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ARCHITECTURAL LAUNDRY

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REFLECTIONS

I AM A TECHNICIAN

SUE HILLERY

Assisting others has been instrumental to how I understand composition and the making of things; how parts are assembled and how construction really is a series of elements finely thought out and fitted together. Many captive and seminal moments key to this criticality of sorts, have been formative to my relationships, connections and friendships that continue to run parallel to my gradual awareness and piecing together of how building works. As an activity foremost, for myself, the world of collaboration is the negotiation and brokerage of ideas, the accumulation of discreet transactions and significant exchanges that then enables larger projects to be realised. Here are four types of collaborative projects that have been instrumental to my own appreciation of making and working with others.

NO.1 JONATHAN COOTE

Voluntarily, I became the technician and support person for Jonathan, a new friend who I collided with at the Architecture School at the University of Auckland. At that time, Jonathan who is now a sharp and savvy practitioner of architecture, was submerged into his 5th year all-consuming final project. I was following closely behind in my 4th year.

As the outside world temporarily ceased to exist, we all lived and breathed 'Architecture School' in this rabbit warren of partitioned cul-de-sac like spaces and semi processed half-baked tectonic schemes. It was in this deconstructed habitat, our unreserved utopia, where magical thinking and ideas were drawn and modelled. Impossible structures conjured from cardboard, fine wires and laminated veneers were our domain, secured by miniature clamps and weighted down by large, oversized library books to reinforce and stabilise all outside forces.

The pinnacle of our lives was the completion of this final model. What we saw as the masterpiece. Idolised as the ideal compact and scaled version of a somewhat crazy building design, the model to us represented our struggle and survival of those months. Then with fingers crossed, assured our rapid ascent into the world of architecture.

This creation needed to contain all of the complexities, the craft and refinement of not only as a built



object in three dimensions, but also as a final homage or swansong to school life.

Beautifully fashioned purpose made small props and wedges.
 Strange, cantilevered fins.
 Set out and taped while the drying process was completed.
 Thin sections of wood spliced, laminated and formed.
 Each part sequentially processed.
 Sanded and layered with white modelling compound.
 Sanded again/ repeatedly.
 Finished with gesso.
 And then polished into final glory.
 Large hand drawings on over-sized acetate sheets.
 Pencilled and drafted as the 1st phase.
 Then matched by ink with a defined hierarchy of line weights.
 Ochre, white titanium and black glazes applied to plans and their cross-sectional cousins to match the strictly thought-out colour palette. Again, these painterly layers were also buffed and varnished with lower case text pushed into the background.
 I finally surrendered my coveted stash of red + white Letraset that marked the floor Level numbering systems:
 FFL 0.00m, + 4.80m, + 9.80m, and so on.

By being a willing apprentice, this loosely defined role of an understudy also expanded into the shaping + assembly of the final presentation. Jonathan's finale.

Mounting drawings with exact precision. Ensuring the model base gleamed. Rehearsing the spoken presentation. Manoeuvring jigs and planing edges.

Learning by helping a more experienced and determined colleague, entertaining long maddening conversations that seamlessly transcending into ranting, we became close friends. Inspired and bonded by the process.

It was all about the making.

About the manufacturing of a small-scaled dream world.

From this experience, I then too in my 5th year brought forward and applied these techniques. My addiction secured for the love of handcrafting, the layering of tapes, and the solicited techniques of composition and patience.

NO.2 GIOVANNI INTRA

Exhibition Lifestyle Morte. The Fish Shop Gallery, 186 Ponsonby Road, Auckland, September 1991.

Oscillating between the art world and the making world is the 2nd illustration of becoming A Technician, that describes an account of assisting Giovanni with his 1st solo show at Myfanwy Rees gallery in Ponsonby Road. The venue, a converted retail store with a glazed tile shop frontage offered a tightly packed gallery space that when curated by Giovanni contained an eclectic range of readymade pieces and treasures. My part was the figuring-out of how to interpret a series of rough sketches offered by Giovanni. The deciphering of sheets of inky workbook lines and shapes to ways these could be translated and fabricated into number of prototypes and differing forms.

Giovanni and I first crossed paths in a co-joint show between the Ilam and Elam Schools of Fine Art at the old Artspace in Customs Street Auckland. He was the hair tousled scruffy art student with taped up reading glasses of Auckland, and I was the competitor from the South with my blackened jeans + chrome zipped leather jacket. It was an instant attraction of rebellious souls.

The show contained a collection of distinct yet related objects:

10mm. glass display cabinet to protect a worn pair of studded doc martens.
A large wall sized section of mirror propped up against the white painted gallery partition etched in cursive text.
Thick black velvet fabric stretched over a rectangular shaped frame.
Embroidered this time. Also with writing.

To solve these technical difficulties and to achieve the desired effect demanded we track-down industries that could assist with our cause. Twisting manufacturers arms, understanding mechanical processes, and testing the limitations of their craft + expertise.

In our eyes the finished and complete items were magnificent. Neatly made, with rigorous attention to the finishing of both the back and the underside of each piece.

Just like the lining of a good suit.
Giovanni loved to wear suits.



He pushed hard with life and his furore of the artworld. Everything fused and embodied into his art practice. There wasn't a distinction the two.

As the process gained momentum, endless discussions were exchanged. Battling together how to collect the embroidered cloth, how much money we had left, 'who was going out with who' and heated debates about Kathy Acker's latest book. We were all consumed by our purpose, by materiality, and the fabrication of his objects of desire.

Reciprocation was important. A transactional currency of sorts. Giovanni switched hats soon after to produce the supporting catalogue for my Teststrip exhibition, *Pose*, in Vulcan Lane. *Pose*, aptly titled was a memorial to the fantastical world of body building, glitz, steroids and glamour.

Our collaboration and friendship continued which initiated our unreserved crusade to establish the publishing house The Crushed Honey Press. Giovanni later moved to Los Angeles where his machinations with the art world accelerated. I think the larger city of LA was a good fit.

NO.3 THE MERTON HALLWAY

Narrowneck. Tāmaki Makaurau. Auckland. 2010.

Advancing into the making of houses, the scale of the technical swelled.

I was becoming more confident with finding solutions to the complexities of built forms. More settled and accustomed to the intricacies of timber detailing and in-tune with the traditions and rationale of hardwood verses the soft-wooded cedar joinery techniques while rubbing up against the secret wins and delight of faultlessly matched wall sarking. Refining the transition of thick travertine blocks to the serrated in situ concrete foundations, then cycling back along the cast ledge on the eastern side corridor up towards the timber sills and frames. In my mind, these relationships of materiality and surface increasingly seemed to become more co-dependent and responsive as I invested and tested how to solve difficult connections, and how the composition of distinct parts could function, connect and perform. These relationships between exterior + interior became more subtle + balanced.

The initial hurdle I needed to resolve was: How does a long 15 metre zig-zag fashioned hallway become the more celebrated part of the house? The refined answer was embedded in the movement of walking along this main axis that connected the three ground floor bedrooms, the central staircase terminated by the open plan living spaces below. Experientially this path began from the roadside, stepping over the threshold through the large pivoting front door. Travelling down the extended passageway to the unbroken view of Rangitoto through the shifting levels of daylight that rippled over the finished surfaces was an unexpected reward that came from the 'actual' building of space. Attuned to the matching of timber sarking lines along the passageway, softened by the milky charcoal tinted stains and lacquers. Counterbalanced by the alternating sections of glazing balanced with grooved cedar panelling.

I think in the end some houses form you.
To me house-making is a series of
signatures.

Impressions made by the skill of fine builders, draughtspersons, supportive clients, technicians and cabinet makers. Beginning with the concept



Fig. 1 Interior shot of the Merton House hallway. Photograph: Simon Devitt, 2010.

sketches and the trialling of shapes and spaces fashioned with cardboard, through to the site office being lowered onto the temporary piles. Admiring the marked up 'rod' used by skilled joiners; learning and witnessing the practice of 'setting out'. Celebrating the meticulous sequencing of concrete trucks arriving in the cooler morning temperatures, through to the planning and journaling with contractors across construction drawings + spare framing off-cuts. These too converted and followed up by more firm and direct site instructions and the eventual solemn meeting minutes.

After 5 years of constant attention, making houses propels you and your thinking. Your understanding of space, texture, constraints and resilience.

NO.4 THE MAKING OF 'DOUBLE PORTRAIT – SCREW THREAD'

A wall installation within the exhibition *Sapphic Fragments* by Imogen Taylor.
Hocken Collections.

The physical model of the Hocken Collections gallery space came first.

Drafted and scaled @1:20. Laser-cut from thin board. Taped and glued. Undercoated and walls painted with colours named Radiating Purple and Parsley green.

Once assembled the model became a perfectly simulated exhibition space layered with a cork sheeted floor. A working apparatus for Imogen. An open topped version of the real thing. Like a playground.

Reduced photocopied prints of Imogen's work were cut out, meticulously positioned. Constantly circulating, switched over and replaced, correcting proportion and tweaking the sequence for a miniature show of sorts. How this device became critical to our collaborative endeavour is still deeply engrained in my experience of making this work.

Double Portrait - Screw Thread wall painting existed for three months as a flat two-dimensional helical painted pattern in the gallery room. 14.0m long x 3.0m high.

Occupying and visually twisting the wall surface, turning the viewer in endless motion.

Rendered in a combination of colours named Butterfly, Portage, Toffee and Chateau Green. Positioned, aligned + adjacent to Francis Hodgins oil painting *Double Portrait* (1922-23) selected by Imogen from the Hocken Collection.

There are specific rules demanded by the helix shape and function. The design process also seemed to match this repetitive rotation. Multiple iterations using CAD then translated into scaled 1:1 templates of each part of the whole. Careful tracing around template circumferences to establish the rhythm. Hand scribed and filled by retired signwriters. Their professional skill impeccable and a joy to witness. Like an over-scaled paint by numbers.

Writers and theorists talk about, and write about, the queering of space.

I first heard about this term as an architecture undergraduate.

I was enlightened that there was an official enquiry.

Well theoretically at least. To 'bend' space was a new idea.

Well to me anyway.

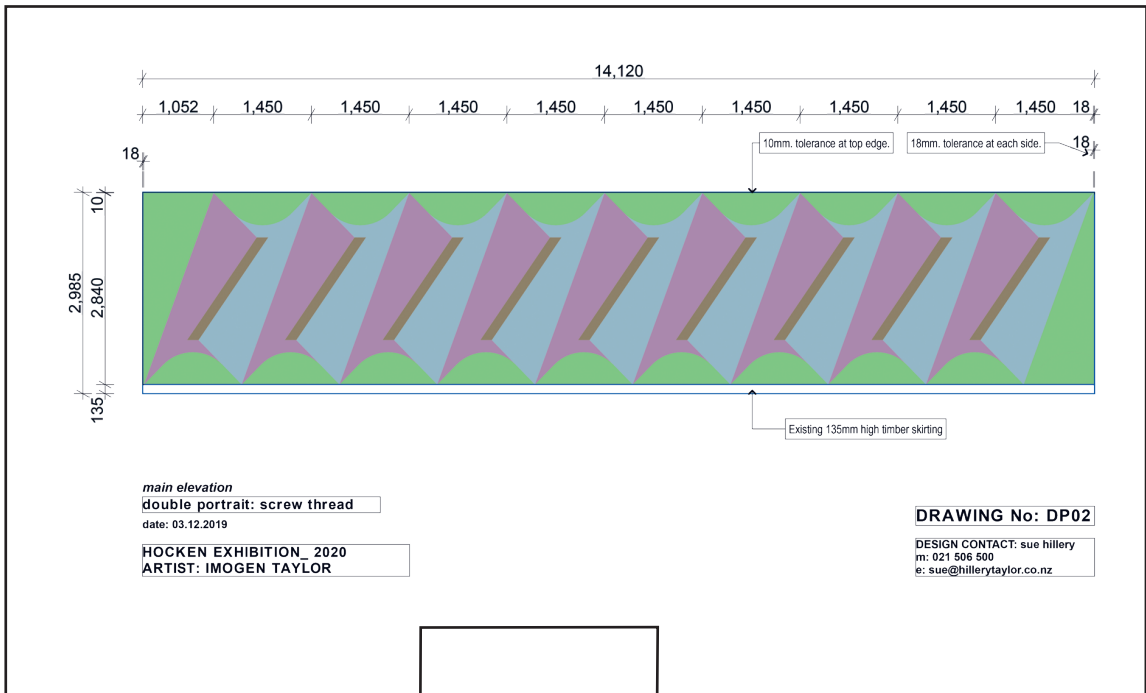


Fig. 2 Graphic representation by Sue Hillery of the wall installation within the exhibition Sapphic Fragments by Imogen Taylor. Hocken Collections, Ōtepoti, Dunedin 2020.

Back in 1997 I proudly thumped a newly bought copy of Queer Space on the library counter. Hauled back from a London bookshop, I was wilful that my donation would demand a new numbering sequence amongst the burgeoning hegemonic library collection. It's an unusual realisation that you live it and breath space like this. And now it has a term.

This is a reflective observation of my role as a technician turning into producer of things.

Rolling forward as an art maker, an architect, and then back again.

Four sequences of technical application.

Four samples of becoming a technician.

SUE HILLERY is a multi-disciplinary practitioner with an established career in architectural education, private architectural and art practices. Sue currently lectures at the School of Architecture, Otago Polytechnic with current interests in contaminated industrial ecologies and building taxonomy, while taste-wise, sifting between Rationalism and formal Regionalism.

DRAWING WITH LIGHT

LYNN TAYLOR

A blueprint of my father's boat, the *Kakawai*, is one of my prized possessions. Drawn in the 1950s, the blue has faded, the chemicals have begun to separate into stains and the paper is worn through the creased folds. This process of creating blueprints to communicate technical plans by designers and architects is now obsolete, superseded by digital, computer-aided construction drawings. However, the medium remains in the art world, referred to as cyanotype, a form of alternative photography that produces Prussian blue.² I'm attracted to this light-sensitive printing, where art and science meet, because I have a foot, although not a foothold, in both. Through exploring and crossing over the similarities and differences of blueprints and cyanotypes, by shifting the boundaries of this photo-reactive medium, new expressions can be generated.

As a printmaker, I am curious to learn how becoming a

technician within Architectural Studies will affect my art practice. I've long been inspired by the etchings of fantastical buildings produced by Soviet printmakers Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin. Created as a revolt against communist architecture, Brodsky and Utkin's architectural plans were never intended to be built.³ Fittingly, my attraction to blueprints is accompanied by a complete inability to translate them into the three-dimensional objects they are meant to be. Through this deficit, I have developed a fascination with interpreting plans in multiple ways. What could I make if I apply my skill set to a series of blueprints? Alternatively, if cyanotypes could be theorised as data, what might they build?

Cyanotype, for me, is a mapping process — not only a record and mnemonic device, but a method of drawing attention to the overlooked, the undervalued. Sensitised paper can be developed in



Fig. 1 The washing-out process of cyanotype printing.



Fig. 2 Cyanotype on fabrics, student work created with exposing plant materials

sunlight and water (see Figure 1), creating nuances and subtle changes that allow the expression of the site to be captured. Cyanotypes invite curiosity, build awareness, memories, reactions, interpretations, and generate directions for subsequent artworks.

While the blueprint process was adopted for economic efficiency in reproducing technical drawings, current conceptual approaches in creating cyanotypes are generating new possibilities and understandings of print. I play with the materiality of cyanotype, an arena that embodies, reveals, becomes and conversationally produces knowledge and originality. Variables such as application methods, substrates, shadows, timing and toning disrupt the results and activate questions that lead to discoveries. For example, attempting to use a laser to develop cyanotype (as an alternative to natural sunlight) failed, but led to a new methodology of etching into paper, burning shallow valleys of map data which then became depositories for cyanotype solution to

pool, creating a layer of deeper blue.

As skill-sharing is part of my process, I showed Bachelor of Architectural Studies students how blueprints and cyanotypes were traditionally made. Students today are predominantly using technology to design their plans. I wonder if high screen time, combined with industry demand for physical functionality, encourages certain sorts of thinking, as some find it challenging to generate more than one 'right' answer. In exploring aspects of their projects with cyanotype, I saw their experience as something that encouraged more flexible and lateral thinking.

Blueprinting and cyanotypes both require pre-production; with printmaking there is a separation and translation between matrix and substrate. With cyanotypes, the matrixes are commonly found materials or hand drawings, or digital information printed onto transparency film. This separation and translation opens up a space between stable and

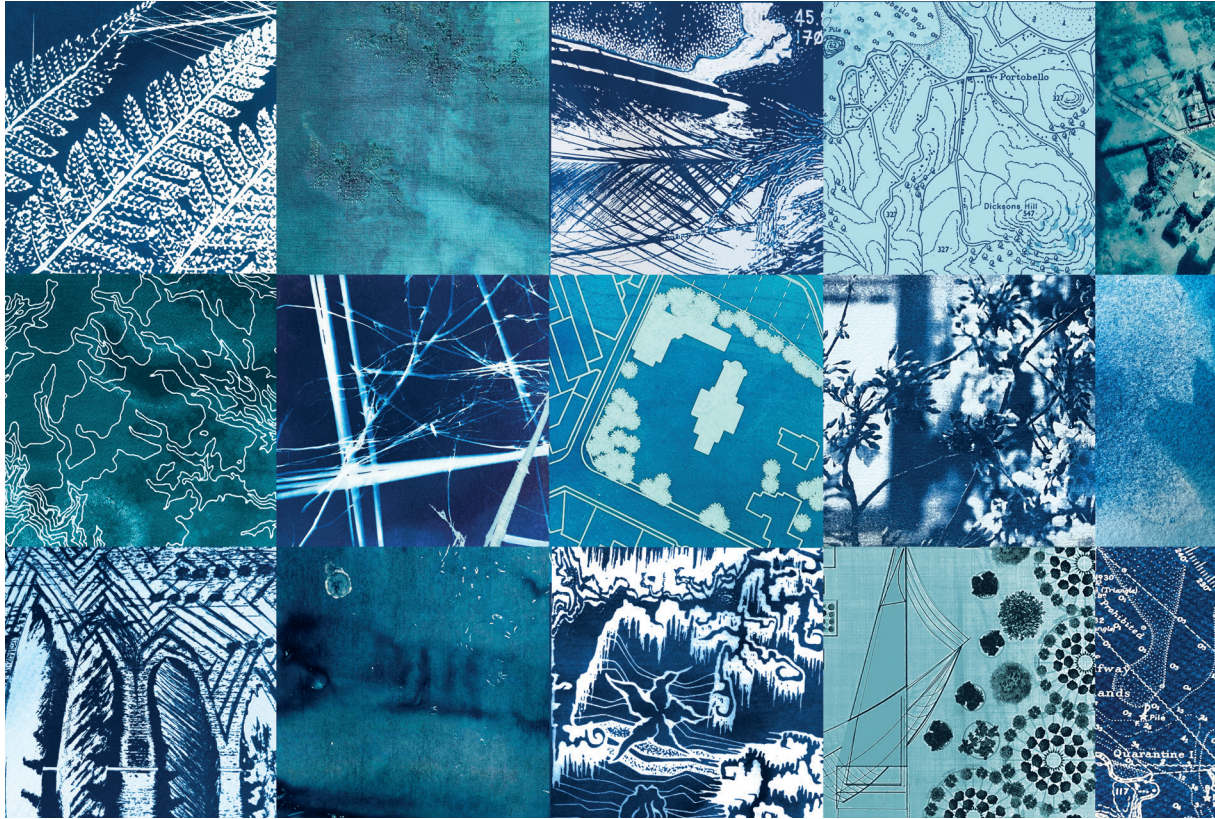


Fig. 3 Selection of cyanotypes from workshops with architecture students compiled into a grid format

unstable; a circulation space where rule-breaking can occur, and flaws can rupture the intended outcome.

Architecture students printed their photographs and site plans into interesting results when transparencies were overlaid. Sensitive work was produced by a particular student when adapted photographs were manipulated to high contrast and then scratched. The resulting marks echoed textures of place, a way to share her experience of Aotearoa New Zealand to family back home in South Africa.

Another participant played around with Photoshop filters over her site map of the Octagon, creating one that made her think of a flower. The 'flower' map was contact-printed onto fabric which, she realised, expressed the biophilic focus of her project. Fabric drapes, so hanging it up created an opportunity to look at the same thing in a different way, leading

another participant to envisage potential clothing applications. This conversation referencing fabrics and the body is poignant for me, because the original technical drawings, the matrix for blueprints, were drafted on linen before being exposed onto the paper substrate. It was common practice by many, including my family, to re-use this fabric by washing away the sizing and information to release a fine white linen that was then used to create baby gowns.

Participants who made cyanotypes on their sites found themselves responding to place in a heightened sensory way. Edward Casey describes this experiential response: "The lived body is what affords a 'feel' for a given landscape. ... Such a body is at once the organ and the vehicle of the painted or constructed map, the source of 'knowing one's way about,' thus knowing how we can be said to be acquainted with a certain landscape."⁴



One response articulates an experience akin to what the others described: “the process helped me feel more present, as you are ever mindful of the weather and your position on the land, and how much or how little light you have at any one moment. It has given me a new appreciation for how buildings here need to be very carefully crafted around the sun’s unique pathway!”⁵

An art student translated large-scale photographs of scenes into sections, produced negatives and laid them onto a piece of sensitised fabric. Working outside, the wind caught some of the negatives and by the time she retrieved and replaced them a colour change had begun; some information was lost. Some areas printed out of focus, but this whole process performed her perception of how we respond to the environment. Another project involved constructing architectural structures that were soft but dependable, structures that touched the earth

lightly, like plants and trees do. In this process the participant made prints of plants from their site (see Figure 2) which they incorporated in the final design presentation, making parallels between plant and architectural structures obvious. The cyanotype process helped express how they felt, while bringing romance to the project.

When I’m fully immersed in the repetitious processes of printmaking, nothing else exists; I am unaware how much time I have moved through, I’m in a state most easily described as reverie.⁶ One participant likened this experience as feeling very slow and meaningful with the added bonus of being part of the development stage of image reproduction which he considered to be more expedient than using a traditional film camera. He felt this alternative photographic medium reflected his way of thinking, towing the line between legibility and architectural expression.

What of the state of blueprints and cyanotypes? Despite having an archival capacity, they are organic, in a state of constant flux. I am intrigued that they are created with light, yet that same light can erase a developed image, which incredibly can be rejuvenated in darkness. Likewise, I view buildings less as static artifacts and more as objects in a constant state of flux, with transformational capacities.

The capabilities of digital reproduction technologies contribute to printmaking's battle of copy versus original and perceived value in the marketplace, even though the contemporary field of printmaking has shifted from editioning to producing one-offs and

variations. Integrating architecture and art lead me to disrupt my own rules as I scanned participants' cyanotypes and digitally reproduced them onto paper, then curated edited squares onto cubes of varying sizes.⁷ Participant response was to immediately touch and pick up these cubes, play and build with them, delighted how their work read differently when edited onto a three-dimensional format. This cycles back to the early differences of intent concerning how the medium is applied, as fluidity and ambiguity continue to evolve. I believe interdisciplinary investigation that engages materiality, a hands-on process and sensory involvement helps in building something different and bridges the gap between real and imagined worlds.

LYNN TAYLOR focuses on nautical and historically themed artwork through mapping, memory, and the poetics of place. She approaches her practice with a 'printmaker's sensibility,' exploring links between ideas and materiality, and responding to the graphic surprise of integrating mediums. Teaching / facilitation forms a dual career path; with work in the Schools of Art and Architecture, as a Sci Art researcher and facilitating workshops in the community.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The terms 'blueprint' and 'cyanotype' are often used in an interchangeable, ambiguous manner. Sir John Herschel developed this printing process in 1842 and while the chemicals and fundamental procedures of sensitising a matrix, making a contact print, and washing out are aligned, the main points of difference are intent and purpose. While the term blueprint remains active today in general references to 'how to construct something,' in this paper blueprint refers to historical architectural plans where the technical drawing appears in white against a deep blue background. Herschel's friend Anna Atkins applied the process in a photographic way in her botanical publication, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, 1843; hence cyanotype refers here to the artistic use of the medium. Put simply, unlike blueprints, cyanotypes are open to artistic interpretations.
- 2 When combined, ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide oxidise to blue in sunlight. Anything that blocks the light will remain the colour of the substrate, traditionally creating negative image.
- 3 From 1978 to 1993 Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin were members of the Paper Architects, a group of

graduates from the Moscow Architectural Institute, who agitated against the near complete loss of Moscow's historical architectural heritage during the 1970s and 80s. Christopher Jobson, "Constrained by the Limitations of Soviet-Era Architecture, Brodsky & Utkin Imagined Fantastical Structures on Paper," *Colossal*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/09/paper-architecture-brodsky-utkin>.

- 4 Edward S Casey, *Earth-mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 17.
- 5 Participant via Teams, 1 December 2023.
- 6 "Reverie is the state of giving ourselves up to the flow of associations. This state of letting something happen ... [is] a mode of introducing personal material into a picture or building ... [and] ... is essential to the creative process in which we come to make thoughts for ourselves." John Armstrong, *Move Closer: An Intimate Philosophy of Art* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2000), 78.
- 7 Although I photographed the cubes outdoors — as I'm stimulated by the interactions and challenges that happen when out on site — for purposes of this publication some the cube surfaces have been formatted on a grid.

ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF PLACE-CONTINUUM

DEVON BELL

My inspiration as a researcher, designer and architectural technician stems from the imposing thought of what has been, what comes next, and how architecture can be constructed in a way that explores and respects this continuum. This is, in part, a reaction to my concern that the trajectory of 'our built environment' is fast becoming emblematic of 'our manufactured surrounding';

*an action of occupancy,
a scene for the contemporary.*

The problem with that scenographic approach has led to context-less environments propelling conditions of urbanisation like suburban sprawl and the removal of one's association with the natural world.

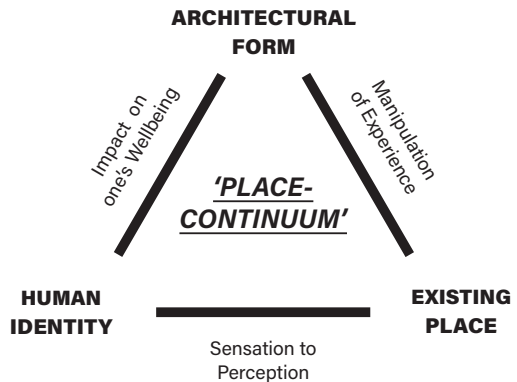
This brings me back to a framework for design that I developed in my final undergraduate year (Bachelor of Architectural Studies).

Place-continuum examines an exploration of cohesion between three concepts, Existing Place, Architectural Form, and Human Identity and discusses the ways they intersect.

This ideology was devised as a response to my enquiry into how the understanding of Place as a conceptual belief informs architecture. My aim was to propose a method to instigate my design response that acknowledged history, associations that people had to existing places and how new architecture cannot erase but offer a continuation of that embodied experience. This was not an attempt to explore and manipulate experience of place into an architectural form (akin to 'Place-making'), but rather I looked to a concept of 'Place-continuing', in order to invite an expression of characteristics of the past while embracing the future.

Establishing this conceptual framework allowed me to consolidate my theoretical understanding of architecture as a student, but as I reflect on it now that I am in practice, I can't help but wonder — how do I preserve my connection with this concept of 'place-continuum'?

Fig. 1 Establishing Place-Continuum, conceptual diagram.



In my brief time working as an architectural technician, I've had the chance to work on a variety of projects, from small-scale commercial construction to planned residential additions and new homes. This has helped me advance my technical education and cultivate a more practical mindset that prioritises client goals and budget. However now that I'm practicing, I notice that I'm progressively drifting away from my philosophy; 'place-continuum' seems more like an idealistic, theoretical afterthought in the realities of architectural practice with all its complexities and constraints.

How has being in practice affected my creative agility? The first thing I learned as a student was to prioritise a critical engagement with a site (culturally, socially and historically) through a range of design processes (like site analysis diagramming and massing models.)

The efficiencies of digital resources have gone some way to disrupt this connection to land as an embodied experience. Instead, there is often little need to visit a site at all, as most work can be carried out in the office through various digital programming

tools. Research that was so drummed into us as students has been reduced to identifying potential risk factors and policy-based parameters.

Or perhaps it is my lack of critical enquiry outside of my day job — lack of engagement in creating, questioning. The omission of both 2D and 3D exploration.

Instead, I intellectualise digital media, searching for evidence of ‘place continuum’ in architectural blogs, questioning if the projects on my screen have been instigated through connection to a physical experience. *Or, am I viewing a constructed reality?*

WHAT HAS BEEN...

In ‘The Aesthetic in Place,’ Arnold Berleant establishes place as a structure of qualities for a person’s engagement with the revolving world. These concrete characteristics are explored through physical identity, coherence, and meaning. Identity conveys a sense of place through one’s ability to orientate themselves within topographical features or centres. Establishing a sense of place through physical coherence is explored through architectural similarity or being bounded by an interior space or urban square. Meaning distinguishes itself by existing as an interaction of human sensibility towards a place. Combinations of these elements contributes to a distinctive presence of place.¹

Context is not implied to suggest a single landscape, but rather a formulation of surrounding community and locality. This is not to say design a building like the one adjacent to site, but to illustrate the importance of awareness towards local materiality and craftsmanship.

(a global know-how design that corresponds with local know-how construction?)

Having graduated with a Bachelor of Architectural studies in 2021, **DEVON BELL** pursues an authentic exploration of architecture that respects connection with existing place and human identity. Now, working in industry as an architectural technician, he hopes to maintain a respect towards this connection while also creating satisfactory architectural form for his clients.

...WHAT COMES NEXT?

As I navigate through the fast-paced world of construction, I am constantly reminded of the importance of efficiency and meeting deadlines. While I strive to uphold my philosophy of ‘place-continuum,’ I also understand the necessity of adapting to the demands of the industry. Finding a balance between the two will be a challenge, but I am committed to maintaining my client-centered approach while staying abreast of technological advancements in the field. Ultimately, it is about finding a way to merge the old with the new, in order to create successful and satisfying projects for my clients and myself.

If successful, I think the application and materialisation of ‘place-continuum’ holds the potential for designers to contribute to our built environment more authentically...

...more conscious of the unity between a sustained scene and witness.

Place-continuum illustrates that place is a multi-layered condition able to adapt and absorb past, present and future ideologies. This is not fixing time architecturally through pseudo representational techniques such as nostalgic or ‘character styles’ but rather presenting architecture that reflects this time, these people, this history and this land.

Architecture that responds, restores, and continues an aesthetic and experiential sense of place, creating re-engagement between form and nature, as well as human engagement, is essential. The advancement and application of both science and technology within construction should look to enhance the connection made to place and human identity.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arnold Berleant, “The Aesthetic in Place,” in *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter*, ed. Sarah Menin (London: Routledge, 2003), 43.

RESPONSIVE ARCHITECTURE: A REFLECTION OF PRACTICE

RATA SCOTT VON TIPPLESKIRCH

In a world that is rapidly changing, the need to adapt and respond to the environmental challenges of today is critical. As an emerging practitioner of architectural design and teaching, whose methodology is concerned with the issue of sustainability, my work reflects a site-specific approach with the aspiration to contribute positively towards climate and landscape, responsive to the conditions and the context.

Upon visiting the architecture of Richard Lepastrier in the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, I was struck by how sensible a dwelling could be. At a pivotal point in my own practice's development, Lepastrier taught me the importance of responding to one's environment by tailoring architectural space to deliver the experience of an unfolding relationship with nature.

We arrived during the greatest rain event in 30 years, registering the importance of creating a building that could be put to the test under such circumstances. Accessible only by boat, positioned tactfully in a natural clearing, and elevated above the river's flood-prone banks were a collection of elegantly poised timber buildings. Their eaves stretched gracefully beyond the building's boundaries as the rain poured down, allowing sufficient cover to the open-air structures, while also offering effective shade on a sunny day, given Australia's hot climate.

Round openings punctured the ply walls, chamfered to create focalised apertures, positioned

in such ways that the air moved across the spaces in soft, cooling drifts. Constructed almost entirely from timber with patchworked profiled metal, the structures appeared as though they would melt into impermanence if engulfed by bushfires or left to decompose. Climatically tailored and perceivably perfect in its performance, this was a dwelling that served the occupants exceptionally, extending their relationship with the surrounding natural environment beyond the confines of built form. Lepastrier in plain architecture was responding to the integral conditions, through a sensibility to place so acute, it resonated in its simplicity.

Experiencing such a work, in such a way, I was affirmed in my aspiration to create site specific architecture that could conceptually blur the boundaries of nature and buildings, woven contextually into place.

As practitioners and teachers of the same school of thought, similar to Lepastrier, Glenn Murcutt speaks of architecture as a climatically responsive practice of reading the site through the process of immersion,



Fig. 1 Contour Aerial, 2019. Contextual aerial image of Banks Peninsula topography locating Little River.

understanding the structure and order of the land. Murcutt teaches the importance of comprehending natural phenomena such as landscape and climate as these are factors that have significant consequences to architecture.¹

As an approach to the process of architectural conception, beginning by perceptually locating oneself within the context of the environment, a methodical documentation and understanding of the site takes shape initially through the collecting of field recordings by way of mapping, photography, writing, and drawing.

This 'collecting' of place, becomes an assemblage of phenomenological connections between body, site and materiality, providing a position from which experimental play can ensue, transmuted as architectural imagination.

In order to give shape to haptic play, a greater contextual understanding is sought through critical investigation, reading and research translated through, sketches, models, and drawings.

Sculpting and drawing as tools for process,

documentation, and as a means of communication play a critical role in the production of architectural design as evidenced by translating the methods of assembly into the reality of construction.

Architect and Lecturer Brit Andresen, also of the same school of thought speaks to the process of architectural design as bound to the interplay between factors of production, environment and culture, a synthesis of what appears to be opposing intentions of seeking design solutions that are poetic yet simultaneously pragmatic.²

As a young designer and an emerging teacher, I don't have the advantage of a ripened practice. However, I do have the blessing of learning about architecture from many angles. Currently practicing architecture, I have studied space from both an architectural and visual art perspective, taught multiple age groups in different settings, travelled to learn about architecture, and helped build projects, offering a skill set that spans in diverse directions.

Visiting the work of Lepplatrier that critically



Fig. 2 Lightplay on Landscape, 2018. Photograph of the view from a specific site.

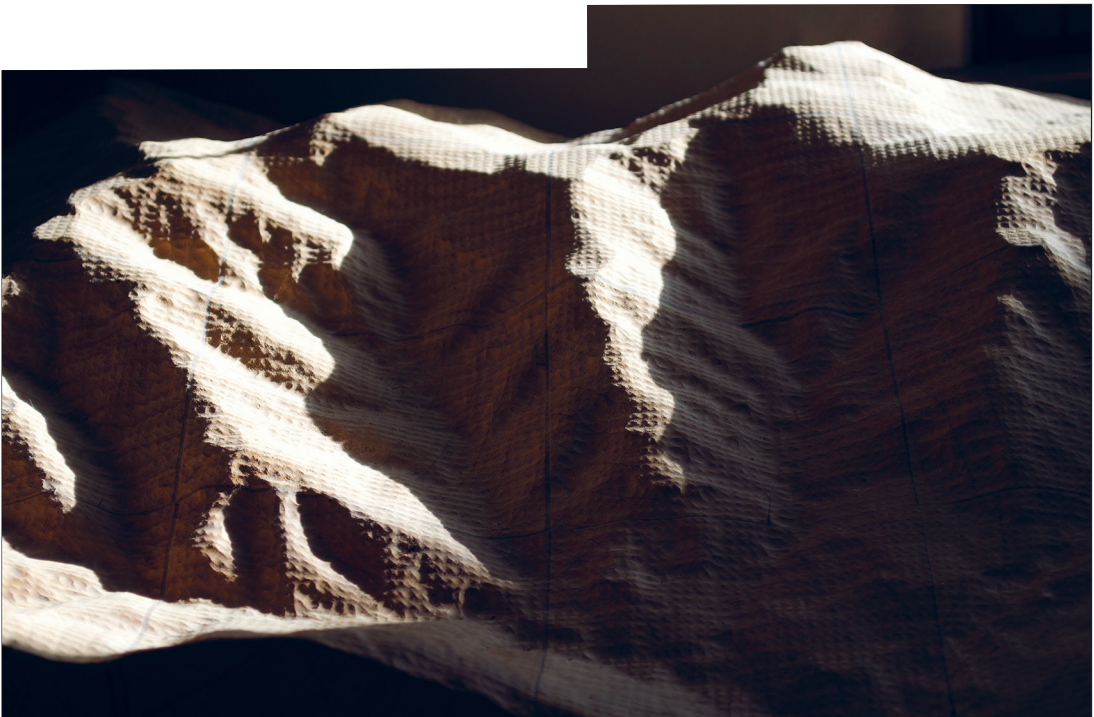


Fig. 3 Contour Model, 2018. Photograph of a topographical scale model of a site.

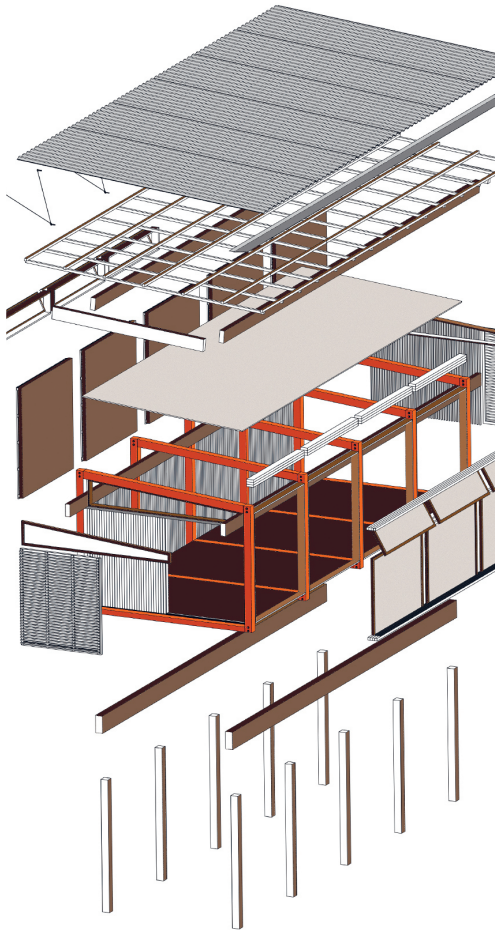


Fig. 4 Axonometric (Detail), 2019. *Exploded axonometric of a proposed project.*

Emerging designer **RATA SCOTT VON TIPPELSKIRCH** BVA (2016) BAS (2019), works in Ōhinehou as an Architectural Graduate for Bull O'Sullivan Architecture. Having previously lectured in Architectural History and Theory and held a position as a Research Assistant for the School of Architecture at Otago Polytechnic, Rata's work investigates themes of Art, Architecture and Ecology.

engages with the natural world, understanding Murcutt's methodology of modifying the environment by way of creating layers of flexibility within the built form that respond to climate and landscape and recognising Andresen's contemplation of the practical art of the processes we undergo as designers, has encouraged adaptivity in my practice.

With the knowledge that the climate today won't be the same climate I am responding to tomorrow, and acknowledging the culture of change that will come with the challenges of the future, exposes the need for agility, required of skilled designers, teachers and thinkers who enrich the broader architectural discourse.

Understanding the importance of architecture's role in the conservation of our world contributes not only to a language of tectonics that can adapt and respond to climate (change) in a way that shelters life, but one that sustains and allows it to flourish.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Maryam Gusheh et. al. *Glenn Murcutt - The Architecture of Glenn Murcutt*. (Toto, 2008), 14-25.
- 2 Andreson O'Gorman, "Architecture Interacting," UME, 2011, 12-27.

ARCHITECTURAL LAUNDRY

ANNABEL SMART

In any creative profession there is an obligation to be actively curious and empathetic. To be constantly learning and seeking out inspiration; adding to, and editing out, the mental filing cabinet of influences. Ultimately, for myself, the creative process begins by engaging in cross-disciplinary listening and honing my skills as an observer. It's about being receptive and intuitive to the current moment and acting as a conduit that transfers those findings into the creative thinking and making process.

I consider the act of seeking out inspiration as a duality between immersion and reflection. Immersion in the current culture is fundamental to any creative journey. It involves zooming into the local, the specific, delving into the micro vernacular.

Being adept at listening to the popular commentary and being curious about what resonates with the people in the community and more specifically the client - what are they asking architecture to provide for them? I also like to personify the site of a project and to act as respectfully and inquisitively to the place as you would be to a paying client. Asking questions such as what was here before and how has this particular site come to be? This process of deep immersion provides a grasp on the site-specific response and ensures the design responds to the immediate physical and metaphysical context.

It is simultaneously important to zoom out and examine the broader context to inform design decisions. To understand the present we need to

Fig. 1 Staff lunch table at Årepa HQ. Photograph: James K. Lowe





Fig. 2 Drinks fridge and timber plinth at Ārepa HQ.
 Photograph: James K. Lowe

draw the road map of how we got here. Exploring the historical references that have shaped the overall conditions, the economic, political, and social climate helps to integrate a sense of continuity and relevance into designs. This process not only provides depth to the narrative of what we design but also ensures that every project is rooted in a broader cultural relevance and maintains an empathetic sentiment. Once we have the full picture, we can be more deliberate and considerate with decision making.

For instance, in recent years there has been a resounding call for a sense of solace, respite and retreat in our built environment, in everything from private homes to shared workspaces. Our design brief for the Ārepa (a brain food technology company) head office in Tāmaki Makaurau, was to create a space that would encourage staff to feel in a state of calm clarity and focused flow, in alignment with

the brand's mission (see figure 1).

Our design response was to provide references back to nature and maximise the effect of natural light through use of light colours, transparency, textured surfaces, and shadow play. We researched sensory cues that evoke positive physiological responses in people, specifically to reduce stress levels and enhance mental performance. Importance was placed on creating spaciousness by reducing visual noise and creating a functional space that caters to their needs as a company, without clutter. Heavily textured walls, raw concrete and exposed timber ceilings create the bones of the space. Brushed aluminium joinery with refined detailing, machine precision edges and fine proportions sit comfortably next to solid rough sawn macrocarpa plinths in the entrance lobby, the contrast emphasising the soft grandeur of the natural timber (see figure 2).



Fig. 3 Staff breakout area at Ārepa HQ. Photograph: James K. Lowe

As part of our research we learnt why watching a curtain move at a slow and steady tempo is such a calming thing for the human brain. It represents a gentle breeze moving through the leaves of a tree, signalling agreeable weather patterns to our ancestral brain. A static curtain doesn't have the same effect and a rapidly flapping curtain can obviously be quite unnerving. So even if the source of that breeze is a ceiling mounted air conditioning unit, as in the Ārepa breakout area (see figure 3) the resulting effect of inducing a sense of calmness in the users of the space is still achieved. The overall design of Ārepa HQ achieves a sense of lightness and atmospheric charm that the clients have described as a serene environment to work in.

This collective yearning for respite is understandable given the high levels of daily stressors and constant stimuli we are faced with. The world is changing at exponential speed and leaving our

animal brain struggling to catch up with it. The post-pandemic energy shift has significantly contributed to this trend, highlighting the importance of connection with nature in our buildings. This call for more calmness and 'naturalness' also seems to be in defiance of modern architecture and its disregard for human connection and experience. In his book *Eyes of the Skin*, architect and author Juhani Pallasmaa discusses the downfalls of modern architecture, claiming that "Modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless!" The reflective, flat surfaces and obvious impacts provided little regard for the human body and led to a 'depthlessness' in our buildings. It gives me comfort to know that people are now seeking out spaces that speak to our humanness, that allow us to decompress and give our nervous systems relief from stimulation. We



Fig. 4 Image generated by AI software Imagine Art.

can see a return to tactile materials, handmade craft over the machine, and an inclusion of the natural world in our built environments. Whether it's textured plaster walls that emphasise subtle shifts in light and shadow throughout the day, or high-tech circadian lighting systems that have a similar effect, we seem to be remembering that we thrive when at one with nature.

Across the board, the creative process is currently being revolutionised by the role of technology in our industry, specifically by the numerous AI programs. The entire way we funnel inspiration into our thinking, how we communicate to clients and how we document our projects is in flux. Embracing current technology is essential to enhancing the creative process. It opens up new possibilities by enabling innovative solutions and efficient processes but can serve as both a catalyst and a challenge. While it is useful for automating some of the more tedious and repetitive parts of the process it has the potential to hinder creativity if relied upon too much. Some programs like Imagine Art provide images from written prompts. The below image was generated in under 5 seconds with the text prompt "A Donald Judd style interior scene of a modernist

chapel, moody lighting and textured materials" (see figure 4). It astounds me that what would have taken one individual countless hours to imagine, design, draft, model in 3D, render, not to mention all the pre-learned knowledge of religious building design and the nuances of Donald Judd's work - can now be generated in an instant.

Other programs such as Maket use "advanced pattern recognition algorithms to generate thousands of design options in a matter of minutes"² We need to overcome our so-called 'FOBO' (fear of becoming obsolete) and use AI tools to let us prioritise conceptual development, critical research and empathetic design thinking.

AI is sometimes referred to as anti-humanity, but the value in leaning into this technology lies in the hope that our industry can produce a more human-centric result. By relieving us of the hours poured into testing plans, drafting and repetitive documenting we can spend more hours on growing our understanding of how architecture can trigger the senses and how significantly we are impacted by our built environment. For this to happen we need to steer AI in the right direction, nicely summarised by author Joanna Maciejewska when she states "I want AI to do my laundry and dishes so that I can do

art and writing, not for AI to do my art and writing so that I can do my laundry and dishes.”³

As an architecture student I was taught that on any given project just 10 - 15% of the time and fees should be allocated to project establishment and concept design, as the later stages of a project are more labour intensive and time consuming. To me this has always felt unbalanced, the early stages of a project - information gathering, researching and being playful with concepts - offers so much depth to the end result. To state the obvious, AI saves us a lot of time. We could use it to tip the scale of the design process so that it is weighted more in favour of these initial stages of a project; the listening and observing part rather than the describing and informing part (the laundry and dishes). Working towards an approach where we stay curious, empathetic, and use the tools we have available to us, will expand our imaginative capacity as designers. My hope is that we can continue to move towards a more holistic and emotive architecture that does a better job of promoting our collective social, cognitive, and emotional development.

ANNABEL SMART is an architectural and interior designer and the Director of Studio 11:11 NZ. She approaches her projects with a thoughtful consideration of materials, aiming to create serene, warm, imaginative spaces for people to inhabit. Annabel has a reserved design sensibility, an appreciation for a natural palette and highly considered detailing, which is prevalent in all her work.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).
- 2 “Top 14 AI Tools for Architects and Designers,” *CO-architecture*, 18 September 2023, <https://site.co-architecture.com/artificial-intelligence-ai/top-14-ai-tools-for-architects-and-designers/#::~:~:text=Maket.ai%20is%20an%20AI,in%20a%20matter%20of%20minutes>.
- 3 Joanna Maciejewska, ““You know what the biggest problem with pushing all-things-AI is? Wrong direction. I want AI to do my laundry and dishes so that I can do art and writing, not for AI to do my art and writing so that I can do my laundry and dishes.”” X, last modified March 30, 2024, <https://x.com/AuthorJMac/status/1773679197631701238?lang=en>.