



RMIT DESIGN ARCHIVES JOURNAL

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ARCHIVES



All Australian Graffiti was started by Con Aslanis, born Athens 1948, Mimmo Cozzolino, born Naples 1949, Geoff Cook, joined by Tony Ward, born East Melbourne 1943, Neil Curtis, born West Ham, England, 1950, and Meg Williams, born As for Kevin Pappas . . . when a Greek has been in Australia for 20 years and he returns to the old country, his accent is so t



Geoff Cook

Izy Marmur

Tony Ward

Neil C

FRONT SOLID PMS 368 ~~SOLID TO GRANT~~ TYPE OVERPRINT SOLID Green over ~~STONE~~ ~~STONE~~



ARCHIVES

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We acknowledge the people of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct our business and we respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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Cover
The Catacombs of Solaris, 2016, Ian MacLarty, Linux/Windows/Mac

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Page artwork for *The Kevin Pappas Tear-Out Postcard Book*, 1977, designer, Mimmo Cozzolino, photographer, Bob Bourne, RMIT Design Archives.

Below
Tiger Stripe textile design, c. 1937–47, designer, Frances Burke, RMIT Design Archives, ©RMIT University

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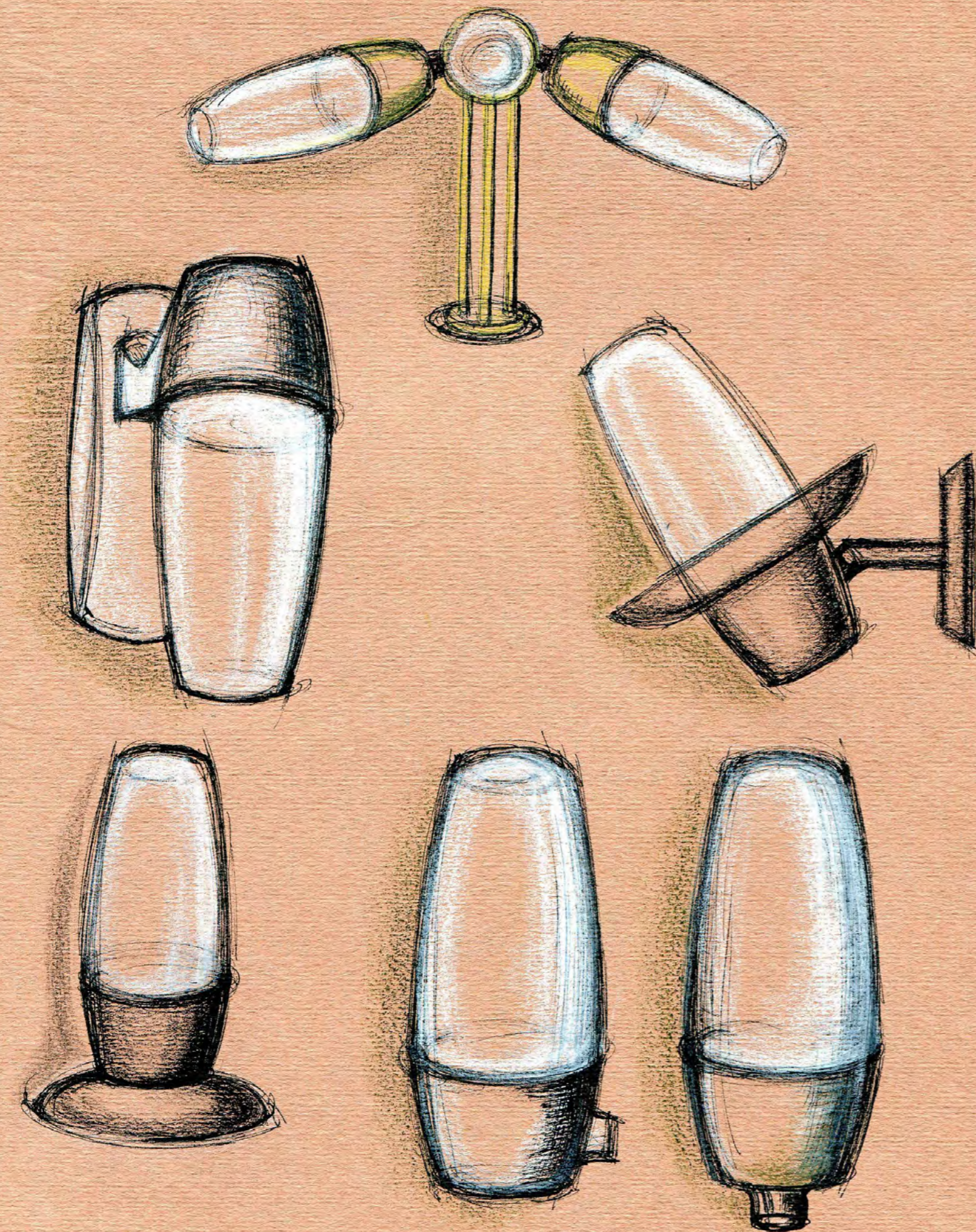
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In 2020, RMIT Design Archives commissioned a Significance Assessment of the collection, supported by the National Library of Australia (NLA) through the Community Heritage Grants Program funded by the Australian Government. The assessment, conducted by heritage consultant Melinda Mockridge, concludes that the RMIT Design Archives is “of significance at a national level for its holdings of exemplary Australian design.”

This issue of the RDAJ explores the significance of design archives – and the process of design archiving – in general, and of the RMIT Design Archives more specifically. There are multiple ways to describe an archive, its significance, and to whom and why it is significant and each of the articles reflects on these complexities in different ways. The contributors to this issue showcase the value of design – social, cultural, emotional, environmental – as artefact from the past and as a future-facing practice. To different degrees and in different registers, each article also articulates the value of design history as a lens with which to view the world, and the value of design archives as a resource with which to intervene in the world.

As community cultural heritage collections, design archives can be understood as significant within a wider, established archival and museum framework. The Significance Assessment focusses on specific criteria as articulated in *Significance 2.0 – a guide to assessing the significance of collection* (2009): the degree to which a cultural or heritage collection has historic, artistic or aesthetic, scientific or research potential, and social or spiritual significance. Excerpts from the Assessment, presented at the centre of this issue, detail some of the ways in which the RDA meets these criteria. Not least, the Assessment notes the RDA’s historical significance at a national level in documenting the directions of design and architectural practice, particularly from the 1950s onwards, in relation to the specific social, economic, industrial and aesthetic histories of post-war Australia. Its historical significance makes the archive significant for research, particularly, and provides opportunities for greater social and educational engagement at RMIT, in Melbourne and much more widely.

The other articles in this issue articulate the significance of design archives, as resources that can be activated to support people in questioning and engaging with existing conditions and decisions around how to change them, whether for societal, economic or environmental good. They layer perspectives and practices across history, social engagement, curating, design and architecture to activate design archives in powerful, future-facing ways.

In their articles, Helen Stuckey and Anna Talley and Fleur Elkerton present design archives in the process of creation, using the iterative development integral to design practice to prototype not only an archive but this process. They demonstrate how the formation of a design archive can itself be a critical creative act with research, educational and public benefits. Talley and Elkerton present *Design in Quarantine*, their award-winning project to create a real-time digital archive of designers’ responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Working in the context of the creative community actions to support each other that typified the early months of the pandemic in the UK as elsewhere, Elkerton and Talley propose a way for design historians and archivists to engage actively through material and visual culture, even when isolated and online.

Design archives and collections are integral to exhibition-making, but to have an exhibition of design, someone needs to have collected the material. Stuckey looks to the relationship of cultural memory, technological change and proprietary interests involved in archiving born-digital design, asking: How do you devise a process for archiving game design, in which the stages of the process themselves are meaningful, for generating, archiving, communicating and preserving knowledge? As she explains, working with emergent games designers to create an archive of the Melbourne games design community enables students to understand the specific social, cultural and economic nature of the local industry.

Opposite
Drawing of Kempthorne
Well Glass Wall Bracket
Lamp, c. 1950s, designers
Joyce Coffey and Selwyn
Coffey, illustrator, Joyce
Coffey, RMIT Design
Archives.

Opposite
Materials from the Fashion Design Council archive, RMIT Design Archives, photographer Tobias Titz.

Design archives embody the power structures and values that create local, industrial and national communities, both as repositories of material and visual culture created in these milieus and as designed artefacts, themselves, whose collection and preservation policies, categories and resourcing reflect past and present priorities. In Brazil as in Australia, flipping the lens towards the archive itself can make visible those workings of power, and has been a powerful mode for historians to problematise colonial histories and their legacies of inequality. In her article, Livia Rezende grapples with the layers of Brazil's colonial histories through the lens of design history, with its focus on artefacts as evidence. Her generous, reflexive article on her experiences working with and in several design archives in Rio de Janeiro presents and engages with uncomfortable truths around power and memory, demonstrating how design archives can serve this greater civic function.

Activating the archives can contribute to critical, thoughtful, hopefully ethical engagement with fundamental societal challenges. In his article on an exhibition of social housing in the UK drawn from the RIBA Archive, Rory Hyde asks how archives might prompt architects, planners, city council members and others involved in the design, procurement and delivery of public design today to reflect on and recognise the necessary aspects of design that is effective for its users, not least residents in social housing. Without an archive, we lose an important element of our capacity to reflect on successful models, and indeed to know them at all. Design archives can provide prototypes and, if well-collected and preserved, illuminate their performance and users' experiences of them over time. Hyde uses his experience of working with the RIBA Archive to draw a contrast with Australia, where the important contributions architecture made to social housing in Melbourne in the 1980s and 1990s have not been assembled in an accessible public repository and therefore cannot provide models for present practice where they would be most valuable.

Archives like the RMIT Design Archives – indeed, partnerships between archives and design schools more widely – enable researchers and teachers in live design environments to involve students in archiving and think through these problems as part of their professional and academic training, towards participation as thoughtful contributors to Melbourne's design ecosystem. Design archiving as a practice embeds into those who undertake it an understanding of and investment in the ecosystem and the value of design. Design archive practice, as the articles in this issue of the RDAJ demonstrate, is revelatory and generative, in that it accepts the propositional nature of past design, continually reimagined in the present.

Archives such as the RMIT Design Archives are a public resource and contribute to the public good in their capacity to act as agents for enquiry into the nature of our cultural heritage as it has been shaped by design in all its aspects. One of the findings of Mockridge's Significance Assessment has to do with the physical arrangement of the collections. As she notes: "Through their co-location, many archives held tell a vivid story of the interrelationships of people and practice, émigré connections and spheres of influence and support in the Melbourne design community post-war". What Mockridge alludes to here is the way the RDA replicates the infrastructure of a design ecosystem, one that relies on networks, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. An image, in fact, of design practice today.

Harriet Edquist and Sarah Teasley
Editors







PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

‘Deep Encounters’ with the Archives: Reflections of a Design Historian in Brazil (in two acts)

Livia Lazzaro Rezende

Our capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons will be severely hampered if we rely exclusively on those aspects of the Western archive that disregard other epistemic traditions. — ACHILLE MBEMBE¹

ABSTRACT

Twenty years apart yet methodologically close, the two instances of archival research I explore in this article frame design archives as powerful tools for the study and undoing of settler-colonialist and imperialist epistemologies. In the first instance, I offer a historical narrative and critical analysis of my first encounter with an archive, an incidental design collection resulting from legal practices implemented in nineteenth-century imperial Brazil. In the second instance—a recent return to the Brazilian archives—I foreground positionality and the impact of

archival research on the researcher. I recount my search for documentary evidence that turned, unexpectedly, into a layered unpacking of the archive site itself as material evidence of past and present structural violence. In this article, I approach archival work as ‘deep encounters’, as does Saidiya Hartman when acknowledging the agency of instinct, intuition, emotions, and chance in history writing as means to work with the omissions, debris and erasures of colonial histories and histories of coloniality.

ACT ONE

Imperial and archival formations

In 1875 a new legal practice began in the Empire of Brazil: whoever wished to turn a commercial mark into an exclusive property distinct from market competitors could register it at the nearest Imperial Commercial Board (Junta Comercial do Império). The procedure was simple: a manufacturer, trader or their attorney presented two physical copies of the trademark design to the Board registrar who—after some bureaucratic measures—returned to the applicant one of the physical copies with a stamp that proved registration of ownership. The second copy was kept by the Board as legal evidence of private property pasted on a register book. The physical copies of trademarks were presented in a variety of ways: from quick freehand sketches on simple paper to elaborately designed labels printed via lithographic, typographic, or engraving means. After being deposited with the Board, the trademark was published in the Brazilian Official Gazette (Diário Oficial), or another high-circulation newspaper, accompanied by a descriptive text, registration date and time and the trademark owner’s name. Next, the newspaper clipping was attached to the Board’s register book completing the registration process. Trademark design, thus, became a public cultural form while at the same time a private property exclusive to the depository and, as with any private property in capitalism, protected by law.²

This legal practice, although timely if compared to international trademark legislation, was short-lived.³ In 1889, a military and republican coup ousted the Brazilian Emperor and installed the Provisional Republican Government who suspended the Board’s responsibility for trademark registration in 1890. A few decades later, the Brazilian National Archives acquired the Board’s collection, which remained unprocessed until the register books were re-discovered and studied by me in the early 2000s. These books contain more than a thousand trademarks and a slightly smaller number of printed labels, mostly of consumable goods.⁴ The labels—bearing their founders’ trade and product names, business addresses, places of

origin, awards granted, letterings and imagery—encapsulate vast historical evidence of how nineteenth-century lawmakers, manufacturers, traders, designers, printers, and consumers viewed and negotiated their worlds through designed artifacts. What started as a legal requirement for ruling commercial transactions in an expanding capitalist society became—unintendedly—one of the most rich and rare collections of graphic design from the Empire of Brazil.⁵ But before I discuss further why this collection remained dormant for so long and how the study of this archival source helped transform me from a designer into a design historian, let’s turn our attention to the participation of these labels in forming their historical imperial context.

1808 marked the beginning of a momentous and conflicting period in Brazilian colonial and imperial histories. The Portuguese Crown and Court, fleeing the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, established themselves in Rio de Janeiro. This unprecedented political event elevated Brazil from a former colony to the seat of the Portuguese Empire in 1808 and to the Kingdom of Brazil in 1815, when the king returned to Portugal. With the king Dom João VI, the Royal Library and Brazil’s first official printing press also arrived. In May 1808, the Royal Press (Impressão Régia) was established, ending the ban on printing presses imposed by Portugal with the aim of controlling life and the spread of ideas in its far away colony.⁶

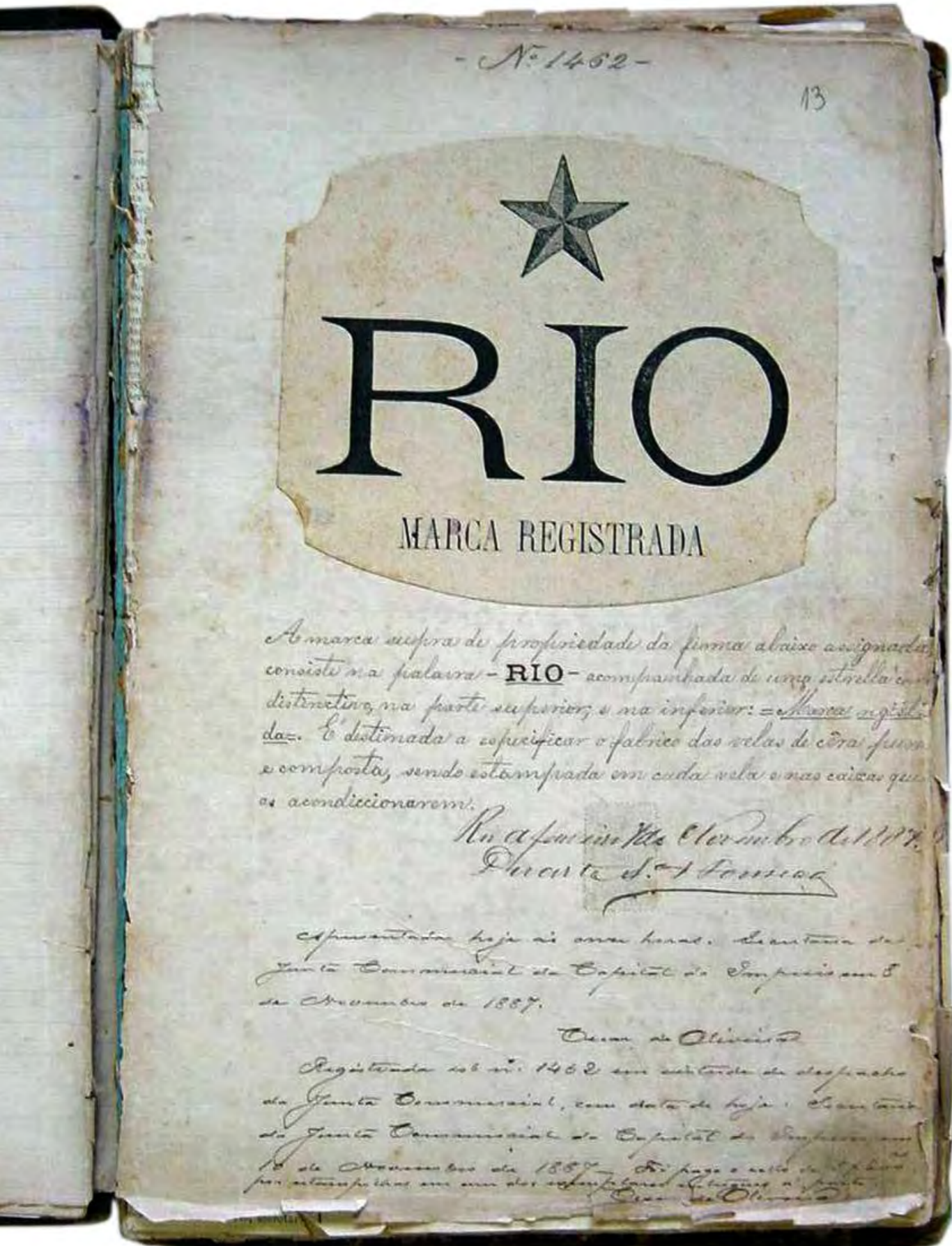
In 1822, Dom Pedro I, the prince regent, proclaimed Brazil’s independence from Portugal and established the Empire of Brazil’s First Reign (1822–1840). Brazil’s independence, having been proclaimed by a prince regent still linked to European nobility, meant continuity with the former order rather than revolutionary change. Notably, the abduction of African peoples and their enslavement to work on stolen Indigenous land allocated to a few and powerful local landowners—a key and brutal trait of the colonial structures in Brazil—persisted until abolition in 1888. Post-independence, those in positions of power were challenged to keep the country’s territory of continental proportions unified, to maintain social cohesion among a culturally and linguistically diverse population, and and to bring competing political and economic interests together.

Opposite

One of the register books deposited at the Imperial Commercial Board (1887), designer unknown, photographer Livia L. Rezende, BR RJANRIO 9X National Archives, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Previous Pages

‘Take-over of the Copacabana fort, Rio de Janeiro that initiated the military coup in Brazil, April 1, 1964, published April 2, 1964’, photographer Evandro Teixeira, Evandro Teixeira/Instituto Moreira Salles Collection



Continued



Right
The ‘RIO’ trademark
published in the
Official Gazette of the
Empire of Brazil (1887),
photographer Livia L
Rezende, BR RJANRIO
9X National Archives, Rio
de Janeiro, Brazil

Top Left
Textile(?) label, ‘Agora
Sim!’, designer unknown,
BR RJANRIO 9X National
Archives, Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil

Top Centre
Chocolate label for the
Imperial Fabrica de
Chocolate a Vapor A. J. de
Brito, designer unknown,
BR RJANRIO 9X National
Archives, Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil

Top Right
Cigarette label for
Cigarros Exposição
by Fabrica Progresso,
designer unknown, BR
RJANRIO 9X National
Archives, Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil



Brazil’s Second Reign (1840–1889) was a period of relatively more political stability with the constitutional monarchy of Dom Pedro II, the full participation of the nation’s economy in the expansion of global capitalism, and the sociocultural formation of an intended ‘national identity.’ Political independence, as said, did not rupture with coloniality: Portuguese remained the only official language of Brazil and elite children were educated abroad, for example. Brazil’s model of economic development and capital investment remained reminiscent of its colonial period: an incipient industry manufactured domestic consumable goods while large extractivist enterprises exported mining, raw materials and agricultural goods for international consumption.

Then, the grounds for a Brazilian ‘civilization’—from the establishment of cultural institutions to the making of literature, history painting or everyday artefacts—were laid both in alignment and in contrast with cultural forms and values of the European colonisers. Yet, in the making of an official Brazilian civilization the participation of indigenous people, Africans in diaspora and Afro-Brazilians (enslaved or freed) was always denied. This larger context of Brazil’s

Second Reign is imprinted on the trademark labels deposited at the Imperial Commercial Board between 1875 and 1889. The labels’ social and cultural role, however, go beyond that of reflecting the society who created them. As designed artefacts that circulated widely, the labels actively participated in the making of the Empire of Brazil, as argued below.

The argument for their active participation in national and imperial formation is threefold. Firstly, most of the marks registered related to the processing of raw materials and the manufacturing of tobacco, liquors, or foodstuff, demonstrating a consolidated nexus between economic development, commercial exchange, and their dependence on visual communication to thrive. Secondly, the period between 1850 and 1890 comprises a distinctive historical moment for the study of image creation and circulation in print. Then, the mechanical printing of complex designs—including elaborate juxtapositions of text and image—became possible due to technical improvements in litho- and chromolithography. Most of those images belonging to the drawing traditions of engraving or lithography became cheaply reproduceable and consumable at a large scale. A writing on the lower left corner of the Fabrica Progresso Cigarros Exposição label reads ‘lith. a vapor’, or steam lithography—this signals a new chapter in Brazilian graphic design history when the adoption of large-scale printing technologies matched the expansion of manufactures in the country. Finally, it is significant to note the extent and speed with which the labels circulated among all social strata. At the end of the nineteenth century, the literacy rate in Brazil was approximately 16% only.⁷ In this context, high-circulation labels that employed visual communication became powerful means for the promotion of complex ideas as images had greater penetration and impact on largely illiterate consumers than the written word.

The label *Agora Sim!*—that is, *Now Yes!* is centred on a banner that bears the date and number of the decree that abolished slavery in 1888. It promotes the idea, evidenced by the men’s enthusiastic handshake that abolition had finally arrived and with it a symmetrical and friendly exchange between white and black people. A historical reading aided

by a critical analysis reveals cracks in this visual proposition: the black man, depicted barefoot in the aftermath of his release from enslavement, would remain destitute for the 1888 decree was not followed by socially transformative measures to lift former slaves from their miserable conditions.

Due to its legal nature, the collection of labels amassed by the Imperial Commercial Board and held at the National Archives of Brazil does not present a specific visual theme. However, currently historians can identify some recurrence of ideas perpetrated and circulated by the labels and can cluster them. One of these recurrent themes, which has become the focus of my research as discussed below, was clearly designed onto several labels. It promoted and propagated the settler-colonialist myth of the ‘noble savage’, that is, the myth that local natives were lifted from barbarity by their white civilising colonisers with whom redeemed savages would live in reconciliation and harmony.

The Xarope d’Abacachi liquor label exemplifies how mundane printed artifacts actively and effectively participated in the construction of these myths and therefore in the Brazilian imperial formation. A woman is depicted incongruously, implausible as an indigenous person from Brazil: her headgear, bow and arrow, dress, body adornments, nudity and sculptural posture are designed in Classical Greek revivalist style. This image belongs to a romantic image-making tradition also seen in the history painting and indigenist literature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. On this label, as with several others in the same collection, the placid countenance and noble stature of the indigenous woman suggest a heroic role for (rather than the actual genocide of) indigenous peoples in Brazilian history. Her headgear—designed ambiguously to resemble an imperial crown—promoted the myth of indigenous people who would have been naturally succeeded by imperial colonisers and civilisers, here symbolised by the Imperial coat of arms on her shield. This liquor, a most common consumable good, travelled—in Brazil and overseas. With it travelled the myth of the Brazilian ‘noble savage’.

INTERLUDE A designer in the archives

This section—an interlude between acts—bridges the two instances of research I have selected to discuss design archives as powerful tools for the study and undoing of settler-colonialist and imperialist epistemologies. Here, I move from contextualising archival and imperial formations through reading the labels towards interrogating why that collection remained dormant for several decades in the vaults of the National Archives. This move marks a passage—and the gain of critical consciousness that comes it—from the studying of an archived artifact to the questioning of archival processes themselves. And in making this passage, I reveal how my deep encounters with the archives have transformed me from a practicing designer into a design historian.⁸

Between 2001 and 2003, I researched and historicized the register books and their labels as part of my graduate training as a design historian. A few years after concluding my bachelor’s degree in graphic design and practicing it professionally, I found myself in a large public building, the National Archives, looking for a past that I hoped had been kept. Although not included in my undergraduate design curriculum and never studied during my bachelor’s degree, I knew that printed evidence from the Brazilian past existed. A considerable production of ephemera and communication design had taken place in the country at least since 1808, when the Portuguese lifted the printing press ban in Brazil. Why, then, none of this evidence of past visual and material culture were part of the history of my profession and activity during my design training?

My encounter with that label collection was instigated by my then supervisor, Dr Rafael Cardoso, who in turn had been shown the collection by archivists. What started as serendipity unfolded into the adoption of a historical period and a framework of research that would remain central to my scholarship for nearly two decades thereafter.⁹ To appease my impostor syndrome—what was a designer doing in the archives?—Cardoso wisely called my graphic



Right
Liquor label for H. Rouquayrol chemist and distiller (in Portuguese and French, printed in France), designer unknown, BR RJANRIO 9X National Archives, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

design knowledge and skills into action, encouraging me to ‘read’ the labels as visual and historical evidence and to ask questions that a designer would ask when encountering and analysing any artefact: how were these labels made; why were these particular symbols, imagery and lettering selected, what is being communicated? From there on, I understood that my trajectory into becoming a design historian would be because of my design training not despite of it. Curiosity went centre stage. A curiosity, coupled with uneasy feelings that today I associate with the violence caused by coloniality, that led me to interrogate why indigenous peoples were being depicted on consumable good labels while being decimated in the forests. Designers are good at asking questions, another essential trait of a design historian.

Other questions I kept asking while encountering the labels for the first time: why this collection remained dormant for several decades in the vaults of the National Archives? Why was this visual record of the Brazilian past absent from my training? One immediate response—the collection’s late historicization—can be further explained by another

historical event, the establishment of modern design in Brazil in the 1960s.

This collection remained overlooked as evidence of past visual and material culture production mostly because design history and discourse in the region were subject, until the early 2000s, to the persistent modernist—and colonialist—premise that design activity is exclusive to professionally trained designers. In other words, these labels had been invalidated as part of Brazilian design history because they were not produced by trained designers in the nineteenth century as ‘design schools’ did not exist then. The question of when design as an activity and design training ‘began’ in Brazil is contentious; diverging opinions are predicated on how design as an activity is conceptualised.¹⁰ For nearly twenty years now, a burgeoning body of literature has been contributing to the broadening of the conceptualisation of design.¹¹ Some authors accept the use of terms like ‘commercial art’, which were more likely used for the labels, as indicative of a graphic design activity and history. Cardoso contentiously framed this issue of ‘beginnings’ in his edited volume titled

‘design before the design’.¹² The second part of this title—the design—refers to design activity as sanctioned by the modernists who established the ‘first’ (another marker of beginnings and display of power) modern design school in Brazil in 1963 as detailed below.¹³

For most of the twentieth century, modernism was adopted, adapted, and practiced in Brazilian design and architecture for its promise of modernization, rationalisation, and internationalisation. Modernism, however, can be treacherous. As Walter Mignolo proposes, the adoption of an idea that has international validation and currency—like modernism—will inevitably incur in the adoption of epistemological structures that, intendedly or not, obscure or annihilate local practices, histories, and knowledges.¹⁴ This conundrum has been guiding my scholarship since those first encounters in the archives.

My research into the label collection contributed to this shift in the design historiography and design discourse. Not only was I a designer who dared to step into an archive, I also framed as ‘designed’ labels that had not been created by designers but by lithographers, draughtsmen, engravers, or illustrators, among other professionals who designed in the nineteenth century. The richness of the labels as visual records of design history contrasted with their absence from my training as a designer. Some questions have remained as frameworks for research: why have modern design schools in Brazil privileged in their curriculum colonialist modernist and industrialist epistemologies that distanced the design they produced from their cultural and social contexts? Why for decades during the twentieth century, design training in Brazil, design history and other dominant design discourses were shrouded in coloniality practices and thinking?¹⁵ In the second act, we will move to a historical period—twentieth-first century Brazil—when formal colonial-imperial political frameworks no longer operate. However, this line of questioning into the colonisation of knowledge and epistemicides in design remains.

Below, I will narrate the search for documental records that turned, unexpectedly, into a layered unpacking of the archive. Continually acknowledging the impact of archival research on the researcher, I will consider archives as evidence of coloniality in themselves, as evidence of past and present structural violence, and as participants in the making of colonialist and imperialist epistemologies. When describing her methods for imagining historical possibilities and impossibilities, Saidiya Hartman proposes that historians strain “against the limits of the archive.”¹⁶ Her deep encounters’ with archival materials consist of working with “scraps of the archive” [...], “with unknown persons, nameless figures, ensembles, collectives, multitudes, the chorus.”¹⁷ Similarly, the quotidian, the invisible, the innocent, the presumed—things and dimensions that are central to design knowledge and practice—are considered below as prime sites from where to unpick the machinations of coloniality and from where to develop decolonial practices in design.

I will recount my experience through a different genre, one that emerged from journaling during archival research, a reflexive and poetic account that helped me (there and then) to record and make sense of the entanglements of place making, design education and political imagination, and on the archival silences and incompleteness that I encountered.¹⁸ Through this genre of thinking with the reader, I propose new methods for (re)writing decolonial design histories that go beyond the solutionist ethos of case studies common in our field.

ACT TWO Unlearning

It is what it is. Archives are the way they are for a reason. At ESDI’s archives I feel cautious, respectful even, of moving and removing things from where they are. They are there for a reason. Not for a purpose but for a reason. Can I give these things purpose? Can I find their purpose?

It is August 2019 and the archive of the Superior School of Industrial Design (or Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial, also known as ESDI) is closed, in part because of the ongoing financial and political crisis in the Rio de Janeiro state and the dismantling of public education and cultural institutions in Brazil.¹⁹ After a few messages and phone calls I am granted a back-door access to it. I did my bachelor’s in design at ESDI in the 1990s; twenty years later I worked there as a research fellow. Asking to see the archives is akin to asking to come home.

I enter the archives guided by a photograph from 1968 that I found in a book.²⁰ 1968 was a momentous year in Brazilian history when the military junta that had overthrown democracy in 1964 effected the closure of the National Congress and the State Legislative Assemblies. In 1968, the militaries institutionalized torture, censorship, and CIA-backed state terror campaign against dissidents, mostly students.²¹ The balance of twenty years of violent dictatorship and democratic repression in Brazil hasn’t been paid yet. Hundreds were exiled; thousands of people tortured and killed, mostly unnamed. A recent enquiry—the only of its kind—recognised the death of a few more than 400 people by the brutal hands of the state.²² Unlike other Latin American countries, Brazil did not trial its torturers, generals, and captains—one of them has become Brazil’s president in 2019.²³

At ESDI’s archives, I don’t feel anger or frustration. I am eager to see beyond what is not right, correct, or normative where others would see only mess. Objects, like the old floor polisher, here seem at home. Shouldn’t a design history archive be inhabited by objects? I am grateful for not spotting cockroaches. I find lots of termites and their debris but no cockroach. I can work here.²⁴

As I enter the archive, I am looking for clues on that photograph found in a book. It is an image of an exhibit from the first International Design Biennial held in 1968 at the prestigious and modernist Museum of Modern Art in Rio.²⁵ I decide to name the exhibit ‘vacuum-broom’. I sometimes call it a chimera. Its top half was an industrially manufactured, electrically powered plastic device designed for sucking dirt by vacuum. Its bottom half was a human-powered technology made of bristles and wood designed for sweeping. I know little about the ‘vacuum-broom’ beyond that it was a student protest staged unexpectedly at the Biennial.²⁶ In 1968 Brazil these two technologies would have been worlds apart. The broom would have been ubiquitous, cheap, generations-old, intuitive to use. The vacuum cleaner would have been an expensive and exclusive consumer goods more at home in Hollywood flicks featuring American Dream housewives than in Brazilian households. This exhibit thus displayed a class divide. It posed a provocation to its contemporaries that resound today: what design are we doing in Brazil, and for whom?

The ‘vacuum-broom’ laughed at the otherwise serious intention of the Biennial, that of inserting Brazil in the global circuit of exhibitions, an effort, as put by Gardner and Green, “very much in the Cold War shadow of the United States’ interventions in South America and its conflicted



Top
View from the Brazilian section of the 1st Biennial of Industrial Design at Rio's Museum of Modern Art (MAM), photographer not identified, MAM-Rio Collection

Inset
The 'vacuum-broom', a conceptual exhibit created by ESDI students at the 1st International Industrial Design Biennial in Rio, Brazil (1968), photographer not identified, published in 'Karl Heinz Bergmiller: um designer brasileiro', Pedro Luiz Pereira de Souza (São Paulo: Blucher, 2019), authorized reprint

sponsorship of brutal, authoritarian, military regimes".²⁷ I could not, however, find any further clues about the vacuum-broom. Rather, one of my first serendipitous finds is a series of posters advertising the design school itself. FORMA / INFORMA. Form / Informs. A play on words. It's enigmatic, hermetic, it does not inform. It is evidence of what I call 'design for those in the know', for those who rejoice in modernist minimalist forms and mantras.

On my second day at ESDI's archive a woman, one of the school cleaners, is lying on a cardboard on the floor. As with several thousand Brazilian workers, she probably leaves home before dawn and endures a dilapidated public transport network to get to work. Archive, or deposit, or quiet room. This is a multipurpose site. I try not to disturb her, switch off the lights and proceed to the cubicle in the far corner, where the filing cabinets and hundreds of toilet paper rolls reside.

Here is another term I made to name and know this archive: 'acquisition process aesthetics'. The hundreds of toilet paper rolls, fluorescent bulbs and sodium hypochlorite bottles which will be my companions this week result from government acquisition processes, from bulk buying and stock piling in times of crisis. "Sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl) is a chlorine compound often used as a disinfectant". It is bleach. The smell of bleach is strong

today, maybe because it is a warmer day. I hope I don't need to return—I will try and finish photographing all documents today. It is a very unpleasant smell; it gives me a headache and makes me dizzy. Yet, no insects or rodents.²⁸

One of the few scholarly works on this historical period hints to me that Maria Valdez—an ESDI student representative who was brutally arrested by the Brazilian state during a student conference in 1968—may have been one of the Biennial protesters.²⁸ Hers are the words that have been guiding this research:

The ESDI pavilion discussed what was design, what was design in Brazil and for Brazil. We wanted, among other things, that the school turned itself to the Brazilian reality.²⁹

I find 'reality' a shocking word. Maria Valdez was a student at ESDI in the 1960s, as I was in the 1990s. Maria Valdez couldn't reconcile the two worlds the chimera attempted at joining disjointedly, and I cannot reconcile them either as a design historian in 2021. Why one of the first and main design schools established in Brazil embraced design and the epistemology of industrial development to the detriment of other forms of making and being that were more akin to its cultural and social realities? My working hypothesis sketches a dim picture of a design education synced with neo-imperialist endeavours in the region.

'those in the know'—rejoiced in the simple complexity of the form/inform posters. Another vision: the bottom half of the vacuum-broom. Design includes the vernacular, imagination and local customs.³⁴ It is understood as 'making', anywhere and everywhere, everyone designs and use design, not only those with formal training.³⁵ Here, popular culture and the Brazilian 'reality' (I quote the term notwithstanding the difficulties I have with it) are not excluded from designing processes. But rather than a game of two halves, the chimera must be considered as a synthesis, as the co-existence of antithetical visions for design.

In her beautiful prose, Saidiya Hartman suggests that historians should work with "scraps of the archive [...],³⁶ with unknown persons, nameless figures, ensembles, collectives, multitudes, the chorus".³⁷ As I leave the archive to return to Australia to historicise these design biennials, the design student protests, their fight against imperialism and pro-reality, I leave the archive, but the archive does not leave me. Like Hartman, I recognise that historical epistemic violence against indigenous and enslaved African peoples, "resides precisely in all the stories that we cannot know and that will never be recovered", because they simply do not feature in these archives.³⁸ As I return to Australia, I leave the archive but the archive does not leave me. I now carry those unknown persons, nameless figures, ensembles, collectives, multitudes, I carry those silences and those silenced as a 'constitutive impossibility' that needs to be re-written into our histories unless we become complicit with that historical violence.³⁹ How to gaze into the abyss and not be afraid of it gazing back at you? How to fight monsters and not become one in the process?⁴⁰ In my own fabrication, I see bell hooks winking to Nietzsche, her oppositional gaze joyfully saying that it is now time that we engage with our colonial monsters.⁴¹

CODA

Other epistemic traditions

When Mbembe extols our capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons he also underscores our capacity to engage with other epistemic traditions.⁴²

In this piece, I have reflected on the unwritten and the unknown in design history. My first foray into the archives in the early 2000s was marked by findings of nineteenth-century visual records forgotten—or silenced—by a modernist epistemology that disregarded them. Another silencing: that of the lives of indigenous populations in the forests, while their distorted images became fashionable on consumable goods labels. My most recent archival research in 2019 was marked by silences, as records of the socially, culturally and racially diverse Brazilian make-up were not kept in the modern design school archive, despite them being everywhere outside of it. In that recent encounter I was cautious at interpreting the found institutional disarray as a temporary mess, as a problem in need of fixing. As I journaled at the archives to face those confronting challenges as they unfolded, I realised that the dismantling of public education institutions is part of a plan that is firmly in place, a colonialist plan to annihilate other epistemic traditions and those emerging. Yet, our systematic forays will persist.

The bleach stinks as the epistemicicides committed then and now. Ann Stoler's words resonate loud. Like her, I see this archive as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources'.³⁰

The dismantling of these structures—public education, cultural institutions, archives—results from the fear that Federal and State governments (then and now) feel of their most dangerous opponents, students like Maria Valdez.³¹ Like Stoler, I want to interrogate structures to understand structural and systemic discrimination, racism, suppression and oppression. Like Stoler, I see this archive and its destitution as an 'intricate technology of rule' in itself.³² Everything in this archive is evidence, is pulsing.

I sense reverberations of my chimeric conundrum in the histories I am writing, in the decolonial design history I have been cultivating. As I prepare a manuscript on the history of the Brazilian International Biennials, I see chimeras in the visions for design proposed in 1968. One vision: the top half of the vacuum-broom. Design is proposed as a modern and modernist planning activity, as order and ordering.³³ It is institutionalised by the Brazilian state in schools, professional bodies, and biennials. It is promoted through national programs for infrastructure building, industrial growth and economic sovereignty predicated on consumption. Here, the educated elite—

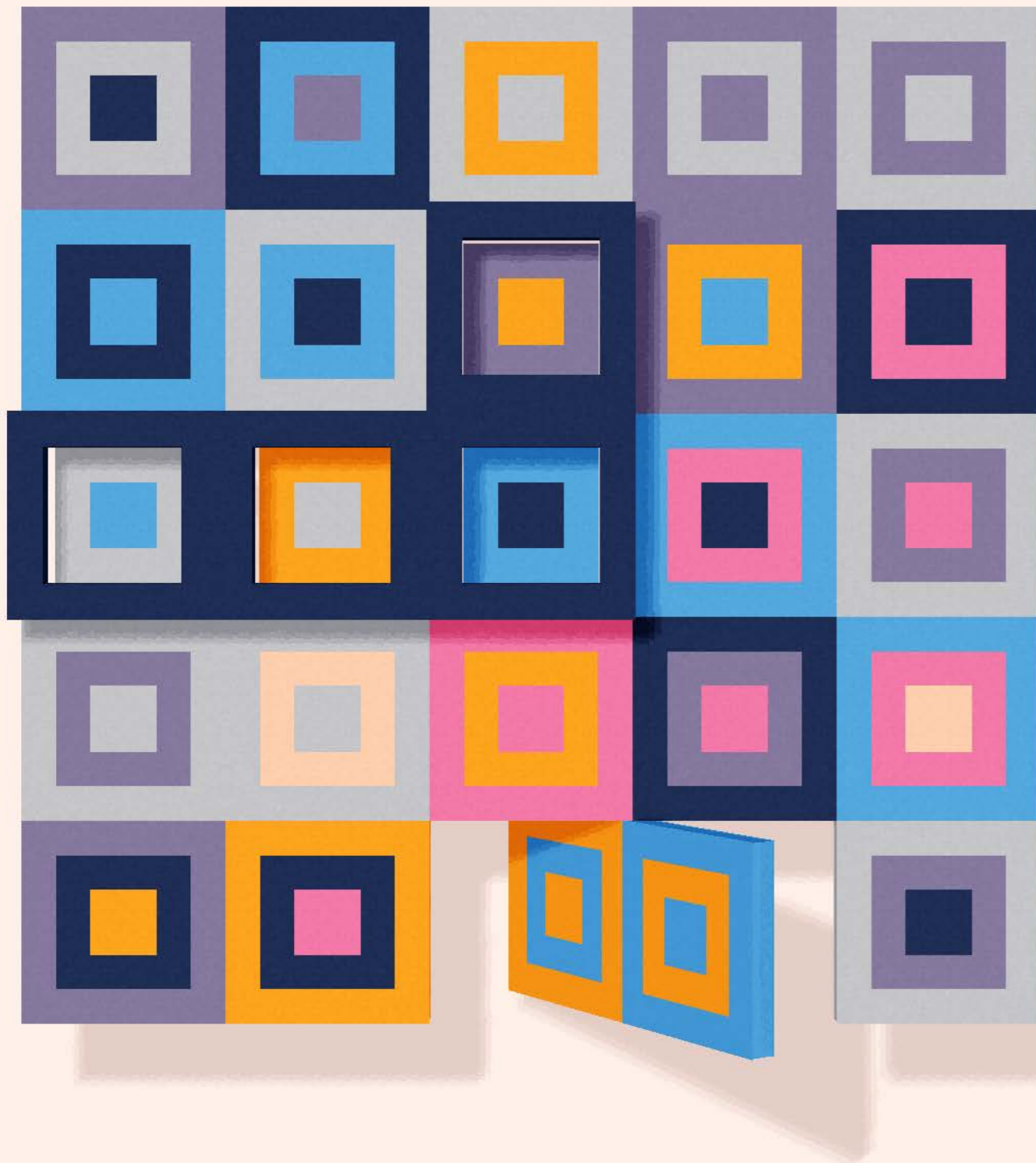
Endnotes

- 1 Achille Mbembe, “Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive” (2015), <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>
- 2 See Livia Lazzaro Rezende, “A Circulação de Imagens no Brasil Oitocentista: uma História com Marca Registrada,” *O Design Brasileiro Antes do Design: Aspectos da História Gráfica 1870-1960*, ed. Rafael Cardoso (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005), 20-57. Carma Gorman did similar research into the intersections between trademarks as cultural forms and the legal frameworks that produced them in the US context. See Carma Gorman, “The Role of Trademark Law in the History of US Visual Identity Design, c.1860-1960,” *Journal of Design History* 30, no. 4 (November 2017): 371-388, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epx024>.
- 3 Gorman, “The Role of Trademark Law”, 376-77.
- 4 Register books IC3⁴⁴, IC3²³, IC3⁴⁶, IC3³³, IC3⁷² and IC3⁹⁰ contain approximately one thousand copies of consumable goods’ labels deposited for trademarking purposes. This collection is kept by the National Archives, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, under BR RJANRIO 9X. Further information on specific labels as well as public domain digitised copies of them can be found in ‘FUNDO: Série Indústria e Comércio - Comércio - Junta e Tribunal etc. (IC3) – BR RJANRIO 9X’ via the website <https://sian.an.gov.br>
- 5 Other collections of graphic design and print culture from the Imperial period onwards can be found at The National Library of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. These include newspapers, illustrated magazines and books, typeface catalogues and typography manuals, maps, commercial prints and posters, landscape albums, among others. However, while the National Library collections are numerous and diverse, they have been assembled through compulsory legal deposit procedures and collection development policies. The National Archive collection of register books and printed labels, on the other hand, has preserved those graphic design artefacts in their contextual legal framework, a rare occurrence. Design historian Leticia Pedrucci Fonseca analyzed in-depth the illustrated magazines published during the first years of the Brazilian Republic: Leticia Pedrucci Fonseca, *Uma revolução gráfica: Julião Machado e as revistas ilustradas no Brasil, 1895-1898*. (São Paulo: Blucher, 2016), available open access here: <https://openaccess.blucher.com.br/article-list/uma-revolucao-grafica-juliao-machado-e-as-revistas-ilustradas-no-brasil-312/list#undefined>. Rafael Cardoso and team have published extensive research into the National Library collections of graphic design and print culture, see: Rafael Cardoso (org). *Impresso no Brasil, 1808-1930: destaques da história gráfica no acervo da Biblioteca Nacional* (Rio de Janeiro: Verso Brasil, 2009). For further work into the National Archive collection of labels, see Rafael Cardoso, Claudia Beatriz Heynemann and Maria do Carmo Teixeira Rainho, *Marcas do progresso: consumo e design no Brasil do século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2009).
- 6 For further information see Laurence Hallewell, *Books in Brazil: a history of the publishing trade* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982)
- 7 Renato Ortiz, *A moderna tradição brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1991): 24, 28.
- 8 My ‘transformation’ is certainly not only creditable to the empirical, sensorial, and critical dimensions or scholarship elicited during archival research. For their contribution to my training as a design historian, I am profoundly indebted to supervisors, mentors and colleagues with whom I have worked in the last 21 years, including Dr Rafael Cardoso (Master’s supervisor at PUC-Rio, Brazil), Professors David Crowley and Christine Guth (PhD supervisors at the V&A/RCA History of Design programme, UK), colleagues from ESDI’s Postgraduate Programme Laboratory of History of Design where I worked between 2012 and 2013; from the V&A/RCA History of Design programme, where I worked between 2013 and 2019, and from the UNSW Art & Design, where I have been working since 2019. Finally, my gratitude for being able to develop a truly collaborative ethos and decolonial praxis with the OPEN collective. See: Sarah Cheang, Katherine Irani, Livia Rezende & Shehnaz Suterwalla, “Emotional Practices” online exhibition at <https://emotional-practices.webflow.io>
- 9 See Livia Rezende, “The Future of the Past: the Representation of the Brazilian First Republic in the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893”, *Iberoamericana* 21, no. 77 (2021):71-95, available open access at: <https://journals.iai.spk-berlin.de/index.php/iberoamericana/article/view/2896/2319>; Livia Rezende, “Manufacturing the Raw in Design Pageant: the Commodification and Gendering of Brazilian Tropical Nature at the 1867 Exposition Universelle”, *Journal of Design History*, 30, no.2 (2017):122-138, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epx007>; Livia Rezende, “Of Coffee, Nature and Exclusion: Designing Brazilian National Identity at International Exhibitions, 1867 & 1904”, *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*, eds. Grace Lees-Maffei G & Kjetil Fallan (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), 259-273; Livia Rezende, “The Artifice of Nature and the Naturalisation of the State at the 1922 Rio de Janeiro International Exhibition”, *Cultures of International Exhibitions, 1840-1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, ed. Marta Filipova (London: Ashgate, 2015),163 - 182; and Livia Rezende, ‘Designing the state at Brazil’s Independence Centennial International Exhibition’, *Design Frontiers: Territories, Concepts, Technologies*, ed. Marcos da Costa Braga, Priscila Farias et al. (Mexico City: Editorial Designio, 2014), 79-89.
- 10 For an orthodox narrative of the establishment of modern design in Latin America that traces an unproblematised lineage between local culture and the adoption of modernist Eurocentric paradigms, see: Silvia Fernández, “The Origins of Design Education in Latin America: From the Hfg in Ulm to Globalization,” *Design Issues* 22, no. 1 (2006): 3-19, doi:10.1162/074793606775247790. A direct counterpoint to Fernández’s arguments can be found in the work of Cuban design historian Lucila Fernández Uriarte, “Modernity and Postmodernity from Cuba”, *Journal of Design History* 18, no.3 (2005): 245-255..
- 11 Besides the works by Fonseca, *Uma revolução gráfica*, 2016, Cardoso et al. *Marcas do progresso*, 2009 and Cardoso, *O Design Brasileiro*, 2005, see also: Patrícia Lara-Betancourt and Livia Rezende, “Locating Design Exchanges in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Journal of Design History* 32, no. 1 (2019):1-16, doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epy048; Priscila Lima Farias, “On the Current State of Brazilian Graphic Design Historiography,” *Journal of Design History*, 28, no.4 (2015):434-439, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epv040>, and Edna Cunha Lima, “Estudando Efêmeros: Rótulos de Cigarros Pernambucanos do Século XIX”, *Pesquisa Visual* 1, no. 1 (2006): 41-9.
- 12 Cardoso, *O Design Brasileiro Antes do Design*.
- 13 A more extensive and detailed discussion ois Rezende, “Of Coffee, Nature and Exclusion”, *Designing Worlds*, especially pages 259-261..
- 14 Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options.*; (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 15 For further discussion see: Livia Rezende & Clara Meliande, “Design at a crossroads: ESDI’s ‘imperialist’ design curriculum as contested at the First International Design Biennial in Brazil (1968)”, *De(s)colonizando o design: resumos expandidos*, ed. Camila Bezerra Furtado Barros, Cláudia Teixeira Marinho & Bruno Ribeiro do Nascimento (Fortaleza: Ed. natifúndio, 2021), 639-647. Available open access from: <https://design.ufc.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/iicpd.pdf>; Livia Rezende & Tatiana Pinto, “Shared and not contested: modern erasures in design and architecture history, practice and education in Brazil”, *Building-Object: Shared and Contested Territories of Design and Architecture*, ed. Mark Crinson & Charlotte Ashby (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Sarah Cheang, Katherine Irani, Livia Rezende & Shehnaz Suterwalla, “In Between Breaths: Memories, Stories and Otherwise Design Histories”, *Journal of Design History* (2022).
- 16 Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 11.
- 17 Saidiya Hartman, “On working with archives,” Interview by Thora Siemsen, *The Creative Independent* (2018), <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/saidiya-hartman-on-working-with-archives>
- 18 I am the recipient of the Design History Society’s Design Writing Prize in 2020 for a visual essay that documents this archival encounter and experiments with the juxtaposition of visual and writing narratives. Part of Act II of the article is featured in that essay. For further reflection on journaling in the archives as research and thinking methods, see: Livia Rezende & Megha Rajguru, “In conversation: the 2020 Design Writing Prize Winner” [podcast] (London: Design History Society, 2021). Available here: <https://www.designhistorysociety.org/news/view/megha-rajguru-in-conversation-with-livia-lazzaro-rezende-the-2020-design-writing-prize-winner>.
- 19 The movement “ESDI Aberta” (2016-2017), in which ESDI’s students, alumni, professors, and employees have ‘invested in alternative ways to live in difference, in response to the administrative and financial crisis’ is thoroughly documented in Zoy Anastassakis, Marcos Martins, Lucas Nonno, Juliana Paolucci and Jilly Traganou, “Temporarily Open: A Brazilian Design School’s Experimental Approaches Against the Dismantling of Public Education,” *Design and Culture* 11, no. 2 (2019): 157-72, doi:10.1080/17547075.2019.1616917
- 20 Pedro Luis Pereira de Souza, *ESDI: biografia de uma idéia* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UERJ 1997), 185.
- 21 Zuenir Ventura, *1968: O Ano que não terminou* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1988).
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- 23 Rosana Pinheiro-Machado and Lucia Mury Scalco, “The Bolsonaro Effect,” *Jacobin*, April 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/10/brazil-election-bolsonaro-corruption-security-pt>
- 24 The reference to termites is not without an ongoing significance and history. Former ESDI’s director, Zoy Anastassakis writes about the entanglements between termite infestation (or ‘occupation’), ‘the administrative and financial crisis that affected...all institutions of public education in Brazil’, and resistance from ‘ESDI’s students, alumni, professors, and employees’. See: Zoy Anastassakis, “Remaking everything: the clash between Bigfoot, the termites and other strange miasmatic emanations in an old industrial design school,” *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, 16 (2019), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-43412019v16a203>
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- 26 Souza, *ESDI*, 186.
- 27 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, triennials, and Documenta: the exhibitions that created contemporary art* (Chichester, West Sussex, Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 64.
- 28 As the writing of this article was ending, I received promising information from the current ESDI Director. The school archives have been removed to a different, safer site, where archivists are reviewing the materials, with the intention of creating a Reference Centre at ESDI.
- 29 Nobre, *Carmen Portinho*, 130.
- 30 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the archival grain: epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 20.
- 31 Anastassakis, Martins, Nonno, Paolucci, and Traganou, “Temporarily Open”.
- 32 Stoler, *Along the archival grain*, 20.
- 33 Fernández, “The Origins of Design Education”; Souza, *ESDI*.
- 34 Lina Bo Bardi, *Stones Against Diamonds*. Translated by Anthony Doyle and Pamela Johnston (London: Architectural Association, 2013).
- 35 Ezio Manzini, *Design when everybody designs: an introduction to design for social innovation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015); Lina Bo Bardi, “Planejamento ambiental: o ‘desenho’ no impasse,” *Malasartes* 2, Rio de Janeiro, 1976; Lina Bo Bardi, “Exposição didática da Escola de Teatro,” *Diário de Notícias*, September 21, 1958.
- 36 Hartman, “Venus”, 11.
- 37 Hartman and Siemsen, “On working with archive”
- 38 Hartman, “Venus”, 12.
- 39 Hartman, “Venus”, 12. My work on these unknown persons, nameless figures, ensembles, collectives and multitudes is forthcoming, see note 14.
- 40 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955).
- 41 bell hooks. *Black looks: race and representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015). Originally published in 1992, in this volume’s essays, hooks proposed the concept—and action—of the ‘oppositional gaze’ as a form of resistance and reaction to whiteness that has historically repressed ‘a black person’s right to look’, and to look back. Basing her analysis on how black people have been represented in film, television and other media, and on how black people have experienced this representation, hooks challenges received, preconceived and racist assumptions on blackness.
- 42 Mbembe, “Decolonizing Knowledge”.





1



Creating an Archive of Contemporary Melbourne Gamemaking

Helen Stuckey

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges facing the collection and preservation of contemporary Melbourne videogame design. It reflects on the need to develop new methods for developing design archives that address the demands of the born-digital and the impact of the cultural shift to privately owned digital platforms in the distribution and consumption of born-digital design objects.

It argues that if we wish to have records of the design cultures of contemporary Melbourne gamemakers that the process of collecting and archiving needs to happen when these works are most relevant. That the traditional methods for the creation of design archives may not be effective for a new generation of born-digital artefacts and contemporary design cultures.

In 2018, opening Mathew Hall's game *Doodle Find* on my IOS phone I was greeted with the message "This game no longer exists on the App Store". The Apple Store had retired it, ending my access to play a game I had purchased and still enjoyed. I had worked on a project *Play It Again: Creating a Playable History of Australasian Digital Games, for Industry, Community and Research Purposes* with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) to collect Australian videogames of the 1980s and was commencing *Play it Again II: Preserving Australian Videogame history of the 1990s* on collecting games of the 1990s. Both projects collected original retail copies of the games on cassettes, cartridges and disk.¹ These material carriers were not only the source of the game software for preservation but, importantly, their material presence in an archive activates the legal option for the software preservation to occur. The loss of *Doodle Find* raised many questions about how we may need to rethink the collecting and archiving of contemporary videogames and underlined the urgency of the challenge.

There are specific pressures in born-digital preservation that make the traditional approach to archiving contemporary design artefacts and design records problematic. The digital distribution of videogames means that there is rarely a material object in the mix. There is no videogame disk in a box but rather an app on your phone or a game that you downloaded over the internet to your Steam² account on your personal computer. This means that there will be no material carrier (no object) to be donated to an archive in the future. The player, when 'purchasing' a game, is often actually only leasing it for the duration of its availability from the network-based provider.

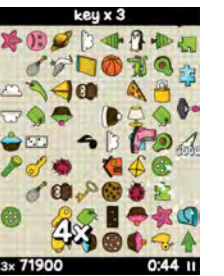
Critically, it is not just the design object that will leave no material trace. The documentation of its means of production will exist predominantly as digital files vulnerable to the vagaries of storage media, the prohibitions of software versions and licensing, and the unthinking

negligence of a volatile industry to the maintenance of its records. Rapid changes of software and hardware ensure that access to these files may require considerable effort in the future. Future access will be dependent on recreating the complexity and independencies of period computing environments requiring specific versions of hardware and software.

The activities of the contemporary design culture that fostered the game's design and the record of its reception will also have played out online within the proprietary platforms of various social media and commercial sites. Where historically traces of Melbourne design subcultures may have survived as ephemera including invitations to events, posters, catalogues, photographs, reviews in the street and small press, all these now circulate almost purely in the digital realm. In a 2013 statement, the Library of Congress explained, "As society turns to social media as a



PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY



Preceding Pages
Paperbark, 2018,
Paperhouse, IOS

Above
Doodle Find, 2010,
KlickTock, IOS

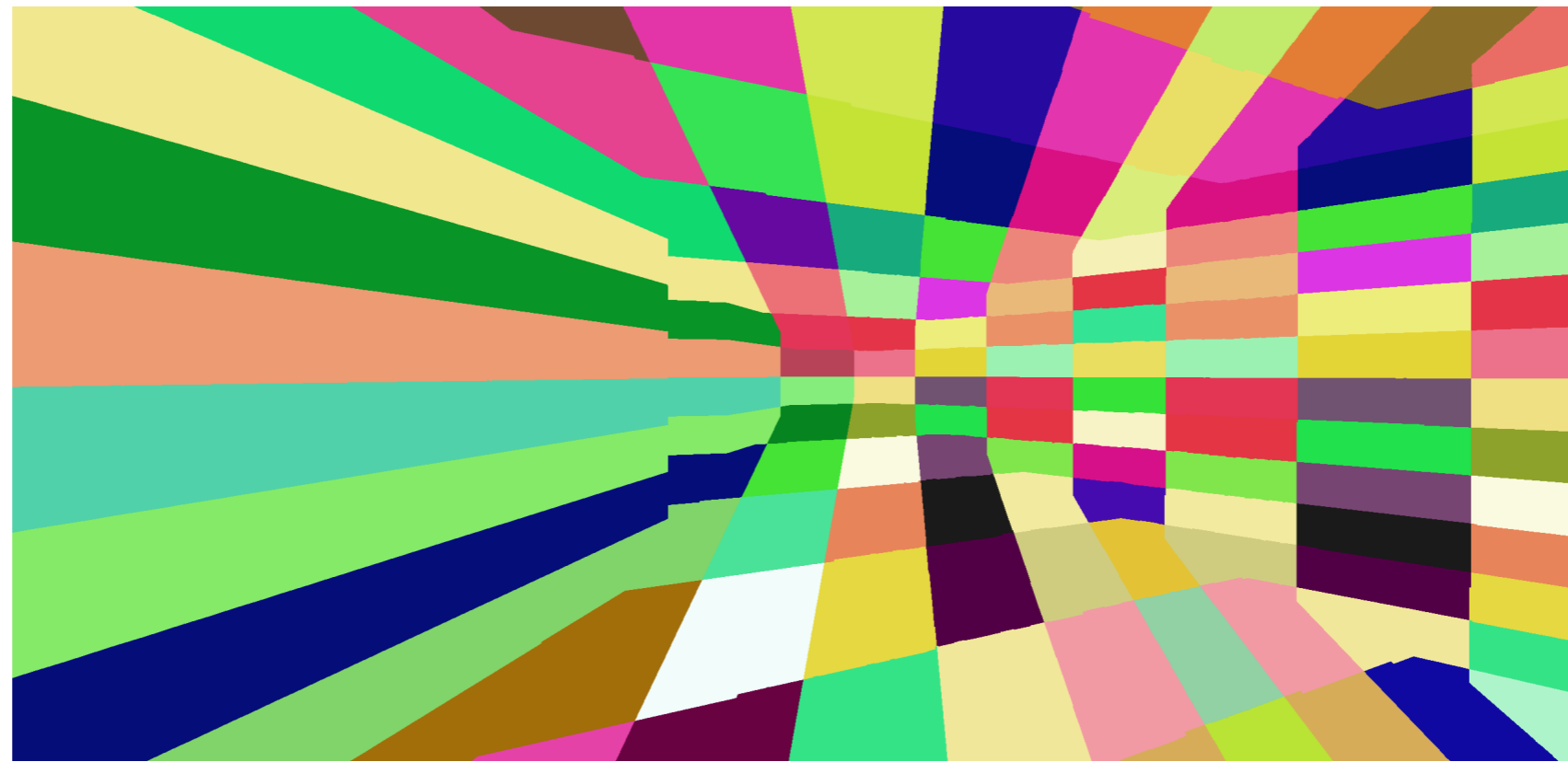
Opposite
Dissembler, 2018,
Ian MacLarty, IOS

primary method of communication and creative expression, social media is supplementing and, in some cases, supplanting letters, journals, serial publications and other sources routinely collected by research libraries”.³

There is recognition that even magazines and journals, a mainstay of design research, may not survive. The majority of magazines today exist only online as web sites. Historically, smaller, locally focused, or alternative press with ISBNs frequently made their way into collections under local publishing laws, but now, as web sites, can easily be missed by memory organisations struggling with a tsunami of digital data. Even libraries subscribing to digital periodicals no longer receive and locally store copies but are licenced to access the material online, relying on the provider to maintain their archive. This is a potentially expensive and fraught proposition for some of the less august publications. In the past, researchers could rely, to some extent, on the serendipitous discovery of records that, although thought insignificant in their day were, none the less, lodged in physical archives (often personal) where they remained available for re-discovery and reevaluation. This era is over. It is apparent that in the new digital reality if we wish to have records of the contemporary Melbourne videogame design scene, we need a more active approach to the archive.

This paper discusses one such experiment to address these challenges, a project to collect a record of the local contemporary Melbourne gamemaking scene.⁴ The intent of the project is to develop a small collection of videogames and related documentation of the local cultures of production and consumption that surround them. The study looks at four Melbourne gamemakers, creating a temporal study of their games’ design and development and their changing practice over four years. The software preservation of the selected videogames is in collaboration with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI). The associated documentation of the local culture of production and consumption was created through the novel approach of embedding it in coursework within the Bachelor of Design (Games) RMIT University.

The discussion identifies two major challenges to established practices for the collection of videogames and the archival resources for games history. Firstly, that digital distribution disrupts existing practices to software preservation of historical videogames reliant on the collection of game files on a material carrier. Secondly that we do not have adequate systems to collect traces of the cultural activity that is now occurring on social media platforms. In addressing these issues, the paper first introduces the concept of platformisation and the ubiquity of commercially owned digital platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, TikTok and Steam as sites for cultural engagement and exchange. It recognises that this project is a minnow in the global digital heritage challenge but respectfully suggests that there will increasingly be a role for the timely curation of local material to support design historians of the future. The discussion that follows addresses the collection of videogame code at the time when its creators are still actively engaging with it, allowing for the most valuable software record of a videogame to be acquired and the collecting organisation to effectively assemble the hardware and software environment required for the software’s ongoing access. It then examines the kinds of records that can be assembled that will provide insights into the social and economic conditions of production of the Melbourne gamemakers and capture a sense of the reception of the videogames with contemporary audiences.



Right
The Catacombs of Solaris
2016, Ian MacLarty,
Linux/Windows/Mac

Platformisation

Platformisation is impacting on how we produce, consume and share culture. It is also challenging how we can collect and archive it. In a 2021 article looking back on a panel discussing *Building the Future of Indie Games* at the Games Developer Conference in 2007, Simon Carless, then panel chair and now author of GameDiscover.co reflects on how in 2007 there was no understanding of how these new platforms would totally transform the industry. The concept of not needing a publisher and working directly with digital platforms was brand new. No one foresaw how critical YouTube, Twitch and TikTok would be for marketing a game as then marketing success was still aligned with review on the big game websites.⁵

Poell et al have defined ‘Platformisation’ as

the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms.⁶

It is a definition that highlights that, as a process, platformisation encompasses evolving technical infrastructures, the political economy of these platforms and the governance of them by a corporation, but it also recognises the user activities and cultural practices of work, consumption, community, and creativity hosted within them.⁷ Critically, platforms such as Facebook and Steam support producers and consumers with a suite of value-creating interactions online and harvest, in return, the plethora of data created by these interactions. This discussion focuses on how exchanges occurring in these platforms might leave no material traces like those that traditionally formed part of archives and collections (letters, photos, posters, reviews etc). It does not discuss the politics of these systems but reflects on what kind of content concerning the local Melbourne gaming scene is located within these corporate infrastructures and how might it be collected to remain accessible in future.

The shift to digital culture is a global challenge

Memory institutions are focused on developing practices that address the shift to digital culture. Since the 1990s there have been global efforts to document culturally relevant public facing web sites such as the Australian Web Archive⁸ and the Herculean efforts of the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. The preservation of web pages is, however, uneven in its data capture. The web-crawlers utilised have limitations and struggle with various kinds of content including databases, content management systems and proprietary formats such as JavaScript and the now defunct Flash. Smaller, more manually curated projects can ensure better quality capture but even then rarely offer a complete record due to the hypertextual nature of the web.⁹ The archival sector is not resourced to keep pace and web-crawler technology lags behind evolving web technologies. The importance of documenting the significant activity on new social media platforms is recognised. Unlike the more open systems of the World Wide Web, working with these corporations is a far more transactional process. Famously, in 2010 The Library of Congress entered a partnership with Twitter to collect all of Twitter’s public tweets. The complexity of the collection for existing infrastructure ended the project in 2017 and now only selected accounts are collected.¹⁰ The Library of Congress Twitter project is unique for its scale and ambition. It also remains, at this point, inaccessible to researchers – embargoed until “access issues can be resolved in a cost effective and sustainable manner” as currently a single search can take 24 hours to execute.¹¹

Data from Twitter and Facebook is currently available to researchers using APIS¹² (for a cost), but the question remains whether this option will be there for future researchers of historic material. Data access itself is controlled by the platforms. Social media researcher Axel Bruns has reported that platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are increasingly restricting the data access available to researchers in part in response to the

publication of critical studies relating to the platforms’ practices.¹³

Whilst Australian memory organizations are working to create records, they are working with limited resources. The Australian libraries and archives are collecting data from social media, their curatorial agenda is focused on political figures, economic data and major events.¹⁴ The Australian Twittersphere collection, managed by QUT’s Digital Observatory is an ongoing collection of public tweets from approximately 838,000 Australian public twitter accounts. It was created to support ongoing access to the data in a variety of formats from raw data to analysed overviews for researchers.¹⁵

These projects exemplify a new frontier where archivists are battling with issues both technical and operational including scale, legal frameworks, capture and storage.¹⁶ Furthermore, there are deep conceptual challenges in embracing digital data as heritage. UNESCO Persist state in their charter on digital heritage that: “The really valuable parts of the web are not the bits which contain the ‘content’ (text, pictures, film.) but the bits that capture our on-line behaviour.”¹⁷ In her analysis of the impending replacement of traditional forms of heritage with digital formats, Fiona Cameron argues that we need to acknowledge that there will be “a shift in heritage as human-centred productions to new type of humanism that acknowledges our profound entanglement with data”.¹⁸

The question posed by this paper, framed in relation to these global challenges, asks how can we curate material now so that records of the contemporary Melbourne game scene of this era may exist into the future. At the core of the project is a conventional oral history framework with interviews conducted with the local Melbourne gamemakers. The research was designed as a class option in a third year subject dedicated to students completing an independent research project. The final year Game Program students are a group of critically engaged users and makers with specialised skills and knowledge ideally equipped for the task of identifying representative activity. Selected gamemakers are



Top
Wayward Strand,
unreleased,
Ghost Pattern

interviewed annually by the class about their design practice, their games, the business of making games and the local Melbourne game scene. Over the last four years local game makers participating include Ian MacLarty, PaperHouse, Ghost Pattern and Worm Club. The preservation outcomes of the project are twofold. Firstly, in partnership with ACMI, we are collecting the source code and GIT of selected games by these gamemakers. This is with the intent of not merely capturing these games so that they can be accessed in the future as playable games, but also to document their design process. Secondly, to research the cultures of local gamemaking and reflect on how records may be created to document these cultures of production and reception.

Collecting the software

The videogames identified by this project are all digitally distributed. Ian MacLarty's more commercial puzzle games *Dissembler* (2018), *Jumpgrid* (2019) *TileSnap* (2019) are sold through the Apple Store and the Steam Platform. In contrast, MacLarty's art games such as *The Catacombs of Solaris* (2016), *The Road may lead Nowhere* (2017), *Red Desert Render* (2019) and *If We were Allowed to Visit*

(2020) can be downloaded through the self-publishing site Itch.io. PaperHouse's *Paperbark* (2018) was designed for release on the sixth generation iPad, its gorgeous graphics showcasing the processing capabilities of this new generation of hardware.¹⁹ Ghost Patterns game *Wayward Strand*, currently in development, is featured on Steam. Not yet released, a number of player demo versions have been briefly available when the game was showing at festivals and conventions.²⁰ Worm Club's original *Frog Detective* (2018) was first available on itch.io as a student game before winning numerous international awards and becoming available on Steam. The *Frog Detective* games remain slightly less expensive on itch.io which does not have Steam's commercial commission payments for hosting games. Steam, however, is the platform that supports a videogame to be findable by the largest global audience of gamers. In 2019 Steam had 95 million monthly active users.²¹ Worm Club's loyalty to Itch.io, home to more experimental and personal videogames, indicates the developer's alliance with a global community of indie creatives. Itch.io also allows users to download videogames as the designers

uploaded them, potentially free of any Digital Right Management (DRM) that will prevent them being saved and stored – a practice that is becoming increasingly rare within digital distribution.

Games purchased on Steam and App Store are tethered to the platforms through their DRM. They will operate offline but this is in an offline mode. If Steam is uninstalled, it will uninstall all purchased games. If Steam goes out of business, purchased games are all lost. It is a different model of 'ownership'. Hollywood actor Bruce Willis famously made headlines in 2012 when he challenged Apple. He wished to bequeath his children his iTunes music archive that had he had passionately curated for years and identified with as a significant personal collection. It was not however a collection he 'owned', according to the lawyers, and he had the right to listen to his collection but no rights to sign it over to another.²²

To provide context to this discussion on digital distribution and the 'leasing' rather than acquisition of game artefacts, the current standard institutional model of videogame preservation is built on the presumption that a material

object will be collected containing an executable game file. This is conventionally a retail copy of the videogame. The existence of this object in the collection provides the legal precedence for its preservation. This file will be imaged and made accessible as a playable videogame using emulation. There are many challenges to this process. The material carriers of game software, e.g tapes, cartridges and disks, all degrade over time. The NFA has declared *Deadline 2025* on magnetic tape²³, a consensus in global archives that, after that date, data stored on tape will likely be unrecoverable. Optical media such as CD and DVD discs are just as vulnerable and more prone to catastrophic failure from damage and diskrot.

Emulation is also no simple task. Emulation is the creation of a virtual machine that simulates the systems of the original hardware and can be supported on contemporary hardware and software. Thanks to the efforts of videogames fan communities, such as the Software Preservation Society and World of Spectrum, there has been lots of work done in emulating early microcomputers and game consoles.²⁴ These emulators, however, all require ongoing maintenance

Continued



Above
Frog Detective:
The Haunted Island.
Worm Club, 2018
Windows/Mac

to remain compatible with new operating systems and browsers – something fan communities are less reliable at. Increasingly, professional software preservationists are working on developing more manageable and sustainable emulation systems.²⁵ Not addressed in this discussion are legal issues that may affect emulation and other preservation practices.

Essential criteria in selecting the Melbourne game designers to participate in this study was that they were independent and maintained full rights to their work. This enabled the project to ask designers for the videogames' source code and GIT so it could be collected by ACMI. Source code is the form of code that is written to be understood by a human being. What are made available to the public as playable videogames are executable files that are the source code files converted to machine code that then run on the designated computing platform. GIT is the most commonly used version control system. GIT documents the changes made to source code files, when, and by whom they were made. It is the software that provides the version control system that documents all the designers' changes to the source code. Source code is the most valuable artefact to collect as it will allow future researchers to understand the design decisions and analyse the detailed logic of the software. Len Shustek, board director of the Computer History Museum explains "Source code provides a view

into the mind of the designer."²⁶ Coupled with the GIT, the source code is both design artefact and a comprehensive design record.

Videogame source code is also the base from which the videogame can be migrated to various platforms. Because of this fact and its transparency, it is rarely made available to collections even when security is assured. Videogame source code remains valuable commercial property to companies such as Sony and Nintendo. Securely stored by ACMI, the collection of this material ensures there is an enduring record of the design and supports the potential for the work to be compiled and exhibited as playable at a later date within new computing environments. Executable files will also be collected that are playable within the current hardware and software environments.

For ACMI, the collecting of the software is a process that also requires an immediate engagement with archiving and preservation. Software is understood as inherently unstable and its collection demands collating also an assembly of softwares and hardwares that allow for ongoing access to avert its technical extinction.²⁷

Collecting the social and cultural conditions of videogames design and consumption

The source code and GIT can provide a narrative of the design decisions, but they tell us little about the cultural and

diversity of the Game students' chosen fields of enquiry created a useful device for investigation, offering a scope not defined by conventions of existing archival practice but coming from the community of practice under investigation. Their selected topics of inquiry ranged across the local production of games, the local games scene and the reception of the games. It included research into funding models that local indie developers were using to support their gamemaking, how they crunch, risk management practices, marketing practices and, due to the timing, included investigations into the impact of COVID-19 and the Melbourne lockdowns on indie gamemakers. It also looked at community activity such as the role of the venue BarSk and the Freeplay Parallels event at Melbourne International Games Week.

The Records

The records created by the class are designed to be easily accessible, saved into file formats that have the least demands for ongoing access. Records of the local Melbourne Game Scene created included documentation of Bar SK, through an oral history project. Opening in 2016 Bar SK was a pivotal place for local gamemakers, showing experimental games, and hosting talks and performances including those of a group of experimental New York gamemakers curated under the umbrella of the satellite program for National Gallery of Victoria's New York MoMA exhibition, and regular exhibitions of local gamemakers' work-in-progress. This research was timely as Bar SK closed in 2020, a casualty of COVID-19's devastation of Melbourne hospitality industry and artist-run spaces. Another community-focussed investigation was of Ian MacLarty's exhibition of work at various venues including the major industry convention PAX Australia and at Bar SK. Featured in this research was documentation of a live gameplay event for *Catacombs of Solaris* (2016) at BarSk. The documentation comprised tweets and video from the live event in addition to reviews from online journals and a poem written by Gemma Mahadeo inspired by the game and published in *The Victorian Writer*. The research effectively mapped the curious ecosystem surrounding this event.

A third investigation specifically embraced the documentation of the liveness of an online event through an examination of the Freeplay Zone for Parallels. Parallels is a live event that annually highlights some of the unique, experimental and personal independent games being made in Australia and its near neighbours in the Asia Pacific. It is part of the offering curated each year by the Freeplay Independent Games Festival and is a fixture of the larger industry event, Melbourne International Games Week. The Zone is a virtual online place, an 8bit version of RMIT's Capitol Theatre. The Zone was created by Cecile Richards and Jae Stuart²⁹ to host the 2020 Freeplay Parallels event as COVID-19 prevented it from happening live in The Capitol. It was designed as a place to attend Parallels virtually, to offer a sense of liveness by being present in an audience who could chat and cheer and jump about together. Concerned that just a record of the Zone was insufficient to capture audience's engagement, the student researcher also recorded Twitter feeds from communities in attendance, capturing both the more reflective and nuanced responses of the audience to the designers' heartfelt talks in juxtaposition with the cartoon-like dynamism of the Zone. Additional information was sought from the gamemakers on production practices regarding production documents and marketing materials. Records gathered include recordings of Twitch feeds of gamemakers playing their games (with public comments), and PDFs of data relating to financials and sales generated from Apple Store and Steam developer accounts. Shared also were other relevant

economic conditions in which the game was designed or how it was played.

The second part of this research explores what kind of records might be created to reflect the cultures of the production and consumption that surround the games entering the ACMI collection. This research also responds to the impacts of digital platforms to access. This research is informed by the understanding that the collection of a record of the culture of the contemporary Melbourne game scene requires a timely intervention in those places where these activities occur. New media scholar Abigail de Kosnik has stated

information science understands a lot about preserving cultural objects that are old, that have taken on great significance in the time since their release, but preserving digital culture means archiving texts, images, video, and motion graphics as they are circulating, when they're the most relevant, not when they are already relegated to 'the past.'²⁸

The students were asked to generate documentation of material valuable to future researchers. They were also asked to prepare questions so the topics identified could be covered in the in-class interviews with the gamemakers. These oral histories are intended to play a central role in situating the archival materials being generated. The

Continued

practices regarding developer's engagement with Steam such as the significance of 'Wishlists' to the findability and economic forecasting of pre-release games on Steam,³⁰ and the impact of Steam's refund policy for short play games from the perspective of the gamemakers' experience.

In the collation of materials to archive, questions of context were interrogated. For example, the importance of the social media platforms TikTok for understanding Worm Club's Grace Bruxner's videos promoting the *Frog Detective* games. Whilst the video files themselves can be requested directly from Bruxner for archiving, without the comments of the TikTok audience they are less coherent. Bruxner's videos are funny and knowing in their parody of the popular tropes and conceits of TikTok content. The comments on TikTok demonstrate that her audience acknowledge and enjoy this fact. But how will historians interpret this content separated from the contemporary experience of TikTok and the comments on the videos' reception? In the context of the collection, they will be dependent on the student's report to provide these insights.

Capturing gameplay

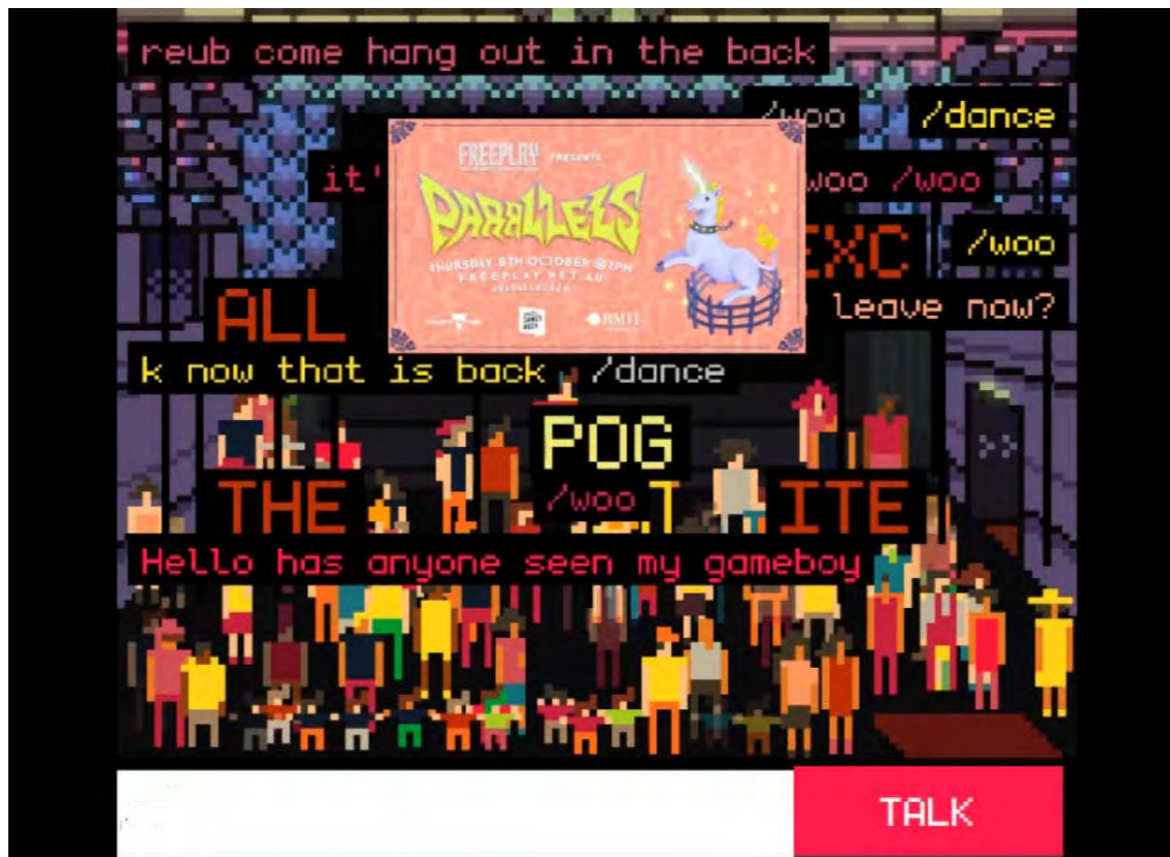
Recorded gameplay of all the games on original hardware was created. Videogames historian and curator James Newman has argued for the importance of preserving records of videogames as played. He argues that, due to the inherent instability of videogames, preservation of long-term playability of games may be an unachievable goal and perhaps therefore should not be the major preoccupation of museums and that records of games as played and played with would be a better focus for the preservation project of videogames.³¹ Whilst this project hopes to preserve software (albeit with the intent that this is both a design text for the literate and the source material for the actualisation of a playable game) it fully recognises the importance of collecting records of videogames as played.

An example of how Newman's notion of the importance of understanding games as played and played with is represented in an examination of players voice acting *Frog Detective* in Lets Plays. These player-made videos, shared on social media sites such as YouTube and the streaming service Twitch, show players of the *Frog Detective* games delighting in recording their own voice acting for the game's characters (whose speech is only text driven in-game). This feature was not originally conceived as part of the game's appeal by the designers. Worm Club's Grace Bruxner has explained in interview that, once they recognised that voicing the characters was a popular feature for players, they worked to support it in the sequels, emphasising character traits and writing vocabulary that supported novelty voice acting.

Gameplay videos shared online are a valuable resource but not an unproblematic one. Whilst game companies have learnt to be comfortable with the ubiquity of sharing of gameplay online,³² the downloading of a YouTube recording is illegal without the permission of its creator. There are, however, tools for archiving online videos and the Wayback Machine will save the urls for YouTube videos.³³ Materials such as these, however, can remain vulnerable for any long-term access unless permission is sought to download and collect them now.

Thinking locally about digital heritage

As part of this research, sites have been identified and added manually to Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, creating a little cluster of records of contemporary Melbourne gamemaking. Many relevant sites were already represented, and it must be acknowledged that the online communities who care for videogames history have been one of the more



Right
Screenshot of live
streaming of Parallels
Freeplay game talks for
Melbourne International
Games Week inside the
Freeplay Zone a multiuser
8Bit virtual Capitol
Theatre. 2020

attentive groups in populating the Wayback Machine and the Internet Archive with computing history in all forms. Other cultural interests are only now realising the important role that it can play. Whilst this discussion is, in part, asking what digital material needs to be collected to provide useful records, other areas of cultural practice are only now recognising that the records they have relied on for centuries are at risk.

One interesting example, in that it addresses the threat to historically recognised resources, is the New York Art Resources Consortium (NYARC) project *Making the Black Hole Grey*. NYARC is a consortium of museums archives and libraries in New York City including The Brooklyn Museum, The Frick Collection, and the Museum of Modern Art who formed in 2006. They had become aware that the digital turn had moved most auction records and commercial exhibition records online. The shift of galleries to making these records available online with cost and access benefits means that there were no longer print equivalents finding their way to archives and memory institutions. Such documents have been a seminal resource for art history and the establishment of artwork provenance for centuries. The NYARC pilot project *Making the Black Hole Grey* uses the Internet Archive's IT service to crawl sites that they have identified as significant. These are born-digital catalogues raisonnés,³⁴ auction house websites, contemporary artists' websites, the NYARC institutional websites, and born-digital art resources falling under the categories of restitution of lost and looted art and New York City galleries or dealers.³⁵ The project is ensuring that copies of these sites (whilst sometimes incomplete due to the limitations of webcrawlers) remain extant and searchable on the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine and also findable through the NYARC webpage. The NYARC project recognises that, as de Kosnik has observed, archiving increasingly needs to occur when digital information is most relevant as it is often transient and instable.

Conclusion

This paper discusses a novel approach to building an archive through working with RMIT Game Design students to develop records of local games culture. Working in collaboration with Melbourne gamemakers over a four-year period to generate a temporal study, it has been able to follow some videogames through production to release.

The records collected from the gamemakers and the associated documentation are all saved in the currently most stable preservation formats of PDF, MOV, JPEG and WAV. These ideally will remain accessible to future researchers allowing them to listen to oral histories, view interviews and game capture, and review relevant articles, event details, Twitter commentaries and other elusive media. There is a rich assortment of material collated from within the community, albeit by emerging practitioners. The documentation is contextualised by the student reports and visualised as an archive of assorted documentation and narrative moments. As a collection, these fragments remain associated and findable.³⁶

In addressing the demands of software preservation, the research has treated software as both design object and design record, seeking software artefacts for the ACMI collection that speaks to the design process as well as providing the best prospect for ongoing access. The research has addressed the implications of platformisation in terms of the impediment they offer to the collation and survival of the traditional resources used by design historians. What has been created is a small but representative archival record that is stable and can continue to be accessed. Ideally, it would be supported in the future by ongoing archival activities that strategically capture the Melbourne game scene over further eras of transformation.

The project is an example of the growing recognition that collections need to be more proactive in working with community to create archives of local contemporary culture.

Many identify the need to address the impact of social media. For example, New Zealand's Alexander Library Facebook Archives is one such project. Going live in 2019 the library asked people to donate their Facebook archives pertinent to life in Aoteroa New Zealand as social history (including design) to the New Zealand National Library.³⁷ This project acknowledges the importance of the records held in social media and that the archival process needs to happen whilst they are live and active.

Future work

This discussion, whilst offering a considered strategy for ensuring that design records of this era of Melbourne gamemaking will survive as a resource for future historians, has not contemplated the burgeoning questions of how historical scholarship may change when the evidentiary basis shifts toward the digital. It could be said that what is discussed here is a conservative approach looking to reconstruct the micro-narrative of local experience as previously captured by curating fragments of old-style cultural records, albeit it in its contemporary forms of tweets and tiktoks, etc, rather than embrace the full potential of digital data.

It is a collection that aligns with the traditional image of the archive as a site which arrests time, which stops all motion. Left unexplored is what happens to the collection if we embrace the inherent mutability of the digital object rather than affixing it in time.³⁸ Scholars such as de Kosnik, Cameron, and Wolfgang Ernst, meanwhile, are asking provocative questions regarding how the cultural shift to born-digital data will transform the archives themselves and thus how they could transform how history is written.³⁹

I argued at the beginning of the article for game preservation by collecting source code when digital distribution in the era of digital distribution leaves the player without ongoing access to a copy of playable game software. The solution offered, whilst best practice, is not going to be a valid solution in most cases as source code is the most legally complex software to access. Few game developers would ever be in the position to share it with cultural memory organisations. If we wish to continue to collect and preserve Australian games, we will need to consider broader options. Perhaps in the future we will see more collective approaches like the NYARC collective to work on solutions as a community to preserve our local design history. Possibilities include working directly with the Australian games development industry to invite their members to lodge a copy of executable game software of their releases with a local memory institution.

Furthermore, in discussing the source code, I have also only spoken of it in preservation terms relative to maintaining access to the game experience as per the original hardware (and as a design document in its own right), but there is the potential for software to iterate and evolve. That with source code (and permissions), notions of preservation do not have to be of stasis but open to new conceptual possibilities, offering the chance to evolve. Videogames preservation and scholarship, by necessity, is at the leading edge of understanding and responding to the crisis in collecting due to the increasing prevalence of born-digital cultural artifacts. This discussion forms part of much larger one addressing the changing nature of design archives and the need for the sector to quickly evolve nimble and scalable solutions to save the present for the future.

- These are the two Australian Research Council funded projects led by Professor Melanie Swalwell. "Play It Again: Creating a Playable History of Australasian Digital Games, for Industry, Community and Research Purposes" (2012–14) and "Play it Again II: Preserving Australian Videogame history of the 1990s"
- Steam is a digital distribution service for videogames owned by games development and publishing company Valve. A digital storefront Steam offers, sales, digital rights managements (DRM), DLC, Server hosting, streaming and social networking services to its users.
- Library of Congress (LOC).2013. "Update on the Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress". Washington, DC: Library of Congress. January 2013, https://www.loc.gov/static/managed-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/02/twitter_report_2013jan.pdf
- The world was fully alerted to the fact that there was a unique design culture for independent videogames happening in Melbourne in 2019 with the global success of *Untitled Goose Game* created by the four-person indie studio House House. *Untitled Goose Game* won numerous international awards including three of the most prestigious D.I.C.E 2020 Game of the Year, Game Developers Choice 2020 Game of the Year and the BAFTA for Best Family Game (2020). It was nominated for numerous others.
- In 2007 even the impact of the Unity engine to transform access and quality of indie gamemaking was yet to be realised. Carless, Simon. 2021. "15 Years Later, Did Indie Game Discovery Happen like We Thought? What's Changed in Game Distribution, Tools and Platforms Since?" *GameDiscover.Co*. 2021. <https://newsletter.gamediscover.co/p/15-years-later-did-indie-game-discovery>.
- Thoas Poell, David Nieborg, and José van Dijk. 2019. "Platformisation." *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019): 1–13.
- Aleena Chia, Brendan Keogh, Dale Leorke, and Benjamin Nicoll. 2020. "Platformisation in Game Development." *Internet Policy Review* 9, no. 4, (2020): 1–28.
- Led by the National Library of Australia (NLA) the Australian Web Archive is collection of 'snapshots' of Australian websites identified as "relevant to the cultural, social, political, research and commercial life and activities of Australia and Australians". It accessed through Trove and contains the Pandora web project launched by NLA in 1996.
- Joanne Hocking. "Search and Rescue: Saving the South Australian Web." (Paper, Moving Image for the Born Digital Cultural Heritage Conference, ACMI, Melbourne, 2014). Audio recording, <http://www.ourdigitalheritage.org/archive/playitagain/conference-report/>.
- Twitters doubling of character from 140 to 280 and the increased ability to attached image and videos further exacerbate the challenges to collection management. See Elisabeth Fondren and Meghan Menard McCune. "Archiving and Preserving Social Media at the Library of Congress: Institutional and Cultural Challenges to Build a Twitter Archive," *Preservation, Digital Technology and Culture* 47, no 2, (2018): 33–44.
- Library of Congress. 2017. "Update on the Twitter Archive" quoted in Fondren, McCune "Archiving and Preserving Social Media", 39.
- An API is an Applications Programming Interface which simply allows two applications to talk to each other. Search is one of the possible functions of an API. Axel Bruns, 2019. "After the 'APIcalypse': Social Media Platforms and Their Fight against Critical Scholarly Research." *Information Communication and Society* 22, No. 11, (2019).
- Bruns, "After the 'APIcalypse'."
- NLA collects the public twitter websites as part of their web initiatives for Australian politicians and other significant figures and groups. This is a record of the "tweets" rather than capturing all the associated data that can be accessed thorough using APT's.
- Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media Analysis (TRISMA), <https://trisma.org/>.
- For a literature review and discussion of the current states of web and social media archiving see: Eveline Vlassenroo, Sally Chambers, Sven Lieber, Alejandra Michel, Friedel Geeraert, Jessica Pranger, Julie Birkholz, and Peter Mechant, "Web-Archiving and Social Media: An Exploratory Analysis," *International Journal of Digital Humanities*, (2021).
- UNESCO also identifies business capacity to sift the digital mass for useful information. (Report from the PERSIST session at WLIC, Lyon, August 2014). Quoted in Fiona Cameron, *The Future of Digital Data, Heritage and Curation in a More-than-Human World*, (New York: Routledge 2021), 86, 359.
- Cameron, *The Future of Digital Data*, 20, 359.
- A PC version was later made available on Steam but lacked the magic of the touchscreen experience of IOS.
- Demo versions of Wayward Strand were made available on Steam for Melbourne International Games Week 2021, LudoNarraCon Festival 2021, and Steam Game Festival 2020.
- "Steam (Service)," Wikipedia, accessed October 18, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steam_\(service\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steam_(service)).
- Phillipa Ryan, "The End of Ownership in Digital Economies?" in *Trust and Distrust in Digital Economies*, (Routledge, 2019, Rights Taylor & Frances 2019), 224–28.
- Claire Derricks, ed., "Deadline 2025: Collections at Risk," in *Collections at Risk New Challenges in a New Environment*, (Lockwood Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvvnq1.8>.
- Helen Stuckey and Melanie Swalwell, "Retro-Computing Community Sites and the Museum," in *The Handbook of Digital Games*, ed. Mario C. Angelides and Harry Agius, (Hoboken, NJ: USA: IEEE/Wiley, 2014), 523–47.
- Part of the challenges faced in Play it Again II is that, after the stability of the 1980s microcomputers' fixed hardware and operating systems, the emulation of computer games from the mid 1990s onward is considerably more complex. There are many factors that need to be considered with games for home computers of the 1990s including differing operating systems, graphics cards and drivers, and other unique software and hardware interdependencies making emulation of individual games a tricky affair. The added challenges of the emulation of network gameplay and massive multiplayer online worlds are far too vast to address here.
- Leonard J. Shustek. "What should we collect to preserve the history of software?" *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, 28 no. 4 (2006):110–112.
- Most games in discussion are designed in versions of Unity Engine but some of Ian MacLarty's games are created in his bespoke engine Amulet which is also being collected. Amulet is a Lua-based toolkit Maclarty has made accessible on GIT Hub under MIT's OpenSource Initiative.
- "Why Study Fan Archives: An Interview with Abigail De Kosnik." Henry Jenkins, ed. Confessions of an ACA-Fan, 2016, accessed November 2021, <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2016/10/why-study-fan-archives-an-interview-with-abigail-de-kosnik-part-one.html>.
- Inspire by and based on the online galleries and spaces of American game artists LikeLike.
- What is significant data is constantly shifting. In 2021 it is apparent that Steam "wishlist" are valued as key performance indicators for the success of a games upon release. A Wishlist indicates the number of Steam users who have expressed an interest in purchasing the game upon release. Wishlist numbers are cultivated through showing builds of the game at conventions online and in real life and attention on social media gained through podcasts, TikToks, LetsPlays, Twitch and interviews. Whilst it simple for a developer to extract Wishlist information from Steam when a game is live and for them to anecdotally correlate it with events such as appearing at PAX East or a playthrough featuring on the streamer Scottish comedian Limmy's Twitch feed (June 17, 2021 Frog Detective) this is an example of the kind of information that must be collected as it happens.

- Dissembler*
(Ian MacLarty, 2018) IOS/Android/ Linux/Windows/Mac
- Doodle Find*
(KlickTok, 2010) IOS
- Forests are for Trees*
(Ian MacLarty, 2018) Linux/Windows/Mac
- Frog Detective: The Haunted Island*
(Worm Club, 2018) Windows/Mac
- Frog Detective: The Case of the Invisible Wizard*
(Worm Club, 2019) Windows/Mac
- If we were allowed to visit*
(Ian MacLarty and Gemma Mahaedo, 2020) Windows/Mac
- Jumpgrid*
(Ian MacLarty, 2019) IOS/Android/Windows/Mac
- Paperbark*
(PaperHouse, 2018) IOS/ Windows/Mac
- Red Desert Render*
(Ian MacLarty, 2019) Linux/Window/Mac
- Tile Snap*
(Ian MacLarty, 2019) IOS
- The Catacombs of Solaris*
(Ian MacLarty, 2016) Linux/Windows/Mac
- The Road may Lead Nowhere*
(Ian MacLarty, 2017) Linux/Windows/Mac
- Wayward Strand*
(Ghost Pattern, unreleased) Windows



LYCEUM CLUB

PROPOSED NEW CLUBROOMS.
AT RIDGEWAY PLACE.

STAGE ONE Y4/34501 STEPHENSON AND TURNER ARCHITECTS.

1

IF WE LIVE AS IF IT MATTERS, AND IT DOESN'T MATTER, IT DOESN'T MATTER.
IF WE LIVE AS IF IT DOESN'T MATTER, AND IT MATTERS, THEN IT MATTERS.



Assessing Significance: The RMIT Design Archives Collection

Melinda Mockridge

Significance assessment recognises the importance of people, places and context in understanding collections. It is a process that investigates and analyses the meanings and values of items and collections, facilitating the sharing of ideas and information

(Russell and Winkworth, *Significance 2.0*, 2009)

In 2020 RMIT Design Archives (RDA) received funding from the National Library of Australia (NLA) to undertake a Significance Assessment of its collection, provided through the Community Heritage Grants Program funded by the Australian Government. Established in 1994, this program supports the identification, preservation and interpretation of community owned materials which are of potential cultural heritage significance to the nation.

The accepted guide for how to undertake this process is *Significance 2.0 – a guide to assessing the significance of collections* by Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth.¹ This guide outlines what significance is and the defined process for identifying it. The primary criteria used are historic, artistic, or aesthetic, scientific or research potential, and social or spiritual. The degree of significance is determined by assessment against the comparative criteria: provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness, and interpretative capacity.

It is acknowledged in the Preface to *Significance 2.0* that in assessing the significance of archival collections it is often appropriate to focus on a study of context and provenance, rather than individual records. “This contextual study may identify functions, activities, individuals, events, relationships and organisational units or entities ... that are potentially of significance”.² The Design Archives collection however is both archival and to an extent object-based, rich with material reflecting practice as well as records of the design disciplines. The assessment found that the RMIT Design Archives collection is of significance at a national level for its holdings of exemplary Australian design. This is an excerpt from the report – the collection-wide Statement of significance.

Previous Pages
Proposed new Club Rooms for Lyceum Club, Ridgeway Place, Melbourne, 1959, architect, Edythe Ellison Harvie, Stephenson and Turner, RMIT Design Archives.

Opposite
Poster titled, ‘The Greenhouse Project: Planning for climate change’ c. 1991, designer, Alex Stitt. © Paddy Stitt; CSIRO; Commission for the Future.

Continued

Statement of significance – collection-wide

The RMIT Design Archives collection is a unique holding of design-related material which is of historic, aesthetic and research significance at a state and national level. Certain individual archival collections are of international significance. It is of national significance as a repository of documents and exemplary design material across design disciplines unlike any other in Australia. No other collection holdings of design are of such depth and breadth for the post-war period and record in such detail the genesis and development of design items which are familiar throughout Australia. The Design Archives, as the holding institution, is of social significance at a national level for the Australian design community. As well, it holds the design-related collections of an internationally recognised Melbourne institution, RMIT University, which has had a profound and lasting impact on the design profession and, through RMIT trained designers, on manufacturing in Australia post-war.

Historic significance

The Design Archives collection has strong national historic significance. Through the collection the history of the development of design as a practice and a profession in Australia can be traced. Archives of important early Australian designers such as Frederick Ward, Frances Burke and Ron Rosenfeldt document the establishment of the design profession and the contribution of design to industry in the post-war period. This is the case also with the small but significant automotive design collection, in particular the archive of automotive designer Phillip Zmood, whose work helped shape both Australian automotive design and contributed to the success of the industry in the 1960s and 1970s. The relationship between design and changes in Australian society during this period is also reflected in a number of archives, particularly those of Alex Stitt, David Lancashire and Mimmo Cozzolino. The archive of fashion designer Prue Acton documents her business and her design practice and its links with important social changes for women in the 1970s. The records of RMIT's Centre for Design document internationally recognised developments in sustainable design in Australia in recent decades. Unique records of the practice of nationally significant architects such as Ernest Fooks, Robin Boyd and Frederick Romberg give insight into their careers and contribution to architecture, while the extensive archives of the firm of Edmond and Corrigan also hold unique documentation of important buildings like RMIT Building 8, as well as Peter Corrigan's contribution to architectural education and debate within the profession.

The Design Archives collection holds archives which are of state historical significance. A number of the collections are inter-related and together tell a story of the design community in Melbourne at particular periods. The story of the influence of émigré architects, designers and artists is an important theme in the collection. Through their co-location, many archives held tell a vivid story of the interrelationships of people and practice, émigré connections and spheres of influence and support in the Melbourne design community post-war and the European design legacy of interdisciplinarity evident in the collection. This is the case with the community of modernist designers active in Melbourne the 1930s and 1940s which included Marion Fletcher, Michael O'Connell, Frances Burke and Fred Ward and the confluence of creativity in Melbourne fashion, art and design in the 1980s as seen in the archive of the Fashion Design Council. This archive reflects not only the creative links in the alternative fashion scene in Melbourne in the 80s but its wider impact nationally. The archive of graphic and interior designer George Kral holds material which is of both state and national significance for its documentation of aspects of Australian aviation history in the interior designs for Melbourne Airport, the first purpose-built jetport in Australia, and records of influential design studio, Gallery A, in Melbourne. The archives which hold records of teaching, curricula, student work and research activities at RMIT University, from its early years as Melbourne Technical College onwards, are of state significance as they document the activities and development of an important educational institution and its contribution to design education in this State.

Aesthetic significance

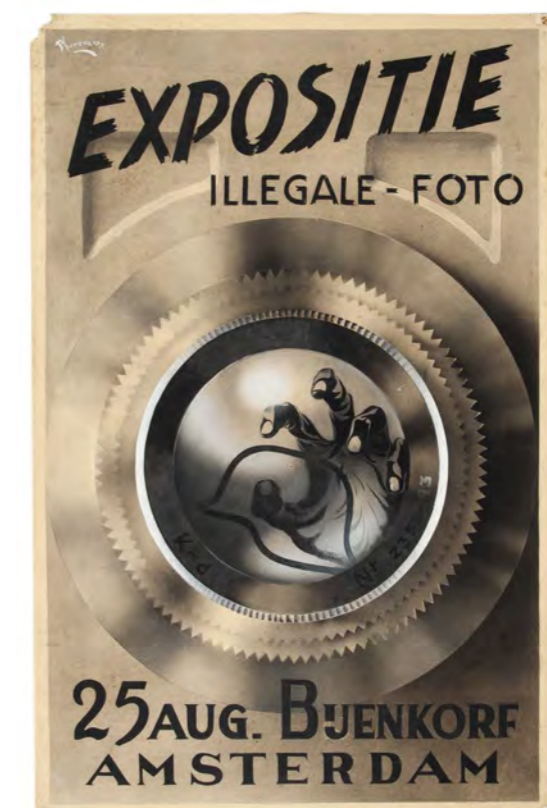
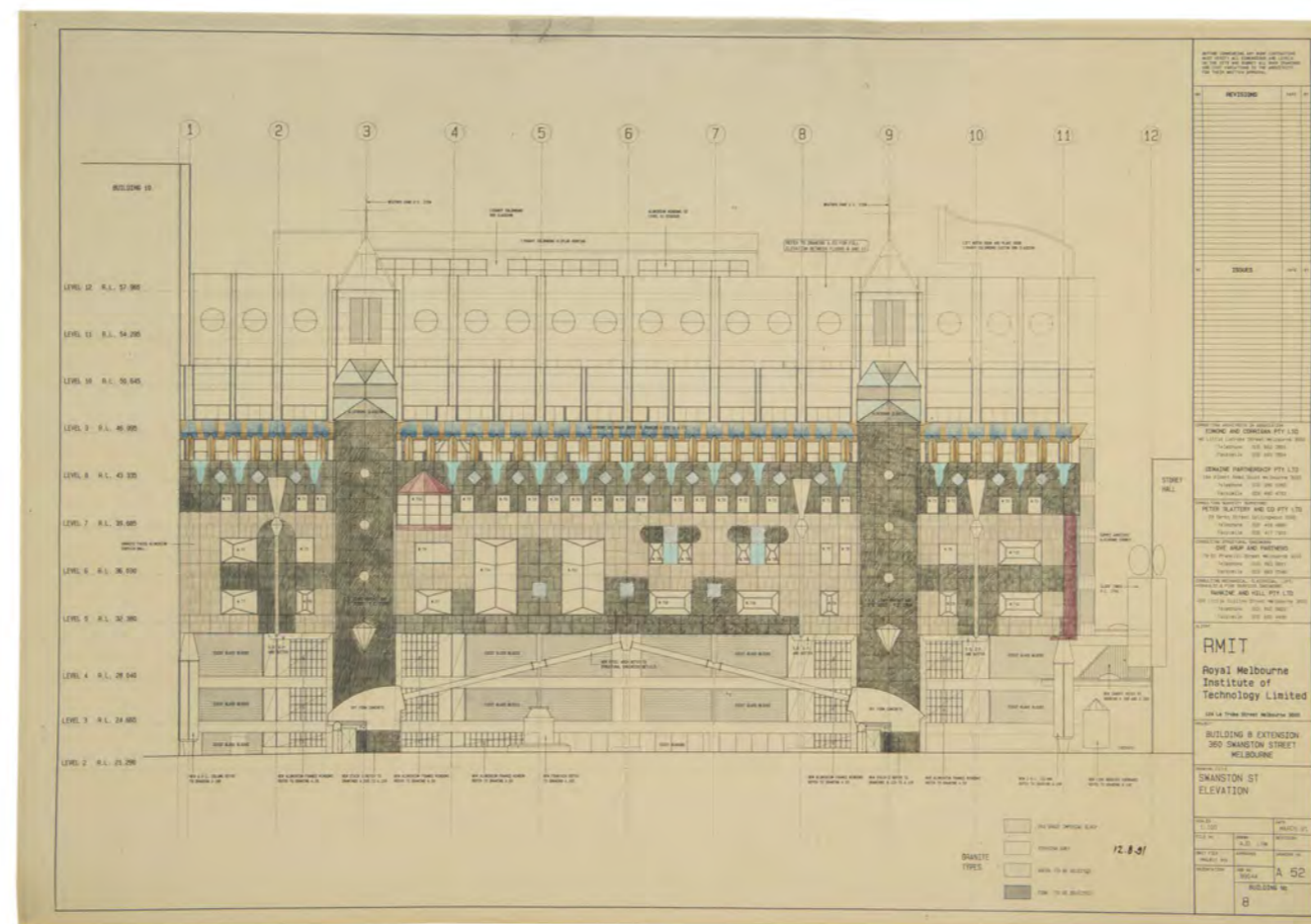
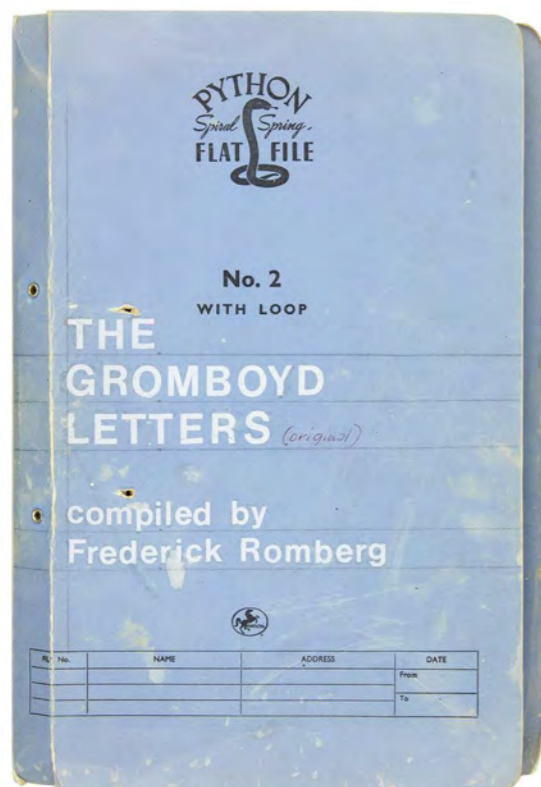
There is aesthetic significance at the highest level in the archives of nationally and internationally recognised designers who are considered exemplars in their fields. Much of the material is of importance for its quality, originality and design thinking and its ability to demonstrate the highest standards of design practice. As well, some archives give insight into design processes through such items as sketches, preparatory and presentation drawings, models, prototypes, photographs, samples and toiles and other material often considered ephemeral and rarely collected.

The archives reflect the introduction of modernism to Australia through the records of émigré architects and designers, and the adaptation of modernist principles to an Australian context over time, through the archives of Australian architects, furniture designers and graphic designers in the post war period. They are of state and national significance for this. The RMIT Design Archives collection is unique for its holding of material related to the documentation of post-modernist architectural practice. As well, some archives hold photographic material by eminent photographers such as Wolfgang Sievers, Mark Strizic, Athol Shmith, Helmut Newton and Henry Talbot. There are fine sketches and drawings by industrial designers Joyce and Selwyn Coffey for popular products such as the Kempthorne lighting range and detailed hand painted presentation drawings by industrial designer Ron Rosenfeldt for Blackwell and Vulcan manufacturers. The automotive sketches and designs of Phillip Zmood vividly illustrate this eminent designer's artistic and design skills. In addition, some archives of individual designers, such as those of David Lancashire and Prue Acton reflect the designer's own art practice, or in the case of Robert Pearce, the blurring of boundaries between art and design.

Left
The Gromboyd Letters 1953-1971, compiled by Frederick Romberg 1987, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program in memory of Frederick Romberg and Robin Boyd, 2008. RMIT Design Archives.

Middle
Diazotype of 'Swanston Street Elevation, RMIT University Building 8 Extension', 1991, architects, Edmond & Corrigan in partnership with Demaine Partnership Pty. Ltd., RMIT Design Archives. © Matthew Corrigan, Maggie Edmond.

Right
'Expositie Illegale Foto' [Illegal Photo Exhibition] 1945-1950, designer Pieter Huveneers. RMIT Design Archives. © Tanis Wilson.



Continued

Research significance

The collection as a whole is of research significance. It is used regularly by independent researchers, curators, academics, designers and students. The material in the archive that relates to the significant contribution made by émigré architects, designers, and photographers to the development of the design professions and the public acceptance of modernism in this country in the post-war period, has been the focus of much research activity in recent years. As a collection of post-war design, there is significance and research potential in its holdings of 'mid-century modern' archival material for those involved in the preservation and interpretation of the architecture and material culture of this era. There is also research potential in the extensive archives of Edmond and Corrigan for researchers of post-modernism in architecture, and in the archives of Pieter Huvneers for those researching corporate graphic design. The collection has inspired new research and the setting up of associations for scholarly activities around discipline areas such as automotive design. The RMIT Design Archives also publishes the peer-reviewed *RMIT Design Archives Journal*, considered a landmark contribution to the understanding of design in the Australian context,³ and supports design-related post graduate research. The conferences, symposia, talks, books, journal articles and exhibitions related to the RMIT Design Archives collection since its founding reflect its ongoing research value.

Social or spiritual significance

There is social significance at a national level in the RMIT Design Archives collection for the Australian design community. This is demonstrated in the active participation of eminent members of this community on the RMIT Design Archives Advisory Panel and the Design Archives Journal Editorial Board. It is also reflected in the ongoing relationship between the Design Institute of Australia and the RMIT Design Archives. As well, and importantly, it is reflected in the continuing donation of archival material by individual designers and design historians and the regular use of the archive by design researchers and educators, reflective of the collection's value for the design community. The archives hold important histories and stories of the design community and of professional associations in Melbourne, and Australia wide. These archives are, in effect, Australian design heritage and of particular significance for this community as a demonstration of past practice and achievements for current and future designers.

Rarity

The collection holds rare material not often collected by public institutions in Australia, and the archives of designers not held elsewhere. Much material held in the RMIT Design Archives is rare, by virtue of its nature as original design material, and in a number of cases, is unique. This includes archival material from eminent designers which reflects design process such as hand drawn sketches, preparatory and presentation drawings not held elsewhere. Early design drawings such as the Blueprint series by furniture designer Fred Ward are rare, and the Unit furniture design drawings by industrial designer Ron Rosenfeldt, are unique. There are design prototypes for design items and architectural models not held elsewhere. As well, rare personal items are held in many archives such as the personal papers and photographs in the Frances Burke archive. The Gromboyd Letters compilation of architect Frederick Romberg is unique.

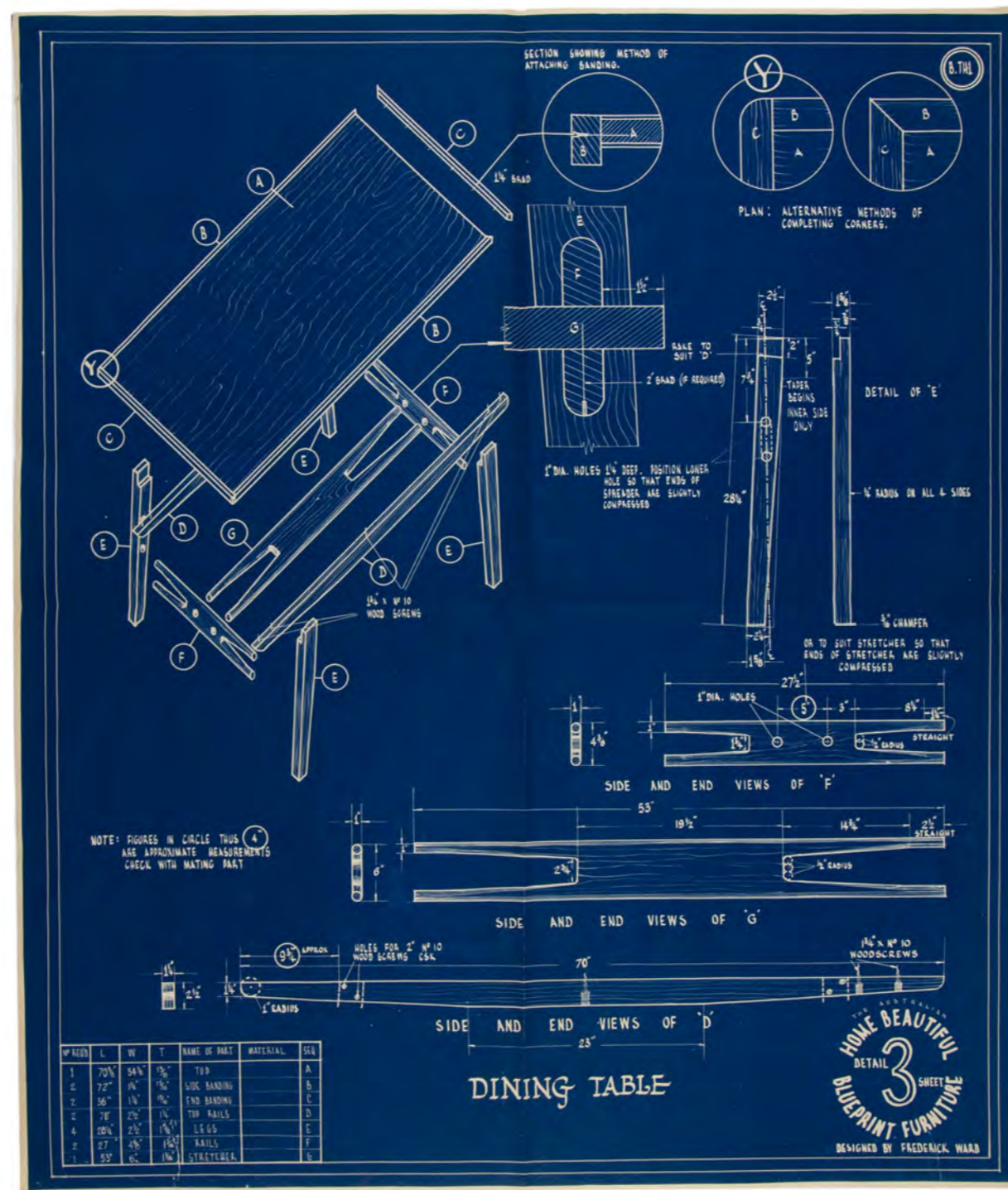
Interpretative capacity

The interpretative capacity of the archive is demonstrated through the numerous publications, exhibitions, seminars and archive-related talks given since its establishment. A number of the archival sub-collections are of huge public interest. The holdings of automotive designs and 'mid-century modern' design across the fields of architecture, furniture and interior design, in particular, are of increasing public interest as indicated by the resurgence in interest in the preservation of houses from this period, and in modernist buildings across Australia – the heritage of modernist design. Themes such as the influence of émigrés and European modernisms on Australian art and design, home-grown mid-century design across disciplines, teaching design, professionalizing design, alternative design practices, designers and Indigenous communities, design for health and environmental campaigns, sustainable design and women and design are just some of the thematic entry points potentially available into the collection.

Left
Futura Furniture Company, 36 St Kilda Road, St. Kilda, 1956, architect, Ernest Fooks, RMIT Design Archives.

Middle
Blue prints for *The Australian Home Beautiful*, 1950–51, designer Fred Ward, RMIT Design Archives. © Martin Ward.

Right
Louis Kahan, Fashion illustration on newsprint, 1958, artist, RMIT Design Archives. © Lily Kahan.



Provenance

In general, the documentation of the provenance of archival material is good. Much of the collection is made up of donations by individual designers, or their families, and thus is of excellent provenance having been in their possession since creation. Other collection material has been donated by associates of designers, their students or design and manufacturing businesses associated with designers or products. There is also material donated through Commonwealth grants as well as from teachers or former students of RMIT University.

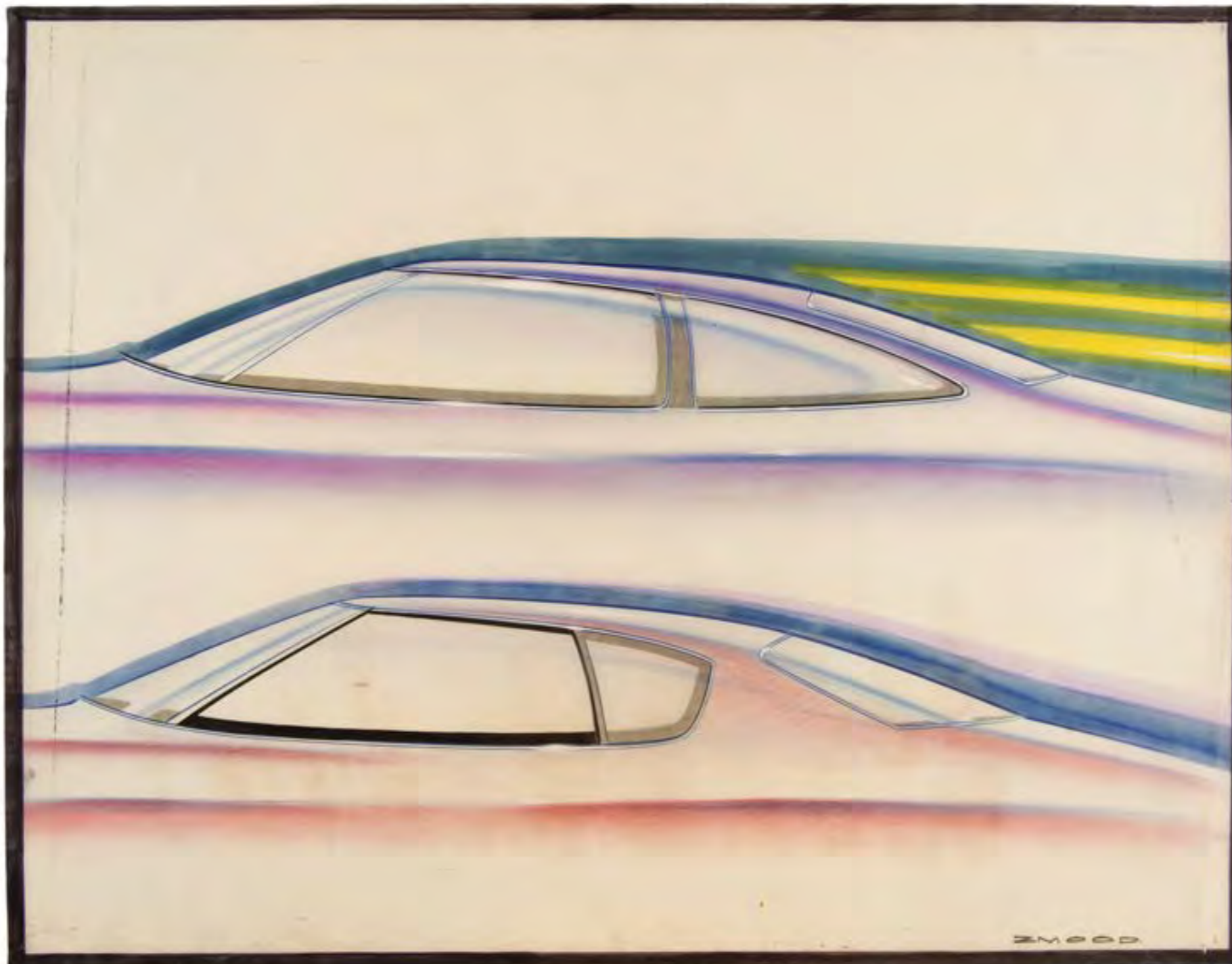
Condition/completeness

The archival collections are housed in well-designed, purpose-built facilities, although large donations in recent years have reduced storage space. In general, and based on the information available for the assessor to review, the condition of the collection is good and, in the case of certain archives, excellent. Some individual archives contain items which are in need of conservation, particularly material such as audio and videotapes, cassettes and fragile negatives and photographs.

Endnotes

1. Collections Council of Australia Ltd., 2009. The first edition, *Significance*, was published in 2001.
2. Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0 - a guide to assessing the significance of collections* (Adelaide: Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2009), Preface, vi.

Right
Styling exercises for
Holden HQ Monaro
Coupe window concepts,
c. 1971, designer Phillip
Zmood, RMIT Design
Archives © Phillip
Zmood.







Design in Quarantine Creating a Digital Archive of Design Responses to COVID-19

Anna Kallen Talley (main text) and Fleur Elkerton (preface)



PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

ABSTRACT

Design in Quarantine was founded in April 2020 in order to document, preserve and provide a research resource, in real time, for design responses to the Coronavirus pandemic. This paper charts the creation, dissemination and future of Design in Quarantine. It begins with writing on archiving that has inspired the project's theoretical foundation. It then goes on to describe the aims and objectives of Design in Quarantine and the practicalities of

constructing an online archive in a socially distant, digital working environment. We then discuss our collecting practices and methods and how we used untraditional mediums to disseminate the archive's content and connect with designers and researchers. Finally, the essay discusses the digital preservation of the archive and its benefit for interdisciplinary research.

PREFACE

Design in Quarantine was produced rapidly. It was a response by two design historians, using our practice to make sense at a time of crisis. Now, eighteen months on from April 2020, the archive stands as a resource for both the present and future. It allows practitioners and historians to draw their own questions, answers and conclusions about pandemic design by engaging with the digital collection.

We, as co-founders, acknowledge the issues concerning digital enfranchisement and democratising access to the internet around the world. Although reaching non-digital audiences, and providing them with digital resources, has been accelerated by the pandemic, the solution to scarce digital access is not the project of online cultural and heritage initiatives. Yet in the UK, digital cultural and heritage resource creation incentivised audiences to digitise, or the UK government to provide tools to access digital resources, in order to enable participation in remote learning and experiences. It is in this context that Design in Quarantine has flourished.

We have now begun to reflect on both the digital legacy and the future of the archive. Recently we have been asking

ourselves questions such as: how do you end a digital collection, is there a finite point where rapid response collecting ceases to be needed whilst preserving a crisis, and when does the project end and the legacy start? Hopefully, searching for the answers to these questions will allow us to develop the collection, whilst sharing our practice with others through social media, digital workshops and lectures. Therefore, as this paper will detail, as Design in Quarantine had evolved, so has its aims. The collection establishes how an archive can represent the development of COVID-19 through design responses. We now also strive to demonstrate how 'history' can occur in the present, not just the past, whilst providing a platform for exchange and interaction with pandemic related design.

INTRODUCTION

Design in Quarantine was founded in April 2020 in order to document, preserve and provide a research resource, in real time, for design responses to the Coronavirus pandemic. We felt that it was urgent for design historians to respond as swiftly to the coronavirus pandemic as designers were themselves, and we wanted to use our skills to participate in the flurry of creative and practical initiatives that occurred in the wake of the outbreak. The sudden closure of museums, libraries and archives, our traditional environments for conducting and disseminating research, forced a shift in design research. Inspired by the technique of rapid-response curation, our fully digital collection sourced through open calls, social media and online research provides an example of flexible design research methods in light of a global crisis. In the future, we hope that this archive will be used by historians as a starting point

for research into how designers in communities across the world responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a starting point for practicing designers to research global design responses to changes in everyday life.

This paper charts the creation, dissemination and future of Design in Quarantine, beginning with writing on archiving that has inspired the project's foundation. It then goes on to describe the aims and objectives of Design in Quarantine and the practicalities of constructing an online archive in a socially distant, digital working environment. We then discuss our collecting practices and methods, as well as how we have used untraditional mediums to disseminate the archive's content and connect with designers and researchers. Finally, the essay discusses the digital preservation of the archive and its benefit for research both now and in the future.

Preceding Pages

Post pandemic inflatable mask for socialising, May 2020, designed by Alessio Casciano Design, from an idea of MARGstudio, and art direction by Angeletti Ruzza, rendered by Alessio Casciano Design.

Opposite

Knitted Face Mask, April 2020, designer Ýr Jóhannsdóttir/Ýrúrarí

The Practice of Archiving and Defining the Archive

We determined that archiving was the most proactive way we could participate as design historians in a period of significant historical importance or change, such as the Coronavirus pandemic. Elizabeth Yale's essay 'The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline', was influential to us insofar as it details the way Western archives can be used to wield power but also serve as forums for civic discourse.¹ Although Yale refers to archives constructed by state institutions and used (or abused) by governmental bodies, her essay nonetheless allowed us to prod at some of the issues concerning archives, such as public access and the role of the archivist, as we were creating our own collection. We do not see Design in Quarantine, in its digital form, as fundamentally different from what we would typically consider as the 'traditional' archive in terms of its purpose. Like any archive, digital or physical, Design in Quarantine is a system that catalogues cultural activity and records human experience.

Creating an Online Archive

Aims and objectives

In order to determine the structure of that system, we used the technique of what historian Kirsten Weld (2014) calls 'thinking archivally'.² We approached Design in Quarantine critically through the questions: what is an archive, how is it created, what power structures are embedded, and whose stories does it tell? These questions allowed us to recognise our own bias, as well as gaps in collecting projects more generally. Further, considering these different aspects of archiving allowed us to hone our aims for the archive into questions more closely related to our project:

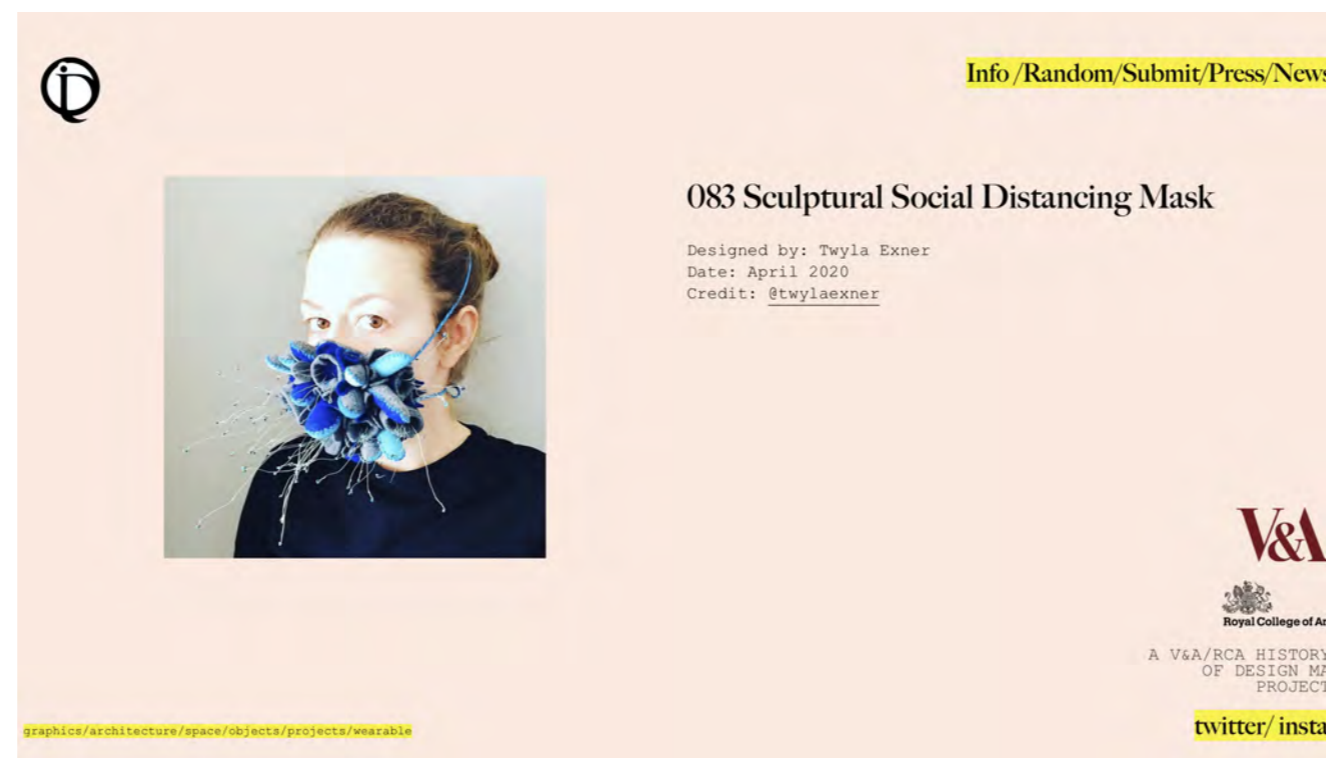
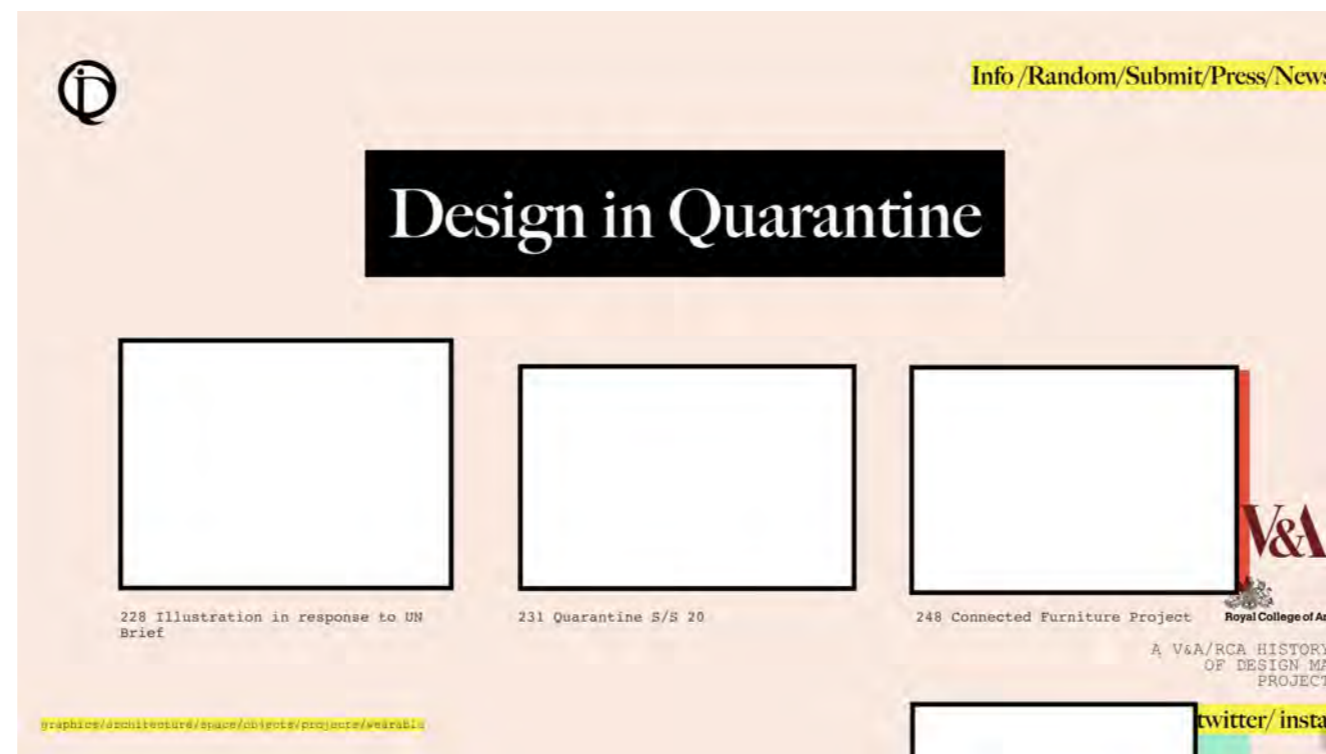
- > How do historians respond to contemporary crises in real-time?
- > What does a digital archive look like and how can it be structured?
- > How can we make living history as accessible as possible using digital methods?
- > How can we document different kinds of design responses to the pandemic, across disciplines, both successful and unsuccessful?
- > How can we provide a platform for designers, both now and in the future, to educate themselves on the ways in which design can respond to a public health crisis?

These questions shaped the archive's rationale and outcomes, which we stated in an internal planning document:

We hope that this living archive will serve as an inspiration to designers looking to change the course of the pandemic through design-based initiatives. It will also serve as a record of how the field of design responded, simultaneously highlighting a shift in design-historical practice and creating a resource for future generations.³

This rationale also shaped the initial collections manifesto, which stated:

We seek to collect works which are integral to representing the evolution of design responses to the coronavirus pandemic. Our aim is to represent the range of responses across design disciplines including but not limited to graphics, architectural concepts, product and furniture design, and bespoke craft. Works collected are not only exceptional pieces in themselves, but also relate to broader issues concerning the pandemic such as mental and physical health, evolving technologies, and societal change.⁴



Working within a mutable environment, it was crucial to establish both the theoretical foundations for the archive and create the platform for its digital manifestation as quickly as possible. We began talking about the project just after London went into lockdown in March 2020, believing it was urgent for design researchers and historians to respond as swiftly to the coronavirus pandemic as designers were themselves, as evidenced by the onslaught of work being covered in the press and what we saw in our own social media feeds.

We wanted to have the archive live to begin collecting and preserving design projects, thus simultaneously working with and against the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the ephemerality of social media. We knew that the pandemic

period and the designs it generated would be of interest to future researchers, hence the idea of constructing a simple, digital archive that could serve as a resource. Within two weeks of having talked over our initial ideas, we decided on a name for the project and secured the web domain, worked out a design for the website and launched the site in mid-April. All work was done remotely using Zoom and WhatsApp as communication platforms and Google Drive to store, share and edit all documents related to planning the archive.

These initial documents included meeting agendas, name brainstorm, design inspiration and style guides, and the aforementioned rationale and outcomes document and collections manifesto.

Digital Platforms and Management

Design in Quarantine is served by the on the US-based web hosting platform Cargo Collective. We chose this platform for two reasons: the first being financial and the second, methodological. Our first year on the platform was free, as Cargo Collective offered a complementary year of hosting for digital projects related to the pandemic. Such an offer allowed social and cultural projects like ours to launch quickly as the pandemic took hold, revealing the impact temporary fee waivers can have in supporting the creation of non-profit projects by removing financial barriers. Methodologically, hosting our site on Cargo Collective further integrates us with the same communities we represent in the archive, as it is a platform that is often used by designers themselves. This integration with the design community has been a core aim of the project and is further demonstrated by the project's presence on social media platforms and our interdisciplinary workshop.

In addition to Cargo Collective, we also created accounts on Later, a social media managing platform, and Typeform, a digital survey tool, to schedule regular posts to our social media platforms and assist with the collection of project submissions. All these digital tools have been integral to the function, growth and promotion of the archive. Neither of us had previous experience with these platforms and have used the project to expand our digital skill sets—skills we believe will be key to research practice in the future.

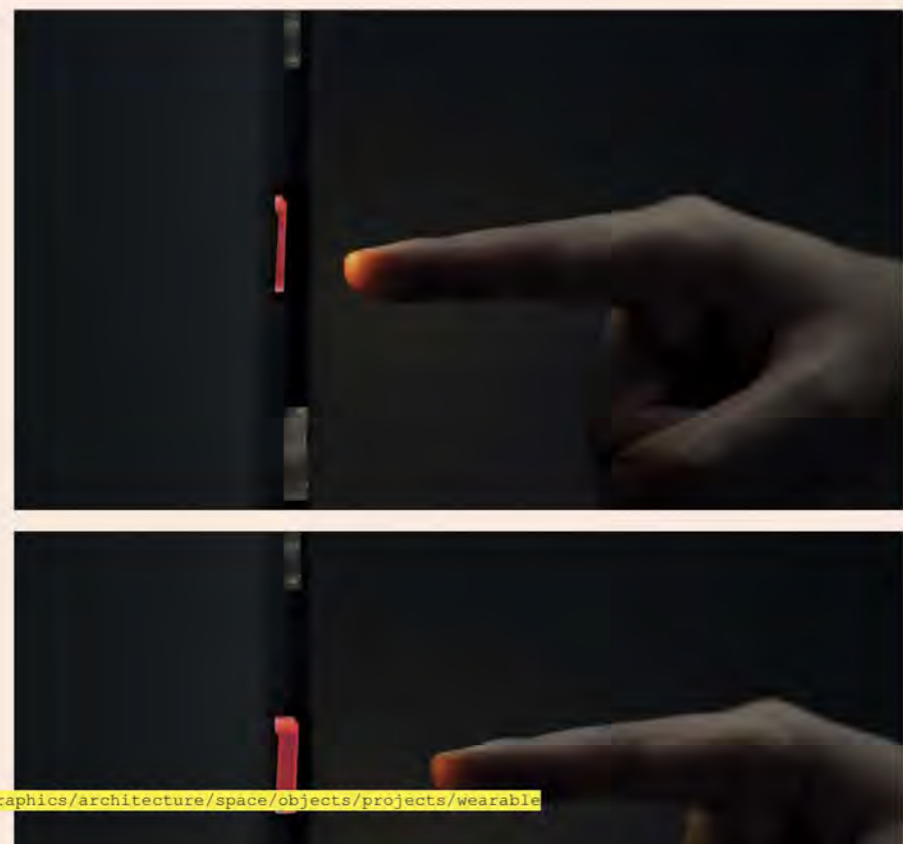
Initially, we paid out-of-pocket for Later and Typeform, and would also need to renew the site in a year's time when Cargo's COVID-19 promotion expired. In mid-2020, we were successful in receiving a grant, the Virtual Design History Student Award, from the Design History Society (DHS), to help maintain the site and its outreach through 2021 as the pandemic and its aftermath continues to elicit responses from designers. This was the first year the DHS has offered the Virtual Design History Student Award, demonstrating how stalwart academic societies are recognising the importance of innovative research in the digital realm, which we hope will continue to be funded in the future as digital methods shape the field.

Structuring the Archive & Entries

Although built on a web design platform that is typically used for bespoke portfolio sites, we used the flexible framework that Cargo provided to create a basic collections management system for our project. The website is composed of four contextual pages, which include 'Info', 'Submit', 'News', and 'Press'. Each design work is catalogued on its own page on the site, which is organised on the back end as an index of all entries in chronological order.

When designing the navigation of the site, we deliberately wanted to avoid creating exclusionary taxonomies in an attempt to combat implicit biases and consciously reject hierarchies. We designed the website to randomise the entries displayed on the home page each time an individual visits and restricted sorting the entries into six broad categories: architecture, graphics, objects, projects, space, and wearables, thereby providing only a base level of organisation. This randomisation and looseness in our site works to subvert traditional methods of archiving.

Early entries did not include descriptive labels, and only the title, date, designer and credit were listed, as we believed to be truly empirical, the archive should include observation and documentation in real-time without qualitative comment. However, as the archive grew, it became necessary to add labels to increase entries' search engine optimisation (SEO) for those conducting research through an external search engine, as the website platform



Info / Random / Submit / Press / News

448 Kinetic touchless, tactile responsive tech

Date: January 2021
Designed by: STUCK design
Credit: [stuckdesign](#)

Kinetic Touchless is a series of experiments by STUCK design in how to merge technology and tactile human experiences. They have created a prototype contactless button that simulates the action of pressing down and have applied it to a variety of scenarios, such as elevator buttons and a digital keyboard.

V&A



Royal College of Art

A V&A/RCA HISTORY
OF DESIGN MA
PROJECT

twitter/ insta

did not allow for a built-in search function. Many designers submitting work also included descriptions with their projects, so we decided that short labels providing context to works' production, materials, use and context would be ultimately valuable to future researchers. In writing labels, we have still attempted to avoid criticism and seek to provide objective descriptions, taking our model from the Victoria and Albert Museum's guidance on writing in-situ museum labels.⁵

Collecting and Dissemination

Digital Collecting Practices

Design in Quarantine is made up of 'digitized' records, images that are surrogates for physical objects. The difference between 'digitised' material and 'born digital' material can be defined as such:

A digitized object exists to record and present characteristics of some physical object. In contrast, born digital objects began their existence as digital. In the case of digitized materials, we care about the fidelity of a digitized copy to an original. In contrast, born digital materials do not serve as surrogates for physical objects, these born digital objects are originals.⁶

Though Design in Quarantine consists of digitised records, this does not mean the physical and intellectual labour that went into each upload is any less than if the object was physical. Our collecting criteria were extremely broad: anything that constituted a 'design response'.

The method we employed to collect work was adapted from the v&a's rapid response collecting practice, employed by the Design, Architecture and Digital department. This type of collecting was introduced in 2014 to allow for acquisitions that are 'in response to major moments in recent history'.⁷ For example, in 2021 the v&a acquired a series of posters by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya titled 'I Still Believe in Our City.' These posters celebrate New York City's Asian immigrant community in the wake of xenophobic attacks carried out against Asian Americans in the United States following the COVID-19 outbreak. In the way the v&a collects recent design work that responds to contemporary concerns, our speed of digital collecting mimicked the speed at which designers were creating works in response to the COVID-19 crisis, allowing us to respond to the coronavirus as historians as quickly as designers were themselves.

Of course, there are challenges with rapid response collecting. Particularly in the months immediately following March 2020, the volume of potential material suitable for the site was extremely large based on what we observed on numerous design websites, online newspapers and social media feeds while searching for works. With only two people actively managing the archive, we know that we were unable to capture every project. Our biggest limitation was our own time and capacity to find projects, download and re-upload images, link to the sources, and write labels. In deciding what to upload to the site, we made authorial decisions about what to include, which was

largely determined by how much time we had to do the work of collecting and uploading. Like every archive, ours has gaps in the collection. Questions of selection, access and inclusion still stand in a digital archive, despite the fact that digital projects tend to have the aura of being more accessible or inclusive, just by virtue of being digital.

Believing that it was important to collect these digital projects rapidly in real-time, we did not reach out to each entrant we included in the archive, thereby saving time and allowing us to increase the number of works we were able to collect. Now, over a year on, we recognise the issues of consent and resource monopolisation that rapid response collecting can produce and acknowledge the decisions we have implemented to create the archive might not be approved of or agreed with by future researchers. Nonetheless, we ensure that each creator is properly credited on the entry's page and make it clear in the Info page of the site that Design in Quarantine does not claim to have created or own the copyright to any of the works we have collected. All copyright remains with the original, credited creator of the work, and we offer that if a creator and would like to contest or correct an attribution, or have their work removed from the archive, they are free to email us and we will accommodate their requests. If a designer submits an entry through our online form, they are asked to check a box granting a CC BY-NC 4.0 Creative Commons License, meaning they retain full rights to the image but allow us to post it on our site.

When inviting the public to submit, it was also necessary to be precise with the scope and aims of our project. Although the term 'design response' is quite broad, we received several submissions that we believed fell more into the domain of fine art, and so decided not to include them in the archive. Another challenge with rapid-response collecting is that we were choosing objects 'before their time', before understanding their true impact and historical relevance. For instance, one of the earlier works (#40) collected was a ventilator designed by Dyson in early 2020. Although the company is well-known for its high-end vacuum cleaners and fan technologies, the Dyson ventilator was never put into production as they were 'not required' in the UK by May 2020.⁸ Even though Dyson is one of the most prominent industrial design companies operating today, their ventilator will not be remembered as making a significant impact in saving lives during the pandemic, despite the press fanfare when the design was originally released.⁹ In contrast, we saved designs related to the changing landscape of cities during the pandemic: from temporary bike lanes in Germany (#18) which we saw replicated in cities across Europe, to New York City's Open Restaurants initiative (#405). Many argue that these alterations make cities more pedestrian and eco-friendly, and debates have continued even after pandemic restrictions have been eased.¹⁰

Since April 2020, we collected nearly five hundred works that represent the evolution and variety of design responses to the coronavirus pandemic. We aimed to collect a range of responses across design disciplines including but not limited to graphics, architectural concepts, product and furniture design and bespoke craft. As mentioned, the site is also open for submissions, and we have received several designs from individuals and studios all over the world. These include a touch-tool called A Mano submitted by Leandro Ricci, an Argentinian designer (#235); a concept for indoor dining domes by Bangkok-based studio THINKK (#276); the 'anything' face shield by mmm design studio based in South Korea (#259); and a series of bold, geometric illustrations depicting lockdown life by Brazilian designer Leonardo Santana (#342).

With the inclusion of commercial projects in the archive, we also had to make clear that Design in Quarantine does not make any claims to promote or endorse entries of such products. We do not profit from the inclusion of projects, nor should we be considered a consumer platform. Further, many projects included in the archive are concepts and have not been actualised. We have done our best to indicate which projects are conceptual, and if a visitor recognises that this has not been made clear in a particular instance, they are encouraged to email us with a link to the project. Representing different narratives within pandemic-design discourses, such as the marketing of conceptual products and Kate Wagner's (2020) critique of design media's promotion of such projects has enriched the story of COVID-19 design by complicating progressive narratives.¹¹ This complication is essential to fully portray the role of design during the COVID-19 crisis.

Moving beyond only design media outlets like Dezeen or Designboom, we began to look at a variety of sources, such as international newspapers like *The Hindustani Times* and *The Moscow Times* to find examples of design responses that we could include in the archive. This helped to diversify the content beyond what would typically be featured in design media. We made a conscious effort to include projects from countries outside the Euro-American sphere, and the archive contains works by African, South American and South and East Asian designers. For example, we received a submission of posters displayed in Bangalore

Right
An example of a later entry including descriptive text. 448 Kinetic touchless, 2020, designed by STUCK Labs © 2020 STUCK Labs.

Design in Quarantine

AN ONLINE ARCHIVE THAT DOCUMENTS AND PRESERVES
THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN REAL TIME.

SUBMIT SUBMIT SUBMIT

DiQ welcomes submissions from everyone, however big or small the project.



DiQ welcomes submissions from everyone, however big or small the project.

SUBMIT SUBMIT SUBMIT



Royal College of Art

design_in_quarantine
Design_inQ



that detail the dangers of COVID-19 in both English and Kannada, underscored by stock images showing figures social distancing or in hospital beds (#180). The archive also includes Rwanda's first COVID-19 ventilator, designed by biomedical engineers from the Integrated Polytechnic Regional College Kigali (#323) and hand-crafted objects, such as silk masks by the Afghan designer Rika Sadat

(#102). There are limitations to our research capabilities, particularly in terms of language barriers, the filtering of projects through international media outlets, and our own identities and backgrounds. We acknowledge that the archive will always reflect this, despite our efforts to subvert our own bias and expand our sources beyond Western outlets.

Social Media for Collecting and Sharing

We became further engaged with our audience after beginning to actively reach out for submissions on social media, which led us to think more proactively about our collection process. To find new projects, particularly those not necessarily featured in popular design media, we began searching hashtags like #coviddesign and #pandemicdesign on Instagram. We would comment or message creators when we came across a project we wanted to add to the archive, which led to the inclusion of many projects by emerging designers and makers.

Our frequent presence on social media also illustrates how we encourage wider exposure for the projects we collect, seeking feedback and suggestions from the communities that are on these platforms. We cooperated in running our social media accounts on Twitter (@Design_inQ) and Instagram (@design_in_quarantine), and at the height of the pandemic, posted one project from the archive daily on each platform. This ensured that audiences who might not visit the site still had a way to view and access the archive's content. We also started an online newsletter in January 2021 to continue public outreach by providing updates about the archive and COVID-19-related design more broadly. The newsletter also served as a way to reflect on our work through short essays and provided an opportunity for guest writers to share their thoughts on the material in the archive. Our use of these platforms also underscores the importance we give to only using free resources for the public and/or research community to interact with the material.

We began receiving press interest fairly soon after the launch of the website and are very pleased to have been featured in the *New York Times*, *ICON*, *Disegno*, the *Financial Times* and others. Interest in the archive by these more general and practice-based media outlets demonstrates the achievement of one of our aims, which was to reach beyond the design history community and bring the archive and work within to a broader public.

The Future of an Online Archive

Digital Preservation

The digital afterlives of collections in our now very virtual world was something which concerned us as we were planning the project, as many websites seem so ephemeral. We ensured our site was saved on Way Back Machine and applied for it to be archived by UK Web Archive. We were successfully chosen, and archived copies of Design in Quarantine are available on-site in the Bodleian, Cambridge University Libraries, Trinity College Dublin, National Libraries of Scotland and the British Library. We hope that storage on the Web Archive's servers will preserve the data of our site indefinitely and give future researchers the capability to access the archive.

Thanks to the hard work of a colleague at King's College, London, we also have obtained an .xlsx file of all of the objects on our site as of July 2021, which has been uploaded to github for anyone to download and use for their own research. Though collected, conceptualised and living in the now, the digital archive will continue to function beyond the end of the pandemic when used as a research resource in the future.

Engagement

Seeking ways to collaborate, we were interested in working with practitioners to foster research around archiving to create outcomes that are both theory and practice based. In February 2021 we convened a three-day workshop at the Royal College of Art, 'The ALT/Archive: Alternative Archiving Workshop', which we ran with students in

both practice and theory-based programmes as part of AcrossRCA 2021. The workshop aimed to break away from traditional modes and concepts of archiving, exposing students to new ideas about collecting and preserving the material and the immaterial. We wanted to produce a workshop based on the methodologies we were employing in the archive and also to unpick and respond to archiving as a practice. The aim wasn't for us to put our project centre stage, but to collaboratively discuss and observe how participants responded to different methods of archiving, different prompts and different opinions. In recent months, we have also presented at a number of conferences, including the 'Clothing the Pandemic' ICOM workshop, the Coalition of Masters Scholars for Material Culture conference 'Material Culture in an Increasingly Digital World', and the 2021 DHS annual conference. We hope that sharing our process and outcomes in these academic environments might inspire scholars to explore digital methods in their own research.

Conclusion

Inspired by critic Tomas Tanselle's comment that textual sources should be read 'not in isolation from, the physical evidence present in the object transmitting the words', we consider each entry in the archive as a primary source with text (the label) but also a physical equivalent that 'speaks'.¹² We believe our public archive holds examples of designs that serve to answer many of the most pressing questions in the realms of health, the environment, work and society that have been raised by the pandemic. The glass vial (#424) may be the most obvious object referencing the worldwide public health campaign for COVID-19-vaccination, but the homemade visiting pod at the Vicaridge Court care home in West Yorkshire reminds us that it is just as important for our mental health to be able to safely see vulnerable loved ones (#397). Although the website contains many mask designs, there is only one that addresses the issue of waste deriving from single-use masks. The GLAD mask steriliser, by STUCK Design, is a hacked plastic food storage container that can sanitise paper masks using UV light, allowing for multiple wears (#240). The work-from-home mandate also sparked a number of innovative designs, one being the concept Nōmada desk by Enrique Tovar, which is made from lightweight materials and can be assembled almost anywhere thanks to its releasable joints (#351).

Recognising that not all design solutions work for everyone, Ashley Lawrence, a college student in Kentucky, USA, created a reusable face mask for the deaf and hard of hearing that features a clear panel in the front to assist with lip-reading (#60). Similarly addressing inclusion, New Zealand's Unite Against COVID-19 campaign featured posters in both English and Māori, ensuring the island's Indigenous population was considered in public notices about the pandemic (#318). Each of these examples, created by both professional practitioners and engaged citizens, demonstrates the range of designs addressing various environmental and societal concerns that were foregrounded by the pandemic.

A database for the present and an archive for the future, Design in Quarantine engages socially, culturally and intellectually with relevant research questions for both practitioners and historians in the design community. We aim to show that 'history' is not always in the past, it is happening now, and that archived material can be part of the evolving story of COVID-19 now and in years to come through its use by designers and researchers.

Opposite
A poster calling out for submissions that was distributed across Design in Quarantine's social media platforms and via email campaigns, 2020, designed by Denise Lai, Courtesy of Denise Lai.

APART
APART
APART
APART



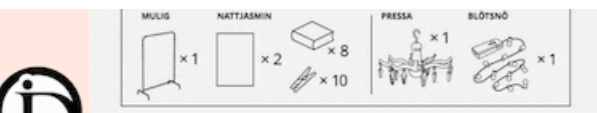
003 CDC Keep Calm and Wash Your Hands

graphics/architecture/space/objects/projects/wearable
Be a part of the solution.
Stay apart.

Endnotes

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12. Tomas Tanselle, "The World as Archive," *Common Knowledge* 8, vol. 2, (Spring 2002): 402-06.

Opposite
Screenshot of Design
in Quarantine website,
October 2021, Fleur Elkerton
& Anna Talley, courtesy
of Design in Quarantine,
www.designinquarantine.com



145 IKEA FORTS



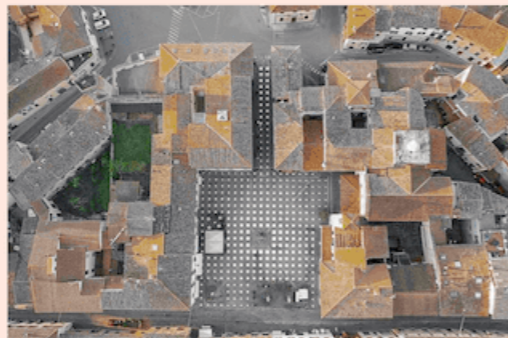
140 Spot robot dog



139 Pop-up Tent Schools for Learning



148 Spray-painted social distancing circles



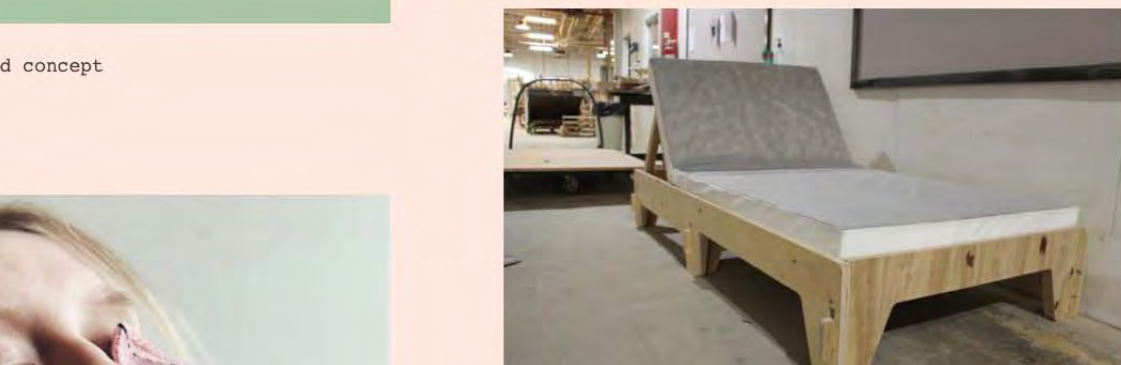
147 The StoDistante



149 plex'eat



151 Rimbin playground concept

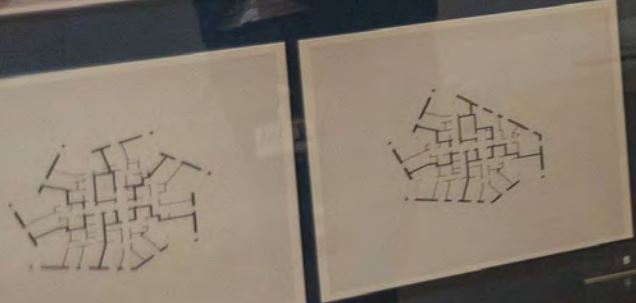


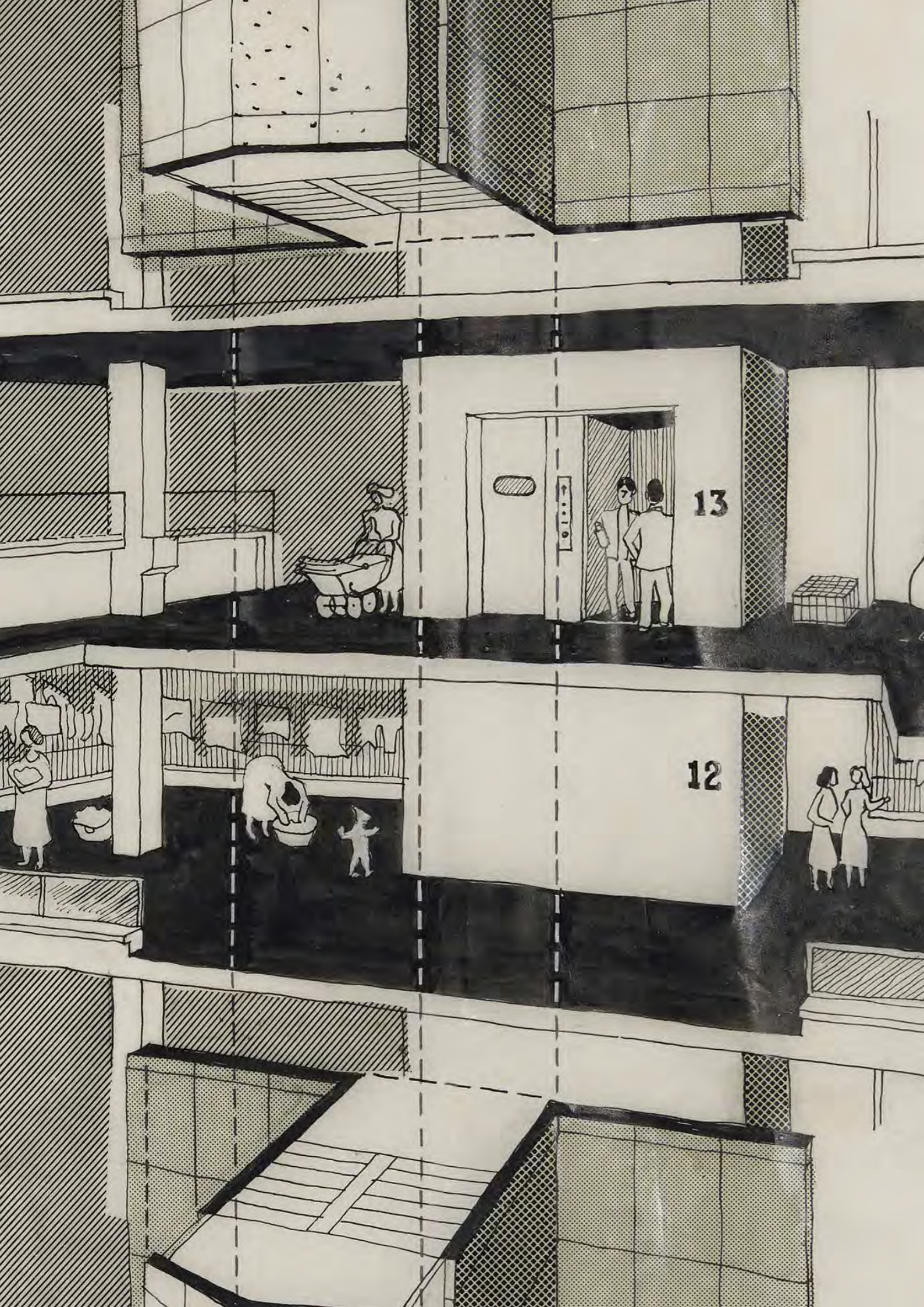
015 Sterilising Lamp



Blurring public and private

UQ collaborative design





Using the Archive to Provoke the Future

Rory Hyde



PEER
REVIEWED
ESSAY

ABSTRACT

What role can an archive play in shifting design practice? The exhibition *A Home for All: Six Experiments in Social Housing*, was staged at the V&A in 2018 against the backdrop of a renewed boom in the construction of social housing in London. Curated in partnership between the V&A and the Royal Institute of British Architects, the exhibition sought to remind design practitioners – architects, planners, local councils – of the radical history of social housing design throughout the twentieth century.

In particular, it foregrounded successive experiments in spatial quality, access to light, social connection, community engagement, and collaborative design, and thereby highlighted the relative lack of ambition in social housing design today. As Melbourne similarly embarks on its biggest investment in social housing for decades, this paper also looks back to the local high point of social housing design under the Ministry of Housing in the 1980s, asking “What lessons could we learn? And, critically for this issue: Where is the archive?”

The exhibition *A Home for All: Six Experiments in Social Housing*, staged at the v&a in 2018, sought to draw upon the archive to provoke a discussion around the design of social housing. As Melbourne embarks on its biggest investment in social housing in decades, what lessons can we take from London?

The archive is a place of memory, where evidence from the past is recorded and kept safe. It is protected from the passage of time by a stable temperature, low humidity, white gloves, polypropylene sleeves, plan chests, keys, and biometric fingerprint sensors. Its contents were once present, once urgent, but now pile up as sedimentary layers, their stories preserved, but their agency dulled. And yet, these stories still hold the power to provoke. They lie in wait, to be revived and activated in the present. This is the radical potential of the archive, to be lifted from drawers at the right time in an attempt to change the future.

This was the aim of the exhibition *A Home for All: Six Experiments in Social Housing*, curated in partnership between the Victoria and Albert Museum (v&a) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and staged at the v&a in London in 2018.¹ As curators, we sought to activate the archive to remind those engaged in building social housing – planners, architects, councillors, engineers and communities – of the ambitious and experimental legacy of social housing in the UK (United Kingdom), in the hope that they might aspire for more.

The exhibition was staged against the backdrop of a boom in social housing.² In an urgent effort to address the crisis in housing availability and affordability, local governments across London were undertaking a revolution in social house-building. The think tank Centre for London estimated that 23,000 new social homes were in the pipeline,³ and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Kahn, announced the greatest number of new council home starts since 1983.⁴ This boom was further accelerated by new central government policy introduced in 2018 that lifted the cap on local councils’ ability to borrow to build new homes.⁵ After decades of underinvestment, social housing had suddenly become a major project.

And yet arguably architects today are out of touch and out of practice. Not since the late 1970s, has social housing been built at any meaningful scale in the UK. The 1980 Housing Act closed local authority architects’ departments, once an employer of nearly 50% of architects in the UK, and the government turned to the private sector as the primary provider of new homes.⁶ There are very few architects still practising who participated in the so-called ‘golden age’ of social house-building in the 1960s and ’70s. And as many of the buildings from this era are sold off or demolished, the lessons they offer us today can be harder to see.⁷

Forty years of working for the market had left the design of housing in an emaciated state, as mere assets, not places for community or public life. Our exhibition sought to provide a reminder of what was once possible.

As the subtitle states, our exhibition focused on six pioneering UK social housing projects, foregrounding their contribution to social housing design, from a tower block that up-ended the terraced street, to a DIY kit that encouraged residents to design their own homes. All of these projects were commissioned by local authorities, showing the crucial role of the state in providing housing, an obligation we sought to capture in the title: *A Home for All*. The exhibition comprised original architectural drawings, photographs, site plans, building models and material samples. It also featured archival and contemporary posters and protest material, illustrating the political and social backdrop to these projects.

The material was drawn largely from the exceptional collections of the RIBA. Created in 1834, with the founding of the Institute, the RIBA collection sought to be an “an educational tool for students training to be architects; a source of inspiration for architects already in the profession; [and] a record of British architectural practice”.

Preceding Pages

Installation view of ‘A Home for All’ exhibition, v&a, 2018, Photographer Peter Kelleher.

Opposite

Detail of cutaway perspective showing residents on the 12th and 13th floor shared platform areas of Keeling House, 1958, architects, Lindsey Drake and Denys Lasdun of Fry, Drew, Drake and Lasdun, RIBA Collections, Lasdun Archive.

Continued



Above
View of the rooftop
wind canopy of Wells
or Tunbridge House,
1949, architect, Berthold
Lubetkin, photographer,
Herbert Lionel
Wainwright.
RIBA Collections.

Opposite
Cutaway perspective
showing residents on
the 12th and 13th floor
shared platform areas
of Keeling House, 1958,
architects, Lindsey Drake
and Denys Lasdun of Fry,
Drew, Drake and Lasdun,
RIBA Collections, Lasdun
Archive.

Today the collection comprises more than four million items, including more than one million architectural drawings, 1.6 million photographs, 150,000 books, 400 architectural models, and 1.5 million manuscripts and archive documents.⁸ It is managed by a team of seven curators, actively acquiring new material through purchase and acquisition, curating exhibitions, publishing research, and caring for and maintaining for the historic collections. The collection is kept across three sites, at the v&a, RIBA headquarters in Portland Place, and a storage centre in Chelsea. Amongst these vast holdings are significant examples of social housing design.

In selecting the material for the exhibition, we looked for examples of design ideas which have been overlooked, asking the question, What has been forgotten? We decided on six projects, from Berthold Lubetkin's Spa Green, designed in 1938, to PSSHAK, designed in 1971.

This article will now turn to each of these projects, focusing on a single work of different media – photo, drawing, model, chart, handbook – which illustrates the key idea of each project.

Health and Modernity – Spa Green

The exhibition begins with the Spa Green Estate, designed by Tecton, the practice led by Russian émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin, in 1938, and completed after the war in 1946.⁹ Lubetkin was an avowed modernist, and sought to bring to housing design a connection to light, space, air and nature, an approach in stark contrast with the closely-packed slums that his building replaced. Located in Finsbury, central London, the scheme comprises 126 flats in three thin slab blocks, set back from the street amongst a green landscape. The thin profile allows each apartment to have a dual aspect, with sunlight, air, and views from every room. Commissioned by the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury, a local council, it formed part of a larger ensemble of public works, including the Finsbury Health Centre, described as “the realisation of a radical humanitarian brief for a deprived community.”¹⁰

This image, from the RIBA collection of photographs, shows the concrete aerofoil-like roof on top of the two larger buildings, providing shelter to the shared laundry spaces,

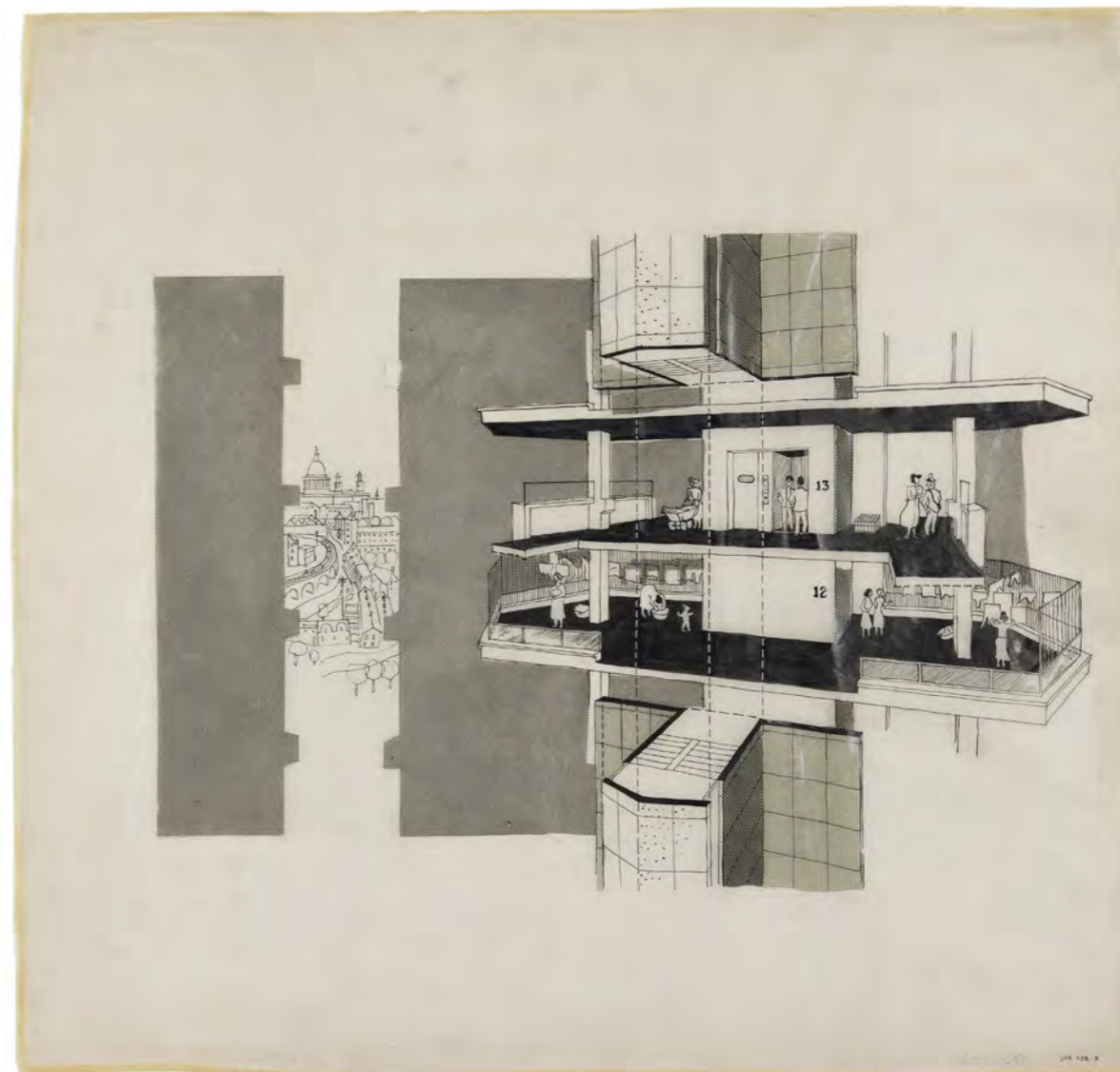
and accelerating the wind for drying clothes. The black and white photograph by Herbert Lionel Wainwright captures the building in the early evening, with long shadows stretching across the tiled roof deck, emphasising the streamlined design. This roof feature is a curious collision of the high and low, a heroic gesture of aircraft-inspired functionalism, serving a prosaic domestic function. This one element captures Lubetkin's socialist ideals. He would declare, “nothing is too good for the workers,”¹¹ a statement which speaks to the wider progressive values of the time, expressed most powerfully in the foundation of the National Health Service in 1948.

Spa Green is now a mixture of council flats and private owners, and remains desirable. And yet it would be near impossible to build today, when thin plans are deemed inefficient, with the vast majority of apartment towers built around a central elevator core. Not to mention how much of the site is given over to gardens. It demonstrates how living densely need not lack access to sun and air, a lesson seemingly forgotten today.

Highrise Community – Keeling House

Keeling House, designed by Denys Lasdun in 1955 and completed in 1959, sought to recreate the social encounters of the terraced street in the form of a tower. Lasdun, best known as the designer of the brutalist megastructure that is London's South Bank Arts Centre, believed in a robust and muscular architecture as a backdrop to public life. While designing Keeling House, he spoke extensively with future residents, meeting them for lunch “to try and understand a bit more about what mattered to them.”¹² Out of these conversations came the importance of community and street life, leading Lasdun to create various spaces for casual encounters, fostering social cohesion, and asserting the importance of human scale in mass housing design. Lasdun described the building as “a protest against treating the human being as a statistical pawn.”¹³ A position at odds with the anonymising and cold Modernism of other tower block housing estates of the time, which simply stacked up units like lines in a spreadsheet.

The building was conceived as a ‘cluster block,’ comprising four 16-storey blocks clustered around a central services



tower. Privacy was achieved with short access balconies that serve only two flats and face each other at oblique angles. While shared central platforms, envisioned as “hanging gardens,” provide a vertical alternative to the traditional backyard – a space to meet and chat over laundry lines.

This cutaway perspective drawing conveys the social ambition of the project. It depicts various vignettes of daily life taking place on the shared landings – a woman pushing a buggy, men chatting in the lifts, children playing, hanging the laundry – while also framing a view of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral between the gap in the clustered towers. Here the building is presented operating at multiple scales, as stage for the social encounter, and as confident object on the metropolitan horizon. The unusual perspective enables these two scales to be illustrated simultaneously, at once domestic and civic, representing the complex experience of urban life.

Although the drawing is credited to Lasdun and his partner Lindsey Drake in the RIBA collection record, this attribution likely applies to the design of the building only. The drawing is possibly by the hand of T. Gordon Cullen, who also provided the illustrations for the influential *Homes for Today & Tomorrow* report, published by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1961, better known as the Parker Morris Report.¹⁴ We can see similarities in the use of solid black hatching, and the distinctive profiles of the figures.

Keeling House stands as a monument to a period of social housing design that was self-confident and high quality, becoming the first tower block to be heritage listed in the UK. And yet, it's impossible to imagine anything like it being built today. In our era of “value engineering” (cost cutting), who could justify building five separate towers joined together? It remains a reminder of what an unashamedly progressive public architecture could look like.

The Social Street - Alexandra Road Estate

The Alexandra Road Estate, designed by Neave Brown in 1972 and completed in 1978, is a pioneering example of high-density, low-rise housing. Brown was part of the progressive architects' department led by Sydney Cook in the London Borough of Camden, which created “some of the best and most exciting council housing ever built.”¹⁵ Alexandra Road foremost among them.

Brown's design was a reaction against the modernist tower blocks of the 1960s, which he saw as poor urbanistically, standing as objects in space, “withdrawn from the perimeter of the site and at some distance from each other.” Instead, he conceived of Alexandra Road as having “a closer conformity to the continuity of the existing city,” referencing the older patterns of terrace housing.¹⁶ If this sounds polite and contextual, the result is anything but. Alexandra Road could be better described as a brutalist megastructure, a continuous concrete ziggurat, hugging low to the ground, and stretching 300 metres long. The

Continued



Left
Alexandra Road
presentation model, 1970s,
architect, Neave Brown
of the Camden Council
Architects' Department,
RIBA Collections,
presented by the architect,
2017.

Opposite
*The Architects and Other
Agencies Involvement
in Community Affairs*,
Ralph Erskine,
Byker Estate, 1974,
RIBA Collections.

520 dwellings are arranged into two terraced arcs, seven storeys and four storeys, facing each other onto a red brick pedestrian 'street', a social condenser for the maximising of casual encounters.

At the time of our exhibition the RIBA was in the process of cataloguing a major acquisition of Brown's work, initiated after he was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal in 2018, shortly before his death.¹⁷ Among original sketches, plans, photographs, and notebooks, was a large balsa wood model of Alexandra Road, in near-perfect condition. The model shows the clarity and confidence of the planning of the estate, bold arcs stretching the length of the site, the northern building appearing to defy gravity as it cantilevers out over the railway line. It also shows the various other programmes which formed part of the project: a landscaped park designed by Janet Jack, shops, a school for intellectually disabled children, a community centre, and a youth club.

Today it would be almost unthinkable for a single architect to be given sole authorship over a precinct of such scope, especially at only forty years old, as Brown was. Commissioners have come to fear the overbearing hand of the architect, that it leads to monotony and soullessness, instead preferring to carve up projects into small chunks. In many instances this fear is justified, but it also can mean that clarity of purpose is lost. Alexandra Road demonstrates the power of architecture to set in concrete spatial and social relationships which can shape people's lives for many

years to come. The Alexandra Road Estate continues to serve its residents well, standing as a living monument to civic generosity.

Architect-led participation - Byker Estate

The Byker Estate in Newcastle, designed by Ralph Erskine in 1968 and completed in 1982, is arguably the most ambitious example of participatory social architecture in the UK. Erskine was born and studied architecture in London but emigrated to Sweden in 1945, drawn to Swedish modernism and the opportunity to build for the welfare state. He intended Byker to be "a complete and integrated environment for living in the widest possible sense," comprising 1,800 homes, with schools, shops, churches, and community facilities.¹⁸

Erskine set up his design office on site, where future residents could drop in to examine the plans, discuss the project and inform the design. The long schedule of 14 years from commencement to completion was due to the staging of the project, which meant that residents only had to move once – from their old home, to their new home, rather than into temporary accommodation – allowing neighbours and families to be re-housed together, maintaining their social and economic ties.

Byker was described by the architecture critic Reyner Banham as "a tidal wave of sheddery and pergolation,"¹⁹ reflecting the eclectic and seemingly improvised appearance of the estate and its unusual use of materials such as timber, plastic, and polychrome brick – materials more commonly

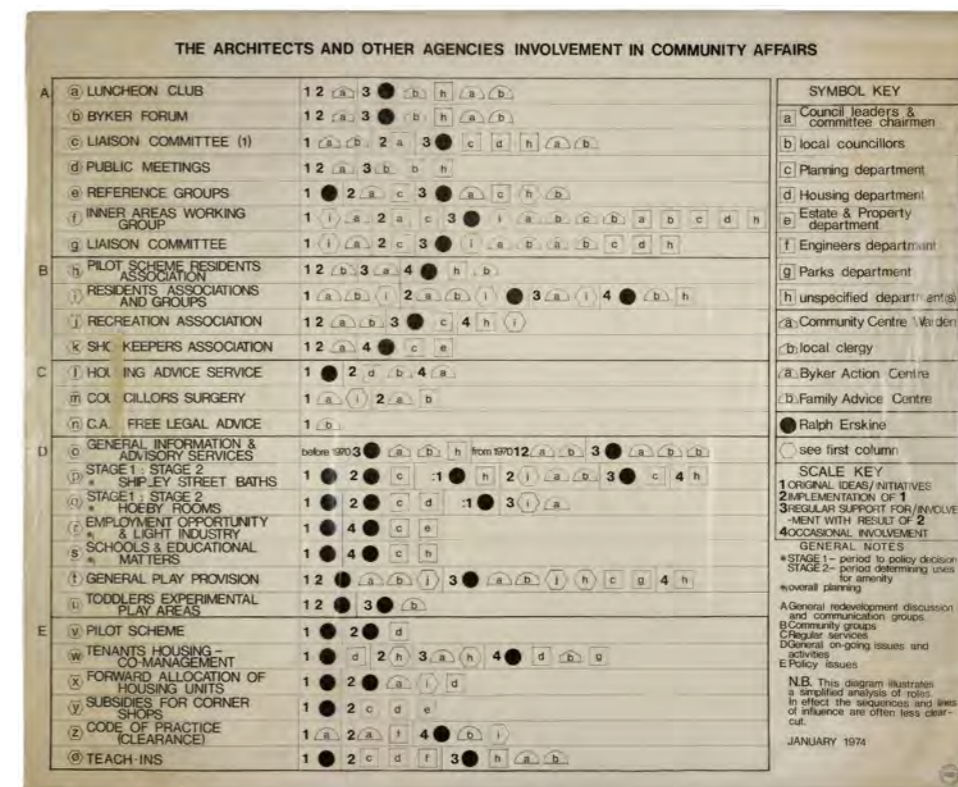
used to build a garden shed or pergola. Byker was a clear break from the anonymous concrete modernism that had come to define post-war social housing, and remains a striking example of an estate embodying the complexity of a community.

The RIBA holds the complete archive from Erskine's office of the Byker project, stretching over shelves and shelves in the Chelsea Collections Centre, comprising countless letters between residents and the office, questionnaires, specifications, bills of quantities and file notes.²⁰

In our preparation for the exhibition we were only able to undertake a cursory glimpse into the depth of material available, skimming across the surface to select eight objects in total.

Among them was this diagram titled *The Architects and Other Agencies Involvement in Community Affairs*, dated January 1974. It is a list of the various committees, groups, and associations in the conception of the new estate. Some sound prosaic: 'Luncheon Club,' 'Public Meetings,' 'Reference Groups,' 'Housing Advice Service.' And some sound way out there, including 'Toddlers Experimental Play Areas' and 'Subsidies for Corner Shops' – only possible in the 1970s, before health and safety and the decline of the welfare state.

The diagram also indicates who is to be present at each of these meetings. The solid black dot denoting Ralph Erskine – presumably, the office, rather than the individual – is to attend practically all of them. The diagram describes what

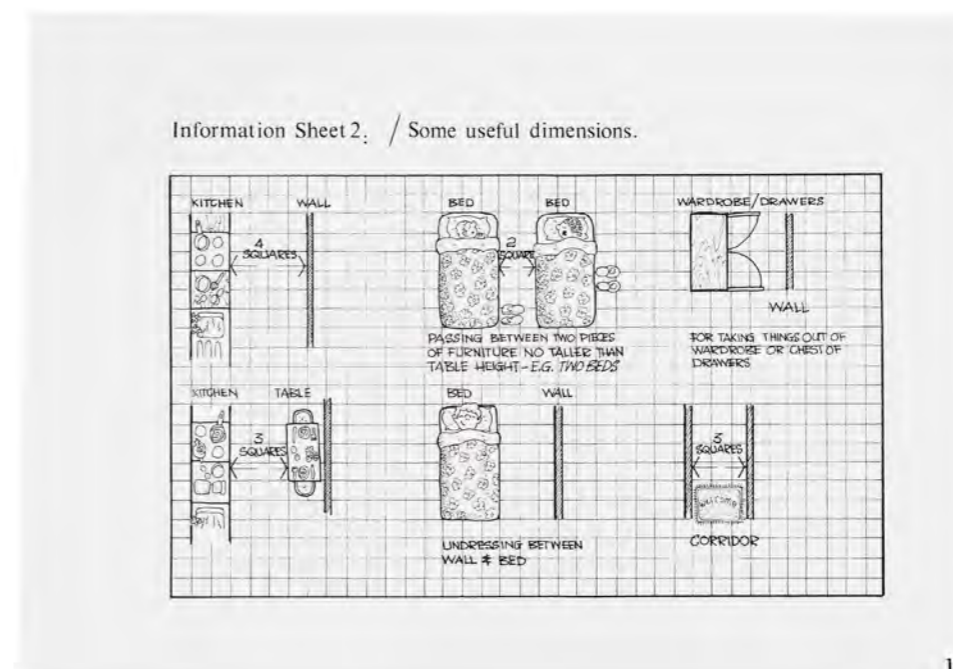
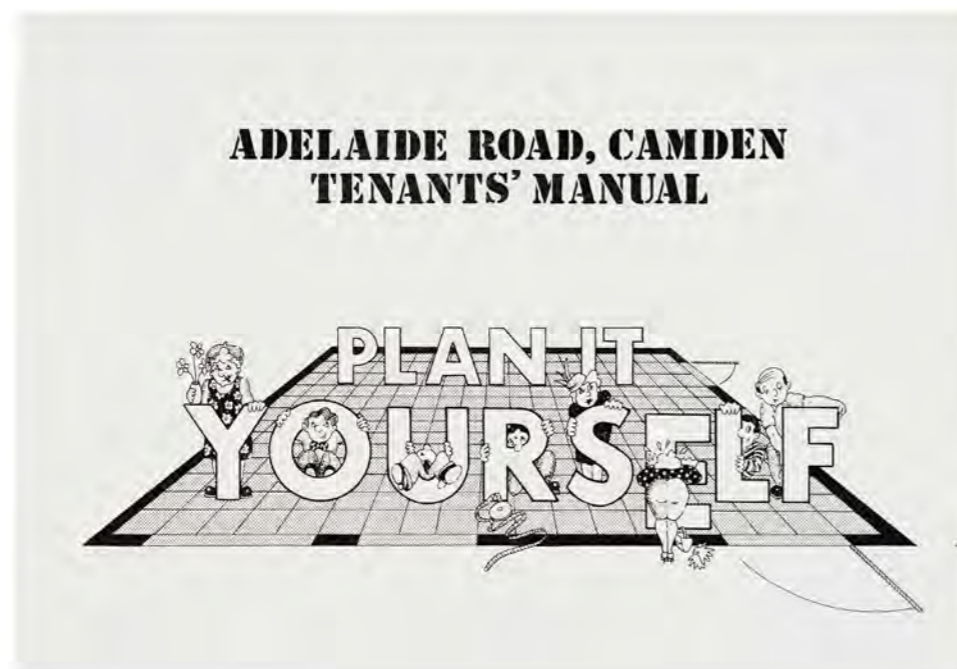


is unique about this project in a way that no conventional architectural plan could. It shows the depth of engagement of the architects in the strategic, social, educational, commercial, and organisational aspects of the project too often dismissed as 'not architecture.' When too often architecture is equated simplistically with form, and when community consultation has become a mere box-ticking exercise, Erskine's approach to the design of Byker stands as an example of what truly meaningful participation looks like.

DIY Collaborative Design - PSSHAK

This final example came as a surprise to us as curators, encountered in the RIBA archive after a lucky keyword search. The Primary Support Structure and Housing Assembly Kit, or PSSHAK for short, was conceived by Nabeel Hamdi and Nicholas Wilkinson in 1971 when they were students at the Architectural Association. It is a flexible design system that allows future residents to play an active part in designing their own homes. Using an instruction manual, residents could place furniture, fittings, and even walls, which were then drawn up and built to their specifications.

The concept was inspired by the work of Dutch architect John Habraken, who proposed the separation of building components into support and infill, allowing greater flexibility.²¹ Hamdi and Wilkinson proposed a system whereby the floors, ceilings and external walls would be fixed, but the internal walls, services (kitchen and bathrooms), fittings and furniture would be determined



by the resident. “As architects, we are not occupied with designing dwellings,” they wrote, “but with designing the possibilities for dwellings to be made.”²²

The point of the system is to allow greater flexibility and adaptability of the home. In an interview in 1972, Hamdi explains, “Present housing offers absolutely no choice, no adaptability as families change. We can provide for family needs with PSSHAK in terms of actual increase or decrease in the size of the family, change in the actual structure of the family, change in their life style.”²³ They give an example of a family where two daughters no longer want to share a room, the father wants a darkroom, and the kitchen needs expanding to suit the new dishwasher. The system, with its flexible plan and moveable walls, promised to accommodate these changes.

Hamdi and Wilkinson put PSSHAK into practice while working in the Greater London Council Architects’ Department in 1971. A small pilot scheme in Hackney was followed by a larger development of eight three-storey blocks on Adelaide Road in Camden. Each block was a shell that could be sub-divided to contain different combinations of individual dwellings.

To determine the needs of each family, and their desired layout, residents were issued a tenants’ manual titled *Plan It Yourself*.²⁴ Playfully illustrated with cartoon people, it guides residents in the process of designing their own home through a series of checklists, diagrams, and instructions. “There are hints on how to divide each area to give more room, how to enlarge rooms, to add storage, to adjust position of doors for suitable furniture arrangements, etc.” Information sheets provide scale drawings of furniture and standard rooms, which can be cut out and arranged on a sample plan. Example drawings give suggestions of what works and what does not.

Having completed their handbook, residents then met the architects in an interview, where they could discuss and refine their ideas. Photos in the archive show this process of collaborative design, with Hamdi and Wilkinson reaching across large building models, moving walls, as prospective residents look on eagerly.

The handbook conveys a friendly optimism that’s uncommon in the history of public housing. What is

ostensibly a functionalist building system is softened by the cartoon drawings, showing a boat in the bathtub, a couple snoring in the double bed, coffee on the kitchen table, food in the cupboards. PSSHAK promised to respect social housing residents, to understand and listen to their needs, rather than to simply treat them as a number to be housed, or a problem to be solved. Like Byker, PSSHAK represents a truly participatory process of design, of the kind of specificity only afforded to those at the highest tier of the private sector. PSSHAK acknowledges that everyone – even those on the bottom of the housing ladder – has their own specific needs.

Although the system wasn’t used on any subsequent projects, it established the potential for a participatory form of social housing exemplified today in projects such as Berlin’s Baugruppen co-housing schemes, where citizens work directly with architects to determine specific designs, cutting out the developer.

Learning from Melbourne

Melbourne in 2021 stands in a similar position to London a decade ago. The crisis of housing affordability and more than 48,000 people on the social housing waiting list has led to bold political commitments to address it. In November 2020, the Victorian State Government announced the Big Build, a \$5.3 billion programme to build 12,000 homes within four years, described as “the biggest single spend on social housing in the state’s history.”²⁵

And yet, just as in London, our architects are out of touch and out of practice. While architects in Melbourne are accomplished in the individual house as an experimental proposition, mass housing design has become dominated by private developer-led speculative towers, designed primarily to exploit a rising market, rather than as sustainable and supportive places to live. There is a danger now that the housing built as part of this major investment will be of the same cynical design, just owned by the state instead of owned by investors.

The examples from the UK listed above offer some clues to this unrealised potential, but what is suitable in London may not be suitable in Melbourne. We have our own climate, our own urban form, our own cultural mix, our own ways of living. While there are important examples of social housing

in this country, the image is dominated by the anonymous prefabricated towers built by the Housing Commission in the 1960s and 1970s. There are few lessons to be recovered from this era.

There was, however, a brief period of radical public housing design in Melbourne in the 1980s, offering an alternative history from which architects today could learn from. Under the leadership of architect John Devenish as Group Manager, Rehabilitation and Redevelopment, the newly named and branded Ministry of Housing (removing the tainted word ‘commission’ from its title) would recast itself as an agency driven by design and research, and which stressed the importance of the community as active agents in housing. As Karen Burns and Paul Walker write, “The renewal of the agency extended in every direction: from its policy agenda, to the redesign of its administration system, to its new recruitment criteria for regional managers and its relationships to external bodies.”²⁶

Devenish commissioned a slew of adventurous young architects including Sue Dance, Edmond and Corrigan, Cocks and Carmichael, Daryl Jackson, Norman Day, Peter Elliot, and Greg Burgess to design low-rise urban infill housing, in a sharp move away from the high-rises that had come before. This work is exuberantly postmodern – a term adopted by the Ministry itself²⁷ – characterised by playful form-making, bright pastel colours, checkerboard tiles, patterned brickwork, and a “surreal suburban idiom”²⁸ compellingly captured by John Gollings’ iconic photographs.²⁹

As Burns and Walker argue, these buildings were part of a broader use of media and branding intended to shift perceptions of the public housing authority, from that of grey concrete to something more friendly and approachable.³⁰ Part of this drive even included an exhibition for secondary school students titled *That’s Our House*. A book of the same name published in conjunction with the exhibition shows a group of smiling kids on BMX bikes in front of Edmond and Corrigan’s Kay Street Housing.³¹ The message of housing for people and for communities is clear. “The policy was to invest social housing with the same dignity enjoyed by owner-occupiers,” wrote Devenish, “No more high-rise towers, and no more concentration of social housing.”³²

This work offers a thrilling precedent for designers of social housing today. While much of it still stands in the ‘museum without walls’ of the street, to return to the focus of this journal, we ought to ask: where is the archive? Victoria, or Australia for that matter, does not have a coordinated repository for its history of housing. There are holdings with various public museums, libraries, and universities, but what exists is piecemeal and haphazard, with no dedicated curators or acquisition plan in any institution. If you wanted to do an exhibition on public architecture in Melbourne, you couldn’t without great difficulty. The material is out there. Many of the practices engaged by Devenish continue today, such as Daryl Jackson and Peter Elliot, and maintain their own practice archives. Norman Day has a private archive. RMIT Design Archives holds the collection of Edmond and Corrigan, including their work on Kay Street. The University of Melbourne has recently acquired a selection of Greg Burgess’ work, the great majority remains in a temporary private archive. The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Museum and State Library of Victoria each have marginal holdings from this period.³³

While this is not nothing, it is far from optimal. Compare this to the UK, where by my provisional count there are at least 20 full-time curators of architecture managing collections, in the v&a and RIMA alone. Without this archival memory, we can’t learn from our history, and we can’t take the confident steps required to shape our future. What is needed is a concerted effort to preserve the evidence of these projects, and to present it in a public forum such as an exhibition.

These projects together speak of a time when those with the least were looked after by society, and demonstrate values of social cohesion and support for the disadvantaged that we urgently need to recapture today.

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Overleaf
Installation view of
A Home for All
exhibition, v&a, 2018,
Photographer Rory Hyde.



Endnotes

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33. Thank you to Harriet Edquist for help with this list.

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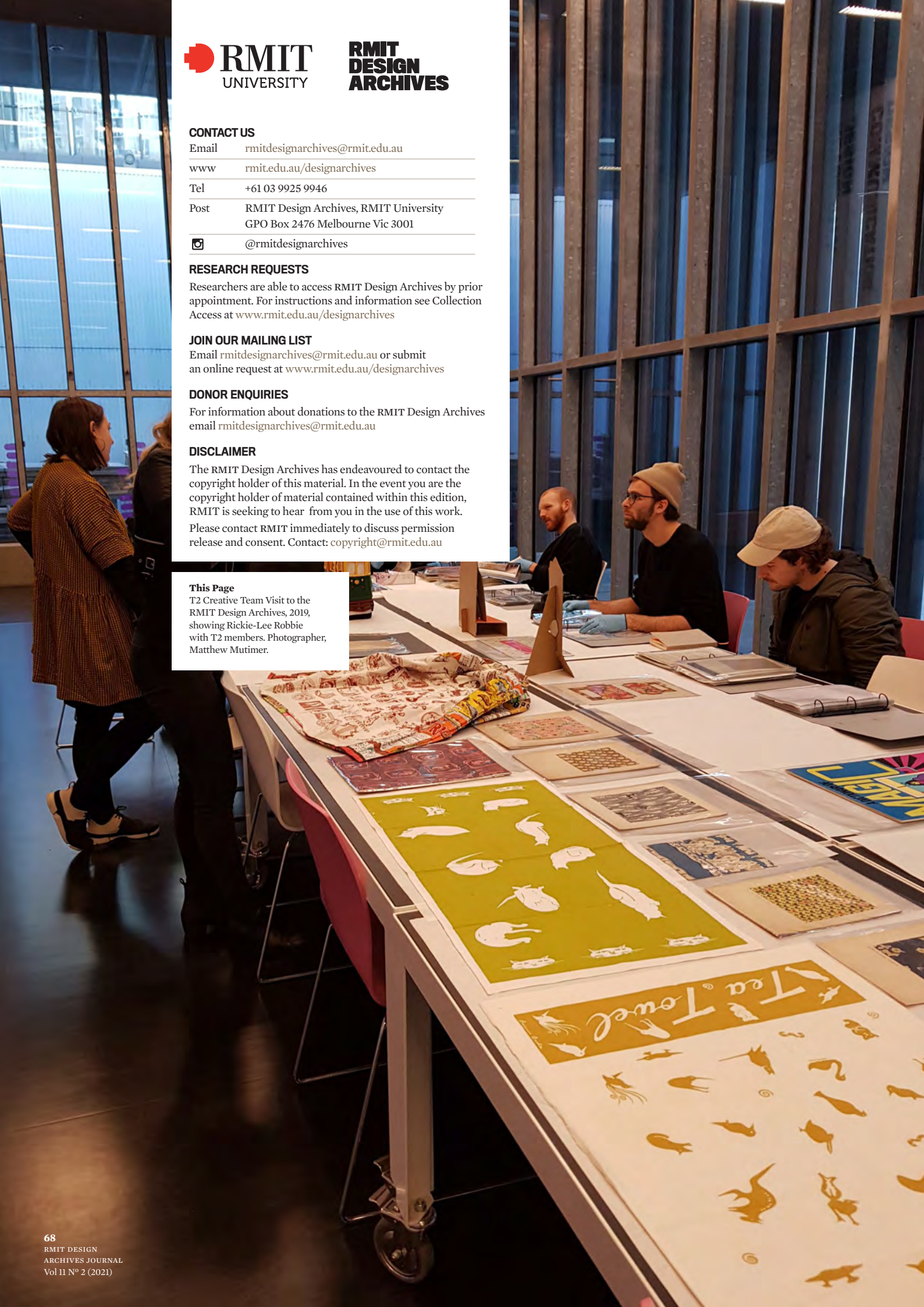
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T2 Creative Team Visit to the RMIT Design Archives, 2019, showing Rickie-Lee Robbie with T2 members. Photographer, Matthew Mutimer.



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