CHAPTER 1

Geography, Culture and the Construction of Identity

Michael J. Ostwald and Steven Fleming
The University of Newcastle

Isolation and the periphery

A line drawn from the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, through the Earth’s centre, to the other side of the globe, arrives in a vast, brown desert. Not only is this place ostensibly dry or arid, it is also apparently devoid of human and animal life. The only motion visible in this desert is caused by the environment; the passage of winds across grassy plains, the rustling of leaves in stunted trees and the cracking of creek-beds as they dry in the sun. What animal life exists there is hidden below ground, or shelters in the shade of scattered trees. The tracks, nests or detritus left behind by the animals are the first sign that the land is inhabited. However, on closer inspection more overt signs record the passage of humans as well.

The geometric paths traced by road or rail-lines that slice across this terrain provide a stark counterpoint to the irregular network of gulleys and the distant, low lying hills. Some of these roads are lined with telegraph poles and others with dilapidated wire fences that signal the legal rights of the landowner rather than any real sense of physical possession. In Jacques Derrida’s meditation on the origins of language, he talks of the violence embodied in such lines and structures. They are like pen-strokes on a parchment; they record the intentions
of the author, the owner or the state regardless of whether the surface acknowledges their authority. This place, which is at once both desert and deserted, is the “outback”, the mythical locus of the continent of Australia.

You cannot find the outback marked on any map—it is not clear where it begins or ends. The outback is a colloquial term for the geographic heart of Australia. It refers to a remote, barren region that is sparsely populated. Importantly, the outback is as much defined by a sense of place as it is by a state of mind. Authors, poets and filmmakers have described the Australian outback as a site of environmental fear, cultural intolerance, sexual awakening, adolescent nightmares and aboriginal dreaming. It is central to the nation’s psyche; yet, it is poorly defined, rarely visited and has relatively few inhabitants. Simon Schama argues that all landscapes have some capacity to evoke particular emotional responses not unlike those attributed to the Australian desert. These emotional responses in turn explain the origins of local folk tales, myths and traditions. However, certain landscapes, like the Australian outback possess a dramatically heightened mythopoeic capacity. Paul Carter supports this contention, not only in terms of the agoraphobia such spaces can evoke, but also the particularly unsettling qualities of the Australian landscape. Part of this capacity of the land to evoke transcendent, mythical or profound psychological responses can be explained by returning to the analogy of the globe and the line traced from a northern ocean, apparently bordered by inhabited lands, to a number of southern landmasses surrounded by empty seas.

The simple spatial operation of passing a line through a globe of the world raises two important realisations about the Australasian region and its cultural identity. First, the region is geographically isolated from the dominant cultural and social hubs of Western civilisation. Historically, in Europe and the United Kingdom, the far extent of the world was initially unknowable, because it defied comprehension, and later simply unknown because its possibility was acknowledged even if it had not yet named, circumnavigated and colonised. Depending on whether the Pacific Islands, New Zealand or Australia plunders, a place of exotic civilisation and roles the region remained apart or Western world and its civilising influence.

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ing a line through a globe of the out the Australasian region and its phically isolated from the dominant ion. Historically, in Europe and the was initially unknowable, because it known because its possibility was acknowledged even if it had not yet been mapped. Later, once the region had been named, circumnavigated and colonised, it took on a different range of symbolic attributes. Depending on whether the particular geographic region is the South Pacific Islands, New Zealand or Australia, the area was seen as a resource to be plundered, a place of exotic civilisation or a site of forced exile. In all of these roles the region remained apart or separate, in a philosophical sense, from the Western world and its civilising influence.

The geographic isolation of Australasia has been noted by many scholars and used to explain a myriad of its cultural traits and practices. In architecture, this isolation is seen as engendering a practice of invention combined with a ‘make-do’ attitude; an approach celebrated in European criticism of both New Zealand and Australian architecture until recent times. For example, Phillip Goad traces the development of some recent architectural works from this tradition of the bush carpenter through to the “lyrical technologists” of today—architects like, Australia’s Peter Stutchbury who produce architecture from simple machine produced elements combined with recycled native hardwood. According to Goad, in Australia “[t]heorising and design experiment does not emerge from within the academy or within the journals, but on the building site.” Goad echoes Jennifer Taylor’s view that in Australia, “[t]he architect tends not to be a theorist, so the history of architecture is written in built solutions rather than in polemics and conceptual schemes.” While this proposition is necessarily a generalisation, and is less accurate today, it provides one possible theory for interpreting architecture in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

The second realisation raised by considering global geography is that the Australasian region is dominated by peripheral rather than medial spaces. For example, the vast majority of the Australian population lives in cities on the eastern seaboard (running from north to south, Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Wollongong and Melbourne). Other major cities are also coastal; Adelaide to the
similarly south, activity. The Pacific instead of the inhabitation of geography in the region is also part of the way in which architectural space is occupied.

The architectural writer and critic Philip Drew argues that Australia is a nation of fringe dwellers; not only do Australian cities cling to the continent’s edge, but Australian families, as a result of their lifestyle and the environment, are similarly liminal in their inhabitation patterns. For Drew, the quintessential Australian architectural space is the veranda. In the traditional Australasian house the veranda, a semi-enclosed space, circles two or more sides of the central enclosed and controlled domestic space. Historically such a house was a colonial structure introduced from Europe or the United Kingdom. Not only was the form of the house imported—its steep gabled roof and tightly compartmentalised interior—but it was also an overt attempt to translate a lifestyle and set of values from one country to another. However, the antipodean environment was not kind to such structures—neither the architecture nor the values embodied in them. The heat, dust and wind in central Australia and the tropical storms in northern Australia, parts of New Zealand and the Pacific Islands all gradually undermined the ability of the colonial house to provide adequate shelter. Moreover, the impact of the land is not only physical. The sublime power of the Australasian topography could not be blocked out by lace curtains on windows or neatly framed by glass-panelled doors. Just as the colonial house needed to be shielded from the elements so too it had to augment its boundaries to embrace or at least tolerate the landscape. The solution to the twin problem of physical and psychological wellbeing was to provide a transition structure between the harsh exterior and the calm interior. This structure was typically a veranda; a 'lean-to' roof supported on posts at its edge shelter from the sun, rain or dust. It seemed to extend the house into the a sense of protection.

The veranda is the archetypal Australian linear structures that, much like the sun, winds and rain. Modern coastal  structure display this lineage. At both an architectural and cultural values is through its simple formula or doctrine that each structure—be it a park, monument, produced it. One of the reasons for identity and the production of amorphous constructs. To further expression of cultural identity.
The people of New Zealand are on the edge of a vast ancient continent, raised by more recent tectonic plates of land fragments stretching Asia and America. This perimetricality in the region is also part of the sublime power of the Australasian environment was not to be equated shelter. The coastal living in Australia, the South Pacific Islands and New Zealand has historically been reliant on temporary, often linear structures that, much like the veranda, are only partially sheltered from the sun, winds and rain. Modern coastal houses in the region, even to the present day, display this lineage. At both an architectural and geographic scale, a sense of threshold linearity is a common feature. While it is possible to counter such a suggestion, there is much to support the argument that, in a spatial sense, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands are inhabited at the periphery and that this may be part of the region's cultural identity.

One important and enduring way in which any society expresses its political and cultural values is through its public architecture. Despite this, there is no simple formula or doctrine that elucidates the relationship between a physical structure—be it a park, monument, building or urban space—and the culture that produced it. One of the reasons for this lack of understanding is that both cultural identity and the production of architectural meaning are intricate, fluid and amorphous constructs. To further complicate matters, many developed parts of the world are sufficiently geographically, historically and politically complicated that they provide relatively poor case studies for considering the architectural expression of cultural identity.
The present volume is focussed on the Australasian and associated Pacific region precisely because its geography and history has limited the number of complications, which might otherwise render an enquiry into ‘architecture as cultural expression’ meaningless. This is not to say that the endeavour is straightforward or will be conclusive. All of the regions in the present volume do possess some broad spatial characteristics in common. As previously identified, the concepts of isolation and the periphery provide a valuable lens through which the question of cultural identity in Australasian architecture may be viewed. Similarly, all of the regions also possess a history of colonisation wherein a native, indigenous of aboriginal culture has been partly subsumed into a European culture. Despite these broad similarities, the forces shaping architecture are more complex than just colonisation, isolation, and the periphery.

Major public buildings, and particularly those that seek to embody national cultural or social values (museums, art galleries and cultural centres), tend to draw on geography, local traditions and spatial qualities as a starting point. However, they are also inspired by poetry, literature, local politics, sport and even fictional events to shape their expression.15 Furthermore, in the last decade several Australasian firms have developed an approach to architecture that draws on the sciences of complexity or topographic geometry for its inspiration.16 Other designers have employed satire, humour and irony in their public buildings, parks and urban spaces. This is why any attempt to offer an explanation for the way in which multiple buildings express cultural identity is unlikely to result in an unequivocal conclusion. However, a review of the recent cultural constructions in the antipodes does reveal a number of shared concerns and approaches to architectural expression.

Cultural Constructions in the Ant

The present book comprises buildings, structures or spaces in a region. Specifically, all of the cultural centres while the places are public performance. These structures and political values of the buildings also necessarily reflect importantly, indicators of the way themselves. As many of the authors intricately concerned with the expression spaces or structures reviewed in the The exception is Jørn Utzon’s referenced in different ways by the as a precedent, a benchmark for contributions of the authors have independently of the region’s

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Cultural Constructions in the Antipodes

The present book comprises of a series of nine studies of major public buildings, structures or spaces in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. Specifically, all of the buildings function as museums, galleries or cultural centres while the places are frequently urban plazas, gardens or sites of public performance. These structures and spaces express the philosophical, cultural and political values of the society that has produced them. While such buildings also necessarily reflect their designers’ intentions they are, more importantly, indicators of the way in which nations, regions and groups see themselves. As many of the authors in the present volume note, such buildings are intricately concerned with the expression of identity. All but one of the buildings, spaces or structures reviewed in the present volume have been recently completed. The exception is Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera House, a structure, which is referenced in different ways by the chapters in the present volume. Whether it is as a precedent, a benchmark for comparison or a focus of critical reflection most of the authors have independently drawn connections between the structures they are analysing and one of the region’s greatest architectural works.

In chapter 2, the first of the nine separate studies, Stephen Frith considers the modernist architectural dictum that “form follows function” in relation to the Sydney Opera House. While Utzon’s structure ignores many of the era’s architectural truisms it has been able to avoid the criticism that would normally follow such a rejection. This realisation leads Frith to question the way in which Utzon’s design has been able to achieve its lasting recognition. Frith postulates that the theory of rhetoric may be used to explain the structural eloquence of Utzon’s work. In particular, the chapter develops this argument to illuminate the experiential qualities that Utzon was able to achieve. For example, Frith traces the way in which users of the Opera House are lead through a series of spaces that carefully choreograph their experience, which takes the user away from the modern city and into a more idealised space of fantasy and ‘make-believe’.
Significantly, this chapter identifies one of the key qualities of the building as its geographic setting—on a platform connecting the continent to the water. Frith alludes to both the sense of the periphery and of isolation when he describes the stage on which the Opera House is sited, as both a gesture towards the edge of the landmass and as a form of mythmaking in its creation of an artificial geology for the site.

New Zealand’s Te Papa Tongarewa Museum in Wellington was described at an early stage of its design as a reaction against the Sydney Opera House. In Michael Linzey’s analysis of Te Papa Tongarewa in Chapter 3, he asks, “how can a work of architecture contribute to the national identity?” Linzey answers this difficult question through his analysis of Te Papa Tongarewa and through reference to the works of Plato. In particular, the chapter draws on Derrida’s argument that architecture can achieve some notion of national identity if it can bridge between the reality, which is intelligible (the known qualities of an object) and that which is visible (the emotional experience of the object). A major theme in Linzey’s chapter draws on the concept of the fractured edge. The Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, is arranged around the concept of the geomorphological fault. This a reference not only to Wellington’s location in an earthquake zones (at the edge of a plate), but also to the ever-present underworld of myth and legend, which is evoked in Te Papa Tongarewa’s labyrinthine interior spaces.

In Chapter 4, William Taylor considers the relationship between Western Australia’s new Maritime Museum in Fremantle and the Swan Bell Tower in nearby Perth. Whereas in previous chapters Linzey and Frith refer indirectly to geographic readings of the periphery, Taylor develops a detailed overview of the social and cultural connection that exists between coastal architecture, the ocean and sea-going vessels. The chapter draws out a number of relevant spatial and social connections that exist in liminal zones and which traditional architecture accentuates. Taylor describes the the Sydney Opera House maroon Swan Bell Tower, it alludes to isolated communities and the ‘imperialist nostalgia’. Taylor considers the relationship between contrived existence. His critique of the two does the difference between cultural architectural expression of cultural

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accentuates. Taylor describes the Maritime Museum as being like a fragment of the Sydney Opera House marooned on the opposite coast of Australia. Like the Swan Bell Tower, it alludes to the powerful relationship between people in isolated communities and the sea even if it ultimately reveals a kind of ‘imperialist nostalgia’. Taylor concludes by offering a comparison of the relationship between contrived cultural icons and the rich heritage that once existed. His critique of the two structures can be read as a process of uncovering the difference between cultural identity, which is rich and diverse, and the architectural expression of cultural identity, which is often artificial and touristic.

The method of cultural critique proposed by Taylor is further developed in Ali Mozaffari’s chapter, which contains an analysis of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. In terms of Adorno’s writings on mimesis, Mozaffari explores the shared ideological assumptions of the building’s advocates and detractors. Mozaffari contends that a close reading of the National Museum of Australia reveals both a seemingly contradictory enlightenment impulse and a curiously fetishistic approach to architectural form. In the first instance, the chapter uncovers a range of deeply traditional values hidden beneath the outwardly subversive shell of the museum. In the second case, Mozaffari explains the architectural and formal games played by the designers; an approach, which references famous buildings and places them in an ironic context. This chapter also explicitly considers the spatial consequences of the periphery arguing that the rise of the ‘cultural cringe’ is associated with the inhabitation of marginal spaces.

At the heart of the National Museum of Australia in Canberra is a so-called ‘garden’; a space of painted concrete and richly layered icons that, much like the Australian outback, is largely devoid of plant or animal life. In Chapter 6, Naomi Stead considers this heavily coded, palimpsestic work as an allegory for the Australian landscape; a contested territory where the isolation of the continent’s centre is juxtaposed with its mapping and naming, division by cars and eventual
inhabitation in the suburban backyards of coastal cities. Stead's unravelling of the garden and its references reveals the problems of cultural identity especially insofar as they pertain to the landscape. The garden acknowledges the spatial conditions of the periphery and of isolation as it seeks to fashion a new lore of place and location. The space is appropriately known as the "Garden of Australian Dreams"; a reference to the revival of the importance of mythmaking that is embodied in this, and a number of the other projects in the present volume.

Chapter 7 investigates the cultural buildings of one of Australia's foremost architectural designers, Gregory Burgess. According to its author, Harriet Edquist, Burgess's architecture, and in particular his Eltham Library, reveals a deep concern for the human condition. Edquist traces Burgess's design philosophy and uncovers an attempt to re-integrate science, technology, spiritually and symbolism in built form. Burgess's Eltham Library displays a range of esoteric geometric traces that allude to the uneasy tension that exists between modern Australasian society and the ancient landmass it occupies. Edquist, like Stead, unravels the connections between design and landscape not by way of science, but through an acceptance of the importance of myth, allegory and legend in antipodean culture.

Changing approaches to cultural identity are exposed in Philip Goad's analysis of the National Gallery of Victoria; a building initially constructed in 1960 and recently the focus of a major reconstruction. Goad's analysis of the building, its history and spaces, reveals a shift in expression from a structure which originally exhibited local Oriental and Italian influences, but has since become internationalised into a more orthodox structure. For Goad the original building 'asserted a peculiarly local' civic vision which argued that, 'at the antipodean periphery, an architectural blending of East and West might be realised.' Like the other authors in the present volume Goad identifies the role played by linear and perimetric spaces in the building along with the famous curved water wall; a reference to the coastal edge. Goad concludes by arguing that before a structure is changed its ban and appreciated. Moreover, there of various periods that cannot be s them.

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In Chapter 9, Davina Jackson examines Federation Square, a short walk from the National Gallery of Victoria in geographic terms but a considerable departure in its formal, philosophical and aesthetic resolution. Jackson summarises the background to this major urban project and a critique of it associated with the concept of civic decorum. Jackson rejects this criticism and proposes instead that Federation Square is an architectural expression of society’s transition from an industrial to a digital age. For Jackson, this architecture of topographic tiles and fractured planes is an architecture suited to modern Australasian urbanism in general and the riverside of Melbourne in particular.

Reflecting on Pacific cultural centres in Chapter 10, Mike Austin highlights architecture’s problematic and often paradoxical role in reflecting and defining cultures, which their architects seldom belong to. In this chapter, Austin traces the spread of cultural centres across the pacific region starting on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, moving to Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and then concluding with Renzo Piano’s Tjibaou Culture Center in New Caledonia. In this chapter, Austin notes that the line between theme park and cultural centre is a very fine one especially when the architecture is framing only one version of history, or only one facet of a region’s culture.

Bringing together a series of investigations of contemporary antipodean cultural structures serves a number of purposes. One of the major aims of the present work is to consider the relationship between architectural expression and cultural identity. The first and last chapters by the editors make a case for several important themes, including the spatial qualities of isolation and the periphery and
the difficulty of mitigating colonial influence, which mediate between formal expression and societal character. The present volume also provides an important occasion for reflection, comparison and celebration. It offers an opportunity to consider architecture's capacity to intellectually and spiritually enrich the wider community. The chapters related to each major building not only serve to illuminate each commission, the values of its client and designer, but they also demonstrate the role that architecture plays in cultural reflection. While the focus of the majority of the work is on how architecture seeks to reflect the cultural identity of a region, a secondary theme is present in many of the works; how does an architectural work shape the culture around it after its completion? All of these issues are considered in the following chapters and in the analysis of more than 20 major structures, buildings, gardens and spaces.

Introduction

Following Jørn Utzon's win in Sydney Opera House, the efforts Utzon's master-work, especially that as something of a struggle. A magazine, Architecture Record, 'dishonesty' of the shells, a mere however, the Sydney Opera House building, but the modernist critic greatness, as the architecture does regard as appropriate: its 'form' de once reserved in its use of material than being a 'decorated diagram,' 'formalist,' where an object such pressed into service underneath it. expunged from modernism, suspect how is the Good Modernist to resp takes the breath away?
NOTES

Preface


Chapter 1

Chapter 2

23 Examples include the anonymous manual known as Ad Herennium, Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria or Cicero’s Orator. Quintilian, for example, places judgement about particular matters as being had in hand with invention: ‘For my own part I do not believe that invention can exist apart from judgement.’ Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, III.3.5, H. E. Butler trans., Loeb Classical Library, London, William Heinemann, New York, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921, Vol. I, p. 384: Ego porro ne invenisset quidem credo eum, qui non iudicavit. Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria, II.vii, 6.
24 QUINTILIAN, INSTITUTIO ORATORIA, VI.II.
26 For different accounts, see François Fromonot, Jorn Utzon, The Sydney Opera House, Corte Madera, CA, Gingko Press (Electra), p.113; Philip Drew, The Masterpiece, Jorn Utzon, A Secret Life, South Yarra, Vic, Hardie Grant Books, 1999, p.101; Richard Weston, Utzon – Inspiration – Vision – Architecture, p. 184, who cites Utzon from the “Edge of the Possible” video: “The halls were intended to fit inside, like walnuts in a shell.”

Chapter 3

33 Longinus, On the Sublime, B. Einarson, The text named “Dionysius or Longinus O from the tenth century of the codex Parisin modern texts are taken. It was probably wri as a Greek scholar addressing Roman fri treatise is lost, with possibly more lost from Jorn Utzon, ‘Letter to H. Ingham Ashw Canberra: National Library of Australia.
41 Jorn Utzon, ‘Minor Hall’, Zodiac 14, 19 also Richard Weston, Utzon – Inspiration -
42 Jorn Utzon in a passage on the Chamber Vision – Architecture, p. 199.

Chapter 3