

PROXIMITY

LINES THROUGH TIME



BYERA HADLEY TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

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PROXIMITY **1**

INTRODUCTION

Entitled “Proximity”, my Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship submission proposed an exploration of “how we, in Sydney, can adopt a more assertive approach when designing in proximity to our valued buildings”¹. While “Proximity” was not precisely defined, the general premise was that urban places thrive on visual and spatial competition between buildings of differing periods and styles.

The city of Sydney is prosperous, has a benign climate, features spectacular topography and has many fine old buildings. However in recent times Sydney has been characterised by conservative architecture which reflects a deeply conservative society. With iconic structures such as the Opera House, Harbour Bridge and Queen Victoria Building, there is a sense that the general public is happy enough with the present character of Sydney and wishes to preserve the city rather than risk its improvement. Local and State Government planners have acted in deference to public sentiment, which is largely why, though Sydney has undergone numerous developments in recent years, the outcome is unfailingly conservative. When architect Richard Francis-Jones of FJMT proposed a visually intense addition to the Museum of Contemporary Art; “the jury rejected his proposal on the basis that its expressionist nature competed too strongly with the Opera House.”² After brief moments of public exuberance, order is calmly restored.

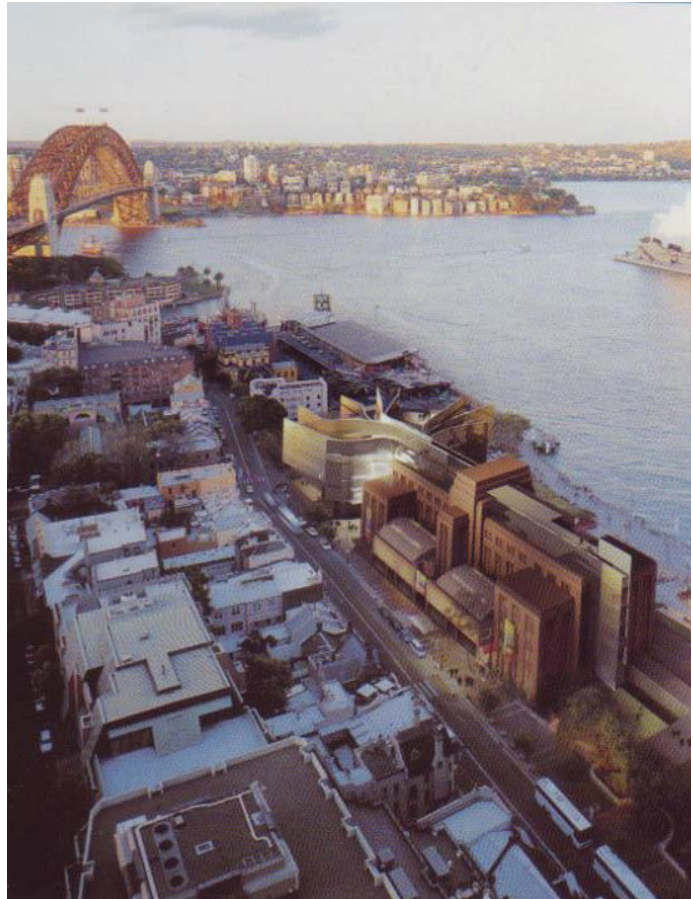
If Sydney’s architectural milieu largely reflects the dominant cultural/political paradigm, what then did “Proximity” seek to discover? The death this year of Opera House creator, Danish architect Joern Utzon, reminded us that Sydney’s greatest and most progressive building was designed by an outsider and in defiance of conservative sentiment. Like artists, architects operate more effectively from the periphery rather than from within the establishment. Perhaps this is why, as the public sector has become increasingly privatised, the formal qualities of civic buildings designed by contemporary architects have begun to appear disturbingly uniform.³

Cities are fundamentally places of trade. In modern times the traditional status of the city as a trade node has been outmoded by a globalised financial network, which has seemingly eroded the outward differences between cities. At a local level, however, the functioning of the city has continued unimpeded. The city expresses its significance through the exchange of commerce, politics, societies and cultures, languages and signs. The density and diversity of this exchange is what defines the vitality of the metropolis. From a visual/spatial perspective, this exchange is as reliant on the input of minorities and outsiders as it is on the dominant paradigm. At the turn of the millennium, the image of Arthur Stace’s chalk graffito emblazoned on the Harbour Bridge was a powerful expression of this phenomenon.

However, in the urban domain, contemporary architecture not only contributes to the city’s exchange of values, but also emphasises the continuity of time as a counterpoint

to the destabilising forces of Modernity. Spanish thinker, Ignasi De Solà-Morales Rubió, theorises that the need to recognise and isolate historic strata was a by-product of Modernism's dialectical definition of "newness and oldness".⁴ Accordingly, "new buildings [had] value only to the extent that they present[ed] a challenge to the passing of time".⁵

In his essay for *The Double Dimension: Heritage and Innovation*, the late Neville Quarry asked; "Does history begin and end, and peter out some time in between?"⁶ The apparent rift between bygone ages and the present is a construction of Modernity, embodied in Sydney by the unsympathetic treatment of the city's colonial sandstone infrastructure by its internationalist skyscrapers, and subsequently in the zealous over-protection and embalming of historic fabric. Whilst old buildings remind us of the worth of bygone ages, new buildings embody our hopes for the future. We need both: memories of the past and dreams of the future, in order to aspire to anything better. What are cities if not collective places of aspiration?



FJMT MCA Proposal

<http://www.butterpaper.com/vanilla/extensions/InlinelImages/image.php?AttachmentID=85>

What "Proximity" was really concerned with was the "intervention"⁷: a very specific type of project in which an architect is required to add to an existing historic building - or create a new infill building - within an existing historic streetscape. Concentrating issues of value exchange and historical continuity in a single built envelope, this type of project generally attracts the utmost interest and debate. The ongoing transformation of the heritage-listed Museum of Contemporary Art, which has to date exhausted a score of architectural designs, is an exemplar of the controversy which often accompanies an attempt at intervention.⁸

Whilst my proposal began by proclaiming "that we in Sydney should build important public buildings in proximity to one another"⁹, the study was in fact intended to encourage the frequency and quality of interventions carried out in Sydney. However Solà-Morales Rubió warns against any attempt to establish empirical principles: "The relationship between a new architectural intervention and already existing architecture is a phenomenon that changes in relation to the cultural values attributed both to the meaning of historic architecture and to the intentions of the new intervention", he writes. "Hence it is an enormous mistake to think that one can lay down a permanent doctrine or still less a scientific definition of architectural intervention". What is clear is that an "intervention" must be carried out using contemporary techniques, materials and idioms. Any attempted recreation of historic motifs or styles inevitably simplifies and abstracts the historical period

which the architect has attempted to replicate. Or, as writer/curator Peter Emmett succinctly puts it; “a projection into the future is as abstract as a projection into the past”.¹⁰

When I proposed my research topic for the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship, it seemed that Australian architecture had reached an impasse. The forces opposing adventurous architecture in close proximity to historic buildings far outweighed an enterprising few who championed such work. Within a few months in 2003, several high profile public projects became casualties of community and government backlash. As an architecture student and Sydney resident, why was I so dismayed by these developments?

CONTEXT

A quick glance through a history book on almost any city will reveal grainy black and white photographs depicting magnificent buildings long since demolished. The replacement of historic fabric with new is by no means a modern phenomenon: The Vatican built its monuments using stone extracted from Roman temples. Mussolini's Rome bulldozed centuries-old structures to make way for grand boulevards. In the past 35 years the Heritage movement has consolidated from intellectual fringe to political establishment in a general attempt to halt the thoughtless erasure of historic buildings. Dissatisfaction with the 20th Century's program of post-war rebuilding has planted a deep suspicion in the minds of most aesthetes, irrespective of the modern masterpieces which emerged from this period of destruction and regrowth alongside incalculable numbers of faceless industrial edifices.

Yet the preservation of historic fabric is paradoxically more straightforward in Western Europe than it is in Sydney, where property prices, harbour views, and a thoroughly contemporary strain of conservatism tend to pervert issues of Heritage. While Sydney has been the site of human occupation for approximately 60,000 years, its earliest surviving buildings date from the colonial period of the early 19th century. When viewed in respect of Europe's millennia-old cities, the hysteria attached to historic protection in Sydney seemed absurd. In a 2003 Sydney Morning Herald article, the late Harry Seidler wrote:

what predominates in our restrictive rule making is the obsession with 'heritage'. This does not emerge in European countries where people live with superb monuments of the past. They encourage the best new design to stand next to the best of past eras. Progress and encouragement to build the best of today is unencumbered in contrast to our procedure...¹¹

Seidler believed that there was a lot more being protected in Sydney than there should be, and that protection often does not happen for the right reasons, or in the right way.



The 1972 demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project was claimed by Charles Jencks as the death of Modern Architecture

<http://pomo2009.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/pi-falling1.jpg>



FEDERATION SQUARE, MELBOURNE

Federation Square by LAB, view to Cathedral
<http://thezone.firewave.com.au/thezone/images/garbage/403.jpg>

In 2003 Melbourne's Federation Square opened to the public. The building had endured a torturous process to completion, well documented on film. This included numerous forced redesigns, the addition or subtraction of key programmatic elements, a spiralling budget and, significantly for my study, a battle with the City Council and community over the building's relationship to the adjacent St Paul's Cathedral. Called the Northern Shard by architects LAB, the north-western corner of the building was ultimately greatly reduced in height and demoted from a dramatic tower which framed the elevation of the Cathedral, to a small entrance vestibule for an underground information centre.¹² According to Neville Quarry, this change augured worse for the Cathedral than the Square itself. "Instead of being brought into the community of buildings that constituted Federation Square and its setting", he wrote, "the Cathedral's protectors had managed is marginalization."¹³ Despite these setbacks, Federation Square has arguably become Australia's most significant cultural building since the Opera House. Bordering a historically significant and visually prominent section of the Yarra River, the Square opposes the magnificent 19th century Flinders Street Station. The elaborate façades of the new building stand in vibrant opposition to the fine sandstone ornamentation of the Cathedral. "As built, [the facades] are as rich in materials and articulation as anything ever built in Melbourne."¹⁴



Federation Square comparative images. Northern Shard as built shown above, original Shard proposal below
http://bp1.blogger.com/_kLLeYeQqt8M/SHn50rm0iLI/AAAAAAAAACAo/g6M4iITRIGU/s800/LABstPaul%27sCourt.jpg

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY

Federation Square's opening invited reflection on the failure two years before of the second international competition to extend and re-image Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. Writing for the Herald, Elizabeth Farrelly provides a neat summary of the outcomes of the two competitions:

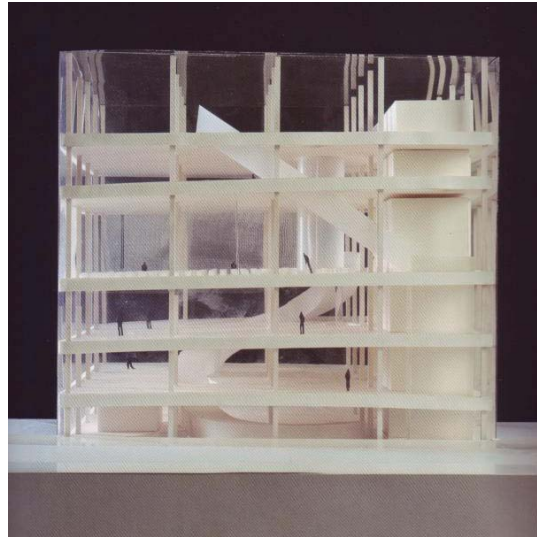
The MCA's first international competition, with cinematheque, was won in 1997 by distinguished Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, who designed a glowing white light box of the kind that has become her signature. Then someone discovered Sydney's oldest wharves dotted under the site... The second competition, also mit cinematheque, went in 2001 to distinguished Berlin architects Sauerbruch Hutton. Their two schemes - conforming and non-conforming - were also of the glowing light-box variety, only more out-there and less serene than Sejima's. More German, I guess, less Japanese. Then Bob Carr pulled the money rug out from under and that, she wrote, was that.¹⁵

In contrast to Federation Square's joyously discordant façadism, the "almost literally featureless"¹⁶ schemes by Sejima and Sauerbruch Hutton were still deemed too extreme for their heritage setting and consequently could not attract funding. A key point of contention was whether the MCA's premises, a former Maritime Services Board building constructed in 1952, was deserving of heritage protection over and above the needs of the new institution. The decision to preserve the World War II-era Art Deco edifice, (which itself had replaced Colonel Foveaux's convict-built Commissariat Building)¹⁷, was upheld irrespective of significant functional shortfalls.



Sauerbruch Hutton's MCA Proposal
http://www.sauerbruchhutton.de/images/mca_sydney_en.pdf

Two vectors emerged from this period of debate. If Seidler was right, I would need to visit Europe in order to gain historical perspective on Sydney's heritage concerns. To follow his argument, the city with the greatest monuments from past eras would also contain the best designs of the present. With its richness of historic architecture, from Etruscan to Neo-Classical, Rome would be the ideal city on which to test Seidler's hypothesis. On the other hand, in Melbourne progressive attitudes to heritage could apparently be found much closer to home. Consequently my travel plan involved a study of European cities, focusing on Rome, before a returning to evaluate recent projects in Melbourne.



Sejima's MCA Proposal
<http://www.butterpaper.com/vanilla/extensions/InlinelImages/image.php?AttachmentID=84>

EUROPEAN TRAVELS

ROME

Rome was indeed a good place to commence my study. Guided by expatriate Melbourne architect Carl Pickering, I discovered the Castello St Angelo, and the Teatro Marcello, key examples of historic buildings which had been modified continuously through several different eras. However upon my arrival in Rome it was apparent almost immediately that Seidler's theory was not applicable here. At the time, Rome contained very few works of contemporary architecture. The concentration of modern buildings increased the further one moved from the historic centre. At the northern edge of the historic centre and on the right bank of the River Tiber, Richard Meier's Ara Pacis Museum was under construction. A little further north, work had just commenced on Zaha Hadid's Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo.

Although contemporary edifices were absent from Rome's corsos and piazzas, another more subtle transformation of the urban fabric was taking place. Scaffolds, construction sheeting and advertising hoardings cloaked much of the city, revealing the continuous program of restoration required to sustain one of Europe's most visited attractions. Albeit temporary, the infrastructure of restoration effected a more radical transformation of ancient monuments than any architectural intervention would dare. A fellow architecture student who came to visit me during my stay in Italy was dismayed to discover an enormous rotating scaffold housed within Hadrian's Pantheon, obscuring the effect of the perfectly spherical temple and its celestial oculus.

Rome's municipal authorities clearly approach the historical city as a continual project of excavation, improvement and restoration. The pressure of tourist expectations outweighs attempts to provide new icons. I found that by examining two historic and two then unbuilt contemporary projects, much could be gleaned.

CASTELLO ST ANGELO

Built as Emperor Hadrian's tomb circa 135-139, the Castello St Angelo comprises an immense circular plinth originally surmounted by a funerary monument of chariots and Cyprus pines. A gently sloping spiral ramp, punctuated by 20 metre high light shafts, eventually arrives at the gaping hollow core of the plinth. Angled skylights dramatically illuminate the walls and floor of the void, which contains (somewhere, in the vast murky darkness below) the ashes of Hadrian, his family, and successive Roman emperors. The ramp straightens and ascends through the centre of the core towards the roof of the plinth. Prior to completion of the Monumento Nazionale a Vittorio Emanuele II in 1935, Castello St Angelo was Rome's tallest building. The high vantage point of the Castello was transformed into a fortress in



Castel St Angelo
http://image24.webshots.com/25/2/33/74/35423374ghKoFF_fs.jpg

the year 401 during the decline of the Roman Empire. Remarkably, although the marble cladding and statuary of the tomb were stripped, a circular rampart was built around the plinth, and battlements constructed above, the internal spaces were preserved. Gradually defensive towers were erected at four corners of the circular rampart and a series of rooms was installed on the tomb's flat roof. The fortress became a Papal hideout in the 14th century, with Pope Nicholas III constructing the Passetto di Borgo, a long corridor protected with a ramparted wall, between the Castello and the Vatican. The reigns of successive popes saw more rooms added to the complex. Celebrating the end of the Plague, a large gold-plated angel, symbolic protector of the city, was installed on the roof of the complex, visible from beneath the outermost wall.

In the preface to his famous tome, *The Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari writes:

in order to build churches for the use of the Christians, not only were the most honoured temples of the idols destroyed, but in order to ennoble and decorate Saint Peter's more than it then possessed, they took away the stone columns from the tomb of Hadrian, now the castle of Sant'Angelo, as well as many other things which we now see in ruins.¹⁸

The Castello St Angelo survived its use as a quarry only because numerous generations of Roman occupiers saw strategic value in the building's location and scale. Today there is a compelling tension between the pure cylindrical volume of the plinth and the orthogonal cluster of the Papal/fortress complex above. Because gravity restricted the additional buildings from overstepping the limits of the tomb's roof, the jumbled complex seems to emphasise the solidity of the base. The retention of the Castello as a fortified and protected site involved the use of the hollow plinth and its ascending ramp as a mechanism of defense, which is perhaps why the interior was never filled in nor repurposed for housing or storage. Maintaining its scale and enshrining its sacred spatial sequence, the result of the continuous modification of the Castello has been the preservation of the tomb's physical integrity and cultural significance.

Teatro MARCELLO

The Teatro Marcello, or Marcellus' Theatre, has survived a sequence of regimes and modifications every bit as tumultuous as the Castello. Commissioned by Julius Caesar and completed by his successor Augustus in 12BC, the Teatro prefigured the Colosseum. Like the Colosseum, the Teatro is an amphitheatre with an elliptical plan. At ground level, wide brick arches anchor the structure and create openings for public egress. As they ascend the façade in stacked tiers, these arches gradually become more slender building elements with smaller openings. The architectural style and construction of the Teatro would make possible the scale and drama of the Colosseum. With the fall of the Empire in the early middle ages, the building ceased to be used as a theatre. Like the Castello, the Teatro became a fortress, constructed by the Fabii to defend Rome against hostile elements across the River Tiber. Ramparts replaced the top tier of arches and seating. The volume of the theatre was drastically modified to accommodate troops and supplies, and battlements were added. Despite these changes, the purity of the building's external form endured until the incumbent Pope ordered part of the travertine-clad exterior stripped for building material. The main elevation to the street was retained, but most of the exterior was demolished and a massive masonry wall constructed in its place, obscuring much of the structure. In the 16th century, as the Renaissance brought more peaceful times to Rome, the Orsini residence was constructed in place of the ramparts. Designed by artist/architect, Baldassone Peruzzi, the residence bestrode the ruined theatre like a grand villa on a hilltop, sympathetically replicating the curve of the remnant arches below.

Today the former glory of the Teatro is diminished. Only a quarter of the original building's circumference is visible, and that quarter has been stripped of its cladding, chipped away, eroded by time and coated in black grime from the car exhaust fumes of the modern city. However this disrespect shown to the past has - somewhat perversely - resulted in a fascinating architectural form which expresses the continuity of ancient Rome into the present. The Teatro is an amalgamation of Roman, medieval and Renaissance



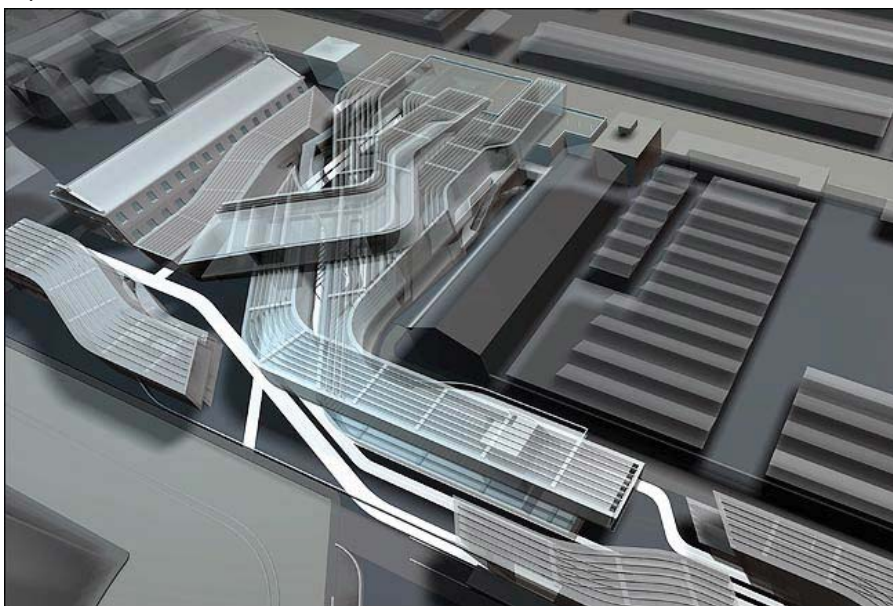
Teatro Marcello
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/45/RomaTeatroMarcello01.JPG>

constructions; a series of clearly visible archaeological strata which narrate the story of the place, and indeed of historic Rome itself. Like living coral, the porous construction of the theatre became foundation material for other forms of life. Now divided into numerous apartments, Peruzzi's sympathetically appointed residence continues to house Roman occupants. Here and there one can make out a television aerial, a satellite dish, or coloured garments hanging from a window.

MUSEO NAZIONALE DELLE ART DEL XXI SECOLO

A busy construction site at the time of my visit, Zaha Hadid's Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo (National Museum of Art of the Twenty-First Century), or MAXXI, is still yet to open*. Located in the mainly residential area north of Piazza Del Popolo, west of Renzo Piano's auditorium park, the site is unassuming. There are neither monuments or ruins nearby. Still, the site is bordered on all sides by pre-17th century buildings. 3D computer renderings of Hadid's competition-winning proposal reveal a complex network of interlaced volumes zigzagging across the site like an above-ground cable network. The surrounding historic buildings are not shown in the competition images, suggesting that the contrast with the physical context would be pronounced. However on inspection the first thing apparent is a large section of retained façade from a historic street-fronting building. The façade of the new Museum shrinks behind this propped relic. It is apparent that the width and height of the new façade have been minimised in deference to the scale of the old. This is not the usual approach taken by an architect known for dramatic urban transformations such as the Phaeno Science Centre and the Cincinatti Contemporary Art Museum, rather than for camouflaged infill developments. The streetscape response is almost apologetic. The appropriateness of retaining historic façades as scenography, like two-dimensional stage set props, is questionable. The nominal retention of façade does not satisfy the holistic aims of promoting continuity of use for the existing historic fabric. To borrow an analogy from wildlife preservation, it has more to do with the furrier than the animal sanctuary.

* I believe Hadid has been waiting for the publication of my Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship report.



Rendered view of Zaha Hadid's Museo Nazionale Delle Arti Del XXI Secolo
http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2326/2082576957_5cd8569a52_o.jpg

ARA PACIS

Also unfinished at the time of my visit, Richard Meier's Ara Pacis Museum promised to be "the first modern building to rise in Rome's historic centre since the days of Benito Mussolini",¹⁹ a comparison which, if unflattering, has since proven apt. The Ara Pacis is a sacrificial stone altar dedicated to peace by the all-conquering Emperor Augustus in 9BC. It was relocated from Rome's outskirts to its current site in the 1930s as the centrepiece of a Fascist-era piazza, and installed in a pavilion designed by Vittorio Morpurgo. This gradually disintegrated until its replacement became a matter of urgency. In 1995, American architect, Richard Meier, was invited to design the altar's new home. Essentially a modernist glass, steel and white marble vitrine, Meier's museum was savaged by critics upon its unveiling in 2006. Critical reaction to the finished building will be discussed later in my report. At the time of my visit the Ara Pacis was little more than intriguing construction site, one of many scaffolds shrouding central Rome.

In 2004, after a month of wandering the streets of Rome from, quite literally, dawn til dusk, I felt quite remote from my subject of inquiry. I had found two intriguing examples of buildings modified by successive interventions. However these examples could hardly be called contemporary. Two contemporary buildings were under construction in Rome, but neither would be sufficiently complete during my stay to enable investigation. The Rome-based architects I met during this time, Carl Pickering and Massimiliano Fuksas, recommended that I look elsewhere for examples of interventions. This prompted a period of immensely enjoyable but only vaguely directed wanderings around the cities of Western Europe. From Milan to Paris, Barcelona to Graz, to Venice and finally back to Rome, the arc of my travels eventually lead me to the revelatory projects of Carlo Scarpa and Enric Miralles, which inspired the essay included in this report.

MILAN

In contrast to Rome, Milan is filled with numerous modern age buildings. However, with the possible exception of an intriguing university faculty recently completed by Grafton Architects, these insertions into Milan's historic fabric are inscrutable, industrial-era edifices, characterised by blank facades of traditional dark Milanese stone. BBPR's imposing Velasca Tower is the exception, somehow both menacing and whimsical, an apartment tower block with an overhanging upper volume supported on medieval-style concrete buttresses. Like the city itself, I found Milan's architects remote and unapproachable, and so learned little about prevailing attitudes to contemporary architecture. However what became apparent was that the relative proliferation of Modern buildings had much more to do with the imperative to rebuild the bombed city in the postwar period, than any planned program of architectural progression. Papal intercession had spared Rome from widespread bombing.



Piano and Rogers' Centre Georges Pompidou
http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/beaubourgeffect_files/image008.jpg

PARIS

Paris yielded far more accessible examples of contemporary interventions, foremost among them Piano and Rogers' 1977 Centre Georges Pompidou, which dominates the historic Beaubourg district. More a wholesale clearing than an intervention, the footprint of the Centre and its adjacent square replaced an entire historic neighbourhood. "The machine-age design was antithetical to Paris' historic fabric, promising not merely to contribute to place but to reinvent it."²⁰ An aesthetically pleasing contrast between new and old is created by the clearing, "satisfaction derived from a view of the old as a manifestation of the passing of historical time",²¹ allowing the visitor a panoramic view of what is otherwise a narrow and congested area of medieval streets. Although Piano and Rogers' design rejects any attempt at historical continuity, a 2003 extension to the museum was designed by Piano with a more traditional terracotta cladding, which responds to the alignments and solid-to-void ratios of adjoining 18th century buildings.

Occupying the gap in a row of typical 18th century Parisian townhouses, Jean Nouvel's 1995 Cartier Foundation presents an almost invisible elevation to the street. The gallery spaces and offices of the Foundation occupy the interstices between parallel layers of transparent glass. Continuing past the building's internal volumes, the glass dematerialises into the sky. Trees and vegetation weave through the layers of glass from the garden behind. It is as if the void in the streetscape has been preserved, the new building being simultaneously vacant and present, its façade an elaborate technological screen of impeccable craftsmanship.



Richard Meier's Museum of Contemporary Art
[http://www.zibkip.be/barcelona/foto/nieuwe%20foto/macba1%20\(1536%20x%201152\).jpg](http://www.zibkip.be/barcelona/foto/nieuwe%20foto/macba1%20(1536%20x%201152).jpg)

BARCELONA

A dramatic insertion into the gritty, intricate Barcelona neighbourhood of El Raval, Richard Meier's pristine white Museum of Contemporary Art, aka MACBA, employs a similar strategy to the futuristic Pompidou. The blank glass façade of MACBA becomes a canvas for the eclectic urban fabric of its surroundings. The adjoining square attracts a swarm of local skateboarders, surging through the open space as if exploring virgin territory. However it has been noted that the enormous glass façade "inexplicably exposes the interior to the blazing sun."²² Air-conditioned and hermetically sealed, the museum interior is insulated from the joyous contamination of the neighbourhood. An ascending ramp behind the façade transports the visitor further and further from the reality of the street. The museum entrance acts as a portal between the local and the generic.

GRAZ

Described by architects Peter Cook and Colin Fournier as a "Friendly Alien", the Kunsthhaus in Graz was constructed in 2003 to coincide with the city's status that year as European Capital of Culture. An upended cow's udder sheathed in a continuous skin of grey glass panels and animated with a display of ever-shifting pixels, the Kunsthhaus contrasts dramatically with its Baroque-era surroundings and an adjacent 1847 iron house. Graz has by far the most contemporary buildings in Austria, and relative to its size, of probably any city. The university system, largely unchanged since the fall of the Berlin Wall, allocates a disproportionate number of places to architecture students. Consequently, Graz has the highest number of architects per capita of anywhere in the world! In Sydney a Kunsthhaus like this would be unthinkable. In a city of architects, however, conservative backlash is a lesser consideration.



Cook and Fournier's Graz Kunsthaus
http://www.mimoo.eu/images/542_1.jpg

PORTO

Another by-product of the Capital of Culture phenomenon, Porto's Casa Da Musica is another alien vessel in a historic domain. Designed by OMA and inaugurated in 2005, the concert hall is "of a scale and language completely foreign to the... surrounding neighbourhood of low rise 1920s apartment blocks"²³. However many of Porto's residents, unlike those of Graz, objected to the proposed new edifice bordering the historic Plaza de Boavista. The Casa makes concessions to neither conservatives nor heritage controls. "Resembling a concrete asteroid with ground flat edges, a polygonal Death Star, the Casa is clearly a sculptural, rather than contextual, object."²⁴ In his article for Dutch zine, Archined, Rodrigo Cardoso responds to critics of the Casa with a stirring call to arms:

For others the problem is pure conservatism. Like sheep following their shepherd, they cannot imagine any work in Porto which does not refer to the historical buildings of the city. It is not a question of critical analysis of the context; it is a question of "pastiche". They ask for a nice façade, which looks like the stone-based buildings of the partially 19th century Boavista Avenue, next to the site. As long as the "mask" is kept, the rest (i.e. quality) is indifferent. For that matter, one could ask why not refer to the horrible shopping mall or to the wild speculative urbanism close by? What criteria

do these people use to demand a reference to one moment of history over every other? Many people are still ashamed of contemporaneity and forget that today will also be history tomorrow. Perhaps it would be fair if we were able to leave our heritage with the same courage and truth as others did in the past.²⁵

Ironically, in 2006 The Portuguese Architectural Heritage classified the Casa as a heritage-protected “Building of National Interest”, wrapping the building in a 50 metre zone in which no new development will be permitted.²⁶



VENICE

OMA's Casa de Musica
http://www.kultureflash.net/archive/119/images/cdm_NF_425_1.jpg

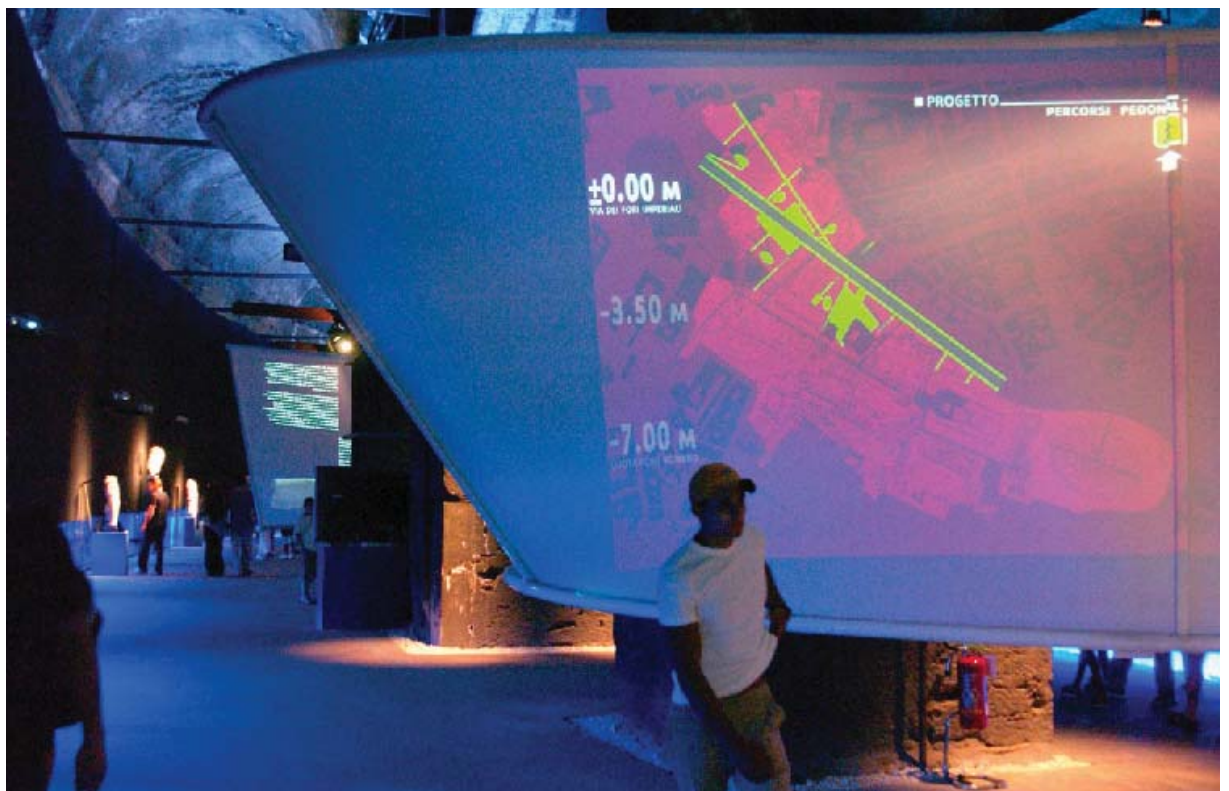
In September 2004 I attended the Venice Architecture Biennale. There I was able at a glance to survey an enormous number of new international architectural projects, both built and unbuilt. Gathered under the vague curatorial theme of “Metamorph”, these projects collectively expressed the current practices and interests of the global architectural profession. I was struck by how many eminent architects referred without a trace of irony to the site and context as the inspiration for their buildings. The result was invariably an object of pure ego: divorced from human scale, an overflowing form of whimsical curves and twists. Disconnected from their environments, these forms extended into the infinite. Constructed, the projects became gross fetuses aborted prematurely from the glossy womb of virtual space. The result was at once dazzling and alarming.²⁷ How can we steer architects towards restraint, I wondered, when the technology on which architecture now relies pushes steadily towards free expression? Devoid of human scale, structural concerns, context or ethical conviction, today’s digital architecture cannot hope to be reconciled with a historic environment built according to these principles.

Venice itself seems to have survived the modern era with very little adjustment to the amenity and morphology of the modern city. The city’s repurposing from trade hub to tourist diorama circumvented the need for efficient power and services, roads, expansion and large-scale redevelopment. Still, diesel-powered Vaporettas packed with tourists make waves which undercut the foundations of Venice’s postcard façades. The allure of the ‘untouched’ city protected by dogged conservationists, inspiration for the 1964 Venice Charter and the contemporary preservation movement, entices an unsustainable number of tourists each year. These tourists have rapidly displaced the city’s native population, eroding from within the centuries-old patterns of use which gave rise to Venice’s unique form. Today Venice is occupied predominantly by tourists and foreign hospitality staff. Vast sums of money are spent maintaining this illusory world. An endless pantomime is performed, with only the actors changing. Meanwhile Venice, the ghost ship, slowly sinks into the lagoon.

RETURN TO ROME

I returned to Rome in June 2005. At a vast exhibition within the Colosseum, local architect, Fuksas, unveiled an ambitious addition to the city. Hovering over the Roman Forum, a space-age network of glass bubbles linked by travelators enclosed in glass tubes, would control the impact of future tourists on the ancient site. Stretching thousands of metres to the Piazza Venezia, the infrastructure was intended to replace a road ploughed by Mussolini through the very centre of the Forum. Whilst the intention of the proposal was undoubtedly the preservation of a World Heritage site which has borne the impact of millions of tourists over hundreds of years, its manifestation as a futuristic hovercraft was problematic. The historic city was presented as a precious relic, beyond reach and accessible only by the prescribed path of the new intervention. The Forum's power and relevance has always resided in its legibility as a civic plan. Read from a distance rather than experienced, the plan becomes an artefact rather than a tangible experience. True historical sensitivity avoids consigning the past to a museum exhibit. By reusing its monuments indiscriminately, the ransacking Vatican was paradoxically kinder to Rome's ruins than the well-intentioned Fuksas and his crystal quarantine. "The success of the preservationist lobby in keeping Rome's ancient centre ancient is evident to - and validated by - the millions of tourists drawn to the Eternal City every year", writes The Guardian's Steve Rose.²⁸ However as the examples of Venice and Rome demonstrate, the method of preservation is critical to the form by which the city endures. Or as Hans Mommaas puts it in City Branding;

...the question is to what extent the city's image does indeed stimulate a continued expansion and deepening of cultural tactics, or else leads to a petrification...²⁹



Fuksas' proposal for the Roman Forum
<http://www.fuksas.it/#/progetti/1401/>

EUROPEAN CONCLUSIONS

It was clear from my travels that the cities of Western Europe had embraced a bilateral approach to heritage, zealously protecting historic sites while placing faith in contemporary buildings as instruments capable of radically transforming place. The latter impulse has undoubtedly been encouraged by the 'Bilbao effect' on cultural tourism. This has resulted in the type of architecture described by Solà-Morales Rubió, where discontinuity between past and present becomes a desired aesthetic.³⁰ On the other hand; the decisive break has its value in an era of bureaucratic compromise. "The emphasis on the conservation of heritage fabric in Europe, rather than aesthetic consistency, safeguards the impact of incremental change that we have been less successful in achieving", writes Susan Macdonald.³¹ The original fabric is kept in its entirety before a single, conclusive change is made. This change may represent the only opportunity to rescue an old building in the face of inevitable demise due to the pressures of the environment. Such alterations occur increasingly frequently as changes in occupants' needs - data, hydraulics, security, and ventilation - outmode ageing buildings. The change might also represent an isolated opportunity to revitalise a historic area and protect it from the carnivorous speculations of commercial development.

My study comprehensively disproved Seidler's assertions. In Western Europe history and tradition carry far more weight than in Australia's newly burgeoning society. The depth of Europeans' attachment to the past creates an inertia which hampers fresh attempts at cultural expression. I did not find an abundance of bold, innovative contemporary buildings, "the best of today"³², alongside equivalent historic buildings. However during my travels I found enough interesting and exemplary cases of both successful and unsuccessful interventions, to inform my arguments.

While living and working in Treviso, I discovered the works of Trevisan architect, Carlo Scarpa. Predominantly small and humble interventions scattered around the Veneto region, Scarpa's projects have attained cult status. The implications of his methodology are increasingly relevant today, as renovation rather than creation increasingly becomes the architect's occupation. Through my interest in Scarpa, I developed an appreciation for the work of Enric Miralles, whose prodigal projects provide a bridge between Scarpa's archaic real-time working practices and the predetermined, computer driven architectural methodologies of the present. As I am sure has always been the case with Byera Hadley scholars, the most significant influence on my study has been the opportunity to live and travel outside Australia, gaining a new perspective on the positives and negatives of the culture and practices of the place I call home.

MELBOURNE

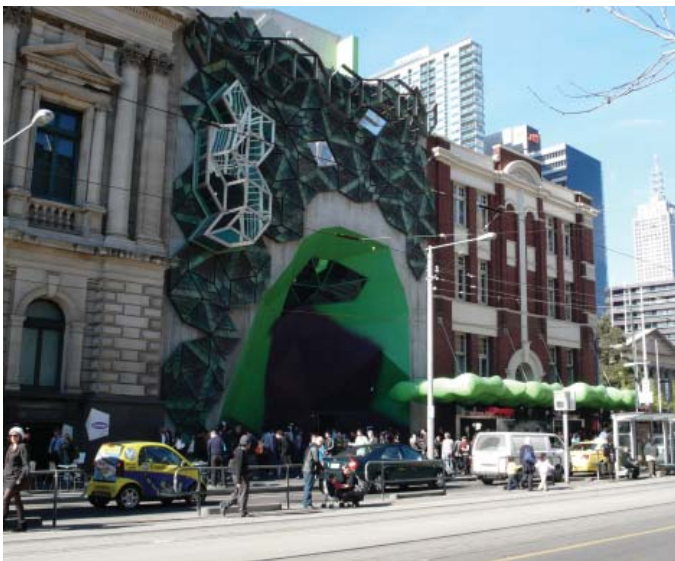
My intended study of Melbourne eventually expanded to three years and coincided with a Masters of Architecture at RMIT University. The length of my stay in Melbourne helped to demystify the architectural culture of a city intent on scripting its own fables. RMIT Professor of Architecture Leon Van Schaik has even written a book, *Design City Melbourne*, in an attempt to mythologise his contemporaries. Practitioners such as Peter Corrigan, Howard Raggatt and Paul Minifie employ deliberately obscure symbolic references, and barely conceal contempt for their Sydney colleagues.

STOREY HALL

Designed by Raggatt and his practice, Ashton Raggatt McDougall (ARM), Melbourne's Storey Hall is a project unlike any other in Australia. At the behest of the Dean, the building's façade was famously kept under wraps until its opening. An addition to a neoclassical 1887 Tappin, Gilbert and Dennehy building, Storey Hall was completed in 1995 to provide an auditorium, lecture theatre, exhibition spaces and seminar rooms for RMIT. The façade of the new addition makes a dramatic departure from its neoclassical neighbour. A chiselled concrete cave smeared in lurid green and purple paint, denotes the street entrance. Surrounding the cave, a complex composition of cast bronze Penrose tiles and protruding windows is seemingly ruptured by green neon lighting. That the building has something to say is immediately apparent - the clues to its language are much harder

to discern. The confrontational urgency in the building's presence is the architectural equivalent of punk rock. The whole thing seems to vibrate.

Inside, the frenetic imagery continues, with the Penrose tiles colonising an interior of intense colour and illumination. Eclectic motifs borrowed from the Griffin's nearby 1924 Capitol Theatre, Ron Robertson-Swann's contentious Vault sculpture, feminism, Australian-Irish Melbourne and, of course, Roger Penrose, among numerous other sources, combine in an architecture "of density and wit, critical and of its moment: one that requires translating... which centres on a richly



ARM's Storey Hall
http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3151/2753571978_89e37e6b71_o_d.jpg

complicated narrative.”³³ Despite the confusion of signs and quotations, the building operates as a visceral as well as an intellectual experience. “Celebrating individual qualities of making things, materials, textures, casting metals, colouring walls”,³⁴ ARM’s building embodies a level of craftsmanship appropriate to its heritage setting. Its urban response is extreme, but not disrespectful. It is also an articulate visual essay on the qualities of Melbourne’s inner-city grid, where an apparently neutral street pattern brings disparate buildings into coincidental proximity.³⁵ As opposed to Sydney’s urban composition of dominant topographical features and prominent landmarks, Melbourne’s grid bears no deformations based on the impact of significant buildings or changing patterns of street use. Within the grid, no site is more visually prominent than another. Only buildings at the periphery can be seen from a distance. The heritage setting is localised, the grid a chess board waiting for a chance move.

SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE ADDITION

Not far from Federation Square, another key Melbourne project occupying a heritage setting is the 2003 addition to the Shrine of Remembrance, also designed by ARM. Unlike Storey Hall, the Shrine is not sheltered by the grid but instead occupies Melbourne’s most visible site, at the apex of the Shrine Reserve within the Kings Domain, and the axis Swanston Street. The addition also had to address the symmetry of the existing Shrine, built in 1933 to honour Australia’s war dead, and designed in the classical style by Hudson and Wardrop. The addition comprises a foyer and exhibition space, presentation, meeting and administration rooms, a gallery of medals and two memorial courtyards. Internal spaces were inserted in the low space under the Shrine’s northern flight of stairs, with the courtyards protruding at either end. The addition also provides access, through the existing building’s



ARM's Shrine of Remembrance addition
http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3027/2891430757_4856681462_o_d.jpg

foundations, to a crypt located beneath the Shrine's interior. Commencing in the eastern, and terminating in the western courtyard, the addition's spaces are arranged sequentially.

Enclosed in tilted concrete walls, the courtyards are mirrored in appearance and bookend the volume of the Shrine, merging with the materiality and structure of the existing building as horizontal grey rustications. The new addition doesn't just complement views of the Shrine, it creates new views, with the looming appearance of the building above heightened from the sunken courtyards, providing startling visions at dawn and dusk.

COOK AND PHILLIP PARK, SYDNEY

Like Melbourne's Shrine addition, Sydney's Cook and Phillip Park development is located adjacent to a significant city landmark, and is also mostly concealed below grade. A sports and leisure centre completed in 1999, the complex is sited between the Australian Museum's 1857 James Barnet wing, and William Wardell's 1862 St Mary's Cathedral. Architects, Bligh Voller Nield were concerned with presenting an unobstructed view of the Museum and Cathedral's façades. The roof of the complex provides an austere forecourt to the Cathedral, but its internal spaces bear no relationship to the historic edifices at either end. It is a space of emptiness and shadow, one which provides no new perspective on the Cathedral, instead condemning its dignified neighbour to splendid isolation.



BVN's Cook and Phillip Park
http://farm1.static.flickr.com/33/50695675_23e254deef_o_d.jpg

AUSTRALIAN CONCLUSIONS

Significant historic buildings are fundamentally expressions of cultural, material and technological value. What architectural elements express value in today's world? Historically such factors would have been determined by the rarity of materials and the intensity of labour. In our time-restricted economy, the mental expense and effort invested in design is the ultimate commodity. The selected Melbourne examples demonstrate an intellectual agenda which is brought to the task of historical intervention. This agenda exists independently of client demands, functional requirements, planning provisions, or heritage concerns. It imbues the intervention with a symbolic life of its own, one capable of forming a narrative with the existing fabric and investing it with new visual qualities and spatial possibilities. In Sydney rather than promoting craft and complexity - the values we attempt to preserve in heritage places - the absence of incentive policy fosters a communal perception of architects as self-expression driven egotists. The viability of a development application often hinges on the reduction of contemporary expressive elements to please a conservative faction. Melbourne's architects undoubtedly face the same challenges, but the intellectual agenda many of them bring to the project is adaptable and irreducible, a subversive logic which adapts and builds on what is available and cannot be removed from the project by council decree.

BURRA CHARTER

No discussion about the relationship of new buildings to old in Australia can occur without reference to the Burra Charter. Adopted in 1979, the Burra Charter is based on the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1964). The aim of the Burra Charter is to promote the preservation of Australia's historic places. Importantly, the Charter states that it is the cultural significance of a historic place which must be preserved, not exclusively or entirely its physical fabric, use or setting. A selective response to the articles of the Charter follows.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

According to the Charter, the term, "cultural significance", is synonymous with heritage significance and cultural heritage value. Adopted by local government to indicate buildings of special historical status, the related term, "heritage significance", has itself gained significance since the original drafting of the Charter. Local councils have put in place regulations to protect the status of these historic buildings. The regulations control any modification of a heritage building, any new buildings constructed in proximity to a heritage building, and any buildings built or modified within a general area of heritage significance. In order to be comprehensible and concise, the regulations have been reduced to a series of measurable controls partly to subjective council assessment. The effect of these regulations is to concentrate attention on the physical integrity of the heritage item itself, overlooking issues of the broader social context in which any new building work occurs.

Article 1.2

'Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.'³⁶

Although heritage significance and cultural significance are related terms, cultural significance cannot be defined by regulations. It encompasses a much wider understanding of context than that afforded by the current usage of heritage. A building may be easily determined to be of heritage status if it is of a certain period, quality and architectural style. However the cultural significance of the same building cannot be so simply articulated. In Sydney, the procedure of regulating what may be added to a heritage context could certainly be improved. The system is weighted towards individual, untrained objectors, rather than professional designers, and is based largely on a simplified aesthetic, rather than practical concerns. Susan Macdonald, Assistant Director of the New South Wales Heritage Office,

cites the refusal of a development application by the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales, which was upheld primarily on grounds of aesthetic non-compliance:

“What is interesting in this case is how the aesthetic values of the place were considered fundamental to the planning outcome, but the relationship between the aesthetic values and all the other heritage values of the site was not well understood. If the use is threatened changes to the fabric and the design are almost inevitable.”³⁷

Cultural significance must always be determined relative to the present, and it is axiomatic that the present is always changing. Our standards for appraising significance must be suitably adaptable.

CONTEXT

It is comparatively easy to decide whether past events are of any historical interest. Yet in order to understand the cultural implications of those historic events, we must study everything which has come to pass as a consequence of them. Rather than employing the empirical eye of Positivism, this means studying such events relative to the current time.³⁸ Today’s curators and historians typically adopt this approach. For old buildings, the active urban context must serve in place of the museum, providing a datum to which cultural significance can be indexed. While as much as possible of the fabric of the significant place must be retained, retroactive enforcement of a heritage setting around the place must be avoided. A building can retain its usefulness, and hence significance, only if life continues around it. Removed from its present context, a building’s cultural significance is indeterminate. In this sense, old and new places have a symbiotic relationship. The cumulative fabric of these places is inscribed with an ongoing dialogue which reveals significance in both past and present.

Practically, this reading of the Burra Charter involves not just the awareness of a historic place’s latent physical characteristics, but also some understanding of the broader scales of context - local, regional and temporal - in which the place is located. Those responsible for determining the preservation status of a historic place must consider what changes are likely to affect it in the future, and adopt a bold strategy for the ongoing use of the place. Unfortunately, typical outcomes of heritage adjudication automatically insist on maintaining the status quo, or worse, attempt a return to some bygone era.

Change is inevitable for any building, if only through the natural processes of weathering and decay. Similarly, the broader city undergoes prosperity and recession, expansion and contraction, development and abandonment, improvement and neglect. In order to integrate an existing building into the altered urban realm, while maintaining the building’s usage and hence cultural significance, radical changes to the setting may be necessary. Where new buildings are erected next to old, the new building must act as a link between the historic remnant and its contemporary context.

Article 11

‘The contribution which related places and related objects make to the cultural significance of the place should be retained.’³⁹

New buildings can have a positive impact on a historic place. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona revitalised the problematic area of El Raval, which had once been hostile to the city's inhabitants. ARM's addition to the Shrine has given the building new functions and spaces while contributing to its cultural relevance. New buildings can add another layer of richness and complexity to the urban context. The addition does not have to be a tectonic shift. It may settle with time to comprise just another sedimentary period, like Victorian architecture deposited on Georgian.

Article 13

'Co-existence of cultural values should be recognised, respected and encouraged, especially in cases where they conflict.' ⁴⁰

URBANITY

As I have stated, cities are fundamentally places of trade. Trade involves the exchange of a variety of goods, and that variety is the product of distinct cultures. The city is the place where these cultures meet, exchange, interact, and for better or worse, conflict. Architecture should reflect positively on its time and place. Urban architecture should therefore express the cultural exchange of the city. This is achieved through an encouragement of diversity. Different styles, periods, scales, materials, technologies, uses and typologies should be emphasised. New buildings should be built embedded with the cultural values of the time and place. The presence of such values informs our reverence for iconic structures such as the Colosseum, Eiffel Tower and Barcelona Pavilion. New buildings constructed in proximity to old should be sensitive to their context, but must also express enough of their time and place to suitably conflict with their historic setting in a manner befitting the city.

'Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past which has formed us and the Australian landscape. These places of cultural significance must be conserved for present and future generations.' ⁴¹

Construct a new building next to the old, imitating the style or blending in with the old building, and at best you can hope to evoke the sense of a particular time and place. However, after a time the wind will change, and the values which you assigned to that time and place will have been redefined. The newer building is no longer "new", but merely younger than the other. Over a long span of time similarities between the two buildings become increasingly confusing and contradictory. The younger building damages the prestige of the older. Erect a new building which differs distinctly from the old, however, and the two will always stand as a testament to the passage of time and the temporality of cultural values. Future generations will be able to read the buildings as chronologically distinct, and might even be able to still comprehend the significance of the older building.

Article 1.2

'Cultural significance may change as a result of the continuing history of the place. Understanding of cultural significance may change as a result of new information.' ⁴²

The simple fact is that, just as any place is always changing, so is its cultural significance. Every place, whether deemed to be of historical importance or not, embodies a certain degree of cultural significance. In the urban environment, the cultural value of any place is determined relative to the neighbouring area, which as has been described above, is itself in a state of constant change. Cultural standards and measurements are themselves always in flux. No evaluation of a heritage site can be conclusive. Our efforts to design for such an environment must accommodate this unstable condition through a holistic, rather than reductive, approach. Any attempt to encapsulate a certain period, emphasise a specific historic characteristic, or freeze a stage of preservation will ultimately fail.

VISUAL CATCHMENT

Article 1.11

‘Setting means the area around a place, which may include the visual catchment.

Article 8

Conservation requires the retention of an appropriate visual setting and other relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place. Aspects of the visual setting may include use, siting, bulk, form, scale, character, colour, texture and materials.’⁴³

Visual catchment is perhaps the most contentious and loosely defined concept within the Burra Charter, and is a frequent snare in issues of heritage preservation and contemporary intervention. A landmark building has an enriching effect on its surroundings. Views to and from the building contribute to its cultural significance. One might therefore suggest that we should never build anything which obscures existing views of the landmark from public vantages, and should even try to clear the surrounding urban domain to provide more views of the landmark, thus contributing to its significance.

Just as we associate jars of formaldehyde with dead animals, over-intensive attempts to preserve a historic building will contribute only to its demise. Freeze the growth of the surrounding area, insulate against the impacts of social and economic forces, or attempt to retroactively transform the area into an extended setting serving the heritage item,⁴⁴ and the building becomes drastically removed from the realities of the city and its evolving culture. As the Burra Charter asserts, if the use of a building is forgotten, so is its significance. The best way to conserve the use of a building is to maintain its connection to the urban locale, and its accessibility to locals. The principle of adding new buildings in proximity to the heritage item should accordingly be either encouraged or discouraged based on normative, non heritage-based assessment criteria.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Article 3.2

'Changes to a place should not distort the physical or other evidence it provides, nor be based on conjecture.

Article 5.1

Conservation of a place should identify and take into consideration all aspects of cultural and natural significance without unwanted emphasis on any one value at the expense of others.' ⁴⁵

A building's physical evidence must not be distorted. All aspects of a place's cultural and natural significance should be considered, without emphasising one value over another. There's no use denying that a 19th century building is from the 19th century. Nor is there any sense in pretending that a new building added adjacent to its 19th century counterpart dates from the same period. We must be honest about the time we live in, conscious of its opportunities, technologies and values, and utilise this awareness in our attempts at design. Additionally, a one-dimensional relationship of new to old will be comprehensible only temporarily, before the two entities are consigned to history. Any new building constructed next to old should relate to its historic neighbour through as many of the variables described above as possible. The depth of understanding demonstrated by the new addition will directly influence its own longevity next to a structure which has already justified its continued preservation.

SYNTHESIS

Article 15.1

'Change may be necessary to retain cultural significance.

Article 22.1

New work such as additions to the place may be acceptable where it does not distort or obscure the cultural significance of the place, or detract from its interpretation and appreciation. New work may be sympathetic if its siting, bulk, form, scale, character, colour, texture and material are similar to the existing fabric, but imitation should be avoided.

Article 22.2

New work should be readily identifiable as such.

Article 23

Continuing, modifying or reinstating a significant use may be appropriate and preferred forms of conservation. These may require changes to significant fabric but they should be minimised. In some cases, continuing a significant use or practice may involve substantial new work.' ⁴⁶

We have reached an age in which traditional craftsmanship, often evident in the buildings we regard as being of heritage status, is practically extinct. A new building constructed

in proximity to the old can hope to reinterpret the qualities of its neighbour only through siting, massing, form, scale, character, porosity, colour, texture, material and decoration. Complete imitation is virtually impossible.

This represents a challenge for the architect wishing to do justice to the past. Instead of adopting nature's methods of mimicry and camouflage to survive in the heritage context, the new building must adopt more conceptual survival tactics. Current heritage law prescribes that any new work in proximity to a heritage building be regarded essentially as a renovation to the building itself. This notion can be reversed: any new work should be seen in synthesis with the heritage item, as the aim of such work should not be to merely prove acceptable, but should instead comprise the continuous improvement of the heritage building and of the greater urban environment.

“Too many heritage advisers and local heritage committees in Australia still see their job as protection against change rather than the management of change.” ⁴⁷

BURRA CHARTER CONCLUSIONS

I have learned from my European travels that context is ever-evolving and organic. Buildings age, decay, and fall into ruin. New buildings are erected, but even under construction - as empty site, scaffolded or unoccupied shell - they radically alter the streetscape. The most unified streetscape can be undermined by a billboard, poster or billowing streamer on a telegraph pole. In the relentless onslaught of passing time, we must ensure the survival of historic buildings in preference to their preservation. The act of intervening in historic fabric becomes critical, often surgical. The new entity contextualises itself around a living fragment of the past. At worst, the insensitive entity embalms the fragment as a hollow shell, a death mask. At best, the sensitive entity reminds the public of the fragment's vitality, its relevance, and opens a new chapter on the foundations of the past.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

ROME

In September 2006, Meier's Ara Pacis Museum was publicly unveiled. It was immediately likened to a petrol station, a pizzeria and a giant coffin by its detractors. Celebrity art critic Vittorio Sgarbi staged a public demonstration, setting fire to a model of the building and branding it "an indecent cesspit by a useless architect."⁴⁸ New York Times architectural writer Nicolai Ouroussoff was almost as harsh if a little more explanatory, labelling the building "a flop". "Mr Meier's building is a contemporary expression of what can happen when an architect fetishizes his own style out of a sense of self-aggrandizement", he wrote. "Absurdly overscale, it seems indifferent to the naked beauty of the dense and richly textured city around it."⁴⁹ Right-wing politician Gianni Alemanno was later elected to Mayor of Rome on a platform which included demolition of the contentious museum.

Historic Rome's first new addition in fifty years, the Ara Pacis Museum has seemingly failed to connect to its sensitive setting and equally sensitive inhabitants. The architect has absorbed most of the blame for this disconnect. Ouroussoff takes issue with the relationship of the museum to the nearby historic churches of San Rocco and San Girolamo dei Croati:

Although Mr Meier speaks eloquently about the architectural past, his buildings can be stubbornly oblivious to the physical and cultural context. To root his building in the city's ancient fabric, he created a long travertine wall that extends from the museum's main



Meier's Ara Pacis Museum
<http://sogniebisogni.ilcannocchiale.it/mediamanager/sys.user/8080/AraPacis.jpg>

entrance to the roadway beside the river. Viewed from the road, the wall chops the churches off at half height, so that you don't feel the full effect of their coming into view... Meier's project overwhelms the piazza below, pressing in on it disrespectfully so that the church façades seem almost to recoil in embarrassment.⁵⁰

The unusually fierce criticism levelled at Meier reveals a very specific contention: "most critics' objections centre on the way he has chosen to dress his spaces, rather than the spaces themselves".⁵¹

BERLIN

Since unification, Berlin has prided itself on being Europe's most progressive city. This stance has been reflected in a daring program of urban planning and reconstruction, which has resulted in acclaimed additions to the historic fabric such as OMA's Dutch Embassy and Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum. The entire envelope of Libeskind's museum acts as a historical text, inscribed with deep voids and slashing marks and cuts. The steel façade of the new addition to the 1737 Kollegienhaus is read independently of the floor-plates and rooms, with windows and fenestrations bearing no relationship to the levels behind. (Melbourne's Federation Square borrows this expressive device, with a tessellated façade hanging off the building from a steel frame, proclaiming the mutual independence of the building's internal volumes and their external wrapping.) Berlin's progressive building program has since triggered a conservative counterplot and the disjunction between inside and out employed by Libeskind as an integral narrative device has found its corollary in historicist scenography. Modern interiors are the norm for buildings constructed today. The spatial, material and technological aspects of the spaces inside the Atlantis Hotel, Dubai's latest neoclassical fantasy, are as contemporary and up to date as those found within Delugan Meissl's avante garde Porsche Museum in Stuttgart. So when conservatives call for period-style buildings, they are no longer concerned with interiors. The metre-or-so of articulated façade which clads the addition to a historic setting has become the sole site of contention.

In November 2008, a Berlin jury of artists, politicians and city planners voted to reconstruct the Berliner Stadtschloss, an 18th century Prussian palace, on the site of the demolished Soviet-era Palace of the Republic.⁵² Built in 1976, the vast Palace of the Republic housed the East German parliament behind a grid of reflective gold glass. In 2003 the German government controversially voted to tear down the symbol of the city's Communist past. Praised by its jury as a "clever architectural connection of old and new, of modern usage and the reconstruction of the former palace",⁵³ the new project will in fact constitute a reproduction rather than a reconstruction. Three of the original palace's four façades will be built in replica baroque, behind which a modern building



Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum
http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/museumimages/thumbnail1.php/mgl200725120925arc_pht.jpg



Comparative photographs showing the original 18th Century Prussian Palace and the 1976 Palace of the Republic
<http://www.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/Wolke/deu/Themen/041/Flier1/Bild08.jpg>

housing a library and museum will be concealed. “I didn’t want to create a counterpoint to the city architecture, but provide continuity, not replacement,”⁵⁴ Franco Stella, the Italian architect appointed to oversee the new project, is quoted as saying. But as Britain’s *The Guardian* reported, “he will have to reconstruct the original facades, down to the last ornament, curlicue and naked angel, allowing little freedom for personal interpretation.”⁵⁵ Critics have opposed the project as a pastiche of architectural styles and an attempt to “whitewash” history.

The jury’s decision to rewrite the site’s history by replicating a building from the distant past, contradicts the principle of historical continuity. That the replication only extends to the façades of the historic entity is an absurd simplification of cultural significance. It brings to mind Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s ambiguous wrapping of the Reichstag in 1995. It is also the opposite approach to that employed by Norman Foster in his restoration and extension of the Reichstag, completed in 1999. Foster persuaded the parliament not to erase battle scars and Red Army graffiti from the walls. These features were seen as historic evidence rather than unsightly damage, and retained as a contribution to the narrative and character of the building.⁵⁶

DORSET

Far from an isolated tactic, the nostalgic and tokenistic *trompe l’oeil* of the Prussian palace seems to be part of a widespread trend. In Dorset, Prince Charles has just completed his first contribution to architecture, a modern fire station sophisticatedly decorated in Georgian

style. A long-time outspoken critic of contemporary design, he famously derided a proposed extension to London's National Gallery as "a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend" in a 1984 speech to the Royal Institute of British Architects. He also described the extension as "a kind of municipal fire station".⁵⁷ 25 years later, His Royal Highness' choice of a municipal fire station as his first project, is either intentional or highly ironic.

From the outside, Prince Charles' creation merges a row of fire truck garages, rusticated stonework, oculi windows, exposed gutters and drainpipes, recessed pilasters, electric light fixtures, triangulated pediments and a mock balcony supported on narrow arches. This jumbled array of features comes of little surprise from a designer who thinks that columns and domes comprise a "concept".⁵⁸ Inside, of course, the building is a contemporary fire station. The result has been aptly described as "a freakish hybrid" and "pretentious kitsch".⁵⁹ In his 1984 talk, HRH championed the rehabilitation of historic places. The misguided creation of faux historical places is a different matter entirely. "Exactly what aspect of our heritage is this mess trying to defend?" asked editor Justin McGuirk.⁶⁰

SYDNEY

Described by Farrelly as "all-wrap-no-pressie"⁶¹, the latest proposal for the extension of Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art was exhibited in November 2008. Designed by local architect Sam Marshall, the proposed addition will provide a new main entrance to



Prince Charles' Dorset Fire Station
http://www.bdonline.co.uk/Pictures/468xAny/v/w/x/Dorchester_fire_stati_8F876.jpg

the museum as well as additional exhibition spaces, a rooftop sculpture garden and café, new media and education facilities. “This building is our dream,” proclaimed MCA director Elizabeth Ann Macgregor. “It is like a series of boxes that have been twisted around,”⁶². But the building *is* a series of boxes which have been twisted around. It makes no attempt at analogy or narrative. “The MCA proposal has no shaping idea”, writes Farrelly, “it is little more than a 3D diagram tricked up with multicoloured concrete.”⁶³ Primarily designed to solve access and circulation problems, the design relegates its public gesture to an afterthought. Expressed as a cluster of disordered volumes in varying mushroom tints, the proposal has an awkward, submissive relationship to the adjoining postwar-era sandstone monolith.

TV personality Andrew Frost has bemoaned the “pedestrian” appearance of the design, proposing a narrative device in its place far more appropriate to the housing of contemporary art; “a huge skull carved from sandstone with eyes that light up red when the place is open.”⁶⁴ Australia’s answer to Richard Meier, Philip Cox, himself widely known for favouring the white steel shed as a response to any and every contextual situation, also offered a novel critique of the proposed design:

“Does this building actually respond to Circular Quay and its position? I don’t think so,” he said. “I think it’s a pity that it’s very obviously a cubistic white box that denies the very urban aspects of The Rocks area itself, which is essentially a sandstone environment. To my mind it’s too obvious to put a white box [that is] saying, ‘Look at me, I’m the extension onto the MCA’.”⁶⁵

The problem, in fact, is exactly the opposite. By subjugating its visual impact and privileging functional demands over spatial composition, Marshall’s design fails to sufficiently respond to the significance of its context. Lacking aesthetic complexity and without an embodied narrative agenda, the proposal appears a poor cousin which diminishes the stature of its heritage-listed counterpart. The eventual choice of a local over previously favoured

Japanese and German candidates clearly indicates the conservative intent behind the MCA’s new direction.



HERITAGE REDUCTION

Collectively however, these recent examples demonstrate a worrying reduction of heritage concerns to an attitude surpassing the merely conservative. Berlin’s jury of intellectuals, Prince Charles, Macgregor and their ilk conceive of contextualism as mere drapery, a decorated skin concealing a generic modern interior, like a plaster cornice attached to a cruciform steel

Sam Marshall's proposed MCA extension
http://203.145.50.198/idl/media/december_08/projects/mca_hero.jpg

column. Espoused in the Burra Charter and the modern preservation moment, the principles guiding contemporary alterations to historic settings privilege the sustenance of cultural significance over aesthetic mimicry. Writes Jennifer Hill:

Both solutions, modernist indifference and historic pastiche, can be superficially pictorial. Neither architectural approach is, by its nature, more likely to succeed for they do not provide a detailed analysis of a building's site, context and history, which allows an assessment of its significance, and can therefore often challenge the preconceptions of generalised rules.⁶⁶

The facile hybridisation of a pantomimic exterior and detached interior to ape historical sensitivity is often encouraged by superficially pictorial planning regulations.

PROXIMITY CONCLUSION

Perpetrated in the name of heritage, uninformed resistance to contemporary architecture is deeply rooted in nostalgia. Nostalgia comes from a fear of loss. What is being lost, more than fine detail or craftsmanship, are the stories and signs embodied in our historic buildings. We need a new language to transmit these signs and stories. By forming a relationship to the historic setting, the architectural intervention is the perfect medium for translation between old and new dialects. Meaning is based on contextual relationships. In the present age new buildings rely on their relationship to the past for meaning. This relationship could otherwise be defined as a narrative. At an RAIA event entitled Contemporary Architecture versus Heritage: Zeitgeist, Nostalgia and the Search for Authenticity, Richard Francis-Jones of FJMT contended that “ultimately architecture is blind to the distortions of time.”⁶⁷ I would argue that architecture is the record of time’s distortions.

Awarded the Francis Greenaway Award by the RAIA in 2005 as the state’s best heritage project, FJMT’s restoration of the historic Mint Offices was the subject of Francis-Jones’ address. Completed in 2005, the addition to the Mint is essentially Modernist. Supported on a rational steel grid, a series of glass and timber planes frames the historic fabric, which is retained as an occupied ruin and in its found state of disrepair. The courtyard at the heart of the Mint is enclosed by an elegant ring of new and restored façades. As John



FJMT's Mint Offices
<http://www.architecture.com.au/awards/images/20052032/1.jpg>

De Manincor notes in *Architectural Australia*, Sydney's City Council rejected a proposal for a more playful addition to this grouping.⁶⁸

While the restoration work has been handled sentimentally and the scale and functioning of the addition is appropriate to its 19th century setting, it is the spare approach to landscaping which reveals the Mint's deficiencies. Asks Manincor, "is it appropriate to continue to pursue Euclidean forms when new production techniques allow for more adventurous forms to be realized economically?"⁶⁹ A single plane of manicured lawn hovers over the courtyard like a minimalist magic carpet. The sandstone edge of the lawn abuts a convict-carved gutter but makes no attempt at relating the machine-cut edge of the material to the hand-tooled surface beneath. According to Manincor, the original building manifests a physical text:

There may be any number of individual interpretations of this "text". "It is nonetheless there in stone, steel and peeling paint, awaiting translation." ⁷⁰

The hard-edged style employed by Francis-Jones, undecorated and visually austere, preserves the many artefacts within the Mint complex, but fails to translate the building's language into present day idiom. FJMT's well-intentioned treatment of the historic site reveals the conceptual and technical shortcomings of most Sydney architects working in a heritage context. As will be shown in the latter section of this report, these shortcomings are addressed and overcome, through a narrative approach, in the work of Scarpa and Miralles.

As an aesthetic operation, the intervention is the imaginative, arbitrary, and free proposal by which one seeks not only to recognize the significant structures of the existing historical material but also to use them as analogical marks of the new construction.

Ignasi De Solà-Morales Rubió. ⁷¹

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LINES THROUGH TIME 2

LINES THROUGH TIME: THE ARCHITECTURE OF CARLO SCARPA AND ENRIC MIRALLES

The problems involved are the same as ever, only the answer changes.¹

Like the human population of the western world, the building population is ageing. We have entered the era of the palimpsest: a built environment comprising overlapping construction which has increasingly been determined by preceding generations. In the professional and academic realms of architecture the notion of *tabula rasa*, the virgin site, is virtually extinct. While populations grow and prosper; cities increase in density, preservation methods improve, building materials become scarcer and concerns heighten about the energy embodied in these materials. Barring the large scale destruction of another world war, it is easy to imagine a near future in which the freestanding structure is redundant and in which architecture has become an ennobled discipline of additions and alterations. In this context, I regard the 20th century work of architects Carlo Scarpa and Enric Miralles as visionary, and worthy of reassessment.

Scarpa, “a jeweler at the scale of a building”², chose to operate almost entirely within the fabric of existing old buildings. Rather than treading carefully, however, he relished the intellectual stimulus of working in proximity to the craft of ancient artisans.³ He envisioned his work as just another layer in an unending narrative of accretion. His major works of historic restoration, beginning with the 1955-57 Canova Museum in Possagno, and gaining momentum with the 1961-63 Foundation Querini Stampalia in Venice, gradually became more radical, culminating in his renovation of the Castelvecchio Museum in Verona. Completed from 1956-73, the Castelvecchio is Scarpa’s most radical and public work. Working on site and in close cooperation with local craftsmen, the architect boldly deconstructed the historic fort into periodic stratum in order to make legible the building’s myriad layers, and, in turn, challenged the orthodoxy of restoration.

Better known for his extraordinary artistic virtuosity than for his restorative projects, Miralles is nevertheless responsible for what I believe to be the greatest historic interventions of the late 20th century: the Utrecht Town Hall and the Santa Caterina market in Barcelona. Designed in partnership with Benedetta Tagliabue, the former project exploited the prior demolition of a nondescript addition to the historic town hall complex. Completed following Miralles’ untimely death, the latter project involved the complete integration of the old and new market structures. While Scarpa employed an additive or subtractive method when working with historic fabric, Miralles attempted mimesis and the hybridisation of new and old in these projects, seeking a powerful whole rather than a collection of parts.

Despite their prominence in the field of historic alterations, these architects and their projects have, to the best of my knowledge, never been examined together. Scarpa was born in Venice, Italy in 1906, and died in 1978. Born in Barcelona, Spain in 1955, Miralles died in 2000. Both architects worked, and realised much of their oeuvre, in the

cities of their birth. Though perhaps as a student, Miralles encountered an ageing Scarpa during the latter's visit to Spain in 1975, I could find no evidence of their ever meeting or corresponding. Kenneth Frampton mentions Scarpa at length and Miralles briefly in *Studies in Tectonic Culture*.⁴ However, no published work of theory or criticism connects these two architects of different places and times. Yet when one considers, for example, the correlations between Scarpa's Castelvecchio Museum and Miralles and Tagliabue's design for the Utrecht Town Hall, a continuity of thought and technique is apparent. In both schemes an historic shell is reinvigorated with a series of planar and perspectival contemporary layers, constructing a spatial narrative which binds old and new. It seems evident that Miralles has built on Scarpa's example, and that the free hand afforded Miralles in reconfiguring existing buildings owes much to Scarpa's innovation in this area. It is my contention that the combined work of Scarpa and Miralles represents the emergence of a distinct practical and theoretical approach to altering historic fabric. Their projects embody not only an alternate methodology to that outlined in the Venice Charter, but they also constitute an intellectual framework for modifying existing structures which should be of increasing relevance to contemporary practitioners.

This essay will examine key projects by each architect: Scarpa's Canova Museum, Possagno, Foundation Querini Stampalia, Venice, and Castelvecchio Museum, Verona; and Miralles' Utrecht Town Hall and Santa Caterina Market, Barcelona. Responding to their historical context with a varying degree of abandon, these projects modify the spatial integrity of the existing fabric in order to entertain the architect's narrative vision. This narrative approach will be examined through the lens of the 1964 Venice Charter, the prototypical and still in use document outlining the principles of heritage and conservation, in order to assess the implications of the work of Scarpa and Miralles for architects working in a historic context today.

SCARPA AND MIRALLES IN DISCOURSE

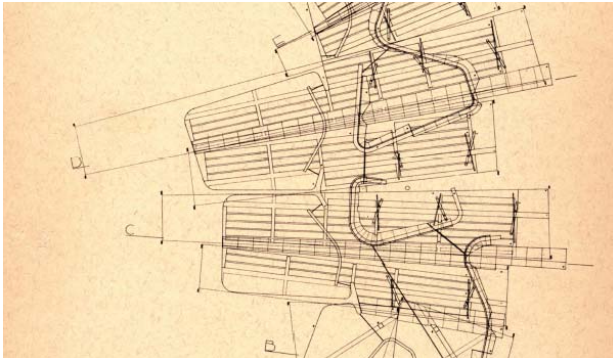
Commentary on the work of Scarpa and Miralles often focuses on their drawings.⁵ Compiled on layers of tracing paper and completed on-site as a dialogue with the craftsmen, Scarpa's sketches are unfussy but often astonishingly detailed. By contrast, Miralles' meticulous and fantastically beautiful drawings were always drafted in the studio. The drawings of both architects embody Paul Klee's notion of "taking a line for a walk"⁶: they are the willful, intuitive and experimental documents of an open-ended creative process. However these drawings don't transmit the real qualities of the architects' spaces. Writes William J.R. Curtis in his essay *Mental Maps and Social Landscapes*:

It is important to underline the physical qualities of Miralles and Pinos' work, especially at a time when drawings are sometimes discussed as if they had the same reality as finished works."⁷

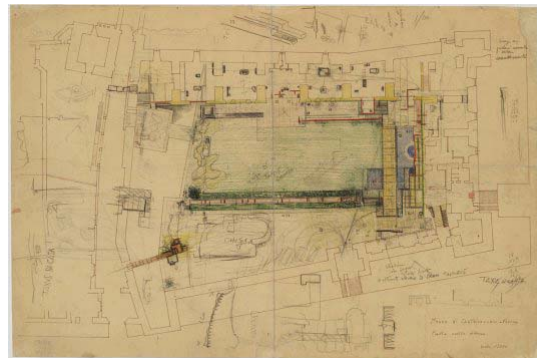
Yet too much emphasis on the physical also misplaces the strong narrative intent in both architects' work. By focusing myopically on the tectonic richness inherent in Scarpa's material junctions, Frampton fails to construct a coherent explanation for Scarpa's distinctive approach. Whereas Frampton contends that "the joint is the generator", the datum, Scarpa's

device for establishing a spatial narrative, appears as an equally strong generator of his designs.⁸

Because Miralles' works were produced relatively recently, there is a paucity of critical commentary surrounding him, and much of my information has been compiled from architectural magazines rather than theoretical tomes. Consequently no prominent discourse to rival Frampton's on Scarpa could be consulted as groundwork for this essay. In general, contemporary commentary on the work of these architects seems to be preoccupied with their drawings, or infatuated with the level of craft embodied in their projects. In either case the self-generated narrative which drives the architects' work is overlooked. It is this narrative which finds expression in every drawing and each constructed detail.



Detail of Enric Miralles drawing, Olympic archery range
<http://www.josepmariamontaner.cat/arti/revistas/>

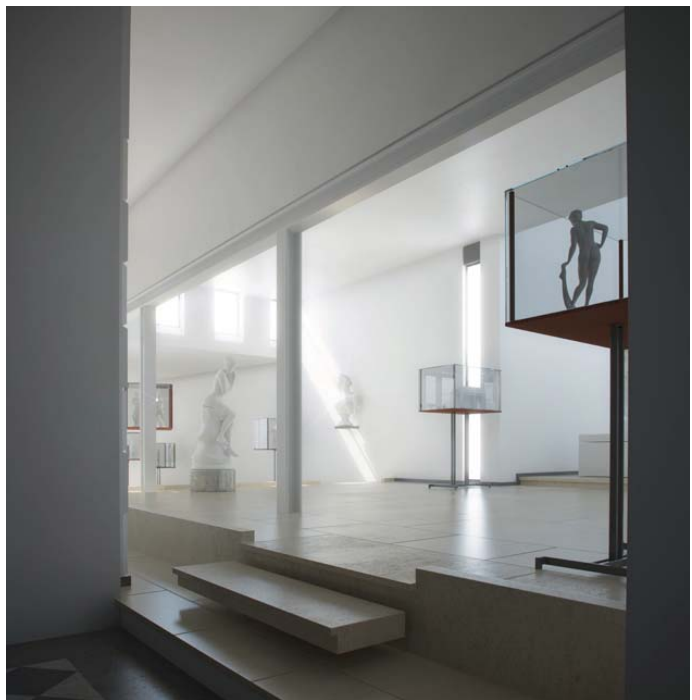


Carlo Scarpa drawing, Castelvecchio
<http://www.archimagazine.com/acescarpa4.jpg>

CANOVA MUSEUM

It seemed to me logical to marry the new building to the old one, to bring them together. You understand that before construction began, this building was isolated from the other one...⁹

Scarpa's extension to the 19th Century Canova Museum was completed in 1957 to mark the 200th anniversary of the sculptor Canova's birth, while providing more space in which to house Canova's sculptures. Apparently given carte blanche with his addition, Scarpa eschewed a colour scheme which would clarify the differences of period between his addition and Guiseppe Segusini's 1836 basilica-shaped hall.¹⁰ He chose instead to use white cement plaster throughout the new volume, and painted the previously grey walls of the hall white to match. In so doing, rather than reinforce the threshold between old and new, he created a spatial continuity between the existing building and his intervention. This approach was regarded as highly provocative at the time.¹¹ In order to accommodate a series of descending platforms which orientate the gallery towards the garden, Scarpa raised the floor level abruptly between the hall and addition, establishing a datum which is then 'excavated' over the course of the descent. The contradictory merging of wall surfaces and disconnect between floor levels indicates that, rather than being concerned with maintaining a consistent approach towards the existing hall, Scarpa modified the context in any way necessary to prioritise his own spatial narrative. In essence, Scarpa's addition creates a trajectory which links Segusini's hall with the adjoining 19th century house and courtyard. Commencing with a tall cubic volume and tapering via an elongated room towards a terminating glass wall overlooking a pond, Scarpa's addition creates a processional experience which revises the closed route of the original hall. This procession is punctuated with a series of level changes and openings which little by little expose the participant to the levels of the earth and to views of the surroundings, a sequential dematerialising of the hall's poche walls and sober massiveness. In Scarpa's addition, windows and steps seem unrestricted by gravity, cantilevered or frameless and suspended in the strong light which enters from surprising angles. Running in a channel between the hall and the addition, the pond, a sort of fluid hinge, gradually infiltrates Scarpa's gallery via subliminal glimpses and refraction. Perhaps most importantly, Canova's statues of figures in various states of activity, which are arranged inertly and uniformly around the edges of the original hall, come to life in Scarpa's addition. Suspended in glass vitrines, projecting from the walls on ledges, or reposing on individually designed podia of metal and stone, the figures seem to inhabit the space around them. Rather than a display hall, this is a dwelling for Canova's marble statues.



Carlo Scarpa's Canova Museum
<http://i29.tinypic.com/whbmn5.jpg>

FOUNDATION QUERINI STAMPALIA

In contrast to the Canova Museum addition, Scarpa's restoration of the ground floor of Venice's Foundation Querini Stampalia took place almost entirely within the volume of the existing building, with a bridge, water gate and garden the only exterior traces of Scarpa's intervention. Scarpa was charged with orientating the 16th century Palazzo Querini towards the neighbouring square, the Campiello S.Maria Formosa, by spanning a new bridge over the adjacent canal and punching a new front door through the Palazzo's principal façade.¹² Located alongside a much older stone pedestrian bridge, the lightweight timber and steel Querini bridge seems grafted onto the older structure, an almost redundant act of doubling without precedent in Venice, where bridges connect to thoroughfares rather than buildings. Next to the bridge, an ornate steel portego, or water gate, provides a boat entrance to the Palazzo. A whimsical rather than functional gesture, the portego embellishes the romantic mythology of the water city. The interior courtyard of the Palazzo has been transformed into a delicate oriental garden, animated by the continuous flow of water which seems to emanate from the canal. Venice is a city as much about its hidden interiors as its expressive facades. Scarpa's garden contributes to a legacy of partially concealed and mysterious interior spaces.¹³ A sequence of rooms controls the visitor's passage between the bridge entry and the garden.

Just as in the Canova Museum, here Scarpa again established a new datum for his intervention, raising the ground floor level in order to protect the building from periodic flooding from the adjacent canal, while exploiting these raised levels as an opportunity for creating a new spatial narrative. Detached from the surrounding walls, a stone platform navigates through the rooms edging the canal. Reminiscent of the temporary platforms installed around the city during aqua alta - the seasonal high tides - the platform incorporates a series of steps leading down to the portego, further embellishing the myth of the water entrance.¹⁴

Rather than assisting the visitor to move around these rooms, the stone platform actually incorporates a hob which impedes movement. Given limited space in which to work, Scarpa has interrupted the flow between rooms in order to assert a new path through the Palazzo. Between the platform and the courtyard garden, an airy gallery space rediscovers the original floor level of the Palazzo. However the datum, and by association the Venetian tide, continues through this room, with the gallery's rough concrete floor wrapping up the walls to the high water mark. Above this implied water line, the gallery is clad in panels of precious travertine. Scarpa has replaced the back wall of the gallery



Carlo Scarpa's Querini Stampalia
<http://www.msa.mmu.ac.uk/continuity/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/qsf2.jpg>

with glass, flooding light into the room and completing his carefully choreographed procession from enclosure to exposure.

CASTELVECCHIO MUSEUM

A fortified 14th Century castle, the Castelvecchio was converted into a military barracks during Napoleon's occupation of Verona, and subsequently into a museum. In keeping with preservation trends at the time, in 1923 museum architect Ferdinando Forlati had dressed the building in the scenery of a palazzo, affixing salvaged Gothic ornaments to the front wall of the barracks in a romantically symmetrical composition.¹⁵ Scarpa was hired to undertake some localized renovations of the museum in 1958. However he had no intention of containing his influence to restoration work. Scarpa carefully analysed the modern museum additions, the barracks and the ancient remnants of the castle, and concluded that the stratified Castelvecchio was a museum in its own right, independent of any exhibits.¹⁶ Over three stages of intervention in a fifteen year span, Scarpa gradually peeled back historical layers in a forensic examination reminiscent of the drawings of Viollet-le-Duc¹⁷, in order to clearly display the various periods of the building's life. In all, Scarpa stripped out the interiors, excavated the moat, demolished part of the Napoleonic barracks and a grand 19th Century staircase and opened up a long concealed ancient portal. Acting more as a curator than as an architect, Scarpa then added a contemporary layer to the complex, weaving his own spatial narrative into the fabric of the museum. The first significant change administered by Scarpa was the repositioning of the museum's entrance, moving it from the central bay of the barracks to the end closest to the fortress gate. This reconfiguration meant that the rooms of the museum could be accessed in a linear, rather than disjointed, sequence. Punctuating these rooms is a series of idiosyncratic steel and glass openings, which slice through the ground floor façade and contradict the symmetry of Forlati's gothic decorations. Within the ground level rooms, Scarpa laid a new stone course over the existing castle floors like a rug. The stone course stops short of the internal walls to create a shallow channel like a miniature version of the castle moat.¹⁸ Here again the raised stone floor represents the datum in Scarpa's work, as a means for directing occupants' movement and for communicating a particular narrative about the historic context.

The most radical, and the most enduringly controversial, of Scarpa's interventions at the Castelvecchio was the demolition of the end bay of the barracks and the adjacent staircase. While excavating the moat, Scarpa, apparently intuitively, surmised the presence of the Porta del Morbio, an historically significant city gateway, behind the barracks wall.¹⁹ He ordered for the corresponding section of the barracks and staircase to be demolished in order to disengage the barracks from the Reggia, the residential wing of the castle, thereby uncovering a complex multi-layered junction between moat, Porta del Morbio, Reggia and the palace tower and fortifications. Supported on a cantilevered concrete plinth, the famous equestrian statue of Cangrande della Scala magisterially occupies the open air room at the severed end of the barracks. Rather than stopping the barracks roof short, Scarpa extended the roof with a leaf of new construction which



Carlo Scarpa's Castelvecchio Museum
http://www.mimoo.eu/images/9092_1.jpg

splays outwards from beneath the soffit of the old roof, sheltering the statue below. Orbiting the statue, an intricate knot of circulation paths and stairs functions as the hinge between the ground and first levels and contributes to the dynamic spatial effect of the void.

TOWN HALL UTRECHT

A conglomerate of ten medieval houses which had been gradually consolidated over 700 years, Utrecht's town hall was a tangle of varying floor levels and labyrinthine corridors. Beginning in the 1920s, a series of luckily unfulfilled plans had emerged calling for the drastic reconfiguration or even demolition of the complex. Eventually the local authorities decided to preserve as much of the historic fabric as possible.²⁰ In 1996 Enric Miralles was chosen from a field of 31 architects to rationalise the town hall's disparate spaces and adjust them to modern administrative requirements. Echoing Scarpa's intervention at the Castelveccchio, Miralles' first move was a bold one: the demolition of the most recent addition to the complex, a 1940s brick registry building. Miralles then reoriented the entire building by 180 degrees, creating a new square in the vacant footprint of the registry building. Tables and umbrellas from neighbouring cafés and bars now occupy the square.

The main entrance, previously located on the imposing neoclassical façade fronting the Gazenmarkt canal, was switched around to face the new square at the rear. Rather than excavate space for a staircase within the building, Miralles draped the staircase over the new entrance, within a glazed enclosure which zig-zags up into the existing building like a switchback railway. While these changes have radically altered the spatial syntax of the town hall, Miralles' main interest was in reviving the sorts of memories and cultural activities which are traditionally associated with a civic building but which have become increasingly neglected in modern times.²¹ In order to retain a sense of its ceremonial importance, the old main entrance is now used for wedding processions. Within the building, two rooms have been designated for weddings: one a formal chamber fitted with period furniture;

the other an informal space populated by an eccentric collection of chairs from various places and times, remembering the days when townsfolk brought their own chairs to functions. Where the registry building met one of the original medieval houses, Miralles crafted a new four-storey concrete and brick addition which seems to unpeel from the junction with the older building. Facing



Miralles and Tagliabue's Utrecht Town Hall
http://farm2.static.flickr.com/1353/1116053867_b0739a2747_o_d.jpg

onto the square, the façade of this addition features an asymmetrical composition of stone window sills and lintels salvaged from the demolition. Arguably the most important room of Miralles' town hall is the square itself, which is animated by a capricious steel fountain, wavy timber seating and bands of differing floor surfaces which indicate the traces of former walls and foundations.

SANTA CATERINA MARKET

In some way there would be no distinction between the old and the new construction. We could say that the new construction would be the air enclosed between the structure of the new roof and the lateral façade of the existing building.²²

Living not far from the Santa Caterina market in Barcelona's Gothic Quarter, Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue had scoured the archaic building for architectural inspiration long before they won a 1997 competition to revitalise the market and its environs.²³ Built in the 19th Century on the site of the ruined convent of Santa Caterina, the city's oldest covered market was nearing dereliction when authorities intervened, saving it from the bulldozer.²⁴ Located in a poor neighbourhood, the new market and its integrated social housing block have since become a symbol of urban regeneration. The success of the project has also demonstrated the viability of this time-honoured commercial ritual within the daily transactions of the contemporary city. Miralles' intervention takes the form of an extraordinary, rippled 5500m² roof which vaults over the original arched walls of the market. At one end of the building, the roof overhangs a public boulevard which connects the market to the Barcelona cathedral. At the other, the roof engages with a new public plaza and the six storey social housing block, which juts out over the roof like a man on a picnic blanket. Adjacent to the plaza and sheltered by the roof, a small museum houses archaeological remains from the ancient Roman town which predated Barcelona, discovered during excavation.²⁵ A substantial loading bay is concealed beneath ground, with goods lifts accessing the market floor. Comprising a simple grid of modern stalls, the interior of the market is a surprisingly dark space, not unlike the more traditional covered market located nearby off the Ramblas Boulevard. A complex assembly of immense concrete beams, tubular steel arched trusses, timber joists and battens and some of the original 19th Century trusses, the underside of the roof soars over the stalls with a sculptural intensity reminiscent of Gothic construction.

An infill of cedar slats reminiscent of the lids of fruit crates terminates the roof-wall junction, admitting striated patterns of light. In most senses a conventional market, this building engages the 21st



Miralles and Tagliabue's Santa Caterina Market
<http://www.thecityreview.com/spain2.jpg>

century through the surface covering of its roof. Made up of 300,000 tiles in 67 colours, the mosaic tile-clad roof features a pixellated image of fruit and vegetables enlarged to enormous scale. This city-scaled graphic terrain, visible from the surrounding gritty apartment blocks, represents the "fifth elevation"²⁶ of the market, a powerful advertisement for urban renewal. Due to the reuse of structural elements and the archaic aesthetic of the roof assembly, today the historic fabric of the market and the new addition appear inseparable, a hybrid construction.

THE VENICE CHARTER: CONCLUSIONS

Relating the works of Scarpa and Miralles to the Articles of the Venice Charter is like reawakening the debate between Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc.²⁷ Who determines whether an alteration to a historic building is appropriate or not? Should the result of such work seek to present, interpret, clarify or consolidate historic artifacts? Superseding the 1931 Charter of Athens, which was drafted to safeguard historic buildings in the aftermath of World War I, the Venice Charter was the culmination of the 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments. The principles of the Charter, which consists of 16 Articles, continue to inform international heritage safeguards and legislation. In 1979 the Burra Charter was developed by ICOMOS Australia in order to apply the Venice Charter locally. Since its conception in 1964 the Venice Charter has never been revised, although documents such as the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity have sort to test its powers.²⁸

Article 3 of the Venice Charter states that the intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence.²⁹ The notion of historical evidence has been thoroughly tested by Scarpa and Miralles. At the Castelveccchio, Scarpa thoroughly modified the situation in which he found the building to convey a particular sense of its historical continuity. Miralles' addition to the Utrecht town hall rearranges the spatial hierarchy of the entire building. It could be said that these significant changes were driven by the desire of the architects to reinstate the social usefulness of these buildings. However Article 5 of the Charter, while declaring that the conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose, also warns that such use... must not change the lay-out or decoration of the building.³⁰ Article 6 further asserts the primacy of the existing, proclaiming that; no new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and colour must be allowed.³¹ Scarpa's white-on-white treatment of the Canova Museum, and Miralles' hybridized market structure would apparently fail these requirements.

Any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp, affirms Article 9.³² The historic interventions of Scarpa and Miralles were carried out in an unfailingly contemporary language, though whether these interventions were indispensable would be extremely hard to qualify. Furthermore, the Article declares that; the process of restoration... must stop at the point where conjecture begins.³³ Both the Castelveccchio and Utrecht projects, which were facilitated by speculative demolition, could not have gone ahead at the determination of the Charter. On the other hand, exponents of Scarpa and Miralles could perhaps have recourse to Article 10: Where traditional techniques prove inadequate, the consolidation of a monument can be achieved by the use of any modern technique for conservation

and construction, the efficacy of which has been shown by scientific data and proved by experience.³⁴ Miralles and Scarpa built on an indisputable wealth of experience in dealing with historic fabric when they approached a project of this type.

The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration, states Article 11: When a building includes the superimposed work of different periods, the revealing of the underlying state can be justified only in exceptional circumstances and when what is removed is of little interest and the material which is brought to light is of great historical, archaeological or aesthetic value, and its state of preservation good enough to justify the action. Evaluation of the importance of the elements involved and the decision as to what may be destroyed cannot rest solely on the individual in charge of the work.³⁵ This Article seems to justify the decisions which Scarpa and Miralles carried out in consultation with experts and craftsmen. The provision to preserve aesthetic value is particularly important, as it allows for the removal of certain elements of the historic fabric in order to create the aesthetic of successive occupation and use, as Scarpa and Miralles did at the Castelvechio and Utrecht Town Hall, respectively. However it was Scarpa or Miralles, acting alone, who decided and had final authority on what was of interest. Article 12 establishes that; replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence,³⁶ Scarpa's Canova addition merges effortlessly with the 19th Century hall, while its raised datum makes a definitive seam between old and new. Miralles' Santa Caterina market, however, deliberately renders old and new almost indistinguishable in an attempt to maintain the continuum of the marketplace.

Perhaps the crucial detail missing from the Venice Charter is provision for the creation of a new masterpiece in a historic context, a masterpiece at the level of artistry embodied in one of the realised works by Scarpa and Miralles. Additions cannot be allowed except in so far as they do not detract from the interesting parts of the building, its traditional setting, the balance of its composition and its relation with its surroundings, states Article 13.³⁷

CONCLUSION

Rather than being concerned with their impact on the historical setting, Scarpa and Miralles instead sought to create a new work equal in detail, ambition and narrative interest, to its context. They considered themselves worthy and capable of this task, as demonstrated by the confident and decisive manner of their interventions. The narrative vision embodied in their projects is an intellectual framework whereby their contemporary work attains a dialogue with that of preceding generations. It establishes a new datum designed to withstand temporal change, and speak directly to practitioners charged with carrying out future alterations to these historic places. Our urban environments are increasingly consolidated, and the freestanding building has become an endangered species. But rather than seeking to preserve and retain as much as possible of what already exists, it is my hope that emerging generations of architects will look to the practical and theoretical approach of Scarpa and Miralles, and pursue the creation of a new architecture which will prove as valuable as the constructs of the past.

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REPORT CONCLUSIONS

This Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship report has attempted to synthesise five years of protracted thinking about the relationship of contemporary architecture to the accumulated fabric of bygone ages. My investigations during this period span from my initial response to architectural debate occurring in Sydney at the time of my Scholarship entry, to a detailed study of the work of two European architects, Scarpa and Miralles. These architects seem to have mastered the troubling problem of relating modern efforts and technologies to the embodied cultural values of the past.

The act of reigning in discontinuous bursts of thought on the subject has required much effort. First and foremost, I have progressed from a third year student to a graduate architect. I have been engaged in numerous other projects and studies while endeavouring to complete the Byera Hadley report. I have also developed as an architectural writer, as the appendix to this report will attest.

In five years the global context has also considerably altered. A combination of the Global Financial Crisis, a failure to emulate the “Bilbao Effect” elsewhere, and backlash against architectural celebrity has contributed to a new wave of conservatism with values profoundly different to those which stirred debate in 2003. The case of Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art, which originally aroused my interest in the subject of historic interventions, provides a neat bookend to this period of study. By deciding last year on a more modest and conservative design than what was earlier envisioned, the director of the MCA has, at least temporarily, answered the question as to what heights Sydney’s architecture can aspire.

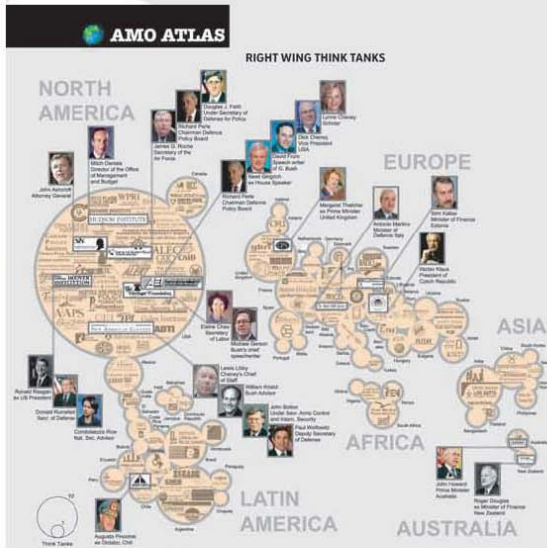
Ultimately, reference to successful, vibrant interventions in Europe and Melbourne demonstrate what is required if Sydney’s architects are to emulate their global and regional compatriots. By embedding an ambiguous, self-generated and referential narrative in their designs, architects as diverse as Scarpa, ARM and Jean Nouvel, have managed to complete the necessary act of translation between old and new. It is as if a third tongue must be established independent of the dialogues of history and modernity, a language of experiences, dreams and memories, one which has remained universal and comprehensible.

The absence of such a narrative from many of Sydney’s recent heritage context projects speaks less of the apparent obstacles to good design presented by councils, clients, low budgets and conservative public sentiment, and more of a lack of imagination on behalf of the architects. It is my hope that the content of this report, and of the subsequent work I will produce as a result of its findings, will contribute to the reawakening of an imaginative era for Sydney’s architects.

REPORT APPENDIX: SELECTED MAGAZINE ARTICLES **3**

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The architecture of disContent

Thick as a book with a magazine's format and gloss, *Content* combines essays, advertising and graphics. A sequel to *S,M,L,XL*, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau's 'novel about architecture', *Content* is a hybrid publication, fusing tabloid and monograph, satire and social realism.

A practising architect and theorist for over 20 years, Koolhaas has maintained relevance by embracing the dualities of architecture and urbanism. In writing, he is ironic to the point of profanity, eagerly willing to take the good with the bad. As director of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), and later the Architecture Media Organisation (AMO), Koolhaas juxtaposes cheap construction and rich design, trash and high art. Humour is pervasive.

"Architecture is too slow," writes Koolhaas in his opening statement. When emerging global trends pass in the blink of an eye, the ponderous architectural process, from contract to construction, cannot hope to keep pace. While in theory this implies that the ideas embodied in built architecture will immediately be out of date, in a very real sense,

Book review.

David Neustein.

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The Evil Architects Do

As urban planning becomes an increasingly common tool of military conflict, has the time come to add architecture to the list of war crimes?

BY EYAL WEIZMAN

The inauguration in the Hague of the International Criminal Court¹ announces the prospect of a Judiciary Utopia under international jurisdiction: individuals can be charged for the most serious crimes of international concern, such as the crimes of apartheid and war.² At the basis of the court, the International Humanitarian Law is designed to address military personnel or politicians in executive positions.³ But in the frictions of a rapidly developing and urbanizing world, human rights are increasingly violated by the organization of space. Just like the gun or the tank, mundane building matter is abused as a weapon with which crimes are committed.

The application of international law as the most severe method of architectural critique has never been more urgent. Crimes relating to the organization of the built environment, originating on computer screens and drafting tables, call for placing an architect/planner, for the first time, on the accused stand of an international tribunal.

International justice must bypass the legal system of states – usually complicit

in such cases – and decide whether a particular planning practice deviated from the naturally aggressive character of planning and its “acceptable” level of “collateral damage” to qualify as a violation of international law. When an architect’s design premeditatedly aims to cause material damage – as part of a large-scale policy of organized aggression – a war crime may have been committed. The evidence for these crimes are in the drawings – marked as lines on plans, maps, or their immediate real time replacement – aerial photographs.

The nature of the planning action concerned is twofold, including both acts of strategic form making: construction and destruction.

From the political/military point of view, the city is a social/physical obstacle that must be reorganized before it can be controlled. “Design by destruction” increasingly involves planners as military personnel reshaping the battleground to meet strategic objectives. As urban warfare gradually comes to resemble urban planning, armies have established research programs to study the complexities of cities and train their own urban practitioners. The effect is evident

worldwide. The destruction in Bosnia of public facilities – mosques, cemeteries and public squares – followed a clear and old fashioned planner’s logic: social order cannot be maintained without its shared functions (Article 8.3.b.iv). The manipulation of key infrastructure – roads, power, water and communication, such as in Baghdad – seeks to control an urban area by disrupting its various flows. Bombing campaigns rely on architects and planners to recommend buildings and infrastructure as potential targets in order to evaluate the urban effect of their removal. The destruction of monuments and heritage sites, such as in the bombing of Belgrade, seeks a psychological victory over “enslaving” architectural projects (Article 8.3.b.v). The grid of roads, the width of an army bulldozer, that carved through the fabric of the refugee camp of Jenin and the “clearing out” of a large area at its center reveals another planner’s speciality – the replacement of an existing circulation system with another – one more accessible to the occupying army and

therefore easier to control (Article 8.2.a.iv). Revealingly, the Israeli army employs architects and civil engineers as commanders of its military bulldozers.

These violations of the articles of war do not require an official declaration of war to qualify as such, however. The source of the term “unlawful” – the destruction of the condition of plurality that defines a city – did not originate in Belgrade, Mostar, Grozny, or Gaza but in the regenerations and “hygienic” practices of American urban planning, such as those described by Marshall Beaman after the aggressive “clean up” of the Bronx.

Planning’s pretence to facilitate the social and economic improvement of an abstract “public” has long been ignored, and physical development now largely manifests itself as the executive arm of a geopolitical strategic or market-driven agenda. Large scale development such as in the Pearl River Delta or the Three Gorges Dam in Yichang, China respond to political and market demands by displacing huge populations across national space (Article 7.2.d) and erasing their home villages. The design of a closely knit fabric of homes and infrastructure, such as in Sao Paulo, Mexico City, or California acts as a form of spatial exclusion – creating wedges that separate the habitat of a population of –

Has the time come to add architecture to the list of war crimes?

for Koolhaas and OMA, this has meant an increasing number of projects cancelled prior to realisation.

Faced with two options – either find a faster way to get projects built or operate as a purely virtual studio – Koolhaas embraced the dichotomy and chose both. In response to the former option, OMA shifted operations to Asia, where rapid urbanisation has accelerated construction. The latter option has been addressed by the creation of the AMO to explore global trends free from OMA’s material concerns. *Content* chronicles the success of these competing impulses over the past seven years.

While S,M,L,XL was both the book’s title and organising principle, with projects arranged formally according to scale, *Content* refers to the current tome’s status as an empty vessel for ideas. Accordingly, with chapters loosely based around the theme ‘Go East’ bordering on editorial anarchy, Koolhaas takes the reader on a dizzying ride through recent conflicts, globalisation, *Big Brother*, new media, Martha Stewart, Las Vegas, corporate branding, the Middle East and the European Union,

before reaching his final destination, the expanding Asian sector. Strands of images and text explode off the page like fireworks.

Early 2002 and Koolhaas is faced with another decision: compete for the redevelopment of the Twin Towers site or go after the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) headquarters in Beijing. In *Content* he flippantly ascribes the choice of CCTV to a fortune cookie. We know, however, that a door closed behind Koolhaas in New York with the failed collaboration of OMA and Herzog & de Meuron on the Astor Place Hotel. In a prime image of discontent, Astor Place hotelier Ian Schrager lies uncomfortably on a bed in a mock-up hotel room, his head pressed against the wall. On the following page, irreverence abounds as an animated coffee mug and chilli conduct an autopsy on the doomed project in a pixelated comic strip.

So steeped are Koolhaas’ designs in multimedia that it is difficult to distinguish the work of OMA from AMO. What is clear is the benefit of utilising an external studio to explore contemporary concerns, which has revolutionised his architectural practice. While previously

Koolhaas was satisfied with using elevators, escalators and trains in his designs to sustain momentum, here he travels at the speed of information, with projects in New York (for Prada) and China (for CCTV) marrying physical demands and new media.

Better than anyone, Koolhaas realises the importance of the ideogram in conveying information. At various points OMA’s recent projects appear caricaturised as bug-eyed monsters. It is a clever ploy, both celebrating and ridiculing OMA’s clunky iconoclasm. But architecture’s ability to embody ideas is temporal. We briefly return to the Maison à Bordeaux to find that the wheelchair-bound owner has died, outmoding the house’s ingenious elevator machinery.

A scatter-gun blast of pixel and print, *Content* achieves Koolhaas’ aim of being at the crest of a new wave of architecture – fast, aggressive, media-savvy and increasingly orientated towards Asia. But with world markets and alliances in a constant state of flux, *Content* is only as current as the next trend.

“This book is not timeless,” deadpans editor Brendan McGertrick. “It’s almost out of date already.”

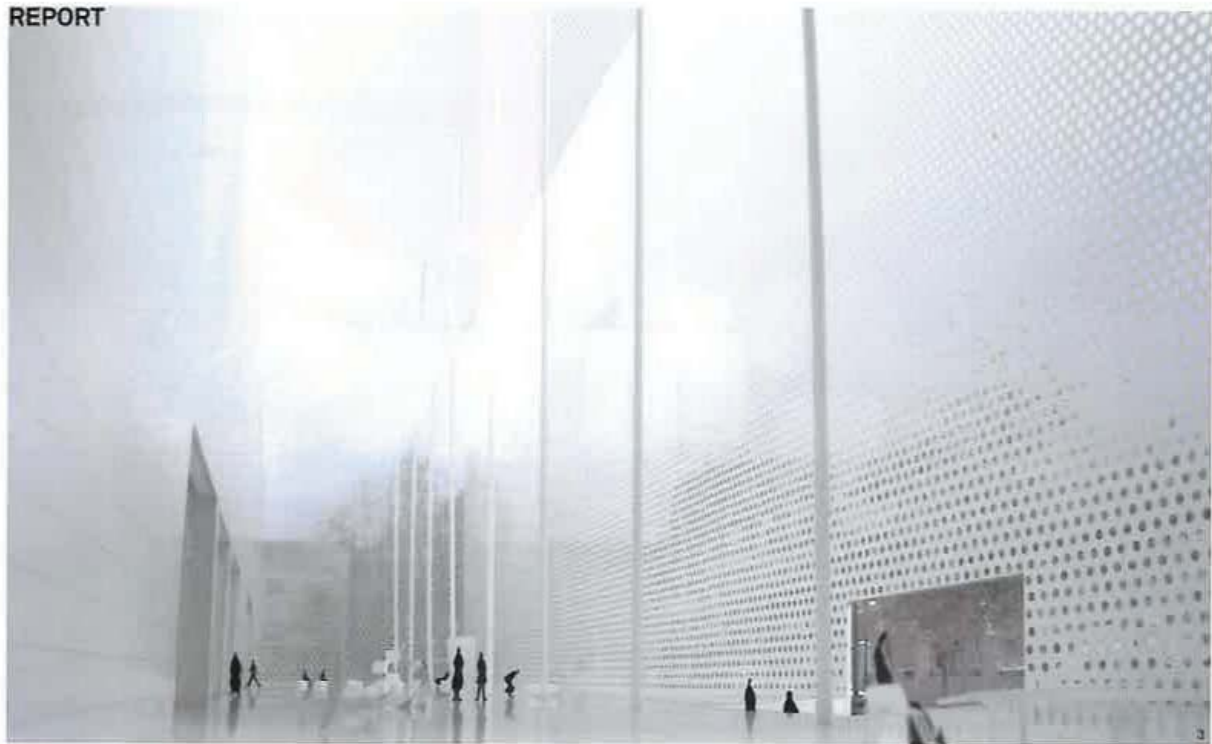


LA BIENNALE
DE VENEZIA

ARTICHOKE
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REPORT



LA BIENNALE DE VENEZIA

NOTES FROM METAMORPH –
THE 2004 VENICE INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE.

text
DAVID NEUSTEIN

"Computer technology is the new lifeblood of all our operating systems." So declared Kurt W. Forster, director of *Metamorph*, the Ninth International Exhibition of Architecture. The International Exhibition is one of the main events of the Venice Biennale and the premier worldwide survey of architecture. It alternates biennially with the International Exhibition of Visual Art. *Metamorph*, which concluded in November 2004, encompassed ideas of transformation, both physical and theoretical, innate in architecture. More specifically, Forster focused on

the rapid mutations within the discipline caused by computerization. Over 170 architecture studios were selected to illustrate that theme with more than 200 exhibited projects. Most works were displayed in the Arsenale, an imposing former medieval naval base, and in the Giardini, where individual countries presented their wares in a treasure trove of famous architect-designed pavilions, amid a sprawling lagoon-side garden complex. Forster's main curatorial statement, "a recital of recent history", was housed in the Corderie, a dauntingly large boatshed within the Arsenale.

The Corderie was divided into five areas – Transformation, Topography, Surfaces, Atmosphere and Hyper-projects. Each area presented a different aspect of metamorphic architecture, though the differences sometimes seemed arbitrary. The exhibition space was designed by New York studio Asymptote. "torquing three-dimensional rope through the space ... producing a surface map ... and then serrating that landscape for the ability to walk around and view the models". To the uninformed, the installation appeared not as clinical software-tooled serrations, but as whimsical

abstracted gondolas stretched between warping white walls. Either way, Asymptote's intervention was a light and curvaceous counterpoint to the Corderie's hefty brick columns and deep timber beams. Lined up on the "gondolas" were hundreds of models in protective perspex cases, like hundreds of tiny Lenins. Accompanying the models, text and illustrations of the featured projects hung on adjacent walls. With so many models on display, it was difficult not to treat the space as a beauty contest. dECOi's large-scale Miran Galerie was particularly eye-catching, a molded timber shell



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5/ ACCONCI STUDIO, MUR
ISLAND, GRAZ, AUSTRIA, 2003
(AERIAL DAYVIEW)

6/ PREDOCK FRANE ARCHITECTS,
ACQUA ALTA OR JUST ADD WATER,
INSTALLATION, FILAMENT, PAINT,
ACRYLIC, LEAD, 2004.

7/ OTAKU, PERSONALITY +
SPACE + CITIES, INSTALLATION.

8/ ALBERTO CRECHETTO'S CITIES
ON WATER FLOATING PAVILLION

× **Metamorph -**
la Biennale di Venezia
9th International
Architecture Exhibition
Giardini della Biennale
and Arsenale, Venice Italy
12 September - 07 November 2004
www.labiennale.org

REPORT

computer-milled so that the grain of the wood swirled across discontinuous parts.

We are constantly reminded of the freedoms afforded by computer modelling. Why, then, were so many aesthetically similar projects presented? "It looks like the same software did all the work," quipped Ron Arad. In a Maxwell Smart moment, Foreign Office Architects' Novartis Parking and Park – a biomorphical weaving of car park and nature strips – was selected as the winner of the Topography section, from among near-identical schemes by KOL/MAC Studio and 3xNielsen. In the Surfaces area, the search for continuous forms stretched into the infinite. Vector-laced images of Eisenman Architects' TAV Station in Napoli suggested that architecture has become so smooth it's practically teflon, and the engendering ideas are even more slippery. The antidote to so much slickness could be found in the street that ran between the Arsenale and the Giardini – put it down to either genius or good luck – where the Venetian locals hung their underwear out to dry.

I asked John Tuorney and Sheila O'Donnell – architects of contemplative, handcrafted timber structures featured in the Arsenale's Irish room – for their comments on the main exhibition. O'Donnell mused: "A lot of the work in the exhibition was in the last Biennale, has been seen before, has been much published, and most of it is unbuilt." Tuorney added: "I think that the exhibition is trying to assert a new orthodoxy, what we understand as a style. Overall that exhibition leaves you with the sense that the world is only about manipulated form. Architecture's a lot more about content and culture than simply shaping a surface."

Jean Nouvel's inventive proposals for Tokyo stood apart from this rhetorical skin game. Nouvel

continues to attempt a metaphysical architecture. In his scheme for Tokyo's Temporary Guggenheim Museum, a quirky artificial hill was wrapped in deciduous vegetation. His proposed office building in Shinjuku, Tokyo's downtown neon wonderland, completely dematerialized into haze and light. R & Sie might be Nouvel's heirs. Their Dusty Relief, a contemporary art museum for the "dusty grey luminous city" of downtown Bangkok, resembled a glass brick, stuffed inside a prickly durian and kicked around in the dirt.

Congratulations go to PTW Architects: their swimming complex for the Beijing Olympics, conceived collaboratively with Chinese firm CSCEC, picked up the award for the Atmosphere section. Featuring a skin composed of the geode structure of water bubbles, their design snugly fitted the curator's bill of "a new metabolic architecture". An Australian firm winning an Italian award for a project in China, PTW represent the increase in export opportunities for antipodean architects. For the fifth consecutive exhibition, however, no Australian show graced our pavilion.

Given PTW's continent-leaping success, one could question the importance of showing in the pavilion at all. The Biennale pavilion is significant either as a forum for engaging in dialogue with other nations about the global built environment, or as an offshore base enabling the critical distance often necessary in examining local concerns. On the global front, Israel invited several international architects to explore an expansion into the Mediterranean: Belgium presented a sociological study of Kinshasa, Congo; a clutch of young Danish designers teamed with Bruce Mau to propose radical schemes such as the export of Greenland's melt-water to Africa; Switzerland's Christian Waldvogel imagined the reconfiguration of the earth itself.

Focusing on local issues, the curators of the French pavilion assembled three superstudio teams who, in a series of brainstorming sessions, formulated ideas for the sustainable future of an industrial zone. In the German pavilion, contemporary buildings were Photoshopped into a continuous, sub/urban vista which wrapped around the viewer. The nearby Japanese pavilion was transformed into a collectors' market – an insight into an emerging demographic of materialistic, white-collar single men – with rows of glass display cases lit by superbright fluorescents. The opportunity to undertake an equivalent cultural study was again denied the Australian architectural community due to the lack of national representation at the Biennale.

Apart from providing a discourse on local and global tendencies, the pavilions of the Biennale offered designers the chance to reimagine Venice. C.J. Lim, in the British pavilion, and Predock-Frane, in the US pavilion, did this most successfully. Lim's exquisitely intricate series of paper cut-outs, *Virtually Venice*, invoked the *Invisible Cities* of Italian author Italo Calvino in a conversation between Kublai Kahn and Marco Polo. In Aqua Alta, Predock-Frane created a dense field of suspended filaments. A stained strip at eye level evoked the water line in a transient, sea-sway environment.

The Italian pavilion hosted most of the individual meta-events – a series of installations and shows, supplementary to the general exhibition, which took place in and around Venice. Of the events within the Italian pavilion, Where the Particle Responses, a bafflingly named collaboration between architect Kengo Kuma and Michitaka Hirose, founder of Japanese virtual reality, was crowd favourite. Controlled by calligraphic brushstrokes on a console, a shoebox-sized robot raked

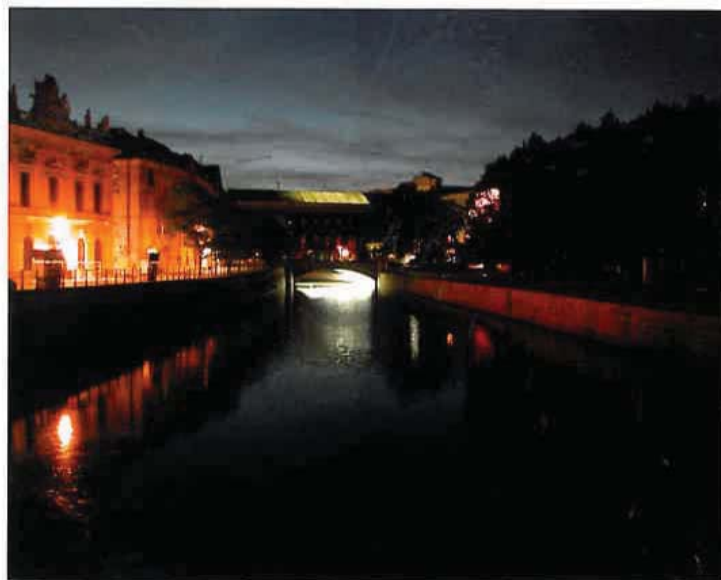
a garden of sand and veered off occasionally into the wall. Also contained in the Italian pavilion was Views from the Interior, an exploration of habitat and lifestyle in contemporary Italy, and a collection of contemporary concert halls. Copenhagen firm Plot's opera house for Stavanger, Norway – a remarkably sensitive gathering space binding city and waterfront – stole the show. OMA's Casa Da Musica in Porto, Portugal, was curiously omitted.

Round the bend from the main display in the Corderie, the Citta d'Acqua (Cities on Water) exhibit featured a topical array of large-scale urban projects for coastal metropolises. With port industry deserting cities, populations ceaselessly massing by the coast and oceans rising, change and adaptation are inevitable. Viewers were brought close to the water level of the Arsenale basin in Alberto Cecchetti's floating pavilion. Clad in translucent polycarbonate sheeting, it was the most atmospheric and contextual of the exhibition settings.

In nearby Verona, Peter Eisenman – awarded the exhibition's golden lion – staged another meta-event with an intervention on the hallowed turf of Carlo Scarpa's Museo Castelvecchio. Externally, a garden folly of lawn was teased and sliced into waves, intersected by crisp concrete planes. Within Scarpa's main gallery, Eisenman placed a graffito of functionless, red-painted steel bits and bobs – like shamefaced children – in low corners. A friend interpreted the work as "Eisenman pissed here".

Like the host city itself, a conundrum of alleys and canals, the 2004 Exhibition of Architecture tended towards spectacle over reason. Slick models and surface styling aside, however, the exhibition offered a fascinating discussion on metamorphoses in the built environment – regional and worldwide. Australia was sadly silent.

**FATA MORGANA,
CONSTRUCTED CONNECTIONS**
KUPFERGRABEN, BERLIN
June 2004 – April 2005
Review David Neustein



FOR 50 YEARS The Wall divided Europe. East and West. Both symbolic and real, the wall ran through Berlin, creating a scar in the city's heart that has yet to heal. Today the majority of Europe subscribes to a single Union. Borders between states have been relaxed, and European citizens can pass between with ease. For the optimist this is a taste of future unity. New symbols – a spangled flag, a common currency – express this spirit. If the wall stood for a disconnected Europe, should not the emblem of this new connected Europe then be a bridge?

The City of Berlin had the symbolic bridge in mind when it commissioned *Constructed Connections*, a series of temporary installations to reinvigorate the city's historic bridges. Following an international design competition, Tom Heneghan, Professor of Architecture at the University of Sydney, and Manu Kumar, a Berlin-based artist, were invited to collaborate on one of those bridges.

Heneghan and Kumar's *Fata Morgana* takes as its site the Eiserne Brücke, an unassuming iron bridge which spans the Kupfergraben (Copper Canal). The bridge joins the Museum Island to the historic centre of Berlin. Given UNESCO World Heritage status in 2000, the Museum Island is an architectural curiosity: a cluster of some of Europe's most important museums moored in the river Spree. At night time, after the buildings have closed, the island is used solely as a crossing point between East and West.

The project's title derives from a type of mirage, usually observed at sea, comprising several superimposed images of a single object. Heneghan and Kumar's mirage appears only at night, when a map of Europe, composed of interwoven satellite photographs, is projected onto the constantly shifting surface of the canal. The slightest ripple or wave disturbs the image's coherence, land forms break apart and vibrate.

Satellite photographs of East and West – Beijing and Los Angeles – were interlaced to create a contemporary European metropolis that is ideologically and ethnically diverse. Onto this generic city the map of Europe was superimposed. The resulting graphic was printed onto transparent vinyl and bonded to a grid of 180, 10mm thick translucent acrylic sheets. Backlit by 600 fluorescent tubes, the grid was then fixed with a steel frame to the arch beneath the existing bridge. The bright reflection of the illuminated image is visible from parallel bridges and banks either side of the canal.

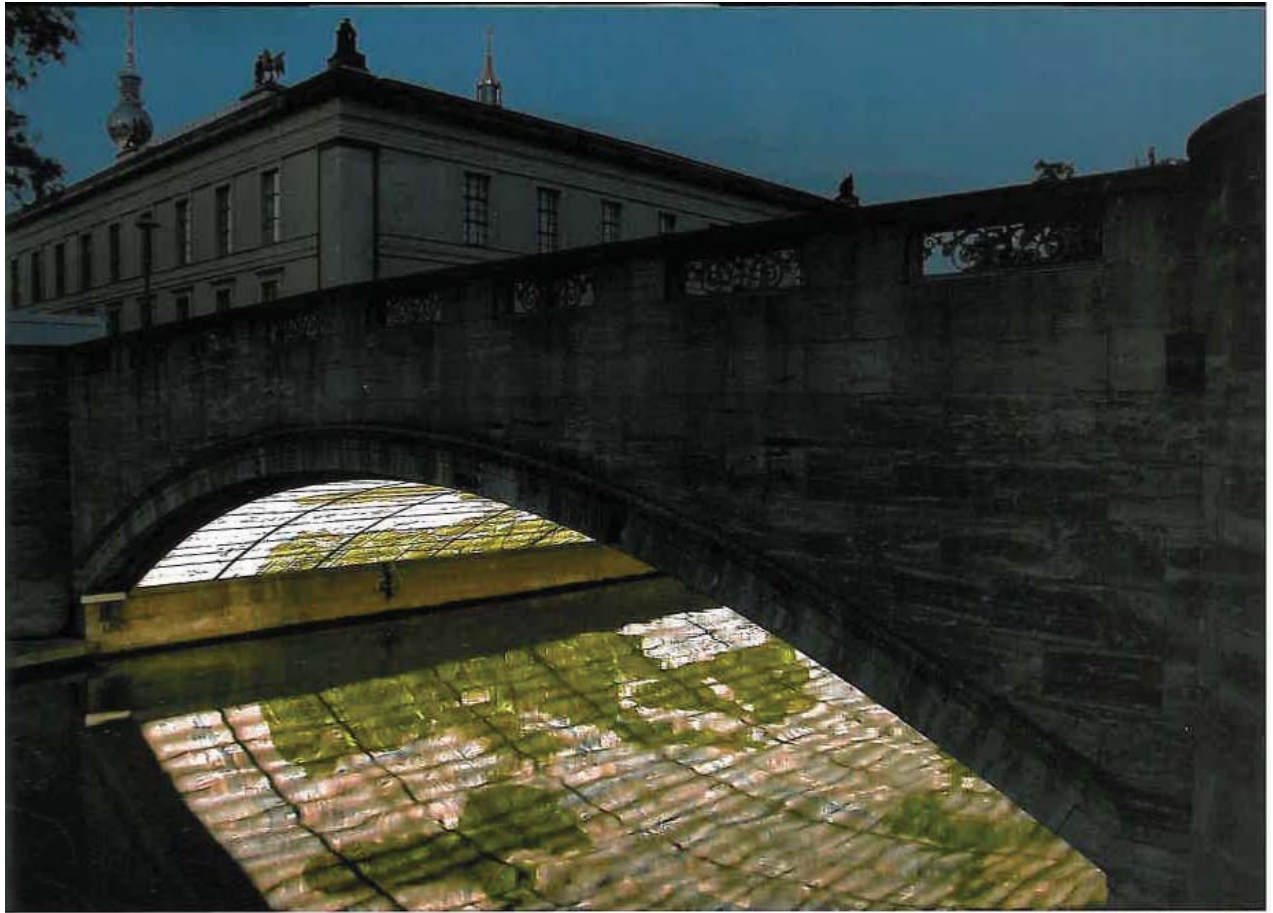
Like a mirage, the reflection shimmers enticingly from afar, drawing in passers-by. As with a mirage, the urge is to get as close as possible. On my visit I found myself scaling a padlocked gate on the western bank. The gate guarded a flight of stairs descending to a small landing adjacent to the underside of the bridge. It was midsummer, and I wasn't the only one to discover this space. In the glowing underbelly of the bridge, flies,

spiders, mosquitoes, dragonflies and several other types of bug had forged a happy unity.

From my intimate vantage on the landing, the mirrored image bore the mysterious illusion of bending downwards into the depths. An aerial photograph of a vast city lay before me in remarkable clarity. I could make out streets, buildings, even cars. I couldn't comprehend, however, the complex boundary, caused by a difference in tint, which divided the city. Only when my eyes adjusted did I realise that this boundary formed the contours of a map of Europe. I dangled the tip of my shoe into the water and watched as the continent trembled and dispersed, and imagined the currents running deep below.

The majority of Europe is of one flag and currency, but there are new walls and new battlefronts. Wounds open and close like lapping waves. Heneghan and Kumar's *Fata Morgana* symbolically weighs optimism and caution. Rather than a wall we have a bridge. The bridge reflects the hopes of a new Europe. Heneghan and Kumar urge us to cross that bridge, but to respect the currents passing below. [m]

PHOTOGRAPHY: MANU KUMAR



SPACE ODDITY

CASA DA MUSICA, OMA

Architect Rem Koolhaas has made a remarkable career out of challenging our assumptions. His Casa Da Música in Porto, Portugal, redefines the relationship of concert hall to the public and the city.

On 14 April 2005 the curtain finally rose on the Casa Da Música, six years after designers the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) officially commenced work. Intended to open as part of Porto's 2001 European Capital of Culture celebrations, the Casa was delayed by administrative changes, construction challenges and rising costs. The completed building justifies the long wait. From outside forbidding and remote, inside it is remarkably open. The heavy solid refuses to be inert, trembling with vital energy.

In Portuguese, Casa Da Música means House of Music. OMA principal Rem Koolhaas claims that the project originated in the unrealised design of a house. In the house, a large living area was surrounded by bedrooms and other spaces. With the commission for the Casa Da Música, Koolhaas recycled the ideogram into an auditorium with a sequence of overlooking secondary rooms. What might have been a nightmare of surveillance as a house has translated into a generously open public building.

"Where to innovate in a case of a traditional typology like the concert hall?" Koolhaas, a reliably innovative architect, asked himself this question at the beginning of the project. In Han Scharoun's prototypical Berlin Philharmonie, adapted by architects Joern Utzon (Sydney Opera House), Renzo Piano (Parco Della Musica) and Frank Gehry (Disney Concert Hall), the disparate parts of the building's program are integrated as an organic whole, smoothing the spatial disruption of services and technical nuts and bolts.

Not so the Casa Da Música. The main instrument of any Koolhaas project, (see the recently completed Dutch Embassy, Berlin, and the Seattle Library), is the use of the main path through the building to bring disparate spaces into immediate conflict and contact. The auditorium of the Casa is a box wrapped in twisting circulation tunnels. Like worms deforming an apple, the tunnels push outwards from the core of the auditorium into the building's envelope. The tunnels are divided into two disconnected spirals: one for the public, the other for musicians and staff. A wonderfully unexpected sequence of smaller rooms can be reached at nodes along the spirals. While the pathway is uniformly surfaced in rough exposed concrete and perforated aluminium, the rooms are furnished in a variety of different colours and materials, so that each has a unique character. Windows connect these rooms both internally to the main auditorium, and externally to panoramic views of the city. The visible connection of the various rooms to the main auditorium represents the evolution of Koolhaas' spatial technique; the windows bind the various rooms into an intelligible whole, gathering into the public domain what would otherwise be private spaces.

Structurally, the building consists of a honeycomb concrete shell connected by reinforced floor slabs. Thick columns run diagonally through the building to help transfer loads to the foundation strata. Set at



Image - Monument 68

inclined angles, the wall panels caused constructional problems before the roof could be installed for bracing. The steeply pitched roof also gave engineers headaches. Ultimately, prefabricated concrete roof slabs were hung off an interior steel structure. When I visited the Casa I took a walk on the roof's smooth moonlike surface, and can attest to the ingenuity of those engineers.

Looming over 19th Century Avenida da Boavista, Porto's grand boulevard, the concrete edifice of the Casa appears massive. A square concrete plinth, clad in travertine, occupies the full area of the site. The plinth swells up at its corners to allow a restaurant and other services to tuck in underneath. From the centre of the plinth the building rises nine storeys to the sky. The minimalist exterior partly references famous Porto modernist architect, Alvaro Siza, but is of a scale and language completely foreign to the slightly chaotic surrounding neighbourhood of low rise 1920s apartment blocks. Resembling a concrete asteroid with ground flat edges, a polygonal Death Star, the Casa is clearly a sculptural, rather than contextual, object.

Visitors climb a flight of steel stairs with glowing glass treads. Like the landing ramp of an interstellar craft, the stairs project from the immense lunar surface of the façade. Slanted glass doors slide open to the main lobby. Here an enormous multistorey void ascends to the roof. Below the lobby level are three floors of rehearsal and staff rooms and below that again is an underground car park. In total, there are nine floors above ground, eight of which are publicly accessible. The building can accommodate up to 200 staff and musicians.

The main approach to the auditorium is via a corridor dramatically sandwiched between huge panes of undulating wave glass. The wave glass, like bent paper, is self-supporting. Through the outer pane, facing west, the ocean can be glimpsed beyond a landscape of jumbled rooftops. Above the entry corridor, hovering between the layers of glass, is a linear bar which services the adjacent small auditorium. Cheeky Koolhaas has given the bar a transparent glass floor, so that arriving gentry can peek up society ladies' skirts.

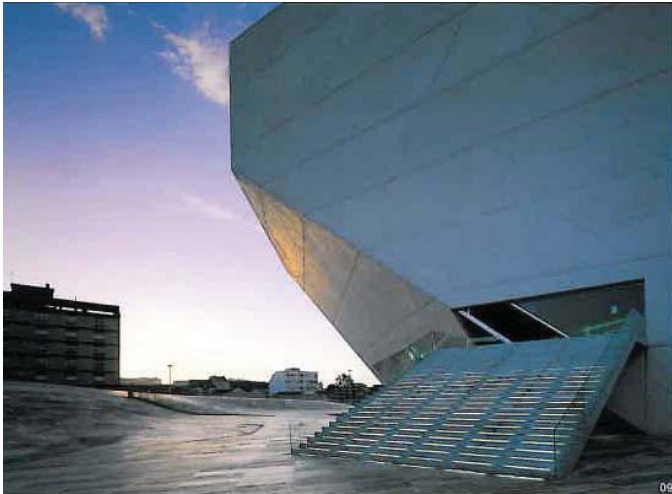


Image - Monument 68

The auditorium has a formal language strongly rooted in sci-fi. A huge rectilinear room, sealed at either end by giant windows, resembles a space shuttle loading bay from 2001 Space Odyssey or Star Wars. Jutting into the central volume from above, secondary spaces - like glass walled control rooms - peer out through the immense aperture of the main windows to the vast void beyond.

The auditorium, which seats 1300 people, runs directly east/west. Afternoon light glows off a pixelated timber grain pattern of gold leaf affixed to raw plywood panels. A reflective aluminium floor, steel benches and silver fabric cushions form a single metallic sheet. The stage is set low

to the ground, backed by a choir pew. Unforgivably for some, there is no orchestra pit. In line with the brief, the auditorium has been prepared only for acoustic performance. The Casa's programme will not include large scale operas, musicals or ballet. Behind the stage, the awesome eastern window spans the full width and height of the wall. Sunlight permeates the room, which contrary to type, feels powerfully open and transparent.

Adjacent to and above the grand auditorium is a smaller, 300 person hall. With no fixed seating and a removable stage, the room will accommodate activities not possible in the larger space. Perforated red plywood panels conceal curtains and rigs for lighting and sound. The walls of the nearby Cybermusic area, a multiuse electronic music and installation space, are covered in queasy green polyurethane-coated foam pyramids. Further up the spiral, the privileged will make use of a VIP room clad in traditional blue and white azulejo tiles. A top floor restaurant can be accessed directly from the street. Concrete columns slant on dramatic angles beneath a wide skylight. At the building's summit, a notch in the façade creates a sharply funneling outdoor terrace from which to drink in the splendid views east.

The chiseled form of the Casa Da Musica is the most deliberately iconic of Koolhaas' completed buildings. The Portuguese Architectural Heritage Institute is currently lobbying - by all accounts successfully - to have the Casa classified as a "Building of National Interest", which would warrant a 50 metre protection zone around the Casa in which no new development is permitted. The classification, however, cannot prevent construction of a seven storey BPN bank headquarters immediately behind the Casa, blocking the ocean vista. Measures have now been put in place to spread the bulk of the proposed bank building, preserving the Casa's outlook. The importance being given to protecting the vista is justified. While the thick mass of the Casa pretends indifference to its surrounds, it relates to the rest of Porto, and makes its public gesture by opening its gaze to the cityscape.

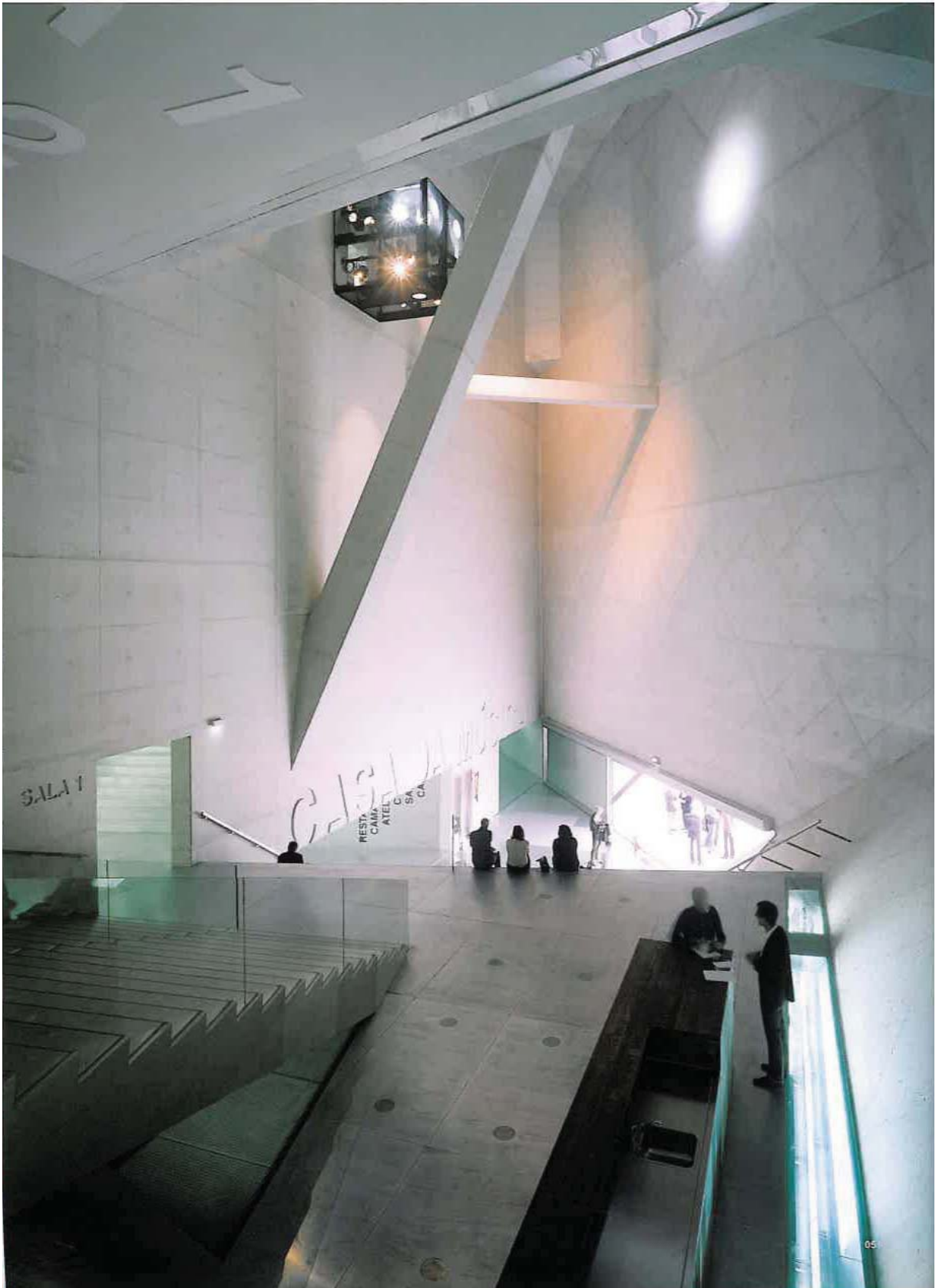


Image - Monument 68

REVIEW EXHIBITIONS

SECOND INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE ROTTERDAM

May 26–June 26

Review David Neustein

A DARK AND powerful wave poised to crash, was the image used to advertise The Flood, Rotterdam's Second International Architecture Biennale.

Biennale director George Brugmans, stated that the theme of The Flood encompassed "water as a concrete issue, a political issue and an economic issue". In his introduction to the press, Brugmans commented on how appropriate this theme was in the wake of the recent Asian tsunami. Of course the tsunami had struck mere months before, so perhaps it was unfair to expect the Biennale to respond to such an extraordinary event.

Nevertheless, once Brugmans had mentioned the tsunami, it was hard to flush it from my mind. Though well intentioned, the Biennale's exhibitions were diluted by comparison with the shocking images of rapidly rising waters, devastated cities and bewildered survivors that poured in from South-east Asia.

A world away in Rotterdam, The Flood's principal curator, Adriaan Geuze of West 8 architects, focused on the comparatively settled landscape of the Netherlands. Geuze intended The Flood as a metaphor for the Netherlands' manmade, water-drained landscape, "directly linking the tradition of the Dutch water city with the challenges of the future". But while the Biennale promised to be international in its scope, most exhibits dealt with local problems instead of global issues. The most successful exhibits had ventured offshore by engaging international curators and designers to collaborate with their Dutch counterparts.

The "Mare Nostrum" exhibit did just that. Curator Christine de Baan had invited 17 curators from 17 nations or regions to present a study of the impact and potential of the world's biggest industry, tourism, and its inextricable link to the sea. Curated by Professor Leon Van Schaik of RMIT, Australia's "32,000 beaches" occupied pride of place, right at the entrance. Architects Terroir, Donovan Hill, Richard Black, Iredale Pederson Hook and Stephen Nettle, assisted by student teams, had tackled diverse regions on Australia's perimeter. The teams had worked within local council guidelines to arrive at strategies for simultaneously developing and protecting the coast: creating habitable barriers to protect fragile dunes; consolidating seaside towns; and reusing industrial sites as recreational attractions.

Scotland's outstanding entry, "6000 miles", presented a more radical range of ideas than those of the other nations. GROSS.MAX Landscape Architects proposed "Global warming/local cooling", a nuclear-powered iceberg designed to counter climate change. Fellow Scots, Graven Images, planned the infrastructure of a local sushi industry. Meanwhile, curators from Spain and Turkey grappled with solutions for exploiting seasonally inactive tourist traps. Israel's entry, "Red Sea

Crossings", postulated the creation of a regional entity in the Gulf of Aqaba, overcoming territorial borders to link Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Located on the grittier side of Rotterdam harbour, the Las Palmas warehouse provided an edgy venue for two of the five Biennale exhibits. Visitors had to scale a giant shaky staircase of blue scaffolding to enter the exhibition space. Featuring maquettes from historical, current, future and imagined cities, "Water Cities" was curated by Geuze. Those prepared to immerse themselves in the detail, discovered a series of intelligent models for building on water, including old but still radical concepts from Le Corbusier and Archigram. "Climate changes in the Netherlands will bring new strategies and massive investment in the next century," Geuze told the press. "But such strategies are not on the national planning agenda." "Water Cities" made a convincing case for a strategy of avoiding construction on sub-sea level polders.

The more staid National Institute of Architects (NAI) hosted the other three exhibits. The best of these, "Flow", featured nine design projects by young international practices which 'go with the flow', by embracing rather than repelling the unstable medium of water. Hourglass, by Mark Van Beest, was a plan to accelerate erosion and ecological processes in order to create a nature theme park in a disused quarry. Spain's Alday, Jover and Sancho presented an already built project on the banks of the Gállego River. By purposefully building sports fields and a bullfighting arena on the previously avoided floodplain, Alday Jover celebrated seasonal floods as dramatic spectacles.

The highlight of the "Flow" exhibit was WAVEgarden by Yusuke Obushi, an experimental proposal for a wave-generated power station off the coast of California. WAVEgarden's 'piezoelectric' membrane undulates with the ocean swell to create energy equivalent to a nuclear plant. The results of a student masterclass in Flood Resistant Housing led by American architect Greg Lynn were also presented as part of "Flow". Ida Krizag of the University of Zagreb stood out with her design for a fully-submersible dwelling employing phosphorescent plankton as lighting.

The expansion, densification and changing morphology of Tokyo, Venice and Amsterdam were examined in the "Three Bays" exhibit. Under Geuze's direction, guest curators from the three cities provided drawings, models and images. Unfortunately the exhibit lacked cohesion and offered no insights into the challenges these cities will inevitably face due to environmental change. "Three Bays" missed the boat by overlooking the situations emerging on the waterfronts of these cities. In Amsterdam, for example, submerged sandbanks in

the IJ river delta are being reclaimed to create land for new residential complexes.

Alongside "Three Bays", curator Linda Vlassenrood created a gridded Monopoly-board landscape of green felt and blue vinyl for the "Polders" exhibit. Drained by windmills and ditches, polders are manmade agricultural regions often situated metres below sea level. Interestingly, to the Dutch they represent the main experience of 'nature'. Celebrating the particular fascination of the Dutch for minute detail and data, the exhibit comprised maps, photos, video, and 15 detailed models representing the development of 3500 polders over seven centuries. The display culminated in the dilemma Dutch authorities face today over whether to preserve the polders as they are, or exploit them for further development. It was disappointing that the global applicability of the polders was not explored: as ocean levels rise, populations worldwide will be forced to drain land as the Dutch have done – for agriculture, housing, industry and recreation.

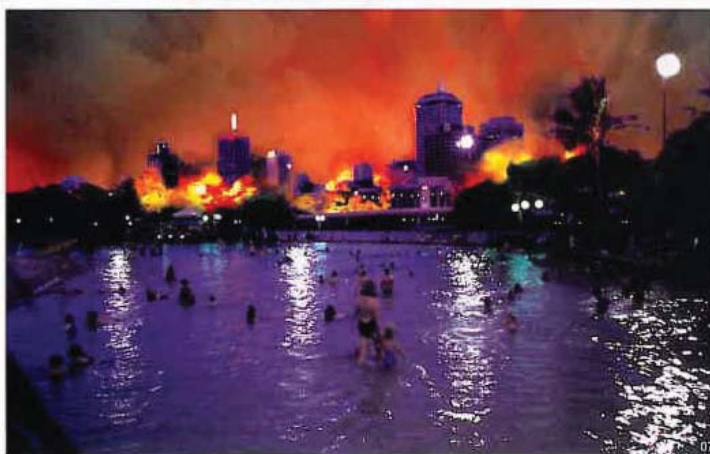
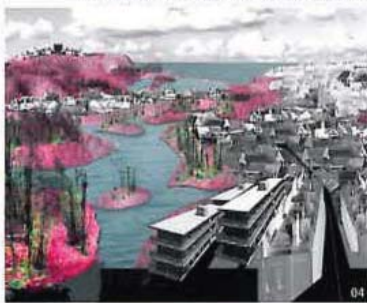
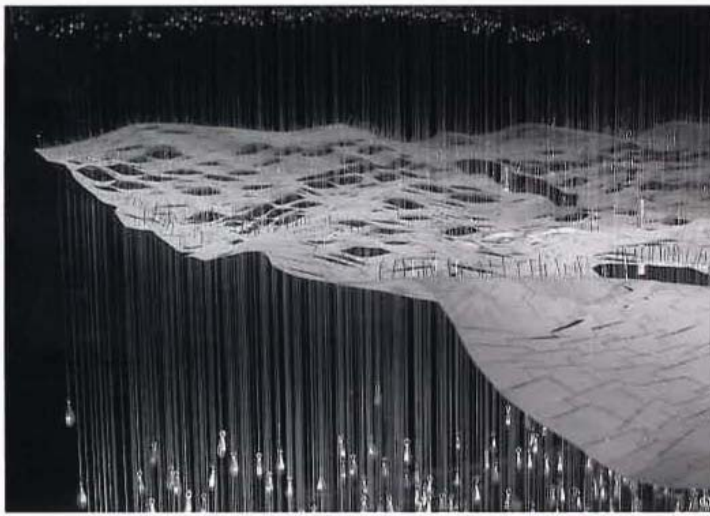
During the Biennale a small program of City Events occurred in Rotterdam's centre. The V2 Centre for Unstable Media showcased artworks based on interactive technology, which simulated weightlessness, submersion and disorientation. While all the listed events related vaguely to water, none really had much to do with The Flood theme.

"This Biennale is different to the first Biennale of summer 2000: we don't make a conclusion," said Geuze – making a statement, not an apology. Unfortunately, the lack of conclusions was obvious in most of the Biennale's exhibits. After all, what is the use of holding a Biennale – bringing strategists, designers and curators together in an international forum – if not to make conclusions? Information and ideas are not enough to inspire action.

At the time of writing, a Third International Biennale of Architecture to be held in Rotterdam in 2007 is in jeopardy due to lack of allocated funds. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has omitted the Biennale from its 2005–2008 cultural policy document. [1]

- 01 WAVEgarden: Yusuke Obushi
- 02 Recovering Gállego River Waterfronts: Alday, Jover & Sancho
- 03 Hourglass: Mark van Beest
- 04 New Dutch Water City – The Waal Elbows: Niall Kirkwood
- 05 Model of Stevensweerd (1600)
- 06 Archetypal Dutch Watercity with KLM Houses
- 07 Brisbane Must Burn – 32,000 Beaches: Donovan Hill
- 08 Fish Farm – Between Aqaba and Tabá: Sigal Barrié & Yael Moria
- 09 6000 Miles: Morag Bain

IMAGES COURTESY 2ND INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE ROTTERDAM (05–06) MARITEN LAURIAK, 08 MOTTI KAPLAN



Tough Love

PLAZA PIUS XII, FLORES PRATS, BARCELONA



BLOODED IN THE studio of Catalan architect Enric Miralles, Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats are building a reputation as quirky, crafty designers. On our visit to Flores Prats' latest project, a child-friendly piazza, Flores begins by buying a couple of lollipops. "I like this type best," he says, handing me one, "because of the surprising chewing gum centre".

A drive down Gran Via De Les Corts Catalanes reveals a Barcelona rarely seen by tourists. Gran Via accelerates north through the city and across the border into France, morphing from downtown street to major highway as picturesque Barcelona gives way to the massive raw scale of the motor city.

Plaza Pius XII is located on the urban fringe, where Gran Via slips beyond city limits. The forecourt of a typical 1960s apartment building in a working-class area is not exactly standard architect territory. Barely a stray bullet away, the infamous La Mina neighbourhood is home to

the very poor, drug dealers, gangs and gypsies. The 2004 Barcelona Forum, an exposition park designed by international glamour architects, is also located nearby. However the urban regeneration which was intended to follow the Forum, has yet to eventuate here. Prior to Flores Prats' intervention, junkies would shoot up in the dark and forbidding space in front of the apartment block.

The first move for Flores and Prats was to relocate the small street bordering the block. Formerly the street ran directly along the building's façade, creating a barrier between building and forecourt. The isolated forecourt in turn attracted drug addicts and pushers. The architects have banished the street to the block's perimeter, binding forecourt to building front. Now children can play outside their homes unmolested by traffic (or thugs), and ground-floor cafés have extended chairs and tables into the public domain.

For an example of what locals can usually expect from their public spaces, Flores takes me to see a courtyard a block away. It is early evening, and residents gather after work on a few benches arranged around a drab grey kiosk. There's barely a tree to be seen. Meanwhile, back in Flores Prats' piazza, kids play happily on swings, see-saws, slides, or scuff around a football while parents chat happily at nearby café tables.

Constructed in advance of the architects' involvement, a wide flat pedestrian bridge traverses Gran Via. Flores Prats has attempted to humanise this strangely unarticulated urban fragment by extending the bridge's red bitumen surface, like a strip of red carpet, into their site. Rows of dark red prune trees accompany the crossing, a visual link which guides kids across the bridge from school to home. Red tubular railings and red hula hoops circling around tree trunks complement the lively colour scheme.

>>

PHOTOGRAPHY ALEX GARCIA

POSTCARD SITE



01 A Barcelona rarely seen by tourists 02-03 Zebra-stripes playfully overlap 04 Trees provide a visual link guiding children between school and home 05 Forecourt focal point, a rocket-roofed kiosk 06 Pergola will be covered in vines

SITE POSTCARD



>> With its spiral rocket roof, the maroon-painted kiosk is the forecourt's focal point. Like a gingerbread house or a sticky bonbon, the kiosk attracts people – especially young people. Children hover on balconies above, waiting for the flaps of the simply constructed sheet-metal kiosk to open. A former neighbourhood tough is employed to run the kiosk while keeping a watchful eye over the area. Observing Flores and the kiosk vendor chatting like old mates, it becomes clear that the architects have a personal and ongoing involvement in their project.

Apart from combating social ills, the other challenge faced by Flores Prats in this city-edge border zone was the daunting presence of the unbroken horizon. A bare steel pergola – which will eventually be populated by vines – mediates between the vertical mass of the apartment building and the motor-scale outlook. Flores says the pergola “zigzags like soldiers crossing a battlefield” to give vitality to the previously inert space. The end of the pergola turns the block corner in an inviting gesture, then turns again to connect with the trajectory of a red metal hood of one of several underground car-park exits.

The architects' playful touch is everywhere. Even zebra crossings have been affected, their stripes crossing and overlapping. Stock-standard Barcelona paving tiles are rearranged into eye-catching configurations. Ordinary park benches and rails accentuate pavement patterns while the pergola slaloms overhead. Either side of the paved thoroughfare, fine gravel delineates informal play areas. The overall composition demonstrates the architects' process – acquired in Miralles' studio – of tracing and retracing the main lines which define the site. The architects have fashioned a rich public space using the cheapest of components. The expense is mental, rather than material.

David Neustein



FATHER FIGURE

RICARDO LEGORETTA INTERVIEW

Vividly coloured walls that seem cut from pure pigment are the trademark of Ricardo Legoretta, Mexico's most famous living architect. His buildings flare from the landscape like the warm, blue eyes from his sun-worn face. The friend and protégé of Mexican Modernist heroes Jose Villagrán and Luis Barragán, the 74 year old remains humble and true to his roots, despite having achieved worldwide fame with buildings such as the Cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua and the Solana Complex, Dallas, Texas. In 1991 he and son Victor joined forces as Legoretta and Legoretta.

How are architects perceived in Mexico?

Mexico is a country in which, maybe not specifically architecture, but beauty plays an important role. In the villages and in the small cities there are a lot of people who build their own houses. Now developers are taking leadership in how the city develops and architecture is becoming a bit of a business instead of a profession.

Glenn Murcutt resists offers to build outside Australia because he says that architects should work only within their local culture. You have built buildings all over the world. How do you remain true to Mexican culture?

There is no need to be building every place in the world to be a good architect. I have found that the right attitude is to respect the culture, try to understand it, to not try to be Mexican but to take my own personality. Respect and honesty make great buildings and provide the possibility of becoming universal, as opposed to globalised. By working in other parts of the world we make our minds and our lives richer.

We received a letter from the owner of a school of music who wanted a house for his guests. At the end of the letter he wrote: "there is no need to consider Japanese culture". It was almost an instruction to transplant Mexican architecture. Of course we said that we could not design a Mexican house, we would try to do something of Japan. After the house was finished the client held a party. I looked around and said "you know, I don't know what it is but I have the feeling of being in a Japanese house". At that moment the owner appeared and said "I want give you special thanks. The house is beautiful and I'm very happy that you paid attention to my first letter - this is the most Mexican house I have ever seen." That to me is a very good example of the interchange of cultures.

It could be argued that your architecture involves the continuous reassembly of pre-modern elements. Do all modern buildings emerge from the forms of the past?

Yes they do. My architecture has a lot of influence from the past, the same as with a human being. People may get along well, or not at all, with their parents or grandparents, but they have that relationship, the genes, the way of moving, of thinking. You cannot deny that deep down you come

from somebody. On the other hand you have to be a better person than your father.

The Mexican Pavilion at Expo 2000 seemed to herald a new phase in your career.

More than a new direction, it reinforced the approach that you have to respect the environment. To do a pavilion for an exhibition is a completely different job because it's temporary. We decided not to use any material at all that would be permanent: any clay walls, any plaster. When you take seriously all the things that we architects talk about, when you say let's respect the environment, let's respect the problems, then the possibilities are endless.

Four days ago a retrospective of my work opened in Mexico City. I've never done so much work for an exhibition in my life, it took the whole year. In going through the process of presentation, of how the exhibition would be placed, I went through the process of my life. First I went through the drawings done with rulers and squares, after that drafting machines, then computers and the path continues. It really impressed me how differently your methods progress according to your tools.

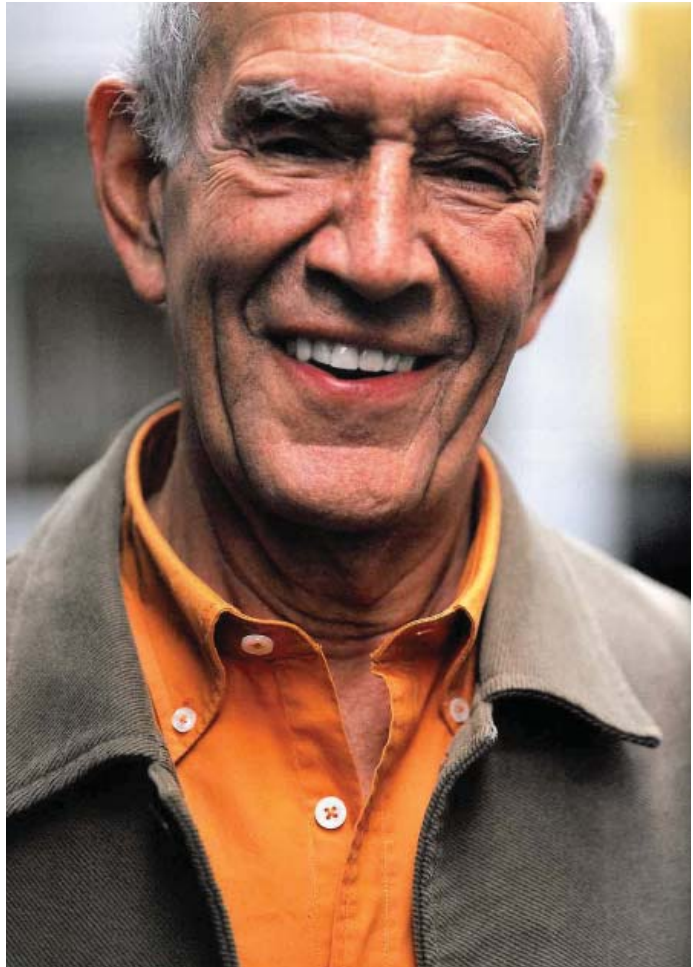


Image - Monument 70

Do you and Victor always work together?

Always together. It's the best thing that's happened in my professional life. We don't release any idea or any solution unless we both agree. When we started to work he was just three years out of school. I was in a moment in my life, which everybody goes through, of saying well, I already know what I have done, I already know how good I am. He brought that freshness of questioning everything.

What was revered Mexican architect Luis Barragan like in person?

Even though Luis and I use the same tools - walls, colour - his passion for quality influenced me the most. When somebody is successful they acquire an aura which distorts the truth of that person. For Luis the quality of life was upmost. He would invite you for tea, but it had to be at exactly 5 O'Clock based on the angle of sun, the songs of birds. If not, don't bother to come.

Are there architects today on par with the Barragán generation?

Yes. We may not know yet who they are - it takes time to find out if your architecture is really good. I try to make a timeless architecture, but I don't know if it will age well. Architecture needs maturity, which makes the life of the young architect somewhat bitter. Alvaro Siza is an excellent architect, Tadao Ando, Fumihiko Maki. I know that you are thinking that all of those architects I mentioned are old. We have to wait and let it mature - that's the fascination of architecture.

You served on the Pritzker Prize jury for many years. Does this mean that you can never receive a Pritzker yourself?

Every architect wants to win the Pritzker. But recognition is nothing - the real thing is to see people happy in your buildings. You must be careful or you start to design for recognition alone. Many architects are in that stage right now. I remember the first time my work was published. A market I had designed was featured in the most important journal of the time. The picture was tiny, maybe 2 by 2 centimetres. I rushed to show it to my father. My father frowned, and said "Ricardo, I have mixed feelings; on the one hand I am very proud, but on the other hand be careful; this stuff is worse than drugs."

We architects have to say to ourselves: we are common people. We are not geniuses.

THICK SKIN

THOM MAYNE PROFILE

"Mayne sees architecture as a contact sport", quipped Pritzker Prize juror Karen Stein. "Architecture is a long distance sport", Mayne himself has said. Combat or endurance - whatever the sporting analogy - most people see Thom Mayne, as a late entrant in the game of architecture. Few picked up his run before he crashed over the line as the first American (after Frank Gehry) to win the Pritzker in 17 years.

Though he has only recently attracted the camera flash of celebrity, one of Mayne's earliest projects, the Kate Mantilini restaurant in Beverly Hills (1986), remains his most photographed. "I created this thing called an Ori, which means universe in Japanese", says Mayne. I basically took fragments derived from various parts of the building and collected them around a jagged skylight with a sundial. When I showed the design to the client he asked 'what does it do?' and I replied 'nothing'. It cost (US) \$150,000 but it's the most interesting part of the building, and remains an enigma. Busloads of Japanese tourists still come to look at the bloody Ori."

In Michael Mann's film, Heat (1995) detective Al Pacino and thief Robert De Niro's gripping encounter across a Kate Mantilini table renders the subsequent gun battle anticlimactic. Perhaps Mayne's looming Ori, like Kubrick's monolith, helped to embed the tension in that scene.

"I'm a shy guy", says Mayne, 61, director of Los Angeles firm Morphosis. "It took me a long time to understand that I was actually scaring people." Slightly stooping, with a scarecrow walk and a crazyman stare, Mayne has an unnerving appearance which belies his calm, coherent manner. For years he's worn the misunderstood tough guy tag which other architects have tried so hard to attain.

Mayne admits to having only a vague memory of his first visit to Sydney as a Royal Australian Institute of Architects keynote speaker. A decade later, Mayne has returned to collaborate with teammates; landscape architect George Hargreaves and Sydney-based Project Architecture, on the second stage of the East Darling Harbour urban design competition. The team has been selected as one of five finalists, and Project Architecture has instigated a minor media frenzy to coincide with Mayne's visit. Asked to deliver a talk to "a small group of people" at the Museum of Sydney, Mayne instead found himself standing before an audience of hundreds, packed into a University of New South Wales lecture theatre. During our interview, a newspaper photographer buzzes hungrily around us.

The first stage of Mayne's East Darling Harbour scheme - a matrix of sinuous apartment buildings anchored by an origami hi-rise, appears to be a toned-down version of his New York City 2012 Olympic Village design (2004), which is similar to his Penang Turf Club Masterplan (2004), which looks quite like his European Central Bank proposal (2003), and so on...He is quick to remind me that the scheme, "focused on the site's topography, the edge, the relationship to downtown", is "much

more strategic than specific, a tactical approach rather than a specific design."

Stylistically closest to Austrian firm Coop Himmel(b)au, Morphosis buildings are characterised by their tectonic richness. Layers of highly engineered building skins, through their transparency, satisfy our curiosity for the inner workings of the machine like a child's x-ray section book. "Of course for every architect the most interest is in the building before you finish it", says Mayne. "That's why I reveal the skin, the structure." "I'm preoccupied with unfinishedness, architecture which refuses to be seen as complete." Another recurring motif is the dramatic cantilever, elements which detach obliquely from the building's envelope. "For obvious reasons", says Mayne, "my wife likes to poke fun at the bits poking euphemistically out of my buildings".



Image - Monument 71

A short walk from Gehry's Disney Concert Hall in downtown LA, Mayne's largest completed building, the Caltrans District 7 Headquarters, features a double façade of perforated aluminium panels which create an animated armature as they open and close automatically. Uncompromising in scale, Caltrans is "building as infrastructure", inspired by the very highways which the Headquarters oversees. "LA", explains Mayne "is in many ways the modern freeway city. It grew from infrastructure, not a Cartesian web. Mayne depicts LA as the Petri dish of the modern world, prototype for all current and future megacities. Together with his students at UCLA, he has produced a book - LA NOW: Shaping a New Vision for Downtown Los Angeles - and reels off figures from his research: "LA is the size of Holland, with an agricultural area half the size of Peru, a day's driving is 6000 times round the earth..."

Caltrans is one of a few major projects which Mayne sees as the second stage in his emergence as an architect, following his previous, smaller scaled work (Kate Mantilini, Diamond Ranch High School), with the third stage yet to be realised. "I find that aspects of my smaller work are now much more explicit in my larger work", he says. In March the first major Morphosis exhibition will open at Centre Pompidou, Paris. The firm's work will be installed inside a giant "wafer" designed by Mayne to hover above ground. Mayne imagines people will crawl along the surface of the wafer to get a glimpse of the models set within it.

Has the Pritzker changed his approach to architecture? Having exhausted the living masters, the annual Pritzker Prize now rewards the "potential rather than achievement" of architects. Though the signs of success are manifest, Mayne acknowledges that many remain sceptical. "The complaint has been that there's no central clarity in my work, that it's difficult to access, to penetrate."

Mayne's designs are not meant to be easily read, but instead express the spirit of our times. "Architecture's characteristics should be parallel to the world we live in. This is a very complicated time, one of challenges to religious systems, we no longer believe in the soul. Developments in Chemistry and Biology are challenging the old narratives, which has generated a lot of tension, a divide between East and West. I'm fascinated why people have to believe in something. Why can't we accept unknowability? Today's world is one of extreme conflict. We have to discover how to turn that into something useful. Most architects are afraid of the emotional contact. We deal in the mineral world, in inert matter. The challenge is to make the inert matter speak."

MEMORY LANE

RECOLLECTING ROWE STREET EXHIBITION REVIEW

"A street of contrasts, where some of the world's best women rub shoulders with art students who gossip on pavement, drink coffee." Pix, May 2 1953

Memory Lane: Recollecting Rowe Street is currently on display in Sydney's new Customs House library. The exhibition presents a eulogy to one of the city's original bohemian haunts.

A narrow laneway running between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets in Sydney's CBD, Rowe Street was one of the few places where a beatnik could grab an espresso in the coffee shop-scarce 50s and 60s. In its heyday poets, intellectuals, uni students and artists would gather to chat or browse the famous Rowe Street Records. It was also a cosmopolitan shopping destination, with boutiques displaying the wares of some of Sydney's foremost designers.

Like the street itself, the exhibition is small in scale, comprising a series of glass cases housing artifacts gleaned from the shops of the day. On the opposite wall a series of evocative black and white photographic prints, including a Max Dupain snap, depict the street at its bustling best. Steeped in shadow, these images of passers-by attest to "how the little streets in the inner city reflect the times of day like a mountain hollow"¹



http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/images/about/sl_mag/april09/jitterbug-milkbar.jpg

The artifacts themselves are a cornucopia of early modernist style. Groovy bentwood timber chairs, authentic Marimekko fabric prints and handmade glassware capture the zeitgeist of a scene which included designers Marion Best, Clement Meadmore, Frances Burke and Gordon Andrews.

Given the care with which this exhibition was assembled it is disappointing to find no discourse on the circumstances surrounding Rowe Street's disappearance. The street's bohemian air had long dissipated when bulldozers arrived to clear space for Harry Seidler's MLC Centre, though Rowe Street was only one of many lanes that formed a network transverse to the major thoroughfares. When Sydney emerged ahead of Melbourne as Australia's banking capital in the 70s and 80s, its laneways were erased to make way for new office towers. Melbourne's laneways remained.

I have recently moved from Sydney to Melbourne. On any given day you might catch me loitering in one of Melbourne's quirky laneway locales. These dark alleys become the stage for all manner of creative thought and action and are as crucial to the city's cultural life as its libraries, galleries and concert halls. In Sydney, the once flourishing bohemia seems as buried as the old Tank Stream which flowed beneath Martin Place. We should therefore welcome the Lacoste and Stevenson-designed Customs House library, with its burgeoning exhibition program, an inner city cultural oasis.

¹ Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 1 edited by Michael W. Jennings et al Harvard University Press 2005

VIAGRATECTURE

WOLF PRIX PROFILE

It seems prescient when architect Wolf D Prix struts into Sydney just days ahead of ageing rock gods the Rolling Stones. Clad in aviator sunglasses and a flared green suit, Prix puffs away on a cigar as he emits cryptic statements into the atmosphere. "Gimme Shelter [by the Rolling Stones] is the key. The very conception of the piece is like our architecture. The tension field the guitar playing of Keith Richards is opening up, this could be translated into architecture, as a concept for urban planning."

Like the four members of the Stones, Prix is a charismatic geezer who first came to fame in the 1960s. Unlike the Stones, whose continuing success relies on their back catalog, Prix is only now constructing his greatest hits. In November this year, workers at Europe's largest building site will down tools as Prix's BMW World is unveiled to an awed public. Car dealership, museum and shopping mall in one, BMW World features a sinuous roof with a greater surface area than Venice's Piazza San Marco, hovering improbably on just eleven supports. At the same time as curtains part on BMW World in Munich, the Akron Art Museum will be drawing its first crowds in Ohio. Prix's Musee Des Confluences in Lyon will open soon after that, completing what should prove a chart-topping trifecta for the Austrian architect.

Coop Himmelb(l)au, the firm Prix founded in Vienna with Helmut Swiczinsky, is perhaps better known for its theoretical output than its built work. In 1967, while Peter Cook and Archigram (MONUMENT 70) were devising fanciful walking cities, the then Coop Himmelblau (meaning blue sky cooperative) conceived the Villa Rosa, a network of modular spheres which imagined communal living in an organic rather than fixed state. Later, as its projects transformed from the conceptual to the actual, the firm's name segued from blue sky, to sky construction, or Himmelbau. Today, with offices in Vienna, Los Angeles and Guadalajara Mexico, Coop Himmelb(l)au has retained the (l) in its name as a reminder of its radical roots.

A penthouse apartment of steel and glass, raking out from atop a traditional Viennese housing block, Rooftop Remodeling brought Coop Himmelb(l)au international attention when aired in 1988. That same year Prix and Co exhibited in Deconstructivist Architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, alongside fellow wunderkinds Rem Koolhaas, Thom Mayne and Zaha Hadid. At the time, writes critic Anthony Vidler "any idea that 'Deconstructivism' was a movement of consequence beyond the art gallery was rejected out of hand." However since then Koolhaas and peers have built prolifically. In 2001 Coop Himmelb(l)au won international competitions for the Munich, Ohio and Lyon projects. "Twenty years ago a critic went through our objects and said of one model: 'I hope you will never build it'", says Prix. "Ten years later the same guy stood in front of the same model and said 'oh, you are going to be very slick'. The aesthetic issues changed, and people got used to [our architecture] since we proved that we can build it."

In his keynote address at The Future is Now, the 2006 RAI National Conference, Prix presents preview movies of his projects. The movies feature helicopters and motorboats which whiz the viewer around

Prix's souped-up structures to a seat-thumping soundtrack. The buildings depicted both attract and repulse, their forms at once sensuous and monstrous. "What I'm doing now is just building what we dreamed in the 60s", claims Prix, who has weathered the shift from counter-culture to institution. But the elegant, cloudlike forms he conceived on paper, unbowed by gravity, have become swollen and ominous as storm clouds in solid form.

"The forms we are making are very remarkable for companies that are looking for brand architecture", says Prix, who now treads an uneasy line between his desire to play provocateur and his obligations to clients such as BMW. "Middle Europe is in danger of losing public space by the drag of capitalism", he says. "Investors move into the core of the city, buy land and squeeze out of every square inch as much money as they can get. I think the architects have to invent strategies to avoid that, or better, to combine both interests." The frozen cloud is a motif which expresses these combined interests: dangling mid-air, Prix's iconic clouds leave the ground unoccupied for public space. Though what such space becomes, in the shadow of corporate entities, is questionable.



Image - Monument 74

In conversation Prix vacillates between his social agenda as an architect, and the trappings of architectural stardom. "I'll tell you a story about my son", says Prix. "When he was 8 or 10 I gave him my guitars and taught him to play. When he was 18 he started to study architecture. A year later he came to me and asked: 'Hey you, I don't want to have the John Lennon syndrome. What should I do, should I study architecture or should I go back to music?' I said: 'look at (the girls) in the first row of an architecture lecture and in the first row at a rock and roll concert'. Sex drugs and architecture, this is a dream which never came true, I'm sorry to say."

CARME PINOS

CARME PINOS INTERVIEW

“Enric and I were very young when we met. We were 21 years old when we started the investigation of the kind of architecture we wanted to do together, talking and thinking about everything. He had enormous drawing ability. In a way he was my hands. Maybe for that reason my projects since are much more elemental. I don't manage with his kind of virtuosity.”

The Barcelona studio founded by Carme Piños and Enric Miralles in 1982 built on Gaudi's example of architectural drafting as a creative, rather than mechanical, act. The notion that a blank piece of paper is a site to be investigated reached its apotheosis in their Igualada Cemetery (1985-1994), where drawn lines became eroded canyons which trace the paths of mourners. In the machocentric world of architecture, Miralles was seen as the partnership's creative force, so few expected Piños to succeed when she set out on her own in 1991. Though long in gestation, her recent projects have met with deserving recognition. Cube Tower (Guadalajara 2005) comprises three triangular volumes which fan out from a central core while somehow resisting the temptations of gravity. In town to speak at The Future Is Now, the 2006 RAI A Conference, Piños delved into her history and explained why her personal design approach differs from the method she developed with Miralles.

What is your favourite place in Barcelona?

In Barcelona, ever since I was a kid, to go out at night means to go to the old city. I remember when I was young we would go to the Ramblas to walk, it was our place. After studying until late, we finished the night in the small bakeries as the bread was prepared. For years I haven't crossed the Ramblas, because it has nothing to do with us now. It belongs to the tourists.

Do you feel the influence of Gaudi in your work?

Yes, I suppose. For example the section of the Igualada cemetery is very similar to the section of his Park Guell. In a way Gaudi has been in our lives forever. I live very near his Pedrera. The way that he understood nature is part of my work, and was when I was with Enric. One of our favourite places to go was along the Colonial Way to see Gaudi's Crypt.

Many years have passed since your success with Miralles.

The break with Enric was total. I have been alone for many years. It has not been easy for me to gain people's trust. But now I have a lot of possibilities. For example the [Cube] tower (Guadalajara 2005): behind this kind of architecture is a client who trusts you. If the client does not trust you it's impossible to make a good project. When I don't have work I make competitions but I don't spend time phoning people and looking for jobs. I prefer to be quiet, to concentrate on my work and wait. If you make competitions, if you travel and explain your work, you create a network and in a moment something can happen.

What's the ideal scale of project you like to work on?

I prefer public spaces to private houses. I like to make people move, to create relationships. I think that architecture is an instrument to make connections between people... to make community. Everything must start with human scale. I try to think in abstract, but always in relation to the human scale. The intention must be very clear in the beginning, and the intention must always be human.

We are in the culture of mass, the culture of massive movement, the mass market. Society expects an architecture of spectacle, not generosity. A lot of people are impressed in this way, but they are impressed as consumers: you receive the shock, you say "wow!", and that's all. Good architecture must be generous. To make architecture more silent, an experience to be discovered differently each time is difficult now.

How have you managed the transition from hand drawing to computer modeling?

I always start with hand drawings. My projects are very elemental. The project must first be very clear: the rules, the structure and the program. When I can make a simple sketch to explain to the people who work with me on the project, then we start to make models. The project is done before this investigation, it's only a game to find a shape. After that we use the computer to express the geometry. I don't permit anyone, not one student, to make an investigation first with the computer. It's forbidden.

I make architecture with my head more than with the pencil. I'm not good at drawing. When I have a very clear intention and rules, which are always connected with the structure, I give it to the studio to start the game.

I have heard that the Igualada Cemetery may be extended.

We constructed only the half of the project. The municipality has asked me to continue because they need more space.

I haven't been to the cemetery since the death of Enric, because for me his death was a shock. I knew Enric so young, I knew so much of his character and his thoughts. To think that this boy I met when he was 21 arrived at only 45 years old was an enormous shock. I couldn't go to the cemetery to see his tomb. When I received the telephone call saying: "do you want to continue the cemetery?" I thought: "if I can't go to the cemetery, how can I continue the project?". When I decided to visit the cemetery all the people of my studio came with me. It was beautiful. I started to remember all of the decisions I had made with Enric and decided that I wanted to go ahead.



Image - Monument 74

ELÍAS TORRES

ELÍAS TORRES TUR PROFILE

Chance has ruled the life and work of Elías Torres Tur. It is the force to which he attributes his success and the quality he searches for in buildings. Destined to be a shipwright, Torres grew up in the then working class island of Ibiza. For four generations the men of his family had built boats. But his father barred a young Torres from entering the trade. “He said I would have to sacrifice too much of my life”, says Torres. “I decided by chance to become an architect”. There were no architects on the island, so Torres made the thirteen hour voyage from Ibiza to Barcelona, where he began studying architecture and met his collaborator, José Antonio Martínez Lapeña.

Torres is impish, with cheeky blue eyes offsetting his otherwise dark features. In photographs his counterpart Lapeña appears taller, older, greyer and perhaps more somber. The duo began practicing in 1968 and soon built a reputation as experts with historic buildings, a case, according to Torres, of being in the right place at the right time. “We were not specialists”, he insists. “The first work we did in the renovation of monuments was by chance”. A wave of enthusiasm followed the death of Franco in 1975. Spain’s Ministry of Culture began handing out public commissions to private architecture practices. Lapeña and Torres were entrusted with the restoration of the Sant Pere De Roda Monastery in Girona, which they eventually completed in 1990 after 14 years of sensitive work. “Only touching small fragments”, the architects cantilevered flights of concrete steps over the stone ruins of the old stairs and converted the monastery refectory into a small museum. Lapeña and Torres concurrently received projects reviving ancient castles, churches, convents and houses, most of which were commissioned by the Ministry of Culture.

Unheard of in Australia, official dispensation to creatively alter historic monuments is still rare in the rich architectural agglomeration of Europe. Such work is typically small-scale yet intensive, requiring close involvement in the construction process, attention to detail and the ability to adapt to unexpected layers of building fabric unearthed on site. “I am used to constantly bothering the project, to touch and change things a little, and to better define the design”, says Torres. Though he now works on an eclectic range of projects Torres has retained the fascination with the unexpected instilled in him through the formative restoration projects. “Sometimes small things contain more intensity than big things”, he says. “The best moment of a project is when you find something that you don’t expect and that you don’t know where it comes from.”

Lapeña and Torres have since managed to channel the moment of surprise into much larger projects. Entrusted with transporting pedestrians from a parking garage and over the steep ramparts of Toledo’s historical centre, the architects responded by eschewing a conventional windowless elevator. Instead a jagged scar startlingly breaches the Rodadero hillside. Built in 2000, the zigzagging La Granja escalator ameliorates the vertiginous ascent, responds to the faceted topography of the hillside and reveals unexpected views of the surrounds. Incased in a massive concrete shell which seems hewn from the rock itself, by night the escalator alchemises into an astonishing slash of light.

A diviner of chance and circumstance, Torres' approach is clearly influenced by Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa's work in the 1950s and 60s. Scarpa, "a jeweler at the scale of a building", famously demolished a Napoleonic wing of Verona's Castelvechio fortress to reveal an unanticipated medieval wall. Torres was fortunate to meet him in Madrid just one month before Scarpa's untimely death. "He came with a roll of original drawings, in a silver Rolls Royce loaned to him by a friend", recalls Torres. The "inventive, inspired, emotional work" of Josep Maria Jujol, is cited by Torres as another major influence. A younger contemporary of Antonio Gaudí, Jujol is best known for the sublime mosaic encrusted bench which undulates around the terrace of Gaudí's Park Guell (1913) in Barcelona. "He was a magician", says Torres enthusiastically, "without pretensions and without any sense of force. In his hands iron became flexible and ceramics like watercolours on the wall. From garbage into illusions, it was almost spontaneous." In 1984 Lapeña and Torres were consigned the renovations of Park Guell, and in 2002 they authored a monograph on the subject.



Image - Monument 76

Almost twenty years after Park Guell, Lapeña and Torres received their largest commission in Barcelona yet: the Fórum Esplanade, a 14 hectare extension of the Diagonal Avenue which connects the city to the water. Created to host "Fórum Barcelona 2004", the hand-shaped Esplanade rises over a harbourside water treatment plant and adjoins the large scale creations of several major international architects including Herzog & DeMeuron and Foreign Office Architects. The surface of the Esplanade is an immense 5-colour asphalt patchwork designed to flourish into a myriad of unforeseen colours as the surface is patched up and repaired. A series of broad canopies with solar energy-gathering photovoltaic surfaces shadow the Esplanade. The most dramatic of these canopies rises like a wing in torsion on 4 flexed concrete supports. The canopy hovers over the harbour and tilts towards the sun, its 4,500m² surface plane spilling dappled light beneath. "The unexpected is there", claims Torres. "You just need to discover it." Architecture is based on expectation. Its practitioners shape plans to a client's desire and the building process is an exercise in managed risk. As virtual design has attained primacy, computer coordination threatens to consign material architecture to an act of assembly, rather than imagination. Meanwhile our best cities conglomerate what we expect to find with what we do not. Elías Torres Tur understands the vicarious pleasure and untold opportunities which come from investing in chance.

FRAME FOR LIVING

FOMBERTAUX HOUSE REVIEW, CLASSIC HOUSES

Like volcanic soil to vintners, the sandstone ledges of Sydney's North Shore have long provided fertile ground for architects. In the postwar period and before inner city life became fashionable the steepest and cheapest sites of the northern suburbs were often occupied by architects building their own homes. Frontier between big smoke and bush, the raw North Shore inspired architects to trade the urbane for the naturalism of Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto. This in turn gave rise to the 'Sydney School' which advocated the intertwining of building and landscape and was amongst the first stirrings of regional modernist architecture in Australia.

Jean Fombertaux studied architecture at Sydney Technical College alongside many members of the Sydney School such as Russell Jack and Bruce Rickard?????. Like his peers he later chose to build his own house on the North Shore. However, he eschewed the Sydney School vernacular. Born in France and raised in the remnant French colonies of South-east Asia, an adolescent Fombertaux fled the war with his parents and arrived in Australia aged sixteen. The architecture of the Fombertaux House synthesises this upbringing, blending European Modernism with an exotic recollection of Asia. [how is it asian? Explaining Asian architecture would be another paragraph - Asian vernaculars often express the frame of the house as a spatial organising system, with walls as interchangeable infill. Not sure where to slot that in]]

In reaction to his first home in Australia, a poky and dim Federation-era house, Fombertaux proposed a rational and transparent environment with spaces visually connected across levels and large windows to the sunlight and surrounds. The design of the house was also a revolt against his parents' generation. With his father at work in the French Foreign Service, Jean had endured a strict upbringing in which children were [muted?] [peripheral?]. [better ? bit clichéd?] In contrast to this remote approach to parenting the Fombertaux House was configured in order to force parents and children to interact, bringing its occupants into constant proximity.

When work began on the house residents of East Lindfield reacted with dismay at what they thought was an auto garage being erected in their neighbourhood. A cheeky steelworker even hung a large Michelin banner across the naked frame of the house. Direct in its form, construction and materiality, the Fombertaux House comprises a frame for living. This is true both in a literal sense as a living container and metaphorically, as a conceptual framework for family life. A grid of 16 slender steel columns is intersected by concrete floor plates which spiral incrementally upwards to define working, living and sleeping zones. Rooms are stacked interstitially within the grid like Jenga blocks. A central stair within a light well connects these rooms over three levels. Rather than extending into the large site these spaces are concentrated in what is essentially a Japanese plan and an urban approach to housing. Inset into the steel frame, large panels of glass and tilt-up concrete provide either exposure



Image - Monument 78

or enclosure. The columns are anchored into a massive sandstone floater which infiltrates the lowest level of the house. Tension resonates from the juxtaposition of the cubic black structure and the organic bulge of the sandstone beneath.

Fombertaux's approach to architecture was atypical of Sydney though not unique. In the slightly older Harry Seidler, Fombertaux found a fellow European migrant with a similar sensibility. Seidler built his early and most influential houses in and around the North Shore but his approach never meshed with the Sydney School. Rather than dissolve his buildings into their surrounds Seidler propped his houses like white surgeons' gloves on the operating table of the Australian terrain. Seidler and Fombertaux collaborated on an entry in the Sydney Opera House competition before the former rose to fame and the latter entered into the commercial sector and relative obscurity. While Seidler's built legacy extends across continents and decades, the now demolished Esso building is Fombertaux's best known work.

"The rocky outcrops, the sandstone bluffs, the difficult sites - there you find the really adventurous architecture," says Andre Fombertaux, who for most of his life has lived in the house designed by his father Jean. He was 11 when the house was built in 1966 [or 63? McGillick I think says 63 - yes and Ogg says 72 but Andre insists 66, the house was of course finished over an expanse of time]. At the time Jean Fombertaux had been offered a dream job in the office of Le Corbusier but never made good his return to France: he died ten years after the house's completion. "When he died I showed no promise, no skill, no ability," says Andre. "All my abilities and things that I had to offer came after he died." Andre became a builder and today works with architects such as Virginia Kerridge and Ian McKay. He considers his most important work to be the continual improvement of the house. "It's out of respect because I was fortunate enough as a kid to have a father who I considered my best friend," says Andre. "It's an ode to him that I'm still here working on this house. I still have conversations with him, what his thoughts were, what he proposed to do. I've got a genetic license to work on this house."

Ironically this genetic license has been refuted by the local Council who insist that the house is a heritage item and cannot be modified. "The house was never finished," says Andre. Built in non-weatherproof black rather than galvanised steel, the frame is flush with the exterior and therefore

exposed to the weather. Fins were installed as an afterthought to stabilise 6mm sheets of window glass in a house designed without eaves or any concession to climate. Most of Andre's modifications [not sure about bandying about illegal - for his sake as much as anything. Will it get him in strife? Maybe, let's kill it.] to the house have been carried out in order to make the house safe and amenable to family life. "We raised three kids here," he says. "My wife was delirious with hysteria but nothing ever happened." Andre has infilled balustrades with steel mesh and built timber decks to bridge the levels of the house with the surrounding garden. Part of the frame was enclosed on the uppermost level to create a third bedroom. Shades and screens have been installed to shield the interior from direct sunlight. Andre has also overseen the expansion of the garden, replacing the Japanese notion of a cultivated and minimal garden distinct from the house, with a tangle of Australian natives. [Does this help to flesh out Asian qualities?] While dramatic views from the living area of surrounding bush are now interrupted by foliage, large trees protect the house from the elements.

"The house has had quite an impact on our family," says Andre. "We're probably more irritable than we normally would be. Interactions between each other: merely going to sleep because there's very little privacy. It's been a disadvantage but nowhere near the advantage of living in a very pleasant space. I think when our kids move out, when they live elsewhere they'll realise what an impact the house has had on them. My eldest is 22, when she was eight her only concern was "why can't I have a house like everyone else?"

Now surrounded by trees and painted in a vivid colour described by Andre as "jacaranda", the house has lost some of its heroic starkness but retains its spatial and intellectual clarity. A true classic of the '60s, the Fombertaux House endures as a built testament to the talents of its obscure but assured designer.



Image - Monument 78

A COUNTRY PRACTICE

RURAL STUDIO PROFILE

Rural Studio is “not a tourist program taking kids to Africa, building something and then leaving”, says architect and Studio director Andrew Freear. “We have to take responsibility as a neighbour for what we do, and if we fuck up we hear about it.”

Freear is disarmingly honest with a dry and self-deprecating wit. His Yorkshire accent occasionally veers into the Deep South twang he has taken on since arriving to teach at the Rural Studio architecture program at the University of Auburn. Tall but slight, clean shaven but slightly disheveled, youthful with grey-flecked hair, Freear was promoted to Rural Studio director in 2001 following the death from leukemia of Studio founder Samuel Mockbee. “It’s not meant to exist,” says Freear of the Studio. “It exists somewhat despite the university, it exists because of Mockbee who broke down a whole lot of barriers.” Arising out of the private charitable work of architects Mockbee and DK Ruth, Rural Studio liberates second and final year architecture students from the classroom and empowers them to build what they have designed. Aged in their early twenties, supervised teams of students spend up to two years living in impoverished Hale County, Alabama, where a lax local attitude to building codes allows them to construct buildings at low cost, using recycled and unconventional materials, in response to the needs of the community. The Studio exposes students trained in the insulated white box of the design academy to the everyday realities of the rural hinterland, as well as to the architectural constraints of occupancy, budget, time and construction. The social and educational intent of the Studio has received international acclaim, as have its quirky, wildly inventive and pseudo-vernacular buildings, which include structures made from hay bails, cardboard, bottles, newspapers, tyres, license plates, carpet tiles and windscreens. The program has been run continuously for 15 years and has provided a model for at least 50 other ‘design and build’ architectural education programs worldwide. “We’re the biggest thing in Hale County!” Freear claims. “Time and perseverance are terribly important to this place”. We’re not just a bunch of academics in the middle of a field. We’re neighbours. We have locals who work for us and often object vociferously to what we do.”

While Rural Studio projects are normally conceived entirely by students, Lucy’s House was completed a year after Mockbee’s death in accordance with his sketches. Showcasing the alchemical transformation of junk to riches which underlies the Rural Studio mythology, the house has been beautifully crafted from walls of 72,000 stacked carpet tiles. On moving in Lucy and her family bought the most ostentatious furniture they could manage. Lucy’s House extends Mockbee’s legacy by gifting the born-poor family the chance to have aspirations.

Following Mockbee’s diagnosis in 1998 the pace of Rural Studio accelerated, with several teams of ambitious final year students attempting to expand the Studio’s scope from iconic single houses to substantial community buildings. But when Mockbee died aged 57, Freear assumed leadership of a program in crisis. The first of the Studio’s community buildings, a spectacular “windshield chapel” composed of rammed earth and 120 junkyard Chevy Caprice windscreens, languished largely



Image- Monument 79

unoccupied and uncared for beside a dirt road in Mason's Bend. Several other projects hung in the balance. A disparity between student optimism and local tendency was evident. Freear, faced a dilemma: had Rural Studio reached its limit as a domestic housing endeavour, a well-intentioned educational experience benefiting a needy few, or could it evolve into a more serious and wide-ranging social project?

Freear's response was to simultaneously tighten the reins on his students while facilitating their quest for ever larger social gestures. "We try to be pretty rigorous about programming", he explains. "Apart from better detailing we've tried to make sure our programs and the buildings are sustainable, that there's a framework of people to run projects at the beginning. When we leave the projects there needs to be someone there to carry on and make it happen and that's almost the hardest part of it. The easy part is making the lovely objects."

It is unlikely that the projects constructed under Freear will be received with the same enthusiasm in architectural circles as the "lovely objects" overseen by Mockbee. Whilst Freear insists that the aesthetics of projects are determined solely by his students, it is apparent that under Freear's direction architectural exuberance been tempered by cool precision, crudeness replaced with directness. Projects are no longer conceived as isolated objects but links in a chain of essential social services.

The most recently completed final year projects exemplify this approach. Comprising an animal shelter, public park and hospital courtyard, these three projects will serve more people in West Alabama than the nearly seventy projects completed over the Studio's duration combined. A cell-like lamella structure 43 metres long and 12 metres wide, the open air animal shelter features in-

floor heating in the animal enclosures. Baseball Tomorrow provided a \$US500 000 grant for the 162 000 m² Lions Park, which has been renovated and reconfigured so that parents can watch their children playing on each of the four baseball fields simultaneously. An “anonymous leftover space” in the centre of the County Hospital has been rejuvenated as an attractive courtyard. Featuring an expanded metal trellis, bamboo patch, fish pond and butterfly garden, the courtyard provides shade and respite for hospital workers and staff.

Another of Freear’s strategies has been to reform the method of project selection so that second year students no longer choose assignments for themselves. Local community organisations maintain a list of clients in need and help to provide funding. Despite the positive work of Rural Studio, poverty in Hale County remains entrenched and high demands are placed on Freear and his fellow staff and students. “The fact it has become a public service is great,” says Freear, “but at its heart Rural Studio has always had a clear agenda of teaching architecture students. We could simply be digging septic systems but students will learn only so much from that.”



Image - Monument 79

“I don’t know whether the students know what it takes to manufacture the situation that they’re in,” says Freear. “I do a lot of politicking to make stuff happen and there’s a safety net. I’ll somehow find some money from Rural Studio coffers if the local money doesn’t work out. If you make mistakes you can always apologise. You’re not employed and you’re not likely to get fired as the architect.” However Rural Studio is a far cry from amateur. For decades architects have advocated a shift from a bureaucratically controlled to a self-regulating profession. That Rural Studio is not only self-regulating, but that it produces buildings of exceptional quality in direct response to the needs of the community, suggests that it has evolved from a teaching exercise to an alternative and compelling method of architectural practice.

Another seachange looms for Rural Studio. Freear believes he has reached his own limitation as program director. “From my point of view the projects are only going to ever get so big,” he says. “How many baseball fields can I do and how many cardboard houses can I do? There might be a point where I get to a level and maybe the studio just needs someone else to come in and change it.” Recently Freear has hastened that transition, flying to the AA twice month to teach a class with Indian architect Anapama Kundoo, whom he met and formed a public alliance with at the 2006 Royal Australian Institute of Architects National Conference in Sydney. Intense public interest has also had its effect. In December 2005 The New York Times transformed Rural Studio from “the redneck Taliesin” into an arts precinct overnight with a feature in its Cultured Traveler section. “It’s great because there are two bed and breakfasts there and there are two crappy places to eat and they got written up in The New York Times because of Rural Studio”, says Freear. “There are people now who come and get a map, travel around all the projects and bring money to Hale County. The nature of the beast has changed when you become a tourist destination. You have to be a little bit grown up and make sure the beer cans aren’t lying around.”

RISK!

2007 RAI NATIONAL CONFERENCE REVIEW

Risk! There are two types of risk in which architects must engage: creative risk and legal risk. The amount of creative risk assumed is optional, driven by the architect's desire to express and innovate. Legal risk underpins the entire profession and determines contracts, duties, codes and standards. A worrying consequence of our litigious society is that the circumstances, in which the former may operate, are restricted by the latter.

Fittingly, the subject of risk dominated debate at Departure Lounge, the 2007 Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA), National Conference, held in Melbourne from 19-22 April. With creative directors Timothy Hill (Donovan Hill Architects) and John Mitchell (BuildingSmart Australasia) at the helm, the conference attracted a record 1300 delegates. While I don't have the official figures, an overwhelming student presence was evident. Students crowded the back of the lecture hall, sat on the floor, and were even invited to occupy the dais onstage.

Students asked the bulk of questions after each of the invited speakers had presented. While the questions were varied, they amounted to the same demand: "how do we distinguish ourselves from our peers and attain success?" The answer was typically that there was no simple answer. However what became clear as the conference progressed is that architects will not chance educating students in their offices at the expense of time and money. Universities can only teach so much. Students must risk their own education if they are to succeed.

Meanwhile, at Form&Function, the building product trade show which ran concurrently with the conference, RMIT architecture student Daniel Griffin had done just that. His self-initiated "Animal" pavilion, a flexible structure made of white plastic ribs, displayed the projects of fellow RMIT students. That Griffin skipped classes and went into debt while fabricating the pavilion in his Carlton backyard, is a familiar story of creative success based on personal exposure.

The star of the conference was unarguably Mark Dytham, the affable English-born director of Tokyo's Klein Dytham Architects. With a glut of glamorous projects to his credit, and flocked by students at every turn, Dytham embodies creative accomplishment. Yet he was quick to remind us that success hasn't come easily. Lacking work, a visa and the native tongue, a destitute Dytham nearly quit Japan soon after arrival. Despite these odds, he persevered, but still had to settle for designing building hoardings when other projects were scarce. Today these hoardings are among Dytham's most awarded work, and his personal risks have evolved into an architectural practice predicated on creative risk in an environment, Japan, which supports it.

Indeed, at times mass-departure to Japan seemed the destination suggested by Departure Lounge. The other Tokyo-based conference speakers, Yui and Takaharu Tezuka of Tezuka Architects, drew wide-eyed appreciation for their 2001 Roof House. Demonstrating the extreme freedom possible under

Japanese building codes, the house features a sloping roof which the inhabitants occupy as a somewhat precarious living room. Appearing via video link from Barcelona, Spanish architect Benedetta Tagliabue understands better than most the legal consequences of creative risk taking. Though the roof of her Scottish Parliament Assembly Hall partially collapsed after opening, Tagliabue remains undaunted, and as a virtual tour of her office testified, her practice is thriving.



Image - Monument 80

Surely structural failure is the worst possible outcome of risk taking. If one architect can survive that fate, then Australian architects can endure lesser challenges. And if architecture is to be an art, its practitioners must take imaginative chances. A culture of risk taking could in turn allow for the acknowledgement of failure; which would help to demystify architectural knowledge and bridge the student and professional realms. How then can we educate the public and lawmakers to accept our failures along with our triumphs? Architectural innovation has at best a marginal influence on broader society, a fact reinforced by the continued staging of conferences such as this in the bland corporate arenas of convention centres.

Given these concerns, I remain unmoved by director John Mitchell's claims that the Building Integrated Modelling (BIM) software showcased during the conference provides the ultimate solution. BIM gives all parties involved in a project equal access to information, which is then subject to interrogation, analysis and change. Not only does this impinge further on the architect's creative autonomy, but chances are that anything deemed irrational will eventually be stripped from the project. Just as no methods ensure creative success, no tools exist by which to measure it.

CV08 FUTURE VISIONS

EXHIBITION REVIEW

From Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to Archigram's *Plug-In-City*, the early to mid twentieth century was rife with grand and often hopeful visions of the future. Today, tempered by Post Modern scepticism and the "Inconvenient Truth" of a threatened global ecology, we approach those visions with a mixture of nostalgia and irony. Architectural imagery, however, has been largely immune to this change of heart. Zaha Hadid's distended vectors, Wolf Prix's ultramodern whirligigs and Rem Koolhaas's cartoon death stars continue to emulate the style, if not the content, of those earlier sci-fi yearnings.

For the exhibition *Sydney Future Visions*, six young architectural studios were selected for the task of imagining the city's centre and suburbs in the year 2050, by which point Sydney could have as many as 10 million residents. Timed to coincide with *Critical Visions*, the 2008 Australian Institute of Architects National Conference, *Sydney Future Visions* was displayed for the Conference's duration in the lobby of the main venue. The exhibition will remain on show in Sydney until 31 May 2008 in a more peripheral display space at Customs House Library. Sydney's Scale Architecture, Tribe Studio, Choi Ropiha and Vector Guerillas, Hobart's Room 11 and Melbourne's Andrew Maynard Architects were the six participants charged with anticipating solutions to the current and impending challenges of climate change, social inequity, mass urbanisation, displacement and growth.

Scale Architecture's "*Alt_City*" focuses on a projected population explosion, proposing a development cordon around the city. Leaning heavily on ideas floated several years ago by former NSW Government Architect Chris Johnson, Scale Architecture offers Parramatta as a new western CBD at the intersection of major transport corridors. The resulting master plan looks too much like one of Koolhaas's trademark stylised supergraphics, and is lazily dependent on an overlay of the Manhattan grid, an urban scale of dubious relationship to Sydney's western suburbs.

Addressing the problems and opportunities of a car-less society, Tribe Studio's "*Sydney 2050*" attempts a response to the question: "How do you get people, goods and waste in and out of the city?" However rather than answer directly, Tribe Studio has evasively decided to retain people, goods and waste within the city rather than transport them. In the absence of motor vehicles, redundant streets become sites for strip line buildings which crop up between skyscrapers. In the style of Le Corbusier's 1925 *Plan Voisin*, these buildings are depicted simply as featureless and unoccupied white boxes of uniform scale. The boxes apparently house apartments with roof gardens. But from where do they get their light? For decades one of the biggest problems affecting the everyday use of the Sydney CBD, like many other centres around the world, is the canyon-like effect of deep shadows cast by skyscrapers. A more convincing proposal is the use of underground car parks, newly liberated from functionality, as hydroponic farms, water harvesters and waste facilities.

Like Scale Architecture, Choi Ropiha responded to a forecasted population influx with a growth cordon, and like Tribe Studio envisions a future with only mass transit and no cars. "Structuring for

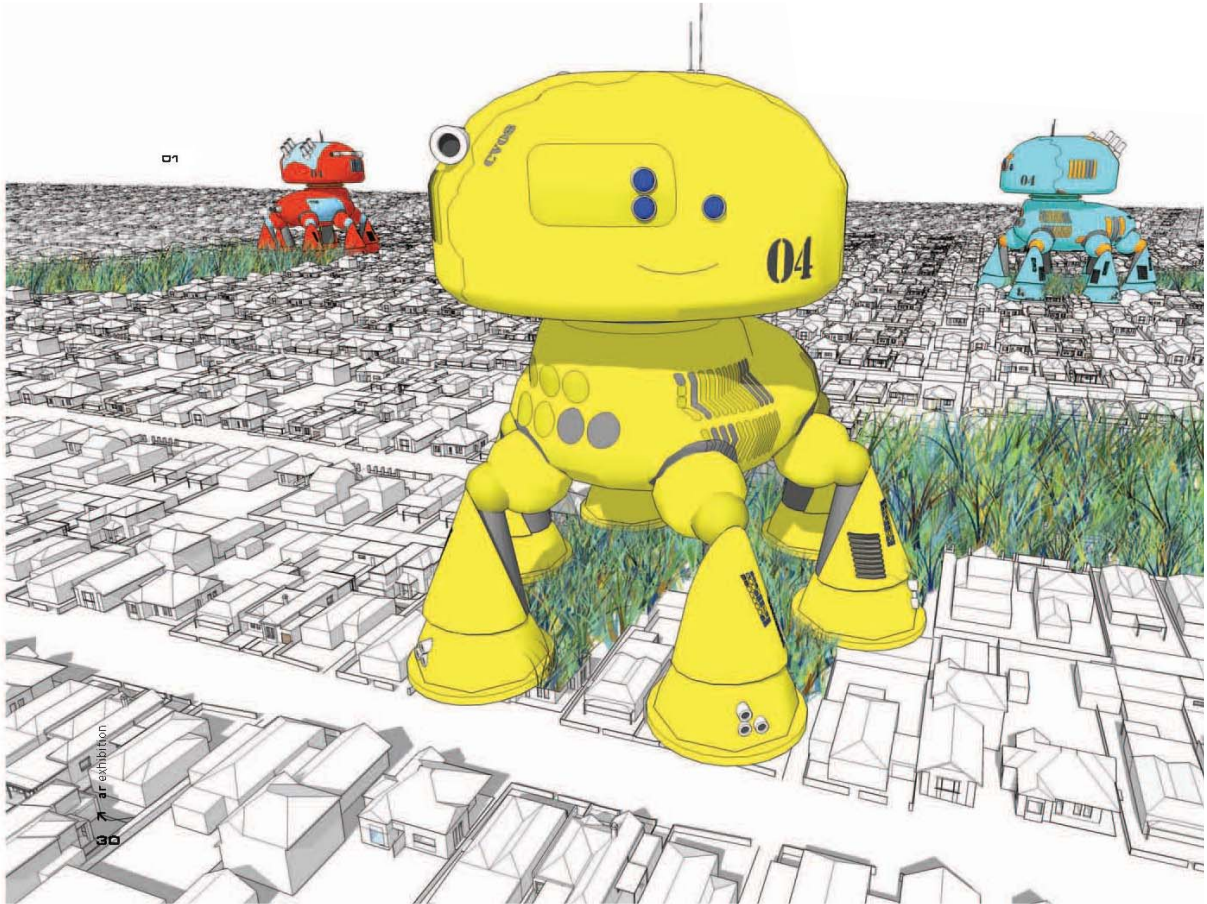


Image- Architectural Review Australia 105

Possibilities”, Choi Ropiha’s proposal, flirted with the idea of massively densifying Sydney’s genteel Northern Beaches. This idea was presented with whimsical images of fantasy cities hugging the coastline, spliced together from photographs of familiar European buildings. The Danish Super-Port devised by architects Plot and Bruce Mau in 2004 is seen hovering incongruously offshore.

Perfect children of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City and contemporary doomsday artist/architect Lebbeus Woods, beautiful shard like cyber towers rise at even intervals in a mundane landscape. Described as islands of energy generators which sustain the suburbs, these towers express the tension between the nostalgic and futuristic which underlies attempts to visualise the future. Vector Guerrillas, a group of designers and academics from the University of Technology, Sydney, has managed to transcend the obvious with their proposal entitled “States of Convergence”. An all-encompassing information network, “driven by pervasive system intelligence”, tracks the urban environment and prescribes planning regulations based entirely on averages. A clever critique of present-day conservative planning codes, In Vector Guerrillas’ perversely ordered future, computer-age architects are forced to hack the system to create exceptional buildings.

Room 11 seems to share Vector Guerrillas’ vision. However “Illbient Data City” takes a more positive spin on the info network idea, imagining an open-source planning and design system which allows for free participation by all. Inspired by chaos theory, a data-driven butterfly effect is created in which an enhanced classification and calculation of matter organic and man-made generates urban form. “The problem of the top down Utopian imposition is that society is excluded and it rebels”, announces Room 11 in its text-only series of posters. But the call for an urban design version of wikipedia is essentially

a proposal for a glorified form of design by committee, devoid of the guidance or coherence on which architecture thrives.

After trawling through these five rather sober schemes, Andrew Maynard's humorous "CV08" came as a welcome relief. Straight out of the Archigram back catalogue with a liberal dash of Japanese comic art, a giant robotic dog roams through abandoned suburbs where residents stranded by the decline of the automobile have fled for the safety of the city. Wilfully consuming houses, the robot excretes a trail of regenerated forest. Obese suburbanites too slow to join the exodus are sucked in to a purpose-built robotic leg and ejected along with bicycles made from recycled



Image - Architectural Review Australia 105

housing stock. Maynard has also managed to disseminate his "CV08" rapidly through internet blogs, reaching an audience far beyond the event.

Interestingly, while all the projects referenced contemporary sources such as Bruce Mau's polemical book *Massive Change*, the imagery deployed remained steadfastly aligned with the optimistic language of modernism. Each project portrays the future as a superficially modified version of the present, vastly different from the bleak urban atrophy depicted in recent dystopic films such as *Children of Men* and *V for Vendetta*. How, I wondered, had these architects ignored emerging issues of public surveillance, global pandemics, food shortages, and rapidly changing regional power structures? And why, given that the six participants were responding to a projected massive population influx, were people almost entirely absent from their images?

In the 1960s young studios such as Archizoom, Archigram and Superstudio made their names with radical projects destined only for publication. With the exception of Maynard and perhaps Vector Guerrillas, the architects presented here seem to have put limited effort into their proposals. The pedestrian content of the posters on display might reflect the low priority given to this exhibition by these burgeoning studios, which are engaged in an abundance of "real" commercial projects, or a pragmatic response to the small scale and budget of the exhibition, or perhaps a cumulative lack of conviction in the power of architects to shape the future.

CRITICAL VISIONS

2008 RAI A NATIONAL CONFERENCE REVIEW

The RAI A National Conference is always an exciting event for me; a chance to rub shoulders with leading architects from Australia and overseas, and feel part of a larger, inclusive creative community. I have been lucky enough to attend the last three conferences. My first was *The Future Is Now*, held in Sydney, 2006, under the direction of Stephen Varady. I don't know whether it was Varady's aim, but delegates that year divided into two camps: one side led by the slick international bravado of 'starchitect' Professor Wolf D. Prix, and the other by the inventiveness and integrity of educator Andrew Freear and Indian architect Anupama Kundoo. The division on stage led to some edgy and hilarious panel discussions in which the audience were engaged in taking sides. *Departure Lounge*, the 2007 conference held in Melbourne and co-directed by Timothy Hill, provided an entirely different experience. Anchored by significantly less 'star power' and with a massive student presence, it was more low-key and revolved around discussions in which audience members were asked to share the stage with delegates. Communal dinners held in an adjacent park extended these discussions late into the night.

This year's conference, *Critical Visions* (CV08), directed by FJMT Architects' Richard Francis-Jones, was more ambitious in its scope 2006 and 2007. With more delegates, local and international than before, and taking place over three full days, the conference for the first time sold out in advance. Conference sessions were divided between two venues with back-to-back presentations, and as a result CV08 unfolded more as a lecture series than a true conference. At the end of each presentation, question time was scarcely utilised, suggesting the audience was driven into passivity by the format. The main auditorium was mostly kept in darkness, with the audience subjected to periodical rapid-fire slide shows and sound grabs. According to Francis-Jones' pre-conference predictions, an official 'CV08 bar' would become the most important venue for interaction. However, the bar was poorly attended and seemed little different from the average Sydney drinking spot. The only real communal area seemed to be the RAI A stand, located deep within the vortex of *DesignEx*, a concurrent event.

Problems of format aside, CV08 began on a promising note, Francis-Jones' impassioned introduction, bristled with statistics about an impending environmental crisis. Locating the conference at the intersection of global forces, he graphically described the irresistible vector of growth and excess bearing down upon a desperate struggle to curtail climate change. Architects, he claimed, had become lost, indulging in senseless form-fiddling while Rome burned. The conference's title was meant as a rallying cry for architects to critically re-engage with the world's problems; a task abandoned along with Modernism. If indeed architecture had gone astray, conference keynote speaker Kenneth Frampton's encyclopedic recollection of major projects from the past 25 years was a good place to start. Frampton appeared via videoconference and recited from the unfinished update to his exhaustive tome *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. He praised the finely-tuned rationalism of a building he admires, Renzo Piano's San Nicola Stadium in Bari, while deploring the wanton material wastefulness of one he does not: Herzog & de Meuron's Beijing National Stadium (*Bird's Nest*).

The lack of opportunities for dialogue emerged as a great shame because many of the delegates themselves espoused principles of knowledge sharing and interaction. Members of 'interdisciplinary research network' OCEAN, Michael Hensel and Defne Sunguroglu, draw on a broad community of designers and academics to generate their projects. Reinterrogating ideas abandoned with Modernism, Hensel explores architectural typologies that transcend typically rigid Western paradigms. At the conference he contrasted the nuanced-comfort gradients of a camp fire with the spatial partitioning of conventional floor plans, while Sunguroglu seized on the motif of the traditional Islamic screen to depict an ideal environmental modifier.

Speakers Chris Wilkinson, Christoph Ingenhoven and Thomas Herzog represented an ageing guard of humanist/Modernists. At a symbolic level, the 'masculine' rationality of their designs contrasted with the 'feminine' intuition at play in buildings by Francine Houben, Brigitte Shim and Billie Tsien. Zooming out telescopically from her own home to successively larger projects in Italy, America and India, Tsien's talk 'Resistance' demonstrated how site-specificity, materiality and delight can counter the mutability of the contemporary world. The stoic Herzog (often confused with his celebrated namesake Jacques Herzog) seemed best equipped to answer Francis-Jones' critical visions premise, explaining the deliberate way he has gone about researching ecologically-attuned architectural systems throughout his long career. Chinese architect Qingyun Ma emerged as the best equipped to face the greater challenges of our time. His work operates on a vast scale, appropriate to problems of climate, urbanism and inequity, but far too large to permit preoccupation with formalism. (An interview with Qingyun Ma is on pages 34-37)

At the conference's summation, the first genuine debate broke loose, with Ma and Australian academic Leon van Schaik locked in argument over whether, in a globalised culture, differences or commonalities were the more valuable. But even this brief provocation failed to ignite. The closing this year was another opportunity lost: instead of the all-in party of 2007, a more conventional split of VIP and public functions followed. Francis-Jones had earlier promised that CV08 would offer a space to pause and reflect. It did offer respite from day-to-day practice, but the opportunity for reflection never really manifested.

MADA/QINGYUN MA

QINGYUN MA INTERVIEW

A Renaissance man for our times, Qingyun Ma is not only China's foremost architect. He is also Dean of Architecture at the University of Southern California, chief curator of the 2007 Shenzhen Biennale, a frequent collaborator with architecture's megastars, an enthusiastic patron of the arts and a leading Chinese winemaker. Head of the improbably named MADA S.P.A.M, a thriving international architecture practice responsible for the design of museums, media centres and even cities and artificial islands, While China's mass urbanisation might seem a curiosity to the outside observer, Ma was quick to remind me that, as the world's most populous nation, China is rapidly and unsentimentally redefining the norm.

You have often been quoted as saying that the essentially public ownership of land in China creates incredible freedoms. Nevertheless we have a perception in Australia that personal freedoms are more compromised in China than they are here. Are private land ownership and personal freedoms inseparable?

I know my position on this issue is very controversial, it's even scandalous for many parts of the world - even in China - but I believe that the problem that we have created is the kind of perpetuity of private ownership of land. Mathematically speaking, as human beings are living longer, the overlapped area of people's [lifespans] together is many fold more than just pure quantitative population growth. So what that means is that our spatial resource, is [diminishing]. Then our environmental problem is getting more and more serious. So here you have a dilemma, and the environmental problem as we all know is a coordination of efforts, it's not a procedure that is decided at some point in the world and just carried out. But coordination can be only done when the private ownership of land is made secondary. I think sustainability, or a sustainable culture to meet future demands - let's say not public ownership - depends on a coordinated treatment of land.

From an historical point of view, the value of land actually transforms and changes as social infrastructure develops. So who is going to say that the land you bought 50 years ago was a fair price for the land, because how can you value at any time the millions of years before your time and the millions of years to come? So the point of the ownership of the piece of the land and the value is so incidental that it has to be re-evaluated constantly by what it means to society at the time and in the future.

My understanding is that in various places in China, whole communities of the poor are displaced by the government to create suburban style houses. What protects these people from relocation?

You have to understand the background. Why are they located there in the first instance? This is the question nobody asks. Those lands were not purchased by any of the individuals. They are entitled to live there through another governmental arrangement, made let's say in the '50s and '60s. When



Image - Monument 85

Western critics ask such questions, they assume people who actually live there now were entitled land in perpetuity. My sense is no.

Well I suppose it's the unequal distribution of wealth which is the source of the problem.

You mean the unequal distribution within China caused this? I think it is not unequal in its social scheme, but it's unequal in its temporal scheme, because obviously there's no place in the world where the wealth is equally distributed. So why all of a sudden in the last 5 to 10 years, when social wealth was not equally distributed in China, did it suddenly become a political problem? Obviously for a country of 1.4 billion people they can take the place of tens of millions at once and we will bear more bitter fruit from the environmental impact. Everything is connected. But what I am hoping to let your readers sense is that China is in a transitional period. Many of its social programs have been devised to cope with emerging problems that were never really anticipated. One thing that I am confident about in the Chinese program is that the land is not private. That to me is the last check for a sustainable future.

I have now been living in LA for a year, where though it takes 10 years to debate one subway line leading from the west to the east side, it still cannot get approved because all the land above is privatised. We all know subways and public transportation are our future in terms of urban mobility and the environment. In Shanghai in less than 5 years, 10 or 12 subway lines are already in place. Half of them are running. So I think the whole of mankind has to really change [its perception] of the meaning of possessions and the meaning of wealth. You mentioned earlier that freedom in other parts of the world is associated with private land ownership. That's not freedom, it's actually a lock.

Freedom is a good social welfare system and completely mobility of opportunities, and that's what China is offering. Large herds of immigrant workers are moved to the cities and everybody says it is bad news and the last thing you want to see in China, but that's exactly what freedom is about. It's a kind of spatial navigation, searching for new opportunities offered by people who seemingly get wealthier at first, but that's a natural process. The hope now is that the social elite become aware of the advantage of public ownership of land and benefit the population as much as possible, and not the population of today, but the future population.

Of course as the Director of the most internationally recognised of China's architecture practices, you have become the unofficial spokesperson for all things China and architecture.

I am not actually commissioned by the nation or government, but I think by now I have lived through enough places and really understand the problems of China. I think the difference in that society is the hope for a new paradigm. Many problems still exist, but if we don't keep optimistic, in the end China will be another America. So I am actually personally reminding my colleagues in China to 'be aware of the differences that Chinese society has compared to the others, but be sensitive of how to cultivate those differences rather than mindlessly just following other models and eliminating those differences.' I think difference is what the Western world is actually afraid of, difference in ideology, difference in market rules, difference in government. I mean that's natural, but I think that difference is of value.

Would you say that China is a sort of latent architectural super power as well as an economic super power?

Well, here's the thing. My being recruited by USC as Dean, my friend Yung Ho Chang Dean at MIT, it probably gives people a false perception that China is quickly becoming an architectural powerhouse. I think that is a recognition of commitment to architecture by Chinese architects because they are actually still able to be committed to experimental architecture, and that is very much valued in academic situations. But I don't think China is actually an architectural powerhouse, and I hope it won't be, because being mastered by a few superstars is not something China wants to be. Chinese architecture is most of the time so generic and basic that it can actually be demolished without feeling criminal. So I think we should stay that way, it's much healthier. Every building done by a celebrity architect, in 50 years will have to be preserved.

I have to say though that in a way is sort of saying 'do as a say and not as I do', because you are very rapidly building a whole series of monumental buildings throughout China And you are very rapidly becoming an architectural star.

Ok, Ok, I know you were going to get to there, but that question or argument is split in two parts. I like the way that I am being monumentalised, because I can die, but I don't like the way my buildings are being monumentalised, because then you can't demolish them. So actually I want to be seen as a moving human body, as forming voices and forming a point that influences my colleagues or students. Then again it's a biological part, I can just pass, so all my value will be left in concrete forms which means in words, in books, even in cities. I am fine with those, but I am not fine with a building that once it's built will be kept forever, which is what a monument is supposed to be. So in that way I refuse to create a monument, but I love to create intensive catalysts. Once it has fulfilled its catalysing role - which is provoking, expediting, reminding and even troubling - it should be gone.

That's why I made my office manifesto and moved away from architecture to being problem-solvers. I think we are more problem discoverers and even problem-makers, because by making problems you actually bring a lot more to the surface of public awareness and debate and in the end that's the role of architect, being the intellectual not being the builder. The ultimate intellectual power is not to leave any physical traces, it is to leave thoughts. This is still a dilemma in the Chinese world, because in Confucius' time all Chinese people read books [rather than] making objects. Somehow architects have been these well-trained intellectuals, doing something against that ultimate intellectual aim.

It's an expedient argument though, because it's a way of dealing with what I presume to be the real issue, that the speed of construction is too fast. Controlling the true quality of the building is not really an option.

It is an option to many of my colleagues, but I actually choose not to take it as an option. I think buildings at this moment in time have a transient role in providing social spaces, because are we so sure what we are building now will be good forever? I don't think so. I think many of the buildings in Shanghai will be demolished twice in our lifetime. Why? Because at the time when they were needed to be built, [they were contingent on] the availability of technology, the insight into social complexity, and the level of craftsmen. They were put together to meet that moment's need, and that need is a lot bigger than the need to make a building intricate. And 10 years down the line, the need has changed and then the building will be changed as well.



Image - Monument 85

When you go to China, let me give you a very simple kind of a suggestion. Everybody who visits Shanghai sees so many bad buildings, right? Those buildings don't only seem bad to you, they actually seem bad to many people locally. So why are they still built and why don't people seem to mind? The reason people don't mind the ugliness is because they know that they are there just for a short period of time.

As far as I see it, architectural theory is really a way of dealing with what you have got, and finding a way to sort of put a positive spin on it, so that you can continue to work. I would be interested to catch up with you again in 20 years' time and discuss whether the present is as good as it seems.

When you talk about future or how the future is being determined today or perceived today, I think it's extremely problematic. The futuristic view is only to have another angle to justify today, that's what's been the problem. But we never really break away from our present need and foresee a future that is different from today and can benefit all of us. Futurism is really an excuse to justify the needs of today. If futurism can be seen from the future's future, then we will have a better result.

I am always joking that it takes 5 trades to do a roof. Design, structure, concrete tech, thermal proofing, waterproofing and in the end it still leaks. What happened? Have we invested enough in this? Then we are talking about sustainability, we are talking about all these fantastic things, and we all know the reason because the construction industry is probably the most gravitational, inert, slow industry and people have no interest in moving ahead and they just want to expand. So I think the whole futuristic take when you are connected to how we build things, it is just very frustrating, but in the next 10 years we will see a drastic change in this. I think it's coming.

KEILOR MAUSOLEUM

In a society preoccupied with hedonistic pursuits, death does not make for a popular subject. Which is presumably why, though 25,000 Melburnians die on average every year, cemeteries were overlooked in Melbourne 2030, the cheerily-illustrated State Government planning policy introduced in 2005. Ignoring the obvious, however, will have its cost. Existing burial plots in Melbourne are finite in number and rapidly dwindling, and smaller cemeteries risk closure under pressure from Victoria's 2003 Burial and Cremation Act, which requires cemeteries to maintain their plots in perpetuity. Set against death and all it entails, perpetuity seems a strange concept. Those in the funeral business know better than most that nothing lasts forever.

Wedged between two pulsating freeways in Melbourne's north west suburbs, Keilor Cemetery seems to epitomise this plight, pushed to the spatial and spiritual periphery. Established in the mid-1850s by prospectors as a pastoral burial field, today the cemetery is surrounded by a flat and windswept plain interrupted by industrial sheds and powerlines. From the outside, the new Keilor mausoleum by Harmer Architects seems resigned to this context, a solitary fortress of concrete, elegant but inscrutable, enclosed by a moat of tarmac parking spaces. Inside, however, Harmer has crafted a building of tactility and calm, which transcends its inauspicious environs to offer hope for the future dead.

The new mausoleum is an addition to a formal American-style structure of archways and gable roofs built in the 1990s. Harmer Architects director, Philip Harmer completed a master plan for the mausoleum complex 10 years ago, incorporating the original building into a tear-drop shaped symmetrical plan with cloister-like burial galleries orbiting a central courtyard. "A strongly axial pattern was already set", says Harmer, who describes his successive additions as "the body to the original head". Completed 4 years ago, the courtyard comprises the first stage of Harmer's intervention. Divided by two shallow pools, the courtyard is a tranquil space bordered by slender columns which trace the path of the sun in rhythmic shadows.

The latest stage completes the enclosure of the courtyard with a non-denominational chapel and mausoleum under one roof. An ingenious consolidation of activities, the chapel/mausoleum also embodies the evolution of Harmer's expertise in the area of funerary architecture. To date Harmer has completed mausolea at Springvale's Necropolis, Melbourne General Cemetery, Fawkner Cemetery and Mildura. While maintaining a vibrant practice which also undertakes cultural centres, office buildings, churches, small hospitality projects and private houses, Harmer has fashioned a unique specialisation through which he has had a tangible effect on a distinct architectural typology. Few other mausolea of contemporary design exist in Australia.

The word Mausoleum derives from the monumental tomb, one of the wonders of the ancient world, erected in honour of King Mausolus at Halicarnassos in 353 BC by his widow and sister Artemisia. During the Gothic period in Italy monastic cloisters gradually evolved into sheltered burial spaces which became known as mausolea. One of the earliest and most serene examples is the Campo Santo



Image - Artichoke 23

in Pisa, designed by sculptor Giovanni Pisano and architect Giovanni di Simone and constructed in 1270. Like Harmer's Keilor Mausoleum, the Campo Santo features a symmetrical plan punctuated with axial chapels. Banded black marble strips define the extent of each burial vault.

Harmer pays faithful attention to history. Stripes of black and white marble in the interior of the Keilor Mausoleum not only reference the variegated schema of the Campo Santo, but pay homage to Siena's iconic Gothic cathedral, giving the predominantly Italian patrons of the mausoleum a trace of home. Coincidentally, the same Giovanni Pisano of Campo Santo fame worked on the Siena cathedral with his father, and remains buried beneath its main façade.

Harmer has been a consistent innovator in the enclosure and detailing of mausoleum spaces. At Keilor, he says, "a simple program of galleries and bays [creates] a series of protected spaces." The outermost gallery is unmistakably Australian in composition, essentially a lofty verandah defined by serried inclined concrete planes inset with glass panels at eye height and perforated metal screens above. The glass deflects the wind without obscuring the view of the rather forlorn looking cemetery, while the screen filters sunlight. The interior edge of the verandah contains casket spaces stacked six high. The concrete is acid-washed, the floor an exposed pebble-finished aggregate. Fixings and eaves are galvanised metal, with ceilings the only painted surface. Between the verandah and the main hall is a second gallery of casket spaces punctuated by triangulated timber clad bulkheads tapering to high clerestory windows. Mirrored in plan, the internal galleries are clad in red and green

granite, evoking subtle associations with Italian heritage. The green granite, called Golden Musk, is particularly lustrous, variegated in wild swirls like an aerial photo or a John Olsen painting.

The main hall is the culmination of the journey inwards, its furnishings almost domestic compared with the external galleries. Here the burial niches have become the walls to a fully enclosed room. Segmented like idealised clouds or giant leaves, a curvy timber clad ceiling spans between clerestory windows, bringing light down from 9 metre high recesses which feature stylised stained glass panels. Reminiscent of church interiors by seminal Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, the ceiling forms are reproduced in a green carpet which spans between the burial walls like pastoral terrain and which conceals data points for chapel services. The combination of soft carpet floors and the suggestion of bodies decaying behind a thin skin of marble is slightly unnerving but not without precedent: most of the world's great cathedrals, after all, were constructed on top of crypts.



Image - Artichoke 23

Keeping the Italian clientele, who have funded Harmer's mausolea to date, happy requires a careful balance on the architect's part. In negotiating religious iconography, he must avoid Catholic kitsch and embrace contemporary materials whilst maintaining a legible link with the past. Harmer commissioned all the artwork for the project, with perforated metal screens by Steve Hennessy depicting pixelated schoolbook saints working particularly well with the surrounding architecture. Animating each casket space are small gilded vases with integral electric lamps. "Seeing more and more how to enrich materials and colour", Harmer regards funerary buildings as an "opportunity to refine detail more than usual, putting less energy into the pragmatics, more into refinement." Of the \$5m construction contract for this stage of the project, more than half went into the concrete infrastructure alone, with technical considerations such as ventilating and draining the burial niches concealed behind polished stone.

Harmer is an unabashed admirer of Miralles' and Pinos' celebrated cemetery at Igualada. The landscape of Keilor, barren and remote is not unlike Igualada, site of a former quarry. And like Miralles' and Pinos' open-ended zigzag plan, Harmer's design incorporates expansion.. Behind a calm timber wall, a double-storey addition will eventually extend the complex to the south and bring its total burial capacity to over 3,600 casket spaces. When present estimates suggest that the current stock of conventional burial plots will be exhausted within 60 years, the importance of new models such as the Keilor Mausoleum is evident.

DI STASIO VENICE IDEAS COMPETITION

HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITION REVIEW

Scattered around Venice's public gardens, or Giardini, the 29 national pavilions of the Biennale resemble a miniature ambassadorial quarter. While the content of the art and architecture expositions at the Biennale evolves biannually, the pavilions remain essentially unchanged, windows into their respective nations' political and cultural ideologies at the time of construction. Germany's austere pavilion, for example, was altered under Hitler's instructions in 1938 to emulate the style of Nazi architect Albert Speer. While the American pavilion mimics the neoclassical appearance of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, Sverre Fehn's modernist pavilion for the Nordic nations seems to have grown around a grove of trees in a sublime reflection of his region's respect for nature.

Initiated by restaurateur and enthusiastic architectural patron Rinaldo Di Stasio, the Di Stasio Ideas Competition invited entrants from around the world to submit proposals for a new Australian pavilion at the Biennale. More than a mere theoretical exercise, the open competition was intended to add impetus to a long-running campaign within the architectural community to replace the existing Australian pavilion. Designed by Philip Cox, the existing pavilion was installed in haste in 1988 in order to claim the last remaining site within the Giardini for Australian purposes, in turn scuttling Peter Corrigan's pre-approved designs on the site. Intended as a temporary structure but since given permanent status, the incumbent pavilion has been maligned over the years for its inadequacies as a gallery space. In recent years Cox joined the chorus of voices calling for its replacement. The competition brief left participants free to reuse the site of the existing pavilion or choose another location in Venice.

Presiding over the competition was the prestigious judging group of photographer John Gollings, The Age critic and architect Norman Day, artist Callum Morton and City of Sydney architect Bridget Smyth. 168 entries were received, with winners selected in professional and pre-professional categories. Installed in a newly opened gallery space designed by architects O'Connor & Houle, 56 short-listed entries were exhibited at Melbourne's Heide Museum of Modern Art from 28 June - 3 August. Incorporating 18 small screens which displayed a field of constantly shifting digital images, the exhibition's curatorial device comprised a jagged black structure with glimpses of a vivid red interior. Filling the gallery, the structure appeared to be a scaled down version of the gallery building itself, a pavilion within a pavilion, around which viewers circulated. While the entrants' explanatory text was notably absent from this display, the exhibition added a vibrant experiential element to the act of viewing the proposals, drawing the curiosity and amusement of visitors to the museum, who in turn were encouraged to vote for a People's Choice prize. An extensive catalogue with essays by critic Dejan Sudjic and art editor Andrew Mackenzie was published to accompany the exhibition.

References to revered Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa are evident in both winning entries. Professional winner, Italian Davide Marchetti, proposed an object to be eroded by time, an elegant



Image - Architectural Review Australia 106

cast-concrete hive, its simple volumes punctuated by openings in the walls and roof like Gothic archivolt. Aside from the clarity and beauty of Marchetti's images, one might question what a design reminiscent of Scarpa's funerary chapel at the Brion Cemetery has to say about Australian identity. However Venezuelans didn't seem to mind when Scarpa himself designed the Venezuelan pavilion in 1956. Located near the Giardini on the Grand Canal, Scarpa's Monument to the Partisan Woman, an iceberg of overlapping marble blocks which becomes partially submerged by the tides, was the well-chosen departure point for the winning pre-professional scheme by SPF15+, a trio of Melbourne architecture graduates. An instant ruin or pre-pavilion, the elegant platform conceived by SPF15+ lies dormant between Biennales, awaiting its turn as the armature for a peacock profusion of ever-changing temporary pavilions. With a passing wink to Tom Kovac's Virtual Australian Pavilion of 2004, SPF15+ cleverly avoided the question of what form an Australian pavilion should take.

Denton Corker Marshall's Barry Marshall, a finalist for the professional prize, answered this question more directly in his proposal, a monolithic black cube which makes the delineation of light its distinguishing feature. Drawn with confidence and economy in Marshall's instantly recognisable soft pencil style, the design celebrates Australia as an island culture, exaggerating its enigmatic detachment within the archipelago of national pavilions. Though similar in approach, fellow finalists Ashton Raggatt McDougall prefer satire to heroism. Hewn out of "dark material", the exterior of their pavilion, like a glistening cluster of mineral ore, defiantly declaims a shameful legacy of resource exploitation. Inside, however, is a different story, apparently neutralised of politics and ready for industry branding.

A few years ago, inspired by Delirious New York, Rem Koolhaas' so-called "retroactive manifesto" for Manhattan, architect Toby Breakspear set about writing a retroactive manifesto for Australia's Biennale

pavilion. Rather than a series of contingencies and accidents, his thesis reasoned that the spotted history of the existing pavilion could be read as a deliberate expression of Australian architecture and culture. Seen in parallel with our colonial past, the pavilion's origin as an expeditious land grab seems entirely apt. So too the temporary nature of the structure, which sits off the ground on steel props, blind to the picturesque proximity of the canal. Unsuitable for showing art, the pavilion remained closed for more than a decade of Architecture Biennales due to the ignorance of the Australia Council. Within Breakspear's premise, Philip Cox is the building's fitting author. Forget Glenn Murcutt or Harry Seidler - The Architects radio presenter Stuart Harrison contended recently - Australia's most influential architect is Cox. While Seidler's towers and Murcutt's houses have regional significance, Cox's functional but bland white steel sheds have pervaded sports and conference complexes all over the world.



Image - Architectural Review Australia 106

While the brief for the new Australian pavilion expressed misgivings about Cox's pavilion, entrants were free to choose their attitude to the existing structure and its site. It is therefore disappointing that not one of the short-listed proposals retains the pavilion in whole or part, reuses its fabric or critiques its architectural character. Collective amnesia seems to have swept the field, with entrants imagining a tabula rasa on which to situate their proposals. Like it or not, Australia already has a pavilion at the Venice Biennale. If we erase the pavilion from memory in order to replace it, a powerful embodiment of our cultural tendencies will be lost. The last thing this nation needs is another historical revision.

Like the Max Protetch Gallery's landmark "A New World Trade Centre" exhibition of 2002, the Di Stasio Ideas Competition brought together a broad and imaginative field of entries. Ranging from Architects Eat's pulsating angry red blob to graduate Nicholas Braun's poetically suspended floodgates, the competition drew responses as varied as a tethered Tasmanian tiger, a stranded Sydney ferry, a floating island in the shape of the continent and a scheme for distributing branded red umbrellas. Just as the Protetch exhibition preceded a lengthy and high-profile "official" competition to select an architect for the politically-charged World Trade Centre redevelopment, the replacement of Philip Cox's pavilion seems a foregone conclusion. The process of realising a new Australian pavilion will almost certainly be a bureaucratic rather than creative exercise, with the demands of Biennale Authorities, the Australia Council, and project sponsors, comprising a minefield to be negotiated by the chosen architect. Soon we will be able to compare Daniel Libeskind's blurrily corporate World Trade Centre edifice with the powerfully optimistic design he submitted for the Protetch exhibition. It will be equally interesting, a few years from now, to recall both Cox's design and the Di Stasio proposals as we gaze upon the constructed reality of a new Australian pavilion.

ON THE REUSE OF IDEAS IN ARCHITECTURE

When architects read the same magazines, use the same software, wear the same clothes, drink the same coffee and listen to the same music, it's no coincidence that the same ideas seem to bounce around like loose coins in the dryer. Architecture is reliant on the repetition and reuse of systems, processes and ideas, because there's a limitless amount to think about when designing buildings, but never infinite time or money. Though the recycling of one's own ideas is accepted, the reuse of another's ideas can be decried as plagiarism. Seneca wrote that the best ideas are common property, a notion not shared by the world's architectural celebrities. In 2003 Rem Koolhaas published a series of realistic-looking patents for his signature buildings, perhaps to draw attention from the striking resemblance that his celebrated Beijing CCTV tower bears to Peter Eisenman's unbuilt Max Reinhardt Haus of the early 90s.

Originality has usurped tradition. First, destabilised by Modernism's revolutionary rhetoric, Architectural educators stopped promoting copying as the path to mastery. Then the international competitions of the mid 20th Century profoundly altered architectural culture. In a brave new world connected by media and tourism, entrants were seldom judged on their technical acumen or adherence to a particular culture or ideology. In their winning entry for the Centre Pompidou, a young Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers championed the idea of the public building as a city in miniature. Their machine-age design was antithetic to Paris' historic fabric, promising not to contribute to place but to reinvent it.

Today the establishment of the European Union, along with the booming economies of the UAE, Russia and China, has created a vast and adversarial architectural arena. While it's difficult to separate ideas from aesthetics, the latest expressive computer graphics and processes have had a perversely equalising effect on the stylistic traits of once very diverse architects, making designs by the usual suspects such as UN Studio, Foreign Office Architects, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Snøhetta and company, virtually indistinguishable and putting the competitive emphasis ever more strongly on the Big Idea.

Arguably it's been powerful ideas more than artistic virtuosity which has brought architect Daniel Libeskind his extraordinary haul of competition successes. After working on Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, Donald Bates of LAB emulated the style of the Museum in his design for Melbourne's Federation Square without causing ire. But when Australian architects Ashton Raggat McDougall (ARM) reused one of the Jewish Museum's floor plans for their National Museum of Australia, Libeskind pursued legal action.

Now it seems the shoe has shifted to the other foot. In a recent interview on Melbourne radio show The Architects, Danish architect Bjarke Ingels revealed his surprise at receiving a letter from ARM

claiming a breach of copyright. ARM had noted similarities between one of Ingels projects, in which the building's façades create pixelated portraits of the Swedish Royal Family, and an earlier design of their own. "It shows that two different practices on either side of the planet are working with the same photoshop software and have access to the same filters," said Ingels, "so maybe we are bound to invent the same ideas."

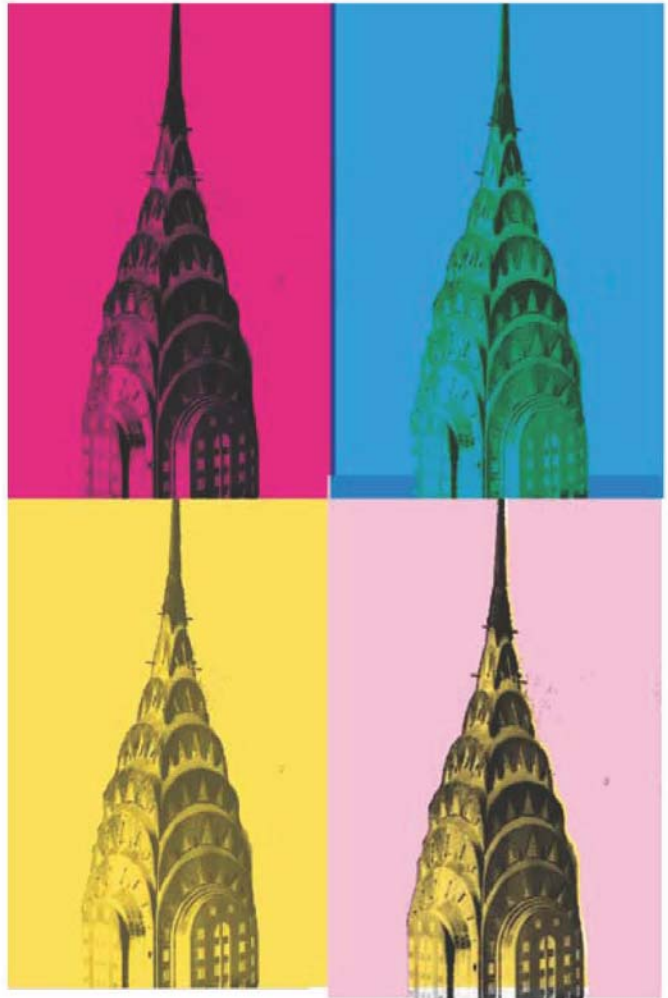


Image - Monument 87



GLOBAL VERNACULAR: BJARKE INGELS TALKS BIG

interview
David Neustein

images
Courtesy BIG

Bjarke Ingels, founding member of Dutch architectural practice BIG, is a very rare beast indeed – an architect under the age of 40 who can safely be said to have “emerged”. Brought out to Australia as a guest of Monash University’s architecture department, *AR*’s David Neustein caught up with Ingels to discuss his remarkable career trajectory, the failures of the International Style, and the pleasures of Jørn Utzon.

DN: Both you and your practice have enjoyed remarkable success for an architect so young. How was this achieved?

BI: As an architect, it’s really hard to set out an agenda or a mission statement and then work towards well-defined goals. What you end up doing is almost like a completely incidental series of opportunities, and you must make the most out of each opportunity, then gradually make your ideas and your work evolve from that random series of events. What I am going to talk about tonight is the idea of evolution, rather than revolution. Traditionally, I think architects, but also the media, like to declare revolution – a big breakthrough that has come out of nowhere. In reality, things quite often evolve gradually and unexpectedly. One idea emerges in one context, which is then being pushed over by another opportunity. An office or practice is populated by these ideas and once in a while they actually find a means to become realised.

DN: I get the sense from the way that you present your projects, particularly on your website, that they’re the result of an almost instantaneous conception. They’re presented as an immediate and clever response to a problem, which gets built with great speed, seemingly almost off the cuff. But I’m presuming there’s a lot more strategising and preparation behind the work.

BI: I think it has to do with communication. There is a quote by Søren Kierkegaard, “Life is lived forward, but it’s understood backward”. Once you move ahead with a project, you have all this productivity and it is really like a Darwinian evolution.

Concepts evolve through success and selection: we give birth to way too many ideas, way too many models for them all to be able to survive. Only the ones that deal with the parameters best will survive. Maybe one model is very attractive and another model is very efficient, and they’ll have different mutant offspring, but only the most successful ones will end up as the

result. But then once you’re there, with all the failed attempts and all the aborted models – even though there were maybe 100 sketch models – you can backtrack. So to explain why it looks like it does, is just as easy as saying one, two, three, four, five. It’s going to look very simple, and it is very simple, but getting there was not very simple.

DN: It sounds like the way that you build on those ideas is by creating models of them. Is this the process?

BI: I think that it is a collective effort, we’re a team: we have clients, we have consultants, we have specialists, we have guest critics and we invite other team leaders from the office to criticise the team’s work. It’s impossible to get criticism for something you have inside your head. It’s nearly impossible to get others to contribute to anything that is inside your head. You have to get it out there. Anything that is tangible, manageable and manipulable is going

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"The planet is an urban laboratory, with six or seven billion people every day conducting an experiment."

02



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BIG's Copenhagen project
Mountain Dwellings
(2008). Photography
courtesy BIG.

to make a project available to a larger group and that's the only way that multiple intelligences can contribute to a project.

So this idea of sitting around for two weeks thinking until you finally reach something is a bit like how the artist Bjork described going solo after The Sugar Cubes. She said that after a while it was a little bit like sitting in a corner masturbating.

DN: So when you talk about your team, what sort of team do you have? How many people work in your office, and are they predominantly Danish or are they from everywhere? When I went to the Royal Academy in Copenhagen, I saw they had quite an international bunch of students. Does that translate into your practice?

BI: I think we have a bit more than 20 different nationalities. We have a fair amount of Koreans and Japanese. After teaching at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, we had a fair intake

of Americans and then all over Europe and South America. We get a good share of applications from internationals. We find much more fitting portfolios and talented students actually applying from abroad than locally, because Copenhagen is such a small school.

You can say that until now, all of our realised work is in Denmark, but recently we are building a big hotel in Stockholm; a big one in Oslo. We're doing a large mixture of projects in Prague, Athens, Baku in Azerbaijan, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. So I think with that, our permanent staff will be more and more international. This multi-national aspect is clearly an important element in our work.

DN: There's a lot of discussion about the export of architectural ideas; Dubai, for example, has been pinned as a supposed vacuum. How do you feel about the process of international commissions? Because obviously the international

commissions offer you incredible opportunities and they allow you to extend your practice.

BI: It's like the exhibition we have on in London right now called The Copenhagen Experiment, where we take the virtues of Copenhagen, let's say Scandinavian metropolitan values, and try to see how could they lead to a much more varied expression than the classic idea of Danish architecture [in a foreign city]. There are seven quite radically different projects, but they all deal with something that is specific to Copenhagen or strategies that are specific to Copenhagen. We try to diversify the interpretation of compliance for the parameters, whereas last year most of our work had been international. We're interested in this idea of the new vernacular.

I saw this project studio at Harvard, where the main idea was that the international style was fuelled by the rigorous analysis of the engineer. Where you dissect what a building needs to do,

"Our work in Dubai is trying to liberate [the skyline] from the tyranny of the American skyscraper. We're trying to help Dubai invent typologies that are much more Dubai than current Dubai."

into a set of qualities that it needs to provide. For example, say you need to be able to see [when you're inside a building], so you therefore design a machine that allows you to see, which is electric lights. So then you don't really need windows that much. But then you need to have fresh air, so you design a machine for mechanical ventilation that blows air through ducts in the ceiling. So then we don't really need to open the windows anymore.

So essentially, it was seen as a series of freedoms that liberated architecture from history, and in the end it also emptied architecture of any quality. What you were left with were these boring boxes, essentially tube-fed by a lot of different machines. As a consequence, architecture got a lot more boring because it didn't do anything, and energy bills got higher and higher and eventually it became unstable. So our main idea was to reinvent the idea of vernacular architecture.

In *Architecture Without Architects*, Rudofsky showed how in different regions all over the world, the local population can organise their buildings and cities in natural ways, which are as nice to live in as possible. They built little towers that blow down the wind for natural ventilation; narrow streets in warm regions that won't allow the sun to hit the ground; roof slopes that allow the snow to stay to insulate the attic, or so steep that the snow actually falls off. All these [concepts] were developed over time.

So what we're trying to say is that maybe in the globalised world, vernacular doesn't mean local materials so much. It's more about the organising of your buildings and cities in such a way that they provide all the qualities, like natural ventilation and temperature, as a product of the architecture rather than machines.

[I encourage] the students to work with either Iceland or Dubai: two extremely different climates, which would reach extremely different architectural responses.

We're just starting a project in Baku in Azerbaijan. As part of our contract for the first month we just did research on Baku – the climate and the vernacular architecture of Baku – as the client is really into this idea of trying to liberate Baku

from this inherited generic American skyscraper as a typology. We're trying to demonstrate that there are a lot smarter ways that could be specific to Baku and not just create Atlanta in Azerbaijan.

DN: I wanted to ask about the idea of exploring the Danish sensibility. In Melbourne, the Council have just implemented these 'Copenhagen Lanes' for cyclists, where there is space for the traffic, parking, median divider and then a bike lane – clearly attributed to Copenhagen.

BI: I think there's a much smarter way of planning and doing architecture, based simply on this idea of perspective. I think it's a really good idea to go travelling. Rather than trying to figure something out in the office, go travelling and then place a benchmark. Analyse what it is that works well [in other cities], and then promote that as a typology. It's not throwing away your own culture because it's going to be done in a Melbourne way, in Melbourne.

The planet is an urban laboratory, with six or seven billion people, every day conducting an experiment. It's this idea of the Melbourne planners going to Copenhagen, checking out the bicycle paths, [then coming back to Melbourne and saying], "This is what we've seen so far that works best, let's copy it and maybe even make it a little better".

DN: This sounds like a tolerance towards other people's differences, and the exchange of differences, rather than control by the dominant culture.

BI: I also think there is no loss of identity. You can say there's basically two things that we've been doing at BIG: one is focusing particularly on Copenhagen and the other one has been trying to in a way reinterpret the specifics of foreign cultures. For example, our work in Dubai is trying to liberate [the skyline] from the tyranny of the American skyscraper. We're trying to help Dubai invent typologies that are much more Dubai than current Dubai. So I think you can actually do both.

I think Denmark is the country in the world with the least social difference in terms of economy; the difference between the richest and the poorest is the shortest. So this kind of equality could also be translated into a [liberated] cultural [tolerance].

DN: You seem to be quite comfortable being an ambassador for Denmark. I remember seeing your pavilion at the 2004 Venice Biennale – what really impressed me was how clearly you communicated the ideas. There was an instantaneous recognition of the project; you proposed what the problem was and what the solution was.

BI: We always look at the big Copenhagen experiments, we're talking about the work that we do in Copenhagen, and therefore it talks about our reinvention of what Copenhagen is all about. But it's not like I ever saw myself as a Danish architect.

If anything, I have a pretty tortured relationship with Arne Jacobsen – my architectural hero is Utzon and he's super un-Danish. He built two buildings in Denmark, most of his work is in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia or obviously Australia. The Sydney Opera House is a Scandinavian interpretation of a Chinese typology in a former British colony – so imagine how un-Danish that is.

I must say when I went to Sydney a few years ago, when we landed, we checked into the hotel and then we basically ran through the park to go to see the Opera House. I was really thrilled at how amazingly cool it is, and I think you don't realise this if you haven't been there. The gothic arches are so iconic and you completely miss the urban trick of that building, which is creating this massive public podium. When you're there you realise how brilliant an urban gesture it is – we landed actually right after the tsunami had hit, so there was the tsunami concert on the steps which really showed it perfectly. **ar**

DO ARCHITECTS DREAM OF ELECTRIC LIGHT?

As we begin our descent, daylight ebbs and the earth recedes into darkness. While landing gear distends from a mechanical belly, a million electric lights flicker into wakefulness. The mottled landscape is replaced by a shifting map of human activity through which headlights drift. On arrival, the terminal's blue fluorescent tubes throb impassively. In the pre-dawn fog beyond, orange streetlights radiate loneliness. A single lamp smoulders invitingly behind drawn curtains. At night or in the deep interiors of large buildings, electric lights communicate ambiances to our emotion sensors, and our moods shift accordingly. Like a plaintive ghost, artificial light simultaneously broadcasts our existence and is immune to our presence.

"No space, architecturally, is a space unless it has natural light", said Louis Kahn. He was wrong. Modern architecture and electric illumination were born conjoined in a flurry of intellectual activity at the outset of the 20th Century, when a small group of architects from Munich - among them Peter Behrens and Josef Hoffman - established the Deutscher Werkbund, precursor to the Bauhaus. Behrens was appointed artistic consultant to AEG, the General Electricity Company, which had earlier purchased the manufacturing rights for the filament light bulb and other Thomas Edison patents. From arc lights to factories, AEG became a test bed for the Werkbund's Functionalist ideals. The characteristics of artificial light were translated into spatial concepts. Clean, open, flexible rooms were inspired by the hygiene and efficiency of electric lamps. Behrens passed on these principles to his students: Walter Gropius, Mies Van Der Rohe and Le Corbusier.

The rapid proliferation of electric light coincided with developments in steel and glass fabrication which made possible the transparent facades and deep interiors of office buildings and department stores. The new light sources did not permeate inwards in radial swathes like the sun, but spilled outwards in brilliant arrays from these buildings, transforming the surrounding streets. For thousands

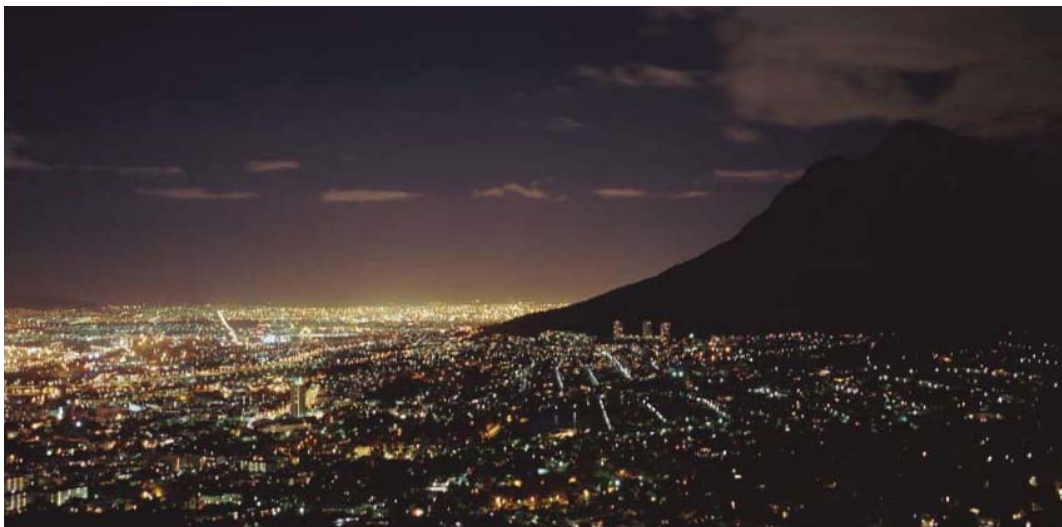


Image - Monument 88



Image - Monument 88

of years the sun and moon had been seen as the givers of life, poised in a celestial equilibrium which determined the structure and values of societies. Instantaneously transforming night to day, electric light provided newfound independence from nature's rhythms and challenged the constructs of the old ways of life. Modernity thrived on this ambiguity.

Decay is the term used to describe the reduction of light through space. When the lights go down, however, it is space itself which decays. When I finish writing this article I will make my nightly retreat from living room to bedroom, switching the light off in each room as I pass. Darkness will fold in close behind me, collapsing vacated spaces like a train of dominoes. Night will seep in through darkened windows and fill the house in negative. Finally my eyelids will close, and reality will be displaced by the electric impulses of dreams.

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Lighting in the domestic interior : Renaissance to Art Nouveau by Jonathan Bourne and Vanessa Brett, London Sotheby's, 1991.

RECONSTRUCTING ARCHITECTURE

INTERVIEW WITH NADER TEHRANI OF OFFICE DA

While the USA boasts many of the world's finest architectural academies, since the demise of post-modernism its architectural profession has been associated more with mediocrity than innovation. Office da, a still little-known architectural practice based in Boston, is a dazzling exception to this trend. Winning interest and acclaim with recent projects such as the Tongxian Gatehouse in China and Helios House in Los Angeles, Office da works almost obsessively with specific materials to overturn our spatial expectations. Recently in Melbourne to lend ideas to the newly formed Monash University Architecture program, founding principal Nader Tehrani spoke to AR.

It seems that your practice is on the verge of big things. To date most of your commissions have been significant interiors. Now you've been commissioned to do a whole number of much larger and complete buildings.

The only freestanding buildings we've done to date are the Tongxian Gatehouse in China (2003), Helios House in LA (2007), the New England house (200?) and the Macallen apartment building in Boston (2008). These four buildings are our main buildings today, but the Risd Library is a big project, 50,000 square feet. It's a restoration, renovation and intervention project. The rest are basically interiors. Right now, a huge shift has occurred, and we have been commissioned to do two blocks of a master plan in Tellapur in India, which is mixed use; it's residential, it's public amenities, it's commercial and retail space and gardens, about a million square feet in area. Parallel to that we have a soccer stadium that we're designing for St Paul in Minnesota, and that's maybe the most significant translation of our material studies and interior explorations to the civic scale. Then there is another mixed use development in Cleveland, Ohio that is two or three blocks of buildings between the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Cleveland Institute of Art. Foreign Office Architects is doing one and MVRDV is doing the other and we're just the chunk in between, the fabric between two important buildings, we're the band aid, we're the glue.

Beyond that, we also have a new commission by the federal government to do a border crossing between the US and Canada in one of the most northern stations. So the scale shift (between these projects) is enormous. The United States has this program called the Design Excellence Program. The GSA, The General Services Administration, asks for requests for proposals from architects who would not normally be eligible for the government jobs; they don't have the experience and so forth. By doing that, they enable small firms, eccentric firms, whatever firms to participate in the building and design of courthouses, federal office buildings, border crossings. In this case we were working with a border crossing specialist. I can't even begin to tell you the amount of restrictions there are. I mean imagine a project where 90 percent of it is already designed for you. Your wriggle room for design is that last 10 percent. In a way you're renovating the existing project. The more we design, the more we realise that all projects are like this; you just have to find the riddle of how to get out of that



Image - Architectural Review Australia 108

tight spot of convention, of the world as it is, and most of our projects are a healthy dose of tweaking transformations out of very banal situations.

The impression I have is that your practice is really an old fashioned architectural practice where you turn your hand to everything, where as designers you're not restricted to a certain area, I think there's an of incredible sense of adventure that's restrained by a very exact conception of what the project should be.

First of all, you know that Monica and I are both urban designers,. By practice, most of our projects are within the strictly architectural area. And of course we do interiors, furniture, products; so the range of scales tends to be quite vast. I do think there's a world of difference between urban design, architecture and industrial design, but that's because the parameters and key issues of each should not be confused with each other. But insofar as there are differences it's maybe not helpful to stick so tightly to definitions such as what is the design of a city versus what is the design of a cup, because there are certain issues that may actually translate across the board that have been suppressed. Which is why you've seen, for instance, so much critical investigation around the blurred edges between architecture and landscape architecture over the last decade or so. People have rejected the disciplinary enclosure between these different fields.

Basically, we were educated in the eighties at a moment when there were two dominant tendencies in the academic arena; one was kind of the tail end of post modernism, the kind of re-evaluation of history, typology and things like that, and at least in the American context, much of the investment that had been made in prior generations in material studies or the building industry had basically been erased, which is why you got all of those stucco boxes that looked like basilicas or rotundas and made allusions to history. At the same time, there was another tendency that was looking outside of architecture towards literary criticism, philosophies and so forth, with the advent of deconstruction and all of that, where notions of negation, fragmentation found their counterpart in an architecture, well, that looked like fragments or looked like collages, and all of those, by the way, posed interesting challenges for the building industry, but their study and their bias was not really in the building industry; the building industry was seen as a veil through which they had to penetrate in order to materialise the Theory. I think maybe these were necessary moments in a certain sort of historical trajectory, but actually we were not interested in them. We basically launched our initial set of buildings in the early

nineties as a systematic analysis and critique of each medium of construction; that's why you have a house in wood, that's why you have a house in terracotta, one in concrete, a chapel in glass, and so forth. So for better or worse, the artificial isolation of a technology for each project was a way for us to identify a cultural convention: terracotta, Venezuela; clapboard, Alabama; precast, Arizona; stone, Toledo. So in a way we used the material as a way of inscribing, almost in stealth, certain conventions of projects, and then because of the redundancy of mono-materiality, the obsessive over-use of a certain medium to demonstrate how that medium can be radicalised. If you use that same material, for floor walls, ceiling, roof, these have different performative requirements, they have different structural functions, they have different phenomenal relationships. The question was how do you underline them in different ways? So the kind of brick and block transformation you see in Casa La Roca are precisely a demonstration of the limits of a certain materials set. Whereas in a normative architecture the greatness comes from an understanding that a floor is a floor, a partition is a partition, and a hung ceiling is a hung ceiling, and a structure is a structure. I would say this is the way architecture does and should work. To do what we do is to artificially project onto it a requirement which problematises something in order to solve it; we produce a problem in order to solve it.

As we were rejecting what we saw was happening in America, we were also looking at Spain, Switzerland. We were looking at these other practices within elements of our own, because they were able to transform the material foundations of the discipline. To some degree, Frank Gehry did that in America. I'm not a huge fan of the way in which Gehry works, but he's always consistent, and the by product of what he does is always challenging how the industry works. In the early work it was the kind of exposure and [delamination] of the construction industry, but later when he did all of those metal sheeting buildings, it was not - it was through dematerialisation. When you look at them, you don't see the means and methods of construction, but he had to invent a building industry here that would work with him. I think we were fascinated by the idea that the architect could lay claim, once again, to an area where they had become completely impotent. Architects, at least in the US, cannot determine the means and methods of construction, that's a legal statute, and architects cannot determine the pricing and the value of construction, because contractors do that. Those two things alone render the architect effectively obsolete in the context of a terrain that is debatably the most important area of our concern. At Mantra. the restaurant, the Hookah Den was bid out at \$200,000, that was the budget of half of the restaurant. You can't spend half of the budget on some stupid installation in the corner. So we realise, okay, we're not going to be able to build this unless we build it ourselves. It was built with a drawing that was suspended on the ceiling with plum lines that identified each intersection of the stacked loops, relatively simple. You work with string and gravity. the point is that no matter how well we did our math, we came out to \$30,000, so we basically took it out of the contractor's scope. We basically built it ourselves. Now there are problems with that because you expose yourself to liability, but basically it gives you ownership over something that you were robbed of. So in short, you get people like us taking the industry on by just building it ourselves or taking it over, or you get the good traditional architects who understand so much about pricing, who can sit around the conference table with clients and contractors and know exactly where to target the questions so that the contractors can't get away with certain shenanigans.

Australian architects tend to talk about the skins of their buildings as functioning in a way which is performative and complex, while in fact they're generally very simple things made out of sliding screens or louvres. Whereas your buildings are elaborate, problematised constructions. They're not easy pieces of construction, they're bristling with problems. You've challenged the perceptions of budgetary restrictions in your work, and I think the same possibilities are available to Australian architects here should they wish to pursue them.

We went through a range of experiments where slowly we realised that we were compressing the structure and skin together, and finally structure became the morphological and parametric envelope for the entire development, where the entire building, skin, structure, envelope, is operating

synchronously together. And then there are actual structural experiments that we have done, like some of these installations, the ICA one was a failed structural experiment, which is why the China one was a successful structural experiment. After this meeting, we're going to go over to Monash University, and we're going to have discussions about research. It's very evident what historical research is to historians because they know what they're debating about, archival research, primary, secondary sources, theoretical overlays on those sources and so forth. Engineering research is prototype testing and so forth, when you talk about biomedical research, there are lab studies, but nobody knows what research is in a design context, and how you get tenure or what's valid as fundable. It appears that Australia is going through that same kind of discussion also that we go through in the States. So part of it is to determine what can Monash do that others cannot do here? What are certain research platforms that they could embark on, and what is different about constructing a curriculum today as compared to 50 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago?

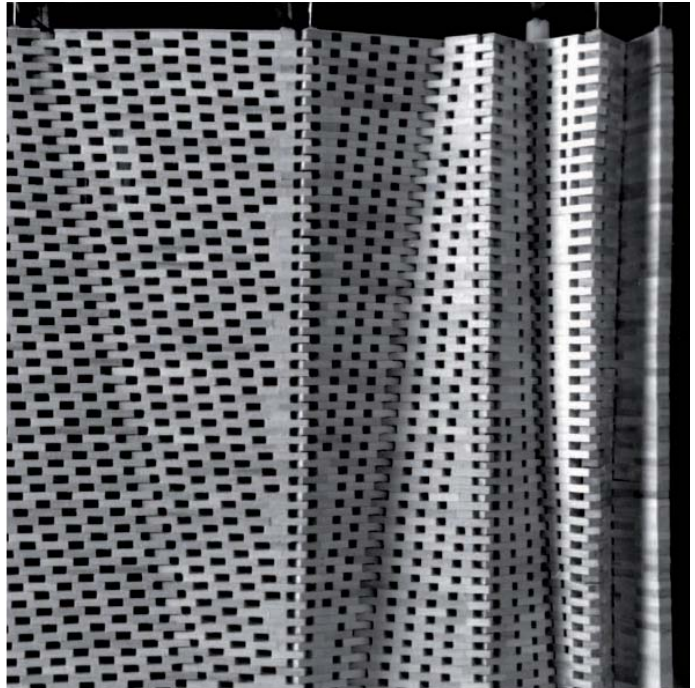


Image - Architectural Review Australia 108

The bigger question to all of us is as we look down the road, how much are architects going to dirty their hands with the processes that pre-empt architecture; architects have become developers, architects have become client consultants for patronage purposes, architects who get involved in the building industry who change the way things are built, whether it's through digital fabrication or otherwise. Architects who change the way schools work as a foundation for the way that the discipline is practiced, architects who are involved in new conceptualizations of software, BIM models and things like that, that change the way people work with each other on and off site. All of this for me is a significant restructuring of the foundations of power, usually there's a conventional triangulation between client, contractor and architect, so there's redistribution of responsibilities that can possibly give us more control or give us more say in the dialogue. And at the same time, give us access to building possibilities we lost over the last 30, 40 years. But also a way of not buckling to the industry, finding a way where mom and pop shops can do things as effectively as a corporate shop, both in design terms but also in manufacturing terms. Now there are a handful of boutique fabrication shops, and more often than not they're being run by recent architectural graduates, not building industry people; they're people with ambitions of building their own stuff but actually they're funding it by building other people's stuff and they're creating a unique little construction industry, so it's based on water jets, and CNC routers and laser cutting and all of that business, but they're adding a new resource for builders, and they're outbidding out things where they know better.

THE POSITIVE RECESSION

I was mystified when Phaidon recently released its Atlas of 21st Century Architecture. Had we not excitedly received the Phaidon Atlas of Contemporary Architecture just four years earlier? How had Contemporary become past so fast? And what was next, an Atlas of Right This Minute Architecture? Of Recent Future Architecture?

The 21st Century Atlas presents a variety of buildings completed since the year 2000, and some, like Beijing's CCTV tower, yet incomplete. To say that the timing of this tome seems premature would be an understatement. The book's title promises the impossible. But the impossible is precisely what design enthusiasts have lately come to expect. While conventional print media is generally too slow, popular blogs such as Architecture Daily, Moco Loco and dezeen deliver almost hourly updates on the latest architectural news and projects. Bloggers make little distinction between the real and unreal, posting images of virtual projects alongside photographs of completed buildings. An audience in the millions hungrily swallows this as visual entertainment, subjecting architecture to a superficial level of scrutiny formerly reserved for fashion and film.

In an era of unprecedented development, we have had an excess of everything except meaning. In the past few years, an insatiable greed for novelty has driven the frenzied revival of the skyscraper, buildings shaped like iPods and computer chips, artificial islands as collectors items, endless slippery-walled pavilions based on abstract mathematical principles and fractalised triangular patterns covering walls like a geometrical pox. Since the year 2000, the unprecedented speed of development has seemed to negate all possibility for thought or contemplation. A host of big-name architects, formerly known for their strikingly unique creations, have resorted to producing endless copycat versions of their own designs, whatever the context, in order to satisfy demand. Architecture has lost its way, if not its soul.

As news of the impending recession broke, a recent article in Melbourne's The Age proclaimed architects "the canaries in the coalmine", destined to lose their jobs at the first hint of economic downturn. The article made us seem a rather tame and toothless profession. But the news wasn't necessarily all bad. While numerous developments have been put on hold in Australia, a lack of demand for commercial space is providing impetus for much-needed residential development. In Melbourne, developer Grocon has altered plans for its inner-city Carlton United Brewery site from a predominantly commercial development with an additional residential component, to a citadel-scaled 1000 apartments. Offering hope to a starved residential market, the developers also took advantage of the financial lull to relax time restrictions on a planned archaeological dig at the historic site

Good times can often seem little better or worse for the common domesticated architect. Of course, in a recession many architects will lose jobs. But as intelligent and resourceful people, unemployed architects often land on their feet in other work with decent pay, regular hours, and holidays - offering an improvement on their prior working conditions. As architects are forced into considering career changes, other spheres of work could profit from their expertise. Local Council is one area that could certainly benefit from an influx of trained architects, as could the development sector, the film and

gaming industries, and architectural media. On the flip side, the recent building boom delivered countless new commissions and competition wins, but only the pointiest end of the profession saw any financial reward for its endless toil. In contrast to a spike in construction expenditure and revenue, increased inflation and spiralling living costs, the award rate for architectural graduates has seen no increase since the year 2000. In good times, architects just work harder.

The possible positive consequences of the recession often go hand-in-hand with the negatives. At present our public buildings and spaces are at the mercy of corporations. A politically convenient shift from state funded public projects to shared responsibility through public/private partnerships (PPPs) has deferred responsibility for the public realm from Government to profit-orientated developer consortiums. In Sydney, this has resulted in white-elephant tunnel systems; in Melbourne faceless department stores tacked onto major train stations and conference centres. As corporate finances dwindle, future public projects will be threatened. But so too will the attractiveness of PPPs to Government, undoing what seemed an inevitable march towards the total privatisation of our cities' landmarks.

From Dubai to Denmark, there has been a proliferation of speculative high-rise edifices which resemble crude symbolic gestures, empty of significance. As big-money loans become harder to secure, these projects will hopefully disappear into the vacuum of ideas from whence they came. The environment could be the major beneficiary of this recession. As rising energy expenditure and pollution in developing nations indicates, unfettered economic growth is incompatible with sustainability. While the global financial slowdown could divert investment from the development of green technology, it should slow the exploitation of natural resources and focus attention on renewable energy alternatives. In the USA, President-elect Barack Obama has announced a plan to effectively mine public buildings for the value of their wasted power, retrofitting them with energy efficient technologies. A significant share of his planned US \$700 Billion funding package is devoted to the upgrade of public buildings, making the "single largest new investment" in infrastructure since the 1950s.

What will come to replace the insensate architecture of the present? We can look to the previous recession in the early 1990s for some indication. The recession of the 1990s halved the workforce of giant architectural offices such as Skidmore Owings and Merrill, and Kohn Pederson Fox. Big firms splintered into smaller offices, which in turn were forced to seek work outside the commercial realm which had sustained architects in the 70s and 80s. An extremely competitive market forced practitioners to develop specialisations or to branch into related disciplines, such as landscape architecture, or interiors.. Others returned to universities and pursued their architectural ambitions through academia. As the architectural profession diversified, its ideas and practices changed. A reduction in commissions meant more time for research, which hastened the development of Computer Aided Design. CAD-literate architects, most of whom emerged from the universities, took the spotlight from their less technologically-savvy peers. In an absence of real work, CAD enabled digital visualisations of radical unbuilt projects, while conversely facilitating the realisation of far more complex construction processes than contemporary labour methods could handle. Deconstructivism, which until then had been confined to wistful drawings on paper by a few talented individuals, exploited this technology to emerge as a significant architectural movement which was ultimately responsible for the most significant works of the next decade. In Australia, innovative practitioners emerged amidst hard economic times. Six Degrees Architects originated in the 1990s with low-budget warehouse conversions and went on to enliven the cultural life of Melbourne with the first 'laneway bar'. Firms like Six Degrees will be well suited to surviving the looming recession.

As 2008 came to a close, work commenced on what may eventually be considered the first truly 21st Century building. After tearing down Soviet-era Palace of the Republic, a panel representing Berlin's powerful and intellectual elite voted to replace the stigmatised edifice with a modern reconstruction of what had preceded it: an 18th Century Prussian palace. In a city known for its progressive architecture, this radically conservative shift towards nostalgia perhaps demonstrated the emergence of a new post-boom sobriety society, one in which the past holds more lustre than the future.

AGE IS IMMATERIAL

TOYO ITO INTERVIEW

Toyo Ito looks too good for a man born in the same year as Bob Dylan and Dick Cheney. I make this observation while watching his talk from the distant stalls of the Melbourne Recital Hall, only to find the effect strengthen later in person. Dressed youthfully in a plain white t-shirt, his feathery black hair betraying only traces of grey, the architect appears ageless. He wears a wristwatch with two faces, one black, one white, as if mocking Father Time. However, perhaps his appearance results from time-delay, rather than sheer immortality. Beginning work in the sixties, Ito had to wait until age 60 to achieve international fame with the Sendai Mediatheque, a transparent club-sandwich filled with nonhierarchical public spaces and structural wizardry. While the architect still considers himself youthful, he has acted as senior mentor to some of Japan's most accomplished architects, among them Kazuyo Sejima, Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham.

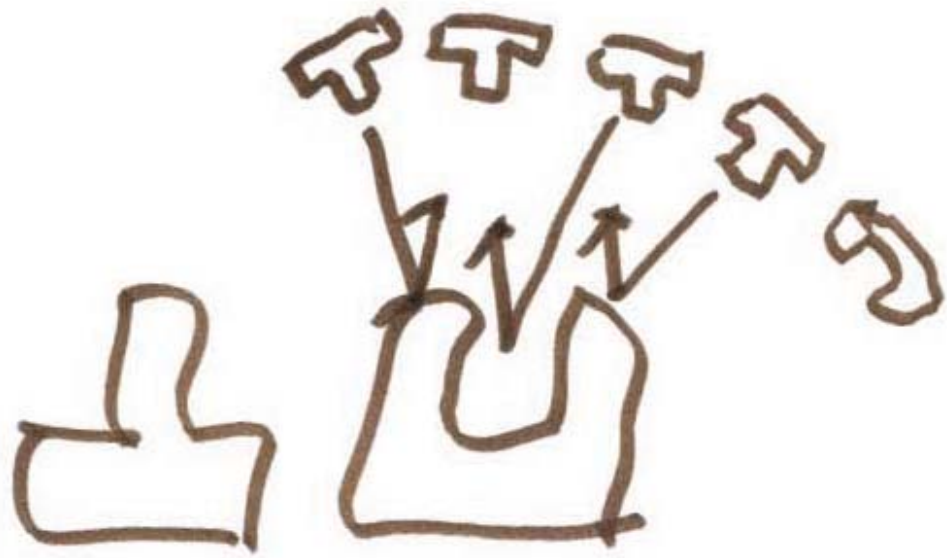
More astonishing than all of this, though, is Ito's willingness to seek in each project new and more demanding forms of expression, bigger and more complex programs, and fresh philosophical challenges. From the dynamic branch-like structural wrapping of the Tod's flagship fashion store in Tokyo (2004), via the serenely beautiful undulating concrete roof of the Meiso-no-Mori (Forest of Meditation) Funeral Hall in Kakamigahara (2006), to the enormous woven steel question-mark of the newly completed 2009 World Games Stadium in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, a tour of Ito's recent work reveals both a sculptural consistency, and an experimentalism which renders every project unique. And while his office has embraced the digital age by adopting a heavily computer-augmented design process, Ito continually strives to emulate the beautiful self-evident structures of the natural world.

Entitled "Generative Order", Ito's talks for the Australian Institute of Architects in Melbourne and Sydney outlined his desire to liberate the apparently neutral plane of the Modernist grid. By warping, curling or dissecting the rational checkerboard of columns and beams, Ito hopes to evoke natural patterns and invoke bodily sensations. At the same time, the enormity and energy of the building process, which he first fell in love with amid a shower of welder's sparks on the Mediatheque construction site, has lead Ito to a growing appreciation of the brute substance of buildings, putting him at odds with the typical Japanese predilection for perfection. David Neustein spoke to Toyo Ito about natural beauty, longevity and golfing.

You and [fellow Japanese architect] Tadao Ando play chess. Who wins?

[Laughs] If it was boxing, I would lose. Probably I would win at golf. Not sure about chess, but probably neither of us would be very good at it.

What part of your character has allowed you to remain so successful?



Drawing - Toyo Ito

[Picks up pen and begins drawing] If you were to divide people into these two Kanji characters, then I consider myself absolutely the right-hand character which means “hole”, but I think that Ando is probably more like the other shape which protrudes up. I am the type of person who takes in suggestions from everybody, for example my staff. I take it all in and work from there; I think that is the most interesting way to be. It’s good if the staff are the other type of person, because then they come and contribute something, but if the staff are same type as me then they just hang around waiting.

How do you keep your mind so young and flexible, particularly with the pressure of ever larger projects??

[Continues drawing] Maybe one way is that inside the office, I have many young staff, I try to not have any hierarchy between myself and the staff. I’m really interested in the process, how design might happen. I may start with something really vague and undefined, what I have called in this drawing “my first image”. I then put that forward and it gets many comments from everyone including for example the engineer and all the staff, everybody. Then the idea goes to a different place and changes, and then that whole process happens again and again, so it keeps moving. And it can change to a whole different tack, can come back to the previous one, or move off to a different place.

There’s a competition I’m working on which started in November last year, and which is due next week. The NHK television network has been filming the process every day, filming every meeting, and they’re going to make a one hour long program about the process of design. But it makes me feel so insecure because normally if I’m taking part in an interview or that kind of television program it’s always after the design has been completed, and I can feel that I know what it’s about. But in this case I’m being filmed in this unknown state, which is right in the middle of the process. It’s probably the most interesting aspect of the process, that there is this unknown, and then so many people make comments and proposals towards the project, and something happens from there.

I understand that you play golf. What is your handicap?

[Laughs] [Suddenly comfortable with the subject matter, Ito-san switches to English] Maybe 15-under or so. I started to play golf when I was 51. Generally the people said that half of your starting age is

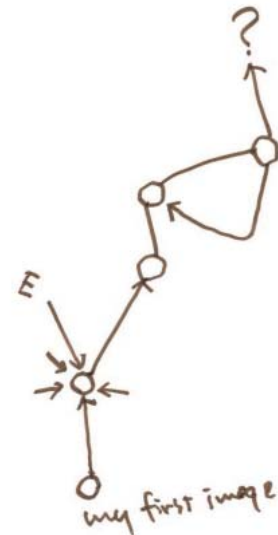
your possible handicap, so I am proud of mine. If only I had started 10 years earlier, I could be a bit better. But I enjoy it very much.

Did the rolling greens of the golf course inspire GRIN GRIN park?

Not Grin Grin, though sometimes people say: it is the shape of a bunker. But I like some undulations. I am not conscious of it, but unconsciously I must be influenced.

You have spoken before about the relationship between a building's materials and human activity. How does this work, for example, in the Funeral Hall at Gifu?

Maybe the construction is more the part through which I am thinking about materials. So what type of structure, and obviously the material that goes with it, is very important. But in terms of materials there are not actually that many types that I use, and not even that many colours, at least recently. However with steel, for example, I definitely don't want it to have an artificial quality, and I try to give it a feeling of warmth. In the building at Gifu, the roof is something like birds' wings, which come up and down from the sky, and the ground rises up to form the various rooms. The two don't touch but they come together to make the space. The ground comes bubbling up and the top comes floating down in between.



Drawing - Toyo Ito

Is the emphasis on materiality in your more recent work a response to the insubstantial digital age?

This is something I have spoken and thought about a lot previously. There's a sense of superficiality in the digital age. For example in this table, or in many tables, the expression of timber has become something which, visually, you might consider to be timber. But the construction and the sensibility of it is not about its being timber. So I feel that there has been a loss of animal understanding or instinct, of the physical response. In my work previously, I used a lot of aluminium and I was more interested in the effect that it might produce, to do with how the light interacts with your perception of it. But now my thinking has changed, so it might be more about; what is the substance of the material? Previously I may have been searching for a kind of visual abstraction, but now I am trying to find a bodily abstraction, something that is more about the whole human body rather than just about vision.

Your projects are always so complete. Do you ever wish you could stop construction at a more raw, elemental state?

When you build in Japan, that just happens. Without even realising, it becomes smooth and well-finished. In myself, I wish that I could have a raw, unfinished kind of result. The type where it just doesn't matter who does it, or where it's from.

With reference to the house you are building in Chile, are you in fact entering a phase of more archaic buildings, much like Le Corbusier's late work?

There's no conscious thought of emulating Le Corbusier's later work. In this case I have visited the site only once, sent the drawings over and a local architect actually managed the work. If the result is a raw type of project, I would say it is good to have this. And if you are so kind as to consider it similar to Le Corbusier's late work, I am very happy.

Your increasingly complex and technologically advanced architecture appears to in fact be a search for simple self-evidence. Is this the case?

I want it to be that way. Simple is a difficult word to use, maybe primitive would be better: something where human beings have a direct relationship with the work. Because of computers, there's a new possibility of living on top of a tree, or inside a cave. These are things which modernism didn't really allow for.

What is the most important idea you haven't given to the younger generation of architects?

I think of myself as a young architect!

What do you make of the Japanese tendency to photograph buildings before people, furniture, even handrails?

I used to also be like that, and have my photographs taken in that way. But now I want the photographs to be really as natural as possible. I do discuss with furniture designers what kind of furniture might be in a certain place, but it's nothing like previously where people said "it must be these people and it must be taken in this location". Previously, it was that people said "take a photo from this particular location and looking in that direction and it will have the most beautiful view." But I'm not thinking like that. Now I'm thinking that the architecture is in the way that people move around and experience the space, and that is what must somehow be captured by photographs.

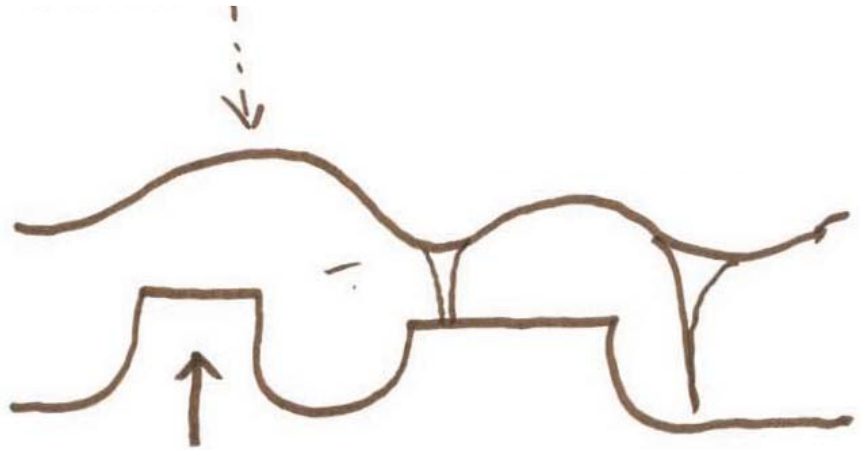
A famous writer said that, while nature is beautiful, in fact the city is the most beautiful thing in existence. Would you agree?

The European idea of the city and the Japanese idea of the city are really two quite different things. In general, in Japan the city and nature seem to be mixed up together, so it becomes very difficult to even distinguish them. This is the kind of city that I enjoy.

Japan's cities have mainly come up historically in the Edo period, sometime between 1500 and 1600. There were the focus points of hills and castles, and then the city naturally developed from that point. So Tokyo was built around a castle, and then there was a spiralling development outward from there. In the last 100 years or so, since the Meiji period, there have been a lot of different kinds of development, where the water has been infilled with reclaimed land and grid-system urban developments have spread on those areas. Aspects of the natural Edo - which is the old name for Tokyo - the natural developments, have been obscured. I would like to imagine that you could draw those aspects back up to the surface. The simple example is that the relationship to water that was there of course is now gone, because of the reclaimed land. To somehow to be able to understand that intrinsic nature is something that I would be very interested in.

So going back to the question, I see that nature and the city are maybe not really two different things. I am also thinking about that in my own architecture at the moment. Architecture and nature could be one thing, working as one.

David Neustein wishes to thank Marika Neustupny, who ably translated this interview, and Andrew Barrie, who provided insight into the work and philosophy of Toyo Ito & Associates.



Drawing - Toyo Ito

EMBRACE THE CAVE

LA VITA BUONA WINE STORE BY SIX DEGREES, REVIEW

Six Degrees Architects are clandestine space-makers. Their trademark building alterations don't just work within the existing context; they intensify it, leaving you wondering what is remnant and what reconstruction. The intrigue surrounding the Waiters Restaurant, a Melbourne institution, is central to the Six Degrees mythology. The aged décor of the restaurant bears no obvious signs of intervention; yet the architects claim to have taken the interior apart, cornice by cornice, only to reassemble it intact! Their design approach combines a larrikin Australian take on *objet trouvé* - the found object - and a forensic obsession with materials and joints which traces lineage to Carlo Scarpa. Carried out onsite and in collaboration with builders and tradesmen, the construction process often involves using found or common objects and materials, but assembling them to the highest standards of craftsmanship. The result is a high/low aesthetic, pioneered in their 20 Meyers Place bar (MONUMENT 10), which has spawned a wave of copycat designers and has become synonymous in Melbourne with authenticity and cool.

In 2003 Six Degrees commenced work on a strip of chic premises for a single developer, including bar 3 Below (MONUMENT 66), Caboose restaurant, Fur hair salon and Leopold's Empire menswear. Fronting Melbourne's lively City Square but wedged beneath the hulking mass of the Westin Hotel, the row of tenancies should be shadowy, cave-like spaces. However with each project the architects have managed to transcend the site's limitations. The latest addition to the line-up, wine store La Vita Buona, bucks this trend. The architects have chosen to embrace the cave.

A solemn marble-clad cross at the threshold speaks more of the crypt than The Good Life. Indeed inside the walls are lined with niches. But these are drinking niches, cosy and jewel-like, nestled into corners or within a wall lined with wine bottles. Instead of the dank air of the tomb there are

the sweet smells of coffee and boxed cigars. Dominating the centre of the space, three solid-brick columns perform a witty masquerade as structural piers supporting the faux-Parisienne Westin above. Glimpsed from the side, however, the columns dematerialise, hollowed out with black steel and filled with racks of bottles. Rather than supporting the space, these free-standing elements compress it, purposefully narrowing the room to create a cluster of framed apertures



Image - Monument 90



Image - Monument 90

and hidey-holes. The columns also exclude natural light, creating a permanent winter evening in which a fireplace smoulders, candles twinkle and no daylight dawns to disturb the drinker's revelry. Carefully placed small mirrors double furtive glances. "You can spy on the customers, but they're not aware of you", says barperson Amber.

Featuring classic European design cues like dark timber joinery, intricate stained glass panels, Thonet bistro chairs and parquet flooring, the furnishings are almost stuffy. However, artfully placed reminders of the working cellar - a scrum of staff aprons hanging in one corner, stacked timber crates - undercut any pretension. Halfway down the long entrance corridor flanked by high shelves of fine vino, the working barista's counter is open to arriving partons. Grit and polish: the patented Six Degrees approach.

