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Introduction

Architecture in Dialogue with an Activated Ground: Unreasonable Creatures presents an investigation into the epistemological processes of my architectural practice, in which personal experiences are put in relation to a wider context. Themes discussed include the emergence of space in a staged opposition between the architectural object and the ground, and between emotive cognition and analytic synthesis in the design act. In both oppositions, there is a productive engagement with 'unreasonable' thought or behaviours. The work presented here documents an approach to architectural design in which these oppositions (confrontations) and the unreasonable are understood as constructive pathways towards developing the performative potential of designs that tap into local histories and voices, including those of the seemingly inanimate – the architecture itself and the ground it sits upon – to inform the site-related production of architectural character and space. In doing so, the work offers encouragement to accept the usefulness and validity of the unreasonable in architecture.

Through this research, I seek to validate the strategies I deploy to facilitate the poetic aspects of architecture within a discourse whose evaluation parameters predominantly involve reason. By examining my own work and that of other designers, I will show how relinquishing control and harnessing seemingly illogical actions can become tools in fostering the emergence of new ideas and solutions in an otherwise highly regimented environment. The context of my design work is set by the relationships between existing fabrics and a secondary layer of architectural form, whose investigation contributes to the discourse on sensible models of urban growth, unfolding strategies for retrofit, additions and densification. The work not only explores how the interests of multiple custodians and stakeholders are accommodated, but also examines the architect's responsibility to find even more histories and voices to actualise unrecognised potentials and desires. In doing so, the work offers a critique on the simplistic appropriation of modernity in architecture while also raising debates about the values pursued in design approval processes and the ways in which site relatedness is both produced and judged.

The inquiry is carried out through design projects and is reciprocally influenced by text-based observations. Accordingly, the findings are communicated in the language of the discipline – drawings, renders, photographs – and accompanied by a written exegesis. The introspective analysis of my

architectural work and the in-depth description of the creative processes steering it offer a critical perspective on my own work in relation to that of other designers and architects. Unfolding the characteristics of my practice, the investigation underwent three steps of reflection: understanding the aims and concerns of past work, testing the gained insights against projects that are currently in production and finally speculating about the ramifications of this research for future design works.

The research investigates how unreasonable processes contribute to architectural production when balanced with intellectual synthesis. Other dualities include working between Austria and Australia, and the alternating roles occupied within the practice-based research of being both the observer and the observed. It was expected that the overlay of these three different dualities – unreasonable versus analytic, observer versus observed, Austria versus Australia – would allow me to discern the blind spots in my practice and unfold insights that are of value to the wider community, addressing issues, values and questions inherent to the design and production of architecture in general. Dialogues with my peers and critics at RMIT's Practice Research Symposiums have informed the investigations documented here.

The text is structured into 15 chapters that guide the reader through my reflective practice.

Coinage | personal introduces my non-architectural background that established my spatial intelligence.[1] It concerns aspects of growing up in a family of designers and makers, as well as my studies in communication design, both of which influence the manner in which I practise today.

Coinage | austrian reveals the key notions and sensibilities of a community of artists, practitioners and intellectuals embracing sculptural architecture in Austria, which have influenced my architectural upbringing. Similarities and differences in their architectural values and corresponding design tools are identified.

Coinage | angewandte examines the ways in which the University of Applied Arts Vienna and my related travels have influenced not only my own and fellow peers' value systems, but also the way in which I teach architecture in a different academic context today.

Coinage | mentors introduces peers and role models that have informed my practice and manner of operation. It outlines similarities and differences in the methods and values we pursue and relates them to a wider context.

Modes | unreasonable examines a three-fold project choreography, defined by a central spine of morphological genesis, and two different modes of interrogation: one emotive, the other analytic. The chapter then expands on the ways in which the unreasonable is intentionally incorporated into my own practice, as well as those of other designers and artists.

Modes | analytic interrogates the way in which I aim to view a design task through

the eyes of an external observer. This leads to a discussion around second-order observation and the role of graphic representation in determining purpose and meaning beyond my own personal agendas.

Agents | characters is devoted to illustrating the evolution of a project from field to figure to character. This is placed in relation to the modes of operation (emotive cognition and intellectual synthesis), the overall aims and the cultural background of my practice. After addressing past work and present tendencies, future developments are foreshadowed.

Agents | space investigates the way in which different forms of space materialise in response to mediating the dialogue between the architectural object and its context. This is discussed in relation to my Austrian coinage and the processes I deploy to sense and cultivate the poetic qualities of architecture.

Agents | ground explores how I tap into local histories and voices to inform the site-related production of architectural character and space. While questioning traditional notions of site relatedness, the work investigates the performative relationship between object and ground, and why people have emotional responses to architecturally designed spaces.

The following chapters set out to validate the previously described revelations by examining projects from different work scenarios – built, speculative, experimental and teaching.

Case study | speculative reveals in which ways strategies developed in architecture may be relevant to landscape projects as well, shifting the previous focus on formal expression towards the performative relationship between object and the ground, using the *River Torrens footbridge* project as an example.

Case study | built follows the project *Thalia Graz* and explores how urban consolidation policies are increasingly challenging architects to work on sites that are articulated by multiple custodians and stakeholders. It also examines the architect's responsibility to identify even more histories and voices, appreciate unique conditions and realise individual interventions.

Case study | experimental examines how artistic installations allow me to explore the topics of my research in a medium that is free from programme or functional constraints, revealing the aspirations and contradictions that are present in my work. *Dissecting the whale* is the most recent step in this series; it reads as a synthesis of my past practice while also providing an outlook into future work.

Case study | teaching links my role as a teacher with my architectural design research, showing how explorative techniques are employed to lure students beyond their comfort zone, recognise the affordance of form and reflect on the alternative realities that may be developed from it.

Conclusion draws together 'what', 'how' and 'why' I design the way I do. It

summarises the different investigations, highlights its major discoveries and speculates on the implications for future practice arising from this research.
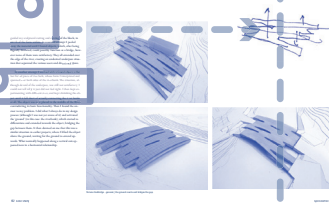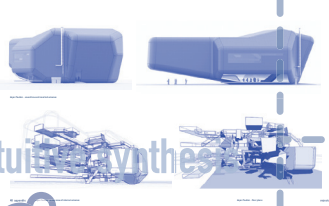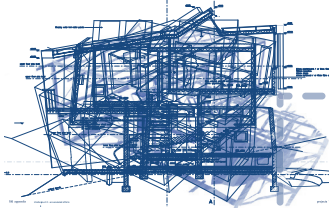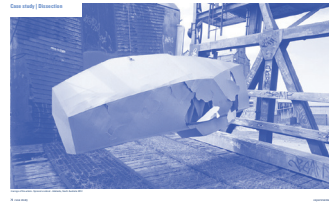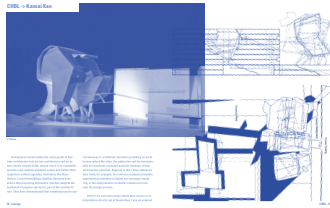
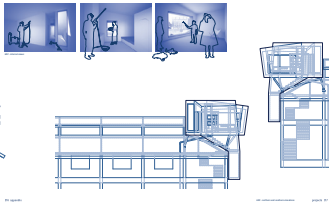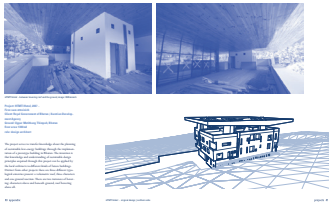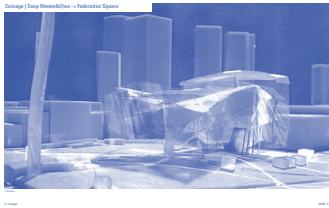<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

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Note
1. I use the term with reference to the work of Leon van Schaik in *Spatial Intelligence*.

2.1 following page:
Project matrix | covering past
and present practice, Melbourne,
Australia 2014

field

site

figure

ground

character

activated

dissection

meaning

$x_1, x_2, x_3...$

Communication Design

intellectual synthesis

frame of reference

conceptualisation

Coinage | Coop Himmelb(l)au -> Federation Square

CHBL -> Kansai Kan

EDK -> Biskanone

Case study | Dissection

Projects | Uralla Court II

Projects | Austrian Expo Pavilion
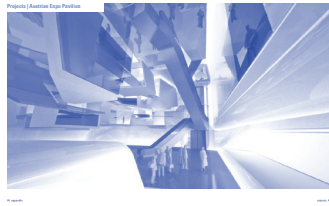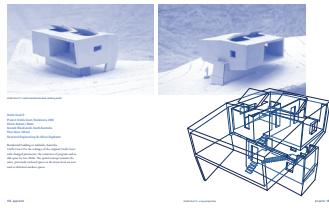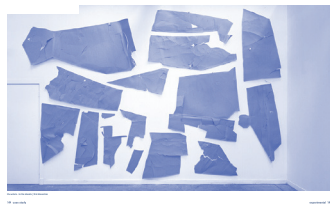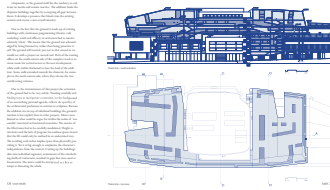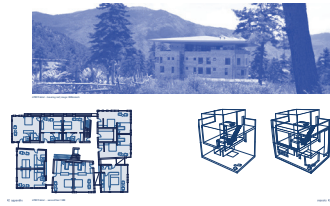
intuitive synthesis

emotive cognition

Case study | River Terrace footbridge

form - space