Mining the Continuum: Architecture Without Beginning or End

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Architecture and Design).

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author 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; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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dedication
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abstract
This dissertation researches twenty years of professional practice and demonstrates how architectural thinking is permeated by a cultural continuum. The work explores the proposition of open-ended architecture, whereby architecture resonates with preceding cultural values and awaits a new set of future values. Architecture is without beginning or end, but emerges in a context in flux.

The projects take their part in the continuum of cultural activity and references, contemporary culture being the brightest light of the moment. Contexts, whether urban or rural, are amalgamated from the cultural thinking of passing societies and communities.

The following research through practice and reflection has revealed to me a series of architectural notions: Continuum, Greater System, Subversion and Context. These are different lenses through which the connectedness of all architectural preconditions – time, place, culture – can be visualised. Such views have become the architectural preoccupation in my practice.

This research has thrown a light upon my fascination for locating my conceptual ideas for a project in the ever-changing historical, physical and functional context, right from the embryonic stage of the design. Whilst my practice has continuously evolved over the last twenty years a ‘mode of practice’ has developed to facilitate this architectural aspiration. As new technologies have come along, such as animation, they have been embraced and become part of my working method.
introduction
This Appropriate Durable Record (dissertation) comprises two volumes. Volume 1, entitled, ‘Mining the Continuum: Architecture Without Beginning or End’, is mirrored by an essay by Peter Tonkin entitled, ‘Making: History, Sculpture and Big Things’ in his complimentary dissertation.

Volume 2 is entitled ‘Jointly and Severally’, and explores the collective methodology and production of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects (TZG). It contains a catalogue of TZG’s built and major unbuilt projects, arranged chronologically, a brief history of the practice, a positioning of TZG’s architectural practice, an essay by Brian Zulaikha discussing his role in the practice, and three interviews conducted by Dr Elizabeth Farrelly with Tim Greer, Peter Tonkin and Brian Zulaikha.

This volume reveals the steps I took to find the threads of enquiry that run through my work when I am in the design process. My study is also aimed at discovering any patterns or modes of practice in my architecture. Finally, I seek to detect a connection between my background in a colonial New Zealand town and the kind of architectural notions that preoccupy me.

In order to reach these findings, I have isolated five TZG projects for which I am responsible, that span approximately ten years from 2002 to 2012. Architectural concepts occupy a space somewhere between imagination and reality but it is the process of making architecture that transforms a conceptual idea into a built reality, and it is the repetition of this action that makes the architect. So, I have explored these five projects for commonality in design process and in conceptual architectural ideas, irrespective of building type. In identifying these common themes, I have been hoping that they suggest to me patterns that become an abstract structural form of design procedure, an instrument that can be applied to future projects.

The patterns are there. During this study, my habitual modes of practice have sharpened in focus, which, unexpectedly, have made me more aware of how I design, and have allowed me to take more seriously the architectural ideas that I previously thought to be unrelated. Furthermore, the more I thought about the architectural ideas themselves, the more I recognised their connectedness. Then I was faced with the revelation that the notion of connectedness is crucial to my design practice.

The title of this dissertation, ‘Mining the Continuum’, goes some way to describing my research process, as well as hinting at the outcome I was working towards. I went in search of raw facts about my unconscious working methodology that, once understood, could be processed and used for future projects. This research was not about simply determining how I have practised until now; it was to unearth whatever in my past could be projected into the future, hence the notion ‘Architecture Without Beginning or End’. This subheading took on a meaning of much greater significance when the research lead me to a realisation: what really interests me is that I have been attempting to make the architecture resonate with preceding cultural values whilst at the same time setting the scene for the inevitable evolution of future values.
2 backstory
As this research takes the notion of the continuum as a central theme from which to explore a series of architectural ideas, there is no better place to start than peering into the past to get some understanding of those parts of my life that have informed my conceptual thinking as an architect. There are number of interests and events that, when isolated, offer up some reasoning to my approach to architecture and life in general.

**location**

I grew up in New Zealand on the colonial grid of Christchurch, a town set on the lower slopes of an alluvial plane, between the extinct volcano of Banks Peninsula and the geologically recent Southern Alps.

**sculptural landforms**

I was constantly drawn to sculptural landforms of the New Zealand landscape with its mountain peaks, hanging valleys and rugged coastlines.

**family**

I grew up being the youngest, by seven years, of three brothers. This may go some way to explaining my compatibility with being the youngest of the Tonkin Zulaikha Greer trio.

I never thought of myself as following in my brother’s footsteps, rather I observed their inevitably different approaches to similar situations. I was unknowingly cataloguing their methods and successes, in order to select my method when the time came to negotiate for the extra piece of chocolate, a night at a friend’s place or the most important tool of them all, the car.

From an early age I realised that we are always building on the actions of others.

**absence**

I had a happy upbringing but, from an early age, I was aware of an overwhelming sense of absence: an absence of human habitation in the landscape; an absence created by an uncompleted colonial city, with the grid promising the potential of the city, but with insufficient time to fulfil the promise of an urban environment; and an absence created by a transplanted culture – collective culture was studied not experienced.
two degrees and one long trip
I punctuated my architecture degree with two years in 1980s Europe (including an accidental diversion into Eastern Europe) where I discovered that history is experienced naturally, not studied.

I realised that the history of my childhood was imported from another place. I visited the work of Alvar Aalto, Hans Scharoun, Godfrey Bonn, and Enric Miralles in his architectural infancy.

berlin – an accidental diversion into eastern europe
It was a mixture of youthful innocence, ignorance of the German language and a dash of East German bureaucratic slackness that culminated in three architecture students standing at the blocked Brandenburg Gate on Unter den Linden. We looked from East Germany into West Germany, mistakenly thinking it was the other way round and empathised with those poor trapped East Germans on the other side.

It was not until our use of the West Berlin map became more and more fraught with anomalies that we realised our mistake – and, raising our head from the perplexing map and looking round, woke up to our surroundings of run down buildings and small belching cars.

We had bungled our entry to West Berlin and had obliviously breached a European border between East and West which, in those last days of the Cold War, might have had more serious consequences for us if our youthful luck hadn’t held.

In all the years since, this episode has left its mark on me, as it led me to believe that the environment in which we grow and whose codes we learn fundamentally directs how we perceive or ‘read’ architecture and our environment.

Architects speak a lot about architectonic values as a basis of architecture but what interests me is how these are rooted in cultural values. I have become fascinated by pre-architectonic values and their interpretation as a basis of my architecture.

hippies and post structuralists
In the two years I was absent from the Auckland School of Architecture, the Hippies had been flushed out and the Post Structuralists had taken over. One degree exposed me to two profoundly different architectural approaches.

the third building
At Architecture School, my final year sub-thesis design project was titled ‘Sweet Surrealism’. As a starting point I used the Surrealist notion of the search for evidence, constructed or otherwise, and applied this to a re-working of a sugar refinery on the north shore of Auckland Harbour. Setting out to assert that it was possible to develop architecture without reference to an architectural model or typology, I had mixed success. I did, however, discover that between the inherited artefact and the proposed newly designed addition or intervention emerged a ‘third building’, one with an indefinable and ethereal presence. Using this creative strategy, I have found that it is this ‘third building’ that prevails and endures with time. The architecture of it is not immediately tangible or explicable – and is defined rather by the mystique that it confers on the building as a whole, than by visible delineation.

1. My travelling companions were Nicholas Stevens who went on to establish Stevens Lawson Architects and the late Nicholas Murcutt who established Neeson Murcutt Architects.

brandenburger gate

Brandenburger Gate

Overseas Passenger Terminal

Whilst these anecdotes are diverse, there are a number of common threads that appeared to be fruitful for further investigation, or integration as in the case of the later Elizabeth Farrelly’s interview.
3 interview summary
introduction
If the backstory is a considered memory of my past, my interview with Dr Elizabeth Farrelly, like any good conversation, was refreshingly chaotic and anything but considered.

Elizabeth is one of Sydney’s most enduring and vocal social commentators, she has been a client of ours and has publicly commented on our work from time to time.

To some extent this interview is a natural foil to my backstory, with Elizabeth teasing away at seemingly complete ideas to reveal other unacknowledged impulses in my life and practice. Needless to say, she soon zoomed in on some tricky dark stuff. Before moving onto my thoughts about each of my projects, I will attempt to address some of the puzzling personal impulses that Elizabeth identified here whilst leaving the body of the interview to Volume 2.

Our education and professional lives have crisscrossed for some time which made for quite a project specific discussion. By leaving the interview to after the projects and ‘modes of practice’ have been introduced, hopefully the specifics of the discussion will make a little more sense.

restlessness
Elizabeth found a sense of restlessness in my approach to design, which I think is generated by a simultaneous fascination with history and the avant-garde. By ‘history’, I mean accessed summaries of collective endeavours – built and cultural - that survive today. By ‘avant-garde’, I mean an intended breech with history, and reference only to current or future cultural activity, that opens fresh possibility for new form. I had always thought of this simultaneity as my ideal understanding of ‘now’. She saw it more as being ‘caught’ between past and future, which in turn led to a sense of restlessness, oscillating between the two states.

The avant-garde, with my interpretation of it, above, may disregard history, but, by definition, it can not exist without it – history is captured in its definition as a necessary adversary or simply a possible reference point of comparison. To add further insult to the avant-garde, it is eventually consigned to history, where its currency is discharged. To some extent, I see my architectural thinking in this light, with new and radical impulses in opposition to accepted movements in architecture. Before long, the new and radical thoughts join the fold of the culturally documented or categorised.

dissent
Further prying led Elizabeth to identifying a compulsion to dissent, which I think is brought about by my radical dream-making inside a deeply conservative industry. While artists are expected to raise societal questions, architects are expected to answer them. This may have something to do with the fact that, as architects, we have a habit of affirming that we have all of the answers. To ask questions of society as an architect, and to propose alternatives to established typologies can be seen as dissent. I hope it is. The history of architecture has been shaped by dissent – as society changes so must the buildings that accommodate that society. Therefore such dissent could be seen as essential to the continuum of architectural history.

absence
Elizabeth focused in on a preoccupation with absence or, more importantly, my avoidance of it. She also observed that the creative process, by definition, “produces presence”.

My anxiety towards environmental absence stems from childhood memories, living in the incomplete colonial city of Christchurch. I would travel through seemingly empty New Zealand landscapes and observe that the built environment was largely immigrant. All cultural pursuits in our part of New Zealand seemed to come from another country on the other side of the world (England), where it was strangely cold at Christmas.

I may well have been asking questions about place, without having the tools to understand the complexity of it, without even realising that this would control my unease. Now when I return to Canterbury the country does not appear as empty and bleak as I remember it, especially the open landscape, covered in an industrialised net of farming and a multitude of microclimates.

Addressing this absence may have been a subliminal motivation to become an architect. After all, we can describe our job as “producing presence”.

These impulses will emerge in varying ways throughout the exploration of five key projects and are given some structure in the ‘modes of practice’ investigation later on.
projects
When I searched for seminal projects to interrogate for this dissertation I found it incredibly difficult, as I began to realised that all the projects were interconnected to a stream of evolving ideas. No project represented a single stand-alone idea or set of ideas but rather the same ideas surfaced and resurfaced through the projects with varying levels of intensity.

The five projects I have chosen rely on the architectural ideas that are dearest to me and are currently resurfacing in new projects. These works were conceived independently, at different times, and are the result of different briefs, environments and objectives.

Carriageworks at Eveleigh 2003-2006
Paddington Reservoir Gardens 2006-2008
The Glasshouse, Port Macquarie 2002-2009
Clowdy Bay, Blenheim New Zealand 2010-2012
Baillies Lodge, The Rocks 2012-13

At first glance, it is easy to see what sets these projects apart from each other but when they are collected together the points of connection between them can be identified and examined, and I can contemplate how these connections formed.

In addition to the series of connections between these projects it became clear that the projects were all underpinned by a consistent architectural methodology or ‘mode of practice’. For this reason, I have organised my exploration of the five selected projects in this section under these ‘modes’ to give a sense of my working method. Then I refer to the same modes in ‘Section 5: Thinking About Thinking and Modes of Practice’ to investigate architectural themes that I have discovered during my dissertation, to be central to all these projects.

The modes are:

Memory
the period of reflection (of previous work and backstory)

Looking
the period of searching

Sketching
moments of invention by myself

Adjusting
developing through drawing with TZG and others

Experiencing
the moment of realisation of the built project

It is hoped that by looking first at the architectural ideas in the selected projects and then linking these ideas into a theme, a clearer reading of my architectural thinking will become clear. This process was instrumental in researching for this dissertation. The five columns of images which summarise each project express this structure for clarity, as will become evident in Part 5.
4.1 carriageworks at eveleigh
2003 - 2006
introduction

As I began my research about the carriage factory, I wondered, “what is the relationship between a contemporary theatre and a historic railway factory?”

If a new building is placed inside an old building, how does the inherited building shape the proposed building, and the proposed building shape the perception of the inherited? By drawing connections between the two, I would find a variety of ways occupants and visitors could interpret the building.

Project description

Carriageworks is described as the home for the contemporary arts in Sydney. Developed by the NSW State Government through Arts NSW, the former 1888 Carriage Workshops building at Eveleigh was transformed into a new centre committed to the conception, development and presentation of a wide spectrum of performance. Tonkin Zulaikha Greer’s adaptive reuse of the building as the Carriageworks Arts Centre has embraced the building’s past whilst providing it with a new future.

Three fully serviced, flexible theatre spaces – small, medium and large – rehearsal rooms, administrative offices, workshop space and amenities are housed in discrete concrete boxes. These are clearly articulated from the heritage fabric of brick and cast iron, which retains its patina of age and use and its remaining industrial artefacts. The forms stand free of the rows of original cast iron columns, creating circulation routes in the interstitial spaces with views through the building.

The foyer spans the entire width of the building. The linear entry structures to each of the theatre spaces are like ‘ghosts’ of the carriages that once moved through the space. The front of house is divided by glass doors from the back of house activities, which are located adjacent to the railway tracks.

Bay 17, the large performance space, has been designed for experimental and physical theatre. This required removal of a portion of the original wrought iron framed roof to achieve the briefed height. The new elevated roof echoes the rhythm of the original roof monitors and reads as a glowing beacon. The original trusses have been reused as a sculptural entry structure, located on Wilson Street, to herald the new use.

memory

At the same time, I was reminded of the Cordoba Mosque (987AD), a cathedral inside a mosque, and the notion of a theatre inside a factory resonated for me. The Carriageworks central theatre was always going to be taller than its surrounding building, just as the Cordoba Cathedral was taller than the Mosque. I found this similarity between projects – the conjunction of two different cultures in one place – to be reassuring.

An extraordinary sense of place, as felt at the Cordoba Mosque was possible in the Carriageworks project.

looking

Through my research, old photographs of the building were revealed. Among them were two images: one showing the building in its working life, full of carriages under construction; the other showing the space empty and waiting. Already, the inherited artefact is quite different from the living/working building it has been. Now empty of equipment and abandoned for decades, the spaces seemed hollow and aimless.
4.1 carriageworks at eveleigh

The spatial hierarchy of the original carriage works was even and democratic, orderly and with little emphasis on one space over another. The plan, in effect, was a series of co-ordinates across which different factory activity had taken place at different times of the building’s history. The plan was orthogonal and, as with any grid, lent itself to a strong navigational strategy for its new use as a set of theatres. The clients, all with backgrounds in street theatre, physical dance and contemporary circus, did not want the theatre to be like a theatre. They spoke of an anti-theatre. Using non-hierarchical coordinates as an ordering system fit with the notion of freedom in the plan.

I searched for visual patterns in the information available to me. First were the literal interpretation of inherited shapes, for example, the lines of the railway track converging and diverging that we borrowed for the patterning of the entrance glazing. Then there were more abstract interpretations, for example, the scale of the carriages themselves was a determinant for the forms of the foyer structures containing access stairs, bars, theatre entrances. This was also a way of adjusting the scale from a place of machine production to one of human inhabitation. As a playful reference to theatre, and also to the original building, I repurposed the old roof trusses up-ending them to become an entry signage structure, arranged to evoke a chorus line. Finally, there were references to the symbolism of the local area, for example “skipping girl”, a whimsical piece of street art that had become emblematic to Wilson Street. Skipping girl was used in the gender signage for the WCs.

2. The term ‘anti-theatre’ was coined by the Key User Research Group (KURG), which consisted of potential tenants - performing arts companies - invited by Arts New South Wales to act as the expert ‘client’ for the project.

The KURG members were frequently replaced throughout the project and the meetings often lacked philosophical cohesion as would be expected from such a diverse group. Even so, all potential tenant companies agreed that the Carriageworks should be established as an ‘anti-theatre’, deliberately proposing an alternative to the suite of traditionally based theatres in Sydney.

The potential performance companies such as Performance Space, Legs on the Wall, Theatre Kantanka and Gravity Feed, to name a few, argued that the traditional theatre notions of Front of House, Back of House and Theatre should be subverted so that performers could interpret the Carriageworks in a way relevant to their art form. This in turn would allow the patrons to view the performing art venue in a different light.

3. Julie Mackenzie was the TZG Project Architect for Carriageworks and ascertained which carriage work functions were carried out in which part of the factory. Her study, summarised by this analytical diagram, revealed that the same functions occurred in different factory locations over time.

sketching

The sketches reproduced for the Carriageworks and for my other projects are concerned with making a link between my memory and the process of looking to the central architectural idea(s). They were not intended as a device to convey the idea, but rather a means to finding the idea. I’m primarily interested in sketching as momentary thinking and how sketching reveals thought processes, and for this reason, it can capture the moment of discovery of a notion, of invention. These are generally the types of sketches I have employed for my dissertation.

This early sketch, which was the first design act, shows how I intended to use light and shadow as a way to connect one generation of building to another. The restored roof structure and skylights of the Carriageworks cast a moving shadow across the north facing walls of the new performing arts structure. The blankness of the concrete bears the projected detail of the existing roof structure, a tracing that links the present with the past, the Australian contemporary with the colonial industrial.
In this sketch of the foyer, I seek a way of maintaining an industrial scale using carriage-sized structures. Here, I explore the notion of eroded forms evoking a place of production. The sketch technique, cutting away the corners of the mass, allowed me to give primacy to the interstitial space. It probed the notion of whether interstitial space could be used as a device to establish the anti-theatre.

The initial sketch for the ‘chorus line’ entry sign was arranged as a row parallel to Wilson Street (refer previous page). When the land ownership changed the sign had to be re-oriented. Adjusting the design through drawing and re-drawing, we were able to keep the entry structure as a whole, remaining true to the original concept.

The plan takes the historic coordinate system of ‘tracks’ and ‘bays’ and distributes the contemporary performing art uses in a non-hierarchical manner, supporting the Carriageworks performers’ desire for the anti theatre, allowing performers to take over the foyer and patrons to navigate deep in to the building.

We engaged with David Lean’s method of filmic representation in his 1945 film “Brief Encounter” to search for a seemingly relevant aesthetic, merging the Sketch Design and Design Development stages so that the architectural idea can be worked upon for longer, simultaneously firming up decisions for documentation. This protects the architectural ideas from the often corrosive effect that simple translation to CAD often has. It also allows the prolongation of design investigation that is often lost in the context of limited commercial timeframes.

Neither I nor anybody else at TZG seemed to have had experience of railway architecture, so this synthetic experience seemed a useful and interesting way to explore the design development for the Carriageworks. The synthetic experience is of course natural for someone like me, with a post-colonial upbringing, where knowledge was learnt and not experienced.
converting to memory

From the Carriageworks design work I picked up a procedure that could be used on later projects: in sifting through the site context, site history and the form of the inherited artifact itself (the original building) the architect is playing detective, seeking evidence of the building’s ‘story’, and with that evidence, inspiration for the new design. Successful adaptive reuse relies on a series of relationships between the inherited artifact, where the memories of earlier use are imbued in the textures of its materials and antiquated forms – and its new use which is contemporary and relevant.

To some the Carriageworks demonstrates my interest in history as a summary of collective built and cultural endeavours that have survived until today and the avant-garde as an intended breech with history with reference only to current or future cultural activity that opens up new possibilities can be seen here.

I have realised why I don’t favour the diagrammatic analytical method of removing or isolating elements (road networks, building massing, circulation routes etc.) for observation: in doing so, the fragility and magic that arise in the layering of connections are often lost and destroyed. The medical analogy would be to observe an organ in the body. By removing the organ we can see it for what it is, but we can’t see what it does. To study an element in situ, we are compelled to develop a more complex understanding of the relationships between the elements.

This was to become a central theme of the Paddington Reservoir Gardens and, to some extent, the experience of the Carriageworks became the memory of the Reservoir Gardens.
4.1 carriageworks at eveleigh

Entry structure and front door: Symbolic power in re-appropriating heritage fabric and anthropomorphising disused roof trusses to form a ‘Chorus Line’ entry structure.

Front door: The existing bricked up carriage entrance was reopened to form the main pedestrian entrance.

Foyer Detail: Shadow cast by existing structure.
4.1 carriageworks at eveleigh
4.1 carriageworks at eveleigh

Large Performance Space (Bay 17)

Curtilage space: The desire of the client theatre companies to have an anti-theatre was interpreted through the CWKS factory floor.

Between the rehearsal rooms: The importance of interstitial space or loose-fit architecture, as a way of avoiding the designing-out of future possibilities.

Rehearsal Room: The performing arts uses were distributed in a non-hierarchical manner across the existing bays and tracks, in other words, the factory’s co-ordinates.
4.2 **paddington reservoir gardens**

2006 - 2009
project description

When TZG and James Mather Delaney Design (JMD) were commissioned to convert the Paddington Reservoir into an urban park, the general expectation was that the site would be capped off and a brand new arrangement built on top. However, we were captivated by the possibilities of revealing the 19th century structures as a ruin through which members of the public could wander, taking in the dramatic spaces and play of light across the remnants of historic walls and vaults.

Paddington Reservoir was originally constructed in two stages, completed in 1866 and 1878. The water chambers were built below street level with a grassed park above, opened to the public in the 1930’s. The operational life of the reservoir ceased in 1899 and the site was used as a workshop and garage until 1990 when roof collapses forced its closure.

We believed the concept for the project was embodied in the existing artefact. An accessible sunken garden and pond, surrounded by a raised pre-cast concrete boardwalk, has been inserted within the conserved ruin of the western chamber of the former reservoir. The edges of the ruin are contained by concrete up-stands in such a way as to amplify the distinctive curved characteristics of the original brick vaults. The Victorian tree-fern garden hints at the era in which the Reservoir was originally built.

The eastern chamber has been conserved with new timber columns and a waterproof concrete structure over, stabilising the brickwork and forming the base for the new landscaped park above.

Two lightweight roofs float above the reservoir, signalling the main entry points to the park. The lightness of the roofs act as a counterpoint to the solid earthiness of the masonry vaults, while there is a whimsical reference to the older masonry mortar joints in the staggered pattern of the metal grid.

A restricted pallet of three materials – steel, aluminium and concrete were chosen as contemporary partners for the historic brick, cast iron and timber, united as they are in their raw industrial expression. This quality, crucial to sustaining the memory of the original purpose of the structure, is softened by the status given to the planting and also by the overt invitation, implicit in the walkways, to explore the whole park.

introduction

For the duration of the Carriageworks project, I was continually searching for the relationship between inherited and proposed buildings, and a series of approaches were established throughout the design period, operating at a number of levels. The factory floor ordering system was used as the starting point for the non-hierarchical ‘anti theatre’. The shadows cast by the original Carriageworks onto the new structure of the performing arts centre created a relationship between one generation and another. Disused roof trusses were stood on end to form an entry marker, which anthropomorphised these historic elements.

While many such strategies were incorporated in the Carriageworks, for Paddington Reservoir Gardens I initially sought an over-riding idea for interconnecting the new and inherited. This could be summarised as the concept of the new use lurking in the inherited artifact.

I began considering the site, with its evocative ruins, and the brief that we had been given by the City of Sydney that requested the remnant structures be covered over with a suburban park. When I looked at the broader context and history of the site, I began to visualise something different altogether. The collapsed Reservoir was located amongst a collection of colonial public buildings, on a sandstone ridge that separated Sydney Harbour from Botany Bay and consisted of chaotic piles of brick rubble.
memory

Not long after I first came to Sydney I entered the "Transition - Discourse on Architecture” “Companion City” Competition, and produced an architectural proposal entitled “Subterranean Sydney Revealed – The Companion City” in 1991, which coincided with the exploration on foot of my new city and its subterranean realm.

Each day I would walk from my flat in Woolloomooloo, up the hill past St Mary’s Catholic Cathedral, across Hyde Park with the Archibald Fountain at its high point, down Market Street running across the CBD, over the Pyrmont Bridge, to the office on the ridge of Pyrmont, a precinct that was then suspended between its post-industrial past and pre-residential future.

On the surface, Market Street appeared to be a collection of office buildings with ground floor and basement shops. I soon found that, for commercial benefit, connections had been made between the underground shops of certain buildings. I began to entertain myself by seeing how far I could traverse the city without surfacing above ground. Sometimes I ended up in underground car parks cut into bedrock, where the Sydney sandstone was exposed – this was often the best part of the building.

The city had revealed a new dimension and extended further than it seemed. This was the basis for my architectural proposition. The Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park would become the mythical water source, transforming Market Street into a canal, and bringing Sydney Harbour into the centre of the city at sea level. The subterranean city would be exposed and re-appropriated: Market Street would once more be a market for all to see. There would be a new city hustle and bustle as produce was dragged up from boats in Darling Harbour, to be sold at markets and distributed to the periphery of Sydney.

I started to think about the city as an interconnected organism. I drew one building unified at the canal base, fingering into the existing structures, and growing out into the skyline.
As a student, I visited as many Scarpa’s buildings as I could and became fascinated by the interconnectedness of his architecture with historic buildings. I observed the playful interrelation of different architectural generations. At the Castelvecchio Museum (1973), Scarpa lovingly stitches a ‘ribbon’ of contemporary uses and materials through the medieval castle in Verona. Like so many architects, I was profoundly influenced by this building – not only by the built work, but by Scarpa’s architectural approach of establishing a set of contemporary ‘conditions’ that must be reconciled with the existing building. He had a unique architectural language in his detailing and resolution of materials, but by allowing the inherited building equal status with his interventions, the original building was never debased and always relevant.

The Reservoir, a beautiful piece of Nineteenth Century infrastructure, had been cut into the honey coloured Sydney sandstone, on a ridge that marked the edge between the rock of Sydney Harbour and shifting sands of Botany Bay.

4.2 Paddington Reservoir Gardens

For the Paddington Reservoir Gardens, the brief seemed to be for a suburban park, which I did not see as appropriate to the context – that of an urban, built-up street. Having reached a certain density, the street had developed an interior nature with shop-lined walls and paved flooring. I began thinking about continuing the idea of the ‘interior’ into our project. In so doing, I would be subverting the notion of ‘park’ into a series of open air urban rooms, made from the remnants of the disused water reservoir, itself a grand Interior, and one that could be inhabited in a new and intriguing way.

As existed, the place was a hoarded-off ruin, with a series of intact and collapsed brick vaults, covered in wilding plants growing at will. An intriguing spatial arrangement had been formed by the ad hoc destruction of the water reservoir. The site was located in the colonial town centre of Paddington, and was surrounded by a town hall, post office, several pubs and a building that had been a church.
The moment of invention for the Paddington Reservoir Gardens came not so much in a fleeting drawing, but rather in the sketching out of an evocative idea expressed as an architectural narrative – that the concept for the new use lurks within the artifact: new function and contemporary activity can be imagined within the material of the existing building. The architect becomes a detective searching for evidence and inspiration, in the history and form of the artifact.

There seemed to me a case for a set of urban rooms made from a ruin connected to Sydney’s sandstone bed, with a rich spatial hierarchy, an exotic quality of light, and meaning expressed in the building fabric. Fortunately, the Lord Mayor Clover Moore and the City of Sydney quickly understood this alternative proposal, and envisaged the possibilities as I did.

Capitalising on our spatial reading of a ruin whereby our mind makes assumptions about the absent pieces creating something much more evocative than a complete object or building. The spatial arrangement of the new gardens and the resulting plan is fragmentary in its strategy, creating a new set of spatial possibilities that would not be possible with a new building.

A fragmentary approach was taken into the project documentation, where the set of construction details, based on a series of rules and generated by aesthetics and usefulness. These details or architectural conditions (refer construction sections) can be ‘moved’ around the repeating cells of the existing building, as a means of connecting the new to the inherited.
An example of this concept used in a later project was The Virgin Australia Departure Lounges at airports around Australia, begun in 2011. These interiors are also based on the notion of repeating forms springing from architectural conditions and a resultant grid that is systematically distorted. The ‘repetition’, in this case, was a series of repeating interconnecting leaves which simultaneously concealed the myriad of services and provided a symbolic surface for Virgin’s marketing. The resultant grid was distorted to suit the range of tenancy spaces in different airports around the country.

The new building work at the Paddington Reservoir is seated in the cellular structure of the original building, with new intervening shapes in contemporary material emerging from the original framework. This strategy allows for a contemporary expression of the new use, but introduces aesthetic common territory for past and present to meet. The tension between past and present generates the architectural expression of a ‘third building’, which you can’t quite put your finger on.
Western Chamber: The concept for the new use that lurks within the inherited artifact.
Remnant structure and pond: A new spatial ordering system was employed, based on the fragmentary spaces of the ruin.

Historic brick vault and new aluminium vault with lift shaft in between: The development of a strategy that allows for a contemporary expression of the new use, but introduces aesthetic common territory for past and present to meet.
4.2 Paddington Reservoir Gardens

Entry Structure and historic air vent in the distance: harnessing the power of the repetition of one simple form, the brick vault.

View from the Western Chamber into the Eastern Chamber: it is the tension between past and present that generates the architectural expression of a ‘third building’, which you can’t quite put your finger on.

Oxford St Entry canopy from below: indicating the juxtaposition of new and inherited pieces.

View out of the Eastern Chamber: The inherited portion of the building already contains memories and associations by virtue of its existence.
4.3 **glasshouse**
port macquarie 2002 - 2009
project description
The Glasshouse, Arts Conference and Entertainment Centre is located in the centre of Port Macquarie, a rapidly-growing coastal city north of Sydney. The Glasshouse comprises a 600-seat performing arts theatre, a 600m² Regional Art Gallery, a studio theatre, conference facilities and a community workshop. The project brief was to establish the Cultural Centre as the pre-eminent performance and exhibition arts facility in the region.

The design takes advantage of a view of the Pacific Ocean and is based on ‘openness’ and accessibility. The gallery is located to share the foyer space of the theatre, allowing appropriate exhibitions to fill the public spaces of the building and, in low-visititation days, the centre to be operated with minimal staff.

Wrapped around the sculpted form of the tall auditorium, the foyers are open and glassy, and are naturally ventilated. The foyer and building expression is generated by the contrasting orders of the city grid and the voluminous form of the theatre shell, with its level three echo. The glass ‘skirt’ cantilevered over Clarence Street. Shaped voids and overhangs offer street shade, airflow and an exciting architectural journey from street to auditorium. The auditorium is a semi-traditional proscenium horseshoe, with a fully equipped lyric stage and fly tower. Operable sound-screens enable the space to be used for classical concert music. The orchestra pit is hydraulically raised and lowered to increase the flexibility of the space.

The design anticipated significant archaeological relics from the Governor Macquarie convict era, the footings of a series of 1820’s cottages. They were not fully revealed until the existing site buildings were demolished, and, once exposed, the footings were preserved and displayed to the public in the basement with interpretive signage on the ground floor of the foyer.

The Glasshouse is now a regional partner of the Sydney Opera House as part of the Open House program.

introduction
In the face of globalisation, how do you make a building that is culturally relevant to its community?

The answer to this question, for Port Macquarie, seemed to lie in investigating a cultural identity with the river and ocean of its shipping history, its street pattern, the riverside parks and walkways, public wharf and vistas to the water from the town itself.

memory
While Alvar Aalto’s Finlandia (1971) does not have bulging curvilinear forms, it does have repetitive vertical upright elements and a facade with concave shapes scooped out, referencing the tree canopies that used to be on that part of the site. The notion of repetitive elements to evoke the natural world is how I conceived the bulging river forms along the regular mullions of the facade.

Aalto’s use of curvilinear forms in other buildings has doubtless influenced the direction of my design here, grounded as it is in the local timber industry, as Aalto was directed by the availability of local craftsmanship.

looking
Next I discovered the significance of the timber industry: the area supplied all the timber linings for the Sydney Opera House. Port Macquarie’s primary industry was in timber after its early history as a penal area. I had hoped to reclaim timber that was at that time being removed from the Sydney Opera House and re-use it in the Glasshouse, thereby ‘bringing it home’. That idea proved impractical, so instead, a workshop was initiated that included NSW Forestry, local loggers and mill owners, local carpenters and suppliers. This process was designed to engender interest in the project among the community.
At my first meeting with the client body at Port Macquarie, I heard a rumour of penal colony archeological remains on the site. More in-depth research revealed the possibility of the existence of a group of 1817-1821 Superintendents’ cottages buried under the site. At some point, Clarence Street, the north boundary and main address of the site, had been realigned, potentially positioning the cottages on a slightly shifted axis at approximately 1.5m below ground. There seemed to be an extraordinary opportunity to make a physical and cultural connection between modern Port Macquarie and its historic reason for existence: as a penal colony. By locating the foyer over where we thought the cottages should be – and this was guess work – as well as elevating the foyer, we allowed an interstitial space for a possible vantage point to see the remnants of cottage footings, paving and an ovoid drain. As the project proceeded, the remnants were discovered.

The brief required an Art Gallery and Theatre to be built on the same site, so I was faced with the question of how best to combine the two. Port Macquarie had no history of major public buildings and the citizens did not want an imposing building, but one that was accessible, welcoming and democratic. We proposed a foyer completely transparent from the street and this is how the Glasshouse was named. The public foyer, as a place of assembly, runs the full width and height of the front of the building. The contents of the building – the convex form of the theatre and the concave form of the art gallery – can both be seen fully from the street.

**sketching**

This early sketch shows my very first notion of the foyer as wharf and the theatre as vessel, separated by the abyss, a fantasy realm for leaving our mundane lives behind as we enter the theatre. The horizon line is seen in the sketch, showing how important the ocean seemed to me at this site.

From early on, I perceived the foyer’s ground floor as being an extension of the street just beyond. The space in the foreground of the sketch was, at that stage, a public carpark. This shows a clear intention to appropriate it for a public piazza. Already the theatre wall is sketched as a curving timber shell while the back of the upper level foyer is aligned parallel with the rectilinear street outside. A dramatic top-lit vertical space in the foyer is defined by the curving and rectilinear forms withheld from each other.

This sketch shows an early idea of the archaeological exhibition space being elevated between basement level and ground floor so that it forms a waist height viewing platform.
The memory of the undulating façade of Aalto’s Finlandia Concert Hall permeates this computer wire frame representation of the Glasshouse, where repeating rectilinear panels firm their own undulation. These facets are manipulated to suggest the form of the Hastings River and Pacific Ocean, both nearby. The black line wire frames were chosen as an appropriate drawing strategy for subtly adjusting the angles of the rectilinear forms in order to arrive at the civic gesture of the building.

To me, Finlandia not only exemplified Aalto’s new and beautifully organic approach to architecture, but it also expresses his interpretation of his native landscape as he seeks a contemporary Finish cultural expression.

I’ve begun to realise that each of my building forms is usually a unified form, and generally composed in one material, shaped to acknowledge its location within the building but also to engage the building with its context.

The forms here are subtle and waist-like, which led me to wonder about anthropological forms, namely, ears as projections with clear functions, and waists, as smooth forms leading from one projection to another. The ears, as seen in Cloudy Bay and discussed later in this essay, connote alertness and attention. The waist is a more discrete shape, whose purpose is to draw the architecture into its context and away from prominence.

The architectonic technique is based on consistency of material, and variation of form. There are two main themes in the diverse volumes of the building. The rectilinear nature of the ground floor plan relates directly to the street edge. Above and around it, the curvilinear forms of the glass façade and timber wall linings are taken from the curves of the Hastings River a block away.

I think a lot about the perimeter of the forms, how to change direction and go around corners without sacrificing the wholeness of the form. This presents functional difficulties, but, when these are overcome, architectural integrity is possible.

The archaeological overlay summarises our research into the potential location(s) of the group of buried 1817-1821 Superintendents cottages. Their approximate location was instrumental in shaping the foyer.
Once the archaeologists drawing was obtained the basement planning was refined to provide vantage points from which to view the historic remnants.

Memory

Whilst this building operates as a contemporary performing and visual arts centre, and is architecturally expressed as such, the archaeological remnant layer below invites visitors to engage with the site at a different level: that of Port Macquarie’s physical and cultural ancestry. In the new Glasshouse building, we have made a collective statement of where Port Macquarie is going, while deliberately not extinguishing the view of where it has come from.

The Glasshouse reveals my simultaneous interest in history and the avant-garde, or an architectural ‘restlessness’ as Dr Elizabeth Farrelly called it. In the design of this building, I acknowledged and contemplated the history of Port Macquarie, wanting to guard something important rather than extinguishing it, but at the same time I intended that the Glasshouse would be an architectural proposition about the town’s future.

This same notion – of rootedness in the past combined with a built ‘manifesto’ for contemporary culture – has become a common theme across all of the selected projects.

Manipulating the entry path, by turning the public perpendicular to the street was an effective device to accentuate the moment of entry in the absence of grand steps. This device was used in the Carriageworks, something I was unaware of until reading John de Manincor’s article4 in Architecture Review on the Glasshouse, where he made the connection between the two projects.

As part of the passive mixed mode air conditioning system, the foyer is top lit so that the timber shell around the theatre has natural light on it during the day. This lends a warm glow of sunlight throughout the foyer and illuminates the timber shell so it can be seen from outside the building.

Hay Street Forecourt: Repeating rectilinear elements organised to create sinuous form, evoking the site’s relationship to the Pacific Ocean.

Clarence Street Foyer and stair down to archaeological remains: The deliberate inclusion of the site’s archaeology in the contemporary building is a way of making a public building engage simultaneously with the present and with Port Macquarie’s historic roots.

Hay Street Forecourt and Foyer: The Foyer is perceived as an extension of the street just beyond.
Extending the cultural connection that the timber workers of Port Macquarie have with the Sydney Opera House, whose timber came from the Hastings, Port Macquarie timber companies took part in the timber selection and supply for the Glasshouse.
4.3 glasshouse

(left) Auditorium rear wall: Acoustic detail.

(right) Auditorium: Concrete shell and detail of acoustic paneling.
4.4 cloudy bay winery: shack II guest house
blenheim, new zealand 2010 - 2012, with paul rolfe architects
introduction

This project was a direct confrontation of my memories, growing up in New Zealand, of absence (in the landscape, the incomplete city and transplanted culture as knowledge, rather than experience), and the pre-eminence of the landscape over all else. In reaction to that, I thought about a spatial connection to the landscape that would place the human experience at the heart of it.

Thinking about the predominance of the landscape in New Zealand’s culture I reflected upon Colin McCahon’s ‘Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury’, painted in 1959. This work is an iconic statement of absence in the landscape, an interlocking of sky and land that is at once quiet and yet full of agoraphobic doom.

I revisited New Zealand architecture that is important to me, of Peter Beaven’s Lyttelton Road Tunnel Building (1964) and the petit brutalism of Sir Miles Warren’s Christchurch College (1964). The Tunnel Building is up on piers so that it will stand up to the grandeur of the landscape beyond. Its roofline is sculpturally modelled against the skyline of the background hills, using the lift overrun and rooftop services access. These design decisions were made to intensify the building’s presence. Christchurch College, a student hostel, has been massed to look as extensive and grand as possible, some of it raised on piloti, some stacked up and some spread round a courtyard, to form its own small cityscape.

memory

Our client instructed us to design a small ‘hotel’ for Cloudy Bay’s European guests where they could enjoy the vineyard and the New Zealand landscape.

Previously guests had stayed in the original vineyard farmhouse, both charming in its relationship to the landscape and charmless in its architecture. It was colloquially known as “The Shack”, and was burnt to the ground by a dosing French sommelier who luckily survived.

There seemed to be an architectural opportunity to entwine the humble history of “the shack” with the sophisticated aspirations of “Shack II”, as we called it. This entwining is expressed in humble materials, used in a sophisticated manner, which led to the ironic approach of ‘humble sophistication’, speaking of the beginnings of Cloudy Bay and the International Brand LVMH’s aspirations.

project description

Cloudy Bay Shack establishes the connection between the image on the wine label and the direct experience of the vineyard. We shaped the building to gain vistas along the vineyards to the Richmond Ranges, whose silhouette adorns each bottle.

An entry sequence has been established deliberately to dramatise the ‘Cloudy Bay’ view. On arrival, visitors face two weathered steel walls, resembling someone holding their arms out to welcome an old friend. When the door is opened, a warm timber interior reveals the view obscured by a series of concertina timber panels. As guests enter, the view is revealed by degrees until they walk down three steps to the entertaining level where the full view of the receding vines and Richmond Ranges are presented.

Bedrooms and bathrooms are focused on the same view, with the added benefit that the visitors can be concealed behind their personal timber screen or gain the view directly by opening the screen.

The exterior is composed of materials typical of the region: weathered steel and timber, evocative of rustic buildings seen nestled in the pastoral landscape. This ensures that the building as an object sits comfortably in its environment. To provide unexpected contrast, the interior is lined in well detailed, sophisticated timber and stone.

The developed design and procurement was done in partnership with Paul Rolfe, our partner architect in New Zealand, formerly an associate at T2S.

looking

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The brief directed us to look for ways to strengthen the client’s branding of their wine.

To do this we looked at a series of interconnected relationships: the relationship of the wine label to the landscape; the relationship of the visitor to the landscape; the relationship of the visitor to the label.

This led us to situate the building in a particular attitude to the landscape, with particular views. It was a reversal of the process normally expected of representation – the marketing image preceded the subject of the image, and brought that image into being.

sketching

These sketches establish the connection of the view portrayed on the wine label (representation) to the experience (place) of the visitor.

I revised the subversive tactic used in one of my first design schemes at Architecture School: I inverted the traditional roof form so that the exterior walls offered a stronger presence to the building’s context than they did to the rest of the interior. In doing so, I ensured that the occupant was made strongly aware of their position in the landscape, forming a connection between human habitation and the landscape.

Cloudy Bay Shack is a composition of two wedges, brought back-to-back in calm synthesis. The natural materials – timber cladding, timber screens and pre-weathered steel – are tonally similar, as is the interior timber lining. This unifying technique is a subtle form of juxtaposition, tightly packed and harmonious.

This perspective shows the connection of the long side of the entertaining space to the landscape. The splayed ends thrust the entertaining area forward into the landscape. The same splayed ends are coupled behind, to form enclosed spaces that invite the landscape in at either end of the building.

Liminal Plan

The plan indicates the notion of a liminal building – that is, one comprising separate, contiguous elements punctuated by thresholds, each element with framed connections to the landscape. As the visitor approaches each threshold, a new view is revealed.

Section in the landscape

This section shows the projection of the building’s interior into the landscape. It also shows how the inverted roof form and floor plan present the building’s summits to the edges, magnifying its presence in the landscape.

Entry

This entry sketch shows how the building stands up to the landscape, sequestering an entry precinct from it and embracing the visitor. At this point, the form deliberately withholds a view of the vineyard.

A primary driver of the design was the importance of branding (marketing) to the client, a notion not normally prioritised at the inception of architectural design. In this case, the location – and therefore the site – was central to the client’s marketing strategy.
converting to memory

Cloudy Bay Shack made me confront my reluctance towards open landscape and forced me to take a position in order to form and locate the building. No longer could I take a voyager’s role of comfortably passing through this picturesque landscape, viewing it from a car, as I had many times before.

The landscape is spatially immense, but, close up, it is a giant factory broken down into coordinates of paddocks and vines, and it is culturally loaded for those who live and work there.

I realised that the strategy of looking for and establishing layers of connections with the context and past that I employed for dense urban sites was just as empowering in rural settings. The picturesque landforms were only one part of the story.

It was at this point that I realised why I had an interest in the work of Landscape Architects such as Anton James and Taylor Cullity Lethlean. They raised the notion of cultural values of modified landscape, which is an area I claim no knowledge of. The anecdotal references to it I found compelling, given my experiences of re-identifying the landscape of my childhood, but while I would be interested in enquiring further into the subject, I can not include any part of it as pertinent to my observations here.

Anton James searched for popular plants from the Victorian colonial era of the 1860’s and 1870’s for the planting concept for the Paddington Reservoir Gardens. By going back to the original reservoir’s time of construction, a cultural connection was made between the site’s past and present through plant selection, just as we were researching for the architecture.

adjusting with tzg and others

The entrance is on axis, along the main hallway, to Cloudy Bay and, transverse to this, the broad external wall directly faces the Richmond Ranges. Hidden behind the hallway are the service rooms. Guests are led firmly through the building and the views revealed sequentially in a controlled manner.

This is an architec
tonic study by Paul Rolfe, our partner architect for the developed design and procurement, where we studied the extent of building articulation. In the end we settled on minimal articulation as it was in keeping with the founding ideas of humble materials, executed in a sophisticated manner, speaking of the beginnings of Cloudy Bay and the International Brand LVMH’s aspirations.
Entertaining Space – The wine label imagery and the views of the landscape from the building are connected via the two axes of the plan. The long axis (looking right) is directed to Cloudy Bay, the namesake of the wine label, and the short axis visually connects the viewer to the Richmond Ranges (looking left), the image shown on the label. Unfortunately, due to the exposure levels of the photo the Richmond Ranges aren’t evident in the photo; in reality they are always visible.

The circulation ‘spine’ - Exploring the relationship between the luxury French brand LVMH and the humble rural beginnings of Cloudy Vineyard with a series of entwined contradictions: sophisticated and rustic; grand and humble; corporate and regional.
4.5 baillies lodge
the rocks, sydney 2012 - 2013
introduction
As the new hotel’s surroundings were searched for an understanding of its context, I became fascinated by the idea that the building’s context is no more than a field of interpretation, and that the architect’s role becomes one of continually redefining our relationship with where we are. The context should not be viewed as an absolute physical condition, but rather an ever-changing field of interpretation.

This view is in opposition to the government agencies who, through layers of heritage assessment and documentation, claim an absolute reading of a specific area or context. In spite of these agencies trying to establish the ‘official story’, we all look through different lenses. One’s personal history and accumulated knowledge will ultimately determine what is seen in The Context.

This became obvious to me while trying to gain consent for the hotel in Sydney’s historic Rocks Precinct. This area is seminal to Sydney, not just as the founding point of white Australian settlement, but for the battles that were waged to protect the area from wholesale demolition in the 1970’s. The design review panel, mainly comprising architects of the generation that preceded mine, became a battleground for intergenerational architectural ideologies. Different generations, looking at the same city and the same terrain, but with different eyes, espoused entirely different interpretations of ‘The Context’. This is addressed further in Section 5.1.

looking
Our client was the great grand daughter of Harold Cazneaux, who relentlessly photographed the Harbour Bridge during its construction and afterwards. These photos had a major bearing on my view of the historic Sydney Rocks, the location of the hotel, especially as the Harbour Bridge towers over the area. This cultural connection broadened our view of the site to the harbour’s edge and the giant structure of the Bridge.

These photos became the starting point for the new building. The more I looked at Cazneaux’s Harbour Bridge photos, the more they seemed to be about the irregular shadow cast by a determinedly rational structure.
sketching

Armed with Cazneaux’s shadows and the clients desire for the ‘bright light’ of Australia, an exoskeleton emerged at a scale compatible with the historic Rocks and devised to accept and filter light.

This sketch indicates a desire to cluster the new functions, with their service spaces, inside a new building. The George Street heritage buildings would then be left intact, while behind them, in the space between the rear wings and straight edge of the new building, a convoluted space could be transformed into a new courtyard.

The glass roof structure of the foyer became a device to cast shadows, which would move across the floor of the public space during the day, welcoming guests to sun-drenched Australia. The exoskeleton obscures the city’s gaze, casting Cazneaux-esque shadows across the rooms.

adjusting with tzg and others

During the time we were researching the ambitious glass roof, supported by a timber lattice in pursuit of the ‘bright light of Australia’ for Baillies we were asked to prepare an exhibit in the form of a simple shelter. We used the Emergency Shelter as an opportunity to make a scaled down version of the foyer roof. Stretched Barrisol fabric was used instead of glass, but we explored the timber and, in particular, the beam to column junctions. This research found its way into our own and the façade consultant’s documentation.

This desire to work in situ with the proposed buildings’ context, as discussed with the Carriageworks, has attracted me to animation as a form of architectural exploration and representation. With this device, the context’s shape is replicated digitally as a constant condition. Within this, the new forms can be tested, experimented upon and modified, the subtle differences in relationships between each version and the context clearly manifest in the digital model. In this way, at a very early stage, the new building can be imbedded with seemingly organic compatibility into its surrounding. While true experience can never be replaced, space and movement can be crudely replicated.

As people, we are constantly moving, we experience our environments from a dynamic point of view. So it stands to reason that we need not study architecture from a standing point, frozen in time.

The hand sketch can grasp that first fleeting design idea, but animation can approximate complex and useful spatial configurations. The building is no longer the singular object of representation, but rather a continuation of its surroundings and the broader cityscape. Animation also provides a medium to simply convey and discuss complex architecture ideas with clients with limited architectural knowledge.

5. ‘Cazneaux-esque’; a term I created indicating reference to the photograph Sydney Bridge by Harold Cazneaux, featuring on page 45.
animation precursor

These hand sketches carried out in 2006 for a tower in Sydney’s CBD can be seen as a precursor to animation. I was interested in exploring the notion of the imbedded tower from the point of view of a perceived experience rather than the building as an object. I found this approach of drawing the building from ten or so different viewpoints rewarding and successful as it seemed to de-objectify the building; although it was painstakingly slow and I ended up with a very sore drawing hand. Access to the new tool of animation was a turning point for me in progressing my ideas of de-objectifying architecture in favour of its experiential qualities.
This project is unbuilt, however I realised that the Continuum could be understood as a line that changes in cross section with time as external changes are inflicted upon it. Context at any one moment will not be the same as Context at a previous or subsequent moment, as changes take effect along the Continuum – local inhabitation and demography changes, authorities and their policies are revised and so on. As Context is not an absolute we need to keep redefining our relationship with our context as a way of redefining our relationship with our places. The linear connections (cause and effect) along the Continuum can be considered as part of the investigation of the site, and used as material for design decisions.

Whilst this reflection became apparent through thinking about Baillies Lodge, it could apply to any of my five seminal projects as central to my architectural thinking.

animation

These stills have been extracted from the Baillies Lodge design animation. Whilst they were never intended to be studied as a set of stills, this kind of representation is necessitated by the dissertation format. I hope that this sequence of stills will nevertheless give a sense of moving around and through the building.

experience

This project is unbuilt, however I realised that the Continuum could be understood as a line that changes in cross section with time as external changes are inflicted upon it. Context at any one moment will not be the same as Context at a previous or subsequent moment, as changes take effect along the Continuum – local inhabitation and demography changes, authorities and their policies are revised and so on. As Context is not an absolute we need to keep redefining our relationship with our context as a way of redefining our relationship with our places. The linear connections (cause and effect) along the Continuum can be considered as part of the investigation of the site, and used as material for design decisions.

Whilst this reflection became apparent through thinking about Baillies Lodge, it could apply to any of my five seminal projects as central to my architectural thinking.
thinking about thinking and modes of practice
thinking about thinking and modes of practice

Similar to the discussion about context, the development of project complexities and the interest in the shifting continuum, practicing architecture creates a series of evolving thinking paths. These appear to be heading in a general direction, but are constantly crossing over, folding into each other, diverging and, from time to time, coming to abrupt ends. Thinking about thinking, required many different paths to get to the bottom of it, some of which are charted below.

Peter Tonkin, Brian Zulaikha and I collectively reviewed the work of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects during the first year of our research in order to decide on the TZG buildings that seemed to embody architectural themes common to the three of us. These early themes were then arranged into two diagrams: Firstly we identified those themes that were recognisable within each project (e.g. architectonics, art as conceptual basis, building function etc.). Secondly, we identified those that clarified TZG’s position in the broader context of the architectural profession (i.e. our ‘style’, if there is one), the relationship our work had to its physical context (place) and to its immediate society and culture (people). These themes are addressed in the accompanying volume (Volume 2: Jointly and Severally).

After the first years research, I looked for and charted a set of personal navigational tools, common to the projects that I had selected, that appeared to set the direction for my design strategies. Four relatively clear paths of enquiry emerged: ‘Continuum’ – how one era evolves into another architecturally; ‘The Greater System’ – exploring the interconnection of architecture, landscape, urban form and social activity; ‘Subversion’ and the avoidance of absence; and ‘Context’ as a field of architectural interpretation. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

I then examined how these paths of enquiry showed up in my architecture. I realised that the architectonic expression was one based on juxtaposition and coexistence of building elements. This method of assembling forms and spaces brought into play the importance of interstitial space as a deliberate device for enriching the sense of journey through the building, and simply for bringing a sense of order into the architecture, which clarifies building navigation and circulation.

On reflection, I became aware that Continuum, Greater System, Subversion and Context were all different ways of handling a greater issue: the interconnectedness of everything – time, place, culture – which has become an architectural preoccupation.

Twentieth century French author Georges Perec questioned the existence of a conscious starting point and the ties between seemingly unrelated events, in the same way Spanish architects Nieto Sobejano observed “every work is the mirror of another”.

If architectural concepts occupy a space somewhere between imagination and reality, it is the process of making architecture that transforms a conceptual idea into a built reality, and it is the repetition of this action that makes the architect. Perec’s comment resonated with me as an architectural truth. Ideas can be peripheral to one project but central to the next, a small concept in one detail “mirrored” in the beginnings of the next new architectural adventure.

Whilst links between projects are inevitable, I needed a way of looking at the creative moments within each project. For my fourth doctoral presentation (PRS4) I set about looking for patterns across my five selected projects. While doing this, I realised that the habitual process of making architecture – designing – gives rise to isolated creative moments, which are strongly determinant of the architecture. So I started looking at how and when these creative moments occurred.

what has the phd process revealed?

I have mapped these creative thought processes out to form a diagrammatic instrument, one that reflects how I think about architecture, but at the same time can be used as a programme to describe and monitor progress in the journey to a design solution. I have identified that the ‘looking’ part of the investigation is when I am most likely to arrive at design solutions, so it is worthwhile extending this period as much as I can. This diagrammatic instrument is based on five modes of practice, not necessarily in strict chronological sequence, but each leading to the other:

Memory – the period of reflection (of previous work and backstory).
Looking – the period of searching.
Sketching – moments of invention by myself.
Adjusting – developing through drawing with TZG and others.
Experiencing – moment of realisation of the built project.

I observed that, in every project, my creative design moments sprang forth during the early period of intense searching or looking at the site, its context and its history, and that this period of looking was heavily biased by my experience or memory. This creative ‘design’ moment, when a whole set of intangibles seem to coalesce into the kernel of the design idea, is often accompanied by a great sense of satisfaction, as if my subconscious senses a complex riddle has been solved.

Once this kernel has been established, which is usually in the form of a very crude sketch, but is sometimes a sentence, it is then used as a device to engage with the numerous people involved in the detailed design and delivery of the building.

When the project is completed, I will frequently visit the building to examine its ‘trueness’ to the original ideas, connecting it back to those design moments, and I go back to its various modes of representations – drawings, photos and articles – testing the reality against those original thoughts. I’ve realised that this is a way of converting the project into some form of condensed memory.
5.1 memory – period of reflection and backstory

When I start a project, I think about what is important to me at that exact point, taking stock of my architectural values. This process is ensnared in my history: the transplanted English buildings of Christchurch, New Zealand, the fresh and evolving geology of my native landscape, travels at an impressionable age, my education and importantly, my working life as described in my backstory.

When we commence a project, we bring our architectural memory or value system to the new project. This memory appears to operate both consciously and unconsciously. It is only when I take stock of my architectural values, by recognising their prevalence in previous projects, that it becomes clear how much power my life experience has over design decisions that I had previously assumed to be determined by my current preoccupation with the contemporary world.

residual beliefs

Through analysing my projects, produced since arriving in Sydney, I have noticed some recurring beliefs that seem to stay with me from project to project, and form a base from which to apprehend every new architectural concept. These beliefs could be summarised as an interest in the notion of continuum which I have explored from different viewpoints.

continuum – a cultural basis

My notion of an architectural Continuum is based on the idea that historic and contemporary cultures can be perceived as being interconnected through the continuum of time. There is a continuum in which our current culture takes part, with contemporary culture merely the ‘brightest light’ of the moment.

This is not to say that time can be read in our built world as a two-dimensional thread of indefinite continued progress of existence, but that it piles up around us in a compilation of history. In changing something from one state to another, a physical connection between old and new arises: a new relevant use inhabits an urban artefact, the object becomes imbued with urban memories.

Somewhere between the new building that is relevant to us now, and the urban artefact representing our past, there is a third ethereal building that bestows mystique onto the project.

The architectural strategy here is underpinned by the notion that the architectural concept for the new use lurks within the artefact. The architect becomes a detective searching for evidence and inspiration in the history and form of the artefact. This strategy allows for a contemporary expression of the new use, but introduces aesthetic common territory for past and present to meet. It is this tension between past and present that generates the architectural expression of the third ethereal building.

The overriding aim is to form a continuum of the past and present, without one dominating the other.

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continuum – the interconnected greater system

Buildings are not objects in their own right. They can’t escape being part of an urban setting, a landscape, a social network or a moment in time.

I view the city as an evolving organism, ever-changing: thriving and dying, receding, and regenerating.

I am very interested in patterns of order and disorder as organisational systems. The pattern is the system that orders the ‘body’ of the building. This is a holistic strategy that connects building form to surface, and reconciles urban and individual scales, and also the device that makes the connection between the individual and the collective.

The inevitable discord of the city, with its energetic dis-rhythms formed by ad hoc collections, is invested into my architecture, at times subverting regularity and order.

Juxtaposition has been a recurring and consistent theme across all my building types, be they adaptive reuse or new buildings. Just as the city is composed as a ‘collection’ of forms, both ordered and chaotic, so are my buildings.

The buildings are the city in miniature, composed of pieces, with each piece contributing to the building’s expressive qualities in ordered and chaotic ways, simultaneously speaking of the individual and the collective.

Juxtaposition (and coexistence) is a strategy for the positive connection, creating various tensions or resolutions within a building. These can be manipulated in multifarious ways: sometimes to magnify the building’s presence; sometimes to energise the building’s expression (Verona Cinemas, Volume 2, page 42) and sometimes to pacify with a calm collection of forms (Cloudy Bay).

If a set of pieces is inherited, a consciousness and memory of their history is suggested. Although the pieces are part of the same building they express something beyond the associations of the new building.

restoring the continuum – avoiding absence through subversion

The need for subversion is rooted in my back-story.

As mentioned previously, my childhood in colonial Christchurch left me with a sense of absence in different dimensions. I was brought up in suburbia, which is an idea of utopia seated in disconnectedness, and there I dreamed instead of a utopia of connectedness – spatially, visually, socially.

When faced with the absence of a cultural context or the ‘suburban void’ I have generally inverted established building forms to intensify the presence of the building. This was my first design move at Architecture School: to take something I understood, a suburban house, and turn the roof form inside out. The form of the gabled or hipped roof is self-referential, shaping itself around its contents and closing out connection to its neighbours. The butterfly roof does the opposite, pinching the interior and opening out to the exterior, whatever that other may be.

From here I pursued a type of reactive architecture that set out to reinstate meaning and vitality into the public realm with an assertive architecture that was visually and socially connected to its broader context, i.e. as a continuum.

It should not be disconnection that speaks of our relationship to our community but a sense of hierarchy between public and private domains. I am interested in this relationship.

The public realm is the best insurance against the architecture of absence, which is why I’m so interested in engaging with public spaces as a practicing architect.

continuum through context – field of interpretation

Context is often presented as an absolute, or as a fact – The Context – but the Context is nothing more than a field of interpretation. One’s personal history and accumulated knowledge will ultimately determine what is seen in The Context.

The Continuum could be understood as a line that changes in cross section with time as external changes are inflicted upon it. Context at any one moment will not be the same as Context at a previous or subsequent moment. As changes take effect along the Continuum, local inhabitation changes, authorities and their policies are revised and so on. As Context is not an absolute we need to keep redefining our relationship with our context as a way of redefining our relationship with our places. The linear connections (cause and effect) along the Continuum can be considered as part of the investigation of the site, and used as material for design decisions.

continuum through architectural practice

My interest in the work of other architects inevitably feeds into my projects. It is crucial to recognise immediately any influence by other buildings, so that I can control how that influence can be used most successfully and avoid copying, or plagiarism. As discussed with the Glasshouse, my interest in the work of Aalto could be seen in the repetition of vertical uprights, the use of concavity in the façade and the engagement with local craftsmen. None of this was done in Aalto’s style, but the influence is there nonetheless.

To sum up, my reoccurring interest in the continuum can be glimpsed in the next section as I break down my design method into component activities that are seated in a belief that one inevitably impacts on the other.
5.2 looking – period of searching

Residual beliefs are not necessarily at the forefront of the mind, but entrenched and murky. In contrast, the conscious part of seeking a concept for a project is clear and focused. I call this ‘Looking’.

architectural concerns

There is a set of architectural concerns that have stayed with me and which I believe to have universal importance in my projects. These are in my mind when I first ‘look’ at the project, and guide my quest for a design approach.

At the outset of a project, I look at the information available to me, seeking evidence and clues for a design approach. Remnants and details, anecdotes and interplays of light and shade all play a role in the story that the new building will tell, whether that is one of theatrical structure (Carriageworks) or the phantom of historic photography (Baillies). Allowing an inherited building’s past into the formulation of the brief leads to an equal weighting of the physical and historic attributes of the site. This approach to a project anchors the contemporary building into a sense of immediate complexity, avoiding any sense of sterility or alienation.

I’m looking for ways the design can involve multiple layers of meaning to satisfy the different occupants and visitors in their various ways of understanding architecture. Some are drawn to literal references, some to the abstract concepts and some to communal connections. The more ways a building can be interpreted, the richer it will be and the more status it will have in the public perception. In this way, Carriageworks speaks at different levels: Skipping Girl appears in the signage as a reference for the locals; the shadow casting of historic upon new is a more ethereal connection between generations; the Contemporary Performing Arts uses are organised along the same set of coordinates as the original factory was, which is a more academic connection. Similarly, at Cloudy Bay, the ‘branding’ benefitted from the direction of the occupant to the iconic view of the Richmond Ranges, across the vineyards, while the use of humble materials in a sophisticated way referred both to the simple rural setting and the international prestige of LVMH.
I look to understand the spatial hierarchy as an ordering system in the building. This offers architectural intelligibility, which in turn allowed a navigational strategy to the occupant. The path is the voyage of experience, the route(s) along which the building reveals itself. Alternative paths can offer alternative experiences. The foyer of The Glasshouse combines the curvilinear form of the theatre and the rectilinear form of the footpath facade into a vertical pathway up through the building, forming a spatial hierarchy. The vertical shaft links the depths of the archeological site to the sky at the clerestory glazing. The giant volume of the theatre, the openings into the gallery and the different levels of the foyer can all be seen from the main stair. At a smaller scale the Baillies Lodge foyer not only establishes the patron circulation but defines the physical relationship of the inherited buildings, offering a complete rear view of the buildings that front on to George St.

Just as there is a desire to compose forms, there is a matching desire to develop interstitial space. In The Glasshouse, solid and void are in tension for the same territory. Interstitial space engages with the forms, advancing the architectural experience. Interstitial space is not left over space, but an active partner to form.

I look for materials that will voice the form, and I like to engage with materials symbolically, spatially and contextually. Symbolically, materials are selected for their associations – historic or contemporary – to speak of the building’s role. In Paddington Reservoir Gardens, we used materials contextually to locate the new building into or against their surroundings. The shiny aluminium archways signified the now; the conserved brickwork was obviously original and the steel barred gates played between the two. In order to give materials prominence, we prefer to use them in a limited palette, as can be seen in the Paddington Reservoir: concrete, steel and aluminium.

In Carriageworks, parts of the original building (the roof trusses) were re-purposed for contemporary use (the entry signage structure), reviving and highlighting original building fabric to present it as an unusual contribution to the new building. The quality of original built work is often unattainable by today’s building industry. In keeping it, we can retain patinas where they provide surface interest, often complementing them with modern interventions. Further, we make space around inherited objects of interest to elevate their status, such as the archeological remains in The Glasshouse.

In the Baillies Lodge design, sunlight is used as a material of equal weight to physical building fabric, that is, sculpturally speaking. It is used to project patterns, and to fill voids conventionally and directly, or as reflected light. It is also employed as a device to draw a relationship between inherited and new building fabric, newly built forms designed to cast shadows on inherited surfaces (or visa versa). This strategy connects the two by means of a slow dance of shadow driven forward by the moving sun. The detail of the cast shadow is constantly moving, changing the atmosphere of the spaces during the day.
5.3 sketching – moments of invention

Sketching represents momentary thinking. The hand is directed by the thought of the moment, however fleeting or pre-determined. If the hand is tutored in architectural representation, sketching can reveal thought processes: it can capture the moment of discovery of a notion, the moment of invention.

Sketching can be used as a process of accessing one’s subconscious memory. Shapes, materials and shades of light flow from the pencil as connections between the imagined and the remembered reveal themselves. These connections are not immediately apparent but may be recognised over time. An instantaneous idea can be rooted in deep thought, built up over years and distilled from many experiences.

The aesthetic or the medium of the sketch, whilst often seductive, can distract with its picturesque distortion. The more I sketch by hand, the more I try to remove any stylistic aesthetic. Sketching, for me, has become a means to an idea. It can also be a useful way of emptying the mind in order to move on.

Beyond this, I see sketching as a large part of my role in the TZG practice. Apart from design aesthetics, broader matters such as project feasibility and expression of the client’s aspirations are often best delineated in a sketch.

Whilst reflecting on my practice over the last three years I realised that another form of sketching had emerged in my work, and that was sketching with words or simple reductive sentences. At the Paddington Reservoir Gardens a simple phase defined the conceptual idea – ‘the concept for the new use lurked within the artifact’. This phase took over from the early drawings that were continually overwhelmed by the romanticism of a collapsed ruin. This is an example of something unable to be drawn being sketched out in words.
If sketching is the tool to grasp the idea, drawing is a means of exploring the idea and bringing it into focus and reality.

We also think of adjusting the design as layers, like ripples in a pool where the intensity of the idea is reduced the further it moves away from the source. Next to - and focused on - the concept is the ring of TZG architects. In the next ring are the various consultant teams (who might cause their own ripples). On the outer layers, are the builders and subcontractors who are less concerned with the central concept and more with their layer of practical procedure that translates theoretical drawings into built reality. The intensity of the signal at the centre will have a material effect on the clarity at the periphery.

Each project uses a means of representation at the Design Development stage, which is rooted in the core of the design idea. This style of representation for developing the Carriageworks design was in the manner of David Lean’s 1945 film “Brief Encounter” as away of searching for a seemingly relevant aesthetic leading to a particular approach to the refinement of the architectural idea. The method, in effect, merges the Sketch Design and Design Development stages so that the architectural idea can be worked upon for longer, simultaneously firming up decisions for documentation. This protects the architectural ideas from the often corrosive effect that simple translation to CAD often has. It also allows the prolongation of design investigation that is often lost in the context of limited commercial timeframes.

I’m primarily motivated by the experiential (phenomenological) attributes of architecture manifest in spatial, material, memorative and associative qualities. For this, it is imperative to study the building in its context. Computer tools of the 21st century have illuminated the design process for our office, strengthening the passage from design concept in context to buildable and built form.

The power of animation to generate movement, engage with ephemera and effortlessly render complexity makes it the perfect tool for my approach to architecture.

The Baillies Lodge project showed me how important animation is to our office in representing architecture at the design stage. We use it as much for exploring the idea as for simply representing complex ideas to the client. From a pragmatic point of view, the animation allows each project team member to contribute their part of the design and to ensure that the additions are workable, consistent and seamless.

The primary ‘adjusting’ tools are traditionally drawings and more recently animation. I have always believed that I relied solely on visual imagery to develop and to communicate conceptual architectural ideas. The natural ‘evolutionary’ process of the Paddington design, strongly underpinned by the one instructive sentence, and, later, the opportunity of this dissertation to identify the drivers of my design, have led me to be more aware of the power of words in architecture.
I now realise the importance of injecting our architectural ideas not only into the context of the proposed building, but into the context of the building’s audience, or, more to the point, audiences. I now find myself ‘seating’ the evolving project in a number of ways, each way prospecting for the greatest amount of meaning for each audience.

The term ‘adjusting’ seems apt, as we set a direction with our architectural concepts and then continually redirect the project to keep it on course against the ravages and tremors of the management and building industries.

The builders receive the remains of the idea, distilled into a clear set of instructions that, once management, labour and materials are added, turns into the representation of the conceptual idea(s). However, as every cook knows, even the best recipes still require a certain amount of adjustment. At this point, ‘adjustment’ becomes an understated term for hundreds of 'request for information' emails, endless conversations, heated arguments, defects lists and, generally, angst. The unfortunate irony of this is that the builders who have the greatest material effect on a project are at the furthest point of the radius away from the conceptual centre.

We are attempting to address this irony on a current project, treating the builder more as a collaborator. This requires a unique client who understands and is prepared to accept the financial risks and such a client is only to be found on smaller projects. It is certainly not an approach that would be endorsed by the contracts of the Australian Institute of Architects.

In this ripple pool analogy of ‘adjustment’, I have always thought of the client as being outside of the process, gazing down from above, seeing all. I now realise this image is totally flawed.

We have a diverse client base, ranging from major institutions to individuals. Each engages with projects differently. For some of our clients, the main priority it is to initiate a project. Some care only about the outcome and others become an integral part of the design team and may in fact drive the adjustment process. Our projects average about four years from beginning to end and our clients, not surprisingly, move in and out of this process in many unpredictable ways.
5.5 experiencing – period of realisation of the built project

As a project turns into a building and stands before us we are at last afforded the opportunity to explore and experience our new shiny thing. However it is not long before it asks questions of us, or, more to the point, questions of our ideas from several years ago when the design process began.

We cannot avoid this confrontation. We must test the original concepts against reality, confirming what is possible in the built world – which of them manage to thread their way through the regimes of the construction industry, regulatory authorities and economic parameters?

So how do we go about experiencing our own architecture? There are several different ways: we can physically explore the building; we can document and record; read reviews; talk about the building. Sometimes we don’t understand how design decisions came about and we’re faced with the murky manoeuvrings of the subconscious. Let’s take these one by one.

The most potent test for me is physically exploring the form of the new buildings, its materiality and spaces. As I move through the building I’m thinking of the original design ambition and asking if it has found its way into reality. It is the ultimate and most powerful test, requiring brutal honesty. Failure is not the end of the world, as it can be used as a stepping stone, as a kind of architectural atonement.

In documenting and recording a building, we are synthetically testing it with a sequence of presentation drawings (that attempt to inspire confidence in the viewer of the design’s inevitability) and photographs in order to capture the moment of completion (when the building in all its baldness best manifests the architectural aspirations, before time and use evolves and softens). This documenting and recording process amounts to an extended test, but also compiles a repository of information.
Reading reviews offers an external view that we can’t obtain by ourselves. Having read at least 40 reviews of the selected and related projects for this dissertation, it has become clear that the scope of each review, and its author’s position can have as strong a bearing on the article as the building itself. The articles that I found the most helpful were written by John de Manincor who has reviewed three of the selected projects in this dissertation. He is at his most insightful when he identifies similarities between projects. He observed a similarity between the paths of movement in the Glasshouse and those in the Carriageworks, noting that both turned the entering visitor perpendicular to the street as a device to accentuate the moment of entry, in the absence of grand steps. I found this observation fascinating as each design had emerged from a different starting point and design strategy, yet there was a commonality in the result, something I had not been aware of at the time of working on the project.

When asked to talk publicly about my architecture I find myself reconfiguring the mass of design ideas into a coherent narrative that foregrounds the main ideas in order to make sense of the project. This often reveals previously unseen ideas, especially if you are ‘open’ to them.

There is also the mysterious issue of the subconscious, which pushes for unnoticed but nevertheless consistent design tactics from one project to another, which may eventually reveal themselves after a while.

If the architectural concept lies somewhere between reality and imagination, the imagination has to be sufficiently nourished and seasoned by experience in the real world. Concepts are born of an intriguing potion of conscious experience, rigorous analysis and subconscious trickery.

As a practising architect, I find the magic of a building lies in its materiality and the sensory experience that it conjures. It is ultimately this experience that I seek to convert to memory for reuse and further exploration.

8. Three Buildings:

John de Manincor, “CarriageWorks”
Architecture Australia July/August 2007 (Vol 96 No. 4)
Architecture Media

John de Manincor, “The Art of Material Dialogue”
Architecture Review Australia 110/Adaption – June/July 2009

John de Manincor, “The Glasshouse”
Architecture Review Australia 114/Out of Town – April/May 2010
6 conclusion
Conclusion

My research and reflection about my practice has been invaluable to the advancement of my architectural thinking. It has allowed me to reveal and understand a way of thinking and working that was not apparent to me several years ago. Moreover, it has changed how I work and has provided me with a much larger ‘set of tools’ to communicate complex architectural ideas to people both within and outside the profession.

The architectural thoughts and working method articulated in this dissertation offer a way of thinking about practicing architecture. This conclusion is mirrored with a TZG conclusion developed with Peter Tonkin, which is located in Volume 2. It is hoped that, when read in concert, these two volumes elucidate my thoughts and the work of TZG Architects.

The avoidance of absence – the making of presence

The modes of practice I have identified in my work lead to an architecture that does not rely on typology, but rather on context in the broadest sense, with expanded notions of site and history that explore my desire to find sustainable relevancy and meaning.

Cultural values are a principal interest for me and I am fascinated by how these can be identified and incorporated into architecture. I have become engrossed by the question of how extrinsic influences and pre-architectonic values can be interpreted as a basis for architecture. The findings of this thesis have reaffirmed to me that cultural signals can be transferred into architecture.

We are not alone. Our actions respond to those of others before us or around us, just as our actions will invite others to respond. I have always needed this connectedness; it seems central to the human condition, or at least to my human condition. Absence, whether perceived or real, has always been a terrifying prospect to me. My work is motivated by a desire to have somewhere to belong, and a need to continually create ‘presence’ through multiple levels of environmental and cultural engagement. This becomes an antidote to the absence apparent in the environment of my early years.

The continuum – the interconnectedness of everything

This doctoral study has allowed me to realise that I’m interested in the interconnectedness of culture, history and building. The realisation has led me to conceive a method of investigation into any new project, and to formulate a set of theories about my work, both of which culminate in a possible strategy of ‘interpretive design’.

In the act of interpreting an existing ‘field’ to find fertile ground for a new architectural concept, a set of pre-existing conditions can be used to cross-pollinate with the new work, so that the historic is not alienated and the new is not sterile.

My designs, as interventions in historic environs, are architecturally expressed as contemporary, but they engage with the pasts of their historic hosts. Together they make a collective statement about where the use of the building is headed, while refusing to extinguish the view of where it has come from. I can now see that this notion – of rootedness in the past combined with a built ‘manifesto’ for contemporary culture – has become a theme across all of my work.

As cities become denser and more complex, with a simultaneous desire in our culture for urban authenticity, this dual architectural approach allows me, as an architect, to engage with the city, clients and stakeholders in a structured and effective way.

Interconnected practice

The discovery of the importance of interconnectedness in my architecture, and its success as a paradigm for directing my projects, has led me to recognise my architectural concepts not as discrete objects but rather as interconnected moments of design in a continuing development of interrelated design ideas.

I now recognise that I have the desire to understand cultural values from preceding times, coupled with a desire to represent our own culture and time. The notion of seeing architecture without a beginning or an end, but rather as part of a cultural continuum, leads me to look and think beyond architecture’s connection to the physical realm, to the cultural context in which it is rooted.

My five ‘modes of practice’ offer a framework across which to observe and understand the trajectory of making architecture, from conceptualisation to built reality. Accepting my is a moment in a continuum of built history and cultural expectation.
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Relational:


Some influences and relevant works:

Michael Lean, *“Brief Encounter” 1945 – a cinematic representation of Nineteenth Century railway structures*

Mosque of Cordoba – a cathedral inside a mosque

Christchurch City Plan – an incomplete urban grid, promising urbanity but with insufficient time to deliver it

Carlo Scarpa, Castlevecchio Museum adaption 1959-73 – a contemporary architectural ribbon threaded through an inherited building


Colin McCahon, *“Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury” 1959 – statement of absence in the landscape, an interlocking of sky and land that is at once quiet but full of agoraphobic doom*

Peter Beavan, Lyttleton Road Tunnel Building, Christchurch mid 1960’s – standing up to the grandeur of the landscape beyond

Warran and Mahoney, Christchurch College, completed 1964 – petit brutalism

Harold Cazneaux, “Bridge Pattern”, circa 1904 – part of his Sydney Harbour Bridge photographic series, where the pictorial is poeticised


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