The Local And The Migrant:
Limits Of Mutual Recognition

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There has been considerable interest recently in architecture and the migrant experience, typified in publications such as Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy (2004) with its broad range of discussion on architecture and displacement.

This paper proposes to use the immigration and work of Italian born architect Enrico Taglietti to shed light on aspects of Australian cultural identity. In contrast to arguments proposing an essentialism of sorts that characterises migrancy, we argue that it is in the specifics of architectural migrancy that the most illuminating lessons are to be learnt. The reception of the migrant architect and the acknowledgement or otherwise of their work powerfully illustrates prevailing architectural norms and historiographic ideologies in the country of destination.

Although the limited acknowledgement afforded the work of migrant architects has been raised by Harriet Edquist, Myriana Lozanovska, Julie Willis, Philip Goad and others in the Australian context, we argue this is not a matter of omission but rather a consequence of a cultural response to post-war non-British immigration. Paul Carter's concept of placism is a referent for this dynamic: the work of migrant architects is culturally scanned for points of possible attachment, as it were, to a nationalist narrative of identity. Predictably, such points prove elusive as a matter of definition

During my formative years when I was in desperate search for the revelation, which would eventually make me understand the essence of architecture. I explored like Marco Polo as many cities as I could. Cities of temples (Athens, Rome); cities of Pyramids (Paris, Cairo), dream cities (Venice), cities of churches (Orvieto), cities of markets (Verona), cities of palaces (Urbino), cities of cathedrals (Barcelona), cities of tombs (Beijing), cities of chimes (London), cities of skyscrapers (New York), cities of golden domes (Kremlin). I reached a basic conclusion: cities are not created by planners. They are created by architecture. Architecture is the real matrix of the city. I found that Sydney was a city without a matrix, a city of sprawling red roofs, with a coat hanger as a bridge and a neo/gothic and neo/classical architecture. Its matrix was not architecture but the hundreds of bays, the city of harbours. On a clear September afternoon many years ago -wattle and prunus in flower, mountains sprinkled with snow - I reached in a Fiat 500 the city of Canberra. A city without towers, without golden domes, without cathedrals, a city without a past. It was the dream of any modern architect.

The nothingness was there: the silence, the music, the tabula rasa (a clean slate), the end of exploring perhaps the destination, the invisible city.
Enrico Taglietti[1]

Enrico Taglietti: a brief portrait
In 1955 Enrico Taglietti, a recent Italian architecture graduate, moved to Australia from Milan, Italy. Unlike fellow migrants who moved for economic or political reasons, Taglietti's migration was prompted by the promise of greater professional opportunities.

Taglietti's early history is bound up with Italian colonial ambitions. In 1938 , with Enrico aged 12, the Taglietti family moved to Asmara in Eritrea, East Africa, an Italian colony since 1860. The intent of the move was to expand the family's hardware concern, which embraced both production and, until the move, European distribution of its products. The move proved a success, and the elder Taglietti succeeded in diversifying the industry within the Ethiopian colonies.[2]

The advent of the Second World War changed the family's fortunes. In April 1941 Italian civil authorities in Asmara surrendered to British forces, delivering some 40,000 prisoners of war into Allied hands.[3] The Taglietti family, as part of the Italian civilian contingent, were kept confined in the city. From 1941 to 1948 Taglietti experienced confinement in Asmara, his mobility restricted to a radius of ten kilometres, limited by curfew, and dominated by military presence.

In 1948 Taglietti returned to Milan to study architecture at the Polytechnic. During his studies from 1948-1954 he witnessed Italy's post-war reconstruction, with its attendant social and political conflicts and debates over architectural education. In parallel with the general political debate the period was marked by

a growing conflict of ideas in the traditionally conservative academy of the architectural schools.

The political milestone of the period was the national referendum of 2nd of June 1946 which transformed Italy from a monarchy to a Republic. In the educational context a strong debate was encouraged by A.L.S.A. (Free Society of Architecture Students).[4] This in effect promoted new 'rationalist' leftist ideas in opposition to the conformist principles prevailing in traditional education. This rupture allowed both interwar modernism into the academies as well as creating an opening for the organic tendencies, with Wrightian overtones, promoted by Bruno Zevi and the School of Rome.

After graduating in 1954 Taglietti commenced his career as an architectural consultant designing the St. Erasmo Theatre, various residential and commercial developments in Milan and Zurich and an association with the International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts and Modern Architecture of the Milan Triennale. The Triennale exhibition of design and *Domus* architecture/design magazine were two established means of raising the profile of architecture and design in Milanese circles.

Taglietti's role as curator of foreign entries at the Triennale, and his involvement in promoting part of the Triennale as an Italian exhibition in Sydney, brought him to Australia. While in Sydney the Italian Ambassador commissioned him to search for a suitable site for the Italian Embassy in Canberra. The consequence of this series of fortuitous events was Taglietti's adoption of Canberra as his home.

From 1955 to the present he has designed, within his private architectural practice, a broad range of private and public buildings. His major works include the Italian Embassy, the Town House Motels in Wagga Wagga and Canberra, the Dickson Library in Canberra and St.Kilda library in Melbourne, the War Memorial repository in Canberra and St.Anthony's Church, Sydney, all built in the period from early 1960's to the late 1970's. Subsequent projects from the 1980's and 1990's include the Giralang public school and Forrest Hill Day care centre. Taglietti continues to practice from his office in Canberra, and has entered built work in the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Chapter Awards as recently as 2002.

Taglietti in the International and Australian architectural context in the 1960s and 1970s
In 1979 Taglietti was invited to participate in the international exhibition titled *Transformations in modern architecture* held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The intent of the exhibition was to identify particular directions within International architecture in the period 1959 - 1979 through 400 images of selected buildings. The examples were grouped in 7 categories and 22 subcategories which exhibited similar characteristics: from sculptural form to structure, from hybrids to elements, vernacular and historicizing, these categories invited a direct comparison of about 10 images of architectural projects in the same group.

This exhibition and the book published by the Museum of Modern Art described how Taglietti fitted into the International architectural context in the late 1970s. Taglietti's selected project, the Town House Motel in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales (designed in the early 1960s and opened in 1964) was included in the category of 'Elements: Parapets' as an example of a building designed in the Wrightian manner. The Wagga Wagga Town House Motel was compared to Paul Rudolph's New Haven Parking Garage of 1963 and Luigi Moretti's 'San Maurizio' condominium apartment block in Rome (1965) as sharing similar characteristics. According to the exhibition curators these projects emphasised a horizontality through the play of cantilevered planes, horizontal roofs, parapets and terraces. Their images were compared to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater to denote, according to the catalogue, how their 'cantilevered terraces seem to float in the air and have the effect of 'demolishing the box' as Wright put it, because their varying projections obscure the continuity of the wall plane'.[5] The curator of the exhibition, Arthur Drexler, noted that:

> Enrico Taglietti's motel in Australia has rectilinear terraces cantilevered at all sides, but where the parapets meet the corner is chamfered and extended visually with a projecting beam like a downspout. The sloping corners emphatically terminate he horizontals and evoke Oriental pagodas, because each floor can be read equally well as a roof.[6]

Taglietti's use of concrete in projects such as the War Memorial Repository or the Giralang School of the late 1970s resonate with the sculptural forms of the vaulted shapes of Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal, Kennedy Airport (1962) and Joern Utzon's Sydney Opera House (1973), as well as an affinity with the elements of post-war Japanese architecture, in particular Kenzo Tange's Kurashiki Town Hall (1960) and Kuyio Mayekawa' s Festival Hall in Tokyo.

The inclusion of the Wagga Wagga Town House Motel in the exhibition is significant in that the exhibits were chosen for their thematic affinity with each other. It is worth noting that Taglietti's motel and the Sydney Opera House were the two projects selected to represent Australian architecture.

Within the Australian architectural community recognition was also forthcoming for Taglietti's designs. Architectural merit awards from the ACT Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects were awarded to the Paterson House in Aranda, ACT in 1969 and the Apostolic Nunciature, (the Vatican Embassy) in Canberra in 1979: the Philip District Oval grandstand and the Forrest Early Childhood Centre ACT were both recipients in 1992. In 1997 the Apostolic Nunciature was entered in the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission (n. 101288). The 1977 Canberra Medallion of the ACT Chapter of the RAIA was awarded to the Giralang Primary School. The school also received a 25 year award for sustained architectural excellence from the ACT Chapter in 2000. Another Taglietti project, the Dickson District Library (opened in 1969), received

the same award in 1995. In 2001 national recognition from RAIA in form of a Life Fellowship certificate was conferred on Enrico Taglietti and Romaldo Giurgola.

Despite the fact that Taglietti's projects had received numerous architectural RAIA awards, and his work had been published in numerous European architectural journals, the acknowledgement of his work by Australian architectural historians has been limited until 1985. This was the year when his residential projects were mentioned, albeit briefly, by Jennifer Taylor in her article 'Beyond the 1950's ' in the *History and design of the Australian House* compiled by Robert Irving. [7]

Notable omissions in Australian historiography include J.M. Freeland 's *Architecture in Australia: a History*[8] published in 1968 as well in the Harry Sowden's polemical *Towards an Australian Architecture*[9] published in the same year or in the Ian McKay edited *Living and partly living*.[10]

Meanwhile the Town House Motels in Wagga Wagga and Canberra were published in *Architettura: Cronache e storia* in 1962, in *Deutsche Bauzeitung* in 1964 and in the journal *Architecture d'aujourd'hui* in 1966: his residential projects were published in *Domus* in 1964. The first project of Taglietti's acknowledged with an article in the journal *Architecture in Australia*[11] was the Conference Centre for the Associated Chambers of Manufacturers of Australia in 1968. His work appears occasionally from 1961in the journal *Cross-section* published by the Department of Architecture of the University of Melbourne. In 1961 the Town House Motel in Canberra was featured, in 1962 the Wagga-Wagga Town House Motel, in 1963 the Italo-Australian club in Canberra and in 1964 two houses in Canberra. St. Anthony Church, Marsfield appears in 1970, with the Dickson Library and the Sun-down Drive-in theatre, and in 1971 the Paterson House is presented.

Architecture in Australia acknowledged Taglietti in 1970 with the publication of the Dickson District Library in Canberra and St. Anthony's Church, Marsfield. In 1981 the journal presented the Apostolic Nunciature for the Vatican diplomatic representatives, comprising a residence and offices.

The special issue of *The Architectural Review* in September 1978 devoted to Australia states, in a generally favourable review of the Giralang School, that it was 'designed by 'a new Australian' Dr. Enrico Taglietti from Italy, and applies a genial expressionism to the libertarian fabric of Australian Primary Education'.[12] Although published in the UK, the wording seems an astonishing inflection on the career of an architect by then resident in Australia for nearly a quarter of a century, the currency of the term 'new Australian' notwithstanding.

Despite wide publication in journals, Taglietti's work remains thinly represented in books. In 1989 his conference centre for the Associated Chamber of Manufacturers of Australia (1967) in Canberra was included in the chapter on 'Late Twentieth-century Organic architecture' in Richard Apperly's *Identify-*

ing *Australian Architecture*.[13] It is not until 1990 that Jennifer Taylor draws attention to Taglietti's work with a series of projects including the Italian Embassy, St.Anthony Church and the Dickson Library in her book *Australian Architecture Since 1960*.

Locating Taglietti
The recognition of Taglietti's work in the professional arena thus proceeded from international exposure to local acknowledgement of the strength of his work. A recent article in the *Canberra City News* quotes architect and academic Roger Pegrum thus:

> Canberra architecture was at that time (1960s) a bit dull. He brought a lot of things with him. His style was and is very strong, simple, and dynamic. He made buildings that people found interesting and they then started to take an interest in architecture.[14]

The central issue, however, is the persistent difficulty of local historiography in assimilating Taglietti's work into prevailing schema. The dilemma is aptly expressed by Jennifer Taylor:

> Italy also contributed to the fashioning of Australian sculptural architecture of the 1960's and 1970's with the work of Enrico Taglietti. The exuberance and formal play of Taglietti's architecture has no parallel in the country. It strangely combines the gaiety of much Italian, free-form construction with the sobriety of the heavy forms of Japan's post war architects: it is an architecture fashioned for mood and visual delight. [15]

In a similar vein, Richard Apperly states: 'Outside the realm of domestic architecture, the more dramatic and spectacular aspects of organic architecture were to be seen in the idiosyncratic designs of Enrico Taglietti'.[16]

Even the architectural journal *Cross-section*, an early vehicle for his work, observed in 1970:

> It is impossible to place the work of Enrico Taglietti in a convenient stylistic basket marked 'F.L.W.' or 'Scarpa', although in the meticulous handling of detail one can detect a leaning towards recent Italian work.[17]

The same journal states: 'The architecture of Taglietti of Canberra displays masterful handling of a highly personalized style.' [18] An earlier edition had prefaced his work with similar sentiments:

> These two houses were recently completed in Canberra by arch. Dr. Enrico Taglietti, whose highly personal style remains outside the main streams of current Australian architecture but is nonetheless invigorating and adaptable. It is an architecture of exaggeration, but within its own idiom, consistently controlled.[19]

These statements can be contrasted with the observations on his work made by the curators of the 1979 *Transformations in modern architecture* exhibition at MOMA. The singularity of Taglietti's work was no barrier to the affinities it held to other modern work, a point that underpinned the presentation at the exhibition.

Taglietti's career intersects a number of historical dynamics: issues of migrancy, style and professional opportunity are laid over prevailing architectural and historiographic concerns. The inability of local historians to place Taglietti is clearly symptomatic of particular constructions of identity and their sharp limits.

Architecture and migration
William Jordy[20] (1972) and Siegfried Giedion[21] (1982 have written extensively about the impact of the post-1930s emigration of European architects on American architecture, and questioned the nature of the evolving dialogue of the imported European modernism and the American architectural environment. On the other hand the study of migrant architects is a relatively new field in Australian architectural history.

It is not until 1997 with the volumes *The Europeans: Émigré' artists in Australia 1930-1960*[22] and *Building, Dwelling, drifting: migrancy and the limits of architecture* [23] that artists and architecture in general have been considered in relation to their connection with migration. *The Europeans* acknowledges the impact of the post-1930s emigration of European artists. Roger Butler argues in the introduction that 'Australian life and culture was transformed by the many European émigrés who settled here in the period between 1930 and 1960'.[24] Contributors to the publication generally agree that 'Little is known of the contribution by European-trained migrants who arrived after 1930'[25]. Among the artists who contributed to the development of contemporary Australian sculpture, graphic arts, jewellery, textile art and design, and photography one architect is mentioned, the Swiss trained Frederick Romberg in an article by Conrad Hamann.

This limited attention paid to the work and influences of continental European migrant architects on Australian architecture has been recently noted by architect and academic Myriana Lozanovska (2002). In the introduction to the April 2002 issue of the Journal *Architect* (Victoria), she editorialised that: 'this issue of *Architect* begins to explore the effects of migration on architecture and urbanization in Melbourne.'[26] With the notable exception of Harry Seidler and Frederick Romberg, Lozanovska notes that 'histories of architects who migrated from places other than England and Ireland such as Ermin Smerkar and Enrico Taglietti are still to be written'.[27]

The career of Frederick Romberg has garnered attention from Conrad Hamann and Harriet Edquist. The latter notes in the introduction to the publication *Frederick Romberg: the architecture of migration 1938-1975* that the history of Australian architecture from the 1940's to the present includes very little of his work, and his projects have at times been mentioned with inaccurate attribution and inadequate recognition

even from his practice partner, Robin Boyd.[28]Conrad Hamann concludes one of his articles with the following exhortation, which could equally apply to Taglietti's work:

> There is now a real chance for historians and critics of Australian architecture to reap full benefit from architects such as Frederick Romberg. This means responding more to architecture outside of the beguilingly teachable mainstream, as Romberg's so clearly was: outside the stylistic exemplar. It means going beyond what Australian architecture wanted European authenticity to be, and instead looking at both the full diversity of European culture, and the real transformation that this diversity would undergo in Australia.[29]

The recent volume *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*[30] presents a number of views of architecture and migrancy in the broadest sense. Of particular relevance to the issues raised above are observations made by Paul Carter in his chapter titled *'Mythforms: Techniques of migrant place-making'*. Indeed, the fit between Taglietti's history and Carter's observations on placism are neat enough to undermine Carter's broader argument through a simple literal correspondence, although the relevance goes deeper. Carter writes:

> Only against the background of the pervasive placism which white settler ideology takes over from its colonial origins, can the distinctiveness of migrant place-making be measured. Otherwise, there would be nothing to distinguish the migrant's arrival from any act of colonisation. Yet, the difference of his arrival is well-established, residing precisely in his refusal to repress the traces of his mobility - by contrast, in white settler foundationalist myths, it is axiomatic that the people were always there, and that without them the land was nothing.[31]

The origins of the problem are not hard to find. Most Australian historiography betrays its naturalist or placist origins, where placism holds that 'every place had its own individual spirit, which it was the artist's task to paint, describe or, in the jargon of the time, 'capture".[32] Freeland states in the preface to *Architecture in Australia* that 'Every building records, describes and explains the time and place in which it was built'.[33] Writing some years later, Jennifer Taylor is more aware of the ironies implicit in the formulation of Australian architecture, yet an overarching national framework remains in her work. The first line of her preface to *Australian Architecture Since 1960* reads 'This book tells of one part of the saga of the making of Australia'.[34] The issue persists: Philip Goad's text for the recent *New Directions in Australian Architecture* is constantly concerned with pinning down commonalities across a range of work nation-wide.[35]

It is Taglietti's very success in holding on to the traces of his mobility, to use Carter's term, that renders his

work opaque to attempts at an 'Australian' historiography. In sketching out a solution Carter offers that 'the placist myth, that stories are made after the place, has to be reversed: places are made after the story'.[36] Yet he warns of the possible resulting 'picturesque multiculturalism, in which every story has a place, and where no history is allowed to leave a mark'.[37]

In the case of architecture, though, the 'story' is not quite as passive. This allows for further reflection: architectural pieces exhibit a self-awareness that, in the strongest cases, issues a challenge. In the case of Taglietti's work, this challenge has been sufficient to allow his works to be valued for their experiential power, whilst still leaving hanging the nationalist question: How might these formal attributes be useful to evolving representations of place?

For Taglietti, this second question has been one of accommodation. He has engaged with it where he saw fit, but the accidents of historical ideology - what defines the unfolding identity of place - have passed him by. Yet the closeness of that passing has its own fascination. What factors determine that Bruce Rickard or Ian McKay's Usonian-inspired houses become allied to a regional identity, when Taglietti's own Wrightian influences fail to resonate at a local level? The answer to this and related questions clearly involve a critical stance towards the placist mythologies that sustain these judgements.

Yet the impression remains that one could write about Taglietti's work and its historical place by simply circumventing the demands of a coherent Australian history. In this way, quite literally, the story would precede place with little loss of coherence. The perplexity of desiring a nationalist consistency seems the domain of those who have most heavily invested in its existence. For others (especially migrants), the opportunity to build, to transpose their story, is firmly taken alongside a wry awareness of the largely symbolic nature of the placist angst. In this it is somewhat akin to flying the flag at primary school: a point of identification, but hardly necessary for the conducting of classes.

[1] Peter Robinson, *'Visions of reality through the building of dreams'*, Panorama section of The Canberra Times, (October 20, 2001): pp.4-5.
[2] Heather Rusden, interview with E. Taglietti - National Library of Australia - Oral History section (ORAL TRC 2263) (March 1988).
[3] Paul Ginsborg, *History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, London: Penguin Books, 1990.
[4] Vittorio Gregotti, *New Directions in Italian Architecture*, New York: George Braziller, 1968, p.40.
[5] Arthur Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1979, p.124.
[6] Drexler, *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, p.124.
[7] Jennifer Taylor, 'Beyond the 1950's' in Robert Irving (ed), *History and Design of the Australian House*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985, p.155.
[8] John Maxwell Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: a history*, Ringwood, Vic: Penguin books, 1972.
[9] Harry Sowden, *Towards an Australian architecture*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1968.
[10] Ian McKay, Robin Boyd, Hugh Stretton, John Mant, *Living and partly living*, Sydney: Nelson, 1971.
[11] 'Conference Centre, Canberra, ACT, for the Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia', *Architecture in Australia* 57 n. 7

(December 1968): pp. 1108-1109.

[12] Lance Wright, Kenneth Browne (eds), *The Architectural Review* (September 1978): p.156-157.

[13] Richard Apperly, Robert Irving and Peter Reynolds, *A pictorial guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1989.

[14] Jehane Sharah, , 'Making designs in Canberra', in *Canberra City News* (17 September 2003).

[15] Jennnifer Taylor, *Australian architecture since 1960*, Canberra: RAIA National Education Division, 1990, p.89

[16] Apperly, *A pictorial guide to Identifying Australian Architecture*,1989, p.236

[17] *Cross-section* Issue No.212 (July 1, 1970) University of Melbourne department of architecture

[18] *Cross-section* Issue No.212 (July 1, 1970) University of Melbourne department of architecture.

[19] *Cross-section* Issue No.159 (January 1, 1966) University of Melbourne department of architecture.

[20] William Jordy, *The impact of European Modernism in the mid-twentieth century* Volume 5 of the series American buildings and their architects, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

[21] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, time and architecture*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.

[22] Roger Butler (ed), *The Europeans: Émigré' artists in Australia 1930-1960,* Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1997.

[23] Stephen Cairns, Philip Goad (eds), *Building, Dwelling, drifting,migrancy and the limits of architecture: papers from the 3rd 'Other connections' Conference*, University of Melbourne, June 26-29 1997.

[24] Butler (ed), *The Europeans: Émigré' artists in Australia 1930-1960,* p.7.

[25] Margaret Vine, 'Jewellers and Jewellery: European trained, made in Australia' in Butler (ed), *The Europeans: Émigré' artists in Australia 1930-1960,* p.192.

[26] Myriana Lozanovska (ed), 'New Australian Architecture' in *Architect,* (April 2002), (pp.4-6).

[27] Lozanovska, 'New Australian Architecture' (April 2002).

[28] Harriet Edquist, 'Introduction' in Edquist (ed), *Frederick Romberg: the architecture of migration 1938-1975,* Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 2000 p.11

[29] Conrad Hamann, 'Frederick Romberg and the Problem of European Authenticity' in Butler (ed), *The Europeans: Émigré' artists in Australia 1930-1960,* p. 55

[30] Stephen Cairns, (ed.) *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy,* London: Routledge 2004.

[31] Carter, Paul, 'Mythforms' in Cairns (ed), *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy,* p.85.

[32] Carter, Paul, *'Mythforms',* p.82.

[33] Freeland, *Architecture in Australia,* Preface (np)

[34] Taylor, *Australian Architecture since 1960,* Preface (np)

[35] Goad, Philip and Bingham-Hall, Patrick, *New Directions in Australian Architecture*, Sydney: Pesaro Publishing, 2001.

[36] Carter, 'Mythforms', p.92.

[37] Carter, 'Mythforms', p.92.