

FINAL DRAFT

The Place and Parametricism Project Symposium

Place and Parametricism: Provocations for the Rethinking of Design Symposium brings a diverse group of thinkers and creators together into a working dialogue to discuss the question: can place be adequately encompassed by the quantitative methods of digital and parametric design? Though what methods can collective research, where the design studio is the founding mode of enquiry, aid in clarifying the nature of place and of parametricism, as well as enabling a rethinking of what design itself might be?

The project, initially operating through a set of design studio provocations based in the fictional places of Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy, further expanded into experiments in place-based situations including historical and contemporary architectures, interiors, and landscapes. What is unfolding is a series of experimental incursions into various environments real and imagined, everyday and extraordinary, guided to some extent by the narratives exposed by close reading of Peake's evocative worlds within place.

Alongside ruminations on place meaning and identity the Project reflects on the imagery, models, and languages that can be applied to computer technologies, to ponder on whether data-driven approaches have any relevance to place design. The Project and the Symposium explores the proposition that two ideas can be connected: close attention to place is central to good design and good place design is furthered by parametric approaches. Issues of sustainability and environmental change drawing together considerations of place design are tempered through discussion on tangible questions of place to include residential, commercial, and public architecture, urban and landscape planning, infrastructure management and construction, alongside the intangible and atmospheric nature of place occupation.

Five sessions each provide a guide to sharing concepts for advancing the questions that have arisen over the course of three architectural studios allowing each investigator to invite key thinkers and practitioners from an expanded range of disciplines and locations, inside and outside of architectural design research. The aim of these sessions is to provide a forum for conversations that embrace, but are not limited to, the nature of and limits to parametricism, tangible and intangible environments, the literature of interiority, place beyond the human, and alternative understandings of home. The team intends to coax the participants of the *Place and Parametricism: Provocations for the Rethinking of Design* Symposium to contribute to a major publication capturing our key findings.

Authors

Mark Burry, Swinburne University of Technology
Gini Lee, University of Melbourne
Jeff Malpas, University of Tasmania
Stanislav Roudavski, University of Melbourne
Mark Taylor, Swinburne University of Technology

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THE PLACE AND PARAMETRICISM PROJECT SYMPOSIUM

Professor Adrian Carter, Bond University

Professor Alberto Perez Gomez, McGill University

Dr Amy Hahs, University of Melbourne

Professor Ed Hollis, University of Edinburgh

Dr Elizabeth Farrelly, Writer and Critic

Adjunct Professor Freya Mathews, LaTrobe University

Professor Gini Lee, University of Melbourne

Dr Imogen Lesser Woods, University of Kent

Professor Jeff Malpas, University of Tasmania

Professor Mark Burry AO FTSE AIA, Professor of Urban Futures
& Director Smart Cities Research Institute

Professor Mark Taylor, Swinburne University of Technology

Megan Baynes, Architect

Neil Spiller, Editor

Nicholas Ray, Architect

Professor Paramita Atmodiwirjo, Universitas Indonesia

Phillip Beesley, University of Waterloo

Professor Ross Gibson, University of Canberra

Sally Stone, Reader, Manchester Metropolitan University

Dr Stanislav Roudavski, University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Suzie Attiwill, RMIT University

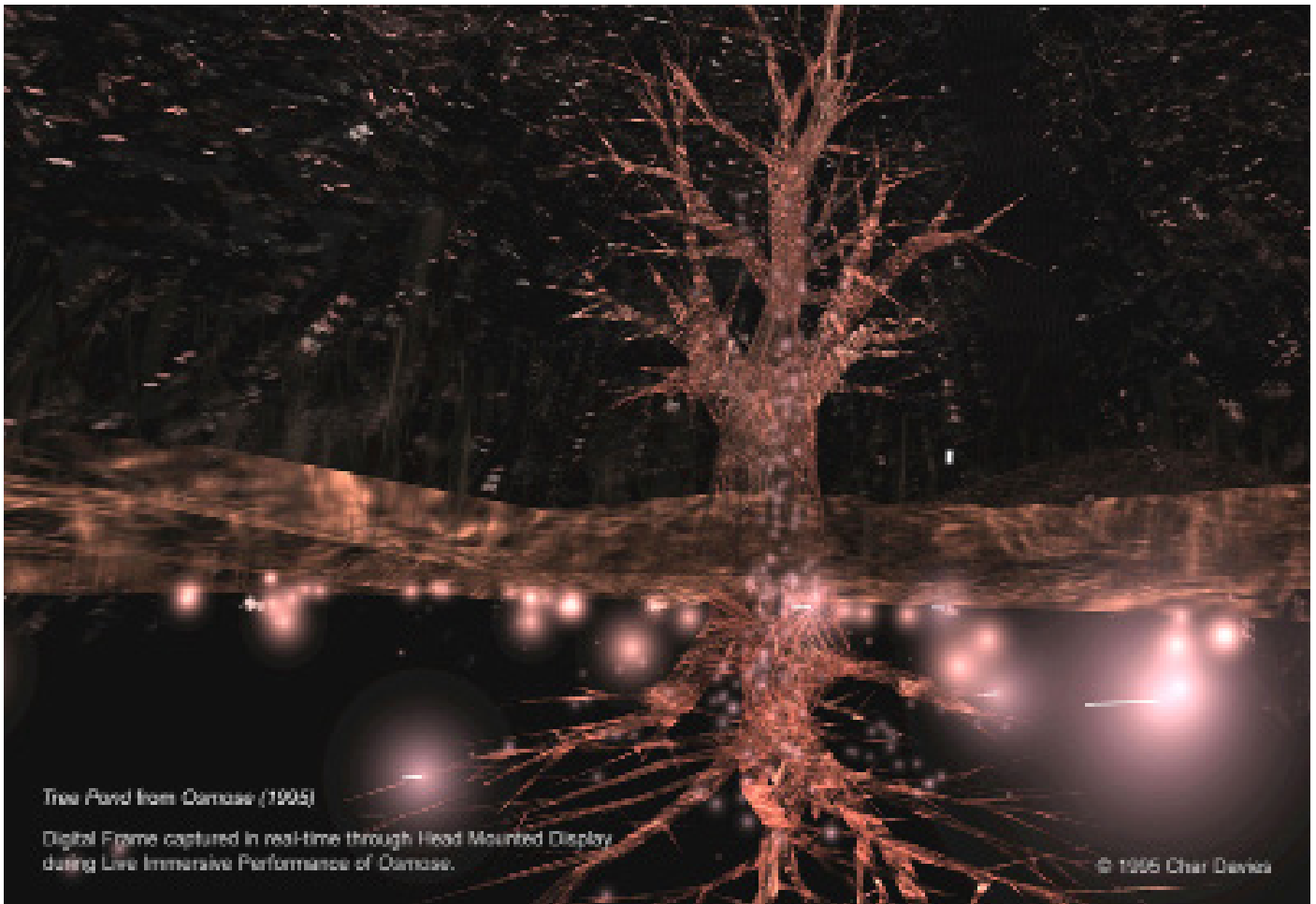
Associate Professor Wendy Steele, RMIT University

Professor Yandi Andri Yatmo, Universitas Indonesia

SYMPOSIUM PROVOCATIONS

The 5 panel sessions spread over 5 days will tackle the following challenges:

- 1. What are the limits of the parametric in design?**
- 2. Homeplace – four stories on the nature of ephemeral traces in (interior) places**
- 3. Facing the blank sheet**
- 4. Place and Interiority**
- 5. More-than-human place**



Char Davies, Osmose 1995 (<http://www.immersence.com/osmose/>), ©Char Davies

SESSION 1: WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF THE PARAMETRIC IN DESIGN?

Tuesday August 11, 2020
8-10 am AEST 6-8 pm USA 11pm-1am UK

Jeff Malpas

Jeff Malpas is Emeritus Distinguished Professor at the University of Tasmania. His books include *Place and Experience* (Routledge, 2018), *Heidegger's Topology* (MIT, 2006).

Panellists

Alberto Perez Gomez, McGill University

Alberto Pérez Gómez directs the History and Theory of Architecture Program at McGill University, where he is Saidye Rosner Bronfman Professor of the History of Architecture. His books include *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT 1983), *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (MIT, 2006)

Megan Baynes, Architect

Megan Baynes trained as an architect in Tasmania and Sweden. Based in Hobart, she has worked in Germany and Australia across both government and the private sector. Her previous work includes GASPI, Lighthouse and her own Little Big House.

Adrian Carter, Bond University

Adrian Carter is Professor in the Centre for Comparative Construction Research, Faculty of Society & Design, at Bond University. Previously he established the Utzon Research Center at Aalborg University, and was responsible for initiating the building of the Utzon Center in Aalborg, Denmark.

Elizabeth Farrelly, Writer and Critic

Elizabeth Farrelly is a Sydney-based columnist and author who holds a PhD in architecture and several international writing awards. She is a former editor and Sydney City Councillor. Her books include *Glenn Murcutt: Three Houses* (Phaidon 2002).

Brief

A provocative dilemma: EITHER parametric design operates as a way of engaging with the very parameters – the bounds – that are integral to place itself OR it remains no more than an irrelevant and pointless playing with quantity and number.

Provocation

What are the limits of the parametric in design – what, in other words, are its parameters? And more generally, what are the limits of the digital in design? Another way of putting this is to ask: what is the place of the parametric and the digital? This question takes on an additional interest if one views place as a key concept in architectural design. What, then, is the place of the parametric and digital in place-oriented design? Three possible answers are as follows.

The first is that the parametric and the digital prioritises the quantitative and the abstract and the numerical in ways inconsistent with a genuine engagement with place. The second is that the parametric and the digital offers tools that, when used well, enhance the engagement with place. The third is that the very idea of the parametric is itself a notion tied to place through the idea of the parameter or limit – in which case could place-based design could perhaps be reconceptualised as parametric (although that leaves open the issue as to the role of the digital here).

This gives rise to several further questions. Can we rethink the parametric and the digital, quite aside from their usefulness as techniques, in a way that takes the idea of the parameter, of the 'proper measure', as a fundamental notion? How much would that require a rethinking of the dominant understanding of the parametric and digital in contemporary architecture and design?

Finally, what is the role of language here? This becomes an issue because of the role language itself plays in most accounts of place. How does a focus on language shift the understanding of the parametric and the digital? And how does might this play out in specific linguistic engagements with place – whether in a work like Gormenghast or elsewhere? Here perhaps, one could begin to ask how language might itself operate parametrically and what this might mean.

“What are the limits of the parametric in design – what, in other words, are its parameters? And more generally, what are the limits of the digital in design? Another way of putting this is to ask: what is the place of the parametric and the digital?”

Place, Space, and the Parametric

Jeff Malpas

Whatever else it might be or become, it seems clear that parametric design cannot directly take up place as something to be defined parametrically in the sense in which the later term is most often used today. And this is because place resists any reduction to quantity or number. This will be true not only of place in general, but also of many elements of place – the movements that are an integral part of it, the stories entwined in it, the organisational configurations that it enables, the atmospheres and experiences to which it gives rise. Parametric design will always remain with that which can be given quantitatively. That quantitative, and so also formally even though that may also be in forms that are aesthetically elegant – indeed, their elegance is itself a function of their mathematical manipulability, and is also indicative of the parametric tendency towards the prioritisation of form.

One conclusion that might be drawn here is that parametric design can operate only as an adjunct to place-based design, along with other design techniques, rather being that in which such design is based or founded. The danger, however, is that the way in which so much contemporary parametric design privileges the quantitative, and the abstracted and purely conceptual-aesthetic elements in design may mean that even when employed in an explicitly place-based design approach, parametric design will have to be used with caution, just because the tendencies with which it is associated run counter to what is at issue in place. It will be all too easy for the quantitatively parametric to take over, with the likely result being what we so often see in parametric design around the world, namely the production of buildings whose forms reflect the design tools by which they have been formed (and so often repeat certain general forms and tendencies) rather than the places in which they are actually situated – hence the globalised character of much contemporary design (globalism itself being a feature that Schumacher takes to be characteristic of parametricism as a style).

Of course, parametric design does not itself generate the parameters with which it operates. Those parameters must have their origins in some existing artefact, site, or design idea. The parameters that parametricism employs thus always lie outside of the parametric. In that case parametric approaches can only be an adjunct or a tool in design, rather than being constitutive of design, and this must be so even given the design tendencies that parametric design may itself bring with it. If there is a style associated with contemporary parametricism, then, it will be a style grounded in the more basic choices made by parametric designers and that themselves set the parameters of that mode of design that is then termed 'parametricism'. Recognising this general point is itself a part of grasping the proper place of parametric design, which is to say, it is part of grasping the limits (parameters) of parametric design.

Despite the tendency for the parametric to be identified with quantitative and numerical approaches, and so for parametricism to be taken to be more or less convergent with computational (or digital-computational) approaches in design, it remains important not to treat parametricism as simply identical with computationalism. Although it has become dominant in many areas of contemporary architectural design, computation is not always parametric in character. Thus, not only does the parametric extend beyond the computational (so that there were, as already noted,

parametric modes of design and design-making even before the advent of digital computation), but the computational itself extends beyond the parametric. If computational and parametric are brought together at all, it is only in virtue of the tendency for parametricism, in its narrower contemporary form, to privilege quantity and number, a tendency that is, of course, central to the computational. But inasmuch as parametricism and the computation can also be distinguished, then there is also the possibility of thinking of parametricism more broadly, and so in ways that do not rule out the possibility of a real connection between place and the parametric – one that goes beyond the mere technical usefulness of parametric techniques.

To take place as the key notion in architectural design is to take place as having the central conditioning role in the making of design – on this approach, architectural design should, from the very first, be constituted as a response to place. Another way of putting this is to say that it should be place that is the proper *measure* of design (where 'measure' is here understood not as a quantity, but as that which is 'proper to', is 'moderated', is 'within limits'). In this sense, the parametric can be understood as already invoked in the idea of place, since place must here function as that which sets the parameters within which architectural design, in general and in particular, must operate (place will thus be what provides the measure in the sense of moderating, 'appropriating', limiting). We thus come to the point, finally, where there appear to be two answers to the question of the relation between place and parametricism: on the one hand parametricism always concerns place, since in one important sense, the parameters of any architectural design can only be the parameters set by the place itself; on the other hand, if we understand the parameters at work in parametric design always to be set qualitatively and numerically, then parametricism will be, at best, simply a tool or technique available to place-based design (as to any design), or, at worst, may operate to obscure the placed, which is to say, the properly bounded, character of design.

There is an obvious irony in the way in which, when understood narrowly as focused on the qualitative, numerical, and so also the spatial, parametricism does indeed have a tendency to neglect or overlook the idea of limit or bound. It does so, however, just because of the way in which the bounds that arise within the purely qualitative, the numerical, or the spatial can only be arbitrary in character (for this reason, it is also subjective, which is to say that it operates always as something posited or projected by a subject). The notion of limit or bound at work in the idea of place, however, is not arbitrary, but relates directly to the very nature of place and is constitutive of it (it is therefore also not a subjective posit or projection). The irony here, then, is that parametricism, in this sense, actually stands opposed to a certain form of the parametric – to the parametric as referring to the bounds that belong to place itself.

Against Parametric Reductionism in Design

Alberto Perez Gomez

I will be arguing that parametric operations in the production of architectural form are limited in their possibility to respond to the pre-given, situatedness of a future building. In other words, the reduction of existing conditions to quantitative variables to play roles in parametric equations is unable to encompass the qualitative dimensions of *place*. While architectural representation necessarily needs to account for the mathematical qualities of a future project, i.e., its geometry and structural integrity, and digital models certainly offer flexibility for innovating in this direction, driving a project through models that simply do this, basically that simply do this, assuming a homology between the space of the design and the future lived places, are unsatisfactory modalities of architectural representation, usually resulting in experientially impoverished buildings. The reason for this is simple: conceptual spaces are manifold and have developed through history, but they are never primary: bodily spatiality will always come first. Presuming the inverse is a fallacy that leads to excesses in top-down design operations that disregard prior situatedness.

Already in the 19th. C. Gottfried Semper had dreamt of design as the resolution of a complex equation in which the resulting form would be the function of the factorization of manifold variables, from the most obviously quantitative ones, like functional, structural and surface requirements, to possibly cultural expectations. Parametric design continues the dream of an operation based on algorithmic thinking which is itself a problematic. In his remarkable essay on the phenomenology of language, Maurice Merleau-Ponty explained how and why the algorithm and the analytic prose it inspires, is "a revolt against language in its existing state." This observation is crucial for my critical arguments against the *modus operandi* favored by architects in the last two centuries. Refusing the confusions of everyday language, the algorithm is "an attempt to construct language according to the standard of truth, to redefine it to match the divine mind.... to tear speech out of history." Drawing further consequences from this insight, in "The Phenomenology of Language" Merleau-Ponty explains how the universality we desire from communication is only accessible through the specific given languages we learn to speak -- and not from some ideal Esperanto, a transparent articulation of fact. This observation is obviously valid for all expressive systems, including architecture, dooming its efforts to generate meaningful forms from the reduction of "variables" in the world of experience to algorithms.

I will unpack my skepticism through three interrelated meditations:

1) The first issue in our conversation should be a recognition of the primacy of architecture as performance. Architects design buildings, their work is performative. And we take his for granted we can then ask about the usefulness of digital representations or parametric reductions of observed conditions in the external world. But the history of our discipline shows how much is lost by such assumptions.

2) Digital tools are not neutral and can become highly problematic. Their capacity for seduction and true innovation, for example, as well as their responsiveness (or lack thereof) to cultural values must be examined carefully. But by the same token the real issues of architectural representation cannot be circumscribed by a discussion of

the media themselves.

3) Poetic -- original, polysemic -- language is central to the very possibility of retrieving cultural roots for architectural expression that may result in appropriate atmospheric qualities responsive to pre-existing *places*, typically themselves brought to presence through articulate stories. *This concern is not current in architectural theory and practice.*

Architecture has suffered during the last two centuries the limitations of potential solipsism and near nonsense. In our discipline this is the syndrome of architecture made for architects, *particularly* when detached from language and not framed through appropriate critical questions. This has prolonged the crisis and, some would even claim, the agony of the discipline. Yet the fundamental existential questions to which architecture traditionally answered, the profound necessity for humans to inhabit a resonant world they may call home, even when separated by global technological civilization from an innate sense of place, remain as pressing as always.

The call for a careful and multilayered consideration of poetic and hermeneutic language in the generation of architecture and the built environment appears pressing. Narrative forms should be engaged for their fundamental capacity to orient ethical action; this is a call for history as interpretation through stories about the past, one that acknowledges the deep roots of our questions in the history of the Western world. Stories are also important for their unique ability to map architecture's urban context, increasingly synonymous with the human environment at large; they are crucial to set in *place* human actions, as in Paul Ricoeur's narrative model of *prefiguration, configuration and refiguration* (as set out in his *Time and Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, 1988). Ricoeur's schema might suggest for architecture a narrative understanding of site as prefiguration, form and atmosphere as configuration, and lived program as refiguration, accounting for the nature of the project as an ethical promise, communicating through emotion and reason. Engaging hermeneutic and poetic language in this fashion we can imagine how architecture may offer better alternatives to reconcile the personal imagination of the architect with an understanding of local cultures and their autochthonous places, pressing political and social concerns, beyond obsessions with fashion and form: the crucial dilemma we have inherited with our modern condition.

Being Somewhere

Megan Baynes

I have not found parametric design to be useful in my own thinking. I have known the quirky joy of a nurbs curve. Guilty delight, as a bulbous creature precipitates with a click. I did a student project once for some street lights in New York City. Illuminated folds, of some uninvented material, strode with the throng. It was novel. But it held no meaning.

I have only made a few things. Probably because of this constraint, I have had little use for the ubiquitous tools of global practice. At this point in my life I have no office. I own no software. I draw with pencils on rolls of cooking paper.

Sometimes I drive the hour from mountain to the sea. From chilly hills to lower lands. I look at the new things that have been added to the old things. I consider the need to reconsider. Three great planes of concrete enclose some air. Timber decks quarterize the plan. Six glass sliders are as big

as they can be and enclose an inner realm. Timber boxes. Boxes within boxes.

The light falls on the concrete. It falls through the slender leaves of the peppermint gums. The sun is obscured by a cloud and for moment the wall is alive. The other day I was there and it rained. The boards went black but the drops evaporated off the concrete immediately. It was beautiful. I hold this in my head. The surface of the river flickers. These things mark time. They make me intently aware of the moment. We are always, and can only ever be, in the now.

Perhaps you are thinking what a self-indulgent bourgeois person she is. Perhaps you are right. If it is any consolation, this painfully sincere architecture is necessarily therapeutic. I have known some strange things in my life and am not one for crowds.

I like simple things because they become a surface, or register, for photons and atoms. The play of light and the trace of liquid. I know this is hopelessly romantic and privileged, but I am grateful for it all. I work in a job to pay for my life. I do my architecture at night and on weekends. Because I do not earn a living from doing architecture, it is free to be exactly what I choose. It is the conflation of earning and architecture which I reject. Perhaps this is foolish. Perhaps it is interesting.

So many questions are raised by the way Architects practice. How can we discuss authorship or paternity in a firm with one thousand employees? Software enables large scale collaboration – across geographical expanse. It enables trans-national practice. It enables profit. It is also vulnerable. It is a huge creature which serves itself. It has to be fed specific people, money and projects in order replicate itself. This creature creates coherent branded things in a succession of different places. It is all so convenient. The thing bulges here or there, draped in a flexible blanket. Client driven programmatic changes can be most easily accommodated. There is no need to spoil the diagram. Jeremy Till would be pleased. But I wonder about the purpose and meaning of such exertions. Do we work to sustain practice or do we practice to create works? There are question about ubiquity, and relentlessness in this.

For me it is as simple as this: Do I want to look at a thing, or do I want to look out from within a thing. We dwell in a house. We do not dwell in the street where a photographer once stood. I am interested in lodging, in particular places, to create irreducibly specific sets of experiences.

This pertains to being somewhere.

Digital Delusions: Fear and Loathing of the Parametric Utopia

Adrian Carter

‘Resist any idea that contains the word algorithm’ Lebbeus Woods

As a child, my father, an aeronautical engineer, took me onboard the supersonic plane Concorde. The experience made an indelible impression. I realised at that early age, what the synthesis of advanced engineering and design pushed to the limits of the prevailing parameters could achieve.

However, as I came to appreciate many years later, even in major engineering projects, with quite specific requirements and constraints, there is still considerable creative leeway within the defined parameters. That allows for almost

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infinite expression of form and aesthetic judgement. And, if civil engineering structures cannot be purely parametrically designed, then certainly architecture per se cannot. As Juhani Pallasmaa so eloquently and unambiguously states 'the timeless task of architecture is to create embodied existential metaphors that concretize and structure man's being in the world. Images of architecture reflect and externalize ideas and images of life; architecture materializes our images of ideal life. Buildings and towns enable us to structure, understand and remember the shapeless flow of reality and ultimately, to recognize and remember who we are. Architecture enables us to place ourselves in the continuum of culture' (Pallasmaa, 1994, 37). Architecture is not as Le Corbusier suggested merely a 'machine for living', just as he misguidedly proposed replacing much of what defines the identity and sense of place of Paris with the repetitive architectural banality and sterility of the high-rise housing blocks of his proposed Ville Radieuse project.

Early in the 20th century, first Functionalism and then the more globally pervasive International Style sought to create a ubiquitous universal expression of modern architecture. Parametric design similarly aspires to universal adoption - despite the inference that the parameters pertaining to each project would be determined by the actual context. The visual appearance of the resulting projects, from the Azerbaijan capital of Baku to Zhengzhou, seem remarkably similar in their undulating, curvilinear and blob-like forms, irrespective of place. They are also invariably scaleless, as much that is designed purely in a digital environment, so often are. Thus, Zaha Hadid designed flower vases, as sold in Harrods, can as easily metamorphosize into high-rise apartment buildings, anywhere in the world.

As the architectural expression of neo-liberalism and the dangerously fallacious mantra of dynamic, endless exponential economic growth, parametric architecture does not seek to enhance, re-use and adapt existing buildings and urban structures, but rather demolishes to achieve a tabula rasa and replace, as with Corbusier's Ville Radieuse. Its excessive disregard of existing embodied resources and energy, flying in the face of knowledge that resources are finite and such increasing growth cannot be sustained. Similarly, parametric architects are also seemingly not encumbered by sensitivity to pre-existing social, historical and cultural markers of place, as illustrated by 'the illegal and violent evictions of people from their houses in a development area in Azerbaijan, which included the site for Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku.' (Brott, 2020, 148)

Proponents of parametric architecture tend it seems, to not be overly affected by ethical and moral concerns. Such as the appalling labour conditions of indentured labour, in the realisation of notably parametrically designed projects, for example with regards the stadiums being constructed for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and other signature projects throughout the United Arab Emirates. Architects innocently conceiving buildings in perfect utopian virtual digital space are perhaps distanced, and able to remain blissfully unaware of the harsh realities of their physical realisation in the real world. In the vacuum of digital design in the virtual world, one cannot hear the ensuing human screams of anguish and despair that result from the actual construction of their buildings.

For all its desire to appear fluid and dynamic, the forms resulting from Parametric Design seem stillborn and hermetically self-contained. Frozen in that moment in time, when the number crunching of the selected parametric data and machinations of the algorithms, was terminated by

human intervention, as the subjective creative engagement of the architect/software operator. It is no longer a dynamic process allowing for growth and adaption. In its striving for a pure functionalism, parametric design might seemingly mirror a bio-mimetic approach to design. But genuinely human architecture is never purely functional, always adding something more. Parametric design may seek to simulate forms in nature, but it offers little more in terms of poetic meaning and experiential qualities. Parametric architecture cannot accommodate within its selected parameters, the subjective idiosyncrasies of humanity, ethics, poetics, and the love, that as Alberto Pérez-Gómez describes beautifully in *Built Upon Love* 'responds to a desire for an eloquent place to dwell.' As the use of digital design tools limits and often denies the implementation of embodied experience and sense of human dimension. There is a disconnect between the hand and the brain in the design process. With the result determined by the limited parameters encoded, and not the more nuanced intuitive channelling of embodied experiential knowledge. Though this may play a role in the selection of which variations of parametrically determined outputs to choose, thus still maintaining some semblance of a creative subjective role. The architect/software operator though is merely concerned with the choice from a limited range of variants, rather than a fully active creative engagement, with infinite potential.

Nevertheless, like International Modernism previously, Parametric Design is considered by its most ardent proponents to be the one and only direction going forward in architecture. Fortunately, as with the alternatives to International Modernism previously, there is always more nuanced opposition to such dogmatic directions, that invariably proves to be more interesting and enduringly significant. In clear contrast to an International Style architecture of industrialised uniformity, devoid of poetic reference and remote from human experience, stand the expressively sculptural and highly narrative works of Le Corbusier; the idealised mythology of America in the late works of Frank Lloyd Wright; the sublime abstractions of nature in the work of Luis Barragan and Louis Kahn's poetic re-interpretations of archetypal architectural elements and the inspiration of the ruins of antiquity.

None of this is to suggest that architecture be frozen in aspic in some idealised historic period, as technology advances ever more exponentially. Like the futuristic, yet classical realm imagined in the Trigan Empire. But that we continue to maintain the poetic subjective creative human imagination in the design and making of our built environment. Using technology to facilitate, rather than dictate and limit our humanity and cultural visions. The digital perfection of parametric design offers a vision of immortality through technology, but one devoid of humanity and poetics. And as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote 'we don't ask to be eternal beings. We only ask that things do not lose all their meaning.'

Place and Parametricism

Elizabeth Farrelly

Parametricism: the word says it all. Any ism that embraces the word metric chills the blood and shrinks the imagination, implying as it does a positivistic worldview that - a century on - we still have not escaped. Parametricism exacerbates this.

Architecture, as the old adage goes, sits partway between art and science. Its scientific aspects relate to practical ideas;

structure, materials, weatherproofing. These are no doubt susceptible to and can benefit from design methodologies of various kinds.

But those are simply the twigs. Gathering them, selecting and forming them into a whole that not only fulfils the practical needs of shelter but caters also to the psychic and spiritual yearnings of the human animal – offering refuge and prospect, groundedness, aspiration and delight – and does this in a way that is beautiful; that is the creation of place. And that's an art.

Science strives to genericise and rationalise. Art, by contrast, is rooted in the specific and the intuitive. Skilled it may be but art, responsive always to the incident and accident of real life, is intrinsically irreducible to rules and patterns. It cannot be described, much less prescribed, by measurement. Nor can it be generated by any kind of pro forma or recipe. An algorithm for art is a contradiction in terms. A necessary impossibility. A fallacy.

By cloaking function in an unrelated amorph, parametricism covers a multitude of unresolved and unsynthesised issues; twigs that, although enveloped, remain unsynthesised. This reduces design's degree of difficulty, certainly, but also has the effect of distancing form from its sources of expressive meaning; purpose and context. It is no accident that illustrations of parametric form typically show technical virtuosity floating in space, asynchronous and untethered.

We live in a world that, having failed to shrug off 20th century positivism, is dominated by what I can only tag "men armed with numbers." Such numbers, or metrics, include dollars, votes and speed. They give us wealth creation as the only institutional value (even for institutions dedicated, say, to art or to education). They give us demagogues. And they give us a physical world of skyscrapers and motorways.

This determination to scientise the world has meant that in the spheres of decision-making – board rooms, parliaments and back rooms alike – no argument for mere qualitative values can ever hold sway against the quantifiable and verifiable. In this way numbers have been weaponised against beauty, decency and truth.

Parametric and digital design appeal to this same urge to tame the wildness inherent in the arts, in nature and in femaleness by reducing all value to the numerical. Everything else is effectively dismissed as witchery. In this way, such design methodologies contrive to seem "disruptive" while in fact serving to reinforce the orthodoxies by which we are already beset: neo-Liberalism, instrumentalism, conformism, corporatism, cronyism, formalism and patriarchy.

These hierarchies cater to fear, and fear is always oppressive. In proscribing the mysterious and untameable it makes the world duller and less engaging. But the danger is far deeper. Because place sits at the core of the sacred and our connection with place, sacralised as it is by beauty and interred time, is the source of goodness.

The earliest settlements were located according to augury, sacralised by burial, ruled by castes of priests and given purpose by ancestor worship that linked time past with time future.¹ When, in a jealous quarrel, Romulus killed Remus and buried his bones on the Capitoline, this became the founding moment, and the founding locus, of empire. It was an empire, further, and a city, that gave meaning to life itself so that exile (as in the case of Ovid's lifetime ban or *deportatio*) was considered far worse than even death by crucifixion.



Colin McCahon Eleven: His crucifixion



Ralph Hotere: Sangro Litany (1979)

We, in our threadbare modern instrumentalism, have lost this sense of the city's sacred potential. We've lost the deep life-purpose that Aristotle, for one, saw as originating in the role of citizen. Noting this modern 'white-out' amnesia, Melbourne theologian David Tacey suggests we learn from indigenous cultures, acquiring the ability to connect deeply with place by 'listening with our feet.'

This sounds reasonably intuitive. We are accustomed to thinking of other cultures as spiritually attuned, and of nature as a source of spiritual value. But numinous qualities pertain also to built place. Raymond Tallis' work on *The Four Hungers*, Iris Murdoch's discussion of beauty as a transcendence of ego and Roger Scruton's discussion of beauty as an erotic and kenotic opportunity all point this way. Place, in connecting us deeply with our home planet, can and should be the core of the sacred.

Such an idea seems absurd when set beside the increasingly repetitive soullessness of our contemporary city fabric, where thousands of more-or-less identical apartment towers insist we look and behave like avatars from the Sims. Yet this is architecture's deeper responsibility: to connect us with the source of meaning and bolster us against conformism. Any methodology that intervenes in this connectivity, making form a thing to be gazed at not through, inhibits this transcendence and diminishes our capacity for goodness.

References

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“Parametric and digital design appeal to this same urge to tame the wildness inherent in the arts, in nature and in femaleness by reducing all value to the numerical. Everything else is effectively dismissed as witchery. In this way, such design methodologies contrive to seem “disruptive” while in fact serving to reinforce the orthodoxies by which we are already beset: neo-Liberalism, instrumentalism, conformism, corporatism, cronyism, formalism and patriarchy.”



Tales for an imagined Domain House. Image constructed from digital scans by Gaby Miegerville-Little (2019)

SESSION 2: HOMEPLACE – FOUR STORIES ON THE NATURE OF EPHEMERAL TRACES IN (INTERIOR) PLACES

Wednesday August 12, 2020

7-9 pm AEST 5-7 am USA 10 am-12 pm UK

Gini Lee

Gini Lee is a landscape architect, interior designer and pastoralist. Her academic focus in research and teaching is on cultural and critical landscape architecture and spatial interior design theory and studio practice, to engage with the curation and postproduction of complex landscapes. Her recent curatorial practice experiments with Deep Mapping methods to investigate the landscapes, interiors and gardens of remote and rural Australia. She is currently Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Melbourne, Adjunct Professor in Interior Design at RMIT University and Adjunct Professor at the University of Adelaide.

With Aunty Enice Marsh, Adnyamathanha Elder

Panellists

Ross Gibson, University of Canberra

Ross Gibson is Centenary Professor of Creative & Cultural Research at the University of Canberra. He works collaboratively on books, radio features, films, artworks and strategic-planning exercises, and he supervises postgraduate students in similar pursuits.

Ed Hollis, University of Edinburgh

Hollis has practiced architecture in Sri Lanka and Edinburgh and in 1999 began lecturing, moving to Edinburgh College of

Art in 2004, where he is now Professor of Interior Design.

Working with follies in Sri Lanka, interventions to historic buildings in Scotland, and interiors, Hollis' research addresses time, story, and the built environment. His publications include *The Secret Lives of Buildings* (2009); *The Memory Palace: A Book of Lost Interiors*, (2013); and *How to Make a Home* (2016).

He also contributes to projects that use storytelling to develop new occupations for old buildings, from modernist ruins to medieval houses, and an Indian city built by Scots engineers in the nineteenth century.

Suzie Attiwill, RMIT University

Suzie Attiwill, Associate Dean Interior Design, School of Architecture and Urban Design, RMIT University. Since 1991, her practice has involved exhibition design, curatorial work, writing and teaching. Research is conducted through a practice of designing with a curatorial inflection attending to arrangements (and re-arrangements) of spatial, temporal and material relations to pose questions of interior and interiority in relation to contemporary conditions of living, inhabitation, subjectivity, pedagogy and creative practice. Collaborative projects include urban + interior an international publication; beyond building with the Australian Childhood Trauma Group; Abacus Learning Centre for children on the autism spectrum; and a series of curatorial experiments in ecologies of learning – physical, social and mental.

Brief

Homeplace - four stories invites sharing ideas of homeplace making through various narrative, spatial, material and digital forms. The common ground in our conversations may question how to invest the invisible traces and qualities of sites in contributing to crafting new tangible and intangible homeplaces for those set adrift, wherever and whenever

by choice or unwelcome circumstance. How can examining intangible and ephemeral associations to home and lived place contribute to design scenarios for making spaces and situations familiar, as an aid to enabling a sense of place in unfamiliar spaces? Might a parametric method applied to known sites enable making autonomous homeplaces, from the interior outwards, through adopting forms such as narrative text, kinetic and performative interactions and the invisible layers of the traces wrought on space over time?

Narrative is the medium through which the idea of homeplace as both a site of refuge and a site of resistance from social and economic hardship. bell hooks' stories of black women's keeping and caring from the inside, as a task for making home, prompt imagining how their dwellings may have been configured to allow a sense of belonging in spaces often only temporarily theirs (1991). Memmott and Long contend that cultural places and meanings are mutually made through people-environment interactions in three ways; by altering the place physically either through construction or retuning existing forms, by enacting behaviours associated with specific place or through emotional encounters and recollections of particular attributes and/or histories of places (2002).

The Invisible Place: Bounded Interiors design studio (2019) sought to explore habitable, albeit temporary, futures for existing places by adopting the idea of homeplace as both a theoretical and a practiced concept. The hunch was that by recovering sites of the past as the locale for re-adapted places, new occupations both realised and imagined can be effected through a range of useful programmatic analogue and digital forms. The studio posed the following prompts: Is it possible to read the traces of former occupation by tuning the marks and layers present in the fabric of places now removed from their original purpose? How can an archive of ephemeral and imagined spatial lives of past occupants of building and landscape inform a present project for making homeplaces invested in a program for transitional lived spaces?

Three Travels in Homeplace

Gini Lee

This writing is concerned with uncovering personal notions of homeplaces, where they arise and in what forms. In an environment of increasing lived mobility, one result of insecure working arrangements, it is increasingly vital to find spaces to call home in unused and overlooked places. Beyond mere refurbishment in an architectural sense, perhaps it is useful to look for alternative parameters to normative ideas of what constitutes a sense of home and of self.

Scenario One: The Attic

There is a moment when moving through her attic that Fuchsia exclaims, I am home! I am me! Even though her home is ostensibly all of the Gormenghast castle and the lands beyond to the mountains, it is in the hidden spaces only entered through a concealed door that Fuchsia ever feels truly at home. In some forgotten castle corner oddly connecting topographies of space filled with detritus, memories and atmospheres together with rudimentary provisions for her basic needs are her homeplace. Peake's way is to describe in detail, all the small and intense moments of the girl's navigation of time and space until she reaches her place of comfort. He includes the material, the ephemeral and the temporal punctuations in rooms perhaps originally intended for something else.

“Narrative is the medium through which the idea of homeplace as both a site of refuge and a site of resistance from social and economic hardship. bell hooks' stories of black women's keeping and caring from the inside, as a task for making home, prompt imagining how their dwellings may have been configured to allow a sense of belonging in spaces often only temporarily theirs (1991)”

These essential parameters reside in the fixed and transportable objects, the textured and furnished overlooked spaces promoting Fuchsia's growing sense of wellbeing as she moves further from the places where her curious family resides.

The text reveals practiced moving across space and time: Her emergency supply of eatables gathered up, the candle as a source to light the way, an expandable cloth for carrying provisions, a catalogue of surfaces felt, expectation of reaching familiar places prompted by textures and colours in the gloom, resonance caused through footfall, senses of belonging and anticipation at small destinations prompted by a spatial pause, qualities of warm and still light changing over day, night and the seasons, the lumber room of fantastic collections inviting burrowing into secret spaces within, her attic of make believe - spatially empty of physical beings and rather a stage for her 'minds companions' to act out, and her balcony from which the outside world could be observed. Peake's words enable immersion in Fuchsia's place through an unfolding transit of experiences learned and imagined, simultaneously visible and tactile while invisible and ephemeral, and loved (Peake, 2011).

Scenario Two: More than one place

Domain House was once a home even though it was principally a school. The former Hobart High School (1850) on Queens Domain was/is a place of many lives before and during its many occupations. The land on which it dwells was once home to the Mouheneenner who made good use of the riches found in this place which extended from water to hillslope. Its development records the vagaries of the ideals and realities of the settlement of the 'ghostly' invaders from elsewhere. Traces of the adaptability of this imposing structure convey the Tasmanian Gothic in built form, where the interior is an unruly collection of interconnecting rooms ranging over a number of stories. A year or so ago as we and our students navigated our way up and down stairs and openings it was a task to imagine how various inhabitants had co-existed in these now empty rooms. Clearly a home could once be made out of opportunity beyond design intent as the building accommodated extensive apartments for teacher's families that bookended the central teaching rooms (Freeman, 2015, p 42).

These spatial arrangements are today a dilemma as the building's configuration appears to defy plans for useful reoccupation. As Hobart has also entered a time of housing crisis due in part to an overabundance of temporary tourist offerings, we thought it possible to reimagine Domain House as a place to live in temporarily – a useful halfway house between arriving and eventually finding a permanent place. What would the parameters be to allow for making a temporary home in a new place? In one's mind what to bring to a place of rooms and trace fragments of now invisible past lives? What would be needed to reoccupy rooms with memories as once 'drawing and dining room, breakfast parlour, dressing room and bedroom' opening off classroom, laboratory, public parlour, office room, refreshment room, courtyard, kitchen and privy? What now constitutes both an existenzminimum and a home that could accept personal memories, artefacts and atmospheres to provoke I am home, I am me! Was it even a possible? Experiments in living systems afforded by parametric modelling revealed the challenges of the limits of an architectural intent devoid of an ephemeral eye to convey belonging and amenity in imagined new forms in an old place.

Scenario Three: Making do in place

In remote Adnyamathanha country there are temporary places of respite and learning that I have had the pleasure to visit by invitation from Auntie Enice Marsh and Uncle Reg Wilton. They are named homeplaces that are made from bits and pieces collected, shared and built up over time. They are collective and collaborative places that exist as home because they are on country, where home is at one with place. Each homeland is configured differently yet the essential parameters, the limits to what is needed and what can be made are well established. Somewhere to have a constant fire for heating and cooking and for sitting around in the cold, somewhere to shelter and store day and night, somewhere to gather together, somewhere to sleep – a place for the swag raised above the ground for warmth and away from snakes, separate spaces for men's and women's needs, proximity to water or a creek where food may be gathered, and a view to the beyond towards sunrise and sunset. These minimum arrangements allow people to bring with them their things, their knowledge, practices and memories of practiced country. I am shown around the homeland with intent to share ideas, to gather and notice and to learn to do with what is available in a place that prompts day to day activity alongside deep reflection. Everything is in the right place at the right time, a chronotope for home (Bakhtin, 1981).

References

M M Bakhtin. (1981). "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel", *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, Austin
 Peter Freeman, Peter Walker & Paul Johnston (2015), *Domain House, The University of Tasmania Returns to the Queens Domain*, University of Tasmania, Hobart
 Mervyn Peake (1959, 2011) *The Illustrated Gormenghast Trilogy*, Vintage Classics, New York



Homeland: at home for breakfast Photo: Gini Lee 2020

Story-drivers

Ross Gibson

In his provocative book *Earth Moves*, Bernard Cache suggests architecture should be regarded as 'a cinema of things'.¹ He emphasises how architecture can create a setting wherein a dramatic impetus animates everything -- *moves through* everything -- not only through the people but also through the objects that host the people, so that stories take place in an energised scene.

This idea is close to the brilliant notion that lights up one of the masterpieces of film criticism, Fereydown Hoveyda's 'Sunspots', in which the concept of 'mise-en-scene' is detailed possibly for the first time. Hoveyda explains that cinema works best when it captures and channels an ever-unfolding force that runs through the represented spaces and temporal rhythms of a film and also through the audience in the dark room. When a film really works, he explains, energy can be discerned pulsing coherently in space, in time, and in people so that the animus of a scene flares through all the components of an individual shot and then arcs like electricity from shot to shot, from moment to moment, from screen to audience and back again. In every film, a peculiar set of rhythms and melody-lines (visual as well as sonic) combine to generate an energy-signature that carries, excites, and transforms every part of the film. This is the *mise-en-scene*.

Mise-en-scene, therefore, is more than spatial. Characters, objects, spaces, luminance, time-patterns, and viewers all get altered as the dynamics play out. The result is pantheistic and protean. When a film lights up like this, a charge is harnessed, swirling out of the filmed environment, zinging around us and through us. Irradiated by the cinema screen, we the spectators are sometimes bathed and buffeted by a force that's vital and activating, like the sun. Hence the name of the essay: 'Sunspots'.²

Parametric design, I think, is like this too. More than spatial. In architecture, parametric design facilitates a 'cinema of things'. By designating and manipulating a set of determinant features, it helps us understand how an existential drama can play out in a built environment, depending on how those features or constructive parameters relate to each other so as to generate outcomes whelped from the 'genetics' of liveliness – the *virtues* – that are poised to emerge from the determinant features of the design. In such a parametric 'cinema of things', we see a building not as a stable entity, not as a finished nominalist thing; rather a building emerges as an event, as something animated, an ever-unfolding verbal-noun.

And within such unfolding, we see an array of possible dramas occurring in *everything* – in the materials as well as in the experiences that constitute the environment moment by moment. In other words, we can see architecture as a script, as a system facilitating the enactment of a dramatic array of designed stories. ('Drama': from the Ancient Greek 'dra' – to do, enact or perform.)

A script is an array of parameters, not so different from a parametric design-set. Story-writers often think of the parameters as 'drivers' or factors that can be manipulated into different relationships so that the writer can ruminate on all the possible storyline-outcomes before settling on one particular, published version. There is endless debate about the exact number and names of the narrative drivers, but generally speaking the main ones are:



Sydney, Marrickville Crime Scene, 1953 (Justice & Police Museum Archive)
A scene driven by: Setting (in time & place), Character, Mood, Tone, Plot & Intrigue, Themes & Values.

Setting (in time & place),
Character,
Mood,
Tone,
Plot & Intrigue,
Themes & Values.

From the active relationships poised amongst these parameters, stories emerge as systems of possibility that listeners assess in relation to presumptions about plausibility. Notably, the story-drivers are more qualitative than quantitative. And they are powerful precisely because the qualities tend to prevail over the quantities, assessed as generative factors in the drama of lived experience. This is because what everyone is looking for is: acceptable astonishment or viable surprise felt as the assertion of heretofore unglimped possibility playing out within the constraints of plausibility.

To conclude, let me reiterate then speculate. To reiterate: 'everyone is looking for acceptable astonishment or viable surprise felt as the assertion of heretofore unglimped possibility playing out within the constraints of plausibility.' To speculate: considered alongside Cache's notion of 'a cinema of things', I wonder, might 'the surprising experience of negotiating possibility within plausibility' serve as a working definition of good parametric architecture?

References

1. Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p.29. See also all of Chapter 9, entitled 'Oscillation'.
2. First published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1960, 'Sunspots' was republished in Jim Hillier's influential anthology *Cahiers du cinéma : 1960-1968--new wave, new cinema, re-evaluating Hollywood*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986.

My Dorm

Ed Hollis

I first read *Titus Groan* in 1984. I was a teenager, and it was, as it happens, the first year I made a home away from home. Each night, after the lights went out, I'd put my head under the duvet, and balance a torch and the tome inside the cocoon I'd made, and then I'd enter the gates of Gormenghast.

It was first line of defense. Against the metal frame of the bed. Against the roofless, doorless, cubicle within which it stood. Against its repetition in a dormitory of forty other identical cubicles. Against the school day that would begin when the bell rang at 0720.

Boarding school was an environment subjected to ruthless and ubiquitous parametry. Our time was enumerated by bells; our persons by the laundry number sewn in to our uniforms; our performance by exam grades and rugby scores; our behaviour by rules, the punishment for breaking which was to copy out them out all over again.

This was the place that, in 1984 (yes, I read that too that year) I learned to make my home.

And what a home it was. More Gormenghast than the Ministry of Truth, originally assembled from the fragments of a ruined abbey and a Tudor manor, and repeatedly extended over four centuries, it was so large and complex that one my friends managed to pass an entire fortnight without ever going outside. It was an apparently infinite, immeasurable, interior.

Or at least its parameters revealed themselves slowly. The haunts of older pupils were forbidden to the younger; and so we spent entire years guessing at what was on the other side of a door or a wall. We only understood the building in full in the final year, and then, of course, we were ready to leave.

It had not, originally, been designed to be a school, and, like many institutional buildings, it was it never finished. The signs of its contingent, shifting parameters were awkward junctions between wings and levels, inaccessible lightwells, windows blocked, doors that led nowhere, and hazard tape that would mysteriously appear and disappear in random corners.

If the institution was a closed parametric system, the place that housed it was one whose parameters were so multifarious and contradictory that, in their interstices, they cancelled one another out, creating spaces where no rules need apply. Boarding school was the perfect space for a five hundred unwashed teenage boys to make themselves at home.

It wasn't my idea. My friend Brendan talked me into it; he always did. The façade outside our dormitory window was festooned with columns, designed to evoke the Tudor origins of the building. At first, we just we stood on the cornice; but after a few nights we were scaling the columns, hauling ourselves up by abacus, entablature, cornice and balustrade.

And at the top of this cliff of elaborate, redundant architecture, punctuated by domed towers, undivided by walls or years, unobserved, a *terra incognita* of lead flats and gloaming hours stretched out: unprogrammed, purposeless, unmeasured or unmeasurable. This place, beneath (or above) the notice of the place in which we spent our days, became our home, that belonged only to us.

“There’s nothing unusual about Gormenghast, or Boarding School. Life in found spaces - institutional life, shared life, life on the move, as a servant, a migrant worker, a student, a slum tenant - isn’t an exception: it is, for most of humanity, the norm. “



My dorm, photographed sixty years before I read Titus Groan in it in 1984. It looked exactly the same. The photograph is taken from the top of my cubicle.

And so, for me, under the duvet with the torch, Gormenghast wasn't a retreat from an unhomely reality; it was the manual for the occupation of one.

While we had to copy out the school rules as a punishment for breaking them, they were in Gormenghast, recorded in three books. The first book contained

a list of the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. The exact times; the garments to be worn for each occasion and the symbolic gestures to be used. Diagrams facing the left-hand page gave particulars of the routes by which his lordship should approach the various scenes of operation.

But that was not the whole story, for

Occasionally the routes marked down ... in the diagrams of the first tome were obsolete, as for instance, where at 2.37 in the afternoon Lord Groan was to have moved down the iron stairway in the grey vestibule that led to the pool of carp. That stairway had been warped and twisted out of shape seventy years ago when the vestibule had been razed to the ground in the great fire.

That is, as it always is, that the building, and the brief, as they always do over time, had drifted apart; and his lordship, as we all do, had to improvise a new ritual, 'shakily on the tablecloth with the point of a fork.'

And that's where the story really begins. Titus Groan isn't really the hero of the novel and neither is Gormenghast. The plot (rather than its parameters) is driven by Steerpike, an ambitious kitchen boy who doesn't know his place, or loses it. Like a naughty schoolboy, he improvises. He finds forbidden connections between interiors and people, from the Room of Roots to the roof, and in doing so, even though none of his betters know it, he makes Gormenghast his own.

I went back to school recently, only to discover that the interior I spent five years learning had disappeared. I soon got lost in corridors and halls, which, even if I recognised them, had been rearranged for purposes never imagined in 1984. Such as girls. The institution had changed, and so, along with it, had its spatial parameters.

But Steerpike had stood me in good stead, all the same.

There's nothing unusual about Gormenghast, or Boarding School. Life in found spaces - institutional life, shared life, life on the move, as a servant, a migrant worker, a student, a slum tenant - isn't an exception: it is, for most of humanity, the norm.

In 1984, I made a found space a home place by playing its parameters back against themselves, exploiting the interstices between them to create places of my own. The chief affordance of the home I created was not homely stability, or comfort, or refuge.

Rather it was the proof (or illusion, admittedly, of) devious agency, in a world both more regimented and less stable than I could ever imagine. A world just like our own.

shift(in)g parameters – a folding in

Suzie Attiwill

Following is a curation of ideas and quotes that experiment with shift(in)g parameters in relation to ideas and concepts of I, experience, signs, interior and history to open up trajectories and different ways of thinking through questions of home and place, and a practice of interior designing.

What if the self is 'a habitus, a habit, nothing but a habit in a field of immanence, the habit of saying I'?¹ How might other modes of belonging 'push the question of sensation beyond the phenomenological anchoring of a subject in a landscape'?²

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze's description of a spider in her web³ offers an image to enable this shift in focus: she 'sees nothing, perceives nothing, remembers nothing', she 'answers only to signs' on a visceral level, responding to the slightest sensation of vibration and contracting. Sensation is understood here as a contraction composed of a series of instants; 'the thousands of passive syntheses of which we are organically composed'⁴ where "each contraction, each passive synthesis, constitutes a sign that is interpreted or deployed in active synthesis".⁵ A sensation of belonging to something and a sensation of being somewhere.

Experimental educator, novelist and essayist Fernand Deligny set up a network in the 1970s in France to live with and care for autistic children. He writes of a network as 'a mode of being' composed of arachnean lines and movement, and drew maps of walking as well as 'maps of perceptions and maps of gestures (cooking or collecting wood) showing customary gestures and gestures of drift'.⁷

What if we are composed of lines?

'Man walks in a straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going; he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and he goes straight to it'.⁸

'Modernism was founded on the concept of space. Parametricism differentiates fields. Fields are full, as if filled with a fluid medium. We might think of liquids in motion, structured by radiating waves, laminal flows, and spiralling eddies'.⁹

A professor of art who was also my supervisor told me in what I took to be a disparaging tone that design was design; an act of de-signing. This has stuck with me and given he was a poststructuralist, I have come to understand this as a critique of design in its tendency to reduce signs to modes of communication and representation; embodying a structuralist system of signs as signifiers and signified that affirms the known, i.e. certainty. Art on the other hand – through his poststructuralist lens – was the harnessing of forces and the production of an encounter with sensation that effects a pause and the potential to open up to the unknown and the indiscernible.

Is the act of design one of attending to the customary lines to identify patterns of signs to repeat, represent and reproduce? To affirm the same and habits in the production of the habitus? To confirm relations with the known?

What if design works with an emergent subject? In the pause between stimulus and response? Like the spider in her web, we could think of a network of relations and capacities; interior designing as the fabrication of a space 'in which sensations may emerge, from which a rhythm, a tone, colouring, weight, texture may be extracted'.¹⁰ Design becomes an apprenticeship in the production of signs where belonging is understood as immersed and emergent and time as past, present and future is thought otherwise than a production of consciousness.

Design as a practice is situated in the pause between stimulus and response where the question of folding in through selection and arrangement comes into focus. Deleuze poses two criteria for selection: one on 'the basis of existing criteria – existing representations, recognized perceptions and feelings'. This is habit and 'the outside is only the projection of our habituated interiority'. The other is 'selecting what is new, what challenges or troubles habituated experience'.¹¹

This shift(in)g parameter poses the challenge of a belonging that is not personal nor dependant on an ego and defined by property and ownership. How to make relations of belonging with the unknown and the expanse of existence within which the I is situated? How to think home and place in a global world? These are particularly critical questions as anxiety defines current relations with the unknown, exterior and future.

A shift(in)g parameter is enabled through the concept of ethology posed by Deleuze. He writes:

the important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as form or as a development of form but



Fernand Deligny, *Monoblet*, November 1976

as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. ... relations of speed and slowness, of the capacities for affecting and being affected that characterize each thing. For each thing, these relations and capacities have an amplitude, thresholds (maximum and minimum) and variations or transformations that are peculiar to them. And they select, in the world or in Nature, that which corresponds to the thing; that is, they select what affects or is affected by the thing, what moves or is moved by it'.¹²

A shift in focus for design as a practice attending to humans – as *Is*, agents, characters – where design involves a process of de-signing to enable others to occupy; to design – interior designing – as a practice situated in the pause between the known and unknown that attends to signs that enable participation in the condition of belonging, inviting connections and making relations, producing capacities for affect and to be affected – a folding-in.

This begins a story of belonging in the unknown.

References

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2. John Rajchman, 'Introduction to Pure Immanence. Essays on a Life' (New York: Zone Books, 2001). 10.
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4. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London, New York: Continuum, [1964] 2004). 95.
5. *ibid.*, 94.
6. Fernand Deligny, *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Catherine Porter (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, [2008] 2015).
7. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1980] 1987). 224.
8. Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, [1929] 1987). 5.
9. Patrik Schumacher, 'Parametricism as Style – Parametricist Manifesto', Patrik Schumacher, 2008, <https://www.patrikschumacher.com/Texts/Parametricism%20as%20Style.htm>
10. Elizabeth Grosz, 'Chaos, Territory, Art. Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth', *The IDEA Journal*, 2005, 15–28. 19. <https://doi.org/10.37113/ideaj.vi0.192>
11. Jon Roffe, 'Framing', in Suzie Attiwill et al., *Practising with Deleuze. Design, Dance, Art, Writing, Philosophy*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017). 83.
12. Gilles Deleuze, 'Ethology: Spinoza and Us', in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, [1970] 1992). 625–33. 627–28.

SESSION 3: FACING THE BLANK SHEET

Thursday August 13, 2020

7-9.30 pm AEST 5-7.30 am USA 10-12.30 pm UK

Professor Mark Burry AO FTSE AIA

Professor of Urban Futures

Director Smart Cities Research Institute

Professor Mark Burry AO is a registered architect and the Founding Director for Swinburne University of Technology's Smart Cities Research Institute (SCRI). His role is to lead the development of a *whole-of-university* research approach to 'urban futures', helping ensure that our future cities anticipate and meet the needs of all – smart citizens participating in the development of smart cities.

Mark Burry is a practising architect who has published internationally on two main themes: putting theory into practice with regard to procuring 'challenging' architecture, and the life, work and theories of the architect Antoni Gaudí. He has been Senior Architect to the Sagrada Família Basilica Foundation since 1979, pioneering distant collaboration with his colleagues based on-site in Barcelona concluding in late 2016. Recent publications include an edited 4-volume 1,600 page collection of papers setting-out the grounds for Digital Architecture as a critical concept, including a 9,000 word introduction to the set and accompanying introductions to each volume (Routledge, March 2020), and an edition of AD titled 'Urban Futures' for Wiley (May-June, 2020).

Panellists

Nicholas Ray, Architect

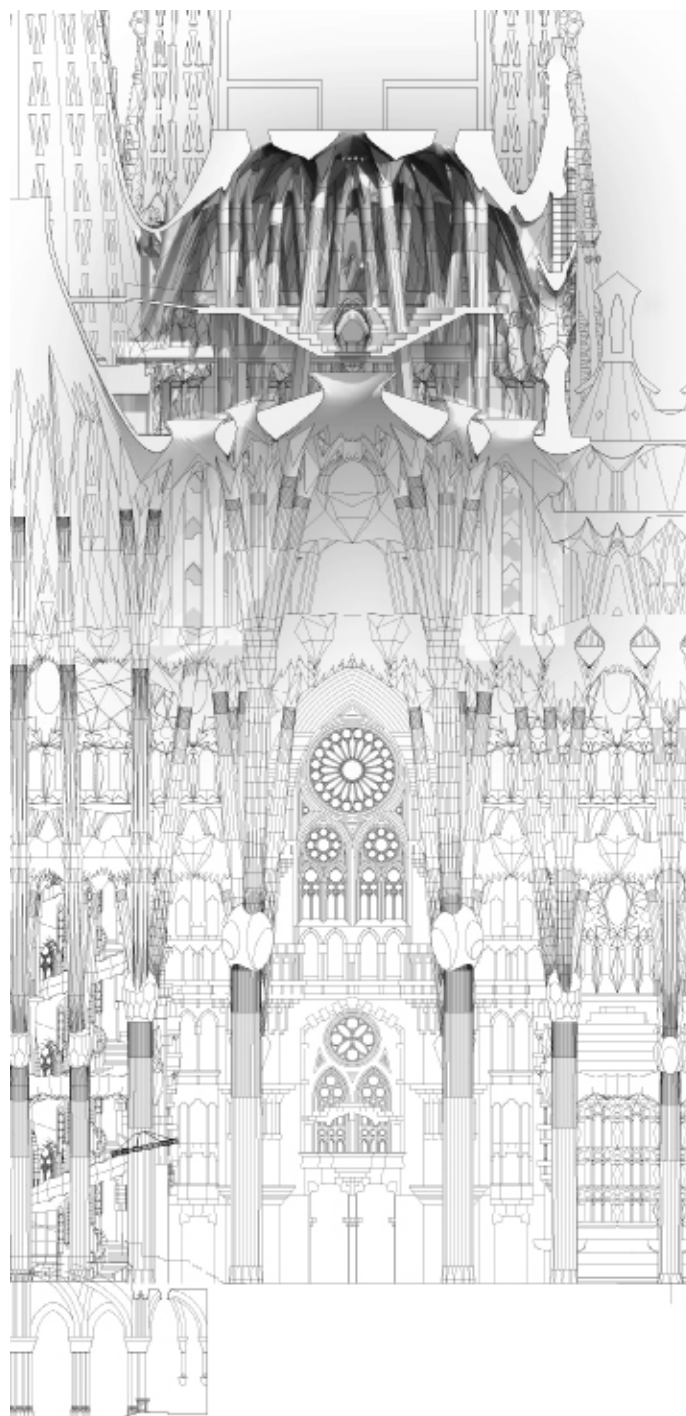
Nicholas Ray is Reader Emeritus in Architecture at the University of Cambridge, an Emeritus Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, and Honorary Visiting Professor in Architectural Theory at the University of Liverpool. He taught at the University of Cambridge from 1974 and has given lectures and taught studios in architectural schools internationally including Harvard GSD, the Universities of Hong Kong, Nanjing and Cincinnati and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago.

In practice (within NRAP architects, where he is now a consultant) he has worked on small-scale domestic projects, larger scale planning studies, and buildings of various kinds for tertiary education, usually in the UK, but occasionally abroad. These have often involved alterations and repairs to listed historic structures.

He is the author of numerous articles in professional journals, and six books to date: *Cambridge Architecture, a Concise Guide*, (Cambridge University Press), *(Re)Sursele Formei Arhitecturale* (Paidea Press, Rumania), *Alvar Aalto, and Rafael Moneo: Building, Teaching, Writing*, with Francisco Gonzalez de Canales (both Yale University Press), *Architecture and its Ethical Dilemmas* (Routledge), and *Philosophy of Architecture*, with Christian Illies (Liverpool University Press).

Dr Imogen Lesser Woods, University of Kent

Imogen began her career in architecture at the University of Nottingham (UK) in 2004 where she did her Bachelor of Architecture and her Diploma in Architecture, whilst working in a small practice in Yorkshire for some of the holidays and working in London between degrees. After completing her Diploma with a distinction she decided to pursue academic



Sagrada Família Basilica, Barcelona Antoni Gaudí: *Sala Creuer* (2005-ongoing). Mark Burry, Jordi Coll, Marta Miralpeix (Jordi Bonet and Jordi Fauli). Render by Michael Wilson, 2017.

architecture. She was awarded a 50th Anniversary Doctoral Research Scholarship at the University of Kent (UK) in 2012. She was a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Kent at this time and then an assistant lecturer. Her doctoral research Literary Language as a Tool for Design: An Architectural Study of the Spaces of Mervyn Peake's The Gormenghast Trilogy and 'Boy in Darkness' was completed in March 2018. Since then she has been perusing education in a different format by raising her daughter.

Imogen's doctoral research examines Mervyn Peake's literary language in The Gormenghast Trilogy as a potential spatial design tool. It used digital and hand-drawn architectural drawings and physical models alongside a traditional written thesis. This combination of working practices enabled Peake's spaces to be analysed as architecture in potential and so provide a recognisable architectural foundation for the analysis of space and language.

Neil Spiller, Editor

Neil Spiller is Editor of AD, previously he was Hawksmoor Chair of Architecture and Landscape and Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Greenwich, London, prior to this he was Dean of the School of Architecture, Design and Construction and Professor of Architecture and Digital Theory. Before this he was Vice-Dean and Graduate Director of Design at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London.

Neil has been Guest Editor of eight editions of AD including the highly successful *Architects in Cyberspace I and II* (1995, 1998), *Procell Architecture* (2011) and *Drawing Architecture* (2013). Neil's books also include *Cyberreader: Critical Writings of the Digital Era* (2002), *Lost Architectures* (2002) and *Digital Dreams* (1998). He has also published books with Thames and Hudson, as author of *Visionary Architecture-Blueprints of the Modern Imagination* (2006), *Digital Architecture Now* (2008) and as co editor of *Educating Architects* (2014) and as author of *Architecture and Surrealism* (2016). He is also the author of *How to Thrive in Architecture School- A Student Guide for the RIBA* (2020).

His architectural design work has been published and exhibited on many occasions worldwide. He is an internationally renowned visionary architect. Neil is also known as the founding director of the AVATAR (Advanced Virtual and Technological Architectural Research) Group. This group conducts research into advanced technologies and into architectural representation but more importantly into the impact of advanced technologies such as virtuality and biotechnology on 21st century design. Neil is also recognised internationally for his paradigm shifting contribution to architectural discourse, research / experiment and teaching.

Phillip Beesley, University of Waterloo

Philip Beesley is a practicing visual artist, architect, and Professor in Architecture at the University of Waterloo and Professor of Digital Design and Architecture & Urbanism at the European Graduate School. Beesley's work is widely cited in contemporary art and architecture, focused in the rapidly expanding technology and culture of responsive and interactive systems. He serves as the Director for the Living Architecture Systems Group, and as Director for Riverside Architectural Press. His Toronto-based practice, Philip Beesley Architect Inc., operates in partnership with the Europe-based practice Pucher Seifert and the Waterloo-based Adaptive Systems Group, and in numerous collaborations including longstanding exchanges

with couture designer Iris van Herpen and futurist Rachel Armstrong. As an internationally recognized expert and pioneer in kinetic, responsive, near-living architectural installations, Philip Beesley leads the LASG Partnership and the Scaffolds research stream.

Brief

The question provoking discussion for this panel concerns place design: can places be designed or do they simply emerge from a set of colliding circumstances? The core premise is that memorably identifiable places (as opposed to unremarkable physically occupiable spaces) come to be as a consequence of a complex mix of largely unrelated decisions.

Provocation

The core premise does not assert that we cannot set out to create places *per se* but rather, the creative's role might be better situated in setting-up the circumstances for places to emerge rather than contrive to exact a predicted outcome.

The test for this premise is thinking about the creation of places in terms of computational design: what are the parameters that influence how a place might be perceived, and how might they be enumerated for computation. But places can be evoked in literature, art and music as much as they might be physical substantiations of a spatial designers' sets of decisions. In considering place beyond the designer's touch, what do creatives have in common when conveying a sense of place beyond the existential experience the architect - the principal materialiser of humanly habitable places - sets-out to achieve? Do all creatives operate with a common set of parameters?

The panel will seek commonalities across the realm of imaginative endeavour applied to the creation of a tangible

sense of place. Creative kindred including composers, fine artists, novelists, poets, and architects certainly have the *parti pris* in common: that essential starting point to an imaginative journey that commences with an empty score, blank canvas, sheet of paper, or sketch pad. The *parti pris*, usually abbreviated to 'parti', is the underlying 'point of departure' - the organising principle or thought behind a concept, or the fundamental basis to a pathway towards decision-making. The *parti* comes in many shapes. It can be manifested as a verbal statement to open a discussion with an audience or it might be visually represented as a diagram, schema, motif, or doodle.

In initiating any creative act the composer, artist, writer, or architect alike would like to set-off with vigour but they may immediately stall by hitting a familiar obstacle: writer's block. What are the elusive resources being called upon to kick-start the creative process and why can they go missing in action when most needed?

Then there is the 'stopping problem', a challenge as much for the scientist seeking to optimise as it is for any artist seeking to perfect leading to a final provocation: if places are emergent from a set of given conditions, which is of course contestable, when do spaces start being places, and do places ever stop evolving as places beyond their perception in any given moment in time - what does change mean in the context of place 'making'?

Facing the Blank Sheet

Mark Burry

Can places be designed or do they simply emerge from a set of colliding circumstances? The core premise is that memorably identifiable places (as opposed to unremarkable physically occupiable spaces) come to be as a consequence of a complex mix of largely unrelated decisions.

This does not mean that we cannot set out to create places *per se* but asserts that the creative's role should be setting-up the circumstances for places to emerge rather than contrive to exact a predicted outcome.

The test for this premise is thinking about the creation of places in terms of computational design: what are the parameters that influence how a place might be perceived, and how might they be enumerated for computation. But places can be evoked in literature, art and music as much as they might be physical substantiations of designers' sets of decisions. In considering place beyond the designer's touch, what do creatives have in common when conveying a sense of place beyond the existential experience the architect - the principal materialiser of humanly habitable places - sets-out to achieve? Do all creatives operate with a common set of parameters?

Are there commonalities to be found from the realm of imaginative endeavour when applied to the creation of a tangible sense of place? Creative kindred including composers, fine artists, novelists, poets, and architects certainly have the *parti pris* in common: that crucial starting point to an imaginative journey that commences with an empty score, blank canvas, sheet of paper, or sketch pad. The *parti pris*, usually abbreviated to '*parti*', is the underlying 'point of departure' - the organising principle or thought behind a concept, or the fundamental basis to a pathway towards decision-making. The *parti* comes in many shapes such as a verbal statement to open discussion with an audience or it might be more structurally represented as a diagram, schema, motif, or doodle.

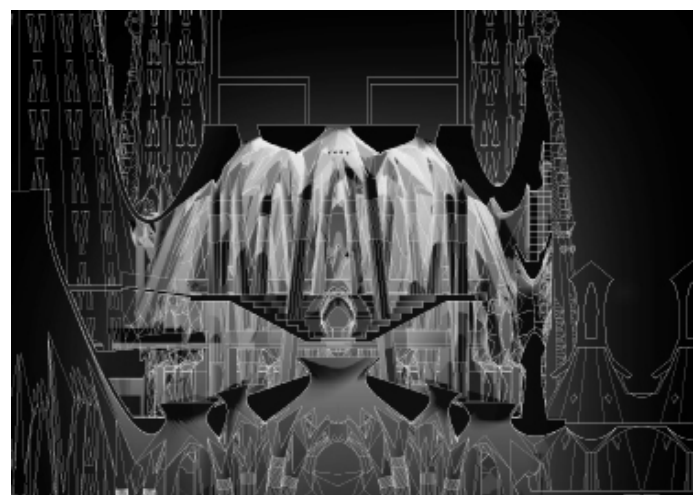
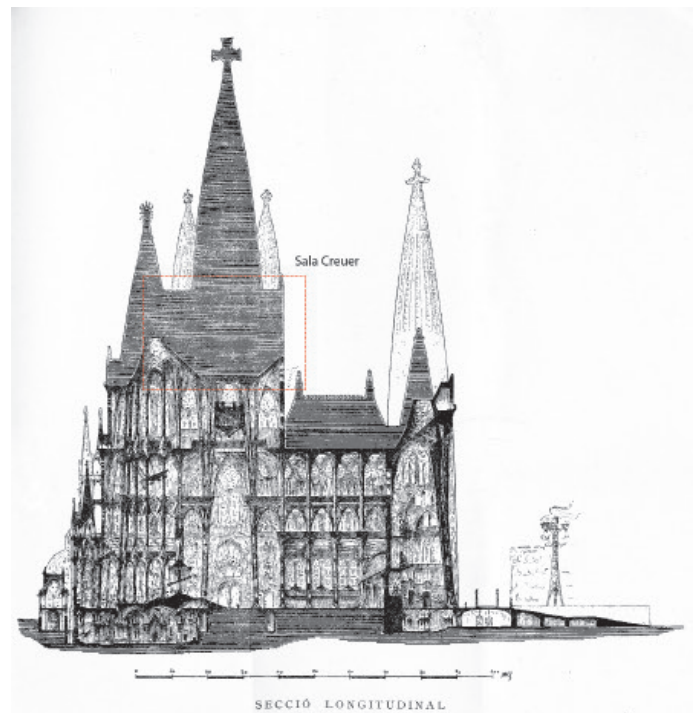
While in initiating any creative act, the composer, artist, writer, or architect alike would like to set-off with vigour they may stall at the outset by hitting a dreaded obstacle: writer's block. The elusive resources being called upon to kick-start the creative process can go missing in action precisely at the time when they are most needed.

While a problem-solving engineer might tackle a challenge by applying a tried-and-tested formula and efficiently orchestrate a concrete outcome - they look to derive the answer rather than viable alternative options. In contrast, identifying a credible starting point and authoring directions for a creative flow is a far less predictable process. Without formulae to draw upon, a blank sheet can be particularly confronting when myriad vague ideas in constant flux at the back of the creative mind stubbornly refuse to step out of the shadows for marshalling into a workable *parti*.

Alternative rival methodologies abound for the translation of creative exposition of concepts into readable, listenable, or visible artefacts but similar strategies cannot be sensibly offered for the very inception of the essential initial ideas. Once seeded, however, an overarching narrative can be adeptly deployed to draw-together and structure the various emergent threads and test a composition's viability, but any such development cannot progress without a source, a spark, an inspiration. One of Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí most celebrated aphorisms is "*originality consists of returning to the origin*", but did he mean origin as in 'centre', or origin

as in 'source'? Looking through his oeuvre Gaudí can be seen taming complexity. In his later work he eventually settled on a *modus operandi* drawing heavily on geometry; was this an apparent formula for arriving at the answer or did he see this as a rich language to draw upon?

For his successors this formula was a gift inasmuch that his clear pathway led collegially to building on from his unfinished business. For the Sagrada Família Basilica project the care and attention to detail invested in the longitudinal section through the nave did not extend into the space above the ceiling vaults. His intention for visitors to the basilica to be able to reach the cross 170+ metres above the crossing necessitated a trajectory passing through this roofspace. Given all of Gaudí's attics and loft spaces in all his other works were exceptional spaces, there is no reasonable grounds for suspecting that the Sagrada Família Basilica would be any different. Treating the ascent to the cross as a biblical journey - the interior of the principal



Professor Mark Burry AO

tower dedicated to Jesus Christ is a built rendition of the firmament, how might the space beneath the tower be built into the narrative? The 'Sala Creuer', as it is known, has almost been completed (literally, the 'Crossing Hall') sits 70+ metres almost but not quite invisibly above the basilica crossing. It has evolved as a circular auditorium large enough to accommodate 200 people on their vertical journey to the highest point of the basilica, and what will be the highest point of any religious building worldwide.

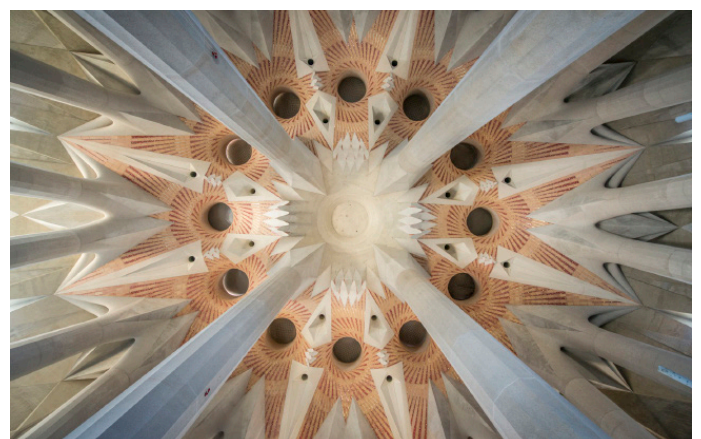
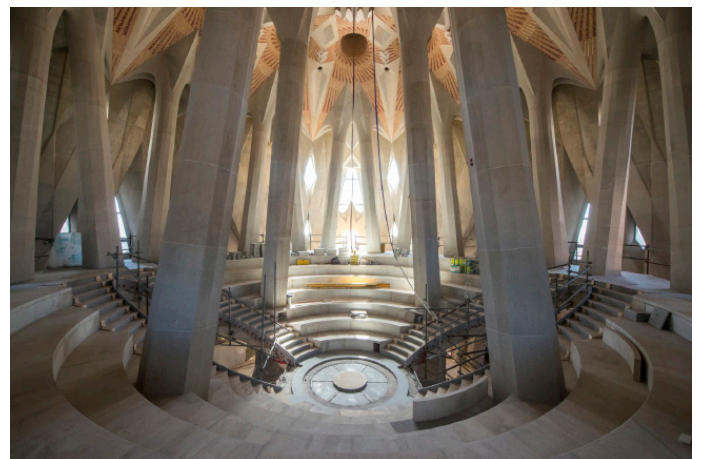
The full version of this essay will delve into the narrational aspects of this adjunct to Gaudí's unfinished *magnum opus*. In terms of dealing with the blank sheet and the difficulty in identifying the architect's role, if any, as a designer of place, the Sala Creuer offers many intriguing questions. As a habitable space – or place, it is unfamiliar in all regards lacking very few horizontal surfaces, and certainly no walls or ceilings that are flat, rectilinear, or 90o vertical. It proved to be very difficult for the designer to represent the eventual outcome to colleagues, to the extent that colleagues were surprised by the interior once scaffolding was finally removed after 8 years of construction. For them, the place emerged. For the designers it was an amalgam of the narrative and the geometrical toolbox Gaudí had bequeathed them. In creating an unfamiliar place in this way, authorship becomes questionable, and the client's trust paramount in the designers' vision emerging as a physical manifestation for a project that was impossible to visually represent adequately as the normal precursor to committing to construction.

Like all great creatives, at least Gaudí did not have a 'stopping problem', a challenge as much for the scientist seeking to optimise definitively as it is for any artist seeking perfection. This leads to a final provocation: if places are emergent from a set of given conditions, which is of course contestable, when do spaces start being places, and do places ever stop evolving as places beyond their perception in any given moment in time – what does change mean in the context of place 'making'? Was Gaudí the designer of the Sala Creuer through an invisible set of instructions, or were his interpreters?

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"La originalitat consisteix en el retorn a l'origen; així doncs, original és allò que torna a la simplicitat de les primeres solucions." Antoni Gaudí

["Originality consists of returning to the origin; thus original is that which returnsto the simplicity of the first solutions."]



Professor Mark Burry AO

Empathetic Understanding

Nicholas Ray

Putting yourself in the place of another has surely been central to the architectural imagination from the beginning of time. How do we set about doing this?

For many years there's been a general lament that a Cartesian world view that separates the subjective world of individual experience from the objective world of scientific experiment is fundamentally misleading. Concepts of phenomenological embodiment, explored by Merleau-Ponty and others, furnish a way out but the problem maybe stems from an inadequate understanding of human perception. In 1979, the year of his death, J. J. Gibson published *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*.¹ In his final book he was critical of much of his earlier work in the psychology of perception because it was restricted by Cartesian assumptions. He suggested that the subject/object divide that has preoccupied philosophers for centuries could be set aside (though perhaps not resolved) if only we understood the way we perceived the environment more correctly.

Gibson claimed, for instance, that Kepler's theory of light was completely misleading in relation to human perception.² It was an extraordinary intellectual invention – that light entered the eye in a “limitless set of pencils” – and has proved hugely useful in the design of cameras and projectors and for any

...images that fall on screens or surfaces that are intended to be looked at. But the success makes it tempting to believe that the image on the retina falls on a kind of screen and is itself something intended to be looked at, that is a picture.

To account for the meaningfulness of what we see, Gibson also rejects the simple bombardment of unmediated spots of light, association, innate ideas of space, rational inference from sensations, data interpretation, spontaneous organization of sensory inputs, and (the latest fashion in 1979) computer-like activities of the brain on neural systems. Gibson claims that, at the ecological level (the level of *surface* which is how we actually perceive the world and which is what concerns him) Aristotle was right that there is a genesis of things and a passing away, even if Democritus and Parmenides were more correct at the atomic level. He sees little usefulness in the realm of ideas that Plato posited. Since substantial media, such as the earth, are relatively stable, though they may differ in hardness, viscosity, density, elasticity, plasticity and so on, they exhibit primary qualities afforded to perception, so Gibson can dismiss Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities as “quite unnecessary”. Descartes, as is already clear, is not to his taste at all.

Along with Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* and other late writings, Gibson is therefore critical of a “picture theory” of meanings. The real issue is not subjectivity or objectivity but inter-subjectivity: it is that which distinguishes us from animals, who surely have subjective feelings.³ So, gazing at St Sebastian pierced by numerous arrows, we are not on the one hand presented merely with an image of a certain scale and proportion, or on the other hand required to put ourselves in the position of the Saint by an exercise of subjectivity. We necessarily take in the whole. Although Gibson's theory had been anticipated by Gestalt psychologists, they have always assumed it was a phenomenal effect entirely dependent on the observer – precisely because of their belief in a Cartesian

“pernicious duality”. As Gibson put it:

The perceiving of the world entails the coperceiving of where one is in the world and of being in the world at that place. This is a neglected fact that is neither subjective nor objective.... To adopt the point of view of another person is not an advanced achievement of conceptual thought.

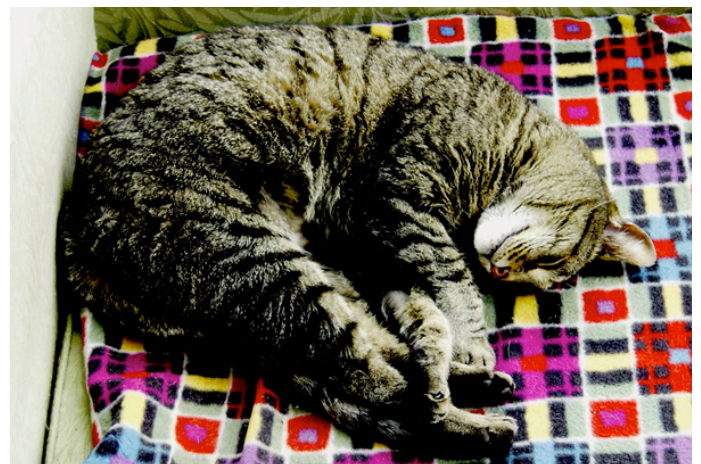
We can therefore talk legitimately of “co-cognition” in relation to others, or to images of others or even, by extension, to particular environments.⁴

Philosophers who have attempted to resolve subject/object dichotomies include Martin Heidegger whose perceptions are frequently invoked. In his well-known essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger rightly ridicules the conventional divide: in a work of art, it is wrong to distinguish form and content, which are “the most hackneyed concepts”. But he then launches into a poetic rhapsody on a pair of shoes that Van Dyck had painted:

From the dark opening of the warm insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth... In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth... etc.⁵

We can find ourselves embroiled in what Stephen Mulhall has described as a “baroque metaphysical system”.⁶ Particularly in view of Heidegger's sometimes unhelpful suspicion of science, it is reassuring (to me, at any rate) that we can profit by some of his perceptions, which arose in part from his contemplation of literature, particularly Hölderlin's poetry, but do not have to embrace his philosophy in its entirety. Although they should not over-value it, architects need technical rationality to change things in the world for the better: scientific objectivity and calculation, provided they are within an appropriate ethical framework, are essential aids in creating and maintaining environmentally responsible buildings in the twenty-first century.⁷

The crucial intersubjective activity is communication – conventionally through language (which was Wittgenstein's central preoccupation) but also by means of creative artefacts: music, works of art and architecture. Architecture is not a language but it communicates to us directly and empathetically through its ‘affordance’ (a noun Gibson invented). Forms can therefore carry associations, such as excitement, fear or comfort. Architects can obtain stimulation for their imaginations from many different sources – literature of all kinds including the fantasies of Mervyn Peake, the work of their architectural contemporaries, monumental buildings of the past, the environments they have encountered in their own lives of



Nicholas Ray.

whatever quality. Gibson suggests that a room with a 'cosy' atmosphere – "this is the kind of room in which I could feel at home" – can be directly communicated: it is a room that affords comfortable inhabiting and hence cosiness. And he claims that this 'affordance' is neither something embedded in the object, or dependant on subjective interpretation: it's transmitted to us, just as it might be to animals such as cats, which we know are adept at finding the most congenial places in which to settle themselves.

As I understand it, this seminar serves as an *hors d'oeuvre* to the considerably larger question for our century: are we prepared to delegate to our machines and their algorithms questions of value? Can a computer feel empathy?⁸

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3. A famous essay in 1974 by the American philosopher Thomas Nagel (b. 1937) "What is it Like to be a Bat?" reopened the Pandora's box in which this issue had been largely dormant (reprinted in Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Canto, 1979).
4. Jane Heal in *Mind, Reason, and Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, says people who are exercising empathy "co-cognize", or think along with others. See also Harry F. Mallgrave, *Architecture and Embodiment: The Implications of the New Sciences and Humanities for Design*, Routledge, 2013.
5. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", in *Basic Writings*, revised and expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, London, Routledge, 1993. His poetic riff attracted the scorn of the art historian Meyer Schapiro in two essays collected in his *Theory and Philosophy of Art*, Braziller, 1994.
6. Mulhall investigated the similarities between the thinking of Wittgenstein and Heidegger and broadly came down on Wittgenstein's side. He suggested that Heidegger believed "...the phenomenon of aspect perception has a general application beyond even that of psychological concepts, and that it justifies the erection of a baroque metaphysical system....We are not discovering a metaphysical truth about human essence; we are reminding ourselves of an aspect of the grammar of the concepts with which we describe human life." Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects*, Routledge, 1990, p.150
7. As Goethe suggested, in his re-telling of the Faust legend, we have made a pact with science, and there is no retreating from that.
8. These are metaphysical issues, difficult to summarise, but surely matters for debate.

Facing the Blank Sheet

Imogen Lesser Woods

When faced with the blank sheet the first step is to mark it: a sketch from which to extend thought.

Place, space, *locus*, *topos*, each indicates an area, a position, a location. Here it is that place is a space of significance, it is particular, it has detail. Space is empty. *Locus* has a nuance of something placed, a static act of something individual, whereas *topos* is perhaps, more collective; the *topós kinós*, the *common place*. The nuances (shading) of language allow us to begin to extract meaning from what was, once, the blank page. This writing begins with the act of definition. Definition again returns to the idea of detail; the particulars that allow the memory to attach and so imbue significance.

This page is no longer blank.

The blank page by itself has no inherent significance. It has an inert potential (Latin, *potentia* power). Its power and meaning comes from within the designer rather than an ability to self-manifest. Its capacity to block lies in our fear of it, as well as what it might become. Is this fear a learned one or something inbuilt? The young child has no fear, and every surface can be drawn upon. Does the nature of this fear alter with the material of the void one is approaching? As Mervyn Peake said 'We do not see with our eyes but with our trades... we all see something different.'¹ We all



Imogen Lesser Woods

inhabit differently too. The blank page means different things to each of us, dependent upon its medium. There is consequence and meaning in the material method used to create marks. The typewriter holds more nostalgic significance (portents) than the computer, the fountain pen more than the typewriter. The mark-maker leans towards the tactile line, the pencil line indicating pressure, suggesting the emotion that made the line. Parametric design does not yet have this embodied homesickness. Perhaps it is too clean, too perfect.

The notion of a formula to overcome writer's block hints at ritual: a routine which sets the scene for creativity, which allows a state of summoning to occur. Perhaps what is required is that the parametric-designer, the computer, is encouraged to become superstitious. That imperfection is allowed to infiltrate the quantitative, clinical state of the digital method. The act of memory lies in the imperfect, the catch, the tear, the smudge, its details and particulars. As bubbles form around imperfections. Does digital design have the capacity to be more blank than the analogue because of its perfection and its infinite space? The sheet of paper has been cut from its roll and dredged up from its vat; it is marked by its making and handling. The paper cuts, the graphite smudges, the ink stains. If the mark-maker is not marked, perhaps, it holds less portent, less potential. The space-to-be-place does not, however, remember. It is the occupants who contain its significance. Places cannot be spontaneous because of this. They require a collective and constant re-inhabitation, re-imagining, re-remembering to continue a place's existence as place. It needs stories about it, true and imagined stories that encourage inhabitation, that are inherent to its existence. It requires Gaston Bachelard's '*realities of the imagination*': imaginary places which can truly be inhabited.²

The blank page and the space it denotes, requires imagination and action in order to become a place. This action, performed via a medium creates the place and the significance that it has. It is the hand and the eye, the body and imagination that make the empty space a place of significance. It begins with the designer, the mark-maker; yet the transference of meaning to the inhabitant is an imperfect process. The sequence is personal, a unique tracing of thought, each iteration produces something new. The mark-maker does not know what holds significance

to others, and cannot adequately share their own inner understanding. Places are evoked, invoked, conjured through marks. Ideas are drawn-out, extracted, from the imagination.

What is drawing? It is making marks. Marks on paper. Marks that form some kind of equivalent to something comprehended. For to make a drawing is to record an idea. An idea of a particular breed that can only be expressed in terms of lead. It is for the artist's passion to rescue from oblivion some fleeting line or rhythm.

For the pianist his keyboard: for the writer his vocabulary: for the draughtsman a stick of graphite. A pencil ranges from the frailest of greys to the black of the tomb. Hell in a cedar-tunnel. The scope is total. A line as thin as a hair, or as thick as a broom. It is a medium capable of a hundred moods, from delicacy to violence [...]

To draw is to make marks that are the equivalent of a discovery. It is the smashing of another window pane. A letting in of the light.³

These marks attempt to capture the ephemeral. A sense of place may begin to emerge as the marks are formed, reworked and overlaid, but only for the maker. It is inhabitation that forms places, without this it is merely space. Yet it cannot be defined. The mark-maker inhabits the marks and their memories before leaving it to those who come after. There may be an absence of place through the transitions of maker to audience inhabitation, between (digital) paper and physicality of space. Places may revert to mere spaces, they might not come back. If they do they cannot be the same place. Places that once held meaning can stop doing so. They stop evolving, they become stagnant and so they die. Places require life. Memories are diluted, lost or mutated into something senseless. This happens during the creative process. Overworking can lead to something tough, dry, lifeless. One must stop when ideas still resonate, when there is still an urge, a desire to continue, when there is still more to come; when things are still a little abstract.

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Confronting the Blank Sheet and Making a Place

Neil Spiller

Love, life and drawings, so individual, so human, so imperative. Drawing helps us to describe our world and our perception of it. To each of us the world is different, constantly being re-drafted.

My work involves creating drawn architectural speculations that often investigate virtuality, biotechnology, nanotechnology, augmented and mixed realities and reflexive architectures. The architectural drawing is not a passive, one way architectural occupation but a symbiotic relationship where the drawer can learn from the drawing and the act of making a drawing can inform the overall concept, idea and scope of architecture by the act of re-reading, post rationalisation and chance. The drawing informs my writing and vice versa.

My work asks the following questions:

Has the drawing much to offer us nowadays in the face of the animated digital model?

Whilst welcoming and championing the importation of computation and virtuality into architectural practice, I am sceptical that this is enough to guarantee architecture's centrality to society.

Are there other methods of making contemporary 21st century architectural representations that in some ways are not wholly reliant on computer technology yet have a symbiosis with it but are not limited by it.

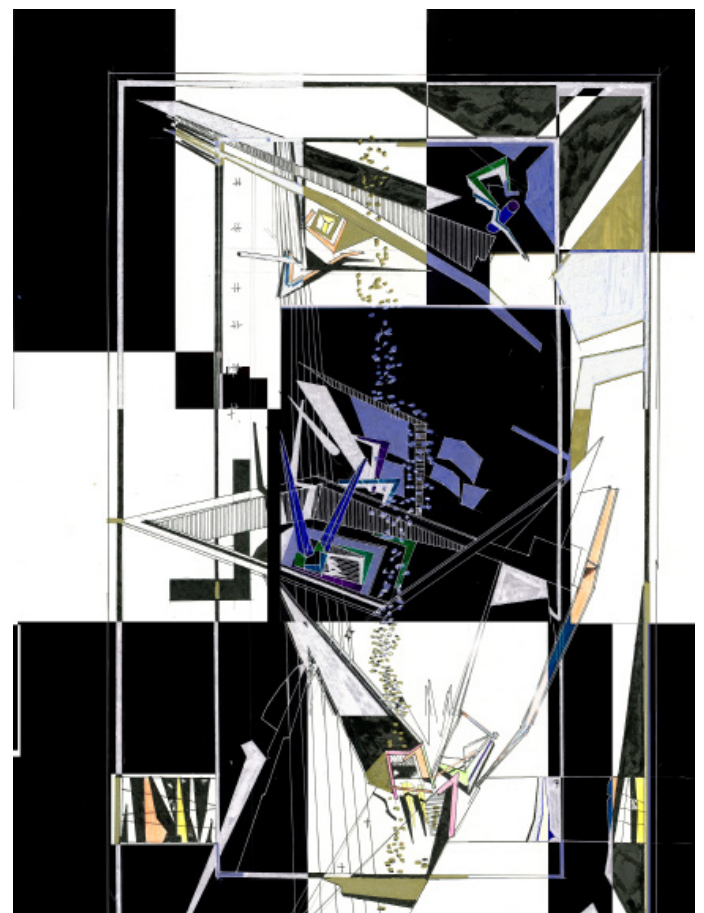
Much of digital architecture and its attendant limited software applications (that were often not initially developed for architecture) have brought a ubiquity to architecture and its representations. This can only be a bad thing and has been influential in creating avant-garde preoccupations with form and not spatial thinking. Many areas of rich potential architectural experiment have been left fallow, such as augmented and mixed realities.

Can drawing show us a wider and more diverse arena for architectural invention and create a fecund place of architectural invention?

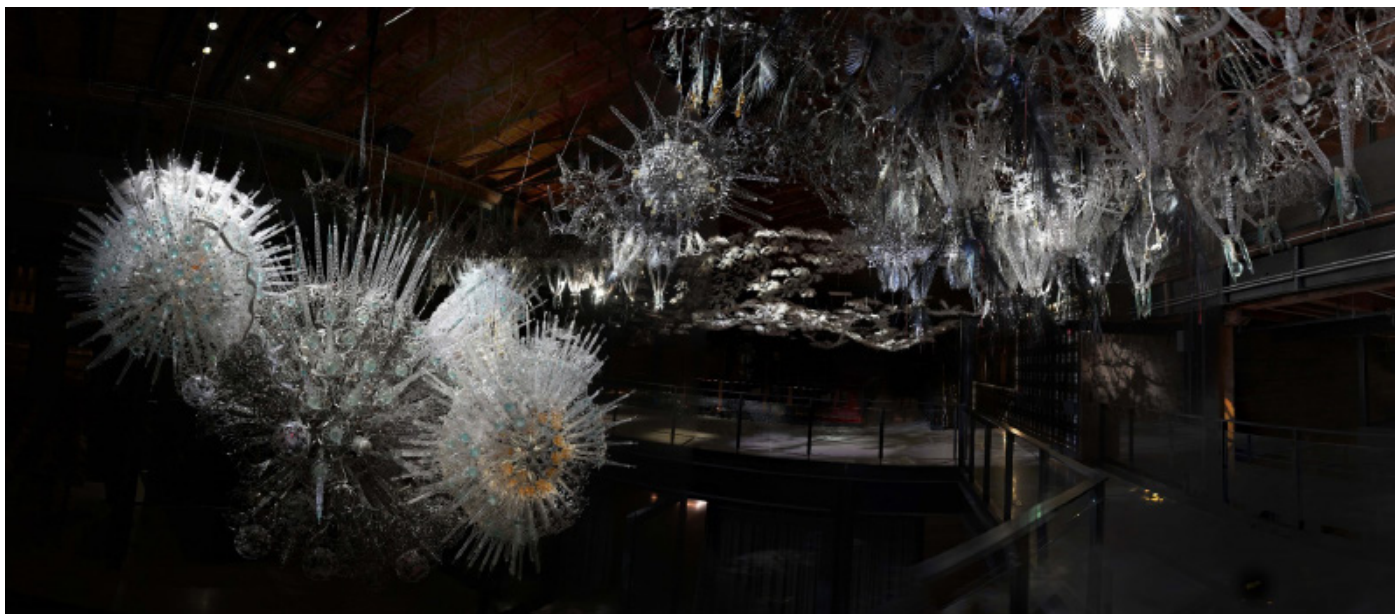
Much of what is currently considered cutting-edge in architectural design has little to do with the poetry of architecture and the rejoicing in the everyday. My drawn work seeks to find new ways of describing, composing and representing architecture in the digital age.

These simple questions provoke a series of aims and objectives for contemporary architectural drawing practice.

To continue to make drawn speculative draw-ings relevant to architectural practice.



Neil Spiller



Meander, immersive interactive environment near completion in Cambridge, ON Canada, Philip Beesley/Living Architecture Systems Group, 2020

This is predicated on the notion that the 21st-century architecture is constituted by the relationship things have across space. It is the embroiling of these relationships, both ecologically and virtually, that makes architectural space. The drawing's place in the design of these relationships, certainly at the initial concept stage, is unassailable.

To gain new insights into architectural space by speculation through drawing and its symbiotic relationship between the conceptual architectural idea and its representation.

This is often, initially, intuitive; the drawings are on-going design conversations. In a cybernetic way, the author designs their work by intellectually building it through constructing the drawing. There is a dialogue between the drawer and the drawing that is constantly changing its syntax, lexicon and attenuation. This method gives a wide horizon of possible compositional, but more importantly conceptual, outcomes. The drawing is a laboratory for researching architectural space and objects.

To create architectural work that has space for the viewer, as well as the author, to speculate – drawings that are as enigmatic as they are specific. This also employs the notion that a work should engage the viewers' imaginations. It should challenge preconceptions, provoke inquisitive exploration and instigate spatial speculation. One of the joys of working in this way means that other comments or understandings of specific work can provoke another set of works that explores other ideas within the project yet unseen by the author. The work is often conceived in sets because of these conversations with others.

To create a body of work that has an interwoven lexicon of objects, things, spaces and semiotics.

Over the years my work has developed a large lexicon of objects and spatial protocols, thus objects often reappear within the work, sometimes after years or even decades. They are part of an ongoing semiotic and mnemonic experiment that brings the whole of my work into a referential, reflexive relationship with itself and the contexts (geographical, psychological and graphic) in which it has been formed.

Long may these monologues and dialogues continue. Rumours that drawing is dead are premature!

My recent work includes a set of drawings that were not preconceived and led to all sorts of places in an attempt to confront the "Blank sheet", dislocate the architectural self and push my architecture into uncharted waters. Such places include towers, views, swimming pools, terrain, mediation of the ground and sky, ideas of materiality, boundary conditions and fractured geometry- all initially unimagined.

We are all different, dogma and doctrine, and self-censorship have no place here and rightfully so.

Diffusive Forms: Against Plato

Philip Beesley

"Originality consists in returning to its origin; consequently original is that which through its own means returns to the simplicity of the first solutions" -Antonio Gaudi

What qualities emerge from pursuing the 'origin' today? If architects continue to follow the Vitruvian tradition that has guided centuries of North American and European building designs, we will continue to see trim, clean, stripped surfaces and dense, crystalline forms – pure cubes, rectangles and domes. These forms echo Plato's vision of the origin of the world borne of an inner core of pure primary geometry. There are good reasons, however, to pursue the opposite of these kinds of stripped forms. Instead of valuing resistance and closure, design for thermal exchange could result in new form-languages based on maximum interaction, the opposite of pure, distilled geometric forms.

Reductive geometries can readily be seen within some aspects of natural form finding, exemplified by the space of a rain drop¹. Yet the reductive form language that guides such efficiency is a kind of machine for resisting interaction as well. The surface tension of the meniscus encircling a drop of rain pulls inward, and the result is a kind of optimum where the least possible exposing surface encloses the greatest possible mass within. In proportion to its interior volume, there can be no less surface for interaction than that of a sphere. The potency of that equation can hardly be overestimated in its influence on the practice of design. Similar equations guides the design of a fort that protects, a bullet that pierces, a bathysphere that can fight the radical

forces of the deep. As if guided by a moral compass founded in equations of distillation and purity, western traditions of architecture have tended to value these kinds of pure forms². The resulting architecture tends to seek strength and stability, resisting disruption.

In his *Timaeus*, Plato described fundamental origins of the universe as embodied within a perfect sphere: "The soul, interfused everywhere from the centre to the circumference of heaven, of which also she is the external envelopment, herself turning in herself, began a divine beginning of never-ceasing and rational life enduring throughout all time. ... But when reason is concerned with the rational, and the circle of the same moving smoothly declares it, then intelligence and knowledge are necessarily perfected." Yet, thinking of the elemental forms of rain and snow, need we assume that the perfectly balanced optimum of a spherical drop of rain is obviously better than the alternate optimum offered by energy-shedding delicate outward-reaching branching spines that radiate from a frozen snowflake? Similarly, when we think of the myriad of forms that the natural world has offered, why should we prefer closed, pure, glossfaced cubes and spheres to tangled, dissipating masses of fertile soil? The reductive form-languages of Platonic forms achieve maximum possible territory and maximum possible inertia by minimizing their exposure to their surroundings³. Such a form can be effective in a cold climate that requires retention of energy. It can also be effective for the concentrated destructive energy of ballistics. However, cooling requires the opposite. The opposite of a spherical raindrop appears in the form of frost crystals and snowflakes. Snowflakes epitomize dissipation; the operation harvests the internal heat by optimizing release through an efflorescence of exchange. Such a form offers a strategy for a diffusive architecture in which surfaces are devoted to the maximum possible intensity and resonance with their surroundings. In turn, following the mid-20th century insights of chemist and physicist Ilya Prigogine, the opposite of reductive spheres and crystals could be found in veils of smoke billowing at the outer reaches of a fire, the barred, braided fields of clouds; torrents of spiraling liquids; mineral felts efflorescing within an osmotic cell reaction. Such sources are characterized by resonance, flux, and open boundaries.

This kind of optimum then seeks the utmost possible involvement with its surroundings with minimum defense and from a design perspective promises an efflorescence of involvement and exchange between body and environment. At the scale of architecture, such principles might offer alternatives to the conception of enclosing walls and roof surface, reconceiving those surfaces as deeply reticulated heat sinks, and as layered interwoven membrane curtains that modulate the boundaries between inner and outer environments. A new form language of maximization and engagement implies that design may in turn embrace a renewed kind of stewardship⁴. Such a role replaces the sense of a stripped, Platonic horizon with a soil-like generation of fertile material involvement with the world.

If designs are configured for uncertain conditions where acquiring and shedding heat play in uneven cycles, they could follow a common language of radical exfoliation. Diffusive form-language seen in reticulated snowflakes, heat sinks and the microscopic manifolds of mitochondria offer an alternate optimum to the perfect geometries of Plato's 'original' space. Writ large, these forms speak of involvement with the world. Their increased surface areas can make their

reaction surfaces potent. A new city built to be able to easily handle unstable conditions where it could shed heat, cool itself and then rapidly warm up and gain heat again might well look like a hybrid forest, where each building is made from dense layers of ivy-like filters and multiple overlapping layers of porous openings.

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Sally Stone, Manchester Metropolitan University

For more than thirty years Sally Stone has been discussing, formulating ideas, and writing about Interiors, Architecture, and Building Reuse. She recently published *UnDoing Buildings: Adaptation and Cultural Memory*, and she is also the co-author of a number of other books including *ReReadings Volumes 1 & 2*, *From Organisation to Decoration*, and the series: *Interior Architecture: An Approach*. She curated the exhibition *UnDoing* at the radical independent Castlefield Gallery in the centre of Manchester, which explored the disconnected yet similar approaches that artist and architects take to the already existing (interior) environment. Sally Stone directs the post-graduate atelier Continuity in Architecture, and leads the Master of Architecture programme at the Manchester School of Architecture.

Brief

Questions of place and interiority revolve around the sensed environment, experienced through physical parameters and the sensing body's spatial narrative and movement. This panel will discuss place and interiority, with a focus on how sensed information is recorded through qualitative descriptions and re-presented through various media, both real and imagined.

Provocation

The premise for this panel is that in literature, writers often take information that is sensed or felt, with varying degrees of intensity, and convert this into descriptive accounts that resonate with the reader. On the other side, the critical reader interprets these descriptions in order to sense the intensity of the writer's environment. That is, literature incorporates sensed data and re-presents it as qualitative description, and uses scenes at the forefront, grounding action and events to a time and a place. Much of this occurs through the writer setting an atmosphere, which apart from any narrative tale, is often drawn from the physical and quantifiable environment, particularly as it impacts the visual, auditory and olfactory senses. One question then is, how is quantifiable environmental data used to inform qualitative aspects of interior places? This literary interest in place and interiority, is sparked by Titus Groan's wanderings through the vast interior of Gormenghast castle. His journeys are sometimes made in parallel to ritualized activities, where rooms are described through their inhabitant's character or occupational activities, as well as his own emotional engagement with the interior's physical and environmental states. While recognising that the condition of the interior is made through internal aspects, such that interiority is revealed through inhabitation, objects and artefacts, a number of questions arise around how the built environment positions place through the senses, including notions of atmosphere and interiority.

How is 'interiority' recognised through atmosphere, feeling and spatial presence? What is the relationship between the enclosing of space, and notions of interiority? What is the potential to extend beyond the bounded internality of architectural spaces, and examine interiority through, for example, ecological systems, identity, and urbanism, the interiority of the public realm? Additionally, further questions arise around notions of subjectivity. For example, if different inhabitants (characters) experience interiority individually, then to what extent is this accommodated in the material design of buildings and city spaces? Or, considering the lifetime changes to places, to what extent does the character of a place change when remodelled or adapted to another purpose or activity? How is the remodelled different to that before, and how is individual experience altered.

“How is ‘interiority’ recognised through atmosphere, feeling and spatial presence? What is the relationship between the enclosing of space, and notions of interiority? What is the potential to extend beyond the bounded internality of architectural spaces, and examine interiority through, for example, ecological systems, identity, and urbanism, the interiority of the public realm?”

Storied Atmospheres: Place in writing and building

Mark Taylor

In Mervyn Peake's second book of the *Gormenghast* trilogy, the narrative unravels a place that seems far from the usual understanding of home, where the domestic interior reflects a nurturing and caring environment. For protagonist Titus Groan, born into a ritualised world, Gormenghast castle is his birthright, history, genealogy and place of solace. Roaming its vast interior, discovering forgotten places, passing through ritualised rooms, climbing staircases, following sounds and other signs in the darkness consumes his relatively solitary early years. Throughout his wanderings, and sometimes in parallel to ritualized activities, rooms are described through their inhabitant's character and occupational activities, as they exist within the material degradation of an ancient and crumbling edifice. Much like other novels that rely on a powerful sense of place, conveyed through both setting (environment) and cultural background (political and social context), *Gormenghast* offers an intimate and engaging fantasy world.

What we can say is that this novel, like other literature, has a 'storied' relationship to place, whether based on real, or in this case, imaginary places. Scenes are used to ground action and events in time and place, forming a relationship with the reader through intimacy, such that the story is felt, as though the reader is there. Much of this occurs through the writer setting an atmosphere, which apart from any narrative tale, is often drawn from the physical environment, particularly as it impacts the visual, auditory and olfactory senses. This information gained from sensory pathways is incorporated into the writing, to give depth and "activate the reader's senses and to evoke an emotional response on the part of readers" (Jeremiah 2000: 26). Its purpose, he argues, is to put "the reader where the writer intends him or her to be mentally" (Jeremiah 2000: 25). That is, literature should "arouse the reader's response", a phrase Jeremiah quotes from Louise Rosenblatt.

What we find is that writers take information that is sensed or felt, with varying degrees of intensity, and convert this into descriptive accounts that resonate with the reader. On the other side, the critical reader interprets these descriptions in order to sense the intensity of the writer's environment. That is, literature incorporates sensed quantitative data and re-presents it as a qualitative description, and like other literature (poems and plays), uses scenes at the forefront, grounding action and events to a time and a place.

Within the built environment a number of phenomenologists also position place through not only the haptic senses, but also those of atmosphere and interiority. This attempt to engage with the sensory aspects of design has a focus on place. This marks an interesting change, and one that shifts away from the notion of the interior as a question of space and décor, to a broader understanding of place and interiority. The term 'interiority' which has an emergent history within interior theory, operates in several ways. Shashi Caan (2011) outlines how the perception of an interior, or what might be called 'interiority' is recognised through atmosphere, feeling and spatial presence. Vlad Ionescu argues, "our lived space, its furniture, walls and roof, is significant because it is a representation of our subjectivity" and states that "how we live is a sign of how we think, feel and imagine the world" (Ionescu :4).

Beyond this work there is also an ongoing interest in interiority that lies outside the bounded internality of architectural spaces. This approach examines interiority



Mark Taylor 2020

through, for example, ecological systems, identity, and urbanism, whereby interiority is found in the public realm as much as it is inside architecture. While recognising that it is "the internal aspects that make and condition the interior", interiority is revealed through inhabitation, objects and artefacts.

Mark Pimlott also proposes that interiority has a relationship to place and states that, "the interior as an increasingly specialised realm at once offered a retreat from the world for the self, and a place in which subjectivity could flourish" (Pimlott 2018: 6). He argues that since interiority is specific to an individual's experience, it is therefore difficult to accommodate in the making or designing of city spaces. Nevertheless, despite such difficulty, it must be attended to because "we, as designers and architects of the interior, must make places" (Pimlott 2018: 10). By focussing attention on place and interiority it is possible to question some of the constraints that have haunted design, particularly those that valorise 'heroic' spatial and visual attributes above subjectivity.

From the literary examples, it evident that such things as weather, terrain, and historical context of a place are used to shape the culture and lived experience of the characters who inhabit the narrative. Moreover, the physical nature of the environment can also affect cultural values and the socio/ political mindsets of the characters. When it comes to design and making of place, whether formally recognised in a prior manner or not, the designer has an opportunity to sense the atmosphere and environmental quality, interpret this into information that is measurable and convertible in order to intervene.

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Mapping interiority in the public realm

Paramita Atmodiwirjo and Yandi Andri Yatmo

Place is experienced through human engagement with place, and such experience occurs within the multiplicity of time and sites. As a consequence, place cannot be represented by a particular, frozen section of time; the traditional representation techniques based on projection tend to reduce significantly the richness of information that define a place. One of the challenges in capturing the aspects of place is on how such engagement and multiplicity could be appropriately represented.

Exploring the idea of place and interiority in the public realm is interesting because it raises a question on the position of subjective place experience and individual engagement with place. Each subject is present in the public domain as the individual self; at the same time, they are part of the collective subjects that contribute to the collective experience. Place in the public domain is defined by the plurality of events; each may occur within the distributed geographical location, or occur as overlapping with one another in continuous sequences. Within such complexity, where one ends, and where another begins, cannot always be clearly differentiated; when individual acts are transformed into collective events cannot be easily identified.

Place could be understood through the inquiry into its operations. Drawing on De Certeau's notion of spatial practice, "ways of operations" are the ways of "doing things" that describes the actual everyday performance in space. Operations indicate the practices of the users in reappropriating spaces as a form of sociocultural production (De Certeau, 1984). Operations indicate the users' act of transforming space into place; therefore, understanding the details of operations becomes one way to capture the aspects of place that emerged from the series of spatial events.

Mapping Stories project was an attempt to map the urban experience in order to capture the complexity and multiplicity of operations that define the place. The project was established in the context of an urban neighbourhood in Jakarta. This context represents the urban situation in many third world countries where informalities are dominating the structure and appropriation of the urban environment, resulting in the dynamic urban structure that are constantly adapting (Dovey & Kamalipour, 2018). Layers of informalities emerge beyond the rigid structure of the urban physical environment and beyond the predefined formal types; these layers play an important role in defining the place. Within the rigid urban structure that tends to be universal, informalities may add certain values that characterise the place. In such situation, place is understood by various forms of engagement with the context: from the ordinary and casual conversation, regular activities performed as a part of daily routine, regular collective events, to the special events of festivities. Each of this form of engagement creates a particular story of the everyday, and from the collection of these stories it is possible to capture the essential qualities of place.

"Stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 118). The qualities of place could be captured through a systematic procedure of collecting the information that indicates all the collective operations, then mapping them using an interactive representation medium.



Mapping Stories

The systematic procedure of mapping the interiority of urban public context requires the utilisation of data that indicate how the operations occur. The narrative of every single event contains the data on actors, actions, geographical locations and time duration; in addition to that basic information, the narratives also contain further qualitative data related to relations, sensory experience, feeling and emotions, physical materiality and physical environmental conditions, which are all necessary elements that contribute to the experience of place.

The data extracted from the narratives are plotted into the geographical layer of the urban space, creating a layered representation that contains the complexity and multiplicity of operations. The narratives from a series of collective events occurring in a place together form a constellation of events, which indicate the dynamic operations of the public domain. The keywords from all the narratives together forming the "cloud" of qualities, illustrating the atmospheric condition of place emerging from the collective experiences.

The interactive medium of representation plays an important role in representing the essential quality of place. In particular, the interactivity of the digital medium (Ishizaki, 2003) allows the narrative to be displayed as sequential events that could be followed individually while maintaining their presence as part of the collective experiences. The interactive map allows the reader to move along the narratives and refer to the geographical location as the physical context of the events. The ability of the digital medium to present the information at different scales allows the reading of the experience and the comprehension of the place qualities in different levels of details. Dynamic movement and dynamic scalability are two of the important elements that define the place and its dynamic qualities.

Mapping interiority at the public domain raises further questions on the meaning of site as the setting where the idea of place is constructed. The site is no longer seen as a static physical entity, but it becomes a fluid context in which the construction of place occurs continuously, along with the dynamic experience made up by the collective events. The narrative provides dynamic data that open possibilities to establish alternative design methods that respond appropriately to the multiplicity of urban operations.

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Malcolm Fraser: Dance Base in Edinburgh 2001

Perfect Spaces - Imperfect Forms

Sally Stone

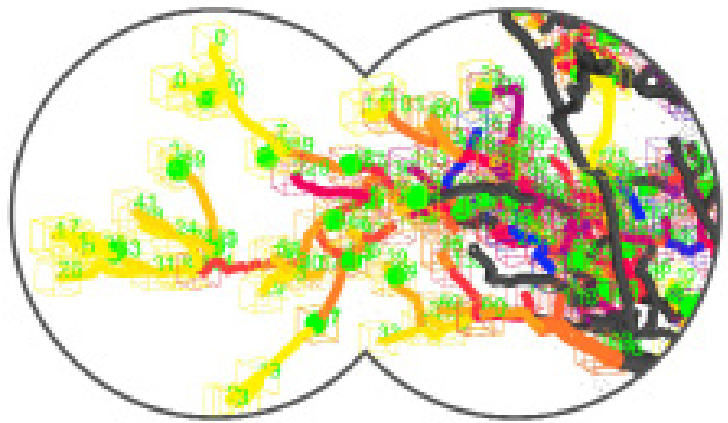
'Existence is movement. Action is movement. Existence is defined by the rhythm of forces in natural balance. (...) It is our appreciation for dance that allows us to see clearly the rhythms of nature and to take natural rhythm to a plane of well-organised art and culture.' Rudolf Laban

Laban was a dance theorist and teacher whose studies in human motion provided the intellectual foundations for the development of modern dance. His analysis of forms in movement, known as choreutics, was a non-personal scientific system designed to apply to all human motion - based on the individual's relation to surrounding space. He developed a theory to classify movement in space, which viewed spatial direction as the most significant element of bodily movement. The whole complexity of movement and dance could be reduced to essential directions that are derived from the basic orientation of the person in space. These related to the vertical and the horizontals of the three dimensions; that is height, width and depth. Laban regarded the most important components in movement as: bodily participation, spatial-direction participation, the shape of the moving body, and sequence. Every movement prompts the body to abandon its own equilibrium and to deviate from the natural and resting vertical position into one or several of the innumerable oblique directions. These directions can be correlated with common conception of the three dimensions: the vertical, forward-backward, side-to-side horizontals. Thus, Laban's view was that movement concerns the relationship between the body and the space that it occupies.

Dancers have extremely exacting space requirements. Just as they have rigorous expectations of themselves, so they demand it from the environment that they occupy. They need to know exactly how big the space is without ever having to think about it, it has to be so perfect that they don't even notice that it is. The dancer will upon arrival in the studio 'centre themselves'. This is a double process that eventually becomes intuitive. The centring will begin with the self, and the mindful awareness of the core of the body, it will then focus upon the surrounding space. The dancer needs to be aware of their position within the room. In order to move freely within the confines of the space, then they need to be acutely conscious of its parameters and responsive to these physical limits.

A dance studio space is designed to mirror a performance venue, which means a wide rectangular area. Irregular shaped spaces make it difficult for dancers to easily determine the proportions of the space and particularly to recognise the front of the room. The space has to be sufficiently large for uninterrupted movement, especially across the diagonal and it also has to be tall enough for even the greatest leap or lift. Other highly precise requirements within this extremely exacting space are; a sprung floor as the wrong type can seriously damage joints and muscles, seamless mirrors on the walls, the space should be illuminated with an even top light, and the heating should be maintained at a comfortable 21c, never going below 18c. (the liminal spaces where the dancer rests or warms up should be much warmer, this is to avoid stiffness and injury). Ideally thigh-height radiators should be positioned along the blank wall to allow the dancers to lean upon them thus keeping their legs warm while awaiting their return to the floor. Thus, for the dancer's intuitive response to be interrupted, the pure rectangular space, or ideal form of the rehearsal space, needs to be perfect.

Given the sheer precision of the meticulous expectations from the space, it is surprising how many dance-based organisations are situated within remodelled buildings. Adaptive reuse is always a compromise between the three-dimensional shape of the existing building and the needs of the new users, and if the remodelling is to be both convincing and appropriate, the designers need to be completely certain that the new function will fit happily into an existing building. However, the dance studio is necessarily a pure rectangular space that cannot be compromised; that cannot be anything other than absolutely perfect. Other rooms, such as the support spaces, the circulation, or even classrooms can be deformed or strangely shaped, but the studio always has to be faultless. The adaptation needs to account for these different levels of expectation and accommodate all of them. Dance studios do exist within remodelled buildings as pure or ideal forms, with the deformed spaces of the ancillary activities distributed around them in the rest of the available space. The studios are treated very much like exterior courtyards or squares, as figural voids within the landscape of the existing building. This collage-type of approach allows for regular forms to be accommodated within a much larger irregular context. Thus, the spatial presence anticipated by the centred dancer is created within the bricolage of the remodelled structure.



Simulated bird vision. Image by Alexander Holland and Stanislav Roudavski.

SESSION 5: MORE-THAN-HUMAN PLACE

Wednesday August 19, 2020
7-9 pm AEST 5-7 am USA 10 am-12 pm UK

Stanislav Roudavski

Stanislav Roudavski is a Senior Lecturer in Digital Architectural Design at the University of Melbourne. His work explores practical and theoretical issues of more-than-human design. His research engages with philosophies of ecology, technology, design and architecture; design imagination; creative computing; parametric and generative processes in architecture; emergence and self-organization; complex geometries and digital fabrication; virtual and augmented environments; theory and practice of place-making; and practice-based research methodologies. Stanislav's work has been disseminated through multiple academic publications and international exhibitions. Prior to his current academic position, he worked on research projects at the University of Cambridge, had a teaching engagement at MIT and practiced architecture in several European countries.

Panellists

Amy Hahs, University of Melbourne

Amy Hahs is an urban ecologist with an established research career investigating how urban landscapes impact the local ecology. Standing as a highly-valued leader in urban ecology research and biodiversity planning, Amy regularly co-organises scientific conferences and workshops for academic and professional participants from around the world. In her previous role as Director of the specialist consultancy Urban Ecology in Action, Amy worked on a diverse range of building projects to develop green, healthy cities and towns, and conserve resilient ecosystems where we live and work. These projects included providing urban ecology advice to state and local governments, industry, businesses and other organisations to help identify

innovative and practical actions that sympathetically integrates biodiversity into urban landscapes. Amy is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Horticulture and a member of the Green Infrastructure Research Group (www.thegirg.org) in the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences at The University of Melbourne.

Wendy Steele, RMIT University

Wendy Steele is an Associate Professor in Sustainability and Urban Planning co-located in the Centre for Urban Research and the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University, Melbourne. Her research focuses on cities in climate change with a particular emphasis on questions of equity, justice and resilience at the local scale, and the implications for sustainability-led policy and planning. Her books include *Planning Wild Cities: Human-nature relations in the urban age* (Routledge), *Global City Challenges* (Palgrave), *Planning Across Borders* (Routledge) and *A Climate for Growth* (University of Queensland Press).

Freya Mathews, LaTrobe University

Freya Mathews is Adjunct Professor of Environmental Philosophy at Latrobe University, Australia. She is the author of five books and almost one hundred articles on ecological philosophy. Her current special interests are in ecological civilization; indigenous (Australian and Chinese) perspectives on sustainability and how these perspectives may be adapted to the context of contemporary global society; panpsychism and critique of the metaphysics of modernity; and conservation ethics. In addition to her research activities she co-manages a private conservation estate in northern Victoria. She is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Brief

What is a more-than-human place? How can designers and managers of future environments account for all forms of life? Humans can refer to their emotions, knowledge, and cultures OR seek to include and learn from nonhuman stakeholders. This learning is impossible without technology, parametric or otherwise.

Provocation:

This panel will discuss the notion of more-than-human place and its implications for the design and management of future environments.

The premise for this discussion is that planetary life is in a state of crisis. Cities cover more than half of the planet. Human activities have modified almost all environments. Human impact and management invariably lead to degradation. Large animals and many other forms of life disappear. Agricultural plants and animals take their place between human settlements. Urban environments become inhospitable to most organisms.

Many current ecosystems are recent. Humans construct them for their benefit. Often, such constructed environments depend on continuous management. The power of this management is extensive. However, its approach is typically extractive and exploitative. In the context of a finite planetary environment, it is irreversibly destructive. Such practices also result in curtailed nonhuman lives, suffering and death.

Numerical measurement of ongoing damage become increasingly persuasive. Investigation of historical human activities demonstrate similarly detrimental impact. Biota of Africa and parts of Asia have coevolved with humans. These are the only places that have retained large animals. In all other locations, humans were colonizers. Invariably, their arrival led to disappearances of megafauna and other substantial environmental change.

Such impacts have not prevented humans from developing strong attachments to the places they occupied, however little or heavily modified. Indeed, the notion of place remains an important concept in many disciplines. However, existing understandings of place are anthropocentric. They either privilege human perspectives on place or claim that place is an exclusively human phenomenon.

Yet, all other lifeforms find themselves in concrete situations. They all engage with the world in particularly constrained ways. They have needs and interests that they pursue based on such subjectivities. Sometimes, they can share their attitudes with others through habits and traditions. They form strongly situated cultures and display place attachment that ecologists call site fidelity. Turtles, seal or sparrowhawks know their places and will not accept functionally equivalent alternative habitats. Plants literally grow into their places, making transplantations difficult or impossible.

In response, this panel will discuss how places emerge from relationships between many forms of living and nonliving entities. It will seek to decenter the human understanding of place and consider perspectives or engagement of others. The panel's key questions will include:

- What are the key characteristics of more-than-human places?
- Who and how can know and share more-than-human places?
- How can design support more-than-human places of the future?

“Human activities have modified almost all environments. Human impact and management invariably lead to degradation. Large animals and many other forms of life disappear. Agricultural plants and animals take their place between human settlements. Urban environments become inhospitable to most organisms.”



Simulated vision. Top left: a large old tree. Top right: isolated canopy. Bottom left: branch architecture. Bottom right: dead branches available for perching (high recognition confidence is yellow/red). Credit: Alexander Holland and Stanislav Roudavski

Co-Design with Nonhuman Lifeforms

Stanislav Roudavski

All lifeforms modify their environments and value the outcomes. However, most of today's places are dominated by anthropocentric (and myopic) sensibilities. This presentation argues that future design must collaborate with animals and other nonhuman lifeforms. This co-design extends beyond embodied human experiences and draws on developing technologies to incorporate nonhuman expertise.

To be inclusive, the concept of more-than-human place must challenge familiar human notions of the environment. Ideas such as land or landscape become unstable at longer time frames. Consider evolutionary mutualisms. Many orchids are pollinated by one species of insects and that one species pollinates only one orchid. Is that orchid a place? Are the orchid and its visitor both in place? Most times the insects are much older than orchids they pollinate, in evolutionary terms. They existed before the orchids, in other kinds

of places. The insects met the orchids when the flowers evolved and formed a strong relationship with them. Now, the insects and orchids live within an intersection of their overlapping individual (and now hypothetical) territories. Is this intersection a place?

Places can overlap, and their edges become fuzzy. They can occur within organisms, as in the case of mitochondria and chloroplasts. In a reverse move, organisms can become extended in ways that situate their essential physiology in the external world. In a cold season, retention of heat is important to warm-blooded animals. A seal might eat more to thicken its subcutaneous fat, a wolf will grow a winter coat. They build their homes by building their bodies. Other animals engage in construction outside of their skins (or exoskeletons). Beavers dam streams and Namib desert beetles dig trenches to collect dew. They cannot live without such devices. Are the resulting environments places if they are also physiological parts of the place dwellers?

These examples underline that the extent of past or current human cultures should not serve as the limit for the consideration of places. Even most persistent, sustainable, and caring human practices are relatively recent and narrowly imagined, even as they are sprawling. The contributions possible through Indigenous environmental knowledge or philosophical reflection will remain important. However, many of the current and emerging challenges call for inclusive participation beyond humans. The development of approaches to such participation is an exciting and important challenge. It is likely that some technology will be essential. After all, technical devices of human languages, including vocabularies, grammars, and writing systems, are already important for the existence of places. Communication and cooperation with nonhumans will require novel technologies. Their definitive formulations are yet to emerge, but the likely toolkit is already here. It will most probably involve information processing, including parametrics. These technologies come with multiple capabilities and dangers. A characteristic that is relevant here reflects the idea of pattern-finding where designers use adaptable recipes to search 'possibility spaces' for more successful solutions. Such technologies can be inclusive of influences and supportive of communication between disparate parties.

Efforts to provide artificial replacements for large old trees provide an example. Such trees are important as habitats of many organisms. There is a worsening global shortage of such trees as many die without replacement. Preservation of existing old trees can mitigate the problem but not solve it because many have no opportunities to reproduce. Replanting is important but also inadequate because young trees do not acquire habitat affordances until they are some hundreds of years into maturity. Artificial structures are a possible alternative. These structures should match place-specific needs and capabilities of concrete dwellers, such as birds. Humans do not have complete knowledge about the lives and relationships of birds. Nor is such knowledge possible. However, human commitment to learning about the dwelling of others can reduce uncertainties about design choices.

One of our approaches uses computational analysis to simulate bird vision. We utilise observations of birds in the field. The outcome is lists of numbers. So many birds on this tree, that many on that branch. There might be more birds on exposed dead branches. It is hard to say why. The simulation can accept a description of a tree as an input. The description is also numerical: a set of points in space. Algorithms disaggregate this input into perceptual entities such as trunks, branches, and leaves. These AI routines can also find exposed branches. The outcome is a reinterpretation of a tree as if seen by a bird. This simulation can appraise a range of existing trees. It can also work on artificial or potential structures. Differences between alternative configurations can be quantified and converted into design constraints. Further algorithms can generate artificial designs to fit these constraints and appraise them in silico. It is likely that these designs will be deficient in comparison with their natural prototypes. However, it is also probable that they will improve the design of artificial alternatives. Importantly, humans can produce new designs to match the preferences of birds in conditions of incomplete knowing. Birds and humans become co-designers.

The idea of co-design opens the possibility for the exchange of know-how between human and nonhuman experts. If nonhuman lifeforms have subjectivity, needs, goals,

“Even most persistent, sustainable, and caring human practices are relatively recent and narrowly imagined, even as they are sprawling. The contributions possible through Indigenous environmental knowledge or philosophical reflection will remain important. However, many of the current and emerging challenges call for inclusive participation beyond humans.”



Paving over nature or nature over paving? Multiple 'Services to Ecosystems' in the Cheonggyecheon River Restoration corridor, Seoul, South Korea. Credit: Amy Hahs.

behaviours, and learning, they are likely to have technology too. Many engage in elaborate constructions. Mammals, birds, and insects use tools and complex recipes. Wasps deploy pebbles in combination with wing vibrations to compact the sand around their borrows. Bumblebees can learn to move wooden balls towards targets, for a reward. Such tool use can be inborn or acquired through studying. What is this if not technology transfer? Many species act as ecosystem engineers and remodel their environments to suits their lifestyles. An oak that grows energy-rich acorns seeks to influence jays to stash its fruits for the winter. The birds bury the acorns at the right depth for germination and at locations a tree cannot reach. If a bird does not retrieve an acorn, a shoot emerges and then a new grove. Jays and oaks have co-engineered a living system.

This engineering does not require humans. The impact of human actions can disturb the resulting relationships. In most places, this disturbance has already occurred. Therefore, the question is not whether to embrace or abstain from engineering or technology as both have existed since well before humans. On an overpopulated and degraded planet, even human modesty, or a conscious withdrawal to 'give nature half', will require scientific learning and numerical evidence. Subjective human attachments will not be sufficient.

Reciprocity in Co-created Places - a Closer Look at Human Contributions to Nature

Amy Hahs

Urbanisation is historically defined as the process of transition that happens as a spatial location changes from a "natural" environment to one that is increasingly modified by humans. In this regard, the emphasis is on how humans alter the space through engineering, design, construction, management and behaviour. These changes can be intentional, such as the deliberate act of designing and constructing stormwater infrastructure, buildings and street lighting; or unintentional, such as the incidental changes to local hydrology, wind movements or night-time light levels. The common theme is the change to the physical environment as a result of human action.

Due to changes in technologies associated with communication and transport, an alternative form of conceptualising urban has recently been proposed. The Continuum of Urbanity describes locations in terms of how people live within them, using dimensions of livelihood, lifestyle, connectivity and place. Under both frameworks, urban landscapes are considered to be human constructions.

However, humans share these urban landscapes with a wide diversity of non-human species. For example, within the

greater Melbourne metropolitan area there are 355 bird species and 21 of Victoria's 23 species of bats. An average home is occupied by 32-311 invertebrate morphospecies in addition to the human inhabitants. This highlights that urban landscapes are not merely places for people, they are also places for nature. This is something that has particularly come to the fore during Covid-19 restrictions, when kangaroos were observed in downtown Adelaide, and the sediments in Venice's canals settled to reveal the diversity of algae and fish that live in them.

There is unequivocal evidence that cities support multiple forms of urban nature, and that this multiplicity is critical for human health and wellbeing. Efforts to raise awareness of the importance of nature include the frameworks of Ecosystem Services, which are the regulating, supporting, provisioning and cultural benefits that people gain from the environment; Nature's Contributions to People, which is defined as "all the positive contributions, losses or detriments, that people obtain from nature"; and Nature-Based Solutions which the IUCN defines as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits". While these frameworks have been created to highlight how nature supports human health and wellbeing, they rarely consider how humans could reciprocate and support nature. Indeed, when nature acts in a way that is detrimental or harmful, it is considered as a disservice, rather than simply acknowledging that they are inherent properties of natural systems.

All of these frameworks share the core foundational assumption that humans are the centre point. The focus is on human actions, human constructions or the benefits or disservices to humans. Thus, they subtly reinforce the concept of human exceptionalism.

This human/non-human divide runs deep. The discipline of ecology has historically considered ecosystems in the absence of humans, although this has changed over the last 30 years as the importance of people as a part of the system has been increasingly recognised in the subdisciplines of conservation biology and urban ecology.

In ecological systems, there are many examples of animals who shape their environment through actions such as nest-making, creating webs and traps to catch prey, or using calls or scents to mark territory. In some cases, their role can create such a fundamental change that they are considered to be ecosystem engineers. These are species who (like humans) physically shape their environment through both deliberate and incidental activities. At least 121 different terrestrial mammal, invertebrate, reptile and bird species have been identified as ecosystem engineers. But perhaps the most compelling evidence of more-than-human as ecosystem engineers is the role that plants played in the creation of the Earth's oxygen-rich atmosphere at geological timescales – without this feat the planet would be a very different place.

So how do we disengage from this human/non-human dichotomy? Particularly in urban landscapes which are such highly contested spaces?

The first step is to acknowledge the need for reciprocity in the exchange. If Ecosystem Services focus on the contribution of nature to human health and wellbeing, we need to reciprocate with Services to Ecosystems, and look at how can humans contribute to the health and wellbeing of nature. Such actions can be as simple as creating installations that create dappled shade over an exposed

"The first step is to acknowledge the need for reciprocity in the exchange. If Ecosystem Services focus on the contribution of nature to human health and wellbeing, we need to reciprocate with Services to Ecosystems, and look at how can humans contribute to the health and wellbeing of nature."

stretch of water in a concrete channel or engineering the placement of concrete blocks in channels to create more complex terrain that support the changes in water movements and speed present in healthy streams, actions which have already been demonstrated by the Cheonggyecheon River Restoration in Seoul. More complex solutions could be finding ways to manage pest species through planning, design and construction techniques that support more diverse and robust ecological systems.

While this framework moves closer towards articulating the concept of creating spaces for people and nature, it still emphasises the role that humans can play. The deliberately prominent framing of this aspect of the exchange is necessary since it is so often and easily overlooked. Framing this reciprocal action as a “service” acknowledges that this will come at some form of “cost”- either as time, money, resources or energy. While there is a risk that articulating this cost so prominently may lessen enthusiasm for adopting this approach, it would be equally misrepresentative to say these things should continue to be performed in a voluntary capacity or out that they can be effectively delivered in the absence of more dedicated investment. As we begin this journey towards a more reciprocal relationship between people and nature, there is a great opportunity to listen more carefully to the Indigenous Ecological Knowledges held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been Caring for Country for tens of thousands of years.

To truly co-create urban spaces for people and nature it is impossible to completely ignore what contributions people must bring to the table, but these need to be informed by an understanding of 1) what we could do, 2) why we could do this, 3) how that co-creation may play out, and 4) the ways we can check to see if we have been successful. The collection of qualitative and quantitative data, rigorous scientific analysis, ongoing evaluation of outcomes and sharing of lessons to create evidence-informed best practice are critical to informing a truly equitable co-created place. This presentation will examine these four questions and the potential contributions that place & parametricism can make.

The Nature of (Wild) Places

Wendy Steele

What does it mean to embrace the entangled nature of ‘wild’ places and what does this say about the limits or possibilities – the parameters of parametric design engagement with the more-than-human?

The lyrical children’s fable *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak tells the story of Max, a young boy who likes to dress up in a wolf suit and cause havoc in his home. The title of the book is based on the Yiddish expression *vilde chaya* (wild animals). In the story, Max’s bedroom transforms into a jungle island inhabited by strange and mythical beasts known as the Wild Things. The message from the author is that ‘there’s a Wild Thing in all of us and that’s okay, it’s what makes you human’. What makes this best-selling children’s book so compelling is its grounding effect that seeks to balance the seesaw of human fear and comfort through place. ‘At home, Max has a tantrum and is sent to his room without any supper. He travels to a far-away land, which is inhabited by ‘the Wild Things’ who make him their King. But he is homesick and wants to go home. The Wild Things cry, ‘Oh please don’t go. We’ll eat you up we love you so!’ But Max returns to his home-place to find a hot supper waiting there for him.

The role of language is important here. Sendek’s story



The rivers have stopped running | The rain is no longer coming | And now the land is burning ... “After the Fire” Artist: Melanie Nightingale

could be read as one of many narratives: of the settler-colonial fantasy of mastery, appropriation and separation from nature/ other; discontent with modern society; the quest for adventure amidst colliding circumstances and changing worlds; the making of home as both visible and invisible; and the shift(y)ing nature of emergent (wild) places. The violent concept of ‘the wild’ pervades the work of geographer Deborah Bird Rose who argues that Wild people (colonizers) make Wild country (degrading and failing). Settler societies are places built, she argues, on a dual war of genocide and ecocide. How, she asks, can we progress a politics of *de-wilding* in the face of ‘the violence wrought on Indigenous ecosystems, and the practices and making of ‘wounded space’. She cites Hobbles Danayarri, a now deceased Indigenous Yarralin leader who argued that from his perspective: ‘Quiet Country stands in contrast to the wild: man-made and cattle-made.’

The destruction of thousands of native trees, including 250 sacred Indigenous trees, some up to 800 years old as part of the upgrade of a dual highway on the Western Highway near the Australian regional city of Ararat in Victoria has recently resumed. These trees are a living heritage of deep cultural significance and practice for the local Djab Wurrung traditional owners who are fighting this decision. Activists have set up camp to protest the destruction of the trees – grandmother birthing trees, their companion grandfather trees, and direction trees. As Nayuka Gorrie who is a Kurnai/ Gunai, Gunditjmarra, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta writer describes, “you can’t understand what it means to be able to connect the blood coursing through your body to ancestors’ blood soaked in ancient soil and ancient trees. To sit in a tree that saw your people birthed, your people massacred, and now your people’s resistance is a feeling that the English language will never be able to capture ...”.

A more-than-human approach to design does not seek to render invisible the trace and impact of humankind (*note the irony here as humans are often very unkind) reinforcing a culture-nature binary as some of the 'wilderness' literature seeks to do. Instead the ambition is to disrupt and this shift binary thinking in design practices that both privileges and fetishizes the human-centred story at the expense of all others. In policy and planning communities in Melbourne for example are starting to advocate for the rights of nature to exist, thrive and survive alongside human needs and rights, and the role of Indigenous custodians. The *Yarra River (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrnong)* Act 2017 explicitly recognizes 'the intrinsic connection of the traditional owners to the Yarra River and its Country and further recognizes them as the custodians of the land and waterway which they call Birrarung.' As Wurundjeri writer Tony Birch describes, "I talk about country in the sense that Indigenous communities in Australia understand and experience it. We talk about a future, shared or not shared – the latter of which leads to our further disconnection from each other and place... if we fail to care for country, it cannot care for us".

All design is intimately entangled with wild places and wounded spaces. Contemporary design attempts to articulate and reflect spatial complexity such as parametricism tend to reject hard geometric forms, serial repetition and separation, and unrelated, juxtaposed elements. Instead they focus on malleable, fluid and relational designs that seek to simulate natural systems through computer algorithms and quantitative digital design. This ontological shift moves from rigidity towards soft, interrelated systems that endlessly reconfigure and react – a 'blobby' ontology. But does this approach work to transform the parameters of the culture-nature divide as a more-than-human inquiry? Or does it simply reframe through different language, new design parameters that leading to new kinds of 'wild' places?

Within the critical social sciences, more-than-human modes of inquiry draw attention to the need to shift our conceptual scaffolding or as Lesley Head highlights finding ways to 'think differently about how human and other life and materials are mutually embedded, and the existence of power relations within such assemblages'. For design this might include a focus on: i] transformational mapping of the possibilities for connectivity in place; ii] a *diagrammatic* of the relational forces that are in play focusing on the tensions and connections; and iii] *sketching emerging* examples using the tools of storytelling and futures design literacy skills as possible lines of flight in design.

In *Encountering the wild in us and us in the wild*, Martin Mueller suggests we must 'look for and engage with what stories struggle to be born from the compost of the old'. The tensions between place, design and parametricism as 'practices within practices' involves following Rose, better engaging with the 'alternatives that are entangled in the midst of the wild, and depend on the wild, even as they resist it'.

Design as Epistemology

Freya Mathews

I shall take as my starting point for this presentation the strong conviction that in the 21st century we urgently need to rethink design as the way we have, as modern humans, been accommodating ourselves at the expense of most other species on Earth, to the point that many of those species are now in catastrophic decline. Instead of invoking the category of place, with its contested philosophical



Broken barn birdhouse. Made by: Ted Bergman. Image by: Diane Worth.

meanings, my argument will rely on the concept of site and of the local.

Let me begin by interrogating the notion – and phenomenology – of design itself. Design, in the sense in which it is relevant to architecture, is generally defined in terms of an abstract plan that prefigures, usually in metrical and technical detail, some kind of built or manufactured outcome – an envisaged structure, installation or commodity. A design generally, at least paradigmatically, takes the form of a blueprint. The blueprint preconceives the intended outcome: it offers an abstract image or model of that outcome, with a view to constructing a concrete instance of it in the real world. In order to preconceive the outcome in this way, the design includes not only exact dimensions and spatial (and perhaps temporal) parameters but exhaustive specifications concerning materials and the sourcing of materials.

In this sense, design represents a highly Platonic activity: it is basically the imaging of an ideal Form of a desired outcome with a view to enabling this outcome to be actualized. In practice, in the history of Western architecture and engineering, the structures that have been thus blueprinted by design have been highly anthropocentric in intent, in the sense that they referenced human interests exclusively: architects and other planners designed forms of accommodation and amenity intended exclusively for human use and enjoyment, with little or no consideration for context. Appointed sites, indeed entire terrains, were routinely bulldozed and leveled to make of the site or terrain a tabula rasa for the actualization of the blueprint. The other-than-human lives and interests embedded in those sites or terrains were ignored as irrelevant. As the scale of this process of erasure of the given in order to allow for the actualization of the abstract has increased, and as the footprint of such human 'development' has expanded by orders of magnitude, the erasure of other-than-human lives and interests has reached the point of mass extinction. One popular response to this problem of the impact of

development on the rest of life has been to require that design include provision for and accommodation of other-than-human as well as human interests. Design, it has been argued, should be bio-inclusive. Designers should visit the site or terrain of any proposed installation in order to discover and identify existing ecological communities and contexts, at both larger and smaller scales. Provision and accommodation for those more-than-human interests should then be factored into the design. [Examples might include nest boxes; balcony gardens; insect walls; the cladding of walls with vegetation; re-engineering of water courses, flood plains, topographies in order to facilitate original – but now disrupted – ecological flows.] This kind of response, described in the most general terms as designing with nature, is, from an environmental point of view, a very good one, and would undoubtedly take us a long way towards a built environment more hospitable to the rest of life.

However, such expansion of the traditional brief of design may not get to the bottom of the problem with design itself. The basic problem with design, I will argue, is that it arises precisely from the way of thinking that is at the root of the attitude of domination that has characterized the Western tradition since ancient times. According to a variety of accounts – feminist, postcolonial, ecophilosophical, for example – the Western mindset is shaped by a deep underlying dualism with respect to a cluster of core categories, such as human/nature, mind/body, culture/nature. The origin of these core binaries is explained in a variety of ways, but one of these is to see them as arising from the seeming capacity of humans to ‘rise above’ the material plane by mapping or modeling reality in purely abstract terms via theorization. This activity of stepping back from reality and internally mapping or modeling it in abstracto gives rise in the knower, at a phenomenological level, to a sense of ownership – the abstract construct, having been created by the knower, is tacitly understood by him as his own property. It has become, in the knower’s mind, object to his – the knower’s – subject. This phenomenological sense of ownership is then played out on the external plane as appropriation: the actual world is subtly elided in the knower’s mind with his abstract map or model, and as such is also consigned to the status of property. The knower, as authorial subject, experiences a sense of separation from, and transcendence of, the world as authored object, and this translates as a tendency to treat the world literally as object, and hence as a mere resource which may be exploited as the knower sees fit. At the same time, accurate abstract modeling or mapping of reality, especially in the quantitative and mathematical terms deployed by science, opens up previously undreamt of opportunities for manipulating and hence instrumentalising the world, as, in the modern period, the history of science has attested.

Modern design, as it is practiced in architecture and cognate fields, may be seen as prospective modeling or mapping of desired outcomes, made possible by the kind of theoretic or Platonist epistemology I have just outlined. As such, design is complicit in the attitude of domination which arises from theory when theory is the prevailing mode of cognition in a society. Design in this sense reflects an arrogant assumption that we as humans can, and are entitled to, control the world, to re-make it in accordance with our own ends and understandings.

In my presentation I shall argue that an alternative epistemology is required if we truly wish, as architects and as practitioners of every kind, to re-embed our culture in the wider Earth community.

In Encountering the wild in us and us in the wild, Martin Mueller suggests we must ‘look for and engage with what stories struggle to be born from the compost of the old’. The tensions between place, design and parametricism as ‘practices within practices’ involves following Rose, better engaging with the ‘alternatives that are entangled in the midst of the wild, and depend on the wild, even as they resist it’.

Guidelines

Session set-up

1. Awnili Shabnam is the host for each session;
2. Each session chair is assigned as co-host;
3. Awnili is preparing and archiving high quality video recordings for each session;
4. Awnili is sending Zoom invites to everyone listed;
5. YouTube live streaming is being set-up by Awnili for sharing with anyone wishing to attend but not participate, or access the recording subsequently;
6. Awnili will open the Zoom session 15 mins prior to the start time. Session chair will chair the meeting and Awnili will manage. As chairs are co-hosts the sessions they can manage the session too, if preferred (chairs to liaise directly with Awnili).

Session program

Suggested format for sessions (but session chairs run sessions to suit their requirements)

1. Sessions are as per program - 2 hours (or 2 hours 30 minutes depending on number of participants);
2. Chair opens session with brief outline of topic and introduction to panellists with details regarding (5-10 minutes);
3. Chair and panellists present their provocation, preferably supported with visual material (15 mins max + optional 5min for questions);
4. Panel discussion (25 mins);
5. Open discussion 1 (25 mins);
6. Chair closes session with a quo vadis? statement (5-10 mins);
7. Session chair handles all post session thank you notes and publication-oriented follow-up cc'ing to Awnili to ensure archiving.

“Place and Parametricism: Provocations for the Rethinking of Design Symposium brings a diverse group of thinkers and creators together into a working dialogue to discuss the question: can place be adequately encompassed by the quantitative methods of digital and parametric design?”

Prof. Mark Burry AO

Director
Smart Cities Research Institute
Swinburne University of Technology
E mburphy@swin.edu.au
P +61 3 9214 4410

Dr Stanislav Roudavski

Senior Lecturer
Digital Architectural Design
University of Melbourne
E srou@unimelb.edu.au
P +61 3 8344 3360

Prof. Gini Lee

Professor
Landscape Architecture
University of Melbourne
E virginia.lee@unimelb.edu.au
P +61 3 9035 3868

Prof. Mark Taylor

Professor
Architecture
Swinburne University of Technology
E marktaylor@swin.edu.au
P +61 3 9214 3752

Prof. Jeff Malpas

Distinguished Professor
Geography-Geology
University of Tasmania
E Jeff.Malpas@utas.edu.au
P +61 3 6226 2257