

Unlocking Physical Spaces



Richard Le Messurier
Creative Practice Research

Projects

Unlocking Physical Spaces



Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the successful completion of this research. I would like to thank my supervisors for their attentiveness and support. Dr Urs Bette who advised me from the outset and Dr Julian Worrall for his perceptive guidance. Sincere thanks to Dr Jo Russell-Clarke for her suggestions with the written sections and to Con Brauer and Jemma Holt for their grammatical inputs. Many thanks to the University of Adelaide for its financial support and to the School of Architecture and Built Environment, in particular to Urs Bette, Tanya Court and Jo Russell-Clarke in driving the Design Research Colloquium program in a new setting, encouraging practitioners to examine their practices in the critical framework of a PhD. Finally, I thank my supportive family.

Supervisors

Dr Julian Worrall
Dr Urs Bette

Clients of Included Projects

Ying Le – Thirsty Moon Tea
The Art Gallery of South Australia
Artsake Productions
William Freesmith and Simone Mazengarb
Ancient World Nightclub
Sparkspitter
Nick and Denise Le Messurier

Collaborators and Assistance

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Thomas Mc Dougall
Anna Fritz
Benedikt Stoll
Guerilla Architects

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Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree. I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

August 2021

Preface

Unlocking Physical Spaces is the title of a PhD by design research¹ examination undertaken at the University of Adelaide. This volume, *Projects*, forms the first of two books and precedes the *Written Inquiry* by providing supportive and introductory visual documentation. Visual media seeks to reveal essential details of the small-scale interventions central to this study, to elaborate on their design processes, spatial articulations, tactics and outcomes. Further visual documentation is included to support assorted chapters² of the *Written Inquiry* and to provide a general overview of my design practice, to reveal fascinations, persistent themes, biases and the methods I employ for developing research in formal and incidental ways. Both books are best read in conjunction.

The pages immediately following this preface reveal seminal personal projects³ that have helped to shape my 'spatial history'.⁴ The projects portray a practice geared towards making, construction and experimentation.

Notes

¹ This type of investigation is also increasingly referred to as a 'Creative Practice Research' inquiry, in line with experiences of the design research program at RMIT University.

² The latter section of this volume includes visual materials that supplement the Practice Agenda, Domestic Consequences and the Urban Analysis chapters in Book 2.

³ These pages largely support the Backstory chapter, in Book 2.

⁴ 'Spatial history' is a reference to the work of Leon Van Schaik.

Formative Projects





Treehouses (left)
 Photos: Denise Le Messurier
 Circa. 1996-2000

Early provisional structures: between the ages of 6-12 I was consumed by the interest to develop treehouses and shelters on a rural property.

The Rural Pavilion
 Photos: Stephen Crawford
 2008

**Please keep any
uncivilised feelings
bottled inside you.**



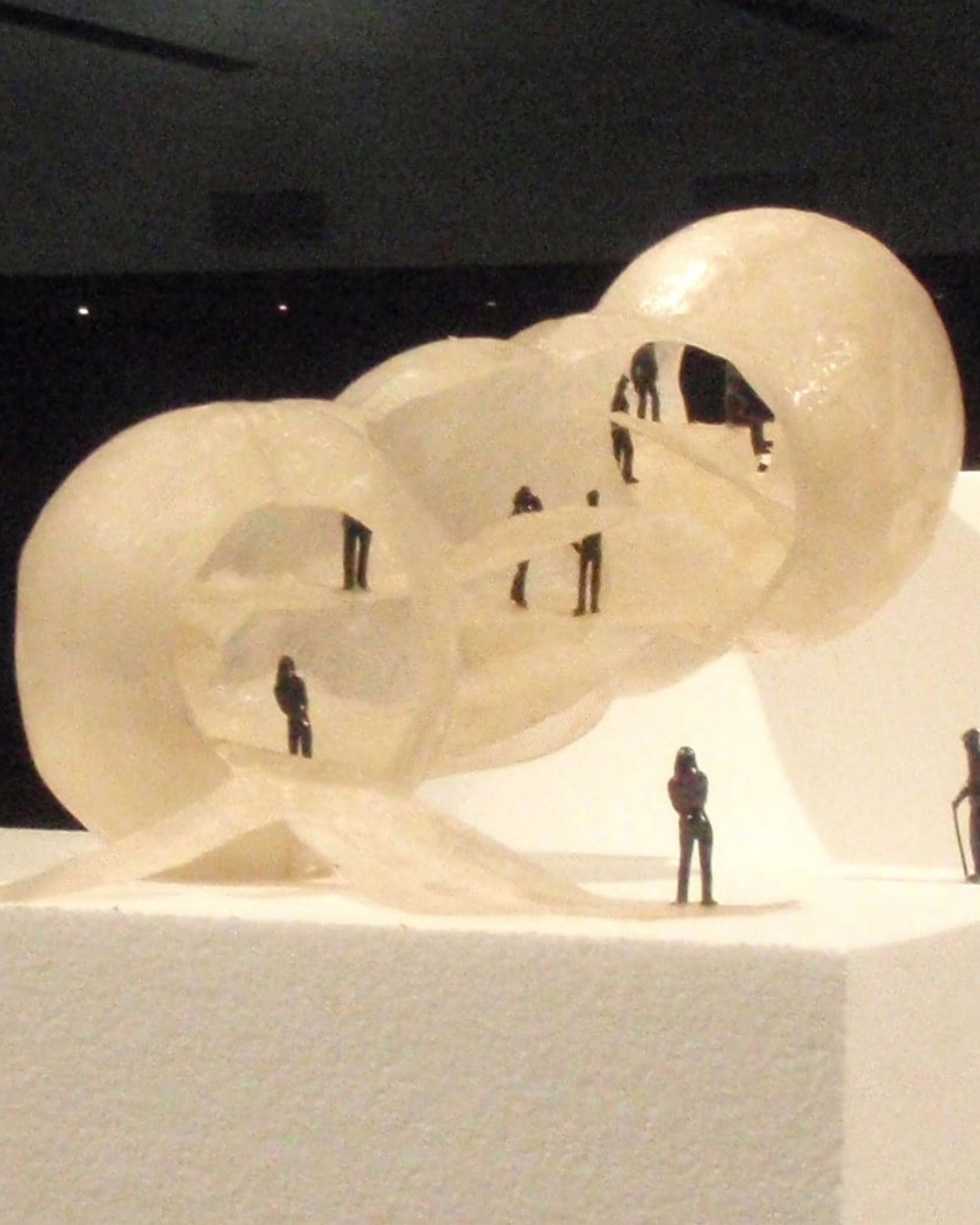


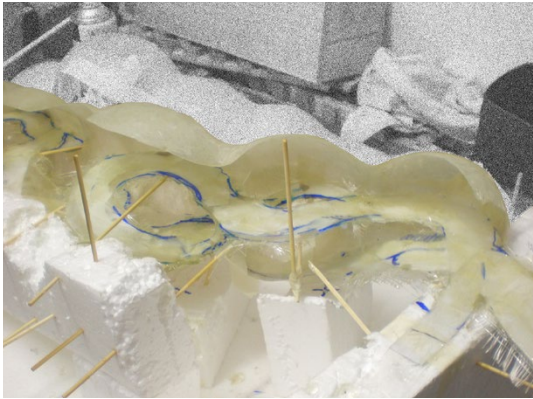
Urban Placards
Adelaide
2010 / 2021

A microscopic intervention: situational placards containing striking statements were sited in various CBD locations.

Dialectical Signs
Rundle / Hindley Street
2010

Pecha Kucha, Vienna (top)
Photo: Anton Stein
2011





Physical model under construction

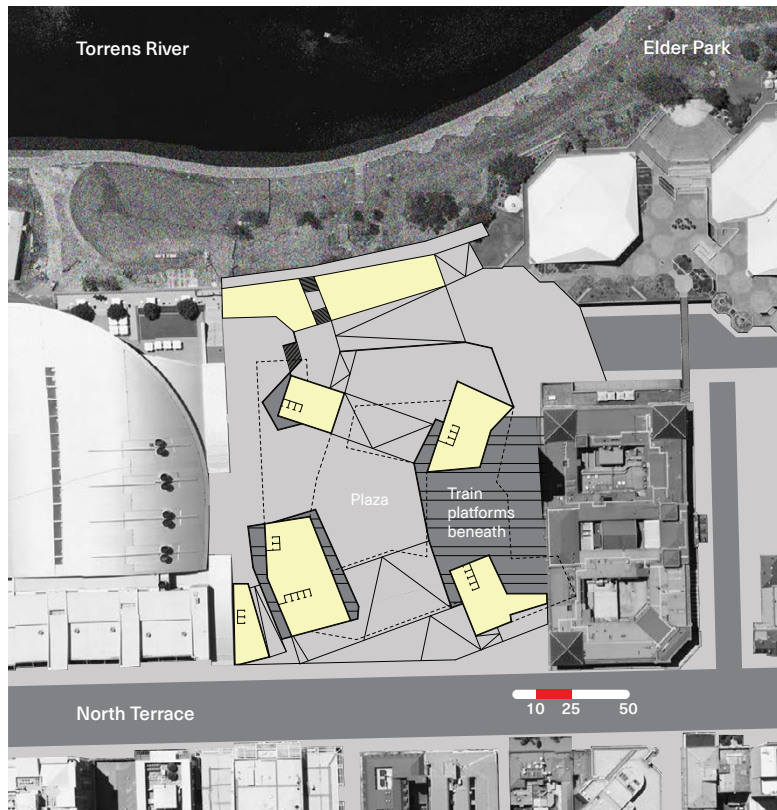
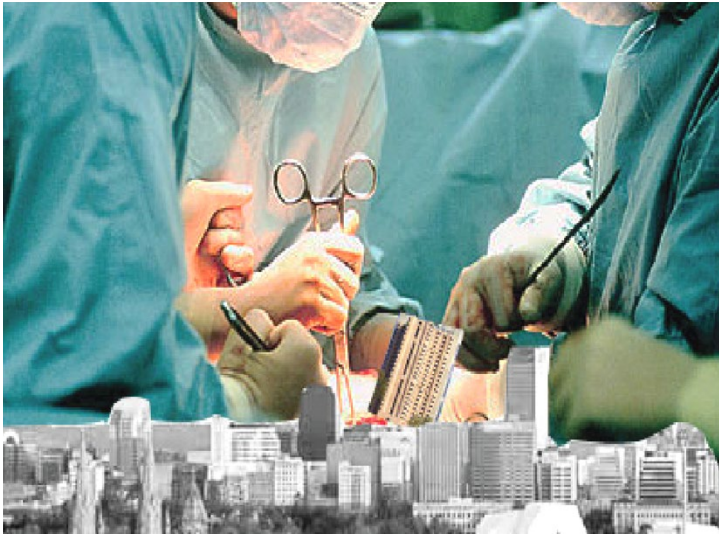


The Dialectical Bridge
National Student Competition (Top 5 Finalist)
2008

This bridge seeks to soften the construct of confrontation native to a conventional lineal bridge. Its organic casement disorientates people and mediates their proximity, revealing others in serendipitous moments.



- A – New hotel facilities
- B – Public plaza / pedestrianised realm
- C – Riverfront restaurant and bar strip



The Urban Crown
University Project
2009

Adelaide's Hyatt Hotel is demolished in an act of 'urban surgery', reclaiming the region above the Adelaide Railway Station platforms as public space. It forms a portal to Elder Park, extending a chain of pedestrian oriented alleyways through Adelaide's CBD. An alternative hotel is proposed above the plaza that doubles the existing hotel capacity.





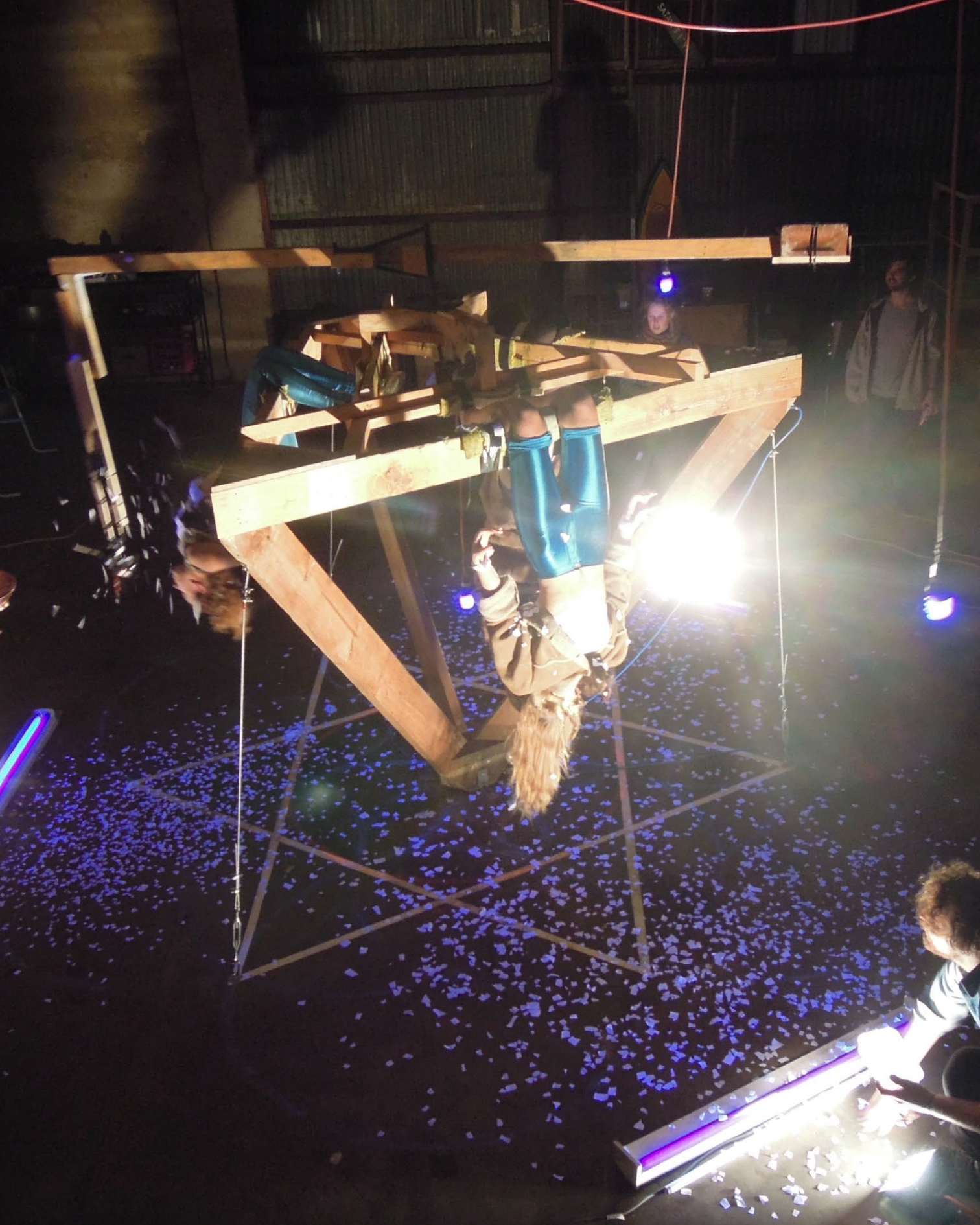
Chair
Pine, seatbelts
2015

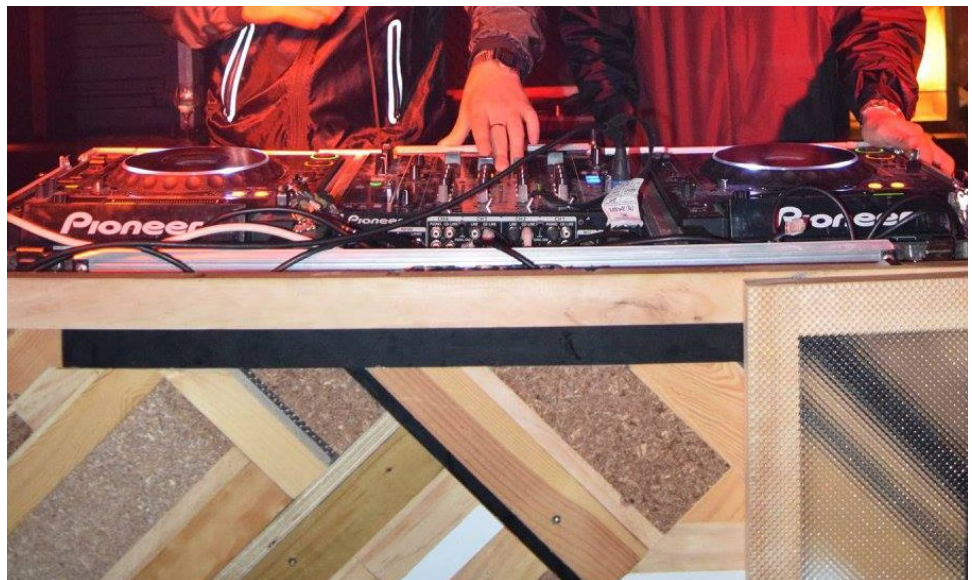
Artwork
Pine, tape
2015

Sidetable
IKEA shelving
2015

MAXI
Acrylic on canvas
2015

Furniture and artworks developed for
TRANS-FORM: a retail design shop arranged
as an augmented domestic interior.





Vandalis
Set-design for a film-clip
2014

Footage was filmed upside-down and
flipped during post-production to create
an analog means to a special effect.

Ancient World Nightclub DJ Station
Photo bottom right: Matea Gluscevic
2015





Cellardoor and Art Gallery
Photo: Thomas Capogreco
2013

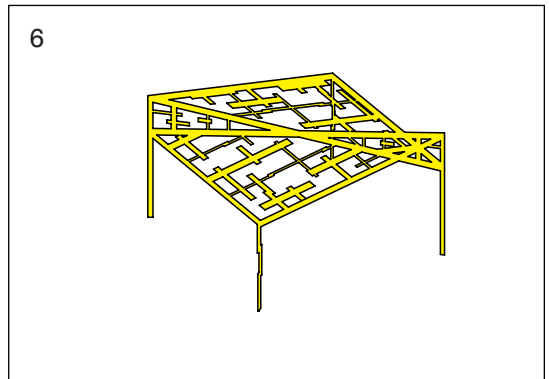
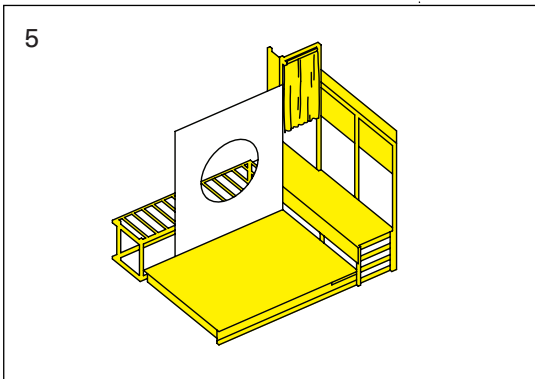
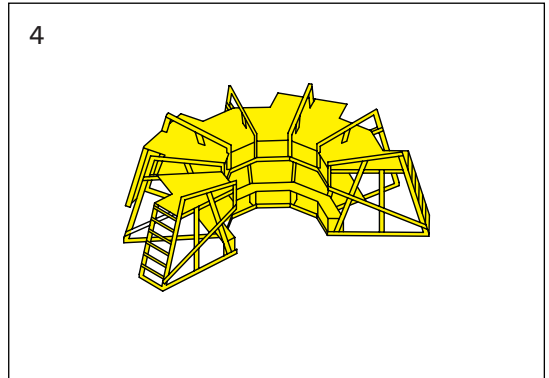
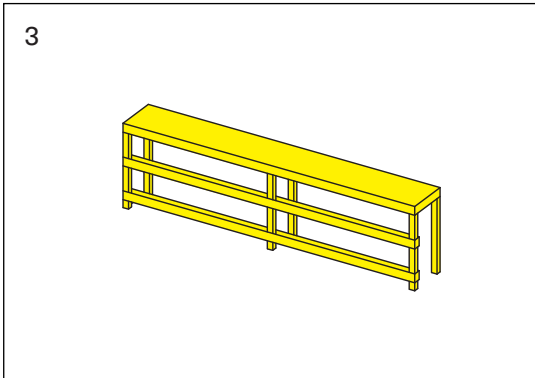
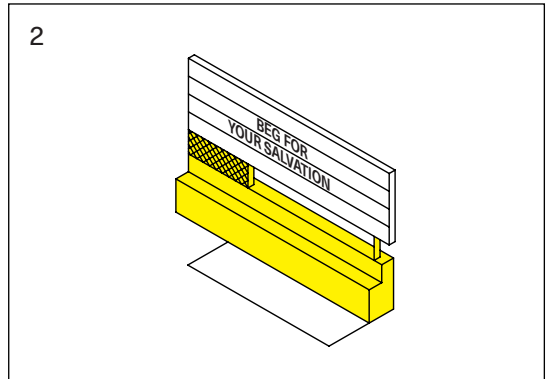
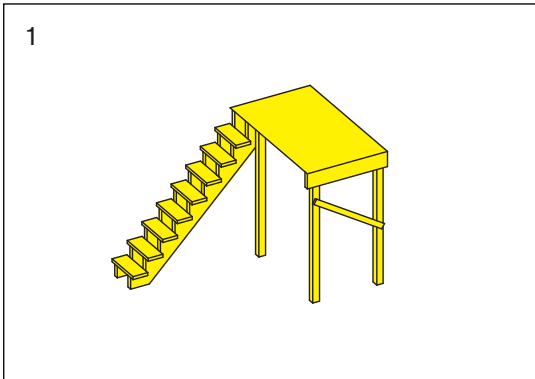
This concept for a cellardoor responds to the clients request that the building not be a 'barn'. It nestles a tapering and inflecting form between a row of vines and dam.

A Tribute to the Power-Walker
Parking Day Sculpture Concept
2016



Business Card
Upcycled bus ticket
2012

An Adelaide Metro Bus ticket was re-coded as a business card by the use of a customised banded sticker.



Six Urban Interventions

- 1 Hidden Borough Staircase
- 2 LOW (A Kneeling Bar)
- 3 The EN/counter
- 4 Proxaemic Theatre
- 5 Hōjōki Terminal
- 6 The Dirty Tea-house

The following sections document six, original, small-scale architectural interventions central to this investigation. Each project seeks to enable new types of social interaction and urban experience. The projects are conceptualised as fine grain infrastructure that connect with existing built fabric to intensify sites of underestimated potential. Each project is self-built,¹ where contributors arrive serendipitously; a refutation of ‘the current architectural practice that serves the construction industry’.²

Small things can have big impacts!

Notes

¹ Built independent of the construction industry, its labor forces and associated codes.

² EXYZT Collectif Manifesto, 2013.

Intervention 1



Hidden Borough Staircase

Tactic

Unlocking Community Memory

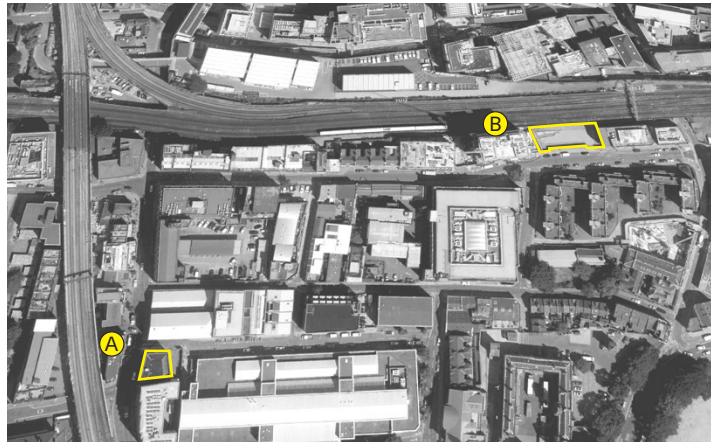
Hidden Borough Staircase

> Written Inquiry p129



Claiming a Private Warehouse

For their inaugural project, Berlin-based Guerilla Architects (GA) gained spontaneous legal jurisdiction of a dormant warehouse in Southwark, London, by seizing a legal loophole relating to squatters' rights. The loophole disadvantages landlords who buy land but do not express intention to lease – a London-specific legal clause aimed to prevent dormancy of building stock.

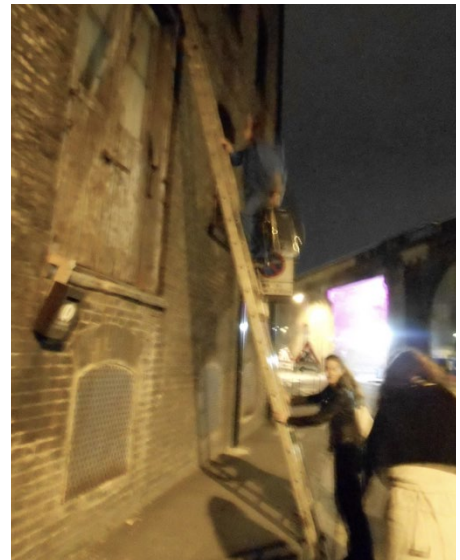


A – Hidden Borough – 55 Great Suffolk Street, London
B – The reUNION – EXYZT Collectif Site, 100 Union Street

Photo: Google

Issues of Access

The GA team originally accessed the building via ladder and proceeded to occupy the building for over 24hrs – this duration was critical to qualify for squatters' rights of the premise. Image right shows the original method of access, prior to development of the intervention.

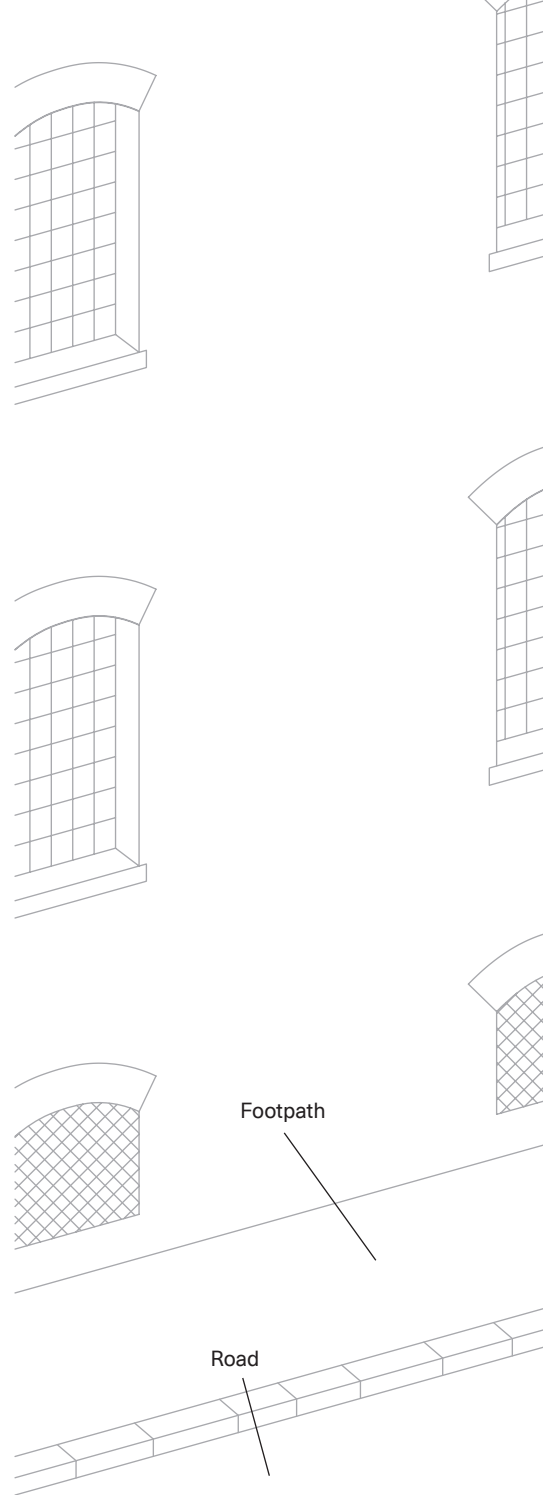


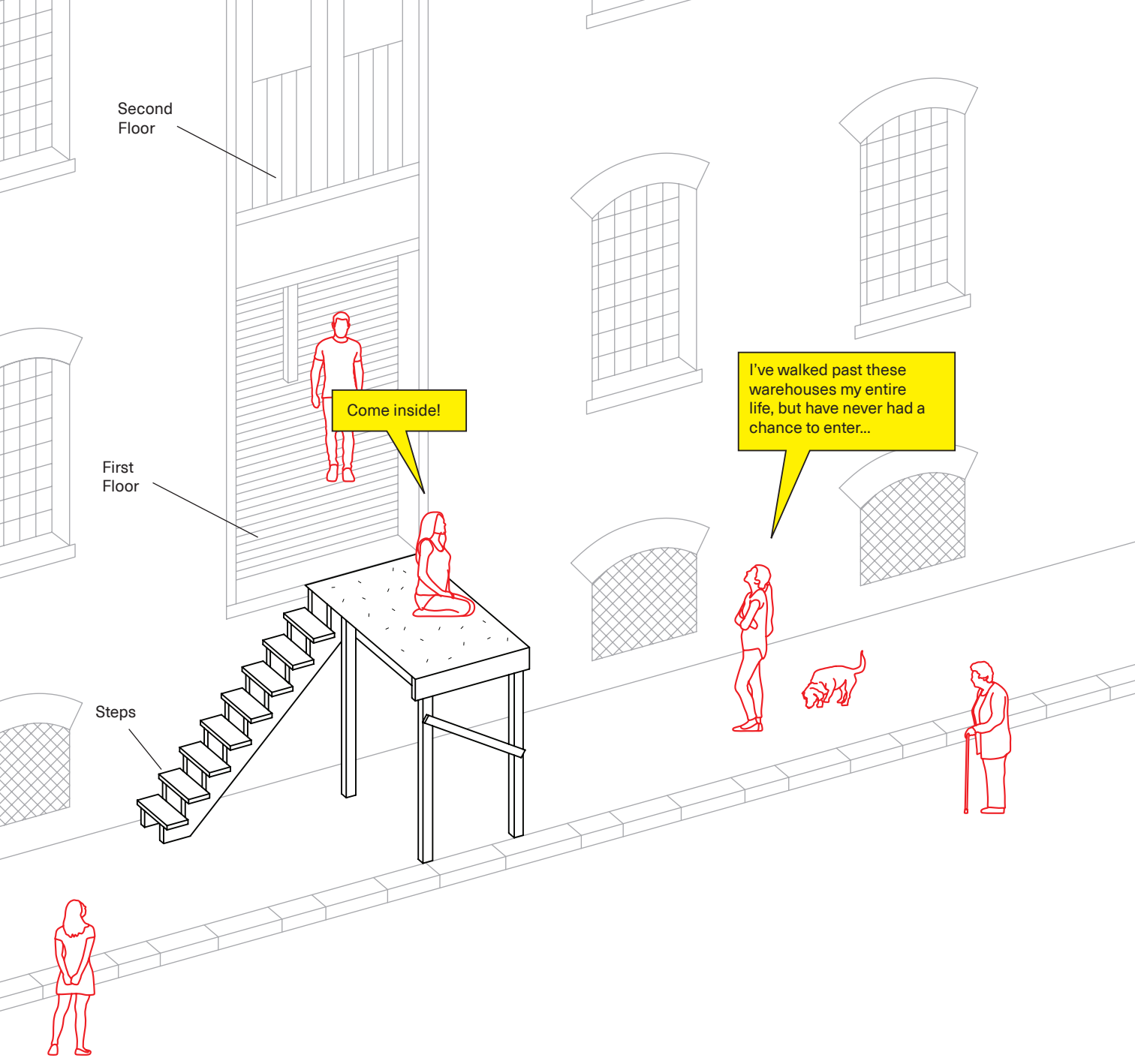
A Community Intersection Point

The Guerilla Architects invited me to collaborate on their project, to develop a new method of access to the historic four-storey warehouse from the building's public street front. A piece of infrastructure of this nature (shown right) would make the warehouse more publicly accessible and aid their vision to transform it into a community intersection point, featuring an exhibition space. Their ambitions were underpinned by an ethic that sought to establish public commons and to highlight contradictions surrounding London homelessness, despite the prevalence of empty buildings.

Claiming Public Land

The central challenge of developing amenity/infrastructure for provisional access to the warehouse, was that no land was available for it to be sited on – aside from the public footpath. With no alternative options available, the decision to claim public land was agreed upon – a 'guerilla' action that is expressly controversial.





Second Floor

First Floor

Steps

Come inside!

I've walked past these warehouses my entire life, but have never had a chance to enter...



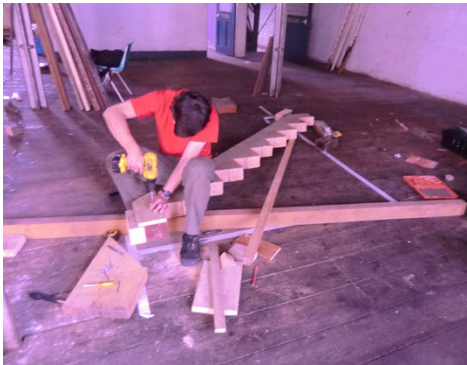


Photo: Benedikt Stoll



Mining the City for Resources

All structural timbers for the intervention were sourced from the basement of the warehouse and all tools were borrowed from neighbouring construction sites. Familiar resources were not available, since all participants of the project were visiting London from homes overseas.

Image removed due to copyright

Photograph shows Benedikt Stoll and Richard Le Messurier carrying found timber through the streets of Southwark, London

Photo: Anya Fritz

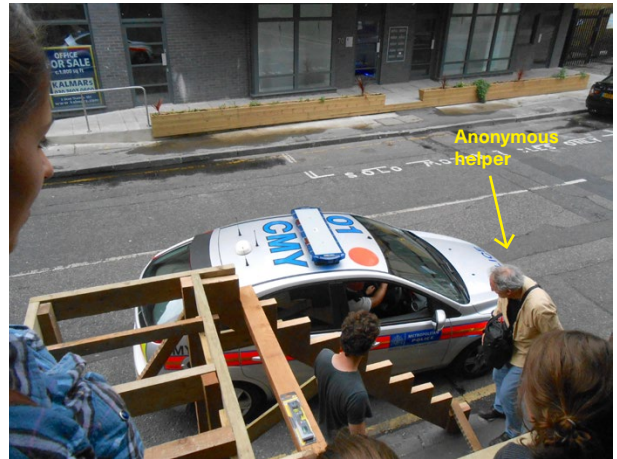
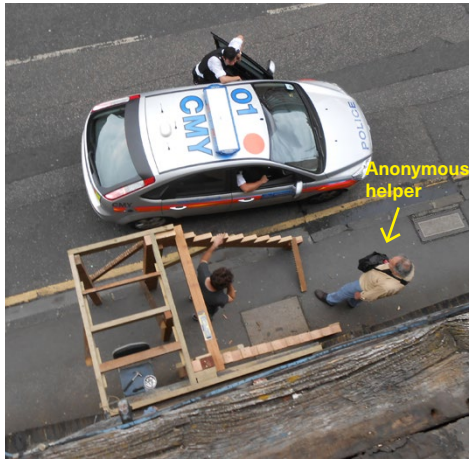
Preparations

All parts were pre-assembled inside the warehouse in attempt to execute a discrete and spontaneous installation of the intervention onto the public footpath. The stair trusses were cut entirely with a hand-saw due to low availability of tools.

Image removed due to copyright

Photograph shows installation of the staircase structure

Photo: Anya Fritz



Legal Friction

The interventions instalment onto the public footpath caught immediate attention of the London MET Police. This led to an extended stand-off. To our surprise, an anonymous elderly man who lived on the street came to the defence of the project. His support was instrumental and the officer's ultimately relinquished after forming an agreement that the intervention could remain for 24 hours.

Adapting / Negotiating

Extended negotiations with the officers led to the mutual agreement to adjust the staircase, so it would consume less space and accommodate free pedestrian movement beneath. Image right shows the new reduced width of the stairs. The adaptation was made in-situ with a hand-saw, leaving traces of sawdust on the footpath.



Controlled
ZONE

Stair width reduced
by 90cm

The EXYZT Collectif Site

How the Project Came About...

I met the Guerilla Architects in London while I was working on EXYZT Collectif's project *The reUNION Public House* – a provisional project for a hostel facility furnished with a range of supportive programs; including a sauna, pool, nightclub, sun-baking courtyard and library. It is one of several iterations the group has made for the same site over consecutive years.



1



7



2



3

Photo: Nicolas Henninger



5



4

Photo: Kim Harbison



6

Image: EXYZT Collectif



8



9



10

- 1 A mobile tool stand built by EXYZT Collectif.
- 2 A wheelbarrow was adapted to assist the dispersion of gravel.
- 3 Demolition of a provisional fence facing Union Street, Southwark, London.
- 4 Inside the site kitchen and communal rest area that would later become a public bar.
- 5 A production line was setup to manufacture furniture.
- 6 Promotional postcard for the project.
- 7 A self-built mobile scaffold. This element would later be transformed into a dormitory.
- 8 Architects and builders collaborated design and construction of the project.
- 9 All major meals were shared communally on the work-site.
- 10 Guerilla Architects arrive on-site gifting vegetables salvaged from a nearby market.



1



2

Work by Guerilla Architects

The warehouse acted as a residence for GA members for the duration of the project, with all members sleeping on inflatable mattresses. The images on this page provide a clue to their collective domesticity and the internal spaces of the warehouse that they curated for a public exhibition (aspects of the project I did not contribute to).



3



4



5

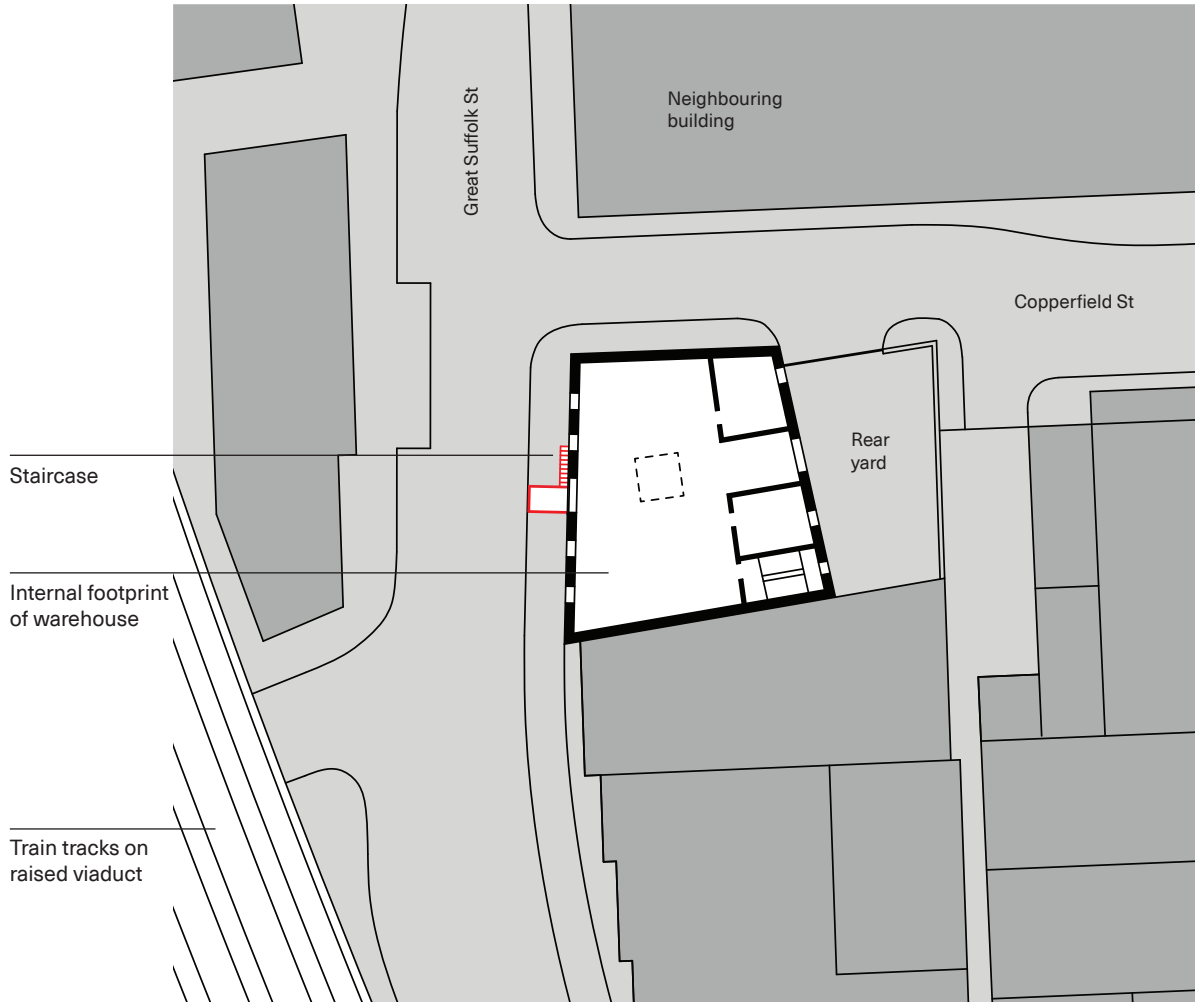
Lasting Question

What architectural adjustments can take place in the city, with minimal resources, to enable new forms of social interaction and unlock new urban experience?



6

- 1 Makeshift domesticity: a communal mirror and dressing table setup by the GA's.
- 2 Jumpsuits and a changing-screen used by the GA's.
- 3 Members of the GA's team procure exhibition spaces on lower warehouse floors.
- 4 A site-specific installation made by the GA's.
- 5 Construction workers from a nearby site are humoured by the intervention.
- 6 View from above the intervention, showing extent of the raised platform.



Intervention Facts

Type

Staircase / platform

Location

Great Suffolk Street
Southwark, London, UK

Period of Use

3 days

Date of Use

July 2012

Period of Construction

2 days

Client None

Budget None

Size 2m²

General Project Organisers

Guerilla Architects

Intervention Collaborators

Anna Fritz, Silvia Gioberti, Benedikt Stoll et al. of Guerilla Architects, Berlin, Germany

Construction

Found timbers, screws, OSB Board

Project Requirements

Enable access onto the first floor of the building

Project Obstacles

No planning

No tools

No budget

Built on public land

Contravenes local planning laws

Court case

Intervention 2



Low (A Kneeling Bar)

Tactic

Subverting a
Commonplace Ritual

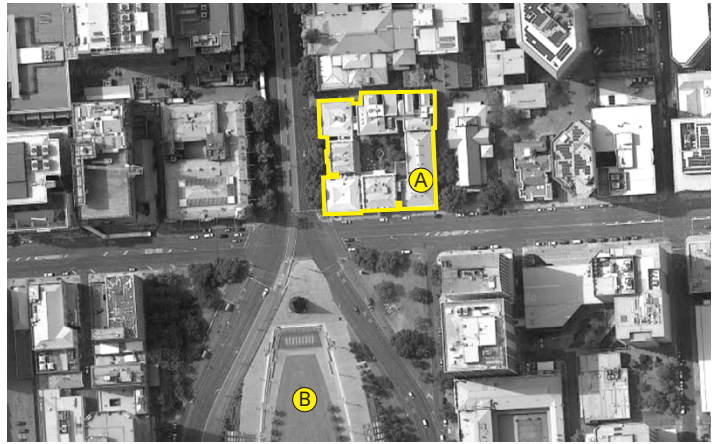
LOW (A Kneeling Bar)

> Written Inquiry p 139



Beneath The City

An art event was held in historic tunnels beneath the Adelaide Treasury Building. The organisers of the event approached me with the opportunity to design and build a bar in a compressed space at the entry of the exhibition. They encouraged creativity and requested that the bar respond to the two interchangeable themes of the event: *Beneath* (week 1) and *Humility* (week 2).



A – Site: The Adelaide Treasury Building
B – Victoria Square, Adelaide CBD, South Australia

Photo: Google

A Creative Bar for an Art Event

With the creative freedom provided, the bar was approached as an opportunity to reinvigorate the convention of ordering a drink – to animate an unexpected social situation and to enrich the space with conceptual content.

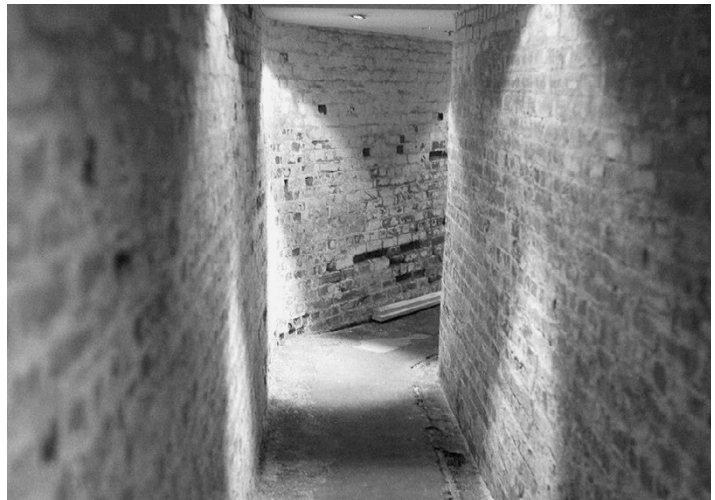
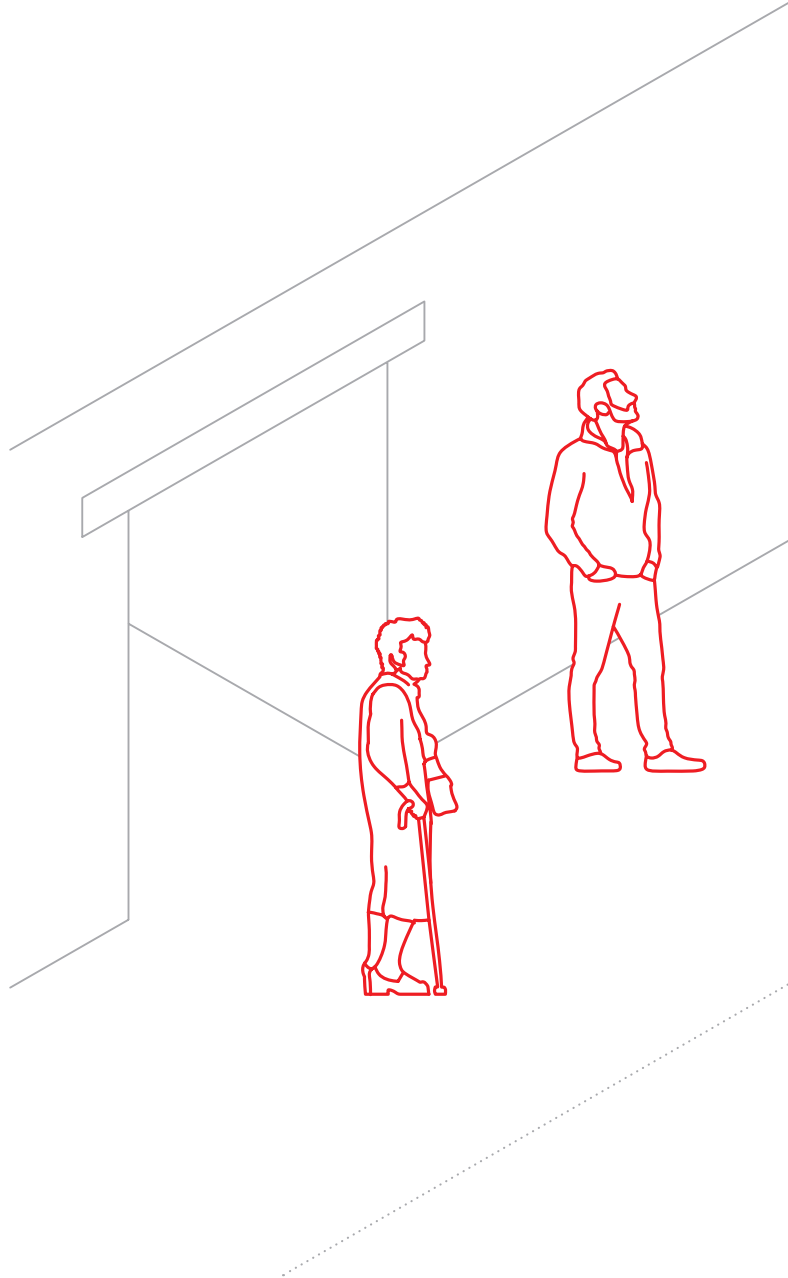


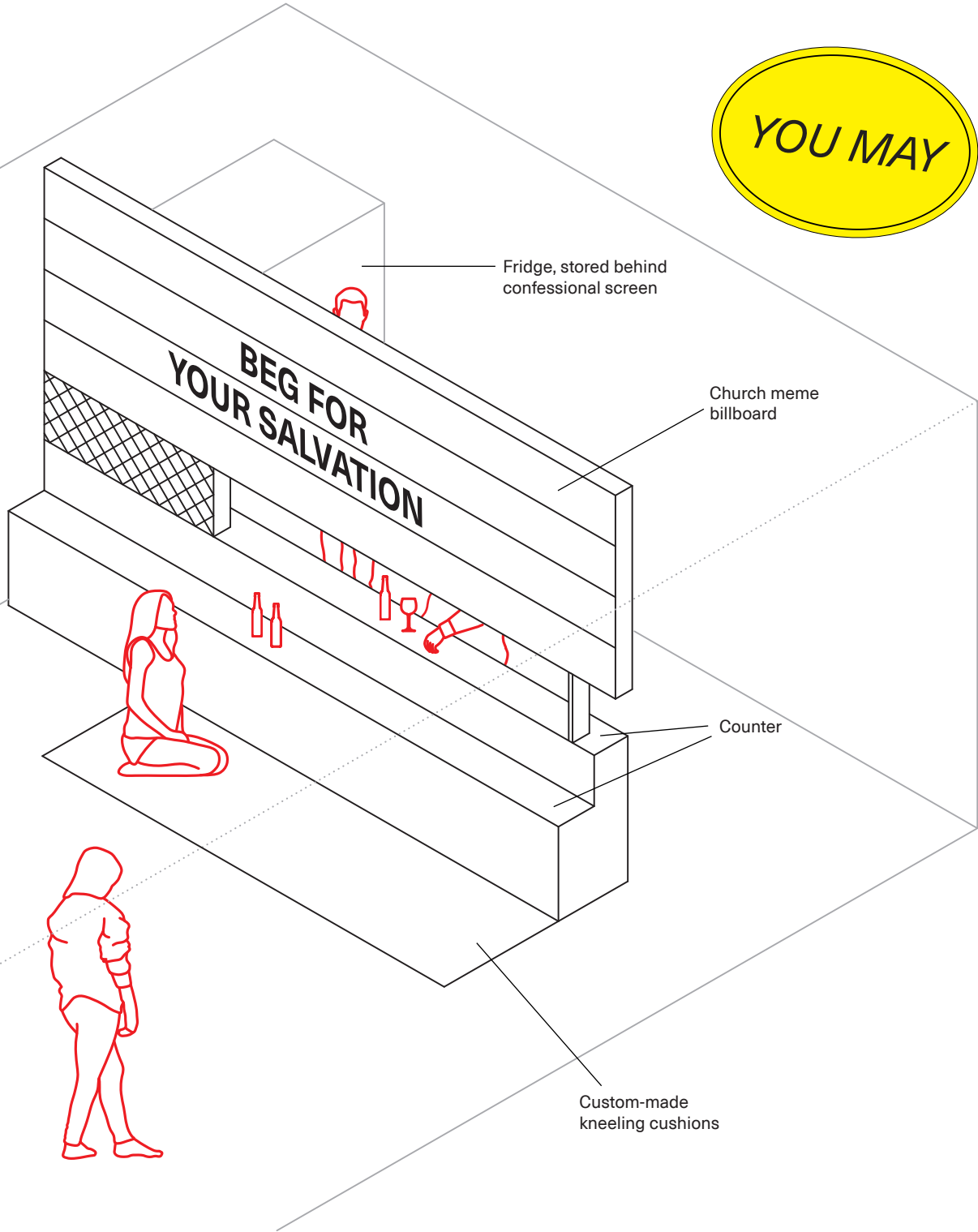
Photo: Christopher Arhlander

Re-thinking Type

The bar was re-configured as a confessional booth where patrons kneel to receive offerings of refreshment. By kneeling, rather than standing, participants are poised to re-experience human commonalities. The bars unorthodox format generated social sparks by disrupting familiar orthodoxies and re-programming spatial relations.



YOU MAY



Interchangeable Event Themes

Two separate event descriptions were prepared for the interchanging themes of the event. These descriptions were reinforced by statements on visually prominent church-meme billboard. I provide below the event descriptions, in their original, esoteric formats...



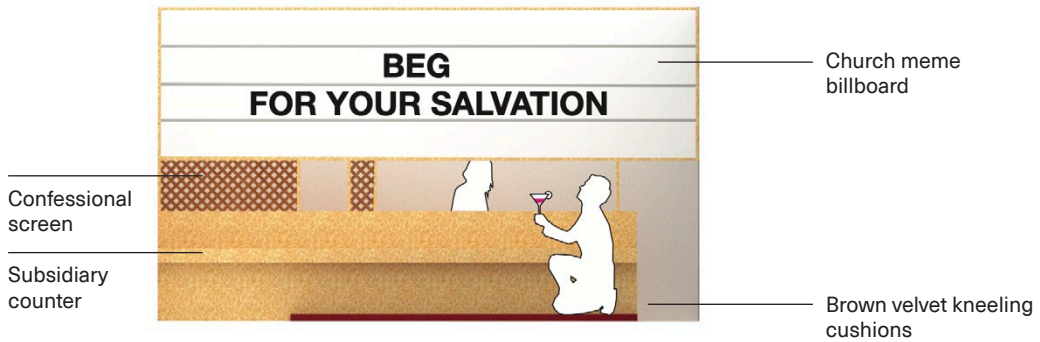
Week 1

Theme: Beneath

Project Description

What lurks beneath?

LOW is a confessional booth-meets-kneeling bar that intends to elicit the revelation of unlikely tales, repressed memories, dreams, desires, or simply something that would normally remain hidden. To facilitate this, staff are partly obfuscated by a screen, to emphasise and prioritise the aural sense and exchange of words. A sitting position marked by its LOW-ness surprises patrons who are reunited with the ground, stirring childhood nostalgia and providing a catalyst for the exchange of repressed memories. Let it slip!



Week 2

Theme: Humility

Project Description

Patrons are invited to kneel or sit and receive offerings of refreshment! Transcend insatiable desires and reunite with the ecstasy of exchange, in this celebration of an iconic gesture of humility. Once poised in primal kneeling position, patrons are primed to re-experience human commonalities, as political clichés specific to the orthodox of standing are challenged – whether through fashion, footwear, body posture, sex or height. LOW subverts the physicality of the space to emphasise the liminal zone between offering and acceptance.

Confession box



REVEAL THE FILTHY SECRETS



Photo: Michal Kedem



Photo: Christopher Arblaester



Photo: Christopher Arblaester

Setting the Mood

Staff and patrons alike embraced the novelty of the Kneeling Bar and, in most cases, readily adapted to it. People came to the event expecting the unexpected and the bar rewarded this anticipation. It appeared to help set a mood of gaiety in the space.

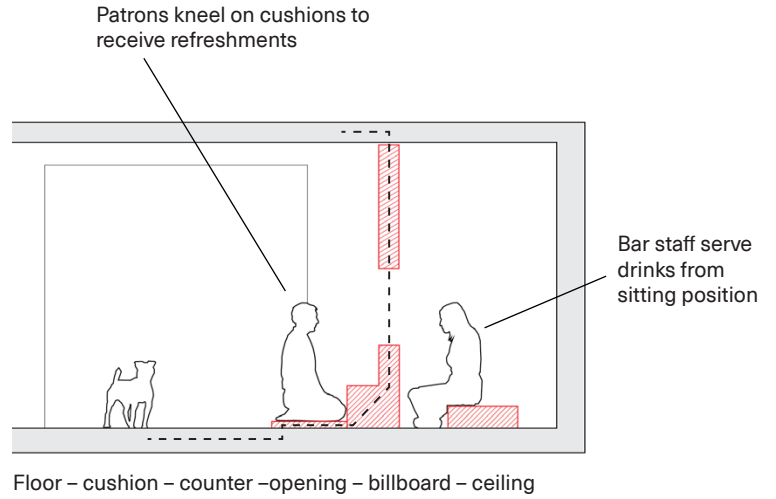
Focused on Fault

Multiple able-bodied people speculated that the bar format might pose issues to people with 'knee problems'. These criticisms strangely overlooked how flexible the bar was in practice – people could kneel, sit, stand, crawl, or approach the bartenders via wheelchair,

at eye level. People who voiced these criticisms also struggled to accept how accommodating the bar was to a participant who arrived in a wheelchair, who contrarily praised the bar, expressing his wish that 'more bars like this' would be built in the future.

Merging of Systems

Rather than being an isolated object, the bar integrates and synthesises with the existing space.



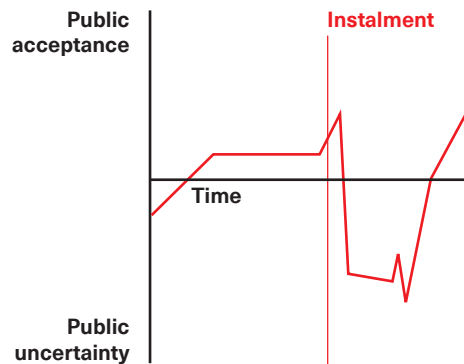
Textural Interplay

The materiality of the intervention sought to offset the ruggedness of the existing historic walls of the tunnels, to ameliorate the sense of enclosure in the limited space.



Panic!

Immediately following the completion of the bar, an unnamed official observed the intervention and demanded that it be 'removed immediately', citing it as a significant 'safety hazard'. Rather than highlighting realistic dangers,* this reaction drew attention to how culturally unaccustomed parties in Australian contexts can be to temporary architecture and novelty, and possibly how deep-seated litigious insecurities can impact on people's enjoyment.



*The staff member was concerned that people might 'knock their head' on the intervention – I provided a counter-argument explaining that the materials at head level were made of polystyrene. However, the staff member by this point had grown irate and productive negotiations were thwarted.

Performative Mobility

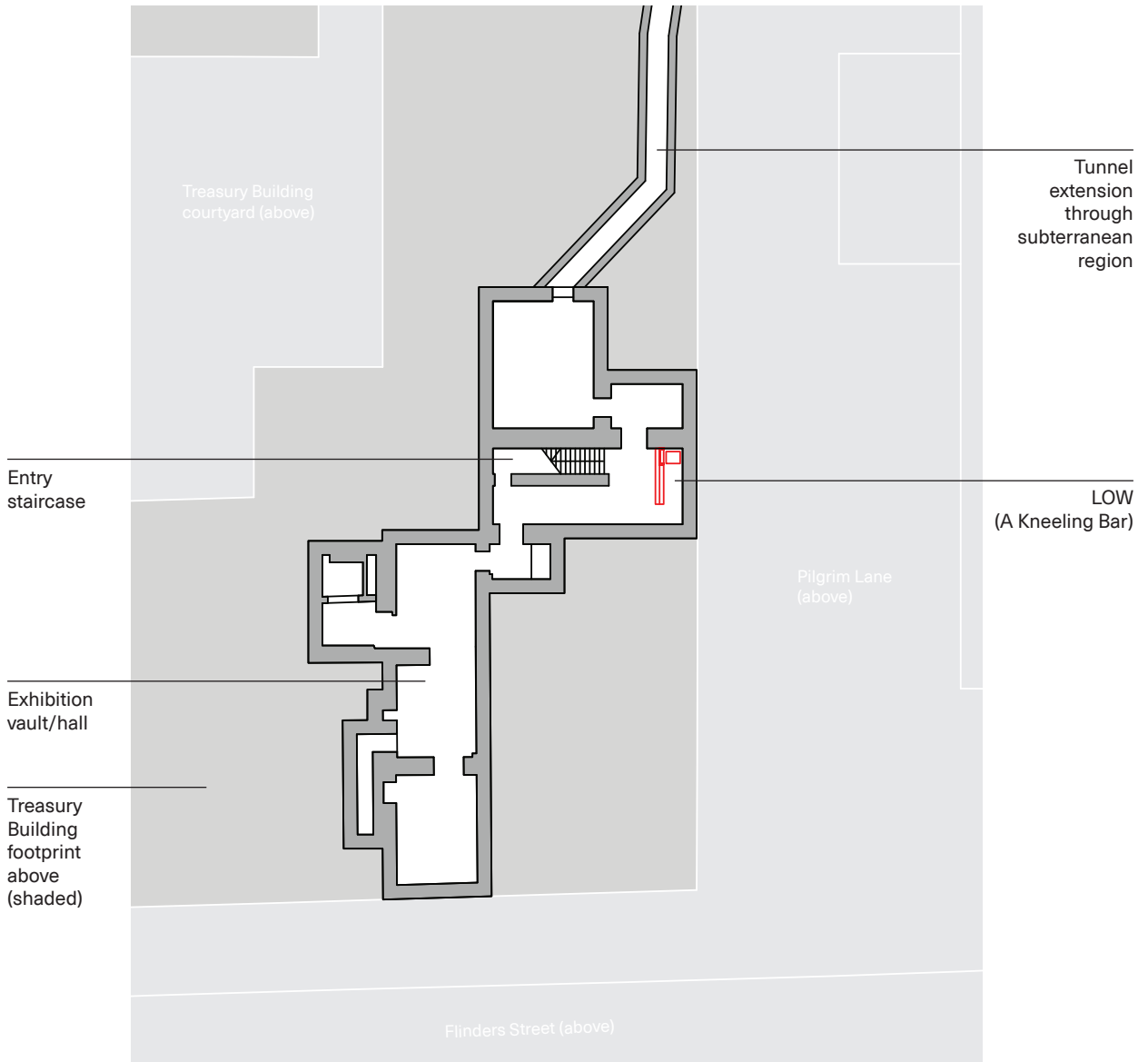
A custom-built bike trailer was used to transport all parts of the bar to its CBD location. The trailer was then implemented as a rickshaw to wheel the materials through the existing building and directly to an elevator linked to the tunnels. This avoided CBD carparking expenses and multiple back-and-forth trips to a vehicle. The action doubled as a performative stunt, in mind of the unusual cargo. Image right shows the first load of the cargo. Two trips were necessary.





Pouring of 'holy waters'.
Photo: Christopher Arblaster





Intervention Facts

Type

Bar

Client

Artsake Collective

Budget

\$500 AUD

Size

5.4m²

Location

The Adelaide Treasury Building,
Adina Apartment Hotel, Adelaide.
Located in historic tunnels one
level below ground level

Collaborators

No formal collaborators

Construction

Up-cycled pallet timber, Merbau battens,
foam-core, cardboard, glue, spray paint,
screws

Period of Use

20 days

Project Requirements

Conceptual content to serve as iconic
entry-point to the one-off art event. Project
was devised to fit inside small space

Dates of Use

April 19 - May 9, 2013

Period of Construction

14 days

Key Features

Counter, kneeling cushions, meme
billboard, confessional screen

Intervention 3



The EN/counter

Tactic

Re-Thinking Suburban
Encounter

The EN/counter

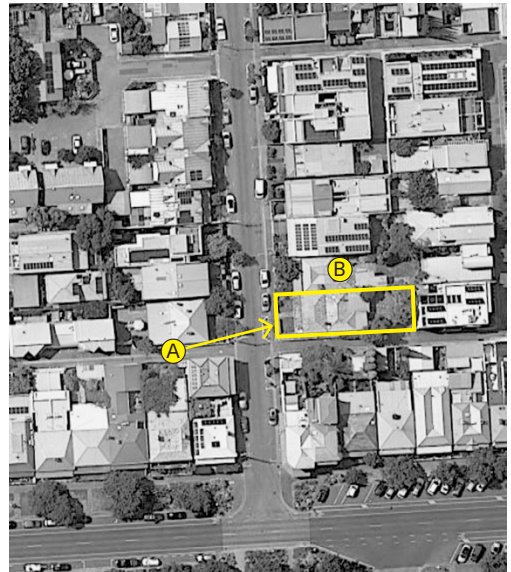
> Written Inquiry p 145



Photo: Simone Mazengarb

Filling A Void

When tenants moved into a rental property they were presented with the unusual condition of having a fence on only one half of their street frontage. The desire to heal this rift led to discussions about creative solutions.



A – Counter location
B – Property boundary

Photo: Google

Re-Inventing The Suburban Fence

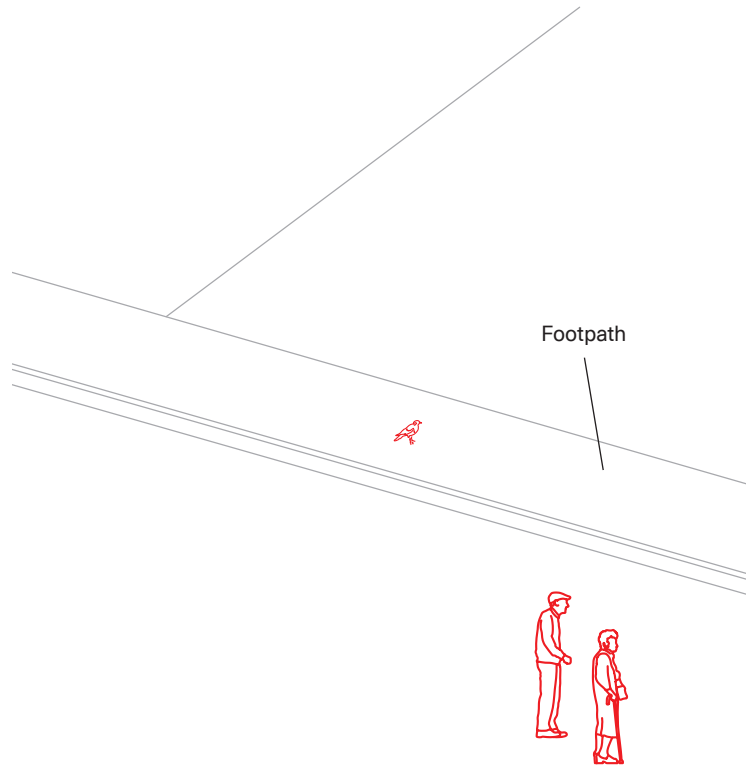
Instead of a fence a counter was conceived, re-imagining the suburban fence as a site for social dwelling. The counter was inhabitable with mobile stools that could occupy the public footpath and private lawn regions – claiming forgotten spaces. The simple element filled a void and created continuity with the adjacent fence height.



Photo: Jessica Reid

A Space for Conviviality

This simple counter unlocked the public threshold of the private dwelling as a social space – a space for convivial interactions with other members of the neighbourhood. It raises questions about the role of today's suburban front yards. What functions can they serve aside from transition spaces, or places to store our vehicles? Suburban front yards across Australia absorb energies with their continual upkeep, only for backs to be turned to this space once tasks are fulfilled.

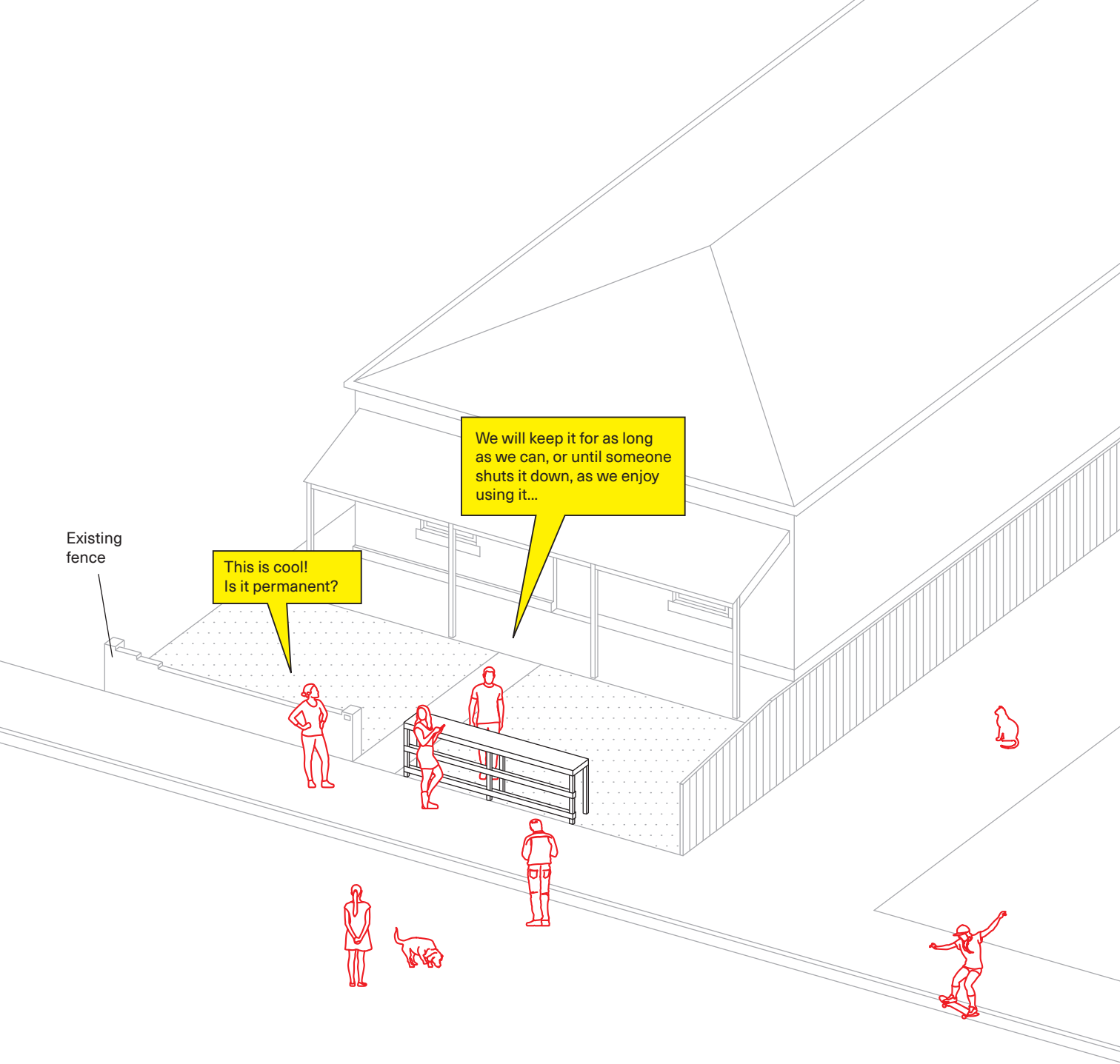


Triggering Awareness

By breaking away from normative applications of architecture, the general public's attention and awareness of their surroundings was sparked. Small interventions like this might provide the key to elevating architectural design in the Australian cultural consciousness. If we only employ architecture for commercial and large-scale applications, we may perpetuate and preserve a state of indifference between the general public and the possibilities that architectural design present.

Building Fulfilment

Self-build projects like this contribute a sense of fulfilment to those who participate in its realisation. Positive sentiments like this will remain locked, if construction and design remain wholly within the confines of a highly bureaucratically administered construction industry.



Existing fence

This is cool!
Is it permanent?

We will keep it for as long
as we can, or until someone
shuts it down, as we enjoy
using it...

Excitement and Uncertainties of a Deviant Structure

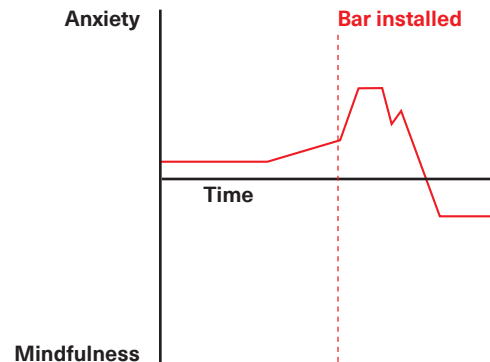
This architectural-furniture element was built entirely independent of the construction industry, which carries with it inherent vulnerabilities as certain authorities could demand its spontaneous removal – squandering the time and materials invested. These uncertainties may have contributed to the excitement that surrounded the counter, knowledgeable that its lifespan was potentially limited.



Photo: Billy Reid

Public Response

Occupation and dwelling at the threshold between private and public space is uncommon in an Adelaidean domestic setting, and consequently, contention was anticipated. However, the attitude of the neighbours who lived on the street quickly transformed, commencing from anxieties until support for the bar was founded. This appeared to be a product of the convivial demeanour of the bar owners and their respect and openness to other members of the community. The inclusiveness, community presence, passive surveillance and safety that the bar afforded the street may also have contributed to its acceptance.





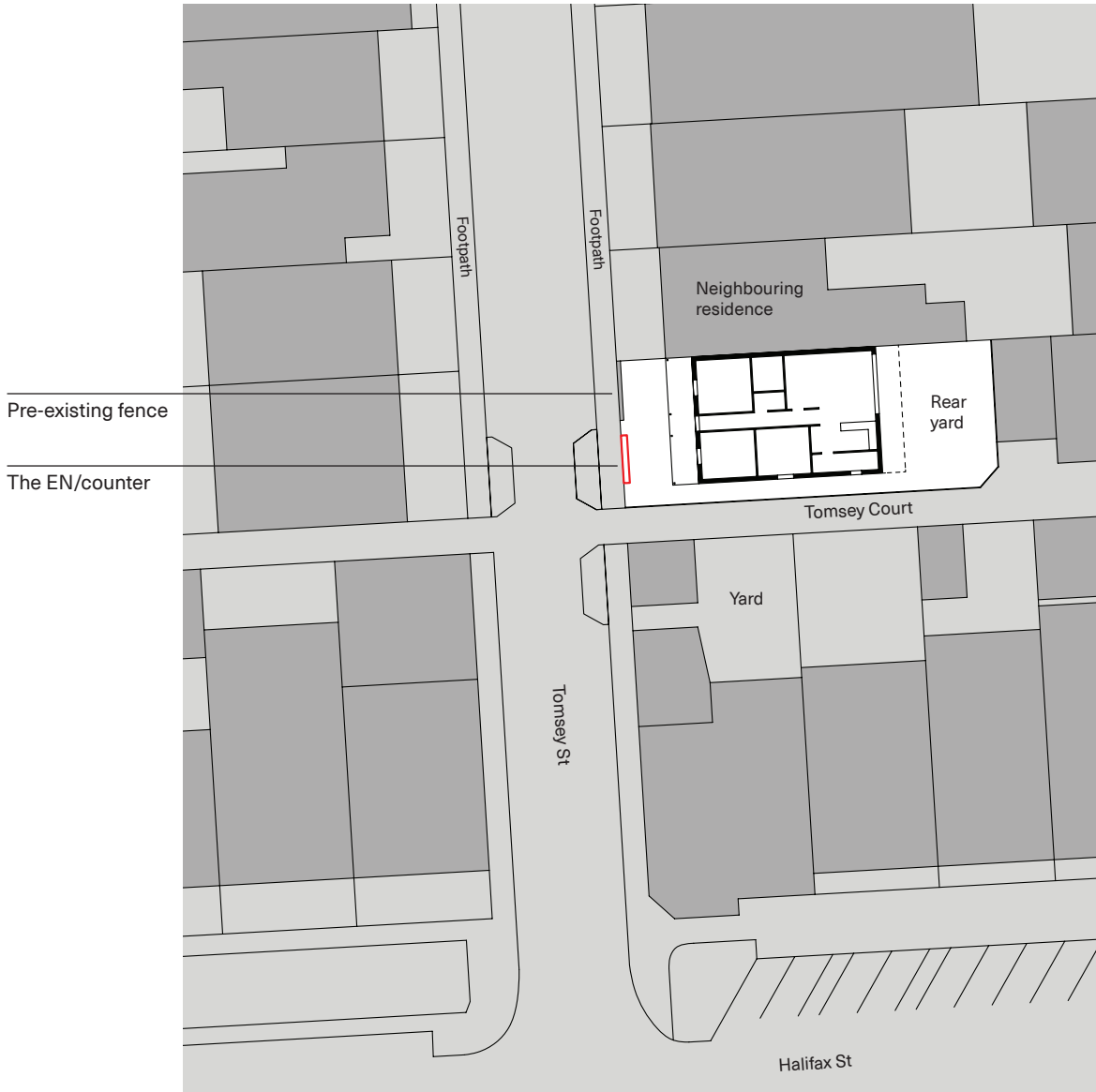
Self-build as a Value

'..people do not only need to obtain things, I think they need, above all, the freedom to make things –things amongst which they can live. To give shape to them according to their own feelings, tastes, their own imagination. And to put them to use in caring for each other and about each other.'

From 'The destruction of conviviality', a conversation between Ivan Illich and Richard Wollheim, 1971.



Photo: Phoebe Le Messurier



Intervention Facts

Type

Counter / Fence / Green Wall

Location

Tomsey Street, Adelaide

Period of Use

3.5 years

Dates of Use

July 2014 - November 2017
Intervention still stands at the time of writing

Period of Construction

5 days

Client

Simone, William

Budget

\$25 AUD

Size

5.4m²

Construction and Design

Simone Mazengarb
William Joseph Nandor Freesmith

Construction

Up-cycled pallet timber, screws, plantings

Project Requirements

Generate a space for respite and socialising, fill gap in front fence

Key Features

Counter, stools, plantings

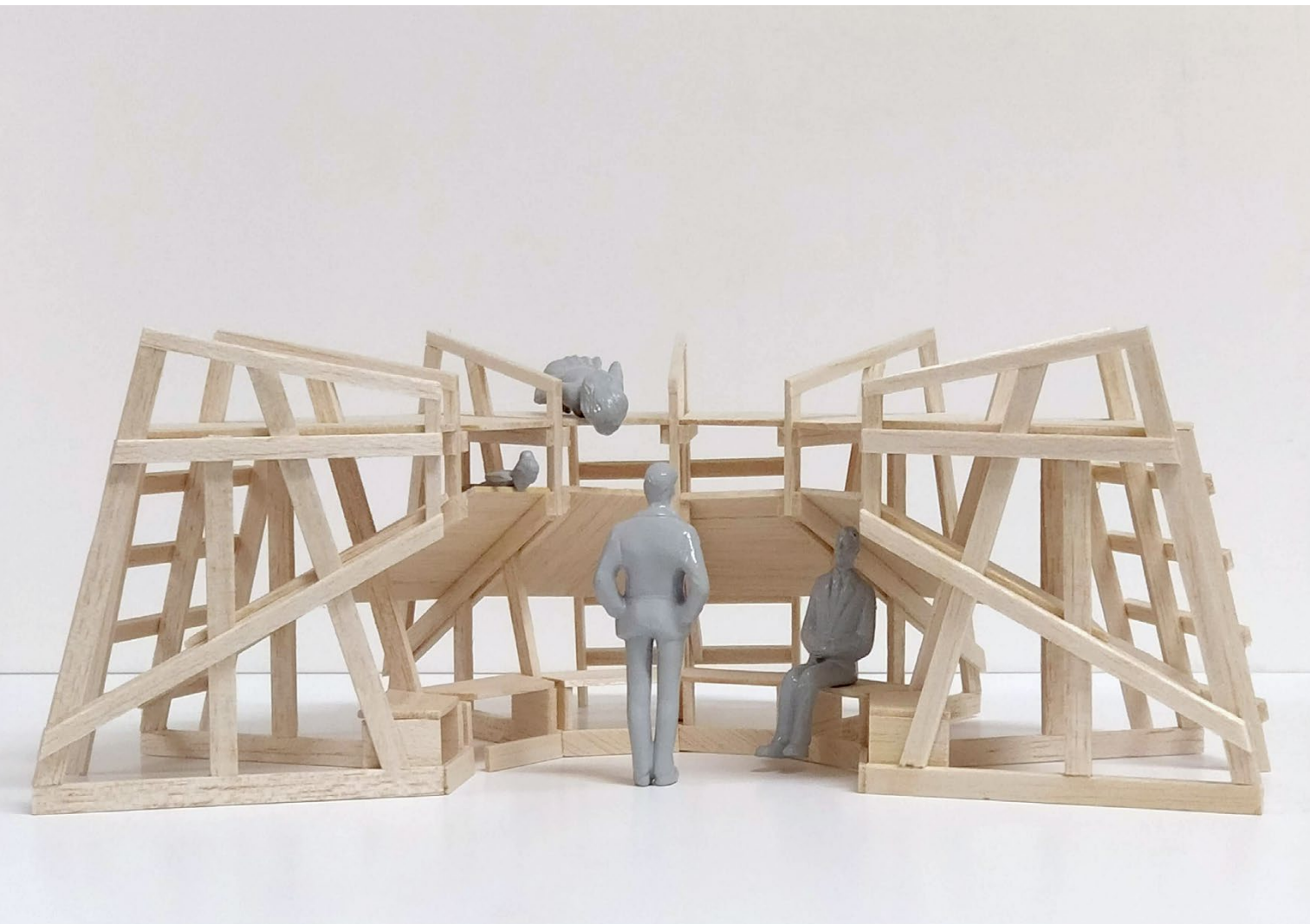
Intervention 4



Proxaemic Theatre

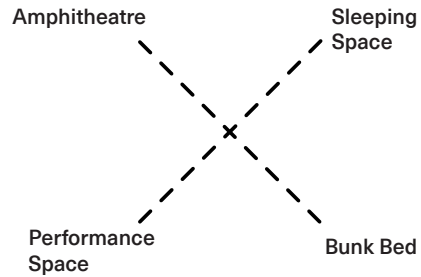
Tactic

The Limit of a
Performative Device



An Unprecedented Structure

The *Proxaemic Theatre* is an experimental proposal for a new type of performance space—meets dynamic intervention for public space. It explores the potential of architecture to unlock human openness by spatially restructuring proxemic relations. It might be described as a re-imagining of an amphitheatre, cross-fertilized with a bunk bed, that accommodates up to 20x people.



'Proxemics'

The structure places people at the threshold of 'Personal Space' and 'Social Space' as outlined by Edward T. Hall in 1963, forming a unique, intimate relationship between audience and performer.

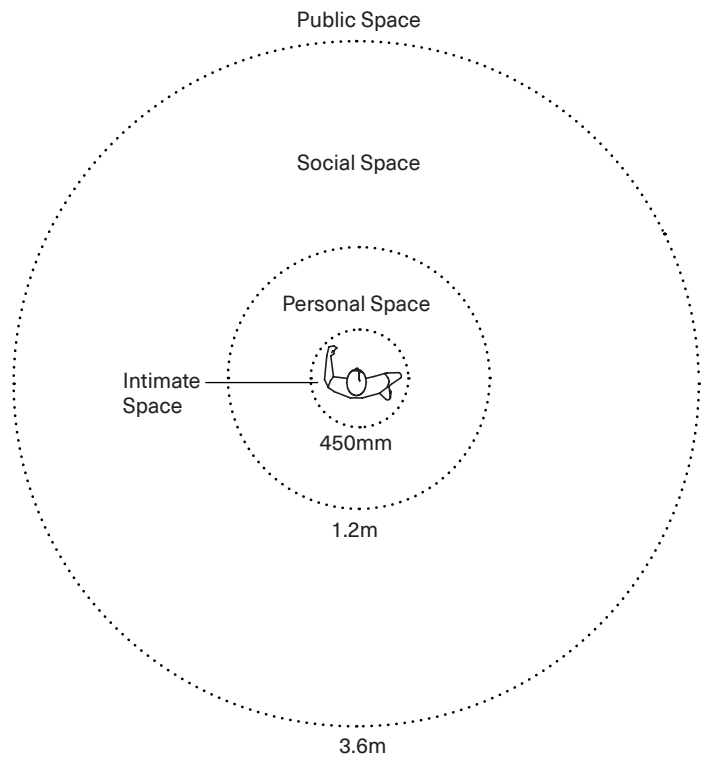
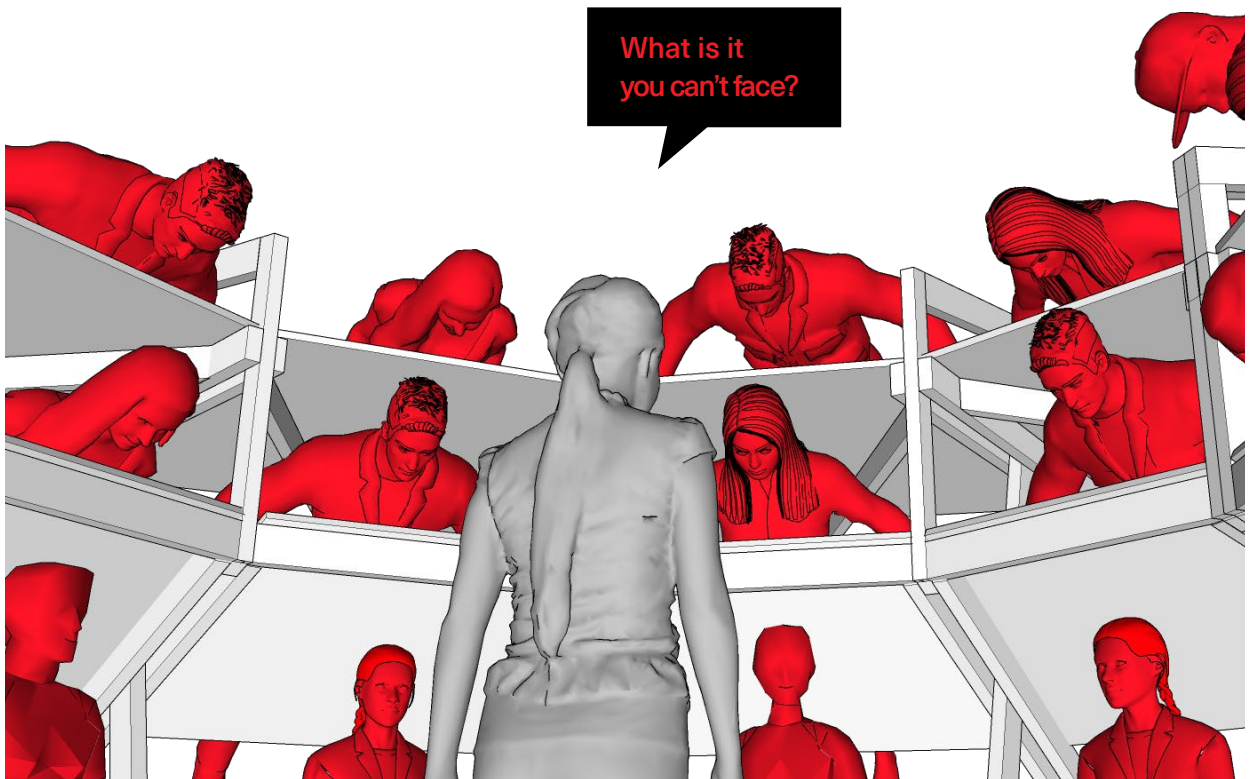


Diagram (Right)
'Proxemics' as defined by Edward Hall
1963



A Hydra, of Sorts

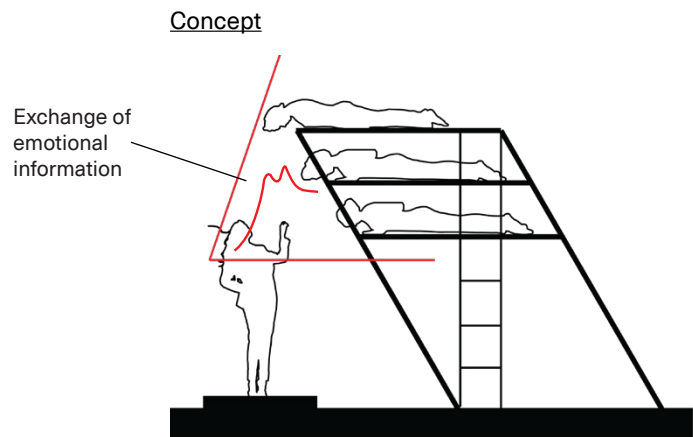
The structure concentrates and stacks people into a centrifugal field, with faces directed towards a central void. Here, technology is implemented to overcome bodily limitations, in an arrangement possibly reminiscent of a hydra – a many-headed creature of Greek mythology.



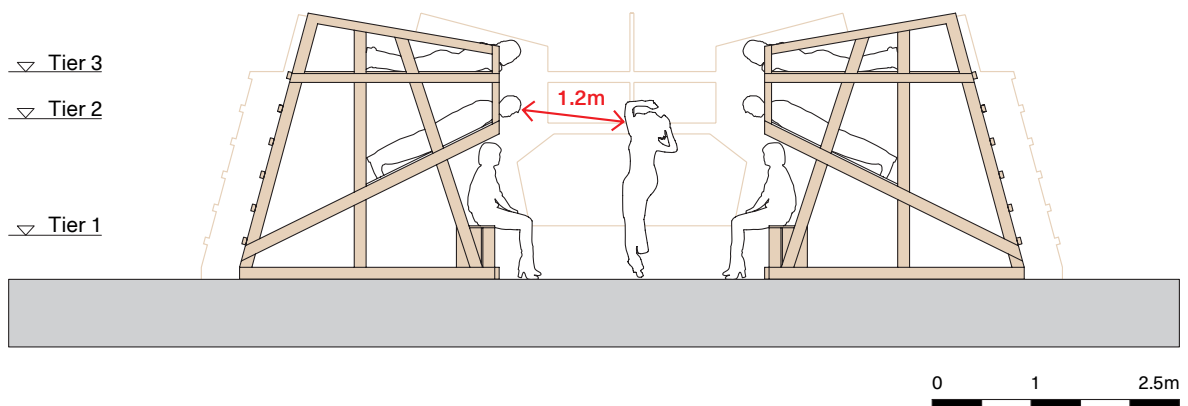
Image: Andrew Jian

Trust and Interpersonal Space

The intimate arrangement leverages the capacity of face-to-face proximity to deliver a high bandwidth of emotional information. For many it may be a challenging experience. It draws upon the experimental practice of 'compromised audience'. However, the intervention is also participatory; it invites people to climb, crawl, lie and awaken childhood playfulness in adults.

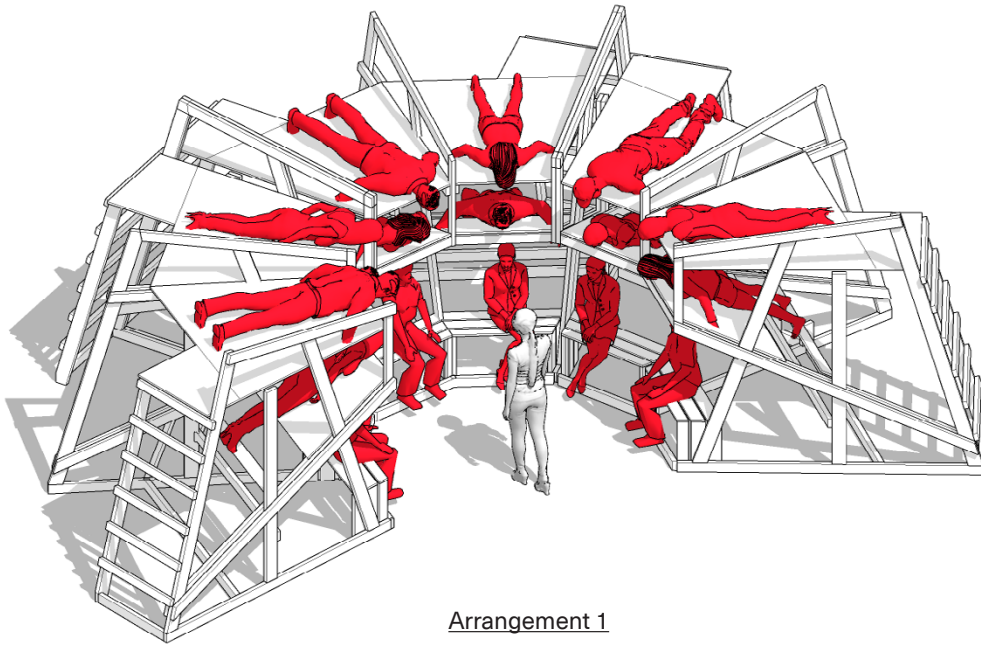


Proposal

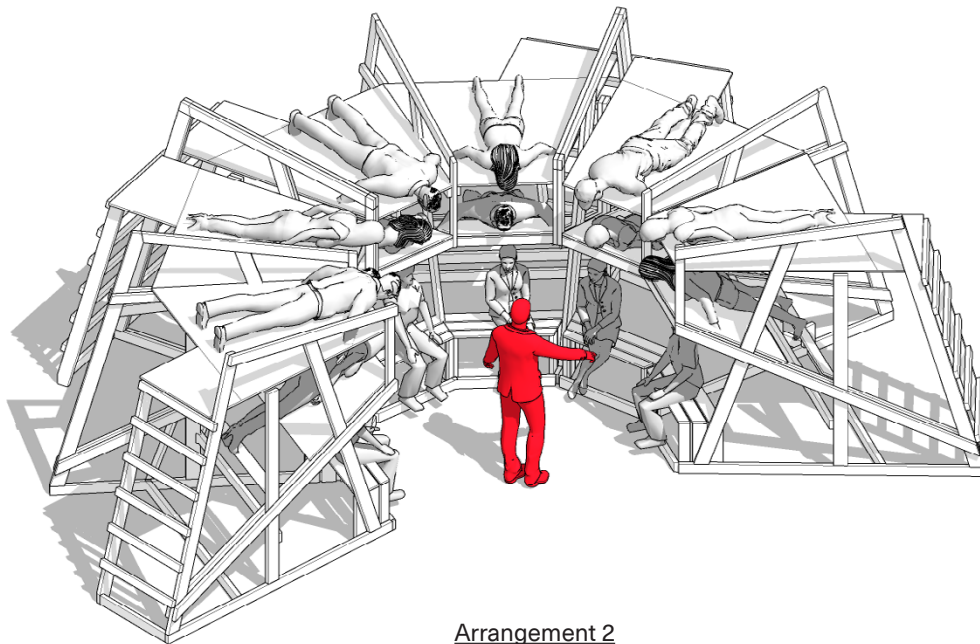


Interchangeable Arrangements

The structure has two distinct arrangements: up to 18 performers can occupy the structure, as a choir or spoken word poets, performing to individuals in the centre. The arrangement can also reverse, with 1-2 central performers and an audience of up to 18 members occupying the structure.



Arrangement 1



Arrangement 2

 Performer(s)

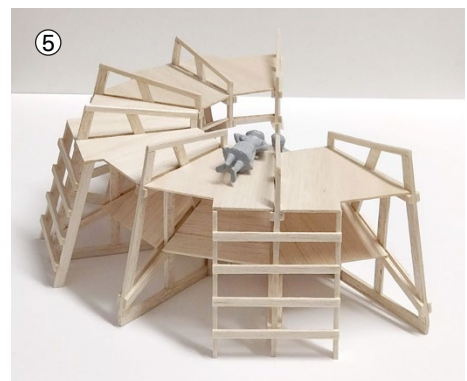
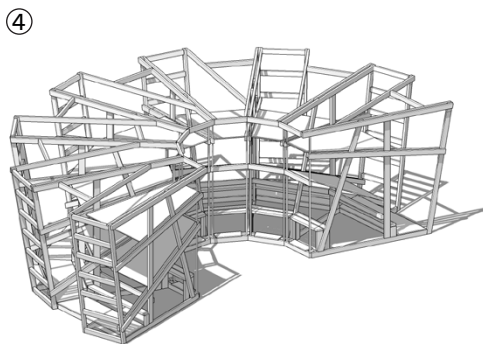
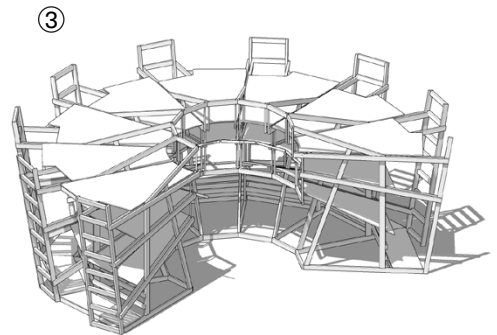
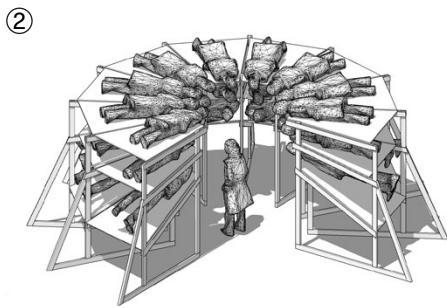
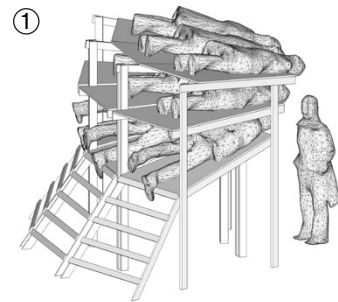
 Audience

Alternative Use

The structure also has potential in a rural setting, for collective camping and star-gazing from its top tier.

Digital Design Development

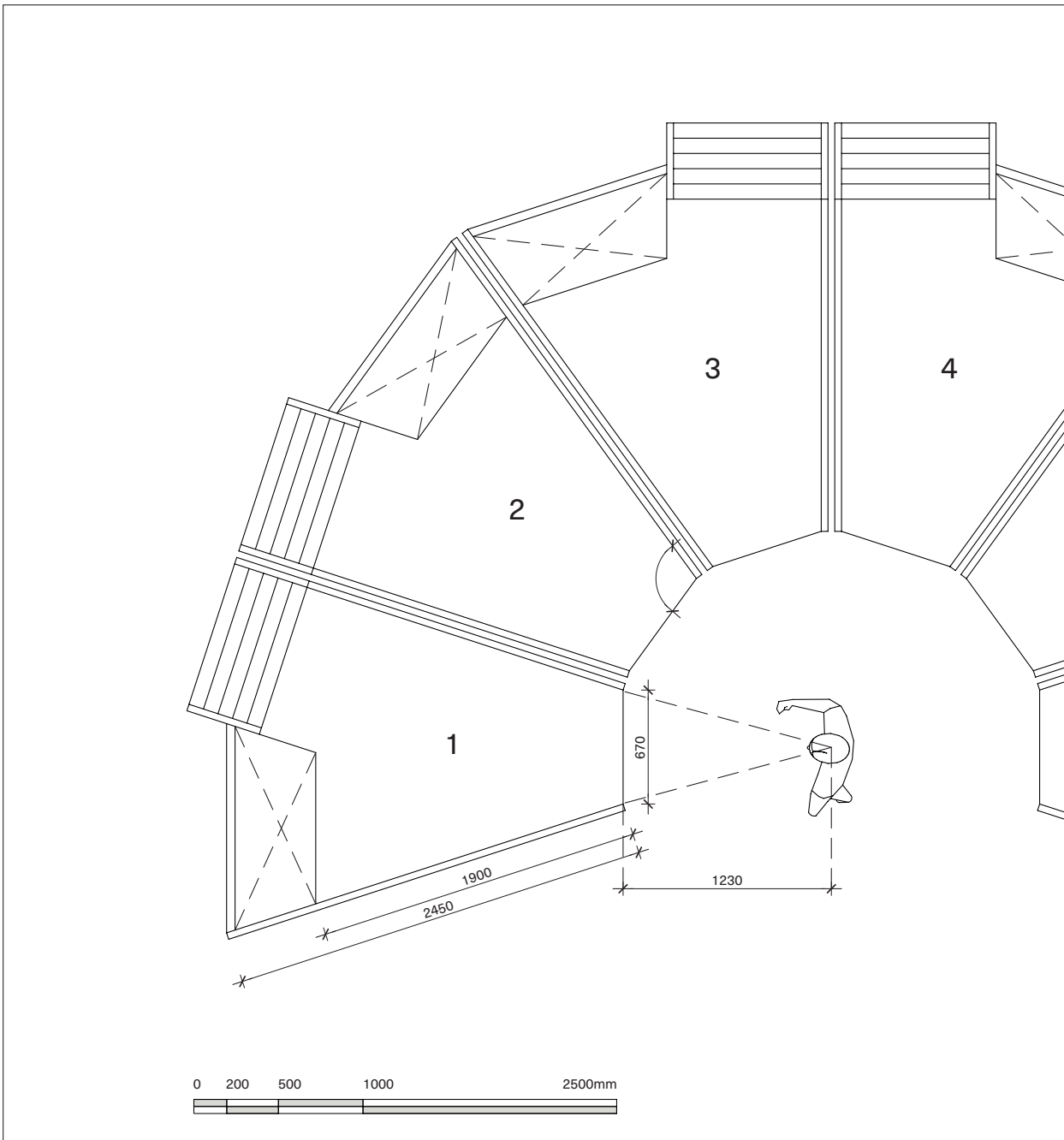
With no existing precedent to reference for the spatial arrangement of the *Proxaemic Theatre*, the design rapidly progressed through a number of design iterations (shown).

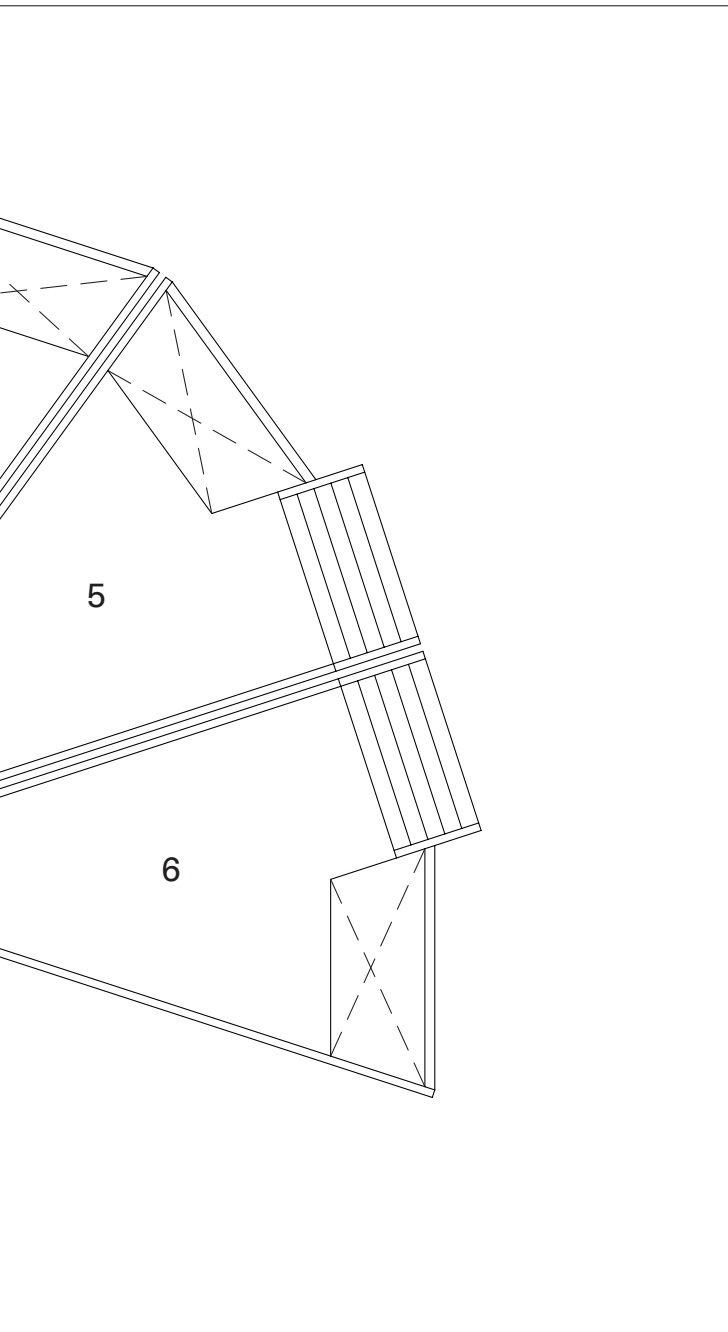




Prototype Testing

A segment of the device was built at 1:1 scale to test the comfort of the structure, to trial performances and to deliberate on its proportions.





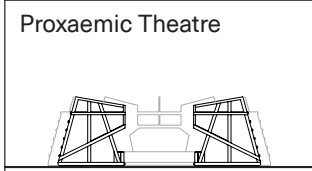
Notes:

Developed Design

This scaled drawing represents the developed design in plan, indicating dimensions and proportions that have evolved through 1:1 scale design development.

Preliminary Design

Plan 1:25



Richard Le Messurier Design. M.Arch This drawing is copyright.	
Revision	Drawing no.
C	1



1:1 scale prototype testing of a segment of the theatre

Intervention Facts

Type

Performative structure and public space intervention

Client

Unspecified

Budget

\$3000

Size

17m²

Location

Hello Wood Festival, Hungary

Collaborators

Thomas Capogreco

Period of Development

2017-2018

Construction

Structural pine (MGP10), 14G bugle screws, 6G-8G Robertson screws, 19mm premium pine

Period of Prototype Construction

9 days, September 2018

Project Requirements

Low-cost, efficacy of construction, strong enough to support weight of multiple people, reconfigure proxemic relationships

Key Features

Platforms, ladder, seat, rails, base

Intervention 5



Hōjōki Terminal

Tactic

Re-Coding an
Open Territory

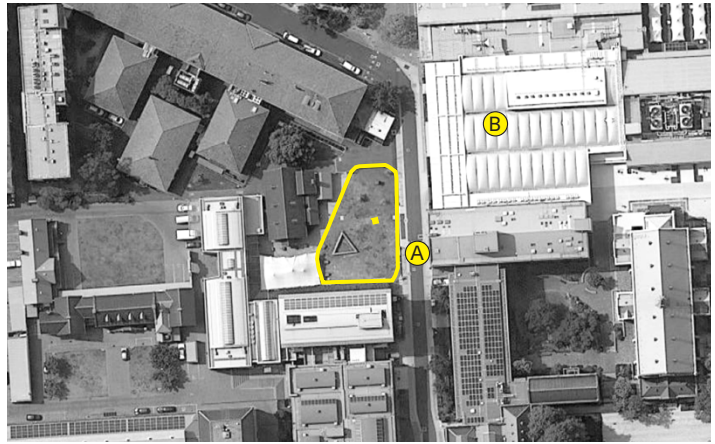
> Written Inquiry p161



Tea-practitioners unite and occupy the structure at the opening of the World Tea Gathering

Re-Coding an Open Territory

A temporary pavilion was developed to host tea ceremonies and workshops, on the occasion of the World Tea Gathering in Adelaide in 2018. The pavilion riffed on ideas in Kamo-no-Chomei's 13th century text *Hōjōki*, which roughly translates as 'Ten Foot Square Hut' – a philosophical text that poetically expresses ideas of impermanence, simplicity, microcosm and non-attachment; concepts that intersect with the practice of tea.

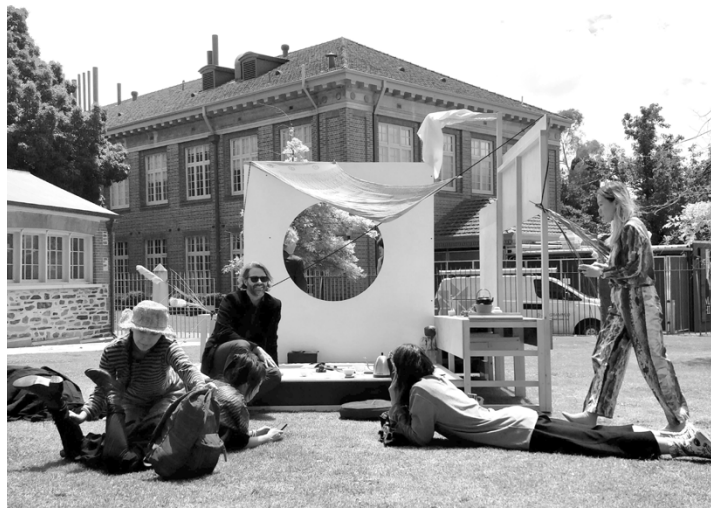


A – AGSA lawns boundary / Hōjōki Terminal Site
B – Hub Central, The University of Adelaide

Photo: Google

Architecture Beyond Aestheticization Towards Socialisation

Ostensibly a simple platform for the performance of tea ceremonies and workshops, the structure was augmented by additional, minimalistic elements that aimed to elicit incidental or spontaneous social interactions, catalysing fresh experiences of communication and encounter in its public setting.



Catalysing Social Intersection

A visual survey
of usages

Occupy
Interpret
Rest
Meet
Intersect
Play
Discover

Wonder
Learn
Perform
Observe
Enjoy
Discuss
React



Photo: Thomas Capogreco

Photo: Thomas Capogreco



For Rugged Use and Adult Play

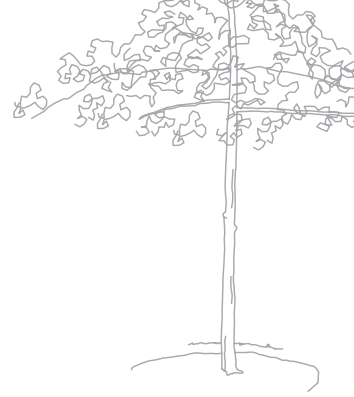
An open structure conceived to enable universal participation. You may touch, photograph and eat food on the structure! ...subverting from familiar injunctions associated with objects of artistic curatorial settings.

'The space is inviting, open and provides for chance encounters; ichi-go ichi-e moments, the value of which is not recognised in Western society...'

– Adam Sōmu Wojciński,
Director of the World Tea Gathering

Are all Pavilions the Same?

If all pavilions are interpreted through purely aesthetic lenses, then yes... they are all objects. If they are interpreted through social lenses, that take note of the behaviours and interactions that manifest as a consequence of their presence, then what makes them distinct may begin to become apparent.



Why don't things like this happen more often?

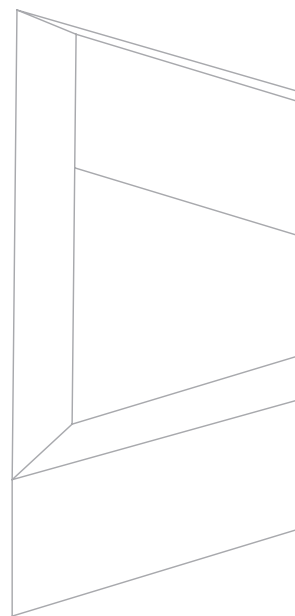


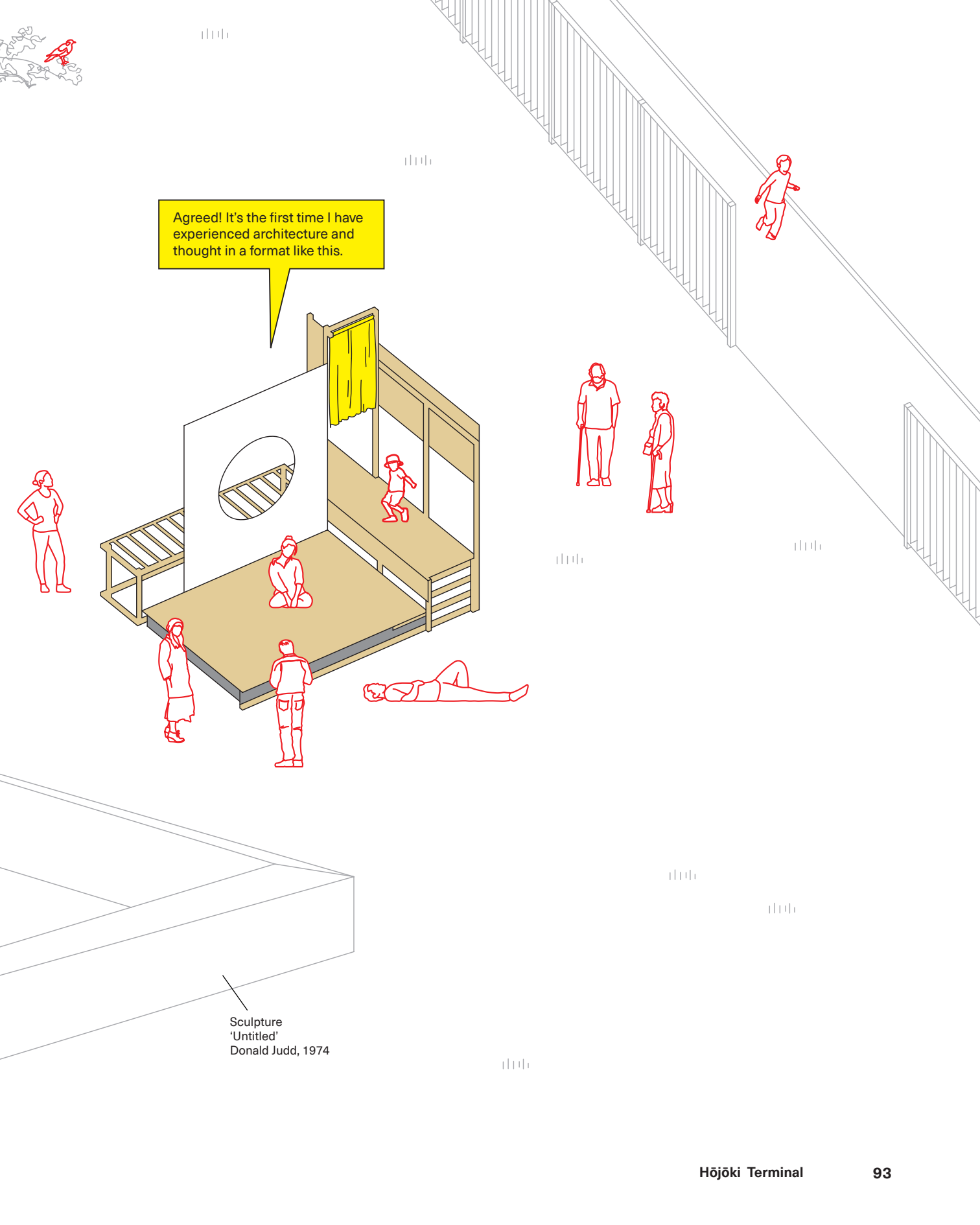
Design Language

Planes and elements of colour recall a modernist treatment of space and are used to frame a variety of outdoors rooms and sightlines. Material abutments were made with precision and connections made with expressed bugles and screw-heads. This embodied an immediacy thought to reflect the improvisational nature of tea.

An Open, Interpretative Structure

The installation served as an organisational device that framed rooms within the grassed territory, while providing a destination that could be occupied in a variety of ways.





Agreed! It's the first time I have experienced architecture and thought in a format like this.

Sculpture
'Untitled'
Donald Judd, 1974

A Highly Crafted Object

The *Hōjōki Terminal* was designed as a piece of architectural furniture, its tectonic assembly, detail and craftsmanship integral to its success.

Demonstrating New Potentials

'I didn't appreciate the potential of this type of space until I used it, after which I became convinced that I would like to practice in spaces like this in the future.'

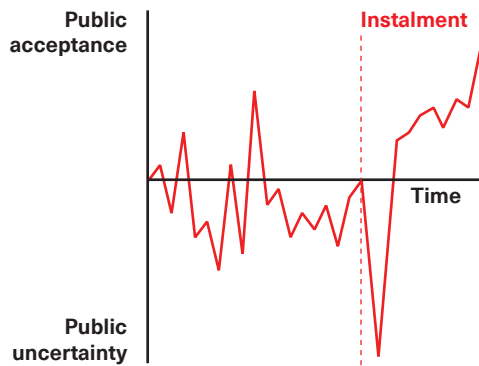
– Ying Le, a.k.a Thirsty Moon
Tea Practitioner, Berlin

Artefacts

The vertical elements and frames of the pavilion provide sites for hanging fabrics and storing artefacts significant to the tea practitioners, while the platform was scaled to enable the placement of traditional tatami mats.







Resistance, Once Again

The moment the *Hōjōki Terminal* installation was complete, an unnamed authority suddenly surfaced demanding that it be 'removed immediately', deeming it a 'significant safety hazard'. I responded by reiterating the agreements made with Art Gallery staff prior to the interventions instalment, and proceeded by asking how this object could possibly be more dangerous than the spiked iron fence that sits at low height at the lawn's periphery. I also reiterated that all surfaces and corners had been diligently sanded with 220 grit. This question sparked self-reflection in the contesting authority, and they suddenly admitted they could not completely rationalise their logic. This event had uncanny parallels to the resistance experienced with the project *LOW* (A Kneeling Bar). Both reactions occurred despite acceptance already being granted from relevant persons for the projects. Why were these interventions viewed as such explicit threats?



Saved By... Toddlers!

During the course of the conversation with the official regarding the safety of the intervention, a team of toddlers suddenly seized the structure – jumping and running through all sections. This action seemed to immediately diffuse the discussion and issues about safety did not arise further.



A New Layer of Infrastructure
for Learning

The intervention provided a physical environment where incidental dialogues were attracted, seemingly stimulated by the novelty and intellectual tenets of the object. The cross-section of identities who coalesced around the intervention unlocked further opportunities for exchange of knowledge.

1:1 Scale Design Development

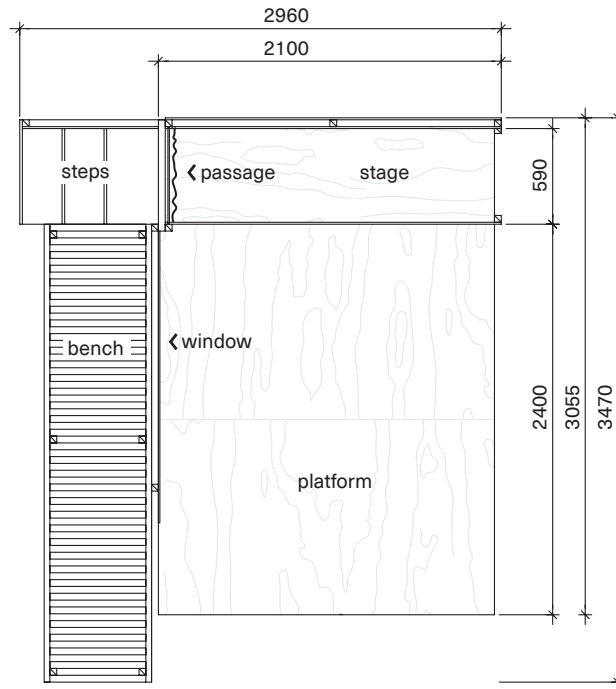
The entire intervention was prefabricated off-site allowing for expedient instalment on the day (which took under 30 minutes). The image on the immediate right shows a 1:1 scale design alteration, or 'Gordon-Matta Clark moment', where tools are used to shave down entire sections of form. The plan overleaf shows the resolved dimensions that resulted from 1:1 scale development and physical testing.



Photo: Brad Tonkin

Notes:

Do not scale off this drawing.



Hōjōki Terminal

Plan 1:25

Richard Le Messurier Design. M.Arch
This drawing is copyright.

Prototype for a Tea Platform

Revision

Drawing no.

E

1

Feedback

Praline_panini

Via Instagram, November 5, 2018

Love it

Ena_groz Says

Via Instagram, November 5, 2018

So good.

Ying Says

Via Facebook, November 5, 2018

We prefer this type of space, because Tea houses these days are usually closed and exclusive, used by people for the wrong reasons, ones that we (as tea artists) want to avoid.

Tindo_8 Says

Via Instagram, November 6, 2018

Great! Is this thing staying up for a few weeks?

Sherry Says

Via Facebook, November 17, 2018

Cool Project.

Llewellyn Says

Via Facebook, December 9, 2018

The Hōjōki Terminal was a surprisingly engaging and entertaining structure. Initially, when I first saw it, I thought of it more as a spectacle rather than an interactive space, but once I began to move I began to see the different angles and openings within the structure. The multiple spaces in which one could enter, sit and play within the structure was remarkable for such a simplistic and small environment and showed an exceptional understanding of three dimensional space. The most remarkable feature however, was how there was no prescribed way to engage with the structure, people

were essentially given a free space to explore however they wanted. Generally, such freedom of physical engagement only really happens within a natural setting that has been untouched by the human hand. So for a human to be able to directly replicate this phenomenon is truly astounding, and it's something that should really be explored further in the development of public spaces and institutions.

David Says

Via Facebook, December 10, 2018

The Hōjōki Terminal had some great conceptual ideas that I would like to see fleshed out in both residential dwelling spaces as well as commercial childcare centre projects. The interactive space was both imaginative and practical and I look forward to its continual development and further implementation in the future. Great job Richard! Please keep pushing and exploring the bounds of interactive and imaginative use of space; as well as sound design and function.

Dkneeze Says

Via Instagram, November 10, 2018

Looks great!

Gabriela Says

Via Facebook, December 10, 2018

I'm not an architecture connoisseur or anything but I find this structure fascinating. At an eye-shot, it's unengaging and looks incomplete. As I cast my eyes over it sectionally, I'm astonished how many fragments there are that when I observe them in clusters, challenge the simplicity I originally saw. The

original simplicity is challenged by voids, line continuity, shapes, height, prospective utility and how I can engage with it, depending on which orientation I am around the structure. It's a lot and nothing all at once. A bit like a Monet painting where from far, it's coherent and communicates something clear, but close up, there is a lot of complexity. Very interesting, Richard! Congratulations

Adam Says

Via Facebook, December 11, 2018

As Ying wisely suggested, I sincerely hope the Hōjōki is placed in international transfers terminals in airports around the world. The space is inviting, open and provides for chance encounters. 'Ichi-go ichi-e' moments the value of which is not recognised in Western society, but would surely improve the quality of public life with the consciousness that each encounter is unique, can never be repeated and therefore must be cherished. As a tea space, the Hōjōki works well if there are people with imagination to improvise. If it is made with the premise that it is to be used for tea, people, say at an international transfer terminal, may need a bit of inspiration decided for them in order to engage with the structure. In addition to the 'playground for adults' vibe that seemed to underlie the structure, adults are so used to (encouraged to) not playing in public that a bridge from the normal, stale public space to the Hōjōki will have to be made, to engage more people. This might be outside the scope of the Hōjōki, but something that will have to be considered for

future projects to be successful. This being said, I think a measure of success is not 'numbers'. The amount of people interacting with a structure means nothing if no one is inspired or no relationships between people are furthered. What does a life changing encounter equal in numbers? One cannot measure an unforgettable encounter in capitalist terms. If the Hōjōki provides for one sincere, heartfelt human encounter a week, but only has 100 'bums of seats', I would still like to think that a structure like the Hōjōki is a very successful part of the public space. Personally, I would like to see a roof on the structure in part. In the open it needs some shade, especially in Australia. The slatted seat on one side works well as a seat and as a potential area for decoration and personalisation. The higher 'walls' on one side where perfect for hanging art and notices, allowing the structure to be adapted for many uses. The open 'floor' lacked a little integration with the rest of the structure, I felt. Not a disaster, but with a partial roof like Tame-san hung over the structure, the other, previously 'outside' elements felt like more of an integrated whole. Closing the Hōjōki off completely would make it less approachable, I feel, so there is a delicate balance to find if a partial roof is to be explored. I loved the fact that the height allowed the open floor to be a seat and a table, bleeding the structure out into its surrounds, blurring the line of where the Hōjōki started and finished and there blurring the lines of tea and everyday life.

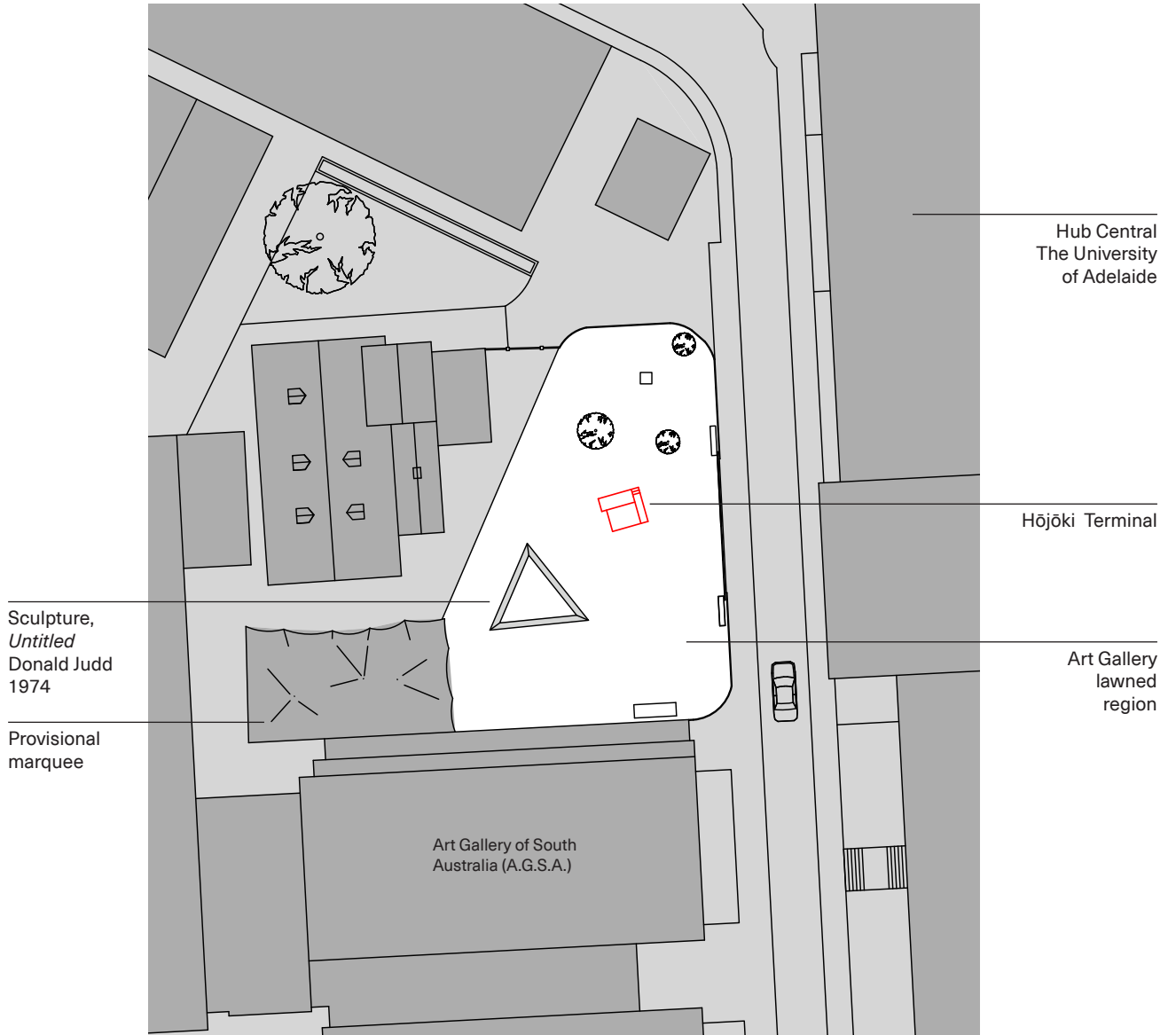
**Marzieh Jalilvand Says
Via Facebook, December 13, 2018**

A good idea to put them in open spaces in schools, kids really love to explore these kinds of spaces... It's really creative this kind of space, other models could be made...

**Chloebenton Says
Via Instagram July 4, 2021**

To me it was the "first time" I'd experienced quality architecture and thought being brought to me. It was accessible and approachable. It was a learning environment and a peaceful environment at the same time. It encouraged engagement and reflection. It was architecture that the common person can experience even if they don't have the resources or prestige to be welcomed into a place more commonly associated with "architecture".

The following double page spread compiles public feedback to the *Hōjōki Terminal*, in unedited form and chronological order. Although an official Facebook page was established to gather and centralise feedback, communication trickled through on a variety of social media platforms and threads, in an informal fashion. As a result, I have noted the social media platform the feedback has emerged from.



Intervention Facts

Type

Platform for tea ceremonies, workshops and incidental use

Location

Barr Smith Lawns
Art Gallery of South Australia
North Terrace, Adelaide

Period of Use

14 days

Dates of Use

August 9 - 23, 2018

Period of Construction

9 days

Client

The Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) and The University of Adelaide

Budget Size

\$2000
9m²

Collaborators

Dr Julian Worrall

Construction

12mm Plywood, 9mm MDF, Formply, 6G-8G Robertson screws, structural pine (MGP10), paint, fabric, glue

Project Requirements

Low-cost, efficacy of construction, prefabricated for expedient installation, open structure to accommodate plein air workshops and expansive gatherings of people, built elements to hang fabrics from and store artifacts. Platform scaled to fit tatami mats

Key Features

Platform, window, stage, information wall, bench, steps

Intervention 6



The Dirty Tea-house

Tactic

Catalytic Architecture

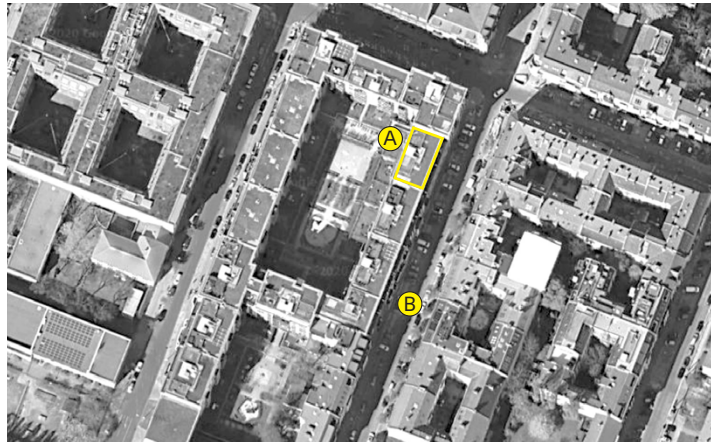
The Dirty Tea-house

> Written Inquiry p173



Inspired by the Hōjōki Terminal

A Berlin-based Tea Practitioner approached me to develop a novel architectural concept for 'tea space' on the roof of her private residence, after practicing tea in the *Hōjōki Terminal* intervention in Adelaide.



A – Rooftop intervention site
B – Lehmbruckstraße, 10245 Berlin, Germany

Photo: Google

Healing a Space

The architectural response aimed to make the space hospitable and conducive to extended stays, to ameliorate a sense of over-exposure created by 200+ apartments that passively faced the site.





Existing Tea-house Approaches

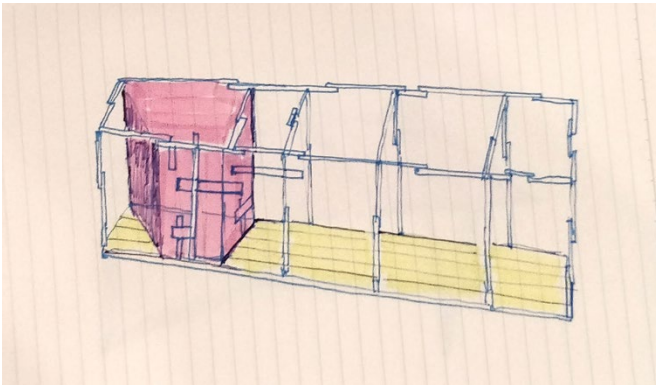
Tea-houses have often been closed natured, or have assumed traditional forms. To turn away from this, contemporary tea practitioners have often favoured open / plein air tea settings, rather than engage in architectural and design possibilities.



Site-less Design Concepts

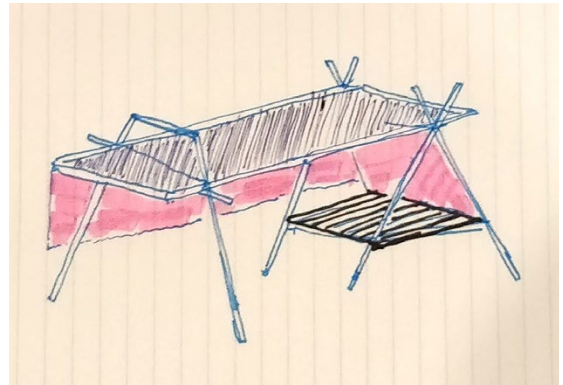
I commenced exploration of design concepts (right) prior to physically visiting the site, knowing that I would only have a chance to witness it seven days prior to the construction deadline of an approaching tea symposium. I sought to gain familiarisation of the general technical problems, anticipating that an approach might be easily adapted to the site. I explored light-weight construction shelters and considered bracing and material options.





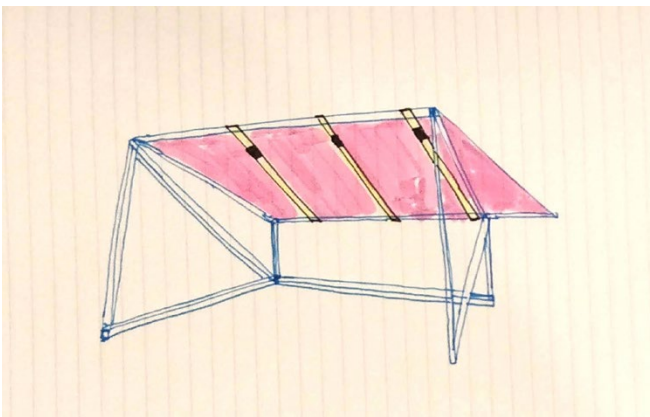
The Arcade

An architectonic quality is achieved by stretching the space long-ways, providing a frame for hanging artefacts and multiple access points to the site of tea ritual.



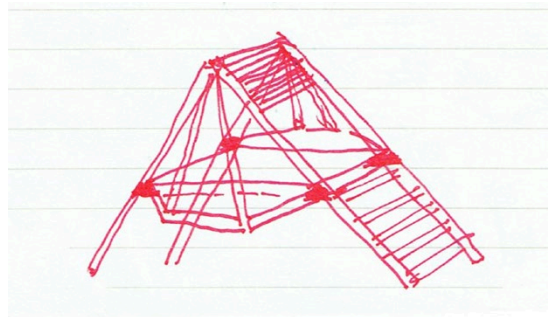
The Tent

An exploration of adhoc construction techniques mindful of bracing options. It provides a shaded nook, while achieving modest spatial expression.



The Parasol

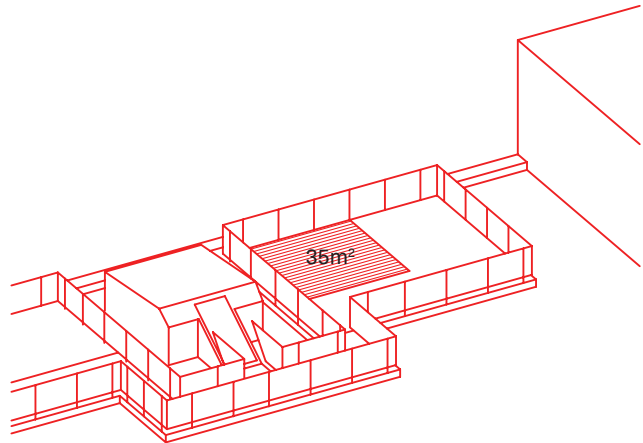
This idea focused on sun-shading, exploring imaginative material opportunities. Industrial straps are used to secure a water protective membrane to a frame.



Space Gazebo

This concept recalls a yurt structure and elevates the floor-plate to emphasise the site of tea ritual.

Site-Strategy



①

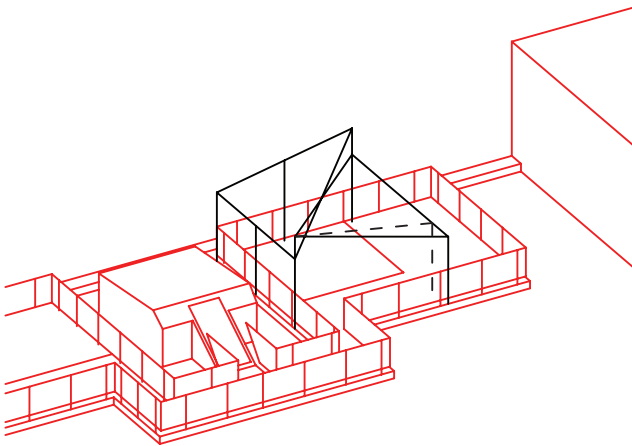
Site

□ Plantings

▨ Deck



Hatched regions
show land included
on the clients title.



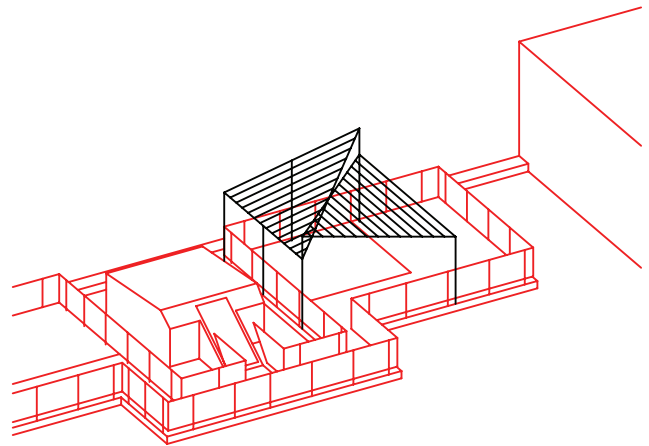
④

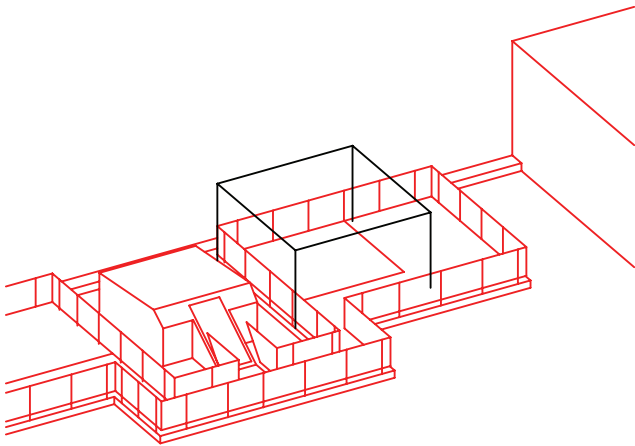
Problem-solving: The footing of the structure is inflected and anchored to the existing balustrade, to gain greater structural support.



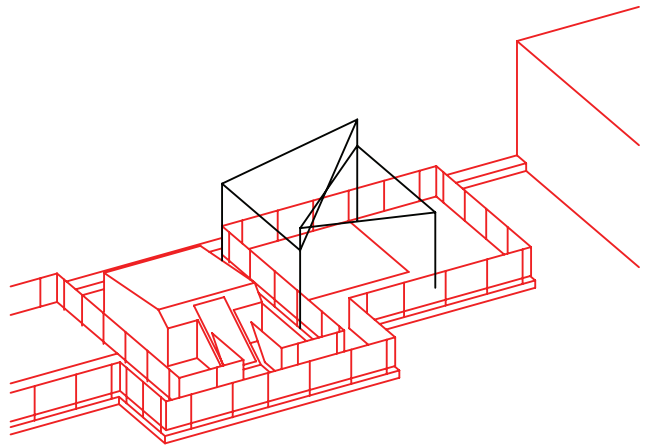
⑤

A canopy is instated and fenestrated to enable dappled light.

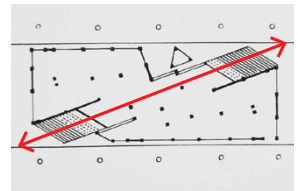




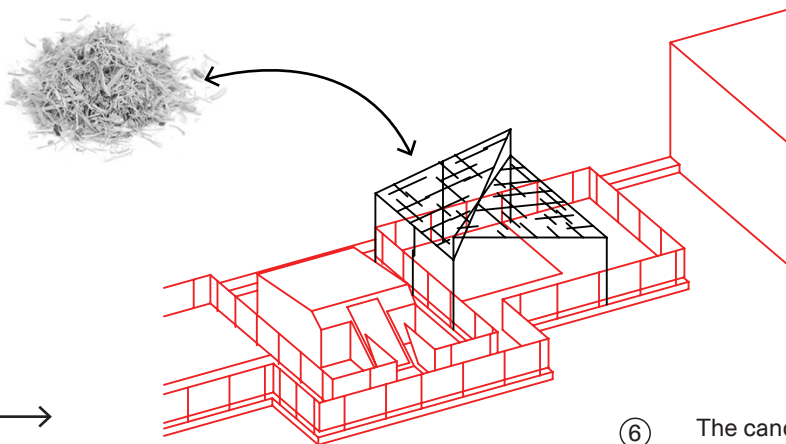
② Frame sited to enclose decking region.



③ The frame is distorted to encompass scissored bracing in the canopy. The asymmetrical gesture references Melnikov's Pavilion – an early *social condenser*.



USSR Pavilion, Melnikov, 1925.
Image: J. Curtis



⑥ The canopy is radicalised to contend with the homogeneous surroundings, referencing the spatial quality of organic tea leaves.

Architecture for Refuge

'Tea relaxes the body and helps strip down constructions' – Ying Le

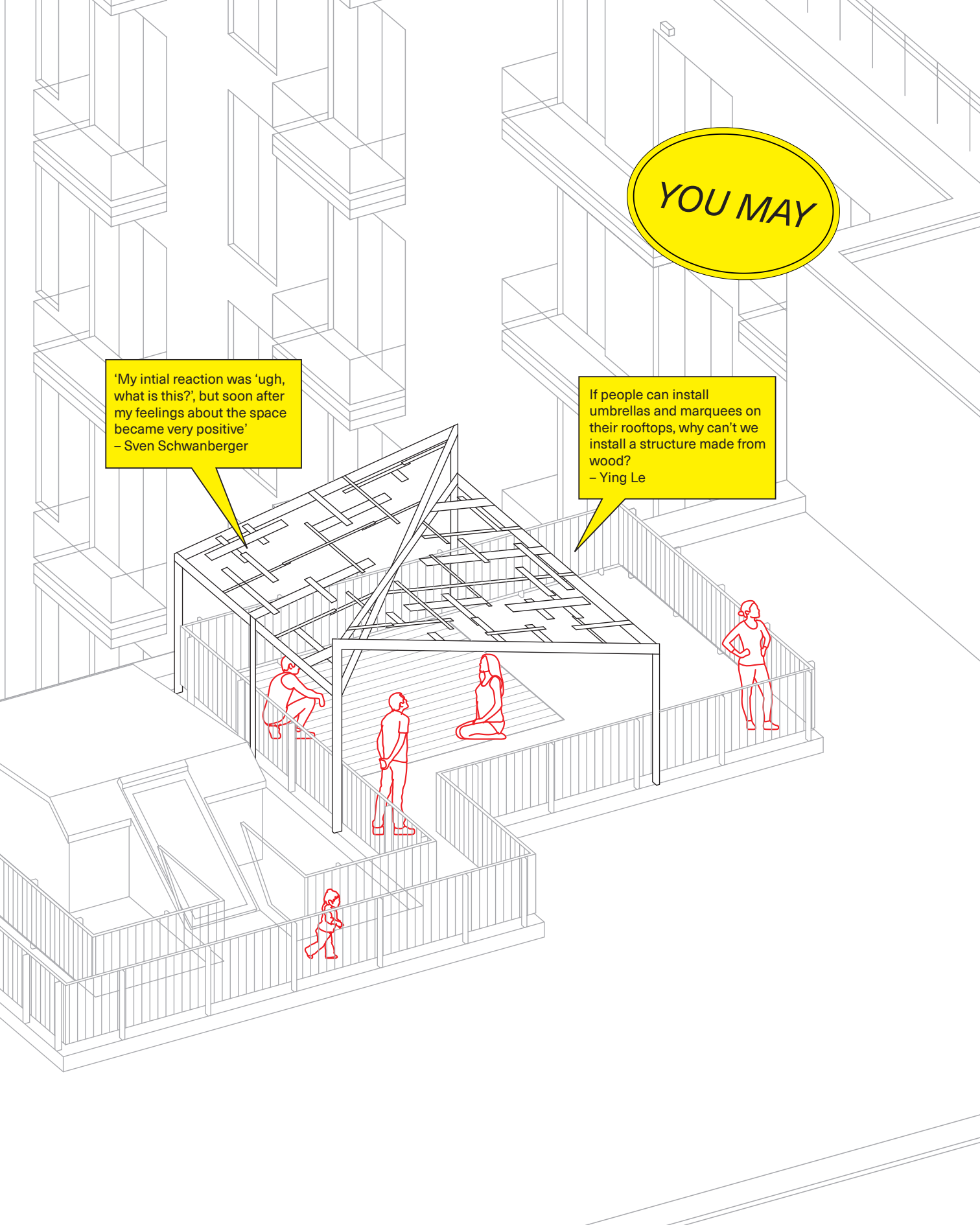
The porous, skeletal frame protects inhabitants from a sense of overexposure on the rooftop. Through this action, the structure pairs with the practice of tea by increasing comfort and relaxation, heightening the social and physiological functions of tea rituals. The skeletal frame and its artistic patina disrupt the intrinsic barrenness of the site and provide foreground texture and spatial qualities to stimulate social encounter.

Terrace under
neighbouring title

YOU MAY

'My initial reaction was 'ugh, what is this?', but soon after my feelings about the space became very positive'
- Sven Schwanberger

If people can install umbrellas and marquees on their rooftops, why can't we install a structure made from wood?
- Ying Le





1

A Skeletal Structure

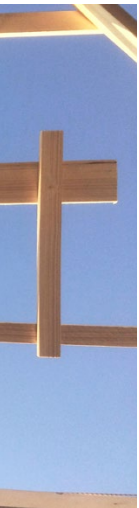
The porosity of the canopy provided a balance between dappled shading and exposure to the atmospheric transformations of the sky above. The timber was left unpainted to enable the natural quality of the timber to emanate during its provisional lifespan, to reduce costs and to accelerate the completion time.



2



3



Marquee →

1 An unimpeded social space.
 2 Atmospheric events are visible through the skeletal canopy.
 3 A contemplative moment: people displayed renewed interest to occupy the rooftop after the intervention was sited.
 4 Image shows the marquee on a nearby rooftop that had initially triggered the client's imagination about how she might inhabit her own.



4

Public Invitation

A public tea symposium was held the day the intervention was completed. The organising Tea Practitioner put posters around her local neighbourhood and in the foyer of her apartment building to invite members of the public to attend. This instilled a public quality to the private rooftop.



Photo: Ying Le

2



Photo: Ying Le

3



1



4

Artefacts



5



6



7

Photo: Ying Le

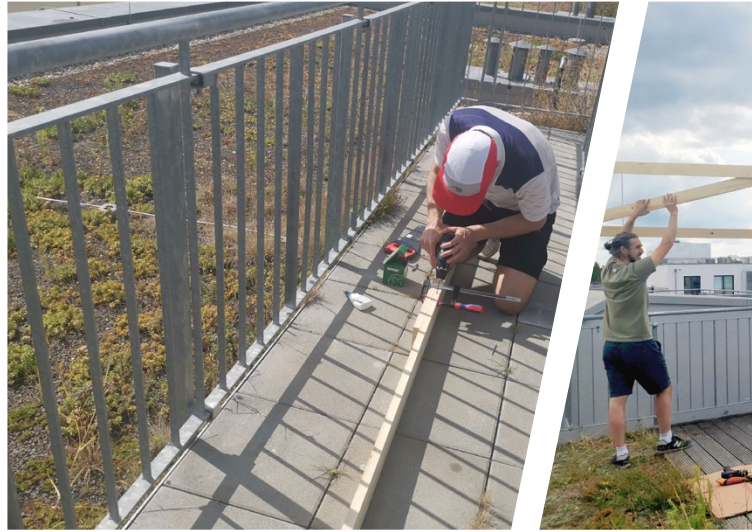


8

- 1 Poster displayed on the apartment block front door, promoting the tea symposium.
- 2 Public tea workshop and film screening, held at the Dirty Tea-house.
- 3 Public presentation of this study 'Unlocking Physical Spaces' during the symposium.
- 4 A poster displayed on the street, in the local neighbourhood.
- 5 Built element for storing teacups.
- 6 Nooks for storing special artefacts were integrated into the structure.
- 7 The Dirty Tea-house unlocked encounter with atmospheric events.
- 8 A shelf was sited 1950mm above floor level to store artefacts significant to tea practice.

Construction Principles

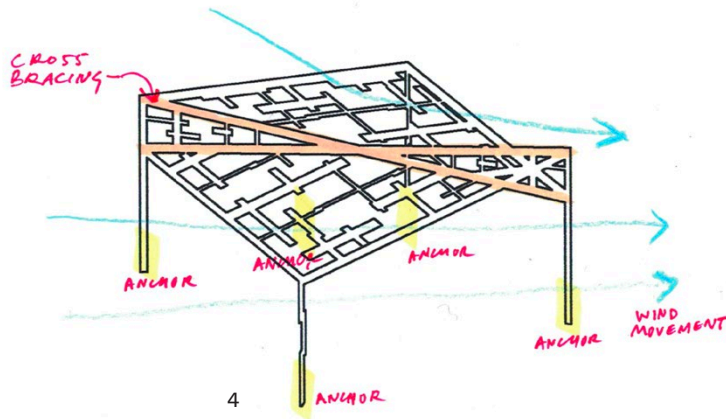
The intervention was conceived as a 'bare-boned' structure built from timber to gain weight and anchored to the existing steel balustrade. The structure avoided claddings to minimising wind loads and prevent the risk of creating a 'parachute' in the wind-exposed location. Cross-bracing was inconspicuously integrated into the roof canopy – a measure that helped to determine its morphology. 6G screwed connections of all timbers were chosen to compress connections together and avoid risk of parting. The structure was anchored to the steel balustrade at five locations using thick gauge zip-ties. Further subsidiary timber-block anchors were sited to prevent ascension. The structure was built on the premise of being a temporary structure whose integrity must be monitored.



1

Photo: Ying Le

2



4

- 1 Prefabricating canopy structure elements.
- 2 Installation of the centralised cross-bracing.
- 3 In situ construction.
- 4 Diagram summarising construction principles.



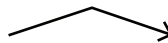
Photo: Ying Le

3

Photo: Ying Le

Catalytic Response

- ① Dirty Tea-house installed on rooftop region.



- ② Two days later a makeshift intervention was sited on an adjacent rooftop, by unknown neighbours.



Dirty Tea-house client Feedback
Ying via Gmail to maessprojects@gmail.com wrote:

Hey kenguru :) Here's a few words from me about Richards unconventional architectural inventions. Edit cut and add as you like, I'm so dyslexic most of the time... Now specially after finally accepted for the Monday dance without you....

The Dirty Tea-house were raised as a parallel site to conduct tea ceremonies and meet-ups during the four day long Listen to Tea gathering in Berlin.

Under the days of planning and carrying out the building process, a form of symbiotic relationship with the context, involving a broad spectrum of ones emotions affections towards space design surfaced. The site for TDT is on the roof of one of many quickly raised, generic yet eco-sustainable building that has been raised as response to the cities population expansion the last years. Many protests has taken place to address this form of gentrification, understandably as alien they look among the cities skyline. Living inside the mutual feeling of distance continues, finding myself never able to adjust the perfect straight concrete walls. For years the roof were hardly being used, perhaps the lack of intimacy prevented me wanting to cultivate the space as my personal belongs always looked very odd in there.

When Richard showed me the drawing of the Dirty Tea House I couldn't fully comprehend what its supposed be, a sculpture from afar that could go in any directions. Now sitting under this weird and beautiful construction I'm amazed how versatile this architectural object is. Letting my eyes travel and mind distracted by the many randomly placed timber cuts I find myself in a state to explore. This is exactly why I'm so into tea! The complexity of the taste that reflects nature where they were grown and the arts of the making, the energetic vibrations from each varieties,

all come into play when I make tea ceremonies. At best tea drinking should reflect a beautiful way to play with the cosmos, and the cosmos is always changing directions as nature knows the order from within.

From this from each exploration into how architecture could happen and encourage to a more free movement rather than constrain.

Radically different than other tearoom construction Richard seems to have incorporated a more encountering viewpoint, closer to relationship to the natural principles and therefore brings a diverse body of natural responses to the site. The structure effectively de-constructs and utilizes the mind. This tea house looks like a sculptural object from afar, have the comfort of a house when you are in it yet white-out walls. The intimate feeling towards the timber as material brakes down my previous barriers to engage, a self-built herb garden as extension is already under planning for the next spring. If architecture is a medium then TDT has successfully through influences of an architectural process consequently affected the concrete reality and enhanced the sense of the space.

Its a witty response to the possible direction life could take in a generic and placeless architecture, the opposing methods of change can be changed through clever adaptation rather than accepting life in constrain. A step further from the creational and the generic architecture, to go towards architecture that encourage to more free movement in a transcendental space, where everyone can attempt to invent possibilities of inventions:)

To be continued....thanx Rich xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx



Intervention Facts

Type

Plein air tea-house

Client

Ying Le

Budget

€2000 Euros

Size

9m²

Location

Private apartment rooftop,
Lehmbruckstraße, Berlin

Construction Assistance

Thomas McDougall

Period of Use

16 months

Construction

Medium rough-sawn Pine, 8G star-head screws, zip-ties

Dates of Use

August 2019 – December 2020

Project Requirements

Low-cost, efficacy of construction,
anchored to rooftop, passive sun shading,
allow for sky observation

Period of Construction

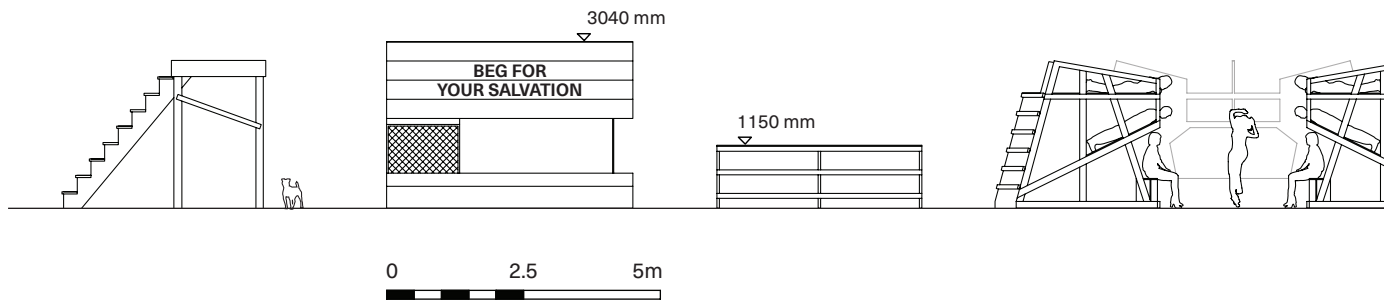
5 days, August 2019

Key Features

Timber frame, porous canopy, shelving for
tea vessels and artifacts

Post-Analysis

Materials / Scale



Hidden Borough Staircase
2012

Materials
Found Timbers
Screws
OSB board

LOW (A Kneeling Bar)
2013

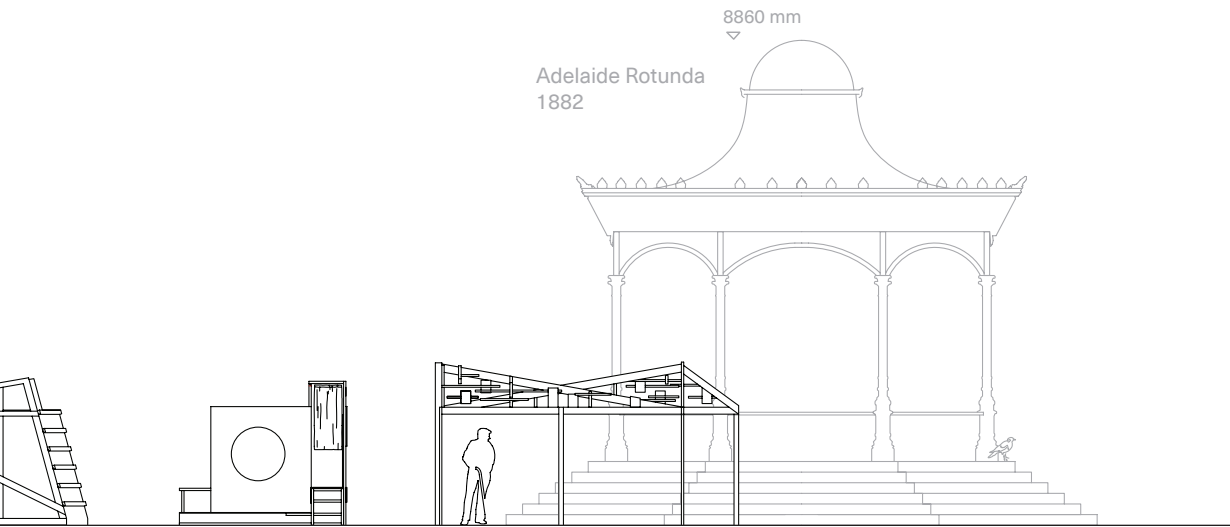
Materials
Up-cycled Palette Timber
Merbau Battens
Foam-core
Cardboard
Glue
Spray Paint
Screws

The EN/counter
2014

Materials
Up-cycled Palette Timber
Screws
Plantings

Proxaemic Theatre
2016

Materials
Structural Pine (MGP10)
14G Bugle Screws
6G-8G Robertson Screws
19mm Premium Pine



The Hōjōki Terminal
2018

Materials
12mm Plywood
9mm MDF
Formply
Structural Pine (MGP10)
6G-8G Robertson Screws
Paint
Fabric
Glue

The Dirty Tea-house
2019

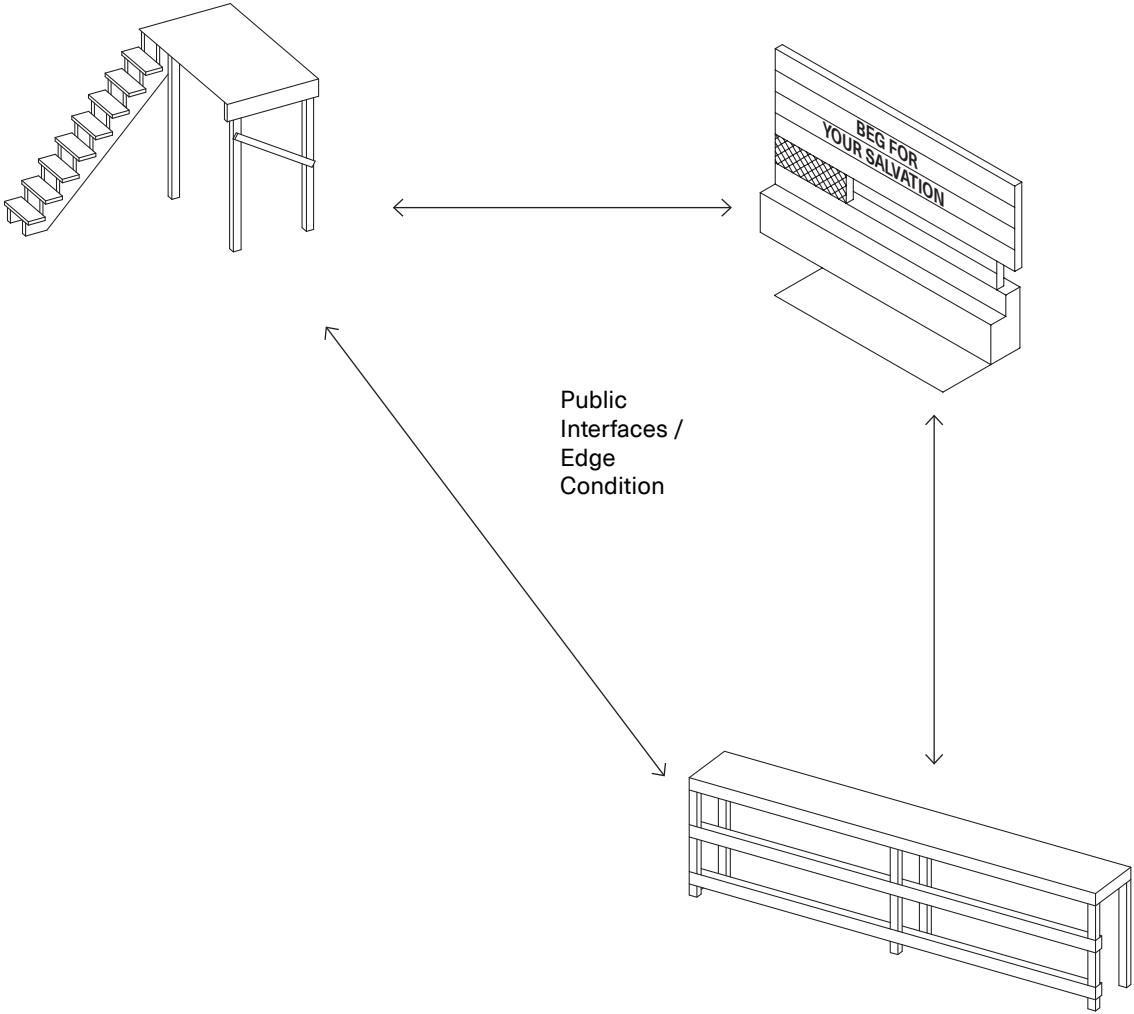
Materials
Medium Rough-sawn Pine
Zip-ties
8G Star-head Screws

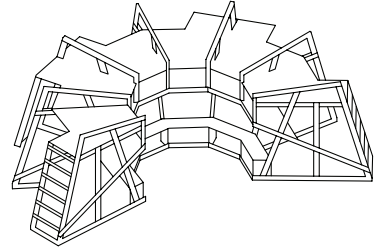
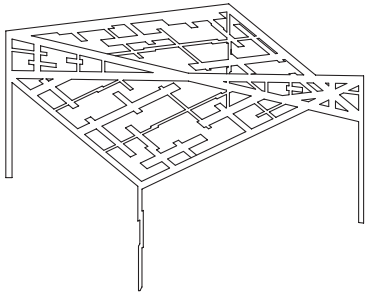
Intervention Time
Span Averages

Lifespan
Public land interventions: 12 days
Private land interventions: 2 years

Construction Time
All interventions: 7 days

Spatial DNA

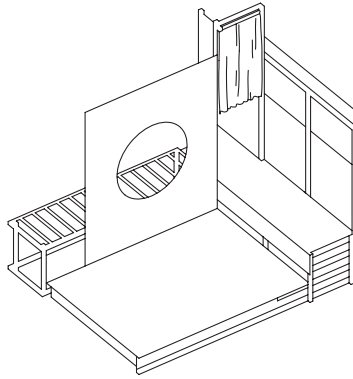




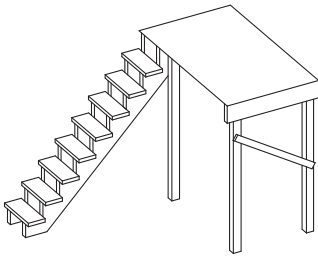
Defining
Contingent
Spaces



Autonomous
'Machine'



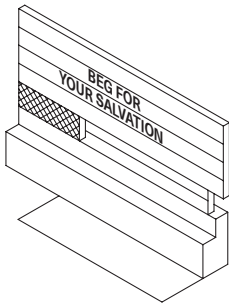
Semiotic Cues



Staircase



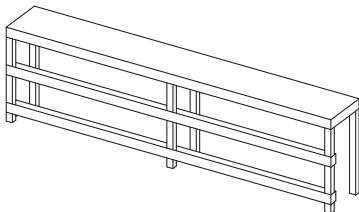
Image: Paris Opera House Staircase, Charles Garnier 'Le nouvel Opéra', 1880



Church meme billboard



Image: au_tiger01 (edited)



None / Purely abstract

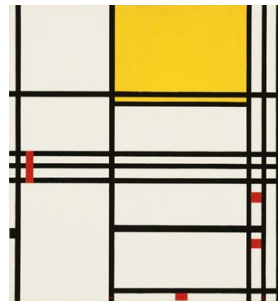
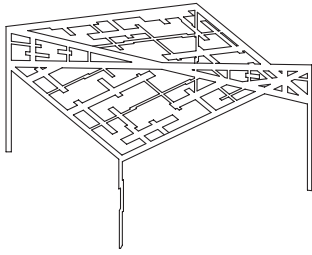


Image: The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.*

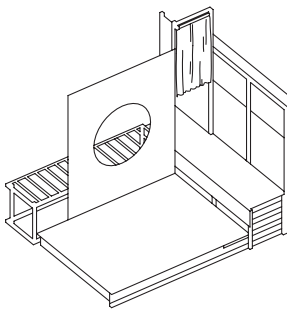
*Piet Mondrian, Painting No. 9, between 1939 and 1942. Oil on canvas, 31 3/8 x 29 1/4 in., 79.7 x 74.3 cm., The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. Gift from the estate of Katherine S. Dreier, 1953.



Organic tea



Image: Difference Engine (edited)



Traditional Japanese architecture

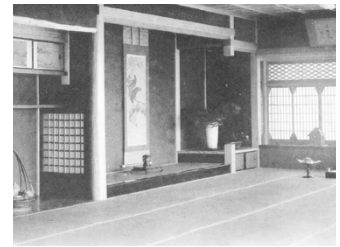
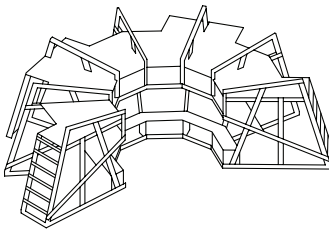


Image: The National Museum of Denmark / Flickr Commons (edited)



Asteroidea (Unintended Cue)

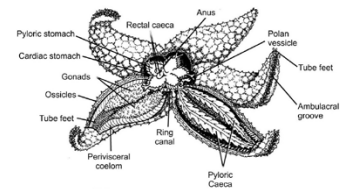
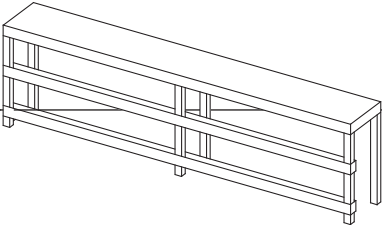


Image: BIODIDAC

Abstract vs. Semiotic
Permanent vs. Temporal

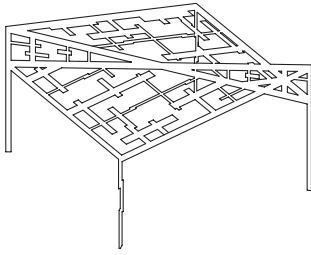
Abstract

Permanent

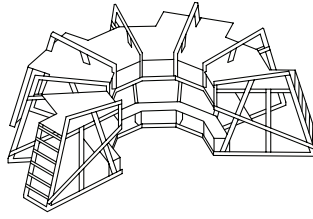


Lifespan: 1000 days+

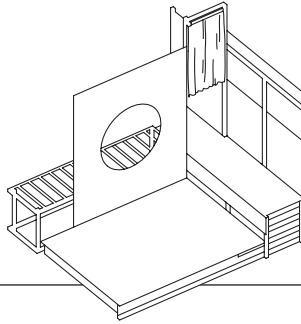
Semiotic



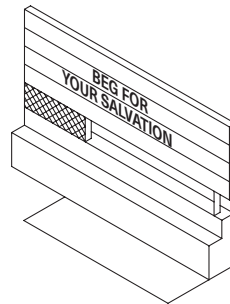
Lifespan: 500 days



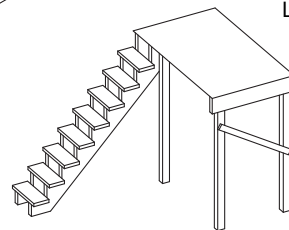
Lifespan: 21 days (speculated)



Lifespan: 14 days



Lifespan: 14 days



Lifespan: 3 days

Temporal



Steve

1-800-555-1234

FRANK JONES
123 Main St
Anytown, CA 90001

FRANK JONES
123 Main St
Anytown, CA 90001

CAUTION
Please do not touch

1-800-555-1234
FRANK JONES
123 Main St
Anytown, CA 90001

QR Code

BREMICK
ELECTRICAL

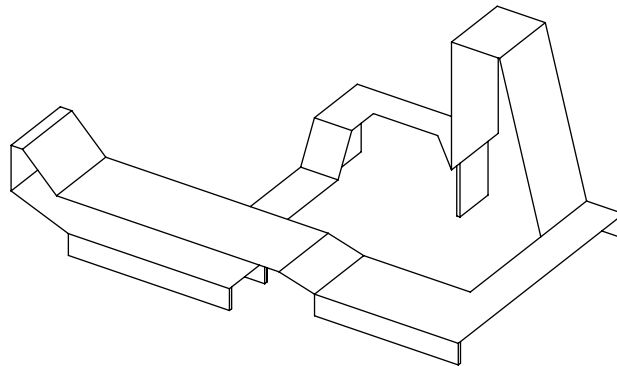
Exhibition

Tactic

The Limit of an
Interstitial Space

> Written Inquiry p179

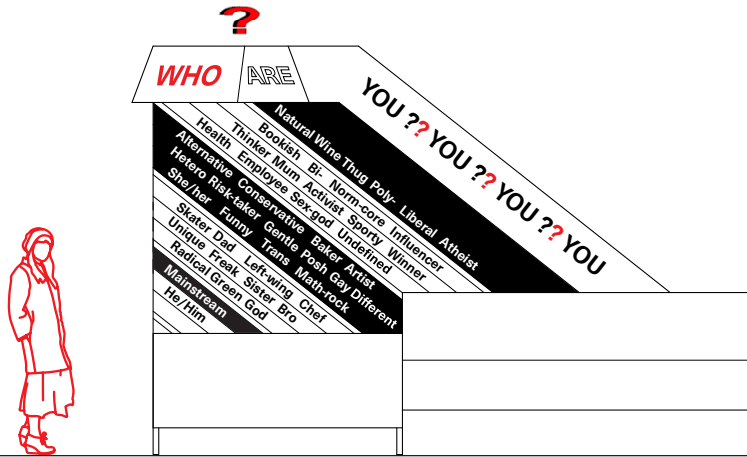
Design Trials



Trial 1

Möbius Strip

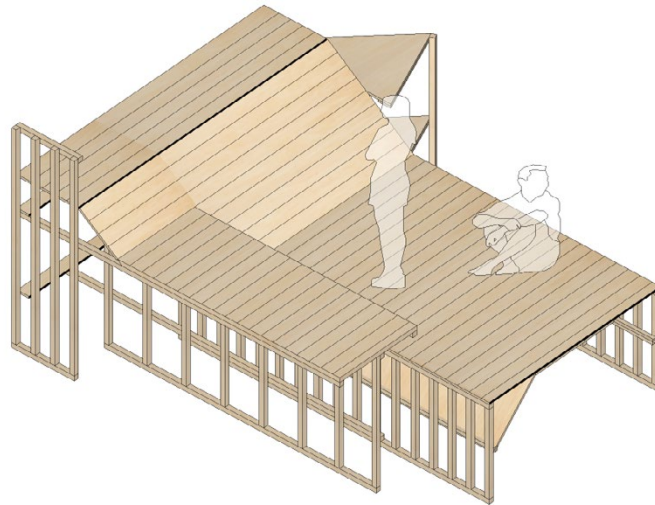
This approach focused on generating an architectural-scale, public furniture element that could accommodate interpretive cohabitation, unorthodox body postures and occupancies.



Trial 2

Identity Kiosk

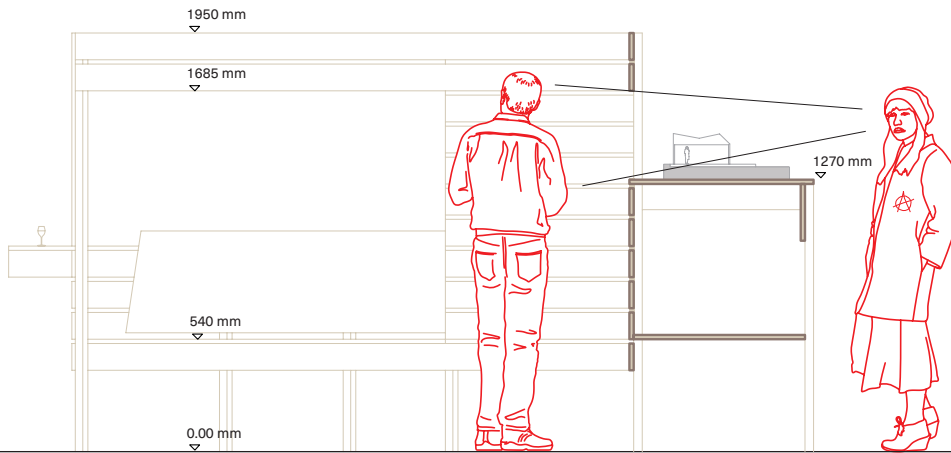
This conceptual direction explored the event of accelerated screen dependency during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ceaseless avatars that are created to mould and project personal identities. It sought to offset the interests of former interventions by setting its gaze towards digital spaces.



Trial 3

Interpretive Furniture

This direction explored a similar theme to the Möbius Strip concept in Trial 1, offering interpretive, grey-areas for occupancy. Ambiguity is rarely a strong selling-point, however, if it is approached with intention it has potential to be subversive.



Trial 4

Melvin

This installation synthesised furniture elements and platforms for presenting models, to create an island/stand where people may coalesce and engage in passive social intersection. It was conceived for both outdoor and indoor environments, with a view towards future alternative uses, such as a provisional oyster stand.

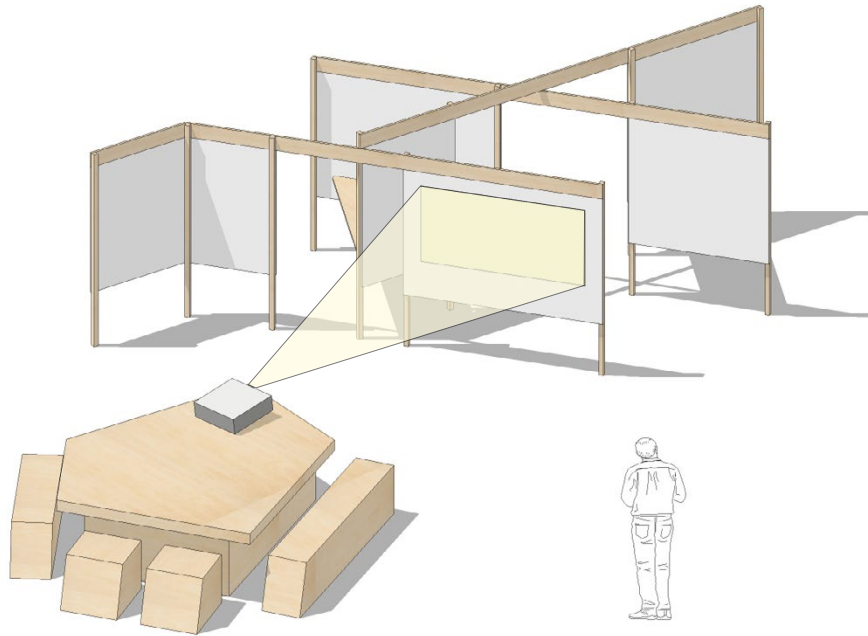




Trial 4 Continued...

Physical Models To Display

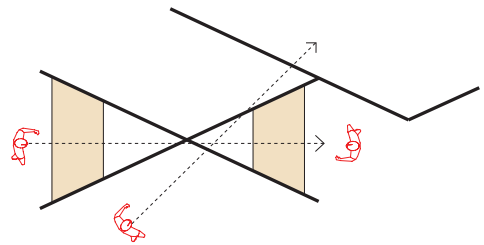
Hidden Borough Staircase @ 1:20
LOW (A Kneeling Bar) @ 1:10
The EN/counter @ 1:20
The Proxaemic theatre @ 1:20
Höjoki Terminal @1:20
The Dirty Tea-house @ 1:20



Trial 5

Overlapping Program

For this concept I shifted attention to how panels might be spatially arranged, to foster overlapping movement and chance social intersection. A subsidiary furniture element in this scheme was conceived as an inclusive, accommodating island tabletop, where workshops, presentations and karaoke could take place communally.



Floor-plan
Continuous sight-lines

Design Direction

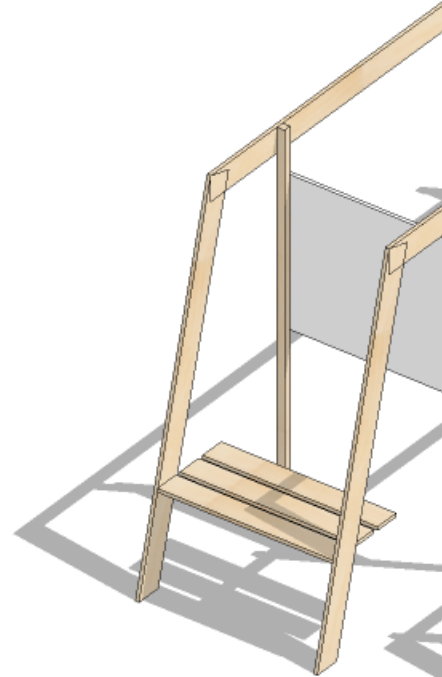
Trial 6

A Disruptor of Normative Proxemic Relations

This intervention is conceived as a field, or filtering device for humans, that generates proxemic ambiguities between people as they navigate their way through the exhibition displays. It plays on obscurantism, instigating new social and spatial relationships to maximise opportunities for chance intersection, social sparks, humour and play.

A Synthesis

Previous design trials had leant overtly towards being either an exhibition structure or a stand-alone intervention, supplemented by exhibition boards. This new direction synthesised exhibition boards with a compositional structure that offers elements for interpretation.



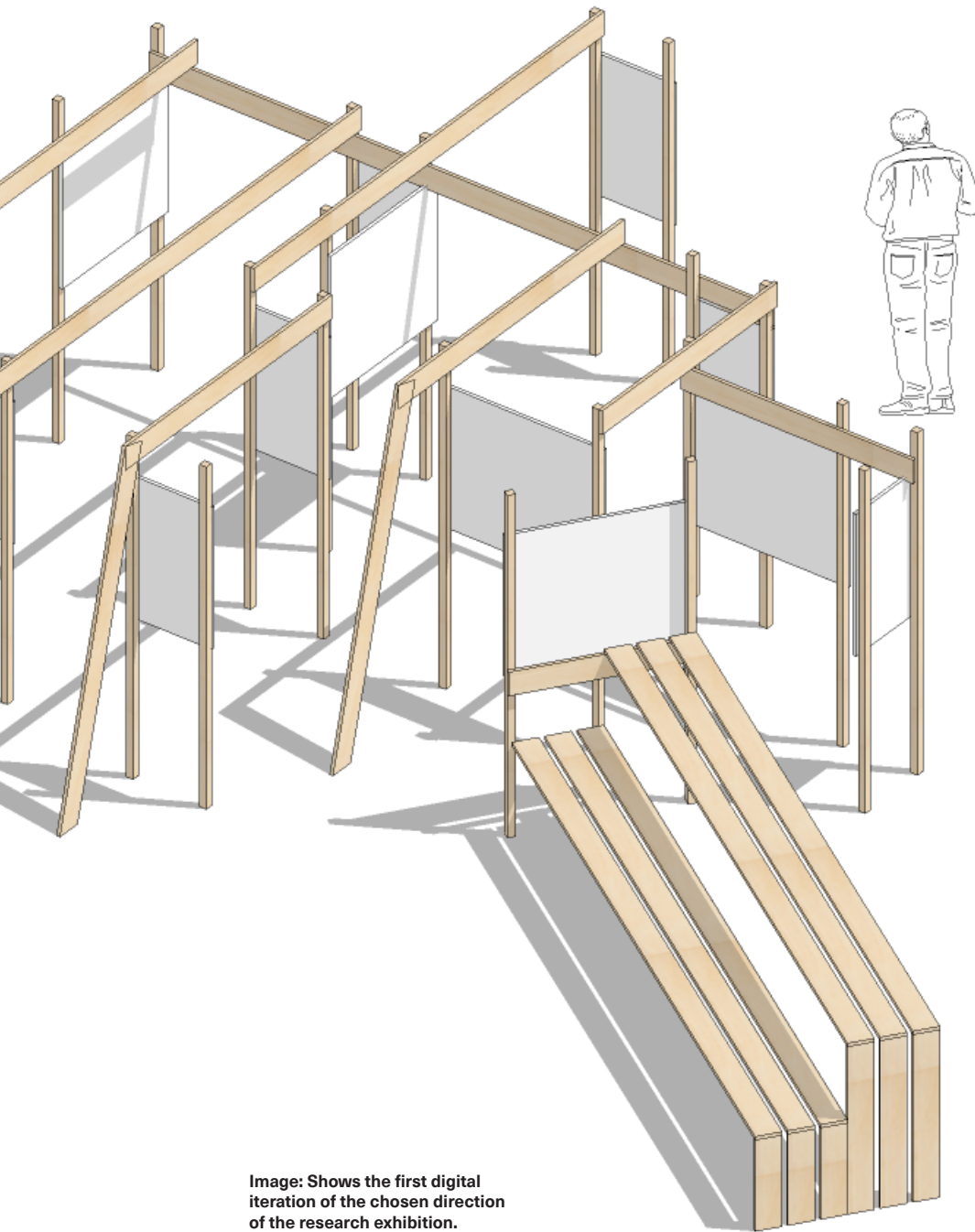


Image: Shows the first digital iteration of the chosen direction of the research exhibition.

Exhibition Site

Oddio is an industrial winery and event space sited in a former church in Bowden, Adelaide. The operators have adapted the venue over time, progressively discovering new uses for undefined spaces.



A – Oddio, 31 Drayton Street, Bowden, South Australia
B – Exhibition Site
C – Drayton Street
D – Sixth Street

Photo: Google



Street frontage of Oddio, when viewed from Drayton Street.

Photo: Google

For One Site and One Site Only

The exact site for the exhibition within the premises was offered by the winery operator, who permitted use of two carparks (shown). Located at the front of the premises, the site was outdoors and visible from the footpath on Drayton Street, offering a semi public quality.

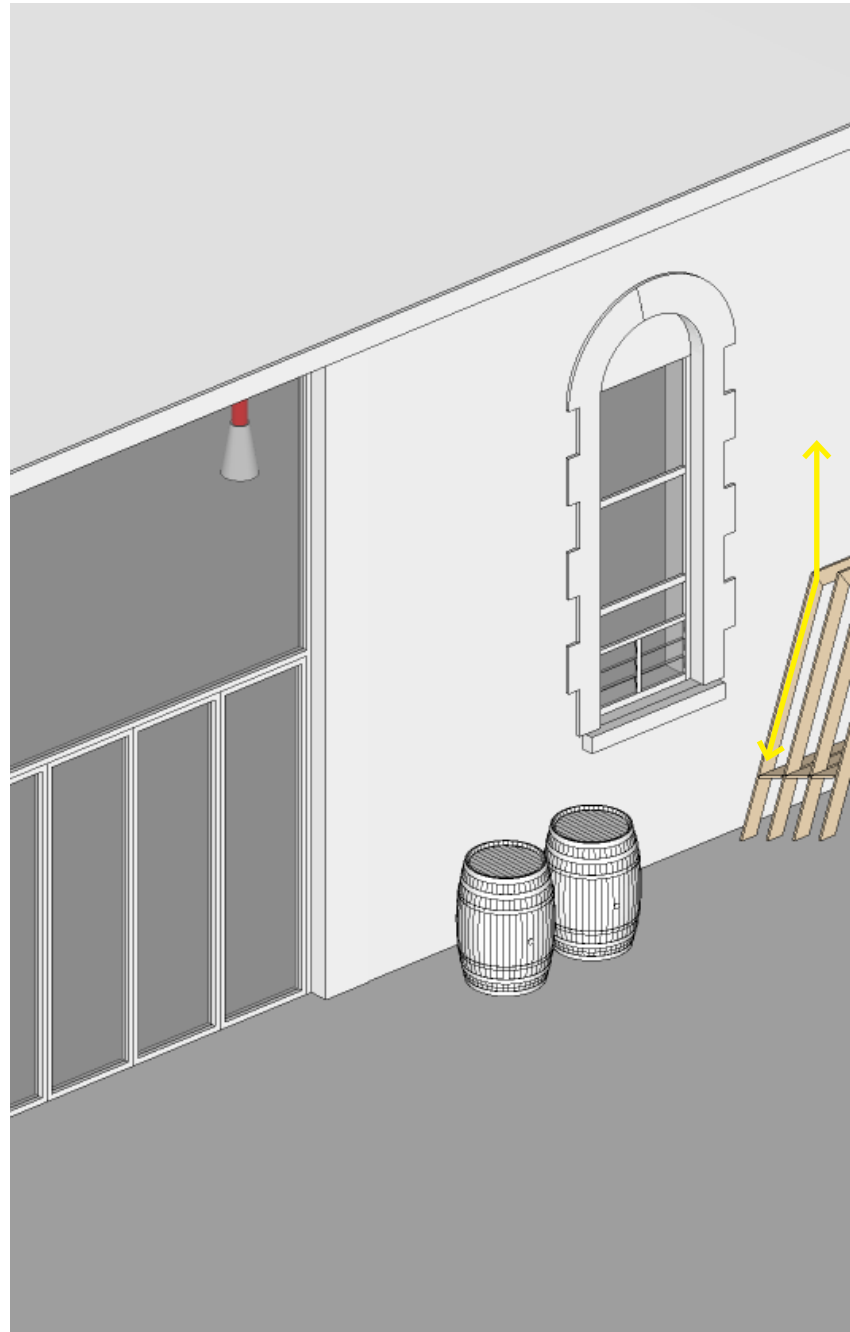
Industry Meets Leisure

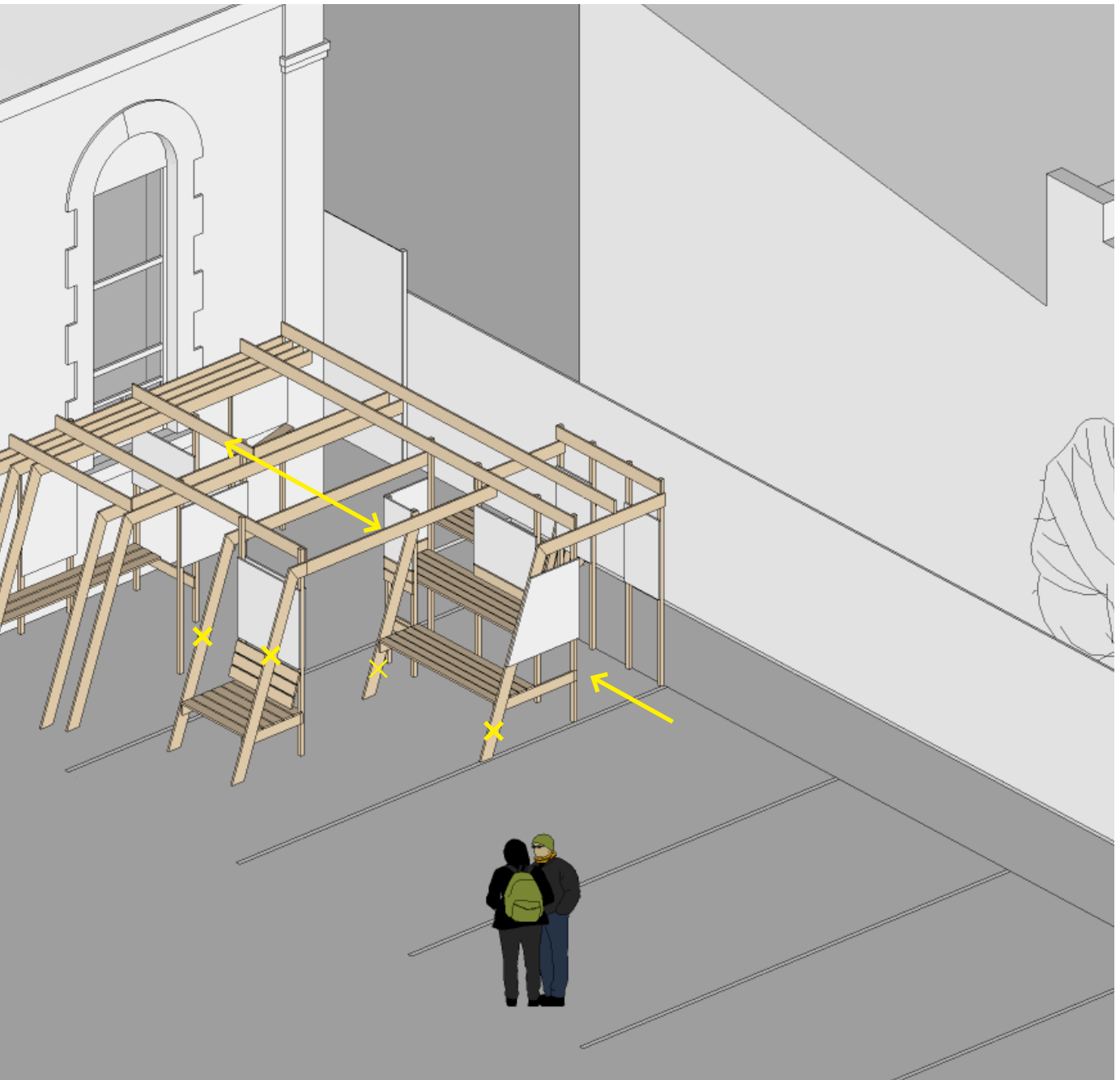
Informal elements such as planter boxes and industrial crates were relocated to claim a site for a minimal duration.



Design Development

This design iteration attempted to develop a spatial dialogue with the adjacent building. However, this measure started to absorb excessive materials, leading to its rationalisation. Strange public furniture elements were integrated into the structure to accommodate cohabitation.







Exhibition Walk-through
Photo: Daniel Marks
2021

The Third Space

The exhibition acquires its name from its siting – between a traditional church building and an industrial, pragmatic space, or what Frederic Jameson may describe as a space of ‘alienated modernity’.¹ This interstitial space, or ‘third space’, is viewed a place for surplus enjoyment, leisure, discovery and learning. It draws on the social utility of the Paris Opera Staircase, noted by Slavoj Žižek – as a vital, architectonic, interstitial space that supplements the functions in the main hall adjacent. Although these types of spaces often inherit labels such as ‘auxiliary spaces’, or ‘supplementary spaces’, their utility can exceed, or be equal to what is assumed to be the central program, as people can utilise the space to serve their own needs.

¹ Jameson. Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

Premature Adoption

After the exhibition framework was installed a group of anonymous wine enthusiasts amassed the intervention, appropriating and claiming spaces in creative ways.



Photo: Daniel Marks



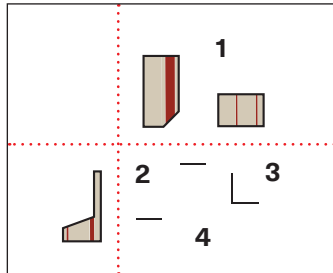
Conceptual Tenets

A summary of design principles that underpin the exhibition structure...



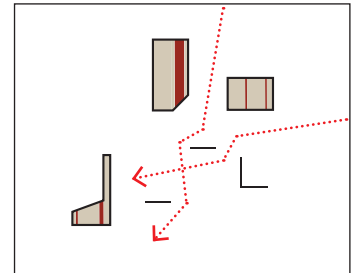
Public-ness

Horizontality and continuous lines are a cue to the urban; mindful of the semiotics of archetypal urban furniture.



Organisational Device

The intervention generates a series of rooms and frames a series of axes.



Multiple Paths of Movement

A loose spatial arrangement with multiple paths of movement unlocks a sense of spatial discovery and exploration.

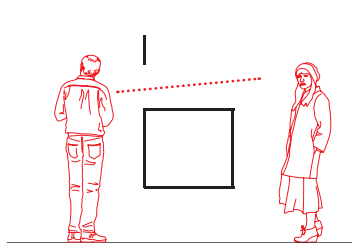
Image: Alexander Baranov



Hybrid Structure

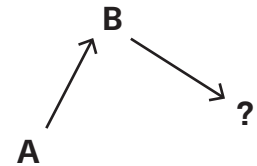
Furniture–Exhibition Stand
Architecture–Furniture

Hybrid functions generate overlapping uses.



Cohabitation / Proxemics

Physical mediation can unlock intimate proximities and generate forms of public togetherness.



Future Re-Appropriations

After the exhibition individual elements and materials will be upcycled to create the following:

- Hand-sanitiser station
- Bench seat for a bouncer
- Outdoor table
- Workshop counter
- Chicken coop



Recycled Materials

Timber salvaged from former interventions are up-cycled to reduce dependence on new materials.



Lasting Traces

It was hoped that traces of the intervention would merge with the site and linger. The element shown above is one remaining trace that found new use as a hand-sanitising station and bench seat for the venues bouncer.



Image: Charles Garnier, 1880

Interstitial Spaces for Social Intersection

'If the play on stage was the enjoyment which made the public come, the social game which went on on the staircase before the performance and during the intermissions was the foreplay which provided the 'plus dejour', the surplus enjoyment making it worthwhile to come there.'

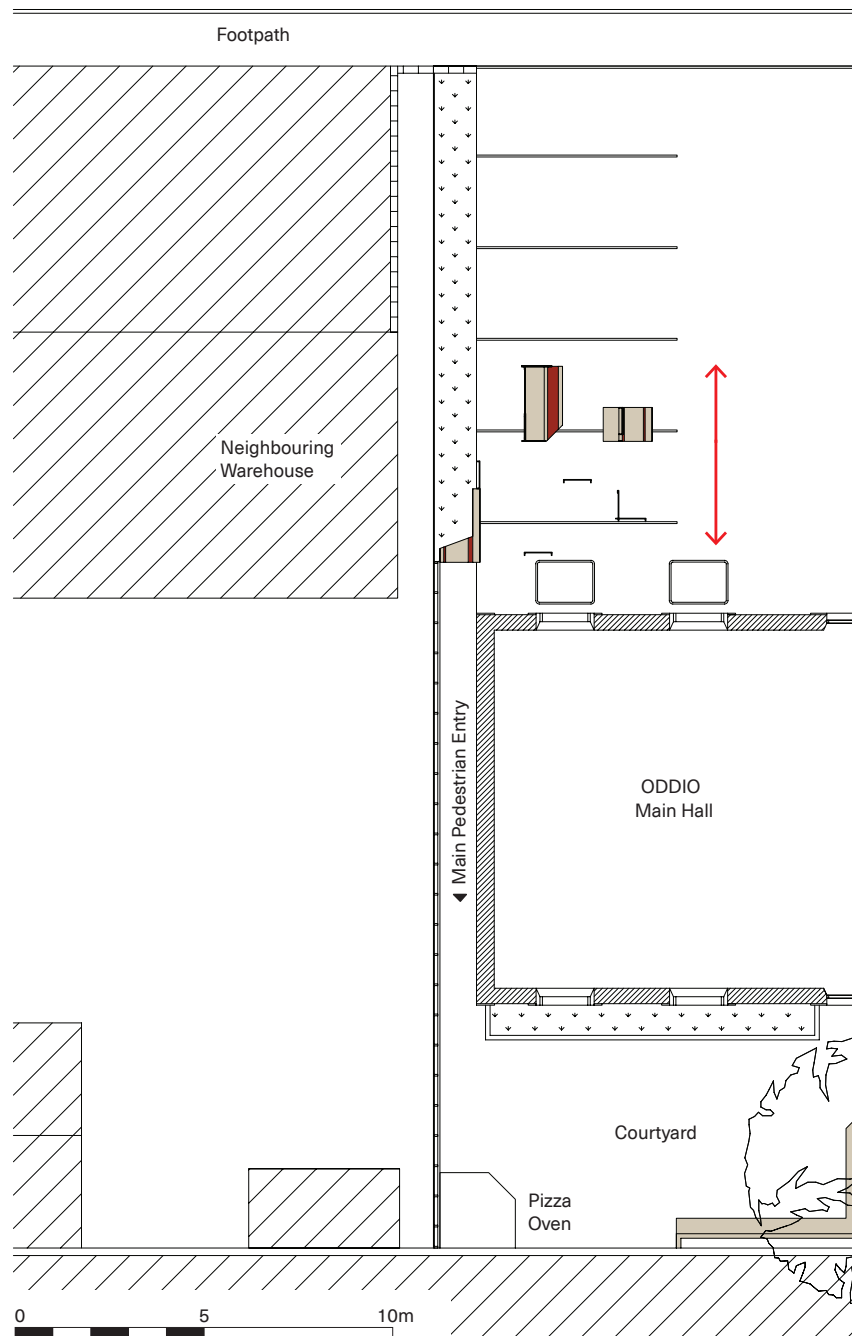
Slavoj Žižek, commenting on the staircase of the Paris Opera. Architectural parallax: spandrels and other phenomena of class struggle, 2009.

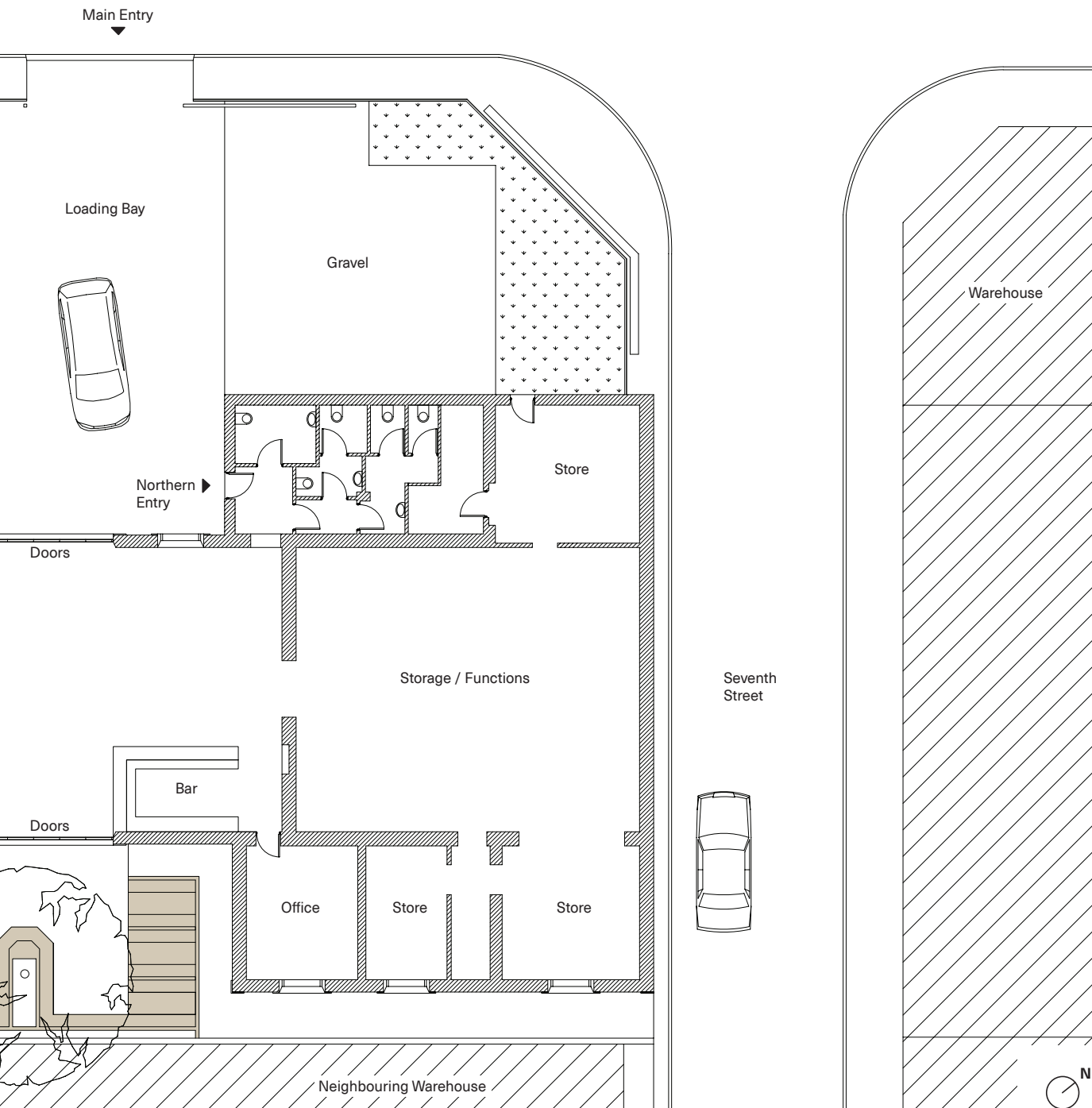
Re-coding a Carpark

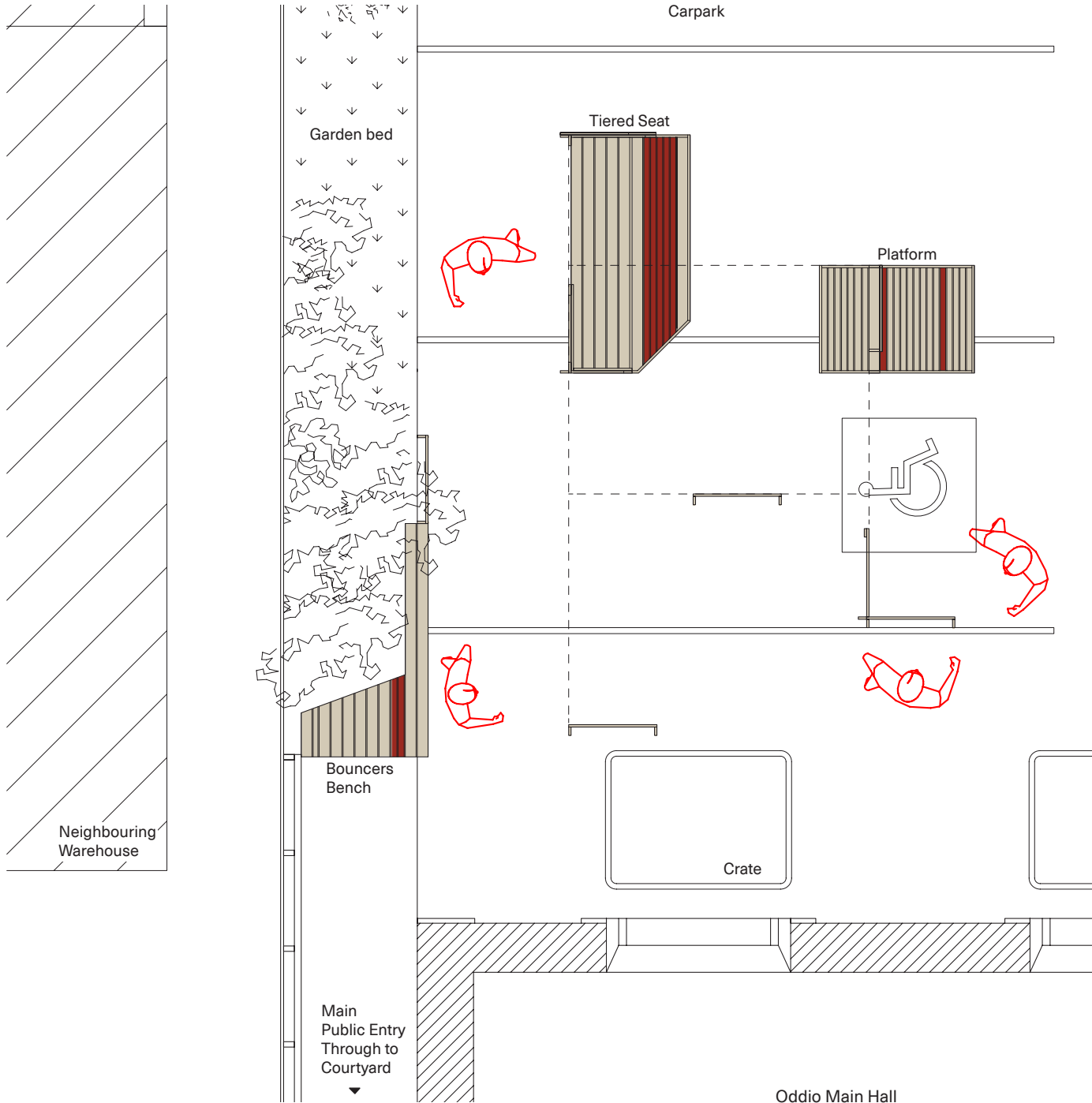
The intervention re-codes a series of carpark spaces as a site for human dwelling and represents the first furniture or architectural elements to be trialled at the front interface of the winery. The intervention was sited in the specific corner of the Loading Bay / Carpark during a period of industrial production at the request of the venue operator. This was in order to not compete with industrial equipment traversing the Loading Bay.

Access

The operators of the venue do not utilise the Loading Bay as a public carpark during events, to avoid conflicts between cars and pedestrians. This results from pedestrian movement being accessed from the vehicle gates, then continuing towards a passage on the eastern flank of the building. One exception are those with disabilities arriving at the venue. These persons are able to use the Loading Bay, vehicle assisted and without contention from other cars. In everyday practice, these vehicles park towards the northern entry door (shown) overriding conventional territorialisation of parking spaces – an organic and practical way to respect those less able.







Entry From
Drayton Street



Intervention Facts

Type

Exhibition / Furniture / Gateway

Client

Self

Budget

\$400

Size

22m²

Location

Oddio Winery
31 Drayton Street, Bowden, SA

Construction

Pine, salvaged floorboards

Period of Use

7 days, May 2021

Project Requirements

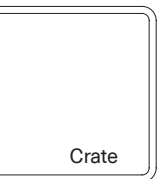
Low-cost, efficacy of construction, interpretive elements

Period of Construction

14 days, May 2021

Key Features

Platform, tiered seats, bouncers bench, exhibition displays, overhead frame, vertical elements





Exhibition
Photo: Daniel Marks
2021



Exhibition
Photo (bottom): Daniel Marks
2021

Responses to the Exhibition

Thomas

Via Telegram, May 14, 2021

Das sieht voll geil aus!

Arthur

Via Telegram, May 14, 2021

You got that physical space
unlocked dawwwwg

Denise

Via WhatsApp, May 14, 2021

Sitting pretty in the disabled car
park

davidfrussell

Via Instagram, May 17, 2021

A great activity for those poor
souls who find themselves in an
Oddio line-up this season

isabelmichell

Via Instagram, May 17, 2021

This is beautiful!
Congratulations, Rich

Dani

Via Messenger, May 18, 2021

Steve should keep it up for this
weekend for people to interact
with!

Phoebelem

Via Instagram, May 18, 2021

I would have liked to see @
frederickstevensonwines feature
breast cups incorporated into the
design. I look forward to waiting
on this when in line

Adam Somu

Via Instagram, May 18, 2021

It really annoys me when the
council paints over graffiti. Waste
of public money and resources.



Photo: Daniel Marks



Photo: Daniel Marks

Transportation

All parts of the structure were prefabricated off-site, flat-packed and transported to the venue in a single trip, in the tray of a domestic ute (utility vehicle).



Photo: Daniel Marks



Photo: Daniel Marks

Domestic Consequences

Domestic Consequences

> Written Inquiry p 195

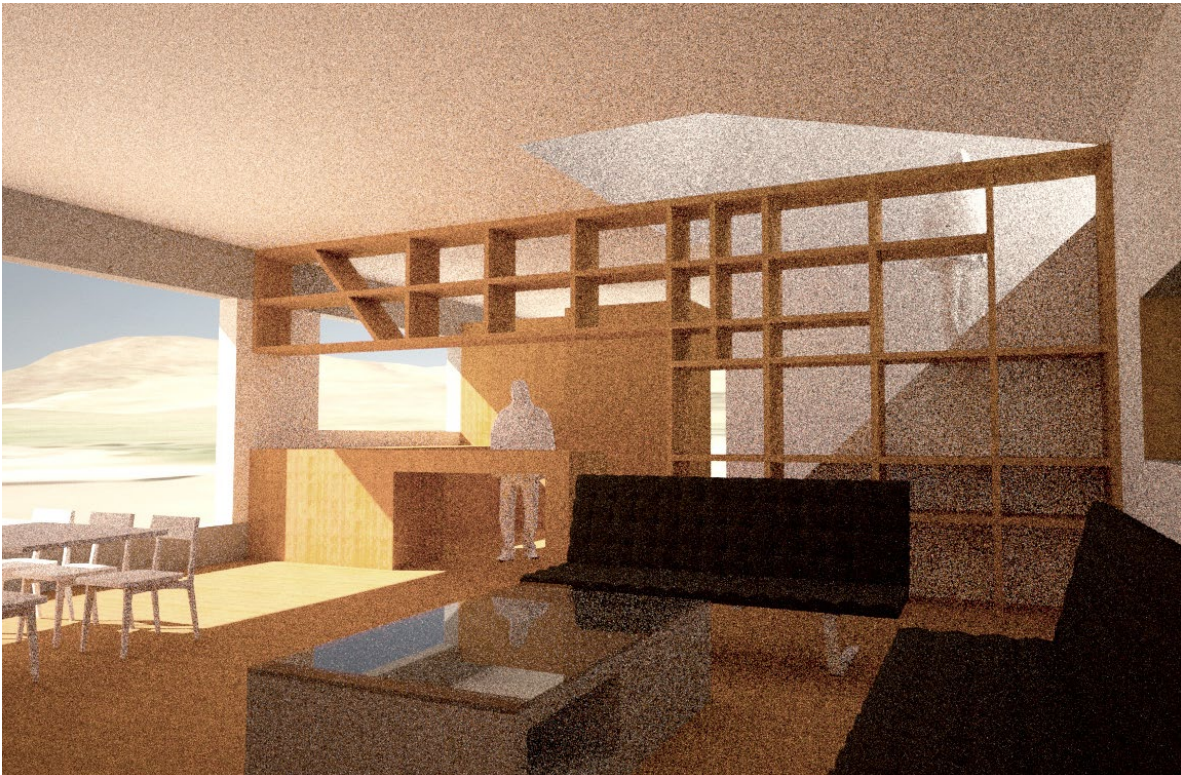
If research outcomes from the small-scale interventions were applied to a domestic setting, what would be its effects?

This section reveals a schematic design for a rural block in Second Valley, South Australia. It incorporates design thinking triggered by the small-scale interventions. The scheme is an adaptation of a design concept for a real site and real clients, that has been revised purely as a didactic exercise. It focuses on conceptual content, rather than being a polished working drawing. It represents one possible expression of the research principles, that myself or other practitioners may build on. The house seeks to open up different ways of living, to disrupt traditional arrangements and elicit new types of social intersection within the domestic setting.



Re-coding Tectonics

Ostensibly a low-cost construction, this building integrates a set of everyday architectural elements observed around the surrounding Second Valley township – such as verandah, canopy, posts and centralised openings. This measure seeks to augment the everyday into the extra-ordinary. By riffing on familiarity/unfamiliarity, the building seeks to heighten peoples curiosity and encourage the production of moments. Spatial richness is concentrated towards the roof canopy – an extra-ordinary architectural element, whose profile mirrors the immediate topography. The buildings morphology, more generally, is an augmentation of a traditional Australian homestead.



A Catalytic Intervention
Embedded in a Domestic Space

As one enters the living space from the front door, they face a shelving element (shown above) that partly conceals a staircase. The stairs arise into a spatial cavern, or eruption, characterised by expanding, geometric lines and backlit by natural daylight. It forms a stage where an actor may engage with other persons in the room below. The differentiation of heights

created by the stairs, combined with the non-uniform shelving openings frame a multitude of apertures for communication, encouraging creative and playful interpretation. This spatial mediating device seeks to trigger social sparks and humour by conflicting our physiognomy. It provides a moment of spatial intensity and release from the orthodoxy of the building.



Can socially catalytic moments be consciously integrated into a domestic setting?

Ground Floor

- 1 Main Bed
- 2 Living / Dining
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Micro Living
- 5 Study / Library
- 6 Bed
- 7 Pantry / Wine Store
- 8 Public Bathroom
- 9 Utilities
- 10 Deck

Upper Floor

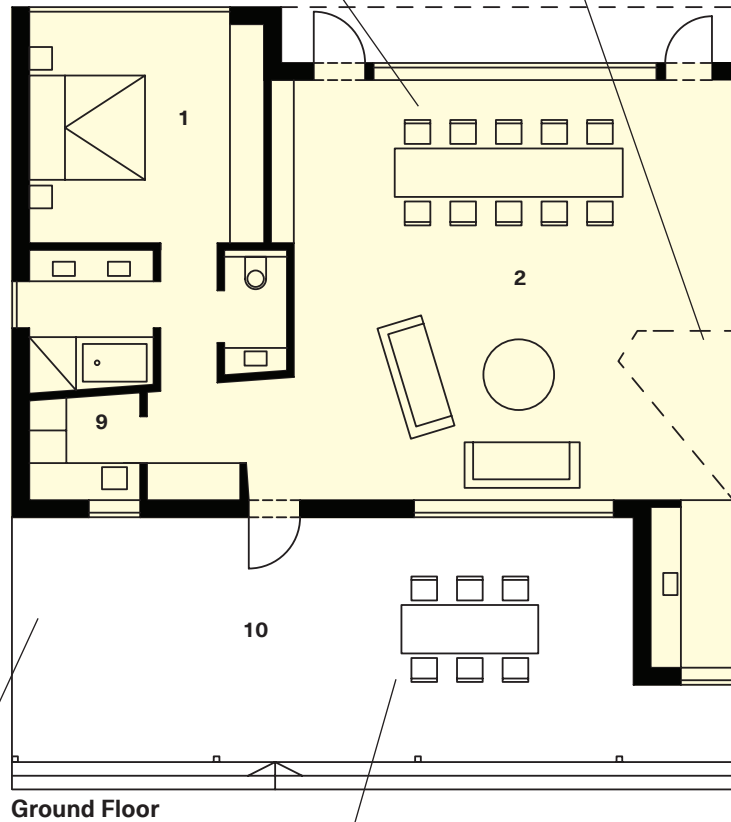
- 11 Deck
- 12 Bedroom / Rumpus Room

Cohabitation

The dining table is centralised for large communal dinners

Microplan Intervention

A catalytic intervention that centers around a staircase is a catalyst of social sparks and playfulness



Public Interface

The outdoor living space connects with the front of the block, to engage with passive activity

Versatile Outdoor Room

Decking is concentrated in one area to form a deep and covered external region, that accommodates dwelling without impeding movement

Cook Inclusion

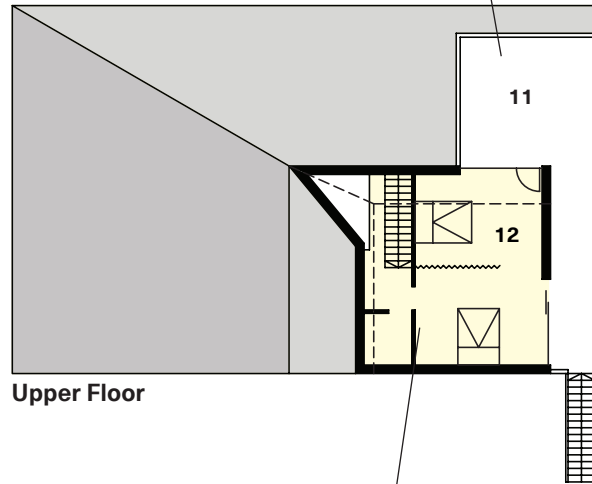
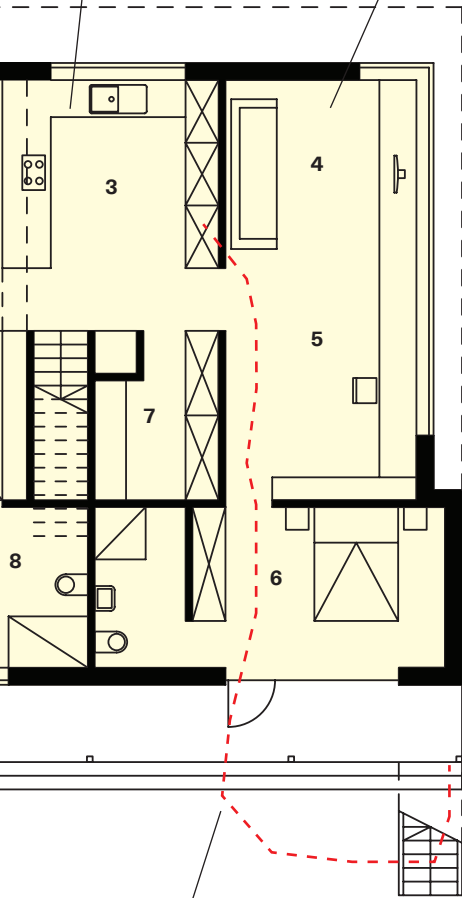
The kitchen layout is mindful of the cook's social inclusion. The stove-top is centrally sited to unlock a performative quality to cooking

Interstitial Living Space

A subsidiary, micro living space is included for respite, it doubles as study, library and storage space

Discovery

A rooftop deck for scenic views and star-gazing forms a memorable social moment



Movement

Continuous paths of movement through the building and site invite exploration, discovery and movement

Unlocking the Outdoors

An external staircase to an upper floor deck is viewed as a catalytic device that unlocks new relations with the landscape. It doubles as a destination in itself, where incidental social intersections may centre

Versatile Space

Beds can be folded up into walls when not needed, unlocking alternative uses for the space



Urban Speculation

Re-engineering Adelaide's East Parklands

Urban Speculation

A bold idea for a grand, lineal promenade for the East Adelaide Park Land's, that boldly re-engineers and unifies the disparate park realms, reinvigorating the space as an iconic cultural moment for the city that is radically human-centric.

The map, shown right, has been generated by superimposing Hauptallee onto a satellite image of Adelaide. Hauptallee is a 4.5 km lineal boulevard located in Wien, Austria that embodies tenets of Baroque planning that contributes to the contemporary version of the city. The proposed promenade would iron out creases and knots in the existing park lands path system, to create a 'pedestrian highway'. A talking point, city attractor and social condenser, the unified strip would spark new urban sensibilities, transforming the contingent paths into a destination for everyday movement, access, recreation, self-expression, drifting and safety.

The promenade would commence from a new iconic Botanic Gardens gateway and continue 2.3km towards the south-eastern corner of the Adelaide Park Land belt, unlocking the Botanic gardens to the greater city.



Satellite image: Google (edited)





Wine Centre

Lot 14

New Botanic Gardens Gateway

The East End

Adelaide Bowls

Hutt Street

2.3kms

Southern Park Lands

New Park Land Gateway

OSTANGENTE WIEN

Ernst-Happel-Stadion

Stadionbad

Gesellschaft

Lusthausstr.

Lusthaus

Gärtnerstr.

Forsthaus

Schw.

Gr.-Ebnstr.

Garten

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Project

Highway for Alternative Forms of Movement

Location

Victoria Park, Eastern Parklands, Adelaide



What do you like most about this promenade?

...I love having a major walkway that is well lit and frequented 24hrs. It means that you can walk through the park at night and feel safe.

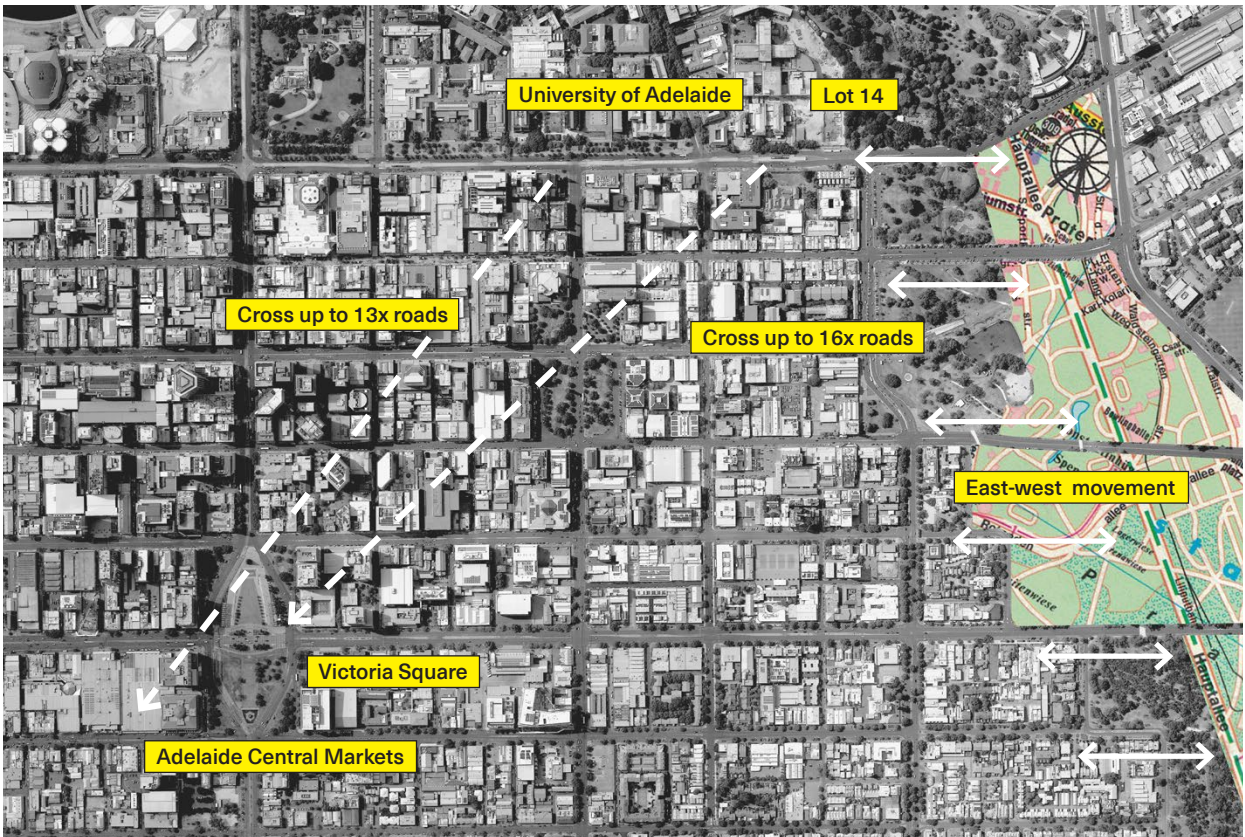
IF GET TRACK IN USE



The iconic destination points of this promenade encourage use.

Condensing movement onto a major passage generates an iconic cultural moment.

This idea for a pedestrian highway arose following a personal reading of Adelaide that identified a car-dominant planning focus. Could a 'big infrastructure project' in South Australia focus on alternative forms of movement?



Unlock What?

Traffic lights are a cumbersome way to mediate movement through an urban centre. This 'taking-in-turns' approach sacrifices people's time to guarantee safe egress. In the course of doing this, rhythm and movement through the city is stifled.

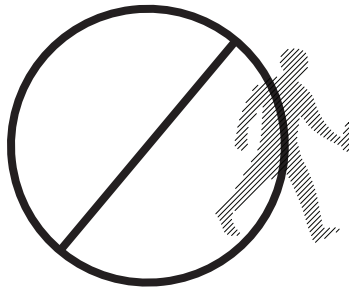
The prevalence of this obstruction in Adelaide's urban form is prominent. A pedestrian travelling between major CBD nodes must apply and wait at an exceptionally high number of traffic lights: for

a pedestrian travelling from Lot Fourteen to Victoria Square this number is as high as 16 traffic lights.

What are the alternatives? Cyclists, pedestrians, scooters and other alternative forms of movement can circumvent CBD roads with the speculative grand, lineal promenade. People can hone in on city blocks, filtering along east-west channels. Adelaide has the weather to be a great walking city, what steps will be taken to enable this?

THE FOLLOWING NOTICE IS ISSUED BY THE RELEVANT
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN STATE AUTHORITIES...

Do Not Drink Alcohol in The Adelaide Park Lands



THIS ISSUE IS NOT FOR PUBLIC DEBATE. THOSE WHO
CONTRAVENTE THIS INJUNCTION CAN EXPECT EXCESSIVE
FINES AND POLICE HARASSMENT.

PLEASE ALSO RESPECT THE FOLLOWING:

PLEASE CENTRE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AT FEE-PAYING AND LICENCED VENUES
PLEASE AVOID THE PARKLANDS AFTER NIGHTFALL
PLEASE DO NOT RIDE A BICYCLE
PLEASE DO NOT JAY-WALK
PLEASE DO NOT CELEBRATE AUSTRALIA DAY IN THE PARKLANDS
PLEASE DO NOT QUESTION MAINSTREAM IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVES
PLEASE DO NOT DRIVE FASTER OR SLOWER THAN THE PRESCRIBED SPEED LIMIT
PLEASE DO NOT RAISE CONCERNS THAT THE CITY IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS
PLEASE DO NOT WEAR BRIGHT COLOURS OR DYE YOUR HAIR

This notice is for satirical purposes

Project Summary

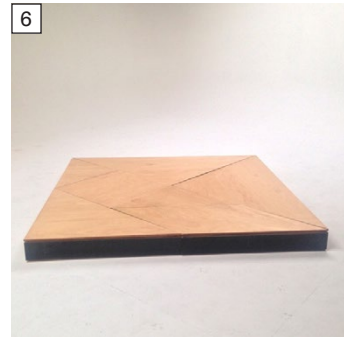
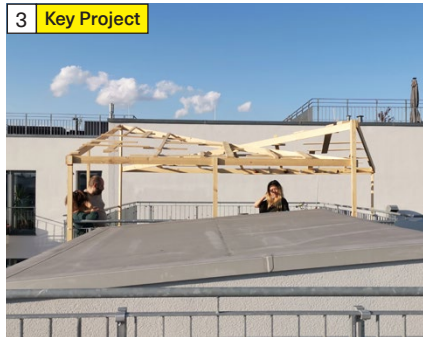
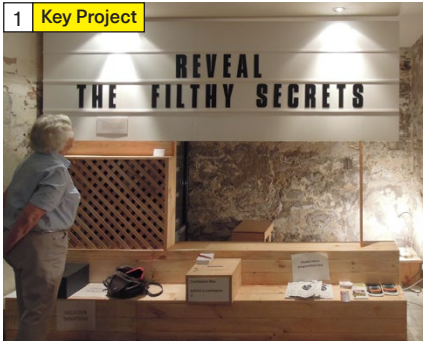
Small

Medium

Unbuilt

Community of Practice

Small



1 *LOW (A kneeling bar)*
The Tunnels Art Event, 2013

2 *Höjoki Terminal*
AGSA, 2018

3 *The Dirty Tea-house*
Berlin (DE), 2019

4 *The Rural Pavilion*
Yankalilla, 2008

5 *Vandalis*
Structure for a film clip, 2014

6 *EMU Touchpads*
W. Charles Whittington, 2013

7 *DJ Station*
Ancient World Nightclub, 2015

8 *Bicycle Trailer*
Self built, 2013



9 Key Project



12 Key Project



10



13 Key Project



11

9 *The EN/counter*, Tomsey Street
W. S. Mazengarb and B. Freesmith, 2015
Photo: Jessica Reid

10 *Urban Placards*
Institute of Profound Knowledge, 2010

11 *TRANS-FORM* Design Emporium
W. Matea Glusevic, 2015

12 *Hidden Borough Staircase* (UK)
W. Guerilla Architects (DE), 2012

13 *The Third Space*
Research Exhibition, 2021
Photo: Daniel Marks

Medium



1 *Robe Beach House*
Additions and Alterations, 2020

2 *West Croydon Residence*
Addition and Alterations, 2018

3 *Sidewood Cellardoor*
Woodside, 2011

4 *The Extra/Ordinary House*
New Build, 2013

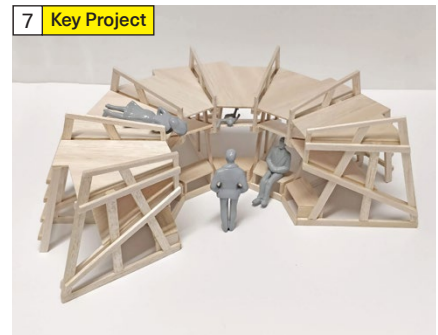
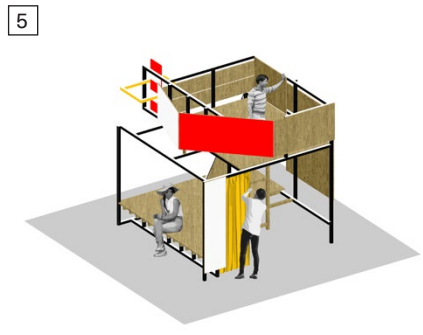
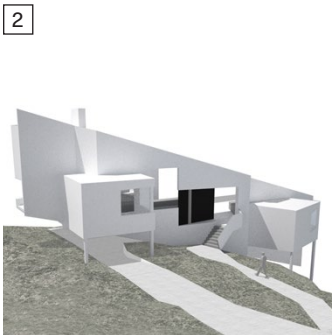
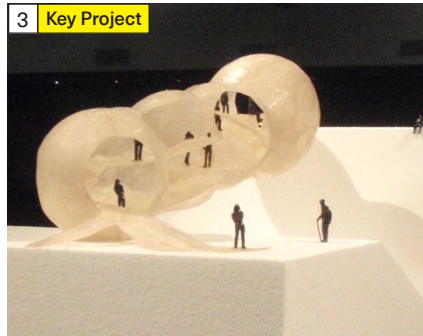
5 *Glenelg South Residence*
Addition and Alterations, 2017

6 *Norwood Residence*
House Addition, 2021

7 *Yankalilla Residence*
Alterations and Carport, 2016

Unbuilt

Speculative Projects
Competition Entries



1 *Park Land Pavilion*
Competition Entry, 2012

3 *Dialectical Bridge*
National Student Competition, 2008

6 *Cellardoor and Art Gallery*, 2013
Photo: Thomas Capogreco

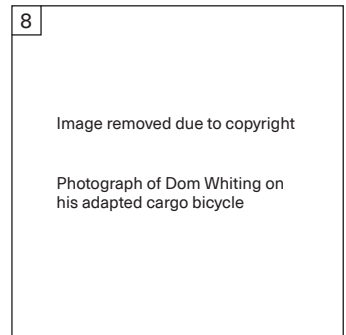
2 *Sum House*
University Project 3rd year, 2007

4 *The Urban Crown*
University Project 5th year, 2009

7 *The Proxaemic Theatre*
W. Thomas Capogreco, 2019

5 *Hōjōki*
W. Julian Worrall, 2017

Community of Practice



1 Raumlabor
Floating University EV,
Climate Care Festival, 2019
Image: Lena Giovanazzi

2 The Next ENTERprise
Kempelenpark, 2018
Image: Lukas Schaller

3 Škart
Seesaw Play-Grow, 2010
Image: Michele D'Ariano Simionato

4 EXYZT Collectif
The reUNION, 2012
Image: Julie Guiches

5 Walking Chair Studio
Ping Meets Pong, 2002
Image: Guenter Parth

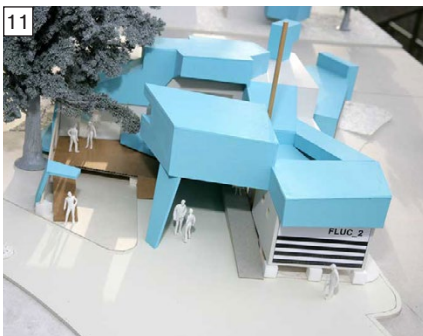
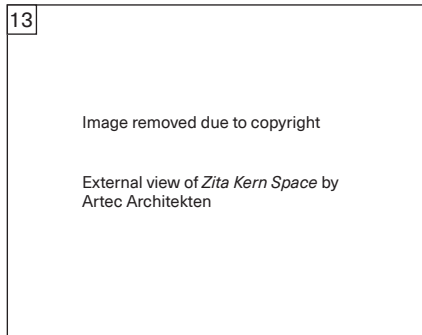
6 FELD 72
Hochstapler, 2007
Image: Hertha Hurnaus

7 Yo Shimada
Ritsumeikan workshop, 2020
Image: Yo Shimada

8 Dom Whiting
DnB Bike, 2020
Image: Lily Hansen-Gillis



This double-page spread presents an incomplete survey of projects by others that have stimulated the alternative course of my practice. In line with the preoccupations of this study, emphasis is placed on projects that provide *social fulcrums* and low-tech, minimalistic infrastructure for public social intersection.



9 Folke Köbberling & Martin Kaltwasser
Werdplatzpalais, 2007
Image: Köbberling & Kaltwasser

10 Julien Boidot
Public Space and Hall, 2018
Image: Clément Guillaume

11 Klaus Stattmann
The Fluc, 2006
Image: Klaus Stattmann

12 Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (Free), 2011
Image: Jonathan Muzikar

13 ARTEC Architekten
Zita Kern Space, 1998
Image: Margherita Spiluttini

14 Atelier Jan De Vydler Inge Vinck
Rampelken, 2017
Image: Filip Dujardin

15 Peter Märkli
Studio House, 2014
Image: Heinrich Helfenstein

Biography

Richard Le Messurier

A sole practitioner, maker and thinker, I operate a creative design studio that addresses broad scales of construction. Projects are driven by a design philosophy that pays attention to the social interactions and behaviours that spaces elicit. Projects often incorporate minimalistic and tectonic gestures to heighten the lived experience of space. Each project is approached as a nuanced sets of problems that require a tailored and innovative response, drawing from broader considerations of the urban and landscape context. I conceptualise, design, draft, monitor construction and build structures.



Unlocking Physical Spaces



PhD
University of Adelaide School of
Architecture and the Built Environment

© Richard Le Messurier



Unlocking Physical Spaces



Richard Le Messurier
Creative Practice Research

Written Inquiry

Unlocking Physical Spaces



Written Inquiry | Book 2 of 2

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the successful completion of this research. I would like to thank my supervisors for their attentiveness and support. Dr Urs Bette who advised me from the outset and Dr Julian Worrall for his perceptive guidance. Sincere thanks to Dr Jo Russell-Clarke for her suggestions with the written sections and to Con Brauer and Jemma Holt for their grammatical inputs. Many thanks to the University of Adelaide for its financial support and to the School of Architecture and Built Environment, in particular to Urs Bette, Tanya Court and Jo Russell-Clarke in driving the Design Research Colloquium program in a new setting, encouraging practitioners to examine their practices in the critical framework of a PhD. Finally, I thank my supportive family.

Supervisors

Dr Julian Worrall
Dr Urs Bette

Clients of Included Projects

Ying Le – Thirsty Moon Tea
The Art Gallery of South Australia
Artsake Productions
William Freesmith and Simone Mazengarb
Ancient World Nightclub
Sparkspitter
Nick and Denise Le Messurier

Collaborators and Assistance

Dr Jo Russell-Clarke
Con Brauer
Jemma Holt
Thomas Capogreco
Simone Mazengarb
William Freesmith
Dr Julian Worrall
Timothy Tuppence
Thomas Mc Dougall
Anna Fritz
Benedikt Stoll
Guerilla Architects

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Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree. I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

August 2022

Abstract

This research examines how an architect might contribute to the social and public dimensions of contemporary Australian cities through small-scale, low-tech, object-based interventions. Employing a research-by-design methodology, original interventions that invigorate everyday, abandoned and overlooked city spaces are created and interrogated. The unlocking of behaviours and corresponding explosions of social activity reveal a latent public potential, suggesting an untapped spatial determinism. Intervention sites are conceptualised as ‘micropia’ which are anomalous yet beneficial ruptures in the urban fabric that emerge from an organic engagement with everyday life. These ‘micropia’ put into question ‘grand designs’ devised and imposed from the preserve of a detached professionalism.

Introduction

Through overt familiarisation, architectural and urban form drift into the background becoming a shadow or a trace; there is a kind of resignation. Their immutability grows acceptance. While architects frequently demonstrate aptitude for remodeling known archetypes to achieve high standards of built form, the commercial briefs they respond to rarely offer scope for imaginative exploration of wider public impacts. This study steps outside the confines of urban allotments and the Australian building industry to examine the potential of small-scale architectural interventions to contribute to the public and social character of cities. New architecture in the city is constrained in the ways it can challenge and enlarge our perceptions. This study examines novel architectural interventions that catalyse new types of social interaction and behaviour in public space. The anomalous moments¹ that unfold within these sites as a product of architectural stimulation, highlights the physical contingencies of our built environment or conditions that remain 'locked'. Conceptualised as fine-grain layers of guerrilla infrastructure, interventions integrate and overlap with existing contexts to circumvent and challenge accepted boundaries and expected use of spaces. Interventions are characterised by originality, provisionality, low-cost construction methods and ongoing design adaptations that abet their realisation of nuanced proportions, urban form linkages and public qualities. Interventions of this nature have been realised in cities around the world in contemporary contexts by a variety of existing practices. They are part of a rich and varied catalogue of approaches to urban social infrastructure that remain largely unexplored in Australia.

This study is underpinned by a process of self-examination that has drawn attention to the small-scale and bespoke architectural structures my practice has delivered. Here, a critical value was embedded that had not been articulated or unpacked for audiences beyond the sites where the projects had manifested. After revealing unexpected results and patterns in formative projects at DRC² events, I then embarked on developing new interventions with greater intention, underscored by specific tactics that creatively respond to commonplace obstructions in the urban environment. In the earlier stages of this study, I examine my 'spatial history'³ to reveal seminal moments of development that have directed my thinking, fascinations and biases towards this subject. In the latter stages of this investigation I reveal the tactics employed by the interventions and reflect on their outcomes, revealing subtle resources and hidden innovations that underpin the originality of this study.

Unlocking

Unlocking happens when one provides a 'key'. In this case, the urban interventions are the key – what is accessed are new types of urban experience and social encounter. Throughout this study, these values stand as banners for a wider array of effects that would otherwise be difficult to assimilate. In lieu of this, I seek to reveal new terminologies to give greater potency to the temporal and elusive events that appear to evade common perception. I am interested in the fulcrums of the city where anomalous behaviours, experiences and encounters are catalysed. The latter parts of this study explores the possibility that these instances can be facilitated through the provision of architectural elements such as public seating, urban counters, information, frames, conceptual narratives and interactive and interpretive built elements. Unlocking refers to the way that architectural tools can provide access to spaces beyond the encasement of existing institutions.⁴ This has directed the attention of this study towards urban spaces that may otherwise lay dormant; left-over spaces or urban 'junk spaces'.⁵ In earlier stages of the research, *enabling* was trialled as a descriptive term, but was deemed too passive. In contrast, when something is unlocked there is a kind of eruption, an explosive quality akin to the social interactions or behaviours that manifest. While 'enabling' emphasises the agency provided to individuals, unlocking has a kinetic and even mechanical implication that draws attention to the architectural action: the process of cause and effect.

Intervention sites are conceptualised as *micropia* – a novel term that collates 'micro' and 'utopia' to describe a small and anomalous rupture in the urban fabric, coloured by aspirational social values. An alternative terminology considered was *islands of social hope* to reference the participation of sites among an archipelago of other similar socially contributing spaces. Micropia was deemed more succinct and recognises the elusive nature of the social aspirations, or 'utopianism'. Furthermore, attempts to assimilate these sites into a broader vision for the city, or system, was not deemed necessary as a micropia is focused on the inner world of an intervention. A micropia is framed by a specific tactic aimed at unlocking the unimagined potential of a site; in this sense they can be viewed as emancipatory spaces. As a result, the ideation of a micropia offers potential

for larger scales of architecture and types. To demonstrate this, I include a brief account at the latter stages of the study that explores ways that lessons from public architectural interventions can be transferred to the design of domestic spaces.

Practice Context

This research was commenced after ten years working on projects within the bounds of the architectural discipline. After this period, I had begun to feel that my practices were spread thin between house additions, commercial projects, provisional interventions, activism and teaching. Projects seemed to miss a crucial common thread. I also sensed an urgency to reconcile the vocationally disparate spheres of design and construction; what I perceived as a contingency of a former milieu of industrialisation – conditions that have evolved due to the availability of tools, knowledge and resources. This practice-based inquiry has helped me to gain a general sense of congruence in my practice by sharpening my field of focus and forging a component of specialist understanding. I am now equipped to arrive at design problems pre-armed with theoretical intent. I can also now use future commissions as an opportunity for continuing research, if the context is relevant.

Post-Pandemic Context

The foundations of this study preceded the impacts of COVID-19.⁶ Early work focused on the need to establish socialisation as a design problem – for city planners, urban planners and architects. In formative presentations, I described the participation of technological agents in a trajectory of social atomisation. This received mixed responses at the time, with some audiences maintaining that my critique had a despondent tone. However, this perception finds reinforcement from a heterogeneous group of architects, artists and thinkers. From the writings of Paul Virilio to the novels of J.G Ballard and the dictums of Cedric Price, identities warn of the un-checked state of our physical and technological environments in terms of their social implications, although the extent of responses to these issues remains unclear. The sudden implementation of ‘social distancing’⁷ measures and lockdowns

during the pandemic severely impacted urban space on an unprecedented scale and duration, in my Western frame of experience. The event reified the dictums I had expressed, re-framing them as a foretelling of conditions to come. The lasting impact of the pandemic presents an urgent need to consider strategies for our re-socialisation, to re-learn or to re-invent how to inhabit our public spaces. Has it taken a pandemic for the themes of this research to reach popular discourse? If we can take anything positive from the pandemic, we might appreciate how rapidly people have been able to adapt to new conditions. When reflecting on the pandemic Rem Koolhaas noted ‘...the incredible flexibility that people have shown in terms of changing their behaviour in the most radical way’.⁸ Koolhaas’ observation conceals a certain promise: If we ever did spontaneously and radically restructure our built environment, people would most likely adapt and rise to the occasion.

Challenges

The basis of this study relies on a conception of ‘social value’ – a construct that risks rhetorical use. I derive a conception of social value from personal observations and experiences elaborated in the early sections of this writing. I also draw reinforcement from prominent thinkers, including Hannah Arendt and her appraisal of ‘human dialogue’ and ‘self-expression’,⁹ or the appraisal of ‘community’¹⁰ by Jane Jacobs in the 1960’s. Other terminologies present similar challenges for this research. This includes ambiguities surrounding the definition of behavioural affects such as a ‘meaningful’ social experience, or what constitutes an act of ‘self-expression’. I remain mindful that certain conclusions I will arrive at in this analysis deserve greater depth of analysis and must, through necessity, remain idealistic. These challenges need not detract from the broader framework of this study. Previous historical attempts to influence or emancipate behaviours through architectural measures, or to contribute ‘social value’ have often been marked by inherent contradictions and paradoxes. My vision for the city is not devoid of similar risks. Michał Murawski observes how the *social condenser* – a central ambition of the 20th century Russian Constructivists, loosely described as a ‘conductor and condenser of socialist culture’¹¹ or a machine for ‘life-construction’ – was ‘...riven with paradoxes and contradictions: between collectivist and

individualist... small and large scales... vertical and horizontal forms; mundaneness and extraordinariness'.¹² Murawski also notes how Henri Lefebvre rendered the social condenser rather differently to the Constructivists, by Lefebvre's contention that 'social condensation happened not as a determined, engineered effect of 'scientific' architectural practice but as an aleatory occurrence, an 'explosion', which occurs due to the 'condensation'.¹³ While I agree with Lefebvre's conviction that socialisation occurs without a script to a certain degree, and that exact movements of individuals cannot be engineered, I also suggest that Lefebvre's comment underestimates the potential of built form and program to attract and trigger unprecedented behaviours. My rebuttal confides with Cedric Price's view that public interventions can 'spur novel connections';¹⁴ a viewpoint epitomised by his conception of *Magnets* that he developed after Lefebvre's popularised texts.

Architecture for Socialisation?

'The vulgarization of architecture and its progressive isolation from society have of late driven the discipline in upon itself ...this tendency reduces architectonic elements to pure syntactical signs ...at its most nostalgic it celebrates the loss of the city through metaphorical and ironic proposals'.¹⁵ – Kenneth Frampton

If architects were tasked by client briefs to generate productive social outcomes and were generally more committed to this cause, would the insecurities that the architectural discipline harbours,¹⁶ relating to its relevance and usefulness, evaporate, or at least dissipate to some extent? The architect is a generalist by necessity, responsible for addressing fettered contextual demands of a project. It could be possible that matters elusive (such as behaviours, social interactions and emotive responses) are disavowed to secure limitations and boundaries for a project, to save oneself from exhaustion. Matters may also simply be sidelined through lack of knowledge. I do not dismiss the value of aesthetics or semiotics in the curation of the built environment, but could it be imagined that the social interactions that happen in spaces exceed their significance? While they most likely work in collusion, assessment and appeals to social value seems often to be missing from industry discourse or remain weakly evident in undeveloped forms. New knowledge and

clear articulation of how to achieve social value needs to be formulated. With the popular gaze fixed on architectural imagery, how do we catalyse a shift towards the figures that encircle it? The micropian interventions that underpin this study are valuable, didactic tools for gaining immediate new understandings that can then be applied to larger contexts. They also address a political dimension; they seek to challenge the underlying intentions of the Australian architectural discipline by spontaneously generating new forms of social commons in our cities and challenging the neglect of urban public space – proposing radical, active alternatives.

Notes

¹ In reference to Henri Lefebvre's Theory of 'Moments'. Critique of Everyday Life.

² Design Research Colloquium meetings held by the University of Adelaide School of Architecture and Built Environment.

³ 'Spatial history' is a reference to the work of Leon Van Schaik.

⁴ Clare Bishop reflects on how relational art practices in the 1990's were overshadowed by the institutions they were housed in. Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics, 52-53.

⁵ Slavoj Žižek defines urban junk space as the 'foul-smelling left overs of city space'... spaces disjoined from a cities 'idealised image of itself'. Žižek. Architectural Parallax, 7.

⁶ The name of the coronavirus disease and global pandemic commencing in 2019.

⁷ 'Social distancing' describes measures intended to prevent the spread of a COVID-19. It may also be referred to as physical distancing.

⁸ Rem Koolhaas, Time, May 2020.

⁹ Arendt. The Human Condition.

¹⁰ Jacobs. The Death and Life of Great American Cities, 35.

¹¹ Michał Murawski. Crystallizing the Social Condenser, 10.

¹² Murawski explains that these issues possibly arose because 'the Russian social condenser was short-lived, remained theoretical and was generally misunderstood.' Ibid, 1.

¹³ Lefebvre. The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution, 109.

¹⁴ Herdt. Architecture and the City of Change, 169.

¹⁵ Frampton. Modern Architecture – A Critical History, 10.

¹⁶ Jeremy Till highlights the uncertainty that underpins the profession in his book 'Architecture Depends'.

Backstory

My father ran a wholesale timber company and hoarded a variety of plywood sheets in the shed on the family's rural property. Aware of this resource from a young age, I was compelled to build treehouses and follies. Each project was pursued with endeavour in attempt to earn the confidence of my parents and be entrusted with access to the enamoured plywood supply. Plywood was an ideal material for a treehouse, given the expediency in which structural plates and walls could be established. This material, combined with generous open spaces surrounding the rural homestead, fuelled my imagination for design and construction from an early age. Nine different sites on the property were established as test-sites for evolving vestibules, from the ages of six to twelve. I refer to them as vestibules for their distinct trait of always having multiple doors, or entry points. They served as gateways and platforms to regions in treetops, for exploration. New 'extensions' were continually annexed onto existing sections. They almost intentionally avoided a sense of finitude and instead, were inclined towards continual expansion.

Sites were chosen employing both feeling and strategy, mindful of orientation, views, and potential for spatial richness. Structures were unusually ambitious; one example being an eight-storey treehouse rising 12m from the ground. What was significant about these projects was the inception of my way of thinking about space, the course of their development and their design methodology. Projects commenced by mining the farm for materials, as well as the bins at nearby regional hardware stores, embodying an almost militant resourcefulness. Recently completed structures were brazenly disassembled to channel all new resources into more ambitious projects, sometimes mere weeks after they were built. All materials were affixed without paint or finishes. Destined to decay, they were consciously temporal in nature; each treehouse was a veritable prototype leading to the next, more advanced version.

The vestibules' temporality imbued a quality of excitement and possibly sparked the fascination of family and friends, knowing that something novel would be short-lived. Projects were the result of continual making and experimentation. They were reactive to topography and the trunks of pine trees that stood in various clusters. Projects always began with drawings and a vision. However, decision-making and design development happened continually, on-site at 1:1 scale. What fuelled each project was a palpable excitement for the subsequent

realisation, excitement for the site and for the new scavenged materials. Family friends were recruited to collaborate on projects and healthy childhood competitiveness fuelled outcomes. A fundamental policy was maintained that no project would simply be a 'box'. My father had initially helped me build my first treehouse composed of a rectilinear raft, but I recall my lack of interest in its orthodoxy. It seemed to lack scope for development.

The process led to the design and construction of an ultimate structure of reflective value¹ that I developed when I was 12 years old. It was grafted between two established pine trees and stood on approximately 14 piers. With a vista to a lake, the structure was accessible from its sub-structural region via a timber ladder. From here, one arose into an expansive space with staggered floorplates, where the view was revealed. Parallels could be drawn with Frederick Kiesler's *Endless House*² project, complete with its non-rectilinear floorplan, organically splayed floor joists and partially concealing walls. Very few right angles existed throughout the structure and new materials were always placed instinctively, with a degree of spontaneity.

During the reflective process of this investigation, I have considered the consistencies between this childhood enterprise and my endeavours as an adult. The similarities appear uncanny. I have chosen to reveal the consistencies to authenticate my fascinations and to provide readers with a contextual basis to understand my unorthodox adult pursuits. By mining these early, defining experiences of notable obsession, instinctive drives are discovered. These drives preceded exposure to the images that saturate screens today, in my later adult life. For the childhood pursuits, design decisions were the product of instinctive impulses rather than the fetishisation of an image or idea. They involved continual problem-solving at 1:1 scale, embarking towards unknown destinations and were marked with de-constructivist³ tones. The treehouse experiences were an esquisse of a future career modus operandi where original, provisional, one-off realisations were continually trialled. They could even be considered as social out-buildings that provide ruptures to the confinement of the domestic residence to enable heightened engagement with nature. If we fast-forward to the *Hōjōki Terminal* project, this same ambition has been mirrored 22 years later as an open-air structure is detached from the main establishment to connect users with an under-utilised lawn region.

The Dialectical Bridge

The fascinations embodied by the treehouses would be unconsciously repeated years later during studies and professional practice. For a bridge design submitted to a National Student Competition in 2008,⁴ during my fourth year of study, I again proposed an interior with fluctuating floor plates that was ascended into. Entitled *The Dialectical Bridge*, the competition brief called for a conceptual bridge to span a river separating two conceptual cities, 'The City of Nostalgia' and 'The City of Zeitgeist'. My responding proposal explored ways in which architecture could encourage people of different tribal associations to relinquish their guards and share a meaningful chance encounter. In order to achieve this, the bridge attempted to re-engineer the ritual of confrontation that occurs on a conventional lineal bridge, when two parties arrive from opposite directions. Instead, the bridge intentionally disorientated users and obfuscated the visual sense, where social constructs proliferate. Articulated as an organic casement, the form of the bridge presented a fluidity that also sought to ease people into proximity, revealing others in serendipitous moments or 'situations' as they emerge from crevices. From the direction of the nearby fictional City of Zeitgeist, a perpetual haze of light emitted, evading the translucent bridge material, reducing pedestrians to effigy and shadow and dampening the visual presence of others. The organic casement of the bridge would also make the origin of audible footsteps ambiguous, further softening the arrival of others. This bridge represents the genesis of my ambition to mediate social relations with architecture. It might also be considered my first social condenser⁵ of merit. The bridge was an outlier among competition entries for being the only organic morphology. Interestingly, the judging panel, aside from one panel member who had chosen the design as a finalist, chose to focus on the bridges engineering aspects, rather than investigate its intended social functions.

The Rural Pavilion

In 2008, concurrent to my architectural studies, I proceeded to design and construct a pavilion on the same rural property where I built the childhood treehouses. The idea for the pavilion stemmed from the desire to provide shelter and support to paddock barbecues, 100m from the established rural homestead. As the design progressed, so

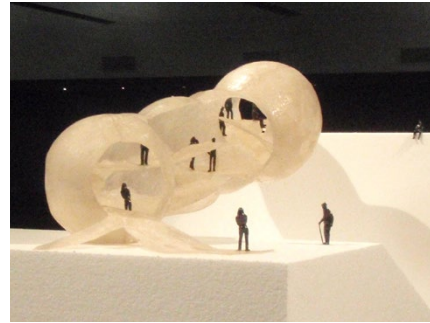
did the requirements of the structure. It transformed from a storage shed of barbeque equipment⁶ to a 23m² structure that could provide shelter for larger numbers of people. The exceptional views of the chosen site, atop a ridge on the property, prompted the urge to frame them. This led to the provision of a sizeable aperture facing the valley beyond. Despite its lofty location it was raised even higher on eleven supporting stilts. With egress across the farm limited by many obstructions: fences, gates, marshes, streams and dams, the chosen site presented an ideal, accessible destination where new visitors to the property could panoramically survey the surroundings and be immersed in nature. In the following decade since the pavilion was completed, visitors to the farm would take sojourn in the pavilion, almost as a course of ritual. This resulted from visitors' insistence to explore it, something I always assumed arose from a desire to escape the homestead and the sense of being 'house-locked'. What I found interesting in terms of this investigation, was how first-time visitors to the property would ordinarily assess the structure and detect that it is not a conventional look-out, nor obviously a simple utility shed. This has led to questions about its purpose. Something I found ironic was that these questions were raised while the structure was serving its intended function: a place for gathering, recess, leisure and observation of the nearby farm. People's questions about the structure recall a bias pertaining to architecture confessed by Lebbeus Woods, when he asked,

'Why should we find only architecture limited to some assigned purpose? Why should architecture limit its potential to create space to satisfying the demands for the already known for some normal 'program of use'? Architecture should be freed to follow its own rules and ways to its own spatial, and spiritual, conclusions'.⁷

Is the lexicon for leisure-focused structures in Australian rural contexts missing? Having spent many years travelling back and forth to Europe, I have begun to see this as an Australian ideological conundrum. As a fleeting observation, European leisure-seekers tend to understand the structure more readily. My brother-in-law from the UK was not in the least confused at the utility of the structure. He, coming from London, appeared fundamentally familiar with the functions of bespoke pavilions. While social gatherings and the almost mythic, culture-defining traditions of the BBQ constitute a very normal 'program of use' in Australia,⁸ the architectural pedigree of the pavilion is little appreciated as a structure that might provide for exactly this.



1 Treehouse in a Fig Tree, 1996.
Photo: Denise Le Messurier



2 *The Dialectical Bridge*, Critical Visions National Conference, Sydney, 2008.
Photo: Kim Harbison



3 *The Rural Pavilion*, Hay Flat, 2008.
Are leisure focused structures awkwardly positioned in Australian culture?



5 'What is the purpose of this structure?'
The Rural Pavilion, Hay Flat.
Photo: Stephen Crawford



4 *TRANS-FORM*, 2015; an experimental concept for activating an abandoned shop-front that involved ongoing design and construction.



6 Making; a bicycle trailer was built to reduce vehicle dependence.



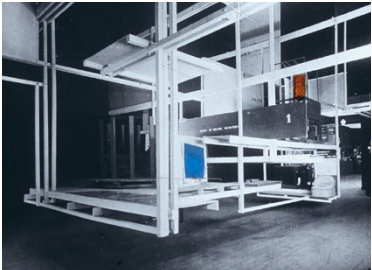
7 The Adelaide Railway Station platforms prior to construction of the Hyatt Hotel. Circa. 1970. Photo: Unknown



8 A University project for a restaurant embodied my early fascination for cataclysmic spatial expression.



9 In chess, unexpected moves are played to *disrupt* the normative sequence of play and unlock new possibilities. Savielly Tartakover vs. Andor Lilienthal, 1933, Paris. Image: lichess.org



10 'No Walls, No Foundations'. *City in Space*, 1925. Frederick Kiesler Image: © 2022 Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna

The pavilion raises questions surrounding Australian cultural attitudes towards bespoke, leisure-oriented architectural structures; structures that are not strictly utilitarian. If we scan the broader surrounding region of the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia, one might also admit a veritable obfuscation of architectural design.⁹ However, after investigating the rural region more closely, it was oddly discovered that the pavilion does in fact have an historical precedent. Approximately 100m from its site, on a neighbouring ridge, a compact church¹⁰ once stood that now lies in ruins. The church was once attended on Sundays by members of the specific denomination and, according to a text on the history of the area, Sundays were for prayer, music and the wearing of traditional colonial outfits. The building serviced a cultural affair and a social purpose. Today, the nearest church is 8kms away, reflecting changes associated with better roads and how infrastructure over time concentrated habitation towards town centres. Similar to the church, the Rural Pavilion serves purposes of congregation and ritualised cultural social activity. Both are places where guitars are played, conversations are had, stories are told and one's best coat (or garment) is worn. Yet despite these consistencies, questions about the purpose of the pavilion still arise to this day. Is religious worship essential to solicit the construction of a social out-building? The pavilion establishes its own explicit functions. It provides a gateway to the rural setting that the homestead falls short of achieving, it unlocks rural exploration and creates a site for communal memory and culture.

The design of the Pavilion drew upon my fascination for traditional Japanese architecture, which offered useful ideas for simple, low-cost, timber construction. One example includes the nuanced floor-joists that protrude 30cm from the building's corrugated exterior. From these joists an unintended outcome has hatched – a recreational activity, where adults compete to scale the exterior of the structure without falling onto the grass below. This quirk invites a playfulness and performative competition among adults that architects would not typically plan for.

Formal Studies

In 2009, during the 5th year of my Masters of Architecture studies, I developed a project that would reveal the origins of an activist modality. Against the wishes of my

tutors (initially, until persuaded otherwise), I elected to focus on an urban site that appeared to be drastically overlooked: The Adelaide Train Station and the adjacent Hyatt Hotel. I proposed the bold concept to demolish Adelaide's Hyatt Hotel, supported by my claim that the meagre ceiling height and spatial quality it delivered to Adelaide Station's central platforms below was a spatial insult to the Adelaide public who would frequent these central platforms on a daily basis. It was furthermore suggested that this region barricaded access to Adelaide's centralised Elder Park, a contingency that had resulted from a lack of urban foresight. The suggested demolition was conceived as an act of 'urban surgery', envisaged as an essential measure that would deliver health to the Adelaide public. I proposed an alternative concept that delivered extensive, paved public regions above the platforms connecting pedestrian movement from the city grid to the Elder Park district. The concept would simultaneously accommodate new hotel and hostel facilities that would house more than twice the existing accommodation, as well as apertures to allow air and daylight into the train platforms beneath. The proposal's form-making reflected a particular personal fascination that characterised this period of my studies, involving cataclysmic spatial expression and asymmetry, most likely influenced by Frank Gehry.¹¹

A desire for creative freedom has continually characterised my practice. I recall the moment when I peeled away from working as an architectural assistant to Enzo Caroscio in his newly established independent architectural practice to pursue a financially dubious project with an unclear destination, entitled *Trans-form*. The project obtained a grant from Renew Adelaide¹² to inhabit an unused shopfront in Topham Mall, Adelaide. A collaboration with artist Matea Gluscevic, the space hosted a storefront for experimental furniture and crafts developed from unconventional material palettes, including a side table built from repurposed IKEA products and a chair made from seatbelt straps. The works were arranged as an augmentation of a conventional living room and aimed to continually evolve, with no fixed form. Items were for sale and co-existed in the shopfront with ongoing in-situ fabrication to provide rich intrigue to incidental passers-by. This instilled the space with a work-in-progress atmosphere, subverting it from a conventional exhibition space that is often highly curated and seen as an endpoint in the design process. The project reflected my interests for hands-on experimentation, enabling the exploration of a broader set of materials and fabrication methods.

Moving Around and Disrupting

Somehow I have found ways to eject myself from the normalcy of a fixed address for most of my adult life. Shifting through different social contexts has perpetually exposed me to a range of community formations and communality, leading me to imagine how they may they be reproduced. Constant movement results in limited tools and resources and a dependency on sharing and collaborating. For the Dirty Tea-house Project examined in this study, I arrived in Berlin, having travelled from Australia, with only a tape measure and laptop in my backpack to build the structure. After arriving, I proceeded to negotiate and mine for tools, exploiting available resources and improvising according to opportunities. Movement has also been a catalyst for stimulating conversations and generating ideas. I do not underestimate how instrumental these stimulating conversations have been for the conceptualisation of the interventions examined in this study.

Making

Over the past 10 years since I have graduated from my Masters of Architecture studies, a recurring pattern has emerged: I would depart an established practice and immediately commence a design-construct project for a creative community, dislocated from the industry and in a forgotten urban space or remote location, unequivocally on the cities' margins in a spatial, economic and vocational sense. I would always view the closure of my office tenures as a stroke of brilliant chance, enabling my re-immersion in a construction setting that is alive, and where a palpable productive energy exists beyond the glow of a screen or the clicking of computer mice.

Chess and Tactics

The game of chess is a personal pastime and important aspect of my spatial history. The boardgame represents a highly active field where creative tactics, improvisation and risk seek to unlock spaces for advantageous positional play.

The intersections between this pastime and my approach to architectural space is not merely a stroke of coincidence but reveals a creative spirit. The chess board serves as a metaphor for the city and its nascent possibilities. Specifically, what intrigues me is the vastness of unique scenarios that are arrived at in chess with such a small set of pieces, requiring players to adapt and apply a set of principles to any given situation. Chess is a highly studied game that presents a normative and obvious set of moves that one 'should' play. Breakthroughs occur through novelty, invention and surprise that disrupts the expected course of play, to deliver something that was not anticipated. What novelties will we employ to 'win' the city?

Notes

¹ Refer to image in Projects, Book 1, page 12.

² Frederick Kiesler. Endless House. 1947–60.

³ Deconstructivism is an architectural form-making approach characterised by fragmentation, non-rectilinearity and disruption. The term was influenced by Jacques Derrida's writing and was exemplified in work by architects like Bernard Tschumi, Coop Himmelblau and The Next ENTERprise Architects.

⁴ The Dialectical Bridge Competition for the Australian National Architecture Conference in Sydney. The bridge was awarded shortlisting among five entries from a pool of nation entries.

⁵ See glossary.

⁶ A site to shelter equipment including chairs, shovels and a barbecue hot plate etc...

⁷ Lebbeus Woods. Statement at the opening of a house designed by Gunther Domenig, 2008.

⁸ This mythic quality might be epitomised by the Australian Tourism Commission's 1984 commercial featuring Paul Hogan, who promises 'cold beer and plenty of shrimps on the Barbie (barbeque).'

⁹ Obvious exceptions are private architecturally designed homes lined along popular coastlines.

¹⁰ The internal footprint of the church was estimated to be 50m², approximately twice the size of the Rural Pavilion. This number was determined by analysing the existing ruins.

¹¹ 'Cataclysmic spatial expression' is embodied by Frank Gehry's personal residence in Santa Monica, 1978 and the unbuilt concept for the Familian Residence, Santa Monica, 1977-78.

¹² Renew Adelaide is a not-for-profit program that offers short-term rent-free tenancies to promote new enterprise in underutilised CBD spaces.

Mentors and Influential Projects

During my early studies, I was inspired by lectures on the history of 20th century architecture, taught by Peter Scriver. What struck me from Scriver's lectures were the societal aspirations of modern architects and how ideas about societal dynamics were transmuted into matter. Other university studios of my early studies had focused on issues such as 'place-making', sustainability and heritage, yet, to me, these themes appeared as commonplace considerations as everyday as keeping the moisture out of a building. Alternatively, architecture's response to and influence on society presented a challenge of depth that gripped my interest and one that could naturally incorporate broader considerations whether ecological, heritage or existing built contexts. Engineer and architect, Werner Sobek, notes a similar frustration for the slow progress of the state of the art of architecture when he states 'architects brag about making sustainable buildings, as if this was something special, whereas by now sustainability should be as essential as fire safety and structural stability'.¹ Sobek's reflection might highlight a latent individualism of our milieu where the personal marketing campaign of a practice is favoured over collective social achievements. Scriver's lectures affirmed that architecture's servitude to society has previously constituted a valid, central problem for architects without disregarding its enigmatic dimensions. He did not deliver narratives with an ideological intention, but simply attempted to form an accurate picture of historical experiences. I assembled my own ideological position, inspired by writings from members of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno.² I was also inspired by the Russian Constructivists and their optimistic belief in the ability of art and architecture to transform society.

After this theoretical stimulation, my enthusiasm was largely dormant during studies until I met Urs Bette in my fourth year of the Master's program at the University of Adelaide. Urs arrived with new eyes from an Austrian context, bringing an original, diplomatic approach to teaching that empowered student inventiveness and creativity, provided one rigorously maintained a set of personal design policies. This differed from the master-slave approach that had echoed within other studios where teachers were situated as the experts who disciplined students to do things the 'right way'. Another mentor from this period of studies whose ideas influenced my thinking was Antony Radford. In his lectures on 'Responsive Cohesion' Radford emphasised the user experience of architecture

and the mutual benefits that are awakened when the architectural object, the people and the existing context interact.³ Radford's contribution is valuable for planting the seed for my own thinking and it remains implicit throughout this study that a 'responsive cohesion' between object, people and context is operative in many of the small-scale projects I examine. However, rather than attempting to describe the foundational value of architecture, this study seeks to unlock latent possibilities by disrupting normative architectural arrangements, contexts and social interactions – drawing attention to the potential of specific tools, programs and design processes. These goals lead to the appraisal of creative agencies such as 'rupture' and 'disruption' rather than 'cohesion', that at times lead to outcomes that may be viewed as highly minimalistic or even 'anti-architectural'.

Soon after completing my studies I moved to Vienna, Austria, to work for the firm The Next ENTERprise Architects (tnE). My Masters dissertation tutor, Urs Bette, provided the personal contact to the practice, having noticed an affinity between my university projects and the projects of the Austrian-based practice. The tnE office exposed me to the possibility of realising spatial and sculptural intensity of a vigour I had not witnessed in my subjective Australian context. The tnE office would retroactively generate narratives to give daring spatial realisations coherence, while projects extracted conceptual richness from processes more common in the art world. At tnE I also discovered an affirmation for 'loose structures' that are unapologetic about spatial schisms and, instead, use them advantageously for spatial effect. 'Loose structures' are indifferent to cultural impulses that call for rectilinearity, sleekness or hygienic material palettes, in favour of sculptural and tectonic qualities. This aesthetic politic appears contentious among many architects if the formal outcomes that they produce are any measure of their beliefs.⁴ I recall when Timothy Hill expressed his abhorrence at my initial design concept for the *Rural Pavilion*⁵ when he suggested that the design was 'averse to the entire cultural course of the development of architecture'.⁶ Three years later, however, I would serendipitously find myself standing in the tnE workshop in Vienna, beside a 1:20 scale model of a building that held overwhelming consistencies with the initial design concept that had repulsed Timothy, as it was complete with collisions of materials, schisms and uninhibited sculptural expression. The similarities between the projects could not have been bolder. The model I stood beside was for *Kinsky*

*House*⁷ – a project by Ernst Fuchs and Klaus Stattmann for an addition to a rural residence in Austria. I later interpreted Hill’s antipathy to my instinctive spatial response to the site as indicative of broader forces of design conservatism in Australia.

City Making Collectives

In 2012, my tenure at architectural offices would be disrupted after encountering EXYZT Collectif’s manifesto online. I was captivated by the theoretical stance of this French-based, design-build collective and the ‘alternative practice model’⁸ they operated. I boldly approached them offering to collaborate, despite being geographically located at opposite sides of the globe. To my surprise my approach was successful, and I flew overseas on a whim, walking off the plane onto a construction site in Southwark, London, for the *reUNION* project.⁹ Coinciding with the London Olympic Games, the project converted a forgotten urban space beneath a train viaduct into a public facility packed with a variety of program. The project was ostensibly a temporary hostel and pub that reacted to the rising numbers of visitors to London during the Games, furnished with a range of supportive public programs including a sauna, pool, nightclub, library and sunbaking courtyard. The project formed a unique microcosm in the city, or rupture, where new social formations were unlocked within novel architecturally conditioned spaces. Reflections have led me to view the *reUNION* as a veritable manifestation of a *Magnet*,¹⁰ envisioned by Cedric Price in the previous century. Like *Magnets*, the *reUNION* aimed to reinvigorate an underperforming high street in London by engaging with the ‘dynamism of the urban context’¹¹ and through introduction of novel programs. To ensure its public engagement, the broad extent of the project’s street frontage was comprised of operable panels that could fold down flat like a drawbridge. The process of production that underpinned the project was as novel as its diversity of program. New programmatic elements were spontaneously and concurrently planned and built to fit within a basic conceptual outline of the project. This occurred through a participative format of deliberation that included broad parties, in comparison to a conventional hierarchical architect-builder relationship, where predetermined decisions are explicated on a set of working drawings and diligently adhered to. EXYZT Collectif’s alternative modus operandi resembled

a reformulation of how design and problem-solving of a project could proceed. In their manifesto they describe this as a reinvention of ‘dynamics of exchange’ and continue by stating that ‘architecture can expand into a multidisciplinary game where everyone brings his own tools and knowledge to contribute to a collective piece.’¹² This design process successfully broke down established patterns of behaviour and social hierarchy. The process was made possible by access to an abundant supply of materials stored on site, and by employing simple construction techniques than new participants with minimal prior construction ability could readily apply, derived from low-tech assembly methods rooted in DIY construction cultures. The abundant material bank was limited to a palette of medium rough-sawn pine, OSB board and self-tapping screws. This material palette was complimentary, removing the design process of matching materials, in favour of limitless possible configurations. This enabled heightened focus on spatial invention, tectonics and the sheer provision of new program. EXYZT Collectif’s methodology resembled an ethic for democratised construction that might be traced back to Enzo Mari’s manuals for easy-to-assemble furniture in the 1970’s.¹³ My exposure to their praxis represented a turning point in my attitude, but also the introduction of a key dilemma. It exposed me to the possibility and the challenges of concurrently practicing on the edge of construction, design and theory in an Australian context.

In their manifesto, EXYZT Collectif revealed their ambition to ‘renew social behaviours’.¹⁴ This was achieved through a variety of means and not simply through their reinvention of ‘dynamics of exchange’.¹⁵ The novel architectural setting that the project presented freed social interactions from familiar spatial codifications that may engender habit. Another means for renewing social behaviours stemmed from the project’s optic, which deviated from the public’s familiarity in manifold ways. This optic carried a behavioural quotient as it led to original, incidental conversations and interpretations. The project’s construction was made by plain-clothed persons not typically ascribed as a construction labour-force. This engendered a performative vein that helped warrant curious attention. A performative quality also stemmed from the act of participants camping on site, in plain, public view. For the six weeks I volunteered on the project I would camp in a tent alongside other architects and builders. This on-site camping was common practice for EXYZT Collectif and mirrored the activism that was taking place in the city for ‘Occupy London’.¹⁶

It was during the *reUNION* Project that I met the newly formed group Guerilla Architects, leading to my collaboration on their project *Hidden Borough*. This subsequent project was driven by similar ideals to EXZYT Collectif's, relating to the awakening of hidden resources and territories for public use. I arrived on the project after the Guerilla Architects had seized a legal loophole to obtain jurisdiction of a found warehouse that lay dormant. They then transformed the building to make it publicly accessible, with domestic quarters designated on the upper levels. Among other outcomes that I reflect on in this study, *Hidden Borough* challenged bureaucratic and legal frameworks to spontaneously render a forgotten building as a public space. My involvement with the *reUNION* project and *Hidden Borough* led to my intersection with a wide range of collaborators from differing collectives; these included members from ConstructLab (Berlin), Orizzontale (Rome), Raumlabor (Berlin) and Assemble Studio (London). Certain members from these collectives admitted how they had left commercial architectural office settings in pursuit of finding alternative avenues to contribute to the life and vitality of the city. They generally voiced their attraction to design-construct collectives as stemming from a perceived social value of the projects they engaged with, and the excitement warranted by freedom and experimentation.

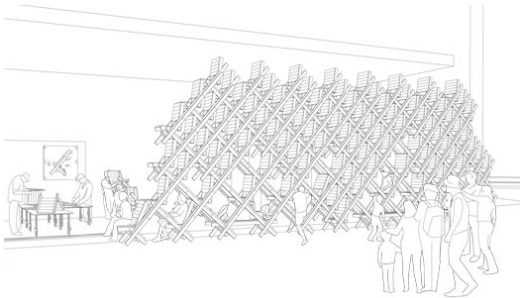
Returning to Adelaide, I continued to work for a variety of traditional architectural offices while concurrently working on independent projects. Returning to these traditional offices, the presence of a theoretical agenda was generally comparatively muted, as projects were centrally underpinned by economic forces and client interests. The appeal of working for these subsequent offices was to gain broader exposure, professional design responsibilities and generate income. In many cases, these practices centred on generating low-risk outcomes or what is sometimes framed as 'service architecture'.¹⁷ Practice outcomes of this nature appear representative of Australian high-stake economic circumstances, where small project variations and minimal complexity can expose a client or architect to economic headaches and extended project timelines. Service architecture might also reflect a builder's influence on a project, where aspirational measures beyond convention are sometimes unfairly viewed as superfluous and costly appendages outside the builder's everyday skill set, leading to the omission of key details. The range of practices I have worked for, or with, in Adelaide include David Jellett, Williams

Burton Architects, Anthony Donato Architects, Ron Danvers, Enzo Caroscio, Mulloway Studio, Urs Bette and Julian Worrall. Every practice and collaboration I have engaged with has provided me with valuable learning experiences.

Models of Action

The participative processes adopted by the design and construct collectives I mention above carry multifaceted benefits; they can stimulate socialisation, unlock skill-sharing and circumvent barriers relating to finance and labour. These processes resemble ‘models of action’ that might find precedent in relational art practices that emerged in the 1990’s. Such practices sought to enable people ‘to step outside habitual roles as observers and become participants’¹⁸ paying particular focus to the social context of observers. An early example of these practices is by the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija for his project *Untitled (free)*, in 1990. In order to disrupt the normative social context of an exhibition in a gallery setting, Tiravanija re-sited his entire studio into the gallery from where he also cooked and shared Thai vegetable curry, serving it free of charge to anyone who wished to eat. Interestingly, as Tiravanija’s seminal project evolved it grew to employ architectural framing elements¹⁹ that performed a subtle architectural function; they decomposed the void of the gallery space and helped to foster refuge and social intimacy. They also created congestion points and fulcrums where incidental encounters may coalesce.

My first exposure to a ‘model of action’ by an architectural practice was for the project *The Generator – Sedia Venezia* by Raumlabor, for the 2010 Venice Biennale titled *People Meet in Architecture*. This project involved a set of simple tools and instructions that people with minimal ability could implement to construct chairs. These chairs could then find various appropriations in open spaces around the Venice Arsenal. This ‘learning by doing’ approach to architecture invited participation and empowered the individual to change their physical environment. Participative approaches now appear a mainstay of contemporary European design and construct practices such as EXZYT, Raumlabor, Orizzontale and Assemble Studio. In the case of urban interventions, ‘models of action’ unlock new types of social exchange and urban experience in the process.



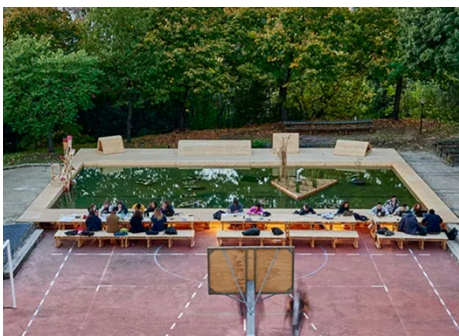
11 **Raumlabor, *The Generator: Sedia Venezia***
Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy.
Image: raumlaborberlin



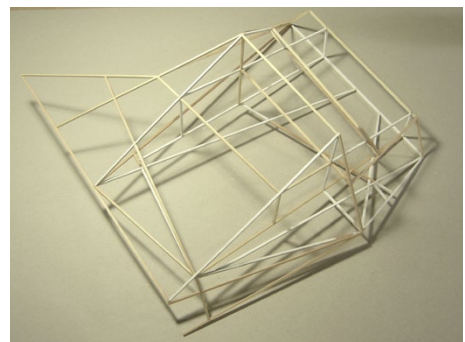
12 **Assemble Studio (UK)**
The Cineroleum, London.
Photo: Morley Von Sternberg



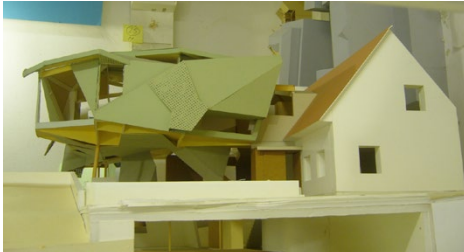
13 **Atelier Bow-Wow, *Furnicycle***,
Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai, China.
Image: Atelier Bow-Wow



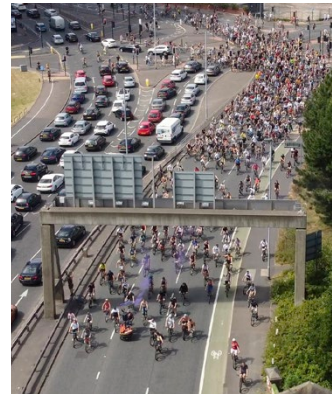
14 **Spontaneous transformation of landscape;**
Cento by Orizzontale, Sapienza University, Rome.
Photo: Carmelo Battaglia



15 **The Next ENTERprise Architects (tnE)**
House Fidessor, Austria. Physical model
development of a roof structure that
embodies spatial and sculptural intensity.



16 A loose structure that embraces schisms; physical model for *Kinsky House* by Klaus Stattmann and Ernst J. Fuchs.



17 Dom Whiting
Drum and Bass on a Bike, Manchester.
Photo: Dom Whiting



18
De Vylder Vinck Taillieu
House Sanderswal, Belgium.
Photo: Filip Dujardin



19 De Vylder Vinck Taillieu
Huik House, Belgium.
Photo: Filip Dujardin



20 Raumlabor, *Officina Roma, Rome.*
Photo: raumlaborberlin

Using Forgotten Abilities

Intrinsic to this study is the idea that each citizen withholds underlying resources that can contribute to the vitality of the city – they only need to be unlocked. Raumlabor appear cognisant of this latent value and employ projects in a multitude of disciplines that broaden their audiences and their field of impact. The name Raumlabor translates from German as ‘space laboratory’ and describes the breadth of their practice interests – they develop architecture, performances, events, theatre, mobile structures and participative workshops. This resembles an expanded practice format that appears uncommon or non-existent in Australian contexts. Reflecting on Raumlabor alone, raises questions about a possible uniformity in Australian architectural practices, or, an overt subservience to economic production. I view Raumlabor’s practices and achievements as a product of a broader cultural environment, mindful of the ‘organic’ collaborative processes that covertly underpin innovation. In Australian contexts, grass-roots collectives of similar creative foundation appear to face challenges to survive, possibly accredited to a lack of minimal funding. This reflects my own personal, fringe involvement with the Adelaide-based creative collective Format.²⁰ I sense in Australia an impulse to value high-end, high budget, urban and large-scale outcomes to almost exclusively, as well as a difficulty to validate our local talent and small-scale projects.

Creative communities that surround collective like Format demonstrate exceptional resourcefulness and can find ways to contribute energy and life to spaces on minimal budgets. In Australia, budgets for modest sized landscaping projects can amount to millions of dollars, the consequence being that the transformation of spaces to meet people’s needs and desires is inhibited. European-based practices I have interacted with, like Raumlabor, EXYZT and Orizzontale, demonstrate the possibility of realising affordable, socially profitable public infrastructure that circumvents ordinary costs, contributing new amenity to urban spaces with immediacy on the proviso that certain concessions are made. For the Project *Cento* by Orizzontale in Rome, economic obstructions that inhibited the realisation of a much-needed solution were overcome by inviting students to participate in the design and construction of the project. This project demonstrates the potential for a para-architectural industry to deliver a highly impactful outcome

in an urban setting. It allows creatives who live in the city a means to contribute their abilities. A hidden advantage of including the end-users in the production of the space (as was the case for the project *Cento*) is a sense of ownership and care that contributes to the resolution and ongoing maintenance of the space.

Using Forgotten Materials

The successful use of construction waste to build new public amenities has been achieved under the guidance of creative practices in a set of examples in European contexts. This has been observed in a set of free-standing follies: for *Officina Roma* by Raumlabor, *Werdplatzpalais* by the artists Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser and *Cineroleum* by Assemble Studio. In each case, a small shelter with four walls and a roof was built and sited in highly public urban settings. The use of upcycled materials reflects the short lifespan of the interventions and the associated ecological, economic and even symbolic benefits – as forgotten materials were transmuted into something highly profitable.

For the project *Werdplatzpalais* by the Zurich-based artists Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser a one-room structure was sited in a sparse public square in Zurich, under a 3-month temporary building permit. Like the other interventions I mention, *Werdplatzpalais* was planned as a site-specific installation reactive to existing conditions. The reclaimed materials were sculpturally composed forming a visual counterpoint to the existing, generic building facades that faced the square. During its tenure, the structure found use as a cinema, lecture hall, gallery, and soup kitchen. Köbberling Kaltwasser describe the use of reclaimed materials as representative of a ‘sculptural, sociographic reflection of the city of Zurich’.²¹ For the project *Cineroleum* by UK-based multi-disciplinary collective Assemble Studio, a more minimalistic intervention was realised involving the adaptive reuse of a service station into a public cinema. Assemble Studio describe the purpose of *Cineroleum* as a demonstration of ‘the wider potential for re-using the 4,000 empty petrol stations in the UK as new spaces for public use’.²² Curtains made from upcycled roofing sarking were draped from all four sides of the service station canopy, while seating was made from upcycled timbers. A third example of this typology constituted

from waste materials was developed by Raumlabor for the exhibition *RE-cycle*, associated with the MAXXI National Museum in Rome. Titled *Officina Roma*, the folly was sited adjacent to the recently built and formidable reinforced-concrete MAXXI museum building. *Officina Roma* formed a poignant counterpoint and contrast to the museum's materiality and its process of production. It may even be argued that the structure unlocks certain programs that the MAXXI museum is not equipped to accommodate. Conceptualised as an esquisse of a villa the project included a bedroom, a kitchen and a workshop. At the end of the project's 5-month lifespan, the shelter was then used to host workshops and seminars on alternative building practices that employed recycled materials. Despite the varied and explicit programs of each example I reflect on, implicit programs are also evident, namely, the incidental socialisation that happens around the edges of the shelters. Incidental socialisation may also be abetted by the vulnerability of the structures to weather, as strangers spontaneously seek collective refuge inside during weather events.

Using Forgotten Spaces

The project *Floating University E. V.* by Raumlabor provides an example of how strategic new architectural elements can unlock an urban site formerly considered irreparable. Forgotten urban spaces often spiral into neglect becoming repositories for refuse and other symbols of disuse. The site for the project *Floating University E. V.* is no exception. Originally a rainwater retention basin to service the Templehofer Feld,²³ the site consists of a large body of contaminated water. Measures have been undertaken to economically transform the region into a public space for new forms of community, learning and exchange. If conventional pathways were undertaken to remediate the site, economic costs would have skyrocketed and the project would possibly not have commenced. *Floating University E. V.* offers spaces for face-to-face exchange of knowledge outside of institutions, providing an extension of the knowledge infrastructure of the city of Berlin. In their project description Raumlabor describe their vision of a space to deliver 'non-disciplinary, radical, and collaborative programs to the public'.²⁴ The DIY construction quality that permeates the project is consistent with the aesthetic values that underpin other interventions and activities in the adjacent Templehofer Feld. The project

proves that under certain guidance and cultural values it is possible for citizens to undertake responsibility for urban spaces and to be entrusted with their upkeep. Despite this, it may be difficult to identify examples of similar socially organised and maintained urban spaces in Australian contexts that have lasted.

Landscape Continuity

When I advocate for the disruption of existing contexts this is pursuant of latent social possibilities, not forms of gentrification or erasure of elements. I look towards practices that successfully preserve existing settings, histories and landscapes through the introduction of concise, minimalistic, site-specific elements. This interest reflects a politic that runs throughout this study. It seeks to challenge a normative western ideal that views the success of an architectural or urban transformation of a space as dependent on widespread changes and new pristine surfaces. This ideal has been similarly echoed in colonial approaches to rural landscapes where native fauna and flora have been eviscerated in favour of naked and sweeping plains of grass. Must widespread parts of an urban setting be overhauled, or can small, economical and impactful changes be made instead? For a series of projects produced for Yo Shimada's Ritsumeikan Workshop, minimalistic timber elements were abutted and connected to existing built-form to create simple public furniture.²⁵ Through the creative application of limited lengths of timber, the surrounding fatigued modernist buildings and landscape are provisionally revitalised to an extent that far exceeds the material and energy input. The minimal elements disrupt the normative setting and introduce playfulness that alters people's perception of the space.

For the domestic architectural project *Zita Kern* by ARTEC Architects, a structure was sited with minimal landscape intervention or changes. Retrofitted above an existing historic stone stable and comprised of a crystalline morphology with a holistic reflective skin, the structure leaves the existing setting profoundly untouched and informal. The reflective quality of the massing captures colour from the adjacent landscape, further binding the building to its site. It forms a contrasting element and powerful statement. Public interventions and domestic builds alike will often combine with existing

built elements to generate physical congruence and avoid the production of unintentional schisms and conflicts, thereby producing a landscape continuity.

Mobile Interventions

By placing objects on wheels, new programs can be spontaneously delivered to urban spaces to unlock unforeseen potential. This action can generate ‘unprecedented events’ through ‘programmatically layering’ and the ‘interference’ of activities²⁶ – expressions adopted by Rem Koolhaas for his personal definition of a social condenser. Mobile interventions can override conventional obstructions and contestations such as land ownerships, planning codes and forms of arbitrary control, due to their fleeting quality and the process of negotiation and adaptation to the urban environment realised by mobility. An early example of this practice might be traced to the previous century when ‘block party’ DJ’s in New York City wheeled decks, amplifiers and speakers in shopping trolleys to mundane urban locations to generate spontaneous public affairs. This practice found a surprising new lineage during the pandemic when UK-based DJ Dom Whiting²⁷ began habitually riding around London and other UK cities with DJ decks outfitted to the front of a cargo bike from where he performed moving Drum and Bass sets. Whiting’s stunt emerged in response to the closure of many UK nightclubs during the pandemic. It has since evolved to gain popularity, culminating in the formation of immense swarms of cyclists who navigate urban centres in unison, in pursuit of Whiting, his music sets and even the ‘swarm’ itself. Numbering up to one thousand people at a time²⁸ the success of the congregated rides is attributable to many factors. In a general sense, they amalgamate forms of transgression, exhibitionism and social inclusion – appealing to people’s inner desires. In the context of the pandemic, they have enabled release from a common sense of captivity produced by various UK lockdowns, helped to restore an expanded sociability of strangers and expressed forms of protest. In urban terms, the rides demonstrate the possibility of transforming the way we experience the urban environment spontaneously and through a sheer economy of means. A range of architectural practices have independently recognised this potential and developed a variety of mobile interventions. For the Shanghai Art Biennale in 2002, Atelier Bow-Wow

proposed a range of furniture that was cleverly merged with bicycles. Entitled *Furnicycle*, the intervention sought to reflect urban attributes of Shanghai such as commonplace bicycle mobility and ‘to generate new behaviours in daily life’.²⁹ Like Whiting’s innovation, these new behaviours are products of the ‘dynamic co-existence of activities’³⁰ that result from overlapping programs realised by mobility. Further successful examples that connect with my community of practice include *Space Buster* by Raumlabor, and *White Limousine Yatai* by Atelier Bow-Wow.

Augmented Games

Well-known games such as ping-pong or play equipment have been augmented by design practices to awaken new social possibilities. Notable examples that come to mind include *Ping meets Pong* by Walking Chair Gallery and *Seesaw Play-Grow* by the artistic collective Škart. Augmentations of familiar games can unlock forms of playfulness and other agencies that appear constrained in the original archetypes. This might be accredited to their novelty, surprise, their disruption of normative interactions and their demand for new interpretations. I was first exposed to an augmented game in 2011 when helping to install an exhibition at Walking Chair Gallery for tnE Architects in Wien. On the exhibition opening night at an appropriate moment, members from the gallery sited their project, *Ping meets Pong*, out onto a public footpath. The project merged an orthodox circular dining table with a ping-pong table and featured a rotating centralised net. This new arrangement led to dynamic play and loss of control on behalf of participants producing remarkable moments of play and contributing to the entertainment of the device. Walking Chair Gallery’s project might find precedent in the project *Ping Pond Table* by artist Gabriel Orozco in 1998. Although Orozco’s iteration was compelling, it was conceived for a gallery setting and was notably more static, making it less mobile and adaptable to opportune circumstances.

At the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2010 titled *People Meet Through Architecture* I encountered another impactful augmentation of a familiar game displayed at the Serbian Pavilion. Devised by the artistic collective Škart, the exhibit titled *Seesaw Play-Grow* presented a variety of bespoke seesaws

designed and engineered to be used in the gallery by multiple adults and children simultaneously. Another 'model of action', the seesaws warranted great attention, attracting playfulness and forms of collectivity that appeared unrivalled by other exhibits at the Biennale. The project explored the idea of architecturally mediated social encounter – a function inherent to the seesaw.

Tectonics and Economy of Materials in Domestic Construction

Tectonic and economical domestic construction involves the reduction of an architectural folly or structure down to its essential elements, often maintaining the original properties of materials, expressing structure and highlighting individual parts that make up a construction. I perceive a nascent community of architectural practices in the sphere of domestic architectural design who demonstrate ongoing innovation for this aesthetic politic. Practices include Julien Boidot, Sean Godsell, Peter Märkli and Architecten De Vylder Vinck Tallieu (ADVVT). The outcomes I refer to typically substitute a range of traditional and sometimes highly toxic materials with construction craftsmanship and care of assembly. This is necessitated as trims are omitted and blemishes cannot be readily 'patched' with caulking or putties; as they are typically difficult to colour-match and effectively conceal. This carries a range of advantages that span ecological, economic (reduced material costs), aesthetic and functional. I perceive further design opportunities with this approach in making projects more personally interesting, while reconciling the demands of a more conservative domestic design market in South Australia.

For the project *Studio House* by Peter Märkli, bricks were left unrendered and unpainted in favour of nuanced and intriguing material abutments that express a sense of homely individuality. This gesture counteracts mindsets that view the architecture and interior design as distinct elements. It also steers away from the commonplace impulse to create highly polished residences, expressing a differing set of values. The suitability of this approach in a domestic residence is the casual atmosphere it helps to generate. Here, a balance is found where the design is not ever-present or pressing – a risk that some architectural projects face especially when adopting customary 'architectural' motifs such as black

aluminium windows, vast regions of white painted gyprock walls and numerous internal downlights. The articulated internal construction of *Studio House* withdraws from visual prominence of the space allowing incidental objects that fill the space greater prominence. This may simply be attributed to the fact the walls are demarcated by shadows, forms, materials and colour changes.

Belgium-based practice formerly known as Architecten De Vydler Vinck Tallieu³¹ strip away conventional trimmings and linings to express the infrastructural quality of a building; overlapping structural systems to generate tectonic and sculptural qualities, while highlighting built elements with coloured powder-coatings or by preserving raw materials. These measures accentuate the ‘constructive’³² quality of a building – which I see as the essence of architecture. I can also detect the in-joke or humour of ADVVT’s work, where they have habitually appear to propose measures that are considered taboo. For their project *Huik House*, a bath hob was encased in a mirrored surface to increase the perceived size of the space and to emphasise the varied material palette of the bathroom. This action is only resurrected from the label of kitsch through their close attention to details and the complexity and design language of the space. The bath splash-back above is transformed into a spatial, planar element, coloured with a flat pink pastel hue that interplays with the natural timber-grain walls. I have not previously seen timber used in a wet area, but given its visual warmth and the advancement of products for its preservation, is it still fair to say that it is not possible?

Unlocking an Ethic of Care

Greater levels of care during construction can increase the lifespan of an architectural project as certain vital steps such as installing flashings and protective barriers are not omitted in haste, or hastily installed. An ethic of care can lead to greater resolution of details, heightening the lived experience of a space and the value a build offers its users. However, despite the fact that behaviours are entirely malleable, conventional industry pathways in Australia for delivering a public intervention or a domestic build risk omission of care, in cases – as trades wish to get a job done as rapidly as possible. This possibly results from the fact that

those who build are commonly divorced from any future use or enjoyment of the products of their labour. Care also serves to impact the broader extents of a projects site, as construction can rapidly accumulate extensive refuse and become highly invasive, especially if those building the construction lack concept for its preservation. While working on the *reUNION* project with EXYZT Collectif, it became apparent how an intrinsic ethic of care for the outcome was realised, as people who participated in the development of the space were also the end users.

An alternative sphere of domestic construction where an ethic of care has been demonstrated for the same reasons mentioned above is in a lineage of self-built architecture and communities traced back to the 1970's. Publications have recently brought to light the existence of an architectural 'para-industry' and an alternative practice model pursued by personalities such as Walter Segal. As Kevin McCloud notes, Segal's industry outsider approach was driven by a 'public service of duty'.³³ Contemporaneous revival of similar practices with intrinsic ethics of care have emerged in the form of self-built 'micro-homes' and other construction ventures documented on social media platforms such as YouTube. In these cases, an incentive for care also stems from the extensive audience exposed to the projects.

Summation

Reflections on projects by others reveals possible trajectories for my practice to take following the conclusion of this study. Special attention has been drawn to a series of devices and nascent prototypes for new public commons that present potential for stimulating new types of social and urban experience. These include small public pavilions, mobile interventions and augmented familiar games. My fascination for these small, programmatic innovations is driven by a determination to unlock the benefits of architecture to broader user groups beyond those able to finance high-end outcomes. This reflects an ethic that intersects with the core of this study and with the small-scale and provisional projects I validate. Reflections are largely focused offshore to a European context, where I have discovered a politic among specific practices that resonate with me personally. This geographic focus has been further attenuated by seminal lived experiences.

The practices I refer to operate alternative practice models that have discovered ways to deliver high quality architectural outcomes that avoid economic and other obstructions. This is commonly achieved through small-scale, provisional interventions and participative ‘democratised’ construction formats. For the case of domestic construction, this underlying ethic has drawn my attention to innovation by practices for economical and low-tech construction that seeks to reduce costs and therefore make architecture more widely accessible. Further universal conditions that underpin the success of each scale and type I reflect on include the enrichment of a design process and site-specific design response.

Notes

¹ Sobek. *Re-Inventing Construction*, 34.

² Texts that helped to inform my critical interests include *Arcade’s Project* by Walter Benjamin and *Minima Moralia* by Adorno.

³ Radford. *Responsive Cohesion as the Foundational Value in Architecture*.

⁴ Well-known firms that appear to contest ‘loose structure’s’ might include David Chipperfield Architects, Raphael Moneo, Denton Corker Marshall, Woods Bagot et al.

⁵ I encountered Timothy Hill during a student mentorship event associated with the Australian National Architecture Conference, Parallax, in Melbourne, 2009. The Rural Pavilion is introduced in the Backstory chapter of this study.

⁶ A verbal comment made by Timothy Hill.

⁷ *Kinsky House*, Stössing, Austria by Klaus Stattmann and Ernst J. Fuchs.

⁸ Hyde. *Future Practice, Conversations on the Edge of Architecture*.

⁹ The reUNION Public House, EXYZT Collectif, 101 Union Street, Southwark, London, 2012.

¹⁰ Cedric Price described the function of *Magnets* as: ‘Installed on existing metropolitan sites at present UNDERUSED or MISUSED ... Their SITING enriches the intensity of the city grain the STRUCTURES act as both INSERTS and TRANSPLANTS providing socially beneficial movement routes.’ Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, 1996. Tania Herdt expands this by adding that Price’s ‘Magnets’ intended to ‘Spur novel connections, meetings points and places for people to sojourn’. *Architecture and the City of Change*, 169.

¹¹ Herdt. *The City and the Architecture of Change*, 169.

¹² EXYZT Collectif. *Manifesto*.

¹³ Enzo Mari was a designer who, in the 1970’s, sought to democratise design through the establishment of a series of manuals that people with minimal carpentry skills could use to build furniture.

¹⁴ EXYZT Collectif. *Manifesto*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Continued...

¹⁶ Occupy London was a movement connected to the global 'Occupy' movement, 2011-2012.

¹⁷ 'Service architecture' is a colloquial term that describes architecture of exclusive concern with economic factors, often to the sacrifice of design qualities.

¹⁸ MoMA Highlights: 375 works.

¹⁹ For Tiravanija's 2011 iteration at MOMA, New York.

²⁰ Jack Rudd states, '...a reeling in of discretionary arts funding in recent years has made it difficult (for Format) to continue.' broadsheet.com.au

²¹ Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser. www.koebberlingkaltwasser.de

²² Assemble Studio. assemblestudio.co.uk/projects/the-cineroleum

²³ An historic airport and public space I explore further in the Urban Analysis chapter.

²⁴ Raumlaborberlin.

<https://raumlabor.net/floating-ev/>

²⁵ Refer to page 178, Community of Practice, in Book 1, Projects.

²⁶ Koolhaas. Content, 73.

²⁷ Whiting is better known as the 'DJ on a bike'.

²⁸ Excerpt from website: 'Around a thousand cyclists came out to join Drum and Bass on the Bike as the mass gathering made a return to Birmingham.' iambirmingham.co.uk

²⁹ Atelier Bow-Wow. architizer.com/projects/furnicycle/

³⁰ Koolhaas. Content, 73.

³¹ Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu (ADDVT) is a practice formerly based in Ghent, Belgium.

It has now been reformed as the separate offices of Architecten Jan De Vylder Inge Vinck (AJDVIV) and Jo Taillieu Architecten.

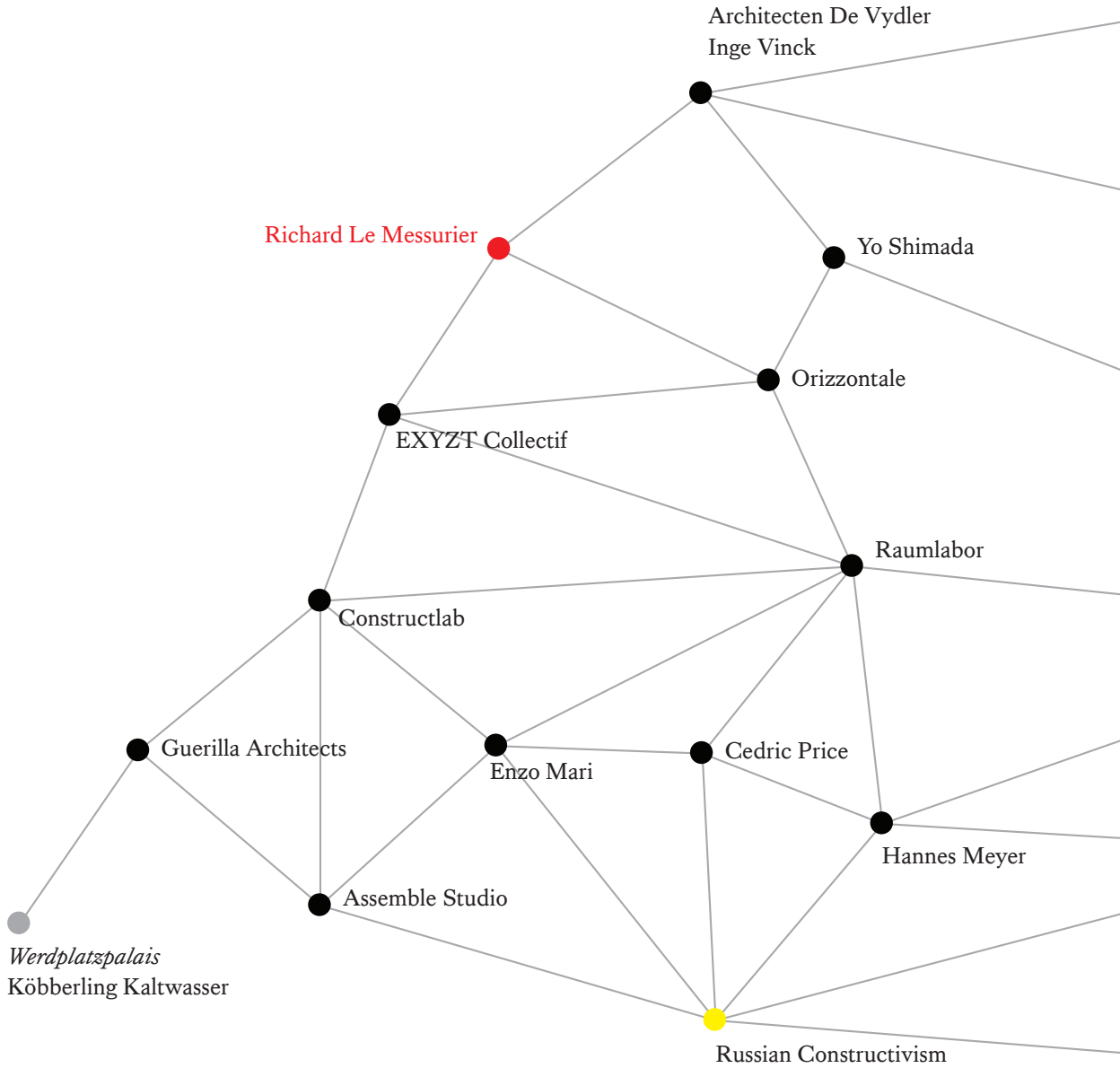
³² In reference to Russian Constructivism.

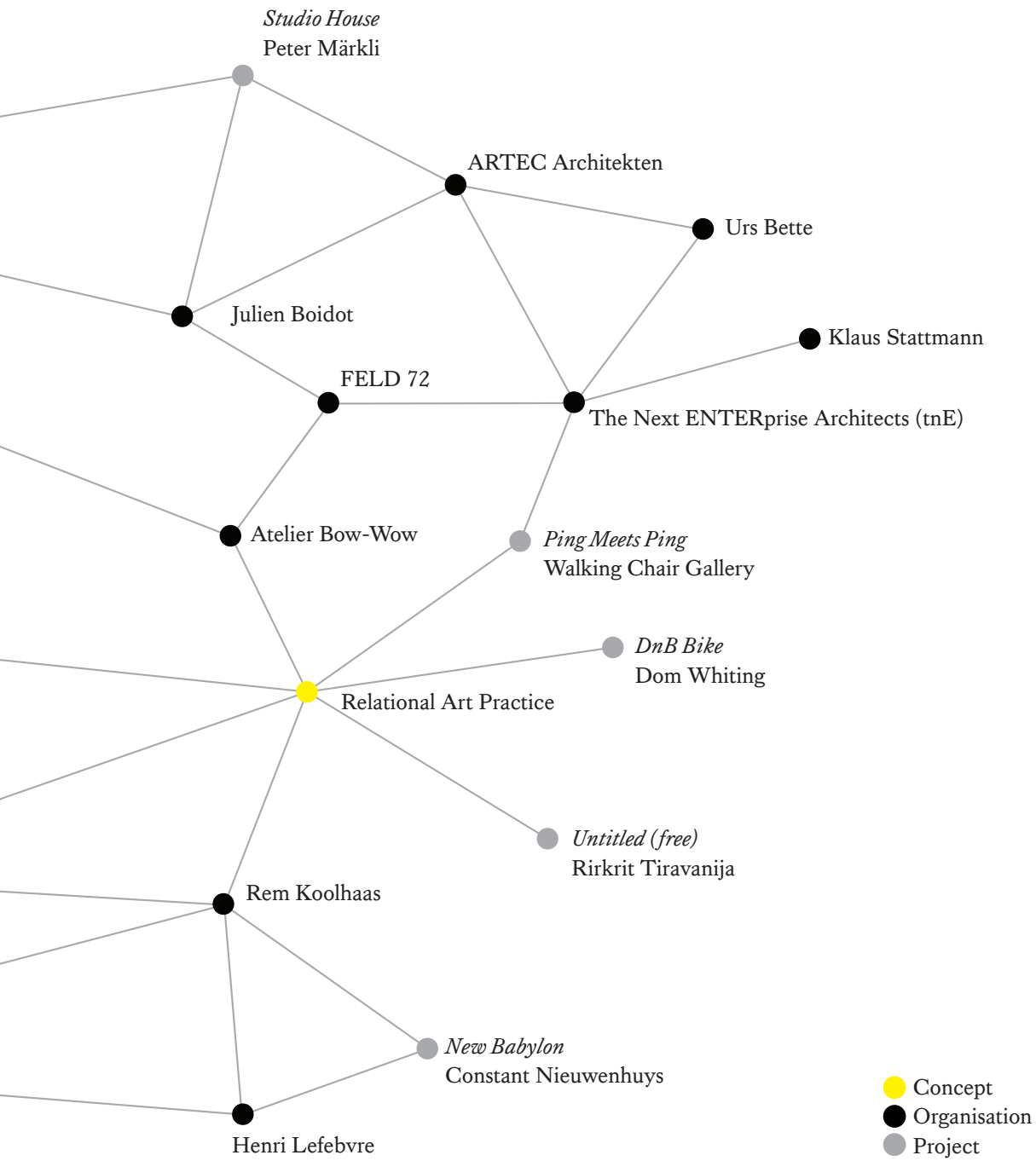
³³ Grahame and McKean. Walter Segal: Self-built Architect, 5.

Community of Practice Matrix

The community of architects, artists and designers that my practice draws inspiration from or has worked for. The linkages represent common concerns and associations.

Fig. 21





Practice Agenda

I operate an ‘expanded practice’¹ that lies on the edge of architecture, activism, research and construction. I pursue this range of concerns with the ambition to address spatial issues that are out of reach by the profession and to find other uses for architecture. I am interested in broad forms of architecture. This includes varied scales, typologies, materials and imaginative programs. However, against this openness to wide-ranging design briefs, my practice maintains a specific lens of inquiry and is underpinned by a set of fascinations and biases that I seek to reveal in this chapter. I am fascinated by ways that physical spaces influence, trigger and emancipate human behaviours. This interest has led me to examine the potential of small-scale, provisional interventions to contribute to the public character of cities and unlock new social possibilities. Varying strategies are explored for this scale and type. Some interventions ‘hack’ existing urban spaces to exploit latent potential, while others seek to intensify or repair spaces that have fallen from use. I view public space as a site where a didactic, enriching potential lies and seek to extract lessons for broader building scales and types. This includes lessons about communication, behaviour, flexibility of spaces and social connection. In other chapters, I question the obstructions and limitations of the normative Australian city. In this chapter, I will extend this mode of critique to my own personal circumstance, where I seek to disrupt my containment as an architect in the profession and to unlock myself from traditional and expected duties. This leads to my theorisation of the *Unlocking of Design Process*.

Ruptures and Bright *Moments*

In his text *Critique of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre theorises *moments*² as distinct from the ambiguity and flux of everyday life. More than a mere exception to the everyday, Lefebvre elaborates remarkable qualities of a moment – including its ‘festival’³ and its ability to assist the ‘constitution’⁴ of an individual. I seek to unlock ‘moments’ in public spaces through the employment of architectural tools and strategies. This ambition is distinct from producing a spectacle in public space or serving isolated functions. I have chosen the term, moment, to house the indiscriminate set of possible behaviours that might emerge in response to physical form. Although I note my central fascination for unlocking new

behaviours, they are elusive and unpredictable. Lefebvre was aware this and conceived the term moment for his theory to encompass all possible scenarios.⁵ Therefore, when I address a specific behavioural trait manifesting in a space and point in time (e.g. play, leisure, respite), this is for analytical depth.

In the former modus operandi of Austrian-based practice, The Next ENTERprise Architects (tnE), they recount Ernst Mach's vision for 'incredible abruptness's, bright moments, and timeless chances'.⁶ Mach's scientific perspective accentuates the specific threshold that is crossed, from the mundane to the incredible, thereby building on the distinction of Lefebvre's moment. My practice undertakes a design process that seeks to cross or unlock possibilities beyond this threshold by addressing specific emergent conditions. I seek to manifest 'bright moments' and 'timeless chances' in spatial expressions, social circumstances or with public interventions generally. The other takeaway from Mach's compelling vision is the possibility of an unimagined intensity. Lefebvre's moment helps to 'constitute' the individual lost in the flux of everyday life, while Mach's vision provides promise for the intensity of this constitution, the threshold crossed to realise incredible possibility.

Social Interactions?

I seek to realise informal spaces where members of the public can stop and engage in face-to-face communication, develop dialogue, political discussion and to deliberate uninhibited by class, age, tribal classification or social media silo. This ambition reflects a personal practice politic, or bias, that appraises the capacities of bodily presence. These capacities include body-language and non-verbal cues, forms of creative self-expression, empathic responses, play, wit and storytelling. I am opposed to a society excessively mediated by screens for the detachment it generates from an individual's lived experience. This critique recalls Guy Debord's theorisation of the *spectacle* which he described as 'a social relation among people mediated by images'.⁷ Bodily presence contends ceaseless consumption of digital images, products, narratives and ideology that arrive from distant sources and instead demands that one employs their capacities. My appraisal of these values has emerged independent of the university where I have trained and largely

independent of the workplaces I have attended. Instead, I have found affirmation in my creative community and through various thinkers and writers. In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt reflected on ‘the human need for creative expression and social dialogue’⁸ as a reaction to conditions of mass culture during the mid-20th century. Although Arendt’s observations precede the era of digital interface and the experience of reality via our manifold avatars, they appear to remain relevant today. For the *Dirty Tea-house* intervention, public notices were installed in the neighbourhood that invited members of the community to access the private roof space and engage in cultural activities. This included public presentations, tea ceremonies and films, subsidiary programs that invite participation, inclusion and face-to-face interaction. This variety of programs unlocked self-expression by inviting exchange of knowledge, with broad parties empowered to contribute their personal knowledge or skill. The architectural discipline is challenged by existential anxieties.⁹ While advances in engineering enable pliability of our dwelling containers to reach new levels of cultural sophistication, siloed focus on building envelope, material expression and representation continues to reach new levels of exhaustion, while other pertinent issues in the social domain boil beneath the surface. What possible alternative aims could the architectural discipline embrace? Could aesthetic fetishes be put on hold, returning to the intrinsic question, ‘What do *people* need?’

Notions of Public Togetherness

During the process of conducting this investigation, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, and everyday social interactions were obstructed, especially during enforced ‘lock-downs’. In these instances, a sense of harmful social isolation was expressed by many, newly reifying how indispensable every social interaction is. It also became prescient that commonplace digital supplements were inadequate compensation. A study at Deakin University in Geelong investigating the impact of lockdowns on mental health confirmed that ‘parent and child mental health symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress followed the COVID-19 infection rate’.¹⁰ I recall how my personal sense of social isolation during this time triggered me to deliberate on the constructive force that strangers have on my life and the significance of generalised social connection, not just to those



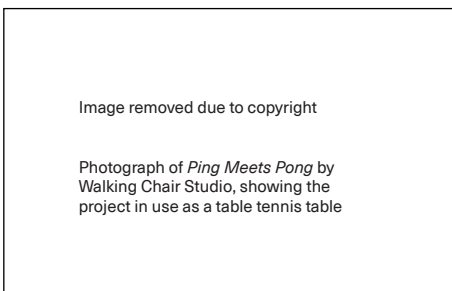
22 'Planking' generates a *moment* and gives an individual constitution, by instigating an unexpected program in its given context.
Photo: iStock.com/YKD (edited)



23 Ernst Mach observed 'Incredible abruptnesses and brights moments' in the field of physics.
Photo: US Navy Photo by John Gay



24 Public space 'hacking' employs invention, ad-hoc and sub-legal measures to overcome physical obstructions and unlock unprecedented urban possibilities.
Image: iStock.com/spyarm



25 How can architectural tools be employed to spark new types of social intersection? *Ping Meets Pong*, Walking Chair Studio.
Photo: Guenter Parth



26 Example of a 'provisional frame and backdrop' that the public can claim and project their identities into.

we hold dear. Is it time to start re-imagining civic infrastructure for interstitial social interactions, to extract a lesson about our need for social connection from our collective experiences? Can we presume that forms of self-organisation during post-pandemic freedom will automatically manifest the environments we need to serve our social and spiritual needs? Or, do architects need to proactively intervene to offer new physical environments that can facilitate these needs? The six interventions discussed in the tactics section of this study can be considered prototypes of possible new civic infrastructure that address this concern, that have potential to evolve into new, augmented forms.

'Hacking' City Spaces

Rather than hacking a computer system, could one hack into the urban spaces of a city, exploiting sites opportunistically to realise 'moments' and new forms of social habitation? Hacking an urban space involves siting new programs rendered with architectural qualities that are unexpected in their given context. This measure can challenge cultural constructs around how specific spaces 'should' be used and disrupt the complex codifications, rules and rituals that are ascribed to physical spaces. For the intervention *LOW (A Kneeling bar)*, I experimented by lowering the conventional bar interface towards the ground. This demanded creative and playful adaptation by patrons. The disrupting of the familiar type served as a catalyst for new types of social intersection, as people turned to others for clues on how to adapt. 'Hacking' city spaces also involves siting new programs into unremarkable frames, to generate unexpected and remarkable outcomes.

Object-based Response

Re-imagining the city in large-scale spatial terms may be an onerous challenge, given the stakeholders and interests of those who control spaces. However, opportunities exist in the form of small objects that integrate or 'hack' existing urban contexts. Object-based response is a service that my practice offers and involves the intensification of interstitial and overlooked urban spaces with temporal

architectural fixtures – integrating provisions such as platforms, architectural furniture, visual frames, narratives and conceptual programming. These objects are viewed as alternative layers of infrastructure for the city, rural centre or coastal township. Although parallels can be drawn with the practice of ‘Urban Acupuncture’, where my approach is distinct is that interventions are viewed as isolated systems or ‘eruptions’ in the urban fabric. While they do tacitly aim for broader influence beyond the limitations of a particular site, they are not troubled by theoretical attempts to claim such influence. Instead, they focus more intensely on their immediate surroundings, on the inner world of the ‘moment’ generated by the intervention. What they do offer beyond their interiority is the utility of interstitial spaces as contributory realms to existing buildings and more explicated, familiar functions. The exhibition intervention of this study, the *Third Space*, generated an interstitial space at the entrance to a winery, contributing and expanding on the sequence of movement into the main bar region. While ostensibly an exhibition structure, an implicit and additional program was apparent. Spaces like the research exhibition structure offer supplementary architectural elements to adjacent fixed buildings that enable a variety of appropriations. In this way, the *Third Space* healed a rift and provided a sense of finitude to the greater environment.

Architect as Roaming Medic

My mode of operating can be likened to a *roaming medic* who seeks to intensify and repair adhoc urban spaces that have slipped out of use, sometimes by operating as a project initiator or entrepreneur. The roaming medic analogy implies the city is a patient, where innovative tactics or methods are applied and the results monitored and adapted. The analogy of the roaming medic also draws attention to the temporal nature of the city, challenging conceptions of permanency. Urban interventions are often marked by short durations and small scales. Their temporality, like our mortal existence, plays powerfully on our existence in time in the city, accentuating urban rhythms and syncopation. The ‘roaming’ reflects my modus operandi of drifting around the city and disrupting normative settings with unorthodox objects. ‘Medic’ is underpinned by an impulse to shift, or heal Adelaide; my local, personal context. ‘Architect as Roaming Medic’ represents my

alternative practice model for operating. Rory Hyde reflects on the emergence of such practices when he states ‘Urban activists are using strategies outside of those normally taught in the faculties of architecture or engineering ...to reclaim some of the ground lost to professional exceptionalism and shape a more just and social city’.¹¹

People as Program

If a provisional intervention is adequately planned and executed, then conventional, explicit programs are not always paramount for their successful functioning. The people can be the program. In the previous century, Cedric Price conceptualised a series of experimental structures entitled *Magnets*; projects similar in scale and objectives to the interventions I explore in this study. With his structures he sought to invigorate under-performing high streets in chosen boroughs across London. In Tania Herdt’s reading of Price, she emphasises Price’s awareness of ‘the dynamism of the urban context’¹² and how it might be considered a viable program to underpin a project: ‘Within this minimalistic approach for interventions in an existing social system, he (Price) let the dynamism of the urban context generate the programme and allowed for all kinds of appropriations of these spaces’.¹³ *People as program* builds on Herdt’s interpretation of Price. It seeks to highlight an undervalued utility of a low-tech, minimalistic intervention and responds to distanced receptions of the research interventions of this study that underestimated their potential. Where ‘people are the program’, minimalistic architectural infrastructure provides frames and backdrops into which members of the public can project their identities. Although Price’s *Magnets* were not realised at the time, I argue that they have manifested in other various forms, discretely, in projects by practices such as EXYZT Collectif, or Constructlab in Europe.¹⁴

Embracing Subtle Outcomes

The research component of my practice investigates the subtle functions that provisional interventions perform. When architectural contributions to the built environment are discussed, attention is generally drawn to the overt program; to serve

linguistic economy. However, provisional interventions serve a kaleidoscopic array of functions, some of which are muted, yet highly productive. I seek to assess subtle outcomes by giving people something indeterminate and then wait to see how they will react, drawing comparisons between intended and unintended outcomes. The outcomes are typically subtle, as behaviours are elusive and diachronic in nature. Outcomes are also chaotic, meaning that they risk evading our frame of reference, and therefore cognition. In the case of the *Hōjōki Terminal*, the intervention presented an ambiguity of purpose, only to be interpreted and claimed as a playground by children, at its inception, who expressed amplified forms of play not normally witnessed. Why was this space interpreted as playground and not Donald Judd's adjacent concrete sculpture? Even more so, what was the source of the amplified forms of play? Anomalous ruptures of behaviour like this are an example of those that may be commonly overlooked, yet are productive for research and understanding how architectural spaces function. Through a performative, physiological action, children signalled something about the space that adults, more subtly, attempted to express through language. I speculate that the object's architectural qualities, its newness and the subversion of its programming triggered the outbursts of behaviour.

Unlocking Design Process

Two conventionally compartmentalised professional realms, the design office and the space of construction labour, overlap in my practice. This applies to the small-scale interventions that my practice delivers, as I find these manageable to design and construct as a sole practitioner. This arrangement gives rise to an improvisational and reflexive design-build methodology where design changes are expediently administered at 1:1 scale. This enables intimate understanding of the design, its proportions and its central logic, which prepares me for the seizing of serendipitous and emergent opportunities. This methodology contrasts with 'design-construct' practices that professionally partner the architect and the building labour force, where the architect intermittently oversees work sometimes leading to a loss of aesthetic control, missed opportunities and a high level of energy expended on communication. Architectural drawings conventionally contain a degree of interpretation, unless the architects are willing to spend excess hours in an office



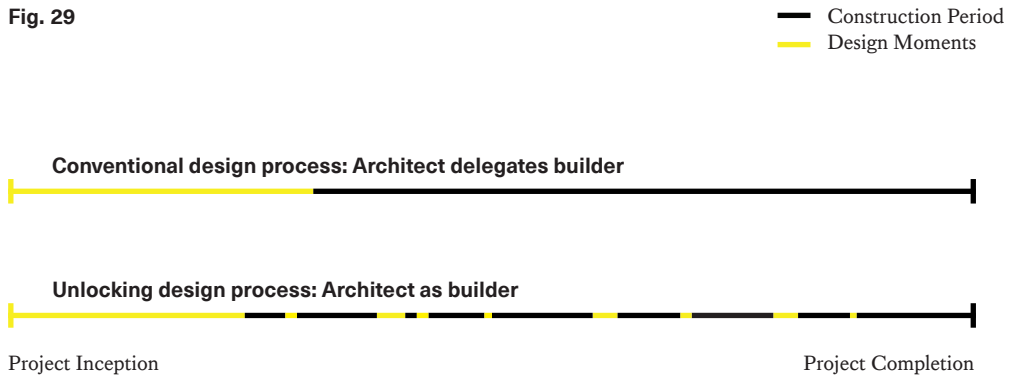
27 Architects acquire cordless tools for 1:1 adaptations during the unlocking of the design process. Photo: Richard Le Messurier



28 What architectural adjustments can take place in the city, with minimal resources, to enable new forms of social interaction? Yo Shimada et al. *Ritsumeikan Workshop*, 2020. Photo: Yo Shimada

Unlocking Design Process

Fig. 29



resolving details that can otherwise be expediently resolved on-site. For the small-scale interventions projects I work on, the completion of technical architectural drawings is not viewed as the conclusion of the design. Rather, they are seen as the basic, constructive template. I view the design process as non-linear; composed of events or 'abrupt, bright moments' (to reference Mach again) that are captured, deliberated upon and then responded to with equanimity. Only through retroactive narrativization does the design process inherit an impression of linearity and order.

At the inception of the design process, I trial many ideas with rudimentary diagrams and loose lines. I see these formative lines as exercises in cognition, to prepare the mind for an instinctual response. Drawings are paired with writing to stabilise the aims of a project and to identify opportunities. I will often attempt to strategize beyond the confines of a brief, to challenge conditions that may be taken for granted in order to make the project more interesting to work on. Many ideas emerge and many are false alarms during the conceptual stages of a project. One idea usually jumps out and falls into place. I am struck by something. This idea usually emerges as a creative vision that must somehow reconcile the parameters and excess of information I have been deliberating on. This creative event is charged by an excitement, knowing that it is liable to evaporate and be forgotten if it is not captured in a diagram or drawing. This process is paralleled in my other creative past-times, such as music and painting. I cannot plan when the moment of creativity will occur, meaning that the search for a design fit can be effortless or painstaking. I have found that in many cases an answer is not found because the initial question is wrong, requiring re-articulation. The *unlocking of design process* seeks to maximise exposure to these abrupt, creative moments throughout the extended timeline of a project's realisation, including its construction. This enables the ongoing enrichment of a project.

I have always sensed a general dissonance between the set of problems that I deliberate on in an office chair, and the on-site realities. Architectural design today is generally progressed via photographs and representations that construct a simulation¹⁵ of a given site. However, images can obscure and augment important details of a physical site, such as its atmosphere or one's internal reactions to it. Representations can also deceive an architect of scale. Each intervention I have built to date has

emphasised this perceptual gap between CAD models and the human proportions of the outcome. This was apparent while building the *Hōjōki Terminal*, for example, despite my best attempts at accuracy of scaling in the digital model. This led to continual, spontaneous adaptation during construction. In most cases, the digital design was bloated and larger than necessary. Practice-based settings I have worked in have sometimes circumvented the challenge of assessing scale and proportions by adopting a set of principles and by making spaces oversized as a default.

Precise human scaling is one of the redeeming qualities I seek to achieve in the design of provisional interventions. Even untrained eyes appear intrinsically perceptive when something is 'at odds' or out of proportion with its surrounding. This is accentuated if the thing being observed is intentionally anomalous in its environment. The unlocking of the design process assists in specialisation of small-scale architectural design by revealing possibilities for spatial nuance that may not be thought of in an office chair. The architect has long been viewed as a generalist. However, I argue that general architectural training and office experience does not guarantee competency in these types of spaces or scales. Gaps in knowledge relate to the emphasis of digital design in education and the fascinations that correspond, often leading to the development of vessels and volumes with stimulating articulated skins, rather than tectonic, open and understated structures. It is interesting to speculate how the scaling of architecture has augmented alongside the dominance of digital design and digital culture generally. Were modernist architects more concerned for human proportions because of the tools they had at their disposal?

1:1 scale design is advantageous in allowing complexity to emerge as a result of feeling and deliberation, with less reliance on applying over-arching design rules. It also enables a productive level of control in cases where materials have been upcycled and require creative application, forming an environmental advantage. For the *Ancient World DJ Station*, the successful application of up-cycled materials was made possible as I was able to continually experiment with options first-hand while concomitantly assessing the outcomes. This led to an enriching compositional patina for the booth's façade. Handling and hauling of materials during 1:1 scale design has also led to a perception of their economy and a sense of what would be practical and expedient to build; values that are productive in the expression of a tectonic detail.

Low-tech Construction

Low-tech construction methodology is a fascination central to my design practice, irrespective of the scale I am working on. It represents a radicalised approach to construction that entails subversive political, environmental and economic dimensions. At first glance, the interventions documented in this study might appear antithetical to ‘architecture’ given the visual, cultural constructions of our milieu. However, architecture is not just form, materials and their mesmerising combinations; it can also be infrastructure that derives beauty from its utility. I trace this aesthetic politic back to Hannes Meyers Bauhaus of the 1920’s and his rejection of art as ‘a collector’s piece for an individual’,¹⁶ in favour of objectivity, instrumentality, serialization and non-hierarchical composition. According to K. Michael Hays, Meyer advocated for reconceptualising architecture ‘...not as an aesthetic object – the fictive organisation of an organic whole... but as a program, a set of procedures, an apparatus for the production of events’.¹⁷ Low-tech construction is reciprocal with the unlocking of the design process as it favours of an immediacy of outcome, as design changes are less inhibited by financial restrictions. It points away from Gyprock and hermetically sealed construction, towards timber, exposed structure and a reductive material palette that is easy to build, repair and adapt. It seeks to avoid a set of environmentally problematic building materials, such as putties, paint, silicone and caulking and replaces linings with natural expression of materials. By reducing costs of materials and labour, alongside needs for numerous, specialised contractors, the coming into existence of construction is less hindered. This is reminiscent of Charles Jencks ideas of *adhocism*, when he writes:

‘...these needs and purposes are frustrated by the great time and energy expended in their realisation. A purpose immediately fulfilled is the ideal of adhocism; it cuts through the usual delays caused by specialisation, bureaucracy and hierarchical organisation’.¹⁸

While the label ‘low-tech’ might attract associations with amateurism, it can also be architectural par-excellence. It is differentiated from Jenck’s idea of adhocism, as it is not about favouring incidental materials or spontaneous outcomes

that sacrifice control of visual qualities. Rather, low-tech construction gains architectural qualities from its considered tectonic assembly, a quality exemplified by Enzo Mari's furniture, where materials are abutted in ways to minimise and eradicate complex cuts or notches. Abutments and connections of materials are considered and controlled to produce spatial qualities. As a guiding policy, even the cheapest materials must be implemented with the highest degree of accuracy and craftsmanship. Care must be taken for the outcome. This includes decisions about where revealed fixings might be sited and the consistency of their application and type. Mari's objects, and the low-tech architecture I espouse, serve to democratise construction – to again refer to its subversive political quality. In some instances, they can act as forms of protest against the limitations and expulsions of the Australian construction industry, as they enable unskilled and unlicensed contributors to manufacture objects of high standard. I have often planned self-built projects for ease of construction, so that they are only slightly more complex than assembling IKEA furniture. This has enabled me to build architectural interventions single-handedly, or with help from one or two friends with little construction knowledge. As Mari confirms, 'constructible efficacy is important'.¹⁹

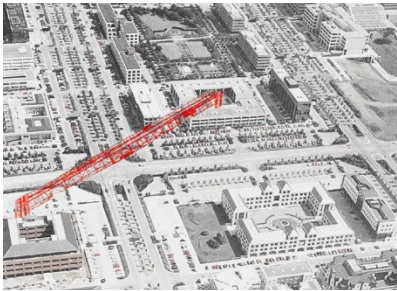
'Architectural' may often be characterised by expensive material palettes that serve an extended lifespan of a building or to convey social status. Alternatively, low-tech construction embodies an ideal that views the physical environment as intrinsically temporal and in a state of constant change, as occupants and contexts of spaces shift. Low-tech construction is highly suitable to provisional and short-life projects. An implicit aim of my future domestic projects is to devise solutions that can be readily changed and adapted throughout the building's lifespan. Formal design considerations for low-tech assembly are upheld, such as repetition, contrast, volume, proportion, colour, and light. Complexity can arise from low-tech assembly by assisting ideation for assembly outside frameworks designated by engineers and relevant building codes – a force of conformity that leads to generic structural expression. I don't encourage the construction of any structure without engineering consultation – I merely maintain that low-tech assembly presents opportunities that may otherwise be dismissed from the outset. The tectonic assembly native to low-tech architecture is especially concerned with structural integrity and often celebrates connections that are robustly held together by strong fixings.

Disrupting Coding of Materials

I seek to disrupt the coding of materials and their expected normative use. One example includes the various pieces of furniture that I developed for *TRANS-FORM*,²⁰ involving the ‘hacking’ of IKEA products to make new, original pieces. Another example among the research interventions involved the use of untreated and exposed timber, allowing for the decay of interventions over time. Disrupting ways that materials ‘should’ be used was also evident in the *Hōjōki Terminal* intervention, not simply for its low-tech articulation, but also for the use of painted MDF knowing that some architects would be uncomfortable with such an ‘arts and crafts’ application. What is key to this gesture is that unlikely materials are implemented without sacrificing the finished outcome. Acts like this can have a subtle humorous tone, but also invite people to conquer fears about matters that are inconsequential. Provocations in the mute medium of built form target enforcers of social orthodoxies and provide conversational triggers, as people are prompted with choices about of how to react; they can choose to engage with intellect, frustration or jest.

Small is Cool

I draw a series of speculations regarding local attitudes towards small-scale architectural projects in Australia. Australia’s enormous landmass and relatively small population might make small-scale architecture seem unwarranted on a superficial level. Australia’s normative building stock might also form backdrops that are overly nihilistic for new design endeavour to resonate – I’m referring to the seas of Colorbond fences that swamp our suburbs, the cookie cutter units, McMansions, vapid CBD apartment blocks and the trend I observe empirically where all things are painted dark grey. This contrasts greatly with settings where I have built interventions in Europe, where architectural quality formed the normative backdrop, veritably stimulating architectural response. Avoidance of small might also occur because architects in Australia have a logical preference to work on larger projects with higher returns. The Architectural registration process may also remit the realisation of small-scale projects in Australia, by gearing its examination process and fees towards large projects and corporate-scale



30 Cedric Price's *Magnets* are object-based interventions that form *anomalous ruptures* in an urban setting. Photo: Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal

Image removed due to copyright

Sedia-duo chair by CUCULA, Refugees Company for Crafts and Design

31 Enzo Mari's furniture represents a tectonic design approach rooted in DIY cultures. The chair shown is built by CUCULA and is based on a design documented in Mari's manual *Autoprogettazione?* Photo: CUCULA



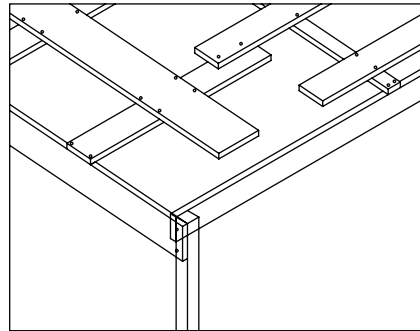
32 This project for a carport in Hay Flat, SA, embodies my ethos for revealed construction and tectonics.



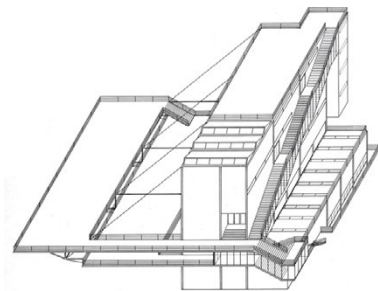
33 Low-tech construction methods can unlock resourceful use of materials. Photo: Picnic Magazine



34 Disrupting the codification of materials; to develop this artwork I experimented by applying coloured adhesive tape to an IKEA pine shelf.



35 Isometric detail of low tech construction; showing *Dirty Tea-house* post and canopy junction. Here structural timber elements and revealed screw fixings comprise the finished outcome.



37 Objectivity and instrumentalisation of architecture was intrinsic to the projects of Hannes Meyer. Image: Hannes Meyer



36 Recodifying materials
Image: © Association Marcel Duchamp. ADAGP/Copyright Agency, 2022



38 Alternative funding models; *Luchtsingel*, Rotterdam, ZUS Architects, 2015. Photo: Fred Ernst

architectural practices. However, it is not safe to assume that large practices have the expertise nor experience to deliver small scale, experimental projects. Are these forces the cause for the absence of small-scale typologies in Australian settings?

Funding of Small

Provisional interventions and other small-scale architectural projects are often complex, time-consuming and have limited budgets, leading potential clients to often relinquish opportunities and strive for lacklustre, alternative solutions. As a result, small-scale architectural ideas are often not tested and therefore their potential remains difficult to validate. This stifles an ongoing cultural process, where prototypes naturally evolve over time through the voices of different authors. It may take several design episodes until an experimental program is properly executed and realises intensities previously unimagined. Similarly, the small projects examined in this study are viewed as new prototypes for ongoing evolution. I received remuneration for some of these projects, while a limited number had non-existent budgets. Sometimes remuneration was subsidised by gifts, such as free accommodation, meals and power tools. While this was useful for supporting living costs and felt rewarding enough, the projects were not able to accumulate savings. This represents a hurdle for the development of experimental small-scale projects in Australian contexts; societal needs might be thwarted by economic forces such as high construction costs.²¹ If I was reliant on qualified carpenters for the realisation of the interventions examined in this study, they would never have eventuated due to economic obstructions. The timeliness of their delivery would also have presented challenges as delays are integral to the construction industry and most carpenters would prefer to work on the largest project they can handle. This prompted me to acquire a set of construction tools and self-build each intervention. Traditional funding models for small and provisional projects include philanthropists, local government grants and social event schemes, or are done pro bono. Alternative funding models are nascent; for *Luchtsingel*, a pedestrian bridge by ZUS architects in Rotterdam in 2015, crowd funding was adopted to successfully finance the project.²² The bridge has been regarded by some as the world's first crowd-funded infrastructure. Another alternative funding model example is *MPavilion* in

Melbourne which amalgamates a range of government and corporate stakeholders.²³ These emergent, funding model precedents may unlock new possibilities.

Projects Emerge from City Participation

There has always been a certain tension between the creative community I inhabit and the commercial architectural practices I have found myself serving. My creative community presents a matrix constituted by informal and established peers from broad disciplines. It is where a certain excess of intellectual and creative energy emerges that propels innovation. As a subcultural group with no name, that aggregates many members, it risks being undervalued. However, communities of this nature are where ideas are tested and formulated outside the ideological framing of an institution. The set of research interventions examined in this study have undoubtedly profited from this community (alongside support from the university community). The interventions might even be viewed as attempts to reconcile currents of the creative subconscious of the city. New collaborators and helpers to projects have serendipitously arisen from this unknown pool of creatives. This means that an incidental-collaborative nature has existed in my practice, for the provisional interventions. Although in my view, there is at least a minimal collaborative dimension for almost any architectural project that is built, as clients, builders and consultants offer many ideas throughout the process.

Facing Doubt

When I first viewed Cedric Price's drawings for *Magnets* prior to conducting this investigation, I was initially doubtful, despite the lens of my architectural training and office experience. They simply looked like empty shells impotent to an obvious utility. Similarly, the provisional interventions I have personally developed have often received this type of reception or doubt prior to their physical realisation. These attitudes towards the projects have stood in contradiction to those after their realisation, revealing a gap in knowledge regarding the often subtle resources that a provisional intervention provides to the public. Does architectural training

and experience overprivilege visual readings of architectural spaces, inhibiting readings of program and their more muted, socially affording functions? The typology and scale of the provisional interventions central to this study appears to be wholly missing from the urban environments I know in an Australian context. I seek to disrupt this paradigm by creating and instilling new awareness of this smaller scale and type among the public and potential future clients.

Summation

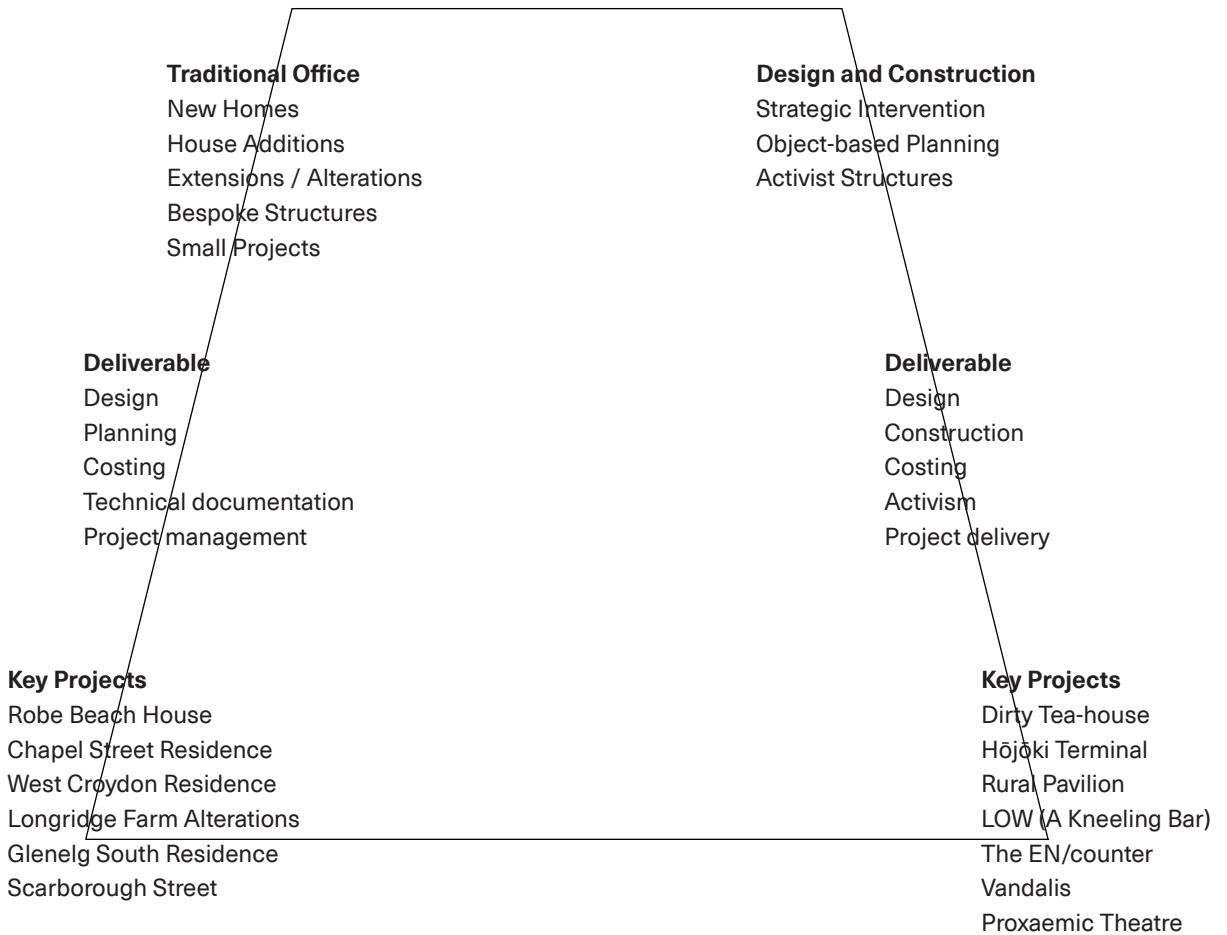
My fascination for small-scale and provisional interventions stems from the ambition to emancipate individuals from the physical and social limitations prescribed by the city. This has led to my proposal for surplus, designed spaces in Australian urban contexts that are stimulated by architectural qualities. These spaces provide infrastructure for face-to-face communication and social 'moments'. The need for this provision has been further attenuated by alienating forces of the pandemic. Small-scale, provisional interventions that serve these functions benefit from the unlocking of the design process as a design can evolve organically, according to collaborative inputs and emergent events. This ultimately serves to unlock a greater design 'fit' that assists realisation of the greatest possible intensity of a given urban space. Low-tech assembly methods are reciprocal with this type of provisional program and design process.

Notes

- ¹ With reference to the work of Leon Van Schaik, see: Van Schaik, *The Practice of Spatial Thinking*.
- ² Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 345.
- ³ Lefebvre explains 'the moment does not appear simply anywhere, at just any time. It is a festival, it is a marvel...'. Ibid, 354.
- ⁴ '...the moment wishes to achieve the possibilities of everyday life and to give human beings a constitution by constituting their own powers'. Wark, *The Beach Beneath the Street*, Lefebvre, *Quotidian II*. 335, *Critique of Everyday Life 2*, 343.
- ⁵ Lefebvre admits that one cannot 'draw up a complete list' of moments. *Critique of Everyday Life*, 231.
- ⁶ tNE. *Philosophy: On the Modus Operandi of the next ENTERprise*, 1.
- ⁷ Debord. *Society of the Spectacle* 'The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images'.
- ⁸ Arendt. *The Human Condition*.
- ⁹ Kenneth Frampton explains, 'The vulgarization of architecture and its progressive isolation from society have of late driven the discipline in upon itself'. *Modern Architecture – A Critical History*, 10.
- ¹⁰ Westrupp. Results are in – COVID lockdowns were bad for our mental health.
- ¹¹ Hyde, Rory. *Future Practice, Conversations on the Edge of Architecture*. 2012, 103.
- ¹² Herdt. *The City and the Architecture of Change*, 169.
- ¹³ Ibid, 169.
- ¹⁴ The reUNION project by EXYZT Collectif in 2012, was a short life structure that stimulated a London high street.
- ¹⁵ Baudrillard. *Simulation*.
- ¹⁶ Meyer, H & Hays, K M. *Modernism and the Post-humanist Subject*. 1995, 103.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 136.
- ¹⁸ Jencks. *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*.
- ¹⁹ Mari. *Autoprogettazione?*
- ²⁰ TRANS-FORM was a design emporium and workshop I established in collaboration with Matea Gluscevic, 2015.
- ²¹ 'Construction costs remain high in part due to Australia's geographic isolation. Compared to Europe and the Americas, there is far less private sector competition to complete construction work and these companies import a large proportion of construction materials', according to Gareth Robbins, Arcadis Australia Pacific in 2017.
- ²² Citizens could buy boards at a starting price of €25 in return for having their names embossed on them or could elect to contribute higher amounts.
- ²³ Sponsors include the City of Melbourne, Creative Victoria and Development Victoria and ANZ bank.

Practice Structure

Fig. 39



Practice Biases and Fascinations

Fig. 40

<p>Realms / Disciplines</p> <p>Architecture Activism Research Construction</p>	<p>Design Process</p> <p>Unlocked / ongoing adaptation 1:1 scale design development Inclusive / organic collaborating Diagrams Writing Physical models Performative</p>	
<p>Design Aims</p> <p>Remove obstructions Build public character Unlock new behaviours Facilitate socialisation Synthesise systems Create moments Narrativise / storytell Sectional richness Invent new programmes Unlock playfulness Intensify overlooked spaces</p>	<p>Creative Predilection</p> <p>Making Disrupting Enabling Roaming Adapting Challenging Disassembling Questioning</p>	<p>Stylistic Fascinations</p> <p>Low-tech Low-cost Assemblage Revealed systems De-constructionism Spatial expression Understated Colour Self-build Tectonic Modernist Timber</p>

Urban Analysis

Amidst the tilt-up concrete walls, militarised real-estate signs and visually stimulating building facades that sit uneasily against the existing city grain, what opportunities do Australian cities provide for new forms of social intersection and new urban experience? This urban analysis scrutinises all terrains of the Australian city, freed from the constraints of real-estate allotments and the dictates of urban-planning masterplans, to question the public character of our cities and the social affordances they provide. In doing so, problems relating to the normative and highly regulated Australian city are identified, leading to the call to establish urban ruptures, or *micropia*'s,¹ where social relations and behaviours can be re-structured and new differences realised. These provisions, abetted by the full potential of architecture, contend and overcome a set of visible and invisible barricades and obstructions in the contemporary built environment. My elaboration of these physical limitations provides an account of the complex conditions that a small-scale, strategic intervention is immersed in.

The 'Old Normal'

The advent of the 'new normal'² during the global pandemic presented new urban realities that everyday citizens were acutely perceptive of, due to their immediacy. However, urban environments are always in a state of flux. As time progresses, new technologies, policies, social contexts and built fabric evolve, impacting how we use our cities, even if the masonry landmarks, arterial passages and general city plans remain largely static. Change unfolds gradually and we quickly become desensitised to new urban realities. Similarly, established constructs often evade our perception due to familiarity. To understand today's urban, Australian 'normal', it may be didactic to reflect on one of the longest surviving archetypes of western architecture: the church. In his text *Against Architecture*, Dennis Hollier interprets George Bataille's analysis of Notre-Dame Cathedral, who explained how its design was driven by the intention to demonstrate the power of the church – by diminishing people and making them feel as though their 'arms are too short to box with god'.³ Hollier's readings of Bataille remind us of the social instrumentalization of architecture, a force that conditions our cities present realities, even if it is no longer the product of intention:

'Architecture exists only to control and shape the entire social arena. It is constituted by this impulse propelling it to erect itself as the center and to organise all activities around itself'.⁴

Is it possible that the church sought to maintain its dominance by preserving its facilities as the uncontested locus of social connection and community, to the detriment of alternative, informal, socially facilitating spaces? By expanding Bataille's heretic architectural analysis to the urban environment, we may begin to appreciate ways that historical social ambitions and forms of control are embedded in western public structures and spaces. Observations may be drawn about how denominations of the church and other ruling bodies, such as the colonial military, have impacted the planning of Australian cities and provided the matrix for cultural approaches to spatial regulation. Aaron Magro emphasises the colonial impact on Australian public spaces in his historical reflections, suggesting that 'the architecture of (Australian) public spaces provided the environment for colonial dominance to be achieved.'⁵ Magro's critique continues by suggesting how the piazza was intentionally excluded from Australian cities; a measure that effectively omitted a fundamental social interface from the built fabric of our cities. Did this omission simply lead to the intensification of private domains? What took their place?

Architecture Shapes the Social Arena

While churches remain a familiar urban type today, their social concentration has significantly diminished since the 19th century. If we are to contemplate Bataille's analysis wholeheartedly, then which built structures have supplanted the church (or the piazza) as 'organising' agents of the 'social arena'? Have churches, former silos of social intersection, been sublimated into new, familiar built types; into today's consumption spaces, sports orientated institutions, shopping malls, gyms and alcohol-centred venues? If this is the case, then we need to build new 'churches', devoted to alternative social formations, rather than to simply bygone gods, heroes and consumer deities. While an obvious, underlying ecological argument for the provision of attractive, non-consumptive spaces exists, the purpose of this analysis is not to pick a battle with tariffed venues and



41 **Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris.**
Photo: lanfhunter



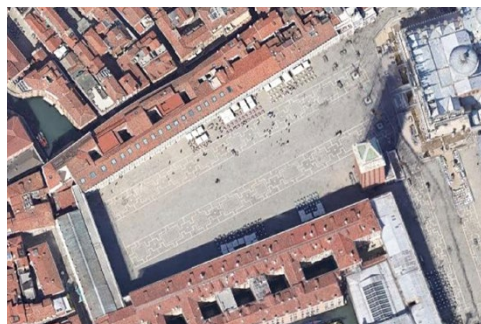
42 **Elder Park; once Adelaide's festival season closes, where do the public go?**
Photo: Andrew Beveridge



43 **Cedric Price, *Magnets*.**
Image: Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal



44 **Have civic structures such as billiard halls, music venues and town halls eroded from Australian cities?**
Photo: Boston Public Library



45 **The Piazza was omitted from the designs of Australian cities. Piazza San Marco, Venice.**
Photo: Google

commerce per se, but to establish differences; spatial variations to cater for the broadest forms of life in urban centres. What are the next frontiers of containment to disassemble, to allow new modes of existence and new states of freedom?

Private, All Too Private

The growth of private spheres and cellular spatial organisation in urban environments has appeared to accelerate to unprecedented levels in human history. Never have we been able to transition from cell to cell with such minimal human engagement, even preceding the pandemic. Michael Kimmelman, a columnist on architecture for the New York Times, echoed this perception when he reflected on the foundations of ‘social-distancing’⁶ during the pandemic:

‘We had already drifted toward a kind of social distancing by living increasingly on our phones and in virtual communities, bingeing on Netflix’.⁷

Kimmelman’s observation may sound like a confronting truth, as it challenges the lifestyles that many contemporary urbanites have chosen. In a similar vein, Cedric Price, the iconoclast architect of the late 20th century anticipated a societal trajectory away from public existence, when he observed the ‘erosion of civic structures’ in an English context. To counteract this, he proposed their replacement with innovative new architectural types, leading to his conception of *Magnets* that sought to re-invigorate London high streets, with the aim:

‘To design metropolitan structures that through their form and content create a social magnet for information, learning, sanctuary and delight – a reimagining of the role fulfilled by past civic structures such as town halls, municipal ballrooms, city parks and billiard halls’.⁸

Price’s vision for *Magnets* were never realised. Similarly, attempts to reinstate original civic-oriented structures appears stifled in Australian contexts. Köbberling Kaltwasser, the Berlin-based artists, identify social forces as obstructions to realising new types of public occupancies. Adopting an activist tongue, they describe arbiters of

inhibition as 'proponents and stooges of the neoliberal and entrepreneurial privatised city and order fanatics'.⁹ Köbberling Kaltwasser's critique may also be applicable to Australian contexts, given the western and economic consistencies. Drawing from my own personal experiences building provisional interventions in both Australian and European settings, I assume that their sharp position is a product of oppositions and obstruction they have experienced first-hand, when building installations and interventions in public spaces.

Invisible Obstructions

The city is, by its very nature, a complex amalgam of barricades and obstructions. Such dividing agents are the antithesis of public space, as they organise people into social groups, prevent movement, event and social contact points. Can it be assumed that incidental social intersections occur within the city's crevices, through organic, uninhibited, self-organisation, without the need of mediation? Slavoj Žižek the cultural theorist, offers insight that may repudiate this, when he alludes that complex codifications, rules and rituals are inscribed in private and public spaces, designating how people will operate and how they will socially intersect. In his text 'Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle' he states:

'When a building embodies democratic openness, this appearance is never a mere appearance – it has a reality of its own, it structures the way individuals interact'.¹⁰

Žižek examines the implicit injunctions encoded in capitalist spaces, while hinting that our perception or belief in a city's openness may not reflect how it truly functions. One example he cites is how in order to sit in a café, it's implied that one must purchase an item. An injunction like this performs as an invisible obstruction. It is one among a myriad of less detectable obstructions that are encoded in city spaces. Further implicit injunctions relate to cultural constructions surrounding how a public space 'should' be used. Control of these injunctions is exercised through behavioural gestures, forces of the public gaze and conditioning. While more explicit acts of invisible control include legal orders, verbal injunctions and individuals who exercise 'arbitrary power'.¹¹ An obvious example of such legal orders in Australian contexts is alcohol licensing

laws. Their ubiquitous presence eradicates a layer of incidental social intersection from the city and park regions, reinforcing the vacuum in which a social group may exist. The impact of this legal control is heightened by the commonplace inclusion of alcohol in Australian social contexts. My perception of the hindrance of alcohol licensing restrictions is made acute from cultural comparison with public spaces in Europe, such as Templehofer Feld in Berlin, where people drink alcohol without governance and without detriment to the public sharing of the space. In 1968 Hans Hollein proclaimed that 'everything is architecture'.¹² I want to reiterate and expand on Hollein's statement by suggesting that the implicit injunctions ascribed to spaces are also architecture, even if they are invisible. As are the social habits, customs, rituals and the myriad of behavioural attributes that designate how people will use spaces.

Recognising Interstitial Spaces

So far in this urban analysis I have reflected on several realities pertaining to our cities that we collectively disavow. From the plasticity of the city, to invisible codifications and controls, to the social plan that our cities have for us as a result of technological shifts or embedded historical remnants. I will add to this list a psychological rift associated with perceiving the possibilities of interstitial spaces. In his essay 'Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle' Slavoj Žižek states; 'In human dwellings there is an intermediate space which is disavowed: we all know it exists, but we do not really accept its existence – it remains ignored and (mostly) unsayable'.¹³ Can we expand Žižek's admission relating to domestic interstitial spaces to those of the urban environment? Interstitial spaces are latent resources of the city that present possibilities for public life. Žižek highlights the productive and supplementary role of the interstitial space when he cites the example of the Paris Opera. Žižek notes how it was on the staircases and in the foyers of the opera that 'the important foreplay took place'.¹⁴ Here, the interstitial served a principal moment of public, Parisian life by being the site where *surplus enjoyment* takes place.

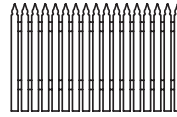
'If the play on stage was the enjoyment which made the public come, the social game which went on the staircase before the performance and during the intermissions was the foreplay which provided the *plus de jouir*, the surplus enjoyment making it worthwhile to come there'.¹⁵



Private Dwelling
Compound



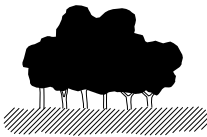
Interior Spaces



Fence



Vehicle Cell



Grass and Plantings



Supermarket



Screen



Barriers for Accessibility



Tradition and Customs



Anxiety and Social
reservation



Habit



Expectations and
Verbal Injunctions



Workplace



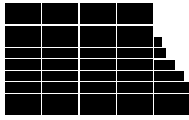
Registration
& Licences



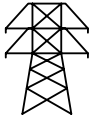
Liquor Licencing Zone



Footpath



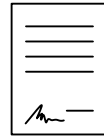
Uniform Urbanism



Infrastructure



Cost of Construction



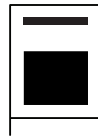
Lock-in Contracts



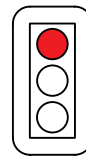
Bitumen / Roads



Colonial Legacies of Control



A-frames, Bollards and Other Incidental Objects



Traffic Lights



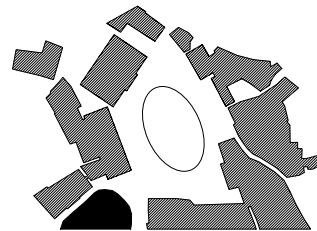
Social Receptivity and Openness



School / University



Religious Institution



The Omission of the Piazza from Australian Town Planning Plan: Tartini Square, Slovenia

In the case of the Paris Opera, a productive social space exploded upon a piece of infrastructure conventionally intended for utility: the staircase. Interstitial spaces in urban environments exist plentifully and often arise as gaps after other utilities and infrastructure have been served. Mackenzie Wark describes the intrinsic duality of the modern city, where ‘for every shiny metropolis there’s an anti-city of warehouses and waste dumps’.¹⁶ I want to draw attention to the half-way point between these poles as a focal point of civic potential, to what Žižek describes as the ‘Third Space’.¹⁷ Can principal moments of public life be realised in such spaces, by providing new and economical architectural definitions?

The Fate of Informal Open Spaces in Australian Spaces

When reflecting on the disavowal of interstitial urban spaces, I am reminded of the example of the *Hōjōki Terminal*, a project documented in this study. I was surprised to learn that it was the first architectural installation to inhabit the Art Gallery of South Australia’s rear lawns. This surprise came because of the qualities that this outdoor region afforded. For a trained eye, it appears an ideal site for an engaging and stimulating architectural intervention, as it is open, public, visible, spacious and largely remains bare and underutilised. A site of this nature presents the gallery with an opportunity to engage with the architectural discipline, something that is not necessarily perceptible after visiting the space. Is architecture not an intrinsic discipline of fine art? This may indicate the habit to disavow interstitial spaces and the architectural discipline itself from Australian cultural settings. It caused me to speculate whether architecture is often overlooked, or its potentials are yet to be truly explored. This is especially the case for provisional architecture and smaller scales, through lack of obvious examples. If my reading of this disposition is accurate, it heightens the irony of instances where the public lose spatial contests to inanimate objects. We culturally accept a kaleidoscope of spatial contingencies, yet when a space has authorship, people seem liable to internalise conflicts.¹⁸ Contests for space in Australian cities are lost to A-frames, garden beds, fences, cars, electric scooters and poker machines, among an ever-expanding list of examples. On top of this, open spaces that could be set aside for public commons are almost pre-destined

to become parking-lots in Australia, or are fenced off and gated, while alternative strategies for use are rarely adopted. A prime example is the Le Cornu Site in Adelaide: a strange city icon, where a large, central block on a commercial high street attained little other creative use besides a large-scale carpark.¹⁹ Do we lack the imagination for generating inventive temporary programs in informal spaces like the Le Cornu site or AGSA? Or do other cultural forces impede the use of architectural tools in Australian settings, relating to our openness and receptivity? What transformations would the Australian city experience if architects suspended their fetishes relating to aesthetics and ‘sustainability’,²⁰ and replaced them with the simplified ambition to enrich our social fabric through innovative spatial measures? I am not claiming that aesthetics and sustainability are poor aspirations; they should instead be intrinsic considerations and beyond debate by this point in history.

The City as Analog Synthesizer: The Dynamic City

To understand the potential of any parcel of land across a city, we must take into account its means for access. In today’s cities we can transcend the limitations of place due to the mobilisation accredited to two critical technologies: the automobile and our personal devices. This condition was anticipated by Melvin Webber in the 1960’s when he described the city as a ‘non place urban realm’²¹ of modern life, one often viewed from the window of a car. Ironically today, we can also add the ‘window’ of our personal devices. Webber conceptualised the modern city as a giant switchboard – a large-scale system that facilitated communication. He argued that density, or place, were not the defining factors of cities, but rather ‘dynamic locations’ were made accessible by technology.

I want to riff off Melvin Webbers idea of the city as a giant switchboard and propose that the city is an analog synthesiser. A complex form of switchboard, composed of rack, cords and modules. In essence, the ‘rack’ (the city), cords (the conduits of movement through the city) and the modules (provisional interventions; ‘dynamic locations’ that can be plugged in to create new ‘sounds’) work together as system. This analogy draws attention to the plasticity of the city and the possibility of original sites emerging irrespective of their previous success as a public space. It



47 Example of a discarded urban space.
The University of Adelaide, North Terrace.



48 The fate of informal open spaces in
Australian cities; the former Le Cornu's
site, O'Connell Street, North Adelaide.
Photo: City of Adelaide



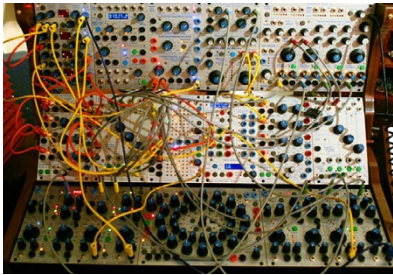
49 A forgotten urban space; the
rear lawns of the Art Gallery of
South Australia (AGSA).
Image: Google



50 Spatial contingencies and conjection in
Australian cities require design attention.
Shown: Vaughan Place, Adelaide, CBD.



51 Do we need to *re-learn* how to inhabit our
public spaces? If so, what tools are available?
Shown: Rundle Mall, Adelaide.



52 The analog synthesizer; a metaphor for the city and the dynamism of links between locations.
Photo: Michael Tiemann



53 Adelaide's congested Riverbank Precinct.
Image: Google



54 Do Australian alcohol licensing laws eradicate a layer of social activity from urban centres?
Photo: The Advertiser



55 Superstudio, *Life Without Objects*. 'If architecture is merely the codifying of bourgeois model of ownership and society, then we must reject architecture' – Natalini, 1971.
Image: Cristiano Toraldo di Francia



56 Templehofer Feld, Berlin; an urban void that unlocks a range of dynamic and informal activities. Image shows former airport building behind.
Photo: Nic Simanek

emphasises that this success, however, is dependent on the realisation of mobility (cords). Interventions, objects and dynamic spatial appropriations must work in concert with a city's paved, pedestrianised realms and open spaces. Furthermore, like a synthesiser module, a provisional intervention is more likely to be used if it is exciting, uncomplicated and nuanced. Generic alternatives are not likely to warrant people's attention; they call for invention and competent execution.

A public space that epitomises the realisation of 'dynamic locations' is Templehofer Feld in Berlin. Previously an airport, it has been preserved as a public space, or urban void, rather than providing land for (possibly) equally needed housing. Characterised by expansive land that has been minimally modified or curated, it enables vast arrays of temporal uses that 'dynamically' transform over time. Locations across the space are stimulated by objects and instruments, ranging from architectural interventions, to kites, recreational tools, and even a guerilla herb garden. Its success as an urban space is confirmed by the sheer numbers of people that attend it and the spectrum of activities that occur in the space. This success may seem counter-intuitive, as it side-steps the traditional architectural fixtures, landscaping, master-planning and maintenance one would expect as mandatory in an Australian context. Here, people catalyse events, contributing energy and life to the field, veritably stimulated by the elimination of invisible obstructions. It contends architectural ideals that a space must be 'made good' or repaired, rather than being productively empty. What lessons for Australian cities can we inherit from Templehofer Feld? The informality of this space contends the high regulation of Australian urban spaces. It presents a utopian realisation that uncannily recalls Superstudio's conceptual vision of a city freed of obstructions, architecture and town planning;²² open, semi-paved realms and canvases that people can project their identities into.

Bituminised Cities

Bitumen, an environmentally alarming oil-based product, forms the uncontested majority of public surfaces in our urban centres. This follows unabated financial investment into road infrastructure since the mid 20th century, dwarfing investment into pedestrianised movement, cycling, rail and alternative transportation

forms. Prioritising the car has followed certain economic stigmas, however, the dominance of the car has come at a social cost that is conveniently overlooked. Before cars were normalised as high-speed projectiles and threats to public safety, road territories had an equality of use. Pedestrians had rights to drift, gather and stop in zones utilised by vehicles. Roads were enabled as public spaces where incidental social intersection could occur because the top speed of vehicles was significantly reduced. This quality freed pedestrians from readily congested footpaths, that instead inherited the implicit function as a movement zone into buildings. The car today presents an inherent deadlock that is a result of our own design: while being liberated by our cars we are simultaneously enslaved by them. We are also enslaved by the infrastructure that serves them. How are we to interpret Jane Jacobs' contention that the car in the 1970's was the 'chief destroyer of American communities'?²³ Jan Gehl Associates rally with Jacobs' earlier observations by noting that cars 'remove faces from streets'.²⁴ Alongside this are everyday anti-social behaviours that emerge on roads, products we collectively disavow in order to defend our vehicles liberating and protective affordances. The privileged codification of bituminised territories as 'serving vehicles only' combines with their urban ubiquity to eradicate vast expanses of potential public social space. To lay feet on bitumen today is to walk on a bed of hot coals.

Successful examples of *paved* terrains do exist in Australian cities, such as Federation Square in Melbourne, however, a normative state of congestion is commonly apparent and their occurrence remains too infrequent, especially in the hearts of Australian cities. Councils will spend fortunes on masterplans, trialing different locations for bins; they will install trees, remove trees, re-install trees and will over-curate spaces. However, the core reason for this restlessness might be because the wrong question is being asked. Shopping strips of Adelaide, Melbourne and Hobart, for example, may simply require blank, open, generous, paved, pedestrianised territories, invigorated by temporal dynamic objects.

Sedentary Suburbanism

Given the prevalence of car-containment and the demise of the urban flâneur, do we still experience the city with the same 'Immense joy'²⁵ that Baudelaire experienced in 19th century Paris? Do we still derive the same inspiration that Nietzsche derived



57 Australian streets prior to the codification of bitumen as a non-pedestrian realm.
Photo: Museum Victoria



58 Reclaim the bitumen; has the prioritisation of vehicles in Australian cities driven the extinction of the urban flâneur?
Pulteney Street, Adelaide.



60 Congested roads lead to car incarceration. South Road, Adelaide.
Photo: Tony Lewis, Indaily

Image removed due to copyright

Meme detournement of the Beatles Abbey Road album cover

59

Aggression and other anti-social behaviours are normalised on our roads – the defining built constituent of our cities.
Image: unknown



61 Personal devices assist with access to urban locations, but often displace individuals after they have arrived.
Photo: EugeneEdge / Shutterstock

from a walk? When Slavoj Žižek indicts the warning that ‘the individual of the scientific age is losing their capacity to experience themselves as a centre of energy’,²⁶ the shortcomings of our sedentary dispositions appear more urgent than ever before. As we scroll through the smorgasbord of food options available on UberEATS, for example, from the comfort of our living room sofas, we not only negate our own two legs, but also our urban environment and a layer of chance social interaction that may occur. This mode of heightened control facilitated by technology substitutes the footpath for the glow of a personal device, absorbing our limited dopamine reservoirs, euphoria and emotion, instead of revealing these in the urban environment, or during interpersonal engagement. In a more general sense, online culture has enabled people to experience the world vicariously through others, via TikTok and YouTube videos, supplanting lived experience and the corresponding social intercourse, the conquest of fears, exposure to real life consequences and sensory experience – all factors that might predicate the experience of oneself as a ‘centre of energy’. The greatest challenge we may face is recognising the implications of a technologically saturated suburban environment. In his foreword to Lars Lerups book, *One Million Acres and No Zoning*, Edward Dimendberg reflects on Houston’s condition as a ‘pariah’²⁷ and its ‘invisibility’ to urban studies. The car-dominated, suburban, Australian city appears similarly situated in a ‘blind spot’²⁸ of urban analysis, to borrow Dimendberg’s pun. Combined with the automobile obsession, is the unreality presented by these urban environments, where Boydian (Australian) ‘featurism’²⁹ matches Houston’s ‘tastelessness’³⁰ and skylines jump skittishly between visual themes and striking colour palettes against blazing blue Australian skies. Dimendberg furthermore perceives Houston as a place where ‘bodies, automobiles and distances appear larger than elsewhere’,³¹ compounding a sense of unreality, but also noting the impacts of the urban environment on the body: a dark by-product that require health measures more drastic than token government warnings on cigarette packets. I believe that answers lie in pedestrianism and other forms of passive exercise, in urban and social connection. The dominance of the car is antithetical to other forms of movement that go against the grain, leading to forms of arbitrary punishment where cyclists, for example, vainly attempt to access urban environments on inadequate, discontinuous networks in Australian cities – displacing users and exposing them to deleterious mental health by-products, in addition to the more overt risk

of physical injury. These issues represent the dark underbelly of the suburban Australian environment and the difficulties we evidently face, as a society, in addressing issues that contend the status quo. The nature in which we are bound to our cars, and the manifold shortcomings of this dominant technology remind me of a tale from Greek Mythology, that portrays the inception of technology as a story of tragedy. When Prometheus stole fire and gave it to humanity, he was sentenced to eternal punishment by Zeus by being bound to a boulder.

The City as a Product of Market Forces

The Australian architectural industry appears to excel at delivering normative built types, but what about more radical approaches to space? What Australian practices exist pursuant to new forms of social collectivity, beyond the silos ordained by commercial design briefs? Kenneth Frampton in his text 'Modern Architecture – A Critical History', suggests that no convincing 'over-arching vision exists outside the consumerist waste economy'.³² While the term *social* is familiar in the lexicon of our national profession and associated media (in the Australian context), is it more traditionally used to mask the hegemonic dimensions of our planning which are dominated by market forces? Rem Koolhaas, the celebrated urban planner, expands on Frampton's dictum when he elucidates the baseline driving agent of our built environment, noting how 'the triumph of the market economy since the late 1970's'³³ has propelled the architectural profession's determination to serve the private sector:

"...architecture no longer expresses public values but instead the values of the private sector. It is in fact a regime – the ~~Y€\$~~ regime – and it has invaded every domain, whether we want it or not. This regime has had a very big impact on cities and the way we understand cities. With safety and security as selling points, the city has become vastly less adventurous and more predictable'.³⁴ Can we rely on the market to produce the right types of spaces for our city? While drawing attention to the predictability of civic spaces, Koolhaas warns of the ruling forces that have conditioned the briefs prepared by clients for architects and planners. If we were to reprogram the city, what would the new selling points be, beyond safety and security? Have our efforts to generate 'safety

and security³⁵ outweighed the provision of certain social affordances in the Australian city? If the basis of advertisement and consumption is to establish a void that a commodity can then heal, then what if our cities, through continual transformation on the basis of serving capital, are similarly subservient to engineering voids of subjectivity? I raise this idea as an antagonistic possibility.

Architectural interventions can awaken new territories that supplement consumptive spaces. The anticipated decline of the Australian high street or mall, in the face of rising online and mail-based services (Amazon, eBay and Alibaba etc..) could trigger renewed interest in architectural curation of space by generating user-experiences that cannot be rivalled by online convenience.

The Australian Architectural Discipline

Koolhaas' identification of the emphasis on safety and security in today's cities might illuminate what is implicit about an award-winning Community Centre in Juliana, Sydney.³⁶ If we interpret how the building speaks to the street, one might readily observe the 4.5m tall powder-coated steel fence, window shutters, defensive netting and obscure window openings in the building envelope. Do these measures speak to a commitment to community openness, or a commitment to security measures? What does the building offer the public realm, considering it is a community centre? It appears everything is locked up behind security measures more reminiscent of expat settlements in Caracas, Venezuela.

The National Architecture Awards celebration of 'social' contributions seem far from a radical vision of what can be realised collectively. While architects and architectural education might receive some of the blame for the lack of imagination of ways that urban space can be invigorated, a key obstruction might be the ways that architects are compensated. Would a client approach an architect if they did not have a site, nor any finances? Would architects make personal financial risks in a country with high living costs? Given the economic obstructions of object-based planning, new economic models and conduits of finance must be invented to realise these spaces of 'surplus enjoyment'.³⁷ It is the responsibility of



62 Example of a decongested urban space.
Tartini Square, Piran, Slovenia.
Photo: Jaka Jeraša



63 The legislation and bureaucracy that governs Australian public spaces can inhibit organic emergence of new use.
Photo: George Rinhart / Corbis / Getty Images



64 *Collins St, 5pm*, by John Brack illuminates urban forces of orthodoxy; it depicts what Lefebvre refers to as *abstract space* – a space perpetuated through grids, plans, and schedules.
Image: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

65

Have Australian cities become overly focused on security and safety? *Juanita Nielsen Community Centre, Sydney* – 2017 AIA National Architecture Awards: Public Architecture, Neeson Murcutt Architects.
Photo: Brett Boardman (edited)

Image removed due to copyright

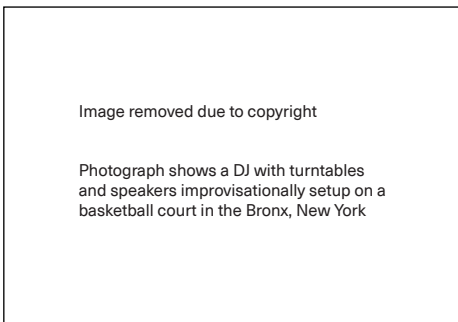
Juanita Nielsen Community Centre by Neeson Murcutt Architects. Photograph edited to parody a scene from the film *They Live*, 1988



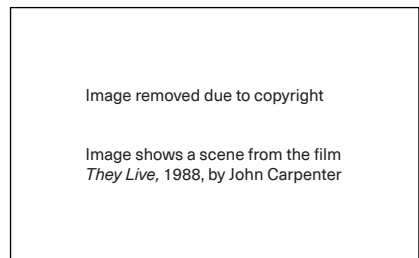
66 The Barbican Centre, London; demonstrates the possibility of a successful car-free urban development. Photo: Richard Le Messurier



67 La Défense, Paris; expansive, paved pedestrian regions enable citizens to drift. They unlock urban experience, passive social intersection and public moments. Photo: Edison McCullen



68 *G Man* — Park Jam in the Bronx. What tools can be spontaneously deployed to re-structure our urban spaces? NYC block parties have used hip hop to unlock a latent urban reality. Photo: Henry Chalfant



69 *They Live*, John Carpenter, 1988; a film that commentates on 'the ¥€\$ regime' of the modern city, leading to the paranoid fiction that Los Angeles is ruled by a league of shapeshifting reptilians, hinting at a possible inhuman quality of modern urban environments. Image: Universal Pictures

the profession to create public awareness of the potential of architecture where it would not typically be expected and to challenge the ambitions of clients and stakeholders to establish an ethic of sharing and diversifying the city's public spaces.

The City Shapes Us

When considering the repair of a bomb-ravaged House of Commons after World War II, Winston Churchill observed that, 'we shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us'.³⁸ Churchill had a point: every structure in the physical environment is didactic, even at the most minimal level. As we negotiate a given physical entity, or space, we generate a neural pattern, or use an existing one. This means that spaces indebt us with habits and tools that are carried into new scenarios that are often unconsciously replicated. A highly normative and regulated city without a gamut of spatial exceptions is instructive to citizens in terms of how they will socially intersect. The problem with this scenario is when the total sphere of influence of the urban environment reinforces social behaviours and mindsets that are undesirable, or unconstructive. Social habits, customs and rituals work in concert with physical spaces; they participate in structuring our experience.

When considering behavioural reinforcement of normative urban fixtures, my attention is drawn to traffic lights. What emotional and behavioural patterns ensue from the specific chronological structure we are habitually exposed to? I theorise that Australian traffic light systems symbolise a sudden onset of danger during the expedient transition from green to yellow to red, demanding defensive response. After viewing a dozen sequences of traffic lights, could we expect that after leaving one's car, the next experience will be treated with the same neural patterns? What if urban restlessness and trends of excessive travel and tourism, pre-COVID, reflect unconscious desires to escape from the burden of urban systems? Traffic systems and roads represent a highly ordered urban realm, but they are not exclusive phenomena. The Australian city is generally highly regulated, curated and maintained in comparison to other cities around the world; I reiterate the example of Australian alcohol licensing restrictions and the extreme pecuniary punishments that result from disobedience.

Car-dominated cities demand a certain pragmatic ethic from each individual and punish those who do not develop these sensibilities. It punishes being adrift, sometimes with the sounding of a horn, however every person should have the right to manifest a state of drifting up to a certain limit. Drifting and roaming are subversive acts that empower the individual as they acquiesce and override various injunctions and demands that society attempts to impose. A vehicular-pragmatist ethic echoes into other tasks that people do; mentalities are focused centrally on 'functions' that follow the abstract needs that arise in the city, while less explicit functions are dismissed as arbitrary. I argue that being adrift is also pragmatic, as our minds need respite; a function that serves our mental health. Being adrift invite's chance events, encounters, surprise, dreaming and emancipation from the secret plan that a city would otherwise have for us. Australian cities need more spatial arrangements that are adrift from normalcy, so that peoples' unconscious desires and needs are better catered to. By highlighting how our cities shape us, we form an urban argument for providing novel exceptions in the city fabric.

Towards a 'Micropia'

A micropia is a spontaneous moment of architectural intensification within a given urban environment where 'social explosions',³⁹ dialogues and other embodied experiences are stimulated. They are conceived as utopian, or 'good' exceptions to generic, everyday and contingent city spaces. Embodied presence carries a vast set of affordances; communication tools, body language, behavioural intelligence, emotional connection, social excitement, social etiquette and cultural customs. We need spaces to rebuild authentic communication lines, to compete or combine with technological versions. Physical spaces are an alternative reality that contend the delimited political space, or silo, of social media and excessive exposure to distant ideological narrative. The utopian dimension of a micropia arise from the values that face-to-face dialogue and embodied presence afford, by assisting the cultivation of empathy for those who may have different viewpoints and empowering citizens to express viewpoints more freely, with less fear of persecution. Embodied presence exposes our limitations of time, energy and knowledge as opposed to the eternally switched-on sphere of cyberspace. Ascribing value to

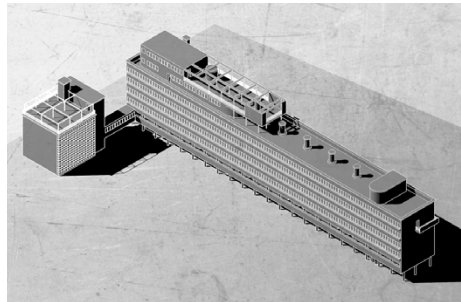
embodied presence is not a rejection of technology, a 'new age' romanticism or a move back to a grassroots 'nature' – it's a response to the limitations and contingencies that dominant technologies have generated. Technology is an extension of humans and architecture should play a role in extending our inherent limitations, even if it means catalysing something as primordial and 'low-tech' as embodied experience and face-to-face dialogue. Micropias, as catalysts for new forms of embodied presence and exchange, must be realised as a matter of urgency to combat lingering, alienating forces of the pandemic.

The micropia embodies an egalitarian ethic that could be associated with Marxism in lieu of its ambition to create non-consumption oriented public spaces. But where it differs is that it does not attempt to procure universal and widespread changes, nor does it dismiss the private enterprise of consumptive spaces. Rather than complete upheaval of a system, can we address existing shortcomings by synthesising new elements into an ecology of working parts? The micropia is about creating exceptions – bright, temporal moments of collective energy and rupture in the everyday fabric of the city. They facilitate consumptive spaces by adding a chronological phase to urban experiences that cater to our social and spiritual needs. I want to free the citizen using the full capacities of architecture and design, re-invigorating the utopianism of the 20th century, but on a small scale, within a delimited space and without claims of far-reaching impact. This is a reaction to social aspirations of architects of the 20th century, who generally focused their ambitions on monolithic proposals, as grand visions for society. From *Plan Voisin* by Le Corbusier, to the speculative megastructures of Constant Nieuwenhuys, to Hilberseimer's *Großstadt* and similar housing-block social condensers of the Russian Constructivists. It may also be relevant to consider that the original concept for a utopia was an island, in Sir Thomas More's novel 'Utopia',⁴⁰ an independent and small entity. Some urban environments are more profitable to the realisation of a micropia than others. In their text *Designing Disorder* Pablo Sendra and Richard Sennett argue for an underdetermined form of city-making to 'disrupt rigid forms'⁴¹ to allow for 'life enhancing'⁴² alternatives. A less structured environment would serve a micropia by awakening conduits for access and by providing plentiful, supportive break-out spaces. As a microcosm of the city, a micropia

Image removed due to copyright

Photograph shows a domestic living space with open-ended furniture elements for varied leisurely appropriations

- 70** A domestic *micropia*; alternative spatial arrangements invite new proxemic relationships, behaviours and communication.
Photo: Golden Homes



- 71** 20th century monolithic aspirations; Luca Lanini and Natalia Melikova, *Narkomfin Building*.
Image: Pisa University Press

Image removed due to copyright

Image of physical model of *New Babylon* by Constant Nieuwenhuys

- 72** *New Babylon*; an architectural speculation for a future city by Constant Nieuwenhuys that proposed alternative life experiences, or *situations*.
Image: Constant Nieuwenhuys



- 73** An urban *micropia*; at the Spanish Steps in Rome co-habitation is facilitated by the ordering mechanism of the steps.
Photo: iStock.com / Vladislav Zolotov

Image removed due to copyright

Photograph shows outdoor decking arrangement of the prefabricated home *Yō no ie* by Muji

- 74** *Yō no ie*; this kit home by Muji features a *fulcrum* for social intersection – a sunken fire pit ‘programmatically layered’ with a deck. The openness of the space caters for the unexpected.
Photo: MUJI

similarly profits from less rigidity, to allow for informal social intersections and freedom. This is achieved through the provision of architectural fixtures that are strategically open-ended, rather than a product of contingency. By strategizing for the unexpected and framing the unexpected with architectural qualities, a utopian 'good place' is realised and its potential optimised.

Leisure and Play

The functions that a micropia afford have been identified by mining the work of previous utopian thinkers and artists who sought to extrapolate the needs of individuals. Constant Nieuwenhuys' fictional concept for a radical future city prompted my early thinking about the issues in this analysis. Nieuwenhuys' project for *New Babylon* depicts a city in which Homo-Ludens (man at play) would wander from one leisure environment to another in search of new sensations, situations and alternative life experiences. An environment where 'work', 'family-life' and civic responsibility is discarded and the imperative of the clock and the fixed abode is removed, elevating self-fulfilment and satisfaction as the primary goals.

Drawing on the writings of Walter Benjamin,⁴³ a micropia seeks to re-invigorate the urban flâneur in the 21st century by providing moments of discovery and reward in the generic city. Where has this leisurely, urban wanderer gone? Nowhere, they are waiting at traffic lights. Brett Steele, in his introduction to Lars Lerup's book, 'One Million Acres and no Zoning', admits: 'The Houston depicted in Lerup's tale confirms that we've forever left behind the era of the flâneur'.⁴⁴ I draw strong comparisons between Houston and other Australian cities; as prototypical suburban, car-oriented metropolises.

Summation

This urban analysis questions the public character of the contemporary Australian city, unpacking a set of barricades and obstructions that supplant it. It portrays our urban environments as the result of contingency, indebted to a broad range

of shaping forces that have aggregated over the lifespan of Australian cities. Ranging from colonial and historical ambitions, to market forces, to bureaucracy and administration, towards shifts in social values that increasingly privilege technology and private cellular arrangement over social massing, free movement and overlapping boundaries. These conditions establish the rifts that temporary, ‘microplan’ interventions seek to heal, or at least, react to. They also found practical constraints that other public projects of varied scales and mediums might seek to address. We need to zoom in and enrich spaces at the ground level by offering more stimulating, appealing and diverse claimable spaces. Our cities will also profit decongestion and overcoming biases that privilege certain forms of movement, to service an equality of access. We must develop dignity for our public spaces before we can appreciate their exciting products. It is hoped that this urban analysis will challenge councils, planners and potential clients to embrace socialisation as a profitable ambition that can underpin the vitality of a site and to recognise architectural invention as a means for realising this aim.

Notes

¹ A novel term conceived during this investigation. See glossary for further elaboration.

² The ‘New Normal’ was a catchphrase that emerged at the start of the global pandemic and was widely popularised.

³ Johnson, *Your Arms are Too Short to Box with God*, 1927.

⁴ Hollier and Bataille. *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*.

⁵ Aaron Magro notes ‘...the architecture of public spaces provided the environment for colonial dominance to be achieved. While towns and new suburbs in the young colony were deeply influenced by European urban design, a key feature was excluded – the piazza. Governor

Richard Bourke made very clear to surveyors that new towns in New South Wales (which at the time encompassed present-day Victoria) must not include public squares as these could promote rebellion.’ *Australians Don’t Loiter in Public Space – the Legacy of Colonial Control by Design*, theconversation.com

⁶ ‘Social distancing’ describes measures intended to prevent the spread of a COVID-19. It may also be referred to as physical distancing.

⁷ Kimmelman. *Can City Life Survive Coronavirus?* 2020.

⁸ Price. *Cedric Price Works 1952-2003*. 2016, 811.

⁹ Köbberling et al. *City as a Resource: One Man’s Trash is Another Man’s Treasure: City as a resource*, 2016.

Continued...

¹⁰ Žižek, Architectural Parallax.

¹¹ The term 'arbitrary power' was taken from a text by David Graeber, who explains that 'we cling to bureaucracy because we are afraid of arbitrary power, and bureaucracy lets us pretend that arbitrary power doesn't exist'. Graeber. The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy.

¹² Hollein. Alles Ist Architektur, in Bau: Schrift für Architektur und Städtebau.

¹³ Žižek. Architectural Parallax, Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Wark. The Stack to Come – On Benjamin Bratton's 'The Stack'.

¹⁷ The term 'The Third Space' is borrowed from the essay Architectural Parallax, by Slavoj Žižek.

¹⁸ This was an outcome of research interventions.

¹⁹ One exception was the use of the Le Cornu site as an annual Christmas market.

²⁰ Sobek. Architecture Isn't Here to Stay, 34.

²¹ Webber. The Urban Place and the Non-place Urban Realm.

²² Natalini. SuperDesign, 210. '...if architecture is merely the codifying of bourgeois model of ownership and society, then we must reject architecture; if architecture and town planning is merely the formalization of present unjust social divisions, then we must reject town planning and its cities...until all design activities are aimed towards meeting primary needs. Until then, design must disappear. We can live without architecture...'

²³ Jacobs, Dark Age Ahead.

²⁴ Gehl and Svarre, How to Study Public Life.

²⁵ Baudelaire, The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays.

²⁶ Žižek. Living in the End Times.

²⁷ Dimendburg and Lerup. One Million Acres & No Zoning, 21.

²⁸ Ibid, 21.

²⁹ Boyd. The Australian Ugliness.

³⁰ Dimendburg and Lerup. One Million Acres & No Zoning, 21.

³¹ Ibid, 21.

³² Frampton, Modern Architecture – A Critical History.

³³ Koolhaas. Are Smart Cities Condemned to Be Stupid?

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The building was awarded an AIA National Architecture Award for Public Architecture in 2017.

³⁷ Žižek, Architectural Parallax.

³⁸ Winston Churchill, in his speech to the House of Lords, October 28, 1943.

³⁹ Lefebvre. The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution, 109.

⁴⁰ More, Utopia.

⁴¹ Sendra and Sennett, Designing Disorder, 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Benjamin. The Arcades Project.

⁴⁴ Lerup and Steele. One Million Acres & No Zoning, 17.

Activism and Artistic Practice

The consideration of human relations and the ‘social context’¹ of an artist finds precedent in relational art practices² that date back to 1990’s. A theoretical framework was conceived where an artist was viewed as the catalyst for interpersonal relations, generating ‘ways of living and models of action’³ in the words of Nicolas Bourriaud – as is reflected on in an earlier section of this study. This sought to counteract the normative restraints of a private gallery setting and enable traditional observers of art to become participants. Given the pretext of this practice, it must be emphasised that this investigation outlines new awareness’s – but not the emergence of a new general theory relating to the subject and their social context. My design practices have unconsciously intersected with this theoretical standpoint, despite my retroactive exposure to it. Relational art practice theory presents new opportunities for experimentation in broader disciplines. I sense this is especially the case when applied to urban-minded projects – given the complexity of public space and the possibilities achievable with architectural tools. In this chapter, I offer a brief overview of ways I have unconsciously repositioned myself as an author in order to generate new social relations, on a number of non-architectural projects. These projects have been extrapolated from the *Backstory* chapter as they are incongruous with my architectural practice ambitions. However, they do contain reflective value.

Urban Placards

‘Our central idea is the construction of *situations*, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior *passional* quality.’⁴ – Guy Debord

In 2010, shortly after graduating, I embarked on devising and fabricating a set of approximately 100 small placards (45mm x 60mm) that shared semblance with ordinary street signs, containing satirical and political phrases. These placards were then sited in public settings around the Adelaide CBD affixed to existing buildings and other urban elements⁵ with adhesive. This self-driven, ‘guerilla’ project sought to fulfil my desire for a creative output as I sought for a position in an architectural practice. Each placard contained an original phrase; some sought to stir, startle or humour, while others expressed political opinions relating

to their immediate context. The guerrilla siting of the placards and their political expressions reflected an activist modality, while their semblance with ordinary street signs introduced subterfuge and a layer of interpretative ambiguity. At the time, the project was inspired by readings on The Situationist International⁶ and aimed to instigate situations⁷ by intensifying ordinary and interstitial urban sites with engaging content, to reward flâneurs and other receptive urban wanderers. Despite the size of the intervention, its methodology of realisation and its intent intersects with the architectural interventions of this study. During their installation a performative quality arose from the tension the unusual activity generated. Consistent with other projects I have developed, collaborators emerged serendipitously and with enthusiasm to assist with installation, albeit to my surprise. The placards challenged notions surrounding authorship of public spaces and utilised artistic mediums for an immediacy of outcome.

A Tribute to the Power Walker

In 2014 my current housemates at the time and I experimented by eating dinners in the front yard of a residential share-house in an Adelaide suburb.⁸ This was prompted by discussions surrounding the disuse of the yard and its overlooked potential. The yard was generous, lawned, treed and publicly exposed to the street by a low-lying fence. It was agreed that the public exposure of the yard should, logically, not deter its usage. The dinners sought to transform the yard into a living space and combined as an act of protest against a perceived, concealed quality of suburban Australian domesticity. The leisurely use of the space generated a subtle yet perceptible tension with other users of the street who were unaccustomed to the optic. People attending the dinners noted their surprise at the frequency of passing exercisers – what appeared as an unrivalled and dominant user of the public space. To ironically celebrate this dominant user I developed a graphic image titled ‘A Tribute to the Power Walker’. This image was later used as a conceptual departure point for a Parking Day sculpture. The prevalence of this urban figure engaged in exercise presented an imbalance considering the domestic nature of the setting, and the assumption that leisure and enjoyment should seamlessly harmonize with a suburban setting. This brings to light questions regarding the public nature of the Australian

front yard. Is it authentically public or does its usage require legitimisation? The power walker may have legitimised their public appearance because they were serving a practical function (exercise) – to again refer to the ‘pragmatist’ ethic that I mention in the Urban Analysis. The homage to this urban figure intended to be humorous, considering the underlying alienation of the subject who roams a set of streets at a constant speed, alone and unreactive to events in their environment.

Public Freeform Dance

In 2012, I generated a *situation* in Elder Park for the making of hip-hop video, with assistance from members of Adelaide’s creative community. Filmed at the Elder Park Rotunda near Adelaide’s CBD, incidental passers-by were invited to participate in an experimental free-form dance routine to be used as the backdrop to a rap performance. New serendipitous arrivals were welcomed and guided by other invited performers to dance with unmitigated freedom. What stood out was the spontaneous eruption of festival and passions. The event triggered spontaneous transformation of people’s behaviour. The key takeaway from this experiment was the establishment of a benchmark behavioural intensity that provisional interventions may seek to realise.

TRANS-FORM

A hybrid shop–workshop–social space was conceived to activate a shopfront tenancy for RENEW Adelaide⁹ in 2015. A collaboration with maker Matea Gluscevic, the space was used to fabricate and market a range of bespoke designed products including clothing, jewellery, furniture and other domestic items made from ‘hacked’¹⁰ IKEA products. While the items created were marked by tectonic and material experimentation, the value to this investigation is the behavioural situation catalysed by the space. I view the space as a public intervention in a shopfront, in contrast to an outdoor public setting. Specific passers-by would show vigorous curiosity, seemingly triggered by the amorphous nature of the shop and the activities unfolding within. New objects were manufactured in plain public view, energising the space with a spirit of creativity



75 Dance; still images of a 'situation' generated for a hip hop film-clip. Video: Milo Gluth



76 An activist mindset; example of an *Urban Placard*. Satirical and political phrases were developed and tactically sited across the Adelaide CBD.



77 Enigma and nuance invite interpretation and discussion. *Untitled*; painting, acrylic on canvas.



78 *TRANS-FORM*; this hybridised shop-workshop-retail space disrupted the codification of everyday retail strips by unlocking performative making, incidental collaborating and by encouraging extended public visitation.

and invention that appealed to people's passions. The space incorporated symbols and elements to reinforce its public quality, such as generous seating and a curated sparseness reminiscent of a public facility or gallery setting.

Making

After reflecting on a small set of non-architectural experiments that sought to catalyse new social relations, I will now briefly examine an extraneous way that my practice extends its activist ambitions. When Gretchen Wilkins reflects that 'cities emerge through making things'¹¹ she provides a reminder of the enriching contribution that art and crafts practices make for the assembly of city fabric. In some ways, architecture could be imagined as a distillation of creative practices that surface from a grass-roots level. Making fuels my creative spirit and unlocks awareness's for alternative medium approaches. This sometimes involves the upcycling and re-coding of everyday and found materials. An example involves the adaptation of an Adelaide Metro bus ticket into a business card, in 2010. For this project I layered and integrated a new band of information onto existing and pre-used tickets. Its subversion lies in its contention of cleanliness, rather than establishing a purified clean slate – as is often the convention for architectural promotional materials, or even built projects. Through this means an urban quality was achieved and a subtle form of protest against commonplace wastefulness was expressed.

Visual Arts Experimentation

Visual art is an artistic medium I have consistently revisited as a source of creative output. Works have been developed through an organic process that I argue, mirrors the way that my practice has developed provisional interventions. I draw on everyday experience and emergent events, incorporating content that jumps out and captures my fascination. This has led to works of variety that subtly deviate in medium with each iteration, with some consistent themes. The repositioning of myself as a creator of visual art (for a medium I am not trained in) compounds the sense of novelty and surprise inherent to the works.

However, given the concerns raised during this chapter does this generate new social relations? While the typical private setting of a visual artwork may diminish its potential to do so, I argue that some visual artworks are more advantageously positioned to trigger bright social responses. This is particularly the case for works that contain enigmatic qualities, often leading to communal deliberation and discussion to unlock understanding. This presenting a ‘stimulating ambiguity’ that is translatable to architecture. The novelty of the works and the use of bright colour palettes in my former artistic practices may also compound this event, contributing life and energy to the moment¹² of observation.

An example of an artwork that has fuelled collective deliberation is a painting titled *MAXI*¹³ where I portrayed a fictional urban environment that is technologically oversaturated, devoid of people and flooded with cars. Adopting a figurative painting style loosely modelled on the work of modernist artist Ferdinand Léger, I inadvertently crystallised issues conveyed in the Urban Analysis of this study. The painting has catalysed conversations about the urban issues presented, leading others to reflect and express their own perceptions. The paintings might be considered reminiscent of a psychoanalyst’s Rorschach test that uses pictures to unlock people’s repressed contents. What do people not know that they know about the city? It has been interesting to measure peoples’ passionate response to the urban issues, as well as foresight. In a formal sense, paintings like this contribute to the development of my architectural identity by providing a space to trial motifs and design methods transferrable to architectural projects, such as planes of colour, layering, definition of line and perspectival depth. Other formal techniques transferrable from artistic experiments include bricolage, collage and the re-codification of materials.

Translating Lessons From Creative Mediums

Reflections on subsidiary, non-architectural projects help to authenticate the fascinations that underpin my practice. These reflections have also helped me to specify which creative digressions are didactic to my architectural practice. The accessibility of artistic mediums assist experimentation, providing a source of reference to gauge emotive, or passionate¹⁴ responses to offerings

– helping me to understand what I may seek to achieve with architectural tools. Experimentation in varying mediums reveals the creative ‘laboratory’ format of my practice, forming spaces for imagination and for anticipation of alternative urban trajectories. The inclusion of this praxis is motivated by Hans Hollein’s prompt that ‘everything is architecture’¹⁵ and his forecast that architecture will continue to overlap with other disciplines.¹⁶

Notes

¹ Bourriaud defined the approach as 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.'

Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 113.

² Relational art practice theory has been advanced by theorists including Nicolas Bourriaud, Jacques Rancière and Claire Bishop, among other voices.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Debord. Report on the Construction of Situations.

⁵ Urban elements include Stobie poles (power line poles), retaining walls and various public infrastructural elements.

⁶ The Situationist International was an international organization of social revolutionaries emerging in 1957. It loosely aggregated avant-garde artists, intellectuals, and political theorists.

⁷ Guy Debord described a situation as 'a need to fulfill human primitive desires and pursue a superior passional quality.' This formed a central aim of the social revolutionary group the Situationist International.

⁸ Fitzroy, Adelaide, SA. North of Adelaide's CBD.

⁹ Renew Adelaide is a not-for-profit program that offers short-term rent-free tenancies to promote new enterprise in underutilised CBD spaces, in Adelaide, South Australia.

¹⁰ 'IKEA hacking' is an established practice involving the repurposing of IKEA products to create original pieces.

¹¹ Wilkins. *Manufacturing Urbanism*, 6.

¹² Debord's situation and Lefebvre's moment intersect and differentiate in complex ways. McKenzie Wark offers explanation of their variances in the text *The Beach Beneath the Street*.

¹³ See *Projects*, Book 1, page 21.

¹⁴ In reference to the work of Guy Debord. See: Report on the Construction of Situations.

¹⁵ Hollein continues by saying, 'many areas outside traditional building will enter the realm of architecture, as architecture and 'architects' will have to enter new fields'. Hollein. *All is Architecture*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Research Method

This study is comprised of an action-based research methodology; by designing, constructing and testing six, original, provisional interventions in public and semi-public contexts. In the Practice Agenda chapter, I outlined a series of attributes that define the theoretical concerns of my design practice. The research experiments that follow are devised in line with these attributes; as minimalistic, small-scale, low-cost constructions, assembled using low-tech¹ building methods. Despite the subversions of these attributes² (noted in the Practice Agenda), the innovation of the research relates to perceiving how people are affected by the provisional interventions, and the innovations of the programs realised. Experiments are developed, armed with the intention to determine off-beat, subtle and unimagined programs. These programs seek to facilitate the unlocking of new types of social interaction and urban experience; I will assess their potency for achieving these aims. Each intervention is headlined by a ‘tactic’ that alludes to their programmatic innovation, despite their functions being manifold. This is opposed to describing their explicit, familiar elements, such as a platform or staircase. The tactics emerge following reflection on the behaviours, events, fleeting verbal comments and sentiments that arise from the intervention’s presence. These responses could be considered the text that is analysed. My ability to gauge responses is heightened by being immersed in the built interventions and drawing from first-hand observation; an experimental approach to obtain data. Witness accounts will also be valued, and people will be proactively and retroactively probed to determine their lasting impressions.

Operating as an Architectural Detective

Previous analysis of behaviours in public spaces has been undertaken with a video camera and a clipboard in hand. Such was the case for William Whyte’s landmark study in the 1960’s, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*.³ Whyte sought to understand people’s interpretation of laconic and, generally, large existing public spaces and plazas, with some attention paid to universal architectural fixtures such as standardised furniture elements. This study differs as it concentrates on bespoke and comparatively more complex, more intimate architectural structures, in existing public spaces. When I commenced this study, I considered using similar tools to Whyte, however early trials revealed the formal nature of these tools and their risks

of obstructing results. The intimacy and small scale of the research interventions meant that analytic tools had heightened presence, leading to people becoming self-conscious that they were being examined. This risked negating potential findings, as the tools had a behavioural quotient. This was also the case for questionnaires, which generated a behavioural event through the act of inviting participants. I experimented with several types of questionnaires on early occasions, but I did not get satisfactory results, with many people finding them a burden. I consider fleeting verbal accounts an alternative form of survey, where information arises from necessity, as a product of a person's instincts, rather than request. Consequently, the method I chose for obtaining data was to integrate as a natural participant of the interventions, almost like an undercover detective. This immersion and presence enabled my proximity to events that unfold naturally, that would reveal vital clues. I consider the social behaviours that play out in spaces as concrete as the buildings that constitute the city. We simply (currently) lack sophisticated tools to obtain this data, although, simultaneously, we do not necessarily want to be put under the microscope. Some new tools are emergent yet retain prosaic qualities. For example, mapping movements through spaces with touch-pad sensors seems only slightly more sophisticated than the rudimentary procedure of counting the number of people that enter a space, as they only reveal kinetic factors.

Knowledge Through Immersion

'Architecture is a physical experience — it needs to be seen and touched to be wholly understood'.⁴ In this sobering statement, Nicolai Ouroussoff reminds us of the importance of the physical experience of architecture to gauge an adequate assessment of its qualities. His comment arrives as an aberration, in a milieu when our gaze is transfixed by the representation of architecture, largely in photographic form.⁵ I concur with Ouroussoff's perception, yet add that architecture also needs to be reflected on as understanding is also ephemeral and elusive. The same can be said about behaviours, events and emotive responses that manifest when experiencing a space (the interests of this study). Compared to a physical structure, these phenomena leave little or no physical trace leading to an absence of evidence. This presents a gulf that defines challenges intrinsic to this research.

The built environment is fixed and quantifiable with ordinary tools, such as a tape measure, or through visual analysis of materials and form. How to interpret and document the temporal phenomena that emerge in response to a given space?

Improvising the Criteria Examined

A traditional study that examines behavioural responses to a given phenomenon may focus on a specific, isolated terminology, or a limited and itemised set. In the case of Whyte's landmark study mentioned above,⁶ public movements and stopping times were recorded to understand how members of the public interpret public spaces. Similarly, when I devised this study, I considered focusing on the behavioural trait of *play* in urban public spaces, to establish a focused lens. However, after reflecting on formative projects, I decided to document behaviours and events that were undefined at the time of testing – to improvise criteria and issues as they emerged. This approach seeks to grasp a complex array of responses: unexpected behaviours, spontaneous interpretations, accounts, sentiments, emergent patterns and anomalies. A pre-determined set of criteria for analysis is ultimately based on what is already known. My experimental approach forms a broader, open-ended arrangement, devised as a source for innovation. This mindset recalls Johann Goethe's maxim that 'knowing is not enough, we must apply'.⁷ In this study, I refer to the umbrella of possible appropriations as *moments*⁸ (elaborated in the Practice Agenda). This enables me to identify and examine behaviours and phenomena that I am predisposed to disavow. The research limits the information that is assessed by focusing on patterns, or on outlying anomalies that present potential for illuminating new understandings.

Variety of Experiments

Six interventions framed by six 'tactics' for six different sites, gives authenticity to the behavioural patterns that may emerge. This number has been chosen considering the time and resources required to execute a provisional intervention.⁹ It is also worth admitting that a construction site and an office space are relatively



79 **Architectural detective;**
fleeting events may reveal a vital clue.
Photo: Craig Whitehead



80 **Analysing from afar;**
William H. Whyte in the 1960's
used a clipboard and camera to
analyse public spaces.
Photo: www.pps.org



81 *The EN/counter, Tomsey Street, Adelaide;*
sited on an urban threshold, between
public and public space.

incongruous, demanding differing toolsets, muscles, muscle memory, neural pathways, habits and so on. The conflicts associated with shifting between these spaces pose challenges that may obstruct other studies of similar nature. In the case of the following interventions, I concede that further design qualities may have benefitted the projects, in instances. This drawback is a product of the timeframes, the resources available and the ambitions of the interventions. I view the research interventions as brazen built experimentation that exposes itself to criticisms, including aesthetic ones, in the quest to gain new understandings. Constructing, testing and concluding the experiments has been the primary objective. This leads me to also note that at the finalisation of this study the *Proxaemic Theatre* was not fully realised in a public setting and consequently remains an outlier. Although, in defence of this project, a small segment was built and tested. I have maintained its inclusion in this study for the innovations it reveals.

Slotting and Grafting

The interventions examined in the following sections react to non-structured environments; spaces that have coalesced into mute states demanding new definitions. In many cases, new architectural elements have been devised to slot and graft into urban spaces of this nature. Interventions also often stretch along urban thresholds of changing ownerships, where private and public realms abut or overlap. These thresholds present opportunities as they often lie dormant, demarcated with physical barriers that serve singular or limited functions (such as defining ownership). The interest to disrupt these specific barricades with fine-grain architectural infrastructure (in cases) amounts from the assertions in the Urban Analysis that precedes.

Notes:

¹ See the Practice Agenda section for further elaboration of 'low-tech'.

² On top of points already mentioned, architecture in Australia is often reserved for classes who can afford it. Low-cost and low-tech democratise architecture by making it available for *use* in broader segments of society.

³ Whyte. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*.

⁴ Ouroussoff, *The Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 2003.

⁵ With ubiquitous dissemination of architecture through digital media, the number of people who engage with a given built structure in photographic form may at times far exceed the number who engage it phenomenologically.

⁶ Whyte. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*.

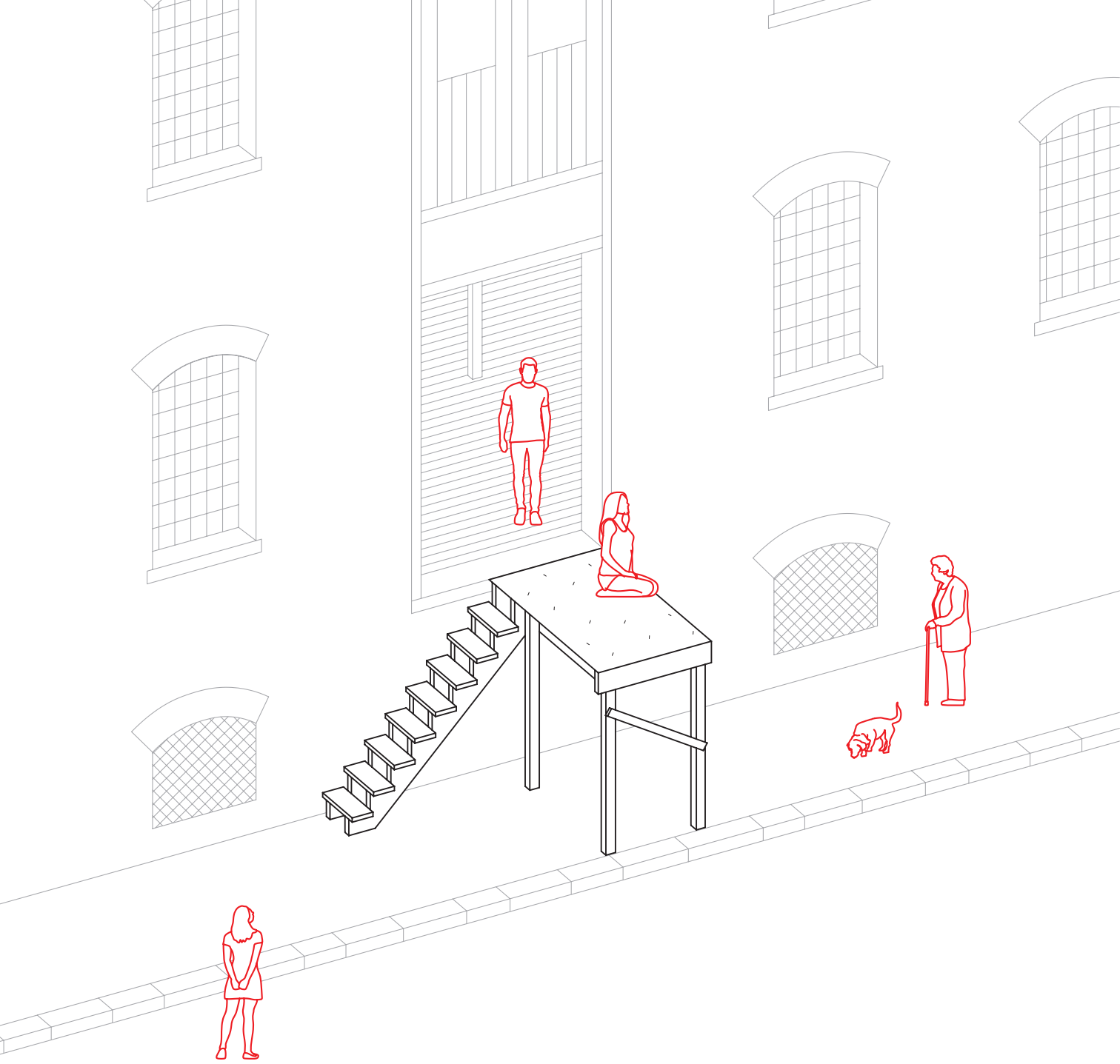
⁷ An epigram generally attributed to Johann Goethe.

⁸ In reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre.

⁹ Provisional interventions need to be planned, resources need to be obtained, pre-assembled off-site (in most cases), transported, installed on-site, occupied and photographed. This is often done with minimal support.

6 Tactics

6 sites, 6 interventions, 6 outcomes



Tactic 1

Unlocking Community Memory

Hidden Borough Staircase, 2012

I met the Guerilla Architects (GA) team in 2012 while working on EXYZT Collectif's *reUNION* Project in Southwark, London, UK. One afternoon, the newly formed GA team burst onto the *reUNION* site and proceeding in single file wearing blue matching jumpsuits. They had arrived with offerings of produce they had salvaged from a nearby market.¹ Fresh produce was a relevant gift for EXYZT Collectif, as all meals for the crew were collectively cooked and eaten on-site. GA introduced their presence to other members of established design-build collectives through a performative gesture that embodied the ethics central to their practice. The GA team had arrived in London from Berlin as part of a studio exercise connected with Berlin Technical University. They arrived with the intention to highlight the 'forgotten and unused resources of our cities'² and proceeded to formulate a project that responded to this objective as opportunities and resources were identified. The foundations of their project matured when they acquired a building in central London through tactical measures. With their activities newly centred around this building, their project was then titled *Hidden Borough*. Their organic process for reacting to opportunities led to my unplanned collaboration on their project. My role was to design and construct a simple intervention that would unlock public access to their project site.

A Project with Zero Budget

Hidden Borough proceeded without any notable budget available. This formed the unorthodox condition where the site, materials, labour, lodging, tools and, in some instances, food were to be obtained by negotiation or inventiveness. Collective remittance from team members was to be relied upon only as a last resort. In order to obtain a space where activities could be centred, the GA team devised a strategy to seize upon a local legal loophole related to squatter's rights in London. After mining Google Street-View and considering countless options, they identified a forgotten Victorian four-storey warehouse in the heart of South London, 300m from Southwark Station and 350m from the EXYZT project site. They infiltrated the building by climbing a barbed-wire fence at the rear of the property, inhabited the space for 24 hours and were then litigiously challenged by the proprietor. This led to an immediate court proceeding which they had intended to face. The GA team

emerged from the court victorious with squatter's rights favourably ruled for a provisional duration. This legal right arose because the proprietor had demonstrated no obvious intention to lease the building – a condition that the GA team had astutely identified prior to accessing the space. The rationale behind the law aimed to discourage proprietors from obtaining significant properties in London and holding them without attempt to inhabit or lease. This law had been enacted in

the context of a highly populated metropolis with a shortage of lettable spaces and a high number of people sleeping homeless across the city. After gaining jurisdiction the GA team then set out to transform the historic warehouse into a public common and domestic space. From this building, the GA team would live, eat, sleep, work and host a public exhibition. Sleeping on-site helped to avoid significant expenses and is a surprisingly common undertaking among design-build collectives in Europe. Every aspect of the project was defined by an active resourcefulness. The proximity of the project to the EXYZT Collectif site was convenient for borrowing tools and for social support. The GA team demonstrated further resourcefulness by establishing a make-shift shower on the roof of the warehouse, that was relied upon on a daily-basis. The shower was achieved by adapting a garden hose that ran from a tap on the first floor. Electricity for cooking and charging devices was periodically achieved through a mobile generator, although this was restricted due to its disruptive noise. The GA team adapted to this restriction by working remotely from a local Starbucks to take advantage of free power points that were offered to attract customers.



Fig. 83 | When the public assembled in this unadorned warehouse a bright, collective moment was lived that overrode the building's finished qualities.

Demand for an Inventive Solution

The GA's ambition to transform the building into a public common was obstructed by an issue of access. The warehouse had not seen any significant changes since its use as an industrial building in the early part of the 20th century. This

resulted in a strange condition where the only available doors for accessing the building from the street were situated 2 metres directly above the footpath. This presumably catered to loading cargo onto carts prior to technological developments. As a result, a temporary solution was demanded to facilitate safe access via the building's oddly sited doors. An additional challenge arose from the condition that any solution would have to stand on the footpath, contentiously occupying public land. The GA team members recognised that a piece of built infrastructure might form an appropriate solution; however they generally lacked confidence with construction. This led to their endeavour to recruit a collaborator, which would also help free their energies for curating the building's internal spaces for their planned exhibition. When they approached me with an invitation to contribute I was compelled by the originality of the project and the group's sense of urgency to address issues outside the beaten path of architectural practice. I joined the project despite the proviso that no financial remittance could be offered. Instead, they were willing to offer me a level of ownership and responsibility for constructing an intervention that would resolve the issue of access.

'Hacking' City Spaces

With no land legitimately available and a short project timeline of 2 days – from conception to completion – a design solution was demanded that could not be achieved through traditional means. The alternative path taken to realise a solution can be likened to the operative term 'hacking',³ where ad-hoc and sub-legal measures are undertaken to surpass the physical and invisible obstructions of the built environment to unlock unprecedented possibilities. To rationalise the legitimacy of the subversive undertakings I took into account the project's incredibly short lifespan and the activist ambitions of the project, although others may argue otherwise. The GA team collaborated on the design of the intervention by engaging in fleeting deliberations at each instance an obstacle was met, or when new ideas emerged. Although the GAs had initially used a temporary builder's ladder to access the space, this method was deemed unsuitable for public access as it was notably unsafe and especially prohibitive to less able members of the public. Group deliberations also ruled out any possibility of constructing an accessible ramp, as this solution was well

beyond the minimal resources and time available. Deliberations led to the concession that a staircase and platform was optimal to maximise safe access to the building for the broadest numbers of people. To address the issue of having no legitimate land available to site the intervention, it was agreed that the only option available was to occupy the public footpath without permission. Facing the contentiousness of this measure, we strategized to install the staircase stealthily to reduce the amount of attention it would attract. As a result, all parts of the structure were prefabricated inside the warehouse allowing for a swift installation just prior to nightfall.

All Cops Are Busy

Contrary to our wishes, the installation received immediate attention from the London MET Police, who arrived on-site just moments before the intervention was fully installed. The officers were greatly perplexed as to what the intention of the structure was. This led to a scene of intense negotiation and, ultimately, to the officers departing from their original request and allowing the structure to be removed 'at some point over the next 24-hours, otherwise penalties would apply'.⁴ This window of time was crucial to the success of the project and meant that the new form of access would be in place for the Friday and Saturday evenings of the weekend. An elderly, long-term resident of the street serendipitously arrived on scene during the negotiations and provided unrequited defence of the staircase, to our surprise. This resident had shown interest in the project and felt compelled to vehemently defend it. Admittedly, the MET Police demonstrated remarkable patience, although it is fascinating that the same resources that may be used to thwart a serious crime, for example, are also used to ensure that a small, inanimate timber structure, the size of a park bench, does not place its footings on public land without permission. Negotiation with the MET Police led to further evolution of the design, involving a reduction in the width of the staircase treads. It was originally intended that the staircase would consume the entire width of the footpath. In its final format, the staircase consisted of a set of 45cm wide treads, 4 piers and a 1.5m² platform.

A Gritty and Low-tech Solution

The finished outcome of this intervention does not adequately embody the principles for ‘low-tech’ construction that I outline in the Practice Agenda chapter. This is a consequence of the stoic limitation of resources and tools on the project. With no budget available, timber for the intervention was mined from the basement of the historic building and incidental tools were borrowed from nearby construction sites. Using found timber meant that member sizes were varied, as were species and tones. Found timbers were also poorly formed, with warping and thick patinas that could otherwise be ameliorated if a thicknesser⁵ was at hand. EXYZT Collectif generously contributed by lending a handsaw and a cordless drill, even though their project was under pressure for completion and just days away from opening. These minimal tools enabled the project to proceed, although the handsaw was not appropriate for clean cuts of timber. An electric plunge-saw would have increased accuracy of cuts and reduced construction time and effort considerably. These conditions lent an unavoidable adhoc quality to the carpentry of the staircase, despite my greatest efforts. We later agreed to embrace this aesthetic and to deviate from architectural convention. This led to the intentional emphasis of the way bracing members connected to posts. It was speculated that this quality might play upon the curiosity of the public by making the social group to which the object belongs elusive. The informality of the aesthetic also possibly acted as a cue or invitation to the public to inquire about the building and its activities.

Unintended Social Prompt

By reducing the width of the steps from 130cm to 45cm, an unexpected result emerged – it meant that only one person could ascend or descend the staircase at a time and that they invariably required some form of assistance from supervising persons. The 45cm tread width omitted the possibility of siting a handrail as this would overly constrict the trafficable space. This structured the need for teamwork and cooperation to use the stairs, a social prompt that led to humour and bonding in many cases. Given the risks posed, there was also a thrill associated with ascending and descending the stairs, leading to playful exchange. Thankfully all egress happened safely, without unexpected events.

Community Eruption

'We have both lived on this street for over twenty years and have never had an opportunity to meet, until tonight' – Michelle, local resident.

For the two days that the warehouse was open to the public, it received many visitors. Visitors were largely composed of local residents and people who worked or owned businesses in the vicinity. I was surprised by the level of interest from the public in exploring the building, and the number of attendees exceeded my expectations. Some people expressed their gratitude for the act of opening an historic building up for public, one that had been closed for peoples' entire living memory. It became apparent that the building had a sentimentality that resonated with many people. One narrative that arose was how historic buildings of this nature have been inscribed into the cultural identity of the Southwark borough by popular Charles Dickens novels and were consequently viewed with great affection. Many people appeared to visit simply from curiosity and fascination with London's heritage building stock. Alongside curiosity were ecstatic reactions. Stories were exchanged at the site and special social connections were formed on the days the building was opened. For some people, connections were forged with neighbours they had lived alongside for decades, yet had never engaged in conversation, leading to surprising emotions. Although emotions may have been assisted by the consumption of wine, I am confident that this was not a determinative factor. This rupture in the neighbourhood enabled interface that had been kept dormant through the lack of an alternative catalyst. This outcome supported my suspicion that other community bonds unnecessarily remain nascent in western urban contexts. Although an event of this format may be a crude instrument for measuring the extent of nascent community bonds, I find it difficult to think of a more appropriate tool than providing an uncodified space and event of this nature. Sadly, documenting these social exchanges photographically was difficult due to the dim lighting in the warehouse. However, I maintain that peoples' verbal testaments and behaviours account for a good measurement of their realities. When any unprecedented event happens in one's neighbourhood, there is a natural excitement that can be expected; its meaningfulness is amplified. Excitement may also have related to anxieties

that permeate when exploring a dimly lit building with a group of strangers. However, I speculate that the dim lighting worked in the project's favour; it meant that people were less on show, it offered people a layer of protection.

Community Memory

Hidden Borough provided a break-out point, freed from the social constructs of public space, where community members could share stories, participate and collectively explore a newly revealed space. There was a sense that this type of break-out space was unprecedented in this neighbourhood, therefore the legacy of the project lies in the community memory of the event. I perceived a latent desire from members of the neighbourhood to bond with other neighbours. In some ways the project was an inversion of a prototypical architectural project, as it formed an invitation for visitors to tell their stories and to convey what it means to be an inhabitant of the neighbourhood. This contrasts with imposing a building, structure or narrative on an existing matrix. Aside from infrastructure and obvious utility, what else is a building but an amalgamation of meanings that pull upon personal memories and a space for social cohesion? The project would go on to be recognised by a European award for urbanism⁶ in a design category. At the time it struck me as strange that the project was successful in this category, although I would later assume that the prize concerned the creative and outstanding design of the overall project – something I cannot take credit for.⁷ One thing is for certain: the project will be remembered for the community moment that was awakened and not for the prize that was awarded. A prize is indicative of another imposition on a project that supersedes social realities.

Synchronous Events

The opening of Hidden Borough coincided with the opening of *The Shard*, a tower by Renzo Piano. This building, at the time of opening, was to become the tallest building in Europe and to celebrate this event it emitted an extensive laser show across London from its peak. This laser show was conveniently

visible from the warehouse as both events were located in Southwark. The event presented an uncanny synchronicity, especially when mindful of the polarity of these two projects in architectural terms. Another synchronous event was the coincidence that the GA team, along with myself, had booked flights to travel to Berlin for the same day the project was due to be completed, prior to us meeting. This meant that we could continue our social engagement and our collective excitement for the project for days after its completion.

Notes

¹ Vegetables were salvaged by negotiating with market stall operators to obtain produce that had recently reached expiry.

² Statement of intent by Guerilla Architects. Taken from futurearchitectureplatform.org/

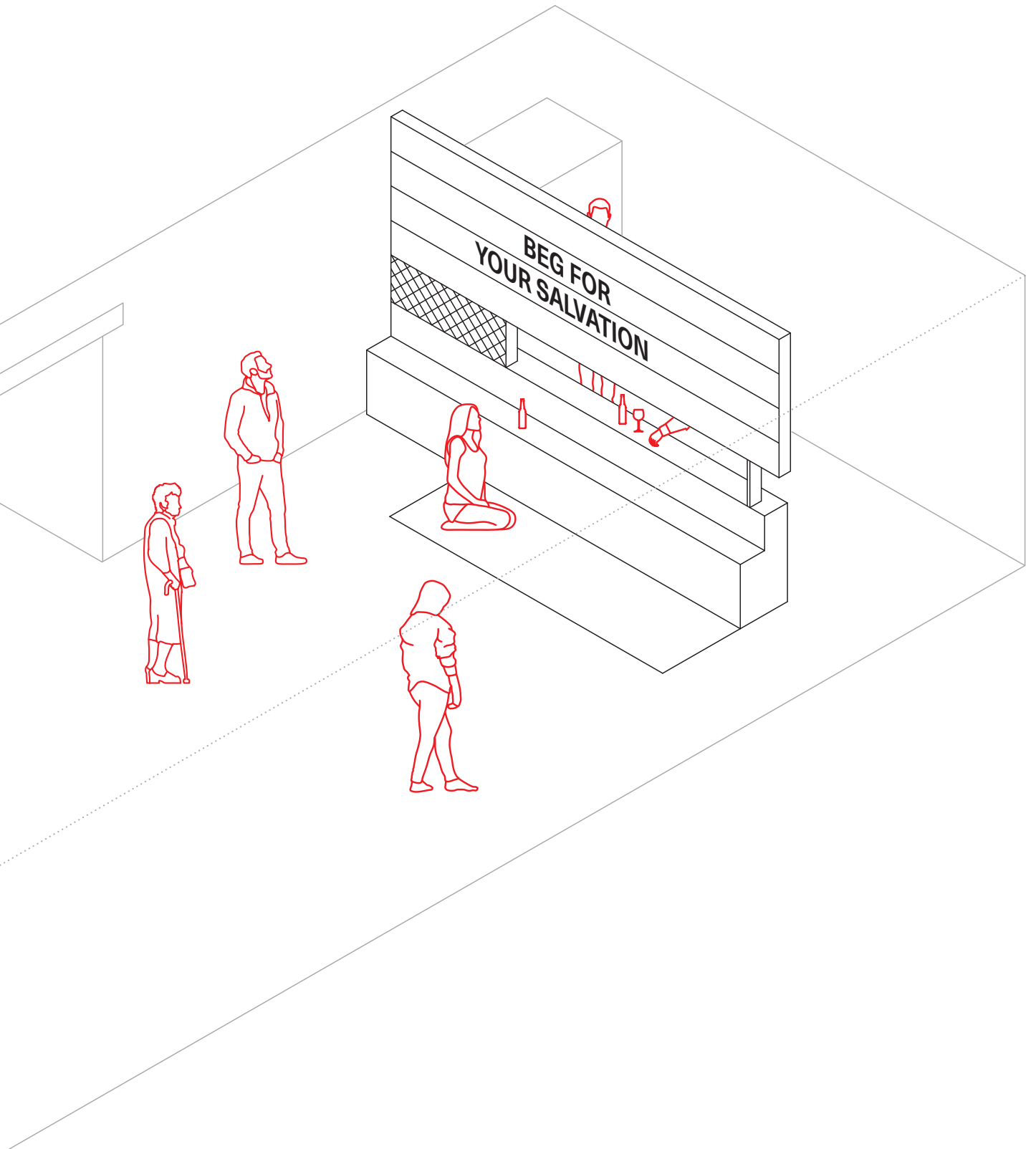
³ See the Practice Agenda chapter of this study.

⁴ A fleeting verbal injunction made by London MET Police.

⁵ Also known as thickness planer.

⁶ Urban Transcripts (EU) prize for Design, 2013.

⁷ The Guerrilla Architects (GA) team and supporting staff at Berlin Technical University can be accredited for masterminding the overall project. I was involved in incidental collaboration and with design of the intervention.



Tactic 2

Subverting a Commonplace Ritual

LOW (A Kneeling Bar), 2012

A novel art event was organised and held beneath the Adelaide Treasury Building in a network of historic tunnels (sometimes also known as the Medina Grand Hotel).¹ The organisers of the event approached me with the opportunity to build a centralised bar, one enriched with conceptual content, reactive to the events two themes. These themes were planned to oscillate on a weekly basis, with the first week framed by the term 'Beneath' and the second week framed by the term 'Humility'. The themes represented the energy and vision the organisers had for the space. When I was first approached with this brief and was exposed to the small space intended for the bar, I was initially not overwhelmed by the opportunity it presented. The space appeared far too small, in my mind, to generate an impactful outcome, to grapple the multiple conceptual themes and reinforce their presence. I accepted the challenge regardless, almost out of curiosity to measure the potential of such a small space.

The events conceptual themes stimulated the idea to develop a bar that drew semblance with a place of worship – one where patrons could 'humbly' kneel and request offerings of refreshment, or alternatively submit confessions and reveal what lay 'beneath' their consciousness. An interpretation of a church meme billboard complemented this conceptual ideation and was integrated with the bar, spatially transforming a conventional bar counter into an interface. The billboard hosted memes that reinforced the themes of the event. For the week thematised 'Beneath', the phrase 'Release the Filthy Secrets' was displayed, while for the week thematised by 'Humility', the phrase 'Beg for Your Salvation' was shown. These phrases were intended to be provocative and colourful, as, when a scene is playful people tend to lighten up. Velour kneeling mats were sewn to make the action of kneeling more comfortable and a 'confessionary screen' was sited to visually obscure a fridge.

Augmenting Behaviours

While the act of kneeling to receive purchased drinks may seem readily humorous, it also contained a hidden intention – to challenge the rituals and behaviours associated with the custom of ordering a drink, in western convention. By kneeling rather than standing, certain cultural constructions and bodily signals that we use (albeit, often

defensively) were suspended, demanding adaptation. This led to the forfeiting of proxemic conventions and prompted new and unfamiliar forms of intimacy, as people condensed and kneeled by the bar. It was speculated that kneeling in a western context is generally experienced during childhood and that the action may consequently trigger childhood sentiments and awaken commonalities, as children have different proxemic relationships. Kneeling also suspended the western, politicised dimension of standing height, as patrons are 'levelled' at the ground.



Fig. 85 | Architectural tools are employed to disrupt convention and prompt behavioural response.

Resistance

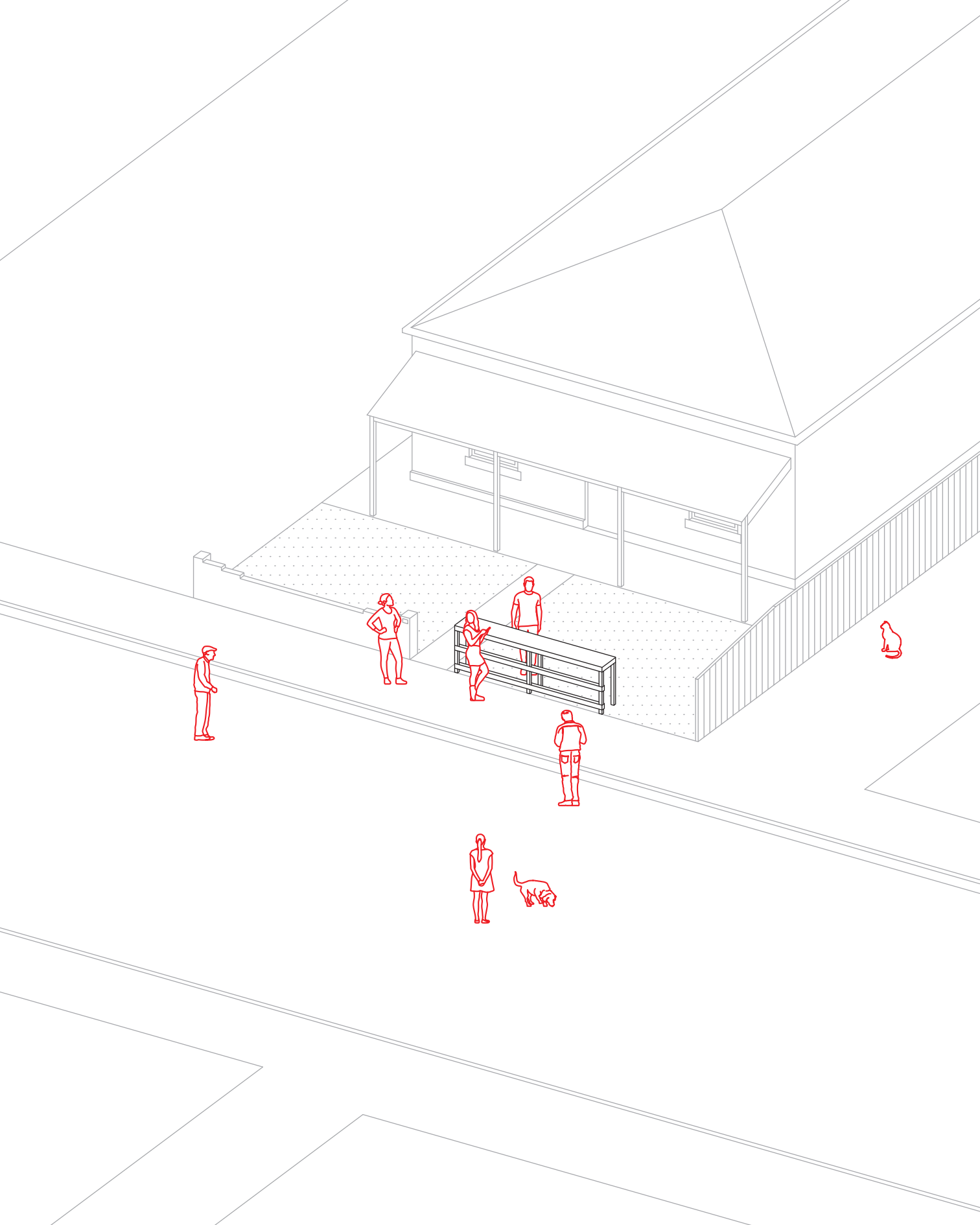
This act of 'disrupting' the familiar bar typology reflects my practice agenda to challenge cultural constructions about how a space 'should' be organised. The act was met with surprising resistance. Immediately after the intervention was installed and hours before the event opening a staff-member of the Medina Grand Hotel began to panic immensely after seeing the installation, stating fears that the device would be a public safety risk. This person's central concern was that 'someone could knock their head on the installation and be badly hurt'.² I firmly disagreed with this conviction and attempted to draw attention to how built elements at head height were in fact made from polystyrene and paper and therefore could not possibly pose a logical threat of injury. Furthermore, it's important to understand that no part of this intervention is kinetic, apart from the fridge door, which was cordoned off by the 'confession screen'. My powers of negotiation were stretched thin, and the staff member was not willing to compromise. They continued to press and ultimately requested that the entire installation be removed immediately. My final defence came in the form of an untruth: I explained that I was suffering from exhaustion and that if I was to remove the structure immediately

an additional and prescient health risk would be posed. The organisers of the event attempted to assist defence of the intervention; however, their contributions were similarly unsuccessful. What was the source of this person's anxiety? The irony of this reaction was that other bespoke structures and frames for artworks had been extensively installed throughout the tunnels yet drew no attention from the authority figure. The backlash from this individual dissipated as public enjoyment of the intervention commenced. This display of excessive governance of the space revealed social and cultural forces that may impede and restrict other unorthodox and imaginative uses of space. To what extent do Australian architects avoid experimentation in order to please the public and avoid similar forms of backlash?

Notes

¹ The Medina hotel has since been re-branded as the 'Adina Grand Hotel'.

² A comment made by a staff member for the hotel, who remains anonymous.



Tactic 3

Re-thinking Suburban Encounter

The EN/counter, 2015

Boarding up the front of one's residence with a tall 1.8m fence is a commonplace gesture in Australian metropolitan contexts. So ubiquitous are these protective barriers today, they could arguably be considered a symbol of Australian suburban life. This provision has appeared to continually escalate, despite no agitation from 'unlawful entry with intent' rates over the last 28 years since data has been obtained.¹ This probes my thinking that they are not simply security measures but are rather the product of cultural forces and habits. For some architects I have worked under, the provision of a tall fence for residences was a matter of design policy and not an issue for deliberation. However, not all architects agree. Some view tall, hermetic front fences as anti-social acts that signal one's disinterest to socially participate in a neighbourhood.² The prevalence of Australian fences is especially noticeable in new housing developments, where Colorbond fencing is a defining built feature that conventionally hides a traditional gable roof house behind. In some instances, it is possible that a fence serves no other purpose than to reduce insurance premiums for a speculative break-in, fulfilling the isolated interests of an insurance broker. However, tall, hermetic fences come at cost. They can reduce sun access, impede movement, remove visual links with surrounding buildings and passive street activity and remove 'eyes from the street'³ – which according to Jane Jacobs is a characteristic of a successful and safe neighbourhood. Tall fences can render the front yard a discarded space, unworthy of habitation and useful only for transition.

Instead of a Fence: A Meeting Point

This intervention, entitled *The EN/counter*, replaces the conventional suburban fence with an inhabitable counter. Moveable furniture elements were developed to compliment the intervention and assist the hosting of epicurean activities (eating, drinking and conversation) in plain view of the public. Positioned on the threshold between a private residential allotment and the public footpath, it claims use of a territory that is typically avoided, ignored or obstructed. The *EN/counter* was built and tested and experienced regular use until the tenants of the house at which it was installed finally moved to a new location. Questions regularly surfaced when the intervention was occupied relating to whether people 'should' be using the space. Although the intervention was initially met by a minimal

tension with neighbours, it quickly grew local support as its contribution to the street became apparent. It facilitated community intersection, safety and passive surveillance of the street and helped to foster a sense of community togetherness. Neighbourhood bonds were given the opportunity to develop through the frequency of social contact that the intervention structured. *The EN/counter* aimed to challenge social customs and transform



Fig. 87 | Simple infrastructure renegotiates the threshold between private and public space, to realise new social experiences.
Photo: Jessica Reid

the front yard of a residential property into a site for gathering, rest, meeting and leisure. Testing of the intervention confirmed that public occupancy of the Australia front yard can unlock broad reaching benefits. Is it time for Australian suburbanites to reconsider their attitudes towards the front yard?

The Ground was Paved

Of the six interventions examined in this study, this project emerged through the most organic collaborative process entwined with everyday life. This quality might naturally reflect the public deliberation that one would expect to occur at the interface of a domestic frontage, rather than artificially structuring an object against social agreement. Its realisation was oppositional to designs that are imposed from an office, in each way imaginable, as no plans or digital models were relied upon and every phase was spontaneous and collaborative.⁴ Consequently, it stands as an esquisse of an alternative way to procure our built environment: that is, through unhindered communication and collective action. A set of serendipitous events foregrounded the realisation of the intervention as the ground was quite literally paved for it. Its roots can be traced to collective living practices in Prospect, Adelaide, in a previous context. This seminal context involved experiments of hosting dinner parties in front yards. Two years after these formative events, a spirited friend from the same Prospect context would move into a new tenancy

where he, along with other new tenants, were confronted by the strange imbalance of only having a fence on one half of their street frontage. The serendipity of the circumstance was expounded by the fact that the house was situated along my daily bicycle commute to an architectural office one block from the residence. Given my daily exposure to the frontage of the house, it was only natural for my friend to eventually probe me for an idea in my passing. I suggested that a bar or counter would be more interesting than a traditional fence. Knowingly sharing similar values with the tenants, I thought they would be immediately receptive to the idea. However, it took several weeks for them to come around to the idea and for some time I thought the suggestion was going to be abandoned. This thinking was inspired by practices of EXYZT Collectif in London, and having recently returned, I was deliberating on ways to instigate new, temporary programs for public spaces in Australian contexts. Travels to Vietnam and Laos in 2006 also stirred my awareness for the highly private nature of suburban Australian domesticity, after being exposed to entirely different cultural sensibilities of private and public. I had faith that there was a way around of the cultural impasse of occupying the Australian front yard.

Policies Associated with the Intervention

Policies were developed and negotiated with residents on the street to provide a basic framework for the use of the counter and to avoid obvious patterns of conflict and respect people's interests. One policy agreed upon was that all persons were to disperse from the bar by 10.30pm on any given night and to move noise indoors.



Figure 88 | Ubiquitous Colorbond fencing in Australian suburban contexts; the semantic of protective armour? Photo: iStock.com / tap10

Another agreed policy was that if music was played it should only be played from small speakers or be turned down upon the request of neighbours. By negotiating and agreeing on such policies and adhering to them with integrity, it communicated to residents on the street that their interests were respected and if anyone harboured further conflicts for the intervention, they could refer to the policies to ground their disputes. The policies were devised and adapted

in an ongoing fashion and represent an organic continuation of the intervention's design process. This brings into question conventional methods for procurement of the built environment that favour bureaucracy over ongoing negotiation, in order to avoid conflicts. This traditional approach reflects a compromise that may impede the realisation of forms of public existence, as possibilities are negated by default.

Why It Worked

Rather than an aestheticized or sculptural object, *The EN/counter* was reduced to a program and 'an apparatus for the production of events'⁵ – to use a phrase coined by Hannes Meyer. It represents an instance where the provision of program is the central architectural concern. To claim that this type of intervention would work on any Australian street, in any suburb, may be optimistic. I have little doubt that its success relied on a variety of special conditions relating to the street, the local demographic and the behaviour and demeanour of those who inhabited and cared for the intervention. If similar interventions were to be developed, they would probably require further creative input and willingness to adapt the design to the conditions of the specific site. A degree of courage was also necessary from the tenants to newly expose their lives in the public space and be subjected to public judgement. A period of vulnerability existed for the intervention in the early stages after it was built, and it was considered a matter of good fortune that members of the surrounding neighbourhood warmed to the measure over time. As a participant who occupied the space, I can admit that while the duration of my occupation extended, I could almost sense my cultural constructions re-wiring, until internalised discomforts made way for urban contentment. It seems safe to conclude that other occupants experienced a similar kind of urban repositioning as they familiarised themselves with a new form of everyday public existence. The successful occupation of this space and its enjoyment relied on the social abilities of the people who occupied it, as well as the openness of the residents who lived on the street. These two factors combined to generate a mood of conviviality that enriched the normally dormant street. It was also useful that the suburban street that it was sited on was not a key thoroughfare or short-cut for vehicles, as vehicles commonly brought disruptive noise, high speeds, danger and other anti-social gestures into the space, effacing the atmospheric

qualities of the street and therefore discouraging use. The impact of vehicles had impeded an earlier attempt to transform the front yard of an Adelaide suburban property⁶ into a space for dwelling and leisure. Furthermore, disruptive behaviours from pedestrians were not common in the area, despite being in Adelaide's CBD.

Post-Analysis

Is Adelaide's stigma as a 'sleepy town' merely a consequence of its population density? Or could this stigma be a product of cultural approaches to space that lead to private occupancies, where people are out of sight and out of mind? *The EN/counter* demonstrated a transformative effect on people's behaviour and catalysed the formation of community bonds and trust. In this sense, the intervention might be considered a manifestation of a social condenser – an architectural object for public space intended to influence and augment people's behaviour, or, as Rem Koolhaas idiosyncratically describes; the 'dynamic coexistence of activities' and the 'generation of unprecedented events'.⁶ The *EN/counter* represents a starting prototype for occupying an archetypal overlooked urban space.

Notes

¹ ABS 2020, abs.gov.au, Graph, Unlawful Entry with Intent 1993-2020.

² These issues have been raised during informal discussions at Adelaide's DRC.

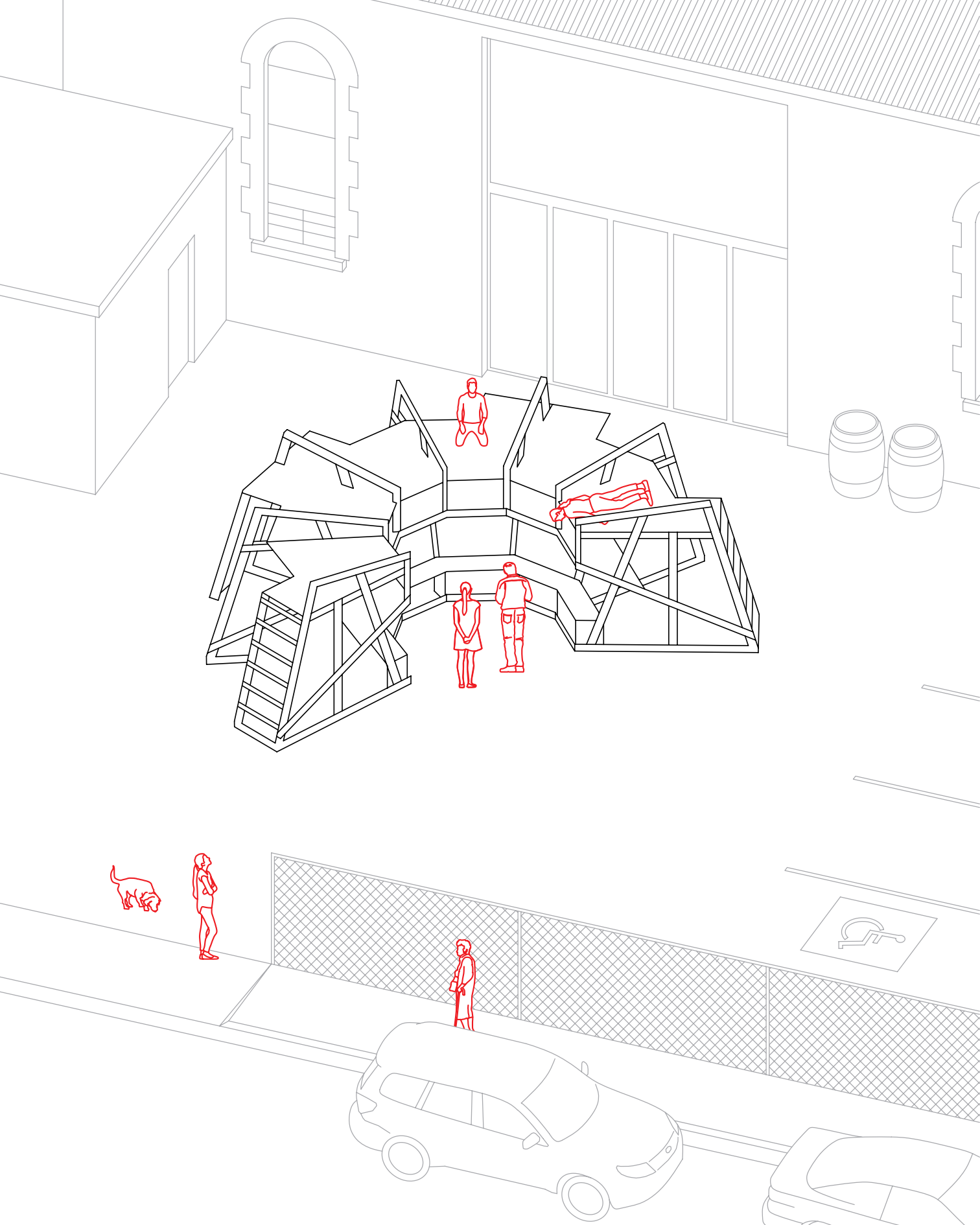
³ Jacobs. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. 2016.

⁴ Simone Mazengarb took leadership during the project's design and construction phases.

⁵ Meyer, H & Hays, K M. *Modernism and the Post-humanist Subject*. 1995.

⁶ Braund Road, Fitzroy, South Australia.

⁷ Koolhaas. *Content*, 73.



Tactic 4

The Limit of a Performative Device

Proxaemic Theatre, 2017

The *Proxaemic Theatre* is a concept for a new type of performance space that structures a highly personal interface between audience and performer. An experiment in 'proxemics',¹ the structure stacks people on three levels in a centripetal arrangement, to manufacture an unprecedented engagement with performer(s) at the threshold between 'personal space' and 'social space', as outlined by Edward T. Hall.² By placing people at this threshold, the typical audience-performer relationship is re-structured. People are positioned where they must manage the presence of another person at an emotional level. This process puts our openness and receptivity in the spotlight, openness 'regardless of gender, identity, race, species, or any material category'.³ In the Urban Analysis chapter I refer to social receptivity and openness as an 'invisible obstruction'⁴ that impacts the public character of our cities. The *Proxaemic Theatre* responds to this analysis by seeking to heal a schism at an interpersonal level. An ultimate measure of success of this experimental concept would be its capacity to build new social bonds and trust among the public. Although these outcomes may be difficult to ascertain or measure, they remain the project's ultimate objective.

A Social Condenser

This study makes numerous references to the constructivist's social condenser and ensuing attempts by authors to define it. In the book, *Delirious New York*, Rem Koolhaas attempts to traverse the enigma of the theoretical concept when he defines the social condenser as 'a machine to generate and intensify desirable forms of human intercourse'.⁵ If this interpretation is accepted, then this intervention might be considered a distinct example of a contemporary social condenser. Its alignment as a social condenser is furthered by other descriptive potentials, such as its ability to generate 'unprecedented events',⁶ or to allow 'life to unfold in its most unpredictable form'.⁷ Characterised by serial form with repetitive, machine-like connotations, this experimental piece of infrastructure seeks to unlock 'unpredictable' social moments by initiating physical proximity. Proximity aims to engender behavioural transformation by leaving residues of social connection. In a modernity where architecture is habitually employed to establish boundaries via walls, fences and containments, this intervention points in an opposite direction. It seeks to dissolve

a wall at the very interface of human interaction. Proxemics is sometimes simplified as a branch of knowledge that exclusively differentiates human spatial relationships according to culture. However, it also examines non-verbal communication as a result of spatial relationships. Consequently, the structure hopes to unlock new forms of non-verbal communication through the intimate and performative circumstance it generates.

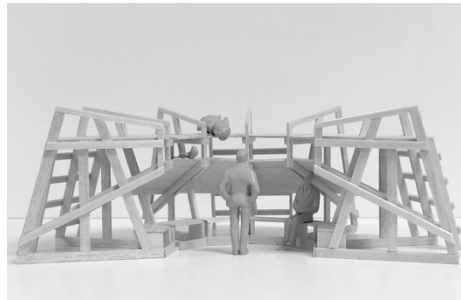


Fig. 90 | 'Proximity makes theoretical notions of intention, character, and intimacy, become tactile, urgent'
– Thomas Capogreco

The *Proxaemic Theatre* is conceived to interchange between two different arrangements. In one arrangement, the structure can host up to 18 performers and function as a choir, theatre or spoken word poetry group, performing to individuals in the centre. Alternatively, the arrangement can reverse, with 1-2 central performers and up to 18 audience members occupying the surrounding structure. The experience can be streamed to an online audience with a 360-degree camera and a binaural ASMR-style microphone rig. The centripetal arrangement concentrates human energy, igniting the 'electrical energy'⁸ of a crowd, to borrow Charles Baudelaire's expression. One third of the structure accommodates a tier of ground-level seating that is accessible to elderly people, or those unable or unwilling to climb, to ensure the universal accessibility of the experience. Persons in wheelchairs can also participate by joining people at the seated, ground level. For others, accessing or occupying the structure may be found challenging. This is a deliberate function of the theatre and reflects the avant-garde realm of compromised body position.

Project Motivation

My fascination for inventive, collectively inhabited architectural furniture was sparked when I encountered Raumlabor's project *Future Two*.⁹ For their project, familiar public furniture, such as chairs and tables, were re-thought to instruct

proximities of greater intimacy. This ‘disrupting’ of a familiar type invited humour by challenging cultural constructs relating to proxemic boundaries. When Melbourne-based thinker and long-time friend Thomas Capogreco probed me to think of ways that architecture could be used to inform a new type of performance space, I immediately recalled the proxemic ambiguities of Raumlabor’s chairs. We then discussed and workshopped ideas for taking this mechanism to a new limit. Capogreco’s experience in the performing arts was instrumental in conceptualising a performative experience, making an invaluable contribution to the concept. I then set upon a process of digital design that tested many possible configurations, leading to a course of design evolution that has landed at its current format. The circular spatial arrangement of the theatre was partly inspired by a loose lineage of historical and contemporary, circular civic structures. This lineage might include park rotundas, amphitheatres, stadiums and archaic astronomical structures. The serialism of the structure was also thought to have a public quality and is indicative of my impulse for ‘low-tech’ construction methodology that I reveal in this study. The resultant concept might also be considered the evolution of an earlier project entitled *Vandalis*, collaborated on and commissioned by Capogreco a few years prior for another symmetrically-configured, performative device.

Site

In the Practice Agenda, I liken my approach for generating interventions to that of a ‘roaming medic’. This operative metaphor highlights my tendency to ‘roam’ and encounter a site, and then determine design measures to spontaneously ‘heal’ it. For the other five interventions central to this study, it is clear how this operative term is applicable; as design processes commenced in response to the facts of built form or existing ‘symptoms’. The *Proxaemic Theatre* varies by being designed independent of a specific site, with the intention to be adapted to one later. Although this might make the Proxaemic Theatre appear an outlier among the set of interventions examined, this does not free it from the requirement to fit within a site appropriately. Further design process would be necessary to site the structure for it to realise its full potential. It could even be considered that the *Proxaemic Theatre* does seek to ‘heal’ a specific space; namely, a large,

blank, open space or field. The universal quality of the circular arrangement reflects the project's vision for it to be sited in various ongoing locations. During the design process I have considered the mobility of the structure, leading to my conceptualisation of it being transported as a 'migrating caravan'. This could generate a performative event involving a ritualistic parade through urban or rural corridors. Mobility of the structure could be made possible by decomposing the arrangement into six detachable segments, with bolted or clamped connections.

One of the central aims of the *Proxaemic Theatre* is to steer to new forms of face-to-face communication within the heart of the intervention. It is also hoped that as an intervention for public space the theatre would trigger communication and incidental encounter beyond the perimeter of the structure. These incidental encounters would occur in the 'negative space' between the outer perimeter of the morphology and other incidental built elements. In this space, 'moments'¹⁰ would be stimulated by the playful mood of the structure and the novel activities unfolding within. Its monumentality would further impact surrounding space, inviting awe and unlocking its function as a Magnet.¹¹ During non-performance periods the structure is envisioned to stand as a sculpture in the urban environment, or monument to social unity, while also being open as a piece of furniture that the public can explore and inhabit.

Supporting Infrastructure

Choosing an appropriate site for the intervention would take into consideration the theatre's need for supporting infrastructure. At a basic level, it is anticipated that the *Proxaemic Theatre* would require access to WC's, considering the structure's extended use during performance times. Similarly, if the intervention was to reach its full potential, access to electricity would be necessary to support a significant amount of anticipated auxiliary technology, such as lighting, cameras, microphones and virtual simulation recording devices. These devices may present challenges to the original ambition for the theatre to be sited in an outdoor setting or open field, due to problems relating to rain and wind exposure. Rain may also render the structure obsolete in terms of people's comfort. This may lead to design development

and the introduction of a canopy, or it may push the intervention into an internal setting. It is important, however, to consider the profitable nature of an outdoor public setting. Reacting to these emergent demands will benefit from an *unlocking of the design process*, where the intervention is adapted to emergent conditions.

Prototype Testing

At the time of writing, this intervention has reached prototype stage, with a 1:1 scale fragment of the structure built, inhabited and tested by performers. Prototype testing has been essential for the development of the *Proxaemic Theatre*, as the spatial arrangement has no obvious precedent. Its typological ancestry is possibly found somewhere between a bunkbed and an amphitheatre. Testing of the structure revealed unanticipated outcomes including a heightened playful mood among adults when climbing and entering the structure. The novelty of the collective behavioural situation also appeared to contribute to this mood. These outcomes were also evident in earlier performative-oriented projects such as *Vandalis* and *LOW (A Kneeling Bar)*, which also structured proxemic novelties. 1:1 scale prototyping facilitated the evolution of the design which initially stacked bodies on three levels or tiers. Physical testing led to recognition of the potential for a tier of seating at the ground level, a provision that was not considered in earlier digital prototypes. Other ongoing adjustments to the 1:1 scale prototype focused on increasing the comfort of inhabitants when immersed in the structure. Of the six research interventions, *The Proxaemic Theatre* is the only project that is yet to be fully realised. However, the intention remains to realise a full-scale version at the completion of this research.

Notes

¹ Proxemics is the branch of knowledge that deals with how social interactions vary according to our physical proximity and the non-verbal communication that entails various thresholds of intimacy.

² Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*.

³ Statement by Thomas Capogreco, contribution to grant application, the *Proxaemic Theatre*, Science Family/Maess Projects, 2012.

⁴ Refer to the Urban Analysis, page 87, Book 2.

⁵ Koolhaas. *Delirious New York*, 152.

⁶ Koolhaas. *Content*, 73.

⁷ 'The Rubenstein Commons creates a space between — not just between walls, but between life and architecture ...in order to expand the

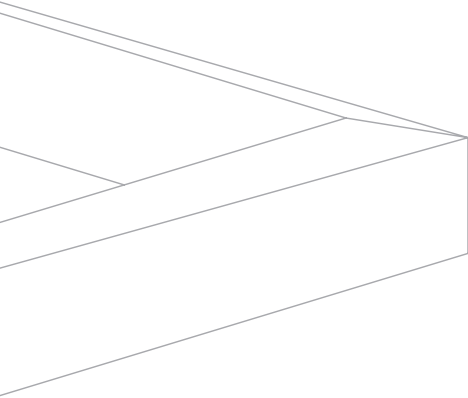
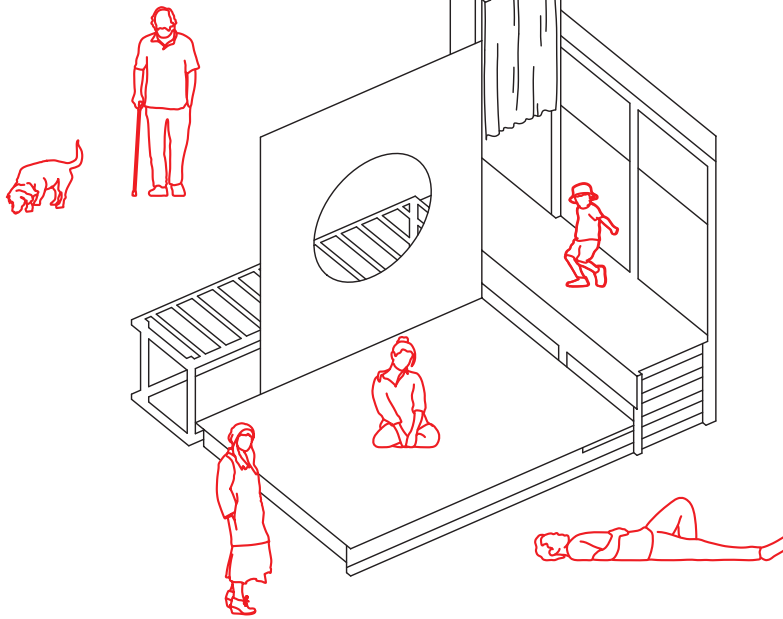
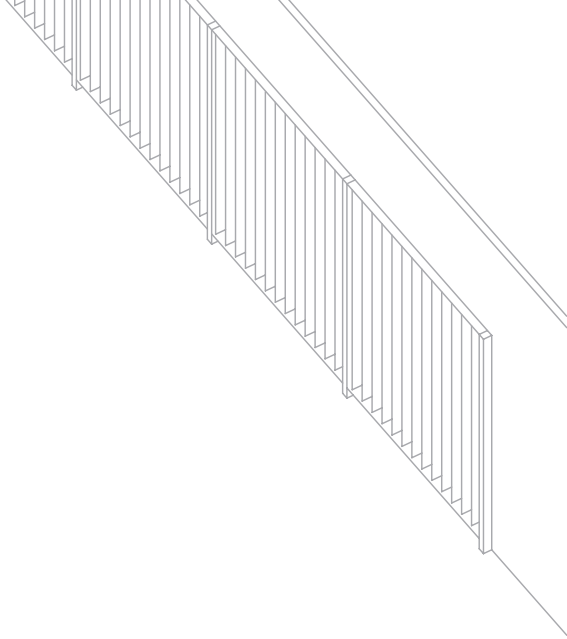
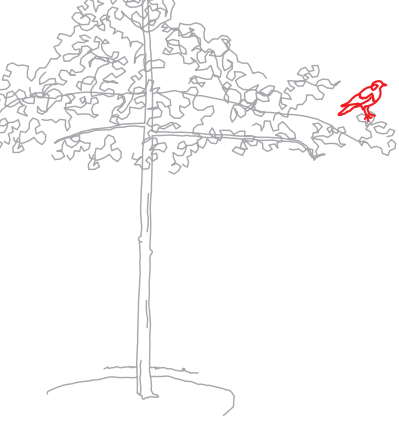
horizon of our knowledge and collective human consciousness. It is not simply about giving form to life but rather allowing life to unfold in its most unpredictable form'. Bokov. *Lessons from the Social Condensers*.

⁸ 'The lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy' - Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*.

⁹ Raumlabor's project for Future Two, Montreal, Canada, 2012.

¹⁰ In reference to the Lefebvre's 'Theory of Moments'.

¹¹ In reference to the work of Cedric Price.



Tactic 5

Re-coding an Open Territory

The Hōjōki Terminal, 2018

In 2018, the Art Gallery of South Australia hosted The World Tea Gathering,¹ a three-week event centred around a symposium of lectures and tea workshops conducted by various tea practitioners.² The practitioners travelled from Germany, Japan, Brazil and China to Adelaide for the event to share engaging contemporary and historical perspectives on tea, to reveal the depth of the age-old ritual and remind us why it may be relevant in a contemporary western context today. These perspectives contrasted with the Australian cultural setting where tea has held a different cultural significance and, for example, has not traditionally been viewed as a conduit for public existence. The tea practitioners seemed aware of the context they had reached and brought a sense of purpose along with their practices to challenge the status quo. This resembled an activist agency that I immediately identified with.

Public Space and Tea

The tea workshops took the form of ‘pop-up’³ events and ‘impromptu rituals’⁴ in various public settings within and beyond the State Art Gallery. Arranged like an archipelago, reaching as far as the Adelaide Botanic Gardens,⁵ the workshops were generally improvised by laying tatami mats in found locations. A public quality invigorated the tea workshops with urban sensations and movements as well as the opportunity for chance social intersections. The public settings made the workshops inviting to new, serendipitous arrivals who were curious to participate and learn about tea. The tea practitioners emphasised the value of these chance social intersections by describing them as ‘ichi go, ichi e’⁶ moments, that roughly translates as an unrepeatable and treasured moment, or, ‘for this time only’. The impromptu nature of the workshops in public settings held reciprocity with the interventions that my own practice has developed. As a result, I perceived a unique, shared understanding with the practitioners, who from my perspective also sought to ‘heal’ spaces like ‘roaming medics’.⁷ As a result of this operative similarity the tea practitioners were able to immediately understand the provisional intervention I would develop for the event, possibly more expediently than trained architects, although, they also had the distinct advantage of being first exposed to the finished outcome, rather than a representation of the concept.

Project Inception

My involvement with the Adelaide World Tea Gathering was the product of an *ichi go, ichi e* encounter. One day, while standing on the sideline of a junior school soccer game, the organiser of The World Tea Gathering and my colleague Dr Julian Worrall met, which led to a conversation about an architectural competition entry on

which Dr Worrall and I had previously collaborated. The competition entry had responded to concepts in the ancient Japanese text *Hōjōki*⁸ – a Buddhist philosophical text of the 13th century written by Kamo-no-Chōmei. *Hōjōki* is an account of the minimal dwelling of a hermit that poetically expresses ideas of impermanence, microcosm, simplicity and non-attachment; themes that variably intersect with the practice of tea. The organiser of The World Tea Gathering was enthused by this conceptual foregrounding and recognised its potential to enrich a bespoke tea pavilion for the upcoming event. During initial conversations with the event organiser, Dr Worrall proposed that the envisioned tea pavilion could simultaneously serve as a research tool associated with this study and explained my interest to unlock new types of social interaction through architectural mediation. The proposition of this mutual function was warmly received, considering the social emphasis of the Tea Gathering. This emphasis was possibly encapsulated by the event's subtitle 'togetherness through avant-garde tea'. This fortuitous chance encounter landed me a project that would enable me to test ideas specific to this study.



Fig. 92 | Architecture as a prop for chance social encounter and bright behavioural situations.

Design Process

In the brief for the seminal competition entry that inspired the *Hōjōki Terminal*, Fram Kitagawa and Hiroshi Hara framed the contemporary context of *Hōjōki* as an alternative to 'homogenous space',⁹ an idea reminiscent of Henri Lefebvre's reading of the 'abstract space'¹⁰ of 20th century capitalist cities and his appeal for a more diverse,

emancipatory 'differential space'.¹¹ It felt natural to reappropriate Kitigawa and Hara's theoretical foundations as a means for ensuring contemporary relevance and critique. In order to counteract abstract space, early considerations for the design of the pavilion sought to stray from symmetry, enclosure and familiarity. With enriching conceptual tenets in place, I also proceeded to outline the basic programmatic elements of the pavilion, to see how they might steer its form. This led to the establishment of a centralised platform and social space for tea workshops that was scaled to enable a set of tatami mats to be comfortably sited. It was also recognised that vertical elements and shelves, in some form, would be highly useful for hanging fabrics and storing cultural artefacts significant to the tea practitioners' workshops. However, the tatami mats seemed to contradict Kitigawa and Hara's provocation by steering the space towards a rectilinear arrangement. Different forces seemed to pull the design in opposite directions, while the project risked being overwhelmed by conceptual tenets. To navigate this, I centred attention towards my basic research ambition to unlock new types of social interaction. I concentrated on ways to augment the vertical elements to make them productive for chance social encounter. I configured these additional elements with the aim to catalyse fresh experiences of communication in the public setting by mediating strange social proximities and cohabitation. I consciously maintained attempts to avoid forming a protective enclosure as this was deemed to be at odds with Kitigawa and Hara's call for 'differential' space, and certainly at odds with Kamo-no-Chōmei's account of a minimal dwelling.

Low-tech

The small project budget and a construction window of three weeks demanded a solution that could be built quickly with simple, uncomplicated connections. Any solution also needed to be robust to withstand the varied and multiple occupancies of the structure that I anticipated and hoped for, including sitting, climbing, leaning and lying on the structure. With these considerations I mapped out suitable construction materials and decided to adhere to structural pine and 14G bugle screws as a basic design constraint. Another constraint I committed to at an early stage of the design process was to realise a constructive quality via exposed fixings and laminated or additive connections of materials, instead of rebates,

chamfers and concealed fixings. I viewed these gestures as suitable for conveying sentiments of impermanence and transience that Kamo-no-Chōmei had reflected on. Even though these techniques were instrumental for the structural strength of the intervention, they were also at odds to normative ‘architectural’ assembly, instead pointing towards a makeshift or amateur construction methodology. Aware of this and recognising that such a construction approach might challenge people’s expectations, I proceeded with the expedient construction measures. I viewed the approach as a form of ‘controlled amateurism’ that maintained precision of assembly while omitting unnecessary labour. This project stands as an authentic example of the ‘low-tech’ construction methodology that I elaborate on in this study, paralleled only by the Dirty Tea-house and The Third Space exhibition structure, whereas earlier interventions until this point remained slightly unformed, or inhibited by the tools, materials and knowledge available at the time.

A Pavilion Without Walls

To address Hara and Kitigawa’s appeal for ‘diverse’ and ‘differential’ space, I considered a line and planar expression that would produce visual and communicative links with the greater landscape through openings and gaps. This approach would adhere to 90-degree connections, profitable for the overall robustness and strength of the intervention, but also profitable for a calming spatial effect. This approach would recall modernist experimentation of De Stijl and the Russian constructivists, making passive reference to a concept repeatedly addressed throughout this study: the constructivist’s social condenser. Like other gestures that sought to challenge people’s expectations, I recognised that some observers might be disgruntled by such a nostalgic reference. However, I also believed that the reference was subtle enough to evade reception. One might argue that pinpointing planar and rectilinear expression to a single moment in history is itself nostalgic, given the universality of the spatial expression. My attraction to a disciplined line and planar expression was furthered by a detectable post-humanist tone and an appealing movement away from specific or overtly obvious cultural motifs and iconography. This would facilitate the tea practitioners to take centre stage and ascribe their own voices to the space, through incidental fabrics, ceramicware and other incidental objects.

Kamo-no-Chōmei describes the *Hōjōki* as a microcosm that charts relations with the macrocosm of the wider world. Determined to honour this key function, I considered the defining spatial characteristics of the greater Adelaide CBD that lay adjacent to the Art Gallery setting. My attention was drawn to the gridded streets of Adelaide's plan and I recognised that a semiotic reference to this urban region, or 'macrocosm', may help to establish a psychological link or extension. This reinforced my commitment to rectilinear forms and 90-degree relationships between surfaces and structure. I encountered another affirmation for the chosen spatial expression in a journal article published by De Stijl, when Frederick Kiesler explained that an open structure composed of line and planar expression might inform a connection to space beyond a city, when he elucidates,

'And our cities? Walls, walls, walls. Let us have no more walls, no more sitting up body and soul in barracks, this whole barrack-culture with or without decoration. What we want is... transformation of global space into cities...'¹²

Patterns in Claiming Spaces

The *Hōjōki Terminal* was claimed by different user groups at different intervals, lending it a dynamic quality of use. Typically, one user would instigate a specific of use and similar behaviours would follow, determining different cycles of use. As an example, if the structure was completely empty, a single child would often claim the space in a playful and exuberant manner, prompting other children to do the same. At other times, the structure became a locus for rest and conversation that spilt beyond the object across the lawns.¹³ Another observation that was made apparent was how strangers were less likely to approach the structure if only one or two inhabitants dwelled within it. However, if larger numbers of people inhabited the space, more people would aggregate, following suit. The element of the pavilion conceptualised as a stage¹⁴ attracted a variety of contingent use and was notably appropriated by children during play or used to store and display artefacts and tea vessels. In general, the structure was touched, jumped on and sat upon, subverting usual codifications relating to the preservation of objects in artistic curatorial settings.

Can a Physical Structure Be One Thing AND Another?

People's questions about the structure revealed early hesitations to occupy and engage it. These questions tended to reflect efforts to compartmentalise the structure as serving a single function or age group, possibly to determine what social groups were permitted to occupy the structure. For example, one common question asked was 'Is it a playground, or is it for tea?' Questions like this might also reflect familiarity with age-specific codifications of spaces. Armed with my 'disruptive' modus operandi, I was both surprised by these questions and pleased. Surprised, because I assumed it was self-evident that the structure was public and non-age-specific, and pleased, because I wanted the structure to be appropriated by broad-ranging age groups and categories, to 'disrupt' the normative occupancies of our urban environment. I was also pleased that the structure was not claimed by a dominant cohort during its passage through time on the lawns, as this would have indicated an unsuccessful outcome. Despite the intervention's openness, several people still expressed discomfort using it during initial stages, commonly asking; 'Are we allowed to sit here?' Following varied use of the structure, hesitations and doubts from the public subsided. It appeared that new, original occupancies legitimised similar appropriations and proactively codified the open-ended structure. I have viewed the ambiguity of the *Hōjōki Terminal's* coding as a measure of its success. This stems from my personal bias that the inclination for social groups to compartmentalise into discrete identities is a schism that needs to be 'healed'.¹⁵ I view compartmentalisation as essentially private and therefore antithetical to a desirable public character. The inclination to compartmentalise reflects an 'invisible containment' or obstruction of the urban environment that I refer to in the Urban Analysis, relating to our openness and receptivity of others.¹⁶

A Device for Interpretation

What began as hesitation regarding the open-endedness or ambiguity of the structure evolved into embrace and emergence of new types of behaviour that are not normally witnessed in the lawn region. How often do we witness truly exuberant play, rest or lying-down in public urban settings? The *Hōjōki Terminal*

sited a variety of planes and materials at various heights, inviting people to interpret and adapt to the structure. It led to varied appropriations that are largely documented photographically in the *Projects* volume of this study. The built elements structured a variety of different spaces or ‘rooms’ in the lawn region that could accommodate multiple strangers in comfortable proximity. Architectural furniture and other engaging elements like information or ceramic ware were offered in these spaces to attract passers-by. The cumulative effect of these functions encouraged multiple user groups to simultaneously congregate on the space and form a locus of public gathering. People could seize and dwell in nuanced armatures of the pavilion and establish fresh lines of communication to those occupying adjacent sections, mediated by the built elements of the intervention. On reflection, opportunities for similar ‘differential’ types of social spatial mediation and interpretive appropriations appear excluded from the adjacent built environment from the ‘homogenous spaces’ of the city that Hara and Kitigawa critique.

Obstructions

Doubts regarding the function of the *Hōjōki Terminal* emerged prior to its completion, despite my attempts to elucidate its intended functions. These doubts came from untrained members of society as well as trained architects. These doubts reveal challenges in conceptualising the dynamic nature of public space and the ways that human occupancies and interactions unfold in relation to built structures. Members of the public largely limited their inquisition of the project to its economic foundations, asking ‘How much were you paid to build it?’ or ‘How much did it cost?’ Some users expressed confusion that the structure was provisional, with one person asking ‘What is the point of building something temporary?’ The Japanese idiom *ichi go ichi e* would provide an immediate answer to this question. This makes me wonder if the same economic emphasis would surface if the experiment was conducted in a Japanese context.

Moments before the installation was complete, an unidentified official at the Art Gallery of South Australia suddenly appeared and proposed that the installation be ‘removed immediately’ due to their perception that it was a ‘safety hazard’.¹⁷

This spontaneous reaction has been a consistent occurrence with my temporary projects and the concerns voiced were almost identical to those expressed by the citizen who opposed the intervention *LOW (A Kneeling Bar)*. The safety of any structure that I design and construct is an integral personal concern that I am committed to deliver. As a result, lengths were undertaken to remove any sharp edges of timber with 220 grit sandpaper prior to installation. I sense that this action was not appreciated as it was not made publicly visible or heavily vocalised. Furthermore, the general construction of the *Hōjōki Terminal* was made with a high level of care, with Plywood sheets, timber lengths and fixings sited in a calculated manner to avoid fissures and convey a constructible finesse. I therefore sense it is safe to assume that the interventions build quality was not a reasonable attractor of doubt, however, the exposed fixings used for assembly may have been unfamiliar to the concerned official and could potentially have carried an agitating stigma. The safety fears expressed have never been validated by any accident or detrimental effect in connection to the works I have produced. Is this stated source of concern valid, or does it represent an alibi for arbitrary, citizen governance of space?

Legacy

The *Hōjōki Terminal* presents an original, provisional infrastructure for outdoor occupancy that can accommodate multiple user groups. Following the occupancy that the intervention experienced over seven days of deployment, Dr Urs Bette suggested that it functioned as a ‘can-opener for the lawns’.¹⁸ The intervention opposes the baseline, familiar method for inhabiting green spaces; by throwing a blanket over grass or by installing a light-weight plastic canopy or marquee, which seem to get blighted by wind almost as a course of ritual. The vertical, line and planar elements of the intervention framed a series of rooms within the grassed territory and provided minimal refuge so that new arrivals did not feel over-exposed in the public setting, performing as a *spatial dampener*.¹⁹ The intervention functioned as a magnet to the lawns for curious passers-by who generally appeared to be instinctively aware that the object was offered for public use. Furthermore, the intervention unlocked play and playfulness in the space that was not merely limited to children.

Now that the intervention has been removed, the ghost that lingers on the Gallery's lawns is palpable, considering how unpopulated the space has remained without it. Despite the sun-drenched northern exposure of the lawns and its public accessibility, they appear today as an under-utilised site for public leisure and gathering. Following its installation on the AGSA lawns, the intervention prompted extensive feedback, suggesting that the structure captivated the public's imagination. The tea practitioners who practiced at the event expressed special enthusiasm for the intervention and for my research generally, leading to new commissions. They resonated with ideas that I illustrated during my public lecture at the Art Gallery, such as the concept 'socialisation as a design problem'. Many of the ideas I presented intersected with their own personal forms of activism regarding western approaches to public space. Another surprising outcome of the project was the polarisation between the feedback received prior to its installation, compared with the feedback following its manifestation and testing. This exposed a fascinating set of cultural constructions surrounding provisional, built objects.

Notes

¹ Founded by Mai Ueda and Adam Wojciński, the inaugural World Tea Gathering took place in Reykjavik, June 2014.

² Sometimes referred to as 'tea artists', in certain contexts.

³ A buzzword commonly used to describe a provisional use of a space.

⁴ Taken from the website of Yumi Umiumare Butoh. yumi.com.au

⁵ The Adelaide Botanic Gardens was sited approximately 800 metres from the Art Gallery.

⁶ 'Ichi go, ichi e' is a Japanese idiom that roughly translates into 'for this time only', among various translations from Japanese into English.

⁷ 'Roaming medic' is term coined in the Practice Agenda section of this study.

⁸ Kamo-no-Chōmei, Hōjōki'.

⁹ Hiroshi Hara describes homogenous space as 'a second nature, ... comfortable and convenient, ... a world of new, artificially regulated climates and transportation, a place divorced from its original natural environment'. Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale 2018, competition brief.

¹⁰ Lefebvre. The Production of Space.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kiesler. Space City.

¹³ Further appropriations and occupancies are unpacked in Projects, Book 1.

¹⁴ For details of the Stage see Projects, Book 1.

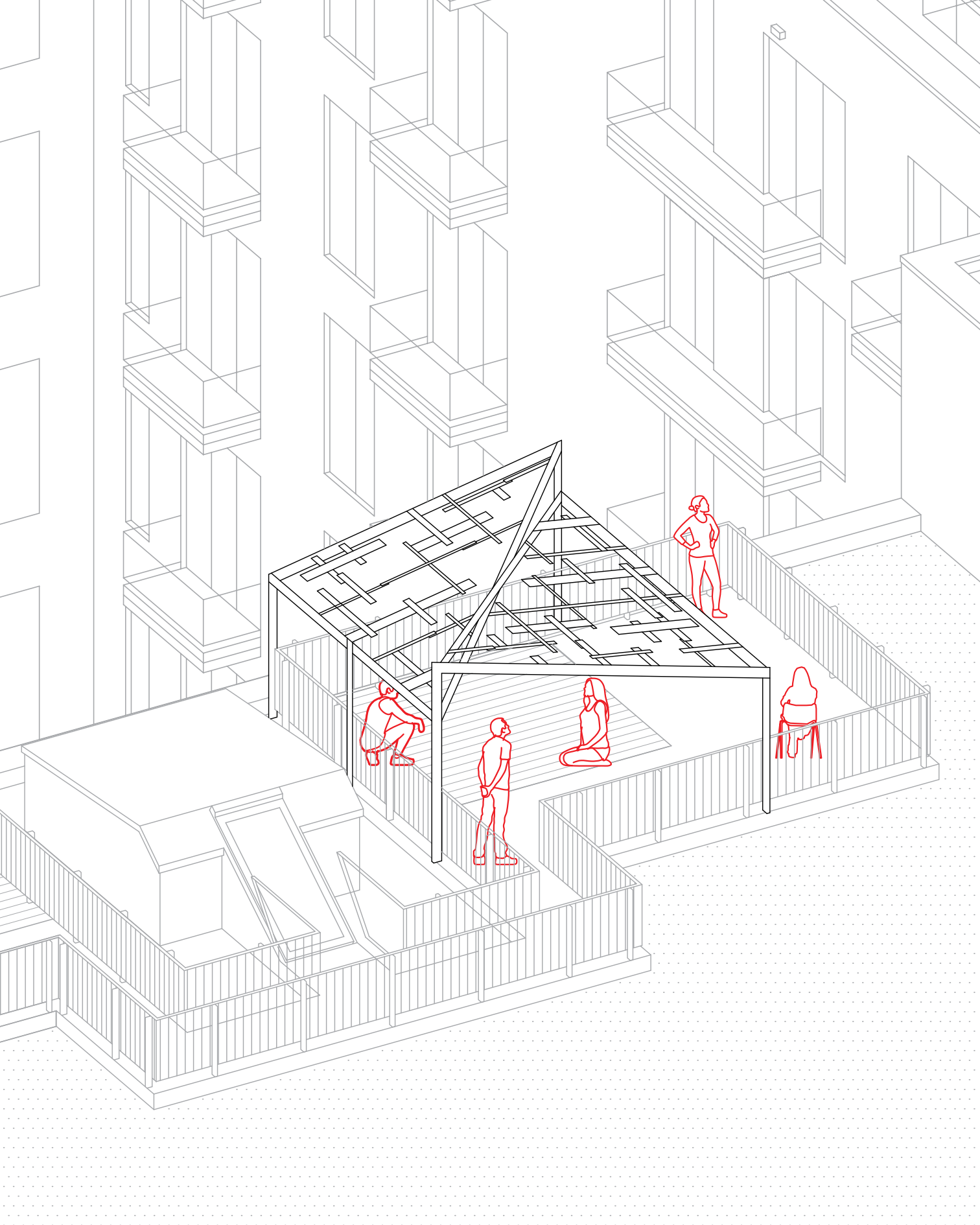
¹⁵ In reference to the concept of the 'roaming medic', see Practice Agenda.

¹⁶ Refer to Urban Analysis.

¹⁷ Comments made by the unknown official.

¹⁸ Statement by Bette, 2018.

¹⁹ See Glossary in appendix.



Tactic 6

Catalytic Architecture

The Dirty Tea-house, 2019

A client unsatisfied with a semi-private rooftop terrace approached me to devise a possible architectural correction that could be easily and expediently installed. Although the terrace was a selling point for the apartment, over time the client found that it remained largely under-utilised, despite its exceptional views across Berlin and its exposure to European sun. One likely reason for the lack of use of the space was the sense of exposure produced by the 200-something apartment living room windows that faced the site indirectly. When I first visited the site, I sensed a feeling of vulnerability from this passive gaze, possibly limiting the length of time I felt comfortable staying in the space. With some balconies an arm-length away, one could not help but feel that they were 'on show'. Other factors inhibiting the use of the space may include the fact that the space is publicly accessible, yet private only by nature of title, its lack of human scale and the homogeneity of the adjacent newly built apartments.

A Structure for Variation and Refuge

The rooftop terrace is sited among a newly developed housing district in Rudolfskiez, Berlin, among an immense succession of six-storey cookie-cutter apartments belatedly re-instated in a WWII void in inner-Berlin. After exiting the stairwell and emerging into the space, you are confronted by the unbroken walls, ceaseless grey render and the ubiquity of rectilinear lines of the urban development. A sense of abandonment of the space is signalled by the weeds that have made this territory their home. It is an archetypal forgotten urban space. There is also a sense that the space is architecturally incomplete, with the only accommodating features being a caging, steel balustrade and a composite wood-plastic deck, the artificiality of which, captures the spirit of the surrounding development. The housing district has received indignation from native Berliners, who, on the street level, celebrate and enjoy the intimacy of small corner shops, candle-lit bars and spates of surviving, heritage building stock. It presents the conflation of two veritably incompatible worlds. The client was cogently aware of this gulf and was determined to transform her titled rooftop region into a space with appropriate warmth for hosting intimate tea ceremonies. She requested a built structure be developed that would provide elements of privacy and refuge in the space, without compromising views or

sunlight. I sought to develop a response that would avoid the anti-social gesture of constructing a wall or barricade. The consequent proposal focused on the provision of a canopy structure upheld by posts anchored to the existing balustrade. The canopy was articulated by two interlocking triangles, establishing a crystalline morphology that concealed bracing in the structure for strength. I felt that this geometric approach reintroduced a missing element to the space, to disrupt the severe orthogonality of the neighbouring buildings. This contrasting feature was further reinforced by the canopy's natural timber materiality and its fenestration, composed as a patina derived from an abstracted depiction of organic tea leaves. For this intervention, all-is-frame, inviting the client to contribute authorship by dressing it with translucent and traditional fabrics, by painting it or by adding artifacts to shelves integrated with the structure. The structure was intentionally not weather-proofed, stemming from the client's request, who was interested to witness its decay – another element seemingly omitted from the surrounding buildings (with exception of the weeds). The naming of the structure stemmed from this quality.



Fig. 94 | Architectural adjustments can provide a sense of completion to external spaces. How often are such actions avoided due to forces of the public gaze?

Struck By Lightning?

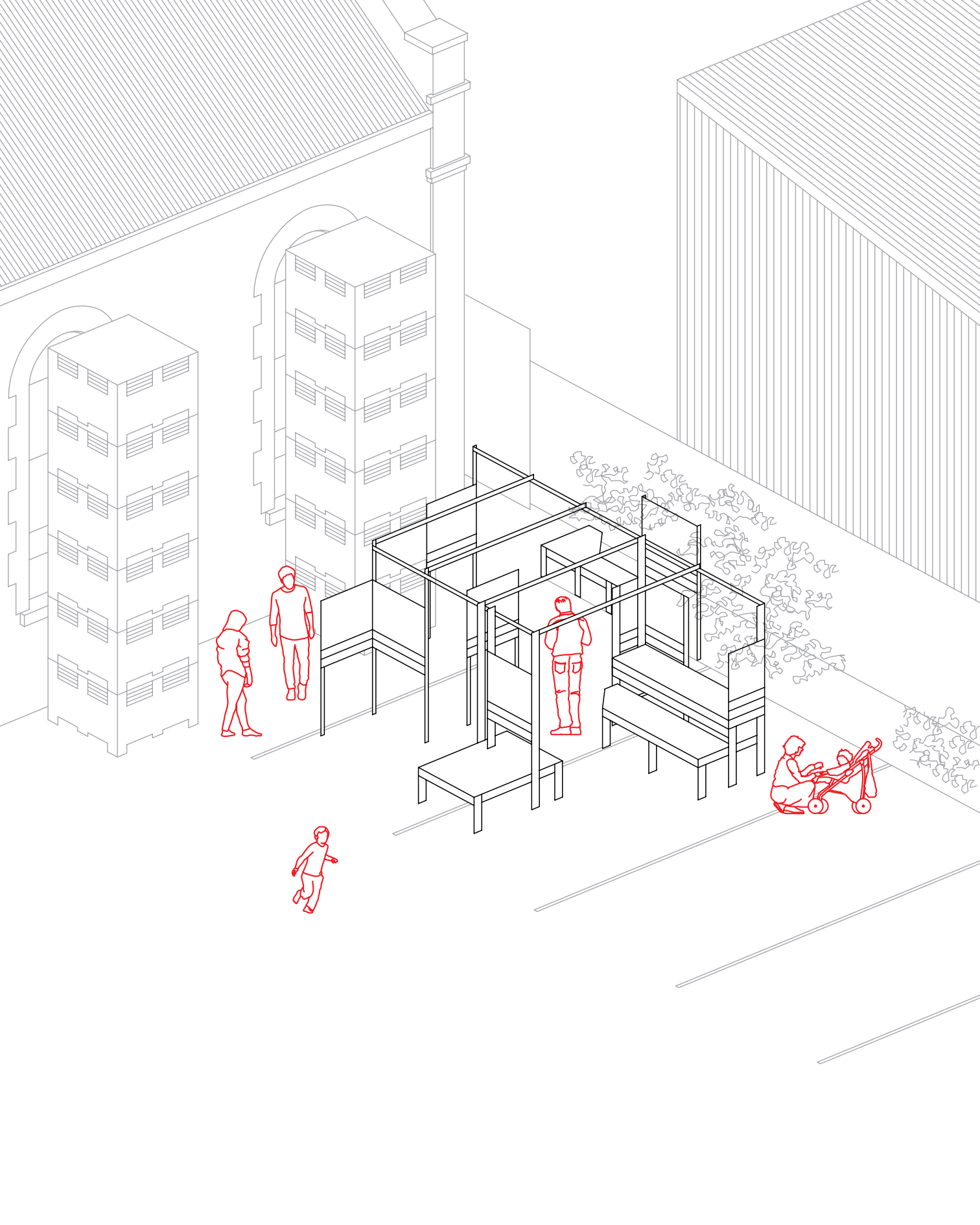
Moments after its completion, the *Dirty Tea-house* encountered surprise resistance. Following a strange knock on the door, we were confronted by a previously unknown individual who claimed to be acting on behalf of another anonymous local resident, to relay concerns that the structure was at risk of being struck by lightning. This person continued by expressing the opinion that the structure 'should be removed immediately'. After deliberating, we chose to dismiss this suggestion on the grounds that the structure was not conductive (as it was made of wood) and that many lightning rods exist in the immediate vicinity at higher locations than this new insertion. Furthermore,

an aluminium-framed tent exists on a nearby rooftop but has remained despite these uncertainties existing in the community. We retroactively interpreted this as a reactive gesture, of social pressure to maintain the rooftops status quo.

Catalytic

Two days after the intervention was complete, another surprising outcome arose, one that was instead affirmative. On a nearby rooftop region, approximately 10m from the project site, an anonymous neighbour had installed two umbrellas in an oversized pot plant, signalling the claiming of their rooftop region. The client of *Dirty Tea-house* identified this gesture as a form of mimicry, given its timing and explained: 'I've never seen these umbrellas before, they must have done this in response to our structure!' Despite the makeshift quality of the assumed reaction, the behavioural response was interesting. While this reveals the didactic quality of the intervention in demonstrating the usefulness of the space, I read into the gesture further; to suggest that the *Dirty Tea-house* acted as a type of 'ice-breaker', one that disrupts a pattern of use to boldly overcome the judgement of the public gaze. It is often difficult to be the first person to break the mould. Once a tried and tested way exists, others tend to follow; group psychology is at play. What social forces exist to determine how we 'should' use our public spaces?

The structure was built on a whim, without any permits or consultation and consequently pushed the limits of what is socially and legally acceptable. It was intended as a subversive construction that pairs with the transformational aspects of tea, hoping to set a precedent for occupancy of other forgotten rooftops and trigger a culture of similar public structures. The intervention could also be considered a variation of *The EN/counter* intervention, as it forms a new, inhabitable vantage on the public threshold to the private residence; albeit in an inner-urban European context. Building and testing this prototype in a European context was an interesting exercise to draw comparison to the Australian interventions. Interestingly, the behavioural responses to the structure were largely indistinguishable to my Australian-based experiences.



Exhibition

Tactic 7: The Limit of an Interstitial Space
The Third Space, 2021

An exhibition was developed to summarise and communicate the outcomes of this study. Following an extensive exploration of conceptual options, it was concluded that the exhibition was best conceived as an original, seventh, built intervention, to compliment the existing six. By taking this course, the exhibition could function as an independent and productive research instrument while communicating the atmosphere and physical experience typical of the previous interventions. Architectural elements common to the research interventions were naturally incorporated, including structure for refuge, furniture for cohabitation and tectonic expression.

A Field

The exhibition was conceptualised as a spatial field that utilises visual displays as organising and influencing agents, combined with other didactic furniture elements. The arrangement sought to mediate and disrupt normative human spatial relationships by providing intentional obstructions and instigating proxemic ambiguities, as people navigated through the display. Sites within the field arrangement hoped to establish fulcrums to prompt minimal social negotiation for those passing through or dwelling at the intervention, providing agency for social sparks, humour and play. Furniture elements were integrated to encourage random use, respite and to forge sentiments of public togetherness in a previously unoccupied space. I recall a design principle inherited from the first architectural office in which I worked that stipulated no transitory space should be less than 800mm wide.¹ The exhibition structure subverts this rule without hindering movement, as people are provided with a variety of options for moving through the space.

‘The Third Space’

The exhibition's title, *The Third Space*, is a reference to its interstitial siting; between a traditional building and a publicly interfaced carpark that serves a venue known as Oddio, in Bowden, Adelaide. On this site, a former church has been transformed

into a semi-industrial wine-making facility which is seasonally adapted into an event space. The carpark, sited at the front of the venue, is composed of an expansive, square, concrete-pad that abuts the historic walls of the church. The only permanent furnishings in this realm are plantings and rocks on peripheries. The occasional, offhand wine barrel is also noticeable in the vicinity, almost as a semiotic clue as



Fig. 96 | Exhibition structure; can architects develop physical fulcrums that structure new forms of social engagement?

to what occurs behind the historic facade. The carpark, a dynamic and active space, serves two distinct functions. During production periods it acts as a docking bay, where industrial equipment, cars and crates are in constant competition for spaces, while during events, it reverts to a blank and sparse canvas, with mobile elements maximally packed away to 'tidy' the space and make it pleasant for patrons who typically line up in numbers during popular event periods. Patrons have previously offered conjecture surrounding the tedium of waiting in line, a possible unconscious reaction to the sparsity and openness of the carpark.

Subverting Council Restrictions

Conversations with the operators of the venue revealed that the sparseness of the carpark did not reflect their intentions but is a result of sternly administered council licensing restrictions that prohibit alcohol consumption in the entire front open portion of the property. This is surprising considering the expanse of this leased region, comprising 390m², and the lack of open space in other parts of the property. As a consequence, the operators have avoided any built elements in this region, to avoid passive invitations to patrons carrying wine glasses in hand – a legally problematic instance that could be met with crippling fines. This injunction is maintained despite the universal rates per-square-metre the operators pay. They expressed a sense of injustice and powerlessness on this matter, forfeiting their instinctive ambitions to populate this expansive, front vantage.

This context established a subversive quality for the exhibition structure and required an impressive amount of flexibility and dynamism from the venue operators. Many would simply follow protocol, in lieu of pleasing the council. The operators were prepared to allow for a small concession, in consideration of the exhibition's temporal nature, while being transparent about the complexity of the situation and the associated risks. This presented an unprecedented opportunity to test the potential of the blank space. No licences or permits were sought for the procurement of the structure, as these processes would have invited time-consuming bureaucracy and anticipated obstructions.

A Portal or 'Spatial Dampener'

Described as a 'spatial dampener', the exhibition structure aimed to alleviate the sparseness of the carpark and ameliorate the sense of impatience expressed by those who wait in lines during winery events. In service of patrons to the venue, the structure was comprised of an open quality that could enable movement of people from the venue's main entry through to the main pedestrian entry passage and courtyard beyond, serving as the arterial gateway to the main event space. In this sense, the structure can be viewed as a portal where certain obstructions are introduced, balanced with the needs of free pedestrian procession. The structure would provide a range of additional affordances useful to urban ambulist's,² including



Figure 97 | Taking the public on a walk-through of *The Third Space* exhibition during its opening.

visual and spatial stimulation, a variety of seating opportunities, chances for spatial discovery, exploration and refuge. One user admitted that the minimal structural elements were advantageous for a sense of refuge when she sought to calm an anxious child. The openness of the structure also allowed for the adjacent plantings to visually integrate with the intervention and not be overwhelmed or obstructed.

A Site-specific Structure

Design changes happened daily until its completion, over a two-week period. The structure was configured as a loose kit-of-parts that allowed the exact locations of elements to be determined in-situ, according to feeling. This measure was essential to generate the intended tensions and proxemic ambiguities. The 'kit' was also essential for the projects transportation, as elements were prefabricated off-site and then flat-packed and carried to site in the tray of a ute,³ in a single trip. A bench seat element was introduced that integrates with an edge condition, concealing a rock-laden garden bed. Named 'The Bouncers Seat', it aimed to offer dignity to the bouncer who may wish to sit during long periods of tenure. This reflects the ethic that underpins the previous interventions.

Unashamed Spatial Experience – Re-thinking the Architectural Exhibition

During my regular attendance to Architecture Biennales in Venice, I have witnessed countless architectural exhibits that strip away all architecture or focus exclusively on models and image. This exhibit faces its vulnerabilities head-on, proposing unashamed construction and lived spatial experience. People were permitted to touch and inhabit all parts of the exhibit, subverting from familiar restraints that characterise architectural or artistic displays. Many users were immediately challenged by permissions surrounding the structure, revealing uncertainty about whether the furniture elements could be inhabited, often asking: 'can we sit on the structure?'

Further Reactions

Several users expressed concern that the exhibition sat in the mandatory disabled parking space, however this action was unavoidable as the specific site was designated by the operators of the venue. Multiple people expressed enthusiasm for interacting with the structure while lining-up to enter the venue, for having something to explore and engage with. People's appetite for

exploration of the structure was affirmed prior to its completion; on the day I returned to site to install finishing touches, I pleasantly encountered a group of anonymous people inhabiting and loitering around the intervention, claiming spaces and being curious. One of the operators of the winery suggested that drapes and other elements might help to soften the structure, noting its bareness, a gesture that would help to absorb the sun given the site's northern exposure.

This intervention presented the first occasion that anxieties and alarms from unknown authorities or members of the public did not arise. However, my established social connection with the venue operator was undoubtedly advantageous for this scenario. Another staff member of the venue admitted that she had never spent leisurely time in this front aspect of the venue prior to the installation of the exhibition structure, noting her surprise at the impact of the structure.

After-life of the Project

Provisional interventions can absorb a notable quantity of materials, especially if they are large enough to be inhabited. Given the energy used to create the materials and our inherent social and environmental responsibilities, disposing of materials at a rubbish tip shortly after their time limit has exceeded seems untenable. Therefore, the after-life of provisional interventions is an intrinsic consideration that also helps to construct a narrative around the object. This intervention was already the realisation of after-life of sorts, as it was partly built from timbers salvaged from previous interventions. In addition to this, a bounty of pine floorboards, that once lined the former church floor, before it was a winery, were salvaged from the back storeroom of the venue.⁴ This material bricolage reflects a common predilection of the earlier interventions and was economically appropriate for such a prototype. On a deeper level, it was considered that new materials would be overly emblematic of the construction industry, a sphere at odds to the realisation of the interventions and notions of democratised construction that were fundamental to their realisation. The kit-of-parts configuration of the exhibit meant that various elements could easily separate after the exhibition, discovering new and varied post-project uses. At the time of writing, 'The Bouncers Bench' is a single element of the exhibition

that has remained on-site. This element, nestled on the fringe of the carpark, found new use as hand-sanitising station. The reappropriation of other elements involved reimagining a seating element as a patio table by adding a new set of legs while the tiered seating element has been split into two parts to become a shed workbench and a bench-seat respectively. Other elements will be upcycled as needs arise.

Democratised Construction

The structure was built with a democratised construction method that favours easy-to-assemble, low-tech techniques that do not require specialised training and only a limited toolset. This led to the articulation of a highly tectonic structure, where 20mm thick boards were affixed by additive applications, rather than using dowels and similar carpentry methods that would streamline connections. Despite this design language, the policy was maintained to achieve the highest level of precision to avoid splinters, spandrels and gaps, to ensure the aesthetic resonance of its assembly.

Notes

¹ Williams Burton Architects in Adelaide was the first office I worked for. The design principle was determined in relation to domestic architectural design.

² An 'ambulist' describes one who walks.

³ A 'ute' is a colloquial Australian term that describes a utility vehicle with an open cargo tray at the rear.

⁴ Floorboards are reflected in photographs by the brown painted elements of the intervention.

Investigation Results

One of the remarkable outcomes of this investigation was the consistent pattern of behaviour that emerged in reaction to the provisional interventions. In this chapter, I will unpack this pattern and reveal its various nuances in the process. Public responses to the provisional interventions highlighted a set of contradictions. These contradictions served to emphasise the idea that specific training, knowledge and experience is necessary to conceptualise the potential of a provisional intervention.

Public Doubt

Concepts for the research interventions were circulated prior to their physical development, among formal design circles and friends. This gesture marked the first phase of public exposure to the project and was primarily driven by an appeal for shared excitement. It was also an indirect appeal to others for incidental input, feedback and support. However, for the research interventions examined in this study, I generally found that responses to concepts were marked by doubt and questioning. This certainly exceeded preceding optimism for the provisional projects, with the exception of clients who were intrinsically familiar with the goals of the projects. What was especially notable was how expediently these doubts dissipated after the interventions were physically experienced. This reminds me to be careful about who I share ideas for projects with, as doubts are not always constructive and can erode one's belief in a project. This also served as a convincing indicator of missing knowledge and understandings relating to how provisional interventions will be impactful once they are physically realised.

A range of interpretations can be drawn here. One could interpret doubt as a process of testing convictions. However, I also felt that preceding doubt lacked lenience, was resolute and therefore is better equated as an obstruction to the project, as a defence mechanism. My hunch is that people are intrinsically aware of the contention of public space and perceive the sense of strong public judgement that comes with it. Doubts may reveal a general lack of familiarity for small-scales, low-tech construction methods and provisional programs in Australian contexts. I also concede that part of this disparity might be due to the methods of representation chosen for the ideas. I admit that my attempts to communicate

the functions of the interventions with conceptual drawings and digital models were not as successful as I had hoped, as time and resources were prioritised for other duties. Following the research, I plan to explore new methods to heal this schism. My hunch is that the public and even trained architects will often assess a space in habitual ways, namely in terms of its aesthetic qualities, underestimating the phenomenological, behavioural and social dimensions of spaces. This has led me to theorise that first-hand and intimate experience of small-scale architecture is paramount for understanding how it will perform.

Arbitrary Control of Space

The second notable phase of behaviour occurred the moment the interventions were completed, where a person would spontaneously appear and request instantaneous and total removal of the intervention. For this phase of behaviour, the self-appointed authority figure was always previously unknown to me, the clients or other collaborators. They would consistently arrive at the site alone, overcome with emotion and detached from the project on any social terms. This eruption of behaviour would dissipate as rapidly as it appeared, as the person soon realised they did not have public support. Because of the insubstantial claims that underpinned these expressions of fear and anxiety, I have come to view them as forms of ‘arbitrary power’¹ that may reveal the governance of public space by citizens. After comparing the stated fears with the events that ensued it seems safe to conclude that they were exaggerated, particularly considering the heightened level of distress displayed by these figures. No significant design changes to the research interventions were made to appease these persons. The only notable exception being for the project *Hidden Borough Staircase*, which was adapted to appease law enforcement officials. This was distinct as they represented an authentic authority. These events, along with the consistency and frequency of their occurrence, may reveal the Australian public’s unfamiliarity and discomfort with small-scale architectural projects. They may also point towards heightened public safety fears and fear of litigation. This experience might inform a new chapter for the research component of my practice, where I work *with* the law, rather than running below its radar, to explore its inherent limitations and possibilities. This would also safeguard against forms of arbitrary control of spaces and outbursts of public emotion.

The public expressed their doubts and enforced forms of 'arbitrary power' through a range of verbal tropes. These tropes revealed psychological rifts, stigmas and injunctions regarding permissions, what is 'acceptable' and how a space 'should' be used. The tropes tended to dissipate as the values and properties of the interventions became evident. I have now grown familiar with a set of specific tropes and queries following my involvement on small-scale, provisional projects.² Notable tropes included: 'Can I use it?', 'Is the project only temporary?' and 'The timber has not been painted!'

Public Support

Forms of contention and expressions of arbitrary power routinely emerged the moment that the research interventions were physically realised. These events sprung upon the vulnerability that the projects newness presented and generally only lasted for short durations. To my great surprise these events coincided with forms of support, with anonymous members of the public arriving in aid of their defence. This confirmed the polarising nature of the interventions examined in this study. Immediate forms of appraisal and support that emerged, casts light on the doubts expressed when audiences viewed preceding digital representations. Public doubts and contention were quickly superseded by sentiments of public support, in most cases, and expressions of excitement, fascination, enthusiasm and curiosity.

Catharsis

The eruption of public enthusiasm that surfaced after the interventions were physically experienced may almost be read as a vital release, or catharsis. Could this reaction reveal an intrinsic appetite in people to break from routine and experience memorable, joyful, social bonding and moments? I sensed that a yearning exists for bright moments and novelty in our public spaces, from almost every participant that engaged intimately with the interventions. I was struck by one user's feedback for the *Hōjōki Terminal*, who explained it was the first time she had the opportunity to 'experience architecture'. This might highlight

a sense of starvation in members of the Australian public for architectural and spatial experimentation, in fine-grain and creative forms at the ground level.

Catalysts

After the projects were experienced, I could sense that they probed people's thinking. New actions for claiming public spaces by other members of the public emerged in a timely fashion after the interventions had been installed. These actions seemingly mirrored the interventions, making their function as catalysts apparent. Another catalytic outcome related to the manner in which people would descend on the object in a chain reaction, recalling Lefebvre's ideas about 'social explosions'.³

Does One Type of Architect Fit All Situations?

The uncertainties that emerged the moment the interventions were completed may also correspond to a simple visual cue: with the unfamiliarity of plain clothed labour forces, in Australian contexts. Australia has a highly regulated and uniform building industry, where contractors are iconified by Hi Vis garments and building sites are dressed with highly visible, normative public safety precautions,⁴ almost without exception. What I learnt about the interventions was that every event and communicative gesture associated with the project's served a performative function and was instrumental to how they were interpreted. This included every social exchange, the appearance of the labour force, their garments and even the instruments and methods for ensuring public safety. Every visible object in a space has a communicative function and is therefore worth consideration. In 2012, I was unsuccessful in my attempt to convince colleagues of EXZYT Collectif to consider doing a project in Australia,⁵ although I would later admit that the issues described in this paragraph would impede their operations, mainly due to the lack of flexibility in ways that the built environment in Australia can be curated. 'One type fits all' is a mentality embedded in the Australian construction industry and the Australian architectural profession. The knowledge implemented when developing small, fine-grain architecture varies significantly to that used when

developing a convention centre, for example. However, the Australian architectural registration process only recognises one type of ‘architect’⁶ for all situations. The problem here, is that companies familiar with building larger developments risk using the same set of protocols, formalities, design approaches and processes when they generate a small-scale, architectural project. These matters risk impeding the sensitive nature of a small-scale architectural project and ultimately, their potential.

Play and Refuge

People seized the spatial offerings presented by the interventions with tenacity, using the structures and spaces to serve their own needs. Opportunities for playfulness were seized by adults and children alike, that may not be available in everyday urban environments. For example, I was struck by the variety of age groups that intersected when joyfully participating in *LOW (A Kneeling Bar)*. It made me perceive the differentiation of play between adults and children as a social construct that spatial interventions can help to disassemble, through their ambiguity of age-specificity. general On another note, several participants admitted how the physical elements of the research interventions assisted their comfort in outdoor, public settings and provided a sense of refuge. They played an instrumental role in the length of time that people spent in public spaces. Fine-grain architectural elements can be used to fine-tune urban spaces by serving our psychological needs for public comfort and refuge.

Collective Memory and Time

The ghosts that have lingered after the provisional interventions were immersed in their respective sites are palpable. Provisional interventions serve as markers in time against the ongoing flux of everyday urban life, due to their temporality, distinct visual presence and the anomalous events that they structure. What struck me was the passionate storytelling about the interventions that later surfaced. Could this be a result from their utility in assisting the ‘constitution’⁷ of individuals, as Lefebvre describes? This has led to my reappraisal of the force

of collective memory for urban ‘moments’ and events. Could collective memory be comparable to the permanency of brick and mortar? Provisionality possibly heightens the public’s intrigue. There is an excitement linked to something temporal. There is also a thrill associated with being a witness. Support and enthusiasm for alternative types of break-out spaces could also be a response to how static and unmalleable our cities are for many months of the year.⁸

Notes

¹ The term ‘arbitrary power’ is taken from David Graeber, who explains ‘we cling to bureaucracy because we are afraid of arbitrary power, and bureaucracy lets us pretend that arbitrary power doesn’t exist’. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*.

² Further tropes and queries include: ‘Am I allowed to sit on the structure?’, ‘Does the project need more weather protection?’, ‘How much did this cost?’, ‘What is it?’, ‘What is its purpose?’

³ Lefebvre, *The Explosion*.

⁴ Highly visible public safety precautions include standardised safety and warning signs, permits, bunting, ‘witches hats’, safety bollards and orange safety fences.

⁵ EXYZT Collectif largely focused their endeavours to projects based in Europe.

⁶ Anyone using the title of ‘architect’ in Australia must sit an examination process centred on contracts and procurement experiences suitable to large building developments. This registration process is entirely independent of tertiary study.

⁷ In reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre. *Everyday* Vol. 2, 343.

⁸ Exceptions to static urban form arise from a limited number of temporal programs in Australian cities, eg. in Adelaide this would include the annual Adelaide Festival and Adelaide Fringe.

Domestic Consequences

Can understandings from the object-based interventions of this study be transferred to domestic architectural design to reveal unforeseen potential? Although this research examination is specific, the typologies and scales that my architectural practice addresses will remain broad. A significant part of my practice is dedicated to domestic architectural design. This presents natural questions regarding how this study relates to any of my other projects. In this chapter, the consideration of ways that knowledge can be transferred from public interventions to domestic settings seeks to heal a critical schism. My appraisal of small-scale architecture in this study does not indicate that I address this scale exclusively, but rather represents a special interest, awareness and critique. I propose that awareness regarding small-scale elements is relevant for any architectural project, since the size and needs of people who inhabit spaces do not change when the size of a building increases. People have requirements to dwell, shelter and socialise in specific sites of a building regardless of its total floor space. Consequently, I maintain that all scales of architecture and urbanism can be enhanced with ‘fine-grain’¹ detail. For the domestic projects or larger-scale projects on which I work, the resolution and inclusion of fine-grain elements is one way I measure the success of a project. As an example, I typically seek to include built-in counters, storage, furniture elements and bench seats in domestic projects to enhance the lived enjoyment of domestic spaces.

The domestic architectural builds that my practice has formerly delivered have been generally normative and economically minded. This set of projects have sought to address clients’ needs and have generally stuck to contemporary architectural traditions.² This approach contrasts with my earliest residential designs for clients, which were far more spatially explorative, idiosyncratic and ambitious. However, clients ultimately chose to not build the earlier designs to pursue options that were more design and financially conservative. This is perhaps why I turned to experimentation with provisional, object-based interventions, as they allowed me to employ my capacities and to be tested as a designer. They allowed a level of creative freedom and opportunities to define my own fascinations and practice identity. This led to the organic evolution of a coherent praxis that I have retroactively identified. This praxis remains nascent or unrealised in my domestic projects. The realisation of the small-scale interventions and experiments also unlocked testing that has led to certain discoveries.

Are public spaces and private spaces entirely different, defined by incongruous needs? Public and private space have a stigma of incompatibility among architects. This might be because their conceptual distinction is instrumental when defining the intended use of spaces. However, ruminating on the design of a domestic project informed by civic qualities may have enriching potential. In the *Projects* volume of this study, I



Figure 98 | Are functions and motifs of colonial-era homes perpetuated in contemporary architectural design?

present a sketch for a house that attempts to embed socially catalytic moments in a domestic setting.³ Here, I attempt to translate a typical function of the research interventions to a domestic space. I anticipate that the ideas presented will evolve over time, as opportunities emerge to test them. I have a hunch that domestic architecture and public interventions have more similarities than meets the eye. Both are spaces for dwelling that should expand our capabilities, where a combination of social and private moments unfold. I believe that a private space can benefit from elements of publicness and a public space can benefit from elements of privateness, rather than being conceptualised as two mutually exclusive realms. There also is no reason why a domestic setting cannot incorporate a *microopia*: a rupture of intensity that provides interpretative or playful elements, as well as novel spaces for social gathering that are not structured by familiar codifications. Such ruptures could lead to new forms of social assembly and new perceptions of the domestic space.

Private / Public Threshold

The EN/counter unlocked the use of the front yard of a suburban home, leading to significant portions of time spent in public exposure. After experiencing this exposure, I personally warmed to it to such a degree that my eventual relinquishment to the familiar, walled spaces of a house and backyard entailed a sense of loss; it triggered an emotive response. This unexpected experience crystallised just how enriching an engagement with the city and public life can be in a domestic context.

It probed me to think of the domestic threshold to public space in terms of dwelling, leisure, community and communication, rather than simply protection or transition. In a competition entry for an Adelaide parkland pavilion that was never submitted, I riffed on the idea of the traditional colonial verandah as an architectonic device centred on protection. Motifs of protection in traditional Australian homes may also be expressed by the solidity of their construction, along with the archetypal long corridor, a single access point from the street into the deeply-sited hearth of a home. This corridor typically passes a set of bedrooms and private spaces until it finally reaches the public sections. These historic conventions could be disrupted⁴ by reorientating the kitchen and other public spaces of a home towards the street frontage, where they maintain a vital link to passive, urban activity. This would reformulate certain social messages that are tied to form. However, to successfully achieve this, design sensitivity would be needed so that a private interior is not over-exposed and people are not uncomfortably put on show.

Towards an 'Urban' Interior

By disrupting the codifications and nostalgias that imbue familiar materials of domestic Australian interiors, a domestic construction might establish links with the city beyond and help to curate a micro-public space in the hearth of a home. The tectonic approaches to the research interventions were chosen for reasons of expediency, adaptability and economy. Their assembly was typically expressed and they consequently possessed an infrastructural quality. By transferring this expression of construction to a domestic



Figure 99 | Example of an urban interior; *Casa Butantã*, by Mendes da Rocha, São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Nelson Kon

building, urban sensibilities and linkages may permeate. Kenneth Frampton reflects on this value when analysing Mendes da Rocha's architectural projects

'The revelation of engineering form is a precondition for the creation of a work of civic significance, thereby exposing the interrelationship between earth-work, roof work and waterwork'.⁵

While Mendes da Rocha achieves civic or urban qualities with exposed concrete made from cheap formwork and expansive, horizontal floorplans, I naturally aspire to appropriate materials and techniques from the research interventions; to redeploy the tectonic assembly of timber and plywood. Frampton continues his analysis da Rocha's domestic living rooms by noting how they were conceived as 'a space of public appearance'.⁶ I wish to explore ways that moments in a house can achieve a similar civic quality by integrating interventions, or *micropias*.

Delaminating The Public Interface

The *Hōjōki Terminal* offers ideas for the spatial articulation of a home's outer shell, where dispersed screens and minimalistic structure could mediate privacy and foster refuge. This subsidiary skin could also take formal cues from the *Dirty Tea-house* canopy. Both projects point towards delamination, where an outer skin houses a secondary outdoor space. This in-between space could host moments of respite, solace, sun and social dwelling, while maintaining refuge, safety and passive engagement with the street. It could return private space back to the public sphere in visual terms, without losing practical use. This would depart from rudimentary methods for regulating privacy in everyday Australian suburban settings that often rely on a blind being drawn across a window, or a tall fence that hermetically seals off the inhabitants. Admittedly, it was only after the *Hōjōki Terminal* project that I suddenly understood Frederick Kiesler's dispute with walls.⁷ Attempts to unlock physical spaces in a house might assume the form of inhabitable and productive interstitial spaces at the public interfaces of a home.

A House as a Field?

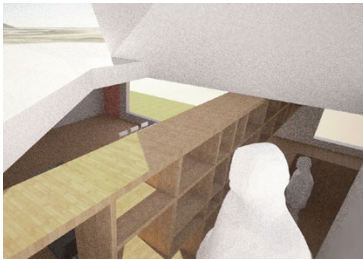
Hiroshi Hara's critique of the 'homogenous'⁸ and 'artificial'⁹ nature of our built environment is applicable to everyday residential homes. This critique refers to the air-conditioned, white-walled boxes and artificial lighting that define normative living spaces in Australian contexts. Delaminating the public interface of a residence is one approach for disrupting this contingency by allowing the



100 **Park Land Pavilion; an unsubmitted competition entry that sought to heal the psychic rift of the colonial verandah, by making it publicly accessible.**



101 **Norwood Residence; I seek to transfer ideas from provisional interventions to domestic projects.**



102 **Could catalytic interventions be embedded in domestic spaces?
Image: House in Second Valley (unbuilt)**

Image removed due to copyright

Photograph of the street frontage of *Kavel Warande House*, by Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu

103 **An example of delaminating the public interface of a residence; *Kavel Warande House*, by Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu. Image: Filip Dujardin**

natural environment to penetrate our personal barricades. Further opportunities to disrupt homogeneity and artificiality may be discovered by extensively re-thinking the layout of a home beyond a series of closed cells towards a 'field' of spaces. The staggered arrangement of the exhibition structure, *The Third Space*, prompted me to imagine a house where rooms have more fluid associations and subtle links, more like bodily organs in a purely spatial regard. A house composed as a field would contain rich opportunities for discovery, with multiple paths of movement instead of a single arterial passage. People showed great enthusiasm when the temporary interventions presented choices for navigating and accessing spaces. This minimally empowering provision appeared to trigger a sense of playfulness, even in adults, representing underestimated potential.

Moments of Play and Release

The public research interventions demonstrated the effect of spatial novelty to trigger playful collective moods. Interventions incorporated in domestic settings could seek to trigger similar moods, acting as agents of release for the inhabitants. Drawing on the experiences of the *Hōjōki Terminal*, materials and forms can be used to spark conversation and debate by possessing intentional ambiguities. *LOW (A Kneeling Bar)* probed my thinking about novel body postures as catharsis or subversion. Opportunities for further corporeal subversions could be integrated in domestic spaces; opportunities to lie, kneel, jump or climb, for children and adults alike.

Provisionality and User-Built Houses

The temporal nature of the research interventions prompt questions regarding the permanency of domestic structures. Werner Sobek attempts to help us overcome assumptions of permanency when he reminds us, 'architecture is not here to stay'.¹⁰ Assembly of the research interventions necessitated tectonic approaches that were expedient to construct and adapt, moving away from glues, plaster, paint and other setting agents. Conventional modern construction appears stifled regarding the life cycle of materials. One example is joinery made from chipboard

or laminated MDF¹¹ which carry generalised expiry dates. If elements of domestic buildings were easier to replace and aged more gracefully, this might address environmental issues regarding construction waste, while empowering users to readily repair their own homes with minimal expertise and effort. Wollheim and Illich identify further positive social attributes of user-built or adapted homes:

‘...People do not only need to obtain things, I think they need, above all, the freedom to make things – things amongst which they can live. To give shape to them according to their own feelings, tastes, their own imagination. And to put them to use in caring for each other and about each other’.¹²

The democratised, low-tech construction techniques employed for the research interventions prompt me to speculate whether houses in the future will be built by an unspecialised labour force. This would result from ongoing advancements in tools, technology and distribution of knowledge, should legislation and stigmas be overcome. Furthermore, user-built homes might serve to reduce wastefulness as communities appear better equipped to share resources than industry practices. ‘Unlocking the design process’¹³ for user-built homes may also reduce material wastage by enabling inhabitants to address needs organically when they arise. This would lead to a greater level of customisation and precision of homes that would entail extensive benefits.

Notes

¹ 'Fine-grain' refers any additional small-scale built elements distinct from larger gestures, such as furniture, shelves, counters and platforms.

² Traditions such as simple skillion roofs, eaves, casement windows and rectilinear floor-plans

³ See page 159, Projects, Book 1.

⁴ 'Disrupting' is a term used in reference to my practice agenda.

⁵ Frampton, Modern Architecture – A Critical History, 388.

⁶ Ibid, 389.

⁷ Kiesler. Space City.

⁸ Hara. In: Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale 2018, competition brief.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sobek. Architecture Isn't Here to Stay, 34.

¹¹ MDF stands for medium-density fibreboard.

¹² 'The Destruction of Conviviality', a conversation between Ivan Illich and Richard Wollheim, 1971.

¹³ For elaboration, refer to the Practice Agenda of this study.

Conclusion

I commenced the study by examining the potential of understated public structures to liberate citizens from everyday urban contexts and shift their perceptions. This interest stemmed from my perception that blank, uncodified spaces entailed a special animating quality, possibly echoing the constructivist's ambitions for the 'electrification'¹ of spaces. Through the design, construction and testing of experimental, short-life interventions, I observed the manifold events and moments² that coalesced around the projects and shifted my attention away from the facility of blankness. The study evolved to inquire whether architectural elements could participate in animating or 'electrifying' spaces by offering fulcrums where new types of social intersection emerged. This new direction was underpinned by the emergent belief that the public harbored deeper needs than my architectural education and office experience equipped me to appreciate. Reflections on provisional interventions became focused on the novelties and patterns of behaviour that emerged in response to the experiments. This was reinforced by practice reflections, where I grew aware of my personal disavowal of events that had manifested in formative projects that possessed a critical value. This realisation reflects a gap possibly universal to architectural design practice; the gap between an architect's intentions versus what actualises in a space once it is built.

Anomalous Ruptures

One of the points of originality of this study lies in the contention that 'social condensation',³ or the unlocking of 'unprecedented events',⁴ is aleatory and cannot be engineered.⁵ I concur with this conviction to an extent by agreeing that the point in time, the parties involved and the nature of the behavioural 'explosions'⁶ or events are unpredictable. However, I build on this by suggesting that eruptions of behaviour are disposed to occur in spaces unequally. I argue that new behaviours and socialisation can be stimulated and unlocked by offering architectonic elements and interfaces that individuals converge upon, interpret and appropriate according to their own will, to generate their own social fulcrums. This views the everyday citizen as a contributor to the production of space, employing their creativity and instincts to appropriate physical spaces. This viewpoint emphasises the 'magnetic'⁷ force of novel architectural structures in determining an inequality of spaces.

People sometimes gravitated towards the research interventions tenaciously, as though they had been waiting for the opportunity. This conjured the sense of a latent reality hoping to burst into existence. The ‘anomalous ruptures’ in the urban fabric established by the architectural experiments of this study were strangely paralleled by libidinal eruptions and explosions of behaviour. It’s difficult to determine precisely what underpinned these responses. However, in the urban analysis of this study I provide a potential hypothesis when I imply that the Australian contemporary city is saturated with visible and invisible boundaries and controls that inhibit social possibilities. During the course of the investigation I have unpacked a myriad of descriptive terms to account for what animated people, including their desires for novelty, discovery, learning, excitement and play. While these terms remain relevant descriptions of the affordances of the experiments, the message I chose to bring to attention is that the eruptions in behaviour expressed people’s desire, and even need, for social bonding beyond the confines of their private networks. Or, as Koolhaas describes, ‘human intercourse’.⁸

The research interventions demonstrated their ability to attract and concentrate unpredictable events and behaviours within their sphere of influence. Here, Cedric Price’s usage of the term ‘magnet’ is an appropriate metaphor, as people converged the architectural objects of fascination. However, after the ‘magnetic’ attraction to an urban site, a secondary function occurred where the architectural objects *unlocked* unprecedented events and spirited, libidinal reactions. This reinforces the argument that exceptions in city form stimulated by architectural qualities should be provided to unlock the most expansive variety of possibilities, should we wish to enrich the public character of our cities.

The *Micropia*

A micropia is a novel term coined in process of assembling this investigation. It describes a small, incomplete utopia – a characteristic of the six research interventions of this study. An ‘anomalous rupture’ describes the relationship of an intervention with existing urban fabric. A micropia reinforces the qualities within such a site, emphasising its scale, its ‘goodness’,⁹ its idealism

and emancipatory potential. The broad variety of benefits that entail short-life interventions were originally housed within the term ‘socialisation’. However, this terminology risked focusing the study toward a sociological investigation by examination of a sole behavioural quality. Instead, a micropia points towards possibilities and transcending the confinements of the highly regulated and maintained Australian city. In mind of this, micropias offer claimable spaces that are not tariffed or gated. They are inclusive and democratically open to all members of the public. Here, the everyday citizen is viewed as an actor capable of contributing life and energy to the urban environment, rather than merely a financial contributor to established institutions, or worse, an optical problem. A micropia might even be considered a reinvigoration of civic spaces and structures that have fallen out of popular imagination.¹⁰ I extensively deliberated on how a micropia fits within the bigger picture of the city, reflecting on existing urban approaches like ‘urban acupuncture’¹¹ and ‘tactical urbanism’.¹² I concluded that small-scale interventions do not need to participate in an over-arching theory, or be part of a greater urban system. They are instead viewed as anomalous ruptures in the city fabric: bright moments of intensity and impact.

Micropias, as catalysts for new forms of embodied presence and exchange, must be realised as a matter of urgency to combat any lingering, alienating forces of the pandemic. They may also play a useful role in healing social rifts that appear to be escalating in western contexts,¹³ by providing physical spaces for new types of communication. This study has led me to view the creation of public commons through the sporadic provision of micropias as a new modern project now that ‘the modern project of the avant-garde of the 1930’s is unattainable’.¹⁴ This ambition is possibly nascent, with sporadic examples of imaginative small-scale interventions being realised by practices around the world.

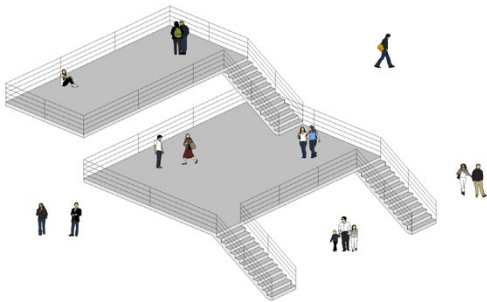
In the early stages of this study, I speculated that systemic social shortcomings arise discretely as a result of our built environment. Over time, I grew to accept that this claim was limiting to new possibilities, considering the tools available to architects for disrupting and reprogramming existing contexts. Instead, a micropia steers away from what Hiroshi Hara describes as ‘homogenous space’.¹⁵ Hara’s view frames the everyday built environment

as limited, uncomplex, a result of habit and often preoccupied with serving single functions. I would add to Hara's conception that 'homogenous spaces' are also less cognisant of the deeper needs and desires of city users.

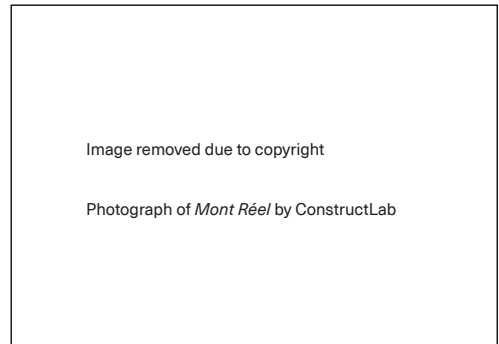
Serving a Plurality of Needs

The plurality of needs of users of the city are a challenge that this study has faced when attempting to define the aims of the experiments. However, the solution is not to simplify this plurality and favour certain needs over others, but, rather, to embrace a chaotic plurality and address needs continually as they arise. Even the most forward-thinking architect may not always comprehend future needs at the time a project is conceived from the comfort of an office space. Some needs are emergent and unprecedented, as the pandemic has reminded us. The 'unlocking of design process' revealed in the Practice Agenda can lead to architectural solutions of greater design 'fit'. It can also unlock greater complexity, nuance and tactility. It enables the additive enrichment of an object, as useful built elements are grafted and adapted to a structure, as needs arise. This includes new tactile and functional elements such as architectural furniture, counters, frames, interactive elements, shading devices and spatial elements for refuge. This *modus operandi* pulls into question a mode of industrialisation where a prefabricated object may be dropped into a site from the back of a trailer, or from a crane. At the same time, those parties who have invested economic resources in the object sit back anxiously, hoping it will serve its intended functions. Here, small and nuanced built elements are often omitted to facilitate the streamlined and smooth transportation of an object and to expedite its completion and reduce production costs. In other cases, tactile elements are omitted for reasons of safety, to discourage climbing on structures, to inhibit vandalism and satiate fears of litigation.

The complexity derived from an architectural intervention formed by an additive process can contribute to a sequence of experience, revealing a succession of engaging spaces and elements towards which to mobilise. This helps to inform time intervals for the objects, allowing people to unpack their process of exploration and discovery. Across the full span of a project's development, from ideation



104 The research commenced by interrogating the value of anomalous and understated public infrastructure for incidental use.



105 An object-based response that appeals to peoples joyful and empathetic sharing of public space. Project: *The Mont Réel*, by ConstructLab, Montréal, 2017. Photo: Ashutosh Gupta



106 Other world cities are profiting from inventive approaches to object-based planning. Project: *The Biggest Pool*, Pool is Cool, Brussels, 2017. Photo: BOZAR



107 An explosion of social, public activity; every person is an urban actor, capable of contributing life and energy to their physical environment.



108 The research interventions reinforced the importance of physical experience of a space to assess its broader values.



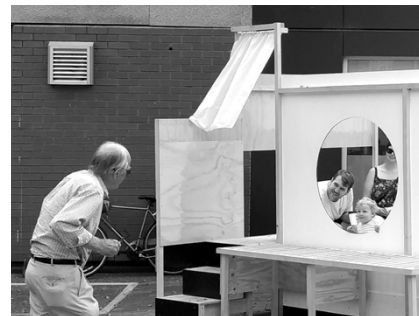
109 Architectonic structures can invite playfulness into urban settings, rather than into delimited 'ground's'. Shown: a play structure designed by Aldo van Eyck. Photo: Amsterdam City Archives



110 Pruitt Igoe; could the creation of *micropias* be ratified as a new modern project? Photo: US Geological Survey



111 Object-based interventions can counteract the vast terrains in Australian cities that are codified as transitory spaces and inform *differential* public spaces. Image: Tony Lewis / InDaily



112 Fine-grain architecture can serve people's needs for an expanded sociability of strangers and generate a *different* kind of social interaction. Photo: Thomas Capogreco

to physical completion, new moments come into life that reveal vital clues or pathways that may enrich the outcome and improve its 'fit'. As a veritable metaphor for our existential condition, the pathway to take is often unclear and we only know where we want to arrive after certain experiences have 'unlocked' understanding. The 'unlocking of design process' willfully exposes architecture to the public while still in a state of incompleteness. This imbues a project with a sense of becoming that can fuel people's anticipation and curiosity. Some readers may note the plurality that underscores this unconventional exegesis. Admittedly, this is also the consequence of a similar 'additive' creative process, where individual parts have been developed to enrich the impact of the whole.

Expanded Sociability

During the pandemic, a regrettable urban trend was reinforced where public movements were marked by avoidance of strangers and social intersection was largely restricted to only established social connections. This scenario was heightened during lockdowns and moments of increased transmission anxiety. It was interesting to observe the tensions and anxieties that resulted when our expanded sociability was restricted, emphasising the value of incidental encounter and variety in people's daily happenings. Although people hoarded food and personal effects during these instances,¹⁶ the resource of true scarcity was social connection and activities for relinquishing from the tedium of being static. As lockdowns ease, microspias have the ability to serve the value of an expanded sociability of strangers and people's capacity and desire for empathetic and joyful sharing of public space.

With urban space abandoned during the pandemic and anxiety of transmission present, the prospect of facilitating social encounters may seem annulled. Although lockdowns would appear to limit the potential of small-scale interventions for periods of 'social distancing', in this context they might also have an increased necessity, as they could provide sites where people can escape their private containments and gain a moment of respite in outdoor, ventilated spaces. The gearing of the city towards consumption spaces meant that our lives effectively shut down during interim 'social distancing' periods as capacities at these venues were limited.

The urban analysis drew my attention to digital space as a dominant public common of our milieu, one marked by limitations relating to physical presence, social warmth, bonding, non-verbal communication and the quality of dialogue. This study helped me develop awareness for how ruptures in the city fabric might facilitate novel face-to-face dialogues, emerging in stimulating contexts. This form of communication is central to the utopian aspirations of a micropia; they strive for sensibilities of community and public togetherness and, presumedly, the mental health of citizens.

Steering Experience

The aesthetic approach of the research interventions veered towards serialism, low-tech assembly techniques and stoic provision of program – a radicalised approach to architecture that echoes the ‘tough and exact rhetoric’¹⁷ of Hannes Meyer when he expressed his vision for a new Bauhaus school building in the 1920’s.¹⁸ Meyer advocated for the new building to serve ‘social, technical and practical needs’,¹⁹ instead of ‘inbreeding, egocentrism, unworldliness and aloofness’²⁰ that he associated with over-emphasised aims of artistic self-expression. While the interventions of this study provide people with tools for participation and social intersection, viewing them as simply the provision of equipment would amount to a misreading of this study. They are instrumental in steering experience, in framing views, in re-positioning urban subjects, in elaborating sequences of experience, defining contingent spaces and unlocking unprecedented events. When K. Michael Hays reflects on Meyer’s vision for the ADGB school, he clarifies ambitions that underpin his radicalised, program-orientated approach to architectural aesthetics, also hinting at concealed and overlooked programs:

‘The ADBG participates in the construction of the ‘new world’ by reprogramming its inhabitants, training them in new perceptual habits, producing new categories of experience, delineating new subject positions...’²¹

Meyer’s advocacy against self-expressive designs sought to highlight the instrumentality of architecture. However, it is also worth clarifying that spatial qualities and the resonance of materials are also instrumental in steering experience,

as they help to differentiate an object of coherence from its surroundings and communicate to people that the space offered for claiming is novel and exciting. Spatial qualities and resonance of materials combine with cleanliness, precision of assembly and the syntax of materials to contribute to the attractive force of a short-life intervention. My fascination for a radicalised, low-tech or serialist aesthetic does not seek to avoid implementation of these latter contributory properties, but has rather served to express a political statement. As a result, future interventions may embrace more adventurous spatial qualities to command greater attention. I am only in the position to explore this after gaining awareness for how a variety of small-scale interventions functioned.

Small

I commenced the research with doubts relating to my early, playful and small-scale experiments – that I was dealing with something of lesser significance. I sensed that small-scale projects were divorced from architectural industry and media. This research investigation, backed by the community that has underpinned it,²² has provided a turning point to help me overcome this stigma and give legitimacy to my pursuits of small. Many Australian cities are fixated with building their post-card image through large-scale buildings and big infrastructural gestures. However, after someone has arrived in the city it is the elements at ground level that are engaged with, while landmarks recede into the background. I have always harbored an uncertainty about architectural design and inventiveness being limited to the stimulating articulation of a skyscraper or large vessel, while the ground plane remains starkly normative, offering very little for surprise. This study hopes to spark new dialogues around small structures in Australian contexts and hopes that other practitioners will help advocate for small-scales by growing public awareness for their utility. Over-valuing big scales in Australia may be intertwined with a historical shortage of materials in the country and the difficulty of long haulage distances, establishing mindsets of economisation.

The polarized reactions to the research interventions may highlight discomforts surrounding small and temporary architecture, a lack of familiarity beyond

normative built types or simply cultural attitudes interwoven with the heightened control and regulation of public spaces in Australian contexts. The panic and eruptions of arbitrary power triggered by the fine-grain architectural experiments point towards irrational insecurities that are generated by fears of litigation and excessive fines for misdemeanors²³ in Australian contexts.

Novelty and Play

The behavioural eruptions and attenuated emotions that the interventions unlocked may also be a product of the limitation of spatial novelty in Australian Cities that one can engage with at the ground level. With architecture largely reserved for a class of society who can afford it, minor architectural adjustments to our physical environment outside a particular league of expenditure can startle as what was assumed impossible has manifested. Australian cities could become testbeds for ongoing experimentation and research of fine-grain architecture. I sense a deeper, almost primordial desire for alternative spaces in the city, for novelty and unpredictability. Among an exhaustive list of human needs that city spaces might service, one need that is repeatedly woven throughout this study is play. Playfulness counteracts the homogeneity of the city that I revealed in the urban analysis by engendering a radical undermining of normative, instrumentalist and economically stimulated behaviours. The playfulness demonstrated by participants when reacting to the research interventions (including both adults and children) exceeded my expectations. I emphasise the need to incorporate moments of playfulness in our cities, as another learning point of this study.

Knowledge Through Immersion

I have often sensed a dislocation from the outcomes of the house additions that my practice has delivered. Once these projects have reached completion, I typically only experience the space for a fleeting moment. This inhibits a clear picture of the lived possibilities of the space: the subversive occupancies, unexpected appropriations and delimitations of the spaces in special moments.

This obscures understandings that could fuel the development of my design work and even the ordering of my design priorities. Immersion and participation in the built settings of the research interventions have been central to observing their impact. What was observed stood in contrast to speculations and criticisms that preceded their realisation. This brings me to another innovation of the study: the anticipated outcomes of the small, object-based interventions were inconsistent with the way they were physically experienced or lived. These anticipations appeared to undervalue the possibilities that the small projects realised.

Unlocking Activism

This study has consolidated various forms of activism as conscious pursuits of my practice. One new central concern that has emerged is the advancement of the public and social character of Australian cities. I have grown to focus on the ways that built obstructions, privatisation and other codifications delimit public occupancies. The small-scale architecture that this study investigates is a suitable instrument to antagonise these issues, due to their immediacy of outcome, reduced budgets and reduced objectives to comply with, in comparison with traditional place-making projects. I am more interested in people-making and raising awarenesses than 'placemaking'. Projects seek to form micropias, to unlock spaces and free them from hidden injunctions, renewing them as spaces for new types of behaviour and urban experience, to provide alternatives to consumption-oriented spaces. Projects seek to disrupt urban forces that pull towards dormancy, habit and relinquishment to social constructs. They also seek to aid the constitution of individuals, by stimulating moments²⁴ through engaging content.

Contribution

Metropolitan and rural councils in Australian contexts today have an opportunity to think beyond traditional forms of urban reinvigoration, such as complex planting schemes, large-scale masterplans, isolated public artworks, high-cost material treatments and measures that demand perpetual maintenance with minimal

reward. Object-based, short-life, designed interventions provide an alternative approach to urbanism that concentrate materials and resources towards structures that appeal to people needs. Architectural practices in Australian contexts, like my own, have an opportunity to guide various stakeholders and demonstrate alternative possibilities for sites by employing strategic design thinking and challenging local values. Many public spaces in Australia appear focused on beautification,²⁵ instant long-term solutions or problem avoidance. Alternatively, microplacitas, and the small-scale architecture that I espouse in study can re-invigorate underutilised or underperforming urban sites by offering new and stimulating programs. These programs can invite participation in settings and unlock socially enriching 'moments'. This can be achieved through the employment of strategically designed architectural-scale furniture, platforms, shelters or other unique forms architectural-infrastructure. Such projects prioritise the accommodation of multiple user groups and benefit from low-cost construction methods to achieve intended goals. They form destinations, meeting points and resting points, and attract users through inventive spatial articulation that serves people's desire for discovery. They provide exceptional sites for public information to be displayed in bold, untraditional formats²⁶ or forums for face-to-face exchange of information and knowledge. If they are skillfully planned and executed, the benefits gained from the programs they offer can circumvent the relevance of a paving scheme, for example. They can provide nuance and texture for social intersection, unlocking the resources of individuals and enabling their contribution to urban spaces.

Similar to 'tactical urbanism' approaches, 'anomalous ruptures' and similar object-based responses can be viewed as interim uses for a site that serve immediate and emergent needs. They have great transformative potential by attracting new visitors and shifting public perceptions about the value of a site. Object-based responses are useful research tools for investigating a site's inherent potential. They can contribute to the process of consolidating longer-term solutions. Central problems for object-based responses relate to awareness of their potential, the skill and knowledge required for their execution and the willingness to commit funding to original ventures. New precedents for similar interventions that emerge in Australian cities must be impeccable to advance new cultures of design of this typology. Object-based responses to a site require design process and foundation to ensure they are

relevant and adequately respond to the existing context – they are more complex than simply siting an isolated object. Successful object-based responses interweave the capacities of architecture with the landscape, mobility and the ‘parameters of access, improvisation and syncopation’²⁷ afforded by one’s personal devices. Despite their relative self-sufficiency, they still remain dependent on the built qualities of their immediate environment, requiring informed assessment.²⁸ They are also notably dependent on existing provisions such as paved regions (in contrast to paving patterns) and tools for access (public transport, walking, cycling, cars).

This study reveals that architecture’s potency remains elusive, particularly regarding how people live in a space, or what is able to actualise in a space. It is hoped that the set of tactics that frame the original interventions of this study may be adopted and augmented by other practitioners for the development of similar fine-grain, public architectural infrastructure. The research secures my dedication to a type of practice that deserves more support for the value it provides to cities.

Notes

¹ Murawski explained the 'magical-electrifying capacity' of the Russian Constructivist's social condenser. Murawski. *Crystallizing the Social Condenser*, 14.

² In reference to Henri Lefebvre's *Theory of Moments*. *Everyday Vol. 2*.

³ Michał Murawski observed Lefebvre's contention of the Russian social condenser, noting his suggestion 'social condensation' happened not as a determined, engineered effect of 'scientific' architectural practice but as an aleatory occurrence, an 'explosion', which occurs due to the 'condensation'. Murawski. *Crystallizing the Social Condenser*.

⁴ Rem Koolhaas. *Content*, 73.

⁵ This determination followed Henri Lefebvre's reflections on riots in Nanterre in May 68'. Stanek would later note Lefebvre's emphasis that 'explosions' of behaviour that manifested were 'not pre-defined by the material layout of space(s)'. Stanek. *Lefebvre on Space*, 190.

⁶ In reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre.

⁷ In reference to the work of Cedric Price.

⁸ 'Human Intercourse' is a term coined by Rem Koolhaas when speculating on a requirement for creativity. *Redesigning Public Spaces was Needed Pre-Covid*. *Time*, May 2020.

⁹ Utopia derives from 'eutopia' (Greek) meaning 'good place', or a place of ideal well-being.

¹⁰ This includes 'Past civic structures such as town halls, municipal ballrooms, city parks and billiard halls' – Cedric Price. *Cedric Price Works 1952-2003*, 811.

¹¹ 'Urban acupuncture' combines urban design with Chinese acupuncture.

¹² 'Tactical urbanism' is concerned with the transformation of neighbourhoods and streets through small-scale projects.

¹³ These rifts are crystallised by ongoing protests and conflicts that have manifested during the pandemic.

¹⁴ Extract from testimony by Kenneth Frampton for the 41st Ocupação Itaú Cultural program.

¹⁵ Hiroshi Hara describes 'homogenous space' as 'a second nature ... comfortable and convenient ... a world of new, artificially regulated climates and transportation, a place divorced from its original natural environment'. Excerpt taken from Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale 2018, competition brief.

¹⁶ Ill-based fears of supply shortages led to hoarding and subsequent shortages of toilet paper at Australian supermarkets.

¹⁷ Hays. *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject*, 122.

¹⁸ For the ADGB Trade Union School building in Bernau bei Berlin, Germany, that was consequently realised in 1928.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 122.

²⁰ Meyer, 'Bauhaus and Society'.

²¹ Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject*, 140.

²² This community centres around the DRC at the University of Adelaide and combines with panellists from a broader local and international community.

Continued...

²³ For example in South Australia: 'Anyone who has or drinks alcohol in a dry area can be fined up to \$1,250 (AUD)'. Dry Areas, 2022. Sa.gov.au

²⁴ Lefebvre. Theory of Moments. Everyday 2.

²⁵ An example of prioritisation of beautification can be found in the Frome Road prioritised bicycle lane, Adelaide's CBD. Design efforts were made to beautify the barrier with plantings, between vehicle and bicycle conduits. This resulted in reduced visibility and space for movement.

²⁶ Untraditional formats might integrate graphic displays with architectural structures, making them more engaging to the public than traditional, freestanding information panels.

²⁷ Wark. The Stack to Come.

²⁸ Environmental conditions that can impact the success of an intervention include vehicle traffic, sun exposure, noise, pollution and urban isolation.

Appendix

Glossary of Terms

Bibliography

Image Credits

Biography

Glossary of Terms

Architectural Para-industry

An industry of individuals and collectives that exist outside the recognitions and certifications of the established architecture industry.

Architectural Third-Space

An interstitial space that arises between two distinct built typologies and/or infrastructure. In his essay *Spandrels and Class Struggle*, Slavoj Žižek emphasises the 'socio-political'¹ implications of such a space and its 'quasi-utopianism', following his reading of Frederick Jameson.²

Interstitial Spaces

In-between spaces or residual spaces that exist between spaces with prescribed functions, often arising contingently as the result of built form.

Micropia

A micropia is a synthesis of the words 'micro' and 'utopia', that refers to a small or microscopic 'good place', differentiated from the modern associations of utopia's that sought to ascribe an over-arching system or a broadly realised aspiration. A micropia is conceived as a rupture in a normative urban environment that overcomes obstructions to unlock new, self-organising forms of socialisation. They are conditioned by architectural qualities that steer experience, offer novel programs, frame views and resonate material and spatial qualities.

Their utopian nature derives from their inclusiveness, democratic openness, and their social aspirations; they are geared towards embodied presence, face-to-face communication, structuring of new forms of social assembly and they view the everyday citizen as an actor capable of contributing life and energy to the urban environment.

Moment

In this study the term *moment* is used in reference to Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, and the chapter: *The Theory of Moments*. Lefebvre describes a moment as emerging from within the everyday to provide an immanent critique, by revealing alternative possibilities. *Moments* are similar in nature, yet distinct to *situations*.³

Motorarchal

An urban system that privileges private motor vehicles, while suppressing alternative forms of movement; such as walking, cycling and public transport.

Play Condenser

An interpretive, architectural scale object conducive to sparking playfulness among broad age groups, similar to a social condenser.

Proxemics

This term was coined by Edward T. Hall in 1963.⁴ It refers to a branch of knowledge that deals with how social interactions vary according to our physical proximity and the non-verbal communication that entails within various thresholds of intimacy.

Social Condenser

The most extensively theorised concept of the Soviet architectural Avant Garde of the 1920's,⁵ varied interpretations of the social condenser exist after new voices have appropriated the term. Original constructivist descriptions imbued the concept with pathos and expressive terminologies, to loosely describe a designed device, club, or public space that could 'magically electrify'⁶ 'brand new, previously-unheard of human relations'.⁷ Intertwined with the ambitions of the socialist Soviet Union, they were conceived as 'life-constructive'⁸ spaces that existed at the boundary between everyday life and the utopian and otherworldly, often manifesting 'in striking contrast relative to their urban context'.⁹ Lefebvre would later interpret social condensation as an 'explosion' of social activity. While Rem Koolhaas would later formulate a personal, more mechanical interpretation that is now popularly reiterated in design blog posts and contemporary journals.¹⁰

Social Fulcrum

A term that has emerged in the process of this investigation, it refers to deterministic spatial form where social intersection may coalesce.

Spatial Dampener

A spatial strategy involving the implementation of a porous architectural structure or frame to soften a large open territory, providing discrete amounts of privacy and refuge.

Urban Device

Similar to an architectural intervention or *Magnet*¹¹ an urban device refers to a bespoke, small-scale and (typically) temporary object that overlaps new programs with existing contexts.

This glossary reveals the definitions of original and existing terms interwoven with study. Relevant attributions have been made for terms invented by others. New terms in this glossary often augment familiar language to serve concepts about physical environments and cities.

Notes

¹ Žižek, Spandrels and Class Struggle.

² In reference to Jameson's critique of Gehry's Santa Monica residence.

³ In reference to the work of the Situationist International.

⁴ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*.

⁵ Murawski. *Crystallizing the Social Condenser*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid*, 14.

⁷ Leonidov. *Criticism of Constructivism*.

⁸ In reference to the work of the constructivists.

⁹ Anya Bokov. In: *Crystallizing the Social Condenser*, 14.

¹⁰ Koolhaas describes a social condenser as the '...programmatic layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference, unprecedented events'.

Koolhaas. *Content*, 73.

¹¹ Cedric Price conceived of *Magnets*.

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Biography

Richard Le Messurier

A sole practitioner, maker and thinker, I operate a creative design studio that addresses broad scales of construction. Projects are driven by a design philosophy that pays attention to the social interactions and behaviours that spaces elicit. Projects often incorporate minimalistic and tectonic gestures to heighten the lived experience of space. Each project is approached as a nuanced sets of problems that require a tailored and innovative response, drawing from broader considerations of the urban and landscape context. I conceptualise, design, draft, monitor construction and build structures.



Unlocking Physical Spaces



PhD
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