TERROIR as a state of mind

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Architecture

SCOTT BALMFORTH
B. Env. Design UTAS 1991
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October 2007
I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the authors alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

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Our three-year engagement with the RMIT Masters program has been an exploration in what we “do” and what our state of mind and operation is, to lead to a continued mastery in and expanding and evolving practice. Greater understanding of our strengths and weaknesses has allowed us to distance ourselves further from new projects and reflect upon the space these projects occupy within our framework of ideas and explorations.

The platform we have built for moving forward is structured upon that which already exists - primarily the collaboration between Gerard Reinmuth and Scott Balmforth – with a greater awareness of practice operative procedures to deal with “new” issues that we were confronted with during the Masters program, including; working outside collectives that encourage mastery with our exposure to new clients and managing practice scale which grew from a team of 15 to 25.

Current office projects were used as exemplars of the presentation of our ideas and methodology and to seek critical comment on “what we do” and propositions to assist us in using our “state of mind” as a platform to further innovation.

The projections on future practice that conclude our Masters program are of course therefore also projections as to how our collaboration can further yield new developments with the sharpness offered by the vision acquired during this Masters process. Any further “conclusions” would be anathema to the whole process we have undertaken – this document is the history of the practice and its projection.
# CONTENTS

**PHASE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>A PERSONAL STATEMENT OF THE JOURNEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A ‘READER’ FOR THE UNINITIATED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PHASE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>TRANMERE HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>LONGLEY HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CANBERRA LIBRARY AND STUDIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ORANGE LINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>MOENS KLINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>TOLMANS HILL HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>PEPPERMINT BAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>THE HAZARDS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PHASE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>LANDSCAPE - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>FISH 349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>SHFA FORECOURT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>BLUNT TO FINESSE - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL CRESCENT HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>ACTON PARK HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>TAKING CONTROL - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>SHFA FOYER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>ANZAC PARADE AMENITIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>MANAGING NEW TECHNOLOGY (“TOOLS”) - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>SHFA CANOPY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>FERN TREE HOUSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PHASE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>PHASE THREE - introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>PRAGUE ANALYSIS - real time reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>REFLECTING ON PROCESS - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>METAPHOR FOR OPERATIVE EFFECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>USING TECHNOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND OPERATIVE EFFECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>DEFAMILIARISATION OF CONTEXT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>TRUST IN REAL THINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>HUMOUR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>PRACTICE DATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>IMAGE REFERENCES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

A PERSONAL STATEMENT OF THE JOURNEY

The invitation to undertake the RMIT Master program from Leon van Schaik in late 2003 was flattering to our young practice which at the time was only four years old. Equally flattering was the recognition that in our early work we had shown a level of “mastery” worthy of further reflection that comes from this Masters program, an opportunity that aligned with our impatient drive to progress our office and work. Simultaneously other research opportunities availed themselves, such as the enrolment of our only practice Associate in the SIAL program and thus began in intense period for our young practice which at the time constituted 12 people.

The perfect alignment of the Master program and one’s particular practice development has been a consistent theme during conversations with alumni of the program and is certainly applicable to us. The past three years of the program has unfolded against our practice completing a suite of projects that had begun prior to the commencement of the Masters and a time when our practice has doubled in size and seen an increase in new client and project opportunities. Both of these deserve further brief reflection;

The critical reflection of the program enabled a fuller understanding of projects such as Gunn House and Liverpool Crescent, which were catalysts for ‘trigger moments’ which is documented later in this catalogue, particularly pertaining to the realisation that our work exists between the two poles of “Blunt” and “Finessed”. However, without the masters program I believe these important projects would have remained within our portfolio of completed projects with recognition from Gerard and I of an uncertainty of their true value in the practice’s project direction, even seeing them as diversions from our pursuit of a particular office direction.

The last three years has seen a rapid increase in the size and projects of the office exponentially. In the last three years, new project and client types have been introduced to the office along with further “developments” such as the introduction of new digital technologies. These aspects are fully accounted and in fact form the basis of the Phase 2 component of our Masters and are fully explored in this catalogue. Despite the intense and aggrieved periods experienced along the way, we are indebted to the timing of the invitation that went with critically dissecting “what we do” whilst we were actually doing it. Undertaking the program during this period of intense activity ensured a raw state of action that on reflection has enabled the most benefit to us.

If I was to recount a moment that defined the Masters program it would be one that is covered during the Phase 2 section of this catalogue regarding the SHFA Foyer project. It was a moment – approximately half way through our program – which distilled a number of issues about the design climate we have established that were to become apparent in the latter (Phase 3) stage of our program against a backdrop of troubles we were experiencing with managing the increased use of digital representation and the process of a client body that had the potential to thwart a quality design outcome.

The nature of the program, to better understand one’s mastery as a platform for future innovation, is such that a “conclusion” is impossible. Rather, Gerard and I can only conclude with recognition of the indelible effect the program has had on the manner in which we embark on the next stage of our career and anxiously await the next tranche of projects which have manifest during the last three years and – we trust – will only begin to reward the faith and time placed in us by many people over the last three years and most notably by Leon.
INTRODUCTION

A ‘READER’ FOR THE UNINITIATED

So, to the Catalogue. Although we entered the program to focus on our work, from the start we could never escape the intense interest from visiting critics in how we work. Thus, this aspect of the practice has become dominant in our progression through the Masters and any discussion of the work tends to be contextualized in the discussion of our collaborative design process. That we work from alternate locations seems to add further wonder to spectators watching us complete each other’s sentences and has also resulted in one of the most significant suggestions by a critic (Leon, in this case) which is to concentrate on the design of our digital environment as the next project in the future. This process then, can be seen as a sort of information gathering exercise for that (significant) undertaking – clarifying the climate within which we work to the point that it can be described sufficiently to enable a more sophisticated digital design and communication environment to emerge. More sophisticated that is, than the one we have now - consisting of an elaborate use of email and tablet PC’s and other “out of the box” pieces of software.

This document then, is also evidence of that process. We work as one in the studio – that is, coming from our own perspective but completing works in which the role of an individual is not apparent. As with Donovan Hill, our couplet contains the same ingredients – a verbose one and a precise one – but our deployment is perhaps different. Our level of collaboration permeates every aspect of the practice – each letter is co-authored to the point that we should be a marketing device for Microsoft Word’s “track changes” function [1]. There is simply no such thing as a “Gerard project” or a “Scott project”. The minute such a distinction could be made would be the minute that the practice folds in on itself and disintegrates. If there was a sense that these statements reflected a constructed appearance rather than a reality, one could refer to our clients who, even on the smallest projects, can find one or the other stepping in with full knowledge of the project and process. If anything, influence over a project can often increase with distance such that Gerard’s location in Sydney and Scott’s in Hobart is also a useless device for determining individual authorship.

This Catalogue has been authored on the same basis. Every passage of text is about 50% written by each of us and this 50% split is not serial but rather in a form of intense editing such that barely a paragraph exists without both our input. This mode of operation is essential to the way we work and as such we have not attempted here to artificially “split” our inputs as to do so would be so unrepresentative of our approach as to make this Masters document irrelevant to the mode of practice celebrated so often by critics over the past 3 years.

In outline the Catalogue follows the three-phase approach encouraged by the academy and via which most participants before us have worked through the program. Phase 1 reflects on the “established mastery” on the basis of which we were invited into the program. This consists of works completed prior to 2004 and which formed the content for our first GRC presentation. Our enchainments (in some cases, going back to experiences as children) have always formed part of the narrative around the presentation of this work and is again represented here.

Phase 2 consists of a collection of around 10 projects which all commenced around the time of GRC 2 in June 2005. These projects became the subject matter of the masters and the means via which interrogation from the panel could be made. The intensity of the workload and office expansion during this phase resulted in numerous errors of judgment to which we were alerted and the resolution of which formed the learning experience.

These Phase 2 projects could be presented in a number of ways – chronologically, on a project basis, or thematically. Given the static nature of the DVR, we have opted for the thematic mode of presentation here to give the clearest segue into Phase 3.

Phase 3 is the projective phase – where we speculate on future projects. While it has often been the practice of Masters candidates to show an actual project as evidence of this future work, we have opted to keep things very much in “future” mode by publishing schematic work from a range of new projects in the context of the lessons learned from this process. We have also added a piece to this tripartite structure – a “bridge” passage between Phases 2 and 3 which forms a link between the two via one cathartic presentation of 150 emails from the design process for an international competition. This is explained more later on in the document.
**TERROIR as a state of mind**

SCOTT BALMFORTH
Master of Architecture
2007 RMIT
ADVANCED SCREENING

GERARD REINMUTH SCOTT BALMFORTH
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# CONTENTS

09  A PERSONAL STATEMENT OF THE JOURNEY  
11  A ‘READER’ FOR THE UNINITIATED

## REVIEW OF ALREADY ESTABLISHED MASTERY  PHASE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>TRANMERE HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>LONGLEY HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CANBERRA LIBRARY AND STUDIO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ORANGE LINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>MOENS KLINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>TOLMANS HILL HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>PEPPERMINT BAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>THE HAZARDS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## INVESTIGATION OF MASTERY  PHASE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>LANDSCAPE - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>FISH 349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>SHFA FORECOURT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>BLUNT TO FINESSE - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>LIVERPOOL CRESCENT HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>ACTON PARK HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>TAKING CONTROL - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>SHFA FOYER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>ANZAC PARADE AMENITIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>MANAGING NEW TECHNOLOGY (“TOOLS”) - context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>SHFA CANOPY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>FERN TREE HOUSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFLECTION ON PRACTICE  PHASE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>PHASE THREE - introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>DEFAMILIARISATION OF CONTEXT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>TRUST IN REAL THINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>HUMOUR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

72  PRACTICE DATA  
73  IMAGE REFERENCES  
75  BIBLIOGRAPHY
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Our dominant reflection as we compile this document is not related to the work but to the imminent end of the experience itself. The RMIT Masters program is an astonishing apparatus and we feel extremely privileged to have been part of it. The numerous interactions, criticisms, contradictions and celebrations have left an indelible mark and one that we are convinced has left us many times the better for it.

In particular, we need to thank a large group of peers and critics who have provided valuable critical comment and insight during the GRC process: Zeynep Mennan, Sand Helsel, Katherine Heron, Jonathan Hill, Thomas Daniel, Allan Powell, Johan Verbeke, Dale Jones Evans, Ephraim Joris, Riet Eeckhout, Adrian Iredale, Finn Pederson and Robert Simeoni.

Particular distinction must be made in regard to the contributions of Leon and Ranulph. Ranulph Glanville offered critical comment at every GRC and understood and unpacked our collaborative design mechanism in the context of his specialist interest in this mode of working. He also offered general support, encouragement and inspiration outside the arena of the critical feedback sessions. Leon van Schaik supervised this work and it is to him who we are indebted for initially presenting the opportunity to partake in the program and for pressing his well-oiled levers throughout in an effort to provoke and uncover what we didn’t know existed. It has been a privilege to undertake this process with someone such as Leon who, after a decade or more leading the program is operating with his powers at a maximum.

We dedicate this work to the two halves of our existence – the brilliant team of people in the office who have assisted us every inch of the way with their tireless spirit of exploration and their loyalty to what we do, and to Fiona and Marie-Louise who have attended every GRC possible and tolerate the numerous midnight calls we make to resolve a design issue before the next day begins.

Gerard Reinmuth
Scott Balmforth

“... on the nature of their team; Kate Heron noted the coordinated tool kit of the Terroir three, the same black notebooks similarly marked up, their clearly expressed individuality but their ability to talk together to build a coordinated picture, all bringing to the table, all taking away, the sum greater than the parts, a rare quality, rarely exposed.”

Leon van Schaik, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006
We visited this site together, the day after Gerard returned to Tasmania from a year overseas and the first visit after the establishment of our practice. Gerard remembers a sense of wonder at the setting of the house – a wonder instilled by detachment from Hobart for this period. Therefore, in visiting the site, we discussed the “clarity” with which Gerard was able to “see” the site characteristics and context, and whether this abstracted awareness could underpin the design.

The site is located on the eastern shore of the Derwent River, 8km from and looking across the river to the city of Hobart. It was this re-acquaintance with what is the typical Hobart aspect available from the site - looking over a gently sloping foreground to the successive layers of river, city and foothills – that Gerard stylized in diagrammatic terms in his initial visit. The abstraction of this view into five linear bands [2] - trees (foreground), river (middle ground), Hobart foothills (distance) and Mount Wellington beyond – set a basis for the design approach. This linear, or banded quality then led to an awareness of larger connections, particularly of the extension of the river northward. The site was quickly understood as a place from which these greater landscape connections – across to the mountain and up and down the river valley – could inform the design and thus question the location and form of adjacent houses.

In detail, the house was formed from a 2-part diagram that responded to these contrary axes of spatial awareness [3]. The diagram was derived with a narrative including time, whereby first act was to make a place in the landscape that reflects the key characteristics of the site condition in the form of a massive cut and shelf against which habitation could occur. This excavation and formalisation of the site geometry represents the ‘archaeological’ component of the project and forms an armature upon which the layering of program is grafted [5]. The grafted components on the other hand deal with a more temporal condition – the habitation of the site by a young family whose needs may change or who may sell the house thus resulting in altered habitation requirements. These planes recall the planar layering of the city landscape on the western side of the river, and are embellished in thin galvanized stripes on the façade that further dematerialise the planar layers and suggest the extension of the building beyond its suburban plot.

This house saw the first collaboration between us and as such sees a coming together of two trajectories and a sort of exercising of prior teachings and experience. The desire for monumentality in the archaeological response derives from the approach of Heffernan, Nation, Rees, Viney that we were both exposed to at formative points in our career (Scott worked for Ray Heffernan [7] while Gerard worked for Michael Viney [6]). The character of these elements emerged from discussions about favourite architects; with Aalto providing a reference for the faceted plan of the rear element and varying spaced mullions of the highlight window which sought to engage with the bushland setting behind and in contrast the tautness and deft detailing of Denton Corker Marshall [8] – where Gerard had worked post graduation - whom - assisting in the resolution of the “plates” and the front façade openings.
The astonishing thing about this house, in retrospect, is that it was designed and built in parallel with the Tranmere House. While the Tranmere house saw the exorcism of previous influences and the development of a diagram-driven approach to weld the collaboration, Longley used this approach and immediately extended it into new territory at the same time as the approach was being developed.

The site could not vary further from Tranmere, located in a valley 30kms south of Hobart featuring three key spatial experiences discernable from the house site - a line of large, evergreen trees to the south which, along with the mountain to the north, provides a sense of containment; a gully running diagonally to this axis; and the rise in the ground plane toward a nearby hill in the west. Initial explorations into how a Murcutt pavilion might be located in relation to these elements were abandoned as the diagram-driven approach used in Tranmere emerged. However, due to the differences in context from Tranmere, the result was something quite unrecognizable when compared to it.

The plan form of the house rolls around the site in response to the triad of external landscape features, locating rooms in relation to them. A more complex geometry resulted than in the Tranmere House given the trigonometry of these features. Again, as in the Tranmere House, time was an important part of the conceptual diagram, with a masonry "tub" (walls and floor) making an archeological mark in the landscape as a first order response to the landscape geometry [2]. Temporal elements exist here as a series of lenses which cap the ends of the archaeological tub [1]. In resolving these elements, research occurred into Corbusier’s Maison Jaoul [4] and its timber lenses which Gerard had seen a few months before returning to Tasmania.

The particularized nature of these lenses is a key difference between this and Tranmere and subsequently became a focus for study into the threshold idea central to the formation of the practice. Thus, Richard’s input here was felt in his understanding of these elements as a “threshold” both to an external, physical space and also an internal psychological one. This architectural threshold was understood as not just about a physical modulation of light, temperature and moisture between inside and out, but as a space of engagement and exchange - projection and introjection - between the world and us [3].

This three-dimensional ‘zone’ was a critical response to the ‘louvered skin’ endemic for some time in Australian architecture. Through the intersession of carefully placed personal objects this architectural prosthetic allows the occupant to escape the distancing effect of objective ‘looker’ and to become subjectively engaged, an ‘actor’ and participant in (rather than simply an observer of) the landscape.

This project was designed via a “conversation” between Hobart and Sydney offices, particularly involving a tic-tac of facsimiles. This enabled quick design diagrams being transferred [5], commented and/or added to and then returned [6]. This process lead to a shared authorship that has underpinned all projects since, and which now utilizes other forms of technology such as Tablet PC’s for similar fast-paced transfer during a design discussion.
The art critic John McDonald contacted Gerard in 1998 to consider a gallery project in the rooftop of the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney. While this project never occurred, it became the spark around which the practice formed and led to a friendship with John which followed his transfer to Canberra as Head Curator of Australian Art at the NGA. Having purchased a house on a rural site near Canberra, John required a library for his 17,000 volumes while his partner required a sculpture studio. The sloping site sits within a small valley, its northernmost boundary is the Molonglo River which flows from a flood plain to the east, widening into a pool at the north-west corner of the site. The valley and pool provide two key reference points; the valley gesturing toward an expansive, limitless space that welcomes the morning sun, while the pool defines something of a punctuation in the river course.

The “story” of the project expanded from the focused, “rule-based” diagrams of the early houses, to a suppler story involving input from clients and a greater reliance on intuition. In this case, the sculptor’s interest in Greek and Mesopotamian art led to reflections on Doxiadis’ analysis of the constellation of buildings which form Greek sanctuaries [3]. Richard Johnson (DCM Sydney, now JPW), with whom Gerard has worked prior to forming TERROIR, had an interest in proportioning systems and Doxiadis work in particular. The application of Doxiadis’ mathematical framework in reordering the two buildings occurred in parallel with both the Longley and Tranmere houses on site. The archaeological components of both these houses were under construction – bringing the realization that this suite of buildings could both be rearranged by the mathematical overlay but also anchored to the site in a stronger way, again separating the “permanent” and temporal components of the project.

The centrally organised composition which resulted – based around a “propylaea” in the original house - is embraced by two varying end conditions: to the east a site excavation gestures toward the valley below and beyond; and to the west a ribbon that increases in height and terminates in a verandah facing the natural pool [2]. The emergence of a long wall in the landscape provided an archaeological structure for the work. ‘Guillotining’ this wall into the land began the transformation from landscape into architecture. At this point the work of land artists such as Heizer and Andre [4] entered our frame of reference. Andre’s work led to the capping of the wall with tiles to reflect the story of the project expanded from the focused, “rule-based” diagrams of the early houses, to a suppler story involving input from clients and a greater reliance on intuition. In this case, the sculptor’s interest in Greek and Mesopotamian art led to reflections on Doxiadis’ analysis of the constellation of buildings which form Greek sanctuaries [3]. Richard Johnson (DCM Sydney, now JPW), with whom Gerard has worked prior to forming TERROIR, had an interest in proportioning systems and Doxiadis work in particular. The application of Doxiadis’ mathematical framework in reordering the two buildings occurred in parallel with both the Longley and Tranmere houses on site. The archaeological components of both these houses were under construction – bringing the realization that this suite of buildings could both be rearranged by the mathematical overlay but also anchored to the site in a stronger way, again separating the “permanent” and temporal components of the project.

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The story informed further moves - the Greek ‘treasury’ provided a means of ascribing a significance to the artist’s work, underpinning the form of the gallery [6] while a wrapped copper sheet cladding recalled the green fabric utilized in her work Origin of the World (after Courbet). The original had been visited at the Musee D’Orsay with the clients a few months earlier. The library [7] took the form of a labyrinth that protects and organises the book collection. Drawn from the etymological basis of the word ‘book’, the library walls are lined in layers of beech veneer that peel away from their substrate. The permutations of the labyrinth form serves to increase the available wall area of the length of the library. A number of ‘islands’ - freestanding bookshelves - sit within the wall alcoves to further increase the spatial complexity [8]. In addition to the provision of an archive, a space is provided where the client can work in ideal conditions for reading and writing, accessed via a secret door in the continuous bookcase.
Not long after the completion of the two early houses and the cancellation of the Canberra project, we were invited to contribute a temporary installation [1] at the vineyard of Stefano Lubiana as part of a 2 day “wine trail” festival encompassing Tasmanian wineries.

The work in Canberra had led to an interest in the potential of large-scale public art to further explore the balance between architecture, culture and landscape – however, we had not imagined such an opportunity would appear so quickly.

The focus in the practice at the time on hand-drawn diagrams and the pencil mark led to an idea that this two-day installation would be a “sketch” of sorts, so we chose to create a large-scale “sketch” in the landscape - a miniature “trail” in itself mirroring the “wine trail” theme of the festival. Rather than focusing on the interiority of our design practice as occurred with other art installations over the weekend, we encouraged an understanding of the terroir of the environment in which the vineyard sits in a precise and focused way. As architects concerned with the physical and cultural context, we demanded an installation made specifically for this place rather than the placement of a previously made work in the hope that some relation can be drawn between the two.

At a basic level, the line was a guide, providing an indication of the vineyard at the main road and leading visitors up the hill. At the end of the day, having enjoyed the Lubiana hospitality and wine, the line assisted the visitors in finding their way home … in true “Hansel and Gretel” tradition.

As with the Canberra project in particular, a range of other “stories” found expression in this project, thus expanding its potency beyond a simple formal exploration:

- The “hands-on” approach to wine making at Stephano Lubiana led us to considering the mark left by the hand of the “master”. In our case, our “sketch” is the mark left by us as architects;
- Just as the Lubiana graphic of a cursive handwriting relying on the flow of a continuous line, our continuous line wavers across the landscape as a giant Lubiana “logo” [2].
- The lines’ bright orange colour [3] is a deliberate reference to Lubiana’s previous disagreement with the Champagne house Veuve Cliquot who took exception to Lubiana’s sparkling label’s similarity to its “…'Cliquot Yellow'.

Thus, the Orange Line concluded a first “cycle” of sorts in the mastery we developed prior to commencement of the RMIT program. Reflections occurring in real time between the design operations in the two early houses led to a more refined approach to the Canberra studio, which remains a seminal work for us. The Orange Line delivered to us the most abstracted version of this path of enquiry, operating as it was without program. Having stripped the work back to these bare essentials, new projects were attempted with a refined and clarified process and greater confidence.
The Geocentre Møens Klint competition was for a museum of Denmark celebrating the history of a nation and located in a dramatic landscape setting on top of chalk cliffs overlooking the ocean [2]. In asking why people go to Moens Klint to look out over the sea, collect fossils, we concluded that the answer lies in the complex relations of body, landscape and culture that entices the subject.

Thus, Moens Klint provided a space in which we could extend the explorations of Canberra Library/Studio and Orange Line, but with a full architectural brief yet in a competition mode.

Richard’s PhD in culture-wilderness relationships led to his framing of the problem with Eckersberg’s painting – demonstrating that the answer is not necessarily the cliff itself since it remains hidden from view. Rather a subject, with telescope in hand, looks out from the cliff at something else [3].

Richard also observed that the two others engrossed in close conversation are looking neither at the cliff nor the view. Therefore, he concluded that this painting suggests that dialogue or discourse are essential - conversation inspired by the setting and informed by the elevated advantage of the cliff top where a naturally occurring giant platform harnesses a sense of scale and strength of the geological events that caused this formation. This was an initial cusp moment in Richard’s role in the design process of Terroir.

Richard Blythe email to Gerard and Scott, 11 December 2001

This is the painting by Friedrich’s [4], interesting since it is painted from the perspective of the viewer looking over the top of the cliff ie immersed in the experience of landscape and the sublime rather than a more rational ‘view’ back to the cliffs ie ‘what is the experience of the place?’ rather than ‘what does it look like?’

Richard Blythe email to Gerard and Scott, 11 December 2001

Can’t help imagining a white chalk clearing (Gregotti’s placing of the stone in the landscape, or the idea of structuring the landscape through modification or mimesis of what is there – the chalk cliffs re-imagined and excavated as a horizontal plane) and the building rising up as chalk landform walls that support a floating grid form framed roof structure in a blend of the aerial and the telluric, the rational and the subjective, the smooth and the striated, the grided and the free-from. These relationships might then be structured around some kind of discussion of the sublime that might be a way of bringing these amazing Romantic paintings (including Friedrich’s) into play in relation to this site.

Richard Blythe email to Gerard and Scott, 11 December 2001
Our design explorations began with diagrammatic [5] and text explorations of different contexts of the site driven by the spatiality of the site and with the memory of the painting in our consciousness. First explorations were concerned with movement (a continuation of the orange line study) and the geological history of the site through its formation and erosion. Models were made of the site and of the pathways across it [7].

This construction of models of a path [6] – as opposed to models of a building itself – was an event understood at the time as key moment in the development of our design method.

Overlaid on these were models of other “ideas” such as glacial movement - open ended, speculative models that tried to understand the relation between the glacier as a body moving across the chalk surface [9, 10].

These were exploratory models designed to open up the physical possibilities of the project – but using a range of techniques inspired by land art and the desire to further our developing design approach.
Located in the hills above Hobart, the site has a sweeping view of the Derwent River [2]. The view from the best vantage point high on the site is sliced by a large number of existing trees whose silver trunks punctuate the muted tones of the greater landscape.

Placed within an array of houses exhibiting individual “expressions”, a fundamental organizing system was sought for the project. Continuing investigations within the practice into paths and lines within the landscape led to the consideration of a path from the road below, up to the garage and entry and then winding around back on itself to run along the contour to an elevated position. At the house site, the line cranks around the contour, offering little resistance to the natural landform and at the rear cradling a group of mature eucalypts that anchor the house [1,3].

In this sense, the design approach extended Moens Klint into an even greater trajectory across the landscape [4], but for a smaller project. This amplification of conceptual scale and reduction in object scale resulted in a “bluntness” whereby the building and line were understood as of the same dimension. This path thus provides an invisible armature around which the house itself is formed but is also the house. Internally, the line is embellished via program to consist of a main space and a series of “poche” spaces that sit “within” the wall membrane [5,6].
In terms of the external form, the visual "noise" of the adjacent houses resulted in a reflective response - a "house as shadow". A decision was made to respond to the hillside development by the simplest formal response and colour palette possible. The clipped nature of this diagram - a single container with a clearly defined boundary and minimum threshold - reinforces the defensive relationship to the adjacent suburb [7,8].

The work of Botta, in particular his residence in Stabio, was influential in this response. Botta's work had been an influence to both of us during our studies and gained greater polemic when Gerard visited this Botta project to discover the true nature of it's siting within a standard suburb [10], not as it had been published [9]. In defiance of it's immediate context it sought a simple, formal response to the greater landscape context [11].

Derived from the necessity to produce a very economical project for a young couple, where by necessity the external envelope was kept very taut and direct in its construction and materials, this project also revealed to us the potential of the uncanny object in the landscape – in this instance a deep-green "shadow" in an unremarkable new housing sub division - leading us on a path that would develop via the work of Geoffrey Crewdson and others.
Peppermint Bay was a major opportunity for the practice and remains, at the time of the masters examination, the largest project completed by the practice [1].

The project provided a perfect set of conditions given the explorations we had undertaken previously: a site in a stunning landscape [2]; visited by a journey which is part of the project experience itself; a need to intensify engagement with place as a key aspect of the brief.

The winding journey by boat or car to the peninsula led to a mapping of possible journeys and their extension onto the site, where it could be continued as a labyrinthine plan [4] through the garden, culminating at a 100 year old oak tree. While some aspects of this journey were fixed – its commencement, site entry point and the significance of the tree as a destination – we took this path and rolled it around the site to define a circumnavigation of the place with resting and small events spaces between key trees or relating to key views [5].

As with Tolmans Hill, the path works as path but also structures the building’s internal arrangement and further development of the site and garden over time. The increase in scale here led to a great reliance on the lessons of Moens Klint, where again a path had provided an armature around which program was arranged [6]. As with Tolman’s hill, this program was arranged with poche spaces abutting the path, but here these poche spaces worked in this mode (cellars, bar storage) resulting in a thick wall that backs onto large dining areas, each of which has a precise and different relationship to the landscape [7].

The increase in scale and complexity in program left us with a more complex diagram than previous projects – a diagram that was tested and retested in section until resolved. Understanding that the poche element needed to exist at a certain dimension, the conceptual question emerged as to the character of the main dining rooms and kitchen located on separate sides of this path and poche wall [8].

PROJECT DATA: CLIENT: Mr. Simon Currant. PROJECT BRIEF: A waterside function venue, at the core of a multi-faceted tourism development, comprising a wharf side cruise centre in Hobart, high speed multi-purpose cruise vessels. PROGRAM: 100 seat function room, 100 seat dining room, Public accessible wine cellar, Public bar with adjacent outdoor terrace, Kitchen (capable of catering for functions serving 400 persons), Delivery and storage facilities (incl table/seating storage to rear of function space), Provedore/retail outlet, Toilet facilities, Separate food and beverage cool rooms SIZE: 1,050sqm. BUDGET: $1,900,000. PROJECT TEAM: Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe, Gerard Reinmuth, Sarah Benton, Paul Sayers, Rolf Svendsen, Daniel Lane.
At this point a decision was made to incorporate the path into the diagram (as opposed to the more usually expected release detail with glazed roof) resulting in a single roof [11]. In addition to the cost benefits of a single roof place, a grey metal landscape resulted from the gathering of all roof and wall elements, exhausts, and entry and exit sequences into a single folded plate [11,13]. This landscape contrasted with the lush interior [12,14] – recalling the interplay of inner and outer as explored in the work of Parent and Virilio and later Nouvel. "The Little Prince" diagrams of the elephant [16] and the hat [15] enabled the resolution of this diagram with confidence.

The gathering of the roof into a single element, combined with the acceptance of equipment and a desire for each space to be "formalized" via its own self-related roof geometry, yielded a complex plate. Many have called this a parametric design exercise, whereby the plate resolves not due to an externally applied geometry but rather it stretches and shrinks as required by the changing programmatic requirements to which it must respond. This combination of elasticity (in the roof) [17] and formality (in the interior spaces) [18] and the fuzzy relationship between the two has persisted as a key research area of the practice.

The opportunity to design a large hotel in a world-class landscape area is a significant one but also came with a great responsibility. The site is located approximately 2 kilometres west of the town of Coles Bay on Tasmania's East Coast, with only a beach and single connecting road between. The dominant feature of the site is the expansive view along the beach and across the bay to “The Hazards” – a famous landscape that makes the Freycinet Peninsula one of the most visited wilderness areas in the state [2].

A series of key organisational decisions formed the basis to the design strategy. The original brief for 150 units, spread across the site in a “resort” formation was challenged. By locating all units at the coastal edge of the site the whole development could be accessed via internal circulation, thus changing the emphasis from a resort to hotel. In addition to addressing qualitative issues of 5-star accommodation in a cooler climate, the rooms were located on the most degraded part of the site (thus returning the rest of the site to bushland) and each room could receive the famous Hazards view.

Operating in parallel with these decisions was our emerging poetic position in regard to the occupation of the site and the way in which this occupation would reinforce its key characteristics. These characteristics - geology, landscape form and climate - led to the development of a series of written strategies and diagrams intended to clarify the architectural potential of these and thus the experiential and interpretive potential for short-term visitors.

Thus, the lessons from previous projects was applied to this site and problem: a key path through the site provided an armature for the building [3]; a series of formal rooms terminating on key landscape features were arranged in relation to this path; decisions regarding the hierarchy of spaces between rooms and poche areas were made. In this project, a major overriding issue in resolving these moves was our understanding of the Tasmanian landscape as an essay in monumentality and intimacy [5], a juxtaposition exemplified in the photography of the late Peter Dombrovskis [6].
The building consists of three key components [8]. Firstly, a monumental copper roof plate crowns the site, providing an abstract and iconic synthesis of the site and the characteristics of the landscape in which it is placed. All indoor public spaces are located under this roof, both an identifier and a gathering space [7]. Secondly, a central zone of pools and walkways provides a foreground to the view in addition to a unique experience in the form of hot pools that recall the combination of granite and steam that formed this particular landscape [9]. Finally, the room wings roll along the contours [10], ensuring that each room obtains a view while, via their detailed geometry, ensuring that the scale of the development is minimized.

It is in this first component – the main building – that the lessons of previous projects were most obviously applied. However, unlike Moens Klint or Peppermint Bay (which both twisted along a path) the main building at The Hazards was understood as one element in a sequence. Thus again, an increase in scale and change in context resulted in a simplification of the base diagram of each component. In this case, the platform created viewing The Hazards rock formation was of a scale that enabled all public spaces to be strung in a line with a similar section and relationship to the view. Differences between spaces were effected via changes in section and the interior overlays.
terroir as a state of mind
... recovering repressed memories

RMIT GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN RESEARCH
LANDSCAPE

CONTEXT - PHASE 2

Growing up in and now practicing in Tasmania provides a rich environment in which to explore the relationship of architecture and landscape. The particular characteristics of Tasmania's sublime landscape – its uncanny quality, labyrinthine structure and unique formal characteristics had underpinned many of our projects to date, particularly those featured in Phase 1 including Tranmere House, Tolmans Hill House, Peppermint Bay and the Hazards.

The latter stages of reflecting on already established mastery – a process of recovering memories – was critical in expanding our understanding of the manner in which we approached “landscape” and its importance on our design process.

“Perhaps your approach is a way of letting the site do things to you; force a shape on to you. This is unlikely, passive.”
Ranulph Glanville, GRC 3, October 2005

The paintings of Friedrich [1] were becoming important references in latter Phase 1 projects, in their portrayal of entering the landscape through a figure in the painting and the idea of empathy in particular. The influence of Friedrich in our work is traceable back to Richard introducing a Friedrich painting in the Moens Klint competition; a group standing on a cliff top looking out to sea. Further investigation into Friedrich revealed an uncanny resemblance in a particular painting in landscape and subject to an image of a Tasmanian bush-walker atop a mountain [2] where one is seemingly looking out through the walker to the landscape.

On reflection, Phase 2 commenced when we began to expand our investigation into dealing with “landscape” to include references such as Icelandic singer/songwriter Bjork [3], particularly the way she very much carries the impression of the landscape which she has come from [4] but undertakes a series of character changes depending on circumstance at the time [5]. Thus her work has constantly developed through different idioms and a worldwide existence yet has never lost the intrinsic influence of her native homeland, including the manner in which she developed her singing by whispering in sheltered enclaves and screamed at the top of her lungs when confronted with blustering gales.

“Terroir have more in common with Bjork than with Murcutt, in that you explode the hell out of a situation…”
Dale Jones Evans, GRC 1 October 2004

Fish 349 is a project in three parts: the original Georgian building on a corner site in the Elizabeth Street commercial strip of North Hobart (2 kilometres from the Hobart CBD), its 1970's extension and the new plywood and glass armature that connects them. In this transformation of a former grocery store into a contemporary fish café, we have attempted to modify existing fabric in a manner that brings new clarity to the history of its fabric and in particular its place in the extended landscape of Elizabeth Street.

The impetus for the armature comes from the extended landscape of the major Hobart street that originates at a dockside pier, passes through the CBD and extends through North Hobart and beyond to the north, negotiating the dominant topography of Hobart and its suburbs along the foothills of Mt Wellington and parallel to the Derwent River. The street’s “line” found its way via folds, twists and nooks into the new interior and positions diners relative to passing pedestrians and vehicles. In this way the external space of the street is folded into the intimate space of a commercial interior in such a way that the interior is experienced as an extension of that urban condition.
At the point of entry patrons are held in a pocket space defined by the concrete floor that flips up the wall and back across the ceiling. This space provides a threshold between the open kitchen to the left and the dining room to the right. The dining room occupies the entire ground floor of the Georgian corner building and this delineation creates clarity through use about the history of these building objects (Georgian and 1970’s). This if further reinforced by pulling back the textures of the Georgian structure to reveal original materials: brick walls and a ceiling of the timber structure and lining to the floor above.

The tool for exploring the contexts of this project has been the “line” derived from the landscape: the direction of the street, the trajectory of a pedestrian, a line of sight. These linear explorations result in formal, material and spatial delineations that vary from careful spatial studies to playful graphics.


PROJECT DATA: CLIENT: Mr. Nick Kalimnios. PROJECT BRIEF: Redevelopment of an existing delicatessen into a café/restaurant. PROGRAM: New commercial kitchen, back of house storage and cool room, new entry/service area, dining room, patron facilities including new male/female/equal access toilets. SIZE: 268sqm. BUDGET: $430,000. PROJECT TEAM: Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe, Gerard Reinmuth, Matt Skirving, Paul Sayers, Justin Hanlon, Nic Fabrizio, Alex Reed.
SHFA Forecourt is the public space of a project with multiple components in and around a heritage building in Sydney’s Rock district. The public space is a highly visible triangular site and deals with a very critical intersection in the Rocks and has views to Sydney Harbour and up George Street to the CBD. It was a project for a major public open space requiring a strong connection to place.

The initial response to “landscape” was an act of stripping the podium of detail and raising it to a uniform upper level to understand the key platform space connecting to the Harbour water plane. This primary action also included connecting it to the topography of the urban streetscape by making it out of a singular familiar material – concrete.

One thing that we do is walk to a site and just notice at a certain point the way we’re orienting to place. A visit to the site culminated in us arriving at a particular part of the site which was the most optimum part of the site; away from George Street in an apex that provided the most favourable view to the harbour. This specific location was to become the site of a proposed canopy for the public space.

When moving throughout the space we also found ourselves continually twisting between acknowledgment of the view through to the harbour and addressing the busy street corner which was back-dropped by George Street curling back around towards the CBD. These ‘reactions’ to the site determined the initial ‘actions’ to the podium; the view through to the harbour manifest in maintaining the level datum for a precise connection between public space and water plane and the spatial drain down George Street became the primary access point from the intersection up on to the podium.
Having established the primary presence in the landscape, we began further finessing of the space – literally around the edges – such as the way we dealt with George street, the way we dealt with the secondary Hickson road dropping from George street down to the harbour. Like actions that we were to be simultaneously uncovering in many projects, in the SHFA Forecourt, in an open space project, this playing around the edges was a form of embellishment and finessing to the overall blunt object.

Many of these embellishments were highly pragmatic transformations such as an accessible ramp which carried with it pragmatic site response issues in that it had to go from the highest point on the surrounding footpath to enable the shortest permissible ramp.
BLUNT TO FINESSE

CONTEXT

“... problems of the inanimate and the animate here bring us to a consideration of the toy. The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction; it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy in a way that the abstract space, the playground, of social play does not. To toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within sets of contexts, none of which is determinative ... to toy is “to dally with and caress, to compose a fantastic tale, to play a trick or satisfy a whim, to manipulate, and to take fright at ...”

Ranulph Glanville, GRC 3, October 2005

“Whether you like it or not your windows frame up the view into what become meaningful clusters of signs. There seems to be a characteristic way in which you set up the frames….This sensitivity is not yet getting acknowledged in your process.”

With our expanding office we were presented with projects in new places and with new technologies at our disposal. This forced a deep investigation of the true essence of our mastery rather than seeking a universal architecture in the manner that Moneo has been criticized by Leon van Schaik - and in turn Moneo has made a critique of Álvaro Siza.

Our previous understanding of our mastery had focused on the line and the vector as site-generated foundations of our work. The GRC process had revealed to us our work existed between the two poles of “blunt” and “finessed”. This had resonance also in our constant and familiar working through cardboard models and even in topological closed objects that were becoming increasingly familiar project references such as the stealth bomber.

The genesis of this realisation was during a GRC presentation whilst we were showing Pirates Bay House which was nearing the end of construction. It was presented as an exemplar of a growing realization of our tendency in recent projects to push the “blunt” by pushing the extreme logic of an idea – in the Pirates Bay House it was how a large slightly-inflected container was pushing the idea of its locale on the end of a long-sweeping bay on Tasmania’s East Coast [1]. During our presentation, Ranulph asked us to ponder an image that began a realization that we were in fact ironically pushing the “finesse” of the project, in this instance by a seemingly random array of silicon joints in a large window aligning with and ordering the existing trees on site [2].

This realization was paralleled with us grappling with new technology and in one particular instance wishing to remove a detached computer image to actually “hold the model” and wondering what the model holds ... thus the further revelation of our work as “blunt toys” – a term coined by Leon van Schaik.

The toy-like quality of projects is borne from a desire to hold them to understand what they do, what their potential holds and playing with them, “toying” with them.

The materiality of recent buildings also strove towards a “bluntness”, tending to a cardboard-like appearance where even inserting openings was done in the manner of cardboard – like cutting slits with a modeling knife.

Ranulph Glanville, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006

“Blunt toys? There is in working through models a sense of command, like that of a child over a toy train set (Peter Timms). Holding the model they have a sense of understanding what they do, controlling what they do, playing....Whereas the gigantic, the monumental, surrounds us, becomes a landscape. (In the screen the model becomes gigantic?) So, following Ranulph Glanville’s insight at the last GRC (#3, October 2005), they come to see ‘the blunt’ (as in ‘as blunt as that telephone junction box’) opens up the space for the finessed. Colleagues tend to stray into the middle ground, vitiating the equation, partly because the role of digital tools in the equation has not yet been mastered.”

Leon van Schaik, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006

Externally this house is a blunt cube in the landscape on a south-facing steep site west of the Hobart CBD, an uncanny object which responds to the gravitas and power of the landscape with a restrained formal language [1]. The external formal restraint is underpinned by the limited materials palette; darkened and unforgiving, a gesture of the occupants privacy.

This external brevity is contrasted with a surprisingly rich and intimate interior [6,7], similar to a general reference within the office of Jean Nouvel’s Tokyo Opera competition entry. Public spaces of this interior are “carved” from the blunt block that establishes the house position on the site and are compressed by the more private functions - toilet, bathroom, bedroom etc - that occupy the solid components remaining from this carving action and which remain connected to from the base [4,5]. This carved action results in a refined materials palette built upon the exterior materials resulting in a robust but surprisingly intimate interior. This externalizing of the materials palette has profound spatial implications and results in a tension between the inner and tightly sealed outer layer. This tension between the inner and outer is played out in a range of complex spatial manoeuvres as the external skin is bought into and sometimes passes entirely through the interior section of the house to distribute light to lower levels [8].

The core folds out into the landscape in a sun-trap courtyard connecting the spatial sequence of the house with the slope of the site. The courtyard and vertiginous windows suggest, conceptually, another level of folding outwards and interconnection with the greater landscape. In this sense the play of interior/exterior is extended to take in the valley and the hill.
This house can be understood then as a play of doubles - interior/exterior, carved space/plateau and in particular blunt/intimate - in which the experiential qualities of house, of “home”, of inside and landscape are folded together in a powerful expression of place.

This project also evidenced the development of our work. Originally designed 5 years before it was eventually built with similarity and difference to it’s original conception; it evidenced to us the importance of the “story” – in this case the imagined occupation of Chillida’s Giacometti’s Table [2] as an original concept – in maintaining the project through many “hands” in the office and after a considerable delay. Likewise, the precise understanding of putting buildings together in the Tasmanian marketplace in the ensuing years had contributed to a tightness in detail and acceptance of a tough, uncanny exterior (where the money is spent keeping the water and cold out!) in favour of a rich interior that belies the eventual economical project.


Acton Park House furthers explorations into the development of a place-based architecture - but one which extends notions of place from topography, climate and vegetation to one inclusive of cultural and societal narratives. In this rural subdivision [2], these narratives include the role of the uncanny and unexpected.

The house is a low-lying long, dark object placed centrally on the allotment in anticipation of the preservation of distant views and amenity when adjacent allotments in the foreground are developed. The stretched house responds to the open landscape with which it seeks to engage, one of low-lying open fields and sheltered water-ways which folds into a neck of land locating Hobart Airport. The setting is contained by a horizontal band of hills which define the bottom edge of a large sky view [6].

“The materiality of the buildings is blunt too. The ones under consideration here look as if made of cardboard, some non-specific black stuff, slit and opened with cuts like a model, (like a pattern in fashion?). Decisions about material are held in suspension by the models, deferred until ‘we get down to it’.”

Leon van Schaik, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006

The reality of the suburban subdivision which this project is situated anchors an interest in the uncanny manifest in the photographic work of Gregory Crewdson [3]. The large scale allotments contribute to the aspiration for “rural” living, but in fact only amplifies suburban issues such as lack of privacy and the enchainment to maintenance of manicured “front lawns” albeit on a magnified scale [1,4].

The building’s exterior seeks to disappear, stealth-bomber like, in to the shadows of the existing, adjacent mature pine trees [5]. In turn, this seemingly non-material “shadow” in the landscape is resolved by pushing the diagram which generated its siting and rooms layout to the limit, without affectation. The result is a blunt background upon which a level of finessing - profiled gutters, broken flashing and window arrangements and even the applied satellite dish are among many elements added-on in a “toy-like” manner.

“... this enabled us to look to this site for the central view corridor for minimal intrusion in the future …”

Scott, GRC 4 June 2006

“... choosing a site for two houses that don’t yet exist that will look like that and placing a house in relation to that …”

Gerard, GRC4, June 2006
The blunt, subtly twisted and tapering external envelope [7] is contrasted by a dramatic interior, formed by breaks in the linear plan - so that all spaces, both public and private, have a share of the view [8] - into non-orthogonal facets that lock together to reform the overall single external form [9]. The result is an internal sequence of varied spaces, each setting the occupant up in a different relationship to the external environment. At two points, the tightly-packed interior is pulled apart, where the occupant is “exposed” to the outside and the outside seeks to flow through unabated. In turn, these locations reveal the internal complexity via their indented and angled external glazing.

A series of rooms are geared to particular views ... circulation squeezes along the back [11] and eventually flicks through to the other side .... the reference within the office to this pen knife [10] is a reference to the toy-like quality of this thing ... a form that was generated from our understanding of this being a long, low stealth-like object in the landscape, just poking its head up and then disappearing again and the width was generated from pragmatic concerns for the width of the two cars and the entry at one end and the width of the living room at the other ... there was a logic within the plan that actually arrived at the final form.

Scott, GRC 4, June 2006

This house as “blunt toy” has elements of finesse in the armature-like stuck-on profiled gutters and horizontal metal flashing stripes across the long facades [5] – which recalls an earlier house, Tranmere House whose horizontal façade striped sought to accentuate the house in a thirty kilometre valley. These embellishments add to the “toy-like” quality of the object sitting quietly in the open setting and give another layer of meaning to the house when viewed up close which differs from the blunt object in the landscape when viewed from a distance.


PROJECT DATA: CLIENT: Mr. Anthony Bratt. PROJECT BRIEF: Private residence. PROGRAM: 3 bedroom, 2 bathroom, kitchen and adjacent dining room, living room, outdoor terrace, garage, storage, wine cellar. SIZE: 275sqm. BUDGET: $400,000. PROJECT TEAM: Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe, Gerard Reinmuth, Sophie Bence, Danica Taylor.
From an architectural point of view, the line provides both a means for the analysis of a site and a building, and so for the articulation and development of those landmarks and the surrounding environment, and evident too in the physical plan of the structure – most obviously in the arrangements of corridors, stairways, doors and windows – and in the composition of the spaces by that built structure, and, indeed, of the site, but is interdependent with those elements, modifying and being modified by them.

The Liverpool Crescent house is a good example of this latter point, although it is also a building that might be supposed, contrary to the comments immediately above, to constitute,
Dealing with the problems of an expanding office - which carries with it new project types, sites and clients – in parallel with the masters program has enabled reflection on our role as curators and directors of the practice in a very focused manner.

When commencing the masters program we were experiencing an office expansion and thus were in the early stages of identifying the problem of how to take a design process between the three Directors – in whom it had essentially been driven by to date – in to a realm that involved multiple “hands”, acknowledging that unlike our early projects, we were unable to retain total control over the many levels of designing in our office in such a direct way.

We became aware of the potential for the thwarting of design work by our “generous” office climate whereby we seek to vest the utmost authority with respective project architects, enabling an open design collaboration spirit extended to includes modes of representation that often reflected the inherent skills of individuals on particular projects. Furthermore, our desire to actively involve clients in a collaborative manner during the design process also has the potential to undermine our previous manner of designing - especially when encountering different client types for the first time such as multifaceted government client bodies.

In summary, an “open” office design environment crossed with constraints initiated by stricter procurement process’s resulted in a loss of control and direction in the design of some projects in the office during this experimental period. This realization lead to our understanding of the need to “take control” at key moments – not as a domineering management approach but to assist the project in clarifying and moving forward.

Taking control is generally in the manner of a project’s underlying concept or “story”, as often the project has run off course from its agreed understanding. The design statements that are often written at the outset of a project to “capture” a conceptual position and are reflected upon and updated throughout a project’s life had been a mechanism to which we had maintained control of a project when the exchange was solely between ourselves in the practice’s infancy. Now the necessity for an “armature” around the project such as a clear “story” or conceptual position was necessary when the project was placed in the hands of more people within the office, many of whom had limited experience with the manner in which we had previously operated.

Also, the existence of a clearly articulated design position could be beneficial in the collaborative approach with clients. Discussion around the true essence of the project was favoured over more personal critiques that suffer in the absence of an agreed over-arching position.

The act of taking control is manifest in our office structure, in particular the “remoteness” afforded by having a Director in each office and thus distanced from the day-to-day issues surrounding a particular problem and thus preventing the Director or staff in that circumstance the opportunity to truly reflect on the problem in light of the over-arching design intent.

In moments of extreme desperation and angst, to “take control” we take ourselves offline in a sense; removing ourselves from the pressures and distractions of daily practice. Historically, this has been in the form of some opportunistic moments such as late-night discussions when we stay overnight in respective cities, even whilst jogging whilst in another city lecturing. The necessity to go off line and “take control” has been realized sufficiently to frequently warrant scheduled discussions between ourselves, generally out of business hours and away from the office. During the Masters, these periods were “rediscovered” and redeployed with an awareness not present in the earlier years of the practice.

“The panel discussed various models for the roles of the players, auteur, director, author, critic, curator, designer.”
Leon van Schaik, GRC 2 panel comments, May 2005
This essay has argued for a specific interpretation of the quest for a ‘creative opening’ in relation to the conception of place. Objects of architecture execute such an opening due to their normative character. Rather than by following a poetics, these objects themselves form part of the rule-giving process. In order to understand the sources and dynamics of the emerging grammar, this essay investigated three key notions related to the creative process: synthesis, poiesis and autonomy.

In conclusion the analysis suggests that TERROIR objects be understood as constitutive elements of a poetics of indeterminacy of the inner and the outer. This grammar of indeterminacy is markedly set out in TERROIR morphology. TERROIR objects are particularly striking where the ambiguity of inside and outside is not instantiated in an eccentric way but where the ambiguity as such is suspended. The eccentricity which marks the oscillation between transparency and perspicuity, certainty and doubt, clarity and opacity, understanding and bewilderment gives rise to the idea of a virtual point of reconciliation and lasting equilibrium. For good reasons however, the objects of TERROIR manage to instantiate the indeterminacy only rhapsodically. The suspension is reached only in rare moments of transience, which gives the objects an aura of vibrant fragility and elusive beauty.

The “SHFA Foyer” [1] is a component of a larger project [2] designed and documented in the first part of 2006. The design process faced many difficulties, including the need to respond to a previous DA by another architect, the difficulties of working within an existing site, and the difficulties inherent in designing and documenting a project which is simultaneously being presented as it develops to a client on a weekly basis.

To assist in the acceleration of the project, a number of decisions were taken regarding the management of the design process which in turn affected that process. Many of these decisions stem from the “generous” design climate of the practice:

- Vesting an executive authority in regard to client and consultant management with the Project Architect;
- Increasing the opportunity for the design collaborator to affect the process, both in terms of the design itself and the mode of representation used;
- Deciding to involve the client in a collaborative design mode, via regular weekly updates and an open approach to the reportage of the current design status.

While much is positive in the design environment created, the intersection of that environment with the constraints of the procurement process resulted in a loss of control of the design on a number of layers:

Externally, the regular reportage of inconclusive design positions to the client resulted in a misdirection of this process as the client could not understand the nature of the “weak intelligence” through which we wanted the design to develop. Pressures of time and the client’s own reportage requirements locked down certain aspects of the project in isolation prior to the formation of a cohesive concept for the whole.

Internally, the need for regular presentation to the client resulted in a heavy reliance on the digital environment as a design tool given the ability to quickly produce three-dimensional outputs [3]. At its most extreme, this led to the focus of design discussions around renderings from that model reviewed on screen, usually within the context of emails sent to the design team by the primary design collaborator.

This process led to a loss of design control – by the simplification of the design process to a series of manoeuvres in response to two-dimensional outputs, and the feeding of these outputs back to the client who exerted further impact in addition to locking down certain aspects of the design as a result of conclusions made in response to these representations.

When this was realized, a process of design recovery was implemented. This recovery was focused around an insistence that the design collaborator move out of a screen environment into a physical environment for the production of representations. This was accompanied by a formal space in the design program that could be created on the basis of emerging technical and design issues and thus created some time without client input.

“... do a cardboard model on the computer!”
Gerard to collaborator.
We got in this perverse situation where the person on the computer is not very comfortable in cardboard which is interesting because their ability is very high in the computer so we started having to get computer models built as cardboard models so we could try to understand what we were doing. We still weren’t quite getting there so we kept talking about the “Chinese box” [6] and explaining the action of folding this thing which in a singular action would solve the bridging quality [4], the light quality above and so on. We finally forced one model out of them to actually test and just feel; to feel what it’s like to make a thing out of cardboard and fold that thing around [7]. It started to get there, we applied that back to the cardboard models that were happening in the office in other areas, because different people in the office were hovering around with less concern about playing in our usual format if you like. And then we finally got to this point where we’re still searching for the final resolution of the problem that’s got to the blunt of the instruction, to actually just do a cardboard model in the computer. And this is where the project is left for the point of this presentation, having recovered that object, we’ve of course worked back out again in terms of solving obstruction issues, lighting issues and so on and so on [8].”

Gerard, GRC 4, June 2006

The resultant process recovered a level of clarity in regard to the design. The focus on physical models led to consideration of the conceptual operations driving the resolution of the foyer diagram rather than more pictorial “view” related design adjustments and discussions. Having gone back to physical models, the design collaborator was then able to return to the digital realm and produce a sort of “cardboard” model in virtual space.

This new model contained the intelligence of the physical model and its operative qualities without diminishing the potential of the digital realm to extend the development of the design in ways that would not be possible without it.

This emphasis on the conceptual operation enabled a stronger position to be put to the client, with its own internal logic. Thus, separate opinions regarding appearance were diminished in importance when compared to discussions of an appropriate response to the conceptual operation.

The final result has a clarity more reminiscent of the practice’s best work than the earlier design proposals which demonstrate a level of formal dexterity but lack the purpose and focus of the solution currently under construction.

This project was important in terms of understanding a productive means of taking control – and one which preserves the design climate of the practice while also ensuring a level of curation of the process by Directors. By taking control in terms of the client management process and of the mode of design exploration, the project was bought into focus without diminishing the role of others in the collaboration. Rather, a education in regard to the practice’s design concerns and the need to adopt a multi-faceted toolset to explore them, took place. This is an important result for a practice which does not desire expansion without confidence that design quality will be compromised, while simultaneously desiring that staff in an expanded practice can operate in a meaningful way and with a high level of ownership over projects.
This project faced very different concerns to the other two which address the process of taking control. Complexities of client or of teams with multiple members were not the issue here. Rather, the case study evolved from a desire to vest a significant ownership of the project with a senior but relatively new team member.

In collaboration with and in some cases driven by the team member, a position was quickly reached in regard to the conceptual framework of these projects, particularly in regard to the way in which they locate themselves in the urban realm. This work was very positive. The unclarified aspect of the project was the impact that this urban position was to have upon the development of the formal language of the object itself.

What emerged was an intriguing situation where the dilemma of the practice’s own language (as expressed to date in projects) and the desires of a new team member to respond to that come to the fore.

This unfolded as follows. Firstly, the primary urban connection to be made by the project – across a main street [6] – was made in a literal manner. Lines were literally drawn across the intersection [2] – as a direct and considered response to the urban design strategy – and the building emerged as a landscape object occupying these lines [3]. In addition to making a large landscape gesture, the form of these interventions could be said to be “familiar” to the practice [4,5].

However, in many ways the project was a facsimile of a TERROIR project. While the outcome resulted from a genuine and faithful attempt to operate within the practice idiom, the danger emerged that it could become a parody of the practice approach. The history of larger practices which have deteriorated to this situation where new staff work “within the idiom” of the practice became familiar.

In this case, the inability to distribute program within the formal arrangement in a satisfactory manner provided the window through which the failure of the design could be understood. Rather than a synthesis between the urban approach, a formal response and the resolution of programmatic issues, a disconnect between all three was evident.

The decision was taken to terminate the development of this design and reconsider the project from the agreed urban design position onward. This occurred during a period in Brisbane where Scott and Gerard were both guests at QUT for a week. This distance from the practice provided space to make this review – taking control of the project in a moment outside the pressures and distractions of daily practice.
While anecdotal, it is worth noting that the recasting of this project occurred during an extended run Scott and Gerard made one morning around Brisbane [7]. The relevance of this is the way in which this session accords with the “midnight to 2am” design sessions Gerard and Scott frequently undertook during a 3-year period when Gerard was in Hobart on a fortnightly basis. The effectiveness of these sessions – exchanges where the subconscious was allowed to take hold as projects were radically rethought outside the “rational” nature of daytime conversations – has been long understood. In this case, a similar opportunity (a run in Brisbane) led to a cyclical conversation which gradually unwound the project logic as it stood.

The result was a new approach – far more lyrical than the existing design and more reliant on supple connections within the project content [8]. The desire to connect across the intersection was rethought in terms of the project site and its predominant characteristics (a blue gum avenue). The constraints resultant from these trees (no work inside the root-ball area) led to a mapping of these root-balls to ascertain the buildable area [9]. The geometry which resulted – a set of circular intersections between these mapped constraints – inspired the development of additional “virtual” trees to define the allocation of program.

A number of realisations emerged during the reflection on this process. Firstly, problems associated with staff working within a perceived “terroir idiom” were understood. The need to encourage staff to work within the logic of the idea (as opposed to a perception of how we might solve a problem) was realized. Secondly, the value of “offline” sessions between Scott and Gerard, to collect thoughts and “play” with the idea, was reiterated. The final result is a significant one for the practice – a project which embraces landscape concerns but at a different scale and within a different context to much of the practice’s work, but which, in embracing these issues, pushes through to an unexpected formal language derivative of the conceptual idea and not from an application of a “house style”.

1. Sketch by Gerard and Scott. 2. Diagram of intent to “stitch” cross road and unite natural landscape on both sides. 3. Early plan. 4. Early model. 5. Early model using formal interventions that were “familiar” to the office. 6. View of site. 7. Gerard and Scott running in Brisbane. 8. Sketch. 9. Digital image developing the idea. 10. Plan
terroir as a state of mind ... 

... DIRECTORS CUT

RMIT GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND RESEARCH
MANAGING NEW TECHNOLOGY ("TOOLS")

CONTEXT

The introduction of new technology into the practice of architecture is not a new problem, nor is it a problem specific to our practice. Rather, the lack of a position on technology has had its benefits, with technologies picked up in a relatively pragmatic matter. For example, the tyranny of distance between Directors resulted initially in a rapid transfer of facsimiles between offices and developed into an email-based design discussion with its inherent benefits of being able to involve more people in the discussion and use different electronic communicative means. The potential to extend this discussion with digital drawings from Tablet PC's placed us as an early adopter of this technology.

Given the comfort with which these adoptions of new tools occurred, a change in mode – via an intense focus on technology – created a productive disruption. This "intense mode" came in the form of our sponsorship of a new PhD program – embedded practice – run by Mark Burry/SIAL at RMIT and featuring a core member of the practice as a member of the first intake.

Thus, 5 months after our Masters commenced, Sarah Benton (our only Associate and key design collaborator on many projects) started this PhD program. The disruptions were significant, including new pressures on Sarah's time, new staff with technology skills but without Sarah's historical knowledge of our process, challenges to our process via the PhD, testing of new procedures as part of the PhD, and Sarah's own personal challenge in locating her design-focused role within the SIAL environment (and its emphasis on production).

Thus, for the first time, technology became "an issue". The intense level of experimentation was bound to create difficulties and these became a subject for reflection and discussion during the Masters program. The means to ameliorate these issues were discussed at length, particularly in regard to our tutoring of Sarah in regard to her PhD and the subsequent conclusions that form the basis of that PhD (due for completion in March 2008). Given this, much of the material exists elsewhere (Sarah's PhD) and is not discussed at length here. Our focus in this reflection on our masters program is in presenting cusp moments where our use of technology is exemplar. In the two examples this use has been most evident as it arose from projects in "crisis".

"This grappling with new forms of visualizing and designing, in which their intention was focused on how to make this work for them has serendipitously revealed to them what their architectural actuality consists of."

Leon van Schaik, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006

The clarity of reflection offered by Tom Kovac who made the following observations (penultimate GRC presentation, June 2007) is our most succinct account of how we use technology. Considering Tom's awareness of contemporary technology in design we have no reservations in reciting his observation. Our practice "works with technology, through technology" and "our work is beyond technology – it's about trusting humanness – technology can aid us but not inform us."
This canopy is part of the urban interface of the project at 86-88 George Street, and is integral to the design of the podium upon which it sits [1]. While the schematic design was well understood, the refinement of the object was commenced at the later part of the design and documentation process. The decision was made to confirm the podium geometry before completing the canopy given the interrelation of the two.

This decision made good strategic sense in our view but did create a particular pressure in terms of the little time available to bring the canopy to completion. Given the newfound reliance of team members on digital technology to “speed up” the design to documentation transition, the design was kept in the digital realm. However, this decision was found to create particular difficulties, both in terms of the design itself and the iterative process between Scott/Gerard and the designer.

In regard to the design, the use of digital tools (in this particular case, with an emphasis on 3DS) exerted a particular influence on the designer and thus on the design itself. In particular, the “malleable” nature of models in the digital realm (as opposed to card or plastic models) created difficulties [3].

The core difficulty was related to “literalism” in that an idea (a canopy as a fuzzy “smudge” on the edge of the podium) could be literally created. As a result, the form of the canopy structure became increasingly complex, wobbling in a literal response to the idea of a fuzzy object. Concerns arose, both in regard to the “familiarity” of the object and its ability to relate to the geometry of the podium (which had been determined by a combination of sketches and digital work) and also in regard to constructability [4].

The second issue was that of the iterative process and the ability of Scott/Gerard to interface with the object. Similarly to the foyer, responses could occur via a two-dimensional (screen) interface. This created similar problems, particularly in regard to the absence of the “toy” in the design process [2] – the object around which collaboration could occur and discussions could focus.

“... there’s also this desire to unite it back to the building as you’re coming down George street from the city, the canopy will almost flick you up to the façade of the heritage building [6] ... a crumpled little handkerchief back in the corner, flicks you from the podium back up to the building.”

Scott, GRC 4, June 2006
A circuit breaker was again required and again it took the form of a scale model [7]. This move was made by the collaborator involved without instruction, thus confirming the value of a team who has reflected upon our process and its strengths and weaknesses. In building the model, changes to the design (reflecting the material of the model) also reconciled the object in regard to its actual materiality and the capacity of that material to take on complex form [8]. Simultaneously, the model address a number of fronts: the connection between form and materials, the relation of the object to its podium context [9], and the provision of an object around which conversations could coalesce.

In summary, this experience was invaluable as it provided its own lessons but also compounded lessons from adjacent projects. That the recovery of the project was again focused around an insistence that the design collaborator move out of a screen environment into a physical environment does not in any way diminish the power of digital tools – rather, it is a reminder to deploy alternate toolsets in response to the aspect of the design problem at hand. Rather than diminish the use of digital tools, this exercise increased our confidence in regard to the management of design tools and with this confidence, greater potential exists for its further use.

“...yet they still wished to be “holding the model”, wondering what the model holds.”
Leon van Schaik, GRC 4 panel comments, June 2006

“... to do with the digital influence in the office, we’re now in the position where someone could give us a sausage. There was a point that I remember sitting in the office literally on a one-to-one, real time basis, being able to manipulate the sausage. I think there again was the point where we just knew we almost literally had to take control because the sausage was going any way we wanted to, all understanding that it wasn’t sitting comfortably.”
Scott, GRC 4, June 2006

“... so the thing at this point was trying to understand or trying to remember something about the action of each cardboard model, something about the way they resolve problems for us, and trying to understand how we deal with that in another medium which remains unresolved to the current question.”
Gerard, GRC 4, June 2006

“...what of all the marks that result from an active engagement with a site? Smudges, scratches, blurs?”
Leon van Schaik, GRC 3, October 2005

“... if there was an idea at all at this point it was actually that we would make a smudge ...”
Gerard, GRC 4, June 2006

1. Canopy rendering. 2. Client likened canopy proposal to a “toy” dinosaur. 3. Digital options for the canopy structure. 4. Detail of digital proposal for canopy structure giving us a “line” that was unfamiliar. 5. Digital image of canopy and forecourt. 6. Concept sketch showing canopy in profile uniting the building (left) and forecourt. 7. Model (balsa and cardboard). 8. Director comment (in red) over a model image taken during a consultant workshop meeting. 9. Digital aerial view.

PROJECT DATA: CLIENT: Sydney Harbor foreshore Authority. PROJECT BRIEF: Canopy over external dining area. BUDGET: Part of $7,000,000 redevelopment. PROJECT TEAM: Scott Balmforth, Richard Blythe, Gerard Reinmuth, Tamara Donnellan, Sarah Bentor.
A new client for a commercial project (Peppermint Bay) also presented us with the opportunity to design his new house in a bush site on the edge of an escarpment at Fern Tree, in the foothills of the imposing Mount Wellington that rises to 1800 metres at its pinnacle behind Hobart. At our first meeting, the client showed us a previous proposal for the house; a mediocre, standard suburban 2 storey dwelling.

The primary site response came from significant views to the south from the escarpment edge; to the dual waterways of the Derwent River mouth and North West Bay (a view split down the centre by a naturally vegetated hill in the foreground) [2]. The winding and weaving nature of the approach dirt road through the bush land lead to an architectural response in the form of a line in the landscape as a continuation of previous investigations by the practice to date into the formal and spatial potential of a singular line in a powerful landscape setting, such as Orange Line.

A "poché" space created on the rear of the timber wall was to contain the house within a singular element; roof and walls in profiled metal-cladding. This metal-clad object varied in its distance from the timber wall, narrow at the approach end before opening out to the double-headed view to the south.

The singular quality of the timber line through the landscape and the metal-clad element behind, was a desire to eschew any notion of domesticity or romantic “rural” habitation, particularly aggressive in its contrast to the original house sketch for the site the client had showed us. We were seeking a monumental object which navigates its landscape setting and provides both a “place” to inhabit within that landscape and a backdrop to it.

The potential of the project’s concept that we jointly determined from our initial reading of the site was lost in the early stages when the initial sketch [3] and ‘story’ was quickly transferred in to a utilitarian “plan” [4]. This was due to many factors, including; the desire of a demanding client anxious to compare our version of his ‘house’ against his previous arrangement and us not understanding our process of working through a concept in an operational sense which this masters program has enabled a greater understanding of.

Due to a series of client changes over a three year period we documented this project four times and each time was a further realization that for various reasons (some recurring and some new)- such as client demands, in appropriate resourcing, lack of focus – we were continually “losing” the project. By the fourth iteration, the project had unwound to the extent that it was unfamiliar to us both, and rather than understanding the dysfunctional course it had taken from our original strong design principles we were in fact hoping, nervously, that we were “seeing” a new development in our oeuvre before us. On reflection, the distance of the project from our practice’s design methodology proved this was not so.
The key point in the recovery of the design was our acknowledgement that the thing that underpinned our initial site observation was “seeing” the landscape in a particular way, however, still lost we embarked on our safety net of mass model production to try to understand how to move the project forward. In excess of thirty models were made.

At this point our office was rapidly expanding, particularly in new digital techniques through the engagement with the SIAL programme also at RMIT. Sarah, a practice Associate who was enrolled in the SIAL programme had commenced using animation as a design tool. To understand the way the project had “lost” itself, Sarah created an animation sequence that began with the original concept and culminated in the most recent design [1].

This morphing of original and current design opened new possibilities. Our act of “taking control” of the project was to find a point in the animation where the project finally spoke back to us in a manner that we had rediscovered the project [6]. It was a true “Directors Cut”. The original way we see the landscape was revealed with greater polemic than it’s original manner; the design was now actively drawing the landscape in and additional images provided by new technology to the office further reinforced this unity [5].

Important for us in understanding how an expanding office deals with new “tools” – in this instance animation – we were not relying on the digital to produce the answer for us. Rather we were using new tools to capture a moment that was previously unseen.

“The window is the shape that suits the view outside. The mode is on a continuum between ‘taking in’ and ‘form making’, receptivity to giving out. Confronted with Mr Blunt you hide your sensibility, but remember the initial impulses from within. Taking-in-ness is easily jettisoned in favour of finding a form to keep Mr Blunt happy. A three way partnership can deal with this where a solo practitioner cannot produce enough quickly enough to keep Mr Blunt happy. When you say ‘undercooked, unfinished detail’, I see the elegant agricultural quality of the work. Exquisite, jewel-like.”

Allan Powell, GRC 3, October 2005
PHASE THREE

INTRODUCTION

The competition for the Prague Library (Czech National Library in Prague) took on a critical importance in the Masters program, providing a “real time” opportunity to reflect upon Phase 2 but to capture these reflections via the use of the design mode in which we operate. This mode – based around a multi-locational collaboration held together via an intensive use of email – proved a perfect mechanism whereby the reflections on Phase 2 could be put into action.

In then reflecting upon the emails of the Prague process, we made two further discoveries:

- A fuller understanding of our design process (because of the amount of emails on record). This is opposed to Phase 2 where, without the full evidential account of the design process, we “saw” far less. Thus, there were no longer 4 key areas of enquiry but rather a wide family of issues that needed further curation to be understood; and

- We saw - in a direct evidential way due to the account - our “emotional intelligence” captured and playing out in the design process. Thus, this aspect of the process emerged as a cornerstone of our “reflected practice” in its own right.

If the Prague Library provided an opportunity for a real-time reflection upon the lessons from the Masters program, the reflection upon that reflection provided a lens through which lessons for future practice became evident. Thus, a recap on the process to date can contextualise this realization and acts as a launching pad for future practice.

Phase 1 consisted of a reflection upon an already established mastery. This mastery was exhibited in a full cross section of the practice’s work prior to 2004 of which the following projects are key:

- Library-Studio in Canberra
- Orange line
- Moens Klint
- Tolmans Hill House
- Peppermint Bay
- Hazards

In response to these projects, a level of analysis and critique followed. Much of the content of this is contained within the project pages included as part of this catalogue.

In Phase 2, a range of new projects were presented as they emerged. This presentation – during production as opposed to post production – exposed the vulnerability for these incomplete explorations. The areas of greatest vulnerability became portals through which different aspects of our practice could be queried.

While the logic of this enquiry seemed unclear at the time – concentrated as it was on problems as presented – the opportunity for reflection upon this phase provided clarity and a means of organizing this experience. Upon reflection at the end of GRC6, Phase 2 could be understood as a process whereby four current dilemmas were highlighted. These areas were: the need to widen our approach to landscape; the need to manage new technology and its implementation in the hands of others; an understanding of when we need to “take control” of the collaborative environment we have created; and an awareness of the character of the projects themselves, as “blunt toys”. As explored on the Phase 2 pages within this Catalogue, the projects presented during this period related to one or more of these issues and thus a matrix of projects and issues could be reflected upon.
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

TAKING CONTROL

Traffic police
Managing new technology/tools
Giving direction
Going off line

LANDSCAPE/CONTEXT

Defamiliarising the context
Seeing the problem

CONCEPTUAL OPERATIONS

Metaphor for operative effect
Toying with references
Using technology ('tools') to understand operative effects
Reflection in action
Conceptual rigor
Productivity in the 'for' and 'against' argument
Toying with ideas ... (testing the absurd against pragmatic issues).

Reflection on knowledge
Catholic references
humour
Negotiation and collaboration protocols

TAKING CONTROL

Built-in etiquette
Weak intelligence
Mutual respect
Conversational email
Trust
As explained in the introduction to this section, the competition for the Prague Library took on a critical importance given the “real time” opportunity it afforded for a reflection upon Phase 2 in the context of a projection forward into a new project. Thus, this competition offered something of a model – completed during the masters – as to how we might project forward. This model exists in the form of real-time reflection via an email record of the design process.

Therefore, a review of these emails provided a further level of reflection into the way we work. The review took the form of a search through all 600 or so emails used in the competition for “trigger moments” that might provide some insight into how the issues addressed in Phase Two had evolved. However, in searching for evidence of these issues, an unexpected discovery was made – that the pluralistic and layered nature of our multi-authored design process defies such a simple ordering method. At its most extreme, each one of the 600 emails could be said to contain its own clue, its own issue, such that our four categories expanded to a number in the hundreds. The following pages show a small sample of some of these emails and are labelled with the key issue which emerged from each. They are included as exemplars, for to include all 600 would not shed any further light on our process in the context of this document.

These issues were as numerous as the emails containing them:

seeing the problem; seeing hidden potential in something; defamiliarisation of context; metaphor for operative effect; pushing the logic of a concept; normative process; conceptual rigour; avoiding contrivance; productivity; using technology to understand operative effects; blunt toys; toying (with ideas and with references); reflection in action; reflection on knowledge; taking control; acting as traffic police; going off line; giving direction; managing new technology; trust, respect; etiquette; humour; negotiation and collaboration; conversational email; weak intelligence.

The full page image to the left is a map of the various issues raised, but re-ordered via a new, meta-organisational method. This method re-orders, via reflection, phase 2. “Taking Control” assumes a greater importance as it covers such a wide range of issues. On the other hand, the chapter in phase 2 – “dealing with new technology” – can now straddle both the “Conceptual Operations” and “Taking Control” categories as it is a subset of both these in different ways.

Having made this new summary, four headings emerge as areas of enquiry for the practice in design mode:

- Landscape/Context;
- Conceptual Operations;
- Taking Control;
- Emotional Intelligence.

The significance of this list is as follows:

- Landscape/Context remains a major area of enquiry and a foundation for all projects;
- Conceptual Operations have developed over the life of the practice to consist of a range of methods of enquiry, always expanding but also aware of the history of methods previously used;
- Taking Control signifies a new awareness of the timing and methodology via which Gerard and Scott need to curate the design process in an expanding office; and
- Emotional Intelligence is a completely new discovery, explaining in simple terms the “character” of the design process and thus acts as a great signifier as to office culture generally.

With these four areas described, a clear description has emerged of the depth, character and particular skills involved in TERROIR’s design process. This description should provide an invaluable tool for current and future staff, while also enabling a projection on future practice, covered in the latter part of this Phase Three.
CATHOLIC REFERENCES

DEFAMILIARISATION OF CONTEXT
SEEING HIDDEN POTENTIAL IN SOMETHING

then there's an interesting relationship to the gory dancing house A.R. (Aust) while emailed through yesterday which noted an essential quality about prague (physical and spiritual) being - the connection between GROUND and SKY... in the SILOHOUETTE line in the interface between ground and sky

RE: PRAGUE: Letna Park / Letenske Sady Beer Garden

Gerard Reinmuth [reinmuth@terror.com.au]

skyline is first pic is interesting (fat line with periodic spikes), particularly reflecting on the early frieprise paneling as proposed building in relation to prague castle image.

RE: Prague: Kafka and Prague

Gerald Reinmuth

Kafka and Prague

Exhibition information on Franz Kafka:

Existential Space: In this first stage of our immersion into the world of Kafka, we look at what the city does with the water, how it shapes his life, the kind of stamp it leaves on him. Prague reacts on Kafka with all of its metamorphosing power, conferring upon it an existential space which he can only enter by "losing my gaze on the surface things". Prague forces Kafka into a spatial eschatological, perversely distancing its secrets. Prague contains the myth, its esoteric magic, a magnificent backdrop, but it abounds clarity. And this is precisely what Kafka desires.

He sees the city as a "dear little mother with chains", endowd with a past which is greater than its present, shielded by its charm, yet also raising a great, curiously threatening lid. His Daine and the viennese correspondence with his family, friends, lovers and editors bear witness to this influence. Our aim is to explore the city, seeing it from Kafka's points of view. An exclusively biographical or merely chronological approach would not be enough; the challenge lies in condensing the principal conflicts in the life of Kafka in Prague, guided by the writer's own space. This means jumping Kafka on his footstool into the depths of his city, admiring himself to the seminal range and cognitive register, becoming involved in a slow distortion of space-time - in short, agreeing to an experience where everything is allowed except indifference.

Imaginary Topography: The way Kafka creates the layers of his city is one of the most enigmatic operations of modern literature. With the odd exception, Kafka does not name the places he describes in his novels and short stories. The city steps back, no longer recognizable by its buildings, bridges and monuments. And even if they are recognized by an inhabitant of Prague or a student of Kafka, they have become something else.

People are keen to import real Prague places in Kafka’s fiction. It is generally recognized that the anonymous cathedral in The Trial is none other than St. Vitus cathedral, and that the path taken by Joseph K. in the last chapter leads from the Old Town to the other limits of Malastrana, over Charles Bridge. It is also said that in The Judgement, from Georg Bernolak’s window, we recognize the wolf, the river, the opposite bank of the Moldau, just as they could be seen from Nilastrana, where the Kafka family lived at 102. Efforts have been made to prove that the topography of Prague is a constant which simply goes unrenamed.

Yet this is not what really matters. In his fiction, Kafka carries out a more difficult operation: he turns Prague into an imaginary topography which transcends the fantasy of reality. Kafka’s phantasmic architecture has other aims. Rather than a letterhouse, school, office, church, prison or castle—being important, it is not these constructions in which they act as topological metaphor or allegorical shafts. What surprises does this transfigured Prague hold in store? And how far can the metamorphosis of a city take us?

Reinemuth Bythe Bairdylo TERROR

“Visitlo”

10 Elizabeth Street

Holley 745-7355
Avoiding Contrivance

Conceptual Rigour

I'm still uneasy that we're costing a path when we get up to the top plateau, perhaps some could be said of PSMM's kind, but our PE had a strong anchor of the London path and maybe we'd build the building as knot between science (cocept) and a relatively short distance to the prescribed/resting point down the gun. Therefore within these archetypes/structures we were then able to fluid and play with outline. Different thought entering and playing the line simultaneously at this stage - make sense?

If I keep playing/working at this path of encirclement, ours drawing a line that as an 'allegorical commentary by myself' is not immediately recognisable beyond the existing traces on the landscape field to the plateau... thoughts?

towards, to complete the 'self' is first instance however, can your do a path mapping of the (preposed) underground road which will offer in line and speed to the existing main road.

however, refer my sketch over below for a couple of other things:

red line denotes what I keep being... us occupying the top left corner of a defined park... just finished geometries by half/half and the family (other shared family tragedy)... what also do you call it when the family’s own home in to a man-sized cup overnight and eventually dyes a (natural death)? and curiously they concluded with a walk in a (that) park... symbolic of starting anew, blossoming... a new chapter.

I think the blue and yellow are interesting in regards to paths;

yellow is where I understand to be the key existing city paths when the city has confronted its landscape... in bridges over man and paths up the encirclement (harps one is existing road to top plateau and others are ceremonial roads) - and I recall even caves... up where stain status once stood... by nature, these are very regular paths where nature yields

blue is where the city has grown in a complex web system... sometimes very closed (old city) and other times more open weave (top of plateau)... therefore paths through these areas would be multiple and complex... optimised in the open public land where freedom of movement enables complete freedom of movement.

... perhaps this applies to a 'benificial' circulation system within our library of -

key regular paths (access clearly established informal network) as a primary network between key features... a single point of entry (library) to public archive facility, then, -

-MULTIPLE circulation potential throughout such area... is trams/motorised maze (not singular labyrinth system) like book stacks within the archive.
PUSHING THE LOGIC OF A CONCEPT

In condensing the key aspects, Gerard has drawn on past diagrams and addenda and added a further forecast.

Reflection in action

Scott Bailsworth [bailsworth@coerio.com.au]

To: Gerard Reamsholt

Subject: Prague: bg_revvel

57
REFLECTING ON PROCESS

CONTEXT

“Reflecting on your process is your process. There are two elements; performance and emotion.”
Ranulph Glanville, GRC 5, June 2006

Given the reflection and organisation of these reflections undertaken as a result of the Prague process, we have devised a tool via which projections on future practice can be made and measured against.

This tool thus demanded from us an atypical approach – that is, a variant from the usual path which is to design a single project as an exemplar of future practice. Rather, many current projects, still in the design phase, are occurring with this knowledge available and thus can be analysed in the context of these 4 categories. Our projects on future practice are therefore occurring in real time – as far into the future as we can reasonably advance while still showing project design work.

In selecting exemplars then, we have deferred to exemplar categories from our Prague analysis rather than exemplar projects – that is, the projects in this part of the document are not the subject, but rather the content. The subjects selected from our range of reflections are five in total and are as follows:

- Metaphor for operative effect
- Using technology (to understand operative effect
- Defamiliarisation of context
- Trust in real things
- Humour

In each case, the category has been deconstructed as follows:

- The demonstration of this category via an exemplar from the Prague competition email set
- Insight into previous work of the practice to find and explain an example of this category previously occurring
- Demonstration of this category being present in a current project

Thus, a “swizzle stick” is pressed into the history of the practice, seeing through and projecting forward, and the climate we have created at Terroir for designing can be understood and will hopefully enable a greater intelligence on future projects.

“Brave, straightforward, generous, factual. Revealing what the design process yields, what it does not....”
Sand Helsel, GRC 5, June 2006
REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

METAPHOR FOR OPERATIVE EFFECT

Through the reflection on practice that this masters program entails, we have discovered recurring metaphors that until recently have not been understood as prime references yet which have been part of the design dialogue on many projects—a fact that is traceable by delving into the archive of emails between ourselves. Prague was often referred between ourselves as a “carpet-bag steak” [3] where a steak is sliced open and pocketed with an alternate food, most commonly oysters. Again, there is a similarity between design and obscure references in the difference between inner and outer. Who would ever have thought that Jean Nouvel’s Tokyo Opera scheme would be compared to a menu option we are both familiar with from a popular steak eatery in Hobart!?

Designing Prague included reference to a “carpet bag steak” in the manner in which we were lifting the ground and ‘pocketing’ the archive ‘eggs’ underneath the park [2].

“You seem to agree on a metaphor or metaphors that hold the discussion, deferring the coming to form.”
Sand Helsel, GRC 5, June 2006

RE: Prague the City of a Hundred Spires
Sarah Benton [Benton@percor.com.au]
To: Scott Balintirth
[20/10/2005]

Like a ‘carpet bag’ steak (recall this reference in PB early days) the ground is lifted/shifted to accommodate the extra space needed for the library... this is both OUTSIDE and INSIDE space... the INSIDE spaces comprising secret, treasure-like vaults housing archives, library special collection etc... materiality of copper as per previous to contextual in a different manner the ‘special material of otherwise prague’ spires etc...

carpet bag steak with shifted ground to accommodate more mammoth carpark and a copper cup...
front line shown vaults as parking/public space and open jewel as the archite...
METAPHOR FOR OPERATIVE EFFECT

The tranche back in to past emails revealed a reference during the design of Peppermint Bay to a “carpet bag steak” [1] in regards to the conceptual operation of lifting the ground to form a place for visitors [2].

Thus, we can see this metaphor having a greater importance than its single usage in the Prague project and can understand it as a signifier of a greater “intelligence” operating in regard to our design approach.

This recurrence of metaphors for operative effect is a major reason why Tom Kovac in our GRC6 panel review noted:

“... the work refers back upon itself ... it investigates itself ... betters itself ... looking at the last project I can see the beginning ...”

Tom Kovac, GRC6, June 2007
Our design process often features repeating metaphors that are derived from natural occurrences. These metaphors often first arrive due to a very specific project situation but, when successful, recur through other projects.

In this case, the metaphor of a glacial action first entered our lexicon in the Moens Klint competition, undertaken in 2001. Of note is the manner in which the reference to the glacier in this instance was ‘introduced’ [2+3] due to a real connection to the historic glacial action that had determined the topography at Moens Klint [1].

Since then, the action of a glacier has been a frequent reference for operative effect. The sublime character of a glacier has similarities with another oft referred object; the stealth bomber. The potent yet ‘quiet’ force – and in the glacier’s sense the slowness of time - shared between the two is something recognised in our projects as identified by Tom Kvan at GRC 6, June 2007;

“Time is curiously absent from the projects….blunt toys are static, there’s an absence of time.”

Tom Kvan, GRC6, June 2007
The use of a glacier as a metaphor for operative effect is exemplar in the design of a Canopy at Meadowbank (under construction) [5], where the form was understood as a glacier (conceptually) moving between the context of existing residential towers [1-4].

Here, the metaphor was used not for its relation to a brief or context but due to the manner in which we wanted the canopy to exist. The metaphor thus determined the “character” of the project. Its use is therefore not random, but has been deployed in a precise manner in response to a particular problem.
The introduction of animation as a “tool” to the office design process was met with immediate success on the Fern Tree House project when Sarah, who had been introduced to animation techniques in the formative stages of her SIAL program, toyed with animating a project from its initial design to its current version having gone through much iteration. The opportunity availed by animation was to see hidden potential in something, via the realization of the project in a new version after we had taken control from the animation put before us [2].
USING TECHNOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND OPERATIVE EFFECT

With an appreciation of animation technology to our design process gained from Fern Tree House - to better understand the operative effects of the underlying “story” of a project - animation was used during the designing of two cabins at Douglas River on Tasmania’s East Coast (under construction) [8].

From their hillside location alongside an approach road to an existing house further up the hill, two cabins sit 50 metres apart but joined by an umbilical like dark fence line in the landscape [2+4], recalling an early investigation in the Canberra Library/Studio (unbuilt) [1].

They share the same expansive view out to the Tasman Sea to the east, but both cabins present this view in subtly different ways [5]; the lower cabin is through a compressed foreground landscape and the upper cabin has a more unrestrained prospect. This engagement with the view was a conceptual driver to the project, whereby the ‘compression’ and ‘release’ informed similar functional elements - 2 sleeping cells and a wet area cell – arranged in different ways.

An animation was requested to fully release the character of the lower compressed cabin releasing like a spring in to the upper cabin arrangement [8].

This project is currently under construction and the operative effect of compression and release is readable [6+7].
DEFAMILIARISATION OF CONTEXT

We increasingly use the new technology of “Google Earth” to provide an alien-like understanding of a context, stripped of any emotional or preconceived attachment to a place [1]. This use of Google Earth has not occurred however, but because we have had a long standing need to increase the methods via which we can strip a site of detail to assist in clarifying a project context.

The Prague Competition extended computer modeling techniques to include constructing context models with only enough detail to show us what we want to see, from our “alien” viewpoint, similar and complimentary to large scale site models previously built up in cardboard [2]. In to these models, devoid of content which may have distracted us, we were able to see primary characteristics of the place, in this instance the ordering lines of the edge of the escarpment and the main thoroughfare on top of the escarpment, and between which our site occupied.

“When you are unfamiliar with a place you can get greater understanding, more imagination … Self-alienation to strip back meaning to look at patterns in a clear way.”
Zeynep Menem, Comments at GRC4, June 2006
DEFAMILIARISATION OF CONTEXT

When presented with an opportunity to work in a new place - Maitland, on the edge of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales – we used “Google Earth” to defamiliarise the immediate suburban context of a major public facility, a bowls and recreation club (under construction) [3], and focus on the greater landscape [2]. The project, in particular the incorporation of a new roof that is viewed on approach, enabled a relationship beyond the bowling club’s immediate context to address the scale of the greater region’s landscape [1].

This suite of images to explain the project were used by Gerard (who was ‘leading’ this project) to introduce the project to Scott whom had never visited the site or region. Thus when Scott eventually visited the site once the design stage was fully underway, his “conditioning” maintained an alien-like awareness of context.

Operating in 2 different locations, Hobart and Sydney, enables one of us to hold and encourage a detached “alien” view and thus guards this conceptual driver to the design when the specific needs of a client and detailed issues with a project require attention. Thus, the “distance” we have structured in our office, and the use of modern technology such as “Google Earth”
“trust seems to be an issue in the process. One of you had been to Prague, so you could trust your experience; real experience converted into knowledge through reading, through pictures … how you establish such trust is a core matter for reflection”

Ayse Senturer, GRC 5, June 2006

“here’s a bit of velvet … can you lay it on the park?”

Scott, email to Sarah during Prague competition.

“Finding that the computer velvet lacked the suppleness of real material, Sarah reverts to the REAL THING to develop a more direct understanding of the nature of this material, before returning to the computer. [1]”

Gerard, reflection on Prague competition process, 21 October 2006

“Computer rendering wasn’t working so Sarah reverted to a sketch. [2]”

Gerard, reflection on Prague competition process, 21 October 2006
The vibrancy within such architecture is one that playfully oscillate between two possibilities. What is an appropriate form for an ice-cream stand on the edge of the lake, with Parliament looming on the horizon? The uncanny nature of the planned city and the formal nature of the setting result in small, blank timber boxes that read as sculptural installations within the projects are key elements in transforming a ceremonial space into an active public space with appropriate amenity for democratic use.

Commonwealth Place Amenities (under construction) [5] are located in the foreground of Old Parliament House on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin with an uncanny character – appropriate to such a planned city - from an absurd shift in the overarching geometry of the city plan. The silence of the objects are contrasted with a surprise created by a light filtering system under its canopy which recalls the light under the tree canopies adjacent [3].

An extract from Gerard's sketchbook [2] reveals a moment of trust in a real thing, in this instance a chocolate bar is readily understood by us both as having the cellular character we are desiring [1]. This reference is a familiar one, using a favourite topic of Gerard in particular – chocolate!! – it is a topologically closed object that describes to us the blank exterior and wondrous, nested interior that's shared with many other familiar references (Jean Nouvel’s Tokyo Opera Competition entry, stealth bomber…) and past projects (Peppermint Bay, Acton Park House, Liverpool Crescent House…) [4].

TRUST IN REAL THINGS

Real things are trusted for a shared understanding during a design discussion between us … anecdotally, this discussion was in a Melbourne café prior to meeting with master’s supervisor Leon van Schaik and regarding a project in Canberra to which we had recognised the need to use the opportunity together and off-line from our respective offices.

Humour is an important part of the emotional intelligence of Terroir. It often manifests in conjunction with other aspects gleaned from the reflection of this master program, for instance when toying with ideas, we will often test the absurd (humorous) against pragmatic issues and in conversational email.

The fast-paced nature of preparing a competition entry such as Prague left many traces of humour [1] ...

“... this idea of the story and the idea that three people in a way seem to need a story and tell stories to each other to be able to focus the work. Of course key elements in a story emerge and the fact that this story telling has very Australian humour at its core which is part of it as well”

Gerard, Terroir Book Symposium
HUMOUR

...a humorous image to “toy” with ideas (Hazards project) [1+2] ...

...and humour is often extended to other collaborators on a project. In this instance, an image was forwarded to mechanical consultants on a major project to portray the aesthetic character desired of a roof [3] ...

...and was quickly returned with their forecast proposition [4] !!!

This exemplar therefore confirms, via an external consultant, the awareness of our office “character” by those close to us and the centrality of humour as one of these characteristics.
TERROIR consists of two offices one based in Sydney and the other in Hobart. Both offices commenced in 1999. We have a total of 24 staff which consists of three directors, four associates and 15 other architectural staff, the various roles and expertise are noted below:

• Three Directors;

• Four Associates;

• Four Senior Project Architects (minimum 6 years experience);

• One Technical Specialist;

• One Interior Design Specialist;

• One Retail Design Management Specialist;

• Two Assistant Retail Design Managers;

• Three 3D Specialists;

• Ten Project assistants with university degrees;

• Two Student assistants;

• Two Administration assistants.
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**IMAGE REFERENCES**

Unless otherwise noted all photographs, sketches, hand models, digital paintings and drawings are by TERROIR. Images are credited by page number, and then reference number adjacent image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>IMAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 - 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>9 - 10</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>3 - 4</td>
</tr>
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