CHAPTER 11

Fractured Strata or Common Ground

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Concluding Themes

In this final chapter, a number of themes that were raised by various authors throughout the present volume are summarised. Whereas the opening chapter set out three overarching, interconnected concepts—-isolation, the periphery and colonisation—and prefaced their development in the following chapters, this final chapter has another goal. It is apparent that while there are elements in common between many of the works analysed in this volume, the differences are equally as important. In this chapter, these common grounds are juxtaposed against the fractured strata of ideas raised by the eleven authors who have considered the relationship between cultural identity and architectural expression.

One of the first themes raised by the present volume is the sense that to live in the antipodes is to be exiled from the cultural centres of the world. This situation, which closely parallels the theme of isolation identified in Chapter 1, has been seen by the authors of previous chapters as having both an advantageous as well as a detrimental impact on different aspects of the design process. The next section examines the inverse proposal, that the architecture of the region is necessarily international in its scope and aspirations. This section also describes the economic and social impact of the museum, gallery or cultural centre—the well known ‘Bilbao effect’. Finally, the interpretation of architecture as art is
described. In total, these are four, closely connected themes—exile, internationalism, economic impact and architecture as art—that permeate the different chapters in the present volume. Importantly, these themes should be read in parallel with the three components of the analytical framework developed in chapter one—iso1ation, the periphery and colonisation.

Pacific and Atlantic Fissures

The buildings featured in the previous chapters in this book circle the Australian landmass, clinging to its continental edge, while others balance on the faulted geomorphology of New Zealand’s north isle or are sited on islands scattered across Oceania. In the majority of these cases, one common factor is the Pacific Ocean. The dictionary definition of the word ‘pacific’ means ‘characterised by or tending to peace’; a tranquil place. Like many definitions, it has its origins as much in what it is, as what it is not. The Pacific is frequently framed in art, literature and film in opposition to the Atlantic. The Atlantic Ocean is described as cold and lashed with gale-force winds; a volatile, physically harsh environment effectively ringed by continents. In contrast, for explorers the Pacific Ocean must have seemed serene, warm, exotic and inviting. However, the Pacific is also wracked by storms and the heat is, in many ways, as dangerous as the cold. More importantly, as Chapter 1 in this book suggests, the Pacific can be conceptualised as an ocean containing segregated landmasses, whereas the Atlantic is an ocean ringed by land.

Of the two conditions, the Atlantic’s circumscribed state evokes a sense that it is contained or controlled, to the extent that anything on such a scale can be truly understood and appreciated. To border the Atlantic is to participate in a history of cultural, commercial and military exchanges that has been recorded in thousands of years of scholarship, art and literature. The great works of architecture in Europe and North America encircle the Atlantic Ocean. In contrast, the Pacific’s topography is one of fragments—reefs, islets, atolls, archipelagos and several island nations. This cannot be contained as or understood. Certainly Western history records the fortune and work-hardened pioneers in the history of the region’s native culture. We cannot be more acceptant of the opposite side of the globe from the worst, the sense of exile can can reveal by architecture; the ‘cultural cringe’ manifests. At its very least, the sense of exile can or displays a powerful desire to define the built environment. All of these geographical the previous chapters in the present volume. An appreciation of cultural identity. Despite this, some architects to breakdown the international practice of design.

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closely connected themes—exile, history as art—that permeate the themes should be read through an analytical framework developed in this book. Chapters circle the national, while others balance on the north isle or are sited on islands. Certainly Western history records the lives and passages of explorers, soldiers of fortune and work-hardened pioneers in Australasia and the Pacific. More recently, the history of the region’s native or indigenous people has begun to attain a similar level of recognition and acceptance. However, for many, to be situated on the opposite side of the globe from the Atlantic Ocean, is to be in exile. At its worst, the sense of exile can cause antipodeans to be apologetic for their architecture; the ‘cultural cringe’ many authors in the present volume identified. At its very least, the sense of exile can result in architecture that is self-conscious and displays a powerful desire to define the distinctive characteristics of the local built environment. All of these geographic and cultural factors have been raised in the previous chapters in the present book and all have an impact on the expression of cultural identity. Despite this, there is an equally strong desire on behalf of some architects to breakdown the sense of isolation and participate in an international practice of design.

The present volume demonstrates that museum, gallery and cultural architecture in the antipodes are as much concerned with global discourse as it is with local discourse. For example, while the National Museum of Australia is a serious building, it clearly lacks the sobriety and restraint that is normally associated with other museums in the region. With its bold pallet of forms, colours and textures, and with its cornucopia of conceptual ideas, the National Museum of Australia could easily upstage most, if not all, of the Northern hemisphere’s recent architectural wonders. Paradoxically, if the National Museum of Australia had been in built in London, Berlin, or even Bilbao the museums of Herzog and Demeuron, Libeskind and Gehry might have to share their limelight. The National Museum of Australia is even more curious for the fact that it is, despite appearances, a civic building funded by the nation’s tax payers to represent and contain their cultural heritage.
Various hypotheses can be offered for the libertarian spirit that permitted the National Museum of Australia to be designed and constructed in this way. It might be that antipodeans feel a need to make sufficient noise that they may be heard on the global stage. If this is the case then the National Museum of Australia could be viewed as a cry for attention. Alternatively, this may be an instance wherein a public building operates as a type of theme park; an attempt to attract tourists and associated funding that is now critical for the ongoing success of many of these buildings. This is one international trend in which, not all, of the constructed works of the present volume participate. Many museums in this volume have their origins in the need to attract investment, encourage tourism and to entice 'the creative classes' to live and work there. Federation Square in Melbourne is an excellent example of a building, which both houses culture (in its galleries), provides a space of performance (in its piazza forecourt) and has become an urban icon. Cox Howlett and Bailey Woodland's new Maritime Museum in Freemantle is equally conspicuous, with its postcard friendly 3-D curving forms poised over the water. It could be said that these buildings seek to emulate the Bilbao Guggenheim phenomenon—the revitalization of the city through the insertion of an iconic, arts building. There are other similarities as well that arise indirectly from the 'Bilbao effect'. For example, in contrast to museums of twenty and thirty years ago, the cultural centres, galleries and museums of today feature much larger travelling exhibition spaces, sprawling cafes, theatres and bookstores. Meanwhile, permanent holdings—the raison d'être of the traditional museum—are shuffled between extensive archival vaults and comparatively small permanent gallery spaces.

While the Bilbao effect—the forsaking of decorum for publicity—may account for the libertine spirit displayed in some of the works, there are other, equally plausible explanations. An alternative proposition is that places like Australia and New Zealand, are centres of received culture; they borrow ideas from the rest of the world in a raw state. Thus, the spatial isolation of the antipodes may allow new concepts to "raw" material and then developed an design is produced. Such a design is definitely local in its production. In and an appreciation for geometric t incubator and evolved into a brush as these isolated lands provided for kiwis and thylacine. However, the similar explanations that might be of being too closely associated with a Jencks has noted, the moment a most potentially moribund. In modern importance of publicity, rapidly aba the leading edge of design.

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antipodes may allow new concepts to be adopted or imported from overseas as
“raw” material and then developed and extrapolated until an exciting and original
design is produced. Such a design is both connected to the international but is also
defiantly local in its production. In design terms, the essence of postmodernity
and an appreciation for geometric topology may have merged in this cultural
incubator and evolved into a brash architectural presence, in much the same way
as these isolated lands provided fertile terrain for the evolution of kangaroos,
kiwis and thylacine. However, there are weaknesses in this proposition and
similar explanations that might be offered. Fundamentally, architects are wary of
being too closely associated with a particular style or movement. As Charles
Jencks has noted, the moment a movement is identified and labelled it is already
potential moribund.293 In modern society, the clever architect, aware of the
importance of publicity, rapidly abandons the old and as they strive to remain at
the leading edge of design.294

Despite the problems inherent in working within an established architectural
movement, during the period of work covered in the present book the architectural
fraternity in Australasia has been at the vanguard of two movements; Critical
Regionalism and the architecture of complexity. According to Kenneth Frampton,
Critical Regionalism accepts the importance of global culture but argues that such
trans-cultural or trans-spatial impulses must be mediated through regional
influences.295 Critical Regionalism represents an attempt to subvert the dominant
universal culture of architecture through local influences, which include tectonic
traditions, local materials, colours and textures, as well as environmental and geo-
spatial characteristics. Charles Jencks has promoted a more universal model of
design that is predicated on the notion that recent advances in science,
mathematics and computing should be reflected, however abstractly, in
architecture.296 While Jencks has been widely criticised for this view, there has
indeed been an avant garde global trend that has produced buildings inspired by
fractal geometry and topographic tiling.297 The Western Australian Maritime
Museum in Chapter 4 and Federation Square in Chapter 9 can be seen, respectively, as suitable illustrations of the propositions of Frampton and Jencks. The Tjibaou Culture Center in New Caledonia is also widely regarded as a triumph of Critical Regionalism; yet, as Chapter 10 notes, it is culturally insensitive on many levels.

Finally, the majority of the authors in previous chapters have framed the architecture they are investigating not merely as repositories of artefacts, but as artefacts in their own right. Indeed the premise of this book is that architectural forms are important cultural icons. Such forms are a product of both a designer's understanding of cultural identity and of a structure's capacity to become part of that culture over time. While there is considerable evidence in previous chapters to support such a proposition there is also a more contentious tendency to treat, promote and criticize architectural projects as if they are works of art. While iconic structures, including bridges, advertising billboards and cultural centres, can all contribute to the identity of a region this does not necessarily render any of these objects as a work of art. Of course, such a proposition cannot be defended without some sense of what art is. Indeed, art, as a self-conscious and definable category of human endeavour, may be—as Arthur Danto argues—a bygone paradigm in itself, that was expunged with the passing of a master narrative from The Renaissance until the emergence of Pop-Art in the 1960s. According to Danto, what is called contemporary art has been produced after the end of art, during an indefinite period with no stylistic or philosophical constraints. Works of what Danto calls 'post-historical' art, frequently encourage reflection upon their own being and becoming, to such an extent, that some post-historical art can be thought of as a kind of philosophy. Thus, when comparing museums to the array of artefacts and contemporary artworks displayed within them, it is worth asking whether or not the discipline of architecture is as diverse as the art world that it seeks to frame within itself. It could be argued that even the most flamboyant of the buildings within this volume, are the product of an homogeneous design culture, which is societies celebrated by the collection these buildings are as pluralistic as to elicit in their viewers the levels of refl can arouse. What is clear is that t distillation, creation and affirmation cannot successfully encompass the m expression of Australia, New Zealand.
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homogeneous design culture, which is, in a sense, at odds with the heterogeneous societies celebrated by the collections they house. It remains unclear whether these buildings are as pluralistic as the populations they serve, or whether they elicit in their viewers the levels of reflection that art, following Danto's definition, can arouse. What is clear is that they do perform an important role in the distillation, creation and affirmation of cultural identity, even if the do not, and cannot successfully encompass the myriad of facets that make up the cultural self-expression of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.
273 Andrew Ross, p.95.
282 Chris Wilson uses the same term (camouflage) for the Adobe stucco that was applied to make the Santa Fe style. The history of Santa Fe is contentious and violent and Wilson suggests that this has been covered up for tourist consumption. Chris Wilson, The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1997.
289 New Zealand’s Treaty House the house marking the birth of the nation, was prefabricated overseas.

Chapter 11

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el: NLNS "terrorists." p. 257.

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