream loudly the value of land below them, as well as containing equally hilarious and dangerous vertical circulation. Amsterdam, along with London and Sydney, have extortionately high per square metre prices for buildable land, and to combat 'loosing' any space to circulation, floor-to-floor stairs running vertically in only 1.5 horizontal metres is deemed completely acceptable. The pressure to design for immediate usage, and not for the 'comfort' of adaptability, appears contained within this housing, but it is a strong reminder of the legacy bad design can pertain.

# Spaces and Flows: Fourth International Conference on Urban and ExtraUrban Studies

After several days of touring the Noord, Zuid, Nieuw-West, and Central Canal districts, I attended the Space and Flows Conference at the University of Amsterdam, meeting with delegates from all continents and a similarly wide range of academic research. Alongside keynote speakers, presenters from the fields of Sociology, Geology, Political Sciences and Architecture each contributed research, identifying the changing landscapes of developing urban communities, housing and national identity within urban contexts. We were welcomed by the former National Geographic contributor, founding Director and Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Amsterdam, Dr. Jan Nijman. His explanations of Amsterdam's occupant driven development, leading it's significant investments in public parks, canals, and squares for it's citizens, framed a multicultural and diverse approach towards urban planning, the likes of which the Netherlands enjoys through the beauty of today's Amsterdam.



The canal-side University of Amsterdam

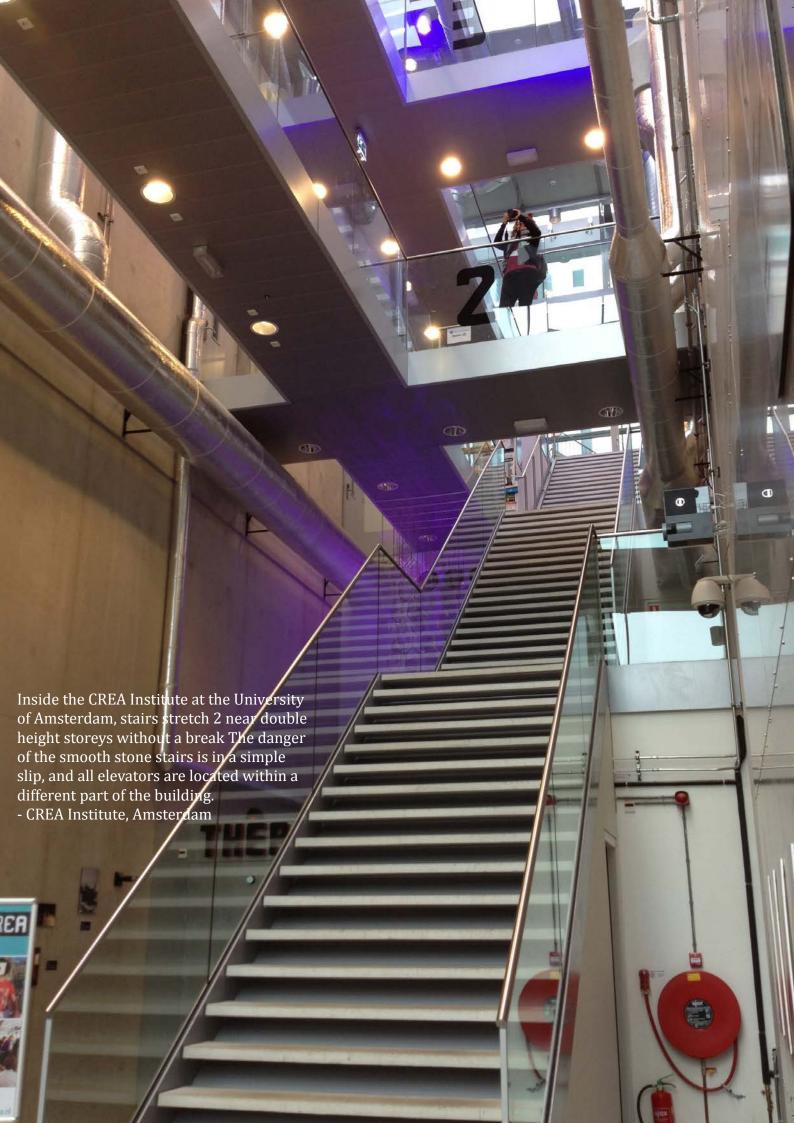


Prof. David Wilson (University of Illinois) and delegates from the University of New York



Dr. Jan Nijman's opening remarks





The academic abstraction of this conference was at first confronting, as I believed successful urban planning was more often simply the collaborative work of architects and urban planners; however equal design rigour and consideration for a magnitude of users is also required in the construction of laws and regulations which govern 'public spaces'.

The presentations of socio-political commentators ranging from American Harvard PHD candidates, to Professors from Ukraine's Taras Shevchenko, jointly reinforced the value of both grassroots *AND* governmental strategies for designing inclusive environments, sighting governmental, alongside community-based programs, to facilitate the needs of rapidly increasing world populations.

On an urban scale, the morphology of the Amsterdam shows a movement towards enabling the plentiful canal bridges by retrofitting those previously fitted with only stairs, to having ramped entrances and seating. In utilising the existing material palette of the street, the improvements to mobility, usability, and value, become significantly enhanced. The process of these redesigns are also crucial, where sometimes the 'second chance' given to design problems, produces a more honest, interactive, and accessible architecture.

#### **BIRMINGHAM**

Taking a short international flight, I began the second half of my journey: the United Kingdom. I traveled directly to Birmingham in order to attend the RIBA organised 'Access for All' Seminar, hosted by M\*A\*D\*E, Birmingham's architectural action office.

M\*A\*D\*E provided a great setting for lively discussions amongst architects and other industry delegates. The seminar focused on the importance of design within inclusive architecture, outlined through specification and building regulations. From window heights suitable for wheelchair users, to door handle and backing plate contrast for those with vision impairments, resources and examples were discussed in workgroups, discussing specific design challenges.

"To a child, the colour of a wall might be the most vivid thing they remember about their school, or the smell of the desks. If we ignore the acoustic, the lighting, or the malleability of fittings, we can unknowingly create environments more psychologically similar to prison cells than healthy, functional spaces."

Importantly, the course did not focus solely on the built environment, but also provoked designers to sense the often 'invisible architecture'.

#### Access For All: Designing Inclusive, Accessible Buildings and Spaces Seminar

Designs shaped in order not to exclude, but to accommodate, guide, traffic, and welcome the flows of public, disregarding their level of mobility, were unfortunately not largely present in Birmingham. Similarly to Amsterdam, Birmingham has deliberately maintained most of it's pre-settlement landscape, however in Birmingham's case, the undulating hills have translated to uneven entrances to buildings. sloping or stepped ramps with concoctions of obscure handrail placements, and illogical 'box-ticking' designs. Walking slowly along the rolling streets of Birmingham, the consideration is not one of individual plots or rules, but over the urban domain; as demand on these urban domains expands, accessibility appears to have been pushed to the bottom of a long list of priorities.

Exemplar precedents such as the Tring Park School for the Performing Arts demonstrate healthy spaces for young people through their detailing. Numerous designers of aged care facilities now use easily recognisable and personalised colour wheels to assist patients suffering from Dementia in wayfinding. These precedents extended my awareness of how far

universal accessibility needs to be considered, and the importance of it's consideration at all stages of design projects.

Birmingham's central shopping district The Bull Ring served a healthy level of architectural intrigue with its' alien formations, and very fully considered accessibility throughout the complex's difficult hillside location. The flow of space over level changes and landscape, show clearly that Universal Design is not achieved through a check list, but through intelligent design; considerate of the specific, needs and daily users, with honest expectations of their desires to move.

My appreciation for statutory and large scale urban regulation increased as my journey continued, and the influence of regulatory structures within varying socio-political schemes began to divide the 'tick-box' designs, and integrated community spaces. Private businesses who's stores welcomed clients, or who had consulted an access consultant, were legibly improved. The flow and ease of access into stores, which in turn benefits business owners and their community, did not discriminate between the narrowest of bars, and wide fronted commercial malls; the choices for Universal Access are made often.



Delegates form working groups in detailing & specification discussion



Access for all, or some? One example of literally hundreds, in access barriers in Birmingham's CBD



M\*A\*D\*E Centre for Placemaking is the meeting place for the network of inter-industrial designers





#### **LONDON**

After several more days in and around Birmingham, I traveled by bus to London to undertake a internship with an office in Fulham. I had organised to spend time at the office of dblo Associates, a highly recommended practice for their accessibility projects and ongoing client relationships. dblo's reputation for accessibility responses was (and continues to be) formidable. The intricate nature of the in-house design processes taught me comprehensive lessons in conceptual reasoning and it's integration into architectural practice and design.

While traveling in London, I also utilised the existing online networks of Accessibility and Disability advocacy groups, allowing me to openly question accessibility with an audience of over 20,000 users. London's @ AccessibilityUK is one such group, maintaining live coverage of all Tube, bus and rail networks. Resources produced by the group include maps, station, and platform information for zero-level-change journeys, a vital resource for those planning journeys with Transport For London.

Every ramp, stair tread, tactile indicator, and handrail I observed in Amsterdam, Birmingham, London, Sydney, and the places in-between, served a purpose. Some served this purpose 100 times an hour, others perhaps only once every 6 months. The key concept of integrated access is not in a single solution, but in a series of choices fit for all members of the public, without exclusion.



Wheelchair users were hard to approach, but happy to discussing the shortcomings of TFL's services



Hybrid entrance to a bank. Aesthetically part tickbox design, but fully accessible



dblo Associates studio space

## Conclusion

The findings from my journey have gone beyond an awareness of accessibility, and have focused me to pursue the richness of inclusive design further. Broad terms such as 'community', and 'user' do not force architects to imagine a person struggle to perform simple tasks such as opening a window, but are unable to due to unconsidered design.

The initial motivation for my research was drawn from the experience of separation, dividing people according to their level of mobility. I believe at every stage of every project, there is an opportunity to create more considered inclusive design, and it is the prerogative of Architects and Designers to hone these opportunities.

Finally, the Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarship has allowed me a fresh perspective towards design within Australia. As designers, we often perceive problems which could be fixed, or improved with a small effort, however we are often so close to these problems, we are unable to detach ourselves from routine. This scholarship has encouraged me to confront issues of communal value, and to utilise the network of designers globally to produce affirmative, accessible architecture. Being awarded this scholarship have been a huge motivation, and I am thankful for the drive it has provided me to put my findings into action.



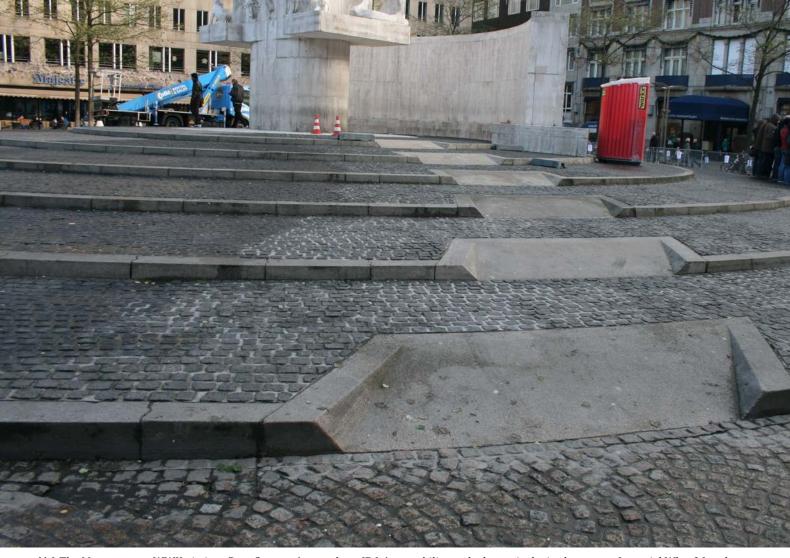
Fulham & Imperial Wharf residences built in the 1970s'



Imperial Wharf's new multiresidential area provides an elegant solution to ramping, as stairs are equally important to urban fabric diversity as ramps



Inclusive, singular approaches to access are not always the best, however this smooth gradient toward the ferry terminal appears suitable within it's context



(A:) The Monument to WWII victims, Dam Square, Amsterdam (B:) Accessability to docks are inclusive by nature, Imperial Wharf, London













# BYERA HADLEY TRAVELING SCHOLARSHIP 2013-14

GREETINGS. SAMUEL BUTLER IS MY NAME.

I AM A TRAVELING ARCHITECTURE STUDENT, STUDYING INTEGRATED ACCESS IN EUROPEAN AND AUSTRALIAN CONTEXTS.

MY RESEARCH IS PART OF A BYERA HADLEY TRAVELING SCHOLARSHIP

ARCHIVE RANDOM RSS SEARCH TWITTER

# **Sydney > Amsterdam**

Date: 21 November 2013

#### Sydney > Amsterdam

Leaving the warmth and familiarity of Sydney at 23° C, I boarded a flight for the long journey to Europe. There was short respite from the 22 odd hours of flying, with a 2 hour stoppover in Singapore, which amongst the carp pools and butterfly enclosures on the overhauled Changi Airport, Travelators speed both abled bodied and limited access users to their respective gates.

Upon arriving into Amsterdam I quickly donned my winter coat, the same one I looked ridiculous walking around Sydney with the day prior, but the icy local weather of -1°C comfortably justified my preparations. Leaving from Schiphol Airport, I entered the beautiful, free city of Amsterdam for the first time, and a new country, presumably equally as free and beautiful.

I transferred via a disabled-access equip train (see images above) and arrived into Amsterdam Centraal at 6AM, and through exploring the station further, I discovered the not-so-well hidden obsession of all Dutch people. Bicycles. Locals treated the casually freezing morning as if it were springtime in the countryside, perfectly displaying the non-difference between 'commuters', and everybody else. Children rode up-top, in handlebar mounted seats, or in wooden playpins attached frontally, as parents pedal carefully over tram tracks and ice. My investigation of integrated access here took on another dimension, the consideration of exterior surface treatments for hard (read: European) winters.

#### People I meet:

Howard, Plane flight from Singapore to Amsterdam.

Howard is a gentleman with limited mobility, as well as several health conditions which prevent him from standing for long periods of time. He often uses a wheelchair with a dynamo to get around his hometown of Eindhoven, but he admitted to being 'typically male', in not wanting to show his physical limitations.

"When I go shopping with my wife, I am always looking for the next place to sit. We can walk together, she will go off to another shop, and I will wait for her sitting down. That's the most important thing for me when we go out, a place you don't have to pay to sit."

Public architecture isn't always just about looking great; often, it's only about finding a place to sit.

By the by:

Amsterdam is BEAUTIFUL.

### **Conference Review**

Date: 26th November 2013

4th Annual Spaces and Flows Conference of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies

Friday morning sun filled a bright but chilly courtyard, illuminating the breaths of myself and around 150 colleagues. I am checking in for the 4th annual Spaces and Flows Conference of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies, the European leg this year being hosted at the University of Amsterdam.

The conference drew papers by Urbanists, Geographers, Architects, Landscape Architects, academics and PhD candidates alike, with a truly international representation. After warming our variously jet-lagged bodies and minds with coffee, we were welcomed by the conference's first presenter Jan Nijman, Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His passionate and factual presentation plunged deep into the cultural, economic, and social influences which shaped current day Amsterdam, and instilled a sense of understanding for the many first time visitors to Amsterdam.

During sessions over the next 2 days, papers were presented over a range of topics, mapping current academic work from all over the world. The format of the conference was a 15 minute individual presentation of papers, followed by 5 minutes of questions. Aside from mentioning individual speakers, the collective of presenters shared views on globalisation, governance, the effects of psychological and imaginary spaces, the mind's relationships with place and space, and as far ranging as waste tracks around tropical islands, and community.

Day one wrapped up with panel presentation session and drinks at CREA\*, the student run cultural centre at the University of Amsterdam. As the cold evening then took hold, around 30 delegates whisked themselves to cosy De Waag restaurant, located in the Nieuwmarkt square.

Day two bought on a slightly shorter, but equally intense day of urban and extra-urban presentations, while the morning plenary sessions by Rachael Pane and David Wilson inspired delegates with hope, and reminded of the human face of academia.

The Spaces and Flows mantra continued through all discussions, and I took part in the nominally named 'Garden Sessions' with plenary speakers David Wilson and Gordon MacLeod, although 'Indoor Canal-side Sessions' would have been an equally suitable title. Their views towards integrated access was complex, but agreed that an integrated approach is what is required for both retrofitting and new projects.

Spaces and Flows wrapped up with a series of new friendships, and approaches towards the now multifaceted field of access. Importantly also, I learned that through not only problem solving, but through vision and planning, we will be able to build a future which will not exclude.

# Haarlem, Amsterdam, Birmingham

Date: 28th November 2013

#### A chilly hello.

In keeping some chronology, I'm posting a few days behind, having now arrived in Birmingham. But the bonus is integrated photos in blogposts!:)

Also, I can confirm that I will be taking part in an Internship with dblo associates in London! http://www.dblo.co.uk

Amsterdam > Haarlem > Birmingham

The National Monument remembers the victims of WW II. It stands in Dam Square, home to the Royal Palace, and various luxury hotels and shopping. It is incidentally a fantastic example of integrated access, provides barrier free access to all levels of the monument, and a beautifully simple answer to level changes. THIS, even though small, perfectly exemplifies the concept of Integrated Access.

Cross promotion! For further images and review of current travels, keep up to date on twitter: @ SamuelButler13

The phrases 'Tactile Indicators' and 'Interesting' rarely meet, however this is a noteworthy example. Historically sensitive and completely useable, this is pretty neat.

Now: a final look at Amsterdam written in Haarlem, and some more photos to come. Feel free to email through any feedback or questions to byerahadley.samuel@gmail.com.

United Kingdom, I'm on my way!

# "Access for All: Birmingham"

Date: 26th November 2013

Access for All was presented in Birmingham on Thursday the 28th November as an RIBA initiative for Continuing Professional Development, and a display of fresh perspectives on inclusion, disabled, and integrated access work from specialists Prof. Keith Bright and Jane Simpson.

An introduction based on the overlap between British Standards and Best Practice documents outlined the prevailing theme of the seminar; no matter who our clients are and who are the proposed users, architects have to consider the lifespan of our buildings in terms of their uses, to future-proof our buildings for inclusion.

Regulations such as the Equality Act are similar in the UK as in Australia, however the 'Intended use and users' struck a chord, telling designers that we are liable for our choices to include or exclude from projects, but only to the intended users of that particular building.

For example, if you are a small firm requiring office space in a multi-storey building, and no employees have limited access, there is no problem in your office only having stairs. In considering the future though, we must consider future users. To finish that scenario, in 5 years time and a different company moves into that office space, a worker who requires a lift will have grounds for legal action against the buildings owners, if they are not able to retrofit the access to allow for their usage.

Whilst this sounds limiting, future-proofing buildings to allow for change should now be an integral element to the design process. While individual houses and small access solutions may be required to buildings retrospectively, large building projects should now be considering projects, whilst still on paper, to be adapted for future use.

Next stop, London!

Photo: Birmingham's new state-of-the-art library

# "The Wrap Up"

Date: 5 December 2013

It seems fitting that I can now sit and write comfortably on my laptop, aboard the first of two flights taking me home. With the clouds floating around hundreds of metres below, and the seatbelt sign now switched off, I can reflect on the past 3 weeks.

The closed loop from the Spaces and Flows conference in Amsterdam, where the academic and publication worlds provoke a methodological approach to urban design, with time out for delegates to sip mulled wine over imitation oak christmas markets. To London's overland train system, bringing literal worlds of commuters daily, where the culture of appearing not to see another human is both frightening and surreal. To Birmingham, where although the city can easily be divided between it's farming and urban roots, careful consideration is given to wheelchair and disabled access widely.

Most recently in London, I spent one week in the office of dblo associates, assisting in the documentation and evaluation of projects. dblo's team come highly recommended due to their inclusive approach to design, deep considered design for holistic client needs, and designing to futureproof each of their projects. Office leaders have had their own swipes with the regulations, however agree that through a combination of guidelines and 'tailored-fit' design, Integrated Access is entirely achievable for 95% of projects.

The opportunity to participate in this field investigation has been advantageous and rewarding; being able to follow design intuition in theoretical practice, and constantly reference new surroundings. As a new direction in my architectural education has been formed, I see the area of disabled access design and advocation for integrated access a personal cause, which I aim to work in furthering in practice.

I would like to thank the New South Wales Architect Registration Board, and the panel whom chose candidates for the Byera Hadley Traveling Scholarships. In addition, I would like to acknowledge and thank Paul Berkimier and Dr. Catriona McLeod for their guidance in preparing for the Scholarship. The advantages of this scholarship I hope to repay to the Architectural community of NSW and Australia at large.

This opportunity to travel allowed me a change of context, and to focus on the 'everyday' urban fabric. So often we see things that could be fixed, or improved with a small effort, however we are unable to detach ourselves from routine to make those changes. It seems I have a fresh set of eyes.

Thank you all for reading.

Kind regards,

**Samuel Butler** 

# **Contact Sheets**

